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Musical Memoirs of the Holocaust. The Case of Helena Dunicz-Niwińska

There, in your Birkenau, you have no idea what wonders of culture happen a few kilometres from the chimneys. Imagine, they play the overture from Tamcredi, a piece by Berlioz and some Finnish dances by one composer who had many as in his name. Warsaw cannot be compared to such an orchestra. But, wait, I'll tell you everything in order, and listen to me, because its worth it.

Tadeusz Borowski, *Here in Our Auschwitz...*¹

This short quotation from a short story by Tadeusz Borowski demonstrates that most prisoners could not believe that there could be music played by a camp orchestra in a death camp. The accounts and memoirs from just after the war and the measures that aimed at documenting Nazi activity resulted in the earliest narrations and demands being focused on punishing the perpetrators, and the primary topic was the death camp apparatus, cruelty, and death of millions.

¹ T. Borowski, *U nas w Auschwitzu* [*Here in Our Auschwitz*], [in:] *idem, Pożegnanie z Marią* [*Farewell to Maria*], Warszawa 1988, pp. 188–189.

In the earliest period after 1945, focus was on the reconstruction of the plans concerning the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question”, and fading memories prevented such issues as music in the camps from being raised.

We still know relatively little of music in the context of the Holocaust. Music was mentioned, usually with regard to its instrumental function, e.g. in relation to the march of kommandos, by such persons as Primo Levi or Seweryna Szmalglewska. The first attempts at publishing memoirs about music were neither popular among publishers nor welcomed by the government². When Szymon Laks published *Musiques d'un autre monde*³ in Paris in 1948, he wanted to reach the Polish reader as well. His attempts ended in a partial success in 1978, when the text was published in London as *Gry oświęcimskie* (*Auschwitz Games*). Similarly, Władysław Szpilman's book *Śmierć miasta* (*The Death of a City*), which was published in a small number of copies, failed to stimulate reflection on music from the Warsaw Ghetto due to the description of racketeers' actions. It was his son Andrzej's endeavours that resulted in the publication of the pianist's memoirs, first in the West, and later, in 2002, in Poland. The first woman to publish memoirs concerning a female camp band in Auschwitz-Birkenau was Fania Fénelon, a singer who published a controversial book titled *Sursis pour l'Orchestre* in 1976⁴.

2 In most cases the reason for rejection was the excessive ‘idyllic’ character of the works and overly favourable depiction of the Nazis. See S. Laks, *Gry oświęcimskie* [*Auschwitz Games*], London 1979, s. 9–10; A. Laks, *O moim ojcu Szymonie Laksie i jego książce “Gry oświęcimskie”* [About My Father, Szymon Laks, and His Book], transl. A. Buchner, “Muzykalia” No. 6, pp. 3–4, [online], http://www.demusica.pl/cmsimple/images/file/laks_muzykalia_6_judaica1.pdf, retrieved on 23/05/2016.

3 The book, which was published in the USA under the title *Music of Another World*, became a part of the canon of Holocaust literature (e.g. in the Holocaust Literature programme managed by Amelie Rorty at the Brandeis University). A. Laks, *op. cit.*, pp. 2–3. In Poland, the book *Gry oświęcimskie* was not commonly discussed and analysed in spite of the fact that the State Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum reprinted it in 1998.

4 See H. Dunicz-Niwińska, *Drogi mojego życia. Wspomnienia skrzypaczki z Birkenau* [*One of the Girls in the Band. The Memoirs of a Violinist from Birkenau*], transcribed by M. Szewczyk, Oświęcim 2013, p. 86. As Dunin-Niwińska wrote: “Fania writes so, but it wasn't true. After all, Fania's whole book is a collection of various confabulations, and even her fellow Jewish women were critical of it”. *Ibid.*, p. 121. See: *eadem*, *Prawda i fantazja. Recenzja książki Fani Fénelon* [Truth and Fantasy. A Review of Fania Fénelon's Book], “Pro Memoria” 1995, No. 3, p. 74. The public heard of Fania Fénelon in 1980, when CBS, an American TV station, broadcast a TV spectacle based on her memoirs (translated into English as *Playing for Time* in 1977) and directed by Arthur Miller. Due to her controversial statements on her past (including collaboration), the former prisoner unleashed a debate on morality and the ambiguous nature of camp life (Primo Levi and Bruno Bettelheim stood against them). See G.A. Plunka, *Holocaust Drama. The theater of atrocity*, New York 2010, pp. 57–65.

