

GUNILD KEETMAN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SCHULWERK

by Friedrun Gerheuser



The name of Carl Orff has won worldwide recognition both for his operas and for his work in music education. But if we mention the name of his associate, Gunild Keetman, there are few who recognize it, even among Orff teachers, although her name lies on the cover of all the Schulwerk books. She has been Carl Orff's collaborator all her life, but who she is and what her own contribution to the Schulwerk has been, very few people know. This is a situation we shall try to remedy here.

To do so, we have to go back to 1924 when Carl Orff and Dorothee Gunther founded a school for gymnastics, music, and dance together in Munich, one of many that sprang into being at this time in response to the new feeling for the human body and its movement possibilities. Because of his previous work in the theater, Orff was very interested in this new kind of expression. With him on its faculty, the new Guntherschule had a special accent on music. It was at this time that he was experimenting and developing the barred instruments which have carried his name all around the world.

Gunild Keetman was a student in this school, preparing for a career as a teacher of gymnastics. She was a student of Carl Orff's and soon became his collaborator in preparing the first edition of the Schulwerk in 1930, and supplementary books of exercises for percussion instruments, timpani, xylophones and glockenspiels, and recorders. At the same time, she was composing the music for the performing group from the Guntherschule for which Maja Lex did the choreography, introducing Orff's new instrumentarium to the public for the first time.

After 1933 the politicians condemned the ideas of the Schulwerk as undesirable, and all this activity came to an abrupt stop.

When the Bavarian radio commissioned Orff to do a series of broadcasts for children in 1948, Gunild Keetman was there again. It was she who transferred Orff's musical and pedagogical ideas into practice. She trained the children for the radio programs, trying out and developing the pieces

that were later-compiled into the five volumes of the Schulwerk. How much Gunild Keetman herself contributed we can tell by the many pieces which are marked by her own style, like the lovely "Berceuse" in Book IV.

I'm sure that "Tanz, Mädchen, Tanz" is by Keetman. All the music of the "Weihnachtsgeschichte" is by her, including revisions of "Dormi Jesu" and "Gloria" from Book II, and the recorder pieces are hers too.

Professor Keller thinks that Keetman wrote the instrumental pieces in the first four books and Orff chose the texts and wrote almost all the vocal pieces, but it is very difficult to separate their work, and ultimately, unimportant, since it was a joint endeavor from the beginning.

In 1951 Keetman was engaged as a teacher of Orff Schulwerk at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. There she taught children's classes and a select group of adults including Doreen Hall, the editor of the Canadian version of the Schulwerk; Daniel Hellden, the editor of the Swedish version; and Minne Lange, her student-assistant, the editor of the Danish adaptation, all well-known representatives of the Orff approach in their own countries today.

With this worldwide expansion of the Schulwerk, Keetman was often called upon to compose the accompaniments to foreign songs. She has done an enormous job. Her ability to feel and function in the different musical traditions is uncanny, as, for example, in her settings of Japanese children's songs.

But it is not only as a composer that Keetman holds such an important place in the development of the Schulwerk. She is also a teacher of movement and embodies in herself the combination of music and movement that the whole approach is seeking. Whoever has had a single lesson with her will never forget it. Who would suppose so much temperament and energy could exist in this graceful person! How much magnetism her smallest gesture reflects! Remember only her introductory clap or stamp and the "creative pause" before movement was initiated!

No one ever felt that too much was demanded in her lessons, because she understood so well the limitations and possibilities of basic movements such as walking, running, hopping, jumping, and swinging, and how to develop and combine them to form the most beautiful dances. With a ready imagination and teaching ability, she was always composing little parts in ever-changing combinations, and using ideas suggested by her students to make a complete living form—not drilled and fixed like the complicated forms of art dances. Only in this kind of teaching can there be a spontaneous and vital experience of movement, stimulating the student's own creative activity. If we know the pedagogic goal of the Schulwerk, there is no need to dwell on the importance of this point. It is sad that this limitation to simple movement is such a big problem for many people—especially movement specialists with dance training. Because it would be boring for them to be restricted to the kind of movement any child can do spontaneously, they forget that ordinary mortals have no interest in becoming professional dancers and no need for dance technique.

