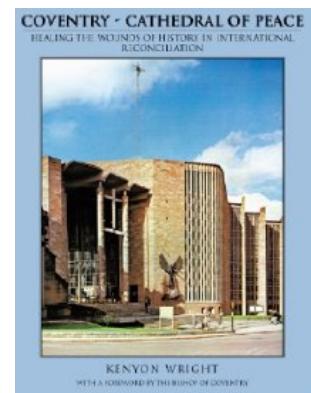


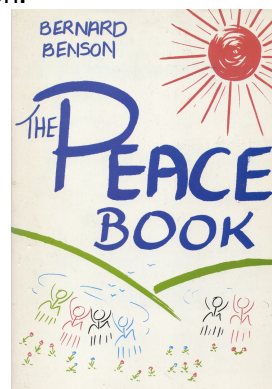
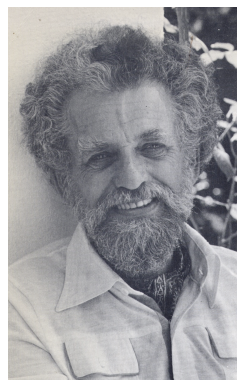


## PEACE CHILD

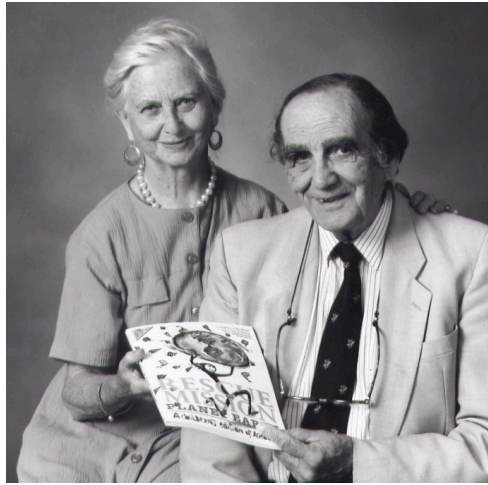
The magic that is Peace Child draws on six separate roots, coming together to form a single living organism. Seven, if you count the children around the world who performed the show and became the major drivers of Peace Child throughout its history. Eight – if you include the Russians and Eastern Europeans who contribute songs and ideas from their long history and spectacular commitment to peace-making later in the story.



Perhaps the single biggest root is David Gordon, whose Oratorio, *Alpha Omega*, provided two of the major songs for *Peace Child*, *Sing!* and *Child for a Day*. It was David Gordon's energetic insistence on following up the first, successful performance of *Alpha Omega* in Coventry Cathedral starring Edward Woodward, with a performance in London for peace and disarmament that led to first the Dominion Theatre and then the Royal Albert Hall being booked. He also involved agents Larry Westland and Mel Bush whose professionalism ensured the participation of stars like Susannah York and Peter Straker. It was also the quality of his music and the vision of *Alpha Omega* that caught the attention of the second root, Bernard Benson.



Benson was the author and illustrator of the magical *Peace Book* - the touching story of two children who agree that they both want to live not die in a nuclear holocaust. The book tells the story of how they persuade their two presidents to agree to a peace treaty. Benson wrote and illustrated the book himself in delightful colours: it was already a stellar success in Benson's adopted country, France, and was gaining a reputation elsewhere in Europe. Benson himself had already presented a copy to Pope John Paul II, and Sir Peter Ustinov had endorsed the English edition. Tom Maschler of Jonathan Cape had agreed to publish the book in the UK and Cape were thus thinking about promotional strategies.



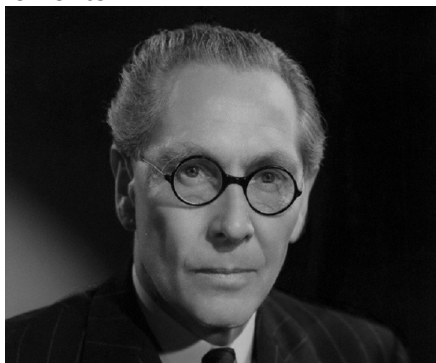
*Eirwen and Michael Harbottle*

Roots Three and Four, were Michael and Eirwen Harbottle, directors of the World Disarmament Campaign(WDC) who brought Gordon and Benson together. Michael had met Benson in Sweden and been impressed by the vision of his Peace Book. Both Michael and Eirwen had been at the first performance of Alpha Omega in Coventry and been overwhelmed by the power of its majestic music and soaring vision. They wondered how that power could be harnessed to their work of raising awareness about the UN's 2nd Special Session for Disarmament – the focus of the WDC's work. David Gordon was introduced to them by Eirwen's daughter, Rosey (Root FIVE).

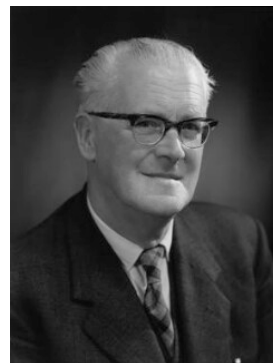


*Rosey Simonds*

She was working as a casting director at the time. She called David Gordon to find out if he was still planning to cast Alpha Omega as a West End Musical. He said that he was not and that he was planning to mount a performance as a benefit for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament(CND.) Rosey told him about her mother's World Disarmament Campaign and suggested that he do a benefit for them. Thinking that a 'World' Campaign sounded rather more significant than the UK-based CND, David asked for Eirwen's number and got in touch with her. Together, they discussed the idea of "a celebration for peace" to replace the traditional protest marches beloved of most peace movements.



