

Leperiben/Remembering: Romani Musical Remembering in Today's Prague

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Abstract

According to Jan Assmann (2011), storytelling about the past (including an imaginary past) represents one of the axes of collective identity. Given music's place in the culture of Romani people in the Czech Republic, and given the stereotypical association of Romani people with music by the majority society, it is not surprising that music plays a significant role in their events of public remembering. The "Leperiben" presentation introduces the dynamics involved in the formation of such remembering during the last decade, from the spectacular *Requiem* (2012), dominantly organized by pro-Roma organizations (which also determined its form), to contemporary projects collecting songs about the Holocaust of the Roma (*Porraimos*) which have been designed and instigated by Romani activists. The collected material not only confirms several existing concepts about how collective memory works (e.g. the concept of "Archive versus Canon," Aleida Assmann 2010), but also gives rise once again to the eternal questions in ethnomusicology, e.g., those about intervening in a field situation and the disbalance of power relations.

Romanes Abstract

Leperiben/Remembering

Leperiben pal o romano bašaviben andre adadivesutni Praha

Vakeriben pal o (the na čačutno) čirlatuňipen sikhavel pal o lava le Jan Assmann (2001) jekh koter than grupakeri identita. Than kaj perel bašaviben andre kultura romengeri pal o Čechi, the vaš o stereotipno šuniben pal o Roma the lengere bašavibnaha so hin la gadžengera seratar, vaš oda nane čudos, hoj avri maškar manušengero leperiben pro romano čirlatuňipen hin o bašaviben baro predal o Roma. Prezentacia „Leperiben“ barol upre, zorałol avka predal o agorutno deš berš – khatar o baro *Requiem* (2012), so has but kerdo le organizenca so šigitinen le Romenge, tiš avka dičholas avri, dži andro adadivesutne bufa so kiden romane gila pal o porajmos, so keren o romane šerale, so andre interesimen. Ada kidlipen na ča hoj čačutnarel varesave idej sar kerđol grupakero leperiben (phenas: koncept „Archivos versus Canon“ Aleida

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case, these parts are clearly marked as such.

Assmann, 2010), tiš anen phučlibena le etnomuzikologenge so peren andro thoviben andro situacii maškar Roma, abo ňisavo jekhetañiben maškar o šerutne.

Translation from Czech to Romanes by Stanislava Miková.

In the past ten years, I have participated in four public events about the Romani Holocaust¹ in which music has played a major role, a phenomenon I call musical remembrance.² Several other smaller events of a similar type have been linked to such remembrance as well. We are thus direct witnesses to the crystallization of the collective musical recollection of the Romani Holocaust. The shaping of its form – including the specifics of minority remembrance – is the topic of this paper. Since its ambition is to capture the process of that formation (that is, the diachronic perspective), I will gradually introduce all the relevant events and voices of some of the actors involved. I will begin with the most recent, from March 2023, so the reader can have an idea of the contemporary form of this musical remembering. Then, however, I will return to the first significant event of the series, the large-scale *Requiem for Auschwitz* with its rich referential context, and then I will proceed chronologically so that the crystallization will become apparent, including the gradual involvement of different actors. In the final paragraphs, in dialogue with those who are authorities on collective remembering, I will endeavor to identify the more general rules governing the musical remembering of Czech Roma.

Terne Čhave – Music of the Forgotten Holocaust

Concert during the Eternal Hope Festival
21 March 2023 at 19:30, Vzlet venue

The Eternal Hope Festival (Věčná naděje) was established in 2016 by Jiří Polák, a descendant of a survivor of Theresienstadt, in order to commemorate the composers imprisoned there (Jurková 2022). Later the focus of the festival widened to include other musicians who were persecuted, and this year a new subject was raised: the Holocaust of the Roma.³ The evening of 21 March 2023 was dedicated to this theme, and the concert was held in the recently-opened Vzlet (Takeoff) venue, which aims to be a place for

¹ While I am aware of a certain ambivalence about the concept of the Holocaust/*Porrajmos* of the Roma (see, e.g., Berkyová 2017) I am using this term here as it has been approved of by Romani authorities.

² In my conceptualization of the terms “memory” and “recollection/remembering” I adhere to Astrid Erll’s understanding. According to her, collective memory is observable and can only be investigated through specific acts of remembrance (Erll 2011: 8). It is only on the basis of analyzing it in a concrete cultural context that we are able to draw conclusions about the nature of such memory and how it works.

³ Sometimes referred to by the Romanes term *Porajmos*, which was also mentioned by the moderator of the concert, Anna Mašátová.

“cultural intersection” in the Vršovice quarter of Prague. The name of the venue and its layout both reference its origins: It is a reconstructed cinema first built for the Sokol organization a century ago.⁴ The hall on the first floor above the café is a bit reminiscent of a gymnasium save for its large stage; if all of the folding chairs available were to be used, 200 people could fit in there. For this concert it was roughly half-full.

Unlike the other concerts in the festival, nobody in the audience (myself included) is wearing evening clothes. I see a young Romani author, a moderator of Romani radio programs, and the camera crew filming the concert from the aisle has the logo of the Romani media organization ROMEA on it (see [ROMEA TV 2023](#)).⁵ However, the vast majority of the audience are non-Roma; most are very likely fans of the well-known Rompop (or, as they call themselves, Rom’n’roll) band Terne Čhave (The Young Guys, Jurková 2013b, 2024). The acquaintances whom I encounter on the tram on my way to the venue confirm to me that they are going to see these musicians in particular.

While the other concerts in the festival were introduced by its executive director, this time the young PR manager of the festival, Anna Mašátová, comes onstage to do so. She explains her role by saying the concert was her own idea, and she describes how they dug up the material to be performed in archives, academic works, audio recordings, and shorter articles; since there was not a lot of it, the musicians have sometimes added their own lyrics or melodies from time to time. She cites several motifs from the lyrics to the songs, which is necessary for most of the listeners because they will be performed in Romanes. From interviews conducted later with Mašátová (27 June 2023), with the manager of Terne Čhave, Dušan Svíba (21 July 2023), and with the band’s lead singer Gejza Bendig (25 August 2023), I gather the following: Ms. Mašátová and Mr. Svíba agreed that the band would be the right choice for a concert during Eternal Hope dedicated to the Holocaust of the Roma because they have a comparatively broad fan base among non-Roma. The band’s lead singer, of course, made the realistic assessment that their usual musical style (which he called “hopsandy” or “hopscotch,” involving a lot of syncopation) is not appropriate to this subject matter, and so he agreed with acquaintances of his, Ondrej and Soňa Horváth, who usually perform at Romani parties and weddings around Hradec Králové, the band’s home town, that they would perform as well. He used one tip for a song from an online resource sent to him by Ms. Mašátová and found the rest himself. In one case he recalled a melody he had heard from Vlach Romani musicians and wrote his own lyrics to it.

When the band comes onstage, it is apparent that they will be performing different music than usual: The three brass players are not there and neither is the accordion player, but Soňa and Ondrej Horváth have joined the lineup, both in their 50s, who have never performed with the band before. Bendig, the guitarist and lead singer of Terne Čhave, will play with them, as will the bass guitarist and a drummer during two numbers.

⁴ Sokol is an association for Czech calisthenics of historical significance.

⁵ Note that the ROMEA TV recording covers only approximately the first half hour of the event.

