

Lithuanian presence in the first Latvian opera *Baņuta*. Some interesting facts in Latvian music history

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ABSTRACT. In the text (original) of the first Latvian opera *Baņuta* (libretto's author Artūrs Krūmiņš, composer Alfrēds Kalniņš, 1919/1920) the action takes place in Lithuania. According to opera's libretto, the main characters' names (*Baņuta*, *Daumants*, *Valgudis*, *Vīžutis*, *Maiga*, *Zvantevaitis*, *Zvalgonis*, *Jargala*, *Reda*), the gods' names (*Pērkons/Perkūnas*, *Pikols/Pikuolas*, *Patrimps/Patrimpas*) and several words, for example, *kunigas* and *krīvs* – are of both Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish (also Old Prussian) origin. This article is about the history of the creation of the libretto of the opera *Baņuta* and presents an analysis of the cultural-historical context's impact on the opera's staging practice in Latvia and abroad in the 20th century.

KEYWORDS: first Latvian opera *Baņuta*, Lithuanian presence in the opera's libretto, cultural-historical context impact.

Introduction

The date May 29, 1920 is a significant date in Latvian music history. On this day was the premiere of the first Latvian opera *Baņuta*. The composer of this opera is Alfrēds Kalniņš (1879–1951).

According to Latvian music historiography Kalniņš is a founder of the Latvian national opera and the finest early 20th-century Latvian composer of solo songs. He has also enriched a variety of genres – piano, organ, orchestral, ballet and choral music, as well as arrangements of folk music – with his romantically unrestrained use of poetic imagery and subtly picturesque treatment of the folk idiom. A pupil of Anatoly Lyadov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory (1897–1900), Kalniņš preferred the delicate expression of moods in miniatures, an approach whose roots and analogues can also be traced to the national schools of Northern European composers – in the works of Edward Grieg (1843–1907), Selim Palmgren (1878–1951), and Erkki Melartin (1875–1937).

Numbering over 100, his works for choir are often narrative and ballad-like, lyrical-epic in nature, with a dramatic pathos and a joyful enthusiasm inspired by the social struggle of his time. In the period up to 1918 Kalniņš' choral works sometimes touch on the genre of the Latvian romantic ballad, but in his poetic perception he also makes use

of idyllic pastoral scenes, painted in his own dreamy or mournful fashion, where nature often appears as a personification of his native land. Most of his over 120 folk song arrangements for voice and piano were written in the 1920s, whereas the 1930s and 1940s saw the creation of his most important choral arrangements, about 40 in all. In his arrangements, Kalniņš respects the harmonies based on natural folkloric scales, yet he also employs chromatic elements for harmonic colour and favours a rich choral texture.

In the 1920s, Kalniņš worked for a short time at the Latvian National Opera, produced the first performances of his operas *Baņuta* (1919/1920) and *Salinieki* (1926), and gave organ recitals. During this period his national romantic musical style became even more picturesque, refined and expressionistic. His development continued during his years in New York (1927–1933), when his orchestral, piano and organ works were also influenced by constructivism, although this did not affect his choral music¹.

Like a number of other nations and national music history since the 19th century, Kalniņš opera *Baņuta* is also based on the imaginary ancient events of the past, which also includes some elements of national mythology and reflects several trends in the style of late Romanticism (Wagner's musical drama, French-Russian (especially Tchaikovsky) lyrical opera, fairy-tale opera). However, some aspects make the example of the first Latvian national opera very particular. What is this specific aspect?

In the libretto of the opera the following words appear: *action time: the Lithuania-Latvia in the ancient past*². In turn, in the opera's premiere of 1920, the relevant scenes were sung with the following text. In the first act the wedding of the new king Daumants and Baņuta takes place. Daumants introduces his bride to the old king, his father, and the people, and he sings³:

Pār **Lietuvu** ērglis lidoja,
viņš biedreni ligzdai meklēja.
Pie jūras tas viņu atrada,
caur gaisiem uz spārniem atnesa.
Tēvs Valgudi, **kunigas** lielais,
ja tu viņu pieņemi,
kar apkārt tai dzintara rotu,
to par Baņutu sauci!

An eagle flew over **Lithuania**
searching for a mate for his nest.
He found her by the sea,
carried her home on his wings.
Father Valgudis, great **kunigas**,
if you accept her,
adorn her with an amber necklace
and call her: Baņuta!

