

### 302. Dziesmu Svētki

It's a beautiful summer evening in Riga, Latvia, and a murmur can be heard among the crowd of 50,000 people seated on long benches in Mezaparks, a huge open-air venue in the middle of the forest. In front of them is a gigantic stage, and when I say gigantic, I mean the stage looks more like the stands of a stadium. In the middle of this huge stage, there stand a thousand people, all of them wearing traditional Latvian clothing, and the stage is so vast that they appear tiny in comparison.

Drums and bagpipes start playing. Rows of people start entering the stage from all sides. Without breaking stride, these rivers of people gradually fill the stage. Thousands upon thousands of Latvians. Women and men, young and old, mothers and teenagers from all regions of Latvia take their places on the stage, looking at their best in their traditional attire, the women wearing flower crowns or traditional headwear. The first thousand people who were on stage start singing as everyone else is taking their places. Just by seeing so many people enter, your mind starts to comprehend the size of this event. They keep entering for twenty minutes, non-stop. The mass of sound grows and grows, as the choir sings pieces from every region of Latvia, until the stage is nothing but a sea of tiny heads. When the stage is full, they all sing in unison. Seventeen thousand voices singing together. The venue, the forest, the entire country is flooded with song.

One after another, legendary conductors with silver hair take the podium to conduct old and new songs. They look so small against the enormous choir. The singing continues on and on, all throughout afternoon. The sky darkens at eleven o'clock at night, and the singing still continues, way past midnight.

For one week every five years, all of Latvia converges in its capital, Riga, to become the world's largest choir, in a ritual of unity that has been happening for 150 years and that UNESCO has recognized as an intangible world heritage. I had the immense fortune to be present this year and feel in every cell of my body the reverberation of seventeen thousand voices and seven centuries of Latvian history.

This is Hyperfocus, I am Elisa Schmelkes, and in this program, we will trace the history of Latvia through its Song and Dance Celebration. This is my first show in English of my project Hiperfoco, where I will create podcasts of all sorts of interesting content, not just music. I am Elisa Schmelkes, thank you for contributing to the creation of this show and others like it. In today's show, we will trace the history of Latvia through its Song and Dance Celebration. Look for us on social media @hiperfoco.wtf on Instagram and Twitter, and @schmelkes - that's me.

This extraordinary event, the Song and Dance Celebration doesn't only happen in Latvia; it also takes place in its sister countries, Estonia and Lithuania. It is an essentially Baltic tradition. These three countries guard the cold coast of the Baltic Sea, south of Finland, north of Poland, and west of Russia. In today's show, we will focus on Latvia, but the history of these three countries is more or less parallel, with some, of course, very important differences.

The history of this festival is interwoven with the history of Latvia. And the festival is also a very important part of history of Latvia. You can't talk about one without the other. So let's start from the beginning.

The Baltic peoples have inhabited the area that is now Latvia for 5,000 years. In the 12th century, the Germans embarked on a crusade to Christianize the Baltic region, in an event known as the Livonian Crusade (the ancestral name of Latvia). They imposed serfdom on the Latvians for three hundred years. And from there / The history of Latvia is a long litany of Oh no! Here come the Germans! Here come the Swedes! Here come the Russians! Here come the Germans again! And so on. That Latvia exists as an independent country is a true triumph of their resistance over almost seven centuries.

Latvia conceives of itself as a singing nation, and polyphonic singing has been present all along, from its most ancient cultural expressions. There is a beautiful ancient type of singing that is still practiced today. During the German colonization, much more recently, in the 18th century, Lutheran hymn singing was introduced, and choirs began to proliferate in every parish. The structure of a choir was fertile ground in a nation that already had singing in its veins.

When this festival began in 1873, Latvia didn't yet exist as an independent country. It was part of the Russian Empire. But in the 19th century, there was a need in the air for each nation to find itself, name itself, consolidate itself. It was a clergyman, Juris Neikens, who first gathered Latvian speakers to sing together in their language. For the First Celebration in 1873, he summoned a choir of a thousand people to sing. (And btw this is why, on this anniversary, the singing began with a choir of a thousand people, as I described above.) Let's listen to our first song today. And I'll tell you a little about it. Before the festival, Kārlis Baumanis, an amateur composer, sent a collection of his works in Latvian to the festival organizers, and among them was this song, which was first performed at the 1873 festival, the first festival. This song was banned by the Russian Empire, but it was sung at the First Celebration. This song would later become the Latvian National Anthem, still sung to this day. In these early works of the Song Festival, you can hear a very German-style harmonization, very much like a religious hymn, and very characteristic of the 19th century.

### **Dievs, svētī Latviju!**

Dievs, svētī Latviju!  
Mūs' dārgo tēviju  
Svētī jel Latviju  
Ak, svētī jel to!

||Kur latvju meitas zied

God, bless Latvia!  
Our dear fatherland,  
Bless Latvia,  
Oh, bless it!

|| Where Latvian daughters bloom,

Kur latvju dēli dzied  
Laid mums tur laimē diet  
Mūs' Latvijā!

