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“Into the Arms of Strangers”: Remembering the First Kindertransport from Vienna on 10 December 1938

10 Dec 2007

The documentary film “Into the Arms of Strangers” will be shown on the top-floor hall of the Urania on 11 and 12 December 2007. The event, which is sponsored by the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, remembers the so-called “kindertransports” in the years 1938 to 1939, a dramatic rescue operation for Jewish children in the shadow of Nazi persecution before the onset of the systematic extermination of the Jewish population.

Between December 1938 and August 1939 almost 10,000 Jewish children from Austria, Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia were brought to England by train and ship in order to rescue them from Nazi persecution. During the war, the children remained separated from their parents, many of whom perished in the Holocaust. The presentation of the film recalls the first transport of Jewish children from Vienna, Westbahnhof, to London, Liverpool Street on 10 December 1938.

The Oscar-winning documentary “Into the Arms of Strangers” was produced by Deborah Oppenheimer, who is herself the daughter of one of the children. Using historical documents and with a multitude of interviews with eyewitnesses, the film tells the story of the children who were taken to England, depicting their emotions and their lives in their place of refuge during World War II and thereafter. The one-time rescued “children”, Berta Leverton, Hanny Hieger and Otto Deutsch, will attend the film screenings on 11 and 12 December. Screenings will be held for school groups on the mornings of 11 to 14 December in the presence of the eyewitnesses and the survivors.

The National Fund and its Secretary General Hannah Lessing place great emphasis on the importance of supporting historical projects on the subject of the kindertransports. Young people’s experiences of flight and separation in the years 1938/39 can be used to effectively convey the menace and violence of Nazi persecution, particularly to children and young people. In this respect the National Fund also co-funded the exhibition “For the Child” that was held at the Nestroyhof Theater in November 2006, at which surviving eyewitnesses of the kindertransports held talks for school groups.