

Nine Hungarian Geniuses in Exile

Hungarians are the only people in Europe without racial or linguistic relative in Europe, therefore they are the loneliest on this continent. This....perhaps explains the peculiar intensity of their existence....Hopeless solitude feeds their creativity, their desire for achieving...To be Hungarian is collective neurosis.

- Arthur Koestler

Nine men, who were brilliant products of Budapest's brief Golden Age, were then driven from Hungary by anti-Semitism. They fled to the West, especially to the United States and changed the world. Each of these nine men were celebrated for their individual achievements and were part of a unique group who grew up in a time and place that will NEVER come again. They brought their distinctive outlook on life, science and culture to the U.S. and Western Europe, and played an immensely important role in shaping the mid-twentieth century world.

Alexander Korda

September 16, 1893 Hungary – Jan. 23, 1956 London, UK

Alexander Korda was a producer, director and screenwriter. He founded his own film production studio and film distribution company. In 1930, he found refuge in England. In 1933, his film, the Private Life of Hendry V111 was a huge critical and financial success, becoming the first British film to break into the American market and won him an Academy Award. In 1934, The Private Life of Don Juan followed. Perhaps his real achievement as a director was in providing the next generation with an example of never doubting that filmmaking was something wonderful and individuals engaged in filmmaking should have the best materials and resources. His charisma and charm were integral to his success. In 1942, he was the first film producer to receive a knighthood by King George VI. He spent much time in the U.S. during World War II as he acted as a courier for Winston Churchill. He was a major, if controversial figure and acted as a guiding force behind the British film industry of the 1930's and continued to influence British films until his death.

Quotes:

- *One way to keep momentum going is to have constantly greater goals.*
- *The freedom to fail is vital if you are going to succeed.*
- *If you don't believe in yourself, then who will believe in you?*

Andre Kertesz

July 2, 1894 Hungary – September 28, 1985 New York

Andre Kertesz was a photographer known for his groundbreaking contribution to photographic composition and the photo essay. In the early years of his career, his then-unorthodox camera angles and style prevented his work from gaining wider recognition. He emerged as one of the most influential practitioners of the medium. In 1920, he moved to France to pursue his career but with its growing Jewish persecution, he emigrated to the U.S. There he went on to work for magazines, such as Vogue, Harper's Bazaar and House and Garden. He also mounted solo shows at the Art Institute of Chicago and the museum of Modern Art in New York. His piece *Chez Mondrian*, 1926 sold for a record breaking price of \$464,000.00.

Quotes:

- *The camera is my tool, as I can do something with almost anything I see.*
- *I still regard myself as an amateur today and I hope that's what I will stay until the end of my life.*
- *The photographer's art is a continuous discovery which require patience and time.*

Arthur Koestler

September 5, 1905 Budapest – March 1, 1983 London UK

Arthur Koestler was an author and journalist. In 1931, he joined the Communist Party of Germany, but he resigned in 1938 because it disillusioned him. In 1926 he lived in Israel, then Palestine on a kibbutz, but his application to join the Heftiziba was rejected by its members. He left in 1927. He is best known for his novel *Darkness at Noon* which he wrote in 1940. His anti-totalitarian work gained him international fame. Over the next 43 years, he espoused many political causes and wrote novels, memoirs, biographies and numerous essays. In 1968, he was awarded the Sonning Prize for his outstanding contribution to European culture. Unfortunately, he killed himself from an overdose of barbiturates, based on the finding that he suffered from leukemia and Parkinson's disease. His wife killed herself with him, at their home in London, though nothing was found wrong with her.

Quotes:

- *Nothing is more sad than the death of an illusion.*
- *The principal mark of genius is not perfection but originality, the opening of new frontiers.*
- *Creativity is the defeat of habit by originality.*

Edward Teller

January 15, 1908 Budapest – September 9, 2003 Stanford, CA

Edward Teller was a theoretical physicist, who is known as the “father of the hydrogen bomb. Teller along with Leo Szilard and Eugene Wigner, helped urged President Roosevelt to develop an atomic bomb program. In July, 1945, he was one of the few scientists to actually watch the detonation of the bomb. In 1951, he, along with Polish mathematician Stanislaw Ulam came up with the first workable design for a thermonuclear device, which was roughly 1000 times larger than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. He regretted the decision to drop the atom bomb on Japanese cities, arguing afterward that doing so had been a mistake. The design, which came to be known as the Teller-Ulam design, still remains classified. In 1954, he was a major proponent of investigating non-military uses for nuclear explosives. As well, he was the main advisor on nuclear matters for Israel.

Quotes:

- *The science of today is the technology of tomorrow.*
- *Two paradoxes are better than one; they may even suggest a solution.*
- *The main purpose of science is simplicity and as we understand more things, everything becomes simpler.*

Eugene Wigner

November 17, 1902 Budapest – January 1, 1995 Princeton, N.J.

