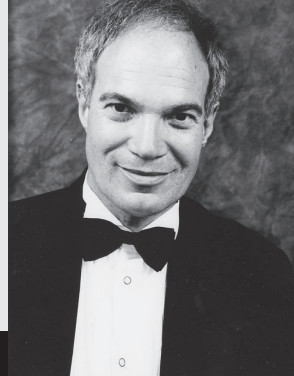


## PERSONALIA

### Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph at sixty



Wessel van Wyk

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Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph is undoubtedly South Africa's most eminent female art music composer. Her compositional output numbers more than seventy works, covering most musical genres, from the large scale symphony to chamber, choral, ballet, rock opera, film and solo instrumental music.

Since 2001 she has held the position of Professor of Theory and Composition at the Music Department in the School of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand. As an educator she has shared her vast knowledge and vision and has inspired many young budding student composers. As a person of integrity and with her warm personality, she is respected and admired by many, myself included. Our friendship dates back a long time, and I feel privileged to write about her as she reaches this milestone in her life. The 'question and answer' session was held at her Johannesburg home a few days before her birthday.

Jeanne's formative years were spent in Pretoria where she was born on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 1948. Her talent and special aptitude for music soon became evident, and from the age of five she was sent to her aunt, Goldie Zaidel, for piano and theory lessons. Under Goldie's expert guidance, Jeanne was soon trying her hand at composition. One of her earliest attempts bears the title, "Rushen Dance" - she could notate music before she could spell properly!

Jeanne passed all the UNISA piano examinations with honours, and her playing was featured on the radio programme "Young South Africa". As head girl of the Pretoria Girls' High school, she matriculated in 1965 with a first class pass. During her BMus(1969) and MMus(1971) degree studies at the Music Department of the University of Pretoria, both of which she obtained cum laude, she excelled at both composition and piano performance. *Seven Variations on an Original Theme* and *Sonata no. 1* (both for piano), *Kaleidoscope for Wind and Percussion*, as well as *Five Pieces for Woodwind Quartet and Soprano*, are compositions that date from this period. She received tuition in composition from Prof Johan Potgieter and Prof Arthur Wegelin; her piano tu-

tors were Philip Levy and Dr Adolph Hallis. As a performer, she was frequently in demand; in 1968, she became the first student of the University of Pretoria to be contracted to play as a soloist with a professional (PACT) symphony orchestra. She also managed to scoop up no less than four Performer's Licentiates - LTCL, LRSM, FTCL, and UPLM - all *cum laude*.

It was during this period that I met Jeanne for the first time. I was also a piano student of Goldie Zaidel, and one Saturday morning as I arrived for my customary lesson, I found in her place an attractive young lady, with long dark hair, who informed me that she would be teaching me as her aunt had taken ill. I was in absolute awe - Jeanne turned out to be most helpful and inspirational - and I left the lesson determined to practice harder than before!

After being awarded an Ernest Oppenheimer Memorial Trust Scholarship for post graduate studies, Jeanne furthered her music studies at the Royal College of Music, London. She studied composition under John Lambert and electronic music under Tristram Carey. She won the prestigious R.O. Morris Prize for composition, and her *Reaction* for piano, 'cello and percussion was awarded the Cobbett Prize in 1973. Her piano tutor was the renowned British pianist John



Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph

Lill, with whom she forged a life-long friendship.

Jeanne returned to her home country in 1975 to take up a lecturing post at the University of the Witwatersrand, a position she held for two years. I had commenced my own music studies at the same institution, and to my delight, I knew my lecturer in harmony and counterpoint personally. She was a very popular lecturer amongst the students, not only because she was such an accessible person, but also because she had the uncanny ability to explain the 'rules' of writing music in a most lucid way (she must have been skilled at this, for I managed to pass the grueling Grade VI Unisa theory exam under her tuition!).

