“Se non ora, quando?”
The Hidden Musical Testimony of Holocaust Survivors in Australia

Joseph Toltz

Abstract: In Australia, personal recorded testimony has been a feature of readings of the Holocaust since the early 1980s. Yet up to now, no specific studies in Australia have focussed on a notion of music as a testimonial device. This paper presents a cross-section of musical testimonies gathered from Holocaust survivors living in Australia. Such memories are a crucial part of the psychological and musical life of survivors, post-Shoah, where a wealth of hidden experience lives on in the songs and memories preserved, and each memory is used as a reflexive pedagogical tool in discussing the nature of those experiences. Music acts as a powerful medium in the context of traumatic isolation, describing, educating, mocking, soothing and distracting.

Introduction

Psychologists and historians, sociologists and philosophers have much to say on the testimonial process: its influence in how we view the Holocaust, the clinical ramifications on survivors and descendants, and how the development of testimony has shaped new readings, and indeed whole new fields such as trauma studies. From the very beginning of testimonial activities, music has acted as a
counterpoint to factual reportage and witness bearing. David Boder’s 1947 collection of
survivor interviews contained not only testimonies but also recordings of survivors
exploring their experiences through musical performance. Recently, Adelaida Reyes defined
the task of ethnomusicology to document an expressive culture, “a treasury of collective
experience and associations from which members of a culture draw for meaning that
transcends the merely literal or semantic to become cultural meaning”. This paper traces
the framework of music as a trope in literary testimonies, and will also present examples
from my ethnomusicological research with survivors living in Australia, demonstrating the
resiliently multivalent nature of musical experience in the Holocaust.

Seventy interviewees comprised the Australian component of my doctoral study, with 45
recorded testimonies ranging in length from twenty minutes to four hours. Over 140 songs
were collected, 32 of which are original or unrecorded works from ghetto/camp experience.
13 songs employ contrafactum technique (where an existing melody is updated with words
pertinent to the immediate situation), whilst the rest of the songs are well-known works
performed in varying circumstances, each with a unique new commentary on the place of
music during moments of trauma. Material has been collected in a multitude of languages –
Czech, Yiddish, Polish, German, Hungarian, French, Italian and Russian. Music has also
served as a component of community Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) events
in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. Judith Berman documents the role of music in these
events as ranging from instrumental to solo, group and choral performances. In Melbourne
especially, the cultural presentations seem to be dominated by combined school choir
presentations from 1967, in Yiddish, Hebrew and English. Berman details three songs
which have remained a “permanent feature of the commemorations for the past fifty years”,
the Partizanerlid, Ani Ma’amin and Es Brent. The choice of these songs is not surprising –
the first reflecting immediate post-war Holocaust documentation focussing on heroic
resistance of ghetto fighters; the second, marking the shift to a more complex reading of
spiritual resistance; the third co-opting a pre-war work of one of the most popular Yiddish
songwriters of the early twentieth century into the
commemorative context. All three are popular, well-known works, easily accessible and familiar to audiences of survivors and their families, now associated with Holocaust commemoration.

Although recorded programs of the other musical offerings are not readily accessible one can assume that instrumental offerings provided a reflective cultural offering, a ‘break’ in the proceedings from the formal addresses in Yiddish and English. Other than special events presenting music written in the Holocaust (usually formal concert music written in Terezín), this appears to be the extent of exploration of musical experience. Surprisingly little musical material and testimonies exist in the University and Jewish community archives in Australia, and very little documentation. The Sydney Jewish Museum has 12 objects in its collection, none of which are musical notations; the Jewish Holocaust Centre has an exceptional testimonial archive, but only two musical scores and some recorded material focusing on music; and the Australian Archive of Jewish Music has excellent material from the Bialystok survivor Ester Werblud (née Trevaks) in Yiddish. Even when searching the Shoah Visual History Archive database for music, there are very few questions asked about musical experience in the context of testimony. For example, the interview with Cantor Michael Deutsch (a survivor of Mauthausen and Gunzkirchen, and an important figure in Sydney Jewish communal life for over 50 years) does not explore the role music played in his Holocaust experience, something of which he spoke in detail during Yom Hashoah commemorations held at Temple Emanuel in the 1990s. In the Australian context, it appears that music generally plays a subservient, contemplative role to spoken testimony in commemoration and recording. In order to find a locus for this role, it is useful to trace the place of music in the context of the testimonial enterprise.

