



Ēvalds Daugulis – doctor of arts, professor in the Department of Music and Arts at Daugavpils University, Latvia
Research interests: the development of harmony teaching content in different countries around the world, scientific and methodological issues of lecturing on theoretical subjects in music, the perfection of harmony studies, important principles of harmonisation in artistic arrangements of Latvian instrumental folk-music
E-mail: evalds.daugulis@du.lv
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3311-0463>

Ēvalds Daugulis – meno doktars, Daugpīlio universitēto Muzikos ir meno katedros profesoriuss, Latvija
Moksliniai interesai: harmonijas mokymo turinio raida įvairiose pasaulio šalyse, moksliniai ir metodiniai teorinių muzikos dalykų dėstymo klausimai, harmonijos studijų tobulinimas, svarbiausi harmonizacijos principai Latvijos instrumentinės liaudies muzikos aranžuotėse
El. paštas: evalds.daugulis@du.lv
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3311-0463>

Ēvalds Daugulis

Daugavpils University, Latvia

THE COUNTRY MUSIC BAND MARATHON AS A NEW PHENOMENON IN LATVIAN CULTURAL LIFE

Abstract

In recent years, the artistic activity of country music ensembles has become increasingly popular in Latvia. In 2008, a marathon of country music performers was organised for the first time as part of the program of the 24th National Latvian Song and Dance Festival. The article attempts to review the goals, content, variety of forms of expression, instrumentation, repertoire, discoveries and losses of this marathon. A new concept of *folk music band* is presented.

KEY WORDS: Song festival, marathon, country music band, repertoire, music instruments.

Anotacija

Pastaraisiais metais Latvijoje vis labiau populiarėja meninė *kantri* (*country*) muzikos ansamblių veikla. 2008 m. pirmą kartą kantri muzikos atlikėjų maratonas buvo organizuotas kaip XXIV nacionalinės Latvijos dainų ir šokių šventės programos dalis. Straipsnyje bandoma apžvelgti šio maratono tikslus, turinį, raiškos formų įvairovę, instrumentarijų, repertuarą, pasiekimus ir problemas. Pristatoma nauja *folk music band* koncepcija.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Dainų šventė, maratonas, kantri muzikos grupė, repertuaras, muzikos instrumentai.

Introduction

The aim of the research is to investigate the phenomenon of the country music marathon in the space of the development of Latvian traditional music life. The actual data for ethnomusicologists and all traditional culture researchers to understand and to accept country music as a form of contemporary folklore presentation are presented here as scientific tasks. The scientific novelty is based on the thesis about the very fast-changing concept of folk music, including perceptions of worldwide country music here. The comparative-descriptive approach, media analysis, social anthropology and cognitive methods are used in the research process, reflected in the article. Significance: the investigation results enrich the understanding of the phenomenon of traditional and folk music altogether, in local, regional, national and global contexts.

The Latvian Rural Band Marathon is a topic that has not yet been researched. Events in Latvia over the past decade encourage scholars to take a closer look at the country's musical cultural heritage. Amid the abundance of ever-emerging events, it is easy to lose sight of values with a unique significance. An essential place among the variety of folk music-related events belongs to country band gatherings, which in recent years have evolved into Folk Music Festivals, encompassing almost all types of folk and traditional instrumental music, to some extent reflecting the trends in their development. It is known that country band gatherings have served as a showcase for folk culture, as unifiers of folk art, and as a source of strength, a special tradition in Latvian instrumental folk music that is unique worldwide. But what about the Country Band Marathon? Does such an event even exist in Latvia? The answer lies in the aim of this article: to summarise the practices of traditional Latvian instrumental music in the marathon during the Song Festival.

Historical overview

As an independent genre, Latvian instrumental folk music gained recognition thanks to the work of the composer and folk music researcher Emilis Melngailis.¹ Of particular note, however, is the artistic achievement of Gunārs Ordellovskis²

¹ Emilis Melngailis (1874–1954) was an outstanding Latvian composer, a notable folklorist, a master of choral songs, and the organiser and chief conductor of several Nationwide Latvian Song Festivals. He composed 53 original songs for a cappella choir, and created covers of several folk songs, including those for the vocal-instrumental ensemble *Deviņi bāleliņi* (1935–1947), deliberately blurring the boundaries between folk music, variations of folk melodies, and original music, with his characteristic stubborn conviction (Melngailis 2025).

² Gunārs Ordellovskis (1927–1990) was a conductor, composer, teacher, and professor in the Wind Instrument Department of the Latvian State Conservatory (LSC), a member of the Composers' Union (1970), a musician with the Latvian Radio Symphony Orchestra, conductor

in his work with the Latvian Radio Country Band (1959–1985), the first professional ensemble in this genre, which purposefully preserved and brought to prominence the heritage of the Latvian folk spirit.

In turn, a broader expression of the amateur art of country bands declared its independence in the early 1980s. A genre such as covers³ of folk melodies for country bands emerged, which received a positive response in society. Several dozen country bands were already actively working throughout Latvia. With the blessing of Gunārs Ordelovskis, the prerequisites were formed for starting the tradition of country band gatherings. The authors of the idea believed that, just as choirs unite in the Song Festival joint choir, country bands, folk music ensembles and orchestras could also unite in a common waltz or polka. An encouraging example was probably the gatherings of Latvian choirs⁴ and brass bands that had already taken place (starting in 1960).

