

Children, Conflict and the Art(s) of Hope



Saturday 24 and 25 June 2017, 2.30PM

Bootham School, York



Children, Conflict and the Art(s) of Hope

A performance of material created by child prisoners in the Terezin/Theresienstadt Ghetto in the Second World War.

PERFORMERS

Andy Choi

Mary Davidson

Harry Docwra

Flora Guildford

Toby Haswell

Jasper McCarthy

Narrator Bruno Korica

Piano Accompanist Paul Feehan

CREATIVES

Costume & Props Joan Attwell

Director Simon Benson

Technical Support Luke Gilliver

Video Design & Production Rachel Gladwin

Front of House Freya & Zara Forbes

PRODUCTION NOTES

Use has been made in this production of original material, including children's art work, poems and prose writing, reproduced in ... *I never saw another butterfly ...: Children's drawings and Poems from the Terezin Concentration Camp, 1942-1944* ed. Hana Volavková (New York: Schocken Books, 1993). The opening spoken commentary uses Chaim Potok's Foreword to this publication as its basis, in an edited version by Simon Benson.

Looking For A Spectre by Hanuš Hachenburg, which forms the centrepiece of this production, is published in *Performing Captivity, Performing Escape: Cabarets and Plays from the Terezin/Theresienstadt Ghetto*, ed. Lisa Peschel (London: Seagull Books, 2014).

The two songs by Ilse Weber performed here are taken from "*Ich wandre durch Theresienstadt*" *Lieder für Singstimme und Klavier*, ed. Winifred Radeke (Berlin: Boosey & Hawkes, 2008).

BIOGRAPHIES

FRANTA (František) BASS was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia on September 4, 1930. He was deported to the Terezin Ghetto on December 2, 1941. He was subsequently deported to the so-called family camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau – where he perished.

PAVEL FRIEDMAN was born on January 7, 1921. He was deported to Terezin on June 4, 1942. On September 29, 1944 he was deported to Auschwitz where he perished.

HANUŠ HACHENBURG was born on July 12, 1929. He lived with his mother, but never knew his father. He was sent to the Jewish Orphanage in Prague in 1941. Hachenburg was only 13 years old when, on October 24, 1942, he arrived in Terezin/Theresienstadt. On December 18, 1943, Hachenburg was deported to Auschwitz, where he perished.

EVA PICKOVÁ was born on May 15, 1929. She was sent to Terezin on April 16, 1942. On December 18, 1943 she was deported to Auschwitz where she perished.

EVA SCHULZOVÁ was born on July 20, 1931. She was deported, aged 10, to Terezin on December 14, 1941. She was then deported to Auschwitz on December 18, 1943, where she later perished.

ILSE WEBER was born on January 11, 1903. An author and songwriter, she wrote children's fiction, her most popular book was *Mendel Rosenbusch: Tales for Jewish Children*. She learned to sing and play guitar, lute, mandolin and balalaika, but she never sought a career as a musician. She got her eldest son to safety in Sweden through the Kindertransport. However, Ilse, her husband, and their younger son Tommy were sent to Terezin in February 1942, where she worked in the camp's children's hospital. She wrote many poems while there, setting many of them to music; accompanying herself on the guitar, she would sing them to the children and the elderly of the ghetto. When her husband was deported to Auschwitz two years later, she and Tommy went with him so as not to break up their family. Eyewitness reports say that she sang her song *Wiegala* to her son and other children, to calm them, as she accompanied them voluntarily into the gas chambers.

HELGA WEISSOVA was born in Prague on November 10, 1929. On December 4, 1941, she was deported to Terezin. In October, 1944, she was deported to Auschwitz. She survived and, after World War II ended, Helga went back to Prague and became an artist – exhibiting her work at home, in Austria, Germany and Italy. In 1993 she was awarded an honorary Doctorate by the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, for her lifetime achievements. She won many awards. In February 2013, aged 89, she was still living in the flat she was born in, the flat from which she was taken in 1944. Her account of her experiences, "Helga's Diary: A Young Girl's Account of Life in a Concentration Camp", was published by W. W. Norton & Company on April 22, 2013.

