

# Heather Gell and music education in the community

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## Abstract

Kindergartener and Dalcroze teacher, Heather Gell (1896-1988), brought music to thousands of Australian children and adults. The community touched by Gell was vast: it included her classes in studios and teacher training colleges, 'listeners in' to her radio programs, viewers of her television programs, Dalcroze trainees, and people in her theatrical productions. This paper focuses on Gell's work outside institutions and colleges, namely her studio classes in the community for children and adults, and her productions.

Gell was a talented and imaginative teacher. Entrepreneurial and opportunistic, she used networks of support, and her connections with people of influence to achieve her educational goals. She also took advantage of the electronic technologies of the day. Evidence for this has come through interviews with former students, memoirs, letters, newspaper cuttings, scrapbooks, photographs, archival material, Gell's writings, syllabi from Departments of Education, and personal contact with Gell herself. Hers is not a conventional story as she was not employed full-time by any state department of education or institution, but worked all her life as a freelance specialist in Dalcroze Eurhythmics.

**Key words:** Heather Gell, Dalcroze Eurhythmics, community music, studio classes, biography, theatre productions, reputation.

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## Introduction

Gell's work in the twentieth century has been investigated extensively in recent years and assessed in the context of the social and economic conditions at the time.<sup>1</sup> A major biographical study of Gell has shown how she influenced Australian music education for several decades in the twentieth century through her work across several areas, including music in

the community.<sup>2</sup> According to Gordon Cox, biographical research offers a chance to view relationships between educational processes and social change.<sup>3</sup> The research on Gell has revealed several themes in Australian society: the culture of charity and volunteerism in the Kindergarten world before the advent of government funding in the 1970s, the role of the Australian Broadcasting Commission in school education, the effect of the Depression and two world

1. Joan Pope, "ABC School Broadcasts in Western Australia: 1938 - 1946: An Investigation into Radio Programs for Early Childhood featuring Music, Movement and Drama." MEd thesis, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia, 1994; Joan Pope, "Dalcroze Eurhythmics in Australasia – The first generation from 1918." (PhD diss., Monash University, Melbourne, 2008); Jane Southcott, ed. *Dalcroze Eurhythmics from a Distance – a miscellany of recent research*. (Turrumurra NSW: Heather Gell Dalcroze Foundation, 2007).

2. Sandra Nash, "Heather Gell: a Dalcroze influence in Australian Music education 1924 - 1979." PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2011.

3. Gordon Cox, "Transforming Research in Music Education History," in *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning*, eds. Richard Colwell and Carol Richardson. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 695-706.

wars on society and education, women in the workplace, and the pioneering days of dance and theatre. Other themes include music teaching and learning in private studios and informal settings, the role of the free-lance teacher, networks of support, and reputation as a factor in promotion of one's music education objectives.

Research by dance historian Selma Odom into practices and reputation in dance worlds and networks of artists and teachers reveals much about the early reputation of the Dalcroze method and its teachers, or 'insiders'.<sup>4</sup> She notes that many talented young teachers who worked with Jaques-Dalcroze deserve more recognition but this is unlikely 'because the hierarchy of reputation in the arts places higher value on performance than on education.'<sup>5</sup> Surveying the Dalcroze method in more recent times, Odom observes that 'specialists usually are well-known locally and in insider circles, and few achieve great personal renown.' Having examined the lives and work of numerous Dalcroze teachers spanning almost a century, Odom concludes that the majority have been women acting with notable autonomy.<sup>6</sup> Gell was such a person.

Gell's reputation was established in Adelaide in the 1930s and further widened when her radio programs, *Music through Movement* for children were broadcast nationally from 1939 to 1959. These lessons for young children reached homes and classrooms throughout the country. Several earlier studies by Nash and Pope have investigated these radio broadcasts.<sup>7</sup> Gell's reputation in the community as an authority on music education for young children no doubt strengthened her studio enrolments. In both Adelaide and Sydney, Gell conducted classes

for children and adults. Her stage productions involved all these people as well as pre-service kindergarten and Dalcroze teachers. Indeed, the many different areas of Gell's work overlap due to the common thread running through all of them, namely the teachings of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze. His broad-based philosophy of an education in music based on body movement was an inspiration which Gell acknowledged in all that she did.<sup>8</sup> This philosophy embraced ear training, music appreciation, body movement and gesture linked with music, conducting, and the realisation of musical forms in group movement known as *plastique animée*. Gell was attracted to the education of the whole person. She was drawn to the physical aspect of the Dalcroze Eurhythmics and the opportunity to express musical ideas in body movement. With her background in Montessori principles and its emphasis on learning through the senses, she saw the potential in capturing the listening sense through movement.

During Gell's years at the London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics from 1921 - 1923, two of her teachers were Ethel Driver and Annie Beck, who had worked closely with Jaques-Dalcroze at Hellerau, a special school and theatre built for him in 1910 near Dresden by German philanthropists. Driver and Beck taught rhythmic movement and *plastique animée* and Gell was deeply influenced by them, especially their use of music such as Holst's *Earth, Fire and Water* ballet music from *The Perfect Fool*, Debussy's *Nuages* and excerpts from the large scale productions of Jaques-Dalcroze. Gell used these in her own productions, such as *The Bluebird*, later in Australia. In the summer of 1923, staff and students of the London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics, including Gell, visited Geneva to see a summer festival created and directed by 'Monsieur Jaques,' and also to take

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4. Selma Landen Odom, 'Reputation as Collective Practice: Insiders and Mediators of Dalcroze Eurhythmics', *Re-thinking Practice and Theory/Repenser pratique et theorie. Society of Dance History Scholars and Congress on Research in Dance Joint Conference*, (Paris: Centre Nationale de la Danse. 2007): 183 - 189.

5. Ibid., 188.

6. Ibid.

7. S. Nash (2011, 2005, 2004); J. Pope (2007, 1994).

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8. Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1856 – 1950), Swiss composer, teacher and creator of Eurhythmics.

classes with him.<sup>9</sup> Gell was inspired by meeting him, as well as by the atmosphere and the scale of the event. She used excerpts of music by Dalcroze for years afterwards, especially *Le lac*, with its legato phrases in five-time.<sup>10</sup> Gell loved both teaching and 'putting on plays' and realised that she was torn between the two. For Gell, community music activities were both a way for her to satisfy her Thespian aspirations, and also to attract children to her classes because of the lure and appeal of a stage performance. The recognition of community music by governments in recent years indicates that this is now seen as a specific type of music education with its own aims and outcomes. This article focuses on two parts of Gell's 'community': her privately run studios where she taught Dalcroze Eurhythmics, and her theatrical productions.

### **Gell's studio classes**

After graduating as a Dalcroze teacher in London in 1923, Gell established a teaching studio in Hindmarsh Square, central Adelaide, and taught in the Kindergarten Training College, selected schools and kindergartens as a Eurhythmics specialist. The success of her Aural Culture and Dalcroze demonstrations, including one for children at a Music Teachers' Conference in July 1925, drew much attention and enhanced Gell's reputation as a teacher of Eurhythmics and Aural Culture. She was the only South Australian Dalcroze teacher and press advertisements show that she took advantage of her position of exclusivity.

Gell taught young children at all stages of her professional life. Gell taught classes of up to thirty children to follow the music for the natural rhythms of walk, run, skip, gallop and sway, using known songs, excerpts from the piano repertoire and her own improvisation. She presented the elements of music: rhythm, pitch, dynamics and touch variation, by linking sound with movement. Gell's lesson plans reveal a dynamic and imaginative approach and an outstanding ability to appeal to children. The Jaques-Dalcroze approach, 'an education *into* music, *through* music',<sup>11</sup> is centred on music, both composed and improvised, and an outstanding feature of Gell's classes was her dynamic and rich piano improvisation. Children learned to read rhythmic notation using French time-names, sang in solfa, and played un-tuned percussion instruments. Another feature, group conducting, was often shown in Gell's demonstrations because it so clearly illustrated how a child could express his or her own musical ideas and communicate these to the class.<sup>12</sup>

Memories and comments about her children's classes in Adelaide in the early years have been recorded by many former students including historian Helen Jones and teachers Lyndall Hendrikson and Lesley Cox. Jones recalls Gell at the piano in the Currie Street Studio:

*[The piano] seemed to be part of her. I remember her as plump, always calm and rather like a Pied Piper. We children were enfolded in her own warm embrace of the music and movement. I quickly forgot the prickliness of my royal blue woollen bathers and joined the little flock of barefoot children moving in time with the music: walking, skipping, trotting and galloping around the big long room. Miss Gell's voice gave*

9. 'Monsieur Jaques' was a familiar form of address used by friends and family of Jaques-Dalcroze. He was born Emile Jaques, but changed his surname name to Jaques-Dalcroze as a young man on the advice of his publisher in order to distinguish himself from another writer at the time.

