About Violins of Hope

Violins of Hope is a project of concerts, an exhibition of more than 70 instruments and their individual stories, and educational programming based around a private collection of violins, violas, and cellos—all collected since the end of World War II. Many of the instruments belonged to Jews before and during the war. Many were donated by or bought from survivors; some arrived through family members and many simply carry Stars of David as a decoration.

Israeli luthier Amnon Weinstein is the founder of Violins of Hope and restored these instruments. He and his son Avshalom, also a violin maker, own this collection. They have dedicated their expertise and endless love to ensure that these instruments, most of which are not professional-quality, get a beautiful make-over. Amnon died on March 4, 2024 in Tel Aviv. He was 84.

While the provenances of these instruments are not always clear, they are symbols of Klezmer and other Jewish traditions that were all but completely destroyed during the Holocaust. The Nazis confiscated many thousands of instruments from Jews all over Europe.

The stories behind these violins are powerful. Some belonged to Jews who carried them in suitcases to concentration camps, and who were then forced to play them in orchestras as prisoners marched to the gas chambers. Others were played to pass the time in Jewish ghettos. One was tossed from a train to a railway worker by a man who knew his fate.

Violins of Hope concerts represent the victory of the human spirit over evil and hatred. Violins of Hope is not only a memorial to lost culture and people, it is also an educational act that reaches audiences from young students to adults wherever these concerts are performed. In recent years some of the world's most celebrated orchestras have held Violins of Hope concerts including the Berlin Philharmonic and the Cleveland Orchestra, among many others.

Today in Oberlin there are three violins on display outside the Conservatory Library, in addition to the Ole Dahl violin on which Professor Bernhardsson is performing during the Holocaust Remembrance Day program in Warner Concert Hall.

Violins of Hope at Oberlin

DAHL VIOLIN

(Used on stage for the performance)

Ole Stedden Dahl was a violin maker. His violin was an early Hopf from the late 18th or early 19th century. Ole was born in 1919 in Copenhagen, Denmark and died in 2004. He learned the luthier's art as an apprentice in the late 1930s at a venerable firm in Copenhagen, Emil Hjorth and Sons.

When Germany invaded Denmark on April 9, 1940, Ole's music-filled life changed in an instant. He joined the Danish Navy and, along with all other Danish military personnel, were interned by the Germans. Like many young Danes, Ole made the brave decision to join the Danish Resistance, secretly fighting against the Nazis. He exchanged the peacetime tools of a gentle violin maker for the material tools of a war-time saboteur. The comforting smells of rosin and freshly carved wood were replaced by odors of gun oil and explosives.

Throughout the occupation, Ole must have taken solace in his first love, classical music. This violin served as a touchstone, a way for Ole to recapture the beauty of life in the harmonies of Vivaldi, the

precision of Bach, and the melodies of Mozart. He could pick up his instrument and forget about the dangers of everyday existence, lost in music, only facing reality when his resistance group planned their next missions.

His childhood home, a rambling old house north of Copenhagen in bucolic Esbønderup, was used to hide Danish Jews escaping the Nazis, and Ole's younger brother felt that Ole secretly helped transport Jews across the water to freedom in Sweden. Ole's new life in the Resistance was dangerous. Nazis caught and executed Resistance fighters. He and his group, Korps Agesin, participated in blowing up train tracks to impede German supply lines and they carried out other acts to make the invaders' lives difficult. The Resistance group he served in was a "Stodtroppen," a small, elite, and well-trained unit. Ole is listed in the database of Resistance personnel maintained by the Danish Resistance Museum in Copenhagen, but little is known about the specific sabotage actions his group carried out.

This violin survived World War II, and so did Ole. When Denmark was liberated, he joined the British army, serving as a Trooper in a royal Tank Regiment. In England, he met Diana Parry, who was serving in the ATS, a women's branch of the British Army. They married when their service was completed in 1947, after a romance largely carried on by mail. They left war-torn Europe behind and emigrated to America.