The beginning of the first composition surprises me: Its phrasing and rhythm is like a slower jazz piece, but the vocalist begins to sing lyrics from an iconic song in the genre of *halgató*, which serves the function in the Romani community of a lament over life's difficulties (usually in a woman's voice):

Denaš, phrala, denaš	Run, my brother, run now
bo o Němci aven	The Germans are coming
jaj, bo o Němci aven	Oh, the Germans are coming
šaj, šaj amen murdaren. ⁶	You know they could kill us both.

These lyrics, which I know from the repertoire of Romani traditional music, are normally sung not about “Germans” but about “šeruna,” which literally means “the bosses” and, as Milena Hübschmannová once explained to me, also means “gendarmes.”

The text of the second verse is one of the most frequently performed of the genre:

Romale čhavale	Roma guys, Roma boys
Den man kotor maro	Give me a piece of bread
jaj, den man kotor maro	Oh, give me a piece of bread
jaj, bo me som bokhalo.	Oh, because I am hungry.

The main melody is reminiscent, at some points, of the one I know from the repertoire of Romani songs that are traditional, but the rhythm of swing shifts it in a different direction stylistically. Bendig later clarified to me that the arrangement he used was one he associates with the post-war era, which is when these songs were written. Soňa Horváthová (see Figure 1) is singing; her musical expression – her intonation, phrasing, etc. – is full of emotional urgency and mastery, but she is holding a piece of paper in her hand and glancing at it from time to time as she performs. I am sitting near the stage and can see that the lyrics to the song are there in large font. During the third and fourth lines of each verse (the phrases starting with “Oh”) the keyboard player doubles the vocals with a tenor harmony while continuing to play. The guitarist sometimes adds his voice as well.

The song closes with the last two verses slowing down in a moving way. The drummer then leaves the stage because the next two songs are from the genre of *halgató*, where regular rhythm has no place. These are the best-known songs making explicit reference to the fate of Romani people during the war. The first, about the “big building in Auschwitz,” has even been thoroughly researched by the excellent folk music scholar Dušan Holý, who specializes in music from Moravia and who knew the Romani singer of this piece, Růžena Danielová, who survived her imprisonment in Auschwitz. In a book-length monograph, *Žalující píseň* (“Song of Accusation,” Holý and Nečas 1993), Holý analyzes archival field recordings and his own field recordings to describe the

⁶ Most Roma in the Czech Republic speak the north-central dialect of Romanes, and the transcriptions of Romani words and phrases in this text therefore follow orthographic rules approved in the 1970s by the Gypsy/Romani Union. See Hübschmannová, Šebková, and Žigová (1998).



Figure 1. Soňa Horváthová and Gejza Bendig at the Terne Čhave concert, 21 March 2023, Vzlet, Prague (photograph by the author).

process through which this song was performed in different variations in Bohemia, Moravia, Poland, and Slovakia; originally sung to a blackbird carrying a letter written by the singer, it later acquired new verses referencing Auschwitz as the subject, or Ilava⁷ in the case of the Roma from Slovakia:⁸

1. Aušvicate o kher baro
 Odoj bešel mro pirano
 Bešel bešel gondolinel
 Te na pre ma zabisterel.

1. Auschwitz is a great big building
 Where my love sits in prison
 He sits, he sits and reflects
 So he will never forget me.

⁷ The city of Ilava, Slovakia is infamous among Roma who have been imprisoned there. The locative case of the name of this place in Romanes (Ilavate) has the same number of syllables as the locative of Auschwitz in Romanes (Aušvicate), which is an essential feature of that variation of the lyrics.

⁸ According to one of Holý's sources, the Polish poet, essayist and collector of Polish Romani songs, Jerzy Ficowski, "Gypsy folk song is ahistorical . . . Some indications permit us to predict that over time, as the eyewitnesses to those days pass away, the gypsy memory of the persecution during the Second World War will become extinct, the reality that is specific to these songs will be lost, and they will begin to imitate their predecessors, the prisoners' songs" (Ficowski 1986: 240, cited in Holý and Nečas 1993: 116). Of course, this author never suspected that remembrance of this persecution would become one of the pillars of Romani identity (at least among Roma in Bohemia and Moravia).

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| <p>2. U tu kalo čirikloro
Lidža mangem mro liloro
Lidža lidža mre romeske
hoj som phandlí Aušvicate.</p> <p>3. Aušvicate bare bokha
Ňič so te chal amen nane
Aňi oda koter maro
O bacharis bibachtalo.</p> | <p>2. As for you my little blackbird
Bring him this letter for me
Bring it, bring it to him now
So he will know I'm in Auschwitz.</p> <p>3. In Auschwitz there is great hunger
We have nothing to eat here
Not a single piece of bread
Because the guard is so evil.</p> |
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In addition to the typical lyric motifs (great hunger, a loved one far away, or prison – and frequently the subject of the death of one's mother, which are the reason this set of songs is called the *čorikane gila*,⁹ we are now also hearing the characteristic features of such music: sets of four rubato phrases corresponding to the verses; a minor key and a relatively large singing range, usually an octave. The guitar, bass guitar, and keyboards are mostly limited to accompanying the singer with arpeggiated (broken) chords.

The next song is sometimes called “Gypsy Tears” (“Cikánský pláč”) and some of my Romani acquaintances say it is the real anthem of the Czech and Slovak Roma. Today's performance corresponds to its important, even dignified role: First the overture features this well-known ascending minor melody using the synthesizer's choral setting, which sounds like thousands of voices from the faraway past or far-off future singing in unison. Then Ondrej Horváth switches the keyboard setting to acoustic piano and begins to sing himself. After the gentle, high tone he used to accompany Soňa during the previous number, I am surprised by his colorful, sonorous voice expressing a full dose of emotion. He skips the famous first verse about a Romani girl whom the singer asks to make a fire and begins with the verse about the camp:

<p>Andr'oda taboris, joj phares Roma keren. Phares Roma keren, joj mek mariben chuden.</p>	<p>Inside of that camp there, oh Roma are hard at work Roma work so hard there, oh and they still beat us up.</p>
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The continuation of the song is traditional, about the singer's old mother with her hair let down.

For the fourth song, the drummer returns to the ensemble and in a brisk 2/4 rhythm the Horváths sing a piece by Terne Čhave to a melody with Csárdás elements:

<p>Sar man ile Aušvicate Mro dživipen on murdarde //:Mire vasta mire jakha miro jilo sa phagerde://</p>	<p>When they brought me into Auschwitz They destroyed all of my life //:They broke my hands, they broke my eyes, they broke my heart, everything is broken://</p>
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This is the song for which Bendig resurrected his recollection of a Vlach Romani melody and wrote the lyrics himself.

⁹ The Romanes term *čoro* has a broad semantic range: miserable, orphaned, poor, or wretched, among others (see Hübschmannová, Šebková, and Žigová 1998).

By the close of the first part of the program, which lasts roughly 45 minutes, we will hear two more classic halgató pieces – one about a train whistling as it takes the poor Roma away (“E mašina mar piskinel”), and one where the singer says goodbye to his mother and keeps her poverty and sorrow in his heart (“Sar me mamó adarig džav”).

