

Urve Lippus (Estonian Academy of Music, Tallinn):

Grieg as a model of Nordic national composer for Estonian musicians in the first half of the 20th century.

In the years of the first Estonian Republic (1918-1940) national art, national music and the essence of national style were most widely discussed. However, the interest of Estonian writers, artists and musicians towards Norway goes back into the beginning of the century. As the farthest of the Nordic countries it was also considered somewhat exotic, even mystical with its untouched nature and rich folklore.

The rise of Estonian national identity is part of a wider process -- the 19th century national movements in Europe. The first powerful burst of national feelings culminated with the first Estonian song festival in 1869. For centuries educated Estonians had melted into the German-speaking society. All through the 19th century the number of Estonians moving into the cities, achieving better economic positions, studying at high schools and even at the Tartu University, was constantly growing. A self-conscious Estonian community started to form, opposing itself to the Baltic-German community. By little, Estonian institutions of public musical life were established, starting with choruses, amateur orchestras, musical societies. Developing national ideology demanded also genuine Estonian music. At first that meant songs and settings of Estonian folk melodies, but around the turn of the century, the first professional musicians dreamed already about Estonian symphonies and operas. But what should be specifically Estonian in those high genres of European music?

Our national ideology has always presented specifically Estonian qualities as something Nordic. In this way "Estonian spirit" was distinguished not only from German, but also from Russian cultural idiom. The strongest motive to look to the north was the closeness of Estonian and Finnish languages together with common old folklore (*kalevala*-songs). Though Swedes and Danes have conquered Estonia, that was sufficiently long ago by the time of national movement (in folk tales the Swedish period is even referred to as "good old times"). Relations between Finnish and Estonian writers, scholars and artists started earlier, in the beginning of the century interest towards Norwegian literature and art became pronounced. After the 1905 revolution

many young artists were forced to go abroad. They used this forced emigration for travelling and studies. A writer Friedebert Tuglas tells us: "It is natural that only this generation of artists connected with the name of Young Estonia reached to that [contacts with new art in Paris]. Earlier art studies mostly at St. Petersburg had alienated them from Italian and German traditions. Grown up in the atmosphere of political radicalism they sympathised also to radicalism in art. [...] I have described already the common times in Helsinki and at Åland. The same was repeated later. The place might change, the group might change a little, but their gathering around one centre remained the same. [...]. Next to France, this generation of artists had another land of dreams. That was Norway, as if the extreme opposite with its primeval nature and as primeval geniuses."¹

Before the revolution, Estonian musicians had studied at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, the closest higher music school. Many ambitious Estonians had settled in this city and around 1910 they formed the largest and wealthiest Estonian community (about 50 000). Musicians moving to this city did not lose their national identity. Just the opposite -- in the multinational metropolis it was even easier to promote national ideas than in German-dominated Estonian towns.

In the turn-of-the-century St. Petersburg ideas about national music were still much discussed and Grieg as a representative of Norwegian national style was well-known (during several years Russian concert organisations invited Grieg to St. Petersburg and Moscow, ascertaining that his music is well-known and beloved there). It came to Estonia as a natural part of concert music when professional musical institutions were founded. For example, we find his "Lyrical Pieces" (*Lyrische Stücke*) among the obligatory repertoire at the Tartu higher music school.² In the beginning of the century, the first influential Estonian composer Rudolf Tobias (1873-1918) was also the first to dream about Estonian national music. His own musical taste was more to the direction of Wagner. In one of his articles he mentioned Grieg and

¹ Friedebert Tuglas, *Noorusmälestusi*. Kogutud teosed 6. Eesti Raamat, Tallinn 1990, lk. 251-252.

² Virve Lippus, *Eesti pianistliku kultuuri kujunemine*. Eesti Muusikaloo Toimetised 3, Eesti Muusikaakadeemia, Tallinn 1997, lk. 69.

Tschaikovsky together as "easily falling into mannerism".³ For Tobias, national spirit was related to temper and energy, that was not a compositional problem. In the 1930s writings about national music become more technical, often we recognise ideas similar to Bartók. Just at that time popular views saw Grieg as a model of "Nordic spirit" that should fit best for Estonian music. For example, analysing some piano pieces of Mart Saar (written in the 1930s), rather direct source of inspiration can be established.⁴

³ Rudolf Tobias, *Kas meie suund on progressiivne? In puncto musicorum*. Koost. Vardo Rumessen, Ilmamaa, Tartu 1995, lk. 88.

⁴ Virve Lippus, *op. cit.*, Examples 4.6 and 4.7.