10. In the 1970s, the writer remembers doing some Esquisses (movement sketches) by Jaques-Dalcroze with Gell in her adult Eurhythmics classes. She would often finish a lesson with one of his songs, '*Nous ne sommes pas ceux qui sont, Nous sommes ceux qui serront*', as the class danced a chain. 'We are not the children of today, we are those of the future.' (Translation by the writer).

11. "It is important - and it would be imprudent ever to forget - that Eurhythmics is to be considered a form of education through and into music." in Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, '*La grammaire de la rythmique (préparation corporelle aux exercices de la méthode)*', *Le Rythme*, 1926, No 17, 3.

12. This is where the class is grouped in the room and, using a known piece of music with clear phrases, a child 'conductor' indicates the direction for the group to move on each phrase using large, clear arm movements.

*minimum guidance... It was an exhilarating world for a child in the eurhythmics class.*<sup>13</sup>

Gell's classes also influenced future performers. Lyndall Hendrikson, known in Australia for her work as an instrumental teacher and music therapist, recalls Gell's energy and personality, as well as Gell's position in the musical culture of the 1930s:

*What enormous energy she had! [As a child] I used to go to classes from 5 to 6 pm then she had 6 – 7 and 8 – 9 [pm] classes and probably 4 - 5 as well. What power and stamina! What flowed from those classes was that she gave me freedom of movement. I was much more conscious of movement in my violin playing. I would walk around the room. I was loose and that was the Heather Gell influence in my playing. There is no doubt about that.*<sup>14</sup>

Linking the teacher's improvisation and the child's movement is a powerful and exhilarating experience. One reads repeatedly of Gell's ability to help children overcome shyness and self-conscious behaviour.<sup>15</sup> Through being involved in Gell's classes and productions, students developed confidence and assurance. Lesley Cox was one of the first children to join Gell's children's classes in Adelaide, and participated in many demonstrations. Cox recalls how, in 1945, after a demonstration, a school headmistress came up and asked Gell what she was doing:

*and when they had finished talking [Gell] came into the studio and she said to me, "I just want you to follow the music." She played and I followed her [in movement]. Of course this was many years that we had been doing this together, and when we finished the woman was speechless, and I don't think she really believed it was ... made up! And Heather said to the woman, "It is the most satisfying thing to do. It is like playing music on a human body."*<sup>16</sup>

13. Helen Jones, in Lesley Cox, Patricia Holmes, and Joan Pope (compilers), *Recollections: a tribute to Heather Gell by those who remember*. (Eden Hills, Adelaide: Lesley Cox Publications, 1995), 131.

14. *Ibid.*, 115.

15. Cox et al., *Recollections*, (1995).

16. Lesley Cox in the transcript of an interview with Helen Frogley, 10.

This demonstrates Gell's skill as an improviser and illustrates the level of listening and quick movement response Gell developed in her young students. They were able to show what they could hear: step rhythm patterns and conduct the bar-time, and respond to music expressively using free body movement. The excitement of spontaneous creation in Gell's lessons is remembered by many of her students.

When Gell moved to Sydney in 1938, she opened studios in the city and suburbs.<sup>17</sup> Gail Reeves attended Gell's classes at St Philips Church, York Street, in the late 1940s, along with young Nick Yardley, who starred as Tom in Gell's production of *The Water Babies*. In those days, there were few dance and drama classes available for children and according to Reeves, there were between 20 and 30 children in each class:

*Mum knew Nick Yardley's Mum. They were 'arty' people and lived next door to us in Castlecrag. We just loved going to Miss Gell's classes. We went into the city to St Philips Church Hall, York Street. We would go into this big room and just bounce off the walls. It was such fun! I especially liked the preparations for a production and going on stage at the Theatre Royal. When we heard that Leonard Teale was in the cast we were so excited. He was the voice of 'Superman' on Sydney radio, and in those days before television, so many kids listened to it.*<sup>18</sup>

*We did lots of movement and responding to music and group conducting. My favourite thing was what we called 'The Cat's Chorus'. Two children would have to go outside the room, and the class would quietly decide which two songs they would sing simultaneously, without words but making 'cat' sounds. Then the two would*

17. Gell set up her first studio in Philip Street, later moving to St Philips Church, York Street, and then to George Street above Grimes' Garage.

18. *Superman* premiered in a 15 minute serial format on Australian radio on 23rd May 1949. Running four days a week, Monday to Thursday at 6.30 pm it was very popular and benefitted from the fine speaking voice of Leonard Teale who went on to significant success in Australian TV's *Homicide*. The *Superman* series concluded in 1954 after 1040 episodes. <http://www.supermanhomepage.com/radio/radio.php?topic=radio-aus> (Accessed 26/10/2008).

*come in and have to figure out what the two songs were. It was hilarious and we loved it.*<sup>19</sup>

This game shows another side of Gell: she could appeal to children through her sense of humour and mischief. The 'cat' sounds are a marked contrast to the rounded vowels necessary for Gell's radio programs broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission and the noble aspirations of progressive education.<sup>20</sup> Gell believed that lessons should be fun both for her and the children. As a self-employed teacher, she had to win children over and keep them coming to classes, so their enjoyment was paramount.

While some responded to the theatrical elements in Gell's classes, others were drawn to musical aspects. In one instance, Gell was preparing a realisation of the *Two-part Invention*, (F major) by J. S. Bach. After some weeks, the children had memorised their parts and had worked out a realisation in movement for the piece. One of them went home and played the whole piece on the piano.<sup>21</sup> This child went on to study music and become a professional violinist. Gell identified musical ability and nurtured it in the children she taught.<sup>22</sup> Whatever their inclination, the hundreds of children who attended Gell's Eurhythmics classes were also involved in her productions and pageants in Adelaide and Sydney from the 1930s through to the 1960s.

## Gell's productions in Adelaide 1929 – 1938

Having trained as a Kindergartener in Adelaide, Gell was always committed to the cause of the Kindergarten Unions in Adelaide and Sydney. In the days before substantial government funding for early childhood education, Kindergartens were dependent on donations, volunteer help and charity to pay for facilities, buildings, equipment and staff.<sup>23</sup> Each year, Gell put on a demonstration or production involving children and donated the proceeds to the Kindergarten Union of South Australia (KUSA) and other charities such as the Red Cross. These events offered performance opportunities to large numbers of children and adults, sometimes as many as 200 or 300, and generated publicity and enrolments for her classes the following year. There was usually a small orchestra, and she invited leading figures in the community such as Directors of Education and professors from the University, to preside. Gell's close friend Doris Beeston was the secretary of both the KUSA and the Dalcroze Society of South Australia, and in the social milieu of Adelaide from 1924 to 1938, Gell became well known for her community events. She was recognized and warmly acknowledged by society women and patrons of the Kindergarten Union such as Lady Hore-Ruthven and the Lady Mayoress, Mrs. J. L. Bonython. These connections were significant to Gell throughout her years in Adelaide as shown in the press where her name often appeared in reviews and advertisements for her shows.

Gell's Eurhythmics students participated in several large-scale pageants: *The Warrior* (1929),<sup>24</sup> *The Bush Babies Ball* (1933), and the *Toc H Symbolic*

19. Personal communication with Gail Giuliano (formerly Reeves), who attended Gell's classes from 1948 to 1972. She took part in Gell's productions of *The Blue Bird*, *Water Babies*, *Pied Piper* and *The Enchanted Tree*. She attended Sydney University and the Nursery School Training College, Newtown, and joined the Dalcroze professional training course with Gell in 1957. Interviewed in Canberra, July 16, 2009.

