



LETTERS FROM RUTH

Chamber musical in two acts
Libretto by Aksel-Otto Bull and Gisle Kverndokk
Music by Gisle Kverndokk

**Briefe
von
Ruth**

Musical von Aksel-Otto Bull
und Gisle Kverndokk

BASIEREND AUF
„DAS LEBEN KÖNNTE GUT SEIN“,
RUTH MAIERS TAGEBÜCHER 1933 BIS 1942
(HERAUSGEGEBEN VON JAN ERIK VOLD)

DEUTSCHE ÜBERSETZUNG VON
ELISABETH SIKORA

**Musical
Frühling
in Gmunden**

**Welt
premiere
FRÜHJAHR
2023**

IN KOOPERATION MIT DER NEW YORK-OPERA-SOCIETY
EIN REFERENZPROJEKT DER EUROPÄISCHEN KULTURHAUPTSTADT SALZKAMMERGUT 2024
www.musical-gmunden.com

Credit: Ruth Maier | The Ruth Maier Archive
Owner: The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies (HL-senteret)

Poster for the world premiere in Austria

March/April 2023

www.musical-gmunden.com

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Libretto by Aksel-Otto Bull and Gisle Kverndokk

Music by Gisle Kverndokk

Based on "Ruth Maier's Diary: A Jewish girl's life in Nazi Europe" (published by Vintage, edited by Jan Erik Vold, 2010).

German translation by Elisabeth Sikora

World premiere at the "Musical Spring Gmunden" 2023

Co-production with the New York Opera Society

A reference project of the European Capital of Culture Bad Ischl Salzkammergut 2024

Premiere: March 31, 2023, Stadttheater Gmunden

Further performances: 1/2/10/14/15/16/21/22/23 April

"The image of the Holocaust is usually determined by the accounts of the survivors. Ruth Maier's notations are an exception in this respect and show that those who were later murdered must not be reduced to their role as victims; they were individuals with hopes and ambitions."
Martin Doerry in a review of Ruth Maier's diaries (Der Spiegel 42/2008)

"Ruth Maier's Diary" is a selection of her surviving diaries, letters and notes from 1933 to 1942. Her texts have been edited for the sanctity of private life and to create a unified work of literature. Jan Erik Vold's editorial work and Ruth Maier's texts constitute an invisible whole. Copyrights for the international editions of "Ruth Maier's Diary" are shared by Judith Suschitzky, who is the sister of Ruth Maier, and Jan Erik Vold. Judith Suschitzky has donated her copyright earnings to Amnesty International.

LETTERS FROM RUTH

Ruth Maier is a Jewish girl from Vienna who, at the age of 19, flees from the Nazis to Norway in 1939. Although separated from her family, she feels quite comfortable at first in the foreign country, goes to school and graduates from high school. Despite the circumstances, she is able to enjoy a personal freedom in the Scandinavian country, that would probably not have been possible in Vienna, even without the invasion of the Nazis. This only changes when Norway is also occupied.

Already at the age of twelve, Ruth Maier begins to record her social observations and her longings for human and artistic realisation in diaries, letters and drawings, which form the basis for this musical. With a touching and captivating radicalism, an emotional and intellectual urgency, the young woman confronts the existential questions of growing up, love, political developments and feeling lost.

Ruth's will to live is the main motif of this touching and reflective musical by Aksel-Otto Bull and Gisle Kverndokk. While the music forms a continuous sound background, singing and speech stand side by side without transition. The scenes shift from reality to dream and back, across different times, between direct communication with the audience in narrative texts and the dialogue of the performers among themselves in acted scenes. The result is an intense musical work about a young girl's curiosity for life, her great ambitions, her irrepressible lust for life and expectations. And about how the war and the persecution of the Jews mercilessly kill this zest.



*Embankment of Akershus, Oslo, Norway, November 1942
Photo: Georg W. Fossum*

Cast

LETTERS FROM RUTH can be performed by an ensemble of 10 cast members – 7 women, 3 men.