The second half of the concert featured the group in its classic lineup and was opened by the saxophonist saying: “Romani music is still alive – and we are the proof. We create contemporary Romani music that incorporates all kinds of influences. Let’s enjoy it now!” The catchy melodies quickly brought a significant part of the audience to their feet, and one could see the widest possible range of creative dancing happening in the open space.

The Journey to Minority Musical Remembrance

In the case of an ethnomusicological probe into minority (specifically, Roma) collective remembrance, it is necessary to include at least three theoretical perspectives: 1) collective remembrance; 2) its specifics in the case of minorities; and 3) the role of music in it. While the first perspective has been and is dealt with quite often (so I can just summarize the basic theses of it upon which I proceed), for the other two perspectives the existing theoretical solutions are considerably more modest. That is why I pay more attention here to those last two perspectives – the specifics of minority remembrance, and the role of music in it.¹⁰

Our reflection on music in collective remembrance by minorities will therefore take place within the following theoretical premises:

1. Individual and collective remembrance are each largely governed by different rules; the collective one is intentionally constructed in the present. Although individual and collective remembrances are undoubtedly interconnected¹¹ – it cannot be denied that the collective/community (collectivity) consists of individuals with unique memories, and at the same time that each individual’s memory is formed by the collective¹² – each type of remembrance is determined by different rules. Wulf Kansteiner’s formulation of this notion is fruitful here: “collective memory is not just a metaphoric expression. Collective memories originate from shared communications about the meaning of the past that are anchored in the life-worlds of individuals who partake in the communal life” (2002: 188),¹³ and further:

¹⁰ Kay Kaufman Shelemay (1998) discusses the role of music in the remembrance of Syrian Jews, primarily in the US, but their minority position is not thematized there.

¹¹ For the complex interconnection of individual and collective remembrance and the function of music in it, see Jurková (2017: 8–9).

¹² See in particular Maurice Halbwachs (1992) and his “collective frameworks of memory.”

¹³ Given the breadth and therefore the ambiguity of the use of the term “collective memory” (for an overview see Šubrt, Maslowski, and Lehner 2014), I try to avoid it in this paper. I focus on collective acts/events of remembrance that I consider to be manifestations of collective memory.

[W]hile the emanation of individual memory is primarily subject to the laws of the unconscious, public memory . . . [it] testifies to a will or desire on the part of some social group . . . to select and organize representations of the past so that these will be embraced by individuals as their own. If particular representations of the past have permeated the public domain, it is because they embody an intentionality – social, political, institutional and so on – that promotes or authorizes their entry. (ibid.)

The second aspect of collective remembrance is its strong community-forming potential. The historian Jan Assmann describes it as one of the axes of collective identity,¹⁴ and the sociologist Stuart Hall emphasizes the crucial role of remembering in constructing collectivity: “actually identities are about using the resources of history . . . in the process of becoming . . .: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’ so much as who we might become” (1996: 4). In summary, collective remembrance reflects the processes of the present – and looks toward the future.

2. A minority does not exist without a majority (Reyes 2007: 22–23). This general thesis is specified by Dana Bittnerová (2013) in her introductory piece to a volume of work about the situation of the relationship of the Romani minority to the majority in the Czech Republic, *Etnické komunity: Romové*. The central theoretical term for her is that of the “symbolic nobody,” a category the Roma must permanently cope with as ascribed to them in Czech society. Bittnerová also touches on music in that work, which is one of the tools of Romani coping, and through it “the category of” symbolic nobody “is transformed into the category of attractive, instrumental exoticism” (2013: 14). The present paper, however, is following a different situation: the music is not at the center of performance (through which the Roma might avoid a stigmatizing situation), but is an instrument used in the process of remembering. One of my key questions is about its function and its functioning.
3. According to Thomas Turino, “ethnomusicologists have emphasized the importance of music for expressing and creating social identities in many societies around the world” (Turino 2008: 94). Although our view of teenagers with headphones on their ears as being closed in their own musical world convinces us that music is above all an individual phenomenon, musical anthropology presents music as a powerful tool for integrating an individual into a collective and integrating members of a collective with each other. When asked why meaningfully organized sound, as music is usually understood, should effectively form social ties, the ethnomusicologist answers: “Music and dance are key to identity

I define collective remembrance as “A social process that takes place in the present and deliberately uses elements of the past” (Jurková 2017: 8), most condensed in public/collective acts/events that are reminiscent of the past.

¹⁴ According to Assmann, each culture is bound by a so-called connective structure that has two dimensions, social and temporal. The temporal dimension “links yesterday with today by giving form and presence to influential experiences and memories” (2011: 2).

formation because they are often public presentations of the deepest feelings and qualities that make a group unique” (ibid.: 2).

At the intersection of the perspectives described above, the question outlined above about shaping the form of minority musical remembrance refines itself as follows: Who are the actors of this remembrance? What does the Roma/non-Roma *pas-de-deux*¹⁵ look like during the formation of this remembrance? How does music work in it?

Requiem for Auschwitz¹⁶

On 4 November 2012, a concert was held at the Rudolfinum, the main concert hall in Prague and an indisputable symbol of high culture of majority, advertised on posters as *Requiem for Auschwitz*. The composer was Roger Moreno Rathgeb from the Netherlands, who until then was unknown in the Czech Republic; the soloists and the mixed choir were local performers;¹⁷ and the orchestral part was played by the Roma and Sinti Philharmonic Orchestra from Frankfurt and conducted by the founder and artistic director of the orchestra, Riccardo Sahiti, who was born in the former Yugoslavia.

Tickets were no longer available one week before the concert, which was only partly due to the fact that they were free. During the last few days before the concert the Israeli ambassador, a presidential candidate, and other prominent personalities were doing their best to get hold of them.¹⁸ It was a first-class social event. At the same time, however, the audience of more than a thousand people was very different in one way from the audience of most of the concerts taking place here: an estimated quarter were Romani. They received tickets from the Slovo 21 production company through a network of Romani organizations.¹⁹

The composition uses traditional Latin lyrics, and its Western art musical language is eclectically romantic.²⁰ (I noticed just one so-called reference passage to what might be perceived as a Romani musical idiom.) It was performed without a break, but the singing was interrupted three times and two reciters – a young Rom, David Tišer, and a

¹⁵ In this text I am not being so bold as to discuss the issue of the relationship between two minorities, specifically here Jewish people and Romani people, which is unusually challenging in terms of both fact-finding and theory. A great deal of historical information can be found in Milena Hübschmannová's book *Po židoch cigáni* (2005: especially 677–722). The organization of the events described was contributed to by Jewish organizations in addition to pro-Romani ones.

¹⁶ I deal with this specific event in a separate article (Jurková 2013a). I have taken some formulations here from that text.

¹⁷ The soloists were Pavlína Matiová – soprano, Jana Wallingerová – alto, Martin Šrejma – tenor, Martin Bárta – bass, the choral part was sung by the Kühn Mixed Choir.

¹⁸ Information from my daughter Jitka Pánek Jurková, who managed the entire project.

¹⁹ For more details regarding Slovo 21 see, e.g., Slovo 21 (n.d.) and also Jurková (2019).

²⁰ A video recording of the concert is included in my article about it, see Jurková (2013a).



Figure 2. *Requiem for Auschwitz*, 4 November 2012, Rudolfinum, Prague. Pavlína Matiová stands at the front in the middle (photograph by the author).

member of the National Theater (a non-Roma) Tatjana Medvecká – read short pieces by Romani authors in the original Romanes and in Czech translation.

