

Child Survivors of the Shoah in Germany

By Philipp Sonntag

The conference of Child Survivors in Germany was held from October 22 to 25, 2009, at the Max Willner Home in Bad Sobernheim, a small spa town west of Bad Kreuznach, equidistant to Baumholder, Kaiserslautern and Wiesbaden.

The center is owned by the Zentralwohlfahrtstelle der Juden in Deutschland (ZWST), or Central Jewish Welfare Organization of Germany. As a Café Europa program, it is supported by a grant from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany (the Claims Conference). Both ZWST and the Jewish Community in Frankfurt am Main have addressed the post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from the impact of the Shoah.

The Max Willner Home is a Jewish institution of ZWST with exquisite Jewish equipment and outlook. It has been perfect also for *Kabbalat Shabbat* for the group.



Photo: German Government, Guido Bergmann / Steffen Kugler

Federal President Horst Koehler awarding Cilly Peiser the Federal Cross of Merit.

written for online sites: for a Society of Christian-Jewish Cooperation (see www.deutscher-koordinierungsrat.de); and for Wikipedia, we provided a description of the “*Jüdischer Kulturverein Berlin*” (Jewish Cultural Association in Berlin). These are but a few of our activities.

Federal Cross of Merit for Cilly Peiser

For many years, our member Cilly Peiser has been an outstanding contemporary witness, addressing many students for our Speakers Bureau. At a ceremony on October 5th, 2009, she was recognized for her work and was awarded the Federal Cross of Merit by Federal President Horst Koehler. She was praised for her many social actions: her establishment of peaceful cohabitation of different cultures in Israel, her care for handicapped children, her fosterage of survivors suffering from tuberculosis, and her monitoring of child survivors as longtime chairman of the Child Survivors Deutschland e.V. In Bad Sobernheim, this acknowledgment of her work was celebrated with great enthusiasm.

Yiddish songs revitalized

Another outstanding achievement is the result of a collaboration between Sara Bialas, member of our Child Survivors Deutschland e. V. with musician Karsten Troyke, born in 1960 (see www.karsten-troyke.de and Wikipedia).

Troyke, a well-known singer of Yiddish songs, regaled us with his hilarious, long-forgotten tunes. Sara Bialas had noticed his potential in a 1987 performance, and she has enriched his repertoire by teaching

him hitherto unknown, nearly forgotten Yiddish songs. Thus Karsten Troyke has been able to produce a unique CD “*Vergessene Lieder*,” (Forgotten songs), with texts printed in both Yiddish and German. Examples are: Surele, Budapesht, Tshishn Goldene Zangen, Neshumele, Azoy miss es zayn, Ayn Balade fin tserisne Shikh, Brinele, Memenyu oy Memenyu.

Sara had heard old folksongs during her childhood in Poland, and later in Israel, Paris, and throughout Europe. After surviving Auschwitz, where her large family perished, old Yiddish songs “stayed alive in her heart.” The booklet that accompanies the CD says, the songs “helped her to overcome the sadness.” Until he met Sara, Karsten Troyke had rarely come across people who spoke or understood Yiddish. And yet he started arranging, collecting and performing Yiddish songs in the context of an anti-Nazi stance in his family. Karsten Troyke found out that many of Sara’s songs had not been published elsewhere. Regarding the sound, the authenticity and the quality of Troyke’s rendition, Sara was totally committed to getting it right.

Child Survivors as a group

We plan to visit Israel as a group in 2011. A new board has been elected: Horst Selbiger and Prof. Gerhard Baader as first and second chairmen respectively, Philipp Sonntag as treasurer, and Andrée Leusink and Barbara Lippold as reporters and as organizers of special projects. The next meeting will be arranged by Barbara Lippold in Worpsswede, a town of artistic and visual arts, as an exception to the usual meetings at Bad Sobernheim. Local monthly meetings continue in Berlin.

In recent years we decided not to include second and further generations of Child Survivors in our group. With the passing of many members, it is evident that old age and illness, partly due to our post traumatic stress, will diminish and soon end the group. There is an alertness regarding the limited record keeping, and an intention, to further document our own experiences. You can read more about us at www.child-survivors-deutschland.de. ■



Karsten Troyke presenting Yiddish songs.

Actions amid society

The conference was attended by eleven child survivors, two second generation (Isidor Kaminer und Kurt Grünberg), and three outsiders who contributed to the meeting. The members’ involvements in many programs were reported. These were: exhibits at the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt and in Wismar (Children in KZ Theresienstadt); research on anti-fascism; and various public actions. We volunteer as *gabbaim* in synagogues, and we work in a ceramic workshop that unites youth of different religious backgrounds. We’ve