Where Latvian sons sing,  
Grant us to thrive there in happiness,  
In our Latvia!

In other words, this anthem is a prayer. But it's not a prayer for a king or a czar, like the anthems of England and Russia, respectively. It's a prayer for the land and its people. In this song, Latvia is named for the first time.

Kārlis Baumanis

**Dievs, svētī Latviju!**

Let's listen to the 1990 version, when it was sung in Latvia just after gaining independence from the Soviet Union, after being banned for 50 years.

There is simply no recording that can convey the massiveness of this event, the feeling in your body when you hear that many voices. There's nothing I can say, it's unlike anything else. It's a tsunami of sound.

In this first festival, something magical happened for the first time. When you're singing with a thousand other people, something happens inside you, you realize what immense power you have. Those first thousand people and their audience realized in that very moment... We are more than just a bunch of people who speak the same language and are scattered across a territory. We have a common culture, a common history, a deep love for singing and for this land. Maybe we also have a common identity, maybe we are a nation.

In that first festival, a bass singer named Miķelis Krogzemis was present, singing. He happened to be one of the legendary poets of Latvia, known as Auseklis, the god of the morning star. Auseklis, like all of Latvia that day, realized the power of songs.

And he wrote many incredible songs, including this next one, which is foundational to the Latvian national mythology. It tells an ancient legend from Latvian history in a very beautiful way:

According to this legend, the Estonians (a sister nation and also a fellow singing nation) once attacked a Latvian fortress. So they were attacking, and arrows were flying... until an old shaman went up to the ramparts to play the kokle and sing. And when they heard his song, the Estonians lowered their weapons, and the war ended right there.

**Beverīnas dziedonis**

Beverīnas staltā pilī,  
Tālivaldis valdīja.

In the grand fortress of Beverina,  
Ruled Talivaldis far and wide,

Viņa slava tālu tālu  
Visā zemē izpaudās.

Throughout his realm,  
He was loved and admired by all.

Igaunīši, bālenīši,  
Naidu cēla Latvijā:  
Viņas pilij virsū mājās,  
Skaudras bultas šaudīja.

The Estonians, sister nation,  
Caused trouble in Latvia,  
Besieged its grand fortress,  
Shot sharp arrows.

Kara vētra, kara vētra  
Pili gāzīs gruveļos!  
Ozolrungas, egļu vāles  
Galvas skaldīs varoņiem!

Storms of war! Storms of war!  
Beverina will be destroyed!  
Oak and fir mallets  
Will crush the heads of heroes.

Augstu, augstu vajā logā  
Vaidelotis parādās:  
Sirmiemi mati, baltu bārdzu,  
Vaidu kokles rociņā.

Up above, on the battlements,  
Appears a vaidelots (pagan shaman),  
Silver hair, white beard,  
In his hands the sacred kokle.

Strinkšēja kokles,  
Dziedāja vecais,  
Igaunijai vāles  
Iz rokās šļuka;  
Nu vairs nerūca  
Kara bungas,  
Nu vairs nekvieta  
Somu dūkas.

Playing the kokle,  
The old man sang,  
The weapons of the Estonians  
Fell from their hands,  
The drums of war  
Suddenly fell silent,  
The war pipes  
Stayed quiet.

Dziesmu vairogs atsita bultas,  
Dziesmu skaņa pārņēma troksni,  
Dziesmu vara aizdzina karu,  
Tautu izglāba dziesmu gars!

The arrows were stopped by a shield of song,  
The noise was silenced by the sound of song,  
The war was ended by the power of song,  
The nation was saved by the spirit of song!

Here is the essence of Latvia in a song. A shield of song.

BTW In this 1895 festival, interesting things were already starting to happen. The concert was supposed to begin with a speech by the Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church, an arm of the Russian Empire and an agent of cultural Russification. Before the speech, the Russian anthem had to be sung. So it was sung, and then the audience, as was customary, requested it be sung again. And then again. And then again and again... And the Metropolitan was right there, waiting for it all to end so he could give his speech, telling the conductor to stop, and the conductor just said, "Father, but it's what the audience wants." Well, they kept repeating the anthem over and over until the guy left. They used one of the weapons of the Russian empire, the Russian anthem itself as a form of resistance against it. It wasn't just the lyrics of the songs that were important; the act of singing itself was becoming a statement of Latvian identity and resistance.

Auseklis / Jazeps Vitols 1891. Estreno IV Festival 1895

## **Beverīnas dziedonis**

**DzSv 1990**

The Russian Empire, under the autocratic rule of Tsar Nicholas II, was notoriously brutal and over-controlling. It didn't matter if peasants and workers were starving as long as the upper class was doing great. There was plenty of discontent, and any hint of protest was crushed with an iron fist.

