

“... German spirit rising anew ...”: premieres of the *St. Matthew Passion* by J. S. Bach in Tallinn (Reval) and St. Petersburg in view of social changes in the 19th century

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Abstract

Estonia, one of the Baltic governorates belonging to the Russian Empire, was characterised by big social changes in the 19th century. The Baltic governorates were locally administered and culturally shaped by the German upper class but already in the 1830ies slight russification begun which became especially strong in the 1880ies; on the other hand the Estonian national movement gained ground. So the Baltic Germans stood in an area of conflict of different political forces. In this situation the *St. Matthew Passion* by Bach was performed in Tallinn in 1883 – a composition which had become a myth in German cultural area as one of the most important works for the protestant church music and the German spirit in general. Bach wasn't unknown for the audience in Tallinn: Philipp Spitta worked there 1864–66 and gave a public lecture about Bach. In 1883 also *Lohengrin* by Wagner was premiered in Tallinn, also a strong symbol representing German culture. Soon after that Tallinner musicians gave the passion in St. Petersburg too, where ideological contention between the so-called Western-oriented forces and the Mighty Handful tightened at that time. That way the *St. Matthew Passion* became a powerful symbol in the Russian-German “culture war”.