



RUACH Reports

September 2019 Annual Program Report, Issue #4

BRUNDIBAR: RUACH Brings the Holocaust-Era Children's Opera to Milwaukee



RUACH presented the children's opera *Brundibár* May 26-28, 2019 to sold-out houses for each of its three performances at The Harry & Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center's Ritz Theater. RUACH held two additional free shows on May 20 at Ovation Jewish Home's Rubenstein Pavilion, the first primarily for students from schools that would otherwise not have the opportunity to experience such a production, and another for residents from Ovation Communities and the general public. A number of schools, as well as the Mary Ryan Boys & Girls Club, had the unique opportunity to participate in outreach events featuring Jason McKinney and Rabbi Mendel Metzger, focusing on the topics of bullying and the Holocaust.

RUACH's production of *Brundibár* was directed by accomplished Wisconsin actor and theater educator, Elyse Edelman, with Nathan Wesselowski, Milwaukee opera singer and instructor, serving as music director. Dr. Alexander Mandl conducted, and Jason McKinney, internationally known opera performer, played the title role. The cast, which rehearsed intensively over a month-and-a-half-long period, was comprised of talented students from Southeastern Wisconsin, and Yeshiva Elementary School students formed a children's choir. Top Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra (MYSO) students and local professional musicians comprised the excellent orchestra.



Jason McKinney as *Brundibár*



***Brundibár* Cast**

A tale of two children who—with the help of animal friends and hundreds of school kids—defeat the villainous *Brundibár*, the Holocaust-era opera is an allegory mirroring the experience of Jews in Europe being persecuted by the Nazis. It depicts themes of anti-bullying, the power of friendship, and the triumph of good over evil. RUACH Executive Director, Josh Richman, said, "Producing *Brundibár* presented a powerful opportunity to bring together diverse community members to explore the depth of Jewish history, art, and expression, at the same time celebrating the universal values that bring out the best in all of us. Endeavors like these reinforce the conviction that the sound of good cannot be silenced."

The history and message of *Brundibár* will have a lasting affect on all who participated, their families, friends and all who enjoyed the production. Here are statements from some of the cast and their families:

"This experience has changed Casey. He is definitely a more understanding and accepting person at the end of this experience. He also has a renewed sense of speaking up and not being a 'bystander' when witnessing injustice."

~Julia Anderer-Westphal (mother of Casey)

*"It was important for me to be in *Brundibár* because...it was important to honor the memory and survivors. *Brundibár* has an important message about overcoming the bully."*

~Scarlett Hirano (Aninku)

*"I come from a Jewish family. Some of my ancestors went through something similar. Today, many people don't know about the Holocaust. With *Brundibár* being a children's opera, it's a good way to teach Holocaust education to people my age."*

~Aryeh Karan (Pepíček)

*"I was honored to be chosen to play the sparrow in *Brundibár*. I'm not Jewish, but I received a crash course in what it was like to be Jewish during the Holocaust by participating in this show. The fear and heartache will stay with me forever. I'm a different person after performing in *Brundibár*. My life is different, I'm more empathetic, and I feel the need to become more active and defend the defenseless after learning and performing the story of *Brundibár*."*

~Casey Westphal (Sparrow/Baker)

Sherman Park Arts Festival Encourages Neighborhood Harmony

This season, RUACH coordinated the second annual Sherman Park Arts Festival (SPAF), a collaboration of a wide variety of neighborhood partners that encourages the diverse populations of Sherman Park to create and enjoy neighborhood harmony through the arts. This 2019 festival kicked off with the **SPAF Community Arts Day** at the Mary Ryan Boys & Girls Club on March 31. The event welcomed people of all ages and backgrounds to come together to create art and engage in art activities. More than 175 individuals—primarily from the Sherman Park community—participated.



New artists and activities were added this year, which made the event more fun, festive and family-friendly. One such addition was an open painting station led by *Vibez Creative Arts Space*, an arts organization located in the Sherman Phoenix. Another new feature was a lively musical performance by the *Milwaukee Police Band*, enjoyed by all. Several young SPAF attendees even got a chance to conduct the Band!

