

Music as ‘Transitional Object’ and the Curated Scrapbooks of Conductor Rudolf Pekárek *

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Transitional objects specific to the Holocaust-survivor experience can often include musical objects that survivors cling to for consolation, during and after the Holocaust. This article argues for the connection between conductor and Holocaust survivor Rudolf Pekárek’s programming of Czech composers throughout his career in Australia and this music being a transitional object of comfort for him. Drawn from research into Pekárek’s archival collection held at the University of Queensland’s Fryer Library, ten scrapbooks containing news articles, photographs, and ephemera including concert programs are analysed as case studies into how Holocaust survivors might use personal curation by scrapbooking for identity reformation.¹ Findings reveal that Pekárek’s programming choices were likely derived from his connection to Czech composers’ music, which became transitional objects for him because of his experiences as a Czech Holocaust survivor. Pekárek’s specific preoccupation with and passion for Dvořák is linked to a moment in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp that gave him hope: specifically, melodies from Dvořák’s Symphony no. 9 in E minor, op. 95, ‘From the New World’, therefore held special meaning for him. In Australia, Pekárek’s programming created

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¹ Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

musical experiences for his local and regional audiences, as well as audiences abroad, that were critically recognised. Pekárek's own narrative is meticulously recorded in a series of scrapbooks capturing his personal curation of storytelling that details his conducting journey through the placement of artefacts, and this article concludes that these scrapbooks were identity-strengthening for him as a Holocaust survivor. By applying a theoretical framework of self-fashioning, and processes of identity-reformation, this article also investigates the potential for scrapbooking to create an elevated sense of control for personal narrative through the honouring and curation of memories, particularly for Holocaust-survivor musicians.

Rudolf Pekárek (1900–1974)

By detailing the milestones of Rudolf Pekárek's life, connective threads between transitional objects and his concert programming choices become apparent. Born in 1900 in Czechoslovakia, Pekárek was a musician and conductor. He studied at the Prague Conservatorium as an oboe player under Professor Václav Talich, and founded the Film, Opera, Koncert (FOK) Symphony Orchestra in Prague in 1934. His career was disrupted in 1941 when he was deported to Litzmannstadt (Łódź) Ghetto, and then again to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944.² He was separated from his wife Teresa (Terry), who was also a musician but sent to work in a German aircraft factory, while he was sent to Jaworzno, working in a coal mine under forced labour. He survived the war, liberated by Soviet forces from Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945, and reunited with Terry in Prague.³ Both Rudolf and Terry lost family members during the Holocaust and, feeling unable to continue living their lives in Czechoslovakia, the couple migrated to Australia in 1948.⁴ Pekárek stated: 'I was sure that when I have the possibility of conducting an orchestra, it will be alright ... I wanted to be free and that was only possible in Australia ... I brought much music with me.'⁵

The importance of these music scores to Pekárek in his programming choices cannot be underestimated. Talich, as conductor of the Czechoslovakian Philharmonic Orchestra, had connections to Rafael Kubelik, who in turn recommended Pekárek's conducting to ABC General Manager Charles Moses.⁶ In 1949 Pekárek was the resident conductor of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra (WASO) and from 1954 to 1967 he was the chief conductor of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra (QSO), and toured extensively, both nationally and internationally.⁷ Pekárek died in Brisbane in 1974, leaving a legacy in music history, much of which is captured in his scrapbooks and papers, now in the Fryer Library. A prize was established in his honour at the Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University, awarded for the most outstanding student completing Performance Study on oboe.⁸

² Newspaper clipping, 'Whistle helped him trace his wife', *Sunday Mail* [Brisbane], 1969; eulogy by Berthold (Bert) Klug, 1997, M1998/023:004, Sydney Jewish Museum, <https://sjm-web.adlibhosting.com/AIS/Details/museum/1581>.

³ M1998/023:004, Sydney Jewish Museum.

⁴ Czechoslovakian identity cards; eulogy by Berthold (Bert) Klug, 1997, M2005/019:002, Sydney Jewish Museum, <https://sjm-web.adlibhosting.com/AIS/Details/museum/1521>.

⁵ 'To Conduct in Perth', *West Australian* [Perth], 22 October 1949, 13.