*Philip Noel Baker*



*Fenner Brockway*

Lords Philip Noel Baker and Fenner Brockway, the leaders of the WDC and both Nobel Peace Prize Winners, approved this idea, remembering the celebratory peace meetings for the League of Nations that had happened in the Royal Albert Hall in the 1930s.



*Albert Einstein speaks at a Peace rally in the Royal Albert Hall in February 1933*

David was also delighted to discover that Michael and Eirwen had seen *Alpha Omega* in Coventry. He had found, it appeared, his peace partner.

A couple of days after that first meeting, Eirwen called David Gordon to say that Bernard Benson's *Peace Book* had arrived in the mail. (Cape's were circulating copies to all peace groups inviting them to help promote it.) The first seeds of an idea were born to somehow meld the music of *Alpha Omega* into the story of the *Peace Book*. Michael and Eirwen arranged a dinner party at their Hamilton Terrace apartment, inviting Gordon, Benson, the Maschlers and Peter Ustinov to discuss the collaboration.



*Sir Peter Ustinov*



*Tom Maschler*

At an extraordinary evening, all were served with large helpings of Ustinov's wit and wisdom - but little concrete was decided about the 'celebration of peace' - and the possible combination of Gordon's music with Benson's story. At the end of the evening, Gordon gave Benson a cassette of his oratorio. Benson listened to it in the car on the way home and was deeply moved. He contacted Gordon the next day writing him a note saying that he offered him exclusive rights to create a musical adaptation of his *Peace Book*.

Together, Eirwen Harbottle and David Gordon set about getting the production together. They selected a date during Disarmament Week and, fortuitously, got a date at the Royal Albert Hall for 30th October 1981 when another booking was cancelled. Ustinov had suggested many leading figures from the London Theatre for the all-important role of script-writer/adaptor. Unfortunately, Trevor Nunn, Peter Hall, the Royal Court team and everyone else were either too busy or too expensive and they had to start scraping the bottom of the barrel. And right there at the very bottom of the barrel, they found Root Six: David Woollcombe - Rosey's husband!





*Rosey and David Woollcombe*

A script writer and film-maker who had some experience of theatre from University days - and who had the immense privilege of having Eirwen Harbottle as a mother-in-law. As ever the polite English gentleman, I could not possibly say 'No!' to my recently acquired mother-in-law - so I agreed to review the pieces and offer an opinion. Initially, he thought the task impossible: there was no way that Gordon's magisterial music could be combined with Benson's ethereal, cartoon-style story. David Gordon was very persuasive: for some reason, he felt he'd found the man for the job and spent hours cajoling and pestering him. So, one morning, skipping a dull location recce for an industrial film, David Woollcombe wrote the words, "Peace Child" at the top of a piece of paper and started writing. 12-pages later, the first draft of the musical was complete - splicing the essential elements of Benson's story into the framework of the Alpha Omega musical. The draft was rushed to Benson, Gordon and the Harbottles + to Jonathan Cape. That evening, a meeting was convened at the Harbottles flat where an agreement was sketched out that the World Disarmament Campaign would present the musical, Peace Child, at the Royal Albert Hall in disarmament week; Mel Bush would be the overall producer; Rosey and David Woollcombe would be the line producers. David Woollcombe, Bernard Benson and David Gordon would be the co-owners of the musical, Peace Child, in an agreement that was later drafted into a legal document by Rupert Woollcombe, David's father. The three of them + Rosey and Eirwen and Michael Harbottle would, for ever after, be counted as the founders of Peace Child.

The question of finance reared its ugly head: though all the participants were donating their services, there would inevitably be costs - and those costs needed to be under-written as there was no guarantee of an audience. Benson approached a Buddhist foundation that he knew. They indicated interest so he and David Gordon made a presentation to them. £20,000 was secured as a guarantee which basically financed the production. In August, Gordon, Rosey and I drove down to Benson's chateau in Montignac, France to develop the script I had written.



*Chateau Montignac*

During his time there, David wrote three of the key songs for the musical, *Mr President*, *I want to Live* and *Peace Day*. Susannah York agreed to play the Story-teller, and Rosey started casting from London Embassies, choirs and schools; Gordon secured the participation of the Coventry Choir and the National Youth Orchestra who had played the original *Alpha Omega* performance.

The production was set.



*Susannah York and some of the Albert Hall cast*

However, during rehearsals, a fascinating thing happened: the idea of children bringing peace to the world and ending the nuclear arms race intrigued all the young cast members - and driving them home from rehearsals, they discussed the story excitedly with each other. Often, the conversations they were having on the back seat of my car were more interesting, and funnier, than the conversations they were having on stage! So, frequently, David found himself adjusting the script - re-typing whole pages and handing them to them the next day at rehearsals. They read the new lines with interest - noting the ideas that they themselves had been talking about:

"Didn't I say that in the car last night?" they would ask.

