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FOR PLAYERS OF VIOLIN, VIOLA, CELLO, BASS & FIDDLE
Violins of Hope: Instruments restored from Holocaust coming to Cleveland for wide-ranging cultural project

by ZACHARY LEWIS

CLEVELAND, Ohio – You can break bodies. You can extinguish voices. You can even rend souls, temporarily.


No, as a major exhibit and series of concerts featuring violins restored from the Holocaust will make poignantly clear in Cleveland this fall, music always survives. Even under horrific conditions, music unites, saves and transcends.

“It’s a monument to all those who can’t talk anymore,” said Amnon Weinstein, the Israeli violinmaker at the heart of the project, titled “Violins of Hope.”

“These violins, for me, represent six million people. To me, they say ‘You cannot win. We are here.’”

Cleveland, and most of the world, has never seen anything like it. When “Violins of Hope” arrives in the fall, the project won’t just showcase objects of inestimable value; some 25 instruments brought back to life from near ruin over the last 20 years. It also will tie together Northeast Ohio more securely than any cultural effort in recent history.

Details are still being finalized. In terms of scheduling, “Violins of Hope” remains a multimillion-dollar work in progress. The scope and cast of major players, however, have long been clear, and both, simply put, are remarkable.

In addition to an exhibit at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage Oct. 1-Jan. 3, “Violins of Hope” will entail performances on the violins by the Cleveland Orchestra with conductor Franz Welser-Most, violinist Schlomo Mintz and artists from the Cleveland Institute of Music, as well as related coursework and public talks through Case Western Reserve University and an ever-expanding array of educational...
programs at area schools. WVIZ-PBS also will produce a documentary and broadcast the project’s main events. A dedicated website, violinsofhopecle.org, is set to go live Sunday.

The goal, said organizer Dick Bogomolny, chairman of the orchestra’s board of directors, is to stoke a visceral response to the Holocaust and thereby to open young eyes to contemporary genocidal threats.

By itself, he said, as history, the Holocaust “has about as much emotional appeal as the pharaohs and pyramids.” Through Weinstein’s violins, however, “we can use that story to make a powerful connection. The lessons of the Holocaust don’t matter much without that. The carrying it forward is going to be the critical thing.”

The appeal of the instruments is considerable, even from a distance, months ahead of their arrival in Cleveland. Long before it will be possible to behold or hear them, even to read of violins recovered from concentration camps and Holocaust survivors is to travel straight back in time, to imagine their former owners and to appreciate something of what those objects must have meant to them.

For those who played for their Nazi captors, the violin was a lifeline, a critical link to food and other supplies. For others, it was an escape mechanism. Through music, prisoners enjoyed momentary respite from omnipresent terror and misery. One brave soul even used his violin case to carry out a bomb attack. Those who literally escaped, meanwhile, often ceased playing, viewing their violins as little more than painful reminders.

Imagine, then, how Weinstein—who lost relatives in the Holocaust and whose in-laws were among those depicted in the film “Defiance”—felt, and still feels, as the one charged with revitalizing the instruments. For him, to handle such objects and encounter all the ways in which they and, by extension, their owners, were mistreated, is to experience waves of conflicting emotion: revulsion and curiosity, sorrow and elation, frustration and pride.

“You’re holding the soul of somebody,” Weinstein said. “You’re touching this thing and you’re thinking, ‘Ay, ay, why can’t you talk to me? You’ve seen the worst scenery in human history.’

“But then you have to do your job. You have to show that people resisted the Nazis with their violins. You have to show that there was another kind of resistance. The power of this little, 350-gram (3/4-lb.) instrument is incredible.”

Cleveland is not the first to host “Violins of Hope.” Earlier this year, the Berlin Philharmonic gave a high-profile concert on the instruments, and in 2012, a smaller collection than will be shown here was displayed in Charlotte, North Carolina. Detailed stories of the violins also have been compiled into a book by James Grymes, consulting curator of the Maltz exhibit.

Still, the Northeast Ohio version is certain to be in a class by itself. In no other place will so many of the violins find their way into the hands of musicians, or will such a broad effort be made to engage children and the public.

“It’ll be unique, there’s no question,” said philanthropist and onetime violinist Milton Maltz, a lead supporter of the project along with his wife, Tamar. “We knew from the outset this was going to be something very, very special. It’s something we’re very honored to be involved with.”
Holocaust-era ‘Violins of Hope’ to be performed and exhibited in Cleveland

The collection of instruments performed on by Jewish musicians during the Nazi regime was restored by Amnon Weinstein.

Violins of Hope – a collection of instruments played by Jewish musicians before and during the Holocaust – is to form the basis of a programme of concerts, exhibitions and educational opportunities in Cleveland, US, running from 27 September 2015 to 3 January 2016.

The collection features some 45 Holocaust-era violins, restored by Tel Aviv violin maker Amnon Weinstein over a period of two decades. The instruments have since been performed in concerts around the world, most recently by the Berlin Philharmonic in January 2015. The Cleveland visit will mark the violins’ second trip to the US following their two-week residency at the University of North Carolina in spring 2012.

The Cleveland project, supported by seven local organisations, will include orchestral, chamber music, and klezmer concerts; an exhibition at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage; lectures; films; and educational programming in schools throughout Greater Cleveland. Highlights include a September concert featuring The Cleveland Orchestra and violinist Shlomo Mintz, under the direction of Franz Welser-Möst.

Amnon Weinstein discovered a swastika and “Heil Hitler” penciled inside the body of this violin.

April 27, 2015
Violins of Hope Coming to Cleveland

by STEPHANIE POWELL

Violins of Hope, a collection of 45 Holocaust-era violins, will arrive in Cleveland this fall for a community collaboration of concerts, exhibits, and educational opportunities focusing on the role of music and musicians during the Holocaust.

The violins have been restored by Amnon Weinstein, a second-generation violin maker based in Tel Aviv, Israel. Cleveland marks the second time the violins have visited the US—the first in 2012 at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

The Violins of Hope Cleveland, the official moniker of the Cleveland-based effort, will offer a slew of performances, exhibits, and workshops surrounding the violins’ visit, including a September 27 concert, where the restored instruments will be played, with Israeli violin virtuoso Shlomo Mintz and the Cleveland Orchestra under the direction of Franz Welser-Most, the dedication of Case Western Reserve’s Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center at The Temple—Tifereth Israel’s newly renovated Silver Hall to Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, who played a role in establishing the nation of Israel post-World War II, and an exhibit displaying the violins at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage.

“These violins carry extraordinary meaning across generations,” said Milton Maltz, one of many who championed the effort to bring the instruments to Cleveland. “To have members of one of the world’s finest orchestras play them in the newly renovated Silver Hall, and also have them available to view at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, represents a remarkable opportunity for education of people’s hearts and minds.”

Seven local organizations, including the Cleveland Orchestra, Case Western Reserve, the Cleveland Institute of Music (CIM), Facing History and Ourselves, ideastream, the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, and the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, partnered to bring the collection of violins to Cleveland.

“The opportunity to bring these extraordinary instruments to greater Cleveland immediately united organizations and individuals across the region,” Richard Bogomolny, Musical Arts Association chairman of the board and one of the leaders of the Violins of Hope Cleveland effort, said in a statement. “A profound personal story lives within each violin, and together they possess the potential to leave an indelible impact on every person who sees and hears them.”

For more information, visit the Violins of Hope Cleveland’s website at www.violinoshopecle.org.
Violins of Hope coming to Cleveland

by ELIZABETH BLOOM

It might be worth a visit to our neighbors in Ohio this fall to check out a project to bring the Violins of Hope to Northeast Ohio. The 45-plus instruments were played by Jews imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps and have been restored by an Israeli violin-maker. The project includes a collaboration between various institutions, including the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Cleveland Orchestra and Facing History and Ourselves.

More details about concerts and other events will be announced at a later date; until then, here is the press release:

CLEVELAND — More than a half dozen organizations across the community have come together to bring the historic Violins of Hope to Northeast Ohio this fall. Played before and during the Holocaust, the instruments have been painstakingly restored and serve as testaments to the resilience of the human spirit and the power of music to lift hearts in even the most horrific of circumstances.

Among the organizations inspired to partner on a project combining performances, educational programs and a major exhibition are: The Cleveland Orchestra, Case Western Reserve, the Cleveland Institute of Music, Facing History and Ourselves, ideastream, the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, and the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage.

“The opportunity to bring these extraordinary instruments to greater Cleveland immediately united organizations and individuals across the region,” said Richard Bogomolny, Musical Arts Association Chairman of the Board and one of the leaders of the Violins of Hope Cleveland effort. “A profound personal story lives within each violin, and together they possess the potential to leave an indelible impact on every person who sees and hears them.”

Details about all of these programs and events, including ticket information, will be available this summer. More details about the project and associated activities can be found at violinsofhopecle.org. Amnon Weinstein, a second-generation violin-maker based in Tel Aviv, Israel, has collected and repaired more than 45 Holocaust-era violins from around the world, some with the Star of David on the back and others with names and dates inscribed within the instrument. The violins have been played in concerts around the world, most recently by the Berlin Philharmonic in late January of this year.

The Cleveland visit will mark the violins’ second trip to the U.S. The violins first came to this country in the spring of 2012, when the University of North Carolina Charlotte hosted a two-week visit. UNC Charlotte musicology professor James A. Grymes published Violins of Hope: Violins of the Holocaust – Instruments of Hope and Liberation in Mankind’s Darkest Hour last year and is curating an exhibition of the violins at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage that runs from Oct. 1 through Jan. 3, 2016.

Among the highlights of Violins of Hope Cleveland will be a September concert featuring The Cleveland Orchestra, under the direction of Franz Welser-Möst, which will dedicate newly renovated Silver Hall, part of Case Western Reserve’s Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center at The Temple – Tifereth Israel.

“These violins carry extraordinary meaning across generations,” said Milton Maltz, one of those who catalyzed the effort to bring the instruments here. “To have members of one of the world’s finest orchestras play them in the newly renovated Silver Hall, and also have them available to view at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, represents a remarkable opportunity for education of people’s hearts and minds.”

Members of the Cleveland Orchestra will play the restored violins, while the Israeli violin virtuoso Shlomo Mintz also will perform with one of the instruments. The hall is named for The Temple’s longtime leader, Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, who also was among the leaders in the effort to establish the nation of Israel after World War II.

“We can think of no more fitting way to mark the opening of Silver Hall than this extraordinary concert,” Case Western Reserve President Barbara R. Snyder said. “We also look forward to hosting extensive public programs featuring our faculty and collaborating with the rest of the organizations involved.”

ideastream, the region’s nonprofit public media organization that includes WVIZ/PBS, 90.3 WCNY, and WCLV Classical 104.9 Classical, will record September’s Violins of Hope Cleveland Concert live for broadcast by WVIZ/PBS and WCLV Classical 104.9 radio. ideastream also will develop a half-hour documentary highlighting Northeast Ohio’s experiences with the project as well as individual stories involving the instruments.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime event for the Greater Cleveland community, and it’s essential to record and document the series of Violins of Hope events and exhibitions,” said Kit Jensen, ideastream chief operating officer. “The live broadcasts and recordings will amplify the amount of people who can participate in this uniquely historic project, both today and in the future.”

Case Western Reserve faculty already have begun planning lectures and programs that will provide students and the broader Cleveland community opportunities to learn more about the complex role of music in concentration camps and the larger religious, cultural and historical contexts involved. The university’s Laura and Alvin Siegal Lifelong Learning Program will play a pivotal role in outreach across the region, and also will join with the Department of Judaic Studies to bring internationally renowned Jewish scholars to speak in Cleveland.

Local students also will have ample opportunity to participate in public programming, and to consider the violins...
within their classrooms. The Cleveland regional office of Facing History and Ourselves has scheduled teacher workshops and is developing lessons and other materials for Northeast Ohio educators to use. Facing History is an international non-profit education organization dedicated to using lessons from history to encourage students to consider how their own choices can make a positive impact on society.

“These violins are a dramatic memorial to the lives lost in the Holocaust,” said Mark Swaim-Fox, Director of the Cleveland office of Facing History. “Learning about their story is an emotional lens that allows students to experience the many ways that Jews in Europe used music to survive and to resist the Nazis.”

The Cleveland Institute of Music (CIM) Orchestra, meanwhile, will present Music of the Violins of Hope, a free concert for the community at Severance Hall on October 14 in which CIM students play the restored violins from the Holocaust. In addition, CIM will present several faculty and student concerts featuring chamber music of the time, including music written by composers held in concentration camps. CIM’s Distance Learning program will support the project’s education efforts with offerings that prepare students and area residents for their visit to the exhibition and concerts.

“The Violins of Hope will serve as a reminder to us all of the timeless power of music over adversity,” said Joel Smirnoff, President and CEO of CIM. “The Cleveland Institute of Music is proud to partner in bringing these historic instruments to Cleveland and in bringing their sound back to life for our community.”

The breadth of activities planned for Violins of Hope Cleveland touches multiple elements of the mission of the 112-year-old Jewish Federation of Cleveland – perhaps most significantly in the organization’s commitment “to promote the well-being of our community.”

“The Jewish Federation of Cleveland is thrilled and proud to be a partner in bringing the Violins of Hope to Cleveland. Through this program, our entire community will have the opportunity to learn about the enduring lessons of the Holocaust—not only the tragedy brought about by baseless hatred but also the resilience of the Jewish people,” said Hedy Milgrom, Chief Development Officer at the Federation. “One manifestation of that resilience is embodied in the violins owned and played by thousands of Jews, most of whom perished, but some of whom survived. These violins were played throughout the years of the Holocaust—because where there was music, there was hope. And through these violins, the Jews who perished are immortalized and serve as an inspiration for us today.”

To learn more about programming and events, please visit the Violins of Hope Cleveland website, www.violinsofhopecle.org.

Violins of Hope Cleveland is a community-wide collaboration that aims to inform, educate and inspire people throughout the Midwest. Played by Jewish prisoners in Nazi concentration camps, the instruments have been collected and restored by Israeli violin maker Amnon Weinstein for more than two decades. The historic violins have been played in concerts from Jerusalem to Berlin and Charlotte, NC, and provide a rare opportunity to explore unique stories behind each instrument and the individuals who owned them. Throughout the fall of 2015, a diverse range of nonprofit organizations will sponsor performances, lectures, an exhibition and other public programming. The partners are: The Cleveland Orchestra, Case Western Reserve, the Cleveland Institute of Music, Facing History and Ourselves, ideastream, the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, and the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage. For more information, please visit violinsofhopecle.org.
Holocaust-Era Violins to Be Played in Cleveland This Fall

by ERIC SANDY

A very special and unique musical arts exhibition is coming to Northeast Ohio, giving us all a look and a listen into history.

Violins of Hope builds a bridge to Nazi Germany, where music played a vital role in the minute sense of hope that was illuminated for the dying.

The group’s founder, Amnon Weinstein, first encountered a customer at his restoration businesses who described violins being played by Jewish musicians while Nazis marched other victims to death. Almost 20 years ago, Weinstein began actively collecting and restoring violins that had been played during the Holocaust.

“Wherever there were violins, there was hope,” Weinstein says of the program.

“A profound personal story lives within each violin, and together they possess the potential to leave an indelible impact on every person who sees and hears them,” says Richard Bogomolny, Cleveland Orchestra chairman of the board and one of the leaders of the Violins of Hope Cleveland effort.

This is only the second time the violins have been seen and heard in the U.S. (they were first hosted in Charlotte in 2012). Violins of Hope Cleveland will launch Sept. 27, 2015 and will conclude on Jan. 3, 2016. The months of programming will be anchored by a major exhibition at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, and events will take place all over Northeast Ohio.

From the exhibition hosts: “The multimedia exhibition contextualizes and shares each of the instruments’ very different stories and further illustrates both the strength of the human spirit and the power of music.”

The program is organized by Case Western Reserve University, The Cleveland Orchestra, the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Jewish Federation of Cleveland and ideastream.
Maltz Performing Arts Center, Maltz Museum to spotlight Holocaust strings

by CARLO WOLFF

It has been said that the sound of the violin resembles that of the human voice. The proximity will come clear both actually and symbolically on Sept. 27, when violins of singular provenance, played by musicians of singular prominence, star at Silver Hall. Silver Hall, in case you haven’t heard, is the name of the imminent 1,200-seat theater at the Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center on the campus of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. That arts center is a story unto itself. Another time. At Silver Hall, Shlomo Mintz, the Israeli virtuoso, will perform the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with the Cleveland Orchestra under the direction of Franz Welser-Moest in a program also featuring works by Ludwig van Beethoven and Arnold Schoenberg. That Sunday afternoon, Mintz will play a Violin of Hope, one of nearly 60 such instruments collected, restored and revived by Tel Aviv violinmaker Amnon Weinstein. Ideastream will broadcast the Sept. 27 concert live over WVIZ/PBS and WCLV/104.9 FM.

The gala is designed for donors to Violins of Hope, an ambitious, multidisciplinary project involving seven of the most significant cultural institutions in Greater Cleveland. The orchestra’s performance, and Mintz’s turn in particular, signal the launch of a venture so rich it promises to resonate in perpetuity. At least that’s the goal.

This story deals with the first two Violins of Hope expressions: the Sept. 27 concert and “Violins of Hope,” an exhibition that will run at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood through much of the fall and winter.

Four days after Mintz plays the Mendelssohn, “Violins of Hope” opens – by invitation only – at the Maltz Museum, showcasing about 20 of the violins Weinstein has amassed over nearly 20 years. Its purpose is to make voices long gone speak anew. Its vehicle is everyday instruments that, as doppelgangers of their onetime owners, are Holocaust survivors. The official opening of “Violins of Hope” at the Maltz Museum is Oct. 2. It will run through Jan. 3.