⁶ 'Conductor Finds Freedom Here', *The Age* [Melbourne], 15 January 1953, 4; 'Last Night's Skymaster', *Sunday Times* [Perth], 30 October 1949, 32.

⁷ 'Conductor Finds Freedom Here', 4; 'Last Night's Skymaster', 32; M2005/019:002, Sydney Jewish Museum.

⁸ 'Rudolph Pekarek Oboe Prize', Griffith University, <https://www.griffith.edu.au/scholarships/competitions/rudolph-pekaek-oboe-prize>.

The music and scores by Czech composers, which I argue were transitional objects for him, formed a defining part of Pekárek's identity after the Holocaust. While transitional objects are predominantly researched in children, adults too, have transitional objects that can bring self-regulation and soothing; these objects often include photographs, clothing, and music records.⁹ Similarly, transitional objects for children can take the form of blankets, pieces of patterned cloth, teddy bears, books, certain words, and melodies.¹⁰ Amanda Norman, who specialises in infant care pedagogies and emotional well-being, confirms that 'an inanimate (non-human) object can become connected and identified as an extension of the young child as well as the adult,' and that non-human entities can be defined as 'plants, animals, geology, and natural forces, as well as those created by humans such as art or music.'¹¹ Music, as a subcategory within transitional objects, likely influenced Pekárek's programming choices, stemming from his own Czech past.

The defining event leading to Dvořák's scores becoming especially meaningful to Pekárek is captured in a news article, 'Whistle Helped Him to Trace his Wife,' held by the Sydney Jewish Museum. Pekárek recounts in this article: 'One day I was working in the yard near the women's section. I whistled part of the "New World" symphony. Terry started whistling where I left off. I did not see her, but I knew that she was alive.'¹² Their love story, strengthened by this whistling, is a story of hope, survival, resistance, and music; as a result, the symphony held special meaning for Pekárek.¹³ While the newspaper clipping details this event as occurring in Litzmannstadt, it is likely an error, since it is documented that Rudolf and Terry were not separated until their arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944.¹⁴ While in Litzmannstadt Ghetto with Terry, Rudolf made the decision not to tell anyone he was a musician, and did not attend recitals. This decision saved both their lives, as Terry recalls in her testimony that the ghetto orchestra musicians were the first victims sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau.¹⁵ While they were ultimately sent there, where they were separated from each other, their survival, intuition, reunion, and knowledge that the other was alive—expressed through Dvořák's music—is remarkable.

In addition to exploring how the term 'transitional objects' can include musical objects that survivors could hold on to for consolation during and after the Holocaust, this article draws upon my research from Pekárek's archival collection, and analyses Pekárek's ten scrapbooks as a case study into how one Holocaust survivor used personal curation through scrapbooking for identity reformation.

⁹ Sheela Madhukar Joshi, 'Transitional Objects in Adult Treatment: Case Studies' (Master of Social Work, Smith College, 2008), 32, <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/1240>.

¹⁰ Lawrence D. Blum, 'Music, Memory, and Relatedness' *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 10 (2013): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1002/aps.1354>.

¹¹ Amanda Norman, *Transitional Objects in Early Childhood: The Value of Transitional Objects in the Early Years* (London: Routledge, 2024), 2008, 12, 23.

¹² M1998/023:004, Sydney Jewish Museum.

¹³ The symphony is known as both no. 9 and no. 5. Only five were published during Dvořák's lifetime, and 'of these the numbering is very misleading and bears no relation to the order in which they were written'. Pekárek, 'Concert Program commenting on Dvořák symphonies numbering inconsistencies', Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 8, Folder 8.

¹⁴ Violin 2 (interactive object) from 'The Holocaust during World War 2', Queensland Holocaust Museum (online), <https://www.holocaustmuseum.online/zone2b>.

¹⁵ Violin 2 (interactive object), Queensland Holocaust Museum.

Pekárek's scrapbook collection came to the Fryer Library via his family in the late 1970s as part of a larger archive, suggesting the couple's strong relationship to Queensland and Pekárek's connection to the university. Within the archive, Pekárek's old Camp Hill address is revealed on several pieces of correspondence written on University of Queensland (UQ) letterhead. In one letter, dated 1968, Hugh Brandon, Senior Lecturer in Music at UQ, wrote to Pekárek, asking him to provide a rough translation of a verse from a Czechoslovakian folk song. Brandon wanted to include the verse in a book of folk songs in examinations for his students who were to memorise the music with the words written under the right notes. For this assessment, Brandon sought to capture the mood of the poem as well as the notation.¹⁶ Two weeks later, Brandon wrote to Pekárek again, thanking him for the translation of the folk song, remarking that he was grateful. Correspondence such as this highlights Pekárek's passion for Czech music and his desire to help share meaningful and accurate translations of verses from his home country.

