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Reception of Czech and Latvian Music by German Music Critics in Riga in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries: Some Comparative Aspects

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Abstract

The second half of the 19th century is the time when in the art music created by the composers who represent conditionally small nations the efforts to prove their national identity were manifested stronger than ever previously. How was this process perceived by the music critics representing other, larger nations, and was the reception influenced only by purely musical factors, or also by the historically established relations between national communities? The paper is searching at least partial answer to this question researching the assessments of the Czech and Latvian music in the Riga German music critic in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Key words

national identity, Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák, All-Latvian song festivals, program music

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Introduction

For a number of small European nations,¹ the 19th century was a time of intensive cultural and musical development. It also attracted the attention of greater, internationally influential nations – English and French, German and Russian. How did they receive the new ideas that composers – representatives of the small nations – manifested in their works? Were their assessments determined only by musical considerations, or, consciously or not, also by other factors?

The aim of the article is a search for at least a partial answer to this question through a comparative analysis of reviews of two subjects – Czech and Latvian music² – in Riga's German periodicals in the late 19th and early 20th century. The following steps will be carried out:

- a general insight into Riga's music life and its historical context at the time period will be provided;
- the reception of several compositions, especially novelties for the local audience, will be examined in more detail. Because Riga's music critics discussed not only concerts in Riga but also events in its immediate periphery, in places such as Majorenhof (today Majori in Rīgas Jūrmala), the paper will also look into this part of reviews;
- conclusions about the common and different tendencies in the reception of Latvian and Czech music by Riga's German press will be formulated.

The discussion of this topic could be interesting for several reasons. First of all, in the mentioned time period, neither Latvia nor Czechia were independent states, however, there was a strongly expressed national revival movement in both countries. Still, in Latvia it started only in the second half of the 19th century with a forming of the national intelligentsia (the so-called Young Latvians), meanwhile, the Czech revival movement had much older roots; nevertheless, the second half of the 19th century was one of its highest culminations. Despite differences in the political situation, a common factor in both countries was the presence of a rather large German community. On one hand, the cultural environment created by local Germans was a source of many valuable cultural impressions. On the other hand, it was a strong competitor, trying to assimilate at least the more educated representatives of the small nations and thus endangering their

1 The concepts of *small* and *great* nations are, of course, quite conditional. In the context of this paper, Latvians and Czechs are considered as relatively small nations, unlike the Germans.

2 The reviews of the Baltic German press on Latvian music are also previously analyzed in several other papers by Baiba Jaunslaviete, including: *Latviešu dziesmu svētki vācu un krievu preses atsaukmēs (1873–1938)* [Latvian song festivals in German and Russian press reviews (1873–1938)]. *Letonica*, no. 17, 2008, p. 78–94; *Das Musikleben in Riga aus der Sicht deutscher, russischer und lettischer Musikkritik (1873–1914)*. In *Musik – Stadt: Traditionen und Perspektiven urbaner Musikkulturen*. Vol. 1: *Traditionen städtischer Musikgeschichte in Mittel- und Osteuropa*. Helmut Loos (ed.). Leipzig: Gudrun Schröder Verlag, 2011, p. 45–59; *Instrumental Music of the First Latvian Composers in the View of German Critics: The Crossroads of National and Musical Values*. *Art Tempus* [Daugavpils], no. 2, 2014, p. 102–112; a.o.

cultural identities. The views of the German community on the neighbouring national cultures were also quite ambiguous.

1. Music life in Riga in the late 19th and early 20th century: historical context and its influence on the reception of Latvian and Czech music

Riga is a city whose affiliation since its founding in 1201 has changed many times. From 1721 up to 1918, it was the centre of the Livland government in the Russian Empire. However, during most of this time period, its largest and also politically and economically most influential national community were Baltic Germans. Their institutions also dominated the music life: since 1782, it was focused around the Riga City Theatre (*Riga-er Stadttheater*) which included both dramatic and opera troupes, and evidence of its high artistic level are, for example, the names of several chief conductors (*Kapellmeisters*), such as Richard Wagner (1837–1839), Bruno Walter (1898–1899), a.o. Orchestra musicians of the theatre regularly organized both symphonic and chamber music concerts. Thus, the local audience and also music critics of the daily newspapers had enough justification to be selective.

Since the mid- 19th century, the national situation in the city was tended to initially slow yet significant changes. The Russian government tried to weaken German positions in Livland, first by stimulating its russification³ and, second, by offering the indigenous people, Latvians, broader educational possibilities than ever before. It resulted in the formation of a national intelligentsia whose representatives manifested their opposition to the previously dominant role of Germans in the region.

Latvian art music had just emerged at this time, so Baltic German critics had the opportunity to follow it from the very beginning. Nevertheless, they did not do it very actively: only the all-Latvian song festivals, where the music was intertwined with the expression of the political position, always aroused great interest. At the same time, Baltic German music critics reviewed only very few of the many Latvian concerts that took place since the late 1860s. However, their descriptions are comprehensive enough and thus reveal certain trends in the reception of Latvian music.

