

Eino Tubin

# EDUARD TUBIN

*A Biography*

RAHVUSVAHELINE EDUARD TUBINA ÜHING  
INTERNATIONAL EDUARD TUBIN SOCIETY



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A stylized, handwritten signature of Eino Tubin in black ink, written over the bottom right of the main title.

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TALLINN

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Sources for photos and archive items

Eino Tubin's private collection  
Estonian Theatre and Music Museum  
Estonian Maritime Museum  
Digital archive Digar  
Archive of National Opera Estonia  
Archive of Vanemuine Theatre  
Eduard Tubin Museum

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ISBN 978-9949-81-825-9

[www.tubinsociety.com](http://www.tubinsociety.com)

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## Preface

After Eduard Tubin's centenary in 2005, I started to draft a biography of my father. Showing it to the Swedish Royal Music Academy, I was commissioned to write a biographical text for a series of portraits of Swedish composers. Actually, the Academy was already looking for somebody who could do it. Since I have no musical education, the Academy asked PhD. Tobias Lund to add descriptions of my father's most important works. I enjoyed excellent cooperation with Lund as well as with my editor, professor Thomas Anderberg. "Svenska tonsättare, Eduard Tubin" was printed in 2011 by Atlantis.

I then translated the book into Estonian and started looking for an editor and a publisher. Professor Urve Lippus, a member of the board of the Tubin Society, took an interest. She cleaned up my old-fashioned Estonian, checked all dates and added many facts. Since Tubin's works do not need descriptions for an Estonian audience, Lund's texts were replaced mostly with contemporary reviews. However, I quoted him liberally, especially when his opinion differs from the conventional view in Estonia. The book was printed in 2015 as "Ballaad, Eduard Tubina lugu" (Ballade, The Story of Eduard Tubin) by the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum with publisher SE&JS.

Sadly, both my mentors passed away soon after completing their work; Thomas Anderberg of a brain tumour while Urve Lippus fell victim to a domestic accident.

The present text is mostly adapted from “Ballaad”, while historical facts meant for a foreign audience are taken from previous versions. Beside prefaces in English to the Collected Works, occasional Yearbooks from the Tubin Society, CD booklets and a few reviews, all sources are in either Estonian or Swedish. The first chairman of the Society, Vardo Rumessen (1943–2015), collected and commented all father’s letters in two volumes, his articles and lectures in “Rändavate vete ääres” (At the wandering waters) and his conversations and interviews in “Vestlused Tubinaga” (Conversations with Tubin). Rumessen also compiled the catalogue “The Works of Eduard Tubin, ETW” and a large picture album with a valuable timeline for the centenary, “Tubin and His Time”. Quotes from Herbert Connor’s groundbreaking article in *Svensk Tidskrift för Musikforskning* 1978 are frequently used (Connor). Quotes from CD booklets carry the company record number and from Collected Works the volume number.

Most photos can be found at the Theatre and Music Museum. The text and most quotes are translated by myself. Any errors and inconsistencies are my own fault.

*Eino Tubin*

## Chapter I. **Prélude**

Once, my father took us to a Western named “The Professionals”. He liked the title and the charismatic characters that Burt Lancaster brought to the screen. Indeed, it was about some professional gunfighters, making short work of Mexican bandits but at the same time keeping a strong integrity. That’s how Eduard Tubin wanted to see himself, as the man who knew his trade and who would stick to his ideals. He refused to ask for favours or even to promote his own works.

There were fellow professionals in the music world, whose example to follow. With his revered teacher Heino Eller he had studied Palestrina and Bach. In later life he was ever more impressed with Joseph Haydn and the subtle humour with which the prolific master could vary his themes. Of 20<sup>th</sup> century composers, he mostly liked Stravinsky and Bartók. On the other hand, he was quite cold to Shostakovich, to whom he was sometimes compared by critics. On the wall he had a small picture of Mozart and on his piano a signed portrait of Prokofiev, cut from a concert poster when he visited Estonia in 1934.

A sign of the true professional is the ability to let the brain rest and charge its batteries. Eduard Tubin’s interests and hobbies were very varied. He built model airplanes; he was interested in photography and film making, good cooking, chess and art. He read a lot, often in the original Swedish, Estonian, Russian, German or English. He enjoyed walking in nature, picking mushrooms, talking to

animals and feeding birds. He had a strong sense of humour, was a calm person and never raised his voice. Like most Estonians, he was not keen on showing his feelings. He preferred to let them loose in his music.

Regarding Eduard Tubin's life and work, two questions emerge, which can be endlessly debated. Was he an Estonian or a Swedish composer? Did he write "pure" music or does it contain hidden programs?

Some Estonians and Swedes have put much weight on the nationality question. In fact the issue is irrelevant. The music writer Herbert Connor, himself a war refugee, offered a sympathetic alternative in his article from 1978: *Eduard Tubin: Estonian, Swede, Cosmopolitan*. Perhaps both Estonia and Sweden were too small for him, most royalties always came from abroad.

What Sweden could offer him, beside the basic condition of being a free country ruled by law, was the position of "archive worker" that enabled him to devote a sizable part of his working time to his own music. With time, Eduard and Erika Tubin became as well integrated as possible for people who have to change countries at a mature age. They did not live in a bygone world or isolate themselves from local life. They had an active interest in Swedish cultural life and politics, read the morning papers and voted at every election. Tubin enjoyed good relations with his Swedish colleagues, took a keen interest in their work and went regularly to the activities of the Composers' Union. When at the end of his life he got some prestigious awards and was elected member of the Swedish Royal Music Academy, he deeply appreciated it. In fact, half of his entire life and two thirds of his creative life were spent in Sweden. One could well compare this with Handel, who in a similar way divided his time between Germany and England and is claimed as "our" composer in both countries. But Handel was of course not a refugee.

Certainly he didn't turn his back on Estonia. He frequently used Estonian folk tunes in his works; often in unexpected places. His greatest loss in the beginning was the contact with fellow musicians, who had remained behind. For more than ten years all relations were broken; during Stalin's time even correspondence was banned. He deliberately took the risks involved with visiting occupied Estonia in 1961, such as being called a traitor by right-wingers, for the urgent needs of seeing old colleagues and to encourage and inspire a younger generation of composers isolated behind the Iron Curtain.

Neither is there a simple answer to the question of programmatic content in his music. His attitude changed with time. At school he liked to tell tales in connection with music. His Symphony No. 2 *Legendary* comes to mind, but is certainly an exception. The *Ballade on a Theme by Mart Saar* written during the last months of the war could well be compared to Chopin's most passionate pieces, reflecting the Polish uprising of 1830. He liked Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" and Respighi's Roman triptych. In Rome he made a film of the fountains that inspired Respighi. Tubin had worked as a film musician and written hours of incidental music to plays, gaining knowledge how music can enhance the emotional impact of a story. But is it possible to describe something only by music? With time he became increasingly critical, when eager compatriots tried to find programmatic content in his works. In later life he consistently argued that it is not possible to describe pictures, places or even feelings with music and that all such efforts were misguided. He claimed that his music was "chemically free" from programs.

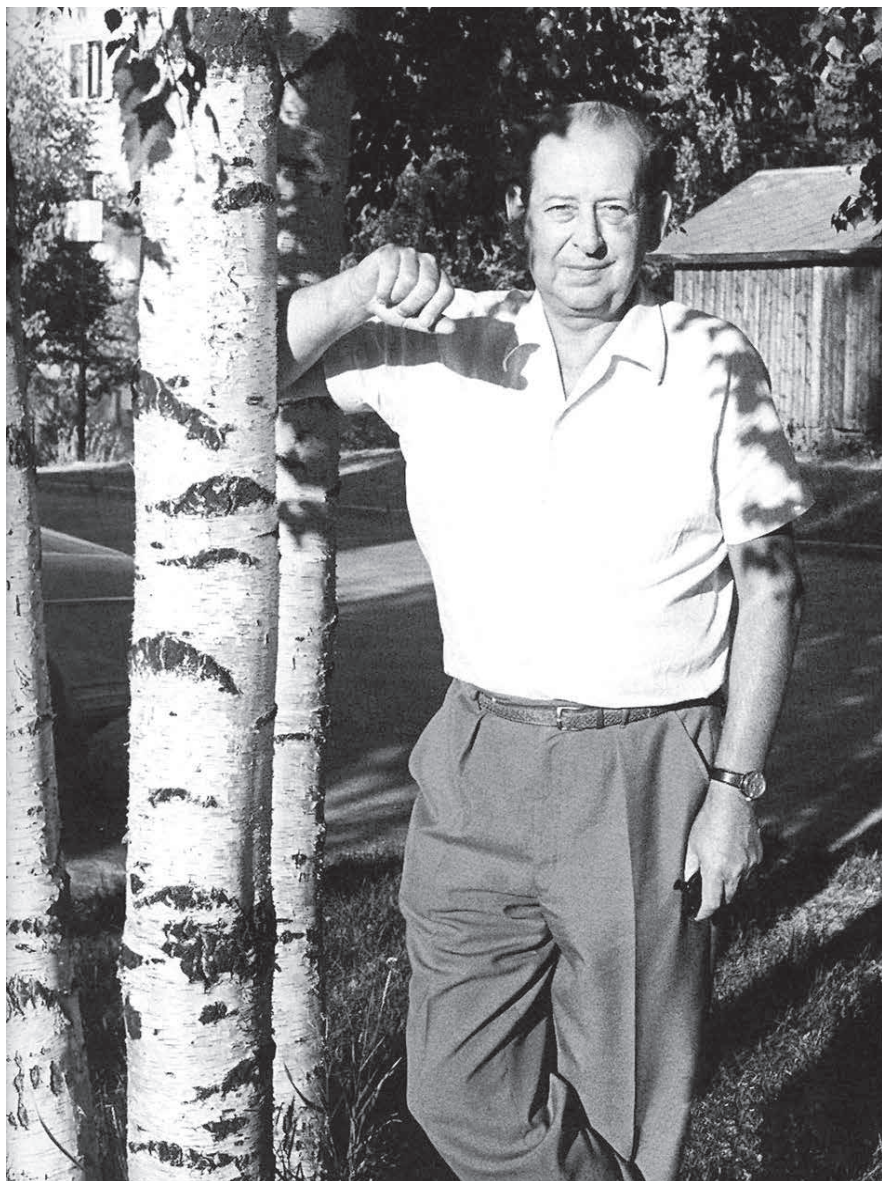
But as with all great art, the artist's personal feelings, hopes and disappointments are important factors giving life and tension to his creation. However, it would be wrong to presume that his experiences in life and his music went on parallel tracks. He worked methodically with certain ideas and elements for a time; then turned to others. That's why he could write his "Lyrical" symphony during the worst

time of the Second World War and the dark and enigmatic *Symphony No. 8* during a time when most things in his life had changed for the better. One should also not forget that music is bound to produce different sentiments in different people and that perceptions of music vary between countries. If some Estonians want to see *Music for Strings* as anguished, written in the aftermath of his first post-war visit to Estonia, Swedes view it as an easily understandable, melodious, post-romantic piece.

In fact, Estonians and Swedes formed very different pictures of the composer and person Eduard Tubin. The Estonians knew all his early works, he was an important public person and many tried to read hidden messages in all his oeuvre. In Sweden, only his later orchestral works were played and he was seen as a shy and stoic person. When interest for his music took off during his last years, his health was declining.

One of Eduard Tubin's closest friends in Sweden was the musician and publicist Harri Kiisk, with whom he discussed many of his works. Kiisk used this material for articles in the exile-Estonian paper "Teataja" and later for booklets for the Swedish record firm BIS. The first lengthy and comprehensive Swedish article was written by Herbert Connor, based on interviews with the composer. Father's own thoughts are also found in radio and newspaper interviews and in letters to his colleagues. But everything should not be taken at face value; he knew the art of teasing interviewers by saying something wholly unexpected.

What I regret most in my life as a writer is missing the opportunity to interview my parents when I had a chance. Now, thanks to the work of others, notably Vardo Rumessen, a wealth of biographical material has been published, not least items that I was too short-sighted or embarrassed to ask about. I would like to connect this material with what I remember to try to achieve a full picture.



*Eduard Tubin near his home  
in Hammarbyhöjden,  
Stockholm, around 1965.*

## Chapter 2. Swineherd with a flute

Eduard Tubin grew up in the countryside. In various biographies his birthplace has been noted as Torila, Kokora or Kallaste, which actually overlap – he was born in the Pärsikivi farmhouse in the village of Torila, which then belonged to the municipality of Kokora. Nowadays the place is situated in the small lakeside town of Kallaste in Tartumaa County. The farmstead of Pärsikivi collapsed long ago and the memorial stone from 1990 stands on the lawn of a concrete villa. Estonia then belonged to the Russian empire.

He was born on 18 June 1905 as the third and last child of Joosep Tubin (1862–1929) and Sohvi (Sophie) Tehvan (1864–1946). They married in 1887 and their first child died as an infant. The second, Johannes, became a schoolteacher and died of tuberculosis in 1912 at the age of 22. Tubin is a rare Estonian family name from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was formerly spelled Tubbin. The dialectal noun is borrowed from Russian and means bludgeon. Torila is situated at the Peipus lake and had a mixed population of ethnic Estonians and Russians. While the Estonians were Lutherans and belonged to the nearby parish of Kodavere, most Russians were “old believers”. The old believers fled persecution in Russia after a 17<sup>th</sup> century reform of the Orthodox church and settled on the west bank of Peipus, in what was then Swedish territory. Their small wooden chapels are still seen at the main street running parallel to the shore.

Peipus is the fifth largest sweet-water lake of Europe and forms the major part of the Estonian-Russian border. As many large inland

lakes, it can be quite treacherous and storms can appear suddenly. In winter it freezes. The people living on the shore were mostly fishermen, in winter drilling holes in the ice to get their catch.

In Torila, Joosep worked as fisherman and tailor. When Eduard was 3 years old, the family moved inland to a small place named Naelavere near Alatskivi, where Johannes had become schoolteacher. The family rented a part of the village schoolhouse and started to care for the school farm. The nearest centre was Alatskivi, with a grand manor built by the von Nolcken family towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The classes in the tiny village school were all held in the same room. When Johannes died, the family stayed on, since the new schoolteacher was not interested in farming. A memorial plaque was attached to the building in 1990.

Little is known about the parents. It was said that Joosep was a diligent and hardworking man, whose only hobby was music. He attended many song festivals and played brass instruments in the village orchestra. In his youth he even sent a polka for publishing in a paper that asked for musical contributions. Sohvi was member of the church choir and sang folk songs when working at home. The children inherited their interest for music. The older Johannes played violin and conducted the village orchestra.

Eduard learned to read and write already before school. After two years at his brother's village school, he joined the Torila County Elementary School, which incidentally was just a stone's throw from his birthplace. Nowadays the building is a home for elderly people. Although a car-borne visitor might regard all these places – Naelavere, Alatskivi, Torila and Kallaste – as rather close to each other, the distances were then big enough for the children of the Elementary School to be boarded at the schoolhouse, visiting their homes only on weekends. Eduard also walked back home once a week. On Sunday night the fathers took turns to drive them back by horse carriage together with food supplies for a week.

When Eduard Tubin remembered his youth, he often dwelt on the animals. He loved the birds, squirrels, foxes, cats, dogs and pigs, but mostly the horses, the loyal work companions of the farm. He took part in all kinds of farm work. In summer his task was herding the pigs of the village. He inherited a piccolo flute and some scores from his brother Johannes. His father showed him the basics in reading scores. At age nine he could join the Koosa orchestra, named after a neighbouring village, where his father played trumpet, later trombone and sometimes also tuba. Two uncles also played in the orchestra. Tubin wrote:

*It's perhaps peculiar that I always carried my flute and scores with me when 'I worked' looking after the pigs (which lasted from my 7<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> year). I had dance tunes, even violin concertos that I borrowed from the violinists in the orchestra. The pigs were grazing and the swineherd played technical passages by Viotti, Rode and other such masters as accompaniment...*

When his fingers grew, Eduard changed to a normal flute. The Koosa orchestra was not a brass band, more like a miniature symphony orchestra: it had violins, viola, double-bass, clarinets, flute, trombone and sometime additional instruments. The orchestra played overtures to operettas like *Zampa* and *The Gipsy Baron*, a pot-pourri from the opera *Oberon* and certainly marches, waltzes, polkas or other dance tunes. It played in the club houses of Koosa and other villages, to accompany some theatre performance or for village feasts. In a barn near Alatskivi the orchestra played first to strike the mood, then in the middle of the program and at last to the dance, which could last until 2–3 in the morning. Then father and son walked back in the night. Sometimes the orchestra also played at funerals in the Alatskivi cemetery. In Tubin's own words (Letters II):

*In summer we marched from Naelavere to Koosa and back at about 3 o'clock, in winter we went by horse and carriage.*

*There were parties everywhere, nearly every Sunday night, but mainly in Koosa. When I started school in Tartu, I couldn't of course play at the winter parties. When the orchestra took a pause, round dances and songs broke out.*

When Eduard was 13, his father sold a calf at the market in Tartu and bought him an old table piano. Father Joosep could only tap a simple piece on the piano, so Eduard had to learn to play on his own. He started practicing after a popular book of hymns by Punschel. During the summer breaks he accompanied visiting and village fiddlers, playing simpler sonatas by Handel, Corelli and Tartini or pieces popular at the time.

The pupils at the Elementary School were first taught in Russian, mother language of many of the pupils living on the Peipus shore. The school orchestra with balalaikas, mandolins and domras played mostly Russian folk tunes. Eduard was the only flutist. School mates remembered him sitting at an open window practicing flute, when others kicked football. Once he interrupted a rehearsal, saying that the instruments were out of tune. The music teacher thought he was joking and asked the boy to tune them himself. Everybody was surprised when he succeeded. In the future all tuning was left to him. He became interested in chess problems in a newspaper and the headmaster taught him the rules. This became a life-long interest; every day he studied chess moves by himself. Tubin also liked drawing at school, which might have led to his future interest in art and his remarkable calligraphy writing music scores. He was an avid reader and school mates remembered him as a good storyteller.

Eduard went to confirmation class at the nearby church of Kodavere, where the pupils also went to sing. With some others, he once sneaked into the church at night to light the candles and to try to play the organ. He managed to surprise the vicar, who once played a song and distributed the words. Eduard remembered the

tune, made a choir arrangement and taught it secretly to the other pupils. When the vicar brought out the song next time, the boys could already sing the voice parts.

A neighbour in Naelavere was Juhan Liiv, one of the foremost Estonian poets of the time, writing about nature and giving words to the yearning of the Estonian people for freedom. Tubin saw his funeral procession as a child, and later used several of his lyrics in songs. The first collection of Tubin memorabilia started at the little Liiv museum, near the old schoolhouse.

These were tumultuous times for Estonia. The country had not experienced freedom since Viking times. It suffered under serfdom for seven centuries, which is also the theme of a song by Mart Saar which Tubin later turned into his passionate *Ballade* for piano. Successive conquerors came and went: Danes, Poles, Germans and Swedes. After the great Nordic wars of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Peter the Great incorporated Estonia into the Russian empire. The administration, trade and large estates remained in the hands of ethnic Germans, who also dominated the arts and higher education.

An Estonian national awakening started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – like in Finland and Norway – when writers, poets, philologists and musicians founded a distinct national culture on what was basically a rural oral tradition, neglected in the shadow of the culture of the upper and mercantile classes. Fortunately they could build on a very high degree of literacy, thanks to the Lutheran church which took as its task to give countryside people a basic education. The new popular movement focused on folk songs, traditions, revival of ancient sagas and music making.

The cornucopia of Estonian folk tunes is said to be the largest in the world, next to the Irish. A systematic collection started around 1900 when The Estonian Students' League sent schoolteachers and students able to write music scores to the countryside to catch the remains of a fading oral tradition. It was then also possible to record

on phonograph rolls. When Eduard Tubin later rummaged through the Estonian Folklore Archive in search of folk tunes to his ballet “Kratt”, he even found a tune written down by his own father. Some time earlier he had been asked to write down songs from old phonograph rolls for the archive. For each he was paid 5 crowns, which was then good money. Tubin described it as very difficult work. The wax rolls could not be played more than 5 or 6 times before the squeaky sound completely disappeared. Only later did it become possible to transfer the sound to longer lasting gramophone records.

The great song festivals, in which choirs and bands from all over Estonia took part, carried the momentum of the national revival, and do so until this day. Tubin has himself mentioned the first National Song Festival in 1869 as the starting point of Estonian classical music. When Estonia managed to re-establish its independence from the collapsing Soviet Union in 1991, it was called the “singing revolution”. The massive Song Festival in 1990, where one of four inhabitants personally took part, showed to the world that the Estonians were united.

When the uprising of 1905 had been squashed, the main threat to the newly founded Estonian culture came from imperial Russia. Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin launched a program of Russification in the Baltic provinces as well as in Finland. Even public speeches in Estonian were forbidden for a time.

When the First World War broke out, a great number of Estonians were mobilized to the Tsarist Russian army. After the October Revolution, the Russian front broke and the soldiers streamed back, followed by German forces of occupation. In the short interval between occupiers, leading Estonian politicians managed to declare independence, on 24 February 1918. After the European armistice, the Germans reluctantly withdrew – still dreaming of making the Baltic countries a German dependency. In a desperate fight the

ragtag Estonian army, supported by Finland and the British Royal Navy, managed to beat back first the advancing Bolsheviks and then a German *Freikorps*.

Eduard Tubin was too young to take personal part in the wars. Alatskivi came twice under Bolshevik control, while the more benign German occupation lasted less than a year. He remembered vividly how Russian forces retreated over the frozen Peipus Lake. The ground was strewn with discarded cartridges, which the school-boys eagerly collected. A military band threw all their instruments into the ditch. Horses who couldn't move were shot on the spot. Once some Russian troopers expropriated the family horse and once a retreating soldier took aim with his rifle on young Eduard walking home from school. If he hadn't been prevented by a comrade, the career of the future composer would have been stopped there and then.

Only on 16 January 1919 was Alatskivi liberated by Estonian forces. When a peace treaty was signed in Tartu in 1920, Estonia became an internationally recognized independent country. The estates and manors of German barons were confiscated. The castle in Alatskivi, inspired by Scottish Balmoral and now the venue of the Tubin museum, was turned into a central primary school when village schools were closed down. It has once been the most expensive castle project in all of Estonia.

A liberal constitution was adopted, giving cultural autonomy to minorities. But the power of the state in the constitution was too soft. To stop a right-wing movement that gained momentum in the 1930s, President Voldemar Päts suspended parliamentary democracy and ruled by decree.

Tartu was then still the cultural capitol of Estonia. It is one of the oldest university towns in the Nordic region – the Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus had established the Tartu University in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The *Vanemuine* theatre and opera house opened in 1906.

It was the first of its kind, preceding by seven years the better known *Estonia* opera and concert building in the capitol Tallinn, which was built after a national collection. In the autumn of 1920, the first higher music schools were simultaneously opened in Tartu and Tallinn.

The same year, at the age of 15, Tubin went to Tartu to study – to the Teachers' College. His parents had decided that he should follow in the footpath of his deceased older brother and become a school-teacher; a solid profession in their eyes. He stayed loyally at the College until graduation in 1926. His grades were rather average, but in pedagogy, psychology, teaching methods, mathematics, Estonian, singing and music he was graded as "good". He already knew Russian from the Elementary School and could now add German and English to his languages.

However, his interest quickly turned to music. In Tartu he heard symphonic music with a full orchestra for the first time. The *Vanemuine* orchestra gave concerts twice a week during the winter season, and had popular garden concerts in summertime. Here he heard the works of Beethoven, Brahms, Sibelius, Tchaikovsky, Scriabin and even his future teacher Heino Eller.

Little Estonia, which now is sending composers, conductors and musicians all over the world, was rather late in joining the musical mainstream of Europe. The song festivals and the proliferation of choirs and village bands certainly awakened interest in music. Still, music was seen mostly as entertainment. Serious classical instrumental music was only launched around the turn of the century when composers Aleksander Läte and Rudolf Tobias started organizing concerts in Tartu. The *Vanemuine* orchestra grew to a peak of 50 members in 1920, but then started losing players, who went for better opportunities in Tallinn. In the 1930s, when Tubin was second conductor, it had shrunk back to the original 18 members. It started to grow again during the Second World War.

The first generation of Estonian composers, who were active at the beginning of the independence, has mostly studied in St. Petersburg before the Revolution and had been imbued with the Russian neo-romanticism of that period. The greatest and most tragic of the early composers was undoubtedly Rudolf Tobias, who moved to Germany in 1908 looking for better opportunities, writing large and powerful works that could not be properly performed during his lifetime. Other skilful composers were Artur Kapp with several large orchestral works, Cyrillus Kreek with choir songs and a great Requiem and Mart Saar, who based his songs and chamber works on folk tunes.

A special place in the history of Estonian music belongs to Heino Eller, teacher and mentor not only to Eduard Tubin but to generations of later Estonian composers. Tubin had heard him conduct his *Dawn*, *Twilight* and *The Night Callings* at Vanemuine summer concerts and found them extraordinary interesting and fresh. Then he found one of Eller's piano preludes printed in a magazine. He explains in a letter for Eller's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday:

*This small, about 20-bar prelude is suddenly, unexpectedly, traversed by such a strong wind that leaves you gasping for breath. Only one burst, but with such power that it lives on inside and stays there after the mournful end of the prelude... Even before I became your student, you gave me a lesson of the strength of inner force in music and showed me the path along which one must walk in order to find the force and to know how to use it.*

To find the force and to know how to use it! Actually, his own work as a composer cannot be described in better terms. It must have been an amazing revelation for a student who had not yet decided to go for a life in music.

The music teacher of the College soon entrusted the conducting

of the students' choir to Tubin. In 1923, he took part in the Song Festival in Tallinn with the College choir and next year led a concert of mixed choirs at Alatskivi castle, at the early age of 19 – his first public appearance as chief conductor.

After a few years in this stimulating environment, Tubin decided to study music. He had already written some small pieces (“a la Viotti & Co”) and one of his violin pieces was performed at a College music evening. The headmaster doubted if he could manage two schools simultaneously but he was encouraged by a teacher who had heard his early violin piece. When Tubin decided to join the Tartu Higher Music School he first chose the organ class. It would of course be useful for a future teacher to learn to play the organ.

Entering the organ class, he also passed the *solfeggio* test with Eller and was invited to learn music theory and harmony. During the Christmas break he surprised Eller by harmonizing a hundred hymns, which earned him a place in the more advanced special harmony class. The organ studies were interrupted by an appendix operation, which meant that he had to rest his belly muscles and could not tread the organ. Organ playing came handy when Tubin graduated from the College and had to work his compulsory three years as a teacher. This he did in the small town of Nõo, 15 minutes by train from Tartu, while continuing his music studies. To earn extra money, he played the organ at local church services. Tubin used to say that he was cured of any interest in religion in the process, since he had to endure all the boring sermons.

Of course Tubin also started conducting the local choir in Nõo, but soon received a better offer. His school mate Alfred Karindi, leader of the choir of the Tartu Male Choir Society, once fell ill and asked Tubin to replace him during a tour. In 1928 Karindi became music teacher at the university and suggested Tubin as the new choir leader. In a few years Tubin brought the choir to the Estonian elite.

Until fleeing Estonia in 1944 he conducted the choir at more than 100 concerts.

After finishing the College, Tubin didn't return to Naelavere as he had done all previous summers. His parents were too old to continue farming and left the work to other people. A few years later Tubin lost his father, while mother Sohvi continued as tenant in the old schoolhouse until the Second World War.



*Inaugurating a memorial stone at Tubin's birthplace.  
From left: Beyhan and Eino Tubin, Vardo Rumessen, 18 June 1990.  
The stone was created by Airike Taniloo-Bogatkina and Endel Taniloo.*

*The Koosa Orchestra.  
Eduard's father Joosep in the middle with trombone,  
in the rear young Eduard with flute.*





*Eduard Tubin as choir leader at Alatskivi  
on 29 June 1924.  
He conducted the combined Alatskivi,  
Savastvere and Koosa mixed choirs.*

## Chapter 3. The young composer

After graduating from Teachers' College in 1926, Tubin spent the summer in the small town Elva together with his schoolmate Eduard Oja. Oja also wanted to study composition, but lacked the theoretical knowledge necessary for studies. All summer Tubin taught him the special harmony and counterpoint, which he had acquired during his music studies in Tartu, so that they could enter Heino Eller's composition class together in the autumn.

Tubin has told that they lived a "wild bachelor life", eating, drinking and partying. They threw sausage skins on the floor and cleaned up with shovel and broom once a week. Black and white films were shown on Sundays in the club house. Oja was a good violinist and they played to accompany silent films to earn money. The musicians had to find the repertoire in film music sheets. A program could consist of a mixture of newsreels and comedies and melodramatic serials that often finished with a cliff-hanger so that the audience would be back for the next instalment. There were three performances the same day and they played for nine hours straight with only short breaks. At night they were exhausted.

The other students in Eller's class were Olav Roots and Karl Leichter. They all later became key figures in Estonian music: Oja as composer, Roots as pianist and conductor and Leichter as musicologist and teacher. Another friend from this time was Alfred Karindi, who was some years ahead of Tubin in his music studies. Karindi became a composer, organist and choir leader. Tubin and Karindi

often played four-handed piano reductions of classical symphonic music together, which was the only way to hear the musical works you wanted before the advent of radio and easily available records. They played all of Beethoven's symphonies, many symphonies by Haydn and Mozart, Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade" and even tried to play Scriabin's Third Symphony. At the Music School, Tubin also met Linda Pirn, a song student. They fell in love and married after graduation.

All students took part together in Eller's lessons. The lessons were in a homely and friendly mood, but Eller was also a strict teacher. Much time was spent on composition technique, counterpoint and how to develop a music idea smoothly. They learned the technique of Bach and Palestrina. In Tubin's own words he learned instrumentation by himself, studying the works of Mahler. New music heard at concerts or on the radio was frequently discussed: Ravel, Stravinsky, Bartók, Prokofiev.

Eller's professionalism suited him well:

*The lessons started about 3–4 o'clock in the afternoon and could sometimes last until 8 at night... I must confess that it was the most profound working time I have ever had in my life. The tasks on which we worked had to be finished without errors; they had to be logical, well considered and polished. All what was muddled, diffuse or somewhat tardy had to be reworked...*

No doubtful part was permitted, the students had to rub it out and write anew, until there was a hole in the score paper from the rubbing. But Eller certainly encouraged experiments. As long as the students worked with full interest, Eller was always helpful. If they couldn't finish, which sometimes happened, he would simply say that "the gunpowder ran out", and leave it at that. He never tried to force a student who didn't have inner conviction to go on.

In 1926, an academic quarrel broke out between the director of the music school August Nieländer and Heino Eller. Tubin said that the spark came when Eller admonished a violin teacher for the sloppy playing of a violin student. The underlying reason was probably that Nieländer wanted the title of professor and Eller didn't think he deserved it. The students all backed Eller and wrote a letter to the minister of education defending Eller. Tubin, Karindi and a female student went to Tallinn to deliver it. They were promptly expelled from school together with some other students who had signed the letter. As a protest, Eller stopped working at the music school and gave his lessons privately at home. Next year the Music School was reorganized and Eller and the expelled students could continue as before.

In the meantime, Tubin had to enrol in the composition class of Artur Kapp in Tallinn as a formality. He didn't want to be drafted to military service, from which students at the top level of the Tallinn Conservatory were exempt. The Tallinn Conservatory was also the only school that issued diplomas for professional musicians; many students from Tartu also took final exams in Tallinn to get this diploma. Tubin dutifully showed up in Tallinn once a month. Kapp knew it was a game but issued the diploma nonetheless, which means that Tubin on paper graduated from both of the higher music schools in Estonia.

In fact the lessons with Eller never finished, even after graduation from his music school. Many years later they still had unofficial meetings, where Eller helped with unsolved problems, giving good advice and discussing details. The sessions were always concluded in the backroom of some inn, where the former student and teacher, now colleagues and fellow composers, had a shot or two of vodka and a schnitzel.

Eduard Tubin was not a prodigy. He knew very well the quality of his student works and cared only for some. Few were performed

and many were lost. Some were stuffed in boxes when he was moving from one flat to another and found in various places long after his death. Nobody knows for instance about the violin piece, which was performed at the Teachers' College and started a discussion whether it would be good for him to go to two schools simultaneously.

The first preserved compositions are some solo songs and piano miniatures. He mostly picked the lyrics of Estonian poets. The first work performed in public was probably *Grey Song*, on the program of a *Vanemuine* concert in 1926. Many of the first songs were dedicated to Linda Pirn, who premiered two of Tubin's best known early works: *Autumn Sun* and *Red Apple Blossom* to lyrics by Juhan Liiv.

After moving to Nõo, Tubin started composing in earnest. Now he had more experience and a better theoretical foundation. Among the works written in Nõo is the solo song *Dreng's Song on a Glacier* to lyrics by the Danish poet Johannes Vilhelm Jensen, later a Nobel laureate. One of his novels, *Den lange rejse*, had been translated to Estonian and left a deep impression on young Tubin, conveying harsh images of the ice age and yearnings for distant lands. In 1937 he added the original Danish lyrics and offered it to the music publisher Wilhelm Hansen. It was his first attempt to find a foreign publisher for his works. However, it was refused. But Wilhelm Hansen came back, if nearly half a century later. Soon after the composer's death, the daughter of the famous Danish publisher signed a general contract for all of Tubin's unpublished works.

From the same period is one of his greatest hits, *The Shepherd's Song*, a brief and merry folk tune in a sophisticated choir arrangement. It was first performed by the Tartu Male Choir at a *Vanemuine* concert conducted by the composer himself. The lyrics, also folk poetry, tell nonsensically of a shepherd, actually a girl, who has climbed a tree and taken the cuckoo's chicks. The cuckoo is pleading

and promising to make three pairs of shoes: one from wood, one from bone and one from stone – the latter for going to church. Tubin said that the song was written on the occasion of a Finnish choir visiting Tartu. In 1933 it received an award as the best choir song and was the first of his works to get printed.

