

Latvian Women Composers: Gender Identity and Research Perspective

ILZE ŠARKOVSKA-LIEPIŅA

Latvian University, Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art

ABSTRACT: Broad and gradually growing women's representation on the Latvian professional music scene started at the beginning of the 20th century and nowadays forms a significant part of Latvian music culture (female composers, performers, teachers, music administrators and managers, musicologists, etc.). Music by Latvian women composers Marija Gubene (1872–1947), Paula Ličīte (1889–1966), Lūcija Garūta (1902–1977), Santa Ratniece (1977) and others can be approached using the methods of historical or systematic musicology. But gender, sexuality and feminist discourse require an interdisciplinary approach, including aspects of sociology and social history, which might appear to be quite provocative within the context of Latvian music and the music history canon. Gender identity, the identity of Latvian women composers in particular, will be constructed as an aspect of the national culture identity, based on analysis of several social, political and other factors, feminist studies of Latvian literature and culture, women's self-understanding, self-knowledge, self-criticism.

KEYWORDS: *Latvian music, identity and music, gender studies, feminism, Latvian women composers*

99

LATVIAN music life is currently rich with female musicians, including distinguished composers, performers – singers, solo instrumentalists, conductors, music teachers and music administrators. If we take a look at the landscape of musical life, than we must conclude that women take a dominating role in many fields of music. For example – in music education, where there are a notably large number of women – around 80% to 90%. Based upon Latvian Song Festival data, approximately a third of the most active Latvian choir conductors are women. In the Latvian Composers' Union, alongside 60 male composers, there are 25 female composers. The number of women among the composition students at the Latvian Academy of Music is notably increasing. This means that the existing proportions at the Composers' Union will continue to change in the future. Women also have leading roles in music administration, for instance – the chairman of the Latvian Composers' Union is composer Gundega Šmite, who, additionally, is the artistic director of the *Arēna* festival. Musicologist Anda Beitāne is the vice-rector of the Latvian Academy of Music, and women also work in the higher levels of Latvian professional orchestra management. The director of the Latvian Music Information Centre is musicologist Ināra Jakubone and the director of Latvian Classical Radio is musicologist Gunda Vaivode, among other notable women. Analysing gender statistics in the field of music, one must remember that the overall social status of women in Latvia is very positive – Latvia is in 18th place

in gender equality, notably above Lithuania and Estonia. This is indicated by the latest analysis by the World Economic Forum (WEF) – *The Global Gender Gap Index* [...] (2010: 8–9). In the study, Lithuania and Estonia take, respectively, 35th and 37th place. However, my goal is not to simply describe only the facts or statistics which influence the gender structure in the field of music, but to provide a sketch of the social background which a researcher has to take into account when considering gender and feminism studies in the field of music – to attempt to structure the identity of Latvian female composers.

FEMINISM AND GENDER STUDIES

The ideas of feminism, which initially were concentrated around the idea of women's equality, are quite longstanding – in modern Europe they have existed since at least the time of the Renaissance (when female composers self-actualised). The proclaimed personal and citizen rights declaration in the time of the French revolution were, in fact, the rights declaration of men. When Olympia de Gouges formulated the declaration of women's and citizen's rights, demanding the right for women to vote, as well as the right to hold national office, it is symptomatic that she was sentenced to death. Even until the end of the 19th century, the Western world was structured as a world of men's power with the domination of masculine culture (cf. Buceniece 1999: 107–108).

Only at the turn of the 19th century, with the appearance of the first wave of feminism and the demand for equal rights for women in society, begins the political identity and the formation of societal emancipation of women. As a result, women gained the right to vote in many nations worldwide (among them, in New Zealand – 1893–1919, in Finland – 1907, Denmark, Iceland – 1915, Austria, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, United Kingdom – 1918, USA, Belgium – 1920, Sweden – 1920, Spain – 1932, France – 1944, Italy – 1945, Switzerland – 1971).

The second wave of feminism, which relates to the period after the Second World War, alongside tendencies of equal rights, are searches for specific identity characteristics, particularly womanly differences. Research turns to psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, and social theories, which show the social and cultural differences in genders.

Modern feminism, begun in the 1970s, contains both themes of both historical phases:

- defence of equal rights, which use statistics and empirical sociology,

- search for differences, which are skills of modern feminism philosophy, literary critique, writing, as well as musicology.

Modern feminism as a historical, sociological and other scientific perspective accents the belief that the woman in history has been marginalised and has formed a cultural minority, and that is why she wishes to reinterpret the world which has been created by man. A woman, in her self-interpretation, does not wish to be only theoretical and scientific, but also create her own unique difference and manner of writing (cf. Buceniece 1999: 107–108).

