

May 2, 2026

Poster presentation at the "Space to Remember"

- Music **Jiahe Liu (Saxophon)e**
Johann Sebastian Bach: Partita a-Moll BWV 1013 – Allemande
- Welcome **Karin van Steeg**
Relative of 14 Dutch prisoners from Putten
- Speech **Magdalena Wajsen**
Granddaughter of the Polish prisoner: poster for Kazimierz Wajsen
- Speech **Jacques Durif**
Son of the French prisoner Louis Durif
- Music **Jiahe Liu (Saxophone)**
Sergeij Rachmaninow: Vocalise
- Reading of the names
- Music **Jiahe Liu (Saxophone)**
Darius Milhaud: Scaramouche – 3. Satz (Brazileira)

Karin van Steeg

Musical piece by Jiahe Liu – saxophone

Johann Sebastian Bach – *Partita in A Minor, BWV 1013 – Allemande*

Dear participants, dear friends, and especially dear relatives.

A warm welcome to you all! Firstly, thank you very much to Jiahe Liu for this musical piece and the following ones, which give this poster presentation a special meaning.

Jiahe Liu is studying classical saxophone at the Hamburger Konservatorium with a special focus on chamber music and sound design.

My name is Karin van Steeg, and I live in the Netherlands. I am delighted to accompany you through this poster presentation and to welcome you all here.

This afternoon we will greet many international guests, we will hear family stories and pay tribute to the victims who are so dear to us. This day means a great deal to me personally because I believe in the power of remembrance and connection. Together we bring our memories to life and pass them on to the next generation.

We warmly welcome our guests from Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Ukraine, Poland and Spain. It's lovely to have you here!

Today we want to extend a very special greeting to Magdalena Wajsen and Jacques Durif. They will shortly share their family stories, which have had a lasting influence on their own lives.

The presence of every single one of you is tremendously valuable and contributes to the importance of the Space to Remember. Thanks to your participation, the victims are no longer viewed only as numbers. Their names and faces are restored to them, which emphasizes the fact that they were beloved people who are remembered to this day. Let us continue working together to create a world in which everyone is seen and remembered, and where solidarity is the key.

The creation of the Space to Remember was the result of a process that took many years. A new memorial site was needed in Neuengamme for the family members of former prisoners. This led to the working group for the Space to Remember.

The working group now consists of Bernhard Esser, Uta and Halina Kühl, Alyn Šišić, Barbara Hartje, Alexandra Köhring, Martin Zerrath, Tina Henkel, Franciska Thiele, Sven Adebahr and me.

Dear friends from the working group, would you please stand up so we can thank you for your work?

The working group's commitment to the Space to Remember and their respectful interaction with the victims and their relatives are especially appreciated. I am very grateful to be able to work intensively with them to help the Space to Remember continue to grow.

Since 2015, the working group has been supported by the Friends of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial. The Friends association recently provided money to finance printing plates so that family members can participate free of charge in the Space to Remember this year. Thank you very much for this generous contribution. We hope that other organizations follow your example.

In addition to the efforts of the working group, a decisive role is played by students and volunteers at the Space to Remember. The final design of the Space to Remember memorial site was developed by a group of students from Hamburg University of Fine Arts under the direction of Professor Jesko Fezer: a printing workshop for posters, with shelves to hold the printing plates and poster walls to present the prints.

A new group of students from this university is now involved in the Space to Remember: Béla Dizdar, Greta Lauk, Jonas Bendlin, Lilly Wellner and Lotta Gabele. For over a year now, your engagement and enthusiasm have contributed to the continual growth and improvement of the Space to Remember.

The volunteers Margalit Goldberg, Emma Roterberg and Jette Verg also support the Space to Remember by helping to clean the printing plates and poster walls and printing the posters, among other activities.

Dear Professor Jesko Fezer, dear students, dear volunteers, would you please stand up so that we can thank you for your work?

Many people are actively involved in the Space to Remember. Unfortunately, it is not possible to mention them all by name. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed

in some way to the Space to Remember. I do want to specially mention two people whose work behind the scenes is vital and deserves a great deal of recognition.

Tina Henkel has been involved in the Space to Remember from the very start and was amongst the first group of students. She prepared all of the poster designs so they could be turned into printing plates. And I don't just mean this year's designs, I mean every year's. There has already been a total of 184 posters lovingly designed by families from many countries.

