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NEWS

Because of COVID-19, Wausau's annual 'Nutcracker' show is still going on, virtually

Aliya Surti For the Wausau Daily Herald

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Editor's note: This story was written by D.C. Everest Senior High School student Aliya Surti as part of the Student Journalism Program, a partnership of the Wausau Daily Herald and Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service.

For over 50 years, "The Nutcracker" performed by Central Wisconsin School of Ballet has made an annual appearance in the Wausau area.

But in the past, if you didn't go to the show around the holidays, you missed your chance.

This winter, ballet instructor Patrick Kasper had to make a change — as a result, the show went on ... and in a way is still going on for anyone who wants to attend.

Kasper initially planned to keep tradition alive by having "The Nutcracker" at The Grand theater in Wausau as usual, but with fewer audience members and a livestream option. The theater's COVID-19 safety precautions prevented that version from occurring.

The ballet troupe considered a delay, despite the holiday theme of the show.

"We could move it up to May, but we don't know what the COVID-19 situation will be in May," Kasper said.

They settled on the option schools and workplaces all over the country were using: video. Central Wisconsin School of Ballet worked to safely record the performance, which a ticket buyer would be able to watch from anywhere.

The film is available on the school's website at cwschoolofballet.com. It will also be available on DVD later this year. The \$55 ticket includes all three casts of the 2020 show

as well as the 2019 filming.

“It was my last 'Nutcracker,' so I'm definitely sad we couldn't be at the Grand, but it's something different for us dancers,” Emma Becker, a D.C. Everest senior, said.

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The filming process took a week and each dance was filmed twice, once with a wide view and the other with moving cameras.

“It was cool to have the cameras following us while we danced. I'm mostly grateful that we were able to do Nutcracker this year,” D.C. Everest senior Grace Wilkins said.

Senior years are the last for the dancers and made special with solo dances and letters from the younger girls. Most of the seniors have been dancing with the school since they were as young as 3.

“I know that a senior's last 'Nutcracker' is very special to them,” Wausau West senior Sarah Heywood said. “We are able to cherish the recordings that were filmed. Now in the future, I can look back on my last 'Nutcracker.'”

The ballet school's studio had been painted and a new floor was put in. Lighting systems were also set up. Backdrops and smaller set pieces were used as well.

“There was a lot of hard work and dedication put into filming,” Heywood said.

The school has been open since June with safety measures in place. Masks and social distancing are required for the dancers.

“Wearing masks is a small price to pay for the overall safety of everyone in the studio, and there is no concern being unable to breathe, even while dancing,” Anika Lindell, a D.C. Everest sophomore, said.

Beginning in April, the dancers attended virtual classes over the online video platform Zoom in order to keep moving while being at home. But they were eager to get back in the studio to rehearse.

“I was so glad we came back for the summer so I could dance more full out than what I was able to do at home,” Wilkins said.

Now, after "The Nutcracker" and its usual holiday break, the Central Wisconsin School of Ballet is going back to class this month. No matter what 2021 brings, the show must go on.

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