

## The Secretariat under Maud Karpeles: London, UK, 1947–1963

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“I was appointed Hon. Secretary.” Maud Karpeles ([1976]:218) wrote this brief statement concerning her selection in 1947 as the inaugural secretary of the International Folk Music Council (IFMC). It was not the first time she had acted as an organizational secretary; she had assumed that role for both the committee for the London International Folk Dance Festival in 1935 and of the International (Advisory) Folk Dance Council (Karpeles 1969:15), but it was the secretaryship of the IFMC which was to be her longest and most significant. Karpeles’s vision had already catalyzed the formation of the IFMC, and her period as secretary was marked by passion, determination, self-sacrifice, and an enduring desire to nurture an organization of global influence in the fields of music and dance.

Much information about further aspects of Maud Karpeles’s life and work may be gleaned from other chapters in this volume. Here, in writing about the years during which Karpeles was secretary, my aim is to highlight the disparate facets of the role and to underscore the remarkable achievements of Karpeles as the first person to hold that office. Sources include IFMC *Bulletins*, minutes of meetings of the IFMC Executive Board, materials in the ICTM Archive curated by the National Library of Australia (Canberra), Karpeles’s autobiographical notes, and a published biography. Her secretarial work is presented as, first, administration of the organization, followed by the ancillary duties of liaising with other associations and producing publications that furthered the scope of the IFMC.

### General administration

One of the most important features of Karpeles’s time as secretary was the onerous nature of her administrative environment. Most notably, the position was unpaid, and this was reflected in her original title of “Honorary Secretary” (*BIFMC* 1, Oct 1948:1). This situation stemmed from the lean financial capacity of the IFMC in those early years. Indeed, “the creation of the IFMC

was an act of faith in many respects, and particularly as regards finance” (Karpeles [1976]:218).

In 1948, the Council consisted of “140 Correspondents representing 35 countries” and the subscription fee was £1 per annum (*BIFMC* 1, Oct 1948:7, 13). In the Council’s infancy and with other costs to be met, such as producing a *Journal*, there were no funds available for a secretarial salary. Karpeles worked without financial remuneration for seven years (EB minutes, 13th meeting, 1–2 Jun 1954: §152), using an inheritance from her maternal grandfather, the banker Henry Lewis Raphael, to meet her living expenses (Pakenham 2011:1). From 1954, a small annual honorarium was awarded, although this was still unable to adequately recompense Karpeles for the time she devoted to IFMC business (*ibid.*:236). The honorarium was £400 per annum, whereas the salary offered to her successor, Robin Band, was £1000 (EB minutes, 29th meeting, 4–5 Aug 1963:§363); by 1963, the membership numbered 866 and although the proposed new subscription was only £2, the Council’s financial status was more stable, due to various donations and grants (*BIFMC* 24, Oct 1963:10, 13, 16).

An additional burden for Karpeles was that, for a period of eighteen years, “the IFMC office had consisted of a room in my flat (wherever it happened to be)” (Karpeles [1976]:256). Several addresses are listed in IFMC *Bulletins* during that time, including 26 Warwick Road, London SW5; 12 Clorane Gardens, London NW3 (both in *BIFMC* 2, Nov 1949:26); and 35 Princess Court Queensway, London W2 (*BIFMC* 22, Oct 1962:32). It is not surprising, then, that the “time involved in securing and moving into new premises” was cited by Karpeles as one of the major difficulties she faced during her time as secretary (EB minutes, 22nd meeting, 10–11 Aug 1959:app. C).

Although Karpeles spent much of her time working alone, her output was remarkable. Around 3,000 letters were sent out from the Secretariat in a twelve-month period in 1962–1963, the equivalent of eight letters for every day of that year (EB minutes, 18th meeting, 22

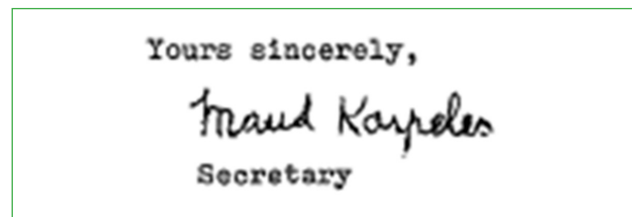
Aug 1957:app. B, §x). Yet, Karpeles notes that “for 15 years, except for a shorthand typist I had been working practically single-handed” ([1976]:255). The assistance of Norman Fraser had been secured in 1952, but after a year he was forced to resign due to personal financial problems (EB minutes, 11th meeting, 8 Jul 1953: §130). Klaus Wachsmann also helped for a short time (EB minutes, 20th meeting, 27 Jul 1958:app. A, §vii), but otherwise the work fell solely to Karpeles.

