

Nations have long understood that their greatest treasure is their people. Latvia is an exceptional example of how great people and great ideas are born in relatively small countries.

The World Knows Latvia By...

Latvia: Smart and Stylish

Over the centuries, Latvia's geopolitical situation has been shaped by its strategic Baltic Sea location, at the crossroads of trade and conflicting power interests. The dynamic forces that forged Latvia's turbulent history have produced a unique set of values, traits, and characteristics in its people, and have led to their recognition around the world.

This is just a brief look at the achievements and contributions of some of the world's most famous artists, musicians, athletes, scientists, designers, and scientists whose lives originated or were influenced by Latvia. Also notable are those exhibiting a characteristically Latvian attribute – a passion for exploration, innovation, and adventure.

Culture



Mezzo-soprano Elina Garanča (1976)

Endowed with a magnificent mezzo-soprano voice, **Elina Garanča** became a finalist in the 2001 BBC's Cardiff Singer of the World Competition and soon after made her solo recording debut. In 2005 Garanča signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon. Currently a soloist at the Vienna Opera, she has appeared at the world's major opera houses and concert venues and established herself as one of

the music world's newest stars, thanks to her beautiful voice, stellar musicianship, and compelling stage portrayals. In 2008 she made her debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Tenor Aleksandrs Antoņenko (1975)

Another outstanding Latvian opera singer and guest performer at the Metropolitan Opera is **Aleksandrs Antoņenko**, who debuted at the Latvian National Opera in 1998. Since 2004, Antoņenko has sung at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf, the Graz Opera House, Covent Garden in London, Monte Carlo in Rome, the Geneva Opera House, and the Salzburg festival. He has cooperated with the world's most famous opera singers and conductors, including Renee Fleming, Barbara Fritoli and Riccardo Muti.



Conductor Mariss Jansons (1943)

One of the leading conductors in the world is Latvian-born **Mariss Jansons**. In 1979 Jansons became principal conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, which was soon recognized as one of the best orchestras in the world. He has worked with such well-known record labels as EMI, Chandos, BMG, Sony and Simax. Many of his recordings have received prestigious awards, making Latvia proud to have raised one of the greatest conductors of all time.



Conductor Andris Nelsons (1978)

Born in Riga to a family of musicians, **Andris Nelsons** began his career as a trumpeter in the Latvian National Opera Orchestra; he has also won many prizes for singing. After successfully conducting the Latvian Opera orchestra for several years, Nelsons became musical director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in 2008. He regularly receives raving reviews for his impassioned guest conductor



appearances at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, the Metropolitan Opera in New York, Wiener Staatsoper, and Deutsche Staatsoper. He also makes regular appearances at such summer festivals as Lucerne Festival, BBC Proms and Berliner Festspiele.

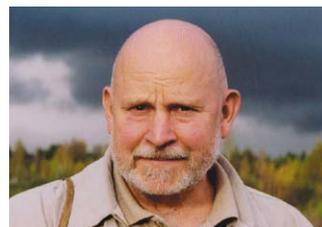
Composer Ēriks Ešenvalds (1977)

Ēriks Ešenvalds is one of the most popular and beloved Latvian composers of the new generation. His piano, clarinet and choral music has been performed in Germany, Austria, the United States and other countries, and has been recorded by several international choirs on albums showcasing new Latvian music. He is currently resident composer in Cambridge and a member of the State Choir Latvija.



Composer Pēteris Vasks (1946)

Pēteris Vasks is the most internationally renowned composer from Latvia. He began his career at the Vilnius Conservatory, where he studied contrabass. Since the 1980s, Vasks has regularly received commissions from world-famous musicians, including the Kronos Quartet. Many of his hauntingly beautiful works have been used by international choreographers in original ballet productions. Vasks is the only Latvian composer who has a contract with the renowned music publisher Schott Musik International.



Latvian National Opera

Opera has been a significant part of Latvia's cultural heritage for a long time. Personalities from Wagner to Blech have spent time as conductors in Riga. The rich **Latvian National Opera** house, first built in the late nineteenth century, is home to both the Latvian National Opera and the Latvian National Ballet. The opera season, which runs from September to June with sold-out shows almost every night, features approximately 200 performances, including an average of five brand new productions every year. The LNO is also a frequent guest at prestigious opera houses around the world, and has recently performed at the Hong Kong Festival, the Bordeaux Opera, the Catania Opera, the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow, the Luxembourg Opera and the Dalhalla Festival in Sweden.