The aim of such gatherings was to cultivate the artistic quality of country band music, and to integrate it into the events of the Nationwide Song Festival. Their core is a joint orchestra, which the initiators of the plan wanted to see in the near future on the Main Stage of the Song Festival. However, after Ordelovskis' death (1990), the folk music joint orchestra genre declined. But what about the neighbours? A tradition of country band music also exists in Estonia and Lithuania. The first Estonian Folk Music Festival was held in Toila,⁵ while the Lithuanian country band performed as early as 1960, and at all subsequent song festivals (Alensks 2006, 83). Apparently, the events in neighbouring countries encouraged enthusiasts of Latvian folk music to take a serious look at the genre.

and artistic director of the State Philharmonic Song and Dance Ensemble Sakta (1950–1963), director of the Latvian Radio Country Band (1959), conductor of the State Musical Comedy Theatre (1963–1968), principal conductor of the State Dance Ensemble Daile (1968–1971), founder, artistic director and principal conductor of Latvia's first professional wind orchestra Riga (1972–1990), chief conductor of the Wind Orchestra of the 14th to the 20th Nationwide Latvian Song Festivals, and principal conductor of the 17th to the 20th Folk Music Orchestra of the Nationwide Latvian Song Festivals (Ordelovskis 2025).

³ A cover is a set of voices accompanying a melody, an accompaniment. The same melody can be arranged (harmonised) in different ways; however, the most important elements are determined by the tonal and intonational structure of the melody itself. The authentic style of the cover should be named, a classical-romantic cover, modern folk instrumental music, or so-called world music. An arrangement is aimed at adapting a certain composition to the characteristics and capabilities of a specific performing group, maximally preserving the musical image of the original source, but a cover, being an object of copyright, is a type of composition in which voices (both instrumental and vocal) are created on the basis of the original source, using widely a variety of musical means of expression (Daugulis 2006, 24).

⁴ Latvian choir gatherings (1959, 1960, 1964, 1967, 1972, etc) (Grauzdiņa 2004).

⁵ The first Folk Music Festival was held in the northwest Estonian town of Toila in 1978, and subsequent ones have been held mostly every two years (1980, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, etc) (Nurks 2006, 101).

Thus, directed by Vilis Kokamegi,⁶ the first gathering of the republic's country bands took place at Ikšķile in 1984. At the festival, the order of Country Band Gatherings was established (I – 1984, II – 1986, III – 1989). From then on, the gatherings were renamed the Folk Music Festival. The 24th Latvian Folk Music Festival took place in 2025 (Nolikums 2025).

Terminology

Analysing and evaluating the evolution of country band playing in Latvia is hampered by various problems. First of all, the ambiguity in terminology should be mentioned. The very concept of *folk music* is interpreted in different ways. In the author's opinion, it is important to distinguish it from the term *traditional music*. The concept of *folk music* can be applied to absolutely all music played by the people, from folk songs to popular songs (in Latvian *ziņģes*) and *schlagers*. The instrumentation in folk music is also comprehensive: it includes diatonic, later chromatic, professional and electronic musical instruments, and the instruments of other nations, for example, African drums, etc. In turn, *traditional music* is music that is played or sung in a specific traditional setting.

Secondly, the use of names for various musical groups tends to be imprecise: *band of folk instruments*, *folk music band*, *country band*, *city band*, *ensemble*, *group*, *folklore group*, etc. I would propose the following division: if the musical group's instrumentation is comprehensive (electronic instruments are also permissible), the name can include the phrase **folk music**: *folk music ensemble*, *folk music orchestra*, *country band*, *city band*. On the other hand, if only acoustic traditional instruments are used, then the keywords could be **folk instruments** (*folk instrument band*, *folk instrument ensemble*, *folk instrument orchestra*; similar concepts are also *folk band*, *folklore band*).

Of course, during the research, it is also important to pay attention to what musicians play, what they play with, and how and where they play. Thus, different types and styles of music making are possible, with respect to instrumentation, function, being closer to tradition, or a stylised, modernised sound. Three concepts can be highlighted as the main ones: country band,⁷ folk music en-

⁶ Vilis Kokamegi (born in 1946) is a chief conductor of brass bands, a long-time head of the instrumental music section of the Emilis Melngailis Folk Art Centre, and the chief conductor of the folk music orchestra of the 20th Nationwide Latvian Song Festival (Kokamegi 2021).

⁷ A country band is a group of musicians (four to six members, sometimes more) that play folk and traditional (including traditional dance) music. The repertoire is inherited or learned from folk musicians and other country bands. Folk (violin, harmonica, accordion, zither, kokle, etc) and modern academic music instruments (double bass, trumpet, tuba, etc) are used, depending on the playing style, type, manner and function. The band is characterised by an individual playing style (Daugulis 2005, 74).

semble⁸ and folk music orchestra.⁹ Each collective is characterised by its own instrumentation, playing style, repertoire and function.

The interaction of folk and traditional instrumental music with society is essential. In this respect, I propose to distinguish between domestic (folk music) and concert (stage music); these directions sometimes exist separately, but can also appear integrated. So far, they have not been widely studied in Latvian ethnomusicology, because documentation was lacking in the past, and modern practitioners lack theoretical knowledge. The few existing studies concern only one aspect, the continuation of tradition; however, creativity (covers, the composers who created them) has remained outside the scope of attention. Melngailis once polemicised on the issue of creating covers of Latvian folk music, and his statement is popular: ‘Am I not a nation then?’ (Grāvītis 2006, 19). What concerns creativity, a comprehensive and exhaustive research, is necessary, but that would be the topic of another publication. In this article, the focus is mainly on one aspect of the outlined topic, the Country Band Marathon, and its repertoire as part of the Nationwide Song and Dance Festival.

