

Gumby, Cincinnatus, et al, visit College

By J. Dana Haynes
Of The Print

Jack Shields, theater director for Clackamas Community College, organized a workshop last week. Among his guests were Tigger, Gumby, Mr. Weatherbee, Cincinnatus and dozens more.

Dallas McKennon, professional actor and voice man, presented a workshop called Vox Box. McKennon, 64, has been doing voices and sound effects for movies, television and radio since 1935.

"The Vox Box class deals with the mechanics of vocal manipulation," McKennon said. "I teach people how to do different sounds and voices."

The class will be repeated for the general public on March 30-31, from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. The admission will be \$25.

McKennon's work includes stints with Disney, the "Archie" TV cartoon, the "Daniel Boone" show and Walter Lantz, the creator of Woody Woodpecker.

He began his work at radio station KOBM in LaGrande, Oregon. At age 15, McKennon was hired to read short stories by Mark Twain and O'Henry on the air, using different voices for different characters.

His first experience in communications came even earlier. "I started out on our farm, talking to the animals," he said. "After a while, they started talking back, which gave me the confidence to talk to people. Boy! Was I shy!"

After KOBM, McKennon moved on to KGW radio in Portland, which at that time featured voice-man Mel Blanc, famous for Bugs Bunny and other Warner Brothers' characters (ironically, McKennon didn't work with Blanc while at KGW, but they did work together later on in Hollywood). McKennon then moved from Portland and radio to Hollywood and films, eventually landing two roles in James Roy Hill's "The Wheeler Dealers" (with Lee Remick and James Garner).

Later, he moved on to Disney Studios, where he stayed from 1952 until Walt Disney's death, working on movies such as "101 Dalmations," "Jungle Book," "Mary Poppins," "Winnie the Pooh," and "Bednobs and Broomsticks." He did voices for Disneyland and Disneyworld (including Disneyworld's futuristic Epcot Center) and eventually became a friend of Walt Disney.

"One day back in the early fifties, Walt took me into his office and showed me a sketch of something he was going to call Disneyland," McKennon fondly remembers. "Walt was a great guy with a wonderful ear and eye for theater."

The role for which McKennon is best remembered is Cincinnatus from the "Daniel Boone" show, which ran from 1960-67. "I loved working with Ed Ames and Fess Parker," he said. "Fess did a tremendous amount for my career."

His other credits include 19 years with Walter Lantz (he did the voices for all the characters except Woody Woodpecker, whose voice was provided by Gracie Lantz, Walter's wife) and the "Archie" cartoon show (McKennon did the vocalization for Archie Andrews, his dog Hotdog and Mr. Weatherbee, the principal of Riverdale High).

McKennon now works in Hollywood, preferring the pace of his combination home/recording studio in Cannon Beach. The pace may be different, but not any slower. McKennon has a menagerie of projects in the works including:

"Fanciful Facts," a series he is doing for cable TV featuring the character of Skinny Bones Jones and dealing with the origins of old sayings. McKennon said the project has proved popular and successful with foreigners trying to learn English.

"The Poppenheimers," on PBS, a series about the German language. McKennon plays Charlie Poppenheimer, but said "Actually, I don't speak a word of German."



Dallas McKennon

Photo by Duane Hiersche

A series of concerts with singer Nancy Olson, who has performed on Broadway and in the New York Metropolitan Opera House.

A record with Portland pianist/organist Jonas Nordwall. They will play music written by McKennon, who admits to not being able to play any instruments or actually write music. "I whistle and sing into a tape recorder and Jonas transposes it into music," McKennon said.

Of all his projects, McKennon said he is probably most fond of the Vox Box workshops. "Lots of people won't do it (teach acting techniques) because they think they're giving their 'tools' away," he said. "I like it. I like teaching people to be the best they can be, at whatever they want."

McKennon added, "The important thing for a young actor to do is pick out what he wants to do and do it! Go for it all the way, but don't do it just for the money. If the all-mighty fat buck is the final goal, then you'll starve to death in this business."

The Print

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AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL—College student Becky Hilderbrand "Scats" to accompaniment of Portland jazz pianist Tom Grant at last weekend's Jazz Fest.

Photo by Joel Miller

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