

Centenary

Magazine

1/4



Latvia
100 =

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Office Latvia 100



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Proem

How to read ourselves

If we compare a nation's history to the length of a human life, then it is hard to know where its careless childhood ends, when maturity begins, and when the country starts to age or grow sick. No country's beginning has been so careless, but its maturity and years of strength can appear at any moment. A country's centenary can be a long life that appears suddenly, without notice.

The value of jubilees is that a round number is more likely to make you stop and think about what has happened, what you have achieved and what you want to achieve in the future. Latvia's centenary seems to be its adulthood, and we're afforded a chance to look back at our origins, to get a sense of how we came to be what we are. We can identify our strengths, ambitions and the limitations of our capabilities, formulating ideas about ourselves as well.

Just like a young person receiving his first passport, excited to choose the prettiest signature by repeating his name on a piece of paper over and over again, we await the arrival of the country's adulthood, repeating the word Latvia in various declinations, the shapes of the letters, beautiful phrases and words of congratulations. Sometimes we get tired of this, thinking that there is too much of that word, but it is important to learn how to write it again, to understand how we see ourselves. It is important to learn how to read ourselves and remember the sense of what we have read. In this sense, a country can be compared to a person; it's important for us to know who we are. We must know ourselves not just when filling out official forms, receiving whatever salary we have earned, answering the questions posed by a traffic cop, or waking up after a raucous birthday party. It's important when we meet someone else, talk to this person and decide either to love or to hate that person. Being together means not only to understand the other, but to understand yourself. This also is important to a country.

Ilmārs Šlāpīns

Latvia's Centenary Events from January to April

Routes of Latvia's Statehood Seven tourist routes to travel through Latvia and learn about the country. Latvia.	Through 2021
Circle of Honour Festival in the municipalities of Latvia	All year
Path of the Latvian Flag A specially woven national flag travels to Latvians in South Korea, France, Russia, Germany, USA, South America, Latvia	All year
tuesi.lv Series of videos about young and inspirational Latvians people. www.tuesi.lv	All year
100 outstanding people in the Latvian history of medicine Virtual encyclopaedia. ieverojamiemediki.lv	From January 29
100 Moments in the History of Medicine Travelling exhibition. Pauls Stradiņš Museum for the History of Medicine; cultural centres, schools, libraries and museums	From January
Luther: The Turn Exhibition. The National Library of Latvia, Rīga	Through Feb 4
Signs of the Latvian Soul Exhibition of applied arts focusing on Song Festival traditions. Kuldīga Art Centre, Kuldīga	Jan 5 to Feb 25
Mare Balticum Latvian Radio Big Band concert programme. Lincoln Centre, Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, New York, USA; The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, USA	Jan 8, 10
I Promise Performance which won the Latvian National Theatre's competition for centenary plays. Latvian National Theatre, Rīga	From Jan 12

Portable Landscapes International contemporary art exhibition. Villa Vassilieff Art Centre, Paris, France	Jan 13 to March 24
Letters of Light Opening of the centenary year with the multimedia performance The National Library of Latvia, Rīga	Jan 18 to 21
Snow Symphony Performance featuring Slava Polunin, Gidon Kremer and the Chamber Orchestra Kremerata Baltica. Compensa Concert Hall, Vilnius, Lithuania; Nordea Concert Hall, Tallinn, Estonia; Daile Theatre, Rīga	Jan 24, 27, 30, 31
Lakstīgala (Nightingale) Latvian folk song singing competitions for schoolchildren. Jēkabpils, Cēsis, Kuldīga, Bauska, Ventspils, Rīga	Jan 25 to March 9
Family Business Exhibition and performance. SIC Space, Helsinki, Finland	Feb 2 to March 4
Origins: Textile as a Concept and material in Latvian Identity Interdisciplinary art exhibition. Rīga Art Space, Rīga	Feb 2 to March 18
The Baltic Academies Orchestra Concerts: Estonia Concert Hall, Tallinn, Estonia; Vanemuine Theatre, Tartu, Estonia; Vidzeme Concert Hall Cēsis, Cēsis; GORS Concert Hall, Rēzekne; Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, Vilnius, Lithuania; Kaunas Philharmonic, Kaunas, Lithuania; Gdansk Academy of Music Concert Hall, Gdansk, Poland; Berlin University of Arts Concert Hall, Berlin, Germany	Feb 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18
55th Winter/Spring Sports Games of Latvian sports veterans Priekule, Rīga, Valmiera, Jelgava, Cēsis, Jēkabpils	Feb 10 to May 12
Māris Briedis Quintet Plays Rothko in Jazz Concert programme. Bozar Concert Hall, Brussels, Belgium	Feb 11

Šventė (Celebration)	Feb 13 to March 23
Artist Jānis Avotiņš solo exhibition. Vartai Gallery, Vilnius, Lithuania	
Finnish Jägers in Latvia	Feb 14 to April 10
Exhibition of documentary evidence. Great Amber Concert Hall, Liepāja	
LATEST	Feb 15-18
Contemporary Estonian theatre programme. Rīga	
100 Objects from Finland	Feb 16 to April 8
Travelling exhibition. Latvian National Museum of Art, Museum of Decorative Art and Design, Rīga	
100 Strings	Feb 17
Festival of Baltic Symphony Orchestras. Vilnius Congress Concert Hall, Vilnius, Lithuania	
Lithuania Celebrates its Centenary	Feb 17
Concert. VEF Culture Palace, Rīga	
Baltische Orgelnacht	Feb 17
The concert of Iveta Apkalna. Konzerthaus Berlin, Berlin, Germany	
Haus-Konzert	Feb 19
Baiba Skride, Linda Skride, Lauma Skride and Kristīne Blaumane concert. Konzerthaus Berlin, Berlin, Germany	
Rudolf Tobias' Jonah's Mission	Feb 20
Estonian National Symphonic Orchestra and State Academic Choir "Latvija". Konzerthaus Berlin, Berlin, Germany	
Across the border	Feb 21
"Latvian Voices" concert "Across the border". <i>Konzerthaus</i> Berlin, Germany	
Reading in Latvia	Feb 20-25
Final event in the series of performances and readings. National Library of Latvia, Rīga	
Parādīze '89	From Feb 22
Feature film. "Latvian Films for Latvian Centenary" programme. On screens all over Latvia	

Future State	Feb 23 to May 20
Contemporary art exhibition. LNMM Arsenal's Exhibition Hall, Rīga	
Vidzemnieki (People of Vidzeme)	From Feb 24
A play based on motifs from lesser known stories by the famous Latvian playwright Rūdolfs Blaumanis. Valmiera Drama Theatre, Valmiera	
<i>The Keys to Magic</i>	From Feb 24
Play dedicated to Mikhail Chekhov, after whom the Rīga Russian Theatre is named. Mikhail Chekhov Riga Russian Theatre, Rīga	
New sounds from "Skaņu Mežs" for Latvia's centenary	Feb 24
Three avant-garde compositions in the genres of free improvisation, contemporary music and electroacoustic music. Ģederts Eliass Jelgava Museum of History and Art, Jelgava	
Guest performances in Estonia by the Latvian National Opera and Ballet	Feb 27, 28, March 1
Estonian National Opera, Tallinn, Estonia	
Guest performances by the Estonian National Opera	Feb 27, 28, March 1
Latvian National Opera, Rīga	
To be Banned: Baltic Books 1918-1940	From March
Travelling exhibition. Lithuanian National Library, Vilnius	
100 Bookmarks for Latvia	March 2 to April 30
Exhibition. The National Library of Latvia, Rīga	
Musical Fairy Tales for Sunday Morning	March 4
Concert for children. Vidzeme Concert Hall Cēsis, Cēsis	
Auce Cello Festival	March 4
Concert. Auce municipality Cultural Centre, Auce	
Borders	March 7-16
Artist Artūrs Analts solo exhibition. 12 Star Gallery, London, UK	
Lakstīgala (Nightingale)	March 9
The final event of the Latvian folk song singing competitions for schoolchildren. The Riga Latvian Society House, Rīga	

Signs of the Latvian Soul	March 9 to April 22
Exhibition of applied arts focusing on Song Festival traditions. Ģederts Eliass Museum of History and Art, Jelgava	
Ēriks Ešenvalds's Volcano Symphony	March 10
World premiere of multimedia vocal and instrumental performance. Vidzeme Concert Hall Cēsis, Cēsis	
Liepāja izAICINA (Greetings from Liepāja)	March 16, 17
Concert of young performers for young people. Liepāja Olympic Centre, Liepāja	
Latvian Radio Choir concert with Iveta Apkalna	March 19
Società Filarmonica Trento, Trento, Italy	
NeoArctic	March 21
Choral opera. Chasse Theater, Breda, The Netherlands	
To be continued	From March 22
Documentary film. "Latvian Films for Latvian Centenary" programme. On screens all over Latvia. Latvia	
Musiques Americaines	March 23
Latvia Radio Choir concert at the Monte-Carlo Spring Arts Festival. Musée océanographique de Monaco, Monaco	
Bille	From April 3
Feature film. "Latvian Films for Latvian Centenary" programme. On screens all over Latvia	
2nd Youth Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra and String Orchestra Festival in Latvia	April 8
Riga Secondary School N°6, Rīga	
Wild Souls. Symbolism in the Baltic States	April 15 to July 15
Exhibition. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France	
The London Book Fair	April 10-13
Baltic participation. Olympia, London, UK	
Antonija #Silmači	From April 13
Original Latvian ballet. Latvian National Opera, Rīga	

Family Business	April 13 to May 27
Exhibition and performance. kim? Contemporary Arts Centre, Rīga	
Trauma and Revival: Cultural Links Between Eastern and Western Europe	April 13 to May 27
Contemporary art exhibition. kim? Contemporary Arts Centre, Rīga	
NeoArctic	April 14
Choral opera. La Place des Arts, Montreal, Canada	
Ring of Vidzeme. The Mountain will Rise	April 19, 21, 25, 26
Concert cycle. Musical performance. Vidzeme Concert Hall Cēsis, Cēsis; GORS Concert Hall, Rēzekne; Great Amber Concert Hall, Liepāja; Jelgava Cultural Centre	
Portable Landscapes	April 27 to June 17
International contemporary art exhibition. Latvian National Museum of Art, Rīga	
Big Cleanup	April 28
Voluntary community activity across Latvia	
Bridges of Time	From April
Documentary film. "Latvian Films for Latvian centenary" programme, On screens all over Latvia	
The State Before The State	April to September
Exhibition. The National Library of Latvia, Rīga	

The programme is subject to change.
The entire Latvia's centenary programme can be found at lv100.lv

Latvia's Inevitability

TEXT **Roberts Rasums**

PHOTO **frames.syndicate.lv**

Talking about the accidental or inevitable establishment of the Republic of Latvia means to engage in intellectual exercise about alternative historical scenarios that might have happened if one of the gears of history would turned a bit differently. True, that does not keep us from analysing a far more important aspect in relation to the event—the “the unwavering will of the Latvian nation to have its own State,” as cited in the preamble to the Latvian Constitution. Although this will to have its own state has experienced a century full of bloodshed and conflicts, its appearance was a far more importance justification for the existence of the Latvian state than was the declaration of independence signed November 18th. Today, the Latvian state perpetuates not just the continuity of forms of political organisations that existed during the pre-war period, but also the fundamental principles for the existence of the state established at that time.

The end of World War I established a new paradigm in European history. The collapse of major European empires opened the way for nationalism in small countries that wanted to ensure self-determination. Only the deconstruction of tough and imperialist nations could create conditions under which the current political map of Europe was created. That, however, was not possible without a simultaneous cultural and social revolutions based on the national efforts of the new countries, as well as revolutions in Germany and Russia. All of these aspects came together in 1918 in Latvia, with a strengthening of national autonomy and a battle over the governing socio-political organisational model. It must also be taken into account that this battle was both local (between pro-Bolsheviks and the national development model) and regional (anti-Bolshevik forces against the so-called first wave of “exported revolution”).

The political chaos in 1918 can be called an interregnum period in Eastern Europe, and it made possible the development of various forms of self-organisation that sought political power. That applies to the People’s Council of Latvia, which brought together several



important political and cultural activists in Latvia, but could not effectively defend its positions due to a lack of military forces. Nor could the council ensure civil governance, due to insufficient administrative and financial resources. It must be said that late in 1918, the People's Council enjoyed support from a narrow range of people in Latvia who were all the more confused about the alternative offered. The Soviet Latvian government established on 4 December, 1918, by the well-known public activist and the famous Latvian riflemen Pēteris Stučka who offered a nice alternative to the Latvian public, which was leftist and distinctly anti-German at that time, than was the case with the Latvian Provisional Government chaired by Kārlis Ulmanis. The Soviet Latvian government had an effective administrative and military apparatus to establish Latvia's statehood, and its positions were strengthened by a clear position vis-à-vis the issue of Germans and the promise to resolve problems that had effectively existed for many decades. These related to issues such as the status of unemployed and landless people.

Under such circumstances, it was no surprise that when the battalion of Oskars Kalpaks withdrew from Rīga on 3 January, local residents attacked it with denunciation claims that they were running dogs for the Germans, and even the throwing of rocks. The retreat involved a long route up to the Venta River. As the situation became more and more hopeless, internal and external factors changed. First, the Estonians managed to stabilise the situation in their territory, and that involved help from the larger part of the Soviet Latvian army. Second, increasing numbers of troops arrived in Latvia from Germany, the aim being to protect the motherland against the spread of Bolshevism. That, however, would not have saved the small number of Germans and Latvians in the region of Liepāja if the Soviet Latvian attack had not suddenly halted. The ability to stabilise the front lines meant a new paradigm in the development of the Latvian state. The terror caused by the Soviet Latvian regime and its inability to ensure supplies for local residents quickly destroyed its legitimacy. All of this caused fertile soil for a counterattack in March 1919, with Rīga falling on 22 May. Battles at Cēsis occurred soon after, destroying the military brotherhood between Germans and Latvians while also fully turning public support in Latvia in the direction of the temporary government.