Mid-July conversations with representatives of some of those sponsoring institutions — the Cleveland Orchestra, Case Western Reserve University, the Cleveland Institute of Music, Facing History and Ourselves, Ideastream, the Jewish Federation of Cleveland and the Maltz Museum – attest to the scope and profundity of a project years in gestation. They also signify an alliance of a type that might not be able to be forged anywhere but Cleveland, according to Richard Bogomolny, who as chairman of the board of the Cleveland Orchestra is in effect the program’s orchestrator.

Many movers and shakers are responsible for Violins of Hope, principal among them violinmaker Weinstein and Bogomolny, who also holds the title of chairman of the Musical Arts Association, the Cleveland Orchestra’s nonprofit parent.

The repairman

Weinstein sounds like a man of zest and passion; he’s also a musical curator of the highest sort. He breathes and thinks violins. He aches for them. He exults in them. In a telephone conversation from his workshop in Tel Aviv, Weinstein name-checked the great Jewish violinist Isaac Stern in a parable-like anecdote.

“Once people asked him why so many Jewish people played the violin, and so good, by the way,” Weinstein said. “He said it was the easiest instrument to pick up and run away with.”

During the pogroms of the early 20th century, Jews tried to escape with their pianos; the violin, “a very, very Jewish instrument” that is far more portable, got away far more often, Weinstein said.

The violin was an integral part of European life, first through the Italians, then the Jews, and then the gypsies. “Today, it’s not the same anymore,” he said, adding that in the 20th century and into the 21st, many major violinists were and are Jewish: Joshua Bell, Ivry Gitlis, Jascha Heifetz, Nathan Milstein, Mintz, Itzhak Perlman, Stern, and Pinchas Zuckerman.

Weinstein, who was born in 1938 in Israel after his parents emigrated from Poland, lost all his relatives but his parents in World War II. His extended family numbered about 380. Violins of Hope, he suggested, is his way to reconnect with murdered kin.

“It’s like a memorial to the memory of, first of all my family, and then to the six million,” he said. “The violin didn’t change from 1500, when it was created in Italy, we are playing on the same instrument, with some
improvements, but (it is) the same sound people had in the Second World War, in the last minute of their lives.

“It was the last human sound that they heard. So if you’re coming to a concert and you can feel the violins, you can hear something that is talking for all this lost generation. For them the violin was the last human voice to listen to.”

The curator

James A. Grymes came to know Weinstein well in researching his book, “Violins of Hope: Violins of the Holocaust – Instruments of Hope and Liberation in Mankind’s Darkest Hour on the project.” Grymes said the day Weinstein’s father learned what had happened to the rest of the clan, Moshe Weinstein, who also was a violinmaker, had a heart attack, “and from that point on, he refused to ever talk about the family.” Weinstein’s mother was so grief-stricken she joined her husband in Holocaust muteness.

At the same time, his parents hosted visitors who were among the first wave of immigrant Holocaust survivors. Weinstein, in his bed, would hear these poor souls thrashing and moaning at night in an adjacent room, so the boy “had the physical presence of the Holocaust without the mechanism to talk about it with his family.”

To Grymes, who attended the first U.S. Violins of Hope-related events in 2012 at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte, Weinstein “is the thread that holds the project together and the thread that holds my book together.” Grymes’ book won the National Jewish Book Award in 2014. Grymes, who is neither Jewish nor a violinist, also is curator of the Maltz exhibition. “I’m a music historian and I was so inspired by these stories that I had to write them,” he said.

The orchestrator

Maybe nine years ago, Israel Wiener, arts and culture consultant for the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, told his friend Richard Bogomolny about Weinstein and his phoenix-like violins. Bogomolny did nothing with the information at the time.

“We were right in the midst of the recession,” said Bogomolny, adding he didn’t feel Cleveland’s cultural movers and shakers would then “take their eyes off” efforts “to save their own institutions.”

Gradually, the economy brightened, so when the shaliach revived the idea with Bogomolny a few years ago, Bogomolny told Wiener he would “talk to certain people in the community.” His first contact was Milton Maltz, founder and president of the Maltz Museum in Beachwood. Maltz, according to Bogomolny, “immediately said he would like to do a major exhibition at the Maltz Museum including the violins,” and, after Bogomolny told him Weinstein believed repairing and playing them prove “that the voices of their former owners” survive at least symbolically, the show should tell some of their stories.

After Maltz committed to a major show, Bogomolny recruited Barbara Snyder, the president of Case Western Reserve University, to the cause. Snyder, he said, noted the development of the Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center on the Case campus. Wouldn’t a Cleveland Orchestra concert with conductor Franz Welser-Moest and a soloist playing a Violin of Hope be a perfect inaugural event? She asked Bogomolny. The answer will ring loud and clear Sept. 27, when Mintz plays the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto and the orchestra performs Beethoven’s “Overture to the Creatures of Prometheus” and Arnold Schoenberg’s “Kol Nidre.” The concert will end with Beethoven’s “Leonore Overture No. 3”; Bogomolny said Mintz is likely to perform an encore, noting almost every Orchestra violinist will be playing a Violin of Hope.

The facilitator

As vice president of development and university relations at Case Western Reserve University, Lara Kalafatis, who oversees events and donor relations, makes “sure the trains run on time” in regard to Violins of Hope.

Kalafatis said talks between Case Western and the Cleveland Orchestra led to the idea of opening the Violins of Hope program with the concert in Silver Hall, the theater memorializing The Temple–Tifereth Israel leader and prominent Zionist Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver.

A steering committee with representatives from all the institutions involved – “we prefer to refer to those entities as our partner organizations,” Kalafatis said – first met in October 2013. The committee includes Hedy Milgrom, vice president, endowments and development at the Federation; Jerry Wareham and Kit Jensen, respectively president/CEO and COO, ideastream; Ellen Rudolph, executive director of the Maltz Museum; and, of course, Bogomolny.

In addition to the programming – musical, artistic and educational – the group raised $1.2 million to fund the project, which also will feature special educational programs at Case for incoming freshmen, a free concert by Cleveland Institute of Music students Oct. 14 at Severance Hall, and community outreach education programs under the auspices of Case Western’s Laura and Alvin Siegal Lifelong Learning Program.

“Not only have we programmed together, we have raised money together,” Kalafatis said, “and I think that is something really special.”

“Instead of piece-mealing this, we came together and said, what do we want to stage?”
The impresario

The violins Weinstein resurrects spoke to Milton Maltz with eloquence. To Maltz, who played the violin as a boy, the Violins of Hope represent above all the Jews murdered in the Warsaw ghetto, including people who “made beautiful music and knew they really had no real way to rebuff the Nazis.” When Maltz and his wife, Tamar, visited Weinstein in his workshop three years ago, Weinstein showed them a violin with a swastika and a “Heil Hitler” inscription inside its body. Years ago, it seems the owner had had the instrument repaired by a German who may have meant to deliver a message warning “the Jews Hitler was going to be our leader,” Maltz said. These violins speak to a vanished, complicated culture, he suggested. What better way to inaugurate the Maltzes' namesake performing arts center at Case Western than the Sept. 27 concert featuring these remarkable instruments?

The overseer

Ellen Rudolph, executive director of the Maltz Museum, said “Violins of Hope” will be a “design-forward exhibition” created from scratch. It sounds like it will be an environment unto itself. As of mid-July, it was still being put together.

“It’s meant to feel like you’re entering a kind of jewel box-like space with dramatic lighting, with circular pods that contain the violin cases and spaces that are comprised of strings, which are of course meant to evoke the violin,” Rudolph said. “The exhibition will be a multisensory experience, so it integrates the actual violins with the stories of the people who owned and played them.”

There will be appropriate images and videos as well as a soundtrack blending classical and klezmer strains. At times, local musicians will play the actual instruments. “We’ll take the violins out of their cases and they’ll literally be brought to life in the exhibition space,” Rudolph said. “Amnon has pointed out that not only have the construction and sound of the violin not changed in hundreds of years but the instruments themselves replicate closely the human voice. Hearing them played is the closest thing to being able to connect with them. The other thing I’m learning about violins and violinists is that the people who play them leave an imprint of the patterns of their play on the instrument. That’s an incredible continuity from the owners of these instruments to the people who are playing them today and the people who are hearing them today.”

Encores for the repairman, the orchestrator

Don’t forget, Amnon Weinstein said, that “one of the most beautiful pieces for violin,” Ernst Bloch’s “Baal Shem,” was written in Cleveland.

“The meaning of that is that we are the winners of this war, not the Germans, not the Nazis. They wanted to kill this outstanding tradition and this tradition is existing, not the Nazis,” Weinstein said. He collects these violins “all the time, every day” and hopes one day to have them all. “What Cleveland is doing for this project is beyond all my dreams,” Weinstein said. “It is something so great, so big, so wonderful. I don’t have the words in English to say what I think.”

“This is a program that was brought to the community by some of the heaviest hitters in the nonprofit world in Cleveland,” said Richard Bogomolny. “We all realize the slogan ‘never again’ doesn’t mean anything unless you have many more than just the Jewish people involved in that promise.”
Local Arts Institutions Collaborating to Bring Violins of Hope to Cleveland

by JEFF NIESEL

For the past two decades, Amnon Weinstein has restored violins that survived the Holocaust. The violins in his collection have been played in concerts in Jerusalem, Berlin and Charlotte. This fall, seven cultural arts organizations are working together to bring the instruments to Cleveland with an array of plays, concerts, lectures, exhibitions, films, and other public events. A Violins of Hope exhibition featuring the violins and their individual stories at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage anchors the community-wide collaboration. Earlier this morning, the museum hosted a press conference to announce details around the program, which brings together nearly 20 local arts institutions and more than 50 funders.

At the start of the press conference, Maltz Museum director Ellen Rudolph provided an overview of the exhibition, which will open on Oct. 2 and be on display until Jan. 3. The exhibit will include 19 violins, one of which is coming from Holocaust authority Yad Vashem and will make its American debut. Historically, concentration camp orchestras often played to entertain SS officers or while prisoners marched to their deaths. But the orchestras’ music also “reminded prisoners of their own humanity.” The exhibit will touch on these aspects and be multisensory; it will feature circular pods that will be “dramatically lit” as a soundtrack of klezmer and classical music plays. While the exhibit is on display, musicians from Baldwin Wallace Conservatory and the Cleveland Institute of Music will stop in the gallery to play on the actual Violins of Hope in the exhibition. “It’s an amazing opportunity to bring those voices to life and connect with those who are lost,” said Rudolph.

The press conference included a video greeting from master violin maker Amnon Weinstein, who recalled finding a violin with a Cleveland connection — it belonged to former Cleveland Institute of Music director Ernst Bloch. He talked about the various organizers who have helped put the program together. “My English is not good enough to praise all the people and efforts for this outstanding project,” he said. “I hope people will be able to listen to the sounds and stories.”

The Cleveland Orchestra chairman Richard Bogomolny then provided background on how the project got started. He initially heard about the violins in 2007 when there were only 14 or 15 instruments (there are now about 50) in Weinstein’s collection. He wanted to bring the violins to Cleveland but because of the recession, he didn’t think Cleveland’s art institutions could find the finances at that time to put the exhibit on.

“This project could have only happened in Cleveland,” he said. He said he first approached Maltz Museum chair Milton Maltz, who immediately wanted to do an exhibition at the museum. “[Maltz] said, ‘I want this exhibition to be good enough that we could take it on the road to New York or Washington D.C.’” Bogomolny also quickly scheduled a performance with the Cleveland Orchestra at Silver Hall (now the Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center at The Temple-Tifereth Israel), a venue that is in the midst of an extensive renovation. “The ground rules for this exhibit are that we operate as one organization,” he said with regard to the collaborative nature of the event. “I have never seen an organization work like this one has where it’s all for one and one for all.”

Maltz talked about his own personal connection to Cleveland and spoke about the renovation of Silver Hall, which he said is slated to re-open as part of CWRU on Sept. 27 with the Cleveland Orchestra performance featuring the violins. “I’m so proud of all the friends I’ve made in Cleveland, Ohio,” he said as he recounted the circumstances that brought him to the city. Case Western Reserve University president Barbara R. Snyder said she was “thrilled” about the performing arts center, the collaboration and all of programming that would be coming out over the next three months. “The hall is stunning,” she said in reference to new performing arts center. She talked about the various courses that Case will offer in conjunction with the arrival of the Violins of Hope. Filmmaker Malcolm Clarke, the director of The Lady in Number 6: Music Saved My Life, will even be on hand to conduct a class. “We hope to attract families from across the region,” Snyder said. “I think we’ll remember Violins of Hope Cleveland for many, many years.”

Details on all the programs being offered can be found at violinsofhopecle.org.
‘Violins of Hope’ goal: become Holocaust teaching instrument

by CARLO WOLFF

Richard Bogomolny, one of the top stakeholders in “Violins of Hope,” said Aug. 28 that he hopes the “emotional content” of the project resonates with today’s students so deeply that the lessons of the Holocaust will never be forgotten.

Bogomolny, the board chairman of the Cleveland Orchestra, who was instrumental in putting together the multifaceted project, made the remark at a news conference about Violins of Hope at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood.

A multimedia exhibition featuring 18 violins from the collection of Tel Aviv violinmaker Amnon Weinstein and one from Yad Vashem, the center of Holocaust research in Jerusalem, will run from Oct. 2 through Jan. 3 at the Maltz Museum. The violins were played before or during the Holocaust. Weinstein has spent decades restoring some 60 of these violins, workaday instruments largely made in Germany.

Other stakeholders at the conference were Maltz Museum co-founder Milton Maltz, whom Bogomolny turned to jumpstart the project; Barbara R. Snyder, the president of Case Western Reserve University, where Silver Hall, the core of the imminent Milton Maltz Performing Arts Center, will debut at 3 p.m. Sept. 27 with a gala featuring the Cleveland Orchestra and Israeli virtuoso Shlomo Mintz playing a Violin of Hope; and Mark Swaim-Fox, director of the Cleveland office of Facing History and Ourselves, which has developed Violins of Hope-related teacher workshops and Holocaust-based lessons for Northeast Ohio educators.

The new Maltz performing arts center is a two-phase, $59.3 million renovation and repurposing of The Temple-Tifereth Israel, a striking, domed 1923 structure, blending Byzantine and Romanesque styles, on the north side of Case’s campus.

Bogomolny first heard of Amnon Weinstein and his Violins of Hope from Israel Wiener, the Tel Aviv-based arts and culture consultant for the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, seven or eight years ago. The idea of an exhibit intrigued him, but the economy was in recession. A few years later, Wiener revived the idea with him, and the economy had improved. Bogomolny said he soon approached Maltz, who “listened to the story, and it took him at least two minutes” to agree to mount an exhibition.

The project mushroomed when Maltz connected it to Case, where the performing arts center named after him and his wife, Tamar, was in the works. According to Bogomolny, all the elements fell into place over about three weeks; to hear him tell it, everything has run as smoothly as a Swiss watch.

“I’ve never seen an organization work the way this one has,” said Bogomolny. Maltz jokingly referred to Violins of Hope as a form of personal redemption.

Besides the Cleveland Orchestra, which will perform under Franz Welser-Moest at Silver Hall Sept. 27, participating organizations include ideastream, which will broadcast the concert from Silver Hall live over WVIZ/PBS and WCLV/104.9 FM; the Cleveland Institute of Music; and the Federation.

Silver Hall is a 1,200-seat theater memorializing The Temple-Tifereth Israel leader and prominent Zionist Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver.
Soul Music

by REBECCA MEISER

Holocaust-era instruments make music again with the three-month-long Violins of Hope movement.

Amnon Weinstein remembers when an old man walked into his Tel Aviv, Israel, violin repair shop in the '80s carrying a battered violin. The man told Weinstein how he played the instrument in Auschwitz as a member of the concentration camp’s orchestra. The Nazis had musicians play as a calming mechanism for when prisoners were taken to the gas chambers. The violin in front of Weinstein saved the man from death, but after the war, the man had stopped playing music. Now, he wanted the violin fixed, to give to his grandson.

Weinstein got to work repairing the instrument, but when he opened the violin, he discovered ashes — possibly the incinerated remains of Auschwitz victims. Weinstein tried to block the incident from memory.

“For years, I was haunted by it,” he says.

It was also a painful reminder of his history: Weinstein had lost nearly 400 family members in the Holocaust. The experience helped him to realize these instruments were important artifacts. He put out a call for Holocaust-era violins and received more than 58.

Eighteen of these restored “Violins of Hope” will come to Cleveland for an Oct. 3 to Jan. 1 exhibit at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage along with programming at other institutions, including the Cleveland Orchestra and Case Western Reserve University.

“In the violin, you can hear the human voice. It can cry. It can smile,” Weinstein says. “They are living tombstones.”

One of the violins belonged to Feivel Wininger, who saved 16 family members and friends, by playing the violin in the Transnistria ghetto in exchange for extra food, water and firewood. Another one belonged to a teenage resistance member who used his violin case to sneak in explosives at a Nazi social club.

The best way to remember and honor these musicians, Weinstein realized, was to fix these instruments, tour with them publicly and have them played again.

