

Liberty memorial in Riga.

LATVIA

Latvia is situated on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea—bordered on the north by Estonia, and on the south by Lithuania. Together, these three countries are known as the Baltic States. During her independence, Latvia encompassed a territory of 25,000 square miles and a population of approximately 2 million people.

The Baltic tribes, among them the Latvians, settled along the Baltic Sea some 4,000 years ago and have lived there ever since, developing their own distinctly Western culture and institutions. Latvians belong to the Baltic branch of the Indo-European family of nations; and the Latvian language, distinct from the Germanic or Slavic, is one of the oldest spoken today.

For centuries Latvians have resisted, with varying successes, the onslaughts of foreign armies. In 1795 Russia gained complete domination over Latvia; but, after the collapse of the Russian empire during the First World War, Latvians grasped this historic opportunity and in 1918 proclaimed their independence as a democratic republic within their ethnic boundaries. In a peace treaty signed in 1920, the Soviet Union pledged to respect forever the sovereignty of independent Latvia. This pledge, however, was honored for only 20 years.

During their 20 years of independence, the Latvians, without the aid of richer nations, put all their skills and energy into rebuilding a nation where, in the words of the first Prime Minister, Kārlis Ulmanis, "there are to be neither oppressors nor oppressed."

The scars of war were wiped out in just a few years. The agrarian reform law created new fami-

ly-owned farms; and, within a few years, farm output was large enough not only to satisfy domestic consumption, but also to provide a surplus for grain exports.

Dairy farms progressed even more rapidly. By 1937, Latvia exported 19,200 metric tons of butter, mostly to Great Britain. Toward the end of the thirties, a growing market for Latvian cured ham was developing in the United States. In the years 1920-1937, the number of industrial workers in Latvia grew five-fold. Industries were built around Latvia's natural resources—forests, peat, clay, limestone, dolomite and gypsum. A growing textile industry used homegrown wool and flax and imported cotton and silk to produce clothing materials.

The rapidly growing state-owned Electrotechnic Plant, VEF, produced high-quality measuring instruments, automatic telephone equipment, radios, light bulbs; and the world's first truly efficient miniature photo camera, the "Minox," was invented and produced at the VEF factory.

One of independent Latvia's most lasting achievements was the development of a public education system. During the thirties, Latvia had the highest percentage of youths attending high schools and colleges of any European country. In addition to the University of Latvia, it maintained an academy of agriculture, an academy of arts, and a conservatory of music.

Literature and other branches of art based on folk tradition flourished. During the 20 years of Latvia's independence, 22,000 books were published, and these sold a total of 60 million copies—placing Latvia second among all European countries in per capita distribution of books.

A state opera and several theaters were maintained by government subsidy in the capital city of Riga. Every town with a population over 10,000 had a theater of its own.

Perhaps the most impressive of the cultural events were national song festivals. The first song festival, held in Riga in 1873, was considered a milestone in the Latvian national awakening; hence, these festivals acquired symbolic meaning and took deep root in the hearts of the people. The ninth festival, in 1938, had a combined chorus of 17,000 voices and several hundred thousand in attendance.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

THURSDAY, JULY 3, 1975

- 4:00 p.m. THE OPENING CEREMONIES OF THE SONG FESTIVAL
Washington Plaza Hotel
- 6:00 p.m. THE OPENING OF THE FINE ARTS AND CRAFTS EXHIBITION
Snoqualmie Room, Seattle Center -Open 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. July 4, 5, and 6.
- 7:00 p.m. LATVIAN WORSHIP SERVICE AND CONCERT OF LATVIAN SACRED MUSIC
St. Mark's Cathedral, Seattle
- 9:30 p.m. YOUNG PEOPLE'S GET ACQUAINTED BALL
Washington Plaza Hotel
- 10:00 p.m. THE FLAMENCO GUITAR OF ANDRÉ EL LETÓN
Washington Plaza Hotel