All this latent discontent finally erupted in the 1905 Revolution. Strikes, riots, and protests started breaking out throughout the Russian Empire. The imperial government barely survived and harshly repressed those who protested. Latvia was no exception. In a protest in Riga on January 26, 1905, the Russian army opened fire, killing 130 people and injuring over 200. There was a national movement, and even several villages were taken over by peasants, but the revolution didn't fully materialize. That's when the empire unleashed its sword, and a period of repression and purges would follow. Over 300 houses were burned, more than 2000 people were executed, thousands were exiled to Siberia, and many more had to leave the country to escape repression. This would become an open wound in Latvian history. Those who were executed weren't necessarily radical revolutionaries; sometimes they were just teachers or farmers who had shown too much initiative.

Before this, in 1897, lawyer and journalist Jānis Pliekšāns (Rainis) had been arrested for being part of a subversive organization and was exiled. In exile, he published a collection of poems, one of which was later set to music by the composer Emīls Darzins.

To understand this song, you have to imagine what the Latvian coastline looks like. It's a coastline made of sand that the sea has tossed at the earth for millions of years. There are white beaches, then dunes upon dunes, on which endless pine forests grow. I mean, I come from Mexico, we have pine trees, we have beaches, but they are NOT next to each other, so it was really weird for me.

### **Lauztās priedes**

Vējš augstākās priedes nolauza,  
Kas kāpās pie jūrmalas stāvēja -  
Pēc tālēm tās skatieniem gribēja sniegt,  
Ne slēpties tās spēja, ne muguras liekt:

The wind broke the tallest pines  
That stood upon the dunes by the coast  
Their gaze lifted towards the horizon,  
They couldn't hide or bow their heads

"Tu lauži mūs, naidīgā pretvara,-  
Vēl cīņa pret tevi nav nobeigta,  
Vēl ilgās pēc tāles dveš pēdējais vaids,  
Ik zarā pret varu šņāc nerimstošs

"You shattered us, hostile foe,  
But our battle against you will not end"  
They cast their final breath towards the  
horizon,

naids!..."

Un augstās priedes pēc lauzuma  
Par kuģiem iz ūdeņiem iznira -  
Pret vētru lepni cilājās krūts,  
Pret vētru cīņa no jauna dūc:

"Brāz bangas tu, naidīgā pretvara-  
Mēs sniegsim tāles, kur laimība!  
Tu vari mūs šķelt, tu vari mūs lauzt -  
Mēs sniegsim tāles, kur saule aust!"

Eternal hatred in each of their branches

And the tallest pines, once broken,  
Rose from the water like ships,  
Their chests proudly raised against the  
storm,  
The struggle against the tempest roars  
again!

"Break your waves, hated enemy!  
We will reach the horizon where  
happiness lies,  
You can splinter us, you can break us,  
But we will reach the horizon, the rising  
sun!"

So, in this metaphor, the tallest pines represent the bravest and brightest people of Latvia who were being repressed by the empire. The song speaks of these tall pines that stood on the dunes, pines that couldn't hide or bow their heads, so the wind broke them. But the broken pines, from the sea, rise again like ships and face the storm.

Emils Darzins, 1904, on a poem by Rainis  
**Lauztās priedes**  
DzSv 2008

Let's listen to one more song about this very painful moment in Latvia's history. Another song that has become a part of Latvia's profound repertoire, based on a poem written in 1906 to remember all those who were executed, persecuted, deported, or exiled during this terrible time.

### **Mūžam zili**

Mūžam zili ir Latvijas kalni,  
Mūžam nav miera zem Latvijas bērziem,  
Mūžam raud kokle pār Latvijas kalniem.

Sasisti senču upuru trauki,  
Miglā tīti dzimtenes lauki,  
Zem sila sirmajiem zariem  
Miera nav sentēvu gariem...

Forever blue are the hillsides of Latvia  
Forever restless are the shadows of the birch  
trees  
Forever will the kokle weep on the hillsides of  
Latvia

The sacred vessels of the ancestors  
lie shattered  
The fields of our land hidden under the mist  
Under the gray branches of the cypresses  
The spirits of the ancestors cannot rest.

Mūžam baltās Daugavas krāces  
Veļ caur klintīm sendienu stāstu,  
Mūžam nerimst Daugavas krāces,  
Mūžam nerimst varoņu gars.

Forever white, the rapids of the Daugava  
Carry the history of ancient days through their  
stones  
Forever restless are the rapids of the Daugava  
Forever unsettled are the spirits of the heroes.

Mūžam zili ir Latvijas kalni...

The Daugava is the immense and beautiful river that crosses Latvia, passes through Riga, and flows into the Baltic Sea. It's important to note that the composer altered the original poem, which was more violent. The fields were not hidden in the mist but under stars of blood. The rapids of the Daugava don't carry the stories of ancient times, but the curse of the heroes. And it's not the kokle that weeps, but the trumpet. This poem is a bitter reminder of the high price paid by those who sought freedom. It's a deep longing for that self-determination that seemed distant at that time, almost impossible, after the empire had felled all of Latvia's tallest pine trees.