Meanwhile, Czech (Bohemian) music has significantly deeper roots in Riga's music life. Joachim Braun, who has researched links between Czech and Latvian music, pays significant attention to wandering artists, e.g. "Pragers" who appeared in Latvia likely in the 17th century and held their concerts even up to the 19th century: "Pragers" performed at folk fests and weddings and also played their "symphonies" in various music

³ See for example: VOLKOV, Vladislavs. *Krievi Latvijā XIX gadsimtā un XX gadsimta sākumā* [Russians in Latvia in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century]. In *Slāvi Latvijā (Etniskās vēstures apcerējums)* [*Slavs in Latvia. Reflection on the Ethnic History*]. Ilga Apine and Vladislavs Volkovs (eds). Riga: Mācību Apgāds, 1998. p. 152.

societies.⁴ The works by Jan Stamic, Leopold Koželuh, Jan Ladislav Dušek a.o. were played at the first public concerts organized by the Riga City Theatre. Nevertheless, both originally from Bohemia, these composers were far more connected with the musical culture of other European regions (Stamic worked in Mannheim from about 1741, Koželuch – in Vienna since 1778; Dušek lived in what is nowadays Belgium since 1779 and he also travelled throughout Europe, spending particularly longer time working in Paris and London).

However, the last decades of the 19th century brought something new in this respect: the concert repertoire included compositions whose authors far more than their predecessors sought to stress their national identity. This stemmed from the general tendencies in Czech culture, in which, as it is noted by Amelia Davidson, new trends emerged after 1848: “*The nationalists also had a clear cultural agenda of promoting all things “authentically” Czech [...]. To these ideals we can attribute the rise in popularity of Czech-language opera.*”⁵

Thus, the Baltic German concert audience and music critics got to know Czech music from a completely new angle.

2. Vocal compositions and music for stage:⁶ from Latvian choral songs to Czech opera

The choral songs were the main genre of **Latvian** art music in its foundations, and the attention paid to it reflects both the inspiration from German sources and, at the same time, the rivalry. The popularity of choral music was determined by the tradition of song festivals that was borrowed from Baltic Germans by Latvians – it is noted by several researchers, Andrzej Topij among them:

*“From the mid-19th c., the Germans organised song festivals, both regional and all-Baltic. For example, such German festivals were held in Reval in 1857 and in Riga four years later. Soon, the tradition was taken over by the Latvians and Estonians and is continued today in both their homelands and abroad alike.”*⁷

4 BRAUNS, Joahims. Latviešu un čehu mūzikas sakari [Links between Latvian and Czech music]. *Karogs*, no. 5, 1958, p. 130–131.

5 DAVIDSON, Amelia. *Reclaiming a Golden Past: Musical Institutions and Czech Identity in Nineteenth-Century Prague*. Dissertation. University of Kansas, 2019, p. 53 [cit. 2020-07-15]. URL: <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/29581/Davidson_ku_0099D_16614_DATA_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

6 The title mentions quite different genres; however, the rationale for their comparative assessment in one chapter is that the vocal element plays an important role in both of them. It should be noted that the Baltic German press discussed only Latvian (and not Czech) choral songs at the late 19th and early 20th century, and also the reception of *The Bartered Bride* by Smetana could not be compared with any Latvian opera of this period, because the first significant achievements in this genre in Latvian music appeared only after the World War I, in a completely different political and cultural context.

7 TOPIJ, Andrzej. The Role of the *Deutschbalten* in the Cultural and Economic Development of Russia's Baltic Provinces in the 19th Century. *Zapiski Historyczne*, 2011, Vol. LXXVI, no. 4, p. 63–95. [cit. 2020-07-15]. URL: <http://zapiskihistoryczne.pl/files/issues/6f7b428319f91a0fa9a79319f6a67755_ZH_2011_4_TopijN.pdf>

Therefore, it is consequential that the first reviews in Riga's German press related to Latvian art music discuss the song festivals. In the German community, these events caused not just interest but also certain resentment about the desires of the new Latvian intelligentsia to highlight the independence of the emerging Latvian culture and therefore to distance themselves from the Baltic Germans. These feelings are reflected, for example, in the words by Theodor Hermann Pantenius (1843–1915), an influential novelist at this time and a reviewer of the First All-Latvian Song Festival (1873):

*“But you, our Latvian countrymen, do you know that your celebration could have been much more festive, much more beautiful? You should have been a little more forthcoming to your German countrymen. Unity and faithfully sticking together can be appreciated anywhere, but especially during a festival. How could our city have welcomed you, decorated for the festival, how could the celebration in Riga have turned into a celebration for the whole of Riga, when you just left us aside? Just by the way, only on the Saturday before the holiday, we learned from you that you are celebrating something and celebrating it in our city. The invitations, which were very frugal and formless, were received very late.”*⁸