20. See Nash (2011) and Pope (1994).

21. A realization of an invention could involve half the class showing the treble voice in movement, the others showing the bass line. This was usually done by stepping the actual rhythm, so of course it was all memorised.

22. Personal communication with this child's mother, Maureen Travers, a retired music teacher and pianist, Sydney, 2005.

23. Federal Government funding for Early Childhood Education in Australia was introduced in the 1970s.

24. *The Warrior* was written by Nora Collison, regarded in Adelaide at the time as an expert in pageantry. The producer was an expatriate Australian, Kenneth Duffield.

*Pageant* (1934).<sup>25</sup> In December 1933, Gell followed her annual demonstration with Maeterlinck's *Bluebird* at Adelaide's Theatre Royal. Alex Burnard, reviewing for *The Advertiser* was struck by the originality of the ideas and the 'unerring taste of the costumes'.<sup>26</sup> While featuring music by Holst and Jaques-Dalcroze, Gell also used works by Adelaide composer, Horace Perkins: *Icicles, Snow and Cold in the Head*. Perkins played the piano, and led a small chamber orchestra. Burnard's colourful description conveys the flavour of arts reviews in the 1930s:

*Many of the "group movements" were quite startling in their imaginative power. Alan Harkness (the Spirit of Fire)... was the devouring monster, flickering and leaping – only to be dashed into hissing impotence at the advent of water (Thelma Thomas). Those wave undulations were quite marvelous; and the war frenzy (Helen Parsons)... Let me commend to those with a taste for the 'macabre,' the skeletons and ghosts; and for sheer realism the impression of brittle, metallic crispness conveyed by the 'Machinery' ballet would be hard to beat. All these ... go to make up a highly entertaining and graceful fantasy, and the whole redounds to the credit of Miss Gell's power of organization and interpretative skill...<sup>27</sup>*

Maeterlinck's play is about a girl Mytyl and her brother, Tytyl and their search for happiness, represented by the 'Bluebird of Happiness'.<sup>28</sup> The play embodied spiritual and moral values and consciously or not, Gell had an affinity with the play's message: that happiness was not

dependent on material luxuries, and that the dreams of children had to be fulfilled in a joyful way. The play's symbolism included the Palace of Night with its ghosts, plagues, stars and terrors; the Palace of Luxuries; and the Gardens of Happiness. The Azure Halls of The Kingdom of the Future are inhabited by the countless souls of children not yet born. The play reinforced the idealistic view of childhood embraced by progressive educators. Gell would present it again in 1940, 1948, 1959 and 1965.<sup>29</sup> A summary of Gell's productions from 1929 to 1965 is given in Tables 1, 2, and 3 at the end of this paper, noting the date, venue, conductor, and the donation of proceeds for each one.

In April 1934, Gell directed a large-scale display of Girl Guides on the Adelaide Oval as a farewell tribute to their chief commissioner, Lady Hore-Ruthven, wife of the governor of South Australia.<sup>30</sup> More than 20,000 people watched 5,000 Guides take part in a colourful pageant of children, brightly dressed as flowers, who formed a human garden. They moved in time with the music: opening and closing, rising and falling, travelling in pathways and circles. Gell coordinated other dance schools and eurhythmics groups, and afterwards, she received a hand-written letter of support and appreciation from the governor's wife. This friendly association would continue for years to come.

Gell continued to present demonstrations and nativity plays throughout the 1930s: Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies*, a popular play for children in 1934, and *Fulfillment - a Biblical Fantasy*, in 1935.<sup>31</sup> The Adelaide papers

25. ToC H was a service organisation set up by an Australian army chaplain in Belgium during the First World War. Its purpose was 'to provide basic comforts and refuge for young men going to and from the front lines. It was a place to refresh the body and cheer the soul, where rank played no part.' It was introduced to Australia in 1925. <http://www.toch.org.au/> (Accessed 10 July, 2010).

26. Thelma Afford's scrapbook, a cutting from the Adelaide *Advertiser* (12 Dec. 1933), "The Blue Bird" – Grace, Colour and Music at Royal.

27. Review by Dr Alex Burnard in the *Advertiser*, (Dec. 1933). Burnard (1900-1971) later moved to Sydney where he taught on the staff of the NSW State Conservatorium of Music. His textbook, *Harmony and Composition* was published in 1950.

28. The play was first produced in September 1908 at Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Blue\\_Bird\\_\(play\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Blue_Bird_(play)) (Accessed 12/11/2009).

29. When the writer met Gell in the 1970s, she referred to the children wearing royal blue leotards in her Eurhythmics classes as 'little bluebirds.'

30. Lord Hore-Ruthven, KCMG, was Governor of South Australia, 1928-1934.

31. Gell acknowledged the influence of Mona Swann, headmistress of Moira House, a progressive school in Eastbourne, where Swann had developed 'Language Eurhythmics' or speech and drama work based on Dalcroze principles. Gell had visited Moira House during her 1930 visit to England, and had seen Swann's play, *The Road to Emmaus*. This inspired Gell to use portions of it in *Fulfillment*.

commended Gell's work: 'Sheer Beauty Charms in Christmas Drama,' from *The Express*, and 'The most ambitious venture yet attempted by Gell,' and 'a magnificence of colour, movement, wonderful grouping and light' in the *Advertiser*. Thelma Thomas's costumes drew high praise. For a scene in Pharaoh's court, Gell used Ravel's *Bolero*, composed just seven years earlier, with its persistent rhythm to suggest the stillness of Egyptian art; 'the whole thing strikingly costumed in black and gold and half of the performers carried great fans shaped like the palm leaf and emblazoned with gold and rich colours.'<sup>32</sup> The music of Ravel and Debussy was still regarded as modern at this time and was rarely performed.

In 1933, Gell joined *Ab Intra*, an experimental theatre group with a different emphasis founded in Adelaide in 1931 by actor Alan Harkness, and Kester Baruch, a writer and lighting designer.<sup>33</sup> They believed that the strength of their work must come 'from within oneself'.<sup>34</sup> Others in the group included actors Agnes Dobson, Patricia Hackett, and Robert Helpmann, and dancers Mina Bauer, Walter Dasborough, and Joan Joske from Melbourne.<sup>35</sup> The group sought a fresh approach to theatre and became well known for presenting 'works of beauty and the unusual' in a small intimate space.<sup>36</sup> The theatre was a large room off King William Street where 'the audience sat on large satin cushions, inhaled large amounts of incense, and were prepared for the play by Japanese gongs beaten to weird music churned forth from the Edison.'<sup>37</sup> *Ab Intra's* repertoire had a strong symbolist bias and included dance and

mime, sometimes with poetry.<sup>38</sup> Gell appears to have had an effect on the other members of the group, as they not only collaborated but also 'fell under her spell'. Harkness and Baruch joined Gell's adult Eurhythmics class, taking part in *plastique* interpretations of the music of Bach, Debussy (*La fille aux cheveux de lin* and *L'après midi d'un faun*), Chopin, Cyril Scott, Jaques-Dalcroze and Walford Davies.<sup>39</sup> Gell also improvised at the piano. The lighting and costumes were significant in these performances. Although the theatre closed in 1935 when Harkness and Baruch left for London, others in the group would continue working with Gell throughout the 1930s.

The *Heritage* production of 1936, a celebration of one hundred years since the founding of South Australia, was the climax of Gell's theatrical career in Adelaide. Her association with the experimental *Ab Intra* theatre provided a network of support that she was now able to call upon. Gell relished the opportunity to combine music, movement, language, costumes, and set design. She was also indefatigable. Gell's papers at the State Library of South Australia contain numerous newspaper cuttings, articles and reviews about the pageant. Much information including the full script and the performance program is available due to the work of Lesley Cox, who in 1976 recorded and transcribed detailed interviews about *Heritage* with Gell and the writer, Ellinor Walker.<sup>40</sup>

The Wall Street crash of 1929 brought unemployment and despair to many across

32. *The Express*, Dec 20, 1935.