Female band in Birkenau

The reflection on music in Auschwitz-Birkenau to date has concerned the manifestations of cultural life in the camps⁵, description of memories concerning musicians⁶, or accounts related to the activity of specific ensembles⁷. A more in-depth analysis of camp stories has been presented by Jacek Lachendro, who noted that “the surviving sources and memoirs concerning the issue are strongly limited”⁸. However, they can be the basis for tracing the most important points in the musical history of the camp. In Auschwitz-Birkenau, the musicians largely played German marches that accompanied the departure of kommandos. Despite the quite homogeneous nature of the music they played, the Nazi concentration camps (German for concentration camp is *Konzentrationslager*) started

- 5 See Z. Jagoda, S. Kłodziński, J. Masłowski, *Życie kulturalne w obozie oświęcimskim* [Cultural Life in the Auschwitz Camp], “Przegląd Lekarski” 1974, No. 31 (1), pp. 28–31; K. Dunin-Wąsowicz, *Przejawy życia kulturalnego w hitlerowskich obozach koncentracyjnych* [Manifestations of Cultural Life in Nazi Concentration Camps], [in:] *Przejawy życia kulturalnego w obozach koncentracyjnych jako forma samoobrony więźniów. Materiały na konferencję naukową* [Manifestations of Cultural Life in Nazi Concentration Camps as a Form of Prisoners’ Self-Defence. Materials for Academic Conference], Lublin 1974; K. Dunin-Wąsowicz, *Ruch oporu w hitlerowskich obozach koncentracyjnych* [Resistance Movement in Nazi Concentration Camps], Warszawa 1979; E. Kuźma, *Życie kulturalne w KL Auschwitz* [Cultural Life in KL Auschwitz], Zamość 2006, pp. 89–119.
- 6 K. Bilica, *Muzyka w obozie według Szymona Laksa i innych* [Music in the Camp According to Szymon Laks and Others], “Muzykalia” nr 11, s. 1–19 [online], access: http://www.demusica.pl/cmsimple/images/file/bilica_muzykalia_11_judaica3.pdf, retrieved on 06/09/2016; I. Urbańska, *Życie kulturalne więźniów w KL Auschwitz w świetle relacji i pamiętników* [Prisoners’ Cultural Life in KL Auschwitz in the Light of Accounts and Memoirs], Toruń 2005, pp. 105–111. See articles in “Ruch Muzyczny” from 1945–1946, “Pro Memoria”, 1996, and “Przegląd Lekarski” (the entire first issue in the year concerning the issue of concentration camps).
- 7 See G. Fackler, *Muzyka w obozach koncentracyjnych 1939–1945* [Music in Concentration Camps 1933–1945], transl. P. Logan, S. Wiczorek, “Muzykalia” No. 6, pp. 1–26 [online], access: http://www.demusica.pl/cmsimple/images/file/fackler_muzykalia_6_judaica1.pdf, retrieved on: 24/05/2016; also: G. Knapp, *Das Frauenorchester in Auschwitz. Musikalische Zwangsarbeit und ihre Bewältigung*, Hamburg 1996. Some information (mainly biographical) can also be found on the *Music and the Holocaust* website [online], access: <http://holocaust-music.ort.org/>, retrieved on: 16/05/2016.
- 8 It also results from the fact that the Auschwitz-Birkenau orchestra was not treated as a separate kommando. See J. Lachendro, *Orkiestry w KL Auschwitz* [Orchestras in KL Auschwitz], “Zeszyty Oświęcimskie” 2012, No. 27, p. 8–10, notes 6, 7, 9. This researcher’s article is an extended version of the earlier findings published on the State Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum (in 2006–2008). Lachendro’s findings were also repeated by Piotr Świątczak in his MA thesis titled *Historia orkiestr obozowych w KL Auschwitz* [History of Camp Orchestras in KL Auschwitz], Kraków 2009.

to be called *Konzertlager*⁹, which was supposed to emphasise the grotesque nature of the situation. According to Krzysztof Dunin-Źasowicz:

Camp orchestras existed in virtually all camps. They were created even before the war, e.g. in Buchenwald [in 1938]. Instruments were obtained primarily from prisoner's deposits or purchased for their money. The orchestras, which originally were small, significantly grew in size [...] in Auchwitz – 120 in the brass band, 80 in symphonic orchestra, a few tens of musicians in orchestras in other camps or even some subcamps. Initially, the orchestra played marches upon the departure of prisoners to work. With time, however, it gained certain privileges and the right to play concerts, primarily for SS personnel, but also on Sunday afternoons and for prisoners¹⁰.

