

# Beginnings of Eurythmy in South Africa

The art of Eurythmy preceded all other anthroposophical initiative in South Africa by nearly 30 years. It was introduced to South African audiences in 1927 in a tour organised by Hendrika Johanna Hollenbach (6 May 1880 - 14 September 1950) together with two English-speaking colleagues from Dornach, Winifred Grafton and Ingrid Gibb. Where and what they performed we do not know, as no programme survived. Miss Hollenbach followed this up by founding her Music and Eurythmy School in Pretoria, which she ran until the end of 1945.

Hendrika Hollenbach had emigrated with her family from the Netherlands at the age of 13, her architect father one of the many educated Hollanders brought to the Transvaal by President Paul Kruger to assist in setting up the machinery of government, education and training. After obtaining her degree in Music in Amsterdam around the turn of the century, she returned to South Africa to work as a free-lance music teacher in schools and as private tutor. She had come to know about Theosophy and joined the Theosophical lodge in Pretoria, where she held a number of talks on the work of Rudolf Steiner. In April 1911, she wrote to Rudolf Steiner through Marie von Sivers, expressing her desire to leave aside worldly ambitions and devote herself to the spiritual life. She asked to be received by him as a personal pupil and member of his Esoteric School of Theosophy. At the end of that year, she arrived in Berlin, living at the Motzstrasse 17, the headquarters of the Theosophical Society, where Marie von Sivers and Rudolf Steiner also lived. In 1914, she moved to Dornach, supporting herself financially through private piano lessons and as a translator.

In 1919, she was asked by Rudolf Steiner to take the children of the small Friedwart school, created for the children of the co-workers in Dornach, for music. Having taken part in all of the Eurythmy courses offered by Tatiana Kisseleff and others, she approached Rudolf Steiner on whether she might introduce some of the sparse indications given for Tone Eurythmy in 1915, in adapted form for the children's musical instruction. He gave her many personal indications on which she based her teaching. As she had previously done with her students in Pretoria, she arranged occasional small performances of the children's work, to which she also invited Marie Steiner. When she saw what the children were doing, Marie Steiner at once asked Hendrika to teach these things to the other eurythmists as well and from that point onwards, around 1921, included children's Eurythmy in her regular performances and tours. Things now developed rapidly and Hendrika, able to interpret on the piano the pieces other Eurythmists wished to perform, would play these for Rudolf Steiner and receive from him the appropriate



1 Hendrika Hollenbach



2 Letterhead of the Eurythmy and Music School

choreographic forms. She continued to work diligently on this until Rudolf Steiner's death in 1925.

In 1926 she returned to South Africa. Her advertisement for a piano accompanist in Pretoria was answered by a student at the University of South Africa, a Miss du Toit, who showed interest in the background of Eurythmy and together with her sister, formed the backbone of what became the Pretoria branch of the Anthroposophical Society. This work was extended to Johannesburg as a number of immigrants from Europe arrived in the course of the '30s and it was these that subsequently continued the work of the movement and started initiatives like the Christian Community and the Johannesburg Waldorf School.

Hendrika returned to Dornach in 1946, recording in writing the events that had led to the evolution of Tone Eurythmy. An obituary written by Fred Poeppig appeared only in the newsletter of the Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung with very limited distribution and thus her name and the role she played have, until recently, been virtually forgotten.

## Camphill School – Hermanus (Founded 1951)

The first anthroposophical institution to begin working in South Africa was the Camphill School in Hermanus, founded in 1951 by May Redman with the assistance of Dr Karl König. He sent several able co-workers to the country who subsequently helped the budding Waldorf Schools.

## Lieselotte Maurer 1927 - 1973

Lieselotte Maurer came from Germany training as in nursing. While working in a German "Lazarett", or military hospital towards the end of the war, the 18-year-old nurse met 33-year-old Heinz Maurer, badly wounded in the leg in the Russian sector. He had already come to know Anthroposophy and after the war, the couple began to work at the Michaelshof in Hepsisau. While Heinz spent two years at the priest's seminar in Stuttgart, Lieselotte did two years of training at the Eurythmy School in Köngen with Elsa Klink. Following an advertisement for curative educators at Sunfield Homes in Howick, Natal, the family emigrated to South Africa, but after disagreements with the management, moved to the Camphill school in Hermanus.

She got to know the Anthroposophical Group in Cape Town and Lyda Bräunlich, who was in the process of starting the first Waldorf Kindergarten. For the opening celebration in January 1959, she performed in Eurythmy, together with her daughter and son, the fairy tale Little Red Riding Hood for the assembled guests in the garden.

