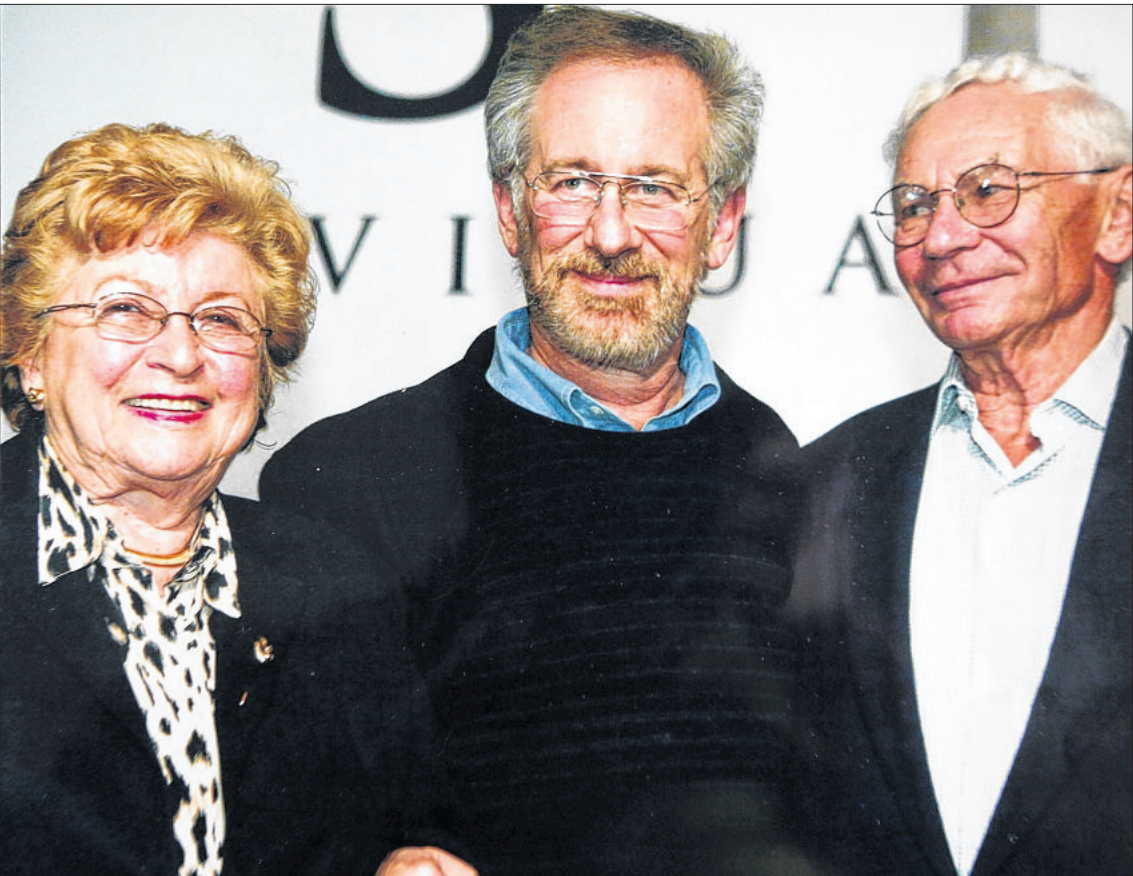




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'SCHINDLER'S LIST': 20 YEARS LATER

A reunion of SCHINDLER'S SURVIVORS



Rena and Lewis Fagen, Holocaust survivors, with Steven Spielberg (center), the producer of "Schindler's List." Rena, 87, and Lewis, 88, of Delray Beach, were held prisoner at Plaszów, a Nazi labor and concentration camp in Kraków, Poland. PHOTO COURTESY THE FAGEN FAMILY

Twenty years after film, local survivors appear with author of novel at Boca arts fest.

By Staci Sturrock
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

When you get right down to it, Oskar Schindler was a once-in-a-century cross between a hero and a bastard. "He wasn't the sort of businessman that you would invite into Rotary. He wasn't quite respectful, and he was an appalling husband," said his biographer, Thomas Keneally, from his home in Sydney, Australia. "He's not a great philosopher. He never sits back and says, 'Why am I doing this?' He had too many dinner dates to have time to be self-reflective, and yet he saved this sizable portion of people."


As anyone with a passing interest in Holocaust history or Oscar-winning films knows, the flamboyant industrialist rescued roughly 1,100 men, women and children from the clutches of his fellow Nazis. His story was celebrated 20 years ago this year with the release of Steven Spielberg's "Schindler's List," which was based on Keneally's 1982 Booker Prize-winning novel, "Schindler's Ark."

