

# **Memoirs from the Holocaust**

## **—An Opera in One Act—**

### **Characters:**

Hans, a Jewish boy of about 11	boy soprano
Hanna, his mother	mezzo-soprano
Kurt, an older German boy of about 17	tenor
Vati, the patriarchal village wise man	baritone

### **Synopsis:**

After the overture, the curtain opens to reveal Hans absorbed in a game of hide-and-seek with a balloon on a long string. As he is busily daydreaming, the balloon bursts and Hans returns to the present, melancholy over the recent death of his father.

Across town, Hanna is pondering a poster displaying new regulations restricting Jewish rights and limiting the value of her ration card. As common as these posters have become, Hanna can never get accustomed to them and wonders how long she will be able to shield her son from the hatred all around them. Her only consolation is that the boy does not know the truth concerning his father's death.

Again the scene shifts to Hans and his games. As Hans is playing, he meets up with his older friend Kurt. Hans admires Kurt, who speaks of the time the boy will grow up and serve his country as Kurt is doing. After exchanging pleasantries, Kurt begins to sing of the "New Order" he belongs to—the Nazi party—and how patriotic he is, no longer being treated like a child. When Hans mentions his loneliness since his father's death, Kurt quickly changes the subject and urges the boy to "begin again"—advice which Hans ponders as Kurt leaves the stage.

As Hans is leaving, Vati enters. He is the archetypal village wise man, beloved by all the community (hence his nickname). Like Hanna, he too has seen the trend towards despotism in the town, and the masks used to hide it. After wondering, "Where is the truth?" he departs.

The next scene opens with Hanna calling Hans, on his way home from playing with Kurt. Hans has become "Dutzfreunden" with Kurt (he now uses the informal "du" to address him), and rushes home to tell his mother of the new dimensions of their friendship. In

bursts Hans with the news, when suddenly, Hanna flies into a rage and slaps him. She then proceeds to enlighten Hans as to the motives and responsibility of Kurt and the other Nazis in the death of Hans' father. Stunned, the boy tries to reason out this hatred in his mind. Failing at this, he rushes out of the house, heartbroken.

Vati is out for his evening walk, a type of communion with nature, when Hans rushes up to him, still greatly agitated. Hans pleads with the old man for "the answer" that will explain man's hatred towards man. Vati has no answers for hate; he can only explain love, which he does by using God's sky as an object lesson. The first section of the opera concludes with the thought, "You see...love is the strongest force in the world!"

Interlude: From offstage, to the accompaniment of martial music based on earlier themes, Kurt is reading an assortment of new anti-Semitic laws and propaganda. His voice gradually becomes distorted, hard, ugly, until the sound is no longer bearable. He stops.

Kurt enters, a rather small figure after that penetrating noise. He has just discovered a part of himself that he never knew existed. He realizes that he has only two choices: renounce the Nazis and face humiliation and persecution, or continue his present path and sever all past ties with former friends. Ultimately, he chooses the latter and "the glory of the German Reich." He seals this pledge by posting yet another "New Law"—the deportation order.

On the morning of the deportation, Hans and Hanna stand at a window, transfixed at the sight of the crowd processing through the street to the "gathering-place." In a last act of defiance, Hanna refuses to join the "herd of humanity headed into oblivion," preferring impending death to this ultimate humiliation. Suddenly, the door is kicked open and a small detachment of troops enters. Hans cries out in fear and recognition—the leader is none other than Kurt, resplendent in Nazi uniform and insignia. A verbal free-for-all ensues, with Kurt and Hanna piling abuse upon one another while Hans looks on, terrified. In a fit of fury, Kurt pulls out his gun and shoots Hanna. Then Kurt grabs Hans and throws him out into the street, where the boy, his spirit completely broken, is enveloped by a helpless mass of people. In the crush, he discovers a familiar face—that of Vati. Vati takes the boy's hand, points to the sky, and seeks to console him as the two slowly depart to their ultimate fate.

## **Dedication:**

*Memoirs from the Holocaust* is respectfully dedicated to the memories of my mother and father, Edna and Gerald Braz. This work is also dedicated to the memory of Hannah Braz, actress and children's theatre mentor, who lived in the Warsaw Ghetto and was among the first to be deported.