

Gideon Klein: The musician the Nazis tried to silence

Limmud Festival, December 2019

Dr. David Fligg

Gideon Klein

b. Pířerov 6 December 1919; d. Fűrstengrube (Auschwitz sub-camp) 27 January 1945

Timeline

- 1931: Moves to Prague
- 1933: His first public Prague recital, where he performs at the Prague Conservatoire
- 1938-1940: Concurrently studies at the Prague Conservatoire (piano with Vilém Kurz, composition with Alois Hába), and musicology at Charles University
- 1939 (March): Germany occupies Czechoslovakia (Bohemia & Moravia)
- 1940: Has to perform under an assumed name, Karel Vránek, as the Nuremberg Laws prevent Jewish musicians from performing in public
- 1940: Prevented from taking up a place at London's Royal Academy of Music
- 1941: Transported to Terezín (4 December)
- 1942-1944: Intense musical activities in Terezín
- 1944: Transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau (16 October), to Fűrstengrube shortly after
- 1945: Murdered by the SS during the final liquidation of the camp (27th January)

Selected completed, or almost completed, compositions

Works are published and commercially recorded unless otherwise stated

The Poplar Tree (Topol)

Melodrama for piano and narrator

July 1938.

Publication (edited by David Fligg) in progress; commercial recording not yet available

Four Movements for String Quartet

September 1938.

Divertimento for Eight Wind Instruments

April 1940.

Duo for Violin and Viola in the Quarter-Tone System

February 1940 (fourth movement incomplete)

Preludium for Solo Viola

April 1940

Three Songs for High Voice and Piano, Op. 1

June 1940, with later undated revisions

String Quartet, Op. 2
August 1941, with later undated revisions.

Duo for Violin and Cello
November 1941 (second movement incomplete)

Folksong Arrangements for Male Chorus
April 1942, Terezín

Madrigal No. 1, for mixed chorus
April 1942, Terezín

Bachuri Le'an Tisa (My Boy, Where are you Going?), for female chorus
December 1942, Terezín

The First Sin, for male chorus
December 1942, Terezín

Madrigal No. 2, for mixed chorus
December 1942, Terezín

Spruch (A Saying), for mixed chorus
February 1944, Terezín

Arrangement of lullaby: 'Sh'chav B'ni' ('Sleep, my Son'), for voice and piano
February 1943, Terezín

Fantasy and Fugue, for string Quartet
February 1943, Terezín

Piano Sonata
October 1943, Terezín

Trio for Violin, Viola and Cello
Gideon Klein's final composition.
Completed 7 October 1944, nine days before deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau

Ballad of the Forester
Poem by Gideon Klein, possibly for a vocal/choral setting.
Date unknown, but during his Terezín years.
Unpublished

Further resources

Dopis od Gideona (Letter from Gideon) by David Fligg. P3K publishing, 2019 (in Czech; English version out in 2020)

Various resources about Klein on the Jewish Music & Theatre (Performing the Jewish Archive) website: <https://jewishmusicandtheatre.org/people/3>

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