His output for piano varied greatly, from the exquisite *Two Preludes* to his first large-scale work, the *Piano Sonata No. 1*. It is in four movements and lasts some 45 minutes. Actually, before finishing, the composer began to doubt if the last three movements were good enough and didn't take the trouble to write a clean score. The first movement, *Sonata-Allegro*, was played by himself on a concert in 1928 dedicated to the centenary of his Teachers' College. He held it as a self-contained work and sold it as such to the Cultural Endowment Fund for publishing. The remaining three movements were lost and found only after the composer's death in various places in Estonia. The first three movements were recorded by Vardo Rumessen for BIS' album "The Complete Piano Music/ Eduard Tubin" (1988). The fourth movement was found later. The Sonata was for the first time played in its entirety by Marko Martin at the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum in 2012, 30 years after the composer's death. After the performance, the musicologist Mart Humal called it the most virtuoso work in all of Estonian piano music.

The Swedish musicologist Tobias Lund writes about the first movement:

*The Sonata-Allegro is a stylish movement that works well as an independent piece. Both powers that meet in the first bars create an emotional richness of nuances and a dynamic that propels the music between quarrel, tenderness and visionary high points.*

Although Tubin sold it to the Cultural Endowment Fund, it

was never printed. The Fund bought various works, but managed only to print smaller pieces, which were easy to sell. Throughout his whole life, Tubin had problems with the copying, printing and distribution of his works – he had a regular publisher only for a few early years in Sweden. Later the Swedish copyright bureau (STIM) made copies on demand from scores written in ink on onionskin paper. In pre-war Estonia the only way of copying was writing the entire score once more by hand.

Soon Tubin finished his first orchestral work, *Estonian Folk Dances*. Probably it was meant as incidental music for a children's play; it's an unpretentious and straightforward arrangement of three folk dances. Tubin's diploma work was the *Piano Quartet in C-sharp minor*, performed at the students' final concert in 1930. When the only score was lost from his coat pocket during a choir rehearsal, he amazed his fellow students by writing a new from memory.

The piano quartet is a more rare music form than the string quartet. Still there are several, especially from the romantic period. Beethoven, Brahms and Mendelssohn have each written three quartets for piano, violin, viola and cello. Tubin's Piano Quartet is in one movement, beginning with a chaconne – a formal old dance that became one of Tubin's favourites, used frequently in both big and small works. From a simple theme, variations emerge. Leo Normet gives the following characterization (BIS CD-574):

*The process gathers momentum by relentlessly straining upwards, interrupted in occasion by lyrical moments preceding passionate climaxes. From this youthful work it is apparent that unified thematic material can be an asset rather than a hindrance to inspiration.*

The Piano Quartet has been played quite often in Estonia as well as abroad. In Sweden it was performed for the first time on a

concert celebrating the composer's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. Some years later it was his first work to be presented on Swedish TV.

Eduard Tubin got his degree from Tartu Higher Music School on 22 May 1930. He had now also completed his compulsory three years as schoolteacher and could quit his job, move to Tartu and start working at the *Vanemuine* theatre. He started as pianist for rehearsals and on half-time basis as second conductor to the musical director Juhan Simm. He appeared as conductor of the *Vanemuine* symphony orchestra for the first time on a summer concert in the garden.

One of Tubin's most popular choir songs was written at this time, *Yearning*. The lyrics by the poet Ernst Enno can be seen a congenial summary of his own youth:

*At the wandering waters  
among the cowberry stalks  
a single shepherd's horn  
is sounding a tune.  
Still is heard from the woods  
The hum of a quiet song;  
Take me along, take me along,  
Distant, alluring glimmer!*

The shepherd had now become a professional musician. On Christmas Eve the same year he married his music school sweetheart Linda Pirn. Already next year he became a full time conductor at *Vanemuine*. Tubin had never studied conducting and had to learn from others, especially of course first conductor Juhan Simm, who had studied conducting in Germany before the First World War. Simm and Tubin worked together for a decade and apparently had a good working fellowship. Their first cooperation was Kurt Zorling's operetta *The Girl from America*.

Like many Estonian conductors, Tubin had started conducting choirs at an early age. Now he learned while working what an orchestra needs. Tubin would tell later that thanks to his time at *Vanemuine* he could at least theoretically play all the instruments of an orchestra. During rehearsals in Sweden, orchestra members always approached the composer during breaks, to discuss some part or simply to give their thanks for the challenging solos, which he always included in his music.

At *Vanemuine*, Tubin brought the amazing number of over 40 new operas, operettas and ballets to the stage. In a single season the theatre offered eight new operettas – a premiere every month! He also conducted symphony concerts, summer garden concerts, took the ensemble on tours to the countryside and wrote incidental stage music to theatre plays. In addition to his work with the Tartu Men's Choir and the choir of the *Vanemuine*, for a while he also conducted the *Miina Härma Mixed Choir* and the mixed choir of the *Estonia* theatre in Tallinn, spending endless hours commuting on the slow train.

The programmes of *Vanemuine* consisted mostly of German and Austrian operettas, but also serious operas. In a few years Tubin could tick off a substantial part of the classical operetta and opera repertoire: three operettas by Oscar Straus, Kurt Weill's *The Threepenny Opera*, Puccini's *La Bohème* and *Madame Butterfly*, Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* together with Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Johan Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*, Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, Verdi's *La Traviata*, Lehar's *Das Land des Lächelns* and *Giuditta*, Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* and many others. Of groundbreaking Estonian stage works, he conducted the very first Estonian opera, Evald Aav's *The Vikings* in 1935 and his own ballet *Kratt* in 1943.

In addition to regular symphony concerts, Tubin also conducted several demanding oratorios such as Caesar Franck's *Les Beatitudes*,

Beethoven's *Mass in C Major*, Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem* and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. It was then still in fashion to play live, incidental music to some theatre plays. In addition to conducting such well-known works as Grieg's music to Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Tubin was commissioned to write music to plays such as Friedrich Schiller's *Turandot*, Christian Dietrich Grabbe's *Hannibal*, Eino Leino's *Simo Hurt, 1905*, a play after a part in Anton Hansen Tammsaare's novel "Truth and Justice", and to two plays by the contemporary Estonian author August Mälik: *Man from the Sea* and *Lost Sun*. Some of the scores perished during the war.

This stage music undoubtedly claimed a great part of the composer's time and energy. Tubin gave a striking comment to the writing of incidental music when he visited Estonia after the war and was invited to Aleksandr Stein's "The Ocean" with stage music by Veljo Tormis. When Tormis started to apologize for some tedious passage, Tubin cut him short: "But that's how it's done..." – as one tradesman to another!

The *Vanemuine* orchestra was small, the cast was small and the economical resources were limited, but all wanted to do their best, in a brave effort to show that Tartu could still compete with the national opera *Estonia* in Tallinn. The theatre had to postpone paying an ever-growing debt, which it could not get rid of during the whole independence period. The conductors had to rearrange all works, since the small orchestra lacked several key instruments. During the Second World War the orchestra started growing again. When Léhar's *Giuditta* was again performed, this time in the original, Tubin was surprised by the difference; the orchestra had now a completely different brilliance.

Another problem was that the singers were also tempted to leave for Tallinn. *Vanemuine* abused young talents and didn't give them opportunity to develop. Only towards the end of the 1930s could the ballet master Ida Urbel establish a small ballet troupe. Previously,

the opera choir had to do the dance steps, while it sometimes also was engaged in spoken performances. Opera singers were forced to work as actors and actors as opera artists. The costumes were patched up until only rags remained.

Tubin's fourteen busy years at the *Vanemuine* were celebrated on his centenary in the presence of the Estonian president and prime minister, the mayor of Tartu and international guests. On the lawn in front of the theatre a monument was unveiled, showing Tubin as conductor. In front of the statue are chairs and a sound installation, playing recordings of his music.



*Eller's composition class in 1930. From left: Eduard Tubin, Olav Roots, Heino Eller, Karl Leicher and Alfred Karindi. Eduard Oja is missing from the photo.*

*The pre-war building  
of the Vanemuine theatre.*



*The Vanemuine orchestra in 1938  
with all available extras.  
Conductor Eduard Tubin sits  
in the middle with first violinist Boris Muršak.*



## Chapter 4. Excessive density of sound

When Eduard Tubin started as a young second conductor at *Vanemuine*, Tartu had already lost its status as capitol of music and culture. Tallinn offered better opportunities for musicians and other artists. The *Vanemuine* orchestra had shrunk to 18 members and could no longer perform symphonic works. To have their orchestral works played, composers had to go to Tallinn, where the *Estonia* theatre had the only symphony orchestra in the country. For larger public symphonic performances even this had to call in extras; later it could be united with the new growing State Broadcasting Orchestra for symphony concerts. One by one the best teachers and musicians moved to the capitol. On their nightly walks Tubin and Eller complained about the shrinking resources in Tartu.

In music, there were two different schools in Estonia. While Eller encouraged his students to explore new paths, the music life in Tallinn clung to the ideals of national-romanticism. After moving to Tallinn in 1925, Juhan Aavik (1884–1982), became the dominant figure of Estonian music life. He was musical leader of the *Estonia* theatre, professor and from 1933 head of the conservatory, choir leader, leader of the national song festivals, chairman of various music foundations, etc. At the same time he was a prolific composer. His musical taste had been formed during his studies in St. Petersburg. With time he became increasingly conservative. Tubin and other young composers were no radicals, but the establishment in Tallinn frowned upon all what Eller and his students produced.

The Tartu school was derided as “French impressionist”, a catch-all term applied to what to some people seemed ugly and modern. Their works were infrequently performed. The situation improved gradually when Olav Roots moved to Tallinn and started working with the new State Broadcasting Orchestra – which after the war developed into the present Estonian National Symphony Orchestra (ERSO).

In fact it was difficult, if not impossible in the 1930s to follow the development of modernism abroad. As Tubin wrote to Eller:

*Next to your works I could study Skryabin, later Stravinsky, Kodaly and to a lesser degree Hindemith. Schönberg, Alban Berg, Webern, Shostakovich, these were hardly known for us. And one could hear them very rarely, maybe only on radio...*

His first work for orchestra after graduating was the *Suite on Estonian Motifs*, first performed at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the *Estonia* theatre in Tallinn. This was also Tubin’s first appearance as conductor in the capitol. It was not well received by the conservatives. The influential critic Theodor Lemba objected to the notion, formulated by himself, that “ugliness and awkwardness should be depicted by means of dissonant sound combinations” (Päevaleht, 3. Nov.1931) while a Baltic-German critic, Otto Greiffenhagen, found the suite a “bizarre attempt to be original” (Revalsche Zeitung, 3. Nov.1931). Despite this, it was played a few times in the 1930s.

Tubin was not so easily discouraged, but at the same time he was too busy at his workplace. Two years later he wrote *Three Pieces for Violin and Piano*. The complete work actually got its first performance in France; also the first time any of Tubin’s compositions was played abroad. Violinist Evald Turgan and Olav Roots were in Paris for additional studies and performed it at the Musicians’ Society.

Hugo Schüts, first violinist of the *Estonia* theatre orchestra, became one of Tubin's closest friends. Schüts had a car and they made several outings. One morning they visited a Roma camp outside Tartu. Tubin was surprised of the friendly reception and expressed his pleasure of meeting such impressive people. Together with wife Linda they visited Naelavere and stayed there for a whole month. They played for local people at the Alatskivi castle and surprised one of Tubin's childhood friends at his wedding, sneaking into the church and playing Schubert's "Ave Maria" on the organ.

The couple's son Rein (1932–1988) was born on 2 December 1932. Next year the young family went to see Linda's parents and relatives in her hometown Laeva. But the workload and different interests soon pulled the couple apart. Sometime around 1936–1937 they separated. Linda, who kept Tubin as her family name, embarked on a career as a successful actress in Tartu and later Tallinn. However, for some reason they wanted to keep the appearance of living together, at least until Linda moved to Tallinn. Formally the marriage was not disbanded before 1941, when Eduard Tubin decided to marry for the second time. Linda was then already living with her long-time partner, the actor Voldemar Alev. Discreet as always, Tubin never talked about his first wife and the reasons why they separated when their son was still small. Rein apparently often stayed with her mother's relatives, until Linda urged Eduard and Erika Tubin to take him along when fleeing the country.

The Tubins, later the single composer, lived in a succession of quite nondescript wooden houses in Tartu, where they rented small apartments. No photos of family life or interiors have survived. Only in 1940 did Tubin rent a proper, modern flat on the second floor of a functionalistic house on Herrmann Street. He stayed there until forced to flee. Many of his important works were written there and the house is now marked with a memorial plaque.

In May 1932, Tubin got his first opportunity to go abroad,

to the 10<sup>th</sup> ISCM festival in Vienna. Since he was considered too young to get a state scholarship to travel, he had to cover the expenses by his own. The International Society for Contemporary Music had been founded in 1922 and had World Music Days as its main endeavour. The travel to Vienna at that time was a long and complicated train journey through many countries and border controls. In his letters to Heino Eller, Tubin says that he stayed in the centre of the town, walked around, quaffed the fabulous beer, smoked good cigarettes and watched the crowds and the traffic. He saw *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Pagliacci* and *Tannhäuser* at the Opera and listened to an orchestra of 1000 playing Strauss waltzes.

It seems that the merry life in Vienna and the opera performances gave a more lasting impression than the contemporary pieces of music performed during the ISCM festival. Still, the music teacher and pianist Hilma Nerep claims in an article written for Tubin's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday (Eesti Teataja in Swedish, June 1965) that Tubin in Vienna for the first time heard the music of Anton Webern and that this inspired him to write bolder music himself. A student of Arnold Schönberg and one of the most important writers of 12-tone music, Webern was then rather little known. In any case, after this travel Tubin became "an avid promoter of contemporary music in his homeland.." (Connor).

The work as a choir leader also included travels abroad. In 1935 Tubin conducted the Tartu Male Choir at the Riga conservatory in Latvia. The program consisted of Finnish and Estonian songs, among them Tubin's popular "The Shepherd's Song". The audience was so pleased that he had to repeat it twice. The same year he travelled with the mixed choir of the Estonia theatre to Vyborg, then still in Finland. In the summer a remarkable choir contest took place in the Tallinn cinema Grand Marina. Among the participants were two of the best choirs of the country – the male choirs of Tallinn and Tartu. Tubin and his choir lost honourably to legendary Gustav Ernesaks, then leader of the Tallinn Male Choir Society. In

1937 Tubin and his choir made a long journey to Poland, giving concerts in Warsaw and Cracow. Near Cracow the choir visited the famous Wieliczka salt mine and sang in the huge chapel, situated 101 meters underground. “The Shepherd’s Song” was again one of the hits.

Tubin needed several years and many consultations with Eller to finish his *Symphony No. 1*. The manuscript carries 11 May 1934 as the finishing date. The reason was to a great extent Tubin’s workload. In the mornings he had orchestra and choir rehearsals, at night concerts or stage performances. In best case he could spare some hours in the afternoon for composing. It is only the fourth symphony in Estonian musical history, after Artur Lemba’s two symphonies from 1908 and 1923 and Artur Kapp’s *Symphony No. 1* from 1924. It was first performed on a fitting occasion, the Estonian National Day on 24 February 1936, in the Estonia concert hall, Olav Roots conducting.

It also got a rather mixed reception. Some critics complained that it was too complicated, heavy and compact and that the overall effect was monotonous and tiring. Others, notably Karl Leichter and Olav Roots, pointed out the masterly technical workmanship.

Tobias Lund offers the following description:

*The Symphony No. 1 is written in three movements, which have much in common. In all movements the music often and rapidly reaches high intensity [...] The style is melodic, but often the most important melody seems to be the one created by tense intertwining of voices. The melodic use of bass instruments contributes to a wide spectrum of sounds. Now and then the orchestra opens up to let out a long solo. A single high-strung violin comes back in all three movements. The symphony doesn’t look like three pieces of art put together, more like a colossus seen from three different angles.[...]*

*This first symphony makes clear that Tubin was capable of building rises where the direction is clear from the beginning but where so much happens on the way that the interest is kept up. In the last movement there are also examples of just as skilfully constructed relaxations. Before the last violin solo of the symphony the tension is let down, not least by a harp chord that transforms the scenery. With Tubin one never finds emptiness between formal way stations.*

Before starting to compose his next major work, the *Symphony No. 2, Legendary* in the summer of 1937, Tubin wrote a few smaller pieces, one or two each year. The ballade *Ylermi* to the lyrics of Finnish poet Eino Leino is a dramatic story of a proud knight, who refuses to bow before God. The song was dedicated to baritone Arno Niitof, who also performed it in the *Estonia* concert hall. In 1936 Tubin spent much time working on *Sonata No. 1 for violin and piano* which was performed by Evald Turgan and Olav Roots in the hall of the Tartu University the same year. Next year he wrote the small *Capriccio No. 1* for the same duo. Later in Sweden, Tubin re-edited both pieces. They are now among his most popular violin works.

Vardo Rumessen writes in a CD booklet (ERP-6112):

*Violin Sonata No. 1 is one of the earliest extensive works by the young composer written as a result of a long creative search that ran parallel to his everyday job at the theatre. Similar to the 1<sup>st</sup> Symphony the sonata reflects the composer's aspirations to create a grand work where the whole musical structure flows from one and only central theme which in its turn gives rise to other contrapuntually connected themes. This makes the texture of the work extremely dense and complicated, at the same time supported by strong inner logic. The work reflects the composer's wide imaginative powers,*

*polyphonic skills and a strong sense of form that integrates the separate passages.*

In a single week in January 1937 Tubin wrote *Toccata*, a rhythmic orchestral work with several interesting solos, lasting only 6 minutes and leaving the audience breathless. It could even be called a small symphony or a miniature piano concerto. It was written for the concert celebrating Heino Eller's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1937; certainly a fitting birthday present for Eller, who: "didn't permit much empty talk, you had to you say at once what you wanted to say". To Connor *Toccata* reminds of Stravinsky's suite from the ballet *Petrushka* with its motor-like rhythm and percussion-like piano. It has been performed all over the world, but the main reason why it is not played more often seems to be rather practical. It is short but also quite demanding to perform, and therefore difficult to include in a normal concert program.

Sometime in the 1930s, another bullet could have ended the composer's life. Tubin was proud of his marksmanship and acquired a Belgian small-calibre semi-automatic rifle called Monte Cristo. The magazine held 10 cartridges. When a friend was unloading the rifle, he forgot to eject the last cartridge before pulling the trigger. The bullet buzzed just under Tubin's nose.

In the summer of 1937, Eduard Tubin joined artists from *Vanemuine* for a vacation in Toila on the northern coast of Estonia. It has a varied, romantic landscape with the huge park of Oru castle and steep cliffs facing the sea. The Estonian president had recently been given the castle as summer residence. It was a huge building, built by the Russian tycoon Jelissejev at the turn of the century for a fabulous sum of money. In the 1930s it was purchased by the state and renovated, only to be blown up in the Second World War. Tubin visited the luxurious castle after befriending the commanding officer. With his friends he also played chess and a game with sticks. He bought smoked herring from the local fishermen.

A young boy, Jüri Randviir, watched curiously when the composer was solving chess problems. Tubin started to give the first lessons to the future chess master. Tubin also came up with an idea to create a chess game with white chess figures patterned after ancient Estonian warriors and black figures patterned after their historic enemies, Teutonic crusader knights. A friend of his, the artist Valdeko Ole, then moulded the figures in brass. This highly original chess set was shown in Estonian newspapers in the autumn.

In these romantic surroundings Tubin started writing his *Symphony No. 2*, titled “Legendary”. It is the only work, to which he himself added a programmatic title. But what legends could hide behind this name? Have they anything to do with the knights of the chess game? In a newspaper interview (Postimees, 19 Nov. 1937) he told that the symphony dealt with “heroic legends”, but in a letter to Erika Saarik – his future wife – that he was inspired by the sea and waves. It was a contemporary fad to be thrilled by ancient tales and heroes. Tubin’s later friend Harri Kiisk put in a word of caution (BIS CD-304):

*The subtitle “The Legendary” has given rise to diverse interpretations, some of which are far-fetched. For the composer did not have a concrete programme in mind. But “The Legendary” gives an indication of the work’s character.*

The symphony was finished the same autumn and Tubin’s fellow student Karl Leichter described it with following words (Eesti Sõna, 22 Dec. 1942):

*The symphony begins with fairy-tale beauty, a quiet world of moods crowned with deep seriousness, reminding of life in the far past. Then an agonizing unease takes over and battle commences, leaving depressing memories. A funeral march takes on the deep solemnity of some ancient ritual. A new*

*tightening begins amid depressing impressions and memories; a repetitive short motif sounds to everybody, a call for action, a new will to live: again the unextinguished fire of human longing blazes. The beautiful melody of the solo violin echoes memories of the past, the reverberations of a hard time. Finally the whole symphony fades into the mood from the beginning: the noble, grand fairy-tale sphere of longing.*

Tobias Lund gives a more sober assessment:

*...the composition is at the same time tight and clear.[...] The different movements are related by motifs and themes and the movements are so written that they easily take over from each other. The orchestral sound is rich and varied, the voices are independent, not shadowing each other. Another characteristic is also that the music often leaves the impression of containing something more than what we hear at the moment. Some small dissonances show that something is about to emerge; broken motifs forecast that something great might take place when they are once united.*

The first performance took place during the national song festival next year, with Olav Roots conducting. Even now the critics were not satisfied. Teodor Lemba again complained that the symphony „suffers from excessive compactness or density of sound together with a tendency to use too much dissonances“ (Päevaleht, 25 June 1938). Despite this criticism the Second symphony was played in Estonia nearly every year until 1944, during the independence time as well as under the Soviet and Nazi occupations. For a young composer this was a considerable success.

Nowadays the symphony has been appreciated even more; some experts even consider it one of Tubin's best works. In Sweden it was first performed in 1984, more than a year after the composer's

death. The leading Swedish critic, radio producer and music journalist Per-Anders Hellqvist, was present and wrote after the concert (Stockholms-Tidningen, 25 Jan. 1984):

*It was a complete shock. I wept openly in my seat over this unique, but above all formally complete and endlessly expressive music: like an instrumental requiem for Europe at the brink of the catastrophe. Dmitri Shostakovich's best works from the 1930s may sometimes be more original, considering their time and society, but they hardly surpass the expressive force of this symphony, which should be seen as one of the most touching musical achievements of the pre-war years.*

*Tubin (right)  
with wife Linda  
and violinist  
Hugo Schüts  
at the Alatskiivi  
cemetery.*

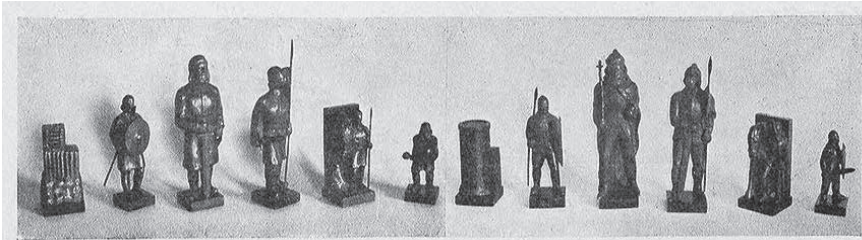




*Tubin, wife Linda and son Rein  
with Linda's relatives in Laeva in 1933.*



*Tubin's house at Herrmann  
Street in Tartu.  
Photo: Eino Tubin*



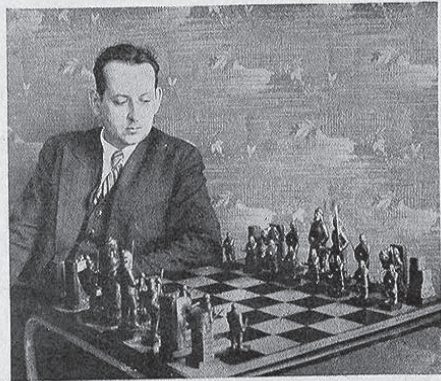
Muinasestlased (valged)

Raudmehed (mustad)

### **Muistsed eestlased ja raudmehed malenditeks**

Tartlane „Vanemuise“ muusikajuht Eduard Tubin omab kahtlemata ühed eesti algupärasemad malendid. Need on valmistatud kunstnik Ole poolt ja kujutavad valgetena eesti sõdureid muistsel vabadusvõitluse ajal ning mustadena saksa raudrüütleid. Nikerdatud on nad pronksist ja seejuures väga huvitavalt ning omapäraselt välja töötatud. Alates sõdureist ja lõpetades kuningaga on malevigurite tüübid püütud hoida võimalikult lähedal ajaloolistele „alg tüüpidele“. See on ka väga hästi õnnestunud ja sellega on saavutatud uudne ning kunstiväärtuslik, aga ühtlasi rahvuslik stiil ruudulise laua sõjameestele.

Oleks ainult soovida, et säärane mõte järeltegemist leiaks.



E. Tubin oma malenditega

*“Ancient Estonians and men of iron”,  
Tubin with his historical chess figures.  
From the newspaper “Tänapäev”.*

## Chapter 5. Occupations

In Torila Eduard Tubin's thoughts were not only going to ancient myths. The summer of 1936 was probably the last together with Linda. On a tour with *Vanemuine* Tubin went up to a young ballet dancer and asked her to sew a button for him. That was the start of a long secret love story, followed by a long marriage. The full name of the dancer was Elfriede Erika Elena Saarik. When she was young she was called Elfriede or Frida, later she chose Erika.

Erika was born as the only child to Mihkel and Liina Saarik on 22 April 1916 in Kazakhstan, some days' travel from the town of Karkaralinsk, now spelled Karkaralo. Her father Mihkel was an engineer, born on the Estonian island of Muhu. Some old relatives on Muhu proudly keep faded photos of her parents and of young Frida posing in a dancing dress. Mihkel Saarik worked in Riga and married Liina, a Latvian, after a childless first marriage. He was offered interesting work in faraway Siberia, as it was then called, and went to build a steam-powered mill in the wilderness. During the First World War, Austrian prisoners of war worked at the mill. They were not guarded since there was nowhere to escape. When Erika was born, the Austrians made a Christmas tree from barbed wire and gave the child a silver heart inscribed in German with "From difficult times". When the Reds came after the revolution and civil war, Mihkel was threatened with execution as a blood-suckering capitalist, but was saved by his workers who pleaded for him. Eventually the family was put on a train, making one of the

endless journeys in a freight car such as described in Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. Erika remembered making fire for the tea during the journey, igniting with worthless rouble notes from Kerensky's time. Having lost everything, the family eventually came to Estonia, where Mihkel Saarik became head of the Ulila peat power-plant west of Tartu. Erika used to tell about the small lakes and snake-infested peat swamps, from which the power-plant got its fuel. Since she didn't know enough Estonian, she was sent to the German School in Tartu. Apparently she grew up as a free spirit, boarding in Tartu away from parental control. She went to ballet school and found work at *Vanemuine*.

During the summer of 1937 the romance was under way, with Tubin writing tender letters, although still using the formal Estonian pronoun *teie*. The same year he dedicated his *Valse Triste* to her, which she also danced on stage. It is an interesting counterpart to the famous piece of the same name by Sibelius. It's Tubin's shortest orchestral work, lasting only four minutes, but it is not a bagatelle. As Harri Kiisk writes (BIS CD-337): "In reality the waltz is a mask to conceal serious, gloomy thoughts".

In February 1938, Eduard Tubin made his last major travel abroad before the Second World War. He stayed three weeks in Budapest and three days in Vienna. He had collected some fees selling his compositions and used them for the travel. Some writers have jumped to the conclusion that he "studied" with Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók. He certainly met both composers, but rather briefly. Kodály told him it was important to use folk tunes in music. He brought his two symphonies to Kodály, but the busy master had little time to study them. Tubin stayed at the flat of violinist Herbert Laan, who was studying in Budapest. With Laan he presented the *Meditation* that he had written in Budapest to Kodály, who liked the melodic style (Rumessen, ERP 6112). They also met briefly on his last day in Budapest. His guide in Budapest was a music professor named Viktor Vaszy, without whose help he would never even have

seen Kodaly. Vaszy promised to have Tubin's works performed in Budapest, but never managed to do it.

Tubin visited many rehearsals and performances. Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion, Piano and Celesta* had its first performance and he was fascinated by the smooth sound of the string section. Whether the merit of conductor Ernst von Dohnány or orchestral tradition, for him it was deeply touching. Erich Kleiber conducted Beethoven's 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> symphonies impressing Tubin with his steely discipline. The French pianist Alfred Cortot gave an unforgettable Chopin recital.

On stage Tubin saw, among others, *Lohengrin*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Salome*, Monteverdi's *Orpheus* and Respighi's last opera *La Fiamma*. He was very critical of the way Wagner was staged. The singers were standing and gesticulating, but there was no movement. He also took time to visit the taverns and listen to the gypsy bands. Some Roma were remarkable musicians, Tubin later recalled, but in Hungary they were second-class citizens who had no chance to play in a real orchestra.

Tubin did what tourists do: he went to the famous hot baths, bought wine and food from vending machines, enjoyed the town park with fake gothic castles and saw eye to eye with a friendly-looking tiger at the zoo. In the art museum he looked at the paintings of Raphael, Titian, Rubens and Goya. Budapest gave a lasting impression, but he never visited it again. Returning through Vienna, Tubin listened to Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in the St. Stephanus Cathedral, which turned into one of the deepest musical experiences in his life. Another was a piano recital by Sergey Rachmaninoff in the golden hall of the *Musikverein*, where the audience refused to leave, demanding more extras. Even turning off the lights didn't help, Rachmaninoff had to come back to play one of his hits once more.

Tubin was now short of money and found everything too

expensive in Vienna. But it was also a politically tense time with a very ugly mood. Tubin got the impression that somebody was following him on the street. When he reached home and turned on the radio, the first thing he heard were the Nazis in Austria screaming “ein Reich, ein Volk, ein Führer”. Austria had been swallowed by Nazi Germany. Talks about a concert tour to Austria next year with the Tartu Male Choir came to nothing.

Inspired by the visit to Kodaly and his advice to use more folk music, Tubin soon wrote one of his most popular orchestra works, the *Suite on Estonian Dances*. The suite consists of three dances. The first, Dance with Crossed Sticks, is from the largest Estonian island Saaremaa. Women cross sticks on the ground and make intricate dance steps between the sticks. The second dance, a Long Anglaise, is from northern Estonia and includes one stately and one lively part. The third, Setu Dance, originates from the south-eastern Setumaa border region with a very distinct, colourful folk culture. It consists of three lively tunes.

Tobias Lund writes:

*Unlike Kodaly, who treats folk tunes softly and with romantic richness of sound, Tubin uses a somewhat austere or at least businesslike language. This doesn't prevent his orchestrations from having playfulness and lightness. The Suite is written for a large orchestra, but percussion is limited to kettledrums. Even the most intensive parts, where one can imagine the dancers leaping eagerly around, have a transparency that partly comes from the orchestration, partly from the treatment of rhythm. Not even in the last movement with its primitive traits, does the music get really rough and heavy.*

The suite was first performed by the Estonian Broadcasting Orchestra, conducted by Olav Roots on 26 September 1939, and immediately became one of the most popular Tubin works. It was

his first orchestral piece to be recorded, by His Master's Voice as part of a big, unfinished project to record contemporary Estonian music.

During the summer of 1938 Eduard Tubin went to the islands of Muhu and Hiiumaa to collect folk tunes. It also gave an opportunity to meet his secret love Erika on her father's home island Muhu, away from curious eyes in Tartu. Already in May, he had asked Oskar Loorits, director of the Estonian Folklore Archive, about stories on Kratt, a folklore goblin who brings riches to its owner but ultimately exacts a harsh revenge. Notes in the archive's ledger show that he repeatedly borrowed materials on this subject. His mind was set on a competition for a new stage work announced by the *Estonia* theatre, with the deadline set for 1 February 1940. Erika was enlisted to provide the libretto, based on folk tales.

In 1939, his fellow student and staunch supporter Karl Leichter proposed that the president should give him a state salary, so that he could go on composing music without economical problems. In Finland, Jean Sibelius and some others had been given such grants. President Konstantin Päts referred the matter to the highest authority on music, who happened to be Tubin's nemesis Juhan Aavik. He turned down the proposal, adding in a postcard to the young man that he should "change his style". At the same time, an anonymous writer obliquely criticised the proposal by saying that monuments should not be erected to living persons. The Tallinn school had spoken. For Tubin it was a humiliating experience that he could never forget.

In spring 1939, Tubin asked for a stipend to go abroad, to Berlin and Paris. Paris was celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the French Revolution with many interesting musical events. But he never got on his way, war was looming in Europe. He had to contend with a short vacation on a beach near Riga.

However, cultural life was blossoming. The "Legendary" symphony

was performed at the *Estonia* on National Day 1939. Tubin conducted his stage music to Eino Leino's *Simo Hurt* at the *Vanemuine* and led a row of first performances – Tchaikovsky's *Eugen Onegin*, Kálmán's *The Violet of Montmartre*, Léhar's *Land des Lächelns* and several symphony concerts. With Juhan Simm he conducted choirs on the national male choir festival in Tartu. A big rebuilding had started at *Vanemuine*, where the theatre hall was converted into a concert hall. In the meantime, some stage productions were moved to the nearby German Theatre, which continued to serve as an annex. It later served as opera house when *Vanemuine* was devastated in the war. The pre-war rebuilding of *Vanemuine* was completed in a year. Tubin was very critical of the acoustics of the refurbished concert hall, but promised to carry out the planned concerts.