FRIDAY, JULY 4, 1975

- 1:00 p.m. THEATRE PERFORMANCE "BEZ SILTĀM and VAKARIŅĀM" by Gunārs Grieze (in Latvian)
- 5:00 p.m. Playhouse, Seattle Center
- 9:00 p.m. YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERT
Playhouse, Seattle Center

SATURDAY, JULY 5, 1975

- 9:00 a.m. CHILDREN'S THEATRE "SPRĪDĪTIS" by Anna Brigadere (in Latvian)
Latvian Cultural Center, 11710 - 3rd N.E., Seattle
- 2:00 p.m. PERFORMANCE OF LATVIAN FOLK DANCES
Arena, Seattle Center
- 7:00 p.m. CONCERT: SOLOISTS - RUTA GERKE ANDRĒJS KURMIŅŠ/ARTŪRS OZOLIŅŠ
Opera House, Seattle Center
- 10:00 p.m. AN EVENING WITH "TRĪS NO PĀRDAUGAVAS" (Latvian Trio)
Washington Plaza Hotel

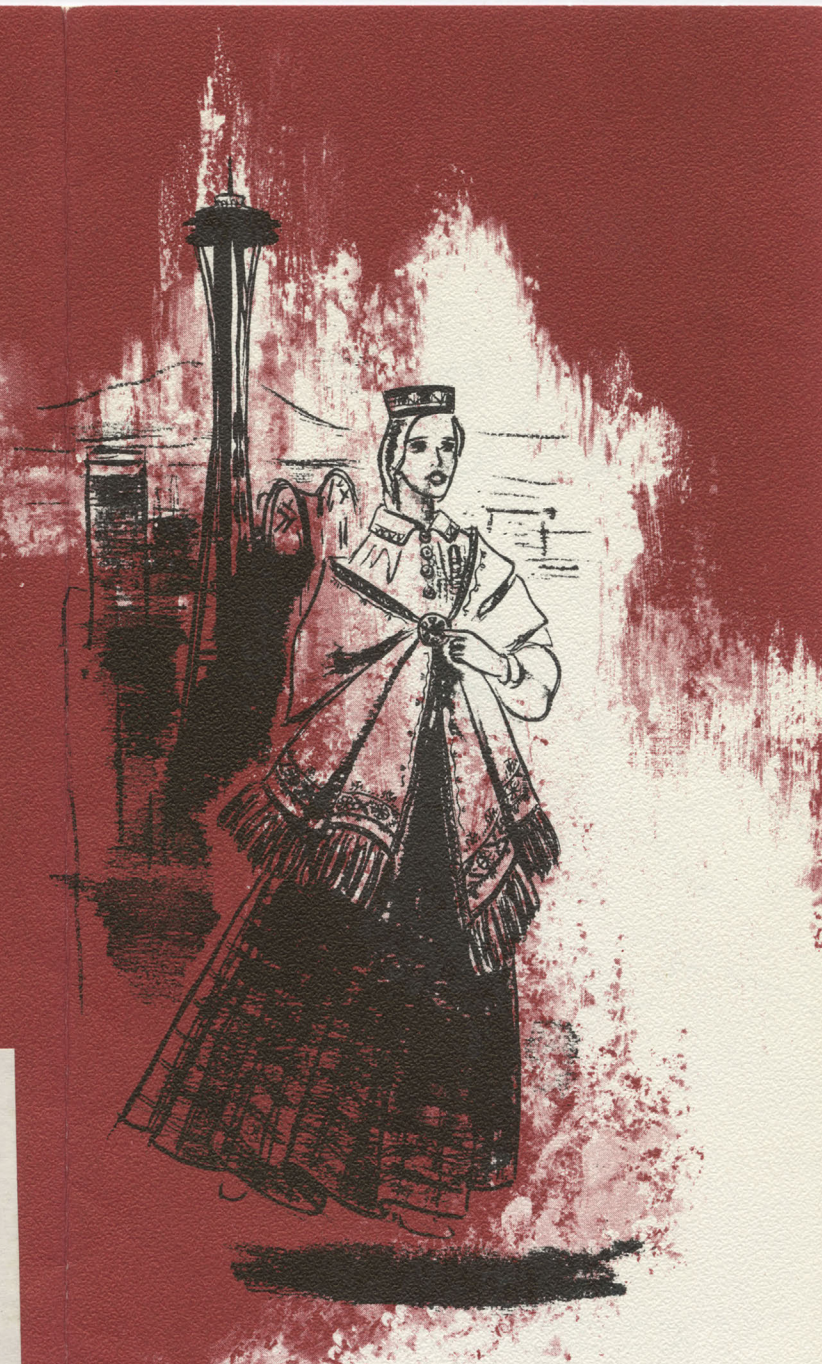
SUNDAY, JULY 6, 1975

- 10:00 a.m. LATVIAN WRITERS' SYMPOSIUM
Washington Plaza Hotel
- 11:00 a.m. LATVIAN WORSHIP SERVICE
Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church
11710 - 3rd N.E., Seattle
- 3:00 p.m. GRAND CHOIR CONCERT
Opera House, Seattle Center



LATVIAN SONG FESTIVAL
COMMITTEE
24005 - 48th Avenue West
Mountlake Terrace, Washington 98043

LP 2018.922

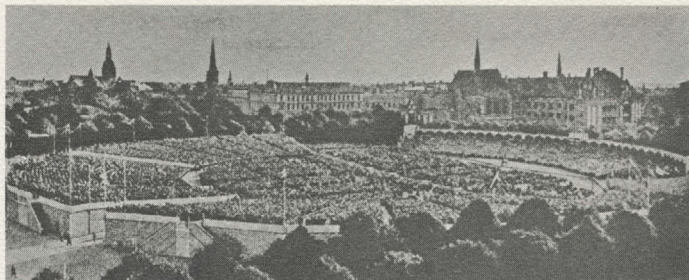
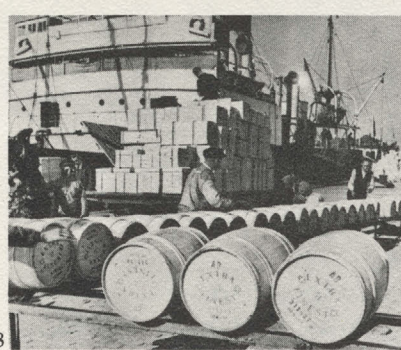
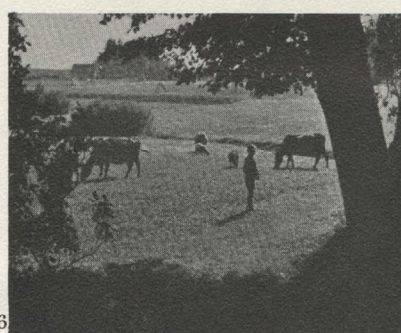
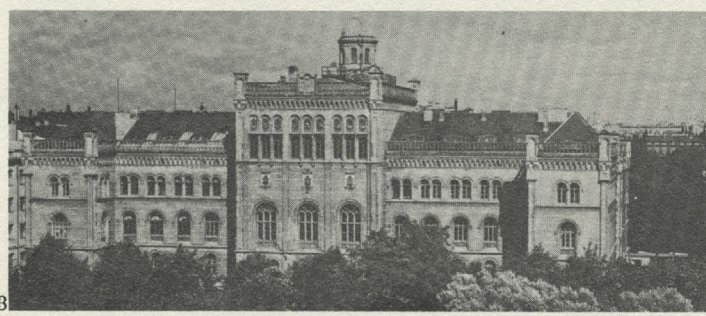