Summarising the above, we can conclude that in the context of the history of country bands, entering urban and rural life, playing in pubs, at weddings, open-air parties, dance evenings, and other events, they gradually acquire a different expression of music-making in various styles and genres. The result was the formation of folk music ensembles, folk music orchestras and various types of integrated collectives, with a wide variety of instruments (violin, zither, kokle, reeds, harmonica, accordion, drums, bagpipes, shepherd’s horn, devil’s drum, electronic musical instruments), repertoires (covers of Latvian folk songs and dance melodies, arrangements and original compositions, Latvian and German popular songs, hits, everyday melodies), and functional attachments (dance evenings, weddings, market squares, concerts, festivals, competitions, Song Festival stage, etc). The same group can perform both at social events (weddings, dance evenings) and at academic concerts. Usually, one direction dominates. Social (domestic) music is older and more diverse. The tradition of concert music is in

⁸ A folk music ensemble is a group of musicians (up to 15 members) who play and sing professionally arranged folk music or compositions based on folk music (instrumental or vocal-instrumental). Various folk and professional instruments and their modernised versions (so-called concert flutes) are used. Ensemble types can be mixed or homogeneous (e.g. small wind ensembles) (ibid. 75).

⁹ A folk music orchestra is a dynamically and timbre-balanced ensemble of musicians and instrumentalists (15 or more musicians) of a certain composition, which plays professionally arranged folk music and instrumental or vocal-instrumental compositions based on folk music. In terms of the composition of the instruments, it is a mixed orchestra (string, woodwind, brass, percussion, accordion, kokle, zither, etc, folk music instruments) (ibid. 75).

many ways connected with the cultural policy of the postwar period, in which one finds both pros and cons.

Country bands and song festivals

The evolution of the country band genre has been gradual and purposeful. There are Latvian Country Band Gatherings and the Nationwide Folk Music Festival. But the tradition of the performance of traditional instrumental Latvian music at the **Song Festivals** began at the 20th Nationwide Song and Dance Festival (1990), and continued at the 21st Nationwide Song and Dance Festival (1993), the 22nd Nationwide Song and Dance Festival (1998), the 23rd Nationwide Song and Dance Festival (2003), the 24th Nationwide Song and Dance Festival (2008), the 25th Nationwide Song and Dance Festival (2013), the 26th Nationwide Song and Dance Festival (2018) and the 27th Nationwide Song and Dance Festival (2023). Latvian country bands performed before each grand concert of Song and Dance Festivals.

At the 20th Nationwide Song and Dance Festival (1990), regional orchestras were formed to play dance accompaniments at the Grand Concert Dance in the Daugava Stadium. Each region gathered country bands, and the joint folk music orchestra was led by a conductor. The four regional and Riga city united folk music bands performed folk dance cover melodies characteristic of their region in instrumental and vocal-instrumental styles. The conductors of the united folk music orchestras of the regions were Gunārs Ordelovskis (Riga), Artūrs Kloppe (Vidzeme), Ēvalds Daugulis (Latgale), Vilis Kokamegi (Zemgale), and Aivars Klīngenberg (Kurzeme) (Emīla Melngaiļa ... 1990, 32, 40–41). It was a successful start to common live music-making to accompany dances, which was followed by a grand dance concert at the 21st Nationwide Song and Dance Festival (1993), but beginning with the 22nd Nationwide Song and Dance Festival (1998) the dances were accompanied by musical recordings.

The Country Band Marathon

In recent years, country band music has become increasingly popular in Latvia. A new phenomenon, a one-day country band marathon (music is played continuously on several stages throughout the day) began on 6 July 2008 in the Vērmāne Garden in Riga, in the context of the 24th Nationwide Song and Dance Festival. What is a country band marathon? Basically, the marathon is a ten-hour-long outdoor concert, where Latvian folk music of various types, styles, genres (dances, polkas, *schlagers*, etc) and repertoires is played. The instigator of the idea was Ilmārs Pumpurs, a folk music expert at the Latvian National Cultur-

al Education Centre, and head of the Hāgenskalna muzikanti country band. He had seen something similar in Lithuania, but all the bands there were divided by style and genre. During the pre-holiday period, the methodological centre carried out a lot of preparatory work for the festival, namely, as early as the spring, contests were held in the regions, and the aims and objectives of the band marathon were set. The aims of the marathon are clearly predictable: to summarise forms of expression of traditional instrumental Latvian music in one concert/marathon during the Song Festival (hence the opportunity to participate in various genres and styles, and the types of currently active musical collectives/music groups), to perform to a wide audience, to play compositions in various forms and content orientations, to feature various instruments, both ethnographic and modified, and modern instruments and their evolution, and at the same time to hear and learn something new, to promote the purposeful development of folk instrumental music in the 21st century.