The Republic of Latvia was proclaimed on 18 November, 1918, but the unwavering will of the Latvian nation to have its own State strengthened in June 1919, when companies of high school students from Cēsis and Valmiera volunteered to shed their blood in

the name of the nation state. This slightly romanticised assumption is, at the end of the day, based on more serious facts. There were three governments in Latvia in March 1919—the pro-Bolshevik government of Pēteris Stučka, the national government led by Kārlis Ulmanis, and the pro-German government of Andrievs Niedra, and the amount of public support was decisive information for the ongoing development of the state. Masses of citizens volunteered for the Latvian Army, and that ensured one of the three main components of the state. The territory had to be cleaned out in military terms, and a political approach was needed to win international diplomatic recognition of the country. If the temporary government had the support of the populace, all of this was just a matter of time.

To be sure, the Latvian state did not appear just because of the desires of its residents. This was also based on a favourable military and political situation. Just as was the case with the revolution in Russia and the defeat of Germany during World War II, of decisive importance in the initiation of national independence was the ongoing ideological battle between Soviet Russia and anti-Bolshevik forces. We cannot talk about Latvia's independence war without mentioning the so-called "Baltic redoubt." The first phase of the freedom battles involved German soldiers, who were less interested in Latvia's independence than in a desperate battle to keep Bolshevism from approaching German borders.

There is no point in trying to guess whether the Republic of Latvia might not have been established under these circumstances, but it is important to understand the processes that related to its establishment not just because of the centenary, but also because the same principles remain important today. Unwavering will of a nation to have its own State does not just mean the hope that there will be political independence or autonomy. It also is a choice in favour of a specific political and cultural organisational model. The shift of political legitimacy in favour of a nation state did not happen on a single evening. It was a long and complicated battle over the hearts and minds of local residents, and this involved a great of bloodshed before it was achieved.

We must also remember that the Latvian state was by no means a country of Latvians. Future citizens who fought on behalf of its independence included Russians, Germans, Jews and others. Despite that, however, the Latvian nation chose in 1919 to establish a republic based on Western political values, with a homogeneous society being a fundamental factor therein. It is precisely this aspect—a single cultural space focused on the West—that remains an irreversible characteristic of the Latvian state today, surviving five decades of occupation.

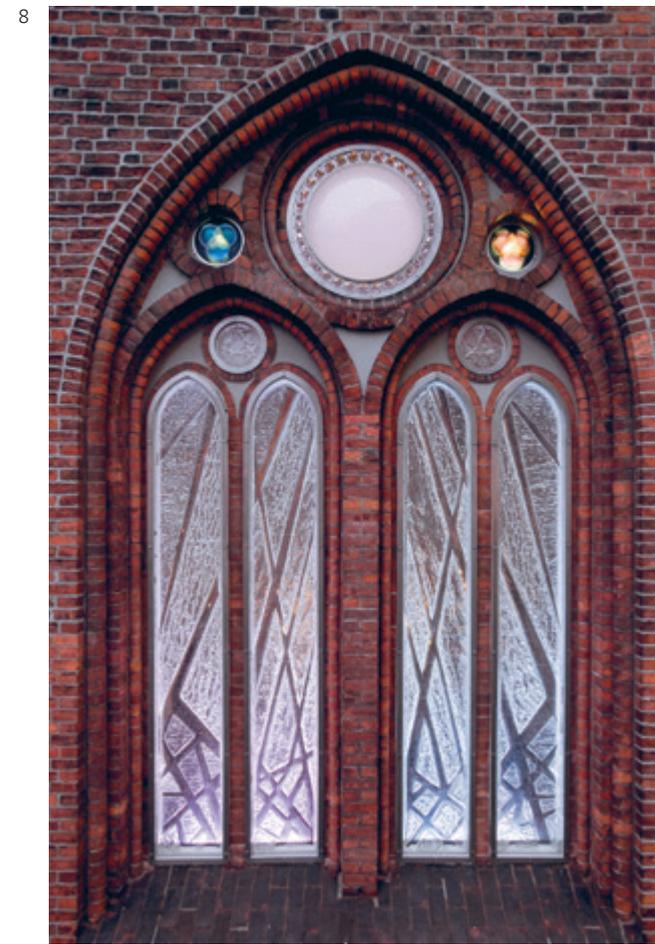


With Fervour in Support of Independent Latvia

A stained glass and glass sculpture devoted to the events of the 1991 barricades was unveiled in January 2018 at the Chapel of Mary at the Rīga Dome Cathedral. In anticipation of Latvia's centenary, the sculpture by Krišs Zilgalvis and Dzintars Zilgalvis was donated to the church by Ascendum organisation, the board of the Rīga Dome, and private donors.



1. The composition is based on an eternally moving frame with geometry symbolically linking each historical region of Latvia to completeness.
2. Artist Krišs Zilgalvis preparing a sketch of the sculpture.
3. The glass objects are transparent, and their visual effect is based on reflected light.
4. The centre of the composition, *Completeness*, is 0.5 metres thick with a perimeter of 32 polished glass diamonds.
5. Reflection of light through the stained glass.



6. The largest objects stand 4.6 metres high and are made of a thick piece of compound glass.
7. Installation of the stained glass, which has nine windowpanes, each with a special symbolic meaning.
8. The sculpture *With Fervour in Support of Independent Latvia* is dedicated to Latvia's centenary and is a symbol of our collective memories. It was unveiled on 13 January, 2018.

Interview

Becoming a Mother

Nora Ikstena's novel Soviet Milk has been translated into English. It will be presented on behalf of Latvia at the annual London Book Fair, where Nora Ikstena will be the Author of the Day. Ilmārs Šlāpins interviewed her in advance of the event.

PHOTO Ģirts Raģelis



Would you have written *Soviet Milk* if there had not been a series of historical novels?

Soviet Milk is certainly logical, and I had planned it for a long time. The accident is that it was published in the series *Us and Latvia: 20th Century*. That is one theme for me. Looking back, I see that I basically wrote the third volume of a trilogy. The first is called *Celebrating Life*, the second is *The Virgin's Lesson*, and the third is *Soviet Milk*. This is my topic, what I try to deal with as a writer. To put it briefly, it's the heritage of generations of females, also addressing relationships with mothers. Why have so many people read this book and accepted it as their own? It's because the era and the relationships that existed at that time between generations—grandmother, mother and daughter—are not my own personal experience. It's a universal experience.

How much of you can we find in the novel?

There are autobiographical motifs. Hollywood films would state that they are “based on true events.” Of course, autobiographical aspects have become different than they are in real life because of my imagination. The book had a historical editor who examined all of the details about the era. But what is history? It involves our own personal memories.

Why is the theme of the mother-daughter relationship so important to you?

The mother-daughter relationship is very different and special. Psychologists say that mothers usually love the children of their daughters better than the children of their sons. This is unconscious love, but it does exist. I think that this is a mystery of life brought into this world by women. In *Soviet Milk* it's complicated, not like stories with happy endings.

Not as it should be?

Yes, not everything in the book is as it should be. You formulated that very precisely.

But what determines the incorrectness and crippled approach? Is it the era?

This era of the Soviet cage basically made the mother's problem more vivid in the book, but really the question is why someone who has been given a life doesn't yearn for life. Why does he do everything not in order to live, but to die? The main heroine of the novel very visibly chooses death. The era in which that happens could have been any era, but in this case the internal battle over freedom is made more

vivid because you are still in the cage of the regime.

You referred to the main heroine, but which of these women is the main one?

Yes, there is a bit of duplication of personalities. That was very complicated, and initially I was worried about the fact that both characters spoke in the first person. Sometimes readers have told me that it makes it more difficult to read the book, but basically I can say they're both the main heroine as one.

The mother-daughter relationship is probably the least represented in literature. Because of different gender roles, the issue of fathers and sons has been written about far more often since the origins of history, because men were the ones who wrote the earliest books.

Yes, that is true. After a performance of the play *Fathers*, which opened up Gundars Āboliņš' path to the world, I spoke to him, and he also asked why the mother-daughter relationship has been discussed so little in Latvian literature. Regīna Ezera was also interested in other themes, and none of her books involve a mother. In 1998, a writer called Nora Ikstena turned up with her own theme. Even if I look at my generation—perhaps Gundega Repše writes on this theme, but Inga Ābele and Andra Neiburga do not.

Although we know that most readers in Latvia are women, I wonder what men are saying about your book.

It is interesting that so many men have read *Soviet Milk* too. I had a meeting with doctors, there were many male doctors there, surgeons: they admitted that the novel opened a door to something they'd gladly discover, but they wanted to stay on the sidelines. You need courage to enter that world and understand it. The world of the woman in this book is not described from the most beautiful and romantic perspective. Childbirth during the Soviet era was often a serious trauma for women in terms of the conditions in which they gave birth, how they were treated and what happened around them. Abortions were conducted without any anaesthesia, that's the kind of thing I'm talking about here. Women had to survive a terribly painful experience while the men were bystanders. Now men are telling me that the novel allows them to come into contact with a world they might have known about, but didn't understand to the bone.

Is it the duty of every woman to become a mother?

No, it is not. The desire to become a mother at any cost is as big an obsession as any other. I completely believe that each woman can

choose or not choose to become a mother. Sometimes it's nature that has taken it away from her, leaving something else in its place. I know lots of women who intentionally didn't become mothers. They could have, but didn't. I personally could have become a mother, but it didn't happen in my life. I feel, however, that maternal instincts can be put into practice by women in other ways, as well. It takes on many different forms.

Why did you become a writer?

I started to write because the history and science of literature were not enough for me. I was bored. I studied philology, wrote critical and scholarly works about literature and worked at the Rainis Literature Museum. I had to copy letters addressed to Rainis by hand, and that seemed monotonous, difficult and boring to me. I was in that world already, and then I tried to write some short stories. I simply felt that I wanted to try my hand at it to find out whether it was possible. And that's how it began, all by itself. Really quite late in my life, after university.

Does it provide you with enjoyment? Still?

Oh, yes, and especially right now it provides me with more and more satisfaction. I've never felt the same in language that I feel now. I feel that language yields before me somehow, and that gives me satisfaction. Up until my fourth or fifth book, I didn't necessarily struggle, but I really did have to wrestle with language. Now I feel free. I like to write.

Does language resist you?

I wouldn't say that it resists me, but prose writers have to go through a period of apprenticeship before learning all of the foundations of the language. People need to learn how to work with language. That moment when you've accumulated a certain amount of experience, you feel free. And, if a person is healthy and has a clear mind, then a prose writer composes his best work during the latter half of his life.

What about poetry? There are those who say that you can only write poetry up to the age of 30.

Poetry is a different issue, but the poems of Thomas Tranströmer don't support that theory. There are few examples, but I think that poetry mostly comes from the "live fast and die young" arsenal. When it comes to prose, however, Vizma Belševica once said that female prose writers find nothing good there, just damaged nerves and a fat derriere. She was speaking ironically, but I think that there

really is a need for patience. You can't sit down and write a story, let alone a novel or a biography in a single minute.

Could you stop writing?

Sometimes I do. It's not like I write every day, and it is not just prose either. I don't have the sense that I could never stop writing, because I am very interested in the life around me and all kinds of practical things, it's not like I couldn't live without writing.

How important is it to teach children to write and to produce literary texts? This is still taught in schools – composing essays and so on.

I think that writing is vitally important, especially in our day and age. It would be wonderful if penmanship returned to schools, because handwriting has been very seriously damaged, and I can only be amazed by the calligraphy that was used in the past. I'm practicing my handwriting while learning Georgian, you can't write Georgian letters quickly. The ability to write, to say what you mean and to say what you want to say—that is the foundation and beginning for everything. Sadly, our school system has always tried to put children into a framework. They are told that when they compose an essay, it has to have an introduction, a body and a conclusion. The creative moment is pushed aside.

Does reading of books make people better?

Absolutely. Reading books can make a person better and happier. I always say that once you've waded through the mandatory literature programme at school and read so many books that you are about to vomit, then there is no greater happiness in life than finding your own book. Reading and living together with a book is an unbelievable feeling of happiness. I don't know whether everyone thinks so today, but I do. People wonder what we're supposed to do in this information age. Last year I was in New York and Boston, big cities with enormous technological opportunities, but still I saw people reading in every bookstore, and I also saw people reading on the subway. That was a good and hopeful feeling.

How can you separate a good text from a bad one?

It depends specifically on the timbre. It's hard to formulate, but I like the timbre of spoken language, how things are said and in what way they're said, not what the text is about or the plot. The author's voice and timbre. I don't think it's an issue of good or bad. You can tell whether the timbre of voice is close to you or if it's a voice you don't like.

That suggests that in purely objective terms, there is no such thing as good literature.

Objectively good literature has to stand the test of time. That *Ulysses*, which Joyce took to ten publishing houses and ten publishing houses rejected him, is one of the cornerstones of global literature. I think that objectivity comes from the test of time.

Why is it important to read *Ulysses* in Latvian?

First of all, I don't think that many Latvian readers could make their way through the book in English. Second, the translation allows us to see what kinds of opportunities there are in Latvian and how the author's voice or timbre can be transferred. You get a sense of happiness when you read the book and see that its translator, Dzintars Sodums, tortured himself and worked very hard to be original and authentic in trying to transfer Joyce's text into Latvian. At the end of the day, why did he decide to translate *Ulysses* into Latvian? He was 25 years old when he moved to Sweden as a completely impoverished refugee, and he saw that the Swedes had published *Ulysses* in Swedish. It seemed to him that if they could publish it in Swedish, why couldn't they publish it in Latvian? He decided to raise the bar to the highest level and see if it was possible. It turned out that yes indeed it was possible. It turned out that the Latvian language in particular does all kinds of somersaults and passes through twists and turns that we had never even imagined before this translation.

Do you still remember the first book that you ever read?

Yes, I do, really clearly. I spent my whole childhood and school years reading fairy tales. My parents thought that there was something wrong with me. I read all of the stories from the *Wonderland* series, starting with fairy tales from Brittany and ending with some from Madagascar. I read fairy tales for a comparatively long time, and then, in high school, I immediately switched to Latvian literature.

But how old were you when you realised that fairy tales don't always tell the truth?

