

Centenary

Magazine

2/4



Latvia
100 =

Co-funded by the Latvian State
Centenary Programme



Ministry of Culture
Republic of Latvia

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Typefaces
Freight, Lapture

Paper
Maestro print 190 g/m², Maestro print 90 g/m²

Design
Kārlis Dovnorovičs, “You Made My Day”

Publisher
“Ascendum” Association
May 2018

UDK 930.85(474.3)(051)
Ce565
ISSN 2592-8473

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Proem

The Best Gift for Latvia

For a few years now, we've been thinking of what we can give to our country on its birthday. The projects and ideas already undertaken differ wildly, ranging from the extravagant to the surprising to the very simple. Building a flowerbed at the school, recording songs, collecting people's memories. There was even a firefighters' expedition around Latvia – during their time off, of course.

Recently, however, a worried young man addressed me on the tram. His mother was having problems with alcohol, but he had come up emptyhanded after perusing the web in search of a treatment centre for women, preferably in Latgale and with a Christian slant. “Wouldn't it be great to make a database where everyone could find information on opportunities to help their relatives?” He wanted to create such a database. “Wouldn't it be a great gift on the centenary of the Latvian state?” he asked me. I think it'd be a great gift for us all – to find a chance to help others. To give them hope and solace. To cooperate and exchange information over the best way to do such a thing, and to involve others in reaching a common goal.

One of the benefits given to us by the time spent celebrating our centenary is that we are finally learning to cooperate with our neighbouring countries, not only on a military or political level, but also on a cultural level. We are the joint participants at the London Book Fair, we are creating guest performances. We have invited Estonian and Lithuanian artists to participate in common projects, including the very small ones. We are finally establishing the Baltic Culture Fund.

We have also learned to greet centenary ideas that are overeager or overly thought out with a smile. And this is more important than resentful denial and exclusion. We are different, and that's why the best gift to Latvia on its centenary would be to avoid sorting people into categories of “acceptable” or “unacceptable”; to make Latvia, this year, at least a little more honest, inclusive and united. A year ago, Juris Rubenis said: “The best gift I could give Latvia would be at least one better, more truthful, more forgiving, more tolerant, and more loving human being.” We're trying.

Ilmārs Šlāpīns

Latvia's Centenary Events from May to July

Portable Landscapes International contemporary art exhibition. Latvian National Museum of Art, Rīga	Through 17 June
Wild Souls. Symbolism in the Baltic States Exhibition. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France	Through 15
Over the Threshold The first exhibition dedicated to the Centenary of the Latgale Congress. Museum of Cultural History of Latgale, Rēzekne	Through 30 December
Paradise '89 Feature film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. On screens across Latvia	From February
To Be Continued Documentary film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. On screens across Latvia	From March
Bille Feature film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. On screens across Latvia	From April
Convocation of the Constituent Assembly of the Republic of Latvia On 1 May 1920 the Constituent Assembly of the Republic Latvia convened for the first time. Latvia	1 May
Māris Briežkalns Quintet "Rothko in Jazz" Concert. Mikhail Baryshnikov Arts Center, New York, USA	2 May
Mērija's Journey Documentary film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. On screens across Latvia	From 2 May
Finnish Jaegers in Latvia Documentary exhibition. Tallinn University Library, Tallinn, Estonia	2 – 30 May

Art from Latvia. Ivars Heinrihsons Exhibition. Museo Fundación Antonio Pérez. Cuenca, Spain	3 May to 3 July
Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia On this day in 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR adopted the Declaration "On the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia". Latvia and around the world	4 May
White Tablecloth Celebration A tradition dedicated to the restoration of Latvia's independence. Latvia and around the world	4 May
Celebration with an orchestra Part of the "Born in Latvia" concert series. A concert of the best Latvian children's and youth symphony and chamber orchestras. Great Guild Hall, Rīga	4 May
Brass band parade and concert The Freedom Monument, Rīga	4 May
Latvian Composers for the Latvian Centenary Grand concert. National Library of Latvia, Rīga	4 May
Latvia's Century Joint exhibition curated by the Museums of Latvia. National History Museum of Latvia, Rīga	From 4 May
Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics Documentary short about the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. Latvia	From 4 May
The Wheel of Time Opening of an interactive sculpture by Kārlis Īle. Square between Lielā iela and Jāņa Asara iela, Jelgava	From 4 May
The Freedom Monument, Dedicated to Latvia Photo Exhibition. St. Peter's Church, Rīga	From 4 May
Art Nouveau. Its Beginnings, Influences and Original Nature Exhibition. The Art Museum Riga Bourse, Rīga	4 May to 5 August

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Anatomy of a street. Maskavas Street An alley of photos. Spīķeri quarter and the square on Mazā Kalna street, Rīga	4 May to 31 October
Freedom Street Stories A series of events. Daugavpils, Jelgava, Jēkabpils, Jūrmala, Liepāja, Rēzekne, Rīga, Valmiera, Ventspils	4 May to 18 November
Strong Race A run in honour of the Restoration of Independence Day. Recreation and sports complex Zelta Zirgs, Ķegums	5 May
Europe. After 100 Before Conference. National Library of Latvia, Rīga	7 May
Volcano Symphony New work by Ēriks Ešenvalds. Theatre House Jūras Vārti, Ventspils	10 May
Powers in Latvia: From the ancient times to the modern state Conference. National Library of Latvia, Rīga	11 May
Antonija #Silmači Original Latvian ballet production. Latvian National Opera, Rīga	11 May
Give Up the Ghost The XIII Baltic Triennial. Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania	11 May to 12 August
Maestro Mariss Jansons and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra Maestro Mariss Jansons and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra	13 May
Lattelecom Riga Marathon 2018 Rīga	19, 20 May
Kremerata Baltica 20-year anniversary tour France	15 – 22 May
Baltic Tribes Documentary film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. On screens across Latvia	From 16 May

Cradle. Museum Night 2018 Latvia	19 May
A White Crow in Black Play. Winner of the contest for original plays, titled “The East Arrives in Latvia. Shelter and a meeting (or lack thereof).” Daile Theatre, Riga	From 20 May
Kremerata Baltica 20-year anniversary tour Baltic music programme. Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France	22 May
Klas Torstensson. Christina Cycle A Concert with <i>Sinfonietta Rīga</i> . De Doelen concert hall, Rotterdamdailes; Muziekgebouw concert hall, Amsterdam, Netherlands	22 – 24 May
State Before Statehood Exhibition. National Library of Latvia, Riga	22 May to 19 August
NeoArctic Choral opera. Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, UK	24, 25 May
Kremerata Baltica 20-year anniversary tour Bergen Festival 2018, Bergen, Norway	24, 25, 27 May
Creative hives for Rīga and Latvia Setting up mobile cultural spaces in Ziepiņiekkalns and the Ķengarags promenade, Riga	May to September
Kremerata Baltica 20-year anniversary tour Musical Theater Basel, Basel, Switzerland	1 June
Boys Can! X Latvian Boys’ Choir Gathering. The open-air stage of the Cēsis Castle park, Cēsis	1 June
The Song Festival: An Ideal Latvia Documentary film. Latvia	From 1 June
Finnish Jaegers in Latvia Documentary exhibition. The Jaeger Museum of Finland, Kauhava, Finland	1 June to 28 September

Celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Riga Latvian Society Celebration of the 150 th anniversary of the Rīga Latvian Society	1 June to 31 October
Kremerata Baltica 20-year anniversary tour Liederhalle cultural and congress centre, Stuttgart, Germany	2 June
The 48th Latvian Folk Applied Arts Fair An event of the European Year of Cultural Heritage. Latvian Ethnographic Open Air Museum, Riga	2, 3 June
Kremerata Baltica 20-year anniversary tour Alte Oper, Frankfurt, Germany	3 June
Antonija #Silmači Original Latvian ballet production. Latvian National Opera, Riga	3 June
100 km for Latvia’s centenary Series of running events. Riga	5, 12, 19 June
Tradition & Innovation The 6 th Riga International Textile and Fibre Art Triennial. Latvian National Museum of Art; Arsenāls Exhibition Hall; the Art Museum Riga Bourse; Museum of Decorative Arts and Design; etc, Riga and Latvia	6 June to 16 September
A Collection of Contemporary Tapestries from Mobilier National (France) A visiting exhibition. Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, Riga	6 June to 30 September
Sviests 2018 Summer ethno-festival. Valmiermuiža	16 June
Baltica 2018 International folklore festival. Latvia	16 – 21 June
Opening of the restored Mežaparks Open-air stage Mežaparks, Riga	18 June
The Seasons A concert performance with pianist Reinis Zariņš and choreographer and dancer Kirils Burlovs. Latvian National Opera, Riga	18 June

The 4th World Congress of Latvian Scientists National Library of Latvia. Rīga	18 – 20 June
Trauma and Revival A European project on cultural relations between Eastern and Western Europe. BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels, Belgium	19 June to 31 August
Vienna Philharmonic and Elīna Garanča Part of the “Born in Latvia” concert series. Dzintari Concert Hall, Jūrmala	20 June
Discover New Business Opportunities. Discover Latvia International business forum. Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija, Rīga	20, 21 June
Baltic Jazz Trio Concert. Discovery Series, Ottawa Jazz Festival. National Arts Centre, Ottawa, Canada	21 June
Illuminate Latvia! A solstice bonfire event. Latvian border municipalities	21 June
Summer Solstice Celebration “Līgo, Rīga! Līgo, Latvija!” Conclusion of the International Folklore Festival “Baltica 2018”; traditional Latvian crafts and Līgo herb market; midsummer celebration. 11 November embankment, Rīga	21 – 23 June
Latvia’s Centenary Sports Games. 55th Tournament of the Latvian Sports Veterans & Seniors Final competition. Latvia	21 – 24 June
I am Latvian (Too) Exhibition. National Library of Latvia, Rīga	21 June to 22 August
Nature concert hall. Nature is always good Open-air concert and event programme. Daugava Museum, Salaspils municipality	22 June
Heavenly Pärt Concert by the Latvian Radio Choir and the <i>Sinfonietta Rīga</i> chamber orchestra. Frauenkirche, Dresden, Germany	23 June

A Single Tone Concert by the Latvian Radio Choir and the <i>Sinfonietta Rīga</i> chamber orchestra. Kissinger Sommer festival, Bad Kissingen, Germany	25 June
The XIII Baltic Triennial: GIVE UP THE GHOST Baltic Art triennial. Tallinn Art Hall, Tallinn, Estonia	29 June to 2 September
World Latvian Economic and Innovation Forum World class forum dedicated to the development of international trade and industry. Valmiera Drama Theatre, Valmiera	28, 29 June
Postage stamp “The Latvian Republic Turns 100” First day of issue. Rīga	29 June
LAMPA Conversation festival. Cēsis	29, 30 June
The XXVI Latvian Song and XVI Dance Celebration 2018 Rīga	30 June to 8 July
The Wonder Bird A musical for young people and their parents. VEF Culture Palace, Rīga; Latgale Embassy GORS, Rēzekne; Liepāja Theatre, Liepāja; Vidzeme Concert Hall “Cēsis”, Cēsis	3, 15, 22, 29 July
Portable Landscapes International contemporary art exhibition series. Körsbärgården Exhibition Hall, Gotland, Sweden	5 July to 5 August
Dmitriy Kurlandskiy. Dolce Stil Nuovo New Sounds for Latvia’s Centenary. International festival for adventurous music Skaņu Mežs. Great Amber Concert Hall, Liepāja	7 July
Latvia International Ceramics Biennale Exhibition of the International Ceramics Competition Martinsons Award. Daugavpils, Rīga, Sigulda, Ogre, Rēzekne, Panevėža	7 July to 9 September
Imants Tillers. Journey to Nowhere Exhibition. Latvian National Museum of Art, Rīga	7 July to 30 September
Muzykys Skrytuļš Festival of modern Latgalian music. Likсна, Daugavpils municipality	14, 15 July

Freedom Street Summer school and festival of the Platform of European Theatre Academies (PLETA). Cēsis	14 – 30 July
Marina Rebeka. Karel Mark Chichon. The Latvian Festival Orchestra. Salut d'Amour Symphony and opera music concert, part of the “Born in Latvia” concert series. Jūras Vārti Theatre House, Ventspils; Great Amber Concert Hall, Liepāja; Cēsis Castle Park, Cēsis	19, 20, 22 July
Born in Latvia. Kristīne Opolais. Ksenija Sidorova. Vineta Sareika. Ainārs Rubiķis. The Latvian Centenary Youth Symphony Orchestra Part of the “Born in Latvia” concert series. Dzintari Concert Hall, Jūrmala	24 July
To be Banned. Baltic Books 1918 – 1940 Travelling exhibition. National Library of Estonia, Tallinn, Estonia	31 July to 20 October

The programme is subject to change.
The entire Latvian Centenary programme can be found at lv100.lv

Wild Souls

Symbolism in the Baltic States

LATVIA | ESTONIA | LITHUANIA

Musée d'Orsay in Paris, France
April 10 – July 15



Ministry of Culture
Republic of Latvia



Musée
d'Orsay



Baron Hans Manteuffel-Szoegge. From the book, *Die Baltische Landeswehr im Befreiungskampf gegen den Bolschewismus* (1929)

A Different War in Latvia

TEXT Roberts Rasums

The proclamation of Latvia's independence on 18 November 1918 was a very significant but nevertheless formal act, which soon had to be backed with armed force; in December 1918 the Soviet Latvian forces, backed by Soviet Russia, crossed the border into Latvia. The Latvian War of Independence was not just a small nation's attempt to win independence – it was also part of larger conflicts – the Russian Civil War, domestic bickering in Germany, and the global fight against Bolshevism. From the very early days, the battles for independence in Latvia were not fought exclusively by Latvians: the first battle started on 31 December at Inčukalns, where the freshly established Baltic Landwehr held off the Bolshevik's approach to Riga for twenty-four hours. Among the 35 people who fell were Latvians, Baltic Germans, Germans and Russians. Later on, Estonians, Lithuanians, Brits and Poles also spilled blood for Latvia, and their tribute is gratefully commemorated each year. The matter of Germans is no simple one: on the one hand, they were our allies in this fight, but on the other hand, they were our sworn enemies against which more blood was shed than any other.