The choir and orchestra performances were standard. Three of the solo performers in the quartet were experienced matadors of concert stages, but the audience’s attention was attracted the most by the least experienced soprano, the Romani performer Pavlína Matiová. (see Figure 2)²¹ I have rarely experienced such enthusiastic and lengthy standing ovations from an audience. When I asked a few Roma friends after the concert how they liked it, they mostly said it had been “beautiful”; I would characterize the tone of their answers as “cautiously excited.” The exception was a young musician and university student who agreed that the performance had been nice but mentioned that it could have been more “Romani.”

I am convinced that those standing ovations were not responding to either the originality of the composition or to the quality of the musical performances. They were for the importance of the event, which was determined by its context. Regardless of the romantic musical language, the absence of Roma musical idioms (or stereotypes), the Latin used, and even despite the author’s statement that he had dedicated the piece to everyone who suffered or died at Auschwitz, it was the most visible act of musical remembrance of the Roma Holocaust that there has ever been in the CR. One segment of

²¹ The media expressed itself about the performance by saying “Pavlína Matiová shone,” see [Česká televize \(2012\)](#).

that contextual framework is certainly the Romani performers: the orchestra, one soloist, and one reciter. However, due to the renowned universality of Romani musicians, that was not the most striking segment.

The second significant contextual segment was that of the side events organized around the concert: the exhibition entitled “The Romani Genocide during the Second World War” at the Jewish Museum in Prague; the films *Just the Wind* (about the persecution of Roma in today’s Hungary), and *To Live! Ceija Stojka Speaks*, about the Austrian Romani graphic artist, writer and singer; and the Roma Positive conference, organized by the British Embassy in Prague. The third contextual segment is that of media reports in which it was possible to read, for example, that the composer, Roger Moreno Rathgeb, identifies as Romani:²² He was born in Switzerland to a German-speaking family. At the age of 12, he learned that his mother was Sinti. Later on, he became a member of a Sinti band, Zigeunerorkester Nello Basily; its repertoire included the music of the Roma of Romania, Hungary and Russia. In retrospect, Rathgeb said he considers that encounter to have been essential. As he says in an interview: “They just kept me around and I immediately felt at home among them” (Jurková 2012: 15). He also learned the Sinti dialect of Romanes there.

From an interview with Rathgeb we also learn about the journey taken by the composition to its Rudolfinum performance: the composer, inspired by Verdi’s *Requiem*, intended to write a composition, as he emphasizes, dedicated to everyone who died at Auschwitz. Albert Siebelink, director of the International Gypsy Festival in Tilburg, helped Rathgeb through his creative crisis. Through Siebelink, the composition found its way into the network of world music / Romani music festivals. Several members of that network, among them the Prague NGO Slovo 21, were able to obtain an EU grant. Thanks to that, they could realize relatively large-scale performances in Amsterdam, Prague, Berlin, Frankfurt, and Krakow.

The intention to use Rathgeb’s composition to attract attention to the so-called “Forgotten Holocaust” of the Roma was confirmed by the project coordinator from Slovo 21, who said: “It is essential for us to put Romani Holocaust remembrance in the context of current racial intolerance. Understanding the problems of the past is the key to coping with the present and the future” (Slovo 21 2012).

To confirm the Romani contextualization of the concert, it is useful to include one more quotation, this time directly from the concert program brochure. The quote is from Jarmila Balážová, a journalist, former spokesperson for the Ministry of Education, and one of the most prominent figures on the Romani scene in recent decades:

I come from a family of Moravian Roma who were, along with the Czech Roma [author’s note: during the Second World War], almost completely exterminated. After the war, only 600 people came back. The consequences, not only for those concrete families, but also for the identity of the Romani population in the Czech Republic, were tragic. More than 90% of the Roma who live in this country came from Slovakia after World War II. This, among other things, marks a certain distance [between various Romani subethnic

²² Rathgeb’s life data are taken from his official website (Moreno n.d.) and from Jurková (2012).

groups, note ZJJ in discussions about the necessity of resolving questions regarding the so-called “Gypsy Camps” run by Czech overseers where Czech and Moravian Roma were intentionally interned and consequently deported to concentration camps at Auschwitz and elsewhere. In this regard, the Slovak Roma cannot fully share a tragedy to which they simply were not subjected on this territory. (Balážová 2012: 3)²³

This quote, understandably, is not meant to substitute for the extensive academic literature about the Holocaust of the Czech, or rather, the Czechoslovak Roma.²⁴ Even the absolutely uninformed reader can acquire basic data about this issue from it; in addition, it is meant to serve here as an illustration of the differentiation of Romani ethnic sub-groups in the Czech lands (supported withal by historical documents). This is a differentiation that it will be necessary to overcome in the interest of finding the kind of representation of the past that Romani people in the Czech Republic would be able, in Kansteiner’s words, to “embrace . . . as their own” (2002: 188).

The differentiation on the basis of ethnic sub-group and the different fates of each group during the Second World War is just one reason the Holocaust of the Roma has been marginalized as a subject. Another is their minority status. As a group, Romani people have long lacked the historically developed institutions that the majority society has for collective commemoration and remembrance (see Sadílková, Schuster, and Závodská 2015: 2). Romani people were able, just like other concentration camp survivors, to strive for compensation after the war after being awarded the status of “participants in the national fight for liberation.” For administrative and capacity reasons, of course, fulfilling the terms of that compensation was possible for just a small number of Romani victims. The Commission on Former Prisoners of Concentration Camps, which existed for a short time as part of the Union of Gypsies/Roma, was meant to aid with this, but the Union was abolished in 1973. At that time historical research on this topic was also developed, among other matters, in an effort to support those applying for compensation. Ctibor Nečas (1999) tracked the historical persecution of the Roma from 1939–1945 through the documentation of the camp at Lety, while Vlasta Kladivová studied the fates of those in the “Gypsy Family Camp” at Auschwitz-Birkenau (see Kladivová 1994). An integral part of this research was capturing the testimonies of survivors: In addition to these historians and the ethnomusicologist Dušan Holý (see below) the eminent Romani Studies scholar Milena Hübschmannová paid attention to these testimonies and began recording her interviews and transcribing them in the 1960s (Hübschmannová 2005). During the 1990s, the activity of the Museum of Romani Culture followed up on her work, (e.g. Horváthová et al. 2021). This context also includes the activities of the American genealogist Paul Polansky discussed below. In 1995 a memorial to the Holocaust and its Romani victims was unveiled at Lety u Písku in the presence of

²³ Regarding the different fates of Slovak Roma in comparison to Czech and Moravian groups during the Second World War, Helena Sadílková writes that “the Roma and Sinti living in the territory of the wartime Slovak Republic suffered a long series of persecution orders. Yet, as a group they were spared mass transports to concentration and extermination camps” (2021: 193).

²⁴ Nečas (1999) is among the most significant.

Czech President Václav Havel. That event was an important impulse for the remembrance which has been more and more often associated with the date of 2 August, as recommended by the European Parliament.²⁵

Another important remembrance event about the Romani Holocaust using music as an important instrument was the theater production *Lety – 1942*, produced less than two years after the *Requiem for Auschwitz*.

