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Music in Estonia:

A Short History

The story of Estonian music can be approached from different angles. Over about a hundred years, the story has been told in a strictly national framework. According to this story, Estonians became a part of the European musical culture in the second half of the 19th century, when national cultural societies started to emerge and the kernel of the choral movement was born, which spread across the country. The national cultural societies of the time set the scene for national culture and statehood in their widest sense. Actually, the history of European musical culture in Estonian towns dates back much further in time, and the development of national professional music in the late 19th century would not have been possible without it.

While the first evidence of Christian influence in Estonia dates from the eleventh century, an extended Christian mission, which integrated historic Livonia into the western Christian cultural space, began with the Livonian crusade of the Teutonic Order at the end of the 12th and start

of the 13th century. The Cistercian and Dominican monasteries, established in the 13th century, as well as cathedral schools in emerging towns, became hubs of formal education, introducing, among other things, the religious music culture, Gregorian chant and, later on, polyphonic choral singing to Estonia. Records about town musicians in Estonia date back to the 14th century. Since then, local folk music and European art music existed side by side in Estonia, the latter mainly in towns and manors.

The Reformation reached Estonia in the 1520s, significantly changing local religious and educational practices. As a result of the Livonian War (1558–1583), North Estonia fell under Swedish control, while Saaremaa became a Danish possession and Poland claimed southern Estonia. Until 1629, when the whole Estonia became part of the Swedish Crown, its territory was—besides straddling the fault line between Western and Eastern Christianity—also on the border between Protestant and Catholic Europe. The



Johann Valentin Meder's opera *Die Beständige Argenia* (1680) was performed in the spring of 2011 by the Opera Studio of the EAMT.

Tallinn City Theatre

schools founded in Tartu by Polish Jesuits (translators' seminar in 1585), as well as Tartu University (1632) and Tallinn Gymnasium (1631)—both founded as a response by the Swedes—provided an important impetus for the development of written Estonian language, religious singing in Estonian, and musical activities in towns.

Music instruction held an important position in town schools. Pupils performed at major church services, singing chorales and performing more complex musical works. A choir was established in almost every major church; for example, Tallinn's St. Nicholas Church had a large choir as far back as the late 16th century. Printed sheet music of the western European repertoire, as well as music textbooks, became available

in towns. As Estonia belonged to the same cultural space as northern Germany and Scandinavian countries, a number of prominent musicians of the region found employment in Estonian towns. **Gregor Zuber**, one of the most outstanding violinists of northern Europe, and cantor Michael Hahn, a pupil of **Heinrich Schütz**, lived and worked in Narva in the 1660s. Their collaboration produced a couple of brilliant church cantatas that have been preserved to this day. Narva was also home to **Ludwig Busbetzky**, who came from a family of Tallinn organists and was educated in Lübeck, Germany. The most prominent 17th-century musician to live and work in Estonia was **Johann Valentin Meder** (1649–1719), a cantor in Tallinn between 1674 and 1683,

who composed and performed 'Die beständige Argenia,' one of the earliest German operas, with the students of Tallinn Gymnasium in 1680.

Estonia was integrated into the Russian Empire in 1721, following its conquest during the calamitous Great Northern War. The Baltic provinces retained their special status, which secured the supremacy of German culture. After the war, the Lutheran Church was strongly influenced by Halle pietism. Around 1730, the Moravian Brotherhood Congregational Movement (the Herrnhut Movement) reached Estonia, triggering a wide and culturally important religious and educational movement among the peasants. This encouraged the spread of literacy and musical education among the peasants. The Moravian Brethren introduced multipart singing and instrumental music to their prayer meetings; the spread of choirs and brass bands outside towns in the 19th century would not have been possible without them.

The music scene in towns livened up in the second half of the 18th century with the emergence of bourgeois amateur societies that started giving public performances. New of music was introduced to towns by German travelling theatres, whose repertoire included *Singspiel* and operas. Madame Tilly's opera troupe from Lübeck visited Tallinn in 1795, performing a number of operas by Mozart and his

contemporaries. German playwright **August von Kotzebue** (1761–1819) lived and worked temporarily in Tallinn, where he founded an amateur theatre company in 1784. In 1809, the theatre became the first professional theatre in Estonia; besides drama pieces, the theatre regularly performed European operas.

A public performance scene, led by bourgeois music societies, started to take shape in Tallinn and Tartu in the early 19th century. Amateur orchestras and choirs performed classical symphonies and oratorios by Mozart, Haydn, Handel and others. From 1829 to 1835, the Tartu music scene was focused around a string quartet financed by the land marshal, Baron Liphart, and led by one of the most prominent virtuoso violinists in Europe, **Ferdinand David**. Many musicians travelling through Riga to St. Petersburg stopped over in Tartu to give performances. For example, Ferenc Liszt and Clara Schumann performed in the assembly hall of the University of Tartu. German and Estonian choral societies were established in Tallinn by organist and composer **Johann August Hagen**, who also published the first Estonian-language music textbook in 1841. **Gertrud Mara**, one of the greatest singers and music teachers in Europe who spent the final years of her life in Tallinn, helped to organise performances of oratorios. Tallinn had an



Gertrud Mara
Portrait by C. T. von Neff, 1828

active music scene—regular performances started with the establishment of a music society in 1841. The head of the society was virtuoso pianist **Theodor Stein**, later a professor of piano at St. Petersburg Conservatoire. Choirs were also established in villages. In southern Estonian parishes, where the influence of the Moravian Brethren was stronger, Estonian school choirs performed complex four-part pieces; organ and violin instruction was available as well. Peasant brass bands were also widespread.

From the 1850s onward, the political setting favoured bourgeois cultural

societies. Numerous German choral societies were set up in towns, followed by the first Estonian cultural societies: the Estonia Society in Tallinn and the Vanemuine Society in Tartu, both founded in 1865. Following the example of the song festivals organised by the Baltic German community in 1857 and 1866, the first Estonian song festival was held by the Vanemuine society in Tartu in 1869. The regular choral festivals (initially held predominantly in Tartu and from 1896 in Tallinn) evolved into a landmark event in the Estonian National Awakening.

The first Estonian composers to compose choral pieces primarily were amateurs (Kunileid, Hermann). In the late 19th century, a number of Estonians (Kappel, Läte, Härma, Türnpu) studied the organ at St. Petersburg Conservatoire, where they also received instruction in composition. **Aleksander Läte** went on to establish the first Estonian symphony orchestra in Tartu (1900), while **Konstantin Türnpu** conducted choirs in Tallinn, performing classical oratorios including Bach's St Matthew Passion and Mass in B minor.

The Estonian composers and musicians who were educated at St. Petersburg Conservatoire at the turn of the century laid the foundation for the Estonian professional music scene before the First World War. While **Rudolf Tobias** (1873–1918),



Rudolf Tobias on the Estonian 50 kroon bill (issued in 1994).

as an ideologist, wrote a number of articles about the nationalist style in music, his main work, the oratorio *Des Jona Sendung* (Jonah's Mission,

1909), still followed the tradition of German romanticism. It was **Mart Saar** (1882–1963), with his expressive piano music and his choral and solo songs, along with **Cyrillus Kreek** (1889–1962) and his choral music, who became the innovators and founders of the Estonian national style. The completion of the construction of new theatre buildings in Tartu (1906) and Tallinn (1913) brought about a major change: both became hubs for professional musical theatre and symphonic music performances.

Following the birth of the independent



Artur Kapp with his students, composers Riho Päts, Evald Aav and Enn Võrk in 1928. Estonian Theatre and Music Museum

Republic of Estonia in 1918, new musical institutions were established. Higher music schools were established in Tallinn (Later Tallinn Conservatoire, now Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre) and Tartu (now Heino Eller Tartu Music College) in 1919, in the midst of the Estonian War of Independence. **Heino Eller**, the grand master of Estonian national instrumental music, laid the foundation for professional music education in Tartu. Eller was a professor of music theory and composition at the Tartu Higher School for Music. His pupils included composer **Eduard Tubin**, conductor **Olav Roots** and musicologist **Karl Leichter**—each a pioneer in his field in Estonia. The professors of the Tallinn Conservatoire included eminent musicians who had received their musical education in Russia, such as **Johannes Paulsen** (violin), **Raymond Bööcke** (cello), **Artur Lemba** (piano), **Jaan Tamm** (French horn), **Artur Kapp** (composition), and **Peeter Ramul** (music history). Starting from 1921, the activities of choirs and the organisation of the Estonian song festivals were overseen by the Estonian Union of Singers. The Union also published a monthly edition of *Muusikaleht*. Performances of instrumental music, as well as publishing of scores and sheet music was arranged by the Estonian Academic Society of Musicians, founded in 1924. The Estonian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the predecessor

of the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, was founded in 1926. The first chief conductors of the orchestra were **Raimund Kull** and **Olav Roots**, later the principal conductor of Orquesta Sinfonica de Colombia.

In 1940, after the illegal annexation of Estonia by the Soviet Union, all national institutions were disbanded and the Estonian music scene was adapted to Soviet practice. The Tartu Higher School for Music was downgraded to a lower-level school, and Heino Eller was invited to work as a professor of composition at the Tallinn Conservatoire where he taught until his death in 1970. To this day, two schools are differentiated in Estonian music: those of Heino Eller (the Tartu school) and of Artur Kapp (the Tallinn school). The former, more modernistic school was focused on instrumental music (composers like Eduard Tubin, Arvo Pärt, Lepo Sumera), while Artur Kapp's was oriented towards a more traditional style and focused mainly on vocal music (Eugen Kapp, Riho Päts, Gustav Ernesaks). Kapp's teaching period ended much earlier, with his resignation in 1944.

Many Estonian musicians fled Estonia in 1944 during the final months of the Second World War, seeking refuge in western countries. Those who remained were forced to write music 'national in form and socialist in content' under the Stalinist regime. A new advent of Estonian music began



Heino Eller with his student Arvo Pärt in 1960.

Estonian Theatre and Music Museum

around 1960: a young conductor, **Neeme Järvi**, brought a new quality to the Estonian Opera and the National Symphony Orchestra. The Tallinn Chamber Choir set new standards in choral music. A new generation of liberal-minded composers—**Veljo Tormis**, **Eino Tamberg**, **Jaan Rääts**, **Arvo Pärt** and others—emerged. The styles of Tormis and Pärt changed

significantly in the late 1960s: Tormis delved into Finno-Ugric folklore and became one of the most original choral composers in the world, while Pärt created his *tintinnabuli* style, emigrated in 1980, and became the global symbol of Estonian music.

The Soviet Union, entering a new era of stagnation in the 1970s, failed to suppress the spirit of music. The 1967 Tallinn Jazz Festival provided a powerful impetus to a new generation of jazz musicians; as the tidal wave of beat music flooded Estonia in the 1970, original rock bands (Ruja) and the first prog-rock bands—Mess, Psycho and In Spe—emerged as the first of their kind in the Soviet Union. The official academicism was also challenged by the early music movement that began in the 1970s (the early music ensemble Hortus Musicus, 1972) and by the activities of conductor **Tõnu Kaljuste**, which led to the establishment of the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir in 1981. The Early and Contemporary Music Festival held in Tallinn in 1978, under the leadership of **Andres Mustonen**, was one of the most notable avant-garde music events in the Soviet Union.

All this inevitably led to the Estonian Singing Revolution in the late 1980s: rather than being a clear-cut event, the Singing Revolution was the political realisation of the free spirit that had manifested in music, art and

literature. Music had a special role in mobilizing people and creating a sense of solidarity—the same angst and yearning for freedom that was expressed in works by composers **Lepo Sumera** and **Erkki-Sven Tüür** in concert halls was carried into pop culture by the punk band Propeller, whose concert triggered youth riots in September 1980, by rock band Ultima Thule (formed in 1987), and by the Tartu pop music festival, where prog-rock band In Spe performed Alo Mattiisen's Five Awakening Songs for the first time (1988). After that, Estonia's restoration of its independence was just a question of time.



Lepo Sumera and Erkki-Sven Tüür in 1999.

Krista Väli



After the first performance of Five Awakening Songs by Alo Mattiisen, Estonia's restoration of its independence was just a question of time.

Tiit Veermäe

Estonian music at the beginning of the new millenium

The feminisation of art implies that music is becoming marginalised in society.



Galina Grigorjeva and Andres Mustonen in Moscow (2016).
Private collection

In retrospect, the turn of the millennium marked an abrupt generational disruption in Estonian music: **Lepo Sumera** (1950–2000) and **Raimo Kangro** (1949–2001), both central figures in the music scene at the time, as well as some of their somewhat lesser known peers, such as **Mati Kuulberg** (1947–2001) or **Tarmo Lepik** (1946–2001) (the latter had retired from active creative work and was virtually unknown to the younger generation), died at the peak of their creative age. While younger representatives of their generation, **René Eespere** (1953) and **Peeter Vähi** (1955), continue to compose, their work, despite being highly professional, does not mark the cutting edge of Estonian music after the turn of the millennium.

