

**International Orff Schulwerk Forum Salzburg
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**Gunild Keetman,
a short introduction into her life and work**

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Dear friends and colleagues,

it is a great honour for me to speak about Gunild Keetman and I do so with deep gratitude and admiration for a wonderful and extraordinary personality.

Who was this woman who in her great modesty stood in the shadow of Carl Orff for decades? Orff wrote

"I am not exaggerating when I say, that without Keetman's decisive contribution through her double talent, the "Schulwerk" could never have come into being." ¹

In the short time available, I would like to sketch out her life in brief and report a little of my own experiences with her, for in-depth reading I recommend the bilingual German/English book

<i>Gunild Keetman: A Life Given to Music and Movement, Schott</i> Minna Ronnefeld and Herman Regner (ed.)

Gunild was born as the third of six children on 5 June 1904



Gunild Keetman, aged about one year. Photo: unknown

¹ Orff, 1976, 67

in Elberfeld near Wuppertal in Germany. Her parents were musically and artistically interested, extremely health-conscious, but also - probably in keeping with the times - very strict. All children learned to play an instrument and chamber music was played regularly in the family. Gunild learned to play the cello, but she did not enjoy it very much:

*"Of course I already had some musical education at home, some piano, some cello, but I am afraid I have to say that the teachers, were often dull representatives of their profession, who were unable to muster any enthusiasm or any readiness to exert themselves more than was absolutely necessary"*²



Gunild with her sister Doris playing chamber music, about 1932, Photo: Keetman/Bavaria

She was not happy at school and left her parents' house and Elberfeld right after graduating from the Lyceum. Her parents wanted her to study at a home economics school. After that she enrolled at the University of Bonn in art and music history. Soon, however, she realized that a purely theoretical course of study did not suit her and she transferred to the "Hochschule für Leibesübung" (University for Physical Education) in Berlin, but there she was repelled again by the "militant" atmosphere and the huge classes.

During this time she learned about the Günther-Schule in Munich, which combined music and movement, her two main fields of interest. In 1926 she began her studies in Munich and with that her path of life had found its direction and destiny.

Günther-Schule

Gunild must have been an ideal student, highly talented in both, music as well as movement, interested, curious and eager to experiment, diligent and most creative, therefore also very much encouraged by the teachers, especially by Orff, who taught the musical subjects at the Günther-Schule. He immediately recognized her extraordinary talent and drew up a special teaching plan for her.

² Keetman, 1978, S.13



Gunild as a student, about 1928, Photo: A.A. Gulliland,

Soon after her final examination she was engaged as a teacher at the school and fulfilled various tasks. She became, so to speak, "the GS's house composer", writing the music for most of the dances, which were choreographed by Maja Lex. They formed the programme of the many tours of the dance group of the Günther-Schule to several countries and received numerous significant international awards.



Rehearsal with the school orchestra (Gunild at the right) . Photo: unknown



*The dance group of the Günther-Schule, Photo: Enkelmann
Carl Orff-Stiftung, Archiv Orff-Zentrum München*

Some of Keetman's compositions
for the dance group (selection from about 70 dances)

- Barbarische Suite (1930)
- Auftakt, Bolero (1930)
- Tanzsuite Miniaturen (1931)
- Ekstatischer Tanz (1933)
- Tanzsuite Klänge und Gesichte (1934)
- Tänze zu Ehren von Tag und Nacht (1935)
- Tänze für Klavier und Schlagzeug (1937)
- and more

Gunild was also the one who developed an adequate technique for the new instruments and published seven booklets in the first version of the Orff Schulwerk (in the nineteen thirties) others were written by Hans Bergese, Carl Orff and Wilhelm Twittenhoff.



