

Performing Memory: The Holocaust in Music and Poetry

Organisers: Lizzy Robinson-Self and Ruth Jacobs, PhD Students, University of Edinburgh.

Date: 23rd April 2015

Location: 50 George Square Rm 3.39

In the face of extreme trauma, human experience exists not only at the edge of words, but of (or perhaps beyond) comprehensibility. This study day seeks to question the role of poetry and music that was written within concentration camps in relationship to Arnold Schoenberg's conception of Holocaust memory in *A Survivor from Warsaw*.

Programme

12.30pm-5pm

12.30-1.00: Lunch

1.00-1.20: Performance

String Trio: Gideon Klein

Violin: Ruth Jacobs

Viola: Tom Widdicombe

Cello: Gage Ehmann

Poems: Read by Lizzy Robinson-Self

1.20-1.30: Introduction

1.30-2.00: Lizzy Robinson-Self, 'Reading the Concentration Camp Poem Today'

2.00-2.40: Dr. David Fligg, 'Defining Gideon Klein-Terezin, 1941-1944'

Dr. David Fligg is Project Consultant for the recently-launched £1.5M AHRC-funded international research project 'Performing the Jewish Archive', based at the University of Leeds. In 2013, he co-founded the project's predecessor, the WUN-funded 'Music, Memory and Migration in the Post-Holocaust Jewish Experience' (University of Leeds), and was the director and initiator of the International Terezin Music Conference in Leeds in 2012. After more than 30 years of full-time teaching, David now lectures part-time at the Royal Northern College of Music, Leeds College of Music, and is currently Visiting Professor at the University of Chester.

2.40-3.15: Discussion/Refreshments

3.15-3.45: Ruth Jacobs, 'An Incarnation of Memory: The Role of Singing in Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947)'

3.45-4.15: Second Performance

4.15-5.00 Final Discussion

Reading the Concentration Camp Poem Today

Post-war Holocaust poetry has attracted considerable scholarly attention, yet another significant collection of poems – those produced during the Holocaust in National Socialist concentration and extermination camps – has for the most part been either criticised or overlooked entirely. Frequently dismissed for being simplistic and technically unaccomplished, these poems have instead been studied primarily as historical documents, which could provide limited factual insights into the reality of life in the camps. Their aesthetic value, if acknowledged at all, is perceived as minimal. This short paper will explore the varying attitudes towards these poems and consider how we should engage with these works today: are they best understood and read as aesthetic objects, historical documents or testimony? Moreover, is it possible for them to stand alone in their own right as poems?

Defining Gideon Klein-Terezin, 1941-1944

Moravian-born composer and pianist Gideon Klein was just 22 when he was deported from Prague to Terezin (Theresienstadt) ghetto. Working alongside fellow-internees, some of them Czechoslovakia's finest musicians, Klein has been almost totally referenced by his imprisonment. Though understandable given the circumstances, this view is nonetheless somewhat simplistic and problematic when evaluating the complex circumstances of what took place in Terezin. Exploring these issues raises the question, though perhaps without an answer, of whether we can, or even should, define Klein's music beyond the discourse of creativity under adversity.

An Incarnation of Memory: The Role of Singing in Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947)

Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947) is a twelve-tone work written for chamber orchestra, narrator, and men's chorus. Throughout *Survivor*, the narrator's broken testimony serves to demonstrate the inadequacy not only of language, but traumatic memory itself. While the narrator repeatedly asserts that he cannot remember everything, his musical memory seems to function in a different way. He remembers only the moment a group of Jews begin to sing the *Shema Yisroel* as they are sent to their death. The song acts a locus of memory, both in the narrator's testimony and Schoenberg's structural conception of the work. This paper will explore how he employs the intersection of spoken testimony, song, and twelve-tone structure to distinguish musical memory from an incoherent conception of the past.

We will also be performing Gideon Klein's String Trio and some of the poems being discussed. We hope that experiencing these works live will allow us to explore the possibility that performance has the capacity to incarnate a kind of memory that exists beyond the limitations of language, a concept that is implicit in Schoenberg's work.