

# OPERA IN THE MUSIC HISTORY OF LATVIA: PERIODIZATION, FACTS, CHRONOLOGY

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## Summary

The history of opera in the current territory of Latvia dates back to the first examples of the genre in the court of Duke of Courland-Semigallia. The article provides systematically collected facts and a chronology of opera in the music history of Latvia. The facts and chronology basically is described in following periods:

- An explicit period influenced by several external (contextual) factors until the proclamation of independent Republic of Latvia in 1918;
- First period of Latvian independence 1918–1940;
- Occupation by USSR 1940–1941 and 1944–1991 divided in three sub-periods:
  - the second half of 1940s and 1950s (late Stalinist period),
  - the end of the 1950s and 1960s (Khrushchev's Thaw in USSR culture),
  - the 1970s and 1980s (late Soviet era);
- Restoration of independence of Latvia in 1990–1991 and the following period until 2022.

The preliminary collection of facts shows that in the current territory of Latvia at least 132 completed operas 2022 have been created until 30th September. Two scores of the staged operas have been lost, and 34 works have never been staged yet (of these, three scores of these operas have also not been found). The total number of completed operas in relatively classical traditions of the genre (122) is composed of a wide range of examples. The differences are manifested especially clearly in several avant-garde or experimental operas as well as in a number of examples that can be called a "poly-genre" from the 1970s onward. In the field of rock-operas, there are eight completed and staged rock-operas and one non-staged composition. One new metal-opera can be added to this list, leaving the analysis of this sub-genre for further studies.

The research presents several general conclusions related to the chronology and periodization of composing operas. Over one and a half centuries (from the last trimester of the 18th century court of the Courland-Semigallian Duke to 1920-1921 in Riga), in the current territory of Latvia, only ten operas were composed (six with libretto in German, four – in Latvian; eight out of ten have been staged). To a certain degree it could be explained by the Baltic-German society's clear orientation towards cultural and musical life in Germany, which obviously decreased the possibilities to show some local Baltic-German composers. Latvian society started to become involved in professional music

and culture only from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Actually, the regular increase in the number of operas dates back to 1918, when the independent Republic of Latvia was proclaimed.

Departing from this point, there are several periods of time characterized by active opera composing and the following decrease of operas. After the First Republic (eleven staged, eight non-staged operas, all with librettos in Latvia) the first decrease was in the 1940s and the first half of the 1950s (four staged, seven non-staged, one with libretto in Russian). Here, this can be clearly attributed to the different socio-historical conditions during WW2 and the Soviet occupation. The end of the 1950s and 1960s shows an increase in new operas (twelve staged, six non-staged, all with librettos in Latvian). The fragmentation of the opera compositional practice in the 1970s and 1980s is much more complicated to explain (fifteen staged<sup>1</sup>, five non-staged<sup>2</sup> operas, one with a libretto in Russian). This fragmentation continues in the 1990s (nine staged, two non-staged operas, one with librettos in German, English, French, Japanese and Chinese) and can be explained by the transition from the Soviet occupation era and its related impact. In addition, the first two decades of the 21st century (and the beginning of the 3rd decade) shows at least a quantitatively notable interest towards the opera genre by composers and librettists (thirty-nine staged<sup>3</sup>, four non-staged operas, thirteen with librettos in English, French, Italian, Japanese, Russian, Latin, Norwegian, Ancient Greek, German). Simultaneously, the definition and understanding of the genre and its further development is challenged.

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The wide range of operas described in this article uncover several questions for further research. For instance, one interesting subject to research is the thematic focus in librettos during different periods of time and their justification in light of the culture processes of the time. Another interesting aspect for research is the cooperation of composers, librettists and other stakeholders (for example, state institutions, NGOs) and their role in the development in or denial of planned operas. There are interesting examples from the genre (both staged and non-staged) still in the shadows, waiting for an analysis of text and music, style and peculiarities, and also the comparative perspective with the opera heritage of other countries which seem to be very promising. And last, but not least, the author leaves the list open for new facts and data to be discovered in the future.

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1 Incl. four rock-operas.

2 Incl. one rock-opera.

3 Incl. two rock-operas and one metal-opera.