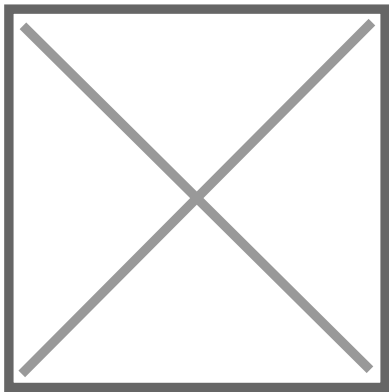




From the Ocean Floor to Red Rock Heights: Tuacahn’s Little Mermaid Makes a Lasting Impression

Description

IVINS, UT As the sun sets over Southern Utah’s iconic red rock canyons, **Tuacahn Amphitheatre** transforms the desert into a world of theatrical magic. With its dazzling production of *The Little Mermaid*, Tuacahn doesn’t just stage a beloved **Disney** tale—it reaffirms its role as a home and launchpad for **Broadway**-caliber talent. Featuring inventive staging, stunning design, and a cast of rising stars, this production dives deep and soars high.

Tuacahn’s Little Mermaid invites all generations to rediscover the magic beneath and above the sea.
Rhetorical Review

Kelsey Lee Smith as Ariel, Photo Credit: Leavitt Wells.
Kelsey Lee Smith as Ariel, Photo Credit: Leavitt Wells.

A Familiar Tale, Freshly Surfaced

Based on the **Disney** film and **Hans Christian Andersen’s** tale, *The Little Mermaid* follows **Ariel (Kelsey Lee Smith)**, a spirited mermaid who dreams of life on land. After rescuing **Prince Eric (James Everts)** from a shipwreck, she makes a dangerous bargain with the sea witch **Ursula (Julie Cardia)**—sacrificing her voice for a chance to win his heart.

The musical—featuring a book by **Doug Wright** and songs by **Alan Menken, Howard Ashman,** and **Glenn Slater**—premiered on **Broadway** in 2008, expanding the original with new music and deeper character arcs. Tuacahn’s **2025** production embraces that legacy with spectacular visuals and emotional depth, appealing to both lifelong fans and new audiences.

While not all added songs reach the iconic status of the originals, numbers like “The World Above,” “If Only,” and “Daddy’s Little Angel” bring welcome complexity. In an age of pre-

recorded tracks, Tuacahn's live orchestra under **Christopher Babbage's** direction is a rare and refreshing asset.

Cast of the Little Mermaid, Photo Credit: Leavitt Wells.

Cast of *The Little Mermaid*, Photo Credit: Leavitt Wells.

Desert Becomes Ocean: Design, Direction, and Dreamscapes

Doubles are cleverly used during Ariel's rescue of Eric, with both suspended midair in a breathtaking visual feat. **Paul Black's** lighting and scenic design conjure an enchanting underwater world, while **Brad Peterson's** painterly projections and Josh Liebert's immersive sound design bring ocean and sky vividly to life. These visuals are more than scenery—they feel like animated works of art. Visible brushstrokes in the textures give the illusion that the entire world is being painted into existence around the characters.

Hoverboards and rolling platforms allow mermaids to glide effortlessly across the stage. **Ariel's** transformation enhanced by **Paul Rubin's** flying effects is seamless and stunning.

One signature effect—water cascading across the stage—was not in use the night I attended. While a minor disappointment, the rest of the production more than compensated with inventive design and memorable imagery.

Movement with Meaning

Choreographer Mara Newbery Greer evokes the dreamy fluidity of the sea. One of the most enchanting sequences in the show is "Kiss the Girl," staged with a level of ingenuity that makes it uniquely Tuacahn. Instead of a static boat scene, the rowboat carrying Ariel and Eric is suspended by cords, allowing it to gently rise, tilt, and glide midair. This dynamic staging offers the audience shifting angles of the pair as the song unfolds, with dancers circling the boat creating a dreamlike, floating sensation that mirrors the romantic tension of the moment. It's a visual and emotional lift that turns a familiar Disney ballad into something genuinely cinematic and fresh.

