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## Thoughts on Biography as a Research Problem with a Look at Current Estonian Music Biography

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The biography has been one of the most popular genres in Estonian literature during the recent decades. At the same time there are few cases where the biographer reveals her/his theoretical ideas of writing the life of another. And there are very few special critical studies focused on biography as a scholarly problem either in Estonian literary studies or in musicology.

The purpose of this article is to give a brief survey of the history of music biography, discuss some new approaches to writing musical lives and to look at the state of current Estonian music biographies.

The history of Western music biography as an academic discipline dates back to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Starting from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we find a series of monumental documentary biographies of the famous composers. On the other hand, a lot of fictional biographies were published for popular audiences in this time period as well. In the age of musicology the writing of composers' biographies was influenced for a long time by two prominent musicologists, namely Guido Adler (since 1885) and Carl Dahlhaus (since the 1970s), whose opinion of biography as a musicological genre was very low for different reasons. A heightened interest in biography emerged only in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Recent years have seen a lot of new approaches, and new problems have been placed on biography as a research problem. Among these were questions about biography as a narrative form (how to construct a chronologically ordered text while avoiding linearity in portraying the other's life), about the role and the task of the biographer (how he or she can choose and interpret facts of an individual's life - a question which is implicitly connected to the author's ethics and morality), etc. One of central problems in the case of composer's biography was/is this: how and whether the person's life can be connected to the musical output - in other words, could the biography seek to illuminate the life of a composer in order to explain his works?

Generally speaking, in today's Estonian music biographies we can find three different tendencies in writing lives. The first one is a so-called polyphonically constructed portrait of an outstanding composer or musician: into one biographical publication the biographer draws together memories, interviews with several people, fragments from letters, concert reviews and so on. The second subdivision in writing lives is an "autobiographical biography": a large-scale interview with the composer with detailed specification, written by the questioner (or biographer?). The third branch in writing lives is the traditional biography: the author imprints his/her imagination of the other person (usually a great composer) in narrative form. Sometimes the accent is clearly on compositions (on musical analysis), at other times it is on the composer's life events and his/her social and historical nexus. The roots of this traditional biography are to be found in the music biographies of the early 1960s, but today's problems, questions and accents are much more diverse and far wider than those of the biographical works of Soviet Estonian.