

From Hannelore Brenner's *Brundibár* to the J-ArtEck Stage

How a Book Inspired a New Generation

The idea to stage the opera *Brundibár* at J-ArtEck Camp was born from the pages of Hannelore Brenner's beautifully illustrated children's book *Brundibár. Wie Aninka und Pepíček den Leierkastenmann besiegten* (*Brundibár. How Aninka and Pepíček Defeated the Organ Grinder*).

Published in Hebrew, Ukrainian, and German, the book reimagines the classic opera for young readers, offering emotional depth and a powerful message of courage and solidarity. Its trilingual editions became the spark for our own creative journey – inspiring the J-ArtEck team to transform this story of resilience into a multilingual stage production that connects art, remembrance, and youth from different countries.

THE GIRLS OF ROOM 28

Hannelore Brenner, a former radio journalist, first met the women of Room 28 in Prague in 1996 while researching her radio feature *Brundibár und die Kinder von Theresienstadt* (*Brundibár and the Children of Theresienstadt*).

These Holocaust survivors, who had lived together in Room 28 of the Girls' Home L 410 in the Theresienstadt ghetto, vividly remembered the opera's performances in which some of them had sung or acted. Their stories grew into a long-lasting Jewish-German project of remembrance – a book, an exhibition, and a theatre play *"The Girls of Room 28"*. Drawing on the diary of Helga Pollak, the scrapbook of Anna Flachová, letters, poems, photographs, and personal memories, the

project tells of life, friendship, fear, and hope in the ghetto. When *Brundibár* was performed in Theresienstadt, some of the girls were on stage while others were happy when they could watch the show. Most were later deported and murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau; those who survived were determined to remember – and with Hannelore Brenner's help, they gave their voices to the world.

A LEGACY FROM THERESIENSTADT

What began as remembrance grew into an enduring educational mission. In 2004, Hannelore Brenner published *The Girls of Room 28* (Droemer, Munich), followed by an exhibition that helped survivors share their memories



with younger generations. For years, the women travelled with it across Germany and the Czech Republic, giving history a human face.

Translated into several languages, the exhibition has been shown at major institutions across Europe and beyond. In 2023, Hannelore Brenner received the Federal Cross of Merit of Germany for her contribution to Holocaust remembrance.

A PERFORMANCE TO REMEMBER

On August 18, 2025, J-ArtEck participants staged a multilingual performance of *Brundibár* – the culmination of months of creative collaboration. The production was accompanied by panels from

Hannelore Brenner's exhibition *The Girls of Room 28*, forging a living connection between historical memory and the experiences of young people today.

As a special gift, each participant received a copy of the book – a lasting reminder of the story's message and of their shared journey of bringing it to life.

Through this project, the book that once inspired us continues to inspire others – turning the story of *Brundibár* into a living bridge between generations. ■



Voices from the Project

STAS GAVRILOV:

"Hannelore Brenner's book in Hebrew allowed me to delve deeper into the libretto, expanding the characters' emotional depth.

It helped bridge language gaps and brought Israeli participants closer to the story, making *Brundibár* more accessible and meaningful for everyone."

ELLA NILOVA:

"Hannelore Brenner's commitment to preserving the memory of the girls from Theresienstadt deeply moved me. The story of *Brundibár* resonates with the spirit of J-ArtEck.

Inspired by this connection, I proposed a multilingual musical-theatre production of *Brundibár* as the centerpiece of J-ArtEck Camp 2025, both an artistic tribute and an act of remembrance."