Sometimes, there were also performances by smaller chamber orchestras (usually at private parties organised by the commanding personnel), but they were rare. Due to the volatility of the (both male and female) orchestra line-ups, conductors and composers (more often instrumentating instrumentalists) had to elaborate on the technical details depending on the instruments they had and the performers' skills. Orchestras, most of which were multinational, used universal musical language and the camp jargon¹¹. It facilitated the expansion of the repertoire – canonical works from Romance, Germanic or Slavic language circles were exchanged. Another thing that is noticeable in Auschwitz-Birkenau is the musicians' conspiracy activity as the musicians interlaced melodies of German marches with motifs from Polish Christmas carols, *Mazurek Dąbrowskiego* or *Rota*¹². The prisoners of this camp who were active in the field of music before the war included Szymon Laks, Helena Dunicz-Niwińska, Alma Rosé, Zofia Czajkowska and Adam Kopyciński.

The Auschwitz concentration camp, which started functioning in June 1940, was originally intended for political prisoners from Poland. As early as in November 1940, the camp deputy (then Karl Fritzsche) received the first applications

9 R. Grunberger, *Historia społeczna Trzeciej Rzeszy* [*A Social History of the Third Reich*], Vol. 2, transl. W. Kalinowski, introduction by W. Markiewicz, Warszawa 1987, p. 295.

10 K. Dunin-Źasowicz, *Przejawy życia kulturalnego...*, p. 9.

11 See A. Kopyciński, *Skład orkiestry obozowej w Oświęcimiu* [*Auschwitz Camp Orchestra Line-up*], "Przegląd Lekarski" 1966, pp. 217–219; *Skład kapeli kobiecej w Birkenau zapamiętanej przez Helenę Dunicz-Niwińską w okresie od października 1943 do jesieni 1944 r.* [*Birkenau Women's Band Line-up as Remembered by Helena Dunicz-Niwińska between October 1943 and Autumn 1944*], [in:] H. Dunicz-Niwińska, *Drogi mojego życia...*, pp. 171–177.

12 See *Tango łez śpiewajcie muzy. Poetyckie dokumenty Holocaustu* [*Sing Tango of Tears, o Mus-es. Poetic Documents of the Holocaust*], B. Keff, ed., Warszawa 2012.

for permission to issue instruments to musicians¹³. It was probably initiated by Bruno Brodniewicz and Franciszek Nierychło¹⁴, who also encouraged prisoners to join up to form a band of dozen or so people in late 1940. The first concert took place on 6th January 1941, and the commanding personnel liked it enough to officially consent to the establishment of an ensemble, which was to accompany the everyday departures of kommandos¹⁵. On the other hand, the Birkenau female orchestra was formed in 1943 at the command of Maria Madl, who tried to equal the male camp in the level and the manner of camp management¹⁶. The female ensemble played near the exit gate, and it was conducted by Zofia Czajkowska, Alma Rosé, and Sonia Vinogradova. Alma Rosé came from a musical family (her father, Arnold, was a concertmaster at the Vienna Philharmonic, her uncle, Gustav Mahler, an eminent composer), she was a violinist, and when she took the role of the band-master, she significantly raised the level of the camp orchestra. “When she conducted the band, she seemed to float in the air above this ensemble”¹⁷. She died on 4th April 1944; the circumstances of her death have not been explained, however she was probably poisoned¹⁸.

In recent years, the institutions related to the former camps started organising cultural events and publishing memoirs concerning music on a larger scale. Apart from the reprint of Laks’s *Gry oświęcimskie*, the State Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum published *One of the Girls in the Band. The Memoirs of a Violinist from Birkenau* by Helena Dunicz-Niwińska¹⁹. On the other hand, Ignacy Szczepański, the author of *Häftlingskapelle* (a collection of reflections, memoirs of the Auschwitz camp orchestra band who stayed in Poland after the war), and the documentary film titled *Kapela oświęcimska (The Oświęcim Band)* marked the beginning of the attempts to reconstruct life in the camp by the return to that space and interviews with witnesses. TVP, the Polish national TV broadcasting company, also produced an episode on the camp orchestra in the *Kroniki Auschwitz [Auschwitz Chronicles]* series. In 2010, a documentary film titled *Dziewczęta z Auschwitz [Girls of Auschwitz]* was shot, where the protagonists recalled the history of the band ensemble.

¹³ J. Lachendro, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

¹⁶ K. Kompisch, *Żeńska załoga SS (SS-Gefolge): kobiety nadzorczyniami w obozach koncentracyjnych [Female SS Crews: Women as Supervisors in Concentration Camps]*, [in:] *eadem, Sprawczynie [Täterinnen...]*, transl. S. Kupisz, N. Badiyan-Siekierzycka, Warszawa 2012, pp. 284–285.

