

## The Girls in Room 28

Original documents from the Theresienstadt concentration camp were used to create the *Girls in Room 28, L410* Exhibition which will be on display at the Wales Millennium Centre in June. The Exhibition was created in Germany in 2004 at the instigation of survivors who wished to remember the girls who lived with them in Room 28 and were murdered by the Nazis. Since then, it has been extended to include a reconstruction of Room 28, and was first displayed in this format at the German Parliament in 2008.

Can anything be more poignant than reading the diaries and writings, with their echoes of young lives cut tragically short, showing the courage of these young girls? There are notebooks, a scrapbook, poems, letters, essays, photos, drawings – echoes of lives lost. One of those whose diary is on display was Helga Pollak-Kinsky. Her diary not only gives details of the daily life in the camp but gives us a glimpse into what it must have been like for a 12-year-old girl to live there.

Twelve thousand children destined for Auschwitz passed through Theresienstadt between 1942 and 1944. Of these, only a handful of the 11-14-year-old girls who survived, lived to tell the story of *The Girls in Room 28*.

The Jews deported to Theresienstadt came from countries all over Europe: and their survival was a priority among the adult prisoners. Men

and women who had been teachers or youth workers somehow managed to create a disciplined environment despite the surrounding horrors. Inmates of the camp included talented musicians, artists and playwrights – European Jews tragically *en route* to Auschwitz. Under their instruction, the children produced art, poetry and music and even performed plays such as *Brundibár*, the opera that will be performed at the WMC at the same time that the Exhibition is on display.

Anna Hanusová, known as Flaška, was one of those who *did* survive. She was determined to create a lasting memory in honour of her friends in Room 28 and it was her burning desire to do so that was instrumental in the Exhibition being designed. Flaška, who was part of the *Brundibár* ensemble and after the War devoted much of her time to speaking to people, both young and old, about her experiences, passed away in 2014. By an extraordinary coincidence, *Brundibár* will be conducted by Tomáš Hanuš, musical director of Welsh National Opera – who is Flaška's son. What an emotionally-charged experience this will be for WNO's talented conductor!

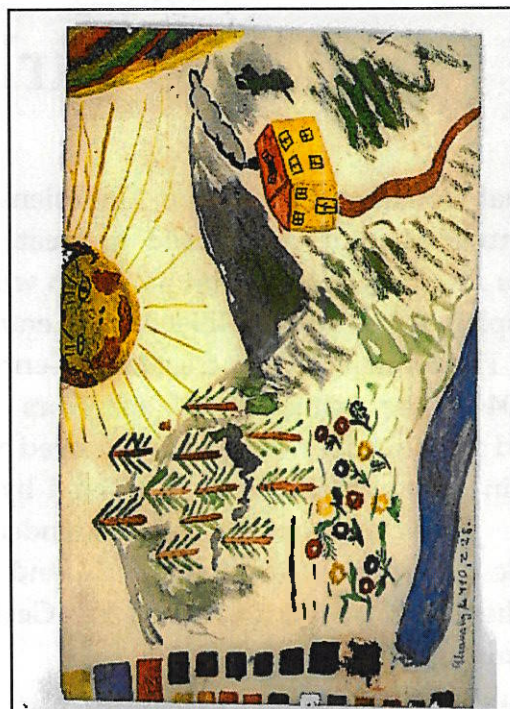
The Exhibition will be at the WMC from Friday June 7<sup>th</sup> to Sunday June 30<sup>th</sup>. Admission is free and no advance booking required.

Barbara Michaels

*Editor's note:* The Exhibition is complementary to Hannelore Brenner's book *The Girls of Room 28: Friendship, Hope and Survival in Theresienstadt*. Available in translation, price £21.09 hardback, £12.99 Kindle and on MP3 CD at £15.00.



The Girls of Room 28 - drawing from Anna Hanusová's autograph book



The Girls of Room 28 - painting by Erika Stransky

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