Tuacahn's *The Little Mermaid* proves spectacle and soul can coexist.
Rhetorical Review

2025 Cast of The Little Mermaid, Photo Credit: Leavitt Wells.

2025 Cast of *The Little Mermaid*, Photo Credit: Leavitt Wells.

"Under the Sea" is a full-blown showstopper, bursting with color, rhythm, and visual surprises. Two aerialist jellyfish float and spin high above the stage, adding a vertical shimmer to the number's joyful chaos, while the happiest starfish in the world beams and grooves with uncontrollable glee. These delightful touches, combined with Greer's choreography and Tuacahn's technical wizardry, turn the scene into a kaleidoscopic coral reef of celebration.

And special shout-out to **Sebastian**, played by **Eric B. Anthony**, who not only delivers the calypso rhythms with charm and precision, but also brings some serious dance moves and a buttery-smooth voice to the mix.

Eric B. Anthony as Sebastian, Photo Credit: Leavitt Wells.
Eric B. Anthony as Sebastian, Photo Credit: Leavitt Wells.

**A rowboat floats midair, jellyfish spin above the stage, and yes— even
exuberant starfish dance.
—Rhetorical Review—**

Tuacahn's Moment

Tuacahn's *Little Mermaid* isn't just a family-friendly delight—it's a bold artistic statement. As public funding for the arts wanes, Tuacahn stands out as a thriving hub for emerging theatrical talent. That trajectory was evident last year when **Cayleigh Capaldi's** powerhouse performance as Elsa in *Frozen* captivated Tuacahn audiences. Since then, she's starred in the New York revival of *Titanic*, performed in the West End, and was recently cast as Maria in the upcoming *Sound of Music* National tour. For spectacle, heart, and emerging talent, *The Little Mermaid* at Tuacahn is not to be missed. It's a theatrical adventure that invites all generations to rediscover the magic beneath—and above—the sea.

**Ranked one as a top ten outdoor amphitheatre by USA Today, Tuacahn is
more than a destination—it's a launchpad.
—Rhetorical Review—**

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TUACAHN
AMPHITHEATRE



*From the ocean floor to the canyon sky, the design stuns at every turn.
â??Rhetorical Reviewâ??*

Â?

The Cast

At the heart of the show is **Kelsey Lee Smith** (returning from last yearâ??s Tuacahn season as Anna in *Frozen* and Anastasia in *Anastasia*), a true standout in every way. Smith sings â??Part of Your Worldâ? • not just beautifully but earnestlyâ??anchoring the characterâ??s longing with crystal-clear vocals and expressive physicality. A warm orange glow (thanks to **Paul Black**â??s lighting) bathes her in light during â??Part of Your World,â? • subtly highlighting Arielâ??s yearning for the sunlit world above while visually separating her from the cool blues of the underwater realm. What impressed me most is that this showstopper is performed entirely on a hoverboard, demanding a level of balance and athleticism that few singers possess. She glides effortlessly across the stage, then suddenly stops and shifts directions with precisionâ??all while singing with full emotional clarity. The crowd clapped enthusiastically at the end of â??Part of Your Worldâ? • and even harder during its repriseâ??one of the few moments in the show where you could feel a collective gasp turn into sustained applause. Her Ariel is dreamy but determined, naive but strong. Sheâ??s got star qualityâ??and this performance feels like a launching point.

**Kelsey Lee Smith sings â??Part of Your Worldâ?? not just beautifullyâ??but athletically, emotionally, and utterly spellbinding.
â??Rhetorical Reviewâ??**

James Everts as **Prince Eric** brings a rich tenor and grounded presence to â??Her Voice.â? • The chemistry between Smith and Everts is warm and naturalâ??quickly turning into one of the most emotionally resonant duets of the evening. **Everts** is also starring as the lead in Tuacahnâ??s Newsies this season, and previously appeared in *Jersey Boys*, *The Sound of Music*, and last seasonâ??s *Anastasia* (asâ?? Dmitry).

