

Friendship During The Shoah



A scene from “The Butterfly,” a production of the children’s theater company Making Books Sing. In the play, an 11-year-old Catholic girl helps her Jewish friend escape the Nazis.

by Ted Merwin

The stage adaptation of “The Diary of Anne Frank” by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett is, it is probably safe to say, the only play about the Holocaust that most school children know. But that may be about to change, thanks to Barbara Zinn Krieger, the indefatigable artistic director of the children’s theater company Making Books Sing. Krieger’s company has taken Patricia Polacco’s book, “The Butterfly,” and turned it into a family musical that is now touring New York City.

Directed by David Schechter, “The Butterfly” is the tale of Monique, an 11-year-old Catholic girl living in Nazi-occupied France, who discovers that a Jewish girl her age, Sevrine, is hiding in her attic. It turns out that Monique’s mother, along with their priest, is part of the French Resistance, and is providing refuge to Jews. When they are found out, Monique helps her new friend to escape. (The book has no connection to the famous children’s poem from Terezin, “I Never Saw Another Butterfly.”) The cast includes Alyssa May Gold, Emily Harvey, Alexa Holzberger, Al Pagano, Ted Boulton and Joe Grandy.

Krieger founded the Vineyard Theatre in the Union Square neighborhood. During her 22-year tenure as the Vineyard’s artistic director, the company won two Pulitzers — one for Paula Vogel’s “How I Learned to Drive,” the other for Edward Albee’s “Three Tall Women.” In 2003, the year that she left, the Vineyard produced “Avenue Q,” which transferred to Broadway, where it is still running. Making Books Sing is in its 12th year; it has adapted children’s books about many different cultures, from 17th century China to 19th century America. But this is the company’s first look at Jewish history.

In a telephone interview, Krieger told The Jewish Week that it “seemed like a good time to do this because of all the genocides going on in the world. The message is that people are people and you love them for who they are.” For children who are too young to appreciate the enormity of the Shoah, she said, the work teaches simply about friendship. More than 12,000 children will see this year’s show. “Kid audiences can’t be fooled,” Krieger said. “If they’re bored, they get restless. But if they’re really involved, they’re the best audience. They’re totally into it.”

“The Butterfly” will be performed this weekend at Symphony Space, 2537 Broadway. Performances are Feb. 9 and 10 at 4:30 p.m.; Feb. 11 and 12 at 10 a.m. and noon. It will also be performed on Feb. 14 and 15 at 10:30 a.m. at the LaGuardia Performing Arts Center, 31-10 Thomson Ave. in Long Island City. Tickets, \$13-23, can be purchased by calling the company at (212) 573-8791 x246.