Karlis Skalbe, dedicated to the martyrs of the 1905 revolution. Emils Darzins, music

**Mūžam zili**

For male choir. Poem 1906. Set to music in 1909

DzSv 1973

In 1914, the First World War broke out. And here come the Germans! Latvia resisted the occupation as part of the Russian Empire until it collapsed, and the Germans took over the territory. The experience of the war gave Latvians coordination skills and trained the Latvian Rifle Battalions, who fought against a hostile Germany and an incompetent Russia. During the war, a People's Council was formed, seeking independence. As the German Empire collapsed at the end of the war, here come the Russians... And this time, the Latvians showed their strength and managed to drive all foreigners out of their land. After a little over a year of fighting against the Soviets, Latvia finally signed treaties with the world, and FINALLY, after decades of nation-building, declared itself an independent country in 1920.

Independent Latvia was a bright dream, a time of great hope and optimism, where it could finally shape its own destiny. The Song and Dance Celebrations continued, grew, and more than ever, the songs affirmed their love for Latvia. Now, let's listen to a song from this era that premiered at the 1931 festival. This song speaks about a deeply Latvian tradition, "Januvakars," the Night of the Summer Solstice, when everyone gathers in nature to perform rituals of abundance and fertility. We haven't talked about Latvian mythology, but it's extremely rich. On this night, called "Līgo," Janis, the son of God, arrives, and the victory of the sun over darkness is celebrated.

The song invokes the god Janis, saying that he has arrived today and invites him to play his copper drum on the doors, so that everyone will come to scatter flowers. It invites the youth not to sleep on the night of Līgo.

## Jāņuvakars

Līgo saule vakarā,  
Līgo gani sētiņā,  
Līgo pati mīļā Māra,  
Telītēm vārtu vērti.

Jauni puisi, jaunas meitas,  
Pušķojat klētes jumtu.  
Visu gadu Jānīt's nāca,  
Nu atnāca šovakar!

Dimdēj' zeme atnākot,  
Skanēj' pieši nolēcot.  
Jānīts nāca pār gadskārtu  
Savu bērnu apraudzīt.

Vai ēduši, vai dzēruši,  
Vai Jānīti daudzināja?  
Ij ēduši, ij dzēruši,  
Ij Jānīti daudzināj'.

Ai, Jānīti, Dieva dēls,  
Ko tu vedi vezumā?  
Meitām vežu zīļu rotu,  
Puišiem caunu cepurītes.

Sit, Jānīti, vara bungas  
Vārtu staba galiņā.  
Lai sanāca Jāņa bērni  
No maliņu maliņām.

Lai sanāca Jāņa bērni,  
Jāņu zāles kaisīdam'.  
Jāņu dienu Dieva dēls,  
Saules meitu sveicināja.  
Jauni puisi, jaunas meitas,  
Jāņu nakti neguļat!

The sun sways at sunset, Līgo  
Come and sway in our garden, Janis, Līgo  
Even Mara (the most important Latvian  
goddess) is swaying,  
Līgo Opening the gates for the calves to enter,  
Līgo

Young boys and girls, Līgo,  
Decorate the barn roof, Līgo.  
All year Janis has been on the road, Līgo, Līgo  
And today he has arrived, Līgo, Līgo

When he arrived, the earth resounded, Līgo  
His spurs jingled as he dismounted from his  
horse, Līgo  
Janis traveled through all the seasons to visit  
his children  
To see if his children have eaten, have drunk,  
if they have worshipped him

And so they had, they had eaten and drunk,  
Līgo,  
and they had worshipped him, Līgo

Oh Janis, son of God, what good things have  
you brought?  
For the girls, beaded necklaces,  
for the men, hats

Janis, go and play your copper drum over the  
gate  
So that on this day, the children from the  
farthest places will come  
And scatter summer flowers, Līgo

On this day, the son of God, Līgo,  
Greeted the daughter of the sun, Līgo  
Boys, girls, Līgo, Līgo,  
Don't sleep on the night of Līgo.

We are going to listen to this song celebrating the summer, that brief summer of joy and optimism, the short two decades of independent Latvia.



Emilis Melngailis (1874-1954)

**Jāņuvakars**

DzSv 2023

In 1939, let us remember that Stalin and Hitler were good friends and they decided to partition Europe like a cake in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Latvia ended up on the Soviet side, so... here come the Russians. Until Hitler betrayed Stalin and invaded Poland, and... here come the Germans. And Latvia lived under German occupation until the end of the war when... here come the Russians again, and Latvia fell under Soviet occupation.

Each time an empire passed through Latvia, it left deep scars. The Russians deported more than 35,000 people to Siberia. The Germans exterminated the entire Jewish population, approximately 85,000 people. And then the Soviets arrived again, and under Stalin, a brutal regime of occupation began.