The Violins of Hope were last played publicly in January by the Berlin Philharmonic at the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

“Nazism wanted to kill all the Jewish voices,” Weinstein explains. “Yet at the concert in Berlin — the seat of the Nazis — the house was full. When the [orchestra] began to play, the violins came alive, and together, they sounded like victory over evil.”
Violins of Hope Project Creates Unprecedented Coalition

by DAVID C. BARNETT

What may be the largest group of Cleveland cultural institutions ever to circle their wagons around a single project will come into play this fall when Case Western Reserve University, the Cleveland Institute of Music, The Cleveland Orchestra, Facing History and Ourselves, ideastream, the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, and the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage join together to present Violins of Hope Cleveland.

Four months of concerts, exhibitions, screenings, lectures, theatrical productions, and educational offerings will center around the extraordinary collection of violins amassed by Tel Aviv violinmaker Amnon Weinstein, instruments that managed to survive the Holocaust.

Weinstein, who emigrated from Eastern Europe to open a violin shop in Palestine in 1938, learned after World War II that some four hundred of his family members had perished under the Nazis. Later, he heard a heartfelt account from a survivor who had brought an instrument in for restoration of what the violin and its music had meant to Jews during those horrific days. In 1996 — and now recognized as one of the finest violinmakers in the world — Weinstein decided to put out a call for Holocaust-era violins. To date, he has restored nearly fifty such instruments to playing condition, a collection he dubbed “Violins of Hope.”

Those instruments have already been heard in concerts in London, Paris, Rome, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Berlin. This month, eighteen of Weinstein’s violins and one from another collection will journey to Cleveland to go on display at the Maltz Museum and to be involved in an amazing series of concerts, the first of which will feature The Cleveland Orchestra under Franz Welser-Möst on Sunday, September 27. That already sold-out event will also inaugurate the new Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center at Case Western Reserve University.

A press conference at the Maltz Museum on August 28 traced the evolution of Violins of Hope Cleveland. Cleveland Orchestra chairman Richard J. Bogomolny and Maltz Museum Founder Milton Maltz spoke about the early stages of the idea of bringing the violins to Cleveland and their success in lining up partners for the project, a process which came together in the short space of three weeks. CWRU president Barbara R. Snyder talked about the decision to hold the opening concert in the new Maltz Performing Arts Center, which was formerly the Sanctuary of The Temple-Tifereth Israel. Mark Swaim-Fox of the Cleveland office of Facing History and Ourselves detailed the vast range of educational activities for adults and children which will center around the Violins. Some twenty Northeast Ohio organizations will offer programs and events during the four-month period.

The Violins themselves — eighteen from Weinstein’s collection and one from Yad Vashem, the World Center for Documentation, Research, Education, and Commemoration of the Holocaust — will be on display at the Maltz Museum from Friday, October 2 through Sunday, January 3, 2016 in a special, multisensory installation featuring circular pods and dramatic lighting. But since violins need to be played, the instruments will sing out on a regular basis in the hands of students from CIM and Baldwin Wallace.

The instruments will also be played by Cleveland Orchestra members and soloist Shlomo Mintz in the September 27 concert, which will include the Mendelssohn concerto, Schenker’s Kol Nidre with narrator Thomas Hampson, and Beethoven’s Overture to The Creatures of Prometheus, as well as his Leonore Overture No. 3. The concert will be broadcast live on WVIZ/PBS and WCLV 104.9 FM and streamed live at ideastream.org at 3:00 pm and broadcast on WVIZ/PBS Friday, October 2 at 9:00 pm and Sunday, October 4 at 3:00 pm.

Other concerts scheduled at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Anshe Chessed Fairmount Temple, Park Synagogue, the Maltz Museum, and ideastream will feature CIM faculty, the Cleveland Women’s Orchestra, the Imani Temple Ministries Choir and the Greenman/Rushefsky Duo in programs ranging from music by Holocaust composers to Klezmer music, songs of resistance from the era of slavery, a commemoration of the women’s orchestra at Auschwitz, a Klezmer band of Holocaust survivors, and the world premiere of a new work by David Shimotakahara for Groundworks Dance Theatre.

Among the planned educational programs are seven early December concerts for Grades 6-12 by The Cleveland Orchestra (Brett Mitchell, conducting) in collaboration with CWRU and the Cleveland Play House MFA program.

Amnon Weinstein himself will be on hand for conversations with Rabbi Roger Klein (September 25), Shlomo Mintz (September 28), Eric Kisch (September 30), and James A. Grymes (October 4). Grymes is the author of Violins of Hope: Violins of the Holocaust — Instruments of Hope and Liberation in Mankind’s Darkest Hour, and will share some of the poignant stories behind the violins.
NE Ohio man helps lead effort to bring Violins of Hope to Cleveland: Faces of the Suns (photos, video)

by LINDA KINSEY

GATES MILLS, Ohio -- Voices of Holocaust victims may have been silenced, but their stories will be told in Cleveland in a far-reaching series of concerts, educational programs and exhibits, thanks in large part to Richard Bogomolny, of Gates Mills.

The philanthropist and retired business executive has made it his mission to bring the “Violins of Hope,” a collection of violins played before and during the Holocaust to Cleveland – both as an exhibit and as a way of making a lasting emotional impact on the hearts and minds of those who hear and see the beautifully restored instruments.

Amnon Weinstein, a second-generation violinmaker from Israel, has painstakingly restored and repaired more than 45 Holocaust-era violins. The Cleveland exhibit will mark the second time Violins of Hope has visited the U.S.

Bogomolny approached the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland about two years ago to see if there would be an interest. Bringing the violins here would be a hugely expensive and difficult project, but he was willing to take it on. “With your blessing, I’m going to give this a try,” Bogomolny told Stephen Huffman, president of the Jewish Federation.

What happened next was beyond Bogomolny’s expectations.

Richard Bogomolny, of Gates Mills, played a major role in bringing the historic Violins of Hope to Northeast Ohio this month. It’s a far-reaching exhibit that he hopes will change lives and get people thinking about the lessons of the Holocaust. (LINDA KINSEY/NORTHEAST OHIO MEDIA GROUP)

His idea resonated with those he spoke to, and plans quickly leaped from the drawing board to a real effort backed by some of Cleveland’s major institutions. He became chairman and founder of the committee of partners, which includes the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland Institute of Music, Facing History and Ourselves, and ideastream, representing local PBS-TV and NPR-radio, as well as WCLV, the classical music station.

In the course of about three weeks, Bogomolny’s dream to bring the violins to Cleveland looked like it would become a reality. The swiftness with which the project gained momentum surprised even him.

Maybe it was because when Bogomolny speaks, people listen. The 80-year-old has lived a purpose-driven life – from significant contributions and accomplishments in the business world to nearly endless philanthropic projects. As longtime chairman of the Cleveland Musical Arts Association, which operates The Cleveland Orchestra, Blossom Music Center and Severance Hall, the Violins of Hope project may count as one of his most noteworthy.

For Bogomolny, it is a passionate undertaking brought about by his conviction that the U.S. knew about the Holocaust yet did nothing and, in fact, was aided by corporate giant IBM. When he hears others say that the U.S. didn’t find out about the Nazi concentration camps until it was too late, he is unequivocal: “It’s just crap, frankly.”

Born in Cleveland and raised in Cleveland Heights, Bogomolny grew up in a musical
household. “There was a lot of music in the house,” he says. “There were no computers and not much television. We used to listen to classical music on the radio.”

His mother, Hilda Bogomolny Faigin, was an accomplished violinist and studied at the Institute of Musical Arts, later known as Julliard. Bogolmony also studied violin for many years with Hyman Schandler, principal of second violins of The Cleveland Orchestra, and continued to play until about 10 years ago when serious back injuries and subsequent surgeries made it too painful. “I always considered myself to be a good amateur,” he says. “I was good enough to appreciate what it took to get where the great violinists were.”

Bogomolny’s early years seemed ideal. Following graduation from Cleveland Heights High School in 1953, he was accepted at Harvard University. Majoring in economics, he attended Harvard his freshman and sophomore years, until his father died at 47. His brother, Robert Bogomolny, who would later graduate from Harvard, was still in high school. At that point, Richard Bogomolny returned to Cleveland to support the family by operating the family ice cream manufacturing business, The Eagle Ice Cream Company.

Back home, he earned his bachelor’s degree in English by attending night classes at Western Reserve University, now known as Case Western Reserve University. He earned a law degree at Cleveland-Marshall Law School and was admitted to the Ohio bar in 1961.

He married and had three sons and now lives in Gates Mills with his second wife of 28 years, Patricia Kozerefski. The two adopted a baby girl from China 19 years ago.

“I never planned to go into the ice cream business. But I ended up in business and that’s where I stayed pretty much,” Bogomolny says, reflecting on the direction his life took. He thought seriously about becoming a professional violinist but set that idea aside after attending the highly acclaimed Interlochen Center for the Arts, the international music camp in Michigan, and “saw what kids were doing there. I knew I couldn’t play as well.”

But he played well by most standards – so well, in fact, that he was concert master of the Cleveland Heights High School Orchestra and later the Harvard University Orchestra. In the 1970s, he was principal violinist and soloist for the Cleveland Philharmonic Orchestra. All continued to nurtured a deep love and appreciation for classical music.

Although armed with a law license, Bogomolny seemed destined for a career in the food industry, a journey that would take him to the top his field, both here and abroad.

Throughout his career, however, he has held a deep commitment to give back to the community through a variety of philanthropic endeavors. And his work hasn’t gone unnoticed. Among his many awards is the Distinguished Service Award, given by the Musical Arts Association – the Cleveland Orchestra’s highest honor -- and the President’s Humanitarian Award, presented by the United Cerebral Palsy Association.

He remains involved in a number of organizations for which he’s given time and treasure, including the Cleveland Food Bank, where he was a founding member and trustee and adviser to a successful capital campaign that resulted in construction of its greatly enlarged facility. He is also a trustee and past chair of the Anti-defamation League, Northern Ohio Region, and a former member of the Cleveland Task Force on Violent Crime. The list goes on.

But for now, at least, his attention is focused on Violins of Hope. The program featuring the violins – about 16 of them -- kicks off Sept. 27, when the Cleveland Orchestra and Chorus, under the direction of Franz Welser-Möst will perform on the instruments. The concert will be broadcast live on WVIZ/PBS and WCLV 104.9 ideastream and live streamed on ideastream.org. And the Maltz Museum will then open a specially curated exhibition of the violins, along with their stories.

Bogolmolny hopes Violins of Hope will make a lasting impression on the community. “A real lasting part of this has to be on the education side,” he says. So far, that seems likely as area schools, including the Cleveland schools and Cleveland Catholic Diocese schools, as well as a group of independent private schools will work lessons of the Holocaust into their curriculum.

Unlike the typical history lessons on the Holocaust, which can sound like “ancient history” to students, he says, Violins of Hope offers “the emotional hook” to make a lasting impact.

But above all, he says, “when the violins are played – no matter how Hitler tried to silence them -- you will hear the voices of those who played the violins before.”
‘Violins of Hope’ in Cleveland tell the story of the victory of humanity over the Holocaust’s depravity: editorial

by EDITORIAL BOARD

The extraordinary “Violins of Hope” concerts and exhibitions about to open in Cleveland are about more than just the physical and emotional miracle of one man’s decision to collect and preserve instruments of the Holocaust that during those terrible times had helped keep people -- and hope -- alive.

They also are a celebration of the will to survive and of the overarching power of music to triumph.

And underlying all, these violins -- to be played a week from Sunday by Cleveland Orchestra musicians as part of a special, sold-out concert featuring violinist Shlomo Mintz at the new Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center at The Temple-Tifereth Israel in Cleveland, and that go on display Oct. 2 at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood -- are a reminder of the depraved reality of that time.

It is a reality and a history that must never be forgotten, when Jewish musicians survived the death camps playing their music, playing as much for themselves, for the remembered civilization that those instruments represented amid the cruel inhumanity around them. as for their tormentors.

The Holocaust was an attempt to crush the human soul. It extinguished six million Jewish lives, and an estimated five million other souls -- Catholics, homosexuals, Roma, Slavs, Soviet POWs, the disabled, dissenters from Nazism. But the Holocaust did not succeed in crushing the human soul, and music was part of the reason.

When a visitor first brought Israeli violin maker Amnon Weinstein a violin for repair, explaining that it had helped him survive the Holocaust as he played for Nazi soldiers in the death camps, Weinstein -- as a “Violins of Hope” brochure puts it -- saw only ashes. The ashes of Weinstein's own 400 family members who did not survive the Holocaust.

Three decades later, in 1996, Weinstein was ready to take on the project -- one to which he would dedicate his life as he tracked down more and more of the violins Jewish musicians played during the Holocaust to sustain hope and life, often in death camps where musicians were accorded some privileges, including the privilege of life.

The violins then were the slender thread connecting those prisoners with their former lives. Today, through their music, we can hear again the voices of those long gone, the ones who didn’t survive.

Weinstein’s collection is now nearly 50 instruments, about half of which, reports Plain Dealer classical music critic Zachary Lewis, will be on display in Cleveland. This follows a Berlin Philharmonic concert using the instruments earlier this year and a 2012 exhibition and performance of the violins in Charlotte, North Carolina. The violins have also been exhibited and played in Jerusalem and Switzerland, but the Cleveland events stand out for their breadth, the several months during which commemorative events will be held, and the involvement of so many in the community.

This Sunday, from 1 to 4 p.m., Amnon’s Workshop, a photographic documentary, opens in Beachwood at the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, 25701 Science Park Drive. Next Thursday, in a live interview at 2:30 p.m., Mark Satola of WCLV 104.9-FM interviews Weinstein. And on Friday, Sept. 25, at 8 p.m. at Temple-Tifereth Israel, 26000 Shaker Blvd., Beachwood, Weinstein will talk with Rabbi Roger Klein about the violins and their history, and what “Violins of Hope” mean in today’s world.

Although the Cleveland Orchestra’s 3 p.m. concert on Sept. 27 is sold out, it...
will be broadcast live on WVIZ/PBS, on WCLV 104.9-FM, and live-streamed on ideastream.org. There also will be a free community viewing at the Parma-Snow branch of the Cuyahoga County Library.

And that’s just the start of several months of events, with one of the last commemorations a 3:30 p.m. concert Dec. 6 by the Cleveland Women’s Orchestra at the Park Synagogue Main, 3300 Mayfield Road, in Cleveland Heights, in memory of the Women’s Orchestra of Auschwitz.

Sometimes called the Girl Orchestra of Auschwitz, and the subject of several books after the war and a (controversial) movie, the ensemble was molded and long led by violinist Alma Rosé, an Austrian Jew and niece of the composer Gustav Mahler, who tragically died at Auschwitz of suspected botulism in April 1944. Extraordinarily, at least one of the Auschwitz musicians still survives -- German-born cellist Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, whose son Raphael Wallfisch, born in Great Britain after the war, also is a cellist.

As brilliantly captured by the outspoken French cabaret singer and orchestrator Fania Fenelon in her controversial 1977 book, “Playing for Time,” the Auschwitz Women’s Orchestra was a mix of clashing egos, cultures and outlooks, mingling high society and low, sophisticates with country girls, French Jews and German Jews, Polish and Ukrainian Christians, mandolins and accordions with violins -- yet they all found within themselves the unity of music.

That, in essence, is what “Violins of Hope” will capture for the next few months. It is a journey worth taking.
Nineteen Violins - Holocaust instrument exhibit begins Oct. 2

The Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage at 2929 Richmond Road is about to debut “Violins of Hope Cleveland,” a multi-media exhibit that illustrates beauty and hope in the midst of horror.

The instruments, 19 in all, once belonged to Jewish musicians, some of whom perished in Europe during the Nazi Holocaust between 1939 and 1945.

Of the 11 million people systematically killed by the Nazis, 6 million were Jews, and 1 million were children.

The violins were restored by Ammon Weinstein, a second-generation violin-maker and descendant of Holocaust victims. Weinstein has been working on the project for 20 years.

Eighteen of the instruments are from Weinstein’s own collection. The 19th is on loan from the Yad Vashem, the World Center for Documentation, Research, Education and Commemoration of the Holocaust, in Israel.

The exhibit also will include the personal stories behind the instruments. During the Holocaust, the Nazis organized Jewish musicians being held in concentration camps into orchestras. For some, being able to play an instrument saved their lives.

“When my violins are on stage, 6 million people are standing behind them,” Weinstein said in a statement.

The exhibit, which opens Oct. 2, is being presented in collaboration with Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland Institute of Music, the Cleveland Orchestra, Facing History and Ourselves, WVIZ/ideastream and the Jewish Federation of Cleveland.

“This visually striking, multi-sensory exhibition includes video, mural-sized imagery, recorded music and live performances on restored violins,” said museum Executive Director Ellen Rudolph.

“Sharing the individual stories behind the instruments illustrates the diversity of Jewish experiences during World War II, and the complex realities of the Holocaust.

“Sharing these stories through music is an opportunity to connect with an important part of our past - one that can seem very distant to younger generations of visitors - in a very immediate, intimate and expressive way.”

The exhibit, which will run through Jan. 16, will include workshops, lectures, concerts and a performance by the GroundWorks Dance Theater.
Holocaust Violins Arrive for Local Exhibit

A collection of stringed instruments originally owned by Holocaust prisoners has arrived in Northeast Ohio for a series of exhibitions and concerts.

Tuesday morning, Israeli violinmaker Amnon Weinstein handed a restored instrument to Cleveland Institute of Music president Joel Smirnoff, who gently twisted the tuning pegs to tighten the strings. It’s one of 19 violins with histories connected to the Holocaust that Weinstein delivered for display at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage.

What’s now known as the “Violins of Hope” project began 50 years ago when a Tel Aviv customer asked Weinstein if he could repair a battered instrument. It turned out that the man had been a concentration camp prisoner who played in a death camp orchestra. Weinstein realized that he was holding a history lesson in his hands. He put out a call for more instruments.

