

Jazz and Nazism

Music in The Terezin Concentration Camp



Entrance to Terezín (Also known as Theresienstadt)

Javier Gómez Guardiola

Contemporary Music History Clase

Escuela de Música Creativa, Madrid

May 2017

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY GOOGLE AND EDITED BY HUMAN

Index

1. Introduction
2. Jazz in pre-Nazi Europe
3. Jazz after the rise to power of Nazism
4. Jazz in occupied Paris
 - 4.1 Hot Club of France
 - 4.2 Clandestine activities
 - 4.3 The brothel of Nazi Europe
 - 4.4 The Zazús and French jazz
5. Music in the camp of Terezín
 - 5.1 An orchestra in the ghetto
 - 5.2 The myth of Terezín
6. Personal assessment
7. Bibliography

Introduction

The war introduced jazz to Europe. The American soldiers who fought in World War I brought their music to the old continent. Military units were often accompanied by bands, usually made up of blacks, who performed marches and ragtimes. Thanks to them, jazz arrived on European territory a few years late, but triumphantly. It is curious how, despite being a popular music of African-American origin, it immediately enjoyed the admiration of the wealthiest classes. Artists and intellectuals saw jazz as a sign of modernity. During the interwar period jazz enjoyed great popularity; as it became more danceable (the Swing Era) the halls and hotels of the big capitals surrendered to this style that resonated very deeply among European youth. Jazz connected with people, it was fun, but also freedom. In pre-Nazi Germany, jazz began to have detractors, and its' broadcasting was banned being considered "degenerate music." In this environment of censorship and prohibition, the artistic and musical activity that took place in the Terezín camp-ghetto stands out. A few

months ago I read the novel “The Prisoners of Paradise” by the composer and director Xavier Güell. This work tells about the lives of eminent musicians and artists held in this concentration camp located sixty kilometers from Prague. To extend its propaganda, the Nazi regime allowed numerous artistic and musical activities to take place in this camp: classical and jazz music concerts, theatrical and opera performances, cabaret shows that served not only as entertainment for the ghetto population but also as a sign of normality and dignity in an environment dominated by the terror of death.

The role of music not only as entertainment but as a manifestation of freedom in moments of great suffering is what prompted me to research this topic and choose it for this work on the History of Contemporary Music. I have consulted numerous Holocaust archives, press articles, several documentaries about Terezín, among which are the fragments of the film that was shot inside the camp as propaganda for the Nazi regime. I have included references to all of these documents and links for your reference.

Jazz in pre-Nazi Europe

European intellectuals of the first decades of the twentieth century, especially English and French, were the first to recognize the importance and the aesthetic qualities of that music that was generically called jazz. That is why it is not surprising that this new music was more widely accepted in Europe than in the United States. In Berlin, between the 1920s and 1930s, there were a large number of bars and clubs, in addition to the famous cabarets, where you could listen to jazz. The great Sidney Bechet,



SIDNEY BECHET

pioneer of the new music of New Orleans along with Louis Armstrong between the first and second decades of the century, and the first important saxophonist in the history of jazz, was precisely in the German capital between 1929 and 1931, playing in the evenings at the Wild-West-Bar in Berlin. Bechet recalled, years later, that at least six jazz bands took turns sharing the bill at the venue, which gives a rough idea of the intense jazz activity in the city. It is important to keep in mind that the European intellectual class considered jazz a genuine artistic expression, and that, at the same time, the great popular masses began to enjoy the new rhythms and new dancing possibilities that it offered. When talking about jazz in the 1930s, both in the United States and in Europe, we refer to the two predominant styles up until that time: “hot” music (Louis Armstrong, for example, and the followers of the New Orleans and of “Dixieland”) and Swing, represented mainly by the most famous “Big bands” of the time (Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Benny Goodman), much more commercial, with catchy melodies that are easy to sing and, therefore, more danceable. “Swing” in the 1930s became synonymous with jazz, and was the music almost exclusively played in dance halls. It was the music that the youth danced to, both in the United States and in Europe, with a “wild abandon” that Nazi totalitarianism was not willing to allow.

Jazz after the rise to power of Nazism

Hitler’s National Socialism conceived the idea of a “national community” or “community of the people” behind which the entire German nation should align itself. As a consequence, once in power, a rapid process of suppression and coordination of all political, social and cultural institutions began. To impose the official ideology through terror, Nazism monopolized all media such as the press, cinema and above all radio, thus reaching all cultural and artistic expressions, including music. In turn, the Ministry of Propaganda, led by Goebbels, established tight control of cultural activities in Germany through the Reich Chamber of Culture. Within this organization there was an exclusive department for



music, Reich Chamber of Music, whose mission was to preserve the purity of German music and distance it from the influences of modernism. Music has always had great importance for Germans; also for the Nazis, who in order to spread their propaganda, sought to appropriate the musical legacy of the classics and the romantics, and use it for their own benefit. It is clear that the Nazi vision of what was valid music for the formation of the “community of the people” had nothing to do with the true spirit of those musical movements. In that same Germany, just a few years before, atonal music had been born, and the classical composers were joined by great musicians of modernism: Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg, Paul Hindemith and Kurt Weill (who even began to incorporate jazz elements into his works).). However, after Hitler came to power, German musical culture was completely paralyzed: anything that *smelled* modern or innovative was totally contrary to the new ideology and had to be eradicated. Atonal music (which was identified as a symbol of disorder) and anything that did not conform to the canons of classical and romantic were prohibited. Apart from modernity, another factor that caused the exclusion of a certain type of music was the political or racial affiliation of its composer or singer: Jews, African Americans or sympathizers of Marxism. Composers such as Stravinsky, Hindemith, Schönber and Berg were banned and some of them had to leave Nazi Germany.