Every summer the **Riga Opera Festival** marks the end of the Latvian National Opera's performance season with an overview of the best moments from the previous year. Founded in 1998, the Riga Opera Festival was the first festival of its size and scale in northeastern Europe. The festival has already become a valuable tradition enjoyed by Latvians and thousands of visitors from abroad every summer in June. While paying tribute to the traditional values of the classical and Romantic operas and ballets, the Latvian National Opera continually strives to seek contemporary forms of expression, staging innovative new productions that showcase the latest trends in international opera.





Conductor Māris Sīrmais (1969)

Māris Sīrmais founded the youth choir Kamēr in 1990, and continues to be its artistic director and conductor. The choir has won 60 national and international competitions all over the world, including the European Grand Prix for Choral Singing in Gorizia, Italy, in 2004, as well as three championship prizes and gold medals at the World Choir Olympics in Xianmen, China, in

2006. Sīrmais is also the artistic director and conductor of the State Choir Latvija, which regularly participates in large-scale performances together with prominent orchestras, musicians and conductors. Sīrmais and his choirs have repeatedly received the Latvian Great Music Award.

Conductor Ainārs Rubiķis (1978)

From 1997 through 2006 the conductor of Kamēr was **Ainārs Rubiķis**, who graduated from Latvian Academy of Music. In 2009, Rubiķis made his international debut in orchestra conducting, performing with the Hungarian National Opera Orchestra. He has won prizes in several international competitions. His biggest victory was the 1st place at the Gustav Mahler International Conducting Competition in 2010, where he directed the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra.



Pianist Vestards Šimkus (1984)

Vestards Šimkus started to play piano when he was just five years old. Later in life he improved his skills at world-class academies, such as the Queen Sofia School of Music in Madrid and the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Since then, Šimkus has performed and participated in music performances and festivals all over the world, earning the New Names of the Planet scholarship, the Estonian "White Star" medal, as well as the Latvian Grand Music Award in 2002 and 2009. He has released five solo albums and won first place in several international piano competitions, including the 55th annual Maria Canals competition in Barcelona in 2009.



Theater director Alvis Hermanis (1965)

Internationally renowned Latvian theater director **Alvis Hermanis** has been the director of Riga's New Theater since 1997. In his work, he explores the depths of the Latvian national character, often asking his actors to write scripts based on interviews with their friends and neighbors. Hermanis received the prestigious Young Directors Project award for his show Revidents at the Salzburg Theater Festival in 2000. His talent was also recognized in 2007 when he was awarded the European Theater award New Theater Reality, and in 2008 when he received the coveted Konstantin Stanislavsky Prize in Moscow. Hermanis also cooperates with theaters abroad and has staged shows in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Russia and Estonia.



Pop/rock band Brainstorm

Four ambitious schoolmates established **Brainstorm** in 1989. The band received international recognition in 2000, after they finished third in the Eurovision Song Contest. That same year they released their first international album, Among the Suns, in Europe. Brainstorm toured with sold-out shows and played in festivals across the continent. In 2005,

during their Latvian tour, they set a record for the most people at a Latvian concert, with 40,000 people in attendance. In 2006, the first ever Best Baltic Act nominee was introduced during at the annual MTV Europe Music Awards ceremony; the decision of MTV viewers was unanimous: the trophy belongs to Brainstorm.

Indie electro-pop duo Instrumenti

The hottest new band from Latvia is the indie electro-pop duo **Instrumenti**, made up of two classically trained musicians from Riga – Jānis Šipkēvičs (aka Shipsi) and Reinis Sējāns (aka Reysi). In 2011, the duo released its debut album, TRU, recorded at the legendary Greenhouse Studios in Reykjavik, Iceland, and accompanied by beautifully designed album art. The album mixes catchy pop tunes and rock songs with more experimental tracks featuring sampling and electronics. The band has a devoted following in the Latvian capital as well as on the European festival circuit, thanks to its ever-changing sound, visually exciting videos and live shows, and boisterous sense of humor.



Academy Award-nominated film director Māris Martinsons (1960)

Latvian film director, screenwriter, and producer **Māris Martinsons** began his career as a producer for music videos. His first music video, "This is My Car," produced in 1989 by the band Jumprava, was the first independent video in Latvia's music history. In 1994 Martinsons founded the production company ARTeta, which has grown into one of the leading production companies in the Baltic states. Martinsons has produced over ten original television series and shows. In 2008 his feature film Loss was awarded the Best Director and the Best Music prizes at the 11th Shanghai International Film Festival, and his film Amaya, a Latvian-Hong Kong coproduction starring Japanese actress Kaori Momoi, was a nominee from Latvia for Best Foreign Language film at the 2011 Academy Awards.



