

## arts & entertainment

# Raymond Johnson sees future for modern dance

Modern dance is less than a century old but Raymond Johnson anticipates a long life for the new art form.

"There's a future of modern dance in finding different ways of using the dance company not only through performance," he said. "It should try to be in residency for longer periods, to get really involved in teaching."

Dance has occupied the majority of Johnson's 30 years of life. At age 12 he started studying tap, then he moved to modern dance. He studied at the Henry Street Playhouse in lower Manhattan, the place where he began choreographing and teaching as a teen.

He studied and toured with contemporary masters of

modern dance: Alwin Nikolais, Murray Louis, Rudy Perez. But that wasn't enough. In 1974 Johnson decided it was time to create his own company, the Raymond Johnson Dance Company.

Johnson and the other five members of his company tour the U.S. extensively. He said it's too expensive for the company to remain in New York City all year long and that touring, like his string of Nebraska residencies in Valentine, Neligh, Dunning and ending in Lincoln, is an important part of the company's job: educating people to what dance is all about.

### Touring towns

"Touring is just basically a town, and any type of deviation from that is greatly accepted by the company," he said. "There's no distinction between audiences in large and small towns, but in small towns people are more warm than in large cities.

"They value basic human needs like food and friendship. We respond to that and it really affects us."

But Johnson affects the public, too. Dunning has a population of only about 200 people but attendance at the company's performance in the town drew over 1,000 persons.

"It's not a surprise for me to have people in small towns be open to modern dance. But it was amazing how many people came to Dunning and how excited and responsive they were," he said.

"I hope people will at least be able to say, 'I understood some of it, not all of it, but I enjoyed it' when they come to a performance."

### Dance bias

Johnson acknowledged the bias that sometimes exists against dance because his own father "didn't think it was a practical vocation for a man" and he wanted Raymond to be an architect.

"I knew that bias existed but I didn't want to stick my neck out and tell my friends about it. Later on, when there was a performance I'd invite some of my friends to watch and then they were more open and receptive to it."

It also didn't bother Johnson being the only male in his dance class for four years. Because of it, he got all the starring male roles, he said.

Johnson said social attitudes now are more positive toward dance because "there's more exposure, publicity, knowledge and awareness all over the country." He also said anyone who gets involved in modern dance can be very influential because of its highly individualistic nature.

Johnson must be right. He's come a long way in 18 years and when he says he's inspired by "the energy I get from life," you can feel the power that has made him so dedicated.



Photo by Bob Pearson

Raymond Johnson said he feels social attitudes are more positive toward male dancers and dance in general.

## Disney cartoons in rut, animation lost to ads?

By J. Marc Mushkin

American commercial animation is in a sad state these days. Walt Disney's features are in such a rut that only new waves of children can stomach them. And television cartoons are simply atrocious. At least *The Jetsons* used to be funny; now who can sit through even one Saturday morning program?

With this condition, most Americans treat animation lightly. Once in a while a major work comes along showing the nearly unlimited possibilities of animated art.

*The Fantastic Animation Festival* does this not with a single feature, but with a collection of the world's finest new examples of sophisticated animation.

It is unfortunate that the Walt Disney studio has to be indicted for contributing to the delinquency of an art form, because modern animation has its roots in Disney's work. His 1941 classic, *Fantasia*, (now playing at the Cooper/Lincoln) was the first taste the general public had for innovative, artful use of the medium.

Animation suffered through years of doldrums until 1968 when the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* brought tremendous attention to the possibilities of avant-garde cartooning. Critical acclaim made *Yellow Submarine* a hit, but more importantly, it breathed fresh life into the animation workshops and schools around the world.

So now, nearly ten years later, the *Fantastic Animation Festival* brings us the choice descendents of the *Yellow Submarine*. The format of the collection is pleasingly direct—there is no narrator to "explain" anything. The 18

films run one after another.

Some of the films seem to take themselves too seriously as titles like *Light* and *Cosmic Cartoon* indicate.

The music in all the films was good. It ranged from Pink Floyd to Holst's "The Planets" and was superbly integrated with the animation.

*The Last Cartoon Man*, by Jeffrey Hale and Derek Lamb, is a hilarious short film of a comic who performs by detaching his limbs. His finale is to pop off his head, but he drops it and clumsily kicks it around while trying to find it.

By far the finest film was the last, *Closed Mondays*, by Will Vinton and Bob Gardiner. A serious comment on the relationship between art and society is made using expressive and detailed clay figures.

One disturbing note that the festival brings out is the aspect of money in film production. A section of the show displays two examples of television commercials' animation (for Levi's and 7-up). On the big screen it is clear that the tremendous production of these works is miles ahead of independent studios. One has to ask if it's always going to be true that an animator needs a giant company's money to fully use the potential of his medium.

If this is true, maybe my optimism from this festival about the future of animation is ill-founded. The Levi's ad is technically incredible, but the content is some ad man's gibberish. If this is the only place where the money is, there always will be a severe restriction on the advancement of independent animation, and we may all have to settle for *The Archies*.

## Old-time fiddlin' lives on

By Jim Williams

Music coming up out of basements—that's the grassroots of American musical culture. Whether it's shaggy 16-year-olds thumping through "Mister Speed" or old ladies playing piano duets, the peoples' music rises out of the ground.

Sunday was the 13th anniversary celebration of the Nebraska Old Time Fiddlers Association. Fiddle music came up out of the basement at 4141 N. 62 St., with the smell of meatloaf from the potluck dinner.

Women moved around a table in the cramped dining room, setting out sandwiches and cake. In the living room, dark, brown and dingy, eight musicians were playing polka tunes.

An old man plunked cadences on an upright piano crowned with Panasonic cassette recorders, while another squeezed out the tune on an accordion. Around the small room other musicians were tentatively picking out melodies on violins and guitars.

George Chapman of Lincoln isn't a paid-up member of the association, but he was there to play. He said he began fiddling at age 11, 56 years ago.

"It's to keep the old-time fiddlers intact—to keep them from dying," he said of the group's purpose.

"We get together and play about twice a month, someplace or other."

Delores DeRyke is the president of the Nebraska Old Time Fiddlers Association. She said she started the group in 1964 to prepare for the state's centennial. She said other centennial states had exploited their fiddlers, with things like contests with big entry fees and small prizes.

"From January of '65 to the end of '67 there were three Sundays that we didn't have a meeting or performance somewhere in the state," DeRyke said. "Chapters then took other names and parted company because this business of local politics is unbelievable."

DeRyke said she'd been fiddling 40 years and researching the subject for 21. From her research grew the American Old Time Fiddlers Association, and the American Fiddlers News, of which she is editor.

"I started hunting for a tune my great-uncle used to play, and the organizations developed out of that," DeRyke said. "Last year I finally found the tune."

Why does she do it? "Just the satisfaction," DeRyke said. "Because of what I have done, I have started fiddling groups all over the country."

"There's a kind of therapy or peacefulness that comes from fiddling," she said. "There have been so many hundreds and thousands of people who've enjoyed fiddling—this is the stuff you don't get on radio and records. There's something about it that everybody understands."

DeRyke said more young people are showing an interest in old time fiddling now than ever. She said she thought they were interested in musical heritage.

George Chapman had another explanation. "I suppose they like that kind of music," he said.

## Playhouse plans 'Mr. Roberts' auditions today

Auditions for the next Lincoln Community Playhouse production, *Mister Roberts*, will be at 7:30 p.m. today and Wednesday at the Playhouse, 2500 S. 56th St.

There are 20 male roles and one female role available. Scripts may be checked out from the Playhouse office with a \$1 refundable deposit.