

# ETHEL DE KEYSER

1926-2004



## ANTI-APARTHEID CAMPAIGNER

Ethel de Keyser was one of a remarkable group of Jewish South African women who helped put apartheid in South Africa on the political agenda in Britain.

De Keyser was born in South Africa. Following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, her brother Jack was detained. In the State of Emergency she joined the anti-apartheid struggle and took part in underground activities for the African National Congress (ANC). In 1963 Jack was jailed for 12 years and this led Ethel to dedicate the rest of her life to the cause.

Settling in Islington she became secretary of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM). This was a critical period in the struggle. Resistance in South Africa had been crushed after the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela and other ANC leaders. Together with the Stop the Seventy Tour, led by Peter Hain, the AAM campaigned against the 1969-70 Springbok rugby tour and forced the cancellation of a cricket tour in 1970. When the Government lifted an arms embargo in the same year, Ethel campaigned hard to prevent the supply of weapons to South Africa.

She helped set up Southern Africa The Imprisoned Society. They co-ordinated campaigns to release political prisoners including Nelson Mandela. In 1981 De Keyser became director of the British section of the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, established by Canon Collins of St Paul's Cathedral, which supported political prisoners and their families.



She also helped set up the Canon Collins Educational Trust for Southern Africa, which supports students committed to achieving social justice.

Ethel De Keyser lived in Highbury.

# OSCAR ABRAMS

1937-1996



## AND KESKIDEE ARTS CENTRE

Oscar Abrams established Keskidee, the first Black arts centre in Britain, which had an international impact on promoting African Caribbean culture.

Guyanese architect Abrams came to London in 1958. He became chairman of the Islington branch of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination which fought for better housing and access to education for newly arrived people from the Caribbean.

In 1971 Abrams set up a centre in Gifford Street - Keskidee Theatre Workshop. With its motto 'A community discovering itself creates its own future', the centre nurtured local talent and gave Black youth a space of their own. For years, it was the only dedicated space in London for Black actors, dramatists and technicians.



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Keskidee was a pioneering cultural centre, promoting emerging artists from Africa and the Caribbean. By the late 1970s, it was known across the world, leading to theatre tours of Europe. In the 1979 KesKidee Aroha tour of New Zealand the company met and performed for remote Maori communities.

In the 1970s poet Linton Kwesi Johnson worked at KesKidee and it became a centre for live dub poetry and music alongside classes on tenants' rights, yoga, cookery, photography, painting and pottery.

In 1978 Bob Marley filmed the video for 'Is this Love?' at the centre.

# TRICIA ZIPFEL



## COMMUNITY ACTIVIST

Tricia Zipfel worked with Anne Power and others to build community organisations that improved play facilities and tackled housing problems.

In the 1960's, many Islington families lived in appalling housing conditions - dangerously overcrowded with little open space. Based at Friends Neighbourhood House in Lonsdale Square, Tricia ran the first playgroups in the borough, inspiring many local mums to train as play leaders and set up playgroups. Islington Play Association, formed in 1971, still runs six of the 12 Islington playgrounds, free of charge to local kids.

Poor housing conditions in the private sector and a lack of Council accommodation affected established and recently arrived minority families alike. Gentrification made matters worse, pushing up house prices and pushing out low income families. In areas like Westbourne Road many were faced with eviction due to 'slum-clearance'. Although Tricia and Anne campaigned successfully to get families re-housed, minority families ended up scattered across London, losing their community links.

This led to the formation of Holloway Tenants Co-operative in 1972, the first community run, management co-op in the UK. Supported by Circle 33, HTC acquired, renovated and managed houses in the Holloway area.



Martin Luther King's daughter Yolanda King and son Martin Luther King III visiting Lough Road Playgroup in March 1969

The North Islington Housing Rights Project helped establish co-ops and persuaded Islington Council to abandon large scale clearance in favour of renovation.

After working with the Civil Rights Movement in Milwaukee, USA, for two years, Tricia returned to run HTC. 13 housing co-ops were set up in Islington, many still in existence including Holloway and Charteris.