

KATE (FIONA) KEMBALL (THURSTON 1979)
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Haunting the music block

Back in 1975, second formers had the chore of locking up the downstairs classrooms and music block before going upstairs to their dormitories to bed. Then the music block was above the art room and at right angles to Athlone's dormitory (probably not like that anymore!)

Joanne Brown, a swimmer from Johannesburg, had the duty that term of locking up the music block. After the bell for the end of prep, around 9pm, she would go through all the music rooms, close the pianos and the windows, make sure no-one was still practicing, turn off the lights and lock the door behind her.

Our plan was to send Allison Horsell, a leggy redhead from Athlone, through the window from the dormitory and into the upstairs window of the music block to play the piano as Joanne was walking away from the building.

Allison carefully arranged the window latch of the practice room closest to the dormitory so that it looked locked but could still be opened from outside. Then after Joanne locked up for the night, Allison climbed out the dormitory window, across a balcony and into the practice room window and started to play the piano. Joanne heard the music, and I don't remember if she checked the building again or just bolted for her dormitory in Buxton (or was it Somerset?). But by the next morning the story of the haunting of the music block was all over the school.

From what I remember this happened a few more times that week, with more witnesses so that the reports had reached fever pitch in a few days. Witnesses reported apparitions, sounds, creepy sensations of all kinds. By the Friday evening, Joanne had told the authorities (a university student who was on duty for the weekend) that she wasn't going near the music block without backup. The student and Joanne went all over the music block together, verifying there was no-one left in the building, turned off the lights and went out the building into the quad. I have a memory of watching them turn at the first sound of the music floating out across the quad. I was upstairs in Athlone looking down at the quad from my dormitory. The student was wearing a pale white sundress with big appliquéd flowers (it was the seventies after all!). Suddenly an "adult" was presented with proof of the haunting! The rumours flew thick and fast after that.

After a few days Mrs. Lewis, the principal, ordered in an assembly that all the girls responsible for the haunting of the music block stand up right then if they wanted to avoid punishment. A lot of the Athlone girls stood up (Alison Horsell, Karin Engelbrecht, me, and many others) to the shock and relief of the school.

This escapade had a long and a short term effect in my life. The short term effect was that my cousin "Mellie" Campbell and her friend Margot, both in matric, offered me a cup of coffee while they asked questions about this act committed by juniors in tones of outrage and admiration. The long term effect was to make me skeptical of the reports people have of what they "saw" and "heard", even my memory of this story.

Does anyone else remember this escapade? Let me know!

Kate (Fiona)