

## Television-Commissioned Films in the History of the Riga Film Studio. Cinematic Language and Genesis of Stylistics

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**Abstract.** The research is focused on the development of the means of artistic expression applied in the cinema of a specific time period (1966–1989), analysing the films made at the Riga Film Studio (*Rīgas Kinostudija*), commissioned by the Central Television of the USSR. Both innovative and formal solutions can be found in the films of that era, especially considering the creation of the two-part format. The current publication focuses on the genesis of the artistic and production processes of the film “*Lielais dzintars*” (“The Great Amber”, “*Dziesma par Rīgu*” / “A Song About Riga”, 1972), in the context of the cinema development of that time, based on the documents of the Latvian State Archives of the Latvian National Archives. The inclusion of humorous elements in the film’s narrative, the use of music, visually impressive Latvian landscapes on the screen, an international cast corresponding to the scale of the USSR, was a way to *sell* the film to the customer. Riga Film Studio and its authors agreed to modify the script and film several times, subjecting themselves to artistic compromises. Censorship in the USSR realized its ideological goals by idealizing the Soviet man’s way of life, destroying the narrative and aesthetics of the film “*Lielais dzintars*”.

**Keywords:** Aloizs Brenčs, the film “*Lielais dzintars*”, the Central Television of the USSR, censorship, Latvian cinema, musical film, the 20<sup>th</sup> century

### Introduction

The beginning of the 1960s in the last century marked a significant advancement in the development of Latvian cinema. The state joint-stock company the Riga Film Studio (*Rīgas Kinostudija*, RFS) as a film production centre had acquired a new complex in Riga, Šmerļa iela 3. Representatives of particular types of film were brought together under one roof, obtaining spacious shooting pavilions and other Soviet-era amenities, and moreover – combining creative

resources. Estimated production capacity was 8–10 feature films, 40–50 dubbings, 20–25 documentary films. Film processing departments were planned to serve not only Riga Film Studio, but also the orders of TV studio and the studios from other republics.<sup>1</sup>

In the ideological space of the USSR, the state structures governed the art-related processes both by financing the creativity and by monitoring this process, censoring it and organizing a distribution network of cinematic art within the country or abroad. On 23 March 1963, the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR issued an order on the establishment of the Cinematography Committee of the USSR (an abbreviation rendered in Latvian transcription and accepted in Soviet bureaucracy – *Goskino*). On 11 November 1963, the Supreme Council of the LSSR issued the decision on the establishment of the State Cinematography Committee of the Council of Ministers in the republic.<sup>2</sup> Both institutions were structurally part of the same chain, because only those films that had been approved and financed by *Goskino* could be produced in Latvia. Film production gained the status of a growing industry, and it had both positive and negative implications, presented by the author on the basis of particular examples in the current publication.

Historically, the films of the Riga Film Studio are associated with the mechanism of unified state supervision of the film industry, but since 1966, the Riga Film Studio started producing full-length feature films, which at that time were called actor films or art films (also called feature films), produced pursuant to the order of the USSR TV and Radio Broadcasting Committee (*Gosteleradio*), which ensured content for Central Television (hereinafter – CT). Several years ago, CT had started commissioning short-format films, documentaries and feature films from the Riga Film Studio. These films were intended for the small screen, and for a wide multinational audience. Although the creation of the USSR was a colonial process, the people continued to live, adapting to the political conditions to which they were subjected. Artists tried to express themselves within the limits that were permitted ideologically, politically and morally. During the period examined within the current research, 41 full-length feature films were shot under commission of CT, which made up the third part of all the films that were filmed at the Riga Film Studio during the period under research.

The first feature film commissioned by CT was a 43-minute-long film – the opera “Mozart and Salieri” (1962), which was created by Vladimir Gorikker, a guest director from the USSR, in the hope of establishing opera adaptations at the Riga Film Studio. The creative staff members of RFS were also involved in the team shooting this film – cameraman Vadims Mass and artist Uldis Pauzers. The work was largely filmed in the “*Mosfilm*” studio, with leading Russian actors of the time playing the main roles: Mozart – Innokenty Smoktunovsky, Salieri – Pyotr Glebov. Neither of them was a vocalist. Opera arias were voice overs.

