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## Ilse Weber and Alma Rosé: Women Artists Fighting for Survival in the Shoah

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Ilse Weber and Alma Rosé:  
Women Artists Fighting for Survival in the Shoah

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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## Introduction

“Rosé was even able to convince the Nazis to spare her musicians from selections. When mandolin player Rachel Zelmanowicz was in the infirmary with typhus—a death sentence for any other prisoner—Josef Mengele<sup>1</sup> was prepared to send her to the gas chambers.

‘What’s with this one?’ he asked during his rounds.

‘She’s from the orchestra.’

Mengele continued on his way without any further discussion. As a member of Rosé’s orchestra, Zelmanowicz was untouchable even by him. Her life was spared.”<sup>2</sup>

These words petrified me. I received the book, *Violins of Hope*, for Christmas, a gift that I had no idea at the time would have such an effect on me. Being a daughter of German immigrants, a mother who is a professor of Holocaust literature and film, I had been educated on the horrors of the Shoah since I was young. If we were in the vicinity of a Jewish Heritage or Holocaust Museum while visiting family in Germany, my mother would buy tickets and take us there without question. It was a part of our upbringing. But prior to reading *Violins of Hope*, I knew nothing of the music scene in the years leading up to the deportation of Jews throughout Europe or in the concentration camps. It puzzled me how the subject of the music scene during the Holocaust, being such an integral part of the survival of so many Jews, lacked exposure, even in 2021. The stories I had read of the Beau Bassin Boys who were a group of Jewish refugee

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<sup>1</sup> Also nicknamed the “Angel of Death”, Josef Mengele was a SS physician in Auschwitz-Birkenau where he conducted experiments on prisoners and selected them for extermination.

<sup>2</sup> Grymes, J. A. (2014). *Violins of Hope: Violins of the Holocaust, instruments of hope and liberation in mankind's darkest hour*. Harper Perennial, 139.

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musicians performing for survival while imprisoned in Mauritius<sup>3</sup> or Bronisław Huberman who founded the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and saved nearly 1,000 Jewish musicians by helping them immigrate and escape Nazi tyranny<sup>4</sup>—just scraped the surface of all that transpired in the musical community in the late 1930s and 1940s. After finishing the book, I found myself searching for more information about Alma Rosé and other resilient musicians I read about only to be met with limited resources. It was then that I realized what the topic of my Senior Project would be. I felt compelled to bring their stories to light, analyze their works, and perhaps provide the little exposure that I could to the academic and music world, exposure they perhaps did not receive during their time.

While investigating information on artists who were victims of the Holocaust in archives, at the campus library, online catalogues, etc., I found myself gravitating toward the story of Ilse Weber. It was the lack of sources about her life that intrigued me in addition to how different her life was from the rest of the musicians I had found. On January 11th, 1903, Ilse Herlinger Weber was born in Vítkovice, a city part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>5</sup> As a poet and author, Weber wrote many poems, songs, theater pieces, and books specifically for Jewish children, primarily in the German language. After marrying Willem Weber, they settled in Prague where she later took on a job as a producer for the Czech Radio. In 1942, Ilse along with her husband and youngest son were deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp where she would work as a nurse in the children's infirmary for two years. In October 1944, Ilse and her son Tommy were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau where they were sent to the gas chambers upon arrival and

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<sup>3</sup> Grymes, J. A. (2014). *Violins of Hope: Violins of the Holocaust, instruments of hope and liberation in mankind's darkest hour*. Harper Perennial, 100.

<sup>4</sup> *Violins of Hope*, 57-48.

<sup>5</sup> *Ilse Weber; née herlinger*. Jewish Museum Berlin. (n.d.). Retrieved September 30, 2021, from <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/topic-ilse-weber-nee-herlinger>

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murdered. She did not have the rigorous musical upbringing others had nor was she a professional musician. But she was a mother and a writer who after being ripped apart from her family and deported to Theresienstadt, selflessly performed *Lieder* she wrote for sick children in the camp infirmary. She was not a composer or working musician, but her *Lieder* were no less stirring and ingenious than the works of composers like Schubert and Schumann. Throughout Chapter I, I will discuss how not only did Weber's poems reveal the atrocities she experienced and the trauma she felt while imprisoned in Theresienstadt, but also what it means as a musician to have creative freedom taken away from you, to lose your freedom to create art. While Ilse Weber was not born into a musical family like Alma Rosé was, the art she created with the limited resources she was given as a woman of her time holds incredible depth.

Alma Rosé, on the other hand, was born with privileges and resources at her disposal that Ilse Weber was not. As Chapter II will show, she is an example of an unwavering woman who uses the influence of her esteemed musical family to her advantage and for the survival of the female musicians in Auschwitz-Birkenau. On November 3rd, 1906, Alma Rosé was born in Vienna, Austria to a renowned Jewish family of musicians, where she lived until Nazi occupation.<sup>6</sup> Her story was compelling because against all odds, especially being a woman and a Jew, she was able to sway the SS guards into allowing the orchestra "privileges" other prisoners were not. Alma Rosé's life is also striking because of how frustratingly close she was to achieving a prolific career and reputation independent of her family's in a patriarchal world before being deported to concentration camps. The existence of an all-female orchestra in a genocidal setting such as Auschwitz-Birkenau was an image hard to comprehend, especially with

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<sup>6</sup> Newman, R., Kirtley, K. (2003). *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*. Amadeus Press.

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the SS guards addressing Alma Rosé as “Frau Alma”<sup>7</sup> and the fact that “Alma could get almost anything from the SS through the admiring and ambitious Maria Mandel.”<sup>8</sup> In April 1944, Alma Rosé died in Auschwitz-Birkenau of sudden illness, possibly food poisoning or infection, to this day there is much speculation around her death and the cause remains still unknown. The unlikeliness of her story reveals the pain that music can cause when exploited, but that even through this, she was able to buy her fellow Jewish musicians time.

It was not until visiting the archives in Vienna at the City Hall and Musikverein that I realized how high-profile the Mahler-Rosé family was during Alma’s time. By examining the original photographs and concert flyers at the Society of Friends of Music (Wiener Musikverein) Archive, Alma’s story came alive in a way it would not have if I simply conducted research online. It was also while leafing through the Vienna Philharmonic collection’s documents that I realized how truly patriarchal the music scene was during Alma’s life and what she was up against in terms of her solo career. For example, one book from the Musikverein Archive I was able to examine contained lists of all the members of the Vienna Philharmonic and their photographs during Alma’s time, and there was not one woman musician to be seen. The primary sources like concert reviews not only revealed the anti-semitism Alma fought during the development of her career but also the sexism, especially being born into a family dominated by esteemed male musicians.

The search for sources on Ilse Weber’s life was difficult in another regard; because she was known more for her literary works, the archives and collections I visited had no information on her. The original manuscripts of her writing were primarily in private ownership of her

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<sup>7</sup> Grymes, J. A. (2014). *Violins of Hope: Violins of the Holocaust, instruments of hope and liberation in mankind's darkest hour*. Harper Perennial, 138.

<sup>8</sup> Newman, R., Kirtley, K. (2003). *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*. Amadeus Press, 250.



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family, therefore, the only archival sources of her poems I was able to examine were yellow typescript documents, perhaps intended for publishing later. While I was not able to leaf through as many original sources in my research on Ilse Weber's life, her story came alive through the analysis of her poems. Unlike Alma Rosé, Ilse Weber was not listed in *The Encyclopedia of Jews in Music*<sup>9</sup> published by the Nazi Party. While Weber did have a successful career prior to her deportation, despite her disadvantageous status as a woman and mother, "Willi concluded later that Theresienstadt was the peak of Ilse's career as a writer."<sup>10</sup> Perhaps Willem Weber's statement, Ilse's husband, gives a clue as to why the sources on her time before and during Theresienstadt are so limited. It was the lack of source material that also revealed how different her life was from Alma's and how the Holocaust affected her exposure to both the classical and literary world.

While traveling from archive to archive this past year and gaining access to original source material, I felt closer to Ilse Weber's and Alma Rosé's stories than ever. The experiences I had with hands-on research left me more and more frustrated after learning about all they could have still achieved in the literary and music worlds if it were not for the Holocaust. Conducting research on these two unyielding and enduring women and analyzing their works was taxing. Because of the intricate role that music played in the Shoah, my project did not come to an all-encompassing argument and conclusion. After analyzing Ilse Weber's and Alma Rosé's poems, it became clear how different the function of music can be for people experiencing trauma in genocidal environments. As my project will show, music can be a means to escape the trauma, but music, and the memory of music, can also contribute to the trauma.

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<sup>9</sup> Gerigk, H. (1940). *The Encyclopedia of Jews in Music*. Bernhard Hahnefeld. (Antisemitic Publication)

<sup>10</sup> *Ilse Weber (1903-1944)*. TIMOTHY J. BOYCE. (2017, March 15). Retrieved October 27, 2021, from <https://timboyce.com/ilse-weber-1903-1944/>

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## Chapter I: Ilse Weber

In the early twentieth century, Jews living in Germany represented 3 percent of all working professionals in the music industry, though they formed only 1 percent of the general population.<sup>11</sup> While Jewish success in the professional world, particularly the music scene, was on the rise, so was anti-Semitism in Europe. After Hitler's rise to power, removal of Jews from their public positions commenced and this was soon followed by Jews being laid-off by private institutions. This became particularly noticeable in professional orchestras, as a significant number of the members were Jewish. Many of the musicians who held positions at conservatories and opera companies suddenly had no way to support themselves. Orchestras that were completely made up of Jewish players fell off the face of the earth, as if they never existed. Because Jews represented many of the string sections in professional orchestras, their absence was also immediately noticed. One German composer by the name of Georg Haentzschel recalled that he realized Jewish musicians were being removed "because the violin sections were getting thinner and thinner."<sup>12</sup> Just as musicians' careers were beginning to take off, such as Erwin Schulhoff's and Alma Rosé's, they were cut short by the persecution from the Nazi regime. For example, Schulhoff, renowned already during his time, began writing symphonies in the years leading up to and during his imprisonment. Ilse Weber's best work, according to her

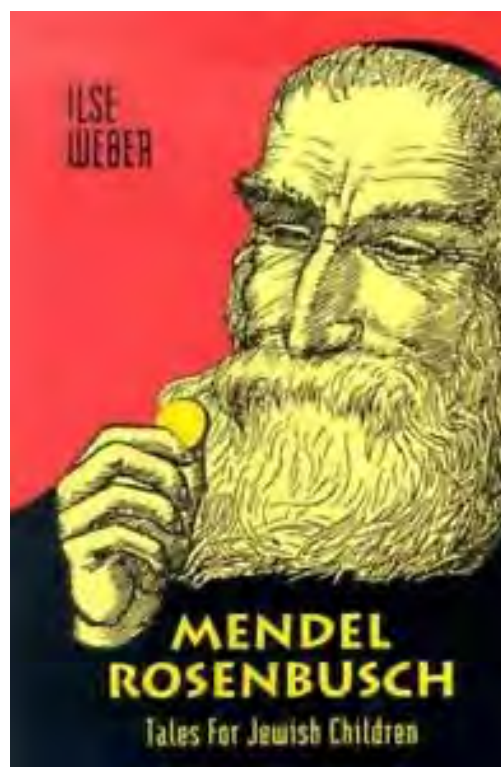
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<sup>11</sup> Grymes, J. A. (2014). *Violins of Hope: Violins of the Holocaust, instruments of hope and liberation in mankind's darkest hour*. Harper Perennial.

<sup>12</sup> Kater, Michael H. (2000). "Jewish Musicians in the Third Reich : A Tale of Tragedy," in *The Holocaust's Ghost: Writings on Art, Politics, Law and Education*, ed. F. C. Decoste and Bernard Schwartz. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 75.

husband, was produced during the years leading up to her death in Auschwitz.<sup>13</sup> Few musical arrangements of her *Lieder* were preserved and made it out of the camps. Though she was already an established writer and had written numerous songs, Weber had not even been mentioned in the *Lexikon der Juden in der Musik*, an encyclopedia published by the Nazi regime that blacklisted Jews who were involved in the music scene. The persecution of Ilse led to her erasure from the industry, the effects of which we still see today as her music is hardly performed.

Since childhood, Ilse Weber, née Herlinger, had been musically talented; lute, balalaika, and piano were just a few of the many instruments she could play. On January 11, 1903, Ilse was born into a middle-class Jewish family in Moravia, a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>14</sup> She was raised being immersed in literature and had gained a passion for writing poems, short stories, and writing letters in her early teens. By the age of 26, she had published a number of poems, written audio plays for the Czech radio, and published three books for Jewish children.



Ilse was a well-established member of the Jewish community by the time she moved to Prague.