By 1950, Ole was working as a violin maker with Lyon & Healy in Chicago and he then signed on with Kenneth Warren & Sons. He always kept his violin and played in string quartets for many years with friends. At the urging of cellist Janos Starker and violinist Josef Gingold, Ole opened his own shop in Bloomington, Indiana in the 1960s and operated it successfully there until he retired, repairing the instruments of his many clients at the Indiana University School of Music.

He never talked about his time in the Danish Resistance, preferring to keep his experiences to himself.

The violin was donated to Violin of Hope by Christian and Peter Dahl.

Violin Display

(Display case outside the Conservatory Library)

VANDERVEEN VIOLIN

Joyce Vanderveen was a prima ballerina, violinist, painter and author (1927-2008). She was born and lived in Amsterdam in the early part of her life. Her Dutch parents were poor, but talented. My grandmother, Rachel, was a Jewish seamstress and quite deaf. She was banished from her family for marrying my grandfather, Jan, an orphan–a non-Jew, who was a sculptor and master craftsman.

From an early age, aside from being a straight "A" student, my mother Joyce showed signs of being a child prodigy in the arts. She became known in the neighborhood since she danced and played the violin in all the local festivals. She was so good that she conducted the children's orchestra at the age of 9.

The second hand violin was a gift from my grandfather, who chose the instrument for her for three reasons:

It was small, and my mother was very petite.

It was elegant

The color of the wood matched her complexion–that of a redhead.

Being a sculptor and artist, he would be aware of such things.

The violin itself is a French Mirecourt, circa 1920, labeled Al Segno del Aquila near Motegalio. The violin is in excellent condition, according to Robert Cauer, violin maker and dealer. There is another label under the visible label, which is unreadable.

When the Nazis invaded Holland in 1940, my mother was barely 13 years old. Much of my mother's memories of the war remain unknown to me. She barely spoke about it. What I do know is this:

The Nazis raided their home in the middle of the night and captured my grandmother, who was taken to Westerbork transit camp. She was finally able to escape.

Joyce continued her ballet and violin lessons until forced to flee Amsterdam. She always took the same route home, and one day after her violin lesson, one of the shopkeepers grabbed her and told her to RUN in the opposite direction. The Nazis were rounding up Jews in the next street and shooting them.

Finally, faced with starvation, my mother, her sister, and my grandmother rode on two bicycles with no tires to the remote reaches of northern Holland to hide and find food. The one possession she took with her was her violin.

They found refuge with three impoverished farm families. My mother was bone thin, covered in boils (there was no hygiene, no soap, no food), and

suffered from scarlet fever. But she survived, along with her mother and sister. They later reunited with my grandfather.

The rest of her family was murdered by the Nazis.

After the war, my mother continued her great love of dancing. She became the star of the Royal Netherlands Ballet. Later she went to Paris, where she joined the Grand Ballet du Marquis de Cuevas, better known as the Monte Carlo Ballet. She toured 19 countries and performed before the crowned heads of Europe as a Prima Ballerina. She often worked with conductors and maestros, and was tenacious about dancing "on the music."

Back in Paris, she was seen by a member of the Kennedy family, who arranged for her to come to America. She received a special artist's visa, signed by Senator John F. Kennedy, for what she could contribute artistically to the American public. She took this privilege very seriously, and did so for the rest of her life.

Based on her performance on the General Electric Hour on television, she was offered a movie contract with Universal Pictures, where she met the love of her life (and my father), Louis Blaine, head of International Press and Publicity for the studio. She proceeded to do many television shows and several movies, including *The Ten Commandments.*

In 1997 she received a surprising call from one of her childhood friends who also survived the war, and went on to become a professor in Portland. She was writing an article on Anne Frank, and had visited the hiding place, now the famous museum. She declared, "Your picture is on the wall above Anne Frank's bed!" The curator came running, having finally identified the mystery girl in the picture after so many decades. My mother had never gone to the museum. She had said, "I want everyone in the world to go. I don't need to go because I lived it."

