

Social meaning of Roma music during and about the Holocaust

Musical activities by roma people inside the nationalsocialistic concentration- and exterminationcamps – did these happen? Whereas music of other victims is detailed researched, the lack of information about Roma motivated me to examine this question in my bachelorthesis about music of roma people in Auschwitz. Here, several examples about romas making music inside the nationalsocialistic concentration- and exterminationcamps are reported and their meaning inside the camp aswell as for the posterity is analysed.

Despite the horror of daily life, even songs were composed inside the camps. What was the meaning for roma people to make music inside the nationalsocialistic concentration- and exterminationcamps? What is and was the social meaning of these songs for the posterity? These are the questions this paper shall focus on.

Musical activities of Sinti and Roma in the concentration- and extermination camps

Musical activities by prisoners taking place in the nationalsocialistic concentration- and extermination camps may be divided in two categories. On the one hand, there were other-directed activities.¹ Such other-directed musical activities of Sinti and Roma took place in so called 'camp chapels'. Here, musical activities were missused by the camp-observers for the enjoyment of the SS or to make the prisoners marching in lock-steps on their way to work. Sometimes, music was even used to increase the strives of the prisoners during punishments, selections or executions.²

In the exterminationcamp for Roma in Jasenovac, the so called „Auschwitz of the Balkan“, Roma suffered worse conditions than other prisoners, 20.000-50.000 were killed. Here, the SS officers created a cruel torture using forced music:

"Each band consisted by 12 men. They played a whole month. (...) They played for lunch, they played in the evening and on the last day until morning. And in this month (...) they were treated better than the other Roma in Jasenovac.

At (...) the last day of each month after supper the electrical light was turned off and only

1 Cf. Fackler, Guido: Musik als Komponente des Lageralltags; Available: <http://aspm.ni.lo-net2.de/samples-archiv/Samples6/fackler.pdf> (6.12.2011)

2 Cf. Weißbach, Anne Merle: Musik der Sinti und Roma im nationalsozialistischen Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager. Die Bedeutung des Singens im Lager und im Kontext der Erinnerungskultur der Sinti und Roma am Beispiel des Liedes *Aušvicate hi kher báro*; Bachelorthesis, Universität der Künste Berlin 2011, p. 11

the candels were shining (...). And now each of the 12 Roms was praying that the commander woudn't become tired. When he became tired (...), he showed on one of the roma musicians. This one had to put his instrument down, he went through the (...) hall infront of the gate of the casino, where the escort waited to bringt him to the forest. When a shot came from the forest – you could hear it even while playing in the hall – the next one prepared. But he played on, until the commander showed on him.“³

Music here was a possibility to achieve better living conditions for a little while, until being killed.

On the other hand, there were determined music acitivities. Several reports of such activities in concentration camps were passed on. Some people managed to bring their instruments; in Mauthausen, there was even a double-bass constructed inside the camp. But most of the trails hint to singing activities. For example, in her autobiografical work Ceija Stojka is telling about here sister Katharina Kaslow:

„We were already sorted out at that time and we were in the bloc, Kathi was laying up in her sleeping place and looking down. In this moment nothing else mattered to her, and she started singing: 'I know, once there will happen a wonder' (...) The whole song she sang and ended with the words '(...) then we all will go home'. The other women were humming along. As soon as she finished, the beating warden was there. 'What do you scream, what do you sing? You will soon experience a wonder!' the wardens screamed at her. But she was singing it out, she did that.“⁴

More over, whole songs are passed down which were performed in the camps and often even deal with the situation in the camp, as the following song is doing.