It was after settling there that she wrote predominantly children's fiction and her most famous

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<sup>13</sup> Boyce, T. J. (2017, March 15). *Ilse Weber (1903-1944)*. TIMOTHY J. BOYCE. Retrieved October 17, 2021, from <https://timboyce.com/ilse-weber-1903-1944/>

<sup>14</sup> *Ilse Weber, née Herlinger*. Jewish Museum Berlin. (n.d.). Retrieved September 30, 2021, from <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/topic-ilse-weber-nee-herlinger>

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book, *Mendel Rosenbusch: Tales for Jewish Children in 1929* (as shown above). In addition to working as a producer for the Czech Radio, Weber had a lot of experience caring, writing, and playing instruments for children, but never pursued music seriously as a career. After meeting Willem Weber, a successful businessman, they married in 1930 and had their first son, Hanuš, a year later.<sup>15</sup> Being settled in Prague with respected professions, Ilse and her family had a quite normal, stable, middle-class life.

Her letters written between 1933 and 1942, being remarkably preserved, reveal much about how Ilse's familial life and local Jewish communities were changing after Hitler's rise to power. Most of these letters were addressed to Lilian von Lowénadler, the daughter of a diplomat living in Sweden and her penpal, with whom she had been corresponding since her early teenage years. In 1934, Ilse's letters were only filled with updates on family travels, her work at the Czech radio, and her second son, Tommy's birth. What was brewing within the Nazi movement seemed like nothing but a small raincloud in the distance drifting along the horizon. However, a few years later the situation in Prague and her seemingly idyllic life was gradually going awry as her letter to Lilian written on April 29, 1937, reads, "I laugh very little these days."<sup>16</sup> More and more Jewish friends within her community were being forced to move into smaller homes and being barred from their distinguished professions. In one of her letters from 1938, she describes being stared at by supposed German "friends" and states, "How Hitler must fear us that he persecutes us so! Up to this day I have believed in God; but if he doesn't give us a token of his existence soon, I can no longer. This persecution of Jews is inhuman."

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<sup>15</sup> *Ilse Weber, née Herlinger*. Jewish Museum Berlin. (n.d.). Retrieved September 30, 2021, from <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/topic-ilse-weber-nee-herlinger>

<sup>16</sup> Weber, I. (2017). *Dancing on a Powder Keg*. (M. Schwartz, Trans.). Bunim and Bannigan Limited.

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### 1.1: Separation of the Weber Family

As the situation in Czechoslovakia territory was becoming increasingly unsafe, Ilse decided to send Hanuš away on a *Kindertransport*.<sup>17</sup> This was a rescue effort organized by Nicholas George Winton that saved nearly 700 children, most of whom were Czech Jews, by transporting them to England. From there, Lilian von Lowénadler took Hanuš into her custody and traveled back with him to her home in Sweden where he would grow up and spend the rest of his life. Weber's letters to him and Lilian were what you would expect of a mother; she would tell him to obey the Lowénadlers and continuously study. But at the same time, the letters revealed much of the deteriorating atmosphere in Czechoslovakia. By 1940, Ilse, Willem, and Tommy had been forced to move into a single-room apartment owned by a friend, a Jewish pediatrician who had been fired and banned from offering any care.<sup>18</sup> They were a few of many in the Prague community who were gradually being shut out of society because of their Jewish identities.

Throughout 1940 and 1941, Ilse's language in her letters to Lillian reveals her family's worsening mental health through news like, "We're no longer used to kindness by anyone. You know, all it takes is for someone to say to me a sympathetic word and I already cry. My nerves are so kaput." and "In the last two years I aged a hundred years, and almost everyone with me."<sup>19</sup> She even stopped writing literature and would for some time until Theresienstadt. Leaving the apartment and going out into the city of Prague was becoming increasingly difficult without being met with discrimination. By the beginning of 1942, on account of being without her

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<sup>17</sup> *Ilse Weber (1903-1944)*. Donne, Women in Music. (2021, September 27). Retrieved October 7, 2021, from <https://donne-uk.org/ilse-weber/>

<sup>18</sup> Boyce, T. J. (2017, March 15). *Ilse Weber (1903-1944)*. TIMOTHY J. BOYCE. Retrieved October 17, 2021, from <https://timboyce.com/ilse-weber-1903-1944/>

<sup>19</sup> Weber, I. (2017). *Dancing on a Powder Keg*. (M. Schwartz, Trans.). Bunim and Bannigan Limited.

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first-born son and experiencing daily discrimination, Ilse's mental health hit a low point and she seriously suggested "to Willi to end it all and rather commit[ting] suicide with [her] and Tommy" because "mentally [she] simply cannot go on."<sup>20</sup>



Family portrait of Ilse Weber with her husband, Willem, and her two sons, Hanuš (right) and Tommy (left). Jewish Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. <sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Weber, I. (2017). *Dancing on a Powder Keg*. (M. Schwartz, Trans.). Bunim and Bannigan Limited.

<sup>21</sup> Seifertová, N., Sumičová, J., & Kaňa, J. (Eds.). (2018, September 12). *Ilse Weber and Her Legacy*. Educational and Information Bulletin of the Terezín Memorial. Retrieved October 27, 2021, from <https://newsletter.pamatnik-terezin.cz/ilse-weber-and-her-legacy/?lang=en>

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On February 6th, 1942, Ilse, Willi, and Tommy were deported to Theresienstadt in Terezin, Czechoslovakia. The ghetto and concentration camp was where most of the Jews from Prague were sent and it served as a transit camp for Protectorate Jews who would later be sent to Auschwitz. Prior to World War II, Jews were one of the largest minorities living in the Czechoslovak Republic with 356,830 people according to the 1930 census. Only 26,000 of them were able to flee before the Nazi regime mobilized in 1941. By the end of the Holocaust, the regime had murdered nearly 74% of Jews who had lived in Czechoslovak territory.<sup>22</sup>

Shortly after arriving at the concentration camp, Weber was assigned a job as nurse in the children's infirmary. There she began writing poems again in many of which she would describe what daily life in Theresienstadt was like. Occasionally she would set them to her own music or familiar melodies and perform them for the young patients as a way to ease their pain. Throughout her life, she always had a powerful sense of duty for both children in her community and her family, and in the camp this did not cease. After being liberated from Auschwitz years later, her husband Willem concluded that the poems she composed during her years in Theresienstadt were some of her best work. "In addition to the many musical performances, Theresienstadt developed into a birthplace for numerous contemporary compositions."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. (n.d.). *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia*. Holocaust Encyclopedia . Retrieved November 28, 2021, from <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-holocaust-in-bohemia-and-moravia>

<sup>23</sup> Fischer, L. (2015). *"Komm mit nach Terezín" Musik in Theresienstadt 1941-45: Instrument des Jüdischen Lebenswillens und der Ns-Propaganda*. Edition Mokka, 27.

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## 1.2: *Musica Prohibita*

Playing the guitar she illegally owned and singing the poems she wrote was Ilse's way of making the children's suffering more bearable. Music served as a medium through which they could psychologically escape their surroundings. All musical activity outside of the orchestra created by the SS for propaganda was strongly prohibited and although her performances were life-threatening, it was her only way of comforting the young patients since medicine was forbidden to Jewish prisoners. One of her songs, *Musica Prohibita*, reveals what it was like having to hide her musical passion from the watchful, oppressive eyes of SS guards. Through the use of ambiguous language and symbolism, Weber's poem functions as a critique of the antisemitic system the regime had created and it stands in defiance of Nazi ideology.



Drawing by Malva Schalek depicting Ilse Weber singing and playing the guitar for fellow prisoners in the infirmary, Theresienstadt, 1942.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ilse Weber (1903-1944)*. Donne, Women in Music. (2021, September 27). Retrieved October 7, 2021, from <https://donne-uk.org/ilse-weber/>



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*Musica Prohibita*

Ich wandere durch Theresienstadt,  
vorbei an dem strengen Gendarmen,  
die Laute, die man mir geliehen hat,  
wie ein Kind verpackt in den Armen.

Mein Herz schlägt schneller, die Wange brennt  
in des Gefürchteten Nähe.  
Es wäre geschehen um das Instrument  
wenn er es bei mir sähe.

Wir sind ja verurteilt an diesem Ort  
zu tiefster Verzweiflung und Schande,  
und die Instrumente nahm man uns fort  
als gefährliche Konterbande.

Wir dulden Hunger und Freiheitsraub  
und alles, womit sie uns quälen,  
doch richten sich immer empord aus dem Staub  
die niedergetretenen Seelen.

Wir dürfen, umgeben von Tod und von Grauen,  
den Glauben an uns nicht verlieren.  
Wir müssen der Freude Altäre bauen  
in den düsteren Massenquartieren.

Mit Dichterwort und ein wenig Musik  
wollen wir dem Elend entfliehen.  
Aus schlichten Liedern soll bißchen Glück  
und gütiges Vergessen erblühen.

Und wenn wieder einige sich gestehen,  
die nahe schon am Verzagen:  
»Es ist auf der Welt doch auch manchmal schön,  
nun können wir's wieder ertragen«  
dann fühlt man um sich so reiches Glück,  
daß man geholfen hat den Armen,  
und trägt furchtlos die Laute wieder zurück  
unter dem Blick des Gendarmen.

The word, "Armen," is used twice throughout the poem, but for its two different meanings; one being the limbs and the other being poor, but in an existential sense. The Nazis disliked multifarious language, the use of it went against their ideology because to them language that they cannot control or regulate can be dangerous. This poem of Ilse's is very ambiguous so it was a contradiction to Nazi ideology in and of itself, perhaps this is why she assigned it the title of "Musica Prohibita," because not just music but also the language she used was prohibited by the regime. The word, "Kontrabande," should also not be read so literally, but

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more so in a figurative sense. It was not simply instruments that were contraband within Theresienstadt, but the connotations thereof. Music and playing instruments was something very spiritual and personal for Ilse Weber, they represented hope, one of very few things left of her old life in Czechoslovakia. Being oppressed in her passion for music was not something she could live with, so she rebelled against this prohibition by writing songs and performing in secret.

Another example of this poem being a contradiction to Nazi oppression is the use of the phrase, “empor aus dem Staub.” The translation, *ascend*, functions as a metaphor for resistance, that Jews like her will rise like a phoenix out of the ashes. The figurative language suggests that music is their only hope and part of their identity still left, but also that music is something she must create in order to flee into it. In a spiritual sense, music and the power of a poet’s word not only offers solace and comfort, but also fulfillment and salvation. The image involving the “Laute,” also gives a clue that music is something very spiritual to her and a form of escapism from her surroundings. The lute is an archaic instrument that consistently makes an appearance in all forms of art, including literature. The instrument serves as an illustration of escapism and can be seen as otherworldly, representing various mythologies and the ancient world in general. Just as the lute transports the listener metaphorically to other worlds, so did music for Ilse perhaps.

This poem also functions as an act of resistance against the propaganda film, *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt*.<sup>25</sup> The film attempted to conceal the atrocities and barbaric living conditions of Theresienstadt while also attempting to assure everyone that the Jews were being well taken care of. The women can be seen making leather purses, the men playing a football

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<sup>25</sup> Pečený, K. (1944). *Theresienstadt*. Nazi Germany; Schutzstaffel.

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game, and an orchestral performance being put on in a concert hall. However, Ilse Weber exposes the cruel reality of what it was like being imprisoned in Theresienstadt, a reality being hidden from the world for so long. Ilse Weber's poem, *Musica Prohibita*, functions as a testament to the idea that art is free and oppressive systems such as the Nazi regime cannot hinder the power of the poet's word and music.

### 1.3: *Ich wandre durch Theresienstadt*

One of Weber's other poems, *Ich wandre durch Theresienstadt* (which we can infer was written later), contrasts the feeling of hope and resistance in *Musica Prohibita*. The language that she uses, such as "das Herz so schwer" and "wann sind wir wieder frei?" accentuates her more apathetic and disheartened attitude towards her circumstances. Rather than resisting the soldiers and hiding contraband, it seems that she has now surrendered metaphorically and literally to her oppressors. "For them, the constant fear of being transported was just as real as dying every day in the camp."<sup>26</sup> Rather than perform music as an act of rebellion against the regime, Ilse has now reached a point at which she only longs for a home, and this seems to be the central theme of the poem.

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<sup>26</sup> Fischer, L. (2015). "Komm mit nach Terezín" *Musik in Theresienstadt 1941-45: Instrument des Jüdischen Lebenswillens und der Ns-Propaganda*. Edition Mokka, 73.

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*Ich wandre durch Theresienstadt*

Ich wandre durch Theresienstadt,  
 das Herz so schwer wie Blei.  
 Bis jäh mein Weg ein Ende hat,  
 dort knapp an der Bastei.

Nach Haus! -- du wunderbares Wort,  
 du machst das Herz mir schwer.  
 Man nahm mir mein Zuhause fort,  
 nun hab ich keines mehr.

Dort bleib ich auf der Brücke stehn  
 und schau ins Tal hinaus:  
 ich möcht so gerne weiter gehn,  
 ich möcht so gern nach Haus!

