

# - *Velveteen Rabbit Cast Bios* -

**Sarah Chandler** (Velveteen Rabbit) is elated to play the Rabbit Spirit in *The Velveteen Rabbit*. She has been in four musicals and two short films with Places! Productions, as well as performing with Presto! for the last few years. Recently, she played Little Red in *Into the Woods* and Lefou in *Beauty and the Beast Jr.* Sarah loves to hang with her friends and listen to musicals when she is bored. Sarah thanks her family, friends, the rest of the cast, David, Brianna, Alyssa, and Rachael.

**Madeleine King** (Skin Horse) has been performing with Places! since the beginning when she was an orphan in *Annie Jr.* Favorite credits include, Places! Productions *The Crucible* (Betty Parris), *Beauty and the Beast Jr.* (Belle) and *Shrek the Musical* (Baby Bear). In addition to musical theater, Mady enjoys being a part of Places! Productions PRESTO Performance group. She sincerely thanks the Places! Team for all their love and support.

**Molly Kesner** (Timothy Lion), a freshman, is very happy to be playing the parts of Timothy the Lion & a tree in *The Velveteen Rabbit*. Molly loves performing for Places! Productions; this is her second musical. She previously played the part of Lefou in this summer's production of *Beauty and the Beast Jr.* Molly would like to thank Mr. David for being an awesome director, and everyone else for helping our musical be what it is today! Molly would also like to thank God for making her into the person she is today!

**Chloe Kesner** (Model Boat) is ecstatic to be Model Boat and a tree in the production of *The Velveteen Rabbit!* Chloe is an eleven-year-old actor who loves to sing and dance. When she's not fighting with Train Engine, she is passionate about cleaning, doing math, ventriloquism, swimming and skateboarding. This is Chloe's second Places! Productions musical; this past summer she enjoyed being a part of *Beauty & the Beast*. Chloe is a part of the Places! singing groups Ping and Presto. Chloe wants to give a special thanks to David and Rachael, who were very helpful during this production!

**Phoenix Gladney** (Train Engine) is 15 years old and joined this program because his teacher asked him to. He certainly doesn't regret it. This is his first musical and his second play. In his free time, he likes to draw and is a 3D modeller, an animator, and a musician. "Thank you so much for attending this play. I hope you enjoy it!"

**Gracie Cook** (Andi) is a 12-year-old at Learning Foundation And Performing Arts Academy. She was born in Gilbert, Arizona. When Gracie grows up, she wants to be a professional interior designer and actress. She has been acting since she was 5 year old. Gracie's favorite performances have been Dorothy in *The Wizard Of Oz*, Narrator in *Beauty And The Beast*, Dwarf in *Shrek The Musical*, and Gracie in *Elves And The Shoe Maker*. Some of Gracie's favorite hobbies are acting, singing, journaling, dancing, and shopping! She would like to thank Allison Zuccaro, David Micheal Paul, Brianna Fallon, Susan Houston, and Rachael Houston for all they did to make this show possible! She would also like to thank her family and friends for being so supportive of her. "Enjoy the show!"

**Jennifer Parent** (Nana) is a homeschool mom to 4 children, ages 12 to 20, celebrating her 50th year doing first and intentional feats, which includes doing her first show in 15 years (last one was *Fiddler on the Roof*), and her first ever with one of her children (Noelle). So thankful to Allison and David for believing in her. She is also trying to fit in 50 hikes and reading 50 books this year. Her family moved to Arizona in 2019 after 23 years in Oregon where she earned her M.Ed. and met her husband—so thankful for his support. She enjoys ethnic food, sushi, travel, dancing (most recently clogging and Irish), Shakespeare, discussing great ideas and teaching—currently enjoying most mentoring youth and supporting 2 children.

**Eddie Kesner** (Uncle Brad) is excited to be performing in his first musical stage performance with Places! Productions. If that is not memorable enough, he has the wonderful opportunity to perform alongside his daughters. Eddie enjoys trail running, surfing, board gaming, playing the banjo, and spending time with his amazing wife. A heartfelt thank you to director David for his impressive directing skills, approachableness, and willingness to share his fantastic acting knowledge!

**Abby Gordon** (Mother) is thrilled to return to the stage with Places! as the Mother! Her favorite past roles include Mary Bailey (*It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*) and Mary Warren (*The Crucible*). She also currently also plays Meg March in *Little Women*. Abby has also been an assistant director for Places!' productions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Our Originals*, as well as writing and directing her first short film, *Wishing*, which premiered in February. She thanks David, and the whole cast and crew of *The Velveteen Rabbit* for the opportunity to be a part of this amazing show!