RUACH once again teamed with Ascension St. Joseph’s Hospital to host the **SPAF Community Concert** on July 10 at Gengler Park as part of St. Joe’s annual *Concerts in the Park* series. Three bands, whose members have close ties to the Sherman Park Community, performed. *Ogham*, a traditional Irish dance band opened the concert with engaging Celtic tunes. Next up was *Kretshmir*, playing a variety of traditional Jewish melodies. The *Greg Adams Trio* closed out the concert with their always enjoyable smooth jazz. It was truly a wonderfully gratifying, multicultural experience!

The success of this year’s Sherman Park Arts Festival was due in large part to the collaborative spirit of our partners, which included: Ascension St. Joseph’s Hospital, Mary Ryan Boys & Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee, Congregation Beth Jehudah, Fifty-Third Street School, Milwaukee Police Department-District 7, Sherman Multicultural Arts Elementary School, Sherman Park Community Association, and Yeshiva Elementary School.



2018-19 CORE PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

In 2018-19, we worked extensively with our Core Partners—Yeshiva Elementary School (YES) and Ovation Communities—to provide their constituents with excellent music and arts programming. Highlights included:

YES Programming (YES)

During the 2018-19 school year, 4th grade girls and 4th grade boys at Yeshiva Elementary School participated separately in weekly school-day, group recorder lessons taught by Mrs. Rochel Leah Fox. This now-three-year-old pilot of RUACH's recorder method book, *Recorders Play Jewish Music*, authored by Mrs. Marty Fox, demonstrated the effectiveness of the program when implemented in a classroom. The annual Nachas RUACH performance at YES on June 16 featured the girls recorder class, along with a YES Girls Choir and solo performer.

RUACH Executive Director Josh Richman also rehearsed and directed a YES-RUACH boys choir featuring a background instrumental ensemble to perform a well-received selection at the YES Banquet in January 2019, which honored Bader Philanthropies.

Yiddish Music Series (YMS)

RUACH, in partnership with the Jewish Home and Care Center Foundation, continued the Yiddish Music Series at the Helen Bader Center for residents with early-to-mid-level Alzheimer's and dementia. In 2018-19, *Adam Margolis and Friends*, as well as *Lil Rev*, performed Jewish and Yiddish music ten times as part of the series, which movingly and effectively draws out long-time memories and feelings from the audiences.

Rubin Sharpe Tribute Series (RSTS)

Through this program, RUACH delivers special high-quality programs including concerts, as well as music and visual arts residencies, to Ovation Communities residents. Harpist Devorah Fisher and pianist Jeff Gibbens kicked off the season in September 2018 with a recital at Ovation Jewish Home's Rubenstein Pavilion. Featuring the music of Ravel and Salzedo, the beautiful performance was enjoyed by about 150 people.

In December 2018, RUACH presented the Israeli *Simply Tsfat* Jewish music group at Ovation Sarah Chudnow and Rubenstein Pavilion at Ovation Jewish Home. *Simply Tsfat*, well received by RUACH audiences several years ago, was a hit once again, with packed houses for both performances!



Frank Almond

The 2018-19 RSTS season concluded with a masterful performance at Ovation Sarah Chudnow by acclaimed Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra Concertmaster Frank Almond, and renowned pianist, Victor Asuncion.

BRINGING PARTNERS AND MUSICIANS TOGETHER



Adam Margolis

RUACH cultivates partnerships with a wide variety of schools, community organizations, institutions, and funders. We also have access to an extensive network of artists, including one of our most frequent collaborators, Dr. Adam Margolis. We are privileged to have the opportunity to bring these groups together from time to time to help enhance our partners' events with outstanding artistry. Over the last year, we were pleased to have RUACH featured at the following community events:

Bader Philanthropies' Global Headquarters Grand Opening

RUACH was honored to arrange for musicians Adam Margolis, Rick Aaron, Linda Raymond Siegel, T.J. Hull, and Leon Cohen to play at Bader Philanthropies' Grand Opening event in October 2018.

Ovation Jewish Home Grand Torah Celebration

Ovation Jewish Home welcomed a new Sefer Torah to its Kohl Family Synagogue in December 2018 at its Grand Torah Celebration. RUACH was delighted to assemble musicians, including Adam Margolis, Guy Fiorentini, T.J. Hull, Avi Gelfman, and Rick Aaron, to play at this significant event.

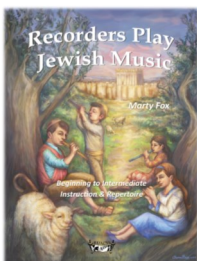
Jewish Funders Network Conference in San Francisco

Kretshmir—featuring Adam Margolis, Guy Fiorentini, and T.J. Hull—accompanied by Josh Richman, traveled to San Francisco in March 2019 to perform at the Jewish Funders Network Conference, which is an annual convening of philanthropists and foundation professionals.