The film was shot in twenty-seven days, and completed eleven days ahead of schedule.<sup>3</sup>

Vladimir Gorikker made two more films at RFS – the operas “Iolanta” (1963) and “The Tsar’s Bride” (1964), however, the opera genre found no successors in Latvia.

In the autumn of 1957, a film group was established at Latvian Television, known in the history of cinema as the Creative Association “*Telefilma-Rīga*.” Describing the relationships prevailing at the time, the director Rodrigo Rikards wrote in his book: “Our people stood out – whether in exile in the West or in slavery in the East – it is the expediency at times compounded with a spirit of rebellion” (Rikards 1994, 7–8). Documentary films, concert films, animated films and short feature films were shot at “*Telefilma-Rīga*.” These were commissioned by Latvian Television and were watched throughout Latvia. These films were also shown on CT and foreign television channels. In the statistics of cinema history, the first completed short feature film was “*Brīnumdare māmiņa*” (“Wizard Mother”, 1961) (Pērkone 2011, 476). “*Telefilma-Rīga*” worked only for the small screen and during its existence never made even a single full-length feature film.

In 1972, RFS editor-in-chief Jāzeps Osmanis reported to the LSSR Cinema Committee: “The studio started releasing Telefilms [...] now the question has arisen about the need to plan production, this year 2 units [two full-length feature films – *D. Ā.*] are planned, the commissioning entity – Central Television. [...] Orders arrive very late, but it is not possible to plan without a script and an order”.<sup>4</sup>

The filmography of RFS already included four completed feature films commissioned by CT and for one of them – “*Lielais dzintars*” (“The Great Amber”, 1972), he himself was the co-author of the original script together with the director of this film, Aloizs Brenčs. Together, they had gone through the very complicated process of making the film, receiving the approval, and handing the completed film over to the commissioning entity.

In the documents preserved in the Latvian State Archives of the Latvian National Archives, the descriptions of RFS films clearly state – a television film, which means that it was made pursuant to the order of CT Creative Association “Screen” (“*Ekran*”), which was a separate department in the structure of CT, responsible for about cooperation with the film studios of the USSR, this is evidenced by the position of each responsible official, signing the film production and coordination protocols and opinions.

In her research, the author would like to emphasize that from the end of the 1960s, the RFS produced two types of films, which were financed by the USSR and were commissioned by two different entities, and the film formats also differed. In the history of cinema, television filmmaking in the RFS has never been studied as a separate phenomenon, isolated from the total supply and spectrum of films.

The aim of the study is to reveal the peculiar characteristics of the artistic process and the specifics of the creative process pertaining to the films commissioned by the USSR CT at the Riga Film Studio. It seeks an answer to the following research questions:

1. What methods did the creative and administrative staff of the Riga Film Studio use to realize their cinematic ideas?
2. Did the films commissioned by the USSR CT result in artistically valuable cinema, taking into account the format of the television screen and the complicated coordination of the creative process with the commissioning entity?

## Methodology

The research is conducted on the basis of the documents preserved in the Latvian State Archives of the Latvian National Archives, as well as the memoirs of filmmakers and personal interviews with the Riga Film Studio makers of the CT films. The research employs the genesis method in order to reconstruct the shooting and approval process of the analysed film, which reveals the operational mechanisms of censorship in the USSR.

## Results

RFS produced films for the big screen, which were primarily shown in cinemas and were shot in the new widescreen format, as well as films for the small screen, which were intended to be shown on TV screens. All the films created in RFS were shot on 35 mm film, however, they were not only technologically different, for example, in the proportions of the film frame, but also in terms of the means of artistic expression. In the 1960s and 1970s, the films for the big screen were shot in the new widescreen format (Eglītis 2003, 35), whose frame proportions resembled a quadrangle, which was expanded sideways (2 : 1), while the frame for small screen films was square-shaped (3 : 4). 41 films commissioned by the USSR CT were made under the RFS trademark in the period from 1969 to 1989, – it was a third of the total number of films (comprising 122) made during this period. The commissions by CT continued until 1992, when RFS had already lost its monopoly on film production in Latvia, and several small studios began to operate in its stead, although remaining under the RFS umbrella. The last six films commissioned by CT were completed by the newly established studio “ALKO” (Āboliņa 2022a).

