



PHOTO BY ZARA TZANEV

The Charles River Creative Arts Program staged "Alice Underground" last week as its first production of the summer. The program is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

Alice through the creative arts lens

By Kathleen Moore
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DOVER — To anyone familiar with the Charles River Creative Arts Program, it was no surprise that the program marked its 40th anniversary season with a production of "Alice Underground" on July 16 and 17.

An offbeat version of an already quirky fairy tale, "Alice Underground" has some the same magic that has made this Dover-based arts camp a mecca for the creative types since its inception. Each summer, more than 500 kids, age 8 to 15, de-

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ascend on the rural campus for four weeks of creative exploration.

"This program is all about creativity," said Program Director Tobey Dewey, a playwright who has worked with the program since 1978. "Kids can struggle in their schools, but here, they can really be what they want to be. They can explore their abilities."

Dewey's reminiscences came on Festival Day, July 17, when the Charles River Creative Arts Program showcased the creative ventures of its first summer session. It was a day when visitors might have felt a bit like "Alice in Wonderland" themselves.

Wander in one direction, and they might have caught the Theatre of the Absurd Fashion Show or Shakespeare Gone Wild, a dance performance. On the soccer fields, there was a

home run derby; in the gym, a drumming demonstration; and in the media rooms, a screening of "Big Strange Movie," a student-produced film. While the grade school-aged kids were belting out Broadway show tunes on the courtyard stage, their fellow campers were tuning their guitars for "Unplugged," an acoustic performance that came next. The day culminated with the second and final performance of "Alice Underground."

"Everyone has a character that's important to the story. We all mattered," said Dover resident Savannah Lobel, 14, an aspiring Broadway actress who played the Mad Hatter in this summer's production. "I had so much fun screaming and making people laugh."

Lobel's comments resonate



PHOTO BY ZARA TZANEV

Becca Phillips, left, and Alicia Dewey take a break between stage appearances during the Charles River Creative Arts Program's production of "Alice Underground" last week.

with the more complex mission of the Charles River Creative Arts Program — to give each student an opportunity to

achieve a creative breakthrough during his brief stay at the camp. It's a vision that was shaped by former director

Priscilla Dewey Houghton (Tobey's mother) and lauded by the National Endowment for the Arts, which designated the program as a national model for multi-arts programs in the 1970s. Over the past three decades, 20 other creative arts programs across the country have used Priscilla Dewey Houghton's handbook to launch their own efforts. One of those, in Brookline, is run by Tobey's sister, Kippy.

But the success of CRCAP is not all in the family. Evidence of the program's popularity can be seen in parade of big-name talent that has stopped by to talk with the students (James Taylor, Tracy Chapman, Mary Chapin Carpenter, William Hurt and Yo Yo Ma, to name a few). It can also be seen in the loyalty of its alumni, many of whom flooded

onto the rural campus on July 11, when the program formerly celebrated its 40th year. One of those alums was Alana Okun, who now teaches music and theater at the camp.

"Coming here helped me get out of my shell," said the Needham native, as she prepped a group of pint-sized thespians for their moment in limelight. "I started out working for the [CRCAP] Daily Double — that's the longest running newspaper in Dover, did you know that? I wrote and created cartoons. I thought it was great to create something that would be seen by so many others."

With that, Okun turned back to her charges who were getting ready to ascend the stage. Time for the next generation to "create something that would be seen by so many others."