

Pensacola's 101 Year Old Opera Maven and Holocaust Sleuth



Source: Andy Marlette *Pensacola News Journal* 2009

A few weeks ago I received a phone call from a venerable Pensacola friend and B'nai Israel Synagogue member. She is an independent 101 year old vibrant and well read woman. Last year, there was a wonderful celebration on her attainment of a hallmark as one of the community's centenarians. She is revered by our congregation and the general community because of her leadership in helping to found a regional feeding program as well as enthusiastic supporter of the construction of a much needed new Public Library. She is also an opera maven and as we will shortly see, a holocaust sleuth. All of which figure in the premiere of a holocaust theme opera, [*Out of Darkness*](#) by the Pensacola Opera to be performed at the Opera Center March 31st, April 1st to 3rd. A special performance of *Out of Darkness* is scheduled at Temple Beth El in Pensacola on April 17th.

The message she left bubbled over with compliments for the beautiful performance of a recent production of the *Merry Widow* by the Pensacola Opera that her visiting daughter and son in law took her to watch. They brought her the following day to the Pensacola Library to listen to the Pensacola Opera Artists in Residence (AIRs) perform *Jack and the Beanstock* before an audience of over 100 children. When one of the Opera staff found out that was her 101st birthday, the AIRs and the children saluted her with a rousing rendition of happy birthday.

There is a fascinating story relayed to me by the wife of a fellow Opera trustee who volunteers as head of the Library bookstore. It concerns the discovery in September 2008 of a Holocaust era onionskin Nazi era German Army telephone directory from occupied Paris in 1942. My Opera colleague's wife, then President of the West Florida Library Board, and library volunteers were sorting donations of books and magazines in September 2008 when a hand-bound 96 page booklet Nazi relic was discovered in a brown paper bag of women's magazines contributed anonymously. The original onionskin telephone directory was sent by the Friends of the Pensacola Library to the Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) where it was authenticated. The title to the Wehrmacht directory in wartime Paris was officially transferred by the Friends of the Pensacola Public Library to the SWC's Archives at the Museum of Tolerance in January 2009 as a gift and given the Archives accession number #2008-065. Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the SWC commented:

The Nazis occupied Europe through force of arms and there were many incidents of the Wehrmacht's direct involvement in atrocities. The directory reflects how meticulously everything related to the Nazi Third Reich was organized and recorded.

There was a Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom Ha Shoah) special event held on April 21, 2009 at the Pensacola Library. The event was held to celebrate finding the Nazi era relic and remembering the more than [72,500 French Jews](#), out of a pre-war population of 350,000, who were deported and murdered in Nazi death camps during the Holocaust. Copies of the German Army 1942 Paris telephone directory were displayed at the reception.



Pictures of Cover and Sample page from 1942 Wehrmacht Paris Directory

Source: Friends of the Pensacola Public Library

There was a missing page in the display copy. Enter my venerable friend then in her 90's. She told the volunteer head of the Library bookstore that years earlier there was a article about a German family living in the vicinity. My venerable friend who had kept the article presented it to the library bookstore volunteer. In commemoration of the discovery of the Nazi relic on Holocaust Memorial Day in 2009, Andy Marlette, editorial cartoonist at the *Pensacola News Journal* drew a cartoon depicting the Nazi relic against the backdrop of former Iranian President Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Khamenei. They sponsored annual holocaust denial conferences in Tehran espousing "wiping the Zionist enterprise, meaning the Jewish nation of Israel, off the map of the world".

The Pensacola Opera premiere of [*Out of Darkness*](#) is a work by acclaimed American contemporary composer Jake Heggie. The opera was composed in three separate movements; "Another Sunrise," "Farewell Auschwitz" and "For a Look or a Touch".

The first two movements are based on the poetry and writings of a remarkable Jewish woman survivor of both the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and Auschwitz, [*Sonia Landau*](#), who took the nom de guerre Krystyna Zywulska as a member of Polish resistance. Landau/Zywulska was captured by the Nazis, imprisoned in Warsaw and then sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. She wrote about her experiences in two books, [*I Survived Auschwitz*](#) (1946) and [*Empty Water*](#) (1966), the later about her experiences in the Warsaw Ghetto. She and her family were displaced from Lodz to Warsaw in 1941, spending two years in the Ghetto before her escape to the 'Aryan side'. She remained in post war Poland, continued writing poetry and children stories. With the rise of anti-Semitism during the Communist Gomulka regime, post-the 1967 June War in Israel, she and other Jewish

intellectuals found themselves deprived of state auspices. Her writings were expunged from official bibliographies. She left for West Germany where she died in 1992 in Dusseldorf.

The premiere of *Out of Darkness* will be performed by the talented AIRs of the Pensacola Opera; soprano Allison Nicholas as "Krystyna", mezzo soprano Amanda Fink, baritone Thaddeus Ennen, and tenor Nicholas DeMeo.

We hope that our venerable centenarian opera maven and holocaust sleuth will attend *Out of Darkness* , as we know the Pensacola library volunteer and her husband , a fellow Opera trustee , and perhaps Andy Marlette the *PNJ* cartoonist , will as well.

The author is a Member of B'nai Israel Synagogue and a Trustee of the Pensacola Opera.