The author will reflect on Schindler at Mizner Park at 7 p.m. Monday as part of the Festival of the Arts Boca. Several Schindler survivors who now live in South Florida will join him, and these retirees are the main attraction, said Keneally. "Being in the presence of the once-young men and women who endured this process, and survived it, is very chastening. To see the flesh that Hitler intended for the furnaces, to see the eyes that were meant to be consumed, and to hear the voices that were meant to be smothered, I've always found it an



German industrialist Oskar Schindler (played by Liam Neeson, center) searches for his plant manager Itzhak Stern among a trainload of Polish Jews about to be deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in "Schindler's List." UNIVERSAL CITY STUDIOS INC.

IF YOU GO

 Thomas Keneally, author of "Schindler's Ark," will speak on "Fraternity Across the Lines of Race: The Case of Oskar Schindler," at 7 p.m. Monday at the Cultural Arts Center in Mizner Park, as part of Festival of the Arts Boca. Information: 561-368-8445. A free screening of "Schindler's List" will play at 1:30 p.m. at the arts center.

extraordinary experience." In researching "Schindler's Ark," Keneally interviewed

roughly 80 survivors, including Lewis and Rena Fagen of the Harbor's Edge community in Delray Beach. The Fagens reconnected with Schindler after the war and even hosted him at their Long Island home. "One time I asked Schindler why he did what he did," said Lewis Fagen. Schindler recounted the story of a kind rabbi who lived next to door to him when he was a boy. "I don't know how true that story is," said Fagen, who is 88. "I know only one thing. He saved my life and my parents' lives."

For the filming of the epilogue of "Schindler's List," in which dozens of survivors surround Schindler's grave, Spielberg flew the Fagens first-class to Jerusalem. And, in 2004, to celebrate the release of the DVD, he flew them to Los Angeles, where they were reunited with some of the film's

Schindler continued on D4

THEATER

'Billy' leaps from screen to stage

Award-winning musical filled with an artful array of dances.

By Hap Erstein
Special to the Palm Beach Post

In recent years, as musicals turned increasingly dramatic, the element that usually got short changed was dance. An exception – and it is exceptional – is "Billy Elliot," the 10-time Tony Award winner from 2008 about the son of a Northern England coal miner who yearns to study ballet. In its move to the musical stage, from its roots as a feature film eight years earlier, the show retained the services of choreographer Peter Darling, who increased the dance quotient, adding tap, character dance and even a bit of hop-hop to the tale in its various dream sequences and physicalization of internal emotions. Since the title character is supposed to be only 10 years old, the production's casting directors have scoured the country for the young, energetic talent required to throw themselves through an exhaus-

BILLY ELLIOT A

Where: Kravis Center Dreyfoos Hall, 701 Okeechobee Blvd., West Palm Beach
When: Through Sunday
Tickets: \$25-\$92; call 561-832-7469
The verdict: A dance-heavy musical about the coal miner's son who yearns to learn ballet, with remarkable young talent and a dramatic Elton John score.

tive series of production numbers, all with effortless skill. At the Kravis Center, where the show continues only through Sunday, four fledgling performers rotate in the role, including the remarkably poised and proficient Noah Parets, 13, who appeared on Tuesday evening. Billy's quest is dramatic enough, but it is played out against the backdrop of the

Billy continued on D4



Patrick Wetzel stars as Mr. Braithwaite in "Billy Elliot the Musical." CONTRIBUTED BY KYLE FROMAN

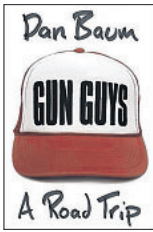
BOOKS

Liberal, gun-loving author in cross hairs of national debate

New book interviews gun owners from across the country.

By Carolyn Kellogg
Los Angeles Times

Dan Baum has an agenda. He wants you to listen to the guys who like guns – particularly if you are an NPR-listening, Whole Foods-shopping progressive. That's how you could describe Baum, a former New Yorker staff writer and lefty down the line – except for his love of rifles, revolvers and the rest. "From the urban, educated effete liberal Democrat side of my world I'm hearing all of this disparaging of 'gun guys,' how stupid and awful they are," he says, speaking by phone from his home in Colorado. "These are conversations that for years I've endured as kind of like a closeted gay man listening to people talking about (homosex-



uals) – I would just stay quiet." Baum is bringing his weaponry out of the closet in "Gun Guys: A Road Trip," which Knopf is publishing this month. In the book, he travels the country to meet some of America's 70 million to 80 million gun owners, talking to collectors and hunters, people concerned with self-defense, and those who take pleasure in the skill of shooting. He gets a permit to carry a concealed weapon and explains the frisson, part power and part threat, of passing through daily life secretly armed. His book arrives at an opportune moment. After highly publicized incidents of gun violence such as the killing of six adults and 20 children at

Gun Guys continued on D4



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Powerful film still resonates

Schindler

continued from D1

stars, including Ralph Fiennes and Ben Kingsley.