Lety – 1942. A Musical Prayer

8 May 2014, 20:00

Divadlo Ponec (the Ponec Theater)

Another important remembrance event about the Romani Holocaust using music as an important instrument was the theater production *Lety – 1942*, produced less than two years after the *Requiem for Auschwitz* at the Ponec Theater. The theater's building is located between a busy highway interchange and a railway line suspended above the industrial district of Karlín, so few would guess that one of the oldest cinemas in Prague was once housed there; according to its operator, today the theater has made a name for itself. Usually there are performances of alternative dance theater on offer. Today's performance fits well into its repertoire.

²⁵ The developments in the Czech Republic have to be seen in wider contexts of a growing activism of Roma in Europe demanding recognition and justice for the National Socialist Genocide of Roma. Only a few notes can be provided in this regard within the present context: Prominent pioneers are members of the German Sinti community, like Oskar and Vinzenz Rose and since 1979 Romani Rose, since 1982 elected chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma (Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma n.d.). Also the International Romani Union (founded in 1971) held its third Congress with over 300 delegates in Göttingen in 1981, prioritizing the call for full recognition of the NS Genocide of the Roma (Council of Europe n.d.). The German Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt officially recognized the Genocide of Roma and Sinti in 1982, raising expectations of other Roma communities in neighboring countries. In the late 1980s, Romani survivors went increasingly public with their experiences during the Holocaust. For example, Ceija Stojka, an Austrian Roma survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, gave testimony in her book (Stojka 2022). She also captured her painful experience in her paintings which obtained an international reputation. Since 2010, a growing Roma youth movement has gathered Roma and non-Roma youths around 2 August to commemorate the extermination of Roma during Second World War. They became a strong voice for the international recognition of the Roma Holocaust (Dikh he na bister n.d.). In 2015, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling upon its Member States to recognize the Roma Genocide (European Parliament 2015). In the same year, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance set up a Committee on the Genocide of the Roma to increase its work promoting education, commemoration and research on the Roma genocide (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance n.d.).



Figure 3. *Lety – 1942*, 8 May 2014, Divadlo Ponec, Prague (photograph by Roman Dobeš, with kind permission).

A few dozen viewers, including several Roma of different ages, are sitting at first on the tiers of the auditorium that slope toward the stage. After the opening scene, the main protagonist accompanies them onto the stage; they will remain seated around its perimeter. The only element of the set is a big black concert grand piano. It will be played by the composer Jiří Korman, and at the end of the performance it will become a metaphorical coffin. About ten mostly young men and women in black (see Figure 3) now stand around Korman; in addition to the acting students, I also recognize two musicians of Romani origin. This group will provide the musical component of the performance and will participate in a symbolic burial at the end.

The monologue component is performed by a single actress – the young Barbora Kubátová. While she wears a blue uniform in the opening scene and describes the organization of camp life at Lety in a matter-of-fact tone, after accompanying the audience members onto the stage she appears in a white dress with romantically entangled long blonde hair. At some points she reads from a thick book, at other times she “narrates” fragments – often so appalling as to be unbelievable – from camp life, with the brutality of the testimony increasing over time. There are alternating characters, and some sections clearly contradict each other (“In Lety you were always beaten, at any moment the guards would beat someone.” – “I don’t remember they ever beat anyone in Lety.”) By now the actress is audibly experiencing the content of the dialogue much more. Some of the characters distance themselves from the “truly black Roma” to whom they

claim not to belong – and for that reason are released from the camp. We repeatedly hear that Czech police or Czech guards were involved in the prisoners' suffering.

About 50 minutes have passed since the performance began. The story culminates in an explicit accusation against the Czech guards:

The Czech guards were certainly the worst of all the camps where I was. From Lety I was sent to Auschwitz and then to Buchenwald and then to Ravensbrück. . . in all the German camps it was better. At Auschwitz it happened just once in a while – in the morning . . . [but] you could have been beaten at any time in Lety. I've been to many death camps, but Lety was the worst. All the guards at Lety were Czechs.

One of the singers, a long-haired young man, pours some alcohol onto the floor, puts a few small items into the piano – a wooden horse, money – closes the piano and puts a rose on it. We are witnessing a symbolic Romani funeral. From within the tiered auditorium, hammered dulcimer music is playing; as at Romani funerals, there is no singing now. The actors-singers, and then the audience, come over to light the candles that form a cross on the staircase leading to the stage. The flickering of their flames intertwines with the hammered dulcimer sounds in the dim space, making it an extraordinarily impressive climax of the performance.²⁶

Both the dramatic and the emotional escalation of the performance are greatly aided by its music. Initially the solo piano either provides an undertone to the recitation or punctuates it. Approximately halfway through, black-clothed performers join the company, a mixed choir whose singers are almost invisible on the dimly lit stage. (The fact that there are other well-known/outstanding Roma musicians in addition to Jiří Korman among them can just be recognized visually: the ensemble singing is not as homogeneous as classical music choirs are, but is very even.) They alternately sing solo and then multi-part arrangements of slow Romani halgató songs such as “Veša veša, churde veša,” which was sung at a moment when the monologue was about the forest behind the concentration camp:

Veša veša, chude veša	Forests, forests, thin forests
Me maškara! o cintiris	and a burial ground in the middle
ola veša čingerava	I will cut those forests down
Sar la romňa me dikhava.	and find my wife.

The frequency of the singing increases as the performance escalates; during the last third, the music controls the stage. When the young man closes the piano-coffin, he sings a song that has a special place in the repertoire of Czech and Slovak Roma – “Čhajori romaňi.”²⁷

²⁶ The director of the performance, Dana Račková, later explained to me that the candles were planted in soil transported from Lety. After the staging ended, the production team returned them to Lety. As an audience member, of course, I was unaware of this symbolic element of the production.

²⁷ “Čhajori romaňi / thov mange jagori / na cikňi na bari / čarav tro vođori // 2. Andr'oda taboris / phares bufi keren / phares bufi keren / a bokhate meren.//” (“Roma girl / build me a fire / not too big, not too small / diligently, please. // 2. They work hard in camp / they work hard/ and they

The first stanza of this song is by far the most frequently cited Roma “traditional” song and a musical symbol of the Roma, widely known even among the majority population in the Czech Republic.²⁸ The second verse explicitly refers to the experiences during the Second World War: “They work hard in the camp and die of hunger.”²⁹ The producers of the show, however, avoided flat stereotyping by not using the most common melodic variant of the song beginning with ascending minor tones, but a less common version that is better known in conjunction with the lyrics “Ma maren, ma maren,” which mean “Don’t beat me.”

Different groups of listeners will have a different experience at this point: those who know both variants (who are probably Romani themselves) may experience a layered perception of the song; for the non-Roma, what remains is a slight surprise at hearing the new version.

The leaflet about the production and the filming of it were produced under the auspices of prominent institutions, starting with the Czech Senator Karl Schwarzenberg, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Goethe-Institut and others, but the media response to it was subsequently very limited.³⁰ I obtained details about the origins of the production and its future from the co-author³¹ and director Dana Račková (interview, 18 September 2018). She came from her native Slovakia to the Theater Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU) in Prague, where she met Jiří Korman, who taught an interpretation seminar on Romani music:

[S]ometimes we had a class on Romani music. It turned out to be really cool that we came into contact with such traditional Romani music, and the musicians learned to play different instruments, and there was the Romanes language and all that. I think it was a very successful project. Then, after school, when I graduated, Mr. Korman and I began working together because he probably liked the way I directed. I didn’t have any ambitions to work with Roma culture, or maybe I have them a little bit, or somewhat more than my classmates from Prague . . . Mr. Korman and I somehow started to work together, but we just had some incomplete projects behind us. . . I wanted us to do something together that we would do from start to finish, he as a musician, me as a director, to test how it all works. I wanted a small part for one actress, for Bára, who eventually performed the role, whom I had worked with very well and I wanted to repeat that experience. So, I asked Mr. Korman to give me a subject that somehow fascinated him

die of hunger. //”) Transcription of the Romanes lyrics and translation taken from Hübschmannová and Jurková (1999: 16).