The situation in Germany in late 1918 and in 1919 was full of destruction. Only a year prior, in late 1917, Germany seemed unshakable in its fight against the Entente, but it took just one year for Rhineland to be occupied by the Entente's forces; the Poles had split East Prussia off from the rest of

Germany, and the country was plagued by unemployment, hunger and political anarchy. Even though a shameful but stable peace was achieved, Germany's domestic affairs became more and more unstable. The sailors' mutiny continued in Bremen, Cologne and elsewhere, with the threat of civil war sweeping throughout the country, further exacerbated by the growing influence of the Bolsheviks on Germany's eastern borders.

Those parts of the army that were not disbanded could not be trusted and refused to suppress the communists' demonstrations. In situations such as these, the German army's high-level command had a great role; as Captain Walter von Medem, the commander of the Badisches Freiwilligen Abteilung wrote in his memoirs, they "did not believe in such a thing as being freed from an oath". The so-called Iron Brigade movement gained force in Germany, uniting forces that were still fit for battle, and later on forming the basis of the Freikorps movement. These units suppressed the January 1919 communist uprising in Berlin, and parts of these units responded to the German government call to defend the borders of Germany. There were many Freikorps in Latvia, and these are usually referred to by the names of their commanders: Lütz's machine-gun battalion; Stöwer's artillery squadron; Damm's machine-gun unit; the Freikorps of von Plehwe, von Brandis, Petersdorff, Jena, and others. These

Freikorps stood by the Baltic Landwehr, the first Latvian militia unit that united Latvians, Russians and Baltic Germans.

Recruitment centres for volunteers were set up in many German cities, where so-called Baltic fighters (Baltikumer, Baltikumkämpfer) were invited to serve in the army. These fighters had different motivations for voluntarily going to war despite the recent end of World War I: from the desire for adventure and material gains, to the desire to fight to the very last bullet for Germany in the so-called Baltic redoute. There were also those who hoped, after fighting, to obtain land and make a life outside Germany, especially as recruitment agents in Germany promoted the belief that such an agreement existed between the Latvian Provisional Government and the German official August Winnig signed on 29 December 1918.

Many considered their path to the East to be part of a self-styled “Holy Crusade” against Bolshevism. Herbert Volk, a commander of one of the Freikorps, described the 16 April events – there was a coup against the Kārlis Ulmanis-led government at that time – in his own terms: “Some Baltic compatriots want my Freikorps to take part in the coup against the Latvian’s Ulmanis government. But then who will defend Liepāja? The greatest part of the Landwehr is stationed far away, near Ventspils. But the German border continues to worry me. Liepāja must not fall. If the Bolsheviks arrive here, they will be at Königsberg soon, where the headquarters fear the Reds.” The so-called Baltic redoute became a romanticised battlefield where the German army was not yet defeated and its men were fighting for Germany.

The commander of the German forces,

Major General Rüdiger von der Goltz, could be considered to be most colourful of the cast of characters. Von der Goltz started his anti-Bolshevik campaign in Finland, leading the Germans’ VI Reserve Corps that helped the Finns in their drive towards freedom. Von der Goltz cut an impressive figure; he was ambitious, an absolutely ardent German patriot and a dedicated monarchist. It should be noted that Goltz never swore fealty either to the Latvian state or the Provisional Government. His adventurism is admirable, and it was based on the belief that it was possible, here in the Baltics, to start a process that would give Germany back the positions it lost after signing the Treaty of Versailles. He described his goals thusly: “In case of success, I hoped to

achieve nothing more and nothing less than saving Germany from ruin, which could be brought about by Soviet Russia, civil war, an economic and financial collapse, and by the hands of

the Entente’s extortionists.” Nevertheless, the Baltics, in von der Goltz’s plans, would have only served as a military base. Even though he was sympathetic to the Baltic German movement, von der Goltz’s plan was to defeat the Bolsheviks, reinstate monarchy in Russia, and to create an army of Russian soldiers and German instructors that would be able to march to Berlin, reinstate monarchy and thus renew Germany’s might. Even though strong Latvian and Estonian states would have been but an obstacle in these plans, it would be an unjust oversimplification to say that Germans only played the role of occupiers or aggressors in the Latvian Independence War.

It seems odd to say, but it would have been harder for Latvia to become independent if not for von der Goltz. He arrived

in Latvia on 1 February, at a time when the Bolsheviks had taken Panevėžys and were moving towards Palanga and thus threatening to split off the anti-Bolshevik forces from their only remaining supply line, i.e. Germany. As von der Goltz arrived in Liepāja, all that separated the German border and the idea of an independent Latvia from the Bolsheviks was a 50 km enclave defended by just 3,850 men, from whom just a few hundred were Latvian. It is thanks to von der Goltz that in March 1919 a successful offensive was started against the Bolsheviks, with Latvians, Baltic Germans, Germans and Russians battling side by side to drive the Bolsheviks out of Latvia. Until the Battle of Cēsis, the weight of the Freedom Battles in Latvia was shouldered by the allied Estonians and Germans: the Iron Brigade, the Landwehr, the Freikorps and other units. A strong Latvian Army was established only in the latter half of 1919.

On 22 May 1919, before the operation to free Rīga, the German Iron Brigade and Freikorps, Prince Lieven’s White counter-revolutionary units, the Baltic Landwehr and a Latvian brigade led by Jānis Balodis, and Estonian and Latvian troops of the Northern Latvia brigade all fought in Vidzeme. The Landwehr’s shock troop battalion (led by Hans Manteuffel) and the Edelweiß Freikorps (led by von Medem) bore the brunt of the task of freeing Rīga. They took Torņakalns by storm, and in a bold move took the bridges over the Daugava River, which they held unscathed until the main forces arrived, beating back incessant counter-attacks. Just twelve German and Baltic German and men could be allotted to the task of breaking through the Old Town,

taking the Rīga Castle and freeing the hostages taken by the Bolsheviks in the so-called “march of death” from Jelgava who were in grave danger. Manteuffel fell during the task, but the remaining men were able to accomplish their objective. Even if this fight was based on the principle “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”, many of those who were rescued later became citizens of independent Latvia.

It is fraught with irony that these former brothers in arms in Latvia, meaning Latvians under Ulmanis, Balodis and Zemītāns; Russians under Prince Lieven; Germans under von der Goltz; and the Estonians allied with Ulmanis, who jointly marched through battle from Liepāja to Rīga and from Valka to Cēsis – each true to their own ideals, which could scarcely be called false or condemnable – were in the end unable to take common action. The case was similar with the Baltic Germans.

It would be pertinent, now, to quote von Medem’s dedication to

his men when, following the Battle of Cēsis, they left the bridges of Rīga, which they had taken a month before: “When we took these bridges and opened the prisons, we did not ask whether those we freed were Germans or Latvians. We only saw their shared plight. Now the unfavourable political conditions forces us to leave Rīga. But you should not be ashamed to leave with banners high. Awareness of the duty that we have fulfilled is greater than this politics.” No matter what happened next, clearly it is quite possible that without the blood of German soldiers shed in the first half of 1919 in Latvia, another, harsher fate would have befallen both Germany and the fledgling Latvian state.

Until the Battle of Cēsis, the weight of the Freedom Battles in Latvia was shouldered by the allied Estonians and Germans: the Iron Brigade, the Landwehr, the Freikorps and other units.

Going Our Own Way

*On the series of historical novels,
We. Latvia. The 20th Century.*

TEXT **Arnis Koroševskis**

It's hard to believe that very soon it will be seven years since the short prose collection *We. The 20th Century* was published. With its unusual concept and announcement, the book stood out palpably among the comparatively bland original works published between 2008 and 2011. An idea was later formulated to create a series of novels with thirteen authors each viewing a particular era, and the series became a widely discussed and eagerly awaited phenomenon. It is unprecedented in Latvian literature; traditionally, works of poetry, prose, and drama are collected in relation to specific literature festivals or events (such as the Prose Readings, Days of Poetry, etc.), or, alternatively, works written in different years (and therefore not sharing an idea at the time of writing) are selected and subordinated to a theoretical or artistic concept that would unite them. In the recent past, one can see somewhat similar intentions behind *Latvian Stories* (2006). However, literature has in general turned out to be more inert than other types of art. Let us recall the film *Vogelfrei* (2007), which was created by four different directors, as well as different modern art installations that were created collectively, etc.

Starting from the time the series was announced, one of its most intriguing aspects was the attempt to assemble, *en masse*, authors of different ages and literary experience who write quite dissimilar prose. The oldest author is twenty years older than the youngest. Six of them were born in the 1960s, and seven in the 1970s. Generally speaking, however, they make up a generation within a fifteen-year margin. The childhood of this generation and youth passed under Brezhnev's stagnation or shortly after, in the vicissitudes of the Perestroika and the Singing Revolution. Five of the authors started influencing and developing Latvian literary processes from the mid-1990s, but most made their debut in the new millennium. They also have different degrees of involvement with history. Some of them – Pauls Bankovskis, Laima Kota, Gundega Repše, and Andra Manfelde – have repeatedly dealt with historical



topics. Others had no similar experience at all (Kristīne Ulberga and Inga Gaile). Furthermore, the motley crew rallied by Gundega Repše also includes historians, art researchers, and literary critics. However, it must be said that the series does not include authors who are drawn towards grasping historical facts in their work (Aivars Kļavis, Jānis Lejiņš, Valdis Rūmnieks, and Arturs Heniņš, who passed away a few years ago). Sadly, however, the experienced authors have exhausted several ideas before. *The Tin Scream* (2002), and *Copper Cart* (2006) – first two parts of Repše’s trilogy – would have been a great contribution to the series, as would Bankovskis’ *Reds, Rats and Rock ‘N Roll* (2002) or even *Secrets* (2003). However, the works they wrote for the series are no longer surprisingly vivid.

The situation is markedly different among the writers who had had only limited or non-existent experience in the genre. Inga Gaile had proved herself a talented prose writer right around the time when the series was started¹, but she nevertheless offered a different and innovative look back at the times of Kārlis Ulmanis in *The Glass Shards* (2016). It is one of the most original prose works of the last few years, and it has been underrated. It would likewise be nice for readers to, in time, become more receptive to Kristīne Ulberga’s “different” novel *There* (2017)². Māris Bērziņš, after spending ten years of active writing, had made headway in readers’ minds with the witty *Gutenmorgen* miniatures. That’s why *The Taste of Lead* (2015) surprised readers and became one of the most important events in contemporary Latvian literature.

A review of the series as a whole suggests an impression of constant prose, one based on classic methods, but that may be misleading. Next to traditionally realistic novels, one can find several complicated works with atypical components of narration or composition, such as Osvalds Zebris’ *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill* (2014), or the aforementioned novels by Gaile and Ulberga. But this is advantageous for the series. I.e., the works are sufficiently different, and each of them crystallises its own artistic “function”. Berelis shocks the reader both brutally and elegantly. Bankovskis’ levity and inventiveness of philosophical thought is fascinating. Both Zebris’ and Māris Bērziņš’ reverence towards historical fact is surprising; and Bērziņš confronts the reader with the ironclad injustice of history. Repše, Bērziņš, and Inga Ābele show us the absurd savagery of World War II; in the way of solving historical mysteries, Ābele

¹ Her story “Milky Ways” was awarded Best Story at the 2012 Prose Readings.

² In early 2018, the novel received the annual *Diena* Newspaper Award in Culture.

and Bankovskis bring to light the ways the past intersects with the present; and Nora Ikstena shows an era as a poisoned collage of suffocating pain. Ulberga, Guntis Berelis and Gaile make us think about the marginal and how contradictory a human being can be; Manfelde conjures, masterfully, the duality of the “two worlds”; while Kota, with the observant gaze of a historian, stylish coquetry and spitefully sparkling vivacity creates an antithesis of sorts to the other, more emotionally heavy works. It is not without reason that Repše neatly summed up the process of writing these novels: “There is, in fact, nothing at all to be desired from history. It is heavy and gnawing stuff down to the very groundwater.”³

The different aesthetics and intonation are wonderfully noticeable in cases when there is a chronological overlap between works. It seems that the 1980s are the most vivid example. Kota describes the middle of this decade with encyclopaedic depth in *The Room* (2016). She breathes the spirit of the age into almost every single episode and detail of day-to-day life in a communal apartment. Meanwhile, in Ikstena’s *Soviet Milk* (2015), the facts of the period – even though they have direct influence on the fates of the novel’s characters – are only superficially noted; the primary goal of the work is to reveal the relationship between a daughter and her mother. Indeed, the novel is very personal. Ulberga’s novel, too, seems to be only minimally related to the decade, and it may seem, at times, that there is none at all. Nevertheless, however paradoxical it may be, the situation described in the novel – the physical and spiritual estrangement from society – is directly caused by the era itself.

It raises the question of what the readers expect from the works of the series, and what the understanding is of the nature of the genre of the (modern) historical novel. The reader who wants to explore, on an all but documental level, the behind-the-scenes action of how the Latvian state was established will be quite disappointed when picking up *Bankovskis’ 18* (2014). The same goes for the reader who wants a traditional, realistic “war novel” and finds Berelis’ *Words Were of No Use* (2015). They will have fits of anger over the horrifying and disgusting things they have read. Nevertheless, no matter how marginal the psychopath Tušs may be, the novel’s overall narrative has several elements inseparably associated with World War I, such as the use of noxious gas as a weapon. Indeed, the density of historical facts can be diametrically opposed between some of the works, and it may not meet the

³ Adamaite, I., Repše, G. “Spite and Alternative.” *Kultūras Diena*, 31 January, 2013.

