

# **“BAŅUTA”, THE FIRST OPERA IN LATVIAN AND ITS LIBRETTO AS A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE IN THE CONTEXT OF STAGING HISTORY**

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## **Abstract**

In theatre (including musical theatre genres), the text of the performance is an artefact which can express and echo a historical theme. Additionally, over the course of time, this artistic narrative can experience various changes due to the influence of external factors. This narrative can also consciously or unconsciously influence society's view over a longer period.

This article is focused on the first opera in the Latvian language “Baņuta” (1920, author of libretto Arturs Krūmiņš, composer Alfrēds Kalniņš). The three versions of this opera (1920, 1937, 1941), especially changes of libretto over time, seven stagings at the Latvian National Opera Theatre (1920, 1937, 1941, 1953, 1968, 1979, 1999) and several concert performances in Latvia and outside (in the 20<sup>th</sup> century eighties) reflect interesting historical experience. It is worthwhile get to know this story in the context of Latvian national culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** *“Baņuta” as the first opera in Latvian, historical narrative, libretto, history of staging, cultural context.*

In theatre (including musical theatre genres), the text of the performance is an artefact which can express and echo a historical theme. Additionally, over the course of time, this artistic narrative can experience various changes due to the influence of external factors. This narrative can also consciously or unconsciously influence society's view over a longer period. In the context of Latvia's centenary, such historically significant artefact and narrative is the first opera in the Latvian language, “Baņuta”. Its libretto and, over the course of time, its staging provide a vivid example of the idea that a work of art can reflect the underlying currents of



Figure 1. Photo from premiere of opera "Baņuta" on 29 May 1920,  
Latvian National Opera and Ballet Theatre.  
In the centre – Dagmāra Rozenberga-Tursa as Baņuta.  
From the collection of Literature and Music Museum, RTMM 53255.

the cultural context of the time it was created, and that these elements of context change due to the influence of external factors, which, seemingly, disappear, but are still maintained at the same time. In the end, after nearly one hundred years, an interesting story has developed, and it is worthwhile to review this story in the context of Latvian national culture.

May 29, 1920 is a significant date in the Latvian music history. On this day premiere of the opera "Baņuta" took place, which is the first opera in the Latvian language (composer Alfrēds Kalniņš (1879–1951), author of libretto Arturs Krūmiņš (1879–1969)), celebrated its arrival in the world.<sup>1</sup> The first opera genre example in Latvian was created and staged for the first time a little later than in other European nations in the North, East, South and Central territories. In other nations, the first opera genre examples (in the national languages and with topics

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the history of the opera genre in Latvia began in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first operas in the German language was created by Franz Adam Veichtner (1741–1822), he was the court composer of the former Duchy of Courland. After Veichtner, the next completed example in the opera genre was the opera "Gunda" (in German) Ādams Ore (1855–1927), a composer of Latvian descent, in 1898. However, "Baņuta" is the first completed and staged opera in the Latvian language.

which represent national culture) were created in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, it was no surprise that, at the beginning of the summer of 1920, Latvian press in Riga displayed the enthusiasm of critics and editorial staff about the fact that, finally, the Latvians had their first opera in their native language, and national themes were being developed [Klotiņš 1979: 224–225].

The music of “Baņuta” allows one to clearly understand the late romantic style of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the influence of the aesthetics and principles of Richard Wagner’s musical drama and composers of epic Russian opera. With an enviable spark of originality, composer Alfrēds Kalniņš wove all this together to create a truly musically vivid and historically enduring music for opera [Briede-Bulāvinova 1975: 64–74; Klotiņš 1979: 227–231].

After the premiere, a discourse has continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and one of the main topics was – distinguished music with somewhat *problematic* quality of poetry and a compositionally resolution of the storyline development [Briede-Bulāvinova 1975: 57–60; Klotiņš 1979: 226–228, 445]. For now, leaving a detailed analysis of the musical and poetic quality of “Baņuta” for another time, the general aim of this paper is viewing on the historical narrative of the opera libretto and its amazing transformation on the stage over times.

### The first version of the libretto

In Latvian musical and culture historiography opera “Baņuta” is denominated as the first national opera. However, the first version of opera libretto nowadays is forgotten. Overall, the history of the opera libretto creation and the first text version highlight interesting cultural and historical references.

