

Like Nothing Happened

Lost oratorio bears witness to the dilemmas of Finnish Jews who became Nazi allies

The story of Finnish Jews during the Second World War is unusual. Finland was the only country fighting alongside Germany that did not introduce any antisemitic laws and where, during the war, the Jews could continue their lives alongside their fellow citizens. Finnish Jews have therefore been sensitive to accusations of collaboration from other Jewish communities.

Pre-1939

A versatile cultural life surrounds the Jewish community of Helsinki before the war. The Jewish Drama Society, led by playwright Jac Weinstein, continues to perform Yiddish plays and cabaret throughout the war.

1941

Finland joins Nazi Germany in the assault against the Soviet Union. Finnish Jews find themselves in a conflicted position; they have become brothers-in-arms with Germans.

November 1942

Eight Jewish refugees are handed over to German Security Police.

December 1942

The Jewish leadership in Finland learns about the scale of the on-going genocide of European Jewry. Throughout the war, Weinstein writes poems and skits that describe the despair and persecution of Jews in German-occupied countries.

June 1944

Finland momentarily becomes closer with its German ally. Afraid of a Nazi coup, Jews are prepared to journey over the Gulf of Bothnia into Sweden. Jewish refugees flee but the rescue operation for the Finnish Jews becomes unnecessary, when Germany loses ground in the north.

1948

After the war Weinstein writes his oratorio *Mother Rachel and Her Children*, which describes the persecution of Jews during two thousand years leading up to the Holocaust.

Weinstein's wartime works and his oratorio give us a new understanding of how the Jewish community dealt with the news about the annihilation of European Jewry that trickled through wartime censorship and how the community, trying to come to terms with its own wartime past, was commemorating the Holocaust.



Sissi Selesté (second from the left), a singer in the Finnish army entertainment squads. The swastika visible on the plane was adopted in 1918 as the symbol of the Finnish Air Force.



Jac Weinstein (1883–1976), secretary of the Jewish community of Helsinki, and a central figure in local Jewish culture



Purim story, from material found in 2015. Written in (Latinised) Yiddish by Jac Weinstein, it tells the amusing story of a woman in search of ingredients on the black market to bake *homentashn*.



Front Karolina was a Swedish-language journal for Finnish Jewish soldiers on the Karelian front. During World War II, 352 Jewish men fought in the Finnish army and 40 Jewish women served as paramilitaries.



The Jewish Amateur Orchestra in Helsinki just before the outbreak of WW II. Its director Adolf Fleischner came to Finland from Vienna in 1938. Before the German invasion of Austria, Fleischner was chorusmaster at the Vienna Opera and assistant conductor to Wilhelm Furtwängler.

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When I discovered the Yiddish theatre material in a cellar in Helsinki, in 2005, I was really excited because it gave an insight into the life of the Jewish community and was previously thought of as being lost.'

Jewish Drama Society (Helsinki, 1926)
Private collection of Dorit Skurnik