Occupation, misery and war came to Estonia in small steps, to a stunned and uncomprehending population. Democracy had already been limited by presidential decree and some emergency laws were still in force. But the great threat to freedom was completely unexpected when it came. A secret appendix to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany on 23 August 1939 carved up Eastern Europe into spheres of interest. Eastern Poland, the Baltic States and Finland went to the Soviet Union. On 1 September, two days before the new *Vanemuine* concert hall was inaugurated, Germany attacked Poland, which led to declaration of war from France and Britain. Two weeks later the Soviet Union invaded from the east to grab its share of Poland.

At the end of September, Estonia was forced to accept a pact of so called mutual benefits with the Soviet Union. Censorship was imposed and telegraphic links with other countries cut. On 18 October long columns of Soviet trucks carrying up to 25,000 soldiers rolled into Estonia, outnumbering the Estonian soldiers on duty. The troops established bases on Estonian territory, but did not yet interfere with the politics of their involuntary host. Finland

refused a similar arrangement and fought the Winter War with Soviet Union to preserve its independence. For Estonians it was a bitter experience to have Soviet bases on its territory while brother country Finland was fighting for its life. The Germans in Estonia, who had lived for generations in the country giving important cultural contributions, were summarily ordered by Hitler to come “home to the Reich”, where they felt distinctly unwelcome. They were supposed to colonize parts of Poland.

The next step came on 16 June 1940, when Stalin on a faked pretext issued an ultimatum to Estonia, demanding full military occupation and the formation of a pro-Soviet government. The next day an overwhelming force of 100,000 troops crossed the border. Lacking any allies or foreign support and wishing to avoid bloodshed, President Päts and the chief-of-staff, General Juhan Laidoner, ordered the Estonian defence forces not to resist. The whole country was quickly overrun. Stalin’s emissary Andrei Zhdanov arrived as a de-facto dictator to the Soviet embassy in Tallinn. The parliament, ministries and police stations were taken over, communist troublemakers released from custody, “workers’ demonstrations” organized and a puppet government appointed.

After rigged elections where non-communist parties were excluded, the new parliament met on 21–23 July. To ensure the right decision, the parliamentarians were surrounded by armed Red Army soldiers. They applied for the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic to be incorporated in the Soviet Union, which of course was duly approved by the Soviet Union. As one of few free countries in the world, neutral Sweden legally recognized the cessation of Estonian independence, a rash and unrewarded decision which would later haunt Estonian refugees.

The emergency laws and censorship still in force from the “silent time”, as the years of presidential rule were called, made a regime change easier. The new rulers introduced their laws retroactively, so

that people could be punished for activities that were perfectly legal and necessary during the Estonian Republic. The president, chief-of-staff, ranking officers, ministers and former parliamentarians were soon arrested by the new rulers and disappeared into far-away prisons and labour camps. Most were subsequently murdered; President Päts survived in a Soviet mental hospital until 1956.

Between the two World Wars, the three Baltic States, which all met the same fate, had managed to climb to the level of the most prosperous, best educated and well-organized countries in Europe, if somewhat lacking in democratic credentials. Now a slow but steady dismemberment of civic society started, replacing the western way of life with communist dictatorship, petty bureaucracy, inequality, dogma, make-believe and finally outright Stalinist terror.

Actually the Soviet occupation brought some personal benefits for Eduard Tubin. Heino Eller was appointed head of the Tallinn Conservatory and Tubin took his place as head of the composition class at the Tartu Higher Music School. Under the new management, led by “peoples’ commissary” Kaarel Ird, an ardent communist, he was also named chief conductor of *Vanemuine*. He started receiving commissions for major new works and was appointed member of an organization committee that under Eller’s chairmanship established a new Soviet Estonian Composers’ Union. Tubin began the work full of naïve enthusiasm, seeing the new Composers’ Union as a solution to old problems regarding commissions, payments and publishing.

Also in private life, there were notable changes. The romance with Elfriede Erika Saarik led to marriage in Tartu on 16 May 1941. Tubin had obtained a divorce from his first wife Linda just a few weeks before. Eino, the present writer, was born on 19 March the next year as their only child.

Tubin had an enormous workload. The *Vanemuine* orchestra started growing again. Opera, ballet, theatre and music had an

increasingly important role to keep up the spirits and to offer a temporary escape from the boredom and gloom of repression, lawlessness, deprivation and war. In addition to world classics such as Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers*, Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* and the ballet *Esmeralda*, Tubin now had to conduct pieces such as the stage music to Oleksandr Korneychuk's play *The Death of the Squadron* or Ivan Dzerzhinsky's opera *Quietly flows the Don* in addition to an increasing number of Russian classical and contemporary musical works. He had to make choir arrangements of revolutionary songs like the *International* and *Red Banner*.

In November 1940, a delegation of Estonian musicians was invited to visit the Leningrad conservatory, to learn how Soviet music life was organized so that they could apply it at home. Ten days were spent in Leningrad. Tubin's letters home are so full of enthusiasm and naiveté that they almost sound faked – everything is so great and beautiful and the people are so kind! He went to splendid performances at the Kirov Theatre (former Marinsky) and was shown the rich Hermitage art museum. He bought a “Young Engineer” erector set for Rein, which was very cheap since Soviet children were so well cared for. Only later did he vent his anger – the trip was badly organized, the delegates felt bored and frustrated, the bread shop had no wrapping paper, the cigarette kiosk had no cigarettes. Trucks were left for 5–6 days at the petrol stations when the monthly ration was used up.

Plans were made for a Soviet Estonian “art decade” in Moscow, to show cultural progress to the new masters. Tubin was now commissioned to write – in addition to his work on “Kratt” – his first opera and his third symphony. At first he planned to write the opera on August Kitzberg's play “Werewolf”, but it turned out that Juhan Sütiste's *The Lake Pühajärv* was better suited for the time. The libretto is based on a peasant uprising in 1841. Its centenary would now be celebrated. Starving farmers demanded the right to emigrate and the barons were so alarmed that they called in the

army and had the farmers flogged. The piano scores for some scenes have been preserved. Apparently the beginning of the opera was also orchestrated, since some parts were played as incidental music to another drama on the same subject with the composer conducting an open-air performance.

This happened in the middle of unmitigated terror. Just before Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, large scale deportations took place. Even before the deportations, some 7,000 politicians, businessmen, officers and well-off farmers – the leading persons of the society – had been arrested as enemies of the state. Communist kangaroo courts ordered about 2,000 to be summarily shot; most died in captivity. On 14 June 1941, 10,000 people, mostly women and children related to these so called state enemies, were packed in freight cars and deported to Russia. Many were executed or died in the Gulag. 50,000 men were forcibly drafted to the Red Army; of whom 33,000 eventually reached Russia to serve in front units or labour battalions. During the summer, about 25,000 civilians were evacuated from Estonia. Some Jews were forcibly evacuated, while others fled voluntarily. Several thousand people died during this evacuation.

The German troops advanced rapidly through the Baltic States. With the Germans approaching, Estonian communists were mobilized to “destruction battalions” with instructions from Stalin to lay the country waste in a scorched-earth policy. They met with resistance from improvised guerrilla groups, the “forest brothers”, consisting of officers, farmers and city people who had managed to escape the deportations and taken to the forests. It was a merciless civil war that continued after the German occupation, when some 6000 Estonians and 1000 ethnic Russians were summarily executed, accused of having been Communist supporters.

The German soldiers were hailed as liberators after the Red terror. However, their advance was ruthless. The battle-lines went

straight through Tartu, where the ancient Stone Bridge was blown up by the retreating Red Army. The Tubins saw with their own eyes how civilians, who had taken refuge in a cellar, were lined up on the street. The German commander had been shaken by a grenade explosion, and rumour had it that the fire had been directed from the cellar. A passing Estonian militiaman recognized Tubin's friend, the chess master Paul Keres, among the hostages, pulled him out and saved his life. The others were mowed down with machine guns and the bodies burned on the spot.

The regular German troops were followed by a *Sonderkommando*, tasked with liquidating the remaining Jews in Estonia. Jews had been well integrated in the pre-war Estonian society and there was no obvious anti-Semitism. Hundreds of Jews had served in the War of Liberation, many voluntarily. With the Germans coming, some hoped naïvely that the new occupiers would do them no harm or that their ethnic Estonian friends would be able to protect them. None were spared. Now the propaganda blamed the Communist cruelties on the Jews. Within half a year, about 1000 Estonian Jews, nearly all who had stayed behind, were murdered. The same fate fell to the Roma community in Estonia.

Estonians were forced to give a hand in the killings. Later, one of the string players in the *Vanemuine* orchestra broke down and confessed to Tubin that he had taken part in the executions as member of *Omakaitse* (Self-Defence Force), a volunteer militia that came under German orders. One of the victims lined up in front of his rifle was his own concert-master Boris Muršak, who had participated in many first performances of Tubin's works. Heino Eller's wife Anna, who was Jewish, was called to the police for interrogation. She was arrested and disappeared.

The Germans had no interest in restoring any independence or democracy. A Nazi general was installed as governor. The economy and production were geared to give as much support as possible

to the German war effort, effectively starving the country. During the Nazi occupation, tens of thousands of Jews, Roma and forced labourers were transported to Estonia from Central Europe and murdered or worked to death in concentration camps. Of some 30,000 Soviet prisoners of war taken to Estonia, about half perished from maltreatment. Some Estonians volunteered to serve on the German side, others were forcibly drafted. About 3,500 fled to Finland where they could at least fight for a good cause.

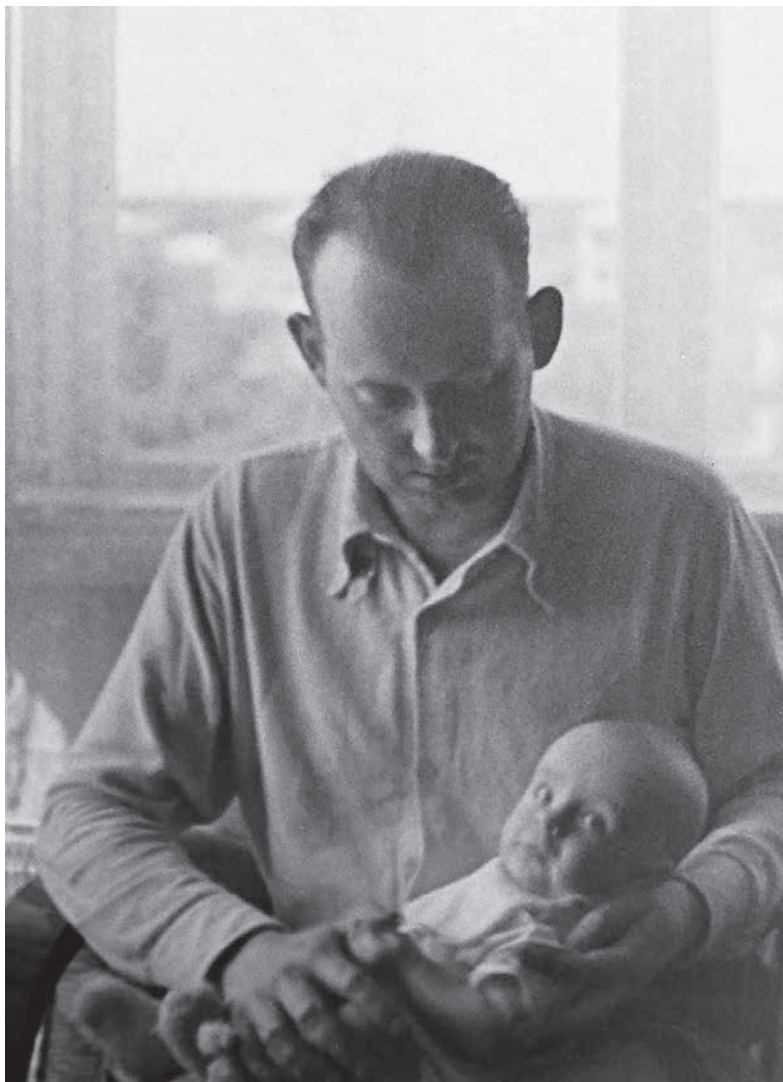
Still, old Estonians remember the German occupation as a respite after the indiscriminating horror of the first Soviet occupation. Life went on more or less normally. Orchestras and music were supported by the state and new commissions offered for composers. Several Estonian artists like Olav Roots were given opportunities to travel and perform abroad, of course to countries controlled by Germany. Estonian Radio, now called *Landessender Reval*, regularly played Estonian symphonic music, among them Tubin's major works.

Eduard and Erika Tubin survived the arrests, deportations, street fighting in Tartu and regime change without a scratch, keeping their positions at *Vanemuine* and other institutions. However, when ethnic Swedes living in Estonia were offered repatriation to neutral Sweden, Tubin tried filling in a formula claiming that he in fact had Swedish heritage and relatives living in Uppsala.

Towards the end of his life, he was asked in a Swedish interview (Dagens Nyheter, 14 Feb. 1979) about the difference between the Soviet and Nazi occupations. The interviewer Marcus Boldemann certainly meant to ask about the music life. But Tubin chose to answer with a bitter old joke: "The size of the dictator's moustache". It did not endear him to the communist bureaucrats in Soviet Estonia, but he couldn't care less.



*Erika Saarik dancing  
Tubin's Valse Triste.*



*Eduard Tubin  
with newborn son Eino.*



## Chapter 6. The dance of the goblin

The musical work, on which Eduard Tubin spent most time and effort during his entire life, is of course *Kratt* (The Goblin), the very first, groundbreaking Estonian ballet, based on folklore and folk music. Tubin was not fond of classical ballet and wanted to do something entirely different. He started working on “Kratt” during the independence time and continued during the Soviet occupation. It was premiered during the German occupation. Since the only full score was destroyed in the war, he reconstructed the ballet from orchestra scores 15 years after escaping to Sweden. Nowadays “Kratt” is often called the national ballet of Estonia, but in the beginning it was twice refused.

Tubin offered it first as a pantomime in four scenes to the contest of a new stage work at *Estonia* on 1 February 1940. It was refused by the jury on the grounds that it was too short to fill the program for an evening. Even at that time, it was a hollow argument. Already then, new ballets could be much shorter; it is now common for the ballet venues of the world to combine several works for an evening show. The real reason for the refusal, as Tubin eventually learned, was that the influential ballet master of *Estonia*, Rahel Olbrei, thought that the music to his pantomime was too modern.

At the same time as he was working on “Kratt”, Tubin finished two different orchestral works. Some of the folk tune material left over from “Kratt” came to good use in *Sinfonietta on Estonian Motifs*. The *Sinfonietta* is in three movements and contains several

beautiful solos – for oboe, violin and French horn. It was first performed by the State Broadcasting Orchestra, led by Olav Roots, during the communist takeover in the summer of 1940. At the same time as he wrote the *Sinfonietta*, Tubin also composed the completely unrelated *Prélude Solennel*, first performed at the *Estonia* theatre on 16 May 1940 to inaugurate an Art Year, named for the artist Kristjan Raud. It is short, lasting about 8 minutes, but containing something of a miniature symphony in three distinct parts. It has no folklore connection at all, being a partly solemn, partly soaring, jubilant and festive piece suitable for openings and celebrations. It was repeatedly played during the war.

A noteworthy performance was at the inauguration of the Swedish Polar Prize in 1992, an endeavour by the producer of the Abba pop group to create an equivalent to the Nobel Prize in music. To play the “*Prélude Solennel*” on such an occasion could be seen as a symbolic recognition of Tubin’s music in Sweden, ten years after his death. The prize money was donated to establish copyright societies in the Baltic countries.

After the first failure with “*Kratt*”, Rahel Olbrei suggested that Tubin should write another short ballet called *Wonderbird* in two scenes, also to a libretto by Erika Tubin. It was based on a story in the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg* of a god in disguise. Wonderbird, daughter of Taara, the god of ancient Estonians, descends to earth and bewitches a wandering kantele player. Naughty village boys try to tear up the flower wreaths of the girls. During the wild dance, the Wonderbird again appears. The boys calm down, love starts growing and the wanderer takes his kantele and sings, while Wonderbird returns to heaven.

The idea was that both ballets should be performed on one evening. “*Wonderbird*” was never staged; the Soviet occupation turned everything upside down. Tubin was also not very satisfied with his work; while writing he even started to doubt if the story

was a genuine folk tale or an invention by Kreutzwald, the creator of “Kalevipoeg”. Only the piano score survived the war, all orchestra scores burned to ashes when the Estonia theatre was bombed on 9 March 1944.

During the Soviet occupation, the Tubin couple was asked to rewrite Kratt for the art decade in Moscow. They added some new scenes and the love story of Daughter and Farmhand. Together with the added music, the ballet now got a full length of 90 minutes, sufficient to fill an evening. It was finished in great hurry in April 1941. But when Eduard Tubin together with Olav Roots on piano presented it for the commission, it was again refused. Non-political musicians were positive to the work, but the last say rested with a party hack, who found the music too modern. Old fairy-tales were not considered sufficiently uplifting for a Communist art decade.

A few months later the Germans had conquered the whole country.

The figure of Kratt – as well as many other stories in Estonian folklore – may have its roots in the great natural disaster some 660 years B.C. when a cluster of large meteorite fragments streaked low over Estonia and struck the island of Saaremaa at Kaali, where the mysterious crater lakes are still one of main tourist attractions. The energy released is comparable to the Hiroshima atom bomb. It was a momentous and unexplainable event, probably with huge loss of life on what was then a rather densely populated island. Kratt is described as a figure flying over the sky, trailing a fiery tail, bringing riches to its owner. Indeed, the high-grade iron collected after the meteorite strike made the survivors instantly rich.

There are many tales about Kratt, for whom there are more than twenty different names in Estonian folklore – according to rural taboo one should not mention dangerous things by their right name, in order not to call out evil spirits. But how did Tubin get the idea to use this obscure fairy-tale figure for a ballet? In interviews Eduard Tubin claimed that he became interested when he read a newspaper

discussion about its right name and characteristics. Erika claimed, on the other hand, that her interest started when she heard old people telling tales about Kratt on Muhu island.

Similar figures exist in folk tales all over the world. In Sweden, witches going to the Brocken mountain could get a helper from the Devil. Another figure is assembled by people knowing witchcraft, to secretly suck milk from the cows of neighbours. People have always dreamt of robots who could do boring or unpleasant tasks. The usual problem in these stories, which often end badly, is how to put a stop to them. The story of Kratt corresponds to the down-to-earth moral rule of rural people that riches must be earned by hard work. If one gets rich quickly, then he must have sold his soul.

In the ballet the greedy Farmer asks Wizard how to make a goblin. Wizard introduces him to the Devil, who tells Farmer to assemble a human-like figure from scrap. The Devil then brings life to Kratt, but not before extracting three drops of blood from the farmer, taking his soul as ransom. The awakening of Kratt is not without its dangers. The farmer must wear a metal pot as helmet, as Kratt will immediately attack him and punch him on the head.

A romance develops between Farmhand and Daughter, who are innocent bystanders. Farmhand becomes suspicious about what is really going on and by chance confronts Kratt. Harvesters and night herdsman dance, showing the merry side of countryside life. When Kratt streaks over the sky, carrying his loot, Farmhand catches him by drawing three rings and then stabbing his knife into the ground. The frightened onlookers beg him to let Kratt go. The raging Kratt disappears, to exact his revenge on Farmer.

In the most colourful scene of the ballet, Satanists – among them Farmer – celebrate their wealth by dancing around a frog-tallow candle. Farmer sees his farm burning in the distance and hurries away, only to be caught by Kratt, who strangles him and takes his soul.

For the ballet music, Tubin picked about 30 folk tunes. In an interview he said the cornucopia of Estonian folk music was nearly limitless. Many items in the archive had never even been touched by other composers, like the huge collections of violin and bagpipe music.

About his use of folk music in general, Tubin later said – in connection with his 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony: “I tried to create a new type of folk music, without using folk tunes. When it is not possible any more to separate music based on folk themes from original folk music, then the composer has truly succeeded in creating music of a national character.” In this he was similar to Bartók: “It is interesting to compare original folk tunes to the wider context in which Bartók has used them. Only a few notes correspond to the original folk tune, all else is freely created in the spirit of folk music.” (Eesti Teataja, June 1965).

Tobias Lund comments:

*Listening to this ballet music one recognizes much as well from Tubin's symphonies as from his other music written for the concert hall. The skilfully constructed moods are typical – the switches between the most naive idylls and music that gets close to the danger zone should make it very suitable for dancing. Another feature typical for Tubin is the orchestration, which is fanciful but not luxurious, and the use of the whole orchestra in the work on the themes.[...] Parts of the musical basic material consist of Estonian folk melodies. Some remind in their simplicity of “Suite on Estonian Dances” (in act III there is actually a part directly taken from the suite), but in general the folk material is used in a much more complicated way in “Kratt”. The music is literally in many layers and sometimes the moods of the layers are quite different from each other, [...] enhancing the dramatic expression.*

The Swedish composer Maurice Karkoff gave the following opinion on the “Suite from the Ballet Kratt” after its first performance on Swedish Radio (Stockholms-Tidningen, 16 January 1962):

*Tubin is one of the greatest masters of our time [...]. The music, which is influenced by Stravinsky, Bartók and de Falla, is colourful, vitally rhythmic, skilfully orchestrated, suggestive and full of contrasts.*

“Kratt” first came to the stage thanks to Ida Urbel, the ballet master of *Vanemuine*. The first performance took place on 31 March 1943. The composer was himself conducting and his wife Erika was dancing the part of Daughter. The folkloristic traits in costumes, decorations and in the dances of harvesters and night herdsmen were clearly brought to the fore. Suffering under the occupation, Estonians felt an urge to exhibit and preserve their own culture. In many ways it was also a pioneering work. There was no tradition or example from which to get support. And after all, Erika Tubin was not a very seasoned libretto writer either. Everything from costumes to movements had to be invented. However, the staging was very successful and the ballet was performed more than thirty times.

The subject contains much witchcraft and superstition, having an effect also on the authors and artists. Even Eduard Tubin, always a rationalist, thought that he saw an extraordinary number of black cats running around when he was writing the parts about the Devil. The ballerina Velda Otsus, who was scheduled to dance the part of Kratt, sprained her ankle. Her replacement Ella Lukk also had an accident, but managed to do her part on the first performance. When the Tubins were walking to the first performance, a large tree broke in the storm and crashed on the pavement just before they would pass. During the performance a doll, representing the flying Kratt, crashed on the stage and the electric light-bulbs in the tail, carefully hoarded for this occasion, started a small fire. To prevent

more accidents, a potato pierced with straw – a folk remedy against the evil eye – was hung next to the curtain. But it helped only in *Vanemuine*. After the destruction of the *Estonia* theatre, most subsequent Kratt performances have had some protection against “dark forces”; even for the 2015 production some talismans were discreetly sewn into the costumes.

After the great success in Tartu, Rahel Olbrei wanted to stage it also at the *Estonia* theatre. The first performance took place on 24 February 1944 – the date of the banned Independence day. During the sixth performance on 9 March the air-raid alarm sounded. At first many thought it was a usual exercise, until somebody called from the stage that “the Christmas trees are already in the air” – these were parachute flares dropped by pathfinder aircraft to show the way for bombers. The audience, dancers and orchestra members ran helter-skelter to the cellar, just before the theatre got a direct bomb hit. During a break in the bombing, people broke out from the cellar and ran over the square to seek better protection in an opposite stone building. Among them was the dancer doing the part of Devil, still dressed in his red cloak. When he entered the shelter, frightened people started screaming. Olbrei later heard herself the gossip of market ladies: “I saw with my own eyes how the Devil jumped out of the fire and ran over the square.”

Olbrei didn’t succeed with her plan to continue “Kratt” in the nearby Drama Theatre that had escaped bomb damage and where the *Estonia* ensemble soon continued their performances. Superstitious people thought that Kratt had done enough damage by burning down the *Estonia*, and managed to postpone the decision indefinitely. It also turned out that there were no scores left. The only full score of “Kratt” had burned on the conductor’s pulpit. When Tubin fled to Sweden he managed to take along the piano score and orchestra scores from Tartu.

Interest in resurrecting “Kratt” started in occupied Estonia

at the end of the 1950s, when it was again permitted to perform Tubin's music. At the *Vanemuine* theatre an idea gained ground to celebrate ballet master Ida Urbel's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday with a new production. At that time it was also considered suitable to give a large commission to Tubin, whom the authorities in Soviet Estonia wanted to invite for a visit. *Vanemuine* asked him to restore the score of "Kratt". It was a difficult and slow job that took a whole year. The old orchestra scores were laid out all over the composer's small flat in Hammarbyhöjden. Tubin walked around and collected the instrument parts for a new full score – a flute from here, a violin from there. At the same time he tightened the musical structure. Tubin didn't like the toil at all and later said that it would have been easier to write a new ballet from the beginning.

During this work he also put together the *Suite from the Ballet Kratt* on a commission from Swedish Radio. The colourful and rhythmic suite, a real bravura piece, contains nine dances, an introduction and an interlude. Another bonus is the short *Cock's dance* for violin and piano, arranged for Tubin's countryman Alfred Pisuke, who was violinist in the orchestra of the Swedish Radio. The dance sounds like a folk melody, but is created by the composer himself.

The *Vanemuine* theatre building had also burned down during the war and was still in ruins at the beginning of the 1960s. The first performance of the new "Kratt" was therefore done in the former German Theatre, used as the second stage of *Vanemuine* already before the war and nowadays known as the "Small hall". The restored ballet met again with great success. It was performed 53 times in Tartu and twice on guest performances in Leningrad – an unbreakable record. Tubin agreed to come and received an invitation to Ida Urbel's jubilee performance on 9 December 1961.

As last time, the *Estonia* theatre wanted to stage a "Kratt" of its own. The first performance of ballet master Enn Suve's version took

place five years later. Both Tubins were this time present. It featured modernised decorations and costumes. The Devil lost his red cape and instead wore a chequered jacket and a cap with visor. Eduard Tubin didn't mind the Devil disguised as a shop clerk, but Erika would have preferred him as in the olden days in *Vanemuine*.

Then the style of "Kratt" started to change dramatically, as all contemporary ballets do. The importance of folkloristic elements was gradually toned down. Instead the directors started developing new and topical themes. The best possible balance in a classical framework was probably achieved in 1984 by choreographer Ulf Gadd and stage director Svenerik Goude at *Stora Teatern* in Gothenburg – the only time "Kratt" has been performed by non-Estonians. They created a timeless and powerful performance, named "The Devil's Dances" after a collection of poems by the Finnish author Pentti Saarikoski. It centred now on the fight between good and evil. The decorations and costumes were rather modest; the Swedes had of course no need to display Estonian folklore on the stage. Gadd and Goude also reworked Erika Tubin's libretto, giving the persons more character and real names. In Estonia the part of Kratt had been done by both male and female dancers. In Sweden the Turkish male dancer Ersin Ayca was chosen, giving the figure an unprecedented suppleness.

Also in Gothenburg, a potato pieced by straws hung next to the curtain.

When Estonian independence had been restored, new versions of "Kratt" moved further away from Tubin's original. In 1994 Ülo Vilimaa created a "ballet-mystery" at *Vanemuine*, where Tubin's music was supplemented with music by the contemporary composer René Eespere. In 1999 Mai Murdmaa's satiric version was presented on the *Estonia* stage. It dealt with greed in post-communist Estonian society. Murdmaa rewrote the libretto according to her own ideas and added greedy stock-exchange players, charwomen

who cleaned the stage after currency speculators and a young girl, who performed a Tubin violin solo on the stage.

On 18 September 2015, choreographer and stage director Marina Kesler brought an extremely powerful and visually stimulating modern production to the stage at *Estonia*, not least influenced by 20<sup>th</sup> century cinema classics. Tubin's music was left virtually unchanged – as stage music always should be. The libretto was timeless, now centred on the love-story between Daughter and Farmhand. The Farmer morphs into a greedy capitalist, who cannot earn enough from his Metropolis-style factory. Kratt is assembled not on a rural road crossing but in a large mill, run by tempting devilettes. His puppy-like loyalty turns to rage only when he feels neglected by his boss. Even the bombing of the *Estonia* flashes by, with Devil himself pressing the button of the air-raid alert. Thus, its history became a part of the ballet.



*Boris Blinov dancing the part of “Kratt”  
at the Estonia theatre in 1944.*



*The creators of “Kratt” at the Estonia theatre after the first performance on 24 February 1944: composer Eduard Tubin, librettist Erika Tubin, decorator Voldemar Haas, costume designer Natalie Mei, stage director Rahel Olbrei and conductor Priit Veebel.*



*Tubin with stage director Ida Urbel  
at Urbel's celebration at Vanemuine,  
9 December 1961.*



*Dance of the speculators in Mai Murdmaa's version  
of "Kratt" at the Estonia theatre, 1999.  
Photo: Harri Rospu.*

## Chapter 7. Last years in Estonia

Eduard Tubin was very productive during the three years of German occupation, despite the hardships of the time. In addition to two symphonies, one violin concerto, the Sonatine for piano, a violin suite, an unfinished opera and many songs, he also wrote incidental music to two plays during this period. At the same time he continued as chief conductor of *Vanemuine* and managed several new first performances of operas and ballets and new concert programs. Among them were Flotow's *Martha* and Johann Strauss' *The Gipsy Baron*. In letters to colleagues he complains of his busy schedule, leaving him no time to relax.

During the Nazi occupation, the ban on modern music continued. What had been banned as “bourgeois-decadent” during the Soviet time, was now labelled “Jewish-Bolshevik”. The occupation power had to approve all new theatre and concert programs. But the nationality and ethnicity of the author were more important than the content and style of the music. Modernistic sounds could in fact pass without the censor saying anything. Censorship was mostly applied to printed words. The collection and destruction of books that had been initiated by the Communists, continued under the Nazis, if from a somewhat different perspective.

Tubin could tell about the arrogance of the Germans in power. Either Olav Roots or himself had been ordered to appear with the orchestra for some ceremony. To the question what they were supposed to play, the answer was: “Never mind, just keep the instruments shining.”

Outwardly, the Tubin family lived well, they had a nice flat and a garden. An elderly German nanny cared for the newborn son. They had a German shepherd dog and a cat that immediately adopted the baby and rushed to his defence when anybody scolded him. The main problem was how to find food. In January 1942, harsh rationing was introduced for all Estonians. Most city people had some connection to farmers in the countryside, which helped them to survive. But it was dangerous to deal on the black market. Once, the Tubins had a real scare when they had managed to buy half a pig. It had to be covered like a baby and pulled home on a sleigh, keeping a watchful eye for patrols. Official receptions were much appreciated, since they were the only chance to get any titbits in addition to the rationed food.

For people, who expect music to be programmatic and mirror the actual situation in the life of the composer, Tubin's *Violin Concerto No. 1* certainly fails to confirm their preconceptions. It is a lyrical and intimate work that has nothing to do with the war, although it was his first work written after the German invasion and the street fighting in Tartu. He finished the solo part and the piano score in December 1941 and gave them as a Christmas gift to his friend Evald Turgan, who had made several first performances of his violin pieces in the 1930s. The concerto was first performed on 30 October next year with Turgan as soloist and the composer himself conducting the *Vanemuine* orchestra.

Karl Leichter wrote in his review (Eesti Sõna, 1 Nov. 1942):

*The simple, legendary basic theme of the first movement created a peculiar realm. Its mood remained in every variety of motion and new nuances offered on the orchestral background. Then the enchantingly tender, soft and Nordic emotional lyric of the second movement came to the fore, full of human inner feelings. [...] The attitude of emotion in the third movement brought a secretive urge, as if growing out of some*

*ancient spring in a mysterious hinterland, searching for an escape from it all and bringing it to an end, to a triumphant rise, a forceful solution.“*

It was an instant success and was performed during the war in Tallinn, Riga, Königsberg (now Kaliningrad), Breslau (now Wrocław), Stuttgart and Hilversum. In Tallinn and on the concert tour it was performed by the rising young Estonian violinist Carmen Prii Berendsen, with Olav Roots conducting. Tubin has said about the soloists that if Turgan performed it thoughtfully, then Carmen Prii did it “like a spark of fire”. Just after the war, the 1st Violin Concerto was performed by violinist Vladimir Alumäe with the new conductor of ERSO Roman Matsov, at the inauguration of the rebuilt *Estonia* concert hall in 1946. They performed it also in Leningrad, Kiev, Vilnius and Yerevan, until Tubin’s music was banned at the end of the 1940s. Alumäe started to play it again when the ban was lifted some ten years later. The first post-war performance in the West came after the composer’s death, when Neeme Järvi recorded it in Gothenburg 1984 with Mark Lubotsky as soloist for the BIS record company.

Next year, Tubin wrote another piece for Evald Turgan, the *Suite on Estonian Dances* for violin and piano, which was first performed on 2 October 1943 in Tartu. It consists of four countryside dances: Old Waltz, Shepherd’s Horn Piece, Kantele Player and Goat-horn Pieces. It immediately became one of his most popular works. In Sweden he wrote down the three first dances from memory and had them published in 1952; he later got a copy of the fourth dance from Estonia and added it again to the suite. In 1974 Tubin orchestrated the suite, which was performed next year on Swedish Radio with Tubin’s countryman Alfred Pisuke as soloist.

Legend says that Beethoven tore up his dedication to Napoleon in the “Eroica” when he learned of the imperial ambitions of his former idol. Tubin’s so called “Heroic” symphony has an even more

ironic story. He started writing it in 1940 when the country was occupied by the Soviet Union. It was commissioned for the communist art decade in Moscow which never took place. He continued writing under the Nazi occupation and finished it in August 1942. The first performance took place at the *Estonia* on 26 February 1943, two days after the now suppressed Independence Day, when it had been customary to perform new Estonian symphonic music. Three years later, when both Tubin and its first conductor Olav Roots were refugees in Sweden, Roots wrote:

*The despair, obstinacy and hate which have overcome a race that longs for its lost independence find musical expression in the Third Symphony. It grows to be a passionate hymn, a powerful expression of self-confidence and inner strength and also a heroic appeal for justice. Something like this could only be expressed in music, since the words were subject to censorship.*

Actually Tubin didn't add the title to the work nor give it a concrete programme, although there certainly are echoes of war, destruction and awakened hope in the work. Probably the heroic label came to the minds of Tubin's colleagues, when they gathered after the first performance and started discussing if the work should have a title. The modest composer is said to have replied: "then also I come waving my little flag."

