

AMERICAN MIDWEST *Ballet*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AT HOME AND ON TOUR, AMB'S *THE WIZARD OF OZ* MAKES A STRONG FINISH

American Midwest Ballet's *The Wizard of Oz*, an original full-length story ballet created by AMB ballet master Erin Alarcón, will wrap up the company's thirteenth season of professional dance this spring.

The show's run will open Friday, April 7, with a 7:30 pm performance at the Hoff Family Arts & Culture Center in Council Bluffs. The next two weekends will be devoted to touring performances: April 14 in Sioux City and April 21 and 22 in Dubuque, Iowa. *The Wizard of Oz* will close out its run at Omaha's Orpheum Theater with performances at 7:30 pm Saturday, May 13, and 2 pm Sunday, May 14.

The Wizard of Oz – Alarcón's first-ever full-length ballet as a choreographer – made its premiere in May 2019, said artistic director Erika Overturff (who will dance the role of the Wicked Witch.)

"Erin's *Wizard* is an amazing accomplishment," she said. "Along with ballet, she takes inspiration from tap, jazz, and musical theater dance, and weaves those elements seamlessly into the choreography. From its colorful, grand scenes to sweet, funny moments, the way she brings the story and its beloved characters to life onstage is absolutely charming."

The performances will feature AMB's 21-member professional company augmented by a community cast of more than 30 young dancers, Overturff said, plus sets for seven distinct scenes and more than 180 specially-designed costumes.

Ticket information for all metro-area performances is available at amballet.org/tickets/. Ticket prices start at \$25 for the Hoff Center and \$27 for the Orpheum.

In the works since age 5

Alarcón is both AMB's ballet master and one of its most recognizable dancers; as in the 2019 premiere, she will dance the role of Dorothy in this production. Her first ballet performance ever – at age 5 – was in a community production of *The Wizard of Oz*, dancing in the Lullaby League.

“Every memory I have of that production, from rehearsals through performances, is filled with an overwhelming sense of joy,” she said. “It has been a dream of mine to choreograph *The Wizard of Oz* for as long as I can remember.”

Alarcón first shared her inspiration with Overturff in the early years of the company. “She told me, ‘I have an idea for a *Wizard of Oz* ballet,’ and I said, ‘Tell me more,’” Overturff recalled. “That was the kernel. By 2019 we were able to give Erin's ballet its world premiere.”

One of Alarcón's first tasks, she said, was to select music.

“Since I wanted *The Wizard of Oz* to feel like a classical ballet, my first go-to was the obvious: ballet music,” she said. “I dove into the world of Johann Strauss II. There is a lovely score Strauss was composing for *Cinderella* before he passed away. This work served as a musical backbone and starting point for me.” From there, she said, she drew on several composers and on compositional concepts such as the *leitmotif*, the technique of associating a specific piece of music with a particular character.

Alarcón also took a wide-ranging approach to the choreography itself.

“I wanted this ballet to be done in the style of my favorite classical ballets,” she said. “You will see a farm scene that reflects the peasant scenes traditionally found in ballets such as *Coppélia* and *La Fille Mal Gardée*. With the poppy scene, I wanted to pay homage to the Wilis in *Giselle*; and with the Gifts scene, I wanted to give a nod to Marius Petipa,” the legendary 19th-century choreographer who created such works as *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Nutcracker*.

Alarcón, a lifelong fan of both L. Frank Baum's Oz books and the 1939 MGM movie version, said her goal for her ballet was to give the audience the feeling of watching a child's imagination come to life.

“As a child, I always wished that the characters in my favorite books could jump off the pages and that I could join them in their worlds of endless possibility,” she said. “That is the experience I'm hoping to capture in *The Wizard of Oz*.”

ABOUT AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET

American Midwest Ballet [AMB] is your resident professional dance company, bringing work beyond words to audiences in Nebraska, Iowa, and beyond. Performing at home and on tour, our mission is to inspire people through dance programs of the highest quality: breathtaking performances, enriching education, and uplifting community engagement.

AMB's Season 13 is presented with the generous support of premiere benefactors the Holland Foundation, the Fred and Eve Simon Charitable Foundation, the Iowa West Foundation, and Douglas County; season sponsors Omaha Steaks and Cindy & Scott Heider; and major supporters the Nebraska Arts Council, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and the Sherwood Foundation.

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QUICK GUIDE TO AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET'S *THE WIZARD OF OZ*

What:

Back by popular demand after its successful 2019 premiere, dancer/choreographer Erin Alarcón's *The Wizard of Oz* combines dance styles including classical ballet, jazz, tap and modern. Drawing on classic Oz characters and story lines, Alarcón creates a unique interpretation through dance.

When:

Friday, April 7, 7:30 pm – Hoff Family Arts & Culture Center, Council Bluffs

Friday, April 14 – on tour in Sioux City, Iowa, at the Sioux City Orpheum Theater, presented by the Siouxland Civic Dance Association

Friday and Saturday, April 21 & 22 – on tour in Dubuque, Iowa, presented by the University of Dubuque Heritage Center in collaboration with Dubuque's Academy of Ballet

Saturday, May 13, 7:30 pm, and Sunday, May 14, 2 pm, at Omaha's Orpheum Theater

Tickets:

amballet.org/tickets/

Highlights:

The spectacular production features American Midwest Ballet's 21-member professional company, augmented by a community cast of more than 30 young dancers chosen from around the community and using 185 costumes constructed especially for this ballet.

Erin's take:

"I think a huge part of the story of *The Wizard of Oz* is that it's the people you share your journey with that are most important. I have had the most incredible people with me during this creative process. I have been so fortunate with the support I have received on this project."

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THE WIZARD OF OZ BY THE NUMBERS

- 5:** Erin Alarcón's age when she first appeared in a ballet production of *The Wizard of Oz*, as a member of Munchkinland's Lullaby League
- 55:** Number of performers (professional dancers and community dancers) in the Omaha-area cast.
- 185:** Number of specially-constructed costumes used in the production.
- 60:** Number of set pieces and props designed and produced for the production. These are tracked on a color-coded spreadsheet that specifies the name, scene, stage location, and storage location of each item.
- 0:** Number of places "like home".

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