Disruption as stylistic transformation

What is remarkable is that such disruption can be viewed as a certain stylistic transformation in the case of younger composers as well. This has probably manifested itself most conspicuously in the transformed style of **Erkki-Sven Tüür** (1959): discursive ‘metalinguistic’ music, which combines diatonic and serialist thinking, was replaced with the more unified vectorial method of composition in which the different *topoi* are developed from a single source code. Although the first signs of a shift towards this new compositional



Ülo Krigul and Timo Steiner in 2009.
Mait Jürjado

technique can be seen in some of Tüür’s earlier works, in particular in Symphony No. 4 *Magma* for solo percussion and symphony orchestra (2002), the first pure example is *Oxymoron* for large ensemble (2003).

This disruption is also marked by **Tõnu Kõrvits’** (1969) abandonment of relatively simple diatonic structures and a decisive shift towards sound modernism. This should be seen as transformation primarily within the context of Kõrvits’ own work, as his ‘national-impressionist’ modernism is rather moderate when compared to that of his peers. Examples include *Müüt* (The Myth, 2001), *Armastuse märk* (The Sign of Love, 2002) and *Eldorado* (2002), as well as his later work *Ellujäämiste laulud* (Songs of Survivors, 2004). In the context of disruption, we can also mention the establishment of “total post-modernism” in the works of **Timo Steiner** (1976). While in Sumera’s works the possible flirtation



Arvo Pärt and Helena Tulse in 2015.
Alar Truu

with different historic styles is always subjected to the strict logic of form which retained the clear hierarchy of values and turned Sumera's works into a Mahlerian attempt to embrace the entire world—an excellent example of such a work is Symphony No. 6 (2000), the last music that Sumera wrote before his untimely death—in Steiner's works, experimentation with different styles often develops into the absurd disregarding of any hierarchy. This is clearly seen in his Symphony (2003), which nearly entirely invalidates itself generically.

The new dominant style is introspective music that is primarily oriented towards sound and replaces the playfulness and magical ostinato patterns that ruled in previous decades. This “new music” was not born overnight. In a sense, *tintinnabuli*

music (since 1976)—pioneered by **Arvo Pärt** (1935)—which inspired the generation of composers that emerged in the 1990s and established itself at the turn of the millennium not so much as a structure but rather as a relation to sound, can be considered its origin. Although the generation that unexpectedly passed away at the turn of the millennium (Sumera et al.) had reintroduced diatonics, i.e. the outer aspect of *tintinnabuli* in the footsteps of Pärt, the composers of the 1990s did this with a certain *tintinnabuli* ‘mentality’, abandoning the somewhat mechanical and simplified approach of the previous generation. Such composers of the 1990s generation include **Toivo Tulev** (1958) and **Helena Tulse** (1972), as well as the somewhat more down to earth and expressive **Mari Vihmand** (1967). Where Tulev can, in a sense, be considered a bridge between Pärt and the new style (Tulev's style still bears a hint of the fetishisation of anguish characteristic of Pärt), the organic flow of Tulse's music has become a feature of the new trend in music.

New dominating style— music oriented to sound

Modernist sound as a new ‘mainstream’ in Estonian music does not mean stylistic convergence, but rather the contrary. At its centre is the organic sound modernism of Tulse and her

‘younger sister’ **Tatjana Kozlova** (1977). This style is characterised by the plasticity of texture, avoidance of caesura and unequivocal articulation (the latter is also associated with the abandonment of traditional motif development and musical structure in general), acoustic sensitivity and a certain asceticism (in respect to sound) without any of the expiating undertone intrinsic to Pärt's works. Further, the themes of such music are not as religious but are inspired by a more general, natural mentality, which is reflected in the titles, such as *Sula* (Thaw, one of Tulse's breakthrough works from 1999) or *Hingamisveele* (To the Breathing Water, 2011) for string orchestra, as well as Kozlova's *Tule süütamine* (Lighting the Fire, 2015). A composer who has recently come onto the scene is **Elis Vesik** (1986), whose works, including *Punctum concursus in prospectu* (2017) demonstrate the vigour and potential of such music.

In connection with acoustic modernism, a number of sub-trends can be pointed out, such as **Märt-Matis Lill**'s (1975) ‘ethical’ or ‘moral’ acoustic modernism. The composer's position is perhaps most clearly expressed in his chamber operas *Indiate uurimine* (Exploring Indias, 2009) and *Tulleminek* (Into the Fire, 2017), both of which create a dichotomy between the external, i.e., ‘real’, and the internal, i.e. invisible. His operas are criticism of the external structures that were eventually proved



Märt-Matis Lill and Toivo Tulev in 2016.
Peeter Langovits



Liisa Hirsch and Mari Vihmand in 2016.
Peeter Langovits

illusory. Such themes may, however, also be reflected in the titles of the composer's instrumental works, such as *Kadunud metsade kaja* (Echo of Lost Forests, 2004) for orchestra, *Hara Hoto varemed* (Ruins of Hara Hoto, 2011) for

table harp, percussion and symphony orchestra, or *Mu nuttev hääil on sügistuul* (My Weeping Voice is the Wind of Autumn, 2005) and *When the Buffalo Went Away ...* (2007).

Composer Toivo Tulev, mentioned above, may be considered to be the most ‘spiritual’ representative of the sound-centred trend, if one bears in mind its strong link to mystical oriental philosophical traditions. While the driving forces behind Tulev’s works are often clear conflicts, as a rule, they develop towards resolution of the conflict and its absorption into a larger entirety at a higher level. Occasionally, such procession is expressed in more specific terms, such as *Neither This nor the Further Shore* (2000) for string quartet: the title of the work cites a part of Dhammapada’s well-known verse “For whom is found no near or far [i.e. no life or death], for whom’s no near or far...” referring to the enlightened, i.e. Buddha; or the piano concert *Nada* (Nothing, 2015), which refers to the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness. Religiosity with an orthodox tinge is also important in the work of **Galina Grigorjeva** (1962) but, unlike Tulev, Grigorjeva represents the ‘calmed’ or settled spirituality.

Recently, the ‘ecological’ and ‘energetic’ segments of sound modernism have become more important. The former is represented by **Mirjam Tally** (1976) and **Malle Maltis** (1977), and the latter mainly by **Liisa Hirsch** (1984).

‘Ecological’ acoustic modernism is characterised by integrating specific natural sounds with purely musical tones produced by instruments, as well as by the themes inspired by a deeply ecological *Weltanschauung*, such as Tally’s *Erosioon* (Erosion, 2015) for orchestra, or Maltis’ *Vee trepp* (Stairway for Fish, 2017) for three organs and electronics. While Märt-Matis Lill’s music is also somewhat related to this trend, unlike the ‘ecological’ composers whose approach tends to be somewhat literary and descriptive, Lill’s otherwise very organic scores embody an internal attitude and can be, therefore, considered within the context of ethics and morals, as indicated above.

‘Energetic’ acoustic modernism may be considered to be a version of sound modernism reduced to the extreme, where nearly everything that can be considered a musical ‘object’ has been removed. Such music wants to be pure energy or flow, a sound independent of any support system, the most notable examples of which are Hirsch’s *Mechanics of Flying* for orchestra (2016), and in particular her glides for various chamber ensembles, in which the connecting feature is the continuous zooming in on an acoustic event.

However, Estonian musical modernism also has its ‘new complexity’ and more macho output that does not shy away from more sophisticated structural games, and is reflected, in particular, in

the works of **Ülo Krigul** (1978). In this context, his works for orchestra *In pax* (2000) and in particular *JenZeits* (2005) should be mentioned. In these works, the composer establishes himself in terms of style, while simultaneously distancing himself decisively from the mild ‘impressionist’ approach characteristic of Estonian sound modernism. Another such composer is **Kristjan Kõrver** (1976) whose angular style speaks to the audience, despite its complex nature, and as such stands in sharp contrast to the cryptic structure of the works of **Andrus Kallastu** (1967), the only pure representative of parametric composition¹ in Estonian music.

New Sincerity in addition to modernist styles

In recent times, an important layer has emerged alongside modernist styles—what has become known as the New Sincerity. **Tõnu Kõrvits**, who has been mentioned here repeatedly, may be considered the spiritual father of New Sincerity. From the second half of the 2000s, Kõrvits’ style starts to gradually become clearer and simpler. In a sense, Kõrvits returns to where he started—

to structures inspired by pop music that by now have been integrated into the composer’s style to such extent that they are almost unnoticeable. As such, they are no longer ‘alien’ or grafted on his music. The arrival of Kõrvits in ‘new classicism’ is marked by his works *Thule elegiad* (Elegies of Thule, 2007), *Pisarate fantaasia* (Tears Fantasy, 2011) and *Hümnid võrvalistele* (Hymns to the Nordic Lights, 2011). It is even more evident in his vocal music, whose share has significantly increased in his work. Special mention should be made of *Lageda lanud* (Moorland Elegies, 2015) for mixed choir and orchestra, the performance of which was one of the highlights of the Estonian music scene in recent years.

While Kõrvits’ ‘new classicism’ cannot be considered a direct manifestation of New Sincerity because it is too nuanced and mature, as a more general mind-set, it has inspired a number of younger generation Estonian composers, such as **Pärt Uusberg** (1986) and **Rasmus Puur** (1991), both students of Tõnu Kõrvits. It may seem slightly strange that it is mainly male composers, whose numbers are decreasing compared with emerging female composers, are fostering

¹ A composition technique stemmed from serialist thinking—musical structure is created through the intentional separation of and assignation of values to various parameters.

² The recent premiere of Puur’s opera *Pihved värvid* (The Colours of Clouds, 2017) at the National Opera is symptomatic of such trend.



Pärt Uusberg and Peeter Vähi 2014.
Peeter Langovits

“well-sounding” styles in Estonian music. The feminisation of art implies that music is becoming marginalised in society; therefore, New Sincerity, despite its popularity (the works of ‘newly sincere’ composers have been incorporated into the permanent repertoire of song festivals and other mass events²), could be seen as a form of escapism—men withdrawing from the forefront of avant-garde.

Evelin Seppar (1986), however, is a completely different and unusual phenomenon in Estonian music—it is difficult to classify her style in this context. On the one hand, her works display the architectonic features of the organic approach, which reintroduces figurativeness into music (which

had almost disappeared); on the other hand, her works share some features with Tõnis Kõrvits’ ‘new classicism.’

While Erkki-Sven Tüür has become the most important Estonian composer since the turn of the millennium, the status of Arvo Pärt is somewhat more ambivalent. On the one hand, Pärt is an absolute sovereign of the world music scene with no equivalent among living composers; on the other hand, his impact on the works on the younger generations of Estonian composers is not comparable to that in the past. Premieres and performances of Pärt’s works continue to be very important, but this is now rather on the social front: think, for example, of the performance of Adam’s Lament

(2009) in Istanbul as an Estonian media event, or Symphony No. 4 ‘Los Angeles’ (2008), which is dedicated to Mikhail Khodorkovsky and in the context of its premiere was rather a political position. Tüür, on the other hand, composed his most important works during this period, including the opera Wallenberg (2001), which can be considered an entirely new level of Estonian musical theatre—a level subsequently pursued by **Jüri Reinvere** (1971) in his *Pubastus* (Purge, 2012) and *Peer Gynt* (2014). Tüür is also establishing himself as a modern symphonist whose style is a symbiosis of organic sound modernism and the ‘new complexity’ based on complex fractures and rhythm structures. If the connections with rock music—Tüür, together with Peeter Vähi and **Rein Rannap** (1953) represents the generation whose taste in music was shaped, in addition to more academic music, by progressive rock—and certain ethics and spirituality (which can be linked to Lill’s ‘ethical’ acoustic modernism) are added, it is possible to say that Tüür’s works integrate and universalise the trends currently dominating in Estonian music.

Estonian musical theatre is also influenced by the developments in the field of performing arts. The turn of the millennium is marked by Tüür’s *Wallenberg*, which tells the story of the Swedish diplomat from a timeless rather than linear point of



Maria Kõrvits and Evelin Seppar.
Sadu-Triste Juurikas

view. Such a ‘post-dramatic’ trend has only intensified in subsequent works: Tõnu Kõrvits’ opera *Liblikas* (Butterfly, 2013) does not focus on the short novel by Andrus Kivirähk, but on the timeless issues raised in the novel. Experimentation is even bolder in more chamber-like works: Helena Tulve’s opera *It’s getting so dark* (2004) abandons the narrative (in terms of movement) altogether and Märt-Matis Lill’s *Indiate uurimine* (Exploring Indias) and *Tulleminek* (Into



Marianna Liik and
Tatjana Kozlova-Johannes.
Mait Jüriado

the Fire) completely deconstruct opera as a primarily genre-based musical form.