In 1903, Riga Latvian Society announced a competition on the Latvian opera libretto creation. Competition rules contained the following condition: “A poet can choose the topic for opera’s libretto as he wishes, but it is desirable to take it from Latvian or Lithuanian history, legends, and fairy tales” [Bals 1903]. Thus, the rules clearly indicated that it was desirable to focus not only on Latvian, but also on Lithuanian topical cultural themes. According to a variety of information, eight librettos were submitted to the competition. In the autumn of 1905, the only prize (second prize) in the competition was awarded to a poet-amateur, also architecture student at Riga Polytechnic Institute Artūrs Krūmiņš (1879–1969)<sup>1</sup>, for libretto “Baņuta”, in

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<sup>1</sup> Architect Artūrs Krūmiņš played an important role in Latvian cultural history. After graduating from Riga Polytechnic Institute in 1907, he worked in Moscow. In 1920 Krūmiņš became a Docent at the University of Latvia, he was Professor from 1940 until his death. From 1936 to 1940 Krūmiņš led Riga Building Commission, he has prepared projects for several buildings in the city centre. Krūmiņš is the author of several books on Latvian architecture and building.

which nearly literally executed all contest rules and recommendations. Other prizes in this competition were not awarded [*Vērotājs* 1905].<sup>1</sup>

"Baņuta" libretto consists of four acts [Krūmiņš 1920]. The first act is characterised by a swift development of events, and a frequent change of the musical mood. The second act is characterised by growth in the event development, reaching a culmination at the conclusion – the attempt to burn Baņuta during Daumants' funeral, Baņuta's oath to get revenge. The third act is characterised by slowing of the intensity of the action. There is a musical *enjoyment* of the midsummer celebration with varied songs and dances. The fourth act is characterised by continuation and resolution in a psychological drama genre – this confirms the romantic opera tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where, due to external factors, love and happiness are never possible and the main characters always die tragically.<sup>2</sup>

**Act I**

*Daumants, the son of the Romove king Valgudis, is celebrating his wedding with Baņuta, who has been brought to him after a battle. In hand to hand combat, Daumants is killed by Vižuts, to avenge the honour of his sister.*

**Act II**

*Valgudis accuses Baņuta of bringing misfortune and wants to burn her together with the body of Daumants. However, Daumants' shield suddenly falls off and is considered a sign to protect Baņuta. Baņuta must swear to find and kill Daumants' murderer, and she is forbidden to fall in love and begin a new relationship until that is done.*

**Act III**

*The people of the land of Romove celebrate midsummer night (Līgo). While this is happening, Baņuta begs Krīvs (priest of Romove) to release her from her oath for one night. Baņuta has fallen in love with Vižuts.*

**Act IV**

*At the end of the midsummer night, after revealing their love to each other, Baņuta finds out that Vižuts murdered Daumants. Vižuts, to release Baņuta from her oath, kills himself. Baņuta decides to follow her lover into death.*

<sup>1</sup> More about it in this publication: Kudiņš, J. (ed.) (2014). Lithuanian presence in the first Latvian opera Baņuta. Some interesting facts in Latvian music history. *Ars et Praxis* (2). Vilnius: Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, p. 11–25.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that in the third version of the opera (1941), however, there is a happy ending – Baņuta and Vižuts remain alive. See below.



Figure 2. Scene from the opera “Baņuta” staging in 1941. Act II, in the centre – Milda Brehmane-Štengele as Baņuta. From Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music Library Electronic Catalogue (Database of Pictures, LF 1771).



Figure 3. Scene from the opera “Baņuta” staging in 1968. Act II, Rita Zelmāne as Baņuta, Kārlis Miesnieks as Valgudis. From Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music Library Electronic Catalogue (Database of Pictures, LF 1843).



Figure 4. Scene from the opera "Baņuta" staging in 1968. Act III, Regīna Frīnberga as Baņuta, Miķelis Fišers as Vižuts. From Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music Library Electronic Catalogue (Database of Pictures, LF 1851).



Figure 5. Scene from the opera “Baņuta” staging in 1968. Act IV, Rita Zelmāne as Baņuta, Kārlis Zariņš as Vižuts. Photograph by E. Freimane. From Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music Library Electronic Catalogue (Database of Pictures, LF 1899).

