

Jūlija Jonāne

Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music, Department of Musicology
Latvijska akadēmija za glasbo Jāzepsa Vītolsa, Oddelek za muzikologiju

Sacred Music – a Forbidden Fruit: Musical and Non-musical Ways of Survival

Duhovna glasba – prepovedani sad: Glasbeni in neglasbeni načini preživetja

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IZVLEČEK

Prepoved duhovne glasbe v obdobju sovjetske Latvije je sprožila pojav »prepovedanega sadu«. Prikrito in skrivaj je bila kršena na različne načine in v nenavadnih oblikah, med katerimi sta najpomembnejši prenos v posvetne žanre in uporaba skrajnih kompozicijskih sredstev. Ponovno branje besedil bo pripomoglo k podrobnejšemu razumevanju razvoja duhovne glasbe v Latviji in drugih deželah.

ABSTRACT

Prohibition of sacred music during the period of Soviet Latvia was exerted like a syndrome of forbidden fruit, that was breached in the underground way and developed in secret and complicated forms, in which the central is secular music genres' and radical musical language's using. A re-reading of texts will lead to a more nuanced understanding of the development of sacred music in Latvia and other countries.

The development of sacred music can be characterized as a societal phenomenon, as well as a phenomenon within the flow of time – it reveals itself as a social manifestation over the course of time. In the creation of professional sacred music, several distinct factors play an important role. The first and foremost of these is the religiousness of the composer, which is usually the reason behind the creation of a sacred opus. A second meaningful factor is the level of interest held by the performers and listeners, which in a broader and deeper sense can be considered as the religiousness of society. Because of it a sacred composition lives and takes effect in time and place, not just as a score written on paper. The unifying prerequisite of these two factors is the loyalty of the social system that enables religious music to survive and develop within a nation.

Sacred music in denominationally inhomogeneous Latvia exists for nearly 140 years. The beginning of its formation dates back to the last three decades of the 19th century. Upon evaluating the results of compiled facts and analysis in the historical overview, one can see three most significant stages of development in Latvian religious music:

The first period is slow, smooth stage of sacred music's development that begins at the end of the 19th century and lasts to the 1930's. This time is marked by appearance of religious genres in professional Latvian music. The most important sacred genres gradually entry into the output of the first Latvian composers (prayers, hymns, psalms, cantatas and oratorios), that reach the first peak of achievement in the works of almost all composers of this time. Significantly, that all musicians who lived and worked at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century (among them composers, conductors, organists, teachers and workshop leaders) belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. And this affiliation has defined the number of sacred genres.

The language of sacred music practically does not differ from that of secular music. However, in religious music an especial expression is formed, which might be called *religious mood*, pioussness and exaltation, which is manifested mostly in sweet and sentimental sounds, elegiac expressions or opposite to that - in hymn-like or pathetic character. This *religious sweet mood* is diversified by different composition in apocalyptic sense. Practically all of them were written in time of about 1905, 1917 or 1939-1940 - during those years Latvians fought for independence or felt the approach of World Wars.

The second period lasts from 1940's to 1980's and essentially marks a situation of crisis. The existence of religious music takes place outside Latvia's boundaries. Religious moods are expressed within territory of Latvia in a disguised way or with compositions that are revealed fully only in the next historical stage.

And the third period of development of the sacred music in Latvia begins at the end of the 20th century - and lasts until nowadays. This is a time of rapid quantitative and qualitative development. Latvian sacred music quickly emerges as a leading realm after long *forgotten* and forbidden years. Included are genres from the first stage of development, and others, especially canonical genres of the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Church. At first, almost all composers pursue sacred music in some kind of fashion style, but later (at the beginning of the 21st century) composers which write sacred music are less, notwithstanding they have found in this sphere their musical language and *mission*.

