



# Defiance at Terezin: Verdi Requiem inspires Czech Artists Last Hurrah

*Mel Meckler*

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Terezin was founded as a garrison town in the late 18th century. Located 60 km north of Prague Czechoslovakia during World War II Terezin, served as a concentration camp principally for Jews being deported from both eastern and western occupied European countries. Terezin was operated by SS Colonel Adolf Eichmann and his SS Nazis staff, the Gestapo and Czech police. It served to conceal Nazi-Germany's planned "final solution" finalized in 1942; as an interim ghetto prior to the transfer of its inmates to Nazi death camps, e.g. Aktion and Auchswitz-Birkenau. Part of Eichmann's planned cover-up required inviting concerned Danish and Red Cross inspectors to witness fake buildings and grounds and attend, as a finale, a concert of Verdi's Requiem performed by camp musicians prior to their departure on the day following. Bold actions undertaken by former composer Rafael Schachter arranged at great personal risk, to revise Verdi's original Latin choral to inform invited inspectors about camp fabrications undertaken by their Nazis oppressors stating in effect that "their day of reckoning will certainly come." Terezin's prisoner musicians and singers volunteered to memorize, sing and play Schachter's ingeniously reworded Verdi's Requiem choral from memory. Renowned concert violinist Bradislav Huberman, then living in Switzerland, decided to suspend his concert tour and career in order to contact and urge other European musicians, still free, to leave for Palestine as soon as possible with visas he had acquired for them and their immediate family in order to begin to organize a Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra. As a result approximately 1000 Jewish musicians and their families escaped Hitler's "final solution" to start what was later to become the world famous Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

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