The designs prepared by Tina are lasered onto acrylic printing plates by André Bernard from WeLoveLaser – a valuable contribution to the Space to Remember. André was also involved from the start and deserves our sincere thanks for his work and dedication.

Dear Tina, dear André, please rise so that we can thank you for your indispensable work!

My involvement in the Space to Remember started in 2017 when I was invited to contribute to the new memorial site in Neuengamme with my own posters for my persecuted family members. Fourteen men from my family were deported to Neuengamme after the raid in Putten on 1 October 1944, together with 574 other victims of the raid. When I delved into their family stories, I established a connection to them and they began to come alive for me. Of these fourteen family members, three died in Neuengamme, nine died in satellite camps, and only two returned home.

After I had made posters for my family members, I talked about the Space to Remember in Putten and other places in the Netherlands. More than two years ago, I joined the board of the 'Stichting Vriendenkring Neuengamme' in the Netherlands, which has enabled me to become even more involved with the Space to Remember. As a point of contact, I help Dutch relatives to design their posters and I provide information about the memorial site. My Poster Project from the Space to Remember is now an important part of our foundation.

Through my work on this project, I have learned how important it is to keep stories alive, and how shared memories can connect people. The Space to Remember and the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial have thus taken on an enduring importance for me.

As I was preparing for today, I asked myself: 'What makes the Space to Remember so special compared to other memorials for victims of the Second World War?'

I found one answer to this question by comparing the Dutch words *herdenken* (to commemorate) and *gedenken* (to remember). Although these Dutch words may look similar, there is an important difference between them.

Herdenken means giving solemn consideration to events from the past and focusing on the event itself and the group involved. Memorials often serve as sites for these ceremonies, where memory is communally kept alive.

Gedenken (to remember), by contrast, emphasizes individual and personal memories. This entails an active way of expressing feelings and preserving the memory of a beloved person. It offers space to put emotions into words and to find one's own forms of remembrance, just as we do in the Space to Remember.

This distinction explains why the Space to Remember is such a unique memorial. Relatives are actually given the opportunity to actively shape the memory of their deported family member by designing a personal poster. Precisely because relatives can express their feelings visually, it is clear that a picture can say more than a thousand words. Each poster is an individual expression of love, memory, grief and loss, and it restores the names and identities of the victims. In this way, their names continue to exist and are not forgotten.

Magdalena Wajsen and Jacques Durif will now tell us about their own family stories.

Magdalena Wajsen's grandfather, Kazimierz Wajsen, was deported from Poland to Germany and only barely survived his deportation to the Neuengamme concentration camp. Magdalena Wajsen was ten years old when her grandfather died. She was too young to talk with him about his wartime experiences. Thirty years after his death, she visited Neuengamme for the first time. It was an emotional visit. She made the poster for Kazimierz Wajsen last year. It is our first poster in the Polish language. I would like to cordially invite Magdalena Wajsen to share her family's story with us.

Übersetzung/ Translation: Jessica Spengler

Magdalena Wajsen

Hello,

It is an honour for me to be here and speak to you.

My name is Magdalena Wajsen. I am the granddaughter of Kazimierz Wajsen, prisoner number 76633 of the Neuengamme concentration camp.

My grandfather was deported to Germany as a forced labourer in May 1942. In April 1944, he was sent to the Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg [work] education camp. Two months later he was released and assigned to work in a metalworking factory.

On 14 October 1944, he was arrested and sent to the Gestapo prison after a sabotage campaign was discovered in the factory. Five months later, at the start of March 1945, he was taken to the Neuengamme concentration camp. In the second half of April 1945, my grandfather was transported to Lübeck. He was first taken to the ship *Athen*, then transferred a few days later with other prisoners to the *Cap Arcona* and later back to the *Athen*. My grandfather stayed there until 3 May 1945. He survived and was one of the lucky ones who was given a new life.

After the liberation, in the DP camp in Wentorf, not far from Neuengamme, my grandfather Kazimierz met my grandmother Jadwiga, who had been sent to Germany for forced labour during the war. My grandmother wanted to return to her parents, so my grandparents moved to Łódź and got married. My grandfather later graduated from business school and worked as an office manager until he retired.

In his free time he played chess and enjoyed reading and learning new things. He kept rabbits. He liked animals very much and always looked after them – all the dogs in my grandparents' house had been strays. He was a very good person, sensitive and helpful. He loved flowers and working in the garden. He spoke German and Russian and knew Latin. He was very curious about the world. He had a lot of books at home. Whenever we visited Oma and Opa when I was a child, my brother would spend half the day reading the encyclopaedia.