- 1 Alfrēds Kalniņš. <<http://lmic.lv/core.php?pageId=747&cid=284&profile=1>> [Accessed on 2014 01 07].
- 2 *Baņuta*. Opera četros cēlienos, librets [Opera in the four acts, libretto]. Rīga: Neldnera apgāds, 1920.
- 3 Opera libretto in English (translator Biruta Sūrmane) is published in: *Baņuta: pirmā latviešu opera / the first Latvian national opera / die erste Lettische nationale Oper*. Rīga: Elpa, 1999.

Second act (at the end of the first act, Daumants is killed in a duel). The women's choir sings a funeral song with the following text:

Vaimanā, vaimanā, **Lietuva!**
Nava vairs varoņa kuniga!
Ceļā viņš dosies drīz tālajā,
bāļajo ēnu valstībā.

Weep, weep, **Lithuania!**
Your heroic kunigas is no more!
He's embarking on a long journey,
to the kingdom of pale shades.

However, the old king Valgudis sings that the murderer must be found in Lithuania:

Nav zināms viņa slepkava,
tas **Lietuvā** vēl dzīvs!

His murderer isn't known,
he's still alive in **Lithuania!**

Then the old king and people demand that Baņuta should take an oath to exact revenge, and afterwards they sing:

Koris:
Tavu zvērestu dzird **Lietuva**
un tās augstie un varenie garī!

Chorus:
Your oath is heard by **Lithuania**
and her high and mighty spirits!

Valgudis:
Tad zvēri vēl, ka nemīlēsi
tu cita vīra **Lietuvā**,
līdz kuniga tu neatribesi,
līdz nebūs kritis slepkava!

Valgudis:
Then swear again that you won't love
another man in **Lithuania**
until you avenge the kunigas,
until the assassin is slain!

In continuation the old king and the people (choir) sing the following texts, which include the word *Lithuania* as reference to the place of action:

Baņuta, celies! Meklē slepkavu!
Lūko kunigu atriebtu!
Dzenā slepkavu **Lietuvā**,
Nokauj, ja satiec pat svētnīcā!
Romoves birzes ziedus kad ver,
asmenis tavs lai asinis dzer!

Baņuta, rise up! Pursue the assassin!
Seek to avenge the kunigas!
Hunt the assassin throughout
Lithuania, Slay him, though you meet in
a sanctuary!
When flowers burst into bloom in Romove,
let your dagger's blade drink blood!

Being acquainted with the libretto text, of course, we may ask such questions. Why in the first Latvian national opera does the action consistently take place in Lithuania?

In searching for the answers to this question we behold a number of interesting nuances of Latvian music history at the beginning of the 20th century. In the continuation of this article, at first we will look at the history of the creation of the libretto for the opera *Baņuta*. Then we will analyze the cultural-historical context's impact on the opera's stage productions in the 20th century in Latvia and abroad.

History of the creation of the first Latvian opera libretto

In 1903, Riga's Latvian Society announced a competition to create the first Latvian opera libretto. The competition rules contained this condition: "The poet can choose any topic for the opera's libretto, but it is desirable that it be taken from Latvian or Lithuanian history, legends, and fairy tales"⁴. Thus, the rules clearly indicate that it is desirable to orientate oneself not only towards Latvian, but also on Lithuanian topical cultural themes. According to a variety of sources of information, six or eight librettos were submitted as part of the competition. In the autumn of 1905, the only prize (second prize) in the competition was awarded to the poet-amateur, also an architecture student at the Riga Polytechnic Institute, Artūrs Krūmiņš (1879–1969), for his libretto *Baņuta*⁵. Other prizes in this competition were not awarded, and from today's viewpoint this proved to be a very interesting situation in Latvian music history⁶.

In this libretto competition one text (under the title *Lāčplēšis and Spīdola*) was also submitted by one of the greatest Latvian poets (also a significant politician) of all time – Rainis (real name Jānis Pliekšāns, 1865–1929). Due to one formality – Rainis had already published a fragment of his libretto – the competition commission rejected Rainis' text. However, later Rainis' libretto became the basis for one of the most famous Latvian drama examples in the 20th century. It is a drama titled *Fire and Night* (*Uguns un Nakts*) and it symbolically tells the story about the Latvian nation and the idea about an independent Latvian state. Before World War I Rainis' drama *Fire and Night* became an inspiration for another Latvian composer, Jānis Mediņš (1890–1966), who created (in 1920) a *second first* Latvian opera of the same title as Rainis' drama. Rainis was a great poet, but Artūrs Krūmiņš was just an amateur. However, the only award in the libretto

4 *Baltijas Vēstnesis*. 1903, March 12.