When identity formation and music are analysed concurrently, it becomes apparent that the two are entwined. Atarah Fisher and Avi Gilboa, researchers and professional music therapists who are both also Jewish—one a direct descendent of Holocaust survivors—have conducted a groundbreaking study on the role of music for musician Holocaust survivors. Their practice is founded with a strong belief in 'the power of music to heal, but also in its ability to destroy,' as is detailed in Holocaust literature and the use of music as torture in the camps.¹⁷ In a paper entitled 'The Roles of Music Amongst Musician Holocaust Survivors Before, During, and After the Holocaust,' they focus on 'the stories of the musician Holocaust survivors' and 'how to enable music to aid in difficult times and situations.'¹⁸ They describe the years before the Holocaust for their interviewees, noting: 'Music was dominant during these years and it had a central role in molding their identity and defining their special place within their family and social environment.'¹⁹ For many of the interviewees in the study, Fisher and Gilboa argue, music helped continue to define these survivors' identities. Applying these findings, using Pekárek as my case study, I contend that there are parallels for Pekárek, his programming choices, and the self-fashioning of his scrapbooks and archival materials that celebrated his career.

Music as 'Transitional Object'

The role of music in healing is a consistent thread among musician Holocaust survivors. As Fisher and Gilboa's study highlights: 'Many participants stated that music was the main force that prompted them to get on with their lives.'²⁰ The participants in the study described the importance of music in their current lives, and how music helped them commemorate their past and reform their identity. Transitional objects, deeply meaningful, were often 'held on to throughout several stages of their lives.'²¹ For instance, for one of the interviewees, Leah, a

¹⁶ Hugh Brandon to Rudolf Pekárek, 1968, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 4, Folder 1.

¹⁷ Guido Fackler, 'Sonic Torture at Dachau', Music and the Holocaust, <https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/camps/music-early-camps/dachau/sonic-torture-dachau0>.

¹⁸ Atarah Fisher and Avi Gilboa, 'The Roles of Music Amongst Musician Holocaust Survivors Before, During, and After the Holocaust', *Psychology of Music*, 44 no. 6 (2016): 1221–39 at 1235.

¹⁹ Fisher and Gilboa, 'Roles of Music,' 1226.

²⁰ Fisher and Gilboa, 'Roles of Music,' 1226.

²¹ Fisher and Gilboa, 'Roles of Music,' 1231.

child Holocaust survivor, singer and music teacher, her father's original scores written during the Holocaust are her transitional objects. Fisher and Gilboa describe meeting Leah as follows:

During her interview, this was the first thing she presented, and she kept holding on to these scores throughout the interview. The scores reminded her of her beloved father. She sings his songs on many occasions and they give her great comfort and consolation.²²

Leah's experience holds evocative parallels to Pekárek's connection with Dvořák's scores and the theme of musical transitional objects as both comfort and connection to normal life. Fisher and Gilboa's observations demonstrate that 'music was deeply ingrained in the lives and identities of the musician survivors, helping them to find a way to move on, and, later, to look back.'²³ They highlight that the most striking findings in their study were the many similarities between the original use of the term 'transitional objects' by psychiatric paediatrician Donald Winnicott, and its use pertaining to musician Holocaust survivors.²⁴ Indeed, as Leora Auslander, who specialises in modern history, feminism, and the politics of everyday life, writes: 'the objects of war—carried, hidden, looted, remade, returned, forgotten, and rediscovered—offer powerful clues to how people and things interact to shape our societies and ourselves.'²⁵ In this context, I posit that the objects Holocaust survivors found comfort in during the Holocaust allowed for them to in turn 'care for them,' through their work as transitional objects.²⁶ Moreover, all participants in Fisher and Gilboa's study reported having an object that was often connected to music, demonstrating the value of further research into this unique phenomenon influencing musician Holocaust survivors.