The resentment about the political position manifested at the All-Latvian song festivals was also occasionally noticeable later. However, this was not an obstacle for constructive and at the same time favourable reviews of the music performed at the festivals. In the first original art songs, such as the works by Kārlis Baumanis (Baumaņū Kārlis, 1835–1905), reviewers did not find any musical expressions of national identity (although it undoubtedly appears in texts): “[...] songs which, although written in Latvian, are rather in the form and spirit of German songs. Here we would like to mention the songs by C. Baumann.”⁹ At the same time, the arrangements of the folk songs were highly appreciated, for example, *Jāņa dziesma* [St. Johns' Day Song¹⁰] by Jānis Cimze with a refrain *līgo* was especially highlighted:

*“All other Latvian folk melodies sometimes resemble the songs of other nations, and the minor mood which is characteristic for the national element could be perceived as a link that unites everyone, however, the midsummer songs with its līgo reflect the Latvian character in the purest, most complete way. Each such melody is the most natural manifestation of the Latvian folkness.”*¹¹

8 “Aber wißt ihr auch, lettische Landsleute, daß euer Fest noch viel festlicher, noch viel schöner hätte werden können? Ihr hättet den deutschen Landsleuten ein wenig freundlicher entgegenkommen sollen. Einigkeit und treues Zusammenhalten ist überall am Platz, zumal aber bei einem Fest. Wie sollte unsere Stadt euch in festlichem Schmuck willkommen heißen, wie sollte aus einem in Riga gefeierten Fest ein rigasches Fest werden, wenn ihr uns einfach bei Seite ließt? Nur so nebenbei, erst am Sonnabend vor dem Fest, erfuhren wir von euch selbst, daß ihr überhaupt ein Fest feiert, es bei uns feiert, eure Einladungen waren sehr spärlich, formlos, erfolgten sehr spät.” P[ANTENIUS], T[heodor]. Allerlei vom lettischen Gesangfest. *Rigasche Zeitung*, no. 149, 30. 06. 1873, p. 1.

9 “[...] einige ursprünglich allerdings in lettischer Sprache verfaßte, aber doch mehr im Geiste und der Form der deutschen Liedcomposition gehaltene Gesänge. Die Lieder von K. Baumann möchten wir hierher rechnen.” [ANONYMOUS]. Von dem in der abgewichenen Woche stattgehabten lettischen Gesangfest [...]. *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, no. 149, 01. 07. 1873, p. 6.

10 Jāņi – a Midsummer celebration in Latvia, partially similar to St. Johns' Day.

11 “Wenn alle übrigen lettischen Volksmelodien hin und wieder denjenigen anderer Nationen ähneln, wenn durch das in nationalen Element vorherrschende Mollgeschlecht sich ein gemeinsam um alle schlingendes Band erkennen läßt, so

In the following years, original Latvian songs also became more diverse, and several composers developed a unique national style. Alexander Theodor Staeger (1857–1932) from *Rigaer Tageblatt* discusses the All-Latvian Song Festival 1895 (it took place near Riga, in Jelgava or, in German, Mitau). From the repertoire, he especially highlights the song *Beverīnas dziedonis* (“The Singer of Beverīna”) by Jāzeps Vītols, as well as *Dievs, dod mūsu tēvu zemei* (“God, Give to Our Fatherland”) by Andrejs Jurjāns. Staeger believes that the rhythm is the most interesting feature of these works: the mixed measures and unsquared periods cause an original, vivid musical pulsation.¹²

Meanwhile, **Czech** music that includes a vocal component was represented in Riga in the selected time period by the opera *The Bartered Bride* by Bedřich Smetana. Its first performance in the Riga City Theatre (*Stadttheater*) took place in 1894, e.g. almost 30 years after the premiere in Prague (1866), during the period when the opera was already internationally recognized.¹³ Therefore, when introducing this work to the local audience, the Riga press also used references to foreign sources describing both the opera and its composer. The *Düna-Zeitung* cites the Austrian composer and music historian Dr. Wilhelm Kienzl; it is remarkable that besides a generally laudatory characteristic of the music by Smetana, he also highlights the idea that could have been shared by many Baltic Germans, namely, the view that the representatives of small nations frequently underestimate the support they have received from the Germans:

“And what is his [Smetana’s] homeland? A country where it is doubly difficult to fluctuate between unlimited nationalism and the highs of generally human, pure art activities – Bohemia! Recognizing greatness among other nations is so much in the German blood that it could be considered neither as a special merit nor as a lack of national conscience. [...] So let’s not take revenge against the Czech nation for hardly recognizing our greatest men.”¹⁴

Discussing *The Bartered Bride* itself, a reviewer from *Düna-Zeitung* uses a metaphor that could be inspired by the emerging Latvian art music. Namely, the main repertoire of the first All-Latvian song festivals consisted mostly of the Latvian folk song arrangements included in the collection *Dziesmu rota* (“A Garland of Songs”, 1872–1884) edited by Jānis

bewahren die “Jāņa dziesmas” mit ihrem Lihgo den reinsten, vollständigsten lettischen Charakter. Jede einzelne dieser Melodien ist der unverfälschte Ausdruck des lettisch Volksthümlichen”. -y-. Vom lettischen Sängerkongress. II. Weltliches Concert. *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, no. 142, 21. 06. 1880, p. 6.

