



## **Doc Kirby for "Book Bit"**

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"The Ghetto Swinger: A Berlin Jazz-Legend Remembers" by Coco Schumann, translated by John Howard

There once was a young man in Berlin who wanted to be a Swing Kid, a Jazzer. He not only became one, he survived being half-Jewish in Nazi Germany (even with a trip to the Camps) and became a world-class professional jazz guitarist, arranger, and band leader!

In 1936, the 12-year-old musical prodigy heard jazz for the first time, and he was hooked. He gets a succession of guitars and gets more welcome at jam sessions and on the bandstand. Soon he is playing with the best swing jazz musicians in Germany. Christened "Coco" by a friend, he deftly avoids the increasingly-oppressive Nazi regime, and enjoys making music. Berlin is slowly being pounded into rubble by Allied bombers, yet they play on.

In 1943, the police picked him up. An informant had infiltrated a casual group of musicians and exposed his Jewish maternity. He would have been sent to Auschwitz but for the intervention of his father, a decorated hero of The Great War. Coco would be sent to the weird fake camp at Theresienstadt, where he became part of the Ghetto Swingers band!

The camp was a PR stunt to convince the Red Cross that Jews were being peacefully relocated to nice, safe towns. After the Nazi ruse worked, they began shipping out Jews to other camps. Coco ends up at Auschwitz, where he is able to survive by playing in a band. They played for private Nazi parties, but also to accompany new arrivals to the "showers". Of this time, he states, "We were playing music in Hell."

They were liberated by the Americans at war's end and Coco went home. His parents and young brother were alive! Post-war Berlin was alive with Allied GIs and they wanted jazz. Coco was back in business. By 1950 Coco Schumann was considered the best jazz guitarist in Germany! He had also fallen in love with a woman who had suffered much during the war and they decided to move to Australia to get away from the "Nazi apologists" who were becoming influential.

In Australia he played with wonderful musicians, worked steadily, and got to be an expert on Cuban and Latin music. After a few years, they decide to go back to Berlin, where he got to play with legendary jazzers like Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, & Ella Fitzgerald. He played in movies and on TV, his compositions were hits, and he owned and ran a nightclub. He even got involved with a political campaign. He did some cruise ship gigs, taught at the Zehlendorf Academy, and they will be making a movie about his extraordinary life and career. His story is inspiring and profound, yet told with a youthful whimsy. Coco Schumann is the very best jazz guitarist you need to know.

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