

# THE HOLOCAUST

**Purpose : make links between works of art and primary sources**

**A SURVIVOR FROM WARSAW by Schoenberg (enregistrement Deutsche Grammophon, 1994 par le Wiener Philharmoniker Orchestra dirigé par Claudio Abbado)**

## **Introduction :**

The text for *A Survivor from Warsaw* op.46 was written in 1947 by Schoenberg himself. It is based partly on accounts which came to him "at first or second hand" of the Nazis' treatment of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. It draws on the truth that in the extreme adversity, human beings are able to fall back on apparently forgotten songs and prayers : as they are led to the gas chambers, the Jews burst into the Shema Yisroel, the command to love God.

The story is told by a speaker, and takes the form of a traumatic re-enactment, half-forgotten on the one hand, vividly recollected on the other. After a short musical and textual introduction, the main narrative starts (from "The day began as usual"). It draws strong contrasts between the brutal screaming of the sergeant and the suffering of his victims, and between the painfully slow movement of the Jews at the beginning and their final « stampede » like "wild horses". Obsessively pervading the score is the reveille motif of the trumpet. At the climax, the Shema Yisroel is sung, not to any traditional melody, but to a twelve-note line supported by a fraught orchestral texture. The juxtaposition of speech and song, with the English ceding here to the Hebrew, recalls Schoenberg's opera *Moses and Aron* (1932), just as the volatile instrumentation goes back to the Five Orchestral Pieces and beyond. But the effect of *A Survivor* is unprecedented. In the whole history of music, there can be nothing to match the overwhelming, almost unbearable immediacy of the seven harrowing minutes.

NB.this introduction is an extract of the leaflet which accompanies the CD ; it has been written by Christopher Wintle.

## **Script**

### NARRATOR

I cannot remember everything. I must have been unconscious most of the time. I remember only the grandiose moment when they all *started* to sing, as if *prearranged*. the old prayer they had neglected *for so many years* - the *forgotten* creed ! But I have no recollection how I got *underground* to live in the sewers of Warsaw for *so long time*.

The day *began* as usual : Reveille when it still was dark. Get out ! Whether you slept or whether worries kept you awake the whole night. You had been *separated* from your *children* from your wife, from your parents, you don't *know what happened*, to them - how could you sleep?

The trumpets again - Get out ! The sergeant will be *furios* !

They came out ; some very slowly : the old ones, the sick ones, some with nervous agility. They *fear the sergeant*. They hurry as much as they can ; ; In vain ! Much too much *noise*, much too much *commotion* and not fast enough! The *Feldwebel* shouts : *Achtung ! Stilljestanden ! Na wirds mal ? Oder soll ich mit dem Jewerkolben nachhelfen ? Na jutt ; wenn ihr durch aus haben wollt ! "*

The sergeant shouts :

"Attention ! Silence! Are you ready. then, or do you need the help of my rifle butt? All right, then, if you really want it!") The sergeant and his subordinates hit everyone : young or old, strong or sick , guilty or innocent. It was painful to hear them *groaning* and *moaning* I heard it though I had been *hit very hard* ,so hard that I could not help falling down. We all on the ground who could not

stand up were then *beaten* over the *head*.

I must have been *unconscious*. The next thing I heard was a soldier saying:

"*They are all dead* »

whereupon. the sergeant ordered to do away with us. There I lay aside - half-conscious. It had become very still - fear and pain. Then I *heard* . the sergeant *shouting* : « Abzählen !("Countoff.")

They started *slowly* and *irregularly* : one, two three, four –

"*Achtung !* the sergeant shouted again, "*Rascher! Nochmal von vorn anfangen ! In einer Minute will ich wissen, wieviele ich zur Gaskammer ablieferere. !Abzählen !*

("Attention !" the sergeant shouted again "Faster ! Start over ! In a minute I want to know how many of them I am delivering to the gas chamber !.

