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Dziedot Dzimu, Dziedot Augu: Latvian identity through folk poetry and choral music during the Soviet era

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Latvian Identity Through Folk Poetry and Choral Music During the Soviet Era

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Introduction

The people who first settled in the part of the Baltic littoral that is now known as Latvia, who would be the precursor to those we now refer to as the "Latvians", arrived around 1000 BCE. They settled and organized themselves socially into what in Latvian is called a "cilts", or kinship-based group (Plakans 1995: 9): "While a common language formed a strong bond, these territories made their own decisions about going to war, in a similar fashion to the raising of war-bands by chieftains among Celtic, Germanic and Slavic tribes" (Kasekamp 2010: 7). In other words, while they had begun to develop a shared culture and would eventually formed larger allegiances with each other for protection and convenience, they did not yet consider themselves a unified "people". The idea that they were all of the same people would come later.

Large empires ruled the territory that would become present-day Latvia beginning in the thirteenth century, most notably czarist Russia and Baltic German landowners under a feudal system. Only in the nineteenth century did a cultural awakening among Latvians themselves start to occur, meaning that Latvians began to acknowledge that they themselves had developed a folk culture of their own, independent of their German and Russian rulers. The question of Germanization of the Latvian peasantry was debated by the *Gelehrtenstand*, the liberally-inclined intellectual class that ruled Kurzeme, Latgale and Livonija. Some believed that a space for Latvian language and folklore needed to be created (Plakans 2011: 170, 207), including Johann Gottfried Herder, who saw the Latvian-speaking peasantry as a suppressed *Volk*. At that time, the term was equated with something like a "vulgar mass of people", but one with a rich oral tradition (Plakans 1995: 84; Eggel, Liebich and Mancini-Griffoli 2007: 54). Herder considered the Latvians a "nation", as they had a shared language and folk culture, consisting of folk music and poetry, fairytales and riddles, holidays and beliefs, and began to advocate for

their independence (Eggel, Liebich and Mancini-Griffoli 2007: 54; Bunkše 1979: 201). Herder was opposed to states having imperialist goals and being completely centralized, and he did not necessarily equate a nation, which was a broad term in his book, with a state. He did advocate for a reform in the education of the Latvian people, which would "stimulate self-expression and encourage people to think for themselves". This in turn would foster their national character, which Herder considered to be positive and not necessarily damaging to the Russian Empire, as the more Latvians are allowed to express their own culture, the less likely they will be to revolt because they consider themselves oppressed. One might consider Herder one of the first Latvian cultural nationalists, even though he himself was not Latvian (Eggel, Liebich and Mancini-Griffoli 2007: 51, 55, 65-67).

The question of education played a large role in the Latvian cultural awakening of the nineteenth century. In 1839, a training institute for rural teachers was established in Valmiera, where over 400 schoolteachers were educated (Plakans 1995: 85). As more and more Latvians were educated, the idea that they had to integrate into the German-language hegemony of the Baltic littoral began to be challenged (Plakans 2011: 224). More works in Latvian began to be published by Latvians by those who were educated in Latvian. One of the beliefs that emerged during the beginning of the cultural awakening movement was that every person had a "national identity" with which they were born, even if it was not derived from an official nation; in other words, a Latvian nationalism began to take shape. The first generation of activists argued that education of the individual would bring these group characteristics to light (Plakans 2011: 89, 225-226). They believed that Latvians needed to see themselves not as part of a class, but as a nation, like other developed cultures did. Atis Kronvalds, one of these first nationalists, stressed to other Latvians that their use of a common language was evidence that they were involved in

national consciousness, regardless of the class status that had been prescribed to them by the German nobles (Ibid: 92-93). However, there was no clear leader of the Latvian nationalism movement, and there was often disagreement on how to best foster a Latvian national consciousness. Some argued economic independence was the way to do it, others said that language, oral tradition and written culture was more important (Ibid: 231).

On November 18th, 1918, Latvia became an independent state, freeing itself from the Russian Federation, thanks to the tumultuous Bolshevik Revolution that allowed them to assert their sovereignty without much resistance. The group of artists who experienced Latvian independence as adults were those that were educated in Russian and remembered the resistance Baltic Germans had to Latvian cultural and political autonomy. Their artistic works had a generally national tone: "The best artists sought to articulate universal values and forms using the Latvian language and imagery and sounds from the Latvian natural world, the Latvian past and Latvian traditional music" (Plakans 1995: 137).

However, this independence was short-lived, as the Soviet Union invaded and occupied Latvia in 1940, only about twenty years after Lenin promised Latvia independence "forever" (Gerner and Hedlund 1993: 1). This era was ushered in by the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. The official reasoning for this pact was to maintain lasting peace in the region. In June 1940, the Soviet government alerted the Baltic governments that they were not satisfactorily fulfilling the terms of the agreement and that new governments must be chosen that would do so, and that Soviet troops must be allowed into their territories to make sure that is this done. Soviet troops invaded Latvia on the night of June 16th-17th. (Plakans 1995: 142-144; Pabriks and Purs 2002: 23-24).

The Soviet-Latvian government ruled with strict control. Censorship was put back into place and pre-Soviet literature, as well as art and music, was either put into inaccessible special collections or burned. When the turnover of the government occurred, a government worker's job depended on how "loyal" they were to the Communist party and new Soviet government – if they spoke out against the new government's ideology, they were fired and likely arrested. The state security apparatus (NKVD) began arresting "unreliable people", a very broad label, in July 1940, which began *Baigais Gads*, or the Year of Terror. These arrests continued at the pace of 200-300 deportations a month for the rest of the year, culminating in 15,000 people being arrested and deported to Siberia, on the night of June 13th-14th, 1941. These people were not arrested as individuals, but by category – anything deemed anti-Soviet was grounds for expulsion (Plakans 1995: 144-147).

About a week later, the Nazi German army invaded Latvia and reached Riga by July 1st. Forty thousand people fled Latvia at their arrival, while another group decided to join Germany in the fight against the Soviet Union, seeing it as an opportunity to retaliate against a government that systematically exterminated their compatriots. However, this group soon realized that life under Nazi rule was not going to better, as with them came Holocaust policies and more suffering (Plakans 1995: 149). When the Soviet Union re-invaded Latvia in 1944, between 120,000 and 150,000 people fled westward. Most found themselves in displaced persons (DP) camps in the United States' zone of Germany run by the UNRRA, others in Sweden when traveling by land was no longer possible (Hilton 2009: 280; Plakans 1995: 152).

Germany was as far as many could go at first because of the Allied advance, but most émigrés eventually continued from the DP camps, emigrating into the United States, Canada, and other nations, establishing strong diaspora centers in major cities such as New York, Chicago,

Toronto, and Los Angeles that persist today (Hilton 2009: 294). Although they were not physically in Latvia, many of these refugees continued to cultivate and preserve their Latvian identity. It became clear to the Soviet government in Latvia, which was attempting to squash all Latvian nationalism, that the émigré community had no intention of assimilating completely into their host nations' cultures, especially when many of their host governments stood by the non-recognition policy of the Soviet governments in the Baltic States (Plakans 2011: 346, 382). Members of the diaspora community remained politically active, lobbying their host nations' governments to support Latvian independence until Latvia re-declared its independence in 1991 (Ibid: 379, 399).

Parallel to the development of Latvian culture outside of Latvia, the Soviet-controlled government in Latvia did allow for literature, music and other forms of art to develop in Latvia, but it was all subject to censorship and had to comply with the socialist realism movement. Socialist realism has no real definition: some describe it as a "joyful, happy art", an art that "demands from the artists the truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development" that "must be combined with the task of ideologically remolding and educating the working people in the spirit of socialism" (Ugresic 2003: 93). It was an art form that served as a Soviet propaganda tool, and therefore had to be accessible to all. Artists and musicians, thanks to the Soviet spirit of competition, which acknowledged the great deal of effort and dedication that went into becoming a master of their respective genre, gained praise by the government, as long as they complied with the expectations of the socialist realist requirements (Ivashkin 2014: 430-431, 433). The Soviet government banned all Latvian nationalist expression, but saw folk music and its subsequent choral adaptations as relatively innocuous and could be manipulated (or so they thought) to assert that Latvians have always meant to be part of Russia.

Latvia declared its independence from the Soviet Union on May 4th, 1991. By September 2nd, 1991, all three Baltic states were recognized as independent, *de facto* nations. On September 18th, 1991, these nations were accepted into the United Nations (Plakans 2011: 399).

After fifty years of oppression, Latvians wanted to return to a pre-war and pre-Soviet Latvia and identity. In both Latvia and in the diaspora during the Soviet era, collective memory and nostalgia were powerful tools that helped the Latvian identity survive. This was especially evident in the diaspora, where the collective memory of exiled Latvians was used to construct an active Latvian community outside of Latvia, with schools, church congregations, scouts, political organizations and many other institutions that function today. Their nostalgia for the homeland and a desire to see it regain its independence was motivation to maintain their Latvian identity and pass it to the next generation.

One of the most well-known aspects of the Latvian national identity is the nation's love of music, especially singing. Latvians have a rich oral tradition of folk songs, or *tautasdziesmas*. These folksongs were first brought to the international public by Herder, which in turn influenced his work on history and folk culture, which would partially inspire the Latvians to collect their folksongs themselves and see them as a "worthwhile cultural expression" (Bunkše 1979: 200). *Tautasdziesmas* later would become basis of the internationally renowned choir tradition of Latvia. Choral singing was one of the most important and effective forms of identity maintenance during the Soviet era. Because choral music was highly regarded as an art form by the Soviet government, who often gave state sponsorship to composers, it was an acceptable way for Latvians to gather en masse. What the Soviet government did not realize was that it was one of the best ways for Latvians in Latvia to collectively express their Latvian identity. The choral tradition of Latvia could be credited for saving the Latvian identity from disappearing into

oblivion during the Soviet era.

While researching for this thesis, I visited Latvia in January 2017 and conducted interviews with several conductors, composers and choral singers, funded by the Catherine Montogomery Fund at Vassar College. I interviewed Ēriks Ešenvalds, a world-renowned and award winning composer of Latvian choral music; Māra Marnauza, conductor of the award-winning choirs "Fortius" and "Balta" and music pedagogue; Ivars Cinkuss, conductor of the men's choir "Gaudeamus" and mixed choir "Cantus Fortis", as well as a member of the organizing committee of the 2018 song festival's choir program in Latvia; and Zinta (pseudonym), a family friend and choral singer. Each interview was conducted in Latvian and transcribed and translated by me. I also traveled to several rehearsals of the New York Latvian Concert Choir, where I observed rehearsals and interviewed individual members. In March 2017, I conducted an anonymous survey on Latvian national identity, which was posted on several Latvian-American Facebook groups. I received 299 responses, a higher number than was anticipated. A copy of the questionnaire used in the interviews and excerpts of the survey results are attached in the appendix.

Chapter 1 of this thesis will give a brief background on *tautasdziesmas*: what they are and why they are important to the creation and maintenance of Latvia's national identity. It will also touch upon the history of *dziesmu svētki*, or song festivals, at which thousands of singers gather in one massive choir to perform a deeply Latvian program, consisting of adaptations of *tautasdziesmas* and original choral works praising Latvia, for an audience of hundreds of thousands of Latvians. This state institution that has acted as one of the most powerful methods of the preservation of Latvian national identity and character, before, during and after the Soviet era. This chapter will also include a discussion of theoretical approaches to identity production,

ethnicity and nationalism, and collective memory and nostalgia, which will be used to analyze the different identities that various groups of Latvians living throughout the world have.

Chapter 2 focuses on Latvia's national identity. Latvia's national identity is often felt most strongly through values, beliefs and practices. A strong sense of familial responsibility, a sort of filial piety, a love of nature and a pride in their nation's language and freedom, as well as a deep love for song itself help define a Latvian national identity. Latvians today, after fifty years of Soviet occupation that systematically attempted to wipe the Latvian identity off the map, want to return to the Latvian identity of the pre-1939 past. This ideal identity is expressed in many ways, but one of the most powerful and unique to Latvia is through the extensive collection of folk songs that Latvians have amassed throughout their history.

Chapter 3 will show choral music as a vehicle for Latvian national identity. It will begin with a discussion of the origins of Latvian choral music, which while not originally indigenous to Latvia, was quickly adopted as a distinctly Latvian form of song, thanks to the love of singing ingrained into Latvians. Choral music is a powerful form of collective expression that helped the Latvian identity survive fifty years of oppression under Soviet rule by giving Latvians an outlet to express it. An especially important aspect of Latvian choir culture are *dziesmu svētki*. The use of *dziesmu svētki* as a form of Soviet propaganda helped the Latvian identity survive, unbeknownst to the Soviet government.

Chapter 4 will discuss the differences in identity and choral tradition between Latvians in Latvia and the diaspora that is scattered throughout the world. Because the diaspora is so extensive, this thesis will focus on the diaspora in the United States. Because the two groups lived in such different societies for fifty years with very little contact with one another, it is no surprise that their identities and traditions developed with differences, a point of contention and

sometimes resentment between the two groups of Latvians. However, the questions of what comes next – post-independence – are still asked today: What does it mean for the diaspora and its existence? What are the possibilities of reconciliation and homecoming for exiles? The different styles of participation in these traditions, as well as the development of the traditions in sometimes opposite directions, bring up these kinds of questions in the hearts and minds of Latvians both in Latvia and in the diaspora, ones that have not been answered yet.

Chapter 1: Historical Background and Theoretical Approach

To understand the role of choral singing in the formation and maintenance of the Latvian national identity, it is first necessary to discuss the theoretical approaches that will be used in the analysis. A brief overview of how a person's identity is constructed and its purpose will be followed by a discussion of various theorists' views on ethnicity and nationalism, most of whom equate the nation with the state. I will also discuss theories of collective memory and nostalgia, which have been especially important in the maintenance of the Latvian national identity during and after the Soviet era.

The second half of the chapter will be devoted to background information about *tautasdziesmas* and *dziesmu svētki*, both of which have been instrumental in the creation, maintenance and perpetuation of the Latvian national identity. Both depend on the theories that will be discussed in the first part of the chapter for their part in the creation of the Latvian identity and their continuing role in the maintenance of it.

I. Theoretical Approaches

Identity Production

Anthropologically, "identity" is a complicated term. Erik H. Erikson defines it as connoting "both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential characteristics with others" (Erikson 1980, quoted in Sökefeld 1999: 417). One's identity, or the way one conceptualizes one's "self", is not created in a vacuum, but rather made in comparison to others: what is similar between someone and what is different helps constitute one's identity. (Sökefeld 1999: 417). Clifford Geertz described the Western "self" as

"a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgement and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against its social and natural background" (Geertz 1984, quoted in Sökefeld 1999: 418).

One's surroundings, family, upbringing – in other words culture – helps define one's identity. Identity tends to depend less on internal factors and more on external ones, like one's history or material surroundings, and can be "provisional and fluid". One can mold one's identity according to the situation in which they find themselves, the people with which they are at that moment, their physical location, and a variety of other factors; in other words, identity is fluid and a person has multiple. Identity is performative, meaning that "identity has become more of an outward show seeking recognition and uptake" (Coats 2011: 109-111). One performs their identity by participating in activities that prove to others the ways in which they identify, which can be different according to the specific situation. For example, a Latvian living in the United States might identify as Latvian while participating in Latvian activities, such as during a choir rehearsal, but as American when with other Americans or during American activities, such as at a Fourth of July celebration. During the Soviet era, the Latvian identity, both in Latvia and in the diaspora, was under threat, and in order for it to survive, it had to exist in conjunction with other identities forced upon Latvian individuals. A Latvian in Latvia could be "Latvian", but they were first and foremost "Soviets" when dealing with the Soviet government.

