

THE REFLECTION OF NILSS GRĪNFELDS PERSONALITY IN THE MATERIALS OF HIS ARCHIVE

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Summary

August 11 of 2007 witnessed the one hundredth anniversary since birth of Nilss Grīnfelds, a pianist, composer, musicologist and teacher. His creative life was spent under the Soviet regime. He was the promulgator of its ideology but at the same time, owing to his erudition and knowledge, he proved to be an authority for many musicians. That was the time when every single composer and musicologist of Soviet Latvia had to pay charge to the Soviet political system and it was done.

The present paper has resulted from the investigation of Grīnfeld's family archive, presented to the department of music of the Riga Museum of Literature, Theatre and Music (*Rakstniecības, teātra un mūzikas muzejs*) by Zigrīda Grīnfelde, the composer's spouse. The archive contains more than 2000 units, among them different documents, photographs, correspondence, manuscripts and publications, enabling scientists to disclose hitherto little known pages in the development of Grīnfeld's creative personality.

Grīnfeld's father, Edgars Grīnfelds (1879–1940), having graduated from Riga Polytechnical institute with the diploma of a civil engineer, in 1906 was assigned to the construction site in Perma region, Russia. The same year he got married to the young painter Milda Branta, a student with Janis Rozentāls, later in Moscow – with Stanislav Zhukovsky and then in Paris – with Henri Martin.

Regardless of the fact that Nilss Grīnfelds was born in Alūksne, he grew up and got educated in Soviet Russia, mixing together with pro-communist Latvian musicians. His parents paid much attention to the upbringing of their son, forming his national world outlook. Nilss has graduated from the piano class by the technical college of music named after the brothers Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein but in 1932 finished the piano class with Alexander Gedike by Moscow State Conservatoire. Still being a student, Nilss Grīnfelds cooperated with the Latvian workmen's club in Moscow and later with the Society of Latvian culture and education *Prometheus* as a pianist. Later the publishing office of the above society commissioned the composer to write several authentic works, namely, songs, arrangements of folk-songs, a symphony etc. Nilss Grīnfelds took part in numerous concerts and radio broadcasts in Moscow, playing music pieces for the piano by Jāzeps Vītols, Ballad (*Balāde*) by Alfrēds Kalniņš and the music of his own. Within 1932–1934 Nilss Grīnfelds was appointed the national broadcasting editor by the All-Union Radio committee and enrolled in the Composers' Union of the USSR.

The year of 1937 witnessed the campaign of Stalinist *purging*, the suspended activity of *Prometheus* and other Latvian organizations and

the escalating genocide against the Latvian nation. Repressions did not bypass the Grīnfeld's family, either. In 1938 his father Edgars Grīnfelds was dismissed from work, arrested, exiled and died under mysterious circumstances 1940 in Kzylord, Kazakhstan. It came as a huge shock for Nilss, together with fear, incomprehension of what was going on, caution and distrust.

With the beginning of the Second World War owing to his poor eyesight, Grīnfelds was not mobilized and he started working as a managing director of the Latvian SSR State ensemble of art in Ivanovo. To build up the repertoire of the relevant ensemble Nilss Grīnfelds was actively engaged in composing songs and symphonic works. Besides, he himself performed together with various concert brigades. Collaborating together with Fricis Rokpelnis and Jūlijs Vanags, he wrote the first Latvian soviet opera *Rūta*, staged by the Art ensemble for the first time in Moscow on April 18, 1943.

Towards the end of the war in 1944 Nilss Grīnfelds returned to Riga as the managing director of the department of music by the Administration of Art activities of the Latvian SSR. That was the time when the music life of Latvia was completely destroyed because most musicians, experiencing dead fear from the red terror, had become fugitive and departed from Latvia, making for the West. Besides, there were those who stayed in the battlefields on both sides of the front and also those who never returned from the German ghetto.

Grīnfelds was appointed an executive secretary of the Composers' union of the Latvian SSR. His one-act opera *Rūta* was staged at the theatre of Opera and Ballet of the Latvian SSR (1945) and concerts presented performing of his war-time cantata *The Gate of the Sun* (*Saules vārti*) and other compositions.

In the December of 1946 in Moscow, jumping off a speeding train, Nilss suffered from a severe trauma – he broke his hip joint, therefore for almost one year any active participation in the musical life was out of the question. However, his days were very busy because of writing music, including also an opera under the title *Daina*, though it was never staged.

One more crash in Grīnfeld's creative effort was caused by his decision on February 10, 1948, concerning the opera of Wano Muradeli *The Big Friendship* (*Lielā draudzība*) and fulmination against the contemporary nature of the language of music, demanding instead of it a clear and optimistic approach as well as the use of folk-music citations and presentation of mass songs. The most severe condemnation was addressed just to Nilss Grīnfelds who was criticized not only for being formal in his musical creations, the opera *Rūta*, cantatas *The Gate of the Sun* (*Saules vārti*) and *In Remembrance of Heros* (*Vāroņu piemiņai*). While an executive official of the Composers' union of the Latvian SSR Grīnfelds was accused of the negative influence, exerted towards Jānis Ivanovs and other composers. Being temporarily released from the responsibilities of an executive secretary, he turned to composing where his best contribution resulted in the genre of solo songs, based on Jānis Rainis lyrics and arrangements of folk-songs.

Since 1940 Nilss Grīnfelds started his pedagogical career in the chair of music history by Jāzeps Vītols Latvian State Conservatoire. In 1952 by order of the Ministry of higher education of the USSR Grīnfelds was appointed the deputy director of Latvian State Conservatoire, responsible for the study work and scientific research. His numerous musicology students still keep him in memory as a demanding but at the same time a very well-read and whole-hearted personality. Within 1966–1984 Nilss Grīnfelds was in charge of the chair of music history and more than 30 years of pedagogical engagement passed before he was certified as a professor.

Grīnfelds also focused on journalism. Starting with 1945 he has published in newspapers and periodicals nearly 400 reviews and analytical articles. Due to Grīnfeld's ideas of pro-communistic ideology this particular field of his activity has been valued rather ambiguously. Still he cannot be denied either many exact and suggestive reviews of concerts and musical events, or substantiate judgement on artful phenomena. The contribution of Nilss Grīnfelds in the history of Latvian music is rather considerable but hitherto not yet seriously evaluated. Without his purposeful and systematic work, resulting in several monographic writings and books the overall contribution to Latvia musicology would have been much smaller.

The culmination of his lifetime, *Vispārējā mūzikas vēsture (The General History of Music)* in two parts (1st part – in 1984, 2nd part – in 1985), written together with other lecturers and professors of the chair of music history, namely, Lija Krasinska, Vita Lindenberga, Jānis Torgāns, Sofija Vēriņa and Jeļena Voskresenska, unfortunately turned out to be a target of a crushing criticism on the part of Atis Valters, a philologist and a connoisseur of music, making a whole list of printing and other mistakes (newspaper *Literatūra un Māksla*, September 19, 1986). No counterarguments were considered and Nilss Grīnfelds could not stand the gravity of this emotional experience. On October 20, 1986 he passed away. Although the personality of Nilss Grīnfelds was controversial, one cannot deny his prolific contribution to the music culture of Latvia which deserves a thorough and professional evaluation.

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