OUWB Connects Art and Medicine for a Special Community Program

In support of the powerful holocaust-themed opera, "The Passenger," appearing at the Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT) this month, Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine (OUWB) joined more than 60 metro Detroit community partners in supporting educational programming related to the opera.

Specifically, OUWB hosted, "The Passenger: Art and Medicine," featuring a MOT performance and discussion that explored the opera’s theme and provided the audience with a history of the dangers faced and the courage required to produce it.

In the Oakland Center Banquet Rooms, soprano Lauren Skuce Gross’s beautiful singing in Russian and English, and acting assistant concertmaster Andrew Wu’s violin solo brought the opera to life with their talents. Wu’s piece, Bach’s “Chaconne in D minor,” captivated the audience as he performed what was described as the most difficult violin solo in opera. Skuce Gross delivered a melodic, emotion-filled performance that enabled the audience to understand the essence of the opera’s lead characters.

Skuce Gross and Wu have participated in several of the community outreach programs to introduce audiences more intimately to the world of opera, but in this particular case to deliver the poignant message of "The Passenger."

"I feel honored to contribute to this outreach and promote a production that is so unique and incredible," said Skuce Gross.

The opera is being performed during the 70-year anniversary of the end of World War II, and it is the largest set ever to be assembled on the MOT stage.

**A brief summary of The Passenger**

In Mieczyslaw Weinberg’s opera — only recently discovered after having been suppressed for over 40 years — a West German diplomat, and his wife, are ocean-bound for a new posting in Brazil. Unbeknownst to her husband, Liese once served as an SS officer in Auschwitz. There’s another woman on the same cruise ship, a passenger whose mere existence haunts Liese.

**Performance Dates**
- Sat., Nov. 14 at 7:30 p.m.
- Wed., Nov. 18 at 7:30 p.m.
- Sat., Nov. 21 at 7:30 p.m.
- Sun., Nov. 22 at 2:30 p.m.

For more information, visit [michiganopera.org](http://michiganopera.org)

**Remembering the survivors**

The evening’s program also included guest speaker Rabbi Aaron Bergman from Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills, who became a rabbi to confront the experiences of his father, a holocaust survivor who lost his entire family. He vividly described his father’s journey from a 13-year-old boy living in a concentration camp to his life after liberation painting the harsh reality of the holocaust for the audience.

Rabbi Bergman praised OUWB for including empathy and compassion as part of the curriculum for medical students.

"This medical school is so human," said Rabbi Bergman, who stressed that his father’s trauma transferred to him, emphasizing the importance of the special health needs of individuals haunted by the images of war.

**Emphasizing veteran health**

In observance of Veterans Day, OUWB Founding Dean Robert Folberg, M.D., reflected on the military personnel who liberated the concentration camps and suffered significant emotional trauma. He remarked on the importance of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Joining Forces initiative that links the mission of medical schools to veteran health.

"It is a week that teaches students how to inquire about veteran health as they interact with patients, and how to best educate physicians on how to care for our veterans," said Dr. Folberg. "It is an important component to the broader education of OUWB."

To this day, members of our armed forces serve the humanitarian needs of civilian populations who are in harm’s way. "The Passenger: Art and Medicine" provided the OUWB community an opportunity to honor Veterans Day, place importance upon veteran health and remind ourselves that the holocaust is an event to remember and a reminder that we must never forget."