

VIEWS OF RIGA'S GERMAN AND RUSSIAN PRESS ON THE MANIFESTATIONS OF NATIONAL COLOUR IN THE LATVIAN MUSIC (1876–1914)

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Summary

The last decades of the 19th century and the early 20th century were a period when many native Latvian composers and performers first entered Riga's music life that was previously dominated by Baltic Germans. At the same time, due to the Russification carried out by tsar Alexander II, the Russian influence in Riga's cultural life also grew, and significant Russian music institutions were formed. Thus, an interesting and complex interaction between the three national communities and their cultures emerged. This paper aims to characterize one aspect of this interaction: how did German and Russian music critics in Riga perceive the manifestations of the musical *Latvianness*? To answer this question, the paper examines the assessments of the Latvian national colour by German and Russian reviewers, as well as their opinions on the following aspects of Latvian music:

- the most characteristic emotional states reflected in music;
- the treatment of certain elements of musical expression;
- the visual analogies evoked by the Latvian music.

Studies on this topic provide an opportunity to enrich our knowledge about the relations between the three national cultures and their historical context.

The largest German newspapers in Riga that published music reviews were *Rigasche Zeitung* (founded in 1778, initially *Rigische politische Zeitung*) and its much younger competitor *Zeitung für Stadt und Land* (founded in late 1866, regularly published since 1867). *Zeitung für Stadt und Land* was renamed *Rigasche Rundschau* in October 1894 and gradually increased its influence. In the early 20th century, this newspaper was not only important locally – along with *St. Petersburger Zeitung*, it was among the most widely read periodicals in the Russian German community, from the Baltic to Siberia (Janssen 1997: 37). The discussions on Latvian music sometimes also took place in the newspapers *Rigaer Tageblatt* (founded in 1876, initially *Neue Zeitung für Stadt und Land*), *Düna-Zeitung* (founded in 1888) and the liberal *Rigasche Neueste Nachrichten* (founded in 1907).

Among the most outstanding music critics of this period, the poet, composer and pianist Hans Schmidt (1854–1923) should be especially highlighted. He worked both in *Rigasche Zeitung* (1885–1888), and *Zeitung für Stadt und Land* (since 1894 *Rigasche Rundschau*, 1889–1922). The name of Schmidt has already attracted international attention due to the famous *Sapphische Ode* (1883–1884) by Johannes Brahms based

on Schmidt's poem. His personality is discussed in such research as *Hans Schmidt, der Dichter der Sapphischen Ode* (Torgāns 1990) and *Brahms and His Poets* by Natasha Loges (2017: 365–372). As a music reviewer, Schmidt was delicate and benevolent. However, despite his close friendship with Jāzeps Vītols and other prominent Latvian composers, Schmidt allowed himself to express not only many words of appreciation for Latvian music, but also criticism – for example, about the too many *grey* sad tones (H. Schmidt, *Rigasche Rundschau* 09.03.1912).

The paper also observes discussions on Latvian music in the articles of other Baltic German critics, such as Moritz Rudolph, Alexander Staeger, Carl Waack, Richard Günther, and Richard von Wistinghausen.

Significant contributions to the criticism of Latvian music life were made by two Russian newspapers – *Rizhskiy Vestnik* (*Rižskij Vestnik* (*Riga Herald*), founded in 1869) and *Rizhskaya Mysl'* (*Rižskaâ mysl'* (*Riga Thought*), founded in 1907). Vsevolod Cheshikhin (*Vsevolod Češihin*, 1865–1934) was the most influential reviewer who worked in both of them (in 1887–1895, at *Rizhskiy Vestnik*, and in 1908–1915, at *Rizhskaya Mysl'*). He paid a lot of attention to the manifestations of national colour, and observed it in a broader socio-cultural context. Apparently, he could borrow such an approach from his father Evgraf Cheshikhin (*Evgraf Češihin*, 1824–1888), the founder of *Rizhskiy Vestnik*, who was also the first editor of this newspaper, and an active supporter of the pan-slavic ideas by Yuri (*Jurij*) Samarin. Similarly to Hans Schmidt, Vsevolod Cheshikhin contributed to the new Latvian music by translating the texts for several song editions by Jāzeps Vītols and Andrejs Jurjāns. His reviews, although generally favourable, often included critical and even mildly ironic remarks.

Besides the name of Cheshikhin, the contribution of Elena Mihalovskaya (*Elena Mihalovskaâ*) should be highlighted: she was the only female music critic in Riga's Russian press. During 1901–1908 and temporarily in 1911, Mihalovskaya worked at *Rizhskiy Vestnik*. In this newspaper, she frequently discussed Latvian music, mostly highly appreciating it.

The main conclusions derived from the provided research are as follows:

- There were certain differences in the views of German and Russian music critics assessing the role of the national colour in Latvian music. Choral works rooted in folk music were frequently celebrated in the German press, while when reviewing music of other genres, an opinion that sometimes appears is that Latvian composers focus too much on the national colour and thus do not fully reveal their individuality (H. Schmidt, *Rigasche Rundschau* 04.09.1906; also H. Schmidt, *Rigasche Rundschau* 09.12.1913). Meanwhile, for Russian reviewers, the national colour was at the top of the rating scale when judging music of any genre; unlike German press, sometimes “jealousy” could be observed regarding the question of whether Latvian composers should follow mainly German, or Russian musical traditions (K. Koninskij, *Rižskij vestnik* (*Rizhskiy Vestnik*) 22.06.1895; V. Češihin (V. Cheshikhin), *Rižskaâ mysl'* (*Rizhskaya Mysl'*) 21.06.1910).

- At the same time, German and Russian reviewers have mentioned several similar tendencies in the manifestations of national colour in Latvian music: the emphasis on the elegiac, melancholic moods, the frequent use of minor keys and relatively slow tempos, as well as, regarding the visual analogies, the predominance of soft and neutral rather than bright tones. This does not mean that the reviewers have ignored other and significantly different features of musical works created by Latvian composers. However, they are not highlighted in the reviews, the authors of which aim for generalizations about the manifestations of Latvianness in music.
- The words of the prominent Latvian composer Jāzeps Vītols about Hans Schmidt as the only German reviewer interested in Latvian music in the period until World War I (J. Vītols, *Mūzikas Nedēļa* 14.09.1923: 2), undoubtedly indicate a certain tension that existed in the relations between the Latvian and German communities. However, they can be perceived as an exaggeration. The provided research confirms that there were quite a lot of reviewers who expressed a lively interest in the development of Latvian music, both with words of appreciation and objections. Researching the contribution of these critics is an important step for understanding Latvian music history in all its contextual diversity.