

# ***The Dybbukast***

## **Season 2, Episode 7: "Sound in the Silence"**

### **Transcription**

**Actors read from the text of *Sound in the Silence*:**

**Actor 1:** At the end of 1938, the SS set up a satellite camp of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in an old brick factory near the village of Neuengamme, a suburb of Hamburg.

**Actor 2:** Red bricks are —

**Actor 3:** Red bricks are —

**Actor 4:** Red bricks are —

**Actor 1:** Red bricks are —

**Actor 3:** Red bricks are what you use to build houses, not modern houses, but the houses that they built to separate history and keep secrets.

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**Host Aaron Henne:** Welcome to *The Dybbukast*, the show in which we ask: What do poems, plays, and other creative texts from throughout history tell us about the times in which they were written, and what do they reveal about the forces still at play in our contemporary societies? I'm Aaron Henne, artistic director of theatre dybbuk.

In this episode, we explore *Sound in the Silence*, a project that uses the group development of performance to personalize Holocaust remembrance at memorial sites. In the years since its inception, *Sound in the Silence* has partnered with a variety of organizations and worked with young people and community members from throughout Europe.

At the start, you heard actors perform readings from a script created by students as part of the project's first edition in 2011. Throughout the episode, you will continue to hear selections from that piece along with excerpts from other texts. We spoke with *Sound in the Silence* co-founder and current artistic director, Dan Wolf, an artist who works with rap, theater and personal narrative. He discusses how his own family history intersected with the creation of this project, while also sharing about the work's longterm impact and the ways in which its collaborative process engages with remembrance.

And now, Season Two, Episode Seven: "Sound in the Silence."



**Dan Wolf:** *Sound in the Silence* is a historical remembrance project that really centers itself in the arts and how arts and live performance and personal narrative and self-expression can be inspired or in conversation with historical locations and places and people and movements and time periods. It really centers around a very specific location, where a number of different groups of people spend, let's say seven days or 10 days, depending on how the project is structured. We bring in participants — most of the time they're students — and then we have historical educators from the location, and then we have artists who work with this kind of both real material of dates and times and place and people, and also this more ethereal material that you collect, which is our thoughts, impressions, and emotions. And then over this time period, through culture exchange, through skill exchange, through just time spent with each other, discussing the location and the history — at the end, the result is usually about an hour-long, site-specific performance. It started in 2011, and we've had about 12 or 15 different editions, as we call them, in the last 10, 11 years.

**Actor 4:** *But red bricks are also beautiful. They shimmer in the sun and give me a warm feeling. Reminds me of the 19th century.*

**Actor 1:** *Red bricks are necessary to build something up — the foundation of a house. They are made of mud and show the area where a family lives. But I don't know who made these bricks.*

**Dan:** The first edition of *Sound in the Silence* was executed in 2011, but it was really born in 2006. In 2006, I was able to tour a play of mine called *Stateless* around Germany. And one of our tour stops was in this town called Fürstenberg, where we performed the show at the end of the week. But during that week we were working with young people from the area of Fürstenberg — all Germans, not Jewish. This is a town in the eastern part of Germany, the former DDR, like, behind the wall, quote unquote. To connect hip hop and history was, like, our task. And so we went to this location. We did our guided tour, and then we sat in this room and we were supposed to, like, start art workshops, and I was completely overemotional. I didn't know what to do. I was, like, in my late 20s. And it was the first time I had really been to a memorial site in this way. So I really didn't know how to approach it. But the artists that I was touring with — one was a beatboxer who had come with me from America, Tommy Shepherd, who was in *Stateless* with me, and then another one was this kid, Max — Mad Max, from Hamburg. And they just kicked a beat, and Mad Max started freestyling about the moment that he was experiencing. He was pissed that this still happens. You know, he was talking about the irony of a German guy, and a Jewish kid and a Black guy, all being together at this concentration camp, trying to do hip hop theater workshops with German kids. Like, it was kind of an absurd situation that we found ourselves in. And I was speechless. Even though I was supposed to be a leader in the situation, I was letting my emotions get the best of me. But they were really leaning into the artistic, expressive, like, middle-finger-to-the-world opportunity. But what I realized was that this moment in time really allowed everybody the freedom to talk about how they really felt. So that's where I was like, oh, okay, let's do a thing where we bring artists to this place, and we utilize this place as our text, as our source material. So I spit this to my friend Jens and he says, that's a great idea, but I can't raise money in Europe to do it with just artists. We have to do it with young students as well. And we just talked about it over time, over time, over time. And it really took us a good five years to raise the money and to find the partners. So he developed his

ideas in Hamburg with a youth club called Die Motte, and I worked on my ideas and kind of got a group of artists together here to talk about what does this even mean. And then he partnered with Neuengamme.