Ich wende mich betrübt und matt,  
 so schwer wird mir dabei:  
 Theresienstadt, Theresienstadt,  
 wann wohl das Leid ein Ende hat,  
 wann sind wir wieder frei

The word, “wandern,” holds significance in the phrase, “Ich wandre durch Theresienstadt” because of what it means to both Ilse Weber as an individual and to the greater Jewish community. The movement of endlessly wandering indicates that she considers herself to be homeless and does not identify with any place being her home, her one and only home in Prague where she was heavily involved in the Jewish community that was taken from her. To lose one’s home, is to lose a part of one’s identity and their sense of belonging, it has a significant, spiritual impact on the individual. This trauma she experienced is evident in Weber’s language. The title could also be referencing the figure of the “Wandering Jew,” a legend that plays a significant role in both art and literature. The antisemitic origins of this legend can be traced back to medieval interpretations of the Bible. A version of the legend being spread through Palestine associated the name, “Cartaphilus,” with the “Wandering Jew.” “When Jesus was carrying His cross to Calvary, this man Cartaphilus jeered: ‘Go on! Faster!’ To which the Savior quietly replied, ‘I go, but thou shalt wait till I come.’ This anecdote originated in Armenia

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during the thirteenth century; later it found its way into Europe.”<sup>27</sup> It was not until 1602, that this legend was revived in a pamphlet published in Germany titled, “A Brief Description and Narration Regarding a Jew Named Ahasuerus.”<sup>28</sup> Due to his taunting, the character was doomed to “wander” the Earth forever, punished for his anti-Christian attitude. This 17th-century version of the legend assigned a different name to the figure: *Ahasuerus*. The popularity of the pamphlet resulted in the rise of Anti-semitism throughout Europe and rise in paranoia that the Antichrist would appear with the aid of Jews. The spread of this anti-Jewish legend was only the beginning of a continuous pattern of using a Jew as a scapegoat. It is an image used to condemn Jewish people and their continuous struggle for emancipation in society. In addition to the legend being associated with the fate of the Jewish community and their being without a home, it was also used in the antisemitic propaganda film released in 1940, *Der Ewige Jude*.<sup>29</sup> Not only did Weber lose a part of her identity with her home, but she has also been reduced to the figure of the “Wandering Jew.”

The phrase, “du machst das Herz mir schwer,” seems to be an echo of Goethe’s language in *Faust* as Gretchen sits at the spinning wheel. This reference centers around the theme of longing, an emotion both Goethe’s and Weber’s texts share, all the while contrasting one another. Goethe’s work highlights longing in the sense of love, while Weber’s poem highlights longing in the sense of belonging and having a home. Her use of the word, “schwer,” may indicate the burden she carries of her existential crisis. The fact that Ilse was quite involved in the Jewish community of Prague makes losing her sense of belonging and home, this part of her identity,

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<sup>27</sup> Bagatti, P. B. (1949). The Legend of the Wandering Jew. *Franciscan Studies*, 9(1), 1–2. Retrieved May 3, 2022, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41974346>.

<sup>28</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. (n.d.). *Wandering Jew*. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved May 3, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/wandering-Jew>

<sup>29</sup> Hippler, F. (1938). *Der Ewige Jude*. Germany; D.F.G. (Deutsche Filmherstellungen und Vertriebs G.m.b.H.

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that much more burdensome. *Ich wandre durch Theresienstadt* provides insight into what it means to be reduced to the image of the “Wandering Jew” and how it feels to succumb to the oppression of a totalitarian regime.

#### 1.4: *Die Schafe von Liditz*

While Reinhard Heydrich, *SS-Obergruppenführer* and *Reichsprotektor* of the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, was being driven to his office in Prague on May 27, 1942, he was assassinated by Czech and Slovak soldiers Jan Kubiš and Jozef Gabčík.<sup>30</sup> Following the grenade attack on Heydrich’s car, the two soldiers fled and for weeks were nowhere to be found. In an act of vengeance, fellow *Gruppenführer* Karl Hermann Frank commanded that anyone involved with the assassins or their mission would be immediately executed. After no further developments in their search for Kubiš and Gabčík, Hitler ordered that any village harboring the two soldiers be burned down and the inhabitants thereof executed or deported. Although no evidence or compromising material was found following investigations and house-searches in Lidice, the Nazis still sought to carry out an act that would avenge the death of one of their “great leaders” and for this chose the people of Lidice. In the early hours of the morning on June 10th, members of the *Ordnungspolizei* surrounded the village limits and executed all 173 men who were in Lidice at the time.<sup>31</sup> The women were deported to Ravensbrück concentration camp and the children were taken off to Chełmno in Poland to be poisoned by exhaust gas. After ridding Lidice of its inhabitants, the Nazi soldiers set the village on fire and demolished its

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<sup>30</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (n.d.). *Lidice: The Annihilation of a Czech Town*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Retrieved November 18, 2021, from <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lidice>

<sup>31</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (n.d.). *Lidice: The Annihilation of a Czech Town*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Retrieved November 18, 2021, from <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lidice>

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remaining buildings. They even proceeded to slaughter the pets and working animals of the village, all except a herd of sheep. The Nazis rounded them up and sent them to Theresienstadt.

With the arrival of the sheep in Theresienstadt, Ilse Weber heard of the massacre that took place days before in Lidice. The horrors she heard from the news may have been what led her to write *Die Schafe von Liditz*.

### *Die Schafe von Liditz*

Flockige, gelbweiße Schafe trotten die Straße entlang.  
Zwei Hirtinnen folgen der Herde, durch die Dämmerung tönt ihr Gesang.  
Es ist ein Bild voller Frieden und doch bleibst du, Eilender, stehn,  
als fühltest du Hauch allen Todes grausig vorübergehn.  
Flockige, gelbweiße Schafe, sie sind der Heimat so fern,  
verbrannt sind ihre Ställe, getötet sind ihre Herrn.

Ach, alle Männer des Dorfes, sie starben den gleichen Tod.  
Ein kleines Dorf in Böhmen, und soviel Unglück und Not.  
Verschleppt die fleißige Frauen, die sorgsam die Herde betreut,  
verschollen die fröhlichen Kinder, die sich an den Lämmern gefreut,  
zerstört die kleinen Häuser, in denen der Friede gewohnt,  
ein ganzes Dorf vernichtet, das Vieh nur gnädig verschont.

Das sind die Schafe von Liditz und trefflich am Platze hier,  
in der Stadt der Heimatlosen das heimatlose Getier.  
Umschlossen von einer Mauer, durch grausamen Zufall gesellt,  
das gequälteste Volk der Erde und die traurigste Herde der Welt.  
Die Sonne ist untergegangen, der letzte Strahl versinkt,  
und irgendwo bei den Kasernen ein jüdisches Lied erklingt.

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Although this poem is to be read literally based on its origin, the image of the sheep holds significant meaning to both Ilse Weber as an individual and to the Jewish community as a whole. Weber begins the poem by drawing a picture of masses of yellow, white sheep, possibly representing the inhabitants of Lidice. This line is significant in that the lamb, which tends to be used as a sacrificial animal in Judaistic texts and stands for innocence, takes on this new, stained image. The yellow color of the sheep could also be referring to the Star of David badge Jews were required to wear in public. These badges marked members of the community, branded them as subversive elements in an Aryan society. The color of white symbolizing innocence and purity is contrasted by the yellow, symbolizing illness and fault. This metaphor could be stemming from antisemitic Nazi ideology, that Jews were not innocent in the eyes of Nazis and were not considered “pure in their racial make-up.” Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe had become outsiders who did not fit into or could not assimilate into society, in a sense, the image of the black sheep. The line, “In der Stadt der Heimatlosen, das heimatlose Getier” further supports this and could be referring back to the legend of the “Ewige Jude.”

Weber’s word choice of “flockige” emphasizes the image of the masses, that Jews had been degraded to indistinguishable animals and reduced to numbers. Much like the image of the “Ewige Jude” forever wandering and not able to find a home, the word, “flockige,” presents the image of floating through the air and thus could function as a metaphor. “Wie ein Lamm, das zur Schlachtbank geführt wird,” the men of Lidice were taken in groups of 5 or 10 to be executed. The use of the word, “flockige,” also may have a connection to Paul Celan’s poem, *Todesfuge*. A line from the fifth stanza reads: “er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch in



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die Luft / dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man nicht eng.”<sup>32</sup> Again, Jews are reduced to the legend of the “Wandering Jew,” people who will remain like “smoke” and “clouds” forever hanging in suspense in the air. But most importantly, this imagery refers to the cremation of Jews in the concentration camps after they were murdered, in the end becoming “flockige” ashes rising in the air. Because Ilse Weber’s poem was written as a reaction to the news that she heard in Theresienstadt, here she attempts to stress the horrors of antisemitic ideology and its effects on an entire people. In stanza one, at first glance, the “zwei Hirtinnen” could be interpreted as the figures of shepherds in the Hebrew Bible. However, because they are gendered as female with the ending *-innen*, this possibility is dismissed. The line, “durch die Dämmerung tönt ihr Gesang” brings the narrative motif of song into play again, a recurring theme throughout many of her poems. The two shepherdesses seem to function as the personification of music and it seems as though Weber associates music with femininity. While music and song seems to live in Ilse Weber’s imagination as they are consistently stressed as otherworldly and existing in a higher realm, the motif is so strong that it emphasizes destruction and death with rhyme and *Klang*.

The use of the prefix, *ver-*, in words such as “verschleppt,” “verschollen,” “vernichtet,” “versinkt,” and “verbrannt,” give the poem an ominous tone. The negative connotations of the prefix and Weber using it in first position stresses the horrors the families in Lidice faced, an apocalyptic storm that only brought on existential dread. Her use of vocabulary associated with genocide brings to light how the deaths in Lidice were futile and senseless, especially since they were innocent sacrifices for an assassination that the Nazis set out to get vengeance for. This is

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<sup>32</sup> Celan, P., & Wiedemann, B. (2003). *Die Gedichte: Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe in einem Band*. Suhrkamp, 40-41

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further supported by Weber's idea that the village had "Unglück" in the massacre and their senseless deaths were not meant to be. The last line of the poem seems to hold significance because of its correlation with some of Weber's other *Lieder*. Up until this point, Ilse's text has been quite sorrowful, mournful, and even personifies death in the first stanza. However, she ends her poem with the idea that music acts as a source of hope and offers solace. Again, music functions as a medium through which Weber can escape and unlike "die Sonne [die] untergegangen [ist]," music is everlasting.

### 1.5: *Wiegenlied vom Polentransport*

In September of 1944, Ilse Weber's husband was notified that he would be transported to Auschwitz.<sup>33</sup> Shortly after he was deported, the children's infirmary of Theresienstadt was also ordered to board a transport bound for "the East." Weber had promised her husband that she would "under no circumstances" board a transport. But she voluntarily registered herself and her son to accompany the children, unaware of what was awaiting them. On October 4th, 1944, she took a transport with Willi to Auschwitz.<sup>34</sup> *Wiegenlied vom Polentransport* was one of the last poems Ilse Weber ever wrote and it was completed while she was being taken with the children on the transport.

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<sup>33</sup> Seifertová, N., Sumičová, J., & Kaňa, J. (Eds.). (2018, September 12). *Ilse Weber and Her Legacy*. Educational and Information Bulletin of the Terezín Memorial. Retrieved October 27, 2021, from <https://newsletter.pamatnik-terezin.cz/ilse-weber-and-her-legacy/?lang=en>

<sup>34</sup> *Ilse Weber, née herlinger*. Jewish Museum Berlin. (n.d.). Retrieved September 30, 2021, from <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/topic-ilse-weber-nee-herlinger>

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*Wiegenlied vom Polentransport*

Schlaf, kleiner Freund, du bist ja so müd,  
es singt der Zug sein eintönig Lied,  
die Nacht kommt auf leisen Sohlen.  
Du bist noch klein und findest noch Ruh,  
mach deine lieben Augen zu,  
es geht jetzt fort nach Polen.

Schlaf, Kindchen, wir sind schon so weit,  
Ach, längst versank in der Dunkelheit  
die Heimat, die man uns gestohlen.  
Wir hatten sie lieb, man nahm sie uns fort,  
nun sitzen wir schweigend und finden kein Wort  
und fahren weit — nach Polen.

Schlaf, kleiner Freund, ich sehe dir zu,  
ich will aus deiner süßen Ruh  
mir Trost und Stärkung holen.  
Die Sterne leuchten hell und rein,  
ich will nicht länger traurig sein,  
Gott gibt es auch in Polen.

Similar to some of her other *Lieder*, *Wiegenlied vom Polentransport* appears to be a lullaby based upon its structure and use of masculine and feminine rhyme. However, Weber's language and the lullaby-like rhythm of the poem creates a melancholic tone that accentuates the sense of her longing. For example, her use of words in the third line of each stanza that rhyme with the word, "Polen," in the sixth line is repeated throughout the poem and creates a motion emulating that of a train moving along tracks. It's particularly noteworthy that for the moments of longing in the *Lied*, feminine rhyme is used while other moments where Ilse's anger and loss

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is revealed, masculine rhyme is used. In the last stanza when she says, “Die Sterne Leuchten hell und rein, ich will nicht mehr traurig sein,” her sense of longing becomes a projection into the future that is nuanced through her use of feminine rhyme. Ilse’s reference to her son being sent away in a *Kindertransport* in “Wir hatten sie lieb, man nahm sie uns fort, nun sitzen wir schweigend und finden kein Wort” reveals the trauma she suffered from losing her child. Her anger with the situation is emphasized through the use of masculine rhyme that creates a more blunt impact on the tone. As a poet, to no longer be able to find words that express how deep her pain was is significant. Her silence highlights the trauma she experienced, the loss of her child led to the loss of her medium through which she expressed herself.

