

The Salt Lake Tribune

Date: April 17, 2010 Section: Entertainment

Holocaust Days of Remembrance: Dance steps toward survival, spirituality

BY ALICIA GREENLEIGH

The Salt Lake Tribune

Sharee Lane grew up listening to her father tell stories about serving in the medical corps in World War II. But it wasn't until 2001, when she first visited the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., that she felt the full impact of the history. "I was so transfixed by that dark time in humanity," said Lane, a University of Utah dance professor, "that the only way I could speak about it was through dance."

For several years, Lane returned again and again to the museum. What she felt there inspired her to choreograph a ballet as part of the U.'s annual Holocaust Days of Remembrance. The ballet, "Remembrance," will be performed by 12 female U. dance students this weekend at the U.'s Marriott Center for Dance, on the bill of Utah Ballet's spring concert.

While creating the ballet, Lane turned to collaborators, working with U. history professor Ronald Smelser, members of the local Jewish community, and Holocaust survivor Abe Katz. Last fall, she was awarded a U. grant to fund the project.

"I didn't want it to be literal," Lane said of the dance, which interprets the timeline of the Holocaust from the Nazi invasion, to the concentration camps, to liberation, and eventually, rebirth. "It was more about survival and people's spirituality, if they had any."

Lane spent hours meeting with Smelser, who also heads the Days of Remembrance committee, to learn more about WW II and concentration camps. And with the help of Rabbi Zippel of Salt Lake City's Chabad Lubavitch, Lane also met with Katz, 86, a local survivor who was willing to share his story.

One evening in January, Lane interviewed Katz, as he retold horrific

memories as well as miraculous tales of survival. The interview was recorded by Brenton Winegar, audio/visual tech for the Marriott Center for Dance, and later sound bites of Katz's stories were woven into Lane's dance. After the performance, the recording will be donated to the Marriott Library's digital archives.

At 14, Katz was abducted from his small village in Lodz, Poland, and sent to three separate concentration camps -- the Central Labor Camp Jaworzno, Buchenwald and Auschwitz, where he was tattooed on his left forearm with the number "B6282."

He spoke of sleeping on benches with others side by side because there wasn't enough room to lie on their backs. In the morning, he said, sometimes he'd wake up to corpses on either side of him. "We were used to it," Katz said. "You could hear them suffering in the middle of the night, and you wanted to help, but couldn't do anything. You had nothing to help with." Katz attributes his survival to being young, strong -- and lucky. When Buchenwald was liberated, he was 18, and weighed only 78 pounds.

All of those stories were transposed into Lane's choreography and staging. Before opening night, the dance professor invited Katz to a rehearsal, where he was moved to tears, overwhelmed by emotion and memories. "It takes a lot out of me to talk about it," he said. "But I do it because the story should not be forgotten."

Smelser, who has been studying WW II and the Holocaust for over 50 years, said Katz's efforts are crucial.

"Right now, we've got a twin phenomenon of [survivors] leaving us, and of people denying that the Holocaust ever happened," Smelser said. "That's why it's so very important for institutions, colleges and schools to make sure the history is never forgotten."

agreenleigh@sltrib.com