

WHEN WORDS ALONE FAIL: MUSIC AND THE SHOAH

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סיפורי מוסיקה
STORIES OF MUSIC



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Introduction

This lesson will explore some of the musical activities that took place during the Shoah, and the ways that Jews have collectively remembered the Shoah through music.

Under even the most difficult of circumstances music continued to be composed. Music provided inspiration and comfort, and served as an outlet for self-expression and resistance. In the post-Shoah world, music has played a vital role in creating and maintaining collective memory.

(*NOTE:* This lesson is intended to be taught over two sessions. For those completing the lesson over two sessions, we have marked where the instructor might break, giving bullet points that can help review that section of the lesson before the break and/or when resuming after the break. If completing this material in one session, the instructor will have to decide what material to include or not, yet still transmit the essence of the lesson. This can be comfortably done with some preplanning.

We have also on occasion provided some possible time frames, particularly for exercises (e.g. pair shares) and discussions. For larger units, we have not. Each instructor should feel free to make the choices on what to emphasize and on which sections to linger based upon their own priorities. We at Stories of Music are available as willing partners to discuss through such issues with you.

Finally, for all lessons we have a Resource Guide and a Student Worksheet. Among the items these contain are lyrics. The Student Worksheet contains all the lyrics to musical selections intended to be explored/discussed. The Resource Guide contains more lyrics.)

Enduring Understandings

(What are the big ideas learners will take away from this lesson?)

- Artistic creation did not stop during the Shoah.
- Music played many roles during the Shoah of which we will only explore several:
 - Music as resistance
 - Music as forced labor
 - Music to document events
 - Music qua music: music for the sake of making music
- Music created during the Shoah continues to play a significant role in the ongoing memorialization/remembrance of the Shoah.
- Music created during the Shoah and music influenced by the Shoah serve to create and maintain “collective memory.”
- Music influenced by the Shoah often holds out the promise of a better world, offering hope and/or motivating action.

Essential Questions

(What are the essential questions that frame this unit? What questions point towards the key issues and ideas that will be taught?)

- What roles do you think music played for Jews and others oppressed by the Nazis?
- Why do you think that, under such difficult circumstances, people continued to compose and perform music?
- How might music serve as a form of *resistance*?
- How do compositions composed after the war differ from those composed during the war?
- What role does music play in the creation and perpetuation of collective memory?

Outline of the Lesson

Part 1: Prelude/Introduction

- Commemorating the Shoah--what is commemoration (Reich's *Different Trains*, Silver's *To the Spirit Unconquered*, and Cohen's "Dance Me to the End of Love")
- Commemorating the Shoah — what was the Shoah?

Part 2: Music of the Resistance

- Cultural and Spiritual Resistance
- Music as Resistance
 - "Zog Nit Keynmo!" (Glick)
 - "Shtil, Di Nacht" (Glick)
 - "Buchenwaldlied" (Löhner-Beda, Leopoldi)

Part 3: Humor and Satire during the Shoah

- "Ikh Fur in Keltser Kant" (Hershkowitz)
- "Baym Geto Toyer" ("Fun der Arbet"; Akselrod/Varshavsky)

Part 4: Music in the Camps

- Sketch of Francois (Frank) Reisz (1890-1967)
- Gideon Klein's "Lullaby" and/or "String Trio"
- "Arboles Lloran por Lluvias"
- Alma Rose

Part 5: Commemorating the Shoah

- "Adio Kerida" (Jagoda)
- "Arvoliko" (Jagoda)

Part 6: Coda and Outro: Commemoration Continues

- Shoah music today
- "Theme from *Schindler's List*"

The Lesson

Part 1 — Prelude/Introduction

SLIDE 1

Welcome to *Stories of Music!*

(NOTE: Instructor may wish to have the audio of some music in the background as participants arrive and get ready for the lesson. If so, you might want to choose any of the music that will be explored or heard in this lesson.)

Under even the most difficult of circumstances of the Shoah (the Holocaust) music continued to be composed. The Shoah formally ended some 75 years ago, but the scope of the horror inflicted and the resulting trauma to individuals, families, communities, and entire peoples, compels us to continue to grapple with the Shoah. One way humans grapple with torment and anguish is through the arts. During the Shoah, music provided inspiration and comfort, and served as an outlet for self-expression and resistance. In the post-Shoah world, music has played a vital role in creating and maintaining collective memory.

While the bulk of this lesson will focus on the unique music that was composed during or directly related to the Shoah, we start by thinking about memorializing and commemorating what happened during the Shoah. Many of you here have been to a Holocaust memorial service or to a museum or to a site in Europe that commemorates the Shoah. Let's share a few examples of such commemorations (take 3-5 responses):

- ❓ What did you see or hear?
- ❓ What was being commemorated?
- ❓ How was it commemorated?
- ❓ What message did you glean?

