

A Musical Collaboration:
The Orchestras of Auschwitz

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When first approaching the subject of music in the Holocaust, it is difficult to understand its place in such a mass of atrocities. It is easy to believe that music in the Holocaust was a medium through which prisoners could re-humanize themselves, regaining their dignity through musical expression. Using standard assumptions in today's culture regarding music as an art form, it is tempting to view concentration camp orchestras as an example of Nazi humanity, since nearly all cultures use music as a positive form of self-expression, entertainment, celebration, and even resistance. If prisoners were allowed to participate in musical activities, it follows that their participation would be a choice to engage in a positive diversion from the horrors of camp life. While there were many instances of voluntary music played and sung by inmates at concentration camps in World War II, such as prisoner songs with themes of resistance and uplifting messages, the official orchestras in concentration camps examined here were created and used by Nazis as a tool to further degrade and dehumanize their prisoners, using music to manipulate them in such a way that it can be referred to as a clear abuse of the art form. With regards to the musicians playing in the orchestras, this abuse of music becomes more complex, as it was the very fact that they played in orchestras that saved the lives of many inmates, allowing them the opportunity to expose this distortion of art after the war.

There is a notable lack of extensive research into the camp orchestras at Auschwitz and Birkenau, though there are many memoirs, interviews, and testimonies available from the surviving musicians. Historian Shirli Gilbert is one of few who tackles the misconception that musical activities in ghettos and concentration camps were all forms of "spiritual resistance," a term used in the literature to define music "not only as a channel through which Nazism's victims derived emotional comfort and support, but also as a life-affirming survival mechanism

through which they asserted solidarity in the face of persecution.”¹ Music did exist in the Holocaust as a form of spiritual resistance, and there were many instances of music that gave comfort to its players and its audience. Things like prisoner-organized cabarets, camp songs written by inmates, and other voluntary musical activity typically expressed “uplifting, encouraging messages.”² This music provided a medium for prisoners to create a narrative about camp life for posterity’s sake, criticize their captors, and attempt to mentally escape from life in the camp for a few moments. However, despite the presence of voluntary music, a large part of music in the Holocaust (including camp orchestras) falls under the category of forced music, which was neither voluntary nor uplifting. Gilbert mentions the idea that music as an art form is often considered to be “inviolable by social forces” and “immune to the process of politicization and corruption,” but points out that this is completely untrue and that music was in fact used by the Nazis in corrupt ways.³ The negation of this outlook is demonstrated perfectly by the official orchestras of concentration camps in Nazi Europe. In looking at these orchestras there are two important perspectives to explore: that of the Nazis, and that of the musicians themselves.

The SS established official camp orchestras made up of prisoners in the camps at Auschwitz, Birkenau, Monowitz, Terezín, and Sachsenhausen, among others. According to Szymon Laks, who spent time in the orchestra at Auschwitz, the “first ambition of the Lagerführer (commander) of every camp worthy of the name was to form his own Lager-kapelle,” or camp musical group.⁴ These musical groups would enhance the reputation of

¹ Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps*, 2.

² *Ibid.*, 16.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴ Szymon Laks, *Music of Another World*, 17.

both the camp and the Lagerführer. At Birkenau Women's Camp, the top SS officer Maria Mandel formed an orchestra not only with the intent of furthering her career but also in order to impress her lover.⁵ This toying with human lives in order to seduce a man is disturbing in its own right and the disregard for prisoners exemplifies the Nazi approach to camp orchestras, regardless of the fact that the existence of these institutions ultimately saved many lives. The groups were collections of prisoners with musical experience, varying in size and quality from camp to camp, sponsored by the SS, and directed by a prisoner often chosen by an SS official. It is perplexing to think that the SS would allow prisoners to rehearse with an orchestra every day instead of engaging in hard labor with the rest of the inmates, but the orchestras served an important function for the Nazi command and (especially in the case of Terezín) they could serve as proof of the sophistication of the camps.

In addition to boosting the reputations of certain camps, the orchestras aided the Nazi command by organizing the prisoners. Every morning the camp orchestras would play marches as the commandos, or inmates, left the camp to go to their work sites. The music played by the orchestra forced them to walk in step at a certain tempo, and they were ordered to organize themselves into lines of five people. By having the prisoners march in neatly defined lines at a specific speed, the Nazis ensured that the counting of prisoners in the morning and the evening went smoothly and quickly, and they eliminated any chance of chaos upon exiting and entering the camp. In Laks' words, the purpose of the Auschwitz orchestra was "to ensure the flawless functioning of camp discipline" even as the returning commandos barely had the energy to

⁵ Richard Newman and Karen Kirtley. *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*, 223.

march together in time.⁶ With the overworked and malnourished inmates in such weak condition there was more risk of prisoners dragging behind than of rioting, but the orchestra's steady beat solved both issues at once.