Music in Testimonial Writing

*Se non ora, quando*⁶ is Primo Levi’s only fictional novel on the subject of Holocaust. Published in 1982, it tells the story of a band of Jewish partisans in Ukraine, Russia and Poland who sabotage the German war effort, cooperate occasionally with Soviet partisans and survive, hand-to-mouth, until liberation. The novel resonates with
and is the precursor to the 2008 film “Defiance”, based on Nechama Tec’s account of the Jewish Bielski partisans of Ukraine. Levi explains that the kernel of the idea for the work was born after speaking with a friend who was working at a refugee assistance centre in Italy after the war, who had encountered “men and women whom years of suffering had hardened but not humiliated, survivors of a civilization (almost unknown in Italy) that Nazism had destroyed to its roots. Exhausted, these survivors were still aware of their dignity”. Halfway through novel a “partisan hymn” is quoted, the last two lines paraphrasing Hillel’s famous aphorism from the Pirqei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers):

Do you recognize us? We’re the sheep of the ghetto,
Shorn for a thousand years, resigned to outrage.
We are the tailors, the scribes and the cantors,
Withered in the shadow of the cross.
Now we have learned the paths of the forest,
We have learned to shoot, and we aim straight.
If I’m not for myself, who will be for me?
If not this way, how? And if not now, when?9

Other significant musical moments include a wedding feast, an account of the provenance of the aforementioned hymn, and a poignant moment of symbolism at the end of the novel when the hero Gedaleh’s violin breaks as the train carrying the surviving Jewish partisans glides through the Brenner pass on to a new world of post-Holocaust possibilities, perhaps bound for Israel, perhaps to the outer reaches of the Diaspora.

This is not the first time that Levi features music in his writings. His 1947 account of life in a Nazi camp, If this is a Man, observes the absurdity of a band playing the popular Rosamunda march at the entrance to Monowitz. It was a strange activity that causes him to wonder if all the ceremonies in Monowitz are “nothing but a colossal farce in Teutonic taste.”10 Similarly in Elie Wiesel’s 1960 autobiographical account Night, a repetitive monotonous “military march, always the same one”11 accompanies workers in and out of Monowitz. In these two significantly successful literary testimonies, music features as a trope of transmission, as members of an unwilling audience share what Szymon Laks, concertmaster of the Birkenau
men’s orchestra terms an experience of music “…entangled in the hellish enterprise of the extermination of millions of people [music that even] took an active part in this extermination.”[12] The biographies of other professional musicians working in the Auschwitz orchestras paint a similarly bleak view of the place of music in concentration camps, of this ‘music in a distorting mirror’.[13]

Later in Wiesel’s narrative (at the end of a death march to Gleiwitz) the author encounters Juliek, a violinist from Warsaw whom he had previously befriended in Monowitz. Against all probabilities Juliek brought his violin with him from Monowitz, and in the dark, amongst a wall of dying people, he plays his own todeslied, a fragment from Beethoven’s Violin concerto Op. 61. Wiesel pauses in his narrative and reminisces thus: To this day, whenever I hear the Beethoven played my eyes close and out of the dark rises the sad, pale face of my Polish friend, as he said farewell on his violin to an audience of dying men.[14]

In his short biographical account, Wiesel has managed to encapsulate the crucial difference that separates the coerced musical activities in Auschwitz with the free expression of music that occurred overtly and clandestinely throughout the camp and ghetto experience in the Third Reich. It takes Levi just under 25 years to write about similar musical freedoms in his collection of short stories, Moments of Reprieve,[15] and only in his aforementioned fictional novel does music play a significantly greater role.

