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November 20, 2013

Ela Weissberger to Appear in Program Highlighting Jewish Composers Who Died in Holocaust

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner-Webb University's LOTS (Life Of The Scholar) program presents a powerful mixed-media event called Voices Of Terezin, featuring Holocaust survivor Ela Weissberger, on Monday, Nov. 25 at 7 p.m. in Blanton Auditorium, located in Hamrick Hall. This program is free and open to the public and will be followed by a reception where attendees will have the opportunity for a meet and greet with Weissberger.

Voices Of Terezin is an event centered on the art, poetry, and music that originated in the World War II concentration camp at Terezin in the Czech Republic. Dr. Megan McCauley, director of Opera Theatre and assistant professor of voice for the GWU School of Performing and Visual Arts, will be singing music from three different composers who were killed in the Holocaust and held at Terezin at some point.

"I picked music that they wrote during the war," said McCauley. Selections will be by Viktor Ullman, described as beautiful and Germanic, using the compositional styles that were trending in Europe at the time. The music of Pavel Haas – that is in Czech and reminiscent of Eastern European folk music that is light-hearted and fun. Songs by Ilse Weber will be accompanied by projected artwork images and interspersed with English translations of poetry created by children who were held at Terezin.

"Ilse Weber is an especially unique composer, because she was not a musician by profession. She was actually a nurse in the children's ward at Terezin and helped care for them when they were sick. She made up songs and sang them to the children while accompanying herself on guitar," said McCauley.

McCauley and Weissberger bonded over the music after meeting at an event. Since that meeting, they have been working together to create Monday's program.

McCauley explained, "I met Ela three years ago when I was singing some of this music at the University of Kentucky for a production of the children's opera 'Brundibar' (originally performed for and by Jewish prisoners). Ela spoke there, as she does traveling to different productions of the opera she starred in as a child. She played the role of the cat for all 55 performances in Terezin, where the opera premiered. Now she travels everywhere to teach the children in the opera and to remind them of all her friends who died."

The program also features an interview with Weissberger from CBS's *60 Minutes*, showing footage from the propaganda film that the Nazis made in Terezin. Weissberger will speak for a few minutes at the program's conclusion, followed by a reception in Ritch Banquet Hall, where Weissberger's book "The Cat with the Yellow Star" will be available.

Chair of the LOTS Advisory Board, Dr. Kent Blevins, professor of Religious Studies, is proud of how the group promotes the academic life of the university outside of the classroom. "Getting her (Weissberger) was an exceptional effort by all involved. I'm urging the community and especially students to realize how rare of an opportunity this will be. There are not many survivors (of the Holocaust) still living," said Blevins, who once lived in the Czech Republic and visited Terezan.

Additional information about the LOTS program is available through Blevins at 704-406-4458.