¹⁷ J. Lachendro, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

¹⁹ See H. Dunicz-Niwińska, *Drogi mojego życia...*

Music in Helena Dunicz-Niwińska's memoirs

Helena Dunicz-Niwińska was born in 1915 in Vienna. Her father, a public servant at the Galicia Treasury Chamber of Lviv, had to move to the Austro-Hungarian capital during World War I. The return to their home city turned out to be difficult – the Bolshevik revolution started after 1917, and it tried to destroy the remnants of the Habsburg monarchy. The Dunicz family cultivated musical traditions. The father cared that Helena and her elder brothers, Jan and Bolesław, received basic musical education, mainly with regard to playing the violin²⁰. Józef Dunicz himself was a classical music lover, and he often went to concerts at the philharmonic. At one of such concerts, little Helena saw and remembered Alma Rosé²¹, who later conducted the camp orchestra. As a student of the Conservatoire of the Polish Musical Society, Helena was well educated with regard to violin. At that time, she met renowned musicians and musicologists of the interwar period. Despite this, the audition at the camp baffled her very much – she had not practiced for two years, and she had to play a signature piece knowing that her life would depend on it.

The willingness to equal the male camp band resulted in a situation where the female orchestra started a more “musical” part of work in the camp when Alma Rosé became its conductor (after Zofia Czajkowska, who later on became Helena Dunicz's close friend, had been removed from the function). Block No. 12, which stood next to barbed wire that separated this part of the camp from the main camp road was an outstanding one:

[...] such a situation was something special. In other blocks, there were even a few hundreds of female prisoners, Out part of the block consisted of something like two rooms, yet without a door between them. In one of them, the band rehearsed. There were stools and score stands, two instrument closets in the corners, and a table where the copyists worked. In the other part, there were three level bunks to sleep in, where we also ate our meals, and shelves for bowls, mugs, and food parcels from families. Both in one and the other room there were iron stoves. Each of us slept in a separate bunk, had her own blanket, pillow, and even a sheet, which was something special in the camp [...]. Another peculiarity was the fact that there was wooden floor in the musical part²² [H. D. N., pp. 80–81].

20 Helena Dunicz-Niwińska's father dreamt of forming a Dunicz Trio that would have some success in the field of chamber music. See H. Dunicz-Niwińska, *Drogi mojego życia...*, pp. 11–13.

21 She was the subject of a separate chapter titled *Frau Alma. Dyrygentka – kapo*. See *ibid.*, pp. 72–79.

22 All quotes from H. Dunicz-Niwińska's book *Drogi mojego życia...*, will be marked as follows: [H. D. N., page number(s)] after the quote].

The rehearsals, which lasted a dozen or so hours, were physically and mentally strenuous because

[...] we witnessed what was going on and what would happen during the next dozen or so hours in the nearby gas chambers and crematoriums. The awareness of the scale of this crime that exceeded human imagination frightened us and made us feel helpless and hopeless. It was the reason we felt torn in two: should we protect our lives and play, or should we refuse and condemn ourselves to a more severe fate, possibly even death? [H. D. N., pp. 84–85].

The people who decided to play in the band were in a difficult situation – they served the Nazi system where music played one of the most important roles. This choice was seen ambiguously by fellow prisoners (also after 1945).

[...] the existence of our kommando was controversial for our prisoners. Many of them thought we were high-ranking prisoners, and they said we lived in “silken conditions”. They were often shocked that we even play, but they did not know some of us had been forced to join the orchestra. And when anyone wanted to leave the band, even at the price of working in *aussen*, she faced an alternative: the band or the penal company [H. D. N., p. 84].

The women who had earlier played an instrument on an amateur basis had to fit in the difficult intense band work. Playing marches upon the departures and returns of kommandos had to have a negative impact on the mood of women in the orchestra:

When the last kommando of uniformed women who carried bodies was marching into the camp, we played the last bars of marches, which were often accompanied by the sound of *Leichenkommando* that bustled about in the evening. You could hear the thud of skinny bodies of the dead that were thrown onto wooden carts and transported to crematoriums [...]. After the assembly, we carried our instruments to the block, and then we returned for stools and stands. This was the “everyday life” we had to accompany with our music [H. D. N. p. 83].