*Hans Bergese, Gunild Keetman, Wilhelm Twittenhoff, (left to right), Photo: W. Strache
Carl Orff-Stiftung, Archiv Orff-Zentrum München*

When the Günther-Schule was invited to take part in the opening of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin it was Gunild who conducted the school orchestra and also composed the music "Einzug und Reigen", although it was Orff's name that was mentioned on the sheet music but not hers



Gunild directing the orchestra of the Günther-Schule in the Olympics Stadium, Berlin 1936, Photo: P.v.Hamm, Carl Orff-Stiftung, Archiv Orff-Zentrum München

Towards the end of World War II the Günther-Schule was closed down by the Nazis in 1944 and was also destroyed by bombs shortly afterwards. Gunild moved to live with

her relatives in Breitbrunn am Chiemsee and lived there in the old mill house until almost the end of her life.



The mill, her home in Breitbrunn, Photo: Peter Keetman, F.C.Gundlach Stiftung

Soon after her arrival she was obliged to work in a military hospital with wounded people in curative gymnastics.



Teaching at the Primary School in Breitbrunn, photo Peter Keetman, F.C.Gundlach Stiftung

Probably during this time she must have started weaving, her favourite activity besides music. She also taught occasionally at the school of her little village Breitbrunn



Gunild Keetman at the loom in her mill, 1948

Gunild Keetman am Webstuhl in ihrer Mühle, 1948

At the loom. Photo: Peter Keetman, F.C.Gundlach Stiftung

New responsibilities arose when the Bavarian Radio invited Carl Orff in 1948 to make a series of broadcasts with music for children. This resulted in a redesign of the Schulwerk as "*music exclusively for children which could be played, sung, danced by children, but which could also be invented in a similar way by children themselves*".³ New material had to be composed by Orff and Keetman because the examples from the Günther Schule were not suitable for children.

³ Orff 1976, p. 212



Radio series led by Gunild at the Bavarian Radio, 1948, photo: Peter Keetman, F.C.Gundlach Stiftung

Out of this grew an abundance of songs and instrumental pieces, spoken texts and rhythmic exercises which finally found expression in the five volumes of *Orff-Schulwerk. Music for Children* which were published by Schott from 1950-1954. The radio series, which extended over several years, was designed by Keetman. From 1957 onwards, she and Orff's daughter, Godela, carried out many television broadcasts.

Mozarteum

Gunild first came into contact with the Mozarteum in 1949 when she was offered a teaching position by Rector Prof. Eberhard Preussner for children's courses in Orff Schulwerk.



With Prof. Preussner in Salzburg, 1956, Photo Minna Ronnefeld

Soon afterwards she was teaching students from home and abroad (including Minna Ronnefeld, her successor at the Mozarteum, Lotte Flach, Doreen Hall, Daniel Helldén and others). The 1950s also included the production of numerous recordings and films. Trips with performances and guest courses took her to Italy, Belgium and Switzerland.



