

April 15, 2020

Dear Ballet School families and friends,

I hope this message finds each of you healthy and your families strong and connected. I'm writing to share that I've sadly made the decision to cancel this year's production of Oz. I have every hope that we'll be able to stage the production next spring. We had a wonderful cast and I am hopeful most of them will join us again for the next school year to see this show eventually come to fruition. I'm grateful to every dancer who made the rehearsal process so fun and inspiring, and I'm extremely proud of every student's work. The hardest part about letting this production go this year is that we will not have the opportunity to celebrate our seniors and witness their amazing work one more time. Reading about them won't make up for watching them perform, but I want to share a little bit about these wonderful young women and take a moment to express my gratitude for all they have contributed to our Ballet School family.

Audrey Welsh has been a student at The Ballet School since 2013. Always a cheerful dancer with great athleticism and a terrific sense of humor, Audrey has blossomed into a beautiful artist with exceptional technique, ability, and classical line. The most daunting aspect of working with Audrey is coming up with steps that are hard enough to challenge her! She will work tirelessly to master any skill, no matter the difficulty. Audrey has raised the bar at our school, students of all ages look up to her and have learned how to work hard, take chances, and shine all while remaining humble, thoughtful, and kind. Audrey was our Cowardly Lion in Oz. She was an engaging, funny, and utterly lovable feline. She will be attending Middlebury College after taking a gap year to study with the Nashville Ballet.

After briefly dancing at the Ballet School as a Pre-Ballet student in 2007, **Rowan Joyce** joined our school as pre-teen in 2014. Her abundance of stage presence, timing, and natural grace have distinguished her in all our performances, and her work ethic, warmth, and positivity have helped set the tone of our classes. In addition to her skills as a dancer, Rowan is a gifted actress and has been featured in many of Brunswick High School's acclaimed productions. Rowan had several roles in Oz, including Aunt Em, and her portrayal was genuine and deeply moving. She is going on to study theatre at Muhlenberg College.

Gwen Thornton joined The Ballet School in 2014. Her first role was as a tiny dormouse in *Alice in Wonderland*, but she is probably best remembered for her moving solo "Danny Boy" in *Calendaria*, and as Gretel in our 2017 production, *Hansel and Gretel*. Gwen has been an artist since her first day in class, and her work on stage has always been powerful and heartfelt. Gwen is well loved among the younger students for her ongoing work as a teacher's assistant, and it was a special pleasure to have her step in as a substitute teacher this winter. Gwen was featured throughout Oz, most notably in her enigmatic and haunting portrayal of The Wizard. She will graduate with an Associate's Degree from SMCC this spring, and will be taking a gap year in the fall... perhaps with enough coaxing from her classmates, teacher, and students, we may be lucky enough to have her grace our studio one more year!

Lyla Corbett started training at The Ballet School in 2015. A smart, modest student with beautiful stage presence and musicality, Lyla has made an impression since day one. Lyla has devoted much of her senior year to ballet, incorporating her training into a large independent study project at Lincoln Academy. A constant and loyal friend, she has been supporting her classmates at Youth America Grand Prix for the past two years and took on the challenge herself this winter, performing an elegant and graceful variation at their Philadelphia Semi-Final. Lyla is tireless in her approach to learning, constantly reaching her goals and setting new ones. She was featured throughout our production of *Oz* as a lead member of the Yellow Brick Road, moving the story along with her vibrant dancing. Lyla will continue to dance while pursuing a pre-med focus at either Goucher College or Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

Calista Pagurko joined our school in 2015. A natural dancer, through and through, Calista's work has an honesty and grace that is impossible to miss. Her ease in all styles of dance, combined with her dedicated approach, brings a depth to her classwork and a radiance to her presence on stage. She is a devoted friend and mentor, looking after all the dancers around her and leading through example with a reverence for hard work, quality, and self-respect. Calista was our Tin Woodcutter in *Oz*, filling the role with beauty, heart, and hopefulness. She was accepted to Boston Conservatory at Berklee which she hopes to attend in the fall. Calista's goal is to teach dance as a career.

Taylor Williams began making the long trek from Old Town to our studio in 2017. The effortlessness of Taylor's dancing belies the determination, grit, and patience that goes into her work. Taylor has pushed through injury, obstacles, and countless miles to dance, and has been recognized by numerous teachers for her pure technique and beautiful quality and skill. A loving classmate, Taylor has been a supportive friend and welcome addition to our program, and would have graced the stage this spring as The Good Witch of the North in our production of *Oz*. Taylor will be attending Husson University where she will pursue a degree in nursing.

Lauren Barclay started dancing with us in 2017. She is a skilled dancer who pays meticulous attention to detail and moves with a quiet dignity and grace. She has performed in our productions of *Cinderella* and *Prism*. In *Oz*, she was a member of The Cyclone and she brought style and precision to her role in The City of Emeralds. For her next step, Lauren is choosing between UC Davis, Oregon State, and the University of Hawaii.

Kayleigh Duggan began training at The Ballet School last summer. She immediately carved out a place for herself through her tireless work ethic and dedication to learn and improve. Her love of movement is evident in her full-out dancing, and her strong jumps and musicality brought liveliness to The City of Emeralds in our production of *Oz*. Kayleigh will be attending Skidmore College.

I can't express how sorry I am that our audiences won't have the privilege of watching these talented dancers one more time. Even though we were only half-way through the rehearsal process, they made their roles their own, and they brought joy to all who were lucky enough to see them. These young women have left a lasting mark on our school and the next generation of students will carry memories of them forward through their own training, dancing, and friendships.