PERFORMANCE STRUCTURE

1. **INTRODUCTION** Slide-show & commentary (using the words of Chaim Potok). *Ich wandre durch Theresienstadt* by Ilse Weber, performed by Flora Guildford
2. *The Butterfly* by Pavel Friedman
3. **LOOKING FOR A SPECTRE: ACT 1 Royal Hall**
King Anti-literate Harangue is upset because the 'Stupid Anti-Literates' won't obey him. Minister suggests he needs a spectre (Death) to frighten people into obedience. The King decrees that the bones of those aged over sixty should be handed in.
4. *Terezin* by Hanuš Hachenburg (performed by Flora Guildford)
5. **LOOKING FOR A SPECTRE: ACT 2 Street**
Peasant Woman laments having to hand over her grandmother. Honza proudly hands over his Grandfather and is rewarded. Death is confused and is arrested.
6. Extract from the diary of Helga Weisssova (performed by Toby Haswell)
7. **LOOKING FOR A SPECTRE: ACT 3 Royal Hall**
Death is presented to the King – who appoints him as 'state spectre', to be led around his kingdom by the Savage Salami to make people afraid.
8. *Fear* by Eva Pickova (performed by Mary Davidson)
9. **LOOKING FOR A SPECTRE: ACT 4 Street**
Three years later: Death tries to scare Mařenka and Jeníček, he and Policeman are mocked. Policeman tries, in vain, to arrest Mařenka and Jeníček.
10. *An Evening in Terezin* by Eva Schulzová (performed by Harry Docwra)
11. **LOOKING FOR A SPECTRE: ACT 5 Sorcerer's Chamber**
The King is increasingly depressed that his subjects are having rebellious thoughts and are laughing at Death. As Death is no longer feared, Sorcerer says that the King should take over as spectre. King is flattered, Minister is pleased, Sorcerer looks worried.
12. *I Am A Jew* by Franta Bass
13. **LOOKING FOR A SPECTRE: ACT 6 Royal Hall**
Mordechai appeals to King for the collected bones to be covered at least by skin ... and

flesh ... and decent clothes. He asks to collect the rags, bones & skin throughout the kingdom. King appoints Mordechai as collector. Church Envoy complains that King's officials have stolen relics from a church. King agrees to return the bonemarrow, but needs the bones to make glue. Envoy prophesies that King will suffer a great misfortune.

14. *A Letter to Daddy* (anon.) (performed by Andy Choi)

15. **LOOKING FOR A SPECTRE: ACT 7** *Circus*

all watch as King and Death arrive dancing and blaming each other. The show ends and all are invited to come and see it again!

16. *The Butterfly* by Pavel Friedman

17. EPILOGUE Designed & produced by Rachel Gladwin. *Wiegala* by Ilse Weber, performed by Flora Guildford

NOTE: After the performance there will be a short question and answer session, in which audience members will have the opportunity to ask questions about the performance and to reflect on some of the issues raised. All are welcome to stay for this.

SONGS

WEBER *Ich wander
durch Theresienstadt*

Ich wander durch Theresienstadt,
Das Herz so schwer wie Blei.
Bis jah mein Weg ein Ende hat,
dort knapp an der Bastei.

Ich wende mich betrübt und matt,
So schwer wird mir dabei:
Theresienstadt, Theresienstadt,
Wann wohl das Leid ein Ende hat,
Wann sind wir wieder frei?

WEBER *I wander through
Theresienstadt*

I wander through Theresienstadt,
my heart is heavy as lead.
Till suddenly my way ends
Right there by the bulwark.

I turn away, saddened and weary,
how hard it is to do so!
Theresienstadt, Theresienstadt,
when will our sufferings end,
When shall we again be free?

WEBER *Wiegala*

Wiegala, wiegala, weier,
der Wind spielt auf der leier.
Er spielt so süß im grünen Ried,
die Nachtigall, die singt ihr Lied.
Wiegala, wiegala, weier,
dWind spielt auf der leier.

Wiegala, wiegala, werner,
die Mond ist die Laterne,
er steht am drunklen Himmelszeit
und schaut hernieder auf die Welt.
Wiegala, wiegala, werner,
die Mond ist die Laterne,

Wiegala, wiegala, welle,
wie ist die Welt so stille!
Es stört kein Laut die süße Ruh,
schlaf, mein Kindchen, schlaf auch du.
Wiegala, wiegala, welle,
wie ist die Welt so stille!

WEBER *Wiegala*

Wiegala, wiegala, weier,
the wind plays on the lyre.
It plays so sweetly in the green reeds.
The nightingale sings its song.
Wiegala, wiegala, weier,
the wind plays on the lyre.

Wiegala, wiegala, werner,
the moon is a lantern.
It stands in the darkened firmament
And gazes down on the world.
Wiegala, wiegala, werner,
the moon is a lantern.

Wiegala, wiegala, welle,
how silent is the world!
No sound disturbs the lovely peace.
Sleep, my little child, sleep too.
Wiegala, wiegala, welle,
how silent is the world!

