

# Frieda Belinfante

(May 10, 1904 - March 5, 1995)

*This essay was written by Pink Triangle Legacies Project Intern Grace Shaffer and based on the important research of Dr. Klaus Mueller and Frieda Belinfante's own oral history testimony. Thank you for your work in preserving queer history.*

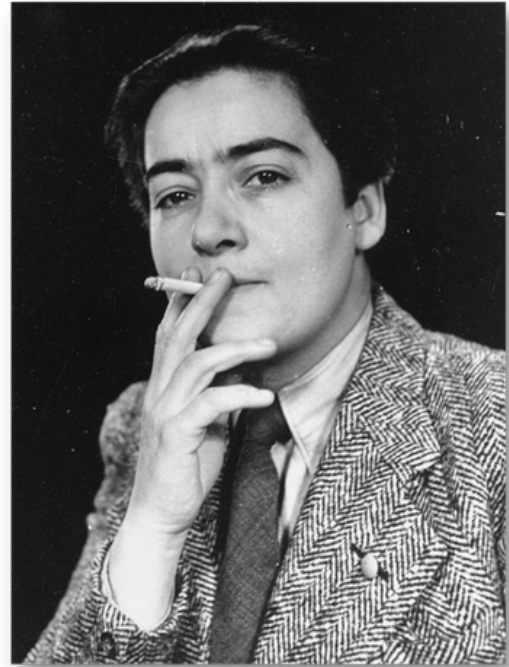
Frieda Belinfante was the third of four children born to Aron Belinfante, a Jewish man, and Georgine Hesse, a Christian woman. Frieda lived semi-openly as a lesbian and was an active member of the Dutch resistance during World War II.

Frieda's father was a well-known concert pianist and music instructor who encouraged his children to learn various musical instruments; Frieda studied cello. She later recalled that she must have been her father's favorite because of her musical ability and their similarities.

In 1920, Frieda met Henriette Bosmans. They were inseparable and lived together for the next seven years. In 1930, however, Frieda married the Dutch flutist Johan Feltkamp. He had confessed his love to her and threatened suicide if she did not marry him. Frieda later rationalized this choice by saying it was better that he continued to live. This drove a wedge between her and Henriette. While she remained married to Johan until 1936, Frieda was still a romantic, maintaining "other friendships that filled [her] life."

In 1938, Frieda became the first woman to conduct an orchestra in Europe. After the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands in 1940, Jewish people were systematically excluded from public life—including the arts. Frieda chose to voluntarily withdraw and dissolved her orchestra. It was at this time she became active with the Dutch resistance.

In November of 1941, she met Willem Arondeus, a gay artist. Together with other resistance members, they established a fund to support artists who were unable to work due to the Nazi occupation. By early 1942, Dutch Jews' identification cards were required to have a J stamped on them. This created a market for forged documents, a niche Frieda soon filled. There were many close calls but, despite the risk, Frieda felt it was worth it. When talking about all that she had done in her life, she said "I've always helped people... They haven't all been worth my effort, but the effort was worth it."



Portrait of Frieda Belinfante, reportedly dressed in men's clothing to disguise herself from Nazi informers, ca. 1943.  
US Holocaust Memorial Museum

The scale of the forgery work escalated and soon, the resistance group had distributed nearly 70,000 fake ID cards. This was a problem for the group, as the original cards—held in Amsterdam’s Population Registry—could easily be checked. Frieda herself offered up a solution: bomb the building and destroy the originals. They set about planning. It was decided that Willem would lead the group of men planting the bombs. The men relegated Frieda to the sidelines. She recalled this with the quip “women could have brought in some of the explosions, some of the things that were not too heavy to carry.” Frieda watched from a nearby rooftop on March 27, 1943 as the bombs went off and destroyed nearly 800,000 ID cards.



Frieda Belinfante (far right) poses with three friends before the war.  
*US Holocaust Memorial Museum*

After the bombing, Frieda and her fellow conspirators went underground to avoid being caught. With a short haircut and a “three-piece suit that fit to a tee, except for this”—gesturing to her chest—Frieda passed as a man for three months. During this time, she ran into several people she knew without raising suspicion. Eventually she escaped on foot to Switzerland and waited out the war. Her close friend, Willem, was not so lucky; he was caught by the Nazis and executed for his involvement. His final request was for the world to know that “homosexuals were not cowards.”

Frieda never hid her sexuality and never felt less than her heterosexual peers. “I just lived my life and never explained anything.” Reflecting back on her years, she said she’d had the most wonderful and romantic life. She followed it up with “you make your own life. Nothing makes it for you.” She passed away in 1995 at the age of 90.

## Sources & Further Reading

“Looking Danger in the Eye,” 12 Years that Shook the World podcast from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Sept. 15, 2022).

Oral History Interview with Frieda Belinfante. The Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive (1994) United States Holocaust Memorial Museum collection.

Chris Pasles, “O.C. Musical Pioneer Frieda Belinfante Dies at 90,” LA Times (March 7, 1995).

“Pride Month: Defying Nazi Persecution,” featuring Dr. Klaus Muller. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. YouTube (July 6, 2021).

Read more about Frieda Belinfante **online** and watch the video on **YouTube**. For more LGBTQ+ Stories from Nazi Germany, visit [pinktrianglelegacies.com/stories](https://pinktrianglelegacies.com/stories).