The stages of religious music history correspond to another history of music development - they are determined to a large extent by history itself. It must be noted that the second and third stages of development of religious music contrast dramatically, because the ideology and mood at the time left an extremely different impression. In the first case - in the second period - the *survival* of sacred music with modest possibilities. And the third period has very rapid, almost explosive character of development. In this way, current guidelines in the development of Latvian sacred music are generally equal to those of the world's religious music tendencies (both in terms of genre functionality and musical expression), having been achieved gradually as a re-

sult of *non-prohibitional* evolution. Also the *forgetting* and ignoring of religious music during Soviet times is a sign that this sphere within the general cultural context is not self-sufficient, but rather an indicator of the society, national awareness and other situational conditions.

But, accordingly to the object of research, I focus on the second period of sacred music development in Latvia.

Since 1944 Latvian culture, comprising that of music, underwent some kind of not only geographical, but also thematic decomposition. In other words, music developed within two separate realms or territories, which were created by composers, who lived in the territory of Soviet Latvia, and those composers, who owing to the political situation in 1944 had immigrated to other countries. This fact directly affected the state of sacred music. It largely owes its deficit has offset by the composers in exile, most of whom had found their refuge and work under the auspice of churches in the more democratic countries (included Australia, Canada, Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, United States of America etc.). Actually, every composer who lived abroad, feeling homesick, longing for relief, shelter and peace, seeking for some kind of eternal homeland and refuge, focused on sacred music genres and themes.

Prohibition of sacred music in the territory of Soviet Latvia has achieved a syndrome of *forbidden fruit*. Being neither composed, nor performed, this particular music sphere theoretically was missing in Latvian music culture under Soviets, but not practically. The prohibition of the sacred music did not mean ignoring this sphere at all. In the 60s and the 70s of 20th century this resulted in various ways of non-compliance to the above prohibition which were effected in the most disguised and inconspicuous forms, through the presenting secular music genres alongside with radical and modern language of music, or contrariwise - creating music in very simple way. However, to trace these elements at the period in question one had to be very competent in the field of music.

It is no secret that there is a number of ways to make secular music sounds *sacred*. Re-reading of texts both musical and non-musical, associated with these ways, will definitely provide for a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the development of sacred music in Latvia and other countries at the time when owing to all kinds of religion being persecuted, the sphere of sacred music was considered undesirable.

First of all, the deficiency of religiousness was substituted by such universal and in Soviet System's proposed categories and persons like *art, motherland, work and peace, Lenin, Stalin* etc. Such were the particular ethic and humanistic values, which were most cultivated, adored and glorified in those long-ago days.

Nowadays some compositions from this period are still popular because of their musicality and emotionality and thereby transcend both the epoch and regime. For example, in 1970 Imants Kalniņš (*1941), a popular Latvian composer, wrote a song for mixed choir *To Lenin*. This composition was very popular during the Soviet time - owing to its patriotism, emotional straightforwardness and the lyrics by very popular poet in Latvia - Imants Ziedonis (1933-2013) as well. In such a way a very intense emotional directness of the above verses sacralized and glorified the image of the leader of the Communistic Party, this man. At the very end of this song after the final cadence

we can see and hear additional phrase with word which makes some kind of mantra “*Lenin! Lenin! Lenin!*” (see Example 1) and can be perceived as sacral “*Amen! Amen! Amen!*”. Also the title *To Lenin* was selected to make this song popular, to let it be sung during the National Song Festivals as well as in every patriotic concert and meeting. Poetry has made an impressive musical input in the patriotic anthem-like song form with elements of march, unified rhythmical mods and block chord texture.

To Lenin

Imants Ziedonis

Imants Kalniņš

The musical score is written for Soprano and Alto (S.), Tenor and Bass (T./B.), and Piano accompaniment. It consists of five systems of music. The lyrics are in Latvian and describe the revolutionary activities of Lenin.

System 1: Soprano and Alto parts with lyrics: "Lī - tā - sak vēr' - tā - ko - m' dzin' - ce - tā - sak vēr'".

System 2: Soprano and Bass parts with lyrics: "ak - mo - m' dzin' - us - ak - to - vs - puz - sā - Un pie - dzimst' - Ei - ro - p' - ba - la - us - pie - dzimst'".

System 3: Soprano and Bass parts with lyrics: "si - kony - lo - dy - hē - d - z - m' - g - g - g - sā - Lē - aug - stu - pa - kal - na - ku - n' - s - tu - gā - m' - vā - ks -".