Jüri Reinvere's works also mix and synthesise different types of art. The experimentation in his works is manifested not so much in experimenting with new forms of dramaturgy (like Märt-Matis Lill) but in mixing different media: characteristic examples are, in addition to the abovementioned *Pubastus* and Peer Gynt, Reinvere's radiophonic operas and his rather dramatic 'ordinary' concert music in which the composer combines verbal, visual and musical media. Such a mixed style is seen in **Marianna Liik's** (1992) opera *Korduma küppuvad küsimused* (Frequently Asked Questions, 2014), which focuses on the

existential issues of young people—a novel concept in Estonian musical theatre. An absolute favourite of the more audience-friendly music theatre is **Tauno Aints** (1975), whose various works, including the operas *Rehepapp* (2013) and *Guugelmooledotcom* (Googlemooledotcom, 2016), continue the tradition created in the works of the 'Grand Old Man' of Estonian music, **Olav Ehala** (1950), enriching it at the same time with post-modernist style games. The latter makes Aints' works as art texts considerably more demanding for the audience and brings them closer to **Tõnis Kaumann's** (1971) neoclassicist works, in which the dramatic element also plays an important role.

Overviews of such kind should end with an apology. The above is undoubtedly not an exhaustive description of the developments in Estonian newer music during the period considered. We have not discussed electronic music and film scores or multimedia as a distinct phenomenon and more popular side of Estonian music. As this is an attempt to describe the changed 'face' of Estonian concert music at the beginning of the new millennium, focusing in particular on the dominating artists, those composers whose style is not directly related to the described trends were left out. Therefore, the works of a number of young composers as well as those of **Eino Tamberg** (1930–



Jaan Rääts and Eino Tamberg in the 1960s.
Estonian Theatre and Music Museum

2010) or **Jaan Rääts** (1932) are not discussed, despite the fact that the former was rather active at the turn of the millennium and in subsequent years. The article also does not cover the composers who had retired from

active creative work, yet continued to significantly influence the music scene, such as **Veljo Tormis** (1930–2017). This article should be read bearing this in mind.

New advent of folk music in Estonian professional music

The history of Estonian professional composing is only 120 years old. Although the first song festival—a sign of Estonians’ cultural awakening—was held in 1869, the songs performed were predominantly by German and Russian composers. The first works in major music genres to be written by Estonian composers came at the turn of the century. While the style of Estonian art music developed as a result of the juxtaposition and integration of European classical heritage and modernism, folk music—both the German-influenced ‘new’ folk songs and the 2,000-year-old runic songs—has enjoyed a special place in it through the ages.

The role of the folk song in Estonian art music has changed over time. At the time of National Awakening in

the second half of the 19th century and in the first days of the Republic of Estonia in 1918, traditional culture bore a strong ideological message: old melodies and community singing embodied the cultural self-assurance of a small nation. During the Soviet occupation, traditional culture remained, paradoxically, a vector for Estonian national identity, although its meaning was inherently contradictory. The ideology favoured traditional culture, seeing it as an expression of closeness to the people and as a positive antipode to Western cosmopolitan culture. Folk song as a symbol was assigned the role of representing the collective harmony and social idyll of Soviet society. In the consciousness of Estonians, however, folk song symbolized paradise lost: national sovereignty.

In the 1960s, after Stalinism, Estonian music was exposed to the influences of modernism and the role of folk song changed: its ideological and symbolic value diminished, while its constructive role in shaping the music style came to the fore. After Estonia restored its independence in 1991, Estonian music was integrated into world culture and the standing of folk music as a cultural symbol waned even further. The subsequent decade was devoted to overcoming the cultural disruption brought about by Soviet occupation and to restoring the connection with the European space of thought. A good number of the existing basic notions were deconstructed and discarded, including nationalism as an aesthetic-ethical category. It seemed that we had reached a point of no return. However, traditional and mythological themes were soon reintroduced into the cultural scene. Folk song was also back—this time with an ecological, pantheist and natural-philosophical spirit – integrating various styles of music.

While folk songs have been used in the works of dozens of Estonian composers over the past 120 years, three composers from different eras are notable due to their works breathing new life into heritage music: Cyrillus (Karl Ustav) Kreek (1889–1962), Veljo Tormis (1930–2017) and Tõnu Kõrvits (1969).



Cyrillus Kreek
Estonian Theatre and Music Museum

Cyrillus Kreek: music from heaven and earth

Alongside Mart Saar (1882–1963), Heino Eller (1887–1970) and Eduard Tubin (1905–1982), Cyrillus Kreek was one of the most influential developers of Estonian music’s ‘own style.’ Kreek was primarily a composer of choral music: a large part of his work is made up of folk melody arrangements and settings for various choirs. Kreek’s fondness for folk music was shaped by the environment he grew up in. Cyrillus Kreek was born the ninth child of a music-loving village schoolteacher in western Estonia. The future composer’s perception of the world was inspired by country life and

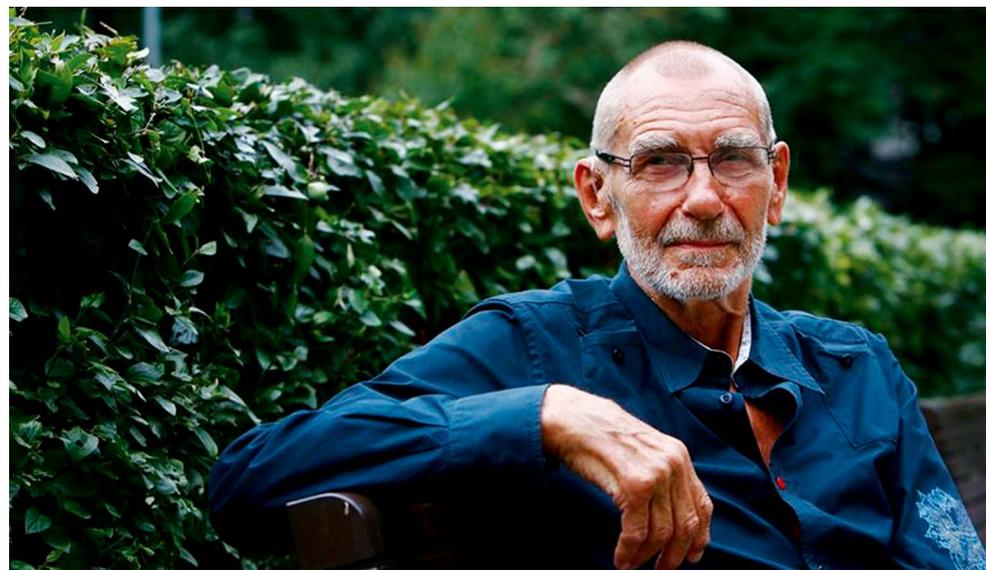
peasant culture, his father's profession as a schoolmaster, and the sweeping enthusiasm for music in the era of national awakening. In 1908, Kreek enrolled at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire to study trombone, music theory and composition, but did not graduate due to the outbreak of war. From 1917 onwards, Kreek worked as a music teacher and choir conductor in Tartu, Tallinn and other Estonian towns. In 1921, he settled in Haapsalu, where he lived until his death.

Kreek had already begun to collect folk songs as a student at the Conservatoire. Kreek's card catalogue includes over five thousand melodies, about one quarter of which were collected by Kreek himself. His works feature nearly one thousand folk songs and pieces of folk dance music. Kreek's choral music includes more than 20 original choral works set to secular and religious lyrics, over 700 arrangements of folk tunes and 500 chorale arrangements in the style of J. L. E. Punschel's chorale book. Kreek's original works include choir works of vivid modernist style, such as *Nõmmelill* (Heath Bell) and *Talvine õhtu* (A Winter's Evening), as well as the Psalms of David—nine psalm settings that have an unmistakable folk tinge. Four of the settings, written in 1923, are especially popular: *Õnnis on inimene* (Blessed Is the Man), *Käida mu hing Issandat* (Praise the Lord, My Soul), *Päeval ei pea päikene...* (The Sun Will Not Strike You By Day...) and

Issand, ma hüüan Su poole (O Lord, I Call to You). Kreek's Requiem for tenor, mixed choir, organ and symphony orchestra, written in 1925–1927 and also known as the Estonian Requiem, was the first of its kind in Estonia.

Kreek's settings of Estonian runic songs are characterised by rich polyphony, monumentality and even symphonic style (*Meie Err* (Our Master); *Maga, maga, Matsikene* (Sleep Tight, Little Mats); *Sirisege, sirisege, sirbikesed* (A Harvest Song), etc.). A special place in Kreek's works is reserved for Estonian and Estonian-Swedish religious folk songs and arrangements of Lutheran chorales. Kreek arranged 10 religious folk tunes for mixed choir in 1916–1918; 443 religious folk tunes for four-part choir in 1931–1937, including 271 Swedish and 172 Estonian folk songs; in 1949–1955, Kreek wrote four-part canons based on 75 Estonian and 75 Swedish religious folk songs.

The sincerity and beauty of Kreek's settings of religious folk songs has captivated audiences across the world. His choral works feature both spiritual glory and secular zest for life and humour. His style is intertwined with the modal harmony of folk songs, imitations of the sounds of nature and classical polyphonic technique. Kreek respected folk music. It features in his works in its pristine form, as *cantus firmus*. "Folk song uses me to show itself," said Kreek. Such a conserv-



Veljo Tormis
Peeter Langovits

ative approach to folk music was quite unique in the context of the individualistic creativity of the 20th century, but also somewhat characteristic of Estonian music in general.

Kreek's mostly religious works were not performed during the Soviet occupation. His time came in the early 1990s, in the newly re-independent Republic of Estonia, where the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, conducted by Tõnu Kaljuste and other conductors, became the most important promoter of Kreek's music. Although Kreek had no composition students, nor did he write aesthetic manifestos, his principles were developed further by another master of Estonian music, Veljo Tormis.

Veljo Tormis: ancient incantation

Like Kreek, Veljo Tormis came from a rural area. Born into the family of a village organist and sacristan in the affluent Kuusalu Parish, Tormis grew up in the countryside. His upbringing included farm work, but he also played the organ and sang chorales. Tormis received his first instruction in music from his father, who played the organ at home. Tormis graduated from the organ class at Tallinn Music School and continued his education at Moscow Conservatoire, where he was a student in Professor Vissarion Shebalin's composition class from 1951 to 1956. In 1956–1960, Tormis

taught composition at Tallinn Music School, where his students included Arvo Pärt. He became a freelance composer in 1969.

Tormis' dramatically throbbing Overture No. 2 (1959) was one of the masterpieces in the renewed Estonian music oeuvre of the post-Stalinist era. He has also composed chamber music characterised by a modernist and laconic style, the opera *Lüigeland* (The Swan's Flight, 1966), choral works carried by the philosophical ideas and social criticism, lyrical settings of classical Estonian poetry (Marie Under, Gustav Suits, Viivi Luik) for choirs, and film scores. A major part of Tormis' work consists of numerous choral pieces based on Estonian and other national folk music. While his early choral music bore features of national romanticism, from the 1970s onwards, Tormis' aim was to give new life to the Estonian runic song in the framework of art music, keeping it as genuine as possible.

Besides Estonian folk songs, Tormis' choral works used the folk tunes of other Finno-Ugric people, such as Ingrians, Seto, Livonians, and Finns, but also Russians, Bulgarians and other nations. His early works—the cycle for mixed choir *Kihnu pulmalaulud* (Kihnu Island Wedding Songs, 1959) and the cycle for male choir *Meestelaulud* (Men's Songs, 1965)—drew attention with their fresh sound. In 1967, Tormis completed an extensive choir cycle, *Eesti kalendri-*

laulud (Estonian Calendar Songs) for mixed choir, based on the folk melodies of different Estonian counties and related to important dates in the folk calendar. The cycle comprised five sets: *Mardilaulud* (Martinmas Songs), *Kadri-laulud* (St. Catherine's Day Songs), *Vastla-laulud* (Shrovetide Songs), *Kiigelaulud* (Swing Songs) and *Jaamilaulud* (St. John's Day Songs). In 1970–1989, Tormis turned his attention to the folklore of other nations. He composed a series of choral cycles under the umbrella title *Unustatud rahvad* (Forgotten Peoples), based on the folklore of the endangered Balto-Finnic peoples: *Liinlaste pärandus* (Livonian Heritage, 1970), *Vadja pulmalaulud* (Votic Wedding Songs, 1971), *Isuri eepos* (Izhorian Epic, 1975), *Ingerimaa õhtud* (Ingrian Evenings, 1979), *Vepsa rajad* (Vepsian Paths, 1983), *Karjala saatus* (Karelian Destiny, 1989).

