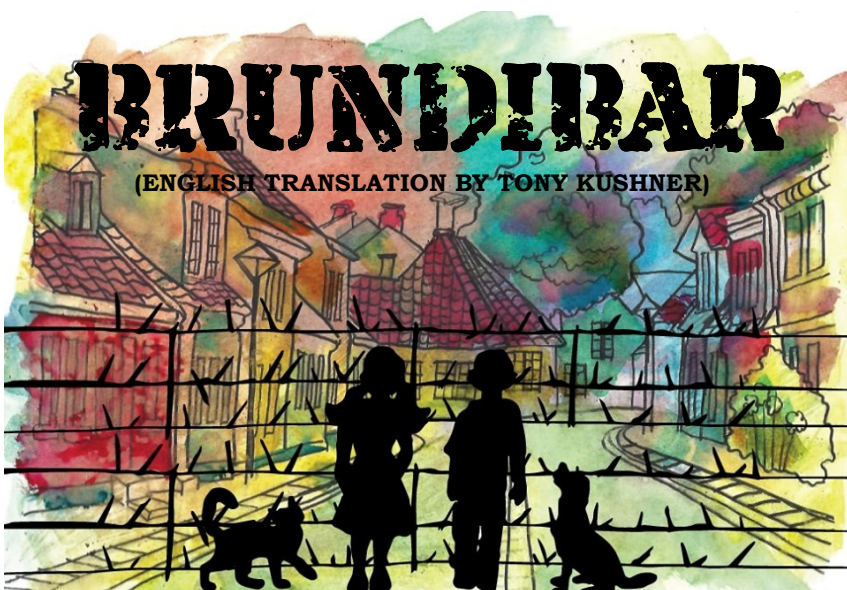




Presents

HANS KRÁSA'S



Sunday, May 26, 2019, 1:00 PM & 4:30 PM

Tuesday, May 28, 2019, 7:00 PM

Ritz Theater

**Harry & Rose Samson Family
Jewish Community Center**

Brundibár performance by arrangement with
Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., publisher and copyright owner

PROGRAM

Jason McKinney, Baritone
Elyse Edelman, Director
Nathan Wesselowski, Music Director
Dr. Alexander Mandl, Conductor
Joshua Richman, Conductor

The English Ballad Medley

Rabbi Michel Twerski (1939-1939)

Mr. Richman

Kindertotenlieder

When Thy Mother Dear

I Think oft' They've Only Gone a Journey

In Such a Tempest

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Mr. McKinney

Elna Hickson, piano

Brundibár

Hans Krása (1899-1944)

Dr. Mandl

BRUNDIBAR

Director, Elyse Edelman
Music Director, Nathan Wesselowski
Conductor, Dr. Alexander Mandl
Technical Director, Christopher Warren
Costume Designer, Darcy Devens
Rehearsal Accompanist and
Outreach Accompanist, Elna Hickson
Co-Rehearsal Accompanist, Donna Kummer

CAST

Brundibár	Jason McKinney
Pepíček	Aryeh Karan Grade 8, Bader Hillel Academy
Aninku	Scarlett Hirano Grade 2, Atwater School
Cat/Doctor	Nathan Kabara Grade 11, Whitefish Bay HS
Dog/Ice Cream Man	Liam Jeninga Grade 9, Delavan-Darien HS
Sparrow/Baker	Casey Westphal Grade 7, Asa Clark MS
Milkman/Farmer	Ryon Davis Grade 8, Golda Meir MS
Policeman	Zephaniah Ponder Grade 4, Burleigh School
Rooster	Sonny Rosas-Bjugstad Grade 3, St. Anthony School

CHORUS: Yosef Broch, Yisroel Brody, Avi Cohen,
Shmuli Cooper, Bentzion Fox, Naftali Fox, Aaron Tzvi
Goldman, Simcha Harris, Bentzion Richman, Reuven
Shlomo Richman

