

Urve Lippus Elmar Arro's letters to Karl Leichter*

In the 1990s the widow of an Estonian musicologist Karl Leichter gave his extensive archive to the Estonian Museum of Theatre and Music (Eesti Teatri- ja Muusikamuuseum – TMM) in Tallinn and a few years ago it was opened for researchers. Karl Leichter (1902–1987) was a leading musicologist in Estonia, active from the 1930s through the war-years and Soviet repressions of the early 1950s until his high age in the 1980s. His archive is a rich source for Estonian musicologists, because he was involved in many activities and organizations which are now a part of our cultural history. He was a close friend of several important musicians who fled from Estonia at the end of the war in 1944 to escape the Soviet occupation. Karl Leichter stayed in Estonia and, at first, he became very active in reestablishing up musical education and musicological research after the war. For some time, he held the post of the dean at the Tallinn State Conservatory and was the main lecturer in music history and aesthetics. However, when the Soviet ideological control in Estonia strengthened at the end of the 1940s, particularly after the famous plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow in 1948 and the following local decisions about formalism and bourgeois nationalism in the arts, he was accused of various faults and lost his position. For six years he lived like an outlaw, it was difficult to get a job and he could not publish under his own name. The political hysteria weakened slowly after Stalin's death in 1953 and from 1956 on Karl Leichter could work again as a teacher at the Conservatory, later he was also chair of the Department of Composition and Musicology. He retired from teaching in 1968 but stayed active as a researcher and writer until high age. In his favorite field, the Estonian music history (and music history in general), he remained the greatest authority in Estonia.

Among the correspondence of Karl Leichter (TMM, Department of Music: M 159) there are 18 letters from Elmar Arro, written in Vienna from 1972 to 1982. Some of them are very short and practical – for years Arro planned to visit his home-

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land and in 1981 he finally succeeded, together with his wife he spent a few days in Riga and Tallinn. But several letters contain interesting and sometimes bitter reflections about the situation of East-European studies in the West, particularly in Germany. Arro's interests were rather wide, including Russian music, Slavic music in general, and Baltic music history. In his correspondence with Karl Leichter an important theme of discussion is the earlier music history in Estonia and Latvia. Arro was sure, that in his youth in the 1930s he had been the last one to study many important documents later destroyed or lost in World War II. Again and again he wrote, that if he died without publishing his studies, those countries would forever remain without a proper music history.

Elmar Arro and Karl Leichter knew each other from their common years in Tartu at the end of the 1920s and the early 1930s. Tartu is the second largest town in Estonia, being the location of the university, several national archives, publishing houses, a theatre and a higher music school. Arro had come to Tartu after defending his doctoral dissertation in Vienna in 1928. In 1929 Karl Leichter finished his music studies at the Tartu Higher Music School and continued as a student of philosophy at the University of Tartu (graduating in 1934). At the same time, Leichter was also a music reviewer for the local newspaper *Postimees* and became soon recognized as an authoritative critic. However, Leichter and Arro evidently had no closer personal contact in Tartu – though approximately of the same age, their social background and professional experience were rather different at that time. They met again in 1971 at the VII International Music Congress in Moscow (4–9 October), organized by the International Music Council, at that time presided by Yehudi Menuhin in cooperation with the Soviet Ministry of Culture and the Soviet Music Council (a rather formal organization related to the central organs of the Composers' Union and presided by the long-time prime secretary of the Composers' Union Tikhon Khrennikov). An Estonian delegation, a group of members from the Estonian Composers' Union, participated in the congress and several prominent composers wrote a paper. In the Soviet system, musicologists belonged to the Composers' Union and thus Karl Leichter was also a member of this Estonian group. Elmar Arro, who was fluent in Russian,

certainly enjoyed the very rare possibility to meet and talk to Soviet musicians and musicologists (although, according to Veljo Tormis' memoirs¹, the Soviet participants were well guarded by the KGB). He made new contacts and renewed old acquaintances at this congress. He also met a young Estonian composer, Veljo Tormis (b. 1930), whose fame as an author of large-scale choral works based on early folk material was just rising. At that time, Tormis was a member of the board of the Estonian Composers' Union and later had some correspondence with Arro concerning the official invitation to visit Estonia and perhaps also the problems of publishing. The correspondence between Arro and Leichter started with a letter from Karl Leichter immediately after they met in Moscow. The drafts for many letters written by Karl Leichter himself have also survived in his archives and the draft for this first letter to Elmar Arro was written the 15th of October 1971.