They began again, first slowly: one, two, three, four, became *faster and faster*, so fast that it finally sounded like a stampede of wild horses and all of a sudden, in the middle of it, they began singing the *Shema Yisroel*.

NB. La plupart des mots en italique dans le texte anglais correspondent à ceux qui peuvent être cachés si on envisage un exercice à trous pour la compréhension orale.

### **Notes about Schoenberg and his musical evolution**

**Schoenberg**, Arnold (1874-1951), Austrian-born composer, creator of the twelve-tone system of musical composition, and one of the most influential composers of the 20th century.

Schoenberg was born on September 13, 1874, to a Jewish family in Vienna. He taught himself composition, with help in counterpoint from the Austrian composer Alexander Zemlinsky, and in 1899 produced his first major work, the tone poem *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night) for string sextet. In 1901 he married Zemlinsky's sister Mathilde, with whom he had two children. The couple moved to Berlin, where for two years Schoenberg earned a living by orchestrating operettas and directing a cabaret orchestra.

Schoenberg and his family fled Nazi Germany to Paris in 1933. In 1934 they emigrated to the United States, and he accepted a teaching position in Boston. The next year, because of his health, they moved to Los Angeles, where his two youngest sons were born. After a year as a lecturer at the University of Southern California (1935), he taught at the University of California at Los Angeles from 1936 to 1944. He became a US citizen in 1941. Schoenberg fell seriously ill in 1946, and at one point his heart stopped beating; this experience is reflected in his String Trio (1946), written after his recovery. In retirement he continued to teach and to compose. He died on July 13, 1951, in Los Angeles.

#### **Musical Evolution**

Schoenberg's musical style progressed from late 19th-century Romanticism to the twelve-tone technique. His early tonal works are reminiscent of the music of the German composer Johannes Brahms, but before long he assimilated the chromaticism of the German composer Richard Wagner. In works such as *Verklärte Nacht* Schoenberg achieved intensity of feeling through rich harmonies and long soaring melodies supported by a dense contrapuntal texture of short, constantly varying motives. Beginning about 1907 these traits became even more pronounced in his Expressionist works, in which tonality was abandoned and musical form became compressed. The prime example from this period is *Pierrot Lunaire*; in this setting of macabre verse, the accompanying chamber ensemble employs a different combination of instruments for each of the 21 songs of the cycle, and the vocal soloist uses the *Sprechstimme* (German for "speech voice"), or *sprechgesang* ("speech song"), a blend of speech and song.

About 1920 Schoenberg began to formulate his twelve-tone technique (often called "serialism" because it is based on a series of pitches) in an attempt to find a substitute for the forms, such as sonata form, on which tonal music had been based. Such forms functioned properly only in tonal music, because they were based on the opposition and resolution of different keys. All his styles, however, are distilled in his greatest achievement, *Moses und Aron*, which he never completed. Schoenberg occasionally returned to tonal composition, but in the majority of his works of the 1930s and 1940s he attempted to synthesize the twelve-tone technique with the formal principles he had employed during his Expressionist period. This synthesis can be heard in his one-movement Piano Concerto (1942) and in the monumental String Trio.

Through Schoenberg and his students, the twelve-tone method became a dominating force in mid-20th century composition and exerted a profound influence on the course of Western music.

### **QUESTIONS**

1°) At first, listen to this piece of music carefully but leave your papers aside.

Then, at the second hearing, fill in the blanks on the paper provided.

2) What are your first impressions ?

3) Who is the author ?

4) Where did this story take place ? What does it tell us about ?

5) Why did the author use different languages to express the tragedy ?

6) What is the part played by the music ?

7) What are the different feelings suggested by the author with words and music ?

8) What is the message of the last prayer ? Try to find something similar in the text "Nazi bestiality"

## Primary sources

All of the documents on this Web page were retrieved from the archives of Shamash: The Jewish Internet Consortium. The comments inside the square brackets were written by Daniel Keren for the Shamash archives.