Ethnicity and Nationalism

Since the mid-1960s, the concept of "ethnicity" has been growing in relevance in the field of social anthropology due to changes in thinking about identity (Erikson 1993: 8).

Ethnicity has to do with the classification of people and group relationships, especially "the aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive" (Ibid: 4). Like any kind of identity, ethnic groups are not created in isolation, but are established when one group comes into contact with another:

> The first fact of ethnicity is the application of systematic distinctions between insiders and outsiders; between Us and Them. If no such principle exists there can be no ethnicity, since ethnicity presupposes an institutionalized relationship between delineated categories whose members consider each other to be culturally distinctive.

Although ethnicity is not created only by individuals, it does give an individual some method to pursue culturally defined interested in an organized way (Ibid: 18).

Hylland proposes that one cannot equate the term "ethnic group" with "cultural group", as different ethnic groups can have aspects of a shared culture (Hylland 1993: 33). Although Latvians consider themselves to be a distinct ethnic group, they do share cultural traits with other Baltic nations, for example, such as linguistic similarities between the Latvian and Lithuanian language (Plakans 2011: 9). According to Frederik Barth, shared culture across ethnic boundaries can be considered "implication[s] or result[s] of a long-term social process" (Barth 1969, quoted in Hylland 1993: 37). The territorial divide between the Baltic states is a relatively new delineation, therefore cultural exchanges among the groups occurred fluidly for hundreds of years before boundaries were established. Even today, similarities between Baltic cultures are evident, like the song festivals, a practice which developed differently in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but has a common point of origin. Culture is an important part of defining an ethnic group, but it cannot be the only criterion due to potential similarities with other ethnic groups.

Since the rise of nationalist movements in the nineteenth century, ethnicity and nationalism have gone hand-in-hand. Ethnopolitical movements "tend to invoke a concept of culture which is in fact often directly inspired by anthropological concepts of culture" and are

territorially based (Hylland 1993: 14-15). However, "nationalism" is another term that is difficult to define. Benedict Anderson argues that "nationalisms" are cultural artifacts that were created toward the end of the eighteenth century. They were caused by a "spontaneous distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, … became modular … with varying degrees of self-consciousness … to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations" (Anderson 1983: 4). Nationalism, in the form we know it today, was created due to the circumstances of the time, but has been coopted by many peoples with different ideological beliefs.

The goal of most nationalist movements is to establish their own nation; as Ernest Gellner writes, "nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent" (1983: 1). According to the form of nationalism that developed and gained traction during the late nineteenth century, any group of people claiming to be a "nation" had the right to self-determination and to be a separate, sovereign, independent state (Hobsbawm 1992: 102). A nation, like nationalism, is a nebulous term. Anderson proposes a definition of "nation" that is as follows: "it is an imagined political community… imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign". It is imagined because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." It is limited because its boundaries are finite, if elastic; and it is sovereign according to the concept invented during the Enlightenment and Revolution when dynastic rule came to an end, meaning it acts outside of the influence of other nations (Anderson 1983: 6-7). Hobsbawm agrees that a "nation" is not an unchanging entity, as the concept itself belongs to a relatively recent era, and are a feat of "social engineering" (Hobsbawm 1992: 9). Most theorists agree that nations, born out of nationalism, are social

constructs.

Knowing that nations derive from a modern idea and are socially constructed, what is the criteria for a nation? Two people are from the same nation if they have a shared culture, but they also have to acknowledge that they are members of the same nation – one cannot force someone to identify with a nation, no matter how hard they might try. This "shared culture" is "a system of ideas and signs and associations and way of behaving and communicating", according to Gellner (1983: 5). However, Gellner agrees with Hylland that shared culture cannot be the only criterion for a nation and that political boundaries must come into play (Gellner 1983: 55; Hylland 1993: 33). A nation, according to Herder, does not have to be a state, but is a "separate natural entity whose claim to political recognition rested on the possession of a common language" (Eggel, Liebich and Mancini-Griffoli 2007: 54). The modern nation is defined by Hobsbawm as a state or a group of people aspiring to be a state. It is larger than a "real community" (as opposed to Anderson's imagined ones), where everyone can meet face-to-face, but people have already mobilized on "feelings of collective belonging… which could operate, as it were, potentially on the macro-political scale which could fit in with modern states and nations" (Hobsbawm 1992: 46; Anderson 1983: 6). This definition, while including the idea of the nation-state, lines up with Herder's early concept of nation. This idea of a nation being a socially constructed, imagined community is especially important for post-World War II Latvia, as it was split by the Soviet invasion. Latvians living in exile still felt part of the Latvian nation, even though they were living far away from their homeland. They maintained a Latvian community and asserted their place in the Latvian nation by expressing their Latvian identity through the Latvian language and participating in Latvian activities, like singing in choirs, folk dancing, attending or teaching at Saturday schools. These activities mobilized their sense of

collective belonging to the Latvian nation.

As the Latvian nationalist movement grew in the nineteenth century, political activists drew on the values expressed in folklore of each area in present-day Latvia, like a value of nature, family and song, and began to prescribe these ideas as part of a unified culture of the entire group of people who lived in the territory that was considered to be "Latvia" (Kurzeme, Livonija, Latgale). This "invention of tradition", in the Hobsbawmian sense, served as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm 1983: 1). In other words, the first generation of those who advocated for a Latvian nation-state used the past – folklore, customs, ancient values – as proof as to why the Latvian people should unite and look to the future together.

These political activists created an ethnic group by claiming that they are from the same "bed, blood and cult": that they are biologically self-perpetuating, have an ideology of shared ancestry and a shared religion (or folklore) (Nash 1988, quoted in Hylland 1993: 34). Like Kronvalds urging his fellow Latvians to see themselves as a distinct people, regardless of their geographical location or social class, because they shared the same language, activists began to claim that the Latvian culture was distinct and unique, not just a part of the culture of their rulers. Slowly but surely, nationalist sentiments became a nationalist movement (Gellner 1983: 1) and snowballed until a Latvian ethnic group was recognized by the Latvian people themselves, and their nation lobbied to become a state. While Latvians identified as a group by the traits and practices that they shared, they also asserted things they were not: they were not German, they were not Russian. After the occupation of Latvia by the Soviet Union, questions of what could be considered the Latvian nation were revisited, as Latvia had lost its sovereignty. Was there a

Latvia? Was the exile community "Latvia" or was the physical, Soviet-occupied homeland "Latvia", or was it possible that both could be "Latvia" simultaneously?

Collective Memory and Nostalgia

Collective memory and nostalgia both play a large role in Latvian culture today. Latvia, as a sovereign nation-state, has been in existence for less than one hundred years, and about half of that time was occupied by other stronger, more aggressive governments. The Latvian people were divided due to the occupation by the Soviet Union, both geographically and socially. Collective memories of the past, both those shared by members of the diaspora and people living in Latvia and those not, are important for the maintenance of Latvian culture through tumultuous times and during efforts of normalization after them.

Memories are "psychic states [that] subsist in the mind in an unconscious state and that can become conscious again when recollected". The sum of these memories from individuals of the same society is what is considered collective memory (Halbwachs 1992: 39). The concept of collective memory rose to prominence in the twentieth century as part of the idea of collective experience (Barash 2016: 39). Collectives, such as ethnic groups or nations, cannot "remember" themselves, as they are not autonomous beings, but members of communities can participate in collective memory through publicly communicated words, images and gestures. One cannot experience what another person is remembering exactly, therefore these devices are used to convey memories secondhand by creating symbols (Ibid: 40, 46).

How do we know that a collective memory actually occurred? Symbols that are used to express collective memories are created by the collective imagination, which is "intrinsic to the public construction of reality". To establish that these events did happen and are not simply a

fabrication, they are inserted back into the memories and experiences of an individual: "To be remembered and publicly communicated, all events that are placed in a temporal web of relations depend on imagination in its fundamental way of situating them in the symbolic order to which they are bound" (Barash 2016: 46-49). Using *dziesmu svētki* as an example, an event in which hundreds of thousands of people participate, whether singing in the choir or as a spectator, someone can recognize that a symbol of the event, such as a poster or a friend's anecdote, is real by recounting a memory of their own about the event. In an anonymous survey conducted by the author in March 2017, 194 of 299 participants (64.9%) said that they have participated in a *dziesmu svētki* themselves, and 82 participants (27.4%) said that they participated as a spectator. Only 23 of 299 (7.7%) said they had never participated or attended a *dziesmu svētki*. One participants describes the event as a "unifying cultural experience" (30s, United States), another said that it was "full of positive emotions and fostered a feeling of unity, culture, connection and identity" (18-25, United States). Anecdotes and descriptions of the event help prove that while they are a collective memory, they are not a complete figment of the imagination.

Indirect memory of older generations and of generations past is also used to create collective memory. When living memory no longer exists, an event must be corroborated with historical research, including symbols that indicate time or place, and narratives of the time to establish its validity (Barash 2016: 55-57). To know that the first *dziesmu svētki* really did occur in 1873, one must look at historical research, as there are no longer any eyewitnesses to confirm that it happened the way it did. By participating in Latvian cultural activities, a collective memory is activated and new aspects of it are created.

Nostalgia is another powerful tool of the perpetuation of Latvian culture, especially choral music, and especially in the diaspora, where culture and nationalism have melded into one

concept. Nostalgia is defined as a sentimental longing for one's past, and is often described as a bittersweet emotion (Sedikides et al. 2008: 305). Through nostalgia, "symbolic ties with… others are affirmed, and close others come to be momentarily part of one's present", supporting Anderson's definition of a nation as an imagined community, establishing ties to people that you consider to be your countrymen but have never met. It "magnifies perceptions of social support, thus counteracting the effect of loneliness", which can be seen amongst diaspora members who were born in Latvia and were forced to flee, and the reasons why they participate in Latvian activities in the United States, which will be discussed in later chapters (Ibid: 306).

Singing choral music and *tautasdziesmas*, or folk songs, about your homeland and expressing your values and identity through song helps a person connect to Latvia and reaffirm their Latvian identity to themselves and others while they are not able to physically be in Latvia. In Latvia during the Soviet occupation, singing in choirs and singing *tautasdziesmas,* especially when singing songs about Latvia itself, in various settings helped keep the collective memory of the independent Latvia of the past alive. Singing together was a tool that used nostalgia to help Latvians work towards regaining independence and returning to the Latvia that they remembered.

II. Historical Background

Tautasdziesmas

Latvians love to sing, which is a well-known fact throughout the world; as Wolfram Gottlieb wrote, "the Latvians are a very musical people" (Gottlieb 1939: 629). An aspect of Latvian culture that is unique to Latvia and a symbol of Latvian national identity is the "corpus

of extant Latvian folk poetry [that] has become unique in its completeness and detail" (Krātiņš 1961: 239), known as *tautasdziesmas*, or *dainas*. Latvians sing or recite them all the time: during holidays, at birthdays, while working, when they are happy, when they are sad. As one German writer wrote in 1844, "an extraordinarily rich store of songs makes it possible for the singer to submerge into the magic of these songs for hours, even days". Another writer wrote that Latvians participate in a "folksong cult", which Bunkše agrees is not an exaggeration (Bunkše 1979: 198).

Latvian *tautasdziesmas* express the Latvian identity in a way that is unique to the Latvian people. Because they are generally non-rhyming and lyric, gaining their "aesthetic effects" through their thematic content and language rhythm, they are especially difficult to translate (Bunkše 1979: 197), making them only truly accessible to Latvians, evoking a collective sense of pride in this folk corpus. Latvians have been ruled by others for much of their history but "the *dainas* in particular came to be considered as pure creations of Latvians, originated by Latvians in a dim, prehistoric time of freedom" (Ibid: 207). *Dainas* were first written before the Latvians were subjected to the laws and oppression of other powers, and are they are an immense source of pride for Latvians and a national symbol of the Latvian culture, depicting an ancient, ideal way of life.

Tautasdziesmas are part of the oral tradition of Latvian culture. Each *daina* is a quatrain, is usually trochaic, although sometimes didactic, and are "complete and self-sufficient within these confines" (Krātiņš 1961: 251). Each *daina* makes an observation, draws a conclusion, seeks to teach something or describes an emotion, magical or practical occurrence. They express both "the tender lyricism of love toward both nature and human being" and "quick wit and biting satire" (Bula 2011, Ivask 1960: 126). Customs and living conditions that are described in *tautasdziesmas* reflect what life was like before German influence pervaded life throughout the

Baltic littoral (Ivask 1960: 127). *Dainas* are often strung together into cycles that are sung as songs, and many have a unique melody (Gottlieb 1939: 629; Krātiņš 1961: 251).

Dainas often make a generalized statement about Latvian values: "the *dainas* are basically lyrical utterances with the qualification that the 'I' figuring in them is not a unique human being, but a universalized persona representing the community and expressing the experiences common to everyone in it". In other words, the sentiments and values expressed in *dainas* are meant to be common to all Latvians, as the "I" persona is meant to represent a sort of Latvian Everyman (Krātiņš 1961: 251, Bunkše 1979: 198). A great deal of metaphor is used to express Latvian value systems in *tautasdziesmas*, often having to do with nature. For example, in the *tautasdziesma* below, a woman's in-laws make her feel uncomfortable like the rain, while her blood relatives are likened to the warmth of the sun (Vīķis-Freibergs 1999: 208).

Visapkārt lietus lija,	All around it was raining,
Vidū saule ritināja;	In the middle the sun was shining;
Visapkārt sveši ļaudis,	All around were strangers,
Vidū mani bāleliņi.	In the middle my kinsmen.

Similar metaphors include colors and weather patterns during birth, likening good, sunny birthdays to good fortune for a child born with "rosy complexion", and "blue-black" weather to something ugly or ill, like a corpse (Ibid: 219-220). The general tone of most *tautasdziesmas* is a "positive-stoicism", showing the value of optimism in the face of adversary in Latvian culture (Krātiņš 1961: 252).

Tautasdziesmas make up a large portion of the oral tradition of Latvia, indicating their importance to a national identity:

> "The picture of community life given in the folk song is extended beyond the confines of time and place into universality… thus it was for songs sung by Latvians in the thirteenth century to be handed down from generation to generation and to be sung on occasions similar to those that first inspired them – to be sung, in fact, by Latvians in any century"

(Krātiņš 1961: 252)

Many Latvians know an extensive repertoire of *tautasdziesmas* by memory, either single stanza *tautasdziesmas* or strings of *tautasdziemsas* sung with their own unique melody, creating a comprehensive song with a narrative. As quoted above, this repertoire was handed down from previous generations, and is a source of pride for many. Certain kinds of *tautasdziesmas* are sung for important Latvian holidays, like *Jāņi*, or Midsummer's Eve, and *Ziemassvētki*, or Winterfest (Ibid: 253), furthering their national importance. *Tautasdziesmas* "[glorify] the past in visions of pagan priests and bright, distant castle hills" (Jaremko 1983: 62), depicting Latvia as a place where an idyllic past is still alive in the present, enacted through a rich cultural tradition, allowing it to live in the collective memory of the Latvian nation. The importance of *tautasdziesmas* amongst members of the Latvian diaspora is similar: "In Latvian émigré practice… very little of contemporary urban life is reflected in song, while much of the rural, remote past is performed" (Ibid: 61), connecting a Latvian identity outside of Latvia to life in the pre-Soviet Latvian countryside.

Because *tautasdziesmas* are so instrumental to Latvian culture, it is natural that they are the inspiration for many choral works. Gottlieb writes that almost all Latvian composers are dedicated to choral music because of "a natural result of the Latvians' love of folk-songs" (1939: 630). Some of the most famous composers, such as Andrejs Jurjāns and Emīls Melngailis, have arranged folk songs for choirs that have stayed as pillars of a basic national choral repertoire that is often drawn from for concerts and song festivals (Ibid: 629-630). This idea will be expanded upon in later chapters.

