

Prelude, Fughetta and Postlude: A Tripartite Reflection on National Ideas and National Music

Anu Kõlar

Abstract

The article gives an overview of Urve Lippus's (1950–2015) principal field of research: nationalness in music and music history. Lippus analysed runic songs and linear musical thought, the construction of nationalism, and national ideas in the first half of 20th century cultural and musical life in Estonia. A special part of Lippus's professional legacy was concerned with the music of Veljo Tormis (1930–2017). In all likelihood, both Lippus and Tormis reaped considerable creative rewards from their discussions, debates and cooperation. The article will also examine the problematic concept of nationalism and issues of national identity in light of the modern day situation, in which phenomena linked to nationality are considered marginal and obsolete.

A significant share of Urve Lippus's (1950–2015) rich legacy of scholarship is dedicated to the discussion of the nationalness of music, of the notions underpinning national ideas, of the role of national awareness in the history of culture and music, and of the interpretations of such ideas in the aesthetics of art. Although I cannot claim to fully fathom the nuances of her analysis, in what follows I will endeavour to present several of her opinions, which (to me) have appeared refreshing and which have opened up novel and broader perspectives. In conjunction with the focus of Lippus's research on the role and significance of national heritage in musical compositions, in the historiography and aesthetics of music, it is only natural and logical that she also wrote about Veljo Tormis (1930–2017), whose thinking and creative work were deeply rooted in the Estonian folk tradition. In all likelihood, both Lippus and Tormis reaped considerable creative rewards from their discussions, debates and cooperation.

Urve Lippus's views on national ideas will be discussed in the middle part, or 'fughetta', of this somewhat unusually structured article. As a musical composition, the fughetta or short fugue forgoes the complex structure and thematic development of the fugue, yet in most cases retains two statements (*dux* and *comes*) of a single musical theme. The sections below will follow that arrangement.

I will begin the article with an introductory prelude in which I will define the central notions of the complex and constantly changing discourse of national ideas. I will limit myself to those definitions whose elucidation is needed to set the stage for the discussion that follows. I will also touch upon Marek Tamm's views on the characteristics that are particular to the national identity construction of Estonians.

In the postlude, I will set out a few subjective and rather sad observations on the skewed interpretations of national identity that appear to have wide currency in our times.

Prelude: Nationalism, nationalness and national identity

In history and the humanities, 'nationalism' is a problematic concept that has inspired a wide variety of different, sometimes conflicting opinions. A significant part of this complexity and heterogeneity is related to differences in the historical, cultural and linguistic contexts in which 'nation' and various other notions derived from it (nationality, nationalness, national identity, national ideas, national awareness, civic nationalism, ethnic nation) receive their divergent interpretations.¹ In other words, the term 'nation' is defined differently in different historical periods, in different linguistic and cultural environments, and in different research discourses, and in accordance with these

¹ This article was conceived and originally written in Estonian (see the online version of *Res Musica* 9; www.resmusica.ee). In the Estonian cultural space, as in Estonian tradition and history writing, the category 'nation' holds a central place and has, in the 20th century, often been overused. 'Nationalism' as an ideology espoused by groups whose members share the same language or culture provides researchers with a suitable theoretical framework for understanding and elaborating the functions and aims of the nation. It is important to note that, in this article as well as in other Estonian-language academic publications – at least for the last decades – *rahvus* and *rahvuslus* [respectively, 'nation'