In the context of cultural studies, gender may be understood as the social constructedness of what maleness and femaleness mean in a given culture. It is an ideological concept that is contingent on socio-historical context, rather than the actual biological sense of sex and sexuality (cf. Beard, Gloag 2005: 68). Feminism, as well as the study of gender, only became a concept of musicology in the 1980s (in interdisciplinary musical research – in the 1970s), analysing music as a discourse of gender.

The study of gender and feminism in Latvian science and culture is a fairly new concept, begun only in the 1990s (in truth – renewed after the period of totalitarian regime) along with the tighter integration of Latvia in the western scientific and cultural space, and, up until now, have been developed mainly in the areas of history, sociology, literature history and theory (cf. Buceniece 1999: 113).

101

DEVELOPING OF WOMEN'S IDENTITY IN LATVIA (END OF THE 19th CENTURY)

In Latvia, the first searches for women's identity began at the end of the 19th century, and that slowly grew alongside the formation of Latvian national self-awareness and national identity. The economic power of Latvian capital grew, and that came into conflict with the economic domination of the German and Russian players. Still, the majority of Latvians came from humble communities and frequently encountered economic, social and political discrimination from the ruling German and Russian societies. Therefore, it is not surprising that questions of national identity became significant and gained support from a broad sector of Latvian society. Both the New Latvians (*jaunlatvieši*), and later the national ideology of the New Current (*Jaunā strāva*) movement, and, at the beginning of the 20th century, the increasing popularity of social-democratic ideas in Latvian society encouraged a notable interest in resolving women's questions and began to form a woman's identity, which differs from the cultivated forms of centuries. This became particularly significant in

cities, where women's independence stimulated the necessity to earn their own wage, and gain education so that they would be able to work. The number of women who, due to varied social reasons became educated and began to work in salaried jobs, continued to increase. Alongside other possibilities, the opportunity for musical education increased for women, and, additionally, the education increased in quality. At the end of the 19th century, there were women who gained the highest education in medicine, as well as other exact sciences, who had mainly been studying at the universities of Russia and France (cf. Zelče 2002). Education in music was gained mainly in the conservatories of Moscow or St. Petersburg.

THE FIRST LATVIAN WOMEN COMPOSER

The freelance artist, theoretician, critic, composer, and organ virtuoso **Marija Gubene** (also *Gubens*, 1872–1947), completed the Moscow Conservatory, and, with her example, influenced the efforts of young Latvian women and created a standard for higher education in Latvia. After the formation of the independent nation of Latvia, Marija Gubene became a lecturer at the newly formed Latvian Conservatory, and, as of 1927, worked there as a professor. In truth, she was the first professional female Latvian composer. Her contribution is involved mainly with organ works, choir songs and folk song arrangements for choirs, which she began to compose already at the end of the 19th century – these genres are typical of the beginning period of national professional musical culture.

PHILOSOPHY AT THE LATVIAN CONSERVATORY DURING THE INTER-WAR PERIOD: MILDA PALĒVIČA

One of the most important factors in the formation of the new woman-musician identity was the study of philosophy, aesthetics, music psychology and art theory, which, beginning in 1920, took place at the Latvian Conservatory under the direction of Latvian philosopher Milda Palēviča (also Palēviča-Bite, 1889–1972). She was a Doctor of Philosophy, the first Latvian woman who gained a doctorate in philosophy, a student of philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941). A significant event in the formation of her political views was the 1905 Revolution. Palēviča also endured prison time for her revolutionary work, and, in 1908, emigrated to Vienna, then Geneva, studied philosophy in Strasbourg, artistic science in Venice and Florence, then in Paris. Beginning in 1920, she taught aesthetics and artistic science in the Latvian Conservatory. Palēviča was also the chairwoman of the Society for the Protection of the Labour Rights of Latvian Women.

The essence of Palēviča, to a great extent, is in response to the acknowledgement of her teacher, the philosopher Bergson, that a person's entire life is a series of acts in a creative work. Palēviča must be acknowledged as one of the most powerful figures, as she was a notable representative of intuitivism in Latvia. She had always brought forward the significance of intuition in the creation and understanding of art – she stressed that the realm of art is images of fantasy, emotion and experiences. According to her, the ability to reveal the essence of something differently than in science and philosophy, and, with thanks to intuition, provides the possibility to gain a grasp of whole and synthetic things. These ideas significantly influenced the aesthetic beliefs of the composers of the new generation – students of Palēviča, young women music theoreticians and budding composers.

