

# Historical Notes

By Joan Pope, 2009

## Part One

### **Australians who studied Dalcroze Eurhythmics in England: 1918-1928.**

Seven Australian women completed the three-year course at the London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics (LSDE) between 1917 and 1927. Five of the Australians returned to their home State and commenced teaching, typically at independent girls' schools and in private classes. Several obtained positions at Kindergarten Training Colleges (KTC) in their home States.

#### **Irene Wittenoom**

Western Australian Irene Wittenoom (1893-1963), studied in London from 1915, graduated in 1917, and commenced a five year involvement with the WA Kindergarten Teachers' College in 1918 which thus became the first tertiary institution in Australasia to offer Dalcroze Eurhythmics. She also taught privately, and as a visiting teacher at several Perth schools. Notably she also influenced a number of WA school teachers, particularly those involved with physical education. Wittenoom married (Mrs F.Heron) and moved to Singapore in 1924.

#### **Heather Gell**

Heather Gell (1896-1988), graduated from Adelaide KTC in 1916 when Lillian de Lissa was Principal. De Lissa had made an extensive journey to Europe and England in 1914, taken a course in Italy with Maria Montessori, observed the teaching at the Hellerau College of Jaques-Dalcroze and been impressed by the new Dalcroze Eurhythmics School in London. After coaching from Wittenoom in Perth for six weeks in 1920, Gell went to the LSDE in late 1921 and graduated in July 1923, with excellent results. She returned to Adelaide and began classes for children and adults in 1924. Gell taught there until 1938 when she moved to Sydney from where she broadcast, for some twenty years, regular *Music Through Movement* sessions to schools, for the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). In Sydney she established classes for children and adults and, in 1956, having been granted the Diploma of the Institut Jaques-Dalcroze, officially opened the first Dalcroze training School in Australia which she titled the Australian National School of Music and Movement. A number of her students qualified and in turn became the 'next generation' of Dalcroze teachers in Australia. Heather Gell was awarded an MBE for her services to music education. In her

eighties she returned to live in Adelaide where she had the pleasure of seeing teachers continuing the music through movement work she had introduced to them.

Gell's book *Music, Movement and the Young Child* was published in 1949, and has been long out of print. One of her students edited and reprinted much of the content with the assistance of the 'Heather Gell Dalcroze Foundation'. *Dalcroze Eurhythmics: hundreds of lessons and thousands of ideas for early childhood, by master teacher, Heather Gell*. Edited and annotated by Joan Pope. (2006) Available from the Secretary of Dalcroze Australia: [carolannbentley@bigpond.com](mailto:carolannbentley@bigpond.com)  
Approximate price \$50 plus relevant postage (please enquire for current rates).

### **Cecilia John**

Tasmanian born Cecilia John (1877-1955), was a singer and singing teacher in Melbourne in the 1900s and well-known as a suffragette, political activist, anti-conscriptionist and campaigner for womens'and childrens' rights. John was the first secretary of the Save the Children Fund in Australia in 1919, and later, from London, became the Overseas Director of the organization. After attending the International Womens' Peace Conference in Switzerland in 1919, one of three Australian delegates, John commenced studies at the LSDE the following year and joined the Executive Committee of the Dalcroze Society of Great Britain in 1923, her graduation year. She made two trips to Australia in connection with Dalcroze demonstrations and the awarding of scholarships sponsored by the LSDE. She returned to work in England and became Warden of the LSDE in 1930, and Principal in 1932, a position she retained until her death in 1955.

### **Ethel Driver**

In 1923-1924 Ethel Driver, (1883-1963), Mistress of Method at the LSDE, presented lecture-demonstrations in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Hobart, Sydney and Christchurch, New Zealand, as part of a six-month promotional tour of Australasia. Dalcroze Societies were enthusiastically formed to support the work in Western Australia (1923), South Australia (1924) Victoria (1924) and New South Wales (1924). Considerable publicity and fund-raising and the offer of scholarships from the London School, led to four Australians going to London in mid 1924 as a result.

