

Area Students Rehearse for 'The Wizard of Oz' at The Sharon

First-through eighth-graders who registered for the camp have been working on the play all week.

By MICHAEL FORTUNA
Daily Sun Staff Writer

THE VILLAGES

On Monday, about 75 local students were swept away to a place where a mighty wizard presided over a magical land.

On Friday, the students will let the public see their rendition of the merry old land of Oz.

The Chicago-based Compass Creative Dramatics is presenting the musical version of "The Wizard of Oz" at 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

First-through eighth-graders who registered for the camp have been working on the play all week. On Monday, the students auditioned for roles and started rehearsing.

Co-founder Cathlyn Melvin and her team go into the auditions without any preconceived notions about the students.

"Every single child gets a clean slate," Melvin said. "(The parents will say,) 'We can't believe you got him to do that.' The kids on Monday might refuse to talk. By the end of the week, they're up singing and dancing."

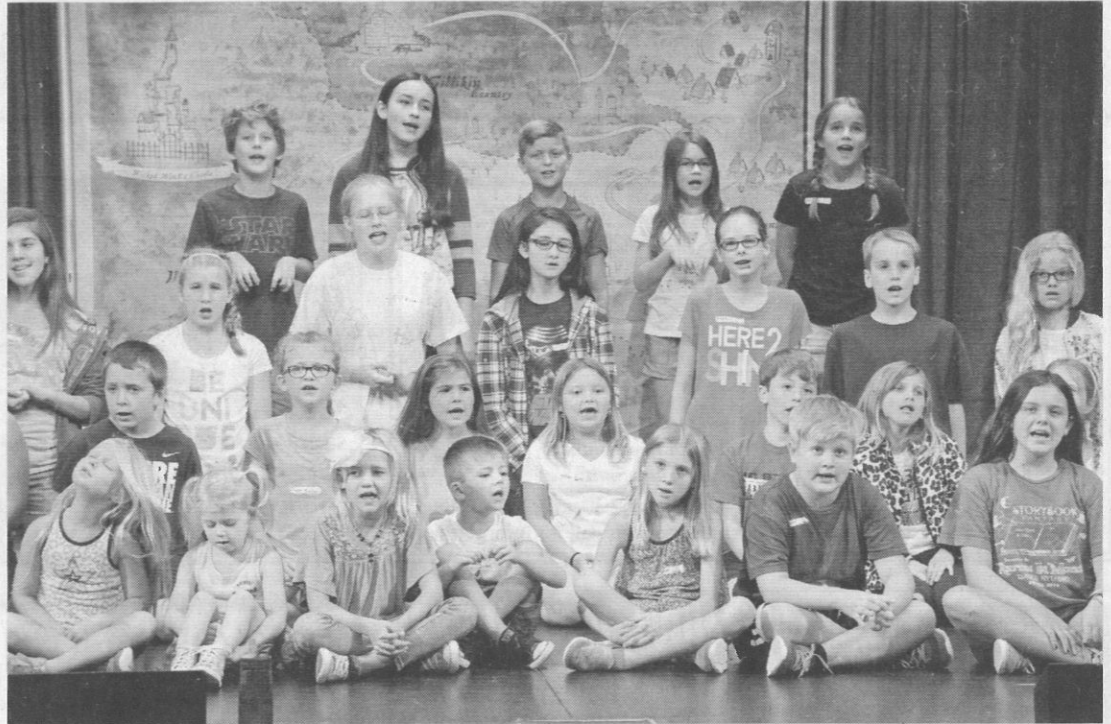
Fifth-grader John Tyler Wozniak and sixth-grader Peyton Gardner participated in last year's CCD production and couldn't wait to jump in again. This time, Wozniak is playing the Scarecrow and Gardner is playing Dorothy.

Seventh-grader Hayma Win, who plays Jade, one of the Oznians, discovered the play through her friend's mother. Eighth-grader Clare O'Brien, who plays Davy, a guard monkey, learned about it when her mother found CCD's website.

"I've enjoyed being on stage," Win said. "It's really fun."

Many of the students were a bit nervous during the audition process.

"My voice gets shivery," Gardner said. "I didn't want



Photos by George Horsford | Daily Sun

The cast of "The Wizard of Oz" rehearse Wednesday at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. Compass Creative Dramatics of Chicago is presenting the play.



Ethan Sullivan, 10, plays the part of the Cowardly Lion during the rehearsal of "The Wizard of Oz."

Dorothy at first, but now I really do (like the part). Acting is great."

"This is a new experience," said first-grader Grayson Sillitoe, who landed the role of the leader of the Yellow Brick Road. "I sing and skip and do a lot of stuff."

On Wednesday, the students were putting various theatrical puzzle pieces together, which

SEE "THE WIZARD OF OZ"

Compass Creative Dramatics presents "The Wizard of Oz" at 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. Tickets are \$10, and are available at any Villages Box Office location or online at thesharon.com.

included acting without the script, running through each scene, and acting with some of the set pieces on stage.

In between, the students took several theater workshops to learn more about the craft.

"The power of a young mind is amazing," said Trevin Cooper, director of education at The Sharon.

Compass creates these plays to be more compatible for children.

"It's kind of a well-oiled machine," said Melvin, who, with David Edward Smith, is

one of the educators for this week's summer camp. "There are a lot of patterns to latch onto. There are tricks and tools built into the script."

The group put on "The Jumping Jacks and the Beanstalk" last year, which was enthusiastically received.

"Word got out quickly," Melvin said. "Within the first day, (the camp) was sold out."

Michael Fortuna is a staff writer with *The Villages Daily Sun*. He can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 9299 or Michael.Fortuna@thevillagesmedia.com.