The title of this work not only refers to Ilse’s situation at the time of which she wrote it, but it could also be referencing the *Kindertransport* her son Hanuš took to London. The first and last stanzas begin with the line, “Schlaf, kleiner Freund,” perhaps referring to the children from the infirmary, while the second stanza begins with “Schlaf, Kindchen.” This further supports the possibility of this poem being written not only about Ilse’s and her son Tommy’s journey to Auschwitz, but also about her other son Hanuš’ journey on the *Kindertransport*. The image of a child plays a very important role in this poem, not only because it’s written as a lullaby but also because of its correlation to music. Just as purity, spiritual peace, and innocence are the strengths of a child, so are they in music. Just as Ilse Weber took an escape into the music with her previous *Lieder*, she takes an escape into the past, an escape into the memories of her child. As she describes in the third stanza, “ich will aus deiner süßen Ruh mir Trost und Stärkung holen,” this escape offers spiritual peace.

The lullaby also accentuates the thin line drawn between sleep and death. It almost comes across as if she can sense an end to her journey, not only literally but also existentially. Her use

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of language such as “du bist ja so müd” and “mach deine lieben Augen zu” begs the questions of what spiritual peace means to Weber, and what its connection is to sleep. In the second stanza, the hyphen used between “fahren weit” and “nach Polen” not only could represent speechlessness (especially because of its context in the line above), but also her literal and spiritual journey becoming more and more distant to her old life. The third stanza ends with the line, “Gott gibt es auch in Polen,” possibly hinting at her arrival in Auschwitz and the end of her existential journey. But also could reveal her escape into religious solace.

Ilse’s son, Hanuš, did not know about the details of how his mother and brother died in Auschwitz until decades later when he came in contact with a friend from Ostrava who had been deported to Theresienstadt and then transferred to Auschwitz to become “employed” as a *Leichenträger* [corpse carrier]. He recalled that in October of 1944, Ilse arrived at Auschwitz via transport along with a group of a dozen or so children. “Ilse stood in their middle trying to comfort the little ones.”<sup>35</sup> Although it was quite risky in front of the SS guards, this friend from Ostrava approached Ilse. She recognized him immediately and asked ““Is it true that we can take a shower after the journey?”” He decided to reveal the truth and answered, ““No, that is no shower room, it is a gas chamber, I will give you a piece of advice now. I have often heard you singing in the infirmary. Go as quickly as possible into the chamber. Sit with the children on the floor and start singing. Sing what you always sing with them. That way you will inhale the gas quicker. Otherwise you would be trampled to death when the panic breaks out.””<sup>36</sup> Ilse Weber’s reaction to this was out of character and not at all what he expected. “She laughed, somehow absently, hugged one of the children and said: ‘So we will not be taking a shower....’” Just a

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<sup>35</sup> Boyce, T. J. (2017, March 15). *Ilse Weber (1903-1944)*. TIMOTHY J. BOYCE. Retrieved October 17, 2021, from <https://timboyce.com/ilse-weber-1903-1944/>

<sup>36</sup> *Ilse Weber (1903-1944)*. TIMOTHY J. BOYCE.

Weber, I. (2017). *Dancing on a Powder Keg*. (M. Schwartz, Trans.). Bunim and Bannigan Limited.

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month after Ilse and her son were murdered, *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler ordered to cease all use of the gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Three months later, the concentration camp was liberated on January 27th, 1945.<sup>37</sup> During the existence of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex, nearly one million Jews from across Europe were executed there by SS camp authorities.

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<sup>37</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (n.d.). *Auschwitz: Key Dates*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Retrieved November 29, 2021, from <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/auschwitz-key-dates>

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## Chapter II: Alma Rosé

Prior to the rediscovery of Alma Rosé's life in the 1980s, she was suspected of being complicit with the SS guards while directing the Women's Orchestra in Auschwitz. An article published by *Der Spiegel* in 1981 reads, "She had only one goal and pursued it mercilessly: to play and to play again in order to forget the horror of Auschwitz and satisfy the SS, to buy time in order to survive."<sup>38</sup> The public had gained a different, tainted view of Rosé 40 years after her death, even though her family was quite famous and respected in the music world. A television film titled *Playing for Time* which was released on CBS in 1980 follows the story of Fania Fenelon's autobiographical novel, *Sursis pour l'orchestre* (The Musicians of Auschwitz). The TV movie was later protested by surviving members of the women's orchestra in Auschwitz-Birkenau for its false portrayal of the musicians and its defamation of Alma Rosé.

During the production of the television film, some claimed that the "privileges" Rosé was able to persuade the SS to allow for the orchestra was due to her complicity with the authorities there. Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, a surviving member of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Women's Orchestra, in an attempt to save Rosé's legacy, recalled that Alma understood that if the orchestra played well, the women would survive. If they played badly, they were "useless to the Germans and there [was] no need for the musicians to go on living."<sup>39</sup> "In the process, [Alma] lost sight of the extent to which her wager for time made the orchestra complicit with the murderers,

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<sup>38</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich, 31.

<sup>39</sup> Newman, R., Kirtley, K. (2003). *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*. Amadeus Press, 254.

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something for which Fania Fénelon, who was averse to any kind of fanaticism, had an eye.”<sup>40</sup> Her situation in the concentration camp and her relationships with people there cannot be understood simply in black and white terms, but it is rather multifaceted and she was ultimately able to save most of the lives of the orchestra members. The question is rather how far is one willing to go in order to save their own life and the lives of others, how much is a life worth? One can attempt to dissect the complexity of her situation by seeing it from her perspective; perhaps the inner turmoil she suffered in order to buy the orchestra members time was due to her having to interact with the very authoritarian figures within Auschwitz who persecuted and murdered her own people. This inner turmoil and developing contempt for the very music she played can be analyzed in her rewritten version of *In mir klingt ein Lied* when she says “Ruhe will ich nur, nicht denken mehr an ein schönes Lied.” It is because music forced her to interact with the SS in order to spare their lives and her survival depending on her direction and performance of music that she may have slowly developed contempt for it.

The lines separating each side of the horrific genocide were much more blurred than is commonly known and this reality is what made it possible for Rosé to orchestrate survival for the musicians in the first place. One cannot confuse complicity with survival, it is because Rosé delved into the utopia of music that so many musicians were able to survive until the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944. The question is how far is one willing to go in their eagerness to survive? It is even more chilling and disturbing that something like an orchestra existed in Auschwitz, and that the SS guards sat down to enjoy the music that Alma would conduct. This oxymoronic setting where both music and genocide were taking place, where musicians had to

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<sup>40</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich, 31.



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perform for their survival and Nazis held lives in the palm of their hands, was the reality for Alma, one that she had to get away from by delving into the music. The monstrosity of the camp lies in the fact that the SS guards would wallow in their musical delusions and then wake up the very next morning to murder Jews.

Growing up in a family of musicians, Alma Rosé was often overshadowed by men and received little exposure to and recognition in the classical music world. Her uncle being Gustav Mahler and her father Arnold Rosé, she had begun to learn the violin as a toddler and was constantly surrounded by classical music. Mahler and Arnold Rosé did not only have a professional relationship, they also had strong familial ties. Rosé married Mahler's sister Justine in 1902 and his brother had been previously married to Mahler's sister Emma. Together, they belonged to what one might call the "royalty" of the classical music scene in Vienna, which is one of the reasons Alma was later recognized in Auschwitz-Birkenau. During the beginning of her musical studies, Alma was taught by her father but later moved on to become "one of Sevcik's<sup>41</sup> first female violin students."<sup>42</sup> Rosé made her solo debut in 1922 at a charity concert in Bad Ischl alongside her father and brother Alfred. Alma Rosé was born into a unity with music that cannot be ignored for it makes her life as a musician so unique.

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<sup>41</sup> Otakar Ševčík, a renowned Czech violin pedagogue of the early 1900s.

<sup>42</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich, 66.

ARNOLD ROSÉ WIRD AN SEINEM 70. GEBURTSTAG VON TOSCANINI UND DEM ORCHESTER GEFEIERT



Arnold Rosé with Toscanini at a celebration with the Vienna Philharmonic on his 70th birthday on October 24th, 1933.

Photo provided by the Society of Friends of Music (Wiener Musikverein) Archive, Library, and Collections in Vienna

DER KONZERTMEISTER IN DER OPER



Arnold Rosé leads the Vienna Philharmonic in an opera as the concertmaster (date unknown).

Photo provided by the Society of Friends of Music (Wiener Musikverein) Archive, Library, and Collections in Vienna



DAS ROSÉ-QUARTETT  
*Arnold Rosé, Paul Fischer, Anton Walter, Anton Ruzilka*

The Rosé Quartet, Arnold pictured on the very left (date unknown).

Photo provided by the Society of Friends of Music (Wiener Musikverein) Archive, Library, and Collections in Vienna

To come from a family so influential in the classical music world, perhaps this is why she took inexplicable risks upon herself later while imprisoned. While her identity as a woman and a Jew burdened Alma Rosé with disadvantages and persecution, her family's wealth and influence provided her with a unique and privileged position, one that many women of her time did not have (even during the Weimar Republic). The same influence which made earning her own recognition and music career independent of her family was difficult in some regards, it also bought her time within Auschwitz-Birkenau and saved the lives of many Jewish women. Following the reactions of SS guards within Auschwitz-Birkenau when finding out who she was, Alma Rosé realized she could use her family's name and position to her advantage and "it was

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said that in the name of music, Alma could get almost anything from the SS.”<sup>43</sup> Alma put the little privilege she had to the best possible use in Auschwitz-Birkenau and she let other women participate in this privilege, during which she was able to dupe the Nazis. This use of her privilege, which also came with incredible risk, is an expression of her humanity and selflessness.

### 2.1: A Woman of the Weimar Republic

While the classical music industry in which Alma was raised had experienced hardly any progression in terms of women's rights, the era of the Weimar Republic was going through drastic changes and women's positions in the workforce were evolving. During World War I, women had to fill jobs left vacant by men who went to fight such as factory workers, lawyers, doctors, store clerks, train conductors, etc. When some of them returned, women took on other professions that would be associated with the female identity for decades to come, such as teachers, secretaries, social workers, etc. For example, in the year of 1918 alone, 11 million women were employed, making up approximately 36% of the workforce in Germany.<sup>44</sup> Alma Rosé was born into a generation of women who were on the rise in terms of human rights and they were becoming more visible in society. The concept of the “new woman” in the Weimar Republic became more popularized and challenged male supremacy and gender roles after the war, during which women were growing less concerned about marrying well and having children. By examining the photos below in correlation with the events of her life, it is easy to

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<sup>43</sup> Newman, R., Kirtley, K. (2003). *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*. Amadeus Press, 250.

<sup>44</sup> Peukert, D. (1993). *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*. Hill and Wang.

say that Rosé is the epitome of the “new woman” who threatened the patriarchy of the classical music world during the Weimar Republic.



Announcement of a concert with Alma Rosé and the Wiener Walzermädel in Copenhagen, 1936



Alma in a white Aero Convertible (date unknown)

Photos provided by The Gustav Mahler–Alfred Rosé Collection from the Music Library at the University of Western Ontario, Canada.



Marlene Dietrich in the movie *Morocco* (1930)  
Eugene Robert Richee/Deutsche Kinemathek, via  
Marlene Dietrich Collection Berlin



Anita Berber at the fireplace of her home in  
Berlin (1918)  
Waldemar Titzenthaler

The androgynous image of the woman with masculine clothing and a bob hairstyle was a look that became popularized in the 1920s. This evolving image threatened societal norms and stereotypes forced on women during this time, this image was an act of rebellion that while progressive, was also an incomplete emancipation. While she's not holding a cigarette or wearing a top hat, Alma's photos emulate the iconography of Weimar Republic's emancipated woman, the style that feminist icons such as Anita Berber and Marlene Dietrich sported. The concert poster to the left depicts Alma Rosé with the signature bob and 1920s-style makeup in front of a backdrop of red and white. By staring into the camera she emits confidence that she would make her own way in the world.

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In the photo to the right, Alma Rosé is sitting in the driver's seat of the car, a position that was very uncommon for the women of her time. This image not only confirms that her position in the classical music world was quite unique, but also outside of her career as well. Considering her position was one disadvantageous in terms of being a woman, but advantageous in terms of being born into the Rosé-Mahler family, she achieved in the classical music industry what many women could not during her time. Her self-confidence and independence from her father is what earned her recognition among artists and patrons before she was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. However, it is the same independence she worked hard for that may have caused a domino effect leading to her deportation.

