



Report: COZ 19: 3 November 2020. Lorry Black and Gila Flam

Holocaust Music- Holocaust Song: Re-defining the subject in the 21st Century

	<p>COZ 19: Tuesday 3 November</p> <p>Lorry Black Associate Director, Lowell Milken Fund for American Jewish Music at the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music</p> <p>with Gila Flam Director, Music Department and the Sound Archives of the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem</p> <p>Holocaust Music- Holocaust Song: Re-defining the subject in the 21st Century</p>	
Lorry Black		Dr Gila Flam

This session can be heard on IFJMS YouTube channel

<https://youtu.be/VNNPelxYUrs>

Report by David Fligg

Holocaust Music – Holocaust Song: Re-defining the subject in the 21st Century

Gila Flam (Director, Music Department and the Sound Archives of the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem)

Lorry Black (Research associate in ethnomusicology UCLA) with

It was entirely appropriate that in the week prior to Kristallnacht commemorations, COZ 19 should focus on music from the Holocaust, and an absorbing presentation from a world-renown researcher of songs from the ghettos. Gila Flam, Director of the Music Department of the Sound Archives at Jerusalem's National Library of Israel, hardly needs any introduction to IFJMS subscribers. Amongst her publications are *Singing for Survival: Songs of the Lodz Ghetto, 1940–45* (1992) and, in collaboration with Dov Noy, *Hobn Mir a Nigndl* (2000), which discusses the songs of the Yiddish 'Troubadour' Nokhem Shternheim who perished in the Rzeszow Ghetto. Gila's talk was facilitated by Lorry Black, Research Associate in ethnomusicology at UCLA.

(See Gila's and Lorry's biographies at the end of this report)

The challenge

Drawing on her extensive and ground-breaking exploration of Holocaust-era songs from the ghettos, Gila examined, within the specifics of the topic under discussion, how we might define the genre of Holocaust music, and how it relates to Holocaust education. This, she explained, was her challenge from when she commenced her research some 30 years ago. Her other key question was how to confront the issue of considering the songs within the context of memorialisation on the one hand, and entertainment on the other, and whether mere entertainment is an affront to Holocaust memory.

This was one of the points raised and discussed at some length during the Q&As. Indeed, as Gila pointed out, survivors have not always taken to new and updated interpretations of the songs. Indeed, as was explained, the majority of those who created the songs wanted to forget them. It was a genre used for survival at a particular time and in a particular place in order to respond to, and cope emotionally with, appalling conditions. So, it is understandable that after the war, survivors did not want to use, for example, a lullaby from the ghetto to put their baby to sleep.

Some recordings of songs were made by survivors after the war and into the 1950s, after which very little was recorded until the 1990s when oral testimonies from survivors began to be collected in earnest. And, not surprisingly, none of the songs were recorded during the war itself. So when Gila began to interview survivors, and evaluate personal testimonies, she discovered that some interviews brought up little information about songs, and even when they did, she had to consider the integrity of memory, and the impact of trauma.

Recordings by survivors and modern interpretations

Gila played a number of extracts from songs, some performed by survivors themselves, others modern arrangements, and especially by the group who had thoroughly researched the songs of the Lodz Ghetto – Brave Old World with Michael Alpert and Alan Bern. (these are listed on the IFJMS YouTube channel). They exhibited fascinating glimpses into life, and sheer survival, in the Lodz, Warsaw and Vilna ghettos. For example, in *Rumkovski Khayim*, the Yiddish text talks about three people with the name Chaim (Khayim in Yiddish), a word translated as Life, ironic in a song about death. The black humour, with its references to ghetto deprivation and politics, hopes that Chaim Rumkovski, the rather controversial leader of the ghetto, will eventually lead the prisoners to freedom. The second Chaim is the Zionist leader Weizmann, and third is, despite his name, the ghetto undertaker.

In another song, *Es geyt a yeke* ('A Yeke walks about') the lyrics talk about how the poverty of the ghetto affected German Jews who were used to lives of luxury. Death is never far away in many of these songs, often dressed up in dark humour, and here the song's protagonist walks to the ghetto's green space, Marysin, only to discover that it is also the graveyard. The melody is a marching tune of uncertain German origin. In Michael Alpert's modern version, the march element is even more sardonic, seeming to have strayed from a Nazi march. Alpert even quotes from the march section of the last movement in Beethoven's *Choral Symphony*, perhaps an indicator of that conundrum whereby Germany became defined by its high art on the one hand, and its murderous regime on the other hand.

Of course, this raises the issue of moral obligations within modern interpretations, some of which, it could be argued, can be manipulative in the way a post-war message can be conveyed. Yet, as Gila explained, even in the ghettos themselves, the prisoners used songs for their own disparate needs, demonstrating a wide range of political views: left to right; Zionism and anti-Zionism, and so on. Unity amongst the ghetto Jews manifested itself within the realms of survival, rather than in the arena of politics.

In the discussion it was also pointed out by Judy Pinnolis that often songs by modern groups are an entry point for a new generation who then are opened up to study the Holocaust of which little is known by young people in America.

This was an engrossing talk, and thanks to Lorry Black who managed the proceedings with aplomb.

Report by David Fligg

Gila Flam biography Gila Flam Gila.Flam@nli.org.il

Born in Haifa, Israel, Gila studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and received her BA and MA in Musicology, and substitute studies in Hebrew Literature, Jewish Folklore, Jewish Modern

History and Theater. Her MA thesis was on the musical work of Beracha Zefira in Erets Yisrael of the 1930s and 1940s. (1982). Gila continued her studies at UCLA Music Department in the Ethnomusicology Program. Her dissertation was on the Songs of the Lodz Ghetto (1988) which was later published under the same title Singing for Survival: Songs of the Lodz Ghetto 1940-1945 by the University of Illinois Press (1992).

Gila Flam was the founder of the Ethnomusicology Archives of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. In 1992, she returned to Israel has been teaching in several colleges Universities and continues to teach at the Jerusalem Academy for Music and Dance. Since 1994 she is the Director of the Music Department and the Sound Archives of the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem, where she developed the greatest collection of manuscripts and recorded sound of Jewish and Israeli music. The collections have been digitized and are available on the library's site and web site.

She is the author of articles on Yiddish songs as well as articles on Israeli music, Music Archiving and other subjects. Gila Flam is consulting and advising to individuals and organizations who are interested in studying and reviving forgotten works from the archive.

Lorry Black biography Black, Lorry lblack@schoolofmusic.ucla.edu

Dr Lorry Black is the Associate Director of the Lowell Milken Fund for American Jewish Music at the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music. As percussionist, pedagogue, arts-presenter, and Jewish music scholar Dr Black has found his home in many interesting offshoots of the music world. Deeply rooted in the Los Angeles performance scene, Lorry has performed with various ensembles including the Santa Monica Symphony, The Jacaranda Music Ensemble, and Torrance Symphony and Chorale. As a freelancer in Los Angeles, he has had the privilege to perform under the baton of many great conductors including John Williams, Alan Silvestri, David Newman, and James Conlon, as well as recording for various artists. Active in the Jewish community, he is readily found performing in synagogues as a conductor and percussionist, often arranging the works as well. He works in multiple specialties including music of the French concentration camps, contemporary synagogue music, and klezmer. Lorry holds a Doctor of Musical Arts in Sacred Music from the USC Thornton School of Music where he specialized in Jewish music and music of the Holocaust. He graduated with multiple honors. Previous degrees include a Bachelor of Arts degree from the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music and a master of music in orchestral percussion from USC.