Where in the opera’s story and libretto are references to specific and still interesting cultural-historical concepts? In accordance with the first version of “Baņuta” libretto, which was published separately in Riga in 1920, at the very beginning it is stressed that the opera’s imaginary story *takes place in the distant past of Lithuania and Latvia*. Besides, Lithuanian ancient history is mentioned first. It is truly a paradox. Moreover, the references to Lithuania are regular and consistent in the first version of the opera’s libretto [Krūmiņš 1920].

For instance, in the first act wedding of the young king Daumants and Baņuta takes place. Daumants introduces his bride to the old king, his father, and the people, and he sings:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Translation into English by Biruta Sūrmane [Gailitis 1999 11, 53].

<p><i>Pār <b>Lietuvu</b> ērglis lidoja, viņš biedreni ligzdai meklēja. Pie jūras tas viņu atrada, caur gaisiem uz spārniem atnesa. Tēvs Valgudi, <b>kunigas</b> lielais, ja tu viņu pieņemi, kar apkārt tai dzintara rotu, to par Baņutu sauci!</i></p>	<p><i>An eagle flew over <b>Lithuania</b> searching a mate for his nest. He found her by the sea, carried her home on his wings. Father Valgudis, great <b>kunigas</b>, if you accept her, adorn her with an amber necklace and call her: Baņuta!</i></p>
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Second act (at the end of the first act, Daumants was killed in the duel). The women's choir sing funeral song with the following text:<sup>1</sup>

<p><i>Vaimanā, vaimanā, <b>Lietuva!</b> Nava vairs varoņa kuniga! Ceļā viņš dosies drīz tālajā, bālajo ēnu valstībā.</i></p>	<p><i>Weep, weep, <b>Lithuania!</b> Your heroic <b>kunigas</b> is no more! He's embarking on a long journey, to the kingdom of pale shades.</i></p>
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However, old king Valgudis sings that it is necessary to find the murderer in Lithuania:<sup>2</sup>

<p><i>Nav zināms viņa slepkava, tas <b>Lietuvā</b> vēl dzīvs!</i></p>	<p><i>His murderer isn't known, he's still alive in <b>Lithuania!</b></i></p>
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Then old king and people demand that Baņuta should make an oath to take revenge and after that they sing:<sup>3</sup>

<p>Koris: <i>Tavu zvērestu dzird <b>Lietuva</b> un tās augstie un varenie gari!</i></p> <p>Valgudis: <i>Tad zvēri vēl, ka nemilēsi tu cita vīra <b>Lietuvā</b>, līdz kuniga tu neatrībsi, Līdz nebūs kritis slepkava!</i></p>	<p>Chorus: <i>Your oath is heard by <b>Lithuania</b> and her high and mighty spirits!</i></p> <p>Valgudis: <i>Then swear again that you won't love another man in <b>Lithuania</b> until you avenge the <b>kunigas</b>, until the assassin is slain!</i></p>
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<sup>1</sup> Translation into English by Biruta Sūrmane [Gailītis 1999: 20, 62].

<sup>2</sup> Ibid [Gailītis 1999: 24, 66].

<sup>3</sup> Ibid [Gailītis 1999: 24, 66].



In continuation old king and the people (choir) sing the following texts, which includes the word *Lithuania* as reference to the place of action:<sup>1</sup>

<p><i>Baņuta, celies! Meklē slepkavu! Lūko kunigu atriebtu! Dzenā slepkavu <b>Lietuvā</b>, Nokauj, ja satiec pat svētnīcā! <u>Romoves</u> birzes ziedus kad ver, asmenis tavs lai asinis dzer!</i></p>	<p><i>Baņuta, rise! Pursue assassin! Seek to avenge the kunigas! Hunt the assassin throughout <b>Lithuania</b>, slay him, though you meet in a sanctuary! When flowers burst into bloom in <u>Romove</u>, let your dagger's blade drink blood!</i></p>
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Getting acquainted with the libretto text, of course, one may ask questions. Why action in the first Latvian opera consistently takes place in Lithuania? How was it possible that, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Latvian society could have such a tolerant and romantic understanding of ancient times, where ancient Latvians and ancient Lithuanians were mythically understood to be almost one nation? This is a reference to an entire cultural layer, which was well known and topical in educated Latvian society in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Names and places

According to the opera's libretto, action unfolds in the Romove. What is Romove? Nowadays, in the ancient Baltic (based on the perceptions about Western Balts or Old Prussians and Eastern Balts or ancient pre-Latvians and pre-Lithuanians before Christianization) mythology research, this place is described as century earlier texts mention the possible sacred site, which has been located at a place called as Nadruva.