The symphony is in three movements without the usual slow middle movement, which is here replaced with an extensive violin solo. Vardo Rumessen writes in *Collected Works II*:

*Compared with Tubin's other symphonies, the tonal language of Symphony No. 3 is somewhat simpler and generally easier to comprehend, yet still offers artistically high creative content. In its way of expression, it is foremost an epic-dramatic*

*symphony, the development leading from brooding and combative spirit in the first movement to the victorious end of the finale. The distinctive formal structure of the symphony and its artistic-figurative world offer further proof of the distinctive and independent qualities of each Tubin symphony. The thematic material, especially in the first movement, has grown out of the typical intonations of Estonian folk music. These are similar not only to the characteristics of Estonian folk tunes in general; one could also say that their serious nature convey the general spirit and way of life of the Estonian people.*

Olav Roots conducted it twice during the war and the audience received it with extraordinary acclaim. The people apparently understood the hidden message. Nowadays the views on this intensive music may be quite varied.

Rumessen writes (CW II): “This is a truly heroic liberation symphony, a proud and mighty song of praise to Estonia”. Harri Kiisk throws in a word of caution (BIS CD-342): “Tubin’s Third Symphony does not, however, have a concrete programme; nor does it bear a sub-title. Tubin proves in many of his works that he can produce special results from restrained material, and here we find great thematic richness, which the composer has succeeded in uniting into a whole.” The Swede Tobias Lund, who calls the end of the symphony “bombastic”, writes:

*In a way this work is over-explicit, but it is no simple task to pan a precise political content. Should the form be tied to the pompous optimism nurtured by both the Communist Soviet Union or the Nazi Germany? Or is it an expression of Estonian nationalism? Or is it a try to awaken another feeling of hope in the prevailing chaos, by using musical expressions that simply were contemporary?*

Olav Roots also conducted the symphony in Riga. Tubin carried the score to Sweden and shortened it somewhat in the 1960s. But he never heard it again. In Sweden nobody had any interest for Tubin's old symphonies. In its new form it was first performed after the composer's death. On a notable performance in Hiroshima in 2002, where the memory of war is painfully present, it was openly presented as a "war symphony". It became the most distributed of all of Tubin's works, when a recording with Kristjan Järvi was included in a BBC music magazine.

Tubin needed two years to write his *Sonatine* for piano, which was finished in the summer of 1943 and first performed by Olav Roots in December. Here his earlier romanticism gave way to a more personal style. It has a well-balanced structure with three movements. In the last movement, which partly resembles a tarantella, something of a funeral march suddenly appears. "We had witnessed a very dirty war", the composer later said in connection with the sonata. This is one of the few instances, when the composer admitted that outer events could find an echo in his war-time music. He was of course thinking about the murder of civilians. The *Sonatine* was played by Roots during his concert tour in German-occupied Europe in 1944 and was later printed in Sweden.

In the morning after the bombing of the Estonia, some men from the Broadcasting Orchestra ventured into the smouldering ruins to check what was left. To their great surprise they discovered a safe containing manuscripts. The safe had crashed from the fourth floor to the cellar and was still warm. It was opened with trembling hands. They discovered that the only full score of Tubin's Symphony No. 4 "Lyrical" was burnt at the edges, but still readable. The orchestra scores were undamaged.

The clear classical form of the 4<sup>th</sup> is quite different from the pathos of the previous symphony. Although it was written in the middle of the war, the comments speak about mildness, melodiousness and

romantic ways of expression, even of images of nature. Olav Roots wrote:

*The Fourth Symphony follows as a complete contrast to the Heroic Third. Tubin exchanges the manly, harsh sounds for soft pastel hues. It is as if the Nordic night shines a soft light on the homeland nature, the contours of which are un-sharp in the twilight.*

Tobias Lund adds:

*Tubin often lets his melodies implicate a direction, which he then follows longer than one expects and sometimes in a partly surprising way. In this way the melodies get a character of something higher, something moving freely over the barriers a poorer melodic art erects. Many of his melodies have a light that could be associated with the dawn movement in Britten's "Sea Interludes" – if one is interested in such similarities in the oeuvre of different musicians. There is a relation to the Third Symphony, but the tonal language is more subdued and friendlier. There are rises, but they never become threatening. There is a pulsating rhythm in the bass section, but it never develops into a march. There are faint trumpet sounds here and there, but they never lead to blaring militarism. In the Fourth Symphony the lyrical melodiousness never leaves its mild seat of honour.*

Since the Estonia concert hall was in ruins, the first performance took place at the neighbouring Drama Theatre, conducted by Olav Roots. The concert program also held Tubin's Violin Concerto No.1 and a piece by Heino Eller. The concert had been commissioned by the radio, the so called *Landessender Reval*, run as an affiliate to the German radio. Afterwards the soloist Carmen Prii Berendsen and composers Tubin, Eller, Aavik and Artur Kapp with spouses were

called to a dinner at the presidential palace, where the governor-general, *SA Obergruppenführer* Karl Siegmund Litzmann, doled out the promised 20,000 marks. The guests were rather embarrassed to eat on the official presidential china of the Estonian republic with a uniformed Nazi general as their host. Probably it was after this dinner, when the gentlemen were alone, that Litzmann asked for fire to his cigarette. Tubin pulled out his lighter, which looked like a small Browning pocket pistol. Everybody went pale and the general's aide-de-camp started grabbing for his gun before they saw that it was indeed a toy lighter. Litzmann laughed politely, but Erika was very angry when she heard of the incident.

Roots conducted the symphony also in Breslau (Wroclaw) and Stuttgart. Then it remained forgotten, until Neeme Järvi much later asked Tubin to restore the singed score. Tubin first said that he didn't care, but told as an aside on their next encounter that he had already rewritten, revised and shortened it. In 1981 Järvi conducted the new version in Bergen, Norway. Tubin could not attend because of his health, but liked the tape from the live performance very much. It was later used for the first release of his symphony cycle on the BIS label.

The Bergen recording and later Järvi concerts renewed interest in the 4<sup>th</sup> Symphony. The British music reviewer Kenneth Dommett wrote: "The Fourth Symphony first alerted me to Tubin's music and has remained my personal favourite ever since." (Hi-Fi News, October 1986). The reviewer John von Rhein wrote: "The Fourth symphony is inventive, full of memorable melodic ideas, lucidly scored and skilfully developed – a worthwhile addition to the symphonic repertory. [...] Listeners who have never heard any of Tubin's symphonies should find it a most rewarding and enjoyable discovery." (Chicago Tribune, 11 December 1987).

During the last year in Estonia, Eduard Tubin also wrote several solo songs to lyrics by well-known Estonian poets. Some of them

are among his most popular and have been repeatedly performed in exile as well as in Estonia. The last song written in Estonia carries the title “Epilogue” and is a resigned but not too sad farewell.

The Directorate for Education, an organ of the Nazi regime, commissioned an opera, but it was too late. The Tubin family spent the summer of 1944 in Valgemetsa, in the countryside some 35 km south of Tartu. There Tubin started on *Werewolf*, based on a play by Estonian writer August Kitzberg, a project that he had started pondering already during the Soviet occupation. He managed to write 138 pages of the piano score. When he much later commented on this second attempt to write an opera, he said that the story was too dramatic and that there was neither space nor need for music. It would be better to leave it as a stage drama or film script. He also found his treatment “rather watery”. In fact the story was later presented by others both as a ballet and as one of the most successful Soviet Estonian films.

In the summer of 1944 the war was back on Estonian soil. Narva fell at the end of July and some of the most violent battles of the war raged on the Sinimäe front, an isthmus between the sea and the swamps north of lake Peipus. A heavily outnumbered mixture of foreign Waffen-SS and Estonian troops gained a tactical victory, which forced the Red Army to invade also from the south. In the beginning of August it was high time for the Tubins to get going. From far, one could already hear artillery fire. The roads were full of retreating German soldiers. Fighters buzzed overhead, shot-up vehicles and dead horses were seen in the ditches. At first they returned to Tartu, but soon the fighting also reached there. The old town was devastated by bombs and artillery fire. The *Vanemuine* theatre became a smoking ruin and its personnel were evacuated towards Tallinn. Now the Germans started pulling out from the mainland. A hopeless effort was made to re-establish a national Estonian government with the help of veterans returning from Finland. They had no chance to hold against the Red Army and

Tallinn fell on 22 September. But for a few days the Estonian blue, black and white tricolour flew from Tall Hermann, the ancient fortress tower of Tallinn, and the sea was open. Of some 80,000 people who fled Estonia, about 25,000 came to Sweden, using anything that could float. It was more a panic than an orderly evacuation. The deportations during the first Soviet occupation were vividly remembered and people feared the worst.

In the morning of 20 September the Tubin family joined a crowd of people jostling towards the mine harbour of Tallinn, where the coastal sailing ship *Triina* was preparing to leave. German sailors lined up and let people aboard one by one. Hours went by pushing and pulling. A Russian aircraft flew over the crowds, but there was nowhere to find shelter. The ship could take at most 250 passengers, now some 600 squeezed aboard. Somehow Linda Tubin could push through the crowd with Rein and begged Eduard and Erika to take him along. Rein would become a hostage if his father escaped and he was left in Estonia.

At exactly 15.30 on 20 September, *Triina* slowly started to move out to sea. A notable part of the Estonian culture elite was aboard. Tallinn was burning and black smoke rose to the sky during one of the calmest and warmest autumn days of the year. In the middle of the Baltic, the engine broke down and the ship moved slowly by sail in a light wind. When the wind got stronger, many became seasick on the overcrowded vessel. Two days later the drifting *Triina* was spotted by the Swedish coast guard and towed through the archipelago to the island of Lidingö near Stockholm. Approaching neutral Sweden, children started crying that the lights must be turned off ashore – or they would be bombed! Women army volunteers offered hot cocoa to the dirty and exhausted passengers, who were quickly taken to delousing and then to quarantine.

*Violinist  
Evald Turgan (1909–1961)  
premiered many  
of Tubin's violin works.*



*Carmen Prii (Berendsen,  
Romanenko), (1917–1991)  
played several of Tubin's  
works in Estonia  
as well as later in USA.*



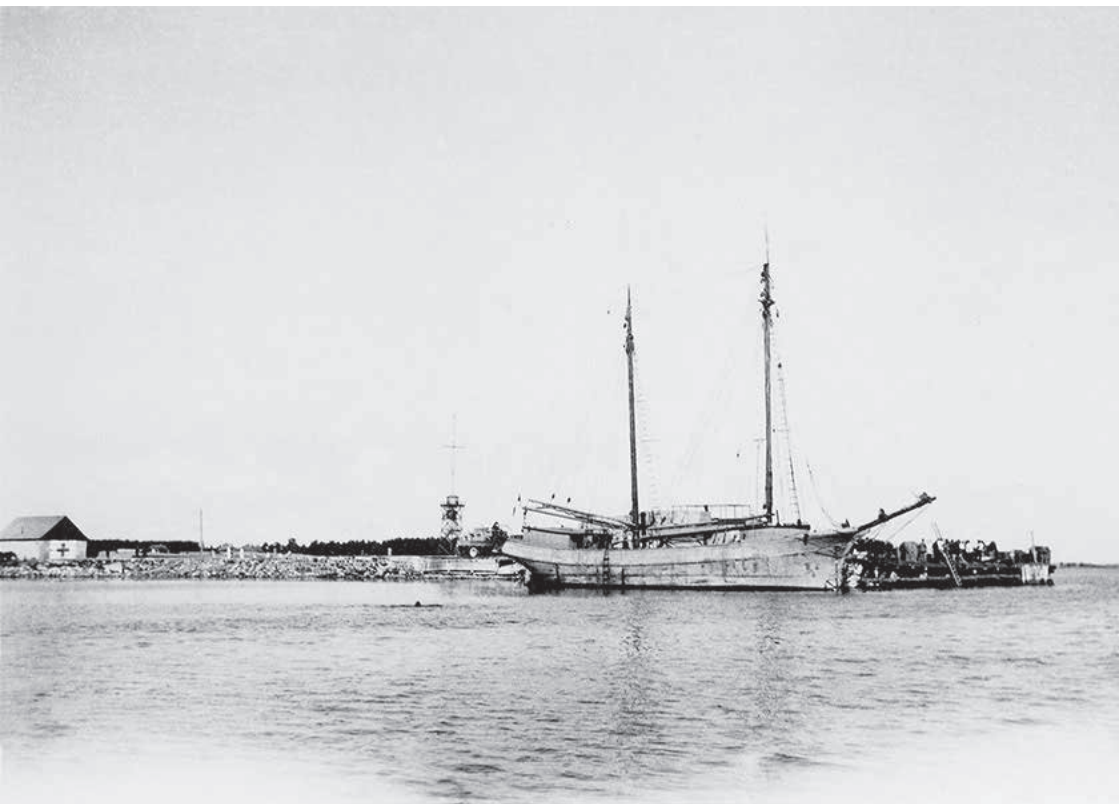
*Olav Roots (1910–1974) conducting in Estonia.*

REVALER ZEITUNG



Die estnischen Komponisten Prof. Aavik, Tubin, Kapp und Eller (von rechts nach links) erhielten vom Landessender Reval Kompositionsaufträge, von denen die beiden ersten am Sonntag in einem festlichen Konzert im Drama-theater uraufgeführt wurden. Im Anschluss waren die Komponisten Gäste des Generalkommissars SA-Obergruppenführer Litzmann im Schloss Katharinental (Vergl. Bericht auf der Kulturseite) Aufnahme Puura

*"The Estonian composers Prof. Aavik, Tubin, Kapp and Eller (from right to left) received commissions for new compositions from Landessender Reval and those of the first two were premiered on Sunday at a gala concert in the Drama Theatre. The composers were then guests of Commissary General SA-Obergruppenführer Litzmann at Kadriorg Castle" (Eesti Sõna, 18 April 1944).*



*The coastal sailing ship Triina,  
with which the Tubin family  
as well as a sizable part  
of the Estonian intelligentsia  
escaped to Sweden.*

## Chapter 8. A new country

The Tubin family was among the people taken to the Eriksdal primary school on Södermalm in Stockholm, which served as a fenced-in quarantine camp, guarded by soldiers. Other refugees were kept at different camps. Some were on the large island of Gotland. It took a long time before they could get in touch with each other.

After a week it was discovered that Erika and younger son Eino were carrying diphtheria microbes. Diphtheria was a dreaded disease. Vaccinations had only begun and mortality was a staggering 10 %. They were strictly isolated for about a month at the Epidemic Hospital in the north of Stockholm – Erika's letters were treated with a hot iron before they could be mailed – while Eduard and Rein remained in the camp. In those days, it was possible to have a letter delivered the same day within the city. Soon they started a correspondence. Eduard Tubin's letters tell of both the camp life and his inner feelings and give a good record of the first time in Sweden.

He had a lot to worry about. The family was split. There were no news about people left behind. Rumors circulated about the thousands of refugees drowned at sea. A parcel with the remaining "Kratt" scores and a rucksack with his other scores had been misplaced in storage and took a long time to find. The threat of diphtheria hung over the camp; the inmates were regularly tested and kept in quarantine. The food was more than adequate for those who had endured three years of German occupation, but the smokers – the

Tubin couple among them – suffered before they had been processed, given IDs and started to receive Swedish rationing cards. There was fear of Nazi agents among the refugees. The camp was a noisy place with children running about.

Despite all problems, the refugees soon started cultural activities. Eduard Tubin got some paper and pens as a gift and started writing down old scores from memory. He even tried to start on his 5<sup>th</sup> symphony. Dancers and singers started practicing for a show. Three weeks after their arrival in Sweden, they gave their first concert with Tubin accompanying on piano. Swedish “coffee ladies” who came to the camp for charity work were invited as guests. Two weeks later, guests from the ministry responsible for the camps and from the Labour Board were treated to a gala concert. Tubin (Letters I):

*Today I talked with the Labour Board representatives. They were very nice, asked what I wanted to do – I said that I wanted to work in my profession, to give lessons in composition, to work as répétiteur at the opera or some theatre, write music to some play or film – maybe also publish my own works if they meet with success in Stockholm. I know conducting, I know orchestrating and in the end I can always copy music. “Don’t you want to go to a factory?”, a cheerful lady asked. Then, interestingly enough, the detective appeared, who had interrogated us, and told the lady something in Swedish, after which the lady suddenly became very polite and asked if I really wouldn’t like to do manual, hard work, to which I replied that it would be equal to death for me, because I have developed myself in music to the top of my ability – and of what use would my life be then? “Can’t you at last understand this?”, I asked. “Completely”, the lady replied and thanked for the nice conversation.*

Ejnar Eklöf, a Swedish composer of nationalistic cantatas, took

an interest in the refugees. Eedo Karrisoo, a leading tenor from the Estonia theatre who had also sung in the Stockholm Opera before the war, was invited to perform Eklöf's songs at some concert. He needed a strong accompanist. Tubin was selected at the last moment and had his first opportunity to get out of the camp and see Stockholm. Björn Forssell, a Swedish opera singer who was temporarily at home from his tenure at the Vienna opera, even offered them cookies and real coffee.

*So I could see the town – how nice it is! The shop-windows are full of merchandise, the people are well dressed; in the centre there are bright fireworks of all kinds of colourful commercial signs – like a fairy tale after this long imprisonment.*

At the Eriksdal camp, Tubin founded a “joint stock company” with friends: industrialist Enn Vallak, novelists August Gailit and August Mälik and history professor Richard Indreko. The purpose was to produce drinkable moonshine from delousing spirits. Whatever the success of this endeavour, the joint stock company plus wives continued to meet for many years as an informal cultural forum. Sponsored by Vallak, who had soon established a successful enterprise, the group met either in Tubin's home or at some restaurant. There were no other reunions, and the refugees were more than happy to put this period behind them.

The cultural life continued, however, and soon exile Estonian primary and secondary schools, parishes, political parties, newspapers, publishing firms, clubhouses, a theatre, scout troops and of course choirs were established. They continued to work for decades, some are still active. From January 1945, Tubin started working with the Estonian YMCA Men's Choir, later known as the Stockholm Estonian Men's Choir, and continued as its conductor – with a break of some years – until his last public appearance in 1981 at the performance of his *Requiem for Fallen Soldiers*.

The family was soon reunited at Eriksdal and sent to a special camp for intellectuals, established in a large wooden villa in Neglinge in the well-off satellite town Saltsjöbaden. An organization called Help War Victims sent artists on tour to other refugee camps and Tubin took part as pianist:

*I was a useful member of these troupes, a “Mädchen für Alles”. The arranger of the tours, Engineer Norén, put the groups together: one priest, one or two singers, one piano soloist, dancers and one actor, who also made the jokes. In the camps the priest conducted a small service and I played chorals on the piano. I could play anything, from sacred chorals to profane dance tunes...*

In the camp he met Einar Körling, who was working for the Labour Board. Körling was owner of a music publishing company and made good money from the works of his father, the internationally known songwriter Felix Körling, and from some ballads by the popular troubadour Evert Taube. Körling immediately agreed to publish some of Tubin's works for what was then good payment, initially including a monthly fee for writing the scores on transparent onionskin paper. But the publishing company had limited resources and the collaboration lasted only for a few years. Tubin became disillusioned with Körling's easy promises and somewhat irresponsible lifestyle. As late as 1965, Körling was still hoping to print some Tubin scores, but the composer declined.

Through Körling, he also found his future employer and home. The Labour Board invented a clever way of supporting the intellectuals among the refugees who could not be sent to forest work or textile factories. They were called archive workers and assigned to various state museums to make inventories and help with other mundane tasks - for which some certainly were over-qualified. The monthly salary was quite low, but steady. The individual cases

would come up for regular review, to see if this kind of support was still necessary.

For some it worked, for some not. The tenor Karrisoo had high hopes to continue his stage career, and felt put down when offered archive work instead. He soon emigrated to the US to become a song teacher. Tubin's friend, the world-class graphic artist Eduard Wiiralt, was so disgusted when asked by the National Museum to prove that he could make a drawing that he walked out and found his way back to Paris where he had worked before the war. But for Eduard Tubin the arrangement was a blessing in disguise. With some other refugees he was assigned to the library of the Drottningholm Royal Theatre Museum.

The Drottningholm theatre is a marvel, now a world famous tourist attraction next to the Drottningholm Castle, the present residence of the Swedish royal family, some 15 km outside Stockholm. It was built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a royal court theatre and the wooden benches still carry the tags showing where the various ranks of courtiers would sit. After the assassination of opera-lover Gustaf III in 1792 during a masked ball at the Stockholm Opera, the wooden building stood empty and was even used as a stable. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was found that the original decorations and stage machinery were more or less intact and that the theatre could easily be restored to its former glory.

But what would it bring to the stage?

The head of the theatre museum, 1<sup>st</sup> Intendant Gustaf Hilleström soon realized that Tubin had the necessary knowledge and was the right person for the work. He was asked to make a thorough inventory of old Swedish operas and ballets and an appreciation of their musical value. For many years, he visited the libraries of the Royal Music Academy, the Royal Library and the Royal Opera, leafing through scores of old masters like Uttini, Naumann, Kraus, Du Puy and many others. He became acquainted with forgotten

works by the 18<sup>th</sup> century composer Johann Helmich Roman, later considered the “father of Swedish music”, and the extraordinary 19<sup>th</sup> century composer Franz Berwald, cosmopolitans like himself. Among other things he discovered the lost overture and some numbers of Berwald’s opera *The Modiste*.

Tubin soon came to an understanding with Gustaf Hilleström. He would write orchestra parts and restore old scores for the Drottningholm theatre. The office of the theatre was so small that he could better do it at home. Hilleström got an invaluable expert, and Tubin a salaried job, which he continued until his formal retirement in 1972.

The Drottningholm theatre needed Tubin’s help mostly during the first years. On average, he spent about half of his working time with the old scores and could use the other half for his own compositions. Even in the 1960s it could happen that he had to put everything else aside for some old work, scheduled for the stage. Later the workload decreased and the arrangement became nearly a sinecure.

Through the years, he worked on more than twenty operas and ballets. A wealth of restorations, piano and orchestra scores, orchestrations and arrangements of operas and ballets flowed from Tubin’s pen to be performed at Drottningholm. There were works by Uttini, Campra, Pergolesi, Blaise, Scarlatti, Mozart, Paisiello, Haydn, Cimarosa, Telemann, Martin y Soler, Kraus and Piccini. He reconstructed a Haydn opera, *Das abgebrannte Haus* where some pages were missing and arranged a ballet-pantomime *The Failed Escapades of Pantalone* after six of Domenico Scarlatti’s cembalo pieces. Its orchestral score is marked Scarlatti-Tubin.

When Tubin was orchestrating Alessandro Scarlatti’s *L’honesta negli amori* he thought that it was like solving a cross-word puzzle: “And the main difficulty with the solution was that it had to be theoretically right and at the same time sound just like the old master wanted.” (Letters II). Tubin:

*Sometimes one has to liberate the work from fake embellishments added at a later time. During last season the theatre had Cimarosa's opera "Il maestro di Capella" on the program. The available orchestration sounded suspiciously like Richard Strauss or the style of his time. I had the re-orchestrate the entire work so that it sounded as I imagined Cimarosa himself would have done it. (Sirp ja Vasar, 22 October 1967)*

Sometimes the family would be invited to see the result, and it was pure magic. In the summer night, the theatre was faintly lighted as by candles – real candles were of course banned because of the fire hazard. Doormen and orchestra members wore wigs and period costumes. Backdrops would roll from the sky, wings be pulled in and out changing the stage view, waves roll in the distance, goddesses descend from heaven and evildoers sink to hell – all to the faint creaking from ropes and pulleys powered by a huge capstan under the stage manned by sweating students.

Already in the refugee camp, Tubin had heard from the composer Eklöf that Swedish copyists and orchestrators were paid decently and that there always was a lack of qualified workers to do the job. This became an additional source of income, when he started working on a free-lance basis for the Stockholm Opera and the Stockholm Concert Society, as the Royal Philharmonic was then called. It was not unusual, when writing scores for some Swedish colleagues, that he mumbled something about their lack of technical skill.

In the camp, Eklöf had even hinted that the income from such work would be sufficient to afford staying at a hotel. At Neglinge, Körling found a better solution. Near to his own flat in Hammarbyhöjden, a southern suburb of Stockholm, a Swedish officer would vacate his flat at Ulricehamnsvägen 44 to move to another assignment. The Tubin family moved in, on May 1945 and stayed for 21 years, longer than Tubin had stayed in any other place.

Most other Estonian intellectuals eventually found their way to another, westerly suburb, where they formed something of an Estonian colony. But Tubin was not so keen to keep their company; he always wanted a personal space around him and needed peace to work.

Hammarbyhöjden was then the last suburb and the last bus-stop. A large nature reserve started nearby and gave many opportunities for walking in the woods and picking mushrooms. A big field opened up just in front of the house. The houses were narrow, white three-storey apartment buildings with two small flats at every flight of stairs. Soon the city started to grow and new suburbs popped up in every direction. A nearby area with tiny gardens and huts, where townspeople grew flowers and vegetables on weekends, was cleared out; only a few apple-trees remained. Tubin liked to walk there and listen to the blackbird singing from the top of a birch. Little by little, the small neighbourhood milk-shops, toy shops and bakeries were closed and turned into offices, as more efficient super-markets and shopping-malls took over. Eventually Hammarbyhöjden was connected to a branch of the metro system.

The flat on the bottom floor was very small, only two rooms and a kitchen, less than 50 m<sup>2</sup>, but the rent was low. The boys shared the bedroom, while the parents slept in the drawing-room, which was also Tubin's working place during the day. The neighbours were mostly Swedish employees or clerks, with whom the Tubin family had little in common.

There were of course language problems. The first contacts between the refugees and the authorities were in German learnt at school. Swedish sounded a bit similar, but is an entirely different language. There were no language courses, but the Tubins bought paperbacks at second-hand shops – mostly comical stories – and started guessing and studying on their own. All refugees could soon make themselves understood, but few of the older generation really mastered the language. Mistakes with the intonation and the

irregularities of Swedish grammar gave away that they were not native speakers, and Swedes were not used to have immigrants in their midst. Always the parents asked the sons to correct their letters, tax returns or applications.

Already in the first letters from the refugee camp, Eduard Tubin speculated what Erika could do to contribute to the income of the family. Her ballet career was over; she had bad feet and had started working as an actress already in Estonia. But there was no work for foreign actresses in Sweden. Her only try was in a radio play, written by August Mälik, where her accent was in its place. Could she work as a language teacher or seamstress? In Hammarbyhöjden she found her first employment in a small neighbourhood toy shop. Then she worked at the big NK department store in town, also in the toy section, where broken toys were taken for repair. Her next job was at *Musikhörnan*, a record shop. Then she decided to learn a real craft and studied technical drawing by correspondence. It landed her a job at an architect's office at walking distance from home. When its future became unsure, she again started commuting to town, working at a major Swedish building firm engaged in big projects in Liberia and North Africa. It was even engaged in the moving of the Abu Simbel temple in Egypt. The office was in the centre of town. She stayed on until retirement age through many re-organizations and mergers, where several workmates lost their jobs. It was not what she had prepared or wished for, but it was solid work, although sometimes quite stressful and tiring for her eyes.

The first years in Sweden were unusually productive and marked a new direction in Tubin's music. The earlier romanticism and lyricism gave way to a bold tonal language with strong rhythms that could sometimes even feel aggressive. He now had complete freedom to express what he wanted. To come to Sweden after the war-time isolation in Estonia was liberating, like "getting out of the bag", as he told an Estonian interviewer. At first he wrote some works for his fellow countrymen to perform.

One of the fellow refugees in the camp was the young violinist Zelia Uhke Aumere, a former prodigy, to whom Tubin wrote many of his best known works. His first composition in Sweden was *Prelude for violin and piano*, written at her request and soon performed at a small concert in the centre of Stockholm on 17 December 1944 with Olav Roots on piano. It was followed by the even shorter *Capriccio No. 2*, also on Aumere's request, first performed in the Little Hall of the Stockholm Concert hall, on 25 September 1945.

The *Violin Concerto No. 2* was also written in 1945, but needed longer time to be performed in its entirety. Tubin was upset that his Violin Concerto No. 1 had been left in Estonia, but found it too difficult to write it once more from memory. Zelia Aumere played the first movement of the new concerto with piano accompaniment on a private concert in the so called crypt of the Swedish Composers' Society on 5 February, 1946. Composers and critics were invited to get an impression of the music of the newly arrived Estonian composers, a kind welcome to colleagues in trouble. Then it took two more years before the whole concerto was performed by Aumere with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Tor Mann, live on Swedish Radio. The following year the concerto was played in public in Malmö, Stig Westerberg conducting.

In his foreword to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Violin Concerto, Vardo Rumessen writes (CW IX):

*Compared to Tubin's first violin concerto, the second is more a virtuoso work. All three movements are written in a lively tempo; the concert lacks a slow movement. The concerto develops in a way characteristic of Tubin's symphonic works, where similar intonation qualities of the themes create an integral structure of the entire work. Interestingly, all three movements start with a solo violin cadenza. Also, in the overall development of the concerto, the orchestra carries an important part.*

The first concerts of Aumere were duly noted by the reviewers, who commented not only on her good looks and style of playing, but also her repertoire. The Second Violin Concerto was positively received. The reviewer Ingmar Bengtsson wrote (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 6 March 1948):

*The Second Violin Concerto is a surprisingly lyrical piece, but its character is tender, mostly with a thoughtful, contemplative outlook. This is also stressed by the fact that all movements begin with improvised violin cadenzas. The first movement proceeds between a dreamy solo part and evil-boding bass passages. [...] In the last movement of the concerto virtuoso passages of the solo part appear and make us even more convinced that Tubin knows how to write for this instrument.*

Curt Berg added (*Dagens Nyheter*, 6 March 1948):

*... the concerto in G Minor shows a characteristic way of both using the orchestra and solo instrument proving that Tubin has thoroughly studied the concerto form and that it eminently suits his way of musical expression. [...] In his commentary to the work, the composer says that the second theme of the finale is “as melodic as energetic”. One could use this expression for the whole concerto.*

Olav Roots also wanted a major work from Tubin. Before the war, Tubin had twice started on a piano concerto, but couldn't progress behind a few bars. In Neglinge he wrote his *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra* in two months. Roots performed it the same autumn with the Radio orchestra led by Tor Mann. Soon it was also performed in the Stockholm concert hall with the Hungarian conductor Carl Garaguly. The Estonian composer Lepo Sumera writes in a CD booklet (Finlandia 3984-20684-2) that the concertino:

*... is a good example of Tubin's style. The very first bars make us acquainted with the essential musical material of the work – with its rhythm (played by kettle-drums), its harmony (the first chords performed by the piano) and the melodic lines (the first piano solo). All these components determine the development, musical substance and general form of the Concertino. There is a contrasting slow middle section, where the piano part and the melodies played by the strings are closer to the romantic atmosphere, but even here one can recognize the main rhythm and the harmony of the beginning.*

The Concertino was much appreciated by the Swedish critics and became one of Tubin's most played orchestral works. The composer Kurt Atterberg praised the "super orchestral tutti" and the "superbly clear structure", highlighting the "magnetic character of the music" (Stockholms-Tidningen, 15 October 1945), Yngve Flyckt called it a "rhythmically lively and harmonically well-rounded work, full of colours and unexpected moods along with good common sense" (Expressen, 2 February 1946) and Kajsa Rootzén wrote that "Tubin's strength is his rhythmic impulsiveness" (Svenska Dagbladet, 2 February 1946). It got also good reviews in local papers when pianist Käbi Laretei performed it on tours in Sweden, Norway and Germany.

The powerful solo piece for piano *Ballade in the Form of Chaconne on a Theme by Mart Saar* was also written in Neglinge. The theme – which had left a strong impression on Tubin – was taken by Saar from a folk song about a little serf boy and used in his choir song *Seven moss-clad tombs* with text from the national epic *Kalevipoeg*. Here the seven tombs symbolize seven centuries of serfdom. A motif, which resembles an archaic chorale, is contrasted by Tubin with another motif taken from the end of the theme in faster rhythm. But what strikes is the passion of the music – in Tubin's hands it becomes a fiery protest against the occupation, bringing back the old serfdom in a new and more terrifying shape.

Olav Roots played the Ballade in the YMCA hall in Stockholm in June 1945 and later on the private concert in the crypt of the Composers' Union. The demanding critic Moses Pergament found it "brilliant". Some years it was even permitted to play it in Estonia, where its sources Mart Saar and *Kalevipoeg* masked any topical message.

Already in the refugee camp there was talk about moving on, to the US, Canada or Australia. Many of the performing artists, who could not find suitable work in Sweden, soon decided to go. Tubin's friend and fellow student Olav Roots struggled as pianist and choir leader, until he in 1952 was invited to the conservatory in Bogotá. He soon became chief conductor of the *Teatro Colon*, brought its orchestra to world level and was elected honorary citizen of Colombia.

But there was also a general feeling of uneasiness about Sweden that came to its peak in early 1946. Then soldiers from the Baltic countries, who had mistakenly arrived in German uniforms, were forcibly handed back to the Soviets. This unnecessary gesture to curry favour with the Soviet Union left deep scars among both the refugees and the Swedish soldiers and policemen ordered to carry out the cruel extradition. For the authorities the refugees from Baltic countries were "without state", since Sweden had legally recognized the occupation. To travel abroad, they were issued special aliens' passports requiring visas even from neighbouring Nordic countries.