Even as a child, I knew that my grandfather had been a prisoner in a concentration camp, but I was not aware and did not understand what a difficult experience that had been. In 1988, when I was ten years old, my grandfather died of lung cancer. I clearly remember how long and how much he suffered – it was an eight-month battle. This disease shaped the life of our family at the

time; there were fixed shifts for caring for my grandfather. First there was the hope that it had perhaps been a mistake, that it could be treated. Later there were consultations with various doctors. At the end was the struggle to find relief for my grandfather, so that he would suffer as little as possible, so that he was not alone? The question was always in my mind: Why him? Why did so many bad things happen to him? Does God inflict suffering on good people because they have the strength to endure it?

My grandfather's experiences were barely talked about in my family. My father knew about the camp and the *Cap Arcona* from him, but he was spared the details of the death march, the act of sabotage in the factory, and the imprisonment by the Gestapo. I think my grandfather found it hard to talk about it. He was probably afraid to think back on these events because it would have brought up the images of suffering again, and the healing wounds would have been torn open.

The fact that we did not talk about the past was not a sign of disrespect towards my grandfather, it was a consequence of the times in which we lived. Life was so hard in the People's Republic of Poland, with constant uncertainty, a feeling of injustice, a lack of security. We simply focused on our current problems. In a way, it was a fight to endure. I remember a story my father told. A few days after martial law was declared, shortly before Christmas in December 1981, my grandfather built a smoker from a metal drum all on his own, and he and my father used it to smoke ham for the holidays. My father went home by bus late in the evening with this fragrant ham in his bag, and he was afraid that the ZOMO [the Motorized Reserves of the Citizens' Militia] would take this painstakingly acquired ham from him if they stopped the bus.

The smoker is just one example of my grandfather's ingenuity. He could make something from nothing, never shied away from work, never gave up, and always looked after the family. He taught himself a great deal, made figurines from plaster which he later sold, constructed picture frames, repaired his shoes himself – I always thought he could do anything. It is hard to say whether his attitude was shaped by his wartime experiences or whether he had been raised that way.

My grandfather had a very painful past: the Gestapo, the camp, his father and a brother were murdered in Volhynia by a gang of Ukrainian nationalists from the UPA, another brother went missing. All of this could have broken a person, but my grandfather was always considered cheerful and jolly. He sang and told a lot of jokes – sometimes they were real theatrical

performances. I think maybe he did that to drown out his inner sorrow and rid himself of the demons of the past.

He always remained true to his principles, and despite pressure he never joined the Communist Party, even though it would have brought many advantages, not just financially. We were not a wealthy family, but I am proud that my grandfather and my father maintained their dignity and did not take the easy path in life. This is the most important thing they taught me: to not do anything contrary to your own principles, to be honest and not give in to temptation. And above all, to not cause any pain to others, but also to be able to say a firm 'no'. They also instilled the belief in me that when I do something, I must do it thoroughly and properly, from A to Z. And, of course, I love animals and gardens very much, just like my grandfather.

My first visit to Neuengamme was very moving for me – all the more so because, for many years, my grandfather could not prove that he had been a prisoner in Neuengamme concentration camp. He was always searching for evidence of it and wrote to Arolsen and Neuengamme. It was only after he died that post arrived from the memorial. I can't imagine not visiting Neuengamme and not talking about my grandfather. It's my duty, and I'm proud that he was a hero. I think he never would have believed that I would come here and tell his story, that I would talk about him in Neustadt as well, that I would find the grave of his brother Franciszek.

I came to Neuengamme for the first time eleven years ago. I encountered many young people who listened to the recollections of former prisoners attentively and with respect. I wished at the time that it was the same in Poland, that more people would learn to meet others with respect.

For ten years I have been active as a volunteer in Łódź, the city where I have spent my entire life. I am a member of an association dedicated to remembering the victims of the ghetto in Łódź. We organize tours through the area of the former ghetto, and we tend to Jewish cemeteries in Łódź and Pabianice. It is encouraging that more and more people in my city are taking an interest in the history of this multicultural place and honouring the memory of the Jewish and Roma victims. Groups of young people join us for the cemetery cleaning activities, sometimes up to thirty people.

I often hear from various people that it is foolish to remember the past, and they wonder why people should talk about suffering that is long over. I absolutely do not agree with this, it is ignorant. We, the descendants of the victims, must talk about it, and we must preserve the memory

of our ancestors and the memory of other victims of cruelty – in order to honour them, and so that this evil never happens again.