Various folk music collectives participated in the marathon, both small country bands that play traditional musical instruments (for example, violin, harmonica, accordion, zither, drums, etc) and large folk music ensembles, whose instrumentation is enriched with electronic musical instruments; they performed professionally written covers of Latvian folk music and original compositions that were based on folk melodies. The atmosphere of the event was joyful, fun and danceable, the audience often sang along, and danced, because it was domestic party music. At the concert, we heard both typical and atypical, traditional (ethnic) and domestic, as well as modern music. The sound was determined by the performing group's instrumentation, repertoire, playing/singing skills, and manner. One could hear both new and valuable compositions, and pieces that are completely inappropriate for the folk instrumental music genre. Hence, there were both gains and losses.

A total of 37 groups participated in the 1st Country Band Marathon. Each of them played a 20-minute individual programme; performances were organised on two stages (large and small). The excellent festive atmosphere was enhanced by the artisans' market in the Vērmāne Garden. In turn, the live music of the ball aroused visitors' desire to dance. The artistic director of the first and subsequent band marathons was Ilmārs Pumpurs, and the project manager was Sandra Lipska.

What did the bands play? The repertoire included *schlagers*, popular melodies from the 1930s and 1940s, and compositions from sound recordings (records, radio, cassettes, CDs, etc). We can trace the evolution of the repertoire (new-age dance music is added: tango, foxtrot, the still popular waltz, polka, Krakowiak, pas d'Espagne). The instruments in each band were slightly different: accordion

(there were few harmonicas), zither, folk kokle, violin, drums, devil's drum, tambourine (*bubins* in Latgale), double bass, reeds, flute, zither, saw, washboard, mandolin, academic kokle, guitar, bass guitar, and drum set. The pieces were performed in various styles and forms of instrumental and vocal-instrumental folk music: authentic style,¹⁰ stylised authenticity,¹¹ covers and arrangements, and original compositions.

It is necessary to consider the form and content of the compositions: the repertoire and the artistic quality of the musicians' performance, the idea and the result, improvisation, covers and original compositions for bands, folk music ensembles and groups, traditions and innovations, the traditional (ethnic) and the domestic (mixture of instruments); the typical and the atypical (sound system, microphones, bass guitar, drum set); the functional attachment, in the open air (therefore a repertoire of domestic music is desirable); the desirable and the undesirable in the development of the genre (an undesirable fascination with pop music elements [syncope in rhythm, pentatonic, ostinato principle, etc]). But what was positive was the opportunity for all bands to participate, to perform in front of a wide audience.

The 2nd Country Band Marathon took place on 5 July 2013 in Riga during the 25th Nationwide Song and Dance Festival. Throughout the day, bands performed in the Vērmāne Garden. That time, there were 46 groups, with more than 350 participants.¹² Individual programmes reflected the musical diversity

¹⁰ In authentic-style music making, a talented folk musician – an improviser, an amateur – comes to the fore. The playing style is simple, for some players: virtuoso, relatively uniform, but never repeated literally. The musical instruments are diatonic, and the basis of music making is free improvisation (similar to jazz). Variant and variational development methods dominate. The freedom of the compositional plan allows the improviser to express his momentary impressions spontaneously (Daugulis 2006, 22).

¹¹ Stylised authenticity is self-expression, imitation. The playing of country bands has a theatrical basis. In this case, the time, environment, people and thinking are already different. So the starting position is different ... The playing of stylisations is usually quite simple, one might even say primitive. Musicians think that the more primitive, the closer to authenticity. Authentic playing also has its own laws, models and habits. For an academically educated musician, playing a traditional instrument is associated with an aesthetic experience. On the other hand, for an amateur, with affect, a certain ritual. The stylisation of authenticity is emphasised by inconsistency in the use of instruments (an accordion instead of a harmonica; incorrect violin playing, etc) (Daugulis 2006, 23)

¹² Aizkraukle Cultural Centre folklore band Karikste, director Anita Ostrovskā; Aizkraukle region Baumanis Family Band, director Imants Baumanis; Andrupene band, director Dainis Platacis; Bārbele band Savējie, director Dace Starta; Bērzpils parish band Kapela, director Juris Stepanovs; Daugavpils Latvian Cultural Centre Folk Music Ensemble Rakari, director Ēvalds Daugulis; Dekšāre band Sovēji, director Janīna Juste; Jēkabpils band Kreicburgas Ziķeri, director Aivars Pugačs; Jērcēnmuizas Muzikanti, director Aivars Auniņš; the band Malnavas Muzikanti, director Jānis Stafeckis; Kārsava Music and Art School band Dimdari, director Vija Orinska; Koknese musicians' group Skutelnieki, director Uldis Bērziņš; Ķekava Culture Centre band

covered by the genre of contemporary instrumental folk music, from folk music ensembles to post-folklore and world music, and from traditional folklore bands to domestic music ensembles. The performance of a joint orchestra was not envisaged.

A total of 46 groups (350 participants) performed 15 to 20-minute individual programmes on three stages. The marathon included the dance groups Kamoliņš (Great Britain), Jautrais Pāris (Indianapolis, USA), and a Brazilian Latvian dance group, whose performances were created in collaboration with Latvian musical groups. Among the neighbouring foreign participants, the folk music ensemble Aušrinė from Lithuania (Šiauliai) should be highlighted. This band marathon featured musical diversity covered by the genre of modern instrumental folk music. The musical performances consisted of several stylistic blocks, and included artistic covers of different styles of folk music for various instrumental ensembles: from academic folk music ensembles to post-folklore and world music, both traditional folklore groups and domestic music ensembles, during whose performances interested parties had an opportunity to participate in folk dances, or feel the atmosphere of an old-fashioned country dancing party.