You know, I think there's a great deal of truth in them. Other country's fairy tales don't always end as happily as they do in our country. Terrible things happen in Breton fairy tales. There's a great deal of truth is encoded in them. And that miraculous thing? I think that to a certain extent, it also exists in life. Just in a different material. There are things to believe in there.



Still from the motion picture *Blow, the Wind!*, 1973

Blow, the Wind!

TEXT Agris Redovičs

The Latvian poet and playwright Rainis was interested in a new medium of his time—cinema. This can be seen in his diary, where he recorded visits to cinemas in Switzerland and Latvia. After returning from exile, he became involved in the “Latvian Film” stock company and wrote two screenplays that were never produced. As education minister, Rainis allowed Sergey Eisenstein's scandalous film *The Battleship Potemkin* to be screened in Latvia.

The film world, however, did not understand Rainis, and it still does not understand him. This is a problem of limited

interpretation in cinematography. Texts by Rainis—his plays in particular—are full of completely sensible and metaphysical nuclei. They are hot and passionate, and they cannot simply be taken from the script and presented on stage or in a film. It is a common belief that that the conditionality of theatre allows us to get close to Rainis' thoughts without getting burned. Film, on the other hand, sees and captures a flat image of reality. Much effort is required to bring a passionate idea into a film. It can burn together with reality and turn into ashes with no content.

The only attempt to set Rainis' world of

thought in a feature film was director Gunārs Piesis' *Blow, the Wind!*, which was released in 1973 with a screenplay written by Piesis and Imants Ziedonis. The film received a great deal of response, including several awards at the All-Soviet Film Festival. It was also screened at the Moscow International Festival; after the screening, the director and one of the film's actresses, Esmeralda Ermale, were invited to the San Sebastian Cinema Forum. 650,000 people saw the film in Latvia, a number made all the more impressive if we compare it to record-setting films today such as *Granpa More Dangerous than Computer*, which was viewed by 75,000 people.

From the time when he was a student, Gunārs Piesis was always seen as someone with a special talent, but his first film at the Riga Film Studio, *Grey Osiers are Blooming*, was a harsh satire of Soviet theatre. Based on this destructive criticism, the young director was sent into "exile" for the next 10 years, and only allowed to work in documentary film. He did not disappear. He directed the film *Memory of the Earth*, a film about gravestones based on a screenplay by Vizma Belševica. He also released an outstanding and undeservedly forgotten feature documentary, *Svyatoslav Richter*, and was one of the first to take part in the then-popular and now culturally and historically important cinema journal *Art*. Then came his golden hour. Gunārs Piesis was allowed to return to the second floor of the Film Studio. In 1971, he directed one of the most outstanding films in the history of Latvian cinema, *In the Shadow of Death*. A few years later came another masterpiece, *Blow, the Wind!*, a film that was complicated to produce and given fairly contradictory critical

reviews of the finished product.

And Ziedonis? In the 1960s, when Imants Ziedonis first got involved in cinema, Latvia's documentary filmmakers were just as sensitive and sincere as poets. They looked for a new language of poesy that would explode the old and normative approach to documentary films. Ziedonis was excited, and he would not have worked with just anyone. Aivars Freimanis, Ivars Seleckis, Hercs Franks—they were all young men who loved their country and wanted to be honest in their films. The scenes they produced were full of truth, and the regime was helpless against this. The poet wrote several times that documentary filmmakers were the ones who taught him to see the beauty and value

Imants Ziedonis marked in the screenplay and wanted to see in the film could not be implemented. Our cinematic world did not have such delicate artists.

of facts. Working with filmmakers, Ziedonis became part of the time and space of Latvia's historical density and beauty.

Ziedonis and Aivars Freimanis adapted Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš's book *The White Book* for film, though it took nearly ten years to

produce. The outstanding film *The Boy* was released in 1977 as part of the anniversary celebration of the centenary of Jaunsudrabiņš's birth.

Later Gunārs Piesis invited Imants Ziedonis to work with him on a screenplay based on a Rainis play, *Blow, the Wind!*. In their initial statement on the film, the authors wrote that "in this film we wish to accent the moral and ethical principles expressed in the character of Baiba. The central conflict in the film is between delicacy and lack thereof, between internal cowardice and braggadocio, between human ideals and propertied power. [...] Because Rainis wrote that the genre of the play was a folk song, we hope to produce the film as a cinematic

legend that takes place in a generalised and approximate ethnographic environment."¹ The authors also declared quite adamantly that they did not think that "the mission of Uldis as a bearer of the future, as formulated by Rainis, is timely or important."

*The new strength of the land that is rising,
Preparing to turn the world over,
Seems to run as soon as it has done so,
Seeking the delicate beauty and its
happiness.*²

The direct conflict with Rainis came over his thoughts on the future. In the early 1970s, when the screenplay was written, ideas on "strength that is rising" may have seemed like a distant abstraction. Otherwise we can read the play's prologue as New Latvia, which has destroyed a lot of what we yearned for. In the 1970s, it seemed more important to protect the fragile soul of the nation from any roughness, so that it would not be broken by foreign will.

So far, so good. Ziedonis, who understood the depths of Rainis' spirit, had persuaded Piesis. After much consideration, the screenplay was approved in Moscow, and work could begin. Here it is important to note that Rainis' play was well known throughout the Soviet Union and had been translated and staged in various locations. This made it much easier to ensure that the screenplay would not be affected much by those making the relevant decisions.

Thousands of young women flocked to

the studio to audition for the role of Baibiņa. Imants Kalniņš composed excellent music even before work began on the film. The film was greatly anticipated with much interest, and the news media heightened expectation by regularly reporting on what was happening on set. The impression was that something important to all of us was being created. This was important for national self-confidence.

A storm occurred during the film's production. Ziedonis and Piesis got into a disagreement. The film's editor, writer Laimonis Purs, recalls: "The conflict between the two creative persons was like black clouds over the filming process, and lightning bolts were possible at any time. The director and I agreed that we would not show the filmed material to the poet."³

Many years later, Gunārs Piesis recalled how *Blow, the Wind!* was produced at a time when there were terrible contradictions in terms of how society was governed. "I never joined the Communist Party, so I had a certain amount of freedom. I could be a nationalist, and that was good if you could do something at a specific period of time against the time and also earn some money."⁴

Imants Ziedonis thought that the finished product was a failure because the goals they'd stated at the start hadn't been pursued. "Now comes the time when we have to decide whether to evaluate it on the basis of serious artistic criteria developed throughout the world as art developed, or on local

¹ Ziedonis, I. *Blow, Wind*. In Ziedonis, I. *The Steam that Facilitates Boiling*. Rīga: *Liesma* (1976), pp 144-145.

² Rainis, *Blow Wind*. In *Collected Writings*, Vol 10. Rīga: *Zinātne* (1980), p 310.

³ Purs, L. "Production of 'Blow Wind'." In Sondore, Dz. *Talented, Interesting, Quarrelsome*. Rīga: *Antēra* (2003), pp 82-83.

⁴ Rietuma, D. "The Wind is Blowing." *Diena*, 4 November 1994.

achievements in dim light (the best work of Latvians, the best work of the film studio, a director's outstanding achievement, etc.)?

"The film was a failure, and that was specifically because the director did not understand the dramaturgical material. Right now the foundation of the film was most banal, and it did not include the essential social triangle in Rainis' play—Zane, Uldis and Baiba. Gatiņš was not there at all, because there was no world for him. The careless hurry that presented nature in the film did not allow us to sense Gatiņš's world. (Gatiņš is a potential "little Uldis" who combats "big Uldis" over Baibiņa. In directorial terms, this "little Uldis" is presented as erotic and beautiful, and he is real competition for Uldis. If that is how Gatiņš is interpreted, then the fight at the end of the film does not come as a surprise. The well-intended magical scenes in the film were presented in such a parade-like and extroverted way that it seemed as if everything was done in terms of the audience and only for the audience. A shortcoming in the film is the lack of Latvian landscapes and major scope. Baibiņa was not the child of cliffs or snake pits, and Gatiņš's ethos cannot be based on mystical cows' skulls."⁵

This review from the popular poet caused a great deal of upset in Latvian society, since many people liked the film. Ziedonis' authority, however, stirred up negative emotions in many. Gunārs Piesis was embittered about this until the end of his life. In an interview with Dita Rietuma, the director said: "Ziedonis, as an outstanding poet, had the right to 'cut' Rainis at that time. Ziedonis, not me. That was a fairly violent partnership." In another interview: "It was undeniably difficult to survive the attitude of

Imants Ziedonis and a certain group of intellectuals towards *Blow, the Wind!*. After that I could no longer work on Rainis, even though I really wanted to bring *Indulis and Ārija* and *Fire and Night* to the screen."

Still, the vivid film had a visual magic programmed into it that initially repelled viewers with its decorative ethnography, but after a while it points to unnoticed values. I tend to think that the things Imants Ziedonis marked in the screenplay and wanted to see in the film could not be implemented. Our cinematic world did not have such delicate artists. There was not such delicate thinking, and I'm afraid that only a few audience members were capable of it. Gunārs Piesis' simplification of the content was an inevitable compromise. In the course of his work, he understood that things could not be filmed as they were written on paper; the screenplay included ethical programmes based on conceptual assumptions that the production—with their insufficient intellectual potential and lack of experience—couldn't handle. The author's thoughts on the film also suggest a personal offence that apparently appeared after differences of opinion with the director who, as far as I can remember, did not choose his words very carefully.

No matter what happened, the film lives on. It is as beautiful and eternal as a folksong that belongs to the golden part of our culture. I imagine that Rainis would have been interested in seeing it, too. I believe that we will train directors who can translate the philosophical passion of the poet into film in our national film school. They will understand the new era and will be able to express it.

⁵ Ziedonis, I. *Blow, Wind*, op. cit., pp 146-151.



Tija Banga, an actresses

Theatre in Valka in January 1918

TEXT Silvija Radzobe

The newspaper *Brīvais Strēlnieks*, which was published in Valka, offered this information on 13 January, 1918: “On Saturday, 31 January, 1918, at 8:00 PM, the Valka Workers’ Theatre Liesma will present, for the first time, the E. Rozenov drama *In the Coal Mines*. This drama powerfully perceives and depicts the lives of coal miners in Germany. In clear and specific ways, the play includes characters such as the old mother Zikel, father Shnirman, mother Zikel’s children, and the great problems of this dynasty, as well as the small joys of workers. The drama must be seen as a serious play in the short series of social dramas, because its individual characters demonstrate the whole wide life of workers. On Saturday, 14 January, at 7:00 PM, there will be a second staging of Lindulis’ play *Work and Bread*, which was completely sold out when it was debuted.”

First, a few historical facts to get a better sense of the situation in Valka at the beginning of 2018, when the Liesma Theatre had been open for just over a month. Local researchers have written that Valka received refugees from Kurzeme in the autumn of 1915, doubling the number of residents in the small city to 35,000 people. This suggests that the potential audience for the theatre was quite established. In

November 1917, Valka was taken over by the 6th Tukums Latvian Riflemen’s Brigade, which supported the Bolsheviks. This meant that the repertoire of the theatre and the way in which performances were organised often involved lectures about the duties of art in the new area, as well as timely political processes dictated by leftist politicians and organisers of cultural life. The “new era” was interpreted not just in terms of the war, but mostly as the time after the 1917 revolution in Russia, when a new society was to emerge with new morals and new types of people. The proletariat—or, to put it another way, the working classes—were presented as those who would do this process, and this was directly in line with Bolshevik slogans about hegemony. That is why Liesma was called a workers’ theatre, giving it the name of a new class appearing in the historical arena. The workers’ theatre was not seen as theatre in which the actors were working class or theatre meant only for workers, but instead as a theatre based on the ideology of the proletariat, as well as a new understanding of societal development and the role of culture, including the theatre, therein. During World War I, Latvian actors and directors worked not just in Valka, but also at other workers’ theatres

in Russia, including the Moscow Latvian Workers’ Theatre, the St Petersburg Latvian Workers’ Theatre and the Kharkov Latvian Workers’ Theatre. On 23 February, 1919, during the Pēteris Stučka regime, the Soviet Latvian Workers’ Theatre opened with the theoretical and organisational support of Andrejs Upītis, director of the Arts Department of the Soviet Latvian Educational Commissariat. The theatre existed for just three-and-a-half months. Its debut at the National Opera featured a play by Leons Paegle, *Resurrection*, and subsequent performances were staged at the N^o. 2 Theatre—in what is the National Theatre today. The National Theatre was established when the Soviet regime fell in Rīga, on 30 November, 1919, with Jānis Akuraters as its ideologue. During the Soviet era, the birthday of the Drama Theatre (now the National Theatre) was celebrated on 23 February. On 30 November, the regime ignored the theatre’s opening date, claiming that it was a reactionary and nationalist institution. This was true, even though the same artists worked for both theatres.

