



The University of Texas at San Antonio
Office of University Communications
One UTSA Circle
San Antonio, Texas 78249-0619
(210) 458-4550
www.utsa.edu/today

DATE: December 6, 2006
Media Contact: Ashley Harris (ashley.harris1@utsa.edu)
210-458-5181 or cell 210-410-1305

**UTSA WELCOMES HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR ELA WEISSBERGER
AS CHORUS PERFORMS BRUNDIBÁR OPERA**

Weissberger original cast member at Terezín Concentration Camps performances

(SAN ANTONIO) – The UTSA Department of Music will welcome Nazi holocaust and concentration camp survivor Ela Stein Weissberger for performances of the Czechoslovakian children’s opera, “Brundibár.” Performances of the famed children’s opera will be held at three San Antonio area elementary schools on Monday, Dec. 18 and Tuesday, Dec. 19. Weissberger will speak to the students as part of the program.

In 1938, composer Hans Krasa and librettist Adolf Hoffmeister wrote "Brundibár" in the ghettos of Prague. The opera made its way to the Terezín concentration camp where it was performed 55 times during the Nazi occupation.

Weissberger, who was 11 years old when she arrived at Terezín in February 1942 with her mother, her sister and grandmother, played the role of “Cat” in all of the concentration camp performances. While many historians associate the opera with the holocaust, Weissberger recalls the hope that the performances gave her.

“When we sang, we forgot hunger, we forgot where we were. When we were on the stage, we forgot everything. And when we sang the victory song at the end, we imagined that we overcame Hitler. There was such power in the music," Weissberger recalls.

In 1944, the Nazis filmed a performance of the opera that was included in the propaganda film, “The Führer Gives a City to the Jews,” which was designed to fool the outside world into believing that prisoners at Terezín were being treated well.

After the filming, the musicians, the composer, Hans Krasa and most of the children in the production were transported to Auschwitz and executed. Of the 15,000 children who passed through Terezín, only 93 survived, including Weissberger.

In June 2006 the UTSA Lyric Theatre program presented the first American production of the children’s fairy tale at Terezín.

-more-

Although written before the Nazi invasion of Krasa's homeland, Brundibár draws many parallels between the Nazi occupation and the quest for hope and justice. It is the tale of a poor family whose children seek money to buy milk for their sick mother, only to have their quest thwarted by an evil organ grinder named Brundibár. With the help of three intelligent animals, the children defeat the unjust bully and return home in triumph.

On Monday, Dec. 18 the UTSA Lyric Theatre and Weissberger will be visiting Larkspur Elementary at 8:30 a.m. and Stephen F. Austin Elementary at 1:30 p.m. On Tuesday, Dec. 19 the group will travel to Nichols Elementary for a performance at 10 a.m. The performances will be sponsored by the Opera Guild of San Antonio.

###

About The University of Texas at San Antonio

The University of Texas at San Antonio is one of the premier institutions of higher education in South Texas and one of the fastest growing universities in the state. One of nine academic universities and six health institutions that comprise the UT System, UTSA is the second largest institution in the system. Celebrating its 36th anniversary, UTSA serves more than 28,000 students enrolled in 62 bachelors, 43 masters and 19 doctoral degree programs.

Programs are offered through the colleges of Architecture, Business, Education and Human Development, Engineering, Honors, Liberal and Fine Arts, Public Policy, and Sciences, and the Graduate School. A Top 100 Hispanic-serving institution, UTSA is ranked among the top 10. A university of access and excellence, UTSA is committed to research and discovery, teaching and learning, and public service.

###