Keetman's greatest gift as a teacher is to give full value to simple ideas and techniques, and to establish the fundamentals securely before attempting to build on them. Only such an approach can lead on and on over the years in a positive direction.

What makes Gunild Keetman so important in the development of the

Schulwerk? She herself embodies the main idea of the whole Orff approach, the combination of music and movement. Because she is both a composer and a movement specialist, there has not yet been anyone else so uniquely qualified for leadership in both fields. When Keetman moves, she always makes music too—whistling, singing, playing the recorder or the drum. The opposite is also true: for her, music is like an "invitation to the dance".

Keetman is a modest and gentle person who shuns the limelight. Without her, the Schulwerk would be unimaginable. Without her, it would not exist at all. Whoever knows her, her music and her teaching, has a profound and inspiring sense of the meaning and value of the Schulwerk, to which she has devoted her life.

Editor's note: Friedrun Gerheuser seemed the best possible choice for this assignment, since she has known Miss Keetman both as a neighbor and as a teacher. Miss Gerheuser's older brother was in the group of children who introduced the Schulwerk to the radio audience under Keetman's guidance. She herself is a graduate of the Orff Institute, and spent a summer working with Keetman as her assistant in a school for the deaf.

HOW THE ORFF XYLOPHONE WAS BORN

from the speech Dr. Orff gave at the inauguration of the new Studio 49 Plant
(Reprinted from *DAS MUSIKINSTRUMENT*, August, 1969, Frankfurt, Germany
and from the *Magnamusic Newsletter*)

During the 1920's I was on the lookout for a xylophone suitable to be used as a melody instrument with our percussion instruments (gongs, rattles, cymbals, and everything else available). I was just as familiar with the classical xylophone of the Gamelan-orchestra as with the African kind with gourd-resonators, but owing to their tuning and their complicated construction neither was seriously considered for use as children's instruments. Once again coincidence played its part here. I was sent, through friends, a Kaffir piano, which was found in the port of Hamburg, where a sailor had brought it from Cameroon. It was indeed an extremely simple affair; a small, square wooden box, with German lettering on it "100 plank nails"—the sort of box one sees lying about on every building-site. Twelve tuned palisander staves were attached to the open side of the box with string. A primitive hammer, with a head bound in cloth, belonged to the instrument. The timbre of this instrument was surprisingly good, however, and thus the unsurpassably simple model had been found. I took this instrument to my friend Karl Maendler, the famous re-discoverer and new constructor of the harpsichord, and asked him to make a xylophone for teaching purposes on the basis of this simple model. Maendler was not only a genius in the making of both pianos and harpsichords, but was also an enthusiastic amateur craftsman as well as being extremely interested in all the new dances that were appearing on the scene - and there were quite a number. This made him interested in the Gunther-School and in our primitive percussion orchestra. In short he was the right man in every possible way. I can remember very clearly the complaints of his wife about all this. She complained bitterly that her husband, led astray by me, spent all his time on a lot of nonsense and rubbish instead of building harpsichords and, to make matters worse, stank out the whole flat while doing this as he was forced to dry the palisander staves in the living room owing to lack of other facilities. This is now done somewhat differently - as we have just seen - but don't forget this was 1928! In the meantime, Keetman had composed a number of dance-tunes for the Kaffir-piano, and the enthusiasm for this instrument, which enabled us to extend our percussion orchestra, was tremendous. This orchestra was well known through the many tours made in conjunction with our dance-group both at home and abroad. The success of this first instrument pleased Maendler as designer and builder tremendously, and it was not difficult to persuade him to make other instruments in other registers. Soon a soprano-xylophone joined the first instrument, which was a very pronounced alto-xylophone—a large chromatic tenor xylophone in cradle form and a bass-xylophone were not long in following. These instruments, which I used in my theatre and concert-works, were responsible for a new sound appearing in European concert and opera-house orchestras—a sound which today no one can possibly imagine as never being there.