Continue

Music has always had a strong role in remembering and commemorating the Shoah. We will now break into three groups. Each group will explore a distinct, post-Shoah musical reflection. Each is a commemoration of the Shoah in some way. One group will be hearing Steve Reich's *Different Trains* (for string quartet and pre-recorded sounds), which tries to juxtapose the composer's own memories of his extensive use of trains in America during his youth at the same time that trains in Europe were deporting people his age. A second group will be hearing Sheila Silver's *To the Spirit Unconquered* (also for string quartet), which reacts to the experiences of Dr. Primo Levi, an Italian chemist who spent years in and survived Auschwitz. A third group will be listening to famed folk-rock artist Leonard Cohen's *Dance Me to the End of the World*, a meditation on the fact that the Nazis forced inmates in the camps to play music, sometimes a string quartet, at the very time they were committing unspeakable acts.

(NOTE: If there is only one means of playing music, or too few students, this exercise can be done as one large group. In such a case, the instructor may choose to do only 1 or 2 of the selections.)

Divide the class into three groups, one for each musical example. Have the learners read the provided information (listed below and offered on a separate sheet for the students) and listen to the track. After they have listened to the track, have them discuss their observations. Some information on the composer and the musical selection is provided.

(NOTE: The lesson plan and resource guide, but not the Student Worksheet, has hyperlinks for fuller biographies and program notes. If students are interested, some or all of these could be provided to students to look at on their own after class.)

Groups should know that they will share what they have discovered/learned after reconvening the full class. In sharing, each group should include in their mini-presentation:

- the name of the artist and 1-2 sentences about the artist,
- the name of the work and 1-2 sentences about it,
- a 1 minute clip of music, and
- the group's thoughts on what the artist might be trying to express about the Shoah through this composition.

Group 1 — Steve Reich's *Different Trains I. America--Before the War*

Introduce [Steve Reich](#)

- Steve Reich is among the foundational composers of the [minimalist music](#) movement. Reich uses interlocking rhythmic patterns that change at a very slow rate as the musical language through which he speaks.
- Reich engages with his own Jewish identity on many different levels, exploring elements of Jewish text and history (ancient and modern) in many of his works.
- Reich's musical language incorporates elements of music from the US, such as jazz, and around the world, including the use of instruments and rhythms from West Africa and Latin America.
- Few composers have had the overall impact that Reich has had in the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st Century. Reich has influenced the works of generations of composers.

[Different Trains I. America--Before the War](#)

(If time is a consideration, listen to the first 3-4 minutes) — [Link to full program notes](#)

- *Different Trains* is Reich's reflection on how, as a child in 1939-1942, he was regularly traveling by train from New York to Los Angeles and back, and how, had he been a child in Europe at the same time, he would have been on "very different trains."
- The piece uses pre-recorded spoken word and testimony, and employs a technique in which the instruments imitate the voices. Through this technique, Reich incorporates the voices into the ensemble as their own "instrument."

Group 2 — Sheila Silver’s *To the Spirit Unconquered* 1. With great intensity--strained, sometimes violent

Introduce [Sheila Silver](#)

- Sheila Silver incorporates elements of tonality and atonality into her musical language, including fascinating rhythmic complexity.
- Silver engages with Jewish themes on a multitude of levels, drawing inspiration from Jewish texts such as the Psalms, and Jewish melodies such as the Hassidic *niggun* in her piano concerto.

[To the Spirit Unconquered](#) — [Link to full program notes](#)

- According to Silver, the work “is about the ability of the human spirit to transcend the most devastating of circumstances, to survive and to bear witness.”
- The work is inspired, in part, by the writings of [Primo Levi](#).
- The work explores the emotional experience and development of individuals who experienced the Shoah.

Group 3 — Leonard Cohen’s “Dance Me to the End of Love”

Introduce [Leonard Cohen](#)

- Leonard Cohen grew up in a very observant, and learned, Jewish family.
- Later in life, he would become a Buddhist monk, but would never abandon Judaism as his religion.
- Cohen’s deepest expressions of Judaism were through the writing of text.

[“Dance Me to the End of Love”](#)

While popularly considered a love song, Cohen described in a radio interview that the song was inspired by a photo of musicians playing in a concentration camp. From the interview:

“It’s curious how songs begin because the origin of the song, every song, has a kind of grain or seed that somebody hands you or the world hands you and that’s why the process is so mysterious about writing a song. But that came from just hearing or reading or knowing that in the death camps, beside the crematoria, in certain of the death camps, a string quartet was pressed into performance while this horror was going on, those were the people whose fate was this horror also. And they would be playing classical music while their fellow prisoners were being killed and burnt. So, that music, ‘Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin,’ meaning the beauty there of being the consummation of life, the end of this existence and of the passionate element in that consummation. But, it is the same language that we use to surrender to the beloved, so that the song—it’s not important that anybody knows the genesis of it, because if the language comes from that passionate resource, it will be able to embrace all passionate activity.”

