

Meet the Staff

Kari Reese

Owner/Instructor

Song and dance have always been a part of Kari Reese's life. Her parents encouraged her artistic endeavors and led by their example. After graduating from Houston's High School for Performing & Visual Arts, Reese received two scholarships to major in dance at the University of Texas at Austin, where she earned her B.A. in Dance. She has performed regionally with theatres such as Theatre Under The Stars (Houston), The Zachary Scott Theatre (Austin) and locally with Musical Theatre Southwest, Albuquerque Little Theatre, The Adobe, The Cell and The Vortex. Her favorite roles include the Wicked Witch in The Wizard of Oz, Audrey in Little Shop of Horrors, Squeaky Fromme in Assassins and Miss Hannigan in Annie. Reese believes theatre can be a positive and powerful influence in children's lives. (She and her daughters are proof of this!). "Theatre teaches us to cooperate, communicate, create and celebrate. It is a place where individuality is cherished and teamwork thrives," says Reese. As Education Director of The Growing Stage, she strives to bring the joy, magic and lessons of theatre to as many children as possible in Albuquerque and the surrounding communities. "It's important and fulfilling work. I love my job!"

Wendy Leverenz Barker

Choreographer

Wendy Leverenz Barker has been a member of the Albuquerque performing arts community for over 20 years. Her credits include Das BBQ, Book of Days, Cinderella, Kiss Me Kate, Cabaret, Gypsy, Peter Pan and Anything Goes just to name a few. She has worked at MTS/ACLOA, ALT, The Adobe, The Cell, Riverside/Tricklock, The Vortex and numerous other theatres around the United States. Wendy created her own cabaret, Welcome To Our Party, and presented it in The Ana Chavira Theatre last November with a special performance by Kari Reese, She is very proud to be supporting Kari and The Growing Stage.

Maya Reese

Instructor

Maya Reese is 16 and has performed in numerous productions in the Albuquerque area since she was youngin. Growing up in the Reese family she likes to think of herself as a tester child of The Growing Stage, under the instruction of her mother Kari Reese, before the business began. As a result of her studies with her mom she landed many roles and opportunities to perform in Albuquerque shows. Among these are 'Annie' in MTS' Annie and 'Gertrude McFuzz' in TGS' Seussical the Musical other favorite shows include The Wizard of Oz, The King and I Joseph...Dreamcoat, Secret Garden, Beauty and the Beast and most recently AIDA. Her Passion for performing has no end to it and she is so grateful to be a part of The Growing Stage crew. It is such a fun experience and she is so enthused to be introducing it to other children as it was once introduced to her.

Zoey Reese

Instructor

Zoey Reese is a student at Oklahoma City University, where she studies many aspects of music and performing. She has been seen numerous times on Albuquerque's stages, as well as a few concert performances in Santa Fe, Philadelphia, and New York. She has an extensive resume with over 40 performance credits, but a few of her past favorite roles include; Beth March in Little Women, Mary Lennox in The Secret Garden, Zoey in the independent film The Vortex, Mary Warren in The Crucible, and Hero in William Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing. She would love nothing more than to spend the rest of her life working with kids in musical theatre. She is so happy to be sharing such a wonderful thing with so many people through the Growing Stage, and hopes she can continue to watch this program grow and build through the years. She is looking forward to many new faces in class (as well as some old ones), and hopes that all children have as much fun learning and performing as she does teaching. "What seems to me the highest and most difficult achievement of Art is not to make us laugh or cry, or to rouse our lust or our anger, but to do as nature does - that is, fill us with wonderment." ~ Gustave Flaubert.

Lisette Herrera

Instructor

Lisette has been enjoying musical theater for all her life. She has been involved with several shows around the Albuquerque area, extensively with Musical Theater Southwest. Lisette has also performed professionally in Orlando at Disney World, Universal Studios, and with a professional dinner theater company. After returning from Orlando, Lisette got her degree in Elementary Education and is currently a fourth grade teacher at Mountain View Elementary School. She looks forward to working with your child at The Growing Stage.

Hal Simons

Director/Instructor

Hal Simons won a 2002 Bistro Award for his direction of Songs In The Style Of Weill, a New York cabaret act starring Lorinda Lisitza. The act also garnered Ms. Lisitza a Bistro Award and MAC (Manhattan Association of Cabarets) Award. Previously, Hal was nominated for a MAC for his performance in The M.G.M. Society, and has directed numerous other cabaret acts here and in New York City. Originally from the Bronx, Hal is a graduate of The High School of Performing Arts, was a theatre major at Hofstra University, and recently completed his Masters in Theatre Arts/Directing at UNM.

Paul Roth

Music Director/Instructor Paul is a native New Mexican who has been playing the piano since the age of five and received his degree in Piano Performance from the University of New Mexico. Along with being a Music Director here at the Growing Stage, he teaches privately, accompanies a few private studios in town, and is the pianist for the Albuquerque Boy Choir Concert Choir. On Sundays you can find him behind the piano at Covenant Presbyterian Church.