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Dancemanía!

Minneapolis, MN–July 9, 2020—It’s been a difficult summer for everyone—especially young people with special needs. Lundstrum Performing Arts, in North Minneapolis, has re-invented its long-standing Dancemanía! program to keep special needs students engaged and teach that the show must go on!

Typically, Dancemanía! students present their musical theater piece at an end-of-semester showcase performance, and Dancemanía! was scheduled to perform “Aladdin” in March, when showcases were cancelled due to Covid-19.

Lundstrum’s partial re-opening in early June allowed for the Dancemanía! class to come back together—in a socially distant way—to reprise the performance of “Aladdin Returns.” Students had the opportunity to dress in costume and perform their piece for the camera. Dancemanía! is alive again thanks to Zoom classes, and will continue through July.

Why is Dancemanía! so important right now?

When Dancemanía! launched in 2006, the program provided a unique opportunity for students with special needs ranging from Downs Syndrome and Autism to express their unique voice and develop skills through the performing arts. Over the years, the program has forged enduring friendships and allowed these children to develop confidence, verbal skills, movement, and fun. Since Covid-19 altered school and many other gatherings as of March, Dancemanía! has allowed these special students to continue their studies in music, dance, voice, and performance in a safe, supportive and fun environment. With a strict Covid-19 preparedness plan in place, all Lundstrum classes adhere to safety guidelines such as face coverings, limited class sizes and social distancing. Many take place via Zoom. Dancemanía! allows the students to come together again to celebrate “Aladdin Returns,” to see friends and teachers, and to practice skills on their performing arts journey.

Why is this a summer feel-good story?

Young people have struggled with isolation, lack of routine, and the absence of classes and extracurricular activities that they enjoy and learn from and this is especially true for students with special needs. Lundstrum’s Dancemanía! allows students the opportunity to continue their studies in dance and performance, to focus on a culminating performance, to connect with friends and caring mentors, and continue to do the practices they love. *(Photos and video of student singing, dancing, and performing on Zoom and video footage of the culminating performances are available to the media.)*

What do these classes and performances look like this summer?

Some on-site classes were held outdoors at Lundstrum studios in North Minneapolis, which allowed students to

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don their costume and perform selections of "Aladdin Returns" for the camera. Remaining July classes are being held via Zoom where students receive individualized attention. A culminating performance will be edited together and presented via video. All costuming, which is safely managed with strict sanitizing, allows the students to present the final performance in costume as they would in a pre-Covid era performance.

Who takes advantage of the Lundstrum classes?

Since 2000, Lundstrum Performing Arts has proudly served thousands of students from diverse backgrounds. Approximately 25% of students are residents of North Minneapolis, an area with a population of roughly 67,000 and a poverty index of 36%. Fifty percent of students come from African American, Asian and bi-racial backgrounds. Nearly 40% of students receive financial aid in the form of grants, scholarships and waivers funded by generous gifts from Lundstrum benefactors. Theater and music training helps children train in movement, singing, acting, allowing them to explore their imagination, develop motor skills, and communicate in fun and creative ways.

Why North Minneapolis?

North Minneapolis was the center of art and culture for many people in the first half of the 20th century. However, highway construction, movement away from the central city and changing economic conditions caused the deterioration and neglect of the arts on the North Side. This is now changing, thanks to a concentration of effort by many artistic and community partners, and Lundstrum Performing Arts is proud to be a part of this change. Located in the heart of North Minneapolis near I-94 and downtown, it is an ideal spot to bring a "mini-Juilliard" for theater arts in their own neighborhood and for youth longing for creative outlets.

About Lundstrum Performing Arts

Based in North Minneapolis, Lundstrum Performing Arts is Minnesota's premier training program in musical theater: dance, voice and drama. Lundstrum's program combines excellence and accessibility to nurture bright futures through the performing arts.

After successful national performing careers, the five Casserly sisters took up the legacy from founder Dorothy Lundstrum following her death and formed a nonprofit organization in 2000 to be a "mini-Juilliard" offering youth development through the arts. The core of its program is a high-quality and integrated curriculum of dance, voice and drama for students taught by Broadway veterans and professional teaching artists. Lundstrum's rigorous program includes ballet, jazz, tap, acting, solo vocal instruction and ensemble classes.

Lundstrum Performing Arts has become an important springboard to talent—especially diverse talent—for theaters in the Twin Cities and beyond. Lundstrum students have gone on to professional careers on Broadway and as award-winning choreographers in the Twin Cities. They also perform regularly in local theaters ranging from the Guthrie Theater and Children's Theatre Company, as well as Stages Theater, Ordway Center for the Performing Arts and others.

Beyond its training in specific artistic disciplines, Lundstrum's program instills lasting benefits from disciplined instruction and building social emotional skills in a nurturing environment of support from teachers and peers. Some of these life-long skills include: self-confidence and critical thinking, essential confidence in his/her ability to learn and hunger for continued achievement.

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Digital images are available upon request.

Pictured below: Dancemania! students perform "Alladin Returns"