In recent times, acts of free musical expression in camp and ghetto have been co-opted somewhat problematically into what Shirli Gilbert terms the ‘redemptive discourse’ of Amida,[16] also known as spiritual resistance. I say problematic because Gilbert rightly points out that the sentimental, mythologizing rhetoric that surrounds such musical discourse is grounded in a nineteenth century teleological construct of music as the language of emotion and expression. An example of this can be seen in the biography of the concert pianist and pedagogue Alice Herz-Sommer (survivor and performer in Terezín, most famous for her Chopin Étude recitals),[17] where the authors use pseudo-musicological descriptions of each individual Chopin Étude (Op 10 and 25) as descriptive allusions of important cultural figures in the ghetto. The example below links Étude Op 10, No. 4 in C sharp minor with the bass Karel Berman:
The C sharp minor Étude is full of energy and vitality. It is insanely quick, but with an implacable clockwork-like rhythm. Right from the beginning it has a monstrous power, lending the music a wild, demonic character and all the tension of a brewing storm, which never breaks but becomes more and more menacing. The music seems to give off sparks; despite its dark colours it is filled with elemental force, power and confidence. The Czech bass Karel Berman carried his unstinting power through Theresienstadt, and on to the extermination camp at Auschwitz.18

To paraphrase Gilbert,19 the power in presenting such rhetorical hyperbole is that it simplifies the diverse complexity of human existence in camps and ghettos; and it implicitly silences opposing voices through the accusation that alternative readings dishonour the memory of martyrs. Having had the privilege of meeting Herz-Sommer in July 2008, the pianist herself neither shies away from the difficult and complex topic of musical activity in the Holocaust, nor sentimentalizes her own performing activities.

To return to the earlier literary presentations of music: if Wiesel and Levi as audience members can legitimately observe musical moments, coerced or clandestine, surely there continues to be opportunities to talk with survivors who have had different but important musical experiences, who may have yet to share such thoughts and memories with us. During the course of my doctoral research, survivors often questioned their own accuracy of recall, not only about melodies and words but also generally about events that happened over 70 years ago and in such circumstances. As Primo Levi remarks, the process of survivor recall and testimony only evokes "ever more blurred and stylized memories, often, unbeknownst to them, influenced by information gained from later readings or the stories of others."20 But the issue of memory taint is not necessarily a central concern for a study focusing on subjective personal perspectives of music. Revealing musical memory and bringing it to the attention of a wider public, allowing it to occupy a legitimate space alongside other testimony as a perspective on human experience in the Holocaust opens new dialogues, allows for a different exploration of personal experience and may contribute to our understanding of the place of music in the psyche of survivors, post-trauma.
The Ribald Muse, Contrafactum and an unrecorded Polka

My first interviewee from Terezín, Jaroslav (Jerry) Rind21 arrived in the ghetto in his late teens, and lived with his father in men’s quarters working in the general Hundertschaft labour force, later as a carpenter. In barracks Rind was privy to various bawdy songs, melodies that were extant before the war and adapted to comment about life in the ghetto. The following song, Terezín zvané (Figure 1), was sung only in closed company.

Figure 1: Terezín zváne, words recalled by Jerry Rind from an existing melody

Sedím v prdeli, Terezín zvané
Žereme topinky nenamazané
Refrain: Už se to houpá, už se to šoupá,
už se to šponuje vojna tu je.
K snídani fasujem trošičku kávy
hořká je, bez mlíka nejsou tu krávy (R)
Všechno nám sebrali, petrolej není
Snad se to za krátko uš všechno změní (R)

We are sitting in an arsehole called Terezín,
We eat toast without any butter.
Refrain: It (the war) swings, it slides,
It pulls, the war is here.
For breakfast we have a cup of ersatz coffee
It’s bitter, no milk, we have no cows.
They took all from us: there is no kerosene
We hope that everything will change soon.
The ladies here complain they have no sex and that they have lost their periods.