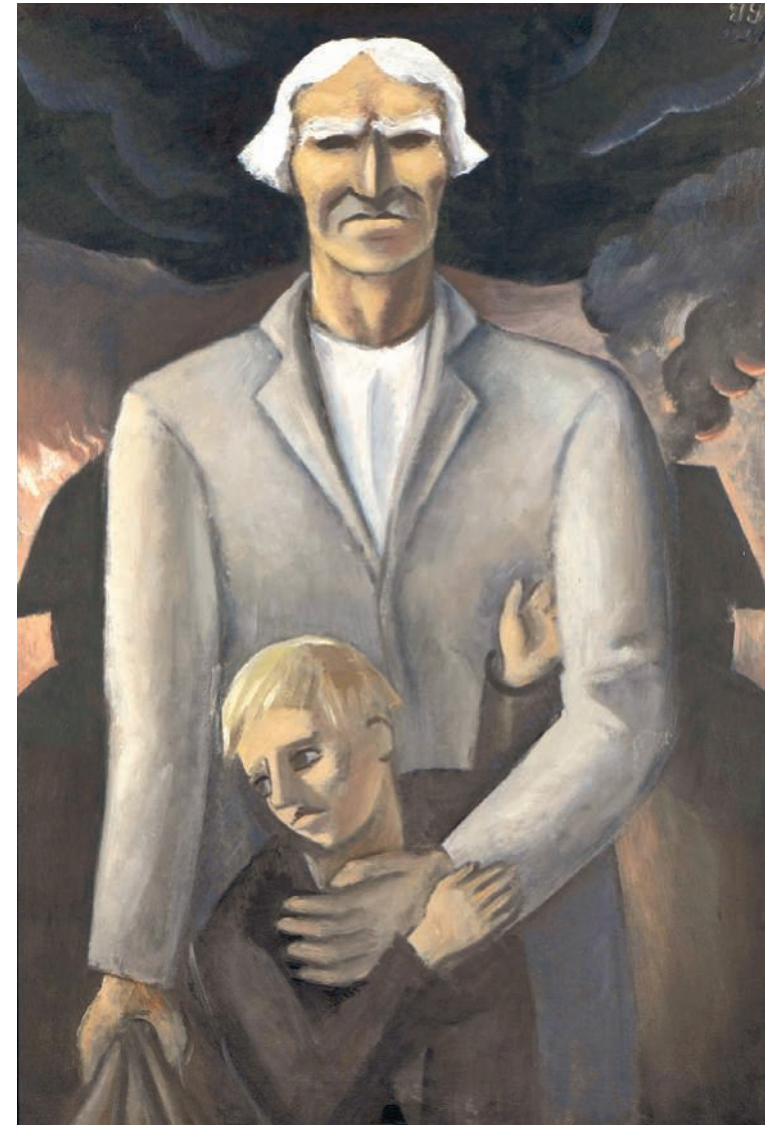
reader's expectations. In Repše's *Bogene* (2016), posing questions and looking for answers is more important than revealing a historical situation, while in Ābele's *The Rumble* (2017), the attempts to unite the legionnaires' fates, episodes relating to the Holocaust, and the unusual characteristics of post-war Riga in a single monumental work make it oversaturated.

Out of the twelve novels⁴, only four are unrelated to the Soviet era. I would not call it a shortcoming of the series, but rather a peculiarity that the readers should take into account. This is caused by the creators of the series, and their attitude against the Soviet regime. Ultimately, every person living in Latvia feels the consequences of the occupation to this day. For example, Arno Jundze's *The Red Mercury* (2017) makes every reader realise, not without bitterness, that what were important matters 25 years ago have still not been resolved, or even approached. That is why the authors of the *We. Latvia. The 20th Century.* series have positioned themselves, as it were, as being on a mission and going their own way. They are not ashamed of discussing matters that seem inconvenient or written to death. Nevertheless, the opportunity to probe inter-war Latvia more deeply has not been used.

Latvian literature is currently very oriented towards the past. In addition to four novels in the series, 2017 saw the publication of Jānis Lejiņš' *The Heart of a Man*, Aivars Freimanis' *The Kettle*, Pauls Bankovskis' prose book *What happened to our caregiver?*, Inguna Cepīte's *Ulsīks*, and Jānis Rokpelnis' *The Museum*. Of the works published within the last few years, it is very much worth noting Māra Zālīte's excellent dilogy, while works such as Rihards Bargais' *Naked Little Pigs* or Aivars Vilipsons' *Adventures of Ārprātījs* show that there is a need in literature to look back at the bohemian adventures of creative figures from a single generation. This, too, is undeniably a part of (modern) history. As a cultural tendency, it can be interpreted in two ways – the project has “forced” writers to focus on their past, and the novels of the series have in themselves increased writers' (and readers') appetites for historical matters.

Even if the tidal fluctuations of the wish to describe the history of the Latvian nation, together with the fact that Latvian prose has been fragmented beyond recognition in the past few decades, have forced some works, especially those written in the 1990s, to go unnoticed, the *We. Latvia. The 20th Century.* series has mobilized our attention and turned the sights of the early 21st century to questions that can never be written to death.

⁴ To avoid confusion, I have intentionally omitted Andris Akmentiņš' *Teachers*, which is to be published later this year, from the article and the context of the series.



Jāzeps Grosvalds, *Refugees*

On Latvian Parenting

TEXT Santa Remere

Trends in raising and educating children are changing rapidly these days, and there is so much more choice. When I had my eldest son, the Japanese Yamaha music schools for toddlers were popular. Now that I'm raising my youngest son, preschools are more likely to offer a self-development system based on the methods of the Italian educator Maria Montessori (1870–1952) or invite parents to raise their children according to the care guidelines of Hungary's Emmi Pikler (1902–1984), which urge parents to avoid over-stimulating their child. Young parents have countless informative articles, books and supporting materials at their disposal, covering various ways of parenting. You can try this and that to find the most suitable model for your own family. Everyone's heard of "French parenting", which teaches patience and respectful relationships between the parents and their children, where children always finish everything on their plate, sleep throughout the whole night and don't disturb their parents on their "child-free" time and territory. At one time, the ideal of the "Swedish mother" seemed most attractive to me: you shouldn't hide anything from your children, nor should there be a compromise regarding the weather, meaning you don't do the thermal *galonbyxor* pants and spend hours at the park, below zero temperatures notwithstanding. The Swedish mother works, exercises and takes her children to after-school activities on her bicycle. She wears practical black clothing and always bakes the birthday cake on her own. Truth be told, I wasn't able to stick to this mode of conduct for long. I was much too lenient and lazy. The Riga municipal *dagis*, or preschool, wasn't available for a very long time, and my children spend a lot of time indoors. With my second child, I'm more similar to the traditional Japanese or nomad mother who stays with her child

until they're almost school-aged. This isn't possible for American parents, who don't have paid childcare leave, and no chance to resume their career or to have the time to breastfeed their children indefinitely; nevertheless, they are quite interested in the effective parenting methods of other nations. A little while ago I read about an American family who are using Russian-style parenting, meaning children have to do their homework each day, eat their soup, study music, dance ballet, but they get to stay up as late as they want to. Internationally, the German parenting attitude is also highly esteemed. It allows children to play with fire (literally) and hurt themselves.

I know quite a lot about the more popular parenting tendencies, but in this muddle of cultures I've never thought – evidently, I lacked the confidence – to define what constitutes a Latvian upbringing. I realise I'm talking about a very superficial and possibly foolish habit to divide upbringing by lines of cultural stereotypes and geographical location, but, despite being a native, I really do have trouble characterising Latvian parenting in the way it's expressed in French gallantry or Russian soup training. Folk songs and ancient Latvian views on life have always seemed mere distant romantic echoes to me. Nevertheless, I've always known what to avoid: you must avoid the Soviet ways, when newborns were not given to their mothers, when you had to feed them according to a schedule, then put them in a cradle and, in general, hand your children over to the system, which, as is well-established, didn't really work and, in the end, didn't remake the people anew as it promised it would.

By way of personal observation, I know that, for the most part, modern Latvian mothers put the children's priorities above their own. They try to ensure all-round

development with plenty of after-school activities. They keep close tabs on their development, and gladly listen to modern psychologists' advice advocating the principle of "naturalness" and go back to work only grudgingly, following a lengthy childcare leave. To my oft-perplexed foreign friends, I explain the reasons for this trend by telling them of our social benefits, wages, and real estate values dictating priorities different from those of other Western countries. I explain it by telling them of the peculiarity of our young nation state, our lack of tradition... However, upon reading parenting and childcare advice in a hundred-years-old edition of the *Homeland News*, I was forced to consider that this might not be related to a lack of tradition, but rather the existence of one, and to the Latvian mentality, as well. At any rate, I was very surprised too by the degree to which this advice for young parents – published the year the Latvian state was established – seemed... *normal*.

In 1918, during the war, when many Latvians had already been dispersed as refugees, among various bleak, trivial and grey columns, there's a naïve and heartfelt section called "On Parenting. Written by the Old

Uncle", which describes in great detail the different stages of child development and the "sensitive workings of the soul", i.e. *psychology*. At a time when the lack of schools, the hardships of life and the circumstances faced by refugees in foreign lands had made parenting all but impossible, this newspaper "uncle" (in reality, the advice was proffered by an unnamed pre-war educator) urges the public to think not about building new houses, but rather to promote the physical and mental well-being of the younger generation. The uncle thinks that the soul of every child has "the makings of the human ideal" inside them and that the art of parenting can use this to form the basis of the child's future. He explicitly refers to parenting as an "art", not a craft, stressing that "no mortal ever has, nor ever will make it fully their own". His first simile that caught my attention was an allegory about a tree and the work of the gardener: the child needs a lot of air and light, some rain and occasionally some lightning. Just as you'd prune the dried-up branches of a tree, you should prune the children's vices as early as you can, curtly and firmly, without long-winding sermons that make a child bitter and spiteful.



The *Dzimtenes Ziņas* (*Homeland News*) newspaper, 25 June 1918

As is the case in horticulture, in children's upbringing you must be able to marry the requirements of nature with those of culture. "Nature is immutable." It can only be perfected and improved. The uncle believes that, in order to tap into the all-round potential of the child, he or she should study both indoors and outdoors, and in the city as well as in the countryside.

He invites readers not to limit the natural mobility of the baby and stresses freedom as an important prerequisite to a balanced development of physical and mental powers. The child should be allowed to run around and explore his surroundings, and fall down and hurt himself, in which case he should be pitied, but he should also assume his own

responsibility (he calls blaming an object a "reprehensible folly"). "The limbs of a child want to move ceaselessly... When one moves, muscles develop, and the sandwich mother made tastes good and there's good sleep. The inability to sit still is in

the nature of all young people. Merriment and liveliness are nested deep inside them." This statement greatly shook my speculative conceptions about the strict discipline of the time long past. The uncle also urges for a quick reconciliation after scolding the child, because "the child's happiness lies in whether parents can live with them" and that strictness should go hand in hand with affirmations of love.

Just like all of today's leading psychologists, the uncle warns that children learn most of all from our example. We can teach them patience and other good qualities only if we have developed them within ourselves. He also urges the parents – mostly the mother, but the father too – to be responsive

and answer the children's questions, but to eschew their childish language and avoid singing praises for every tiny achievement. If the parents reply with interest and give explanatory responses for the child's first six years, it is a guaranteed basis for further self-propelled learning at school, and that this will amount to a "hundredfold" repayment for the parent's efforts.

What is the goal of this advice? "To raise a human being with strong and healthy organs of the flesh, gifted with pure morals and decorated with the richest mental abilities best suited to the needs of our culture... The times alter, and things change, but the lofty goal remains the same." I'm currently re-reading John Medina's *Brain Rules for*

Baby: How to Raise a Smart and Happy Child from Zero to Five (2010). Medina is a modern American brain researcher and molecular biologist. The title of this book contains the age-old central question that at some point preoccupied the old uncle too: How can

one raise an intelligent and happy child?

In conjunction with explaining nerve activity and the regulating functions of human genes, Medina uses the book to try to provide simple answers to the questions posed by American parents: Can I develop a baby's mind from its very first days? How can I ensure that my child is accepted to Harvard when they grow up? Can upbringing ensure that my child will grow up to be happy?... and so on. The author explains the prerequisites of human evolution, which have made human brains so big they can rule the world, but which have made newborns so unprepared for life that parents have to teach them most everything, including food ingestion and egestion, not to mention

Among various bleak, trivial and grey columns, there's a naïve and heartfelt section called 'On Parenting. Written by the Old Uncle'.

movement and socializing. He uses the same simile of the tree and the gardener, or that of the seedling and the soil, to explain that 50% of the potential of a child's happiness and intelligence depends on the genes and 50% on the upbringing. Medina always stresses that we are social animals and that our babies are born with an intention to communicate and create relationships with other people from whom they might receive help and learn life skills. We are a rare sort of animal that can survive only through cooperation, both in procuring food and looking after children. Because a baby's brain is so big, giving birth is a difficult and potentially life-threatening ordeal for human females, and a period of recuperation must follow.

Therefore, others in the group are involved in parenting from the child's very first days. If you, as a parent, think you cannot make it on your own, that's because it isn't natural to do this alone, says Medina.

In order to reach the consciousness of the average reader, Medina not only describes the growth process of the nerves and the brain, which develop with the speed of 8,000 cells per minute in the womb of the mother, he also differentiates the basic principles – or "brain rules" – that should be followed to ensure the best environment for the development of the budding new human being. These are: the happiness of the mother and the quality of her physical and mental well-being; forging empathetic relationships; a sense of security for the child, which is the basis for truly free action; establishing friendly ties with the child; naming one's emotions; a strong discipline that comes from a friendly heart; and the time we spend watching faces, not screens. To sum up, his

writings provide a scientific basis for the basic parenting values listed in 1918's *Homeland News*, but the researcher refers to the brain as the most complex thinking machine in the world, while the old uncle explains the workings of the brain by way of analogy to a telephone exchange, where environmental sensory input flows as it might through a telephone wire. Furthermore, in addition to these "natural" operations, the uncle sets forth the "spiritual" operations that bring about "intuition". "Intuition is the confidence that in my spirit, inside me, there's an ability to think, ponder, consider, notice, etc. For this we use the simple word 'soul.'" The uncle considers educators who work with the child to be the teachers of the

soul. "Each outside event brings about an inner intuition. Through outside events, the child, like the adult, creates inside his soul the images of the word at large... The child sees a person, her face, her pretty eyes; he hears the kind word, sees the soft

hand that gives him food; he sees the cover of clothing, and an aggregate comprised of acts of noticing springs up in his soul: the image of *mummy*." The soul is the "space" of such images or paintings, and the task of the educator is to help the child look after its contents and gain insight into each of its objects.

Despite the sometimes comical ring of the antiquated language, and despite the different misinterpreted and unexplored mechanisms of mental activity, the old uncle's wonderfully poetic invitation promotes the development of a comprehensively educated, independent, harmonious and compassionate person. Meanwhile, the definition of soul as "an intuition that I have

Advice literature does not teach or change society. The instillment of values, and the way they change or not, is rooted much more deeply in the culture of a given society.

an ability to think” is one of the best-placed characterisations of consciousness I’ve heard. For me, the *Homeland News* column brought about a surprisingly realistic realisation of the high ethical ideals and humanistic values that were important to early 20th-century Latvian society in their everyday life, not only culture. And why is it that I had thought differently, or, rather, that I had, without thinking about it too much, supposed that parenting standards were much lower in the days when the writers Jānis Rainis, Anna Brigadere and Kārlis Skalbe were alive? After all, my great-grandmother, who was in all likelihood the target audience of this newspaper, read Skalbe’s “Cat’s Windmill” to her children, with all the tale’s “sensitive” meanderings of the inner world.