Dziesmu svētki

The first *dziesmu svētki*, or song festivals, took place in Riga in 1873, where a joint choir of 1,003 singers started one of Latvia's most important traditions (Plakans 2011: 232). What started as a celebration of *a capella* choir music has developed into a multidisciplinary event, which includes folk dance, instrumental concerts and crafts. However, the focal point of the celebration remains the final choir concert. Approximately 12,000 singers participated in this final choir concert in 2013, the last time the festival occurred in Latvia. (dziesmusvetki.tv)

Dziesmu svētki are a cultural event that throughout history have become a symbol of national identity and unity. They are part of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list, alongside traditions like Peking opera in China and Capoeira in Brazil. *Dziesmu svētki* are, by no exaggeration, a miracle, and without them, the choral music tradition of Latvia would not look the same as it does now (dziesmusvetki.tv).

Dziemsu svētki is a good example of an invented tradition, in the Hobsbawmian sense. It uses ancient materials to construct a new tradition for a novel purpose (Hobsbawm 1983: 6), in this case, using ancient Latvian traditions like group singing combined with the German-influenced choral singing to assert a Latvian identity. At the time of its inception, *dziesmu svētki* not only served as a unifying device for Latvians to create and solidify a Latvian nation, but also showed the German and Russian ruling powers that Latvians are their own separate people and culture. *Dziesmu svētki* tap into the collective memory of Latvians by celebrating the ideal Latvian and ideal Latvia. Independent Latvia and the diaspora saw the purpose of *dziesmu svētki* differently than the Soviet Latvian government, which will be discussed further in later chapters.

Conclusions

Latvians, who had to fight for recognition of their homeland as a sovereign state only to

have it taken away soon after finally declaring independence, express their nationalism and national identity as often as possible. Nationalism in Latvia looks like advocating for a return to the past, tapping into the collective memory of and nostalgia for a pre-war Latvia of Latvians. *Tautasdziesmas*, an extensive collection of folk poetry exemplifying Latvian values and beliefs, are a link to this past. In fact, the customs and beliefs depicted in this corpus of folk poetry are thought to extend back to the twelfth century, before the Teutonic invasion and the beginning of German influence (Ivask 1960: 127). In other words, by singing and reciting *tautasdziesmas*, Latvians can imagine an ancient sovereign Latvia, untouched by outside peoples and powers, which is the goal of the nationalism movements today.

Chapter 2: Observations on Latvian Identity Production

The national awakening of the nineteenth century and the subsequent cultural unification of the Latvian people allowed for the creation of what could be considered "Latvian" beliefs and values. These values and beliefs are taught and ingrained into all Latvians, both those living in the diaspora and those living in Latvia, and create a Latvian national identity. One of the most important and successful vehicles of these beliefs and values are *tautasdziesmas*: they are taught in schools, both during the Soviet era and after regaining independence, they are sung in choral arrangements and in more casual social settings, and are themselves a source of national pride.

Herder, who was one of the first to collect and study Latvian *tautasdziesmas,* wanted to document how people experienced *tautasdziesmas* themselves: "Songs have an effect on people who sing them; Herder aimed to translate, annotate, and publish songs in a way that would extend their effects to his readers" (Šmidchens 2014: 25). Herder writes that "songs are the archive of the people, the treasure trove of their *science* and *religion*, their *theogony* and *cosmogony* of the deeds of their ancestors and the events of their history, the impressions of their heart" (Herder 1777, quoted in Šmidchens 2014: 29). As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, it is important to note that because the translation of *tautasdziesmas* is so difficult, they have not been studied by non-Latvians a lot:

> There might seem to be another reason, already mentioned, for the neglect of the *dainas*: this wealth of songs is in a language spoken by only two million people in the world. Translation, which would appear to be one solution, is almost impossible for two reasons. The intensely compressed language of the *dainas* that gives them their poetic charm rules out any effective poetic translation, especially into an uninflected, highly syntactical language such as English, which is, moreover, not given to forming compounds… (Krātiņš 1961: 254)

The time it takes to translate one quatrain in a way that conveys the original meaning of the song

is more than one might expect. While translating the examples used in this chapter, I consulted with many Latvian-speaking family members and friends to make sure that my word and syntactical choices were as close to the original Latvian ones as possible. Latvian values and beliefs are disseminated in a variety of ways, but one of the most important ways they are spread and maintained is through music, especially folk songs and choral music. Ancient traditions are documented and are passed down from generation to generation in *tautasdziesmas*, and for this reason I undertook the paradoxically mammoth task of translating these quatrains.

Latvian Beliefs and Values

Like any people, Latvians have many shared common beliefs and values that are incorporated into the Latvian identity. Latvians value nature, as Latvia was (and partially still is) an agricultural society (Bunkše 1979: 198). Family values and an individual good work ethic are also integral to the Latvian identity, which became a point of contention between the Soviet government and ethnic Latvians during the occupation. The Soviet government wanted all work to be done for the good of the Soviet Union, as dictated by communist ideologies, rather than for individuals or familial units. Latvians are very proud of their language, which again, was a pressure point during the Soviet era. As a people that had been ruled by hegemonic societies for centuries, Latvians deeply value their freedom, which made the Soviet occupation after only twenty-two years of independence particularly devastating. The Latvian national identity, comprised of these and other values and beliefs, is expressed through song, which is a major practice of the Latvian people – in 2016, 728 choirs participated in state-run cultural events (lnck.lv.gov), and folk songs are "sung at family celebrations and community gatherings and, of course, while walking the song festival procession" (Šmidchens 2014: 50); in other words,

Latvians sing all the time, both in informal and formal settings.

Latvians venerate family and their ancestors. As written in a pamphlet published by the Latvian Institute, "even today, a Latvian values his family and home above all else" (Kalniņš, Mežs and Pīgozne 2006: 4). 235 of 299 survey participants (78.6%) consider "family" as an integral Latvian value (self-conducted survey, March 2017). Latvians revere older generations, especially parents and grandparents, and strive to honor them in their daily lives. Parents instill values like hard work into their children, and Latvians try to live as their parents have taught them. Latvia was an agricultural society for much of its existence, therefore a good work ethic was especially valued while working on farmland, including growing crops and herding domesticated animals, an idea that is often expressed in *tautasdziesmas*:

Ziedi, ziedi man' meitiņa,	Blossom, blossom, my young daughter,
Audzi, audzi, dēluliņ,	Grow, grow, my young son,
Būs mums siena grābejiņa	We will have someone to rake the hay,
Būs druviņas arajiņš.	We will have someone to plow the cornfield.

(2089-0, my translation)

Children admire and want to live as well as their parents do, and to do so, they must have a good work ethic, like their parents instilled in them.

Dod, Dieviņi, tādu laimu,	Give us, God, that kind of luck
Kā tiem mūsu vecākiem:	That you gave to our parents:
Pilna klēts rudzu, miežu,	A barn full of rye, barley,
Stallī bēri kumeliņi.	In the stable bay colts.

(3091-0, my translation)

Parents are a source of infinite wisdom and must be cherished by children. A prominent Latvian conductor, Māra Marnauza, remarked that one of the traditions that is valuable to Latvians is the honoring of parents: "What is valued by Latvians? … Honoring one's mother and father, no?" (Interview with Māra Marnauza, January 16, 2017). Ēriks Ešenvalds remarked that personality is

inherited from parents, helping to define what kind of person you are and will become: "Archetypes are inherited from grandparents, your grandparents, are passed down from generation to generation…" (Interview with Ēriks Ešenvalds, January 13, 2017).

Practices are also passed down from Latvian parents to children, as in any culture. A prominent practice that is passed down in Latvian families is singing, which is often taught through the knowledge and value of *tautasdziesmas*. When interviewing members of the New York Latvian Concert Choir, a common answer to the question of why they sing in the choir had to do with the value of music that was instilled in members by their parents:

> Oh, because my parents sang. And the reason I sing, I think, is because my parents did (Linda [pseudonym], February 19, 2017)
>
> I really, really like to sing… my father sang, my brother was a big musician, he played many instruments, which he learned himself, my mom sang, my grandma sang, everyone sang! (Līze [pseudonym], February 19, 2017)
>
> I guess my mom influenced me, she was a big singer, my dad was a social singer, he had a good voice… (Uģis [pseudonym], February 19, 2017)

Because children are taught to listen and honor their parents, it is no surprise that a Latvian values similar ideas, beliefs and practices that their ancestors did.

Another prominent Latvian value is nature. Latvian culture can be described as a "nature culture… Latvians are as bound to place, to landscape, to particular geographies as other peoples are bound to tribal legends and religions" (Bunkše 1992: 203). A love of nature is an instrumental part of the Latvian national identity: the feeling of a "true Latvian identity" is found in rural areas and "through contact with timeless nature" and "a modern Latvian possesses a strong sense of an unbroken mental and spiritual connection with distant rustic ancestors and their 'natural' milieu" (Ibid: 204-205). In other words, even as more and more of the population begin to live in urban areas, Latvians consider their truest selves to be found in the countryside

and amongst nature. Herder remarked that man must return to nature, as it is the "true fountain of art and happiness" (Bunkše 1979: 201). When asked if nature is valued by Latvians in my survey, 232 of 299 responses (77.6%) said "yes" (self-conducted survey, March 2017). When asked about which kinds of topics he composes, Ešenvalds replied: "Mostly about nature, because it inspires me" (Interview with Ēriks Ešenvalds, January 13, 2017). Marnauza remarked that she feels most Latvian "when I am in the countryside, somewhere in nature" (Interview with Māra Marnauza, January 16, 2017). A love of nature in ingrained in Latvians, as it is a place where Latvians feel most connected to their culture.

A specific aspect of nature that is often sung about in *tautasdziesmas* is land: the idea of a physical place for Latvians to exist. Bunkše writes: "Land is a close, immediate entity and it concentrates basic emotional and practical associations about culture, nature, the past and the future". A well-known, *tautasdziesma* that is sung often is as follows:

Mazs bij' tēva novadiņis,	My father's region was small,
Bet diženi turējās,	But it held its own,
Visi sīki kadeģiši	The fine juniper
Zied sudraba ziediņiem.	Blooms silver blossoms.

(3707-0, my translation)

Historically, Latvians lived on small family farms and homesteads, places that are considered to be "where values and traditions are developed and are maintained" (Kalniņš, Mežs and Pīgozne 2006: 12). The *tautasdziesma* above can be interpreted as celebrating your family's homestead, melding together the importance of family and land. However, it can also be interpreted as praising your country, saying that your "fatherland" being small and beautiful are not two mutually exclusive concepts.

An aspect of the Latvian national identity that is perhaps most intensely expressed is the

Latvian language. During the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century, the only two factors that really matter in terms of who is a nation were based on ethnicity and common language (Hobsbawm 1992: 102). The rise of the vernaculars in the nineteenth century often empowered groups that spoke the same language to feel that they "were entitled to their autonomous place in a fraternity of equals" (Anderson 1983: 84). This is a belief that Latvians hold as well, even to this day, considering that their sovereignty was lost only about twenty years after independence, when they were forced to comply with Sovietization policies, which included "forcible imposition of the Russian language and culture at the expense of the native language" (Zamascikov 1987: 228). 272 of 299 survey participants (91%) remarked that the Latvian language is valued by Latvians (self-conducted survey, March 2017), and almost all of those interviewed in Latvia, when asked what constitutes a Latvian national identity, included the Latvian language in some way:

> One lone person cannot be a nation… that realization manifests itself when you are with those that think like you… that look similar, language also, yes… (Ēriks Ešenvalds, January 13, 2017)

> Well, I think, that… of course that [Latvia's national identity] is constituted by our language… (Māra Marnauza, January 16, 2017)

> First of all… if you speak Latvian… that shows membership to a Latvian identity (Ivars Cinkuss, January 18, 2017)

The importance of a common language is also expressed in various *tautasdziesmas*:

Tālu metu akmentiņu,	I threw the rock far
Atpakaļu atritēja;	And it rolled back.
Tālu laide valodiņu,	I spoke my language loudly
Atpakaļu atskanēja.	And it echoed back.

(34340-1, my translation)

In the *tautasdziesma* above, the nature metaphor of the rock being thrown and rolling back

implies that if you speak Latvian, you will automatically be able to identify with others who speak the same language.

The Latvian language is a generally unifying component of the Latvian national identity, but it has been a contentious subject in Latvian politics. A large portion of Latvia's population are ethnic Russians who were transported there as part of the Soviet Union's efforts to Russianize Latvia, which began as "deliberate Soviet government policies of deportation (in the 1940s) and artificial immigration" (Zamascikov 1987: 229). Because of Soviet goals to completely integrate Latvians into the Soviet Union at the expense of their national identity, the question of who gets to be "Latvian" is hotly debated to this day. Inter-ethnic tensions have been especially high after independence with changes in language laws, making Latvian as the official language of governance, rather than Russian. New citizenship laws excluded many ethnic Russians who were born in Latvia from becoming citizens on the basis that they did not speak Latvian, and many ethnic Russians, who considered themselves part of the Latvian nation, felt this was an unjust method of nation-building (Pabriks and Purs 2002: 71, 77). The Latvian language is a unifier for ethnic Latvians, but excludes those were forced to move to Latvia but grew to consider themselves as Latvian as well, as will be discussed again in Chapter 4.

Latvians also intensely value their freedom. As a nation that had been culturally and politically oppressed for centuries by German nobles and czarist Russia, a source of national pride is the collective struggle Latvians endured to become an independent nation. One of the reasons why the national awakening was ultimately successful in unifying the Latvian people and mobilizing them to fight for sovereignty was their use of collective memory. The first generation of activists believed that "geographic separatism… could be overcome by accepting the notion that all Latvians were one *tauta* (*Volk*) and thus each shared a collective soul"

(Plakans 1995: 92). When discussing what constitutes a Latvian national identity, Ešenvalds emphasized the shared aspects of the Latvian identity, which include using the past as a way to look towards the future:

> we have collective joy, we have a collective direction in which we are moving and future, yes, we also have some collective pain, collective prayers, collective roads down which we will definitely travel… collective children, who are our future… And we have a collective land. (Interview with Ēriks Ešenvalds, January 13, 2017)

Collective frameworks of the past are created to reconstruct images of the past according to the dominant strain of thought of a society (Halbwachs 1992: 40). For Latvians, these frameworks include the perseverance of the Latvian people to maintain their culture, even in the face of adversaries, like German nobles and the Soviet Union, who wanted to squash Latvian national identity. Latvians have sometimes "[suffered]… from a sense of powerlessness over their destiny" (Bunkše 1992: 205), but in general, are proud that they have been able to maintain an identity even though, as one interviewee put it, Latvians "have always been servants" to other bigger, more powerful nations (Interview with male Latvian composer, January 13, 2017).

Latvians feel a profound sense of "together-ness", which is often symbolically expressed through song. One writer wrote that "a favorite sentiment, which cannot be attained even by a clever politician, is gained rather easily by the song of a chorus" (Švābe 1952, quoted in Bunkše 1979: 197). Singing is a collective activity, not only in the context of choirs but also in other social settings. One member of the New York Latvian Concert Choir recounts his time singing in a student group in California:

> When we had our society [a membership-based society of Latvian students at the university], one of the most important activities was… parties, gatherings at a student's house, but I remember best how we would stand in the kitchen, the men arm in arm, singing all sorts of Latvian songs (Interview with Uģis [pseudonym], February 19, 2017).