System 4: Soprano and Bass parts with lyrics: "die - k - la - i - an - vi - ņ - a - ma - te - deg - va - n - d - z - va -".

System 5: Soprano and Bass parts with lyrics: "le - ņ - i - n - s - Le - ņ - i - n - s - Le - ņ - i - n - s -".

Example 1: Imants Kalniņš: To Lenin.

Therefore, when Latvia regained independence, this song despite of the altered political situation has still remained recognized and popular. Only now its title has been changed. Nowadays the above song is called *Shoots* because of the introductory wording:

*Shoots get rooted in the stone and it cracks.
And the white lightening is born into the air of thunder.
And a valiant man is climbing in the higher;
There is victorious word in his mouth:
Lenin! Lenin! Lenin!*

Nowadays this composition has acquired some kind of halation; hence one can deduce that it has been to some extent sacralized.

Fifty years of the Soviet period have threatened not only sacred music, but also the whole Latvian culture in general, including folklore, traditions and language. To preserve it Latvian artists tried to do their utmost, referring to such means as the *speech of Aesop*. The use of *Aesop's speech* or, in other words, the hidden subtext reveals the true idea of the particular composition or other creation of art, which is otherwise artistically disguised and encrypted. Thus, only competent and prepared listeners can understand the true idea of the musical setting. This issue was the object of research by Latvian and Jewish musicologist Joachim Braun (1929-2013)¹. But now we use this notion very frequently. In such a way alongside with the ideological slogan of the Communistic Party the composer also focuses on such notions as freedom, independence and national identity.

A bright example of *Aesop's speech* is found in the score of the nocturne *Ir tikai nakts/It's Only the Night* by Romualds Jermaks (*1931) that was composed in 1968. This opus is dedicated to J. S. Bach and is full of allusion of his stylistic. However, in generally idyllic texture the Protestant Church chorale *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten* is entwined (in English - *What makes God the only Lord in Heaven*; Example 2).

Wer nur den lieben Gott laesst walten

1. Wer nur den lie- ben Gott laesst wal- ten und lobt- fet auf- ihm al- le zeit,
den wun- der- ba- ren er- hal- ten in a- ler Not und Trau- rig- keit.

Wer Gott dem Al- ler- hoeh- sten traut, der lobt auf- kei- nen Sand- ge- baue.

Example 2: Protestant Church chorale *Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten*

1 Joachim Braun, "Raksti. Studies. Schriften." in *Mūzika Latvijā. Music in Latvia. Music in Lettland*. (Riga: Musica Baltica, 2002): 204-227.

Ir tikai nakts

Juris Helder

Romualds Jermaks

Largo di molto ♩ = 58

Example 3: Romualds Jermaks: Ir tikai nakts (It's Only the Night), mm. 1-15.

In such a way, through the contemplation of the genius of Baroque, the Latvian composer essentially follows in his footsteps, complementing this as to the title secular opus with a chorale setting (Example 3).

He goes even further, choosing the forbidden melodic basis and the true ideas of the composition – among them faith, God as the only Lord and religion as *forbidden*

fruit. Thereby, this example also shows the amount of attention paid to the musical oeuvre of J. S. Bach in this period whose music overall is sacred – in spite of the secular or profane themes of his compositions. And during the Soviet time the true idea of this composition could be understood only by Evangelical Lutherans, which kept silent all this time until the end of the 20th century.

Aesop's speech widely spread as a means of revealing the true, but hidden essence of music pieces also in the 60s and the 70s of the 20th century. Many composers wrote their music to little- or non-understandable lyrics – equivalent to Latin, which is often perceived as a church language and shows an indirect tendency of sacralization process. But this language during the Soviet time was unwelcome, because of its using in Roman Catholic Church, so composers should write to other language – in Old French and Old Italian. For example, Mārgeris Zariņš (1910-1993) in *Partita in stile of Baroque* (for Mezzosoprano, instruments; 1963) has chosen poetry by Pierre Ronsard and Françoise Villon in Old French. Likewise, Pauls Dambis (1936), another Latvian composer, has made use of the poetry by Michelangelo in Old Italian for his oratorio *Stanza di Michelangelo* (for mixed choir, organ/string orchestra; 1971) and verses by Shakespeare in Old English for his composition *Music of Shakespeare* (for MS, piano, flute, cello; 1976). In such a way composers wanted to make their music textually more non-understandable, to alienate the text from the audience – especially from the Soviet government. The effect on the audience was very unusual and exceptional, because the text was perceived in the same way as texts in Latin were mostly perceived by Latvians in church services in past – they didn't understand it in details and didn't want to try to do it. In this way music acquired some nuance of inscrutability, mystery and sacredness.