Of course, I do not know who the “old uncle” is, but I assume his teachings must have been informed by the popular psychology of the day. At any rate, they have a lot in common with the conclusions on parenting by Maria Montessori and Emmi Pikler, both of whom lived around that same time. The uncle’s theories, however, have a local feature that brings his suggestions closer to animism, particularly stressing the role of the mother as an educator and protector. He starts almost every single piece – and often supplements its middle parts – with an illustrative folk song (“As a little boy/I started off in the dark night”, “The sun is warm, my mummy nice/Both partake of the same good”, “Gently grows the little birch/Gently sprouts its tender leaves”, etc.), which supplements the idealistic message with, as it were, a pragmatic form that can be found in nature, life, and history. For him, folk songs serve as references to what the readers know well and regard as self-evident, and the remaining theoretical developments don’t play an informative role, but rather analyse that which is already known and remind

readers about it.

From what I’ve seen from modern child-care and parenting books, or self-help books for parents, these, for the most part, do not introduce radical innovations, but rather urge people to see answers in what they recognise and what they want to see being brought to fruition. This does not, however, exclude the co-existence of disparate and mutually contradictory methods as well as references to dubious sources (especially in matters related to feeding and “sleep training” the child). We choose to listen to what corroborates our existing beliefs. After all, someone as early as Aristotle believed that the reading process has healing properties of its own, despite the content and the answers provided.

Advice literature does not teach or change society. The instillment of values, and the way they change or not, is rooted much more deeply in the culture of a given society. However, as concerns the genre of self-help for parents, I consider the advice of *Homeland News*’ old uncle to be, in many ways, a good example: mostly because he talks of ideals and of perfecting the art of parenting, without making parents bear the brunt of guilt for their shortcomings. And after reading this advice, I’ve formulated an answer with which I may one day shine on international mothers’ forums when there’s discussion on the principles of the clever French or the compassionate Thai way of parenting. I will proffer this nugget of folk wisdom substantiated within Latvian advice literature, for which I’m very grateful to my mother:

“My dear mother,
Brought me up so kindly:
She waded through the mud,
Carrying me in her arms.”

10 colourful events

1

Mērija's Journey*A documentary by Kristīne Želve*

WHEN

From 2 May

WHERE

Cinemas across Latvia



The “Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary” programme continues in May with Kristīne Želve’s documentary *Mērija’s Journey*, a story about Mērija Grīnberga, the young woman who saved a great part of Latvia’s museum collections: 700 boxes that the German army took with it upon retreat, and without which many exhibition halls of Latvian museums would have been empty today. Grīnberga was the only volunteer who in 1944 accompanied with the train carrying the treasures of Latvian art in order to return with them back to Rīga. The German occupying forces tried to take them away; the Soviet occupation forces brought them back; Mērija completed her duty. As gratitude for her journey, Mērija was sacked from her job at the museum and incessantly viewed with suspicion.

The film seeks to answer the following questions: Why did a young and educated woman from an intellectual family return to the USSR from the West? How could she go

on living here when her apartment was full of strangers and she was forced to work at a factory? Evidence for the paradoxes of the new life can be found in the diaries of Mērija’s mother, which vividly reveal the history of her family and the country. Until now, Mērija’s journey had been a secret and a riddle.

The film’s director and screenwriter Kristīne Želve made *Mērija’s Journey* along with cinematographer Andrejs Rudzāts.

2

Latvian Composers for the Latvian Centenary*Concert*

WHEN

4 May

WHERE

Atrium of the National Library of Latvia



In preparation for the state centenary, 80 Latvian composers were invited to participate in a contest and create new pieces – *a capella* songs for choir portraying the five elements in music: fire, water, earth (the Motherland), sky, and love – that would serve as a new repertoire for mixed choirs. As a result, 74 new musical compositions were created. These have been performed in

a series of five concerts.

The contest is to culminate in a closing concert, for which the conductors of amateur mixed choirs have selected the twenty best pieces. These will be performed by the State Academic Choir “Latvija”, the Latvian Radio Choir, Ave Sol Chamber Choir, and around twenty of Latvia’s leading amateur choirs under the direction of Māris Sirmāis.

3

White Tablecloth Celebration*A tradition dedicated to the renewal of Latvia’s independence*

WHEN

4 May

WHERE

In Latvia and across the globe



White Tablecloth Day is a way of celebrating Latvia’s second birthday, 4 May 1990, when the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR adopted the resolution declaring the renewed independence of the Latvian State, condemning the 17 June, 1940 military aggression by the USSR as an international crime and renewing the sovereignty of the Latvian Republic.

The goal of White Tablecloth Day, initiated by the Culture Ministry’s Latvian Centenary Bureau, is to inspire people to lay the table together on 4 May with family, friends, neighbours and their community to consciously celebrate the existence of their state and honour those who helped create and protect it.

4

Latvia’s Century*A Joint Exhibition Curated by the Museums of Latvia*

WHEN

From 4 May

WHERE

Latvian National Museum of History, Riga



The exhibition Latvia’s Century is the greatest joint exhibition by Latvian museums since the renewal of independence. Drawing from the collections of 63 public, municipal and private museums, the exhibition displays excellent historical objects from Kurzeme, Latgale, Sēlija, Vidzeme, Zemgale and Rīga. In all, 1,500 items are to be put on display, reflecting the past 100 years of the Latvian state, including photos, documents,

furniture, clothing, everyday items, money, awards, among other objects.

In terms of content, the exhibition encompasses all stages of Latvian statehood, offering an evocative look at Latvian social values of the past and present. It brings together different political contexts of different eras, as well as scenes and life stories from each epoch illuminating cultural, public and economic life. The personal stories invite the audience to engage with the exhibition on more intimate terms.

5

Born in Latvia

Concert cycle

WHEN	WHERE
13 May to 24 July	The Great Guild Hall, the Latvian National Opera, Dzintari Concert Hall, Ventspils' Theater House <i>Jūras Vārti</i> , Liepāja's Great Amber Concert Hall, and Cēsis Castle Park



“Born in Latvia” is a series of concerts from renowned Latvian artists who have mastered their skills and cemented their

reputations outside Latvia.

On 4 May the Great Guild Hall in Rīga will host the *Orchestral Celebrations* concert where about 700 participants from the 22 best children and youth symphonies and chamber orchestras will perform pieces and original works by Latvian composers.

On 13 May, the distinguished Latvian conductor Mariss Jansons will perform at the Latvian National Opera with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and the German violinist Frank Peter Zimmermann. They'll perform works by Sergei Prokofiev, Gioachino Rossini, Richard Strauss, and Maurice Ravel.

On 20 June at the Dzintari Concert Hall the Latvian mezzo-soprano Elīna Garanča will continue the series with the world-famous Vienna Philharmonic and Venezuelan conductor Rafael Payare, with a programme featuring works by Ludwig van Beethoven, Gustav Mahler, and Béla Bartók.

On 19 July the Ventspils' Theater House *Jūras Vārti*, on 20 July Liepāja's Great Amber Concert Hall, and on 22 July the Cēsis Castle Park will host a symphony and opera music concert *Salut d'Amour* featuring the excellent Latvian opera singer Marina Rebeka, conductor Karel Mark Chichon and the Latvian Festival Orchestra.

Finally, on 24 July the Dzintari Concert Hall will host the Latvia's Centenary Youth Symphonic Orchestra, set up as part of the “Born in Latvia” project, together with excellent, world-renowned musicians born in Latvia – Kristīne Opolais, Ksenija Sidorova and Vineta Sareika. The Latvia's Centenary Youth Symphonic Orchestra will prepare the concert programme in cooperation with professional musicians known in Latvia and conductor Ainārs Rubiks.

6

Baltic Tribes

A documentary by Raitis and Lauris Ābele

WHEN	WHERE
From 16 May	Cinemas across Latvia



Baltic Tribes, a popular science documentary film made as part of the “Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary” initiative, shows the last pagans of Europe – the 13th-century Baltic peoples who later formed the Latvian nation – using historical reconstruction, staging, CGI, and commentary from experts in the field.

The main character of the film, a merchant from Gotland named Lars, travels through the lands inhabited by Curonians, Latgalians, Selonians, Semigallians, Prussians, Yotvingians, Galindians, Samogitians, and Augštaitians. Along with Lars, the audience become acquainted with the cultural specifics of this region and gains some insight into the lives of Latvians' ancestors.

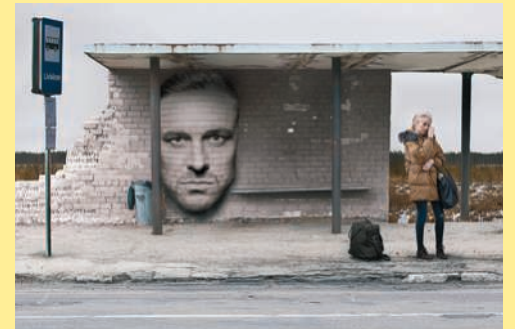
The Ābele brothers came up with the concept for *Baltic Tribes* after the success of their co-directed popular science documentary film, *The Curonians* (2015, 26 min).

7

A White Crow in Black

A play

WHEN	WHERE
From 20 May	Daile Theatre



In late 2016 the Daile Theatre, reacting to the refugee crisis that was particularly dire at that time, announced a contest for original theatrical compositions called “The East Arrives in Latvia. Asylum and (Mis) Match.” The contest aimed to inspire Latvian playwrights to create works that would promote dialogue on relationships, conflicts and possible synthesis between the known and the other, home and emigration, affirmation and negation. Aleksey Scherbak's *Līvberze* was awarded first prize, and it will be staged for the first time under the title *A White Crow in Black* (Latvian: *Balta vārņa melnā krāsā*).

The play, a “current drama” directed by Intars Rešetins, takes place in a Latvian town where an ordinary family lives. Everything changes with the unexpected arrival of a Syrian man. “Nothing is how it was before. White men have fear in their eyes. The family can't sit together at one table. It turns out life doesn't follow strict rules. Too bad,” says the play's synopsis.

8

Tradition & Innovation*The 6th Rīga International Textile and Fibre Art Triennial*

WHEN	WHERE
6 June to 16 September	Arsenāls Exhibition Hall, Rīga



The theme of this year's Rīga International Textile and Fibre Art Triennial is IDENTITY, and its main event is a high-quality – both artistically and professionally – exhibition presenting and promoting the most topical and innovative issues in the field of textile and fibre art in Europe today.

88 artists from 26 countries have been chosen by the international jury to participate, including Baltic, Nordic, Polish, French, German, Austrian, British, Israeli, US, Russian, and Japanese artists. World-famous textile artists Sheila Hicks (France/USA) and Jon Erik Riis (USA) will be special guests at the conference. The works of Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930 – 2017) will also be on display.

In addition to the main exhibition, on display at the Arsenāls Exhibition Hall, a series of satellite events will also take place – a guest exhibition from Le Mobilier National (Paris, France), *Colours of tapestry*

at the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design; Egils Rozenbergs' personal exhibition *Transfiguration* at the Latvian National Museum of Art; as well as exhibitions by Ieva Krūmiņa, Rolands Krutovs and several other artists at a number of galleries around Rīga. To accompany the events, workshops hosted by local artists and students from the Latvian Art Academy will also be held, encouraging audience participation, along with a two-day international conference at the Rīga Bourse Art Museum with guest lecturers from Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, the US, the UK, Finland, Sweden, France and elsewhere.

9

Lampa*The Conversation Festival*

WHEN	WHERE
29–30 June	Cēsis Castle Park



This summer, the town of Cēsis will host the fourth Lampa conversation festival, with the goal of sharpening minds, expanding horizons, and challenging assumptions. This time around, the festival seeks to promote trust; according to a poll by the SKDS agency, 52% of Latvian residents think most

people cannot be trusted, while 5% think others can be trusted fully.

“As research shows, almost all of us have trust problems, but I would invite people to find opportunity to increase trust, while still using critical thinking and judgement. Every one of us is part of this country, and only together can we create a strong, democratic and prosperous Latvia, the place we have called home for a hundred years now,” says LAMPA's director Ieva Morica.

As in previous years, the festival will have discussions, workshops, lectures, engaging games and other events to promote thought and discussion about or experience. The conversation festival is child-friendly and non-commercial. Entry is free.

10

XXVI Latvian Song and XVI Dance Celebration

WHEN	WHERE
30 June to 8 July	Rīga



The XXVI Latvian Song and XVI Dance Celebration 2018, held under the auspices of the Latvian Centenary, will see 43,000 participants arrive in Rīga from 118 Latvian

municipalities, and from many other countries where Latvians continue to uphold and develop the traditions of the Song and Dance Celebration. For seven days they will take part in more than 65 events; choirs, dance ensembles, brass bands, kokle players, folk musicians, vocal ensembles, folklore ensembles, and others will perform in various events, the Latvian folk costume exhibition, the Latvian applied art exhibition, and amateur theatre performances. 500,000 celebration-goers (roughly one quarter of the Latvian population—1.96 million) will be able to attend (ticketed and free) events.

The festival will open on 1 July 2018 with the traditional sacred music concert at the Rīga Cathedral, followed by the Celebration Procession throughout the streets of Rīga. Participants showing off their rich folk costumes will walk a route that takes several hours through the capital city streets, concluding with a special opening event dedicated to the participants.

The most anticipated events include the great dance performance *Māra's Country*. Approximately 17,000 dancers in the Daugava Stadium will tell the rich history of Latvia through music, energy, movement, rhythm, colour, and the patterns created by the steps of their folk dances. Celebration week culminates in the closing concert *Following the Starry Path* at the Mežaparks Open-air Stage in which 12,000 singers will perform a three-hour concert of the most outstanding Latvian professional choral music. As the prepared concert ends, audience members will be invited to add their voices, and the Nighttime Singalong will continue until sunrise.

