

Sounds of Hope & Resistance

BY JAY BOYAR

With the help of the Opera Orlando and FSYO, the Holocaust Center brings the Nazi-era children's opera, *Brundibar*, to stage in observance of Kristallnacht.



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When you think about the horrific camps run by the Nazis, opera is hardly the first thing that leaps to mind. And yet there is *Brundibar*, an opera that was performed more than 55 times at the Theresienstadt camp near Prague.

Brundibar will be presented once again, this time by the Holocaust Memorial Resource & Education Center of Florida, in partnership with Opera Orlando and the Florida Symphony Youth Orchestras. The production represents the realization of a long-held dream of the center's founder, Tess Wise, a Holocaust survivor who has hoped to bring the opera to our community for some 20 years, says Terrance Hunter, program coordinator for the center.

Why was *Brundibar* performed at a Nazi camp in the first place? The Third Reich used Theresienstadt as a showplace to demonstrate how well they were supposedly treating its young prisoners. Performances of *Brundibar* were part of this monstrous charade. Yet the opera has an integrity all its own that helped it to become an inspiring metaphor for the camp's prisoners.

The title character is a bullying organ grinder who targets two children. *Brundibar* came to represent Hitler, while the children's ultimate triumph over his evil influence gave hope to many at Theresienstadt.

"The whole cast is kids," says Gabe Preisser, executive and artistic director of Opera Orlando. He adds that the organization's entire youth company will be featured in the local performance.

Although *Brundibar* was created with a Czech libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister, the new production will be in English. The opera was composed by Hans Krasa (a casualty of Auschwitz), whose music "represents several moods, contrasting the pure hearts of the children and the evil of *Brundibar*," explains Briana Scales of the youth orchestras, which will play that music.

"Music is a form of resistance," Hunter reflects. "In performing this opera, we are highlighting the ways that people in camps could resist openly."

Brundibar will be presented Nov. 5 at 2 p.m. at the Rosen Jewish Community Center to mark Kristallnacht, the infamous state-sanctioned attacks on Jews in Germany and Austria in November 1938. For further information, visit holocaustedu.org/events/kristallnacht. **oam**

Jay Boyar's columns, reviews and articles have appeared in such publications as the Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, New York Daily News and Orlando Sentinel, where he served as the movie critic.