

REQUIEM IN LATVIAN MUSIC. SEEKING FOR THE INVARIANT OF THE GENRE

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Summary

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Among the various genres of music a specific area is taken up by those of sacred music. Their origin, formation and development has been closely associated with church ceremonies and liturgy. But a lot of genres have also proved to be viable outside the sacred space. One of them, most comprehensively developed and revealed, proves to be the requiem.

The genre of requiem in Latvian music should be considered within the context of the 20th century. In the field of our musical creations it proves to be a comparatively new genre, dating back only one hundred years or so. The series of requiems in Latvian music starts with *Latvian Requiem* (*Latvju rekviēms*, 1921) by Emilis Melngailis, later followed by *Concert Requiem* (*Koncerts rekviēms*, 1967) by Pauls Dambis and other requiems by such composers as Viktors Baštiks (1979), Ilona Breģe (1997), Pēteris Butāns (1999), Romualds Jermaks (2002), Georgs Pelēcis (2006) and some others.

Although the number of requiems in Latvian music is rather insignificant one has to admit that the above genre has been interpreted by composers in a multiplicity of singular ways, displaying fundamentals of the genre in question alongside with an individual music handwriting.

In most cases, when writing requiems, Latvian composers make use of the basic textual material in Latin. However, requiems, based on texts in Latin, present a multitude of different music forms. Composers select different fragments of the text, thus, due to the textual program, providing for a wide choice of possible options for the creation of the musical cycle.

Requiem has always been one of those genres, which expresses the conceptually significant world outlook of its author, promulgating his inner creed and reflections about such existentially intrinsic values as life and death. Therefore, seeking for the invariant of the contemporary requiem, one should pose the following question: why do present-day composers still write requiems? Sometimes the reason can be quite personal, giving rise to the requiem as a dedication *in memoriam* to a concrete person. Or its momentum can be some socially significant factor, linked with the victims of war, death camps and deportations. But in cases devoid of such a momentum or a real desire to create a sacred piece of music in conformity with the liturgy of the church comes to the foreground the solely imaginary invariant of the present-day requiem, summoning people to avert their eyes from everyday bustle and trivia to think about the principal values of life and feel the breath of eternity. This, certainly, is the purpose of all

sacred music genres, but requiem is the most appropriate to reflect about such notions as life and death. The emotional experience of every single funeral guest adds to the common feeling of consolidation, cleansing and purifying everybody present. Transformation of such feelings into musical images should be considered to be the imaginary invariant of the contemporary genre of requiem.

As to the genre of requiem in contemporary music there is no doubt that its involvement in the present-day liturgy is not determinant, predominantly intended to be the music for concerts. Therefore, the major function of the present-day requiem is to address those who stay behind, enlightening and strengthening them. In music every composer makes use of his own means of music expression. And yet, the function of creating catharsis predetermines several common features as well. Most clearly they show up in the concluding part of the requiem, because it is solely the coda that winds up everything, directing the message of music towards reconciliation and light.

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