

THE FACTOR OF THE 19TH CENTURY ROMANTICISM IN THE GENESIS OF LATVIAN SYMPHONY MUSIC AND IN THE FIRST PERIOD OF ITS STYLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

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Summary

This article focuses on the problem, concerning the long-lasting influence of the style and aesthetics of the 19th century romanticism on the history of Latvian symphony music within 1880–1940. The above period witnesses the prevalence of the so-called national romanticism as one of the features of the 19th century romantic art in diverse symphony music by Latvian composers alongside with instrumental chamber music, choral works and operas. The most outstanding symphony pieces by composers of different generations (Jurjānu Andrejs, Jāzeps Vītols, Emīlis Melngailis, Alfrēds Kalniņš, Jāzeps Mediņš, Jēkabs Mediņš, Jānis Mediņš, Ādolfs Ābele, Jānis Kalniņš, Volfgangs Dārziņš, Ādolfs Skulte, Jānis Ivanovs) mostly represent such genres as programmatic poems, illustrative music and suites. Most of Latvian composers, striving to be more or less original in their music, had adopted both the aesthetically elaborated principles of tonal harmony, homophone and polyphonic texture by foreign composers of the 19th century, mostly French, Russian or German, as well as the notions of music dramaturgy and form. They also borrowed the intonation codes inherent to such music, making it possible to recognize their either formal or at the same time also deeply contextual identity, pertaining to one aspect of romantic style, namely, basic notions of the aesthetics of national romanticism. However, we find almost no traces of the branch of aesthetics and style of romanticism which reflects sharp contrasts, grotesque and dramatic pathos within the context of music imagery. Such tendencies turn up mostly in the thirties and in the forties of the 20th century. Best examples of symphony music of the time are the following: the Second (*Romantic*) symphony (1938) by Pēteris Barisons and the Fourth symphony *Atlantis* (1941) by Jānis Ivanovs.

The author comes to the conclusion that unlike the music in Europe the first thirty years of the 20th century in Latvian symphony music composers witness little and fragmentary manifestations of the aesthetics of modernism and its characteristic stylistic trends, such as neoclassicism, vanguard and expressionism which synthesize the principles of classical music and innovations, suggested by modernism (for instance, the music pieces by Benjamin Britten, Arthur Honegger, Sergei Prokofiev, Karol Szymanovsky and Dmitry Shostakovich). A totally different situation towards the end of the 19th century and in the first thirty years of the 20th century was observed in the field of Latvian literature and visual art. According to such researchers as Ruta Čaupova, Tatjana Kačalova, Eduards Kļaviņš and Stella Pelše the above fields present several topical trends of modernism, coexisting with romanticism much more intensely.

The prevalence of national and may be even the style of academic romanticism also in the music of other classical genres can be explained by the specific cultural and historical situation of Latvia towards the end of the 19th century and the thirty first years of the 20th.

The aspirations of the first professional Latvian composers in the genesis of classical concert music genres towards the end of the 19th century, the same as in literature and in visual art, stemmed from the stylistic solutions of romanticism, which alongside with aesthetically elaborated and perceptively more complicated means of expression offered a more democratic potential of communication. However, in Latvia the above period despite the intense scope of symphony music, which was rooted in the aesthetics of prevalent national romanticism, this type of communication was most successfully reflected in choral music. In the field of music it turned into the most substantial voice of Latvian national awakening, manifesting itself within the context of European countries and those of the world as a unique tradition of Song Festivals both in their origin and long-lasting development. There is a good reason to believe that such a situation was also favoured by several specific social and political conditions existent in Latvia while it was turning into a national cultural entity and an independent state.

Unlike other peoples who in the 19th century had started on the way towards their national identity (among them Czech, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania and Estonia) Latvians before Latvia was proclaimed as an independent state in 1918 were actually split into several administrative territories, incorporated in Tsarist Russia. Besides, a considerable part of eastern Latvia, namely, Latgale, for a long time found itself under the influence of Slavonic ethno-cultural environment. Owing to the above, Latvian community grew more consolidated and choral music, being rather democratic and easily perceived, turned vital to reflect the above procedures. This process involved the first Latvian classical composers of different generations. Their contribution, in most cases tended towards the choral music of national romantic style, proves to be considerable both in its scope and artistic quality. However, it should be noted that, owing to the prevalence of choral pieces and vocal music genres in general Latvian composers were prevented from writing stylistically more diversified instrumental music. Flourishing of the above field was also hindered by a prolonged lack of any elementary and stable professional basis, namely, a symphony orchestra that could have attracted lasting attention of different layers of Latvian community and others.

In the development of symphony music, tended towards the aesthetics of national romanticism and stylistics, vitally important in several aspects was the striving of such luminaries of Latvian music as Jurjānu Andrejs and Jāzeps Vītols towards certain traditions of academic and national romanticism which, regardless of their conservative nature within the context of the relevant historical background, in the second half of the 19th century were widely-spread in several European countries. They were also

prevalent, for instance, in the conservatoire of St. Petersburg, founded and run by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908), where J. Vītols gradually turned into a distinguished composer and music teacher. Therefore, it was only natural that after his return to Latvia after World War I J. Vītols, being the founder of Latvia Conservatoire, its long-lasting rector and the head of composition department, brought to life those concepts which he had proved both in theory and in practice.

Actually, several features of the aesthetics of modernism and its diverse stylistic ideas could be fragmentarily observed in some of the music pieces of various genres, composed within the above period, among them choral music by J. Zālītis and piano music by L. Garūta and V. Dārziņš. However, such features referred only to such single manifestations of means of musical expression as harmony, texture and form, never witnessing conceptual turning to those trends of the aesthetics of modernism, which prior to World War II boomed in such European countries of long-established traditions of culture, as France, Italy, Russia and Germany.