ORCHESTRA

Conductor, Alexander Mandl*

Conductor, Joshua Richman**

Violin

Kristian Brusubardis

Daniella Brusubardis

Arianna Brusubardis

Sonora Brusubardis***

Cello

Isabelle Kramar

Bass

Kyra Levandoski*

Guitar

Louis Cucunato*

Piano

Elna Hickson

Accordion

Sandy Bednarek*

Percussion

Linda Siegel*

Flute

Gavin Coleman****

Sanda Mašić*****

Clarinet

Stacy Pope

Trumpet

Michael Seybold

Horn

Adam Nelson**

**Brundibár* only

**Twerski only

***Viola in Twerski

****Sunday performances

*****Tuesday performance

PROGRAM NOTES

***Kindertotenlieder* by Gustav Mahler**

Mahler wrote his five-song cycle *Kindertotenlieder* (Songs on the Death of Children) for voice and orchestra between 1901 and 1904. It was based on selections from a group of 428 poems, written by the German poet Ruckert as an expression of grief following the illness (scarlet fever) and death of two of his children. Both the Ruckert poems and the final song of Mahler, which ends in a major key, show, in the end, an acceptance of fate, together with solace. Mahler was also familiar with the death of children, since eight of his siblings died during their childhood. Jason McKinney will perform the final three songs in English, with piano accompaniment.

***The English Ballad Medley* by Rabbi Michel Twerski, Shlit"a**

The English Ballad Medley is comprised of four melodies, originally poignant songs with English words though set to chamber orchestra in this context, composed by Rabbi Michel Twerski, Rabbi of Congregation Beth Jehudah in the Sherman Park neighborhood of Milwaukee.

The four melodies begin with *Etz haim* and *Hashivenu*, followed by *The Child Within*, and culminating with *Im lo Achshav Eimasi*.

Rabbi Twerski, a Hasidic rabbi, is a descendent of the Chernobyler Hasidic dynasty, and he is also known as the Hornosteipler Rebbe of Milwaukee. His many songs and melodies have been arranged for chamber orchestra, full orchestra, and other diverse ensembles, having been performed in concert twice by the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, and recorded by the Israel Philharmonic.

***Brundibár* by Hans Krása**

Written in 1938 as a children's opera at a Czech orphanage by Jewish Czech composer Hans Krása with a libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister, ***Brundibár*** was immortalized through performances by the children of Theresienstadt concentration camp in occupied Czechoslovakia. *Brundibár* was presented at Theresienstadt as part of the Nazis' propaganda machine and ironically depicts themes of anti-bullying, the power of friendship, and the triumph of good over evil. The libretto has since been adapted by Tony Kushner with set design by Maurice Sendak.

History

Krása and Hoffmeister wrote the opera in 1938 for a government competition which was later cancelled for political reasons.

Rehearsals started in 1941 at a Jewish orphanage in Prague for children separated from their parents by war. In the winter of 1942 the opera was first performed at the orphanage in the absence of composer Krása and set designer František Zelenka, who had been transported to Theresienstadt; the orphanage staff and the children of the original chorus were also brought there in 1943. Only the librettist Hoffmeister had escaped.

Krása reconstructed the full score of the opera for the cast in Theresienstadt, adapting it to suit musical instruments available in the camp: flute, clarinet, guitar, accordion, piano, percussion, four violins, a cello, and a double bass. On September 23, 1943, *Brundibár* premiered in Theresienstadt and was staged 55 times during the following year. A special performance of *Brundibár* was staged in 1944 for representatives of the Red Cross, who came to inspect living conditions in the camp but did not know that much of what they witnessed was a sham. Stage fronts similar to a movie set were constructed to deceive attendees into believing that prisoners of war were being treated well. The Red Cross *Brundibár* production was filmed for a Nazi propaganda film, after which the participants were sent to Auschwitz where many perished.

Footage from the Nazi film of *Brundibár* is included in the Emmy Award-winning documentary, *Voices of the Children*, directed by a Holocaust survivor who had sung in the *Brundibár* chorus; included is an interview with the original performer of “the cat” role in the opera. A number of subsequent productions of *Brundibár* have been staged, as it has emerged as a classic of children’s opera. Sadly, it is impossible to separate the tuneful score from the chilling circumstances under which it was conceived and performed.

The current version is based on a production for which Tony-award winning playwright Tony Kushner adapted the libretto from Hoffmeister’s original version. Kushner had originally participated in adapting *Brundibár* into a picture book in 2003, with illustrations by the acclaimed Maurice Sendak. The picture book was named one of the *New York Times Book Review’s* 10 Best Illustrated Books of 2003.

Prior to founding RUACH fifteen years ago, Joshua Richman organized a production of *Brundibár* in Milwaukee featuring students from First Stage Children’s Theater, the Milwaukee Children’s Choir, and Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra, among others. The success of this initiative was a major motivating factor in RUACH’s genesis.

