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CONTRIBUTION OF ORCHESTRA CONDUCTORS TO DEVELOPMENT OF LATVIAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CONDUCTING SCHOOL SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY AND UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD WAR II

ABSTRACT

The article "Contribution of orchestra conductors to development of Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school since the beginning of the 20th century and until the end of the World War II" characterises the personalities of the conductors Artūrs Bobkovics, Emīls Kupers, Georg Schneevoigt, Teodors Reiters, Jānis Kalniņš, Jānis Mediņš, Oļģerts Bištēviņš, Bruno Skulte and Ādolfs Ābele, who played a significant role in development and inheriting of the traditions of symphony orchestra conducting in Latvia, as well as in interaction of art of conducting and composition, along with promotion of interaction with the world music culture traditions. The outstanding artistic activities of the aforementioned conductors may be viewed as a substantial precondition for the formation of the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school in the period from the beginning of the 20th century and until the end of World War II.

Keywords: *conducting school, personality, conductor, traditions, development of principles, symphony orchestra.*

The purpose of the study: To evaluate the contribution of the foremost conductors in the earliest stage of the formation of the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school.

The concept of the principles of a national conducting school as a certain aesthetic direction, the essence and purpose of which is the acquisition of views and traditions, their preservation and dissemination is based on the principles of modern art education as defined by Jānis Anspaks (Anspaks,

2006(a)). The national conducting school is a direction in the music culture, based on a set of certain artistic aesthetic principles, culture traditions and experience, and, as said above, its basic tasks acquisition, preservation, elaboration and dissemination of these values.

Exceptional personalities in the art of conducting are a precondition for the formation of the national symphony orchestra conducting school, therefore it is important to assess the contribution of outstanding conductors in the Latvian music culture.

- the age: “An age sets the requirements for a personality, marks the ways of Latvian, while the personality with one’s creative, purposeful actions influences the direction of the society”;
- pedagogy: “... having performed significant research, enriched such areas of pedagogy science as pedagogy history, psychological pedagogy, methodology”;
- ideas and conclusions “... based on the results of a research”;
- the essence of a personality, revealed in “... action, achievement, or in a wider sense – in the life achievement, lifeworld” (Krūze, 2008, pp. 4–5).

Another aspect characterising personality and its greatness, is revealed in the statement of J. Anspaks, that in preservation and Latvian of culture values the activity of every individual – self-education – plays a great role (Anspaks, 2006).

A. Maslow, characterising the structure of a creative personality, attaches great significance to relation of a creative personality and its self-actualization. Maslow connects the self-actualisation with such traits of a creative personality as openness to emotional experience, natural and free behaviour, naivety in perception and ways of expression, strive for that what is beyond the grasp of the human mind, lack of fear. Such human activity is characterised by structured cognition, mind governed by intuition (Maslow, 1987).

In study of personality also the following needs to be emphasised:

- social relationships characterising a personality – “(..) a personality is a human being having entered into certain social relationships, being aware of these relationships and as a subject of active action can change the world and be responsible for the results of this change.” (Karpova, 1998, p. 13);
- a personality having (..) a certain scale of influence, that can be calculated from a territorial perspective (..). Influence can also be measured in generations and number of contemporaries and descendants covered by the ideas and emotions (..).” (Karpova, 2005, p. 10).

Assessment of the ideas by A. Dauge, J. Anspaks, Ā. Karpova, A. Krūze was the conclusive factor in selection of the personalities, in order to characterise their contribution in development of Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school. For the present research those personalities – conductors significant for the Latvian and existence of the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school – were chosen whose lifework shows the following:

- self-actualisation as the most substantial element in the characterisation of a creative personality (A. Maslow);
- self-perfection and self-education (A. Dauge, J. Anspaks);
- the scale of a personality's influence that can be evaluated in a certain territory and whose influence can be felt in several generations (A. Karpova);
- individual peculiarities, unique individual features, individual style (A. Karpova);
- teaching activities.
- the evaluation of conductors' contribution was based on the elements characterising the formation, existence and development of the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school, and namely: contribution in popularisation of the Latvian national composition school that promoted the inclusion of folk traditions, norms and values in the symphony orchestra music culture;
- contribution in the establishment or work of the conservatory that contributed to teaching of new professional symphony orchestra conductors;
- relationship with the choir music culture traditions that to a great extent promoted the formation of orchestra conducting traditions;
- rich experience in direction of professional ensembles, orchestras, musical theatres and choirs;
- openness towards other musical cultures and contribution to the world musical culture.