Italy joined, also Greece,
We hope that all this shit will be over soon.

As soon as the old pig has enough,
We will live the same way as we used to.
When the pig is full, his belly will burst and
We'll chase the Germans into the 3rd Reich.

After the belly bursts, lungs will split as well
And we will be back in our Republic.

_Terezín zvamé_ mentions the loss of periods among the female population – a symptom of living with extreme hunger and a lack of vital nutrients in the food provided. This issue became one of understandable paranoia in many ghettos and camps, where rumours spread that the Germans were spiking rations with bromide\(^{22}\) in order to neuter the population and prevent births. The bromide rumour became entrenched as one of the more persistent myths surrounding camp life. Beginning with a profanity, the song goes on to describe conditions, concluding with a nostalgic longing to return to the independent Republic.

The very same melody was used in Terezín by a group of younger girls, as an anthem for their residential quarters, room 015 in the Czech girls home. Edith Sheldon\(^{23}\) (née Drukerová) recalls the words to the song:
We are (room) 015, so all should know there’s no boy in the town (ghetto) who didn’t sit here.

Ref: Now it is rocking, now it is shoving,

Now it is tightening, we are at war.

There was our Kamila, and there was Magda

But neither managed to make us any tidier!

Contrafactum techniques worked extensively through camp and ghetto experience, and the song above is a perfect example of such, as well as the fluidity of melody, where Rind’s salacious pub song can transform into Sheldon’s anthem for a girl’s home. Room 015’s anthem contains a frisson of teenage bawdiness without being explicit, and in an irreverent fashion commemorates the two betreuerky (room leaders) in charge – Kamilla and Magda. Magda Weissová was one who took on the task of caring for the 1,264 Bialystok children who had arrived in Terezín in August 1943, having survived the aborted ghetto uprising and consequent liquidation. The children were housed in a special barracks area separate to the rest of the population, and were used by Eichmann as bargaining chips for trucks for the Wehrmacht. This strategy failed, resulting in the children being sent to their deaths in Auschwitz, accompanied by Magda who had cared for them faithfully throughout their brief stay in Terezín. The other room leader was the famous choreographer Kamila Rosenbaumová, who coordinated much of the staged movement in various productions in Terezín, including the choreography for the children’s opera *Brundibár*, the most popular cultural work performed in the ghetto.
Figure 2: Terezín Polka, words and music by Josef Moravec

Znám jednu cestičku znám
Ta vede knam tam do mnu knam
Po ni az se jed nou dam
Známa mi la mi sta zas uhlidám.

Sel bych tam hned tak jak jsem
Treba pesky za vozem
Znam

kaz douzat c - ku znám
Az kní pri jdu (ne po ci tam),
Az za

mos tem se o to cim
Podí vam se na pos le dy na Te

rezin Sním se roz lou cim
Us mi vat se sta le bu du

Znám jednu cestičku znám
Ta vede k nám tam domů k nám,
Po ní až se jednou dáma
Známá milá místa zas uhlídám
Šel bych tam hned tak jak jsem
Třeba pěšky za vozem.

I know a little path, I know
That leads me home, to our home,
When I will walk along it
I will see familiar, dear places again
I would go at once, just as I am
Even on foot, behind a cart.
Another song recalled by Sheldon was one written in the camp by Josef Moravec, a young accordionist in the camp. Moravec perished in the slave-labour camp of Schwarzheide in March 1945, but his sister Věra Moravcová survived, migrated to Australia, settled in Tasmania and published a biography in Czech. In conversation, Edith mentions that Moravcová’s writing style is somewhat ‘folksy’, and that the name Moravec was linked to the 30 or so families of Bohemian Brethren who converted to Judaism in the 17th century rather than accepting Catholicism. Moravcová writes her own version of the song in the book, which includes an extra verse and a repeat of two lines at the end of the first verse. This version was not sung in the Terezín barracks (the words do not fit the melody). The song does not appear to be documented in the annals of Terezín music, yet a 1991 Czech video of Terezín survivors shows a whole group of ‘girls’ from Terezín singing it with abandon as they walk around the grounds of the former ghetto. After I first recorded Edith Sheldon singing this song, we went back to the video and reconstructed parts that were missing from her memory. Her first rendering of the song (Figure 2) was fairly accurate to the video version.

