

# THE INFLUENCE OF THE LIVLAND MORAVIAN CHURCH ON LATVIAN MUSIC CULTURE

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## Summary

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At the end of 1720, the first representatives of the recently re-established Herrnhut / Upper Lusatian Moravian Church arrived in Livland (nowadays Vidzeme). At the end of 1730, the local peasants accepted the ideas they brought, and the Moravian Church became a reality in many locations in the province of Livland. By 1742, it had accepted approximately 3000 peasants. Gradually, overcoming varied obstacles, among them the ban on the movement in 1742/1743, the Moravian Church grew both in territorial scope and in numbers, and by the 19<sup>th</sup> century it had more than 30,000 members, and the number of supporters was even greater.

The Moravian Church influenced many varied areas of life in Livland, including the music culture of the local inhabitants.

Since music was significant for the Moravian Church – both instrumental performance and singing – congregation members in Livland worked in this area as well. Many of the Brethren from Germany brought music instruments with them, the most popular instruments being violins and trombones (the German *Posaunen*). There is reason to believe that the Brethren were among those that brought the modern violin to Livland, and its sound was significantly better than the violins previously used by the people of Livland.

The group singing tradition of the Moravian Church was enthusiastically received among the Latvian peasants. Along with that, thanks to the Brethren, choir singing in Lutheran church services was also improved. Gradually this group singing became a vital part of a peasant's day, and this helped crystallize the idea of a larger scale song festival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Magdalene Elisabeth von Hallart, a general's wife, is another key person, thanks to the attention she paid to the Moravian Church teachers' seminary in Wolmarshof (Valmiermuiža). In spite of its short lifespan (1738–1742), approximately 120 young people graduated this seminary and many became teachers in peasants' schools. As they were taught to sing from sheet music, then they were much better prepared to teach not just language, but also singing to young students in Livland.

The Moravian Church's goals of improving both the education and singing ability of peasants resulted in a new national intelligentsia, including the first professional musicians. Jānis Cimze, the founder and long-time leader of the Livland (Vidzeme) teachers' seminar came from a typical Brethren environment and is considered to be a pioneer of Latvian professional music. Juris Neikens, the originator of the idea and the organizer of a regional song festival, similar to Cimze, came from the Moravian Church. He developed the brilliant idea of song festivals, which became a particularly valuable tradition of the Latvian nation, after attending Bible study, which was a continuation of the Moravian Church meetings after the time when, due to pressure from the Russian Empire and Livland Lutheran Church, it was forced to reduce its activity and changed the character of its work so much that it basically became a sect.

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