The activity of individual conductors reflects significant elements characterising the formation, existence and development of the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school, as a talented performer can in any circumstances surprise and inspire the audience with a fresh, original and unique interpretation of the performed piece that leaves an impression on the public opinion. The basis of this phenomenon is the personality of the artist, as defined by his value orientation and inimitable individuality (Karpova, 1994) that substantially influences the performance of the musical piece, as the development of performing art is closely related to the development of individual personalities.

Artūrs Bobkovics

(1885–1959)

Artūrs Bobkovics was not only the first professionally educated Latvian symphony orchestra conductor, but also a teacher and the long-term director of Latvian University choir.¹ His importance is also increased by the fact that Bobkovics was the founder of the Latvian University chamber orchestra. Thus in his lifework he has realised himself in the fields, that have also been of importance for the activities of other Latvian symphony orchestra conductors.

In his day neither Moscow, nor Petersburg conservatories had special conductors departments, also in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century there were only two such departments – in Leipzig and Sondershausen. From this it may be concluded that G. Schneevoigt urged A. Bobkovics to choose Sondershausen as his university, as at the beginning of 1903 A. Bobkovics entered Leipzig conservatory, but moved to Sondershausen the autumn of the same year, becoming the student of K. Schroeder², who also were the conducting teacher of G. Schneevoigt.

On 4 January, 1907 in the grand hall of the Latvian Society Artūrs Bobkovics on his own responsibility and his material contribution organised a symphony concert with the orchestra of the Riga's German Theatre (Opera). This extraordinary fact initiated a new era in the history of Latvian musical culture, as also in the coming years, despite different obstacles, A. Bobkovics organised 4–6 symphony concerts each winter seasons (Jauģiets, 1970).

“Bobkovics’ conducting was so convincing, that even musically less sophisticated members of the audience immediately instinctively felt that they are observing a true talent” (Dārziņš, 1975, 121–122).

A great merit of Artūrs Bobkovics is also the fact that in these regular symphony concerts he included not only the works by the music classics (L. Beethoven, F. Liszt, R. Schumann, R. Wagner, K. M. Weber, P. Tchaikovsky) but also by Latvian composers (E. Dārziņš, A. Kalniņš, J. Vītols), premiering many of those (Jauģiets, 1970).

The contribution of Artūrs Bobkovics to development of Latvian symphony orchestra conducting traditions and education of concert audiences is undeniable, as testified by his regularly organised concerts, but the fact that A. Bobkovics turned to choir conducting emphasises a peculiarity characteristic not only to the Latvian situation – connection of symphony orchestra conductors with choir conducting.

¹ Artūrs Bobkovics//Skolotāja lieta. LVVA, 1632. f., 1. apr., 2606. l., p. 7.

² Turpat, p. 11.

In relation to activities of A. Bobkovics another aspect characteristic to work Latvian symphony orchestra conductors becomes obvious, namely – rivalry.

Emil Kuper

(1877–1960)

“A new life to the life of symphony music in Rīga was brought by the conductor E. Kuper” (Kārklīņš, 1990, 78). Anatoliy Kuznetsov, the author of the introduction to a book about Emil Kuper counts E. Kuper as a representative of the Russian conducting school: “The name of E Kuper is inscribed in the history of the Russian conducting school” (Купер, 1988, p. 7), allowing to conclude that during his time of activity in Riga from the end of 1925 until the end of 1928, Emil Kuper brought the best traditions of the Russian music culture into the Latvia’s music life. His importance for the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school formation process is also increased by the fact that on the invitation of Jāzeps Vītols in the academic year 1927/1928 the Latvian Conservatory opened the Conductors’ class under Kuper’s leadership³. Emil Kuper led the class for less than three seasons, and the following conductors were among his students: Viktors Babins, Jānis Norvilis, Voldemars Ozoliņš, Juozas (Jazeps) Karosas, Jēkabs Vītoliņš, Alfrēds Feils, Austra Šiller, Helmers Pavasars, Vladislavs Jakubenas, Volfgangs Dārziņš, Arturs Silis⁴. Leonīds Vigners must be mentioned as one of the best among Kuper’s students, as testified by the records of E. Kuper’s conducting class available at the Latvian State Archive found journals.⁵

The most important contribution of Emil Kuper to the development of the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school is as follows:

- being the first teacher of the newly founded Latvian Conservatory Conducting class;
- enrichment of Latvian symphony orchestra conducting traditions with the experience of Russian and German conducting traditions;
- raising the artistic level of the performances of the Latvian National Opera.