“I had a radio program, and I asked for violins with a story from the Holocaust,” Weinstein recalls. “And one-by-one, it was like a snowball at the beginning --- one, two, three, four. And, it’s not stopping, it’s coming all the time.”

The violins will be part of several educational programs, during their local stay. In addition, the instruments themselves will be played in a series of concerts, starting with the Cleveland Orchestra, this weekend.

Amnon Weinstein, CIM President Joel Smirnoff and Milton Maltz
First Look: Completed renovation makes Temple-Tifereth Israel ready for Sunday debut as Maltz arts center

By STEVEN LITT

CLEVELAND, Ohio – Time travel may be physically impossible, but a visit to the newly renovated Temple-Tifereth Israel at the edge of University Circle gives you an inkling of what it would be like to turn back the clock.

A thorough, tender and respectful renovation of the historic house of worship, built in 1922-24, creates the odd sensation of seeing something old made strikingly new again, as if the decades of wear, tear and soot had somehow never happened. You can’t literally go back to the Roaring Twenties, but you can go to the Temple, a National Register of Historic Places landmark at 1855 Ansel Road, next to East 105th Street and west of Rockefeller Park. On Sunday at 3 p.m., the Temple will have its debut as Case Western Reserve University’s Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center, with a sold-out performance “Violins of Hope,” an event related to an upcoming exhibition at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage.

Layers of meaning

But the adaptive reuse of the Temple also encapsulates the ways in which the striking rebirth that has graced some parts of Cleveland in recent decades has been based on the preservation of historic buildings. It’s the latest example of a trend that started with the revival of Playhouse Square’s theaters in the 1970s and has since spread across the city, sparking neighborhood revitalization.

The Temple project, for its part, could hasten the redevelopment at the southeastern corner of Hough, a predominantly African-American neighborhood famously riven by riots in 1966 and now poised to capture energy spilling over from University Circle and the nearby Cleveland Clinic, in projects such as the new Innova apartments.

The Temple’s congregation essentially donated the landmark facility, which it could no longer afford to maintain, to the university, which plans to house its departments of music, dance and theater there.

For 99 years, however, the Temple, now based in Beachwood, will retain access to the University Circle facility for eight days a year on major holidays and for additional events as arranged with CWRU.

It’s a win-win for all concerned, and especially for the public, which through CWRU programs and events will gain access to a spectacular performing arts venue that is both new and old.

A new sound

Sunday’s concert will provide the first real test of the facility’s acoustics, shaped in the renovation by acoustician Paul Scarbrough,
who consulted on the design of Mixon Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

His touches are evident primarily in the 66,000-pound glass and steel acoustical canopy and lighting framework, suspended high over the hall’s new expandable stage. During a tour earlier this week, the canopy, which has been raised to its final position on cables suspended from steel beams above the Temple’s inner dome, resembled a giant, diaphanous bat wing, with panels of glass held in place by a structure of steel tubes and joints.

The canopy, potentially the most intrusive part of CWRU’s renovation, turns out to be elegantly designed and visually subtle.

The same is true of wood-faced adjustable panels, resembling doors, installed on either side of the auditorium.

The Temple’s richly carved wooden ark and choir loft, inscribed in Hebrew with the Ten Commandments and the Sh’mah, the linchpin prayer of Jewish worship, are fully visible and communicate the building’s roots and ongoing alternate life as a sometime house of worship.

Elsewhere throughout the building, the Temple feels much the same as it did prior to CWRU’s renovation, but somehow better.

The same, but better

The facility’s once notoriously uncomfortable pews have been replaced with newer and more generously proportioned seats. The number of bathrooms has been increased. And worn tile floors in reception areas have been replaced with durable and handsome terrazzo.

The overall effect is to draw fresh attention to Greco’s remarkable conception of the Temple as something of an early 20th-century salute to the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, the sixth-century masterpiece of Byzantine church architecture whose stately dome surmounts a series of smaller domes and buttresses.

At the Temple, Greco blended a hint of the Hagia Sophia’s mountainous profile with massive, elegantly detailed facades of Indiana Limestone designed with Romanesque Revival styling inflected by geometries that seem to anticipate Art Deco.

The right-angled setbacks and stair-step motifs on upper portions of the Temple’s facades echo, ever so slightly, the step-back styling of Manhattan skyscrapers at the time, along with the contemporary stacked-tower furniture of Paul Theodore Frankl.

The effect is solemn but graceful, weighty but elegant.

A thorough cleaning has revealed the soft, golden-beige glow of the Temple’s facades, which look uncannily fresh. The cleaning has also highlighted the rich but restrained ornamentation throughout the building, inside and out.

These details include the opulent six-pointed star motif that Greco deployed like a three-dimensional fugue across the ceiling of the Temple’s main lobby, and the richly carved roundels fronting the building’s mezzanine balconies, featuring symbols of the 12 tribes of Israel.

A new cultural venue

The reconfigured Silver Hall can accommodate 1,200 at full capacity, or roughly 950 to 1,000 when the building’s movable stage is fully deployed.

The work completed so far constitutes Phase I of the Maltz-Temple project. CWRU, which has raised $59.3 million for the effort, plans to raise an additional $15 million to pay for a second phase including an addition to the Temple’s classroom wing, a new black-box theater, and rehearsal spaces. Classes in music, theater and dance would then commence at the facility.

Major donors so far have included the Maltz Family Foundation of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, which provided the original lead gift of $12 million in 2010. The Maltzes and their foundation have since more than doubled their pledge to $30 million. The university anticipates it will start programming the Maltz-Temple facility with 20 to 30 events a year.

That activity, plus the eventual presence of hundreds of students, will dramatically expand CWRU’s footprint to the west side of Rockefeller Park and breathe fresh life into an architectural masterpiece that now looks completely ready to cruise into its second century.
Cleveland Orchestra, community prepare for special ‘Violins of Hope’ kickoff concert (preview)

by ZACHARY LEWIS

CLEVELAND, Ohio – They’ll accept applause, no doubt. But Sunday’s performance by the Cleveland Orchestra will not be about the musicians.

Neither will the music be the focus. Not really. While the material the orchestra will play will be of great significance, the concert launching “Violins of Hope” in Northeast Ohio will have no academic dimension.

No, playing instruments rescued from the Holocaust, in a new hall fashioned from a working synagogue, the participants will shed whatever egos they typically have and place themselves at the service of humanity.

“In this case, it’s not about us,” said Cleveland Orchestra music director Franz Welser-Most, leader of the performance. “It’s entirely about people who were massacred. Music, for them, was something they could hold onto.”

Now it’s time for the orchestra, and through it the community, to hold on to the massacred. In picking up and playing 26 instruments pulled from the fires of an attempted genocide, the orchestra will, for a few moments, resurrect their original owners.

At the same time, they’ll join the instruments themselves, numerous area partners and the “Violins of Hope” exhibition opening Oct. 2 at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in making a powerful statement about the durability of music and the ever-present obligation to quell hatred.

“The music performed on these instruments provided comfort and hope in an environment of death, despair and hopelessness, and created purpose and meaning,” wrote principal violist Robert Vernon, one of those who’ll play Sunday.

“These instruments are a stirring testament to the strength and courage of the human spirit as well as the victory of good over evil.”

Here in Northeast Ohio, the instruments also will underscore the richness and collaborative spirit of the region’s cultural sector. Name almost any cultural organization here, and chances are, it’s involved somehow in “Violins of Hope.”

Sunday’s concert, too, marks a special effort. Every Cleveland Orchestra performance entails practice, study and rehearsal. This event, though, is literally years in the making, the fruit of a long mission by Musical Arts Association Chairman Richard Bogomolny and philanthropist Milton Maltz to share the work of Israeli craftsman Amnon Weinstein with Cleveland.

Of all the projects with which Vernon has been associated in his long career, the only one that compares, he said, is a 1995 performance in Geneva, Switzerland, by the World Orchestra for Peace.

“Every institution has spent more than it expected, and nobody is complaining,” said Bogomolny. “This is when the greatness of all the individual institutions begins to shine. Each one is going to its own thing, what it does best.”

Violins of Hope Cleveland | Media Hits 23
Thanks to Bogomolny, Maltz and countless others, 24 violins plus a viola and cello – each one carrying a story almost beyond imagination – at last made the journey this week from Tel Aviv to Cleveland, under careful watch and in climate-controlled shipping containers.

Many had been snatched long ago from concentration camps, where they served officially not to sustain prisoners but to entertain guards. One lost its varnish from prolonged exposure to the elements. Still another bore the mark of pure hatred: a swastika scrawled for no non-vicious reason on an interior panel.

Those present to witness their unveiling here Tuesday could hardly believe their eyes, or convey what they were feeling.

“This is something for which I have no words,” said a visibly moved Weinstein, mere hours after arriving in Cleveland himself.

The instruments weren’t the only cause of his amazement. No, to Weinstein and many others, the sight of the new Maltz Performing Arts Center – embedded within Temple-Tifereth Israel on the campus of Case Western Reserve University – was almost equally stirring.

And no wonder. Out of an historic structure built in 1923, crews have fabricated a lavish concert space – named Silver Hall in honor of Rabbis Abba Hillel and Daniel Silver – complete with an acoustic canopy, adjustable paneling and hydraulic stage extensions, all while preserving and revitalizing the original Temple.

“Mamma mia,” gasped Weinstein upon entering Silver Hall. “It takes top people to do something like this. This has to be a super acoustic here.”

Whether he’s right will soon be known. For Silver Hall will be tested Sunday by more than the Cleveland Orchestra alone. It also will host the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus, violinist Shlomo Mintz and baritone Thomas Hampson.

The program, too, will serve as an acoustic trial. Between the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, Beethoven’s third “Leonore” and “The Creatures of Prometheus” overtures, and Schoenberg’s “Kol Nidre,” a rarely presented work including chorus and narrator, the artists will expose all properties of the space.

But that’s not what will matter most. Even as the musicians sing and play with unpredictable emotions and as listeners take in unforgettable sights and sounds, all present will take part in celebrating the indomitability of art.

“We want it to be a positive, optimistic experience, like the message of the instruments,” said Welser-Most, noting the start of a new Severance Hall season in tandem with “Violins of Hope.”

“I don’t think it hurts that we remind ourselves that there are other things in life, or that without music, the dark sides in life would be even more difficult to overcome.”
Cleveland Orchestra’s ‘Violins of Hope’ concert proves musical, humanitarian triumph (review)

by ZACHARY LEWIS

CLEVELAND, Ohio – Public Square celebrations. Major international festivals. Local residencies. The Cleveland Orchestra is no stranger to grand welcoming gestures.

The concert it gave Sunday, however, was an event of singular significance. The kickoff to “Violins of Hope” and the first public gathering at the new Maltz Performing Arts Center in The Temple–Tifereth Israel, the presentation was meaningful not just to Cleveland or even the nation, but to the world.

Playing instruments recovered and restored from the Holocaust, the orchestra and director Franz Welser-Most reawakened the spirits of that tragedy’s millions of victims in the most eloquent fashion possible, through music. Beyond that, they demonstrated irrefutably that art always trumps hatred and violence.

“Each concert is a victory,” said Amnon Weinstein, the Israeli craftsman at the heart of “Violins of Hope,” in a pre-recorded video. “The concert you are doing in Cleveland is a victory.”

Indeed it was. It was also effective as a performance. While not the group’s most polished-sounding effort – a result of the refurbished instruments in the hands of 26 members – the concert served the occasion perfectly and reflected well on both artists and venue.

Triumphant works by Beethoven, his overtures to “The Creatures of Prometheus” and “Leonore” (No. 3), bookended the program, welcoming and sending off listeners with displays of technical brilliance and Cleveland’s famous cohesion. Of special note in the Maltz Center were those passages in “Leonore” of sublime softness. More somber but no less stirring was Schoenberg’s “Kol Nidre,” a setting of the Jewish text with chorus and narrator. Joined Sunday by no less a baritone than Thomas Hampson, and with the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus in luminous shape, the ensemble under Welser-Most gave a reading marked equally by great gravitas and otherworldly radiance. Each note bore traces of passion and mystery.

But the most moving use of a “Hope” violin Sunday came courtesy of star violinist Shlomo Mintz, a co-founder of the project. With Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto, on an instrument rescued from unspeakable tragedy, he produced 30 minutes of musical joy, a half-hour of melting beauty, heartfelt lyricism, and playful virtuosity.

That the instrument wasn’t up to every task was only fitting. Like the “Violins of Hope” themselves and all who transcended the Holocaust, Mintz overcame obstacles.

He also offered an encore: the “Nigun” from Bloch’s “Baal Shem: Three Pictures of Hasidic Life.” Just when the audience had accepted Mintz’s departure after the Mendelssohn, the violinist returned to widespread delight and joined the orchestra in a gritty, molten rhapsody.

Conceived as an homage to Jewish singing, “Nigun” in Mintz’s hands, on a Holocaust violin, in fact paid tribute to an entire people, to generations past and present. Hope couldn’t have come in a form any purer.

Cleveland Orchestra music director Franz Welser-Most concluded Sunday’s “Violins of Hope” concert by making sure that credit was given where credit was due: to Israeli violin-maker Amnon Weinstein. (Photos by Roger Mastroianni)
Cleveland Orchestra Concert Features Holocaust Violins

by DAVID C. BARNETT

A musical meditation on the Holocaust, performed by the Cleveland Orchestra, inaugurated Case Western Reserve University’s new Maltz Performing Arts Center, Sunday afternoon.

The concert took place in a Northeast Ohio landmark and featured instruments rescued from World War Two concentration camps.

When Cleveland Orchestra Music Director Franz Welser-Most was planning Sunday’s concert, he knew right away a composer he wanted to include.

“I said we have to play Beethoven, because the freedom of the human spirit is more present in Beethoven’s music, I think, than in any other.”

The Orchestra and chorus were joined by baritone Thomas Hampson and violin virtuoso Shlomo Mintz, performing in the enormous sanctuary of the century-old Temple-Tifereth Israel, recently renovated in partnership with Case Western. In addition to Beethoven, the program featured the works of two Jewish composers --- Felix Mendelssohn and Arnold Schoenberg --- both of whom were reviled by the Nazis as “degenerate” artists.

This music had a special meaning to Roman Frayman. As a child living in a Jewish ghetto in Poland, Frayman had many relatives --- most of them perished at Auschwitz.

“I would have had 85 first cousins,” he recalls. “And I’m the only one that’s left.”

As such, the concert was very moving to the 77-year-old Clevelander. Frayman says he’s happy to see how good his refurbished temple looks, and he found the performance to be overwhelming.

“I think it’s so amazing that the violins are now playing music for those who perished. I just sat there in awe.”

Holocaust survivor Roman Frayman says the concert was awe-inspiring.

The Sunday event was part of a three-month series of concerts and exhibitions called “Violins of Hope”, featuring rehabilitated stringed instruments that have toured the world as testament to human survival in the darkest of times.

Sept. 28, 2015
Tri-C professor puts focus on Violins of Hope through photos

by CARLO WOLFF

When documentary photographer Daniel Levin visited violinmaker Amnon Weinstein in May, his goal was to bring Weinstein’s workshop home to Cleveland through photographs that show the 68-year-old Tel Aviv man restoring Violins of Hope.

Levin, an associate professor of photography at Cuyahoga Community College, visited Weinstein and his wife, Assi, for 3 1/2 days, documenting Weinstein as he unpacked violins, treating them to a loving, detailed process designed to bring back the quality they had during the Holocaust.

Levin’s project is but one part of Violins of Hope, a multifaceted, multi-institutional project designed to unfold through next spring and beyond.

Among the imminent, initial highlights of this homage to instruments that survived the Holocaust even when the people played them didn’t: an invitation-only concert Sept. 27, featuring Israeli violin virtuoso Shlomo Mintz on a Violin of Hope, inaugurating the Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center on the Case Western Reserve University campus in Cleveland, and the Oct. 2 opening of “Violins of Hope,” a multimedia exhibit featuring some 50 such violins, at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood.

The 74 photographs Levin culled from some 1,700 images he captured track Weinstein in Tel Aviv as he meets his wife for lunch, scour Tel Aviv’s Dizengoff flea market for memorabilia related to stringed instruments associated with the Holocaust, and handles the mainly workaday fiddles he’s dedicated to reviving.

Curated by Levin and Israel Wiener, the Jewish Federation of Cleveland’s arts and culture consultant, “Amnon’s Workshop” is a highly tactile exhibit. These are close-ups of process, of affection, of humanity. They bring you not only into Weinstein’s neighborhood, but also into his head.

“I was interested in the man and his identity,” Levin said in a Sept. 18 interview at the gallery. “I assumed his identity would come through the objects in his workshop, in his place.” Actually, two workshops: A basement one where Weinstein does most of his work and a second-floor workshop in an adjacent building that is more of an office and waiting room.

What also impressed Levin about Weinstein was his historicity. Not only is Weinstein dedicated to ensuring that the lessons of these Holocaust violins are never forgotten, he’s the son of Moishe Weinstein, a violinmaker, and the father of Avshalom Weinstein, also a violinmaker.

“I think of him as a forensic luthier,” Levin said, “almost like a forensic pathologist.” Weinstein, who apparently can tell the kind of music that was played on the instrument, is kind of a violin “whisperer,” Levin suggested. The master violinmaker seems to tune into a violin’s spirit.