Elmar Arro (1899–1985) was born in Riga, the capital of the historical province of Livonia, that had for centuries united the northern part of present-day Latvia and the southern part of Estonia. His father Johannes Arro was a lawyer in Riga, he was an Estonian and came from a peasant family in Viljandimaa in the South-west of Estonia. In 1922 Elmar Arro enrolled in the Berlin University, where he studied musicology and Slavic philology, then continued with Guido Adler in Vienna and graduated in 1928 with the dissertation “Über das Musikleben in Estland im 19. Jahrhundert”. After that he moved to Tartu (Dorpat), where his family had moved after Estonia and Latvia became independent states.

Tartu has often been called the “intellectual capital” of Estonia (Tallinn being the town of business and power) and its most important institution was the University of Tartu. Some state institutions like the State (Supreme) Court were also located in Tartu. Elmar Arro's father Johannes Arro was appointed the State Judge and during the 1920s he became a prominent person in the cultural life of the town, being also a member of the board of the Musical Society of Tartu (Tartu Helikunsti Selts). In 1929, when Elmar Arro had just arrived in Tartu, this soci-

¹Tormis, Veljo: *Lauldud sõna* [The Sung Word], Tartu 2000, p. 104.

ety founded a new music(ological) journal *Eesti muusika kuukiri* (The Monthly Journal of Estonian Music) and Elmar Arro became the acting editor. Unfortunately, the journal could not find a sufficient number of subscribers and had to give up in the end of the same year. The journal had been planned to compete with the publication of the Estonian Singers' Union (*Eesti Lauljate Liit*) *Muusikaleht* (Music Journal) and to establish higher standards of writing about music, but even that journal needed some regular financial support from the state and the new enterprise failed in finding sponsors. From 1931 Elmar Arro taught at the Luther-Institute, a small German theological institute in Tartu, and later (1936–1938) at the Herder-Institute in Riga, Latvia.

The question may arise why Arro could not find an employment at the University of Tartu. We do not know it, but two causes are probable: (1) There was no chair of musicology at the University of Tartu (quite normal around 1930, when musicology was still largely a German discipline) and musicians employed by the university were expected to have more practical training. (2) Before settling in Tartu, Elmar Arro's contacts with the Estonian intellectual community had been weak. He could appear as an outsider among the first generation of Estonian-educated young academic people, who became active just in the end of the 1920s. However, this decade in Tartu 1929 to 1939 was his most active period of research and he was one of the very few musicologists who had studied musical documents at the archives of Tartu and Riga before the war. He was interested in the earlier music history of Estonia and old Livonia (the historical Baltic provinces), but also in the development of Estonian music and musical life in the 19th century. In 1932 he published one of his most important articles about the town musicians of Tartu², several later works, some left in manuscript, are based on the archival work of those years.

In those letters, written so much later, Elmar Arro confessed that while living in Estonia he felt himself a stranger, because he did not speak Estonian well enough to feel comfortable in the Estonian-speaking academic society, though later in Germany he

²Arro, Elmar: *Die Dorpater Stadt-Musici 1587–1809. Sitzungsberichte der Gelehrten Estnischen Gesellschaft 1931*, Tartu 1932, S. 90-157.