On 9 January, 1918, *Brīvais Strēlnieks* reported on the opening of the Liesma Theatre: “On the evening of 8 January, workers in Valka celebrated the opening of their theatre. A simple hall was overfilled with audience members. Look at the large mob of people, and only in a few cases will you see the powdered face of a lady wearing sparkling gold and silk. In her place, there is a strict and serious worker or a grey soldier. First, journalist T. Draudiņš delivered a lecture on the meaning of the Workers’ Theatre. During the current fierce battles, not too much can be donated to art. We cannot be delighted only about lines of colour or sounds of music. The great work gathers everyone, and all strength must be devoted to this work. Still, during this time of major

work and fierce battles, we must look for places where we can rest after the work is done and find new strength for future battles to make ourselves stronger. There must be such places. Temples of art, including the Workers’ Theatre. Workers still do not have their art or dramatic stage, but these will appear once the new form of life has been enshrined. Along with the creation of this new art, we must find that which is useful to us from old art. We have dramatic plays. Much delight and new strength come from Rainis’ *Fire and Night*, *Indulis and Ārija*, Verharna’s *Ausma*, and others. These can appear on the stage of the workers’ theatre.” This information is of interest for two main reasons. First, we can rectify an error in Kārlis Kundziņš’ *History of Latvian Theatre*: in the second volume he writes that Liesma was opened on 6 (9) January. Second, we can note Draudiņš’s tolerant attitude toward the cultural heritage, allowing the use of plays written by previous generations in the new era as long as there were not yet any plays about workers. This is an incomparably more cultural view than the one that governed in Russia at the time. Vladimir Mayakovsky called for Alexander Pushkin and “similar authors” to be swept away from the ship of contemporary art without any mercy, as if there were any playwrights who were comparable to Pushkin. *Brīvais Strēlnieks* demonstrated tolerance toward the work of Henrik Ibsen, writing about his *Ghosts*, which was staged at the Liesma Theatre: “Everywhere [Ibsen] presents a radical contrast between long-since wasted human lives and scars long since gone sore hidden under elegantly covert smirks and calm conversations. Equally vivid in the work of Ibsen is the idealism of spirit and the suffering of humans who seek the most spiritually valuable and noble. [...] During its brief period of existence, the theatre has



Newspaper “Brīvais Strēlnieks”, January 1918

tried to find plays which more or less play the social string. If these do not speak to the realities of lives of workers, then they at least reflect the general spirit of restlessness in human yearnings and dreams which is so attractive on any battlefield. This is the only possible route for a truly public theatre at this time, and we must not be afraid in the least of the idea that spiritual sins from the old world might be inoculated into the Proletariat thanks to this traffic. We must not be afraid in the least that Shakespeare from feudal England or Pushkin from tsarist Russia might be complete aliens who only create confusion in the homes of workers. Great artists know how to throw their lightning and rainbows across all eras.” The same newspaper, however, also published criticisms of the meaning and value of pre-revolutionary literature in the “new era.” In reviewing a concert organised in Valka on 13 January by the Latvian Riflemen’s Executive Committee, the paper wrote: “The concert was supplemented by the artist Alfrēds Austriņš, who declaimed poems by Bārda, Aspazija, A. Pushkin, Poruks, etc. The choice of poems was inappropriate for the current era. People from the great era cannot make peace with Bārda and Poruks during the great era in which everything is collapsing and dissolving and everything in life is changing.”

The speech delivered before the performance fired up the emotions of the audience in Valka, leading people to feel hatred about the old era and to rejoice about new things on 13 January, when a performance of *In the Coal Mines* was scheduled. Before the performance, those who fell on 13 January, 1905, were honoured – the first freedom fighters in Latvia. The hall fell silent during a sorrowful funeral dirge. The editor of *Cīņa*, Comrade Bauze, delivered a short but emotional speech about these fallen comrades.

13 January was the same for Latvian workers as 9 January was for Russia’s proletariat. On this day, workers who combatted merciless arbitrariness and the class of oppressors underwent the first bloodbath. The best comrades and combatants fell in battle. The Workers did not complain or whine; there is a caste that is always looking far into the distance. The bloodshed doubled their strength, and they joined hands with all workers in Russia, because the battle could be won only with a tight brotherhood. Thirteen long years of battle have passed, and today we celebrate the memory of our fallen comrades as victors. “The battle, however, is not yet over, and the oppressed classes from every land must join together in the international brotherhood. Only then will the oppressors’ power collapse” the speaker concluded his address, and the “Internationale” resounded in the hall. After singing “With Battle Cries on our Lips,” the official part of the ceremony ended. The speech attracted attention due to the views leftist forces had about a global socialist revolution and the importance of the international proletariat brotherhood in pursuit of this aim.

The plays in the repertoire had a distinct social criticism, unmasking the moral degradation of the rich and various exploiters who make use of change to humiliate and steal the respect of those of the pure-hearted lower strata, including the workers. This fomented hatred toward the classes that had just been overthrown during the revolution, with attempts to encourage tolerance toward the winners: the workers, farmers and orphans. This was both a direct and indirect admission of the heartless attitude toward the previous day’s oppressors as far as lawful and just things justifiable in human terms. Thus the Liesma Workers’ Theatre in Valka offered a repertoire of

social criticism that represented an adequate position in life. The aesthetic quality of the performances might have been humble, and the representation of leftist ideas in Latvian art was only continued by the Riga Workers’ Theatre because other theatres either presented the so-called civic position (the National Theatre and Russian Drama Theatre) or developed aesthetic experiments (the Daile Theatre). Leftist ideas were used most vividly by young poets in the 1920s, poets who, incidentally, gathered around the Riga Workers’ Theatre. These included Aleksandrs Čaks, Arvīds Grigulis, Jūlijs Vanags, Fricis Rokpelnis, Jānis Grots and others who wrote plays, reviewed and regularly attended the performances.

Of all the plays performed in Valka in 1918, only two were written by Latvian playwrights. The other was Jūlijs Pētersons’ satirical comedy *Noble Goals*, which was staged on 20 January. This involved “cut up and enlightened ‘noble goals’ among Latvian spiritually impoverished members of the bourgeoisie.” Other plays have been forgotten, and it seems that Russian authors whose work was staged in Latvia cannot be found at all in any print or electronic sources. On 12 January, an autodidactic group from the 2nd Riga Latvian Riflemen’s Corps presented a dramatic and musical evening on 2 January. The theatrical portion consisted of a four-act drama, *Private Company*, by V. Cheresnyev: “Light scenes depict the dressing rooms of our new generation, as well as private schools that teach morals. These guardians and proclaimers of morality pass before our eyes in a long stream, even though they themselves are perverse and morally fallen. A sooty group of pedagogues whose rearing techniques include spying and catching schoolchildren at restaurants and on streets, children expelled without any justifiable reason and



Kristaps Koškins, an actor

because of personal intrigues; the household manager who starved the students and got rich; he principal whose ‘private company’ really was a company; and, finally, the governess who has sex with the inexperienced principal’s son. Thanks to these egoistic and sunken ‘moralists’ the new world is being raised in spiritual darkness. It must find an answer to the thousands and thousands of questions presented by life, and their roads often lead them sideways. It is too late to wake up, and lessons come too late.” On 31 January, Liesma presented Jacob Gordin’s *Orphan Girl Hasja*: “The play is about the life and work of a poor Jewish girl who has ‘rich relatives,’ Jewish financial heroes who take her under foster care, but always harm her. The little orphan girl Hasja is forced to live with her rich relatives as a servant, and her life is not good. She falls in love with the rich owner’s son and elopes with him from the home that has made her sick. The

cowardly and spoiled Jewish gentleman, however, soon tires of poverty, and so rids himself of Hasja. She cannot tolerate the situation and poisons herself.”

Reviews of plays in *Brīvais Strēlnieks* say nothing about the quality of directors or actors, and old texts cannot be interpreted. One gets the sense that the reviewer most enjoyed the performance of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, but we can only guess whether praise was given to the quality of the play or to the work of the director and the actors: “The play *Ghosts* clearly reveals scars, and ideas about rotting foundations are like sand. The world in which the shadows of loneliness, immorality and barbaric dogmas appear as if in a mirror. We must leave it and be above it! The performance of *Ghosts* at Liesma Theatre was prepared quite carefully, and the director, Jānis Simsons, must be praised in every sense. I welcome the fact that the theatre has a nearly real ensemble for *Ghosts*. Individual defects were not major for the actors, who performed in a proper framework. True, Tija Banga (Mrs Alving) could not maintain a single quality of performance throughout; in a few places her performance lacked the convincing self-assurance and self-esteem that provide each tone of voice with a larger or smaller dose of artistic truth. [...] In other senses, however, her performance was fully part of the performance, and in certain (dramatical) moments it was sufficiently powerful. Jānis Simsons delighted the audience with an unexpected side of his talent, which was hard to predict based on his previous work. We can imagine Oswald differently, the tones could have been less resigned throughout, but the basic lines came across happily, and the performance, thanks to that, was complete. Voldemārs Ābrams (the Rev Manders) was not much of surprise until the first half of the first act, but then he relaxed. The artist

offered a natural and quiet flow that carried the character freely and also peacefully. [...] I would like to say that the performance as such was fairly happy, as was the exterior. Kristaps Koškins (Engstrand) offered a well-rounded performance. Ludmila Špilberga (Regina) played her not particularly thankful role with commendable success.”

Eventually, however, there were voices that were unhappy about the music and the performance of the musicians during intermissions and after the play was through: “During intermissions at the Valka Workers' Theatre, a brass band plays, and this is a sad misunderstanding. All of the overtures and waltzes that are meant to satisfy the ‘revolutionary’ (based on their impatience) audience in the back rows greatly damage the artistic impression of the scene that has just been viewed. The orchestra remains in its seats during the performance, musicians even leaning on the stage with their elbows.”

In the middle of February 1918, German forces occupied Valka and the Liesma Theatre was shut down. It had had serious plans for the future, including a performance of Rainis' *Blow, Wind!*, but these plans remained unfulfilled.

10 highlighted events

1

I Promise

Performance at *The Latvian National Theatre*

WHEN	WHERE
From January 12	Actors' Hall, Latvian National Theatre



In 2015, the Latvian National Theatre announced its Centenary Play Competition, inviting playwrights to submit plays that either focused on processes, events and personalities of the present day, or offered a fresh look at 20th century Latvian events. The top prize went to playwright Artūrs Dīcis for *Flying Travolta*, which was staged and directed last year by Regnārs Vaivars. Second place was awarded to Anna Rancāne for *Queen Bee and Werewolf*, which debuted under the direction of Valdis Lūriņš. The top three concluded with Andris Ūdris and his *I Promise*, which premiered on 12 January the Actors' Hall of the National Theatre, directed by actress-director Daiga Kažociņa. The play features Līga Zeļģe, Ilva Centeri, Mārtiņš Brūveris, Raimonds Celms and Kristaps Ķeselis. The story begins when three residents of Rīga meet one night on the outskirts of the city, and their lives are

completely transformed when things buried in their conscience are revealed.

“When I was writing the play, I had just turned 30, and so that is how old my characters are,” says Andris Ūdris. “The basic theme of the play relates to the everyday words that we often speak without any content or thought. We make promises or ask for forgiveness without thinking about the fact that we have to keep our promises and the words that we speak make us responsible to others. Another no less important topic is getting to know people who are close to you. No matter how we try, we never fully know another person. We are forever learning and discovering new things.”

2

To be Continued

Documentary by Ivars Seleckis

WHEN	WHERE
From March 22	On screens all over Latvia



The legendary director Ivars Seleckis (b 1934) has been active since 1963. His documentary *Cross-Street* is part of the Latvian cultural canon and is the only Latvian film to have received a prize at the European

3

Baltic Academies Orchestra

WHEN	WHERE
February 10	Vidzemes Concert Hall Cēsis, Cēsis

WHEN	WHERE
February 11	GORS Latgale Embassy, Rēzekne



Film Awards. The documentary focuses on the residents of a little 800-metre street in the Pārdaugava neighbourhood of Rīga in the late 1980s, presenting their life stories at a time when the Soviet Union was coming to an end, and life was full of contrasts. In 2013, the director returned to the street to produce *Capitalism in the Crossroad Street*, looking at the lives of residents under the realities of the 21st century. In his new documentary, *To be Continued*, Seleckis also intends to consider the changing of eras and the situation in Latvia through the eyes of local residents.

The film's main characters are children who at the time of the filming were in the first grade in various places around Latvia: Among them there is someone with strong family roots in the Latvian countryside; someone who lives with their granny while their mother works in the UK; someone of a different nationality who wants to become a businessman and whose grandparents came to Latvia after the WWII.

The plan is to continue the story once every seven years, with a new director focusing on the lives of these seven children each time. The producers insist that the goal is to make note of the destiny of the country through the eyes of children, as well as to observe how the situation in the country affects the destiny of these kids. The first film took two years to produce, and will be shown in cinemas from March. The creative team includes screenwriter Dace Dzenovska, camera operator Valdis Celmiņš, composer Kārlis Auzāns, editor Andra Drošs and producer Antra Gaile. Produced by *Mistrus Media*.

The year 2018 is the centenary not just for Latvia, but also for Lithuania and Estonia, and one of the primary musical projects celebrating this fact is the Baltic Academies Orchestra, which has been assembled by the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, and the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. The orchestra will present a special programme of symphonic music dedicated to the centenary of the Baltic States, and it will travel throughout the three countries and beyond to demonstrate the unique, colourful and multifaceted aspects of Baltic music, as well as to illustrate the excellent talent of its young musicians. The artistic director of the orchestra working in pursuit of this goal

is Estonian conductor Kristian Järvi, who is globally recognised and is popular among young musicians. Järvi is working with the Latvian conductor Guntis Kuzma and their Lithuanian colleague Modestas Barkauskas.

After initial preparations and rehearsals, the Baltic Academies Orchestra joined forces with professional musicians from the Baltic States, Norway, Denmark and Sweden last April to launch a cycle of centenary concerts, with plans to visit seven countries and 12 cities over the course of three years. Audiences will learn about Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian music in cities such as Gdansk, Berlin, Helsinki and St. Petersburg. In Latvia, the orchestra will appear at the Cēsis Concert Hall on 10 February and at the GORS Latgale Embassy in Rezekne on 11 February. The programme will feature Arvo Pärt's *1st Symphony*, Pēteris Vasks' *Lauda*, Mikolajus Konstantinas Čiurlionis' *In the Forest*, Peter Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* overture, Edvard Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, and Modest Mussorgsky's symphonic painting *Night on Bald Mountain*.

4

Latest

Contemporary Estonian theatre programme

WHEN	WHERE
February 15-18	Rīga



Latest is an initiative from the New Theatre Institute of Latvia and the Kanuti Gildi Saal stage arts centre in Estonia to celebrate the centenary of the two countries. A theatre programme in Riga and Tallinn will introduce participants to contemporary theatre from both countries. This is a continuation of the “Estonian Balsam” Estonian theatre festival in Rīga and the “Lāti kama” Latvian theatre festival in Tallinn, which began several years ago and featured young theatrical artists and new plays. The new Estonian programme will be staged in February, which is the month of Estonia's centenary, and the diverse programme will reveal the worldview of young Estonians on the eve of their country's 100th birthday.

“We live alongside Estonians, and we have much in common, but for some reason that doesn't apply to contemporary theatre and dance,” says the director of the New Theatre Institute of Latvia, Gundega Laiviņa.

