

Andreja Preger

THE JEWISH SCHOOL IN SPLIT
SCHOOL YEAR 1942/43

Born on March 20 in Pécs (Hungary), to father Jakov Preger, who was taken to Jasenovac death camp and killed there.

He completed secondary school and music school in Zagreb. He studied law in Belgrade and Zagreb, where he received his doctorate in 1937. He studied music at the conservatory in Leipzig in the piano class of the renowned professor Max Pauer, and graduated in Ljubljana. Until 1941 he was a trainee lawyer in Zagreb, from where his family fled to Split before the Ustaša. He was a member of the National Liberation Theatre, from 1943 a participant in the National Liberation War, and from 1944 he lived and worked in Belgrade.

He spent most of his working life as a piano professor at the Faculty of Music, where he retired in 1980, and continued teaching piano at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad until 1994.

Andreja Preger achieved outstanding success as a pianist who began playing the piano at the age of five and performed publicly from the age of nine until ninety-nine. He gave numerous concerts in the country and abroad, had highly successful tours, and performed with major artists such as Andrej Šering, Leonid Kogan, André Navarra, Ruggiero Ricci, and Michael Rabin.

For his exceptional artistic work he received numerous awards and recognitions, including the October Award of the City of Belgrade, the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Association of Music Artists of Serbia, the medal of the Republic with Silver Wreath, the Order of Labor with Red Flag, the Order of Merit for the People with Gold Star, and the Medal of the White Angel.

From his first marriage to Ljiljana Pavlović he has a son, Jaša (61). In his second marriage he is with Angelina Djoković, and they have a daughter, Eva (50). From his son Jaša he has granddaughters Ana and Maša, and from his daughter Eva, grandchildren Filip and Ana.

The aspirations of peoples and rulers from the western side of the Adriatic to govern both of its shores date back to the time of the Roman Empire. Emperor Diocletian placed his capital in the area of present-day Split. Powerful Venice ruled Dalmatia for centuries, and after Napoleon's Illyria, Dalmatia fell under the rule of the Habsburg Monarchy. After its collapse following the First World War, Dalmatia became part of the

Kingdom of Yugoslavia, but during the Second World War the fascist Axis powers dismembered Yugoslavia, and at the head of Croatia (and thus Dalmatia) and Bosnia and Herzegovina came Mussolini's protégé from the Lipari Islands, the Ustaša Ante Pavelić.

Immediately upon coming to power, as Poglavnik of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, he had to repay Mussolini for his stay (as well as that of the Ustaša) under the Duce's protection and hand over Dalmatia to the Italians, who established military and civilian authority in that area.

Photo

Andreja in his mother's arms, in his hometown of Pécs, Hungary.

The Italians did not carry out genocidal actions in the territories under their authority; they even prevented them. Thus, the area under their occupation became a haven for all those persecuted by the Ustaša: Serbs and Jews. The Italians tolerated the Jews even when they relocated them to the islands (Rab and Korčula) and sent them into so-called civilian internment in the most remote regions of northern Italy (Piedmont), where Split in particular, until Italy's capitulation in September 1943, became a true refuge for Jews from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Photo

Andreja Preger with members of the Society of Serbian-Jewish Friendship — Dragoslav Mihailović, Andrija Gams, and Dobrica Ćosić.

There was also a large number of young people there of secondary-school age. According to fascist laws, Jews were excluded from all schools. However, this was only formal. The Italian civilian administration was ambivalent. On the one hand, the formal ban was in force; on the other, a special school for Jewish children and youth was permitted, with examinations certified by the Italian authorities.

The Jewish school was founded and organized by Sigmund Šteg, a secondary-school professor who had previously taught at the Split gymnasium (high school). He gathered his local Jewish colleagues, professors, as well as Jewish refugee newcomers, among whom there were experts and intellectuals, and formed a teaching staff. Alongside him was Professor Rajner (languages), Engineer Finci (natural sciences), and others. The author of these lines, as a lawyer, was engaged to teach history.

Classes were held in a private house, and the students were divided into eight grades, according to the curriculum of Italian schools. Groups in individual grades numbered fewer than ten students, sometimes fewer than five. Thus, instruction could be intensive and effective. At the end of the 1942/43 school year, in July 1943, the students took examinations before an official Italian commission and received very good grades. When, after Italy's capitulation, a larger number of students fled to Italy, certificates issued by the Jewish school in Split were recognized there as valid. I know this because my younger sister had a certificate from our school that was recognized for her continued education in Italy.

The work of the Jewish school in Split in 1942/43 was significant. It testifies to the enduring will and action among Jews that, under all circumstances, even the most difficult, children and youth should not be deprived of opportunities for learning and education, and that, despite even the greatest obstacles, they be prepared in the best possible way for the tasks awaiting them in life.