

Drama on Holocaust Uses Young Voices

The Touring Theatre Ensemble of North Carolina will perform its latest drama, *Let Your Children Tell*, at JCC's Gorelick Hall on April 10 at 7:00 PM, in a program sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte.

Let Your Children Tell is the story of the Holocaust told in the words of five young people who experienced it. Taken from diaries and testimonials, these young people, from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, The Netherlands, and Hungary, respond to the deeds and decrees of Hitler and his Nazis by providing intimate glimpses of their lives in hiding, in exile, in ghettos, and in labor and concentration camps.

Portrayed by six actors, we meet these young people as they watched, listened and recorded the dark deeds visited upon them.

"The hope is that the story of this darkest hour of history can be kept alive through their telling and thereby remind the world what can happen when racism goes unchecked," said Brenda Schleunes, writer and director of *Let Your Children Tell*. Ms. Schleunes is producing artistic director for the Touring Theatre

Ensemble.

The North Carolina Council on the Holocaust commissioned the original theatre documentary.

The Touring Theatre Ensemble of North Carolina is based in Greensboro but travels throughout the eastern U.S. bringing the written word to life through dramatic presentations. Now in its 20th year of productions, the Touring Theatre Ensemble is dedicated to promoting literacy and reading and to issues that encourage a greater sensitivity to diversity.

Actors Find Depth, Challenge in Drama

Acting in *Let Your Children Tell* is as challenging as it is rewarding. Just ask the six professional actors who portray the characters telling the brutal story of the Holocaust.

Taken from diaries and testimonials, five young people from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, The Netherlands, and Hungary, respond to the deeds and decrees of Hitler and his Nazis by providing intimate glimpses of their lives under the Nazi regime.

"As challenging roles go, this is

right up there," said Gay-Taylor Upchurch who plays Vera Diamant at ages 10 and 17. "It has been a challenge to dwell on the Holocaust for several weeks. But it's also rewarding."



The cast of "Let the Children Tell" performing the documentary play.

Upchurch said playing a person who lived through the Holocaust has given her insight into the psychological trauma many Jews endured. "I didn't realize how gradually their rights were taken away," said Upchurch. "Once the Nazis stripped these people of their dignity and hope, it was easier to do what they did to them —

eliminate them. I didn't realize the Holocaust was such a calculated process right from the beginning."

Upchurch has found other challenges in her role. "Because Vera's lines are taken from diary entries, it is challenge to turn her words into an interesting monologue."

Upchurch said the struggle for Vera is the separation she faced from her loved ones after she was sent to live with strangers in England.

"She never knew from one day to the next where her family was and how they were doing," explained Upchurch. "Vera is a hopeful person. She has to be in order to hold herself together. Vera undergoes a big change and has to grow up quickly."

Harvey Robinson plays Juergen Bassfreund, a sensitive, intelligent young man with aspirations of being a doctor. "The first time Juergen understands the severity of the situation is when he is taken out of school and forced to work in a factory," said Robinson. "He realizes then that he could die but he must remain rational. He begins to document everything. That is how he removes himself from the pain and fear surrounding him."

Robinson said he admires the way his character pays attention to the advice of fellow prisoners. "His ear is constantly to the wall," said Robinson. "If he had not paid close attention, he would have died. Instead he kept himself alive and shared his story with us. We can use that story for the greater good."

Robinson relates closely to his character, Juergen. "He is much closer to the kind of kid I was: bright, kind of nerdy and an introvert." While Robinson believes many students may relate well to his character, he also hopes the audience will see the depth of all the characters as expressed in their documented experiences.

"In respect to portraying a 13-year-old, it's difficult because you must not be too young or too old," said Lisa Dames who plays Eva Heyman in the drama. She describes her character as optimistic. As for reaching young people today with this story, Dames sees both its timeliness and timelessness.

"I believe a heightened awareness of the Holocaust and what it did to these people is something the world cannot afford to forget. The more we teach about history the better able we can make connections to events of our day and the better decisions we can make politically so history does not repeat itself."