With Palēviča's participation, the monthly periodical *Latviete* (The Latvian Woman), published by the Latvian women's organisations' council, investigated and formed the Latvian feminine identity in the inter-war period. For the first time in Latvia, the concept of the 'philosophy of feminism' appeared. Alongside articles on the first educated, emancipated Latvian women, the periodical was involved in questions of the formation of a woman's identity – the feminine aspect in varied cultures was analysed (European culture as a masculine culture), as well as analysis of the differences in the feminine and masculine spirit, for example, the idea that

[...] the goal of modern women writers and poets, before all womankind, is to show this – to define herself openly, confidently and honestly and define her own unique path and not hide behind words created by the male species – lady, mother, vamp, courtesan, streetwalker and honest wife (Toivo 1935: 102).

The journal also analysed the denial of femininity as a form of negative self-confidence (cf. Buceniece 1999: 114). Palēviča was a frequently published author, who, for example, spoke against conclusions like spirit decreases vitality, and that a nation only requires women in a fertile and reproductive function (cf. Palēviča 1939: 5–7). It is significant that, frequently during this period, womankind was closely associated with national identity, and there is a clear tendency to view an individual's identity and freedom, as well as female identity, but in the context of the freedom of the entire nation and the identity of the nation.

LATVIAN FOLKLORE AND WOMEN IDENTITY DURING THE INTER-WAR PERIOD

In the process of the research and construction of a national identity, folklore materials were widely used. On the foundation of the analysis of ancient mythology, based on the study of folk songs and other folklore materials, there were attempts to reconstruct the ancient Latvian pagan beliefs in the inter-war period (in fact – the construction of a new religion) – *dievturība*, and ancient social (gender) models. The newly formed religion was based on the reconstructed ‘pantheon’ of gods, which was formed by a great number of female deities – particularly the cosmic deities – the Sun and the daughters of the sun, as well as Māra (Earth Mother, Spirit Mother, Folk Mother, Animal Mother, Forest Mother, Sea Mother, and others), Laima (the goddess of fate) and others (cf. Biezais [1955] 2006; Ström, Biezais 1975). The highest deity was God, though, in actuality, matriarchal elements were reconstructed and the vital role and significance of the feminine element was accented in both a historical and a modern context.

Active collection and interpretation of folksongs became an important tool of the formatting and strengthening of national identity. Singing was considered one of the most vivid expressions of identity (cf. Bula 2000). One must remember that the tradition of folk song narration was dominated by a great majority of female narrators – it is women whose contribution dominated the materials of folk song collectors and systemisers, since they were the majority of mixed choir members. All of these conditions must be taken into consideration when discussing the formation of the woman-composer identity in the musical society of that time, as well as leading philosophical and aesthetic directions which influenced Latvian women composers.

THE FIRST GENERATION OF THE LATVIAN WOMEN COMPOSERS – LATVIAN CONSERVATORY GRADUATES

The Latvian Conservatory, founded in 1919 and under the leadership of Professor Jāzeps Vītols was, even at the very beginning and through the inter-war period, very open to women who wished to study. For example, in the 1937/1938 academic year, of 279 students of the Conservatory, 147 or 52.7% were women – the percentage of women at the University of Latvia was only 29.9%, and, at the Academy of Art, 30.7% (cf. *Latviešu konversācijas vārdnīca* 1939: 38585–38586).

Two women composers, study colleagues, graduated from the Latvian Conservatory, brought a powerful feminine dimension to 20th century

Latvian music – Paula Līcīte (1889–1966) and Lūcija Garūta (1902–1977). Both musicians studied composition with Professor Jāzeps Vītols, and Garūta supplemented her education in Paris with Alfred Cortot.

Paula Līcīte belonged to the new era of emancipated and vivid women – composer, actress, singer, music critic, translator, music teacher. Her compositional style was called ‘moderate modernism’ by critics, particularly her early works, which were influenced by the French Six constructive piano style. In her music, one can find elements of orientalism, a Claude Debussy influence alongside a late romantic style, with elements of Alexander Scriabin. A trend towards emotional enrichment can be found in the works of Līcīte, as well as an expressed subjectivism, lost in oneself. The image palette is very broad – from childhood pastorals and reflections on nature to the existential, and themes associated with personal tragedy (cf. Stumbre 1985).