## 2.2: The Wiener Walzermädeln

Following her debut in Vienna in 1926, the reviews of her performance of Bach's Double Violin Concerto in D minor and Beethoven's Romance in F major were mixed. There were some critics who claimed that Rosé "still has some way to go in terms of her technique and articulation" while others said "die unfehlbare Reinheit der Intonation" and "sweet tone" left the Vienna public speechless (see the concert review reprinted below on pages 39 and 40).<sup>45</sup> However, there was not one review that did not mention her father, in actuality, most of them credited him for Alma's successful musical upbringing. Quotes from the media such as "If the musical world outside central Europe does not already ring with the name of Alma Maria Rosé, the brilliant violinist of Vienna, it is because she is the daughter of a man who believes that the great artist must not chase flash popularity" and "Es war ein Triumph für Arnold Rosé" reveal

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<sup>45</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich, 70.

how much Alma truly lived in the shadows of men she was constantly surrounded by within the classical music world.

Even Váša Příhoda, who later became her husband, was an internationally renowned violinist who Arnold Rose took a liking to. They met while her family was on holiday in the Black Forest near Freiburg. After getting married in 1930, they moved near Prague, where Příhoda was initially from, and Alma became a Czech citizen. This would later offer a bit of protection during the Anschluss in 1938 where anti-Jewish measures were taken. In the early 30s, she began touring Europe and pursuing a career as a soloist in Vienna. In the process, however, Alma and Váša became more distant in their marriage until they eventually divorced in 1935. Following this pivotal moment in her life, she needed to gain financial stability and independence and in order to do so, she founded a chamber orchestra called the Wiener Walzermädeln, or Viennese Waltz Girls.



A postcard of Alma Rosé and the Wiener Walzermädeln possibly performing in Italy (date unknown). The Gustav Mahler–Alfred Rosé Collection from the Music Library at the University of Western Ontario, Canada



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From its birth, the groups of performers were already becoming a huge success and rising to popularity in the global city of music. This chamber group truly propelled her career and aided her in making a name for herself that did not rely on the fame of her family members. Alma Rosé and the Wiener Walzermädeln went on an eighth-month tour in 1933 traveling to 28 different cities within central and northern Europe. The success Alma Rosé had with the chamber orchestra was a pinnacle time in her life during which *she* was finally receiving credit for her accomplishments. In a world where the classical music industry was highly patriarchal and women were not allowed to audition for professional orchestras, the existence of the Wiener Walzermädeln served as a shining beacon for young women who sought careers in music. They then ventured out to western Europe until their last few performances in 1937 and 1938.<sup>46</sup>

Prior to the founding of Wiener Walzermädeln, Alma Rosé's accomplishments and success as a solo violinist in Europe was accredited to her father, Arnold. As shown in the reviews below, the media at the time would not report on Alma without mentioning Arnold Rosé and his tutelage of her. Alma had no identity of her own and her playing was completely defined by his playing. The dominance of the "patriarchy" in the music world is evident in the language of the review by Josef Reitler pictured below: "indem man des Tochter Beifall klatschte, huldigte man auch dem Vater." By claiming that the applause following Alma's performance pays "homage" to her father belittles her very accomplishments. In addition, Reitler demeans the quality of her playing by saying that she still does not have "the royal calm of [her father's] bow, the unfailing purity of *his* intonation, and the roundness and heartfelnness of *his* sweet tone." This review demonstrates that no matter what her skills would always be associated and compared to

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<sup>46</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich.

her father's. Many of her performance opportunities were either organized by or associated with Arnold Rosé, not that she necessarily disliked this. But with the founding of the Wiener

<h2 style="font-size: 1.5em; margin: 0;">Feuilleton.</h2> <h3 style="margin: 0;">Konzerte.</h3> <p>Es war ein Triumph für Arnold Rosé, dessen Tochter Alma im großen Musikvereinssaale debütierte. Die beste Wiener Gesellschaft, Komponisten, Dirigenten, Geiger, Professoren der Universität und Musikschulen waren anwesend. Und indem man der Tochter Beifall klatschte, huldigte man auch dem Vater, einem der repräsentativsten Musiker Oesterreichs, dem besten Konzertmeister der Welt, dem Erben Joachims im Quartett, dem edelsten Beethoven-Spieler. Alma Rosé ist ein echtes Wiener Kind, wir sehen sie wachsen, künstlerisch werden. Nun trat sie, anmutig erblüht, zum erstenmal vor das Wiener Publikum. Wir finden, vorläufig, kein stärkeres Lob als die Feststellung, daß etwas vom Geigertalent des Vaters in ihr lebendig ist. Noch hat sie nicht die königliche Ruhe seines Vogens, die unfehlbare Reinheit der Intonation, die Rundung und das zu Herzen Gehende seines süßen Tones. Wer spielt Arnold Rosé die Violinsoli in „Traviata“ und „Tristan“, im „Rosenkavalier“ und im „Musikant“ nach? So bleibt dem dunkeläugig-rassigen Mädchen noch immer einiges für Technik und Ausdruck zu tun übrig. Aber schon jetzt gebietet sie über eine vielversprechende, solid studierte Virtuosität, und ein Temperament ist da, das nur durch Befangenheit an freier Entfaltung behindert wurde. Das Unerreichteste, dem Rosés Geige in so vielen musikalischen Schlachten und</p>	<p>in noch schöneren Festen der Russin vorangeklängt, war, ein idealer Begleiter, zur Verfügung. Und wie dann Vater Rosé den Taktstock mit der Violine vertauschte (in Bachs Doppelkonzert), ergab die Gegensätzlichkeit zwischen Alter und Jugend, Erregung und geruhiger Erfahrung, vibrierenden Nerven und stilistischer Sicherheit, eine herbe und rührende Harmonie. Ihr Bestes bot Alma Rosé im Schlußallegro des Konzerts von Tschairowsky. Hier hatte die Kantilene empfundene Wärme und der feurige Rhythmus zündete. Unter rauschenden Sympathieumgebungen für Vater und Tochter Rosé ging der schöne Abend zu Ende.</p> <p>Selten gehörte Originalkompositionen für zwei Klaviere, St.-Antoni-Choral-Variationen, Stücke von Debussy, eine Fantasie von Rachmaninow, brachte ein Konzert der Frau Schawenstein-Burger mit Baron Vietinghoff-Scheel; erstere vor Jahren als Fräulein Burger in Wiener Musikreisen geschäft, der zweite Abkömmling einer alten deutsch-russischen Adelsfamilie und durch seine Schicksale bemerkenswert. Er war als elfjähriges Wunderkind auf das Dränaen Gayounow's ins Petersburger Konservatorium eingetreten und wurde dort mit mehreren Preisen ausgezeichnet. Nach Ausbruch der Revolution mußte die Familie Petersburg und bald darauf auch Rußland verlassen und erreichte nach abenteuerlichen Irrfahrten schließlich Japan, wo der junge Anatole nach einem dort veranstalteten Klavierkonzert sofort zum Professor an der Musikakademie in Tokio ernannt wurde. Durch das Erdbeben von 1923 fand seine Tätigkeit dort ein jähes Ende. Das Feuer vernichtete sein Wohnhaus,</p>
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Josef Reitler (1883-1948), a music critic and director of the Neue Wiener Konservatorium, commented on the debut of Alma Rosé with “It was a triumph for Arnold Rosé”. *Neue Freie Presse*, December 20th, 1926 (evening edition).

Walzermädeln, it is evident that she was in search of opportunities and recognition that did not rely on her father's. This review also reveals, though so early in her career, that Alma is also defined by her Jewish identity. Reitler describes her as a “dunkeläugig-rassigen Mädchen”, a dubious term that reveals anti-semitic undertones. This comment cries out that she is not “blauäugig” and that her appearance does not fit the ideal image of a blue-eyed, blonde woman. *Rassig* can be directly translated to “sexy” or “racy”, suggesting that just because she is Jewish,

Alma is “sexy”. *Rassig* can also be associated with *Rasse* (race) or *rassig* (racial) and it is morally suspect that Reitler correlates her Jewish identity with her “Technik” in the same sentence, as if they have any relevance at all. This review reveals that being a woman was not the only hindrance Alma Rosé faced so early in her career, but also the presence of anti-semitism in the classical music world (though orchestras in Europe were comprised of a significant number of Jewish musicians).

**MUSICAL PRODIGY INHERITS  
TALENT OF COMPOSER-FATHER**

VIENNA, Austria, November 25 (A.P.)—If the musical world outside central Europe does not already ring with the name of Alma Maria Rose, the brilliant violinist of Vienna, it is because she is the daughter of a man who believes that the great artist must not chase flash popularity.

Alma Maria Rose, too, was an infant prodigy, and might have gone round the world before she got into long frocks. She has learned, however, to lay greater store by the good opinion of an older generation of musicians.

So far she has played in Vienna, Bucharest, Prague, Brno, Freiburg and Karlsruhe, and everywhere people have heard and wondered. They speak of her like connoisseurs of wine speak of a rare vintage—with a gentle motion of the head and a light in their eye. When a member of the old nobility anywhere in these parts, desiring to delight his friends, asks of the knowing ones whom to invite to entertain them he is told, “Ask Arnold Rose to allow his daughter to play to you.”

Alma Maria Rose plays only the classical masters, such as Brahms, Mozart, Beethoven. Every note they have written for her instrument is impressed upon her brain and her senses.

As a child she thought she preferred to sing, but when the great Sefcik saw how she drew her bow over the violin strings her dreams of a singer were dispelled. Her father and Sefcik still train her, but she is rapidly outgrowing all masters. She is only nineteen. This year she will be heard in Berlin and perhaps Paris.

Her father, Arnold Rose, for forty-six years leader of the Rose Quartet, will be heard in Washington next April.



ALMA MARIA ROSE.

An excerpt from one of many American newspapers that reported on Alma’s debut in Vienna and her other performances that followed throughout Europe, calling her a musical prodigy. Circa November and December 1927.

The media coverage of her performances provide evidence of how male-dominated the classical music world truly was at the time. While Alma's career as a woman violinist was an achievement in and of itself at the time and very unique for her identity as a female Jew, it still was always tied back to the reputation of her family, comprised of famous male musicians such as her uncle Gustav Mahler, her father Arnold Rosé, and her brother Alfred Rosé. While the success of male musicians in her family led to opportunities in some ways, it hindered her career in others, and the media coverage reveals this. It is interesting that following the success of the debut of Wiener Walzermädeln, the content of press reviews changes.



Press reviews from the brochure of the Wiener Walzermädeln, date unknown. The Gustav Mahler–Alfred Rosé Collection. Music Library, University of Western Ontario, Canada. Supported by The Gladys Kriebler Delmas Foundation.

For once, there seems to be no mention of Alma's father, or the rest of her family for that matter, in these reviews. They speak of her and the ensemble's technique and virtuosity, the "tänzerischen Klängen" they produced and their "natürliche Musikalität." However, not without

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using sexist language that had no relevance to their playing, such as “geigerischen sexappeal” and “Jugend und Schönheit,” language that probably would not have been used for male musicians. The reviews are a further display of setbacks Alma often faced during her “patriarchal” time.

### 2.3: Life in Exile

Her father, Arnold Rosé had his last performance with the Wiener Philharmoniker in 1938, shortly after which he was dismissed along with other Jewish members of the orchestra and sent into early retirement. Alma as well as her brother shortly afterward lost their livelihoods because they were prohibited to perform for the Viennese public. In April of 1938, the Rosé family were forced to register all their assets and valuables under order of The Ordinance on the Registration of German Property. Two items Arnold did not list were their most valuable, the Guadagnini violin from 1757 and the Stradivarius from 1718.<sup>47</sup> Due to Alma’s mother’s illness, the Rosé family was initially unable to emigrate before the persecution of Jews by the Nazi regime worsened in Vienna. Following Justine Rosé-Mahler’s death in August of 1938, Alma’s brother Alfred expressed his concerns for his sister’s safety in a letter to a family friend, “you cannot imagine how terrible her life now is. [...] She cannot visit the theatre or cinema, nor a park nor any other public venue.”<sup>48</sup> Gradually, Alma not only had lost her livelihood and income, but was also losing her ability to move around freely, to participate in cultural life. Not only did her career come to a standstill, but her freedom of movement was curtailed. More and more institutions, stores, public places, etc. in Vienna were denying entrance to Jews.

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<sup>47</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich, 120.

<sup>48</sup> *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*, 122.

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Finally, after coming in contact with Bruno and Elsa Walter as well as composer Willem Mengelberg, she was able to find safe passage to London on March 15, 1939 before matters got worse in Austria. By being married to Váša Příhoda, Alma had acquired a Czech passport and because Nazis were restricting the exit of Jews who were specifically German citizens, she was able to get past the regulations. However, she left Vienna as soon as she could because she feared with the increasing German occupation over parts of Europe, this loophole in immigration would soon close. Looking back, historians have inferred that it was on this journey to London that Alma Rosé brought the violins with her. The evidence for this claim can be seen in Alma's letter to her brother Alfred: "both violins and all the jewelry are out [of Austria]."<sup>49</sup> Two months later, after passage through various cities like Berlin and Amsterdam, Alma's father Arnold, also arrived in London.

