Don Vollen – Three Memories

Don Vollen · Arlesheim, 6 November 2026



Don Vollen, born in Chicago in 1950, is a eurythmist and entrepreneur who held a senior position at the Goetheanum stage for many years. In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, he encountered Jörgen Smit through eurythmy and their work at the Goetheanum.

In three personal recollections, he describes Jörgen Smit's connection to eurythmy, his lively sense of humour, and his distinctive way of speaking.

Ethos and Pathos

Jörgen Smit was that member of the Directors of the Goetheanum that attended eurythmy performances most frequently. For that reason, he was particularly welcomed at the wood-framed building where one of the eurythmy trainings was based. He held a series of lectures and discussions with students there. The discussion turned to the theme of “Ethos and Pathos” as Rudolf Steiner spoke about it in his lectures about Tone Eurythmy. Jörgen Smit said, “if I may make one observation as an active audience attender… Ethos, the experience of going up and out into the periphery, of going out into space is something wonderful, especially something that female eurythmists seem to enjoy and trust in. But what about Pathos, about going down”? And then he showed that movement with both arms quite impressively. It was obvious that he himself had no inhibitions to demonstrate eurythmy. While doing it, he made a face of reluctance and antipathy about going down, as if he was distancing himself from the world. He added “Eurythmists, especially female eurythmists love Ethos, but what about Pathos? The next step would be to penetrate also that world”. His listeners knew exactly what he was talking about and we were all very impressed.

This must have been just a few years before his death.

“Du hast nicht alle Tassen im Schrank”

(You’ve got a loose screw or you’ve lost your marbles)

I remember being in a lecture in the big auditorium at the Goetheanum. As always, his lectures were very well attended. There were some 750 listeners present. He often developed strong pictures from everyday events or habits and customs which were so obvious, that few people reflected upon them. He spoke at some length about the saying: “Du hast nicht alle Tassen im Schrank”, meaning you don’t fit into civil society, as though that would be an insult. It has a definite negative connotation. But he turned it completely around and said, “Let’s look at this for a moment. Isn’t having all your cups in the cupboard a sign of Bürgerlichkeit — of a petty-bourgeois mentality?” As he was speaking

about it, the audience was laughing louder and louder. He continued “If you don’t have all your cups in the right place in the cupboard, then something is wrong with you“. And he said, “But we should aim for that! We should break out of this petty-bourgeois mentality. That is the strength of being an anthroposophist!”

Jörgen Smit recites for a Eurythmy performance –

«Der Erfrorene» «The North Pole Explorer» von Rudolf Steiner

At a certain point in my career, I was known for humorous pieces in eurythmy, usually referred to as “Humoresken”.

I asked Jörgen Smit, “Jörgen, would you speak Rudolf Steiner’s North Pole Explorer for me at a performance in the main auditorium?” After all, he came from Bergen, close to the Nordic Circle. We are talking about the 1980s. At that time, it would have been very unusual for a member of the Board of Directors to do something like that. When I asked him the question, he said, “I’ll think about it.” A couple of days later, he said, “I’ll do it.”

This is the poem,

DER ERFRORNE Rudolf Steiner

Ein Nordpolfahrer hat wollen
Auf dem kalten Eise schlafen.
Da träumt' er auf den Schollen
Von Hitze und von Licht,

Der Traum war ganz verworren,
Er war so schwül und hitzig.
Der Fahrer war erfroren,
Doch das war nur sein Leib.

We had a grand total of one rehearsal. The moment he stood up from his seat in the first row, where only the directors sat, and went up the stairs to the stage, the audience was dismayed. No one was sure what was going on and what might happen. Many people were speaking, others laughing out of insecurity. Jörgen was a very large and dominant figure. He stood there where the reciters always stand and the entire audience was looking at him. The silent introduction to the actual spoken poem was quite long, but he knew exactly when to start.

And then I remember — and this was very characteristic for him — his emphasis, his strong emphasis. He had a very Nordic, Norwegian way of accentuating certain words. He had actually trained in speech formation and rolled his Rs and did it really professionally. But the way he said it was almost eccentric; it was very humorous. He knew how to make it into a good event. “Auf dem kalten Eise schlafen” — the way he almost went into a flageolet while pronouncing the “A” in “schlafen” -immediately making clear that this was a very bad idea! So the approximately 1,000 people in the audience were already laughing out loud after the second line.
This must also have been in the late 1980s. He was over 70 years old.

THE FROZEN TRAVELLER

A North Pole traveller wanted
To sleep upon the freezing ice.
There, on the ice floes, he dreamed
Of heat and light.

The dream was quite confused,
So sultry and so feverish.
The traveller had frozen to death,
But that was only his body

Editorial note: Recorded by Rembert Biemond during lunch at Restaurant Rössli, Arlesheim, on 6 November 2026. The wording was reviewed and approved by Don Vollen.