The final two lines fade out in the 1991 video; despite our best attempts (including calls to Prague and Israel), neither Sheldon nor I
can reconstruct the melody beyond “stále budu”. The words are highly sentimental, appropriate especially to a reunion gathering. Sheldon remembers the song being sung in Terezín, although the context of singing it may only have been within L410. Yet another mysterious link to Australia surfaced after I unveiled this song, when I discovered a silver charm in the possession of the Sydney Jewish Museum. Donated by Edith Layer (née Sternbergová), the charm is shaped in the figure of an accordion, with the reverse side capturing the first bar of Moravec’s composition; Moravec gave the charm to Layer in the ghetto, as a memento.

Figure 3: Accordion charm, donated by Edith Layer (collection of the Sydney Jewish Museum)

Songs and Education in the Ressorts of Łódź

In a similar fashion to Terezín, incidental music in the Łódź Ghetto provided an important role, commenting on social conditions, acting as a morale booster, providing distracting moments and connections towards another time, be it a hopeful future or comforting past. In the factories, known as ressorts, music was a common feature at work. Anthems were often written to curry favour with the Ghetto Ältester, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, and the following example is one recalled by Guta Goldstein (née Kopel):
Wśród wielu dzwonów jeden dzwon
W melodię serc on wpada ton
On nam piosenkę niesie tą
Co swym akordem zgodne są
Wszywamy tu w sukienki życie nici;
Tu przy pracy można bajkę śnić
Nasza szkoła swoją sławę ma
Naszych serc zgodnym rytmem gra

Nasza szkoła zwie się “Sznajderaj”
Dla pracujących istny raj
A więc śpiewamy wszyscy tu wam
Niech żyje ressort i praca nam

Wszak w tym resorcie každen wie
Nasze mi rękoma tworzy się
Maszyny to nasze baśnie są
I tak snujemy legendę tą

Among the little bells there is one bell ringing,
This little bell makes a melody
and brings us the song that coincides
with the rhythm of the machines
We sew into dresses the thread of life;
Here at work you can dream of fairytales.
Our school has its own fame,
It moves with the rhythm of our hearts.

Our school is called “Tailoring”
For working people it is a paradise
So we sing this song to you,
Long live the factory and work.

Because in this factory everyone knows
That with our hands we create,
The machines are our fairy tales
And so we create our own legend
Goldstein’s cousin Karmela Kopel composed this song with her friend Sala Najman as an anthem for the Sznejderaj ressort (clothing factory). Contained within this song is a line that at first glance seems innocuous enough, but in reality is a cynical dig at the working conditions that the girls had to endure: “Dla pracujących istny raj – for workers it is a paradise”. In performing this song, Goldstein remembers the compositional process whereby the girls used to write such songs at home; she commemorates the creativity of her cousin and friends, and the moments of camaraderie shared during a period of deprivation. When Goldstein sings this repertory of songs (mostly in private, at home), her act becomes a musical matzeyve, a monument in song to friends and family, and is thus an emotional way to connect to a traumatic past without evoking other, less pleasant memories.