— *Leonard Cohen, CBC Radio Interview (August 26, 1995)*

Reconvene and have each group briefly share key points about the artist they studied, the work they discussed, a musical clip (about 1 minute) to support the discussion, and their ideas about what the artist might be trying to say about the Shoah via their music.

Discuss (after all groups have shared) the following questions as a group:

- ❓ How do these compositions fit into/help create a [“collective memory”](#) in post-Shoah America? (For a brief [definition of collective memory, see here.](#))
- ❓ Are works like this synonymous with other forms of Shoah-related art/media (e.g., films like *Schindler’s List* or *Defiance*)? Is music, as a medium for memorialization, any more or less effective?

Continue to consider these questions as we explore music composed/performed during the time of the Shoah. While the works come from very different contexts you will likely find that they are closely related. Furthermore, these questions are worth asking oneself about many (if not all) of the works presented in this lesson.

Background on the Shoah

SLIDE 2

- ❓ Does anyone know why the Jewish community tends to use the Hebrew term “Shoah” when referring to the Holocaust?

(“Shoah” is a term from the Bible that means “catastrophe” and remains a distinctively Jewish term for the targeting of Jews. For more on this, [see Zev Garber’s discussion on the use of Shoah vs. Holocaust here.](#))

- ❓ What do you know about life for Jews under Nazi rule during WWII?
- ❓ What other groups of people found themselves in similar circumstances?

(**Some possible responses:** trade unionists, political dissidents and opponents, the Roma and Sinti people, LGBTQ people (especially gay men), Jehovah’s Witnesses, “asocials” (including those with alcoholism or chemical dependency, homeless and unemployed persons, welfare recipients, beggars, and prostitutes), differently abled people...) (NOTE: It is important to note that while Jews were specifically targeted by the Third Reich, so, too, were other peoples such as the Roma and Sinti people. Many groups suffered immensely. Six million Jews were murdered, and some eleven million others as well. Because this lesson is geared toward Jewish settings, it will focus on the Jewish experience. [See here for more on the documenting of the numbers of victims](#), and a breakdown of the 11 million.)

- ❓ When? (What was the period in which all of this happened?) (No one right answer-- some might point to Hitler’s ascendancy to the chancellorship; others to Kristallnacht, etc.)

- ❓ Where did they live? (E.g., concentration camps, death camps, work camps, ghettos, hidden with non-Jewish families, hidden in convents, forests...)
- ❓ What were the physical conditions?
- ❓ What were the spiritual, psychological, and emotional conditions?

Acknowledge that, based on our understanding/impressions that it may be a surprise to learn that all forms of art continued to be created under such circumstances.

Part 2 — Music of Resistance:

SLIDE 3

“Zog Nit Keyn mol” (Glick) and *“Buchenwaldlied”* (Löhner-Beda, Leopoldi)

There was much resistance shown during the Shoah. This included not only physical/armed resistance but, equally powerful, cultural/spiritual resistance.

(NOTE: The Instructor might ask what people think of when they hear the term “cultural resistance” or “spiritual resistance.” If so, take 2-3 responses.)

“Spiritual resistance” refers to attempts by individuals to maintain their humanity and core values in spite of Nazi dehumanization and degradation, while “cultural resistance” tends to use continue one’s culture in defiance of the majority’s clear expectations. (NOTE: The instructor might ask what did Jews (and other oppressed minorities) do during the Shoah as a form of spiritual or cultural resistance? Take several responses and/or offer several: holding music concerts in the ghettos and keeping Passover in the camps are two examples of resistance.) [Here](#) is a brief overview of cultural/spiritual resistance during the Shoah.

We are now going to explore notions of spiritual and cultural resistance during the Shoah through music.

Introduce [Hirsh Glick](#) (1922-1944)

SLIDE 4

- Hirsh Glick’s poetry and songs act as primary documents, describing events and emotions in the Vilna ghetto, among the Partisans, and generally in secular Jewish life. (For more on [Vilna’s ghettos and the resistance there](#), see [here](#).)
- Glick’s writings and actions demonstrate a lifetime dedicated to secular Jewish social movements, but also demonstrate a connection to universal themes of resistance, perseverance, and unity.
- In the ghetto, Glick was recognized as both a member of the resistance community, and a significant member of the ghetto literary community, composing many songs and poems while in the ghetto.
- Glick’s actions aligned with the ideas he espoused. Glick would survive the liquidation of the ghetto and escape with 40 other prisoners who would go on to join the partisans in the forest. They would all die in combat with Nazi forces.

