

Series title: Traces of the White Rose

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Episode title: Part Two - Your Bad Conscience

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) dive deeper into the resistance writings of the White Rose, and find out what happened to Sophie and Hans Scholl following their arrest by the Gestapo. This episode features choral music by Max Reger, Rudolf Mauersberger, Peter Cornelius and Cecilia McDowall.

Music

Extracts from:

Johannes Brahms - Warum ist das Licht gegeben?

Max Reger - Nachtlied

Mauersberger - Herr, lehre doch mich

Peter Cornelius - Requiem

Cecilia McDowall - Standing as I do before God (soloist: [Hilary Cronin](#))

Episode Transcript

Traces of the White Rose, Part Two: Your bad conscience

SOPHIE

The constant uncertainty that we live in nowadays prevents us from making nice plans for the next day and casts a shadow over all the days yet to come; it weighs me down night and day and doesn't give me a minute's rest. When will the time finally come when we won't have to focus all our strength and all our attention on things that aren't worth lifting a finger for?

Every word is scrutinised before it's even spoken, in case there is even a hint of ambiguity about it. Our trust in other people has to give way to mistrust and caution.

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...

TOM
At the end of the last episode, we heard a letter Fritz Hartnagel wrote to Sophie Scholl on the 17th of February 1943 - he shared his fear that something terrible could have happened in the long period of time since he'd last heard from her...

FRITZ
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.

ALEX
On 18 February, Sophie and her brother Hans were arrested at the University in Munich where they were caught distributing copies of the White Rose pamphlets...

TOM
In this episode, we're going to take you back to find out more about the pamphlets produced by the White Rose between June 1942 and February 1943.

ALEX
...and we'll find out what happened to the members of the White Rose following their arrest by the Gestapo.

SOPHIE

7th November 1942, Ulm

Hans is coming back from Russia tonight. I'm already imagining the days we'll spend together in Munich in our little flat, days that could well be productive.

But I can't truly be happy. The constant uncertainty that we live in nowadays prevents us from making nice plans for the next day and casts a shadow over all the days yet to come; it weighs me down night and day and doesn't give me a minute's rest. When will the time finally come when we won't have to focus all our strength and all our attention on things that aren't worth lifting a finger for? Every word is scrutinised before it's even spoken, in case there is even a hint of ambiguity about it. Our trust in other people has to give way to mistrust and caution. Oh, how tiring and sometimes disheartening it is.

But no, I won't let anything take away my courage, these trivial things will not get the better of me, when I know there are other joys that surpass them. When I think of this, my strength returns, and I want to cry out a word of encouragement to everyone else who is oppressed.

ALEX

Sophie wrote this letter to Fritz in November 1942. She hints at the 'productive' days she and Hans are to spend together in Munich as the new university term begins. She was surely thinking of the White Rose and the continuation of their pamphlet campaign.

It had begun just a few months earlier, when her brother and his friends had decided to take action and defy the Nazis. Over the course of two weeks between June and July 1942 they wrote, printed, and distributed four resistance pamphlets. These pamphlets - some of which we heard in the previous episode - were highly controversial, radical texts, calling on Germans to wake up and do whatever was in their power to resist the Nazi regime.

SOPHIE/WILLI

From the third pamphlet of the White Rose:

Many, perhaps even the majority, of those reading these pamphlets have no idea how they should mount resistance. They cannot see how it is possible. We aim to show them that each and every one of them is in a position to contribute to the overthrow of this system. ...

We do not have a vast range of means at our disposal, we have only one:
PASSIVE RESISTANCE.

ALEX

The pamphlets not only demanded that people take action, but also accused

those at the heart of the regime of wasting the lives of countless soldiers, sending them to die on the battlefields.

SOPHIE/CHRISTOPH

From the fourth pamphlet of the White Rose:

Who has counted the dead, Hitler or Goebbels? — neither of them, in truth. Thousands fall in Russia every day. It is harvest time, and the Reaper cuts into the ripe crop with broad strokes. Grief settles into the country's cottages, and no one is there to dry the mothers' tears. Hitler, however, lies to those whom he has robbed of their most precious possessions, and driven to a meaningless death.

There is no punishment on this earth that would do justice to the crimes of Hitler and his inner circle. But out of love for the coming generations, an example must be set after the end of the war, so that no one will ever feel even the slightest inclination to commit such acts again.

Do not forget the petty villains of this regime; remember their names, so that not a single one goes free!

We will not be silent. We are your bad conscience. The White Rose will never leave you in peace!

TOM

After the first four pamphlets had been produced, the campaign seemed to come to a halt. The White Rose suddenly fell silent.

AL

In July 1942, Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell and Willi Graf were sent to the Eastern Front as medics. When they returned to Germany in November 1942, they knew they had to press on with the pamphlet campaign. The Gestapo had already begun to investigate the pamphlets. Surely it was only a matter of time before those responsible were identified.

Hans, Sophie, Willi, and Alexander were all in Munich for the start of the new university term. Christoph was stationed in Innsbruck in Austria, but travelled to Munich when he could to help with the group's resistance activities.

ALEX

In January 1943, after almost six months' of silence, the group produced a fifth pamphlet. This time they dropped the name 'the White Rose' and instead aligned themselves with all Germans resisting Nazism:

WILLI

An Appeal to all Germans! ...

HITLER CANNOT WIN THE WAR; HE CAN ONLY PROLONG IT!