33. Kester Baruch was a pseudonym for his real name, Frank Perkins. Denton in *Joanna Priest*, spells his name 'Berwick'.

34. Thelma Afford quoted in Denton, M. *Joanna Priest- her place in Adelaide's dance history*, 1993. Adelaide: Joanna Priest.

35. Helpman (with one 'n' at that time) took part in a 1932 production.

36. 'Ab Intra Studio Theatre' entry in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, Sydney: (Currency Press, 1995).

37. Peter Ward quoted in Denton, *Joanna Priest*, 1993, 30.

38. Repertoire included plays by Leonid Andreyev, Clifford Bax, Jacques Copeau, Nicolai Evreinov, Luigi Pirandello, August Strindberg and Thornton Wilder. See entry on 'Ab Intra Studio Theatre,' in *Companion to Theatre*, (1995).

39. Gell's adult class included Lucy Willoughby, Margaret Cox, Lesley Cox, Shirley Stevens, Doris Beeston, Helen Parsons and Thelma Thomas. *Plastique* or *plastique animée* is the term used by Jaques-Dalcroze to describe the realization of musical form in movement.

40. Lesley Cox joined Gell's Adelaide classes as a child in 1923 and continued eurhythmics as an adult, qualifying as a Dalcroze teacher in 1957. She founded the Lesley Cox School of Music and Drama in 1950. Photocopies of these interviews and the program are in the possession of the researcher.

Australia. Unemployment nearly doubled between 1927 and 1929, going from 6 percent to 11 percent. The Scullin Federal Government restricted immigration, gave a million pounds to alleviate the plight of the unemployed, and increased tariffs to protect Australian industries. Commodity prices fell and because South Australia was largely dependent on primary industry, Adelaide suffered more than other capital cities. This was the social environment in which Gell was working when she was approached by the Women's Centenary Council to produce *Heritage*. The honorary secretary was Gell's friend and ardent supporter, Beeston, well known for her skills as an organizer.<sup>41</sup> Gell was invited to direct the whole production using scripts by herself and by Ellinor Walker. The role of Beeston is significant because, in Gell's words, she was able to convince all connected with the production, to trust Gell, and to help her 'do it her way.'<sup>42</sup>

The production was held in the Tivoli Theatre over ten nights from September 23, 1936.<sup>43</sup> A large quantity of green and blue Japanese cotton crepe material, a fabric that would respond to different lighting effects, provided the backdrop, legs and proscenium drop. Gell chose simple and sparse staging, allowing space for crowds and action, with some 'gum-tree trunks' that disappeared up into the "flies" at the top, and a fixed flight of five or six steps stretching the full width of the stage.<sup>44</sup> Gell rehearsed the cast of some 400 amateurs every day for a month before the opening. She had started rehearsing her own pupils and students a year before and throughout the year, assembled the many additional inexperienced people to work on grouping, gesture and stage movement.

41. Beeston was the first secretary of the Dalcroze Society of South Australia, formed in 1924 (see Chapter 2). She also participated in Gell's adult Eurhythmics classes and stage presentations.

42. *Prelude to Production*, (1976), 1.

43. The Tivoli Theatre in Grote Street, Adelaide, was later rebuilt and renamed 'Her Majesty's.'

44. *Prelude to Production*, (1996), 4.

The production saw the cooperation and collaboration of many groups and individuals in the community, a fact mentioned by Sheila Martin (later Wesley-Smith) who played The Spirit of South Australia, and Helen Jones, who was a gum-nut in *Heritage*.<sup>45</sup> Children from Gell's studios took part as did young women from The Kindergarten Training College. Miriam Hyde who composed much of the original music, wrote:

*Heritage involved the community in many ways: composers, orchestral players, part-copyists (no photocopying machines yet, remember), costume designers, ballet dancers, narrators and lighting technicians. The action on the stage, especially as there were some very youthful performers and amateur groups, was not always of the same duration, so the music required optional repeat bars and sometimes a very attenuated rallentando, while the last few 'opals' and 'maggies' disappeared into the wings.*<sup>46</sup>

Thelma Thomas from *Ab Intra* days, designed over a hundred costumes and painted the scenery, and was a key figure in the artistic success of *Heritage*.<sup>47</sup> Thomas met Gell almost daily to discuss the designs she had drawn and painted.<sup>48</sup> Teams of volunteer women worked for six months making costumes and accessories. Other collaborators were electricians, employees of the Post Master General's Department and experts in speech training. Gell again invited Adelaide's dance teachers to participate: Walter Dasborough as the mischievous Banksia Man was surrounded

45. Sheila Wesley-Smith passed away early in 2010. The researcher had spoken to her by telephone a year earlier and she became very animated when talking about *Heritage*. Her sons Peter and Martin are known for their Australian works in music and drama as well as their political activism.

46. Miriam Hyde, *Complete Accord*. Sydney: Currency Press, 1991, 81.

47. Thomas (1908 – 1996) studied at the Melbourne Art School and George Bell's studio. She was artist to the Collins Street costumier designer, Pierre Fornari who was J. C. Williamson's theatre costume designer for their spectacular productions, and she designed symbolic, interpretative costumes for the 1934 Centenary Pageant of Nations in the Melbourne Town Hall.

48. Thomas designed over a hundred costumes for *Heritage* and many of these drawings are now held in libraries in the State Library of South Australia, the Mitchell Library in Sydney, the National Library of Australia and in the Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

by a group of dancers 'on pointe' from Wanda Edwards' studio representing the Spider Orchids.<sup>49</sup>

The pageant told the history of South Australia: the first Australians, the early explorers, the struggles of the early white settlers, and the State's achievements in education, women's rights, transport, communications and primary industry. From the start, Gell featured music by South Australian composers. Musicians from the Elder Conservatorium of Music and the University included John Horner, Dr. E. Harold Davies, Hooper Brewster-Jones and Dr. Thomas Draper Campbell.<sup>50</sup> Gell gained permission from Percy Grainger to use his *Up Country Song*.<sup>51</sup> Hyde was still a student in London when she wrote *The Adelaide Overture*, a work which stood alone and was conducted in 1936 by Malcolm Sargent.<sup>52 53</sup> Hyde's *Fantasia on Waltzing Matilda*, an overture to one of the scenes, has become well known as an independent piece in her various arrangements.<sup>54</sup>

In Part I of the pageant, the trials of the pioneers were shown by groups of eurhythmic students depicting *Drought*, *Dust*, and *Bushfire*. In the Bushfire scene, a spark lit up the stage: rhythmicians appeared from one side, close to the ground, creeping along 'burning' the grasses

and trees until they covered the full stage. Hyde's dramatic music is in five time, 'with darting tongues of flame from the woodwind, cleverly portrayed on the stage by dancers with long filmy red and orange scarves licking at gum tree trunks.'<sup>55</sup> The piano score indicates actions on stage: 'skips,' 'run,' 'flames,' 'triplet running,' 'leaps,' '2 leaps then 3 swishes.' Towards the end, Hyde has written, 'Fire fighters stand triumphant' above a broad, noble theme in E flat major.<sup>56</sup> Gell would have described the kind of movement she wanted, and Hyde turned this into a coherent and colorful orchestration for woodwinds, brass, horns, strings, percussion and piano.

The presentation of 'The Wheat Industry' in Part III opened to flowing music in five time. Some fifty young women in sunray-pleated yellow satin dresses stood close together, and with their bare arms held high, gave the impression of a waving wheat field, moving rhythmically to Hyde's music. The strings played rising and falling arpeggios over which floated a haunting clarinet solo. At the entry of the reaping machines, this changed to a strong, rhythmic ostinato played by the brass. High woodwinds then entered playing the same rhythm in augmentation, building up the texture. For the final scene, 'Fruit and Wine,' Hyde took the traditional nursery tune, *Oranges and Lemons* as thematic material, which led into a fragment of Mendelssohn's Wedding March. Her music for the final scene, 'Wine' was a heady waltz, *Bacchanalian Revelry*, featuring a giant champagne glass in which sat 'The Spirit of Wine.'