12 STAEGER, Alexander. Das lettische Gesang- und Musikfest [...]. *Rigaer Tageblatt*, no. 138, 21. 06. 1895.

13 Evidence of this recognition is mentioned in the paper by Jiří Kopecký *The International Success of Smetana’s Bartered Bride*. The great response that the opera gained in the International Musical and Theatrical Exhibition in Vienna (1892) is especially highlighted. KOPECKÝ, Jiří. *The International Success of Smetana’s Bartered Bride*. In *Czech Music Around 1900*. Lenka Křupková, Jiří Kopecký (eds). Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2017, p. 43, 49–50.

14 “Und welches war sein Vaterland? Ein Land, in dem es doppelt schwer ist, sich aus den Vorurtheilen eines beschränkten Nationalismus zur Höhe allgemein menschlicher, reiner Kunstbetheätigung aufzuschwingen – Böhmen! – Das Große anderer Nationen anzuerkennen liegt so sehr im germanischen Blute, daß es für den Einzelnen weder als ein besonderes Verdienst noch als Mangel an nationalem Selbstbewußtsein gelten kann. [...] Rächen wir uns also nicht an der tschechischen Nation, die unsere größten Männer kaum anerkennt.” [KIENZL, Wilhelm]. Friedrich Smetana. *Düna-Zeitung*, no. 204, 10. 09. 1894, p. 2.

Cimze (1814–1881). This collection is divided into two parts, *Dārza puķes* or “Garden Flowers” (German art songs) and *Lauka puķes* or “Wild Flowers” (the above-mentioned Latvian folk song arrangements). Maybe, this analogy has influenced also the above-mentioned article on *The Bartered Bride*:

*“It is not a bouquet of greenhouse flowers, artificially drawn, wastefully coloured and cultivated, no, there are wild flowers, the simplest, open-air flowers [...]. Yes, this opera is often delightful in its simplicity.”*¹⁵

The highlighting of simplicity is also a feature that is common with the above-mentioned reviews of the Latvian choral songs. A certain analogy is seen in the descriptions of the national colour: in this sense, the role of rhythm has attracted particular attention of the reviewers both of the opera by Smetana, as well as of the Latvian songs, and the traits untypical for the German and Austrian folk tunes are particularly noted. For example, Friedrich Pilzer, describing *The Bartered Bride*, mentions the significance of the mixed measures and also the syncopes as characteristic elements of Czech music:

*“Both in a melancholically-poetic aria or in one of the most effective and original Bohemian dances, we recognize a peculiar accentuation characteristic for Slavic music; an example is the heady dance “Furiant” where the syncopation causes an effect of the transformation of 3/4 measure into a 2/4 bar.”*¹⁶

Riga’s German critics have several times drawn attention to the parallels of *The Bartered Bride* with pre-romantic music, namely, with opera of the 18th century. “Mozart’s influences on Smetana could be seen from the tingling rhythm in a part of the overture, but especially from the Buffo character of the marriage broker Kezal”, notes Friedrich Pilzer from the *Rigasche Zeitung*.¹⁷ It is interesting that another reviewer, A. v. H. from *Düna-Zeitung*, sees a different analogy in the same character, also with 18th-century opera, namely, with Uberto from Pergolesi *La serva padrona*.¹⁸ One of the features that could evoke parallels with the pre-classical and classical era is the refined musical form (*Formenfeinheit*) mentioned by Pilzer¹⁹; still, such characteristics of the Czech folklore reflected in *The Bartered Bride* as dynamism, joy of life, grace and humour, which resonate with the aesthetic ideals of the 18th century, probably have also played a role.

15 “Sie ist ein Bouquet nicht aus Treibhausblumen, künstlich gezogenen, farbenstrotzenden Culturblumen, nein, es sind Feldblumen, die einfachsten, die unter freiem Himmel Blumen gedeihen [...]. Ja entzückend oft ist diese Oper in ihrer Einfachheit.” A. v. H. Oper. *Düna-Zeitung*, no. 228, 08. 10. 1894, p. 6.

16 “Bald an einer melancholisch poetischen Arie, bald an einem der effectvollen und originellen böhmischen Tänze erkennen wir eine der slavischen Musik eigenthümliche Accentuirung der Tacttheile, wie z. B. in dem berausenden Tanz “Furiant” durch Synkopirungen der 3/4 Tact wiederholt in 2/4 verwandelt erscheint.” PILZER, Friedr[ich]. “Die verkaufte Braut”. *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, no. 224, 04. 10. 1894, p. 5.

