

Wonderland Performing Arts

TEACHING SKILLS THAT LAST A LIFETIME

BY AGENT ERIN HOLDEN



Allison Brandon teaching Music Pops Class

Allison Baron Brandon is the Artistic Director and founder of Wonderland Performing Arts, a program that accepts students from infants to retirees, though the bulk of her students are from age 7 to 11. She often thinks back to her own artistic training and how it helped her in life. "What I've learned in ballet and musical theater has absolutely shaped me as a person," she said. "You have to be strong, yet flexible; patient, yet aggressive; you have to know when to turn it on and off and be respectful."



The cast of *Zombie Prom: A Horror Edition* at *Chic deo Arts*, spring 2018

The program offers every aspect of what it takes to put on a production. Besides learning what it takes to work in theater, children also learn developmental skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives. "I treat them like adults, and I don't talk down to them," Brandon said. "It is amazing the things they can do." This is where daily reinforcement of "the Wonderland culture" comes in. It is a manifesto and set of rules that Brandon covers with the kids each time they meet. She teaches them to be kind to themselves and others, which teaches them discipline.

She teaches dedication and self-worth. "If you give them the opportunity, they'll deliver." They learn about self-esteem, as she tells them, "Be your own weird self!" because being different is not a bad thing. "They just have to figure out how to use it and use it well," she said.

Wonderland Performing Arts works with three nonprofits – Zoosiana, the Children's Museum of Acadiana, and the Muscular Dystrophy Association – raising money for these causes, which is beneficial for the children, because they learn what it means to give back.

Allison said that the program "teaches you to problem-solve on your feet. You can use that in any walk of life," she said. "I see these kids grow every time they do a show, and they can't wait to do it again!"

Classes offered to children and teens include Music Pops (newborn to five), production, theater and acting classes, and piano and voice lessons. Find upcoming performances and class schedules at wonderlandperformingarts.com.