His best-known work is *Raua needmine* (Curse Upon Iron, 1972), which features a neo-primitivist incantation that swells out of a folk tune. In 1980, another masterpiece was written, the cantata-ballet *Eesti ballaadid* (Estonian Ballads), in which various Estonian narrative folk songs intertwine into a dramatic epic saga with a symphonic texture and philosophical message. In Tormis' 1990s oeuvre, several dramatic choral works address the human existential battle: *Kullervo sõnum* (Kullervo's Message, 1994), based on the Kalevala texts, and *Püiskop ja pagan* (The Bishop and The Pagan, 1992/1995), a story set during the time of the

Crusades. Besides folk song, the latter features Gregorian chant. Summing up his life's work, Tormis used fragments from the most important works written over a half century in his collage-cantata *Sünnisõnad* (The Rite of Birth, 1999).

Tormis' attitude towards folk song is similar to that of Kreek. "I don't use folk song—folk song uses me," said Tormis, paraphrasing his predecessor. Tormis' choral music makes bold use of the melodious and incantational nature of folk songs, using the corresponding modal harmony, effects of linear polyphony and heterophony, variational build-up and also sonoristic expression. Tormis is extremely attentive to the lyrics and underlying message of his music. His use of text is often theatrical and ritualistic, communicating magic speech and distinct feelings. Tormis is much more passionate in his music than Kreek: "Music is not just making music. It is the trouble and pain of living," the composer has said.

Veljo Tormis is known worldwide, and his works are performed by choirs in dozens of countries on every continent. His works have been recorded by many labels across the world, including Finlandia, Chandos, Toccata Classics, Alba Records, ECM Records and others. The Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and its conductor Tõnu Kaljuste have provided a very strong impetus for the wide spread of Tormis's music around the world.

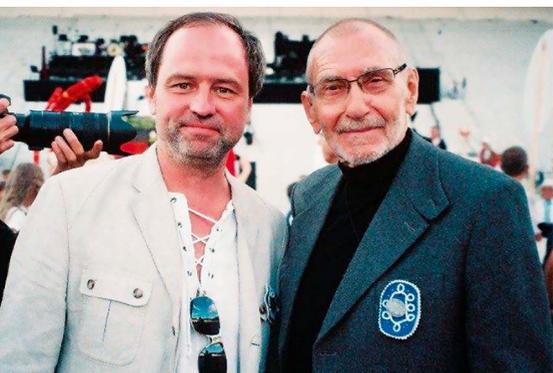


Tõnu Kõrvits
Kaupo Kikkas

Tõnu Kõrvits: Estonian blues

In the 1990s, the newly independent Estonia firmly renounced its past, including the idolisation of national culture. Young authors drew inspiration from cultures far away in time and space. New music was influenced by Arvo Pärt and focused on the value of sound as such and its sensitive flow. This was the time when Tõnu Kõrvits started his creative career. Today, his works, including those inspired by Estonian folk music, attract increasing international interest.

Unlike Kreek and Tormis, Tõnu Kõrvits as a musician is related to urban culture. Born into an extended family of musicians, Tõnu Kõrvits is inspired by rock, pop and jazz



Tõnu Kõrvits and Veljo Tormis.
Private collection

music, as well as classical music. Kõrvits' extensive oeuvre exhibits an elaborate musical style in all genres. He has composed numerous solo songs, ensemble, choral and orchestral works, three operas and film scores. His acoustic melody-centred style combines romantic warmth, impressionist richness of colour, and hypnotic power of suggestion, which ultimately can be defined as 'magic impressionism'.

While Kõrvits' early works bore the imprint of neo-romanticism, he soon introduced Estonian folk songs and the related mythological imagery. His first work to integrate folk songs was *Teispool päikesevälju* (Beyond the Solar Fields, 2004) for solo bassoon and symphony orchestra, written for bassoonist Martin Kuuskmann. The impressionist texture of the piece is intertwined with Estonian shepherd's songs—'Estonian blues,' according

to the composer. Folk songs are used in his other orchestral works written at the beginning of the 21st century, such as *Ellujäänute laulud* (Songs of Survivors) for symphony orchestra, *...neis aedades* (...In These Gardens) for alto saxophone and string orchestra, and *Tsirgutü* (Milky Way) for solo flute and string orchestra. Starting in the 2000s, Kõrvits has composed a series of works reflecting the imagery of the mythical northern land Thule, an archaic prototype of Estonia, most of which are also based on folk tunes: *Thulemaa laulud* (The Songs from Thule) for flute and piano, *Thulemaa laulud II* (The Songs of Thule II) for trumpet and piano, *Thule pildid* (Pictures of Thule) for piano, *Thule elegiad* (Elegies of Thule) for string orchestra, *Thule mustrid* (Thule Patterns) for string quartet, *Thule koraalid* (Chorales of Thule) for soprano saxophone and organ, *Thule visandid* (Sketches of Thule) for saxophone quartet and many others. Other works, as well as Kõrvits' music as a whole, reflect the natural imagery and spatial impressions of ancient elements of the world: time and space, fire and wind, birdsong and the vastness of the universe. Folk song is like a door to the mythical space-time of national culture.

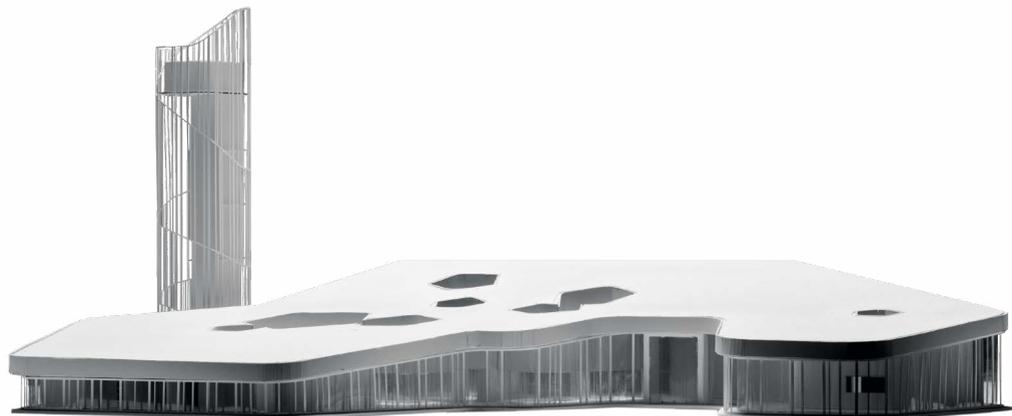
The religious folk songs collected and loved by Cyrillus Kreek have a special place in the work of Tõnu Kõrvits. After consciously preferring other styles, the composer suddenly

recognised the hidden energy of folk tunes. "Folk song is magic. After being sung by so many people, it has accumulated enormous power," said the composer. Kõrvits used religious folk tunes for the first time in 2002, in the cycle *Kuusteist eesti rahvalaulu* (Sixteen Estonian Folksongs) for hand bell ensemble. The composer's best-known work is *Kreegi vihik* (Kreek's Notebook, 2007) for mixed choir and string orchestra, inspired by Estonian folk hymns. The work was commissioned by Tõnu Kaljuste for the Cyrillus Kreek Days, held within the framework of Nargenfestival in Kreek's hometown Haapsalu. As the name indicates, the cycle is based on folk hymns collected by Cyrillus Kreek. Some of the material had been used in Kõrvits' earlier works.

Kreek's Notebook reflects the links between and the changing of times. Rather than being strictly sublime (like in Kreek's settings) or powerfully autonomous (like in Tormis' works), folk songs are dissolved in Kreek's Notebook (as they are in other works by Kõrvits) and acquire the shadowy richness of impressionism, as well as the yearning of blues. When listening to this music, it seems that ancient tunes are taking us not only to the beginning of the national chronology, but also to the depths of cultural subconscious.

Besides Estonia, Kreek's Notebook has been performed in the USA and in many European countries, including France, the Netherlands, Finland, Slovenia, the UK, Germany and others. Kreek's Notebook was also released on CD by Hyperion Records: "Tõnu Kõrvits. Kreek's Notebook (2013)" was recorded by the Choir of Royal Holloway and the Britten Sinfonia, and conducted by Rupert Gough. An earlier CD, *Kreegi vihik* (2008), recorded by the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, features Kõrvits' work alongside Cyrillus Kreek's Requiem.

Why is Estonian folk song so persistent in Estonian art music? Perhaps it is its nature: the 'performance' and declaration characterising the culture of modern times is alien to older layers of folk songs. An archaic folk song is, by its nature, an auto-communicative phenomenon—an incantation summoning collective passion for life, embodying the yearning for the return to the mythological 'primordial cradle.' Perhaps all people and nations across the world experience this unconscious yearning. Perhaps this is why the settings of folk songs by Kreek, Tormis and Kõrvits are warmly received in the cultural and linguistic spaces of other nations. This is definitely one reason why the new coming of folk song continues in Estonian music.



Arvo Pärt Centre – an open meeting place

In the autumn of the year of the centennial celebrations of the Republic of Estonia, the Arvo Pärt Centre will open its doors to the public in a unique new building. The building's architecture is inspired by the composer's music, in particular by one of his most important works, *Tabula rasa*. The construction of the Arvo Pärt Centre's new building is financed by the Estonian government.

The architects are Fuensanta Nieto and Enrique Sobejano, from Spanish architectural firm Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos, whose entry, named *'Tabula'*, was declared the winner of the international architectural competition held

in 2014. According to the architects, the building uses architectural means to reflect the calm and geometry of Arvo Pärt's music. The building is also linked to the surrounding landscape, creating a balance between Pärt's music and the beauty of the forest.

The building, which has no right angles and is conceived as a pentagonal grid of spaces and courtyards, will accommodate the archive, offices, a library, a 140-seat chamber hall, an exhibition area, a video hall, and classrooms for cultural education. The total area of the building is 2348 m².

The Arvo Pärt Centre, founded in 2010 by Arvo Pärt and his family,

is a comprehensive personal archive containing the creative heritage of the composer and the related information and records, both in physical and digital form. The most valuable assets of the archive include the composer's musical manuscripts, sketches and diaries. Arvo Pärt's musical diaries, kept over forty years, reflect the composer's quest for a form of expression as well as his thoughts about life, his works, and religion. Various archive materials also include communication with clients, publishers and musicians, thousands of photos, and records of various media, films and other materials related to the composer's life, work and reception.

So far, the Centre's activities have mainly focused on archival work.

This will continue the journey towards becoming an open meeting place, where the key words are creation and creativity. The Centre will provide an opportunity for researchers to carry out research. It will also host lectures on Arvo Pärt's music, as well as on composition and creativity in a broader sense. Particular attention is being paid to creating an environment conducive to research and learning, and good conditions for listening to music. Philosophical and theological workshops, art exhibitions and concerts are also envisaged. The chamber hall's excellent acoustics provide a fantastic venue for both performing and recording music.

The Arvo Pärt Centre is open to everyone who desires to listen, learn and understand.





Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and Neeme Järvi in 2015.
Mait Jürjato

Estonian orchestral scene AD 2017

The names of the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Tallinn Chamber Orchestra or the Estonian Festival Orchestra might not be very familiar outside Estonia. However, the names

of Neeme and Paavo Järvi—members of the Järvi conducting family dynasty—are undoubtedly internationally known. Several other Estonian conductors, like Risto Joost or Vello

Pähn, are also known worldwide. While the music scene of our small and relatively young country, which will celebrate its centenary in 2018, is diverse, its orchestral scene is rather compact.

The first symphony orchestra in Estonia was established in Tartu in 1900. In the early 20th century professional theatres Vanemuine in Tartu and Estonia Tallinn also had their own orchestras. Today, more than a hundred years on, there are three professional symphony orchestras in Estonia—the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, the Vanemuine Symphony

Orchestra, and the Estonian National Opera Orchestra. There are also some project-based orchestras, such as the Estonian Festival Orchestra, the Nordic Symphony Orchestra, and the Pärnu City Orchestra, as well as a classical chamber orchestra: the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra. From time to time, other project orchestras gather for various musical events. Unlike many other countries, such as Germany, Estonia does not have a tradition of amateur orchestras. It is only in recent years that young conductors have started to establish orchestras of amateur and/or student musicians.

The relationship between Estonia's most important symphony orchestra, the **Estonian National Symphony Orchestra** (ENSO), and its Artistic Director and Chief Conductor, Neeme Järvi, goes back decades. The 2016–2017 concert season was a significant one for both the symphony orchestra and its chief conductor: ENSO celebrated its 90th and Neeme Järvi his 80th birthday.