The day he arrived at Weinstein’s workshop, Weinstein got a package from Germany containing a Star of David violin. He opened the box, tossed out the wrapping paper, and discovered that the top of the case had been cut off, presumably to lower shipping costs. When he rubbed down the fingerboard with linseed oil, Weinstein told Levin “the owner had played a lot of klezmer.”

In the brochure on “Amnon’s Workshop,” Levin says his show is dedicated to relatives of his who were killed in the Holocaust. He applauds his parents, Violins of Hope champion Wiener – and Weinstein and his wife, the former Assi Bielski, “for allowing me into their two-room universe.” (Assi Weinstein, a journalist, is the daughter of Asael Bielski, one of the anti-Nazi Bielski partisans immortalized in the movie, “Defiance.”)

“Thank you my friends for letting me invade your lives, if only for a brief time,” Levin says in the brochure. Levin’s “home invasion” of Weinstein in Tel Aviv has resulted in a loving, resonant exhibit.

WHAT: “Amnon’s Workshop,” photographs by Daniel Levin
WHEN: Through Nov. 8
WHERE: Roe Green Gallery, Jewish Federation of Cleveland, 25701 Science Park Drive, Beachwood
INFO: By appointment except at open houses Oct. 11 and Nov. 8. Call 216-593-2900 or visit jcfcleve.org
See fully-restored Holocaust-era violins on display and in concert only in Cleveland.

by ANNIE ZALESKI

Thanks to its world-class museums and arts institutions, Cleveland has hosted many groundbreaking artistic exhibitions and events. But the forthcoming Violins Of Hope Cleveland—whose first major public event, a sold-out concert at Case Western Reserve University’s restored Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center at the Temple-Tifereth Israel, is September 27—might be one of the most ambitious cultural projects ever to occur in Northeast Ohio.

Seven arts, music and educational organizations are spearheading a series of concerts, lectures, educational events, musical broadcasts and art installations centered on Violins of Hope, a collection of Holocaust-era violins painstakingly brought back to performance shape by Tel Aviv-based violin maker Amnon Weinstein.

These particular instruments belonged to Jewish musicians, who were an integral part of Germany’s pre-World War II cultural landscape, performing everything from classical compositions to traditional klezmer music. Once the war broke out, some musicians hid the instruments or were forced to set them aside. Others were able to seek solace in the instruments, drawing on the power of music to momentarily escape from the horrors of concentration camps and genocidal violence. (In fact, some violinists played in the camps as part of SS-formed orchestras, which often ended up saving their lives.) Many of these violins remained silent even after World War II ended, some because their owners perished in the Holocaust and others because those who survived the camps couldn’t bear to play them.

Nineteen Holocaust-era violins from Violins of Hope will be on display starting October 2 at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, as part of a new exhibit that’s also titled Violins of Hope. Each instrument in this exhibition, which runs through January 3, 2016, has a compelling backstory.

All but one of the instruments on display at the Maltz Museum are from the collection of Amnon Weinstein, who has made it his mission to repair these instruments in order to underscore the resilience of Jewish culture and ensure those who perished in the Holocaust are never forgotten.

“If we are listening to the violin today, we are listening to the same sound the poor people who went to their deaths were listening to then,” he says. “This was the last human sound that they heard in their lifetime. That’s the power of this project—the power of listening to something that’s on one hand horrible, but on the other hand, it’s wonderful. It’s music.”

For the Maltz Museum, translating this powerful sentiment into an exhibit necessitated creating an “immersive experience” that would “tell the stories of the people who owned these violins in a way that would be exciting, interesting and poignant,” says executive director Ellen Rudolph. As a result, the 4,000-square-foot, multi-sensory exhibition space itself is distinctive from the museum’s previous installations, especially from a design standpoint.

The Violins of Hope exhibit will also feature videos, as well as text written by James Grymes, the author of the book Violins Of Hope, to create emotional resonance and impact.

Perhaps more important, the violins won’t just be displayed while in Cleveland. In the Maltz Museum gallery, musicians...
from the Cleveland Institute of Music and Baldwin Wallace Conservatory of Music will occasionally perform pieces of music using the instruments. (Members of the Cleveland Orchestra will also be performing with these violins during separate concerts.)

That these violins are being used is of vital importance to Weinstein. When he receives an instrument to restore, his “main goal is to put them in a condition that you can play a concert in a concert hall,” he says. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these performances are often as moving for the musicians as they are for audience members.

“Each musician who is playing on one of these instruments-number one, he wants to know everything about the violin,” Weinstein says. “All the stories. Number two, he’s not playing 100%-he’s playing to 500% of his abilities. And number three, as they’re giving back the instrument, you can always see wet eyes. It’s difficult for them to give it back.”

The Violins of Hope Cleveland program was organized by Richard Bogomolny, the chairman of the Cleveland Orchestra’s board of directors. He first learned about the opportunity to bring the violins to the city via Israel Weiner, an arts consultant for the Jewish Federation of Cleveland. Intrigued, Bogomolny decided to reach out to his friend Milton Maltz, who immediately said he wanted to do a major exhibit at his namesake museum.

The scope of the project quickly expanded well beyond just an exhibit. As Bogomolny approached other organizations about possibly bringing the violins to Cleveland, he discovered not only great excitement about the project, but an incredible spirit of cooperation.

“Each of these institutions was committed to doing what they do very well, and trying to make something happen using the theme of the violins,” he says. “Which has been the theme from day one, basically: We’re all in this together.”

As a result, Violins Of Hope Cleveland evolved into an unprecedented collaboration between Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland Institute of Music, The Cleveland Orchestra, Facing History and Ourselves, ideastream, the Jewish Federation of Cleveland and the Maltz Museum. These core partner institutions—and more than a dozen affiliate organizations across Northeast Ohio—are hosting a robust number of events as part of the project.

“It’s such a special opportunity to be a part of this incredible collaboration,” Rudolph says. “The collective resources of all of these partner organizations is just astounding—to have them come together in this way is very exciting.”

These events are frequently cross-cultural. For example, the Maltz Museum is premiering an original Violins of Hope piece it commissioned from the Groundworks Dance Theater, as well as presenting a concert by the Miami, Florida-based Holocaust Survivor Band, which is traveling to Cleveland especially for the show.

And during the first week of December, the Cleveland Orchestra is holding a series of educational concerts for middle and high school students, which will combine classical music and dramatic elements with readings, poetry and tableaus—in short, exploring “several ways to bring to life the messages of the music, and the messages of resilience and resistance and hope that are the enduring themes of this project,” says Joan Katz, the Cleveland Orchestra’s director of education and community programs.

Above all, Violins of Hope Cleveland speaks to music’s immense and seemingly endless capacity to inspire and transform the human condition. “[Music is] a completely international language,” Weinstein says. “Music is life.”
Violins of Hope fill the air

by CARLO WOLFF

The debut of the Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center on the campus of Case Western Reserve University went off without a hitch Sept. 27, its centerpiece a stirring concert by the Cleveland Orchestra. The months-long Violins of Hope programming is the fruit of an unprecedented collaboration between Cleveland cultural institutions including Case; the Cleveland Orchestra; ideastream, which broadcast the inaugural concert from the spanking new Silver Hall live over WVIZ/PBS and WCLV/104.9 FM; the Cleveland Institute of Music; and the Jewish Federation of Cleveland.

Named to honor chief benefactors Milton and Tamar Maltz, the Maltz Performing Arts Center is a profound reimagining of The Temple-Tifereth Israel on Ansel Road on the western edge of the Case campus in Cleveland.

The Temple was his and his wife’s temple, Maltz said at the post-event reception. “It could have gone down a rat hole,” he added, speaking to his motivation to rescue the striking building.

Through family and foundations, the Maltzes have contributed $30 million to the project, for which $59.3 million has been raised.

The debut was the unveiling of the first phase. The cost of phase two, which would include a black-box theater, performance theater and performance spaces, has not been determined, and construction on that won’t begin until the necessary money has been raised.

Fresh from a thorough renovation, the 1924 Byzantine-Romanesque landmark opened its original, 11-by-4-foot white oak doors (thoroughly cleaned, of course) to 1,200 people who filled Silver Hall, the concert space at its center, for a performance by the orchestra under Franz Welser-Moest. Silver Hall memorializes Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver and his son, Rabbi Daniel Silver. The father was a pioneer Zionist and famous orator who was senior rabbi there from 1917 to 1963, when his son succeeded him. Rabbi Daniel Silver was The Temple’s senior rabbi until he died in 1989. His widow, Adele, attended the opening.

“What a great redo,” said Jules Belkin, who was there with his wife, Fran. “It’s a renovation of an icon that’s going to be an even bigger icon.” Belkin is a legendary concert promoter who lives in Mayfield Heights.

The event also marked the launch of Violins of Hope, an ambitious educational program celebrating violins that in one way or another survived the Holocaust. Amnon Weinstein, the Tel Aviv violin maker who inaugurated the resonant project, was on hand, embracing Welser-Moest after the flamboyant Austrian finished leading the orchestra in "Leonore Overture No. 3," one of two Beethoven works Welser-Moest presented with a joyous enthusiasm.

Shlomo Mintz, the Israeli virtuoso, performed Felix Mendelssohn’s jaunty, romantic “Violin Concerto in E” on a Violin of Hope that was played in the Israeli Philharmonic upon its founding in 1936. He also soared on Ernst Bloch’s “Nigun,” a part of the suite, “Baal Shem.” Bloch was the first musical director of the Cleveland Institute of Music.

Weinstein revived that instrument, which sounded a bit thin on the Mendelssohn, full-bodied and ravishing on the Bloch, which Mintz and Welster-Moest presented as an encore (a well-rehearsed one).

“I have to come back to reality,” Weinstein said at the reception that capped the celebration. “This was really unbelievable.”

“Everything’s been fabulous, and this is just the beginning,” said Richard Bogomolny, chairman of the board of the Cleveland Orchestra.

The next event in the unfolding saga of Violins of Hope is the Oct. 2 launch of “Violins of Hope,” a multimedia exhibition at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood.
Exhibition serves as reminder of the Holocaust
by JOHN BENSON

There's no denying the power of music.

During the Holocaust, Jewish musicians lucky enough to escape execution often found solace and dignity through their violins. Today, those same violins act as a reminder of the horrors that came to light seven decades ago with the end of WW II.

Specifically, the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage is spearheading a community-wide collaboration – including Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland Institute of Music, the Cleveland Orchestra, Facing History and Ourselves, ideastream and the Jewish Federation of Cleveland – with the “Violins of Hope” exhibition, which is on display Friday through Jan. 3 at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage.

“The violins are from the collection of Israeli violin maker Amnon Weinstein, who gathered violins that made their way through the Holocaust in various ways,” said Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage Executive Director Ellen Rudolph. “He restored them so they could be played on a concert stage.”

For more than 20 years, the second-generation master violin maker, who lost hundreds of relatives in the Holocaust, has been restoring violins that have been played in concert halls around the world.

As far as “Violins of Hope,” this original exhibit highlights 19 violins on display – 18 from Weinstein’s collection and one making its American debut on loan from Yad Vashem (the World Center for Documentation, Research, Education and Commemoration of the Holocaust). Each violin comes with a story, which ranges from being played to entertain SS officers in a concentration camp to an instrument employed in a plot to blow up a Nazi soldiers club.

“One of the challenges was trying to display violins in a way that was interesting because violins are, for the most part, all the same,” Rudolph said. “So what we came up with was a very emotional dramatic space in which to display these violins.”

Designed with dramatic lighting and circular pods constructed with string to evoke the violin, the exhibition is a multisensory experience that actively engages the visitor through narratives, imagery and video. Further, the immersive space allows visitors to reflect on the transcendent nature of music.

“Something we thought very carefully about was illustrating the diversity of experiences of people during the Holocaust,” Rudolph said. “There were some people who got out of Germany and were able to immigrate. Others wound up in ghettos and concentration camps. We wanted to chart the arc of the Holocaust from the rise of anti-Semitism through the end of WW II.”

Naturally, “Violins of Hope” boasts a musical element. Visitors will hear a soundtrack of period-appropriate classical and Klezmer music; however, at times the exhibit will feature students from the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Baldwin Wallace Conservatory of Music playing the violins.

“I hope visitors seeing the exhibition will be reminded of the power of music,” Rudolph said. “Many people were able to use their instruments to survive. Their ability to play got them through either literally, because they were selected to play in an orchestra, or because playing music sustained them in some ways and made them feel human.

“The hope is people can get a better understanding of the Holocaust and connect to the people who played those instruments.”
Violins of Hope
by ANN V. KLOTZ

Though I’ve been home for several hours, I still hear violins -- Violins of Hope -- echoing through Silver Hall at The Temple-Tifereth Israel, built in Cleveland in 1924. I am too full of feelings. I, Christian woman in a Jewish family, teacher, mother, daughter am struggling to make sense, once again, of man’s inhumanity to man, the story that has caught me since I was a young woman in college and my beloved professor Dorothee Metlitski first introduced that phrase to me, “Man’s inhumanity to man.” Iago, of course, so consumed with jealousy for Othello; Regan and Goneril so hateful to their father, the dependent, doddering Lear; Macbeth so drunk on power and fear that he orders the slaying of Lady Macduff and all her little “pretty ones.” I took several classes with Dr. Metlitski, mesmerized by her brilliance and clarity, coming to love her.

It was not until my last semester with her that her sleeve slipped back and I saw the number. It had never crossed my mind that there won’t be anyone left. “I've had an experience listening to Mr. Klein that my own children and grandchildren will never have because there won’t be anyone left.” And, suddenly I am thinking of beautiful Betty Gold, who shared her story with a class of mine only weeks before she died and of my beloved college professor, gone now, too. I imagine my mother-in-law, as a little girl, with her mother and sister on the gangplank to flee Berlin in 1939. Awash in personal connections, this shiksa teacher is struck by how recent the Holocaust actually was -- am I experiencing a telescoping of time? Some inversion that events in the recent past feel closer as we age?

And sitting in luminous Silver Hall, re-consecrated today in the new Maltz Performing Arts Center in the Temple-Tifereth Israel, awaiting a concert played on violins that once belonged to victims of the Holocaust, I am overcome, verklempt.

Our friend John, who was in our wedding, designed the lighting systems in Hall -- a gorgeous lighting grid that floats over the bima, but we had no idea he had been in Cleveland in recent months to do so. He feels like one more ghost in an afternoon in which ghosts swirl in the music, touch down, wail and console. The Israeli violin-maker Amnon Weinstein has been restoring violins that belonged to victims of the Holocaust for several decades. In the video that precedes the concert, Weinstein explains that the job of the violin is to be played, to speak. These violins speak for those who were lost. Each concert is a victory.

Looking up at the slender stained glass arches, which alternate with modified arches full of theatrical lighting, I wonder about those who worshipped here in the late 30s and during the war. Were their prayers filled with dread and foreboding? Today, I sense only joy, not anguish, but once again, I marvel at how recent the Holocaust was.

Both my daughters are bat mitzvahs. I am not Jewish, but the Holocaust gained immediacy for me when I fell in love with and married a Jewish man. On our way to the concert, a friend and I pick up her friend, who told us of a photograph she looked at recently. In it, her mother and aunt are dressed in matching outfits; both girls are holding violins. Her mother was one of very few in her family to survive -- all others perished; but someone gave the family photographs to friends who weren’t Jewish before her family was taken away by the
Nazis. That is why Margie has many family pictures. At the end of the war, Margie's mother must have returned to her village in Hungary to claim them -- pictures instead of people. Imagine handing over your photograph albums because you sensed your time was short; imagine that neighbor placing the album carefully in the bottom drawer of a dresser -- perhaps even that small act a dangerous one.

As I watch the Cleveland Orchestra members take their places and tune their instruments, some decorated with inlaid Jewish stars, I think about the lives of those who perished, each one a person with a family, each one loved, each one trained to play the violin. How many of them played the very pieces we will hear today? The program has not yet begun and tears prick at my eyes. Gentile guilt? This is an old theme for me; I used to have a nightmare that the Holocaust was happening again and that I could not save my family, my Jewish daughters and young son. Man's inhumanity to man.

Do I hear this music differently because I am not Jewish? How can I know? I know only that I feel grateful to be in this lovely space, the circular space inviting with warm stone walls into which motifs of Judaism have been carved -- I see a menorah across the way from me. The curtain covering the Ark is a russet fabric, an autumn leaf. The elegance of the space feels worthy of the carefully restored violins, artifacts that survived. How intimate it is to watch the orchestra before we actually begin. They handle these violins with reverence. I wonder how it feels to play an instrument that is not one's own; if it moves differently in one's hands, sounds different to one's ears?

Then, we are ready. The musicians I can see tuck the violins competently under their chins, flourish their bows. They are professionals of all nationalities it seems, of all faiths perhaps. Music is their shared language. And, isn't that the point? Music speaks to us across horror and across time. The beautiful strains of Beethoven, Mendelsohn float through the sanctuary, offering solace, and inspiration. Thank you, Mr. Weinstein, for restoring these violins so the story of their owners is never lost. Thank you to the visionary donors whose imagination and generosity made this extraordinary sequence of events possible for Cleveland. Where there is music there is hope.
Restored Instruments From Concentrations Camps Give Rise To ‘Violins Of Hope’

by DAVID C. BARNETT

A collection of stringed instruments --- largely silent for seven decades --- is giving voice to the horrors of the Holocaust. The Violins of Hope were once owned by the inmates of Nazi concentration camps, during World War Two.

Clevelander Stanley Bernath got his first look at the Mauthausen concentration camp through the slats of a cattle car, in 1944. The teenager and his fellow Jewish prisoners were yanked off the train --- some were beaten and some were shot as they marched to the front gate.

