

# PĒTERIS VASKS (1946)

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Latvian Radio Choir Sinfonietta Riga Ilze Reine, organ (3)

Sigvards Kļava, conductor

Pēteris Vasks (1946), whose mission has always been to talk about higher values – humanity, conscience, God, nature, eternity, the Latvian spirit – has put his name on the map of musical world as the most recognized Latvian composer. His music is being performed across the globe; he provides sanctuary from the contemporary cycle of capitalism and confirms the existence of the vertical spiritual axis that defies storming, breathless materialism. The world of Vasks preaches, serves the divine, brings light and provides solace. Born from suffering, his music expresses the heavy burden of Baltic history but always grows to prevail, to celebrate and to bring the light of hope.

Pēteris Vasks was born in the small Latvian province of Aizpute, the fourth child in a family of a Baptist pastor, during Soviet regime, when men of faith were repressed and persecuted. A pastor's son was considered the lowest of castes at that time. Because of his 'untrustworthy biography' Vasks was not admitted to the Latvian Conservatory. He went to Lithuania and was admitted to Vilnius Conservatory, graduating as a double bass player in 1970. He spent the following year in the Soviet Army, an experience he later recalled as dreadful. In 1960s and 1970s he played double bass with various Lithuanian and Latvian orchestras. Vasks composed his first works early in his life, as a student at Aizpute Music School, but, he did not show his pieces to anyone – humbled by the deeply personal art of composition and communication through music. Humility, it seems, has remained characteristic of Pēteris Vasks. He acquired a composer's diploma from the Latvian Conservatory as his second degree in 1978.

The creative path of Vasks began with experimental labyrinths of sound, challenged the acoustic capabilities of instruments, and moved on towards silence and spiritual reflection. Key intonations, inspired by folk music, hymns and voices of nature intertwine in his diverse works. Expression is amongst the most significant characteristics of Vasks' music – bursting with enormous spiritual intensity from the most painful depths of soul, and transforming into a source of soothing, unconditional love. Perhaps, this is the definitive signature of Vasks' art – the ability to transform something deeply personal into a metaphysical message of universal proportions that appeals to people all over the world.

Although in his memoirs the composer remarks upon the isolation and loneliness of a creative personality, Vasks is actively engaged in Latvian musical life. He radiates cheerfulness, *joie de vivre* and interest in current events. Without exaggeration, Vasks can be named amongst the greatest bringers of light in Latvia, a fierce patriot at heart, capable of the grandest of gestures. In 2011 the Pēteris Vasks Fund was established under his aegis, nurturing Latvian music and its development; each summer at Mežotne Palace on a scenic riverside approximately 70 kilometres from Riga a chamber music festival titled *An Invitation From Pēteris Vasks: Summer in Mežotne* takes place. Vasks has always supported his colleagues and often attends premieres of Latvian contemporary music in Riga. Many Latvian composers have studied composition with him at Emīls Dārziņš Secondary Music School. They recall his fatherly care, inspiring personality and selfless goal to pass his knowledge to the younger generations. His own creative legacy is maintained by one of the most renowned music publishing houses – Schott Music International.

Although Pēteris Vasks became famous for instrumental works, the choir as the central axis of Latvian music culture has been ever-present in his art. As with Mozart, whose writing seems deceptively simple but requires a high level of performance mastery, Vasks' choral music features endless lines, long notes and complex intonations that demand the finest emotional vibrations and titanic vocal endurance. He created his first choral works in 1960s – at the age of 16 he composed *Prayer* for mixed choir; and as a student he wrote the *Small Concerto for Voices, Conductor and Composer* (1976), which he premiered with the Choir of Musicologists and Composers of the Latvian Conservatory. The latter bordered on provocation – a performance theatre of contemporary music. His dramatic ballades (*Zīles ziņa, Litene, Zemgale*) are now undisputed classics of Latvian choral music, but the works of his later years centre around prayer, food for the seekers of solace. Pēteris Vasks, the Latvian Radio Choir and its conductor Sigvards Kļava enjoy a long-standing and creatively successful



collaboration that has resulted in many new works. The composer has on several occasions remarked how lucky he feels to be able to work with such exceptional interpreters of his art. All of the works contained on this CD were composed between 2011 and 2016.

**Da pacem, Domine** (2016) was performed for the first time at Riga Cathedral by the Latvian Radio Choir and Sinfonietta Rīga under the leadership of Sigvards Kļava as part of Pēteris Vasks' 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary programme, the concept of which focused on the holy service. "I have always seen prayer as great spiritual power in tight focus. When a person is so focused, the call will not remain unanswered. To me prayer is always active. When I composed *Da pacem, Domine*, it was a cry of desperation for our times, a prayer for our mad world. I believe that music strengthens our faith, love and soul."