17 “Daß Smetana von Mozart besonders beeinflusst war, ist aus der prickelnd rhythmischen Führung eines Theiles der Ouvertüre, besonders aber auch aus dem Buffo-Wesen des Heirathsvermittlers Kezal zu erkennen.” PILZER. “Die verkaufte Braut”, op. cit.

18 A. v. H. Die “verkaufte Braut” von Smetana. *Düna-Zeitung*, no. 224, 04. 10. 1894, p. 1.

19 PILZER. “Die verkaufte Braut”, op. cit.

3. Instrumental music

Although vocal music was undoubtedly the main and favourite way of expression for the first **Latvian** composers, since the end of the 1860s, they also created instrumental works. One of the earliest compositions that gained the attention of not only the Latvian but also Riga's German music critics was the tone poem *Līgo* ("Midsummer Celebration") by the then 26-year-old Jāzeps Vītols – a recent graduate of the Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov class in the St. Petersburg Conservatory and later also its professor. *Līgo* was premiered on July 19, 1889, in Majorenhof (today Majori) under the guidance of conductor Fritz Scheel from Moscow. This performance was the source for the first review of Latvian instrumental music that can be found in Riga's German press, in an article by Moritz Rudolph (1843–1892) from the *Rigaer Tageblatt*. Characterizing the composition, the reviewer is benevolently reserved: "*The arrangement of the theme is rich and diverse – in this way the composer shows a notable mastery. He also ably manages the possibilities of the orchestra.*"²⁰ Still, the intention of the symphonic work to reflect a ritual of a national celebration seemed to earn more criticism than praise from Rudolph:

*"Līgo is rooted in Latvian folksongs, and belongs to those sound paintings that have unrealistic expectations from music, since, even when following special commentaries, some specific content nuances often were difficult to understand, at least to those who are unable to remember the initial corresponding poetic images of the composition."*²¹

The music critic Rudolph was, clearly, most interested in "pure" or "absolute" music. This assumption is based on the final sentence in the review of the work: "*Still, initially we would have liked to have received an offering from J. Vītols in the field of absolute, namely, nonprogram music.*"²²

This wish completely contradicted the tendencies that prevailed in Latvian symphonic music of this time, which was dominated by program works, often on the basis of national motives. It manifested itself in a wide spectrum – from tone poems (alongside *Līgo* by Vītols, also *Latvju tautas brīvīšana* / "Liberation of the Latvian People" by Andrejs Jurjāns, etc.) to orchestral suites (Andrejs Jurjāns, *Latvju dejas* / "Latvian Dances", a kind of analogy to Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*, Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*, etc.).

The skepticism expressed by Rudolph about instrumental compositions based on Latvian folk songs has also been adopted by several other respectable Baltic German music

20 "In der Verarbeitung des Themas, die reich und von großer Mannichfaltigkeit ist, verräth der Componist eine bedeutende Gewandtheit. Auch in der Handhabung der orchestralen Mittel besitzt er Geschick." R[UDOLPH], M[ORITZ]. Concert in Majorenhof. *Rigaer Tageblatt*, no. 164, 21. 07. 1889.

21 "Lihgo, auf lettischen Volksliedern basirend, ist eins von denjenigen Tongemälden, in denen der Musik manches Unmögliche zugemuthet wird, und die darum, selbst beim Verfolgen der speciellen Inhaltsangabe, in ihren Einzelzügen vielfach unverstanden bleiben, wenigstens für denjenigen, der sich die zu den musikalischen Themen ursprünglich gehörenden Gedichts-Gedanken nicht zu vergegenwärtigen versteht." Ibid.

22 "Wir möchten aber von ihm vor Allem erst einmal eine Probe absoluter, also nicht programmatiscber Musik hören." Ibid.

critics. As an example, a review published by Hans Schmidt (1854–1923) on September 4, 1906, of the concert, conducted by Pāvuls Jurjāns, could be mentioned. Schmidt highly appreciates the performed works by Vītols (his *Līgo* “outlines an unusually poetic nordic midsummer night scene with its secretive voices of nature²³”), Alfrēds Kalniņš, Emīls Dārziņš and Andrejs Jurjāns. Still, he criticizes the general trend, which is described by Schmidt as follows:

“The source of the creative work for all of them is common – rooted in motifs of Latvian folk music, yielding to its urge and influence. Though this feature undoubtedly seems attractive and interesting, it still contains a certain threat. It is obvious that excessively cultivating the national only harms the individual development. Modern music history provides many disturbing examples in this respect.”²⁴

Schmidt's suggestion to not overly emphasize the Latvian colour in the music is most certainly not influenced by German chauvinism. In fact, it is quite the opposite – this author, based on the recollections of Jāzeps Vītols, was the most positive about Latvians of all the Riga German music critics, regularly (as of 1889) attending the autumn concerts, organised by the Riga Latvian Society (*Rīgas Latviešu biedrība*) and rich with premieres.²⁵ It is clear that the warnings expressed by the critic reflect a wish for composers to raise themselves above national particularities – regardless if it is rooted in German or Latvian culture.