When asked if he collaborates with others within his profession, Ivars Cinkuss argues that he

does not perform as a solo artist, but is always in collaboration with others (Interview with Ivars Cinkuss, January 18, 2017), stressing the collective aspect of music and singing. Ešenvalds put it simply: "the Latvian identity is felt most when our people come together" (Interview with Ēriks Ešenvalds, January 13, 2017).

Tautasdziesmas as Part of Latvia's National Identity

A big part of Latvian national identity is cherishing what is indisputably "Latvian". For centuries, Latvians were not allowed to exist as a people, only as a social class of peasants, and therefore were not privy to expressing their own culture. Folklore has been central to the "very survival [of Latvians] as a distinct cultural and linguistic entity" and is a "source of social coherence, cultural identity and continuity" (Bunkše 1992: 205). *Tautasdziesmas* are a piece of oral tradition that have been passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, and they only began to be collected and organized in the nineteenth century. This monumental undertaking is usually attributed to Krišjānis Barons (Ivask 1960: 126; Krātiņš 1961: 239).

As mentioned earlier, Wolfram Gottlieb wrote, "Latvians are a very musical people" (1939: 629), which grows out of such an extensive collection of folk music. "Folk music… they are the roots from which we can take inspiration… they are our ancient inheritance and… they belong to no one else, only to us Latvians", commented Ešenvalds (Interview with Ēriks Ešenvalds, January 13, 2017). This concisely expresses the national pride that Latvians have for *tautasdziesmas*. *Tautasdziesmas* are not only a source of inspiration for other forms of Latvian music, but a source of motivation for the work to keep the Latvian identity from disappearing. As Ivars Cinkuss said, "We can be proud that we have such a huge, rich… it is rare that any people has such an old and deep oral tradition, one that is still alive" (Interview with Ivars Cinkuss,

January 18, 2017). *Tautasdziesmas* are often used as inspiration for choral music, which will be discussed at length in later chapters.

Every Latvian has countless *tautasdziesmas* memorized. Children are taught *tautasdziesmas* at a very early age. They were still taught during the Soviet era, as they were relatively easy to manipulate to fit the Soviet ideology, using Latvian geography, nature, culture, and history, all described in *tautasdziesmas,* to indoctrinate ethnic Latvians with Soviet beliefs (Bunkše 1992: 205). For example, one interviewee described how a Soviet work ethic was taught through Latvian *tautasdziesmas*: "In those times, which I now recognize to be the biggest benefit from *tautasdziesmas* [in the eyes of the Soviet government], which was taught to very young children, was about work, all about work" (Interview with Zinta, January 15, 2017). In the diaspora, children learn to recite and sing *tautasdziesmas* at Latvian Saturday schools, summer camps, at girl guides and scouts, to learn the values that are expressed in them.

Not only are *tautasdziesmas* an important part of everyday home and work life, they are closely associated with many holidays, another important part of the Latvian identity (Ivask 1960: 127). Traditional Latvian holidays often have their own set of *tautasdziesmas* with a unique type of melody, that are traditionally sung during rituals associated with it; for example, *līgo svētki* or *Jāņi* have a special kind of *tautasdziesma* called *līgošana*, in which the refrain "līgo" is repeated while sung around a blazing bonfire (Krātiņš 1961: 253). Singing *tautasdziesmas* during holidays with family and friends is a powerful practice that is cherished by all Latvians.

Tautasdziesmas are also a way to disseminate moral values. Many *tautasdziesmas* include prescriptions on how to live, like the ones in the previous section about aspiring to live according to your parent's work ethic. Others describe how one's temper and personality should be to live a

good life:

Dārza bite, mates meita,	Bumblebee, mother's daughter,
Tās jau ļauna nedarīja:	They did not do anything spiteful:
Bite ziedus nenosūca,	The bumblebee did not exhaust blossoms,
Meita naida nesacēla.	The daughter did not incite spite.

(6511-3, my translation).

In the *tautasdziesma* above, the moral prescription (girls should not live spiteful lives) is expressed through a nature metaphor by comparing a girl with a pleasant demeanor to a bumblebee. One can find *tautasdziesmas* that express almost all Latvian moral values, practices and ancient pagan beliefs. A *tautasdziesma* that perhaps best describes the demeanor that all Latvians should have is as follows:

Dziedot dzimu, dziedot augu,	I was born singing, I grew up singing,
Dziedot mūžu nodzīvoju:	I lived out my life singing:
Dziedot nāvi ieraudzīju	Singing, I beheld death
Paradīzes dārziņā.	In the garden of Paradise.

(3-1, translation: Krātiņš 1961: 244)

Herder wanted to show his readers why Latvians were a people that deserved attention. Through his research of and writings about *tautasdziesmas,* he was able to show his eighteenth century audience the Latvian way of life and why they were entitled to their own state, not as a class of peasant but as a people.

Observations on National Identity Production

Collective memory and collectivity is instrumental in the production and perpetuation of Latvia's national identity. These processes have created what E. V. Bunkše considers to be a sort of modern-day Renaissance for Latvians:

The Latvians are turning to the past for lessons and inspiration, except that in their case it

> is not the writings or architecture and the plastic arts of great artists of Classical Antiquity that move them; it is the folklore and folk arts of their distant and not so distant ancestors (1992: 205)

This perpetuates that idea of "past as future" for a Latvian national identity: Latvians want to return to the values and morals of a Latvia of the pre-Soviet past, but as a modern independent nation-state. Ethnicity and identity becomes more important when it is threatened (Hylland 1993: 76), as it was during the time of the Soviet occupation. Latvians want to return to what they considered to be a true Latvian identity, which was formed during the national awakening and existed during the first era of independence, when it could be expressed freely.

Nostalgia for and an attempt to return to an identity closer to what it was in the past was expressed in many of the interviews conducted. A reverence for the ideas and values that has been passed down by generations past was expressed by Marnauza: "We have always had sacred things from our ancestors" (Interview with Māra Marnauza, January 16, 2017). However, Latvians want to return to this identity while entering into what they consider to be the "modern" world. Latvian culture, as well as economic progress and prosperity, in the Western sense, for Latvians as a separate, sovereign group of people, has been suppressed for almost the entire time that "Latvians" as a people have been recognized by other ethnic groups. Ēriks Ešenvalds remarked that, "war throws [a people] back into the past… when the war ends, it is necessary to start again from the beginning… and we have not been able to flourish, plus we were occupied by them [the Soviet Union]" (Interview with Ēriks Ešenvalds, January 13, 2017). Latvians strive to reassert a strong identity, which lives in their collective memory and has been perpetuated through cultural symbols like *tautasdziesmas*, and, as will be discussed in later chapters, choral music.

Because of the Soviet occupation, the Latvian population has been scattered around the

world. The biggest population center is of course, in Latvia – 62% of the two million inhabitants of Latvia are ethnic Latvians – but approximately 450,000 Latvians live throughout the world as well (Consulate of Latvia in New York). National identity production in the diaspora and in Latvia has both its similarities and differences. Latvia's national identity is deeply connected to culture and values in both Latvia and in the diaspora, and is perpetuated through the education of children, in both formal academic settings and by family in the home, and through *tautasdziesmas* and choral singing. In the diaspora, summer camps and retreats like "Divreizdivi" (2x2), a "ten-day cultural immersion program" for Latvian youth, are an added factor, as Latvians usually live their day-to-day life in their host nation's culture (Miezītis 1979: 74).

One of the biggest difference between Latvians in Latvia and Latvian in the diaspora is the reasons each group have for why asserting the Latvian national identity is important at all. Ethnic identity is fluid, and Latvians in the diaspora have learned to draw upon their various identities, according to the situation (Jaremko 1983: 64). Latvians living in Latvia, especially for those who were born and/or lived through the Soviet occupation, are attempting to reestablish a Latvian identity as the national identity of Latvia, as Latvia was considered to be part of the Soviet Union, not its own nation. Non-Soviet nationalism was a "principle ideological problem" by the Soviet government and its expression was forbidden (Zamascikov 1987: 229). On the other hand, for Latvians living in the diaspora, it is more about the maintenance of the identity that they brought with them to their host nations and guaranteeing its survival outside of Latvia. The original purpose of the diaspora was to guarantee the survival of what they considered to be the "true" Latvian identity, one that they took with them to the diaspora centers from pre-war, independent Latvia. As will be discussed in the next chapter, both groups would use choral singing as a vehicle of a Latvian national identity. However, choral singing was different in each

location, as different restrictions were imposed on what they could sing or to what kind of music they had access, which will be compared in greater detail in chapter four.

Chapter 3: Choral Music as a Vehicle for Latvian Identity

The tradition of Latvian choral music has its origins during the time of German rule beginning in the thirteenth century, but gained popularity among Latvians themselves in the eighteenth century. Since its inception as an institution in Latvia, it has become one of the most important vehicles for the dissemination of the Latvian identity. Much of Latvian choral music is based on *tautasdziesmas* – the vast majority of Latvian composers, along with original, usually patriotic works, arranged *tautasdziesmas* text and melodies. Along with the development of choir culture in Latvia came the beginning of *dziesmu svētki*, or song festivals, an important tradition that continues to this day. The role of *dziesmu svētki* split after World War II, when Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union – their significance was different in Latvia than it was amongst the Latvian exile populations.[1] Latvia's choral tradition is a powerful and popular aspect of Latvian culture, one that continues to disseminate values and perpetuate Latvia's national identity.

Origins of Latvia's Choral Tradition

While Latvia's choral tradition is now indisputably a "Latvian" aspect of its identity, it has German origins. From the very beginning of their rule in Latvia, beginning the thirteenth century, Latvians were required to attend Christian church services, where hymns were sung. This was a very different style of group singing than Latvians were used to, which was "call-and-response style", where two voices would alternate singing the melody and harmony while a third (or a group) would sing the drone syllable "eh" under it (Carpenter 1996: 97; Wolverton 1998:

[1] The term "exile" among Latvians is a contention term. Some Latvians in Latvia take offense to Latvians abroad calling themselves "exiles", as they consider them to have left Latvia voluntarily, while those who were deported by the Soviet government to have left involuntarily (Carpenter 2007: 337). Most Latvian émigrés disagree, saying that they did not leave voluntarily but were forced to leave to avoid deportation. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to Latvians living outside of Latvia before 1991 as "exiles", and to them as "members of the diaspora" after 1991, when Latvia regained its independence and movement to and from Latvia was no longer restricted.

38). Volfgangs Dārziņš, a prominent composer and ethnomusicologist, describes this style as follows:

> The first double line of the text is always begun by a single singer [feminine] – the *sayer* or *caller*, who, as it were, "gives" the melody, together with the text. The moment that the double line has been "said", it is seized immediately and repeated, often with the same melody, by all other singers … or "twisters" [*locītājas*], who thus fashion the song's other half. It is characteristic that the last, or next to last note of the caller is picked up immediately by the so-called drawlers … - a group of singers who drawl this note to the end of the song, singing usually the vocal a or e. If the drawled note does not correspond to the end note of the song, the drawlers jump across to this last note the moment that the twisters begin to twist the second line of the text (Dārziņš, quoted in Bunkše 1979: 199).

This "call-and-response" style of singing, called *dainošana*, still exists, but only in some parts of the Latvian countryside, but other forms of group singing of *tautasdziesmas* are still prominent and popular. "At informal gatherings of the Latvian community songs are exchanged in an atmosphere of spontaneity and interaction" (Jaremko 1983: 63), which include settings like singing around a bonfire or at a birthday party, *tautasdziesmas* are sung more often than not in unison or with simple two-part harmonies.

The Moravian Brethren came to Latvia from Bohemia with their type of Lutheranism, which was a more egalitarian form. Latvians preferred this philosophy of egalitarian Christianity, as they had come to be seen as not a people, but the peasant class by their German rulers under the system of feudalism in place at the time (Carpenter 1996: 96, 98). Latvians were often prohibited from playing instruments by Germans, as they were considered inferior musicians and were often banned by law from playing certain kinds of instruments. Latvians were not allowed to play wind instruments, hence the prominence of the *kokle*, a sort of lap harp with 13 strings, in Latvian culture. (Brauns 1985: 102; Wolverton 1998: 39). This explains the development of vocal music early in Latvian history, but less of a prominence of instrumental music until later.

The Brethren came with not only hymns, but also encouraged the education of Latvians. This led to the establishment of teachers' training institutes, the most important of which was run by Jānis Cimze in Valmiera in 1839 (Carpenter 1996: 98; Plakans 1995: 85). Cimze's educational institution was established while Germans were still locally in power. Germans were promoting choral singing to replace traditional Latvian pagan beliefs, as they considered choral singing a more modern, civilized form of expression. The Germans believed that Latvians had a natural presupposition to singing, which is why they considered choral singing to be a natural extension of this. The German form, however, was considered less "heretical" and with more "honorable" kinds of song, and would usher Latvians into a modern, urban society. Cimze, who studied composition and pedagogy with Ludwig Christian Erk, who considered choral singing to be "an essential part of the moral education of both children and adults", found that the teaching seminary that he established was "an intellectual culture that was surprisingly amenable to the use of Erk's choral methods in the classroom" (Karnes 2005: 200, 205).

Valentīns Bērzkalns, a prominent scholar of *dziesmu svētki*, writes that "Latvians embraced choral singing… as an organic extension of *dainošana,* for the difference between the two was more a matter of outer form than essence" (Bērzkalns 1965, in Carpenter 1996: 99). The beginning of the popularity of choral singing in Latvia coincided with the national awakening, therefore much of choir music has been patriotic in some way, whether overtly or through adapting *tautasdziesmas* for choral singing. While the Germans were attempting to replace traditional forms of *tautasdziesmas* with choral singing, many, like Cimze, worked to preserve the Latvian form of music by adapting them into songs for choirs. Cimze's collection of songs for choir, *Lauku puķes* (Wild Flowers), included eighty-six arrangements of *tautasdziesmas* for choir. The connection between education, nationalism and choral singing is therefore logical:

"The followers of Cimze can be credited with introducing into the harmonic structure elements of native declamatory song… It was the strength of collective identity which the chorus epitomized that led it to be bound inexorably to the nationalist currents" (Jaremko 1983: 62). From that point on, Latvians indigenized choral singing, making it their own:

> By drawing simultaneously upon both aspects of the Baltic German cultural legacy, and by exploiting for creative purposes the paradox inherent in that legacy, Cimze succeeded in creating a new, modern and distinctly Latvian musical repertory that many of his contemporaries considered the most powerful expression of Latvian national sentiment articulated during the period (Karnes 2005: 201)

One cannot speak of the Latvian culture or Latvia's national identity without discussing choirs. Of 299 survey responses, 89.6% of responses, when asked if music is part of Latvia's national identity, answered yes. When asked what kind of music is associated with Latvia's national identity, 95.5% answered *tautasdziesmas* and 65.7% answered choral music[2] (self-conducted survey, March 2017). Today, Latvian choirs can be found not only in Latvia, but also in the United States, Canada, Australia, almost anywhere where there is a diaspora center. Latvian choirs have received tremendous acclaim in recent years internationally (Wolverton 1998: 39), singing in international festivals and often returning with top prizes. The 2014 World Choir Olympics were held in Riga, in which choirs from around the world participated, but many of the top awards went to Latvian choirs. Ivars Cinkuss recounted that "an American conductor once said, 'Latvia is a choir geek's Disneyland' …on Latvian soil, choral singing has become an absolutely Latvian part [of culture], no longer associated at all with German, with Scandinavian [tradition], nothing like that" (Interview with Ivars Cinkuss, January 18, 2017). There is no question that Latvia has indigenized choral singing to the greatest extent possible.

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[2] This number is higher because some respondents put "choral singing" in the "Other" section.