5 *Vērotājs*. 1905, October 1.

6 Architect Artūrs Krūmiņš played an important role in Latvian cultural history. After graduating from the Riga Polytechnic Institute in 1907 he worked in Moscow. In 1920 Krūmiņš became an Associate Professor at the Latvian University, from 1940 until his death he was a Professor. From 1936 to 1940 Krūmiņš led the Riga Building Commission; he has prepared projects for several buildings in the city centre. Krūmiņš is also the author of several books about Latvian architecture and building.

competition was given to Krūmiņš. In addition, he almost exactly executed all the contest rules and recommendations.

The libretto for the opera *Baņuta* consists of four acts. The first act begins with the wedding – the marriage of the prince of Romove Daumants with princess Baņuta from another land. However, where is Baņuta from? The libretto text does not give an answer to this question. However in the opera's first act there is a scene featuring Baņuta's ballad. There is some indication that Baņuta previously lived by the sea, allowing the imagination to create a presumption that she could be either Lithuanian or Latvian:

*Aiz mežiem, aiz dzīļiem stāv vientuļa
pils – tur jūrmalā vilnis plūst debesu zils,
un puķes tur smaržo un klusumā zied,
un klausās, kā jūra
tām teikas dzied!
Tur meži tik dīvaini šalko, auž vakari
miglu tur valgo.
Klusi kad iemirdzas zvaigznītes, pirmās
dainas tur dziedāju es!
Te parādās vīri, iekalti bruņās, to vare-
nie zirgi grimst dumbrajā.
Kā vētra tie klāt, ko sargāt, glābt?
Skan taures un kareivju sauc, bet naid-
nieka pulku tik daudz,
Drīz nāve un apsmiekls draud
Te pērkons sāk debešos graut,
Tur Daumants glābējs mums nāca!
Rīb bungas, grauj taures,
kviēc dūkas, šņāc bultas,
zviedz zirgi, vaid vīri,
šķind šķēpi, cērt cirvji,
un briesmas jau naidnieku baida,
jau nāve to gaida!
To pulkiem klāts, asinīm
izmazgāts kūp kaujas lauks!*

*Beyond deep woods a lonely castle stands,
sky-blue waters lap the seashore,
fragrant flowers silently bloom,
listening to tales which the sea sings to them!
There the woods rustle strangely,
evenings weave damp mist.
When stars begin twinkling quietly
There I sang my first songs!
Suddenly men appear, armour-clad,
their mighty steeds stomping through
quagmire, like a whirlwind they're here
where's shelter and rescue?
Trumpets sound, summoning warriors,
but the enemy is a legion...
Death and dishonour threaten...
Then thunder growled in the sky,
Daumants arrived to the rescue!
Rumbling drums, snarling trumpets,
squealing bagpipes, hissing arrows,
neighing horses, moaning men,
clanging spears, striking hatchets,
Danger terrifies the enemy,
Death is lurking nearby!
Covered with enemy corpses
The blood-soaked battlefield reeks!*

The first act ends with a duel, in which Daumants is killed by the hand of the stranger, Vižutis. Vižutis avenged his sister's Jargala's honour, which has soured Daumants. In the second act the people of Romove, referring to the (probably, imagined) ancient gods – Pērkons and Pīkols – given signs, consider that Baņuta as a foreigner is guilty and needs to be burned together with the killed Daumants. A sign of rescue is sent to Baņuta, which the people perceive as being sent from Daumants. Baņuta swears

to avenge Daumants' death. The opera's third and fourth acts represent the situation during midsummer feasts (*Līgo*), and also represent rituals for the ancient gods *Līga*, *Praurima*, *Patrimpus*. *Baņuta* falls in love with *Vīžutis*. In order to fulfil the oath, *Baņuta* and *Vīžutis* commit suicide⁷. Thus, a tragic finale.

According to the opera's libretto, the action unfolds in Romove. What is Romove? Today, in ancient Baltic mythology research (based on the perceptions about Western Balts or Old Prussians and Eastern Balts or ancient Latvians and Lithuanians before Christianization), this place is described as a possible sacred site mentioned in texts from a century ago located at a place called Nadruva.