Play “Zog Nit Keynmol” (“Never Say”)

- Inspired by the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the text was written by Glick in 1943 to a pre-existing Soviet tune by Dimitri Pokrass.
- Despite being written while in the Vilna ghetto, the song is bold, forward-looking, and defiant. At a time when Jews had very little sovereignty over their existence, Glick’s anthem encouraged unity and self-determination.
- This song is one of the most often sung from the repertoire related to the Shoah, and is incredibly resonant in the Jewish community to this day.
- Songs that document oppression and resistance in the Yiddish repertoire are part of an incredibly rich history of music documenting the social action among the Jewish people.

Consider

It is traditional to rise when “Zog Nit Keynmol” is sung in a synagogue.

Discuss

(NOTE: The use of discussion questions is flexible. Often, instructors may choose to discuss with the entire class. Nonetheless, when groups of questions appear together (here you will find six!), the instructor may choose the question or questions that best fit the cohort of learners for large group discussions. Sometimes, an instructor may choose to use a question (or questions) for a small group format, perhaps giving different small groups different questions to discuss, or choosing a more personal question for a pair share exercise, etc.)

- ❓ Is this song sung in your synagogue? If so, do you rise?
- ❓ Why might one rise for this song?
- ❓ When else do you rise in the synagogue? For what reason(s) do you rise then?
- ❓ What does rising say about the role of this song in the Jewish community today?
- ❓ What does it say about the song’s importance in the Jewish collective memory?
- ❓ Why do you think “Zog Nit Keynmol” is one of the most—if not the most—widely known and sung songs to have come out of the Holocaust?

Introduce Hermann Leopoldi (1888-1959)

- Hermann Leopoldi was a product of a musical family and had a professional career in the vibrant cabaret scene that defined pre-war Vienna. Viennese cabaret was a unique form of variety show that combined music and comedy. Hermann Leopoldi and his brother opened their own cabaret, the “Kabarett Leopoldi-Wiesenthal” which was seen as one of the most successful clubs in Vienna.

- Shortly after Leopoldi was first imprisoned, he was sent to Dachau, then later Buchenwald where he found himself at the center of the camp cultural life. He often performed his own songs for prisoners.
- Leopoldi was saved by a large bribe from his parent-in-laws that secured his release and subsequent immigration to New York (April, 1939). He would, however, return to Austria at the government's behest to help re-establish cultural activities in Vienna in 1949.

Introduce [Fritz Löhner-Beda](#) (1883-1942)

- Fritz Löhner-Beda was of Bohemian Jewish descent, and moved at a young age to Vienna where he would become a prominent composer and performer. He was outwardly proud of his Jewish heritage at a time when it was unpopular or even risky among Viennese Jewish performers.
- In the broader music world, Löhner-Beda was best known for the libretto he co-wrote from Franz Lehár's *Land des Lächelns* ("Land of Smiles"). He had hoped that his connection to the work would secure his freedom, but he had publicly criticized the Nazis and was arrested soon after the *Anschluss* (annexation of Austria) in 1938.
- While in the camp, Löhner-Beda was often found performing in shows. He was transferred to Auschwitz where he died in 1942. While aware of Löhner-Beda's imprisonment, his former friend and colleague, Franz Lehár, remained noticeably silent, fearing for his own fate and the fate of his Jewish wife.

"Buchenwalder Marsch" ("Buchenwald March")

SLIDE 5

- "Buchenwalder Marsch" or "(Das) Buchenwaldlied" ("The Song of Buchenwald") was written over the course of three days by Viennese cabaret singer and composer [Hermann Leopoldi](#), on a text by [Fritz Löhner-Beda](#) while inmates at Buchenwald.
- The song was part of a music competition of sorts. *Lagerführer* or Camp Commandant Arthur Rödl set up the competition as a response to the camp's communists frequent singing of the *Internationale*. While Rödl never paid the prize money, he nevertheless liked the song and ordered it to be rehearsed and performed often in the camp, including singing it over the *Internationale* at roll call.
- The song captures the mixed emotions of the composer/lyricists; while celebrating the strength drawn from work, it also highlights the bleakness of life in the camp. "O Buchenwald, I cannot forget you because you are my fate."
- While the Glick songs represents ideas and stories associated with active resistance, the "Buchenwalder Marsch" engages in the idea of spiritual resistance.

Play ["Buchenwalder Marsch"](#)

Read the text of the song and answer the following as a group:

-  Is there anything that you find particularly interesting or surprising?

- ❓ What do you interpret as the meaning of the opening lines and the description/role of nature in those lines?
- ❓ Who do you think “the girl” in verse 2 is?
- ❓ What do you think the overall tone and message of the song are?

Interpreting and Singing the Song

- ❓ Some individuals argue that “*Buchenwalder Marsch*” is an example of an act of resistance, others that it is an example of forced labor...what do you think and why?
- ❓ How does singing a “Shoah song” in German affect the way we, as American Jews, hear it?

