Teaching the Holocaust through music is an important approach whose possibilities are now being more widely explored and employed in the educational process. Mostly, what has been done in this direction has concerned the music that existed during the years of the Holocaust, the music of the ghettos and the concentration camps. Indeed, these sources give the opportunities for Holocaust educators to show a vivid picture of the spiritual and emotional life of those who were doomed to the horrors of living under the constant threat of losing their lives. And, yet, they sang, to use the words of the title of Shoshanna Kalish’s book. The songs of the ghettos and concentration camps when presented to students of high school and/or college age can be a powerful tool, not only for creating the atmosphere of those days of oppression but also for breaking the stereotype of the helpless, obedient Jews who went to their deaths without resisting. The young generation should learn that, besides the well known facts of resistance in the camps and ghettos which involved months of preparation, planning, finding the arms and ammunitions, etc., there was another kind of resistance – the poetry readings, the staging of plays, the singing of songs -- all of which carried the same meaning of doing something spiritual under enormous oppression. Their spirits were alive and they were not going to passively obey the Nazis.

Spiritual resistance, something which is so difficult to measure, was behind the enormous efforts of the American and Soviet authorities during World War II to organize performances of the Seventh Symphony by Dmitri Shostakovich (which he wrote in a very short time in his native Leningrad depicting the invasion of Russia by the Nazis.) There were people who say that Shostakovich’s symphonies could not stop a single tank on a battlefield referring to the Seventh Symphony and tried to diminish his creative impact; What these people have underestimated is the factor of spiritual resistance.

Methodology

The main focus of this workshop is on musical compositions, which commemorate the Holocaust in Holocaust teaching. Three compositions have been chosen, representing different styles, countries, and generations of the twentieth century composers. Three sections of the workshop discuss these three different composers and their works

1. A Jewish composer who suffered in the Holocaust – Arnold Schoenberg, represented by his musical drama, A Survivor from Warsaw, written in 1947.
2. A Jewish composer who was spared from the Holocaust by the accident of his birth but still relates to the tragedy in his creative works – Steve Reich, represented by his composition Different Trains, for string quartet and pre-recorded performance tape, written in 1988.
3. A non- Jewish composer who is closely identified with the anti-Semitic experience - Dmitri Shostakovich, represented by the symphony Babi Yar, written in 1962.

The interdisciplinary approach to Holocaust teaching, which is now seen as the most effective one, allows the teachers of English, history, art, or general music education to use musical compositions, together with other arts, in order to enrich the content of the Holocaust unit of
their curriculum. One of the reasons that the music of the second half of the twentieth century has rarely been included in the schools’ curricula, lies in the fact that the musical language of our times often is considered too difficult to understand. But by associating contemporary musical idioms with the dramatic and emotional events of the Holocaust, the music becomes accessible and deeply communicative. What is considered scary in contemporary music, its dissonant nature can be understood and appreciated through the music of Schoenberg, Shostakovich and Reich. At the same time, the historical event, experienced through the prism of composer’s imagination, becomes more vivid and poignant.

An interdisciplinary approach in explaining music could become the only one possible for the students who are confronted with the complexity of the self-expression of the artists of our time. Comparing Picasso’s painting Guernica, Elie Wiesel’s novel Night and Schoenberg’s Opus 46, might result in a fruitful discussion on the similarities of the expressive means of the different art forms dedicated to the same topic.

Composers’ Personal Links to the Holocaust

The first logical step in familiarizing listeners with the musical compositions commemorating the Holocaust would be gaining the knowledge about those who created the music, the composers themselves. Starting with the reminder of the composers who lived and died in the concentration camps (and here we mainly have the Theresienstadt materials available), the questions to discuss would be the following: Why was it important for composers to write the music about such a painful issue? Would have it been easier to forget and never remind people these things? Was it not horrible to live through? Why should people listen to the music that depicts these experiences now, after World War II is over?

In each case, the reason for the composer was very individual and personal. Even though he was born a Jew in his native Austria, Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) had not identified himself with Judaism until 1923 when he came to realize that he now belonged to a minority. He wrote then:

I have at least learned a lesson that has been forced upon me during this year, and I shall not ever forget it. It is that I am not a German, not a European, indeed, perhaps, scarcely a human being ... but I am a Jew.

This realization eventually led to his own emigration that saved his life and to his intense involvement in Jewish politics. He wrote essays and books, which proposed a program that might help to save the European Jewry, offering himself as a president of the Jewish state in exile, and, finally, creating compositions on Jewish themes and subjects. One of these compositions, his Opus 46, A Survivor from Warsaw, is so powerful that, according to the account of one of the listeners at the first performance, "Whole volumes, long essays, many articles have been written about this problem, but in eight minutes Schoenberg has said far more than anyone has been able to do before."