Mein Herr und mein Gott (2016) was premiered at the annual International Sacred Music Festival, organized by the State Choir 'Latvija' and conductor Māris Sirmais. The piece is based on the daily prayer of Swiss hermit and mystic Brother Klaus (real name Nicholas of Flüe, 1417–1487). The composer encountered the aforementioned prayer at a Christian meditation retreat near the coast of the Baltic Sea. Vasks was deeply moved by its poetry and overcome by desire to set it to music. Brother Klaus is the only Swiss person canonized by the Catholic Church. Working in politics for the first half of his life, he experienced a deep spiritual crisis at the age of 50 and spent the following 20 years as a hermit, away from the worldly life and society, dedicating himself to prayer and meditation. This year the world celebrates his 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**Laudate Dominum** (2016) was premiered at Riga Cathedral by organist Tālivaldis Deksnis with the State Choir 'Latvija' under the baton of Māris Sirmais. A version for choir and symphonic orchestra was adapted shortly after. "I conceived this work in autumn of 2015. We visited our friends in California, I sat down at the piano and had

a musical idea. With no sheet music available, I sketched five lines on white paper and wrote my idea down. The only choral lyrics in this piece are *Laudate Dominum*. For me the highest form of love is expressed very quietly, as if by inner voice. The transparent choral texture alternates with majestic organ episodes, merging in the final D major section on a quadruple *Forte*."

The prayer *Lord, open our eyes* (2011) to texts by Mother Teresa was premiered in the concert programme envisaged by Sigvards Kļava entitled *Prayers of Mother Teresa*. The concert took place at Riga Cathedral during the year's darkest season as a musical service before advent, built around the work of Pēteris Vasks with other contemporary pieces by Latvian composers to texts by Mother Teresa. Vasks: "Mother Teresa, small and fragile, embodies phenomenal spiritual power and energy. She is an endless source of inspiration to me, as well as an example of true Christian love, speaking through actions, not mere words."

The other work of Pēteris Vasks with texts by Mother Teresa *The Fruit of Silence* (2013) was written to a request from the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival. Its first version for choir *a cappella* was premiered at the Schleswig-Holstein Festival by the Festival Choir under the leadership of Choir Academy Director Rolf Beck on August 18, 2013. Subsequently, the composer adapted a version for choir and piano, as well as a version for choir and string orchestra, included on this CD. The composer characterizes this work as a very quiet meditation on the symbol of a path: "This path has five signposts – prayer, faith, love, service and peace. I want this composition to serve as a reminder that such a path exists."

Lauma Malnace

The Latvian Radio Choir (LRC) ranks among the top professional chamber choirs in Europe and its refined taste for musical material, fineness of expression and vocal of unbelievably immense compass have charted it as a noted brand on the world map. Since 1992, LRC has two conductors – Sigvards Kļava, Music Director and Principal Conductor; and Kaspars Putniņš.

The repertoire of LRC ranges from the Renaissance music to the most sophisticated scores by modern composers; and it could be described as a sound laboratory – the singers explore their skills by turning to the mysteries of traditional singing, as well as to the art of quartertone and overtone singing and other sound production techniques. The choir has established a new understanding of the possibilities of a human voice; one could also say that the choir is the creator of a new choral paradigm: every singer is a distinct individual with his or her own vocal signature and roles in performances. The expertise of singers has made LRC a remarkably flexible ensemble able to deal with vocal and instrumental music, as well as with opera performances, multi-media projects, intimate a capella talks, and theatrical shows where singers can express themselves as soloists and talented actors.

The choir has participated in the top international musical forums in Salzburg and Montpellier, the Baltic Sea Festival, Klangspuren Festival, La Musica, Ultima, the Venice Biennale, White Light Festival USA, Soundstreams in Canada; and performed in renowned concert halls such as the Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam, Konzerthaus in Berlin, and Cité de la Musique in Paris, Lincoln Center in New York and Dresden Frauenkirche. LRC has successfully worked with many outstanding guest conductors, including Riccardo Muti, Heinz Holliger, Lars Ulrik Mortensen, Stephen Layton, Tõnu Kaljuste, James Wood, and Esa-Pekka Salonen, among others. The Latvian Radio Choir records on a regular basis. Every season, three or four new CDs appear in collaboration with such labels as Hyperion Records, BIS, GB Records, Ondine, and Naïve.

www.radiokoris.lv



Since the foundation of the orchestra in 2006, Normunds Šnē is the Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of **Sinfonietta Rīga**. The chamber orchestra regularly enjoys collaborating with guest conductors – a number of various programmes have been staged in cooperation with Paavo and Kristjan Järvi, Heinz Holliger, John Storgårds, Christoph Poppen, Juha Kangas, Tõnu Kaljuste and Ariel Zuckermann.

