

Series title: Traces of the White Rose

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Episode title: Part One - Out Of Reach

## Episode Description

In this episode of Traces of the White Rose, Tom Herring (Artistic Director, SANSARA) and Dr Alexandra Lloyd (Fellow by Special Election in German, St Edmund Hall, Oxford) take us into the world of the White Rose resistance. We'll find out who they were, how they were connected, and begin to unpack the question of what led them to resist and ultimately risk everything.

## Music

Extracts from:

Johannes Brahms - Warum ist das Licht gegeben?

Paul Ben-Haim - Psalm 126

Heinrich Schütz - Selig sind die Toten

Philip Moore - Three Prayers of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Max Reger - Nachtlied

## Episode Transcript

Traces of the White Rose, Part One: Out of reach

SOPHIE

My dear Fritz!

I've got a feeling that a letter from you will come tomorrow; I hope I'm not mistaken. [...] There are times when I dread the war and I'm on the brink of losing all hope. I don't like to think about it, but soon there won't be anything but politics, and as long as politics is this confused and evil, turning away from it would be cowardly.

TOM

Today - we live with the traces of those who dreamed of a brighter future...in times of upheaval and conflict, we search for traces of meaning to hold onto, and stories of courage and resilience to help guide us forward.

In this podcast, we're going to share a story that speaks powerfully to us today - the story of the White Rose resistance: at its heart, five students and a professor who stood up to Nazism, and paid with their lives.

Through newly-translated letters, diary entries and resistance pamphlets, we'll hear traces of their story in their own words...traces that live on to this day.

I'm Tom Herring...

ALEX

and I'm Dr Alex Lloyd...

TOM

and you're listening to Traces of the White Rose, a podcast series telling the story of the White Rose resistance in their own words with music by my choir SANSARA...

ALEX

and new translations by students at the University of Oxford. If you haven't listened to our introductory episode, then we encourage you to pause this episode here and listen to that first as it sets out a bit of useful context about the White Rose and what to expect from this series.

TOM

In this episode, we'll hear from the core members of the White Rose in new translations of their letters, diaries and resistance pamphlets, recorded in English for the first time. We'll find out who they were, how they were connected, and begin to unpack the question of what led them to resist and ultimately risk everything. But first, over to Alex for some historical context...

ALEX

In 1933, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and the Nazis seized power. They swiftly took control of all areas of German society. Anyone who dared to oppose the regime, or even to criticise it, risked imprisonment, deportation to concentration camps, and the death sentence. Any form of opposition was unimaginably dangerous, not only for those who mounted resistance, but for their friends and families too. To stand up and speak out took incredible courage and strength.

In the south of Germany, a young girl called Sophie Scholl was growing up with her brothers Hans and Werner and sisters Inge and Elisabeth. When the Second World War broke out in 1939, Sophie was 18 years old and still at school. In May 1942, shortly before her 21st birthday, Sophie began her studies at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. Her older brother Hans was already there studying medicine. The day she arrived he met her at the station and that evening they celebrated her birthday together with some of his friends, including two other medical students, Christoph Probst and Alexander Schmorell. Later, she would also meet Willi Graf, another medic and one of her brother's close circle of friends.

Sophie had only been in Munich for a few weeks when something remarkable

happened. Pamphlets began appearing, resistance pamphlets by a group calling themselves 'The White Rose'. The pamphlets urged people to open their eyes and to confront the truths of the state in which they were living.

SOPHIE/CHRISTOPH

From the first pamphlet of the White Rose:

Is it not so that in the present day, every honourable German is ashamed of their government? And who among us can foresee the extent of the infamy that will be on us, and on our children, when the veil is one day lifted from our eyes and the most horrific crimes, crimes beyond all measure, come to light?

Wherever you may be, mount passive resistance – RESISTANCE ...

Remember that every people deserves the government it is prepared to tolerate.

ALEX

When these words first rang out - after nearly a decade of Nazi rule - they were outrageous, shocking, and seriously dangerous. Not only were they calling on people to resist the regime, but they also attacked Germany's leader, the Führer Adolf Hitler.

SOPHIE/HANS

From the second pamphlet of the White Rose:

Even in its earliest embryonic form, [National Socialism] was dependent on deceiving the German people; even then, it was rotten to the very core and could only save itself through ceaseless deception.