In the late 19th and the early 20th century, Rigans had the opportunity to get to know mainly two genres of the **Czech** instrumental music: symphonic works and string quartets. Contrary to *Līgo* by Vītols, the program concept of *Moldau* by Smetana was never criticized, only celebrated in the Riga press of the 19th century. Robert Müller (1844–1919) from the *Rigasche Rundschau* notes:

“Among the novelties so far performed by the Kappelmeister Prill, the “Moldau” (in Bohemian, the “Vltava”) by Smetana deserves the primary attention. [...] This work cannot qualify for a deeper content of ideas; however, it leaves an impression with its song-like melody, clear rhythmic form and delightful sound. The instrumentation is based on the excellent school of Berlioz and Liszt and is most appropriate for the depiction of nature.”²⁶

23 “[...] ein ungemein poetisches Bild der nordischen Johannis-Nacht mit ihren geheimnisvollen Naturlauten”. SCHMIDT, Hans. Konzert. *Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 202, 4. 09. 1906, p. 3.

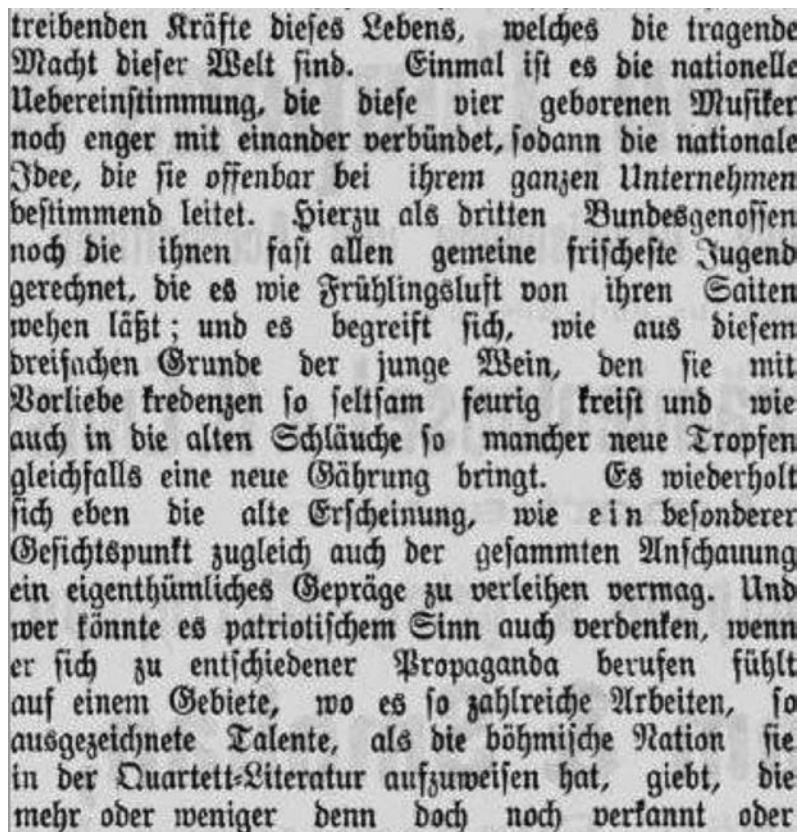
24 “Ihnen allen insgesamt gemein ist die Vorliebe, mit der sie sich durch heimische Volksmotive in ihrem Schaffen anregen und bestimmen lassen. So sympathisch und interessierend dieser Zug an und für sich gewiss auch anmutet, birgt er doch zugleich unleugbar eine gewisse Gefahr in sich. Über der allzu ausschliesslichen Kultivierung des Nationalen erleidet die Entwicklung des Individuellen nur zu leicht empfindliche Einbusse. Die Musikgeschichte kennt hierfür gerade in neuerer Zeit manches warnende Beispiel.” Ibid.

25 VĪTOLS, Jāzeps. Hanss Šmits [necrology]. *Mūzikas Nedēļa*, no. 1, 1923, p. 2–4; see also: TORĢĀNS, Jānis. Hanss Šmits kā mūziķis un cilvēks vācu, latviešu, igauņu un krievu mūzikā [Hans Schmidt as a musician and a man in German, Latvian, Estonian and Russian music]. In *Gadsimtu skaņulokā*. Rīga: Zinātne, 1997, p. 165–177.

26 “Unter den Neuheiten, welche der Herr Capellmeister Prill bislang vorgeführt hat, verdient Smetana’s “Moldau” (böhmisch “Vltava”) die meiste Beachtung. [...] Auf einen tieferen musikalischen Ideengehalt kann dieselbe keinen Anspruch erheben, dagegen wirkt sie durch ihre liedmäßige Melodie, klare rhythmische Form und ihren reizvollen Klang.