Apart from their daily marches, the orchestra would play concerts on Sundays to an audience of SS members, which served the sole function of entertainment for the camp leadership. The orchestra director would hand a program to the SS audience members, who would return it having indicated the pieces they wanted to hear. This direct interaction with their captors often upset the performers, one musician bitterly recalled that after the concerts the SS would "leave and resume beating people to death."⁷ The SS used these performances not only for enjoyment, but also as an opportunity to assert their dominance over the prisoners. Other performances of the orchestra included private performances at the request of whatever official wandered into the music block after his day's work, often having just selected a number of people for the gas chamber.⁸ It was not uncommon for high-profile Nazis such as Dr. Josef Mengele and Franz Hossler to stop by the barracks where the orchestra rehearsed and request a piece of music to help them relax after a hard day "carrying out their not always appreciated work."⁹

The officials would frequently become emotional while listening to the music, which gave the orchestra members a unique perspective on their captors and a difficult conundrum to

⁶ Szymon Laks, *Music of Another World*, 17.

⁷ Michael Daeron, *Bach in Auschwitz* (Flora).

⁸ Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*, 188.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 189; Fania Fénelon and Marcelle Routier, *Playing for Time*, 98., Szymon Laks, *Music of Another World*, 17.

understand; how could someone be so evil as to send hundreds to the gas chambers and then moments later be moved to tears by a Schubert symphony or a Verdi aria? These very human reactions by people committing clearly immoral acts gave insight to the orchestra members and put them face to face with the fact that they shared artistic tastes and passions with their torturers. Performing music is a deeply personal experience, and the forcing of prisoners to express their art for the entertainment of their jailers took away their dignity and dehumanized them.

The orchestra also gave regular concerts for dying patients in the Revier, or the hospital block, with varied receptions. According to Flora Schrijver Jacobs, an accordionist in the Women's Orchestra at Birkenau, "even half-dead, the people appreciated it."¹⁰ However, this music was often seen as mocking, as light music had no place in a hospital block of a concentration camp. Margotte Anzenbacher recalls that the "reaction of prisoners forced to listen to the music was rather negative," as they had no choice in the matter.¹¹ Another orchestra member, Sylvia Wagenberg Calif, remembers seeing a woman throw herself against the electric fence while hearing the orchestra play. She wonders "who is responsible for her suicide? Did the music push her to do it?"¹² If hearing music in such a place truly did lead to this woman's suicide, the SS had concretely forced the musicians to collaborate with them in the killing of Jews, not only on a large scale but also in a very individual sense.

Another occasion on which the orchestra played was at the arrivals of trains full of new prisoners. On arriving at Auschwitz the prisoners were greeted with the sounds of the orchestra,

¹⁰ Michael Daeron, *Bach in Auschwitz* (Flora)

¹¹ *Ibid.*, (Margotte)

¹² *Ibid.*, (Sylvia).

reassuring them and improving their first impressions of their new place of residence. Even the players sometimes forgot where they were; Helene Scheps gives us a very real image in the film “Bach in Auschwitz,” saying “we sometimes played music as if we were living under normal circumstances. Then one night I hear the chanting of hymns and prayers outside. I opened the door and saw trucks loaded with skeletons, living skeletons, singing death prayers on their way to the crematorium.” Music has a powerful way of masking realities, which proved comforting for orchestra members, but manipulative for the incoming prisoners, representing yet another way in which the Nazis degraded and demoralized their prisoners with music.

Despite this constant degradation and undeniable abuse, the musicians of the orchestras received huge benefits from being members. In the Women’s Orchestra at Birkenau, the members were called “the ladies of the orchestra” and were allowed a hot shower every day, a privilege other prisoners received once a month.¹³ Their conductor took great care of them, often asking SS officials for special aid when her musicians were sick, and all players received extra food rations. Because of their strict rehearsal schedule, the ladies were not required to engage in hard physical labor and were even given the chance to have a rest period after lunch, a privilege unheard of for the rest of the inmates. Due to the benefits, anyone would jump at the opportunity to join the orchestra. Recalling the hopelessness of the prisoners, Flora Schrijver Jacobs said that at auditions, “even if I was a doctor I would have said I was a musician, what did I have to lose?”¹⁴ Even if she had been found out to be lying, her punishment could not be much worse than what she was already experiencing. Either she joined the orchestra and had a chance at survival

¹³ Ibid., (Violette).