The Ten Most Important Compositions of the Centenary

TEXT Armands Znotiņš

ILLUSTRATION Didzis Upens



Early 20th century

Since it's the centenary, the list should start with a composition created during the birth of the new state, one which will soon turn a hundred years old itself. Jānis Mediņš wrote the opera *Fire and Night* between 1913 and 1919. He wrote it under the most extreme circumstances, including when he was one of the Latvian Riflemen in the Far East. Mediņš anticipated that this piece would be staged as the first Latvian national opera piece. After an adventurous return to Latvia, it turned out that Alfrēds Kalniņš' *Baņuta* had beaten him to it. Mediņš got even by writing the first Latvian ballet, *Victory of Love*, while *Fire and Night* has entered the Latvian cultural canon. Nevertheless, like all Latvian operas, it has been staged but a few times, and only in an unmodified form when it first appeared on stage in 1921. Mediņš wrote the opus, inspired by Rainis' symbolic

play, on a magnitude fitting for the dimensions of late romanticism, and it could be well seen as the composer's reply to Richard Wagner, as an excellent testimony to his professional abilities and national self-confidence. It is widely accepted that *Fire and Night* is one of the few Latvian operas that would be worth staging at opera houses abroad. However, it seems we still have yet to make our own way to it and to a modern staging of the complete dilogy here in Latvia, too. I would especially like to see a version by Viesturs Kairiņš, but Michael Haneke will do as well.

1920s

In contrast to Jānis Mediņš and others, Emilis Melngailis was a miniaturist. He concentrated on choral music and protractedly perfected pieces inspired by the themes and moods of folk song. He was a pronounced

individualist as well, and his awful and depressingly egotistic character has entered the history of Latvian music. Nevertheless, it has been eclipsed by Melngailis' fine, sensitive and nuanced music, which, additionally, has no trace of "standard" national romanticism. Melngailis was able to harness the code of the national mentality like no one else and create scores that bring together the archaic and the modern. Many of these are considered outstanding works of art, first and foremost "Midsummer Night". Melngailis wrote this song in 1926 for the ballet *Maija*, but in due time it was clear to all that it was the same choral music after all, and "Midsummer Night" is consistently included in the Song Festival programme. Despite the fact that nowadays the numerous amateur choirs have turned into smaller chamber choirs, for which it is not realistic to bring Melngailis' score to life in sufficient colour, the jubilatory B major that concludes "Midsummer Night" is still exciting when performed at the Song Festival. Of course, the same goes for professional choral performances. There's an apocryphal story about thick folders of sheet music still sitting somewhere in the archives of the Latvian National Opera or the library containing pages of the ballet *Maija* written in pencil. It may be true.

1930s

In 1932, Michael Chekhov visited the Latvian National Theatre and staged William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*. He played the lead character and asked Jānis Kalniņš to write the score. At that time, the composer came up with the idea of turning *Hamlet* into an opera. After trying his hand in writing the folktale opera *Lolita's Wonder Bird*, in 1935 Jānis Kalniņš turned to a wildly different literary source. His *Hamlet* premiered in February 1936 with the composer himself

acting as conductor, and Mariss Vētra playing the title role. The composer was 32 at the time, and professionals foresaw a bright future ahead of him. The promised career and wide appreciation did come at last, but in Canada instead of Latvia. Having become one of Canada's most famous composers, he lived to the age of 96 and died in 2000, with memories of Latvia as a "lost paradise". He left behind him four symphonies, a violin concerto, a string quartet, a piano quintet and many small form works, and as a composer he meandered between modernist ideas and laconic post-romanticism but did not write any more operas – neither in Latvian nor in English – when he was in exile. Nowadays *Hamlet* is staged, time and again, in Latvia, and composer Volfgangs Dārziņš at one point said that this work is "likely to find its way across the border". As is evident, this moment has not yet arrived for Jānis Kalniņš' opera, even though it is safe to say it's better than the *Hamlet* composed by Ambroise Thomas.

1940s

Jānis Ivanovs too has left a mark in Latvia's collective memory as being a rough and scary character – and monumental too, in the broadest sense of the word. He lived for 77 years and penned 21 symphonies. This music, which makes short work of countless other master composers in terms of quantity, has an excellent quality to it as well. Jānis Ivanovs' *No. 5 in C major* is ranked among his best scores. Composed in 1945, it marks a departure from the aesthetics of national romanticism in the early works, and the colourful, impressionistic and programmatic *No. 4 Atlantis*. In its stead, there is clear, absolute music that is drawn with dramatic characters and powerful, expressive lines. Symphony No. 5 premiered in Moscow in 1946. Critics praised it highly, but

two years later there was a dictate to condemn "formalism" and "cosmopolitanism", and this time the reviews were the exact opposite. After another five years, there was, again, political change and the exact same people called symphony No. 5 one of the most valuable exemplars of Latvian music. In May 2017 the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Andris Poga, performed the symphony again, reminding everyone that the piece is excellent even outside its historical context. When the most desolate years of the totalitarian regime had passed, Jānis Ivanovs' work took on an increasingly enigmatic aspect, probing the secrets of human existence until the composer's death. His legacy takes up a unique place in Latvian music to this day.

1950s

For all of her life, Lūcija Garūta favoured the romantically heightened spectre of emotions, and the harmonic trouvailles of impressionism gave it extra colour, intensity and depth. Therefore she was able to create, with equal measure of success, both refined miniatures and dramatic large-scale opuses. Garūta's piano concerto belongs in the second grouping. Grieving the death of her adolescent daughter, the composer expressed these emotions with a piercing artistic power, in concert with her aesthetic and existential views that, despite everything, did not see absolute darkness and the victory of evil to be possible. The last bar lines of the piano concerto were written in 1951. The Composers' Union of Soviet Latvia told Garūta that at a time when, according to the theory of non-conflict, there is only the battle between what's good and what's even better, there's no place for such emotionally reactionary works decrying the socialist reality. The false jubilancy gradually subsided with

the death of Stalin, and in 1956 the symphony had its public premiere with pianist Hermanis Brauns and conductor Leonīds Vigners. Over the course of the past few years, everyone had forgotten that tragic narratives exist in art, and the result was shattering. Concert witnesses say that after it ended they felt as if cold water had been thrown onto them. Since that moment, the leading Latvian pianists of every generation have performed this work. The most recent to do so was Reinis Zariņš, and his performance approaches perfection.

1960s

When characterising Pēteris Plakidis' oeuvre, *Music for Piano, String Orchestra and Timpani* is often named among the first among his works. And it is also Plakidis' first symphony score, written in 1969 when the author was 22. It premiered on 14 November 1970, with Romualds Kalsons conducting the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, Elhons Jofe playing the timpani, and the composer himself at the piano. Plakidis' contemporaries say that *Music for Piano, String Orchestra and Timpani* is an absolute chef d'oeuvre. The younger generation agree, and this musical score is a constant presence in the repertoire of young pianists, conductors and orchestra artists who see and hear something fundamentally important inside these lines. The message of Plakidis' piece is evidently timeless. It evokes a suggestive sense of freedom, a plastic and brittle sensitivity, metaphysical and emotional protests, tragic dimensions and more. It is clear that this music expresses something that cannot be put into words, and the non-formable and inexpressible is at the same time very, very personal. Things like that are not forgotten and do not go unnoticed. Plakidis lived for a further fifty years after *Music for Piano, String Orchestra*

and *Timpani*, and kept writing many wonderful musical scores until his activity ceased in the late 1990s. But this opus of his youth still remains something unique.

1970s

Judging by purely professional criteria, one should name the following composers as having produced the best music of the 1970s: Tālivaldis Ķeniņš, Marģeris Zariņš and Romualds Kalsons. One should also name Romualds Grīnblats, Ādolfs Skulte and Artūrs Grīnups. A choice like this, favouring the forgotten or widely acclaimed classics, would be seen as self-evident. Nevertheless, there is one piece that, even though its four-part cycle is far from perfect, still sparks an incessant interest among performers and listeners alike, attracting them with the openly pronounced credo of a creative and free personality: Imants Kalniņš *Symphony No. 4*. This was the same dilemma faced by the creators of the Latvian Culture Canon. *Symphony No. 5* would have been more monolithic; *Symphony No. 3* more professionally worked, but nevertheless *Symphony No. 4* remains that Kalniņš work which challenges the totalitarian regime with the expressiveness of a rock musician and the experience, refinement and the range of symbols available to an academic musician. The regime accepted this challenge, and the original mezzo-soprano singing in English had to be changed to a completely instrumental version when the piece premiered in 1973. The symphony was first performed according to its original intention in Detroit in 1997, but the latest reading of this opus with the conductor Kaspars Adamsons and the Swiss trio VEIN proved that nobody really knows what a canonical version should sound like. Imants Kalniņš is silent about it, and everyone must find their own true answer themselves.

1980s

Gundars Pone belonged to that particular generation of the exiled diaspora which found the conservative aesthetics of exile and the many warring factions of society to be utterly boring. At the same time, these artists understood the fact that the corrupted cultural environment of occupied Latvia is no place for them. Furthermore, Pone did not want to follow previously established formulae, no matter if they came from the avant-garde. He looked for new ideas on his own and had splendid success. Among Gundars Pone's long form works, the symphonic score *Avanti!* is usually mentioned, but as we have come to the 1980s it's high time to bring up the opus *Titzarin*, which was at one time performed by the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra in a single program with Imants Kalniņš' *October Oratory*. The composition *Titzarin* brilliantly represents Pone's aesthetics and the hallmarks of his worldview, where multi-level compositional thinking co-exists with filigree nuance, while a rational architecture does not preclude a direct emotional effect on the listener. The concert programs testify that Latvian musicians and listeners need Pone's chamber music, his symphonic and vocally symphonic works alike, but the heritage of his oeuvre has certainly not been fully accounted for, and the composer's late works such as *Monumentum pro Galileo, Requiem*, and the opera *Roza Luksemburga* still await their interpreters.

1990s

Pēteris Vasks' violin concerto *Distant Light*, like many other scores by this composer, is performed regularly in concert halls across Latvia and around the globe. But the musical lifetime of this opus began at the 1997 Salzburg festival, when Gidons Krēmers performed the violin concerto with the

chamber orchestra Kremerata Baltica and Saulius Sondeckis at the podium. Since 1997 Pēteris Vasks has more frequently turned to sacral topics, and a harmonious and contemplative sound can be found in his scores, with the modernist ways of expression leaving openly existential dramatics in the past. Nevertheless, *Distant Light* is from the point in the composer's work where the opposing forces of light and darkness still wrestle in open confrontation. One is led to think that *Distant Light* owes part of its success not only to the illuminated pages of the violin concerto and the striving towards an emotional purification, a catharsis, but also to the fusion of a personal narrative with a universal one. It is, without a doubt, the story of Gidons Krēmers' childhood, but it is also the story of the childhood and youth of any artist in a socially, politically and psychologically hateful environment, reflecting as it does the fragility and loneliness of a creative personality, along with the composer's experiences. Like any work that carries multiple meanings, of course, Pēteris Vasks' *Distant Light* leaves many questions open – is the dramatic culmination of the violin concerto the triumph of the banality of evil, or is there another key to it?

The 21st century

Upon choosing a composition to represent the eighteen years that have passed in the 21st century, without a doubt I would like to point out if not Alise Rancāne or Līva Blūma, then at least Platons Buravickis or Kristis Auznieks. I will, however, abstain from such an eccentric step, and this means there's a safe choice to be found among the generation of the 1970s, which, as the supporters and realisers of the avant-garde, conscientiously placed themselves in opposition to the earlier authors. Andris Dzenītis is one of the most prominent among them,

and his works too deserve international recognition and the attention of foreign interpreters. Again, if the 1990s weren't allotted to Pēteris Vasks, I would have chosen one of the ravishingly saturated works of Dzenītis' early years, such as the piano quartet *Lacrimae*, but now I am tempted to bring up the opera *Dauka* or at least *Latvian Cookbook*. However, looking at Dzenītis' oeuvre, one would stop, in the end, at *E(GO)*, a concerto for saxophone and orchestra. This 2012 composition won the Great Music Award that year, and is worth listing not only because of this accolade and the great performance by Arvydas Kazlauskas; exciting musical ideas are included here in a masterful and multi-dimensional form. The structural aspects and the emotional gamma of the composition leave a fascinating impression, and, yes, it seems a personal message is at play here too. It seems that it well serves the noble art of composition.



See diversity – see freedom

TEXT **Ingmārs Freimanis**

ILLUSTRATION **Māra Drozdova**

This year, all three Baltic states are celebrating their centenaries. But it is in Latvia where the Baltic Pride, held in a different Baltic capital each year, will be hosted. While to be accurate it is only one of a series of pride events that will take place over a hundred days, the closing parade – scheduled for 9 June this year – usually attracts the most attention.

It is not surprising that Pride is not liked by the homophobic part of the Latvian population, as well as many public figures and organisations they represent. The reaction of these people shows that, to many, Baltic Pride is like the fly in the ointment of the centenary celebrations.

Anyone who has had to argue with homophobic relatives, acquaintances or strangers can name several oft-employed arguments, repeated over and over again. When you ask your opponent about their objections to sexual minorities, you will most often hear that (1) tolerance towards LGBT people is a slippery slope that irreversibly leads to tolerance towards paedophilia, zoophilia and necrophilia; that (2) there is an ideology of “homosexuality”¹ that turns its propaganda towards children and other less protected people in order to convert them to “homosexuality”; that (3) LGBT people are themselves perverted individuals and by demonstrating their perversion publicly in parades displaying sexual minorities, they are therefore degrading the morals of regular people; that (4) there’s a threat that humanity will die out if everyone becomes a homosexual, or a “homosexualist”, because there will be no one to produce offspring; that (5) anyone who has no prejudice against LGBT should watch gay pornography, so that they can see that there is in fact an objective basis for prejudice; that (6) in nature, the function of sex is procreation; that (7) LGBT people do not deserve

¹ Translator’s note: The words “homosexuality” and the corresponding “homosexualist” carry derogatory overtones in Latvian. These are often used to replace the neutral terms for homosexuality and homosexuals in Latvia’s anti-LGBT parlance.

equal rights, because they are not engaged in solving the “demographic problem”, etc.