Her picture on Anne's wall remains there today—a carefree, happy image of a young girl Anne had cut out of a magazine. Joyce wound up doing a taped interview while in Amsterdam, in the room with her picture, which remains in the Anne Frank archive.

After she retired from performing, Joyce devoted her life to training professional dancers, which she did for over 25 years. One in particular became her prodigy, an 11-year-old boy from Russia named Ilya Burkov. He thrived under her tutelage, winning dance scholarships and performing in local dance productions.

Ilya needed an instrument for music lessons, so Joyce loaned him her violin. When he and his parents were forced back to Russia, Ilya returned the violin, where it remained under her bed for 19 years. It was not played again.

Years later, in 2021, Dr. Noreen Green, maestra of the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony, told me about the amazing organization based in Tel Aviv that restores violins of Holocaust victims and survivors, and tours the world, educating and playing the instruments with world class musicians. I told her I thought my mother's violin might be a part of it. This started me on a journey to research the story about the violin. I was catapulted into a search for Ilya, who I located in London, and learned some of the mystery of the violin. Because of him and Maestra Green and her resources, I know now about the violin's past and how my mother came to own and play it.

I have wonderful memories of my mother playing classical music on the PIANO. I never heard her play the violin. I know now the reason is that it reminded her of the horrific war years.

So now the beautiful violin has a remarkable opportunity after its many journeys, and the deserved rest under the bed. In October of 2021, Maestra Green and I traveled to Washington DC as guests of the King of the Netherlands Embassy. Amnon Weinstein, the restorer, was being recognized for

his work by the Anne Frank Special Recognition Award. His son, Avshi Weinstein was present to accept the award, and I was able to formally donate my mother's violin in a ceremony at the Library of Congress. It was a most humbling and proud honor.

EISENBERG VIOLIN

In my eyes, as with many young boys, my father **Alfred Eisenberg** was always larger than life. His was a veritable Horatio Alger story: coming to America with nothing, working for a small paper company, then starting his own successful large distribution company which became a well-known and respected multimillion dollar corporation. His success allowed him to realize the American dream, which he did to the fullest extent possible.

His European flair and Viennese pride served him well socially and the pictures he showed us and the stories he told were of an athletic self-confident young man. He was now enjoying living his new life in the early years after the war.

It wasn't until I was much older that I began to realize the man that my father was in those early pictures, and the mountains of pain and loss that the walls of success and charisma were protecting.

My father was born in Vienna in 1920, first son of Samuel (known as Jacques) and Leopoldine Amster Eisenberg. Jacques, though a naturalized citizen of Austria, was born in Poland, while Alfred, Leopoldine and Alfred's brother, Henry, were born in Austria.

Though I'm not exactly sure of the details, Alfred's grandfather was a violinist back in Poland and although Alfred's father never played, he took to the instrument quite early. The photos shown date back to 1925 when he was only five years old. Alfred became accomplished at a very young age and was performing concerts all through his younger years, a photo of which is shown from 1935 at the age of 15.

His father owned a furniture store and I'm told was a bit of a wheeler dealer but was always able to provide well for the family, and it was always a surprise at the end of each week as to what he would bring home for dinner on Shabbat.

The situation in Vienna was getting increasingly tense in the early-mid 1930's but I can only surmise that disbelief overpowered reason. In the mid-30's, Alfred and Henry were coming home from school by bus and a group of Brown Shirts accosted them yelling, "dirty Jews on the bus!" My father's pocket knife was stolen and used to stab him in the leg while he and his brother were called "Dirty Jews" and chased off the bus. The reality of the situation became dire, and then on November 9, 1938 the utter destruction of their neighborhood finally gave them the impetus to leave their home.

The Eisenberg's, the Amster's and other family members began scrambling for transport documents and it wasn't until late 1939 that they began to trickle out of Austria to family or sponsors in England. In the early fall of 1939, Germany invaded Poland and at the same time all Jewish travel documents that showed "of Polish birth" were canceled. Immediately all naturalized Polish citizens were detained and their travel documents revoked.

