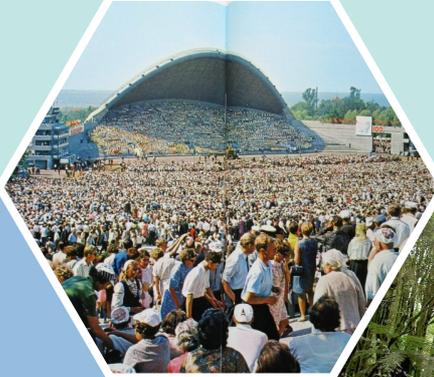


The Singing Revolution of Estonia (1988)

Estonia has depended on music heavily throughout history, in order to solidify their nation's identity, during a time of foreign political dominance. Beginning in 1940, Soviet forces occupied Estonia, elections were held, and about a month later, Estonia was declared to be a Soviet Republic. Approximately 10 000 Estonians were deported to Siberia, and an extremely capitalistic economy was initiated. Only a year after the Soviet occupation of Estonia, Germany invaded. More Estonians, mainly those of Jewish descent fled the country to safer countries. Once the war had passed, Estonia once again became a republic of the Soviet Union. Throughout Soviet rule, there were many music festivals, most of which included Soviet propaganda, but it also presented the opportunity for Estonians to remember and celebrate their cultural pride. A main highlight was during the first music festival that would be held during the U.S.S.R. power, an old poem that composer, Gustav Ernesaks put to music. It was titled "Mu Isamaa On Minu Arm," which translates to "My Country is My Love." Ernesaks' rendition of the poem quickly became a sort of national anthem for Estonians. Eventually, the music performed at festivals took a turn to a more modern genre. A catalyst of The Singing Revolution, was the opportunity for Estonia to adopt the economic principle "perestroika", which would allow them to have a more independent role in international exchange. Estonia signed off on, and would wait to see the U.S.S.R.'s decision on whether it would pass or not. Why this economic turning point catapulted the protest that would gain Estonia's independence is due to artists like Villu Tamme. He wrote music under the "punk-rock" genre.

"Tere Perestroika," translated to "Hello Perestroika," was a song that Estonians identified because it supported their opinions on the potential for economic reform. Another key artist was Alo Mattisen, who wrote "Ei ole iikski iikski maa," which translates to "No Country is Alone." Numerous artists performed Mattisen's song at different festivals, including Tamme, and the Estonian people became more conscious of the political state of Estonia. There are three music festivals that encompass "The Singing Revolution." The first one highlighted more of Mattisen's music, with the five main songs being titled the "Fatherland" songs. The second festival, with about 20 000 attendees, turned into a week long, day and night music showcase that protested against the Soviet's plan to enforce the Russian language in Estonian society. Finally, the height of the revolution took place on September 11, 1988, for the final festival of the year. Approximately 300 000 Estonians were in attendance, which was about 20 percent of the population at the time. Because of the large force and presence that Estonians had, it was easier for them to take a more political target during this festival. Not long afterwards, with growing desire to be separated from the Soviet Union, Estonia, and other Baltic nations (Lithuania and Latvia) banded together. In 1989, the three Baltic nations created a chain of humans that stretched 375 miles, across the three countries, all united in song. The song that was sung was titled "Wake Up Baltic Countries," and it epitomized the desire for separation from the U.S.S.R. In 1991, Gorbachev, the president of the Soviet Union at the time, was put under house arrest.



The Estonians determined that this was a prime opportunity to declare their independence from the U.S.S.R. Tanks were sent towards the Tallinn television tower, and once again, the Estonians united in hands and song. They joined together around the structure, the Soviet tanks halted just short of all of the Estonian civilians, and after the coup in Moscow failed, they were called back.

Finally, in September of 1991, Estonia was officially declared independent of the Soviet Union. What makes this protest very interesting is the use of non-violence. Everything remained peaceful, arguably, joyful. A large group of people, the Estonians, all united together in the hope and desire to reach a common goal: independence and national sovereignty. Following their roots and tradition in celebration of culture through song, they achieved what they were “fighting” for.

written by Kate Martens