The song „Aušvicate“

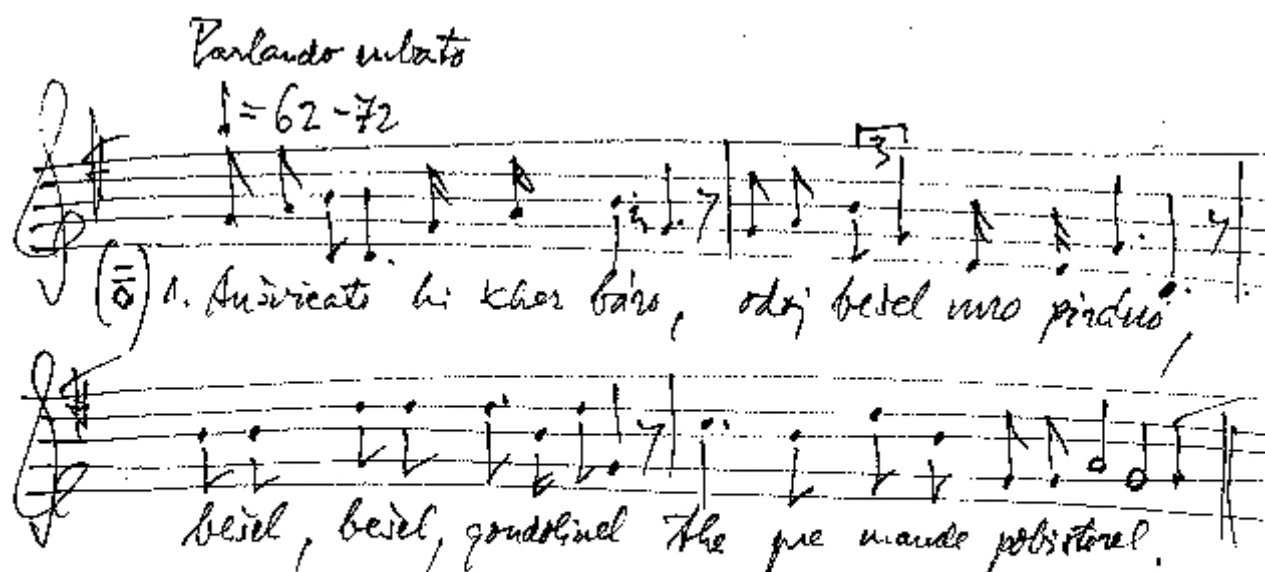
The song „Aušvicate“ was composed on the melody of the old folk-tune „O tu calo cirikloro“. The (partly) new lyrics were composed in the camp in many different versions and tell about the suffering in the camp. It is a song which found its way out of the camps already during the porrajmos. Thus, it can be considered as an important document of oral history for the outside world during the porrajmos as much as for the posterity. The book „Žalující píseň“, meaning 'The accusing song' by Dušan Holý and Ctibor Nečas is documentating this song.

3 Böhmer, Torsten, Meueler, Erhard: Mitten unter uns. Sinti und Roma; Darmstadt 1984

4 Stojka, Ceija: Reisende auf dieser Welt. Aus dem Leben einer Rom-Zigeunerin; Wien 1992, p.151 f; Translated by Anne Merle Weißbach

The Song „Aušvicate“, sung 1975 by Růžena Danielova⁵

Parlando rubato
♩ = 62-72



(0) 1. Aušvicate hi kher báro, odoj bešel mro piráno,
bešel, bešel, gondoline! the pre mardo pobisterel.

- a) 1. Aušvicate hi kher báro,
odoj bešel mro piráno,
bešel, bešel, gondoline!
the pre mardo pobisterel.
- b) 2. Kata Ruska balval phurdel,
mro piráno už man mukhel,
mukhel, mukhel pháripnaha,
hoj na penđas: Áđh devliha.
- c) 3. Ó, tu kálo širiklóro,
lidža mange mro lilóro,
lidža, lidža mra romňake,
hoj som phandlo Aušvicate.
- d) 4. Aušvicate bokha báre,
the so te chal amen náne,
ani oda koter máro,
o blokáris bibachtálo.
- e) 5. Sako dšives amen márel,
andre búřl amen trádel,
the kas kamel mukhel khére,
phenel lake: Pášlov téle.
- f) 6. Až me jekhvár khóre džava,
le blokáris našavava,
le blokáris našavava,
štubinisten napekava.
- g) 7. Kano máro jomi, lave,
naten amen so patri ne!
The me jekhvár khére džava,
le blokáris našavava!²⁾

⁵ Holý, Dušan und Nečas, Ctibor: Žalující píseň. O osudu romu v nacistických koncentračních táborech; Strážnice 1993, p.12 f

Translation of the verses a, c, d and f⁶

a) In Auschwitz there's a big house
and there is sitting my mate arrested,
he is sitting, he is sitting in jail
he is thinking of me and missing me

c) Oh, you little black bird
bring my letter to my wife
so (she knows) that I am arrested in Auschwitz

d) In Auschwitz is a big coldness
and we have nothing to eat
not even a piece of bread
the warder is bad

f) When I once go home,
I will kill the warder
and the stupinistu
I will fry.