¹⁴ Ibid., (Flora).

or she died, which seemed inevitable anyway as a result of hard labor or the gas chambers. As a result of the benefits of being in the orchestra, many of the women survived until liberation and told their stories in the following years. Their accounts are chilling and give insight into the moral complications of surviving in a concentration camp.

When she first arrived at Auschwitz, Helene Scheps was told that she would be saved because she played the violin. Though she did end up in the orchestra, her initial response was “I’ll never play for the Germans.”¹⁵ This knee-jerk response demonstrates the deeply personal nature of music as an art form; in her view, playing violin for someone was like giving them a gift, and doing this for the Nazis seemed unthinkable. She ended up playing for them many times, and she survived to tell her story after the war was over because of her musicianship. Anita Lasker-Wallfisch commented on the absurdity of playing the cello at a place like Auschwitz, but it was her proficiency at her instrument that kept her alive throughout the war. She ended up in the orchestra almost accidentally, after offhandedly mentioning to someone that she played the cello. Many other women from various backgrounds were brought into the orchestra by chance, and the ensemble consisted of women from Poland, Germany, Greece, France, Holland, Belgium, and even Russia.¹⁶

Alma Rosé, niece of the late-romantic conductor and composer Gustav Mahler, was a Viennese violinist who became as the director of the Women’s Orchestra at Auschwitz. A talented musician in her own right, she was raised in the classical tradition in Vienna and soon rose to fame as a concert violinist. A few years later, in 1932, she became the founder of *Die*

¹⁵ Ibid., (Helene).

¹⁶ Rachela Zelmanowicz Olewski and Jochevet Ritz-Olewski. *Crying Is Forbidden Here!: Rachela Olewski (Zelmanowicz): Testimony*, 28.

Wiener Walzermädeln (The Waltzing Girls of Vienna), a group of women musicians who toured Europe extensively playing polkas, waltzes, and other dances while performing choreography in costume. Her all-female group was ahead of its time as one of only three touring women's orchestras in Europe.¹⁷ Under the strict leadership of the daughter of a famous concertmaster, they upheld high musical standards, leading to critical acclaim and wide-ranging success. Despite her best efforts to save herself by marrying a prominent Christian man and nominally converting to Christianity, she was arrested during her attempt to flee from the Netherlands in December of 1942.¹⁸ After being held in a concentration camp near Paris called Drancy, on July 20, 1943, she arrived at Auschwitz as part of Convoy 57, a train full of 1,000 Jewish prisoners. 941 of these prisoners, including Alma, would perish before the camp was liberated in 1945, but in her time at Auschwitz she would help save the lives of 54 women through the camp orchestra.

After arriving at Auschwitz, Alma was sent to live in the experimental block, Dr. Josef Mengele's infamous and lethal human testing ground. She began to organize musical cabarets with her fellow prisoners which, combined with her pre-war fame, attracted the attention of commanding SS officer Maria Mandel. The Women's Orchestra had recently been established and was looking for members, so Mandel provided Rosé with a violin and sent her to live in the music block. Her experiences with *Die Wiener Walzermädeln* had given her organizational and leadership skills, and it quickly became clear that she was the most qualified person to run the orchestra. She soon was appointed the director, running rehearsals and choosing their repertoire.

¹⁷ Richard Newman and Karen Kirtley, *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*, 73.

¹⁸ Richard Newman and Karen Kirtley, *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*, 192-3.

Nazi Germany had placed bans on music written by Jewish composers such as Mahler and Mendelssohn in the 1930s, and a ban was also placed on music that was not in keeping with the German tradition. Paul Hindemith, a noted modern German composer, fled the country rather than change his music to be in accordance with Hitler's tastes, and the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, Wilhelm Furtwängler, expressed his discomfort with the banning of Jewish composers and musicians. Wishing to base his musical selections on quality rather than cultural background of the composer, he threatened to resign if the "Hindemith boycott" was not abandoned, as he had intended to premier a Hindemith work in 1934.¹⁹ Under Hitler's rule musical constraints were strict, and the music of Wagner, Strauss, Beethoven, Bruckner, and Bach was encouraged. The new regime only permitted music by Germans or by Aryan composers with no subversive undertones.

