



# Personal Stories of Art and Resistance in the Holocaust

*Songs of Truth* began with a simple melody scratched out on a piece of paper by Ilse Weber in 1944. A young Jewish composer imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, Weber was murdered in Auschwitz, but her music survived. In 2023, Music Director Urs Leonhardt Steiner and the Golden Gate Symphony arranged Weber's work for orchestra and chorus, and *Songs of Truth* was born.

*Songs of Truth* interweaves archival media, live narration and musical performance to bring Ilse Weber's personal story alive. The project pays tribute to the talent and resilience of six Jewish composers who continued to create music while imprisoned by the Nazis. This unique blend of first person storytelling, archival media and live performance provides a unique window into learning about the Holocaust that teaches empathy and invites diverse audiences to reflect on the rise of antisemitism, division and hate today.

*Songs of Truth* was made possible by the generous support of the Leavitt Family Fund, the Walnut Fund, Roselyne Chroman Swig, the Lisa S. Pritzker Family Foundation and hundreds of individual donors, in partnership with:



Ilse Weber & her original composition.

## WHY NOW?



### One in five young Americans thinks the Holocaust is a myth.<sup>1</sup>

The United States has recently seen a disturbing increase in hate crimes targeting Jewish people and communities. The rise of antisemitism is causing profound fear and anxiety among Jewish Americans and threatening foundational democratic principles of tolerance and diversity.

Historically, antisemitism has been a bellwether for other forms of intolerance and divisiveness. Taking proactive measures against antisemitism is essential for fostering respect among different communities and fighting against division and hate.

Efforts to resist discrimination are most effective when grounded in empathy and understanding. *Songs of Truth* uses the emotional power of music, interwoven with intimate narratives of strength and resilience, to teach history and create empathy in musicians, singers and audiences alike.

<sup>1</sup>YouGov/Economist Poll, December 7th, 2023

# PROJECT ELEMENTS

## 1. Music

The **Golden Gate Symphony** (a community ensemble, based in San Francisco, CA) began *Songs of Truth* by orchestrating music originally written by Jewish composers imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps during the Holocaust.

## 2. Storytelling

**Citizen Film** created a captivating multimedia presentation for *Songs of Truth*, interweaving live narration, archival film and photos curated to be in dialogue with the musical performance.



Taken together, these elements create an unforgettable experience for audiences of all ages, musical experience and cultural backgrounds, generating a blueprint for *Songs of Truth* to engage audiences worldwide.

## 3. Concerts

In collaboration with **Holocaust Music Lost & Found**, the *Songs of Truth* team created a concert and a classroom-length version of the program, making the music and history accessible for adult and youth audiences alike.

## 4. Conversations

San Francisco's **Contemporary Jewish Museum** developed facilitated conversations that puts *Songs of Truth* in a contemporary context, and encourages audiences to resist the rise of antisemitism, division and hate today.

## COMPOSERS

*Songs of Truth* showcases the work of highly accomplished but little known composers who died in Nazi concentration camps. Their music is the subject of an international movement to reclaim the lost compositions of the Holocaust.



**HANNAH SZENES** was a Hungarian-born poet and one of 37 Jewish recruits from Palestine who parachuted into Europe to rescue Hungarian Jews. Szenes was arrested, imprisoned and tortured, but refused to reveal the details of her mission. On November 7, 1944 she was executed by firing squad. She was 23 years old. Her poem “Eli, Eli” is one of the most famous songs among Jews worldwide today.



**ILSE WEBER** was a Czech author and songwriter. In 1942, Weber, her husband and their young son were sent to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Weber wrote more than 60 poems and songs there before she and her son were murdered in Auschwitz in 1944. Weber’s husband survived and, after the war, recovered her work, which the family had hidden in the ghetto underneath a garden shed.



**HANS KRÁSA** was a successful professional composer, best known for *Brundibár*, an opera featuring two hungry children who fight against an Adolf Hitler lookalike. A sly protest piece, *Brundibár* was performed more than 50 times in the Theresienstadt Ghetto before Krasa and many of the child performers were deported to Auschwitz and murdered in 1944.



**RUDY GOGUEL** was arrested in 1933 and imprisoned at Börgermoor—a camp primarily reserved for political prisoners. Goguel, a Communist, composed one of the most influential resistance songs of the era, “Moorsoldatenlied (The Peat Bog Soldiers),” which served as an anthem for international labor movements well into the 1970s. Goguel is the only *Songs of Truth* composer who lived beyond incarceration. He died in East Berlin in 1976.