Klabatas, director Ruta Meijere; Limbaži Children and Youth Centre band Eži, director Sandra Budeviča; Limbaži cultural centre band Labi Ka Tā, director Sandra Budeviča; Limbaži Cultural Centre folk music ensemble Kokle, director Anita Viziņa-Nīlsona; Lizums country band, director Miervaldis Vilnis; Lubāna Cultural Centre country band Meldiņš, director Andris Dzenis; Medņeva parish band Egle, director Inita Raginska, Naujene Music and Art School instrumental ensemble, director Giršs Kagans; Nīgrande parish Kalni Cultural Centre band Spēlmaņi, director Artis Šulbergs; Pociems children's folklore group Airi, director Sandra Jansone; band of the Rencēni folklore group Rota, director Irēna Garais; Rēzekne Cultural Centre band Dziga, director Dace Visocka; Rēzekne region country band Malta, director Normunds Štekels; Riga Day Care Centre Cerību Tilts music group Zvaigžņu Dzirksts, directors Ieva Altrofa, Viesturs Samts; band of the cultural centre Ilģuciems of the Riga Municipality Cultural Institutions Association Hāgenskalna Muzikanti, director Ilmārs Pumpurs; Rucava country band Paurupīte, director Inta Jaunciema; Rūjiena Cultural Centre band Rūvenas Aure, director Valdis Meijers; Salacgrīva band Cielavas Spēlmaņi, director Zenta Mennika; Saldus band Strops, director Agrita Pileniece; Salnava Cultural Centre band Salnavas Danču Muzikanti, director Arta-Ermīne Galvanovska; Salnava Community Centre band Sābri, director Elvīra Bleive; Skrīveri Music and Art School ensemble Sateka, director Marita Vaivode; Talsi folk musicians' group Tals' Trimiš, director Lija Dunska; Tukums Cultural Centre folk music ensemble Danču Spēle, director Armands Krievs; Valka folk dance ensemble Sudmaliņas folk music band, directors Skaidra Smeltere, Tija Bērtiņa; Viļaka region folklore group Atzele musicians' band, director Ilona Bukša; Viļāni Cultural Centre country band Bumburneicys, director Vivita Skurule; Vīksna parish Aizezeres Muzikanti, directors Velga Feldmane, Juris Keiselis; Žiguri Cultural Centre band Ilgas, director Svetlana Bukovska; folk dance group Kamoliņš, director Māris Pulis (Lielbritānija); dance group Jautrais Pāris, director Iveta Asona (Indianapolis, USA); Brazilian Latvian dance group; folk music ensemble Aušrinė (Šauļi, Lietuva).

The 3rd Country Band Marathon also took place in the Vērmāne Garden in Riga, on 6 July 2018, in the context of the 26th Nationwide Song and Dance Festival. The participants in the marathon amounted to 59 groups. This time, each group had to perform three programmes: a 15-minute programme on the big stage, a 20-minute programme on the medium stage, and a 20-minute programme on the small stage. The marathon programme included the names of groups of different musical styles: country band, folk music ensemble and folk music orchestra, folklore group, vocal-instrumental ensemble, dance group *Sudmalīņas*, and folk music band. Is it important? Partially, yes. Sometimes an overly complex repertoire does not match the group's instrumentation or playing skills.

The 4th Country Band Marathon took place on 7 July 2023 in the Vērmāne Garden Esplanade in Riga during the week of the 27th Nationwide Song and Dance Festival, which surprised audiences with the large number of participants, at 58 groups. Three stages were set up for the music performances: the Vērmāne Garden stage, the Rainis stage on the Esplanade, and the open-air party stage on the Esplanade. There were various types of groups: band, country band, folk music band, the *Patjanko* family band, folk musicians' group, folk music group, folk music ensemble, the women's musical association (AMMA), music school instrumental ensemble, *kokle* ensemble, folk group, dance group band, and mixed-type compositions, and thus there were different kinds music and artistic quality.

Analysis of the repertoires and performing styles

How did the covers of instrumental folk music develop? Here we must talk about the contribution of professional composers to this genre. Folk music has always been an inexhaustible source of ideas and themes for Latvian composers' classical scores. The ideas of almost all their most important works are closely related to folk melodies, timbres, rhythms, and perception of life. The harmony represents mainly the centralised major and minor tonality of Classicism and Romanticism. The most significant feature of these compositions is the quoting of folk melodies and the variation-like development, which widely reveals the composer's sense of harmonisation. However, the national significance here is expressed not so much by quotations of melodies as by characteristic intonations, modes and rhythms. Of course, in this case, a specific composition is maximally approximated to professional music. The attitude to folk music material as a starting point can be diverse. However, it cannot be denied that the principle of creating covers itself (creativity based on a specific style) is manifested both

by playing folk music in a professional manner and by stylising the authentic manner, integrating elements of different musical styles into it. The range of instruments and means of expression are different. Consequently, the functional attachment and addressee are also different (Daugulis 2006).

Musicians' bands were widespread and popular, they usually played dance and game music at weddings, and other celebrations and events. The instruments of those bands mostly included a double-reed harmonica, a zither, violins, a tambourine (called *bubins* in Latgale), and sometimes a cymbal. Unlike the instruments that are mostly used in modern country bands (clarinet, trumpet, accordion), ancient traditional folk music instruments have been partly preserved in Latgale ensembles. Today, the cymbals are rarely used in bands, whose strong and rich sound once united the entire ensemble, while at the same time creating a basis of rhythm and harmony (Daugulis 2006).