Even Hitler himself writes in an early edition of 'his' book (a book which, despite having been written in the most appalling German that I have ever read, has been elevated to biblical status by this nation of poets and philosophers): 'You would not believe the extent to which you must deceive a people in order to govern it.' ...

Now, we are approaching the end. Now, everything depends on finding one another again, on one person enlightening the next, always reflecting and never resting until every last person is convinced of the dire necessity of fighting against this system...

An end with terror is still better than terror without end.

ALEX

Sophie Scholl would say in their defence during the first White Rose trial that "somebody, after all, had to make a start". That was precisely what her brother Hans and his good friend Alexander had done in June 1942. They had

come to see that there was an urgent need for someone to make a stand, to denounce Nazism, and to open people's eyes to the injustices that were going on around them.

Hans, Christoph, Alexander, and Willi were all conscripted medical students. This meant they could study at university during term time, but they could be deployed as medics during the university holidays. Eight short weeks after Sophie began her studies, she had to say goodbye to Hans, Alexander and Willi at the Ostbahnhof station in Munich.

By 1942, Nazi Germany was at war with Soviet Russia, and that summer the students were sent to the Eastern Front for a three-month tour of duty. Willi recorded his impressions of life at the Front in his diary. He worried about his parents at home in Germany during the Allied bombing raids.

WILLI

8th August 1942

In the morning it's already raining. The ground is wet and covered in mud. Outside you're constantly standing in filth. The rain doesn't let up, and the sky too is overcast. There's no comfort here.

News arrives that Saarbrücken has been bombed. It's said to be very bad. I'm worried about my parents; I can't get a message from them.

In the evening: on duty, night watch, instructions and checks. I think of home.

ALEX

Hans kept a diary, too, as well as writing several letters to his loved ones back at home. He talked about his daily life at the Front and of shared experiences with friends. His diary contains moments of profound reflection: on literature, faith, and the meaning of life and death.

HANS

7th August 1942

I'm weary from having nothing to do. And the bunker is shaking and creaking since the Russians are loading one bomb after another onto the tracks. I'm superfluous here. I'm a lonely pedestrian in the midst of total chaos. The war has cast its spell over me only between firing and impact.

ALEX

In August 1942, Hans and Sophie's father, Robert Scholl, was sentenced to four months' imprisonment for publicly criticising Hitler and the Nazi regime. Over three thousand miles away in Russia, Hans was thinking about his father and wrote about him in his diary.

HANS

28th August 1942

My father is in prison. At this moment he's certain to be thinking of me. I'm sitting on a wooden crate. A candle is burning, flickering, strange shapes form and flow down its side, wax figures formed at random or by fate. The candle will get smaller and smaller and finally go out.

What is death? Why do people fear it so? Why do your fingers tremble when you touch a corpse? [Ach] And oh, you think with a certain relish of a mother's tears, or the heart of a lover that in pain desires to beat no longer. [Ach] And oh a thought creeps into your mind, a thought you just play with secretly, that you are still alive, that your heart is still beating... [...] My father is in prison. Outside: bombs are going off.

I don't have any music with me. Day and night I hear nothing but the groans of men in anguish, and when I'm dreaming, I hear the sighs of those who have been forsaken, and when I think, my thoughts end in agony.

ALEX

Hans wrote to one of his university professors, Kurt Huber, who taught musicology, philosophy, and psychology at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. His lectures were popular with students, including the members of the White Rose.

HANS

17th August 1942, Russia

Dear Professor!

After a long and varied journey we arrived two weeks ago in a little town, half shot to pieces, east of Vyazma. Here we spend our days doing nothing. I am in the same company as three good friends whom you know.

Greetings from,

Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell, Willi Graf

ALEX

It was not only Sophie's brother and their friends who were on the Eastern Front that summer. Fritz Hartnagel, a young soldier, was also stationed in Russia. Sophie and Fritz had met a few years earlier. They wrote to each other often, and met when they could.

In the summer of 1942, Fritz was among the 250, 000 German troops advancing on the city of Stalingrad. This bloody battle would go on for six long months. Fritz wrote to Sophie as he imagined life after the war.

FRITZ

23rd August, 1942, near the river Don, Russia

My dear Sophie!

I'm just writing to say good night. Today was a proper Sunday, not only because we had real coffee and even pudding at lunchtime, but because it was a really quiet day when I didn't have much work and, for once, everything went as it should, so I didn't have any bother. ...

