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STEPVA CAST SPOTLIGHT: RAYMOND NELSON AND RACHEL CROWLEY

April 27, 2022 by Brigid O'Leary



FREDERICKSBURG, VA—In a tale as old as time, or at least as long as patriarchal inheritance traditions, Disney’s “The Lion King,” like William Shakespeare’s “Hamlet,” features brothers vying for the crown. Disney’s “The Lion King, Kids!” keeps that storyline, and that means STEPVA, the local 501(c)3 non-profit that “empower[s] people with disabilities and their families through creative expression and sensory exploration,” needed to cast both the protagonist and the villain. Taking up the mantle of the royal siblings, will be Raymond Nelson and Rachel Crowley.



Raymond Nelson

Joining the cast was, for Nelson, another chance to be part of something special. He auditioned, he said, “To be in a small Broadway show and be with friends.” Last year, Nelson took on the role of Mario Longtooth, an anchor on the Red News Network in STEPVA’s first musical, the completely in-house production “A Special Covid-19.” This year, he steps into the role of Mufasa, the king at the start of the play.

“I like the way he speaks. He’s the king!” said Nelson, who is known for his ability to create individual accents and voices for his characters. “He’s really strong. He’s the king, he dies, and he comes back as a ghost.”

Nelson, who has been with STEPVA since the beginning, has mastered the stage and hasn’t found being in Disney’s “The Lion King, Kids!” cast particularly difficult, but acknowledges that “This show, [Disney’s] ‘The Lion King, Kids!’ is much longer than ‘Covid 19,’ There’s definitely more to learn.”

And while there's more to learn, much of it has been fun—especially as the King. His favorite part of the show, he said, is “when Mufasa roars and scares the hyenas away.”



Rachel Crowley

Leading those hyenas –though not when they run away–is Scar, who is trying to unseat his brother, Mufasa, from the throne. Having had stage experience prior to joining STEPVA, Crowley was interested in playing the villain role from the start.

“His character is very different from any other role I have played. I wanted to get into Scar’s mind and understand his perspective,” she said. “I have been in other plays at various summer camps but I have never been part of a big production like [Disney’s] “The Lion King, Kids!” This is the first time that I actually had to audition.”

It was at auditions where Crowley met many of the actors who would become her cast mates, and the 21 of them have become a team over the last 12 weeks.

“The best part of being on the cast is being with the other actors and actresses. We have a common goal to put on the best play. Even though we all have our own disabilities, everyone brings their unique talents to the table,” she said.

However, Crowley is one of the few cast members who didn’t come into the experience already a fan of the movie “The Lion King;” when she was younger, the relationship between Mufasa and Scar—and the ultimate scene between the two—made her sad, so playing the role has had its challenges.

“It’s hard to be so mean and heartless when I myself am the opposite,” she said.

As any true thespian does, Crowley is embracing the role of Scar. When considering her favorite song from the show, she replied, “They are all great, but I like ‘Be prepared.’ It is the only song that has a mysterious tone to it.”

Come see Nelson and Crowley battle it out for the Pridelands as the STEPVA cast performs Disney’s *The Lion King, Kids!* on Saturday, April 30 at 7 p.m., and Sunday, May 1 at 3 p.m. Performances will take place at Fredericksburg Christian School, 9400 Thornton Rolling Rd., Fredericksburg, VA 22408. Tickets are \$10; children 5 and younger are free.

To purchase tickets, click [HERE](#).

To purchase live stream tickets, click [HERE](#).

For more information or to donate, visit www.stepva.org.

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