

## **Leonard Bernstein and Hungarian cellist György Horváth**

### **Szombat (Saturday) Jewish Political and Cultural Magazine**

The tragedy of the Hungarian Holocaust continues to engender new stories even today. When former Minnesota Orchestra associate principal cellist Janet Horvath told me about her family history, I thought it should be written about, as few people in Budapest few people have heard about the concerts in Germany of Leonard Bernstein and the Holocaust survivor musicians in 1948. Furthermore, these concerts have ties to Hungary.

In May 2018, Janet Horvath travelled to the German town of Landsberg. Landsberg is known as the site of one of the largest DP (Displaced Persons) camps after WWII, hosting thousands of refugees, including Hungarian Jews. After 1945, millions of displaced persons lived in such camps, which were often converted from former concentration camps. Many of these people had to live among inhumane conditions for several years waiting for documents to emigrate and for news of loved ones.

In 2018, the local council of Landsberg decided to organize a concert to commemorate a concert which Leonard Bernstein gave at the local DP camp in 1948. Janet Horvath was invited to perform as soloist with the Landsberg School Orchestra—an American Jewish cellist, playing at exactly the same place where her father György Horváth had played with Bernstein 70 years before.

Bernstein was only 30 years old in 1948, a promising star, who had been invited for a guest performance by the Munich opera. The invitation was widely reported in the press at the time, as he would be one of the first Americans, and a Jewish composer, no less, who would conduct the German orchestra, in Bavaria. When Bernstein learned that a small group of Jewish musicians were performing for the refugees living in the DP camps around Munich, he travelled there and decided to play a concert with them. These performances took place at the camps in Feldafing and Landsberg. Bernstein was also an excellent pianist, and in addition to conducting

Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, he also performed the piano solo part himself to a grateful audience. It is difficult to grasp today how much these concerts must have meant to the 17 musicians of the orchestra who survived the Holocaust. They got the chance to perform with a famous American star, and the DPs and American Army Personnel who attended, celebrated them enthusiastically. For many of them, this was the most exciting event in their lives, and enabled them to imagine living.

György Horváth was born in Budapest in 1922. In 1940, he began studying cello at the Franz Liszt Academy where master teachers were on the faculty including Zoltán Kodály. György met Katalin at the Academy, and they fell in love. They married in May 1944, the night before György was deported for slave labor due to his Jewish descent.

He was assigned to the infamous copper mines in Bór, Yugoslavia, as many Hungarian men were, but he miraculously survived the horrors. He was liberated by Serbian partisans, but he eventually got safely back to Budapest. (The famous poet Miklós Radnóti was also sent to the Bór mines, but he did not survive the death march.) Katalin weathered the storm of the Arrow Cross Nazi regime in Budapest, and once reunited the young couple decided to leave Hungary as soon as they could. They made the arduous journey across Europe to the Landsberg refugee camp, where the famous concert took place.

The Horváth family later emigrated to Canada. Janet was born there, but her parents never discussed the hardships of the World War. Her father became a cellist for the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, while her mother taught piano. They were also well-acquainted with Hungarian-American Holocaust survivor János Starker, who went on to become a globally renowned cellist. Janet eventually studied cello with him at Indiana University.

Janet's father only revealed the details of his survival weeks before his death. This was when Janet learned about her parents' experiences and how they survived the Holocaust. She believes today that music had played a decisive role in her parents surviving the physical and

psychological suffering of the war. As a professional cellist herself, and writer, she decided to tell their story. Her upcoming book will be published under the title *The Cello Still Sings: A Generational Story of The Holocaust*.

While listening to Janet's stories, I wonder how many promising musical careers were devastated by the Hungarian Holocaust? And what would today's Hungarian music scene be like if fewer survivors had emigrated? Kodály wrote "Music is as basic a necessity to life as air. Music multiplies the beauty of life and all its values. Many people only notice when they are missing it."

For the Horváth family, music and the joy of playing music meant life itself. Music was what helped them survive and build a new life for themselves.

György Lázár



Central Committee of Liberated Jews, Jewish Agency for Palestine  
 AMERICAN JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE  
 IN THE U.S. ZONE OF OCCUPATION

Direktoriatem for Kultur an Dertziung  
 in der U.S. Zone

Montk, den 12. V. 1948 13 o'zejger in Lager Feldafing  
 Montk, den 12. V. 1948 20 o'zejger in Lager Landsberg

## LEONARD BERNSTEIN

tröt öf for der Szejt Hazilek mit dem  
 Rerezentanc Orkester fun der Szejt Hazilek  
 Le kinstler fun der Szejt Hazilek

FOKUSZINGERIN H. DURWASZYN / TENOR M. GOLDSZTEIN  
 FOLEK CH. ARBEJMAN

### PROGRAM

1. Overture fun der oper „Falstaff“ Carl Maria von Weber
2. Menuet un Forondol fun Suite L'Arlesienne . . . . . G. Bizet  
 Reprasentanc Orkester under leiding fun Der-Direktor Leonard Bernstein
3. Szejt G' Ma'l . . . . . Tarkil Ch. Arbuzman
4. „Jeruzalaim“ . . . . . Eric-Jeroel Lid Ch. Domaszyn
5. „Kolanjor“ . . . . . Eric-Jeroel Lid
6. Arje fun der oper „Figulata“ . . . . . G. Verdi M. Goldstein
7. Arje fun der oper „Tosca“ . . . . . G. Puccini
8. „Rhapsody in Blue“ . . . . . G. Gershwin Leonard Bernstein

Der Gest-Direktor akomponirt die solisten



