

FROM THE MUSIC HISTORY OF JELGAVA: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE IV NATIONWIDE LATVIAN SONG AND MUSIC FESTIVAL

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In music history, Jelgava (former Mītava, German *Mitau*, Russian *Mitava*), has ancient and rich cultural traditions. In the end of the 19th century, the city became an important centre of Latvian culture and education because of the efforts of the former students of the Jelgava Men's Gymnasium (former Jelgava Academic Gymnasium or *Academia Petrina*) to reinforce "Latvianness", which led to the founding of the Jelgava Latvian Society, one of the oldest Latvian non-governmental organizations in 1880. In 1887, Jānis Čakste (1859–1927), a lawyer and the future first president of the Republic of Latvia, was elected to the position of chairman of the organization. He undertook the organization of the IV Nationwide Latvian Song and Music Festival that took place in Jelgava from June 15th to 18th, 1895 (according to the Julian calendar) and was the largest festival of Latvian amateur culture until WW1.

However, the birth of the idea of the Jelgava festival roots not only in the activities of the Jelgava Latvian Society, but also in the tradition of the so-called Festival of the Abolition of Serfdom [dedicated to the abolition of serfdom in Kurland] that took place until 1895 and was often overlooked in academic research. Since 1868, after the 50th anniversary of the abolition of the serfdom in Kurland in 1817, the people of Jelgava organized the cultural festival on August 30th every year. This festival reflected the increasing "creative and material capacity" (Kaune 1939: 85) of Jelgava and the Semgallian region. It had been raising its national awareness already by the 1870s, but in 1881, the Jelgava Latvian Society took over the organization of the festival. The path to the Nationwide Latvian Song festival was paved. The article focuses on the significance of this celebration in Jelgava.

The IV Nationwide Latvian Song and Music Festival in Jelgava has a considerable bibliography including essays of non-musicians and testimonies of the event, reviews published in Baltic presses of different national communities, creative work by writers and others. This article offers five aspects of historical significance in relation to the IV Nationwide Latvian Song and Music Festival in Jelgava, and accentuates a new focus on the movement of song festivals in Latvia, which is well-covered in academic research.

Firstly, the Jelgava festival has a new title. After the first three Latvian Nationwide song festivals, this was no more a gathering and event of singing together, but rather the act of the manifestation of Latvian national identity, therefore, in 1895, the words *song* and *music* were emphasized officially. Jānis Bētiņš (1830–1912), one of the most active enthusiasts of music life in Kurland Gubernia in the second half of the 19th century – he was also an organist, pedagogue and conductor –, took a position in the programme

committee of the festival and suggested to include instrumental music. The significant development of this particular festival is the fact that the instrumental music was played by Latvians, and that the leadership of all genres and implementation of the program was taken over by the Latvian community. In general, the repertoire of the festival was a qualitative leap in terms of the contents of the festival. Besides, it established the tradition of listening to concert music among Latvians.

Secondly, until WW1, the buildings erected for the Latvian Song Festivals were similar to basilicas. The building designed by the architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns (1859–1928) for the IV festival reached a considerable volume, but was destroyed just after the event (similarly to the venues constructed for the II, III and V festivals respectively), using the planks for other purposes and thus compensating the notable losses. Similarly, the organ of 20 registers built by the organ master Mārtiņš [J.] Krēsliņš was disassembled. This leads to the conclusion that no solo opuses for the organ were played during the vocal instrumental concerts of the festival in Jelgava.

Thirdly, it is worth noting the major importance of the Trade Fair of Agriculture, Manufacturing and Crafts organized during the festival. Historically, it was the first fair of agriculture organized by Latvians. According to the historian Andris Tomašūns, such an event significantly strengthened the self-estimation of Latvian agriculturists, manufacturers and craftspeople (Tomašūns 2015: 128–129). Although, the German nobles of Kurland organized open-air trade fairs in Jelgava already at the beginning of 1870s, this was the first Latvian trade fair, which took place a year before the Latvian Ethnographic Fair in Riga. The organization committee consciously merged the trade fair with the IV Nationwide Song and Music festival in Jelgava, thus attracting around 27 000–28 000 visitors. This translated to considerable publicity for the festival.

Fourthly, there are important and unique findings particularly related to the events in Jelgava captured by photographers of the time that documented the course and atmosphere of the festival. The festival started with a procession from the garden of the Jelgava Latvian Society (currently Uzvara park) along Ezeru Street towards Katoļu Street, through Anna's Gate and headed to the festival basilica decorated with the coats of arms of the cities of Kurland and garlands. Probably, it was the first procession of national scale in Jelgava. With these authentic photographs, there are rare visual testimonies on this important festival and on the heritage of professional and amateur photo artists.

Finally, the IV Song festival hosted an ambitious idea – to gather 133 musicians from countryside music bands (amateurs) and 37 professional musicians. At the time, the professional slang of Latvian music did not include such notions as “instrumentalists” or “orchestral musicians”. The music band (ensemble) was defined as a choir and the leading person was called “the leader of the choir”. Due to the contribution of Jurjānu Andrejs (1856–1922), a composer and the leading conductor, many people in the audience saw and heard a Latvian symphonic orchestra for the first time in their lives. The IV Nationwide Latvian Song and Music Festival in Jelgava started the regular practice of Latvian symphonic music, which produced a significant impact on the development of the genre on a national scale.