

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Beerman raises the bar in varied musical career

By JENISE FOUTS

Sentinel Staff Writer

From synagogue to strip club to symphony — to Auschwitz.

While the musical influences on Dr. Burton Beerman have been many and varied, perhaps none has so captivated him as the memoirs of a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust.

Beerman was only 8 when he read a book on music theory and promptly wrote his first symphony. Impressed with the music at his synagogue in Atlanta, he wrote a composition for its cantor who laughed at it and promptly ripped it into pieces.

But soon African-American Gospel singers were paying him five dollars for each song he wrote for them. "A little Jewish boy writing Gospel music for a black group in segregated Atlanta," Beerman observed with wonder at his early roots.

At 10, 11 and 12 he was sneaking into the Peacock Club to play saxophone and sing "do-wops" in the background for such notables as Bo Diddley. Beerman continued to play in strip clubs and drink moonshine on breaks, yet he also played clarinet for an amateur symphony group.

In time he earned his doctorate of musical arts from the University of Michigan. Beerman joined the staff of Bowling Green State University's College of Musical Arts in 1970 and became director of its renowned MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music. He also founded the New Music Festival at BGSU which has 1,200 pieces submitted from around the world.

Some time ago he was approached by Bryan Polacek, a baritone saxophone player with the Atlas Saxophone Quartet, to compose a multimedia composition for them based on the events of the



Burton Beerman

Holocaust.

"At first I had no musical solution for such a work," Beerman wrote in "Tikvah's" program. "... (W)hat music could one write to express the horror of such an event?"

But he met Philip Markowicz, a Polish native living in Sylvania who survived the Holocaust. He had been writing his memoirs, entitled "My Three Lives," when he met Beerman. The composer created "Tikvah: A Concert of Hope and Remembrance," based on the elder man's life story.

The 74-minute theatrical chamber composition includes dance, video, narration by Markowicz, soprano soloist and saxophone quartet. (See the accompanying story on "Tikvah.")

"This is a special work for me," admitted Beerman. "I wrote it while I was dying."

On June 27, 2003 he was struck by a truck. Emergency room personnel concluded he had only a dislocated shoulder. But his wife, Celesta Haraszti, insisted doctors at Cleveland Clinic check him. When one physician finally opened his flesh, he described the pulverized mess as "sawdust."

A month later Beerman passed out. Doctors did a CT scan and discovered blood clots on his lung. After staying in the hospital he began physical therapy. But when a thera-

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—Burton Beerman
on the Holocaust

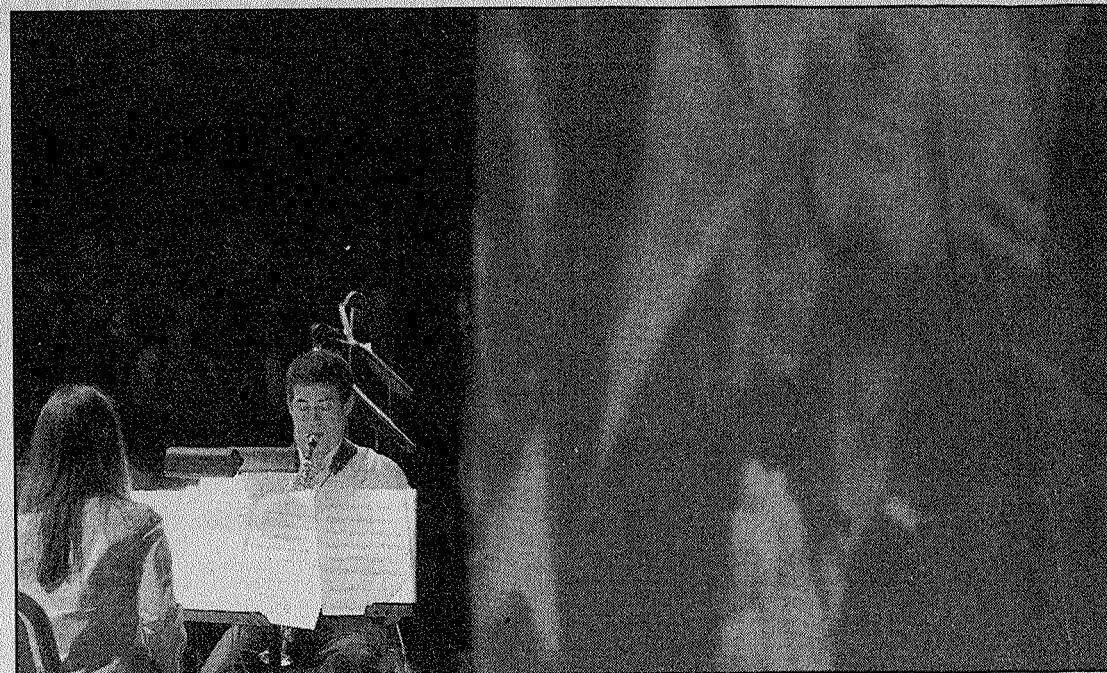
pist pulled on his injured arm, he began to bleed to death, his entire left side turning black with seeping blood from the thinner he was taking for the clots.