The music that the female camp orchestra arranged took a different form. One of the forms of contestation was an attempt to arrange Frederic Chopin’s *Tristesse* (according to Etude Op. 10 No. 3):

It was an unforgettable and deeply moving experience [...]. We played it for ourselves and the fellow prisoners who visited us secretly to hear something special,

something that expressed our resistance to the German tormentors [H. D. N., p. 85].

The prisoners had to keep an eye on each other and avoid speaking how they spent their “free time” because performing forbidden music was punished with death²³. However, music helped Helena Dunicz survive. Why was she saved?²⁴ Why did she hesitate to tell her story for so long?

Also after the war, among former prisoners and people who have had no such experience in their lives we were clearly disapproved of as former members of the camp band. Regardless of the unwillingness to speak of those times that lasted many years, we did not speak publicly and had no wish to write memoirs apart from the accounts for the museum archive. It turned out that Jewish ladies living in the West, former members of the band, did not spoke of their experience in the camp and their participation in the orchestra for a very long time [H. D. N., p. 86].

Music and the machine of death

The debate on musical performances during selection or killing that arose from the memoirs²⁵ unambiguously classified music as an element that accompanied the Holocaust. As Guido Fackler wrote:

Finally, in the extermination camps, particularly Birkenau, the prisoner orchestras performed their most inhuman activity, an activity that caused some surviving musicians to experience feelings of guilt and depression for the rest of their lives. For example, a violinist from Prague [...] was forced to play “Hot a Yid a Vaybele” (A Jew Had a Wife) while watching his wife and three sons led to a gas

23 Some commandants, lovers of Jewish and Gypsy music, requested those tunes at private ceremonies. Szymon Laks thus recalls the audition to the camp: “It seems to me that the best solution would be to play something technically effective, so I start playing a concerto by Mendelssohn without thinking and totally forgetting that it is a ‘Jewish’ composer [...]. Luckily, just after a few bars, the conductor gives me a sign to stop”. See S. Laks, *op. cit.*, pp. 31,

24 According to Agamben, *homo sacer* would be the most credible witness to the crime in Auschwitz. Those who survived cannot be witnesses as they have not experienced the whole Holocaust. See G. Agamben, *Co zostaje z Auschwitz. Archiwum i świadek (Homo sacer III) [Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive]*, transl. S. Królak, Warszawa 2008.

25 See A. Kopyciński, *Ruch muzyczny za drutami Oświęcimia [Behind the Wires of Auschwitz]*, “Ruch Muzyczny” 1945, No. 5, pp. 8–11; J. Górniak, *Jeszcze o muzyce w Oświęcimiu [More on Music in Auschwitz]*, “Ruch Muzyczny” 1946, No. 2, pp. 9–12.

chamber [...]. Erika Rothschild recalls that these prisoners “were driven out of the cattle trucks and lined up. [...] During this process a band, made up of the best musicians from among the prisoners who were already there, played Polish, Czech, or Hungarian folk music, depending on where the new prisoners were from”²⁶.

Helena Dunicz-Niwińska, however, disagrees with such a one-sided presentation of music. She denies that the orchestra played during mass executions and burials:

[...] the band was never called on purpose to come to the new unloading platform that was launched in the early spring of 1944, which led directly to the Birkenau crematorium [...]. The mention that the band played while the Jews were walking to crematoriums that can be seen here and there should be understood in the sense that the band played while the transports walked along the main camp road [emphasis added, P.K.] between the BI section of the women’s camp and the BII sections of the men’s camp [H. D. N., p. 84].

Szymon Laks concedes:

After the war, it was said that in German camps fugitives who had been caught were hanged with musical accompaniment. As regards Birkenau, I must categorically deny it. The orchestra did not take part in it [...]. Well, we sometimes happened to play on our bandstand when columns of prisoners marched towards gas chambers on the other side of the barbed wire. But it was complete accident, pure coincidence²⁷.

However, later on he adds:

Inside the crematorium camp, several rows of benches for musicians were placed [...]. We play for people who will soon be burned, we just do not know by whom; potentially by the musicians? [...] Some people burden us with tasks, names, addresses, which we might never be able to use. But we noted everything down in our memory – it’s no problem²⁸.

26 G. Fackler, *Music in Concentration Camps 1933–1945*, transl. P. Logan [online], access: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mp/9460447.0001.102/--music-in-concentration-camps-1933-1945?rgn=main;view=fulltext>, retrieved on 05/11/2016.