Summary until now for those teaching over two sessions (for those teaching in one session, please skip below to “Introduce Hermann Leopoldi (1888-1959)”).

This was a somber experience today, but I hope we all got a lot out of it. We:

- spoke about the role of music in commemorating the Shoah and in maintaining our collective Jewish memory (Reich’s *Different Trains*, Silver’s *To the Spirit Unconquered*, and Cohen’s “*Dance Me to the End of the World*”).
- spoke about the Shoah itself--the use of the term “Shoah,” life for Jews in the Shoah (while acknowledging others who also suffered during WWII), when the Shoah occurred, where did Jews find themselves, and the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual conditions. We then heard some of the music of resistance.
- found that the creation of music/art did not stop during the Shoah.
- saw that music could serve as a source of resistance, reminding our people of their dignity, and instilling within them determination to survive and to do whatever was possible when possible to resist.

The songs of resistance often holds out the promise of a better world, offering hope and/or motivating action.

Next session we will how music during the Shoah was sometimes infused with humor or satire, that helped bring better perspective on what was happening, and we’ll also see how music was created and used in the camps themselves. We’ll then circle back to where we started today, with the idea of commemoration and how do we commemorate the Shoah and maintain our collective memory of it.

For this session, however, we conclude today with another anthem by Hirsh Glick, entitled, “*Shtil Di Nakht Iz Oysgeshternt*,” that serves as an example of how music was written during the Shoah to help document events. This song celebrates the exploits of Vitka Kempner, one of the many significant female resistance fighters within the Vilna ghetto and as a partisan. (On the slide Kempner is pictured on the far right.) Kempner was a leader among

the Vilna resistance, leading the very first act of sabotage against the Nazis in Vilna, destroying a rail line. Kempner played a critical role for the resistance, moving information, material, and people between the ghetto and the city at large. Her exploits, as captured in this song clearly inspired Glick and they inspired resistance movements during the Shoah.

This song continues to be an anthem of political resistance. Now we'll listen to a recent recording by the modern Yiddish troubadour, Daniel Kahn.

Play ["Shtil Di Nakht Iz Oysgeshternt"](#) ("Quiet, the Night is Full of Stars")  **Slide 6**

—BREAK—

(NOTE: For those teaching over two sessions, you may wish to use the summary above as you begin the second session, perhaps transitioning with: "Today we'll start by exploring the role of humor and satire during the Shoah.")

Part 3 — Humor and Satire during the Shoah **SLIDE 7**

Introduce [Yankele Hershkowitz](#) **SLIDE 8**

- Hershkowitz was a troubadour of the Lodz ghetto, walking the streets singing his songs that documented and commented on activities in the ghetto.
- Hershkowitz's life as a troubadour was driven by the need to survive. He would sing in exchange for food.
- His songs were often a satirical way in which he would document and comment on events and people. He would often satirize the much-hated head of the Jewish council, [Chaim Rumkowski](#), an extremely divisive figure in the ghetto community.
- After the deportation of 1942, there were no longer enough people on the streets to pay him in food, so he chose to work in the factories where he continued to perform.
- Hershkowitz's songs were often ingrained in the memories of survivors who had the opportunity to hear him sing.

Play ["Ikh Fur in Keltser Kant"](#) ("I am Going to Kielce") 

- This song satirizes the cliché of "the grass being greener on the other side of the hill." A popular rumor spread among the Jews in the Lodz ghetto that Jews were living free with plenty to eat in the region of Kielce; however Hershkowitz was keenly aware of the foolishness of this rumor.
- This song exemplifies how artists can use humor and satire to both document events and comment on them through the context, framing and setting of the text. (For more on [Humor and the Holocaust, see here.](#))

Hershkowitz provides an opportunity to discuss the use of humor and satire as a form of resistance. (For a brief overview of [the use of satire during the Shoah, see here.](#))

- ❓ Do you think this song would be considered “resistance”? Why or why not?
- ❓ Can you think of other examples of humor/satire as a type of “resistance”?

Extension idea

SLIDE 9

Additional example of contrafactum (parody) in Shoah music

“Baym Geto Toverl” (“At the Ghetto Gate”), also known as *“Fun der Arbet”* (“From Work”), was written by Avrom Akselrod and set to the melody of *“Oyfn Pripetshik”* (“On the Hearth”) by Mark Varshavsky (recorded as early as 1918). (NOTE: Instructors might wish to play the song first, and then ask the class about the humor they find, about the use of new words to a well-known melody, etc., adding the following as appropriate.)

- The song documents food smuggling in the [Kovno Ghetto](#). Here are two brief oral testimonies, one on [smuggling as a child in the Kovno Ghetto](#) and [one on smuggling as a child in the Horochow Ghetto](#).
- Words to this song were somewhat fluid, changing to fit the precise circumstance in which it was sung.

