

PROGRAM FROM PREMIERE PERFORMANCE OF WILLIAM
WEBSTER'S ODE TO ANNE FRANK

Anne Frank in the World
Menlo Park Recreation Center
700 Alma, Menlo Park

Opening Reception
October 2, 1994
4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Program
5:00 p.m.

World Premiere

Prelude to Intolerance:
Meditations on the Life of Anne Frank

A succession of musical images for violin and piano

by

William Byron Webster

Violin: David Nebenzahl
Piano: William Byron Webster

This programmatic composition for violin and piano attempts to capture in music images inspired by the life of Anne Frank with specific reference to particular historical events, but evocative too of recurring archetypal situations in the all-too-human experience of humanity through the ages in relationship to the theme of intolerance.

The agitated swirling motif that opens the work suggests Fortuna, the Medieval and Renaissance motif connoting the unpredictability, uncertainty, and ambiguity of human destiny. The following theme characterizes the carefree childhood of Anne Frank leading a completely normal existence in Holland during the 1930s even as the lives of Jewish children and adults in her German homeland assume the desperate proportions of a nightmare. A musical portrait of Otto Frank, Anne's father, follows, emphasizing both his strength of character, resourcefulness, but also his kindness of heart that endeared him to his Dutch friends and employees, inspiring in them a loyalty to him and his family that enabled the Franks, the Van Dannels, and Mr. Dussel to hide for two years from the Nazis. Anne's happy innocent childhood before the impending nightmare is briefly recalled. A quietly ominous march intrudes, suggesting the mists of fear oozing throughout Europe and even heard across the Atlantic in distant America, though generally ignored that both precede and encourage the Nazi storm that will engulf the lives of hundreds of millions. A theme imbued with the spirit of romantic yearning evokes the transition from girlhood to adolescence for Anne on the eve of the flight of her family from the Nazis into the Secret Annex. In her *Diary*, Anne expresses her adolescent concerns: "In spite of all justice and thankfulness, you can't crush your feelings. Cycling, dancing, whistling, looking out into the world, feeling young, to know that I'm free - that's what I long for. . ." The catastrophe of displacement from an essentially carefree existence abruptly erupts into the lives of the Franks just as it already has and will for millions of Jews and other racial and political undesirables in the eyes of Hitler and the Third Reich. The insistent march that follows announces the triumph of National Socialism impelled by the spirit of the will-to-power, a complex of ideas coalesced by Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche out of the writings of

her brother, Friedrich Nietzsche, and colored with a pervasive racial anti-Semitic sentiment alien to her brother that lies at the core of National Socialist ideology. As all Europe lies prostrate in terror or adulation before Hitler, the would-be world conqueror and heir of Julius Caesar and Napoleon, and the residue of the free world lies in anguished anticipation of the next move of the Nazi juggernaut, the Horst Wessel Song, anthem of the Nazi Party, ceremoniously celebrates the seeming invincibility of National Socialism. But the motif of Fortuna, the capriciousness of human destiny, returns, anticipating the fiery end of the Third Reich, though only after some sixty million people, including six million Jews, have lost their lives. The confined existence of the Franks and their fellow hidden Jews in the Secret Annex is evoked in a theme that suggests the fusion of the routine and quiet desperation in their lives before their discovery and betrayal to the Nazis. The journey to Auschwitz follows. The theme expresses the bleakness of the prospects of those who enter the hell that might just as well have had over its entrance the caption over the entrance to Dante's Inferno: "Abandon all hope, you who enter here!" Anne's mother dies in Auschwitz as do millions of others both there and at other death camps, victims of the Final Solution to the age-old riddle of the Jewish Question. A guard contemplates the smoke curling above the crematoria of Auschwitz into an apparently indifferent blue sky. But even he cannot help but think of the anguish beyond hope borne by the smoke like incense to the heart of heaven. A song of mourning laments the death of Anne and her sister Margot in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The lamentation embraces the millions of others, largely forgotten, who perish in the Holocaust of World War II, but also all victims of intolerance both before and after the Holocaust, including the episodes of ethnic cleansing we witness today in many places around the world and what is perhaps worse, in our own hearts. There follows a sepulchral dirge to commemorate the victims of intolerance, past, present and future. The conflagration ignited by the Nazis consumes its perpetrators as well. From the Bunker deep below the shards of devastated Berlin, Adolf Hitler remorselessly contemplates the *goetterdaemmerung* of the Thousand-Year Third Reich. Hitler commits suicide. Victim and victimizer, Jew and Gentile, tormented and tormentor, the tolerant and the intolerant recede from the stage of history as, ironically, they enter together into Eternity. The coda: In her *Diary*, Anne writes: "In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart." Two dissenting chords interrupt the musical confirmation of her naive affirmation of human goodness ascending into the empyrean as though to suggest that we have many miles to go before we can sleep in the confidence that tolerance shall triumph over intolerance and man's inhumanity to man.