The original language of CT-commissioned films was Russian. After submitting the films, RFS could make a decision whether or not to dub them in Latvian. Observing the movements of the actors' lips, the differences in language



Figure 1. A scene from the film “*Liela dzintars*” (director Aloizis Brenčs). 1972. Riga Film Museum Collection. Photo by Jānis Pilskalns.

articulation can be discerned in the Latvian-dubbed films. The films had a distinctly international cast, especially in the first years of cooperation, which was requested by CT, therefore communication on the set and documentation was done in Russian.

Although making the films for TV was never considered prestigious or a top priority for RFS, as time went on, this segment gained an ever-greater proportion in the film production spectrum. “The last ones in line for work got TV films”, admitted Rihards Pīks, cameraman, director, former director of the Riga Film Studio (1987–1990) (Āboliņa 2022b), director and screenwriter Jānis Streičs noted that TV films were almost never reviewed in the All-Union press (Āboliņa 2022c). TV film production times were shorter and budgets were about half the cost of feature films of the time. Initially, due to purely financial considerations, the making of two-part films was commenced in order to obtain the budget which was twice the size, which approached the average cost of the Riga Film Studio at that time: 300 000–350 000 roubles (Āboliņa 2022c).

In 1973, a publication in the newspaper “*Cīņa*” reflected the round table discussion of cinematographers on the problems of Latvian cinema. The opinion of film critic Valentina Freimane:



Figure 2. A scene from the film “*Lielais dzintars*” (director Aloizis Brenčs). 1972. Riga Film Museum Collection. Photo by Jānis Pilskalns.



Figure 3. A scene from the film “*Lielais dzintars*” (director Aloizis Brenčs). 1972. Riga Film Museum Collection. Photo by Jānis Pilskalns.

*The practice of state commissions, which can really bring very good results, was mentioned several times today. Let's remember that Sergei Eisenstein's films "Battleship "Potemkin"" and "October" were also commissioned films. Likewise, Herz Frank's "Mūžs" ["The Trace of the Soul"] shows how good a result a smart and creative approach to a commissioned film gives. At the same time, however, there is another type of commission in our film studio, which causes very strong concerns about this part of our film production – these are films ordered by Central Television. Such have already been created, for example, "Lielais dzintars", and two more are being created presently. The authors of the film excuse their mistakes with the approval of the commissioners or even a thoughtlessly given praise, their tastes and requirements" (Purene 1973, 4).*

The film "*Lielais dzintars*" (1972), mentioned by film critic Valentīna Freimane, appears in the documentation of the film's production with a title which was specified three times. The initial title of the work version was "*Būt vai nebūt*" ("To be or not to be"), then – "*Dziesma par Rīgu*" ("A Song about Riga"). In the history of Latvian cinema, it is a film *non grata*. A film which has been banished from the cinema process. The contemporary film researchers hardly ever mention it in their monographs.

The author of this article believes that it is an artistically ambiguous, unusual experiment in film genre and style, commissioned by CT. It is the first two-part film in the history of the Riga Film Studio. In the application to the USSR CT commissioner, the filmmakers define the genre of the film: 'film revue'. The designation of the genre was created by deriving it from the genre found on the theatre stage – revue, which is a magnificent production with music, songs and dances, and dramaturgically made up of individual acts.

The example of the film "*Lielais dzintars*" in this publication will serve as a model that reveals multiple facets – the complexity of the process in the film production scene of that time, the hierarchy of subordination and the ability of filmmakers to make creative compromises.

Admittedly, there was a single goal – to create an eccentric musical film for the widest possible TV audience. The official correspondence between RFS and CT on the principles of the film's structure and the system of characters shows an intense fight concerning the content expressed on the screen, in which the dominant motif was the myth of a man's happy life in the great country. The inner void was replaced by external signs (Barthes 1987, 7–11).

Socialist realism in the 1960s–1970s was officially the only ideologically accepted creative method in the USSR. An Estonian literary scholar and researcher of aesthetics of the Soviet era wrote: "Socialist realism was not defined either at the level of content motifs or stylistic choices, it was all the artists' own fantasy, in which they diligently copied each other in the name of survival or preservation of opportunities to work" (Undusks 2016, 83).



Figure 4. A scene from the film “*Liels dzintars*” (director Aloizis Brenčs). 1972. Riga Film Museum Collection. Photo by Jānis Pilskalns.