Ulrich Schweizer plays the Hungarian gypsy Karl Stojka. An

accomplished violinist, Schweizer brings the music as well as the words of his character alive. Wayne Seymour wrote the haunting melodies played by Schweizer throughout the play.

"Karl is part of close-knit family that has always enjoyed the freedom of moving from place to place," said Schweizer. "Although Karl is a sensitive musician, he has grown up with his share of fighting and pride. No one can tell him what to do."

That is until the Nazis round up Karl and the other gypsies and put them in internment camps. Karl may not have survived the ordeal if not for his music. "Even in the concentration camps musicians were often allowed to keep their instruments, often to entertain the Nazis," explained Schweizer.

Until he took this role, Schweizer admitted to a limited knowledge of the Holocaust. "What I knew of it before was an academic thing I studied in junior high school. But now I have learned that these people would do anything to survive. Karl got through it because he was sneaky and had a fighting spirit. He had a large appreciation for life and did not tolerate the thought it could be taken from him. I believe he survived because he knew how to stay fearless, even in the face of death."

For Melanie Duncan the biggest challenge is playing someone who actually existed. "I am

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Jewish Federation Seeks \$2.5 Million Campaign

The mission of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte is to create and build an organized and effective Jewish community able to address communal needs and fulfill our commitment to support Jews in need locally and worldwide.

The Jewish Federation's 2002 Annual Campaign is in full swing. Our goal for this year's campaign is \$2,500,000, a ten percent increase over last year's record breaking campaign of \$2,300,000. We know these are difficult times, with the country recovering from the shock and the aftereffects of September 11; however, the needs have never been greater at home and around the world. There are more requests for emergency loans from the Community Tzedakah Fund than ever before,

and people are visiting the food pantry at Jewish Family Services with greater frequency. Yet, we ask that people do what they have always been asked to do — to dig deeper into their pockets to assist Jews in need. In Israel, the social service needs have increased as that country seeks to assist the victims of terrorist attacks and addresses the effects of the practically non-existent tourist industry. The crisis of Argentinean Jews continues to escalate, and assistance is needed to help those in need in Argentina, and to assist in the immigration and absorption of Argentinean Jews in Israel. In the Former Soviet Union, our help is needed to feed and provide medicine for hundreds and thousands of elderly Jews who live on pensions of \$18 per month.

According to Jill Newman, 2002 Annual Campaign Chair, the 2002 Annual Campaign currently stands at \$2,108,000, which is fantastic. This year our Major Gifts Campaign soared to new heights, due to the generosity of our major givers, whose gifts averaged more than 18% over those of the previous year. The Campaign Cabinet is currently working very diligently contacting donors and encouraging them to make their 2002 pledges. We hope to complete the campaign on April 14, which is Super Sunday. Volunteers are needed to assist with the all day phone-a-thon. To volunteer, or for more information about Super Sunday, the Annual Campaign or the Federation, please contact Sue Littauer, Campaign Director, at 704-944-6758. ☆

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Jewish Federation 2002 Calendar of Events

Thursday, March 14: Judaic Road Show

7:30 PM at the home of Patty Gorelick

Bring your undiscovered Judaic treasure to Charlotte's first Judaic Road Show.

Wednesday, April 10: Yom Hashoah Commemoration Play:

"Let Your Children Tell"

Sunday, April 14: Super Sunday

Sunday, April 21: Community Yom Ha'Atzmaut Celebration at Shalom Park

Monday, April 22: JFGC Annual Meeting, 7:45 PM in Gorelick Hall

Thursday, May 2: 4th Annual Spring Lecture

Fern Schumer Chapman, author of *Motherland*

7:30 PM at Temple Beth El

Wednesday, May 22: Pride of Place: Jews in Southern Life

Dr. David Goldfield

7:30 PM in JCC - Gorelick Hall

Sponsored in part by CAJE, WTVI and the Jewish Federation

For more information on any of these events, please call the Federation office at 704-944-6757.



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