**HIRSH GLICK** was a Jewish poet from Wilno, Poland, imprisoned in the Vilna Ghetto at the beginning of WWII. In 1943, Glick wrote his most famous song, “Zog Nit Keynmol (Never Say You’ve Gone Your Last Way),” which became a Jewish anthem. Glick escaped the ghetto in 1944 but was never heard from again. He is presumed to have been captured and executed by the Nazis.



**VICTOR ULLMAN** was an internationally acclaimed composer, conductor, pianist and music critic. A student of Arnold Schoenberg, he was imprisoned in Theresienstadt in 1942. Ullmann composed 23 works while in the camp, including a provocative one-act opera entitled *The Disobedience of Death*. After presenting this seminal piece, Ullmann was deported to Auschwitz and murdered in 1944.

## PHASE ONE: 2023 IMPACT



**21 Live Multimedia Storytelling Performances.** In 2023, *Songs of Truth* performed two concert-length events, including the world premiere: a standing room only concert at San Francisco's prestigious Herbst Theater, and a sold-out concert in the Historic Clocktower in Benicia, CA. 19 Community Concerts (45 minutes long) were performed for diverse audiences in high schools, churches, synagogues and community centers throughout the Bay Area. Three were presented at the Contemporary Jewish Museum as part of their [Holocaust, Art, and Resistance Day of Learning program](#).

**29 Engagement Partners.** *Songs of Truth* built a powerful coalition of like-minded organizations and institutions to support attendance at 21 live performances in 2023 and the growth of a successful social media campaign. Primary engagement partners include the [San Francisco Interfaith Council](#), the [JFCS Holocaust Center of Northern California](#), the [JCC of San Francisco](#), the [Jewish Film Institute](#), the [German](#), [Swiss](#) and [Israeli](#) consulates, and more.

## PHASE ONE: 2023 IMPACT

*I've never seen anything so powerful and emotional and beautiful as this performance was. I think everyone in the world should see this production.*

— Bryan Byrnes  
Audience Member



**224 Donors.** With crucial early support from the Walnut Fund, the Leavitt Family Fund and an ever-growing base of donors, *Songs of Truth* fortified its early support with an evolving network of committed individual and organizational partners. Donor support enabled *Songs of Truth* to reach a broad range of audiences, free of charge in 2023, and is growing in support of Phase Two in 2024.

**2,800 Audience Members.** In 2023 *Songs of Truth* performed Community Concerts for a diverse constellation of cultural and educational spaces throughout Northern California. Partners included highschools, synagogues, churches, museums and community centers, serving ethnically and socioeconomically diverse audiences with a range of knowledge about antisemitism and the Holocaust. 1,280 audience members were high school students.

**25,500+ Impressions.** In 2023, *Songs of Truth* worked with the marketing teams of 29 engagement partners to create a social media campaign that introduced the public to the project, built a live concert audience base, and sparked conversation about how to recognize and resist antisemitism and hate speech. Citizen Film documented Phase One of the project and created a suite of short videos to engage audiences on social media and a 3 minute film to support the Contemporary Jewish Museum's Holocaust, Art, and Resistance Day of Learning program.

## PHASE ONE: ACTIVE LEARNING - ADULTS



*Songs of Truth* engages audiences and performers alike.

For adult performers, active learning through the arts invites musicians and singers to immerse themselves in historical narratives from diverse cultures. This educational approach cultivates deep understanding and appreciation for the complexities of the past, and fosters empathy that helps build unified and resilient communities.

*When we perform this music, it's as if we are there in the moment, pouring ourselves into the life of the person who was struggling with facing death. Singing these songs gives me a wonderful opportunity to see my own liberty, and reminds me why it's so important for us to do something now about conquering hate with love.*

— Chris Poston  
Tenor Vocalist, speaking to "Songs of Truth" audience of high school students

## PHASE ONE: ACTIVE LEARNING - YOUTH



Student musicians joined the professional *Songs of Truth* ensemble at several Community Concerts in 2023 and performed on stage for their high school peers.

Creative collaboration is a powerful tool for teaching young people history, growing respect for diverse perspectives and cultivating empathy. Such partnerships bring history alive and help nurture a compassionate and connected next generation.