The Riga Film Studio already had the experience of making feature films with songs and dances. The most vivid example, where the conditionality of realism was achieved by retreating back in the history, is the film “*Vella kalpi*” (“The Devil’s Servants”, 1970). The genre of the film was defined as a historical costume film and was followed by a second film (a sort of second episode) “*Vella kalpi Vella dzirnavās*” (“The Devil’s Servants at the Devil’s Mill”, 1973) where musical acts were incorporated into the adventure narrative. In the early 1970s, this film became a token of recognition of the Riga Film Studio throughout the USSR and was watched by more than 30 million viewers in cinemas: “*Vella kalpi*” had attracted 36.6 million viewers and “*Vella kalpi Vella dzirnavās*” – 30.5 million viewers (Pērkone 2011, 217). Both of these films have been made under the supervision of *Goskino* and are not related to the commissions and funding of CT, but they were also shown on television throughout the territory of the USSR. The ability of RFS to work in the field of musical films was endorsed by millions of viewers. The composer Raimonds Pauls was the author of the film’s songs.

At the end of the 1960s, Director Rolands Kalniņš shot the film “*Elpojiet dziļi*” (“Breathe Deeply”, also known as “*Četri balti kreklī*” – “Four White Shirts”) with



a socially poignant context. The presented narrative was very contemporary at that time, young people who are passionate about music, write songs, and are judged by a stern, rigid commission. The screening of the film was suspended by censorship: the officials of RFS, the Film Committee of the LSSR, the Communist Party and *Goskino*. In the Soviet Union, the concept “to put on the shelf” had become established, and the film was not shown for 30 years. The films previously mentioned by the author mark the context of cinema in the period selected for the study of RFS.

The application for the film “*Dziesma par Rīgu*” appeared in RFS in January 1971.

Aloizis Brenčs, who at that time already had authored several documentaries and three full-length feature films, was recommended as the director and co-author of the script of that musical film. Recommending Aloizis Brenčs for approval as the director of the new film, a particular emphasis was placed on his musical taste, dynamic editing skills and experience in making action films.<sup>5</sup>

The author of the screenplay of the TV film “*Lielais dzintars*”, poet Jāzeps Osmanis in the period of 1967–1982 was the chief editor in the board of script editors of RFS. In addition to being a well-known poet, he was the author of the libretto for the variety operettas “*Annele*” (1964)<sup>6</sup> and “*Sālsmaize Kartupeļu ielā*” (“Housewarming in Potato Street”, 1971), which were staged at the Riga State Operetta Theatre.

The film commission and planning department of CT production association “*Ekran*” supported attracting new authors to write the script of the musical film “*Dziesma par Rīgu*”, including it in the 1971 plan. The film was offered another title – “*Kurš precēsies ar vēju?*” (“Who will Marry the Wind?”), asking to speed up the preparation of the literary script.<sup>7</sup> The film’s application reads:

*Latvia prides itself in its nature, for a good reason its eastern part, Latgale, is called the land of blue lakes. The middle part is called the Switzerland of Vidzeme and Kurzeme. Ethnographic elements are intertwined with modern beauty. Homesteads are changing and new traditions are being formed. Song and dance festivals have gained immense popularity. Various shows, competitions and festivals stimulate mass involvement in song and dance culture. Along with the well-known dance collectives “Daile”, “Dancis”, “Vektors”, Latvian pop groups are gaining huge popularity, among which REO – Riga Pop Orchestra under the leadership of Raimonds Pauls is especially delightful. For his contribution to music, Raimonds Pauls has been awarded the honorary title of meritorious cultural worker of the Latvian SSR and the Komsomol prize. These are the main reasons why the authors came up with the idea of creating a fun, musical film revue, an original musical on the screen, exposing the splendour of Latvia.”<sup>8</sup>*

In the incipient film, 14–15 songs and choreographic numbers were planned, which would be performed by pop soloists and ensembles. The plot of the film was based on the trip of the youth pop ensemble “*Dzintars*” to a show in Riga, but due to weather conditions unsuitable for flying, they miss the performance. The commission scatters all over Latvia, not awarding the first place to anyone. Upon learning this, the group of young people decides to gather the jury back together and ask them to evaluate their song. The script application indicates the places where the characters of the film are supposed to go: cafe “*Sēnīte*”, Riga Central Market, where flowers are to be bought; the following places in the town of Sigulda are included in the trajectory of their journey: the Gauja funicular and cafe “*Sigulda*”, the grave site of Gutman’s Cave and the grave site of Turaida Rose, Fishermen’s festival, the seaside town of Jūrmala, collective farm “*Lāčplēsis*”, which produces good beer, Cēsis choir concert, rural idyll by the lake. The plot of the film also foresees a ballroom dance competition, a car collision with a militsiya car, an episode of drowning of a member of the jury commission, the misplacement of the main prize “Great Amber” by mixing up the boxes, as well as pop dance performances on the street – Brīvības iela, during lively traffic.