Beerman credits his wife with being his champion each time. "She saved my life three times this year alone," he stated.

During his recovery Beerman continued to work on "Tikvah." The music he composed included early hymns he remembered from his childhood in the synagogue, and there was pleasure in writing the concert for saxophone knowing it was outlawed by Hitler as being "Satan's instrument" used by black jazz and Jewish artists.

"'Tikvah' is a story of the Holocaust, of the Holocaust of mankind. We constantly repeat it, but we insist on surviving." Beerman explained he included video images of the dead and surviving skeletal humans in the concentration camps to force it into the face of his audience.

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Michael Lehmkuhle/Sentinel-Tribune

Members of the Atlas Saxophone Quartet perform 'Tikvah' at BGSU

Holocaust song BGSU composer tells survivor's story

By JENISE FOUTS

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"Reason for Arrest: Jew."

For the three-lettered "crime" of being born an ultra-orthodox Chassidic Jew in Poland before the Nazis — his first life — Philip Markowicz was sent to the Lodz Ghetto, then the infamous death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

He survived by sneaking into a work detail when guards weren't watching. By the time he was liberated by American troops in 1945, he had survived starvation, whippings, a death march and the rigors of slave labor in several concentration camps — his second life.

He met his wife, Ruth, in a displaced persons' camp in southern Germany, emigrated to America in 1950, raised a family and set up a successful business in Toledo — his third life.

Today at 81, with a lion's mane of white hair, Markowicz still has his arrest papers. Typed in under "reason for arrest" is the word "Jew" in large letters.

Markowicz's memoir, "My Three Lives," inspired Dr. Burton Beerman of Bowling Green State University to compose a multimedia, theatrical composition entitled, "Tikvah: A Concert of Hope and Remembrance."

It consists of nine movements with music performed by the Atlas Saxophone Quartet. Professional soloist Andrea Rae of New York, Markowicz's granddaughter, sings portions of his memoirs which Beerman set to music.

Markowicz narrates portions of his memoirs

while images of Hitler, Nazi soldiers and vacant-eyed, skeletal Jews liberated from the camps fill the video screen, compiled by digital artist Heather Elliott-Famularo. Interpretive dance is performed by international artist Celesta Haraszti, Beerman's wife.

Though "Tikvah" was performed on April 26 in the Bryan Recital Hall at BGSU to a standing-room-only crowd, its official world premiere will be May 10 in Atlanta's Morris and Rae Frank Theatre.

That will be followed May 25 in America's First Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills, Mich.

Future plans for "Tikvah" include additional national performances at universities and Holocaust memorials, a CD, international performances and a DVD.

Markowicz was present for the BGSU premiere. He described watching and hearing his life's story as "a mixture of sadness and happiness, what life is."

He expects his memoir to be published by the end of this year.

His son, Dr. Allen Markowicz, noted his parents' marriage in the displaced persons' camp was the first wedding at the site, and he was the first baby born in the camp.

"As he says in his book, never in a million years would he dream of the life he's having now (back then) in 1945. It wasn't conceivable; in the realm of fantasy."

Persons interested in attending the Michigan performance of "Tikvah" may call (248) 553-2400 to reserve seats.