Especially bold composers dared to write sacred genres, filled with a pronounced secular expression. However, in depth these compositions have preserved the mission of genres and alongside with it – spirituality and sacredness. One can find a synthesis of the traditional language of church music with contemporary and very radical musical means of expression, used outside the church traditions, thus largely determining the primary or secondary construction principles of music genres.

In this respect the *Concert-requiem* by Pauls Dambis is a very remarkable example. This opus, written in 1967 for two boys' voices, two mixed choirs, bells and organ, is based on the verses of Latvian poet Imants Lasmanis (1937-1974). *Concert-requiem* is dedicated to Those Fallen in the Second World War. So, in this composition the author has synthesized liturgical *pro defunctis* cycle with an idea of concerto. This has resulted in some kind of hybrid of two music genres, features of which are unmistakably evident. The genre of the requiem is reflected through the titles. In the four-part composition three parts present the most characteristic headings of the requiem – *Requiem aeternam*, *Lacrimosa*, *Dies irae*. But in contrast to the cycle of the requiem, where the *Lacrimosa* part logically concludes the *Dies irae* sequence, Pauls Dambis combines these movements freely, in line with the contrast principle of the concert genre. However, despite the fact that lyrics were taken from Latvian poetry, it is just the titles, which provide for the emotional code of the requiem.

The dramatic nature and expression of the requiem are achieved by means of multifarious, bold and valiant musical language. For example, the first part is full of such ele-

ments of psalmody and sonority as wailing of despair and sorrow, screaming, speech, whispers and vocalizing.

The function of the slow movement reveals itself in the second part – *Lacrimosa*. The lyricism of the day of tears is expressed by lament intonations of boys' voices, silent dynamics, and the delicate texture of two mixed choirs. *Dies irae* – the third part is a diabolic scherzo in the metrical step of a march. The final fourth part *Reminiscenza* is created in a different way – as a synthetic compilation of the preceding movements, concluding the composition with a rather optimistic mood and with belief that ideas and deeds never die, that they are alive and eternal, and such will remain.

The four-part structure of the cycle, being devoid of the logical sections of the requiem movements is created in line with the traditional symphonic model. The presence involvement of two mixed choirs and organ is based on the idea of the concert genre: the *concertante* effect is achieved by means of antiphonal texture of choirs, choirs and organ alternating and organ cadenza at the end of the first part.

The untypical interpretation of the traditional sacred genre calls for a different explanation. In the 60s of the 20th century the only possibility to opt for the genre of sacred music (with significant changes and preserving the idea of the requiem) was paying tribute to Those Fallen in the Second World War. But, presumably, nowadays the dedication of this composition does not impede listening to it in order to find its sacred meaning. Furthermore, the choice of the synthesis of two music genres could be attributed to the dualism of the whole work. The dramaturgical order of the movements points first of all to the idea of the symphony. So, maybe the composer added the word *Concert* to the title of this particular composition to underline its deeper hidden meaning – concert as a theatrical performance, show and allegory?

Additionally, the *Concert-requiem* by Pauls Dambis was a very popular composition of the Soviet time. From 1967 it was performed more than 300 times – almost two times weekly in Riga's Dome Cathedral for different tourists, prominent persons and other listeners, who wanted to enjoy the one of the biggest organ in Europe and one of the popular choir (State choir "Latvia") in Soviet Union as well. But, presumably, this kind of popularity was provoked not only by dedication to Those Fallen, but also by choosing the genre of sacred music. The above two factors, possibly, intrigued the audience, so to say, *quenching thirst* for spirituality and sacred music genres in those days, when they were prohibited, and with contemporary musical language that is non-traditional in the field of sacred music creating.

