



*Story about a female vocal orchestra in Japanese internment camp in Sumatra*

*Testimony of women's capacity to survive, of their persistence, solidarity and creativity*

*Extraordinary legacy of determination and strength in unimaginably terrifying conditions*

## **VOGP: Music for Survival**

**Premiere** 2. 3. 2018, Slovene National Theatre Maribor (SI)

**Music:** arranged by Margaret Dryburgh

F. Schubert, J. S. Bach, L. van Beethoven, J. Brahms, F. Chopin, A. Dvořák, E. Grieg,  
W. A. Mozart, P. I. Tchaikovsky etc.

**Concept:** Karmina Šilec

**Stage movement:** Rosana Hribar

**Texts:** Mojca Redjko

**Light design:** Andrej Hajdinjak

**Sound design:** Danilo Ženko

**Performed by:** Female Vocal Orchestra VOGP

**Conductor:** Karmina Šilec

**Production:** Carmina Slovenica

A village in Sumatra during WW2. Women of various nationalities are interned without explanation: The Dutch, British, Irish, Portuguese, Chinese, Australian ... Twenty nationalities of all social classes are forced to bow to the Japanese flag. The internees are coping with torture, hard work, sickness and expanding death heat kill over one third of them.

In the barrack 9, with the purpose of encouraging the internees, musician Norah Chamber and missionary Margaret Dryburgh establish a vocal orchestra. They fear for their lives according to a strict Japanese prohibition of any gatherings, social as well as religious. Every concert implying a risk the orchestra secretly rehearses in four voice groups, and all together in the Dutch kitchen at night. The music brings motivation and hope although the number of women steadily decreases.

The internees get charmed by long loved music bringing out powerful memories. Their thoughts fly away from isolation, hunger, fear, loneliness and smelly dirt, they recollect peace, order, beauty and joy of their "previous" lives. The survivors testify there were three things that helped them survive – love of God, sunrises and sunsets, and the transcendent singing of the vocal orchestra.

### Concept

The VOGP project reflects the moments in lives of women facing suffering and death. It highlights the idea of hope, religion and beauty echoing from the music produced by the female vocal orchestra in times of violence in the middle of an unexpected tropical-forest drama.

Wishing to understand VOGP explores the calming and socially necessary elements in musical power to take over control in the worst possible torture. It tries to catch women's intimate and collective emotions within those painful moments, reflecting a devotion to preciously supporting music.

VOGP sets music against suffering:

Music as a testament. Music as a dehumanisation denial. Music as a symbol of hope.

In a concert hall, audience comfortably follow the story of women's suffering – yet another mythicized human tragedy, one more WW2 topography of pain, a reflexion of historical memory, spirituality, morals and truth.

Recapturing the aestheticized trauma helps to get to understand brutality, volatility and injustice. And music remains in the very core of the general meaning on the edge of disaster.

VOGP expresses the complex relation between music, trauma, mourning and legacy to discuss the reasons for music to become a universal symbol in suffering and the ultimate sanctuary in despair. It has power to overwhelm all senses, one's body and soul, to shift the tormented to some other world. It can possibly rule over death.

VOGP puts music in self-reflecting frame: it presents its own representation, through its impact it illustrates its own exceeding the social and rational structure.

Music stands for the weak, so VOGP leads to consideration and warning: a vocal orchestra in Palangag camp (Indonesia), choirs and an orchestra in Westerbork camp (The Netherlands), internees marching with music in Sachsenhausen camp (Germany), Goldov ensemble in Treblinka camp (Poland), a prison orchestra in Auschwitz camp (Germany), concerts in Drancy camp (France), puppetry performances with women's a cappella singing in Kaiserwald camp (Latvia) ... internees in Bloemfontain camp (South Africa), first prisoners of war in Norman Cross (Great Britain), internees in Guantanamo (Cuba), Ra's al-'Ayn (Turkey), Jasenovac (Croatia), Moor River (Australia), Santiago (Chile), Slocan (Canada), Batangas (Philippines), Perm (Russia), Rosario (Argentina), Bački Jarak (Yugoslavia), Manzanar, (USA), Busan (South Korea), Krasnoyarsk (Russia), Hoeryong (South Korea), Shark Island (Namibia), nowadays in Argun (Chechen Republic) ...