That year, Alma and her father were not the only musicians in London seeking work. Many in exile had fled to London because it was another classical music capital and it was highly unlikely that Germany would occupy Britain. During their time there, Arnold Rosé revived the famous Rosé quartet with members, Friedrich Buxbaum, Karl Doktor, and this time his daughter, Alma. However, they were barely making a living and this left the Rosés in dire financial circumstances. Alma was offered a performance opportunity at the Grand Hotel Central in the Hague, where the Wiener Walzermädeln had performed years prior. After their final father-daughter performance in November of 1939 at an event held in honor of Sigmund Freud who had recently passed, Alma traveled to Holland in order to seek opportunities that would better support them both. By this time, the Rosés had been told twice to sell Arnold's

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<sup>49</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich, 128.

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Stradivarius in order to gain more financial stability, however, they continued to refuse. Thankfully, Alma was regularly sending money to London and they could still avert the sale. Soon the situation grew awry as the German invaded Belgium and the Netherlands. Rosé was still there because her entry permit for Britain expired before she could leave and decided to stay despite the warnings and concerns of her family. Soon, Jewish musicians were banned from performing in public yet again and as a result Alma resorted to performing in house concerts for the wealthy Dutch who were classical music enthusiasts. These house concerts that supported Jewish musicians who were unable to perform in public were continuously organized and they could be seen as a form of resistance against the German occupation and the active persecution by Nazi authorities.

At this point, Alma's brother, Alfred, had moved with his family from London to New York and then they eventually settled in Cincinnati. Arnold Rosé remained in London, perhaps because he was too old to make the entire journey to the US. Alma had also tried for months to get safe passage from Holland to the US, however, she had no proof of employment with an orchestra, for instance, and no financial stability, therefore her case was too fragile to gain access. Thankfully, in April of 1941, Alfred was able to secure an affidavit from a guarantor in the U.S. for her.<sup>50</sup> In June, it was sent eventually to the American consulate and just before they were able to process it, the Nazi regime closed all consulates within their occupation. All her hopes of being able to escape the Netherlands were lost and the situation only worsened when all mailing operations between Europe and the US had ceased due to the attack on Pearl Harbor. It

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<sup>50</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich.

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was from this point onward, that Alma was not receiving word from her family nor could send any updates to them.

Because Alma was no longer able to send letters or money to support her father, she along with Alfred tried to launch an initiative to get Arnold to the US with other famous figures such as Bruno Walter, Albert Einstein, and Arturo Toscanini. Alma was only able to communicate with others and send messages through the Red Cross, during which she found out her father was seriously considering selling his Stradivarius. They tried to go through with the initiative, but Arnold's age and having been born in Romania dismissed any hope of refuge in the US as there were only a certain number of immigrants from Romania allowed to enter. Instead, he moved away from London and to the countryside, Hertfordshire.

On March 4th, 1942, Alma married Constant van Leeuwen Boomkamp in Utrecht as part of a "sham" marriage initiative.<sup>51</sup> Months earlier, many concerned friends of Alma's tried convincing her that marrying an "Aryan" would offer her more protection from the ever-worsening persecution of Jews in much of Europe. She needed to decide and act quickly as well since the Nuremberg Laws would no longer allow "mixed marriages" beginning in April of 1942. This sham marriage later proved to be useful when Alma's life was in danger a couple times during run-ins with the Nazi authorities. After having refused to wear the "Jewish star," Alma was arrested and sent to an internment camp, however, was released thanks to her husband who had to prove his "Aryan" identity. Later in 1942 when raids were taking place and the deportation of Jews in Holland began, Alma was able to avoid the first wave of arrest. However,

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<sup>51</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich, 150.



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this luck would only last so long. In preparation for what might come, she put her violin in the hands of her lover at the time, Leonhard Jongkees, along with a picture of herself.

#### 2.4: Deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau

It is still unclear how Rosé was trying to get to the US, she allegedly had flights to France and then Switzerland. However, someone reported her attempted escape and she was arrested at the Dijon railway station in December of 1942. Alma's friends in Holland received word that she was "under 'special protection' of Nazi officials in Paris. It was even rumored that friends in Berlin tried to help her. It appears that no one outside the camp knew why she was held at Drancy for months."<sup>52</sup> She was taken to the Drancy internment camp until being transferred to Beaune-La-Rolande and then Auschwitz by July. She was registered with her married name, Vanleeuwen Boomkamp, né Rosé. "Neither Arnold nor Alfred knew of Alma's capture and imprisonment" for some time.<sup>53</sup> Including Alma, there were approximately 1000 deportees on the train from Paris, 440 of which were immediately murdered by SS guards on arrival.<sup>54</sup> Alma was one of 560 who were selected to work in the camp. Following the liberation of Auschwitz in 1944, 52 of these deportees survived, Alma Rosé not being one of them. It is frustrating how Alma, being a prominent female violinist for her time, having achieved so much despite battling a classical institution that was severely male-dominated, was so close to gaining the success and independence she deserved, but lost it all including her life to genocide. Not only did the Holocaust end her life, but it also resulted in the erasure of her legacy in the classical music world. Not only did these female musicians have to take 4 steps for every 1 a man had to take in

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<sup>52</sup> Newman, R., Kirtley, K. (2003). *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*. Amadeus Press, 204.

<sup>53</sup> Newman, *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*, 204.

<sup>54</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich, 160.

an unforgiving classical music world, but their careers and legacies were also cut short by persecution and mass genocide.

901	Telila	Jacques	19.1.34	Kind	2021
902	Telia	Salomon	2.7.95	ohne	2075
903	Tepebek	Albert	14.1.28	Felzarbeiter	2052
904	Teperok	Herszel	1898	Schneider	2051
905	Terres	Gentil	8.1.05	ohne	2078
906	Tarres	Michel	15.5.99	Arbeiter	2077
907	Tragars	Chaskiel	19.5.21	Heizungsenteur	2058
908	Treger	Odette	9.3.15	Medistin	2095
909	Treuillet	Lydia	8.12.17	ohne	2059
910	Tuchmann	Abraham	4.11.23	Ledararbeiter	2085
911	Uhry	Yvonne	25.2.03	Sekretarin	2109
912	Unger	Jeseph	3.4.98	Schneider	2112
913	Unikowski	Michel	20.12.92	Markthaendl.	2138
914	Usan	Joseph	1908	Orthopaede	2151
915	Van Gelderen	Ikarus	11.11.19	Student	2361
916	Vanleeuven	Obna	8.11.06	Geigenspieler	2133
917	Van Lee	Adrienne	30.8.76	ohne	2125
918	Vidal	Colette	6.5.27	Kind	2148
919	Vidal	Nedjma	2.6.87	ohne	2146
920	Vidal	Fresper	5.1.87	Festbeamter	2145
921	Vidal	Rachel	18.1.25	Kind	2147
922	Vieyra	Bernard	11.8.20	Juwelier	2135
923	Vieyra	Jacques	2.2.19	Steinfasser	2136
924	Villerd	Liba	25.10.95	ohne	2137
925	Viner	David	15.12.99	Schneider	2152

Transport No. 57 list of deportees en route to Auschwitz-Birkenau from the railway station in Bobigny, Paris. Alma Rosé was No. 916 on this list on July 18th, 1943. Her name was incorrectly recorded by the SS guards as “Obna Vanleeuven”.

Scan provided by the Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris, France.

It is imperative to note what led to Alma Rosé being arrested and deported in the first place. It is possible that Alma’s identity, as a female musician trying to make her way in the patriarchal classical music world of her time, led her to the place and time at which she was captured. After all, it was because of the limited opportunities in London for female musicians that she had traveled to the Netherlands for the only job offer that would support her and her

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father. Not only did her identity as a Jew during this time affect her career, but her identity as a woman as well. Some of the top orchestras in Europe did not allow women to audition until the late 20th century. For example, the Berlin Philharmonic did not hire female musicians until 1982 and the Vienna Philharmonic not until 1997.<sup>55</sup> The London Symphony Orchestra archives show no signs of female members until 1942, and even then, they did not hold permanent positions like the men.<sup>56</sup> Many of the female orchestral musicians in Europe during Alma's time only held positions in women-led institutions that they founded themselves, Alma being one of them. This separation of the sexes carried into the concentration camps, as there was a male orchestra in Auschwitz and a female orchestra.

Not only did Alma have to leave her father in London because their work permits only allowed them to perform in chamber groups, but also because there were hardly any opportunities for women.<sup>57</sup> As soon as Rosé received word of an opportunity for her at the Grand Hotel Central in The Hague in Holland, she took it without hesitation. After all, the choice was either to accept the offer or sell her father's beloved Stradivarius. It was Alma's tour with her orchestra in the 1930s that led to this opportunity, for she played concerts for wealthy families with whom she previously established connections. Alma founded her orchestra and organized its tour because there were no opportunities for her in Vienna otherwise, therefore her pursuit for a career independent of her father's led not only to her increased exposure to the classical music industry, but also to her being captured by the SS.

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<sup>55</sup> Sergeant, D. C., & Himonides, E. (2019, August 16). *Orchestrated Sex: The Representation of Male and Female Musicians in World-Class Symphony Orchestras*. *Frontiers*. Retrieved March 28, 2022, from <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01760/full#fn002>

<sup>56</sup> *London Symphony Orchestra Chronology*. London Symphony Orchestra. (n.d.). Retrieved March 28, 2022, from <https://lso.co.uk/orchestra/history/chronology-alt.html>

<sup>57</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich, 128.

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The similarities between the women-led orchestras throughout Europe and the female orchestra in Auschwitz raise questions about inequality in classical music as well. In Berlin, Vienna, and London, women had to create orchestras of their own in order to get performance opportunities and exposure to the classical music world. In Auschwitz, male and female musicians were separated into two different orchestras. The female orchestra of Auschwitz-Birkenau was founded by Maria Mandel, SS Supervisor of the Women's camp, and originally only allowed non-Jewish musicians to participate.<sup>58</sup> With the growth of the camp, gradually more and more Jews were allowed to join. It is grotesque that females in Auschwitz were almost given more opportunities to play classical music publicly than outside of the camp in Europe because it was not the musicians themselves who had to form an ensemble, but the administration. Just as Alma Rosé programmed waltzes and traditional Viennese music for the Wiener Walzermädeln audiences wanted to hear in order to hold concerts, she had to program music in Auschwitz that catered to what the SS guards wanted to hear. What does this say about the blatant sexism and inequality in the classical music world of Alma Rosé's time? In the 1930s, she had been fighting gender inequality in order to provide for her father and further her career. In Auschwitz, Alma fought antisemitic persecution and genocide *as well as* sexism in order to save her life and the lives of the orchestra members.

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<sup>58</sup> *The Birkenau Women's Camp Orchestra*. Facing History and Ourselves. (n.d.). Retrieved February 16, 2022, from <https://www.facinghistory.org/music-memory-and-resistance-during-holocaust/birkenau-womens-camp-orchestra>

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## 2.5: Orchestrating Survival

At first, Alma Rosé was assigned to the block of Auschwitz where prisoners were to undergo unfathomably painful surgeries and experiments of mass sterilization conducted by SS physician Carl Clauberg. A nurse by the name Ima van Esso, recognized Alma as the renowned violinist who founded the *Wiener Waltermädels* and provided her with a violin so she could perform for fellow prisoners in secrecy. The guards in Block 10 found out about these secret concerts and reported them to Maria Mandl who showed interest in Rosé's talents. Once she heard Alma play, she appointed her as Zofia Czajkowska's successor and conductor of the women's orchestra. What was once an orchestra made up of mainly non-Jewish members then evolved to being a primarily Polish orchestra and finally consisting of Jewish prisoners as well.

The women's orchestra's tasks in Auschwitz were extensive and the amount of repertoire they had to learn, rehearse, and perform left them exhausted and weak. Their task included performing marches at the gate of the women's camp when prisoners were forced early in the mornings to leave for work. Sundays were usually dedicated to playing for the SS guards and administration as well as the Kapos. Winters were especially gruesome because they often had to perform outside and wore concert attire such as blouses and skirts that were much too light for the conditions. As winter began to show face, Alma fortunately convinced the Nazi authorities to allow the orchestra to move into the "Sauna" building so that they might be less cold. While Rosé was later wrongly perceived to have been complicit with the SS, "it was no secret in the camp that the support of their SS admirers was essential to the survival of the orchestra members. One day, when Flora [Schrijver Jacobs] had burned her hand and could not play, an SS remarked bluntly: 'It is lucky for you that you are our accordion player; otherwise I would sent

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you to the gas today.”<sup>59</sup> One of the physicians in the camp and Rosé’s friend, Margita Schwalbová, remembered the performances in the sauna building to be “the most solemn moments in the camp.”<sup>60</sup>

The women’s orchestra emitted quite a distinct and almost otherworldly sound because of the limited instruments they had; string instruments had to play the brass parts which resulted in the lack of an “oomph” in the sound. It was a sound that contrasted that of their counterpart, the men’s orchestra, and would be one remembered by its players for decades. Due to the limited sheet music they had, the players had to often write down melodies they recalled of popular classical pieces and then arrange them for the unique orchestra format they had. Alma Rosé was often in charge of orchestration. Hilde Grünbaum, a violinist who was unable to play due to an abscess, helped Alma with her arrangements and would write different melodies or elements in the score. Many of the women who assisted Alma in copying down sheet music reported that she arranged approximately 200 pieces total for the orchestra, however, many of these sheets were unfortunately not preserved following the liberation of Auschwitz.