Why did Tubin stay in Sweden? Years later, in an exchange of letters with the double-bass virtuoso Ludvig Juht in Boston, he still inquired about conditions in America. He knew that it wasn't easy for a newcomer to find suitable work in the US. He tried to discourage his friend Endel Kalam, a conductor and viola player who had fled to Germany and was thinking to emigrate overseas, suggesting it would be safer to apply for a job in Sweden instead.

The Yankees would offer him a job as window washer and he would find himself hanging in a rope outside a skyscraper.

Certainly it would have been difficult to tear away the family from yet another country, abandon everything and once more start a new life from zero. Probably there was also a subconscious wish among many refugees to remain geographically near to Estonia, to bide time and to see if conditions there would improve.



*A meeting of the “joint-stock company” in 1951.  
From left:  
Tubin, author August Gailit,  
industrialist Enn Vallak, author August Mälik.*

*Tubin in the park  
of the Drottningholm royal castle.  
The court theatre for which he worked  
so many years is in the background.  
Photo: Eino Tubin.*





*The Tubin family with  
operetta singer Milvi Laid and  
her son Jaan.  
Photo: August Zimmerman.*

*Zelia Aumere  
(1919–1998),  
on whose request  
Tubin wrote  
most of his violin  
pieces in exile.*



## Chapter 9. Like an engraving on copper

*I mostly work in the mornings. Then the spirit feels fresh. I don't need very spontaneous inspiration. I write fast and continuously, until the problems create a barrage for my thoughts by putting up a labyrinth of possibilities. Then only a long walk in the bosom of nature helps, where the ideas and problems will clear by themselves. And when creative frenzy then seizes me, the work lasts until late at night. (Stockholms-Tidningen Eestlastele, 13 Feb.1946)*

Tubin rented an upright black piano. He struck a few notes; then sat down at the dining table to write. He wrote music looking out over the backside of the house. There were a few bushes and trees in the green spot separating it from the next house. In winter he fed the great and blue tits with hempseed and balls of lard that he put in a small box on the windowsill. When finches and sparrows spoiled the feeding and quarreled around the box, he interrupted his work to chase them away, so that the tits dared to come back. They politely took one hempseed each, flew to a bush, put it between their toes and starting hacking. Körling once gave the family two canaries in a cage, but they started singing as soon as Tubin sat down at the piano. He was advised to cover the cage, so the birds would go to sleep, but it was against his principles to cheat animals, so he gave them back. The family never had any other pets.

The first gramophone was a *Victrola* with crank – a gift from

Estonian Soviet diplomats, who started to visit soon after the war, to try to entice Tubin to turn back to Estonia. They also brought some 78 rpm. records with sentimental Russian songs like “Black Eyes”. When Erika worked at *Musikhörnan*, Rein started collecting jazz records. Father and son both had Spike Jones with his wild parodies as a favorite.

The furniture was sparse; there was little space anyway. During the first years in Sweden, most Estonians were not too keen on furnishing their homes. They had a feeling that there was something temporary about their stay and that they might soon have to move on. A straw mat covered the ugly wallpaper. The only picture on the wall was a black-and-white reproduction of Alexander Roslin’s painting “Lady with veil”, whose well-known original hangs in the Swedish National Museum. Soon everything was impregnated with a pungent smell of tobacco – Eduard and Erika Tubin were heavy smokers all their lives.

Eduard Tubin took a keen interest in some of the toys of the sons. When the first pieces of balsa wood were imported after the war, it was reported in the newspapers. There was a rush for model aircraft and he built a complicated balsa helicopter with counter-rotating rotors powered by a rubber band. It made a single flight in the kitchen before bumping into something and breaking beyond repair. Tubin later made some very good model aircrafts: a far-ranging plane powered by rubber-band and two large gliders that had to be towed by wire in a run and released when they reached some altitude. They are now exhibited in the Tubin museum. But when Eino started building plastic models he showed little interest; they didn’t require any creativity. The first electrical train was assembled at home from a set sold by a hobby shop. Tubin supported the interest in model trains with suitable gifts. He contributed to the landscape by building a model in 1:100 of a Swedish church and a whole French castle, patterned on a picture in his friend Professor Armin Tuulse’s book of castles in the western world. The towers

were made of cardboard tubes used by architects for sending blueprints. Long afterwards, in 1977, the family visited the real thing, Sully-sur-Loire in France. It didn't look as nice as his symmetric model.

The older son Rein was a practical and easygoing man. After the Estonian primary school, he studied engineering. He was the most musical of the siblings. He played trombone in a Dixieland band, learned to play the cimbalon and later became a choir leader like his father. Rein moved out as soon as he could. For some years he tested cars; then he travelled around Sweden for an oil company giving advice on lubrication before becoming owner of a workshop manufacturing precision-made pieces as sub-contractor for larger firms.

Körling had a fancy Jaguar car and took the Tubin family on the first small trips around Stockholm. The first travel abroad was in 1947, when the ISCM resumed its activities with Music Days in Copenhagen. Eduard Tubin went as an official delegate, but without representing any country. Erika's aunt Mice (Emilija Koch-Larsen) was living in Elsinore. Like her sister she had married a foreign engineer and moved to his country. When Eduard Tubin was enjoying Gino Negri's *Spoon River anthology* and Knud Riisager's Greenland ballet-pantomime, the rest on the family sat on a beach and looked at ships on the horizon. A few times uncle Otto took them on trips in his little car.

Some years later, aunt Mice and Erika quarreled about some trifling inheritance and broke off all contact. Apart from a hard-drinking sea captain named Jaan Sulane, based in Gothenburg, the Tubin family had no other known relatives in the free world. In Stalin's time there was no contact with either Eduard's mother or Erika's parents living in Estonia. When correspondence was allowed again, Erika's mother was the only one alive. She stayed in Tartu and took care of an orphaned Russian boy.

Only much later did Tubin learn what had happened in Estonia: how the music life was subjected to Stalinist dogma, “formalist tendencies” were banned and staged trials started. From 1948 it was prohibited to perform Tubin’s works. Of his closest friends, who had remained in Estonia, Evald Turgan lost his health in Siberia and Alfred Karindi his entire life’s work – all his scores were destroyed during a police raid. Karindi received a long prison sentence, but was pardoned after Stalin’s death. The accusation was that he had conducted a well known choir song about the “forest brothers” during the German occupation – which Tubin also had done.

During the years when the Soviet power didn’t permit any communication with occupied Estonia, Tubin had no chance to recover his scores left behind. He had managed to bring some scores in a rucksack – like his Third and Fourth symphonies – but nobody was interested in Sweden. There were also no recordings of his older works. The Swedes got the impression, not dissipated during the composer’s life-time, that the music he had created in Estonia was an inferior exercise to what he was writing in Sweden. Even Herbert Connor, who made a thorough interview with the composer in 1978, didn’t know better than to write that the first four symphonies “were halting-places on the way to the successful Fifth symphony”. In this way, Tubin lost nearly everything that he had once created.

In an interview in 1946 for the exile Estonian magazine *Kodukolle*, Tubin said:

*I am not taking staying here just as an exile... I want to establish contacts also with England and America... Nowadays, all the important contemporary musicians are there; as you know many German musicians also fled there.*

*Here it is something of a stay, as in many other countries, but once the music life was quite lively... Of their own names, I*

*would like to mention Rosenberg, Atterberg and Rangström. They are composers of international renown; unfortunately I don't know the younger ones so well.*

He soon found two Swedish composer friends, who took the Tubins on boat-tours and invited them to their homes. They were both half a generation older. As Finnish-Swede and Jew, the composer and brilliant critic Moses Pergament had his own problems of being accepted among Swedish colleagues; there was still a residue of anti-Semitism. Hilding Rosenberg was a Swedish counterpart to Heino Eller, a skilled composer who was also the most important teacher of his generation. Like Eller he had introduced modernism at a time when national-romanticism was in vogue. Other early acquaintances were Lars-Erik Larsson and Dag Wirén. Like Tubin, Wirén liked picking mushrooms. Eduard Tubin's name was already becoming known in music circles: when the music encyclopedia *Sohlmans Musiklexikon* needed articles on Estonian music for its first edition, they turned to him.

He started having composition students. Käbi Laretei, a glamorous young pianist, wanted some theoretical musical knowledge. Harry Olt, Diana Krull and Toomas Tuulse became composers in their own right. Some students were Swedish amateurs, who had a theoretical interest in composition, without having any hope of writing something substantial themselves. One Swedish youngster was a serious music student, but had a bad motorcycle accident. Nils-Eric Svedlund was music director of the wealthy Pentecostal Movement. Tubin had no interest for their missionary rhetoric, but they got on very well in the field of music. His teaching was based on practical examples, not abstract theories. According to Olt, he said: "Why read textbooks? Better analyze the great masters." He asked Käbi Laretei to make piano reductions from orchestral pieces and to orchestrate piano music, something she said was very useful in her career as a pianist.

Tubin started writing his Fifth symphony already in the Eriksdal refugee camp, but gave up after 13 pages of the score. The camp was too noisy, he felt too depressed; there were other things to do. When he started again in June 1946, he chose a completely different approach, using the well-known Estonian folk melody *On My Beloved Country Lane* in the first movement and the rural chorale *The Night Ends There* in the second. The rousing end is accompanied by furious beating of the timpani. The symphony was finished in December the same year and had its first performance on 16 November at the Stockholm *Konserthus* with Carl Garaguly conducting. This time, Körling was ready to publish a pocket score.

The reviewers were positive. Tubin received the most extraordinary review of his life-time from Moses Pergament, hidden under a bland headline in a small evening paper with declining circulation (*Aftontidningen*, 17 Nov. 1947):

*...A man without home, a great artist and a human being with such rich experience, on which his creativity is based, that his work becomes a spiritual message. Eduard Tubin, Estonian refugee living in Stockholm since 1944, is an extraordinarily well educated and versatile composer. His fifth symphony that Garaguly now brought to its baptizing, has seen the daylight in Sweden. It is an imposing and eruptive work; its violent inner tension can be sensed both in its idea and in the organic contradictions of its theme. Like in an engraving on copper, its lines in all the three movements are clean and round, in its pulsing rhythms as well as in lyrically dramatic and linear melody. Even when the music seeks support in an old Estonian chorale, *The Night Ends There* as in the *Andante*, it serves the purpose of making not only the musical ideas but also its symbols as understandable as possible.*

*Without doubt, this symphony has been intended and realized*

*as a musical depiction of Estonian national tragedy, and its dramatic quality has been created with the same power and artistic fantasy as its almost religious faith in future and the prophetic vision of freedom...*

*Tubin's symphony has been constructed with a skill speaking of a sovereign mastery of musical form. He has not been restricted by a programme; he creates with strict musical logic. His music is striking and uplifting but also soothing and liberating. The coda of the finale becomes a veritable Mount Sinai from where you can see the Promised Land like a distant paradise, and where the veils of clouds keep rising higher and higher converging in the triumphant major final chord.*

The symphony became Tubin's major international success during his life-time. A German radio orchestra performed it in Detmold, Hamburg and London. It was played on a tour to Trondheim, Bergen and Oslo in Norway with local orchestras, conducted by Arvid Fladmoe. Tubin went along and gave interviews explaining why he couldn't live in Soviet Estonia and write merry Communist couplets when the people was suffering. The first performance in the US was in 1952 in the Carnegie Hall of New York on a concert arranged by local Baltic associations. In 1955, Olav Roots conducted it in Bogotá. 1956, when Tubin was permitted again in Estonia, it was performed by ERSO, conducted by Sergei Prohhorov. The symphony was performed on four concerts in Sydney in 1958 with the famous exile Russian Nikolai Malko conducting. The concerts would nearly have been cancelled, when the ship carrying the postal parcel with the orchestra parts caught fire. In a hurry, Tubin and Kõrling assembled a new rental set and sent it by air mail, which at that time cost a small fortune.

Most Estonian conductors have performed it. For many Estonians it is *the* Estonian national symphony, with tragic reflexions on war and exile. At the extreme end, some claim to hear specific historic

events described in the symphony: the deportations of June 1941, the Soviet tanks coming, a hint at the *Internationale*, the scorched earth... Eduard Tubin, who was already getting allergic to ideas about programmatic content in his music, allowed only that he saw the end of the first movement as an “apotheosis over the stormy sea”. But the music evokes not only war and waves. When rehearsing in Japan for a concert with the Hiroshima Symphony Orchestra in 2005, the young Anu Tali found the timpani players too timid and exhorted them with the following outburst, duly recorded by local TV:

*Can you play more crescendo? It I not pam-pam-pam, but PAM-PAM-PAM. You have the Shinto religion, we have Taara. It has nothing to do with European civilization. It is worshipping stones, trees and nature. That's Estonian for you! Lots of raw energy! No civilization! Savage!*

In the summer of 1947, Tubin met the kantele player Kandle Juss (Johannes Rosenstrauch). He was a real virtuoso and knew many folk tunes. One of Kandle Juss' tunes became *Kantele Polka* in the piano suite *Four Folksongs from my Native Country*, one of the most popular of Tubin's folk-tune suites. K r ling printed the score and K bi Laretei played it the same year.

The *Concerto for Double Bass*, finished on 31 May 1948, has an interesting story of co-operation over the ocean. In autumn 1947, Ludvig Juht visited Stockholm. He was a double-bass virtuoso who had moved to Boston before the war, becoming section leader of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He now came to meet his old Estonian musician friends who had fled to Sweden. He gave a recital in the concert hall and took time to demonstrate the capabilities of his double-bass playing to Tubin. Tubin wanted to know the very limits of the instrument and Juht showed him all the tricks. The goal was to write a virtuoso piece “so that every double-bass player in the US

would keep it on his stand, just to show off”, as Juht put it. The concerto was written during a flow of air-mail letters between Stockholm and Boston. Tubin said:

*Then it became a veritable correspondence course. When I asked if it was possible to play certain passages, the answer was: “Yes, with practice”.*

The concerto lasts about 18 minutes and is in three movements, which follow without pause. Connor comments:

*In fact the double-bass often sounds in Tubin’s concerto as a cello or viola. One cannot believe that it is possible to draw so many nuances from this difficult instrument. But certainly the relation of the solo instrument to other instruments of the orchestra plays a decisive role. Here Tubin shows a sensitive ear and an inventiveness that make the concert not only an acrobatic virtuoso number but also a piece of great music.*

In the second movement the trombones repeat a melody that Tubin claimed to be one of his best. The double-bass plays, but is drowned by other instruments. As Tubin said: “sometimes it is nice just to watch the soloist playing.”

It was a huge success for Körling’s publishing house. When a pirate print with piano accompaniment appeared in Moscow in 1973, all 1500 copies were snapped up at once. It became compulsory in Russia for double-bass students to study the concerto. Leopold Andreyev recorded it for *Melodija* in Moscow with young Neeme Järvi conducting. But at home in Boston, Ludvig Juht met with unexpected resistance when he wanted to play it. The leader of the Boston Symphony Orchestra was autocratic Sergey Koussevitsky, a former double-bass player from the Berlin Philharmonic, who had himself written a concerto and didn’t want any competition. Juht

had to do the first performance with piano accompaniment and could never play his own concerto with an orchestra. His letters to Tubin tell of his great frustration.

The first proper performance with an orchestra was done in Colombia in 1957 with double-bass teacher Manuel Verdeguer as soloist and Olav Roots as conductor. Verdeguer played it several times in other South American cities like Buenos Aires and Caracas. With time it has probably become the most frequently played orchestral work by Eduard Tubin. The concerto is now regularly discovered and performed by new generations of outstanding double-bass players all over the world.

When corresponding with Ludvig Juht, Tubin asked him about an album with Ferde Grofé's *Grand Canyon Suite*, which could not be found in Sweden because of import restrictions. He had heard Toscanini's recording on radio and was fascinated by the excellent orchestra sound, which for him as a former conductor was more important than the highly programmatic music. The album arrived and the family listened to the donkeys walking in the canyon and the thunder and rain, all "described" in music just as vividly as on the garish cover picture.

Tubin had a gramophone for 78 rpm records, but the first 33  $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm records started to appear on the market. Tubin got a private recording of his 5<sup>th</sup> symphony in New York, but couldn't hear it before he had acquired a large commode with built-in radio, electrical gramophone and loudspeakers underneath. The family often sat in front of it, especially for the Saturday night show; listening to the radio was then taken very seriously.

Three of his seminal chamber works from this period passed almost unnoticed by the critics: the Violin Sonata No. 2, the Piano Sonata No. 2 and the Saxophone Sonata.

Tubin needed a rather long time to compose the *Sonata for violin*

and piano No. 2, in *Phrygian Mode*, one of his most important works from this period. The first drafts are quite different from the final version; and as late as 1976 the composer tinkered with the piano score. It actually first started as a cello sonata. The use of the archaic Phrygian mode makes the sonata seem rather austere, but the popular Ritual Dance and reminiscences from other works sneak into the second movement. The shimmering “northern lights” motif from the later piano sonata breaks into the first and third movements, at the end with destructive force. The last movement is characterized by an endless pulsating motion.

The sonata was first played by Zelia Aumere and Olav Roots at a concert of *Fylkingen*, an association for modern music. It was soon also played in London, Munich and New York. The Soviet-Estonian violinist Vladimir Alumäe appeared with the sonata in Tallinn in 1959 and played it later during a tour of the Soviet Union.

Conservative Swedish critics didn't like it at all. For them this modern sounding piece was a “respiratory pause” (Kurt Atterberg, *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 3 April 1949) or “stale echoes” (Kajsa Rootzén, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 3 April 1949). The even more groundbreaking 2<sup>nd</sup> Piano sonata, which soon followed, wasn't mentioned at all in the Swedish press.

Tubin was now rather disillusioned of Swedish critics, who racked their brains to put some label on him, whether it was “a russified Hindemith” or “a stravinskyfied Borodin” (both epithets by Curt Berg, *Dagens Nyheter*, 17 Nov. 1947). All his life he suffered from critics, who were looking for influences in his music from abroad – whether Russia or France – or from other composers.

One cold night in the winter of 1950, Tubin woke up the whole family and told everybody to get dressed and go out. There they stood shivering on the big field in front of the house, looking up. Streams of greenish light were running over the night sky. It was

northern lights, *aurora borealis*, which then still could be seen so close to a big, lighted city. Tubin later said:

*The whole sky was in motion. Everything around me flashed and whirled, all of the nature.*

This became the inspiration for his Sonata No. 2 “Northern Lights” for piano, which he wrote without interruption from February to October 1950. Tubin never gave this name to the sonata; he didn’t acknowledge any programmatic content at all. But the title is pretty, and it easily stuck to the piece which has a definite Nordic content, as it is partly based on Lapp tunes. It is the only time Tubin used folk music from a non-Estonian source in his work. It is done very freely however; there is nothing folkloric in the sonata. He considered this as one of his most important works and said that it became a creative turning point (Connor):

*It was a lesson for life. I learned to concentrate on the important things and leave all unnecessary things out. No ballast, no repetitions, every note should be on its right place.*

Tobias Lund describes:

*Already from the first bar of Piano Sonata No 2 one meets one of the most important and most talked about elements of this work: the so-called Nordic Lights Motif, a movement shimmering by its quick and high arpeggio. While this shimmer mostly moves beyond tonal categories, there is a total charge already in the rising quart and the falling small septima, which appear in the middle of the shimmer to introduce the main theme of the movement. The mixture of tonal and atonal is characteristic for this work.*

The second movement gives variations on a joik and another

Sami tune. Like the Swedish composer Wilhelm Peterson-Berger in his symphony “Same Ätnam”, Tubin found his tunes in a musical-ethnographical study by Karl Tirén, which appeared in 1942 titled “Die Lappische Volksmusik”. Lund notes, however, that Tubin’s treatment in the beginning “reminds more of [jazz pianist] Jan Johansson than Petterson-Berger”.

The Swedish musicologist Gunnar Larsson claims (1986) that traces of these joiks can be found also in the first and last movements of the sonata. The finale starts with drumming like a shaman ritual and develops into a ecstatic symphonic drama, developed and transformed together with the *ostinato* rhythm of Sami drums. After a great culmination, the theme of the Northern Lights from the first movement reappears, before the rhythm of drums and the main theme of the last movement close the sonata.

It is a most difficult work to play. Olav Roots made the first performance in *Konserthuset* in Stockholm on 26 March 1951 and repeated it later on radio in New York, Boston, Sweden and Hamburg. After that it was not performed very often. In Estonia it was first played by pianist Laine Mets, who also recorded it on *Melodija*. Only after the composer’s death has it become a challenge for the best pianists, often overlooked by critics but slowly acquiring something of a cult status. Vardo Rumessen tirelessly propagated this work, pointing out how important it is not only in Tubin’s oeuvre but among all of 20<sup>th</sup> century piano works.

Immediately after this difficult work, Tubin started on the *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano*, finished in March 1951. The second movement, *Adagio*, was actually first written as a freestanding piece for cello called *Troubadour Song from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century*. A fellow Estonian, the cellist Gustav Tohver performed it in 1951 with Olav Roots on piano. Probably Ludvig Juht also tried to play it on his double-bass.

The saxophone sonata was first performed in its entirety by Jules

de Vries on 22 September 1951 in Uppsala, with Martin Keil on piano. De Vries was born in Holland, moved to Norway with his parents and fled the Nazis during the Second World War for Sweden.

Soon after the saxophone sonata, Tubin started writing his Symphony No.6, where a tenor saxophone has an important role. Like the symphony, the sonata also has hints to popular music; Tobias Lund found a motif in the middle movement borrowed from Judy Garland's hit "On the bumpy road to love" (1938). Tubin could have a rather liberal interpretation of old troubadour songs! In the manuscript, Tubin noted that the sonata could also be played on viola. The first viola performance could well have been in Tallinn, when the German viola player Petra Vahle performed it with Vardo Rumessen on piano, ten years after the composer's death.

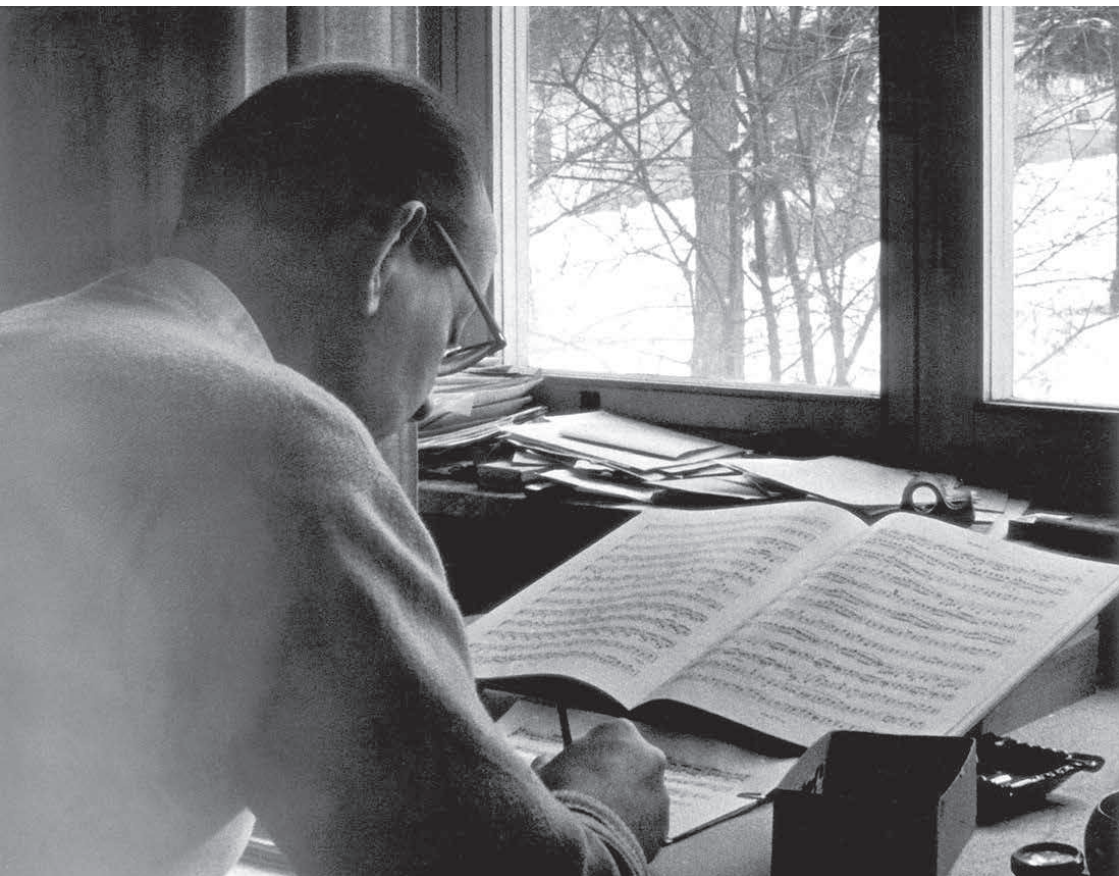
The locals hardly noticed it, but Estonian choir culture had a blossoming in Sweden. In 1948, the first Song Festival in exile took place at *Skansen* in Stockholm with 10,000 Estonians participating – the first mass gathering after the war. Tubin conducted the male choirs on the festival. He brought his Stockholm Men's Choir to a high level and wrote many of his best songs for it. Among them, *Ave Maria* is Tubin's only song on a religious text – in this case the classical *Missale Romanum* sung in original Latin. It has been performed by numerous foreign choirs.

For Tubin the lyrics were very important – the singers had to have an interest in the words. He loved folk poetry and surprising turns. *Dance from Muhu* starts "tink, tink, tink, tillerille" and finishes with a complaint about the nuisance the black pig has done. *The Shepherd's Sunday* describes the thoughts of a shepherd; when others go to church he stays at the pasture, where he has his own good deeds to do. *From Sõmera to Sõrmiku* is a merry road song with funny place names. The heroic ballad *Two Islanders* – an old legend about a pirate and his servant – has a surprising end. The pirate is beheaded, but if the headless man can walk past his

cronies, they will be pardoned – until the old servant topples him with his foot.

At that time, Olav Roots conducted a mixed youth choir, for which Tubin wrote two small songs to lyrics by the influential Estonian poet Henrik Visnapuu, who died 1951 in America. *First Letter to Ing* is a youthful declaration of love, sung as a slow boogie-woogie. Tubin also continued writing solo songs, many to lyrics of his friend Kalju Lepik. Tubin liked his minimalistic style with few, but striking words.

At the end, the work as a choir leader took too much of Tubin's time. It had become difficult to recruit new members and many of the old ones didn't bother to come to the rehearsals. In 1959 he temporarily left the task.



*Tubin writing music at home  
in Hammarbyhöjden,  
with a view of bushes and trees.  
“I mostly work in the morning.  
Then the spirit is fresh”.  
Photo: Eino Tubin.*



*Double-bass virtuoso  
Ludvig Juht (1894–1957).*



*Käbi Laretei (1922–2014) often performed  
Eduard Tubin's piano pieces.  
One of her favourites was "Four Folksongs  
from my Native Country".*



*Choir leader Eduard Tubin  
and his Stockholm Men's Choir  
are received at a Swedish railway station.  
Photo: R. Sömermaa.*

## Chapter 10. A country of stone

Eduard Tubin always had a mixed opinion of Richard Wagner. He admired the sensitivity and nuances in the music, the first one could call modern, but was never satisfied with the lifeless way in which his operas were brought to the stage. The man was himself a riddle; how could somebody who wrote so beautiful music be such a duplicitous character? When he had collected enough money, he decided to go and see for himself in Bayreuth. Somebody had given him a recommendation letter, maybe it would help to get access to the sold-out and terribly expensive performances during the festival. He went for a week to Germany in the beginning of August 1952 and wrote amusing letters home.

It was his first commercial flight and he enjoyed it enormously – he had only flown once before in an open air force trainer in Estonia

From Hamburg he took the express to Nuremberg and then the local train to Bayreuth. A friendly waiter helped him to find a nice room for only 5 marks per night. He went straight to the *Festspielhaus* and managed to get a permit to sit in the orchestra during the *Meistersinger* with Hans Knappertsbusch conducting. When he at last saw Wolfgang Wagner, the stressed-out festival manager only asked if Tubin was alone and immediately provided all tickets he wanted for free: to *Parcifal* and *Tristan und Isolde*, the latter with Herbert von Karajan.

In “Parcifal” the motif of the Holy Graal was blown much too

early from behind the curtain. Tubin had just started admiring Wagner a little extra for the dissonant surprise, when he overheard the stage director scolding the players. A little later something fell down with a bang. Then it felt homely, just like in old *Vanemuine*. But when Karajan managed to bring out all the nuances in the softest moments of Tristan, Tubin got tears in his eyes and saw that the nicely dressed audience was weeping too.

He had a keen eye for comedy. The wooden seats were a torture, but the breaks lasted 45 minutes and gave ample time for beer, wine and sausages. The acoustics were marvellous, but the conductor and orchestra were invisible in their deep trench. So the audience wore tuxedos and evening dresses while orchestra members had Bavarian leather shorts. The costumes and the scenery in “Parcifal” were magnificent, but nothing happened on the stage – it is not an opera but a *Bühnenweihfestspiel*, a festive stage inauguration play, as Wagner called it himself. But in all, he was pleased with the experience and wanted Erika to join him next year.

They didn’t go next year, but the trip to Germany started a family tradition to spend the summer vacations away from Stockholm, to travel, to go places. First the family explored Sweden.

Tubin’s friend from the refugee camp, Enn Vallak, had in a few years established a successful business in Grythyttan, a small town in Bergslagen, the old Swedish mining heartland some 200 km west of Stockholm. He pulled up tree-stumps that nobody thought had any value; he started making dolls and office furniture. Then he invented cooling moulds for molten steel. It became a world success. The Tubin family went for two summers to Grythyttan, to live a countryside life in a cottage in the woods, taking long walks and swimming in a forest lake.

One summer the family went to Järvsö at the wide Ljusnan river, where Tubin enjoyed fishing and went on tours with an Estonian agronomist assigned to teach farmers to vary their crops. The last

Swedish vacation together was spent in a remote place up north, where the grocery van stopped at the nearest crossroads once a week. Tubin was not a swimmer, but Erika and Eino splashed willingly in the cold lake. He taught the son to use an airgun and to row a boat and mowed the high grass with a scythe. Erika was learning landscape drawing, making sketches of farmhouses and nature. The family picked berries and mushrooms. For Tubin it was a complete rest from worries and thoughts.

In fact, he had not settled down and was still thinking of his mission in life. In letters to his friend Endel Kalam, who now was becoming a successful conductor and teacher in America, he tells of a feeling of rejection, of having been pushed aside as a humble archive worker. He wrote (Vaba Eesti Sõna, 17 Jan. 1953):

*It is difficult to say that I would be happy here. The music life of Stockholm is on its own path and it is difficult to find a place there for a foreigner. I could go somewhere else, but it is not easy, because it is very doubtful if I can find a benign master, who would offer some “charity bread”. But if I could find a position, that I could fill, then I would go at once.*

In a later letter to Kalam he is even more bitter (Letters I):

*Do you know that here in Sweden a human being is gradually turned into stone, the same kind of stone on which this whole country is built and which is so close to the people here? But where to go, who is waiting for me?*

When fellow Estonians celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1955, they really tried to cheer him up. The family was awakened by a noise in the morning and discovered the whole men's choir outside the bedroom window, about to sing a serenade for their conductor. What would the neighbours say! Concerts were arranged by exile

Estonians in Stockholm, Sydney, Toronto and New York for his honour and he was heaped with formal leather-bound citations from Estonian organizations. At a ceremony in town, the choir gave him their ultimate gift, an oil portrait by Eduard Ole. Tubin had been posing for a long time, either at home or at Ole's atelier in a suburb across town. Few other painters have gone through so many style changes as Ole. Now he painted in an expressionist way with vivid colours and marked brush-strokes. Some thought the portrait looked too modern, but Tubin was proud of it. He also got a bright painting of a girl with flaxen hair as a bonus from the painter.

Fellow Estonians tried to help, but with little success. A Tubin Society founded in 1949 to produce records with his music soon fizzled out. Tubin was quite sceptical of an attempt to interest Toscanini for his symphonies. Why would the old maestro, who made rare appearances, take on a new work from an unknown composer?

The summers in the nature were certainly needed. All refugees put on too much weight after the starvation of the war and sicknesses followed. Tubin had been in good physical shape as a conductor in Tartu, now he mostly worked at the table. The family was quite worried when his heartbeat suddenly got irregular, but it was overcome by medicine and advice from his friend Dr. Endel Rumma, who sang in the choir. Actually it was Erika who first got chronic health problems. Technical drawing for architects seems like quiet work, but there were constant deadlines, an uneven workload and worries about the future. Such office work was not what she had imagined for her life. She soon developed ulcer and was advised to take a rest abroad. She went alone to the German Alps, while Eduard took son Eino on boat tours in the Stockholm archipelago. In the mountains, Erika met a German couple who owned a motor-cycle factory. Returning, she visited them at home and was deeply impressed when the wife went out to shoot a deer for dinner. Eduard also came to Germany and they made a tour on a Rhine river-boat together.

In 1956 Tubin decided to take the whole family to Salzburg, for Mozart's bi-centenary festival. Rein, who had the only driving license in the family, offered to drive. The family went by train to Lübeck, where they were met by Lea Lesta, an Estonian pianist who had performed many of Tubin's works, and her husband Eugen Miller, a broadcaster working with the Allied occupation forces. They rented a small Ford Taunus, with which the family continued through West Germany. The superhighways were magnificent and the traffic was light, but some bridges were still missing after the war and required long detours.

The family stayed at an inn in Anif, outside Salzburg, near the fabulous 17<sup>th</sup> century castle of prince-bishop Markus Sittikus. He could at any time turn on hidden water jets in the garden to surprise and shower his guests, a feature that strongly appealed to Eduard Tubin. But it was difficult to find tickets; they managed only to go to some chamber concerts and had to listen to the great opening of the Mozart festival on the car radio. They also drove to Vienna to get a quick impression. It was not possible to do everything they had wanted to, but the good food, good drink, cheerful people and the great freedom of being able to drive around on your own left a lasting impression.