Tautasdziesmas in Latvian Choral Music

The collection of *tautasdziesmas* by Krišjānis Barons, which were transmitted as oral tradition until the nineteenth century, is associated with the national awakening movement. Even the term *tautasdziesmas*, whose literal translation means "songs of the people [folk]", was suggested as part of the national awakening movement (Jaremko 1983: 62); before, they were called *dainas*.[3] Therefore, it is only logical that many of the compositions that were written for choral singing by Latvian composers during the time that the choral movement in Latvia started to gain speed were arrangements of *tautasdziesmas*. Some of the most famous Latvian composers, whose works are still in the national repertoire, directly arranged *tautasdziesmas*: Andrejs Jurjāns, Jāzeps Vītols, and Emīls Melngailis, who was the composer of over two hundred *tautasdziesmas* arrangement himself. Others, like Alfrēds Kalniņš and Emīls Dārziņš, avoided direct quotations but folk music elements are evident and integral throughout their works, like in many Eastern European forms of art music during the nineteenth century (Wolverton 1998: 40). These composers followed the trend of romanticism, which is now an integral part of Latvian choral music (Wolverton 2013: 10). For example, in Jāzeps Vītols' arrangement of "Pūt, vējiņ'", a Latvian folk song, the song "resembled the ebb and flow of wind, with singers' breaths staggered so that the music would not pause, beginning softly, each stanza gradually rising in volume to a crescendo in the sixth stanza, then receding to a calm conclusion" (Šmidchens 2014: 175). As Bunkše writes, "the *dainas* have a central hold on Latvian imagination" (1992: 206), which is evident throughout Latvian choral compositional tradition.

During the Soviet era, folk culture, especially *tautasdziesmas,* were the "sole repository of Latvian sensibilities and culture", as talking overtly about Latvia as a separate nation, including discussion of the national awakening period and independent Latvia, was too

[3] This term is now more or less synonymous with *dainas*.

dangerous (Bunkše 1992: 205). During the Stalin years, Sovietization included a "comprehensive, planned assault of independent Latvian cultural life": traditional festivals, like *Jāņi*, were banned, literature and newspapers were heavily censured, even history books were rewritten to "stress the Baltic region's 'organic' connection to Russia" (Pabriks and Purs 2002: 32). However, after Stalin's death, a cultural thaw occurred, which allowed for a revival, albeit partial, of Latvian national and cultural identity. The Soviets saw Latvian expression through folk traditions, like singing *tautasdziesmas* and their arrangements for choral singing as harmless, proletariat, innocuous expression. However,

> given the material and spiritual transformation of Latvian society into a dispirited mass of *homo sovieticus*, Latvian folk culture insured the continuity of precisely those aspects most important to a national identity: language and, for lack of a better concept, a certain spiritual outlook on self, society, and the universe; in other words, the subjective interior that forms the core of any cultural identity. (Bunkše 1992: 205).

The Soviet government did not know was that Latvian folk culture, including and perhaps especially *tautasdziesmas*, is "by far the most powerful expression and affirmation [of Latvian culture]… [that] occurs in choral singing, which takes place frequently, all over Latvia" (Ibid: 207). Their belief that folk culture, especially translated into choral singing, was harmless to their total control and Sovietization was the reason that Latvian culture was able to survive fifty years of occupation. Latvians used song as a way to resist against the erasure of their identity, eventually using it as a form of protest against the Soviet Union before its disintegration:

> That this image of the Latvians as a 'Nation of Singers' would persist in the Baltic cultural dialogue, outlast both the Russian and Soviet empires, and famously reclaim its place in the global consciousness during what is commonly known to its members as the 'Singing Revolution' of 1988-91 testifies to the lasting power of Cimze's vision of a Latvian nationhood both conceived and articulated in musical terms (Karnes 2005: 201)

The development of choir culture in Soviet Latvia occurred simultaneously to the

development of choir culture by exile Latvians. Approximately 120,000 Latvians fled Latvia during the last stages of World War II (Pabriks and Purs 2002: 32), many of whom ended up in displaced persons (DP) camps in the American and English zones of Germany. By October 1945, about 39,000 Latvians remained in these camps, as they claimed non-repatriable status in fear that they would be deported to Siberia if they returned to Latvia. Although they refused to go home to Latvia, they kept cultural sense of being by establishing choirs, schools, and church congregations in the camps (Hilton 2009: 280, 282). Carpenter writes that the DP camps were populated by many "star-groupers" (in Victor Turner's sense of the phrase), or active community makers. They were skilled at creating, producing and responding to "cultural forms that fostered collective identity" (Carpenter 2007: 320). Because approximately a third of Latvian composers, conductors and performers were among those that fled Latvia, including Ādolfs Ābele and Jāzeps Vītols, choirs were quickly established (or re-established) in the DP camps, as part of this "cultural cīņa (fight)" (Hinkle 2014: 197; Carpenter 2007: 320). DP camps gave Latvian exiles a way to create a "complex, well-integrated, and differentiated social system that resembled the society and culture of their origin", which included choirs, a powerful method of collective expression. Latvians, when they dispersed throughout the world, took these structures and institutions to the nations where they emigrated and established a "proxy nation" abroad (Carpenter 2007: 321).

Because Latvian exiles fled a Soviet regime, naturally Soviet Latvia became something taboo. The only territory that was excluded from "the increasingly complex, overlapping networks of the global exile Latvian province", which was a borderless, global "Latvia-outside-of-Latvia" whose mission was to preserve Latvian culture, was Soviet Latvia (Carpenter 1996: 94). The Latvian exiles "resolutely… took up residence in *pre-1939 Latvia*, which became the

Lost Paradise and sole legitimate site for the continuation of Latvian culture, history and social life" (Carpenter 2007: 321). Therefore, Latvian choirs in the United States, Canada, and other parts of this borderless, imagined community of Latvia-outside-of-Latvia[4] only sang songs by composers from the time of independence or by exile composers, as they considered the songs composed in Soviet Latvia to be "contaminated" by Soviet ideology. Many of the composers mentioned previously are revered by exile conductors and choirs, and their works, especially arrangements of *tautasdziesmas*, are sung regularly. Exile (and diaspora) composers, like Andrejs Jansons, Dace Aperāne, Pēteris Aldiņš, Imants Mežaraups composed works for choirs that were arrangements of *tautasdziesmas* texts and melodies that were sung by exile choirs and are now in the "iron repertoire", or the repertoire of choral songs that is continually drawn from for various concerts and song festivals. Because the "true" Latvia was the independent Latvia, they looked to the past for the future, therefore this choral repertoire consists of songs whose themes are nostalgic of this version of their homeland.

Tautasdziesmas are an extremely important source of inspiration for composers of choral music, both in the past and in the present. For Latvians living during the Soviet regime, it was the only way they could collectively express their Latvian values, identity and culture while the government was actively trying to suppress anything nationalistic but who considered folk culture to be harmless. For Latvians in exile, it was a way to preserve what they considered to be the "true" Latvia, the independent Latvia that lived in the past and in their imaginations, therefore the only acceptable choral material to draw from was the works of independent Latvian composers, whose work often derived from *tautasdziesmas*. By arranging *tautasdziesmas* for choir, the values and identity found in them can be perpetuated in an organized way, reaching

[4] Because the Latvian diaspora is so extensive and far-reaching, I have and will continue to concentrate on Latvians in the United States and Canada in depth, with occasional mentions of Latvians elsewhere, in places like Australia, Germany, Ireland, Brazil, Venezuela, etc.

more people in a systematic fashion than just singing them in at informal gatherings, which in Soviet Latvia, was not technically allowed.

Patriotism in Latvian Choral Music

While many Latvian values are perpetuated through *tautasdziesmas* and their choral arrangements, such as the value of nature and family, the Latvian value of freedom, independence and the struggle to gain access to them are sung about through more patriotic choral songs. These songs are usually poetry put to original melodies composed by Latvian composers such as Jāzeps Vītols, composer of "Gaismas pils" (Castle of Light, text by Auseklis) and Emīls Dārziņš, who composed "Lauztās priedes" (Broken pines, text by Rainis); both songs are part of this "iron repertoire" (Wolverton 1998: 41-42).

Many of these songs could be performed during the Soviet era, as their meanings could be manipulated by the government to have an official meaning that fit their ideologies. The Soviet government wanted to emphasize the "natural" connection between Latvians and Russians. The Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party and the Soviet Latvian Writers' Union tasked themselves with erasing "false conceptions" and rewrote Latvian literature and history "in the light of scientific Marxist-Leninism". Much of pre-Soviet Latvian literature written to correct "political errors", like emphasizing the role of Russians in the 1905 Revolution in Latvia, even though the revolution was partially in response to czarist policies (Ekmanis 1972: 46, 48). The Soviet government found some pre-Soviet authors to praise as beneficial to the Soviet ideologies, especially Rainis (pseudonym for Jānis Pliekšāns, 1865-1929). Some of his poems were published as "revolutionary" and "militant", creating a cult of Rainis that was inconsistent with his actual beliefs, as "his work had to be stretched on a procrustean bed in order

to derive from it political benefit" (Ibid: 45). However, Latvians were able to sing choral music based on these texts, deriving a different meaning from these songs, closer to what their authors originally intended them to be, which was often a love song for Latvia.

Because a large portion of Latvian literature and poetry, from which much of patriotic choral music takes its lyrics, was written while under censorship, both before and after the declaration of independence in 1918, these works are therefore often allegorical. "The great Latvian poet Rainis developed a new kind of symbolic drama, reviving heroes from the ancient past (at least their names) or creating symbolic figures from his imagination" (Lesins 1957: xv), therefore they could fit any nationalist ideology. While some of this music was banned during the Soviet era, what was not was allowed to be sung because it could be manipulated into the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Soviet Union. However, these songs retained its original patriotic meaning for Latvians, helping to keep hope and nationalism alive. As Māra Marnauza sums up, "these songs… with this kind of allegory… were not forbidden. And that somehow compensated for… well, we were happy that we could sing songs that were meaningful to us" (Interview with Māra Marnauza, January 16, 2017). Haralds Mednis, a famous Latvian conductor who worked in Latvia during the Soviet era, spoke about how these songs retained their original meaning and were used as a sort of resistance and motivator for Latvians:

> It's good that somebody convinced them that 'Broken Pines' is a song in which the choir praises the happy, victorious Soviet life, that the nation has finally received the opportunity to live in the reality envisioned by the red Latvian revolutionaries, that the song is about the fulfillment of the nation's dreams under the leadership of the great Stalin. That, you see, is what they told the officials and *nachalniki*. … The main thing was that there would be song. Either the officials and *nachalniki* were stupid, or they decided to let the Latvians at least sing. A nation that sings is not dangerous. But we all knew what the nation was singing: 'You can splinter us, you can break us'. What else could those thousands of people do, who each had a family member, a relative deported? It can be called singing opposition, yes it can (Mednis, quoted in Šmidchens 2014: 173-

174).

Song was a powerful form of resistance to the Soviet government, an idea that was ingrained into ethnic Latvians but was only realized as part of the downfall of the Soviet government in Latvia by officials in Moscow when it was too late.

Dziesmu svētki and National Identity

Dziesmu svētki are an institution in Latvia that perpetuates its national identity like no other. Each *dziesmu svētki*, which occur every five years, is a "complex, public display event that resonates with dense concentrations of multivalent cultural symbols" (Carpenter 1996: 100). The first national song festival was organized in 1873, organized by the Riga Latvian Association, several decades before Latvia's independence, and was held in Riga with a joint choir of over a thousand singers (Plakans 2011: 232; Kasekamp 2010: 79). However, regional choral song days in 1864 and 1870 were organized by students of Jānis Cimze, which were precursors to the larger, national festivals (Carpenter 1996: 98). In 2013, there were 388 choirs in the combined choir for the final concert and over 40,000 participants overall[5] (dziesmusvetki.tv). The combined choir consists of regional and local choirs, and starting with 1990, choirs from the diaspora as well (Carpenter 1996: 100).

Song festivals "galvanize Latvians". Arnolds Klotiņš, another prominent scholar of Latvian music, describes *dziesmu svētki* (in Carpenter's words) as "a fertile, paradoxical duality that weds professional music (which he claims nurtures the individual voice) to a base of folk music (which to him represents the collective experience)" (Carpenter 1996: 99). Song festivals turn "a generalized mood into a practical force" (Ibid: 102), transforming emotion into a

[5] This number includes participating folk dancers as well, as *dziesmu svētki* are now song and dance festivals.

collective expression of Latvian identity. In films, video clips, photos and memories of my own experiences, it is obvious that *dziesmu svētki* are emotional experiences – songs like "Gaismas pils" bring the crowd of thousands to tears. *Dziesmu svētki* are events where the collectivity of singing is perhaps felt the most. One survey participant remarked that "the oneness of the experience" will stay with them forever (20s, United States), another said it is "collective creative process" (40s, United States), and yet another called it a "one-of-a-kind experience, highly patriotic, emotional, uplifting" (50s, United States, self-conducted survey, March 2017). After the Soviet occupation, this institution split into two, with song festivals occurring in Soviet Latvia differently than they were abroad.

Dziesmu svētki in Soviet Latvia had different meanings to Latvians themselves and to their occupiers. The Soviet government used song festivals to project communism, as they found that Latvian folk culture and choir movement was a form of collectivization, and they attempted to use it to their advantage. "Familiar structures [were] filled with historically alien meanings", like the insertion of children carrying portraits of Lenin during the *svētku gājiens*, the celebratory procession of participants. To the Soviet government, choirs emerged as an "idealized model of the People", therefore they allowed this deeply Latvian institution to continue (Carpenter 1996: 104). The Soviet government transformed the song festival into a socialist realist event by requiring Latvians to carry portraits of Lenin and Stalin and sing songs like "Dziesmu par Krieviju" ("Song About Russia", composed by Vladimir Zaharov) and "Ļenins, partija, miers" ("Lenin, Party, Peace", composed by Serafin Tuyikovs) (Graudziņa 2008: 332). However, Latvians "paid their ideological dues" (Carpenter 1996: 104) to be able to keep gathering in mass numbers: "Those Soviet songs… were given unto Caesar, sung to the Soviet government, as payment for the chance to sing the non-Soviet songs that the people themselves wanted to sing"

(Šmidchens 2014: 163). This in turn allowed Latvian nationalism to survive because of its connection to song: "Language – as song – served the spirit and created an alternate structure of experience, in which Latvian – not Soviet – values and power prevailed" (Carpenter 1996: 104).

Banned songs were sung as a form of protest and resistance against the Soviet government and policies. For example, the song "Gaismas pils" ("Fortress of Light", Jāzeps Vītols) was banned from the 1985 song festival program after making a reappearance in the 1980 festival after being banned during the Khrushchev era. At the end of the festival concert in 1985, the choir and spectators alike chanted for Haralds Mednis to take the stage and conduct the song, which he did[6]. This act of singing was a powerful form of resistance against the Soviet Union and part of what is called the Singing Revolution, the nonviolent resistance movement during the late 1980s through song that helped Latvia regain its independence: "That performance was officially not planned or sanctioned. The singers, audience, and conductor all knew this. This was a memorable moment of non-Soviet truth in Latvia" (Šmidchens 2014: 177). Latvians wanted to express their identity, and because they wanted to do so in a nonviolent way, through song, the Soviet government could not meet this demand with force without creating an international scandal. During this time, many patriotic songs were subversive and allegorical, therefore could be twisted by the Soviet government to perpetuate its ideology. They were, however, songs written before the occupation, and had already become symbols of the Latvian national identity and were understood by Latvians as "Latvian" songs, rather than Soviet ones. Singing these songs tapped into the nostalgia that Latvians felt for the pre-occupation homeland to which they desired to return and were used successfully as a nonviolent way of resisting the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, the song festivals developed differently among the exile population. The

[6] A video of this event can be found in the appendix (Figure 3).

