

Local kids come on and do the Loco-Motion

V KIDS

BY JUDITH STILES

When confronted with a traditional coloring book, even the most imaginative and creative children will pick up a crayon and color within the lines. However, in the sensitive hands of artistic director Lisa Pilato, of Loco-Motion Dance and Theater Co., children are encouraged to explore, experiment and let loose on stage.

"Be courageous and forget about coloring inside the lines," Pilato urges. "Be creators, not imitators! Take risks and don't be afraid to make mistakes," she tells her students, who are thrilled to hear this kind of advice.

Pilato is something of a pied piper for

children who love theater and dance. They flock to her performing-arts school from all over the city for a chance to work with her and co-founder Susie Page. Housed in the heart of Greenwich Village in the basement of St. Veronica's Church on Christopher St., you will find a bustle of activity where classes in movement and performance are held daily.

"Guardian angels" Father Ken Smith and Father Kevin Nelan of St. Veronica's are strong supporters of the program and not only have they made the space available for a reasonable rent, but they also often provide the services of their talented organist, Harold Blake.

"Loco-Motion is essentially a laboratory where children can explore their own indi-

viduality and creative vision," Pilato explains, animating her sentences with dancing hands. "Being creative is too often considered a special trait belonging only to a genius. I believe everyone has an innate capacity to be creative," she adds. Even shy children do well at Loco-Motion and they don't remain reticent for very long. Students who have never been on stage thrive when given the opportunity to take creative control.

Throughout the year they are introduced to a variety of dance moves found in ballet, modern dance and even indigenous dances from other cultures. For example, Michael and Andrea Markus who are experts on West African dance came for several weeks and showed the young dancers different dances from Guinea. This was followed by instruction in ballet and then the dancers began the exciting process of choreographing their own work. The elusive creative process took over their lives as they honed their own dance over a period of months. They even incorporated elements of hip-hop with ballet and West African dance, and in the end have appropriately named their masterpiece "Hybrid."

In both theater and dance, each student participates in a springtime gala performance. On Sun., April 25, the public can get the first peak at the children's improvisational dramatic work at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, 236 E. Third St. Classes ages 9-11 years perform at 5 p.m. and classes ages 11-14 years perform at 5:15 p.m. Brett Chrisensen of the Upright Citizens Brigade Theater of NYC has mentored these young performers to present at "IMPROVables."

On Sat., May 22, at 7 p.m., at the Harry De Jur Playhouse at the Henry Street Settlement/Abrons Arts center, the young dancers will present "Dance Makers & Ground Breakers."

For a special treat, check out the dance group that has been together at Loco-Motion for 14 years. They will be perform-



Alex Tatarsky, a Loco-Motion student, in performance.

ing "The Third Rail" at the La Tea Theater, 107 Suffolk St., June 3-5 at 8 p.m., and on Sun., June 6 at 3 p.m.

After last year's performance, a Greenwich Village audience was abuzz during intermission, astounded that such a diverse group of children could put on such a professional and innovative performance. "Very lively! So original! Breathtaking!" were phrases doled out by the toughest critics of all — the parents. And as the crowd herded back into the theater, a few parents were lamenting that in public schools the resources for dance and theater are just about nil. Said one of them, "Why, without Loco-Motion, where would our children go for dance and theater?"

Loco-Motion is a 501C-3, nonprofit organization. For more information on Loco-Motion, call 212-979-6124.