27 S. Laks, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

It is likely that the Birkenau orchestra, which played near the central road (from the guardhouse to the gas chambers, later on another point was added – the new unloading platform), “accompanied” both the departures of kommandos and Jews arriving on trains from the entire Europe. Thus the subsequent discrepancies related to the propaganda function of music during selection, which may be implied from what one of the prisoners said:

When Himmler inspected KL Auschwitz in 1942, “camp commandant Höss organised a showcase concert performed by female prisoner orchestras to honour him, and then he demonstrated the new gas chamber procedure which used a gas named cyclone. After 15 seconds, those affected by the gas started to fall. Himmler became pale and fainted”²⁹.

Artefacts of memory

Artefacts that preserve the memory and deepen the melancholy are souvenirs that Helena keeps to this day. A hairpin made of a broken string, Christmas cards, notes from English classes, recipes, or a spoon and a bowl from her friend Jadwiga are the reminders that made it possible to maintain and strengthen memories and emotions related to the time of the Holocaust. Their inclusion in the memoir narration indicates their particular value – they are elements that evoke memories, visualisation of that period³⁰. Objects and memories reinforce the melancholy, which is shown when subsequent items are described: “my spoon from Wisia was something exceptional, it lies in my kitchen drawer to this day, when I use it, I always remember my friend” [H. D. N., 108–109]. The omnipresence of death in the death camps intensified the sense of fear for the loved ones who could be sent to a gas chamber, starve to death or die of one of the diseases that spread around at any moment. Though Helena Dunicz-Niwińska had a close relationship with her mother, she received the news of her death calmly.

I entered the block where she lay, but before I reached her bunk, I had been told she is not there, that I can see her behind the block, where the bodies were taken [...]. But I didn't go to see her body. I didn't want to see HER [emphasis by

29 W.B. Pawlak, *Urodzeni w Warszawie (1)*, “Kontrasty” 1984, No. 10, p. 29. Quoted after: K. Biłlica, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

30 M. Hirsch, *Żaloba i postpamięć [Mourning and Post-Memory]*, transl. K. Bojarska, [in:] *Teoria wiedzy o przeszłości na tle współczesnej humanistyki. Antologia [Theory of Knowledge of the Past and Modern Humanities. An Anthology]*, E. Domańska, ed., Poznań 2010, pp. 247–280.

H. D. N.] on a pile of naked emaciated bodies. It was enough for me to see her in that misery, when she lay on the low bunk in the blocks in Birkenau, when the last sparks of life on the revue bunk were still flickering [...]. On that first night when I was alone, I could pray for her, but I just talked to her and said: "Now, you are only better off". Because was the death in these conditions something better than life in the damned Birkenau? [H. D. N., pp. 91–91].

Helena, however, was not left on her own after her beloved mother's death. Though she had no close relatives, her friends, Jadwiga and Zofia, sustained and supported her.

The survivors' trauma, melancholy and mourning³¹, which are stressed in various studies, did not prove to be the dominant elements of the woman's life after 1945. Opposing the universally accepted opinion that "[the survivors] tried to fight off the trauma of what happened in various ways. They launched such defensive mechanisms as denial, repression of problems – they tried to live as though nothing had happened³²", Helena returned to the camp ten years later:

For the first time since the memorable evacuation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp I was ready to go there with Wisia. [...] There was nothing left of the band's block. We slowly approached the ruined crematoriums [...]. We walked through the gate with the mocking slogan 'Arbeit macht frei' to the Death Wall, where Józio, Wisia's youngest brother, was shot. Painful memories were relived everywhere. The first visit broke the internal barrier of the paralysing fear of THIS [emphasis H. D. N.] place. How difficult it was to go willingly to where evil itself had dominated! Yet an unknown force attracted and still attracts me there – maybe the ashes of my beloved mom [...] maybe it is the force of memories, and maybe the promise that we made – that if we survived WE WILL NEVER FORGET! [emphasis H. D. N., pp. 161–162].

31 Examples include: F. Ankersmit, *Pamiętając Holocaust: żałoba i melancholia* [Remembering the Holocaust. Mourning and Melancholia], [in:] *Pamięć, etyka i historia. Anglo-amerykańska teoria historiografii lat dziewięćdziesiątych. Antologia przekładów* [Memory, Ethics and History. Anglo-American Theory of Historiography of the 1990s. An Anthology of Translation], E. Domańska, ed., Poznań 2002, pp. 163–184; Z. Freud, *Żałoba i melancholia* [Mourning and Melancholia], [in:] *idem, Psychologia nieświadomości* [Psychology of the Unconscious], transl. R. Reszke, Warszawa 2007, pp. 147–159; D. LaCapra, *Studia nad traumą. Jej krytycy i powikłane losy* [Trauma Studies: Its Critics and Vicissitudes], [in:] *idem, Historia w okresie przejściowym* [History in Transit], transl. K. Bojarska, Kraków 2009, pp. 139–184.

