

# MUSICAL LIFE IN DINABURG/DVINSK IN THE LATTER HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY AND THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY: FACTS AND PROCESSES

By Jānis Kudiņš

**Keywords:** First theatre in Dinaburg/Dvinsk (1856–1903), opera and operetta productions, concert life, musicalia sellers, music education

This article, based on information from different sources, explores the testimonies of musical life and processes in Daugavpils, the second largest city in Latvia in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Back then in official documents, the city was called Dinaburg (*Dünaburg*, the name of the Medieval castle since 1274, city 1582–1656, 1667–1893) and Dvinsk (1893–1920).

As an active economic and trade centre (found at the crossroads of several railway lines), the city flourished in the latter half of the 19th century, when the territory of Latgale (Latgallia)<sup>1</sup> was situated in the Vitebsk gubernia of Tsarist Russian Empire. According to data from the census of 1897, at that time, the number of inhabitants of the city reached 69 675 people. The dominating nationalities were Jewish (46%), Russians (27.48%) and Polish (16.34%). Additionally, there were Germans (4.33%), Belarusians (2,19%), Latvians (more precisely, Latgallians) (1.83%) and others. In 1913, the population of the city was 113 000 with the same proportions of different nationalities.<sup>2</sup> This explains the multi-religious and multi-ethnic environment established in previous centuries that has been kept up to this day. The community consists of different branches of Christianity confessions (such as Catholics, Protestants or Lutherans, Orthodoxal Christians, Old Believers or *Staroverij*) and Judaists.

There were several main factors that contributed to the development of civic culture and music life in Dinaburg/Dvinsk. From 1810 to 1878, the garrison officers of the Tsarist Army of Russia residing in the Dinaburg fortress were often people who were well-educated, that promoted the interest of the local society in theatre, art and music. In 1831, a secondary school for nobles was established in the city. In 1835, it was reorganized into a public gymnasium. In the latter half of the 19th century, there were several schools of different levels in the city, which promoted the formation of an educated society. In the middle of the 19th century the new construction wave began in the city, which resulted in the new city centre that partially survived to the present day.

---

1 One of the cultural-historical regions of Latvia, located in the Eastern part of today's Latvia.

2 Until the beginning of the 20th century, the population of the rural territories of Latgallia region were mostly Latvian (more precisely, Latgallian), while cities were inhabited by other nationalities. According to the census in Latgallia in 1879, the rural territories and cities together hosted 501 623 persons, among them 50.58% Latvians (Latgallians), meanwhile, the rest were other nationalities – Russians, Belarusians, Jewish, Polish, Germans and other. The Latgallia region was included in the territory of the Republic of Latvia established on November 18, 1918, however, after WWI, the Army of Latvia with the help of Polish military allies had to fight against the Armed Forces of Soviet Russia for the Latgallian territories. Finally, the status of Latgallia, including Dvinsk as part of the Republic of Latvia was established in 1920.

As a result of the construction, several large parks were established in the city centre that became active venues for cultural and musical activities.

The article describes the musical life in Dinaburg/Dvinsk in the latter half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century based on the following sources: the published memoirs of Vasily von Rotkirch (1819–1891), the former chancellor of Dinaburg fortress, lieutenant general of the Tsarist Russian Army and Gendarmerie, and Pyotr Medvedev (1837–1906), a well known actor and impresario in the second half of the 19th century; a few documentary testimonies found in the National Historical Archives of Belarus, publications in newspapers and music journals from Riga, Vitebsk, Vilnius, Moscow and St. Petersburg (*Artist*”; *Nuvellist*”; *Rigasche Zeitung*; *Teatral’nyj i muzykal’nyj vėstnik*”; *Vitebskija Gubernskija vėdomosti*) as well as the information published in the first city newspaper *Dvinskij Listok* (*The Leaflet of Dvinsk*, established 1900) until 1903.