Typical for a roma camp song is the sending of a message in the second verse. The black bird may be seen as a symbol on the one hand for the death, the concentrationcamp is th on the other hand for the soul, which is able to leave the area of the death. In none of the versions of the song the message is followed by an answer from the other side. This is reflecting the reality: the outside world from the camps drew very little attention to the porrajmos.⁷ While the third verse is describing the conditions inside Auschwitz, the fourth verse expresses hope („when i once go home“), protest and resistance. The different versions passed on have different passages which appear in many of them; those are describing the collective experiences. The specific characteristics enable the songs to tell the individual fates.⁸

Meaning of singing in Auschwitz

What was the meaning of singing in Auschwitz? What made the people doing musical performances in such a terrible situation? Ceija Stojka is telling:

„People were always singing. Everytime and everywhere. You can even sing on the gallow. I can imagine to sing in order to choke down the pain. I was also singing in camp, many of us did that, just for themself, quite into ourself, without sound, in spirit. That way you can sing to banish the fear or bring away bad thoughts. You think of the song, and you become very different. (...) Often you stood next to a woman and heard, she is humming into herself. That was like a bridgeover from the whole dilemma, the misery. It was not singing,

6 These are the verses sung by Emilie Machálková in the attached recording. Translated from czech to German by Jana Lubinova und Marketa Peluchova, translated from German to English by Anne Merle Weißbach.

7 Cf. Weißbach, p. 29

8 Cf. Weißbach, p. 30

*it was more a crying.*⁹

Survivors of Concentrationcamps were telling that singing, even if only in mind, helped them to survive psychically. Singing in concentrationcamps was a coping strategie, e.g. to handle saidness and to facilitate the work. It helped people to reach a state of conciousness where they were able to forget the real life circumstances and the suffering.¹⁰ For the psychical survival music was as important as nutrition and sleep for the physical survival of many people: It helped people not to resignize considering the daily murder. In Auschwitz, people were not treated as humans anymore, but reduced to a number printed on their skin - music enabled to keep an human identiy.¹¹

Singing was a possibility to break the isolation and enable mutual support. When speaking was forbidden, songs where improvised to replace the speaking. As Ceija Stojka describes, the other women were humming along to the singing of her sister. Often Roma were practising this kind of group-solidarity, mutual consoling, empowerment and the inner escape from the cruel reality of the concentration camp. Songs kept a bit of social warmth in an area of social coldness where people began to give up and stopped to function as social creatures. Also, it was an oral documentation for the outside world: Songs like „Aušvicate“, describing the horror of the camp found their way out of the camps already during the porrajmos.¹² Even as a warning to the roma community in the outside world can be considered the new lyrics on the song „Lili Marleen“. The original is a popular song from war, sung from the perspektive of a soldier who is going to war and saying goodbye to his love. Ceija Stojka tells about this song:

„Just after coming in the camp, we heared it from other prisoners. Every once a while, when there was no overseer nearby, somebody sang it quietly. The melody was like 'Vor der Kaserne, vor dem großen Tor...' and here the lyrics:

*'We arrived in Auschwitz-Paradies, Children, let me tell you, this area is bad, nowhere is a house to see, we have to leave through the chimney, oh weh, Lili Marleen. In our camp there is a hospital, ah, who comes in there, won't come out again, and if we want to see us again, we all have to go through the chimney, oh weh, Lili Marleen.'*¹³

The new lyrics may be interpreted as a cry for help. It has a warning message for the new arriving people not to go to the hospital, which was actually not a place to get healthy again, but to be burned.

Singing itself was an expression of resistance against the destruction of human identity. It was expressing the will to survive and not to give up in the misery. In correlation with musical activities, people developed resistance against the agressor, the protection of self-respect, solidarity and decidedness. Furthermore, singing a folk song was also symbolizing and own cultural indentity and

9 Stojka, Ceija: *Reisende auf dieser Welt. Aus dem Leben einer Rom-Zigeunerin*; Wien 1992, p.151 f; Translated by Merle Weißbach

10 Cf. Weißbach, p. 31 f

11 Cf. Weißbach, p. 33

12 Cf. Weißbach, p. 34

13 Stojka, Ceija: *Reisende auf dieser Welt. Aus dem Leben einer Rom-Zigeunerin*; Wien 1992, p.151 f; Translated by Merle Weißbach

group solidarity. Above that, the lyrics of the song „Aušvicate“ appeals and encourages to resist. The resistance expressed by the songs are fitting to the several reports of resistance inside the concentration camps by roma people.¹⁴ Also the following song, which was passed on in a radio-feature of „Radio Romano Centro, sung by Tamara from Novi Sad, contains this appeal to resist:

Phabol lamba, merel lamba

The light is burning, the light goes out in the Straflager
they sit there and cry there, the Roma of Serem
they speak when the evening comes
to come home who is a soldier
Lager, open your doors to see my family
Family, come and take me
we will not give up
while we are in the lager
we will not give up.¹⁵

Meaning of singing in the memorial context

Songs composed in or telling about the life in camps were sung and passed on also after 1945. In order to analyse the social meaning of these songs for the posterity, here a short overview on the situation of Sinti and Roma after the Porrajmos shall be given. Mostly, the Genocid on Sinti and Roma has been pushed out if the general conciousness and neglated for a long time. There was very little interest in the faith of Sinti and Roma. A scaring example for this is the former camp in Lety, where Roma people were imprisoned before being transported to exterminationcamps. The camp was replaced by a commercial pig-farm, which despite protest exists there until today. In the sixties of the last century, when compensation money was paid to several vicitims of nationalsocialism, no compensation money would ever be paid to Romas. This decisions where made by german judges, who often enough had been in charge already between 1933 and 1945. In 1982, it was the first time in history that a german chancellor officially accepted that the nationalsocialistic crimes done to Sinti and Roma had been a 'genocid'. Anyway, a big german newspaper ('Die Welt') still in 2005 claimed that Romas where persecuted due to their cultur and lifestyle, not due to a racist ideologie but due to socialcultural reasons.¹⁶

Only little people survived the the Porrajmos, many of these were not able to write. Also Sinti and Roma were often not interested to make their faith public. Dominant reasons were fear, shame and a longing not to have to remember the cruelties of the past. Some people even hid their camp-number

14 Cf. Weißbach, p. 34 f

15 Radio Romano Centro: Ceija Stojka über die Auswirkungen des KZs (RRC 14); Availible: <http://emap.fm/ondemandpart.php?id=21> (10.7.2015);
Translated by Hristo Kyuchukov

16 Cf. Weißbach, p. 36 f

with a plaster; also, people were afraid to bother their children with their stories.¹⁷

Due to these reasons, there is a lack of testimonies of the porrajmos. But: people went on singing the songs from concentration camps and even wrote new ones telling about the Porrajmos.

Růžena Danielová, who was imprisoned in Auschwitz, is in some sources called the composer of the song „Aušvicate“. Singing this song after 1945, she introduced it with the following words:

„I have to tell you why I sing this song and why I want it to be known in the whole world. I was imprisoned for two years and when I got the most cruel strokes, the flesh was falling from my knees, the same with my elbows. My kidneys are broken until today - under the most devilish strokes I composed the song that I will sing for you. I am not sure whether I will be able to finish it without crying.“¹⁸

After singing the song in Romanian, she translated it into Czech language and describes her experiences in the concentration camps. She finished it with the following sentences:

„My five children died in Auschwitz: Jenda, Majduška, Thomáš, Mišánek and Suzanka – and my husband as well; he was a very good man! Of the whole family, I am the only one who survived.“¹⁹

The meaning of singing in the memorial context may be divided into three.

Firstly, there is a **historiographical and political function**. The song 'Ausvicate' *„functions as a 'reflexive bridge' (...) leading the scholars back (...) to the fate of the Roma in Nazi camps“*.²⁰

The songs are an important memorial of the porrajmos. They spread knowledge about the crime and are a historical document of the conditions in Auschwitz, the personal experienced fate and the emotions of the people. However, due to ever newly made experiences of imprisonment, forced labour, hunger and violence after 1945, many songs lost their function of being reminders especially of NS crimes.²¹

Secondly, there is a **rehabilitational and psychological function**. Music has an important psychohygienical function; it enables to get distance without blocking out what happened.²² It is a way to express feelings and thereby reduce the tension:

„In old songs the Rom expresses everything hurting him (...), all his grief. It was described only that what the Roma experienced. Aunt Gescha often sang a song for her brothers who were killed in the concentration camp. She sang it also for her father and her mother. As long as you sing about a Person that isn't alive anymore, it is still there. And

17 Cf. Weißbach, p. 38

18 Holý, Dušan and Nečas, Ctibor : A Auschwitz il y a une grande prison; in: Cahier de Littérature orale no 30; Paris 1991, p.23; Translated by Andreas Zimmer