Plot

Aninka and Pepíček are a fatherless sister and brother, with a sick mother. The doctor tells them that their mother needs milk to

recover. Impoverished, they decide to sing in the marketplace for money. They are helped by a sparrow, cat, dog, and other animals, as well as children. Unfortunately, they have to contend with the organ grinder bully, Brundibár, who dislikes children, wants to protect his territory, and takes out his own childhood struggles and other misfortunes on them. Brundibár is assisted by a malicious policeman, but Aninka and Pepíček, together with their animal and children friends, unite to overcome their oppressors. Brundibár returns, however, to sound an ominous warning that while he may be defeated for now, he will return, adding that bullies are never vanquished for good.

The plot of the opera is similar to that of *Hansel and Gretel* and *The Town Musicians of Bremen*. Given the context of the times, the triumph of the helpless and needy children over the tyrannical organ grinder is obviously symbolic; but, understandably, the opera has no overt references to the conditions under which it was composed and performed. However, the Thereisenstadt detainees, as survivors have reiterated, surely read between the lines.

The directors of the current production have chosen to include clips of the Thereisenstadt production and historical events, feeling them to be indispensable to the understanding and impact of the performance.

BIOGRAPHIES

JASON MCKINNEY

After studying Judaica at Milwaukee's Hillel Academy and participating in musical theater at Whitefish Bay High School in suburban Milwaukee, Jason McKinney graduated from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. He won the Metropolitan Opera's South Carolina district competition and placed second in the Southeastern Regional finals. He has performed at the Kennedy Center, the White House and at opera houses in the United States and Europe, as well as elsewhere, including Israel. He has won acclaim for his performances as Porgy in Milwaukee's Skylight Music Theater's production of *Porgy & Bess* and as legendary vocalist Paul Robeson. He also has appeared on several occasions for RUACH, including, most recently, as a featured guest artist in the 2018 Sherman Park Arts Festival.

ELYSE EDELMAN

Director Elyse Edelman's Wisconsin theater credits include

multiple acting performances with Door Shakespeare, American Players Theatre, Renaissance Theaterworks, First Stage, Forward Theater Company, In Tandem Theatre, and the Milwaukee Repertory Theater. Other regional theatre credits as an actor include The Guthrie, Park Square Theatre, People's Centre Theatre (Minneapolis/St. Paul), Utah Shakespeare Festival (Cedar City), Chicago Children's Theatre, The Accidents (Chicago), and Riverside Theatre in the Park (Iowa City). She is also a recognized teaching artist and develops curriculum for many of the professional theaters in the State. She is a proud graduate of the University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater BFA Actor's Training Program. Upcoming Projects: *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at Door Shakespeare this summer, and *Fires in the Mirror* at Milwaukee Chamber Theatre in the Fall. Website: www.elyseedelman.com.

NATHAN WESSELOWSKI

Music Director Nathan Wesselowski has been writing, directing and teaching music for children for 18 years through Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra's ACE program, Skylight Music Theatre and Milwaukee Opera Theatre's education programs as well as Next Actors, First Stage and Wisconsin Conservatory of Music. Nathan serves as High Holy Day Choir director at Congregation Sinai. He is also an accomplished tenor who is seen regularly in productions in the greater Milwaukee area, performing with Skylight Music Theatre, Milwaukee Opera Theatre, First Stage, In Tandem Theatre and The Fireside and also through concerts with Racine Symphony Orchestra, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra's ACE Concerts and Bel Canto Chorus. He serves as the Tenor Section Soloist at Immanuel Presbyterian Church.

ALEXANDER "SASCHA" MANDL

Conductor Alexander "Sascha" Mandl has built upon his reputation as one of the foremost violinists and conductors of Brazil to become a well-known violinist and conductor in Milwaukee. Dr. Mandl maintains an active and diverse career as soloist, conductor, educator and chamber and orchestral musician. A versatile artist, Dr. Mandl has appeared internationally at renowned halls, including Alice Tully and Carnegie Hall. Dr. Mandl's recent conducting posts have included leading Milwaukee Musaik, the Kenosha Symphony, the Paraiba Symphony Orchestra, Brazil and the Eleazar de Carvalho Festival Faculty Orchestra. He also conducted the chamber orchestra during an acclaimed RUACH Jewish-themed production of Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat*. He and his wife, MSO Associate Concertmaster (third chair) Jeanyi Kim are featured in Milwaukee's popular Philomusica Quartet.