One more important factor significant in the development of the civic music life in Dinaburg was the opening of the first theatre in the history of the city. The theatre was founded as a private company of Nikolai Hagelstrom (1812, St. Petersburg – 1883, Dinaburg) in cooperation with other army officers. Hagelstrom was the chief engineer of the fortress, major general and even a mayor of the city twice (1865–1870; 1874–1876). He invested his private capital to build a theatre house (400 seats) in the city centre and organized a professional troupe of actors. According to the regulation approved by the Administration of Vitebsk Gubernia, the performances in this theatre were produced exclusively in Russian language. It was the first professional theatre founded in the city of Vitebsk Gubernia. Thanks to the Hagelstrom’s great passion for music, the first theatre in Dinaburg was able to intensively develop their profile of musical performances (operas, operettas, vaudevilles, operatic dramatizations) and the theatre building regularly hosted different kinds of concerts from the very beginning.

In the start of the 20th century there were seven theatres in Dvinsk, and the most active stages were those of Hagelstrom’s theatre built in 1856 and the Riga–Oryol Railway Line Administration theatre. Dramatic and musical theatre productions mostly took place in the building of the first city theatre, which also hosted guest performances of musical theatre troupes from Vilnius and Southern Gubernias of Tsarist Russia (current territories of Russia and Ukraine). Professional opera troupes visited the city less often (for instance, Francesco Castellano Grand Italian Opera Company visited Dvinsk in 1900). In the beginning of the 20th century, the theatre troupe of Hagelstrom’s theatre built in 1856 experienced a crisis. The building was closed in 1903 for technical reasons, and in 1914 it burned down completely and was never restored.

Musical life in Dinaburg/Dvinsk in the late 19th century and the early 20th century consisted of regular concerts in several venues – the first City Theatre, Riga–Oryol Railway Line Administration theatre, the great hall of the City Hall, libraries and halls of the fortress, Martin Luther’s cathedral, Jewish synagogues as well as in schools, parks and, in the summer season, also in Pogulyanka, the nearby suburb resort. Today, there

is fragmented information available on several possible music (choir) associations that existed in the local Baltic-German community. Other national communities residing in the city did not establish any music associations or unions of musicians until WW1. Concerts with the participation of local musicians were often included in different types of musical–literature or musical–theatre evenings. Mainly, these were events where vocal and instrumental chamber music was performed. In the beginning of the 20th century, the classical vocal symphonic concerts in Dvinsk were organized less often. However, they were supported by local musicians (choirs and symphonic orchestras) and performed sometimes in the Large Choral Synagogue.

Located in the intersection of several railway lines, in the last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Dinaburg/Dvinsk was able to easily welcome guest concerts by several Russian and foreign celebrities among other musical performers (singers, pianists, violinists and others). There were also sheet music and musical instrument shops in the city. The newspaper *Dvinskij Listok* often published advertisements, where the musicians with higher musical education obtained in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Berlin and Vienna offered private lessons in music. In 1901, the first private music school in Dvinsk was established. According to the model existing at the time in Russian Empire, it offered a six-year professional basic education in singing and in the playing of several music instruments.

In general, the information found in the different sources leads to a visible evidence of the characteristic multi-ethnic environment and traditions in music life in the second largest city of Latvia in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, mainly in Russian, but also in Yiddish, Polish and German. It distinguishes the experience of Dinaburg/Dvinsk from other cities (such as Riga, Valmiera (former Wolmar), Cēsis (former Wenden), Jelgava (former Mitau), Liepāja (former Libau)) located in other culturally-historical regions: Vidzeme, Zemgale (Semgallia) and Kurzeme (Kurland), where the main impact in cultural and musical life during the previous centuries (until the beginning of the 20th century) came from the former Baltic-German community. Starting from the mid-19th century, the cities of other regions experienced the growth of local Latvian society, which started to play an important role in the music life of Latvia through various activities.

In the cultural life of Dvinsk, it was only in the end of the first decade of the 20th century Latvian society became more visible. Miscellaneous activities of Latvian society intensified along with the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia in 1918, when the city acquired its current name – Daugavpils (since 1920). In general, the main historical events of the 20th century (especially the long Soviet occupation in the second half of the century) have left different testimonies in the music culture of Daugavpils. Nowadays, it is important to uncover and compare the past experiences of different regions and cities of Latvia, including the former Dinaburg/Dvinsk. This approach allows for the accentuation of the different layers of culture and the coexistence of different memories in the common platform of music history in Latvia.