Regarding jazz and swing, given their African-American origins and the large number of Jewish performers as well as its’ sexual connotations, rebellion and musical freedom, they collided head-on with the ideology of the Nazi regime, which is why they tried to

manipulate public opinion against it, proclaiming things like: “...*the so-called Jazz should be devoid of those hysterical rhythms typical of barbarian races whose dark instincts could alienate the Germanic spirit, as well as of*

all those mutes that turn the noble sound of brass instruments into Judeo-Masonic howls...” Also the Nazi dictators saw dance as problematic, both musically and socially, something they could not neglect. From a musical point of view, the swing style was an attack on the ideal of Aryan supremacy, since it was considered a terrible mixture of Jewish ideas with the depraved and savage color of black music. In fact, jazz was called “black music” by the Nazis, and they could not tolerate the young people dancing to music that was considered degrading and without any aesthetic value. From a social point of view, jazz represented a true contradiction since the majority of young people who went to the dance halls belonged to the middle and upper-middle class and knew the choreographies of the dances (fox-trot, jitterbug, shimmys, charleston), as well as the lyrics in English of the songs they listened to. This was incompatible with the idea of a completely uniform and controlled “people’s community”, which should preferably gather around folk music that represented the “true German spirit.” To top it off, dancing was reprehensible because it was considered a means to sexual depravity.

Below I have included part of the official report about a festival in Hamburg in February 1940:

“...the dancers put on an unpleasant show. None of the couples danced normally; there was only swing, and of the worst kind. Sometimes two boys danced with a girl alone; several other couples formed a circle hugging, jumping, clapping their hands, even rubbing the backs of their heads against each other... When the band played a rumba, the dancers went into wild ecstasy. They all got together and sang the choruses in English. The band played increasingly violent numbers; none of the musicians were seated anymore, they all moved on stage compulsively, like wild animals...”

One of the things that most worried the Nazis regarding music



BENNY GOODMAN

was the success and popularity that Benny Goodman achieved in the 1930s, first in the United States and then internationally: he was called the “King of Swing.” and no one could compete with him for more than ten years. The big problem for the Nazis was Goodman’s Jewish origin. Born in 1909 into a family of Jewish immigrants in Chicago, Benjamin David Goodman took his first musical lessons in his neighborhood synagogue, and never hid his ancestry throughout his career. As if this were not enough, his arranger was a black bandleader- Fletcher Henderson- who brought “hot” music to Goodman’s swing, and his band also included white musicians, some of them Jewish like him, as well as black musicians.

Not only did *swing* pervert the purity of German youth, but also its’ greatest representative, who made the innocent boys dance with abandon, was a Jewish American, who got along well with blacks. This music could not be accepted, and at worst, if it could not be completely eliminated, its performance had to be rigorously regulated. The film *Swing Kids* directed in 1993 by Thomas Carter perfectly portrays the situation experienced by many young people for whom swing represented a way of rebelling against the Nazi regime and its prohibitions.



In an attempt to Germanize this musical genre, the Nazi government proclaimed a series of rules to which all jazz performers had to adhere. In the book *The Bass Saxophone* by Josef Skyorecky, the author recounts in the prologue his personal experiences under the Nazi invasion and includes, by

way of illustration, a page of rules that was sent to the musical groups of the time..

It is a historical document that explicitly represents the control that the Nazis intended to have over music...

- 1) The musical numbers with *fox trot* or *swing* rhythm should not exceed 20 percent of the repertoire of the orchestras of dance or light music.
- 2) Within the so-called jazz repertoire, preference will be given to musical pieces composed in a major mode and the lyrics should express happiness (*joie de vivre*) and not the pessimism of the Jewish style.
- 3) As far as the *tempo*, preference should be given to up tempo compositions instead of slow (so-called *Blues*); nevertheless the tempo should not exceed a certain level of *Alegro* in agreement with the aryan concept of discipline and moderation. The negro excesses of tempo (so-called *Hot Jazz*) will not be tolerated under any circumstance, including the solos (so-called *breaks*)
- 4) The so-called *Jazz* compositions can contain a maximum of 10 percent syncopations; the rest should be made up of natural movements of *Legato* without any of the hysterical rhythmic inflections (so-called *riffs*) that characterize the music of barbarians and give rise to dark instincts, foreign to the German people.
- 5) It is strictly forbidden to use musical instruments unagreeable to the German spirit (the so-called *cowbells, brushes, flexitone, etc.*), as well as mutes that convert the noble timbre of woodwinds and brass instruments into a Jewish/Masonic howl (the so called *wa-wa, hat, etc.*).
- 6) Also prohibited are the so-called *drum solos* when they exceed a decent tempo in 4/4 time (except in military marches of a specific style).