**Actor 2:** *The camp was established to manufacture bricks for monumental buildings the Nazis wanted to construct in Hamburg.*

**Actor 4:** *Red bricks are an interesting type of brick, made of sand. They built and rebuilt my city.*

**Dan:** The first edition at Neuengamme was exploration. And Neuengamme is the concentration camp outside of Hamburg. It wasn't a death camp, although people were worked to death. It was mainly a brick factory. Prisoners were pulling clay out of the mud, pushing up these big carts into a factory where they would build, shape and then fire the bricks.

**Actor 1:** *But red bricks are also a bad memory. They are made of pain. They look peaceful, but they aren't. They are a proof of war.*

**Actor 2:** *Nobody knows that they were made by the prisoners — strong, powerful work.*

**Actor 3:** *A lot of work.*

**Actor 1:** *The red bricks are all that is left.*

**Dan:** And so what we did was we found 15 students — high school students in Hamburg, mostly families of immigrants, you know, cause there's a huge Turkish population in Germany. There's a huge Ukrainian population. There's people coming from the east. There's people coming from all over. So we found a school that was mostly immigrant population. And then they found a partner school in a city in Poland; Koszalin, Poland. And so we had 15 students from Poland and 15 students from Hamburg. And the kids were like, I can't dance here. I can't sing here.

**Actor 2:** *The prisoners lived in 16 wooden huts, the so-called "blocks," which were built over time. The prisoners initially had to sleep crowded together on straw mattresses on the floor. Later, the huts were furnished with three-tier bunk beds, lockers and benches.*

**Actor 4:** *Usually considerably more than 300, at times even 600 prisoners, were crammed into the huts, which were 50 meters long and eight meters wide.*

**Dan:** When we walked into the brick factory, it was clear they had swept up and created a space, but they didn't clean up the dust. And about 100 yards into this huge, like, let's say 800-yard factory building was, like, this line where they'd pushed the dirt. And it was just, like, four to six inches of dust. It looked like it hadn't been cleaned since the '40s, right? And so we started asking questions: What's living in that dust? And we started to really develop this idea that we have to come into these spaces, and, as people, we have to be curious about what happened there, what's the history there, what are the ghosts that are there, how do we — how do we make a connection to the place.

**Actor 2:** *Home for me is —*

**Actor 3:** *Home for me is —*

**Actor 4:** *Home for me is —*

**Actor 1:** *Home for me is —*

**Actor 3:** *Home for me is a place where my family is.*

**Actor 4:** *Home for me is a place I can go any time.*

**Actor 1:** *Home is where my stuff is.*

**Dan:** I had seen red bricks all over Hamburg, and now here we were in this place where the red bricks are manufactured. And my question is always, how much are the students aware of the, like, physical, tactile surroundings that they have, and what they

see on a day-to-day basis, and the historical context. So, without telling them that this is what I was going to do, we just did a writing exercise.

**Actor 4:** *Home is where I feel safe and happy.*

**Actor 1:** *Where nobody can look at what I do.*

**Actor 3:** *Private feelings and thoughts.*

**Actor 2:** *Memories and origin.*

**Actor 3:** *Warm inside, but raining out.*

**Dan:** The script that we created in 2011 really had three distinct parts. The first part was red bricks, which was really focused on the factory and the function of the camp. The second part was home, which was my attempt to have the participants —the students — understand the privileges that they have at home versus the sacrifices that the prisoners dealt with. And then the third piece was just love, right? It was just about how to find that joy and that connection with each other. And so much of it is about healing. And so much of it is about revealing something of yourself that maybe you wouldn't reveal in another context. And we were able to perform in this place called The Fabrique, which is a former factory in Hamburg, in the city proper. And then we actually performed in the site of the former brick factory. And what was clear from the beginning — really, from the whole arc of the week — is that those students who on the first day said, I don't know these people, I don't feel safe. I don't — the history is too much. Like, we can't make noise here. We have to be solemn. We have to cry. We have to be silent. At the end of the week, they were playing music outside and playing football with people they had never seen before or met before — this beautiful, transformational quality of all of these students who are becoming empowered by their story and connecting across cultures and finding themselves in the other, and in a natural way that only can happen when you go through the trenches of creating something beautiful with somebody else.