Whilst visiting the late Abraham Cykiert, this iconoclast of Melbourne’s Yiddish community told me of a secret school called “Children for Children”, formed by a young couple called Markewicz to instruct those children left in the Ghetto following the horrific events of the Groyse Shpere (September 1942). Cykiert spoke of the Markewiczes in terms comparable to Pestalozzi and Korczak. The Markewicz school was set up in the factor of Leon Glazer. Cykiert’s description is at odds with testimony given by Freda Rapoport in Gila Flam’s seminal work on music in Łódź. According to Rapoport, Glazer was a good director but a thief who purloined any extra rations given to the children. In contrast, Cykiert describes Glazer and the set-up thus:
The factory was Glazer’s factory, and the address was on Dvorska 16 and Dvorska 10, two houses there. Glazer was an exceptional man, exceptional. He organised that the children who come for the rehearsals and who come for teaching should get an additional soup when they come, once a week or twice a week. Glazer was a man who understood the value of it. And I have tried as much as I could to get his name recorded in Yad Vashem for the work that he did.34

Dawid Bajgelman, the composer and musical leader of Yiddish song and theatre in the ghetto devised a secret project with Glazer and a circle of poets including Cykiert and Szymon Janowski. An actual dress rehearsal for this project took place, with a first performance scheduled for late July 1944, but this was cancelled by the final liquidation of the ghetto itself. Below is Cykiert’s account of the project, and a brief excerpt from his vocal rendition. I asked Cykiert to sing it to me twice, which he did with no script, two minor word variants, and no change in the music whatsoever.

What was the story, and why was it written? It was written to try and alleviate the fear of the young children who understood their position like grown-ups, no question, no doubt about it. We decided there is a character in Yiddish (or it was) called Gonte Kozak. Gonte was a little devil who frightened the children. And in a sort of an advice between us, we decided we will do Gonte Kozak, we will bring him here and the children will laugh at him, and make him ‘we are not afraid, you are not, you are not what you think you are’. And this is how Gonte Kozak was written. It was finished at the beginning of 1944 and Bajgelman started to write the music. Believe it or not, to this day, to day I remember half the text and the music from the beginning, how it started, and if you like I will sing it to you:

I’m going to shape a demon child
Made from mortar and lime
And he will be a Cossack
Without a father, without a home
And before I think about him, ugh!
A nose will be chosen for him
And he will be a magician:
The colour will give him life.
By smearing it with a paint brush
I know what he will be good for
And with a feather from a goose,
Already there is (it’s ready) an eye
And immediately in order
A student (bastard) grows, fine and civil
I dress him in clothes
And complete is the sage of my artifice

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And with a feather from a goose,
Already there is (it’s ready) an eye
And immediately in order
A student (bastard) grows, fine and civil
I dress him in clothes
And complete is the sage of my artifice
The stock character of Gonte Kozak was based on an 18th century historical figure, Ivan Gonte, appointed by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to negotiate a conclusion to a Ukranian Cossack (haidamaka) revolt, led by Maksim Zalizniak. Instead to completing his task, Gonte and his troops joined forces with the Cossacks and went on a wholesale massacre of the town of Uman, slaughtering thousands of Jewish men, women and children over the course of 3 days. Over the decades, Gonte morphed from a historical figure to a stock character of Yiddish folktale, a cruel little devil that delighted in tormenting children.

Conclusion

In discussions regarding cultural production in a post-Auschwitz world, the famous dictum of Theodor Adorno is often cited selectively: “Auschwitz has demonstrated irrefutably that culture has
failed. That it could happen in the midst of the philosophical traditions, the arts and the enlightening sciences says more than just that these failed to take hold of and change people. All culture after Auschwitz is rubbish.” 36 Elaine Martin has surveyed the many pronouncements of this important thinker, arguing that if one looks at his body of writing on the subject, Adorno’s clarifying argument is often overlooked: “While the situation does not permit art – this is what was meant by the sentence concerning the impossibility of art after Auschwitz – it nonetheless demands it.”37 Perhaps Adorno does not realise the similarities between this expression and another traditional dictum from the Pirqei Avot (3:21): “It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task. Yet, you are not free to desist from it.” The tension of representing culture in a post-Auschwitz world has largely faded (or perhaps was never so great an issue for many), yet the tension of representing the Holocaust continues. Perhaps the inherent subjectivity of musical and cultural experience will allow for a more common, resilient language of evocation to develop in the future.