²⁸ For example, one of the few literary pieces written by a non-Romani Czech author about Romani people quotes this song in its title: “Děvčátko, rozdělej ohníček” (“Build Me a Fire, Girl,” Šmaus 2005).

²⁹ Milena Hübschmannová said about this song: “After the Second World War, it also began to be called the ‘Gypsy lament,’ because Romani people in Slovakia who were forcibly imprisoned in labor camps added the verse complaining of hunger, beating and injustice” (Hübschmannová and Jurková 1999:16). Elsewhere, different stanzas can be found, following the first, the most famous one, see e.g. Davidová and Žižka (1991).

³⁰ See a brief article on the Romea.cz news server (ČTK 2014).

³¹ The other co-author was Jiří Korman.

or inspired him to create music and I would look at it to see if it would inspire me as well. . . Well – and then he gave me the book *Black Silence* by Polansky. (Račková, interview, 18 September 2018)

Black Silence: The Lety Survivors Speak (1998) is a book by the American genealogist and journalist Paul Polansky (born 1942) that was the first of many publications by him in different genres dedicated to the Holocaust of the Roma on the territory of the Czech Republic. Polansky is viewed as a considerably controversial person in the Czech environment who drew attention to the history of the Holocaust of the Roma, but who did so at the cost of using methods that were not up to snuff from an academic perspective (see Horváthová 2015). Over the course of time he gradually accused the broadest possible range of stakeholders on the Czech scene, beginning with the Government and public officials and continuing on to Romani Studies scholars and historians, of intentionally covering up this subject (which is where the title of the book comes from) and with persecuting him as the discoverer of the horrifying truth. This somewhat paranoid perspective is fully described by him in the book *Tábor smrti Lety: vyšetřování začíná* (1992–1995), which was published in 2014, the same year as the staging of *Lety – 1942*, and released in 2019 in English as *Death Camp Lety: The Investigation Begins (1992–1995)*.

Without it being necessary to verify Polansky's conspiracy theory, it needs to be admitted that from the standpoint of credibility, *Black Silence* is a book that is dubious at the very least. It is published as a set of oral histories of Romani survivors, but the method the author describes in *Tábor smrti Lety* necessarily greatly confuses the reader with respect to its credibility. Polansky himself does not speak Czech, so he asked his questions in English, an interpreter translated them to the respondent in Czech, and then again interpreted their answers back to Polansky in English. Reportedly there are no audio recordings of these interviews, so Polansky's notes of their answers could later have become much more a matter of his own interpretation than of the respondents' original replies. Polansky's method, its outcomes, and its implantation into a decade of already-existing Czech research into the Holocaust of the Roma, including a confrontation of the most problematic testimonies reported by him with already-existing testimonies collected by others, are discussed in a detailed article by Jana Horváthová, director of the Museum of Romani Culture (Horváthová 2015).

Irrespective of the book's historical (in)accuracy or methodological (in)correctness, a moving artistic production has been created based on it, albeit one that did not last long on the musical scene in Prague. Dana Račková says the following about its organizational framework:

That was part of the European Center for Romani Music, which Mr Korman. . . established and then shortly afterward called on me to be its artistic head. As part of that association we were able to request grants, etc. Afterwards, when we broke up with each other in anger, I left the group completely – and I think he never submitted the final accounting for the grants . . . He neglected all that all terribly. . . (Račková, interview, 18 September 2018).

Due to a schism in the ensemble, the reasons for which can only be speculated about, the planned 10 performances were never fully realized. A couple of years after the premiere, the situation had not improved. When in the autumn of 2018 I myself attempted to negotiate a revival of *Lety – 1942* with Mr Korman, or a performance of an adaptation of it, it was apparent that he was not interested.

In between *Requiem for Auschwitz*, *Lety – 1942*, and the “Day of Remembrance of the Romani Victims of the Holocaust, Leperiben!”, it is useful to at least briefly mention one event that appears at first glance to be less associated with the subject here, the “Commemorative Evening for Věrafý Bílá.”³² That evening was held on 6 April 2019 – the date when the comeback of this legendary Romani singer had originally been planned in association with celebrations of International Romani Day on 8 April.³³ When Věra Bílá unexpectedly died on 12 March 2019, the ARA ART agency, which had organized the originally planned event (and all of International Romani Day) instead produced an ambitious memorial evening.

The venue was already symbolic: The Theater on Korunní Street. That space is frequently associated with Romani events, especially musical ones, because it is above all the theater of the Prague International Conservatory, in which director Emil Ščuka is endeavoring to support the musical talents of Romani youth, in addition to their other talents.³⁴ The theater was literally overflowing with a predominantly Romani audience who, as is typical, joined in the singing, enthusiastically welcomed their favorite numbers, and whose child members asked for their favorites to be played earlier in the lineup.

The intensive two-hour program was moderated by Jarmila Balážová, and one star of the Romani music scene after another traded places onstage. Of course, students of the International Conservatory began the program with their teachers, the siblings Josef and Erika Fečo, performing three songs by Věra Bílá. It was symptomatic that neither they nor anybody else who performed her music attempted to imitate her specific style but rather interpreted the famous melodies in their own ways.³⁵

³² Věra Bílá (1954–2019) was from a family of outstanding musicians; she was equipped with an indisputable talent and the clear joy of music-making. Right after the Velvet Revolution, an experienced talent manager, Jiří Smetana, brought her and her band Kale to the world stage. Despite her world fame, however, she remained an authentic Romani woman in the small town of Rokycany, where she lived all her life: she used to spend time with her extended family, sometimes to gamble, and in the last years of her life she lived in social housing, thus experiencing the problems of many ordinary Roma. See, e.g., Jurková (2008).

³³ The main initiator of the event was a young Romani singer, Jan Bendig, who is immeasurably loved by Romani audiences. An invitation to the comeback concert was filmed with him and Věra Bílá as her final video clip, “Mek som adaj” (“I’m Still Here,” Bendig, Bila, and Kroka 2019).

³⁴ For more details see, e.g., Jurková (2018b), especially the interview with Josef Fečo.

³⁵ Here it is useful to recall the book by Svanibor Pettan (2002) about the Romani musicians of Kosovo. On the basis of comparatively analyzing their music, he demonstrates that while non-Roma are led above all by the principle of imitation when performing, for a Romani interpretation, creativity and variability are symptomatic.

In addition to the spontaneous audience and the personal musical creations, one more thing seems remarkable – it is not easy to convey, but it was obvious: There was a kind of balance/equilibrium between the emotional and the technical components of the event. The moderator never forgot her lines, the protagonists filed onstage in the correct order, the technical aspects, including the accompanying slide show, functioned flawlessly – and at the same time there was room for everybody’s emotions. There was not a trace of either soulless commerce or false sentiment.