Children's class at the Mozarteum, Photo: Minna Ronnefeld

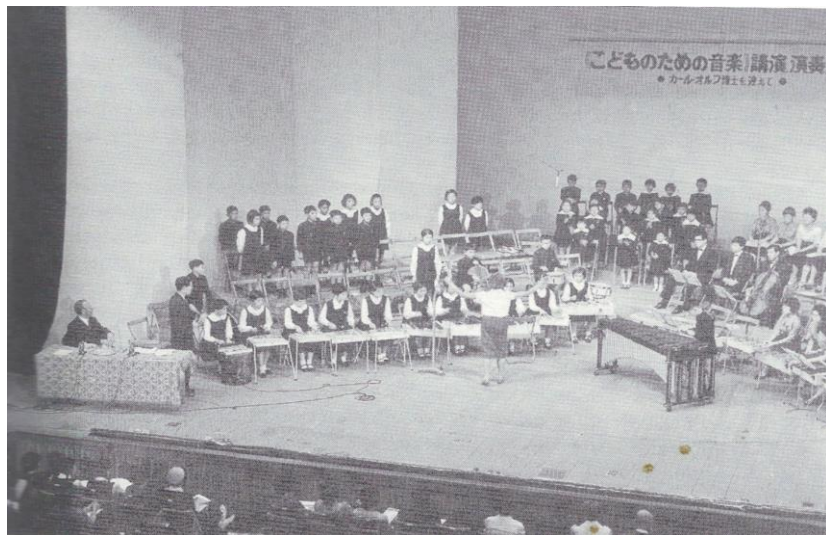
Orff-Institute

Finally, in 1961, the Orff Institute was founded and Gunild taught regularly for the first years, one or two days a week. This was fortunate for us students and young teachers, but for herself it was a heavy burden and misery that often made her very unhappy. She no longer wanted to teach. However Orff insisted and his reasoning that "nobody can do it like you can" was of course completely correct.



*With guests at the Orff-Institute, Photo: unknown
left to right: Wilhelm Keller, Karl Alliger, Carl Orff, Gunild Keetman, Vladimir Pos,
Barbara Haselbach. Carl Orff-Stiftung, Archiv Orff-Zentrum München*

Thus, trips with Carl and Lieselotte Orff to Canada and Japan also became working trips for Gunild. Instead of enjoying the trips she had to give workshops and conduct performances after only a few rehearsals with children unknown to her.



*Television in Japan, 1962, Photo: unknown. Carl Orff-Stiftung,
Archiv Orff-Zentrum München*

As a teacher, Gunild was very clear and determined, her lessons were built up step by step in a convincing and comprehensible manner, and in addition to the objectivity of the structure, there was always a warm interest in the students. Many things were predetermined in the lessons, but improvisation also had its place in a given framework. From today's point of view, we would say it was teacher-centred instruction that brought clear results. We knew what we had learned.

I had the great fortune to be allowed to work with her as an "apprentice". In the first year I went every week for 2 days to Breitbrunn am Chiemsee, where she lived and taught in the elementary school there. Gunild watched my lessons and then discussed them with me in the evening. She was critical and very precise, but also very sensitive and always encouraging and uplifting.

Several years later, I had choreographed her Bolero with students of the institute for a guest performance in Berlin. In addition, there was a conversation between Gunild and us young teachers and her in which we could ask her about the collaboration with Maja Lex at the Günther-Schule. An excerpt of this was recorded in one of the films about the Orff Institute.

As the institute had more and more students and therefore more teachers, she was finally able to withdraw from teaching, but even then Orff still had new tasks for her. He often asked her to come to Diessen and try out something with him that he wanted to use in a composition.



*Carl Orff with Gunild Keetman, trying out some special sounds, 1979
Photo: Hannelore Gassner*

Then came the recording of the 10-part series Musica Poetica that lasted for several years and for which new pieces had to be composed; the publication of several recorder booklets together with Minna Ronnefeld and above all Orff's compulsory obligation for her to write a book that presented her work with the Orff Schulwerk. The long process of writing this book was truly a torture for her. Finally, in 1970, the book ***Elementaria- First Acquaintance with Orff Schulwerk*** was published and became one of the most important sources how to work with the material of the volumes.

Some years later together with Orff they published *Paralipomena* in the 1970s.



Gunild Keetman and Carl Orff , 1979. Photo: Hannelore Gassner

Orff's death in 1982 marked the end of almost sixty years of a nearly lifelong intensive friendship that had the greatest influence on her life. Afterwards, things became increasingly quiet around her. Music was still her last means of expression. Whenever we visited her in her last years we played the recorder together.

All of us to whom the **Orff Schulwerk**, means a great deal, owe Gunild Keetman great thanks for her life's work as a composer and teacher. She has given us so many gifts with her wonderful music. Her shy but devoted personality became an admired role model. Many of us believe that the Schulwerk should actually be called the **Orff-Keetman-Schulwerk**.

I know that she would be pleased that the idea of the Schulwerk is still alive and has grown in so many ways. She would be happy to see how many of you are working with it.

Dear Gunild, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all those jewels you have given to us and to the children in so many countries of the world.

Recommended literature:

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