

RSNO/Eugene Skeef

Henry Wood Hall, Glasgow

IF you had been at the Henry Wood Hall last night, you would have shared a very special experience with the audience and the participants.

Congregating in the hall was a crowd which included reviewers, friends, relatives, children and teachers from Anderston Primary, Kelvinhaugh Primary and Woodside Secondary schools, musicians from the Royal Scottish National Orchestra ... and Eugene Skeef.

Skeef is a most warm and generous person, and an extraordinary communicator and musician. He made the time to talk to me just before the performance which was in itself a preview for *Echoes of South Africa* - a major RSNO education project taking place at the Tramway on Sunday.

Skeef traces his love of music back to his childhood, with affectionate memories of growing up in South Africa - people singing as they work and play, and particularly of his mother waking the family with song and later crooning a lullaby to send him to sleep.

He remembers the sounds of insects, the birds, the sea. "Music was all around me." His mother surfaces readily in the conversation and he talks fondly of a home where people came and went easily, his mother offering her gifts of healing.

Skeef shares his own gifts with an unaffected enjoyment. His influence evidently has spread not just to the participating children, but to their teachers, the musicians and, last night, to the audience.

Isabel Barrie - one of the primary teachers who has been involved since the project got under way three months ago, is visibly enthused and admits to being changed by the experience.

"The music is coming out of the children themselves and I

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feel much more confident about initiating creative projects," she says.

Skeef was exiled to the United Kingdom in 1980. He admits to disappointment in two aspects of British life - the taste of London water and the lack of sweetness in our carrots! His recent return to South Africa with the London Philharmonic Orchestra brought him a lot of joy and he speaks of the love and generous spirit that prevail there.

This gentle but pervasive positiveness flows through his conversation. You can see in his eyes that, for him, music is not merely an aspect of his life. It is integral and he just can't wait to share it.

His attitude is the same towards everybody and he refuses to admit that children with special needs require to be treated differently as far as music is concerned.

"Music flows like a river," he says, and he describes how moved he was to see one child break free from his inhibitions and move his instrument closer to the other children. His whole approach is about sharing and breaking down of barriers - structures that divide. It's about responding, sharing, loving.

This brief chat could easily have become an evening's dialogue but the hall was already filling up. The crowd enjoyed three short compositions created by the children themselves - performed in a way which indicated clearly that mutual listening and shared enjoyment were paramount.

Cheerful applause - was this the end? No fear. Eugene soon had every soul there taking part in a boisterous and moving counterpoint and loving it. What were we making music about? It wasn't because "we wiz daen whit we wiz tollt" but because I and me had become us and we. They no longer existed.

Go along to the Tramway on Sunday. It will give you hope.

George Wilson