

# Magical Evening of English Dance

by Mary Devlin



How old do you have to be to enjoy the subtle beauty of English country dance? A mature thirty or forty? How about five years old? That was the age of the youngest dancers in a recent display of English dance at the weekly Friday night dance in Portland, Oregon. The oldest dancer? All of twelve.

The dancers were students from the Renaissance School of Arts and Sciences. Headmaster Susan Dunn began teaching her students elements of English country dancing and then called on me, a local caller, to add some finishing touches. They were being prepared to dance with the “grown-ups” at a regular evening dance.

On Friday, April 20, the Water Tower Hall in Portland was electric with twenty-two children, their parents and an uncounted number of video cameras. The children danced “Take A Dance” and “Mendocino Redwood” with the adults. They perfectly demonstrated “Smithy Hill” for the adults present for whom the dance was new, and then danced it proudly and confidently.

After a brief timeout for a wardrobe change—all costumes self-designed and constructed of materials from Goodwill—the children returned as the exhibition dance troupe Raven’s Magic and performed “Old Wife Behind the Fire” Then everyone, reluctant parents included, joined in a rousing “Yellow Stockings.”

Perhaps there were some skeptical adults at the beginning of the evening, but it only took once through the first dance to see that the children were accomplished dancers. They not only danced the patterns well but also included eye contact, subtle nods of acknowledgement to their partners, and smiles. And they helped keep the lines straight! They had practiced that too.

A week later the buzz at the school continued to be all about English country dance. Parents are talking about Friday dancing date nights. The children are excited about having more dance lessons. And they prepared to join Portland display dancers to welcome the sun on May Day with English country dancing.

*For information about Renaissance School of Arts and Sciences see <http://www.rsa-sc.org>*



Photos courtesy Mary Devlin