

Eirwen Interview – 2017

- 1. Why do you think *Peace Child* is still important to the world?** – “because it tunes in to the arts, to music, to imagination, to poetry at a time when consideration of world affairs is so stultifying in its lack of all these elements which make life worth living. Instead we have argument, endless repetition and now false news. Peace Child has arguments – but it is arguing for a better way to deal with the issues facing us. There is a difference between argument and quarrelling – and what we get with the false news is a lack of any kind of empathy and integrity.”
- 2. What are your best memories of *Peace Child*?** – “I so much love the songs and they have been with me now for nearly 40 years. So when I hear those songs which mean so much to me – and I hear the children’s voices singing these songs that mean so much to me – it is very emotional to me to hear a new group of children singing them – children for whom, I think, Peace Child has been the first time that they have had a chance to think about the problems of the world from a perspective of joy!”
- 3. Do you have a favourite song – or Scene – from *Peace Child*??** – I think *I Want to Live*. That would be my favorite – because we all want to live and, in the play, the children are confronted with the possibility of total extinction. My favourite scene from the Albert Hall was the little group of children clad in their winter clothing singing “Mr President” to the US President – and the whole of the Albert Hall except for the spotlight shining on that little group of children. That song was followed by the scene where the President was so moved to create Peace Day: but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. It was not possible for him. But – of course – later the children hammered away and made Peace Day happen – as of course 4 years later, it was created in the UN by Costa Rica – on the 3rd Tuesday of September. And somehow the children of Peace Child had done the preparation for that. That speaks to my believe that we all play our part – and in the fullness of time, we can all affect change.
On Saturday, I turned round and asked a mother, whose child was in the show, and she said: “*It’s extraordinary! I’ve never thought about these things before – and now my children have shown me the way....*”
- 4. What do you hope the children who do *Peace Child* take away from the experience?** – I hope that they will find the resilience to keep faith with what they have clearly begun to appreciate and understand of the role we all have to play. It is so easy to get laughed out of court by the adults who appear to know everything and who say: “What do children know about such matters?!” At the Albert Hall, the issue was disarmament and, when we suggested to Lords Fenner Brockway and Noel Baker, that we celebrate World Disarmament Week – Fenner in particular was absolutely shattered by this crazy idea: “What do children know about disarmament....” And I said then: “They know far more than you would give them credit for....” And it’s true. It is so easy to dis-credit children’s passion in world affairs when things are going so wrong. So – now we have the sustainable Development Goals – and the extraordinary Blue Planet series on TV – and the facts that are emerging about plastic polluting the oceans, and choking the fish and the sea-birds in unimaginable ways. It is so easy to throw away plastic bags – so I hope that children of each Peace Child show will remember the SDGs – and will know them by heart – and realise that it really is NOT FAIR that such bags should re-appear in the stomachs of dolphins and whales, and poison the coral reefs. And it’s difficult to know exactly how we can shout loud enough to make everyone take notice. BUT there is a bright horizon in a way because big industries are recognising the seriousness of the situation and they need our energy to push them over the edge to new behaviours: “Stop wrapping things in plastic...”

5. **What do you hope the audiences who see *Peace Child* take away from the experience?** – I hope that they will take away the fact that their children can address these sobering issues of our times. I might be wrong – but I think that women are more likely to empathise with the children than maybe their fathers are. But always it comes back to the financial security of the family. If the men-folk shout loudly enough in the criticisms of what their firms are doing, their jobs are at risk – and all the things that they are working so hard to provide for their families will be lost – because they can't keep their mouths shut. It happened over nuclear weapons – but perhaps it is easier now to make environmental protests. But I would like to talk more about it to fathers....
6. **What values do you think a *Peace Child* cast member should be promoting??** – Fairness is the main issue; it is allied, of course, to Justice – which is rather heavy and made more heavy by lawyers. Because every child yelps: “It’s NOT FAIR” – and they are right: it’s not fair that children are thrown out of their homes in Bangladesh, in Syria, and so many places. It’s not fair that people are forced to take to drink because life has become so intolerable.
7. **What would you like the people running the Peace Child Foundation 50 years from now to be focussing upon??** – I certainly think that monetary reform will be need to be properly addressed either then – or before then. Over the work that I’ve done – in the Centre for International Peace-building – peace and security are paramount goals for every generation – including the one in 2067! And so, I think of a conversation I heard in a play when some one said: “Thank God! – peace at last....” And I think that people will want that security of Peace in the future. What does security mean? One friend in Cyprus told me: “Better Locks!” – WHY? To lock up people’s minds; to lock up their tongues, their jewels. That’s not security: that’s insecurity. And another friend found security in the Tsunami by climbing a tree as the foaming waters swirled beneath him. That Tree was security. So I made a pie-chart because, when the Generals for Peace and Disarmament were going to have a meeting just after Gorbachev came to power, their theme was Security – National, International and Personal Security. And so I thought: “What do I think about this question?” – and I made a pie chart, with Financial Security, Environmental Security, Educational Security. And I asked a Jewish girl-friend: “What have I left out?” And she said, “Yes – know your history.” And I gave it to General von Meinfield – the Dutch General – as a joke! And he put it in his pocket – and the next day, he pulled it out – and he’d had it translated into Russian – so he asked me to introduce to all the Generals: “*I know I’m not a general but this is just what one woman thinks...*” And they all thanked me for thinking about this. And the Hungarian General said: “This is the first time we have had something really interesting to talk about....” And the Polish General took it away and pinned it on the wall. So – to EVERY CHILD, I say: Speak up when you can – and don’t mind if you are thought stupid!
8. **What are the main issues you would like *Peace Child*, the musical to focus on right now??** – Environmental issues and the SDGs. The story of money and of usury and the arguments over usury that have been at the heart of most of the world faiths.

