

## Holocaust survivors return to Poland with new world fortunes to help rebuild Jewish life

A Wednesday, August 29, 2007 article of the International Herald Tribune reports, they spent their childhoods in the rich, layered Jewish life of prewar Poland, then survived Hitler's mission to wipe out European Jewry in the ghettos and gas chambers of occupied Europe.

Now, men such as Tad Taube, Sigmund Rolat and Severyn Ashkenazy have returned to Poland as philanthropists - after making fortunes in the United States - to nurture a grass-roots revival of Jewish life in their homeland.

And while some Jews in America and elsewhere cannot comprehend why the philanthropists choose to return to a land where their ancestors suffered such pain and loss, members of Poland's Jewish community praise the help as crucial to the small renaissance now under way.

"What the philanthropists have done - along with the importance of the material donation - is also empowered us, encouraged us, let us know we're not alone," said Poland's Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich, an Orthodox leader from New York. "And that cannot be underestimated."

Following Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939, about 3 million Polish Jews were murdered in Nazi-run death camps in occupied Poland. Of those who survived, many later fled in reaction to anti-Semitic violence or repression under communism, which eventually fell in 1989.

Of those who remained, many suppressed their identities and intermarried with the Roman Catholic majority, making it difficult to say how many Jews live in this country of 38 million today. However, some estimates put the numbers of people with some Jewish ancestry at between 10,000 and 30,000.

Taube, Rolat and Ashkenazy say Polish Jews, who are often struggling economically, need help in rebuilding a community that hopes to reclaim its place in a country where Jews lived and prospered for a thousand years.

"The population doesn't have a reasonable chance if there aren't institutions in place to support them," says Taube, who left Poland weeks before Hitler's tanks rolled across the border in their Blitzkrieg attack that started World War II.

And so foreign donors have stepped in to fill the void, funding everything from Hebrew classes and rabbis to big ticket items like the annual Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow and Warsaw's landmark Museum of the History of Polish Jews, due to open in 2009.

Ronald S. Lauder, the U.S. cosmetics heir, was among the first foreign philanthropists to take an interest in rebuilding Jewish life in Poland and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. More recently, as the indigenous Jewish community has grown in this young democracy, more philanthropists have begun to help.

Since launching operations in Poland more than three years ago, Taube's foundation has donated some US\$2 million (€1.45 million) annually and encouraged other donors to contribute another US\$8 million to help fund rabbis, educational programs, summer camps, day schools, as well as the Krakow festival and the Warsaw museum.

Taube says he wants to focus on Poland's living Jews, not on those wiped out in the Holocaust.

"The preoccupation of Jews in most of the diaspora is of Poland as a cemetery for Jews," he said during a recent visit to Warsaw. But his philanthropy efforts are "about Jewish life in Poland, not Jewish death."

Rolat, who closely cooperates with Taube and is involved in a host of similar projects, has also worked extensively in his hometown of Częstochowa to put its tiny surviving Jewish community back on its feet.

And there are signs of renewed vigor - and complexity - in Jewish life across Poland.

Ashkenazy survived the war in an underground bunker in the Polish city of

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## Zenon Brzewski's XXXIII International Music Courses in Łańcut

By: *Jadwiga Inglis*

A magnificent Baroque castle, a beautiful park and a music school in the park, provide a romantic environment for the International Music Courses held each July in Łańcut, Poland. The courses are offered to players of the violin, viola, cello and double-bass, classical guitar, lute, viola da gamba, as well as string chamber orchestras and teachers of string instruments. Originally, the Łańcut course was for students and graduates of Music Academies and Conservatories, but to meet the demand, in the last few years a course for young string instrumentalists has also been offered to gifted pupils from primary and secondary music schools.

Professor Zenon Brzewski, an eminent violinist, pedagogue and friend of talented young people, stumbled upon an idea of organizing summer music courses, thanks to which young Polish string instrument students would not have to spend exorbitant sums of money traveling abroad to improve their skills under internationally renowned teachers, but could meet them at home. The professor spent a long time seeking an appropriate venue for such an event before eventually finding the nearly perfect Łańcut. Probably Europe has no other similar facility: a landmark palace housing a magnificent ballroom (as if tailor-made for hosting prestigious concerts), surrounded by a vast park with a unique atmosphere, with a music school right on its doorstep, full of empty summertime classrooms and with a neighboring dormitory to accommodate and feed course participants.

This is the fundamental proof of the uniqueness of the Łańcut project: students do not seek masters out; masters travel to meet students to share their knowledge and experience. Although until recently the courses were attended by Polish students only, for the past few years young foreigners have begun traveling to Łańcut as well. How were the teachers persuaded to participate in the endeavor in the first place? This shall remain an eternal secret of Professor Zenon Brzewski, the initiator and director of the course for 17 years until his death on February 9, 1993. We will most probably never learn the arguments he used - but an international group of leading teachers did arrive in 1975 to attend the first Łańcut Courses. Ever since those prominent foreign musicians have been unanimous in claiming that they would be hard-pressed indeed to name other European music courses organized in a similarly charming environment. Suffice to say that after making a first time appearance, they were happy to accept invitations to attend again and again, even though working with the young course participants is as intense as it is difficult. They admit to having fallen in love with Łańcut.