However, in spite of prohibition and *tabu*, many different denominations (among them Evangelical Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Russian Orthodox, Old-Believers, Baptists etc.) continued to exist illegally survived under Soviets, thus enabling and favouring the emerging of sacred music genres which reached a real upswing later at the end of the 20th century, and nowadays made very multiflorous denominational panorama of sacred music. Thus it must be said, that the evolution of Latvian sacred music shows a rapid, dynamic, serious and successful growth. In a historically brief period of time it has achieved what has taken much longer in other cultures. In approximately 140 years, it has encompassed from sacred choral *a cappella* miniatures to various denominations genres – Lutheran cantatas and oratorios, Catholic masses and motets, as well as Ortho-

dox liturgies and all-night services. Being conscious of the richness of sacred genres, composers have begun to look at them more deeply and widely – experimenting with sacred music models, combining various genre elements, including musical language and expression and performers that are less characteristic of sacred music, etc.

However, in the most interesting and complicated way Latvian composers have used above-mentioned elements at the time when sacred music genre was prohibited. In conclusion I would like to underline, that almost all above referred composers – Pauls Dambis, Imants Kalniņš and Mārgēris Zariņš, except Romualds Jermaks – were interested in sacred music only during the period of the Soviet Union's forbiddance. When Latvia has regained the independence, these composers didn't want to use this *forbidden fruit's* elements in their inputs and to compose sacred genres at all, while the others started to create sacred music outright. Such a circumstance in musical oeuvre of these composers justifies the thesis that the forbidden fruit is the sweetest.

POVZETEK

Prispevek opazuje različne načine, na katere so sakralne prvine pronicale v posvetno glasbo sovjetske Latvije (1945-1990). Prepoved duhovne glasbe je povzročila sindrom *prepovedanega sadeža*. Prepoved so v šestdesetih in sedemdesetih letih 20. stoletja vedno znova obšli. Pri tem so razvili zapletene in prikrite načine, med katerimi sta bila najpogostejša uporaba posvetnih glasbenih oblik in radikalno novega glasbenega jezika. Takrat je kršitve prepoznal le zelo kompetenten poslušalec. Posvetna glasba je bila sakralizirana na več načinov:

- Najpogosteje je bila odsotnost duhovnosti nadomeščena z univerzalnimi kategorijami, kot so *umetnost, domovina, delo, mir*. Prav te etične in humanistične vrednote so bile negovane in *oboževane*.
- Pojavila se je težnja k drugačnemu govoru. Mnogi skladatelji so uglasbili besedila v slabo, ali celo večini nerazumljivem jeziku – večinoma latinščini (ki je sploh veljala za cerkveni jezik in kaže na odkrito težnjo k sakralizaciji), pa tudi v stari francoščini ali stari italijanščini.

- *Ezopov jezik* je vzporednica skladbi, katere vsebina je umetno prikrita, kodirana. Le izobražen in poučen poslušalec lahko razume, kaj je resnično sporočilo skladbe. Na tak način so bile v posvetna dela umeščene koralne melodije, kot glasniki duhovnega.
- Posebej drzni skladatelji so pisali tudi duhovne skladbe, a z odkrito posvetnim izrazom. Vendar te skladbe v osnovi ohranjajo osnovno poslanstvo žanra – duhovnost in sakralnost.

Vse naštetje načine sakralizacije posvetne glasbe najdemo v skladbah latvijskih skladateljev (60-tih, 70-tih let 20. stoletja), kot so Paul Dambis, Romualds Jermaks, Mārgēris Zariņš in drugi.

Ponoven pregled del (glasbenih in neglasbenih) upošteva omenjene načine prikrievanja, bo prinesel – upajmo – natančnejšo in bolj pretanjeno razumevanje razvoja duhovne glasbe v Latviji in drugih deželah v času, ko je bila duhovna glasba nezaželena, vse oblike religioznosti pa preganjane.

Prevod naslova, izvlečka in povzetka Aleš Nagode