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KALAMAZOO

Broadway's 'The Lion King' opens in Kalamazoo with 'nostalgia' and 'culture'

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Scenes from the Broadway musical Disney's "The Lion King" opening night in Miller Auditorium on Wednesday, Jan. 29. (Aya Miller)



By [Aya Miller](#) | amiller2@mlive.com

KALAMAZOO, MI -- The Broadway musical rendition of Disney's "The Lion King" roared into Southwest Michigan on Wednesday, Jan. 29.

People gathered in Western Michigan University's Miller Auditorium on opening night, Wednesday, for the musical's two-week stay. "The Lion King" North American tour will continue through Feb. 9.

"I thought it was the best way to celebrate my 37th birthday," said attendee Kari Deeds.

Deeds said friends raved about the musical, but she had never gone. When Deeds found out the show was coming to Kalamazoo, she had to go.

"I was like, 'I'm not missing out. It's here, I'm going,'" Deeds said.

"The Lion King" was last shown at Miller Auditorium in 2018. The musical first premiered on Broadway in 1998. Since then, the show has won more than 70 theatrical awards across the globe, including six Tony awards and one Grammy, according to a Disney press release.

The African savannah setting of the animated film is brought to life on stage. Actors portray the animals using puppets, masks and headdresses. There are 200 puppets in the show, the release said.



The company of The Lion King on Broadway. Disney

Deeds got a peek at some of the costumes being brought into the theatre when she went to pick up her tickets.

“The costumes are magnificent, beyond great,” Deeds said.

The lions and lionesses wore golden-hued beaded corsets and headdresses with lion faces. The lionesses also had billowing capes with various patterns.

Tricia Lear learned the show was coming to Kalamazoo through a message from WMU.

“I grew up in the ‘80s, so I saw the first Lion King when it first came out on Disney and loved “The Lion King” ever since I was a little girl,” Lear said.

The show features iconic songs from the film like “Be Prepared” and “Can You Feel the Love Tonight.” There are also musical performances not included in the film.

Lynn Zhang, sponsor of Broadway in West Michigan, said seeing the show on a stage adds another layer that you can’t see watching a film. Zhang saw the “The Lion King” on Broadway in New York and the 2018 performance at Miller Auditorium.

“What we see is on stage, but in the back so much hard work is put in to make it happen,” Zhang said.

Prior to this performance, Miller Auditorium removed 215 seats to install permanent center aisles to accommodate for the show. In 2018 the seats were temporarily removed to create the center aisles.

In the opening “Circle of Life,” actors costumed as gazelles, zebras and elephants walk through the center aisles toward the stage.

Monica Padula had never attended a Broadway musical.

“For this to be my first Broadway show and for it to be something I’ve watched as a child, I’m really excited about that,” Padula said.

Padula wore a skirt with an African print made by women in Africa, she said. Padula also painted cat whiskers on her cheeks for the show.

Five indigenous African languages are spoken in “The Lion King.” Six of the 49 cast members are from South Africa, the release said.

“It’s important for any culture, especially marginalized cultures, to have positive artistic representation that is authentic,” Padula said.

Tickets range between \$55 to \$154 and can be purchased [here](#).

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Hi there! I'm an award-winning journalist covering K-12 schools and higher education in Kalamazoo County and broader Southwest Michigan. For story inquiries and tips I can be reached at amiller2@mlive.com.

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