

ORGANIZATION *LATVIJAS SKAŅRAŽU KOPA* (1923–1939) AND COPYRIGHT PROTECTION

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Summary

The article is based on research of documents of the organization *Latvijas Skaņražu kopa* (Composers' Society of Latvia or CSL), mostly found in the Latvian State History Archive of Latvian National Archive, the Memorial Room of Jāzeps Vītols in the Latvian Academy of Music, the Latvian National Library and the Museum of Literature and Music. The first-time study of the organization's archive is important in order to obtain first-hand knowledge, therefore, the aim of this article is to publish new information on this organization and its activities, paying particular attention to the activities related to the improvement of composers' economic and social situations and the protection of their copyrights.

The CSL was one of the associations of musicians that shaped Latvian music life during the 1920s and 1930s. It was established on the 5th December in 1923 bringing together the most visible personalities in music of the time – Jāzeps Vītols, Emīlis Melngailis, Alfrēds Kalniņš, Jānis Zālītis and Jānis Mediņš. The CSL welcomed community-recognised composers, conductors and musicians, reaching 39 active members in 1938. The dissolution of the organization occurred due to the establishment of the so called “Chambers” during the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis. In 1938, under the umbrella of the Music Section of the Chamber of Literature and Art, the Music Society of Latvia was established to become the only association of musicians. The liquidation process of the CSL was closed on the 9th November in 1939.

The CSL had several main activities: publishing – the society established and published the music magazine *Mūzika* and founded the score publishing house; concert organization – it organized the evenings of new compositions; promotion of new compositions – it raised the funds for publishing the scores, maintained the score accounts of the composers; implemented cultural policy – the organization appointed representatives to the Expert Commissions of the Latvian Culture Foundation and the Music Council of the Ministry of Education; the organization of music life in broader sense – the CSL approved the official editions of the Latvian national anthem, fought for the rights of the Latvian Society for Song and Dance festival to curate the VII Nationwide Latvian Song festival; and provided protection of copyright and collective administration. The latter was the most resistant against all challenges and kept its position until the dissolution.

Until now, the issue of the collective copyright protection and management during the First Republic of Latvia (1918–1940) had not been researched. The author managed to find out that in the mentioned period, there were two organizations responsible for the collective management of property rights of the authors – the Latvian Art Agency

(*Latvju Mākslas aģentūra*, 1922), the Composers' Society of Latvia (*Latvijas Skaņražu kopa* since 1931), but from 1939 on, this function was entrusted exclusively to the Chamber of Literature and Art. After the proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Latvia in 1918, the *Law on Author's Rights* dated 1911, created during the Russian Empire, still remained in force. The national *Law on Author's rights* was adopted only in 1937, when Latvia joined the Berne Convention in order to protect copyright internationally. The author's honoraria (royalties) were regulated according to the tariffs adopted by the mentioned collective organizations of copyright protection, but at the end of the 1930s, the author tariffs were approved by the law (1937, 1939).

The first terms and conditions and tariffs of composers were established and announced by the CSL in 1924. The organization delegated the management of copyright of its members to the Latvian Art Agency. After a cooperation lasting six years (1925–1930), the contract was broken, and the CSL itself became the organization of the collective management of authors' material rights (1931–1938). The registering and pay-out of CSL honoraries were entrusted to the treasurer – one of the members of the Board. This position was held by Jānis Mediņš (1931–1935), followed by Eduards Kalniņš (1936–1938), receiving 5% and later 10% from each royalty. In order to optimise the administration of copyright, starting from 1936, the obligations were divided – the honoraries of CSL authors were collected from Riga Radiophone, meanwhile, the author honoraries from different organizations and musicians in Riga and regions were collected by Jānis Kuplis, the representative from the Latvian Society for Song and Dance Festival.

At the same time, the tariff of honoraries for public concerts did not change (except for compositions included in the Song festival), the increase of royalties due for Radiophone broadcasting was claimed on a regular basis. Relatively small amendments in favour of composers were achieved in 1927, followed by a more serious increase in 1934. The law approved in 1937 prescribed a differentiation of tariffs to be paid to foreign or Latvian composers (at rates up to 50% higher than before).

As for vinyl (or shellac) discs, the composers wanted to receive two different types of royalties – a fee for recording in vinyl (or shellac) disc (in 1929 and 1934 the agreed minimum honorary was 200 Latvian Lats (Ls)) and a fee for replaying the disc on radio (the Radiophone declined this requirement, but the *Law on Authors' rights* of the 1937 prescribed that the discs can be played in public without asking permission to the author and without reward). The minimum honorary was also set by law for the reproducing and publishing of scores. In case of a failure to ask for permission and to pay the honorary, the CSL banned the reproduction and publishing of the scores of CSL members and undertook these activities itself. The ban was in force for six years (1928–1933) until its abolition when a new agreement on minimum honorary was formed. Starting from 1931, each composer had a score account, where the royalties were accumulated (withdrawing 15% from each honorary) and used exclusively for the publishing of scores. The CSL also became a member of an international organisation of copyright and started cooperation with foreign composers' societies.

The introduction of the improvements in copyright administration was very slow, but persistent. The permanent urgency of the authors' rights and the respective protection maintained by the society was one of the reasons that led Latvia to join *Berne Convention* and adoption of national *Law on authors' rights* in 1937, which made the protection of copyright easier and stimulated the successful administration of honoraries resulting in improvement of composers' social and economic conditions. The CSL was the main organization of composers' copyright protection during the interwar period.