

# INSIDE THE MUSICAL GUIDE

THE 5TH AVENUE THEATRE'S PRODUCTION OF

## Disney THE LITTLE MERMAID

SEPTEMBER 8 - OCTOBER 8, 2023

MUSIC BY ALAN MENKEN

LYRICS BY HOWARD ASHMAN AND GLENN SLATER

BOOK BY DOUG WRIGHT

Based on the Hans Christian Andersen Story and the Disney Film produced by Howard Ashman & John Musker and Written & Directed by John Musker & Ron Clements

Flying Sequence Choreography by PAUL RUBIN  
Music Directed and Conducted by R.J. TANCIOCO  
Choreographed by JOHN MACINNIS  
Directed by GLENN CASALE

This "Inside the Musical" Guide offers supplementary curriculum containing educational content, interactive activities, opportunities for reflection, and resources based on the themes of the show *Disney's The Little Mermaid*. This guide can be utilized before or after experiencing the show. Questions? Reach out to [educationprograms@5thavenue.org](mailto:educationprograms@5thavenue.org).

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# SYNOPSIS

Beautiful mermaid Ariel lives in an enchanted undersea country, her father is a King, and she has the most beautiful singing voice. She is a passionate, headstrong teenager, and wants what she cannot have – to live on land. When she falls in love with a handsome human prince, Ariel is more determined than ever to gain a pair of legs. But her only option is to defy her furious father and bargain with Ursula the Sea Witch, giving her voice as the price of entry onto dry land. With the help of Flounder the fish, Scuttle the seagull, and officious court composer Sebastian the crab, Ariel must wordlessly gain Prince Eric's love within three days -- or lose her soul to the ambitious witch! Based on the classic Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, and the wildly popular Disney film, this musical staging of *The Little Mermaid* features a funny and fanciful book by Doug Wright, with the beloved score by Alan Menken, Howard Ashman, and Glenn Slater in an expanded but completely faithful form, featuring the rambunctious and persuasive "Under the Sea," the romantic expectation of "Kiss the Girl," and that anthem to longing and belonging, "Part of Your World."

## Content Advisory:

Disney's *The Little Mermaid* is generally suitable for all ages and contains some moments of mild fantasy violence. Children under 4, including babes in arms, will not be admitted.

For more information about the show please visit <https://www.5thavenue.org/shows/2023-2024/disney-s-the-little-mermaid/>.



# CHARACTER BREAKDOWN



**Prince Eric**

A human prince determined to find the girl who saved him from drowning.



**Grimsby**

Prince Eric's guardian and friend who is set on seeing Prince Eric marry.



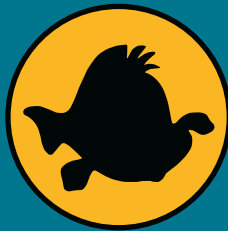
**Chef Louis**

Prince Eric's chef.



**Ariel**

The youngest daughter of King Triton who dreams of life on land.



**Flounder**

A fish, Ariel's friend and companion on her adventures to the water's surface.



**Scuttle**

A seagull and self-proclaimed expert on the human world.



**King Triton**

Ariel's father and King of Atlantica. He dislikes humans and wants to protect Ariel from their influence.



**Sebastian**

A crab, an advisor to King Triton who also serves as the court composer and Ariel's guardian.



**Mersisters**

King Triton's daughters: Aquata, Andrina, Arista, Atina, Adella, Allana.



**Flotsam & Jetsam**

Eels, Ursula's sly and cunning henchmen.



**Ursula**

King Triton's sister, a sea witch who tricks Ariel into giving up her voice in exchange for a pair of human legs.



## ISN'T SHE DIVINE?: A PROLIFIC DRAG QUEEN'S INFLUENCE ON URSULA THE SEA WITCH

By Bri Little

It is fairly common for popular media to model villains after groups that are considered deviant and give them characteristics that are undesirable. Disney is no stranger to this offensive trend that has persisted throughout the history of cinema, which often portrays male villains as flamboyant and feminine. Yet something unique has arisen from the queer-coded character of Ursula in *Disney's The Little Mermaid*; perhaps because she herself was heavily influenced by Divine, a giant in the drag community, Ursula the Sea Witch has been widely celebrated and hailed as a timeless cultural icon in the hearts and minds of queer people.



Divine in 1984. Photo: Greg Gorman

Though Ursula is undoubtedly a trickster, a villain, her presence transcends the typical, offensive portrayals of queer-coded characters. She is bold and brazen, and her biggest characteristic is that she is confident. She is vivacious, provocative, and cunning with a dash of charm. Her performance of "Poor Unfortunate Souls" embodies the essence of drag: the drama, the ostentatious, flirtatious, over-the-top showiness of it all. More than anything, what Ursula covets is a voice, which is a relatable sentiment to queer people, who have historically been pushed to the margins of society.