### **Doc.1 :Speech by Adolf Hitler, January 31,-1939.**

Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals - Washington, U. S. Govt. Print. Off., 1949-1953, Vol XIII, p. 13 1:

### **Doc. 2 :Adolph Hitler speaking to a crowd at the Sports Palace in Berlin, 30 January 1942.**

Quoted in "The Holocaust," by Martin Gilbert, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, NY, 1985, p. 285.

Text as monitored by the Foreign Broadcast Monitoring Service, Federal Communications Commission.

And we say that the war will not end as the Jews Imagine it will, namely with the uprooting of the Aryans, but the result of this war will be the complete annihilation of the Jews.

### **Doc. 3 : Speech by Hans Frank [Governor of occupied Poland], December 16 1941.**

Documents on the Holocaust - Edited by Y. Arad, Y. Gutman, A. Margalio, NY, Ktav Pub.

House in Association with Yad-Vasem, 198 1, p. 247, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression Washington, U. S Govt. Print. Off, 1946 Vol. II p. 634:

One way or another -- I will tell you quite openly -- we must finish off the Jews. The Führer put it into words once: should united Jewry again succeed in setting off a world war, then the blood sacrifice shall not be made only by the peoples driven into war, but then the Jew of Europe will have met his end...

But what should be done with the Jews? Can you believe that they will be accommodated in settlements in the Ostland? In Berlin we were told: why are you making all this trouble? We don't want them either, not in Ostland nor in the Reichskommissariat, liquidate them yourselves! Gentlemen, I must ask you to steel yourselves against all considerations of compassion. We must destroy the Jews wherever we find them, and wherever it is at all possible, in order to maintain the whole structure of the Reich...

The Jews represent for us also extraordinary malignant gluttons. We have now approximately 2,500,000 of them in the General Government [Nazi occupied Poland], perhaps with the Jewish mixtures and everything that goes with it, 3,500,000 Jews. We cannot shoot or poison those 3,500,000 Jews, but we shall nevertheless be able to take measures which will lead somehow to their annihilation, and this in connection with the gigantic measures to be determined in discussions with the Reich.

## **questions**

- 1 ) Present these documents
- 2) What was the main aim of the Nazi policy ?
- 3) Study carefully the style of these speeches and the vocabulary which has been used ;  
what can you conclude ?
- 4) What was the next step in the holocaust ?

## **Word bank**

To steel o.s against : se cuirasser contre

Malignant: malfaisant

Glutton : glouton

### **Doc. 5 Nazi Bestiality: Massacre of Ukrainian Jews**

On 5th October, 1942, when I visited the building office at Dubno my foreman told me that in the vicinity of the site, Jews from Dubno had been shot in three large pits, each about 30 meters long and 3 meters deep. About 1,500 persons had been killed daily. All of the 5,000 Jews who had still been living in Dubno before the pogrom were to be liquidated. As the shooting had taken place in his presence, he was still much upset.

Thereupon I drove to the site, accompanied by my foreman and saw near it great mounds of earth, about 30 meters long and 2 meters high. Several trucks stood in front of the mounds. Armed Ukrainian militia drove the people off the trucks under the supervision of an S.S. man. The militia men acted as guards on the trucks and drove them to and from the pit. All these people had the regulation yellow patches on the front and back of their clothes and thus could be recognized as Jews.

