



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 7, 2009

Contacts: Judith Anderson, publicrelations@lfjcc.com; 760-525-0012
Nan Pace, Managing Director, nanp@lfjcc.com, 858-362-1155

Press Photos available at <http://www.bairdphoto.net/deliver/jco/fireflies/>

J*COMPANY TO PRODUCE WORLD PREMIERE OF
FIREFLIES: THE STORY OF THE ARTISTS OF TEREZIN,
FEATURING THE ORIGINAL CHILDREN'S OPERA BRUNDIBAR

Young Artists Tackle Important Subject

LA JOLLA, CA – The award-winning J*Company Youth Theatre, a program of the San Diego Center for Jewish Culture at the Lawrence Family Jewish Community Center, JACOBS FAMILY CAMPUS, is pleased to announce its World Premiere production of *Fireflies: The Story of The Artists of Terezin, Featuring the Original Children's Opera BRUNDIBAR*, an inspiring story of hope and art, with a universal, current message for tolerance, anti-discrimination and understanding. *Fireflies* is by playwright and children's author Charmaine Spencer; the music of *BRUNDIBAR* is by Hans Krasa with Libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister, and the English Adaptation is by **Tony Kushner**. The production will run **May 8-17, 2009**, at the David & Dorothea Garfield Theatre.

Vienna-born artist Friedl Dicker Brandeis uses her art lessons to help the children imprisoned at the Terezin Concentration Camp in Czechoslovakia. At the same time, she struggles to protect them from the ultimate horror, transport to the death camps. When the International Red Cross presses for an inspection of the camp, the community is forced to contribute to the Nazi propaganda machine by creating a unique performance for the inspectors of the children's opera *BRUNDIBAR*, penned by Hans Krasa and translated by Tony Award winner Tony Kushner (*Angels in America*). What transpires during and after the performance shows us that no matter how huge the lie, truth and the human spirit can still triumph through the enduring strength of human love and creativity.

The play is set in a classroom barrack of Terezin where the art teacher uses her skills to encourage the children to express what they are experiencing. The daily inspiration this teacher gave her young students through her use of art therapy helped them to survive their internment psychologically by distracting them from the harsh reality of their inevitable fate.

Friedl, her husband Pavel, and most of the children she taught were eventually transported to Auschwitz and other camps. Pavel and only about 100 of the 15,000 children who were at Terezin survived. After the war, suitcases containing over 4,000 pieces of the children's artwork were found where Friedl had hidden them. These are now part of the Terezin Memorial in Prague.

Fireflies is a haunting and skillfully written narrative of hope that is suitable for all ages. The children's opera *BRUNDIBAR* has been performed worldwide and has been turned into a stunning storybook written by Tony Kushner and illustrated by Maurice Sendak. J*Company is pleased to be the first theatre company to present the combination of *BRUNDIBAR* and *Fireflies*, making it a World Premiere work of art.

“*BRUNDIBAR* is a show I have wanted to produce for years, ever since reading about the Terezin Camp; however, I knew that *BRUNDIBAR* on its own was not exactly what I wanted to present. How the show came to be produced within the walls of Terezin was the real story,” said Joey Landwehr, Artistic Director of J*Company. “When I discovered the beautifully written *Fireflies* by Charmaine Spencer I knew I had discovered the perfect showcase for *BUNDIBAR*. I also knew that J*Company, a program of the San Diego Center for Jewish Culture, provided the perfect venue for the production.”

“I feel it is my duty, as instructor, artist and humanitarian to teach these wonderful young people and their audience about what happened in the past so we can all learn from it in the present and prevent it from recurring in the future,” said Landwehr. “That’s why we’ve done shows such as *YOURS*, *ANNE*, the story of Anne Frank and her family, and will continue to produce theatre of substance.”

Landwehr is directing and choreographing *Fireflies*. He has worked extensively as an actor and director in New York City, both on and off Broadway, as well as in national tours and regional theatre. He has studied under such instructors as Betty Buckley, Marcel Marceau, Francis Sternhagen, F. Murray Abraham, Twyla Tharpe, and has had the privilege of working with great performers such as Phyllis Diller, Sam Harris, Joel Grey, Kaye Ballard, Michael Feinstein and Howard Keel. Landwehr is a member of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), the American Federation of

Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) and Actors' Equity Association (AEA). Landwehr was honored in 2006 by *San Diego Metropolitan Magazine* as one of the 40 San Diego residents under the age of 40 who are making significant contributions to the community. Landwehr most recently directed *Pocahontas* and *Into the Woods* for J*Company.

Steve Withers is the Musical Director for the production. The set is by **Heidi Atchison**, Lighting is by **David Atchison**, and Costumes are by **Shalmit Nelson**.

