

WAGNER COLLEGE

Survivors of Holocaust showcased in new drama

Original play at Wagner College's Stage One Theater March 17-18 highlights Islanders' powerful stories

Donik Mollabeciri dmollabeciri@siadvance.com

A new original play aims to capture the vital role of youth and resistance during the Holocaust — and why it still matters in today's society.

"In the Light of One Another: A Meditation on Resistance drawn from the Testimony of Survivors" will be performed at the Wagner College Stage One Theater at 8 p.m. Saturday, March 17, and 3 p.m. Sunday, March 18. Admission is "a much-appreciated donation of \$10."

"Twelve Wagner College students have learned the testimony of six Holocaust survivors from Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania — who all live or have lived on Staten Island," said director Lori Weintrob, who co-authored the piece with Obie-winning playwright Martin Moran. The student actors will sing songs in three different languages including English, Hebrew and Yiddish and will include two original pieces by composer David Dabbon. The setting of the play is a Passover seder, the traditional Jewish feast that marks the beginning of Passover. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which began on the first night of Passover in 1943.

During the rehearsal process for the show, theater professor Theresa McCarthy guided students as they came together to embody the survivors using testimony drawn from interviews by the Shoah Foundation, the Kleinman Holocaust Education Center and the Wagner College Holocaust Center. "Students not only learned the words and accents of the survivors, but also the cadence, rhythm, and breath of each survivor," Weintrob said.

Holocaust survivors will be in attendance at each performance. On opening night, attendees can meet Rachel Roth, who, as a teenager, stood face-to-face with the notorious Joseph Mengele at a selection in Auschwitz, not long after she smuggled a gun into the Warsaw Ghetto. On Sunday, meet Romi Cohn, who aided 57 Jewish families in Bratislava, Slovakia, and fought with the partisans. Auschwitz survivor Hannah Steiner also will attend Sunday. The play also captures the tragic journeys and resilience of Egon Salmon, Gabi Held, Margot Capell and others. Their stories showcase various kinds of "Amidah (standing up)" or resistance, from mutual aid to partisan activity.

SILive's multimedia specialist Shira Stoll has worked with Wagner College Holocaust Center and the Jewish Community Center to do additional interviews with over a dozen Holocaust survivors on Staten Island. These videos will be available on SILive starting April 11 for Holocaust Remembrance and heroism day. In addition, Advance Executive Editor Brian Laline will join in presenting Stoll's work, "Voices on Video: A Tribute to Staten Island's Holocaust Survivors," at Wagner College at 6 p.m. on April 10. Those interested in attending can contact Director Lori Weintrob at lweintr@wagner.edu or call 718-390-3309.