For example, medieval German (Teutonic Knights) priest-brother and chronicler Peter von Dusburg (lived at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century) in his *Chronicon terrae Prussiae* described Romuva or Romowe as a pagan worship place (a temple or a sacred area) in western part of Sambia and Nadruva, one of the regions of the pagan Prussia. In contemporary sources the temple was mentioned only once by Peter von Dusburg in his *Chronicon terrae Prussiae*, 1326 [Scholz & Wojtecki 1984]. According to his account, *Kriwe*, the chief priest or *pagan pope*, lived at Romuva and ruled over the religion of all the ancient Balts [Sužiedēlis 1975: 530]. Overall, this place was of the Old Prussian land, nowadays it is Russian Kaliningrad County territory [Gimbutas 1963; Bojtár 1999].

<sup>1</sup> Translation into English by Biruta Sūrmane [Gailītis 1999: 25, 67].

In period of the First National Awakening of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in seventies and eighties, then, when the first nationally significant examples of Latvian literature emerged, these examples reflected in previous centuries, mainly in German written texts about ancient culture of the Baltic people – Old Prussians, pre-Lithuanians and pre-Latvians – in the ancient past. Two of the first Latvian National Awakening period vivid Latvian poets – Auseklis (real name Miķelis Krogzemis, 1850–1879) and Andrejs Pumpurs (1841–1902) – created such texts, which reflected nowadays well-known ancient Baltic mythology elements (godheads, rituals etc.) of the transformation in the form of the subjective artistically phantasy. Thus, the opinion that the ancient Latvians had their own mythology, and largely it was closely related to Lithuanian mythology, this story in early 20<sup>th</sup> century was well known in Latvian society. Thus, it is not surprising why in the first Latvian opera action takes place in Lithuania, not Latvia. At the same time, the opera emphasizes the element of Latvian folklore (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> acts – celebration of the midsummer night or *Līgo* with the stylized Latvian folk songs and dances).

This aspect – an eclectic libretto storyline – has also been illustrated in the names of main characters:

Valgudis – old kunigas (king) of Romove
Daumants – his son, new kunigas (king) of Romove
Maiga – Valgudis' daughter, princess of Romove
Baņuta – princess from another land and another tribe (maybe from Latvia?), Daumants' wife, new kunigaite (queen) of Romove
Vižutis (-ts) – stranger who came from other places to avenge his sister's Jargala (only in the text) honour which has soured Daumants
Zvantevaitis – commander of Romove army
Zvalgonis – ceremony master of Romove kunigas' court
Sorcerer – without his name in the libretto
Krīvu-krīvs – principal priest of Romove Holy Grove
Reda – Daumants' dead mother, old kunigaite (only in the text)

It is interesting that according to opera's libretto names of Lithuanian origin are *Daumants*, *Zvantevaitis* and *Reda*. Lithuanian and Latvian names are *Maiga*, *Valgudis*, *Vižutis*, *Zvalgonis* and *Krīvs* (priest). The old name *kunigas* (as *king*, *sir* etc.) also is undoubtedly of Lithuanian origin. Woman's name *Jargala* has been probably taken from Old Prussian or Polish. Ancient gods' names (*Pērkons/Perkūnas*, *Patrimps/Patrimpas*, *Pīkols/Pikuolas*) are represented in Old Prussian, Latvian and Lithuanian mythology [Gimbutas 1963; Bojtár 1999]. Finally, the origin of opera's title protagonist's name is a great intrigue until the present-day.