These objections have well-known answers that bring out the mistakes implicit in their arguments: (1) mutually consensual relations and sexual abuse are different; (2) sexuality is not an ideology to convert someone to – what’s being promoted is instead *tolerance* towards minorities; (3) there is no basis for reducing relationships between LGBT people to a sexual act, not taking into account human feelings, friendship and love; (4) “perversion” is always a subjective designation that, according to one’s understanding, can be applied to any sexual activity not carried out for the purpose of procreation; (5) one cannot judge other people’s relationships depending on whether they do a good job serving as masturbation material to them; (6) sex has functions other than procreation in human society; (7) despite the fact that two men or two women cannot produce offspring without outside help, it would be naïve to pretend that nowadays the primary solution for demographic problems is as much sex as possible between men and women, etc. This isn’t always phrased as clearly in real-life conversations, nevertheless, I think that the above list is a good reflection of the way discussions like these often go.

Appeals to religion and tradition, or to Christian and traditional values are popular as well, and it is somewhat more difficult to object to these than to the above arguments. On the one hand, it is complicated to talk about cultural history and different religious interpretations. On the other hand, “Christian values” and “traditional” values are, as it were, magic words that work well on their own, without explanation as to what they actually mean.

The word traditional has a romantic, enchanting quality to it. This allows, for example, marketing specialists to sell *traditional* lard and sour cream. What is “traditional”? In the broadest sense, it is something that has existed for a long time, for several generations. From telling examples in the past, it can be easily proven that things that have existed for a long time can be bad, too. For example, we have seen many cases in the past where people were stripped of their rights because of their inborn qualities (nationality, sex, sexuality), and that was the law, and that was normal. Despite the commonality of prejudice against feminism, it would be difficult nowadays to find people who would earnestly say women’s suffrage is a mistake, despite being a comparatively recent innovation. And not long before that there was a tradition of slavery and serfdom. Not many defenders of traditional values would object to abolishing the two. From time to time, traditions should undergo critical evaluation, so that we could find, for example, that traditional dance is a

unique cultural heritage and that the traditional Midsummer cheese is tasty, but traditional prejudice against sexual minorities greatly restricts the rights of several groups of people and should therefore be put to an end.

It seems self-evident that one cannot talk about a single *tradition* in cultural history. Many traditions have always existed in manifold guises, and not all of them are characterised by hate and intolerance towards a different sexuality. The spread of homophobia in the world is, historically, caused by the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). I am not a theologian, so I hope I am not mistaken in saying that Christian Holy Scriptures were written many centuries ago and are not a monolithic text but rather a collection of different writings with inconsistencies, interpreted depending on the historical context and subject to symbolic interpretation.

What are Christian values? Most likely, these are the values that seem important to believers and which are referred to within the Christian Holy Scriptures. Like the Holy Scriptures themselves, the values described in them are multiform, heterogeneous, contradictory and, to a large degree, subject to interpretation. Likewise, many people with widely divergent worldviews consider themselves Christians, and these worldviews are different between the lines of confessions and parishes in which religion is interpreted by clergymen. These are also subject to individual interpretation.

The moral principles of the general public change gradually, and it’s understandable that the part of society which tries to take into account God’s instructions that were written down hundreds of years ago are much slower to take in new ideas, like human rights, an egalitarian attitude against all people, and concern about the environment. Nevertheless, Christian values change too. Therefore there are, at the same time, believers who think that God used the Bible to state clearly that sexual minorities are evil, and these are the same believers for whom it seems more important to love their neighbour and not to cast the first stone. European countries where homophobia is less prevalent and where LGBT equality is the norm have fewer homophobic Christians, and in those countries clergymen support the rights of LGBT people and sometimes even participate in pride parades. Homophobia is not a universal mark of the Christian faith, therefore if believers say that intolerance against minorities is a matter of faith for them, it instead follows that they have arrived at a homophobic interpretation of the holy writings and the Christian faith on their own accord or through the views of their parish.

In discussion with homophobic Christians, one can indicate

the historical context of the instructions found in the Holy Scriptures. Christian objections to homosexuality are based on ancient Jewish texts that included a codex of laws and in which the concept of crime was applied to a variety of personal and private matters. These prohibitions were instated around the 6th century BCE when Jewish political leaders attempted to consolidate the Jewish identity and ward off cultural traits seen as belonging to other nations, including homosexual practices. In discussion with Christians, it is also useful to point out other principles mentioned in the Holy Scriptures about which the opponent does not voice moral indignation. For example, there are requirements that seem absurd when judging by today's standards, such as the prohibition of wearing clothes made of wool and linen woven together (Deuteronomy 22:11).

To sum up the above, it can be said that homophobes lack useful rational arguments to justify their homophobia. Nevertheless, no refutation can convince them to change their opinion. It is possible that discussions such as this, refuting all the faulty homophobic arguments with logic and facts, may prove pleasurable to some defenders of social justice. I think that it is characteristic of liberals in general to dream that their prejudiced opponents will change their opinion after losing a debate and seeing their arguments torn to shreds. It remains, however, but a dream, especially in discussions with homophobes.

I am not saying that it is worthless to try providing rational answers to foolish and logically unsound proclamations. There is always the chance it will make someone think twice, or maybe convince an undecided bystander. The main problem is that homophobia, in its very roots, is irrational, and therefore attempts to mitigate it with rational means are not fruitful. Homophobia is irrational hatred that sees the LGBT community as some sort of an enemy within. Perhaps, wariness towards different groups of people and the tendency to identify an enemy is something that comes naturally to human beings, something that has been preserved from the time when society was made up of tribes.

I think that homophobia can be uprooted from Christian and traditional values. No one needs to stop being a Christian or a patriot in order to wave goodbye to homophobic hatred. If someone converses personally with God and it seems to them that God dislikes sexual minorities, it is possible to concede that this is not a message sent by God but rather a hatred that comes from the believers themselves. Those who care about traditional values and the future of their nation should stop considering LGBT people to be something other and separate from, and ideologically opposed to

them. LGBT people are part of the public, not some sort of outside element that is opposed to everything that is good. Sexual minorities, too, are interested in the welfare of the Latvian state. They are people just like everyone else. Some of them are Christian, and some would doubtless call themselves patriots, especially if other patriots would stop hating them.

Speaking about Latvia's centenary, we often hear a sceptical objection that this centenary actually experienced a significant break that lasted for almost 60 years, and it cannot be denied that not all of these years are wrapped in sweet memories, especially compared to Finland, which recently also celebrated a centenary uninterrupted by Soviet occupation. The years of occupation have left their mark on Latvia. One all-encompassing phenomenon is the economy, which, after the stagnation seen in the Soviet era, still lags significantly behind those European countries that were not forced to spend time behind the Iron Curtain. Another far-reaching phenomenon is the culture of thought and civic responsibility. Statistics show that Latvia ranks especially high in aspects such as distrust towards the state and state institutions, intolerance towards different minorities, and cynical attitudes towards human rights. Likewise, there is little understanding of politics; people easily succumb to populism. Almost every parliamentary election sees a recently established "party of wonders" emerge victorious.

In the mid-20th century, in the Western countries now known for their comparatively high tolerance of sexual minorities, the circumstances of LGBT people were very bad, indeed much worse than in today's Latvia. During the second half of the 20th century circumstances changed rapidly, and gradually the different laws limiting LGBT rights were lifted. There were changes in the overall attitude, and discrimination decreased. In part, this can be attributed to human rights ideas that sprang up following World War II. However, social movements, including pride events, played significant role in this change too. At this time, Latvia had no possibility to see the application of such human rights ideas in practice.

The sixty years during which homosexual relations were condemned on absolute terms and people were jailed for having them have convinced people, on a deep level, that this is the natural order of things. After the reinstatement of its independence, Latvia has done all it can to approach Western countries and reach their level of development. Joining the EU was the main foreign policy goal, and it brought changes to the legal regulations related to sexual minorities, despite public prejudice.

As I have written before elsewhere, I think that pride events and similar initiatives are one of the best ways to dispel homophobia

rampant in the public. Even though the initial reaction is resentment on the part of homophobes, such initiatives clearly show homophobes that not all society harbours hate against LGBT people, casting doubt on the notion that homophobia is normal and widely accepted. Furthermore, these initiatives promote the visibility of LGBT people and give a face to the otherwise abstract image of the enemy. When well-known and popular figures are part of a group, along with regular acquaintances and fellow citizens, it becomes harder to depersonalise. There is doubtless a much smaller chance for people to become homophobic if they have LGBT relatives or acquaintances serving as in-the-flesh proof that LGBT people are individuals with their own human qualities – that they aren't any different from the rest of us, sexuality notwithstanding. Despite being an important part of personal identity, sexuality is indeed not the only aspect that characterises a human being. In places where LGBT rights are particularly oppressed, the fact that parades of sexual minorities have taken place despite attempts to suppress them serves as a signal that sexual minorities and the supporters of their rights do not plan to succumb to pressure by the homophobic public at large.

An important element in pride parades is the support expressed by the presence of politicians, representatives of organisations and other public figures. The parades held on the streets of Western cities are usually accompanied by the city mayor, ministers, church representatives and others. Even though the parades held in Riga are becoming gradually more popular each time, the involvement on the part of high-ranking Latvian officials has been feeble (with a few exceptions). This does not help change the conception of LGBT rights being, as it were, imported from Western countries and unimportant to local politicians and officials. That is why I think that it is commendable that the 100 Days of Pride has been presented as part of the Latvian Centenary celebration.

The Centenary celebration is the moment when we note the fact that the Latvian state has existed for a whole century, no matter how difficult and tragic some episodes have been. However, it is not just a look back into the past, but also a hope of prosperity and security in the future. After regaining independence, Latvia and its society are slowly recouping from the traumas of the occupation. Of course, tolerance towards sexual minorities is just one of the many steps to take on the way towards a more equal, united and democratic society, but I think that organising the Baltic Pride in Riga this year is a very good gift for Latvia's centenary.



Bille

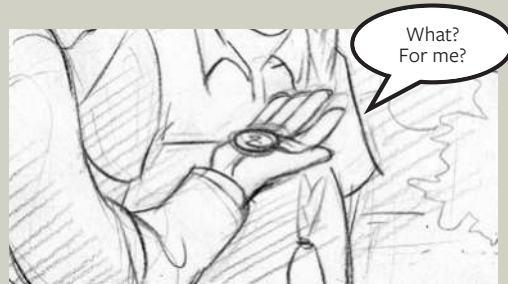
Starting 20 April, all Latvian cinemas will be screening the newest production from the Film Studio Deviņi and director Ināra Kolmane – *Bille*, based on the eponymous autobiographic novel by Vizma Belševica as part of the National Film Centre's "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" program.

The film tells the story of the seven-year-old Bille, living in 1930s Latvia. Defying poverty and everyday troubles, deprived of the love and encouragement of her family, and unable to fit in with the society that surrounds her, Bille nonetheless doesn't give up on her dreams. Instead of bending and breaking, she goes her own way. Together with her friends, Bille discovers how many times you can go on the merry-go-round before your head starts spinning, and, just when it seems she can't go home any more, she goes off in search of El Dorado.

Here we take a look at one of the film's scenes through the storyboard images used during the making of the film.



Father, intoxicated, arrives in the courtyard on a bicycle.



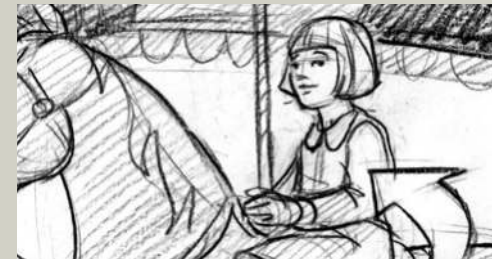
Father pulls out a coin from his pocket and presses it into Bille's hand. She opens her palm to see a two-lat coin.



Both girls hurry off...



Bille and Ausma are going to the fair.



Bille picks a nice horse. The merry-go-round turns...



And turns... and now it's her third ride in a row...



Blurred human figures standing by the merry-go-round spin around Bille. Both of the girls' faces turn gloomy...



Pale and exhausted, Bille and Ausma have sat down on the sidelines of the fair.



Bille and Ausma run up to the ice cream stand. Bille hands some money to the ice cream vendor.



Did Bille make it home with the ice cream intact? What was waiting for her there? Find out by watching the feature film *Bille*, in cinemas across Latvia!

***“On through the Jānis Gates,
Until you meet the fields and grass.
This branch that stretches to Rīga
Is called the Outer Rīga of Moscow.”***

From Ernests Dinsbergs' and Mārcis Reinbergs'
Rīga, or a Popular Song About Rīga and its Life (1865)

There's a tired myth about the most colourful neighbourhood in Rīga's Latgale Suburb – the Maskavas Forštate, colloquially known as Maskačka: that it's the city's twilight zone, where everyone is doomed to tantalizing punishment. Nevertheless, using the word “myth” to characterise this part of Rīga is not entirely justified, as it doesn't take out of the ordinary circumstances for people to experience something unusual in Maskačka. Each day, the eyes of sensitive citizens might seize upon embarrassing situations. It is no secret that the usual epithets applied to Maskačka by the public are emotionally loaded: it's horrific; the most dangerous neighbourhood; it's scary and unpleasant. There's too much disorder, and Bohemian lifestyles are practiced out in the open. There are fewer well-off people here, and the shabby facades of the houses on the arterial Maskavas Street serve as obvious proof that Rīga is still unfinished, and that the area's historical idiosyncrasy is still waiting either for its rebirth or for 21st-century revitalisation.

The area's urban environment is composed of architecture from several different ages – imperial, interwar, Soviet, and post-socialist. But the traditional 19th-century

wooden buildings are in the most critical state. This is supported by the Latvian Television show, *Adreses*. In the show, architecture enthusiast Mārtiņš Ķibilds, together with Māra Upmane-Holšteine, a singer who wrote a song praising Maskačka, strolled around the neighbourhood streets. They saw a contrast between the two former outskirts of the town – Maskavas Forštate and Ķīpsala – where workers and fishermen lived at some point in time. Here, 19th- and 20th-century wooden architecture still stands relatively intact. Viewers are invited to consider their own relationship with the environment, architecture, design, and the stories about specific buildings and places that hold meaning to them. Meanwhile, the host poses a question to the viewers: “The former charm of the wooden buildings on the outskirts of Rīga is disappearing everywhere, in Ķīpsala and Maskavas Forštate alike. The question is: what will replace it?”

Addresses mean people

What is an address? It's a place where people live, brought to life by the people themselves. Several excellent initiatives in Maskačka testify to this. For example, the energetic Baiba

Who's afraid of Maskačka?