felt also a stranger. However, he made great efforts to write to Karl Leichter in Estonian and changed to German only for discussing some musicological subjects or when feeling himself too weak and tired after some illnesses. The choice of the language was evidently an important emotional issue for him, because he knew well that his addressee was fluent in German. Still, he struggled with his rusted Estonian and often the reader has to guess or know the context to understand. Working in Tartu and Riga Elmar Arro had close connections with the local Baltic-German community and left for Germany together with the “Umsiedlung” of Baltic Germans in 1939. In 1941 he was taken into the army and imprisoned at the end of the war. After returning to Germany from the imprisonment in 1955, his most important engagement was to build up a research center for studies in East-European music, first at Freiburg (1959), later at the University of Kiel (Johann-Gottfried-Herder-Forschungsstelle für Musikgeschichte). This center was famous for its library and its series of publications “Musik des Ostens” (Sammelbände der Johann-Gottfried-Herder-Forschungsstelle für Musikgeschichte). Arro was the editor of the first four volumes (1962–1967).

In 1966 Elmar Arro retired and moved to Vienna, continuing there his efforts to advance East-European and Slavic studies in the West. The result of his long-time and occasionally rather hopeless project was a major publication, a collection of articles “Musica slavica I”³. Several of his letters to Karl Leichter tell us about the high and low points on the way to this publication. After it finally was released and arrived in Estonia, Leichter wrote a review introducing the book to Estonian readers in the cultural weekly newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar* (it was not at all common at that time to review a book published in the West)⁴. This publication, planned as a series of proceedings in East-European music history, is an important subject in this correspondence. Arro discussed with Leichter the possible contributions of Estonian musicologists and intended to include some articles about Estonian music in the following volumes of this series. The name of the Es-

³ *Musica Slavica: Beiträge zur Musikgeschichte Osteuropas*, hg. von Elmar Arro, Wiesbaden 1977.

⁴ *Sirp ja Vasar*, 21 April 1978.

tonian composer and musicologist Leo Normet⁵ was mentioned as a potential author, but evidently the obstacles to the publication arose before those plans could be realized and we do not know any articles sent to Arro from Estonia. The theme of *Musica slavica* is related to Arro's travels to several conferences in Poland and other Slavic countries, particularly to the conference-festivals *Musica Antiqua Europae Orientalis* in Bydgoszcz. In the 1970s Arro wrote about his papers and people he had met at the conferences. It seems that only one of those contributions was published – the paper *Die Frage der Existenz einer lokalen Dialekt-Variante des Gregorianischen Chorals im Baltikum des 13.–15. Jahrhunderts* (in the proceedings of the conference *Musica Antiqua Europae Orientalis IV*, Bydgoszcz 1975).

Another late work of Arro that is often mentioned in those letters, is the comprehensive survey *Geschichte der baltischen Kirchenmusik und geistlichen Tonkunst. Versuch einer musikhistorischen Rekonstruktion*. According to his letter from the 7th of May 1978 (Letter No. 10), this work was begun in Germany in 1955 to 1960 and was based on his earlier studies, but also on the Baltic archives in Göttingen and Marburg. From those letters we learn about his search for a publisher for this book, but he also discussed several questions with Leichter and asked for his help in finding some source materials. During his long-planned visit to Tallinn and Riga in the fall of 1981, he evidently had some discussions about possibly publishing in Riga. Immediately after this visit Arro wrote about this book again, by that time all hopes to publish it in the West seem to be lost:

In Riga, I received some valuable more recent materials – and started already to revise my earlier Baltic music history according to the new perspectives. As I've got some hopes to print it in Riga, it is not necessary any more to adapt it to the Baltic-German views: the Herder-Institute in Marburg is here the only authority in Baltic issues and considered as a censor in this field – they demand unquestionably that one should surrender to the Baltic-German “Kulturträger”-theory: for almost twenty years my manuscript has been waiting there for publication without any success – the format does not please them. But now, I have to restore the original text and bring back

⁵Leo Normet (1922–1995) was a prolific writer about Estonian music and the author of several widespread books, also a teacher and later professor of music history at the Tallinn Conservatory.

those two initial chapters about the “pagan” independence period that were required to be left out. I do know that church music in general is not a favorable theme – but earlier music history begins only with that. What can we do?! It is not possible to “correct the history” (how the Russian colleague would call that). But now I hope again, that something might follow [...] (5 November 1981, Letter No. 16).