Reviewers also highly appreciated the string quartet *From My Life* by Smetana that was played in Riga on February 20, 1895 by the Bohemian Quartet.²⁷ This ensemble, too, was received by Riga press as a strongly expressed manifestation of Czech national identity. Hans Schmidt writes:

*“The term Bohemian in the field of jewelry production is always synonymous with the idea of something fake and false, however, now [...] in the field of quartet performance, it has acquired a different meaning and is applicable to quite the opposite features – the most genuine, the most original.”*²⁸



treibenden Kräfte dieses Lebens, welches die tragende Macht dieser Welt sind. Einmal ist es die nationale Uebereinstimmung, die diese vier geborenen Musiker noch enger mit einander verbündet, sodann die nationale Idee, die sie offenbar bei ihrem ganzen Unternehmen bestimmend leitet. Hierzu als dritten Bundesgenossen noch die ihnen fast allen gemeine frischeste Jugend gerechnet, die es wie Frühlingsluft von ihren Saiten wehen läßt; und es begreift sich, wie aus diesem dreifachen Grunde der junge Wein, den sie mit Vorliebe kredenzen so seltsam feurig kreist und wie auch in die alten Schläuche so mancher neue Tropfen gleichfalls eine neue Gährung bringt. Es wiederholt sich eben die alte Erscheinung, wie ein besonderer Gesichtspunkt zugleich auch der gesammten Anschauung ein eigenthümliches Gepräge zu verleihen vermag. Und wer könnte es patriotischem Sinn auch verdenken, wenn er sich zu entschiedener Propaganda berufen fühlt auf einem Gebiete, wo es so zahlreiche Arbeiten, so ausgezeichnete Talente, als die böhmische Nation sie in der Quartett-Literatur aufzuweisen hat, giebt, die mehr oder weniger denn doch noch verkannt oder

Fig. 1 A Fragment of the article by Hans Schmidt (*Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 43, 21. 2. 1895).

Die Instrumentirung basirt auf der vorzüglichen Berlioz'schen und Liszt'schen Schule und kommt der Naturschilderung bestens zu statten.” MÜLLER, Robert. IV Sinfonie-Konzert in Majorenhof. *Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 148, 4. 7. 1897, p. 3.

27 SCHMIDT, Hans. Concert. *Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 43, 21. 02. 1895, p. 3.

28 *“Während der Begriff des Böhmisches auf dem Gebiet von Productionen der Juwelierkunst stets gleichbedeutend mit der Vorstellung des Nachgemachten, Unechten zu sein pflegt, hat er nunmehr [...] auf dem Felde des Streichquartettspiels – sich ganz entgegengesetzt, gerade die Bedeutung des Echtesten, Ursprünglichsten erworben.”* Ibid.

Still, quartets by Dvořák were received in Riga a little more reservedly than *From My Life*. Hans Schmidt believes that the “quite promising beginning of his *Allegro* [Quartet Op. 34] with mysterious wave chimes turned into rather ordinary playful folk melodies too quickly” (“*Allegro, mit einem geheimnißvollen Wellengemurmel ganz vielsagend beginnend, verseicht nur zu bald in ziemlich hergebrachter volksthümelnder Melodik*”). In the same article, Schmidt appreciates the Quartet by Robert Schumann Op. 41 No. 3 because this work reflects an “unconsciously emphasized individuality” (“*die unbewußt vertonte Individualität*”) contrary to “a deliberate accentuation on nationality” (“*bewußt betonten Nationalität*”) which was characteristic for other compositions included in the program (works by Dvořák, Grieg and Tchaikovsky). Thus, the cited review best corresponds to Schmidt’s opinion: “[...] *genuine art has no fatherland*” (“[...] *die rechte Kunst hat kein Vaterland*”).²⁹

After the turn of the century, thanks to guest concerts of the Helsinki City Orchestra and its conductor Georg Schneevoigt, Riga’s audience also got acquainted with one of Dvořák’s most notable works – the Symphony *From the New World*. It was performed at the Riga 700th anniversary exhibition. The combination of Czech national motifs with tunes and rhythms of American origin was something quite new for the Baltic Germans, however, it was also received with great interest by the local reviewers. A critic from the newspaper *Rigasche Rundschau* considers this composition to be the most expressive work of the new direction, in which all the features and advantages of modern music (“*alle Züge und Vorzüge der musicalischen Moderne*”) appear. The main subject of the work, in his opinion, is the slow movement (*Largo*) whose character could be compared with “*fragrant cemetery roses*” (“*duftglühende Kirchhofsrosen*”); it represents an idea that runs through all movements.³⁰ The attention that the reviewer has paid to *Largo* and its semantics allows us to draw parallels with the opinion of the contemporary musicologist Michael Beckerman: he has addressed special research just to this *Largo*, accentuating the features of a funeral march as essential for Dvořák’s music style in general.³¹