*"It was interesting starting off with music... it's a different perspective from what we're being taught in school, because there it's mostly just reading [history] and jotting down notes... But here - I don't wanna say it's better, but it kind of IS better learning here."*

— Juan  
Student Musician, San Lorenzo High School



## PHASE ONE: VIDEO SAMPLES

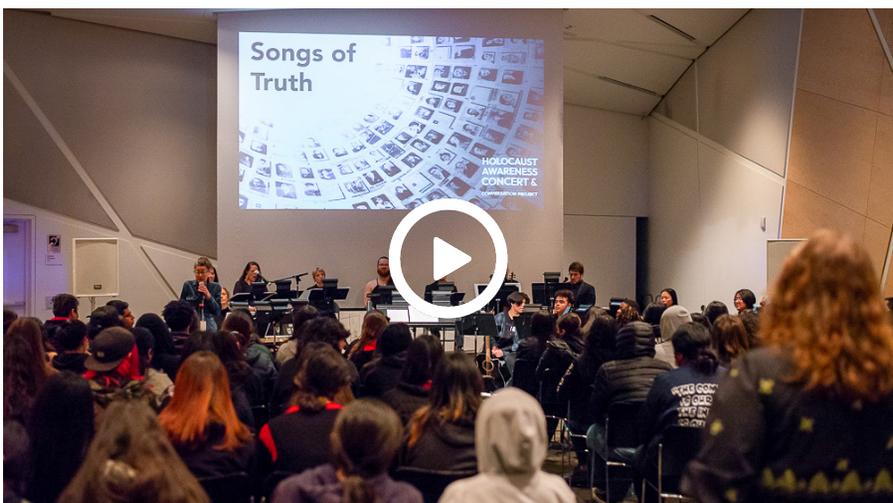


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Experience the power of 120 musicians and singers from the Golden Gate Symphony Orchestra & Chorus rehearsing *The Prisoner Rises*.

The song was written in the Majdanek concentration camp in Poland, and the composer's name is unknown.

[View short video: vimeo.com/839169566](https://vimeo.com/839169566)



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In 2023 *Songs of Truth* engaged 1,280 high school students from diverse communities around the state.

View student responses to *Songs of Truth* in Citizen Film's short video documenting the Contemporary Jewish Museum's Holocaust, Art, and Resistance Day of Learning program.

[View student responses: vimeo.com/850609318](https://vimeo.com/850609318)

# WHAT'S NEXT

## PHASE TWO: 2024

**Community Concerts Continued:** Based on the success of our work in Phase One, *Songs of Truth* will perform 16 additional Community Concerts in Phase Two. These events will take place in schools, libraries, churches, synagogues and community centers. The project will reach a minimum of 2000 additional audience members across diverse communities, and use the time to further develop the *Songs of Truth* multimedia storytelling presentation.

**Fundraising & Partnership:** Develop and broaden the *Songs of Truth* coalition and analyze stakeholder input to inform expansion of programming and impact.

*This program was one of the very best that I have witnessed during my long fifty years as an educator of Holocaust Studies. Anyone who has the opportunity to attend the performance should not miss this uplifting occasion!*

— David Nigel  
Jewish Studies and Holocaust Educator

## PHASE THREE: 2025-2026

**Curriculum Development:** Develop educational curricula for high school and college audiences with our partners at the Contemporary Jewish Museum. Additional potential collaborators include Facing History & Ourselves and Holocaust Music Lost & Found.

**Short Films:** Create a *Songs of Truth* concert film and a series of shorts based on the lives and work of the composers featured in the project. These video assets will be an integral part of the *Songs of Truth* curricula, and be disseminated as stand-alones for film festivals and broadcast/streaming markets. Media placement of short films will help drive marketing and public engagement for educational distribution.

**Educational Distribution:** Package *Songs of Truth* sheet music, educational curricula, multimedia components and video assets for educational distribution. The *Songs of Truth* package will be distributed to a wide range of groups including, but not limited to schools, orchestras, choruses, churches and synagogues. This flexible *Songs of Truth* package will enable those groups to spark crucial dialogue about resisting antisemitism, division and hate in their own communities, both here and abroad.

## FOUNDING PARTNERS



### THE GOLDEN GATE SYMPHONY

ORCHESTRA & CHORUS has provided more than 20 years of classical music performances and educational programs to communities in the SF Bay Area and around the world. The ensemble is a full symphonic orchestra and adult chorus designed to encourage amateur and professional performers of all ages and ethnicities to perform live classical music in close-knit supportive ensembles. The result: a dynamic experience that builds community and social cohesion while encouraging a new generation's contributions to the performing arts.



CITIZEN FILM is a non-profit dedicated to crafting documentary media that fosters active engagement in cultural and civic life. Citizen Film collaborations are widely presented at many of America's most prestigious venues including national PBS, HBO, the Sundance Film Festival, NYC's MoMA, LACMA, and more. Citizen Film's work engages millions of people annually in civic spaces, from public schools, parks and libraries to film festivals worldwide.



### HOLOCAUST MUSIC LOST &

FOUND, is dedicated to recovering, archiving, performing, and providing education about music written during the Holocaust. HMLF develops programs and curriculum for schools, synagogues and other religious institutions, museums, and community organizations. As a collaborative organization, HMLF partners with orchestras, chamber music groups, musicologists and historians to share Jewish heritage to audiences around the world.