Eduard and Erika were surprised to see Rein in a hurry when they returned to Stockholm Central. He had a secret girlfriend named Saima; they soon married and started a family.

Next year *Wiener Festwochen* started again after the war. Eduard and Erika took the younger son Eino along. They stayed at a private apartment in the centre of Vienna. Tickets could now be found easily; refugees from the failed Hungarian uprising stood at every subway entrance and sold them for a small addition. Every evening the family went to the opera, to the golden *Musikverein* or to chamber concerts in various castles. The performances were magnificent, with conductors like old Leopold Stokowsky, Josef Krips,

Karl Böhm and, of course, Herbert von Karajan, who recognized Tubin from Bayreuth and allowed him to sit in on a rehearsal, a rare honour. For him, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* with Karajan was the high point; he had never heard it so perfectly performed before. One night he also took the family to a small tavern, where an old zither player played nostalgic tunes for the few guests, just like in Tubin's favourite film *The Third Man*. For the son's music education, the family attended a typical Viennese ballet performance, although Tubin had a dislike to classical ballet, its conventions, gestures, fairy-tale stories and often rather simple music. But the Viennese could also be cruel. The audience protested, when Karajan conducted a piece by contemporary Kurt Leimer, and the newspapers made puns about Karajan "getting stuck on glue" (Leim in German).

The two symphonies that Tubin wrote in the 1950s are fundamentally different.

The *Symphony No.6* was written from 1952 to 1954. Tubin claimed in interviews that he wrote it as a protest against the prevalent jazz culture with poor and stereotypic improvisations pushing out and replacing classical music. At the time, there was certainly much talk about the dark side of jazz: the drugs and the booze. But this explanation sounds somewhat superficial. Underneath there may well have been other, inner demons of frustration and feelings of being pushed aside, which were now let out to do their rumba around the frog-tallow candle.

Connor describes the symphony in the following way:

*It is not difficult to find jazz elements in the 6<sup>th</sup> Symphony, mixed with bolero, rumba and habanera rhythms. As theme II in the first movement, the tenor saxophone plays a melancholy tango melody reflecting the attitude of the composer towards contemporary developments. In the second movement there is also a nostalgic saxophone melody, while*

*at the same time various drums, wooden blocks and piano are employed. The double bass excels in hot rumba rhythms and different percussion groups fight in violent clashes. An E-flat clarinet and a bass clarinet give spice to the concoction, which begins to look like a great tragic jazz symphony. Then the work finishes with a movement in strict chaconne form that feels like a punch in the eye.*

If one takes the symphony as a protest against the spirit of the time, it is not unique. In CW III, musicologist Kerri Kotta writes:

*[...] the symphony directly links within the tradition of the twentieth-century composers such as Gustav Mahler and Dmitri Shostakovich. Specifically, popular contemporary genres and styles, as if distorted by a curved mirror, often hint at the evil and inhumanity of the outer world, while historic chaconne or passacaglia articulate the inner monologue of the artist [...]*

But it is not necessary to find messages in this symphony. Harri Kiisk wrote (Teataja, 23 Oct.1955):

*[The Sixth symphony] is absolute music and the impressions it creates are as many as the listeners. Taken as pure music, it is one of the richest, deepest and most interesting works in the symphonic literature of Tubin and Estonia. But above all – this work may without exaggeration be counted as one of the most promising also in global new music.*

It is in any case a most difficult symphony to play. Both conductors and musicians were puzzled with the rhythmic structure, especially in the second movement. Tubin got very angry when Tor Mann had not sufficiently prepared for the rehearsal and started on a wrong beat. The composer even thought of interrupting, but didn't want to

create a scandal. The symphony was first performed on Swedish Radio on 30 September 1955. The German Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt, who conducted the Stockholm Philharmonic a year later, confessed afterwards that he had started to understand it only during the performance. Tubin always wanted to be present during the rehearsals, in order to explain, help and if necessary make changes. But after these experiences had had a rather low opinion of the conductors practicing in Sweden.

The reviewers also didn't understand the symphony and received it with much cooler words than the Fifth. Hans Åstrand, former secretary of the Royal Musical Academy, thought it was due to (Aastaraamat 2003):

*...such circumstances as traditional lack of curiosity among music critics, poor willingness to accept Tubin as a somewhat rare bird among the local tribe of composers, his new symphony not fitting under the label that habit had put on Tubin...*

Kurt Atterberg wrote a bizarre review full of contradictions (Stockholms-Tidningen, 1 Nov. 1956), where the symphony is seen as an argument against the dodecaphonists that he hated:

*Eduard Tubin, the Estonian composer, whose works we have so often admired, now offered us his sixth symphony. During its first movement, I said to myself: this sounds just as caustic as the creations of the dodecaphonists, but wait, this is music! You see, it is not the amount of noise that turns notes into music or not music. [...] Despite the extraordinary strong impression I got from the first movement, I cannot call Tubin's sixth symphony a masterpiece. Its second and third movements don't offer enough contrasts from each other or from the first. [...] In any case we can find in this symphony a pleasant example that music of a "modern" kind doesn't have to be*

*idiotic and inspired by mischief-making. Tubin's sixth gives an impression of being music of experience and honesty. Great success!*

In his booklet for the BIS record with *Symphony No. 7*, Tubin's discussion partner Harri Kiisk writes:

*The Sixth symphony occupies approximately the same place in Tubin's production as does "The Rite of Spring" in Stravinsky's. To continue on the same track would be nearly unthinkable. Tubin said very modestly about the Seventh symphony: "I have used the potential of a small orchestra". It might be added that the composer at the same time shows what can be created from a very narrow thematic material. After the apocalyptic storm of the Sixth symphony, the composer surveys the scene of the disaster, picking up the remaining pieces.*

The 7<sup>th</sup> was written in 1956–58 and is Tubin's smallest in both length and instrumentation, lasting about 25 minutes. Connor writes:

*The Seventh symphony is freely tonal, with both tonal and atonal parts. Tubin himself stresses that his purpose was to write in an easy way, while at the same time surveying the possibilities of atonality. The paradox is, he admits, that in reality there is no purely atonal music. "There is always a tonal basis to stand on. But the tonal base can change very quickly, be moved to different voices or just be there latently. If you do not follow your ear and artistic consciousness, you either end up making clichés or in a swamp."*

In the last movement, Tubin experimented with a covert eleventone technique. He was quite pleased with the result:

*The most difficult thing in modern music is to write a flowing allegro movement. Instead of tonal points of support, I have in this movement used a continuous melodic and rhythmic tension. The energy that drives the music forwards is stored in the fuel depot of the three main motifs. I am happy that I was able to write this movement.*

It was first performed by the Gävle Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Gunnar Staern, then Käbi Laretei's husband, on 1 March 1959. Many fans and critics fall in love with this little, "ascetic" (Connor) seventh. Tony Lundman wrote in *Svenska Dagbladet* in 2002:

*The Symphony No. 6 and above all the Symphony No. 7 are magnificent. The former is strongly theatrical; the latter has more shadows and is one of the absolute favourites. It has a kind of agitating voice that keeps the tension high even during the ethereally beautiful second movement.*

It has been performed by a number of smaller orchestras all over the world, but oddly, very seldom in Estonia. An "ascetic" symphony apparently doesn't fit under the national-romantic label commonly used for Tubin in Estonia.

Tubin visited Finland several times, where many of his important works were performed. In 1958 he got an unusual commission from the Jyväskylä University for its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary the following year. It was for an Inauguration Cantata – *Vihkiäiskantaatti* – to lyrics by the Finnish poet Toivo Lyy. The solemn cantata is in four movements for a cast of baritone, reciter, mixed choir and orchestra and lasts about 21 minutes. The first performance at the celebration was broadcast live on Finnish radio. Some Finnish composers were upset that such a commission had gone to a foreigner, but it was

praised by reviewer Timo Mäkinen as a “sculpture hewn from marble” – in a positive sense! (Helsingin Sanomat, 31 May, 1959).

After Nikita Chrustjev’s condemnation of Stalinism in 1956, Tubin’s works could suddenly be played in Soviet Estonia again. He started receiving new musical literature, like the first collection of scholar Herbert Tampere’s *Estonian folk songs with tunes*. On the basis of this collection Tubin wrote *Suite of Estonian Shepherd Songs* (1959) for piano, dedicated to Erika. It was the first time anybody in the West had used material published in Soviet Estonia. On a visit from Colombia in 1960, Olav Roots played the suite at the celebration of the Estonian national day in Stockholm.

The same spring Tubin flew to New York, to take part in Estonian Days. He conducted choirs at a concert in Armory Hall and received many honours and leather-bound citations. With his new movie camera Tubin filmed wealthy American-Estonians, who proudly flaunted their large cars and tidy gardens.

But a siren’s song also started from the other side. After Chrustjev’s reforms, connections between the Soviet Union and the West were restored. Letters from abroad were permitted in Estonia – everybody knew they were steamed open and read by the KGB. Surviving victims of the Gulag were rehabilitated and some artistic freedom was restored after years of mind-numbing dogma. The Communist regime was firmly in place and could relax its grip somewhat. One of its goals was to gain respect, to score propaganda victories. Refugees would be offered to come back. A committee was appointed for improving ties with exile-Estonians with the acronym VEKSA. Visits from the Soviet Embassy intensified. Before every New Year’s Eve, two comrades came for a chat, carrying gifts like a bottle of whisky. The campaign got serious at the end of the 1950s when violinist Vladimir Alumäe, an ardent party member, started to write letters to Tubin. His works were now regularly played in Soviet Estonia, conducted by Sergei Prohhorov and young

Neeme Järvi. Couldn't he come for a visit, for one of the performances of his works? In 1960, Alumäe even came personally to Sweden to try to persuade him.

The younger son Eino was the first of the Tubin family to apply for Swedish citizenship. The parents waited to see how it went. At that time it was still rare to acquire a new citizenship, and he was called personally to interior minister Ulla Lindström to receive the document. When the parents followed a year later, in 1961, the same minister signed the papers but sent them by registered mail.

For Tubin it was a necessity. On a possible journey to Estonia he needed the protection that Swedish citizenship gave. Actually it was a major political undertaking to invite him to Estonia. Raimund Sepp, who had once played viola at *Vanemuine* and was now living in Tallinn, was appointed to handle his financial dealings. Probably on official orders, Sepp had resumed correspondence with Tubin already in 1958. The *Vanemuine* asked Tubin to restore "Kratt" and he could once again see his old scores, hidden from him for 14 years. To compensate Tubin, the party boss of Soviet Estonia had to personally beg Moscow for some foreign currency. When ballet master Ida Urbels 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary got nearer and "Kratt" was again running at *Vanemuine*, Tubin could not postpone his visit any more.

Since Estonia had no direct connections with the West at that time, Tubin had to go to Helsinki and from there to Leningrad, where he was met by a VEKSA car and driven to Tartu. He attended a performance of "Kratt" on 10 December 1961 and took part in Ida Urbel's celebration. Then he was driven to Tallinn where he met the RAM male choir and its leader Gustav Ernesaks, saw the upcoming young conductor Neeme Järvi before a performance of his 6<sup>th</sup> symphony, visited his old teacher Heino Eller and was taken around to institutions like the Tallinn Conservatory and the Theatre and Music Museum. His hosts didn't even try to politicize the visit, well knowing that it would have been counterproductive.

The uproar surrounding Tubin's first visit may be difficult to understand for those who have not personally experienced the claustrophobia of a closed Communist dictatorship or its counterpart, the siege mentality of a self-contained Diaspora. Among some exiles, the trip was met with shrill condemnation, further fuelled by an innocuous radio show, where Kābi Laretei invited guests for a "pleasure trip". Tubin's unbiased answers to questions about Estonian music life were taken as support for the regime. One journalist even compared him to Knut Hamsun, the Norwegian author who supported Nazism and let the Germans use his name in their propaganda. The academic fraternity *Ugala* decided to expel Tubin and the family got anonymous phone calls. With distance the criticism grew stronger and even Olav Roots broke off correspondence for some years. It took a few years to calm the feelings; soon visits to occupied Estonia became common.

Of course Tubin was hurt, but he knew that he was right. It was dangerous to boycott all relations – Estonian culture at home as well as in exile would suffocate from lack of oxygen. Tubin made eight more visits to Soviet Estonia over the years; about one every other year, mostly accompanied by Erika. The later visits were first to Tallinn – ferry connection with Helsinki was restored in 1965 – where they had to wait for permission if they wanted to proceed to Tartu, which was off-limits to foreigners because of a nearby Soviet air base.

What the regime really wanted was of course his permanent return to Estonia. It could perhaps give some respectability for a puppet administration presiding over the dismantlement of civic society, a population change by mass immigration of unskilled foreign labourers, Russification of the culture and uncontrolled pollution of the nature. Various perks were hinted at, sweetening the offer.

Much later, Tubin asked a functionary in jest if he would be able to travel to London if he wanted to. The functionary looked at the

ceiling and mumbled that it might eventually be possible. But if I want to go tomorrow, Tubin asked, well knowing that there would be no answer. Things were not done this way in the Soviet Union; a fact that frustrated conductors of world renown like Neeme Järvi and Eri Klas who had to humbly wait for permission from Moscow every time they were invited to conduct abroad. Actually, Tubin visited London only once. But the principle of being able to go wherever you wanted without begging petty bureaucrats for permission, was important for him. He really enjoyed when the family once drove from Belgium to the Netherlands without even reducing the speed; it was one of the first border controls of Europe to be abolished.



*Portrait  
of Eduard Tubin  
by Eduard Ole, 1955*



*Eduard Tubin cutting grass  
with scythe.  
Älgered, Sweden, 1959.  
Photo: Erika Tubin*



*The Tubin family on the way to the Salzburg festival.  
From left: Rein, Eduard, Erika, daughter of the Miller couple,  
Eino, Lea Lesta-Miller, Lübeck 1956.  
Photo: Eugen Miller.*



*Eino and Eduard Tubin visiting  
the Johannes Brahms monument  
in Vienna, 1957.  
Photo: Erika Tubin*



*Eduard Tubin meeting Neeme Järvi at Kadriorg,  
Tallinn, 6 May 1976.*

## Chapter II. The composer in the sixties

Eduard Tubin was wrong. It was not jazz threatening to push out classical music. The challenge came instead from the interest in radical composition techniques that started in the 1950s in Sweden and which in his opinion were a dead end: the New Viennese school, dodecaphonic music, the Darmstadt school, pointillism, stereophonic, electronic, concrete music... Their supporters got a lot of space in Swedish music life in the 1950s and 1960s. But since the lovers of Mozart and Beethoven also demanded their usual share, the possibilities to perform and broadcast contemporary music based on classical forms diminished. In a letter to Raimund Sepp (1958), Tubin writes:

*I have the feeling sometimes that I am very late coming to this world. My thoughts go to problems that these guys don't feel a thing about, I write music that compared to theirs is quite medieval, and when I try to understand their creations, I am not able to. They say there is nothing to understand, just sit and listen. The music is supposed to awaken a creative process inside the listener, so that the stuff you hear is not a creation, but the creation is what starts inside yourself. I don't think there are so many who have been "enlightened" this way, but who am I to judge what people understand and hold true.*

In a letter to his old school mate Karl Leichter 1964 (Letters II),

he says that the music created by the young radicals lacks “nerve” and instead aims for various empty effects:

*The most comical thing is the fact that the adherents of this spirit are so numerous, that they strongly stick together and support each other when necessary, and that older composers, who have more sense and nerve, don't dare to say anything directly. Only this: well, I don't understand these new directions, I'm a bit left behind. And they let the guys run loose freely, at the beginning a bit reluctantly, but after the second “opus” already with respect. And these youngsters get huge state support, since there is not a man who would dare to criticise (or even analyse) them. As a bystander I cannot say anything, let the natives make havoc. But one can chuckle a bit.*

A milestone in Swedish music life was Karl-Birger Blomdahl's opera *Aniara*, first performed in 1959. Looking at its score, Tubin first thought that the opera was “cold and impersonal like a piece of ice” (to Turgan, Letters II), but later he started to appreciate it. Bits of electronic music and recorded sound effects were actually in their place in a “cosmos opera”. He tried to use dodecaphonic techniques himself, but later told Connor:

*Serial technique is not for me. I have other problems, namely how to express a certain idea in a certain way. Here no composition manual can help. In the 1960s I once tried the serial technique. For me it seemed that writing in this style was too easy, far too easy.*

Getting Swedish citizenship broke the isolation that troubled Tubin in the “country of stone”. Doors opened, he was elected member of the Swedish Composers' Union and could apply for Swedish government grants. He was himself surprised that it all went so quickly. Why had he been waiting so long? The economic

situation of the family improved considerably. Now he had a new goal – to support and inspire young musicians isolated behind the iron curtain. His interests for travelling, photography and filming blossomed.

He returned from his first travel to Estonia with a fur coat to Erika, a large can of black caviar and a Russian camera. Through the years, some roubles trickled from the commissions in Estonia, but they could not be taken abroad. Some swaps could be made with fellow Estonians who wanted to support their relatives. He had to find ways to spend the money in Estonia – during their travels, by supporting Erika's mother in Tartu or by giving a scholarship to Raimund Sepp's son who was studying violin in Moscow. He gave a substantial sum for the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of his first wife Linda. But there was very little beside the bare necessities one could buy with this money in Estonia.

The Swedish government grants had to be motivated. They came through different sources and had to be applied for. The usual stated reason was that he needed peace of mind to be able to complete his current composition – this was the formula given by the bureaucrats and nobody came to check if he really cut down on other work. The tax rules, however, demanded that the grants could last no longer than two years; or they would be retroactively taxed as regular income. Tubin quickly learnt the loopholes and to write his income-tax returns so that he paid as little as possible. It even became a sport. He was quite proud when he once won a court case and could deduce payments for his piano from his income in a shorter time than the tax inspectors allowed. Once he even wanted to be taxed as a home seamstress, since they had some special relief. If Max Reger could call himself an "Akkordarbeiter" and Hilding Rosenberg a herbal gardener, why could not Tubin call himself a home seamstress!

This was a time in Sweden when creative people felt terrorized by

tax collectors. It became Kafkaesque when world famous director Ingmar Bergman was pulled from the stage by police in the middle of a rehearsal, to be interrogated for some tax matter. The conductor of the Radio orchestra Herbert Blomstedt had to escape from Sweden when the tax authorities wanted him to pay for income he had earned in East Germany – which of course could not be taken out of that country!

Tubin went regularly to the meetings of the Composers' Union. For a while he was even member of a commission for recordings. A tradition in Sweden is to eat thick pea soup and pancakes with jam on Thursdays. The Composers' Union made it a monthly social event and invited members, sometimes with spouses, for an open house where of course another ingredient of this tradition – a shot of warm Swedish arrack - was also included. Tubin often frequented these gatherings and made a number of friends. They were mostly composers who also wanted to build their work on classical music forms. When his works were played on radio, some colleagues always sent their congratulations, like the symphonist Gösta Nystroem. He also met the radicals, but both sides found they had little in common.

Most of the works that Tubin wrote in the 1960s are rather sombre and full of experiments in form. In 1962 he wrote the *Sonata for Solo Violin*, which lasts about 11 minutes. It is a complicated and thoughtful piece, without any folkloristic touch, using the full scope of the violin. What seems as a row of improvisations on two opposing themes is united by strict inner logic. It was first performed by Bruno Eichenholz, a refugee from Poland, at the Modern Museum of Stockholm on 11 March 1963. Eichenholz played on his favourite instrument *violino grande*, a hybrid violin-violita built by the instrument maker H.O. Hansson. It has since been played by top violinists in many countries. It was printed in 1965 by Edition Suecia, the publishing branch of the music copyright bureau STIM. The American violinist Frank Almond, who performed it on his Lipinsky

Stradivarius gave the interesting comment (A Violins Life 2, Avie AV2363): “...its hauntingly jagged mood may reflect the displacement that defines [Tubin’s] musical career.”

It was followed by *Music for Strings*, a slightly longer piece for string orchestra, written on the request of Zelia Aumere, now leader of the Lucerne Chamber Orchestra in Switzerland. The three movements follow an unusual pattern: *Moderato*, *Allegro* and *Adagio*. The whole work is based on a very freely used 12-tone form. It was first performed on 22 June 1963 at Schloss Heidegg in Lucerne, followed by a performance in Estonia with Neeme Järvi conducting the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra. It has become one of Tubin’s most popular works with many performances in USA, Canada, Sweden and England, not to mention Estonia. When well played, the constant tension in the sound of the strings makes this piece thoroughly fascinating. However, it evokes quite different feelings, which makes it difficult to put it into some labelled box. While Swedish critics found it “nice, engaging” or “easily understandable and melodic”, a British critic says it is “rather sombre in tone but extremely well set out for the instruments”. For the Estonian composer Lepo Sumera “...(it) associates with neo-classical clarity. But the tension of the music itself and the feeling of the presence of the composer’s own voice in this music makes the whole work closer to romantic.”

After the first performance on Swedish Radio (25 March 1964), Folke Hähnel wrote in Dagens Nyheter that “such a nice, captivating piece should, one thinks, be played all over the country, not least by such orchestra associations which have difficulty managing his symphonies.” When Connor said that he found the work post-romantic, Tubin answered:

*Of course, I dare to be a romanticist. But remember: I had decided to write 12-tone music that should not sound like Schönberg. For me the melodic line was always more important than the doctrine.*

The *Concerto for Balalaika and Orchestra*, finished in 1964, is a quite different work, commissioned by a very unusual man, the Norwegian-Russian neurosurgeon, pistol champion and balalaika virtuoso Nicolaus Zwetnow. In the early 1960s, the Tubins were visited by Erika's school-mate Grete Precht, who was working as nurse at the hospital in Flen, a small town in Sweden. She told that her head doctor was an excellent balalaika player and asked if Tubin could write something for him. Tubin, who remembered the balalaikas from the Elementary School, flatly refused. But when Zwetnow came himself and demonstrated what his instrument could do, he changed his mind.

The concerto is a playful piece, focused on testing the capabilities of the instrument. It is also written in a free twelve-tone style. In an interview on Swedish Radio, Tubin stressed that the concerto didn't have any folkloric content. He didn't like the Russian balalaika culture, where folk tunes were used to show off technical virtuosity. Tobias Lund writes:

*The concerto in three movements doesn't completely break with past balalaika use. Tremolos and glissandos are left in. But as in Symphony No. 7 and Music for Strings, the music moves freely and searchingly over the chromatic scale. Another unusual thing for balalaikas is that the rather weak-sounding instrument is combined with a big orchestra. Often Tubin has to thin out the web of orchestral sound, to let the soloist out, without sacrificing any of the colourful instrumentation. Sometimes the balalaika gets buoyancy by gliding along in the melody of the orchestra. Sometimes it's role is to rise questions, sometimes it whispers excitedly from a hole in the orchestral web. Or is dancing small and wild dances, as a Little My of the instruments.*

It was first played on Swedish Radio with Zwetnow as soloist

accompanied by the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra. It has since been played by Zwetnow with various orchestras in Sweden, Norway and Russia and was first recorded on LP in 1981 with the Stockholm Philharmonic.

The most sombre of Tubin's chamber works is the *Sonata for viola and piano*, dated May 1965. It was written for his friend Endel Kalam, now working as conductor, teacher and viola player in the US. The sonata is in three movements, getting successively gloomier. Despite, or because of, all this pain, Vardo Rumessen calls it "one of the true masterpieces for this instrument in the 20<sup>th</sup> century." Lund writes about the last movement:

*...The sonata ends in an amazing way. In the rise to the last culmination the viola repeatedly plays a dissonant motif with a punctured rhythm. The repetitions build up a static charge and seem to promise a mighty high point when something big should happen. But instead the viola just repeats the motif – soon it's too late – the high point has passed – the dynamic spools down – the piano texture grows thinner – the motif continues towards silence. In opposition to the previous movements there comes no contrasting end. The sonata has really ended before one thinks, while one still wonders how it will end. You really have to look after a more dramatic anticlimax in a chamber music piece.*

It was first played on Estonian radio, on 20 October 1965, by Raimund Sepp with Eugen Kelder on piano. Kalam played it next year in Boston. In Sweden it was first played nine years after the composer's death, in Gothenburg by Petra Vahle. The Estonian cellist Toomas Velmet arranged it for cello and performed it in Estonia as well as on a tour in the Soviet Union.

For the Tubins, yearly travels to the south became a ritual. But it was not only for the sun; for them it was just as important to

absorb the culture, hear the folk music, visit the museums and get in touch with ordinary people, as far as language skills permitted. They avoided going on guided tours with other tourists, instead finding sympathetic taxi drivers who would take them around privately.

They had been to Mallorca and gone together with Eino to Barcelona and Sitges. Now they added Ibiza, Peñíscola, Madrid, Nerja, Granada, Aranjuez and Alhambra to their Spanish destinations. Erika had a fascination with flamenco and the Roma culture; Eduard studied the exciting dance rhythms and bought records of genuine Spanish folk music. Other travels went to Italy – to Naples, Pompeii, Ischia and Rome and to Greece, where they toured Athens, Delphi, Nafplion, Mycenae, Epidaurus and Cape Sounion.

Tubin became seriously interested in photography and film-making. He had bought an 8 mm Canon spring-powered zoom camera for his trip to New York and learned to splice the reels together and cut out the shaky parts. He never did the usual mistakes of the beginners; he used a tripod, avoided zooming and tried from the beginning to make a narrative from the scenes he shot. He soon changed his camera to a battery-powered Leicina that allowed longer scenes. In his first films from Spain and Greece he was fascinated with old-fashioned village life, which reminded him of his own youth. A lot of space was devoted to fishermen pulling up their boats and repairing nets, villagers threshing with horses or builders using donkeys to haul materials. Some early films tell the story of “a tourist’s day”: Erika wakes up, calls for breakfast, swims in the sea, walks to the village and returns at sunset. Much effort was spent on nice titles and animated maps, showing where they had been. Tubin usually didn’t take part in contests, but in 1962 he won an “Oscar” for best documentary film in an amateur contest arranged by the newspaper *Expressen*. It shows son Eino making an ink drawing overlooking the roofs of the Stockholm Old Town.

Sometime in the mid-50s the family bought the first photo camera, a folding 4x4 cm, which was used in Austria, Spain and on forest vacations in Sweden. It soon proved to be inadequate. The *Leningrad* camera that Tubin brought from Estonia was a Russian attempt to imitate the 35mm rangefinder Leica system. It even used the same screw mount for the lenses. But the camera and lenses were too crudely made. Tubin knew the Estonian owner of a photo shop in downtown Stockholm, who collected odd cameras, and exchanged it for a rangefinder Canon with excellent lenses. He also bought a Leitz enlarger and all the cans, basins, pincers, measuring glasses and other paraphernalia to develop films and make prints at home.

The bathroom was too small, so the photographers appropriated the kitchen, covered the window with black cloth and started to make black and white prints of every size. Tubin knew the family of former operetta diva Milvi Laid. Her husband worked in a photo atelier and provided large printing papers unavailable in usual photo shops. Travel photos, smuggled music scores on 35 mm film and various photo experiments were all printed and dried in the kitchen. Eduard Tubin was especially interested in the technical aspects of photography and made various experiments to gauge the sharpness of his lenses. He subscribed for an American technical photo magazine. He never used flash and tried various methods to squeeze the most out of Kodak Tri-X film. Erika also became a good, creative photographer, using her small half-frame Canon.

Their social life was rather limited. One reason was of course that the flat, which doubled as Tubin's working place, was so small. But he was also keen on protecting his private life and didn't let other people close unless he was ready for it. On weekends and holidays the Tubins mostly met an Estonian family, where wife Irma Neider was Erika's schoolmate. They had a summer house outside Stockholm which the Tubins often visited, mostly when the wood-stove sauna was lit up. For Eduard Tubin it was a complete rest. In the Finnish anthology "Masters of Composers" (*Sävelten mestareita*),

where he was mentioned as one of the 123 most important composers in the world, the article is illustrated with crawfish cooking at the friends' summer house.

As a person, Tubin could show very different sides. The choir leader and composer was an authoritative public person. All knew that he didn't stand fools. In the family circle he was completely different: easygoing, joking, tolerant. Before overcoming his fear of making language errors, he could be rather curt when talking with Swedes.

During Easter 1965, Eduard and Erika visited Rome, where they took photos of the celebrations on St. Peter's Square and filmed the famous fountains in Respighi's symphonic poem. Tubin was proud of his close-ups of Pope Paul VI who walked by, blessing the crowds. On 25 April, a small concert took place in Stockholm, led by Tubin's friend Harri Kiisk, to honour his coming 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. After the somewhat exaggerated celebration of his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, Tubin was not too keen for a repetition, so they escaped to Greece for a whole month from the end of May. This time there were celebrations in his absence in Tallinn, with a big symphony concert at the *Estonia* and a chamber concert at the Composers' Union. He wrote to Eller (Letters II):

*This time I spent my "jubilee" in Greece. I sat together that evening with my wife on the hotel balcony with good wine, nuts and other goodies, enjoying the warm southern night. When I reached home at the beginning of July, I read in the papers about the concerts in Tallinn and my heart was warmed, when I learned that you had been given a bunch of flowers.*

When they were back, Eino went off alone on an adventurous car travel to Turkey. By chance he had got an address to a young lady and visited her family on the way. When he returned, Eduard

Tubin had developed all films he had mailed home during the travel, made a nice enlargement of Beyhan's portrait, framed it and put it on his desk. The family invited her to Sweden, but the flat was not suitable for receiving a visitor. It was high time to move to a better place, now that they could easily afford it.

Soon they found a yet unfinished, large flat in the new suburb of Handen, some 25 km outside Stockholm. It was on the top floor of a seven-story building overlooking the shopping centre on one side and a small lake and large forests on the other. Here Eduard and Erika Tubin spent the rest of their life. A friend from the singing choir, Ago Neo, a former wrestler who had won silver and bronze in the Berlin Olympics and now ran a moving service, helped to carry the belongings.

When Beyhan visited in spring 1966, the young people decided to marry the same autumn in Istanbul. When she was showing Eduard to a tailor in Istanbul, he suddenly stopped in the street to listen. The *ezan* had began, the midday call to prayer from a mosque. He liked the intonation and the rhythm. Later Ankara Radio provided him with tapes of Turkish folk music, which Bartók also had studied. Tubin once told the Estonian composer Veljo Tormis that an echo of the *ezan* could be found in the 9<sup>th</sup> symphony. Perhaps it was a joke, perhaps not.

The young couple stayed a year in Handen, while Beyhan studied Swedish at university courses. She got on very well with Eduard, who was keeping strictly regular working hours, interrupting only for coffee, a chat on the phone with Erika, and shopping in the Handen Centre, where he exchanged jokes with the ladies selling fish. At night the food was on the table and he waited at the window for Erika to return with the train.

Eduard Tubin had a secret – his close friendship with Grand Master Paul Keres, according to World Champion Boris Spassky the best chess player of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Keres was never permitted

by his Soviet masters to compete for the world championship title. He had also tried to escape from Estonia with his family, but couldn't make it. Now he was a Soviet chess-player, reluctantly let abroad for tournaments. In 1956 Keres dared for the first time to get in touch. He sent at least 110 letters to Tubin, Tubin at least 66 to Keres. The letters were all secret. Keres told through other chess-players when and where he would get abroad, and Tubin sent letters in advance to his hotel. Tubin came to all tournaments in the Nordic countries, where Keres played. They met in secret, when Keres had managed to shake off the party-affiliated "overcoat", mostly his nemesis Mikhael Botvinnik, who was ordered to keep an eye on him. The friends had the same modest personality, sense of humour and interest for all technical things. In pre-war Estonia they had once played against each other, and Tubin had won. It was however a simultaneous play, where Keres met several opponents.

Keres was very much interested in what was new in the West and Tubin sent him long letters explaining everything from cameras to hi-fi equipment and topical things. For instance, what is a monokini? Once Keres managed to buy an American car, a Rambler Classic, for prize money that would otherwise have been confiscated in the Soviet Union. He brought the car to Tallinn, where everybody could admire it in the sparse traffic. But it needed spare parts, and the brand was getting extinct. Rein with his contacts helped to find what he needed. Tubin's friend Dr. Endel Rumma found medicaments unavailable in Estonia, both for Keres who was suffering from strange ailments – probably partly psychosomatic – and to his daughter who had special needs.

In the winter of 1966/1967 Keres played and won on a tournament in Stockholm. Then he could visit the Tubins for the first time. Erika and Beyhan prepared a grand shellfish dinner, which Keres couldn't touch for dietary reasons. Now Tubin could also meet him in Estonia. But they still kept the exchange of letters secret, it was an important safety valve. Documents in the KGB archive show

that Keres was under surveillance until his death. He succumbed to a sudden heart attack in Helsinki in 1975 and was sent to his grave by 100,000 Estonians as a national hero.



