

CONTACT INFORMATION

GILDA DAVIDIAN

gilda.davidian@psarts.org

310-586-1017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 7, 2022

MUSICAL THEATER TRIUMPHANTLY RETURNS TO WALGROVE ELEMENTARY TWO YEARS AFTER HEARTBREAKING COVID SHUTDOWN OF OPENING NIGHT RENOWNED LA PUBLIC SCHOOL PERFORMING ARTS PROGRAM TO PERFORM LION KING

LOS ANGELES (MAR VISTA), California - First the lights came back up on Broadway and now the curtains are finally rising again for musical theater at one public elementary school in Los Angeles. This month, led by award-winning choreographer and director Donzell Lewis, LAUSD's Walgrove Elementary in Mar Vista will perform three days and nights of *Disney's Lion King Jr.* beginning May 12th.

Two years ago, and just weeks before opening night, COVID brought the curtains down quickly on Walgrove's production of *Alice in Wonderland*. Aside from the hundreds of hours of rehearsal time put in by Lewis and the students, there was also the props and scenery created by a dedicated crew of parent volunteers like Amber Weiss.

"It was heartbreaking. We had finished almost all of the props. There were giant tea cups, giant teapots, giant flowers, giant cards, giant everything. Usually when you see the fruits of your labor on stage and the kids get to finally perform what they have been working so hard on, it closes the circle on the entire production, there is closure. We never got that. We were working so hard to get it finished on time and then all of a sudden it was just over. For the parents who were involved with Alice, we have a bit of lingering fear about whether or not it will happen again. We see the cases on the news rising and we know it is possible but hopefully not probable."

Lewis (donzellewis.com), aside from being a theater teaching artist for P.S. Arts (psarts.org), and the Director & Choreographer at Walgrove Elementary, is an award-winning actor, and comedian with a BFA in Performance and an MFA in Theater Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University. He sees the return of musical theater to these kids and as being about more than just the performance.

"The show is important because it's about community. What happens when a community is tested, challenged and shattered. But through love, bravery and commitment to one another, any community can always rebuild itself- stronger and more powerful than before. Which is what the world has gone through with COVID. And now we all are

finding a way to rebuild our lives post pandemic. And I hope that the students and audiences gain inspiration from our show to know that we have the ability to build a brighter and healthier society with renewed love, hope and resilience.”

The Musical Theater program at Walgrove is a main draw for parents like Heather McAdams who has been an actively involved parent volunteer for the past few years..

“What goes on within the walls of this Musical Theater Program is the best of Walgrove and is the quintessential school community experience. We have people jumping in and helping wherever they can not just because it benefits their own children but also the kids of fellow parents. You see other parents working so hard to do their part for the cast and crew and so when you think you just can’t paint another leaf, you see that parent who has spent hours stapling deconstructed hula skirts onto curtains and you think to yourself, ‘ok, give me back that paint brush. I got this.”

Like the parents, the school staff also see it as a way to get things back to normal after the pandemic altered so much. “With Musical Theater back with Mr. Donzell and the kids doing their thing, it’s really starting to feel like we are really getting back to normal,” said school Plant Manager, Mike Nicoles.

Other past productions include: *Annie, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Once on This Island, The Seussical* and *Peter Pan*.

Photos available upon request.

###