

Ole Dahl Violin



Ole Stedden Dahl was a violinmaker. The violin being performed today from the Violins of Hope collection was his violin, an early Hopf from the late 18th or early 19th century. Ole was born in 1919 in Copenhagen, Denmark and died in 2004. Ole learned the luthier's art as an apprentice in the late 1930s at a venerable firm in Copenhagen, Emil Hjorth and Sons.

When Germany invaded Denmark on April 9, 1940, Ole's music-filled life changed in an instant. He joined the Danish Navy and, along with all other Danish military personnel, was interned by the Germans. Like many young Danes, Ole made the brave decision to join the Danish Resistance, secretly fighting against the Nazis. He exchanged the peacetime tools of a gentle violinmaker for the material tools of a wartime saboteur. The comforting smells of rosin and freshly carved wood were replaced by the odors of gun oil and explosives.

Throughout the occupation, Ole took solace in his first love -- classical music. This violin served as a touchstone, a way for Ole to recapture the beauty of life in the harmonies of Vivaldi, the precision of Bach, and the melodies of Mozart. He could pick up his instrument and forget about the dangers of everyday existence, lost in music, and only face reality when his resistance group planned their next missions.

His childhood home, a rambling old house north of Copenhagen in bucolic Esbonderup, was used to hide Danish Jews escaping the Nazis, and Ole's younger brother believed that Ole secretly helped transport Jews across the water to freedom in Sweden. Ole's new life in the Resistance was dangerous. Nazis caught and executed Resistance fighters. Ole is listed in the database of Resistance personnel maintained by the Danish Resistance Museum in Copenhagen, but little is known about the specific actions his group carried out.

This violin survived World War II, and so did Ole. When Denmark was liberated, he joined the British army, serving as a Trooper in a Royal Tank Regiment. In England, he met Diana Parry, who was serving in the ATS, a women's branch of the British Army. They married when their service was completed in 1947, left war-torn Europe behind, and immigrated to America. By 1950, Ole was working as a violinmaker in Chicago. He always kept his violin and played in string quartet for many years with friends. At the urging of cellist Janos Starker and violinist Josef Gingold, Ole opened his own shop in Bloomington, Indiana in the 1960s and operated it successfully there until he retired, repairing the instruments of his many clients at the Indiana University School of Music. He never talked about his time in the Danish Resistance, preferring to keep his experiences to himself.

The violin was donated to Violins of Hope by Ole's sons, Christian and Peter Dahl.