Jewish Home and Care Center Foundation/Ovation Communities July 3rd Fireworks Fest

This year, proceeds from Ovation Communities' and the Jewish Home and Care Center Foundation's July 3rd FireworksFest event benefitted the RUACH Fund. This fund, which is held at the Jewish Home and Care Center Foundation, is used to provide excellent arts programming to Ovation Communities residents, as part of a collaboration between the Jewish Home and Care Center Foundation and RUACH. RUACH was pleased to coordinate a brass quintet featuring Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra musicians, which included RUACH Vice President Megumi Kanda, to play at the event.

RECORDERS PLAY JEWISH MUSIC



RUACH's recorder program, *Recorders Play Jewish Music*, written by Mrs. Marty Fox, a renowned educator at Yeshiva Ohr Eliyahu in Los Angeles, and under the supervision of Rabbi Michel Twerski, *Shlita*, has been piloted at Yeshiva Elementary School to great success. We are thrilled to announce that we are beginning sales of this program to schools nationwide this fall so that we can reach more young people with this easy-to-learn methodology that, uniquely, features entirely Jewish music. ***If you are interested in learning more about the program, please contact Joshua Richman at joshua@ruachmilwaukee.org.***



COMING SOON!

RUACH has so much in store for the 2019-20 season! Highlights include:

Project: VITAL (Values In The Arts And Life)

We plan to extend this artist-in-residence program, which integrates essential Jewish values that are universally appreciated, to a broader group of schools beginning in Winter/Spring 2020.

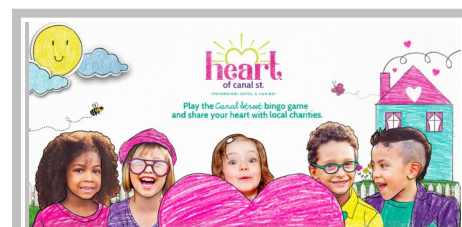
The Composer and Spirituality: A Musical Investigation with Jonathan Leshnoff

In May 2020, RUACH is convening Milwaukee musicians to bring to local audiences the work of visiting guest composer, Jonathan Leshnoff. We'll explore the role spirituality plays in the composition, performance, and audience reception of a composer's work. While Dr. Leshnoff is an Orthodox Jew, the theme is universal, as spirituality is an influence on the work of many composers of various religious and philosophical orientations.

Sherman Park Art Laboratories

RUACH will bring more intensive, year-long arts programming to partners in Sherman Park, in an effort to build upon the success of the Sherman Park Arts Festival.

Watch your mailbox for an invitation to our annual **Spirit of RUACH Donor Appreciation and Tribute Reception** this fall.



RUACH is participating in the 2019 Potawatomi Hotel & Casino's Heart of Canal Street program (HOC).

The HOC randomly draws the names of 20 participating organizations to receive a portion of funds generated through special Canal Street bingo and other promotions.

In 2015, RUACH's name was drawn in the grand drawing, and received \$31,051.43, some of which helped to fund RUACH's pilot Recorder Program.

THANK YOU, RUACH DONORS!

RuOCK Stars (\$5,000 and above)

Bader Philanthropies
Bert L. & Patricia S. Steigleder Charitable Trust
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Madeleine and David Lubar
Mitch and Cheryl Moser
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This list includes donations and commitments between 9/1/2018 and 8/31/2019. It represents our best efforts to be complete and accurate. Please contact RUACH Operations Manager Nicole Carver at nicole@ruachmilwaukee.org or 414-367-4890 to correct any inaccuracies, or to make changes in your listing.