“This exchange of performances and partnership among artists, therefore, is very interesting and useful. Everyone knows that Estonians are supposedly quiet and withdrawn, but young theatre artists in Estonia are the craziest, most open and most courageous artists in the region, and they have an inexplicably dark and powerful energy. To use a metaphor, it is truly Estonian black balsam.”

At the centre of the programme is a performance put together by six Latvian and Estonian artists who were inspired by the history of the Livonians. In the context of the independence of the two countries, the creative team has studied the fate of this nation and language, looking for comparisons in the history of Estonia and Latvia. The creative team includes director Valters Silis, video artist Kristina Norman, choreographers Karolina Poska and Joanna Kalm, set designers Austra Hauks and Epp Kub, playwright Kārlis Krūmiņš, and composer Toms Auniņš. Programme also includes three Estonian contemporary theatre stagings: *Dreamers* from the N^o99 Theatre, *Physics and Phantasma* from the Iggy Lond Malmborg Theatre, and the global premiere of *Seminar*, a meditation on teaching and learning from director Juhan Ulfsak, choreographer Mart Kangro, and playwright Eero Epner.

5

Future State

Contemporary Art Exhibition

WHEN	WHERE
February 23 to May 20	Arsenāls Exhibition Hall, Latvian National Museum of Art



As part of the “Future State” exhibition at the the Arsenāls Exhibition Hall, 19 artists consider what kind of country Latvia might be in future. These artists offer unreal, crazy, but also realistic and realisable ideas about what the country might look like during the next century or far off in the future.

“Forecasts suggest that humanity will change much more over the next 20 years than has been the case throughout its history,” say the exhibition's organisers. “Today we are talking about climate change, the rights of minorities and other human rights, and in the future we will only learn about these things in encyclopaedias. We will be so mighty that we will be able to control tsunamis. Food will be delivered to us by flying drones, and we will have flying cars. Perhaps we will eat virtual food. Education will be taken over by Internet companies. Cloning will lead to ‘people without souls,’ and existing types of work will disappear. New

types of industries will appear, and full-time jobs will disappear. Countries' borders will change, as always. There will be something to take the place of traditional medicine and pills. Or maybe it will be something else completely different?"

Predictions of the future will be offered by Artūrs Arnis, Aigars Bikše, Izolde Cēsnece, Ivars Drulle, Andris Eglītis, Miķelis Fišers, Atis Jākobsons, Ernests Kļaviņš, Liene Mackus, Katrīna Neiburga, Leonards Laganovskis, Kirils Panteļejevs, Anta Pence, Krišs Salmanis, Māris Subačs, Artūrs Virtmanis, Andris Vītoliņš, Rihards Vītols, and Aija Zariņa. Most of these works of art are being created specifically for the exhibition.

In discussing his preparations for the exhibition, artist Kirils Panteļejevs said: "Loneliness is a topic that often comes to mind when I think about people in the future. Virtual communication technologies will develop to the point where physical contact will become less and less important. An effective social protection system will replace family support, and elevated technologies and global logistics will replace the support of a friend. In a developed country, people feel safe when they are alone, and they distance themselves from others in an imperceptible way. What will unify us in the future? Will it really be the fight for survival once again? I want to dedicate my artwork to basic human relationships."

6

Paradise '89

Feature Film by Madara Dišlere

WHEN	WHERE
From February 22	On screens all over Latvia



The second Latvian centenary film to debut at the beginning of 2018 is Madara Dišlere's *Paradise '89*, based on the true story of nine-year-old Paula, who enters the world of adults at a time when Latvia is on the path toward restored independence. It is August 1989; sisters Paula (9) and Laura (known as Laurēns, 7), arrive in a small town to visit their cousins during the summer holidays. The mother of the cousins, Ieva, is not home, and so the girls enjoy "freedom" by pretending to be adults. Eleven-year-old Maija undertakes the direction of the friends' lives. After talking to her mother on the phone, Paula gets the feeling that her parents are getting divorced. She is confused, and tensions are increased by television reports of bloody events. The relationship among the girls becomes tense as they are afraid that there might be a war and as they discover that they are emotionally unable to deal with the lives of adults.

7

New sounds from „Skaņu Mežs” for Latvia's Centenary

Untamed music festival

WHEN	WHERE
February 24	Ģederts Eliass Jelgava Museum of History and Art



The untamed music festival *Skaņu Mežs* is organising a series of concerts, "New Sounds from the Skaņu Mežs," in honour of Latvia's centenary. The first concert on 24 February will feature innovative American trumpeter Peter Evans and Norwegian experimental vocalist Sofia Jernberg at the Ģederts Eliass History and Art Museum in Jelgava. There will be three concerts premiering world-level opuses in three genres of avant-garde music: free improvisation, contemporary music, and electro-acoustic music. Organisers say that the inspiration for the series comes from *Persepolis*, an electronic music piece composed by Iannis Xenakis for the 1971 art festival in Shiraz, Iran, in honour of the 2500th anniversary of the foundation of the Persian Empire. The innovative nature of the opus recalls that

Paula decides that the situation will improve for everyone if Latvia regains its freedom, so she decides to join the Baltic Way demonstration. She hopes that Ieva will return to her daughters and not spend night and day working at the Popular Front of Latvia. An acquaintance, Jonas from Lithuania, will no longer have to hide from being drafted into the Soviet army, and Paula and Laurēns will get home and save their collapsing family. When a state of emergency is announced on TV, the girls, left to their destiny, start preparing for war.

"The basic theme in this film is faith in the ideals that are part of the existing relationships among the girls. It focuses on their perceptions about the order of things, values in life and authorities, but these ideals prove to be illusory and are defeated. Nevertheless it causes the girls grow up and find an individual sense of their future. Paula passes through several phases of doubt and misdirection, and she rejects the temptation of a wealthy life and illusory freedom, instead choosing her family as an eternal value that will be ever-present."

Madara Dišlere is director and screenwriter for the film, the camera operator is Gints Bērziņš, the artist is Aivars Žukovskis, with costumes by Līga Krāsone, and producers Aija Bērziņa and Alise Ģelze. The studio is Tasse Film.

event and that country. Free improvisation, unlike electronic and contemporary music, offers performance without a score, and so the first concert in the series will present a partnership between two musicians who have never improvised with one another before.

Rolling Stone has written that New York-based Peter Evans is “the rare virtuoso player who’s willing to take real musical risks.” Along with musicians such as Greg Kelley and Nate Wooley, Evans is a star in the movement of American musicians seeking to expand the opportunities of the trumpet and break down ideas about how the instrument is perceived in the context of cultural history. Sofia Jernberg, for her part, is a singer and composer who was born in Ethiopia, but lives and works in Oslo and Stockholm. She is a director and composer of the modern jazz octet Paavo and the contemporary music quartet *The New Songs*. Jernberg has been praised by critics for her experimental vocals and her ability to sing the most complicated compositions. In October 2017, Sofia Jernberg appeared as a soloist at the opening concert of the *Forest of Sound* festival.

8

Ēriks Ešēnvalds’ *Volcano Symphony*

World premiere of Ēriks Ešēnvalds’ performance

WHEN	WHERE
March 10	Vidzeme Concert Hall Cēsis
May 10	Jūras Vārti Theatre House, Ventspils



Composer Ēriks Ešēnvalds won Latvia’s Great Music Prize in 2015 for his performance *Northern Light*, in which he studied the phenomenon of the Aurora. Now he continues his study of nature, this time with a focus on volcanoes. “Steaming lakes, hot streams, rivers of mud, clouds of ash, geysers and the hiss when lava hits the water of the ocean—these are all among the multifaceted activities of a volcano,” says the composer. “In partnership with director Renārs Vimba and cameraman Dainis Jurags, we travelled around the world to find and touch volcanoes, swim in thermal streams, hike down pathways formed by lava, examine caves and craters, smell the sulphur, and find local storytellers who told us legends and sang us folk songs about volcanoes.”

The result of this trip was *Volcano*

Symphony, a multimedia flute concerto that will be premiered on March 10th at the Vidzeme Concert Hall Cēsis.

The new performance will first feature choir songs from Ešēnvalds, as well as commentary from his trips to study the mythology of volcanoes. He will talk about interviews with 25 storytellers who live in direct contact with volcanoes. Then his new opus will premiere, featuring flutist Dita Krenberga and colourful video art by Roberts Rubīns. Also taking part will be the State Academic Choir “Latvija”, the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, and conductor Māris Sirmāis.

9

Bille

Feature film by Ināra Kolmane

WHEN	WHERE
From April 3	On screens all over Latvia



Director Ināra Kolmane presents her full-length feature film *Bille* on 3 April. The film is based on the book *Bille* by Vizma Belševica, and that is a partly autobiographic novel about childhood in pre-war Latvia in the 1930s. The book is part of the Latvian Cultural Canon, and Belševica’s

work has received many prizes, including the Latvian Order of Three Stars and a nomination for the Nobel Prize in literature.

Seven-year-old Bille lives in a world in which rich people have their streets, and poor people have theirs. Bille has learned to live with poverty, but she misses the love of her mother. Her relatives care for Bille, but constantly tell her that she is immature and that nothing sensible will happen in her future. This makes Bille sad, and she dreams of breaking free from the web of her inferiority complex. Bille’s growth is interwoven with a complicated period in Latvian history. The producers call the film touching and life-affirming. It is a clever and hopeful story about how a child grows up and forms her relationships with the world. It is also a reminder of the importance of tolerance, sacrifice and self-affirmation. The sets for the film are based on the atmosphere of Riga and Latvia in the 1930s, and most of the scenes have been shot at real locations mentioned in the novel: Grīziņkalns Neighbourhood in Riga and in the Latvian countryside. The producers were particularly fortunate to have access to Belševica’s childhood home and garden on Vārnu Street in Riga.

The screenplay for the film was written by Evita Sniedze and Arvis Kolmanis, the director is Ināra Kolmane, the camera operator is Jurģis Kmins, the artist is Ieva Romanova, with costumes by Ieva Veita, and producers Jānis Juhņevičs and Marta Romanova-Jēkabsons. Little Bille is played by Rūta Kronberga, with Elīna Vāne and Artūrs Skrastiņš performing the roles of her parents. Also appearing in the film are Gundars Āboliņš, Lolita Cauka, Pēteris Liepiņš, Guna Zariņa, Vilis Daudziņš, Lilita Ozoliņa, Intars Rešetins, Maija Doveika and other distinguished Latvian actors.

10

Wild Souls. Symbolism in the Baltic States

Exhibition

WHEN

WHERE

April 9 to July 15 Musée d'Orsay, Paris



“Symbolism in the Baltic States” (“Le symbolisme dans l’art des pays Baltes”) will be presented from 9 April at the prestigious Orsay Museum in Paris, one of the most substantial co-projects among the three Baltic States in preparation for their centenary, as well as one of the largest features of Latvia’s centenary to be presented abroad. The exhibition will inform French viewers of the art of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians, as produced at the turn of the 19th century until independence in 1918. Western Europeans will learn that art in the emerging Baltic countries was at a high level of professionalism, with characteristics that are part of overall European artistic processes.

Symbolism emerged in France during the latter half of the 19th century and had a great influence on culture throughout Europe, including the Baltic region. Topics in the works of art cover the world of mythology, folklore, fantasies, dreams and visions, as well as the moods of decadence,

as seen in the work of distinguished Latvian artists such as Janis Rozentāls, Vilhelms Purvītis, Johans Valters, Pēteris Krastiņš, Rūdolfs Pērle and Teodors Ūders. Lithuania will be represented by classical artists in the genre of Symbolism such as Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis and Ferdinandas Ruščicas, while Estonia will be represented by Kristjan Raud and Konrad Mägi. 133 paintings, graphics, pastels drawings and sculptures will be presented in total.

The concept for the exhibition comes from its senior curator, Rodolphe Rapetti, widely known as a student of European Symbolism who has been interested in Baltic art for quite some time. “The exhibition will illustrate the complex interplay of influence and resistance, through which, after becoming acquainted with European cosmopolitanism, Baltic artists forged a language for creative expression appropriate to their own intellectual worlds using elements of traditional culture, folklore, and local oral rhetoric,” explains Rapetti.

Partnering for the project are the Latvian National Museum of Art in Rīga, the Estonian Museum of Art in Tallinn, the Lithuanian National Museum of Art in Vilnius, and the M.K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art in Kaunas. The only other time when the Baltic States and their culture have been represented so substantially was in 1937, when the Baltic States had a joint pavilion at the International Exhibition of Art and Technology in Paris.

THE LIFE OF I.*

*AN INTROVERTED LATVIAN WRITER

AUTHORS AND BOOK PUBLISHERS FROM THE BALTIC STATES WILL BE GUESTS OF HONOR AT THE LONDON BOOK FAIR IN 2018. THE DELEGATION WILL BE COMPLETED BY NORA IKSTENA, KĀRLIS VĒRDIŅŠ, LUĪZE PASTORE AND INGA ĀBELE. SO THE LATVIAN LITERATURE PLATFORM HAS LAUNCHED THEIR **#IAMINTROVERT** CAMPAIGN, PRESENTING LATVIA AS A NATION OF INTROVERTED AUTHORS.

THIS IDEA HAS BEEN EMBODIED IN A SERIES OF COMICS, “THE LIFE OF I,” BY THE ARTIST REINIS PĒTERSONS. NOT JUST WRITERS, BUT ALL LATVIANS AS SUCH WILL SEE THEMSELVES IN IT.