³ Latvijas Konservatorija // Emils Kupers. LVA, 1655. f., 1. apr., 66. l. 1. lp.

⁴ Latvijas Konservatorija // Spec. pr. Diriģenta E. Kupera k-ga klase 1926./27. m. g. LVA, 1655. f., 1. apr., 720. l., p. 1.

⁵ Latvijas Konservatorija // Spec. pr. Diriģenta E. Kupera k-ga klase 1927./28. m. g. LVA, 1655. f., 1. apr., 721. l., pp. 1.–5.

Georg Schneevoigt (1872–1947)

Georg Schneevoigt was an important personality in the formation process of the Latvian conducting traditions. Being a Finnish conductor, he had periodic ties with the Latvian music life for more than a quarter of a century.

“The concert organised by the orchestra of the German Theatre under the leadership of the conductor Mr. Schneevoigt was equally excellent in regard to its content as it was in regard to the performance” (Dārziņš, 1975, 228).

“Also the Latvian conductors (Bobkovics) should thank him for education and friendly attitude” (Sudrabkalns, 1926).

In the seasons of 1929/30 and 1930/31 the work of Georg Schneevoigt in Riga is of great importance both for the National Opera, as he was the main guest conductor of it, and the Latvian Conservatory, where he continues the work started by Emil Kuper, for two years being the Head of the Conducting class and also the Orchestra class.⁶ The following conductors were his students: Arnolds Lapiņš, Rudolfs Krippe, Kārlis Lietiņš, Jānis Ivanovs, Arturs Silis, Mārtiņš Jansons,⁷ Oļģerts Bištēviņš, Jānis Norvilis, Volfgangs Dārziņš and Leonīds Vigners.⁸

The most important contribution of Georg Schneevoigt to the development of the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school is as follows:

- enrichment of the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting traditions with the experience of the German conducting traditions;
- teaching work at the Conducting class of the Latvian Conservatory and support provided for the younger Latvian colleagues, as well as promotion of education;
- during the second half of his artist's life he undertook the popularisation of the values of Latvian national music.

Teodors Reiters (1884–1956)

From August of 1918 and until October 1944 T. Reiters held the position of the leading conductor and for several times – also the director of the National Opera. He was the producer and conductor of numerous operas, and symphonic music concerts. His work in the field of the choral music

⁶ Latvijas Konservatorija // Šnēfogts Georgs. *LVA, 1655. f., 1. apr., 116. l.* p. 1.

⁷ Latvijas Konservatorija // Spec. pr. Diriģenta Šnēfogta klase 1929./30. m. g. *LVA, 1655. f., 1. apr., 724. l.* pp. 1.–5.

⁸ Latvijas Konservatorija // Spec. pr. Diriģenta Šnēfogta klase 1930./31. m. g. *LVA, 1655. f., 1. apr., 725. l.* pp. 1.–5.

deserves the highest appraisal, as also his talent is the best demonstrated in this field. "Obviously the true element of T. Reiters was choral music and interpretations of large format oratorical works" (Kārklīņš, 1990, 71).

It deserves a special mention that during his career as an opera conductor Reiters has worked along not only outstanding Latvian conductors – Jānis Mediņš, Jānis Kalniņš, Leonīds Vīgners – but also exceptional foreign masters of conducting – Emil Kuper, Grzegorz Fitelberg, Richard Hagel, the patriarch of the Russian conducting school Nikolai Malko, Lovro von Matačić, Ignaz Waghalter, the exceptional Leo Blech and the majestic Hermann Abendroth.

The most important achievement of Teodors Reiters' life is the foundation of the Latvian National Opera and active work in the position of its conductor, for several times holding not only the position of the chief conductor, but also its director. Along with this direction of his activities the foundation of the Reiters' choir with its exceptionally high artistic level is of no less importance.

The activities of Teodors Reiters display the following aspects of formation of the Latvian national conducting school:

- inclusion of Latvian music in the repertory and its popularisation abroad;
- inclusion in the repertory of large form works, thus indicating the quality of national symphony conducting traditions;
- foundation of a professional Latvian opera music theatre;
- ties with the choral conducting, allowing to popularise the works by Latvian composers abroad, gaining success internationally, promoting the interaction of the Latvian music culture with the art of the world.

Jānis Kalniņš (1904–2000)

Jānis Kalniņš became a conductor at an early age – when he was only 19, he became the head of the Music Department of the National Theatre replacing in the position his own father – Alfrēds Kalniņš. After ten years of work at the National theatre J. Kalniņš received a proposal to become one of the conductors of the National Opera.