### **Dorothea Michel**

NSW physical education teacher Dorothea Michel (1901-unknown) received a three-year scholarship and completed the course at the LSDE in 1927, but married after her graduation (Mrs Johnson) and stayed in England. This was a disappointment for the NSW Dalcroze Society.

### **Jean Wilson**

A half-scholarship was awarded to Jean Wilson, (1904-1992) a Kindergarten College student of Perth. She qualified in 1927 and returned to WA, teaching privately and at the KTC before marrying (Mrs R.H.Vincent). With Dorothy Fleming, she created and presented music, movement and story broadcasts to schools in the early 1940s, and played an important part in the development of *Kindergarten of the Air*. She continued broadcasting until 1969.

### **Thelma St John George**

Thelma St John George (1899-1970) and Elizabeth Demaine, (1897-unknown) both primary school teachers from Melbourne also travelled to the LSDE in 1924. Demaine married and stayed overseas, St John George returned to Melbourne and taught privately, and collaboratively, with ballet teacher Eunice Weston, speech teacher Eileen O'Keefe, at Preshil school in Melbourne and also at Geelong Girls Grammar. She married (Mrs A. Lacey) and retired to live in country Victoria.

### **Marjorie Bonnin**

South Australian Marjorie Bonnin (1905-1990) joined the other Australian women in London in 1926, replacing Elizabeth Demaine who had left the course. Bonnin was a student of Heather Gell's a promising pianist interested in improvisation and composition. Upon her return in late 1927, with the Dalcroze qualification, and also the new LRAM for Aural Culture and Musical Appreciation. She joined Gell's thriving studio practice in Adelaide for some years, but later withdrew and concentrated on private piano teaching.

### **Ella Gormley**

Originally from New Zealand Ella Gormley was a senior physical education teacher from NSW who in 1919-1920 requested leave to pursue a Masters degree in Physical Education from Columbia University New York. Whilst there she attended the Dalcroze School of New York and was most impressed. She did not have time to complete a certificated course but was greatly influenced by the work, and requested further time from her employer, the Board of Public Instruction in Sydney, to also visit the London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Here too she realized that the length of the

full course would be impossible for her to achieve. In 1921 on her return to Sydney, she gave a number of intensive courses for fellow teachers, including a special six week course for senior interstate physical education instructresses, and devised new curriculum material in folk dance, rhythmic movement, gymnastics and swimming. Due to the lack of official recognition in regard to an appropriate salary commensurate with her level of work Gormley resigned and married.

With little organizational support, and few opportunities to visit each other in the 1920s and early 30s, these few women imparted their knowledge with enthusiasm, engaged in demonstrations, which served as powerful advertisements for their rhythmic movement classes for children and amateur adults. Contemporary readers should realise a time-perspective here by noting that Perth was not linked by rail service to Adelaide until 1917, that radio services only began in 1924 on a local basis; it was not possible to make long distance phone calls East -West, until the late 1930s, that airmail letters were still rare, and expensive, in the 1930s.

Jaques-Dalcroze had stipulated that a teacher-training course in his method required at least three members of staff to possess the higher Diplôme, not the basic certificate of graduation as a teacher. This was to prove an almost insuperable difficulty for countries distant from Europe. None of the Australian graduates held this qualification.

## **Part Two**

### **Teachers from England who taught Dalcroze Eurhythmics in Australia:**

#### **1920s-1930s**

##### **Mary Whidborne**

English born Mary Whidborne (1884-1970) was a talented pianist who was studying in Berlin in 1910 when she saw Jaques-Dalcroze give a demonstration, and announce the opening of the College at Hellerau near Dresden. She was able to attend for sometime, and also at the London School, however before she was able to qualify, she volunteered for war service in the war office in London and then joined the Womens' Air Force, serving in France. After demobilisation she journeyed to Australia and took a teaching position at Frensham in Mittagong. She taught at this progressive school in country NSW for five years. Whidborne also gave classes in Sydney and was involved with the establishment of a Dalcroze Society there. She went back to Paris and Geneva in

the mid 20s to formally complete her Dalcroze certification. Later, in 1938 she returned to Australia and taught in Sydney for a decade.

