

Youth Movement

By LISA TRAIGER
Special to The Washington Post

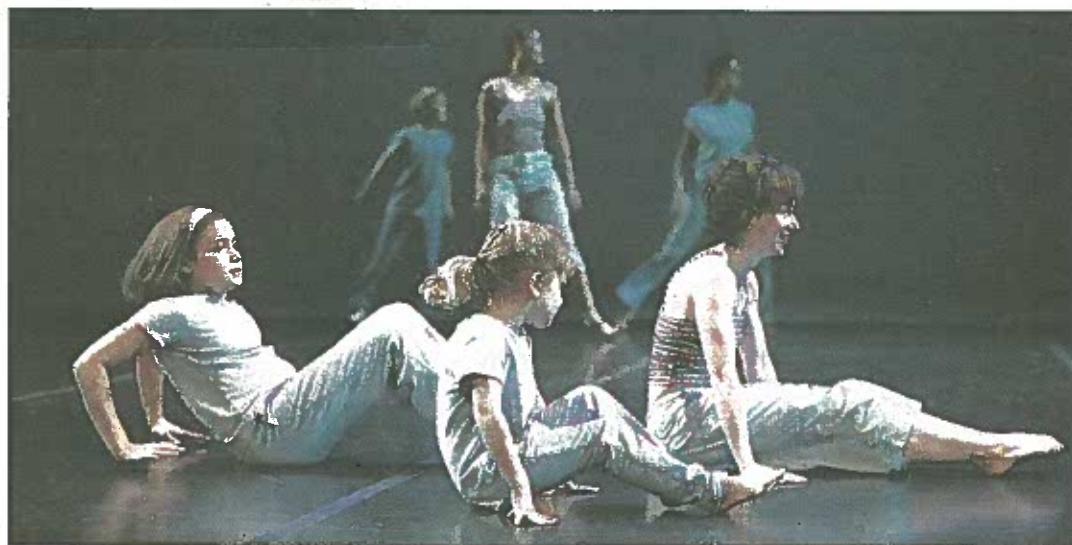
JANE FRANKLIN is unapologetic about being a suburban mom who crafts dances for children as well as adults. While she's an artist and a dancemaker, she's also a working parent—with grocery shopping, laundry and carpools to choreograph. So when she works, it's little wonder that the seemingly mundane wends its way into her studio explorations and finished pieces.

A few years ago, Franklin was inspired to create "Home Remedies" by the homemaking column "Hints From Heloise," which dis-

penses sage advice about what to do with old newspaper bags and how to efficiently manage coupon collections. This time, Franklin found her fodder in the Alexandria-Arlington Extra section of this very newspaper, in a gem of a column called "Animal Watch."

"I love these stories, the way they are written with such detail in so few sentences, and the obvious interactions of the people behind the stories," Franklin relates, about the brief reports on lost dogs and aggressive squirrels. An animal lover herself—family dog Willie was adopted from the Al-

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BY RAY GNIEWEK

The Jane Franklin Dance company collaborated with children to create several pieces.

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exandria Animal Shelter—she couldn't help but find intrigue in this item:

"Rude Awakening by Raccoon. . . . A man sleeping on a closed-in porch was awakened by a noise and found a raccoon sitting on his legs and staring at him. The man moved; the raccoon snapped its jaws but did not bite, then fled through a cat door. An animal con-

trol officer advised the resident to close the cat door at night or use other deterrents to keep the raccoon away."

Franklin saw wonderful creative possibilities in using this and similar stories as the basis for dances by and for children. The choreographer, mother of an 11- and a 13-year-old, began teaching a "mothers movement" class for women and very small children in 1997. Having seen how rewarding it was when

children and adults danced together, she set out to create more opportunities for them to do so.

Her Young Dancers Project, founded in 2002, allows children of all abilities an opportunity to take part in the creative process of making a dance. "I wanted to see what would happen if the children could dance with adults and really be guided to contribute—even with non-parent adults," she explains. Franklin prefers to work with no more than 20 children at a time, with at least two other adult dancers assisting and collaborating with the youngsters. "I feel like the kids absorb things in so many different ways just by having so many different role models in the room," she says. "Both adults and other kids."

And the interaction isn't unilateral. "This also does something for the adult dancers who can otherwise sometimes become overly concerned about their personal performance and the exacting details," she says. Franklin's young dancers, who are between ages 7 and 14, meet Saturdays in an Arlington studio for dance classes, which begin with a warm-up and progress to movement-based problem-solving skills and finally to creative collaboration.

"Animal Watch" features eight children and Jane Franklin Dance, the choreographer's 10-member professional adult troupe. The work appears on a children's program Saturday afternoon in Gunston's Theater One. In the evening, the troupe presents a longer program for adults featuring works by Franklin—her premiere quartet "Fell," with music by Washington composer Jonathan Morris—as well as an installment from Alvin Mayes's ongoing "Paradise Project"

and Pennsylvania-based choreographer Ursula Payne's "Hidden Languages." The Arlington-based company calls the two-program weekend "Day and Night."

The family matinee clocks in at just 50 minutes with no intermission, something Franklin knows parents with young children appreciate. The kids in the audience are more likely to appreciate the company's ever-popular finale. Franklin calls it a cakewalk and it's irresistible: All the children in the audience are invited onto the stage for a few rounds of musical chairs. The winners each get to take home a cake.

"It's a lot of fun," Franklin laughs, "and extremely corny."

"DAY AND NIGHT" — Jane Franklin Dance. Saturday. Family matinee, 3 p.m. Evening performance, 8 p.m. Gunston Theater One, 2700 S. Lang St., Arlington. 703-298-3235.

WINTER PROJECT, REPERTORY FOR YOUNG DANCERS 7-14 — Jan. 29-April 9, 10:45-12:15. Jane Franklin Dance, 3700 S. Four Mile Run Dr., Room 129, Arlington. \$85. To register: www.janefranklin.com/youngdancers.html.

On Stage

THEATER ■ DANCE

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