Connections revealing the importance of Czech composers to Pekárek, particularly Dvořák, can be found throughout the sixteen boxes in the Pekárek collection. For example, there is Pekárek's written request for the return of his score (Dvořák's Symphony no. 4 in D minor, op. 13) from the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra, along with their response, apologising for the delay.²⁷ Similarly, a letter from Harry Hutchins of the Victorian Symphony Orchestra, thanking Pekárek for lending Dvořák's Symphony no. 7 in D minor, op. 70, is stored as the last item in Box 1, Folder 10. The correspondence reveals Pekárek's generosity in lending his Dvořák scores, and confirm that his own copies were precious to him. Outlined below (see Fig. 1) is a table highlighting the programming of Czech composers during his 1960 Northern Tour of Bundaberg, Townsville, Innisfail, Cairns, Rockhampton, and Mackay with the QSO, compiled from concert programs and newspaper articles found in the Pekárek Collection.

In a free concert held in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens on Sunday 27 November 1960, three Czech composers were programmed on the same run-sheet: Dvořák, Bedřich Smetana and Zdeněk Fibich. Similarly, there is a concert program for Dvořák's Symphony no. 1 in D major, op. 60, conducted by Pekárek with WASO (Box 4, Folder 12), which was listed as being the first public performance in Australia and commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of Dvořák's death

²² Fisher and Gilboa, 'Roles of Music,' 1231.

²³ Fisher and Gilboa, 'Roles of Music,' 1231.

²⁴ Donald W. Winnicott, 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena', in Lesley Caldwell and Helen Taylor Robinson, eds, *The Collected Works of D.W. Winnicott: Volume 3, 1946–1951* (New York, 2016), 447–62, <https://doi.org/10.1093/med:psych/9780190271350.003.0088>.

²⁵ Leora Auslander and Tara Zahra, *Objects of War: The Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 39.

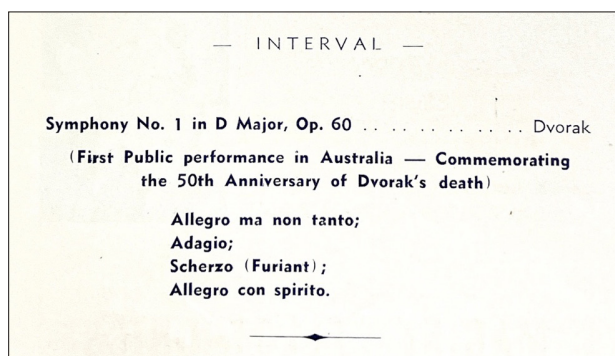
²⁶ Fisher and Gilboa, 'Roles of Music,' 1232.

²⁷ Rudolf Pekárek to the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 1, Folder 3.

Figure 1. Czech composers programmed by Pekárek during his 1960 QSO Northern Tour.

Composer	Title	Performance Location
Dvořák	Symphony no. 8 in G major, op.88	Bundaberg
Dvořák Smetana	Symphony no. 8 in G major, op. 88 Symphonic Poem: 'Vltava' from <i>Má Vlast</i>	Townsville
Dvořák Smetana	Slavonic Dance no. 15 <i>Songs My Mother Taught Me</i> Suite from <i>The Bartered Bride</i>	Innisfail
Dvořák	Symphony no. 8 in G major, op. 88	Cairns
Dvořák Smetana	Slavonic Dance no. 15 <i>Songs My Mother Taught Me</i> Suite from <i>The Bartered Bride</i>	Mackay
Dvořák	Slavonic Dance no. 15 <i>Songs My Mother Taught Me</i>	Rockhampton
Dvořák Smetana	Slavonic Dance no. 15 <i>Songs My Mother Taught Me</i> Suite from <i>The Bartered Bride</i>	Maryborough
Dvořák Smetana	Slavonic Dance no. 15 <i>Songs My Mother Taught Me</i> Suite from <i>The Bartered Bride</i>	Kingaroy

(see Fig. 2). A letter from Pekárek states that WASO was to give the first performance in Australia of two Czech works: Dvořák's first symphony and Fibich's overture to *A Night at Karlštejn*, op. 26.²⁸ Perhaps most significantly, the programming of Dvořák's New World Symphony, holding the melody Terry had whistled back to Rudolf when they were separated from each other in Auschwitz-Birkenau, was performed on 6 November 1954 with the QSO. Conducted by Pekárek, Dvořák's work is listed as Symphony no. 5 in E minor, op. 95. One can only imagine the emotional impact for Pekárek, and the power of this particular transitional object.