An article by Joan Pope in *Brolga* of June 2006, provides more detail of Whidborne's career.

### **Ethel Driver**

One of the first British students to qualify for the Diplôme with Jaques-Dalcroze in Hellerau, Driver (1883-1963) had been a music teacher at an Anglican Convent in England. The Mother Superior recognized her potential talent for the new approach to music education and encouraged her to take the course. Driver became a full time staff member of the London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics in 1914 and, as Mistress of Method, was responsible for developing the excellent teacher training basis of the English course. Her younger sister Ann Driver was also on the staff of the London school and her piano improvisation, and her pioneer broadcasts to school influenced the Australian students there.

Ethel Driver's skills in presenting public lectures and demonstrations explaining the work were renowned, and she created considerable interest in Australia through courses and attendant publicity during the six month tour.

As a result of the enthusiastic reception given in England to the account given of the Australian and New Zealand promotional tour of 1923-1924 by Ethel Driver several other qualified Dalcroze teachers made the long journey to 'the ends of the earth'.

### **Phyllis Crawhall-Wilson and Katherine 'Kitty' Haynes.**

An experienced teacher and pianist, Phyllis Crawhall-Wilson (1893-1963) had been teaching Dalcroze Eurhythmics in Scotland, for some years and by 1919 was so busy she asked another graduate to join her there. This was Kitty Haynes (1897-1988). Towards the end of 1924 they decided to take 'the great adventure' to Australia. Calling in at Perth they were guests of honour at the first AGM of the WA Dalcroze Society and gave very successful classes there for several weeks. They continued to Sydney where they lived and taught at various schools, and privately, for approximately four years. Haynes continued the work at Frensham School started by Whidborne. Demonstrations and courses were presented in Sydney and in Melbourne. When they each decided to return to Great Britain, the Dalcroze Society of NSW dwindled and disappeared. It was not until

1968 that a new beginning was made when Heather Gell and Doreen Bridges, created a Dalcroze Society which would serve Australia-wide.

### **Elly Hinrichs**

In WA, after Wittenoom had moved to Singapore in 1924, the WA Dalcroze Society, the Kindergarten Training College and the LSDE arranged for Elly Hinrichs (1883-1944), a well qualified London teacher, viola player and pianist, with the coveted Diplôme, to come to Perth in 1926. She had the qualification required to conduct Dalcroze Eurhythmics teacher-training, she presented several well-received demonstrations, and hopes were high. Regrettably, her prickly personality made her unpopular and after four years she returned to England without establishing a training course. Hinrichs made several successful broadcasts about musical topics from Perth over the ABC, an early initiative indeed for 1929.

### **Nancy Rosenhain**

English-born Nancy Rosenhain (1906-1990), an LSDE graduate of 1928, arrived in Melbourne soon after her graduation, and was offered a position at Carlton Teachers' College in 1929, but a change of government in Victoria, put a stop to engagement of new staff, and led to general cutbacks to music in education. Rosenhain was a niece of General Sir John Monash, and taught for a short time from his Toorak house. She married (Marcus Kirsner) in 1932, but some years later returned to teaching and had successful lengthy teaching positions at both Melbourne, and later Monash, Universities.

No documentation has been found of Dalcroze teachers in Tasmania or Queensland at this time, and although teachers of physical culture frequently offered 'rhythmics', it was more akin to expressive dance than to the music-centred Dalcroze approach.

These notes, by Joan Pope, May 2009, are drawn from archival material researched for her PhD., Monash University, entitled *Dalcroze Eurhythmics in Australasia: the first generation from 1918*.

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