

Music Theatre Play

The first outcome of our remembrance project was a play which was available as a manuscript by 2002. It is a play about the fate of a group of girls, most of whom were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau. It brings to the stage the lives of the girls between 1943 and 1944 in the microcosm of »Room 28« in the Theresienstadt ghetto.

It is a play about fear and hope, friendship and solidarity, about the opera »Brundibár« and the importance of art, education and human values. Music plays an important role as well as hope – in Czech »Naděje«, in Hebrew, »Hatikvah«. The play vividly conveys what Zionism, the longing for »Eretz Israel«, meant for the children in the ghetto and for all Jewish people who were persecuted during the time of the Nazi regime.



English edition, September 2020



»Ghetto-Tränen 1944« (Ghetto-Tears 1944). Freiburg. Theodor-Heuss-Gymnasium. Directed by Elmar Wittmann.



Otto Pollak (1894 - 1978)
Photo from 1919

Plot

Helga Pollak returns to Theresienstadt in April 1945 in a terrible state. Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Oederan labor camp are behind her. Accommodation in a quarantine hospital. Flashback: Feverish nightmares bring to life past experiences. Reunion with her father. Reunion with Flaška and Ela, who have remained in Theresienstadt. The curtain rises.

Helga enters Room 28. The scene marks the beginning of the common story of the girls brought to life by spotlighting special moments: the arrival of new transports; conversations between girls before they fall asleep; singing with their carer Tella; celebrating Shabbat with Margit Mühlstein; inauguration ceremony for their organization Ma'agal; listening to Verdi's Requiem resounding from the cellar of L 410; listening to a Brundibár-performance, talking about the opera; art classes with Friedl Dicker-Brandeis; Eva meeting her boyfriend Harry; Helga visiting his father...Both Helga's diary and the meetings with her father are key plot elements of the play.

In autumn 1944 over 18,400 people are transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, among them most of the girls of Room 28.

Helga must separate from her father on 23 October 1944. Otto Pollak is left behind in shock. For weeks he would not note down a word.

Otto Pollak. Monday, 1 January 1945

New Year's Day. Snow drifts in the morning. I think of my child all the time. In the afternoon Helga's friends Ela and Flaška come to wish me good luck. It hurts me more than it makes me happy. I miss Helga so much.

Friday, 4 January 1945

Frieda's [Helga's mother] 37th birthday – how might she be doing? I wonder if she holds us to be still alive. In her last letter she wrote, »Watch out for our Helga until we can reunite again«. If Frieda knew that my only child was taken from me and that I am no longer able to watch over my Dearest.

Often and often, I ask myself whether I should have gone with my child, whether I have betrayed Frieda's last warning by entrusting Helga to Tella, her caretaker, who was in the same transport. The head of the Girls' Home and others advised me not to accompany her. They told me that we only would be together on the train, and that my sacrifice would be in vain. All these objections would not have prevented me from setting out on the journey into the unknown with my only child, would I have two legs and could I carry my own luggage. For I know what moral, spiritual and material support I was for my child in Theresienstadt.



Helga Pollak, 1939