TEXT Agija Ābiķe-Kondrāte

PHOTO Ģirts Raģelis

Giptere, an activist from the Association for the Development of the Latgale Suburb, landscapes the yards and takes care to clean them together with her neighbours. She serves as a rousing example to others: “People like living here. Where the environment becomes more beautiful, tidier and more orderly surroundings soon follow. After we clean up a single yard, there’s another, and yet another still. This is how Maskavas Forštate’s notoriety will slowly fade into the past.”¹ During the year when Rīga was a European Capital of Culture, her active neighbours’ projects – in this particular place, the Yard Movement of the Big Cleanup – brought attention to the neighbourhood for its favourable yard environment and colourful and friendly neighbourhood festivals.² Its flourishing corners and blooming flower beds in the backyards, overseen by nimble working hands, invite comparisons of these green spaces cultivated by activists to a local Rundāle.

In addition to this neighbourhood movement, there are others brimming with initiative and creativity who take on work for the public good in the part of Maskačka closer to the centre (Lastādija). The intellectual movement, the Free Rīga association, revives empty buildings with owners’ permission, turning them into socially meaningful, public creative spaces. They encourage active local participation by regularly offering chances to apply for residency. The activists of the T17 association, or the residence on 17

Turģeņeva Street, aim “to research, together with other active residents, the life and stories of Lastādija – the old port neighbourhood – and to promote its cultural life and a sense of belonging”. The local map created in August 2017, *Meeting Lastādija*, is also quite attractive. In its latest version there are 38 points of interest that are topographically, culturally, historically and subjectively meaningful to the residents of Lastādija and Maskavas Forštate. But most importantly they reveal the human face behind places in the neighbourhood. The map’s descriptions are both poetically witty and practically oriented urban miniatures. Personal and emotional impressions are marked out in the local topography. A particularly appealing advantage to note is that points of interests can be added digitally, and anyone can add to the map at any the time, coming up with their own stories about Lastādija and their own personal topography.

An important aspect of the T17 initiative is its promotion of responsibility, individual involvement, optimism and non-forced enthusiasm for locally patriotic activity. It is somewhat unbelievable and difficult to comprehend, considering the misty outlook of the average Latvian, isn’t it? Nevertheless, it is quite real and quite wholesome. The objects and places found on the map show things carried out by many engaged and active people: the Krasta workshops where the Krasta Gallery is located; the musician Igo’s design workshop; the Bānūzis

¹ Baiba Giptere: “There was nothing here except grass stretching to one’s waist, it was all terribly overgrown.” *Saknes debesīs* (TV show), 21 May, 2017.

² The Neighbourhood Festival in Maskavas Forštate. “And what’s happening in your backyard?” *Rīga* 2014, 16 September, 2013. Online source.

cafe which until recently hosted a charming antique shop; the Goodwill Studio with its free, multicultural atmosphere where board game nights and conversation courses in Lavian and English are hosted; the romantic Deficīts shop selling cat souvenirs; the Humusa komanda, an example of social entrepreneurship with tasty Near East food; Dagdas Street, which is undergoing a revival; among many others.

The everyday life of the people of Maskavas Forštate testifies, indirectly, to the fact that local attitudes towards the neighbourhood do not assume a stance of forced positivity and that these attitudes are not a burden to be borne. Everyone who feels that they belong in Maskačka can belong in Maskačka. And everyone who wants to do something – everyone with an idea or a positive message – will find potential and hope here.

Difference and isolation

The urban difference (or isolation) of Maskačka is a historical phenomenon that starts with the construction of the old outskirts or Ārrīga (Outer Rīga) outside the old city walls, which stood until 1857 when they were gradually demolished, causing the city to assume its modern shape. Testimonies to the fact that, outside the Rīga City Walls, “the outskirts – Lastādija – were not as moral and obedient” and that it had “more wildness and audacity” were given by the author Rutku tēvs (Arveds Mihelsons) in his story,

“The Kaiser of Rīga”. Such testimonies are to be found in other historical, literary, and newspaper and magazine sources as well.

The press chronicles have a lot to say about cases of disorder in the outskirts of the town – traffic interference; smoking while driving; poisoning; a high mortality rate among newborns and children; theft and other unpleasant events. The 1889 *Rīga City Police Newspaper* says that “On 7 October, articles of clothing worth 145 Rubles were stolen through the window of the 132 Lielā Maskavas Street apartment belonging to the Jews Movši Šlahtmans and Miheļs Ovsejs”³. Another newspaper says that the

Everyone who feels that they belong in Maskačka can belong in Maskačka.

“petite bourgeoisie Domna Markova, entering the bar on 16 Jaroslavas street, fell down the stairs and broke her leg...”⁴ Or, for

example, “On the eve of 28 August, near the house on 75 Maskavas Street, a disagreeable person attacked the peasant Aleksandrs Mihelsons, who was walking down the street intoxicated, and wounded him in the back with a knife...”⁵ Meanwhile “On 17 December at 193 Lielā Maskavas Street, during an argument the shoemaker Roberts Guts wounded the worker Karls Štolcs in the chest with a knife...”⁶ Nevertheless, one cannot say there were significantly fewer events of this nature inside the city proper.

When becoming acquainted with Maskavas Forštate, one should take into account the fact that its impressive cultural history, which from as early as the 17th century is tied mostly to the ethnic minorities

³ Author unknown. “Daily chronicles of the city. Theft.” *Rīga City Police Newspaper*, No. 225. 10 October, 1889.

⁴ Author unknown. “Daily chronicles of the city. An accident.” *Rīga City Police Newspaper*, No. 244. 8 November, 1895.

⁵ Author unknown. “Daily chronicles of the city. Wounded.” *Rīga City Police Newspaper*, No 191. 1 September, 1885.

– Russians and Jews – is a wide, sensitive, and factologically, chronologically, scientifically and most of all emotionally capacious topic. It touches matters that a large part of society still distances itself from. During Latvia’s centenary, it is important to realise that the traces of multicultural history are important in the general history of all of Latvia, and that the history of the Latvian state, its territory and specific “addresses” are not related only to the Latvian nation, and that many episodes of history can still be brought to light and inspected in wider analytical contexts. Valentīna Freimane, the excellent theatre and cinema historian, invites people not to confuse Putin for Pushkin when discussing politically charged matters touching upon the Russian community, one of Latvia’s ethnic minorities.⁷ While historian Andris Caune, in the foreword to the book, *The Latgale Suburb of Rīga*, expresses a hope that the next generations of Rīgians will respectfully remember “the previous generations of Rīgians and different ethnic groups, who have built and shaped this city”⁸. Here we should note in particular the Russian intelligentsia of Maskavas Forštate, the rich homeowners, the teachers, doctors, and traders. Similarly, the suburb is inextricably tied to the fate of the Jewish community in Latvia, testified by the ruins of the Great Choral Synagogue on Gogoļa Street, as well as the monument to Žanis Lipke and other saviours of the Jews. The Rīga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum

in Spīķeri, Ebreju [Hebrew] Street and the former Jewish cemetery next to it must also be mentioned.

The 30 November and 8 December, 1941 mass murders in Rumbula, where the people confined in the Rīga Ghetto – established in the same year – were killed, are also part of the history of the neighbourhood. That is because the borders of the Rīga Ghetto, which encompassed the area including Maskavas, Jersikas, Ebreju, Līksnas, Lielā Kalna, Katoļu, Jēkabpils and Lāčplēša Streets, are a significant part of our Maskačka.

If You Like Maskačka, Maskačka Likes You

The legendary statement by film critic Viktors Freibergs, “Riding the No. 15 trolley is an existential ordeal”⁹ expresses an essential message, characterising the local environment in a very straightforward manner. To the rest of the public, the reality of the trolley route running from the University of Latvia to Ķengarags is illustrated by the Facebook and Twitter account, The News of Trolley No. 15, (@trolejbuss15) which claims that you can only know Rīga and Latvia when you know the No. 15 Trolley.¹⁰ The administrators of the account ironically name the “pleasant aroma” of the trolley one of its signature marks. Quite a few people routinely use social networks to share their experience riding the trolley.

It’s not just common people who are

⁶ Author unknown. “Daily chronicles of the city. Wounded.” *Rīga City Police Newspaper*, No 277. 20 December, 1895.

⁷ *Latvju Teksti*. Literary journal. Latvian Literature Centre. No. 7, 2012, p 8.

⁸ Caune, A. *The Latgale Suburb of Rīga a Hundred Years Ago. The streets, buildings and people in the postcards of the first half of the 20th century*. Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds (2013), p 8.

⁹ University of Latvia Faculty Of Social Sciences. The faculty speaks. Source: szf.lu.lv/lu-szf-runā

quick to demonise the neighbourhood. This is often aided by people known to the public. It begs a question: what’s one of Maskačka biggest problems? Often it’s outsiders, or *ārišķīgie*¹¹. This appealing designation is found in Luīze Pastore’s children’s book, *The Story of Maskačka* (2013). Its heroes, the dogs of Maskačka, have this to say about themselves: “We’re not bad. We are simply protecting our homes.” The work holds the humane viewpoint – which largely applies to all of us, no matter where we live – that the neighbourhood is a sort of a centre of the world for its inhabitants. It is no accident that the dogs refer to the territory outside the gates of Maskačka as *Āreja*¹², which for the author serves as a witty reversal of roles for the centre and the periphery.

Latvia’s centenary reminds us how useful it is to be aware of the potential of our immediate surroundings, and, in the context of Maskavas Forštate, to be aware of the attractiveness of the diversity of culturohistorical heritage. It would be useful to remember that it’s not only Latvians who are welcome guests in this celebration. Every festival, in substance, is joy to be shared with one’s own kind. Will the centenary cake not become somewhat tasteless if we’re the only guests at the festival table? And what is it that each of us, individually, understands to be “ours” and “our own people”? Aren’t our own people all our peers, our friends, neighbours, and colleagues, irrespective of their ethnic roots? Aren’t they the people among whom many express everyday loyalty to this state and invest in its development?

The Facebook page, *If You Like Maskačka, Maskačka Likes You*, reflects the

neighbourhood’s current events. It features articles and videos about colourful neighbourhood news. The title is a paraphrase of the Latvian Institute’s tourist page *If you like Latvia, Latvia likes you*. By way of analogy, there’s a rather simple and mostly painless way of getting to know, at least a little, the off-putting and mythical side of Rīga – in reality, not a faraway, secluded location, but a somewhat different Rīga that, sans snobbish gloss and polish, offers many nice locations just a few minutes from the capital’s centre.

Only here can you meet the man who sings – loudly, cordially and completely off-key – the poems of Andrei Voznesensky from the Russian version of the ballad “Million Roses” – Миллион алых роз. Only here can you find the tram conductor who on select stops steps off to feed stray kittens from a mystical-seeming red dish he picked up earlier; the spice store seller who offers hearty thanks to each customer; the girl who uses the tram to transport a gigantic silver five-point star; or the legendary triumvirate of Russian salesmen with a professionally polished offer: “Fellow passengers! Batteries, velour handkerchiefs, and Super Glue. Buy it – you won’t regret it!” And there are ordinary-looking, sometimes slightly intoxicated but otherwise cordial people who share poetic aphorisms in everyday speech: “Someone made it, someone else was late...”, “Don’t regret anything in life!” and so on.

And here, addressing the sceptics, we will put to use a dialogic dedication from the aforementioned guide, Meeting Lastādija: “How do you feel good in Rīga? Fall in love!” Our address is Maskačka.

¹⁰ Trolley No. 15 news. Source: <https://twitter.com/trolejbuss15>

¹¹ Translator’s note: Here, *ārišķīgs* (ostentatious) is a pun on *ārējs* (outer, outside).

¹² Translator’s note: *Āreja* can mean “the outside place.”



I

you hide in your stories with a torch and wait
 but streams that flow from words are rooted, dark, and cover the light
 almost entirely—no one is coming to look for you, no one cares
 when clouds gather over the river
 kiosks open every morning, parachutes open when the ground sinks
 under tired feet, and tucked up in shadows, people disappear without trace—
 no letters, no half eaten sandwiches, no red boots
 lying in the hall
 but books pop up everywhere like angels, their margins on fire
 with scribbled notes until words become useless and we communicate
 through dreams—in our flammable garden our anger coats the trees
 that drop their apples at night

II

you are still waiting
 your reference points that don't exist hang from bare branches
 your identifying marks—paper and fire—vanish in the cold rain
 your dog will remember the night the city took you in its hands
 and lanterns lit the cobbles blue

III

in the corner someone is counting and counting, until time
 blasts through the windows like a green flood—
 the city curls up beside us

Interview

Let Life Run Its Course

One of the events of Latvia's centenary is the screening of Ivars Seleckis' documentary To Be Continued, which tells the stories of five Latvian children over the course of their first school year. We met the director to discuss the making of the film and his hopes for the future of Latvia.

Interview by Ilmārs Šlāpins.

PHOTO Ģirts Raģelis



Did you find yourself working in a new genre in the making of *To Be Continued*?

It's nothing new, if you think about it. When you are dealing with time, in order to understand it fully, to seize upon it, you need to have some stable points of reference. That's why long-term projects such as this are very accommodating. There's no way of encompassing time with plot, because it's a moment. We have nothing to compare it to. We can't grasp it. But when we've fixed this moment in time, we can witness a very captivating process. What's happening with this human being? What's happening around him? It's all very thrilling. On our own, we pretend we're outside time and we don't change, but that is fiction. Of course, we change, but we aren't aware of it. Consequently, it's as if time doesn't affect us. But in long-term projects like this... Things like this have been made abroad, but the scale, the means and the possibilities are different there. Seeing a new generation arise, a human being come into existence, and using "stop-moments" to later on see what has happened to them, how the process is going and what's changing – it's inestimably attractive. This time it's too big to tackle on my own, and it's likely I won't be able to finish it. But it's a start, at least.

Film is often used to look into the past, but here you are looking into the future.

We've filmed a lot of material that went unused, but which is very interesting all the same. There was so much material we could have made a feature film about each of the children. Those who will film them next will be able to look back and use episodes that weren't included in the film, and to find some foreboding or character traits that will express themselves later on. Later on it will be possible to look back, but now we're looking ahead, yes.

When you were about to film each of the children, to what degree did you have a sense of what exactly it was you wanted to shoot?