Similar to many European orchestras that were established with the emergence of radio broadcasting (such as the MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra in 1923, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra in 1925, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1930), ENSO was also connected to the birth of national radio. Before records became available, concerts were broadcast live from a studio. ENSO's journey began in 1926, eight years after the birth of the Republic of Estonia, when the first concert performed by a studio trio was broadcast. The ensemble's ranks grew steadily, and, after regularly joining forces with the orchestra of the Estonia Theatre to perform major works, the orchestra reached the size of a symphony orchestra by the late 1930s. From the time that **Olav Roots**, who later became the chief conductor of Orquesta Sinfonica de Colombia, took the post of the chief conductor in 1939, it is possible to speak about the artistic level of the orchestra.

During the Second World War, Estonia was occupied alternately by the Soviet Union, Germany, and then again by the Soviet Union. Being subjected to occupying powers meant that the repertoire had to include certain ideological works. However, Estonian music, with some exceptions, has always held an important position in the orchestra's repertoire. Thousands of Estonians, musicians among them, fled Estonia in the last years of the World War. Thus, the symphony orchestra lost a number of accomplished performers and its chief conductor. The war was followed by fifty years of Soviet occupation with its lows and highs. On the one hand, the occupation regime limited both the free movement of musicians and repertoire choices (the orchestra had to perform a lot of mediocre and downright bad, but ideologically approved music). On the other hand, though, it had the opportunity to perform under the baton of top Soviet conductors, such as Gennady Rozhdestvensky, David Oistrakh, Mstislav Rostropovich, Svjatoslav Richter, Maxim Shostakovich, and Juri Temirkanov, just to name a few.

Cooperation between **Neeme Järvi** and ENSO began in 1956. Four years later, after Järvi graduated from Professor Nikolai Rabinovich's opera and symphonic conducting class at the Leningrad Conservatoire, he joined ENSO as a regular conductor,

working alongside Roman Matsov (1950–1963), and became the chief conductor just three years later, when he was only 26 years old. As a young man, he had enough energy to pursue postgraduate studies at the Leningrad Conservatoire, where his principal teachers were Nikolay Rabinovich and Yevgeny Mravinsky (Järvi graduated in 1966); he won First Prize at the 6th International Conducting Competition of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome (1971), while working as the chief conductor of the Estonian National Opera (1963–1975). Neeme Järvi's arrival brought about a considerable expansion in the repertoire, as well as improvement and stabilisation in the quality of the orchestra's performance. Regular recordings for Estonian Radio and the Melodiya Record Company became an essential part of the orchestra's daily life. The fact that Neeme Järvi is one of the most recorded conductors in the world today confirms that the Maestro has always considered recording a very important part of his musical activities. With Neeme Järvi as chief conductor, the orchestra regularly performed in the most important concert halls in Leningrad and Moscow, and also went on its first tour abroad. In January 1980, Neeme Järvi and his family left the Soviet Union and settled in the USA. However, he did not lose his sense of nation, and has been one of the most active promoters of Estonian music in the world since.

Neeme Järvi's reunion with ENSO after his emigration happened in 1993, in the newly independent Republic of Estonia. In the 2010–2011 season, he resumed his post as chief conductor and artistic director of ENSO.

ENSO (the principals of the orchestra are **Triin Ruubel** and **Arvo Leibur**) as a symphony orchestra has throughout its history fulfilled different roles, operating as a radio orchestra, concert orchestra, and Estonia's signature orchestra. Although during the era of live broadcasts, the orchestra's main task was to fill the airtime with music, over time recording music for the Estonian Radio Archive became more and more important. A large number of symphonic works by Estonian composers have been recorded by ENSO for that purpose. The orchestra continues to fulfil various roles and its repertoire covers the whole spectrum of genres. The nearly 100-strong orchestra gives 60–65 performances in a season and prepares 3 to 4 different programmes in each month. While the 2016–2017 season was devoted to the anniversaries of the orchestra and its chief conductor, squeezing in the orchestra's first tour to China, the 2017–2018 season will be dedicated to the centenary of the Republic of Estonia. The orchestra is planning a number of tours abroad, to the U.S., Hong Kong, and Germany.



Estonian Festival Orchestra
Kaupo Kikkas

In the past decade, the **Estonian Festival Orchestra** (EFO), founded by **Paavo Järvi**, Neeme Järvi's eldest son and Artistic Adviser to ENSO (since 2002), has become one of the most successful symphony orchestras alongside ENSO.

EFO made its first appearance in 2011 at the Pärnu Music Festival as the resident summer orchestra. From 2016, it has performed under the name of the Estonian Festival Orchestra. The resort town of Pärnu

has been a holiday favourite for esteemed musicians (including David Oistrakh and Dmitri Shostakovich) and has hosted numerous summer festivals over the years. Paavo Järvi's ambitious long-time dream of creating an orchestra of carefully selected members—today, members include the best players in Estonian orchestras, talented Estonian instrumentalists pursuing careers abroad, and leading musicians from top orchestras across Europe—has been crowned with

performances that have earned superlatives from critics wherever it has played. According to Paavo Järvi, it is very hard for talented young Estonian musicians to make contacts with top players from other countries: "If you are a young player in Estonia, it doesn't matter how good you are, it's hard to make contact with a top player in the west. Now we can give these young musicians the advantage to both play with top colleagues from around Europe and get to know them as new friends. This spirit is what drives the orchestra and makes me particularly proud as its father figure." EFO can give these young musicians the advantage to both play with top colleagues from around Europe and get to know them as new friends. EFO's principal is **Florian Donderer**, who is also the principal of *Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen*.

The fulfilment of the dream is confirmed by overwhelming feedback from both audiences and critics at home and abroad, who praise the highly concentrated music-making where every detail is worked out, and also the joy of making music, boosted by the impulse from the charismatic and brilliant Paavo Järvi. Paavo Järvi, who has served as the chief conductor of Tokyo's NHK Symphony Orchestra since the 2015–2016 season and the Artistic Director of *Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen* since 2004, and has worked as the music director of

Orchestre de Paris, principal conductor of *hr-Sinfonieorchester* and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and has been appointed the new Chief Conductor and Music Director of the *Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich* for a five-year term from the 2019–20 season, considers the Estonian Festival Orchestra to be one of the most important musical outlets.

Despite its short existence, EFO has performed together with many esteemed musicians, such as Radu Lupu, Lisa Batiashvili, Viktoria Mullova, Zhang Zuo, Matthew Hunt, Martin Kuuskmann, Nicolas Dautricourt, Khatia Buniatishvili and others. While the orchestra initially only performed as the focal point of the Pärnu Music Festival, it has little by little started to take on a life of its own. Until 2017, the orchestra performed only in Pärnu, but in August 2017 it made its first tour to our neighbouring countries on the Baltic coast, performing in Latvia, Finland, Denmark and Sweden. In January 2018, EFO will celebrate the centenary of the Republic of Estonia with a tour to major European capitals, including Brussels, Berlin, Vienna, Zurich and Luxembourg, performing Erkki-Sven Tüür's 9th symphony, commissioned for this occasion.

While the two Estonian theatre orchestras—one, the **Estonian National Opera** (chief conductor and artistic director **Vello Pähn**) and the other, the **Vanemuine Theatre** (chief conductor and music director **Paul Mägi**)—remain out of the spotlight due to their everyday work with theatre repertoire, both orchestras also give a number of symphonic concerts each year. Since 2000, the Estonian National Opera Orchestra together with its choir and soloists has regularly given concert performances of various operas, to great success. In 2016, the Estonian public was treated to Donizetti's 'Anna Bolena' for the first time in the history of the Estonian National Opera (conductor Arvo Volmer); other concert performances include Strauss's 'Arabella' (2015, conductor Vello Pähn), Rimski-Korsakov's 'The Snow Maiden' (2014, conductor Vello Pähn), Gounod's 'Romeo and Juliet' (2013, conductor Vello Pähn), and Bellini's 'Norma' (2012, conductor Alberto Hold-Garrido). While this and the coming season of the Estonian National Opera, as those of many other ensembles, are devoted to the upcoming centenary of the Republic of Estonia, in October the orchestra toured Finland to celebrate the 100. anniversary of our northern neighbour. At a time when many Estonian ensembles and orchestras are seeking the attention of Asian audiences, the Estonian National

Opera has set itself the objective of performing in grand old opera houses: performances were given at the Moscow Helikon Opera in 2016, at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg in the autumn of 2017.

Chamber orchestras in Estonia have not performed very consistently. Today the oldest Estonian chamber orchestra is the **Tallinn Chamber Orchestra** (TCO), founded 25 years ago by Tõnu Kaljuste. While a chamber orchestra of the same name performed between 1961 and 1976, it was not the predecessor of today's Tallinn Chamber Orchestra. TCO comprises around twenty highly rated string players, who also regularly perform as soloists and chamber musicians. The principal of the orchestra is **Harry Traksmann**. TCO is characterised by its outstanding ensemble skills, flexibility and style-sensitive play. Its diverse repertoire ranges from baroque to contemporary music. The Tallinn Chamber Orchestra has a long-standing cooperation with Estonia's signature choir, the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (both founded by Tõnu Kaljuste)—in particular the performance and recording of Arvo Pärt's works. Besides Tõnu Kaljuste, Finnish conductor Juha Kangas has worked with the orchestra as the chief conductor and artistic director (1995–1996, 2001–2003). Since autumn 2013, the chief conductor of TCO has been



Tallinn Chamber Orchestra
Kaupo Kikkas

Risto Joost, who has also been artistic director of the MDR Leipzig Radio Choir (*MDF Rundfunkchor*) since 2015 and was the chief conductor of the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra and Choir in 2011–2015. TCO will celebrate the centenary of the Republic of Estonia with a European tour and perform together with the

Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir in the Netherlands and Belgium in January. Celebrations for the 25th birthday of the orchestra reach their peak in March and April 2018, when the orchestra will perform under the baton of all conductors who have become important to the orchestra over years.

Young musicians are the hallmark of Estonia

Estonia: small in terms of both population and area, yet big in terms of culture. We have made Estonia big by singing and playing music, dancing and writing poetry, painting and performing on the stage. The history of Estonian professional music is not very long, but is impressive—we have Arvo Pärt and Veljo Tormis, Heino Eller and Eduard Tubin, the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra (ENSO) and the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Neeme and Paavo Järvi and many others. This list could go on and on. While Estonian music and musicians are highly regarded across the world, this should not be taken for granted. The quality of our musicians is the result of years of excellent work by music teachers, their fastidiousness and extraordinary dedication, which is bearing fruit to this day. It is amazing that our high culture is so rich and so highly regarded—the Republic of Estonia is

about to celebrate its first centenary and the history of our professional culture is not much longer either.

The current fortunate situation where the Estonian music scene is famous and successful promises to continue for decades because a new generation of musicians is gaining a foothold in the music scene alongside the masters. Many talented young musicians study and pursue their careers abroad, and even more have found their place in Estonian orchestras and educational institutions. While during the Soviet era musicians pursued postgraduate education at Leningrad or Moscow conservatories, today they head for music academies in Western countries, mainly Germany or the UK. The Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal Academy of Music in London, UK, are the preferred choice for young Estonian musicians—the majority of our young pianists have improved their skills in the capital of

the UK. This is also where Toccata Classics has now recorded and released a series of albums of piano music called ‘Heino Eller – Complete Piano Music’, performed by **Sten Lassman**, one of the most remarkable Estonian pianists of the younger generation.

The majority of prominent Estonian musicians are graduates of the Tallinn Music High School—even the fact that such school still exists in Europe today is remarkable. The school was founded in the 1960s on the model of similar schools in Leningrad and Moscow, providing upper secondary education and specialist music studies with the objective of preparing students for university studies in music. It is an expensive undertaking for the State because of the large number of music subjects and the share of individual lessons. The skill levels of Tallinn Music High School students and graduates have been consistently very high for more than half a century. Students are very successful in competitions, and graduates are highly regarded as professional musicians and music teachers. All three musicians showcased in this article were educated at Tallinn Music High School.

The most famous, best loved and most successful pianist of the new generation, **Mihkel Poll** (born in 1986) completed his PhD in Professor Ivari Ilja’s PhD class at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EAMT), studied in the meanwhile



Sten Lassman
Kaupo Kikkas



Mihkel Poll
Kaupo Kikkas



Mari Poll-Novakovič
Kaupo Kikkas

at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Professor Ronan O'Hora and also attended the masterclasses by Professor Eliso Virsaladze at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole in Italy. Mihkel Poll has won numerous prizes at national and international competitions. He set himself ambitious goals at a very young age, performing complicated repertoire with skill far beyond what was typical for his age. Poll often performs with symphony orchestras. His repertoire includes, among others, piano concertos by Estonian composers Erkki-Sven Tüür and Helena Tulve (the latter as

the premiere). Poll has established long-term cooperation with conductor Anu Tali and has toured Europe with the Nordic Symphony Orchestra.