Lūcija Garūta was not only a composer, but a distinguished pianist-accompanist, and music theoretician. Even when Garūta was a still a student, there was recognition from critics regarding her works – regarding compositional technique, development as an interruption without motive, the very open demonstration of emotion. Later, when the composer had matured in art, these points became singular developers of Lūcija Garūta’s musical style. Her emotions were not always under the control of her mind, though these emotions were put into the correct place by her intuition. Garūta’s compositions often had contradictory critical reaction: some praised her richness of emotion, others, who viewed music more rationally, criticised her one-sided, even notably mannered, expressions. Zālītis noted that Garūta was not troubled by technical problems in the music. In “a light-philosophical spirit, she resolves the threads of her musical thoughts” (quoted after Stumbre 1969: 69). The typical vocal style of Garūta involves declamatory melody and a rich, independent, very complicated accompaniment as the creator of an emotional background. The form and structure are technically convincing. The mood of the music is romantic dreaming, lyricism, and later – tragedy. There is also the theme of the stars and space which is threaded through all of her creative work.

Lūcija Garūta is the only female composer whose work has found a place in the official canon of Latvian music (*Latvian Cultural Canon: Music* 2009), which is the cantata *Dievs, Tava zeme deg!* (*God, Your Land is Burning!*), a vocal instrumental work for choir, organ and soloists, composed in 1943 and premiered in Latvia prior to the arrival of the Soviet Army in the territory of Latvia. It is a symbolic work, important in musical culture not only as an artistic document of that era, but also as a powerful confirmation of Garūta’s compositional mastery and ability. Even until the end of the 1980s, this cantata was on the list of prohibited works in Soviet Latvia.

Both Garūta’s and Līcīte’s creative works were influenced by the notion that there is no stronger whole than a nation’s spiritual culture –

from this notion flows the idea that at the centre of identity is national identity. Values and musical elements defined by folklore are a component of this identity. Both composers initially were somewhat reserved in their attitudes towards the usage of folklore elements, though, with time, the role of folk song elements grew in their music. Additionally, this style tendency brought them towards simplicity – the usage of diatonics and simpler, elementary music formation.

Both Garūta and Līcīte were powerful performers. At the centre of their creative works until World War II was the genre of solo songs, and, for Garūta, piano music as well. Both composers wrote symphonic miniatures, and both attempted works in opera, choir songs, and other genres. It is notable that in almost all of the works of Garūta and Līcīte, narrative played a key role, and a striking programaticism characterised their works. Both composers also had a very imaginative thinking and a stylistic subjugation to image, and both were characterised by the experience of frequently writing poetry and music for themselves. That is a leading creative method in the work of Garūta, though it is frequently used in the music of Līcīte.

It is symptomatic that monographs (in the 1960s and 1980s) analysing the creative work of Garūta and Līcīte were written by female musicologist Silvija Stumbre (1925–1987), one of the first academically strong Latvian music historians, which leads to an additional object for research – the feminine component of musicology.

THE YOUNGER GENERATION: SANTA RATNIECE

At this time in Latvian music there are more than 20 active women composers. Among them are artists of many generations:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dace Aperāne (Aperans, 1953) • Ilze Arne (1953) • Ilona Breģe (1959) • Santa Bušs (1981) • Līga Celma (1978) • Mārīte Dombrovska (1977) • Maija Einfelde (1939) • Marina Gribinčika (1966) • Dzintra Kurme-Gedroica (1968) • Vineta Lice (1955) • Selga Mence (1953) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anita Mieze (1980) • Daina Molvika (1975) • Ruta Paidere (1977) • Santa Ratniece (1977) • Indra Riše (1961)* • Ilona Rupaine (1966) • Solveiga Selga-Timpere (1973) • Līgita Sneibe (1962) • Gundega Šmite (1977) • Anitra Tumševica (1971) • Ruta Vintule (1944) <p>* Indra Riše is the first woman composer to ever graduate the Royal Danish Academy of Music.</p>
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Among the authors of the youngest generation, I would like to note Santa Ratniece (1977), a young composer, whose work has received prestigious international awards. If we look for links that join Ratniece's music with the work of Latvian female composers of previous generations, then we find a notable relation with Lūcija Garūta. Ratniece's style can be characterised with many coda words. The first of them would be narrative. In most cases, she has created the narrative of her music herself. It could be only one word, background, or travel, which is turned into music. The second key word – imagination, which allows one to throw themselves into the unknown, or recall the past, to mix that what has not happened and imagine a sound painting. As critics have noted, it is Ratniece's rich imagination that captivates both listeners and performers, as well as the unusual, womanly "fluidity" – this is how composer and musicologist Leo Samama of the Netherlands characterises Ratniece (Samama 2009). The third characteristic is a tendency towards the distant and unknown – searches for unusual impressions and culture, the study and learning of yet to be discovered worlds through languages (not for nothing is Santa Ratniece studying Chinese, and would like to learn about Indian culture, and immerses herself in the life of landscapes and languages, to cry salt lake tears in the verses of Armenian poet Hovhannes Shiraz). These are also searches in unusual musical impressions (the Indonesian Gamelan orchestra, the landscape for folk songs, and others). Also – the love of sound, which the composer expresses in an unusually refined work with sound. If this refinement for Garūta was expressed in the sophisticated harmony and piano parts, then for Ratniece – it is the ability to work with sonorics, textures, until even the usage of microtones. Ratniece has a particularly notable ability to work with unusual sound effects. The most important is that it is an ability to place in the sound work a powerful emotionality, a sense that the creation of a perfect form is the fruit of intuition.

