

Musically Mixed 'Reflections' on Holocaust  
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The Holocaust has become one of the most frequently invoked catalysts for composition in the 20th century--and now, beyond. It is also one of the most problematic. The risk of not doing justice to an event of such unbelievable horror must weigh like a heavy stone upon a composer's mind.

And it is a loaded subject for the reviewer. No one questions the sincerity and commitment of the composers and performers, but sometimes you have to separate the subject matter from what your ears are telling you.

Those challenges were present in the "Remembrances: Reflections on the Holocaust" program from conductor Noreen Green and the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony at Encino's Valley Beth Shalom on Sunday night.

In some cases, the composers struck a nerve. Lucas Richman's "Dachau Lied" expanded Herbert Zipper's song "Arbeit Macht Frei" into a painfully sarcastic Weillian series of marches, with a narration (performed by his father, actor Peter Mark Richman) that followed the example of Schoenberg's "A Survivor From Warsaw." Twenty-year-old Robert Elfman's "We Will Tell Them" used a passacaglia and polytonal harmonies skillfully and movingly. Michael Isaacson's brief "Remembrances" said its piece in a nostalgic, elegiac tone.

The most memorable work was not a Holocaust piece per se. Rather, it was a Piano Concertino by Wladyslaw Szpilman (1911-2000), written in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1940 but never performed until Sunday night, with a remarkable 16-year-old pianist, Arthur Abadi, doing solo honors. Playing on a catchy four-note motif, the piece sounds like a European reaching across the sea to a fellow Jewish composer, George Gershwin, with bluesy, rhapsodic flourishes capped by a jazzy final chord.