In 1960, Heinz and Lieselotte moved to Cape Town, where they founded the Jan Prins Day Centre for curative education. Estelle



3 Lieselotte Maurer as Mary, Heinz as Tree Singer in Christmas play



4 Heinz and Lieselotte Maurer (far right) in Hermanus, Heinz still walking with a stick.



5 Opening of the first Waldorf Kindergarten



7 Felicitas Fuhs with her Class 1

### Brigitta Wegerif

Brigitta van Houten, great-great-granddaughter of the discoverer of the chocolate bar, first came to Cape Town together with her cousin, Ernst Wegerif. Both had worked on the Goetheanum stage for several years. A pupil of the Waldorf school throughout her childhood, even during the years of the War in the single class that continued to exist in Amsterdam, she studied Eurythmy after the War with Elsa Klink in Köngen. She then went to the Goetheanum for training in Speech and was given the part of Luna in Rudolf Steiner's Mystery Plays. Her visit to South Africa in 1962, a kind of farewell voyage to the two cousins long romantic relationship, ended in them getting married and settling in Cape Town.



8 Brigitta Wegerif

The author of this article happened to be one of the students in her Eurythmy classes. The lessons cannot have been particularly rewarding, the resistance and bad behaviour of our class possibly contributing to her decision to take on class teaching as a more fulfilling alternative. When Max Stibbe joined the school in 1964, she joined the training courses he offered, as did the other Cape Town teachers from both schools, in which she both participated and contributed. Thereafter, she became a competent class teacher and for a time a number of classes went without Eurythmy until Sigrid Quednau joined the school in 1969.

When Brigitta's marriage collapsed in the mid-seventies, leaving her alone and penniless with three children, she returned to Europe, welcomed by the Stuttgart Teacher Training with a unique combination of qualifications in Eurythmy, Speech and class teaching.

Brigitta later transferred to the Institut für Waldorfpädagogik in Witten, Germany, where she spent the rest of her working life as a highly respected colleague and lecturer. She and Ernst re-married during this time and finally returned to South Africa, where they died within two weeks of one another at the beginning of 2016.

It would be remiss not to break a lance for the oft disregarded Eurythmy piano accompanist. Ours was in fact my most lasting memory of our Eurythmy classes. **Ruth Bentley**, erstwhile ambulance driver during the Battle of Britain in London, friend of Walther

Bryer writes of this time: "Her enthusiasm and what she achieved were remarkable. She gave regular weekly classes to the Anthroposophists and even directed a short performance for Dr Zeylman at a church hall in Claremont, to which he made the classic reply: 'It reminds me of the first beginnings of eurythmy in Dornach.... the enthusiasm was wonderful!'

In 1964 Heinz went to England and Stuttgart for his final training and ordination as a priest in the Christian Community, while Lieselotte remained to run the Centre and take care of the family. A year later the Christian Community was founded in South Africa, its first Service room in the Jan Prins Day Centre. Not long after this, Lieselotte left Cape Town to set out on her own, starting a nursery school in Montague, a village some two hours' drive from Cape Town. In 1972 she was diagnosed with cancer and passed away in 1973 at the early age of 46.

### Susanne Müller-Wiedemann 1916 – 2010



6 Susanne Müller-Wiedemann

Susanne Müller-Wiedemann and her husband, Dr Hans Müller-Wiedemann, are internationally well-known pioneers of Camphill. Born Susanne Lissau, she was the younger sister of Dr Rudolf Lissau and grew up in an anthroposophical family in Vienna and studied Eurythmy in Arlesheim. Her particular contributions are in the field of music therapy and curative Eurythmy for people with hearing and other disabilities, in which she did much primary and documented research and training of others.<sup>[1]</sup>

### Constantia Waldorf School (Founded 1959)

#### Felicitas Fuhs

Felicitas Fuhs came to South Africa in 1958 to join the Camphill Lake Farm near Port Elizabeth. She was a Eurythmist and Eurythmy therapist, a musician and master puppeteer. The relationship with the Lake Farm community did not last and so she joined the Waldorf School in Rondebosch as Class 1 teacher in 1961. She was there for just a few years, returning to Germany to take care of a sister. There are no further records of her life or background.





9 Ruth Bentley

Johannes Stein and longstanding accompanist at Wynstones School in England, was one of the pillars supporting the school's existence. There are a number of forms of martyrdom unrelated to death and one of these was certainly hers. As a devotee of the art of music, she was seldom able to play more than the first few bars before she was stopped by the teacher. (In later years, during my teacher training, I witnessed an accompanist

who dealt with this problem by simply starting the piece from the beginning once more - without interruption - forcing the teacher to shout her instructions above the din he was making.) A paid musician might view this as a means of gleanng a few miserable shekels, much like a typist, from her career as a musician. Yet Miss Bentley did it for years and years, free, gratis and for nothing! Indeed, considering her regular substantial donations to the school, one might say, she paid for the privilege.