- 7) The contrabass will be played exclusively with the bow during the execution of so-called jazz compositions.
- 8) It is prohibited to articulate the strings of the instruments in such a way that is harmful to the concept of aryan musicality. In the case of the so-called *pizzicato* articulation being absolutely necessary due to the character of the work, it should be executed with utmost caution so that the strings do not come in contact with the sordina (instrument), something that is totally prohibited.
- 9) It is also prohibited for the musicians to make vocal improvisations (so-called *scat*).
- 10) It is recommended that all orchestras of dance and light music restrict the use of saxophones of any kind, and should substitute them with violoncellos, violas or the appropriate folkloric instruments.

Starting in 1938, some exhibitions called *Entartete Musik* opened in



Germany. The German term *entartete*, with its' origins in classical psychopathology, was coined in the field of psychoanalysis to refer to mental degeneration or illness. However, the Nazis used it to designate everything that did not follow the established aesthetic precepts of the Aryan race, that is, everything that was not German. Presenting it as a medical term, although totally distorted, gave the movement moral authority to achieve greater acceptance among the people. The most important *Entartete* exhibition was in Munich and the poster that announced it (image left)

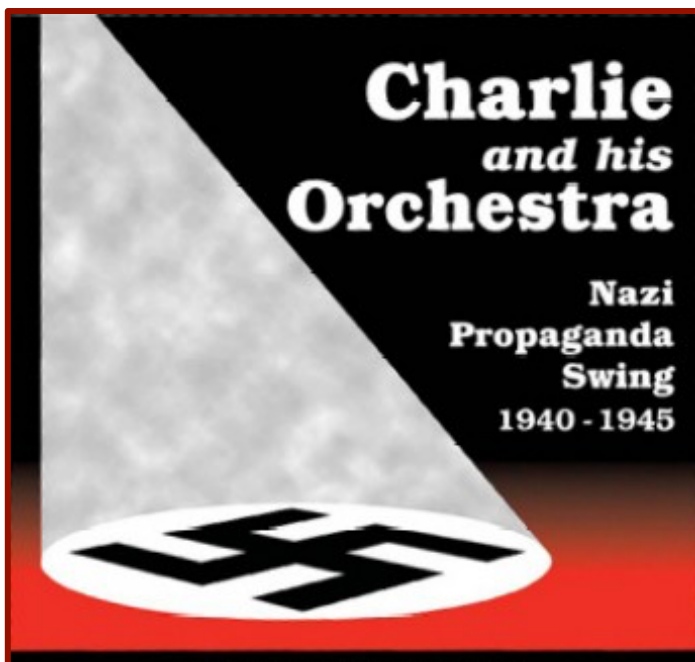
presents jazz as something primitive and dangerous through an unattractive character, black and with a Star of David on his jacket, who is playing a

saxophone, the most popular instrument in jazz. As I already mentioned in the introduction of the work, another of the measures that the Nazi leaders took, demonstrating their rejection of this type of music, was the prohibition of its' broadcast on the radio in 1935. This measure did not achieve success because jazz fans began to tune into foreign stations, especially the British BBC. In this way, in addition to listening to prohibited music, they could listen to news that was not the official news of the regime.

In 1942, Goebbels himself ended up passing a law prohibiting the entry into Germany of any record or sheet music from enemy countries. This measure was not easy to execute since many of those in charge of filtering said records and scores did not have sufficient knowledge to differentiate what was jazz and what was not. Furthermore, the black market worked wonderfully in those times so that (in small quantities) enough material entered Germany so that jazz and swing lovers could listen to music clandestinely, even if they risked being discovered and arrested.

As part of Nazi propaganda against the Allied forces, Goebbels, through the Propagandaministerium (Ministry of Propaganda), created a jazz group led by Karl "Charlie" Schwedler, which was called Charlie and his Orchestra. The group, through the rhythm of swing, interspersed anti-Jewish, anti-American or anti-English messages in the texts of their songs, sung in English, and broadcast on short and medium wave in Canada, the United States and Great Britain. Some of the band's hits, such as *You're driving me crazy* or *Slumming on Park Avenue (Let's go Bombing)*, were a satire of the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and portrayed him as an old man

who hid in cellars to protect himself from evil German bombings. The Hitler Youth organizations saw to it that the dance halls in which swing reigned were gradually replaced by meetings and dances of a completely folkloric nature, in harmony with the ideology of the



“national community.” Radio, so vital for the enormous diffusion that jazz had had in previous years, by express order of Joseph Goebbels completely stopped transmitting “that Judeo-Negroid music of North American capitalism, so unpleasant to the German soul” (his own words). Jazz gradually disappeared from public life, going underground- imitating the roots of jazz history- becoming one of the cultural symbols of the resistance, especially in occupied France. That is another much nobler story than the one I just told and it is the next point I am going to talk about.