SIXTH WEST COAST LATVIAN SONG FESTIVAL

July 3 - 7, 1975
Seattle, Washington



DR. KARLIS ULMANIS.
 BORN IN LATVIA ON SEPTEMBER 4, 1877, FIRST PRIME MINISTER AND LATER PRESIDENT OF THE INDEPENDENT LATVIAN REPUBLIC, RECEIVED HIS B.S. AT THIS UNIVERSITY IN 1909.
 AFTER THE ILLEGAL SOVIET OCCUPATION OF LATVIA IN 1940, THIS GREAT LATVIAN PATRIOT AND LIFELONG FRIEND OF THE UNITED STATES WAS DEPORTED TO SOVIET RUSSIA, WITH MANY THOUSANDS OF OTHER LATVIAN CITIZENS WHO WERE PLACED IN FORCED LABOR CAMPS. THE SUBSEQUENT FATE OF PRESIDENT ULMANIS IS UNKNOWN.
 THIS MEMORIAL PLAQUE HAS BEEN DEDICATED BY THE LATVIAN PRESS SOCIETY IN AMERICA WITH THE SUPPORT OF VOLUNTARY DONATIONS. 1954.



SONGS

It is believed that some Latvian folk songs, or *dainas*, are more than 2,000 years old—however, most of them originated between the 13th and 16th centuries. The collection and classification of these songs was done before the turn of the century by private individuals. In spite of various adverse circumstances, more than 100,000 variant texts with approximately 15,000 melodies have been collected—an impressive achievement for a small country.

These folk songs can be divided into two categories: recitative and solo. The recitative songs are the oldest, and they were sung in choirs—many for special occasions, and their texts changed accordingly. The solo *dainas* were sung by soloists or in unison, and their texts were unchangeable. These songs contain balladic or epic elements.

Accompaniments to folk songs were on rather crude, home-made instruments of the woodwind or drum variety. An ancient string instrument, the *kokle*, consisting of 5 to 13 strings and resembling the ancient zither had the most beautiful sound.

Latvian folk songs are especially valuable because they captured the essence of national history before such history was formally written. Thus, they are an abundant source of ancient religion, traditions and customs. Women were the principal creators of the *dainas*. In their didactic songs, religious beliefs and ethical standards were clearly established. Through these songs they taught their children honor for tradition, respect and love for the native land as well as for nature and all creatures. In simple, gentle, sympathetic language they sang about human interaction: love between parent and child, courtship, marriage, work, death, and the rewards of an afterlife. They also sang of cruelty, war, oppression, slavery and endurance. The subject matter is endless.

Incorporated within the texts is a complex combination of refinement, earthiness, style and rhythm, depicting the unique spirit and art of one particular national entity. A literal translation, therefore, is virtually impossible; one can only hope to render an approximate interpretation of its contents, but in it can never be captured the fusion of style, words, melody, rhythm and philosophy which is the soul and fragrance of the Latvian folk song.

Latvians today and in times past have been proud of this their national heritage and feel that this artistically sensitive ability to create so rich a treasure has been a peoples' unique gift since, few, if any, of the authors were literate. Especially beautiful are the melodies with their many variations and precise combinations of rhythm and beat. Latvian composers, writers and educators today still exploit the resources found in these texts and melodies and incorporate the folk themes in their contemporary works. The *dainas* will remain an immortal part of Latvian culture.

DANCES

Folk dancing is an important fragment of Latvian culture and character. Expressing mostly magical rhythms and cults in ancient times, the dances in the later period of development and in present Latvian social events have become entertaining in purpose. Most of the dances known today originated in the period between the 13th and 16th centuries; however, much older dances existed before efforts were made to preserve them. Various characteristics have been borrowed from other nations, but in general, the Latvian folk dances are most closely related to Scandinavian and northern German dances. There are two broad categories: couple dances and group dances. The couple dances are more nationally original in character.

Ritualistic dances constitute a large part of the dance group. Some portray important events in life, while others express the rhythmic movements of natural phenomena. Dances performed at weddings introduced the young brides to various phases of house-keeping and to the entire life cycle. Those performed the day after a funeral were intended to relieve sadness and to express a belief in afterlife.