32 M. Orwid, *Europa po Oświęcimiu. Uwagi psychiatry* [Europe after Auschwitz. A Psychiatrist's Remarks], [in:] *Europa po Auschwitz* [Europe after Auschwitz], Z. Mach, ed., Kraków 1995, pp. 99–100.

Devoting herself to work (at Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne) and the continuous search for information relating to her brother and friends, the woman made an attempt at coping with her trauma. Her observations of the memoirs concerning the Holocaust that were written after World War II (and often contradicted the life of the camp band as she remembered it) finally induced her to tell her own story though “she tried to describe the terrible time of war, though it is in fact impossible to describe” [H. D. N., p. 167]. It was music that released the energy she transferred to others:

Each contact, also with some Jewish members of the camp band, which was renewed after the war became an event that was very important for us all [...]. We told one another the details of our later histories [...], how we lived then, and with which band members we were in touch. This meeting changed into direct contact [...]. The joy of another meeting after years obscured recent Rachel's death [H. D. N., p. 162–163].

Yet Helena had problems telling her story.

[...] I couldn't muster up my courage for any lengthier talks or confidences then. Yet these memories could not be forced out of memory. They have been carved in it – very clearly. Now, after so many years, when I finally transfer them onto paper, I use fragments of accounts that have already been written as help [H. D. N., pp. 7–8].

However, she managed to break the silence, and thus she managed to cope with one of the elements of the trauma.

Silence remains in the memory in dangerous and complicated relationships. It certainly isn't equivalent to oblivion. More often, it preserves the memory, prevents it from developing and maturing. Silence prevents memory from being worked on, becoming memory of an adult but makes it stay a child's experience which is full of emotion and fears [...]. The Holocaust survivors made effort for oblivion [...] they have never worked on their loss – they could not use the socially accepted rites of mourning, they had no graves, times or capacity to mourn the death of tens of their loved ones and their entire nation³³.

33 K. Szwejca, *Ocaleni z Holocaustu w oczach psychiatry, czyli o milczeniu i pamięci* [*Holocaust Survivors as Seen by a Psychiatrist or on Silence and Memory*], [in:] *Pamięć Shoah. Kulturowe reprezentacje i praktyki upamiętniania* [*Memory of the Shoah. Cultural Representations and Commemorative Practices*], T. Majewski, A. Zaidler-Janiszewska, eds., Łódź 2009, p. 583.

Do the violinist's memoirs have any more innovative literary content (i.e. a fascinating narration) apart from their psychological value? They probably do: However, it should not be the main axis of interpretation and lesson learnt from *One of the Girls in the Band*. Alvin Rosenfeld speaks in this context:

[...] though all literature can be judged, it seems that [this] writing [...] does not require primarily aesthetic assessment [...]. I admit, however, that other issues are more interesting to me, particularly the attempt at defining what kind of knowledge results from Holocaust literature, and the estimation what we can gain from and lose because of it³⁴.

Due to musical memoirs we may learn more about the cultural life in the camp, the repertoire, and the reflections of imprisoned musicians. Helena Dunicz-Niwińska faced the dilemma related to the need and the necessity to share her own reflections several decades after the war. In spite of her activity in the musical circles and among fellow prisoners, she did not have the courage to publish her memoirs. The time between the historic events and the present was the time of reflection and debate with other survivors³⁵.

Had it not been for the determination of her friends who were interested in her fate, who helped her write down and edit the memoirs, the information they contain would probably never see the light and would not become a unique representation of the Holocaust. However, how do we separate historical facts from the subjective reflection in the context of music in the concentration camps? For Frank Ankersmit, historical discourse is too metaphorical to represent the Holocaust and it is replaced with the discourse of memory that recalls the past, points to it, indicates it but never attempts at delving into it.

The access to the Holocaust is in this case more indexical and metonomous than metaphorical. Metonymy favours usual closeness, respects all the unpredictable elements from our memories [emphasis added, P.K.] and by itself is an opposite of the proud, metaphorical appropriation of reality. The metaphor pretends to go straight to the point, while metonymy indicates the movement to what is adjacent to it [...]. Instead of pushing

34 A.H. Rosenfeld, *Podwójna śmierć. Rozważania o literaturze Holocaustu* [*Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature*], transl. B. Krawcowicz, Warszawa 2003, p. 22.