Woman's name *Baņuta* has no clear origin in the Latvian language. In Latvian history of persons' names, in the calendars, this name appeared only in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1937, in an interview Krūmiņš told the following [*Сегодня Вечером* 1937]:

*The name of a woman – Baņuta – for me has remained in the memory from one old magazine which I saw in my childhood. There was a one painting in grey shades. In this painting a young girl was shown, she was dead. Below this painting, girl's name was written – Baņuta. I remembered this name forever. Therefore, my libretto is titled as “Baņuta”.*

In 1885, a novel under the title “The Young Hero” (*Jaunais varonis*) was published in Latvian in Riga's magazine *Rota* [Rota 1885]. The author of this romantic epic novel was the well-known 19<sup>th</sup>-century Polish writer Jozef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812–1887). However, the original title of this novel was not “The Young Hero”, but *Kunigas* [Kraszewski 1881]. The action of the novel unfolds in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Poland and Lithuania, and one of the novel's heroine is *Baniuta*. Names of other heroes in Polish are the following:

<i>Lithuanians:</i>
Marger-Jerzy; <b>Baniuta</b> -Barbara; Rymos; Szwentas; Reda; Walgutis; Wižunas; Jargala; Konis – <u>wejdalota Perkuna</u>
<i>Teutonic Knights:</i>
Brat Bernard; Brat Sylwester; Luder; Siegfried von Ortlopp; Gmunda Lewen; Dietrich von Pynau; Ojciec Antoniusz

You can clearly see that such names as *Baņuta*, *Valgudis*, *Vižutis*, *Reda*, *Jargala* in the first Latvian national opera's libretto have been directly taken from Kraszewski's novel. The storyline of Kraszewski's novel has not been taken into Krūmiņš' opera libretto. However, it is important that some references to ancient Baltic mythology and religious rituals (for example, *Konis – wejdalota Perkuna*) have been included in Kraszewski's novel. Thus, the woman's name *Baņuta* has entered the Lithuanian

and Polish languages. Incidentally, woman's name Baņuta for the first time was published in Latvian calendar in 1910 [Siliņš 1990]. It is significant that this calendar was issued in Latgale which is one the historical regions of Latvia. It is well known that Latgale for several centuries (1561–1772) was under the rule of the former Polish-Lithuanian state (*Rzeczpospolita*).<sup>1</sup>

With such accent on Lithuania, mythical ancient Prussian place Romove and with stylized Latvian folk-music elements, *Baņuta* was first staged in 1920. And what is interesting is that in the music criticism of that time, the close presence of Lithuania was noted, but it did not inspire any discussions [Klotiņš 1979: 226]. It seems probable that in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was self-evident that there was an understanding of the cultural and mythological unity of the ancient Baltic peoples. This was included in the opera's text as a self-evident narrative, which surprises us nowadays with its romanticised unambiguity and eclectic style, where Latvian midsummer folk songs and folk costumes are put together with the land of Lithuania and a holy place of the ancient Prussian Romove people.

### Historical narrative and its versions

The first opera in Latvian at the National Opera Theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was staged 7 times:<sup>2</sup>

<p><b>29 May 1920, Latvian National Opera</b> (1<sup>st</sup> version, the tragic finale) Baņuta – Dagmāra Rozenberga-Tursa, Vižutis – Rūdolfs Bērziņš, conductor Alfrēds Kalniņš</p>
<p><b>7 October 1937, Latvian National Opera</b> (2<sup>nd</sup> version, the tragic finale) Baņuta – Milda Brehmane-Štengele, Vižutis – Nikolajs Vasiļjevs, conductor Jānis Kalniņš</p>
<p><b>9 June 1941, Latvian National Opera</b> (3<sup>rd</sup> version, the optimistic finale) Baņuta – Milda Brehmane-Štengele, Vižutis – Arturs Priednieks-Kavarra, conductor Jānis Kalniņš</p>
<p><b>25 October 1953, Latvian National Opera</b> (3<sup>rd</sup> version, the optimistic finale) Baņuta – Reģīna Māliņa (Frinberga), Vižutis – Arnolds Skara, conductor Edgars Tons</p>

<sup>1</sup> For more information, see: Kudiņš, J. (ed.) (2014). Lithuanian presence in the first Latvian opera Baņuta. Some interesting facts in Latvian music history. *Ars et Praxis* (2). Vilnius: Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, p. 11–25.

<sup>2</sup> Information has been summarized on the basis of data from the Latvian National Opera Theatre history research [Briede-Bulāvinova 1987] and Opera Theatre repertoire publications on the Internet sites over the last thirty years.

