

A GARLAND OF SONGS FOR A NATION OF SINGERS:  
AN EPISODE IN THE HISTORY OF RUSSIA,  
THE HERDERIAN TRADITION AND THE RISE  
OF BALTIC NATIONALISM  
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**Summary**

In 1872 the Latvian schoolteacher and composer Jānis Cimze (1814–81) published, in Leipzig, a two-volume collection of four-part choral works entitled *A Garland of Songs (Dziesmu rota)*. Its first volume, *Garden Flowers (Dārza puķes)*, contained a selection of works widely known from the repertory of the German choral movement of the early and mid-nineteenth century, with texts newly translated into Latvian. Its second volume, *Wild Flowers (Lauka puķes)*, contained eighty-six Latvian folksong melodies arranged for four voices by Cimze and a handful of his Livland colleagues. Over the course of the following decades, Cimze's *Wild Flowers* would emerge as one of the seminal texts in the history of Latvian nationalism, widely acknowledged among his contemporaries as one of the most powerful expressions of Latvian national sentiment articulated during the period. Indeed, the arrangements it contained would form the core repertoire of the First All-Latvian Song Festival of 1873.

Despite its immediate reception, however, analysis of the contents of Cimze's volume and the cultural context in which was published reveals its musical portrait of an emergent Latvian nation to be a synthetic construct. With respect to its scoring and harmonic language, Cimze's *Wild Flowers* borrow directly from the same German choral repertory represented in his *Garden Flowers*—a repertory that had been introduced to the Baltic *gubernii* by Evangelical Lutheran pastors seeking to extinguish the Latvians' folk-song traditions. At the same time, Cimze also drew upon another aspect of the Baltic German legacy in the region, by setting traditional Latvian folksong texts and melodies such as those collected by generations of Baltic Germans in an attempt to preserve a record of the traditional musics of the Latvian people.

By drawing simultaneously upon these two distinct aspects of the Baltic German cultural legacy, and by exploiting for creative purposes the paradox inherent in that legacy, Cimze succeeded in creating a work that was decidedly modern in its Germanic musical language, but that was immediately recognizable as an essential expression of the historical experience of the Latvian people. As Cimze's remarks made clear in the following years, the composer himself was well aware of the essentially cosmopolitan nature of his endeavor. At the same time, however, a new generation of Latvian cultural activists would deride Cimze's work for its Germanic roots. While standing as a testimony to the cosmopolitan outlook of the first generation of Latvian cultural activists, Cimze's *Garland of Songs* also inspired increasingly xenophobic debate about the destiny of his people in pre-revolutionary Russia.

Piemīņas izdevums, veltīts  
1861. gada dziesmu svētkiem Rīgā

32