Let us talk about it, because the world is forgetting more and more. The cruelty of war is not an abstraction, it continues perpetually.

In closing, I want to make an appeal: if you have photos of your ancestors, former prisoners, show them to us. Many victims had no families, or their relatives never found out what happened to them. We have the opportunity to leave behind a trace of our grandfathers, grandmothers and great-grandparents. Let us do this! It is our obligation.

Übersetzung/ Translation: Jessica Spengler

Karin van Steeg

Thank you, Magdalena Wajsen, for your powerful story.

Following this powerful account, we will now hear Jacques Durif's family story. He is the son of Louis Durif, who was arrested at the start of July 1944 on account of his resistance work and deported to the Neuengamme concentration camp. The family unveiled the poster in memory of Louis Durif in 2025. I still remember how the family sang while other relatives hung their posters, which further intensified the feeling of solidarity.

I would like to cordially invite Jacques Durif to tell us his father's story.

Übersetzung/ Translation: Jessica Spengler

Jacques Durif

It is a great honour for me to speak to you today and a meaningful opportunity for myself and my whole family to be able to attend these commemorative events here at the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial. I am aware of what this communal solemn remembrance means to every single one of us here. I would like to thank the responsible people from the Space to Remember working group who asked me to tell you about how we feel and what we found out while preparing for this visit.

On July 4th, 1944, Louis Durif, my [at the time] 32-year-old father, was arrested in Clermont-Ferrand, in his office in the Ministry of Aviation there, along with 36 of his comrades. Some of their work colleagues had reported them, and they were immediately sent to prison. Their department, which was made up of radio operators and was responsible for monitoring civilian aircraft, was accused of being involved in resistance activities and parachute operations and of passing information to the Allies. On July 20th, after being tortured and maltreated, they were deported to the Neuengamme concentration camp, where they arrived on July 31st, 1944.

Then they, like your parents and friends, were sent to the satellite camps. Twenty-one of the thirty-six people who were arrested did not return from deportation. In my father's case, he was sent to the Bremen-Osterort satellite camp, where he had to work under the conditions we all know about. He became seriously ill and was sent with the 'invalids' on a five-day journey in a death train, without anything to eat or drink, to Sandbostel, where he died on April 14th, 1945, the day after he arrived.

Meanwhile, on the day of his arrest, July 4th, 1944, my mother and a friend took me, who was two years old at the time, and my nine-month-old brother in a pram on a walk along the road to Issoire, a small town near Clermont-Ferrand. I happen to have found a photograph of this happy afternoon. Was it already on this day or not until the next that she learned her husband had been arrested? I don't know. She was 25 years old.

Since marrying in 1941, she had spent three happy years with my father. She herself had been completely orphaned when she was six and had lost her grandparents as well at the age of sixteen. This explains how extraordinarily meaningful these three happy years were for her.

She waited for news for ten long months, and as soon as the first deportees returned home, she began searching for signs of life from my father. In October 1945, she learned that Louis had died on the death trains.

What followed was a deep silence for my brother and myself.

My father's and mother's whole family wanted to spare us the story of what had happened. Our family members themselves did not dare to bring up this story because they feared that the memories mixed with sadness and unease would touch on a time in which not all French people had been part of the resistance or were even aware of what had taken place during this war.

Or, as one of my father's cousins once said to me: 'It was a difficult time.'

My mother was severely depressed and spent years, our entire adolescence, in inpatient treatment. We attended the secondary school's boarding school for six years. The silence surrounding my father continued, and my mother could never talk about this dark time. It was only much later, after the birth of her grandchildren, that she was able to overcome her depression.

My brother and I grew up without a father, without a connection to his story.

My father's mortal remains were transferred to Clermont-Ferrand in 1973, and we attended the funeral of this unknown man at our family crypt silently, like bystanders.

It was not until last year, in connection with the ceremony for the 80th anniversary of the liberation in 2025, that I was able to gauge the meaning of these events.

It was finally time.

When I talked with my children and nephews about the idea of organizing a memorial ceremony for my father, they were all gripped by a strong desire to find out what had happened to him. The story of this father no one had ever talked about exerted a magnetic pull on all of us.

What had he experienced in his final days? Where was he?

