

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

What happened before

In 2002 we were invited by Wahaba Karuna (Hawai, USA) to do a weekend in France, following up her outreach work immediately after the Dance Conference, Holland.

As our travel schedule didn't allow for enough time, we passed the INDUP grant for this on to our colleagues Trevor & Glenda Huggons from the UK. They continued the path set out by Wahaba, who has no immediate plans to return to France for the Dances.

In 2003 we were invited to the Lavaldeu Camp in Southern France, an invitation we gladly accepted, as we wanted to get to know the seeds in France from own experience.

There we met with French Catherine, Swiss Lila, Josine (Dutch but living in France, recently certified) and other French people, although the camp basically is run by English people for German dancers.

At the camp we had several talks with the different persons and one longer 'meeting' with all French participants. In this meeting, set up by Wali in his capacity as World Wide Networker, we explained about the Dances, the Network and what else came on our plate.

All in all the camp brought much understanding and peace between the people involved, who all gladly proposed to work together towards creating a Dance scene in France.

At this Camp in Lavaldeu, we were asked to set up a training schedule in France. Even though the numbers are small, residential weekends (preferably not all in the same region) seems the best option indeed to do both outreach work in France and train those who are keenly interested. With more camps and residential weekends in Europe some travel-prone students can get more Dance food easily.

Lavaldeu is deep down in Southern France near the Spanish border. The location is famous for its alleged history with Maria Magdalena (Rennes-le-Chateau) and has a recorded history of the Cathars and Troubadours. Rennes is a bit of a French Glastonbury and many English people live there. The camp is an initiative of an elder English lady, Brigit, who until this year was partly living on the site. She now moved full time to France. The camp originally was taken on by Malika (now Deborah) Green (London) and then turned over to John Bolton, English and living in Germany with his German wife.

The previous year we had been advocates of steering this camp towards a more French oriented camp. Until then the camp drew mainly English and German participants, as the camp originally was an English initiative, turned over to an English Dance teacher, living in Germany.

In 2004, half of the people were French, with the French tongue also the first language, English and German being translated into French throughout.

The previous year we had given up our morning session in favor of a feedback session. This year feedback sessions were part of the program, though not as many as we had proposed. With us presenting a whole morning of Samuel Lewis (dances, talks et cetera) the camp served its purpose in further training people and creating interest for the deeper side of the Dances at the same time.

On our request French Fabienne (Ardèche) was invited as staff member. It was a great learning experience for her. Fabienne and Josine are both our mentees now (Josine co-mentored by Noor Helweg) and they joined forces in offering weekends together. These are all very hopeful signs.

To our delight we met with Mariel, Argentine by birth but now full-blooded Parisienne. She is a certified teacher, mentored by Darvesha. She only came for the weekend, but led some Dances. We will meet her again in Estonia, thanks to Oneness for the grant given to her. Her previous efforts to start the Dances in Paris failed, but who knows what will come out.

This year again we had a meeting with all French people, discussing the future of France in terms of their vision. Apart from some who wanted a fully French Camp, based in Brittany,

France (English model), all were happy with this Lavaldeu Camp. Unfortunately the German/English camp direction didn't attend the meeting, but they approve more or less of the course taken.

We offered these two weekends to both open up and broaden the field, plowed by Wahaba and Trevor and Glenda and sustained over some ten years by Josine Zon, Dutch by birth but living in France for some 15 years. As proposed, Josine was posted as leading the workshop with us.

The first weekend was held in April, 2 – 4, 2004 in La Clé de Sol, south of Lyon. Both the participants and we were enthused and felt France was opening up. The second weekend however, on request scheduled in the same location, for June 4 -6, 2004, had to be canceled, as not enough people signed up. Luckily without financial consequences, if we were to have another weekend at this same venue. Eventually the weekend took place in October, 15 – 17, 2004. Not quite with the attendance the dances drew the first weekend, as many were said to be saving for the longer retreat to come. At this weekend a volunteer offered to do the actual work to produce the French translation of the 101 Manual. Josine as unofficial regent (France is not a region yet) and Wali as WW-Networker will supervise this project. All translation work done in the past (by Belgian Annie Majida de Bondt) is deeply appreciated, as the English language is a big barrier for most French speaking. Fortunately we can offer our workshops partly in French already.

Concluding we can say that – with the help from the Lavaldeu Camp – most of our goals have been met. For this reason we planned to do the longer retreat in the Ardèche. As the Ardèche people are used to dance for free, there is a risk involved, but at the same time our event may work towards a future where the Dances being paid for.

Evaluation

The best evaluation of course is to see France flourishing. This will take some time, as by nature in France spirituality is somewhat shunned and suspicious (as in most southern countries in Europe), so the dances are far from ever becoming main stream or something to talk about as they are in the US and the Netherlands. We meet the same attitude in the French speaking part of Belgium, where we now live. Cautious and slow seem to be the two 'mantras' here, so the work has to be done careful and cautiously, slowly building it up as we go along.

Yet, as Murshid SAM gave his recipe for freedom, liberation and joy, leading to Peace, to the whole worlds, eventually also France will Dance no doubt.

One participant of the Lavaldeu Camp (Dutch by birth, living in Toulouse) signed up for our Dutch training course. His wife will follow the French weekends. For us this again is a sign that the Dances have caught on and are in France to stay. As Amarille, a mentee of Wahaba, is also from Toulouse by birth, this town may be a future place for the Dances to grow locally.

Please find below a letter from one of the participants.

Marie Christine Favé
L'Orangerie,
Les Courans
53200 LONGUEFUYE
tel : 02 43 70 39 16
marie-christine.fave@cam.fr

Dear Wali & Ariënne,

I send you this to thank you for your presence at the weekend of the Dances of Universal peace in Chantemerle Les Blés.

Since my return in Mayenne, in the Western part of France, I feel well in my body and my voice deepened and became more clear. I feel surrounded by the sacred songs and have cherished your teachings with delight.

Part of me is 'not here' as if it is 'somewhere else'. Can it be that the dances have moved my energetic body strongly?

I appreciated the simplicity of the teachings of both of you. The unpretentiousness and the link to every day life (your examples are always very concrete and applicable) has been very apt and good food for me.

With Love,

Lessons learned

1. First of all we again learned that indeed Murshid SAM gave the dances for all, independent of color, race, belief or culture. However, as said above, not all cultures are as prepared to embrace the Dances, so we'll have to accept that the Dances in France will be part of the counter culture for the near future.
2. When we Dance, all differences seem to disappear and the circle could have been in Russia or the Ukraine for that matter. This is not our experience with all circles (sometimes you have to work very hard or it takes a lot of time to crush the shell of culture in order to open deeper layers) but it happened in France.
3. As with other outreach regions, all the work essentially is done in order to find these one or two leaders with enough charisma to work as a magnet for local dancers *and* the willingness to work hard to become a Dance teacher, in spite of all apparent talents. These people are rare, and once found they still may drop out, as the burden to carry a whole country is too heavy, so we have to be patient and we won't make any predictions.