“As we entered, a symphonic orchestra was playing Beethoven,” he recalls. “It was an unbelievable sight. People were being beaten and killed and there’s an orchestra playing.”

That’s a story that Israeli violinmaker Amnon Weinstein has heard before. The first time was fifty years ago, when a man brought a battered, old instrument into his shop that had once been played in a death camp.

“It took me time to begin to touch something like that,” he says. “And I asked him a lot of questions, and from him I know a lot of things about how they played, where they played and everything.”

For Weinstein, that instrument was a chilling reminder of all the relatives he had lost in those prison camps. And for the last twenty years, he’s been on a quest to collect and repair violins of the Holocaust.

Weinstein’s Tel Aviv shop is filled with violins, violas and cellos in various states of repair, and he reckons he’s restored about 60 instruments, so far. About a third of his collection, called the “Violins of Hope”, has come to Cleveland for an exhibition at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage.

Weinstein is happy that hundreds of people will get the chance to see these historic instruments up close, but he’s really excited about a series of concerts with local performers actually playing them.

“Violins have to speak,” he says. “And the most important part of the life of a violin is to be played in concert. And then, they can tell stories.”

Jay Geller says the ability to play an instrument saved some prisoners from the gas chambers. Geller is co-teaching a class in Holocaust art and history at Case Western Reserve University, this fall. “Being a musician, and selected to play in the camp orchestra was a highly-prized position. They were, if you will, the prize cattle.”

This past weekend, Peter Otto was one of 21 members of the Cleveland Orchestra who got to play one of the Violins of Hope in their local concert debut. For Otto, the relationship between a person and his or her violin is deeply personal. After making this initial acquaintance, he rested the scroll of the instrument gently against his cheek and tried to imagine its previous owner.

“I’m right now holding something in my hand that someone at some point cared very deeply for. And that hopefully gave this person some sort of --- I don’t want to say ‘peace’ --- but even if it’s just a way to express their suffering.”

Amnon Weinstein says, for him, each violin is like a memorial.

“In part for my family, a memorial in part for the six-million people. But, this is a forest of sounds for all those people. And this is very, very important.”

And Weinstein says that’s why he continues to look for more violins to bring back to life.
6 million stories come to Maltz Museum’s Violins of Hope exhibit

by CARLO WOLFF

One of the first things you notice, other than Amnon Weinstein addressing you in a video, is the openness of “Visions of Hope,” the new exhibit at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood.

There are no partitions here; walls, yes, but no barriers, and virtually no corners to turn.

Instead, the museum has arranged these exceptional instruments stage front, as it were, occupying glass cases to throw the time, love and work Weinstein poured into them into high relief. They sit at the front of semicircular displays, supporting text and video in the background.

Weinstein is the Tel Aviv violinmaker who launched Violins of Hope more than two decades ago in memory of 400 of his relatives who died in the Holocaust. He and his son, Avshalom, have amassed 60 of these instruments, all somehow related to the Holocaust. Each has its own story; each resonates anew because father and son have brought them back to life.

The exhibit, assembled from scratch, was more than a year in the making, according to Ellen Rudolph, Maltz Museum executive director.

“In some cases, we know everything about the violin and its provenance,” said the senior Weinstein. In other cases, all they know is that the violin was in the Holocaust. And some are so deeply separated from their origins there’s no way to track their history, his son said.

These are mostly German-made.

James A. Grymes, chairman of the department of music at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte, curated the Maltz Museum exhibit and is the author of “Violins of Hope,” a book published in 2014. Like the Weinsteins, he was on hand Oct. 1 and 2 during opening ceremonies for the Maltz Museum exhibit. His book tells the wildly different stories of seven violins.

“Musing on the diverse stories he tells in his “Violins of Hope” book, Grymes said they’re a “poignant reminder that the Holocaust is not one story of 6 million deaths.”

“It’s 6 million different stories.”
Violins of Hope comes to Cleveland

by DAWN KENDRICK

CLEVELAND -- It’s a collection of instruments that has an inspiring connection to history and to the people who played them.

And for the next few months they here is Cleveland. Dawn Kendrick has the story behind the Violins of Hope.

These remarkable violins have survived the test of time as testimony to the Jewish people who faced the Holocaust during World War 2. Their music, gave a small amount of comfort to those in concentration camps. Today, the violins survive because of the work of Amnon Weinstein, a master violinmaker from Tel Aviv.

"I want to find any violin in the world that has a story to tell. And put them in conditions that they can tell the story," violinmaker Amnon Weinstein told WKYC’s Dawn Kendrick.

"Violins of Hope" can be seen at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage. Nineteen violins are on display, each requiring pains taking work to restore.

“The biggest restoration was one year and a half from sheds of pieces of wood. Then it is usually 3 to 6 months. It’s huge work,” Arnon said.

Amnon’s son, Avshi also restores instruments for the collection. That has grown to 60 violins.

Avshi Weinstein noted that “As many instruments as you see here there are many more which we will not have and many more players we will never hear their stories.”

The Cleveland Orchestra recently held a Violins of Hope concert, for the opening of Silver Hall in the Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center.

The programs surrounding the violins Cleveland visit are the most extensive to date for the collection. Which makes Amnon very thankful.

Weinstein speaks highly of Cleveland saying “I’ve been telling it to everyone and I will tell it also to you. Cleveland is crazy, on the good way. This is the most import project on violins in this century.”

If you want to hear the Violins of Hope, the Cleveland Institute of Music Orchestra will present a free, community concert at Severance Hall this Wednesday.
GroundWorks DanceTheater strikes rare chords on evocative Fall Concert Series program (review)

by STEVE SUCATO


Set to music by Pulitzer Prize-winning American composer Howard Hanson, the one act dance-theater work imagined the day in 1941 in which British author Virginia Woolf committed suicide. In it, Taylor-Corbett created a world where Woolf, portrayed with sensitivity by Annika Sheaff, was warmed and haunted by her past. Thought to have suffered from bipolar disorder, Woolf, in what looked to be her study, saw visions of her younger self (Lauren Garson), her husband (Damien Highfield), and other relatives in happier times and times of turmoil. She also recalled the innocent seduction by a romantic interest portrayed by a sultry Felise Bagley. The period-looking piece overall had a playful, Peter Pan-like vibe to it driven by Hanson's animated score. Taylor-Corbett steered clear of a literal depiction of Woolf's demise in the work, tastefully handling her bouts of madness as fights between the imagined characters which Woolf quelled by ripping out pages from her journal that seemed to erase those disturbing memories.

The wonderfully constructed and beautifully danced ballet/classic modern dance hybrid was a throwback to works not seen much from GroundWorks of late.

More indicative of the company’s current preference for contemporary dance works and collaboration, the world-premiere of GroundWorks artistic director David Shimotakahara's “Shadowbox” evoked, in a highly abstracted way, the desperate and hopeless reality of those in WWII concentration camps.

Part of the “Violins of Hope” project and in partnership with the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, Jewish Federation of Cleveland, and the Cleveland Institute of Music, the work featured an often vibrant, somewhat dissonant and superbly original score by Israeli composer Oded Zehavi, a Schusterman Visiting Israeli Artist to Cleveland.

Zehavi's driving music, played expertly by violinist Mirabai Weismehl Rosenfeld, rocketed to life at the very outset of the dance work with Rosenfeld performing live over a pre-recorded soundtrack.

GroundWorks' dancers in drab gray costumes however, moved listlessly in simple pedestrian movements to that music.

Shimotakahara’s choreography, which used children’s games as both metaphor and a jumping-off point for creating dance steps, may have been slow to start but picked up steam and interest as the work progressed, building to powerful heights. The best was a frenetic section in which, within the confines of a small lighted rectangle on the stage floor, five dancers, mostly in pairs, engaged each other in intense, confrontational and consoling movement snapshots that rapidly flashed before us like someone seeing their life pass before their eyes.

Also of note was a touching duet performed by Bagley and Michael Marquez that was filled with glancing touches, delicate head nuzzles and intertwining limbs. The stirring work ended with the chilling image of the dancers lined up across the back of the stage and turning to one side as if preparing to be marched off to certain death.

The Fall Concert Series program’s most interesting and liberating work turned out to be the world-premiere of New York-based choreographer Kate Weare’s “Far and Near.”

The delightfully energetic abstract work set to excerpts of Caroline Shaw's quirky Pulitzer Prize-winning “Partita For 8 Voices,” along with music by Michael Gordon, was – like so many contemporary dance works these days – a collection of movement for movement’s sake.

While inspired in part by a poem by Czeslaw Milosz, “Far and Near” was all about Weare’s keen talent for creating and organizing dance movement into unexpected and satisfying eye candy and GroundWorks’ dancers’ brilliance in conveying it. Everyday motions and movements such as hopping, spinning, brisk hand waving and dancers sniffing at each other’s bodies, along with sweeping unison dance sequences, scratched an audience itch for clever, electrifying entertainment that they rewarded with a standing ovation.

Oct. 19, 2015
Violins of Hope is a memorial to Holocaust victims

by AUSTIN GOODER

“For Jews enduring utter despair and unimaginable evil during the Holocaust, music offered haven and humanity.”

“In some cases, the ability to play the violin spared Jewish musicians from more gruelling labours or even death.”

These are the words found on violinsofhopecle.org. They give context and meaning to a project called Violins of Hope. Its roots are in an era long before us: the 1930s.

The Nazi war machine ground Europe to dust. German Jews were rounded up and murdered in cold blood, or otherwise kept to starve and rot in concentration camps. Jews were marked with Stars of David and persecuted for their faith. The Jewish suffering didn’t end when the Nazis were finally defeated.

As the Allied forces liberated concentration camps, the global Jewish community was still decades away from peace and rehabilitation. This year, some small part of that rehabilitation is happening in Ohio.

As the shrill, haunting notes of a violin filled the Silver Hall in Cleveland, a little bit of healing began.

“All these instruments, when I’m getting them, are in very, very poor condition. Some just suffered a lot in the Holocaust.”

That’s Amnon Weinstein, the man behind a world-renowned violin shop in Tel-Aviv, Israel. He was speaking to the Public Broadcasting Service.

“IT is for millions of people who are dead,” he says. “It is victory. Each concert played is victory.”

Weinstein is referring to Violins of Hope, a project born out of his passion for violin repair.

It involves the claiming and recovery of violins once played by Jewish musicians in the Nazi reign in 1930s Germany.

Weinstein finds or receives the violins and repairs them in his Tel-Aviv shop. He says it’s meticulous work.

These violins are now played by the Cleveland Orchestra. Nineteen of them, in fact, are used as part of the performances at the newly renovated Silver Hall.

Lynn Goodman, project manager for Violins of Hope, says there was a great deal of excitement about the concert.

“The moment right before the concert began when the musicians who were playing the Violins of Hope were asked to stand and show the instruments was dramatic and solemn.

“And once the music began, you couldn’t help but be struck by the contrast between the beauty of the music and the fate of the violins’ original owners,” she continues.

“Many in the audience were moved to tears.”

The tears are understandable, as Goodman explains. Holocaust survivors are reaching their 80s and 90s, and there’s an awareness in the Jewish community about how there will soon be no one left to share first-hand experiences from Nazi Germany.

Hedy Milgrom, senior vice-president of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, was also there.

“The whole concert was a combination of very mixed emotions and surrealism for me,” Milgrom says.
She helped steer the committee that organized Violins of Hope’s appearance in Cleveland.

She also had a more intimate connection to the concert.

“I’m the daughter of Holocaust survivors. My mother was a Mengele twin,” she says.

“My mother and her twin sister arrived in Auschwitz together and were immediately pulled from the line for [Josef] Mengele to have for his experiments.”

Milgrom says the music in Auschwitz made her mother optimistic.

“When the cattle cars stopped, and they were all pushed off the car, the first thing my mother heard was an orchestra playing on the platform,” she says.

“See? They even have music here. It can’t be all bad.”

For Weinstein, Violins of Hope is a passion project that didn’t come easily.

In an interview with National Public Radio, Weinstein revealed he once found a small amount of ashes inside one of these Holocaust violins.

Another report indicated Weinstein found a swastika carved inside another.

“Even amid hopelessness, when you hear music, you feel hope,” she says.

“Even when what’s in front of you suggests otherwise, you still feel hope.”

Jewish culture has endured. Jewish history is forever preserved by textbooks and memories. And there’s a note that endures through it all. A note that the Holocaust couldn’t and wouldn’t extinguish. It’s a note played proudly by Violins of Hope, on those violins that survived so much more than we ever thought possible. The note persists in diaries and books and spoken word. Hope.

Two of the violins he’s received, according to Goodman, were played in Auschwitz and Dachau.

Milgrom says these violins help humanize the story.

“When you tell the story of what happened through the lens of the individual person, you get to understand the enormity of what happened,” she says.

Goodman says it took Weinstein several years to even touch the first Holocaust violin delivered to his violin shop.

“It is a physically and emotionally taxing process to restore these instruments,” she says. “Amnon’s entire family was killed in the Holocaust. Only his parents survived by emigrating to Palestine before the war.”

Modern estimates suggest that nearly six million Jews were slaughtered in the Holocaust. All of them painters, musicians, mechanics, bakers, mothers, fathers, children and more.

Goodman says there are still victories to be found.

“Every violin that he restores to playing condition represents a victory. Although they tried, the Nazis could not extinguish Jewish culture and Jewish history.”

Milgrom, too, says that music was and is important.
Author Daniel Mendelsohn
On Writing And Discovering The Holocaust Anew

by KAREN R. LONG

Cultural critic Daniel Mendelsohn paused in Cleveland this October before his written remarks to take in the stunning, restored Temple-Tifereth Israel, repurposed at the heart of a new Maltz Performing Arts Center.

A month earlier, the richly glowing Silver Hall reopened its doors with a performance from the Cleveland Orchestra, occupying the stage where Mendelsohn stood. The musicians played “The Creatures of Prometheus” and “Leonore,” both overtures from Beethoven, on 26 instruments rescued from the Holocaust.

“I am dazzled by the space we are all sitting in,” said Mendelsohn, gesturing toward the burnished wood and subdued golds. The auditorium reminded him of the ruined beauty of many Eastern European synagogues, abandoned with “trees growing in the middle of them now.”

He also wryly noted, as a platter of pink shrimp hors d’oeuvres shimmered past during the faculty reception, “It’s not a synagogue anymore.”

The celebrated writer, a classicist whose essays appear in the New Yorker and the New York Review of Books, traveled extensively for five years, visiting Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, as well as Israel, Sweden, Denmark and Australia, to report on his much-honored memoir, “The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million.”

Eli Wiesel reviewed the book in the Washington Post nine years ago, finding it “rigorous in its search for truth, at once tender and exacting.” The New York Times praised its meditations on conflicting ways of storytelling, a thread that Mendelsohn took up in his Cleveland remarks, “Lost’ Between Memory and History: Writing the Holocaust for the Next Generation.”

The six relatives in Mendelsohn’s subtitle were a maternal great-uncle, Schmeil Jager, his wife Ester and their four teenage daughters: Lorcka, Frydka, Ruchele and Bronia. For more than three centuries, the family had lived in “a small, pre-Carpathian Polish town” called Bolechow, now part of Ukraine.

The reader enters “The Lost” through the youthful sensibilities of young Daniel, who grew up enthralled by his snappily-dressed, successful grandfather, and who spent part of his childhood provoking tears in Florida from certain elderly European Jews: the great nephew so closely resembled Schmeil. A handful of surviving photos of Jager, reprinted in “The Lost,” capture a strong echo between the two men’s eyes, mouth and posture.

When the Germans marched into Bolechow in July 1941, some 6,000 Jews called it home. In August 1944, as the Soviets’ army arrived, “48 survivors emerged from the forest, the cellars, the haystacks where they had been hiding.”

Some sixty years later, Mendelsohn began searching for this remnant. He also discovered the names of his six relatives...
in the Yad Vashem database for Shoah victims. Yet the archival information turned out to be “wrong, all wrong, the spelling of names, the dates of births and deaths, the spelling of parents’ names.”

“Why does this matter?” he asked. “It matters to me precisely because we are in a hinge moment: still close enough to care about small things, small inaccuracies that depart from the truth. But in 2000 years, will it matter that a young woman died at 21, not 18? That large events are made of small details?”

Mendelsohn, 55, is deeply interested in the moral drift inherent in storytelling. He is keenly aware that his own experience – writing “The Lost” – moved what happened into “the story of what happened.”

The book’s raw material was a fragment of a welter of stories – belonging to “perpetrators, victims, neighbors, survivors.” One such survivor kept her secrets. Meg Grossbard told Mendelsohn, “You think you deserve to know all this because it’s part of ‘history.’ This wasn’t history to me. This was my life. And my life belongs to me . . . If I tell you my story, it will become your story.”

With the perspective of a classicist, Mendelsohn asked his audience – gathered for the first ThinkForum of the academic year – to consider how catastrophic and complex Jewish slavery in Egypt was, now boiled down into the Haggadah, stories reduced to a ritual two hours.

“We today are too close to the Holocaust to assess what it will mean,” he said. “My own, seemingly big book, is not but a grain of sand. In 2,000 years, Lorcka will have disappeared.”

Mendelsohn seems reconciled to this notion. “People of the future will need room to live their own lives.”
Solon man, Amnon Weinstein’s wife share rare family photo
by CARLO WOLFF

Imagine what Robert Zelwin felt when he saw his relatives in a black-and-white photograph from April 1948 showing a group of former members of the Bielski Brigade in a displaced persons camp in Germany.

Among those partisans: Zelwin’s parents.

