

# THE ORIGINS OF LATVIAN SYMPHONIC MUSIC. A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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## Summary

Latvian symphonic works nowadays have become the *face* of contemporary music not only in Latvia, but in other parts of the world as well. Such an event as *The Year of Latvian Symphonic Music 2005* encouraged much research. My paper is focused on miniatures composed by Latvian composers during the period from 1880 to 1914, taking into account each work in the context of the situation of Latvia's concert life, at the same time giving a broader view into the cultural/historical life of Latvia at that time. I touch on the socio-political panorama at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The origins of the development of Latvia's self-awareness and independent cultural life in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were closely linked with people of other nationalities living in Latvia's territory, primarily Germans and Russians. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Riga was economically and partly culturally on a similar level with many European cities. Representatives of German culture were dominant in Riga, with their well developed traditions in music, architecture, philosophy and art, maintaining close ties with Germany. A positive influence on the cultural situation in Latvia was the fact that the Baltics were not only a transit zone between Germany and Russia in terms of trade and industry, but culturally as well. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Latvian national culture had gained a great deal from Russian culture, mostly through ties with the czarist metropolis of St. Petersburg. Latvia's first professional composers and founders of the Latvian national school studied there.

The origins of musical works are not only the result of a creative personality's musical idea, but also of the environment and conditions in which the composer worked. In spite of the high level of activity in Riga's concert life during the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Latvians did not yet have their own symphony orchestra, nor was there a wide audience for symphonic music, and this had a negative impact on the development of output by Latvian composers. Significant also was the powerful influence on Latvian cultural life by the dramatic theatre, which did not enhance the creation of large-scale symphonic works, but oppositely encouraged the creation of miniatures for small ensembles or chamber orchestra. Significant was the problem of financing the publication of printed music.

Beginning with the first Latvian symphonic score in 1880, almost all Latvian composers' works for symphony orchestra (the early works of Andrejs Jurjāns and Jāzeps Vītols, and the *Lyrical Fantasy* by Emīls Dārziņš) were based on quotations of Latvian folk melodies and their development. Single-movement compositions began to flourish – programmatic tone poems, scenes, and the like; these genres were typical for many other new

national schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and they often reflected mythology, folk song and dance themes.

In the table that is attached to this paper is a list of symphonic miniatures by Latvian composers that were written between 1880 and 1914.

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