

TRAINING FRANCE

Wali & Ariënne with Josine Zon

Ardèche, April 20 – 25 2005

This training in retreat format was a follow up of two previous training weekends, both sponsored by Oneness. These weekends and the feedback sessions at the Lavaldeieu Camp (Languedoc, deep in the Southern part of France in the land of the former Cathars and Troubadours) formed the basis of this training and this group of people.

As the people of the Ardèche somehow didn't find the previous site (La Clé de Sol, south of Lyon) and as both Wahaba and Trevor & Glenda worked and sowed their Dance seeds in the Ardèche, we decided to listen to the pleas from the Ardèche organisers Leela and Catherine and chose to do this longer retreat at the same location Wahaba and Trevor & Glenda used.

Wahaba introduced the Dances in this area in 2002 with her partner, a well known French teacher of Tantra, in a big outdoor festival for Peace, attracting over a 100 people. Wahaba invited us next to take over. As we were unable to come on Summer Solstice, we introduced Trevor and Glenda. They did two weekends on Solstice days, in combination with the seasonal festival and within a larger frame of activities. All was offered for free. The third weekend they (much to their credit) insisted on coming only for a weekend of unmixed dances. After this they stopped their outreach work and we were drawn into France, starting with two training and outreach weekends. We saw it as a good omen that at the same time we were invited to the Lavaldeieu Camp, a German-English based Camp.

On this camp we introduced the feedback sessions as this was the only way to also get something of a French flavour. The following year this resulted in more French people and French became one of the official languages of the Camp (until then it was German and English). Our student Fabienne and dedicated Dancer Michel were incorporated in the team, giving the camp team also a French flavour for the first time. At this Camp we met with Josine Zon, who until then was the only one who kept the flame of the Dances in France burning. Josine is native Dutch, living in France for many years. She often combines the Dance work with her Sufi (order) work and voice work (she is a trained musical teacher). As it shows now, her flame was small and needed nourishment, but was necessary for our work. As often, once connected with the source, her light now is radiating more.

In spite of all the work done in this area, co-organiser Leela (Swiss by birth and long time part of the Dance Circle of Timothy Dobson in Denver/Boulder) was the only local person present. All other participants had to travel long distances (and spend much money) to be at this retreat. So one may ask the question if this is a good location for such a retreat, no matter how much we liked the nature, the venue (much used for Shamanic retreats, see below) and the people running the venue (themselves leaders in the Native American Movement). Money and time were the obvious given reason for not being present. The area is very poor indeed, but we also feel that the tradition of offering the Dances for free has done some damage in the past.

Be that as it may, we followed Wali Ali's adagio once more and 'worked with the people who were there and not with the people who were not there'.

All but one had done the previous training weekends (sponsored by Oneness) or had been enthused by the Dances at the Camps in Lavaldeieu (which we attended twice) and this was the 'core group', distilled from these previous events.

It was apparent that distillation makes more potent. Due to the strong commitment of the group we could go right into the core of training. Due to the size all could lead two dances during the retreat, showing what they had learned from the first experience.

We deliberately billed the retreat with Wali & Ariënne and Josine Zon, as we feel we need to teach and at the same time empower Josine Zon, until recently the only certified teacher in France. This third time was the most successful, as her confidence has grown and she is more linked to the network (she was untutored for over ten years) and she proved a reliable partner, ready and able to lead most Dances. To our delight two more students asked supervision from her, bringing the total of her students to three.

Mariel was also invited to lead in 'our' sessions, to honor her level of teaching and her dedication. On the last day we certified her (we had checked this beforehand with her former mentor Darvesha, who also said she was ready for it).

To sum it up: we feel finally an opening has been made for France to grow towards a true region where the Dances can grow and flourish. In all reality we hast to say we are not overly optimistic and realize a lot of work has to be done.

Generally speaking until now the Dances have not really caught on in any Latin speaking country in the EU (France, Spain, Portugal, Italy) or other southern (Mediterranean) countries like Greece. Most local people point towards the strong influence of the church and the equally (and no doubt connected with the former) fear of 'sects'. In France (and Belgium too) the Sufi Movement is considered a sect and is on the black list. This makes the Dances more than in other countries something for the avant-garde or counter movement. In France – as elsewhere – many of these 'old hippies' find their spirituality in what they call shamanism. The 'Amerindien' (Native American) movement is quite strong in e.g. the Ardèche. The choreography and form of the Dances does often not fit these people who want to move more freely as an expression of their spiritual liberty. Big subject...

Teia from Spain followed this retreat and the previous weekend. She is supervised by Josine, who visits Spain yearly for some odd twenty people. Teia's progress is obvious, so she is a promise for the future, even though her shoulders won't hold all Spain (her words also). However Spanish speaking Mariel (Argentinian by birth) may assist Teia and Josine in this outreach work.

Another outreach is Toulouse, situated deep in the Langedoc and close to Spain. At the retreat Catherine invited Mariel, Josine, Fabienne and Teia over to introduce the dances there (Wahaba has been there once before). Catherine's husband Roeland (Dutch by birth) followed last year's training course in the Netherlands with us.

A Network is forming...

Typically enough the two certified Dancers in France are originally Dutch (Josine) and Argentinian (Mariel). The signs are that *inshallah* this may change in some three or four year's time.

April 2005
Wali & Ariënné