Therefore, when the orchestra played concerts, they played "only German composers. Jewish and American composers were forbidden."²⁰ Common pieces were Strauss waltzes, excerpts from Lehár operettas, Offenbach songs, Schubert marches, and Bach Chaconnes. Other European music was permitted, provided that it was not written by a Jewish composer, and the group played music by Rossini and Sarasate, as well as popular songs from pre-war Germany.²¹ Though music by Jewish composers was explicitly banned, the orchestra did have in its repertoire the first movement of Mendelssohn's violin concerto, a very well-known piece. This small subversive action, instigated by Rosé, sent a message of solidarity and quiet rebellion to all

¹⁹ Shirli Gilbert and Jutta Hansen, "Wilhelm Furtwängler," *Music and the Holocaust*.

²⁰ Michael Daeron, *Bach in Auschwitz* (Flora).

²¹ Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust* 178; Richard Newman and Karen Kirtley, *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*, 263.

those who heard and recognized it. The piece was famous enough to be recognized as a part of the standard repertoire and not as specifically Jewish music, and Alma's playing was convincing enough for the officers to let this small rebellion slide.

The variety of instrumentalists in the group posed a challenge for the members and the orchestrators. The musicians were not provided with scores, so most of their sheet music came from musicians who transcribed works from memory, and their versions of pieces were often extremely distorted. As circumstance would have it, "there were no wind instruments" and "the violins played the trumpet parts."²² This led to the extreme frustration of Rosé, who began to actively search for more musicians, taking this opportunity to save more lives. Upon discovering that Anita Lasker-Wallfisch played the cello, she immediately took her under the wing of the orchestra as the only player of a bass instrument. When Yvette Assael told Rosé that she had been meaning to learn the double bass, Rosé got in touch with the men's orchestra at Auschwitz and brought Yvette an instrument and a teacher.²³ Rosé saw the lack of sufficient instrumentation as a way to save women's lives and so she acted on it.

Relations between the members of the women's orchestra were important, with all of the musicians ending up "really look[ing] after each other," according to Lasker-Wallfisch.²⁴ Living in the same barracks (The Music Block) and spending every day rehearsing together, they became friendly and had a sense of community not often found in concentration camps. Since there was little risk of any of the musicians being sent to the gas chambers, there were few

²² Michael Daeron, *Bach in Auschwitz* (Helene).

²³ *Ibid.*, (Yvette).

²⁴ Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, "*Desert Island Discs: Anita Lasker-Wallfisch.*" Interview by Sue Lawley. Radio 4. BBC. London, United Kingdom, 25 Aug. 1996. Radio.

reasons for the women to be in competition with each other, and the sense of camaraderie was strong. They all admired and greatly respected their leader Rosé, one going as far as to say that she was “dignity personified,” with the exception of Fania Fenelón, who portrays her in a rather negative light in her memoir.²⁵ Her book stands out as a singular negative depiction of Alma, saying that she “looked down” on her and going so far as to say that she “couldn’t conduct.”²⁶ While this factual accuracy of many parts of this memoir has been discredited by surviving members of the orchestra and it clearly contrasts countless other recollections of Rosé, it does corroborate the ubiquitous descriptions of her as an unrelenting musical perfectionist. Though she was notoriously tough on her musicians, she used her high musical standards as a way of defying the Nazis by taking pride in her work. In a place where human extermination and degradation were main goals, it was a huge rebellion to do something that established dignity. The better the orchestra was, the more dignity they retained, and the more self-worth they could cultivate. Their forced existence may have been degrading, but their willful improvement and high standards were dignified.

However, playing in the orchestra had its moral complications. In playing music for prisoner selections, roll calls, and marches to work for the commandos, orchestra members were essentially collaborating with the SS, helping them count and organize their prisoners. Just as the Judenrat in Polish ghettos helped the local government corral and administer the citizens, these orchestra members were easing the organization of the prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau to aid the Nazis. And just as the Judenrat would reap fiscal and nutritional benefits from this

²⁵ Anita Lasker-Wallfisch *Women and the Holocaust: Courage and Compassion*.

