

AMERICAN FILM FOUNDATION  
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Press Release

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Pacific Palisades -- Tales of trials-by-fire and inspiration sometimes seem as common as sunny days in Southern California. But the story of Herbert Zipper--conductor, Holocaust survivor, music educator -- is surely unique.

Zipper was an emerging young conductor-composer in Austria when the Nazi takeover sent him in 1938, along with thousands of others, to the Dachau concentration camp. While there, Zipper helped lift the spirits of his fellow prisoners by forming a secret orchestra. Its members played makeshift instruments made from scraps of wood, and held clandestine concerts in an unused latrine. He later would use music again to dramatically boost morale when, in 1945, he organized a concert in a bombed-out building in Manila, the Phillipines, shortly after the city's liberation from the Japanese, beginning the healing process for war-ravaged Filipinos.

On April 22, the television premiere of a documentary on this extraordinary man's life will be broadcast on KCET/Channel 28. "Never Give Up: The 20th Century Odyssey of Herbert Zipper" chronicles the life of a man who, unbowed by his wartime ordeals, came to America and pioneered bringing professional orchestras into the inner-city schools of America.

"Even with all the things I've seen, I've never lost hope," Zipper said.

The April 22 broadcast of the film, directed by Santa Monica-based Terry Sanders, and produced by Sanders and Freida Lee Mock, is scheduled in honor of Zipper's 93rd birthday on April 27. The movie was nominated for an Academy award for Best Documentary Short in 1996 and was exhibited at a special screening at the U.S. Holocaust Museum. It has received numerous other awards.

It was in Dachau that Zipper learned the lesson that music and the arts are essential to human beings' very existence. It was a lesson that was to motivate him throughout his life, and one that he continues to share with his students.

Zipper, a Pacific Palisades resident, was released from the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1939 and went to the Phillipines to conduct the Manila Symphony Orchestra and to marry his longtime love, Trudl Dubsky. When, in 1941, the Japanese invaded the Phillipines, Zipper was imprisoned again, this time in a Japanese concentration camp. After many months, he was released and worked for the underground throughout the war years. He later reassembled the orchestra for the liberation concert.

In 1946, Zipper and his wife moved to New York, where he taught music history and music theory at the New York School for Social Research. During the next half-century, Zipper founded and conducted the post-war Brooklyn Symphony and promoted the idea of bringing concert music into local schools in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Manila and many other cities. He has founded more than a dozen community arts schools.

The conductor was born in 1904 in Vienna, Austria, and was educated in the finest academies. He became a conductor-composer in Germany in the early 1930s. In 1976, Zipper's wife died. She had been a well known dancer and artist. Zipper, however, continued on. By the age of 87, Zipper had been to China ten times, teaching conductors, composers and instrumentalists about Western music.

"What struck me about Herbert Zipper's long and distinguished life," said filmmaker Terry Sanders, "and made me want to make a film about him is that, in spite of the horrible ordeals of Dachau and Buchenwald, he has always remained an optimist, a positive force for good in the world, never allowing himself to become embittered or waste time with feelings of hatred."

"Never Give Up," will air at 10 p.m. on Tuesday, April 22.