Nearly every Estonian musician sooner or later undertakes teaching—it is inevitable considering the small size of our country and limited performing opportunities. Mihkel Poll has been teaching at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre for a number of years already; he also performs at school concerts, introducing and promoting classical piano music to children.

A performance of high quality is guaranteed with Mihkel Poll. He is a musician with exquisite technique and enviably good taste; he is dedicated and meticulous, respects his audience and is very demanding of himself. Although his concerts often feature piano music no older than 100 years, he is an expert performer of the Romantic composers. At his last solo concert in the Estonia Concert Hall, he gave a breath-taking performance of Schumann and Chopin. He also plays in chamber music groups, often together with his violinist sister **Mari Poll-Novakovič**, with whom he has recorded a CD of 20th-century music. Mihkel Poll's two solo CDs, released under the Ondine and Dux labels, feature music from the same period. Despite his young age, Poll has become an opinion leader within Estonian cultural circles, and was

elected chairman of the Estonian Pianists Association. He is a musician who performs in Estonia, Europe and also America. Hopefully, his career as a performer will continue to flourish as it has so far.

In 1991, the largest Estonian concert organisation, Eesti Kontsert, launched the 'Con Brio' competition-festival for young musicians. Unlike most other competitions, 'Con Brio' was open to all instruments and ensembles. The competition was extremely popular and successful and provided an excellent springboard for many brilliant young Estonian musicians. In 2013, the competition was replaced by the TV contest 'Stars of Classical Music,' which, besides hardening the young musicians' performance nerves, offers them an opportunity of media exposure. The three seasons of 'Stars of Classical Music' have brought Estonians much closer to classical music; young contestants are popular and loved by the viewers. The impact of the programme on young children at the start of their music education cannot be underestimated—an attractive format and dazzling role models can make new talents to decide in favour of a career as a professional musician.

The winner of the first season of 'Stars of Classical Music' was young cellist **Marcel Johannes Kits** (born in 1995), one of the most promising young musicians of recent years. After



Marcel Johannes Kits
David Ausserhofer

graduating from Tallinn Music High School (Mart Laas' class), Marcel continued his studies with Professor Francis Gouton at Trossingen University of Music (Germany), and has been performing mainly in Europe since then. Kits has won a number of national and international competitions, including the first prize and two special prizes at the Johannes Brahms competition in Pörtlach (Austria). Kits often performs with various orchestras and gives solo performances. He has worked with pianists Sten Heinoja and Rasmus Andreas Raide. Marcel Johannes Kits and Rasmus Andreas Raide will give a debut performance at Konzerthaus Berlin in February 2018, and will tour Estonia a month later. For this season, solo concerts have been planned in the U.S., China and Japan as well as perfor-



Triin Ruubel
Kaupo Kikkas

mances with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra and Kymi Sinfonietta.

My last experience with Marcel's performance is from last April, when Marcel played Beethoven's Concerto for Violin, Cello, and Piano with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra (conductor Olari Elts), his violinist twin sister Katariina Maria Kits, and pianist Sten Heinoja. His instrument's tone was beautiful, ethereal and translucent, yet dazzling and intensive. It is not often that you hear such a pleasant combination. Kits' technique is brilliant and his artistic poise and stage charm never fail to win over audiences. He is definitely a

very capable and talented cellist with great potential for an international career as a soloist.

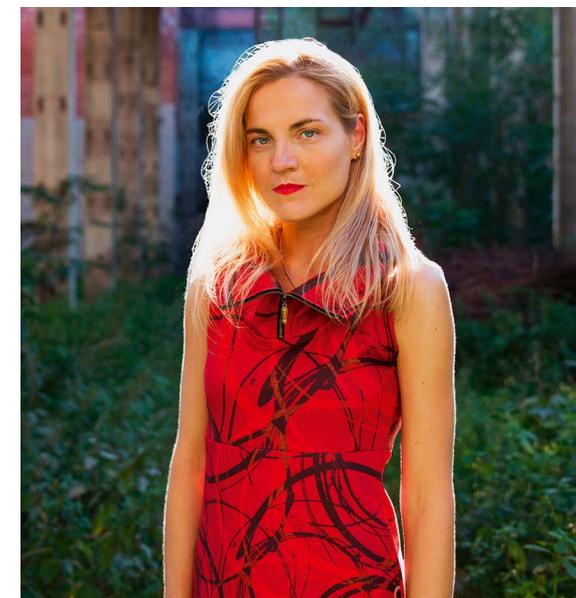
If you listen to the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, it is very likely that you are enjoying the performance of one of our best young violinists, the brilliant and talented **Triin Ruubel** (born 1988). Since April 2015, she has held the position of principal of the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra. After graduating from Tallinn Music High School (under Tiiu Peäske), Triin continued her education at *Hochschule für Musik und Theater Rostock*, in the class of Professor Petru Munteanu, and is

working towards her Master's degree at the University of Augsburg. Triin Ruubel regularly performs abroad, giving chamber concerts and solo performances with orchestras. Triin has won a number of prizes at international competitions, such as the *Grand Prix* at the 'Remember Enescu' competition in Sinaia, Romania, and the first prize and special prizes at the International Competition for Violin, Kloster Schöntal (Schöntal, Germany). Triin's interest in contemporary music has led to the establishment of the contemporary music ensemble Neophon, and to collaboration with composers Wolfgang Rihm, Peter Ruzicka and Jörg Widmann. Contemporary music has also an important place in her solo repertoire and various Estonian composers have dedicated works to her. In addition to teaching at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, Triin also teaches at the Järvi Summer Academy of the Pärnu Music Festival and is a member of the Estonian Festival Orchestra.

Listening to her solo performances with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, in particular her interpretations of Sibelius' and Elgar's Violin Concertos have been a breath-taking experience. Despite Ruubel's young age and heavy workload, her beautiful sound, stylish approach and technical excellence make her one of the best musicians in Estonia today. It is a great fortune that the principal of our signature orchestra is also a brilliant

soloist—we can consider ourselves very lucky. This season, Ruubel will have her debut in the Berliner Philharmonie, as well as engagements as a soloist with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra on their US tour.

Speaking of young Estonian musicians, we cannot omit mentioning the explosive success of **Uue Tänav Orkester** (the New Street Orchestra, conductor **Kaspar Mänd**) in the Estonian music scene. Last season, the youth orchestra accomplished its goal of performing all nine symphonies by Ludwig van Beethoven and continues to give impressive performances that are loved by the audience. While the



Age Juurikas
Sadu-Triste Juurikas



Theodor Sink
Carol Liis Metsla

orchestra has only performed in Estonia so far, it is probably just a matter of time before they spread their wings and extend their activities across the border. Brilliant performances have been given both in Estonia and abroad by the expressive and suggestive pianist **Age Juurikas**, cellist **Theodor Sink**, who enchants the audience with his warmth and natural musicality, the original and exciting pianist **Sten Heinoja**, and many others. Our young conductors do not need to be introduced separately – **Mikhail Gerts**, **Risto Joost**, **Mikk Murdvee** and others have been household names among audiences of European theatres and concert halls for years. Estonian musicians play in many European orchestras. Most of them meet at the Pärnu Music Festival to perform together as the Estonian Festival Orchestra, under the baton of our beloved conductors Neeme and Paavo Järvi. It is wonderful that young performers have the opportunity to pursue a career in the wider world, while not forgetting Estonia. Ethnic belonging has lost some of its importance in today's globalised society, and the language of music is, luckily, universal. The essential features of Estonian musicians are quality, dedication, style and technical proficiency. I believe that as time goes on, these features will become all the more valuable.



Last summer's Youth Song Festival, 'Here I'll Stay'.

Estonians and choral music: myths and realities

KAIE TANNER

Estonians and choral music are like two peas in a pod, like peanut butter and jelly, like hand and glove. At international music conferences, I often hear: "You are from Estonia? Everything is great with choral music in YOUR country." Or: "50% of your population sing in a choir, don't they?"

I usually respond, in a typically self-deprecating Estonian style, that even in Estonia there is room for

improvement in the field of choral music. And choir singers make up much less than half of our population. Our population is 1,315,635 people (according to Statistics Estonia) and we have 47,613 choir singers and brass band members (the latter are traditionally counted as the 'song festival crowd'). That means only 3.62% of the population actually sing in a choir or play in brass band.

However, according to the song celebration study of 2013, more than half (51%) of the Estonian population have at some point participated in a song celebration as a performer, roughly two-thirds have attended as an audience member, and 90% have followed TV or radio broadcasts of our greatest mass choir singing event. Thus, it is indeed true that the song celebration is very important for Estonians, which may be a reason for the myth that “half of the population sings in a choir.”

It should be also noted that Estonian choral music and the song celebration tradition are not quite the same thing. There is no doubt that the song celebration is the biggest and most inclusive event in our choral culture, but there is much more to it. Without the ‘much more,’ our song celebration tradition would not be what it is today, with regular performances from choirs that are active on the cultural scene to keep the level high, thus ensuring the high standard of performances at the song celebration that are held every five years.

What kind of choirs do we have?

There are 1,417 choirs currently active in Estonia: 406 children’s choirs for younger children (aged between 6 and 11), 392 mixed choirs, 283 children’s choirs for teenagers (aged between 12

and 16), 137 boys’ choirs, 98 female choirs, 57 male choirs and 44 girls’ choirs with 880 choir conductors altogether.

Estonia is probably one of the few European countries where the majority of choir singers (61.4%) are children and young people. In most countries, choir singing is viewed as a hobby for middle-aged and elderly people. On the one hand, this makes us very happy; on the other hand, we cannot help but wonder: where do all these choir singers disappear after leaving school and why have they abandoned singing? One of the reasons is probably the academic rigour and heavy student workload at the upper-secondary level that leaves little time for hobbies. After leaving school, former choir singers are too busy pursuing further education (at Estonian universities or elsewhere), finding their first jobs, and starting a family. People have more than enough on their plate with earning money and setting up their lives. It is also true that while most children are able to sing in a one or two-part children’s choir, and many school choirs admit nearly everybody, even a three-part children’s choir requires somewhat higher musical skills from singers, never mind what is required for a four-part girls’, mixed or boys’ choir. Thus, it is the nature of things that not everyone who happily warbled *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* in a choir of first-graders, can sing in (at least) a four-part choir.

How are choirs organised and governed?

There are thousands of organisations in the world that bring choral music performers together, and some countries have more than one national organisation. The Estonian structure is clear and simple: all choirs and brass bands fall under jurisdiction of the Estonian Choral Association (ECA). Any concerns that choirs may have can be addressed to the ECA. More specific issues for different types of choir and their conductors are handled by the ECA’s sub-organisations: the Estonian Male Choirs Association, the Estonian Female Song Society, the Estonian Mixed Choirs Association, the Estonian Chamber Choirs Union, the Estonian Choral Conductors Association and the Estonian Society for Music Education. However, membership of a sub-organisation is voluntary, and not every choir is a member. While children’s and youth choirs are direct members of the Choral Association, there is no specific sub-organisation—collecting membership fees would be a disproportionately heavy burden on the conductors of school choirs. The Estonian Choral Association is a member of the European Choral Association—*Europa Cantat*—and the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM). The Association’s responsibilities include distributing international choral music

information to Estonian choirs and organising study trips for Estonian choir conductors to the World Symposium on Choral Music and to the *Europa Cantat* Festival.

What do the choirs do?

The Estonian choir music scene is large and diverse. Choirs perform at various local events, such as the opening of buildings, Advent candle lighting ceremonies, corporate Christmas parties, welcoming ceremonies for Olympic medal winners, award ceremonies, presidential receptions and dignitaries’ birthday parties. Queen Elizabeth II was treated to a choral concert on the Town Hall Square during her visit to Estonia, and our choirs sang for the Emperor of Japan at the Song Celebration Grounds. The opening concert of the Estonian EU Presidency in June 2017 also featured choral music (but not exclusively). Estonian choirs are becoming increasingly bold in using videos, lights, staging and choreography during their performances—choir music has come a long way from being a solemn event with unsmiling singers dressed in sombre black clothing.

Besides the national song celebration there are regional choral events all over Estonia. Performing at such events is a matter of honour for every local choir. These mini song festivals

are often used as testing grounds for the national song celebration repertoire. They are also a meeting place for the tradition bearers of folk culture—singers, folk dancers, musicians and orchestras, as well as local audiences. Another tradition is nationwide choral festivals for different types of choir: mixed choirs, female choirs and male choirs all have their own special event. Neither cold nor rain or wind—so common at open-air concerts in June—can quash the Estonians’ desire to sing together.

A number of competitions are held for choirs that want to put their skills to the test. There are national competitions in every category: children’s, boys’, girls’, male and mixed choirs. Pop music lovers can compete with each other at the Viimsi Pop-Jazz Festival or at the *Lauluragin* pop and jazz choir competition, held in Valga.

