

## Violins of Hope Sioux Falls: Never Forget Hope

June 06, 2026 at 7 PM at Hamre Recital Hall, Augustana University

Hosted by Mt. Zion Congregation and Curious Music Collective, Presented by Minnesota JCC

Total 12 instruments we are borrowing from JCC

- **10 Violins:**

[JHV 2 The Zimmermann-Krongold Violin](#) - **Dr. Yi-Chun Lin**

[JHV 6 The Moshe Weinstein Violin](#) - **Lily Yan** (student)

[JHV 18 Shlomo in Auschwitz](#) (decorated with a Star of David in the back) - **Kyra Gurath** (student)

\*[JHV 21 Mother-Of-Pearl Klezmer Violin](#) (beautifully decorated) - **Eva Hernandez** (student)

\*[JHV 23 The Auschwitz Violin](#) - **Alastair Brown**

[JHV 24 The Benedict Wagner Violin](#) - **Dr. Ioana Galu**

\*[JHV 32 Erich Weininger Violin](#) - **Xaria Gurath** (student)

\*[JHV 48 The Sandor Fisher Violin](#) - **Amanda Romani**

\*[JHV 68 The Max Beker Violin](#) - **Rhea Petersen** (student)

[JHV 74 The Barnea Violin](#)

- **1 Viola:** [The Carl Zach Viola](#) - **Kelsey Farr**

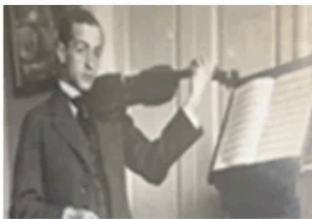
- **1 Cello:** [Cello by Alfred Stelzner](#) - **Sharon Mautner-Rodgers**



Violins of Hope  
Instrument Book

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## 2 The Zimmermann-Krongold violin



Warsaw, 1924

Yaacov Zimmermann was one of the first Jewish violin makers in Warsaw. Shimon Krongold was a wealthy industrialist there and an amateur violinist, who ordered a violin made by Zimmermann. Zimmermann made him a fine instrument with a lovely Star of David inlaid on the back. Inside the violin he glued a label in Yiddish:

“I made this violin for my loyal friend Shimon Krongold,” Yaacov Zimmermann, Warsaw, 1924.

When war broke in 1939 Shimon managed to escape to Russia and ended up in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where he died of typhus towards the end of the war. A few years later a survivor from Tashkent came to the Krongold family in Jerusalem with the story of his death and a violin in hand. Shimon was the uncle of the Krongolds in Jerusalem, who paid for the violin and kept it in memory of their uncle.

It is important to note that before the war Shimon Krongold helped some Jewish prodigal children, among them [Michel Swalbe](#), who used to get music lessons in Krongold’s home. Swalbe later became the leading violinist of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and remembered Krongold as his benefactor.



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## 6 The Moshe Weinstein Violin 1803



1803

The Moshe Weinstein violin, made by Johann Gottlieb Ficker around 1800. This violin was a life-time friend of Moshe Weinstein, our first-generation violin maker. Born in a Shtetl in East Europe little Moishale fell in love with the sound of the violin. It happened when a klezmer troupe arrived in the shtetl to play at a rich man's wedding. While all the children gathered under the table to hide and steal sweets, Moishale was hypnotized by the sound of music. After a few festive days the troupe left and so did Moishale who followed the klezmers out of town. His mother, Ester, looked for the boy to no avail. Well, when he was found and dragged back home, he was first punished and then—got a very simple violin! This was a turning point in our family history.



Moshe and Zehava Weinstein

Moishale learnt to play by himself and later studied in the music academy in Vilna, where he met Golda, a pianist, and both immigrated to Palestine in 1938. Before leaving Europe, Moshe Weinstein went to Warsaw to study with Yaacov Zimmermann to repair string instruments. Since most Jews play violins, thought Moshe, they would need a violin maker in the new land. He first worked in an orchard picking oranges and a year later opened a violin shop in Tel Aviv. Loyal to the tradition of helping out young prodigy kids making their first steps in music, he supported many Israeli talented children among them—Shlomo Mintz, Pinchas Zukerman, Itzhak Perlman and many others.



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## 18 Shlomo in Auschwitz

The history of this violin's original owner is unknown. Its worn condition suggests it endured under difficult circumstances, though no details of its journey have survived.

The instrument gained new symbolic meaning in the documentary film *Le Voyage d'Amnon* (Amnon's Journey), where violinist Shlomo Mintz performed at the gates of Auschwitz. In that moment, the violin returned to a place connected with the broader fate of the Jewish people, its sound carrying memory and meaning. When Mintz played *Ba'al Shem* by Ernest Bloch, the performance gave voice to an instrument whose story remains largely untold—closing a circle between loss, remembrance, and the enduring presence of music.