19 Holý, Dušan and Nečas, Ctibor : A Auschwitz il y a une grande prison; in: Cahier de Littérature orale no 30; Paris 1991, p. 23; Translated by Andreas Zimmer

20 Holý, Dušan und Nečas, Ctibor, quoted in: Hegburg, Krista: Unknown Holocaust: Accusation, Voice, Testimony; Columbia University 2008, p. 5

21 Cf. Weißbach, p. 38

22 Cf. Weißbach, p. 46

often a woman moans: 'Dear God, why did this have to happen to us? Where is my father? Where is my little daughter? Why do of I of all people have to suffer so much?' (...) And the other women responded: 'Wait a little, there will come the time, when it will be different again. But though then, when it will be changed, those will not be with us.'²³

Ceija Stojka describes the active commemoration through music, which enabled mutual consolation and support to overcome the situation. In common memoration, also after 1945 were composed about the holocaust. The following song was sung 1990 by Paula Nardai, who was transported to Auschwitz in 1943. It is describing the porrajmos from a post-perspective:

Traurige čerheni²⁴

Trauri-ge čer-he-ni ando u-žo ne-bo
 an-de mro šat-no khe-re
 a-ri man ligne and' mro šat-no vo-dro
 mra djuvla mu-klom le ča-vo-renca

*Traurige čerbeni ando učo nebo
 na man bleibens ande mro šatno khere
 ari man ligne anda mro šatno vodro
 mra djuvla muklom le čavorenca
 Traurige čerbeni ando učo nebo
 legede man anda mro šatno khere
 ando logorima legede
 odoj tharde man upro prabo.*

²³ Stojka, Ceija: *Reisende auf dieser Welt. Aus dem Leben einer Rom-Zigeunerin*; Wien 1992, p. 142 f; Translated by Anne Merle Weißbach

²⁴ Heinschink, Mozes und Hemetek, Ursula: *Lieder im Leid. Zu den KZ-Liedern der Roma in Österreich*; in: *Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes: Jahrbuch 1992*; Wien 1992, p. 81 f

A said star at the high sky
I have no staying in my flat
they took me out of my own bed
I had to leave my wife and children

A said star at the high sky
they took me out of my house
and then they brought me to the camp
there I was burned to ashes.

Thirdly, the songs have a **funcion for the identity and the cultural being** of the people. Singing in a group gives a social bonding to the individuals and thereby acknowledgement, security and social recognition. It is an expression of identity as well within the roma-community as an expression of roma-identity to the outside world. Due to this, it is also an expression of cultural resistance towards an assimilation.²⁵

A last example may show the importance of music in the memorial context until today. Inspired by an international youth meeting on the occasion of the 2. August 2014, 70 years after the extermination of all remaining Roma in Auschwitz, the two young rappers Purse and T-MOE wrote the song „Ihr seht was passiert“ („You see what is happening“). This song is supposed to remind of the extermination of Roma and telling about the pain as well as the grief of survivors and descendents. The song can be watched with a music-video at youtube. The video is showing a NS-officer at his 'work' and ends with the liberation of the vicitms and a chained officer. The lyrics are pointing to the fact that genocid was neglated in the general conciousness for a long time. Furthermore they are emphasizing the ongoing political and socially developements, which are still meaning a massive discrimination and exclusion for Romas, including recent deportation of Roma with immigrant background. The young artists draw attention to the fact that the reminding of former injustice has to include a critical view on the recent developements of the society.²⁶

25 Cf. Weißbach, p. 46

26 Cf. Amaro Drom: Erinnern bedeutet, einen Blick in die Gegenwart zu werfen!; Availible: <http://www.amarodrom.de/erinnern-bedeutet-einen-blick-die-gegenwart-zu-werfen> (10.7.2015) / Purse and T-MOE: Ihr seht was passiert; Availible: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFlw1Yw7jwc> (11.7.2015);

