

The 2008 South Africa Report

A much more precise idea about what we could usefully contribute was probably the most tangible result of last year's visit to South Africa: new and promising contacts had been made, and building on what we learned, and with the continuous help from Aloisia Woergetter of the Austrian Embassy in Pretoria and Consul General Ingrid Koehn-Dursy in Cape Town, we felt that the second time round something significant could be achieved.

In addition, the understanding of what was lacking the most (sheet music and instruments) had led to a generous offer on behalf of Commend Privatstiftung and The Arnold Schoenberg Choir under their leader, Erwin Ortner to purchase 7 violins, 2 violas, 2 celli, all with their bows and cases, plus 20 bows for student use, and a considerable collection of music ordered with the help of the publisher Erhard Loecker; added to this was a good viola Susan had brought from the US.

Thus our work began well enough – the first activity was handing over the collection of new instruments to Kolwane Mantu and his African Youth Ensemble, the Soweto orchestra Susan had selected to work with. The joy and enthusiasm of the young musicians was palpable, and the new instruments were celebrated with an improvised but long rehearsal just one day after our arrival.

Ten days of Susan's intensive work with Kolwane and his group would be crowned by a formal concert at Pretoria's State Theatre on October 16, with Susan playing five (!) Vivaldi cello concertos under Kolwane Mantu, conducting just as Vivaldi once had, playing his violin. Aloisia had arranged for this spectacular concert to be filmed – eventually a CDROM will document the event for posterity – and a concert on Oct. 19th at Johannesburg's Roodepoort Pro Musica Theatre; this concert was professionally recorded (so there will be the ensemble's first CD!) through David Krut who had taken an active interest, arranging radio interviews, press contacts and a photographer to document the intensive workshops

Susan and Kolwane conducted with the ensemble. David also began to set up a web site for the African Youth Ensemble and will continue to update it. David Krut's extraordinary energy (he is a publisher of books, fine art prints, runs a cultural outreach program in Johannesburg, a gallery and bookshop, a printing press, a bookshop cum gallery at the Montebello Design Centre in Cape Town and a gallery in New York, founded the "Taxi Art Books" and soon "Taxi Films" and kindles the imagination of anybody who comes in touch with him) was also – last year – the reason for a first exploratory dry-point print I was able to develop with the fine printer Mlungishi. This experience led me to plan a whole artist's book, using dry point and aquatint (for a short text) to be developed and then printed at David's workshop. Ten intensive work-days later Mlungi produced a wonderful set of trial prints for "Working at Krut (and visiting Lovis)" a leporello of 10 pages containing 6 dry-point etchings and a text, title page and colophon, to be bound by my favorite bookbinder, Peter Gruenauer of Vienna, thus making this a work of the best of two continents.

It should be published in 15 copies by March 2009.

On our last morning in Johannesburg, October 20th, just before our departure to Cape Town, I was able to sign the proofs as "good for printing".

Beautiful.

The Austrian Consul General, together with Cape Town's Artscape, had carefully planned Susan's workshops with the Cape Town Philharmonic Youth Orchestra and several master-classes, keeping her very busy indeed. After visiting the Montebello Design Centre where I had met Alastair, a fine painter, last year (and where an extensive discussion/interview David Krut undertook with me, was filmed by Revel Fox to be a "Taxi movie" eventually), and seeing his new artist's book "Patmos", an evocative exploration of memory, perception and the continuous battle with the impossible that is the artist's lot – haunting and very impressive -, I spent two days at Greatmore studios, an artist's space where painters from several African countries, from the US and the Netherlands work and exchange experiences; after an extensive presentation of my work I was able to visit the studios and see the work being created there. An introduction into the merits of egg-tempera-painting, including the production of the type of emulsion that I now use successfully and with pleasure for more than 45 years was the gift I left as thanks for an extraordinarily warm welcome. There I met Anthony, a painter willing to dedicate himself to occupational therapy with patients at Falkenberg Hospital for the criminally insane.

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His quiet conviction that painting with the patients could give them some self-esteem and a sense of their humanity touched me - it resonated with memories familiar to anyone interested in Leo Navratil's work and the artists from Gugging.

A visit was arranged and I was able to see his extraordinary gift of gentle humanity at work, and the successful work this generous painter is able to do with some of the most unfortunate members of the human race. His vision, and the understanding of the people who make his project possible, remains with me as an example.

And it's with this - the examples of good will, courage, engagement and tolerance, embodied in the work of people we had the pleasure of meeting and listening to, among others the wonderful writer Mike van Graan, David Krut, without whom art would wither away, and his lady, the actress Grethe Fox, the movie-maker Revel Fox and his wife Roberta, the printers Jill, Niall and the incomparable Mlunglisi, Karin Reinprecht and David Hancock, our friend Tau and, of course, all the musicians around Kolwane and his wife Mpho, all of them now a whirlwind of ideas, smiles, warm memories and good thoughts - that our life has been greatly enriched.

Examples of a life more intense and more generous through the awareness of living closer to the edge - the edge of the Future at that.

Friedrich Danielis