**23 September 1968, Latvian National Opera** (3<sup>rd</sup> version, the optimistic finale)  
Baņuta – Regīna Frinberga, Vižutis – Kārlis Zariņš,  
conductor Rihards Glāzups

**20 June 1979, Latvian National Opera** (2<sup>nd</sup> version, the tragic finale)  
Baņuta – Rita Zelmane, Vižutis – Kārlis Zariņš,  
conductor Aleksandrs Viļumanis

**21 August 1999, Latvian National Opera** (3<sup>rd</sup> version, the optimistic finale),  
open-air staging in Zosēni (only one performance)  
Baņuta – Zigrīda Krīgere, Vižutis – Miervaldis Jenčs,  
conductor Aleksandrs Viļumanis

The opera has been played twice in Latvia as a concert performance:

**17 September 1999, Latvian National Opera, only one concert performance**  
(2<sup>nd</sup> version, the tragic finale)  
Baņuta – Zigrīda Krīgere, Vižutis – Kārlis Zariņš, conductor Aleksandrs Viļumanis

**26 June 2003, only one concert performance, Riga Latvian Society House**  
(3<sup>rd</sup> version, the optimistic finale)  
Baņuta – Zigrīda Krīgere, Vižutis – Miervaldis Jenčs, conductor Andrejs Jansons

This is a respectable count for the staging of one opera. Additionally, as can be seen in the summary of the performances, the opera “Baņuta” has had three different versions over time, and the reason for that is mainly the libretto. We should note that the historical narrative encoded in the opera’s composition still is pure history, since the last staging of “Baņuta” was in 1979 – almost 40 years ago (in 1999 National Opera and Ballet Theatre staged only one special open-air performance of this opera) – and now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are still waiting for a new staging of this opera.

Particularly interesting are the changes in the artistically poeticised history included in “Baņuta” libretto, in the various cultural contexts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Besides, there is the question of what in this opera’s libretto could be considered original nowadays.

Not long after, in 1937, when preparing the second staging at the National Opera Theatre, the word *Lithuania* vanished from the libretto, and it was replaced with words “fatherland” and “homeland” (for example, changing the phrase *Weep, weep, Lithuania!* to *Weep, weep, fatherland!* etc.). Why? This is the first known instance of political censorship in Latvian opera history.

The premiere of the second staging of “Baņuta” was personally attended by the authoritarian leader of Latvia Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942). From the memories of contemporaries, including the research of well-known music historian Joachim Braun, there is a note that in the mid-1930s, there were notable disagreements between Latvia and Lithuania regarding their sea border. When Ulmanis’ government discovered that Lithuania was frequently mentioned in the first Latvian opera, there was an immediate demand to remove it from the libretto. And, from that time, the mention of Lithuania disappeared from the text of the opera [Brauns 2002: 330].

In this way, the second version of the opera appeared. Even without the change in the libretto, Alfrēds Kalniņš created a new orchestra instrumentation, and then both created a vibrant lover’s duet at the end of the third act. This duet was criticised as *a bad example of banal music*, even though the audience liked it [Briede-Bulāvinova 1975: 78].

The third version of “Baņuta” appeared immediately after the Soviet occupation in 1940. The totalitarian political regime demanded to change the tragic ending in the original libretto, and the author of the libretto Krūmiņš and composer Kalniņš were requested to respect this statement [Briede-Bulāvinova 1975: 70–71]. Thus, the happy ending concept (in the third version of this opera, 1941) became a part of the historical narrative of “Baņuta”. It is interesting that it marked a major dissonance with the overall libretto structure and its references to the romanticized ancient Baltic mythology.

Still, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the public liked the happy ending chorus of the third version of the opera, and, along with that, the opera “Baņuta” is even today a unique example in European Romantic opera history. It is an opera with two accepted, though fundamentally different endings – tragic and happy (optimistic). Still, the narrative of the “Baņuta” libretto transformations does not end there. There were also interesting cases of the “Baņuta” performances outside Latvia.