35 Szymon Laks wrote: "Nearly forty years have passed since the facts I am going to describe [...]. It was difficult to judge things and people, both those that we left and those we returned to. This stupor – though it will never completely disappear – has significantly subsided and it is easier to look at events and experience from those years more objectively. See S. Laks, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–12.

the (bygone) reality into the matrix of the metaphorical appropriation of reality, metonymy features combination of network of associations that depend on our personal experience with many other factors³⁶.

In the case of Helena Dunicz-Niwińska's memoirs, what takes the form of metonymy is music, with which the author is closely connected. It was the ability to play an instrument that let her survive. She builds the narrative, which consists of many threads, not only the ones concerning the Holocaust, around the reflection on music. When she decided to share her memories, she gave an explicit sign that she wants her story, which could happen to anyone, to be remembered:

[...] my memories are the fate of a female violinist from Birkenau. Though in my everyday life, due to my age, I always forget about something, I have never managed to forget the camp. This is memory for the sake of a warning! I would like it to last even when I'm gone. I have read wartime memoirs of people who acted bravely, took the highest risk for the Country, to save other people, were steadfast in the face of the occupiers. I look at my fate and painful experience as a particle of what an average Pole had to live through. I was a small gear that survived in spite of its weakness. One thing is sure: if it had not been for the violin, I wouldn't have survived. Is it worth writing about it near the end of my life? [H. D. N., p. 165].

In the end, it was the flow of time that induced the woman who survived due to music to agree to the publication of her memoirs:

Why I started writing down what I have experienced in my life so late, at the age of 90 [...]. My friends and acquaintances tried to persuade me to describe my experience from the time of the war because I couldn't muster up my courage for lengthier talks or confidences on the topic then [H. D. N., p. 7].

It is a fact that the memoirs that were written down as late as in the early 21st century cast new light on the presence of music in death camps. There is hope that this will, in a way, give rise to a discussion; the multiplicity of threads in *One of the girls in the band* makes it possible to build a critical and analytical narrative around various aspects – multiculturalism, everyday life, life before and after the experience of the Holocaust.

36 F. Ankersmit, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

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Muzyczne wspomnienia z czasu Zagłady.

Przypadek Heleny Dunicz Niwińskiej

Streszczenie

Helena Dunicz Niwińska urodziła się 28 lipca 1915 roku w Wiedniu. Rodzina Duniczów kultywowała tradycje związane z muzykowaniem. Zarówno Helena, jak i jej starsi bracia Jan i Bolesław otrzymali wykształcenie muzyczne. Ich ojciec Józef Dunicz był miłośnikiem muzyki klasycznej, często chodził na koncerty do filharmonii. To w trakcie jed-

nego z nich mała Helena zobaczyła i zapamiętała Almę Rosé, która później dyrygowała kapelą kobiecą w obozie koncentracyjnym Birkenau. Helena odbyła studia w zakresie gry na skrzypcach w Konserwatorium Polskiego Towarzystwa Muzycznego. Spotykała się z uznanymi muzykami i muzykologami okresu międzywojennego. Umiejętność gry pozwoliła jej przeżyć okres Zagłady, jako więźniarka obozu Birkenau należała bowiem do zorganizowanej tam kapeli. Przesłuchanie w obozie wprowadziło ją w spore zakłopotanie – nie ćwicząc na skrzypcach już od dwóch lat, musiała zagrać popisowy utwór, wiedząc, że od tego może zależeć jej życie. Artefaktami utrwalającymi pamięć, ale jednocześnie pogłębiającymi melancholię są pamiątki, które Helena przechowała do dziś. Wykonana z pękniętej struny wsuwka do włosów, świąteczne kartki, notatki z języka angielskiego, przepisy kulinarne czy łyżka i miska od koleżanki Jadwigi są nośnikami pamięci, które pozwoliły przechować i spotęgować wrażenia i emocje związane z czasem Zagłady. Po wojnie Dunicz-Niwińska podjęła próbę przepracowania traumy poprzez rzucenie się w wir pracy (w Polskim Wydawnictwie Muzycznym) oraz ciągle poszukiwania wieści o bracie i koleżankach. Śledzenie dotyczących Zagłady wspomnień różnych osób, m.in. sprzecznych z rzeczywistością relacji koleżanek z obozowej kapeli, ostatecznie przekonało ją do opowiedzenia własnej historii, mimo że „okrutny czas wojny próbowała opisać, choć tak naprawdę jest on nie do opisania”. Historia ta przybliży dzieje obozowej kapeli z okresu drugiej wojny światowej i pokazuje historiograficzne zawiłości związane z obrazem muzyki w nazistowskich obozach.