The shock of recognition came over Zelwin’s face in mid-October, when the Solon resident met Assi Weinstein, wife of Violins of Hope founder Amnon Weinstein, in connection with the opening of Daniel Levin’s photographic exhibition, “Amnon’s Workshop,” at the Roe Green Gallery in the Jewish Federation of Cleveland building in Beachwood.

In a recent telephone interview, Zelwin said the meeting came about through Hedy Milgrom, vice president of endowments and development at the Federation, a fellow member of B’nai Jeshurun Congregation in Pepper Pike. Milgrom invited Zelwin to lunch with her and the Weinsteins.

When the conversation turned to World War II and its aftermath, Zelwin asked Assi Weinstein where her mother went after the war. To a DP camp in Germany, she said.

"Where in Germany? Foehrenwald? Really?" is how Zelwin replicated the exchange. "My brother was born in Foehrenwald in a DP camp. She said, really? At which point Amnon reached into this briefcase and he pulled out his iPad and started fiddling around with it and he comes up with this picture, a picture I’d seen before."

The snapshot showed Zelwin’s father and mother, his uncle, his brother’s wife, and a cousin of his mother’s. Zelwin’s aunt is sitting next to Assi’s mother.

"It was just amazing," Zelwin said. "It was just a very unique coincidence."

The ties strengthened about two weeks later when other Bielski partisans came to Cleveland, affirming Zelwin’s impression that not enough people know of the Bielski brothers. It’s the story of a Polish resistance group formed by Tuvia, Asael and Zus Bielski after the Nazis killed their parents in the Nowogrodek ghetto in Byelorussia, formerly Poland. The Bielski group saved Jewish lives and conducted anti-Nazi raids. It is the subject of the 2008 movie, "Defiance."

To Assi Weinstein, the encounter with Zelwin was memorable if not unique. In an email from Tel Aviv, she said she has met "hundreds of ex-partisans who survived in the Bielski brigade. Many lived in Israel. Many in the U.S. and some in Israel."

She did not know of the Zelwin family until she met Robert Zelwin in Cleveland, but there have been similar encounters with "people who knew my name (quite unusual in Hebrew: Assaela), were interested in its origin and then told me about their family who survived with the Bielskis."

"I was very happy to find Robert Zelwin so interested and knowledgeable about his parents past, and as always – it feels like family to meet descendants of partisans," Weinstein said.
Israel Philharmonic thrills Cleveland audience with ear-opening Dvorak and Ravel (review)

by MARK SATOLA

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- It’s always interesting to hear how a different group fits into the acoustic of Severance Hall. When that ensemble is the storied Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, however, under the baton of Music Director for Life Zubin Mehta, the experience is much more than just an aural novelty.

The Israel Philharmonic’s fall tour has taken them just this month to New York, San Francisco, Palm Desert, Los Angeles (where they played three concerts in two days), Chicago, Cleveland and Dallas. Monday's performance here marked the next-to-last performance in a demanding schedule, but the ensemble's intensity and cohesion belied any tour fatigue.

The orchestra's stage set-up guaranteed an ear-opening experience. In contrast to the usual arrangement of the Cleveland Orchestra, Israel's first violins, cellos and basses were aligned on the left, with the second violins, violas, harps and piano on the right and a large battery of percussion clustered in the back stage left. The brass stood at the back corner of stage right, well away from the main body of the ensemble.

The largest forces were employed for the opening work, “Journey to the End of the Millennium” by Josef Bardanashvili, a native of Georgia and a longtime resident of Israel. While the music is drawn from Bardanashvili's opera of the same name, the symphonic poem stands, in the composer's words, as “a musical journey of the Jewish people from the very first (theoretical) days to the 20th century.”

Bardanashvili cites as formal antecedents the symphonic poems of Liszt and Tchaikovsky's “Francesca da Rimini.” His musical antecedents, at least in this piece, seem to be 20th century tyros including Varese and Stravinsky in “Rite of Spring” mode. The musical voice, however, which is sometimes challenging, sometimes almost cinematic, is the composer's own.

“Journey” is not so much a chronological travelogue as a musical essay, employing an organic process in which plainly tonal melody vies with brilliantly deployed dissonance, one growing out of the other, and a clamorous climax of great power that combines a forceful brass chorale (derived from a wedding prayer in the opera) and a polytonal tapestry given blazing illumination by the large percussion section.

The Israel Philharmonic's percussionists, in fact, were stunning in this score, which Mehta managed with technical assurance and a fine dramatic sensibility. Co-principal violist Roman Spitzer was given a solo bow for his worthy contributions.

Percussion was also a star in Ravel's “La Valse,” which was given a reading that was at once sumptuous and clamorous, as befits the work's “dancing on a volcano” theme. Mehta beautifully conveyed the swirling mists out of which the compelling waltz theme forms, and there were many fine moments for the orchestra's solo woodwinds. Strings were silken in the smooth delirium of the waltz themes.

But it was the Israel Philharmonic's fantastic percussion section that really gave the music an extra kick. Timpanist Dan Moshayev was a marvel of precision and energy as he forcefully punctuated the dance, especially as it careened into its delirious climax.

The second half of the program was devoted to Dvorak's Symphony No. 9, “From the New World.” Under Mehta's baton, the orchestra revealed the rich, burnished tone for which it's famous, a sound that derives from its early-20th century origins but has been polished to a 21st-century sheen over the decades.

Mehta is no strict formalist. He allowed the orchestra to linger over the many episodes of loveliness, but also drove them with fire when the music called for it. While this made for a somewhat discursive reading, the effect was nevertheless of a journey of nostalgia and passion, and Mehta was called back to the stage four times to a thunderous ovation. A 'Slavonic Dance' by Dvorak was the audience's sweet reward.
Israel Philharmonic Orchestra entertains sell-out crowd

by CARLO WOLFF

The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra brought a sell-out Severance Hall crowd to its feet at both beginning and end Nov. 16, powering through a performance featuring a symphonic classic, a modernist touchstone and a contemporary Israeli work of drama and dazzle.

The Monday night event marked the Cleveland debut of conductor Zubin Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic's first Cleveland performance since 2004. Yoel Levi conducted that 2004 concert, which also featured the pianist Emanuel Ax.

The show started with a bang with “The Star-Spangled Banner,” followed by “Hatikvah,” the Israeli national anthem. Both orchestra and audience stood throughout these salutes to the bond between the two countries.

The show ended with a similar bang, prompting several standing ovations before musical director Mehta led the orchestra in a spirited encore, Antonin Dvorak’s “Slavonic Dance, Op. 46, No. 8.”

The performance featured four instruments on loan from the “Violins of Hope” exhibition at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood. The presenters were the Cleveland Orchestra, the Maltz Family Foundation and the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, in partnership with the American Friends of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

It was fitting that that entertaining Dvorak encore came on the heels of a majestic rendition of the same composer’s “Symphony No. 9,” subtitled “From the New World.” Mehta and the orchestra he’s led since 1977 refreshed the Dvorak with panache in the slow movements, particularly a gorgeous Largo, capping the 40-minute work with an Allegro con fuoco alternating a majestic brass leitmotif with wind and string figures blending folk dance and nursery rhyme.

The familiar Dvorak symphony attests to the Czech composer’s embrace of his adopted country, the United States. While it incorporates themes from his homeland, it also references Native American motifs and in its underlying exuberance reflects Dvorak’s affection for the U.S.

The modernist offering was Maurice Ravel’s “La Valse,” a mesmerizing summation of a style of music associated with the late 19th-century Vienna of Johann Strauss. It started almost inaudibly, like morning vapors one senses waking from a dream, string washes buttressing filigreed wind instruments as it gathered force.

One sensed that Ravel, who worked on this starting before World War I and finishing after, was torn about the waltz form itself. “La Valse” is an apotheosis, and a summation of a style associated with a vanished, more placid culture. But it also is a critique, and in Mehta’s rich interpretation, it changed from pastoral to tempestuous, anger and dissonance supplanting harmony. It ended threatening, frenzied and powerful.

Josef Bardanashvili’s “Journey to the End of the Millennium” was a 25-minute “tone poem” by an Israeli composer who wrote an opera of the same name. According to him, it is in the tradition of similar works by Liszt and Tchaikovsky and “is built as a musical journey of the Jewish people from the very first (theoretical) days to the 20th century.”

This work was a journey indeed, and a largely successful one. Not only did it impressively demonstrate the Israel Philharmonic’s sonic clarity and mastery of dynamics, it showcased Bardanashvili’s command of effect, spanning delicate piccolo solo and thunderous percussion. Even though the piece at times seemed to wander, capping it with a conga blast was particularly dramatic.

This Cleveland date was the next to last on an eight-city, nine-performance tour, according to Raphael Sutton, executive director of the American Friends of the American Friends of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. This tour concluded with a performance in Dallas Nov. 17.

In a brief interview before the Severance Hall performance, Sutton said concerts on this year’s tour have either featured Dvorak’s Ninth or Beethoven’s “Symphony No. 3,” the “Eroica.” The Bardanashvili and Ravel pieces are constants, he said.

The idea for the Israel Philharmonic, which goes on U.S. tour every two years, is “not only to show Israeli musicians but also Israeli composition,” he said, calling the Bardanashvili “a more contemporary piece.”

The AFIPO underwrites 10 percent to 15 percent of the Israel Philharmonic’s budget, Sutton said, adding one purpose of its US tours is to raise additional funds. Since it mounted its first U.S. tour, in 1951, it has visited this country 30 times.
The release stated that for the story, a CBS crew conducted interviews with Franz Welser-Möst, music director of the Cleveland Orchestra, Richard J. Bogomolny, the orchestra’s board chair, and Peter Otto, its first associate concertmaster; Milton Maltz, chair and founder of the Maltz Museum; and Amnon Weinstein, master violinmaker and Violins of Hope founder.

The CBS crew “captured the initiative’s kickoff concert when the actual violins were played by members of the Cleveland Orchestra on the occasion of the first-phase opening of the Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center at Case Western Reserve University,” according to the release.

Violins of Hope Cleveland was launched in October and continues into February with activities and events in the Cleveland area.
Cleveland ‘Violins of Hope’ segment airing this Sunday on ‘CBS Sunday Morning’

by ZACHARY LEWIS

CLEVELAND, Ohio – Soon the world, or at least the rest of the nation, will know the power of “Violins of Hope.”

Two months after it was taped by a crew from the television show “CBS Sunday Morning,” a segment about the project at last has a broadcast date. Local viewers can tune in at 9 a.m. this Sunday, Dec. 6, on WOIO Channel 19. Those outside Northeast Ohio should consult the comprehensive listing of show times posted on the CBS Sunday Morning web site.

Expect the CBS program to focus on the “Violins of Hope” kickoff event, a September concert by the Cleveland Orchestra – with several artists including violinist Shlomo Mintz playing instruments rescued from the Holocaust – at the new Maltz Performing Arts Center at Case Western Reserve University. Also sure to be of central interest: the eponymous exhibition now on display into February at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood.

Look, too, for interviews with Amnon Weinstein, the Israeli violinmaker who spent decades collecting and restoring the instruments now known as the “Violins of Hope”; local project champions Milton Maltz and Richard Bogomolny; and two members of the Cleveland Orchestra: music director Franz Welser-Most, who conducted the September concert, and first associate concertmaster Peter Otto.

For more information on “Violins of Hope,” visit violinsofhopecle.org or reach out to any one of the project’s seven lead partners, including the Cleveland Orchestra, Case Western Reserve University, the Cleveland Institute of Music, Ideastream, the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, Facing History and Ourselves, and the Maltz Museum.
Cavani Quartet Presents Violins of Hope Concert in CIM's Mixon Hall Tonight

by MIKE TELIN

Composer Erwin Schulhoff, who perished in the Holocaust, wrote in his 1919 avant-garde music manifesto: The idea of revolution in art has evolved for decades... This is particularly true in music, because this art form is the liveliest, and as a result reflects the revolution most strongly and deeply — the complete escape from imperialistic tonality and rhythm, the climb to an ecstatic change for the better.

"I love that quote," violinist Annie Fullard said during a telephone conversation. "It's so upsetting that Schulhoff's life was cut short." On Friday, December 4 at 8:00 pm in Mixon Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Cavani Quartet (Annie Fullard and Mari Sato, violins, Kirsten Docter, viola, and Merry Peckham, cello) will perform two pieces by Schulhoff — Divertimento for String Quartet, Op. 14 and String Sextet — as part of a CIM Violins of Hope Faculty Recital.

The concert will also include Antonín Dvořák's Cypresses with Robert Conrad as narrator, and the traditional Hebrew melody Ani Ma'amin ("I Believe"). The Cavani will be joined by guest artists Rebecca Albers, viola, and Julie Albers, cello. A pre-concert lecture with composer Oded Zehavi (Israel Institute Schusterman Visiting Artist) and Holocaust survivor Jacqueline Mendels Birn will begin at 7:15.

The Violins of Hope Cleveland project centers around a collection of nineteen violins currently on display at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage. The instruments have been lovingly restored by Israeli luthier Amnon Weinstein as a living memorial to those who perished under the Nazis. During Friday's concert, Annie Fullard will perform on the "Auschwitz" violin, and Mari Sato will perform on the "Haftel" violin.

"Amnon was very generous, and he told me that I should try as many of the instruments as I could. He does want them to be played, because their bigger meaning comes to life when they are played."

Fullard first tried the instrument that belonged to Heinrich Haftel, who served as a first violinist in the Vienna Concert Orchestra before the Nazis made it impossible for him to make a living. Haftel went on to serve as a member of the Palestine Symphony Orchestra, a forerunner of today's Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

"The curator of the exhibit brought out another instrument that she said was the 'Auschwitz' violin," Fullard recalled. "I picked it up and started to play it, and I felt a tremendous sadness that was overwhelming. I actually couldn't stop playing it. It has a presence, a voice." The owner of the violin is not known, and Fullard said it is astonishing that Amnon Weinstein was able to put it back together and give it life.
‘Voices of the voiceless’ come to life on Holocaust victims’ violins

by MIKE TELIN

When 300 Auschwitz survivors gathered last January for the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp, the annual commemoration was especially poignant: With survivors now in their 80s and 90s, many worried about how future generations would learn about the Holocaust.

“Never again” has been a vow of survivors, Holocaust scholars, and human rights advocates for decades, even as their education efforts seek new ways to educate about the Holocaust, as first-person testimonies dwindle.

For Israeli violin craftsman Amnon Weinstein, music is a way to honor the six million Jewish victims killed by the Third Reich. But it represents more than despair. “Wherever there were violins, there was hope,” says Mr. Weinstein, who has been working for 20 years to bring the lost violins of Holocaust musicians back to life, a project culminating this fall in Violins of Hope, a Cleveland-area partnership of museum exhibitions, orchestra performances, and lectures to give voice to Jewish communities who embraced music as a means of survival and resilience, even inside concentration camps.

“Weinstein’s father, who was also a luthier, or stringed-instrument craftsman, escaped Europe for Palestine in 1938. But the remainder of his family, some 400 people, were all killed.

Decades ago, one of the younger Mr. Weinstein’s clients brought in an instrument for restoration: the violin he was ordered to play at a concentration camp, the case of which still contained ashes. In 1996, Weinstein set out to collect as many Holocaust-era violins as possible, tracing their owners’ stories and carefully refurbishing them to be played today.

“An instrument becomes part of the person which plays it,” Cleveland Orchestra conductor Franz Welser-Möst told CBS’s Serena Altschul, in an interview airing Sunday, the first night of Hanukkah. “It’s the voice of that person comes through the instrument. And just knowing that some of these people who have owned these instruments did not survive, but their personality is still within these instruments, I find that very moving.”

In September, Mr. Mintz joined the Cleveland Orchestra for a performance of Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto, Schoenberg’s Kol Nidre, and other scores, with several artists using the victims Weinstein had rescued from history. Violins of Hope has held numerous concerts, some featuring the work of Holocaust-era Jewish composers, to accompany an exhibit of 19 violins at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, closing January 3. In mid-November, the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra, founded in 1936 as the Palestine Orchestra, traveled to Cleveland for a joint performance.

“When Amnon created the Violins of Hope, it wasn’t to put them on a table and have somebody look at them,” organizer Richard Bogomolny told CBS. “It was that they had to be played, because that’s the only way the voices of the voiceless could be heard.”

“We cannot afford to move in the direction of devaluing the life of anyone,” violinist Annie Fullard told Cleveland Classical ahead of her quartet’s own performance with Violins of Hope. “We know that artists can celebrate culture, and connecting with each other is how we keep our humanity.”
The message of the Violins of Hope project may be particularly poignant in the wake of violence like the Paris attacks, but also has a new resonance as cultural and religious figures, including Jewish leaders, decry increasingly aggressive campaign rhetoric against American Muslims and Muslim refugees fleeing the destruction of ISIS.

A mid-November article in The Washington Post, comparing the plight of today’s Syrian refugees with World War II-era Jewish ones, has launched fierce debate between those who find the analogy ahistorical, or offensive, and historians who point out that many Americans feared European refugees in the 1930s would infiltrate the country with Communist sympathizers.

In a 1939 poll asking if Americans supported bringing 10,000 Jewish children to the United States, 61 percent said no: a historical lesson that, for many, has alarming echoes of the resistance of many US governors to admitting even handfuls of Syrian refugees to their communities, citing security fears.

The Anti-Defamation League, which fights anti-Semitism, has repeatedly criticized Republican presidential contenders like Donald Trump and Ben Carson for inflammatory speech that stereotypes Muslims.