"Yes, you did!" David replied, "It was great - and now you are going to say it to the whole audience in the Royal Albert Hall!"

"Hmmm!" they replied, secretly quite proud and pleased.

Soon this process of drawing on the children's own ideas was formalised into improvisation sessions where we brainstormed what kids might actually say in the situations that they found themselves in the story. Always, the kids came up with better ideas than what was written for them by me. David Woollcombe became, perhaps, the first playwright in history whose first instruction to the cast was to tear up his lines and write their own!



*Dominic Maffham in 1981*



*Dominic Now*

At the first performance, the young boy playing the role of the lead boy, Dominic Maffham, asked if

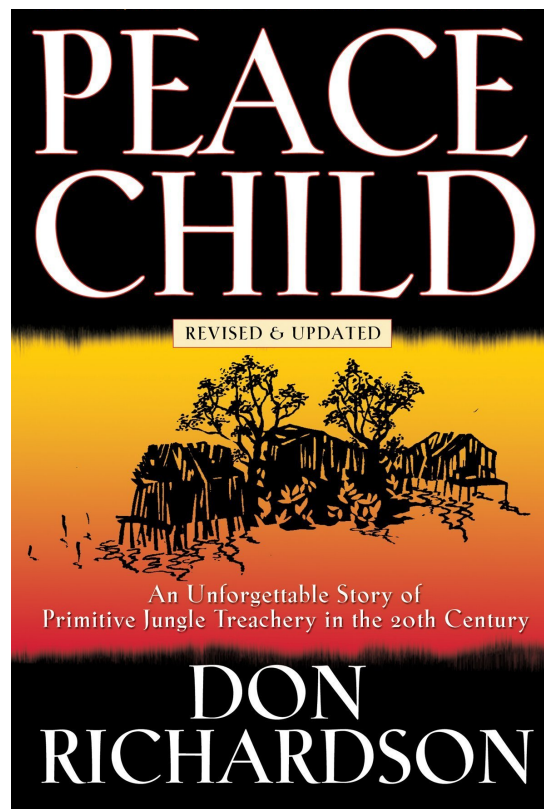


he could improvise his main speech during a TV chat show. I advised him against it - no serious performers ever improvised on stage unless they had to. But Dominic was insistent: he wanted what he said to be spontaneous - from his heart and, of course, at that point, the actor is out on stage by himself in performance so I had no control. He did improvise - and his searching lines were brilliant. Gordon and I agreed that this improvisation at that moment was the high-point of the show as the entire audience moved the edge of their seat as to hear a 12-year old seek to articulate what he so eagerly wanted to say. In doing so, he was enormously empowered - as indeed were all the young cast. In that moment, the mission of Peace Child - "Empowering Young People" - was born.



*Royal Albert Hall – Programme*

By any measure, the performance was a success. The scale was astounding: a 200-voice choir, a 100-piece orchestra; a 5-piece rhythm section, Susannah York as the Story-teller; two star singers and upwards of 30 children + 20 dancers on a huge theatre-in-the-round style stage in the centre of the Royal Albert Hall lit by 5 follow-spots. 3,500 people came - not bad for the first night of a new musical. Noel Baker, Brockway and other dignitaries from the World Disarmament campaign - who had thought the whole initiative by the Harbottles somewhat trivial and ridiculous - were impressed. "*This must be seen in New York!*" they agreed. One audience member, arriving late in the gallery, said that opening the door on to the Peace Child performance, was like leaping, fully-clothed, into a swimming pool of champagne. It had that kind of heady excitement!



There was one final element emerged that night to set the seal on the name, *Peace Child*, and its magic. David's father, Rupert Woollcombe, coming to the show, had been reading a copy of the Listener - something he almost never did. In it, he read of a programme about a Missionary in Papua New Guinea who had adapted one of their tribal practices to put across the message of the Gospel. The BBC's iconic religious affairs correspondent, Gerald Priestland, wrote: *"In Papua New Guinea, when warring tribes made peace, they exchanged a child. Growing up with the other's tribe, the child became one of them - but if, in the future, conflict threatened, each tribe would send out their child from the other side to negotiate the peace. Such a child was called the Peace Child."* Don Richardson, the Missionary, used the story to illustrate how, in the same way, God sent his child, Jesus, to be the intermediary between Himself and humanity. For David, and *Peace Child*, the story confirmed that 'empowering children' to take on peace-building roles was an entirely wise approach, endorsed by indigenous elders. So *Peace Child*, the name, was fixed for the organization, first as Peace Child Foundation, latterly as Peace Child International. And, however much people complain that it sounds flakey - a *"throw-back to the 1960s!"* - the name has stuck. It is a powerful brand. There is a magic in the weave of this name - partly due to the extraordinary people who were the roots of it; partly due to its faith in the children who give leadership to it - and partly due to this magical story from Papua New Guinea which seems to give credence to all our goals for it.



*The exchanging of the Peace Child baby in Papua New Guinea*