**Actor 1:** *Home is my neighborhood where my friends are.*

**Actor 4:** *Lying in bed, hearing mom make breakfast.*

**Actor 3:** *Home is where the heart is.*

**Actor 2:** *Home is where I can call someone in to kill the spiders.*

**Dan:** So, in 1999, I had an experience where I really feel like my culture and my creativity collided. My grandmother contacts my father and says, hey, I got this email from this German guy. You deal with it. And my dad read the email and he said, oh, Dan, you're the artist, you deal with this. And it was because an email was from an artist in Hamburg named Jens Huckeriede. He wanted to do something with music that Jewish people wrote in Hamburg. And he found the song that he had been singing his whole life: "An de Eck steiht'n Jung mit'n Tüddelband," — "On The Corner Stands A Boy With A Hoop".

**Actor 5:** *On the corner stands a boy with a hoop. In his other hand is bread with butter and cheese. Hopefully, he doesn't stumble with his feet. Bam. There he falls on his nose. Oh, how he hits the curbstone with his head and bites his tongue intensely. He jumps up and says, "That didn't hurt at all." That can't embarrass a boy from Hamburg.*

**Dan:** I answered the email at a certain point. And he said, oh, I'm so happy you emailed me. It was like the 11th hour. He's like, I've just come back from China, doing research. I'm coming to New York and then I'm coming to San Francisco. Can I meet you? The content of the email was that he wanted to now make a documentary film about this song. And so he was following the story of the song around the world and that led him to me. So Jens asked me if I'd ever heard of the Gebrüder Wolf — the Brothers Wolf. I didn't know anything about them. They were literally brothers, and there was Leopold and Ludwig, and Leopold is my great-grandfather. They started as a trio in the late 1890s. And then, in the early 20th century, they become a duo, and it's not until their 40s that they have great success because they write these songs — they wrote over 600 songs, but finally they figured out a way to write a song that's reflective of Hamburg.

**Actor 2:** *Home is my own room with a bed.*

**Actor 3:** *A television.*

**Actor 4:** *Music.*

**Actor 1:** *Movies.*

**Actors 3 & 4:** *Internet.*

**Actors 1 & 2:** *Video games.*

**Dan:** So about six months prior to meeting Jens, I got this letter from my grandfather. My dad handed it to me and he said, this is your next play. In the envelope was a 42-page, type-written letter written from my grandfather to me and my sister, started the day after my sister was born in 1977. And the last date that I could surmise from the letter was 1984, which was the year that he died. So literally from the birth of my sister to his death seven years later was the story, his story. And he lays it out pretty clear in the beginning, right?

**Actor 6:** *San Francisco, California; March 9th, 1977. To my grandchildren, Daniel and Jessica: One day after you, Jessica, were born, I am sitting down to write to the two of you a letter, which hopefully will fall into your hands at a time when you will not only be able to read, but also to understand what I am telling you.*

**Dan:** His intention was really to tell me and my sister who he was and a little bit about his life and a little bit about his family, and I think, ultimately, like, why he had to leave Germany to come to America — like, his specific story around that. In the letter are the stories of his youth and where he lived and how they got kicked out of an apartment 'cause his brother was, like, stomping around in boots.

**Actor 6:** *We lived at this address till 1914, until my brother, James, took the apartment to be a parade field and marched in his soldiers boots through the place. And, on account of this noise, we were told to leave.*

**Dan:** One time, he fell in love with a German girl and her brother was a Nazi and they published all this stuff in the newspaper and then they couldn't get married.

