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Sembler Florida Holocaust Lecture to feature author discussing controversial Polish singer, ‘The Accused’

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Vera Gran was one of the most famous singers in Poland when the Nazis invaded and sent her to the Warsaw ghetto and eventually to the Treblinka concentration camp, only to spend the rest of her life fighting accusations that she was a Nazi collaborator.

Gran’s story will be recounted by Polish author Agata Tuszynska on Nov. 18 at 3:30 p.m. in the Debbie and Brent Sembler Florida Holocaust Museum Lecture at the USF St. Petersburg University Student Center Ballroom, 200 6th Ave. S. The lecture, presented by the USFSP Honors Program, is free and open to the public.
During the lecture, Tuszynska will discuss her book, *Vera Gran: The Accused*, and play recordings of Gran’s musical performances.

The *Boston Globe* called *The Accused* “a book of extraordinary depth and power that sets one tormented individual on a lifelong struggle across the moral cloudland.”

Before World War II, Gran performed at theaters and cabarets across Poland. During the war she was forced into the Warsaw Ghetto, where she often performed with Władysław Szpilman, whose memoir was the basis for the film “The Pianist.” Both were eventually sent to Treblinka, the Nazi concentration camp. Szpilman was among those who later accused Gran of being a collaborator, though he later recanted. Two official inquiries cleared Gran, but the stain persisted until her death in 2007.

Tuszynska’s book sheds new light on a neglected chapter in history, said Elizabeth Gelman, executive director of the Florida Holocaust Museum.

“Much research has been done and disseminated on events during the Holocaust, but there is less written about the struggle for reconciliation in the wake of mass violence,” said Gelman. “Vera’s story is fascinating, raising philosophical questions about choices and the price of survival. It’s also chock full of intrigue, suspicion and paranoia.”

Vivian Fueyo, Ph.D., Interim Regional Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, said USFSP is proud to partner with the Florida Holocaust Museum for this lecture series. “This promises to be a thoughtful, provocative lecture and we thank Debbie and Brent Sembler for their support,” she said.

Thomas Smith, Ph.D., director of the USFSP Honors Program, said the lecture will benefit both students and the general public. “We are pleased we can present an author with the reputation of Agata Tuszynska,” he said. “Her talk goes to the heart of what the Honors Program is all about – to deepen our understanding of complex issues.”

The Honors Program at USF St. Petersburg is now in its 20th year of offering academically gifted, highly motivated students an exceptional undergraduate education. A distinguished faculty guides special seminars and lectures and provide Honors students with an array of research opportunities culminating in an original senior thesis.

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Sorry, Wladyslaw Szpilman was never sent to the concentration camp...he was successfully hiding and survived. Please review his biography (and Polanski's film, The Pianist).