

# MAKSIS BRĒMS AND HIS PLACE IN LATVIAN MUSIC CRITICISM IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

Inese Žune

## Summary

This paper is dedicated to one of the most active music critics in Latvian music history – Maksis Brēms (real name Mārtiņš Bremmers) who worked in this field from 1920 to 1940. One could read his name in the newspaper *Latvis*, the monthly periodical *Latvju Grāmata*, and almost every issue of *Latvijas Kareivis*, and that is why researchers often encounter his conclusions about music life at that time, though the character of the author remains unknown. Through the research of his character, we find vital new information about musical life and overall cultural-political tendencies during Brēms' life. The foundation of the paper is material about Brēms which is stored in the collection at the Literature and Music Museum in Riga – collections of his reviews, a few poems, as well his reminiscences of his own life and work. More material about Brēms' life were also found at the State Archives of Latvia.

The paper includes Brēms' life story (1891–1961), where, along with memories of childhood, professional work and the characteristics of his environment, particular attention is paid to the tragic end of his life – on January 25, 1945, Brēms was imprisoned on the charge of hatred of the Soviet regime – this was expressed in his participation in the autumn of 1941 founded People's Charity Organization, which helped maintain hospitals, sanatoriums, kindergartens, support for families that were victims of communist terror, and for maintaining an index of the victims of the Year of Terror (1940/41). The war tribunal sentenced Brēms to ten years in Mordovia Prison. After submitting his appeal, Brēms' case was reviewed on February 21, 1946 at the Ural High War Tribunal, where the verdict remained unchanged. Brēms wrote about these most difficult of his years in his book of reminiscences *Čekas važās* ("In the Clutches of the KGB"), which, sadly, has not made its way to us yet. In 1955 he returned to Latvia where, as he admits, he continues his spiritual exile. Brēms spent his final years in Mārupe, in a house with the poetic name *Ziedu klēpis* ("Lap of Flowers"). He struggled with health problems resulting from his imprisonment, until his life ended in 1968.

Along with his life story, the paper includes characterisations of Brēms' creative work in various fields – including composition and poetry, though the main focus is on his work in music criticism (altogether approximately 2500 publications). In the paper, they are discussed in the following respects:

- Publication style (often very poetic and romantic),

- His view of Latvian-ness in music (he strongly supported it, which correspond to the leading tendencies in cultural life at that time),
- Positive and negative aspects in Latvian music life (at Latvian as well as international artists' concerts) in Brēms' view.

Comments by Brēms contemporaries on his work are reviewed, among which are also critical notes. For example, the unpublished notes by composer Jēkabs Graubiņš *Mana laika sejas* ("Faces of My Era") [Volume III, May 20, 1957, stored at the Literature and Music Museum in Riga] say that the enthusiasm in this critic's expression often overshadows precision. Still, altogether the author of this paper concludes that Brēms' conclusions of musical life for the most part are in synch with the writings of other music critics. This confirms that one can rely on Brēms' notes and his publications of musical events in Latvia can provide a true reflection and evaluation of them.

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