The director once asked the couple how accurate his depiction of the Holocaust was. Not brutal enough, said Lewis Fagen, “but Spielberg didn’t want to show all the horrors because he wanted every schoolchild to see the movie.”

Said Keneally, “I think it’s a very powerful film. I think it doesn’t, in any gross way, misrepresent what happened. Indeed it reproduces the trapped conditions and the claustrophobia of being a Jew. Then there were various subtexts he didn’t have time to go into.”

After the film’s release, Delray Beach’s Kuba Beck traveled all over the United States to share his story of survival, becoming part of the extended “Schindler’s List” family, admittedly a poor replacement for his own flesh and blood.

“I don’t have anybody,”



Married for more than 67 years, Lewis and Rena Fagen were held prisoner at Plaszow, a Nazi labor and concentration camp built by the SS in Plaszow, a southern suburb in Krakow, Poland. They now live in Delray Beach. GARY CORONADO / THE PALM BEACH POST

says Beck, who lost his parents and both siblings in the first selection in the Kraków ghetto, the front gate of which was erected four blocks from the Becks’ home.

The 90-year-old former IBM engineer, who lived in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., before moving to the Kings Point community, studied bookkeeping prior to the invasion of Poland. He apprenticed one summer for Itzhak Stern, who served as Schindler’s

accountant, and he assumes that connection is what earned him a spot on the list.

Beck worked in the tool room of Schindler’s factory, where he occasionally saw Hela Brzeska, who would become his wife of 61 years.

Out of a family of 10, only Hela and her younger sister Cela survived the war. Hela died in 2008, but in 1994 she described Schindler to an interviewer: “You couldn’t find

a guy in Hollywood as good-looking as him. You smelled the perfume, you knew Schindler was coming. ... He was a man who was hard to resist.”

When writing “Schindler’s Ark,” Keneally said, “The question arose: ‘If I had been a German at that time, with all the conditioning that I’d had, would I have been as effective as he was at saving that number of prisoners?’ Secondly, ‘Would I have been able



Delray Beach resident Kuba Beck, 90, lost his parents and siblings in the Kraków ghetto. THOMAS CORDY / THE PALM BEACH POST

to operate with his impeccable instincts?’ But it was all tied up with the fact that he had Jews working for him, and some of them were people he depended on heavily. They did a lot of good for him, and you can’t tell where the kindness kicks in and the opportunism and the desire to make a big fortune ends.”

Keneally’s talk Monday will include his reflections of how he felt far more optimistic about the possibility of world peace during the filming of “Schindler’s List.” “Spielberg actually said to me, which is heavy name-dropping I know, it’s a good time to be making this film when the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ has just

emerged again in Europe.

“Even so, there was hope that universal brotherhood was not so far away, but then everyone took up their militant positions again, even if I dare say so, America, but particularly in the Balkans. ... It just seems as if we’ve learned nothing.”

In August, Simon & Schuster will release Keneally’s latest novel, “The Daughters of Mars,” about Australian nurses saving lives on the front lines of World War I. “And I hope that ungrateful little bugger Spielberg makes a film out of it. After all, ‘Schindler’ won him his first Oscar. What’s he done for me since?”

ssturrock@pbpost.com

Liberal defends guns

Gun Guys

continued from D1

Sandy Hook Elementary in December, gun control again becomes a topic of heated public debate.

“Both camps have driven each other so far apart that we can’t talk about this stuff rationally, because it’s tribal,” says Baum.

Yet he tends to lay the blame at the feet of his liberal cohorts. “The anti-gun tribe thinks it can weaken the gun tribe by attacking the totem. By banning it, by making it invisible, by paring it down as much as it can.”

With one foot in each camp, Baum sees himself as uniquely positioned to explain gun-lovers to gun-haters. “I just want people, when they think about these questions, to have listened to rational, calm, intelligent voices that they might not otherwise have encountered,” he says. It is an eclectic lineup: a Texas pig hunter, a wealthy collector, a Hollywood gun prop house and the man who founded Jews for the Preservation

of Firearms Ownership.

Baum’s book about New Orleans after Katrina, “Nine Lives,” also wove together the voices of the people he interviewed; he draws out his subjects, despite his own strong opinions. While his interviewees in “Gun Guys” provide an interesting narrative, the most enlightening element of the book may be its clear explanation of some of the basics of contemporary gun ownership.