The festival continued under the Soviet regime. Stalin found it wonderful that there was a massive gathering of people singing, it seemed like a perfect event to make everyone sing glories to Lenin and Stalin and the Soviet Union. So the festivals continued. The parades soon were full of huge literal red flags. Composers had to write odes to the totalitarian dictator. And the great festival conductors from independent Latvia continued to conduct, knowing that the price to pay to preserve the tradition was to "give unto Caesar" the dreadful songs that would soon be forgotten, in order to be able to sing the Latvian songs that everyone truly wanted to sing. Many songs were banned during this time, and a delicate dance began between composers, conductors, and festival organizers to convince the Soviet authorities that all the songs were in line with the regime's directives.

In 1949, the first major wave of deportations took place. Stalin's policy was to "Russify" the newly absorbed countries in the USSR: One day, Soviet officials would show up at your door with a rifle and tell you: you have an hour to pack, get ready. And there was no choice, you had to fit your entire life into a suitcase and get on a cattle wagon, where you would endure inhumane conditions for weeks before arriving in Siberia, where you were expected to live. Many wouldn't return. Stalin confiscated their properties and brought Russians to live in the houses and apartments left behind by Latvians. 42,000 Latvians were deported in this way in 1949, alone, a year also remembered as an open wound in the history of Latvia. 140,000 Latvians would be deported in total before Stalin's death.

Imagine how it felt to be present at the 1950 song festival, when the grand choir sang under two large portraits of Lenin and Stalin and the words "Glory to the Great Stalin." Everyone was there, gritting their teeth, singing odes to their oppressor... everyone knew a family or had a friend who had been taken to Siberia the previous year.

But we're not going to play any songs that glorify Stalin. They have rightly been forgotten by history, and we want it to remain that way. Instead, let's listen to how the centennial of the Song Festival was celebrated in 1973, after Stalin's death and under a slightly less brutal Soviet

regime. For this centennial, they sang "Manai dzimtenei," a song that captures a bit of Latvia's history up to that point and how this history intertwines with the song festival.

The narrator of the song recounts how the song festival was born. It speaks of the Daugava River, of the first festival, and looks forward from there. It tells of how blood will rain in 1905 and the wind will break the tallest pines. It tells of how the Latvians will be riflemen, and a castle of light will sing on the hill. And of how singing has challenged destiny for a century, and the broken pines will grow anew.

### **Manai dzimtenei (Por mi madre patria)**

I see men in gray suits walking towards me, it is 1873, Riga rings! And the first Song festival has begun.

Man stāstīja Daugaviņ,  
kā liktenis vīdamās,  
Dziesma savus svētkus svin  
Ar bāliņu celdamās.  
Tā dziedāja bāleliņš,  
Pret likteni stāvēdams,  
Viņa dziesmā gadu simts  
Kā mūžiņis krāsojās.

The Daugava told me,  
Winding as destiny,  
That singing is its own celebration,  
Song and brother rise together,  
So sang our dear brother,  
His song challenged fate,  
In his song, the century  
Gains the colors of a lifetime.

Piedz.  
Vēl nāks piektais gads,  
Asins lietus līs,  
Un visaugstākās priedes nolauzīs.  
Iesim strēlniekos,  
Dziesma vētru sēs,  
Mūžam gaismas pils  
Kalnā gavilēs.

1905 will come,  
Blood will rain,  
And the wind will break our tallest pines,  
We will become riflemen,  
The song will sow a storm,  
And forever, a castle of light  
Will sing on the hill.

Lai balstiņis vīdamās,  
Pār novadu aizvijās,  
Dziesma savus svētkus svin,  
Ar bāliņu celdamās.  
Tā dziedāja bāleliņš,  
Ar Daugavu nemirstīgs,  
Viņa dziesmā gadu simts  
Kā mūžiņis krāsojās.

Let the intertwined voices  
Travel across the land,  
Singing is its own celebration,  
Singing and brotherhood rise together,  
So sang our dear brother,  
His song challenged fate,  
In his song, the century  
Gains the colors of a lifetime.

Piedz.  
Cauri sirdīm mums  
Lauztās priedes augs,  
Jaunā gaitā mūs  
Jauni rīti sauks.  
Tālāk mūžībā  
Dziedot iesim mēs,

Through our beating hearts,  
The broken pines will grow,  
New mornings call us  
To new paths,  
Toward eternity,  
We will go singing  
Forever, a castle of light

Mūžam gaismas pils  
Kalnā gaviļēs.

Will sing on the hill.

This song synthesizes some of the history we've covered today: the 1905 revolution, the riflemen... It references four songs, one is "Rīga Dimd," which is very representative but we didn't hear it today, another is "Ai Balini", "Broken Pines," and the last one, "Castle of Light," we haven't heard yet, but it's fundamental to understanding the upcoming chapter. Do you see how these songs never mention the word "Latvia" and everything is said in metaphors? The castle of light, the broken pines that will grow, the role of singing itself... It was written with a certain audience in mind. In this way, perhaps the Soviet authorities didn't quite get it, but everyone who was singing knew what they were saying: We love Latvia, we honor its sacrifices, the time will come when we will be free again... But it wasn't ever explicitly stated.