The educational component chosen to enhance the cast's learning experience is closely linked to the children of Terezin who had very little but were able to create beautiful artwork through color, imagination and hope. The cast members of *Fireflies* were given a poem from the play:

*The Firefly was bright green.
And he was trapped inside, poor bug.
If they hadn't shut off the lights,
If it wasn't so dark,
We might never have seen him.
Poor little bug. Flashing and flashing,
Somebody see me, I'm here.*

The students were asked to read through the poem numerous times, writing down meaningful words, then to create a work of art based on the poem, using only materials readily available in the room they were sitting in (without opening a cupboard, drawer, etc.) This duplicated the creative efforts of the children at Terezin, who created art using whatever was at hand. The artwork of the cast will be available for viewing in the lobby of the theatre throughout the show's run.

Heading the cast of *Fireflies* are:

Friedl Dicker-Brandeis	Abbi Hirschfeld	16	Rescu Academy
Pavel Brandeis	Robbie Friedman	18	Mt. Carmel High School
Brundibar	Mara Jacobs	13	High Tech High Middle Media Arts
Eva & Adult	Rachel Friedman	12	Earl Warren Middle School
Sparrow	Elisa Greenberg	13	San Diego Jewish Academy
Aninku	Halle Hoffman	12	Sage Canyon
Monkey	Katherine Houk	12	The Rhoades School
Cat	Danielle Levin	14	San Diego SCPA
Rebecca & Adult	Mady Maio	14	Coronado School of the Arts
Leo & Dog	Daniel Myers	15	High Tech High International
Pepicek	Nathaniel Pick	10	Spreckles Elementary
SS Officer	Darien Sepulveda	16	High Tech High International

Production Dates and Times:

Fri., May 8, 10:00 a.m. (School Show)

Sat., May 9, 8:00 p.m.

Sun., May 10, 1:00 & 4:30 p.m.

Fri., May 15, 10:00 a.m. (School Show)

Sat., May 16, 8:00 p.m.

Sun., May 17, 1:00 & 4:30 p.m.

General Information

Tickets for *Fireflies: The Story of the Artists of Terezin, Featuring the Original Children's Opera BRUNDIBAR* are \$13 for children and \$17 for adults and are available online at

www.sdcjc.org/jcompany or by calling the JCC Box Office at **858-362-1348**. The David & Dorothea Garfield Theatre is located at the Lawrence Family Jewish Community Center, JACOBS FAMILY CAMPUS at 4126 Executive Drive, La Jolla.

Press Photos available at <http://www.bairdphoto.net/deliver/jco/fireflies/>

#

About the San Diego Center for Jewish Culture

The San Diego Center for Jewish Culture is the largest Jewish institution in San Diego dedicated solely to presenting high quality, nationally recognized programs which are unique to San Diego County. The mission of the SDCJC is to expand and enrich cultural life in San Diego by presenting the finest in Jewish artistic expression, encouraging the preservation of Jewish culture and heritage, and nurturing new creativity in the arts. A core belief of the SDCJC is to promote respect for diverse cultures and build community tolerance.

The SDCJC offers a wide variety of multi-disciplinary artistic programs that explore cultural identities and perspectives, promote cross cultural understanding, and highlight human themes of family, tolerance, compassion, and hope. These programs, including the San Diego Jewish Film Festival, the San Diego Jewish Book Fair, New Jewish Plays Project, the San Diego Jewish Music Festival, a Holocaust Education Program, and the J*Company Youth Theatre, foster ideas of cultural appreciation and respect. Its facilities feature a 500-seat theatre, a Judaica library, an art gallery, and a community Holocaust Memorial Garden. Approximately 40,000 tickets are sold or provided annually to residents, visitors, and students for San Diego Center for Jewish Culture events.

About the Lawrence Family Jewish Community Center, JACOBS FAMILY CAMPUS

The mission of the Lawrence Family Jewish Community Center, JACOBS FAMILY CAMPUS is to provide social, cultural, educational, and recreational programs to individuals and families of all ages, religions, races, and financial, physical and mental abilities. Likewise, the JCC provides equal opportunity employment to individuals of all religions and backgrounds. The JCC welcomes San Diego's diverse Jewish community and the community at large. The Lawrence Family Jewish Community Center, JACOBS FAMILY CAMPUS is located at 4126 Executive Drive in La Jolla.



SAN DIEGO CENTER FOR JEWISH CULTURE

Lawrence Family Jewish Community Center, JACOBS FAMILY CAMPUS

4126 Executive Drive, La Jolla, CA 92037-1348 • (858) 457-3030 • FAX (858) 457-2422 • www.lfjcc.org