Kelsey Lee Smith as Ariel & Fred Inkley as King Triton, Photo Credit: Leavitt Wells.
Kelsey Lee Smith as Ariel & **Fred Inkley** as King Triton, Photo Credit: Leavitt Wells.

Fred Inkley brings the voice of Broadway royalty to the ocean floorâ??majestic, commanding, and deeply felt.

â??Rhetorical Reviewâ??

Fred Inkley as King Tritonâ??a Broadway veteran best known for his starring roles as Jean Valjean in *Les MisÃ©rables* and the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*â??brings commanding presence and vocal gravitas to the role. Itâ??s not every day you get to hear such a seasoned performer liveâ??his performance elevates the entire production.

Julie Cardia, a seasoned performer with Broadway and national tour experience, sinks her teeth into the role with relish, commanding the stage like a true diva of the deep. With a unique voice, she doesnâ??t just play the sea witchâ??she commands the stage every time she appears. Backed by the eerie, fluid movement of her eel sidekicks, **Flotsam (Alec Talbott)** and **Jetsam (Stephen Diaz)**â??who are absolutely delightful. Their harmonies are on point, and their costumes were among my favorites. When they stood next to each other, the design created the illusion that they intertwinedâ??creepy, clever, and totally captivating.

Kelsey Lee Smith (Ariel), Julie Cardia (Ursula), Alec Talbott (Flotsam), and Stephen Diaz (Jetsam).
Kelsey Lee Smith (Ariel), **Julie Cardia** (Ursula), **Alec Talbott (Flotsam)**, and **Stephen Diaz (Jetsam)**. Photo Credit: Leavitt Wells.

Jackson Beeson (also played by **Hudson Sullivan**) is adorably earnest as **Flounder**, while **Davey Burton Midkiff** brings feathered flair and humor to Scuttleâ??especially in â??Positoovity.â?• His grand entrance, flying across the stage on a line before crash-landing in a flurry of feathers, had the audience laughing from the start. Itâ??s a hilarious and high-flying moment that immediately sets the tone for his bird-brained antics to come.

And letâ??s not forget **Nick Berninger**â??his scene-stealing turn as Chef Louis in â??Les Poissonsâ?• is a hilarious, glow-in-the-dark romp that becomes an unexpected crowd favoriteâ??what a voice! The way the number was staged cleverly alluded to *Beauty and the Beast*â??s â??Be Our Guestâ?•â??also written by **Alan Menken** and sharing the exact same melodic structure. Itâ??s a playful musical callback, one that Menken himself intentionally built into the score. I thought that was such a clever touch, and the staging leaned into it with over-the-top flair, making â??Les Poissonsâ?• feel like a wink to Disney fans in the know.



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Final Thoughts

Tuacahn’s *Little Mermaid* is more than a Disney delight—it’s a full-throated declaration of artistic ambition. With federal funding for the arts diminishing and less opportunities for actors, Tuacahn is proving to be one of the state’s most exciting platforms for discovering musical theatre talent. And with national recognition from [USA Today](#), it’s clear this canyon amphitheatre is no longer just a summer tradition—it’s a springboard to something much bigger with some of the largest audiences in the state.

If you’re looking for spectacle, heart, and stars (those who have played leads on Broadway and those who might be the next generation of stage stars) this production is not to be missed. Tuacahn’s *Little Mermaid* invites audiences of all ages to rediscover a classic. Don’t miss your chance to be part of the magic—*The Little Mermaid* at Tuacahn runs through October 25.

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Show Details

The Little Mermaid

• **Where:** Tuacahn Amphitheatre • 1100 Tuacahn Drive, Ivins, UT 84738

• **Dates:** May 2 • October 25, 2025 (performance days vary)

• **When:** 8:45 PM

• **Tickets:** \$44-\$137

• **Box Office:** 800-746-9882

• **Website:** tuacahn.org

• **Note:** Children under 3 not admitted. Tuacahn offers ShowCare® for young children.