Many gun-control advocates suggest banning assault rifles; Baum points out that the most popular gun in America today is the Bushmaster AR-15: It’s modular, highly customizable, lightweight and easy to shoot well.

“It’s the only gun anybody wants,” Baum says. And what does the “AR” in AR-15 stand for? Oh, yeah: Assault Rifle.

“Far from being some kind of bizarre anomaly of the gun business, it is the absolute heart of the gun business: the most popular gun and the most profitable gun,” Baum says. “So if you’re wondering why even Barack Obama has backed off from the assault-rifle ban, that’s why.”

If the question “Who needs an assault rifle?” seems entirely rational to his liberal friends, to most American gun owners it

sounds like a direct attack.

“Gun guys are not like camera buffs; they’re not like fly fishermen, not like car buffs. It’s deep, it’s really deep,” he explains. “I was really trying to figure out why these things move us, why they are so important to us.”

Baum’s own love affair with guns began at age 5; at summer camp he discovered he had a natural aptitude for target shooting. He was attracted to the physicality of guns and charmed by the James Bond mythology he associated with them.

But in his liberal suburb, the late ’60s brought a schism between the weapons and his world.

“I was against the (Vietnam) war too, and aspired to the hippie aesthetic as much as any other sixth-grader,” he writes. “But that didn’t keep me from liking guns. To me, they were separate.”

This separation between guns and violence is an essential part of Baum’s world view. As he details the way guns make him feel, one thing becomes clear: He finds power in carrying but not using a weapon. “Out on the street, I felt vigilant, aloof from petty animosities,” he writes. He eschews verbal engagement when secretly armed – and he says it’s not just him.

“Gun guys derive a tremendous amount of self-esteem from being able to live alongside these incredibly dangerous things without anybody getting hurt,” he says.

He imagines the thought process this way: “I can live with guns. I can travel around with guns. I can take them to the range and shoot guns. I can teach children to shoot guns. I can hunt with guns. I can carry a gun, and nobody gets hurt. Because I am competent and careful and enough of a sheepdog to manage this incredibly lethal thing.”

The juxtaposition of the lethal potential of guns with the feeling of power they impart is apparent

in the tragic story of Brandon Franklin, a promising young man Baum had met in New Orleans while working on “Nine Lives.” A few years later, when Baum was working on this gun book, Franklin was murdered during a dispute with his ex-girlfriend’s new boyfriend. Brandon had not been carrying a gun; the other man had.

“The unknowable that really tortured me,” Baum writes, “was this: If Brandon had been formally inducted into the sheepdog cadre and had had a legal gun concealed on his person. ... Might the gun have saved his life without ever being drawn?”

Young stars shine in musical

Billy

continued from D1

British national miners’ strike of the mid-1980s, a union that Prime Minister Maggie Thatcher was attempting to bust. Do not be concerned if you are unfamiliar with the conflict. You didn’t know about the students’ revolt in “Les Misérables,” did you?

The coal miners’ dilemma survives intact – albeit in the artful shorthand of musical theater – largely because adapting playwright Lee Hall (also trying his hand at writing lyrics for the first time) and director Stephen Daldry are both holdovers from the film.

Their new collaborator is composer Elton John, no stranger to musicals, but never before has he penned such a character-rich, dramatic score. Songs range from angry (“Solidarity”) to touching (“Dear Billy”) to satirical (“Merry Christmas, Maggie Thatcher”), plus some terrific dance music.

Parets – and the three other Billys, including Boca Raton’s Mitchell Tobin – carries the show on his tiny shoulders, but there are several solid performers in key supporting roles in this road company. Rich Hebert is aptly gruff, but eventually soft-hearted as Billy’s dad, and Janet Dickinson is very appealing as the boy’s chain-smoking ballet mentor.

Even younger and smaller than Billy is his flamboyant pal Michael, a role written to be a scene-stealer. That is exactly what Sam Poon did Tuesday night, particularly on the gay-friendly duet with Parets, “Expressing Yourself.”

Visually, “Billy Elliot” has a color palette of earth tones and black, with only occasional bursts of color, another way it sets itself apart from most musicals. Ian MacNeil’s sets are fairly minimal, even more so in this traveling production, but Rick Fisher’s bold lighting compensates effectively.

“Billy Elliot” would seem to be a hard show for stock and amateur groups to pull off, so you might as well see it now at the Kravis Center. And keep an eye out for the Billys of this production, who should be featured dancers in musicals for years to come.

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Submission deadline: Friday, March 8
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