Figure 2. Dvořák's Symphony no. 1, op. 60, conducted by Pekárek with WASO, listed in a 1954 concert program, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 4, Folder 12.

Further findings suggest Pekárek's preference for programming Czech composers. As seen in an ABC memo for the QSO's Country Tour, dated 7 July 1954, a concert program was reshuffled to replace Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* op. 35 with Dvořák's Symphony no. 4

²⁸ Excerpt of concert program detailing the first Australian public performance of Dvořák's Symphony no. 1 in D Major, op. 60, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 4, Folder 12.

in G Major, op.88.²⁹ In the QSO's third concert as part of the 1954 International Music Festival, half the program conducted by Pekárek contained Dvořák pieces: the Concerto in A minor, op. 53 for violin and orchestra, and three of his *Slavonic Dances*.³⁰

A 1954 review titled 'Touched with Fire' by Robert Dalley-Scarlett of the *Courier Mail* favourably reviewed Pekárek's first public appearance in Brisbane as the new QSO conductor. Dally-Scarlett comments on Pekárek's 'racial and temperamental kinship' with the Czech composer, that he believed enabled 'a performance whose brilliance in conception matched the brilliance of the writing.'³¹ Such critical acclaim further supports a view that Pekárek drew on music by Czech composers as a transitional object. Indeed, sound stimulates memory. Feminist and postcolonial scholar Amal Treacher Kabesh uses the term 'soundspace' to illustrate that 'sound is rooted in space and place.' Drawing on the work of Winnicott, the primary focus of Kabesh's chapter is to explore 'how sound is an object that, like the transitional object, is out there waiting to be found and used.'³² Using Kabesh's insights into 'soundspace', I posit that just as Pekárek heard Terry whistle Dvořák's melody from the New World Symphony back to him in the concentration camp, he now found comfort in performing this symphony here in his new home. Pekárek continued to use and perform Czech music, especially Dvořák, during his tenures as an orchestra conductor. I further suggest that this sense of agency as a conductor—choosing mostly Czech composers and performing their music to critical acclaim—positively aided in his identity re-formation, along with the personal curation of his scrapbooks.³³

Programs and Scrapbooks

In the Pekárek Collection, Box 16 contains ten scrapbooks, curated by Pekárek himself (see Fig. 3). I analysed this material as a case study on how Holocaust survivors might use personal curation through scrapbooking for identity reformation.

Figure 3. Covers of the scrapbooks, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 16, Items 1–10.



²⁹ ABC memo, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 10, Folder 4.

³⁰ Concert program, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 16, Item 3.

³¹ Robert Dalley-Scarlett, 'Touched with Fire,' *Courier-Mail* [Brisbane], 8 November 1954, 5; newspaper clipping, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 16, Item 3.

³² Amal Treacher Kabesh, 'Soundspace,' in *Little Madnnesses: Winnicott, Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience*, edited by Annette Kuhn (London: I.B.Tauris, 2013), 66.

³³ Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Boxes 1–16.

Chiara Giuliani and Kate Hodgson's work on cultural memory raises the concept of the movement of objects and their owners 'within and between continents, countries, cities, and families,' along with memory that travels. Giuliani and Hodgson write:

this movement can often take place through the passing on of what Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer define as "testimonial objects," objects enclosing "points of memory"—points of intersection between past and present, memory and postmemory, personal remembrance and cultural recall.³⁴

Across these similar naming conventions for the concept of comforting objects (that is, transitional, survival, and testimonial objects), Pekárek's scrapbooks are an exemplar of these themes when looking through the lens of memory. I argue that the longevity of the scrapbooking form and its archival qualities, both for the creator and future generations, is a strong part of identity reformation. This is evident in Pekárek's inclusion of articles that focus on his musical achievements, as well as referencing his survival from the Holocaust.