Why has Ursula been able to evade the offensive archetype of the queer-coded villain? Likely because an actual gay person was behind her creation, and because she was modeled after a larger-than-life drag queen. Howard Ashman, a prominent gay man, played a huge role in the development of the Disney adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's classic tale. Ashman was the producer, lyricist, and a writer of dialogue for *The Little Mermaid*. Allegedly, after seeing concept art of Ursula, Ashman chose the image that reminded him of a prolific drag queen, Divine.



Divine at The Embassy Club 1983. Photo: Steve Rapport

The physical similarities between Divine and Ursula are immediate: The thick, bodacious body, the tall hair like flames in the wind, and the deep, growling voice. Divine was known for her roles in John Waters movies like *Pink Flamingos* and *Female Trouble*, where she stood out with her trashy yet overly confident demeanor. Though she met an early demise, Divine's unique and magnetic penchant for high drama earned her *People* Magazine's title "Drag Queen of the Century." Ursula's sleazy and self-assured character is an homage, an immortalizing tribute to Divine's iconic persona.

Ursula's legacy has endured as a revolutionary portrayal of camp, and *The Little Mermaid*'s theme of wanting to belong undoubtedly resonates with LGBTQ+ audiences to this day. Divine, and by extension, Ursula, continues to inspire drag performers across generations. Seattle drag artist Queen Andrew Scott states:



Queen Andrew Scott

“

**Divine's influence on the character of Ursula speaks volumes when you really examine her. She's big, bodacious, loud, a diva, and a rebel. That's what drag is. It's unboxed. It's against the norm while being fabulous and expressive. The character of Ursula has also influenced drag right back, with many paying tribute to her through performance and/or aesthetic. Newer queens resonate with her, and it's telling of how infectious the essence of drag can be! We're all fabulous in our own ways, and seeing someone like Ursula (or a drag entertainer) reminds us of that fabulousness.”**

”

# HANS CHRISTIAN

# ANDERSEN & THE ORIGIN

# OF *THE LITTLE MERMAID*

By Beth Pollack



Hans Christian Andersen was born in Odense, Denmark in 1805. His parents were a poor shoemaker with an elementary level education and an illiterate washerwoman. As an adolescent, Andersen left home for Copenhagen to pursue fame. He was originally interested in theater, music, and dance. However, his unconventional appearance and sometimes odd behavior made it difficult for people to take his ambitions seriously.

While training and performing in small roles at the Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen, Andersen's tenacity won over some influential figures in the government and higher ranks of society. One such person was Jonas Collin, a civil servant and patron of the arts, who would both sponsor Andersen and become a father figure to him. Collin insisted that Andersen needed more formal education and sent him away to school in Slagelse. Andersen had a wretched school experience; he was socially ostracized as the oldest student in his class, had a contentious relationship with the headmaster, and was a poor student overall. Eventually, however, he did pass his exams and fully embarked on his career as an author. Andersen wrote several short stories, plays, poems, and novels. He is most known for his fairy tales, and "The Little Mermaid" is perhaps his most famous story.

First published in 1837, "*The Little Mermaid*" was actually written the year before, in 1836 - the same year that Edvard Collin, the son of Andersen's mentor, got married. Collin was one of Andersen's dearest friends, though

their relationship was not without complications and tensions. Collin tutored Andersen during his time at school. In their adult years, he seemed to appoint himself as a social and financial guardian to Andersen, as well as chief deflator of the author's rather sizable ego.

Though Collin treated Andersen with real affection, he never matched the intensity of the feelings that Andersen developed for him. Andersen wrote Collin emotional letters full of longing, while Collin continually rebuffed or ignored his advances. When Collin became engaged to his eventual wife, Andersen began inserting himself into Collin and Henriette's relationship. His behavior escalated to the point that he was purposefully left out of the wedding planning, and therefore was not able to return to Denmark in time to attend their wedding ceremony.

As a method of working through his feelings, and partially as a gift to the couple, he wrote "*The Little Mermaid*," a story about a mermaid whose forced silence causes her to lose her chance at true love with a handsome prince, and whose grief results in a dramatic self-sacrifice. Despite the many complexities of their relationship, Collin and Andersen maintained a friendship, and Andersen was eventually able to cultivate a relationship with Henriette. Hans Christian Andersen, Edvard Collin, and Henriette Collin all shared a burial plot for several years before Edvard and Henriette's tombstone was moved to the family plot, leaving Hans Christian Andersen alone once more.

