



BRUNDIBÁR

A MUSICAL FOLK TALE

Music by Hans Krása, libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister

Produced by Mahogany Opera Group
in association with Jubilee Opera
and Watford Palace Theatre.

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BRUNDIBÁR

A MUSICAL FOLK TALE

Brundibár was written in 1938 by Jewish Czech composer Hans Krása and was performed 55 times by the children of Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1943. As the unlikely survival of this opera suggests, the joy and beauty expressed in music and art can outlast evil.

Brundibár is an appealing way to introduce the Holocaust to students while inviting them to think about issues of bullying and self-expression through art. As a one-act opera, sung in English, the music is accessible, memorable and enjoyable.

Here you will find information on the history of the opera, the synopsis, ideas for classroom activities and further resources to explore the topic further.

HISTORY

Brundibár is an opera written for children. No more than forty minutes long, it was composed in 1938 by Hans Krása, with lyrics by Adolf Hoffmeister, as an entry for a children's opera competition.

It received its premiere in German-occupied Prague and was performed by children at the Jewish Orphanage. *Brundibár* had one additional performance in the Hagibor building before the mass transports of Bohemian and Moravian Jews to Terezín (Theresienstadt) began in 1942.

In July 1943, the score of *Brundibár* was smuggled into the camp, where it was re-orchestrated by Krása for the various instrumentalists who were available to play at that time. The premiere of the Terezín version took place on 23 September 1943 in the hall of the Magdeburg barracks.

Realising the publicity potential of this enormously popular artistic endeavour, the Nazis arranged a special new staging of *Brundibár* for the propaganda film *Theresienstadt - eine Dokumentarfilm aus den jüdische Siedlungsgebiet* (directed by Kurt Gerron), and the same production was performed for the inspection of Terezín by the International Red Cross in September 1944.

This would be the last of the fifty-five performances in the Terezín ghetto; two weeks later, transportation of artists to Auschwitz and other destinations East began, silencing the most popular theatrical production in Terezín.

The opera continues to speak to audiences today, being performed by children across Europe, America and Israel in recent years.

INTRODUCING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE HOLOCAUST

27 January is a day for everyone to remember the millions murdered in the Holocaust, under Nazi Persecution and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur. On Holocaust Memorial Day we honour the survivors of these atrocities and learn the lessons of their experiences to challenge hatred and discrimination in the UK today. HMD 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the 20th anniversary of the Genocide in Srebrenica, Bosnia.

We have a wide range of resources available on our website for educators, we have a lesson plan aimed specifically for primary schools, easy read life stories, and an assembly plan for young people aged 7-11. All of our resources are free to download from our website.

Within our huge range of resources, there are many suitable for you to use in the classroom or with your families, to introduce children to the history of the Holocaust and enable them to learn about and commemorate the Holocaust. You could read a poem to your young people, get them to write their own poem to commemorate the Holocaust or even have a poetry slam!

Please see our resource, which is aimed at secondary school students, for more ideas <http://hmd.org.uk/education/classroom-activity-holocaust-poetry>

The Butterfly, written by Pavel Friedmann at Theresienstadt, introduces young people to life in the ghetto. You could listen to Samuel Barnett reading the poem, or hear the poem set to music by Charles Davidson (1974).

The Butterfly

He was the last. Truly the last.
Such a yellowness was bitter and blinding
Like the sun's tear shattered on stone.
That was his true colour.
And how easily he climbed, and how high,
Certainly, climbing, he wanted
To kiss the last of my world.

I have been here seven weeks,
'Ghettoized'.
Who loved me have found me,
Daisies call to me,
And the branches also of the white
chestnut in the yard.
But I haven't seen a butterfly here.
That last one was the last one.
There are no butterflies, here, in the ghetto.

SYNOPSIS

Aninku and Pepiček go to the market to get some milk for their sick mother. As they don't have any money, they decide to follow the example of the organ grinder, *Brundibár* – people throw coins in his hat when he makes music. Aninku and Pepiček sing their favourite song but nobody listens to them. When they try to draw attention to themselves, *Brundibár* chases them away for being a nuisance.

It is almost dusk. Aninku and Pepiček don't know what to do. How can they sing louder than the bad organ grinder with their small voices? Lots of children must sing – that might work. A dog, a cat, and a sparrow promise to help. The next morning, the animals round up all the children in town, to make a big choir.

The plan succeeds: their singing is louder than the barrel organ, the people listen, and soon Pepiček's cap is full of coins. Suddenly, *Brundibár* appears, grabs the cap from Pepiček, and tries to run away with the money. However, he is only one against many and he doesn't stand a chance. The children celebrate their victory and the choir sings of friendship and support for each other.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Brundibár is well known (and becoming ever more popular) because of its extraordinary provenance; written in 1938 it was subsequently performed 55 times in Theresienstadt concentration camp, where Jewish Czech composer Hans Krása was taken and from where he and many of the young performers, were never to return. Performing the piece today, one still feels those tragic events woven into the fabric of the piece. However, the beauty, jollity and message of the piece are able to transcend its past and speak pertinently to us today too. The crude allegory of a moustached bad guy was lost on the Nazis who used the piece for their own propaganda but the power of people gaining strength in solidarity to defeat oppression and bureaucracy resonates today as strongly as ever.

The charm, wit and skill with which *Brundibár* is constructed and the opportunities it offers young people to take solo roles and perform alongside professionals makes it a valuable piece in the small canon of children's opera. Having directed *Brundibár* as my first production with Jubilee Opera in 2007, I am thrilled that we are able to revisit the work and take the production on a UK tour that transports the professional elements (set, costumes, creative team and orchestra) but involves local children in each venue. From my own experience, I know how profound it is to be involved in music and theatre at a young age and now I am realising the joys and benefits that adult professionals can gain from working with young people.

Frederic Wake-Walker – Director

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This project began life as a partnership between Mahogany Opera Group and Suffolk-based children's opera company Jubilee Opera. Building on the legacy of Suffolk composer Benjamin Britten, Jubilee Opera is dedicated to providing opportunities for young people of all backgrounds to participate in performances of opera. We're delighted to extend Jubilee Opera's work to other regions across the country. This production of *Brundibár* was first staged at Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh in November 2014. Following performances at the Southbank Centre, London it will travel to Cumbria, Watford and Norwich. The production brings together a diverse range of partners, from schools and Music Hubs to theatres and opera companies, in order to reach hundreds of children around the country as participants and audience members. *Brundibár* is a wonderful introduction to the magical world of opera, carrying meaning beyond the words and notes for everyone to remember.

www.mahoganyoperagroup.co.uk

FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES

Promotional trailer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2TJbNdvt0>

A tour of Theresienstadt concentration camp

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-G059ft0BLw>

Original footage of opera performed in Theresienstadt

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_Qcw5FMrG8