DPs, who later dispersed and established Latvian enclaves throughout the world, claimed "moral victory over those in a political power in the homeland… by capitalizing on their access to free speech and movement" (Carpenter 1996: 94). Without any restrictions or censorship by the government, they were free to assert that the true Latvia is the independent Latvia of the past by singing *tautasdziesmas* arrangements for choirs and overtly patriotic songs, such as "Latvijā" (In Latvia), by Pēteris Barisons. As Latvian exiles were not physically able to go to their homeland, Latvia had to exist in their imaginations and their collective memories: "Latvia resonates as place, idea, and experience in the lyrics and melodies and also is carried in the body as a memory, both as unconscious, ineffable knowledge and as a deliberate, anticipated repertoire" (Carpenter 1996: 95). Latvians were able to keep the memory of independent Latvia alive in their minds by singing about it, which in turn motivated them to work towards reclaiming their homeland from the Soviet Union.

Song festivals abroad were also proof that although Latvians in exile lived across long distances, it was possible to organize events that could collectivize them and make this "imagined community" a little more real, if only for a few days (Hinkle 2014: 203). These song festivals were less about professionalism and more about nostalgia and "reconstructions of the past", in a Halbwachian sense, of Latvia (Halbwachs 1992: 40). Writing about a New York Latvian Concert Choir performance in Sweden in Gotland, Sweden in 1979, as part of a song festival, Einārs Englunds (Latvian translation of his name) commented that the concert seemed to concentrate more on nostalgia than a "particularly polished performance" (Englunds 2012: 58). It was evident that the members of the choir participated in it to be together and sing collectively to express their Latvian identity and that the priority was an award-winning performance. Latvians living in self-described exile were working towards a renewed independent Latvia through

shared national icons, which connected them to Latvia through their "imagination, word and practice", and one of the most important symbols of collective strength was the song festival. Arnolds Šturms, writing in the Latvian-American newspaper *Laiks*, commented that at the time of the establishment of the Latvian exile network, there was worry that Latvian culture would weaken and eventually die with each new generation. However, the opposite happened, and choirs like the New York Latvian Concert Choir were proof that national sentiment outside of Latvia would continue to exist in the future, and that in fact, cultural life is being pushed in a nationalistic direction with the new generation (first-generation Americans, Canadians, etc.) (Šturms 2012: 28).

Abroad, choirs were an important time and place for Latvians living in exile to be Latvian, as their daily lives were conducted according to the rules of their host nations' society. While living outside of Latvia, Latvians had to consciously maintain their Latvian identity and choirs gave them a designated space and time to do so. Singing in a choir was a tangible, productive way to maintain the collective identity and memory of the homeland by participating in a deeply "Latvian" practice. Song festivals allowed exiles to gather across greater distances to perpetuate this collective memory of Latvia and to work towards its return. Similarly, in Soviet Latvia, choirs were a time and place to be "Latvian", as singing was not prohibited but rather censored. However, censors often let them sing songs that celebrated their national identity, even though it was prohibited to express it, but it could be done covertly through song. But to both groups, song festivals are a deeply emotional experience, as it is a time that they gather en masse and openly celebrate their identity, an identity that has been considered by others for centuries as invalid.

Chapter 4: Comparing Latvian Identity in Latvia and in the Diaspora through Choral Music

In this chapter, I will compare Latvian national identity as it is felt in Latvia with how it is felt in the diaspora. I will first discuss the general differences between Latvian identity in Latvia and in the diaspora. Afterwards, I will discuss how these identities are perpetuated through choral music and traditions, focusing on the differences among the two groups of Latvians. Because each group of Latvians lived in different kinds of societies, one with considerably more freedom of expression than the other, the music that was available to each group was varied and their choir cultures began to have evident differences. However, some music, like *tautasdziesmas*, were available to both groups, which helped maintain a connection between the two that was felt once exiles were allowed to return to Latvia towards the end of the Soviet regime. Latvians desperately wanted to reunite as one group in Latvia after the fall of the Soviet Union, but soon realized that because of social differences, it was not going to happen in the ways they had hoped for fifty years.

Differences in Identity in Latvia and in the Diaspora

Identity among Latvians has diverged to an extent between Latvians living in Latvia and Latvians living outside of Latvia. This stems from fifty years of living in very different societies – Latvians living under intense Sovietization policies, where non-Soviet national expression was forbidden, and Latvians living in a society where freedoms of speech and expression were not only acceptable, but a right (Hinkle 2006: 56). These differences occasionally cause conflict between the two groups of Latvians.

When the Soviet Union occupied Latvia first in 1940 and again in 1944, they

implemented strict policies of Sovietization that focused on erasing Latvian nationalist culture (Pabriks and Purs 2002: 32). Part of the Soviet Union's plan to effectively Russianize Latvia was to have a large in-migration of people from other areas of the Soviet Union, especially Russian speakers. By 1989, Latvia was only ethnically 52% Latvian, and while 66% of ethnic Latvians could speak Russian, only 21% of ethnic Russians could converse in Latvian (Plakans 1995: 189). This was a deep blow to the Latvian national identity, as the Latvian language is a huge part of the Latvian national identity: when asked the question "What do you consider to be part of the Latvian national identity?", 288 of 299 respondents said the "Latvian language", regardless of age, where they were born or if they spoke Latvian themselves (self-conducted survey, March 2017). Latvia was also incorporated into the Soviet communist economic model of collectivization. Agriculture was collectivized, apartments were consolidated where everyone was allocated only a few square meters of living space, and small towns grew into big cities through the introduction of industries producing textiles, pharmaceuticals and fiberglass (Pabriks and Purs 2002: 37-38; Runcis 2012: 135). However, the Soviet government considered it to be their duty to improve the lives of the proletariat and underprivileged working class: it was "social justice" (Runcis 2012: 126). These new programs, though they might have improved the living conditions of some, did not allow for any criticism if they were not working or if they made the lives of some more difficult:

> The changing economy and nature of Soviet Latvia spurred the development of two new social forces. On the one hand, the continuing rapid industrialization and modernization dissolved traditional values and helped create the cult of the individual in Soviet Latvia. On the other hand, the lack of democratic political rights and a Soviet nationalist policy that discriminated against Latvians meant that a widening gap emerged between a Soviet Latvian's expectations and the real opportunities available to him or her. In other words, the average inhabitant may have begun to live better, but he or she was alienated from the regime (Pabriks and Purs 2002: 37).

While the Soviet government might have given Latvians the guise of personal agency and achieving something through their own effort and hard work, Latvians were not actually in control of their own destiny, as they had no actual political power. Those in positions of power in the party were Russified or "reliable" Latvians, but Russians were always second-in-command in the local government so the Central Committee in Moscow could keep an eye on political developments in Latvia (Zamascikov 1987: 221-222). Latvians were, once again, a "class" and a discredited bourgeoisie in the eyes of Soviet government, and were distrusted as a whole by officials in Moscow (Carpenter 1996: 108; Runcis 2012: 126).

Many Latvians, dissatisfied with the Soviet regime and policies, distanced themselves from the ideologies being pushed onto them as much as possible. In one example in Maija Runcis' work, Aina, a woman who was eight years old when the Soviet Union first invaded Latvia, was able to use the Soviet system in her favor to gain childcare and health care for her family, but disliked the "Russian behavior", considering it to be "vulgar" and distanced herself from it by asserting her Latvian identity through the practice of Latvian traditions and by gaining an education (2012: 131, 135). Others, however, resisted less, like another woman interviewed in Runcis' work, "KZ". Born into Soviet Latvia, she participated in communist youth organizations and was the "ideal working mother", according to Soviet ideology, but said in her interview that she had little to be proud of and that nothing will change post-independence[7] (Ibid: 133, 136). When asked about Latvia's national identity, Ešenvalds said that Latvians "do not dare to… speak their mind, or come forward with their suggestions… this still sits somewhere… in Latvians" (Interview with Ēriks Ešenvalds, January 13, 2017), due to living through yet another occupying regime that considered them to be lesser than the occupiers.

Latvians have pushed back against this sense of inferiority by asserting their right to

[7] These interviews were conducted in 1990, right before Latvia regained independence.

national expression, which includes the prominent use of the Latvian language, but this has created conflict among ethnic Latvians and ethnic Russians living in Latvia, who felt that their rights were being infringed upon by not including their language and heritage when rebuilding independent Latvia. Many ethnic Latvians argued that ethnic Russians were not really Latvians because they were brought into Latvia as part of the Soviet plan to Russianize Latvia, but many ethnic Russians who had been born in Latvia and grew up considering themselves as part of the Latvian people disagreed, even though they did not speak the language (Pabriks and Purs 2002: 75, 77). One of the most poignant examples of this conflict is the 2013 referendum that was initiated by a Russian-speakers' movement to make Russian the second official language of Latvia, who felt that they had been "humiliated by the [Latvian] authorities" since the independence of Latvia. However, 75% of the votes cast in an election that drew a considerably larger number of voters than most elections voted the proposal down. The Latvian president at that time, Andris Bērziņš, called the referendum "absurd", saying that no one is prohibited from speaking their own language in private spaces (BBC News). Many ethnic Latvians, like Aina, try to dissociate themselves from Russians, who they consider to have many negative qualities and social norms.

While Latvians all share many similarities in their identity, such as the Latvian language, music and customs[8], the Latvian diaspora has unique qualities to it that differ it from the Latvian national identity felt by Latvians in Latvia. The biggest difference is that the Latvian diaspora, or perhaps more accurately, the Latvian exile population had a sense of purpose, a mission, for its existence. Latvians created an Appaduraian "ideoscape" and nurtured a global, borderless "Latvia-outside-of-Latvia" to fulfill the mission they gave themselves of keeping alive the pre-

[8] According to the responses of 299 participants from an anonymous survey conducted for this thesis, when asked "What do you consider a part of the Latvian national identity?", 96.3%, 89.3% and 83.3% answered "yes" to the above categories respectively, regardless of where they were born or where they live currently.

war Latvian culture (Carpenter 1996: 94). Joshua Fishman describes this as a "diaspora consciousness" – a group of individuals that see themselves as the only ones that can preserve and perpetuate a "true culture" of a homeland that is threatened (Fishman 1985, quoted in Carpenter 1996: 94). Latvians in exile considered themselves to be the "true embodiment" of Latvian identity, as Latvian identity was "suppressed and distorted" in Soviet Latvia in their eyes (Hinkle 2006: 49).

Latvians in exile began to establish this "ideoscape" (and perhaps "ethnoscape" as well) in the DP camps in Germany. They established schools, choirs, scouts, and many other organizations where they could engage in "cultural generativity", or do "socially valued work… to instill cultural knowledge and values in constituencies responsive to such goals", like the next generation of Latvian-Americans (Carpenter 2007: 318). Latvians in exile saw it their duty to perpetuate what they considered to be the true Latvian identity, which was based in nostalgia for and in their collective memory of pre-war Latvia, and the best way to do so was to teach it to their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Many survey participants cited that they felt most Latvian when they were speaking in Latvia with their families, especially their grandparents and hearing stories about their childhood in Latvia (self-conducted survey, March 2017).

Thomas Erikson Hylland writes that children of immigrants often feel that they live in two places at one, that they may switch between two (or more) ethnic identities (Hylland 1993: 137). Another large difference between Latvian identity in Latvia and in the diaspora is that in the diaspora, it is more often negotiated with another identity – the identity of the host culture. While proving to be effective, as there is still an active Latvian diaspora community, this "mission" did isolate some émigrés:

> The sense of *duty* or mission generated much positive, creative energy for the formation of organizations, new institutions, and programs, but it also served to isolate the émigrés from American society and culture, and created a rather inflexible framework for correct behavior that eventually caused great strains and divisions within the communities. (Hinkle 2006: 52)

Those who felt pressured by older generations to fulfill this mission of perpetuating the "true" Latvian identity while attempting to negotiate their place in and identity with their host culture would often develop an "assimilated" identity (identifying only with your host nation's culture and not with your native one at all) or a "marginalized" identity (identifying with neither your native or your host nation's culture). However, those who ascribed to this sense of duty sometimes developed "separated" identities (identifying solely with your native culture), but more often an "integrated" identity (identifying with both your native and host cultures). J. Berry, who wrote about these four forms of identities that arise out of acculturation, does not consider identifying with one culture to take away from the ability to identify with another; in other words, identity is not a zero-sum game (quoted in Smith, Stewart and Winter 2004: 614). While 95.7% of survey participants identify as Latvian[9], 61.2% identify as American and 6.7% identify as Canadian as well (self-conducted survey, March 2017). This is a unique aspect of the Latvian identity in the diaspora – more often than not, Latvians in the "Latvia-outside-of-Latvia" identify with not only their Latvian heritage, but also their host nation's culture.

When Latvia regained its independence in 1991, the Latvian diaspora's whole existence came into question. For fifty years, it has a distinct, albeit self-prescribed, purpose, which was to preserve what the exile community considered to be the "true" Latvian identity: the Latvian identity of the pre-war years and to fight for independence for Latvia. However, after Latvia regained independence, what was the purpose of the diaspora community if there was no longer

[9] This statistic is larger, as some participants did not understand the question and put down "Latvian" in the "Other" section of the survey.

any need for advocates for Latvia's sovereignty and the Latvian identity could be freely expressed in the homeland? For Latvians in the diaspora, and increasingly with each new generation, expressing and identifying with your Latvian heritage is a choice – there is no longer an urgent sense of duty to preserve the "true" Latvian identity in preparation for a return to the homeland, as Latvia is once again independent and national expression is not only allowed, but encouraged. In the diaspora today, being "Latvian", rather than fully assimilating to the host nation's culture, must be a conscious choice and maintained through the participation of Latvian activities, one of which is singing in a choir. Even calling the nation in which they live as "host nation" might not be the correct term anymore, as much of today's Latvian diaspora was born and came of age in this nation, never having lived in Latvia. Identifying only with this nation's culture and national identity would be easy, but many members of the newest generations of the Latvian diaspora choose to maintain this connection to their heritage. Of 299 participants, eighty-eight respondents indicated they were under thirty years of age. Of those eighty-eight, seventy-seven were born outside of Latvia, but only two do not identify with their Latvian heritage (self-conducted survey, March 2017). The newest generation of the diaspora, my generation, has actively chosen to stay connected to their Latvian roots.

For years, Latvians in exile expected to return to the homeland when it regained its independence, but a mass return migration did not occur. Some did not return for practical reasons – they no longer had any living family in Latvia, or they had health problems that could not be properly taken care of in Latvia. Those born outside of Latvia did not remember a Latvia before the war, as they were born either during the Soviet era outside of the country or after 1991, when Latvia was already independent. More often than not, these members of the diaspora had roots in their nation of birth for the entire lives, causing the possibility relocating to Latvia

impractical. Others did not return because of perceived differences in identity between Latvians in Latvia and Latvians in the diaspora. They criticized each other of different societal norms, discrepancies in language, and other cultural differences – one group was more Russian, the other more American, for better or for worse. For example, slang in Latvia tends to derive from the Russian language, like the use of "davai", meaning "let's go" or "sure" in Russian. In the diaspora, Latvians are more likely to insert English words into Latvian sentences than Latvians in Latvia are, as most Latvians in the diaspora are bilingual, speaking both English and Latvian. Individual words between Latvians in Latvia and Latvians in the diaspora differ as well; for example, "marshmallow" in Latvia is a Latvianization of the word "marshmallow", but in the diaspora, where it was a new product encountered by exile Latvians only upon arrival in the United States, a word had to be invented, and it is referred to as a translation of "sugar pillow". Latvians in Latvia often accuse Latvians from the diaspora of smiling too much in public, saying it is obnoxious to smile and nod at a stranger when walking down the street, a practice that is normal in many parts of the United States. Latvians in diaspora have often accused Latvians in Latvia of participating in corrupt business practices and bribery (Hinkle 2006: 58-59). Fifty years of separation and different cultural environments creates differences between people who identity with the same nation.

