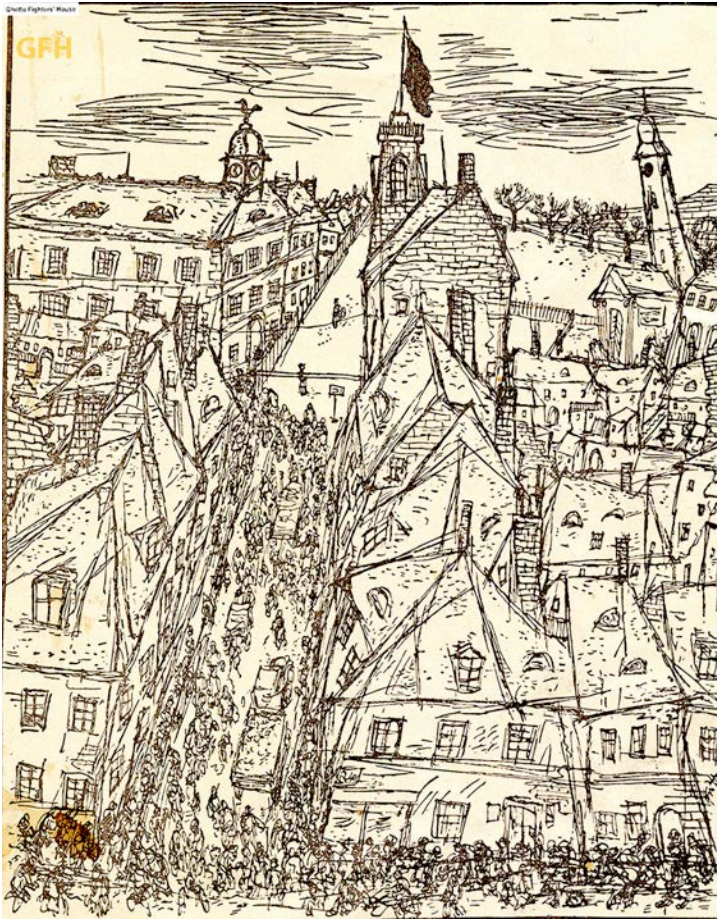


A Study Guide for *Brundibár*

Music by Hans Krasa

Original libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister

English translation by Tony Kushner



Manitoba Chamber Orchestra and the Pembina Trails Voices

Anne Manson, Conductor

Ruth Wiwchar, Director of the Pembina Trails Voices

Donna Fletcher, Director

Performances March 12, 2013: Westminster Church

1:15 pm / school matinee with introduction and Q&A session to follow

7:30 pm / evening concert

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The purpose of this guide

We hope this guide will help you encourage your students' understanding and appreciation of this performance of *Brundibár*, and its relationship to world history.

Brundibár gives us an opportunity to introduce the topics of the Holocaust, racial discrimination, and the treatment of Jewish people in the Nazi concentration town of Terezin during World War II. Please be sure to examine any website content for age appropriateness prior to recommending to your students.

This guide will provide you with background material on the composer, Terezin (or Theresienstadt), a synopsis of the story, and activities that can be incorporated into your curriculum.

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Meet the Composer: Hans Krasá

Hans Krasá was born on November 30, 1899 in Prague to a Czech father, who was a lawyer, and a Jewish German mother. He studied both the piano and the violin as a child, and went on to study composition at the German Music Academy in Prague. After graduating, he became a vocal coach at the Neues Deutsches Theater (New German Theatre), where he met the composer and conductor, Alexander Zemlinsky, who had a major impact on Krasá's career.

In 1942, he was transported to the Nazi concentration town of Terezin, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech republic). While he was interned in the ghetto, Krasá was at his most productive, producing a number of chamber works. Due to the circumstances, some of these have not survived.

Along with fellow composers Viktor Ullmann, Pavel Haas and Gideon Klein, Krasá was sent to Auschwitz and, being considered too old to work and also a possible threat to order, was killed in October 1944. He was not yet 45 years old.