The Wonders of Latvian Animation

Animation is one of Latvia's most attractive exports. The most outstanding Latvian animators are the studios RIJA, AB, Atomic Art and Dauka, as well as directors Signe Baumann, Nils Skapāns and Vladimir Lesciov. RIJA has taken part in more than 40 international coproduction projects, including work with Les Amateurs, Paramount, Sony, DreamWorks, A Film and others. RIJA worked with various international production companies on the animated film The Triplets of Belleville, which was nominated for the Academy Award as Best Animated Feature in 2003.

Illustrator Reinis Pētersons (1981)

One of the most prolific Latvian illustrators, **Reinis Pētersons**, is known for his magnificent visual interpretations of books, particularly for children. He also works in character and set design, painting, poster art, illustration, cartoons and animation. He started to work for the Latvian animation film studio AtomArt in 2009 and has won various Latvian awards for his work. He has also created images and backdrops for animated films. Pētersons has participated in art and design exhibitions and shows around the world, and he continues to inspire people and artists with his unique artistic vision.



Film director, scriptwriter, and journalist Laila Pakalniņa (1962)

Laila Pakalniņa first received international recognition in 1996, when her documentaries Ferry and Post were included in the Cannes Film Festival and received the FIPRESCI award. Since 1991 Pakalniņa has directed a total of 20 movies and is one of the world's acclaimed Latvian film directors; her films have been included in festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Locarno and others. In 2003, Pakalniņa's film Python was included in the Venice Film Festival – the first time a Latvian film was demonstrated at the event. Her documentary Dream Land was nominated for best documentary at the European Film Academy awards.

Sports



Record-breaking long jumper Ineta Radēviča (1981)

Ineta Radēviča is a professional athlete competing in the long jump and triple jump. Her success story began when she won the bronze medal at the 2003 European U-23 championship. The following year she participated in the Summer Olympic Games in Athens. In 2010, she won the Long Jump Women Europe Championships,

setting a new Latvian record of 6.92 meters. She also came in third in the women's long jump at the 2011 World Championships in Athletics.

Olympic javelin thrower Vadims Vasiļevskis (1982)

Javelin thrower **Vadims Vasiļevskis** is one of Latvia's most recognized athletes. He placed 13th at the 2011 World Championships in Athletics and was a silver medalist at the Athens Olympic Games, becoming the fifth Latvian javelin thrower to win an Olympic medal. Vasiļevskis set his personal record in 2007 in Tallinn, Estonia, earning him the rank of 10th all-time best javelin thrower. He came in fourth at the 2006 European Championship as well as at the 2007 and 2009 World Championships.



Māris Štrombergs (1987), the first Olympic champion in BMX cycling

At the 2008 Summer Olympics, **Māris Štrombergs** became the first Olympic champion in BMX cycling. That same year, he also became the first Latvian athlete to simultaneously win the European, Olympic, and World Championship titles. Since then he has added more wins to his growing list of victories, including the US National Cycling League champion title and the American Cycling Association's vice-champion title.



Tennis player Ernests Gulbis (1988)

Ernests Gulbis began playing tennis at age five, when his grandmother first brought him to a tennis court. In 2005 he made his debut at the Davis Cup, the largest men's tennis event. Over the next few years, Gulbis improved his game and broke several personal records. He made a 4th round appearance at the 2007 US Open and has been a semi-finalist in several other tennis tours. He played in three Davis Cup ties for Latvia in 2009 and his participation helped Latvia qualify for the Europe/Africa Zone Group I of the Davis Cup for the first time in history. Gulbis marked his 100th career win in 2011 and reached his highest ranking in single plays, No. 21.



Beach volleyball stars Mārtiņš Pļaviņš (1985) and Jānis Šmēdiņš (1987)

Despite the country's cold climate, Latvia has two of the leading beach volleyball players in the world. The Latvian beach volleyball duo of **Mārtiņš Pļaviņš** and **Jānis Šmēdiņš** started to play together after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, where Pļaviņš and his former partner Aleksandrs Samoilovs rated 9th, becoming the youngest beach volleyball team to participate in the Olympic Games. In their first season together, in 2010, Mārtiņš Pļaviņš and Jānis Šmēdiņš won the Olympic bronze medal at the European Championship and the silver in the World Cup. They ended up taking 4th place in the 2011 World Championship.

