



**30th AUSTRALIAN
LATVIAN ARTS FESTIVAL
PERTH 1980**

**Opening Ceremony
and Concert**

Proceedings of the Opening Ceremony:

Chairman of the ceremony

Mr J. Bernšteins — Deputy Chairman of the Executive Committee.

Arrival of the Hon. Sir Charles Court, K.C.M.G., O.B.E., Premier of Western Australia and Lady Court, and Hon. Ron Davies, M.L.A., Leader of the Opposition and Mrs Davies.

Procession of the Latvian National Flag and folk dancers.

The national anthem "God Save the Queen".

Introduction by Mr J. Parups, Chairman of the Executive Committee.

Opening of the 30th Latvian Arts Festival in Australia by the Hon. Sir Charles Court, K.C.M.G., O.B.E., Premier of Western Australia.

Address by Mr V. Rolavs, Chairman of the Latvian Association in Australia and New Zealand.

The Latvian national anthem, "Dievs svētī Latviju" (God bless Latvia)

Performance of the "Summer's Bequest" by Saules Josta, Latvian folk ensemble.

SUMMER'S BEQUEST

After three summers of travel and searching the suitor finds his dream in the legendary bloom of Midsummer.

Many cross-themes from Latvian folklore link this production; the important search for a life's partner, the giving of offerings to ensure the bounties of nature, the balance of good and evil in nature, the magic and mystery of Midsummer, the necessity of beautifying and enriching one's surroundings. The fundamental principle of giving is a constant part of the daily routine of a people living in close contact with their environment.

Choreography Skaidrite Darius
Musical Direction Imants Līcis

Administration Juris Rungis
Design Dace Bobets

In a dream a young man sees a girl and sets out with two companions to find her.

1. KURZEME

Choosing a partner was a serious matter, for marriage lasted a lifetime, the couple's well-being and prosperity depended upon making the correct choice.

While waiting for the arrival of suitors, the girls of a farm in Kurzeme beautify themselves, wearing their best clothing and finest jewellery. There is a great deal of noise and movement; the young men bragging of their farms, their strength and willingness to work hard — they are "one in a hundred"; the farmer's wife praising the diligence and ability of her daughters. The central dance reveals the patterns and movements involved in weaving.

The girls are lovely and the traveller's companions are willing to stay, but the girl the suitor saw in his dream is not here and they must search further.

2. THE SEARCH

(a) The Lazy Daughters

Even the lazy girls wait for suitors, but what would a young man do with a lazy wife? The three travellers escape from the clutches of the willing but resistable sisters.

(b) Serfdom

Serfdom was a time of heavy and demeaning labour. In the songs from this period we hear the bitterness of hard forced labour, but also the spite which enables the people to endure. The most hated person was the overseer, who used physical punishment to keep the threshers constantly bowed. They were helpless to protect any girl desired by him. The three travellers in their journey help the serfs thresh the master's harvest.

Interval 15 minutes

3. VIDZEME

Sometimes the young men disguised themselves as old people or girls so that they could more easily observe, unrecognized, the habits and manners of the girls. The girls for their part would disguise themselves as old women to escape unwanted attention.

The travellers, disguised, arrive at a farm in Vidzeme at the same time as does a rich neighbour on a similar mission. He sees the muffled "old women" and takes them to be the prettiest young girls in disguise. "Oh dear!" sighs the mother.

4. SUMMER'S BEQUEST

The carefree cooees and games of the little shepherds announce midsummer and the festival of Janis. Midsummer night is full of mysteries, secrets and witchery, good and evil spirits. Using spells and old traditional magic, the women protect their homes, fields and animals. The young people make offerings during this special night so that they may gain some part of its magical strength.

The Summer also discloses her gift - her bequest to the suitor - searcher.

Translation of an excerpt from a review in "Gotlands Allenhanda" (Sweden) on 21/6/1979.

"Saules Josta" Folk Ensemble has broken through a barrier. For years we have been tied to a sterile repetition of our folk art as it existed in the past. In the performance of the "Saules Josta" Ensemble we saw a new creative power. "Saules Josta" did not merely reproduce, but, based on known, unchangeable folk elements, created something new. They showed us that these traditions are alive, in a dynamic growing and changeing process. In this way traditions can live and be a part of the contemporary cultural structure.

LATVIAN FOLK DANCES

Because of its central position on the Baltic Sea and the fertility of the Baltic Sea and the fertility of the land, Latvia has spent a great part of her history overrun by one or other of her larger and stronger and yet she has been able to preserve her identity to a remarkable degree.

The best characteristics of a people may best be seen in their folk art and dances. In the dances of Latvians we see their basic philosophy; their life's cycle, relationship with Nature, the belief that good triumphs over evil and their pleasure in life. There are dances to celebrate the chief events in a man's life, for each part of the year's cycle and the work associated with it, in fact for every aspect of life. The dances are characterized by simplicity, naturalness, courtesy and equality between men and women.

Folk dances are influenced by the environment and the life-style of the people. Dances originating with hunters in a rugged area are fast and spontaneous and feature individual dancers. The Latvians, however, were farmers, so their dances are, on the whole, restrained and disciplined, very often representing some aspect of a farmer's life, but in a symbolic, not a realistic way. They are accompanied by folk songs and so follow a definite plan or pattern, usually with symmetrical, repeated movements. Many are based on the circle, symbolizing the cycle of life. They are group dances with few opportunities for spectacular individual display, yet in their dignity and order we see the simplicity and beauty of the way of life they represent.

A REVIEW OF LATVIAN FOLK PERFORMANCES

by Beth Dean

A Latvian group "Saules Josta" under the direction of Skaidrite Darius has created a lasting impact on not only the Latvian community but also on the many Australians who have enjoyed the privilege of seeing her productions over the years. I think in particular of the one named "The Sash of the Sun" performed several years ago.

This choreographer has excellent taste and the ability to create a dramatic climax by the means of situation-tension. She has achieved a simplicity of innate truth through muted lighting and the groupings which formed the "close circle" of a soldier's family and village friends when he leaves them to go forth into battle — it could even be the Battle of Life itself — we who watched felt deeply involved in the pain of this parting, so every private yet so universal.

As a parting gift the mother presents her son with the woven belt, symbolic of his life, complete with its warp of joys and weft of sorrows, its pattern of light and shadow. It is indeed a moment of intense universality. The group has taken its name from the ideal underlying that production — "Saules Josta" or "The Sash of the Sun".

More recently, "Marieta's Song" (Marietas Dziesma) again possessed the sure touch of absolute sincerity which characterizes the work of Mrs Darius. Its deceptive simplicity evoked the most complex of inner responses. As "those who choose to go into exile, to travel far from their native village, their homeland and dearly loved families" took up, each his own bundle, and travelled into the vast unknown, we shared their sorrow. A shaft of light — the element of hope — was seen diagonally upstage. It contrasted with the huddled group of people in the down-stage corner of dulled grey and darkened hopelessness. When this play of mime, singing and dancing was over, it was the Australians in the audience — housewives, grandmothers, university students and just families — who spoke most about the effect this production had on them. It was the heartbeat itself of the Latvian people.

This group, "Saules Josta", has done much to foster good inter-relationship across Australia, among the people of many cultures who are now a part of Australia, and, as well, on their several tours overseas.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the Australia Council Community Arts Board and Riga Bakery Pty. Ltd.