

- Gan citētās preses atsauksmes, gan interpretāciju analīze ļauj secināt, ka Ilstera trio bija starptautiski konkurētspējīgs ansamblis. Un tas savukārt apliecina: latviešu atskaņotājmāksla, neraugoties uz vēl pavisam īso noietās attīstības ceļu, 20. gadsimta 20. gados varējusi lepoties ar patiesi augstu līmeni.

## THE FIRST LATVIAN PIANO TRIO IN AUSTRALIA (1928/1929): HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, GUIDELINES OF CONCERTS, EVIDENCE OF RECORDINGS

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### Summary

This study addresses the first Latvian piano trio ensemble that performed abroad with great success in 1928–1929 in Australia: the trio of Vilis Ilsters (piano), Arvīds Norītis (violin) and Ēvalds Berzinskis (cello). They performed in Australia under the name of *The Russian Imperial Trio*. This article aims to explore both the ensemble itself as well as the historical background of its origin and activities. In addition to scientific literature, the information found in the Latvian and Australian press is used in the research, as well as recordings by the Ēvalds Berzinskis Fund that can be found in the Museum of Literature and Music (*Rakstniecības un mūzikas muzejs*) and are the first historical sonic impressions of any Latvian chamber ensemble.

The study includes the following topics:

- The motivations (economic and cultural policy conditions), which led many musicians to seek employment outside Latvia in 1920s; from this point of view a parallel with today's situation can be established. This subject still needs to be surveyed; however, it is already clear that material conditions also had an essential role in this regard;
- Factors that made the musicians adopt the name *The Imperial Russian Trio* and not providing their land of origin when performing in Australia. It included the partial change of stage names as well: the pianist Vilis Ilsters performed as *Vassili Ilster*, violinist Arvīds Norītis as *Arvid Norit* or *Noritt*, but cellist Ēvalds Berzinskis became *Ivan Berzinsky* or *John Berzinsky*. In August 1928, the ensemble signed a contract with the respected agency *Williamson and Tait*, which previously had cooperated with other world-renowned Russian artists, for example, ballet dancer Anna Pavlova. Latvia, being a new country, was not recognizable enough in the world to encourage foreigners to want to distinguish specific Latvian colours in the music or

its interpretation. Obviously, there was a a greater appeal to national colours of larger nations, such as Russia, Spain, Austria, etc.;

- The repertoire of the trio; the digitalised press archives of Australia (*Trove*) provide an insight into the music programmes of the Australian radio station 3LO in Melbourne. It appears that the repertoire policy was directly dependent on the orders of the radio station that, in turn, was focused on a wide audience of listeners. Thus, a large part of the repertoire which has been gathered includes transcriptions of popular instrumental works for the piano trio ensemble. However, piano trios of such composers as Joseph Haydn, Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Peter Tchaikovsky, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartoldy were also included in the repertoire of the ensemble. Unfortunately, there was no place for the music of the best Latvian composers in the ensemble's repertoire – it was oriented to the musical taste of the Australian audience. However, we do not have the right to condemn the artists in any way;
- Feedback on the ensemble's performances in the Australian press. It could be possible to become familiar with the reviews of *The Imperial Russian Trio* via the digital press archive *Trove*, mainly in the magazine *The Listener In*. In general, the reviews show that the talent and artistic professionalism of the three Latvian musicians was highly appreciated;
- The analysis of the ensemble's recordings. The following recordings of *The Imperial Russian Trio* have been preserved and can be found in the Museum of Literature and Music: transcriptions for the piano trio of the song *Because* (1902) by Guy d'Hardelot, *Liebeslied* for violin and piano (1905) by Fritz Kreisler, Russian gypsy romance *Two Guitars*, and an Irish folk melody *Londonderry Air*. The analysis is focused on the most vivid features of each musician's style of playing; the violinist Arvīds Norītis' parallels with the violin-playing manner of Fritz Kreisler (his expressive sound and stylistically appropriate portamento, which underlines the romantic mood of the violinist's interpretations), the manner of Vilis Ilsters' playing, which is very often soloistic, and the expressive sound of Ēvalds Berzinskis' cello, as well as his highly delicate ensemble performance skills.

Both the press reviews as well as the analysis of the recordings let us conclude that the trio was truly an internationally competitive ensemble. That, in turn, confirms that we can take pride in the high level of Latvian instrumental musicianship in the 1920s, despite its very brief existence at that time.