107

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Women's creative work, until recently, has been formed and has endured in an almost entirely masculine musical world, as part of the male music canon. On the other hand, Latvian professional music, influenced by folklore and singing tradition as well as by women's role in the process of national identity development and social structure in general, is deeply affected by feminine factors.

Sinfonietta Rīga conductor Normunds Šnē has expressed an interesting thought regarding women composers, which recalls the previously expressed ideas:

It seems to me that women composers differ in the fact that they are able to better reveal their inner world and individuality in their music, since male composers can compose extremely clearly constructed and formally precise works, but women appear more directly as entities, as themselves in their works. They do not consider it necessary to conform in some way to a school or directions or theories – they display more their internal essence (Šnē 2010).

Looking for differences in women's self-understanding, criticism, offers many new research perspectives both in social as well as music language specifics, structures, and music reception among other aspects.

References

Beard, D., & K. Gloag (2005). *Musicology: The Key Concepts*. London, New York: Routledge.

Biezais, H. (1955). *Die Hauptgöttinnen der alten Letten*. Trans. by R. Drīzule as: *Seno latviešu galvenās dievietes*. Rīga: Zinātne, 2006.

Buceniece, E. (1999). *Saprāts nav ilūzija (Rietumu filozofija modernisma situācijā)* [Reason is not an Illusion (Western Philosophy in the Situation of Post-Modernity)]. Rīga: Pētergailis.

Bula, D. (2000). *Dziedātājtauta: folklorā un nacionālā ideoloģijā* [Nation of Singers: Folklore and National Ideology]. Rīga: Zinātne.

Latvian Cultural Canon: Music (2009). <http://www.kulturaskanons.lv/en/1/7/>

Latviešu konversācijas vārdnīca [Latvian Conversation Dictionary] (1939), 19. sējums [Vol. 19]. Rīga: A. Gulbja apgāds.

Palēviča, M. (1939). Sievietes gara līdzdalības nepieciešamība tautas dzīvē un kultūrā [The necessity of the participation of the woman's spirit in the life and culture of a nation]. *Latviete* [Latvian Woman], Nr. 1, 5.–7. lpp.

Samama, L. (2009). *Interview with S. Ņedzvecka*. Rīga, Latvijas Radio Klasika, 22 October. <http://www.latvijaradio.lv/program/3/2009/10/20091022.htm>

Ström, Å., & H. Biezais (Hrsg., 1975). *Germanische und Baltische Religion (Die Religionen der Menschheit)*. Hrsg. von C. M. Schröder, Bd. 19.1). Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer.

Stumbre, S. (1969). *Zvaigznes un zeme: Lūcija Garūta dzīves un daiļrades gaitā* [Stars and Earth: Garūta's Life and Work]. Rīga: Liesma.

Stumbre, S. (1985). *Vasaras pastorāles: komponiste Paula Līcīte dzīvē un darbā*. [Summer Pastorals: Composer Paula Līcīte in the Life and Work]. Rīga: Liesma.

Šnē, N. (2010). Personal interview. 15 October.

The Global Gender Gap Index 2010 rankings: Comparisons with 2009, 2008, 2007 and 2006. In: R. Hausmann, L. D. Tyson, S. Zahidi (2010). *The Global Gender Gap Report 2010* (World Economic Forum), pp. 8–9. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2010.pdf

Toivo, T. Sievietība [Womanhood]. *Latviete* [Latvian Woman]. 1935, Nr. 6/7, 101.–107. lpp.

Zelče V. (2002). *Nezināmā. Latvijas sievietes 19. gadsimta otrajā pusē = Unbekannte. Frauen Lettlands in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts.* Rīga: Latvijas Arhīvistu biedrība.