

## Stones and Flowers

### The San Francisco Youth Eurythmy Troupe in Egypt, February 2008

Piling out of our little tour bus we gaped upward in amazement—above us towered the Pyramids of Giza! All the blurriness of a late-night arrival in Cairo dissolved at the sight of these soaring, perfect, incomprehensibly massive structures. These are Wonders of the World indeed, and it seemed the wonder of a lifetime that we were actually there! Giddy with excitement, we approached the Great Pyramid of Khufu, climbed on the stones, snapped pictures, and bargained with the first of many friendly and persistent souvenir vendors. We visited all three Pyramids—the most intrepid explorers even going inside the Pyramid of Menkaure—full of wonder at their size and perfection, and the culture that had created them. A short distance away was an encampment of camel drivers, and we lurched off into the desert atop these magnificent beasts on an imagined caravan. After a close-up view of the Sphinx, we all felt energized, and more than ready for a roadside stop for felafel, fuul, and shwarma.



*The Pyramids and camels!*

We had come to Egypt at the invitation of friends at the desert community of Sekem, to perform our eurythmy program, “Awakening”. We were welcomed to Cairo by our guardian angel, Martina Dinkel, a eurythmist from Sekem, who had found us a hotel, a guide, and a bus, and created a wonderful whirlwind tour. Our itinerary was a packed four days in Cairo, seeing the ‘Pharaonic highlights’, and then four more at Sekem. A special rate at our quirky downtown hotel included breakfast and dinner, which we eagerly supplemented with delicious treats from the bakery in the vegetable market around the corner.

Each morning we boarded our bus and threaded the miraculous chaos of Cairo traffic for a new adventure. Nihal El-Mofty, our delightful tour guide, brought history alive at the massive Citadel overlooking the city, the resplendent Mosque of Muhammad Ali, the peaceful Coptic hanging church, and the magnificent Egyptian Museum, where we found ourselves face to face with breathtaking statues, King Tut’s treasures, and ancient mummies. On a trip to the Step Pyramid of Zoser at Saqqara, we saw the life-giving power of the great Nile—the road runs through fertile and irrigated land, then abruptly reaches a line of endless desert.

Cairo is an immense and teeming city, where ancient and modern live side by side. It was the capital of the Arab world for centuries, and one can feel the convergence of many cultural and religious streams, and the pride of the Cairenes in giving them all an honored place. We were met with friendliness everywhere, and left with indelible memories—among them the overwhelming sights, sounds, and smells of the bazaar, a sail on the Nile with Captain Omar, and a birthday party where the chef led the dancing!



*Exploring the markets.*

Our last day in Cairo, we met Martina at the Sekem Academy in Heliopolis, a research and higher education center and the site of our first performance. It was a festive moment, attended by Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish, the founder of Sekem, his wife, who was celebrating a birthday, and members of the Sekem community filling a modern performance hall. It was the moment we had come for, and we were blessed with a fine stage and lighting. The students offered the full program with intensity, verve, and sincerity. It was most warmly received by the audience, who took many photos: even Mustafa, a security guard, showed us the cell phone video he had made for his wife.

A night bus ride brought us to Sekem, about sixty kilometers north-east of Cairo, where we were welcomed by Dr. Abouleish and joined a birthday feast. Morning revealed the true miracle that had been wrought there: nearly two hundred acres of desert had been transformed over thirty years into a lush, tree-shaded paradise,



with fields of flowers and crops interspersed with strikingly simple and beautiful buildings. We were given an extensive tour, including different company complexes producing herbs, teas, cotton products and vegetables—all using biodynamic methods, a medical clinic, and a school for more than three hundred children. Our feeling verged on awe as we experienced the harmony, pride, and respect among the two thousand people who arrive every day and participate in a community of life and work at this amazing place.

We gave four performances over two days in the school hall for the students and workers. Astrid Thiersch had created a program with the community in mind; it included works by Pharaoh Akhnaton, Rumi, and Gibran, music from Aïda (played by members of the community), and the centerpiece was a fairy tale, “Princess Sinhold” by Michael Bauer, of an enchanted princess in a barren land. Dr. Abouleish had cited this tale in his book as expressing his



*Eurythmy Troupe with students from Sekem*



*Morning circle at the Sekem school.*

vision, and it was an honor and a joy to bring it to life for him and for the Sekem community. The students, like children everywhere, were enraptured by the performances, and the adults were enthusiastic. In an article in the “Sekem Insight” newsletter for February 2008, Martina Dinkel wrote about the Troupe:

“Their visit was a great inspiration and an example for the students in Sekem, and gave joy to all. It was a wonderful experience to see the young people with such focus and energy for Eurythmy, and in that moment a spark jumped across, connecting cultures and building bridges.”

The friends at Sekem received us with most gracious and thoughtful hospitality. We were fed and housed, toured, educated, and nursed, with no need going unanticipated or unmet. In every aspect of life at Sekem we experienced the development of the person, the community,

and the earth, which is Dr. Abouleish’s guiding motto. In a meeting with him we asked many questions and received wise, profound, and humorous answers. He told us that he hoped we would be inspired to pursue our visions for the future, as he has.

A great highlight for the students was making friends with Egyptian people their own age. Eating together, planting trees, playing soccer, exchanging music, visiting the desert by night, and just hanging out and talking, a bond of friendship and understanding was forged and cultural differences faded. In bringing the gift of eurythmy, we received new impulses and inspiration for our own lives from this beautiful culture, ancient and modern. We are all profoundly grateful to our many supporters, and especially to our new friends in Egypt, for making this trip of a lifetime possible.

— David Weber