THANK YOU EVENT AND PROGRAM SPONSORS

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David and Ruth Coleman Foundation
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Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Mary L. Nohl Fund
Harri Hoffmann Family Foundation, Inc.
Herb Kohl Philanthropies

Holocaust Education Resource Center
Milwaukee Arts Board
Milwaukee Jewish Federation
Nonprofit Management Fund
Ovation Communities
Peck Foundation, Milwaukee Ltd.
Ralph Evinrude Foundation
Stephanie Klurfeld



A LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

So much of what RUACH accomplished during the 2018-19 season was inspired by one of our major endeavors of the year—and perhaps the most significant endeavor we've ever undertaken—producing the Holocaust-era children's opera, *Brundibár*. I've been inspired throughout this season by the writing of Devorah Fisher, a musician and former RUACH intern, who described the origin of the opera and the significance of art and its role in tying the present and future to a very meaningful past:

"In the early 1940s, a small, vibrant group of musically and artistically elite Jews were transported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto and Concentration Camp. There they reunited and formed a thriving underground cultural scene, despite the ban on all artistic and musical activity initially enacted by the SS. One of the secret performances was of the children's opera Brundibár, which premiered in Theresienstadt in 1943. Hans Krasa, the composer, was able to reconstruct his opera inside the Ghetto from a partial piano score, rearranging the music to fit the few Instruments smuggled into Theresienstadt in secret. Eventually, seeing the potential for pro-Nazi propaganda, the SS lifted the music ban and allowed the performances and rehearsals of Brundibár to commence in the open. Brundibár was performed 55 times in the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Nearly everyone involved in the production, including the musicians, the composer, the set designer, and the many children who formed the cast and chorus, were deported to other concentration camps and murdered shortly after the final performance.

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, BRUNDIBAR as a whole is an expression of the composer Hans Krasa. 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 becomes 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."

At RUACH, we are inspired by the power of the arts and propelled by our unique perspective, rooted in Jewish values and tradition. Through the arts, we hearken back to the past, in the present, simultaneously conceiving of and articulating a better future. Through the arts, we can bring people of many backgrounds together under the banner of this universal language. And through the arts, we can uplift, comfort, and encourage where there is division, pain, and doubt.

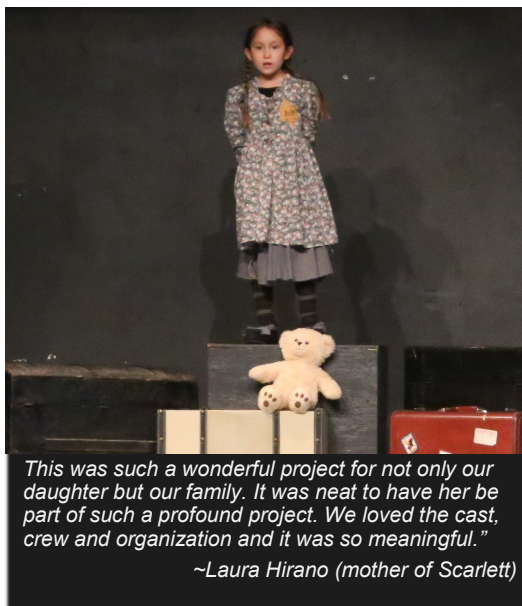
Our programming and achievements during the 2018-19 season as described in the pages that follow are the embodiment of this distinct viewpoint.

On behalf of RUACH, many thanks to all who participated in our programs and supported our work this past season (*please be sure to take a look at our 2018-19 donor list on the last page of this newsletter*). Your generosity and enthusiasm inspire us to continue to expand our reach and impact in the Greater Milwaukee and Jewish communities in the coming year.

Josh Richman
Founder & Executive Director
RUACH, Inc.

RU-ACH

n\roo-akh/ a Hebrew word meaning spirit, wind, or breath



This was such a wonderful project for not only our daughter but our family. It was neat to have her be part of such a profound project. We loved the cast, crew and organization and it was so meaningful."

~Laura Hirano (mother of Scarlett)

About Us

RUACH is a Jewish arts and music 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in Milwaukee, with a mission to awaken 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. Since 2004, RUACH ('spirit,' 'wind,' or 'breath' in Hebrew) has grown to provide creative arts opportunities, set against a Jewish backdrop, to diverse Greater Milwaukee residents. Over time, RUACH has extended its impact to include music, visual arts, dance, creative writing, and theater programming for a variety of Jewish and at-large constituencies, particularly economically and ethnically underserved populations, including youth and the elderly.

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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RUACH's programs are made possible by the generosity of foundations, corporations, government entities, and individuals just like you.

Consider making a gift to RUACH to help us continue to fulfill our mission and reach even more people with our high-impact programs.

To make a gift, mail a check to the address below, made payable to RUACH, [donate online here](#) or call Executive Director, Joshua Richman, at 414-367-4891.

Contact Us

Give us a call for more information about our services and products or to make a donation.

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