A scene that attracted much attention from the press was the opening of the Overland Telegraph from Adelaide to Darwin in 1872.<sup>57</sup> A live electric

49. Joanne Priest and Nora Stewart also loaned their teachers and students.

50. Horner had joined the staff of the Elder Conservatorium in 1928 as a young twenty year old and became known as a talented all-round musician, and teacher of piano, organ and theory. He sought out new music, and established a hand-picked a capella choir, The Lydian Singers, which featured in *Heritage*. His connection with Gell continued into the 1940s when he conducted the orchestra for her 1946 Adelaide production of *The Pied Piper*. Dr T. D. Campbell was the Head of the University's Dentistry Department and a keen amateur musician. He had travelled to Central Australia several times and saw the possibilities for conducting anthropological studies there among the Australian aborigines.

51. Gell, *Prelude to Production*, 3.

52. Hyde was studying performance and composition in the 1930s with R. O. Morris at the Royal College of Music, London.

53. The Gell papers at the State Library of South Australia (SLSA) hold materials relating to *Heritage*, including photographs, newspaper cuttings, and Miriam Hyde's manuscripts of the piano arrangements for many of the scenes such as 'Wheat,' 'Fire' and 'Fruit Growing (Oranges)'. SLSA, PRG 633/29/8.

54. <http://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/artist/hyde-miriam>. (Accessed 23/9/2010).

55. Miriam Hyde, *Complete Accord*, (Sydney, Currency Press, 1991), 81.

56. Miriam Hyde's unpublished manuscripts for *Heritage* in Gell papers, SLSA, PRG 633/29/8.

57. The first message was sent on 21 October 1872 by the South Australian Governor, Sir James Ferguson, to Lord Kimberly in England. Ellinor Walker had searched widely to find the exact wording of both the messages from Ferguson to Lord Kimberly and then his reply. The governor's message was: 'Telegraphic communication established this day between Australian colonies and England. Landline working without interruption since 22 August.' *Prelude to Production*, 17.

wire was stretched diagonally across the stage with two telegraphists at either end, sitting at their machines. Gell, having learned Morse code at the Post Office, taught dancer Dorothy Slane the rhythm of the Governor's message as a tap-dance, to synchronize with the rhythm of the Morse code operators. Her wired up headdress antennae and hand-held 'castanets' sparked as they made contact with the wire. Slane wore a close-fitting black leotard and tights, bound with silver strips spiraling from neck to feet to represent wires, see Figure 1.<sup>58</sup> Gell's flair here demonstrates her courage and creative daring to overcome technical hurdles. Even braver was Dorothy Slane for risking possible electrocution.

The appetite of the public was whetted by numerous press accounts in the lead up to the production. Adelaide newspapers *The Advertiser*, *The News* and *The Mail*, and national journals such as *The Bulletin*, *Truth*, *The Express*, *Homes and Gardens*, *Women's Weekly* and *Smith's Weekly* gave extensive publicity and reviews acknowledging Gell's achievement. As a consequence, Gell's place as a major figure in the artistic life of Adelaide was affirmed: she enjoyed public acclaim and social status, and the name 'Heather Gell' became a household name. Gell's acceptance by society would secure enrolments at her studio, and in her schools. Fascinatingly, the niche Gell had carved out for herself did not fit the usual boundaries: she was an authority on music teaching with strong links to the Elder Conservatorium; as well, she could direct stage productions. Through her work, Gell had developed a network of like-minded people in the fields of music, dance and drama. She was a promoter of 'culture' in the community. Even though Gell had proved herself as a producer of a large-scale community pageant such as *Heritage*, the absence of a separate entry

Figure 1: 'Morse Code - Overland Telegraph' costume designed by Thelma Thomas for Heritage, South Australia's Centenary Pageant directed by Heather Gell. Part II Scene 8. Image courtesy of the State Library of South Australia.



Image catalogue number: SLSA: PRG 689/1. [http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/women\\_and\\_politics/thelma-a.htm](http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/women_and_politics/thelma-a.htm) (Accessed 25/7/2007).

for her in the *Companion to the Theatre in Australia* (1995) is a serious omission.<sup>59</sup>

Following the success of *Heritage*, Gell sailed to London where, in 1937 she attended courses on school music, movement technique, speech

58. Heather Gell in *Prelude to Production*, 17. Dorothy Slane was a leading dance teacher in Adelaide.

59. *The Companion to the Theatre in Australia*. Philip Parsons ed. with Victoria Chance. (Sydney: Currency Press, 1995). Afford, mentions Gell in her entries on Ab Intra, the Adelaide University Theatre Guild and herself. In the *Companion to Music and Dance in Australia* published some years later, there is an entry on 'Eurhythmics' by Pope in which she refers to Gell and other teachers. *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*. John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Mitchell, eds. (Sydney: Currency House Inc. 2003).

and movement. She also joined courses on lighting, mime, improvisation, and mask exercises with Michel Saint-Denis at the London Theatre Studio.<sup>60</sup> Saint-Denis by this time was trying to foster an attitude to acting that derived from the methodical training of the continent rather than the 'Olympian' casualness of the British.<sup>61</sup> Gell capitalized on her European experiences, relishing the *frisson* of her brush with continental theatre. All this, including another trip to Geneva to see a Eurhythmics festival by the lake with music by Jaques-Dalcroze, was reported in the Adelaide papers.<sup>62</sup>

### **Gell's productions in Sydney 1938 – 1965**

Gell moved to Sydney in late 1938 and immediately used stage work already done in Adelaide for a new audience. The war years 1939 to 1945 were possibly the best years for Gell and her productions in this period have been covered extensively in an earlier study.<sup>63</sup> She spread her time between presenting radio broadcasts for children, teaching in colleges, schools and studios, and preparing shows as shown in Table 2. Outstanding among these were *The Bluebird* (1940), *La Rythmique* (1941), *The Water Babies* (1943), *The New Jerusalem* (1943, 1944, 1945), and *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (1945, 1946).

When Gell arrived in Sydney, British culture still dominated Australian thinking. During the

1930s and 1940s by and large, the theatre-going public regarded Australia as a vast paddock on the outskirts of the civilization of Europe.<sup>64</sup> People had barely recovered from the privations of the 1930s Depression when Australia was plunged into World War 2. Government funding for social welfare programs and kindergartens was almost non-existent. Open-air pageants, volunteerism, fund-raising charity events and support for the Red Cross were part of life for Australian communities in the 1930s and 1940s. Apart from the touring commercial productions of J. C. Williamson it was largely an amateur theatre scene and it would not be until the 1950s that theatre in Australia was able to shake itself free from its colonial past and find an authentic voice.<sup>65</sup>

During the 1930s, visiting ballet companies created a wave of enthusiasm for ballet around the country. Australia also represented a safe haven for European dancers and artists fleeing political persecution such as the Borovanskys in Melbourne,<sup>66</sup> and Gertrud Bodenweiser in Sydney.<sup>67</sup> Gell was aware of modern dance trends in Europe because movement technique within her Dalcroze training shared the same

60. Saint-Denis (1897-1971) was a nephew of the French director Jacques Copeau, and his ideas of actor training had a profound influence on the development of European theatre from the 1930s onwards. In 1936, along with George Devine and Marius Goring, he opened the London Theatre Studio. Saint-Denis directed actors such as Peggy Ashcroft, Michael Redgrave, Alec Guinness, Peter Ustinov, and John Gielgud.

61. Michael Billington, *Peggy Ashcroft*, (London: John Murray Publishers, 1988), 96.

62. Gell's notebooks on performances she attended contain lists of actors, comments on lighting, and hastily drawn sketches of costumes and sets. Notebooks in the possession of Joan Pope, Perth.

63. Sandra Nash, 'Spinning a vision: Heather Gell's life and work during the war years 1939 – 1945', *Proceedings of the XXVIIth Annual Conference, Australian Association for Research in Music Education*, (2005), 106 – 116.

64. Geoffrey Serle, *From the desert prophets come*. (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1973). Original source H.G. Kippax in *Australian Society*, A. F. Davies and S. Encel eds., (Melbourne, 1965).

65. Repertory companies such as Doris Fitton's Independent Theatre and the New Theatre were founded in 1930 and 1932 respectively.

