Dear C&C Families,

This is our latest edition of *Currents*, our newsletter that explores key City and Country practices and policies in depth and puts them in writing for our families. We’re continuing this practice with our spring 2011 issue of *Currents* on Rhythms.

The C&C Rhythms Program, for IIs-XIIIs, was designed by Ruth Doing in the School’s earliest years. It has been developed and refined by long-standing and beloved movement teachers Sylvia Miller, Joan Morgan, and now Kali Paguirigan. It is a unique program that focuses on developing strength, flexibility, non-verbal communication, dramatics, and a well-rounded sense of self and spirit.

This issue contains a snapshot of the Rhythms program, a reprint of an excellent piece on Rhythms from our Archives, written in 1959 by parent Karen Gaylord, and commentary and reflections from Kali.

If you have any comments about Rhythms or this issue of *Currents*, please feel free to speak with me.

Sincerely,

Kate Turley
Principal

**P.S. Something to look forward to:** When you return to school in September, you will also find on our website a short but powerful video containing archival and contemporary footage that highlights the myriad manifestations of the Rhythms Program, as well as a catalog of Rhythms photos. These additional materials will launch our first digital exhibit in our online “Gallery,” and will bring the subtle beauty and joy of Rhythms to life.
Rhythms at C&C: Snapshot

Rhythms is a unique movement program developed at City and County in the 1920s. In Rhythms, the children run, leap, and skip to live piano accompaniment, portraying through motion the new worlds they are exploring. Guided by the Rhythms Teacher and carefully chosen music, the children move with spontaneity and freedom, with fantastic invention and skill. They come to understand their own environment and to recognize their own internal rhythms. The program develops movement and coordination skills and enhances harmony of mind, body, and spirit.

Along with Yard, Rhythms is an essential element in the physical development of children at C&C. Children experience increasingly complex movement skills, enhanced by the use of enticing materials such as balls, silk scarves, hoops, ropes, and balloons.

Dramatics is another core component of Rhythms. As the group is exploring a theme in the classroom, the Group Teacher will share their direction with the Rhythms Teacher, who in turn will set up an improvisation scenario for the children to act out. For example, if the children are tending seeds, the Rhythms Teacher might ask the children to become the seeds themselves, burrowing into the ground, soaking up water and sunlight before turning into beautiful flowers.

In the VIIIs through the XIIIs, these improvisations are organized into themes comprising much of what the children have learned about the historical periods and cultures they are studying. With the guidance of their Group and Rhythms Teachers, the children develop these themes into a play that they produce and perform themselves—the culmination of their year-long research study.

RHYTHMS INCLUDES

- **GROSS MOTOR ACTIVITIES**—“Natural” movements (rolling, crawling, swimming, jumping, walking, running) and “learned” movements (skipping, tumbling, cartwheels).
- **MUSICAL AWARENESS**—Movement to live piano accompaniment with a focus on classical music.
- **PERCEPTUAL SKILLS**—Interaction with materials such as balls, hoops, ropes, scarves, and balloons.
- **GROUP INTERACTION AND BODY DIALOGUE**—Communicating with others through all the senses.
- **DRAMATICS**—Kinesthetically exploring classroom studies through improvisations and creating year-end social studies plays in the VIIIs-XIIIs.
- **RELAXATION**—Learning the skill of being still and giving in to the forces of gravity.

“...in no other part of the program are all children in a group drawn into an activity with such genuine and effective response. They feel that in rhythmics they are functioning as individuals and yet socially creative in their attitude.”

—Ruth Doing, Founder of Rhythms at C&C
It seems somehow impertinent, even presumptuous, to attempt to explain, describe, or define Rhythms in one short article. A month ago, I thought I had a fairly simple routine assignment. In the weeks spent since in reading, observing and researching, I have come to see I have a tiger by the tail—that Rhythms is one of the most fascinating, complex, and advanced elements in the City and Country program. Advanced, I say, despite the fact that it has been going on in the Rhythms Room for a long time, since 1922 in fact. Ruth Doing, who discerned and developed the original approach, taught it originally. Sylvia Miller came, first as her student teacher, then to teach some of the classes alone, finally to take over the whole job in 1939. And still the work that started 27 [now 79!] years ago seems far ahead of most current educational experiments, conflicts or theories.

