

Teacher Tool 203: Brundibar Staging the Production Program Study Guide

Study Guide for Theater 33: “Brundibar.” Staging the Production

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**HEC-TV Live! and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis Present
Brundibar: Staging the Production**

Original Date: November 17, 2009

Grade Levels: 6-12

Program Description:

Ever wanted to know what it's like to be part of a professional opera experience? To go inside the rehearsal space and ask directors and technical personnel questions while they work? To find out about their creative process? To see how an opera production comes to life? Find out by viewing this archived program filmed live from the Touhill Performing Arts Center where Opera Theatre of St. Louis was staging their 2009 production of the young person's opera *Brundibar*. Meet stage director Doug Scholz-Carlson, set designer and videographer Wendell Harrington, costume designer Stacy Snyder, and director of production Steve Ryan. View a scene from the production. Hear music from the show. See the set and costumes. Learn from student questions asked of the directors and designers to find out how they create this very unique production.

About the Opera:

Brundibár was written in 1938-39 by Czech composer Hans Krása. The opera is written for an all children's cast and is a classic tale of good overcoming evil. *Brundibár* is famous for having been performed in the Nazi ghetto camp of Theresienstadt during World War II. *Brundibár* was first performed in 1942 at a Jewish orphanage in Prague. By 1943, most of those involved in the production, including the composer, conductor, and all of the children from the orphanage, had been sent to Theresienstadt, where thousands were sent before their fatal transport to Auschwitz. Krása decided to revive *Brundibár* at the camp as a way to distract himself and the children from the fear and depravity that they woke up to every day. This was permitted by the camp authorities and used for propaganda purposes when representatives from the Red Cross were taken to a performance in an attempt to depict conditions in the camp as humane. The children cherished their moments in costume, which were the only time that they did not have to wear the yellow Jewish star, a visible symbol of Nazi oppression. One survivor described those moments in costume as, "a couple of minutes of freedom." *Brundibár* was performed 55 times in Theresienstadt between 1943 and 1945 when the camp was liberated.

The story features two children, Aninka and Pepicek, who have a sick mother who needs milk to get better. They do not have money to buy it, so they decide to imitate the organ-grinder, Brundibár, and raise the necessary funds by singing just as he does. Other children join them in forming a chorus and singing a beautiful lullaby. They are then rewarded with generous donations from the neighborhood.

Program Objectives:

1. The participant will explore the nature of the theatrical experience by participating both as an audience member and as a critical questioner.
2. The participant will interact with professional theatre performers, directors and designers.
3. The participant will watch a scene in performance, and engage in critical evaluation of the script, characterization, direction, and technical elements.

Program Format:

The program focuses on what it means to stage an opera including set design and construction, costume design and construction, production design and staging, and other technical elements.

1. Welcome and Introduction—Student groups and experts will be introduced and welcomed to the program.
2. Background of the Opera—Important elements of the style and structure of the opera will be explored as we create a context for the choices made for this current production of “Brundibar.”
3. Tour of the Performance Space—Viewers will get to tour the Touhill Performing Arts Center stage and see the set and costumes for the production. As we take the tour, students joining us for the live program interact with, and ask questions of, the production’s director and designers who are joining us for the program.
4. Viewing a Scene from the Production—Viewers view a scene previously taped at a rehearsal at the Touhill Performing Arts Center and ask the director and designers questions about the scene.
5. Rehearsals, Staging, and Technical Elements—Students continue to interact with the director and designers to ask questions about their creative process, choices they made for this particular production, etc.
6. Closing Segment--Including summary of topics discussed and final questions from students.

Featured National Standards:
Theatre

NA 5-8.3 Designing by developing environments for improvised and scripted scenes

Students analyze improvised and scripted scenes for technical requirements

NA5-8.7 Analyzing, evaluating, and constructing meanings from improvised and scripted scenes and from theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions

Students articulate and support the meanings constructed from their and others' dramatic performances

Students use articulated criteria to describe, analyze, and constructively evaluate the perceived effectiveness of artistic choices found in dramatic performances

NA 9-12.3 Designing and producing by conceptualizing and realizing artistic interpretations for informal or formal productions

Students analyze a variety of dramatic texts from cultural and historical perspectives to determine production requirements

NA9-12.5 Researching by evaluating and synthesizing cultural and historical information to support artistic choices

Students identify and research cultural, historical, and symbolic clues in dramatic texts, and evaluate the validity and practicality of the information to assist in making artistic choices for informal and formal productions

NA9-12.7 Analyzing, critiquing, and constructing meanings from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions

Students articulate and justify personal aesthetic criteria for critiquing dramatic texts and events that compare perceived artistic intent with the final aesthetic achievement

Students analyze and critique the whole and the parts of dramatic performances, taking into account the context, and constructively suggest alternative artistic choices

Featured National Standards:
Music Education

Content Standard 7 – Evaluating music and music performances

Content Standard 8 – Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts

Content Standard 9 – Understanding music in relation to history and culture

Program-Related Activity Suggestions:

1. Have students journal about their reactions to the experience. What new things did they learn about the world of a professional theatre/opera company? What new insights did they gain in staging a production, designing sets and costumes? Do they view the role of theatre professionals any differently than they did before? What did they learn about careers in theatre and opera that they did not know before?
2. Invite students to learn more on their own about *Brundibar* by viewing Theater 32: HEC-TV Presents *Brundibar* also available on our educate.today website. Viewers meet Ela Weissberger, who appeared in the opera's original production at the Theresienstadt camp, see a performance of the entire opera, and also see backstage interviews from people involved in the production.

Vocabulary:

Blocking--where actors move on stage, how, and facing which direction

Business--Obvious, detailed physical movement of performers to reveal character, aid action, or establish mood

Cue--A signal, such as a word or action, used to prompt another event in a performance, such as an actor's speech or entrance, a change in lighting, or a sound effect.

Emotional Memory--A method of acting where actors remember actions/feelings from their own life that resemble character's in play

Ensemble--a sense of wholeness; everyone working together; working together as a unit toward a common goal

Motivation--the character's reason for doing what he/she does

Subtext--not what is said but how it's said; the actions and unspoken thoughts going through the mind of the character; between the lines; the underlying motivations for actions (including what character says to others)