66. Edouard Borovansky or 'Boro' was a key person in the development of the Australian Ballet.

67. Bodenweiser (1890-1959) fled Vienna with her music director and modern dance company. She was trapped in Australia in 1939 by the declaration of war in Europe, and was to remain for 20 years. Bodenweiser had been the head of the dance department of the State Academy of Theatre Arts in Vienna. She evolved her own style of expressive dancing, an offshoot of Laban's modern dance. Laban's artistic ideas were best fulfilled by two of his students, Kurt Joos and Mary Wigman in the German 'Expression Dance' (*Ausdruckstanz*). Wigman had studied with Dalcroze at Hellaerou. Salter, 115. In her monograph, Bodenweiser a chapter each to Jaques-Dalcroze and Laban. Gertrud Bodenweiser. *The New Dance*, with foreword by Marie Cuckson, republished privately by Marie Cuckson, Sydney. (no date). See also H. Reitterer, Marie Cuckson, Bodenweiser, Gertrud (1890 - 1959), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 13, (Melbourne University Press, 1993), 209-210.

**Table 1: Productions directed by Gell, or incorporating her work, in Adelaide from 1929 – 1938.<sup>a</sup>**

Year	Title	Music	Theatre	Place	Proceeds to
1929	'Warrior' pageant (collaboration)	Orchestra conducted by John Horner	Theatre Royal	Adelaide	
1929	La rythmique	Orchestra conducted by Eric Laughlin	Prince of Wales Theatre	Adelaide	Kindergarten Union of SA
1931	Adeste Fideles	Piano and cello, vocalists.	Tivoli Theatre	Adelaide	
1932	Adeste Fideles		Theatre Royal	Adelaide	Charity
1933	Dalcroze demonstration & The Blue Bird	Grand piano and amplifier. Some pieces composed by Horace Perkins.	Theatre Royal	Adelaide	Charity
1933	Ab Intra presentation.	Piano: Heather Gell & Marjorie Bonnin.	Ab Intra, William Street	Adelaide	
1934*	Adeste Fideles	St Andrews Choir, Walkerville	University of Adelaide		
1934	Adeste Fideles	Piano: M. Bonnin St Andrews Choir, Walkerville	Theatre Royal	Adelaide	
1934 Aug	Toc H pageant (Collaboration, with scenes from The Bluebird)	Unley City Orchestra	Palladium	Adelaide	Welcome to Governor and Lady Dugan
1934 Nov	Dalcroze demonstration and The Water Babies	Piano: Heather Gell, assisted by Alethea Upton. <sup>b</sup> Grand piano and amplifier.	Tivoli Theatre	Adelaide	
1934 April	Girl Guides Garden Festival		Adelaide Oval	Adelaide	Farewell to Commissioner, Lady Hore-Ruthven
1935	Fulfilment	Beethoven Symphony No. 9; Ravel's Bolero	Tivoli Theatre	Adelaide	Kindergarten Union
1936	Heritage	Orchestra, 34 players. Conductor: John Horner. Music by Australian composers.	Tivoli Theatre	Adelaide	SA Women Pioneers Memorial; Aerial Medical Service.
1938	The Coming of Christ by John Masefield	Conductor: John Horner Choir: The Lydian Singers.	University Theatre Guild	Adelaide	

\* Evidence for this event is yet to be confirmed.

a. Sandra Nash, "Heather Gell: a Dalcroze influence in Australian music education 1924 – 1979." PhD thesis, University of Sydney, (2011). 84.

b. Alethea Upton, (later Eddy).

foundations.<sup>68</sup> Lyricism and expression, and a new approach to space and plastic form were some of the features of the new dance. Some of its leading exponents, including Mary Wigman, Hanya Holm, Rosalie Chladek and Marie Rambert, had studied with Jaques-Dalcroze or his students. Presenting ballet or modern dance was not Gell's area and Eurhythmics students were not 'dancers.' Gell's students developed aural perception and rhythm, learned to conduct, read music, and expressed music through movement. With such a split focus, there was not enough time to develop expertise in both music and movement. However, in the post-war period, many families could not afford private music lessons for their children, and attending Gell's Eurhythmics classes was a way for children to learn the rudiments of music and at the same time have the opportunity to perform in her stage productions.

The war years, 1939 to 1945 also saw the formation of the Australian Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), founded by singer, Dorothy Helmrich. Headlines such as 'New Body Plans Better Culture'<sup>69</sup> and 'A Country at War Needs Entertainment', heralded the Council's aims.<sup>70</sup> Photographs in *Pix* magazine show singers and ballet dancers with full orchestra performing for dockyard and factory workers during their lunch breaks.<sup>71</sup> Helmrich and others

wanted to bring culture into the community, widely regarded as a 'cultural desert.' Gell's vision was to bring music and movement into people's lives and the symbolism in her plays served to convey a message of beauty and morality. There was little else for children in the way of live entertainment at this time and Gell was willing to contribute to the cause of cultural improvement.

Through her radio programs for the Australian national broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), Gell was widely recognized as an authority on music for children. The ABC was modeled on the British Broadcasting Corporation which represented 'high culture.' Part of Gell's rationale was that her programs would cultivate the listening sense, and eventually create future audiences for the ABC's Celebrity Concerts. At that time, the ABC also ran the symphony orchestras in the various states and Gell was not shy in using her connections with ABC management to assist with her productions.<sup>72</sup> When Gell produced *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, in 1945,<sup>73</sup> she negotiated persistently with the general manager of the ABC, Charles Moses, to obtain the services of musicians from the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.<sup>74</sup> A 'most enthusiastic and co-operative' young oboist in the orchestra at that time, Charles Mackerras, offered to conduct.<sup>75</sup> While the ABC was not able to donate the services of the musicians, the Commission allowed the musicians to decide for themselves, providing it did not interfere with their orchestral duties. Having asked for 32 players, she succeeded

68. Gell had taken modern dance technique classes in London in 1937 with Dalcroze graduates Henrietta Rosenstrauch, and Louise Soelberg. Rosenstrauch had also taught Eurhythmics in Frankfurt and Mainz. Soelberg was an American dancer, originally from the Cornish School in Seattle. She and fellow American, Margaret Barr, were resident choreographers at Dartington Hall in the early 1930s, a Utopian community in Devon. Barr migrated to Australia later in her life and established the Margaret Barr Dance/Drama Group in Sydney.

69. *Daily Telegraph*. Sept., 1944.

70. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Nov., 1944.

71. *Pix* magazine, March 10, 1945. These newspaper cuttings about CEMA were found in the papers relating to the Creative Leisure Movement, Mitchell Library, Sydney. MS 7550 Box 15X. In 1946, CEMA became the Arts Council of Australia with Helmrich as vice-president, then president. In 1967 the volunteer council was superseded by the Australian Council of the Arts. Helmrich (1889-1984) was a teacher of singing at the NSW State Conservatorium of Music from 1941 to 1974. <http://200australianwomen.com/names/141.html>. (Accessed 24/10/07).

72. Nash, 'Spinning a vision,' 2005.

73. Script by Catherine Shepherd after the poem of Robert Browning. Shepherd wrote radio plays for the ABC. In the late 1930s and 1940s when serious theatre still barely existed, the radio play was almost the only outlet for dramatists and provided as much employment for actors as the stage. Other writers for the radio included Sydney Trumholt, Edmund Barclay, G. L. Dunn, Max Afford, Alexander Turner, Gwen Meredith and Douglas Stewart. In Geoffrey Serle, *From the desert prophets come*, 159.