There are testimonies of the fact that in 1979 during the Sixth Song Festival in Garzgers (USA) Jānis Kalniņš has been commenting conducting skills and lectured on the topic (Kalns, 2004). According to the aforementioned author, J. Kalniņš considered the following as the basis of conductor's technique development:

- good musical education;

- developed musical hearing;
- relax musculature and strong, expressive gestures.

J. Kalniņš considered the plasticity of conductor's gestures as especially important, as it is clearly illustrated by the following quote: "There are conductors with stiff movements, spasmodic-looking arms and shoulders. Imagine such a miserable person conducting *Aida*, *Otello* or the operas of *The Ring of the Nibelungs*, or just any other large format opera. He would be carried away to a hospital or even the crematorium already after the Act I! I had such a colleague in Riga, younger than me. I gave him an advice to learn relaxing his body at the dance studio of one of his relatives. He obviously did not take my advice, as – despite his studies in Germany – the literally appallingly lame movements of his arms and the whole body could only repulse, not inspire, not be understood or enjoyed. And this was tolerated and suffered by choirs, orchestras and the audiences. And this musician had the absolute musical hearing and good education." (Kalns, 2004, p. 349).

Evaluating the life activity of Jānis Kalniņš, the following is believed to be his most important contribution to the development of the Latvian symphony and opera conducting school:

- the expressive composing style, that furthered the interaction of traditions of conducting and art of composition;
- ties with the choir conducting processes (being song festival chief conductor in Canada and the USA);
- forming one's own individual methodological ideas regarding the most substantial conditions of conducting technique development;
- originality of his personality, serving as a proof of the role of extraordinary personalities in the art of composition and conducting.

Jānis Mediņš (1890–1966)

Ingrīda Zemzare in her introduction to the book "Toņi un pustoņi" (Mediņš, 1992) and A. Kalns (Kalns, 2004) express the same idea that Jānis Mediņš, despite the fact that he was an autodidact in conducting, displayed remarkable ability in this field. His activities as a conductor at the early stages of the National Opera, but also later, being the leader of the Symphony Orchestra of the Radio has received favourable reviews from numerous music critics. The practical work with a symphony orchestra in the capacity of a conductor has been favourable for the advancement of the composer's creative activity (Kārklīšs, 1990).

Regarding the beginning of his conductor's career at the National Opera, Mediņš writes: "Now I needed just more practice. Without practice a conductor is good for nothing. The students, graduating from the

conductors class of the Conservatory only become real conductors after a period of practice. These graduates of the conductors class may believe that that they are fully prepared artists, but they are miles away from such a stage, and God forbid such a newbie to come to stand in front of a good orchestra! Then the musicians, as they say, “play pranks on them”, that is, they try to play some wrong notes. When the young conductor fails to notice, then he is done, he loses all respect.” (Mediņš, 1992, p. 120).

The quote clearly shows the idea expressed in the analysis of the formation of conductor’s competencies, namely, that the only way to become a conductor is by practically working with an orchestra. Any previous learning and study experience is just an intermediary stage on the way to the heights of the art of conducting.

“One must return again to Kuper and repeat that I am grateful to him still today. By following his work at rehearsals I was able to learn much more than a any Conservatory. It was a direct, useful practice, not some dry teachings and theories.” (Mediņš, 1992, p. 122).

These quotes by J. Mediņš also emphasise one of the basic principles of conducting technique formation – necessity for the conductor to improve his knowledge, skills and abilities constantly.

Already then Mediņš understood the essence substantial for the teaching process still today: “My work with the students of the Conservatory was very interesting. It was also useful for myself. I was still young then. There were questions asked by the students, and they made me think. I encountered problems that needed to be solved on the spot and without any delay. Thus, by teaching others, I learned something myself.” (Mediņš, 1992, p. 156).

This proves that already then Mediņš had understood the interrelation between the teacher and the student which is of such great importance for the teaching process. Mediņš assigned great importance to self-education in the study process. For example, he suggested his students to study scores. “But I have to admit time and again that it is impossible to learn the skills of instrumentation from theories and textbooks alone. The best schooling in this always be the study of scores.” (Mediņš, 1992, p. 157).

“Leading the Conducting Class at the Latvian Conservatory was not a pleasant position. Conservatory Orchestra has always been small and always with something like accidental character to it. Our instrumentalists-to-be excused themselves with lack of time, and in other ways, but the truth was that they had no interest in participation in the Conservatory Orchestra. To force them to attend the Orchestra class was completely beyond my ability. When there is no will, no compulsion can help.” (Mediņš, 1992, pp. 157–158). This last sentence very clearly indicates that will is the trait of character primarily necessary in order to become a conductor.

