

KEY LARGO SCHOOL DRAMA CLUB PRESENTS 'MOANA JR.'

By **Kellie Butler Farrell** - April 18, 2025



'Moana Jr.' cast members say they are excited for opening night on Friday, April 18. From left, Fatima Gutierrez, Olivia McMahon, Monserrath Ornelas, Emily Ornelas, Gabriela Castano Polo, Hannah Qually, Victor Mora, Vivian Ensign and Sofia Lopez. CONTRIBUTED

After months of exhausting rehearsals, the curtain is set to rise on Disney's "Moana Jr." The cast of this musical, presented by the Key Largo School Drama Club, includes 48 student actors, from 8 to 14 years old.

"The character I play is Moana and I think she's very inspiring because she became a wayfinder despite all the people pressuring her to stay in the village," said KLS fifth grader Gabby Castano. (In the show, a wayfinder is someone who navigates the ocean using cues from nature, like the stars, moon and ocean swells).

"One of the cool things about this show is we made a majority of the islander costumes," said KLS drama teacher Michele Zofchak. "We have been learning about

Pacific Islander culture, we've been learning about how we can show respect for that culture."



The musical follows the adventures of strong-willed princess Moana, who against her parents' wishes, follows her calling and sails out to sea in order to save her village.

"I really like Moana, I feel like she kind of relates to me because we're on an island," said 13-year-old Kaelyn McMahon, who plays the chief ancestor and is also a Moana understudy.

With the help of grants from the Keys Children's Foundation and the Ocean Reef Community Foundation, Zofchak says she and others have been able to make the show "pretty spectacular" with beautiful sets and backdrops.

Since rehearsals started in mid-January, KLS music and movement teacher Kelly Shaw has been helping the students perfect their Polynesian dance moves.



"They really come out of their shells when they're in drama and there's a little bit of everything for everybody," said Shaw.

Viviane Ensign, 9, plays the understudy for Hei Hei. She enjoys being part of the drama club.

"I get to do roles and I get to be characters with my friends," she explained.

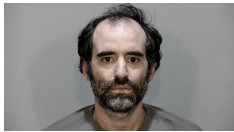


KLS drama teacher Michele Zofchak and parent volunteer Caitlin Perdomo sort through dozens of costumes to be worn in 'Moana Jr.' Many of the costumes were handmade by the cast and volunteers. KELLIE BUTLER FARRELL/Keys Weekly



Gabriel Matus and Kaelyn McMahon pose during a dress rehearsal for 'Moana Jr.' The show opens this weekend. The Key Largo School Drama Club started rehearsing in mid-January. CONTRIBUTED

This will be the first time acting in a show for eighth grader Caedyn Perdomo. He landed the role of Chief Tui and is also an understudy for Maui. Learning his lines and song lyrics came easily.



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"I've watched Moana a lot, ever since I was little, so the songs were really easy to memorize," said Perdomo.

Caitlin Perdomo, Caedyn's mom, volunteered to help sew costumes and even built a gigantic papier mache crab shell used in the show.

"These kids have been putting so much into this and I felt like I wanted to do everything I could to help out as well," said Caitlin.

KLS eighth-grader Lillian Simmons found her role in the production as a backstage worker.

"In my old school, I was in drama club and I always kind of liked it, but wasn't sure if I wanted to be a part of it like in the cast," said Simmons.

As opening night approaches, there are the expected jitters.

"I'm excited but I'm also very nervous," said eighth-grader Gabriel Matus, who plays Maui.

Andrea Lopez said the show is a lot of fun, but also a lot of work. The almost daily rehearsals teach discipline and time management.

“Another thing I like about these shows is it teaches you a lot of responsibility,” said Lopez, a KLS eighth-grader who plays the mom.



“Very, very fun but also, I would love to get some sleep after this,” joked 9-year-old Hannah Qually of the long rehearsal hours. Qually plays Pua.

There will be a total of five performances of Moana Jr. starting Friday, April 18 at 7 p.m. at the Coral Shores High School Performing Arts Center.

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Kellie Butler Farrell is a journalist who calls Islamorada home. Kellie spent two decades in television news and also taught journalism at Barry University in Miami and Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, UAE. She loves being outside, whether spending time on the water or zipping down the Old Highway on her electric bike, Kellie is always soaking up the island lifestyle. Kellie and her husband own an electric bike rental company, Keys Ebikes.