In spite of these difficulties, Karpeles was a methodical keeper of records, ensuring that relevant topics were dealt with in a meticulous and effective fashion. In the inaugural report of the Executive Board, as presented by Karpeles to the delegates at the 1948 IFMC Conference in Basel, it was noted that the Secretariat had been involved in “building up the organisation, establishing contacts, and in preparing for the first meeting of the General Conference” (*BIFMC* 1, Oct 1948:7). At the same conference, during a debate about proposed amendments to the IFMC’s Provisional Constitution, it was Karpeles who coordinated the discussion, referring to her minutes from the 1947 meeting in London. She also augmented the efficiency of those talks by reminding delegates that some matters had already been resolved at that London assembly and pointing out that reiterative discourse on those topics was superfluous.

The need for recruitment and the concomitant receipt of annual fees was always at the forefront of Karpeles’s mind, motivating her to “plea for increased membership, saying it was impossible to carry on the many important undertakings of the Council with such a low membership” (*BIFMC* 6, Sep 1952:12). This evangelical drive to encourage scholars to commit to membership of, and participation in, the activities of the IFMC is also evident in her catalogue of correspondence. For example, Karpeles wrote to Juana Cristoloveanu (New York) on 19 March 1958. After the main topic of dance notation had been addressed, Karpeles reminded Cristoloveanu that her IFMC subscription was due and informed her that, for her convenience, it could be paid by International Money Order.<sup>1</sup> While the ICTM Archive contains mostly unsigned copies of such correspondence, the originals would have borne her signature, as shown in [figure 1](#).

## Ancillary activities

The duties of the IFMC secretary also included interactions with other organizations, a task that Karpeles undertook with characteristic diligence. A particular focus was her attendance at meetings of the International



**Figure 1.** The Karpeles salutation, letter to members of the Executive Board, 27 November 1962 (ICTM Archive MS 10017, series 4, folder 69).

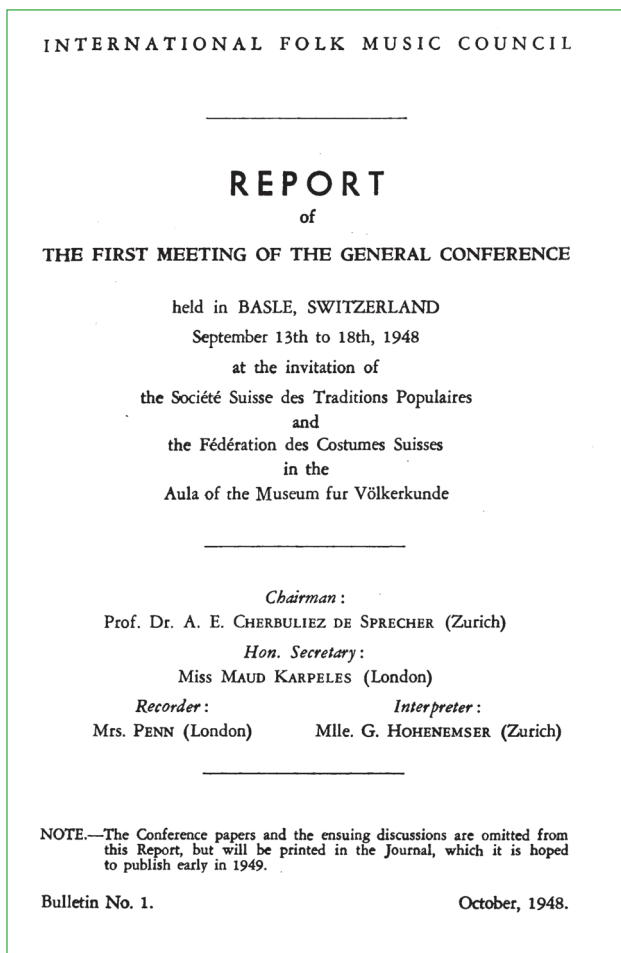
Music Council (UNESCO) at which she campaigned for financial support for the IFMC. In 1952, Karpeles attended the Third General Assembly of that Council and secured three separate grants of US\$500 towards various IFMC project costs. Two further endowments of US\$500 were made following Karpeles’s attendance at a subsequent meeting in 1954 (*BIFMC* 9, Oct 1955:11). The campaign to secure funding was a long-term project and, in 1962, Karpeles argued for even greater sponsorship from the International Music Council, suggesting that an appeal to UNESCO for increased financial support should be mounted (*BIFMC* 22, Oct 1962: 14). Indeed, her quest to secure extraneous financial support for the IFMC lasted for many years.