Even a condensed recount of the film’s episodes clearly showed that the film was in danger of being overcrowded with events and locations. Too many characters, too many dance and song acts. The artistic calculation of the film was clear and CT viewers would not be disappointed by it – a musical scenic film of Latvia whose genre is amalgamated with plot of chase, pursuit, and road movie elements. The main threat was whether it would all come together dramaturgically: lyrical songs, dynamic comic situations, dialogues that should demonstrate wit.

After getting acquainted with the literary script, the RFS Arts Council already began to talk about a two-part film, that is, a film of two episodes. When sending a script application, they asked about increasing the size of the film. On 26 March 1971, the editor Irina Čerevičņika emphasized the commissioner’s demand to give a greater display to Raimonds Pauls’ music, while the director Leonīds Leimanis invites the authors to consider the examples of other films: “*Russkiy suvenir*” (“Russian Souvenir”, 1960), “*Pēdējais blēdis*” (“The Last Crook”, 1966), “It’s a Mad Mad Mad Mad World” (1963) to avoid replication. Aleksandrs Leimanis, the director of “*Vella kalpi*”, had a pessimistic view, because the film actually had no plot. There was no central anecdote around which the motley dynamic would unfold. Film critic Valentina Freimane described this genre thus: “This is still an unfamiliar specificity to us, but the characters come from old flicks.”<sup>9</sup>

On 28 March 1971, the script editorial board of the Riga Film Studio discussed the literary script written by Brenčs and Osmanis for the first time, called it a variety comedy and revealed confusion in its opinions:

*O. Lisovska: The material is too long. Here everything depends on the songs and actors.*

*A. Brenčs: We also want to shorten this and that.*

*I. Čerevičņika: Actions are repetitive, boring, the filming depends on Brenčs.*

*E. Līvs: I don't understand anything in this genre.*

*L. Purs. We must listen to what Moscow will say.<sup>10</sup>*

CT production association “*Ekran*” replied to RFS within two days and spoke constructively about a two-episode musical film, but requested to include the following amendments: reduce the number of episodic parts and members of the competition jury in the film, find a suitable motivation for comedy, why the plane was delayed, make the characters of depicted individuals more colourful, as well as demanded a strict selection of comedy lines, situations and details.<sup>11</sup>

RFS performed the swap of employees. Jāzeps Osmanis submitted a handwritten application and requested to be released from the duties of the editor-in-chief of the Screenplay Board for the duration of the production of the film “*Dziesma par Rīgu*”, while also asking to entrust the functions of the editor-in-chief regarding this film to Egons Līvs. RFS executes a purchase sale deed.

*The member of the Screenplay Board, comrade Strazdiņš [Laimonis Purs is the pen name of the author – D. Ā.], Laimonis Janovičs on the one side, and the authors – executors Osmanis Jāzeps Vladislavovičs and Brenčs Aloizs Aloizovičs on the other side agree that the Riga Film Studio buys the literary script “Dziesma par Rīgu”, paying the authors a royalty 6000 roubles. The amount shall be paid equally from the amount indicated in the deed.*

The document is also addressed to CT “*Ekran*”. The Cinematography Committee of the LSSR as an exception permitted the purchase of the literary script of the screenplay “*Dziesma par Rīgu*” by J. Osmanis and A. Brenčs. The document was signed by the chairman of the Cinematography Committee of LSSR, Nikolajs Kārklīņš.<sup>12</sup>

A reply letter is received from Moscow, confirming the possibility of starting the production of the film, if the following instructions are introduced: the characters who have been mentioned in the plot but whose role is not further developed in the script, must be abandoned, the situation with the illicit concert organized by the administrator must be clarified [the script contained a commercial concert which took place without a prior approval to enable the band gather money to pay for the hotel – D. Ā.], whereas the cultural events and festivals included in the film should be given an international character.<sup>13</sup>

On 16 July 1971, the RFS Arts Council discusses the auditions and cast of the new film. Russian actors are approved in 9 main roles, Latvian actors – in 5 episodic roles. The biggest episodic role is given to Gunārs Placēns, who plays a young Soviet militsiya officer. Aloizis Brenčs revealed that there were doubts whether to direct the film in an egocentric or rather in lyrical direction, but Raimonds Pauls created a distinctly lyrical music and would mainly elect the singers himself.<sup>14</sup> The film's sets and costumes are accepted unanimously.

