



The costumed cast of "Under The Rainbow." KRISTIN BASS-PETERSEN

Young actors launch dreams in 'Under the Rainbow'

Amanda Karioth Thompson
Council on Culture & Arts

Zola Geyer has big dreams. "In 15 years, I want to be on Broadway," she said. The 11-year-old home school student is inching steadily toward her goal. Her first step was joining Making Light Productions. Zola has been cast in their original musical production called "Under the Rainbow" and she's looking forward to her debut. "I love all of it so far, but singing is my favorite thing," she said.

"Under the Rainbow" is set in the bird sanctuary of Noah's Ark and the show explores what it means to be different. It celebrates individuality and inclusivity which are guiding tenets of Making Light. The non-profit theater arts education organization is committed to serving children of all abilities.

The cast of "Under the Rainbow" is comprised of kids with special needs working and learning alongside their typically developing peers. Together, they study music, dance, and acting, as well as build sets, make costumes and perform.

Zola plays a Counting Crow in the production and her costume comes complete with a green accountant's visor. She embodies her organized and analytical character by drawing on some of her natural personality traits though other aspects of her role are more demanding. "I use body language to show that my character's angry. It's hard sometimes, trying to find that anger and frustration so it comes across."

In the show Zola acts exasperated but in reality, she's delighted to be part of this one-hour musical comedy alongside newfound friends like Naomi Asher who plays the Hummingbird. Naomi is in the fifth grade at Gilchrist Elementary School and she enjoys the camaraderie of her castmates. She's been involved with Making Light for two years and she's excited about "Under the Rainbow."

"It's a really heartwarming show and it's about being kind to people," Naomi explained. "The Hummingbird is a fun part. I fly around really fast and have a really obnoxious laugh."

Though Naomi appreciates the attention of an audience, she mostly enjoys the process of rehearsing. "What we say in theater is 'practice makes perfect.' I do the same thing with violin. It's a really hard instrument to play but the more you practice, it becomes easier. Like school work and tests."

Much like learning lines or new choreography, we can also learn tolerance and acceptance - lessons that benefit everyone. Children who work side-by-side with others of different abilities learn that we all have something worthy to contribute. Cooperation and collaboration make us stronger as evidenced by the creative team for "Under the Rainbow."

Mandi Broadfoot, Cameron Garrett and Paul Zmolek are co-directing the production but Zmolek is quick to point out that many people have a hand in making a successful show. "Mandi wrote the libretto and Jeb Bodiford wrote the music for it. We have two parents who are volunteers who have created about 30 elaborate costumes."

In addition to working with Making Light, Zmolek is the co-artistic director of Callous Physical Theatre, an organization that creates original performance installations. He knows the challenges of mounting new productions and said "these kids have been rehearsing this show since August and that length of time is not that much different to what would work with adults. If you have a scripted, published show and you're working with experienced people, you can do it in six weeks, no problem. But if you're bringing a new show to life, a



Zola Geyer plays a Counting Crow and also makes waves in one of the scenes. AMANDA THOMPSON

If you go

What: "Under the Rainbow"

When: 7 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 5, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 6

Where: Theatre Tallahassee's Main Stage, 1861 Thom-
asville Tickets

Tickets: \$10-\$25 at UndertheRainbowMusical.com

year is not unheard-of."

"Under the Rainbow" will be staged at Theatre Tallahassee on Jan. 5 and 6. In addition, the show will be presented to area elementary and middle schools, and available for viewing via Making Light's Vimeo channel. The goal is to spread the musical's message as broadly as possible.

"There's a definite moral to the story," said Zmolek. "We all have our purpose. We need to work together and we should celebrate our differences." These concepts are modeled by the Making Light team and are essential to an inclusive arts education.

"With children, we recognize that there is a need to support their well-being, their sense of self, being able to cooperate and to work individually," Zmolek said. "The arts do that brilliantly. What I'm seeing after working with these kids for a couple years, is a really exciting growth in their abilities. These children have gifts."

"Under the Rainbow" will be presented to the public on Jan. 5-6, at Theatre Tallahassee's Main Stage. Tickets are available for the Saturday night and Sunday matinee shows at UndertheRainbowMusical.com at a rate of \$10-\$25.

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).