Estonia also hosts two international choir festivals. The Tallinn International Choir Festival, launched in 1972, is a classical choir competition involving different types of choirs and various music styles. To participate, candidates must submit a recent CD or video recording of their performance for audition. In terms of the award fund, the Tallinn festival is among the biggest in Europe. The participants include around 30 choirs from all over the world, including Australia, Africa and the Americas. The Pärnu International Choir Festival

focuses on folk music.

Estonian singers enjoy the competition, putting their skills to the test and comparing talents. Estonian choirs are also enthusiastic participants in choir competitions in other countries—each year between 30 and 60 Estonian choirs bring home prizes from such competitions. We are proud that the Collegium Musicale chamber choir won the Grand Prix at last year’s ‘Let the Peoples Sing’ international choir competition, organised by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). We are always overjoyed when the Grand Prix for the Tallinn Choir Festival remains in Estonia, although the last time this happened was in 2013, when *Head ööd, vend* chamber choir was awarded the *Grand Prix*. Estonian choir music aficionados know by heart which Estonian choirs have received the Grammy Award for Best Choral Performance: Ellerhein, the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, the Estonian National Male Choir and Vox Clamantis. The latter also won the Diapason d’Or award a couple of years ago.

Delegations of Estonian choir conductors consistently rank among the most numerous both at the World Symposium on Choral Music and at various European choir festivals. Our conductors take great interest in developments abroad: how and what choirs sing in other countries. It goes without saying that every conductor



Estonian National Opera Boys' Choir

returning from a study trip brings back an impressive stack of choral scores.

The preferred repertoire of the choirs

Years ago, when Carus Verlag published its *Musica Sacra Baltica*. Sacred choral music from Baltic countries certain foreign choral conductors immediately dubbed it “the secret choral music from Baltic countries,” claiming that it was very difficult to find and get scores of our choral music. Fortunately, the situation has improved: thanks to the Estonian Music Information Centre, the scores of Estonian choral music are now available for purchase online (www.emic.ee).

Estonian choirs mainly perform the

works of Estonian composers, which is only natural. While Pärt, Tormis and Sisask are names that are known around the world, we have an ever-increasing number of new composers whose works are performed by different choirs: Tõnu Kõrvits, Pärt Uusberg, Tauno Aints, Andres Lemba, Evelin Seppar, Riho Esko Maimets, Rasmus Puur, Mirjam Tally...

Choirs also enjoy singing folk music arrangements and works by modern composers. From the older repertoire, the romanticists Mendelssohn and Brahms are preferred; works from the baroque period and before are performed less often. The latter is the domain of individual chamber choirs. The number of Estonian pop and jazz choirs is quite small—these styles are still to be fully discovered by

our choral singers. However, they are becoming increasingly popular.

When it comes to the question of which composers are most likely to be represented in the repertoire of the majority of Estonian choirs, the answer is Veljo Tormis and Gustav Ernesaks. No song festival is complete without Ernesaks' *Mu isamaa on minu arm* (My Fatherland is My Love), and there is hardly a single Estonian who is not familiar with this song.

Why are we concerned?

While on the surface it may seem that choir conducting is a very highly regarded profession in Estonia, the reality is not as rosy. The reason is the relatively low salaries of choir directors and the prevailing attitude, which can be traced back to the Soviet time, that choir music as mass culture should be available to all free of charge. 'Free of charge,' however, is often seen as a synonym of 'worthless.'

The majority of active choir conductors in Estonia are over 50 years old, which is a cause for concern—who will conduct our more than 1,000 choirs in 30 years time? On a brighter note, there is a new generation of excellent, exciting, and energetic young choir conductors emerging and already active on the choral music scene. However, if the number of choral conducting students remains small, there will not

be enough conductors for every choir. This is why we are looking for ways to make the choral conducting profession more attractive, to increase pay and offer regular training—to ensure that no choir is forced to disband due to a lack of conductors.

At the 2017 Youth Song Celebration, *mina jään* (Here I'll Stay), 17 young conductors had their debuts. While in the past, the honour of conducting at a song celebration was mainly entrusted to experienced conductors, in 2017 many conductors were in their 20s, and even some students or recent graduates from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. This trust was justified—the young conductors did an admirable job, singers enjoyed singing under the baton of their peers, and the rehearsals as well as the celebration itself were marked by a new energy. The song celebration's title, *Here I'll Stay*, was a kind of vow to stay in the homeland, to stick to music, to remain in the profession of choral conducting, to continue choir singing—depending on how each participant understood the slogan.

I believe that Estonia will always be a country of choirs. Singing together is in our blood; it is a part of our identity. The tradition of song celebrations is something every Estonian can relate to and feel very personally about. When looking at and listening to the tens of thousands of choir singers at a song celebration,

I, too, feel that they are my singers, my people. This is my stage, my celebration fire, my people among the audience. It is an especially good feeling to realise that each and every performer and audience member feels the same way.

To sum up, I would like to mention one example of the Estonians' relation to choir singing.

A few years ago, the Choral Association was involved in planning the cultural programme for a bicycle tour organised by the Estonian Green Movement. It was a massive event: thousands of cyclists rode for three days around Estonia, making stops from time to time to see the sights, participate in debates and attend concerts. Normally, the performers at such events are various bands and pop artists; this time, however, they also included choirs. Looking at the diverse company of cyclists (while their age ranged from 7 to 70, the majority were young people), I was not sure they would enjoy choir music... Well, there was no reason for concern. The first stop was a small church that served as the venue for a concert by Toomas Voll's children's choir. The church was packed to the rafters, so Toomas Voll with his usual efficiency gave three concerts in a row, like in a cinema: a 25-minute concert, audience out, the next churchful of people in, a 25-minute performance, and then again, three times in a row.

Those who could not get in waited patiently for their turn.

Another memory from that tour comes to mind: a young man sporting a green Mohawk passed me on an uphill, pedalling his rather rickety bike loaded with a crate of beer quite frantically. He looked back over his shoulder to spur on his friends: "Step on it! The Tallinn University of Technology chamber choir will perform in 10 minutes!"

And finally, at the end of the final performance in a church yard, all the cyclists stood up to join the choir in singing *Põhjamaa* (A Song of the Nordic Land), a song familiar to many from numerous song festivals. I am quite sure that Estonia is the only place on this planet where such things can happen.

International Music Day – October 1st

more than 100 free concerts all across Estonia on a single day

On International Music Day — held on 1 Octobers — the Estonian Music Council organizes more than 100 free events, which bring together performers and audiences in both conventional settings as well as at unorthodox locations. Be it at a concert hall, on

public transport or even in a bog, the public can choose to visit performances of varying genres, ranging from classical to folk to jazz. The day-long celebration of music culminates with the traditional Estonian Music Awards Ceremony.



Tallinn Chamber Orchestra on the stage of Škoda Ice Arena at Estonian Music Awards Ceremony.

Tiit Mõtus



Collegium Musicale on International Music Day.

Kristel Üksvärav



Reinut Tepp, Kaari Uus, Kadri Kukk at Kemu Manor.

Susanna Paabumets



Võru Music School

Tõnis Anton



Anni Toompere at the Railway Station in Valga.

Ame Kiin



Concert on a trolleybus.
Peeter Langovits

Estonian National Male Choir at Solaris Shopping Centre.
Peeter Langovits



Estonian TV Girls' Choir at Kalev SPA.
Rene Jakobson



Rein Rannap on the plane AN2.
Jaanus Lensment



ENSO performing at the Telliskivi Creative City.
Peeter Langovits



Kristjan Kannukene and Henri Zibo at Haapsalu Neurological Rehabilitation Centre.
Kaija Niiler



Ellerhein Girls' Choir at the Guard Battalion.



Nõmme Station Restaurant Elsa – Evelin Samuel and Marten Altrov.
Jako-Priit Raud



Paljassaare, Maimu Jõgeda.
Lemmetu

Estonia – most festivalised country

A couple of years ago, in response to my question about how they spent their summer, the wife of one foreign ambassador residing in Estonia exclaimed: “Estonia is the most festivalised of all the countries we have been posted to! We did not have much time to spend in our home country because there were so many exciting music festivals here that we wanted to visit this summer.” This certainly was a compliment. But it also prompted me to ask whether the ambassador’s wife had in mind the better-known trademark festivals, or if she had also noticed those with a smaller target group—held during cold seasons when the concert scene is scarce, where a festival provides the local musicians with an opportunity to shine and to enjoy foreign performers. Fortunately, the lady was a true culture aficionado who was able to talk at length about various events—from the baroque music fireworks at the Haapsalu Early Music Festival to the fire eating accompanied by Haydn at the Birgitta Festival.

The tradition of holding music festivals in various genres actually dates back to the Soviet times. Let us not forget that the very first jazz festival in the Soviet empire was held in Tallinn in 1967, with performers including the famous Charles Lloyd Quartet. It was precisely because of the appearance of the American quartet that the Tallinn Jazz Festival, which had begun in 1949, was shelved for a long time by the communist regime: until, that is, the grand dame of Estonian jazz, Anne Erm, resumed the tradition with the Jazzkaar festival. **Jazzkaar** has been a beacon for the organisers of other festivals, showing how determined and persistent efforts have helped a festival team evolve into an organization that holds jazz concerts and satellite festivals all year round.

A number of Estonian festivals focus on different cultures, transitions and periods of early music; the oldest—the Haapsalu and Viljandi early music festivals—have been running for more than a quarter of a



Haapsalu Early Music Festival.
Sabine Burger

century. The **Haapsalu Early Music Festival** spoils the audience with golden soloists and ensembles from different countries, often involving Estonian musicians in their performances as well; the **Viljandi Early Music Festival** often aims its music projects at young people. The festival season in Estonia is not just summer. For example, the **bachFest** (Bach Festival) complements the range of early music festivals at the beginning

of year, during the week of Orthodox Christmas celebrations; the **Ceciliana** early music festival, organized by the Early Music Centre of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, takes place in March, offering high-quality harpsichord music.

Some musical theatre festivals, targeted at foreign tourists, seem to be the most original events among the line-up of festivals. The genre itself requires strong financial backing—this is why



Saaremaa Opera Days.
Eesti Kontsert

we can talk about a search for a new, rather than an established tradition. It is the Estonian opera and ballet festivals that have offered an exciting change to our dance and song theatres. **PromFest**, an international opera festival held biannually in Pärnu, is an ingenious symbiosis between a competition for young singers and an original opera production. The **Klaudia Taev Competition for Young Opera Singers** is also held in the Summer Capital of Estonia. The grand prix of the Klaudia Taev Competition is the opportunity to take a leading role in the subsequent year's PromFest opera production. Winners have the right to specify their desired roles. The artistic risks have been raised to the maximum and the outcome is often worth this leap of faith.

The latest PromFest opera productions have also been performed at the Birgitta Festival, held in the ruins of the mediaeval Pirita (Saint Birgitta) Convent. The **Birgitta Festival** combines the mystical charm of the mediaeval convent with the latest in contemporary music theatre. The Birgitta Festival, offering an eclectic range of genres and applying a broad approach to music theatre, attempts to offer something for every taste: the programme includes a ballet, the staging of major works, golden operas, and more intimate and experimental opuses. There is always something for families with children.

The **Saaremaa Opera Days** have been a major tourist attraction for Saaremaa, the largest Estonian island,

for a number of years now. The festival focuses on opera classics performed by one or two guest opera theatres. As this festival is full of the glamour that has been associated with the world of opera throughout history, for many guests the gala night of the festival is the most anticipated event of the year. Both the Saaremaa Opera Days and the **Jõhvi Ballet Festival** are organized by Eesti Kontsert, the State Concert Institute. The Jõhvi festival focuses on links between ballet and other arts. The Great Hall of the Jõhvi Concert Hall has the largest and most modern stage in Estonia, and the festival makes the best use of its possibilities.

While chamber music is the focus of a number of festivals, great performers can also be seen at numerous concerts and concert series between festivals. The **Kuressaare Chamber Music Days**, the **Mustjala Music Festival** and the **Hiiumaa Chamber Music Days** give a good overview of Estonian chamber musicians performing in various ensembles. A trademark of these festivals is the search for unusual venues for ensembles, playing music and with music in the enchanting island nature, making use of the exciting landmarks of Estonian islands, such as Kõpu lighthouse, Kuressaare castle or the abandoned coastal artillery fortresses

Mustjala Music Festival.

on the Nina Peninsula. Guitar virtuosi from Estonia and elsewhere gather in summer for the **Tallinn Guitar Festival** and in autumn for the **Viljandi Guitar Festival**, held in the Estonian folk capital Viljandi. In terms of genre, neither festival has put in place any strict limits, which has resulted in fascinating groups and a great deal of experimenting.

