

Larissa Khusid's Uncle Elgar Ortenberg's Quartet



Iliozar (Elgar) Ortenberg's string quartet. My uncle Iliozar is on the left. This photo was taken in Paris in 1937. Iliozar's wife was a Jewish girl named Tamara Kogan, whom he married in Berlin. After witnessing the anti-Semitic riot known as "Crystal Night" Iliozar and Tamara ran away to Tamara's relatives in Paris. There, my uncle organized a string quartet whose members were Russian Jews, all of whom were mobilized into the French army even before the Nazis arrived. My Uncle Iliozar went on a tour to the USA with his string quartet. Later, he received a Legion of Honor Order from Errieau, France's Minister of Culture, for his promotion of French art in America. When Hitler attacked France in 1939, my Uncle Iliozar told his wife that they must leave, but he wanted to take along the rest of the family, too, including his wife's sister and her husband, Leon. This caused some delay with their departure. When Hitler was almost in Paris, my uncle closed the windows of their apartment and turned on the gas. He didn't want the Germans to capture him alive. Tamara managed to open the windows before it was too late, and nearly penniless, they all fled to the south of France. In Marsailles they boarded a ship going to America. They arrived in America with one dollar in their pocket. But Uncle Iliozar was soon offered a job on American radio. He worked there for a long time, and subsequently became second violinist in the "Budapest Quartet" a group whose reputation as the best quartet in the world was undisputed. The first violinist and founder of the quartet was a Hungarian.