



MoCo Arts School of Dance students rehearse for their upcoming production of "Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp." Photos by Michael Moore.

Aladdin's Adventure MoCo Tells Story of the Magical Lamp

By Nicole S. Colson

A genie inside a magic lamp grants three wishes to a young peasant in a faraway land — it's one of the most recognizable folk tales, and MoCo Arts dancers will bring it to life next weekend. MoCo Arts School of Dance will present "Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp" June 4 and 5 at Keene State College's Redfern Arts Center. Approximately 250 students in grades 2 through 12 representing the arts organization's ballet, tap, jazz, modern and hip-hop classes will showcase the famous story with their own spin on it.

The original tale of the boy Aladdin comes from "The Arabian Nights," a collection of Islamic tales compiled by various authors over hundreds of years that also includes such well-known chapters as "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" and "The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor."

Though the story is Middle Eastern, it is set in China, and Aladdin is Chinese; however, most of the people in the story are Muslims, and characters have Arabic names.

The tale in a nutshell is about a poor boy and his sidekick (a monkey named Abu) who retrieves a magical lamp from a cave and uses his wishes to become a prince and chase the affections of Princess Jasmine, who wants to marry for love rather than follow her parents' wishes.

Though each collection in "The Arabian Nights" features different stories, they are all centered on the larger story of the sultan Shahrayar and his wife, Scheherazade. The stories Scheherazade tells comprise the collection.

"Her story isn't quite kid-friendly," said Reagan

Messer, MoCo Arts artistic director.

"So we've taken her character and made her into a girl who lives in a gypsy camp. She's the keeper of the stories and tells the story of Aladdin and the lamp."

Messer explains the story she tells in the MoCo Arts production is along the lines of the one featured in the 1992 Disney film, "Aladdin," with the exception of added characters such as Scheherazade and Sinbad the sailor.

"It is the story people know so it makes sense," he says. "However, if people only know the Disney version then they don't know the true story."

MoCo Arts always aims to include all students in the dance program in its annual spring production, which means some more license was taken.

An intricate market scene, for instance, was added to incorporate large groups of dancers who play snake charmers and apple sellers. A group of scarf vendors comprise another colorful scene.

Instead of the sultan in this version there is the sultana the queen.

The entire story is framed by colorful costumes (around 630 of them) and backed by an interesting soundtrack of traditional Middle Eastern music mixed with contemporary tunes. For instance, Paula Abdul's '80s tune "Cold-Hearted Snake" accompanies the snake charmer dance.



Harry Warshaw, a 14-year-old in his fifth leading role in a MoCo Arts dance production, plays Aladdin and Sarah Foucher, a high school senior, is Princess Jasmine.

This will be Foucher's last performance with MoCo Arts. She's been dancing with the company for 12 years.

"The teachers and students here have been amazing and supportive," said Foucher, whose dance

concentration is ballet. "There's not a lot of competition; it's all about the love and fun of doing the show."

Leann Minard, also a senior, plays the heroic Sinbad, her last role with MoCo Arts. "I'll miss everyone here," she said. "They are like my family."

Messer says the message of this show is to follow one's heart.

"It's about love with the adventure, twists and turns and excitement every good story should have," he said.

The MoCo Arts Dance Program will perform "Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp" Saturday, June 4, at 2 and 7 p.m., and Sunday, June 5, at 2 p.m. at the Redfern Arts Center at Keene State College.

Tickets are \$14-\$20 and can be ordered by calling 358-2168 or at www.moco.org.