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Helen "Zippy" S. Tichauer

interviewed by author Richard Newman, author of book *Alma Rosé: Vienna to Auschwitz*

Helen "Zippy" S. Tichauer b. 1918, trained in graphic design; imprisoned Auschwitz but worked in processing - women's camp office, "People would come forward with their fantasy professions (to survive)..Everyone said they could 'write nicely'..Some selected 'to be guests'"; discussion on someone using romantic favor for upward mobility; throughout tapes, Helen can be heard drawing detailed map of Auschwitz & locations where musicians played; first conductor of girl's orchestra (hereafter, "orch"); "When Maria Mandl arrived - she wanted her orch" & Helen played mandolin so volunteered to so she could go to men's camp to see men where "They had 1000's of instruments (stolen) from people that had been brought in..I had never seen so many precious stones, money, richest place on earth!"; Zofia Czajkowska, first conductor of girls' orchestra; orch block "We had good beds"; Nazis' discovery of famous violinist prisoner Alma Rose' (niece/composer Gustav Mahler-Alma's mother, Justine, younger sister of Mahler), "So many famous people coming to Auschwitz, it became unimportant"; "Alma became more important than (Polish) conductor Czajkowska because Mandl wanted to save a Jew"; Commandant Hoess sparing dressmakers for personal use; Alma declared that after war, she would travel through Europe with girls' orch, proud of what they had built, but there were two groups in orch, "One who hated Alma, those who loved her"; Alma hit orch members, "Nothing unusual then, like loving mother hitting child."; Alma used common expression, "You will go to the chimney."; Helen heard Alma scream at someone in French. Second interval: 29:00 breaks away from Helen to interview one of the accordionists who says Frau Schmidt (from clothing department) "famous for her cooking," served dinner to Alma before Alma's death; Alma's demise as depicted in book by Fania Fenelon & film inspired by book "Playing for Time," acc to Helen "fantasy"; truth - Alma's (not a heavy drinker) stomach had been pumped, given med, died in revier (inmates' hospital ward) "from possible food poisoning..taken to autopsy (rare to autopsy a prisoner); Helen searched for Alma in "heap of corpses..recognized Alma because her abdomen had been sewn back from autopsy..eyes eaten by rats."; Helen & interviewer agreed on Czech 1947 book "Extinguished Eyes" (title in question) that chapter was written by "reliable witness" of Alma's experience "because author was there,"; Kitty Hart-Moxon claimed Alma "played for S.S. as much as others."; "Alma possibly died from either meningitis or botulism"; Harper's article; Alma's brother touring America (later Prof at Univ Western Ontario); after entering Auschwitz, Alma's head shaved, hair grew back "funny..wasn't totally gray..she didn't like, so she covered it."; "We (orch) became Mandel's mascot..uniforms nice; male orch "having to play during executions"; girls' orch marching to every performance, i.e. accompanying prisoners' morning/evening marches to forced labor, then rehearsing all day (esp. music of Richard Strauss); orch performed in infirmaries ("most were gased"); more criticism at book/film not portraying "well-organized industry of death...thousands "directed to so-called 'take a shower,'" inaccurate depiction of screaming, "It was very quiet, very militaristic," film's false portrayal of S.S. weeping for Alma; falsely depiction of Alma placed in coffin with Mengele placing Alma's violin on body - "not the

case."; re: people brought in on trucks "average life two wks."; accordionist attributes Alma Rose with her survival.

3rd interval returns to Helen: reference to Alma Rose Collection/London, Ontario; "Alma, so involved in work, ignored "rosette" on face..took job so serious, conducted with (infected) face covered like a mummy..made us laugh..afraid if she interrupted duties, someone could take her place; "Alma had icy expression"-as child, told to put hands behind back in a fall, to protect hands..smashed face in a fall down stairs; Alma's performance of Kreutzer Sonata; Helen again questions accuracy of book/film, references call from actress Jane Alexander after Jane was cast in film "Jane looks very much like Alma."; Interviewer: "Told by Auschwitz survivor that music block was place where men (Nazis) could come to be with girls but stopped after Alma took over - Helen: "Happened too under Alma..but risky..Alma was strict..She saved ALL the girls (from death)."; Interviewer: "Runner for music block also saved"; orch members had privilege with access to camp office; (after Alma's death) "Hilde stayed behind & sang because she could not go see her-too sad"; woman "who worked in revier (did skin treatments for SS & wives) said 'Alma died in her arms. Sheet was brought to cover her body.'"; after Alma, conductor was Russian; Helen: "Alma felt her greatest achievement was developing amateur musicians from all walks of life."; Alma afraid of SS because of their unpredictability; SS accused Alma of favoring Jewish musicians over Polish musicians (Alma felt Polish nationalism interfered); "Alma cried very often"; what it was like rehearsing under Alma's baton; orch never played for selections, hangings, played mostly for loading/unloading trains "to the left, went to crematorium - to the right for work"; Interviewer: "Alma told to stop playing on Budapest arrival of 5000"; orch, illegal to play in different blocks; Sunday morning performances for SS sauna (sometimes inside, sometimes outside);

4th interval: re: Mandl & visit to men's orch; Polish Society; Helen makes corrections on interviewer's book; 5th interval and remaining tape barely audible - appear to be interviewer's personal conversations unrelated to Alma Rose.