**Actor 6:** *A Nazi newspaper published an article headed in bold letters: "Martha Franziska Klinkfort is no German anymore," and continued in the most abusive language to state that, "the Jew Wolf has never been a German and is of no interest." But since MFK wanted to marry me, she proved not to be worth belonging to Germany.*

**Dan:** It showed his business life. He was a businessman. He was in an import and export business in Lagos, Nigeria. And then later, when he escaped to China, to Shanghai, he was — he taught English to Chinese businessmen.

**Actor 6:** *The Chinese were very good to me. Not only that I continued receiving my salary, which in the course of time lost its actual value, as we had to cope with a very strong inflation and I had to look for ways to improve this financial problem. Well, I started giving English lessons, and gradually I achieved to teach 22 pupils.*

**Dan:** He had this first wife, Olly Berlin, who he felt — who was the love of his life, I think. They had a son named Dan. He escapes to Shanghai and is going to bring his wife and his son, but they get deported and murdered in Riga, Latvia. And it's not until that moment that he's open to meeting this girl that his friend's trying to introduce him to in Shanghai. And that turns out to be my grandmother.

One night, I was at my grandma's house and she had this back room. I don't think my grandfather was still alive 'cause I was 10 when he died. So I must've been in my early teens, and, you know, this is the room that me and my sister kinda got put in to watch TV and have our own space when the family was all together. And I found this book and I can't remember if it was in German or English, but I understood what it said. This is a book of, like, people who were deported from Hamburg, and it was a published book. Clearly the government had published it, like in the '80s. And so I, like, said to my sister, wouldn't it be funny if my name was in this book? Ha ha ha. And

so I flipped to the Ws and I found Wolf, and then I found a list of Wolfs, and there was Dan Wolf, and I was like, oh, yeah, not so funny. You know, I remember the gravity of it, like really hitting me in the chest 'cause I was like, I didn't expect there to be any Wolfs in this book. And there was not only Wolfs but, like, my name. Yeah, and so what I've learned since then is that in the Jewish faith, you name your children after deceased members of the family, as a way to, like, honor them and pass the history on.

**Actor 6:** *I received a letter from Uncle Ludwig that on December 4, 1941, Olly, Dan, her mother, and many others have been deported from Hamburg. His letter was dated June 22, 1942. And I expressed the opinion at that time, already, that it is very doubtful that I shall ever see them again, which, of course, turned out that way.*

**Dan:** I learned that my name came from there. I also learned that my last name Wolf is their stage name, which I thought always was pretty cool.

**Actor 6:** *I mentioned at the beginning that my name is Wolf. As a matter of fact, my real name was Isaac. And, on account of the fact that your grand-grandfather was a comedian and acted under the name of Gebrüder Wolf — Wolf Brothers — together with his brother Ludwig, we obtained the permission from the Hamburg Senate to change our name to Wolf. That is also the name under which your father was born and which I am carrying now.*

**Dan:** But then when I realized that their original name was Yitzhak — Isaac — you know, I was like, oh, if I ever have a boy, I have to name him Isaac. I want to, like, complete the circle and give the family name back. And so, yeah, 13 years ago I had a son, and Isaac is his name.

**Actor 1:** *Home could be anywhere.*

**Actor 4:** *Any place.*

**Actor 2:** *Any time.*

**Actor 3:** *In the city.*

**Actor 2:** *In the country.*

**Actor 3:** *In space.*

**Dan:** My dad wasn't wrong when he handed me that manila envelope and said that this is your next play. And so in 2003, actually, Jens got me a grant from the Culture Office in Hamburg. And I got to spend six weeks living in Hamburg, with the goal being that I was going to start writing this play. In my grandfather's stuff, I found this foreigners resident certificate, which was kind of like, you carried it everywhere you went, but it was more like a passport, right? And inside the passport, it had all of this information and it said, like, you know, his name and where he lived. And then, where it said nationality, it said, "stateless." And that blew my mind because here I was, this Jewish-American boy, clearly born in California, but, like, day-to-day, feeling, like, very different than this country; very, like, when I'm looked at as, like, just an American, something doesn't — didn't feel right to me. So when I saw that name, stateless, on that passport, I was like, oh my God, I feel stateless too. I've been given all of this, but it doesn't always feel like it's mine. I was in my band, Felonious, and my best friend, Tommy Shepherd — he's like a six-foot black dude — and I, like, told him this whole story. And I was like, look, look at this thing, stateless. And he's like, you feel stateless in this country. I definitely feel stateless in this country. In the research that I did, I recognized that a lot of the Nuremberg laws were based on the Jim Crow laws in America. And so *Stateless* became this rap-infused theatrical piece that used my grandfather's letter as the structure to explore the relationship between me and Tommy, as we go back to very specific places in Hamburg, which in turn unlocked things for Tommy in relation to those spaces.

