

Worship Leader's Musical Helps Soothe Pain of Holocaust Torture

Ruth Fazal's Oratorio Terezin pays tribute to the thousands who died in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II

A Christian woman's oratorio about thousands of Jewish children and cultural elites who died in a Nazi-run ghetto is striking a chord in Jewish communities wherever it plays.

Oratorio Terezin is a 100-minute musical score arranged to Old Testament prophetic Scriptures and the poetry of the children who perished in the Terezin ghetto north of Prague during World War II.

It was composed by violinist and worship leader Ruth Fazal, who employed a 60-voice children's choir, 60 professional adult singers and three internationally acclaimed soloists to accompany the 80-member orchestra.

Terezin, originally known as Theresienstadt, is an 18th century fort built by Czechoslovakian ruler Joseph II to protect nearby Prague from invasion. During World War II, the Nazis filled the fortress with 140,000 distinguished Jewish artists, musicians, writers, children and the elderly, creating a false cultural Mecca to fool the world and the media.

Behind the scenes, though, conditions were horrific; the occupants either died of malnutrition, disease and exposure or

were shipped off to concentration camps. Only 10 percent of the 15,000 children who lived there survived the war. Their poetry and artwork was found years later hidden in stone crevices.

"The Lord showed me He wanted me to write this after a friend gave me *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, a compilation of the poetry and artwork of the children," said Fazal, who travels internationally as a worship leader. "I felt the Lord was saying, 'Ruth, I want you to take the poems and weave them together with Scriptures into an oratorio.'"

"It's essentially about Israel, the bride, being called and wooed to Christ, the bridegroom. It's also a vehicle to impart God's heart for Israel to the church."

Oratorio Terezin made its world premiere in Toronto in November 2003. Then in March, Fazal took a 20-member chorus from New Streams Children's Choir, the 40-voice Bratislava Boys' Choir and the Slovak Philharmonic Choir on a four-city tour of Europe. In April, Fazal and her team will tour Israel. The oratorio will make its U.S. debut in November.

During the European tour, Fazal was honored by the Jewish museum in Bratislava, Slovakia, where the oratorio was also voted the best cultural event in the country. In Bratislava and Prague, public forums on anti-Semitism were held in conjunction with the performances.

"The highlight for me, though, was in Prague," Fazal said. "The Israeli ambassador sought me out after the performance and said: 'I hope tonight never ends. It's like bringing the dead back to life.'"

The daughter of a Church of England vicar, Fazal accepted Christ at 16. After attending Guildhall School of Music in London, Fazal received a scholarship to study the violin in Paris for two years. In 1975 she moved to Toronto, where she is music director at Little Trinity, a downtown charismatic Anglican church.

“During the four years it took me to write [the oratorio], the Lord took me on a journey to the cross, to the heart of Christ’s suffering like I’ve never experienced,” Fazal said. “I understood that every place of suffering ... in our lives is an invitation to intimacy with God.

“I realized ... the only place of cumulative suffering is at the cross. So that is the only way for us to understand the cumulative suffering of the Holocaust.”

Josie Newman in Toronto

For more information about Ruth Fazal and the Oratorio Terezin, visit