For now, the above accounts are just four short examples of the extraordinarily detailed musical testimonies gathered from survivors who settled in Australia post-war. The initial response from many survivors when I begin enquiries about this subject is “well, I’m happy to talk to you, but you are 20 years too late.” But if not now, when? In my former profession as Chazzan, I was at the house of the grandfather of one of my Barmitzvah students discussing what to say in his funeral eulogy, and discovered that he was perhaps the only survivor in Australia who had participated in the premiere performance of the children’s opera Brundibár in Prague in 1941, prior to the Terezín staging in 1943. Similarly, I was reciting Psalm 91 over the grave of one of the few Bielski partisans who settled in Australia and discovered later that her brother (diagnosed soon after with dementia) was a song leader from the group and a significant presence in the Yiddish speaking community of Sydney.

The value of this musical testimony goes beyond the service of historical fact. The primary narrative of the Shoah rightly began in the province of a positivist narrative, with historians insisting on a rigorous examination and accounting of the facts. In a world unwilling to accept the enormity of the implications of the Shoah – the implications for instigators, collaborators and bystanders in all
countries, this was a necessity. But an unfortunate by-product of factual emphasis was to dehumanise the human experience in the Holocaust. Survival, both physical and psychological, came as a result of a myriad of vast, complex circumstances, including crucial moments of selflessness and compassion on the part of non-Jews, luck, or providence or fortuitous circumstance depending on the personal belief of the survivor. Amongst my interviewees, music appeared to fulfil a humanising role in all its complexities. And although I didn’t capture the Yiddish singer from the Bielskis and the young performer from Prague, exceptional material has been gathered from generous, intelligent, engaged survivors who enriched the Australian Jewish community culturally beyond its wildest imaginations.

Perhaps Jacob Rosenberg assesses the best use of this material in the following words. His two memoirs, *East of Time* and *Sunrise West* are replete with musical references; his words of gentle wisdom and his sensitivity to the topic speaks with persuasion and elegance:

Teaching the Holocaust should be through music, art and poetry, because these things are durable, they last. You look at the way we are repeating the same prayers for the last 2,000 years – did we ever get tired of repeating the prayer? That’s the way it should be done about the Holocaust. To create a philosophy, a teaching … like Primo Levi said, ‘We have nothing to explain. To explain means to forgive – we will not forgive, we cannot explain.’ You cannot make a teaching out of a murdered child – do you want to teach how the child was murdered, or the behaviour of the murderer? This is unimportant to us. What is important to us is that the humanity that we carried for thousands of years we defended, to the last breath of our life … I don’t know what it is, but from the word go, Jewish poetry (in Yiddish) spoke about the Holocaust. I remember myself in 1947, I wrote a poem which goes like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Yiddish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little green grasses</td>
<td>נריציקט גראָסערלעך</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My little flowers of the field</td>
<td>בילמעטלער מיטנט</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have seen everything</td>
<td>איר טקאָט אלן נמען</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is it that you do not cry?</td>
<td>ויז קעמ די מיטש וויזנאָ?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38
Even then, in 1947, how was it possible that we could enter life, after what happened to use? But then, maybe life is stronger than anything else. 39

ENDNOTES

Acknowledgements:

I am indebted to the five survivors mentioned in this paper who shared their time, musical memories and life experiences with me on countless occasions beyond formally recorded interview. Edith Sheldon provided critical corrections and translations for Czech songs; Guta Goldstein provided the same for Polish songs and Dr Jennifer Dowling (University of Sydney) assisted with Yiddish transcription and translation.

