

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 30, No.4 - Winter 1984

Editor of this issue: Jonas Zdanys

ISSN 0024-5089

Copyright © 1984 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



VALDO AND LEILA MILLER RANDPERE ESCAPE FROM SOVIET OCCUPIED ESTONIA TO THE WEST

"I want to live in Estonia. I do not want to live in the Soviet Union." This is how Valdo Randpere, former deputy assistant to the Soviet Estonian minister of justice, speaking also on behalf of his wife Leila Miller, summarized their motives for leaving Estonia early in August.

At a press conference in Los Angeles on 10/9/84, arranged by the Baltic American Freedom League, Valdo read an opening statement on his defection from Soviet rule and answered questions from local radio and press journalists. What the seemingly contradictory opening quotation means, is that the Randperes left in extreme protest against the russification of Estonia, and against the communist system's utter lack of freedom. He also cited his unwillingness to serve in the Russian army and fight the Afghani people.

Valdo said that in their two months in the West they had more free and open conversations and discussions than in their entire lives in Estonia under Soviet rule. Both Valdo and Leila are also professional singers, and were accredited with the Tallinn Philharmonic Orchestra. Valdo described state censorship and complete control of cultural life. For instance, both he and Leila were prohibited from singing their songs with lyrics written in 1930, ten years before the onset of Soviet rule — the songs were found to be anti-Soviet! As Valdo noted, nobody in Estonia knew about such things at that time.

As a government official he had to live with the situation where the KGB, and not the ministry of justice, prepared all the political trials. Such oppression and the gradual destruction of Estonian culture through russification and sovietization became extremely repulsive to them. Finally the Randperes made a most painful decision when an opportunity to escape arose: they left their infant daughter Kaisa (15 months old) behind with her grandmother. Valdo, 26, and Leila, 23, were both born in Tallinn, capital of Estonia. Both attended local schools. Valdo obtained a law degree (cum laude) at the University of Tartu in 1982. Leila studied at the Tallinn Teachers Institute, with a specialty in library science. As early as 1981, Valdo, a member of the Communist party, was already appointed to the ministry of justice. Both he and his wife became accredited singers and composers, and started enjoying what seemed a most rewarding career in the ruling elite. However, there was a price to pay — no freedom, and strict acceptance of the Russian communist rule, so contrary to their aspirations.

From Los Angeles, the Randperes are traveling to Washington, DC, where they will appear before congressional committees, other US officials, and the news media. Then they will return to Sweden where they plan to live, and where they already have made contacts with musical publishers and are preparing to make recordings of their songs.

J. A. R.