Brilliant soloists have performed together with Sinfonietta Rīga: Monica Groop, Inga Kalna and Olga Pasichnyk (Pasiecznik); as well as pianists Kristian Bezuidenhout, Diana Ketler and Alexander Toradze, the most prominent Latvian organist Iveta Apkalna, violinists Kolja Blacher, Pekka Kuusisto, Isabelle Faust, Thomas Gould, Alina Pogostkina, Baiba Skride, Augustin Dumay and Alexander Janiczek, violist Maxim Rysanov, cellist Sol Gabetta, trombone soloist Christian Lindberg, jazz drummer Peter Erskine, accordionist Ksenija Sidorova, flutist Patrick Gallois, clarinetist Emil Jonason and the experts of the early music Andrew Lawrence-King and Enrico Onofri. The orchestra is working together with the Latvian Radio Choir and its conductor Sigvards Kļava. Together, they have annually staged several musical programmes including the first performances of Latvian sacred music.

Sinfonietta Rīga has toured Paris, the Herkulessaal in Munich and the Lincoln Center New York; the orchestra has performed at the Alte Oper in Frankfurt, The Laeiszhalle in Hamburg and at the Philharmonic Halls in Kiev and St Petersburg.

The contribution of the Chamber Orchestra Sinfonietta Rīga to the recording of the album Adam's Lament by Estonian composer Arvo Pärt (ECM) has won them a Grammy Award; but the rest of the eight recorded albums have been released by the devoted partners of Sinfonietta Rīga: Wergo, Ondine, Edition Records and Challenge Records. Three times the orchestra has been awarded the highest prize of its country for achievement in culture and music – The Grand Music Award.

www.sinfoniettariga.lv

**Sigvards Kļava** is one of the most outstanding Latvian conductors, also a professor of conducting and producer, music director of the Latvian Radio Choir since 1992. As a result of Sigvards Kļava's steady efforts, the Latvian Radio Choir has become an internationally recognized, vocally distinctive collective, where each singer possesses a creative individuality. Under Sigvards' guidance, the choir has recorded a number of choral works by little known or completely forgotten composers of the past, as well as formed a friendly collaboration with a number of notable Latvian composers. Sigvards Kļava is a professor at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. Kļava is a multiple winner of the Latvian Grand Music Award. He has performed at the Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw of Amsterdam, Berliner Konzerthaus and Philharmonie, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, Berwaldhallen in Stockholm, Dresdner Frauenkirche as well as in the New York Lincoln Centre.



## **LYRICS**

## 1. Da pacem, Domine

Da pacem, Domine, in diebus nostris quia non est alius qui pugnet pro nobis, nisi tu Deus noster. Give peace, O Lord, in our time Because there is no-one else Who will fight for us If not you our God.

Text: Latin hymn

#### 2. Mein Herr und mein Gott

Mein Herr und mein Gott, nimm alles von mir, was mich hindert zu Dir.

Mein Herr und mein Gott, gib alles mir, was mich fördert zu Dir.

Mein Herr und mein Gott, nimm mich mir und gib mich ganz zu eigen Dir. My Lord and my God, take from me everything that distances me from you.

My Lord and my God, give me everything that brings me closer to you.

My Lord and my God, detach me from myself to give my all to you.

Text: Niklaus von Flüe (1417-1487)

#### 3. Laudate Dominum

Laudate Dominum.

Alelulia.

# 4. Prayer (Lord, open our eyes)

Lord, open our eyes that we may see you in our brothers and sisters.

Lord, open our ears that we may hear the cries of the hungry, the cold, the frightened, the oppressed.

Lord, open our hearts that we may love each other as you love us. Renew in us your spirit. Lord, free us and make us one. Amen.

Text: After Mother Teresa, adapted and published by Kathryn Spink

## 5. The Fruit of Silence

The fruit of silence is prayer The fruit of prayer is faith The fruit of faith is love The fruit of love is service The fruit of service is peace.

Text: Mother Teresa



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# [67:57] • English notes and lyrics enclosed

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