Jazz in occupied Paris

As I mentioned in the introduction, the war introduced jazz to Europe. The American soldiers who fought in World War I brought their music with them. Artists and intellectuals saw jazz as a sign of modernity. At the beginning, England, France and Germany were the countries where it got popular the fastest. During the 1920s, Berlin became the European capital of jazz due to its intense nighttime activity in cabarets and dance halls. As I said before, the Wild-West-Bar programmed up to six jazz bands on the same night. In the 1930s that privilege corresponded to Paris. The musicians, writers and painters of Montparnasse came to the Bobino Club to see how the famous black dancer Josephine Baker undressed to the rhythm of the Charleston. Music halls, taverns, bistros and nightclubs went crazy with the black sounds coming from the other side of the Atlantic. Jazz benefited from literary movements and inspired poets and bohemians. The Montmartre district was known at that time as the “Harlem of Europe”. At the same time, in the interwar period, many North American musicians and small orchestras set out to conquer Europe. The arrival of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band caused a sensation in London in 1919. That same year, the Southern Syncopated Orchestra brought Sidney Bechet to Paris for the first time. It would be the beginning of a series of constant visits to the city. Other artists, fleeing Prohibition or attracted by money and fame, earned the respect of European listeners. Names like Louis Armstrong or Duke Ellington’s orchestra achieved great popularity in Europe during that time, even before

than in the United States. Furthermore, as jazz became more danceable, it connected with people even better; It was fun but also freedom.

Hot Club of France

In 1931, the Jazz Club Universitaire was born in Paris, which would later become the Hot Club de France, the first fan society created around jazz. Young French people gathered to listen to American recordings, discuss them, and form the first orchestras. The first jazz periodicals emerged in Paris. In 1934 the critic Hugues Panassié, president of the Hot Club, founded *Le Jazz Hot*, a magazine essential for the dissemination of jazz in Europe, which took the baton of the pioneering *La Revue du Jazz*, created in 1929.

The reviews and texts published in its' pages contributed to increasing the knowledge of jazz among European fans. But the importance of the Hot Club lies in the fact that it served as a dissemination platform for some informal jam sessions that took place at the Claridge Hotel in Paris. A violinist named Stephane Grappelli and a Belgian guitarist of gypsy origin



named Django Reinhardt played there. Their association gave rise in 1934 to the Quintette du Hot Club de France, a combination of swing and native rhythms (*gypsy-jazz*), which many authors consider the greatest European contribution to the history of jazz. The popularity of the quintet went beyond French borders and spread throughout Europe. However, its' rise was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. The

band had scheduled performances in England just as war was declared in September 1939. Grappelli stayed in London but Reinhart, who spoke no English, returned to the French capital. "Better to be afraid in your own country than in any other," he confessed. On June 14, 1940, the Nazis

occupied Paris. The city went dark, the huge red lights of the famous Moulin Rouge went out. The cabarets of Montmartre and Montparnasse lost their luster.

Clandestinity

This panorama did not facilitate the profession of a musician, especially jazz. In occupied Paris, many of them, especially African Americans, tried to flee. The luckiest remained hidden; others, mainly Jewish and Romani (gypsy) musicians, were persecuted and deported to concentration camps. We must not forget that the Nazis exterminated some six million Jews and more than 400,000 gypsies. There was a curfew. The city suffered constant blackouts. Jazz went underground. Dances, performances and fan meetings were held secretly for fear of Nazi repression.

One of the musicians who accompanied Django Reinhardt described the atmosphere of clandestine Paris like this: “After the patrol of Nazi officers passed and the ground was clear, we would clear the tables and the party would begin. As soon as the alarm went off we put the tables back in their place and everything went back to normal.” The Hot Club of France played a fundamental role in sheltering this clandestine action but had to change its headquarters from Rue Calais to a small hotel on Rue Chaptal. There, in the basements, discreet meetings took place aimed at maintaining the enthusiasm of young people for jazz but at the same time the place served as headquarters for members of the French resistance. For many, jazz was a means of escape, a symbol of the free world and of course a way to revolt against the Nazis. The journalist and musician Mike Zwerin (New York, 1930 – Paris, 2010) writes in his book *Swing under the Nazis-Jazz as a Metaphor for Freedom*, (Cooper Square press,2000): “Very rarely has art had such a direct effect on the lives of people like jazz had then, when it was a daily catharsis, a purifying release of tension...Jazz was loaded with drama, it was political dynamite, created with religious fervor.”

The brothel of Nazi Europe

Curiously, in Paris the Nazi authorities were more tolerant than in other places of the Reich. Not for love of culture. Their intention was to turn Paris into an immense entertainment area for soldiers and officers.

Once again Goebbels carried out his plan to transform the capital of France into a cheerful showcase of the new Europe. Around 125 cabarets and night clubs were reestablished after the occupation. In 1943 the burlesque club Abbaye, previously known for



parodying Hitler, opened under the name Le Chapiteau, a favorite meeting place for Gestapo officers. The Place Blanche, right in front of the Moulin Rouge, was now a café reserved exclusively for German soldiers. Theaters and cinemas also reopened, decorated with swastika flags, although not to show American Hollywood films, but German propaganda films.