²⁶ Fania Fénelon and Marcelle Routier, *Playing for Time*, 53-55.

position, the orchestra members received vastly more food than other prisoners and in the men's camp at Auschwitz were often assigned easier jobs, such as "laundry or potato peeling."²⁷ This sacrificing of one's morals in order to survive is not unique to concentration camps; it is a mentality that emerges generally in wartime. People in Nazi-occupied countries often turned in their neighbors for housing Jews during the Holocaust because they knew that they would be implicated in the crime if anything was discovered. Citizens of towns ravaged by Nazis would pillage corpses that they found left on the street, taking advantage of whatever they could find. With reference to such morally dubious decisions made in concentration camps, Lasker-Wallfisch reminds us that in wartime, "you don't have to be a monster to descend to that."²⁸ Though these actions seem completely immoral in peacetime, it is not uncommon to sacrifice morals and take advantage of fellow humans in order to survive a war situation.

The members of the orchestra have often been criticized by interviewers and asked questions such as "How could you play for the SS?" or "What were you thinking when you joined?" While living a privileged life as a musician at Auschwitz could be seen as dishonorable by those forced into hard labor every day and some survivors do feel guilt for surviving, there was no reason to refuse any opportunities for survival that came one's way.²⁹ Lasker-Wallfisch summed up the general outlook of the musicians in a BBC interview with the question "what was the alternative?"³⁰ If given a choice between playing music for one's captors and being sent to

²⁷ Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*, 180.

²⁸ Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, *Desert Island Discs: Anita Lasker-Wallfisch*.

²⁹ Szymon Laks, *Music of Another World*, 15. Laks comments on his feeling of guilt for surviving the camp, saying that people asking him how he survived Auschwitz "has always given [him] trouble, almost out of shame," and that he has been asked this by people with "clear resentment in [their] voice." Faced with the fact that somebody else's life filled the Nazi killing quota instead of their own, there are clear moral difficulties for survivors to deal with.

³⁰ Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, *Desert Island Discs: Anita Lasker-Wallfisch*.

the gas chambers, it is not hard to understand how these prisoners could entertain the SS, though it clearly toed the line of collaboration.

Reactions to the orchestras from the perspective of other prisoners varied. One inmate said that on days when the orchestra did not play for the march to work, “its absence [was] as depressing as the absence of something that is absolutely essential to life,” and that the marches played made the days “begin cheerfully,” an impressive feat in a place like Auschwitz.³¹ Others were momentarily pleased by the music because it masked the horrors of the camp to new arrivals; the Nazis took great pains to keep the arriving prisoners relaxed and optimistic, “deceiv[ing] them about what was being perpetrated at the camp.”³² Prisoners would disembark the trains to the sounds of Strauss and Offenbach, finding carefully manicured gardens and signs pointing to bathrooms. It was not until after their organization into barracks that they would understand the horrors that awaited them. For a brief moment, the orchestra gave hope and reassurance to people who had been standing in cattle cars for days.

Other prisoners faced the existence of the orchestra with exasperation, wondering why “this madhouse music really tries to play in time” though the prisoners could barely walk.³³ Primo Levi went so far as to call the orchestra the “perceptible expression” of “the resolution of others to annihilate us first as men...”³⁴ He believed that the Nazis were trying to wear down the will of the prisoners by playing the same German popular songs every day. Those whose torture

³¹ Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*, 177.

³² *Ibid.*, 177.

³³ *Ibid.*, 184.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

and execution was accompanied by the dulcet tones of fellow prisoners' instruments surely resented the orchestra and its players for countless reasons. Szymon Laks recalled an experience singing Christmas carols at a hospital full of dying patients, upsetting them so much that he "got the impression that if these creatures had not been so weakened, they would have flung themselves on us and pummelled[sic] us with their fists."³⁵ Instead of being uplifting, the Nazi-mandated music seemed to be mocking the dying people who were likely to be sent to the gas chambers at any moment.

Music holds a sacred place in society as a medium for self-expression through playing or listening and serves a variety of purposes. However, the use of music by the Nazis in concentration camps constitutes a violation of the art form and was dehumanizing for both the musicians and the other inmates. The mere forcing of people to play music is an abuse itself, and when coupled with the forcing of people to toe the line of collaboration by playing music, the violation of the sanctity of music is multiplied. The coexistence of something as seemingly inviolable as music with the barbarity of concentration camps was perfectly described by Laks as a "grotesque clash," emphasizing how out-of-place art was in places like Auschwitz.³⁶ However, the needs of the SS, manifested in the institution of the orchestra, saved the lives of many inmates, and though they were not playing music willfully, they were presented with a way to regain their dignity. Alma Rosé was pivotal in encouraging the honest musical efforts of her orchestra, which re-humanized them and gave them back a small part of what the Nazis took away.