Objects can be powerful tools for the self-fashioning of identity. Self-fashioning is a concept discussed by Stephen Greenblatt that refers to the process of identity construction of a public persona to reflect cultural standards.³⁵ These threads are clear in a newspaper clipping titled 'A Day of Cooking with the Pekáreks' from the 'Concerto Festival' scrapbook featuring Rudolf and Terry, that not only includes some of their story from the concentration camps, but also Pekárek's love of Terry's cooking and the recipes she carried with her from Europe. The food resulting from these recipes might also be considered a transitional object for Terry.³⁶ Indeed, Terry trained at the Domácnost, a Prague school for academic graduates studying the art of cooking.³⁷ While briefly commenting on Pekárek's conductorship of the QSO and the background of Rudolf and Terry's concentration camp years, the article also mentions how the Pekáreks foregrounded their hobbies (Terry's included china collecting, and she mentions her father's coin collection, while Rudolf's are photography and stamp collecting).³⁸ Therefore, this broader cultural focus, outside of the Holocaust, can be considered a further self-fashioning method for identity curation.

The research process of my leafing through these scrapbooks was one of discovery, through the uncovering of clues within clues. For example, lifting one program revealed a folded telegram, and beneath that, a handwritten letter.³⁹ Through folding and unfolding these pages, tickets from his touring concerts were found wedged under postcards. The presentation of these materials reflects Pekárek's self-curation and story through his chosen newspaper cuttings of performances and ephemera from tours including hotel room number cards and tram tickets held in place with brown paper envelopes and paper supports. In the left image of Figure 4, we see two items: a reservation card for the Canberra Private Hotel on Ann Street in Brisbane, which informs guest how to obtain their key and includes the tariff, room number, and an

³⁴ Chiara Giuliani and Kate Hodgson, *Memory, Mobility, and Material Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 6.

³⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 45.

³⁶ 'Concerto Festival' scrapbook, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 16, Item 9.

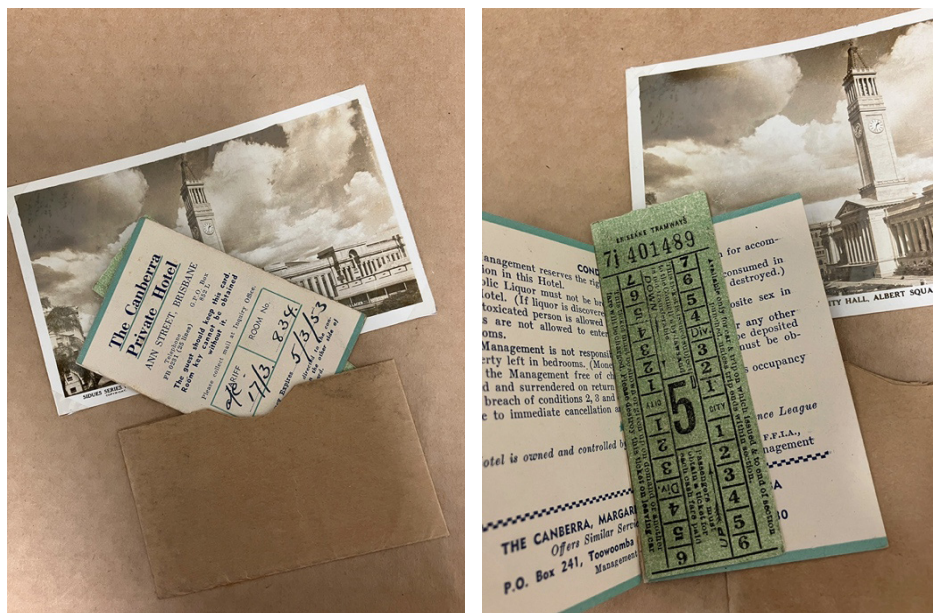
³⁷ UQFL153, Box 16, Item 9. See also Dhanuvarcini Aruchamy, 'Food And Emotional Transitions: A Psychoanalytic Study of Anjali Joseph's Portrayal of Food and Human Emotion in Her Novel, "Another Country",' *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 12 (2024): 481–86.

³⁸ 'Concerto Festival' scrapbook, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 16, Item 9.

³⁹ 'Tchaikowsky Festival' scrapbook, 1953, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 16, Item 1.

expiry date of 5 March 1953, and a postcard of Brisbane City Hall partially covered by the reservation card. The clock tower and part of the building are in the view. The right image shows a green Brisbane Tramways ticket, the inside of the hotel reservation card with rules about conduct (partially covered by the tram ticket), and another photo or postcard of City Hall from a different angle, partially covered by the other objects.