CONFIDENCE



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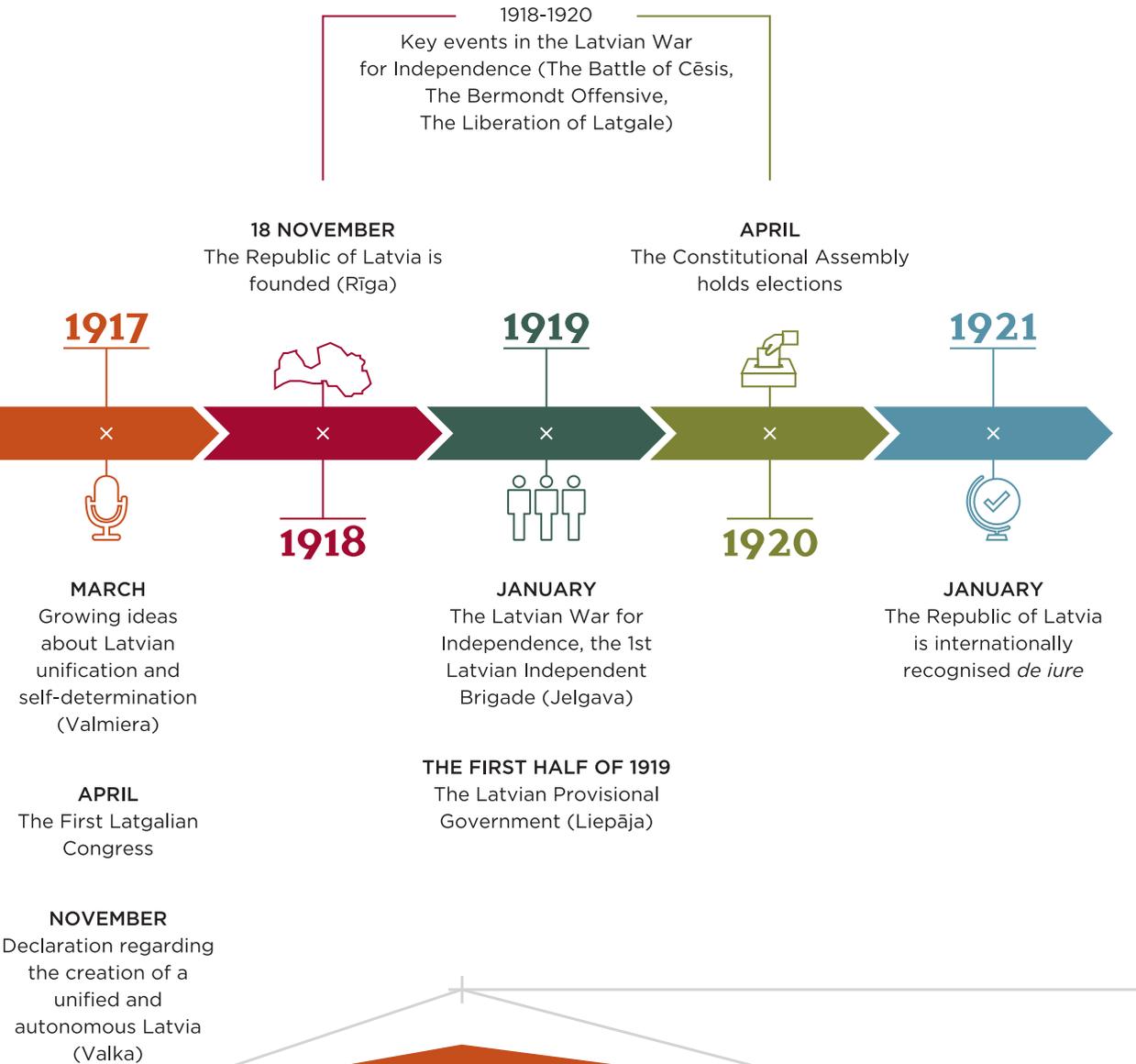
A NIGHTMARE



STRAIGHTFORWARD



LV100 SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS



Latvia did not come to be in a single day. The birth of our nation was the result of the work of goal-oriented, far-sighted, and courageous Latvians. Creating, defending, and strengthening our nation took many years. This is why Latvia's State Centenary programme stretches over five years from 2017 – 2021, exploring the most significant events and personalities pertaining to the creation of the Latvian state.

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Each year of the programme has its own

KEY WORD

GROWTH 2021

1921
The Republic of Latvia is internationally recognised *de iure* and accepted into the League of Nations

2020 **FREEDOM**

1920
The Constitutional Assembly convenes and elects Jānis Čakste as its president

COURAGE 2019

1919
After heavy fighting we prevail in the Latvian War for Independence

2018 **BIRTH**

1918
As empires collapse, Latvia is born

WILL 2017

1917
Boldly and presciently, the Latvian people lay the groundwork for the creation of an independent and democratic state

Latvian Literature in the World

TEXT Pauls Bankovskis

PHOTO Ģirts Raģelis

*“I had a young heart, quite young, uninjured and strong
as a cup just pulled out of kiln with glaze not broken
anywhere... It tinkled when touched.”*

Kārlis Skalbe, “How I Sought the Maiden of North”

It was many years ago that Latvian writing was individually honoured at the annual Gothenburg Book Fair in Sweden. My novel *Reds, Rats, Rock'n'Roll* had just been released in Finland, which neighbours Sweden. I was planning to conquer the whole world. The fact that my Finnish publishers were dressed in black leather jackets and attended rock music festivals meant that they had chosen to publish my novel specifically because it contained the word "Rock'n'Roll" in the title. That was not particularly important to me. I attended a literature festival beyond the Arctic Circle. I flew to a writers' residence in the United States. One of my stories was translated and included in an anthology in Canada, while another one was published in Germany. Yes, I really had to prod the foreigners to pay my honorarium, far more than is the case with local publishers, but I was sure that everything would soon change. Soon, soon, you'll see.

The next morning after the opening party, when the smorgasbord had been cleared, a merry group of us were walking through the city park. We were speaking Latvian, and behind us we heard someone speaking words in clear Swedish: "Latvian pigs." Right then I understood that this was not an analytical and objective evaluation of a Latvian prose or poetry reading from the previous day. It was a transcendental and personal offence to all of us — offence over an unfortunate ship that had been cut up for scrap metal, over the bitterness of Swedish labour unions towards unlimited Latvian construction workers, over their dislike of the Latvian Legion members who had found refuge in Sweden, and other offences and horrors that had breathed their way across the sea. There was no whiff of the syndrome of compassion that is often

praised in Stockholm. Let's be honest. No one ever really expected or is expecting there to be Latvian or other literature in neighbouring Sweden. This is true even if we like to imagine that people expect our poetry, prose or even publicity, divided as we are only by a small part of the sea. During the Soviet era, ambitious refugees managed to cross that bit of the sea on a biplane known colloquially as a "corn plane."

"Where are you from?" they usually ask, and that was true at the Gothenburg event. Sometimes they seem to be very educated, widely written about people, such as Jeffrey Eugenides or *Cloud Atlas* author David Mitchell. "Latvia?" they repeated. "So your capital is... let me guess... Tallinn!/Vilnius!" This, though, is the most favourable scenario as far as how these events tend to develop. These conversations don't usually involve Tallinn or Vilnius, so one has to explain things by using the closest mode of comparison.

"Our country is on the shores of the Baltic Sea."

"In Russia?"

"We're in the European Union now."

"Wait a minute, did you say Bosnia?"

"No, Latvia is one of the three Baltic States."

"?"

"On the Baltic Sea, right where Estonia and Lithuania are. We're in the middle."

"?"

"Not far from Poland. Across the sea from Sweden."

"So you speak Russian in your country?"

"No, we speak Latvian."

"But you're a part of Russia?"

"No, Latvia is an independent country."

"Your language sounds like Russian to me."

Let's be honest. No one ever really expected or is expecting there to be Latvian or other literature in neighbouring Sweden.

"Our language is one of the oldest Indo-European languages, and it is directly related to Lithuanian and Ancient Prussian."

"Russian?"

"No, Prussian, but that's not important."

Yes, please pour me another glass of red!"

Is it any surprise that eventually one becomes offended and bitter? We do have literature, and on average it is probably no better or worse than the literature of our neighbouring countries. We don't even manage to tempt the interest of publishers and readers in other countries, because we are simply not seen or noticed. Certainly, we can always use the excuse of a lack of money. News sites in Latvia recently reported on an anonymous Norwegian philanthropist who had donated EUR 15,000 for the translation and publication of Estonian literature into Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic. The websites were green with envy and full of Schadenfreude. Without generous support from Denmark, we would have heard a lot less or nothing whatsoever about Danish authors such as Peter Hoeg or Karen Blixen. Money is important, in other words, but it cannot be the case that money is the only obstacle and encumbrance to Rainis' *Golden Horse* not being on international bookshelves alongside James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Our poverty does not mean that we lack schools, transport opportunities, or doctors. If the problem isn't money, then perhaps the difficulty has to do with a lack of excellence in literature and with our inability to tell others how wonderful, instructive, useful, entertaining or moving it is for foreign readers.

Nevertheless, the money argument is nonsensical; the greatest obstacle to the delivery of our stories, poems and novels to readers in other countries might be the way we think of categories of excellence and our

search for and praise of excellence. It's like an old gramophone repeating how excellent something is: you can't win real trust like that, especially since people know how to do these things and do them everywhere and all the time. Excellent laundry detergent washes clothes better than ordinary detergent, and so on. "Here are the excellent poems of the excellent author who was almost nominated for a Nobel Prize, but did not receive one." Who cares about that, who is moved by it?

When there is nothing else to do, as an exercise, we can look on our bookshelves for internationally successful books by authors from other countries and try to describe them to foreign readers who have never heard anything about them. "A drunk, twaddling Irishman spends all day running around with a few others like him, and sometimes their conversations can't be differentiated from voices in my head." Or "an unhappy Russian woman cheats on her unhappy husband and finally kills herself by throwing herself under a train." Please note that I have not used epithets such as "excellent" or "outstanding" in these descriptions, but I have also not tried to make them more flowery or beautiful. Perhaps it is specifically the unwillingness or inability to speak directly about Latvian literature that has been the main obstacle to its appearance on the highest shelves of bookshops in London, New York, or Rome. First, true, we should agree that our literature wasn't written with the intention to attract the interest of imagined foreign readers. Au contraire, everything has been done to scare, reject and humiliate these readers, keeping them at a safe distance and allowing them to feel a sense of superior wisdom, beauty, success and wealth. "A brigade of Jewish tailors arrives at a farm and messes up the planned wedding, sowing total chaos. You won't believe what happens next." "A boy who spends most of his

time without the supervision of adults finds himself in endless potentially dangerous situations, but always escapes from them without any harm.” (This latter annotation may be so universal that it would be of use for several examples of classical Latvian literature or even an author’s collected works.) Examples of how to describe our literature can be found among the aforementioned Irishmen, because it is clear that in places where there is Irish prose or poetry, there will also be at least one drunk. In the closer or more distant past, there will be the ghost of famine, with passionate hatred between Protestants and Catholics. There will be all kinds of harsh winds that might frighten, not tempt respectable readers sitting on their warm sofas.

There are such peculiar people, however. They buy books and they read them.

Preparations for the London Book Fair during the year of Latvia’s centenary celebrations have involved a particular emphasis on the introverted nature of Latvian

authors. Like all truths, it is neither good nor bad, and it tells us just as much about Latvian writers as it does about authors who are Irish, Estonian, or Iranian. Even if you are a ladies’ man, a society lady, or the belle of the ball, as soon as you start to write, your view turns inward, and even though nothing seems to be happening to you, if you look at yourself from the sidelines, the fact is that your brain will be full of the craziest things imperceptible to others until the moment they read what you have written. To be honest, it’s not the most exciting thing, but if we can agree that any writer—whether Latvian or Irish—is introverted, then we should look for another epithet for our introverted nature to soften the hardened heart of the

potential reader and publisher, leading them to eagerly anticipate each new Latvian novel or poetry collection, even based on hostility or curiosity. If it turns out that we have nothing very good, we would have to know how to concentrate our weakness, poorness and whinging into global suffering, standing up against incomprehension or accusations that we are piggish. Yes, we are “Latvian pigs,” and we would stuff the mouth of anyone who talks about us behind our backs. We are proud, Latvian, introvert-ed pigs, and our literature consists of the texts these proud, introverted pigs have written. Literature that has now been translated and published in your language, and, in order to make it happen, a whole crowd of people had to work at

it with blackened snouts.

Hogs in Latvian literature aren’t lazy creatures seeking benefits for themselves. They have earned a place at the table of Latvia’s centenary celebrations

An old fairy tale by Dzintra Rinkule-Zemzare features a little hog who visited everyone, but was really a bad hog. He didn’t want to work with others, he didn’t help other animals build their huts, and he couldn’t be encouraged

to join in on the party. Hogs in Latvian literature aren’t lazy creatures seeking benefits for themselves. They have earned a place at the table of Latvia’s centenary celebrations along with athletes, builders of roads, salespersons at shops, teachers and the rest. This is because even if one day the idea came to them to describe their own Latvian piggishness, they would be the only ones who would have the duty and honour, the only ones with no real reason to be offended. What would we say if an Estonian, Finn or Swede were to call us piggish in their literature? That, too, is what literature is for.



Letters of Light

PHOTO Anna Andersone

TRANSLATION Jānis Elsbergs

The cultural programme of Latvia’s centennial celebration opened with the multimedia performance “Letters of Light” at the National Library of Latvia. This is a contemporary story about our country, presented with music and dance by the Latvian Radio Choir, Jānis Šipkēvics, Miķelis Putniņš, Asnate Rancāne, Guntars Prānis, Ieva Nīmane, Anda Eglīte and a group of actors and dancers. The idea was conceived by the performance’s musical director, Kaspars Putniņš, and organised by the Latvian Concerts agency in partnership with the Latvian State Centennial Bureau. The performance was directed by Viesturs Meikšāns, with lyrics written by Ilmārs Šlāpīns, and a set designed by Voldemārs Johansons.

Ilmārs Šlāpīns: “The performance has several musical layers featuring different textual sources, including the myth of the long bean found in Latvian folksongs, as well as modern-day poetry. Two composers and

two types of mythological ornament will come together in a complex story about the upward path of people who move toward God and then return to themselves and to their nation. The long bean symbolises many things in Latvian mythology: new knowledge, spiritual growth, the route toward freedom, but also the path of challenges and initiations that transform a person into an adult who can ensure his own self-realisation. In spatial terms, the performance has two levels. The lower level relates to human beings and everyday lives, while the upper level relates to the godly and transcendental level. By bringing the two levels together, we tell a story about ourselves, our nation and our country. If a country is implemented through its history, then this is what shapes our concept of ourselves. We can only become a nation by telling people about others, learning about ourselves, writing things down and reading. That is what letters of light is about.”

