Music at the Edge of Life: In Remembrance of Jewish Composers Who Perished in the Holocaust

Saturday, April 10, 2010  8 pm
Listening for a Change:
Oral History Project

Students from Healdsburg Junior High School and the nonprofit Listening for a Change worked together to interview, record, and photograph local community members who survived the Nazi Holocaust. Among the interviewees are the following:

Irv Piotkowski's father lost his first wife and two little daughters but survived by hiding in the woods and then being concealed in an attic for two years by Polish neighbors. Irv's mother was the only member of her family to survive Auschwitz/Birkenau. His parents met after the war and fled to West Germany where he and his brother were born. When Irv was 6, the family immigrated to Penngrove where they had supportive relatives.

Susanna Batzdorff and her family were able to escape to New York. Both of her parents were doctors and her father had contacts at Columbia University. Susanna's aunt is the famous and controversial Edith Stein who converted to Catholicism before the war and became a Carmelite nun. However, the Nazis still sent her to Auschwitz where she perished. The Catholic Church has since made Edith a saint.

Alfred Batzdorff was arrested on Kristallnacht as a 16-year-old but was able to escape to England via the Kindertransport. Fortunately, his immediate family was able to join him later in England. They eventually came to the United States.

As a 12-year-old, Vera Korkus was sent from Vienna to the famous fake Nazi camp Theresienstadt that was created to fool the International Red Cross. While it seemed that conditions there were humane because of a cultural life that included arts, music and a huge lending library, it was merely a "holding pen" for Jews who were to be deported to killing camps elsewhere. Somehow, Vera, as well as her sister, survived. Her story is especially compelling because she was about the same age as the children who interviewed her at Healdsburg Junior High. Another extraordinary connection is that three of the four composers featured in this program were also interned at the Theresienstadt camp.

Listening for a Change's school curriculum Essence of Acceptance was the foundation for teaching the students how to conduct oral histories. Lessons included learning how to ask open-ended questions, creating follow-up questions, using appropriate body language, etc. Phyllis Rosenfield, Executive Director, worked closely with the teachers and students to bring this curriculum to Healdsburg Junior High School.