SS commanders mixed with Parisians in the taverns of Pigalle or Montmartre, which recovered the activity of years before. One night they could hear Edith Piaf sing, the next rub shoulders with designer Coco Chanel. But they also listened to German jazz bands. One of the most recognized groups was Charlie and his Orchestra (previously mentioned) which had obtained permission from Goebbels to adapt lyrics and arrange popular jazz songs. Ludwig Lutz Templin, the band's leader and saxophonist, sang classics like St. Louis Blues with a strong German accent, in a style closer to symphonic swing than jazz. He recorded several albums under Nazi supervision, widely broadcast throughout his area of influence, and traveled through the occupied territories, where he collected jazz pieces to reconvert.



There were even great jazz fans among the Nazis. Luftwaffe (German air force) member Dietrich Schulz (left) nicknamed “Doktor Jazz” was a Nazi officer fond of Hot Club music who provided temporary shelters to Django Reinhardt during the occupation.

The Zazus and French Jazz

Despite all the efforts of Nazism to put an end to jazz or Germanize it, young Parisians continued to listen to the American original. These young people showed their discontent with the Nazi occupation and rebelled against what they considered a humiliation. It is the so-called zazú generation, something similar to what we understand today as an urban tribe: large checkered jackets, high-neck sweaters, tight pants, short skirts for them and a fundamental element, umbrellas. Through their English-influenced clothing, customs, and love of dancing, they expressed their discontent with Nazi restrictions. It was the first young movement that rose up against the regime, although they also rose up against the ultra-conservative Vichy government.

They used the term swing as something that fit their way of seeing the world. Everything had swing.

Furthermore, jazz was the center of the life of the Zazús, who saw in Django Reindhart an idol that personified their discomfort. By this time Django had founded the Nouveau Quintet of Paris and was regularly performing throughout the city. Some of his best-known compositions are from that time, such as Nuages. This popularity led some enthusiasts to try to convince



German officials that jazz was actually a French custom. They thought that by removing that American connotation they would avoid the Nazi ban. Some jazz standards were translated into French: *St. Louis Blues* became *Tristesses de St Louis*, or *I got rhythm* into *Agate Rythme*.

In October 1943 the Gestapo found the headquarters of the Hot Club. They took its president, Charles Delaunay, his secretary and the president of the Hot Club of Marseille as hostages. They were looking for the leader of the French resistance, although none of them were. Delaunay was released a month later but his companions were not so lucky. The last thing they saw was the gas chamber. On June 6, 1944, D-Day, the Allies landed in Normandy. Paris was free on August 25 of that same year. The Holocaust and racial extermination were over. It wouldn't take long for Django and Grappelli to reunite and go on massive tours accompanying Duke Ellington. North American artists also returned. Nazism was definitively defeated in 1945. The swing era would not last much longer. It seemed as if, having defeated its two great rivals (the Great Depression and Nazi-fascism), swing had largely lost its reason for being. Jazz, which from its beginnings was both a form of art and entertainment, began to deepen its artistic vein. Restless young people from swing orchestras, such as Charlie Parker or Dizzy Gillespie, would forge a new and revolutionary style, bebop, which laid the foundations of modern jazz: a music to listen to, rather than to dance to. A product for more sophisticated ears. Jazzmen more oriented towards entertainment, such as Louis Jordan, drifted towards other genres (such as rhythm and blues) that would form the basis of rock'n'roll.

Jazz was never as popular as when it confronted the swastika, but it continued to symbolize a multitude of democratizing struggles, such as that of African-American rights in the 1960s.

Music in the Terezín camp-ghetto

Despite all the obstacles and prohibitions imposed by the Nazis, jazz and swing as well as many other musical genres, continued to be heard and performed in all corners of occupied Europe, including the ghettos and concentration camps. In Perpignan, the first prison camp in France, the

Viennese Erich Pechmann, imprisoned for his Jewish origins, sang blues and imitated different instruments with his voice, which managed to raise the spirits of his companions. In Sachsenhausen a group of Czech students founded a vocal group, Sing Sing Boys, whose program included abundant jazz and swing songs.

But, without a doubt, the most striking case is that of the Terezín ghetto, in the former Czechoslovakia.

The Terezín ghetto located about 60 kilometers from Prague was established by the Nazis in October 1941 in the city and fortress that the Austrian Emperor Joseph II had built in the late 18th century to honor the memory of his mother, Empress Maria Theresa.

On November 24, 1941, the first group of Jews deported from Prague and its surroundings arrived in Terezín. In summer, thousands of German Jews arrive, mainly prominent personalities and numerous soldiers highly decorated by the German army for demonstrations of bravery and outstanding action during the First World War. Later, Jews from other countries arrived, including Holland and Denmark.

Between 1941 and 1945, some 140,000 Jews were deported to Terezín. Some 33,000 died there due to hunger and epidemics. Another 88,000 were sent to death camps such as Auschwitz and Treblinka. On May 9, 1945, the date of the liberation of the ghetto, some 19,000 had survived or been transferred to neutral countries. Of those sent to Auschwitz, about 3,000 returned alive. About 12,000 had remained in Terezín.