World-renowned skeleton champions Martins Dukurs (1984) and Tomass Dukurs (1981)

Trained by their father, the brothers **Martins** and **Tomass Dukurs** began competing in skeleton events in 1998. The youngest of the two, Martins, is 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games silver medalist and has won two World Cups. He has been European Champion two times and is the 2011 World Champion in skeleton. His brother, Tomass, has been participating in European and World Championships since 2003. He came in 21st at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympic Games and 4th at the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games; he was also the bronze medal winner at the 2007 European Championship.



Economics- Export



Grindeks, the leading pharmaceutical company in the Baltic states

Founded in 1946, **Grindeks** is the leading pharmaceutical company in the Baltic states. The company produces an extensive range of original products, including the widely known Mildronāts® and Ftorafur®, as well as over a hundred generics and active pharmaceutical ingredients. Products are exported to more than 40 countries, with

export comprising more than 96% of total turnover. The main markets are the Baltic states, Japan, United States, Russia and the CIS countries.

Madara natural cosmetics

Madara produces entirely local, natural and ecological cosmetics in aesthetically stylish packaging. Their products contain organically certified natural extracts from the unique spread of flora and fauna that grow in the Baltic region. Ancient knowledge about how to use these natural substances in medicine, beauty treatments and in the home has been passed from generation



to generation. Extracts from these unique Baltic plants are what form the foundation of Madara cosmetics, which are certified in accordance with the international ECOCERT standard, confirming their natural origin.

Plywood production company A/S Latvijas Finieris

The origins of plywood products in Latvia date back to 1873, when the first plywood mill was founded. **Latvijas Finieris** was established in 1992, and since that time has grown from a plywood production company into a group of 18 subsidiaries. Its focus is the development, manufacture and sales of birch plywood. Latvijas Finieris is also active in forest management, logging and production of synthetic resin and phenol films. The company's vision is to become the world's leading developer and supplier of birch plywood products and related services.



Design



Angel Glass Design Ltd.

Latvia has long been home to strong craftsmanship traditions, which have also provided a basis for many contemporary designers. One of them is **Angel Glass Design**, founded in 2004 by local artists Agnese and Artis Nīmanis, which creates glass and crystal dishes, bowls, vases and flowerpots. These products successfully merge everyday practicality with

creative inventiveness. The glassware is utilizing state-of-the-art technologies, showcasing the best of innovative new Latvian design and the great traditions of local craftsmanship.

Zofa design footwear

Zofa is a Riga-based design footwear label founded in 2008 by former architect Elina Dobeļe. The shoes are designed by Dobeļe herself and handmade at a workshop in Riga using locally sourced materials. Zofa shoes are sold at a special atelier on Antonijas iela in central Riga, as well as at boutique stores in London, Japan, Moscow, and Hamburg. Zofa footwear is not only comfortable and ergonomic, but also smart and stylish.



QooQoo fashion This new Latvian clothing label combines fashion and graphic design in bold, brightly colorful and wittily expressive ready-to-wear garments using fabrics and materials made in the EU. The **QooQoo** label was founded in 2009 by former graphic designer Alyona Bauska, who has twice opened Riga Fashion Week with her collections. Bauska says "QooQoo made a little revolution here in my home country of Latvia, encouraging practical, gray-loving Latvians to fall in love with the colorful and humorous designs of the garments."



MAMMU scarves

Riga-based fashion label **Mammu** has created a line of scarves that are not only stylish, colorful and attractive, but also support an important initiative. MAMMU is one of the very few social business fashion company in Latvia, providing workspaces for mothers in need and ensures flexible working times. The concept of the fashion company is based on Grameen social business principles. The company's goals are to create a self-sustainable business, to stay environmentally friendly, to motivate their workforce and, most importantly, to infuse their line of stylish scarves with joy.