74. From the 1930s, the symphony orchestras in Australia were administered by the ABC.

75. Gell, handwritten letter to Charles Moses, 29 October 1945. ABC archives, *Music Through Movement* file.

**Table 2: Productions by Heather Gell between 1938 and 1946.<sup>a</sup>**

Year	Title	Conductor/pianist	Theatre	Proceeds to
1938 Dec	Adeste Fideles	Orchestra and choir by courtesy of Dr. Bainton	Children's open air theatre, Boomerang St & Haig Ave. East Sydney	The Children's Library Movement
1939 May	Lady Gordon's Matinee with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra	Heinrich Krips	Theatre Royal Sydney	Sydney Day Nursery & Nursery School Association
1939 Dec	Nativity Play		Minerva Theatre Kings Cross Sydney	Newtown and Frank Saywell Free Kindergartens.
1940 Dec	The Bluebird by Maeterlinck	Pianist: Daphne Harpur	Minerva Theatre Kings Cross Sydney	Red Cross
1941 May	La Rythmique	Pianist: Mary Jolley	Tivoli Theatre Adelaide	The Doris Beeston Memorial Building at the KTC
1941 Dec	La Rythmique	Pianists: Heather Gell and Dorothy Cox	NSW State Conservatorium of Music, Sydney	The Red Cross and KU
1943 Dec	The Water Babies	Pianists: Heather Gell & Joan Esmond	Kings Theatre Lindfield	KUNSW
1944 Dec	The New Jerusalem	Soprano: Joyce Atkins, recordings of orchestral music	Independent Theatre North Sydney	Lady Gowrie Scholarship fund
1945 April	The New Jerusalem		Tivoli Theatre Adelaide*	KUSA
1945 Dec	The Pied Piper of Hamelin	Charles Mackerras	Theatre Royal Sydney	KUNSW and the J. C. Williamson's actors' benevolent fund
1946 July August	The Pied Piper of Hamelin	Charles Mackerras	Theatre Royal Sydney	As above
1946 August	The Pied Piper of Hamelin	John Horner	Adelaide	KUSA

\*Produced by Lesley Cox after Gell.

a. Nash, (2011), 111.

in procuring 24, including Clarence Mellor (French Horn), Neville Amadio (flute) and John Farnsworth-Hall (violin) as leader.<sup>76</sup> The show was repeated the following year, and a month later, Lesley Cox staged the production in Adelaide.

The cast of Gell's *Pied Piper* heard a variety of music which Mackerras had arranged for orchestra: the overture from *The Wasps* by Vaughan Williams, *Fugue in B flat* by J. S. Bach (known to its performers as 'The Rat Fugue'),

excerpts from Elgar, Schumann, Gretchaninoff, Mozart's overture to *Bastien and Bastienne*, and many works by Jaques-Dalcroze. In Act III, Scene 1 *In the Land of the Magic Mountain*, healthy attributes in the form of characters are depicted: Lady Orange Juice, Sunlight, Fresh Air, Water, Sound Sleep and Clean Clothes. Lots o' Fun was played by a 25 year-old Leo McKern, who was just beginning his stage career.<sup>77</sup> The production drew high praise from the

76. Through their performances with the orchestra, these musicians were well-known to Sydney concert goers from the 1950s to the 1970s.

77. McKern enjoyed a career as an actor in films and in TV drama, notably 'Rumpole of the Bailey' for the BBC. Australian audiences also enjoyed this series on ABC television.

Department of Public Health officials who had been invited to attend.<sup>78</sup> Gell recommended that the proceeds for the Kindergarten Union were to be spent on the purchase of musical equipment in kindergartens.<sup>79</sup> In this one project Gell was fulfilling a number of agendas: music education, public health, charity fund-raising, and the promotion of her own work and Dalcroze Eurhythmics. She was also providing a platform for young musicians and actors to have their first experiences in a live show. Some were to become famous in the arts. At the time of Gell's centenary in 1996, Mackerras wrote that he had every reason to be grateful to 'Miss Gell' for giving him his first opportunity to conduct a theatre orchestra. Referring to a later performance of *The Pied Piper* in 1953, he said, 'I was glad to be able to repay her trust in me by conducting the London performances for her.'<sup>80</sup>

In addition to children and adults from Gell's studio classes, pre-service teachers from the Sydney Kindergarten Training College (SKTC) appeared in her productions 'by kind permission' of the principal, Jean Wyndham, another of Gell's supporters. Children from several primary schools also joined the performances and had to be fitted out with costumes.<sup>81</sup> In the days before stretch fabric, much imagination was needed and vast quantities of fabric had to be dyed. This would not have been possible but for the help of teams of mothers, and the organizing skills of Eileen

Williams.<sup>82</sup> Further assistance with costumes came from Edith Lanser, a part-time art teacher at the SKTC, who designed and made the animal masks.<sup>83</sup> Interviews have shown that a number of people now aged in their 60s have vivid memories of these shows which seem to have been part of growing up in Sydney in the 1940s.<sup>84</sup>

Lady Gowrie, formerly known as Lady Hore-Ruthven and wife of Lord Gowrie, Governor-General of Australia, attended some of Gell's productions, and invited Gell to use the gardens of Admiralty House at Kirribilli in Sydney for Eurhythmics demonstrations in 1941 and 1942.<sup>85</sup> They enjoyed a friendly relationship and Lady Gowrie signed her name as 'Zara' in letters to Gell. Such support added to Gell's own reputation and success. Lady Gowrie's keen personal interest in the Kindergarten movement went further than the usual involvement of governors' wives, and the allocation of substantial Federal government funding for the establishment of the Lady Gowrie Kindergarten Centres in every capital city of Australia in 1938 was largely due to her advocacy.<sup>86</sup> Significantly, Gell's radio broadcasts were used as the basis of a pioneering study at the Melbourne Gowrie Centre on children's responses to music through movement.

From the 1950s onwards, Gell's productions appear to have suffered due to inadequate preparation and a high dependence on amateurs.

78. A.G. White, publicity officer, Department of Public Health, Sydney. Letter to Gell, 11 Dec, 1945. Gell had sent complimentary tickets. 'Mr. Lucas and I both enjoyed the show very much indeed, and personally I felt it had distinct possibilities as a means of conveying in an instructive manner the importance of nutrition, cleanliness, fresh air and sunshine etc. in promoting good health.'

79. Heather Gell, letter to the Kindergarten Union, August 28th 1946. Gell sent a cheque for £161/17 representing half the proceeds from the mid-year performances.

80. Charles Mackerras in *Recollections*, (1995). 143.

81. Wollstonecraft Primary School and the Christopher Robin School, Darling Point.

82. Williams was a graduate of the SKTC and had gained the Dalcroze Elementary Certificate in London in 1937. She taught Eurhythmics in a number of schools and provided additional children for Gell's performances.

83. Lanser also provided the illustrations and drawings for Gell's radio broadcast booklets and for Gell's widely used book, *Music Movement and the Young Child*, (1949).

84. Personal communications from Francis Carr-Boyd, Helen Barnard, Vanessa Mack and Telford Conlon.

85. The funds raised went to the Red Cross. Admiralty House is the Sydney residence of the Australian Governor-General. After being Governor of NSW in 1936, Lord Gowrie was appointed Governor-General of Australia in 1937, a post he held throughout most of the Second World War. The Gowries left Australia in 1944 and returned to England.

86. Cumpston, J. and Christine Heinig. *Pre-school centres in Australia: The Lady Gowrie Child Centres*. Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Health, 1945.

Press reports of *Cinderella was a Princess*, at Sydney's Theatre Royal in December 1952, are the first evidence of this. One reviewer stated: 'The whole production could have been improved by proper timing and more detailed rehearsals when so many children are taking part in a play.'<sup>87</sup> Others were more severe, as they had come expect a good standard from 'Miss Gell.' Gell sailed to London again in 1952 in time for the coronation of the young Queen Elizabeth in 1953. She presented *The Pied Piper* at the Adelphi Theatre for charity and enlisted Charles Mackerras, by now assistant conductor at Sadlers Wells, to conduct the performance.<sup>88</sup> In addition to Dalcroze students and children from London schools, Gell assembled Australian actors and formed a cast named in the program as 'The Australian Drama Group.' These included Ann Haddy, Ruth Cracknell and Trader Faulkner who each went on to have successful careers on stage and screen. Gell again drew on her vice-regal connections, naming as patron Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Gloucester, wife of a former Governor-General of Australia, and as President, the Countess of Gowrie.<sup>89</sup> Kester Baruch from the *Ab Intra* days provided amateur actors and scenery.<sup>90</sup> Cracknell recalled the event over 40 years later:

*I took a role with the unlikely name of 'Cool, Cool Water' in a production of The Pied Piper on*

87. Newspaper cutting from Gillian Fisher's scrapbook. Headline: 'Cinderella was a hit with the children.' Unidentified newspaper, Dec 1952. Reviewer, John Kardoss.