This citadel, originally built for the Austrian military and their families, (about 7,000 people in total) housed during the years of the Nazi regime an



average of almost 60,000 people at one time, in conditions of terrible overcrowding, hunger, epidemics, constant mistreatment and humiliation. The ghetto, or concentration camp of Terezín, was for the

TICKET FOR AN OPERA 21 OF APRIL 1945 IN THERESIENSTADT

Germans only a stage on the way to the “final solution”, that is, the elimination of all Jews. Their goal was to physically and mentally destroy the inmates. However, they failed in their attempt to break them spiritually. The Jewish prisoners, among whom were a large number of intellectuals and artists of the highest level, managed to overcome the humiliation. Facing daily threats of deportation and death, they found a way to create a clandestine system of schooling and organize higher education groups with forums on ethnography, psychology, sociology, politics, religion and even Zionism.

Between 1942 and 1944, 2,430 conferences on the most diverse topics were held in Terezín. In those years, the presence of distinguished scholars in all branches of knowledge is recorded: university professors, doctors, physicists, chemists, researchers, jurists, historians, philologists, rabbis... 520 of these personalities gave their lectures, usually clandestine, in the most incredible spaces: the sad barracks in which the inmates lived; in the attics and in other unimaginable places, before audiences who were eager to learn, ask, dialogue, debate and give their opinion.

In that same period, classical and jazz music concerts, theater and opera performances, cabaret shows and religious services were held, which served as spiritual and cultural nourishment, as well as entertainment, for the ghetto population. The presence in Terezín of important writers, poets, musicians, visual artists and scientists also left their marks in literary creations, musical scores, drawings and paintings, which reflected the daily life of the inmates and their desires for freedom and a better future. Perhaps the most precious legacy of Terezín is the collection of children’s paintings, a work of art that is a testament to the courage of the children and their teachers, who continued to live, teach, paint, learn and have hope, despite the constant fear of a violent death.

Many of these creations disappeared with their victims. Many others survived the disaster and constitute a document of incalculable value, of the enormous strength, the creative capacity and fortitude of their authors.

Initially the Nazi authorities had prohibited all such activities. Later they not only allowed them but encouraged them, in order to use them for

propaganda. In December 1943, the so-called “city beautification” (Stadtverschönerung) was ordered. The objective was to present Terezín to the world as a model of Jewish settlement. To prepare the visit of a delegation of the International Red Cross, the Nazis spent seven months giving the citadel a clean and pleasant appearance, building sets that simulated the fronts of cafes, theaters, banks and hospitals, and trained the inmates by showing them the comments and reports that they had to give to visitors. The time and effort put into this deception was successful, as in the summer of 1944 Terezín was presented to a visiting Red Cross commission as a Jewish welfare city and rich in cultural life. The inmates played Verdi’s Requiem and Krása’s children’s opera Brundibár. The commission could even hear sounds of illegal jazz coming from the group Ghetto Swingers.

They even made a propaganda film about the idyllic life of its inhabitants, titled *The Führer Gives a City to the Jews*. (They entrusted this task to the well-known actor and filmmaker Kurt Gerron, born in 1897, deported to Terezín in 1943. He was sent to Auschwitz in 1944 once his task was completed, accompanied by most of his thousands of “actors”). This film was to be exhibited in neutral countries by the Red Cross and the Vatican. After the German defeat in 1945, the film and its copies were destroyed in order to hide the truth, with some fragments surviving that are included in this link: <https://youtu.be/P9V6d2Y1WjE?si=Qp3IsXpYzCpRWq9V>

Many books have been written about this ghetto and the daily and cultural life of its prisoners. There are also countless testimonies and extensive documentation that can be consulted in archives and museums, mainly in Terezín itself, in Israel, the United States, Great Britain and other countries.

In no European capital was there ever, during the same period, between the years 1942 to 1944, such a varied and intense cultural life. Although there were many graphic artists, playwrights, painters and actors who left their mark on this place, I am going to focus on the musicians who developed their creativity and found in music a way to move forward despite the terrible circumstances that surrounded them.

Musical life in Terezín was as intense as that of a much larger city, both in terms of the level and breadth of its offerings. Various choirs, cabaret

groups, classical and popular orchestras were formed, music criticism was written, musical education was provided, and a “Studio of Modern Music” was created led by Viktor Ullmann, undoubtedly the most eminent musician of the time. You could hear not only chamber and symphonic works by Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Janáček or Suk, but also operas such as Carmen or Tosca. If someone got a clearance note, rarely granted, they could spend two hours in the cafeteria that opened on December 8, 1942 and could listen to swing and popular music. Furthermore, in Terezín, new musical pieces in the most varied styles were composed and premiered. To carry out these functions the composers had an incredibly large pool of potential artists. This was due to the fact that many closeted performers wanted to continue their previous activities to preserve their musical identity. The stars involved were released from their forced labor duties for being part of the *Division Recreation* (Freizeitgestaltung).

In the following link you can listen to fragments of some of the works created by the most illustrious musicians imprisoned in Theresienstadt:

<https://www.senalmemoria.co/articulos/las-victimas-musicales-del-nazism>.