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## 21 Mother-of-Pearl Klezmer Violin



This hand-made violin, more than 120 years old, is among the most visually striking instruments in the collection. Its craftsmanship reflects the highest standards of violin making, with fine detail evident throughout its structure and finish.

The instrument's defining feature is a Star of David, carefully inlaid in mother-of-pearl. The luminous material catches light with every movement, creating a striking centerpiece on the back of the violin. This symbol connects the instrument not only to Jewish tradition but also to the klezmer musicians who carried music into weddings, celebrations, and community gatherings.

The violin's age and condition preserve a direct link to its time of creation, offering modern audiences the opportunity to encounter both the artistry of its maker and the cultural heritage it represents. Today it stands as a reminder of the beauty, skill, and devotion invested in instruments that gave voice to Jewish life.

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## 23 The Auschwitz Violin



Germany, 1850

Made in a German workshop, c. 1850, and falsely labeled "J.B. Schweitzer," instruments of this type were popular among Jewish amateurs in Eastern Europe, as they were affordable and widely available.

This violin was once played in the men's orchestra at Auschwitz, where music offered both survival and sorrow. After the war, Abraham Davidowitz, a Polish Jew who had fled to Russia in 1939 and later aided displaced Jews in Germany, purchased the instrument from a destitute survivor for \$50, intending it for his young son, Freddy.

Decades later, Freddy Davidowitz donated the violin to the Violins of Hope project, where it was restored to full playing condition. Today, it is performed by leading musicians worldwide, giving voice to the silenced and honoring the memory of those who perished.

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## 24 The Benedict Wagner Violin



1774

This violin was crafted by Benedict Wagner in 1774, placing it among the oldest instruments in the collection. Its construction reflects the skill and tradition of an established 18th-century European violin maker. More than two centuries after it was built, the instrument found its way into the hands of Moshe Weinstein, the first violin maker in the Weinstein family.

Weinstein acquired the violin from a member of the Palestine Orchestra who no longer wished to keep it. The purchase preserved the instrument at a moment when many fine violins were changing hands among musicians in the region. By entering Weinstein's care, the violin became directly connected to the beginning of a family line that would go on to restore, preserve, and share instruments of Jewish heritage.

The Benedict Wagner violin stands today as both an example of master craftsmanship from the late 1700s and as a documented link to Moshe Weinstein's early work as a violin maker.

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## 32 The Erich Weinger Violin



*Workshop of Schweitzer, Germany, circa 1870*

Erich Weinger, a Vienna butcher and passionate amateur violinist, lived a quiet and musical life until 1938, when the Nazis marched into Austria. Arrested and deported to Dachau, Erich somehow managed to bring his beloved violin with him—a fragile link to the humanity the world was losing.

Later transferred to Buchenwald, Erich was no longer allowed to play. Yet he kept his instrument close, guarding it as a symbol of survival and identity. In a remarkable twist of fate, he was released from Buchenwald through the intervention of the Quakers, and he returned to Vienna—only to find himself among the very last Jews able to flee Nazi Europe.

Carrying his violin, Erich boarded an illegal ship bound for Palestine, but the vessel was intercepted by British forces. He was deported to the remote island of Mauritius, off the coast of East Africa, where he remained interned until the end of the war.

Even there, Erich's spirit refused to be silenced. He formed a band with other deportees, performing classical, local, and jazz music in cafés and restaurants, keeping hope alive through sound.

When the war finally ended, Erich reached Palestine in 1945—and his violin came with him once again. This resilient instrument, which witnessed exile, imprisonment, and rebirth, was later entrusted to *Violins of Hope* by Erich's son, Zeev Weinger, ensuring that its song continues to be heard.

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## 48 The Sandor Fisher Violin



Sandor Fisher, born in Romania in 1919, began violin at six and later studied voice and acting. When his father was sent to forced labor, Sandor replaced him, bringing his violin into the camp. Ordered to play for officers, he used the opportunity to smuggle food to fellow prisoners. In 1944 he escaped and joined Soviet forces.

Valeria Teichner was born in Hungary in 1925 and began violin lessons at age six. Deported to Auschwitz in 1944, she became prisoner A-12763 and was separated from her mother. Later sent to the Görlitz labor camp, she was ordered to sing *Lorelei* while playing violin for the commanders. A forbidden gift of cake from a cook led to her death sentence, but at the last moment the capo spared her. She was liberated by Soviet forces on May 8, 1945.

After the war, Valeria and Sandor married in Israel, raised three daughters, and built a family of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Sandor kept his violin close all his life, playing until his final days.