Figures 4. Objects stacked in scrapbooks, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 16, Item 1.



From an art therapy perspective, Taylor FioRito observes that ‘scrapbooking one’s personally nostalgic memories could be considered a form of storytelling.’⁴⁰ Indeed, Pekárek’s scrapbooks are separated into concert years, and are themed by festival. This linear form of storytelling suggests that concerts relating to Dvořák may have held particular significance for him compared to other Czech composers, evidenced by the number of Dvořák pieces conducted throughout his tenure and through his highlighting of articles with positive reviews of concerts featuring Czech composers. For example, in a newspaper article on Pekárek’s second concert for the ABC International Festival at Brisbane City Hall in 1954, Robert Dalley-Scarlett writes that Pekárek’s forte is his ‘own national music,’ filled with ‘vivid interpretations.’⁴¹ He remarks that the Smetana was played with vitality, and that Pekárek provides his audience with a better understanding of Slavic music.⁴² Another reviewer, Ernest Briggs, wrote in the *Sunday Mail* that these pieces were suited to Pekárek’s ‘temperament,’ placing positive emphasis on his use of ‘rhythmic accentuation’ and ‘tonal contrasts.’⁴³ These scrapbook pages contribute to

⁴⁰ Taylor A. FioRito, Allie R. Geiger and Clay Routledge, ‘Creative Nostalgia: Social and Psychological Benefits of Scrapbooking’, *Art Therapy*, 38.2 (2021): 98–103 at 102, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2020.1748986>.

⁴¹ ‘Pekarek on Top: Concert Triumph’, *Courier-Mail*, 11 November 1954, 6.

⁴² ‘Pekarek on Top’, 6.

⁴³ Ernest Briggs, ‘Orchestra Kept up Standard’, *Sunday Mail*, 14 November 1954, 11; ‘International Music Festival’ scrapbook, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 16, Item 3.

Pekárek's life story and narrative: not only does this self-curation reveal his agency through his selection of artefacts, but also, I suggest, aided his healing through positive identity formation. As Giuliani and Hodgson attest, 'objects have the power to contain multiple meanings, play different roles, carry different messages, pass on different memories, including posthumously.'⁴⁴ This multiplicity is echoed by Terence McDonnell, who studies objects and media in everyday life, who states: 'Objects, then, have cultural power both by stabilizing meaning-making and social arrangements and by the inverse—destabilizing routines and opening up new lines of action.'⁴⁵ Pekárek's scrapbooking demonstrates the importance he placed in focusing on his musical achievements after the Holocaust as the direction he wanted to take for self-fashioning his identity, without the sole focus of being a survivor.

As well as forming new, positive identities separate to past traumas, scrapbooking helps its creators cope with grief and loss. From a therapeutic perspective, recent research finds that scrapbooking could be an intervention to enhance coping in individuals experiencing grief and loss, and that participants ranked 'creating scrapbooks that incorporate personal, symbolic objects' as a preferred grief ritual in dealing with loss, helping them 'regain a sense of control in their lives.'⁴⁶ Pekárek's scrapbooks predominantly contain controlled choices, through carefully cut and arranged newspaper clippings about his successful concert performances, drawing on his strengths with Czech music. Deborah Wood, whose research investigates authorship, curation, and absence in scrapbooking, states that 'the newspaper clipping is one of the most common forms of ephemera within the scrapbooking genre.'⁴⁷ Wood specifies that creators curate these clippings 'to expand their understanding and narrative of events ... [forming] the narrative backbone of each scrapbook.'⁴⁸ As an example, Pekárek drew on a variety of national papers, sometimes collecting multiples of the same article. The newspapers included in his scrapbooks include the *Sunday Mail*, *Courier Mail*, *Brisbane Telegraph* and *Hlas Domova* [Homeland's Voice], a Czech-language periodical published from 1951 to 1979 in Melbourne.⁴⁹ When Pekárek toured, he collected the newspapers from local areas such as the *Tweed and South Coast Daily*, *Northern Star*, *Daily Examiner*, *Toowoomba Chronicle*, *Warwick Daily News*, and clippings from *ABC Weekly*.⁵⁰ Pekárek maintained chronology in each scrapbook, possibly for ease of reference to understand and pinpoint the continuation of his narrative, as evidenced by the covers listing the years and festival type.

