

Iran Paul at the Cape  
Archives

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## The real founders of Maynardville

Cape Times November 22<sup>nd</sup>

From Mrs L C THOMPSON, for the committee of the Athlone Group for Nursery Education (1950):

ON December 1, Wynberg's open air theatre will be 32 years old. Contrary to the general belief, the "founders" of this theatre were not René Ahrenson and Cecilia Sonnenberg, and the plaque which has been erected in the grounds of Maynardville to this effect is quite erroneous.

I do not wish in any way to belittle the splendid work done by these good ladies in promoting Shakespeare and the theatre; but, for the record, the founding of Maynardville as an open air theatre took place in 1950 — six years prior to any Shakespearian production.

### Ballet evening

In that year, the committee of the Athlone Group for Nursery Education (who incidentally pioneered non-European nursery school education in the Republic) realized Maynardville's potential and, with the City Council's permission, organized on December 1, 1950, an evening of open air ballet by the UCT Ballet Company under the direction of Dulcie Howes and accompanied by a 40-piece orchestra conducted by Erik Chisholm.

In Pamela Chrimes's interview on Women's World on June 28 of this year, she mentioned this very first performance

and the fact that the original homestead was used as dressing rooms and a means of leading electricity to the stage and grounds. Should any further proof of this initial production be necessary, I enclose photostat copies of the press review\*.

During the years 1951 and 1952, further ballets were arranged by our committee and performed by the UCT Ballet Company, in conjunction with the Cape Town Orchestra under the batons of Fritz Schuurman and Enrique Jorda respectively. By 1951 the old homestead had been demolished, which necessitated the erecting of marquees as dressing rooms, and a lead from an electric pole in Church Street supplied the lighting!

It was our success at Maynardville which first prompted the City Council into considering it as a permanent open air venue; and it was a deputation from our committee who were able to persuade them to keep the theatre as natural as possible and not to build a "Hollywood Bowl" type structure which they proposed doing at that time.

With all this information on record, it surprises us that the City Fathers did not do some research before erecting, at the public's expense, such an inaccurate plaque, and we would respectfully suggest that they either remove it altogether or at least alter the wording.

[\*Enclosed. — Editor, Cape Times.]

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