

The Violins of Hope: Stories from the Holocaust via the violins that were there

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The Stories of the Violins of Hope tells the histories of the violins that their owners left behind. (Supplied: Moira Blumenthal Productions)

A new play set to open in Sydney in May will have a very special international guest star.

Stories from the Violins of Hope gives voice to the histories behind some of the violins saved by the Weinstein family of violin-makers since the Holocaust – and local musician Ben Adler will be playing one throughout the show.

Alongside pianist and the show's musical curator Dr Noreen Green, Adler is part of a production adapted from a script by Lisa Pearl Rosenbaum and Ronda Spinak, telling the true stories of musician Holocaust survivors as gleaned by the restorer of their

violins, Amnon Weinstein. Dr Green is the founder and conductor of the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony Orchestra, while Adler himself started the klezmer band CHUTNEY and has toured with the ACO.

The particular instrument Adler will be playing belonged to Dutch Holocaust survivor Joyce Vanderveen, and will be flown from LA to Sydney especially for the play's run.

As a child growing up in Amsterdam, Vanderveen was on her way home after her routine violin lesson when she was intercepted by a shopkeeper. "Run," they said, thrusting her in the opposite direction, away from the Nazis who were rounding up Jews on the next street over. Though Vanderveen later lost most of her family, she survived, bringing with her that violin. It was a beautiful 1920s French instrument chosen especially for her by her father, being red to match her red hair.



Joyce Vanderveen as prima ballerina. *(Supplied: Moira Blumenthal Productions)*

Vanderveen threw herself into the arts in her adult life, as a prima ballerina, musician, actress, and writer. In 2020 her violin became one of the latest of many in the Violins of Hope collection, and her story another that the collection strives to celebrate and commemorate.



Joyce Vanderveen's violin. (Supplied: Moira Blumenthal Productions)

The *Violins of Hope* – the subject of the play – is the manifestation of Israeli violin-maker (or luthier) Amnon Weinstein's labour of love, decades in the making. From their humble origins hidden in a Tel Aviv attic by Weinstein's father Moshe, to their painstaking revival under Weinstein's expert care, the violins of the collection are as diverse as their last owners, but forever connected by their common journey. Moshe, having been based in Tel Aviv in his violin shop since before the second world war, purchased the instruments from their Holocaust-survivor owners. Although the instruments came into his possession legitimately – many of their owners wanted not just money but more so to be rid of the memories – Moshe didn't cycle them through his showroom, instead putting them away. He knew he was not to profit from the violins, but be their keeper.

It was many years before Moshe's now 83-year-old son Amnon Weinstein could face the weight of what was hanging upstairs. He'd never asked questions, but he'd overheard the owners' tears to his father. When met himself by queries from a young boy about the Holocaust, though, Weinstein began to understand how he was perhaps uniquely placed to preserve a part of history.

Co-writer of *Stories of the Violins of Hope* Ronda Spinak explained to [The Australian Jewish News](#), "Music was played in the camps. Music was played in the ghettos, in the forests. But I don't think people have really comprehended what the music meant to people, and that while they didn't survive, their instruments did.

"As you hear the stories of the violins, you're also hearing the incredible family stories woven through." – playwright Ronda Spinak



A violin from the Violins of Hope collection, with a Star of David inlay.

And thus the Violins of Hope was born. The collection numbers over 100 now, and Weinstein performs a soulful moral duty as he repairs each instrument. It's not easy work; even those instruments stored away in his family attic have faced the consequences of age, and some of the violins still brought to him to this day contain ashes.

In *Stories of the Violins of Hope*, and through one of the literal 'stringed survivors', you'll hear tales from the violinist who won't forget her friend but can't bear to play her violin; the railway worker who rescued a violin thrown from a concentration camp-bound train, and of course, you can hear the sound of Joyce Vanderveen's red violin.