No time was given to him to finish the work and see it printed, although in the very last letter, he gave to Leichter his permission to introduce the manuscript to somebody in Sweden (who had been interested in the perspective of possible publication there – see Letter No. 18).

However, at the very end of the 1980s, when interest towards the Baltic-German musical heritage suddenly burst out immediately after the ideological censorship loosened, Arro’s work (the manuscript copy he had given to Karl Leichter) was actively used by Estonian students as a starting point for new research. As many of Arro’s sources have been lost in the war (in particular he complained about the loss of the town archive of Riga that burned down together with the Riga town hall), it is a unique document of earlier Estonian and Latvian music history writing, though unfinished and partly rather fragmentary.

The themes discussed in Arro’s correspondence with Karl Leichter include also the possibility of publishing an updated version of his early work “Geschichte der estnischen Music I”⁶ together with its still unfinished second volume. The book was written and published in German, it needed to be translated into Estonian. We do not learn precisely who was the first to support the idea of publishing it in Soviet Estonia, but later the main proponent seems to be Avo Hirvesoo (see footnote 38 to Letter No. 17). But from the very beginning, Arro was aware of the possible obstacles. According to him, all his attempts to publish were undermined by his politically suspect person and the ideologically sensitive theme:

This reworking (renewing) could be a most pleasing task. Only one thing I can’t guess: isn’t my personality too suspect (the misunderstanding that I was a representative of the German “Kulturträgetum”-ideology)? (16 December 1971, Letter No. 2).

⁶Arro, Elmar: *Geschichte der estnischen Musik I*, Tartu 1933.

In the letters of the late 1970s the publication of his Estonian music history seems less important, but it was certainly discussed again during Arro's stay in Tallinn in 1981. At least his last hopeless letter to Leichter was written having this work in mind, although the causes listed to explain why his publishing-plans failed and failed again are tenable to the problem in general:

Es ist nicht einmal in Eesti selber möglich, dass etwas von mir über estnische Musikgeschichte an Ort und Stelle publiziert wird. [...] Die Gründe sind mir völlig klar (obwohl ich sie für unsachlich halte): (1) Ich bin nur ein "Kadakasaks", der nicht einmal genügend die Sprache beherrscht. Und Mischlinge werden überall verachtet. (2) Ich bin nur ein Emigrant, d.h. zwangsweise "Repatriierter", der das Baltikum verlassen musste, da er nicht einmal so weit die beiden Landessprachen (Estnisch und Lettisch) beherrschte, um dort arbeiten zu können. (8 December 1982, Letter No. 18).

The Estonian word "kadakasaks[lane]" used by Arro means "a German made of juniper" and was a common nickname for an Estonian acting like a German (and speaking poor German). Arro, in opposite, could better be called a "juniper Estonian", but his vague position between the two communities, partly stranger in both, certainly caused him much trouble. But that was not the reason why his books were not printed in Soviet Estonia or Latvia – had he been a nationally-minded Estonian or Latvian from the West, the bans would have been even more strict. Now, twenty years later, knowing about several other works that were stopped at the state publishing house "Eesti Raamat" approximately at the same time, it seems irresponsible of the local musicologists to give hopes to an old man. And even if the idea was accepted by the authorities, the next serious obstacle would have been the chaotic state of the manuscript, the fantastic plan to update the second volume (Arro was 83 years old and had no sources in Vienna). Actually, I am almost sure that the persons who discussed publishing with him, never got so far as to see the manuscripts, maybe even had not thoroughly read the first volume of his "Geschichte [...]".