As the result of the study along the lines of the research topic formulated above the most important contribution of Jānis Mediņš to the development of the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school is the following:

- the composer's talent, which through popularisation of Latvian symphonic music abroad promoted its interaction with traditions of the world conducting art;
- the extraordinary conductor's talent, that contributed to the popularisation of the Latvian conducting traditions abroad;
- professional leadership of the Latvian Radio Symphony Orchestra over the period of more than fifteen years;
- the work as conducting and instrumentation teacher at the Latvian Conservatory, that resulted in the continuity of the Latvian conducting traditions (Bruno Skulte, Jānis Ivanovs, Jānis Ķepītis, Valentīns Utkins).

Oļģerts Bištēviņš (1907–1972)

Oļģerts Bištēviņš is an interesting and outstanding personality among the most recognisable representatives of the Latvian conducting school. The musicologist Ludviģis Kārklīņš, in his study of symphonic music creation and performance processes in Latvia, expresses the idea that the creation of symphonic music was promoted by the practical work of composers in the capacity of conductors of symphony orchestras (Kārklīņš, 1990).

This idea appears quite well based, as O. Bištēviņš started his work as a conductor with the performance of his own work "Orķestra dziesma".

The most recognisable conductors, active in the period from the beginning of the 20th century and until 1944 in Latvia, either had acquired education in composition or were prolific authors. Of conductors active in the aforementioned period and studied only Artūrs Bobkovics did not have any education in composition. This is to a great extent the result of the condition that at the end of 1920s and in 1930s only students having already acquired the basics of composition were allowed to enter the Conducting class.

Bruno Skulte (1905–1976)

Was known not only as a composer but also a conductor, pianist and organist. At the end of 1930s he was the conductor of the Radio Symphony Orchestra, later also worked as a conductor of the Liepāja Opera orchestra. The concerts conducted by him quite often became outstanding events

for the music scene of the pre-WWII Latvia (Kārklīņš, 1990). During World War II Bruno Skulte received high public acclaim for the excellent premiere of the IV symphony by Jānis Ivanovs “Atlantida” (1943) as well as performances of other musical works. (Grāvītis, 2009).

Ādolfs Ābele (1889–1967)

When conscripted into the Russian army he soon found place in the music company of the 4th Vidzeme Latvian infantry regiment, where he became the commander of the regiment’s brass orchestra shortly after. This may have been the reason why Jāzeps Vītols invited Ādolfs Ābele to become the teacher of army orchestra conductors at the Latvian Conservatory. Ā. Ābele starts his work at the Conservatory as the youngest head of a special – theory class beginning with the 1st September, 1924.⁹ For twenty years Ābele is the teacher of military bandmasters – who were the leading brass band conductors of the time. (Grāvītis, 2009). This is also a kind of paradox, as neither in 1920s and 1930s, nor later in the exile while in Germany and USA he had practically no connection to the orchestra conducting.

Conclusions

The present study reflects the contribution of different orchestra conductors to the development of the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school in the period from the beginning of the 20th century and until the end of the World War II. This period is of importance for the author of the study, as it is exactly this period when serious preconditions for the establishment and development of the Latvian symphony orchestra conducting school were created.

Also socially determined processes such as the formation of a conducting school are shaped by the principle of the development of a balanced individual. A conductor who really wants to reach (or already has reached) the top level of art must be a human being, a personality with vast and deep knowledge not only in his professional field, but one must also be a person of generally developed mind, extensive knowledge of culture in general and philosophy in particular. A unique personality is a substantial pre-requisite for the existence and development of a national conducting school.

⁹ Latvijas Konservatorija // Ādolfs Ābele. *LVA, 1655. f., 1. apr., 16. l.*, p. 16.

In the present study the conductors' contribution was analysed evaluating their activities in promotion of the national composers' school, their participation in establishing the conservatory or in its further work, thus enabling the education of the new generation of professional symphony orchestra conductors. Analysis of the experience in leading ensembles, orchestras, musical theatres and choirs acquired by the selected personalities was of special importance, along with their openness towards other music cultures and general contribution to the world music culture. In the course of the research a problem was identified: the methodology principles of symphony orchestra conducting and other theoretical problems have been little studied, also the research dealing with personalities of outstanding conductors is scarce.

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