I am now considering ever more seriously whether I should take over my father's business, if I can get out of the military after the war, that is. ... Could you ever see me as a 'respectable businessman'? ...

I am waiting to hear from you, it's already been four weeks since your last letter, I send my love as always. You are firmly in my heart and safe in my prayers.

Your Fritz.

ALEX

Sophie started back at university after the summer break in the Autumn of 1942. She wrote to Fritz as the new term began:

SOPHIE

7th November 1942, Ulm

My dear Fritz,

I haven't had word from you in so long that my mind is racing with all kinds of possibilities. Maybe you've finally been transferred, but I can hardly assume that based on your previous letters. But if you are well, I will gladly wait. Perhaps some post has just gone astray.

I would like to wander through the forest with you again, or anywhere for that matter; but that still feels quite far off, even if it is not completely out of reach.

For the time being, I'll have to make do with sending you a letter – from your Sophie.

ALEX

A month later, Fritz wrote to Sophie:

FRITZ

I always try to rise above all the horror, all the madness, to reach a place of safety, whatever may happen to me.

Yesterday when the Russians were firing at us and the sounds of war raged in the air, suddenly a little bird sat on the edge of my foxhole and twittered happily, as though it didn't have a care in the world. I don't know what led me in that moment to believe with absolute certainty that it could only be a greeting from you. And then I felt so safe in my pit, as though nothing in this world could harm me.

Perhaps this letter will reach you by Christmas if I get the chance to send it along with a transport plane. It is all that I can send you for Christmas – a loving and tender greeting from your Fritz.

My fondest wishes to all the loved ones at home.

ALEX

Sophie spent that Christmas with her family. She wrote to Fritz just before New Year's Eve:

SOPHIE

30th December 1942, Ulm

Another quiet evening at home. I found some beautiful old music on the radio, the kind of music that soothes the senses, restoring order to the bewildered heart with a guiding hand. This beauty can never be a bad thing; it breathes the life of a pure mind, and a clear one at that - sometimes mathematically clear.

ALEX

In January 1943, Fritz was airlifted out of Stalingrad and taken to a military hospital in Lemberg, now Lviv, Ukraine.

On the 16th of February, Sophie wrote to him about a recent trip she had made to visit her parents:

SOPHIE

16th February 1943, Munich

My dear Fritz!

Just another quick 'hello' before I dash back off to my lectures. I think I already mentioned in one of my other letters that I went home for ten days to help out there. These kinds of days always do me some good, though I don't get much time to myself, if only because Father is always so happy to have me home and is surprised when I have to leave again, and because Mother is always fretting over a thousand little things. This love, so freely given, is to me something wonderful. I feel it is one of the most beautiful things with which I have been blessed.

The 150 kilometres between Ulm and Munich change me so quickly that even I am astonished by it. I go from being a naive, exuberant child to a woman who must fend for herself. But this time alone does me good, even if it doesn't always sit so well with me because I have been so spoiled with company. But I only truly feel secure in places where I discern a selfless kind of love. And that kind of thing is relatively rare.

ALEX

Fritz, who had not received any post from Sophie for some time, wrote to her the following day:

FRITZ

17th February 1943, from the military hospital in Lemberg

My dear Sophie!

Sometimes - I do have a lot of time for reflection – I grow uneasy when I think that three months have passed since I last heard from you and from home. Could something terrible have happened in this long stretch of time? But I'll wait and hope until the first letter arrives. ...

Write to me soon, dear Sofie. ...

Tom

Back in Munich, just hours after Fritz wrote this letter, his worst fears were being realised... he would never hear from Sophie again...

ALEX

On Thursday the 18th of February 1943, Sophie and her brother Hans were caught distributing copies of the White Rose resistance pamphlets at their university. They were arrested by the Nazi secret police, the Gestapo.

That evening Willi Graf was arrested as well. Two days later, Christoph Probst was arrested and by the following Saturday, Alexander Schmorell and Professor Kurt Huber were also in custody.

TOM

After nearly a decade of Nazi rule, after three years of war, and after nine months of resistance activities, it took just over a week for the core members of the White Rose to be stopped in their tracks.

In the next episode, we go back and hear more of the resistance pamphlets and find out what happened to the members of the White Rose after their sudden arrests...

END OF EPISODE