



*Our Mission: Empower people with disabilities and their families through creative expression and sensory exploration.*

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## STEPVA CAST SPOTLIGHT: KATIE LA SALLE, RYAN O'MEARA, AND ISAAC

April 15, 2022 by Brigid O'Leary



FREDERICKSBURG, VA—Every good movie villain has henchmen, and in Disney's *The Lion King, Kids!* that honor goes to the hyenas. As with the 1994 movie, there are three main hyenas and STEPVA, the local 501(c)3 non-profit that is designed to “empower people with disabilities through creative expression and sensory exploration,” made sure all three roles were filled. Disney's *The Lion King, Kids!* is STEPVA's first licensed musical and the second musical the organization has staged in as many years, having produced and staged one completely in-house last year.



Katie LaSalle

Katie LaSalle steps into her first theatrical role with STEPVA as Shenzi, one of the three hyenas that serve as Scar's minions. New to STEPVA this year, Katie decided to audition because she likes "The Lion King" movie and thought it would be a fun experience. She's particularly excited for the costuming and makeup that are currently planned for the cast, which the actors have seen in parts but have yet to experience in full.

Though the weekly, two-hour rehearsals can be tough, Katie is enjoying every minute of the time with her friends and looks forward to Thursday night rehearsals. It's no surprise that her favorite part of the show is when she and her hyena cohorts get to step into the spotlight, in "Be Prepared."



## Ryan O'Meara

For the same reasons, “Be Prepared” is also Ryan O'Meara's favorite song in the show, as he takes on the role of Ed, the second of three main hyenas that do Scar's bidding. It's a role that suits him perfectly, as the character of Ed does not come with the pressure of having to memorize lines and being understood, while still allowing him to be expressive and funny—which is his strong suit.

Auditioning for the show was a given for Ryan, who knows every word to the movie and often acts out entire scenes—and knew he could bring that same kind of energy to the show. He's enjoying the singing and dancing, even with all the choreography he has to remember. Like others—the best part of the whole experience is “making connections and being part of something,” which has always been important to him.



African hyena

Connecting with cast mates is important for any actor, and it helps that Katie and Ryan have the chance to connect and learn from Isaac, who has been with STEPVA since its inception nine years ago and brings that experience to the role of Banzai, rounding out the hyena henchmen.

“I am so happy to be in [Disney's] *Lion King, Kids!* cast because I have a fun, funny part in the play,” said Isaac, who is known throughout the organization for his sharp wit. “The best part of being in the show is being a villain because I like to be evil in plays. I am having so much fun with my friends at rehearsals.”

Compared to the traditional STEPVA summer performances, rehearsals for Disney's *The Lion King, Kids!* are longer and more intense rehearsals, which Isaac has found a bit challenging, but he's enjoying the experience—especially the scene with the song “Luau Hawaiian Treat,” where the hyenas are after Timon and Pumbaa.

But mostly he, like others, is enjoying the time with peers. “I have friends that are nice in the play with me,” he said.

Those who want a real treat (Hawaiian or otherwise) can come see Katie, Ryan, Isaac, and the rest of the STEPVA cast perform 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](#).

For more information or to donate, visit [www.stepva.org](http://www.stepva.org).

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