- Ruth Maier (age: approx. 20): Soprano, includes belting
- Gunvor Hofmo (age: approx. 20): Mezzosoprano, includes belting
- Judith, Ruth Maier's sister (age: approx. 17): Soprano (plus ensemble)
- Mother (age: approx. 45): Mezzosoprano (dbl. woman in labour camp in Biri, plus ensemble)
- Professor Williger, Ruth's latin teacher (age: approx. 50): Baritone (dbl. Gustav Vigeland, a German SS officer, a Norwegian policeman, plus ensemble)
- Hermann Thimig, actor at the Vienna Burgtheater (age: approx. 45): Tenor (dbl. Mr Ström, a German SS officer, a Finnish soldier, plus ensemble)

Ensemble

- Soprano: Patient 2, woman in labour camp in Biri, one of the friends/girls, plus ensemble
- Soprano: Patient 3, woman in labour camp in Biri, one of the friends/girls, plus ensemble
- Alto: Schoolgirl, Mrs Ström, Björg, woman in labour camp in Biri, one of the friends/girls, a woman in the synagogue, plus ensemble
- Tenor: A schoolmate, a young jewish man, pupil (Per), a young pushy guy, comrade of the Finnish soldier, a man (marshal) on the platform, a Norwegian policeman, patient 1, plus ensemble
- *ad lib.* women in labour camp in Biri, friends/girls, schoolmates (female/male), people on the street in Vienna

Orchestra

Flute (dbl. Piccolo)

Clarinet

Trumpet (dbl. Flugelhorn)

Piano

Drums

Violin

Viola

Cello

Bass

Reduced version

Clarinet

Piano

Violin

Cello

From the authors of LETTERS FROM RUTH, Aksel-Otto Bull & Gisle Kverndokk



We had wanted to develop a musical theatre work from this material for a long time and finally received the consent from the publishing house Gyldendal and the editor Jan Erik Vold. In addition, we had been in correspondence with Ruth Maier's late sister Judith Suschitzky, who agreed to the project.

We call LETTERS FROM RUTH a musical because we have created a form in which song and speech merge, while the music provides a constant sounding board and drives the narrative forward. The music is both melodic and romantic, but also uses operatic means such as recitatives and ensembles, and it is inspired by art and popular music of the 1930s and 1940s. Many scenes oscillate between dream and reality, between different times, between direct communication with the audience and between the actors on stage, between narrative text from the diary and acted scenes. This gives us the opportunity to explore the grey area between opera and musical in chamber format.

At the center of the work is the story of Ruth. Our main motive is the will to live. A young girl's curiosity about life, her great ambitions, her enormous zest for life and expectations. And how the war and the persecution of the Jews kill this desire and drive them into resignation.

The musical was commissioned under the original title RUTH MAIER by the Musikkteaterforum, Oslo, with support from the Norwegian Composers Fund and development support from the Arts Council Norway. In December 2014 we had a workshop at the Chat Noir Theater Oslo under the auspices of the Musikkteaterforum. The work is written in Norwegian and will be premiered in the German translation by Elisabeth Sikora, which was created in close cooperation with us, under the title LETTERS FROM RUTH at the "Musical Spring Gmunden" on 31 March 2023.

A shortened version of the musical was presented in November 2015 at the New Works Series of the New York Theatre Barn at the Daryl Roth Theatre in New York. Excerpts were performed in concert, including a concert to commemorate the deportation of Norwegian Jews in the concert hall of the University of Oslo on 26 November 2017. The New York Opera Society presented individual musical numbers at several concerts in Washington, D.C., and Cape Cod and a shortened concert performance of the piece at the National Gallery of Art in Washington on September 24, 2017. The Washington Classical Review called our piece "a stirring work of musical theatre", "a moving chamber piece that traces Maier's life from her youth in Vienna to her time in Norway and finally her arrest".

Gisle Kverndokk & Aksel-Otto Bull

Further information



This QR code takes you to an **excerpt from Act 2** (YouTube)

Direct link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9L4INFd1v6s&t=22s>



This QR code takes you to **further excerpts** from the work (Soundcloud)

Direct link: <https://soundcloud.com/gisle-kverndokk/sets/letters-from-ruth-highlights>



This QR code takes you to a **YouTube film with excerpts and statements**

Direct link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gj1x0GyGrijk>



This QR code takes you to a **YouTube film with Judith**, Ruth's sister

Direct link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPvEu3aCAA>



This QR code takes you to our **perusal material online (piano vocal score)**

Direct link:

https://issuu.com/musikundbuehne/docs/letters_from_ruth_-_piano_vocal_score_2017



This QR code takes you to our **perusal material online (libretto)**

Direct link:

https://issuu.com/musikundbuehne/docs/letters_from_ruth_-_libretto_08_2017

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