**Actor 7:** *Lights rise on Tommy beat-boxing. He goes through a review of beats, building songs using a Boss looper. Tommy drops the beat to "A Boy On The Corner With A Hoop," and Dan enters. Dan is in another reality and space. Dan finds a manila envelope with a long letter inside. Dan is reading the letter. He sits on a stack of*

*paper, and there are pages all over the place. The pages are not random. They are laid out like a path before him.*

**Dan:** It's a story about brothers, right? Brothers in art, brothers in blood, brothers in survival. And we parallel the relationship between the brothers of the Gebrüder Wolf to the relationship between me and Tommy throughout the piece.

**Actor 3:** *I go back home when I feel lonely.*

**Actor 2:** *Where I return from adventures of life.*

**Actor 4:** *To relax and be on my own.*

**Actor 1:** *Home is totally comfortable and safe.*

**Dan:** *Sound in the Silence* started in 2011, and in 2017, we were invited to Ravensbrück to do an edition of the project. And we fell in love with Ravensbrück and they fell in love with us for a number of reasons. At that point, really, the project had only been between living people who had no experience at the locations; just we were there as students, as artists, as humans at these places.

**Actor 3:** *At my house, I can be myself and not hide feelings.*

**Actor 2:** *There is an invisible bond.*

**Actor 1:** *And nobody can destroy that connection.*

**Dan:** And because of our relationship with Ravensbrück, they invited us in 2018 to come back and do something called Ravensbrück Generations Forum, which is a five-day experience where people who are there volunteering from all over the world during the summer get to spend really deep, enriching time with survivors — specifically a small, select group of survivors who have been part of the Ravensbrück community after their liberation, and after they moved all over the world. And really, as Germany started to invite people back, they stepped in and created special relationships. So, we got to work in this capacity of a *Sound in the Silence* meets the

Generation Forum, and really working with four incredible survivors of that location. And it was the first time that we ever were engaging with living people who had experienced the location in a real direct way. And that changes the whole concept of how you approach it because, all of a sudden, you have people to protect, people to answer to, and people whose lives are getting towards the end of existence, and so you really want to — you really want to love them. You really want to connect with them and you really want to spend time making sure that they know their story is in good hands.

**Actor 2:** *Love is —*

**Actor 3:** *Love is —*

**Actor 4:** *Love is —*

**Actor 1:** *Love is —*

**Actor 3:** *Love is trusting.*

**Actor 4:** *Love is flying totally free.*

**Actor 2:** *Love includes everything.*

**Dan:** In 2018, we were able to build a nice rapport with each other and really understand that the thing that we're doing in a non-traditional way is exactly what they had hoped for in terms of keeping their voice alive. They all wanted to come back in 2019, and we've continued to work with them since then even though the pandemic has put a little bit of a wrench in the plan.

**Actor 1:** *Real love? It doesn't matter anyway.*

**Actor 2:** *Love is hard work 'cause you have to do something for it.*

**Actor 3:** *Love is embarrassed 'cause your partner knows you and loves you.*

**Actor 4:** *Love is easier to forgive.*

**Dan:** We really have three partners, which is: Ravensbrück, and that's a very pointed audience — that's really about historians and historical workers and activists; our partner in Warsaw, which is a European Network Remembrance and Solidarity, right there — this network that is created by the German and Polish government, and it's really about collaboration. And so they're a whole institute of scientists. They also try to bring in a lot of public, so they'll do a ton of publishing and promoting in the local area. And Die Motte is really about new immigrants or poorer people, or — they have all these different programs in their buildings so it really is this cross-section. We're in the third year of a three-year grant from the German government to work with survivors because of — you know, this is really the end of time that we're going to have with the survivors. The hope is that we can get re-upped to do that because we've been working with students of history who, in the future, will be history teachers. So this idea of being able to use this methodology as a way for the next generation of history teachers to teach Holocaust education in Europe.