As a piano student of Dr Adolph Hallis, I mastered her *Three Dimensions* as one of the prescribed works for the upcoming SABC Music Prize competition of 1976. I was flattered when Jeanne invited me to perform this work in front of a live audience at the Sea Point SABC studios for the radio programme 'The Composer Speaks' in June of the same year.

In addition her *Five Pieces for Woodwind Quartet and Soprano* was performed by Cape Town musicians in the same programme, and I remember being struck by it as a brilliant composition as I stood in the wings waiting my turn.

In 1976 Jeanne married Dr Michael Rudolph, (later Professor of Aural Public Health), and they spent 1977 in Boston where he was doing research for his Masters. Jeanne was at this stage enrolled for her DMus Composition degree at the University of Pretoria, with Prof Stefans Grové as her promoter. Fuelled by his inspiration, she produced an array of impressive works - an orchestral *Concert Overture*, a *Chamber Concerto for Eleven Instruments*, as well as her well-known and often performed *The Fugue that flew away* for flute and piano. On her return to South Africa, she became the first woman composer in the country (and the only one to date) to receive the DMus Composition degree (UP:1979). She also accepted a lectureship, once again at Wits, on a part-time basis, to allow herself more time for composing and family commitments.

In 1980 and again in 1982, she represented South Africa at Festivals for Women Composers in New York and Rome respectively. At the *Donne in Musica* in Rome, her *Five Pieces for Woodwind Quartet and Soprano* was received a standing ovation with enthusiastic response (Cohen 1981:773). This resulted in a further connection between Jeanne and Italy – a South African filmed version of a performance of her ballet, *Ukukhala*, has been flighted on Italian television twice.

Her works were also performed at other prestigious music festivals in New York, London and Jerusalem during the eighties. She was noted in publications such as the *International Encyclopedia of Women Composers* (1981), and

the *International Who's Who in Music* (1985).

As part of the Johannesburg Centenary celebrations in 1986, she composed her *Fanfare Overture*, which was performed at a symphony concert by the National Symphony Orchestra of the SABC to great acclaim. She became the very first prize winner of the Total Oil (SA) Composition Competition for her orchestral work, *Tempus Fugit*, also in 1986.

In 1982, Jeanne wrote *Four Minim*, for 'cello and piano (published in New York), which was to become one of her most performed compositions nationally and abroad. She revised it in 1992 as the compulsory set piece for the Unisa/Transnet International String Competition. The Russian contestant Mark Dobrinsky was most impressed with this work, and asked her to write more for his instrument in 1993, *Suite Afrique* for 'cello and piano, dedicated to Dobrinsky, saw the light (Ferreira 1995:12).

In 1991, she composed the large scale work, *Sefirot Symphony* for wind, brass, percussion and harp, and in 1992, her *Five African Sketches* for guitar was commissioned by SAMRO. A commercial CD of her works: "Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph: Music of the Spheres" (CD GSE 1532), was released in 1994.

In 1995, Jeanne produced the new composite version and a full orchestral setting of the South African National Anthem used today. She also provided the English text sung at the end. In 1996 she composed an *Oratorio for Human Rights* for soloists, choir and orchestra for the Olympic Games in Atlanta. For Nelson Mandela's doctoral award ceremony in Cape Town in 1997, she wrote the song, *He walked to Freedom*.

The new millennium saw a burgeoning of Jeanne's achievements. In March 2000, 2002, and June 2003, she was Musical Director, composer, arranger, conductor, and pianist for the show, "Celebration". This was presented in the USA, Canada and in London, where at the Royal Festival Hall, the performance was applauded by an audience of over two thousand people. In the same year, she completed a large scale intercultural work called *Lifecycle* - for the NGQOKO Women's Choir, and an ensemble of eleven Western instruments - for the International Classical Music Festival (ICMF), now known as MIAGI. This work was met with great public and critical acclaim at its first performances in Cape Town and Pretoria. In October, 2004, President Mbeki presented Jeanne with the order of Ikhamanga medal for her contribution to music nationally and internationally.