Parking: Free on-site parking available

Weather Policy: As an outdoor venue, performances are weather-dependent; bring layers for cooler desert evenings

Accessibility: Wheelchair-accessible seating available; assisted listening devices provided upon request

Age Recommendation: Family-friendly and appropriate for all ages (children under 3 not permitted)

Listen to the original soundtrack on Spotify

[Directions](#)

Tuacahn Amphitheatre presents

Disney's *The Little Mermaid*

Directed by **Scott S. Anderson**

Choreographed by **Mara Newbery Greer**

Music Direction by **Christopher Babbage**

Flying Choreography by **Paul Rubin**

Music by Alan Menken

Lyrics by Howard Ashman & Glenn Slater

Book by Doug Wright

Orchestrations by Danny Troob

Vocal Arrangements & Incidental Music by Michael Kosarin

Dance Arrangements by David Chase

Originally produced by Disney Theatrical Productions

Cast of *Disney's The Little Mermaid* • Tuacahn

Kelsey Lee Smith* • Ariel

Julie Cardia* • Ursula

Eric B. Anthony* • Sebastian

James Everts* • Prince Eric

Davey Burton Midkiff* • Scuttle

Fred Inkley* • King Triton

Jackson Beeson/Hudson Sullivan?? *Flounder*
Randal Keith* ?? *Grimsby*
Alec Talbott ?? *Flotsam*
Stephen Diaz* ?? *Jetsam*
Nick Berninger* ?? *Chef Louis*

Mallorie Mendoza ?? *Adella*
Jillian Butler* ?? *Allana*
Delany Gold* ?? *Andrina*
Abby Linderman* ?? *Aquata*
Hannah Hubbard ?? *Arista*
Bella Depola ?? *Atina*

** Indicates a member of the Actors?? Equity Association*

Ensemble:

Charles Antenen, Jacob Beaver, Jillian Butler, Bella DePaola, Delaney Gold, Mariel Harris, Hannah Hubbard, Jackson Hurt, Hailey Rose Kasky, Abby Linderman, Adam Lipson, Mollie-Claire Matthews, Ameena McKenzie, Mallorie Mendoza, Andre Damell Myers, Kayden Oliver, Daryn Polzin, Zac Pritts, Andy Richardson, Anthony Savino, Jack Taylor, Scott Whipple

Design & Production

- **Scenic & Lighting Design** ?? Paul Black
 - **Costume Design** ?? Robin L. McGee
 - **Sound Design** ?? Josh Liebert
 - **Projection Design** ?? Brad Peterson
 - **Hair & Makeup Design** ?? Jeff Knaggs
-

Production Team

- **Producing Artistic Director** ?? Scott S. Anderson
 - **Executive Producer** ?? Kevin M. Smith
 - **Associate Artistic Producer** ?? Shari Jordan
 - **Director of Production** ?? Jeff Miller
 - **Technical Director** ?? Troy McGee
 - **Associate Choreographer** ?? Rachel Perlman
 - **Company Manager** ?? Zoe Baird
-

Stage Management

- **Stage Manager** ?? Jeff Norman
-

-
- **Assistant Stage Manager** â?? Chloe Grotheer
 - **Additional Stage Management** â?? Holley Housewright, A.J. Sullivan
-

Casting

- **Wojcik Casting Team**

Category

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2. Reviews

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2. Alec Talbott
3. Brad Peterson
4. Broadway adaptation
5. Choreography
6. Christopher Babbage
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9. Disney musical
10. Disney stage adaptation
11. Doug Wright
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20. Jackson Beeson
21. James Everts
22. Jillian Butler
23. Josh Liebert
24. Julie Cardia
25. Kelsey Lee Smith
26. Lighting Design
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