

Memories of St. Olaf's Church musician's as the sources for writing music history and as the reflections of cultural memory

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Abstract

Since church activity was officially restricted throughout the Soviet occupation, musical life in church was characterised by a dual life and a constant testing the borders. Therefore official sources do not adequately reflect what really took place. For this article, the memories by approximately hundred musicians of Estonia's largest free church St. Olaf's Church, written in 2009–2011, were explored. The first part of the article provides a description of the historical situation during the Stalinist and the Khrushchev period. It appears that in the generally most repressive Stalinist years there was an active music life in St. Olaf's Church (performances of *Weihnachtsoratorium* and Passions by Bach, *Die Schöpfung* by Haydn, e. g.) whereas the following Khrushchev period, called the *Thaw*, brought far greater restrictions in church music (banning of musical instruments and of performance of large-scale musical works etc.). In the second part of the article, relying on Jan and Aleida Assmann, Maurice Halbwachs and James W. Wertsch the memoirs are analysed as textual constructions reflecting the various aspects of their authors' identity. Generally speaking, the memories demonstrate a strong connection to the Estonian free church tradition that date back to the end of the 19th century.