The diversification of the country band repertoire marked a new musical expression. Some musicians sought the popularity and simplicity of expression of emotions characteristic of domestic music-making, imitating the previously cultivated style of playing, while others turned to complex, elaborate ballad-type compositions. In the first case, musicians were guided by aspirations to democracy and wide accessibility. However, the pressure of the aesthetics of popular music genres was undoubtedly also manifested here: indulgence in the convenience of a superficial perception of the world. There will always be defenders of this type of simplicity, although, in my opinion, it threatens to lower the level achieved by instrumental music, and thus to abandon fully fledged concert music. Of course, this is also possible, but there is another option: in the name of democracy, not to submit to a relaxed, somewhat primitive, aesthetic. This alternative is implemented by ensembles, whose playing has become more branched and deeper in expression. The colouring of covers has gradually tended towards the affirmation of bright colours, but the form, towards expansion and cyclicity (and also balladry). Here, richer means of texture and chords are used, achieving a beautiful scenic and psychological unity in the music. Elsewhere, the principles of improvisation of popular genres are felt (an organic fusion of elements forms the specificity of music or a specific style). Features of the best country band music are brightly expressed genres, melodiousness, and the revival of metrical rhythm and texture.

The instrumental covers created in the last decade are characterised by the use of the tonic organ point; thus, the evolution of this element from the ancient melodies of domestic customs and work to the covers of folk music of the late 20th century can be traced. No less typical of contemporary covers are trichord intonations, combining ancient and new expression. Also characteristic are the

features of linear polyfunctionality, which reflect an essential principle of folk music thinking. Here one notices a similarity with the polytonality of Lithuanian *sutartinės*. The pentatonic scale appears in the scale, which in its pure form is foreign to Latvian folk music.

The development of rhythm as the most important means of musical expression, or rhythm progression, should be highlighted. Contemporaneity is evidenced by the inclusion of syncopation, the connection with popular music, as well as with dance rhythms of other nations (e.g. Irish). We often hear peculiar dissonant consonances, chords with included adjacent sounds (with a sixth or second), fifth and fourth harmonies both vertically and horizontally, and tonal-harmonic counterpoint, which manifests itself as a projection of the features of the melody's change in tone into an independent linear unit, namely, the accompaniment.

In general, it should be concluded that the brightest folk instrument music covers played at the marathon use polyphony abundantly, which is rooted both in a pronounced classically functional harmony and the structure of the covers, as well as in modal harmony and free-form covers. The use of micropolyphony possibilities is especially characteristic (sometimes it permeates the entire composition), which develops into a chordal presentation. In the most sonorous covers, the means of polyphonic development are simple imitation, canonical imitation, sometimes vertically shifting counterpoint, and various modifications of these techniques. Consequently, the sound tapestry is artistically complete, it forms a thematic arch with folk melodies of the most ancient strata, in which the presence of polyphony can be found. In certain covers, we also encounter droning, heterophonic polyphony, parallel thirds, as well as the interaction of chordal presentation and polyphony. It is certain that the style of covers established by Andrejs Jurjāns¹³ has significantly influenced the creative expression of not only his contemporaries, but also several subsequent generations of composers.

Alongside direct covers of folk music, we should also mention music that is composed and considered to be the original work of one or another composer, but in terms of sound is almost indistinguishable from covers or arrangements. In some cases, this can be referred to as stylisation, in others to creativity inspired by a specific style that does not go beyond the boundaries of this style. Covers of instrumental folk music, concert pieces or original compositions for folk music ensembles (orchestras), are composed by professional musicians who embellish these simple folk melodies richly, incorporating all their professional skill into the creation of the composition. They also search extensively for new

¹³ Jurjānu Andrejs (1856–1922) was the first Latvian professional composer, a classic of Latvian music.

techniques aimed at revealing the imagery of instrumental melodies, trying to find modern harmonic means. In these compositions, we can observe a certain evolution from the strict and pure diatonic harmonies of the melancholic style characteristic of Melngailis to more complex, chromatic, harmonic complexes, resulting from the linear movement of the voices, which sometimes have a polyfunctional or accidental harmony character. The melodic lines of individual voices are still very well developed, to which the composers try to give complete independence and expressiveness, corresponding to the significance of the main melody. Such, for example, are the best instrumental works composed in the folk manner by Gunārs Ordellovskis, Jānis Grigalis,¹⁴ Juris Vaivods¹⁵ and others. The musical language of harmonisations is based on the functional principle, the tapestry of sounds is strongly polyphonic, and the plastic individual voices created by the composers sometimes feature dissonant harmonies, but overall create a truly emotional, expressive musical image.