My foreman and I went directly to the pits. Nobody bothered us. Now I heard rifle shots in quick succession from behind one of the earth mounds. The people who had got off the trucks -men, women and children of all ages - had to undress upon the orders of an S.S. man, who carried a riding or dog whip. They had to put down their clothes in fixed places, sorted according to shoes, top clothing and underclothing. I saw a heap of shoes of about 800 to 1,000 pairs, great piles of under linen and clothing. Without screaming or weeping these people undressed, stood around in family groups, kissed each other, said farewells, and waited for a sign from another S.S. man, who stood near the pit, also with a whip in his hand. During the 15 minutes that I stood near I heard no complaint or plea for mercy. I watched a family of about eight persons, a man and a woman both about 50 with their children of about one, eight and ten, and two grown-up daughters of about 20 to 24. An old woman with snow-white hair was holding the one-year-old child in her arms and singing to it and tickling it. The child was cooing with delight. The couple were looking on with tears in their eyes. The father was holding the hand of a boy about 10 years old and speaking to him softly; the boy was fighting his tears. The father pointed to the sky, stroked his head and seemed to explain something to him. At that moment the S.S. man at the pit shouted something to his comrade. The latter counted off about 20 persons and instructed them to go behind the earth mound. Among them was the family which I have mentioned. I well remember a girl, slim and with black hair who, as she passed close to me, pointed to herself and said, " Twenty-three. " I walked around the mound and round myself confronted by a tremendous grave. People were closely wedged together and lying on top of each other so that only their heads were visible. Nearly all had blood running over their shoulders from their heads. Some of the people shot were still moving. Some were lifting their arms and turning their heads to show that they were still alive. The pit was already two-thirds full. I estimated that it already contained about 1,000 people. I looked for the man who did the shooting. He was an S.S. man, who sat at the edge of the narrow end of the pit, his feet dangling into the pit. He had a tommy gun on his knees and was smoking a cigarette. The people, completely naked, went down some steps which were cut in the clay wall of the pit and clambered over the heads of the people lying there, to the place to which the S.S. man directed them. They laid down in front of the dead or injured people; some caressed those who were still alive and spoke to them in a low voice. Then I heard a series of shots. I looked into the pit and saw that the bodies were twitching or the heads lying motionless on top of the bodies which lay before them. Blood was running away from their necks. I was surprised that I was not ordered away, but I saw that there were two or three postmen in uniform nearby. The next batch was approaching already. They went down into the pit, lined themselves up against the previous victims and were shot. When I walked back round the mound I noticed another truckload of people which had just arrived. This time it included sick and infirm persons. An old, very thin woman with terribly thin legs was undressed by others who were already naked, while two people held her up. The woman appeared to be paralyzed. The naked people carried the woman around the mound. I left with my foreman and drove in my car back to Dubno.

On the morning of the next day, when I again visited the site, I saw about 30 naked people lying near the pit-about 30 to 50 meters away from it. Some of them were still alive ; they looked straight in front of them with a fixed stare and seemed to notice neither the chilliness of the morning nor the workers of my firm who stood around. A girl of about 20 spoke to me and asked me to give her clothes and help her escape. At that moment we heard a fast car approach and I noticed that it was an S.S. detail. I moved away to my site. Ten minutes later we heard shots from the vicinity of the pit. The Jews still alive had been ordered to throw the corpses into the pit ; then they had themselves to lie down in this to be shot in the neck.

*Reference : the trial of German Major War Criminals (London, HMSO,1946)*

### **Questions**

- 1) Present the document : who is the author ? he was surprised not to have been bothered ; try to find an explanation for that fact ?
- 2) Explain the background
- 3) What was the attitude of the Jews ? Why did they not rebel ?
- 4) What do you think the father pointed to the sky ?
- 5) What were the components of the nazi bestiality ? What was the attitude of the Ssman ?
- 6) What connections can you find with the survivor of Warsaw ? Which ones ? Justify your answer.

**WORD BANK**

Indictment: acte d'accusation

To weep, wept, wept : to cry, to lament over, to shed tears

To make a plea for mercy : implorer la clémence

To tickle chatouiller

To stroke caresser

To dangle : laisser pendre

To clamber : to climb up

To twitch : to move spasmodically

**words to use to comment on the document:**

behave with dignity

Desperate or in despair

Resigned to their fate

Believer or faithful

Fatalistic

Slaughter. mass executions

Casual, offhand, airy : désinvolte

cynical

**Vocabulary about the holocaust**

Bunk : châlîs

Mass grave : fosse commune

Emaciation : amaigrissement

Sealed railroad cars: wagons plombés

To wipe out : anéantir

Gas chamber

Barbed wires : barbelés