DIRECTOR'S BLURB

Apart from the two songs by Ilse Weber, most of the images in the opening introductory video and the archival footage taken from the Nazis' 1944 propaganda video designed to show off Theresienstadt as a model ghetto, all the words and images used in this production come from the children of Terezin. The centrepiece of our production is Hanuš Hachenburg's puppet play *Looking for a Spectre* – an extraordinary piece of work from such a young boy (he was only 13 or 14 when he wrote it). Though in many ways a dark and sinister play, it also full of comedy, imagination, fun and energy – as we might expect given Hachenburg's age when he wrote it.

As far as we know, the play was never performed in the ghetto. Hachenburg wrote it for publication in a weekly magazine, *Vedem (We Lead)* which, for about a year and a half,

was produced by 13- to 15-year old boys in the youth home in Terezin where Hachenburg was imprisoned. Each week, a single copy of *Vedem* was produced, and every Friday evening the boys would read their contributions aloud to each other and to their guests. The play is a curious mixture of dark fairytale, satire and comedy. The brevity of its scenes and its episodic structure make for a fast-moving play that is often difficult to keep up with and make sense of. But it is precisely this craziness that I love about it! Working with our students at Bootham on the play, we have enjoyed so much the energy and childlike playfulness that lies at its heart. Directing and performing *Looking for a Spectre* has confronted us with the obvious realisation that it was written by a child and to be enjoyed by an audience of children. How could any play so written *not* be full of energy, fun, light and darkness?

It has been a privilege to give body and voice to the words of the Terezin children, and to provide a platform enabling their experiences and perspectives to speak again (no matter that over 70 years separates us from them). The poems and art works included in this production speak of the Terezin children's experiences of suffering and oppression, but equally they speak of their memories of the past and their hopes for the future. Franta Bass's *I Am A Jew* may be the most assertively defiant piece included here, but a refusal to be contained and defined by others is, in itself, also a form of defiance – a defiance that runs through all the Terezin children's creative work, without exception. The freedom they found in their creativity I find hugely inspiring and moving.

Hanuš Hachenburg's *Looking for a Spectre* is, however, very different to any other piece of work I have encountered from Terezin. As Lisa Peschel says "the dark humour of the play is eerily mature ... [and] today's reader may be chilled by Hachenburg's seeming foreknowledge of events in the death camps". Death is used by a dictator to enslave people, the bones of the elderly are simply a commodity to be sold and used as raw material, all are implicated. The play is peppered with satirical references to the Nazis and their practices – the police, the 'Savage Salami' (a reference to the SS), is just one. Hachenburg may not have known everything that was happening to the Jews outside Terezin, but he understood precisely what was going on inside and, from that, was able to "[take] the events he had already witnessed to their logical conclusion: the banalization of death to the point where the human body became just material for collection" (Lisa Peschel).

It is Hachenburg's sheer exuberance, his energy and sense of the absurd that stand out for me. Here is a young boy, faced with overwhelming cruelty and oppression, laughing and enjoining others to laugh with him – and this, not because what they were going through was, in any sense, funny or to be laughed at, but because humour was found to be a form of resistance through which these young children could create cohesion and find empowerment. In finding the play funny ourselves, and in enjoining you to laugh with us as we perform it, we are asking you too to feel a sense of connectedness to Hachenburg and the children of Terezin – for whom creativity and laughter were weapons in the face of unimaginable oppression.

Simon Benson

About the producers

Dr Lisa Peschel is Lecturer in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television at the University of York. Her research about theatrical performance and survivor testimony from the World War II Jewish ghetto at Terezín/Theresienstadt has been disseminated in print and performance. She is a co-investigator on the £1.8 million AHRC-funded project *Performing the Jewish Archive*.

Dr Simon Benson is Head of Drama at Bootham School and is responsible for academic and extra-curricular drama and theatre. Committed to the study and making of theatre and performance that connects with Bootham School's Quaker values, he is delighted to be involved in this project.

The Anne Frank Trust UK

Prejudice and discrimination harm individuals, communities and society. The Anne Frank Trust UK is an education charity that uses Anne Frank's life and diary to empower young people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to challenge all forms of prejudice and discrimination.

It partners with schools, local authorities, criminal justice education services and others, to deliver education to young people in a variety of settings, predominantly in schools. Its interactive and high impact programme includes an exhibition of Anne Frank's life and diary, combined with workshops, peer education and an ambassador programme.

The Trust is delighted to be supporting *Performing the Jewish Archive* and Bootham School through providing a wider historical context to their joint project.

Performing the Jewish Archive

This event is part of *Performing the Jewish Archive*, a three year Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded project working to explore hidden archives, uncover and perform lost works, and create a legacy for the future. For more information visit the *Performing the Jewish Archive* website www.ptja.leeds.ac.uk.