Conclusions

To date, four Country Band Marathons have taken place. What can we conclude? All forms, styles and directions of instrumental music expression are equally important, necessary and acceptable. The interaction of different styles and types is of a continuous nature. The borrowings are mutual, and there are many more covers than authenticity. The borrowings are infinitely wide (transformed and untransformed popular songs, folklorised and non-folklorised, German folk songs or original songs). In each case, the approach to folk music material as a starting point is different. What is common is that a new composition is created within the framework of a specific style. The style of performing covers develops in interaction with professional music, and is its most important source. In the evolution of traditional instrumental music, we find gradualness and purposefulness. In my opinion, the covers and arrangements of instrumental folk melodies in today's context are more attractive, i.e. they are more easily amenable to transformations, integrating samples of music of different styles and genres (folk rock, folk pop, ethno-rock, ethno-jazz, minimalism, world music, etc); therefore, they are able to find modern expression, and they are therefore sustainable. Authentic tradition preserves and imitates what has existed before. In general, Latvian traditional instrumental music is diverse, stylistically and genre-wise. The Country Band Marathon as the culmination of the genre occurs once every five years. A new concept of *folk music band* is entering into practice

¹⁴ Jānis Grigalis (born in 1943) is a choir conductor, teacher, and chief conductor of country bands.

¹⁵ Juris Vaivods (born in 1966) is a composer and conductor.

(integrating the play of country bands [domestic music] and ethnographic groups [traditional music]). In my opinion, the concept of *folk music band* is too vague and all-encompassing. Collectives try to play the popular melodies of today, but many fail because they lack musical education and the skills to create an arrangement. At the end of the festival concert, in my opinion, what is missing is a composition performed by the joint orchestra.

In recent years, the folk music movement has experienced a new upsurge: it includes ensembles that play mainly folk music covers, bands that have experience of ancient traditions of domestic music-making, and groups playing in a folklore and post-folklore manner. Alongside famous ensembles with decades of musical traditions, there are also completely new ones emerging. It is impossible to deny the growing popularity of this musical field and its active involvement in various events in the Song Festival: ensembles perform at a folk music concert in the Great Hall of the University of Latvia, they play interludes in regional programmes at the Brass Band Grand Concert in Dome Square together with dancers, and for a whole day they fill the Vērmanes Garden with songs and sounds. However, the rhetorical question remains: where is the country band orchestra?

We can conclude that the tradition of the country band orchestra is gradually disappearing in Latvia. The Estonians and Lithuanians take it seriously; even more so, country band orchestras occupy a place of honour on the big stage of the Song Festival. However, let us not be pessimistic, because there is an opportunity in Latvia for the tradition of the joint orchestra to be reborn in a new quality, both within the framework of the country band marathon and in the context of the Nationwide Song and Dance Festival. The marathon is the path to achieving the goal, an opportunity that would allow every country band musician to feel like a participant in a great ritual, to become great themselves, to feel their Latvianness, belonging, and value.

Thus, it can be said that already at the end of the 20th century, three paths were marked out which folk instrumental music has followed: first, traditional music-making, directly rooted in peasant culture; second, the newer folk music played by the 1930s bands (*schlagers* and popular songs [*zingēšes*]); and third, freely made covers, stylised original compositions. Various options have been tried in practice: forming an orchestra of Latvian folk instruments, creating ensembles consisting only of ancient instruments, and trying out bands in which ancient instruments are used in combination with modern instruments. And it continues, reaching the 21st century, with the ever-increasing trend of introducing *World Music* currents characteristic of the postmodern era to Latvia. In today's conditions of multilingualism, it seems to be the right place and time to invite those interested to think about the present and future of folk instrumental music.

References

- Alensks 2006 – Vitauts Alensks. Daži būtiski tautas instrumentālās mūzikas evolūcijas aspekti Lietuvā (p. 85–90). In *Latviešu tautas instrumentālā mūzika: process, mijiedarbe, problēmas*. Zinātnisko rakstu krājums. Daugavpils: Saule.
- Daugulis 2005 – Ēvalds Daugulis, Gaļina Zavadska. Tautas instrumentālā Mūzika Latgalē 20. gadsimtā (p. 72–78). In *Latgales mūzikas kultūra vakar un šodien*. Sast. Ilma Grauzdiņa un Ēvalds Daugulis. Daugavpils: Saule.
- Daugulis 2006 – Ēvalds Daugulis, Gaļina Zavadska. Latviešu tautas instrumentālā muzicēšana 20. gadsimtā: stili, veidi, mijiedarbe (p. 23–34). In *Latviešu tautas instrumentālā mūzika: process, mijiedarbe, problēmas*. Sast. Ilma Grauzdiņa un Ēvalds Daugulis. Daugavpils: Saule.
- Emīla Melngaiļa... 1990 – Emīla Melngaiļa Tautas mākslas centrs (p. 32–41). In *XX Vispārējie latviešu Dziesmu svētki. X Latviešu deju svētki*. Rīga: E. Melngaiļa Tautas mākslas centrs.
- Grauzdiņa 2004 – Ilma Grauzdiņa (sast.). *Dziesmu svētku mazā enciklopēdija*. Rīga: Musica Baltica.
- Grāvītis 2006 – Olgerts Grāvītis. Kas iesakāms latviešu tautas mūzikas ansambļu repertuāram: folkloras pērles vai veikli pakaļdarinājumi? (p. 18–22). In *Latviešu tautas instrumentālā mūzika: process, mijiedarbe, problēmas*. Sast. Ilma Grauzdiņa un Ēvalds Daugulis. Daugavpils: Saule.
- Jurjāns 2025 – Jurjānu Andrejs. *Latvijas mūzikas informācijas centrs*. Retrieved from [accessed 09 09 2025]: <https://www.lmic.lv/lv/komponisti/andrejs-jurjans-305#work>
- Kokamegi 2025 – Vilis Kokamegi. *Ogres novada pašvaldība*. Retrieved from [accessed 07 05 2025]: https://www.ogresnovads.lv/lv/vilis-kokamegi?utm_source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F
- Melngailis 2025 – Emīlis Melngailis. *Latvijas mūzikas informācijas centrs*. Retrieved from [accessed 09 09 2025]: <https://www.lmic.lv/lv/komponisti/emilis-melngailis-273#work>
- Nolikums 2025 – Nolikums. *Tautas mūzika. Latvijas Nacionālais kultūrizglītības centrs*. Retrieved from [accessed 17 09 2025]: <https://www.lnkc.gov.lv/lv/media/29589/download?attachment>
- Nurks 2006 – Ahto Nurks. Tautas instrumentālā mūzika Igaunijā (p. 101–102). In *Latviešu tautas instrumentālā mūzika: process, mijiedarbe, problēmas*. Zinātnisko rakstu krājums. Daugavpils: Saule.
- Ordellovskis 2025 – Gunārs Ordellovskis. *Latvijas mūzikas informācijas centrs*. Retrieved from [accessed 09 09 2025]: <https://www.lmic.lv/lv/muziki/gunars-ordellovskis-2131#album>
- Vaivods 2025 – Juris Vaivods. *Latvijas mūzikas informācijas centrs*. Retrieved from [accessed 09 09 2025]: <https://www.lmic.lv/lv/komponisti/juris-vaivods-2135#work>