In 2006, Jeanne was the recipient of an ASCAP Award from the USA Music Rights Society for original music composed by a foreign composer. Her work for string quartet, *Strange Quartet*, was completed in the same year. In 2008, a new composition of hers, *Partials and Pedals*, was included

in the prescribed repertoire list for the Eleventh Unisa/Vodacom International Piano Competition. In April, 2008, the Department of Education of the University of Pretoria conferred upon her an honorary doctorate degree (D.Ed) for her contribution to tertiary education in South Africa. Her years of experience have moulded Jeanne's talents into mature fruition – a prodigious and prolific musician, who at sixty is indeed in her prime.

**W. van Wyk:** “As you now reach this impressive age, let's call it ‘complete prime’ (sniggers), you are an educator, a composer, a conductor and pianist to your ‘Celebration’ group of musicians with performances all over the world, a wife, a mother to four daughters, a grandmother six times over – how on earth do you manage such a hectic schedule?”

**J. Zaidel-Rudolph:** “I am tough on myself. The discipline is to multi-task and to try to find a balance, if at all possible, and of course, one can never find the ideal balance – there is always give or take – too much on the one side and too little on the other, but, throughout all the years, I've managed somehow and it's worked. I'm always incredibly busy, and apart from on the Sabbath, I seldom allow myself time to rest.”

**WvW:** “In reviewing your CV, one is struck by your early dedication to both composing and performing – did this duality of purpose benefit your development as a musician, and to what extent?”

**JZ:** “In my life, the two disciplines definitely are totally enmeshed – I can't imagine being one without the other, truthfully. When I compose piano works, I feel so confident, because I can gauge what is possible, technically, on the instrument. I don't think I would be a good writer of piano music if I wasn't a pianist myself. I still love playing, and when I get the opportunity to perform, I do.”

**WvW:** “You received piano and composition tuition from an impressive list of national and international music figures. The influence of such people is often felt as having ‘Guru’ status in one's life – are there any figures whom you would like to single out?”

**JZ:** “Each teacher brought with him/her a completely different set of skills and qualities, and I've learnt a lot from each one individually. They've all been very different, so I can't say for example that one was better than the other, except perhaps, in the case of John Lill. The excitement of being in one of the top cities of the world and having him there with me going to those wonderful concerts, and the discourse we could then have about the music and the performances, was something very special – I learnt a great deal from him, both during his lessons as well as in the music environment.

After my composition studies in London, I had my dream fulfilled - studying with the great Hungarian composer György Ligeti in Hamburg. I think he was the most formative influence on me in my composing career, being a brilliant, world renowned, international composer, and I probably learnt the most from him. He was very strict – it's not like he just threw one into twentieth century music – he went back to Bach's strict counterpoint and rigorous orchestration techniques, and that was my discipline.

I'd admired Ligeti's works for a long time before I met him – Prof Wegelin brought back recordings of his compositions from the Darmstadt courses, and I would spend hours in the University of Pretoria's library absorbing his fascinating language of experiments with the spatial properties of sound.”

**WvW:** “I remember how effective Ligeti's sound score was for the Stanley Kubrick film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which of course reached cult status during the seventies, and to be honest, that is the only piece of music of his that I'm familiar with (giggles). Let's rather speak more of his influence on your own compositional style – is there for example a piano work that shows it?”

**JZ:** “*Three Dimensions* – this work shows my liberation from the constriction of strict formal ordering and excessive rhythmic permutation – as in my early *Sonata no. 1* for piano – to a more modern approach where I was experimenting with sonority *per se* as a means of expression.”

**WvW:** “Did you keep contact with Ligeti and his work after Hamburg?”

**JZ:** “Ligeti's legacy lives on in my life. He passed away two years ago, but I've kept close contact with his son, Lucas Ligeti, who is a multitalented musician; a drummer, and a composer of various genres of music – serious art, African, rock and pop. I always visit him when I'm in New York, and I've had him work with my students at Wits as a composer in residence”.