JOSHUA RICHMAN

Joshua Richman, RUACH's founder and a conductor in tonight's performance, has served as RUACH's Executive Director throughout its approximately fourteen-year history. A Milwaukee native, he was active in the arts from an early age and soloed with the Milwaukee Symphony during high school. He graduated from Yale College, where he was Principal Trombonist and Assistant Conductor of the Yale Symphony Orchestra and he subsequently engaged in Jewish studies at the Machon Shlomo yeshiva in Jerusalem. He returned to Milwaukee to pursue his dual passions of the arts and Judaism and has been honored by the Milwaukee Jewish Federation as an outstanding young leader and by the Coalition of Jewish Learning as an outstanding educator. He lives in the Milwaukee's diverse Sherman Park community, where he is a member of Rabbi and composer Michel Twerski's Congregation Beth Jehudah.

CHRISTOPHER WARREN

Christopher Warren, Technical Director, is a theater professional who has been involved in theater since childhood. With roots in First Stage Theater Academy, as an adolescent he shifted his focus to the technical side and graduated from the Milwaukee HS of the Arts technical theater program; he is also a former attendee of the UWM BFA technical program. After several years working on cruise ships—specializing in rigging, automation, and performer flying—RUACH has given Chris the amazing opportunity to help resettle into his hometown, and he is extremely grateful for the opportunity to work with such an incredible company.

DARCY DEVENS

Costume Designer Darcy Devens is a freelance costumer from Grafton and works with schools and community theater groups in the area. Professionally in the past she worked as the costume manager for Milwaukee Shakespeare; she also works with Renaissance Theaterworks running wardrobe.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE FROM ELYSE EDELMAN

As a working artist and educator, my day-to-day life too often leaves me unable to pursue personal passion projects – those that ignite me in all the ways that drew me to acting in the first place. Projects that jumpstart the voice in the back of my head, which then responds with “Oh yes, this...*this* is why we do what we do.” Throughout my career, these projects have seemed to find

me at just the right moment. So of course, when Joshua first approached me to discuss *Brundibár*, I immediately heard that voice in my head. And I knew I had to listen.

Contextually, *Brundibár* represents the best of our collective narrative from the worst time in our shared history. An opera composed in the ghetto and performed at the Holocaust concentration camp Theresienstadt, when those who labored for it had their lives to lose and almost nothing to gain, *Brundibár* had all the reason in the world to be forgotten, lost as part of the Nazis' propaganda machine. Instead, its simple, but consistent, messages of hope, comradery, and integrity remain critical lessons for contemporary audiences, young and old alike.

And so it has been adapted and performed time and again across the world, from South Africa to Germany, to right here in Milwaukee. And its message remains the same: when we help each other, when we fight back, and when we refuse to look away, we *can* defeat bullies. We can choose to spread love instead of hate, and to lend a hand instead of ignoring the call for help. Only then, may we begin to drown out the voices of the "Brundibárs" across our world.

I'd like to thank Nathan, Elna, and Donna, who have worked tirelessly beside me the past several weeks, and Chris and Darcy, who went far above and beyond the call of duty - we could not have done this without you. And most importantly, I must thank our young performers, most of whom I've known well for years, and who gave not only their talent, but their time, dedication, and their commitment to our vision. I remain indebted to each of you.

PRODUCER'S NOTE FROM JOSHUA RICHMAN

Part of Elyse Edelman's conception for *Brundibár*, as best I understood it, was based on 'The Lost Boys' of *Peter Pan* fame. As Wikipedia describes them, 'The Lost Boys' are a band of boys lost by their parents after they "fall out of their perambulators" and come to live in Neverland.'

Brundibár was premiered in a boys' orphanage in Prague. Its cast in Theresienstadt was all children. Its mere existence, its evolution and its staying power are miraculous. For the past nine months, and then some, as *Brundibár* has taken shape, I—perhaps along with the members of our albeit-not-orphaned directors, cast and orchestra members—have relived, in our own ways, a 'Lost Boys' experience, such that Elyse's vision is not limited to the stage.

The much-needed but unanticipated help of so many

different 'characters' through this adventure has contributed—for me, at least—to a bit of a Lost Boy feeling, with grateful dependence on the help of friends and colleagues, and ultimately, the One Above.

I urge you to read the Brundibár program note to better understand its deeply spiritual and compelling nature. The following words, written by Devorah Fisher, a RUACH summer intern in 2018, ring strikingly true for *Brundibár*, I think.