Germans! Do you and your children want to suffer the same fate that befell the Jews? Do you want to be judged by the same measures as those who have corrupted you? Shall we be forever hated and shunned by the whole world? No! So separate yourselves from the subhuman nature of National Socialism! Act — prove that you think differently! A new fight for liberation is at hand. The better part of the people is fighting on our side. Tear off the cloak of indifference that shrouds your heart! Decide — BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

Freedom of speech, freedom of faith, protection of the individual citizen from the despotism of criminal and violent states: these are the foundations of the new Europe.

Support the resistance movement, distribute the pamphlets!

ALEX

Just days after the fifth pamphlet was printed and distributed, Willi noted in his diary:

WILLI

3rd February, 1943

In Germany news arrives that Stalingrad has been taken by the Russians. It is news of great significance. Everyone thinks so.

ALEX

This was a considerable military loss for Nazi Germany. For the White Rose resisters, it must have looked as though the tables were turning. A sixth pamphlet was then written, this time by Professor Kurt Huber. It called on students to rise up and fight for their freedom.

KURT

Fellow Students!

Our people look on deeply shaken at the defeat of our men at Stalingrad. The ingenious strategy of our Great War corporal has hounded three hundred thousand German men senselessly and irresponsibly to death and ruin.

Turmoil is fermenting among the German people: are we to further entrust the fate of our armies to a dilettante? Are we to sacrifice what is left of our German youth to the basest power-grabbing instincts of a party clique? No more!

The day of reckoning has come, the reckoning of Germany's youth with the most heinous tyranny that our people has ever endured. In the name of all German youth, we demand from Adolf Hitler's state the return of our personal

freedom, that treasure which Germans hold most dear, and which he has cheated us of in the most wretched of ways. ...

ALEX

On the morning of Thursday 18th of February 1943, Sophie and Hans walked the short distance from their flat to the main building of their university. Working as quickly as they could, they laid out piles of the fifth and sixth pamphlets in the corridors and on the balconies of the entrance hall.

KURT

For us there is only one slogan: fight against the party! Get out of the party structures which stifle our political expression! Get out of the lecture halls of the SS and senior leaders and party sycophants! Our goal is true scholarship and real freedom of the mind! There is no threat that can deter us, not even the closure of our universities. It is the duty of each and every one of us to fight for our future, our freedom and honour in a political system conscious of its own moral responsibility.

ALEX

What happened next is the best-known part of the White Rose story: in a moment of reckless spontaneity, Sophie pushed a pile of the pamphlets off a balcony high up in the hall. The sheets of paper floated down to the floor below.

TOM

Had it not been for this act, Sophie and Hans might have succeeded in disappearing into the crowd of students pouring out of the lecture theatres and classrooms...

ALEX

But instead, they were stopped, reported to the Gestapo, and arrested.

When they were caught, Hans had in his pocket a draft of what would have become the seventh White Rose pamphlet. He tried to destroy it, but the Gestapo found it. The draft had been written by Christoph and it sealed his fate.

The evening before Sophie's arrest had been like any other. She had dinner, and then back in the flat she shared with Hans, she listened to a recording of Franz Schubert's Trout Quintet on the gramophone. As she did so, she wrote a letter to an old friend:

SOPHIE

17th February 1943, Munich

Dear Lisa! I've just been listening to the Trout Quintet on the Gramophone. When I listen to the andantino, I would rather like to be a trout myself. You

can't help rejoicing and laughing, just as it's impossible to have a dispassionate or sad heart when you see the springtime clouds in the sky or branches in bud, swaying, stirred by a breath of wind. Oh, how I long for spring to come again. In Schubert's piece, you can really sense and smell the breezes and fragrances and the birds and the whole of creation singing for joy. The recapitulation of the theme in the piano part – like clear, sparkling water, oh it is truly enchanting. Write soon. With love, your Sofie.

ALEX

This is the last letter we have of Sophie's...

The last traces of her voice survive only in Gestapo interrogation records, in the transcripts of her trial, and in the memories of those who spent time with her in her final days.

TOM

She is full of optimism here, full of hope, dreaming of a Spring she would never see...

Almost a year before this last letter, Sophie described how, for her, 'music opens the doors of the soul', creating the conditions needed for the work of the spirit...

In the midst of war, with her future husband on the Eastern Front, living in an oppressive regime, and preparing to undertake a daring act of resistance, she puts on a record and is set free...

ALEX

Five days later, 750 miles away, Fritz wrote to Sophie. He was recovering from an operation after being airlifted out of Stalingrad.

FRITZ

22nd February 1943, from the military hospital in Lemberg

My dear Sophie!

I am very grateful that you have written to me so diligently, although you still don't seem to have received any post from me. Your letters do me so much good. Today another reached me, and the first thing to greet me were some lilac-red petals that fell into my lap.

And as I hold your letter in my hands, and as warm rays of sunshine stream in through the window, is not spring already here? Or at least a sense that it is on its way and a fervent hope that it will soon be here. ...

But for now you must tell me more about where you are, I still don't know anything about it. For instance, is Hans still with you in Munich? And who else is there?

I spend many hours of the day with you. Take this as a small proof of it.

Affectionately,

Your Fritz.

TOM

Fritz's letter never reached Sophie. On the same day he wrote to her, the 22nd of February 1943, Sophie, Hans, and Christoph were sentenced to death in a Nazi courthouse. They were executed at Stadelheim Prison just hours later.

Hoping to receive another letter from her soon, Fritz instead got a letter from Sophie's mother, explaining what had happened.

ALEX

In Part Three, we find out what happened to the other members of the group with selections from their last letters.

END OF EPISODE