When Alma Rosé first became director of the “music commando” in June of 1943, it only consisted of 20 members who were Polish and non-Jewish.<sup>61</sup> Many of the members were amateur musicians who had hardly any experience in the professional orchestra setting, after all, they were women in the early 20th century. Alma’s task seemed daunting, as they were fighting barbaric living conditions and the average age of the “music commando” was 19 with only a few years of music studies under their belts. However, Alma knew their survival relied on their performance quality and she said herself that “if [they did] not play well, [they would] go to the

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<sup>59</sup> Newman, R., Kirtley, K. (2003). *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*. Amadeus Press, 267.

<sup>60</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich, 166.

<sup>61</sup> *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*, 172.

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gas chamber.”<sup>62</sup> It seemed that Alma was trying to distract herself from their surroundings in Auschwitz-Birkenau with the responsibilities of the orchestra. Manca Švalbová, a Jewish medical student who was deported to Auschwitz from Bratislava and later became Alma’s “Dr. Mancy,” recalled that she believed ““Alma used music as a means of escape. Without it, she was like a bird with bloodied wings beating against the bars of its cage. Music enabled her to take flight and leave Birkenau behind.””<sup>63</sup> Their rehearsal time and quality of performances could mean either life or death, therefore, “Alma’s first aim as leader of the Music Block was to change the image of the orchestra. She set out to retrain the existing players and to find and coach new ones, to provide the orchestra with more and better music, and to raise practice and performance standards.”<sup>64</sup> Many of the instruments for the orchestra were supplied by the camp administration by taking them from prisoners who had just arrived.

On average, Alma made sure to rehearse with the orchestra at least ten hours a day, sparing no one, especially herself. It was their form of labor in which the orchestra was misused for Nazi motives. When she would not be conducting and rehearsing with the orchestra, she would be working with copyists and arranging parts. Many firsthand accounts from women who survived the camp report that Alma gave out punishments, would throw tantrums, and even slap players. In a matter of time, Alma managed to secure 50 musicians for the orchestra, and she primarily recruited Jewish women who seemed to be of high risk of being killed. The occasional woman who failed Alma’s auditions would then assist her with managing the sheet music. Providing music for the orchestra was one of their biggest challenges. The occasional piece brought to the camp upon a Jewish musician’s arrival lightened their load. However, another

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<sup>62</sup> Newman, R., Kirtley, K. (2003). *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*. Amadeus Press.

<sup>63</sup> Newman, *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*, 261.

<sup>64</sup> Newman, *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*, 246.

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obstacle was the fact that the SS “forbade any playing of the proscribed “Jewish Music,” so the work of Jewish composers was banned.”



Mieczysław Kościelniak, a Polish painter and Holocaust survivor, smuggled many of his drawings out of Auschwitz-Birkenau. However, he completed this drawing depicting the women’s orchestra in 1950.

Photo provided by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Oświęcim.

The perversity lies in that the Nazis put so much effort into an orchestra only to misuse them for the mockery of “cheering up” other prisoners. It is not only grotesque and impossible to grasp that such an orchestra existed in a genocidal setting, but also that Jewish musicians were turned into instruments of terror and had to play for fellow imprisoned Jews in order to survive themselves. It is in this process that Alma Rosé may have begun to resent music, that the survival



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she orchestrated for the female musicians came at a cost, the cost of others. The orchestra would perform programs in the early mornings and evenings for what was essentially a death march, where all the prisoners were marching to their stations that would result in exhaustion and imminent death. Paul Celan's poem, *Todesfuge*, contains echoes to this grotesque image of the Women's orchestra playing the death march. Specifically, the line "er pfeift seine Juden hervor läßt schaufeln ein Grab in der Erde / er befiehlt uns spielt auf nun zum Tanz."<sup>65</sup> Not only does this line capture and draw the imagery of the scene that Alma and the orchestra experienced, but it also reaffirms the SS authorities' abuse of music through the use of the word "befehlen." Not only were their experiences traumatic in that playing in the orchestra became a process of dehumanization, but also that they were forced to undermine their own community-spirit and duty to preserve life rooted deep within Jewish tradition. Playing their instruments for survival and what it meant for fellow Jews went against their very Jewish identity. Along with the knowledge that perhaps the musicians' lives may replace the lives of others came subsequent guilt feelings in which "they are unable to resolve their...self-accusation."<sup>66</sup> "The guilt of these people relates to the fact that they had to forego, in the process of life-preserving adaptation on an inhumanly lowered level, their humaneness and dignity."<sup>67</sup> The musicians of the orchestra were essentially forced to abuse their human instinct for survival and music was used as a medium to humiliate and degrade fellow prisoners. This misuse of an art that is typically used for solace, therapy, and pleasure, was now triggering moral disintegration. The consequences of this

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<sup>65</sup> Celan, P., & Wiedemann, B. (2003). *Die Gedichte: Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe in einem Band*. Suhrkamp, 40-41.

<sup>66</sup> Jaffe, R. (1970). *The Sense of Guilt within Holocaust Survivors*. JSTOR. Retrieved April 5, 2022, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4466613>, 308.

<sup>67</sup> *The Sense of Guilt within Holocaust Survivors*, 312.

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were strong enough to induce “survivor’s guilt,” something that Alma Rosé deeply felt and expressed in her version of Ernst Marischka’s poem (discussed below).

The pressure was unfathomable and the young musicians were terrified, many of them “had seen members of their families and friends trucked off to the gas chambers.”<sup>68</sup> What they witnessed made them realize just how precarious their situation really was, therefore, hardly any of the players complained about how much they were rehearsing. As the music strength and playing quality of the orchestra was improving, their “privileges” within the camp were also growing. While the women were still suffering from a constant state of hunger, they received twice as much food as the other prisoners. Following the success of their first few performances, they were also accorded the “luxury” of underwear and socks. Alma Rosé’s reputation among both the prisoners in Auschwitz and the SS and administration preceded her, all had respect for her, to whatever degree. In the name of music and the orchestra, Alma could persuade the SS of almost anything, which is why the orchestra were allowed so many “privileges.” Maria Mandel and a handful of other high-ranking officials within Auschwitz were obliging to Rosé’s demands and called her “Frau Alma.” The treatment of Alma following her sudden death also speaks to how the SS authorities held her in such high regard. After the orchestra members were personally informed by Mandel of her death and entered the camp infirmary, “they found that ‘Frau Alma’s’ body had been laid out in a dignified manner on a sheet. On no other occasion were the human remains of a prisoner treated with similar respect.”<sup>69</sup> Being a woman *and* a Jew in the camp, this treatment of Alma is significant and unheard of, which makes it that much more difficult to understand her situation and what really transpired in Auschwitz. This confusion is what might

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<sup>68</sup> Newman, R., Kirtley, K. (2003). *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*. Amadeus Press, 247.

<sup>69</sup> Raggam-Blesch, M., Sommer, M., Uhl, H. (2019, November 10). *Nur die Geigen sind geblieben - Alma und Arnold Rosé*. Vienna; Haus der Geschichte Österreich, 182.

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have led to her very own controversy 30 years after her death. Her “iron will” earned the women weekly showers and an iron stove for heating, “even her enemies acknowledged that Alma accomplished marvels.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*, 250.

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## 2.6: *In mir klingt ein Lied*

(Text: Ernst Marischka)

In mir klingt ein Lied, ein kleines Lied,  
In dem ein Traum von stiller Liebe blüht  
Für dich allein.  
Eine heiße, ungestillte Sehnsucht  
Schrieb die Melodie.

In mir klingt ein Lied, ein kleines Lied,  
In dem ein Wunsch von tausend Stunden glüht,  
Bei dir zu sein.  
Sollst mit mir im Himmel leben,  
Träumend über Sterne schweben,  
Ewig scheint die Sonne für uns zwei,  
Sehn' dich herbei  
Und mit dir mein Glück.  
Hörst du die Musik,  
zärtliche Musik.

In mir klingt ein Lied, ein kleines Lied,  
In dem ein Traum von stiller Liebe blüht  
Für dich allein.  
Sollst mit mir im Himmel leben,  
Träumend über Sterne schweben,  
Ewig scheint die Sonne für uns zwei,  
Sehn' dich herbei  
Und mit dir mein Glück.  
Hörst du die Musik,  
Zärtliche Musik...

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It was no question that Alma Rosé took risks by fighting for privileges for the members of her orchestra in Auschwitz. During programming for performances, she often refused to compromise with the SS on the selection of pieces or creative ideas. For example, a *Lied* by the title of *In mir klingt ein Lied* became quite popular in the 1930s and most classical musicians of this time were familiar with the piece. The music is from Chopin's Étude op. 10, no. 3 in E major and it was later set to the text from Ernst Marischka's poem. Alma kept the original title and music but changed the words to exude a more melancholic tone that spoke to the longing for solace *from* music. However, Alma would later only be allowed to perform the instrumental version of the piece since the SS disapproved of her changes to its text. The *Lied* was still sung in secret among the orchestra members and this in and of itself was an act of resistance against the Nazi regime and its constant prohibition of creative and musical freedom. It was not only the fact these these artists such as Ilse Weber and Alma Rosé were Jewish that they were not allowed the "privilege" of creative freedom, but that the ideas they tried to express through music and poetry went against Nazi ideology. After all, one cannot prohibit the artist from expressing their beliefs, the two cannot be separated. Art is a medium through which one expresses oneself and expressing a belief is art in and of itself. In this case, both Weber and Rosé used the theme of memory in their poems as a medium through which they resisted Nazi ideology, thus inevitably, leading to the prohibition of their works.

The original text by Marischka seems to center more around longing in the sense of love between two people. This is evident in his use of words such as "für dich," "bei dir," "mit dir," and "für uns zwei." In this version, music becomes a medium through which nostalgia and love is realized. The line, "Eine heiÙe, ungestillte Sehnsucht / schrieb die Melodie," could point to the perpetuity of music and that it brings on memories. The similarity between Alma Rosé's version

and Marischka's is that they both center around the theme of escapism into music. Marischka's text hints at the escape into a musical utopia of romanticism and sentimentalism, a utopia where one "träumend über Sternen schweben [kann]" and "die Sonne für [ewig scheint]." However, Alma's version highlights both the solace that music offers *and* the darkness.

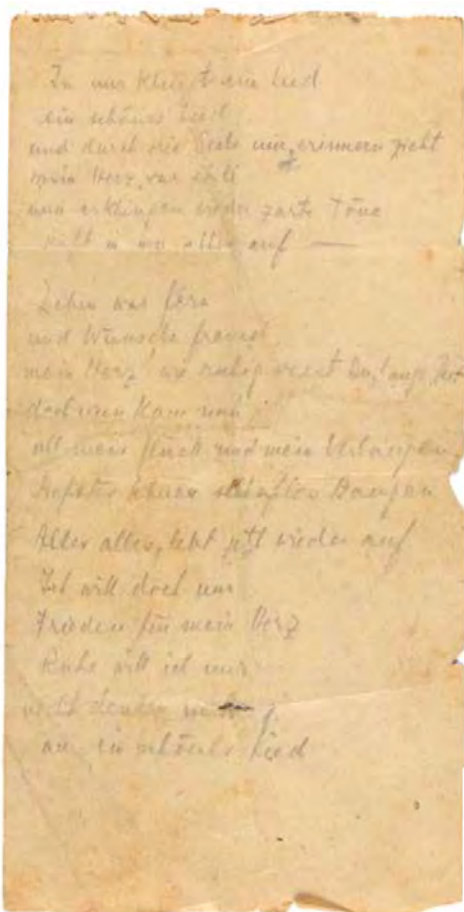
(Text: Alma Rosé)

In mir klingt ein Lied  
 In mir klingt ein Lied,  
 ein schönes Lied,  
 und durch die Seele mir erinnern zieht. Mein Herz war still.  
 Nun erklingen wieder zarte Töne,  
 ruft in mir alles auf.

Leben war fern  
 und Wünsche fremd.  
 Mein Herz! Wie ruhig warst Du, lange Zeit. Doch nun kam nah  
 all mein Glück und mein Verlangen, tiefstes Sehnen, schlaflos Bangen.  
 Alles, alles, lebt jetzt wieder auf.  
 Ich will doch nur  
 Frieden für mein Herz,  
 Ruhe will ich nur,  
 nicht denken mehr  
 an ein schönes Lied.