## OUTREACH PARTNERS



Since 1984, the [CONTEMPORARY JEWISH MUSEUM](#) has distinguished itself as a welcoming place where visitors can connect with each other through dialogue and common experience of the arts. Ever changing, the CJM partners with national and international cultural institutions to present exhibitions that are timely, relevant and committed to the highest level of artistic achievement and scholarship.



The [HOLOCAUST CENTER](#) is dedicated to remembrance, research and documentation, and education about the Holocaust. As Northern California's primary resource for education on genocide, their work increases awareness of Jewish history and the causes and consequences of antisemitism, racism, and discrimination. The Holocaust Center is a program of Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties.



[SAN FRANCISCO INTERFAITH COUNCIL](#) celebrates diverse faiths and spiritual traditions, bringing people together to build understanding and serve the community. SFIC convenes and amplifies the voices of San Francisco's 800+ congregations, healthcare institutions, and faith-based social service agencies that provide safety net services for the City's most vulnerable residents.

# TEAM



**Urs Leonhardt Steiner**  
Music Director / Conductor,  
Golden Gate Symphony  
Orchestra & Chorus

Maestro Steiner founded the Golden Gate Symphony Orchestra & Chorus in 1994. Originally from Chur, Switzerland, he studied at the University of Tübingen and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and took advanced studies with James Wimer and Gustav Meier, and master classes with Andre Previn, Erich Leinsdorf, Leonard Bernstein, and Herbert von Karajan. In addition to leading GGSOC in local and international endeavors, Urs is a guest conductor with orchestras and ensembles in Europe, the United States and Central America.



**Kate Stilley Steiner**  
Producer / Director,  
Citizen Film

Kate Stilley Steiner is a co-founder of the documentary media non-profit Citizen Film. Kate's most recent work includes co-directing *PROGNOSIS - notes on living* with Academy Award winning director Debra Chasnoff, and co-producing the PBS feature documentary *American Creed*, which has been watched by over 1.5M people. Prior to founding Citizen Film, Kate edited documentaries bound for PBS, ABC, NBC, The Learning Channel, Fox TV and for film festivals and educational distribution worldwide.



**Janie Press**  
President,  
Holocaust Music  
Lost & Found

Janie Press founded Holocaust Music Lost & Found in 2022 after retiring from a more than three decade business career in the fashion industry. Inspired by stories about music written by captives in concentration camps during the Holocaust, Janie came out of retirement to dedicate her wide ranging leadership and producing skills to fighting antisemitism via music and the arts.

# TEAM



**Fraidy Aber**  
Director of Education and  
Civic Engagement, The  
Contemporary Jewish Museum

Fraidy Aber has worked at CJM since 2009 and manages a team which produces a vibrant suite of offerings to engage people of all ages and backgrounds in exploring Jewish culture, history, art, and ideas. Fraidy co-led the development of the Zim Zoom Family Room and the Textile Lab, taught the graduate level course “Museums and Social Justice” at University of San Francisco, and created the JET (Jewish Education and Technology) Teacher Institute.



**Elad Kabilio**  
Music Advisor, Holocaust  
Music Lost & Found

Israeli cellist Elad Kabilio is an active soloist, chamber musician and teaching artist. His recent performances have taken place at Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall, the Joyce Theater in New York City, the Aspen Music Festival, and on WQXR Radio. Elad has taught in schools and colleges throughout Israel and New York City. He is currently teaching at the Manhattan School of Music and serving as Music Advisor to Holocaust Music Lost & Found.



**Sarah Scannell**  
Communications &  
Development Manager,  
Citizen Film

Sarah Scannell manages communications and development activities for the entire Citizen Film production pipeline. In addition to coordinating the nonprofit's website and social media accounts, Sarah oversees outreach to partners and audiences for Citizen Film documentary and creative placemaking projects. Sarah has a B.A. in Cognitive Science from University of California, Berkeley.

# SUPPORT SONGS OF TRUTH

Help combat antisemitism and build bridges of empathy.

## Mail Checks To:

Golden Gate Symphony Orchestra & Chorus  
717 Hampshire Street  
San Francisco, CA 94110

## Bank Info:

Umpqua Bank  
17555 NE Sacramento St, Portland, OR 97230  
Business Checking Acct #: 8817814208  
Routing #: 123205054

## Stock Transfer Info:

<https://bit.ly/StockTransferForm2024>

## Online Charitable Contribution Links:

Paypal: [https://bit.ly/ggsoc\\_songs-of-truth\\_support](https://bit.ly/ggsoc_songs-of-truth_support)  
Venmo: <https://account.venmo.com/u/supportggsoc>

**We want to hear from you!**  
**Send questions and comments to:**

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