

programma kafejnīcā *Kongress Rīgā*, Brīvības ielā 15. 1932. gada 15. novembris

RTMM p131663 = Rakstniecības un mūzikas muzejs, inventāra nr. RTMM p131663: Kaizers ar dēliem Valentīnu (pa kreisi) un Raimonu (pa labi). Rīga, 1940. gads. Foto: Jānis Kalniņš

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## **VIOLINIST TEODORS KAIZERS (1902–1964): HIS ROLE IN ENTERTAINMENT MUSIC IN LATVIA AND EXILE**

**Inese Žune**

### **Summary**

Already at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Riga was known as a centre of not only art and music but also entertainment and the enjoyment of life. In a few decades, as Latvia became an independent country, the number of cafés, restaurants and other entertainment venues in the city had quickly grown to almost one hundred. Many people from abroad visited Riga, but Rigans themselves also enjoyed spending their free time in the city's restaurants and cafés, which were ornately decorated according to the latest European trends. Here, the intelligentsia and upper classes met to finalise various deals or simply relax for a few hours. Regular citizens who had come to enjoy a concert, opera or play dropped by the cafés in central Riga to discuss what they had seen and heard on stage. The performers themselves also came to unwind, and among them were well-known names on the Latvian music scene, including Volfgangs Dārziņš, Valērijs Zosts, Leonīds Viņners, Milda Brehmane-Štengele, Rihards Pelle, Mariss Vētra, Teodors Reiters, Jānis Zālītis and others.

In an effort to market and popularise their establishments, the restaurant and café owners organised various types of musical entertainment for their guests. The schedules changed each month and mostly featured artists from abroad. Hungarian and Gypsy violin players were particularly popular, the best of whom dazzled listeners with their improvisation skills and could adapt their repertoire to please each and every audience member.

Local violinists strived to emulate these foreign musicians. One of the most popular Latvian entertainment violinists and band leaders of the 1930s was Teodors Kaizers (born November 27, 1902, in Riga; died December 12, 1964, in Melbourne). He had studied violin privately with a number of different teachers, but his studies in Budapest with the famous salon violinist Georges Boulanger (1893–1958) had been particularly pivotal. It was from Boulanger that Kaizers learned the Hungarian-Gypsy style of playing that was in such demand at the time. According to ethnomusicologist Ieva Tihovska, Gypsy music (although usually stylised instead of authentic) was very popular in Riga's cafés, restaurants, dance halls and casinos in the 1930s (Tihovska 2014: 180–181). Kaizers also had the opportunity to play with Hungarian entertainment music orchestras and become acquainted with their repertoire.

After returning to Latvia, Kaizers performed in many cafés and restaurants in Riga and was a widely known performer of popular music who played not only the violin but also the trumpet, clarinet, percussion, guitar and double bass. The orchestra he led played a very wide variety of music, ranging from arrangements of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century opera music to Hungarian and modern American music. The latter included a number of jazz compositions, for example, Duke Ellington's *Mood Indigo*, as documented by the Latvian jazz history researcher Indriķis Veitners (2014: 138).

One significant performance venue for Kaizers was the *Milk Restaurant (Piena restorāns)* of the Riga Dairy Producers' Union, located at Elizabetes iela 55, on the street that was known at the time as the Old Broadway of Riga. Kaizers also composed some pieces of his own, among them *Spēka dzēriens* (Muscle Drink), a song about milk with lyrics by Vilis Plūdons, which was especially popular at the *Milk Restaurant*. Following the emigration of Latvia's other best-known salon violinist, Bruno Čuncīņš, to Germany in 1939, Kaizers took over leadership of the *Opera Café (Operas kafejnīca)* orchestra. Kaizers also served as principal violinist of the Latvian National Theatre Orchestra (under conductor Jānis Kalniņš) for five years (1928–1932). He even performed the role of the violinist Imre in Melchior Lengyel's comedy *Night Serenade*.

From 1932 until 1938, Kaizers' name regularly appeared in Riga Radiophon programmes that featured his orchestra. Live performances

from cafés and restaurants in which he participated were also broadcast on the radio from time to time. Kaizers took part in many recordings for the *Bonophon*, *Homophon* and *Bellaccord Electro* labels both as a soloist and the conductor of his salon orchestra.

During the Second World War, Kaizers performed as a solo violinist and conducted the orchestra of the Latvian Frontline Theatre, entertaining Latvian conscripts in the Nazi German army. The theatre covered a distance of more than 10,000 kilometres to perform for Latvian military units stationed from the Gulf of Finland all the way to the Black Sea. In late 1944, Kaizers fled to Germany as a refugee. There, he initially played with the Hannover Radio Orchestra and later became the commandant of the *Beverīna* refugee camp in the British occupation zone of Germany. After the war, he organised the Latvian musical ensemble at the *Cerība* displaced persons (DP) camp in Holzen, Germany.

Kaizers emigrated to Australia in 1952, where he continued to work professionally as a violinist at prestigious hotels, nightclubs and restaurants in Sydney and Melbourne as well as Hayman Island in the tropics. In Sydney he re-established a salon orchestra and signed a contract with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), which regularly broadcast the orchestra's music several times a week. Together with saxophonist, pianist and accordionist Harijs Rozentāls and singer Ārija Prindule, Kaizers bought the *Green Dolphin* nightclub in Melbourne in 1958 and continued playing there until the end of his life.

Kaizers' granddaughter Sarmīte Zaļkalna (née Kaizere), who lives in Skrunda, Latvia, has donated a large number of materials from her grandfather's private archive to the Literature and Music Museum of Latvia. Together with other materials, these resources provide a valuable insight into Kaizers' own activities as well as significant aspects of repertoire and style in the history of Latvian entertainment music. It can be concluded that many of the most illustrious musicians in this genre were quite open to the newest European and American trends in music; Kaizers himself, although best known as an exceptional performer in the Hungarian/Gypsy tradition of violin playing, also felt at home with the classical and jazz repertoires. In exile, his achievements among not only his own countrymen but also broader German and Australian audiences point to his personal success as an artist as well as, indirectly, the high level of Latvian entertainment music in general and its ability to compete in the international market.