88. After becoming principal oboe of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 1946, Mackerras went to Prague in 1947 to study conducting, and was making a name for himself in Europe. Described as 'one of Australia's finest musical exports' he was a noted authority on the operas of Janacek and Mozart and the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. Mackerras died in July 2010.

89. From 1945 to 1947, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester lived in Canberra, where the Duke was serving as Governor General of Australia. Gell may have been introduced to them by Lady Gowrie who supported Gell's work. Lord Gowrie enjoyed popularity as Governor General of Australia from 1936 until 1944 when the Gowries returned to England.

90. Students from the London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics joined in, and children from schools where Dalcroze Eurhythmics was being taught. Edith Lanser's masks were in use, and also the costumes designed by Thelma Afford. Gell must have taken these with her on the ship when she left Sydney in December, 1952.

*the West End. Trader Faulkner was the Piper in a production that had both funny and dreadful moments – one when I was left saying four people's lines, plus a crowd reaction, to avoid dead silence on stage.'*<sup>91</sup>

Back in Sydney in the mid-1950s, Gell still wanted to put on shows. Joan Pope from Perth, a student in Gell's first Dalcroze teachers' course, wrote to her parents in 1956 of her misgivings about Gell's play, *An Angel Came - A Play for Easter*, to be put on in Sydney's Theatre Royal. Pope had been in Gell's London production of *The Pied Piper* and recognized some of the same ideas being recycled. The adult Eurhythmics classes became rehearsals:

*I fancy I can see the same sort of THING about costumes and bad movement and chaos, but hope I can help out a bit ... I don't think Miss Gell has sufficient organized production techniques: I can follow her, but I don't feel she explains things or makes them do their best. ... She is fantastically overworked and BROKE too, I think. Some days she visits three schools. Do you wonder how she can fit US (the teachers course) in? I do!*<sup>92</sup>

By mid-1956 Gell was spreading herself across many different areas of work: theatre productions, preparing and presenting her radio and television programs, teaching at the Nursery School Training College, conducting her weekly studio classes for children and adults, and carrying the financial and administrative responsibility for the Dalcroze teacher's course. It all took a toll on Gell's health and as a matter of necessity, she had to recycle earlier productions and modify them to suit the available resources (see Table 3).

91. Ruth Cracknell, *A Biased Memoire*. Ringwood, Victoria: Viking Penguin Books, 1997), 38-39. While Gell's name is not mentioned, the name of the play and other actors identify it as her production. Her program lists Cracknell as playing the role of 'Water' and Faulkner was indeed the Piper in Gell's production. 'The Pied Piper' at the Adelphi Theatre, London, 1953. Copy of program with cast list held by the researcher.

92. Joan Pope to parents, Letter 3 Tuesday 14 Feb 1956. Copies kindly loaned by the writer for this study. The play was put on at the Theatre Royal in April 1956. The Sun-Herald Women's Section ran a heading, 'Housewife's Role as the Madonna.' This referred to Pope who was newly married.

In the post-war years, the arts began to receive more attention from governments, audiences became more discerning, and there was increased competition from dance and theatre groups. Prosperity also meant that differences between community and professional productions became more apparent. With the economic boom in the 1950s, Australian society changed and many families enjoyed a higher standard of living. Immigration was encouraged to remedy the shortage of labour, and with the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, television arrived. American

culture and popular music infiltrated via the radio. Dissent was in the air, and mistrust of governments and authority came to a head with protests against the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. Social change was further accelerated with the women's liberation movement. The face of Australia was different and even with all her talents, Gell could not compete in this new environment. She relinquished the stage but continued to conduct her studio classes and private courses for Early Childhood teachers in Sydney up to the 1980s. Gell died in Adelaide in 1988.

**Table 3: Productions by Heather Gell from 1946 – 1965.<sup>a</sup>**

Year	Title	Conductor/pianist	Theatre	Proceeds to
1947 Dec	<i>The Water Babies</i>	Orchestra led by Daisy Richards, Pianist: Joyce Billings	Theatre Royal Sydney	KUNSW, Sydney Day Nursery Association, Food for Britain, J. C. Williamson's Actor's Benevolent Fund
1948 Nov	<i>The Blue Bird</i>	Orchestra directed by Andrew MacCunn	Theatre Royal Sydney	
1949 Dec	<i>The Enchanted Tree</i>	Orchestra conducted by Cedric Ashton Pianist: Enid Petrie	Theatre Royal Sydney	KUNSW, SDN Association, Food for Britain, Children's Library Movement, J. C. Williamson's Actor's Benevolent Fund
1950 Nov-Dec	<i>The Pied Piper of Hamelin</i>		Theatre Royal Sydney	
1952 Nov-Dec	<i>Cinderella was a Princess</i>	Pianist: Heather Gell	Theatre Royal Sydney	
1953 Nov 27	<i>The Pied Piper of Hamelin</i>	Orchestra conducted by Charles Mackerras	Adelphi Theatre, The Strand, London	The Church of England's Children's Society
1956 March	<i>An Angel Came</i>	Musical direction and percussion, Eric Rasdall	Theatre Royal Sydney	KUNSW, SDN Association, Food for Britain, J. C. Williamson's Actor's Benevolent Fund, Congregational Church, Milson's Point, NSW Cancer patients assistance fund,
1957 Dec	<i>Cinderella was a Princess</i> (abridged)		Mosman Town Hall, Sydney	Dalroze College Fund, St Chad's Church, Cremorne.
1959 April	<i>The Blue Bird</i>	Pianist: Joyce Hutchinson	Elizabethan Theatre Newtown (Sydney)	Sydney Day Nursery, the Nursery School Training College, Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Erskineville.
1965	<i>The Blue Bird</i> (abridged)	Pianist: Alethea Eddy Baritone: Alan Eddy	Union Theatre, Sydney University	NSTC Newtown, Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Erskineville.

<sup>a</sup> Produced by Lesley Cox, based on Gell's earlier Sydney production (1943) a. Nash (2011), 118.

## Conclusion

This article has shone the spotlight on two particular areas of Gell's work: her studio classes and productions. These have been chosen because they show how this enterprising and energetic practitioner reached a wide community in settings outside formal learning environments from the 1920s to the 1950s. Gell used community projects as a means of channeling Dalcroze's influence into music teaching and learning in Australia. She claimed that while the movement in her stage shows was not 'pure Dalcroze,' students who had been taught Eurhythmics were able to respond expressively and independently. People in Gell's productions would hear and respond to works from a wide repertoire numerous times, including works by Australian composers. She called it 'an application of Dalcroze Eurhythmics to drama.' Her enterprise and opportunism was linked to the social and economic times. During the Depression of the 1930s and the war years (1939-1945), there was little opportunity to hear symphonic music except on the radio stations of the ABC. Gell's classes provided an opportunity for children and adults to hear and learn about music in an active way, in a group setting.

Networks of support were essential for Gell's success: Doris Beeston and the Kindergarten Union, Lady Gowrie, the *Ab Intra* theatre group, school principals, staff and students of the Kindergarten Colleges, ABC management and her own students. With her own creative abilities, flair and strong personality, Gell was a driving force and commanded loyalty. The Kindergarten world and its dependency on volunteerism was mutually beneficial: Gell used college students in her productions and in return, she donated funds to the Kindergarten Unions in both South Australia and New South Wales. Her radio broadcasts meant that she was recognized across the country as an authority on music education for young children and this reputation contributed to her success in other settings.

Gell was on a mission to bring music to as many people as possible through Dalcroze Eurhythmics, and in the days before television, her community productions as well as her school broadcasts enabled her to achieve this objective. Gell's enterprise could only have been realized in the Australian social milieu of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Some photographs of Gell's productions survive but unfortunately due to the difficulty of filming in earlier times, there is a lack of material on film and very little audio record of her work. More lasting elements live on in Gell's writings, her book and imaginative lesson plans which are still widely referred to by teachers today.<sup>93</sup>

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