

FIRST NIGHT REVIEW

Concert: Music on the Brink of Destruction at Wigmore Hall

A survey of works written and performed in Terezin and the Warsaw Ghetto

new

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Songs sentimental and satirical, string trios and duos of brazen beauty and wistful waltzes by a tubercular child prodigy. Pulled together in little more than five weeks by musicians from the Leonore Piano Trio and the Belcea Quartet, postgraduate students at the Guildhall and a consort from Leeds University, and programmed by the historian Shirli Gilbert, *Music on the Brink of Destruction* was a survey of works written and performed in Terezín and the Warsaw Ghetto. Of eleven featured composers, only three survived the Holocaust.

You may have heard of Viktor Ullmann and Hans Krása, Pavel Haas and Gideon Klein — students of Schoenberg, Zemlinsky and Janáček whose music promised so much before their murders in Auschwitz and Fürstengrube — but what of Zikmund Schul, Mikhail Gnesin or Josima Feldschuh? And what of the jazz pianist Martin Roman, leader of the Ghetto Swingers in Terezin? Ricocheting between a sultry foxtrot and a giddy, ironic waltz, Roman's *Wir reiten auf hölzernen Pferden* was delivered with crystalline diction and deadly sexiness by Emily Kyte to beautifully clear accompaniment from the pianist Leo Nicholson.

This clever, demotic song was the sorbet between Sam Carl's soulful reading of *Probdena noc* (from Haas's *Four Songs on Chinese Poetry*) and James Way's poised, intense performance of *Um Mitternacht* (from Ullmann's *Geistliche Lieder*), a song that points to the grave beauty of the final quartet of *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*. The violinists Benjamin Nabarro and Krzysztof Chorzelski and the cellist Gemma Rosefield played Klein's 1944 String Trio and Krása's Passacaglia and Fugue with a rich, finely balanced sound, breathing into each fractured phrase.

The Clothworkers Consort of Leeds sang the bell-like choruses of Dovid Ayznshtat's *Chad gadya* and Dovid Beyglman's *Nit keyn rozhinkes, nit keyn mandlen* with guileless sweetness. Smuggled out of the Warsaw Ghetto aged 12, Feldschuh died of tuberculosis in hiding, leaving a sequence of Chopinesque miniatures, played delicately by Vera Müllerová. Gnesin's piano trio, *To the Memory of Our Dead Children*, offered romanticism cut with sarcasm, while Schul's *Chassidic Dances* were Berg-like in their acidic burlesque.