³⁵ Szymon Laks, *Music of Another World*, 99.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

Today, there are many institutions trying to expose the story of concentration camp orchestras. In most literature on concentration camps the orchestras are mentioned briefly or in passing, but many musical institutions are making an effort to bring to light the musical activities that occurred, voluntarily and involuntarily, during the Holocaust. Alexander Kulisiewicz, a survivor of the Sachsenhausen camp, took on the massive project of recording and performing the music he heard and wrote there. Thanks to the United States Holocaust Museum, an album of these performances is available to the public for free. Music of Remembrance, a Seattle-based organization dedicated to music honoring the memory of the Holocaust, commissioned composer Paul Schoenfield in 2002 to orchestrate some of Kulisiewicz's music, resulting in a work called *Camp Songs* for strings, clarinet, piano, and voice. Many memoirs have been written by surviving musicians, and Fania Fenelón's memoir, "Playing for Time" was turned into a movie in 1980. This book and movie are notoriously romanticized and not entirely made up of facts, but their existence represents the effort made to familiarize the public with music in the Holocaust. Stefan Heucke wrote an opera in 2006 based on this movie, and when he contacted Lasker-Wallfisch to ask for her approval she replied saying that it was not an appropriate use of opera and was doomed to fail. When Heucke explained that he wanted to express the story using opera because the topic was "the most crass abuse of music you could possibly imagine" and that "music is the right medium to express this," she gave her blessing.³⁷ Ars Choralis, a New York-based organization that is "dedicated to celebrating the human spirit through the performance of choral music of all periods and styles" formed an ensemble resembling the Auschwitz Women's Orchestra and gave performances in costume in 2009.³⁸ This is just a

³⁷ Apthorp, Shirley. "Bloomberg.com: News." *Bloomberg.com*. Bloomberg, 8 Sept. 2006. Web. 09 Nov. 2014.

³⁸ "Ars Choralis Board." *About Ars Choralis*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Nov. 2014.

sample of the many organizations acting to bring the stories of concentration camp orchestras to light.

Many of the members of the Women's Orchestra have lived to see these tributes, reacting with mixed feelings. Esther Béjerano called the tribute "distasteful," stating that she didn't "want to be reminded."³⁹ Lasker-Wallfisch shares a similar gut reaction but concedes that "it is laudable that people have an interest to do this."⁴⁰ Many of the musicians have remained active in musical ways after liberation, using music as a tool to help them cope with their experiences. Violette Jacquet opened a restaurant in which she sang until some anti-semitic neighbors harassed her and she sold it. Anita Lasker-Wallfisch was a co-founder of the English Chamber Orchestra, a group known worldwide for their vast recorded repertoire and extensive tours. As evidenced by the numerous tributes and active stance of the former members, concentration camp orchestras are a large and important part of Holocaust history.

Though at first glance the stories of these orchestras may seem uplifting and inspirational, in many aspects they are quite the opposite. The members of these orchestras, their talents, and the very art of music were clearly abused by Nazis, though in return many of them were given the resources to survive the war. The moral complexities surrounding the abuse of music are numerous, and deserve more academic recognition and exploration than they have received. These women can be seen as smart (for taking the opportunity to survive), as selfish (for putting someone else's name on the gas chamber list instead of their own), and as taken advantage of (by

³⁹ Kilgannon, Corey. "One Group's Music, Telling of a Struggle for Survival in the Holocaust." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 25 Mar. 2009. Web. 09 Nov. 2014.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

being forced to play for their dying peers), among other things. Their experience in the camps was complex and traumatic, but they are here today to tell their stories because of their exploited talents. The achievements that many of them have accomplished after liberation are remarkable, and in general their attitude toward music is very positive. It is notable that the majority of them kept playing music after the war, almost affirming the idea that music is indeed inviolable. In the reassuring words of Flora Schrijver Jacobs, “sometimes when I am playing in hotel lobbies women approach me and say ‘you’re playing German music!’ I reply that music is international.”⁴¹ It is extraordinary that a person could come to face such trauma and tragedy with acceptance, but shows the power of music as a way of coping with one’s past. The efforts many have taken to make their stories known is equally remarkable, a sign of their bravery and continuing search for justice. Though the secondary literature on the subject is scant, the amount of memoirs and first-hand accounts written by survivors is indicative of the importance of concentration camp orchestras in the history of World War II. It is important to give these men and women their due respect while investigating their roles in concentration camp life, and to remember that art can also be used as a weapon.

⁴¹ Michael Daeron, *Bach in Auschwitz* (Flora).

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