

## Jane Rickenbaugh finds creativity in choreography



By R. W. Greene  
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In the broad spectrum of the American cultural scene, modern dance has never gained an overwhelming audience. Perhaps because of the art's relative youth (it was born and nurtured in the 1930s), or what some would consider the difficult degree of comprehension demanded of its audience, modern dance has never quite caught on, except in a few quarters. In the land of "B.J. and the Bear," and Ted Nugent, one wonders if it ever will.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) this lack of mass appeal, the art demands a high degree of dedication from its practitioners. The physical talents must be kept as finely tuned as the creative or interpretive. The profession is far from lucrative. U.S. Department of Labor statistics show that the average dancer makes \$3,469 a year—more than a motel maid, but less than a photographer.

One such dedicated individual is Jane Rickenbaugh, the College's modern dance instructor, and free-lance choreographer in her own

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right. Rickenbaugh, one of the charter faculty members of the College, though not originally as a dance instructor, has just earned a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies degree from Reed College—the first one ever granted by that institution for dance.

Her masters project, called "Nursery Rhyme Suite--Recollections and Reminiscences of Childhood," called for years of work from Rickenbaugh, as well as a written thesis and the production which eventually involved a composer, a costume designer, and 10 dancers and readers.

"I dealt with the light and the dark of childhood," says Rickenbaugh of the project, "and all the different shades of experience that a child has." The piece consisted of eight dances interspersed with eight nursery rhymes. "The nursery rhymes led into the dances, and they also gave an image of a child's mind, which is very unpredictable. I choreographed from all these childhood feelings and memories that I had."

In the nursery rhyme, "Jack be nimble, Jack be quick," for example, Rickenbaugh "was the one who chanted it, and

my dancer did it three different times. The first time, I portrayed the parent who was being very nice and rational. The second time I became insistent, and quite stern; and the third time I just became diabolical, and irrational." Says Rickenbaugh, "It's an adult's craft looking at childhood, so it speaks to both children and adults."

Despite her current dedication to dance, Rickenbaugh never started out with the idea of being a choreographer, or even a dance instructor. Born in central California, and raised in Escondido, a city about halfway between San Clemente and San Diego, she never took lessons from a young age, as so many dancers do. She was always athletic, she says, being a strong swimmer and tennis player. She majored in speech and English at Palomar College, earned her B.A. at Brigham Young, and her first M.A. at Southern Illinois University. She began teaching speech after that, first at OSU, and then at SOSC before coming to CCC in 1967. "Dr. Hakanson always introduces me as the first faculty member they ever hired," laughs Rickenbaugh.

In the beginning, Rickenbaugh taught both speech and drama. The reminiscence of those early years seems to fill her with a mixture of chagrin and glee. "The janitors built me a stage of 4 x 8 plywood planks and we did these one-act plays, over in Clairmont, when it was still the Student Center," she recalls. A stage tree fell over during a performance of Pirandello, and another time Rickenbaugh almost came to blows with a Servomation man when he tried to start filling up the vending machines during a performance. "Another time," she says, "I unplugged all the machines because they were making so much noise, and forgot to plug them back in again--there were a lot of soggy foods when we came back the next night."

But speech was not fulfilling the creative urges Rickenbaugh was feeling at the time. She began taking modern dance classes from Margaret Charters, who now serves as chairperson of the library. Charters has an interesting story herself, having danced years ago with such pioneers of modern dance as Martha Graham and Doris Humphreys. Charters was quick to

recognize Rickenbaugh's talent, and encouraged her to continue; she did so, taking workshops at Reed and eventually taking an entire year's leave of absence to work on the M.A. project. "I just decided that there was a time in one's life when one did something important or it just never got done," says Rickenbaugh.

Charters is full of admiration for what Rickenbaugh has done, both for her own career, and for CCC's dance program. "She's a very dedicated individual," says Charters, "and it speaks well of her that she's done as well as she has." The early years of the dance program were rough, according to both Charters and Rickenbaugh. All classes were taught off-campus, because both refused to teach on the wood-topped cement floor of the gym and other places; locations were as diverse as the V.F.W. Hall in Oregon City, and a karate studio. When Rickenbaugh returned from her year off, Charters went to the library, and Rickenbaugh took over dance, while still teaching speech, and choreographing on her own. After months of fighting administration skepticism of the idea of a full-time

Clackamas Community College