Information Technology

Veritweet

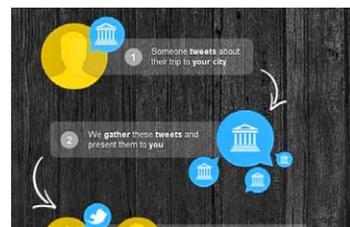
Founded in Silicon Valley and developed in Latvia, **Veritweet** is a Twitter verification add-on that verifies the identity of Twitter users in a simple authorization process, using the customer's bank information. This protects against the creation of fraudulent accounts, for instance, where users register names that are not their own – a common practice on Twitter. Verification allows users to

establish trustworthy online relations, so that Twitter can be used as communication tool in television broadcasts, conferences, seminars and online events, as well as for corporate and governmental organizations. The developer of Veritweet – e-Tag, Inc. – is also a founding member of the Latvian American Business Association in California, which unites leading Latvia IT firms and start-ups in Silicon Valley.



Reach.ly

Another new Latvia-based service that utilizes Twitter in innovative new ways is **Reach.ly**. This new start-up, founded by a small Riga-based team of tech-savvy entrepreneurs, has created a unique direct marketing tool that hotels can use to identify potential guests in real time and communicate with them one-to-one on Twitter. Reach.ly is pioneering real-time text mining and filtering for social media, helping businesses to identify marketing opportunities within the stream of information posted daily on social networking sites.



Science

Ivars Kalviņš (1947), co-inventor of Mildronate

One of the best-known Latvian pharmaceutical products is Mildronate, developed in the 1970s by a team led by **Ivars Kalviņš**, director of the Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis. Mildronate is a drug for the treatment of cardiovascular diseases and cardiac energy consumption reduction. It is widely used for the treatment of various heart and vascular diseases, as well as for treating angina pectoris, improving work capacity, and easing periods of physical rehabilitation. The drug's effectiveness in treatments has earned the recognition of medical professionals and patients in 14 countries.



Molecular biologist Elmārs Grēns (1935)

In 1965, Professor **Elmārs Grēns** organized the Nucleic Acids Chemistry Group, the predecessor of present-day Latvian molecular biology. This was the first group working in the field of molecular biology in the Baltic States. The Latvian Biomedical Research and Study Center was established in 1993, and Elmārs Grēns has been its scientific director since 2001. Today, the institute is engaged in researching various areas of biomedicine, including molecular virology, vaccine development, cell biology, genomics, and proteomics, cancer biology and immunology.



Cardiology

Latvia has earned international renown for its world-class cardiologists, who are at the forefront of research and practice in the field of heart disorders. The leading cardiologist in Latvia is **Andrejs Ērglis** (1964), head of the Latvian Cardiology Center at Pauls Stradins Clinical University Hospital. His main field of study is the development of new percutaneous coronary intervention procedures for patients with coronary artery diseases. In 2001, for the first time in the Baltics, Ērglis performed a stem cell implant using 3D computer visualization and NOGA XP technology, which is similar to GPS. This technology allowed the surgeons to locate the site of the myocardial infarction with much greater precision.

Aris Lācis (1936), pioneer in stem cell transplantation

Professor **Aris Lācis** is the head of the Latvian State Cardiology Centre for Children and the Clinic for Children's Cardiology at the Riga Stradiņš University. He has written about 320 publications, three monographs in Latvia and abroad. In 2010, Lācis led the first successful stem cell transplantation in the heart muscle of an infant with severe heart disease. This kind of operation was conducted for the first time in medical history.



Quantum computing

Several Latvian researchers are engaged in quantum computing. One of Latvia's leading professors, **Rūsiņš Mārtiņš Freivalds** (1942), is the founder of the Latvian scientific school of quantum computing. He has received several academic awards, and became a member of the Europe Scientific Academy in 2010. His student **Andris Ambainis** (1975) is now one of the world's most accomplished researchers in quantum computing and the youngest merited researcher in the history of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. Ambainis is the coordinator of an EU-wide project "Quantum Computer Science" which involves 8 leading research groups from 7 countries. He was an invited speaker at "Federal Vision for Quantum Information Science", an event aimed at creating a national research strategy for the United States of America.



Useful Links

Culture

- culture <http://www.kultura.lv>
- visual arts <http://www.gallery.lv>
- music <http://www.music.lv>
- theater and dance <http://www.theatre.lv>
- literature <http://www.literature.lv>
- opera <http://www.opera.lv>

Science

The Latvian Academy of Sciences
<http://www.lza.lv>

Sports

Latvian Olympic Committee
<http://www.olimpiade.lv/lat/lok/>

Economics and Investment

Investment and Development Agency of Latvia
<http://www.liaa.gov.lv>

Design

Design Latvia
<http://www.designlatvia.lv>



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