**WvW:** “Coincidentally, you and I both decided to make South Africa our permanent home after our respective sojourns in Europe. This decision has certainly gained you accolades and success on your home turf. Do you ever regret not having pursued your career overseas on a permanent basis?”

**JZ:** “Because of the sensitive political situation of the past, there was a time that I thought that I would prefer to live overseas - I'm eternally grateful that I didn't; I'm extremely happy that I came back to this country. As a composer and as a musician, I don't think that I would have survived without Africa, without the sounds of Africa, without the research I do into African music; which literally does feed my creative needs.”



**WvW:** “In reviewing the compositional arena in South Africa since before the new government in 1994, and, at the moment, how would you view the situation – is enough work being written, is the style changing and is there sufficient enthusiasm among composers today?”

**JZ:** “In terms of opportunities, perhaps things aren’t as ideal as they could be. During the Apartheid era, pre-Democracy, organizations like the SABC, the Council for the National Arts, and others, used to commission works from art music composers, so speaking personally, I had a lot of opportunities then. I’m not saying that I don’t have them now; an organization like SAMRO is still supporting and sponsoring new composition and music to a large degree in this country. The pendulum has however swung the other way – popular music is much more important today, whether it is the African Kwaito or rock or pop or whatever, and that is what sells. So there isn’t a demand, and let’s face it, the orchestras are battling to survive. They also have to play the popular classics, and not contemporary new works.

I’ve just marked an interesting piece of work by a black student who is a very good composer, and he says that he and some of his composer colleagues survive outside the country far better than inside the country. They are writing art music which is not of the popular choral genre, therefore they have to find new platforms for their work abroad.

I have some very talented composition students, which is my world and passion - teaching young people the skills of writing music, both technically and musically; and I optimistically believe that they will produce good, interesting and logically constructed works that will be performed. It is difficult to say how they will be viewed in the global context now, because there are so many styles, ranging from minimalism, to post modernism, to neo-tonalism, even to old-fashioned avant-garde modernism.

Established local composers like Peter Klatzow, and the younger generation like Hendrik Hofmeyr, with his lush harmonies and post-Romanticism, are fortunately still actively composing, and I believe, will continue to do so. There are still opportunities, but perhaps not enough.”

**WvW:** “I have sometimes found the labeling of some Eurocentric-orientated South African artists – be they musicians or fine artists - of their own production as being so-called ‘ethnic’, rather artificial and insincere. In the African section of for example your *Three Dimensions* for piano, you conjure your own interpretations of African-sounding textures, which make creative sense to me. What are your viewpoints as regards the use, or direct imitation, of indigenous sonorities?”

**JZ:** “To speak of my own work at present – In 2007, I received from the National Research Fund a research grant into the fascinating overtone throat-singing of the Ngqoko

Women’s Cultural Group in the Eastern Cape, a project that I’m involved with in collaboration with an inter-institutional group from Cape Town University. Transcribing this music with the sole purpose of merely copying it into a Western language, would be, to my mind, apart from opening a can of worms as to the ownership of the music, unethical. I’ve lived and breathed and absorbed their music; I have recorded and transcribed and analysed it extensively to make it a part of me. I compose music around this indigenous Xhosa material, but in a symbiotic way, without appropriating what is essentially their own traditional music.

As in the piano work *Three Dimensions* that you mentioned, I normally use African elements in more of a subconscious, than in a conscious way. Working on the inspiration of a sound is thus not to be confused with working on a direct imitation of the sound.”

**WvW:** “I would say that you received a lot of favours from the Muses in your dedication to a career that can best be described as prolific. Do you have any regrets in looking back?”

**JZ:** “None whatsoever – except that I have had to sacrifice producing much greater quantities of original music due to my heavy teaching and lecturing load. I’ve had ideas for all sorts of pieces of music, and I’ve had to put them on ice, but in my retirement, I’ll definitely get to them!”

**WvW:** “May there be many more!”

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