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## 68 The Max Beker Violin



Max Beker was born into a family with a strong musical tradition in Vilna, then Poland. His grandfather had conducted the Czar's brass band, and Max performed with his father and brother to help support the household.

In 1939 he was drafted into the Polish army, but when war broke out he was quickly captured and became a prisoner of war on September 18. Jewish POWs were separated from the others and sent to forced labor, including work in mines and quarries. Max was eventually sent to Stalag VIII-A near Silesia, alongside thousands of French and other prisoners. His fortunes changed when a group of 63 fellow inmates from Vilna pooled their resources and persuaded an Austrian guard to buy him a violin. With it, Max became part of the camp orchestra. After liberation by American forces, he met pianist Fannia—who, with her sister Henia, a singer, had survived Dachau. The two married and began a new life together.

Max later learned that his parents and six siblings in Vilna had all been killed. He joined the Displaced Persons camp in St. Ottilien, where survivors formed an orchestra. In 1948, Leonard Bernstein conducted the ensemble, restoring dignity and hope to those who had lost so much. Max's story is recounted in detail by his daughter in the book *Symphony on Fire*. Today, his violin continues to be heard in *Violins of Hope* concerts and exhibitions.

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## 74 The Barnea Violin



Alfred Bernheim, born 1871, married Berta in 1903 in the south of Germany. They lived in Passau, then a major town, and owned a small shop, Merkur. Soon the small shop was prosperous and became a four-story general shop, catering to all goods and modeled after the largest shops in Paris, boasting the first elevator and telephone in town. Needless to say, it made the Bernheims rich and the town's people jealous.

Alfred and Berta had three children—Helena, Zigbert, and Felix. All three were active sports champions and popular, enjoying a lifestyle unheard of in town. When Alfred and Berta turned 60, they passed the business to their sons, as Helena married and moved away.

In the late 1920s, the Nazis became active in southern Germany, while Passau was one of the first Nazi strongholds. The Hitler family lived across the street from the Bernheims, and so did Eichmann; Himmler taught school nearby. Nazi terrorism was a daily event. In October 1935, the Bernheims were forced to sell their prosperous shop, not before they were marched naked along the main street and publicly

humiliated, and Felix was imprisoned for six weeks.

Realizing further persecution, Zigbert traveled to Palestine and bought land north of Herzliya. He married Alsbeth and left Germany. His parents left for France, where they were sent to a concentration camp. Their daughter Helena managed to release them, and all went into hiding and survived the war.

After World War II, Alfred and Berta settled in Israel with their son Zigbert. Both died in 1953.

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## 25v The Carl Zach Viola



Vienna, 1896

This viola was made by Carl Zach in Vienna in 1896, representing the fine craftsmanship of a late 19th-century European maker. Built during a period of flourishing instrument production in Vienna, it carries the hallmarks of Zach's careful work and attention to detail.

Many years later, the viola came into the possession of Moshe Weinstein, the first violin maker in the Weinstein family. He acquired it directly from a member of the Palestine Orchestra who no longer wished to play it. This transfer added the viola to the growing number of instruments connected with Weinstein's work as a craftsman, dealer, and caretaker of stringed instruments.

The Carl Zach viola endures as a link between European violin making of the 1800s and the legacy of Moshe Weinstein. Preserved with its maker's identity and its history of ownership intact, it remains a valuable piece of both musical and family heritage.

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## Cello by Alfred Stelzner



### Dresden, 1893

It is not clear how this cello came into the collection, or if it was used during the Holocaust, but it was owned by a member of the Palestine Orchestra.

The maker of this cello was Alfred Stelzner (29 November 1852 – 9 July 1906), a German composer and luthier. Stelzner was born in Hamburg, Germany, and educated in music, physics and mathematics. He produced string instruments of his own design in Wiesbaden and then in Dresden.

His instruments received praise and endorsements from major figures of the day, including impresario Alfred Schulz-Curtius, and the German composer Felix Draeseke composed his string quintet in A major, named the Stelzner Quintetto, specifically for Stelzner instruments.



Stelzner began production of his new instruments in 1889 and continued to make them until 1900. He vigorously promoted his instruments through advertising and obtained endorsements from many famous musicians of the day, including Joseph Joachim, Eugène Ysaÿe, David Popper, and August Wilhelmj.

In addition, he helped sponsor competitions in various categories such as symphonies, opera and chamber music. His own works included the operas Rubezahl (1902) and Swatowits Ende (1903), as well as the never performed Kinder des Todes and Cäcilie.

Stelzner's company eventually failed and went bankrupt.

Faced with overwhelming financial difficulties, Stelzner committed suicide at his home in Dresden in 1906.

Please note: The photos included here are of a Stelzner Cello but not the instrument visiting Fort Wayne.

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