***“TEREZIN: CHILDREN OF THE HOLOCAUST” TURNS 50!***

***May 18th Commemorates 50 Years of Education and Activism Through the Arts***

**May 11, 2021 – Newburyport, MA** – *Terezin: Children of the Holocaust*, the storied play created by playwright, educator, and humanitarian Anna Smulowitz about a day in the life of six children imprisoned in Camp Theresienstadt in the Czech Republic, celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Not many productions can claim to have performed continuously for 50 years, but *Terezin* and its message have stood the test of time. It has proved a necessary lesson in the fight against hate in all its forms for each new generation of students and adults alike. The play has also had a profound impact on the lives of the hundreds of young people who performed in the show over the last half-century.

Smulowitz wrote *Terezin* in 1970 as her Masters’ drama thesis at the University of Cincinnati. She was inspired to write it after reading a real letter from 12-year old Chaim Landau, who was interned at the Terezin concentration camp, in which he wrote, ‘If you should find this letter, please tell someone. We want to go home. We want our lives back. Please remember us.’ Smulowitz was moved to do all she could to remember Chaim and the one million other children who lost their lives in the Holocaust, pulling out her pen and drawing up the first outline for the play.

Ward Baker, former Director of the *Playhouse in the Park* in Cincinnati, OH, offered to produce the first-ever performance of the play. The *Playhouse* has long been known for professional theater and has premiered several Tony Award winning shows. “I owe a world of gratitude to Ward Baker,” said Smulowitz. “He recognized the universality of the message of the play. It wasn’t just about the experience of Jewish people during the Holocaust, but about all people who have been marginalized and oppressed. His belief in the play propelled my career in teaching and gave birth to 50 years of *Terezin* performances that have touched the lives of audiences and cast members around the world.”

*Terezin’s* premiere performance at the Playhouse on May 18, 1971 opened many doors for Smulowitz, including her first professional teaching position at the University of Maryland. It also opened doors for *Terezin*, leading to 50 years of performances at schools and festivals around the globe with hundreds of casts of eager young actors. Smulowitz stays in touch with many of her former cast members, however she maintains a special connection with one of her first casts who performed the show at the University of Kentucky in 1971 and blazed the trail for future casts. Now, mostly in their 60’s, cast members still remember their poignant performances and the effect being in the show has had on their lives and careers.

“I played Celia in Anna’s Lexington, KY debut of *Terezin: Children of the Holocaust*, fifty years ago,” said Cheryl Lalonde, who went on to become an attorney. “As young as I was then, I knew the play had the power to transform thoughts and hearts. It opened me to these big ideas about life, and how to live it. As a cast we knew we were bringing the audience an experience that would make them feel deeply. That is the power of art. Yet, there was something about this play that lived beyond the performance, because the themes are soul-stirring…evil, goodness, terror, tenderness…the seeds of those themes root and grow in fertile hearts over time. In the half century this story has been retold, thousands have been impacted. Think about the many actors, casts, crew members, audiences, and the family and friends of all those people, who have shared conversations because of the play. Then think about how that plays out in the actions and acts of all those people. The ripple effects of *Terezin* have been enormous, and the world is better for it.”

Other cast members went on to have leading roles on Broadway, write and direct feature films, star on television, become journalists, theater teachers, nationally acclaimed playwrights, college professors, Peace Corps activists, civil rights attorneys, and all-around social justice advocates.

“I first read *Terezin: Children of the Holocaust* in 1970 at age 19. It was the first time I truly understood what the Holocaust was, as my high school history book spoke so little about it,” said Marty Jones, former President and Executive Director of the Celebrity Series of Boston. “After directing *Terezin* for the first time in 1971, I began my life journey into a world of fighting for human rights. Today at age 70, with our country so polarized by anti-Semitic, racial, and social injustice, *Terezin* still holds a special place in my heart and its message is just as relevant, if not more so than it was in the 70’s.”

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, live productions of the stage play *Terezin* were paused indefinitely as theaters closed and schools transitioned to hybrid and remote formats. With the backdrop of headlines about the pandemic, global protests for racial and social justice, and the rise of discriminatory acts and hate speech*,* a group of young people decided the message of *Terezin* could not go silent at such a critical time. A cast was assembled, rehearsed in a “social bubble,” and filmed the play adhering to strict Covid-19 precautions. The first-ever filmed production of the play premiered virtually on Saturday, February 6, 2021 and has since been viewed by thousands of people, ushering *Terezin* into its 50th year of continuous performance.

“It seemed unimaginable that the year *Terezin*’s message was needed more than ever before would be the first in 50 years where the show could not tour,” said actor and co-director of the film Andrew Valianti. “After some conversation with Anna, the early stages of a plan began to form with the hopes of expanding the story’s reach farther than ever before. The response to the film has been beyond any of our expectations.”

Winner of the 1984 Children’s Television Award, *Terezin* has toured schools, colleges, churches, synagogues, and theaters as a stage play throughout the United States and internationally, and has been translated into several languages. The play has been performed off-Broadway, at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland, in Cuba, in Panama, in Germany, including in Berlin and Frankfurt, as well as at the Terezin concentration camp in the Czech Republic and at Auschwitz in Poland. The “portability” of the film allows the message of *Terezin* to broaden its reach to a greater number of communities, hearts, and minds through virtual, and soon, in-person screenings.

In honor of the 50th anniversary of the first performance of *Terezin*, Smulowitz has organized an “all-casts” Zoom call on Tuesday, May 18th to share 50 years of stories, impact, and friendships with former and current cast members.

While the play takes place during the Holocaust, it teaches audiences about the consequences of hate and discrimination in our everyday lives, the need for greater social responsibility, the power of every individual voice in standing up to hate, and the inherent childhood capacity for hope. *Terezin* looks forward to another 50 years of inspiring young people that art ignites action.

*Terezin: Children of the Holocaust* is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to fighting racism, antisemitism, discrimination, intolerance and bullying through education and the arts.

For more information about *Terezin: Children of the Holocaust* please visit the website at http://www.terezin.org or email [TerezinManager@gmail.com](mailto:TerezinManager@gmail.com) for more information.