For example, the medieval German (Teutonic Knight) priest-brother and chronicler Peter von Dusburg (who lived at the end of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century) in his *Chronicon terrae Prussiae* described Romuva or Romowe as a pagan place of worship (a temple or a sacred area) in the western part of Sambia and Nadruva, one of the regions of pagan Prussia⁸. In contemporary sources the temple was mentioned only once by Peter von Dusburg in his *Chronicon terrae Prussiae*, 1326 (Dusburg 1984). According to his account, *Kriwe*, the chief priest or *pagan pope*, lived at Romuva and ruled over the religion of all the ancient Balts. Overall, this place was of the Old Prussian land, nowadays it is part of the Russian Kaliningrad County territory. Whether there really was such a place, called Romove, and whether there was an ancient Baltic people's temple there is not clearly known. However, the idea of the existence of such a sacred spot in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century was popular in Latvian and Lithuanian society (Gimbutas 1963; Bojtár 1999).

In the period of the first national awakening of the 19th century, in the 1870s–1880s the first nationally significant examples of Latvian literature emerged. These examples reflected what was written in previous centuries, mainly in German, about the ancient Baltic peoples – Old Prussians, Lithuanians and Latvians – and the culture of the ancient past. Two of the first Latvian National Awakening period's vivid Latvian poets – Auseklis (real name Miķelis Krogzemis, 1850–1879) and Andrejs Pumpurs (1841–1902) created such texts, which reflected the nowadays well-known ancient elements of Baltic mythology (gods, rituals, etc.) of transformation in the form of subjective artistic fantasy. Thus, the opinion that the ancient Latvians have their own mythology, and that it was largely closely related to Lithuanian mythology, was well known in the early 20th cen-

7 *Baņuta*. Opera četros cēlienos, librets [Opera in four acts, libretto]. Rīga: Neldnera apgāds, 1920.

8 Simas Sužiedėlis, ed. (1970–1978). Romuva. *Encyclopedia Lituanica* IV. Boston, Massachusetts: Juozas Kapočius, p. 530.

tury in Latvian society. However, it still does not fully explain why in the first Latvian opera's libretto the action unfolds in Lithuania, rather than in Latvia.

Obviously, this idea, which was widely represented in national romantic Latvian literature was also known to Artūrs Krūmiņš and Alfrēds Kalniņš. In addition, the author of the libretto reflected this idea in his text. There is only one slight nuance. In accordance with national romantic notions, Romove was not in Latvian territory, thus the libretto author defined Lithuania as the setting, as Lithuanian lands were closer to Romove than any Latvian lands. The result was a romantic opera libretto in which the action unfolds in the ancient Lithuanian-Latvian past, in the legendary and, probably imaginary, place of Romove. A place which represents two ancient Baltic nations – the Latvians and Lithuanians.

Of course, this approach also reflects a very eclectic opera storyline. It was very aptly commented by the well-known Latvian émigré composer and critic Longīns Apkalns (1923–1999) in one of his publications in the seventies in Germany: “In general, if we analyze *Baņuta*, by harnessing ethnic geographic touchstones this story reveals quite amazing things. The opera's 1st and 2nd acts represent persons with Lithuanian words, thus, the action takes place in Lithuania [it needs to be clarified that Romove is located in ancient Prussia, at the border of contemporary Lithuania – J. K.]. The 3rd and 4th acts take place in Romove, which, to our knowledge, was in Prussia. These conditions, however, do not prevent everyone from singing purely Latvian Līgo songs at Latvian midsummer feasts”⁹.

This aspect (the eclectic libretto storyline) also brightly illustrates the main characters' names of the opera:

- Valgudis** – old **kunigas** (king) of Romove
- Daumants** – his son, the new **kunigas** (king) of Romove
- Maiga** – Valgudis' daughter, princess of Romove
- Baņuta** – princess from another land and another tribe (maybe from Latvia?), Daumants' wife, the new **kunigaitē** (queen) of Romove
- Vīzūtis (-ts)** – stranger who came from other places to avenge his sister's **Jargala's** (only mentioned in the text) honour which has soured Daumants
- Zvantevaiļis** – commander of the Romove army
- Zvalgonis** – ceremony master of Romove **kunigas'** court
- Sorcerer** – name not mentioned in the libretto
- Krīvu-krīvs** – principal priest of Romove's Holy Grove
- Reda** – Daumants' dead mother, the old **kunigaitē** (only mentioned in the text)

9 Pirmās latviešu oriģināloperas premjeras piecdesmitajā gadskārtā [50th anniversary of the first Latvian opera's premiere]. *Latvju mūzika*, No 3, 1970.