Karpeles’s contribution as secretary also extended to oversight of various IFMC publications. In 1948, she compiled a *Directory of Folk Music Organisations* and a *Manual for Collectors* which was made available to all IFMC members (*BIFMC* 1, Oct 1948:16). In the same year, it was decided that the Council should publish both a *Journal* and a *Bulletin* ([figure 2](#)), so “Maud cheerfully undertook to edit these and contributed a lengthy editorial to the first of them” (Pakenham 2011:224).<sup>2</sup> Several proposed alterations to the structure of the *Bulletin* were proposed in 1957, including a change to twice-yearly production. Karpeles not only shouldered the extra work, but unfailingly reminded IFMC members to contribute items about their research, activities of other organizations, and announcements about courses, conferences, and festivals (*BIFMC* 11, Mar 1957:1).

Karpeles’s secretarial records contain many references to other documents that related to the Council’s academic aims. For example, in 1952, much time at the IFMC conference was devoted to discussing a report, compiled and circulated by Karpeles, about the “significance of folk music in the general cultural life of the present day,” which was “based on contributions which I had received from 35 members resident in 16 different countries” (Karpeles [1976]:233). Such a combination

1 Personal correspondence to Juana Cristoloveanu (ICTM Archive MS 10017, series 4, folder 120).

2 Dieter Christensen (secretary general, 1981–2001) is the only other individual who has held the position of secretary, while also editing both the *Journal* and the *Bulletin*.



**Figure 2.** Cover of the inaugural *BIFMC* 1 (October 1948).

of scholarly rigour and attention to administrative detail was formidable, and served to fortify the international reputation of the IFMC.

Admittedly, it should be acknowledged that not everybody agreed with Karpeles's approach to some matters of IFMC administration. Karpeles ([1976]:225) admits that there was some "heated correspondence" about the definition of "folk" during the 1949 conference in Venice. The 1952 conference held at Cecil Sharp House in London was another time during which tensions surfaced, mainly because of a conflict between Karpeles and the English Folk Dance and Song Society, at whose property the conference was being held. Her biographer observes that during this meeting, "Maud must have come into contact with her growing number of enemies" (Pakenham 2011:229). Nevertheless, her determination, enthusiasm and attention to detail served the Council very well, both during her time as secretary and in the years that followed.

## Personal sacrifices

The role of secretary meant that Karpeles had less time to devote to her own scholarly enterprises; she desired more time for "song collecting and to free herself from the more irksome duties that being Honorary Secretary of the IFMC involved" (Pakenham 2011:233). Although always conscientious, the personal toll was also significant. Karpeles was 61 when she began her tenure. During a visit to the USA in 1961 at the age of 76, she suffered a heart attack, yet upon her eventual return to England, she continued to act as IFMC secretary (ibid.:241). IFMC obligations also intruded into her personal life; in reference to the death of her good friend Frank Etherington in 1962, Karpeles ([1976]:241) lamented that her "absorption with the affairs of the IFMC left me but little time for personal sorrows." Indeed, from the time Karpeles initiated the formation of the IFMC, "her autobiography almost ceases to include any domestic detail and becomes a history of the International Folk Music Council" (Pakenham 2011:222).

Karpeles had indicated as early as 1952 that she no longer felt she was able to continue as secretary (EB minutes, 9th meeting, 13 Jul 1952:§102), but she managed to persist for another eleven years. Over the years that followed, her plea for relief from the position was reiterated several times. In 1953, she told her fellow Board members that both her health and financial circumstances were poor (EB minutes, 11th meeting, 8 July 1953:§130), while in 1954 she once again directed the Board's attention to her financial difficulties, and it was at this meeting that the decision to pay her an honorarium was made (EB minutes, 13th meeting, 1 and 2 June 1954:§152). By 1959, Karpeles was citing her advanced age as the primary reason for retiring as secretary, as she was then 74 (EB minutes 22nd meeting, 10 and 11 August 1959:app. C). Yet, Karpeles managed to continue in the role for several more years.

