

THE LEGENDARY FESTIVAL *VASARAS RITMI* AND ITS MEANING IN JAZZ DEVELOPMENT IN LATVIA IN THE LATTER HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY

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Summary

The jazz festival *Vasaras ritmi* (*Summer Rhythms*), was once the main jazz event of the year, not only for Latvian jazz musicians, but it was also considered to be one of the most famous and prestigious jazz festivals in the entire USSR. The festival, which grew from a simple jazz evening to a concert series over the course of a week, has played an important role in the development of jazz not only in Latvia, but in the entire USSR. In fact, the festival and the related *Riga Jazz Club* were the main catalysts and driving forces in the development of jazz in Latvia in the 1970s and 1980s. Even today, the name of the largest contemporary Latvian jazz festival *Rīgas ritmi* (*Riga Rhythms*), clearly demonstrates the impact of the legendary festival in the development of Latvian jazz. However, it was not without controversy (especially in the late 1980s), and it failed to transcend into a new economic reality after the collapse of the USSR. As a result, it ceased to exist soon after the restoration of Latvia's independence. Nevertheless, the festival left a significant mark on the development of Latvian jazz, and its influence can still be felt today.

Jazz festivals have always played an important role in the development of jazz, but in the context of totalitarian regimes, this has often been much broader than simply promoting a particular genre of music. Jazz festivals in the USSR were much more than just concerts - in the totalitarian society then in existence, they were an opportunity for musicians to express themselves more freely in a genre that was marginal to Soviet life, and a chance for the public to escape the depressing reality of their daily lives.

In the 1970s, quite a few cities in the Soviet Union hosted jazz festivals. Their organizers were skilled and agile people who, in the name of music, learned to use the existing power structures to achieve their goals, often by skilfully and cleverly bypassing the constraints of power and ideology. Gradually, a whole network of jazz festivals was established in the USSR, their organizers and the musicians who played at them both working closely together. However, these festivals were also characterized by their limited financial resources, their dependency on official state organizations, and the ideological control exerted on them by the official power structures. The contribution of these festivals to the development of jazz is historically very important, and their role in the development of jazz culture can only be truly appreciated now.

How was a simple group of like-minded people in the Soviet system able to organize and create one of the longest-running and most successful jazz events in the entire

USSR? The true meaning of the *Vasaras ritmi* phenomenon is revealed when viewed in a broader historical context, starting with the very first jazz festival in Latvia, KIKOK, in 1964, the impact of the famous Tallinn Jazz Festival in 1968, and the establishment and commitment of the Riga Jazz Club with jazz festivals in other USSR cities.

The article is dedicated to the creation and course of the most important Latvian jazz festival *Vasaras ritmi*, revealing the context of its emergence, its role in the development of Latvian and Soviet jazz in the period from the mid-1960s to the 1990s, and its legacy to this day.

The report includes the story of first jazz festival in Latvia, KIKOK, the creation of the jazz cafe *Allegro*, the founding of the *Riga Jazz Club*, as well as the chronology of the festival *Vasaras ritmi*.

The article examines the musicians who regularly performed at the festival, different periods of the festival's development, analyses its organizer's personalities and their importance in the creation and development of the festival.