Interestingly, according to the opera's libretto the names of purely Lithuanian origin are *Daumants*, *Zvantevaitis* and *Reda*. The names of Lithuanian and Latvian origin are *Maiga*, *Valgudis*, *Vižutis*, *Zvalgonis* and *Krīvs* (priest). The old name *kunigas* (as *king*, *sir* etc.) also undoubtedly originates from the Lithuanian language. The female name *Jargala* might be adopted from the Old Prussian language or Polish. In addition, the ancient gods' names (*Pērkons/Perkūnas*, *Patrimps/Patrimpas*, *Pikols/Pikuolas*) are represented in the Old Prussian, Latvian and Lithuanian mythology. Finally, of great intrigue even today is the origin of the protagonist's name from the opera's title.

The female name *Baņuta* is not clearly of Latvian origin. In the history of Latvian personal words, and in calendars, this word only appeared in the early 20th century. In earlier studies (in Latvia) about this opera it has been written that the female name *Baņuta* is also of Lithuanian descent. However, those studying this issue have failed to reach a common ground. Making comparisons in some earlier, less well-known publications, I have developed my own hypothesis about the origin of the word *Baņuta*. In 1979, the Latvian musicologist Vija Briede (1934–1987; in 1975 she issued a monograph about the history of Latvian opera) published a small article in which she relied on new facts about the history of the creation of the libretto for the opera *Baņuta*.

She drew attention to what had been written in one interview with the libretto's author Artūrs Krūmiņš. In this interview Krūmiņš expressed the following words: "The word *Baņuta* for me has remained in my memory from one old magazine which I saw in my childhood. There was a painting in gray shades. In this painting there was a young girl; she was dead. Below this painting the girl's name was written – *Baņuta*. I remembered this name forever. Therefore my libretto is titled *Baņuta*"¹⁰.

In turn, the Latvian musicologist Briede found this magazine. In 1885, in a Riga magazine *Rota*, a novel was published in Latvian under the title *The New Hero (Jaunais varonis)*. The musicologist Briede wrote that the author of this novel is a 19th-century Lithuanian writer Jāzeps Kraševskis¹¹. However, in terms of this fact the Latvian musicologist made a mistake. This romantic epic novel's author is the well-known 19th-century Polish writer Jozef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812–1887)¹². In addition, the original name of this novel is not *The New Hero*, but – attention – *Kunigas!* The novel's action

10 Vtoryc'hnoye poyavlenye pervoy latishkoy operi *Banuta* [First Latvian opera's *Baņuta* second appearance]. [Riga] *Segodnya vecherom*, 1937, October 6.

11 Vija Briede. Par drāmas būtību *Baņutā* [For the essence of the drama in opera *Baņuta*]. *Ciņa*, 1979, August 23.

12 Jozef Ignacy Kraszewski. <<http://www.ignacy.kraszewski.pl/index.html>> [Accessed on 2014 01 07].

unfolds in 14th-century Poland and Lithuania and the novel's only heroine's name is *Baniuta*. The other hero's names in Polish are as follows:

Lithuanians:

Marger-Jerzy; **Baniuta**-Barbara; Rymos; Szwentas; Reda;
Walgutis; Wižunas; Jargała; Konis – wejdalota Perkuna

Teutonic Knights:

Brat Bernard; Brat Sylwester; Luder; Siegfried von Ortlopp;
Gmunda Lewen; Dietrich von Pynau; Ojciec Antoniusz

We can clearly see that names such as *Baņuta*, *Valgudis*, *Vižutis*, *Reda*, *Jargala* in the first Latvian national opera's libretto have been directly adapted from the Kraszewski novel. Kraszewski's novel's storyline is not followed in Krūmiņš' opera libretto. However, it is important to note that in Kraszewski's novella there are some references to ancient Baltic mythology and religious rituals (for example, *Konis – wejdalota Perkuna*). Thus, the female name *Baņuta* can be seen as a name that was encountered in the Lithuanian and Polish languages. Incidentally, the first time the female name *Baņuta* was published in the Latvian calendar was in 1910¹³. It is significant that this calendar was issued in Latgale, which is one of the historical regions of Latvia. As is well known, Latgale was for several centuries (1561–1772) under the rule of the former Polish-Lithuanian state (*Rzeczpospolita*).