Eventually, the services of Robin Band were secured in 1962 and he was eased into the secretarial role through Karpeles's ongoing supervision, until she felt that Band was ready to independently assume the role of executive secretary (*BIFMC* 22, Oct 1962:9–10). Band would also have benefited from the vast number of "immaculate papers" that had been compiled by Karpeles, mainly so that the activities of the Council would be documented, but which had also been prepared "for her successors to take up" and follow her example of rigour and dedication (Pakenham 2011:245).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hundreds of these papers are found in the 98 boxes that form the "Records of the International Council for Traditional Music" (National Library of Australia, Canberra, MS 10017).

## Retirement as secretary

At the time of her official retirement as secretary at the 1963 conference in Jerusalem, the IFMC President Zoltán Kodály and his wife gave a “Presentation Volume,” a cheque and some flowers to Karpeles (*BIFMC* 24, Oct 1963:15). Luis Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo, representing the director general of UNESCO and who had been present at the first IFMC conference in 1948, observed that Karpeles’s “tactfulness and her wisdom in conducting the business of the International Folk Music Council won over the trust of everybody” (*ibid.*:1, translated from French). Indeed, as well noted by Douglas Kennedy ten years previously, the IFMC had been “nursed by Miss Karpeles from small beginnings” (*BIFMC* 7, Sep 1953:19), and this nurture was particularly evident in the broad spectrum of activities that Maud Karpeles undertook while holding the position of honorary secretary.

## Karpeles as honorary president

Although her term as secretary was behind her, Karpeles continued as honorary president of the IFMC, later ICTM (*BIFMC* 24, Oct 1963:2) until she passed away in 1976 and some commentary about this contribution should also be recorded here. From the first *Bulletin* after her retirement as secretary, she was accorded a place immediately below that of the elected president in the listing of Board members, and given her full title of “Dr. Maud Karpeles, O.B.E.”<sup>4</sup> (*BIFMC* 24, Oct 1963:37). Karpeles continued to attend meetings of the Executive Board (e.g., see *BIFMC* 28, Jul 1966:3 and *BIFMC* 47, Oct 1975:18) and maintained an active consultative role with various officers of the Council. For example, she wrote a letter on 25 January 1969 to Connie Matthews, IFMC executive secretary at the time, in which Karpeles discussed various administrative concerns about the next Council conference, provided expenditure details for the film catalogue that was being produced, requested a rough copy of the Council’s financial statement, and offered opinions about matters arising from the previous meeting of the IFMC Advisory Council.<sup>5</sup> Karpeles was also active in a project that had been nurtured since the earliest days of the IFMC, namely, a group devoted to dance research, the development of which is provided elsewhere in this volume.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 3.** Maud Karpeles in August 1975 while interviewing Kenneth Loveless (still courtesy of Don Niles, from video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqiBas3CbnI>).

The final IFMC Executive Board meeting that Karpeles attended was the 51st, held in Warsaw in August 1976. Fifty-one EB meetings had featured the presence and insight of Maud Karpeles in relation to the administration and functioning of the Council she had contributed to since its inception, and all of this happened during the final phase of her life, from the age of 61.

An obituary about Maud Karpeles appeared in the London newspaper, *The Times*, in October 1976, written by Ursula Vaughan Williams (1976), a fitting choice as Ursula’s late husband, Ralph Vaughan Williams, had been the inaugural president of the IFMC and had worked very closely with Karpeles in managing the Council’s affairs. In the article, Ursula Vaughan Williams notes that Karpeles had attended another organizational meeting at Cecil Sharp House, London, only two nights before she passed away; thus, her whole life was characterized by determination and wholehearted commitment to the work of studying music and dance. Inside the front cover of the first IFMC *Bulletin* published after her death, Karpeles was given the highest listing among the office bearers, with the words “Honorary President and Founder” above her name. On the first page of that same *Bulletin*, a short tribute ends with these words:

To the Secretariat, whose members had the privilege and joy to be counted among her friends, falls the first of the Council’s opportunities to say, for themselves and a thousand others, farewell. (*BIFMC* 49, Oct 1976:1)

It is fitting that the Secretariat was the first part of the IFMC to be able to say farewell to Maud Karpeles (shown towards the end of her life in [figure 3](#)), the woman who had first held the position of secretary of the International Folk Music Council.

4 Member of the Order of the British Empire, a civic award bestowed by Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom.

5 Personal correspondence to Connie Matthews (ICTM Archive MS 10017, series 4, folder 120).

6 This group is now the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology.

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