In response to Mr. Trump’s apparent support for a “Muslim database,” American Jewish Committee Executive Director David Harris called the idea “morally repugnant, not to mention unconstitutional,” according to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

“What Mr. Trump proposes, in this case targeting all Muslims, is a horror movie that we Jews are quite familiar with,” Mr. Harris added.

“Dear Donald Trump,” liberal Jewish group Bend the Arc wrote, “When we say ‘never again’ it’s not just about Jews, it’s about everyone.”
Violins of Hope

by MIKE TELIN

The “Violins of Hope” we’re about to hear are from a time when hope seemed to be all but lost. Serena Altschul has the story:

When members of the Cleveland Orchestra recently sat down to perform, they faced a daunting task. This would be no ordinary concert: It would take place in an historic synagogue, and it would be played on instruments that had rarely been touched in more than 70 years.

[Music: Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto in E Minor.]

The goal was not just to make beautiful music, but to give voice to millions who were silenced in one of humanity’s darkest chapters.


The concert was the culmination of decades of work by Weinstein, a second-generation luthier -- a builder of stringed instruments. His father escaped Europe before World War II, but the rest of the family perished.

To honor their memory, and those of everyone who died in the Holocaust, he and his son have collected and restored dozens of instruments that survived.

“I had a guy who came over to me, he played on the way to the gas chamber,” said Weinstein. “And he gave me his violin. He wanted to restore it. And when I opened the violin, there was black powder inside. And for me, this is coming only from one place.”

Many of the instruments in Weinstein’s collection were used in concentration camp orchestras organized by the Nazis.

“And before the orchestra, in front of them, there was a pile of all these dead people,” said Weinstein. “And yet, they played. So the moment that the war was finished, they never touched the instrument again, most of them.”

In the camps, the violin could also be an instrument of defiance.

“It was forbidden to the Jewish to pray,” said Weinstein. “So, the violin was praying for them.”

“So, it’s sacred,” said Altschul.

“Yeah. And to be out of this horrible place for five minutes. You know the value of that? For five minutes in a free world? Some people say that always when he played the violin, he was in a concert hall. You opened the door, you see the barbed wire.”

“Transports you somewhere else.”

“Completely,” said Weinstein. “That’s the power of music.”

Music is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. Persecuted throughout European history, Jews were often on the move, in search of a safe place. Music became a refuge, and a source of joy.

“Always when people asked Isaac Stern why so many Jewish people are playing the violin, his answer was very simple: ‘It is the easiest instrument to pick it up and to run away!’”

Besides portability, the violin has another unique quality: Its design originated in 16th century Italy, where it was created to emulate the range of a female soprano voice.

So it was no accident that when the Cleveland Orchestra performed, guest soloist Shlomo Mintz played notes that literally cried out for the silenced.

“An instrument becomes part of the person which plays it,” said Cleveland Orchestra conductor Franz Welser-Möst. “It’s the voice of that person comes through the instrument. And just knowing that some of these people who have owned these instruments did not survive, but their personality is still within these instruments, I find that very moving.”

Welser-Möst and violinist Peter Otto were keenly aware of the history of the instruments.

Altschul asked, “What happens to an instrument if it isn’t played?”

Dec. 6, 2015
“After a while, it just loses the sound,” said Otto. “It sounds tight. It just loses its spirit, so to speak.”

“So an instrument that’s well-played and loved and used sounds richer?”

“It sounds richer, it sounds more open. It’s like a really good singer singing freely and using everything they got, you know, in their body. I can only suspect what this violin would sound like if it was played for, let’s say, a year every day.”

Which is why a museum display of Weinstein’s instruments, called “Violins of Hope,” at Cleveland’s Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, includes regular performances.

Richard Bogomolny and Milton Maltz are the driving forces behind the exhibit and concert.

“When Amnon created the Violins of Hope, it wasn’t to put them on a table and have somebody look at them,” said Bogomolny. “It was that they had to be played, because that’s the only way the voices of the voiceless could be heard.”

“So how did it feel to be in that incredible space and have this project finally come together?” asked Altschul.

“Well, I’m fairly short -- I’m about five foot five,” said Maltz. “I felt like I was ten feet tall.”

The audience was uplifted as well. The Violins of Hope were no longer silent.

“Violin is talking, violin is singing,” said Weinstein. “And if you have good way to listen, you can listen to all the stories.”
Students learn lessons from Violins of Hope
by CARLO WOLFF

Violins of Hope, the multimedia, multicultural program based on stringed instruments that survived the Holocaust, is winding down. But it’s not going quietly.

“Violins of Hope,” a creative and moving exhibition at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood, will come to a close on Jan. 3, ending a program in the making for years. It involves seven of the leading cultural institutions in Greater Cleveland.

Three of those – the Cleveland Orchestra, Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Play House – were involved in six educational concerts at Severance Hall, the orchestra’s home in University Circle, last week. The series drew some 10,000 middle- and high-school students from Northeast Ohio, eager to take a field trip to one of Cleveland’s most prestigious and celebrated venues.

What these kids experienced was a dense, entertaining program interspersing musical selections with theatrical interludes designed to communicate the horror of the Holocaust and the themes of resistance, resilience, remembrance and reflection. Facing History and Ourselves, a partner in Violins of Hope, formulated those themes.

Before the 10:10 a.m. show Dec. 4, the Beachwood High School string ensemble performed in the balcony of Severance, welcoming students spanning Cleveland public schools and suburban Jewish day schools as they streamed into the building.

The concert was eclectic, ranging from Dmitri Shostakovich’s spirited and angular allegro molto from his “Chamber Symphony for String Orchestra” to Ernest Bloch’s “Simchas Torah” (from “Baal Shem”), concluding with the lyrical overture to “La scala di seta.” Gioacchino Rossini’s piece was featured when Arturo Toscanini conducted the first concert of the Palestine Symphony Orchestra in 1936. That organization would evolve into the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

The underlying notion of Violins of Hope is that these instruments – which were played in concentration camp orchestras and occasionally served as weapons – perpetuate and celebrate humanity. Eighteen of them, out of a collection of nearly 60 amassed by program founder/master violinmaker Amnon Weinstein of Tel Aviv, are on view at the Maltz Museum. Several figured in the educational concerts.

To amplify the musical selections, graduate students in the CWRU/Cleveland Play House MFA Acting Program acted out Holocaust-related stories, underlining the program’s themes.

According to Joan Katz Napoli, the orchestra’s director of education and community programs, the script was a collaboration between the orchestra and the Play House. She developed a basic outline, and there was “a lot of editing back and forth.”

While the two institutions have worked together before, this was the first for the orchestra’s education concerts, Katz Napoli said. It was “just far more elaborate than what I’ve done in the past for education concerts, and because we had the Violins of Hope theme to work with, it was a very substantial body of both music and history.

“You have a lot to get into a concert just under an hour,” said Katz Napoli, a Cleveland Heights resident who attends The Temple-Tifereth Israel in Beachwood and Cleveland. “The fact that it moved seamlessly was really beneficial.”

Dec. 8, 2015
Violins and hope

by KATHRYN MATTHEWS (HUEY)

Last Sunday after worship, several members of Amistad Chapel UCC traveled to the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in an eastern suburb of Cleveland to view — to experience — the special exhibit, “Violins of Hope,” a collection of restored violins that “survived” the concentration camps of World War II. We wandered from one display case to the next, reading about each violin, watching a film of the artist who lovingly restored these remarkable works of art, and listening to the voices of guides who told the stories of the people who played them in the most tragic circumstances one can imagine. There were entire orchestras in the ghettos and camps, playing for the captors who demanded to be entertained, or providing a few last moments of beauty for prisoners on their way to their deaths. One musician handed his instrument to someone for safekeeping, saying, “At least the violin will survive.”

I left the museum with a heavy heart, but deeply moved by the stories I had heard: running through my mind were the words of Psalm 137, “On the willows there, we hung up our lyres …” The heartache and desolation of ancient exile resonated down through the centuries, but so did the persistent spirit that called the people of Israel to remember — remember what God has done and what God has promised to do. Remember who you are, and remember to tell your children these stories so that they will remember, too.

Perhaps the greatest gift of remembering is the way it keeps something alive within us, and maybe even brings something back to life when all hope seems lost. Our city is also the home of the magnificent Cleveland Orchestra, and part of the story of these violins is a very important remembering: members of our orchestra have performed wonderful concerts with these musical instruments, brought back to life and purpose, and singing anew an ancient song. Do we often get to feel the kind of thrilling joy that one feels, listening to these violins playing their soaring melodies of hope? Who could ever have imagined it?

As I left the museum that day, holding all these things in my heart, I turned back and looked at the building I was leaving. It occurred to me that its simple beauty and graceful strength might suggest the loveliness of the Temple long ago. I don’t know if that’s what the architects intended, but watching the people walk into the building that held a part of their heritage, I remembered the things I learned in school about the Bible and those old, old stories. And on that day, I thought I heard a song of hope playing, softly but so persistently, underneath it all.

Sparking Ministry Conversations

In what ways does remembering bring you and your congregation hope? Why are stories told in your church — to remind listeners of what they ought to do, or to remind them of what God has done and will do?
Violins of Hope leaves its legacy here

by CARLO WOLFF

Violins of Hope, an unusually moving exhibition at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, has left the Beachwood building after 82 days and attendance of nearly 16,000, according to Ellen Rudolph, executive director of the museum. Its legacy will continue to resonate, Rudolph suggested.

A tribute to stringed instruments that survived the Holocaust – and to the people who played them – Violins also attested to the devotion of Amnon Weinstein, the Tel Aviv violinmaker who has amassed nearly 60 of these instruments, mainly violins. Weinstein lost hundreds of relatives in the Holocaust. His project is now a family affair.

In an email, Rudolph said the project ranked among the top five of the 21 major exhibitions the Maltz Museum has mounted since it opened in October 2005. Some drew more, but they also lasted longer. Rudolph said this was second only to the museum’s opening exhibition, “Cradle to Christianity,” in the number of visitors per day.

The visual centerpiece of a multicultural, multi-institutional effort, the Maltz display went up on Oct. 2, 2015, and came down Jan. 6. Besides the museum, that effort involved Case Western Reserve University, The Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Institute of Music, ideastream, Facing History and Ourselves, and the Jewish Federation of Cleveland. At its launch last Sept. 27, The Cleveland Orchestra allied with Israeli violin virtuoso Shlomo Mintz in a sold-out concert inaugurating the Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center at The Temple-Tifereth Israel on the western edge of the CWRU campus in Cleveland. Mintz performed a Mendelssohn concerto on a Holocaust violin.

Another highlight was the Dec. 6, 2015 television broadcast about Violins of Hope on “CBS This Morning.”

Will the exhibit just ended at the Maltz Museum travel to other museums?

“There has been interest from other communities, especially since the ‘CBS Sunday Morning’ piece,” Rudolph wrote. “In addition to the cross-pollination of audiences and the lasting educational materials generated, I believe that Violins of Hope Cleveland will serve as a model for how our region can come together to produce once-in-a-lifetime events and experiences that continue to put Northeast Ohio on the world stage.”

And what is its legacy?

“Amnon Weinstein’s passion and the stories behind the violins inspired each of us to work internally to contribute the very best to the project as a whole,” Rudolph wrote. “However, bringing the Violins of Hope here and wrapping their appearance with music, educational, and artistic programming was possible because of the efforts of seven leading cultural arts partners, approximately 12 affiliate organizations and somewhere around 50 funders. It probably can be done on a smaller scale, but we’ve set a high bar with this initiative.”
Heights High students learn about Violins of Hope

by CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS

More than 30 Cleveland Heights High School students from the Lessons of the Holocaust course and the AFS Foreign Exchange club visited the Violins of Hope exhibit at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood in December.

The traveling exhibit includes 19 violins that survived the Holocaust in Europe. The trip was organized by Mark Sack, Lessons of the Holocaust teacher, and Carolyn Robb, AFS adviser.

"I felt it was important for the Heights High students and our international students to see and hear these special violins," Sack said in a press release. "The violins are a powerful reminder of unimaginable experiences, but are also a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the power of music to lift hearts and raise hopes for a better future.

"We want students to learn about our collective past, and we believe that the knowledge will help them create a better future for all humanity."

The museum docents for the student group were two Heights High retired teachers, Adrienne Yelsky and Mary Anne Brennan.

The exhibit ended Jan. 3.
‘Violins of Hope’ project left deep, long-lasting impact on Northeast Ohio (analysis)

by ZACHARY LEWIS

CLEVELAND, Ohio – Emotions ran high during “Violins of Hope.” Around those instruments pulled from the ashes of the Holocaust understandably flowed whole oceans of sentiment.

But the project, now ended, also bears up under cold scrutiny. Whether considered as an exhibit, musical program, educational effort or community collaboration, “Violins of Hope” stands as a marked success.

Fact is, “Violins of Hope” was one astonishing enterprise.

“My orchestra, my temple, my city,” said Cleveland Orchestra education director Joan Katz Napoli, in reference to the “Violins of Hope” kickoff concert at the Maltz Center for the Performing Arts at the Temple-Tifereth Israel. “I’ve never been so proud of anything. It just doesn’t get any better than that.”

Here’s the thing, though. It does, and did, get better. For “Violins of Hope” was more than just one event. It was an entire network.

In addition to its anchor exhibition and public performance, the project reached countless people through concerts, media coverage, related college courses, lectures, and ongoing work by schoolteachers in classrooms across the region.

Those affected, in other words, weren’t just the 2,000 who attended the opening concert at the Maltz Center, or the 16,000 visitors who made the exhibition at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood the second-best-attended show in that venue’s history. Project-wide, encounters surely numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

“[S]tudents...were able to connect with history in a powerful and visceral way,” said Ellen Rudolph, executive director of the Maltz museum. “[T]he educational reach of the initiative was broad, and its impact will be long-lasting.”

Cleveland as a whole certainly came out on top. In addition to the project itself and the new Maltz Center, the Cleveland Orchestra’s “Violins of Hope” kickoff concert in September cast the entire city in a favorable light, through positive reports in national media and a feature on “CBS Sunday Morning.”

Daniel Goldmark, a professor of music at Case Western Reserve University and teacher of a “Violins of Hope” course, said Northeast Ohio emerged before the nation as a beacon of civic initiative.

“Cleveland went all in on this in a way that was really impressive,” he said. “Maybe that’s the main benefit: that other cities will look at this and say, ‘Oh yes, we can do this, too.’”

Equally significant was the way “Violins of Hope” rallied Cleveland’s nonprofit sector. For once, individual missions barely mattered. Through this project, groups that rarely if ever engage with each other learned to collaborate, and found acres of common ground.

Now, should another such opportunity for interdisciplinary partnership present itself, contacts and a working blueprint will already be in place.

“Every partner came so unselfishly to the table,” said Katz Napoli. “Everyone wanted to participate at the highest level. It was such a gift to be able to deal with content, to focus on creating the best possible experience. We’re forever bound in new ways.”
One highlight of this broad partnership was an education concert, featuring the Cleveland Orchestra alongside actors affiliated with Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Play House. Pooling their resources, they put on a show melding words and music, and together left some 10,000 middle-school and high school students with a potent message of tolerance and proof of art’s power to trump evil.

“Without a doubt,” said Katz Napoli, “it was the most meaningful education concert in all my years. No student who saw that performance will ever forget it. They’ll always remember coming to Severance Hall and learning about the ‘Violins of Hope.’”

Only a few, of course, got the true best experience, the chance to actually hold and play the “Violins of Hope,” to feel their weight, hear their sounds up close and commune by touch with the spirits of their former owners.

One such person was Katherine Bormann, a violinist in the Cleveland Orchestra. For her, and undoubtedly all others in the orchestra and the select few students at the Cleveland Institute of Music and Baldwin Wallace Conservatory permitted to handle the instruments, “Violins of Hope” was nothing short of life-changing.

“It had this dark, throaty sound that gave me chills,” recalled Bormann of the violin selected for her by Amnon Weinstein, the Israeli violinmaker and repairman at the heart of “Violins of Hope.” “It actually made my hair stand up a little bit. I felt like I was really connecting with the past.”

While Bormann and others were having their experiences, connections of a much different but no less profound sort were being made nearby.

In a classroom on the other side of Case Western Reserve University, Goldmark and fellow professor Jay Geller spent last semester teaching all sorts of novel lessons in “The Holocaust and the Arts,” a course based on the culture and history behind “Violins of Hope.”

Would that everyone could enroll in such a course. After attending a dress rehearsal of the “Violins of Hope” kickoff concert, an eclectic bunch of students from across the university examined art in all its forms during the Holocaust, and how such art was presented. They also saw and applied what they learned at the Holocaust Memorial Center, outside Detroit.

The course, an elective open to all, may or may not reappear on the school’s academic calendar. Without question, though, the professors said they believe the class they taught left a deep impact.

“Most of the students had very little background on the Holocaust before that,” Geller said. “For them, it was a meaningful way to understand and access the history of what happened. I think it helped elucidate many of the overall themes of the project.”

None of this would have been as effective without the violins.

Professors and schoolteachers could have taught lessons without “Violins of Hope.” The exhibition would have been stirring had the instruments remained under glass. The orchestra could have played any number of related concerts.

But as Bormann and thousands of others in Northeast Ohio can testify firsthand, the impact of seeing and hearing the instruments up close and in person turned what might have been an intellectual exercise into a profound, soul-stirring linkup with humanity.

“So many people have tried to keep what happened [in the Holocaust] in the public eye,” Goldmark said. “But this was a unique way of doing it. Having the actual violins here made it really significant. People may not even realize yet how visceral a thing it was.”