# THE ORIGINAL LITTLE MERMAID

By Beth Pollack



Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* is decidedly darker in tone than Disney's adaptation. In Andersen's tale, our unnamed protagonist also falls in love with a human prince that she saves from a shipwreck. The little mermaid strikes a deal with a sea witch and exchanges her tongue for a pair of human legs, though each step on her new legs feels like walking on knives. If she can win the prince's heart, the little mermaid will gain an immortal soul as well as the prince's love; if she fails, she will dissolve into seafoam and have no hope of eternal life. Unfortunately, the prince agrees to marry a princess from another kingdom, believing her to be the person who saved him in the shipwreck. Resigned to her fate, the little mermaid boards the ship for the wedding voyage, and her mermaid sisters show up with a last chance for her to survive. The mermaid sisters reveal that they traded their hair to the sea witch in exchange for a magical knife. If the little mermaid kills the prince with the knife, she can become a mermaid again. Unable to bring herself to kill the prince, the little mermaid throws herself and the knife overboard. Miraculously, instead of dissolving into seafoam, the little mermaid finds herself rising upward as a spirit being - a daughter of the air. If she spends the next 300 years doing good deeds, she can gain an immortal soul and have the hope of one day ascending into heaven.



## WHAT IS IT LIKE “UNDER THE SEA” IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST?

A Message from The Seattle Aquarium, provided by Moira Tamayo

Ready to retreat from “The World Above” and experience a real-life, below-the-surface wonderland? Look no further than the Salish Sea, home to countless fascinating animals, plants and habitats.

You’re probably already familiar with some of “Les Poissons” (the fish) found in our local waters, from salmon to sturgeon—and beloved flounder, of course. But there are other species “Fathoms Below” that may be less familiar: Pacific spiny lumpsuckers, grunt sculpins, gunnels, tubesnouts, pricklebacks, sticklebacks...these are just a few of the amazing fish living in the Salish Sea. And just the beginning of its wonders!

Although beautiful and teeming with life, these waters are also fragile, and “Human Stuff”—like plastics pollution and ocean acidification—is impacting their health. There is reason for “Positooovity” in the middle of this metaphorical “Storm at Sea,” though. Each of us can make a difference for the marine environment.

How? Choose alternatives to single-use plastics. Conserve water and electricity. Share the ride, and the road. Raise your voice for ocean health. Every action you take brings us “One Step Closer” to a healthy ocean for all.



Want to learn more? Visit [SeattleAquarium.org](https://seattleaquarium.org). Or, better yet, visit the Seattle Aquarium in person. You may not see Ariel, but you will have a chance to experience a sea urchin “hug,” get nose-to-nose with a fur seal, immerse yourself in the Underwater Dome habitat’s 360° view, and even meet some of the animals featured in our show.

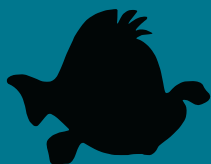
## CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

After you experience the show, reflect on the following questions:

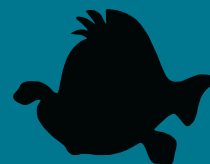
- Which character did you relate to the most and why?
- What do you imagine might happen next for each of the characters? What lesson(s) did they learn (or not)?
- Ariel and Prince Eric fall in love very quickly - almost at first sight. What do they have in common that might have helped bring them together so quickly?
- How would you describe Ariel's relationship with King Triton at the beginning of the show? What has changed by the end?
- Ariel trades away her voice for a pair of human legs. Is there anything you can imagine trading your most precious attribute for? What circumstances would convince you that the trade would be worth it?

# DRAMA GAMES

By Beth Pollack



## YELLOW FLOUNDER



Ariel lives in a fantastical land on the ocean floor, full of hidden caverns, musical grottos, and an underwater palace. Still, she dreams of exploring the world on land and learning about all the places that humans call home. Here's a game that will help you explore land, sea, and everything in between!

**Materials:** Open playing space

### DIRECTIONS

- Before the game begins, define two ends of your playing space. All players except one line up on one side of the space. The last player stands at the opposite end of the playing space. This person is the first “Yellow Flounder.”
- All players ask together, “Hey Yellow Flounder, how do we get to you?”
- The “Yellow Flounder” answers by describing a single imaginary obstacle that is between them and the rest of the players. For example, the “Yellow Flounder” might say, “You have to swim through a lake of honey.” or “You have to cross a very narrow and wiggly rope bridge.”
- All players must then use their full bodies to show how they would navigate that obstacle. Swimming through a lake of honey might mean that the players move their arms slowly through a swimming stroke while walking in slow motion, while crossing a very narrow and wiggly bridge might mean players carefully place one foot in front of the other with their arms out for balance.
- Once all players have crossed the room to the side with the “Yellow Flounder,” they say “We found the Yellow Flounder, we’re winners!” The “Yellow Flounder” then reveals their actual identity by saying “But I’m not the Yellow Flounder, I’m the [adjective] [animal] (Purple Panther, Orange Peacock, etc.).”
- Players who have not yet had a turn rub their hands together and the last “Yellow Flounder” chooses someone to be the next “Yellow Flounder” and continue the game.