VIKTOR ULLMAN

The large number of musicians imprisoned in Terezín is striking and even incredible.

Among the most notable composers are Pavel Haas (1899-1944), Gideon Klein (1919-1945), Hans Krasa (1899-1944) and Viktor Ullmann (1898-1944). But there were also many other musicians (the list is very long) who were also pianists, violinists, singers, orchestra conductors and pedagogues.

Viktor Ullman’s musical production before being deported is enormous. Much of it has come down to us and is appreciated even today, especially by scholars. But there is no doubt that his best-known composition is the opera

The Emperor of Atlantis or The Rejection of Death, a work that breathes echoes of Weill, Hindemith and Viennese Expressionism and is considered his philosophical and musical testament. This composer born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a disciple of Arnold Schönberg and later Zemlinsky's assistant in Prague, would see his career as a composer cut short due to the tragedy of the Holocaust.

The plot is a grotesque portrait of a tyrant (in which many saw a caricature of the Nazi dictator) who forces humanity to consent to a terrible massacre while Death prevents the wounded from dying. The planned premiere in the field was prohibited, despite the fact that the production was practically ready to go on stage.

The Emperor of Atlantis was written in Terezín in 1943. It was rehearsed there, in precarious and dangerous conditions, with the participation of some of the most prominent European artists of the time, imprisoned like its authors for being Jews. On October 16, 1944, the authors and most of the performers were sent to Auschwitz.

For many years the score and libretto had been considered lost.



THE EMPEROR OF ATLANTIS (TEATRO REAL MADRID)

friend of Ullmann.

In 1947, when Adler emigrated to England, he took the scores to London. There, thirty years later, the musician Kerry Woodward reconstructed the musical material, and the opera, under his direction, was finally premiered in Amsterdam in 1975.

But the composer, before leaving for Auschwitz, had entrusted his compositions to his friend, Dr. Emil Utitz, founder and director of the Terezín library and archive. Once the ghetto was liberated, Utitz entrusted his works to Dr. Hans G. Adler, a

From that date on, *The Emperor of Atlantis* has toured the world's stages. In 1978 it was presented for the first time in Israel. Last year it premiered at the Teatro Real in Madrid.

An orchestra in the ghetto

It is important to mention those musicians who set themselves the task of distracting and entertaining their listeners with less pretentious compositions, among them two jazz groups: the Ghetto Swingers, led by pianist Martin Roman (1913-1996) and the Jazz-Quintet -Weiss, headed by the famous clarinetist and saxophonist Fritz Weiss (1919-1944).

Eric Vogel was a Czechoslovakian Jew who played trumpet in a Dixieland combo. (He had one of the largest collections of jazz records in the country.

In 1939, after the German invasion, he lost his job as an engineer and had a yellow star placed on his lapel. When the Nazis confiscated the Jews' musical instruments, he dipped the pistons of his trumpet in sulfuric acid to prevent anyone from playing military marches with it. In 1942, he was transferred to the Terezín concentration camp. In the barracks he met several jazz musicians from Prague. They wanted to play but they had no instruments, until they discovered a battered piano in an attic and managed to smuggle some brass instruments. They began to rehearse secretly, muffling the sound so as not to be heard.

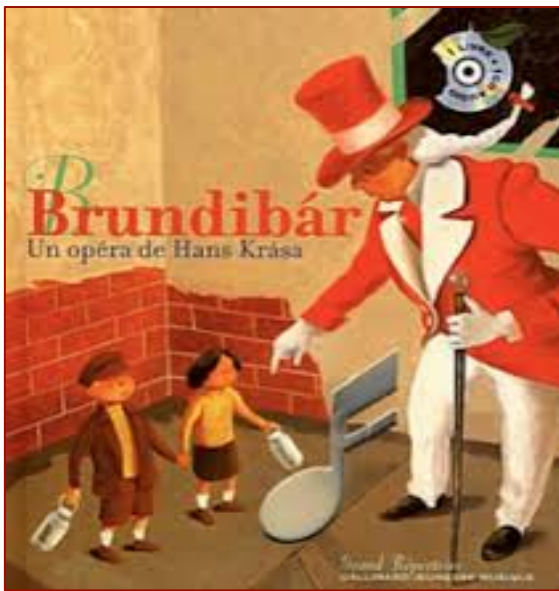


Before the visit of the Red Cross commission, the Terezín authorities gave Vogel permission to found a jazz orchestra. They called themselves the *Ghetto Swingers*: “We were pretty good. We played with swing and feeling, mainly following the style of Benny Goodman”...as he fondly remembers the clarinetist Fritz Weiss, without a doubt one of the best jazz musicians of

interwar Europe. As soon as the Red Cross left the camp, the *Ghetto Swingers* were sent to Auschwitz. Weiss was gassed upon arrival. In 1997, after 50 years of silence, the great guitarist Coco Schumann published his autobiography in which he says that he was one of the members of the *Ghetto Swingers* and recounts the details of his stay in Terezín and Auschwitz.