Raimonds Pauls dziesma ar Jāņš Peters vārdiem.

### **Manai dzimtenei**

Versión DzSv 1990!!!

During the festivals of the Soviet era, songs began to emerge that resonated especially with the choir and the audience. Songs that, when sung, evoked so much emotion that the crowd would request they be sung again. These songs gradually became symbols of the longed-for freedom, so distant then but slightly visible on the horizon.

One of these songs was already a classic back then, a beautiful song by Andrejs Jurjans, called "Put Vejini," Blow, O wind. The music somewhat imitates the ebb and flow of the wind. Interestingly, the lyrics are not at all patriotic, and go like this:

### **Pūt, vējiņi**

Pūt, vējiņi, dzen laiviņu,  
Aizdzen mani Kurzemē.  
Kurzemiece man solīja  
Sav' meitiņu malējiņ'.

Solīt sola, bet nedeva,  
Teic man lielu dzērājiņ',  
Teic man lielu dzērājiņu,  
Kumeliņa skrējējiņ'.  
Kuru krogu es izdzēru,  
Kam noskrēju kumeliņ'?  
Pats par savu naudu dzēru,  
Pats skrēj' savu kumeliņ'.

Blow, wind, carry my boat,  
Take me to Kurzeme,  
There, a woman promised me,  
her daughter for a wife.

She promised me, but she refused,  
She called me a drunkard,  
She called me a drunkard,  
And a horse racer.

Where is the tavern I drank dry?  
Whose horse did I race for money?  
I pay for my own drink,  
And I ride on my own horse.

Blow, wind, carry my boat,

Pūt, vējiņi, dzen laiviņu,

Take me to Kurzeme.

Aizdzen mani Kurzemē.

In this song, a young man sings that he's going to Kurzeme to marry his sweetheart, but her mother won't let him, saying he's a drunkard and a horse racer. But he says, no, I'm not what you say I am. Nobody pays me to race a horse. I might be a drunkard, but I pay for my own alcohol, and I ride my own horse. In other words, I am free to do what I want. It seems to me that this is, in its own way, a song of freedom. And when you listen to it, you'll see why it became so popular. At the end of each festival, this song was sung spontaneously, without a conductor.

And the other of these songs is perhaps one of the most powerful symbols of Latvia. It's a very old song, written in 1875 based on a poem by the national poet Auseklis, which in turn is based on a legend, also from Kurzeme. The story it tells is beautiful...

It's about a legendary sunken castle. This castle once stood proudly atop the free land of the Latvians. But when Latvia lost its freedom, the castle sank into the ground and disappeared. However, the name of the castle was written in the heart of an old oak tree. If someone guessed its name, the castle would rise again from the depths of the earth.

I'll let Auseklis himself tell you the story:

### **Gaismas Pils**

Kurzemīte, Dievzemīte,  
Brīvas tautas auklētāj'.  
Kur palika sirmie dievi,  
Brīvie tautas dēliņi,  
Jā, tautas dēliņi.

Kurzeme, Land of God,  
Mother of a free country,  
Where have the gray gods gone,  
And the free sons of the nation?

Tie līgoja vecos laikos  
Gaismas kalna galotnē.  
Visapkārt egļu meži,  
Vidū gaiša tautas pils.

They sang Ligo in those days,  
There, upon the hill of light,  
Forests of firs grew all around,  
Around the brightest castle of the nation.

[Zelta stabiem, zītar' jumtu,  
Sidrabotiem pamatiem.  
To negāza gaisa vētras,  
Kara viļņu bangojums.

Columns of gold, roof of amber,  
Foundations of silver,  
Nothing could destroy it, not the storm,  
Nor waves of war.

Asiņainas dienas ausa  
Tēvu zemes ielejā;  
Vergu valgā tauta nāca,  
Nāvē krita varoņi.

Bloody days dawned in the valley  
Of our ancient homeland  
The nation in chains of slavery,  
Heroes dead on battlefields.

Ātri grima, ātri zuda  
Gaismas kalna staltā pils.  
Tur guļ mūsu tēvu dievi,  
Tautas gara greznumi.

The fortress disappeared,  
Sank into the hill of light,  
There lie the gods of our fathers,  
And the splendid soul of our nation.

Sirmajam(i) ozolam(i)  
Pēdīgajo ziedu dod:  
Tas slēpj svētu piles vārdu  
Dzijlās siržu rētiņās,  
Jā, siržu rētiņās

To the last ancestral oak,  
A final sacrifice is given,  
Deep within its scarred heart,  
Hides the sacred name of the castle.

Ja kas vārdu uzminētu,  
Augšām celtos vecā pils,  
Tālu laistu tautas slavu,  
Gaismas starus margodam'!

If the name were guessed,  
The castle would rise again,  
And proclaim the glory of the nation,  
Shining with rays of light!