**Additional fun:** Challenge your group to navigate locations from *The Little Mermaid* such as an underwater cave, a ship in a storm, or a fancy palace.



# CAPTAIN ON DECK

Prince Eric loves to sail and longs for the thrill of a life at sea. This game will help you find your own adventure on the high seas!

**Materials:** Open playing space

## DIRECTIONS

- Before the game begins, define two ends of your playing space. One side of the space is “peanut butter” and the other side is “jelly.” The center dividing line between “peanut butter” and “jelly” is “meatball.” Practice moving between all three spaces until everyone feels confident that they know which one is where.
- One person starts as the captain. The captain begins calling out directions for everyone to follow, such as “peanut butter,” “jelly,” and “meatball” while everyone else follows the instructions. Continue practicing moving between all three spaces until everyone feels confident that they know each cue. Then the captain can begin to add commands to the game. Here are some examples:
  - Captain on Deck: All players salute and say, “Aye aye, captain!” Players remain frozen while the captain inspects their crew. The captain must say “at ease” before the players may unfreeze.
  - Swab the Deck: All players get on their hands and knees and pretend to scrub the floor.
  - Go to Sleep!: All players lay down on the floor and pretend to sleep. When the captain says, “Wake up!” the players all hit an imaginary alarm clock and say, “Five more minutes!” The captain calls out a different location or command to move the game forward.
  - Cannonball: Players crouch down in a small ball and count down “3, 2, 1, kaboom!” On “kaboom,” players jump into the air.
- The captain can switch between directions and commands to try and confuse the crew, while the crew does their best to follow every direction and command to the letter.
- When the captain’s turn is over, the captain calls “lifeboat” and everyone playing the game makes a standing up, holding hands circle before the captain finishes counting to 10. A new captain is chosen and the next round begins!

**Additional fun:** Make up your own commands to add to the game! What might it look or sound like to “hoist the sails” or “walk the plank”?

# LIFE IS THE BUBBLES!

By Beth Pollack



*We got no troubles, life is the bubbles  
under the sea!*

- Sebastian, "Under the Sea"

While Sebastian celebrates the rich underwater music of Atlantica, you can bring some bubbly art into your kingdom with this fun activity!

## INGREDIENTS

Bubble mixture  
(homemade or store bought)

.....

Food coloring

.....

Bubble wands

.....

Containers for the different colors  
of bubble mixture

.....

White paper

.....

Blue tape (optional)

## DIRECTIONS

1. Divide your bubble mixture between different containers
2. Add food coloring to the containers and gently mix to create your different bubble colors
3. Dip the bubble wands in the containers and blow your bubbles onto the pieces of white paper. Experiment with layering colors and varying the density of your bubble clusters on the paper!

## TIPS

- Cover your clothes and workstation or consider making your bubble paintings outside to avoid accidental stains from stray bubbles!
- Try using blue tape to create a design on your piece of paper. Once the painting has dried, gently remove the tape to reveal your design.

# ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



Bri Little is a poet, journalist, voracious reader, and copywriter at The 5th Avenue Theatre. She enjoys horror movies, fancy beverages, and starting (and sometimes finishing) crafting projects.



Kevin Calhoun is a multi-talented graphic artist at The 5th Avenue Theatre who's passionate about bringing unique visual voices to life. He has worked with creative directors and project managers to help build advertising campaigns, marketing assets, and creative strategies for well-known clients and musicals. Besides his love for graphic design Kevin also enjoys cooking, screen-printing, and Barbie collecting. Want to see some of his work? Visit [kevincalhoundesigns.com](http://kevincalhoundesigns.com).



Beth Pollack (she/her) is a Seattle-based performer, dramaturg, and teaching artist. She is the Dramaturg and Curriculum Specialist at The 5th Avenue Theatre, helping to create supplementary materials to enhance audience experiences, facilitating educational programming development, and generally having a blast. As a dramaturg, Beth has additionally worked with Seattle Shakespeare Company and Dacha Theatre. As an educator, Beth has worked with Seattle's Young Shakespeare Workshop, Seattle Children's Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Jet City Improv, Book-It Repertory, ACT Theatre, and Seattle Rep's Public Works Program. As an actor, she has performed in classical, contemporary, and devised pieces in New York and Seattle - most recently, you may have seen or heard her work with Village Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Book-It, or Dacha Theatre, where she is a proud company member. Beth graduated magna cum laude from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study with a degree in Theatre Studies and the Historicization of Dramatic Literature and would be happy to explain what that means. More at [beth-pollack.com](http://beth-pollack.com).

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