

South African National Summer School 2 - 9 January 2011

Nestled in a lush green valley in the foothills of the mighty Drakensberg (Eng: Mountains of the Dragon), a World Heritage Site, lies the famous Drakensberg Boys Choir School. And this is where nearly 100 delegates convened for the 47th National RSCM Summer School in South Africa. Some came by car, others came by bus (a nearly 24 hour journey), some flew in to Durban and were transported by local RSCM members to the school, one even hitch-hiked all the way from Cape Town because he had lost his job and could not afford any other means of transport.



Katherine Dienes-Williams from Guildford Cathedral in the UK was our director. After the welcoming ceremony she immediately took control and did voice placing which was new to a great many people. By the time we went to supper, everyone knew exactly their position in the choir. Rehearsals started in earnest the next morning and Katherine proved to be a bundle of energy helping people with vocal techniques, and creating a wonderful mix of sound.



◀ *Katherine Dienes-Williams and the organist, David Orr*



Forty-seventh South African Summer School
at the
Drakensberg Boys' Choir School

During the six services that week we sang a huge range of music. We sang traditional music like the *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in E flat* by Charles Wood and the *Sanders Responses*. We also sang the *Evening Canticles* written in 2010 by David Orr, our course organist and Director of Music at St George's Cathedral in Cape Town. We loved the anthems by Katherine herself: *I sought the Lord* and *View me Lord*. On the last day at the Eucharist we sang the *Missa Prima Lux Australis* (Mass of the First Dawn in the South) by Christopher Cockburn, music that he wrote in 1994 when South Africa turned fully democratic. The Mass has interesting harmonies and complex African and Latin-American rhythms and is accompanied on marimbas and vibraphone. The composer came especially from Durban to help us to prepare the music over the weekend. All the services and most of the rehearsals took place in the well equipped auditorium of the school with its 4-manual pipe organ and two beautiful grand pianos.



On the course we had so many talented people, amongst them four very talented young organists. All four of them played in a very interesting organ master class conducted by Katherine. They also played at the concert we held on Wednesday evening. It was excellent! Also during the concert, Melvin Peters, one of South Africa's foremost jazz pianists, improvised gently and skilfully on some well known tunes - to mention just one of the items.

The concert ended with a marimba ensemble in which Katherine made her debut on the African

marimba, supported amongst others by Sunday Olawuwo, president of the newly formed RSCM Nigeria! The organ recital by David Orr and Katherine on Friday evening is something we'll remember for a very, very long time. It was stunning! One of the delegates wrote to me after the Summer School: "What an absolute gem we had in Katherine Dienes-William! She was a breath of fresh air and I took to her from the first rehearsal. If I had to give a rating it would be ten plus out of ten! We could not have been blessed with a better director. Her gentle but firm leadership, patience with us, musical and vocal skills and absolutely superb playing made the whole experience really worthwhile. What a package! I sincerely hope that we will see and hear Katherine in SA again and hopefully we won't have to wait too long."



This Summer School will go down in history of one of the wettest ever. During the first few days it never stopped raining. Rivers were flooded, towns were cut off from the outside world and the water pumps which usually supply the school with crystal clear water from the river broke down. While everything outside was drenched, for two days the school buildings had no water! The staff, while working tirelessly to sort out the problem, organised showers for delegates at neighbouring resorts and supplied drinking water in huge containers. I have never seen a group of South Africans so happy to see the sun again!



Bishop Rubin Phillip, the Bishop of Natal, came to the Summer School for the last two services of the week and joined in all the fun and celebration on Saturday evening when we said the formal farewells after Evensong. We were able to sit outside under the stars in the "Piazza" where there are tables and benches. The school provided us with trays full of delicious snacks and the "Choristers' Arms" was open. When the



formalities were over, the people erupted in typical African fashion in singing and dancing, celebrating a wonderful week of singing beautiful music, making new friends and renewing old friendships, all in one of the most beautiful parts of South Africa. What a privilege!

Marianne de Jager

Chair of the KwaZulu-Natal Branch of RSCM South Africa