In the first place, if C&C's philosophy embodies self-discovery, development of the whole child, and the flowering of individual creativeness, then Rhythms makes the most of it. As they say uptown, it is the concretization, actualization and finalization of that philosophy.

Taking a giant step and probably falling in up to my neck, it seems to me, that Rhythms boils down to an attempt to encourage and develop the capacities of the human organism to respond, as an organic whole, spontaneously, creatively and purposefully to the environment around it. I'd call them classes in being and becoming, aiming at self-realization.

Does that sound ambitious? Then consider what Sylvia has written elsewhere, that Rhythms should give to children “the experience in childhood of harmony in mind, body, and spirit, an artistic integrity, a sense of proportion and an inner and outer balance that unconsciously colors and molds the very fabric of their lives.”

If that seems impossible then any parent willing to take the time can go to the gym and observe class after class which at some time or another either goes through something very akin to such an experience or else gives an apparently perfect imitation of it. I know. I watched. Part of the time what I watched had a quality of busy, cheerful, happy chaos, but suddenly in every class there would come a moment when one or two or three children and, more rarely, the whole group did something (cartwheel, or leap, or gallop, or dance) of extraordinary, startling beauty. Sylvia says this sort of thing can happen any time, and I hold that to be rather remarkable.
Fundamentals
Apart from the fact that it deals essentially with non-verbal experience, one of the things that makes it so difficult to deal justly with Rhythms in a short space is that it embraces so many fields in one; the rudiments, perhaps the basics of Music, Dance, Drama, Acrobatics, Social Studies, even movement itself are to be found in it. But it does have certain fundamentals and techniques of its own.

Its fundamental assumption is based on the theory that “the mind works rhythmically and that the body consists of nearly 400 organs of motion whose action is rhythmic...” From this it follows quite naturally, as Miss Doing has written, that “rhythm is fundamental and a system of rhythmic training should call into conscious activity this wealth of untapped rhythmic resource.”

The basic techniques by which this resource is developed are big body movements to music (“the organic development of knowledge—through organic listening”) and use of rhythmic materials (such as balls, hoops, scarves, ropes, etc.) to stimulate and encourage freedom and creativity of movement.

Music
Music is used because “it contains so many elements which find resonance in the organism, providing an effective experience in rhythm” and because it provides stimulation toward a controlled expression of the individual. It sets the emotional and physical environment. Therefore it has to be good music, played or presented well, and carefully graded to the emotional level of the child, neither trite, nor too sophisticated. The music used by Sylvia has been painstakingly collected over a score of years to meet just these requirements.

As a matter of fact the accompanist who plays the music must be an accomplished artist in her own right. Both Ruth Doing and Sylvia have always insisted that the music must be presented not in terms of just its metrical beat, which is “only a mold through which rhythm flows,” but rather by emphasizing “the movement in music through its larger units, its ideas—which are never emotionally outside the child’s experience—and its form, impulse and direction. To emphasize just the metrical beat would be to produce an automatic response on the part of the children at once uninspired and lifeless.” The accompanist must also be able to follow the children. For it is a constantly inter-acting process. The music motivates the child—he responds. Out of his responses may come a new innovation and music must not only stimulate, it must cooperate.

Techniques
Ruth Doing saw physical co-ordination as a basic necessity for rhythmic development. She further saw in big muscle activity the basis of co-ordination. Therefore most specific physical exercises in Rhythms, such as cartwheels, somersaults, headstands, and certain types of dramatic play, are intended to strengthen. They also maintain the...
flexibility of the articulated parts of the body, particularly those of the spinal column. One starts from the center of things and only gradually as the organism is ready, works out to the finer, more subtle details of technique. And as Sylvia says, “The rhythmic activities themselves—skipping, leaping, galloping, etc..., are also designed to give children agile and skillful use of their bodies.” Great care is taken to help the children through the “awkward ages” to keep them free and flexible through the times of most difficult growth. Says Sylvia, “The same principles are true of all age levels, but the presentation naturally differs as the child matures.”

Equipment
From the very beginning, along with music and movement goes the use of “rhythmic materials” to help children construct their own rhythmic patterns. There are balls to bounce, hoops to roll about or move within, ropes to jump with and run under, scarves, silken and lovely, even deck tennis rings to toss and roll and to stand on one’s head with. And, of course, bars to climb, mats to somersault on, and poles to balance with. I feel somewhat ashamed at giving such prosaic and obvious functions for these materials, for in the hands of the children, these simple objects become the stuff of life itself; a scarf becomes a sail, a hoop the rings of Saturn, and going up the bars they scale the sky itself.

