

Autobiographical Text by Anita Lasker-Wallfisch

Taken from the archival manuscript: *1925 – 1046 Told by Anita*.

Written and Compiled by Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, London 1988. Page 46.

Donated to the Leo Baeck Institute for the Study of German-Jewish History and Culture in 1990.

The whole document is available online:

https://archives.cjh.org/repositories/5/digital_objects/436612

Anita about Becoming a Cellist in the Auschwitz Orchestra

Thus started my career as the only cellist in the Camp Orchestra, and my life in this small community, which generated the warmest friendships and camaradery as well as the vilest hatred in equal parts. – I shall try to describe this motley crowd which made up the Orchestra.

Transliteration: Thus started my career as the only cellist in the Camp Orchestra, and my life in this small community, which generated the warmest friendships and camaraderie as well as the vilest hatred in equal parts. – I shall try to describe this motley crowds which made up the Orchestra.

Discuss with your group and write answers to each question. Then decide who will present your group's results to the whole class:

- How did being in the orchestra change Anita's experience in Auschwitz?
- What feelings do you think she might have had when playing music in the camp?
- How do you imagine these emotions were different from the emotions of SS guards listening?
- Why is it important for us to read and listen to her story today?

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Anita About Being the Cellist in the Auschwitz Orchestra

Ultimately it was of course different from that of the vast majority of prisoners for the simple reason that I was lucky enough to be in the Orchestra. – The obvious advantages apart, I think that almost the most important thing was, that although my head was shaved and I had a number on my arm, I had not lost my identity completely. – I may no longer have had a name, but I was identifiable. I could be referred to. I was the cellist. – I had not completely melted away into the grey mass of nameless indistinguishable people. – I had never given this any thought when I was there, but today, I am convinced that in a subtle sort of way it helped maintain a shred of human dignity.

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Anita About Playing *Träumerei*

Apart from our twice daily outings to the camp gate we had of course other functions. We 'gave concerts' - believe it or not- on most Sundays, sometimes in the open air, inbetween the A and B camp, or in the Revier. Also, we had to be ever ready to play for any SS personnel who came into our Block for some light relief after their exhausting work of selecting who should live and who should die. - It was on such an occasion that I played the 'Traeumerei' by Schumann to Dr. Mengele.

Transliteration: Apart from our twice daily outings to the camp gate we had of course other functions. We 'gave concerts' – believe it or not – on most Sundays, sometimes in the open air, inbetween the A and B camp, or in the Revier [= infirmary]. Also, we had to be ever ready to play for any SS personnel who came into our Block for some light relief after their exhausting work of selecting who should live and who should die. – It was on such an occasion that I played the 'Träumerei' by Schumann to Dr. Mengele.

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