Ēvalds Daugulis

KANTRI MUZIKOS GRUPIŅU MARATONAS – NAUJAS LATVIJOS KULTŪRINIO GYVENIMO REIŠKINYS

Santrauka

Latvijos muzikos grupių evoliucija buvo laipsniška ir kryptinga: kūrėsi Latvijos kantri muzikos grupių sambūriai, vyko nacionaliniai liaudies muzikos festivaliai, grupės koncertavo visuotinėse latvių Dainų ir šokių šventėse. Formavosi naujas reiškiny – visos dienos kantri muzikos grupių maratonas.

Pirmasis *kantri* muzikas grupiņu maratons ģvyko 2008 m. liepos 6 d. Rygoje, XXIV nacionalinēs dainu ir ņokiu ņventēs kontekste. Maratono idējos autorius buvo Ilmārs Pumpurs, Latvijos nacionalinio kultūros ņvietimo centro liaudies muzikas ekspertas ir kantri muzikas grupēs „Hāgenskalna muzikanti“ vadovas. Maratonu siekta pristatyti Latvijos tradicinēs instrumentinēs muzikas raiņkos formas viename koncerte maratone suteikiant galimybē muzikantams pasirodyti įvairiais ņanrais ir stiliais, koncertuoti plačiajai auditorijai, groti įvairių formų ir turinio kompozicijas, pristatyti įvairius instrumentus – etnografinius, modifikuotus, ņiuolaikinius – ir skatinti kryptingą XXI amņiaus instrumentinēs liaudies muzikas plētrą. Kiti trys kantri grupiņu maratoni taip pat buvo Nacionalinēs dainu ir ņokiu ņventēs dalis: antrasis maratons vyko 2013 m. liepos 5 d., trečiasis – 2018 m. liepos 6 d., ketvirtasis – 2023 m. liepos 7 d.

Visuose maratono koncertuose skambėjo tiek tradicinē (etninē), tiek ir ņiuolaikinē muzika. Jos skambesį lēmē kolektyvų instrumentuotē, repertuaras, grojimo ir dainavimo įgūdņiai bei maniera. Groti tiek nauji, vertingi, tiek visiņkai netinkami instrumentinēs liaudies muzikas kūriniai. Repertuare – ņlageriai, populiaris XX a. 4–5-ojo deņimtmečiu melodijos, garso įraņų kompozicijos. Čia galima atsekti visą repertuaro ir instrumentuotēs evoliuciją. Atliekami įvairių stilių ir formų instrumentinēs ir vokalinēs-instrumentinēs liaudies muzikas kūriniai – autentiņki, stilizuoti, koveriai (perdirbiniai), originalios kompozicijos. Derinamos tradicijos ir naujovēs – tradiciniai ir ņiuolaikiniai instrumentai (garso sistemos, mikrofonai, bosinēs gitaros, būgnų komplektai) ir pan.

Repertuaro įvairovē rodo naujos muzikinēs raiņkos evoliuciją. Vieni muzikantai siekia populiarumo ir paprastumo, būdingo buitiniam muzikavimui, imituodami anksčiau puoselētą grojimo stilių, kiti renkasi sudėtingas, įmantrias baladņiu tipo kompozicijas. Pirmuoju atveju grupiņu muzikantai vadovaujasi demokratijos, plataus prieinamumo siekiais. Tačiau čia slypi ir pavojus demokratijos vardu pasiduoti kiek primityviai estetikai. Geriausių grupiņu muzikavimo bruoņai – ryņkus ņanras, melodingumas, metrinio ritmo ir faktūros atgaivinimas.

Skirtingų stilių ir tipų ņaveika ņiuose maratonuose yra nuolatinē. Kiekvienu atveju poņiūris į kantri muziką kaip savo interpretacijų atspirties taņką yra skirtingas. Bendra tai, kad kiekviena nauja kompozicija kuriama konkrečiu stiliumi. Turime pripaņinti, kad teisę gyvuoti skelbia nauja kantri muzikas grupēs koncepcija.