Starting from August, when part of the material had already been filmed, the editors of CT “*Ekran*” already gave specific instructions that had to be complied with in order to continue working on the film.

*Remove the shots in which the passengers of the plane look unaesthetic. They need to be more personable and natural. They should not distract attention from the main characters. Modern fashion does not have to eclipse the people themselves.*

*Cut as short as possible (but better re-film) the episode where the musicians and the plane passengers go to the airport, because their merriment is too conspicuous (an-end-in-itself), it resembles debauchery and does not provide aesthetic pleasure.*

*Lightness must be achieved in comic episodes. The episode where the chairman of the jury eats cabbage unaesthetically and Sirena Markovna takes photos of herself must be removed from the film. Cut from the film the close-up of Sirena, where she goes swimming in the sea and her corpulent body shape is revealed. To achieve greater lyricism and emotionality in the acting of the main characters Dugina and Streleckij.*

*To use more imagination in the portrayal of comedy episodes. Not to permit stupidity in the actions of comic characters and avoid overacting.<sup>15</sup>*

In the subsequent correspondence between RFS and CT, the title of the film “*Lielais dzintars*” is already used (adding “*Dziesma par Rīgu*” in parentheses) and the narrator's introductory texts are repeatedly rewritten, the intonations in which people talk to each other are re-recorded several times. All dialogues that touch on prices and money, alcohol, are entirely amputated, the ensemble is allowed to perform only for the purpose of promoting the popularity of its songs. All the close-ups of Gunārs Placēns are cut from the film, because it is not appropriate for a Soviet militsiya officer to smile so much, the close-ups of Sirena – Dzidra Ritenberga are cut and the bathing episode is left only in a very distant shot, while one of the employees of “*Ekran*” points out an existing doctrine that prohibits showing men in shorts on TV. The Monument of Liberty is ordered to be cut from the film because it does not fit the comedy genre. A new song about friendship is requested for the finale of the film. Raimonds Pauls writes an

application stating that he permits to write a new text in Russian and to include his song “*Tik dzintars vien*” (“Just Amber”) in the film.

On 9 December 1971, RFS held an extended editorial meeting of the Screenplay Board, in which 20 people participated, including the chairman of the Cinematography Committee of the LSSR, Nikolajs Kārklīņš. The young writer Aivars Kalve, who participated in discussions about this film for the first time, offered to make one film out of two episodes (series). RFS director Heinrihs Lepeško reacts with a retort – this is impossible. Egons Līvs declares that all the actors are unsuitable for their roles and that disrespect is being shown to Dzidra Ritenberga. The word ‘tasteless’ appears 6 times. Nikolajs Kārklīņš intervenes: it is not about how the film will be taken by the commissioner, but about how the viewer will take it, nevertheless the militsiya cannot be portrayed like that. Aloizs Brenčs summarizes: I have always heeded all the reprimands. By cutting out everything requested in the edits, the eccentricity disappeared. The actors were approved by the commissioner and popular actors were required. The film went into production with a delay of 2.5 months. For the sake of justification, it was pointed out that the film was a comedy and Latvia was not mocked anywhere.<sup>16</sup>

The tension between national and international angle of cinema was inevitable (Willemen 1994, 206–207). It was characteristic of RFS films throughout the Soviet era. Experimentation, innovations and games could take place within strict limits, complying with the predetermined playing field – thus wrote Soviet TV researcher and historian Christine E. Evans about the history of CT (Evans 2016, 22).

Correspondence with CT continued regarding further revisions. Noting that the film crew had some track record in making a musical film, another 16 points followed with specific reprimands.