The **Tallinn Chamber Music Festival** and the **Tallinn Winter Festival** are held in different seasons and feature different genres of Estonian classical chamber music performed in numerous churches and chamber halls in Tallinn. However, the focus is traditionally on vocal chamber music and the *Lied*.





Estonian Music Days.
Peeter Langovits

Thanks to the 150-year-old song festival tradition, Estonia is considered to be a country with a strong choral culture. While many amateur choirs perform in various genres, we also have world-class choirs, such as the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and the Estonian National Male Choir. Numerous choir festivals or other musical events focusing on choral music play an important role. The **Tallinn International Choir Festival**, held in odd years, has established itself in the European amateur choir competition calendar. Smooth organisation, a high-level jury and the opportunity to perform in different

churches and concert halls around Tallinn with acoustics virtually created for choral music attracts a significant number of choirs from across the world. Moreover, the festival offers the opportunity to experience the quintessence of Estonian choral singing and the high level of our conducting school. The **Pärnu International Choir Festival** is, on the other hand, the meeting place of choirs focusing on folk and heritage songs. Similar to the Tallinn festival, the Pärnu festival is built around a competition, the difference being that the performers are younger and less academic. Modern choral music

and premieres of various works are the highlight of the programme at the **Pühalepa Music Festival**. Pühalepa is a small village on the island of Hiiumaa, not far from the home of Erkki-Sven Tüür, one of the most fascinating and international modern Estonian composers. Performances of his new works have often been the absolute highlight of the Pühalepa festival. Besides early music festivals, the Pühalepa festival has in a way restored the traditions of the early and modern music festival held in Tallinn in the 1980s. Traditional orthodox vocal music, including choral music, is performed in a brilliant manner at the **Credo** international religious music festival, held in Tallinn each autumn.

The **Estonian Music Days**, held in spring in Tallinn, focus on different orchestras that perform only works by Estonian composers. This festival is one of the oldest music festivals in Estonia—the Estonian Composers' Union initiated the festival to showcase the works of its members back in 1979. To ensure consistency the festival programme does not focus only on new works, but always features earlier works by Estonian composers and those from neighboring countries. The highlights of the Tallinn concert season are the Estonian Music Days' orchestral music concerts, usually performed by our representative orchestra—the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra.

A professional symphony orchestra is also at the core of the **Pärnu Music Festival** and **Järvi Academy**. As the name suggests, the event is a follow-up and further development of the David Oistrakh festival, where Neeme Järvi offered master classes to young conductors. The Pärnu Music Festival and Paavo Järvi have together created a completely new orchestra, the Estonian Festival Orchestra, which from this season is also performing outside the festival, in particular abroad. Paavo Järvi's interpretation and the performance of the dream team comprised of his friends and partners in music, together with the special acoustics of the Pärnu Concert Hall, have become a benchmark for orchestral music in Estonia.

The **Viljandi Folk Music Festival** has found a place on the Parnassus of



Paavo Järvi and Radu Lupu in Pämu (2017).
Kaupo Kikkas

the world's folk and traditional music festivals. The festival, which began as a pedagogical project by the Viljandi Culture Academy, has come a long way, acquired a large and loyal audience, and brought the small town of Viljandi to the forefront of the world's folk festival venues. The Viljandi festival is not only about the perfect technique demonstrated by musicians; it also offers an opportunity to see and listen to fascinating instruments and singing, and to enjoy novel approaches to folk music. It is the special atmosphere and mutually supportive dynamic that takes possession of the town, its residents and visitors over a weekend in July. However, the Viljandi festival is not the only one that brings together folk music lovers. For example, the **Mooste Elohelü** festival, held in spring, encourages competition in putting folk music into contemporary forms and expressions. The competitions within the event stretch the limits of the

creative fantasy of both solo singers and instrumentalists alike, encouraging the audience to look at folk music from a different perspective.

Since Estonia has the biggest number of festivals per inhabitant, based on statistics, this overview is but an introduction for those discovering our festival scene. Villu Veski, a jazz musician and the leader of **Juu Jääb Festival** in Muhu island and the Estonian Music Festivals Association, states, "At the time when global stability is in decline, music festivals are once again giving a helping hand to mankind in its search for identity and cohesion. A music festival is a forum for artists to spread an honest message that reunites humanity, without regard to religion or political affiliation or lack thereof. Today, festivals are the keepers of traditions and meeting places that offer an experience without which it would be difficult to imagine life."



Juu Jääb Festival

Moorland Elegies –

Classical Recording of 2018



The annual Estonian 'Golden Record' (*Kuldne Plaat*) pop music award was established by the Estonian Association of the Phonogram Producers in 1998, the same year that the Association was established. Estonian phonogram producers wanted to honour musical accomplishments by local pop musicians. Today, there are 19 award categories in the Golden Record. In the last five years, the Estonian Association of the Phonogram Producers, together with the Estonian Music Council, has also awarded the Golden Record to a classical music recording. Indeed, Estonian musicians won the prestigious Grammy a decade earlier, in 2004, when the Grammy award was given to the Virgin Classics recording of Sibelius Cantatas with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Estonian National Male Choir and Ellerhein Girls Choir, conducted by Paavo Järvi.

The Classical Record of the Year category includes four genre categories: chamber music, symphony music or

stage music, choral music and a work by an Estonian composer. This year's winner, *Moorland Elegies (Lageda laulud)* for mixed choir and string orchestra (2015) by Tõnu Kõrvits, was nominated in the last two categories. Based on poems by Emily Brontë, Kõrvits' work was very warmly received at its premiere, in Tallinn's St. John's Church on 31 October 2015 by the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Risto Joost. For this work, the composer also received the National Cultural Award of the Republic of Estonia in 2016. A record, released by Ondine in the spring of 2017, also attracted international attention, receiving plenty of recognition by critics—dozens of reviews in record magazines, the Record of the Week award by German web portal Classic heute, and many others. On 25 January 2018, the Golden Record of 2018 was added to these earlier awards.

Estonia 100

programme abroad highlights 2018

ESTONIAN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA TOUR IN EUROPE

Conductor **Paavo Järvi**

18.01 Brussels, Bozar (world premiere:
Erkki-Sven Tüür, Symphony N° 9 *Mythos*)

20.–24.01 Tonhalle Maag (Zürich),
Philharmonie Köln, Philharmonie Berlin,
Konzerthaus Vienna, Philharmonie
Luxembourg (soloist Viktoria Mullova)

13.08 London BBC Proms

14.08 Amsterdam Concertgebouw

15.08 Hamburg Elbphilharmonie

THE MUSIC OF ARVO PÄRT, GRONINGEN Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Tallinn Chamber Orchestra,

conductor **Risto Joost**

25.01 Groningen, De Oosterpoort

ARVO PÄRT WEEKEND, BRUSSELS
Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Tallinn
Chamber Orchestra, conductors **Tõnu**
Kaljuste, Risto Joost, Kaspars Putniņš
26–28.01 Brussels, Flagey

ESTONIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA TOUR TO THE USA

Conductors **Neeme Järvi** and **Arvo Volmer**

27.01–07.02 St. Augustine and West Palm
Beach (Florida), Mason City and Ames
(Iowa), Ann Arbor (Michigan), Palm Desert
and Soka, Aliso Viejo (California)

DRESDNER GEDENKTAG Estonian National Male Choir, Dresdner Philharmonie, conductors **Michael** **Sanderling, Mikk Üleoja**, soloist **Mikhael** **Petrenko**

11.02 (Pärt, MacMillan, Reger, Shostakovich),
Dresden, Kulturpalast

13.02 (Shostakovich, Symphony N° 13 *Babi*
Yar), Dresden, Kulturpalast

RUDOLF TOBIAS'S ORATORIO *DES JONA* *SENDUNG*, BERLIN

Estonian National Symphony Orchestra,
State Choir Latvija, conductor **Neeme Järvi**,
soloists **Susanne Bernhard, Annely Peebo,**
Dominik Wortig, Ain Anger, Johann Tilli
20.02 Berlin, Konzerthaus

ESTONIAN NATIONAL OPERA IN RIGA AND VILNIUS

Programme at Latvian National Opera, Riga

27.02 The Goblin. Ballet by Eduard Tubin

28.02 Opera and Ballet Gala

01.03 Cardillac. Opera by Paul Hindemith

Programme at Lithuanian National **Opera, Vilnius**

15.05 Tannhäuser. Opera by Richard Wagner

16.05 The Goblin. Ballet by Eduard Tubin

17.05 A Streetcar Named Desire. Ballet by
Nancy Meckler and Annabelle Lopez Ochoa

FROM ESTONIA TO ASIA Estonian National Male Choir, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Vox Clamantis

02.03; 05.03 Hong Kong Arts Festival, Vox
Clamantis: Richter + Pärt –
Concert at an Exhibition

03.03 Hong Kong Arts Festival,
HK City Hall, Vox Clamantis

04.03 Hong Kong Arts Festival, HK City Hall,
Vox Clamantis and Jean Penmetier

20.03 Beijing University, Estonian National
Male Choir

22.03 Shanghai Oriental Art Centre,
Estonian National Male Choir

24.–25.03 Final concert of Hong Kong
Arts Festival: Estonian National Symphony
Orchestra, Estonian National Male Choir,
conductor Leif Segerstam

27.03 Singapore Esplanade, Estonian
National Male Choir

ADAM'S PASSION BY ARVO PÄRT & ROBERT WILSON, BERLIN Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, conductor **Tõnu Kaljuste**, directed by **Robert Wilson**

28–30.03 Berlin, Konzerthaus

ESTONIAN EVENING AT 21C MUSIC FESTIVAL, TORONTO Vox Clamantis, Maarja Nuut

26.05 Toronto, Koerner Hall

NHK SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND ESTONIAN NATIONAL MALE CHOIR, JAPAN NHK Symphony Orchestra, conductor **Paavo Järvi**, Estonian National Male Choir, conductor **Mikk Üleoja**

15.09 Toyota City Concert Hall (Estonian
National Male Choir)

16.09 Saku, Cosmo Hall (Estonian National
Male Choir)

17.09 Sendai, Tohoku University (Estonian
National Male Choir)

21.–22.09 Shibuya, NHK Hall (NHK
Symphony Orchestra, Estonian National
Male Choir)

23.09 Sumida Triphony Hall (Estonian
National Male Choir)

24.09 Nishinomya, Osaka, Hyogo
Performing Arts Centre (Estonian National
Male Choir)

THE MUSIC OF ARVO PÄRT, FRANCE Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Tallinn Chamber Orchestra, conductor **Tõnu Kaljuste**

20.10 Philharmonie de Paris

21.10 Nantes, La Cité Nantes Events Centre

**ESTONIAN PHILHARMONIC CHAMBER
CHOIR AND TALLINN CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA TOUR IN USA**
06–18.11 New York, Fayetteville, Kansas City,
Stanford (California), Santa Barbara, Los
Angeles.
Conductor **Tõnu Kaljuste**, founder of both
ensembles. Music by Arvo Pärt, Erkki-Sven
Tüür, Carlo Gesualdo, Brett Dean.

ESTONIAN PHILHARMONIC CHAMBER CHOIR CONCERTS

Conductor **Kaspars Putniņš**

30.01 London, Barbican, Milton Court

31.01 Dublin, National Concert Hall

05.02 Amsterdam, Muziekgebouw

Source: *The Estonia 100*
Organising Committee



Authors

Toomas Siitan (1958) is a musicologist (PhD in musicology in 2003) and conductor. Since 1986, he has taught music history at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (since 2004 as a professor) and was appointed head of the musicological department in 2013. Since 1990, he has been an active conductor, and has served as the artistic director of the Haapsalu Early Music Festiva since 1994.

Kerri Kotta (1969) is a musicologist (PhD in musicology 2004) and composer. He is professor of music theory (2015) and research professor at Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre; Chairman of the Estonian Musicological Society, since 2013; Chairman of the International Eduard Tubin Society; and Editor-in-Chief of the Eduard Tubin Complete Works, since 2015.

Evi Arujärv (1953) is a musicologist, music journalist and essayist. She has been the head of Estonian Music Information Centre since 2007.

Liisi Laanemets (1983) is a young musicologist, music critic, and publicist.

Kai Taal (1973) is a trained pianist, piano teacher, and music publicist.

Kaie Tanner (1975) is a choral conductor and manager. She is currently the general secretary of the Estonian Choral Association and a conductor of the Estonian Radio Children's Choirs, has been active in organizing Estonian and international choral festivals, competitions and singing weeks, and has conducted at the Estonian Youth Song Celebrations. She is a board member of the European Choral Association – Europa Cantat and the president of Choral Festival Network.

Marko Lõhmus (1969) is the head of the Centre for Cultural Management and Humanities, and associate professor at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. Earlier has been managing director of Pärnu City Orchestra, the State Concert Institute and the Tallinn Philharmonic Society.