[Zilā gaisā plivinātos  
Sarkan balti karogi,  
Dobji, dobji atskanētu  
Sirmo garu daiņojums.] \*

Flags of red and white would flutter,  
Above in the blue skies,  
Deep voices would make resound,  
The song of the ancestral spirits.

Tautas dēli uzminēja  
Sen aizmirstu svētumu:  
Gaismu sauca, Gaisma ausa!  
Augšām cēlās Gaismas pils!

The sons of the nation guessed  
The long-forgotten riddle:  
They called: LIGHT! And the light was born,  
The castle of light rises to the sky!!

This song also debuted in 1910 with music by Jazeps Vitols. And since then, it was sung at many more festivals, including several Soviet festivals. Every time it was sung, the audience requested it to be sung again. In 1980, a legendary conductor named Haralds Mednis led it with the composer present, and the audience applauded so much that it was performed two more times. Well, the Soviets didn't like this so much, and in the next festival, in 1985, this song was NOT in the program, nor was Mednis conducting at the festival.

By this point, in 1985, footsteps on the rooftop were already being felt. Cracks in the system were becoming evident. Supposedly, Gorbachev's policy of openness, Glasnost, allowed for more freedom of expression, so the boundaries of this supposed openness were being tested more and more. When the 1985 festival was over, the choir began chanting "Gaismas Pils! Gaismas Pils! Gaismas Pils!" and calling for the conductor, "Mednis! Mednis! Mednis!" And they didn't stop until the conductor stepped onto the podium to lead it. The Soviets couldn't do anything. What were they going to do, arrest 17,000 people? And at that moment, with all of Latvia singing freely about the castle of light that will rise again from the earth, the Latvian people once again felt their immense power.

Join me in listening to this incredible moment that was recorded, in which the song "Gaismas Pils" is sung, and immediately and spontaneously, "Put Vejini" follows. It's an emblematic moment in the history of Latvia.

### **"Gaismas Pils" + "Put Vejini" 1985**

This moment was a premonition of the Singing Revolution, a movement in the Baltic countries that led to their independence from the Soviet Union, starting in 1988. It was a nonviolent movement in which singing played a central role. If you're interested, I made a program about this topic a few years ago, and while working on that program, I fell in love with this story so deeply that visiting Latvia became one of my lifelong dreams, which I finally fulfilled. It's an incredible story that deserves its own program, so stay tuned for a program about the Singing Revolution in Latvia.

By 1990, it was a fact that Latvia would be a free country. That year, the festival felt different. People brought immense emotion, overflowing in song. The national anthem was sung for the first time in over 50 years. And after the anthem, when the festival ended, the choir stayed there and spontaneously sang one song after another... If you want to hear it, I will upload this story as additional content on our Patreon.

The Song and Dance Celebration remains the strongest and most vibrant manifestation of Latvia, and new songs continue to be added to the repertoire. I want to share with you one that was sung twice this year. It's beautiful and once again speaks of Latvia's mythology.

It says, "I am the womb of the earth, and you are the sun." It invokes Perkons, thunder, and the Daugava, the river of destiny. And asks: "Teach me to have a clear mind, teach me the strength of the earth. Rise, sun! Shine brightly, break the darkness, make our land sacred again, unite the entire Latvian people."

### **Lec, saulīte**

Es esmu zemes klēpis  
Tu – mana saule  
Tā pats pērkons lēmis  
Likteņupes straume  
Māci man skaidru prātu  
Māci zemes spēku  
Kā pati Laima lika  
Tinot mūža rakstu

I am the womb of the earth  
And you - my sun  
As Perkons (Thunder God) himself decided  
The flow of the River of Destiny (Daugava)  
Teach me to have a clear mind  
Teach me the strength of the earth  
This is what Laima (goddess of Destiny)  
decided  
When writing our life

Lec, saulīte, spīdi spoži  
Rotā druvu, rotā sētu  
Lec, saulīte, tumšu šķel  
Dari mūsu zemi svētu

Rise, sun, shine brightly  
Adorn the crops, adorn our homesteads,  
Rise, sun, break the darkness  
Make our land sacred again

Es esmu debess velve  
Tu – man saule  
Tā pats pērkons lēmis  
Likteņupes straume  
Māci man dvēs'les mieru  
Māci debess spēku  
Kā pati Laima lika  
Tinoť mūža rakstu

I am the vault of the sky  
And you - my sun  
As Perkons himself decided  
The flow of the river of destiny  
Teach me the peace of the soul  
Teach me the strength of the sky...  
This is what Laima (goddess of Destiny)  
decided  
When writing our life

Lec, saulīte, spīdi spoži  
Rotā druvu, rotā sētu  
Lec, saulīte, tumšu šķel  
Dari mūsu zemi svētu

Rise, sun, shine brightly  
Adorn the crops, adorn our homesteads,  
Rise, sun, break the darkness  
Make our land sacred again

Lec, saulīte, spīdi spoži  
Rotā puisī, rotā meitu  
Lec, saulīte, tumšu šķel  
Vieno visu latvju tautu

Rise, sun, shine brightly  
Adorn the boys, adorn the girls,  
Rise, sun, break the darkness  
Unite all the people of Latvia!

