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Members of Medina and Wilson Ballet companies gave two performances of the ballet at the Jo Long Theater at the Carver Community Cultural Center on June 5.

Ballet performs "Alice in Wonderland"

By Laura Hardt

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Patrons of the arts will be happy to know that Diana McCormack is already working on next year's dance production. But she's not letting the cat out of the bag yet. She's letting her students decide which show they will perform.

Owner and artistic director of the Medina Ballet and the Wilson Ballet, McCormack doesn't just teach dance, she immerses her students in the decision-making, gritty details of an art form that has entertained royalty for centuries and become known as the foundation of dance.

Combining the talents of her two studios, she and her troupe produced a vivid rendition of "Alice in Wonderland" on June 5 at the Jo Long Theater at The Carver Community Cultural Center.

Over 50 young dancers played 35 different characters in the first community performance at the venue since COVID-19 started. McCormack said it was a struggle trying to survive with COVID and produce a ballet performance. The theater was booked before COVID guidelines were eased. This meant that the ballet was developed to allow the audience to view the performance following social distancing guidelines. McCormack's dancers had to do the show twice on June 5 to accommodate ticket holders.

The choreography for the

production was led by McCormack with input from the dancers playing the characters. "Being creative expands kids minds to do something unexpected. When we problem solve, we think outside the box," she said.

McCormack encouraged her dancers to read Lewis Carroll's 1898 literary fantasy and watch film versions of the story, such as Tim Burton's 2010 version of the famous story. Drawing from the characters, the production tells the story of a child growing up through the characters of the Mad Hatter played by Klaire Bradshaw, the Red Queen played by Chloe Cowey who starts out as the Queen of Hearts, the White Queen played by Summer Knappe and two Alices – Younger Alice played by Emerson Chilek and Older Alice played by Averly Tackitt.

"The ballet tells the story of the Mad Hatter's childhood and how it affects his adult life. Maybe he didn't want to celebrate birthday's anymore?" McCormack surmised. When the Queen of Hearts seeks a suitor, she is unsuccessful and realizes no one likes her. She experiences a nightmare in which she sees the White Queen and her anger turns to rage. The Queen of Hearts becomes redder and redder until her color changes over the course of the show and she becomes the Red Queen.

Little Alice falls through the rabbit hole. She is curious with an open mind but

becomes afraid. Older Alice has become courageous and is able to face her fears. The story of "Alice in Wonderland" is as much a story of how we face our fears and what we become because of our choices. In a poke at the COVID mask wearing, Older Alice is not accepted at the Mad Hatter's Tea Party until she dons a mask. Once she is seated, she can remove it. "COVID felt strange and awkward. It was a weird adjustment for everyone similar to Alice's experience," McCormack said.

McCormack believes it's important to keep imagination alive in order to deal with life's challenges. She incorporated all dance styles taught at her studios into the production, including hip hop, tap, jazz and ballet featuring the talents of her students in telling the story of Alice in Wonderland.

"When push comes to push, you've got to make it work. You've got to believe in yourself. If Alice hadn't changed, she wouldn't have saved the White Queens kingdom," she emphasized.

The 64 cast members of Alice in Wonderland were Klaire Bradshaw (Mad Hatter), Susanah Knapp (Little Mad Hatter), Averly Tackitt (Older Alice), Emerson Chilek (Younger Alice), Karen Johnson (Lady Ascot), Robert Werner (Hamish), Emilie Billings (White Rabbit), Chloe Cowey (Queen of Hearts), Olivia Snyder (March Hare), Summer Knappe (White Queen), Jubilation Gutierrez

(Cheshire Cat), Lyla Courts (The Caterpillar), Madison Korzekwa (The Dormouse), Ellison Nassar (Tweedledee), Addison Torralva (Tweedledum), Summer Knappe & Destiny Von Behren (Cousins of Alice), Ariela Caisedo & Jazabel Sosa (Twin Sisters), Charlotte Werner & Susanah Knapp (Cricket Team and Trees), Andre Abrams, Kevin Brewster & Justis Tijerina (The Suitors/Guards), Natalie Ellis & Emily Trees (Paint Brushes), Ella Billings (Door Knob), Kamilla Phillips (Piece of Cake), Riley Marrs, Emmalin Taylor, Marianna DeLeon, Isabella Copa (Talking Flowers), Anna Peterson, Ashlyn Oelschlegel, Lilliana Montemayor, Serenity Yingling (Red Roses), Autrey Pohler, Natalie Pohler, Rylee Rothe, Kendall Payne, Hollis Johns (Falling Items), Ariela Caisedo, Jazabel Sosa, Destinee Von Behren, Riley Marrs (Little Queen of Hearts), Olivia Snyder & Evynlee Rodriguez (Arabians), Emilie Billings, Addison Torralva, Lyla Courts, Ellison Nassar (Playing Cards), Patryn Mount, Isla Garcia, Avery Fieber, Emmie Ehlinger (Court Jesters), Averly Tackitt, Evynlee Rodriguez (Flamingos) and Madelynne Davidson, Natalie Ellis, Rebekah Knapp, Abigail Peterson, Destiny Torres, Emily Trees, Sophia Ward (Boarding School Girls).

Medina Ballet is located in Castroville at 1314 Constanti-nople and Wilson Ballet is located in Floresville. For more information, look for them on Facebook or call (214) 642-3612.