(NOTE: For those teaching this Lesson over two sessions, this would be a good place to take a break, summarizing what the class has done and, perhaps, letting the class know that next time we will explore, among other things, “Music in the Camps” and “Music of Commemoration.”)

Part 4 — Music in the Camps:

SLIDE 10

Gideon Klein’s “Lullaby” and/or “String Trio”; *“Arboles Lloran por Lluvias”*; Alma Rosé

Music was composed and played even in such horrific places as the camps (NOTE: There were various kinds of camps: concentration camps, killing centers, forced labor camps, transit camps, and prisoner-of-war camps. [For the distinctions among these camps, and more, see here.](#)) In this section, we will explore this music in a variety of ways: a sketch that serves as a witness to the Shoah, a classical composer who continued to compose while in a camp, a Ladino song that was spontaneously sung by some as they went to the gas chambers, and a woman who led an orchestra inside a camp. Let’s first look at the sketch.

Background Information on Francois (Frank) Reisz (1890-1967)

- Reisz was in six camps, including Auschwitz and Mauthausen, before being liberated at Ebensee.
- The sketch depicts the orchestra at Birkenau playing while camp inmates are forced to transport the dead, on handcarts and stretchers. (To see other sketches by Reisz of Birkenau, with a brief biographical note, [see here.](#))

Questions to discuss with the class

- ❓ React to this work of art. (What does it state? What is it emphasizing? What is the role of music here? How might the various people in the sketch--those transporting the dead, the musicians, the bystander--think/feel about the use of music?)
- ❓ How can a work of art act as a “witness” or primary document (first-hand accounts, e.g. letters, journals, etc.)?
- ❓ How do you think a work of art like this can add depth or nuance to our understanding of the Shoah?
- ❓ What role does this work of art, and those similar, play in creating and maintaining a Jewish collective memory?

We are going to listen to a work by Gideon Klein, whom we will find out more after listening.

Play [Klein’s “Lullaby”](#) or this [String Trio - Mvt. 3](#) 

Invite

First, let’s go around, and everyone please describe your reaction to this piece in only one word. Take a moment to do this, including everyone. Instructor may wish to ask two or three people to explain their choice of word.

Here, the instructor may wish to ask or comment on the overall impression of the music, its mood, its character, the instrumentation, etc.

Let’s find out a little about the composer, Gideon Klein.

Introduce [Gideon Klein \(1919-1945\)](#)

SLIDE 11

- Gideon Klein was a Czech-born Jewish pianist and composer, and at the time of the outbreak of WWII, Klein was only 19 and yet on his way to being one of Europe’s top piano soloists.
- Klein was among the many esteemed composers and performers in Terezin, arriving there on December 1, 1941, a truly unique experience in its own right. In the camp, he acted as an accompanist, arranger and composer-in-residence, working with some of the top musicians and composers in Europe.
- While his compositions can best be considered “art music” or “classical music”, his compositions are most often categorized as “Holocaust Music”, paradoxically falling into the same category as many folk tunes. This raises the question “What is Holocaust music?”
- Klein’s final work, the *String Trio*, was completed nine days prior to his deportation to Auschwitz on October 1, 1944, while he was still the age of 24. He was murdered by the Nazis just two months after his 25th birthday.

- When listening, note how Klein finds ways outside of traditional tonality (i.e. Do, re, mi, etc.) to create different sections with distinct emotions throughout the piece.

Discuss

- ❓ Why do you think that, under these difficult circumstances, Klein continued to compose and perform music?

Others, too, composed music in the camps. Music was played and performed. In addition, Jews spontaneously drew from their rich musical history to sing songs that spoke to their moment. Such was the case with *“Arboles Lloran por Lluvias.”*

“Arboles Lloran por Lluvias” (“The Trees Cry for Rain”)

SLIDE 12

- This song is in Ladino, a language that was a result of the Jewish diaspora from Spain after Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand’s expulsion of the Jews of Iberia in 1492. (For more on [Ladino](#), see here. For more on the [expulsion of the Jews from Spain](#), see here. To learn of the [Sephardic Diaspora after 1492](#), see here.)
- The song, which predates the Shoah, recounts the separation of two lovers on account of the pogroms that Jews suffered in Iberia (principally Spain and Portugal) from the fourteenth century and beyond the Expulsion, and reflects parallels with the Holocaust, for example, the fact of being expelled from home to die outside it.
- Witnesses/Survivors recall that Greek-Spanish Jews sang *“Arboles Lloran por Lluvias”* when they were taken to the gas chambers as an act of dignity that vindicated their Jewish-Spanish identity.

