

BEYOND THE SONG™

Cathy Rigby and Discovery Arts

Making a Difference for Kids

By: Clif Doyal

Cathy Rigby has been bringing joy to audiences for over four decades. From her worldwide acclaim as “America’s Sweetheart of Gymnastics” as an eight-time gold medal-winning Olympian, to her musical and acting career where she has appeared in many theatrical productions including roles as Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, and the high-flying Peter in *Peter Pan*, Rigby has spent her career wowing and entertaining “children” of all ages.

“Joy is God’s way of telling us that we are on the right path. Sustained joy requires the elimination of others’ suffering,” states Rigby, who in addition to her many creative pursuits, is also the National Spokesperson and Board Member of Discovery Arts, a unique charitable organization that brings the healing power of the arts to children in hospitals who suffer with cancer and other life-threatening diseases. In addition to the benefits of providing an outlet for creative expression, Discovery Arts gives children a much-needed escape from their illness and from the very un-childlike world of hospital rooms and intensive treatments.

“We look beyond the illness into the soul of the child,” says Marilyn Clements, Co-Founder, Executive Director and Vice President of Discovery Arts. “With our ‘Arts Adventures,’ we go into hospitals and set up a room with costume racks and



Photo by: Craig Schwartz

an art cart with themed projects for the day. The children whose blood counts are high enough join us, and for those who can’t leave their beds, we take the art projects to them. We have everything ready and music playing when the children come in, so it all looks simple and magical. Each child has the freedom to choose their art projects for the day. Some want to pick a costume and get their faces painted first. The girls want to be pretty and the boys want to be strong. Some go straight to the arts projects. Soon the kids are dancing and singing to the music. It’s like going to a party where everybody is shy at first, but by the end everybody is wearing lamp shades and dancing in a conga line!”

These ‘Arts Adventures’ provide



a welcome diversion, and an opportunity for children to exercise their minds and their bodies. And, because the medical staff is encouraged to join in the fun, the children often get a new perspective of their doctors as people. “The psychological impact is amazing,” says Rigby. “The kids are lonely and here comes this group of entertainers and it really lifts their spirits! Some of these children have never been exposed to anything like this. It gives them the hope to keep going.”

Discovery Arts was founded in 1993 by Clements and President, Don Harper. Both Clements and Harper are dedicated entertainment industry professionals. Harper is a composer of music for film, television and stage. His works include the scores for Disney’s *Lion King* 1.5 DVD release, and the animated television series, *The Legend of Tarzan*. He also composed music included in feature films such as *G-Force*, *National Treasure*, *National Treasure 2*, *Texas Rangers*, *Armageddon* and *The Rock*, among others. Clements has choreographed and directed numerous special events and theatrical productions for Pope John Paul II’s visit to the LA Memorial Coliseum, the 10th Anniversary Production of Radio City Music Hall’s “Magnificent Christmas Spectacular” and The Joe Gibbs Charity Event at Kennedy Center with special guests, President and Mrs. Bush. She has worked extensively for the Disney Company, choreographing the N.A.R.M. Convention for the Disney Record and Video Divisions, to mention a few.

Discovery Arts serves over 3,500

children and their families each year. Currently there are nine Discovery Arts’ programs in six hospitals in California: Mattel Children’s Hospital at UCLA; Children’s Hospital of Orange County; Miller Children’s Hospital; Jonathan Jaques Children’s Cancer Center; and CHOC at Mission and Fountain Valley Hospital.

The program has recently been added at St. John’s Hospital in Springfield, Missouri, with plans to branch out across the nation. Discovery Arts programs and services are free of charge to the hospitals, patients and their families.

Rigby recently wrapped a six-week run of performances of *Peter Pan* at The Mansion Theatre in Branson, Missouri. To help raise funds for Discovery Arts, she conducted a raffle during each performance where children were able to win a walk-on part in the show. “The children want to fly!” Rigby exclaims. “I sprinkle some fairy dust on them, and they think it is just magical. I can make them smile and bring a twinkle to their eyes - and the eyes of their parents - and they have a chance to forget for a moment. As an entertainer, I get the chance to make a difference. I can’t even describe the feeling.”



September is National Childhood Cancer Awareness Month

How You Can Help:

JOIN OUR CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

Your support of just \$15 a month will help bring “Arts Adventures” to a child with cancer, serious blood disorder or life-threatening illness while they are in the hospital receiving treatment. Print out the flyer in the link and send in to Discovery Arts! <http://www.discoveryarts.org/New-circle.pdf>