For more information on Hans Krasá, visit the following websites:

http://orelfoundation.org/index.php/composers/article/hans_krasa/

For information on children and the Holocaust, visit the following site:

<http://fcit.usf.edu/HOLOCAUST/people/children.htm>

Timeline

Year	Hans Krasa	World Events
1899	Born November 30 in Prague	May 10- Fred Astaire born July 21 - Ernest Hemingway born
1921	Graduates from the German Music Academy in Prague	July 29 - Adolf Hitler becomes leader of the Nazi party
1933	Premier of Krasa's opera, <i>Betrothal in a Dream</i>	January 30 - Hitler named Chancellor of Germany April 1 - Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels orders boycott of Jewish stores, cafes, restaurants, banks and services
1938	Krasa composes <i>Brundibar</i> for a government competition, but the competition is later cancelled due to political developments	March 12 - Germany annexes Austria November 9, 10 - <i>Kristallnacht</i> , or the Night of Broken Glass
1939		Nazis seize control of Czechoslovakia
1941	Krasa is deported to Terezin November 27; <i>Brundibar</i> premieres at a Prague orphanage	Inhabitants of Terezin are relocated so the town can be made into a ghetto for Jewish people
1943	September 23 - <i>Brundibar</i> performed first time in Terezin	January 18 - Warsaw Ghetto Uprising begins
1944	June 23 - Red Cross visit Terezin October 16 - Krasa is deported to Auschwitz and is immediately sent to the gas chamber	June 6 - Battle of Normandy begins October 30 - Anne Frank is deported from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp

About Terezin, Czech Republic

In the late 18th century, Terezin was founded as a garrison town during the reign of Emperor Joseph II and named after his mother, Empress Maria Theresa. However, in 1941, the 'Ghetto Theresienstadt' was established and between the years of 1941 and 1945 the Nazis transferred about 140,000 Jewish people to the town. At its largest, there were approximately 55,000 people concentrated in Terezin, a town that before the war had housed about 5,000 residents.

Children deported to Terezin were not kept with their families, but were watched over by counselors. Education was strictly forbidden, but the counselors found ways around this rule by telling stories, singing songs, and acting out plays to covertly teach history, religion, reading, writing and mathematics. One of the most tragic statistics is that of the 10,000 children who made their way through Terezin, only a tiny percentage survived. Some place the figure at 100, others at 1,000, but either way it is horrifically small.



The cast of Brundibár in a Terezin production

For more information on Terezin, visit the following websites:

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/terezin.html>

<http://www.google.ca/search?q=terezin&hl=en&tbo=u&tbm=isch&source=univ&sa=X&ei=UF0AUcu9DdKE2QXM1oFo&ved=0CE8QsAQ&biw=1626&bih=997>

About *Brundibár*

Brundibár is a half-hour opera written to be performed by and for children. Composed by Hans Krasá in 1938, with lyrics by Adolf Hoffmeister (translated by Tony Kushner in 2003), as an entry for a children's opera competition, it received its premiere in German-occupied Prague, performed by children at the Jewish orphanage in Belgicka Street. *Brundibár* had one additional performance before the mass transports of Bohemian and Moravian Jews to Terezin began in 1942. In July 1943, the score of *Brundibár* was smuggled into camp, where it was re-orchestrated by Krasa for the various instrumentalists who were resident in the camp at that time, and the premiere of the Terezin version took place on 23 September 1943 in the hall of the Magdeburg barracks. Realizing the propagandistic potential of this enormously popular artistic endeavour, the Nazis arranged a special new staging of *Brundibár* for the propaganda film *Theresienstadt — eine Dokumentarfilm aus en judische Siedlungsgebiet* (directed by Kurt Gerron), and the same production was performed for the inspection of Terezin by the International Red Cross in September 1944. This would be the last of the fifty-five performances in the Terezin Ghetto; two weeks later, transportation of artists began to Auschwitz and other destinations East, silencing this, the most popular theatrical production in Terezin.

The camp audience quickly grasped that the simple plot of *Brundibár* represented all that the Nazi regime stood for. When the children sang their final song of victory over the cruel Brundibar, there was no doubt about the evil he personified; this was the very evil that caused the young performers of the opera to be deported to Auschwitz and the gas chambers. Survivors report that people would sing the victory march throughout the streets of Terezin, raising their hopes that they, too, might find victory over a tyrant.

The story and music are accessible enough for a young audience, but layered with historical references, making the opera a poignant experience for an adult audience as well.

For more information about *Brundibár* visit:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/02/23/60minutes/main2508458.shtml>

<http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/theresienstadt/Brundibár/>