These differences polarize the two groups of Latvians from one another. One man said that he "was struck by how often people in Latvia use the phrase 'you and we', much more so than we, on our side of the ocean" (Hinkle 2006: 54-56). After years of hoping of a smooth reconciliation process post-independence, fifty years of separation between the two groups created potential irreconcilable differences that have sometimes resulted in blatant animosity, and have prevented this dream from coming true.

Differences in Latvian Identity Expressed through Different Choral Traditions

While all Latvians share aspects of their identity, no matter if they live in Latvia or in the diaspora, nurturing a Latvian identity in two different societies – one in which you could express yourself freely and another in which you had to hide your Latvian identity and nurture it discretely and subversively – creates evident differences. These differences are also evident when examining the development and practice of choral traditions in Latvia and in the diaspora. Joachim Braun argues that there is only one "Baltic music", which can be specified to one "Latvian music", because "in the present world level of communication and information flow, art cannot be and is not divided according to the geographical location of artistical institutions or the residence of the artist himself". Although stratification does exist, it is "based on the national, social, and personal experience of the artist himself" (Braun 1983: 74-75). I argue that while there might be one Latvian music, the choral traditions in Latvia and in the diaspora have slight but important differences.

The Soviet government in Latvia often sponsored art, including music, as they found that it was an effective form of propaganda. Therefore, a great deal of music was composed during the Soviet era in Latvia, but it all had to conform to Soviet censorship rules, which required music to fit into the socialist realist genre. Music was taken very seriously, as exemplified by the rigorous and exclusive Emīla Dārziņa Mūzikas Skola (the Emīls Dārziņš Music School), where students began their music education at the age of seven, and if they were talented enough to remain there, they were paid to receive their education by the state beginning in year eight. In 1972, there were forty music schools in Latvia, as well as several concertmaster and music pedagogy schools (Schmalstieg 1972: 72). Music, including choral singing, was a highly

rigorous, extremely valued art form during the Soviet era, as evidenced by schools like the Emīla Dārziņa Mūzikas Skola.

Choirs in Latvia often have competitive entry and sing at high, professional levels, thanks to the legacy of the Soviet Union's treatment of music. After proclaiming independence in 1918, Latvian art was sponsored by the state government for the first time, a tradition that continues today (Kasekamp 2010: 115). The well-known and internationally renowned youth choir "Balsis" is sponsored by large corporations like the telecommunications company "Latvenegro" and gas company "Latvijas Gāze" (balsis.lv). Choral singing in Latvia is taken very seriously and choirs are sponsored not only by the government[10], but private companies as well. These choirs tend to perform at a higher level, because more sponsorship means more money to spend on resources to improve their singing and performance abilities, earning them more prestige and sponsorships.

Song festivals show how competitive choirs can be in Latvia. Amateur choirs are required to be evaluated by a panel of conductors, composers and choral experts and are given a ranking in order to show their level of preparedness and musicianship (lnkc.gov.lv). This factors into whether or not they are admitted to sing into the national song festival – although the stadium holds over ten thousand singers, there are more active choral singers in Latvia than room in the stadium and not every choir makes the cut. The final result, however, is a choir of over ten thousand singers singing at a professional level. A recording of the final concert of the 2013 *dziesmu svētki* can be found in the appendix (Figure 3). Song festivals, while a way to powerfully and collectively express the Latvian national identity through choral music, are very competitive, exemplifying the high regard in which choral music is held in Latvia.

However, despite the competitive nature of choir culture in Latvia, it was one of the only

[10] Latvia has an official state choir, aptly named "Latvija".

ways to express Latvian identity during the Soviet era, therefore many Latvians participated in the practice. Because choral singing was held in such high regard by the Soviet government, it was one of the only forms of mass gatherings that was allowed. The Soviet government tried to make choral singing, especially song festivals, into a form of propaganda by changing many of the allegorical patriotic songs into songs about Soviet glory and attempting to make an "obvious" historical connection between Latvian folk music and Russian culture. However, Latvians were able to sing songs from the national canon that were patriotic because of their allegorical nature – they bit the bullet and complied with Soviet censorship and expectations because they knew the true meaning behind these nationalistic songs. If Latvians went through the motions of singing songs that praised the Soviet Union as their homeland, they could sing the songs that were "unofficial anthems" of independent Latvia during the era of occupation:

> The list of songs that might land their singers in prison was not very long, and the list of mandatory songs was also relatively short. In between there were hundreds of other songs, and some of those acquired particular public resonance somewhere in a labyrinth among various government institutions, composers, conductors, sponsors of choirs, singers, and their audience. … in some respects, the unofficial anthems even followed the government guidelines as well. Among their characteristics there was most definitely "people-ness", because the public easily understood the songs and they evoked well-known national or folk traditions. They could display "collectiveness" and sometimes even "idea-ness" … But, unlike Soviet socialist realist songs, they also contained the truth that allowed singers to step past the boundaries of Soviet everyday life (Šmidchens 2014: 163)

Latvians willingly complied with Soviet demands to sing songs that glorified Lenin, Stalin and other Soviet leaders and accomplishments at song festivals to be allowed to continue gathering to collectively express their Latvian identity, as it was one of the only ways they could: "Coupling past and present to an envisioned future - even when that future could not be openly projected - Latvians have remained in intense communication with one another by singing together" (Carpenter 1996: 115-116).

Choirs are just as important to the expression of Latvian identity in the diaspora, but they operate much more casually. Using the New York Latvian Concert Choir as an example, membership is open, and singers often do not know much about music, even sometimes not even knowing how to read music. Many families sing in the choir, and parents who have young children bring them along to rehearsals – no one is particularly disturbed when the children run around and play tag in the middle of the rehearsal space. The choir members take singing in the choir very seriously, but sometimes do not understand what they are doing: they do not understand the rhythm, the harmonies are off, they are singing the wrong part of the song. One choir member discusses how in a rehearsal during a song festival in the United States, the conductor worked on a tricky spot in a song that had a moment of silence that was almost always filled with a stray voice, and the conductors ran the song over and over until this did not happen in rehearsal. When, during the concert, a voice sang during the pause, the conductor did not take offense or get angry, but laughed about it (Alversone 2012: 83). At New York Latvian Concert Choir rehearsals, singers are often admonished for chatting with one another while others are singing. While the conductor tries to correct mistakes, if it is obviously one singer that is the issue, attention will not be called to the individual but rather the whole voice type, even if everyone knows who is the culprit. Latvians were not banned from expressing their Latvian identity in the diaspora, but they did not have the opportunity to do so continuously because they had to participate in their host nation's culture on a daily basis, during their workday or in school. The enthusiasm for singing Latvian songs, the opportunities to sing with each other and collectively express their Latvian identity are the reasons the choir was established and still exists today, rather than to achieve the highest level during choir rankings (which does not occur in the diaspora) or strive to perform at professional levels.

While *dziesmu svētki* in Latvia are extremely competitive and rigorous, *dziesmu svētki* in the diaspora tend to be more relaxed. Almost all of the choirs performing are choirs like the New York Latvian Concert Choir, that members join to spend time and sing with other Latvians, rather than focus on a perfect performance. When asked to describe their own experience in participating in *dziesmu svētki*, one survey participant said that they "couldn't remember everything… too much partying" (50s, United States, self-conducted survey, March 2017). Like individual choirs, *dziesmu svētki* in the diaspora occur to not only continue the tradition and practice itself, but also to give Latvians from across the United States and/or Canada the opportunity to gather and sing and spend time together, and to prove that it is possible for Latvians to meet and express their identity collectively despite large distances between diaspora centers in the United States (Hinkle 2014: 203).

Other Latvian choirs in the diaspora were established for the same purpose as the New York Latvian Concert Choir. Because much of the intelligentsia was forced to leave Latvia, they found themselves in the DP camps, where they continued to do their work, which included composing, conducting and organizing choirs (Carpenter 2007: 320; Pabriks and Purs 2002: 32). Like many organizations that were established in exile, choirs were first started in the DP camps as quickly as 1945, and song festivals between DP camps were organized not long after (Hinkle 2014: 197). When exiles dispersed from the DP camps throughout the world, choirs were a way for Latvians who were living in the same area to come together once or more times a week and express their Latvian identity together through song. Because living in the diaspora often meant negotiating several identities, singing together in a choir was one way of maintaining the Latvian part of the identity of members of the Latvian diaspora.

The song festival held in Latvia in 1990 was the first time since the occupation of Latvia

that Latvians living in Latvia and Latvians in the diaspora had the opportunity to reunite and sing collectively as one group. At this song festival, "natives and exiles expected to play out restored behavior as a 'model of destiny' by becoming again 'that which they aspired to be' and 'that which they once were'" (Carpenter 1996: 105); in other words, it was at the 1990 song festival that both groups of Latvians felt an immense sense of nostalgia for a "true" version of their homeland and saw for the first time in fifty years a future that reflected their desire to return to the pre-war past. Some participants speak of the unforgettable joyful experience that was reflected in the faces of the singers (Pelše 2012: 238). One survey participant wrote that she "felt instantly connected to everyone around me and had a very strong sense of Latvian pride" when attending and participating in *dziesmu svētki* (female, 30s, United States, self-conducted survey, March 2017). *Dziesmu svētki* can be a powerful force to reconnect Latvians, especially those that came of age in exile, to their homeland and heritage.

Others, however, speak of the differences that were felt between the two groups: between social norms, between what the song festival as an institution meant to each of the groups. Some diaspora singers felt like outsiders in what they considered to be their homeland – they struggled with reconciling the present-day Latvia, a Latvia that had felt the effects of Soviet policies of Russification, with the Latvia that had lived in their minds, the pre-war Latvia, with which they were familiar (Carpenter 1996: 107-108). It was at this song festival, when Latvians from both groups finally met, that the differences between the two groups became evident, in both choral tradition and the Latvian identity and its expression, often causing pain for both sides, as both groups began to realize that perhaps their differences were irreconcilable to the extent that they could not return to exactly the past that they desired.

Latvians are grappling with the fact that there are evident differences between Latvians

who lived in Latvia through the occupation and Latvians who lived in exile during this period: language is slightly different and social norms diverge between the two groups. At first, these differences were thought to be minor enough that a post-occupation period of reconciliation could occur. However, these differences have made it difficult to imagine a future where the diaspora will cease to exist because its members will return to the homeland permanently. These divergent practices become evident when the two groups meet for events like *dziesmu svētki*, which hold a great deal of meaning for both groups, but this meaning is not quite identical for each group.

Conclusion

In 1857, Juris Alunāns proposed to unite several regions in the Baltic littoral under the name "Latvia" (Kasekamp 2010: 77). The concept of a Latvian people only surfaced around this time, thanks to the work of activists like Alunāns, Krišjānis Barons and Atis Kronvalds, because for centuries, the people who spoke the common language and shared cultural traits were oppressed by many different hegemonic powers. While there were disagreements about how to best unite the Latvian people among this first generation of activists, ultimately, the Latvian people united and have survived as a people because of their shared culture and language.

Latvian folk music, or *tautasdziesmas*, was one of the first unifiers of the Latvian people. Johann Gottfried Herder's work that showed not only Latvians themselves, but also the outside world, that Latvians are not simply the "peasant class", but a people with their own complex culture and extensive collection of folk poetry. A century later, Krišjānis Barons' work collecting the largest collection of folk songs in the world helped further the young nationalist movement that would ultimately culminate in the declaration of independence in 1918. Latvia's folk culture pervades every part of Latvian life still today – they are taught to children in schools, they carry and transmit Latvian moral lessons and they influence other artistic movements and traditions. Latvians are proud to have such an impressive and extensive folk culture, and it is of envy throughout the world. Many *tautasdziesmas* describe the love for music and singing that Latvians as a people have. The *tautasdziesma* in Chapter 2 is perhaps the best example of the love of singing that is engrained into the Latvian culture: "I was born singing, I grew up singing / I lived out my life singing." This song itself has been arranged for choir by several composers, both in Latvia and by diaspora composers. Latvians love to sing so much that they often sing about how much they love to sing.

Part of the Latvian national identity is its strength to continue to express themselves as Latvians, despite many attempts by many oppressing powers, like German nobles for centuries and the fifty years of occupation by the Soviet Union after gaining independence only twenty years earlier. Expression of identity collectively is an important method of maintaining a nation, and Latvians do it through song, more specially through choral singing. The tradition of *dziesmu svētki*, or song festivals, derives from the German tradition of choral societies of the 1830s and 1840s (Kasekamp 2010: 79), but has become something distinctly Baltic, but especially Latvian, and has been recognized as part of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity List.

Because of the split among Latvians after World War II, the choral tradition developed differently between the two different groups. In the diaspora, free speech and freedom of expression was not an issue, as the diaspora established itself in nations that prided themselves on these rights – the United States, Canada, Great Britain, etc. Therefore, without restrictions on expressing their Latvian national identity, they could sing patriotic songs freely and proudly. On the other hand, in Soviet Latvia, Sovietization policies attempted to squash any kinds of nationalist expression that was not pro-Soviet; in other words, Latvians were prevented from being Latvian. To circumvent these censors, Latvians would sing arrangements of *tautasdziesmas*, which were considered relatively harmless, as their origins were far enough in the past to not be considered "nationalist" by the government. The Soviet government also saw patriotic songs based in allegory as an opportunity to twist them into Soviet propaganda. Therefore, these songs developed a double meaning in Latvia during the Soviet era: they were, in the eyes of the Soviets, songs that perpetuated the Soviet agenda by transforming them into propaganda, and in the eyes of Latvians, they were patriotic songs that helped the Latvian national identity survive by serving as a reminder of pre-war Latvia and a form of resistance

against the erasure of the Latvian identity.

Originally stemming from the German *Liedertafel*, or the men's choir (Jaremko 1983: 62), Latvians indigenized choral singing, making it something indisputably Latvian. During the Soviet era, singing in choirs was one of the only ways the Latvian identity could be expressed collectively, as other forms of non-Soviet nationalist expression was forbidden by the Soviet government. The Soviet government actively encouraged new works of music, as long as they matched and perpetuated Soviet ideological goals. However, much of the music performed during this period, both pre-war and new works, was allegorical and could be twisted to fit anyone's ideological goals. They doubled as a form of propaganda for the Soviet government and nostalgic works that reminded ethnic Latvians of the pre-occupation homeland to which they wished to return. Because of this legacy, Latvian choirs have won world acclaim in international choral competitions, and Latvian composers are sought out in other places of the world for commissioned works (Wolverton 1998: 39; Interviews with Ēriks Ešenvalds and Ivars Cinkuss, January 2017).

These differences in choral traditions point to the differences in Latvian identity between the two groups. Because the two identities developed in two very different societies, it is not surprising that there are evident differences between their Latvian identities. This has created incidences of conflict between the two groups, an issue that came to light during the 1990 Song Festival in Riga, the first time that both groups united to collectively express their Latvian identity through song. These perceived differences have created feelings of hurt and rejection between diaspora Latvians and Latvians in Latvia, which have isolated the two groups from one another. The reconciliation and "homecoming" of diaspora Latvians post-independence did not occur as they had dreamed during the Soviet era. Latvians in Latvia and Latvians in the diaspora

feel polarized from each other because of the forced separation between them and the consequent development of different Latvian identities.