Under oppressive circumstances, music and the arts don't have the luxury of being a frivolous pastime. The only artistic expression possible during times of persecution is that which absolutely needs to be expressed; even the simplest child's tune is transformed into something more when it is sung at great risk to the singer's life. Extreme pressure lends more importance to the arts because the oppressive environment naturally strips all meaning contained within the arts to the bare bones. By engaging in acts of human expression, persecuted artists and audiences engage in an act of inner resistance against the persecutors who seek to dehumanize them. The mere existence of the art means that the persecutors haven't won.

Certainly, Brundibár as a whole is an expression of the composer Hans Krása. But when we, in the present, revisit the music of the Holocaust, we forge connections with the original musicians and audience members as well. Each present-day musician and each of our cast and chorus members has become a conduit for the essence of the musicians and the children who played those parts in Theresienstadt. Each present-day audience member relates back to a prisoner who sat in the audience in the Ghetto. We form connections with everything they believed in and felt and loved and hated and lived.

When we, in the present, revisit this music, we build up the ties that attach their experiences and lives to our current world. It is a raw and true commemoration of their lives and deaths, as this music, born of their oppression, is saturated with the sparks of their souls. Every performance strengthens the hold their stories and their messages have on our world today, ensuring that the people behind them don't fade from our past and from our future.

May our performances, and our entire *Brundibár* experience, serve as an enduring testament to the children who originally performed *Brundibár* in Theresienstadt, along with all those who sacrificed their lives in the Holocaust.

—JER



Nearing its fifteenth anniversary, **RUACH** (“spirit” in Hebrew) has consistently offered a wide variety of arts opportunities to underserved populations. **RUACH**’s reach has expanded over time to include diverse groups of all ages both within and outside the Jewish community.

RUACH has established itself as a frequent and willing programming partner, working with almost fifty schools, community / special needs centers and synagogues, and senior living program facilities.

RUACH has developed a programming framework which includes: Project: VITAL 2013-2019 (Values in the Arts & Life), engaging numerous, diverse organizations through arts residencies integrating essential, universally appreciated Jewish values; Core Partner Programming with Yeshiva Elementary School and Ovation Jewish Communities; **RUACH** Onstage providing concerts, theater, exhibits and other presentations, and Special Endeavors connected to its mission, including Sherman Park Arts Festivals uniting the diverse populations in **RUACH**’s birthplace community.

RUACH’S Mission

RUACH awakens creativity through arts enrichment rooted in Jewish values and the rich cultural diversity of Sherman Park. **RUACH**’s performances, classes and other innovative programs uplift and unite underserved communities throughout Greater Milwaukee.

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This production of *Brundibár* represents perhaps the most ambitious project RUACH has undertaken in its nearly fifteen-year history, bringing together the City of Milwaukee and its suburbs, students and alumni from First Stage and Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra as well as numerous public and private schools and three Jewish day schools, and the Greater Milwaukee Jewish and general communities. It is supported by grants from the NEA, the State of Wisconsin, Milwaukee County, and the City of Milwaukee, among other generous funders.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No project like this stands on its own. **RUACH** wishes, first, to thank the student performers and their families for their tremendous efforts in making Brundibár a reality! Deepest thanks to the funders of this Project and **RUACH's** board of directors and staff, all of whom are listed elsewhere in the program.

RUACH greatly appreciates the work of staff members at Bader Hillel Academy, Bruce Guadalupe School, Fifty-Third Street School, Jewish Family Services, Milwaukee Jewish Day School, St. Anthony Upper Elementary School, Mary Ryan Boys and Girls Club and Yeshiva Elementary School which facilitated and/or hosted numerous outreach sessions and community and student concerts.

RUACH is deeply grateful to the Jewish Community Foundation of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, and to Caren Goldberg, its executive director. Our thanks to Caitlin Klister of Boundless Consulting for her work on marketing and numerous other matters, MYSO Artistic Director Carter Simmons for his assistance with musician recruitment, Adria Willenson for her work on design of marketing materials, and WUWM, Urban Milwaukee and the Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle for their interest in the project and their programs and articles.

Thank you to staff member Shayna Hunt for her special help in procuring, preparing, and transporting props for the show, to Kenn Miller and Whitefish Bay High School for lending us theater blocks and to Donna Kummer and Plymouth Church for loan of stand lights. In addition, we would like to thank the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center which housed many rehearsals and loaned music stands, Ovation Jewish Home which hosted auditions, rehearsals, and community performances, and the Harry & Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center and its staff.



*Thank you to our donors and sponsors
for making this project possible!*



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