The myth of Terezín

Continuing with the cultural life of the Ghetto, it is important to note that the artistic activities of Terezín did not only serve as propaganda or as an end in themselves. With the performances in nursing homes and hospices, with their training of newly arrived artists, and especially in the effort and



enthusiasm put into *Brundibár* (image left), a children's opera by Hans Krása, (in which a large part of the children held in Terezín actively participated and which was performed 55 times), the solidarity of the musicians with their fellow prisoners and also the educational, cultural and psychological mission of the music of Terezín is evident. Music became a means to preserve the identity of both musicians and listeners. Music also served to promote survival and gave hope for a better world. In the camp, interest in music was evidenced by the fact that they frequently had to repeat performances and had to hand in

tickets. Precisely because of the extreme situation of the camp and the possibility of death, the interest in music in Terezín underlines the metaphysical content of art.

Terezín was not an oasis of Jewish culture despite its musical diversity. Although gathering instruments, sheet music and paper or organizing rehearsals and performances was easier here than in other fields (since composing music was officially permitted) even in this "model field" there were limitations. Like their fellow prisoners, the musicians were hungry, at risk from disease outbreaks, and threatened by deportations.

Some artists were victims of the “model ghetto” illusion. The world they created through art made it difficult for them to be aware of their role as instruments of propaganda. An example was the jazz musician Eric Vogel: “Those of us who were musicians did not think that our oppressors saw us only as tools in their hands. We were obsessed with music and were happy to be able to play our beloved jazz. We were content with this dream world that the Germans were producing for their propaganda.”

Terezín historian and survivor Miroslav Kárný has stated that “the great musical and cultural life affected the internal life of the camp only minimally and temporarily. Along with its political and propaganda work, Terezín also served as a collection point where some 33,500 people died of hunger, disease, and mental and physical exhaustion. It also served as a temporary stop on the way to the death camps, mainly Auschwitz-Birkenau, where around 84,000 men, women and children were murdered after being dragged from Terezín.

According to historian Wolfgang Benz, a “Terezín myth” was created through the many commemorative concerts and performances of the “Terezín Music”. This myth carries with it the enormous danger of “idealizing the historic place” and the terrible living conditions in the camp. For this reason, it is important to keep in mind that compared to other concentration camps, Terezín, precisely because of its special function and history, had more favorable conditions for cultural production.

A hundred-person unit of the protectorate police functioned as external guard. In contrast to members of the SS, most Czech police officers behaved respectfully towards prisoners. Sometimes there was even contact with Prague, which also included the exchange of musical scores, for example. The internal activities of the camp were supervised by the “ghetto police”, which was made up of the inmates. For this reason, the SS were not very well represented within the camp. As a result, the freedom to compose music was much greater there than in most camps, and resorting to illegality was almost unnecessary. However, this does not mean that they could always play music without external coercion or limitation.

Despite the cultural activity that took place, we must not forget that life in Terezín, as in other Nazi internment centers, was characterized by totally inhumane living conditions: hunger, epidemics, diseases and death were omnipresent. The medical and hygienic conditions were absolutely inadequate, and the homes were overcrowded. Anxiety was omnipresent and the impending fate of the prisoners remained totally uncertain. In Terezín, of a total of 141,000 inmates, only 23,000 lived to see the end of the war.

Personal assessment

After doing this work I am even more convinced of the liberating power of music. I believe that what drove so many musicians to continue creating and performing in terrible circumstances was nothing other than the love for life and the passion for music, which in the end was what kept their dignity and humanity intact. It is true that they were used for propaganda purposes but what was truly important was that they maintained a certain “normality” in the lives of thousands of children and prisoners who found in music an escape from so much horror. They were able to *create* in the midst of so much destruction. On the other hand, it is interesting to see how music can become an ally or enemy of different social and political movements. Its power to unite people from very different backgrounds, whether social, political or religious, has been and is still considered a danger for many dictatorships (Argentina 1976 and Spain during the Franco regime, to name two examples). To this day, music continues to be persecuted and banned in certain countries. A very current example is the *Songhoy blues*, a group from northern Mali that had to flee their country since a “sharia” strictly prohibited playing or listening to music. This group is one of the protagonists of the documentary *They will have to kill us first*.

I would like to finish this assessment with the words of Garba, guitarist of this group: “Life is not possible without music. We know other things where they come from, but it is impossible to go back to the origin of music....Man and music have to be together.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “Los prisioneros del paraíso” Xavier Güell. Editorial Galaxia Gutenberg, 2017
- Fragments of the film “The Führer gives the jews a city”
<https://youtu.be/P9V6d2Y1WjE?si=0eNGsniVRsWlhihf>
- holocaustmusic.ort.org/es/places/theresienstadt/
- Film “Swing kids”, director: Thomas Carter / Produced by: Buena Vista /1993
- www.senalmemoria.co/articulos/las-victimas-musicales-del-nazismo
- www.jewishbookcouncil.org/book/the-ghetto-swinger
- www.abc.es/cultura/20150818/abci-campo-nazi-cruz-roja-201508122201.html
- Huffpost “The Ghetto Swinger: The Incredible Story of Jazz Star Coco Schumann Who Played in Auschwitz For His Life” by Michaela Haas 01/12/2016
- miguelbronfman.homestead.com/ALEMANIANAZI.html