Musician Holocaust survivors curating their self-identity through scrapbooking is not unique to Pekárek. Operatic performer and cantor Robert S. Tullman's scrapbook collection, held at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), shows similar methods to Pekárek's scrapbooking choices, where newspaper clippings and concert programs are cut

⁴⁴ Giuliani and Hodgson, *Memory, Mobility, and Material Culture*, 7.

⁴⁵ Terence McDonnell, 'Cultural Objects, Material Culture, and Materiality,' *Annual Review of Sociology*, 49 (2023): 196, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-031021-041439>.

⁴⁶ Joanna King, Brooke Prout, Amanda Stuhl and Rhonda Nelson, 'Scrapbooking as an Intervention to Enhance Coping in Individuals Experiencing Grief and Loss,' *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 50.2 (2016): 183, <https://doi.org/10.18666/TRJ-2016-V50-I2-7308>.

⁴⁷ Deborah Wood, 'Fragmentary Connections: Authorship, Curation, and Absence in Polar Scrapbooking, 1870–1920' (MPhil, University of Cambridge, 2021), 38, <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.89219>.

⁴⁸ Wood, 'Fragmentary Connections,' 38.

⁴⁹ Newspaper clippings, Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 16, Item 3.

⁵⁰ Rudolf Pekárek Papers, UQFL153, Box 16, Item 3.

out in neat squares and arranged geometrically with coloured pencil underlinings, often in red.⁵¹ As is the case with Pekárek, while several articles make reference to the Holocaust, these are usually in reference to the positive performances of the musicians in the context of their survival, and their relationships. For instance, in Tullman's scrapbook the first page contains a 1942 newspaper clipping titled 'Refugee Will Hear Husband for First Time as Cantor Here,' reinforcing the importance of love and family to Holocaust survivors.

Many of the oral history transcripts from Holocaust survivors and their descendants held as part of the USHMM Collection make reference to scrapbooking and the power of curation. For instance, Holocaust survivor Fredy Seidel states in his testimony: 'You know, some people have put together scrapbooks and it sort of became an inspiration for us. I have to try and do the same thing. I just never have the time for it, but I got to find the time to do it, to put things together.'⁵² These anecdotes suggest the value of scrapbooking to Holocaust survivors for identity and personal curation. Musician Holocaust survivors like Pekárek and Tullman, and their drive to highlight positive performances that also reference their survivor past, while simultaneously ensuring that their past trauma is not the singular focus, is a possible avenue for further research.

Conclusion

This article explored the possible meanings of Rudolf Pekárek's programming of Dvořák and other Czech composers throughout his conducting career in Australia. I contend that this music was a transitional object to him as a Czech Holocaust survivor, and that, through an analysis of Pekárek's ten scrapbooks from Box 16 of the Pekárek collection, he used personal curation through scrapbooking for identity reformation. For instance, he brought his personal narrative to life by choosing to highlight positive reviews in newspapers. These reviews captured Pekárek's contribution to Australian society, where he created musical experiences that were recognised by critics. Articles throughout Pekárek's scrapbooks do reference his concentration camp survival, however, these are always in the context of the acclaim his conducting received. I argue this curation provided him with an elevated sense of control, demonstrating an identity reformation not exclusively defined by the trauma of his past, yet still acknowledging its presence through the powerful creativity of scrapbooking.

About the Author

Anna Jacobson was the 2023 Fryer Library Fellow at the University of Queensland. She holds a PhD from Queensland University of Technology, receiving an Outstanding Doctoral Thesis Award. She is an award-winning writer, poet, artist, researcher, experimental filmmaker, and soundscape creator. The author of *How to Knit a Human* (NewSouth, 2024) and two illustrated poetry collections: *Amnesia Findings* (UQP, 2019) and *Anxious in a Sweet Store* (Upswell, 2023), Anna will publish her third poetry collection, *All Rage Blaze Light*, with Upswell in 2025.

⁵¹ Scrapbooks, 1925–1940, Robert S. Tullman Collection, 2007.525.1, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives.

⁵² Oral history interview with Fredy K. Seidel, RG-50.462.0517, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.