

November 9, 2006

## Almaden students help bring CMTSJ's 'The Jungle Book' to life

By Lorraine Gabbert

*Staff Writer*

When Children's Musical Theater San Jose presents Walt Disney's timeless tale, "The Jungle Book," three Almaden children will be among its talented cast: Bryan Herr, Brian Huhn and Victoria Hall.

In this production, running Nov. 16-19 at the Montgomery Theater, the jungle will be jumping as Mowgli, Baloo, King Louie and the gang swing their way through adventures and thwart the ferocious tiger, Shere Khan. Featuring colorful characters and favorite tunes like "The Bare Necessities," and "I Wan'na Be Like You," this production is sure to set toes tapping to the jungle beat.

CMTSJ is dedicated to nurturing and educating the youth of today to become the artists, patrons and leaders of tomorrow. Their guiding principles include casting all who audition and providing a positive environment where youth learn teamwork and communication skills, and experience the pride of accomplishment.

Friends, neighbors and classmates Herr, Huhn and Hall are excited to be performing in CMTSJ's production of "The Jungle Book" together. Although all three have performed in plays since they were in first grade at Almaden Country School. This is Herr and Huhn's first CMTSJ production, and Hall's first time playing a lead with CMTSJ—and they couldn't be more excited.

Herr and Huhn, who have been close friends since they were 4 years old, will both play the parts of rocking rocks and wolves in this production, while Hall will play Shere Khan, the sinister tiger.

### **Bryan Herr**

Herr, 11, is very happy to be a part of this production. "He jumped right in due to his experience at Almaden Country School," says his mother, Helen, "singing and dancing with confidence." Herr gained musical experience playing guitar and singing with



*Victoria Hall plays the lead role of Shere Khan in CMT's "The Jungle Book." Photo courtesy of Denise Hall*

[http://www.almadentimes.com/current/alm\\_students.htm](http://www.almadentimes.com/current/alm_students.htm)

Almaden Country School's Zoom group. "I think it's really good for him to be able to express himself," she says. "He enjoys the performing arts and I'm sure he'll want to continue with more performances with CMTSJ."

Helen is impressed with the way the CMTSJ staff works with the children, including offering creative criticism as a learning tool. "They run their organization well," she says. "It's amazing how the children respond."

Herr is excited about having his friends and family see him perform on opening night. "He's a ham," laughs his mother.

### **Brian Huhn**

Huhn also enjoys performing. "I like being on stage and having all those people see me," he says. "I get to balance, carry props and sing. I think I'm doing really well because I'm getting a lot of good comments." Since first grade, Huhn has performed in productions such as "Pinocchio," "To Be or Not to Be" and "Alice in Wonderland." Besides making friends and gaining professional experience, Huhn says that performing before an audience has made him more comfortable speaking before a group, which helps in school. Following "The Jungle Book," he would like to stay with CMTSJ, but his time may be limited due to a number of extra-curricular activities. Huhn says he's glad that Hall suggested he try out. "It's been a lot of fun," he says.

Huhn's mother, Genny agrees. "He loves music and theater," she says. "He thrives doing it and this seemed like a natural next step. Like everybody, he'd like to be a star or have one of the leading roles, but this is his first year with CMTSJ." Huhn is the kind of kid who throws himself into everything he does. "He's very musically inclined," says Genny. "He plays piano and likes to sing, including singing the national anthem for Little League.

Genny believes that having children participate in the arts is extremely worthwhile. "My mom told him that although baseball and soccer are great, there comes a point in life when you can't do them anymore, but you can still play a song on the piano. Music is a gift you give yourself: a lifelong gift."

She also thinks that CMTSJ's staff is incredible. "My hat's off to them," she says, "... the time they spend broadening our children's love of music and theater ... they are just a wonderful group of people." Genny especially appreciates the creativity and sweet nature of costume designer Lisa Laymon. "The stuff she's done is amazing," she says.

### **Victoria Hall**

In "The Jungle Book," Hall, 11, plays the lead role of Shere Khan, the tiger. Although she has played lead roles before at Almaden Country School, this is the first time she captured one with CMTSJ. Her mother, Denise, believes it has a lot to do with her frame of mind when she auditioned, as well as her professional experience and ability.

Hall was ecstatic to receive CMTSJ's highest honor, the Gypsy Robe Award for her performance as a pottery vendor in "Aladdin," for epitomizing the spirit of the

production. Presented with the robe onstage opening night, she was invited to become a part of its rich history by adding a patch bearing her name, picture and show title. She will also be honored at a dinner in December and have her name added to a plaque of Gypsy Robe recipients. "She is intuitive and has a gift for performance and timing," says Denise.



*At age 11, Victoria Hall is already a rising star.*

In addition, Hall recently signed with a Theatrical and Commercial Agent in Los Angeles following an impressive audition in New York City. Chosen by John Robert Powers Acting School to represent the Bay Area at an industry forum competition before agents from Virgin Records, MGM, and Disney, Hall not only received several awards for her acting and singing, but also offers from numerous agents on the spot.

"After winning the Gypsy Robe award, the success in New York and getting an agent," says Denise, "she felt like a million bucks when she went for 'The Jungle Book' audition. This was quite a contrast to her first tryout three years ago, when she was so scared she cried. It was such a metamorphosis. She's found her niche and she's having fun."

Denise appreciates what performing has brought to her daughter. In addition to aiding her with public speaking and building her self-esteem, Denise believes it played a role in providing Hall with leadership qualities, exemplified by her mentoring younger cast members and taking them under her wing.

Although Virgin Records has expressed interest in grooming Hall for a girl band, her parents believe in biding their time. "It's really important to have a balance," says Denise. "She's only 11 years old and CMTSJ is wholesome and offers a lot locally. It's really professional and a great venue."

Hall hopes to one day do voice-overs for films or video games or appear on Broadway. One thing is clear: She loves theater and singing and playing the lead in a CMTSJ production. "It feels great," she says, "because I'm doing what I love."

*For tickets and information, call 408-288-5437, or contact CMTSJ online at: [www.cmts.org](http://www.cmts.org).*