Despite the differences between the Latvian identities felt by Latvians in the diaspora and the ones that are felt by Latvians in Latvia, there is one Latvian national identity. It is one of resilience and strength through centuries of adversary and fighting for freedom, and it is expressed through song. *Tautasdziesmas* are the basis for much of Latvia's music, but arguably the most powerful collective expression of the Latvian national identity is conducted through choral singing and through traditions like *dziesmu svētki*. Despite differences that Latvians have, they are united through the power of song.

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Interviews and Surveys

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Interview with Māra Marnauza, Riga, Latvia. January 16, 2017. Self-translated.

Interview with Zinta (pseudonym), Riga, Latvia. January 15, 2017. Self-translated.

Interviews with members of New York Latvian Concert Choir, Yonkers, New York. February 19, 2017. Self-translated.

"Latvia's National Identity and Music", self-conducted anonymous online survey, March 2017.

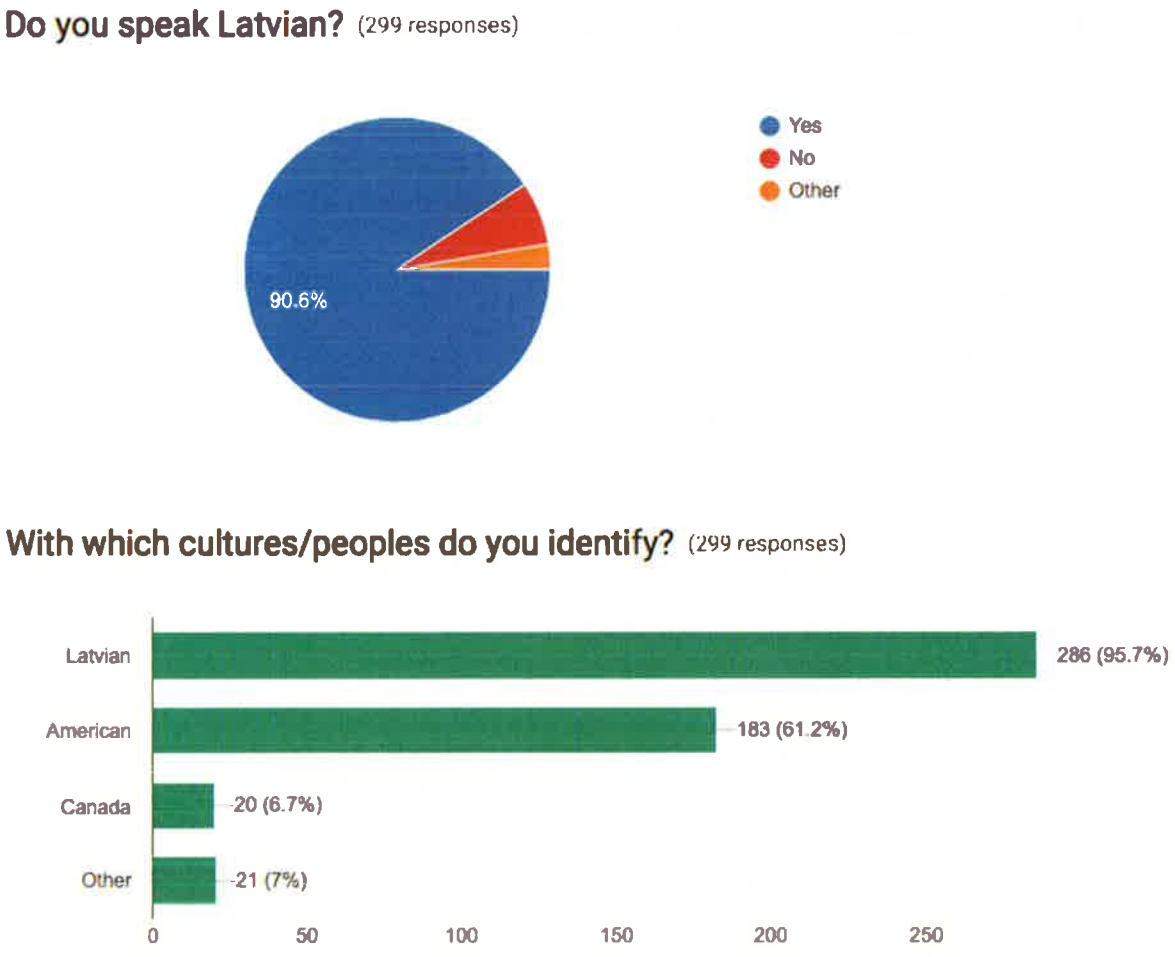
Appendix

Figure 1: Questionnaire Used in Interviews in Latvia

1. What is your name and age?
2. Where were you born and where do you currently reside?
3. With which nations/cultures do you identify?
    a. With which nation/culture do you identity most?
    b. When do you feel "most" (insert their cultures with which they identify)?
4. In your own words, how would you describe your job?
    a. How long have you been working in this positions?
    b. Did you hold other positions before this one?
5. Do you work with other people in the same field as you?
    a. Describe your work with these other people.
6. Do you work with other people from different fields?
    a. Describe your work with these other people.
7. Where do you primarily work, geographically? In Latvia, or elsewhere?
    a. If in Latvia, where in Latvia?
    b. If elsewhere, where?
8. What kind of music do you write/conduct/perform?
    a. If patriotic, why?
9. What genres does your music fit into? Why?
    a. Follow-up: Is your music part of popular culture? Why or why not?
10. Did you live in Latvia during the time of the Soviet occupation (1944-1991)?
    a. If so, how old were you?
    b. Did you work in your profession during this time?
    c. If so, were you able to produce the kind of music you wanted to, or were you censored?
    d. Did you write/conduct/perform patriotic Latvian music during this time? Why or why not?
11. If you did NOT live in Latvia during the Soviet occupation, did you work in the independence movement in the diaspora?
    a. If yes, how? In which ways? Doing what?
12. How would you describe Latvia's national identity, in your own words?
    a. Which parts of this identity is unique to Latvia?
    b. During which times, activities, events is Latvia's nationalism most felt? Why?
13. Through which processes has Latvia's national identity been formed?
    a. Through which processes has Latvia's nationalism been formed?
14. Is music in general part of Latvia's national identity?
    a. If so, what kinds of music?
    b. What kinds of music are most closely associated with Latvia? With a sense of Latvian nationalism?
    c. Follow-up: In your opinion, does your work contribute to Latvia's national identity? Why or why not?
    d. Does your work contribute to Latvia's sense of nationalism? Why or why not?
15. What is the influence of forms of folk tradition (especially tautasdziesmas) on your work?
    a. What is the influence of forms of folk tradition (especially tautasdziesmas) on Latvia's national identity?
16. Are you involved in dziesmu svētki in Latvia (and in the diaspora)?
    a. If so, how? In which ways?
    b. What is the role of dziesmu svētki in the formation of a Latvian national identity?
17. Do you sing/lead/conduct a choir?
    a. How many people do you know living in Latvia sing in a choir? What percentage of the people you know living in Latvia sing in a choir?
    b. Are choirs part of Latvia's national identity? Why or why not? If yes, how?
18. Are choirs part of popular culture in Latvia?
    a. If yes, why?

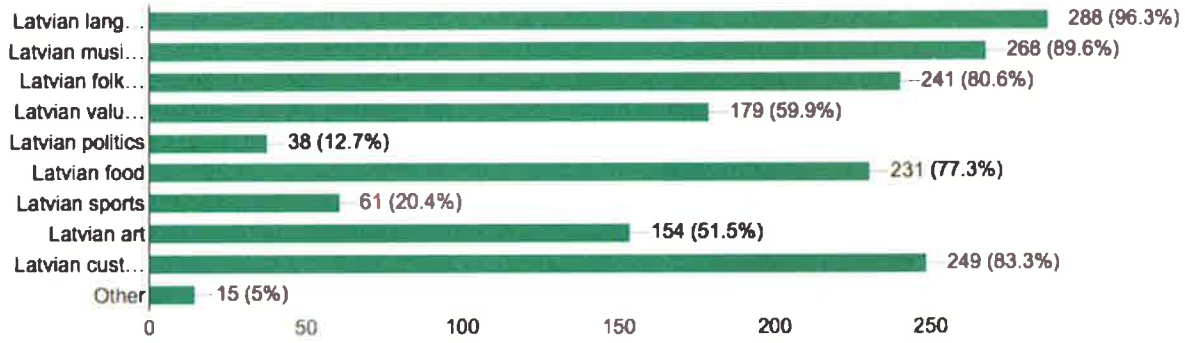
19. What, in your opinion, are the views of Latvian choir culture by other nations or cultures?
    a. How influential are Latvian choirs on an international level?
20. Did you participate in the 2014 World Choir Games?
    a. What role did you take?
    b. Did this event perpetuate what you describe as a Latvian national identity? Why or why not?
    c. What other events, like the World Choir Games, perpetuate a Latvian national identity?

Figure 2: Data from March 2017 Online Survey

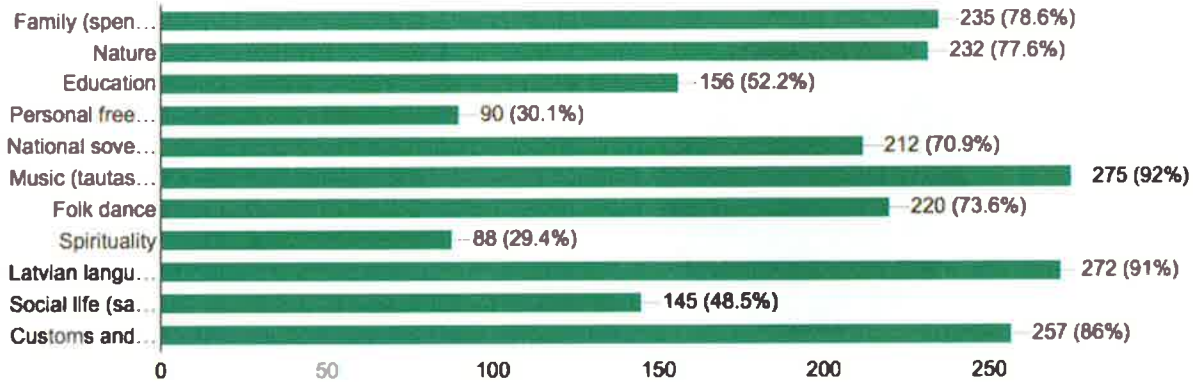


What do you consider to be a part of the Latvian national identity?

(299 responses)

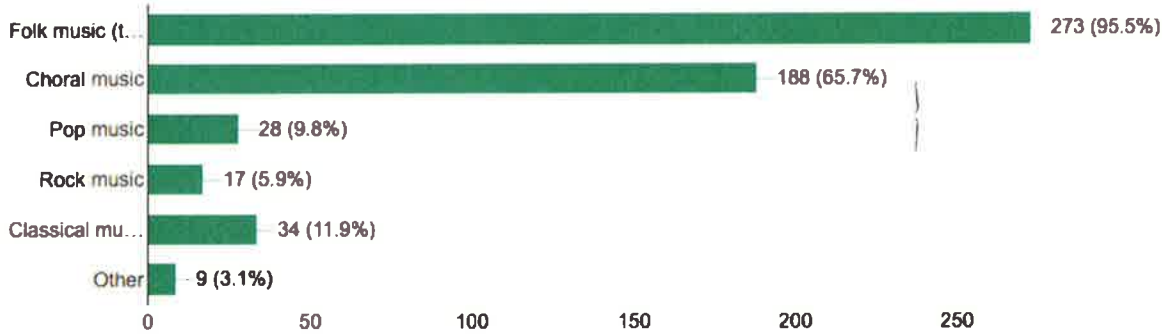


Which do you considered to be valued by Latvians? (299 responses)



If you answered "music" for either of the two previous questions, what kind of music is most closely associated with Latvia?

(286 responses)



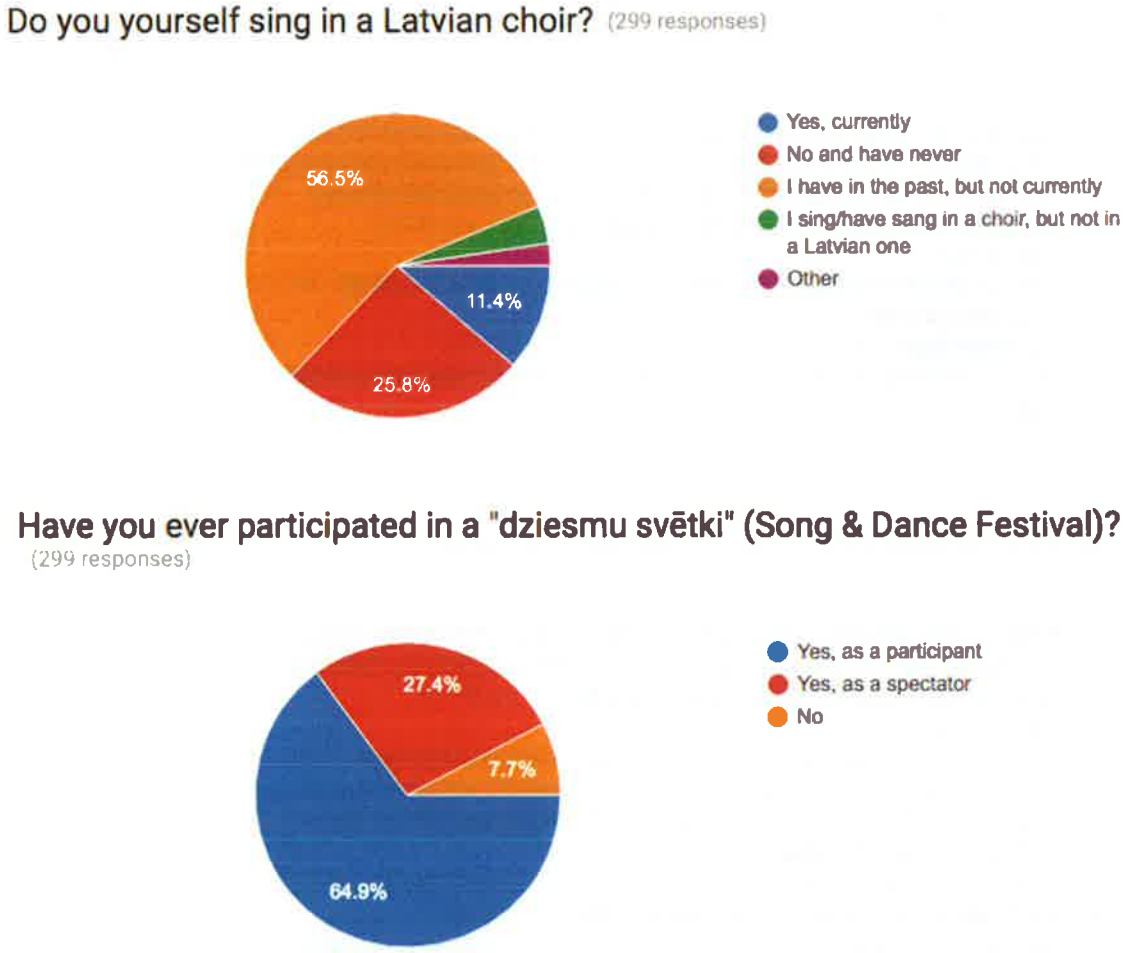


Figure 3: Examples of Latvian Choral Music

1. Performance of "Gaismas pils" at the 1985 *dziesmu svētki* in Latvia, conducted by Haralds Mednis
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiPfinuyn-Q

2. Performance of "Latvijā" (P. Barisons) in 2011
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YdCN4Nwcb0

3. Video of the 2013 *dziesmu svētki* in Latvia (full festival concert)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IFFEO4UD4o