## **Raimonds Tiguls / Rasas Bugavičūte-Pēce**

### **Lec, saulite**

#### **DzSv 2023**

When one casually browses a map, it might seem inevitable for each country to exist within its borders. But Latvia could just as easily have been just another province of Russia, like many others that remain part of the imperial legacy of that country. Can you imagine? Its language dying, its people scattered, its culture an exotic relic of a past that is quickly fading away. However, I believe that with what we have heard today, it is more than clear: Latvia sang itself into existence, it sang its mythology and its memory; it sang its independence, its resistance, and finally, it sang its freedom. Latvia sang and sang until what its songs proclaimed became reality. And it continues to sing, because that freedom and that community are not something to be taken for granted, they are built every day. I have always believed in the immense power of song, but in Latvia, this is not an idealistic folly; there, it actually happened, it's the real and tangible history of their land.

And so we reach the end of this show. A very special thanks to Daiga Bondare, who accompanied me throughout the beautiful process of discovery, patiently explained the history to me for hours, shared resources with me, and fact-checked the script. Thanks as well to Brigita

and the entire press team of the Celebration; they were amazing with me. Thank you, Latvia, for welcoming me so warmly and for being such a luminous nation.

I will leave you with my recording of my favorite song. With lyrics written in 1919 during the War of Independence, but with music premiered in 1989 during the Singing Revolution, this is also one of the most emblematic songs of the Festival, and it is often sung more than once, including this year. It is a song that tells the foundational myth of Latvia, with its main gods, Saule, sun; Perkons, thunder; Dievs, the supreme god; and of course, their sacred river Daugava .

It tells how Saule, the goddess of the sun, placed Latvia at a gate and gave her the key. Evil beings broke the gate and took the key, but Perkons, the thunder, sent blue lightning and took the key back from the demons. Saule ordered Dievs to dig the Daugava river, the animals dug, and Dievs filled it with the water of life. In the Daugava flows both the water of life and the water of death. This is an incredible song, let's listen.



## Saule, Pērkons, Daugava

Saule Latvi sēdināja  
Tur, kur gali satiekas  
Balta jūra, zaļa zeme  
Latvei vārtu atslēdziņa.

Latvei vārtu atslēdziņa,  
Daugaviņas sargātāja.  
Sveši ļaudis vārtus lauza  
Jūrā krita atslēdziņa.

Zilzibeņu Pērkons spēra,  
Velniem ņēma atslēdziņu.  
Nāvi, dzīvi Latve slēdza,  
Baltu jūru, zaļu zemi.

Saule Latvi sēdināja  
Baltas jūras maliņā  
Vēji smiltis putināja  
Ko lai dzēra latvju bērni?

Saule lika Dieviņami,  
Lai tas raka Daugaviņu.  
Zvēri raka, Dieviņš lēja  
No mākoņa dzīvūdeni.

Dzīves ūdens, nāves ūdens  
Daugavā satecēja.  
Es pamērcu pirksta galu  
Abus jūtu dvēselē.

Nāves ūdens, dzīves ūdens  
Abus jūtu dvēselē.

Saule mūsu māte,  
Daugav' – sāpju aukle.  
Pērkons velna spērējs  
Tas mūsu tēvs.

Saule (the sun goddess) seated Latvia  
Where the endings meet  
White sea, green land  
Latvia held the key to the gate

Latvia held the key to the gate  
Guardian of the Daugava River  
Strangers broke the gate  
And threw the key into the sea

Perkons (the thunder god) sent blue lightning  
And took the key from the demons  
Latvia was the bridge between life and death  
White sea, green land (2x)

Saule seated Latvia  
On the shores of the white sea  
The winds brought the sand  
What will the children of Latvia drink?

Saule commanded Dievins (God)  
To dig the Daugava  
Animals dug and Dievins made  
Water of life spring from a cloud

Water of life, water of death  
Flowed in the Daugava  
I touched the water's surface, I feel both within  
my soul

Water of death, water of life  
We feel both within our soul

Saule is our mother  
Daugava eases our pain  
Perkons, who killed the demons,  
He is our father.

I want to share with you this version that I personally recorded, in Mezaparks, with my heart soaring, alongside my friend Krisminta, who has a unique, beautiful voice and couldn't resist joining in the singing. She will be the protagonist of our second show about Latvia's singing revolution. Here, you will hear what it feels like to be in the middle of a crowd of 50,000 people,

with screaming children and everything, and how the 17,000 voices contrast with Krisminta's own, beautiful voice. Thank you, Krisminta, miss you!

Thank you for listening. I'm Elisa Schmelkes, and this was Hiperfoc, Hyperfocus. This is Saule, Pērkons, Daugava.

Martins Brauns / Rainis  
**Saule, Pērkons, Daugava**  
Personal recording