For many weeks my father, uncle and grandmother were detained in a "transfer camp" and were now separated from the dozens of other family relatives that had not been born in Austria as they had. The stories were starting to travel about the building of the 'work' camps and separation of families and the trio was told to leave all of their possessions other than what they could carry. My grandmother carried her silver Shabbat candlesticks hidden in her coat, and my father, who had preceded my grandmother and uncle in their exile to England, had his inexpensive but third generation Czech violin and his and his father's tefillin. (His father joined them in America the following year.)

They then took a train to Holland, and then a ship to England to meet my father. The three stayed in England until 1939, living with relatives who had left Europe a few years earlier, having seen what was on the horizon in Europe. My uncle continued his schooling and my father found what work he could to help with the family needs.

On February 5, 1939, the three sailed from Southampton to America on the SS Westernland. They entered NY through Ellis Island and headed to Brooklyn NY to live with relatives temporarily. Shortly thereafter, the United States did a number of things for my father. He was made a naturalized citizen, was drafted into the army, and was given a driver's license. He first went to Camp Pickett, and then on to Camp Ritchie, on secret orders.

Camp Ritchie was just evolving into the now famed Military Intelligence Service. The "Ritchie Boys" consisted of approximately 20,000 servicemen, about 14% of them Jewish refugees born in Germany and Austria. Most of the men sent to Camp Ritchie for training were assigned there because of their fluency in German, French, Italian, Polish, or other languages needed by the Army.

At Camp Ritchie, Alfred was taught interrogation techniques and spy craft to be trained with the intent of sending him back to Europe to interpret for the Allies or Spy on the Germans. About the same time German POWs began to be returned to the States in droves. The Americans realized that the General

Staff was often masquerading as enlisted men to avoid interrogation. The Senior Staff decided to take Alfred and his friend Eddie and dress them as German officers and have them mingle with the captured POWs, which allowed them to remain in the US.

Apparently, this was so successful that one of the camp colonels arranged a band for the camp commander composed solely of this small group of interrogators. As there were no stringed instruments in a marching band, my father learned to play the snare drum, but in his off hours, when he returned to Brooklyn on leave, the violin always came out.

My father barely talked about the war, though there were a few stories of kangaroo courts and shootings of SS soldiers by guards who were identified as soldiers that had killed family members, and quite a bit of payback from the Camp Ritchie soldiers from time to time. When he was finally discharged in 1945, he went to work for the Paul Bine Paper Company and then started his own company Canover Paper Company in Long Island City, NY in 1949. One of his first projects at that time was to become party to a class action lawsuit against the Austrian government for what was to become a 60 year lawsuit settling a few years after his passing.

All through my childhood my father played...all the classics, Strauss, Rachmaninoff, Gypsy music, *Dark Eyes*, a favorite. He played at parties, at people's homes and when entertaining, the violin was always played, sometimes with our cousin who was a concert pianist. We traveled to the Red Tulip in NYC, his favorite restaurant, so he could play with the Hungarian Gypsy violinists. The violin was part of his soul. Although my siblings and subsequent children are all very musical, the violin was always Alfred's alone. I only recall touching it once when I was 5 and apparently my mother took a picture of it!

My father played with a beauty and a sadness that only now in my memories can I appreciate. It captured his life, his lost childhood and the horrors of all the family members left behind, murdered in the Holocaust, and buried in Austria and Poland.

In 2008 the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism closed the class action suit, and in addition to a precise actuarial value of life cataloging all my family members that were slaughtered in Europe, gave us a few thousand dollars as compensation for the horrors our family endured...never a better example of adding insult to injury.

My father passed away in 2004 and his violin found a home under my piano.

My family couldn't be more pleased that the violin's new resting place will be with the Violins of Hope. It could never do the story justice sitting under my piano, when it can sing the story to the world in such illustrious company.

SMALL VIOLIN

This ¾-sized violin would commonly be played by a child.