### **The Michael Mount Waldorf School (Founded 1961)**

When the Johannesburg Waldorf School started with Class 1 in 1962, Janine Hurner taught the children Eurythmy during their first year. Her background in Eurythmy was in attending private and public lessons with Marianna Ruoff in Zurich during the year she was doing her training there as a Kindergarten teacher. She moved to Cape Town at the beginning of 1963 to take over the Kindergarten there.



10 Janine Hurner

Later that year, or early in 1964, Elsa Kongeter joined the school. She was from Germany and had studied with Marguerite Lundgren in London. What little we know of her comes from the recollections of Maxine Olofsson and Eileen Tippet (both quoted in Act of Faith - A History of Michael Mount Waldorf School 1960 - 2010). They mention a public Eurythmy performance in 1968 of the fairy tale, The Seven Ravens at the school, at the time

still in Oxford Road, Rosebank. Pauline Scott, at the time Pauline Radcliffe and a Kindergarten teacher at the school, recollected in a conversation with the author her personal friendship with Elsa whom she had introduced to some friends in the Johannesburg Indian community. A romantic attachment between Elsa and one of the men apparently came about and this resulted in both of them leaving South Africa for Canada, probably at some time during 1969.

Dorothy Olsen, together with her husband Ray, one of the founding parents of the school now living in Canada, reported that she had met Elsa Kongeter, then married to an English-speaking South African by the name of Terry Kirk, in Ontario, Canada. She subsequently passed away there during the mid-eighties.

For several years after this, the school had no Eurythmy until Ludmilla and Peter King settled in Johannesburg in the mid-'70s. She was joined by Douwe Raaths five years later, coinciding with the founding of the Michael Mount High School. It was Ludmilla who established Eurythmy firmly within the school, incorporating it in



11 Staff of the Johannesburg Waldorf School: Ella van der Stok, Isabel Slaughter, Graham Slaughter, Elsa Kongeter, Gert van der Merwe, Magda Lissau, Ms Levy, Maxine Olofsson-Hertz.

the high school class plays and other events consistently over the next thirty years, working with colleagues such as Dorothea van Breda, Juliet Hurner and Christiane Wigand and others.

### **Michael Oak Waldorf School (Founded 1962)**

The Michael Oak Waldorf School started in 1962 after over half the staff at the Rondebosch school split off, due to disagreements with the Trustees. Within a year, only two of the original teachers remained, a group of young colleagues new to Waldorf Education taking over. These formed a small, dedicated College that struggled for years to keep the school afloat. Unlike the school in Rondebosch, which had a Eurythmist so to speak by marriage, Michael Oak and other such pioneering ventures in far-off lands faced three inevitable questions before being able to offer Eurythmy as part of its curriculum: Is there any Eurythmist available? Is there money for an additional salary? Can he or she do the job under the particular conditions of our school? In practise, this usually means waiting until destiny leads someone with the right qualifications to settle in the area, who is able and willing to take this on. In the case of Michael Oak, this turned out to be Cecelia Beckenstein.

Cecelia was South African by birth but had emigrated to the United States. There she studied Eurythmy at the then New York Eurythmy School of Ilse Kimball-von Baravalle and met and married Leonard Beckenstein, a chiropractor. They settled in South Africa with their three almost grown children in 1969, where Leonard opened a practise in Somerset West and Cecelia began to teach at Michael Oak. A year later, she started the Eurythmy School, with the financial and moral support of her husband and support in the teaching from Sigrid Quednau, initially with the three students Estelle Bryer, Valery Hibbs and Adrienne Milne.

From that time onwards, many graduates from the Eurythmy School were eager to teach in the warm, supportive environment Michael Oak provided for its teachers.



12 Cecelia Beckenstein



13 Leonard Beckenstein

## *The Rosemary Hill and Roseway Waldorf schools*

The Waldorf School on Rosemary Hill, founded in 1972 as the Fountain School by Max Stibbe in Pretoria, and the Roseway Waldorf School in Hillcrest, Durban by Janine Hurner in 1985, for the reasons already mentioned in connection with Michael Oak, were unable to offer Eurythmy during the first years of their existence. At the beginning of the 1980s, Douwe Raaths taught in Pretoria for a short time before joining Michael Mount. It was also through this school that Truus Geraets came to South Africa a few years later but it was only after the first students graduated from the Centre for Creative Education that Eurythmy became firmly established.

In the case of Roseway, it was not until Caroline and Bernard Hurner moved to Durban in 1994 that it was introduced through Caroline.

