



## **Biography of Henry Meyer**

Henry Meyer was born in Dresden, Germany in 1923. Henry and his younger brother, Fritz (Joachim) were considered child prodigies; Henry on violin, Fritz on piano. Soon after Hitler came into power in 1933, Jewish musicians were expelled from German cultural life. In 1936, an opportunity arose for Henry to continue his musical studies and perform in Prague, Czechoslovakia (today Czech Republic). He became well known in Prague as a “wunderkind” and was soon invited back to his hometown of Dresden to play a concert on Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938. He and his father were arrested and after their release, Henry found that travel for Jews was prohibited, so he could not return to Prague.

In an effort to continue playing, Henry joined the Judische Kulturbund in Berlin, which was a Jewish organization formed so that Jewish performers could continue composing and performing music. That organization was disbanded in 1941 leaving Henry unable to perform. Henry’s parents, father Harry and mother Johanna, were deported from their home to Riga and murdered in 1942. One year later, Henry and his brother were rounded up and 1-2 days later, arrived in Auschwitz. After prisoner intake, Henry and Fritz were assigned for labor in Auschwitz III-Monowitz (Buna), a synthetic rubber factory. Fritz fell ill soon after arriving and died. Grieving for his brother and forced to work long hours outside in the winter doing construction work, Henry soon became sick.

Henry was taken to the sick ward where he met a Jewish doctor who had seen him perform in Germany. The doctor gave him medication and got him assigned work cleaning the barracks of the SS medical staff. When that job came to an end, Henry received a “request” to join the band at Auschwitz -Birkenau. Happy to have a violin back in his hand, Henry and other musicians would play music as prisoners were marched to and from work. At one point, Henry was placed in a marching band. Violins were not typical for marching bands; therefore, Henry did not want to be dismissed, so he told them he was a virtuoso on the cymbals (which he wasn’t).

In fall of 1944, the Russians were approaching the camp so the Nazis began forcing prisoners on death marches back to Germany in order to eliminate evidence of what they had done. First, Henry was transported by railcar to Ohrdruf concentration camp, then marched towards Buchenwald. During the march, Henry and three of his friends escaped from the group and waited for the American front to reach them. Two weeks later, Henry was free and in Paris where General Eisenhower’s staff arranged for Henry to immigrate to the United States in 1948.

Arriving in New York, Henry began to rebuild his life through music, studying at Julliard. He would later be a founding member of the world renowned LaSalle Quartet, which he played along with three other Holocaust survivors for 40 years. Henry taught music for 53 years at the University of Cincinnati’s College Conservatory of Music. He died in 2006.