Eugene Wigner was a theoretical physicist and also contributed to mathematical physics. In 1930, Princeton university recruited Wigner. In 1933, he discovered that the force binding the nucleons together is very weak when the distance between them is great, but very strong when the nucleons are close to one another. He was responsible for prompting President Roosevelt in initiating the Manhattan Project to develop atomic bombs. He was afraid that the German nuclear weapon project would develop the bomb first. In 1963, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics. In later life, he became more philosophical and published the book *The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences*. From 1946-1978 he won nine awards for his incredible work.

Quotes:

- *It was not possible to formulate the laws of quantum mechanics in a fully consistent way without reference to the consciousness.*
- *The unreasonable efficiency of mathematics in science is a gift we neither understand nor deserve.*
- *The simplicities of natural laws arise through the complexities of the language we use for their expression.*

John von Neumann

December 28, 1903 Budapest – February 8, 1957 Bethesda, MD

John von Neumann was a mathematician, physicist, computer scientist, engineer and polymath. He was generally regarded as the foremost mathematician of his time and is said to be “the last representative of the great mathematicians.” He built a solid framework of quantum mechanics. He also worked in game theory, studied what are now called von Neumann Algebras and was one of the pioneers of computer science. In 1930 Princeton University recruited him and he came to the U.S. as a result of that. He worked on the Manhattan Project and eye-witnessed the first test of an atomic bomb detonation, which was code-named Trinity. Von Neumann was a child prodigy. When he was six years old, he could divide two eight-digit numbers in his head and could converse in Ancient Greek. He was able to memorize phone books and his father would use his genius as a way to entertain his guests.

Quotes:

- *Anyone who attempts to generate random numbers by deterministic means, is, of course living in a state of sin.*
- *In mathematics you do not understand things...you just get used to them!*
- *When we talk mathematics, we may be discussing a secondary language built on the primary language of the nervous system.*

Leo Szilard

February 11, 1898 Budapest – May 30, 1964 La Jolla, CA

Leo Szilard was a physicist and inventor. In 1933, when he fled to London to escape Nazi persecution, he conceived the nuclear chain reaction. In 1934, he patented the idea of nuclear fission reactor. In 1938, he fled to the U.S., where he accepted a teaching position at Columbia University. In 1939, he wrote the letter for Albert Einstein's signature which finally resulted in the Manhattan Project that built the atomic bomb. He continued his work at the Metallurgical Lab to construct the first nuclear reactor. In 1945, it was clear that the U.S. was planning to use the bomb against Japan. Szilard began a campaign against its use. He circulated petitions among the scientists demanding greater scientific input on the future use of atomic weapons. In 1947, he decided to leave physics for molecular biology and continued to work towards peaceful uses of atomic energy and international arms control. In 1957, he helped create the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, spending his last years as a fellow there.

Quotes:

- *If you want to succeed in the world, you do not have to be much cleverer than other people.*
- *If one knows only what one is told, one does not know enough to be able to arrive at a well-balanced decision.*
- *A scientist's aim in a discussion with their colleagues is not to persuade, but to clarify.*

Michael Curtiz

December 24, 1886 Budapest - April 11, 1962 Los Angeles

Michael Curtiz was movie myth maker, recognized as one of the most prolific directors in history. He directed Casablanca, discovered Doris Day and directed James Cagney in the quintessential patriotic film, Yankee Doodle Dandy. Though 1938 was a terrible year for much of the world, it was not for Curtiz. He directed Warner's three biggest hits: The Adventures of Robin Hood, Four Daughters and Angels with Dirty Faces. He stayed with Warner for over twenty years. He introduced to Hollywood a visual style, using artistic lighting, extensive and fluid camera movement, high crane shots and unusual camera angles. He was versatile and could handle any kind of picture, whether a melodrama, comedy, love story, film noir, musical, war story, western or historic epic. He always paid attention to the human-interest aspect of every story, stating that the 'human and fundamental problems of real people' were the basis of all good drama.

Quotes:

- *So many times I have a speech ready but no dice...always a bridesmaid, never a mother.*
- *Don't talk to me while I am interrupting.*
- *The only things you regret are the things you didn't do.*

Robert Capa

October 22, 1913 Budapest – May 25, 1954 Vietnam

Robert Capa was a photographer and photojournalist. He is considered by some to be the greatest combat and adventure photographer in history. At the age of 18, he was accused of alleged communist sympathies and was forced to flee Hungary. He moved to Berlin, but then the Nazi Party came to power and he left Germany and moved to Paris. He first achieved fame when he accompanied Ernest Hemingway as a war correspondent in the Spanish Civil War which Hemingway would later describe in his novel, For Whom the Bell Tolls. In 1944, he was the first photographer to go ashore on D-Day. In 1947, General Dwight Eisenhower awarded Capa the Medal of Freedom for his work in recording World War II. That same year, he co-founded an organization as the first cooperative agency for worldwide freelance photographers. In 1954, when the regiment was passing through a dangerous area under fire in Vietnam, Capa was killed when he stepped on a landmine near the road. He was only 40 at the time of his death. Hungary issued a stamp and a gold coin in his honor.

Quotes:

- *If your pictures aren't good enough, you aren't close enough.*
- *It's not enough to have talent, you also have to be Hungarian.*
- *It's not always easy to stand aside and be unable to do anything except record the suffering around one.*