*The balalaika-player,  
neurosurgeon and pistol champion  
Nicolaus Zwetnow (1929–2016).*



*Tubin at home in Handen,  
editing 8 mm movie film, 1966.  
Photo: Eino Tubin.*



*Eduard Tubin boiling crawfish  
with Rein and Eino at friends' summerhouse in Huddinge.  
Photo: Rickard Neider.*



*Eduard Tubin filming at the wedding  
of Beyhan Ariksoy and Eino Tubin  
at a municipal wedding hall  
in Istanbul, 8 September 1966.  
Photo: Erika Tubin.*



*Tubin's close friend  
Grand Master  
Paul Keres at the  
chess table.  
Photo: Eduard Tubin*

## Chapter 12. One dares to laugh as well as cry

Eduard Tubin's experiments in music came to a climax with the enigmatic Symphony No. 8, finished soon after moving to Handen. He had now worked so much with 12-tone music, dissonances and sombre themes that he felt he had come to the end of the road and had to get them out of his system. But to Connor, he mentioned a connection to the criticism he had to endure after his first trip to Estonia:

*I had quite a strong emotional experience with my travel to Estonia in 1961, which was roundly condemned by some Estonian emigrant circles. Nowadays it is quite common that people visit their relatives in Estonia. But in 1961 such a travel was seen as collaboration with the occupying power. I think that anger over the many insinuating writings accumulated with me and found an outlet in the final movement of the 8<sup>th</sup>, whose tense repetitions of tones would be a "hymn to myself". When you get older, you dare to show your feelings; one dares to laugh as well as cry.*

But this is an afterthought. When Tubin wrote the 8<sup>th</sup> symphony, several years had passed after the travel and the polemics. "A hymn to myself" may harbour other personal feelings, maybe also disappointment of being so little played and appreciated in Sweden. *Symphony No. 8*, which Valeri Gergiev conducted with great success on Tubin's centenary festival in Tallinn, is in many

ways an unusual work. This time everything went wrong: the orchestra was tired, the conductor had missed his flight, there was no time to make a proper rehearsal – and maybe because of all this, the work came out brilliantly. Connor:

*If the Sixth is the Dionysian and the Seventh the ascetic among Tubin's symphonies, then the Eighth could with reason be called Sinfonia espressiva. If you leave aside the symphonies of his youth, influenced by Scriabin, this work [...] is the most emotionally loaded that the composer has ever written. It is not a matter of expressing romantic-subjective feelings, but a new inner mysticism that has passed the purgatory of atonalism and linear dodecaphonic rules. The last movement with its unbridled brass outbursts and its incessant rises is a rolling sea of excited feelings...*

The Eighth symphony is rarely played. Some Tubin specialists consider it his best, while many listeners are taken aback by the despair in the last movement, which bears a marked difference to his other sometimes uplifting final movements.

Surprisingly he could never be present at a live performance of this symphony. It was first performed in Estonia on a rather sensitive date, the banned Independence Day on 24 February 1967 by ERSO, conducted by Neeme Järvi. Tubin could later listen to the tape at the radio house. The rather perfunctory first Swedish performance was in Gothenburg on 20 May 1968, conducted by Sixten Eckerberg and also broadcast live on Swedish radio. Tubin was very interested in Järvi's first performance of this symphony in Sweden, in Malmö on 30 September 1982, but was too ill to attend or even to hear the live broadcast. The family taped it from radio and he could later listen to it on a Walkman in the hospital. Finally he said that he was very pleased: "and then the last chorale makes its appearance before disappearing into the distance."

Already in Hammarbyhöjden, Tubin had bought a small Challen grand piano. He was often consulted when choir members or acquaintances wanted to buy a piano, and knew the market well. It was placed near the balcony window in Handen, so he could watch the lake and the nature when working. To write the scores, he went to the kitchen table, where he could enjoy the same lake view. The birds soon found their way to the upper floor balcony, in winter to be rewarded with hempseeds and balls of fat. The blackbirds, whom he treated as colleagues, got slices of apples.

There are few drafts left from Tubin's time in Sweden. As soon as he had made a pencil sketch at the piano, he wrote it down with Indian ink on transparent so called onionskin paper. He joked about some German composer who claimed that he was composing "direkt auf Wachs", but he was not far from the procedure himself. Later, the director of the Swedish Music Library asked the heirs about the composer's "autographs". She could hardly believe that the only ones were the neat onionskins that the composer had left for safekeeping at STIM, the Swedish copyright bureau. There they could be used for light printing; some were later used to print scores. The calligraphic writing is so clear that even experts find it hard to believe that it was done by the composer himself.

Every New Year's Eve, the family followed a ritual. At the stroke of midnight, Tubin sat down at his beloved piano and played the Estonian national anthem (on the same melody as the Finnish by Fredrik Pacius), sometimes with surprising jazz improvisations. Then Beyhan played the Turkish anthem and the family could pop the champagne. The Challen is now used for recitals at the Tubin museum in Alatskivi Castle.

Once he wanted to surprise Beyhan and managed to buy a Riga upright piano in Estonia as a gift. It took two years of wrangling with the authorities to get permission to take it out of the country. At the end, Raimond Sepp had to bribe the crane operator not to

drop the cargo when loading it on the ship. Suddenly Tubin got a message from Swedish customs that the piano was waiting in the harbour of Stockholm. It had neither a customs declaration nor a bill for its value, but it took only half an hour for him to do the formalities so that Neo could be dispatched to bring it home.

Eino had a roomy Plymouth Valiant and the families met every other week for countryside tours, mushroom and berry picking, or walks around the Ruda Lake. In 1969 they decided to tour Switzerland and Italy together. They met in Berne and drove over exciting Swiss mountain passes, saw the Verona Arena and stayed for a few days in Venice. Tubin's film starts with pigeons climbing all over the young couple on St. Marco Square and ends with a quiet, romantic gondola tour through small canals. Finally Eduard and Erika were dropped off at a beach near Rimini.

In 1971 and 1972, the Tubin family added another country to their travel destinations: Israel. Erika's Jewish bench-mate Riva (Rebekka Kramer) from the German School became a Zionist and emigrated before the war. The joy was great when they got in touch after a quarter century. Riva lost her only son in the Six-Day War and remarried a Czech veteran officer of the Israeli Border Guard. They took the Tubins all over the country. Tubin writes of his surprise seeing the Old Town of Jerusalem: narrow streets crowded with people, an Oriental bazaar; utterly different from the holy place one could expect from reading the Bible and listening to sermons. He enjoyed the lively company on parties in Tel-Aviv where the language could switch in a moment from Estonian to Russian, Latvian, German, Yiddish, English, Hebrew or Czech.

The burden of work was lighter, the economic situation was good, the new flat was comfortable. Now Eduard Tubin could use his free time for hobbies and get the gadgets he was dreaming about. The new Super-8 cine format for amateurs had come but he doubted its sharpness. He tried several cameras before settling for

the ultimate: a Canon Double-Super-8. He proudly carried the heavy camera on all his travels together with a tripod. When granddaughter Rana was born in 1971, he carefully filmed her first movements. He was especially proud of his film from Jerusalem, shot together with his son and daughter-in-law. After every trip, the family had editing sessions, where films were cut and slides framed and put in magazines. A magnetic stripe was glued to the finished film and some sound effects and light music added. Tubin mostly left the choice of music to Eino, saying that the background music should never dominate.

He was also seriously interested in film as an art form. He went regularly to the Film Institute to watch old documentaries, comedies with his favourite Buster Keaton – always dignified and serious in a mad world – and classical feature films by Buñuel, Hitchcock and Fritz Lang. He watched films in every genre, for him it was most important that they were well made: crime stories, dramas or Wild West films. One favourite among the experimental films was Charles Eames's washing of a schoolyard, where the foam is dancing to Bach's "Goldberg Variations". Once he had a surprisingly negative reaction. He couldn't stand Stanley Kubrick's famous space movie "2001", mainly because Kubrick used music in an ironic or contrasting way and put a Hollywood choir as background to a sketch with apes. He wrote to Keres that he could not distance himself from the music. That spoiled the whole movie, turning it into a revue.

Tubin claimed that he had a distaste for TV. Watching the fare on Swedish public TV was in his opinion a waste of time. When he eventually bought a set, it had a tiny 13-inch screen; he soon started complaining about the strain it made on his eyes. Before the war he had a powerful Marconi short-wave radio receiver, one of three in Estonia – only the president and chief-of-staff had similar. Now he bought a Sony short-wave radio that could receive stations from all over the world. Mostly he used it to listen to music broadcasts from Estonian radio, but he also tried to find transmitters on the other side of the earth.

Tubin was always interested in good reproduction of sound. He went to demonstrations arranged by loudspeaker inventor Stig Carlsson and built up an impressive collection of LP records. Many were recordings with his favourite conductor Herbert von Karajan; of solo pianists his favourite was Glenn Gould. He loved the vitality and sound of American music: Gershwin, Bernstein's "West Side Story", Charles Ives's image of two bands marching into town from different directions. Once Olav Roots sent a tape of "La Noce de los Mayas" by the Mexican composer Silvestre Revueltas and Tubin was fascinated with the wild rhythms and sounds of exotic percussion instruments.

He also loved parody, if it was done in an intelligent and musical way. He borrowed all records by Gerard Hoffnung from Harri Kiisk. Hoffnung was an eccentric British lecturer, tuba player and cartoonist. In his parodies the orchestra mixed up the scores and the tuba part was played on a garden hose. He uncanny feel for timing was much appreciated by Tubin.

Tubin subscribed for a dozen newspapers and magazines, from *National Geographic* to the satirical magazine *Grönlöpings Veckoblad* and the chess paper *Tidskrift för schack*. Once he said that his political sympathies were closest to the cultural magazine *Vaba Eesti*, which had a liberal, pan-European line. The Tubins were voracious readers. They admired serious Swedish novelists, who dared to take a moral stand against the injustices of the time: Vilhelm Moberg and Eyvind Johnson. They devoured world literature, including most Nobel Prize winners. Americans like Sinclair Lewis and Ernest Hemingway were favourites. Tubin found a special affinity with I.B. Singer, who in seemingly simple words recalled a lost Jewish world in Poland, complete with djinns and other creatures of superstition, hiding behind the chimney. He collected books by Czeslaw Milosz, awarded the Nobel Prize in 1980 for his observations of totalitarianism and its effects on the human mind. Of 19<sup>th</sup> century classics, he often returned to Dostoyevsky, Pushkin and Tolstoy that

he read in original Russian as well as in Estonian or Swedish translation. The Tubins supported exile publishers and bought nearly everything from *Kirjanike Kooperatiiv* and *Orto*. But when they just wanted to relax, they turned to crime stories; Agatha Christie, Georges Simenon and the Swedish writers Maria Lang and Stieg Trenter were favourites in this genre.

In an interview Tubin once formulated his creative ideal: “to master your skills”, meaning that you should know your handicraft before starting to develop your visions. In painting, his favourites were those masters, who dared to break conventions of their time while using superior technical skill: Rembrandt, Tiepolo, Goya, Turner, Picasso, Chagall and Klee. Everyone immediately recognizes the work of these artists, just like one recognizes Tubin’s music, once you have heard it. The Tubins often went to art exhibitions, always visited art museums on their travels and assembled a great collection of art books.

“Cooking is composing”, Tubin once said. All visitors were impressed with his cooking. In the beginning, when Erika was working out and he was working at home, he had to learn the basics. It developed into an interest in gourmet cooking with special attention to strong sauces, always made with real butter. For holiday dinners, he bought elk meat, a goose or turkey at the best market in town, and lovingly spent time preparing it. He also developed into a connoisseur of good wines, whiskies and brandies. He made wine at home. An early experiment making quick champagne with carbon-dioxide pellets was a disaster. Rein had invented a tool for putting on the corks, but they kept popping off and the kitchen was soon a mess. He was however quite successful with dessert wines that needed long time to mature.

A good insight into what Tubin thought and did at that time is given in his own letter to Olav Roots in December 1970, when their correspondence resumed (Letters II):

*...I wouldn't like to tire you with my principles and thoughts; it's enough to say that I found it necessary, because my 5<sup>th</sup> symphony had such great success in Estonia, to establish personal contacts with my colleagues of a younger generation, in order to give them a bit of fresh air from abroad. I tried as much as I could to avoid all the party propaganda and all things connected with it, showing myself in front of everyone as a free thinking person with western orientation. And interestingly they accepted this; they didn't want to quarrel with me about what was better and who was right. Once Alumäe tried, but when I asked why Heljo Sepp was forced to call the best parts of Eller's oeuvre "bourgeois type impressionism", also he fell silent and apparently felt badly at ease. The Russians play "Herrenvolk" all the time; and everybody has to take this in account when he says or does something. Then why not bring them some fresh air, which they need so much?*

*And I must tell you, old friend, that I've had some success with it. Nearly all the young composers have (no bragging here) assimilated something of my work, either the rhythm (Rääts), how to develop the motifs (Koha), or formal nuances (Pärt) – in other words I have succeeded being something of an example to them. In addition I have brought them some books on 12-tone technique, etc.*

*Another example: at the Moscow Conservatory prof. Fortunatov has a class, where he together with his students analyze all of my works that he can get hold of, down to the smallest details. And this already for ten years. Then a curiosity: the conductor of the Tashkent orchestra came to Tallinn for a guest concert and did my 6<sup>th</sup> by heart. "Estonia" ordered an opera from me, namely "Barbara von Tisenhusen", based on the short story by Aino Kallas.*

*This opera has now run for more than a year and reputedly*

*always for a sold-out house. In a Moscow music magazine I recently read a long story on the qualities of this opera. Recently the former Leningrad Marinsky theatre has asked for an audio tape and piano score of this opera for its art commission – maybe it will be performed also in Leningrad, which would be great. You can't forget for a moment that they very well know what I think and that I am in exile in Sweden. Enough of this.*

*Now I sit with another opera, also based on a short story by Aino Kallas, this time "The Parson of Reigi". The libretto is by Kallas herself, written for E. Aav, but he died and then the libretto stayed with Aav's relatives, until it came into the hands of Ernesaks, who kept it for a time in his drawer. I have a sketch ready of the opera and have written a neat score of the first half, but then I got this disease, with which I struggle since a whole month; because of a certain mental strain I got neuralgia in my right side, which is troubling me. That's why I am now resting some more weeks before starting on the other half.*

*Maybe that's old age affecting me, I haven't the energy and spirit for work as in my youth. I should have enough technical knowledge for the opera, so that I can write rapidly and I guess that's the only way to do such a long work; but look, I lost my strength!*

*I have now told you in broad strokes what I make and how I do; I could add that I am officially a "Swedish composer", I am on the best, friendly terms with them, but nobody still accepts me as a real Swede. The radio here is rather reluctant to play my things, I get always more royalties for my works from abroad than from Sweden, but life still is rather good, it could be worse. I still work for this Drottningholm theatre, and there are now new people who don't give me very much to do – they often rent their scores from outside...*

The full letter only briefly mentions Erika. Tubin avoided this subject, since at that time they had a marital crisis that only time could solve. He could now make plans for himself, buy the gadgets he wanted and chose where to travel. Erika had to continue her boring, strenuous work, so that the economy would break even. Sometimes the frustration was too much for her. As many men of his generation, Tubin could not easily show his feelings or understand how his spouse felt. He was flabbergasted when Erika suddenly got jealous or when she demonstratively threw away some gift. The only things that helped were the understanding that there was no alternative to keeping together, maybe also joy for the new grandchild.

Both operas demanded a great part of Tubin's time, but he also managed to do other things and to edit some of his older works. In 1967 he completed *Song of warriors retreating* for male choir and piano and two years later *Old maid's songs* for ladies' choir.

"Song of warriors retreating" is based on an enigmatic poem, written in the 1930s by Uku Masing. Masing was an extraordinary philosopher, theologian and folklorist, who arguably knew 65 languages. The poem may be interpreted in different ways – as foreknowledge of Estonia's fate in the Second World War, when Masing heroically hid a Jewish friend to save him from the Nazis, or as a spiritual parabola. Tubin chose the interpretation that was closest to him and shortened Masing's title, which in original says "Song of warriors retreating from phantoms". The song was commissioned by the Stockholm Male Choir, but it took many years before the choir was ready to perform it. An acquaintance of Tubin, the Catholic priest Vello Salo, had the lyrics translated into English, but there was no interest in this version. In Estonia it was not possible to perform the work, since Masing was a dissident also to the Communists.

Tubin finished his sombre decade with his funniest work: *Old*

*Maid's songs*, full of folksy humour. It is his only work originally written for womens' choir. This time he even put a subtitle, Vergilius' famous sentence "Timeo danaos et dona ferentes" – Beware of Greeks bearing gifts. Don't trust boys, don't trust those who bring silk aprons and long ribbons! In bed the old maid has a good time with a louse, but when she on her death-bed needs an iron cross, the iron is still in Sweden and the blacksmith's sons too young. The suite was performed for the first time at the concert celebrating the composer's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in Stockholm.



*Picking mushrooms near Handen: from left Erika, grandchild Rana (inside car), Eduard, Beyhan and her brother Ilhan Ariksoy, 1979. Photo: Eino Tubin.*

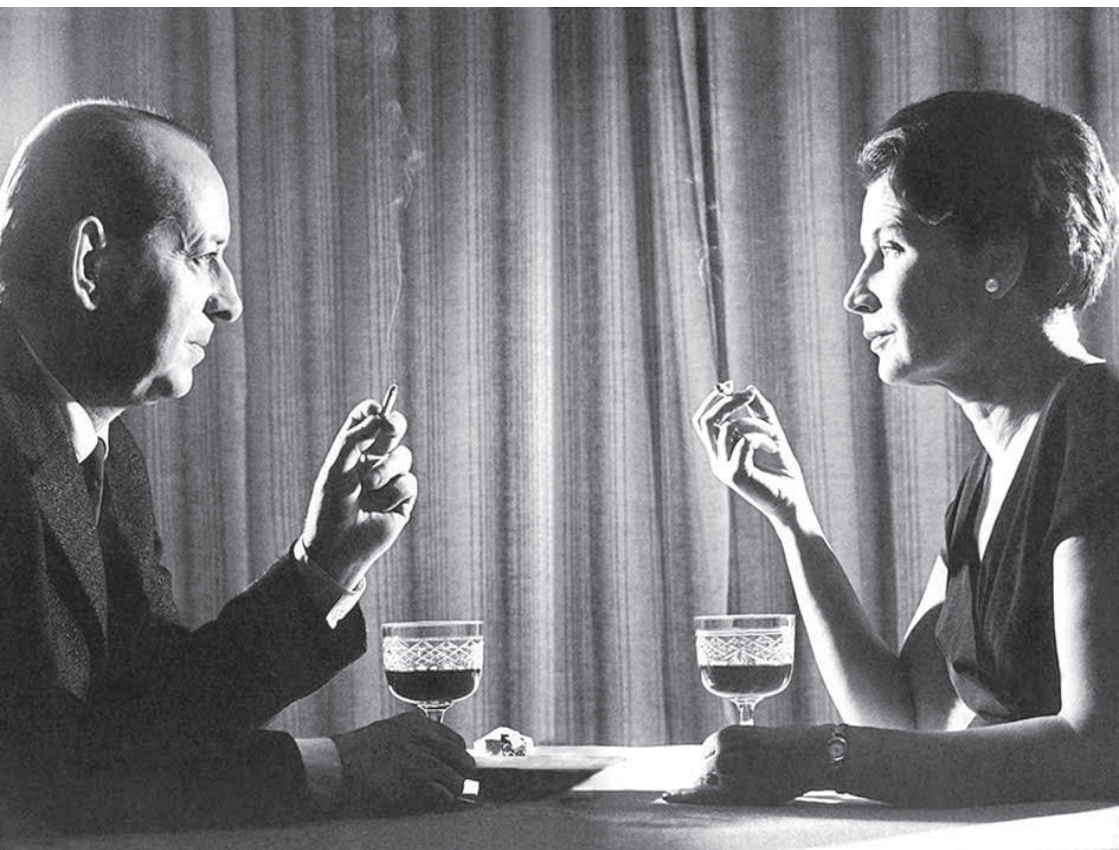
*Eduard Tubin filming  
in a gondola in Venice, 1969.  
Photo: Eino Tubin.*





*Erika and Eduard Tubin  
serving turkey in Handen.  
Photo: Eino Tubin.*

*Eduard and Erika Tubin  
at the dining table.  
Photo: Eino Tubin.*



## Chapter 13. Eros the Slayer

Before the war, Eduard Tubin had three times pondered writing an opera, but never got as far as a beginning. In Sweden he had no wish to resume work on the two unfinished operas he had been commissioned to write during the Soviet and Nazi occupations. Now he had accumulated a thorough knowledge of opera repertoire not only from the Drottningholm theatre work but also from collecting records and listening to the radio. He was especially interested in two modern operas, Alban Berg's "Wozzek" and Benjamin Britten's "Peter Grimes".

When the young artistic director of the *Estonia* theatre, Arne Mikk, asked if he would like to write something completely new, he soon agreed. Wise from experience, he immediately turned down any idea to write something based on the national epic "Kalevipoeg" or the works of the classical novelist Anton Hansen Tammsaare. National romanticism didn't suit him at all. Mikk came up with a better alternative: a story on a historic theme from a collection of short stories called "Eros the Slayer" by Aino Kallas (1878–1956). Kallas was a colourful Finnish writer, spouse of Oskar Kallas, one of the central Estonian cultural figures and diplomats of the first independence period. Aino Kallas wrote her stories in an archaic style, often taking her subjects from old Estonian history. Mikk also suggested a first-rate librettist, the well-known Estonian novelist Jaan Kross. "Barbara von Tisenhusen" was their first collaboration. Tubin left an exact description how he wanted to shape his opera.

After seeing the first draft, which in Tubin's opinion was more suitable for a chamber opera, he asked Kross to add some scenes so he could develop the music in a more symphonic way. To prevent the Communist rulers from interfering, the various versions of the libretto were smuggled by people travelling between Stockholm and Tallinn.

*Barbara von Tisenhusen* is in three acts and nine scenes. It was written in eight months and finished in 1968. The opera lasts about 90 minutes. Tubin (Teataja, 19 Nov. 1968):

*I had the feeling that one has to write an opera fast and continuously, or one could lose track. I tried out many scenes with my wife – for instance the scene where the persecutors find the sleeping Barbara and rise her by touching with a sword. I checked on my watch how long it would take for Barbara to wake up and grasp the situation, before she surrenders and says: "Let's go". This time had to be filled with music.*

The story of "Barbara von Tisenhusen" is about an inhuman class society, the "honour" of a patriarchal family and, at the end, of a murder. It is based on real tragic events and persons, briefly mentioned in Balthasar Russow's "The Chronicle of Livonia" (1578). It begins 1551 in Tallinn.

The noble maiden Barbara is among the guests at a colourful aristocratic wedding. Her three brothers show that they are obsessed with family honour. Straying from the celebration, she suddenly becomes aware of the chasm between the opulent lifestyle of the German nobility and the misery of common people. The opera then moves to the countryside castle of the Tisenhusen family. Barbara, now a humbler person, shows interest in the despised country people and their songs and teaches a village boy to read and write. A new scribe, Bonnius, arrives from Germany and the two young

people fall in love. The brothers arrange a cruel show with dogs attacking a captive bear, while the shocked Barbara is comforted by the scribe. Barbara confesses to the family priest Friesner that she is in love with Bonnius, but he warns of the consequences: if a noble maiden marries a commoner, the “Treaty of Pärnu” says that she can be put to death by her family. Barbara and Bonnius elope and are pursued by the brothers, who eventually catch her in a moment when he is away and drag her to a family court of honour. In the final scene, when peasants refuse to harm Barbara, the brothers themselves drown her in a hole in the ice.

Tubin has himself described the musical development in the opera in an interview (Teataja, 19 November 1958):

*The whole opera is really based on a single theme. At the beginning a passacaglia consisting of nine notes is presented in its basic form, then backwards, then in a mirror image, then backwards in a mirror image etc. The whole music is founded on this basic theme. First I did it because I wanted to, in order to find out what can be done with one single theme, but then I also found that Aino Kallas’s short story has a continuous motion – from the wedding to the hole in the ice. This motion is quite deliberately carried out, and that’s why I tried to give the music a corresponding structure. The problem was also how to vary the theme, so that it would characterize each situation.*

But Tubin’s operas also connect with grand operatic tradition. To the Finnish reviewer Hannu-Ilari Lampila (Helsingin Sanomat, 26. Jan. 1991) the first scene with the great wedding reminded of Verdi’s “Rigoletto”: “In both operas the high society of the 16<sup>th</sup> century dances and clicks the goblets [...] The rhythms of Tubin’s music to the party shows a wantonness similar to the merriment in the first scenes of “Rigoletto”. But then the musical similarity ends.

Tubin's opera in one of the heaviest and gloomiest works ever created."

But why not compare also with the final scene of "Carmen"! The final confrontation of the protagonists in "Carmen" takes place in front of a bullring, where the bloody ritual is carried out to the cheering of the spectators. The background to Barbara's and Bonnius's love scene is the castle courtyard, where aristocrats are hounding dogs to attack a captured bear. The final scene of Tubin's second opera "The Parson of Reigi" takes place in the Town Hall Square in Tallinn. Curious onlookers congregate, reminding of people going to the bullfight in "Carmen".

Barbara von Tisenhusen was first performed on 4 December 1969 at the *Estonia* theatre. Eduard and Erika Tubin were both present. Like "Kratt", the new opera was an instant success and played to a full house more than 50 times. Two years later it was staged by *Vanemuine* in Tartu and played 18 times. No other Estonian opera has been so successful; some people even want to call it *the* national opera. When the liberation from Soviet Union started, it was again staged at *Estonia* in 1990, and later taken on tour to Tampere, Copenhagen, Gothenburg and Stockholm. The *Estonia* theatre staged it again in 2004, to celebrate Tubin's centenary the following year.

The second opera, *The Parson of Reigi*, is also based on historical events and persons, again used rather freely. This time, Jaan Kross completed Aino Kallas's own unfinished libretto, based on her short story in "Eros the Slayer". It's one of the few texts the author herself wrote in the Estonian language. Her libretto was meant for the composer Evald Aav. Then the draft stayed for some time in the drawer of Gustav Ernesaks. Tubin felt inspired by Kallas's own words and wrote the opera in only three months in 1970-71. It is in six scenes and slightly shorter than "Barbara". For "Barbara", Tubin first wrote the piano score and then orchestrated the opera.

Now he started with the orchestra and wrote the piano score at the end. In this way the text and the music follow each other better, he said.

Writing “The Parson of Reigi”, Tubin was so absorbed by the work that he literally fell ill. In his letter to Roots he complained of an ache in his side. Two scenes in particular were so exciting that he for the first time in his life had to ask his friend Dr. Rumma for tranquilizers: the love scene where the deacon quotes Solomon’s Song of Songs, a text that always had intrigued Tubin, and the final executioner’s parade. Despite the fact that the heroines in both operas elope in the name of love and are condemned to death, the two operas are quite different. When “Barbara” is about a noble, innocent soul crushed by cruel times and customs, “The Parson of Reigi” is about an uncomprehending countryside parson watching his bored wife being carried away by a clever seducer. The couple is of course doomed and we watch the proceedings towards the inevitable end with the same excitement as a Hitchcock film – to which the British reviewer Eric Levi actually compared the opera (Gramophone Explorations, Vol. I, 1996). The first time Erika Tubin read Aino Kallas’s libretto, she said that it would eminently suit as a movie script.

The opera takes place during the Swedish time in Estonia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some 90 years after the story of “Barbara”, and all main characters are ethnic Swedes. It starts on a quiet, early morning as the parson sees the fishermen off at a remote village on Hiiumaa Island. He blesses the fishermen and their catch and wishes that God would bless him and his wife Catharina Wycken with a child. A new deacon, Jonas Kempe, is about to arrive from Stockholm. He is received with drinking and foolish singing at the parson’s manor and soon starts flirting with Catharina. Rumours follow Kempe that he was banished from Stockholm because of his interest in his superior’s wife, whom he had bewitched. A love scene in the garden reaches an emotional climax when Kempe reads The Song of Songs

to Catharina. Lempelius sees them, interrupts and dryly explains that the text only means love in a religious sense. In the next scene the servants gossip about the amorous affairs of the rich and mighty. When Catharina arrives, they hint at forbidden love and its consequences. Lempelius asks Kempe to confess and then strikes down the deacon. When Kempe recovers, Lempelius promises to take him to court for sorcery. He addresses his wife angrily, but also softly and pleadingly, wanting her back.

In the next scene we find Kempe and the runaway wife in a courtroom in Tallinn. They had tried to elope from the manor, but were caught. When Catharina refuses to return to her husband, who refuses to pardon the deacon, the court has no choice but to condemn both escapees to death. The final scene takes place in Tallinn's famous Town Hall Square. Fresh buns are offered for sale, a balladeer hawks a mocking song and the burghers scramble for the best places to watch. The executioner's procession passes to a slow, "nasty and morbid" march (the composer's words). The dishevelled parson asks for the last time the blindfolded Catharina why she has abandoned him. The sinners are led away. As the bells toll, the parson is left alone with his question, to which there is no answer.

Musically, the two operas are quite different. Now Tubin didn't limit himself to variations of the same motif. But, as Merike Vaitmaa says (Teater, Muusika, Kino, no. 11, 1988): "in the first bars of the work, a theme sounds, from which the most important musical material of the opera grows out like branches of a tree[...]. The beginnings of other scenes are also important: in short orchestral introductions a motif is repeated that creates the mood." The main figures are characterized by contrasting and significant songs – Kempe, who arrives from Stockholm, sings a gallant love song to the tune of "La Folia", while the robust Lempelius sticks to a chorale warning of the devil. The court-room scene contains only spoken language on a background of sombre music. Tobias Lund

adds that “The Parson of Reigi” is as near to spoken drama as an opera could ever be.

In both operas key roles belong to clergymen – a profession for which Tubin from early youth carried a marked distrust. Friesner in “Barbara” is certainly well-meaning, but at the same time a weak person who leaves the moral conflict to Barbara herself to solve. What especially caught Tubin’s interest in “The Parson of Reigi” was how the two rivals contesting for Catharina’s love gradually leave their clerical roles behind. Still it was a mark of progress that the Communist rulers of the time could accept such figures on the stage.

The opera was ready in 1971. However, suddenly party hacks found it unsuitable to have a priest as the main character in an opera, even if he was a cuckold. The planned first performance at *Estonia* was prohibited. A first try to stage the opera was made by *Vanemuine* in June 1979, where the veteran director Kaarel Ird knew the system intimately and managed to get permission directly from Moscow. On his last visit to Estonia in November 1979, Tubin could attend a guest performance at the *Estonia* theatre. Unfortunately Ird had not been able to assemble a suitable cast and the performance left a bleak impression. It is usually not mentioned among his achievements. Then it took nearly ten years before Arne Mikk could give the opera a proper premiere at the *Estonia*. It was performed more than 30 times and taken on tour to Stockholm and Karlsruhe. In 2014 the opera was again performed at *Vanemuine*, where director Roman Baskin and conductor Paul Mägi tried to enhance the excitement by inserting fragments from the Town Hall Square scene in the beginning, as often is done in movies.

Both of Arne Mikk’s productions were shown on Estonian TV and released on CD by the Finnish company Ondine. The *Vanemuine* performance of 2014 was also released on CD, this time with the original timeline.

Both operas were translated into Swedish on Tubin's request by the poet Ilmar Laaban. But it was not possible to interest the Swedish opera houses. After much persuasion from wife and sons, Tubin once tried to show the score of "Barbara" to the manager of the Stockholm Opera, but he happened to be busy when Tubin turned up at the appointed time. Tubin returned angrily, determined never to hawk his music any more. More than 35 years after the composer's death, "The Parson of Reigi", a dramatic and exciting contemporary opera written in Sweden, brilliantly translated into Swedish and having ethnic Swedes as main characters, has yet to find a stage in the composer's second homeland. About the unsuccessful meeting Tubin once told the journalist Andres Küng (Eesti Päevaleht, 4 Nov. 1981): "Generally I don't like to walk in like a needle merchant, who will climb in through the window when he is thrown out from the door."