Thus, in terms of the place of action, separate words and the characters' names, Lithuania is greatly represented in the first Latvian national opera. What a paradox! In the early 20th century, after World War I, the Baltic States emerged based on a strong nationalistic ideology. In this context, of special importance have always been the first examples of all the classic art genres. Perhaps this is why the first Latvian opera libretto soon underwent a change.

The opera's changes over time

It is interesting that after the opera's first staging in the 1920s, Latvian music critics paid no special attention to the fact that the opera's action unfolds in ancient Lithuania, not in Latvia. However, in the second staging of the opera in 1937 the word *Lithuania* disappeared from the libretto (for example, not *Weep, weep, Lithuania!*, but *Weep, weep, fatherland!*, etc.). What were the reasons for this? Neither the author of the libretto, nor

13 Siliņš, Klāvs. *Latviešu personvārdu vārdnīca* [Dictionary of Latvian personal names]. Rīga, LPSR ZA A. Upīša Valodas un literatūras institūts, 1990.

the composer has commented on this situation in their texts. However, a number of their contemporaries' memories nowadays leads to the conclusion that the word *Lithuania* disappeared from the opera's text in relation with the Latvian nationalist ideological boom in the 1930s. This was the time when the Latvian-dominated authoritarian regime under Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942) was in power (1934–1940).

Musicologist Joahims Brauns (1929–2013), who in the 1970s emigrated from Latvia (as a former Soviet Union territory) to the West (later to Israel), in one of the articles in the Latvian émigré press has pointed out the following facts. In the middle of the 1930s a dispute escalated between Latvia and Lithuania about the maritime border. Moreover, this fact was one of the main reasons why censors focused attention on the word *Lithuania* in the opera and requested that it be eliminated from the libretto¹⁴.

Thus, the word *Lithuania* was dropped from the libretto. However, the name of the place of action remained – Romove, as did the main characters with names of Lithuanian origin, and the former commentary in the libretto's annotation – the action unfolds in the ancient past of Lithuania-Latvia, and it was this censored version of text that the opera *Baņuta* was known as in its performances in the history of the second half of the 20th century. This serves as a clear sign of how certain events in the past have an impact on a work of art. However, the story of the Lithuanian aspect in the first Latvian opera does not end there. The unexpected part of this aspect appears in the staging history of this opera in the second half of the 20th century.

Until today, Alfrēds Kalniņš's opera *Baņuta* has been staged in Latvia seven times:

1920, May 29, Latvian National Opera (1st version of the finale)

Baņuta – Dagmāra Rozenberga-Tursa, *Vižutis* – Rūdolfs Bērziņš,
conductor Alfrēds Kalniņš

1937, October 7, Latvian National Opera (1st version of the finale)

Baņuta – Milda Brehmane-Štengele, *Vižutis* – Nikolajs Vasiļjevs,
conductor Jānis Kalniņš

1941, June 9, Latvian National Opera (2nd version of the finale)

Baņuta – Milda Brehmane-Štengele, *Vižutis* – Arturs Priednieks-Kavarra,
conductor Jānis Kalniņš

1953, October 25, Latvian National Opera (2nd version of the finale)

Baņuta – Regīna Māliņa (Frinberga), *Vižutis* – Andris Skara, conductor Edgars Tons

14 Joahims Brauns. *Baņuta* Minsterē [*Baņuta* in Münster]. In: *Latvija*. 1984, August 20.

1968, September 23, Latvian National Opera (2nd version of the finale)
Baņuta – Regīna Frinberga, *Vižutis* – Kārlis Zariņš, conductor Rihards Glāzups

1979, June 20, Latvian National Opera (1st version of the finale)
Baņuta – Rita Zelmane, *Vižutis* – Kārlis Zariņš, conductor Aleksandrs Viļumanis

1999, August 21 (2nd version of the finale)
Opera's alfresco staging in Zosēni (only one performance)
Baņuta – Zigrīda Krīgere, *Vižutis* – Miervaldis Jenčs, conductor Aleksandrs Viļumanis