For instance, "ein schönes Lied" may remind Rosé of the life she had before she was imprisoned, music that "durch die Seele [sie] erinnern zieht." While in Auschwitz, Alma had to rehearse and perform pieces that she had been familiar with her entire life, pieces she had been playing just as her musical career had been taking off. This becomes very clear in her description of her life seeming "distant" and her wishes "unfamiliar." The line, "Nun erklingen wieder zarte

Töne, ruft in mir alles auf,” seems to hold significance because it implies that music brings on hope, strength to “orchestrate survival.”<sup>71</sup> However, Alma moves on to highlight the pain that music also causes, it seems that what “ein schönes Lied” meant to her had changed. Before, music offered solace because of how “ruhig” it was, until it brought on “Verlangen, tiefstes Sehnen,” a longing that became painful. Finally, she ends the poem with “Ruhe will ich nur, nicht denken mehr an ein schönes Lied,” implying that music no longer brought peace, but that she sought peace *from* music.



A sheet from Rosé’s personal notebook with her version of Marischka’s *In mir klingt ein Lied* poem. This document was recovered by Hilde Grünbaum Zimche following Alma’s passing.

Reproduction provided by the Yad Vashem Artefacts Collection, Leihgabe von Hilde Zimche, Kibbutz Netzer Sereni, Israel

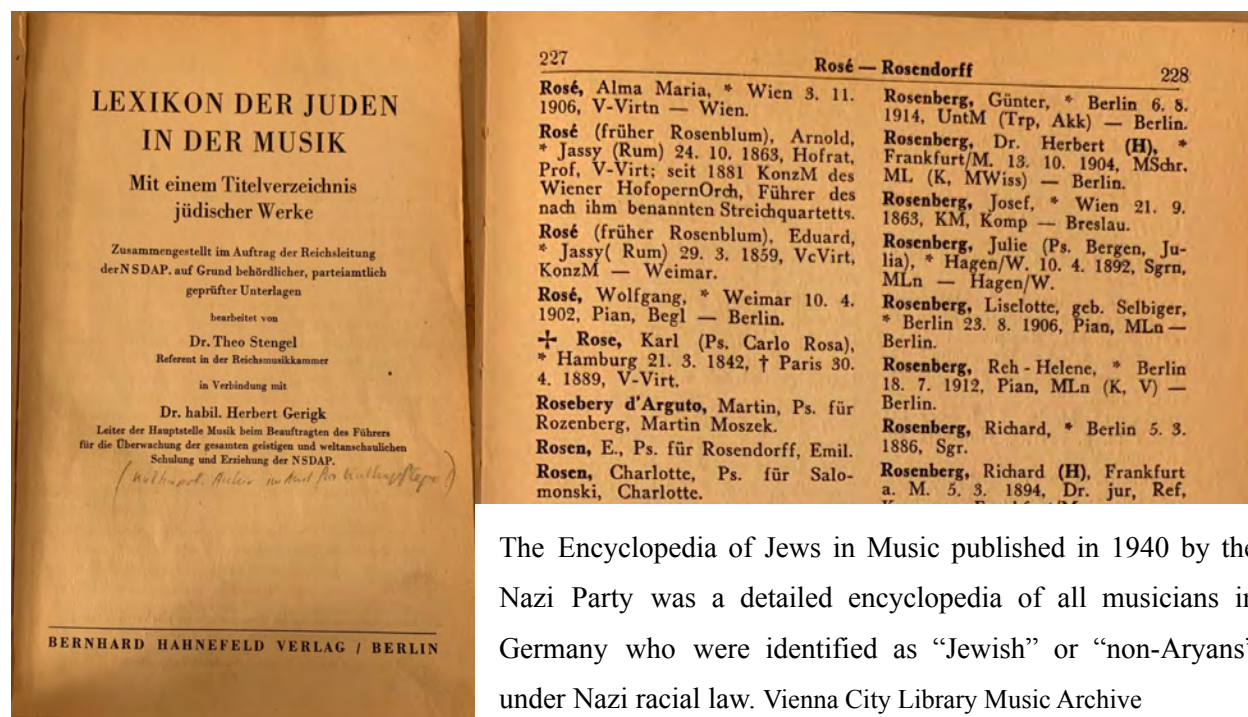
<sup>71</sup> Maltz, D., Raggam-Blesch, M., Uhl, H., Sommer, M. (2021, November 12). *Alma Rosé: Orchestrating Survival*. Daniel Adam Maltz. Retrieved June 29, 2021, from <https://www.danieladamaltz.com/classicalcake/alma-rose-orchestrating-survival>

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It is important to consider and analyze deeply as to why Alma's version of the poem was prohibited by the SS, for they are the same reasons as to why the orchestra was prohibited from performing any Jewish composers' music. The word "verboten," used in a few firsthand accounts, is multifaceted and opens up discussion as to why Alma Rosé was "blacklisted" in the Lexicon published by the Nazis (see below). The "deutsche Seele" is one that is expressed in holy and precious art, but Alma questions the very existence of this ideology through the medium of poetry and song. Her last few lines in the poem function as a rebuttal to Nazi beliefs during which she says she no longer wants to think of "ein schönes Lied," a *Volkslied*, a song that represents the soul of the German people.

Her rewritten version of Marischka's text undermines the German *Volkslied* image because her words long for the past. To not look toward the future, but rather the past, essentially goes against Nazi ideology. The idea of the *Volkslied* represents German Romanticism, however, the Nazis coopted this for their longing for the German "Reich," whose greatness was first represented by the Germany of the Middle Ages, and whose racial purity had since been sullied by the Jews. Wagner's opera, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, presents this idea of finding the true German song and "heilige deutsche Kunst." Through the *Volkslied* Hitler intended to "realize German greatness again" and keep the dream and confidence in the *Volk* alive. By rejecting the longing for the "schönes Lied," Rosé goes against the Nazis' very idea of German tradition, it goes against the longing for the soul of the *Volk*. With the line, "Schlaflos Bangen," Rosé connects the past with the present and highlights the memories that come imprinted with them, making her version a stark contrast to Marischka's. Instead of saying let's dream ourselves





The Encyclopedia of Jews in Music published in 1940 by the Nazi Party was a detailed encyclopedia of all musicians in Germany who were identified as “Jewish” or “non-Aryans” under Nazi racial law. Vienna City Library Music Archive

into a *schönes Lied* or a *Volkslied*, she pushes it aside. Her use of the phrase “Schlaflos Bangen” indicates this and does not fit what Marischka would say. This phrase along with the last stanza express anxiety and a defeatist attitude, revealing that she does not believe in recapturing the dream of a true German song, an attitude no Nazi can have.

While Alma Rosé’s version of Marischka’s poem is not openly political, at least less so than Ilse Weber’s works, it does reveal the despair of her time in Auschwitz. In addition, language she used such as “Ruhe will ich nur” and “Leben war fern und Wünsche fremd” reveal feelings of *Lebensmüdigkeit* and *Erschöpfung*, indicating inner turmoil and perhaps mental illness, “weaknesses” the Nazis could not stand. In the end, it was also Alma Rosé’s Jewish identity that prevented her version of the song from being performed in Auschwitz, regardless of her family’s reputation in the music world. In attempting to “realize German greatness again,”

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the Nazis' "obsession or fear was always that of failing to become artists, of not being able to succeed to 'great Art'... it is because what was at stake was their identity", thus they could not allow for the display of Jewish art.<sup>72</sup> In Nazi ideology, they considered Jews to be "not simply a bad race, a defective type: he is the antitype, the bastard par excellence... Rosenberg takes care to point out that the Jew is not the 'antipode' of the German, but his 'contradiction.'"<sup>73</sup> In this way, because Alma Rosé is Jewish, the text she produced also becomes the "contradiction" of Nazi ideology, it threatens the very *wahre deutsche Kunst* they wanted to realize again. Due to this ideology, perhaps the SS guards in Auschwitz prohibited the performance of Alma's song because they were afraid that the production of Jewish art would result in the erasure or "contamination" of the *wahre deutsche Kunst*.

The unity between Alma Rosé and music was so unmatched that she turned to the orchestra as a means through which she could placate the SS, music was her instinct for survival. Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, a cellist from the orchestra who survived, recalled that Alma was the "supreme example of the instinct for survival" and for the majority of the orchestra, "surviving was all that mattered."<sup>74</sup> However, this escape or *Flucht* into the music was not a utopian response to trauma that offered peace from her genocidal surroundings, but rather, it brought on existential dread and "schlaflos Bangen." The perversity of their situation where the orchestra had to perform in front of prisoners marching to their forced labor is evidence of how the Nazis exploited music. That music, which is something that cannot be separated from Rosé's identity, could be abused in such an obscene way, mocking the imprisoned Jews, evidently changed her entire outlook. Her very trauma of Auschwitz was that even a dream or thought of music would

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<sup>72</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe, P., Nancy, J.-L., Holmes, B. (1990). The Nazi Myth. *Critical Inquiry*, 16(2), 299.

<sup>73</sup> The Nazi Myth. *Critical Inquiry*, 307.

<sup>74</sup> Newman, R., Kirtley, K. (2003). *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*. Amadeus Press, 255.

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make her aware of her unfathomable situation, where she had to participate in the exploitation of classical music for survival. Alma Rosé is music, however in her poem, she denies her very identity by saying “nicht denken mehr an ein schönes Lied.” It is only through extinguishing the very thought of a Lied that she can escape the “schlaflos Bangen.” In the original version of the text, Marischka considers music to be a medium with which one can create a dream, however, Rosé’s version functions as a rebuttal to this. Unlike Ilse Weber who was trying to escape the awareness of her surroundings through music, it seems Alma Rosé was seeking refuge from music because it made her aware of her surroundings. It is in this that the multiplicity of the function of music in genocidal settings is realized. Perhaps music can offer solace from trauma and suffering, or perhaps music can also trigger trauma and suffering in a person.

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## Conclusion

Due to the Nazis' persecution and censorship of Jewish artists such as Ilse Weber and Alma Rosé, their stories remain widely unknown today. An important discovery I made during the completion of this project was how interrelated antisemitism and sexism was in Weber's and Rosé's experiences. Not only were they put at a disadvantage due to their Jewish identities, but also their female identities and this may be why their stories lack exposure even today. Given the obstacles they had to face every day in the patriarchal society of their time, these two women were already quite successful in their own right. However, the fact that their careers were cut frustratingly short and their stories remained sequestered for some time, reveals much about the tragedy of an artist. There is significant risk in creating music in genocidal settings, especially music that was prohibited and labeled as "degenerate" by the Nazi regime. To have the freedom to create art taken away from oneself is traumatic and loss in and of itself. In order to come to terms with their genocidal surroundings, Weber and Rosé felt they were left with no other choice than to do what they did best, create art. When the Nazis took everything else away from them, their homes, their families, their livelihoods, and they were reduced to "wandering Jews" and "sacrificial lambs," they turned to music in the end. Music became their "instinct for survival."<sup>75</sup>

After reading *Violins of Hope* and analyzing Weber's and Rosé's poems, I realized that the role music played in the Holocaust was infinitely more multifaceted than I could have ever expected. There are millions of stories to tell and not enough time to tell them. Weber and Rosé are just two stories in a sea of many, therefore, to what degree their stories are exemplary is

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<sup>75</sup> Newman, R., Kirtley, K. (2003). *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*. Amadeus Press, 255.

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difficult to say. There are certainly similarities and dissimilarities, however, there is no generic pattern to the stories and there is no certainty to whether music functions one way or the other. Classical music at this time was *the* form of entertainment and the Holocaust left a significant dent on its landscape, an impact that eradicated some of the best, rising composers and emptied entire orchestras. The subject of music in the Shoah is like a tree, branches of which spread out into a million different stories and never seem to end. One can get lost in researching the waves of musicians fleeing to Israel early in Hitler's rise to power. Or the musicians who found themselves imprisoned in Mauritius and performed for the locals there. But Ilse Weber's and Alma Rosé's stories continued to occupy my mind because in the most unfathomable circumstances, in the absence of hope, they continued to create. As Weber was aboard the *Polentransport* en route to Auschwitz, she still sang for the children she was accompanying. Even after Nazi officials prohibited the performance of her *Lied*, Alma Rosé still performed it for fellow prisoners in private. And not only were they creating music and fighting for their survival, but also the survival of others. In incomprehensible circumstances such as Theresienstadt and Auschwitz-Birkenau, the incredible selflessness and depth of empathy speaks to their humanity and that to create music is to be human. To not create music and to forbid the creation of music is inhuman.

While my project did not come to an all-encompassing argument that proves music functions as a form of escapism, it does make evident how the function of music is not simply one or the other. But rather it evolves in genocidal environments such as Theresienstadt and Auschwitz-Birkenau depending on the individual. The complexity of music in the Shoa lies in that Ilse Weber used music as a means through which she sought to escape, and Alma Rosé who sought to *escape* the music. Music became an instrument of murder; orchestras in Theresienstadt

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were simply used for propaganda to hide the horrific truths and orchestras in Auschwitz-Birkenau were used to accompany death marches. While music was abused in a similar way in Weber's and Rosé's environments, how they came to terms with this reality differed. Ilse Weber created music, dove into it, and lost herself in it in search for solace from her traumatic surroundings. Alma Rosé dove into the music as well, but she sought for solace from music. The only conclusion that completing this project did leave me with is that it is far from finished, it has shown me what work there still is to be done. Much of Holocaust music remains largely obscure, my only hope is that my thesis is a step toward raising this awareness.

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