Music by Smetana was also performed in Riga in the early 20th century, and sometimes it came under the crossfire of ratings reflecting the principal differences in the estimation of national motifs. *Šárka* that was first performed in Riga on 21 February 1912, under the guidance of Schneevoigt, was enthusiastically praised. L. D. from the *Baltische Post* highlights this composition as one of the most perfect works from the cycle *My Fatherland*: “*Nowhere is there a lack of melodic depth, and strong dramaticism is particularly lively in the Amazon battle where the roaring, whirring and raging runs through a series of colourful, funny Slavic melodies*”.³²

At the same time, the name of Smetana is found in a review (November 20, 1907) of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto whose author (B. V. from the *Rigasche Rundschau*)

29 SCHMIDT, Hans. Concert. *Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 250, 03. 11. 1895, p. 2.

30 G-r, V. Zehntes Elite Concert in der Ausstellung. *Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 178, 8. 8. 1901, p. 5.

31 BECKERMAN, Michael. Dvořák’s „New World“ *Largo* and „The Song of Hiawatha“. *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 1992, vol. 16, no. 1, p. 44-46.

32 “*Es fehlt nirgends an melodischer Tiefe und starker Dramatik; besonders lebendig ist die Amazonenschlacht, wo das Dröhnende, Schwirrende und Tobende durch eine Reihe bunter, lustiger slawischer Melodien wandelt.*” D., L. Symphonie-Konzert. *Baltische Post*, no. 43, 22. 02. 1912, p. 3.

considers a strongly expressed national colour as an undesirable feature in music; besides, he formulates a discussable notion about the absence of deliberate national self-expression in the works by Chopin. This writing confirms that Hans Schmidt was not the only one in his skepticism about folklore-based compositions:

*“In the last movement [of Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto], you again meet a certain not-entirely-prepared folkness, poor in its one-sidedness and failing from the now stabilized international tradition; its essence is to tell us “from fatherland”, as Smetana does. [...] Bach never wanted to be a German as well as Chopin – a Pole. Even if we can find something of folkness by them it arose without their striving.”*³³

Conclusions

Although Baltic Germans of Riga were frequently accused by other national communities of arrogance and seclusion in their own cultural environment, still, they were interested in the music of smaller nations and were also able to appreciate traditions different to their own cultural values. Baltic German reviewers addressed many words of appreciation to Latvian composers, however, overall, their works were assessed more critically than the Czech music – especially the compositions by Smetana. Could this tendency be influenced by the fact that Smetana, alongside with the highlighting of Czech motifs, also emphasized the roots of his music in German culture – specifically in the New German School?³⁴ This possibility could not be excluded. However, the differences in assessments could also be influenced by the cultural and historical background – the life of two communities (Baltic German and Latvians) side by side and rivalling each other also unfortunately affected Riga’s German music critics.

There are some common features in the reception of vocal and instrumental works. The manifestations of national colour in vocal music have always caused delight and enthusiasm by Baltic German critics, meanwhile, the reception of national motives in the instrumental music was more ambiguous. The thoughts expressed by Hans Schmidt and other critics, that an artist must not have a homeland and a passion for national colours threatens individuality, could be found both in reviews of Latvian and (although to a lesser extent) of Czech music.

In the future, the research presented in this paper could be expanded both chronologically and geographically. In this regard, the regions where the local German society

³³ *“Im Schlußsatz begegnet man wieder um einer gewissen nicht so ganz unvorbereiteten Volkstümlichkeit, derjenigen nämlich, die mit einer dürftigen Einseitigkeit behaftet ist und die ausfällt aus dem nun doch einmal gewählten Gefüge internationaler Tradition und die darauf besteht, uns “aus der Heimat” zu erzählen, wie auch Smetana es tut. [...] Bach hat niemals deutsch sein wollen und Chopin kein Pole. Was an ihrem Volkstum durchkam fand sich ein, ohne daß sie es erstrebten.”* V., B. Konzert. *Rigasche Rundschau*, no. 270, 20. 11. 1907, p. 6.

³⁴ Benjamin W. Curtis notes that Smetana felt an internal contradiction regarding Czech and German cultural influences: *“On one hand, he sometimes denied his inheritance from German culture. [...] This is despite the fact that throughout his life Smetana actually spoke German better than Czech. [...] “The Old Czechs made me out as dangerous for the national independence of art because I recognize the German direction in music – Wagner – too much.”* CURTIS, Benjamin W. *On Nationalism and Music*. Dissertation. Vol. 1. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago, 2002, p. 168–169.

with its rich art music traditions interacted with other national communities (e.g. Hungarian, Polish, Estonian, etc.), arouse a particular interest. Such a comparative study would provide a more complete picture of the history of Central and Eastern European music. Some of its aspects could also be helpful looking from the contemporary point of view and searching for analogies to understand the role of culture of small nations, and the resonance it creates, in the current globalization era.

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