The opera has been played twice in Latvia as a concert performance:

1999, September 17, Latvian National Opera,
only one concert performance (1st version of the finale)
Baņuta – Zigrīda Krīgere, *Vižutis* – Kārlis Zariņš, conductor Aleksandrs Viļumanis

2003, June 26, only one concert performance,
Riga's Latvian Society House (1st version of the finale)
Baņuta – Zigrīda Krīgere, *Vižutis* – Miervaldis Jenčs, conductor Andrejs Jansons

In turn, proof of how the historical situation directly impacted the art genre, which is very open to different interpretations, is confirmed by the fact that in 1940 this opera's new finale (the second version) was created. After the Latvian occupation (from the former USSR) in 1940, a new staging of *Baņuta* was held in Moscow. However, the 1930s and 1940s in the former Soviet Union were known for the popular ideas about the tragic conflict arising over exclusion of artwork. According to Communist Party ideologist Andrey Zhdanov, writings from that time exerting a tragic conflict in artwork cannot inspire Soviet people to lead a happy life. Therefore, the Soviet censorship demanded of the composer and librettist to create a new, optimistic finale for this opera. According to the new version, the two lovers – *Baņuta* and *Vižutis* – are released from the oath the people and escape vengeance, and they can happily live on (Briede 1975).

This kind of solution for the finale is contrary to the opera's text and the overall concept of the musical dramaturgy. However, the composer created a very vivid closing choir which the audience liked. Thus, until today two radically different final scenes for this opera are accepted. In the first case, the two main characters (*Baņuta* and *Vižutis*) commit suicide, in the second case they are saved and are happy. In this aspect, in the history of the opera's staging there have been interesting situations, such as below.

For example, in 1979, after a long intermission *Baņuta* was staged with the first, original finale version. However, when in 1980 the Latvian National Opera gave a guest appearance in Moscow, it was decided to stage the second version of the finale at the *Bolschoi Theatre* (Briede 1987). In 1999, in summer, when there was an outdoor staging of this opera in the village where the libretto author was born, the opera was played with the second version of the finale. In turn, a month later, this opera's concert performance was held at the Latvian National Opera, played with the first version of the finale. However, in all cases after World War II, the commentary remains unchanged – action unfolds in the ancient past of Lithuania-Latvia.

After World War II, beyond Latvia's borders, the émigré composer and conductor Andrejs Jansons (b. 1938, he lives in New York) inspired and conducted three concert performances of this opera:

1982, June 5, in New York's Carnegie Hall

New York Latvian Choir, orchestra, soloists, conductor Andrejs Jansons

1983, June 30, in Milwaukee, USA

New York Latvian Choir, orchestra, soloists, conductor Andrejs Jansons

1984, July, in Münster, Germany

New York Latvian Choir, orchestra, soloists, conductor Andrejs Jansons

Interestingly, in all these three stagings of the opera the first (original) libretto text version was used, which includes the word *Lithuania*. Major roles in the opera were sung by famous foreign singers. *Baņuta*'s role in Latvian (!) was sung by the famous soloist of the New York Metropolitan Opera in the 1970s, Maralin Niska (b. 1926). Italian opera singers Michael Fiacco and Aron Bergelli played *Vīžutis*. In turn, émigré Lithuanian opera singer Algis Grigas (b. 1935) appeared in one performance as *Vīžutis* and in two performances as *Daumants*. In its time, in the Latvian émigré press Andrejs Jansons said that the libretto's original version was of actual importance because it reflected interesting poetic peculiarities. When a Lithuanian singer was invited, there were expectations that this fact would be interesting for the émigré Lithuanian audience and, as written in several publications in the émigré Latvian press at the time, these expectations were at least partially fulfilled¹⁵.

15 Skaņas un atskaņas [Event review]. *Jaunā Gaita*. No 145, 1983.

Conclusion

The first Latvian national opera is a very good example regarding the characterization of a work of art and its context in different aspects. The text of this opera includes specific perceptions on the Latvian and Lithuanian mythological past from the beginning of the 20th century. Why have such perceptions in Latvian society emerged and why do they exist – this topic offers very good potential for its implementation in cultural history-related researches. This opera is also a perfect illustration as to how, in the context of various events, the opera's text has been changed, as well as our understanding of it.

