

Music, The Holocaust In

The suffering of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis has been a widely-explored musical subject both during and after the Holocaust. Music has provided an outlet both for the expression of the pain caused by the Nazis, and for the hope that endured even during the darkest years of Jewish history.

Soon after Hitler came to power in 1933, the Nazis instituted a central music office to control all musical activity in Germany. Richard Strauss, the composer, was made its president, and the conductor Wilhelm Furtwaengler was made vice-president. Performing the works of Jewish composers was not allowed, and all professional Jewish musicians in Germany were fired. In July 1933 the Jews established the cultural union of German Jews, which furthered the cause of music and the arts among German Jews. The society was very successful; over eight years, its members performed 500 performances of 25 operas and hundreds of other concerts. Many Jewish musicians fled Germany, some for Palestine. There they joined the Palestine Symphony Orchestra (today's Israel Philharmonic Orchestra), which was founded for the purpose of saving German-Jewish musicians.

When the war began and Jews in Poland were transferred to ghettos, musical life continued and flourished. Old songs were sung and new were written. Among the most famous songs composed in the ghettos of Poland were the "Song of the Partisans," "Es Brent" ("A Fire Is Raging"), and "Shtiler, Shtiler" ("Quiet, Quiet"). An 11-year-old living in the Vilna Ghetto wrote the music for "Quiet, Quiet." The Warsaw Ghetto had a Jewish symphony orchestra that even played in the coldest of conditions. The Nazis shut down the Warsaw orchestra on April 16, 1942, as a punishment for having defied orders not to play works by German composers. Chamber and liturgical music were often performed in the Cracow Ghetto. The Lodz Ghetto had a community center specially built for music and theater performances, a symphony orchestra, the Zamir choir, and a theater group. A symphony orchestra, a theater group, and several choirs were active in the Vilna Ghetto. Vilna also housed a music school with 100 students. Music flourished in the

Theresienstadt Ghetto, with orchestras, choirs, community singing, and opera productions. One opera composed in the ghetto was about to be performed in October 1944 when most of the ghetto's musicians were sent to Auschwitz. Many years after the war the manuscript was finally rediscovered and the opera performed.

Music was also part of life in the camps. In this case, the Jews themselves did not form orchestras or choirs; in most of the large concentration camps and Extermination Camps, the Nazis set up music groups and forced the Jewish prisoners to play at their whim. Music was performed when new trains arrived, when the new arrivals were on their way to the gas chambers, during selections, during marches, and for the entertainment of the SS (see also *Selektion*). The extermination camps---Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibor, and Majdanek---had orchestras. Auschwitz had six. Some musical creations were also composed in the camps.

Both during and after the war, numerous musical compositions were created on the subject of the Holocaust. Among the many topics covered in these operas, choral pieces, oratorios, symphonies, marches, and other types of music are the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the gas chambers, Anne Frank, Auschwitz, Babi Yar, and the children of the Holocaust. Composers from all over the world and from many different backgrounds have contributed to the music of the Holocaust. Some experienced the Holocaust personally and some were even born after the fact. Israeli institutions, such as Yad Vashem and *Yad Letzlilei Hashoah* (the Institute for Conservation and Research of Jewish Music of the Holocaust), collect and put out musical works and songs from the Holocaust.