MESSAGE from Eirwen and Michael Harbottle, London Centre for International Peacebuilding, to PEACE CHILD on the opening night of the USA/USSR tour, 5th September 1986, York, Pennsylvania.

Five years ago in the Spring of 1981 in our London home we were talking about Bernard Benson's Peace Book and its message that children have much to contribute in the search for world peace. Six months previously we had been present at the remarkable world premiere of David Gordon's oratorio Alpha-Omega with its passionate appeal for human understanding and an end to war and violence.

It was a moment of inspiration in that conversation when Eirwen said, "Don't you think that Bernard and David are saying the same thing? Would it not be marvellous to bring them together in a musical for children!" So PEACE CHILD was born - on a sudden idea.

The story of how that dream became reality is now well known and it explains why PEACE CHILD has become such a part of our lives, with every new success being a matter of joy and pride for us. Its creator and producer, David Woollcombe, is Eirwen's son-in-law and so PEACE CHILD has become a family affair. His and Rosey's dedication and tireless energy have been the basis of its success; but there would have been no success without the open generosity of America in funding the many community productions across the United States and the generosity of spirit of so many people in believing enough to persevere.

It is therefore for these very special reasons that we wish the opening night of this US/USSR production the very greatest success. We send our love and peace to all those American and Russian children who will be part of it, and to the musicians and adults who will support them. We send our thanks and best wishes to all those who have made the tour possible.

And we send to all the other children and parents who will be in the audience a special warm word of welcome. We pray that the story of PEACE CHILD will become a reality for them too.



PEACE CHILD

3977 Chain Bridge Road, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 703-385-4494

Eirwen Harbottle,
London, England.

October 7th 1986

Dear Eirwen,

Thank you for creating the idea of "PEACE CHILD". It has given us all an experience that we will remember for the rest of our lives.

sincerely,

W. J. P.
H. To
A. J. P.
Alvin Barrett
Collin Barry
Alan Hillway
Will Roberts
David R. Woolcombe

Paula Callahan
Katly Hardin
Frank Brown
Muel Lee
Sue Hillway
Klein
Benj.
Erykoff

Stanley
Fernand Sanghety
R. B.
Mary
James
Benj.
Erykoff

The Cast and Crew of the 1986 Soviet American Peace Child Tour

David Woolcombe, President Lucia Effros, Administrator

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Peace Child

DISARMAMENT WEEK 1981 ROYAL ALBERT HALL, 30th OCTOBER 1981

We were told it wouldn't work; that it was over ambitious - a waste of time and effort to attempt an elaborate musical in the Royal Albert Hall a bare ten weeks from the time the script was written. Ambitious, yes. But it did work....3,500 disarmament supporters responded in their applause and shouts of Bravo! to a show which, though a "workshop production", nevertheless frequently rose to heights of compelling power and beauty. Africans and Scandinavians, West Indians and Anglo-Saxons, Jews, Arabs and two small Vietnamese Boat Children, all came together to create a kaleidoscope of the world's problems and hopes, sometimes through dance, sometimes through parodies of international political jockeying, or else in the story of how Peace Day came to be celebrated because children of the world had shown the way. Susannah York was our Storyteller and it was she who made the final moving plea for public commitment to the cause of world peace through disarmament. Dominic Mafham, the 13 year old boy from Kent, needed no prompting as the Peace Child. His passionate concern (and knowledge) poured forth in a torrent of words most of which he had written for himself during the weekends spent being coached by scriptwriter and director, David Woollcombe. Woven through the story - which was adapted from Bernard Benson's internationally successful Peace Book, were David Gordon's lyrical songs, some of which were specially written for the show or else were taken from his oratorio "Alpha-Omega".



"This cannot end here", exclaimed Sean McBride, Nobel prizewinner and president of the International Peace Bureau who was happily in London that evening. "It must be put on during the next UN Special Session!" And this is now one of our targets for SSDII - to enable the two Davids, Gordon and Woollcombe, to find suitable backing and support for its presentation in New York. The original script has been revised and polished and the new show will contain several new songs.

PEACE CHILD has endless possibilities for presentation, either as a full blown musical with symphony orchestra, choir and dance chorus, or as a more simple amateur production for schools and peace groups. David Woollcombe is working overtime preparing appropriate scripts as he tries to catch up on his own work, virtually neglected over the past 6 months.

WDC would like to take this opportunity of expressing publicly our deepest thanks to the two Davids, to all the cast of PEACE CHILD who gave their talents so generously, and to the parents who willingly ferried their children across London for endless rehearsals. We would also like to thank our Buddhist friends for their generous help to finance the show. PEACE CHILD was WDC's expression of hope for the future. We believe a seed has been sown that will in time bear the richest fruit.