After the last staging in 1979, since the 1980s the opera *Baņuta* has fallen out of the Latvian National Opera repertoire. This raises the question – maybe this opera is nowadays just a historical fact? However, the situation is dual – many who are familiar with this opera's music evaluate its artistic and stylistic qualities very positively. However, the last thirty years' triumph is experienced in the so-called *Director's Theatre* in the Latvian National Opera house (led under this tendency by apologist Andrejs Žagars (b. 1958) from 1996 until 2013), and according to this concept, the first Latvian National opera may be perceived as probably inappropriate for interesting staging. Such opinion is also reflected by the dramaturge of the Latvian National Opera, musicologist Mikus Čeže (b. 1972; when Andrejs Žagars was in power he was one of the former Latvian National Opera house director allies). In 2009, broadcast on some Latvian Radio programme, Čeže expressed this kind of opinion: "At least for me the opera *Baņuta* is associated with ancient braids-plaits and an orphan, who has been kidnapped by Lithuanian robbers. It alienates me from this opera. If somebody like a talented director would appear who would be able to show this opera as fresh and interesting, then perhaps our viewpoint will change"¹⁶.

So, time passes, but *Baņuta* on the opera's stage in Latvia has still not been performed and this situation allows us to ask this kind of provocative question. Perhaps someone would be interested in staging the first Latvian National Opera in Lithuania? However, there are currently no other options but to leave these issues to be raised for another time.

Submitted 2014 07 30

Accepted 2014 09 03

16 Latvijas kultūras kanons, mūzika. J. Mediņa opera *Uguns un nakts* <<http://latvijasradio.lv/lv/lr/arhivs/?adv=1&d=9&m=8&cy=2009&d2=&m2=&cy2=&channel=3&keyword=>> [Listened on 2014 01 07].

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Lietuva pirmojoje latviškoje operoje „Baņuta“. Keletas įdomių Latvijos muzikos istorijos faktų

SANTRAUKA. Pirmosios latviškos operos „Baņuta“ originaliame tekste (libreto autorius Artūrs Krūmiņš, kompozitorius Alfrēds Kalniņš, 1919–1920) veiksmas vyksta Lietuvoje, Romovėje. Operos libretą sudaro keturi veiksmi. Pirmasis veiksmas prasideda vestuvėmis – tuokiasi Romovės kunigaikštis Daumantas ir kitos šalies kunigaikštė Baņuta, o baigiasi dvikova, kurioje Daumantas krinta nuo svetimšalio Vižučio rankos (šis atkeršija Daumantui už paniekintą savo sesers Jargalos garbę). Antrajame veiksmė Romovės gyventojai, įžvelgę senųjų dievų (veikiausiai įsivaizduojamų) Perkūno ir Pikuolio ženklus, nusprendžia, kad dėl to kalta svetimšalė Baņuta, todėl ją reikia sudeginti kartu su Daumanto kūnu. Tačiau Baņuta gauna ženklą kaip išsigelbėti, kurį liaudis supranta kaip pasiųstą Daumanto. Baņuta prisiekia atkeršyti už Daumanto žūtį. III ir IV operos veiksmuose vyksta vasarvidžio šventė (Līgo), vaizduojamos pagoniškos apeigos garbinant senąsias dievybes Līgā, Praurimā, Patrimpā. Baņuta pamilsta Vižutį. Kad įvykdytų priesaiką, abu nusprendžia nusižudyti. Tuo baigiasi operos pirmoji versija.

Pagrindinių operos personažų vardai (*Baņuta*, *Daumants*, *Valgudis*, *Vižutis*, *Maiga*, *Zvantevaitis*, *Zvalgonis*, *Jargala*, *Reda*), dievybių vardai (*Pērkons* / *Perkūnas*, *Pikols* / *Pikuolas*, *Patrimps* / *Patrimpas*) ir keletas žodžių, pavyzdžiui, *kunigas* ir *krīvs*, yra latviškos, lietuviškos ir lenkiškos (taip pat senosios prūsų kalbos) kilmės. Straipsnyje atskleidžiama operos „Baņuta“ libreto sukūrimo istorija, nagrinėjamas kultūrinio-istorinio konteksto poveikis statant operas XX a. Latvijoje ir svetur.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: pirmoji latviška opera „Baņuta“, Lietuva operos librete, kultūrinio-istorinio konteksto poveikis.