On the official form of “*Ekran*”, the decision was sent from Moscow – on 29 December 1971 regarding the first episode, and on 7 January 1972 regarding the second episode, – the film was accepted without corrections, taking into account that the group had carefully observed the reprimands. And the Riga Film Studio had done a great job in this difficult genre of film – revue.<sup>17</sup>

## Discussion and conclusions

The RFS film “*Liēlais dzintars*” was originally intended to highlight the qualities of Latvia suitable for cultural export, packaging them in an entertainment TV film format. It revealed the dream of a Europe that could be reached within the USSR (Lordanova 2003, 11–12). The differences in Latvian cultural traditions during the Russification era were confirmed by several Latvian elements of the film, including the non-Soviet-style costumes created by Večella Varslavāne. The British film theorist Peter Wollen compares the importance of style on screen to the air you need to breathe, without even knowing what its gaseous composition

might be (Wollen 1969, 206). However, the most convertible art currency in the Soviet era, which was also the most protected from devaluation, was music.

The composer's name appears before the film credits at the beginning of the second episode: Raimonds Pauls' music in the film "*Lielais dzintars*." The songs that Margarita Vilcāne and Valery Obodzinsky sang in Russian in the film were translated into Latvian in the 1980s, and were sung by many Latvian soloists. The film "*Lielais dzintars*" was never dubbed in Latvian. Aloizs Brenčs never worked in the musical film genre again. Meanwhile, he became the first Latvian director who, commissioned by CT, shot a seven-episode Latvian historical story "*Ilgais ceļš kāpās*" ("The Long Road in the Dunes", 1981), – it featured an international ensemble of actors and music by Raimonds Pauls.

The model of the film "*Lielais dzintars*" reveals that the production of RFS films pursuant to the commission by CT of the USSR was subject to massive censorship by CT, but the authors of the Riga Film Studio had no mastery of the revue genre. The authors of the film were not sure of the correctness of their artistic solutions and submitted to the imposed compromises in cooperation with CT editors, experienced the degradation of the artistic conception of the film.

The creation of the two-episode format was stimulated by both the insufficient funding for filming and the specificity of the TV format, creating the dramaturgical structure of the film. The narratives of the TV films were influenced by the commissioner, but RFS enriched them with the local flavour and aestheticized them, however, taking into account that the main audience of the films was outside of Latvia.

The films commissioned by CT at RFS in a certain sense represented a playing field for making a cinema of lighter content and genre, revealing that the filmmakers had learned the rules of the game of Soviet cinema ideology.

Censorship of the USSR realized its ideological goals by idealizing the way of life of the Soviet people, influencing and subverting the narrative and aesthetics of the film "*Lielais dzintars*".

The film "*Lielais dzintars*" reflects the artistic means of the cinema of its time and is a cinematic work worthy of extended research in the history of cinema.

## NOTES

- 1 National Archives of Latvia (hereinafter – LNA), State Archives of Latvia (hereinafter – LVA), fund No. 678 (fund of the Ministry of Culture of Latvia), description No. 1, case No. 199 (Ministry's orders on film production, hereinafter – case No. 199), p. 189.
- 2 LNA, LVA, fund No. 1405. (Fund of the Cinematography Committee of the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR), Description No. 1, case No. 329 (Financial and production plans with annexes, approved by the Committee and subordinate authorities), p. 2.

- 3 LNA, LVA, fund No. 416 (The fund of the state joint-stock company Riga Film Studio (Rīgas kinostudija), hereinafter– fund No. 416), Description No. 2, case No. 71 (Documents about the television feature film “Mocarts un Saljēri” (“Mozart and Salieri”) – application, conclusions, copies of orders and protocols), p. 4.
- 4 LNA, LVA, fund No. 1405 (Fund of the Cinematography Committee of the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR), Description No. 1, case No. 317 (Financial and production plans with annexes, approved by the Committee and subordinate authorities), p. 3.
- 5 LNA LVA, fund No. 416, Description No. 4, case No. 98 (Documents about the television feature film “Lielais dzintars” – script, application, opinions, orders and copies of protocols, etc.), p. 253.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., p. 252.
- 8 Ibid., p. 256.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 242–243.
- 10 Ibid., case No. 98, p. 249.
- 11 Ibid., p. 238.
- 12 Ibid., pp. 236–238.
- 13 Ibid., p. 231.
- 14 Ibid., p. 94.
- 15 Ibid., p. 76.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 53–54.
- 17 Ibid., p. 3.

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