Play [“Arboles Lloran por Lluvias”](#) sung by Rosa Zaragoza, a well-known Mediterranean singer who has researched Judeo-Catalan music specifically, as well as Sephardic, Andalusian, and Mediterranean music more generally. 🎵

Discuss

- ❓ Describe and/or react to the selection you just heard.
- ❓ Zaragoza combines this song with her rendition of Kol Nidre? What, for you, connects the two pieces?

Extension idea

SLIDE 13

Continuing to Make Music at all costs

Alma Rosé: Conductor of the Women’s Orchestra

Have students read [this short article on Alma Rosé](#) and discuss the following questions:

- Was this an example of forced labor or active resistance?
 - Consider the use of the music, was it being weaponized? Or being used as a tool of freedom?
- How does the story of Alma Rosé align (or not) with your understanding of the individual’s experience during the Shoah?
- How does Alma Rosé’s story, together with that of Vitka Kempner’s story (immortalized in “*Shtil, Di Nakht*”) affect your understanding of women’s experiences during the Shoah? (For more background, see [here](#).)
- Is there anything else you find particularly fascinating, compelling, or inspirational about this story? Or conversely, do you find it problematic in any way?
- What else do you feel can be learned from the story?

Part 5 — Commemorating the Shoah

SLIDE 14

Explain

There are many ways to commemorate the Shoah. Perhaps this class could serve, in part, as a commemoration. Music usually anchors a commemoration. So, too, this class. We began learning Steve Reich’s *Different Trains*, Sheila Silver’s *To the Spirit Unconquered*, and Leonard Cohen’s “Dance Me to the End of Love,” all compositions to commemorate the Shoah in some way. We also spoke of music, commemoration, and the idea of “collective memory.” So now we explore a Ladino song, “*Adio Kerida*,” that is often used in Shoah commemoration.

Introduce [Flory Jagoda](#) (1923-2021)

SLIDE 15


- Born in Sarajevo (Bosnia), Jagoda was a guitarist, accordionist, composer, and singer-songwriter known for both her composition of and interpretation of Sephardic songs, Ladino songs, and Bosnian folk ballads (*sevdalinka*).
- An old Ladino saying states, “If Bosnia is bread, Jews are neither the flour nor water—but they are the Salt.”
- After the Nazis invaded (then) Yugoslavia, Jagoda and her family bravely escaped to various islands off the Croatia coast. Jagoda, then a teenager, went by herself on a train with false documents and no ticket. She played her accordion and sang songs the entire four hours. Apparently, the conductor forgot to ask her to show her ticket, as he was singing along with the passengers.
- While she and her immediate family escaped, the Shoah brought great terror and devastation to Yugoslavia’s Jews. Of the 82,500 Jews living in the country at the time, only 14,000 (17%) survived the Holocaust. (For more on [the Holocaust in the Yugoslav Union](#), see [here](#).)

- Jagoda became a superstar in the Sephardic world. She was known as “The Keeper of the Flame” for her commitment to preserving older traditions, Ladino language, and music of her Sephardic heritage. One example is her rendering of “*Arboles Lloran por la Lluvia*.” (For more on [Sephardic Jewry](#), see here.)

“*Adio Kerida*” (“Goodbye, Dear One”)

- This Ladino song is ubiquitous with Shoah memorialization in the Sephardic/Ladino community. This song is often a cornerstone of Yom HaShoah commemorations in such communities.
- The lyrics, on the surface, speak powerfully of lost love. On another level, though, the song represents a bittersweet message to Spain from its Jewish exiles, who felt rejected by the miserable persecutions and expulsions from a land in which they had felt at home.
- When heard in the context of the Shoah, the listener may rightly hear a message of “*Adio Kerida*,” “Goodbye, my Love,” directed to the loved ones lost in the Shoah.
- In addition, one may detect a further message to Iberia and to Europe, of the depth of pain that an entire people, a proud people, experienced at the ongoing recognition of dislocation, persecution, expulsion, and horror placed upon them by neighbors, coworkers, and others who previously celebrated their presence.
- Some contend that Giuseppe Verdi heard Jews singing the melody and used it as the basis for the aria “*Addio del Passato*” in *La Traviata* (for example, [see here](#)). However, the opposite, that the melody was originally derived from Verdi’s work, today is seen as more likely (for example, [click here](#) (and scroll towards the end!))
- This song is particularly resonant in the Greek Jewish community, a community that was particularly devastated during the Shoah. (For a brief overview of the [Shoah in Greece](#), see here. For more on [the experience of Sephardim in the Shoah](#), see here.)

Play [“*Adio Kerida*” performed by Flory Jagoda](#) 

-  Jagoda performed classic Sephardic songs that she recontextualized to recall and memorialize what happened to Bosnia, and especially her family, during the Shoah. Why do you think she did that?

