

The Head of State, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves presented today in Kadriorg the Young Cultural Figure Awards of the Cultural Foundation of the President to Risto Joost, a conductor, and a special award to Igor Kotjuh, a poet, essayist, translator and individual who is shaping a society liberated from prejudice.

“The diversity of both of you does not translate into superficiality,” President Ilves said as he addressed Risto Joost and Igor Kotjuh. “On the contrary, this represents a deep interest, and without such an interest it is impossible to do anything properly and change the world for the better. And, luckily for all of us, you put your heart and soul into everything that you do.”

The candidacy of Risto Joost was proposed by the Musical Council of the Estonian Choral Association. According to the Council, he has stood out for diversified and high-level concert activities both as a conductor and as a solo singer.

The Head of State reminded those present that apart from his own chamber choir, *Voces Musicales*, which Risto Joost established when he was nineteen years old, and the chamber orchestra *Ensemble Voces Musicales*, which he launched at the age of twenty two, he is also the Head Conductor of *Tallinn Sinfonietta* and the Symphonic Orchestra of Tallinn Music School and he has worked with a large number of renowned orchestras and choirs. Risto Joost has conducted the works of Arvo Pärt and Erkki-Sven Tüür as well as the first performances of his peers, young Estonian musicians.

At present, Mr. Joost is the conductor of the Estonian National Opera Estonia and, as of next season, the Head Conductor of the Netherlands Chamber Choir.

The candidacy of Igor Kotjuh was proposed by the Estonian Institute, which stated that he is an acknowledged poet and essayist and diversified translator, but his role as a powerful warden of Estonian-Russian literature, recognising with accurate sensitivity the characteristic differences between Estonia and local Russian cultural space and – what’s even more important – also opportunities to cross these borders, is remarkable and of special importance.

According to President Ilves, Mr. Igor Kotjuh has expanded and crossed borders, which people tend to erect between different cultural spaces and languages, thereby maintaining a bridge between different languages, different meanings and different means of expressions. Apart from Mr. Kotjuh's own works, poetry and essays, or, as one can read from the website of the Estonian Writers' Union – essemistics (eseme – fusion of expressive tools of essays and poetry), we must emphasise his work as a translator, an initiator's role in Estonian-Russian literature and what's most important for us – his dedicated efforts to shape an Estonia free of prejudice.

By writing text that simultaneously relies upon the Estonian and Russian literary traditions, Igor Kotjuh has created a literature of new type and quality – Estonian-Russian synthesised literature. To achieve his objectives, he has assembled local young Russian literates, inspiring them to continue literary activities, promote contacts with their Estonian peers and search for a shared part with Estonian cultural space. For that purpose, he has created literary online publications and established KITE publishing company. The activities of Mr. Kotjuh are not limited to developing the dialogue within Estonia; he is also a welcome 'interpreter' of the dialogue within Estonia abroad, for example, in St. Petersburg University, his course of lectures on Estonian literature, incl. Estonian-Russian literature, was very highly appreciated.

The Young Cultural Figure's Award is 4,793 EUR or 75,000 Estonian kroons and this is financed by Toomas Luman. The special award, presented on special occasions, is 3,000 EUR and this is funded by Indrek Neivelt.

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