## *Inkanyesi Waldorf Centre*



14 Truus Geraets

Truus Geraets came to South Africa from the United States around 1985 together with Claartje Wijnbergh (1924 - 2019). They were the principal initiators of the Inkanyesi Waldorf Centre initiative with the school starting its Class 1 in 1989. From the very beginning the children have had Eurythmy lessons, already in the Kindergarten that preceded the actual founding of the school. In subsequent years, Juliet Hurner and Christiane Wigand taught there as well.

Truus Geraets did much to bring awareness of the role of Eurythmy and of Eurythmy Therapy to the Johannesburg area, working in the Society and in conferences, as well as making Eurythmy an integral part of the Baobab Community College teacher training programme in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, from which three of the first five Black Eurythmy students in this country qualified with the Centre for Creative Education and went on to teach at Michael Mount, Roseway and Rosemary Hill. In order to place this event in its historical and social context, a brief overview of the Waldorf schools' journey towards an integrated, non-racial education may be helpful.

In 1963, the first multiracial school in Southern Africa, the Waterford School in Swaziland, was founded, in direct response to South Africa's Apartheid policies. The first multiracial school in South Africa, founded seven years later in Johannesburg's northern suburbs, was the Woodmead school, which had too much corporate funding and too high a political profile for the government to close down. Then, at some point in the mid-seventies, the Constantia and Michael Oak schools in Cape Town were notified confidentially by the Department of Education that they no longer needed to fill in the column of the pupil registration forms that noted the race of the applicant. This was due to the South African government's attempt to foster diplomatic relations with other African states and receive their diplomats together with their families. These children could not be expected to attend the departmental Black schools and they were therefore asking a selected number of private schools to take them in. This opened the door to an integrated education, which had previously been strictly forbidden, under threat of closure. The dispensation did not apply to the rest of the country, as there would be no Black diplomatic families living there. However,

a small number of the Catholic schools in Johannesburg chose this moment to open their doors to Black students without seeking permission. When, by 1983, the educational situation in South African townships had reached crisis proportions, a number of Black parents found also their way to the Michael Mount school and were accepted. By 1985, all Waldorf schools in South Africa were integrated and the initiative to start a Waldorf School in a South African township had begun.[2]

By the early nineties, there were already four such schools and both the Novalis College in Cape Town and the Centre for the Art of Living in Johannesburg had been working with Black teacher trainees since they began in 1987 and 1988. When the Counsel of the Federation of Waldorf Schools received a letter from, and subsequently met with the Cape Town School of Eurythmy to discuss a request for their training through the schools, one of the principal issues discussed was why there were still no Black Eurythmists trained at the School. Any future funding was made conditional to this and a few other, educational, issues being addressed. As it happened, the Centre for Creative Education had been formed in 1993 out of the original Novalis College, this time dedicated solely to the task of training Waldorf teachers for Waldorf schools. As neither they nor the Counsel of the Federation had the confidence that the Cape Town School of Eurythmy would be able to meet the needs for urgently required Eurythmy teachers, Silke Sponheuer, who had previously visited the country and performed there, was invited to join the Centre and begin an educational Eurythmy training under its auspices. This initiative, particularly with the added incentive of attaining a degree in Eurythmy, has attracted Black students from all over Africa and South Africa.

## *Final remarks*

What is it that changes the fabric of soul within a country where, for over 40 years an impulse like Eurythmy is carried exclusively by immigrants, by people who have met and studied it in Europe, and then quite suddenly, it becomes an emotional need of many local people who take it up and carry it forward. The success of the Cape Town Eurythmy School during the 1970s, drawing a comparatively large number of students, paralleled what was happening elsewhere in the world. Its handover to the training at the Centre for Creative Education, one of the few undergraduate Bachelor programmes in Eurythmy and a significant contributor to the anthroposophical work in all of Africa, is also part of this developing timeline. What Hendrika Hollenbach started as an extra-curricular programme mainly for Pretoria schoolgirls in 1927 and which disappeared completely after she left the country in 1946, has transformed into an emotional desire living in people, who are able to bring to it new qualities and establish it as a local art.

### Notes:

[1] Biographies and Books about SMW: Heileurythmie und hygienische Eurythmie Verlag am Goetheanum 1996 ISBN 9783723508923

The Lives of Camphill: An Anthology of the Pioneers Edited by Johannes Surkamp Floris Books 2007 ISBN 9780863156076

Tributes to Susanne Müller-Wiedemann in Camphill Correspondence May/June 2010 by Elsbeth Groth, Anna Ree and Christiane Lauppe.

Obituary in Camphill Correspondence July/August 2010 by Fiona M. Zahn based on a 1996 article by Hans Müller-Wiedemann

[2] For a more detailed account of this process, see the author's book Integrating South Africa's Waldorf Schools – A Brief History – with a discussion on Cultural Racism and Anthroposophy Eric Hurner 2017 ISBN 9781973435976