There are dances associated with certain festivities. The most outstanding one is the *Ligo* festival, or—after the crusades—known as St. John's Day, which is still celebrated in midsummer. Its origin is traced back to the ancient magic fertility rituals. The dancing, accompanied with special recitative folk songs, was fast and vigorous. Rapid movements were performed around trees, with high jumps over burning logs or round objects; and young men were challenged to show their courage by leaping through the flames.

In the purely rhythmic dances, the dancers may imitate the movements of the sun across the arc of the heavens; in others, various animal behavior patterns—symbolizing perhaps the dependence of man upon nature.






Some have no symbolic meaning and were performed simply for pleasure or for the pure joy of movement. Many of these are known as the "circle dances" and involve as many as sixteen couples. However, the dominant formation is the square, made up of four or eight couples. Whatever the makeup or purpose of the Latvian folk dance, great performance precision is required because many of the figures are very complex. Singing and special musical instruments accompanied the dancing. Woodwinds, horns, tympani, bells, and the *kokle* were used.

Contemporary Latvians show an increased interest in the ancient dances and still perform them in the traditional style wearing national costumes. Latvian choreographers and maestros have incorporated many of the original folk dance rhythms and steps into modern ballets and operas. Thus, the Latvian folk dance, like the national spirit is not doomed for extinction, but is ever revived and always enjoyed.

ART, CRAFTS

Archaeological excavations of ancient castle hills give evidence that Baltic tribes had reached a high level of civilization well before the Middle Ages. These tribes were not isolated entities, but had developed trade relations with ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and other peoples. Most desired from the northern tribes was amber; hence, Hellenic Greece and Rome referred to the Baltic area as the land of mysterious amber, or *electron*, which was considered even more valuable than gold.

The arts and crafts, like music and dance, must be viewed as only a segment of a total culture, for in them are expressed a basic philosophy of life. There is no one dominant, correct art form, since the ancient Latvian peoples formed a kind of loose federation of many tribes. Every district developed distinct forms of design and color combinations; indeed, each had its own costume that was worn on festive occasions, which over the years have been preserved and reproduced in their original forms. While they are different, they can be quite easily identified as Latvian because of their similar symbols and geometric lines. Some more often used signs include the symbol of God, or

heaven , sun , moon , stars , and these are always proportionately larger than the signs of lesser deities and spirits which inhabit the earth. Other symbols were used to ward off evil, for example, the double cross .

Excavated objects of the late Iron Age show beautifully engraved jewelry and belts on which the basic symbols appear in many variations of the rhythmic and impressive shaping of lines and the strong tendency toward abstraction and stylishness. Skilled craftsmen today still create jewelry based on these originals.

Pottery is the oldest of the excavated items and had been decorated with the same designs. Vases and pitchers, usually dark green and golden brown, are accurately reproduced today and are found in most Latvian homes. Wood carvings are among the most beautiful items. Jewelry is perhaps the most desired of the art objects and was usually made of fine silver and sometimes gold. Most often, amber was used and also other precious stones and finely cut colored glass.

During the centuries of growth and development, Latvian culture has changed. Through good times and bad, through favorable and oppressive governments, the distinct art forms have remained surprisingly pure. It must be emphasized that Latvian folk art is not only an object for museums, but is also a living organism which still continues to develop in the domestic culture of present-day people. Latvians love and treasure their art—for it is, in part, the visible expression of the Latvian soul.

1. Commemorative plaque at the University of Nebraska.
2. The war leaves its scars on one of the oldest churches in Riga.
3. A beloved and esteemed institution—the University of Latvia.
4. In peace or war—a place of refuge.
5. Home of Latvia's opera and ballet companies.
6. A youngster's first job.
7. Zvārta cliff on the Amata River.
8. Latvia's butter leaves the Port of Riga.
9. Ten shares of Latvia's largest textile mill, "Rīgas Audums."
10. VII Song Festival in Riga, 1931—combined chorus of over 11,000, with 30,000 in the audience.
11. The dance—a delight to the young.
12. Brooch in silver with amber.
13. Juice set.

