

THE VOCAL LYRICISM OF JĀNIS IVANOVŠ

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Summary

The symphonic music of Jānis Ivanovš has been since the middle of the 20th century at the centre of attention among listeners, musicians, and conductors, as well as musicologists. However, his vocal chamber music has not gained such popularity.

In compiling all of the available information – fragmentary items in the media, family archival materials, and published music, three main lines of research were conducted:

- during which periods did the composer most actively devote himself to the solo art song;
- determinant selection of poetic themes, in which the poet's texts are predominant;
- the role of tradition in the solo songs of Jānis Ivanovš, and their main stylistic features.

The genre of the solo art song for our symphonic composer *par excellence* [1: 169] has not been richly represented in his output. If one were to weigh Ivanovš' 21 symphonies against 23 solo miniatures, then his art songs would be much lighter and more fragile, although not less significant. According to information available to me, he has composed 23 songs for solo voice with accompaniment, as well as 9 folk song arrangements for voice and accompaniment, in several versions.

The first examples of solo songs are connected with the mid-1930's; this indicates that this genre, so much loved by classic Latvian composers, was also esteemed by the master of large symphonic forms, Ivanovš.

During the 1930's Ivanovš composed 18 miniatures. These were mostly settings of poetry expressing the beauty of nature and of the passing of time by Jānis Rainis (1865–1929), Tālis Matīss (1904–1985), Raimonds Bebris (1891–1940) and other poets. The greatest artistic achievement of this time period that has been lost to our musical culture is the cycle *Five Songs on Texts by Rabindranath Tagore* (*Piecas dziesmas ar Ramindranata Tagores vārdiem*), composed in 1939–1940.

During the 1940's Ivanovš composed four songs on poems by Augusts Eglājs (1904–1994), Kārlis Skalbe (1879–1945), Andrejs Eglītis (1912–2006) and Alberts Sprūdžs (1908–1944). Among these, the most typical in musical and poetic content are Augusts Eglājs' *In the Meadows of Latgale* (*Latgales līdumos*, 1940) and *Time Flows in Currents of Years* (*Laiks gadu strauvēm plūst*, 1944) with text by Alberts Sprūdžs.

In 1955, another solo song appeared: *Andra's Song* from the music for the film *Frost in the Spring* (*Salna pavasarī*), although the song itself was not incorporated into the soundtrack.

In characterizing the thematic content of Ivanovs' solo songs, one can highlight the themes of human responsibility and obligation, the love of the beauty of nature, and furthermore, there is a predominance of folk-like clarity and an easily perceived, sometimes impressionistically colorful portrayal of that native land.

The selection of poetic texts was done with great care and thought. In poetry the composer sought weighty stability, directness and clarity of meaning, not so much symbolism or philosophic juxtapositions. He felt closeness to the poetry of Fricis Bārda, Jānis Rainis, and Tālis Matīss, which is clearly perceivable, sometimes lyrical, and often rich with vivid analogies, metaphors and epithets.

In terms of musical expression, the composer preserved typical elements of the solo song of the Romantic period. Primary among them are the importance of genre and illustrativism. Three-part musical form is predominant, which can be found in almost all of the opuses of the 1930's and 1940's.

Very well thought out and interestingly presented is the composer's dramaturgy of tonality. In looking over the solo miniatures that are and were at my disposal, I cannot help but notice that Ivanovs prefers keys in flats rather than those in sharps. Especially favorite for him are E-flat major and minor – *Near My Homeland (Manas dzimtenes pusē, 1936/1937)*, *The Plowman's Faith (Arāja ticība, 1937)*, *On the Hill of the Sun (Sauleskalnā, 1937/1939)*.

An undoubtedly traditional, not at all innovative, and yet highly attractive, colorful device is having a final cadence on a major tonic chord for a song that is in a minor key. Typical of Ivanovs, this gives the song a brighter, more hopeful conclusion in the context of a contemplative work in a manner that is understated and unobtrusive.

My article is not intended to be a comprehensive study of the solo songs of Jānis Ivanovs; part of the reason for this is a shortage of printed musical material. Nevertheless, some insight into a hitherto neglected area in the works of Ivanovs is offered here, opening a new and less known page in the portrayal of the master from Latgale.

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