Ancient texts

TEXT Folk songs

One white bean is what I had
In the ground I put that bean
Grow it did, oh, mighty tall
All the way up to heaven

I climbed up the beanstalk twigs
All the way up to heaven
God's own son I saw up there
He was fishing in the mist

Copper boat and golden net
Diamond sail is what he had
One white bean is what I had
I didn't know where I should plant it

Shall I plant it in the rose garden?
Or upon a sandy hill?
I did plant it on the hill
On the very top of it

On the very top of it
By a big, wide road
Let it sprout and let it grow
All the way up to heaven

It grew up both wide and tall
Sporting nine thick branches
Sporting nine thick branches
All the way up to heaven

I climbed up the beanstalk branches
All the way up to heaven
I climbed up to visit God
Up the beanstalk branches

From up there I saw the sea
Black white-horned bulls were swimming
there
They were no black bulls, though, there
They were God's own horses

They were no white horns, though, there
It was a silver bridle
God's own sons I saw up there
Walking around heaven

Silken socks and shoes of glass
Silver handkerchiefs
God's own sons I saw up there
Saddling their horses

Good morning, dad and mum,
Why did you leave me, still so small?
Darling, son, you know, we left you
In the cradle of dear Mary

Darling, son, you must be clever
Take the advice of your old man
Make yourself a sharp sword, son,
A sharp sword with nine barbs

Where shall I find a blacksmith
Who'll make such sword for me?
Don't you worry, darling, son,
God himself will help you

Gather courage, gather wit
Make the sword yourself
Make the sword yourself
From the sting of a bee

God's own son gave me a sword
A three-edged sword it was
So I went across the sea
To hack the old Devil to pieces

The river flows sparkling light
In the dead of night
Demons went across the sea
Reeds were rustling away

I just stood on the shore
With the sword in my hand
With the sword in my hand
Waiting for the old Devil

Then I cut the Devil's head
Into nine pieces
The old Devil's blood
Gushed onto my white coat

The old Devil's blood
Gushed onto my white coat
I asked dear Mary
Where can I wash my coat?

Dear Mary told me:
Look for a spring down in the glen
Look for such a spring that has
Nine streams starting from it
In the ninth stream your coat
Will get nice and white again

New texts

TEXT Ilmārs Šlāpins



He writes this book about us –
we are like ink on the skin,
he's got too little of Mahabharata
and not enough of Iliad,
he never leaves town,
he almost reaches the end,
and God is not yet born,
and man is a lonely island.
How lonely is this typewriter,
rust crunches beneath his fingers,
it crumbles from a sudden hunch –
sooner or later we'll die,
we'll love, talk, stay
forever on this side of the street.
Who needs it anyway?
Why do You look on without a word?
The world litters its papers within me,
written all over in forgotten hand.
Lord, we are your laziest bees,
we are your busiest drones.
We'll buy this book all right,
we'll put it on the shelf,
we might even translate it,
we just don't want to know the price.



We fall down and down to the ground
we're made of clay, of coal, of chalk
we're always a part of the forbidden
we're human, we're one folk,
gathered together and written down
not embraced and driven away
we are the pearl found in a river
firewood piled for a winter to come
we fall down and down to the ground
furrow we are that ploughed in a field



Beyond streets, borders and fields,
beyond dishes, unwashed for years,
beyond the world and sunshine,
beyond crowds of hungry refugees,
I see you, I see the image of you,
too early, woken up too late,
I see you writing an old folksong,
as terse as a haiku,
love claims your time,
time claims more and more lives each year,
life claims the fruit of your land,
land as ever claims only blood,
and the blood claims conquest and oblivion.
Everything in this world claims something
from somebody –
Maybe one should finally be giving.



Going out into the world,
I go looking for myself,
for acceptance and proof of myself,
I'm taking my people abroad –
to seashores, paradise, hell,
while looking for myself,
I always find somebody else.
God, make me rather a giver,
not only as ever receiver.
Going out into the world,
I learn to read myself –
to find familiar letters within myself
and burning fires of bitter confessions.
Going out into the world,
I learn to read myself.



Ruins of The Great Choral Synagogue on Gogol street in Riga

Rebirth of the City

TEXT **Inga Gaile**

TRANSLATION **Ieva Lešinska-Geibere**

PHOTO **Ģirts Raģelis**

On that day, the entire city went down on its knees: On Maskavas, Jersikas, Ebreju, Līksnas, Kijevas, Jēkabpils, Lāčplēša Streets, Virsaišu, Lauvas, Lielā and Mazā Kalna Streets, and heads were bent in Rumbula Forest. On that day, the entire city went down on its knees, both those who had been guards and those who could not pronounce “g” or draw a yellow star, and their children and grandchildren, and great grandchildren, a field of people with heads bent, in order to become the foundation for a new city that would never forget, that would walk in their footsteps, that would ask heaven to forgive this prolonged silence, not looking in the eye, this rushing past in a city in which every day shades of people with coloured stars on their foreheads do not walk on the sidewalks.

And I asked, grandma, dear, how could you sleep, you and grandpa, on those nights in November and December, scared of the war, naked trees knocking on windows, embracing each other to keep warm? How could we sleep on all these nights since?

We are a small nation. Indeed. Our trembling voice is our flame and we sing.

I have a friend who has only half a brain after a drunk driver left him to die. But he lived. And this friend has problems speaking—he sings. And so it is with us. We sing. Who ran us over?

On that day, the city went down on its knees and a plea, quivering like an autumn leaf, floated up to heaven: forgive us, we who looked away, who shot you, who arranged you in rows, who told children to look elsewhere, who let you walk in the gutter, who thanked God for having been born light-skinned and blond, forgive us, we who did not bring you bread, who did not sew yellow stars on ourselves, who did not enlist in the partisans to hatch a conspiracy, forgive us, we who were not žanis, elvīra, anna, who were not among those 270 others. We are an even smaller nation than we thought up to now.

On that day, when the city went down on its knees and not even words, trembling whispers went up to heaven; on that day, deep down inside the city, its heart slowly resumed beating.

And after 700 years, birds came back to the city.

Look at your iPhone. Today is that day.



Cinema/History

TEXT Inga Pērkone

PHOTO Agnese Zeltiņa

“History always uses the makeup that is most fashionable,” says Pēteris Krilovs, director of the movie *Obliging Collaborators* (2016). He suspects that he might be accused of twisting history, as was the case when the director Aloizis Brenčs released the movie *When Rain and Wind Knock at the Window* (1967). *Obliging Collaborators* is one of the very few¹ films in our culture that scrupulously analyses the mechanism whereby regimes use cinema arts to influence the minds of people. History is not what has happened; it is that which others have told us.

In 1988, historian Hayden White

proposed a new term for the science of history—*historiophoty*, which refers to the representation of history in visual images and cinematic discourse². The director and theorist Dāvis Šīmanis has written that “the explanation of history in cinematic art is the most powerful organiser of public historical ideas during the 20th and 21st centuries. Cinema [...] as a structure dominates human understanding about the pace of history. Historical films relate to a broad range of arguments, and their function is different, as well. First, a historical film tries to reconstruct the past in an objective way. Second, it can represent history as an interpretation

¹ Here one must also mention films such as *Without Legends* (1967, Hercs Franks, Aleksandrs Sažins, Aloizis Brenčs), *Voice* (1986, Augusts Sukuts), and, to a small extent, *Nazis and Blondes* (2008, Arbo Tammiksārs).

² White, H. “Historiography and Historiophoty”, *American Historical View*, Vol. 93, No. 5 (Dec. 1998), pp 1193-1199.

During the filming of “Chronicles of Melania”

of the past. Third, it can represent the history of the time when the film was produced. These types of representation often merge in a specific film, and so it is not possible to determine the historical content of the project in a clear way.”³

If we keep in mind the axiom that every film is a testament to its era, then I want to offer a brief description in this paper about the types of Latvian history and eras offered by feature films. This is the group of films⁴ that traditionally have the broadest audience. True, in recent years there have been so-called documentary films that speak to the past, with much-used, unconcealed scenes showing that the producers of films want to approach an historical era or shape history in accordance with the imagination and goals of the author. Artificial structures seem more convincing than authentic evidence.

During the nearly 100 years of Latvian cinema, only ten or so films have focused on a time before the 19th century. In most cases, this period of time is demonstrated as a fairy tale or stylisation. Films about the 17th century, for instance, include *Servants of the Devil* and *Servants of the Devil in the Windmill of the Devil* (1970, 1972, Aleksandrs Leimanis). The past is basically an open game room or playground. In the openings of the films *Lāčplēšis* (1930, Aleksandrs Rusteiķis) and *Blow, Wind!* (1973, Gunārs Piesis), the past is a myth that stands outside of time. The ornamental decorative nature of *Blow, Wind!* offers vivid evidence of the “garter culture” of the 1970s, while visual techniques in *Lāčplēšis* can be seen as a catalogue of stylistic trends in silent film, confirming that the producers were aware of processes

in global cinema. *Lāčplēšis* also offers a good example of how historical films reveal attitudes of the time toward the depicted period, separating good guys from bad guys and using symbols that need no explanation to contemporary audiences (a closeup of a German military helmet before the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia, dark silhouettes during the Liepāja putsch, Kangars in a leather jacket in Rīga in 1919, etc.).

It is also important that films using details as precise as possible from the era cannot avoid mythology. History or the ancient era is seen as dark, frightening and destructive, as is seen in films such as *In the Shadow of the Sword* (1976, Imants Krenbergs), *In the Twists of Time* (1981, Gunārs Piesis) or *Toms the Werewolf* (1973, Ēriks Lācis).

Approximately 17 films have depicted the 19th century and particularly the turn of the 19th century, though it is very important that two-thirds of the films devoted to that period represented films based on classical Latvian literature. Furthermore, two of the films were produced twice (*Indrāni*, 1928, Aleksandrs Rusteiķis; 1991, Gunārs Cilinskis; *Times of the Land-Surveyors*, 1968, Voldemārs Pūce; 1991, Varis Brasla; *Echo*, 1959, Varis Krūmiņš; *Aija*, 1987, Varis Brasla). This era is subordinant to the characteristics of writers and relationships among them. History is shown as a diktat from the film’s commissioners. Examples of this include the film *The Late Frost* (1955, Pāvels Armands, Leonīds Leimanis) and *The Slough Wader* (1966, Leonīds Leimanis). These films express class-related relationships, as marked out in line with the requirements related to the method of Socialist Realism.

³ Šīmanis, D. “Construction of Historical Narratives in Cinema: The Southern Renaissance Model,” dissertation, Rīga: Latvian Academy of Culture, 2015.

⁴ The beginnings of cinema in Latvia related to the film *I’m Heading Off to War* (1920, Vilis Segliņš).

Émigré author Anšlavs Eglītis thought about the influence of the method and saw it in the modernist film *The Boy* (1977), directed by Aivars Freimanis. Russian censorship forced Latvian producers not to depict Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš's bright descriptions in *The White Book*, instead presenting them as a “black book” in which classes and exaggerations were supposedly demanded by the “party-related” Socialist Realism.”⁵ Eglītis also emphasised details he thought were inappropriate for the era shown in the film: “When Jaunsudrabiņš was a child, petroleum lamps had been used for a long time, and splinters were burned very rarely.”⁶

During the 1920s, Latvian cinema had every opportunity to be a reflection of the era, but apart from a few short films, all of the films produced in Latvia until 1934 dealt with the past. The situation is surprisingly similar today. Of 16 different genres of films included in the state-financed programme “Latvian Films for Latvia’s Centenary,” 12 (or three-quarters) focus on the past. Among feature films, the only one about the present day is *Granpa More Dangerous than Computer* (2016, Varis Brasla).

The hypertrophic interest in the past during the years of independence created a situation where independent interwar Latvia—the 1920s and 1930s—were depicted more in films produced during the Soviet period than during that time, and the only evidence of that era was *The Fisherman’s Son* (1940, Vilis Lapiņš). Thus our concept of the period of democracy and the Ulmanis era are largely based on the films *Serving a Rich Mistress* (1969, Leonīds Leimanis), *The Kiln* (1972, Rolands Kalniņš), *The Corred*

Youth (1979, Gunārs Ciliniskis), *The Child of Man* (1991, Jānis Streičs, etc. Ideas related to cinema gradually became the main source of history for subsequent films such as *Dream Team 1935* (2012, Aigars Graube), basically a historiographic film which speaks more to the narrative and visual canons that began in Hollywood during the 1930s and continued in other films, as opposed to speaking about the 1930s as such.

World War II (and particularly the Great War of the Fatherland) and the post-war years have been depicted the most in Latvian historical films—more than 30 films in all. Most of these films, of course, apply to the Soviet period, when the Great War of the Fatherland was seen as a sacred war for the people and a cornerstone of Soviet ideology. The May 9th celebrations still remind us every year of the power and durability of this propaganda.

In Latvia, as was the case in relation to 1914, the war was less important than its consequences—the battle between supporters and opponents of the Soviet regime. I have written in the past⁷ about the so-called battle among classes in Latvia’s countryside. I have also written about the so-called forest brethren who attacked local Soviet structures and were seen as bandits by the Soviet regime. This was depicted extensively, creating the paradoxical impression that Latvians were seriously opposed to the Soviet regime for a long time. To be sure, the bands as such were shown. In the film *Obliging Collaborators*, Pēteris Krilovs brought together the screenplay and visual stereotypes used by supporters of independence as sadistic criminals or alcoholics or, at best, as weak

⁵ Eglītis, A. “Boy,” *Brīvā Latvija*, No. 4, 1993, p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ See Pērkone, I., Balčus, Z., Surkova, A. and B. Vītola. Reality of Screenplays: The History of Feature Films in



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people who had lost all hope and direction.

