

# GAISMAS PILS (THE CASTLE OF LIGHT) BY JĀZEPS VĪTOLS: PERCEPTION OF THE PIECE DURING THE 20<sup>TH</sup> AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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## Summary

Being one of the most popular choral ballads and being considered as an outstanding example, even the standart – the symbol of Latvian National Song Festival – the ballad *Gaismas pils* can be discussed and analyzed as a mythological phenomenon.

*Gaismas pils* is closely connected with the name of the prominent composer Jāzepe Vītols. However, over the time we can notice mystification or artificially constructed myth of *Gaismas pils*, and that can already be called a real mythology.

In 2009 the song was included in Canon of Culture in the field of music of the Ministry of Culture of Latvia. It is the only piece by Jāzepe Vītols that has been accepted by the jury in the List of 12 values. Now the song has an official status of canonization in our society.

In December 1936 the colleagues of Vītols created a wonderful gift when celebrating his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as professional composer and teacher – the musicians presented him with a handmade artistic plate with illustrations of Vītols' nine most outstanding compositions. In 1930ies the society of contemporaries recognised a considerable amount of values in Vītols' output. They remarked his symphonic music, instrumental chamber music and choral music in the broad sense of the word. At that time *Gaismas pils* was not perceived as a strong and remarkable symbol of his output.

The perception of the piece *Gaismas pils* cannot be restricted only in the context of Latvian National Song Festival. Music historian Valentīns Bērzkalns discovers the history how the song *Gaismas pils* became the symbol in exile during the period of 1946–1965. It can be observed that in 1950ies Latvians in exile started to use specific models of programmes where a song has its own particular place:

Model 1: National anthem – *Gaismas pils* – ...;

Model 2: National anthem – classical „canon“ (different songs of Latvian classics, including *Gaismas pils* by Vītols);

Model 3: National anthem – the concert programme – the final piece *Gaismas pils*.

Another interesting archives document can be found at Jāzepe Vītols Memorial Room at the Jāzepe Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. It is a version of the song rewritten in exile in Germany by Vītols. The note of

his wife says that it has been written by heart, and the wife had helped him to recall in his memory the text. It has been written down in 1945 in Flensburg.

The Soviet ideologists organized the first plenum of composers in Latvia Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in 1946. The Latvian composers in exile were totally declined in the plenum. As representatives of Latvian music „golden foundation“ only Emilis Melngailis, Emīls Dārziņš, Jānis Zālītis, Alfrēds Kalniņš, Jāzeps Mediņš and Jēkabs Mediņš were mentioned. An important fact to be stressed is that in 1948, during the I Soviet Latvia Song Festival, the composer Jāzeps Vītols was rehabilitated with the song *Gaismas pils*. The song took its particular place in the programme of the Song Festival during the Soviet regime, too. The song is still irreplaceable in nowadays Latvian Song Festival programmes.

The article continues with research on Latvian poet Auseklis (1850–1879). As the most talented poet in 19<sup>th</sup> century history, he belongs to the group of artists who searched for the lost paradise motive in the art. He wrote the poem *Gaismas pils* around 1875–1876. Some songs with lyrics by Auseklis have become the highest manifestation of patriotism and national pride during the Latvian Song Festivals.

In the article there are some explanations why the composer did not take two verses of the well-known poem, although the poet talks about the colours of Latvian flag and mythology. In Russia the period from 1890ies till 1905 was reactionary, the censorship was very strong for the press and literature. Auseklis' politically ambiguous text was forbidden already before Jāzeps Vītols composed the song in 1899.

There are plenty of historical facts (myth's structures) that continue to live in the Latvian society, many elements of *Gaismas pils* myth being reborn from time to time, but some of those constructed elements dying off.

The society still preserves the popular myth of the lost paradise (which is *Gaismas pils* in point of fact). For example, the new building of the National Library of Latvia will be opened in 2014. In our society it is been called *Gaismas pils*.

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