At the end of his life Arro was worried about his archive – where to give his unpublished manuscripts and other materials. On the 1st of July 1982 he wrote to Leichter (Letter No. 17) that he will deposit his archive to an institution called TABOR (Ton-

Archiv zum Byzantinisch-Ostkirchlichen Ritus) in a small German town called Gaildorf, near Stuttgart. He had just returned from a travel there – they had opened a special “Elmar-Arro-Archiv” presenting a record of old Russian music for bells (*Das russische Glockenspiel*. TABOR Nr. 8492), dedicated to him as a researcher of this music. He wrote in the same letter that this archive will take all his manuscripts, collections and personal library, sent a booklet introducing this institution and asked Leichter to forward this information to the Estonian Composers’ Union and the Estonian Museum of Theatre and Music. However, there is some confusion about this information and some later attempts to find Arro’s manuscripts either in Gaildorf or Vienna have had no results. But, as yet, nobody has really thoroughly studied his life abroad and searched for his archive.

The period reflected in those letters is approximately a decade beginning with the end of the Soviet thaw-years of the 1960s – in the beginning of the 1970s Estonian musicologists seemed to be rather optimistic about the possibilities of publishing Arro’s works here, but the situation changed. Most of the letters are longer than a page and contain often emotional personal passages. There is much talk about the ideological or political restrictions to his work in West-Germany. Also, he felt that he was expected to promote the conviction that Germans have brought culture to the Baltics (“Kulturträgertum”-theory) and that any interest in East-European or Slavic music was considered suspicious. In May 1978, he complained to Karl Leichter in connection with problems arising around “Musica slavica”: “Wieder ist es das alte Lied: Osteuropäische Musikgeschichte ist – ‘bolschewistische Infiltration’!” (7 May 1978, Letter No. 10).

Was it really so or was it Arro’s fantasy, an attempt to explain his financial and organizational problems with political pressure? It is not at all a simple question and an interesting problem for further research. At present, I assume that Arro did not understand all the political undercurrents communicating with such scholars as professor Zofia Lissa, or one of the authors of his “Musica slavica”, professor Yuriy Keldish (the chief editor of the Soviet “Musical Encyclopedia”, member of the board of the Composers’ Union, at the committee of Lenin’s prizes, etc.), and several other Soviet musicologists of high official position. Such people were not

only scholars, at least not in their communication with western colleagues.

Other people mentioned in those letters are a few Estonians: the composer Heino Eller and his wife, the musicologist Avo Hirvesoo, the composer and musicologist Leo Normet, and the folklorist Herbert Tampere. It is amazing how few people from Germany and Austria figure in those letters. Although Arro is bitter about his working conditions in Germany, only a few institutions are mentioned and no persons figure in negative context (we must keep in mind that he was sure that his letters were censored):

Meine Post wird z. B. laufend perlustriert, so dass meine erhaltenen Briefe 2–3 Wochen durchschnittlich unterwegs sind. Manches (auch Eingeschriebenes, Rekommandiertes) geht “verloren”. (8 December 1982, Letter No. 18).

Still, it is obvious that after retirement in Vienna he lived a very lonely life, most of the friends of his youth were dead or lost all over the world. He mentioned only Dr. Teophil Antoniek as a single “friendly colleague” and gave his address to Karl Leichter to contact him in case something might happen to him. At the same time, Arro was rather enthusiastic about scholars he met at various conferences in East European countries – first of all about Zofia Lissa in Poland, but also after his visits to Bulgaria and former Yugoslavia.

The collection of those letters is even more valuable, because in addition to Arro’s letters most of Karl Leichter’s letters have survived. Karl Leichter has carefully made typed drafts for his own letters and then corrected them by hand. Altogether, there are nine of Leichter’s drafts. A few of Leichter’s letters are missing – Arro’s letters show responses to some questions or thank for some materials sent. In this way, we have an almost complete correspondence from both sides. We are not going to publish Karl Leichter’s letters here, but I have used them for commenting. Leichter’s letters are shorter, very polite and more official than Arro’s letters. He did not have the motives for such emotional outbursts as we find in Arro’s letters, but he certainly was also cautious and self-controlling writing from the Soviet Union to a person in the West.