During the industrial period, most of the films produced in Latvia were about the present. Approximately 80 films were produced between 1967 and 1987, in various genres such as melodramas, crime films and comedies. It seems that these films could be used as a way to look back at the period of the thaw or stagnation from the perspective of later periods. Still, there are very few historical films about these time periods – *Family Melodrama* (1976, Boriss Frumins), as well as *The Shoe* and *Dawn* (Laila Pakalniņa, 1998, 2015). These films were set in the late 1950s or early 1960s. *Long Road Into the Dunes* (1981, Aloizis Brenčs) and *Tapers* (1989, Rolands Kalniņš) partly related to the 1960s.

Only one very vivid reconstruction of the 1970s is seen in Laila Pakalniņa’s short film *Fire* (2007) from the *Elements* cycle. The main character in the series, Marija, was shown as a child, and each sound-related and visual element was a reminder of the Brezhnev era to those who experienced it. The first feature film related to the history of the 1980s will be Madara Dišlere’s *Paradise ’89* (2018).

What will be the appearance of the 21st century from the perspective of the future? It is entirely possible that it will be the same as how present-day films present the present day.



Andrejs Upītis museum, Rīga, Brīvības str.

TEXT Anete Konste

PHOTO Ģirts Raģelis

Why Wasn't I Invited?

Dedicated to Latvian literature and read during the 2017 Prose Readings

I'd decided to organise a birthday party for the author Andrejs Upītis. He was seriously old at the age of 140. I meant it to be a surprise party, but I couldn't decide between two venues—the Association of Latvians building or Latvia's No. 1 rock café. I ended up choosing the rock café so that the party would be more modern and would attract a youthful audience. Because the scope of this idea exceeded my financial abilities, I filed a grant application with the State Cultural Capital Fund. They said no, because the anticipated result wasn't convincing. Oh, well. Their loss, not mine. Instead, I contacted the Teterevs family.

"Is it a cultural or a social project?" they asked.

"It is a cultural project, of course," I replied. "There'll be readings, performances, prose karaoke, a cabaret performance based on Upītis' work, and so on. It'll be a very rich programme, conceptual, allowing each audience member to discover something satisfying his or her taste."

"It sounds more like an entertainment project."

"Of course. It's a birthday party!"

"We don't fund such projects."

"What do you mean? Surely you fund Latvia's birthday!"

So they were forced to yield and provide the funds necessary for the party—EUR 10,000. The first thing I did was cancel a planned meeting with Valērijs Belokoņs. (I hadn't expected the process to be so smooth.) Then I rang a few friends who were involved in planning the party to tell them the excellent news. We met that evening and immediately got busy with the plans. We developed a mobile website that linked fragments from Upītis' work to music adapted to the reading rhythm, thus offering an opportunity for

each visitor to create a unique performance. An organisation of young poets prepared a cabaret performance entitled *The Broken Heart*, based on motifs from a Upītis play by the same name. We contacted one of Latvia's best stage designers who promised to create the aesthetics of the *Moss Village Boys* in the café. It was very difficult to wade from one room to another. The sponsor of the party was the Skrīveri ice cream company, and the stage designer instructed them to produce edible and drinkable installations.

I sent an e-mail to a series of people, asking them for their thoughts on how we could make the event even more colourful. The first response came from a correspondent who wasn't pleased with the location. Why should the anniversary celebration of a classical Latvian author be held in a place where young people are entertained? Next I heard from a publishing company who wanted to present and market a new publication of *Green Earth*. Someone else asked why the party focused on Andrejs Upītis. Weren't other authors celebrating birthdays this year? The fact that it was the 140th anniversary of the author's birth wasn't seen as sufficient justification, and people continued to ask why the party focused specifically on him. Some suspected that the real purpose was to present and market the publication of *Green Earth* that had been released by a certain publishing house. Oddly, my letter was also received by a woman who claimed to be a professor and said that she would like to begin the evening with a series of lectures, "Manifestations of Social Realism in Upītis' Work." Later the woman sent me another letter, saying that she'd drunk some coffee and seen a heart-shaped contour in the dregs—which surely signalled a green light "from above" for her idea. For several days I didn't open any e-mails, particularly those with subject lines in all caps.

Once I felt more or less recovered, I started to think about invitations. We came up with objective criteria to determine who should or shouldn't be invited. The first criterion said that we must invite those who would be offended if they were not invited. The second criterion was that we must invite those who were already offended by something. No further criteria was necessary, as the potential number of guests almost exceeded the capacity of the second floor hall. All that remained was to invite those who absolutely had to be invited. In order to democratically cover all age groups, we spied on the guest lists of this year's Aleksandrs Čaks awards and the T Prize ceremony for alternative poets. We cleverly covered the middle-aged generation by using a list of participants from the latest Prose Readings.

A few days later, I discovered that my colleague had sent invitations to everyone on the Čaks awards guest list. As if that weren't complicated

enough, she used the 2005 list, not last year's, which meant that some of the guests were dead. The letters were probably already in the addressees' mailboxes, and I was horrified to think about someone opening an invitation addresses to a deceased husband or wife: "I am pleased to invite you and your wife/husband to join in the celebration of my birthday. Andrejs Upītis."

One day before the big event, I got a call from the rock café, saying that several men in tights had showed up and claimed they had to perform that evening. They had mentioned my name. The employees sounded worried, because in half an hour, the opening of Fēlikss Ķīgelis concert tour was to be held, featuring the single "Fairy Tale." They didn't want the event turn into a gay pride celebration. "It's not a pride event, it's a cabaret," I

tried to explain, in vain. After an hour I managed to get in touch the group of poets, but they told me not to worry: they had long since been having drinks at the Merry Fox.

Upītis' birthday party turned out to be fantastic. During the prose karaoke event, the microphone was passed around the room. The party at the Merry Fox only seemed to benefit the "Broken Heart" performance, and the result was very sincere, indeed. The fake bearskins on the walls of the café looked like kitschy piles of unhappiness who had just been told that The Luck Bear doesn't exist, which is why they were so sadly deflated. Of course, some people arrived late, some didn't arrive at all because they had confused the dates, the video projector didn't work during one of the performances, and most of the installations had been consumed before

midnight. We were happy anyway. The party reached its peak when the birthday boy himself turned up in an elegant top hat and tails, loudly complain-

ing that he wasn't allowed to smoke in the café. A respected literary critic immediately offered him her e-cigarette, and very soon Upītis was happily blowing large amounts of smoke that smelled of cherries. Then all the guests sang his favourite song, "Sift the Oats, My Girl," after which they queued up for autographs and selfies. Parties where the main surprise is the arrival of the celebrant are very uncommon. It's an even bigger surprise when the celebrant arrives after the party is over.

The real problems began the next day, when I received a bitter text from Valērijs Belokoņs: "Could you really not have sent me an invitation?" I considered that to be a rhetorical question and didn't reply. On the street, I saw several people who walked past as if they didn't know me. One day

On the street, I saw several people who walked past as if they didn't know me.



Writing desk in Andrejs Upītis museum, Rīga, Brīvības str.

later, the director of the largest publishing house sent me an official letter, asking me to explain how I chose the artists who appeared at Upītis' birthday party and why she hadn't been asked to approve the list. She said that at least three or four good Latvian authors hadn't received invitations. A journalist from Latvia's most trusted media outlet launched a debate on Facebook in an attempt to find out who was behind the birthday party and how exactly the artists and guests were selected. I spent a full day chatting with her on the portal, and at the end of the day I could put together a list – "100 Things I Could Have Done Differently" or "100 Things That Could Have Been Done Differently If You Had The Same Foreign Experience That I Have." Several people rang me personally to say that they absolutely did not need invitations to the party, telling me that next time they should be given a chance to review the planned programme and guest

list in advance. The more the media wrote about the event, the more offended everyone was. The main question: WHY WASN'T I INVITED?

More than six months later, I attended a seminar called "A Review of Latvia's Centenary Celebrations: A Success Story." I went there with a friend who had convinced me to attend the event because after the seminar there would be a fancy banquet with wine, salmon, canapes and lampreys. It would have everything, as is always the case with Latvians!

"One of the most brilliant events of the centenary turned out to be a party to celebrate Andrejs Upītis' birthday at a rock café, and I really must thank the Teterēvs Foundation very much for it..." began a story told by a woman from the Office Latvia 100 and everyone applauded her statement most eagerly, indeed.



At the White Tablecloth

TEXT **Baiba Petrenko**

PHOTO **Reinis Oliņš**

My relationship to patriotism, love of my country and a sense of belonging in Latvia emerged during my childhood in the 1990s. Almost every literature class at school discussed seven centuries of slavery. The teacher's eyes gleamed, and we poorly hid our glee over the exaltation with which this topic was discussed. Latvia was like a mama—self-evident and beloved, no matter what kind of mama it was. It was too close for me to reflect on it. Latvia's youth, adventures and past were incomprehensible to me. I learned that there are often very different definitions, expressions and

attributes in terms of patriotism. My father is a patriot when he watches hockey games. My brother takes part in song festivals and corrects those with incorrect grammar. My grandmother knits socks with Latvian symbols. My aunt sings in a choir, boys in my class beat up Russians at discotheques, a classmate has a tattoo of the Tree of Austra, and so on. When I asked my mama how she engages in Latvian lifestyle, she replied that she sorts waste.

A year ago I accepted a zero waste lifestyle. It means trying to live without refuse, and I linked that to my sense of

responsibility in terms of my son. It didn't seem radical; sorting waste was customary at my parents' home, and that was true ever since this service was offered in Latvia. First, we re-evaluate consumption to decide what we can get rid of. Our choices relate to our true needs, and we move away from the culture of using single use objects.

My home, country and planet used to be abstract concepts that I didn't view with much logic, but now they seem inseparable, and an equal sign can be placed among all of them. Before I began to re-evaluate the influence of my choices in terms of space, I also thought less about time – the influence of the past on my life today and the influence of today on my future. I had never thought much about the future or the amount of time that hasn't yet occurred and is incomprehensible and mysterious. Carrying on in the world through my offspring, however, means that my personal time becomes longer, and so information about a middle-aged crisis is no longer an abstract and scientific fantasy. It is reality that awaits my child. Right now these are attitudes that cannot be kept separate from everyday choices.

When I cultivate these ideas, I have a much clearer sense of contradictions between individual or social values and actions. We teach our children not to drop rubbish on the ground and to make sure that the surrounding environment is clean. If, however, we place the waste in a receptacle meant for it, the waste does not disappear. It ends up in the same environment that we want to protect. Yes, this happens in a particularly organised and controlled manner, but it is just limited, it doesn't eliminate its negative influence. We love the Baltic

Sea seashore, for instance, but each summer we harm it by accidentally sinking a few hundred plastic containers or ice cream wrappers that are very easily blown into the sea from the overflowing garbage receptacles. There are endless examples of this kind of thing. This may be symptomatic in terms of the collective inability to see links, and it is stupid to hope that this might change. Still, I hope that individuals develop social processes and that yearning for linkages to the consequences of people's activities can be broader than it seems. All that is sometimes lacking is the first bit of encouragement and guidance. When I wanted to reduce my dependency on consumption, friends offered me advice on zero waste. I know that these are collective efforts that

When I asked my mama how she engages in Latvian lifestyle, she replied that she sorts waste.

continue to be an inviolable component of the process.

I am always astonished when someone declares that he or she does not like nature. It is clear that depending on the context,

this could mean these people don't like to be outside. They're afraid of insects or snakes, sand in their shoes, wind that crawls behind their clothing, etc. Still, this is like claiming that I don't like to breathe or that I don't like the beating of my heart. We ourselves are nature, and disliking nature sounds like self-denial. I don't think that everyone should love nature, but it seems that remembering that we cannot exist without it is a fairly fundamental principle for our survival. Nurturing the environment cannot be just a hobby for those who are enthusiastic about biology. As long as we are concerned about the survival of ourselves, our successors, our country and our planet, this must be on the agenda of every single person.

The good news is that lives that

minimally harm the environment are possible, and they can be connected to a modern lifestyle. Our understanding of what is normal and acceptable changes quickly, particularly today. If we do not want to lose biological diversity, clean drinking water and the quality of earth and air irreversibly, then the level of information on environmental preservation must increase rapidly. I am interested in this, and so my Facebook wall offers me countless bits of information about ecology each and every day. It would be naïve, however, to think that most people are equally informed. The TvNet website recently published a story about how waste can be reduced, and soon after people I know and

people I don't know alike told me that they had never thought about that. I recently thought that the only thing I can do is look helplessly at statistics about pollution and at the idea that the environment can only be protected by changes in legisla-

tion and greater responsibility on the part of manufacturers, not by individual consumers. Now, however, I know that if we reduce consumption and observe secondary use and waste-sorting principles, then the amount of waste that cannot be recycled can be reduced to the size of a single bucket every year. Public interest in responsible and sustainable consumption is on the rise, and that means that there are inspirational initiatives in terms of facilitating this.

Holidays are an appropriate time to train the harmony between our activities and our values. This particularly applies to national holidays during which we celebrate our country, its independence and freedom, and its forests, rivers and beaches. The

ways in which we can balance our activities and values are trivial, everyday and humble. This means decorating our home with natural elements, not decorations that we buy at a department store. It means buying an elegant dress from a shop that sells used clothing. It means taking the train when visiting others, as opposed to driving a car. It means cooking our own meals, as opposed to ready-made meals packaged in plastic. One of the most important lessons I have learned when reducing waste is that everyday things that seem unimportant take up an essential part of our lives, so it is important to be responsible for this and to be concerned about those things that are precious to us.

As long as we are concerned about the survival of ourselves, our successors, our country and our planet, this must be on the agenda of every single person.

Patriotism and nationalism are of secondary importance in terms of how I love Latvia, although I welcome the privilege of living in an independent country, and I feel a sense of cultural and historical belonging in my country.

Still, far stronger emotions about this country appear in me when I think about our small country shaped like a slice of bitten bread here on planet Earth. I want my son to experience the things that make Latvia so special – clean and biologically diverse beaches, forests in which thousands of birds sing, meadows that are home to thousands of insects, and the changing seasons, each of which has its own smell and feeling. I don't know whether my efforts to nurture nature will ensure this. Probably not, unless these efforts become collective. Still, it is at least a way of life that brings together our activities and our values.