**Kevin King** (Doctor) returns to the stage with Places! Productions as Doctor. His most recent credits are Deputy Governor Danforth in *The Crucible*, Papa Bear/Bishop in *Shrek the Musical*

and Mr Van Daan in *The Diary of Anne Frank* with Places! Productions. He would like to thank the Places! team for this opportunity all their hard work!

**Olivia Kesner** (Brown Rabbit/Wild Rabbit Three/Tree Solo) is thrilled to be in *The Story of the Velveteen Rabbit*. She is playing a toy, a tree, wild rabbit three, and brown rabbit. When she's not on stage, she likes to make up dances, sing, skateboard, go on vacation (specifically the beach), and hang out with her friends and sisters that are in the production. She also participates in both Places! Productions singing groups. This will be her second musical with Places! The first was *Beauty and the Beast* when Olivia played Babette, the feather duster. Olivia would like to give a special thanks to David the director and Rachael the choreographer.

This is **Olivia Kubiak's** (Doll/Rabbit) first ever performance and she is very excited to be a part of the production. She loves to sing and dance and she hopes to be in many more shows to come.

**Madison Saffin** (Doll/Rabbit) is excited for her first ever performance with Places! productions. She loves to dance and sing in her spare time, putting on shows for her family. In addition to dancing and singing she likes to color and draw. Madison would like to thank her mom for her support and her family too.

**Marielle Valdez** (Doll/Rabbit) was born to be on stage. She had her debut performance with Places! Productions at the age of 3. She loves dancing, singing, playing on her swing set, and spending time with her family! She is excited to be back on stage with all her new friends. She would like to thank her Mom, Dad, Tia Rachael, Tia Zib, and Auntie Ally for inspiring her to be a performer. She would also like to thank her directors for believing in her and helping her learn and grow.

**Maria Stallings** (Doll/Wild Rabbit One) is 9 years old and attends the 4th grade at Chandler Legacy Traditional Schools. She is the daughter of Sean and Laura and is the younger sister to Samara. This is her first play and she's excited to be a part of such a wonderful cast and crew. In her free time, in addition to beginning to participate in plays, she also enjoys attending voice lessons to continue her development with singing.

**Abby Kesner** (Doll/Rabbit) is excited to be in *The Velveteen Rabbit* playing the part of a rabbit, a doll, and a tree. When she grows up she wants to work with animals. Abby, who is 12, enjoys drawing, swimming, reading, skateboarding, going on trips, having fun with her family, and homeschooling. Abby was delighted to be in *Beauty and the Beast*, which was her first musical

with Places! Productions. Abby is happy to perform with her dad and three of her sisters in this production. Abby would like to thank the director and production staff.

**Mackenzie Wallace** (Doll)/Rabbit/Tree Solo) is 12 years old and in the 6th grade at LFPA charter school. She started performing in musicals at LFPA in the 2nd grade, then joined Places! Productions in the 3rd grade, and has grown to love it more with every play! Mackenzie loves to sing and act and hopes one day to perform at Gilbert's Hale Theatre. She is so grateful to be a part of such a talented group of kids and adults with Places! Productions and is so happy to work with David Buehrle directing the *Velveteen Rabbit*!

## *-Artistic Bios-*

**Alyssa Jesser** (Assistant Director) is excited to work on this sweet show with David and Places! She is bursting with pride for this young cast and their incredible talent and hard work. She hopes you enjoy the show as much as she does!

**Rachael Jacobs Houston** (Choreographer) has been teaching and choreographing in the valley for the last 14 years. She got her start in the musical theater world at the age of 5, long before she fell in love with dance. After catching the dance bug as a teen she was given the opportunity to train and perform in New York, Los Angeles and throughout Europe. After graduating from ASU she founded The Movement Project in Mesa where she spent many years molding competitive dancers of all ages. Rachael has been awarded countless choreography and artistic awards over the years, but she finds it the most rewarding to connect with each of her students and help them achieve their goals. Rachael now works as the Arts Director at a local arts school where she is able to advocate for and inspire a new generation of arts educators. She would like to thank the VR production team for all the hard work they have put into this show, as well as her husband Wesley Houston for his constant support and encouragement.

## *-Director's Note-*

**By David Buehrle**

Thank you for joining us for this performance of *The Story of the Velveteen Rabbit*. This incredible cast and crew have worked hard to put this beautiful show together, and we're eager to share the story with you during the holiday season. "The Velveteen Rabbit" (or "How Toys Become Real") is a British children's book first published in 1922 and written by Margery

Williams. Some may say this was the original “Toy Story”; and by some, I mean me. My hope is that this story impacts you in a way that transports you back to when the possibility of magic and believing in the impossible, made your imagination feel endless. Thank you for supporting the arts, Places! Productions, and this talented cast. I hope you enjoy the show.