It was always unexpected. We knew beforehand there would be an event, but there was of course no telling what it will be like. It is actually not so pleasant to impose your will on someone. If directors came up with everything beforehand they, wittingly or not, would want to carry out their idea and then there'd be pressure on life. Nothing good would come out of it. I prefer not knowing anything – it's a great relief, as in that moment everything is coming into being.

If you tell a character what to do, you blur the boundary between documentaries and a feature films.

You know, that's where the misfortune of Latvian cinema lies – that nowadays they call anything a documentary film. They are films, for sure, but are they documentaries? It's very important to achieve this verisimilitude, so the person filming can't get involved and arrange events in the order they want. They can do it during editing, but it's not good to do it in life. You must let life run its course, whatever it may be. That's where the beauty and the magic lie.

Is Latvia, as seen in *To Be Continued*, the real Latvia?

It consists of parts of the real Latvia. It's like a mosaic. I knew beforehand that we could only show Latvia on a piece-by-piece basis, as each child has their own environment, their place and time. The environment in which a child is located is very important. You can, of course, edit it so that everything else is hidden, like from the apartment to the school. But we wanted the audience to see something from Latvia. To show Latvia as it is and the way I know it is a very difficult task. I remember many hills, but when we climbed them it turned out everything was overgrown and there was nothing to see.

Was there something in these children that made you hopeful?

They had no negativity. If they had any, these could be best described as fancies. They're ready to take anything offered to them. They are energetic. What will happen to them depends entirely on the public. Education is of crucial importance. Driving around, we saw schools where teachers had adopted six children just so they could finish school.

Did you have a chance to talk with the children after the premiere? Do they recognise themselves in the film?

You know, it's all very weird as far as recognition is concerned. People don't recognise themselves by sound, as we hear ourselves from the inside but sound completely different from the outside. And it's even more difficult for a child. They've changed a lot. They're different children. They grow very quickly! They had become different people after six months. A year later they were completely different. I have to get to know them all over again. I've a different opinion already, a different level of information. It all happens very dynamically and interestingly. And unpredictably as well. To me, it was a great discovery that they're smarter than we are. So we became smarter as well.


Non-fiction

Diary

Notes from the London Book Circus

TEXT **Anete Konste**

PHOTO **Çirts Raġelis**



**Let's call it
love there's
probably no
better word
for it**

Inga Gaile

The work I did for Latvia's participation in the London Book Fair has been simultaneously both the most beautiful and the most excruciating work experience of my life. It's likely that anyone who's ever participated in the organisation of a large, international cultural event will find something recognisable in the situations described below.

Day One, 8 April

Right after landing at the Stansted Airport, we hurried to the London Book Fair venue. "Latvia, along with the other Baltic states, is an honoured country in this year's fair, which opens up unprecedented opportunities in the English-speaking market." That's a sentence I've repeated at least a hundred times within the last few years. It's my gift to Latvia's centenary. We were in a rush, to the point that we were pressed to take a taxi from Liverpool Station. The support staff responsible for the monitors and other tech at the stand were leaving that evening, and I had to learn how to connect, plug in and disconnect everything correctly.

"Where are you from?" the cabbie asked us. "Latvia," we replied, and he asked no further questions. When we arrived at the book fair, the taxi driver noticed the billboard with the logo of the Baltics and said: "Look, Latvia!" He alternated between pointing a finger at us and the advertising panel, saying cheerfully, "You! Latvia! Latvia! You!" as if he had solved a complex equation. I gather that, for him, it was a rare occurrence to drop some Latvians off right in front of a sign that said "Latvia".

To enter the hall, you had to wear a reflective vest. These were conveniently sold right by the entrance, for just five pounds. Experience has shown that, if there's a single penny left to be squeezed out of you, the London Book Fair won't pass up the chance.

At the stand, there were problems with

the "Audio Shower", the booth in which we were planning to play recordings of four Latvian authors accompanied by videos. All of a sudden, everyone was given a good fright by a fragment of Nora Ikstena's *Soviet Milk* which roared menacingly across the hall. Even though we managed to adjust the sound, it became clear that the noise would create a chasm in the already fragile relationship with our neighbours. We decided to use headphones instead, which weren't working at the moment, but that was alright – perhaps wireless headphones would do the trick, once we found out where we could buy some.

Halfway to the hotel, I realized that I was still wearing my reflective vest.

There was a mix up when we were going to a poetry performance by Sergejs Timofejevs – we ended up at the British Library. When we got to the correct location, the Latvians among the guests were so introverted they didn't even say "hi".

Day Two, 9 April

Everything was working at the stand – unbelievable. A colleague and I freed a few hours to go to a Disney store to buy presents for her children. As I was sending my brother a picture of Mickey Mouse's tool kit, asking if his son would like one, I received a call from Latvian Radio 4. "Right, right. We'll have the monitors, the 'Which Writer Are You?' quiz, the coats. Everything will be there!" I told them. "But will there be books too?" they asked anxiously. "Yes, yes, there will be books there too, of course," I said, comforting them.

I hurried back to our stand; the large monitor had gone out. Over the phone, someone from tech support told me how to restart the processor. I'd have to repeat this process again and again over the coming days.

I raced back to the hotel to change, and

was now part of a delegation of fifteen people headed to a reception organised to thank all our cooperating partners. Stepping out of the Tube, some of the delegation – especially those who were in London for the first time – were enthusiastic not just about the red lanterns in Chinatown, but also about an award-winning (as it said on the window) gay bar, called "The Gay Bar".

Some left the reception early to make it to an evening dedicated to Baltic authors, featuring Nora Ikstena, but I for one had no strength left for that – just fish and chips for me, thanks.

Day Three, 10 April

The official opening ceremony of the London Book Fair took place in a corner of the second floor, right below a sign pointing towards the nearest toilet. Ministers from all the countries gave speeches, as well as the fair's management. We heard the group Saule, Pērkonis, Daugava there, too. It was just like any other opening ceremony, except there was no wine, pastries or plates of cheese.

As it turned out, the tablet with the quiz "How Introverted Are You?" on it could only be charged after removing it from the support stand. It's a good thing we hadn't bought the extension cord yet.

It turned out that our new wireless headphones had to be charged as well. The headphones that had no charge left assumed a new use as they could be used to rest your ears from the buzz of the fair in silence. Another place where you could rest from all the incessant noise, talk and people was, of course, the toilet. Quite cleverly, we placed #iamintrovert campaign posters in there that said "Finally I'm alone. What a relief." As early as last year, we decided that we had to get this ad space no matter the cost. It was worth it. We received copious compliments

about these ads, and it was particularly enjoyable that the Estonians were very envious. A colleague of mine told me that a British journalist had called her, asking if Estonia has a national stand at the fair, too.

Seminars with Latvian authors and industry people were held one after another, sometimes simultaneously. Sadly, I was able to catch very little of what they were saying. It's hard to concentrate when you're stressed out, and there were always different tiny problems to be solved at our stand. "Like what?" you ask. Here are some examples.

There were four tables at the stand, which the participants of the Latvian delegation could book for meeting foreign publishers, agents and cooperation partners. One publisher had booked one of the tables for the entire duration of the fair, so that she could, for the most part, work on her computer and rest her legs. First come, first served!

Meanwhile the writer Philip Ruff was looking for the poet Madara Gruntmane, as she might in fact be related to the Latvian anarchist Pēteris Mālderis. Where was she to be found?

At the Baltic States' joint information stand, which featured representatives from all three countries, we were the only ones without a chair. Lithuania had been tasked with procuring the chairs. They were sorry, but they were unable to buy any. They were renting their own, so they said, from the book fair.

London Book Fair representatives had brought two boxes of beer, along with t-shirts featuring the introverted writer I. to show and offer to visitors at the joint Baltic bar. Once we got there, though, all we were offered were sweet mushrooms presented as traditional Lithuanian cookies. No one had heard anything about the introvert beer. All they had was Heineken. Nevertheless,

everyone could sample different traditional Baltic foods, such as chicken with sprats.

The computer with the test on it froze again. It turned out you had to press F11, refresh, and F11 again whenever this happened. The more you know.

Someone lost their jacket from the store room. Later on, a Latvian literature translator lost a bright orange bag. The test froze again. This time it was because someone had thrown a bag onto the computer it was being operated on.

A journalist had turned up at the information stand, wanting to learn more about Latvia's textbook market. Who was there to give him a briefing?

As a colleague was bringing a catalogue of illustrators to an agent, she inadvertently walked into a photo-shoot being done of a representative of one Latvian publisher. "Get out of the fu**ing photo!" she said politely.

And so on.

Day Four, 11 April

I missed a literary breakfast with the poets Artis Ostups, Sergejs Timofejevs and Madara Gruntmane, but at least I made it to Luīze Pastore's book launch.

I couldn't find the PEN salon, where Claire Armitstead was talking with Nora Ikstena.

I wanted to cry.

Our beer and our t-shirts still weren't to be found at the Baltic bar.

The day also saw the arrival of the Imants Ziedonis Foundation Viegli, with a giant bear. To this I must dedicate a lengthier aside. More than a year ago, the Foundation Viegli said they want to perform at the Latvian stand. They weren't the only ones. It seemed as if the Latvian stand at the book fair had become a sort of a circus stage, where every local wanted an opportunity to show their talents – whether singing,

dancing, knitting mittens, playing the kokle or applying mud masks. We – the Latvian Literature platform – and the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia informed them that the book fair doesn't hold concerts, shows, performances or launches for books published in Latvia in English. Despite this, after contacting high-ranking officials, the Foundation Viegli managed to secure a concert in a separate room, and their event was even included in the professional Latvian programme. The result was, as we had expected, that there were only Latvians present in an already half-empty hall. Not to mention the bear. As my colleague Inga Bodnarjuka-Mrazauskas said, "Latvians still think that they'll be greeted with open arms just because they have something good and special. But they aren't doing anything to talk about this special thing they have and make people interested in it. It's an overly idealistic view of life outside the country."

Day Five, 12 April

During a seminar, Nora Ikstena and Luīze Pastore made the audience cry.

Our photographer offended a high-ranking official by asking to free up the foreground of the stand so he could take a photo of the team. We received an angry and resentful message.

Our beer and t-shirts were still nowhere to be found at the Baltic bar.

The workers started dismantling the stand.

We were happy it was all over. Just a couple events left in the coming days. Unbelievable. Everything we believed in had turned out well. Lat-vi-a, vic-to-ry.

My thanks to Inga, Juta, Andra, Dace, Una, Madara, Toms, Liga, Ildze, Inga, Vilis, Žanete, Jade, Ieva, Iveta, Reinis, Aija, Elina and many others for the honour of having been on this adventure along with them.



TEXT Justīne Janpaule

PHOTO Ģirts Raģelis

18 November

From the story collection, Motivation Letters

This is the hat I wore when leaving Riga. A grey felt hat with a wide brim. Today, it's three years since I left, with two cardigans, and blouses, bedding, a pair of shoes, a dress and a pair of pants in my suitcase. My travel bag was quite light – I didn't yet know for how long I'd be gone. I was to stay at the room on Rue Séverine for three months, until Laima returns from Madagascar. Three months in free fall, after which comes the landing – maybe I'll return, as if from a

long journey, or maybe not. I am not afraid. There is nothing to do at home anyway, and I cannot go on like this.

I cannot keep looking at life from the sidelines. I cannot waste away in a rental apartment with shabby last-century furniture, uneven linoleum flooring with dusty cracks, and a crumbling balcony that opens to the rutted asphalt of the courtyard. Everything around me seems dirty and old. Rubbish bins lined up by the door. The

old women of the neighbourhood lined up on the bench. I'm tired of passing it all by, of walking the same streets, going to the same events, and meeting the same people whose sole occupation is spinning around on their axes. I'm tired of waking up in the morning and seeing mum go to work, my boyfriend going to work, and my father going to the decaying countryside, and seeing my acquaintances pump the internet full of their pictures – you can only enjoy this year's mushroom harvest and the golden autumn for so long. I cannot go back to motivational letters that go unanswered. I can no longer stoop to the cheap translation jobs offered by shady translation companies.

The computer screen gradually bites out my eyes. They're dry and red. I lean back in my chair and slowly stretch my back, which has started to ache in the lower parts, and let my gaze drift across the room. At four in the afternoon, November mingles the greys of rain clouds and dust. It thickens quickly, to become true darkness, and I have to turn my table lamp on. In the yellow light, things not put in order are quick to bring attention to themselves. But I won't sweep the floor, or polish, tidy up, wash or cover anything. These old objects dictate their own rules, but I am not one to submit. I don't want to live in the rhythm and colour of the previous century, as it was interpreted by a former restaurant cook and her husband, a retired general. There are shelves, pantries, and boxes full of their stuff – crystal dishes and porcelain figurines, Christmas, New Year's and Easter decor, old magazines, calendars, tarnished cutlery, nails, screws, hammers, weights, plastic toys, dolls and brooches.

What was once suggestive of welfare and prosperity has become a stifling artefact, seemingly guarding the turf of its former owners. Once, I threw out a whole quarter of it, winning a few square metres back for

myself.

The blank walls were regarding me with reproach, but I will not be putting anything back to fill them up again. I myself will leave this space to become something new. It doesn't matter what. A florist making bouquets ad nauseam, from giant anemones, blooming marigolds and peonies in a flower salon on a boulevard; an assistant in gauzy socks and a pencil skirt, tapping my high heels, making reservations for conference halls and answering phone calls in all the languages of the world; a waitress rushing from table to table in a black apron, trying her best not to make a mess between aperitifs, desserts and main courses; a bookseller at a store, arranging new novels and best-sellers in the display window.

The cheapest ticket is for 18 November. It seems it's a date more pertinent to return than departure. The day is grey, as usual. The clouded skies are as much a matter-of-course on the national holiday as the flags, and the torches, and the candles. Leaving for the airport, I too am dressed in a grey coat, hat and gloves. I blend into the foggy scenery that will still escort me as a cloudy aura tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, and all the days I will spend somewhere far away.

At take-off, there's the Riga skyline. There's Daugava River with its tiny ships, from which they'll launch fireworks in the evening. Flashes of the grey embankment, and then the Television Tower which will broadcast the festivities live. My heart is beating as we gain height. I recall the posies of pink heather I left in the balcony box to commemorate the retreating summer and fall. Maybe they will invoke memories of sunnier days, just behind them, to someone else. Maybe they'll inspire hope that the winter won't be so severe after all. Maybe they'll go unnoticed and freeze come the first November frost.

