

# Fireflies

by  
Charmaine Spencer

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## **DEDICATION**

*For Hugh*

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

*This drama is based on the true story of the well-known artist Friedl Dicker-Brandeis who brought hope and beauty to thousands of children at the concentration camp of Terezin.*

It's World War II and the Nazi juggernaut is running full time forcing Jews and other "undesirables" into concentration camps. At Terezin concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, one woman prisoner tries to make life bearable for the children. Using her passion for art and teaching, Friedl Dicker-Brandeis encourages them to draw pictures, often of home and family, trying to bring comfort to a place that has none. As Friedl struggles to protect the children from the ultimate horror, transport to the death camps, she becomes especially close to Rebecca, 16, and Eva, 13. Despite the terrible conditions, Terezin is touted as Hitler's "gift to Jews," and when the Red Cross presses for an inspection, Friedl is forced to contribute to the Nazi propaganda machine by designing a production of the children's opera "Brundibár." In defiance of his teacher and in despair at his own helplessness, Leo, 16, devises a plan to reach the visitors with the truth. His plot fails but he discovers that no matter how huge the lie, truth can still triumph through the enduring strength of human love and creativity.

The play can be presented as a stand-alone piece or paired with a performance of the one-act children's opera "Brundibár."

## **ORIGINAL PRODUCTIONS / AWARDS**

6th @ Penn Theatre, Resilience of the Spirit Festival, San Diego, CA, August 2007. Directed by Dale Morris.

J\*Company Youth Theatre, La Jolla, CA, May, 2009. Directed by Joey Landwehr. This production won the National Youth Theatre Award for Outstanding New Play, 2009.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(3 to 4 m, 3 w)*

**FRIEDL DICKER-BRANDEIS:** Teacher, artist, 46.

**PAVEL BRANDEIS:** Her husband, a carpenter, 47.

**REBECCA:** A student, 16.

**EVA:** A student, 11-13.

**LEO:** A student, 17.

**SS OFFICER:** Aged 35-40.

**GUARD:** May double with Pavel.

**Offstage voice** of young Marta.

### **TIME**

1944-1945

### **SETTINGS**

The main setting is the attic of girls' barracks L 410, Terezin Concentration Camp, Czechoslovakia. It contains crude tables, chairs, a cot surrounded by a painted curtain, and children's drawings on one of the walls. Scenery pieces are stacked against another wall. The DS entrance suggests a set of steps or a ladder below. A small window is UPS.

Scene 6 is backstage at the Magdeburg Barracks Auditorium consisting of a few stacked boxes in front of a curtain concealing the attic set.

### **SCENES**

Scene 1: Early May 1944, morning, the attic

Scene 2: Early June, night

Scene 3: Next afternoon

Scene 4: Two weeks later, late at night

Scene 5: Next day, late afternoon

Scene 6: Three days later. June 23, 1944. Backstage at the Magdeburg Auditorium

Epilogue: August 1945, the attic

**NOTE:** A production of the one-act children's opera "Brundibár," referenced in the play, may be inserted between Scenes 5 and 6. Contact Boosey and Hawkes Music Publishers for opera rights.

## **BACKGROUND**

Friedl Dicker-Brandeis was a highly-respected artist and designer in 1942 when the progress of the German invasion forced her, and her husband Pavel, from their home in Vienna to Prague, Czechoslovakia, and finally into nearby Terezin concentration camp. During the two years she lived at Terezin, Friedl used her experience as a teacher, and her theories about art as therapy, to help the children she was assigned to supervise.

The camp, called Theresienstadt by the Germans, was touted as a model ghetto. The population included many artists and intellectuals who were allowed to conduct lectures, performances and classes for the children, as long as these were considered leisure activities and not education.

In June 1944, the camp was visited by members of the International Red Cross who enjoyed a superficial tour and an original opera, performed by the children. They never saw the horrible conditions behind the hastily assembled facade nor recognized the fact that Terezin was, in truth, just a holding facility for Jews on their way to the death camps.

Friedl, 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. Friedl did not. After the war, suitcases containing some 5,000 pieces of the children's artwork were found where Friedl had hidden them.

**Please find more information about this play and the playwright herself on our website, [www.histage.com](http://www.histage.com).**

## Scene 1

*(AT RISE: It is early May 1944, morning. The scene is a small attic room. Stained wooden floor, rafters. The room is an art classroom, furnished with crudely built tables and chairs. A rusty tin tub sits in a corner. There is a cot on a small platform, hidden now by a painted curtain. Children's drawings are on one wall. A pile of lumber and faded scenery flats lean against another. There is one small dirty window upstage, and a small door which opens onto a ladder downstage. REBECCA is sitting at one of the tables. She has fashioned a crude little puppet and is drawing the face and decorating it with colored pencils. She holds the puppet up and performs a little dialogue.)*

**REBECCA:** *(In a masculine puppet character voice.)* Dobré ráno [Good morning], Rebecca. [Approximate Czech pronunciation: Dah'-bree Ray'-nah] *(In her own voice.)* Good morning, Herr Loutka. [Approximate Czech pronunciation: lout'-kuh] *(As puppet.)* Ha, ha, ha, ha. *(Laughs softly at herself, lays the puppet on the table and continues working.)*

*(Girlish giggles of MARTA and EVA are heard offstage.)*

**VOICE of MARTA:** Eva! He does not.

**VOICE of EVA:** *(Off. Giggle.)* He does. Petr loves Marta. Petr loves Marta.

**VOICE of MARTA:** He does not. Come back here.

**VOICE of EVA:** *(Off.)* Catch me if you can.

**VOICE of MARTA:** Come back here!

*(Giggles, the sound of hurried steps on the ladder. EVA stumbles into the room.)*

**REBECCA:** Eva!

**EVA:** Shhhhhh! *(Flattens herself against the door frame and peers down the ladder.)*

*Fireflies*

- 6 -

**REBECCA:** *(Laughing.)* What are you doing?

**EVA:** SHHHHH!!! *(Dives under Rebecca's table.)*

**REBECCA:** What...?

**EVA:** I'm hiding.

**REBECCA:** From who!?

**EVA:** Marta. *(Tumbles out from under the table, looks around and dives behind the bed curtain.)*

**REBECCA:** *(Laughs.)* Marta? Why?

**EVA:** Is she coming up the ladder? Tell her I'm not here.

**REBECCA:** All right.

**EVA:** Is she coming?

**REBECCA:** I don't know.

**EVA:** Well, look and see.

**REBECCA:** All right. *(Goes to door.)*

**EVA:** Is she coming?

**REBECCA:** I don't see anybody. *(Picks up the puppet, goes quietly to the curtain and suddenly thrusts it inside. In puppet voice.)* Tell me, Miss Eva, why is Marta chasing you?

*(EVA screams, giggles, scrambles to the other side of the curtain and pokes her head out. REBECCA slips behind curtain and pokes the puppet out.)*

**EVA:** *(Laughs.)* Well, Mr. Puppet, I'll tell you. Marta likes Petr Ginz.

**REBECCA:** *(As puppet.)* Oh, I thought she was in love with me.

**EVA:** No, no, you're too ugly.

**REBECCA:** *(As puppet.)* Oh, I'm crushed.

**EVA:** *(Laughs.)* Why did you make that?

**REBECCA:** My little brother's birthday. *(Hands the puppet to EVA.)*

**EVA:** Will they let you give it to him?

**REBECCA:** I hope so. So, Marta likes Petr Ginz?

**EVA:** Yes. So, I said... "Marta, guess what? Petr Ginz wants to KISS you."

**REBECCA:** You didn't.

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