Spinster Sisters Versus Nazis

The story of Ida and Louise Cook, two opera buffs who lived with their parents while running a scheme to rescue Jews from Hitler

Ida, at left, and Louise Cook at the Israeli Embassy in

London, after receiving an award in recognition for their efforts

by Phyllis Chesler

Isabel Vincent, the author of a recent book, revisits a rather operatic story about how two British “spinster sisters,” Ida and Louise Cook, rescued 29 Jews from Hitler’s ovens.

The book is titled *Overture of Hope*: *Two Sisters’ Daring Plan that Saved Opera’s Jewish Stars From the Third Reich*, and it is based on prodigious research into the lives of the two “ordinary/extraordinary” sisters. She draws from Ida Cook’s own writing (Ida became a successful writer of romance novels, which helped fund their rescue work), specifically her 1950 memoir. The book was titled *We Followed Our Stars*, though it was republished in 2008 under the title *Safe Passage*, which in my view is not quite as romantic.

On that note, I would retitle Vincent’s excellent book: *Overture of Hope*: *Two Sisters’ Daring Plan that Saved Opera’s Jewish Stars From the Third Reich.* While the Cook sisters, frugal, modest, civil servants, neither worldly nor political, did save Jewish stars from Hitler—the great majority of these refugees were not great opera stars, but simply civilians.

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