

INSTRUMENTS OF INSPIRATION

Violins of Hope comes to Phoenix

BY ALISON BAILIN BATZ



Music has the power to break down barriers, to unite us. And now through March 26, some of the most inspiring of instruments are coming to Phoenix. Known as the Violins of Hope, the instruments are restored violins owned by musicians during the darkest of times: The Holocaust.

“Violins of Hope tells the remarkable stories of violins played by Jewish musicians during the Holocaust. Today these instruments serve not only as powerful reminders of an unimaginable experience but also reinforce lessons of tolerance, inclusion, and diversity,” says Rachel Hoffer of Violins of Hope Phoenix.

The violins were first discovered by Israeli violinmaker Amnon Weinstein, who, as a young violinmaker more than 50 years ago, was asked to restore a particular violin.

“The customer shared with Weinstein – who himself lost hundreds of relatives during the Holocaust – that the violin was played by a musician at Auschwitz as he marched to the gas chamber,” Hoffer says. “The musician was spared by the Nazis but forced to play at the camp afterward.”

Weinstein was unable to restore that instrument, as the memory was too painful. But in 1996, Weinstein put out a worldwide call for violins from the Holocaust.

“He sought out to restore every single one he could find as a way to reclaim his lost heritage and to give a voice to the victims,” Hoffer explains.

The Violins of Hope (www.violinsofhopephoenix.com) have now been played in concert halls and exhibited in museums worldwide. They’ve been featured in books, print, film and television, and their stories and messages have impacted thousands of individuals.

“And now, thanks to the Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix and other community partners, Violins of Hope is here,” Hoffer says.

Over the next two months, the Violins of Hope program will feature more than two dozen events showcasing the role of the violin and music not only as an important aspect of Jewish culture but also as a symbol of strength and optimism in the face of adversity.

A sampling of upcoming events in Phoenix: A free photography exhibit by renowned artist and photographer Daniel Levin called *Amnon Weinstein, The Man Behind the Music* at the Cutler-Plotkin Jewish Heritage Center (Feb. 3-Mar. 27), a ticketed theatrical performance recounting French writer Charlotte Delbo’s survival during the Holocaust called *Who Will Carry the Word* at Grand Canyon University (Feb. 16), the Arizona Opera’s performance of *Defiance through Art*, with operatic selections from *The Emperor of Atlantis* and *A Beautiful Place* at the Heard Museum (Feb. 19), and a ticketed concert with pianist Elizabeth Pridonoff and violinist Steven Moeckel at the Phoenix Art Museum (Feb. 20).