Play reveals secrets of when the British bugged Nazis in a Middlesex mansion

16/05/2012

Now this hush-hush work will be told in a dramatic play at Trent Park - the place where it happened. The project has been made possible by a grant of almost £95,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Pascal Theatre Company, working with Middlesex University, The Jewish Military Museum, The Jewish Museum and the Wiener Library, will train up 20 young volunteers to undertake the research needed to pull the information together. Trent Park is currently home to Middlesex University where the performance is scheduled for Sunday 22 and Monday 23 July 2012.

The project, called The Secret Listeners, will show how the refugees provided vital information because of their extensive knowledge not only of the German language but also cultural traditions. They recorded and made detailed transcripts of private conversations between Nazi senior officers, which yielded valuable strategic information to the Allies, including to what extent the German army was aware of and implicated in the Holocaust.

Nazi prisoners, including many generals and other high-ranking officers, lived a relatively comfortable existence in the mansion, previously the home of the Sassoon family, and where Charlie Chaplin and Lawrence of Arabia had once been house guests. The British plan was to make the POW's feel relaxed enough to discuss issues among themselves, unaware that every room throughout the building was bugged.

Young people working on the project will be recruited from students and graduates at the University, as well as volunteers from the North London Jewish Community. They will have access to transcripts of the original recordings held in the National Archives.

In order to create their dramatic performance they will work with Adam Ganz from Royal Holloway, University of London. Adam's father was one of the original Secret Listeners for British intelligence and Adam, a professional screenwriter, has previously had a programme about Trent Park broadcast on BBC Radio Four.

A subsequent performance of the resulting drama will be held at The Jewish Museum late this year or early next and a permanent record of the project will be available at the University and the Jewish Military Museum.

Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, Sue Bowers, said: "This is a fascinating but little-known slice of national history which underlines the vital contribution made by this group of refugees. The young people taking part will help ensure that the story is much more widely known while at the same time gaining a range of valuable skills."

For Pascal Theatre Company, Julia Pascal, said "Thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund for enabling this extraordinary story to reach a wide audience and to all those at Middlesex University who are going to such great lengths to make the event possible".

Adam Ganz added: "I am very excited about the chance to work with volunteers to make a site-specific drama from the exact words spoken in the same rooms over 70 years ago. As their story echoes down the generations we can remember the terrors they were fleeing, and learn so much from what these refugees gave to their host country. "

Further information

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