The Ninth and Tenth Symphonies were written by Tubin close in time to the operas. The Ninth wasn't meant as a last word, as it happened with Beethoven, Bruckner and Mahler, but as a word on the way. Tubin titled it *Sinfonia semplice*, a simple symphony. It was written in only two months in the autumn of 1969 and the first performance took place two years later under the baton of Stig Westerberg on a live radio concert at the Musical Academy, which was then still used as the main venue of the Swedish Radio orchestra. In an interview (Kodumaa, 10 Dec. 1969), Tubin stated:

*The symphony is entitled "Sinfonia semplice", like the Sixth symphony of the great Danish symphonic composer Carl Nielsen. However – the second movement – Humoresque – of Nielsen's symphony contains some comedy, whereas my symphony is serious in mood throughout and composed in a classical form. It is not so easy to do that by using a modern language and orchestra. I experienced great difficulties in my work: the score was already completed when I realised that,*

*no, it cannot go on this way. I was in despair; it took a week before I got everything right.*

The Canadian professor Edward Jurkowski, who edited the later symphonies of Tubin for the Collected Works, adds (CW, V):

*It represents one of Tubin's crowning achievements, with respect to generating structural coherence from a circumscribed series of motives.*

The Ninth has become one of the most performed of Tubin's symphonies. At this time a new generation of reviewers had emerged, who better knew to appreciate Tubin's music. Carl-Gunnar Åhlén's review carried the prophetic headline "Tubin's time is coming" (Svenska Dagbladet, 21 Nov. 1971). Runar Mangs wrote (Dagens Nyheter, 21 Nov. 1971):

*The "Sinfonia semplice" is – as the name hints – composed with an easy hand. This doesn't exclude painfully cutting accents and sweeps of tight melancholy, growing threats, growls of uneasiness, emerging protests, unbridled energy or such things as the completely unsentimental lament of the second movement.*

*All in all I would say that the lightness is on the communicative level, where a clean, straightforward orchestra voice transmits an unpolluted tonal language with a clarity that one immediately grasps.*

*The whole symphony gives a strong impression of something that is emotionally and technically thoroughly dealt with – a symphony of such mature weight that it can afford lightness.*

The *Symphony No. 10* was also finished in a very short time in the spring of 1973. It was a commission from Tubin's Swedish

favourite, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra. Tubin joked: “As I was in a hurry, the symphony has only one movement.” Tobias Lund writes:

*The Symphony No. 10 in one movement is not Tubin’s most violent symphony, but certainly one of his most intensive. The various parts, which correspond to movements in a cyclic work, follow one after another and form a clear and orderly process. As in the Ninth symphony, the musical language is tonal. Polyphony occurs less than in some other late works. The fact that hints at vocal genres play an important part, may point at the work with both operas.*

The first performance was conducted by an American, William C. Byrd, and broadcast live on Swedish Radio. Tubin was present and was very pleased with both the conductor and the performance. But in his letter to Karl Leichter (Letters II) he still wanted to mock a bit, reminding how ill prepared Tor Mann had been at the rehearsal of his Sixth:

*The conductor [...] had delved into the work with remarkable thoroughness and managed to convey all what was necessary to the orchestra. It is rare that a conductor delves so deeply into a work; I have indeed seen the very opposite, that the orchestra gets it first and that the work becomes familiar to the conductor on the basis of what he hears on the rehearsals.*

The Tenth Symphony also got positive reviews. After a later performance in Malmö, Paul-Christian Sjöberg wrote (Sydsvenska Dagbladet, 17 Nov. 1980):

*In 1976 Tubin explained in an interview that he was satisfied with his 10<sup>th</sup> symphony and that it bears witness of “mastering*

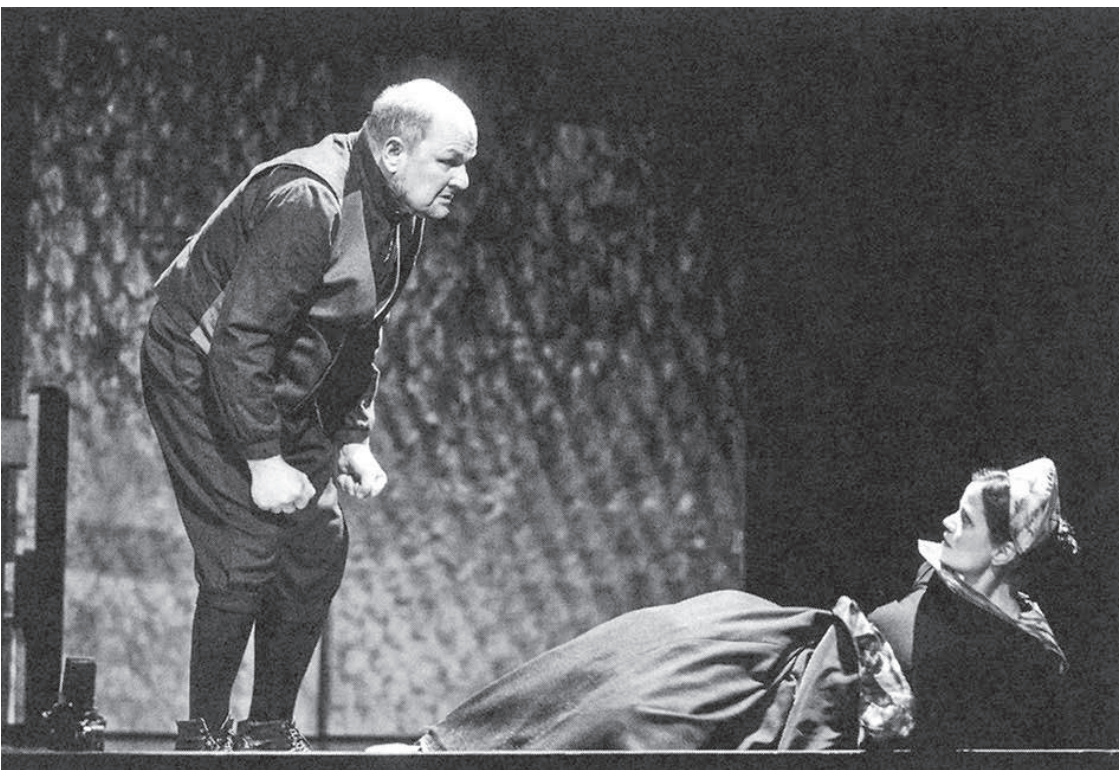
*one's skills". This is really no boasting and not just a summary by an honest and humbly proud composer, the result in sound is closer to a magnificent testimony of a peculiar world of expression with a strong individual profile. Surly, stubborn cells of motifs are converted into chamber musical oases of lyrical intensity, all held together by a masterful architect, whose strong expressiveness never becomes empty pathos.*



*Eduard and Erika Tubin receiving flowers with director Arne Mikk, conductor Kirill Raudsepp and the main singers after the premiere of "Barbara von Tisenhusen", 4 December 1969.*

*Tubin with director Kaarel Ird and conductor Erich Kõlar at a rehearsal during a guest performance of “The Parson of Õeigi” at the Estonia theatre, 1979.*





*First performance of “The Parson of Reigi”  
at the Vanemuine theatre in 2014.  
Lempelius – Jassi Zabharov (from the Estonia theatre),  
Catharina Vycken – Karmen Puis.*



*Eduard Tubin in front  
of the Gothenburg concert hall before  
the first performance of  
his Symphony No. 10, in 1973.  
Photo: Eino Tubin.*

## Chapter 14. Summing up

Periods of illness and hospital treatment interfered during the last eight years of Tubin's life. The first warning came when he was working with "The Parson of Reigi". On a vacation trip to Crete in 1974 he became seriously ill. Returning home he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. After the operation he had a bad infection and needed a whole year to recover.

During the 1970s he gave several interviews and continued to exchange letters with friends and colleagues. When asked about his music he often replied that he thought his last work was his best. He liked to call himself a merry musician, as for instance in a radio interview by Berit Berling. This name of honour he also bestowed on a few occasions to Bartók. He had no regrets, sentimentality or self-pity. In 1979 Sigvard Hammar, a clever radio journalist, tried to provoke him by asking if he didn't feel bitter having lost the status he once had in Estonia.

*ET: Yes, but dear me, what does it help! It doesn't help at all. In the beginning I had of course a great homesickness. Everything what I had written there was left behind, and now I'm sitting here rewriting some old baroque music! But I could overcome this.*

*SH: How did you overcome?*

*ET: Occasionally I had a shot of vodka and it made me merrier...*

After the 10<sup>th</sup> symphony Tubin didn't write any more orchestral works, except for the unfinished 11<sup>th</sup>. But his creativity was undiminished. It was a time for summing up, collecting lost threads. Now he was free from the Drottningholm work and could himself choose what to do. Health permitting, he travelled as much as he could.

In August 1975, he went for a one-day cruise to Tallinn together with son Eino. He had bought two tickets on a small Russian cruise ship, but Erika didn't want to go. It was Eino's first visit and came as a shock. For the first time he heard people speaking Estonian in the streets, but soon realized that those were the minority; in central Tallinn most were Russians. The town looked run-down, gloomy. There were few cars in the streets. Tubin started to film and got some nice shots when a thunderstorm had passed. They collected some family porcelain and had trouble getting past the angry Russian customs lady, who demanded that every piece should be unpacked and checked against the export permit. Now the authorities had got word that Tubin was in town. A flashy young man entered the cabin, introduced himself as a secret policeman and asked if he could help with anything. It was a great relief to get back to the Stockholm archipelago.

In 1976 Tubin again agreed to lead the Stockholm men's choir, with Rein as assistant. But why did a 70 year old composer take on such a difficult task with an aging choir? Harry Olt offers an explanation in a TV-interview (ETV, *The Sum of Absent Days*, 2005) – Tubin wanted to keep the old Estonian tradition that a composer also has to do choir work. In spring the choir made a nice tour to Arnhem, Dieren and Hilversum in Holland, where Tubin took overwhelming colour photos of the tulip fields.

Now it was Erika's turn to have bad health. Her old ulcer problem got worse and was finally cured by surgically cutting a nerve. They

spent a summer month with friends on Sicily and later went for a week in London.

In the summer of 1977 the Tubins made their longest car tour together with son Eino, daughter-in-law Beyhan and 6 year old granddaughter Rana in Europe. They met in Milan, when Eino's family was returning from Turkey, visited the cathedral, saw Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper and had ice cream together in the Galleria. Then they crossed to France and started touring the Loire castles at Beune. In Amboise, where da Vinci is buried, Tubin found a special bottle of Armagnac in a wooden box. He kept it in his knee all the way to Sweden, where it was ceremoniously opened on Christmas. All through this tour, Tubin patiently dragged his big Canon DS-8 along, putting it on a tripod when he found the right angle and shooting the castles in long, unhurried sequences. Returning through Sweden, all realized that this would be their final tour together, but did their best to be cheerful to the end.

In 1975 Tubin wrote *Courting Songs* for baritone and piano, which he also orchestrated. The humorous texts are taken from Estonian folk poetry and the titles describe the situations: *Feeding the Suitor's Horse*, *Suitor at the Well*, *Dirty Woman*, *Dull Maiden* and *Suitors from the Heath*. It was never sung during the composer's lifetime. The first performance was in Toronto two years after the composer's death with baritone Avo Kittask and the orchestra version was first performed in Tallinn in 1990.

In the autumn of 1976, Tubin finished his collection of *Ten Preludes for Piano*. Seven of the small, exquisite preludes were new, but he wanted to combine them with three early ones from 1928 and 1933. Since no publisher was ready, they were never printed in this form and pianists continue to make their own choice from altogether 14 preludes. The cycle selected by Tubin concludes with a slow dance macabre and a chaconne, the ancient musical form that the composer loved most.

Granddaughter Rana went for some years to piano classes for children. For her seventh birthday in 1978, grandfather came with a special gift: *A Little March with Variations*, lasting about 4 minutes. It is of course meant as an instructive piece, but the cheerful little tune, gradually getting more complicated, is quite addictive. Rana performed it proudly on the yearly concert of Laszlo Beer's piano class, in a beautiful art nouveau palace in Stockholm.

Eduard Tubin often claimed that the most difficult thing in music is to write a good string quartet. He loved quartets and had all of Haydn's on records. A few times he actually started to write a quartet, but gave up after a few bars. When he finally got a commission for a string quartet, he wanted it to reflect his admiration for the old master. Haydn had often used Austrian folk tunes, Tubin would use Estonian tunes found in Herbert Tampere's collection "Eesti rahvapillid ja rahvatantsud" (Estonian folk instruments and dances). The commission came from the exile Estonian Students' Society. Its predecessor had once organized the large-scale collection of folk tunes in 1904-14. The *String Quartet on Estonian Instrumental Folk Melodies* in four movements was finished in 1979, nearly half a century after the Piano Quartet, his graduation work from the Tartu Higher Music School. Tubin commented (Teataja, 20 May 1981):

*This genre is a kind of science – one must not take a too serious approach or write a work which exceeds beyond a certain length. There cannot be a great deal of contrast in tone colour and the general palette of sound should remain within strict limits. One should write in a strict contrapuntal style. I commenced work in April 1979 and completed the work in May of the same year. For a first effort in this genre I found it quite easy to write.*

Tobias Lund adds:

*Just as when one listens to the quartets of Haydn, it is easy to get the impression that the music is written to be fun to play. Themes are cleverly used, moods are created with great skill and – last but not least – the four parts all contribute to the thematic work and interact with intimacy and in continuously new ways.*

The same year Tubin wrote three more works that could not be more different in form and style. The *Suite on Estonian Dance Pieces* for solo violin was written for Zelia Aumere and is a straightforward folkloristic suite, based on five authentic folk tunes with variations added by the composer: *Bagpipe Piece*, *Night Herdsmen*, *Slow Waltz*, *Horn Piece* and *Serf's Dance* (Overcoat of Stone in original Estonian). This was also a signing-off. 35 years had passed since he wrote the first little violin prelude for Zelia Aumere in the refugee camp.

Tubin had one more important work to finish. He had never written any solo piece for the instrument of his youth – the flute. The *Sonata for Flute and Piano* was ready in October 1979 and immediately became one of his most popular works – just like the String Quartet and the solo violin suite. It was first performed next year on a concert dedicated to Tubin's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday at the Musical Academy. It has nothing to do with folklore. Anders Bråten describes it briefly in a CD booklet (Sforzando SFZ 1005):

*The first and third movements of the Sonata consist on long cantilenas which develop in ascending lines while the middle movement, the Vivace in 3/8 is very rhythmical and written in the French flute music tradition.*

After the death of the composer, Kristjan Järvi asked his friend Charles Coleman to arrange the piano part for string orchestra. The piece has been repeatedly played by, among others, his sister

Maarika Järvi. The flute solo part is the same, but the two versions leave somewhat different impressions. The original with piano accompaniment is crisp and precise, the “Flute Concerto” softer and more romantic.

The *Requiem for Fallen Soldiers* took a long time to mature, longer than any other of Tubin’s works. He started on it already in the 1940s, but gave up after some 20 bars of music. After trying different texts in 1949–50, by chance he found a book with Henrik Visnapuu’s poetry which inspired him to write the first half of the work. But several members of his choir were veterans, who didn’t want to be reminded of war and death. The work remained unfinished until 1979, when Tubin decided to add funeral signals on trumpet to the last part.

In addition to male choir and trumpet the requiem requires an alto voice, organ, side-drum and timpani. It is not a religious requiem and Tubin stressed that the non-political and non-heroic texts were not referring to any special war. However, the texts of the first and fourth movements were written directly after the War of Independence, in which Visnapuu served, while his text of the second movement and Marie Under’s *The Soldier’s Mother* were written during the Second World War. The inspiration to use trumpet signals came from one of Tubin’s favourite films, “From Here to Eternity”, where a bugler plays at an open window in remembrance of a dead comrade. Håkan Hardenberger, who played the trumpet on the BIS release, later asked if he could use the signals as a solo number. The requiem has been performed by many choirs in Estonia as well as Sweden. Despite the language, it has universal appeal: the Bat-Dor dance company in Israel used parts of the BIS recording for its ballet *Upon Thy Walls* in Jerusalem in 1987.

The requiem is in five movements with a symmetrical layout: the first and the last movements remind of marches, the second and fourth movements tell of funerals and the middle movement

contains a mother's words to her soldier son. The first movement *Be Hailed, Be Hailed* starts solemnly with one of Visnapuu's most famous poems, which Estonian schoolchildren used to know by heart. The first words are truly shocking: "How fine to die when young", written during the War of Liberation.

The second movement – *A Soldier's Funeral* – describes a field burial among snowdrifts that turns into a desperate fire-fight, written in 1944 when Estonia was caught in the crossfire between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The middle movement to Marie Under's lyrics from 1942 with the solo alto voice shows a mother's feelings for her son who went to war and will probably not return. The fourth movement, *Lilac*, refers to the custom of students to honour fallen school-friends in the Independence War by putting sprays of lilac in their inkwells. After the military tattoo signals in the last movement, the first movement is repeated in somewhat altered form.

Tubin personally gave the score to Gustav Ernesaks, the legendary leader of the RAM choir, but the Communist leadership interfered. It could not be performed in Estonia before 1989, when the liberation had begun. The first performance in a church in Stockholm was conducted by the composer himself on 17 March 1981 with the Stockholm Estonian Men's Choir – his last public appearance as a choir leader. After the performance he was very tired, but also relieved. Among the guests was Eller's and Tubin's former student, the composer and cellist Kaljo Raid, who served as a Baptist pastor in Canada. On Neeme Järvi's request, Raid later orchestrated the last bars of the first movement of Tubin's unfinished 11<sup>th</sup> Symphony.

Tubin's last completed work is a song composed for his friend Kalju Lepik's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, *Wedding Song*. It is very short and based on a humorous poem by Lepik. It was first performed on a concert dedicated to Lepik's birthday on 18 October 1980.

Tubin started working on his *Symphony No. 11* already in 1978, but abandoned the draft and started on a new beginning in 1981. He continued as long as his health permitted and managed to orchestrate all but the last bars of the first movement, *Allegro vivace, con spirito*. He managed only to write a few bars of the piano score of the planned second movement. But he claimed to have the outline of the symphony ready in his head.

For some, used to see strife, contrasts, problems and struggle in Tubin's symphonies, this completed first movement is an enigma. It is simple, driven, self-assured, powerful, sunny and positive. It has a fast tempo that remains the same throughout the movement. Tobias Lund writes:

*Should the problems begin later in the symphony? Or did Tubin really permit himself to write simply and affirmatively after a whole life of fighting and reflective music? [...] Or maybe the terminally ill composer, used as he was to write only the music he himself wanted without compromising, decided to adopt a style that one suspects had a rather low status in some art music circles. Tubin's Eleventh Symphony could have been the best and maybe only Wild West symphony of all ages.*

Brezhnev ruled in Moscow, the “time of stagnation” had begun in the Soviet Union and artistic freedom was again curtailed. After the ban against “The Parson of Reigi” the Communist authorities had understood that Tubin would never return. He had repeatedly said that he could turn back only to a free Estonia, a prospect which then seemed quite remote. Still they asked him on his last travel to persuade Neeme Järvi to remain in Soviet Estonia. Instead Tubin wished him luck in the free world. After this – and learning of his joke about the moustache size of the dictators – his works were again banned in the Soviet Union. Even scheduled concerts were cancelled when party hacks intervened.

Both Neeme Järvi and the most distinguished Soviet Estonian composer Arvo Pärt had had enough of the bureaucracy and repression at home. Finally they were permitted to emigrate, under various pretexts. They were put on a train to Vienna, the collecting point for dissidents and Jews leaving the Soviet Union. Järvi was immediately whisked off to USA. He soon received invitations also from Sweden and performed several major Tubin works with various orchestras in Gothenburg, Malmö and Stockholm. Tubin warmly recommended him to accept the post as chief conductor of the Gothenburg Symphonic Orchestra. It led to two decades of splendid artistic cooperation. Järvi brought the orchestra to world level and made it widely known through numerous recordings.

When Tubin's Sixth Symphony was performed in the new Berwald Hall in Stockholm on April 1982, Sigvard Hammar wanted to make a radio interview with Järvi and asked Tubin to act as an interpreter. Tubin willingly accepted and the talk went brilliantly. In his later years Tubin had lost all reluctance to speak Swedish in public.

Arvo Pärt stayed for a while in Austria and then settled in Germany. In one of Hammar's radio interviews (10 July 1980) Tubin, who had followed his musical career with interest, said that Pärt would become famous after 3–4 years. They exchanged some merry greetings.

The last travel abroad for Eduard and Erika Tubin was the visit to USA at the beginning of 1981 for five centenary concerts of the Boston Symphony Orchestra with Tubin's 10<sup>th</sup> symphony conducted by Neeme Järvi. He was visibly affected by his disease but found strength to go to all performances but one. Järvi drove them around personally and took them to visit Endel Kalam, the conductor and viola player, and Tubin's childhood friend Voldemar Krimm. He was also honoured with a special evening at the Estonian House in New York.

Another important interpreter of Tubin's music who appeared in Sweden at that time was Vardo Rumessen, a young Estonian pianist and musicologist. He was invited by the Baltic Institute to deliver a lecture with some music examples in Stockholm in spring 1981 and proceeded to play all of Tubin's piano works on two recitals. Nobody had paid much attention to Tubin's piano music in Sweden. It had mostly been heard on small concerts organized by fellow Estonians. Tubin went to the recitals and the critic Marcus Boldeman, who wrote a very positive review, remembered what he had said earlier: "I think the best times in my life are when my music is played and I can be there myself." The recitals were so impressive that Harry Olt, who was behind the invitation, immediately called a sound technician to make a recording. *Caprice*, the record company of the Swedish concert bureau, eventually brought out this first recording of the complete piano music on three audiocassettes with an extensive booklet edited by Olt. Gunnar Larsson, former secretary of the Royal Academy of Music, contributed with an analysis of the Northern Lights sonata stressing the Nordic and Sami elements. It also contained the first complete list of Tubin's musical works, researched and compiled by Olt.

During the last dark years of oppressive Communist rule in the 1980s, Rumessen almost singlehandedly kept the interest for Tubin's musical heritage alive in Soviet Estonia. He kept on researching his life, interviewing people who knew him, organizing recitals, preserving materials and putting up memorial plaques despite official silence or occasional setbacks.

Järvi's and Rumessen's performances and the first hi-fi record of the Balalaika concerto showed the Swedish public the potential of Tubin's music, if it was taken seriously and properly played. Now headlines appeared in the press: "A Master is being hushed up", "Tubin – a Godsend". He also got his share of official acknowledgements, the prestigious Kurt Atterberg award in 1977 and the Culture Award of the City of Stockholm in 1981. On 15 May 1982,

he had the ultimate honour to be elected member of the Royal Music Academy, together with world-famous musicians like conductor Sergiu Celibidache and violinist Isaac Stern. The Academy sent him the pattern for a dress suit collar, worn by members on formal occasions, but it was never made; he was then too frail to take part in its activities.

Around 1980 the illness returned. Tubin got lesions on his legs and suffered long, tiring treatments. Since he was always optimistic and the doctors kept silent, the family didn't realize the seriousness. In summer 1982 he rested at home. Everybody thought that this was a pause between periods of chemotherapy. In autumn he suddenly felt worse. Erika felt helpless, but daughter-in-law Beyhan took over and called an ambulance. He was taken to Radiumhemmet, the last stop for many cancer patients.

Records were, and are still, vital to reach a larger audience. The Estonian branch of the Soviet monopoly *Melodija* had produced some LP records of Tubin's music, but the technical quality of the pressings was low and they had no distribution in the west. Already before Neeme Järvi left Estonia, he had started talking about recording a symphony cycle. But it had to be done with a western company.

When Tubin was hospitalized for the last time, Järvi said that he wanted to talk to him on the phone. Beyhan asked for a hospital phone to be brought to the bedside at the appointed hour. But everybody had forgotten about the one hour time difference between England, where Järvi was at the moment, and Stockholm. Still the phone stayed silent and the hours ticked away. Was it a mistake; was Järvi busy at some rehearsal? Tubin was already despairing. Then the call came through. When Järvi gave his solemn word that he would soon record all orchestral works, Tubin's face suddenly lit up.

It was a last moment of great satisfaction and joy that nobody present could ever forget.

He passed away peacefully in the morning on 17 November.



*Last car travel abroad with family.  
Eduard, Erika and Eino Tubin  
at the French border, 1977.  
Photo: Beyhan Tubin.*



*The whole Tubin family gathered for Eduard's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday in Handen: front row: Beyhan, Eduard, Rana, standing from left: Erika, Eino, Rein, Anne, Jaan and Saima.*



*After the first performance of Tubin's "Requiem for fallen soldiers" at the Hedvig Eleonora church in Stockholm. From left: composer Kaljo Raid, Eduard Tubin, Harri Kiisk, Erika Tubin, soprano Ileana Peterson, 17 March 1981.*

*The chairman of STIM,  
the Swedish copyright society,  
Ove Rainer, giving the Kurt Atterberg prize  
to Eduard Tubin,  
16 December 1977.*



## Chapter 15. Postlude

Only the closest friends attended the funeral, the family didn't want solemn speeches or choir singing.

Erika had a hard time to pick up the pieces. By herself, sometimes with the help of Harry Olt, she started organizing her husband's papers, reviews, tape recordings and scores. Everything had to be done from the beginning; there was not even a proper list of works. Erika had always been the silent partner, who had to sacrifice her ambitions and interests in order not to disturb her husband in his work. War memories and boring office-work had turned her into a basically pessimistic person. But she was also a theatre actress, who could change her face in a moment and engage in witty, elegant conversation. Unfortunately her health didn't last and she suffered a fatal brain haemorrhage in less than a year after her husband's death.

Sons Rein and Eino, the present author, cared together for the heritage for some years. In 1988 they went together to Tallinn, to the first proper performance of "The Parson of Reigi" at the *Estonia* theatre. Rein's great moment came during a concert at the St. Nikolas museum with RAM, the State Academic Men's Choir. Gustav Ernesaks offered him to conduct and they merrily joined hands during the applause. But Rein was already suffering from symptoms of the cancer that quickly brought him down the same autumn.

Neeme Järvi's recording plans were realized with the help of Robert von Bahr, owner of the maverick Swedish BIS record

company. Within a decade, most of Tubin's symphonies, major instrumental works, chamber music, piano works, works for solo instruments and some cantatas had been recorded and released. Järvi also took care of the financing, persuading well-off exile Estonians to give contributions. The instrumental works were mostly recorded with the best Swedish orchestras, usually before or after public concerts. Vardo Rumessen recorded the piano works once more and accompanied violinist Arvo Leibur and viola player Petra Vahle for the complete violin and viola recordings. Much later, all symphonies were once more recorded with ERSO conducted by Arvo Volmer for the Finnish Alba record company and the complete violin music by Sigrid Kuulmann-Martin, violin, with Marko Martin, piano, for Estonian ERP.

Toward the end of the 1980s, during Gorbatsjov's Glasnost, Vardo Rumessen could again work actively in Estonia to introduce and preserve Eduard Tubin's legacy. Memorial tablets were attached to his childhood home in Naelavere and to the houses in Nõo and on Herrmann Street in Tartu, where he had composed many of his works. A memorial stone was unveiled at his birthplace. When Estonia became free in 1991, there was great interest in the culture that had been suppressed during the Soviet occupation.

The re-evaluation of Tubin's music took off after his death. Some years later, Mikael Strömberg wrote (Aftonbladet, 22 Feb. 1987):

*As a symphonist, Tubin emerges more and more as one of our truly greats. There he calls for resistance and saves a lost nation. Trumpets and percussion tear down walls, fugues chase away intruders. And then this longing that eternally blazes...*

*[The Swedish composers] Alfvén and Pettersson-Berger are rather thin gruel compared to Eduard Tubin.*

Tubin's piano music, which had never been touched by foreigners, started to be played by world pianists. Conductors like Neeme, Paavo and Kristjan Järvi, Eri Klas, Arvo Volmer and Anu Tali took it as a task of honour to bring Tubin's orchestra works to the great world.

A milestone was the founding of the Eduard Tubin International Society in Estonia in 2000 with Rumessen as its first chairman. It's most important task is to make all Tubin's scores available for libraries and musicians by producing an academic edition of Tubin's collected works. All symphonies and piano works, most violin and chamber music works and one opera are already published, in co-operation with Gehrmans Musikförlag; an amazing success. Usually it takes decades just to get started with such a project.

The oeuvre of Eduard Tubin contains more than 130 works. How did he get the inspiration to write them? He has himself touched the subject of inspiration in a lecture in 1956, where he argued against the common myth that masterworks are created in a creative trance. He quoted Stravinsky, who claimed that inspiration is a feeling that occurs *after* the creative process. If the work then stands up to the creator's demands, it might leave a feeling of satisfaction. Tubin's second example was Carl Nielsen's tale of a student, who had gone astray with an exercise and defended himself that he had felt that way. "Young man", Nielsen said, "remember that when you are writing music, you shouldn't feel anything". Tubin went on by saying that all people have creative ideas. To be a professional means to learn how to use these ideas and put them together to an artistic whole. This learning lasts the whole lifetime. It is not enough to have talent: "the major force pushing forward is work, work and again work."

This might leave the impression of Tubin as an impassionate craftsman, but his own music writing could sometimes be quite emotional and passionate. He could get inspiration from northern

lights and be so absorbed in his work that he continued in a “creative frenzy” until midnight. He could even get sick from creative tension! Such contradictions give a key to understanding the personality of the composer Eduard Tubin. If something aroused his curiosity, he would grasp it and try systematically from different angles what could come out of various ideas and means of expression, while never compromising his superior technical skill. But there is also continuity in his work, as expressed by Connor:

*...every work can be seen as a prism, in which the light of tradition breaks, mixing colours in new ways. Without looking right or left, Tubin has steadfastly followed his own path, independently of the capriciousness of changing fashion. He assimilated what he saw as useful for his symphonic development, and left the rest aside. In Tubin's oeuvre one can follow a steady development and renewal within the temperament of a searching merry musician.*

Tubin's music is certainly demanding. Vardo Rumessen said in a radio interview in 2014 that it is “difficult to grasp, difficult to listen to, difficult to play”:

*Tubin has a very individualistic style. All those composers, who can be singled out by their personal way of expression, need prolonged absorption. The great classics are above all distinguished by their individualistic style. This is not popular music for one-time listening. Tubin demands effort and familiarization from the listener, who has to know beforehand something about this music – why it was written, what the composer wanted to express. Not one of Tubin's works is similar to some other – that's the hallmark of a great composer.*

Few Nordic composers have written in so many genres and left

behind so many singular works. Eduard Tubin felt inspiration also in Stravinsky's sense. He said that he knew the value of his music and also that it would be discovered in time. This belief kept him going during all difficult times. When he started as a composer, he was found too modern. The war and occupation years were a struggle for survival, with cultural life in Estonia cut off from Western influences. After the first acceptance in Sweden all turned into stone – the Fifth symphony was well received, but the “Northern Lights” sonata and the Sixth symphony, his central and most expressive works, met with silence or doubts. In the 1960s, when he had become a member of the Swedish Composers' Union, a wave of radical modernism swept over Sweden and pushed Tubin aside as an old-fashioned traditionalist. Of course he was disappointed because his works were seldom performed. Many of his Swedish colleagues had the same experience. The turn-around came only in his last years, but his fame grew slowly. When Swedish TV woke up and wanted to interview him in the summer of 1982, he was already too ill to make a public appearance.

The Swedish critic Carl-Gunnar Åhlén once used a catchy headline for a Tubin review – *Tubin's time will come*. The same words were used 40 years later on a poster by the Theatre and Music Museum in Tallinn, announcing that a Tubin museum would open its doors in Alatskivi castle in 2011. It took so long for the composer to reach an internationally acknowledged place in the classical music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*Rein Tubin was asked by  
legendary choir leader Gustav Ernesaks  
to conduct the RAM choir  
on a concert at the St. Nikolas  
in Tallinn in 1988.  
Photo: Eino Tubin*



*A monument to Eduard Tubin was unveiled in front of the Vanemuine theatre on his centenary in 2005. It was designed by sculptor Aili Vahtrapuu and architect Veronika Valk. The sound installation is created by Louis Dandrel.  
Photo: Eino Tubin*



*Eino and Beyhan Tubin with wax figures  
of Eduard and Erika  
at the Tubin Museum in Alatskivi Castle.*

## Appendix: The composer's voice

### Can music have a program?

Eduard Tubin found a discussion partner in the Estonian composer Veljo Tormis (1930–2017), who shared his interest in folk music, although they had quite different approaches. Tormis wanted to preserve the original, archaic character, while Tubin used folk tunes as “raw material” to be developed as the composer wanted. One of his letters to Tormis, dated 1 May 1975, deals with the basic questions of programmatic music, folk music and Wagner that busied him all through his life as composer.

*...Your sentence that “all [folksong] texts can be sung with any of the melodies” vividly stirred my thoughts. Why not?! Let’s remember what Stravinsky once said: “Music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all”. And really, if we would take for instance the oratorios of Handel and Bach and write new texts to them, they would sound just as splendid! Or if we think of Mozart’s Requiem: “Tuba Mirum...”, where he gave an almost lovely melody to the baritone solo, which is supported by the trombone. Maybe he grasped that it is not possible to imagine something like “Tuba Mirum”!? Of course we are caught by the tradition that a certain text belongs to a certain tune, but are they really always so tied to each other? I’m even thinking that it would be time to write a new text to R. Wagner’s “Ring”, because the one that Wagner wrote is so lacking of any lyricism that it*

*is almost a parody. Or is Wagner's music so suggestively impressive just because the text plays no part in it? Really it doesn't, because you cannot hear it, nobody can understand it and it is everywhere sung only in the original language. And it is certainly wrong when it is said that this or that composer "melodised" this or that text. Didn't he do anything more than just "melodising" it? – Music moves according to its inner logic, the text after its own, and you cannot melt them together. When there is good music, we hear the music, when there is bad music, we hear the text.*

*Such neutral music as a folk song can of course carry any text and there you are completely right. But...but... Is it really possible to sing the text of a serious work song to the tune of a merry song at the village swing? Of course it is, and when we get used to it, then such a combination seems eminently suitable. It all depends on what we can get used to.*

*Maybe my thoughts about these problems may sound somewhat "wild", but since I read the sentence by Stravinsky quoted above, something started to brew inside me, until I have now reached this conclusion. I have tried as a test to listen to all kinds of programmatic music, until I finally understood that it has nothing to do with creating an image according to the text. At most there can be a kind of music, which after reading the text evokes a mood that is in accord with that of the text – "a garden in rain", "a peaceful evening", "thunder", "riding at night" etc. If you don't have the program in your hand, it will be highly questionable what the composer wanted to show; but if the inner logic of the music is good and solid, then I hear this at first hand and feel happy about it...*

## Like holding back a horse

How did Tubin consider his own style? He gives some clues in an interview by Gunilla Petersén in “Tonfallet” (no. 1, 1979):

*My music builds on classical tradition, and it often contains some Estonian folk tunes. I still don't understand twelve-tone music. It is so construed, so ice cold. With Arnold Schönberg, anyway. Alban Berg had his heart in it, and it immediately becomes better. I have thought a lot about atonalism and found that nothing can be entirely atonal. If you look vertically, you can even find tonality with Schönberg. Everything surrounding us is tonal, think of the birds, they always sing tonally. But of course, I have sometimes changed my style and written in a freer fashion...*

Which composers have meant the most for you through the years?

*First Mahler. It was during the years 1924–1930. I acquired his full scores and learnt instrumentation by studying his works. I like Brahms and Haydn for their feeling for form. And Mozart, after he had become acquainted with Bach's counterpoint. Before he wrote a bit too simply. Stravinsky and Bartók of course. And Sibelius. But he makes us tired, his instrumentation is standing still. I like Berwald very much,*

*his tonal language is brief, to the point and witty, a close relative to Haydn's. I think one should learn counterpoint thoroughly, even today. But nowadays there are so many different rules...*

Do you feel old-fashioned?

*No. Music is always the same. If one can express something with one's music, then the style doesn't really matter. That's my consolation. Of course, that's a poor consolation, since I don't know myself how much content my music has. But the principle is important to me. Maybe it is old-fashioned to think that you must always hold back a little, control your feelings. Not just culminate completely. It's like holding back a horse. This tension is important for me.*



*Erika and Eduard Tubin on their way  
to the Composers' House in Tallinn  
together with colleague and  
discussion partner Veljo Tormis, 1976.*

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