

## Lost Childhood: Opera as a post-Shoah means of communication between Germans and Jews

Gottfried Wagner on the Tel Aviv performance on July 29, 2007

On July 25, 2007, the American composers Janice Hamer and I, as historical and musical theater collaborators, presented the new opera *Lost Childhood* as "a second-generation opera and a musical bridge for Germans and Jews of today" at the Music Center in Tel Aviv-Yafo. in the full version. The opera is a plea for dialogue between all German and Jewish generations after 1945. We developed this project as a team with the poet and librettist Mary Azrael for nine years. Librettist Mary Azrael created a free adaptation of Yehuda Nir's autobiography *The Lost Childhood*, which she linked to recorded conversations between Yehuda Nir and myself. In his memoirs, Nir describes his six years of survival as a Polish Jewish boy with his mother and sister during World War II and the Shoah and the trauma of the assassination of his father and friend Ludwig.

Nir chose a quote from Samuel Beckett's play "Malone Dies" as the motto of his memoirs:

"Let me say this before I go on: I don't forgive anyone. I wish them all a horrible life and then the fire and ice of hell for the cursed generations to come."

The motto irritated me a lot because it contradicted my humanitarian positions. I disagreed with Yehuda Nir's tendency to see Germans in general as enemies in conversations with me. I kept reminding him of a sentence from the Auschwitz report. Is that a human being? by Primo Levi: "I can't stand it that people are judged not by what they are, but by the group to which they happen to belong." This sentence is the basis of my collaboration with Jan and Mary and remains an open discussion between Yehuda and me to this day.

The quote from Beckett in Nir's autobiography as a motto is contrasted with the peaceful closing words of Mary Azrael's libretto. Of particular importance are the scenes between Judah and Manfred, especially the end of the opera.

They show the development from the fate of an individual to a symbol for the universally valid. Manfred and Judah sing in their final duet:

" I listen to you. The world is still dark from the fire. But our children need to know that we are listening to each other. Nothing is forgiven, nothing can be undone. The world is still dark from the smoke. It must not end like this. Tell me how it was and how it is."

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On July 29, 2007 the opera was performed as a workshop. The workshop performance was part of the Sadnat ha Opera Summer Festival conducted by Joan Dornemann, Principal Vocal Coach at the Metropolitan Opera New York. The work was performed by young, trained singers as a concert performance with piano accompaniment, without an orchestra and

without a choir, which is why a few scenes had to be cut for this unique presentation and only minimal stage effects (costumes, lighting) were used. Everything in miniature.

During the development of the opera, what was fascinating for us was the possibility, away from the often discriminatory classifications such as “descendants of Nazi perpetrators and Nazi victims” and Jews and Germans after 1945, to talk about the effects of the Shoah on our identities from all conceivable perspectives communicate. Among our many themes in the preparatory period, Wagner, Weill, and Schoenberg also played a role, as well as recognizing that the Shoah became the common starting point for us to share world and family history, but not other 20th-century genocides in our conversations about neglecting a global ethic. This peaceful message caused excitement in the crowded hall of the workshop performance on July 29 this year. great dismay and approval. The entire Tel Aviv team from three continents managed to convey this message with great intensity. Janice, Mary, Yehuda and I are now hoping for the 2009 premiere, which will take *Lost Childhood* on a long journey. Something new that was created in order to one day be performed on a large stage with a first-class orchestra must certainly first fight its way into the repertoire of opera houses, onto the stage of musical theater venues and into the international public - against the Spirit of the time, against political "correctness", against state-sanctioned and subsidized high culture in the style of the Richard Wagner Festival, which apparently still belongs to the pillars of German cultural identity.

I was particularly pleased about the great interest in the international media, which generally report fairly about the events. Among other things, the report by the historian Annegret Ehmann on the history website "Learn from history" from the summer of 2007, which clearly highlighted the connection between the events in Tel Aviv and Bayreuth.

LOST CHILDHOOD- an opera of the second generation

An interesting music project starts on July 29, 2007 in Tel Aviv —Yafo Music Center, Janice Levin Auditorium.

A Musical Bridge for Germans and Jews Today, a project by Janice Hammer, Composer, USA, and Dr. Gottfried Wagner, director and music historian ,Italy . It is based on the autobiography of Holocaust survivor Yehuda Nir and conversations with Gottfried Wagner. On July 25 and 29, 2007, the American composer Janice Hamer (b. 1947) and Gottfried Wagner (b. 1947), the consistent enlightener of their own history of Richard Wagner's descendants, fatally entangled with Hitler and National Socialism, will present in Tel Aviv an opera that certainly embodies the absolute antithesis of what sounds on the same day as a state-subsidized media and cultural spectacle on the Bayreuth Festival stage: the *Meistersinger von Nürnberg* future contest and love song directed by Katharina Wagner (29), Gottfried Wagner's half-sister from the second marriage of Wolfgang Wagner's festival director (87) ... Gottfried Wagner stood, away from the media hype, in Israel, at the Yafo Music Center in Tel Aviv Side of the American-Jewish composer Janice Hamer and with her led the lively dialogue of that Shoah successor generation of victims and perpetrators who see it as their responsibility to build bridges over the abyss that the criminal breach of civilization in the 20th century in the world and into the hearts of men.

In their introductory event, Janice Hamer and Gottfried Wagner spoke about the genesis of the opera "*Lost Childhood*", the experiences on which this work is based and the ideas that inspired it. This opera, the first of the composers Janice Hamer, was performed for the first time and uniquely as a workshop performance in Tel Aviv. Janice Hamer and Gottfried Wagner have a lot to say about "cultural identity": "I wanted to find out more about what it

means to be a German or a Jew of the "second generation", explained Janice Hamer. "I wanted to know if an open dialogue is even possible. The more I became aware of all the forces that are capable of sabotaging such a dialogue, the more preoccupied I was with the question of what needs to happen so that these blockages, these solidifications disappear and people can speak openly to one another across all barriers."

In Gottfried Wagner, the passionate campaigner for enlightenment and human rights, Janice Hamer found a congenial partner who gave important impetus to her work. "I don't understand, I can't stand the fact that people are judged not by what they are, but by the group they happen to belong to". The words of Primo Levi, a rejection of the compulsive national, religious and family classifications of the individual, stand like a big exclamation and question mark over this new musical work, which has arrived in the modern age and will hopefully radiate far into the future. The overlap between Katharina's Bayreuth debut as future festival director with the Meistersinger von Nürnberg and my performance in Tel Aviv On July 25, a coincidence with a signal effect for the future was in my discussion with my sisters Eva and Katharina on the subject of the Wagner family and Hitler in Bayreuth."