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Abraham Cykiert and Jacob Rosenberg

1 Fully transcribed interviews from the Boder Collection can be accessed via the web:
http://voices.iit.edu/


4 Ibid. p. 42

5 The Partizanerlid (Zog nit keynmol as du gyst dem letsn veg) is a feature of all commemoration services around Australia, usually sung towards the end of services, and was written by Hirsh Glik in the Vilna Ghetto, set to an existing tune by Dmitry Pokras. Ani Ma’amim (correct title is the Varshaver geto-lid fun frumer Yidn) was collected by Shmerke Kaczerginski after the war; the words are derived from Maimonides’ Thirteen Articles of Faith, and the tune has been attributed to a Modzitser Hasid, composed on his way to Treblinka. Es Brent was popularized prior to the war, written in 1938 by Mordecai Gebirtig in response to a pogrom in the small shtetl (village) of Przytyk, and like many of Gebirtig’s repertoire, was sung throughout the war in ghettos and camps.


8 Levi, If Not Now, When? p. 328

9 Ibid. 150. This hymn is an original composition by Levi, and not an extant partisan song.

10 Primo Levi, If This Is a Man (Sydney: Four Square Books and Horwitz, 1963), p. 20

11 Elie Wiesel et al., Night; Dawn; [and], the Accident : Three Tales (London (28 Poland St., W1V 3DB): Robson Books Ltd, 1974). p. 57


13 Ibid.

14 Wiesel et al., Night; Dawn; [and], the Accident : Three Tales. p. 101

The definition I use for Amida comes from one of its earliest usages, when Meir Dworzecki wrote that “the concept encompasses more facets than such terms as rebellion, revolt and resistance, and embraces active Jewish resistance (Underground, ghetto warfare, partisan activity, fighting in the ranks of regular armies etc.) as well as resistance which was more a psychological, moral, spiritual and cultural nature – both of individuals and of the general population.” Meir Dworzecki, “The Day-to-Day Stand of the Jews,” Proceedings of the Conference on Manifestations of Jewish Resistance, Yad Vashem (1968), pp. 152-3

This paper uses the Czech name Terezín rather than its German equivalent, Theresienstadt, except when quoting texts or interviews directly.


21 Edith Sheldon, Interviews with the author (Sydney: 28 November 2007, 29 October 2009, 19 November 2009)

22 The word betreuerky is a Czechicized version of the German betreuerinnen (responsible persons). In the more Zionist-leaning girls rooms the Hebrew title Madrichot (leaders/guides/educators) was used.


24 Literally, ‘great curfew’ = shpere (Sperre in German, meaning locks) were events organized by German officials (in the case of Łódź, assisted by the Jewish police force and/or the Jewish Sonderkommando, two distinct bodies under the control of the chief of the Ghetto, Chaim Rumkowski) to round up people for transportation ‘East’ (in actuality, to Chelmno, where mobile gassing units were set up). The Groyse shpere is also known as the Gehsperre in literature of Łódź. See Abraham Biderman, The World of My Past (Melbourne: AHB Publications, 1995), pp. 72-5.

Both Pestalozzi and Korczak were famous pedagogues who worked in children’s education. Pestalozzi, a nineteenth-century Swiss educator, believed in structured education beginning from learning easy tasks, gradually moving on to more complicated ones with the
acquisition of new abilities. He disapproved of corporal punishment and rote memorisation. Janusz Korczak was the pen-name of Henryk Goldszmit, a Polish-Jewish children’s author and paediatrician, who ran the Dom Sierot Jewish Orphanage in Warsaw. After the creation of the Warsaw Ghetto, he moved with the orphans into the ghetto where he tried to maintain a normal existence for his charges. In early August 1942, on orders from the Gestapo, Korczak and his children marched in a dignified, orderly manner through the ghetto, to the deportation point, where they boarded the train to their deaths in the gas chamber at Treblinka.

34 Abraham Cykiert, Interviews with the author.
35 According to one Yiddish source, over 25,000 were murdered over three days, from the 5th to 7th of Tammuz (1768), http://www.algemeiner.com/generic.asp?openYear=2007&id=2741&cat=2007&id+2741&cat (accessed 20 August 2010)
37 Ibid. p. 204
38 Transliteration: Grinike greyzelekh, blimelek mayne; Ir hot alts gezien - vi ken der (den?) nisht veynen?
39 Jacob Rosenberg, Interview with the author (Melbourne: 2 April 2008)