

CX/1997

# Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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pour le Réarmement moral

# CAUX

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## ARCHIVES

Mountain House  
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Dear friends,

I am distracted as I write these words by the sight of two paragliders borne side by side on a light wind, against an evening sky gilded by one of this damp summer's rare sunsets. I imagine them filled with delight, feeling that the world is theirs. They might, besides, be wondering what goes on inside the immense building over which they are flying in silence.

Here, down below, the different phases follow on, bearing no resemblance to each other. There is one final detail to add to the picture of the reunion of the cast of 'Anything to Declare'. On the last evening their children, after singing their parody of a song from the show, processed off stage in couples, arm in arm - an allusion to the goodly number of marriages which had followed shortly upon the end of the tour twenty-six years ago. A hint of a wink at their parents, and a 'thank you!' for the romances which had given them life.

After this family jamboree came the opening of the 'Pssst!' session. 'Pssst!' is the sound of a champagne bottle when the cork comes out - or perhaps in Caux it should be a fizzy drink bottle! The very sound of the word evokes the creativity which can be awakened in each one of us. So meetings gave way to workshops, the daily 'point fixe' gathering of the whole house became the 'open space'. Conversations were carried on by gesture and mime; major points in the timetable were signalled by a gong.

On the first day, the audience were asked to listen to the tone of a bell, then to take up the note with closed lips, and then to go into harmony, each person developing their own variations. To everyone's surprise, a vast harmonious chord filled the great hall; and then, with no prompting, silence fell as if by magic. And so the spirit of the week was set in motion. Everyone was asked to allow the breath of creativity to rise within themselves, without tension or resistance. Everyone was invited to join a workshop, not necessarily the one which they thought suited their talents but the one where they could learn the most.

The flower-arranging workshop produced the most spectacular results. People who had never tried the art created wonders. And soon a score of Japanese-style floral arrangements, both simple and elaborate, were gracing different public rooms - a feast for the eyes. One person who signed up for this workshop was Theo Zondo. A Zimbabwean businessman who lives in a city centre, he had never been interested by flowers. The workshop broadened his horizons. 'Here is something I can do for others,' he said. 'And I know now that there are things I can learn which I had never thought of. Arranging flowers can't be done in a rush. It demands care. In the beginning, I felt lost and shy. Then I relaxed. I talked with the flowers. I see a new virtue coming out of me.'

Abel Katito, a Zimbabwean engine driver, signed up for the theatre directing workshop. Why? 'Between shifts I help to look after Coolmoreen farm, an MRA centre where twenty-four families live. The children are free in the afternoons, and usually they are all over the place. I would like to teach them to do something together. Why not theatre? I have read many of Shakespeare's plays, and the workshop has helped me to understand and appreciate theatre.'

Painting, poetry, baking, video, stage production, contemplative movement, patchwork, puppets, music, creative listening, dance, writing, voice projection, photography - let's hope that these workshops release a galaxy of new vocations!

The morning gatherings began with sketches. Did they suit everyone, did they get across? Some appeared rather obscure. The people in the audience concerned with 'message' and the spiritual content, and the artists interested in using form, found it hard at times to understand one another. I expect that each of us needs to learn to take a step towards the other, to go towards the person who is different from us and of whose inner development, and sometimes of whose pain, we are ignorant.

The sketch which perhaps brought us closest together was about a composer and a painter in search of inspiration, swapping or stealing each other's talents, to the accompaniment of distant strokes of the bow or the odd note on the piano. It climaxed with a moving performance, by Jonathan and Elizabeth Sparey, of Mozart's Third Concerto for violin and piano. This was an unforgettable moment, and was followed by an interview with Jonathan. He told us how music changes him, how playing with others develops a sensitivity to the non-obvious, how the interpretation of a piece of music is different each time it is played. Day after day, we were able to enjoy these 'brief encounters', interviews which helped us to understand the motivations, the moments of grace, or the questionings of one artist after another.

We felt the full strength of the creative force during the Caux Lecture by Ernst Neizhvestny, the greatest of contemporary Russian sculptors. This small, sturdy, vibrant man was left for dead on the battlefield in the Second World War. In 1962 he risked his liberty, and possibly his life, when he contradicted a vulgar and insulting Nikita Khrushchev at a Moscow sculpture exhibition. His sculptures, shown to us on screen, are monumental, his paintings tormented. One cannot avoid the sense that the suffering of Russia still obsesses him, and that he finds forgiveness difficult. To him liberty, as in the West, and non-liberty, as in Russia for seventy years, are equally harmful to the artist if he does not take his own full responsibility for what he creates. Neizhvestny is equally dismissive of socialist realism, the product of totalitarianism, and hedonist realism, the product of the market economy, both of which stop us from asking: Where have we come from, who are we, where are we going? 'An artist cannot be an artist without having found a sense of inner freedom. Moreover, this freedom does not depend on the style or the school to which he belongs. His freedom is in the absolute faith that his vocation comes from God.'

A fresh and quite different expression of the breath of creativity blew through the 'brief encounter' with a young American, Allison Kenny. Some years ago she left her home town to try and get over a fear of street violence which had almost physically paralysed her. Having recovered, she came to Britain, studied video production, and then found herself unable to get a job - until the day she found the address of Moral Re-Armament in the phone book. Miraculously, it was perfect timing. Alan Channer was desperately looking for someone to edit the documentary which he had just filmed of an experience of reconciliation and forgiveness following the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya. Allison set to work. The first rough-cut was not satisfactory. She got down to it, slashed, corrected, re-cut. At last, joy of joys, she suddenly realised that she had for the first time created a film. The premiere showing of this video will take place here next week.

This evening, no one has wanted to miss the concert given by the Fitzwilliam Quartet, in which Jonathan Sparey plays second violin. Three concertos in D major by Haydn, Shostakovich - played with a perfection of intuitive fusion, and Borodin - a little gem - have given the greatest of pleasure to the audience. It has been, in advance, a celebration before tomorrow comes, a day of sharing, drawing conclusions and thanksgiving. But this letter has to get off...

With warmest greetings from Caux,

Jean-Jacques Odier