Considering the above, we may conclude that a more frequent turning of Latvian classical music composers to radical aesthetical and stylistic concepts which were essentially different from romanticism of the 19th century, started very gradually and fragmentarily only in the second half of the 20th century, mostly in the sixties. Firstly, owing to the long-lasting activities in music education and maintenance of such professional creative establishments as orchestras, choirs, operas and theatres, effected by the democracies of the first free state of Latvia (1920–1934), the authoritarian regime of K. Ulmanis (1934–1940) and the occupation power of the USSR (1940–1991), even despite the ideological terror by the Soviets in the field of art, in the long run had quite naturally favoured the awareness of greater potential stylistic diversity in the perception of composers, performers and the audience. Secondly, several external cultural-historical and socio-political factors within the period in question considerably favoured an increasingly rapid development of such activities. In general, the following factors prove to be most essential:

- the occupation of Latvia under Soviets as a gradual initiator of the 3rd national awakening of the Latvian people at the end of the eighties of the 20th century which periodically facilitated increased interest in taking over every potential artistic experience;
- increased threat of local and global ecological disasters as a price for our technological progress at the expense of nature, having definitely affected the choice of themes and their implementation in art;
- globalization not only in economics but in culture as well as an increasingly active interaction among various regions and traditions which nowadays has affected almost every state of the world.

It should be noted that the topicality of romantic and artistic world outlook has never ceased in Latvian symphony music activity over the course of the 20th century. Just vice versa – towards the end of the century,

owing to several above-mentioned factors, these world outlook notions gained their *second wind*, thus highlighting the panorama of different symphony music stylistic trends with the genesis of neoromanticism and long-lasting flourishing. As a feature of style, reflecting the fundamental notions of the prevalent aesthetics of postmodernism in culture and art of the end of the 20th century, neoromanticism in the music creations of Latvian composers has been and still is the manifestation of universal modes of musical imagery within the framework of the aesthetics of romanticism through the means of expression, based on the synthesis of principally new stylistic solutions, pertaining to different epochs. Such an approach of several contemporary composers makes it possible to perceive the relevant music material as a neo-modification of the style of 19th century romanticism mostly within the aspect of intonationally contextual and constructive qualities of the suggested language of music. However, such a solution sometimes may quite unexpectedly stand out in a most original way as an implementation of overall artistic world outlook regularities in particular creations of music.

Among most outstanding representatives of the trend of neoromanticism in Latvian symphony music towards the end of the 20th century with their creations in the genres of symphony music, instrumental solo performance and lyrical and as well as epic poem can be mentioned, for instance, Ģederts Ramans (1927–1999), Romualds Kalsons (1936), Vilnis Šmīdbergs (1944), Pēteris Vasks (1946), Pēteris Plakidis (1947), Juris Karlsons (1948), Selga Mence (1953), Arturs Maskats (1957), Rihards Dubra (1964) and Andris Vecumnieks (1964). As a matter of fact, in the music of the above-mentioned composers individual stylistic concepts of the romantic world outlook of an artist come to the foreground only in several pieces of music because, being in line with his time, every talented composer has to effect diverse artistic as well as aesthetic ideas.

It might be also pointed out that alongside with representatives of the trend of neoromanticism in Latvian symphony music the last thirty years of the 20th century marked the appearance of such composers who consequently focused on the concepts of romantic music style of the 19th century. The most prominent among them prove to be such personalities as Arvīds Žilinskis, Jānis Ķepītis and Ādolfs Skulte. This period is also characterized by the monumental music creations by Jānis Ivanovs with the unique style of his own, thus confirming a really unsurpassed synthesis of diverse stylistic aspects of modernism and romanticism in the realm of Latvian music history. In this respect J. Ivanovs can be regarded as a personality of no less significance than Benjamin Britten, Arthur Honegger, Sergei Prokofiev, Igor Stravinsky, Karol Szymanowski, Eduard Tubin and Dmitry Schostakovich.

On the one hand, the author actually doubts that the best achievements of Latvian symphony music, created within the period of the first sixty years, taking over several aspects of the aesthetics of the 19th century trend of romanticism can arouse a wide and steady interest within an extended

geographical context. According to the author, the only exceptions here prove to be only such music scores as, for instance, the suite *Latvian dances* (*Latvju dejas*), Concerto for cello and orchestra by Jurjānu Andrejs, the suite *Jewels* (*Dārgakmeņi*) by Jāzeps Vītols, the symphonic idyll *My Motherland* (*Mana Dzimtene*) by Alfrēds Kalniņš, Concerto for cello and orchestra, the Fourth symphony *Atlantis* by Jānis Ivanovs. The above symphony pieces stand out not only as more or less successful adaptations of romantic style of the 19th century but can also address the audience as artistically and stylistically unique, perfect and spiritually saturated examples of music, created within 1880–1940. However, on the other hand, the symphonic heritage of the first period nowadays definitely serves as a significant hallmark to reveal the specific nature of the traditions of Latvian national culture. The specific and from certain aspects of human perception even unique implementation of the notion of romanticism which has never got disrupted in the long run has proved itself to be a matter of value in the history of Latvian symphony music. Such a matter of value, that we can really feel proud of. Such a matter of value that is highly appreciated in the epoch when questions, concerning national identity and culture traditions, have become topical. The more so, within the context of overall procedures of globalization, owing to which the problem of preserving national identity alongside with classical traditions calls for a much more critical assesment of the most diverse advantages and disadvantages of the cultural environment of our contemporary democratic community that took shape after World War II in other countries of Europe step by step, but in Latvia since the beginning of the nineties of the 20th century – rather spontaneously, in many cases even speeding-up in a most disbalanced way.

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