Cast of Characters and the Pembina Trails choirs to which they belong

Pepicek: a young boy: Mitch Heron — PTV Men

Aninku: his sister: Stephanie Bell — Chorale

Brundibár: the organ grinder: John Anderson — PTV Men

Ice cream seller: Alexandra Skwarchuk — Chorale

Baker: David Newell — PTV Boys

Milkman: Matthew Woelk — PTV Boys

Policewoman: Rachel Woelk — Cantemus

Sparrow: Jane Petroff — Cantemus

Cat: Tessa Jenkyns — Cantemus

Dog: Ella Wiebe — Chorale

Chorus of young people from the neighbourhood

Synopsis

Aninku and Pepicek, two little children, have a sick mother. The doctor has prescribed milk for her health, and they go seeking milk in the town marketplace, but they have no money with which to purchase it. Three traders hawk their wares: an ice-cream man, a baker and a milkman. The children engage the milkman in a song, but he tells them that they need money for milk. Suddenly, the children spot the organ-grinder, Brundibár, playing on the street corner. Seeing his success, they decide to busk as well (and proceed to sing a song about geese), much to the annoyance of the townsfolk and Brundibár, who chase them away. Three animals — a sparrow, cat and dog — come to their help, and together they recruit the other children of the neighbourhood in their plan. Night falls, the dawn comes, the children and animals begin morning exercises and the townsfolk get ready for the day. The plan goes ahead: the animals and children drown out Brundibár; they then join in a beautiful lullaby. The townsfolk are very moved and give Aninku and Pepicek money. Suddenly, Brundibár sneaks in and steals their takings. All the children and animals give chase and recover the money. The opera concludes with a victory march sung about defeating the evil organ-grinder.

Before attending the concert

Connect and motivate

Discuss:

- What do you know about the story of *Brundibár*? What do you think is the point of the story?
- What is a tyrant? Do you know any tyrants?
- What do you think the opera will be like?

Audience etiquette

Discuss:

- Is it all right to laugh? Cry?
- Is it all right to applaud? When?

Read the background information

Discuss life in Europe during the Second World War

- How did life differ from the times in which we now live?
- How do you think the times may have inspired the story of the opera?

During the performance

Look

What do you see? Notice the following:

- Sets and props
- Costumes
- Movement/choreography

Listen

- How does each scene begin?
- What arias or other songs are sung?
- How does the music change the mood?

Think

- What problems arise in the opera?
- How are the problems solved?

After the performance

React to the experience

Write or talk about the following:

- Did you like the opera? Why or why not?
- What did you like the best or least?
- What character(s) did you like the best or least?
- Sets/costumes/props

Retell the story

Write something original

- Write a song for one of the characters in the opera
- Write a song for a fairytale character
- Write a story, song, poem or skit with ideas from the opera, such as:
 - helping friends
 - talking animals
 - your mother
 - money
 - greed
 - victory

Research

Find out more about one of the following:

- Terezin, Czech Republic
- Fairytales
- Hans Krasa
- Surviving cast members, such as Ella Weissberger – the original Cat

Curricular connections

Aesthetics and art criticism

- After reviewing the Study Guide and attending the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra's production of *Brundibár*, ask students to write a review of the production, noting how the music directly affects the emotional impact for the listener.

English, reading and writing

- After seeing the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra's production of *Brundibár*, ask students to write a journal entry or review of the show as a reflection.
- Write a sequel to *Brundibár* about what happens to the characters or life in the town 5 years after the action in opera.
- Using persuasive writing styles, create a new ending for the opera, using known character information to produce absolute change within one or more of the characters.
- Ask the students to consider whether there are other stories that remind them of *Brundibár*. Ask the students to choose a fairytale and write an opera libretto. Remind them that they may have to streamline and/or simplify the story. It takes longer to sing something than to say it. The libretto will consist almost entirely of dialogue. After they have written the libretto, have them reflect on what they had to do to take a written story and make it work as a dramatic or musical one. They can use poetry or not, as they wish.

Science

The voice is a combination of a wind instrument and a string instrument – air passing through the vocal cords creates a vacuum, pulling the vocal cords closed, The cords then vibrate together and create sound. Pitch is determined by the tension of the vocal cords, just like a violin or guitar. You can demonstrate this with a rubber band: wrap a rubber band around your fingers. Pluck it a few times. Can you see and feel the vibrations? The harder you pluck the rubber band, the more it will vibrate, creating a louder sound. If you stretch the rubber band, making it longer and thinner, what do you hear? (It will be a higher pitch.) Have your students place their hands on their throats while speaking or singing at different pitches so they can feel the vibrations in their throats and chests. Explore sound waves.

Create, present, perform

- Obtain copies of the translation of the libretto for *Brundibár*. Have students read the parts in a dramatic reading, infusing as much feeling and power into the words as possible. The language may be awkward or embarrassing. Ask them to translate the libretto into their own way of speaking and perform that way. Then return to the original libretto. How does their perception of the language change — or not? Do they think that music can affect how the lines sound?
- Have students work in groups to write their own ‘operas’ using popular songs, stringing them together with dialogue. These could be performed for the class.