After the Second World War, beyond the borders of Latvia, exile composer and conductor Andrejs Jansons (b 1938, lives in New York) inspired and conducted three concert performances of this opera:

**5 June 1982, New York Carnegie Hall**

New York Latvian Choir, orchestra, soloists, conductor Andrejs Jansons

**30 June 1983, Milwaukee, USA**

New York Latvian Choir, orchestra, soloists, conductor Andrejs Jansons

**July 1984, Münster, Germany**

New York Latvian Choir, orchestra, soloists, conductor Andrejs Jansons

It is interesting that in all three opera's concert stagings the first (original) libretto text version was used, which includes also the word *Lithuania*. Major roles in opera were sung by famous foreign singers. Baņuta's role in the Latvian language (!) was sung by famous soloist of the New York Metropolitan Opera in the seventies Maralin Niska (1926–2016). Italian opera singers Michael Fiacco and Aron Bergelli performed the role of Vižutis [Brauns 2002: 330]. In one performance as Vižutis and in two performances as Daumants was exile Lithuanian opera singer Algis Grigas (b 1935). In Latvian exile press of that time Andrejs Jansons said that the original version of the libretto became topical because it reflected interesting poetic peculiarities [Valdmane & Šmite 1983].

### Conclusions

To summarize – “Baņuta”, the first opera in the Latvian language, for the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century reflected the notion that the artefact as a carrier of a specific historical narrative had undergone dramatic transformations, which were caused by a changing cultural-historical context. In the second half of the century, the reference to the romanticized ancient Baltic mythology disappeared from this opera staging in Latvia. However, in performances outside Latvia, this intriguing reference remained. Along with that, over time, a truly fascinating story developed.

In 1999, a new publication of the first version of libretto of “Baņuta” [Krūmiņš 1920] appeared, with a translation into English, German, French and Russian [Gailītis 1999]. However, due to an incomprehensible self-censorship, the mention of *Lithuania disappeared from the translation* in the text versions of German, French and Russian.

For instance,

<p>in Latvian:  <i>Vāimanā, vāimanā, Lietuva!</i>  <i>Nava vairs varoņa kuniga!</i>  <i>Ceļā viņš dosies drīz tālajā,</i>  <i>bālajo ēnu valstībā.<sup>1</sup></i></p>
<p>in English:  <i>Weep, weep, Lithuania!</i>  <i>Your heroic kunigas is no more!</i>  <i>He's embarking on a long journey,</i>  <i>to the kingdom of pale shades.<sup>2</sup></i></p>

<sup>1</sup> Gailītis 1999: 20.

<sup>2</sup> Translation into English by Biruta Sūrmane [Gailītis 1999: 62].

in German:

*Wehe dir, wehe dir,*

***Heimatland, Heimatland!***

*Einer der Kühnsten den Tod hier fand.*

*Heut' geht sein Schatten ins Totenreich,*

*wandelt den weiten Weg so bleich.<sup>1</sup>*

in French:

*O ma **Patrie** chérie, prends le deuil,*

*prends le deuil tu as perdu ton prince*

*fier et preux, fier et preux.*

*D'un autre monde franchissant le seuil*

*qu'il soit reçu parmi les dieux.<sup>2</sup>*

in Russian:

*Плачет **отчизна**, плачет, плачет.*

*Нет с нами князя, нет Дауманта.*

*Скоро в далёкий он мир уйдёт,*

*будет он в царстве теней жить.<sup>3</sup>*

Altogether, over the last 30 years, the opera "Baņuta" has made its mark on Latvian cultural life many times with both its release on CD<sup>4</sup> and publication of the original libretto in five languages (including the aspect of strange self-censorship). In 2011, in Jaunpiebalga, Zosēni, where librettist Arturs Krūmiņš was born, a museum dedicated to the opera "Baņuta" was opened. Still, for more than 30 years, the opera has disappeared from the National Opera Theatre repertoire.

Is the opera "Baņuta" now just a historical fact? What is the authentic version of this opera libretto nowadays? It is probably not possible to answer now, as we have not had any new staging of the opera. However, the opera itself, its libretto and the encoded layered historical narrative in its dramaturgy, are potentially intriguing elements for the creation of a new staging.

<sup>1</sup> Translation into German by Marta fon Dēna-Grabbe [Gailītis 1999: 102].

<sup>2</sup> Translation into French by Madeleine Vītols [Gailītis 1999: 181].

<sup>3</sup> Translation into Russian by Ludmila Azarova [Gailītis 1999: 144].

<sup>4</sup> Kalniņš, Alfrēds. Baņuta. CD. Rīgas skaņu ierakstu studija, 1996.



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