Expression
All of the preceding does no more than touch upon the ABC’s of Rhythms, the basic raw materials. And at that I have left out one, and by no means the least important. Besides the music, the exercises, the materials, there is the expression of living. The fact remains, however, that from the earliest days the children act out what they learn and experience in school and “abroad.” This may range from the IVs, who after witnessing the remodeling of a 13th St. building...
from the Roof promptly and spontaneously began recreating it in the Rhythms Room (they hammered, they sawed, they mixed cement) to the plays, so often complete with original music, created by the older children.

“Dramatic play,” says Sylvia, “affords the child an expression outlet of great power in which he can feel himself the complete artist, either individually or as an important part of the Group.” It comes about in various ways. “Sometimes from social studies, or trips, sometimes from particular music, or pure imagination. We try as much as possible to know what is going on in the social studies program of each group and to be prepared with the right music, so that we are ready when the thing ‘pops.’ When the time is right I may just say to the whole group, ‘I understand you’ve been studying Egyptians. I wish you’d show me, without speaking, all the things you know about the Egyptians,’ and the place is very apt to turn suddenly into an ancient Egyptian scene with a wide variety of activities taking place.” Often from this recreation, this acting out of things truly learned, come original music and song. There is an enormous difference, says Sylvia, between songs made up by young children in vacuo and those made up by them as they work, play or act. The former are too often stilted and forced, while the latter, though made up of subtleties of melody and rhythm that might make a musicologist shudder, are incredibly accurate, empathetic, and right for what they are doing.

**Kali: On Dramatic Play**

For the younger children, the leap from real life into dramatic play seems to be a narrow gap, and a discussion about birds or blooming flowers has the children wriggling out of their bodies, eager to act out the scenario in the room. The dramatic play is sometimes quite simple and will begin with a question from me, “What did you do on your trip? Can you think of one thing that you can SHOW me with your body, without words?” And the children quietly get to work, expressing themselves wordlessly, accompanied by piano.

The older children are so accustomed to the task that they are willing to recreate memorable sculptures after a trip to the Met, or as the XIs did after a trip to a Scholar Garden in Staten Island, recreate doorways with partners and rock sculptures within the garden. At other times for the older children, the leap into dramatic play is not always as obvious. But as I have discovered through developing the end-of-the-year Plays with the Middle and Upper School Groups, the desire to express oneself through dramatic play is undoubtedly there. It may be brought on from a tool or weapon that’s been created in Shop. Sometimes, as is the case in the XIs, they are inspired by the great epic poems and stories that they read in the classroom and they eagerly re-create them in the Rhythms Room. Other times, groups become completely immersed in the creative storytelling process and create fabulous, intricate plays that read like great historical fiction novelettes.
At thirteen the children learn social dancing, “all the basic steps to everything,” says Sylvia Miller. And after a thorough groundwork has been laid, they are encouraged to feel that, rather than making it into a matter of routine “1-2-3,” this too can take its place as something creative, something to improvise and build upon.

Relaxation
Last of all, even as the children discover how to use their bodies, so also do they discover how to refrain from using them, how to let them rest and recuperate. They explore that difficult but vital and healing art—relaxation. Strenuous exercises or activities are always followed by a short rest period and for this, too, there is music as well as specific “relaxing” exercises. I don’t know why I chose to list this aspect last since it seems to me that in the areas of action response and tension—for every person unsure of how to get started, there are three who haven’t the vaguest notion of how to stop. In the 20th Century perhaps one of the greatest gifts we could give our children would be the conscious knowledge of how to relax.

“...There is a certain freedom with this kind of sharing, a freedom from language, which allows children to show and get to know a different, under-utilized side of themselves. And for those children for whom expressive language is a challenge, this kind of activity can be an ideal one, a physical and artistic one where the child is joyously finding a balance between body, mind and spirit.”
—Kali Paguirigan, Rhythms Teacher

Conclusion
So it is with Rhythms. And still I am not sure that I have been in any sense able to convey the wonderful excitement, vitality and importance of this program: the sense that for each child and each group it represents something different as they respond each in their own way to a challenge that invites them to find their own individual rhythm as well as the various rhythms of the world about them.