Top virtuosos and marvelous pedagogues, such as Marina Yashvili, Oleg Krysa, and Ivan Monighetti of Russia and Ukraine, Wolfgang Marschner from Germany, the Swedish Kurt Lewin, Keng Kok Lee from England, Michael Flaksman of the United States, later joined by Roland Baldini from Austria and the German Claus Reichardt, Helen Brunner from England, Jerzy Kosmala from USA, Prof. Danuta Głowacka - Pitet from France have practically become regulars at the Łańcut courses. They have obviously been working hand in hand with many well-known Polish artists, with Irena Dubiską and Kazimierz Wilkomirski, both doyens of Polish art, in the lead.

There is another secret to uncover when attempting to explain the uniqueness and beauty of the Łańcut music courses. It is possibly crucial. One should never forget the extraordinary atmosphere of openness, friendship, and mutual support, binding teachers and their young charges alike. Such a climate is rarely found at other art events; it allows very intense artistic work to be intertwined with true mental rest, turning Łańcut at courses-time into a really distinctive oasis. Some credit should also go

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## Poland may demand \$20 billion for Nazi destruction of art treasures

By *Judy Dempsey*

Poland's nationalist-conservative government could claim as much as \$20 billion in compensation from Germany for the destruction of its art treasures during the Nazi occupation, in what is becoming a growing dispute between the countries as Polish parliamentary elections approach, officials in Warsaw said Tuesday.

The latest dispute, one of many that have led to a sharp deterioration in relations between Warsaw and Berlin since the Polish government was elected nearly two years ago, linked the destruction of Polish art treasures by Nazi Germany to attempts by Germany to recover art it had transported to eastern territories in what is now Poland to safeguard it from the Allied bombing of German cities.

Since 1991, both governments have been negotiating terms under which items could be returned to Germany, with Poland insisting on its legal right to retain the treasures - which include music scores by Mozart and Bach, and the collections of the former Prussian State Library. The negotiations stalled two years ago.

German officials said Tuesday the issue would become more complicated and emotional, now that Poland has raised the question of compensation as part of a possible resolution.

"Compensation or reparations had never been discussed until now," said a German government official.

### Today in Europe

Victory of new Turkish president breaks grip of secularists Wildfires ignite political turmoil in Greece, Poland may demand \$20 billion for Nazi destruction of art treasures

Poland has claimed legal ownership to the German art treasures, according to Wojciech Kowalski, the Polish government's special envoy assigned to resolve the issue. "During the Allied carpet bombings of several German cities in 1943, the German curators of cultural heritage decided to take the collections from the towns, museums and churches and take them outside the range of the carpet bombing," Kowalski said Tuesday.

"The treasures were moved to Poland, which was then German territory," Kowalski, a law professor at Warsaw University, said. "They hid the treasures in cloisters and palaces in the provinces. These territories became part of Poland. We found the treasures and saved them. Since it was abandoned property and formerly German property, the property was nationalized by the Polish state."

A German government official said Tuesday that the works of art "were the property of the German museums and should be returned." Poland's government, led by Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński, however, has countered that because Germany destroyed many Polish art treasures during the Nazi occupation, it could be entitled to compensation from Germany.

Anna Fotyga, Poland's foreign minister went further. "We estimate our losses at over \$20 billion," she told the newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza.

The issue has been simmering for weeks after the conservative daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung said that Germany should recover the treasures without paying. It suggested that the items in Poland were "beutekunst," meaning looted or stolen art.

This infuriated the Polish government, since beutekunst is a term commonly applied to art stolen by the Red Army when it entered Berlin in 1945 and taken to the former Soviet Union.

"The art we have is not beutekunst," Kowalski said. "We did not steal nor loot this property. It is not German property. It is Polish property."

While the German government has tried to play down the dispute, it is becoming an emotional issue in Poland where Kaczyński appears to be using relations with Germany and the controversy over art as an election

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issue. Kaczyński said Tuesday that Oct. 21 would be the best date for elections, two years ahead of schedule.

"Our impression is that the art controversy and the repeated criticism of Germany by the Kaczyński government is about electioneering," said Peter-Oliver Loew, a Polish expert at the German-Polish Institute in Darmstadt, Germany.

Last week Kaczyński accused Donald Tusk, leader of Civic Platform, the largest of the opposition parties, of having a "fascination" with Germany. He accused Civic Platform of being so close to the European People's Party, the European Union's center-right political party, which includes Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union in Germany, that it accepted German dominance.

Kaczyński said such a close relationship with Germany would undermine Poland's tough foreign policy toward its western neighbor. Kaczyński believes that Poland, having suffered so much at the hands of the Germans during World War II, should be given equal status with Germany in the European Union. In practice, this would mean having the same number of votes or else being capable of blocking Germany and other countries over certain decisions. □