**Actor 2:** *She told me love is like chocolate.*

**Actor 3:** *Love is like a bed, 'cause when you go in, it's warm and comfortable.*

**Actor 4:** *Love is shoes that helps you move on.*

**Dan:** Mostly it's been focused on Europe, just because that's where the project was born. But for me, like, I've been asking forever, like, how does this work exist in America? How can we do this work here? Who is the right communities? What's the right story? What are the locations that we can be working with? And I haven't cracked that nut yet. You know, it's really something that I am actively thinking about and talking to people about. I feel it takes, like, a funder who really understands the vision and understands the exploratory nature of it. Um, it takes the right community partners and education partners.

**Actor 3:** *Love is warmth, like when you're being loved, you are warm from the inside.*

**Actor 4:** *Love is forget everything else, call my friends.*

**Actor 1:** *Love is starting to have feelings you never had before.*

**Actor 2:** *Love is general attitude changes.*

**Dan:** My generation is the third generation post-Second World War, and trauma is a crazy thing because it gets passed down to all of us. Like, I hold trauma in my bones and blood and body because of the experiences of my grandparents — because of the unhealed experiences of my grandparents. But with them, the trauma was so acute, right? It wasn't memory. It was reality. And my parents grew up in a house where that betrayal and those health issues — mental and physical health issues — they were, like, getting the repercussions of that trauma, right? Because they're the children of the victim, quote unquote. And we are the cherry on top. We're the rebirth generation. We're the generation that, like, has enough distance from it that imagination can really come into play in a certain sense. Whereas my kids' generation, they have no connection to it. It's just history books to them. And it's just stuff that mom and dad talk about. So when we're talking about that, we're also talking about the distance away from people who are witnesses to the actual atrocity, people who actually experienced it.

**Actor 3:** *At least 42,900 prisoners died at the main camp, the satellite camps, and during the evacuation of the camps.*

**Actor 1:** *More than 80,000 men and 13,500 women were registered as prisoners.*

**Dan:** I think people really want to preserve memory and it's — that's really hard because it's completely subjective. We all have to find our own way, and an open process like this allows us to honor each individual, right? Because your memories and the way that you remember becomes as valid as anybody else's. All of us are carrying the ghosts of our ancestors and the ghosts of these narratives that are floating around at these locations, and when we all engage in relation to each other, our memories — they change in us, or a new memory in a way is created, right? So it's really about these layers of time, layers of history. It's not this line that ended. It's not like in a, in a glass case in a museum that can't be touched. It actually is to be touched. It's to have

another layer of its existence laid upon it. This location is both a horrible place because they murdered people here, and it's also this incredibly joyous place because we connect and we laugh and we sing and we love each other and we meet each other here as well.

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**Aaron:** Thank you for listening to this episode of *The Dybbukast*, "Sound in the Silence". Featured in this episode were actors Joe Jordan, Julie Lockhart, Rebecca Rasmussen, Clay Steakley, Rena Strober, Jon Weinberg and Mark McClain Wilson. Readings were taken from the first edition of *Sound in the Silence*, the play *Stateless*, and a letter written by Dan Wolf's grandfather. Thanks also to Dan for sharing his insights. Our theme music is composed by Michael Skloff and produced by Sam K.S.. Story editing is led by Julie Lockhart with support from me, Aaron Henne. The series is edited by Mark McClain Wilson. Please visit us at [theatredybbuk.org](http://theatredybbuk.org), where you will find links to a wide variety of materials which expand upon the episode's explorations. And if you want to know more about theatre dybbuk's work in general, please sign up for our mailing list on that same website, on the contact page. This season of *The Dybbukast* is generously supported by a grant from Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, and this episode is made possible in part by a grant from the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs. In addition, this episode was conceived of as a result of a research trip, which was supported by Asylum Arts. New episodes are available every second Friday of the month. *The Dybbukast* is produced by theatre dybbuk.

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**Actor 1:** Love is music to express.

**Actor 2:** Love is standing the pain.

**Actor 3:** Love is finding your soulmate, good times and bad times.

**Actor 4:** Love is family. Talk with them.

**Actor 1:** Love is forgiving, but not forgetting.