Leperiben/Remembering

Friday, 2 August 2019, 19:00

Náměstí Míru (Square of Peace), Prague 2

It is a hot summer evening on a square near the center of Prague. In front of the neo-Gothic church of St. Ludmila there is a covered stage (a black canopy in the shape of a tent) with a Romani flag – blue, green, and the red wheel in the middle; next to the stage, the banner of ARA ART, the organization established six years ago by David Tišer, which is holding this event (see [ROMEIA TV 2019](#)). Inside, beneath the white ceiling of the tent, there is room for a hundred spectators. Most of the chairs are already occupied before the program begins, while other people are sitting on benches around the perimeter of the square or standing around. Some stop by just for a moment, but the audience inside the auditorium has obviously come there intentionally and will remain the whole time. About three-quarters of them are Romani.

At the announced starting time, three musicians of a Cimbálová muzika (“dulcimer band”) – encompassing ensemble leader Viliam Didiáš (violin), a double-bass player, and a hammered dulcimer player – perform onstage. Didiáš improvises on the motifs of well-known Romani folk songs and the others accompany him sensitively. (I appreciated the sound system, which allowed us to follow the melodic line accurately without too much distortion.) After the music had attracted the audience’s attention to the stage, two young men – one speaking in Czech and one in Slovak – state the purpose of the gathering: To commemorate the murder of nearly three thousand Romani people in Auschwitz-Birkenau on the night of 2 August and the early morning hours of 3 August 1944.

For the next hour or so there will be a performance of . . . *and again we slept Pindral* (. . . *a zase jsme spali Pindral*),³⁶ a one-act play based on Zora Horváthová’s memories of

³⁶ There is a short video about one of the numerous theatrical performances of . . . *and again we slept Pindral* with Pavlína Matiová in the leading role, which also describes the history of the piece’s creation (see [ROMEIA TV 2018](#)). The play premiered in Slovakia in 2017 and was then performed in Prague during the Khamoro festival 2018.



Figure 4. “Leperiben,” 2 August 2019. From left Pavlína Matiová, Pavlína Daňková, Marta Balážová, and musicians of the dulcimer band (photograph by the author).

the Second World War (see Figure 4).³⁷ Three young women in dresses sit down on stage; two have colorful scarves draped over their shoulders, and a similar piece of fabric serving as a tablecloth. The main performer is Pavlína Matiová, an actress and multi-genre singer whom the Romani cultural scene can barely do without (at least in Prague) and who also participated in the *Requiem for Auschwitz*. This time she is performing the story of a big Roma family from a small Slovak town. Before the war, the parents made their living from their traditional professions. A neighbor betrayed them during the war, and they were captured and transported to the concentration camps, first the three older daughters, then the parents. The narrator, at the age of 15, must take care of her younger siblings; they survive the last winter of the war in the forest, where they sleep *pindral*: This Romani word refers to an old practice (not exclusively Romani), in which several children used to sleep under a duvet with the soles of their feet touching, so that each of their bodies extended in a different direction.

Pavlína interleaves the dramatic reading with the singing of old, slow halgató songs. One is “Marel o Del marel / de kas kamel te marel / te Man o Del mardá / bon a šundom

³⁷ Published in the book *(Ne)bolí* (Kramářová 2005). Of course, this is far from the first published testimony by Czech and Slovak Romani people who survived the Second World War. The first more extensive collection of testimonies from Slovakia is in Milena Hübschmannová’s book *Po židoch cigáni* (2005). For more details, see Horváthová (2015).

mra da”: “God punishes / whomever he wants / he has punished me too” (see Hübschmannová and Jurková 1999: 25). Another is “Denaš more denaš”: “Run, boy, run / the bigwigs are arriving / bringing their chains with them.”

When I first encountered these songs in the 1990s, they impressed me greatly, but it was almost impossible to encounter their performance in the Czech field at that time (see Jurková 1998), and musicians of the younger generation called them “our grandmothers’ songs.” During the performance today, these old melodies with their mournful lyrics, in conjunction with the interwar and Second World War memories, succeed in creating a special atmosphere: Although the story takes place in a specifically Romani setting to the sounds of Romani music, the fates of the victims of the war – whoever they were – would have been the same. The music has turned us into a community of shared emotion.

The onstage listener to Pavlína’s story is Marta Balážová, a singer who works in various musical genres. Today she and Pavlína will take turns singing the *čorikane gila*. The third woman, and the youngest at the table, wearing a red dress, is Pavlína Danková, who in the end sings a song with a modern melody:

Apsenca phares gilaavav	It is hard to sing through my tears
O Jjilo man dukhal	My heart is in great pain
Apsendar pro drom na dikhav	I can’t see the road for my tears
Devla le mandar Pharipen.	God, take this pain away from me.
Pro Roma mange leperav	I remember all the Roma
Aušvicate mernas	who all died in Auschwitz
sar len adre jag čhivkernas	how they threw them all in the fire
sar len labarnas Murdarnas.	how they burned and murdered them all.

Later, I learned from David Tišer that the song was composed by musicians from the Khamoro group, the members of which emigrated from Neratovice in the Czech Republic to Australia at the turn of the millennium. However, they stay in contact with Czech Roma of all kinds, including by sharing their recordings on YouTube. That is how Pavlína Danková (interview, 17 September 2019) learned the song.

A fourth young woman will join the events onstage twice – Petra Gelbart. She sings the two *halgató* songs whose lyrics are most closely related to Auschwitz: The piece called the lament of the Roma, “Čhajori romaňi,” and another called “Oda kalo čirikloro.”³⁸ Unlike the other singers, who are accompanied by the musicians onstage, Petra accompanies herself on the accordion. Her singing also sounds a little different: you can hear her experience with the repertoire of Russian Roma in it.³⁹

Pavlína, in character, ends her onstage reminiscence crying: She can no longer remember what her mother looked like. The moderators then announce that public and

³⁸ For more details about the song “Čhajori romaňi” see the section above on *Lety – 1942*. The second song has been discussed in a monograph by Holý and Nečas (1993).

³⁹ David Tišer confirmed in an interview (17 September 2019) that the diversity of those involved was his intention.

cultural figures will read the names of the Romani victims of the Holocaust.⁴⁰ About 15 people take turns reading the victims' names into the microphone. Among the readers is a well-known young female politician who is a representative of the city district where the event takes place, a former spokesperson for the Ministry of Education, a promoter of the Theater of the Oppressed, a representative of the Terezín Initiative⁴¹ – non-Roma and Romani people, elderly people and youth. Each lights a candle that has been prepared for them and places it on the table. The atmosphere is one of ceremony. It is apparent that we have reached the closing. The moderators declare “Amen na bisteras!” (“We will never forget!”) The audience stands and joins in singing the song “Dželem, dželem,” which has been designated the Romani national anthem.

The enthusiastic, spontaneous reactions of agreement from the mostly Roma audience during the evening, as well as their active involvement in the final singing, confirm that they accept the event as their own: this is how they remember – or, more precisely, how they accept a manifestation of collective remembrance.