Extension idea

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“*Arvoliko*” (“Little Tree”) by Flory Jagoda

- This song acts as a musical grave marker, memorializing the tree near Jagoda’s original home in Sarajevo. The tree is the only physical marker for the mass grave of 42 members of the Altaras (Jagoda’s) family.
- This song is unique in that Jagoda is choosing to memorialize her family in their lingua franca (*Ladino*), supporting the creation of collective memory both for the general audience and within the Sephardic community. (For more on [“*Arvoliko*”](#), see here.)

Play [“*Arvoliko*”](#) 

Continue

We hope that by exploring the repertoire composed during or influenced by the Shoah, you have engaged with individual stories that illuminate the various experiences of the Shoah.

What have you learned and what will you take away from our time exploring music and the Shoah? (*NOTE:* Instructor might write down responses on white board or similar so everyone can see.)

Instructor should add to the responses any of the following:

- Artistic creation continued even in the dreadful circumstances of the Shoah (e.g. *“Buchenwaldlied,”* Klein’s *“Lullaby”* and/or *“String Trio”*)
- Music played a number of distinct roles during the Shoah
 - Music as resistance (Glick’s *“Zog Nit Keynmol”* and *“Shtil, Di Nacht”*)
 - Music as humor/satire to help cope (Hershkowitz’s *“Ikh Fur in Keltser Kant”* and Akselrod’s *“Baym Geto Toyer”* using Varshavsky’s well-known melody)
 - Music sometimes served to document events or serve as witness (*“Shtil, Di Nacht,”* Reich’s *Different Trains*)
 - Music for the sake of continuing to make music (Klein’s *“Lullaby”* and/or *“String Trio”*)
- Music was even a part of the experience of the camps, albeit in different ways
 - The holding of musical programs, etc., was a form of cultural and spiritual resistance
 - The oppressors forced inmates to play music even while the horror was going on around them (Reisz’ sketch, the case of Alma Rosé, Cohen’s *“Dance Me to the End of the World”*)
 - New music continued to be written (Klein’s *“Lullaby”* and/or *“String Trio”*)
 - Songs were sung, even when going to the gas chambers (*“Arboles Lloran Por Lluvias”*)
- Music forms an important part of our attempts to commemorate the Shoah (Glick’s *“Zog Nit Keynmol,”* Jagoda’s *“Adio Kerida,”* Reich’s *Different Trains*, Silver’s *To the Spirit Unconquered*)
- Music of the Shoah helps to create/maintain our collective memory (e.g. *“Zog Nit Keynmol,”* *“Arboles Lloran Por Lluvias,”* Jagoda’s *“Arvoliko”*)
- Music influenced by the Shoah often holds out the promise of a better world, offering hope and/or motivating action. (e.g. *“Zog Nit Keynmol,”* *“Shtil, Di Nakht,”* Silver’s *To the Spirit Unconquered*)
- Music and associated stories can often offer insight in a way that the study of general history simply cannot.

We have only scratched the surface of this material. There are a multitude of stories to be told; we hope this lesson has been a platform from which to begin your own musical exploration.

One area we have not discussed in depth is the use of Shoah-related music today. In addition to the music written, performed, and/or sung during the Shoah, much music has been written since, such as operas, folk songs, cantatas, choral works, orchestral works, and more. When should such music be used? To what ends? We do not have time to explore this fully, but let's take a moment for a pair share:

Pair share

- ❓ What role(s) do you think playing Shoah-associated music serves today?

After allowing 3-4 minutes for this, the instructor may wish to ask people to share an interesting idea that they heard from their pair share partner. If so, the instructor may wish to limit this to 2-3 comments.

As a final piece of musical storytelling and commemoration (as we experienced with “*Adio Kerida*”) we offer a work that you may already be familiar with. The “Theme from *Schindler's List*” (composed by [John Williams](#)) is a beautiful work composed for orchestra and violin, but is not directly connected to the experience of the Shoah in any way other than through popular culture. However, *Schindler's List* and the accompanying music have taken on greater significance in the Jewish community, highlighting just how powerful storytelling through music can be. Often, the theme is played in Reform and Conservative synagogues (worldwide) for Yizkor or other memorial services.

We will leave you with a fascinating and powerful performance of the work performed in the Dohany Street Synagogue in Budapest with thousands in attendance. Listeners should note the use of multiple organs in the accompaniment, referencing the early Reform services that would have taken place in the synagogue. Take note of the violinist's positioning in the synagogue; is he a violinist, or is he the Chazzan?

The [Dohany Street Synagogue](#), the largest synagogue in Europe, was bombed in 1939 by the Hungarian pro-Nazi Arrow Cross party. It suffered further damage from aerial bombardments. It was part of the ghetto; some 2,000 of those who died there are buried on synagogue grounds. Adolf Eichmann turned the synagogue into a concentration point from which to send Jews to the camps.

Play [“Theme from *Schindler's List*”](#) 

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שלום // See you at our next session.