The contemporary American composer Steve Reich, born in 1936 in the United States, has another connection to the Holocaust. He wrote his Different Trains as a personal response to the thoughts he had as an adult about his own childhood. Soon after his birth, his parents separated and, as a child of split custody, he spent his early years traveling with his governess by train from New York to Los Angeles, i.e., from one parent to another. Years passed and the composer started to think of this childhood experience in terms of a lucky accident that spared him from the fate he would have shared with the Jewish children who were born in Europe in the same
year of 1936 and who would have ridden on different trains. Thus, his 1988 composition bears the title *Different Trains* which refers to the trains that were taking the Jews from their homes and towns to concentration camps where, sooner or later, most of them would meet their deaths.

A very similar account was given by George Steiner in his essay *A Kind of Survivor*:

> I happened not to be there when the names were called out. I did not stand in the public square with the other children, those I have grown up with. Nor did I see my father and mother disappear when the train doors were torn open. But in another sense I am a survivor, and not intact.

The Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) was not a Jew but he identified himself with the Jewish people – their history, their past and present – as a symbol of a tragic and unjust fate. He used Jewish elements in his music when he wanted to express the deep feelings of sorrow and suffering. The Thirteenth Symphony, *Babi Yar*, the song cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry*, the Piano Trio written in memory of his best friend Ivan Sollertinsky (who was sympathetic to Jews), -- all these and other compositions written at different periods of Shostakovich’s life show that his interest in Jews and their culture remained constant. The composer included Jewish elements in his music in different ways: by using Jewish subject matter, setting Jewish texts, and by employing musical idioms derived from Jewish folk music. All these methods have been used by different composers throughout the history of music. What was unique about Shostakovich’s method, was his use of his own musical monogram DSCH which, when translated into musical sounds, consists of intervals which sound very similar to a Jewish melodic motif.

Musical history has precedents of the composers quoting their own as well as other composers monograms in their music. The most famous example is Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) who was notorious for using his musical monogram BACH, sometimes openly, sometimes covertly as a riddle. In the monogram DSCH, the letter "D" stands for his first name Dmitri and the combination of three other letters "SCH" represents the German transliteration of the first letter of his family name Shostakovich. It could hardly be coincidental that the composer chose this particular combination of the letters, the one that would sound Jewish.

In trying to answer the question, why was it important for a non-Jewish composer to be recognized in his music as a Jew, we should refer to the long history of anti-Semitism in his native Russia. One should not forget that the very word pogrom originated in the Russian language and was adapted as a synonym for a terrorist act against the Jews. The life of an artist in a dictatorial society, which denies the essential right of free expression, made Shostakovich identify himself with the historically persecuted minority group, i.e., Jews, and, as such, forced him to develop strategies of assimilation.

With the arrests of many of his Jewish friends, with mounting attacks in the press on the newly established Jewish state, and the official denunciation of Jewish intellectuals for their *cosmopolitanism*, is it any wonder that Shostakovich should have adopted a Jewish idiom as a language of dissent asks the Israeli musicologist Joachim Braun.

Trapped in the situation, Shostakovich learned how to sacrifice sincerity, how to compromise, and how to express his deep thoughts and beliefs through the allegories of Aesopian language, using his monogram DSCH.
Listening to the Music and Analyzing it

Listening to the music of each composition will be an essential part of the workshop. To bring the attention of the students to the musical narrative, to show them what to listen for in music (using the title of a book of an American composer Aaron Copland), will be a major part of this teaching unit. The development of literary narrative consisting of the introductory section, the exposition of the main characters, the development of their relationships, the climax, and the conclusion is similar to musical narrative. In analyzing musical compositions during the workshop, the participants will be asked to follow the scores in order to define where the introduction starts and finishes, where the main section of the story unfolds, where the culminating points are; and how the composers, in each case, makes the listeners hear the music the way they do.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the educational goals that can be achieved through music more effectively than through any other means of presentation?

2. What are the problems that can be stated and resolved through the music?

3. What would the outcome be in terms of the students’ response, their gaining of knowledge and skills?

Conclusion

Including music in the teaching of the Holocaust will help to highlight the most important message against hatred, injustice and intolerance. Learning about the composers’ lives and the circumstances that brought them to write their Holocaust compositions, as personal as they are, help to serve this goal. Unfortunately, current events bring still more examples of the exercise of national superiority, ethnic cleansing, and hate crimes. Ill-fashioned words that reflect an ill-fashioned ideology are still in the active vocabulary of those who call themselves neo-Nazis or neo-Aryans. While knowing that education can not change the past, we must believe it can help to make a better future.