Ihr seht was passiert – You see what is happening²⁷

<p>Von wegen Familienlager, ihr könnt vieles labern uns umzubringen, das war eure Schandtat jetzt denkt ihr, ich schaue tatenlos zu falsch gedacht, denn ich gebe meinen Senf dazu Ihr denkt es wäre jetzt taktisch klug wieso, vielleicht ist es jetzt mein letzter Versuch euch meine Meinung zu sagen es nicht mit mir zu tragen seit August, Auschwitz-Birkenau</p> <p>Fast dreitausend Leute wurden umgebracht mach dich schlau, find es raus was in dieser Nacht passiert ist ohne Atem, ohne Worte flossen Tränen übers Gesicht jetzt kommt ihr vorbei und wischt es weg als wär das nichts ich seh in euer Gesicht und ihr tut nichts das Blut unser Vorfahren ergießt sich über uns jetzt sind wir dran, lasst uns sie verändern unsere Zukunft</p> <p>Schmerz, Leid und den Hass gegen Rassen Tränen und Tod hat uns Auschwitz hinterlassen das Schweigen ist gebrochen, jetzt reden wir die Stimme der Zukunft, ihr seht was passiert</p> <p>Früher schickte man Zigeuner mit Zügen in den Tod heute schieben sie Roma mit Flügen in die Not Deportation sind die Regel, nicht die Ausnahme, Asylkompromiss, Wilfried findet ihn herausragend</p> <p>Manche arbeiten jetzt früh, andere fliegen früher raus die Hoffnungen von vielen sind auf dem Müll gebaut diskriminiert von der Mehrheit der Gesellschaft, ausgegrenzt, Leben in der Zeltstadt</p> <p>Zugleich leben viele unter uns, du erkennst sie nicht verschweigen wer sie sind weil sie zu ängstlich sind Massenmord an Vorfahren prägt ihre Geschichte Jahrzehntelang wie dieser, unterbelichtet so viele sind integriert und arbeiten hart doch die Mehrheit kommt nicht auf diese Tatsachen klar bist du nicht schmutzig, kriminell sondern seßhaft, erfolgreich passt du nicht in ihr Bild von Roma, Zigeuner</p> <p>Schmerz, Leid und den Hass gegen Rassen Tränen und Tod hat uns Auschwitz hinterlassen das Schweigen ist gebrochen, jetzt reden wir die Stimme der Zukunft, ihr seht was passiert</p>	<p>Family camp, as if! You can prate anything, to murder us, that was your turpitude now you think I would watch deedlessly, you think wrong, I do put my oar in You think it would be tactically clever, why, maybe it is now my last try to tell you my opinion not to carry it inside me since august, Auschwitz-Birkenau</p> <p>Nerely threethousand people were killed, search for information, find out what happened in this night without breath, without words tears were running over the face now you come by and wipe it away as if it was nothing I look into your face and you do nothing the blood of our anchesters is outpouring on us now it's our turn, let us change it our future</p> <p>Pain, harm and the hate against races tears and death Auschwitz has left us the silence is broken, now we talk the voice of the future, you see what is happening</p> <p>In the past, gypsies were sent by trains into death today roma are pushed of by flights into plight deportation is the norm, not the exception Asylum-compromise, Wilfried likes it outstanding</p> <p>Some people work early now, others get the chop the hope of many people are buildt on the trash discriminated by the majority of the society excluded, life in a tent city</p> <p>At the same time, many are living among us, you don'trecognize them concealing who they are because they are too afraid mass-murder on their anchesters shaped their story for decades like this, underexposed so many are integrated and work hard but the majority doesn't get on with this fact if you are not dirty, criminell but settled, successful you don't fit in their image of roma, gypsies</p> <p>Pain, harm and the hate against races tears and death Auschwitz has left us the silence is broken, now we talk the voice of the future, you see what is happening</p>
--	---

²⁷ Purse and T-MOE: Ihr seht was passiert; Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFIw1Yw7jwc> (11.7.2015); Transcribed and translated into English by Anne MerleWeißbach

Attachment

1. „Aušvicate“, sung by Emílie Machálkova²⁸
2. „Angekommen sind wir in Auschwitz-Paradies... / Lili Marleen“, sung by Ceija Stojka²⁹
3. „Phabol lamba, merel lamba...“, sung by Tamara from Novi Sad³⁰

28 Radio Romano Centro: Ceija Stojka über die Auswirkungen des KZs (RRC 14); Available: <http://emap.fm/ondemandpart.php?id=21> (10.7.2015)

29 Radio Romano Centro: Ceija Stojka über die Auswirkungen des KZs (RRC 14); Available: <http://emap.fm/ondemandpart.php?id=21> (10.7.2015)

30 Radio Romano Centro: Ceija Stojka über die Auswirkungen des KZs (RRC 14); Available: <http://emap.fm/ondemandpart.php?id=21> (10.7.2015)