Music, Remembrance, and Roma in the Czech Lands

There are many ways to comprehend the constitution of the musical remembrance dedicated to one specific historical era – the Holocaust – undertaken by Romani people, which has now been captured by four different ethnographies. Let's start by discussing the interconnection between the majority society and the minority. The Holocaust of the Roma, as a subject connected to music as a remembrance medium of significance, was brought into the public space in the Czech Republic by the pro-Romani organization Slovo 21, together with other organizations of a similar kind abroad. That alliance has enough capacity to organize exceptionally complicated events – such as the *Requiem for Auschwitz* – which attract the attention of the broader public as well as important institutions (embassies, the Jewish Museum, public broadcasters of radio and television and so forth). Of course, neither the locations of these events nor the musical languages used during them have been part of the experiences of the Romani people present here, so in Kansteiner's terms, a representation of their past that they could accept as their own has yet to be created through these events.

However, this alliance and this event did involve Romani youth, for whom it was an artistic experience of an occasion to perform (sometimes their first), and these young Roma realized the significance of the central subject of this event. Some of these Romani performers, especially Pavlína Matiová and David Tišěr, are becoming, in Dan Lundberg's terms, “*expressive specialists*” who have “an important status as qualified

⁴⁰ While I am aware of a certain ambivalence about the concept of the Holocaust of the Roma (see, e.g., Berkyová 2017) I am using this term here as it has been approved of by Romani authorities.

⁴¹ An association of former Terezín ghetto prisoners; see [Terezínská iniciativa \(TI\) – sdružení bývalých židovských vězňů \(terezinskainiciativa.cz\)](https://terezinska.iniciativa.cz) (accessed 3 October 2024).

bearers and interpreters of their groups' cultural identities," especially in a multicultural society (Lundberg 2010: 32). Recall in this regard that remembrance, or in Jan Assmann's (2011) terms, the temporal dimension of a connective structure, is a basic attribute of identity.

When we follow the motif of the majority-minority *pas-de-deux*, David Tišer is its direct embodiment: He comes from a Romani family who are "traditional," he graduated from Charles University in Romani Studies, and he has been a co-worker with Slovo 21 for many years, among other things. In 2013 he established the ARA ART agency (Tišer, interview, 17 September 2019), which initially targeted LGBTQ+ Romani people (an issue which is so unfamiliar as to be unwelcome in the environment of Romani society); ARA ART plays a crucial role today in collective events of remembrance among the Roma. Before producing larger such events in public, ARA ART attempted an event with the format of a remembrance occasion on a smaller scale in the Romani environment when they held a memorial for the legendary Romani singer Věra Bílá (1954–2019).⁴² Expressive specialists like Tišer, equipped with cultural and social capital that allows them to deftly move between both the majority and minority milieux, are not controlled by the syndrome of being a "symbolic nobody," so the way this specialist shapes his presentation of the past does not have the character of harshly confronting the majority, but rather of seeking a format that will be meaningful to the minority. The prestigious production of the *Requiem for Auschwitz* also involved well-known members of the Romani elite, who lent the event their personal moral credit (e.g. Jarmila Balážová), as well as eminent organizations run by Romani elites (the Museum of Romani Culture).

The publicity for this subject then opened up opportunities for others to address it, such as those around Jiří Korman and the students from the Academy of Performing Arts' Department of Dramatic Theater with their piece *Lety – 1942*. Their incompetence in organizational terms and their inexperience made it impossible for their own project to last for a longer time in the public space.

Romani people in the audience for the "Leperiben" events held a dignified minute of silence for the dead, demonstrating that this specific remembrance event for a particular representation of the past as conceived of by a capable expressive specialist, is something they accept as theirs, or in Kansteiner's terms, that they "embrace . . . as their own," including Romani people whose forebears did not suffer during the Holocaust or did not die in the Lety concentration camp or in Auschwitz.

During the most recent remembrance event about the Holocaust of the Roma, the concert by Terne Čhave at the Eternal Memory festival, we ended up in this spiraling movement with an overlap of the *Requiem for Auschwitz* event: Again, the initiator and the main organizer of the event was a non-Romani organization, again the Roma appear

⁴² Of course, this has not been the only such remembrance of a "big Romani star." For years, the annual Khamoro music festival has held remembrance evenings for Romani figures who passed away during the previous year. See the interview with Olga Fečová according to whom public remembrance is part of Romani culture (see Jurková 2018b).

as musicians, and non-Roma predominate in the audience once more. Despite these similarities, however, the course of the event was undoubtedly influenced by the lessons learned from previous remembrance events held by Romani people and the genre of music presented was indisputably Romani – the performers of Romani origin significantly influenced the format for the repertoire, and the performance itself was in the hands of a famous Romani band.

There is one more motif to add to this dance between the majority and minority. This is associated with Aleida Assmann, the wife of historian Jan Assmann, who has been repeatedly cited here. When negotiating the cultural practices related to collective memory, she (2010) differentiates between the dominant mode of forgetting and the mode of remembering; both forms of processing the past can be either active or passive. The active form of forgetting includes cultural practices such as censorship, or the destruction of (material) reminders so that a certain past can be forgotten. The form of forgetting that is passive relates to ignoring relics of the past or allowing them to become so diffused that it is just a question of time before they themselves and what they represent will actually cease to exist altogether.

Aleida Assman calls the passive form of remembrance the *archive*, after what are the most characteristic institutions preserving the memory of the past;⁴³ their basic function is to gather relics for further use. From archives, on the basis of choices for different purposes, these relics can be used in the active form of cultural memory, which Aleida Assman calls the *canon*, and that happens in the public space. The above-described story of how Romani musical remembrance of the Holocaust is constituted involves numerous examples of this phenomenon moving from the passive to the active form of collective memory (the archived *halgató* songs used, e.g. by Dušan Holý for his analysis reach the public space thanks to his publication, or the archived narrative of Mrs. Horváthová published in the book (*Ne)bolí* (“It Does [Not] Hurt”), Kramářová 2005, which was later used during the “Leperiben” event). Archives, those institutions of the majority (predominantly), the collections of which have mostly been fed by collectors who are members of the majority society, are then able to become gold mines for future “expressive specialists” as well as for others involved with minority remembrance.⁴⁴

Especially in relation to Romani people, for whom music is perceived as one of their most distinctive “identity markers,” some authors consider its use to be an instrument unifying them in their political struggle, i.e., in the spirit of strategic essentialism (e.g. Turino 2008: 104–105). Nevertheless, my understanding of why the *halgató* songs were performed during both “Leperiben” and the Terne čhave concert, a genre that certainly

⁴³ This includes the depositories of museums, and in recent decades, depending on the nature of the relics, different storage places for them online as well.

⁴⁴ Of course, it is impossible to pretend the process of archiving involves objectivity of any kind, as described in relation to recordings of Romani music by Kratochvíl (2020). On the use of Vienna’s Phonogrammarchiv in the process of the canonization of the cultural memory of the Roma, see Fennesz-Juhász (2020). That same institution is a “gold mine” for Czech Romani people, as the audio collections of two leading Czech Romani Studies scholars are stored there, Milena Hübschmannová and Eva Davidová.

is not among the most frequent to have been heard by most of the Romani people present (and yet they were still able to accept the events as their own) is different. My understanding is closer to Turino's formulation as mentioned above: "presentations of the deepest feelings and qualities that make a group unique" (Turino 2008: 2). It is exactly in the halgató songs that today's Roma believe their uniqueness is captured, including their unique understanding of it, which the non-Roma can never achieve, as well as its association with previous generations.

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