

# JĀZEPS VĪTOLS IN THE SOURCES OF ICONOGRAPHY

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## Summary

**Keywords:** iconography, portrait, satirical cartoon, caricature, Jāzepe Vītols

The research of iconographic sources in the historiography of Latvian music has been limited. In this paper, there has been an intentional separation of iconographic sources from films and photographic documentation sources. When compared with other diverse portrait makers in the field of music culture, Jāzepe Vītols is a striking leader, and this direction deserves a greater attention in the field of research. This paper accentuates a particular aspect – source research criticism of portraits, satirical cartoons and caricatures of Jāzepe Vītols - while not attempting to research visual history *per se*.

Iconography is systematic research and description of the image of a defined subject or person, and provides an explanation of its meanings, symbolism, and attributes in its artistic portrayal system. It is also research, description, and systemization complex, based on the typological features of a particular subject or portrayal of a person. In that way, iconography indicates the historical development of a subject or a person's portrayal, a continuous repetition of a particular visual tradition.

The author's most important assignment was to collect and systemize the broadest possible range of sources. The second vital assignment was to clarify the source's hidden (or indirect) information and the historical context.

Well known works of art have enabled the development and further reproduction of visual stereotypes of Vītols. For many decades, Vītols did not change visually (there were always recognizable elements – bald head, glasses, beard, neckerchief, and so on). When analysing recognizable iconographic sources, one can conclude that Vītols' public image has not always been evaluated in the same way.

Iconographic sources allow viewers to see Jāzepe Vītols in two ways:

1. In the aspect of national historic memory – Vītols, as someone who worked in the field of culture, is considered to be one of the most distinguished personas in the nation's pantheon – his portraits are representative.
2. The characteristic hyperbole of the satirical cartoons and caricatures reflects maintenance of social norms, didactic motifs, a turn towards negative occurrences in society. The diverse

views of Vītols as a public persona reveal both subjective and sensitive reactions to the mood of society.

The paper analyses Jāzeps Vītols with regards to the St. Petersburg Latvian artist group *Rūķis* and its members Rihards Zariņš, Jānis Roberts Tillbergs, Kārlis Brencēns, and collaboration with artists Ludolfs Liberts, Niklāvs Strunkis, Alfrēds Kalniņš and Juris Soikans, as well as displays the accomplishments of these masters from 1906 onwards. The caricatures are taken from the periodicals *Svari*, *Aizkulises*, *Latvija*, *Atpūta*, and the main themes analysed are the Song Festival, Latvian composers, and Vītols' anniversaries and awards.

Iconographic sources illuminate the many facets of Jāzeps Vītols' personality: satisfaction with his leadership status, comfort (1906, 1937), praise for being the leader of musical life (1933), the cultivation of his image or his internal and external appearance (a particular neckerchief in 1926, 1929, 1931, 1948), the status of patriarch (1926, 1933), and the role of the bringer of composure and wisdom to society (1926). It is significant that Vītols' iconographic sources, particularly satirical cartoons and caricatures, were created in the time period from 1926 to 1933, and involved anniversaries of Vītols' work and life, notable events, as well as celebratory culminations. For all of these years he, as a public persona, was an active initiator and participant in these events. That partly explains why we have such a broad range of iconographic sources from the perspectives of diverse artists. Additionally, we must consider the fact that the 1920s and 1930s were a time when humorous drawings flourished. Altogether, Jāzeps Vītols' personality is most often characterised in satirical cartoons, while in caricatures he represents the groups of society involved with cultural and political questions. The views of the caricature artists are not about Vītols' personality specifically, but relate more to his public status – it is for his being a member of high society that the composer is among the national elite of those being caricatured. Jāzeps Vītols is the first Latvian musician whose visual canon has remained so powerful and viable to this very day.