So, last year I came here with the whole family – 23 people in total, including five of his seven grandchildren and five of his great-grandchildren – to familiarize myself with the place where he spent his last year of life between July 1944 and April 1945. We learned about the horror of Neuengamme concentration camp and about his death march to Sandbostel. Deeply moved, we stood in silent remembrance before the field where the camp of huts that was Stalag 25 had previously stood, where his life ended along with that of thousands of others.

We returned this year to trace the journey of his last days of life between Bremen and Sandbostel together with the family members who had not been able to come last year. I also found fragmentary evidence of his life during the year of deportation and the days of the death march. And I realized with dismay that I knew nothing about my father.

He was a good classmate, a football player, he put his lovely voice to use in the choir of the secondary school where he, like I, was a boarding student, he loved his job as a radio operator, he built two-way radios, he was a young pilot. When he was deported, he maintained his dignity and cared for his dying comrades, he was devout, and he wrote a wonderful letter to his wife before the deportation started.

A deported resistance fighter who fell for France.

These memories I rediscovered in my mind, along with a few written documents and the testimonies of his comrades, are like pieces of a puzzle we put together as a family, under the umbrella of his story which ended here, as it were.

We experience these moments here, as a family, and together with you. They are sad and painful memories, but we also carry this love that conquers death. And we owe it to ourselves to familiarize ourselves with this history and learn lessons from what happened.

Why did so many people have to die in horrific conditions? Who was responsible for the hatred with which they were persecuted? What motivated the people responsible? How can we prevent something like this from being repeated? What responsibility does an individual bear?

For my part, I choose not to accuse others, such as foreigners based on language and culture, of being responsible for the economic and security policy problems of the world today. We should adopt a position of uncompromising openness and designate political decision-makers who embody these values. Suspicion and isolation from the outside world do not pave the way for progress but instead lead to misfortune.

The second lesson to mention is the importance of resilience, which is enabled by every community to which we belong. First our family, because I discovered my father within the family circle, and then our shared community, our country, the great European community to which we belong. I felt the strong cohesion embodied by the one thousand Europeans who were present in Neuengamme last year. What a sign of strength for us all to come together here, united in shared remembrance!

In closing, I would like to thank Karin van Steeg, the Space to Remember working group, and also all guests present here today.

Thank you to everyone who has enabled and organized this time to remember our deceased parents and friends. Your determination and support are indispensable, it prevents us from forgetting and ensures that the past is never repeated.

Thank you all very much!

Übersetzung/ Translation: Jessica Spengler

Karin van Steeg

Thank you, Jacques Durif, for your wonderful personal story.

We are just about to hear another musical piece by Jiahe Liu.

In the meantime, we would like to ask all relatives who designed a poster for a family member this year or in previous years to take their printing plate from the table. The printing plates based on your designs are alphabetically organized here.

You can come forward with your printing plate and stand next to each other here on the stage. We can form rows behind one another if necessary. We want all the printing plates to be clearly visible.

You can pick up your printing plates now.

Musical piece by Jiahe Liu – saxophone

Sergei Rachmaninoff – *Vocalise*

I would now like to ask all relatives here at the front to hold up your printing plate and, one by one, say the name of your persecuted family member loudly and clearly so we can all hear it.

We'll start on the left from my perspective, at the start of the first row. In the next row, the person behind the last speaker will take over until everyone has had a turn. Let's all look out for each other so the names are said one after the other. If necessary, you can give the person following you a small nod when you're done speaking.

We would like to ask everyone present to stand while the names are read, in honour of the victims whose names we will now hear.

We will now start with the reading of the names.

[Reading of names]

Thank you very much!

Let us now remember our loved ones together with a minute of silence.

[Minute of silence out of respect for the victims]

Thank you all for contributing to this moment of respect!

Jiahe Liu will now perform one final musical piece. You can remain standing at the front with your printing plate.

Musical piece by Jiahe Liu – saxophone

Darius Milhaud – *Scaramouche: 3. Brasileira*

The time has now come to hang the posters together. You can hand in the printing plate on your way to the exit. At the exit you will find the tables with the printed posters, which are also organized alphabetically. Take your time and give one another space when hanging the posters. Please be careful with your clothing – the paste is hard to wash out. If you need help, please ask one of us. You can identify us by our nametags.

I will say farewell for now, and I look forward to wrapping up this event with discussions at the poster wall. Don't hesitate to chat with us!

Thank you for your attention, and I wish you unforgettable moments while hanging the posters together!

Übersetzung/ Translation: Jessica Spengler