

= Nala (The Lion King) =

Nala is a fictional lioness , a character who appears in the Disney Lion King franchise . Introduced in the animated film The Lion King in 1994 , Nala subsequently appears as a less prominent character in the film 's sequels The Lion King II : Simba 's Pride (1998) and The Lion King 1 ½ (2004) . In the original film , the adult Nala was voiced by American actress Moira Kelly . Young Nala 's speaking voice is provided by actress Niketa Calame , while singers Laura Williams and Sally Dworsky provide the singing voices of young and adult Nala respectively .

Nala is introduced as the childhood best friend of Simba , and ultimately becomes his wife by the end of The Lion King . Several years after Simba 's uncle Scar has killed Simba 's father Mufasa and usurped the throne , Nala desperately ventures into the jungle to find help . Upon unexpectedly reuniting with a grown Simba , who she had long been tricked by Scar into presuming dead , Nala encourages him to return to Pride Rock , overthrow his uncle and ultimately become king . As Simba 's queen , Nala has a daughter , Kiara , whose story is explored in The Lion King : Simba 's Pride .

Nala is the most significant female character in The Lion King . As the film was inspired by William Shakespeare 's tragedy Hamlet , Nala is considered to be The Lion King 's equivalent of Hamlet 's love interest Ophelia , although differences remain between the two characters . Many early concepts first developed for Nala were eventually abandoned , including a brother and father for the character , as well as her being romantically pursued by Scar . While critical reception towards Nala has been generally mixed ? both film and feminist critics complained about the character 's lack of involvement in the story and supposedly submissive demeanor during the song " Can You Feel the Love Tonight " ? Kelly 's vocal performance has been praised .

Nala appears in the Broadway musical adaptation of the film , first played by singer Heather Headley . The character also appears in the television series The Lion Guard , with Gabrielle Union replacing Kelly as the voice of Nala .

= = Development = =

= = = Conception and writing = = =

Film critic James Berardinelli identified Nala as The Lion King 's " sole significant female character . " Screenwriter Linda Woolverton conceived Nala " as part of a gradual progression ... which have driven recent public conversation about what young girls should be able to expect from their cinematic role models . " In early versions of the screenplay , Nala has a younger brother named Mheetu , who enjoys accompanying his sister and her best friend Simba on their adventures . Pronounced " me too " , the character 's name alludes to this personality trait . At one point , Simba was supposed to save the cub from a wildebeest stampede , and Nala would eventually become responsible for protecting Mheetu from Simba 's tyrannical uncle Scar . Nala also had a fox friend named Bhati . According to Woolverton , Mheetu and Bhati were eventually written out of the film because their stories were beginning to distract from Simba 's , in addition to the Mheetu @-@ Scar subplot making the film too dark when combined with the death of Simba 's father Mufasa . At one point , Nala also had a father ; the character was similarly abandoned .

Because The Lion King was originally conceived as a much more mature and adult @-@ oriented film , Nala was supposed to have been banished from the Pride Lands as punishment for rejecting Scar 's romantic advances . This idea was to have been further explored in Scar 's song " Be Prepared (Reprise) " , during which Scar demands that Nala become his queen , but the musical number was ultimately cut from the final film because the scene was considered too " creepy . " Matthew Roulette of TheFW believes that the scene was abandoned because of the characters ' significant age difference .

Nala means " gift " in Swahili . The character has a mother , whose name is never mentioned in the film ; however , she is credited as Sarafina during the film 's end credits . Candice Russel of the Sun @-@ Sentinel believes that Nala contributes to the film 's love story ? " an indispensable factor in

Disney cartoon features " ? in addition to convincing Simba to return to Pride Rock . It has been observed that , unlike Disney 's three previous animated efforts (The Little Mermaid (1989) , Beauty and the Beast (1991) and Aladdin (1992) , the romantic relationship between Nala and Simba is not main plot of the film . Ella Ceron of Thought Catalog observed that " At [Simba 's] return , she 's not exactly the friendliest little kitten , either ... but is willing to overlook her own hurt ego in the spirit of their friendship . She believes in Simba , and doesn 't understand why he wouldn 't want to fight for his right to rule . "

= = = Voice and music = = =

The speaking voice of adult Nala is provided by American actress Moira Kelly . Kelly was first informed that Disney was scheduling auditions for the role of Nala by her agent . Despite not having been the directors ' first choice for the role initially , Kelly was allowed to audition nonetheless because the filmmakers had been longing to hear different voices . Kelly believes that the directors were searching for a specific " quality of voice ... a sort of authoritative voice but with a lot of warmth " to compliment Nala 's sensible yet nurturing personality . After a series of callbacks , during which Kelly returned to Disney several times to read the character 's lines , the final decision eventually came down to be between Kelly and one other actress . It was not until several months after her audition that Kelly would finally be contacted and offered the part ; Disney 's initial first choice for the role remains undisclosed . Actor Matthew Broderick , voice of Simba , had already begun recording alongside another actress who had been cast as Nala before that actress was eventually replaced with Kelly . Broderick was not informed about his original co -@ star being recast , and only learned that Nala was actually voiced by Kelly at the film 's premiere .

The film 's entire recording process took approximately three years to complete , during which Kelly 's sessions were held in both the United States and Canada , while her co -@ stars Broderick and Jeremy Irons , voice of Scar , were recording in the United States and England , respectively . Each main cast member recorded their dialogue separately , which took Kelly some time to get used to because she had grown accustomed to working with several other actors at a time on the sets of live @-@ action films . For The Lion King , a director would often take the place of another actor for Kelly to act opposite of . Vocally , Kelly decided to approach the role as though she were reading to a child , explaining , " it 's kind of fun to play with different voices and try to color the lines for the child so they can imagine it more fully " , which she admitted is different than how the actress would approach a live @-@ action role . Because Nala is a " very straight character " , determining what kind of voice she would use for her was not a particularly challenging task . Additionally , the filmmakers would also film Kelly 's performances in order to incorporate her own facial expressions into her character 's design , the process of which impressed the actress . In her film debut , actress Niketa Calame voices young Nala . According to Calame 's official website , Nala remains the actress ' " biggest role to date " . A classically trained pianist and chorister , Laura Williams provides the singing voice of young Nala , which can be heard in the song " I Just Can 't Wait to Be King " ; the singer was 15 years old at the time . Meanwhile , singer @-@ songwriter Sally Dworsky provides the singing voice of adult Nala , which is heard during the song " Can You Feel the Love Tonight " . The film 's love theme , " Can You Feel the Love Tonight " 's lyrics were re @-@ written approximately 15 times , according to lyricist Tim Rice , who wrote the song alongside composer Elton John . At one point , the producers wanted the song to be a comical duet performed by supporting characters Timon and Pumbaa , despite the fact that John had originally composed the song with Nala and Simba in mind . However , John lobbied in favor of " Can You Feel the Love Tonight " being a love song performed as a duet by Nala and Simba , with which the filmmakers ultimately agreed .

It is rare for the cast of a film to reprise their respective roles in its sequel , but The Lion King 's sequels hold the distinction of having the majority of its original cast return , including Kelly . When asked by Disney if she was interested in reprising her role as Nala in The Lion King II : Simba 's Pride , Kelly immediately accepted , joking , " Sure , you wanna do a third , fourth , fifth ? I 'm right there " . In the case of The Lion King 1 ½ , it took the actress only a few days to record her character

's dialogue due to Nala 's comparatively smaller role in the film ; much of Nala 's footage from the first film was simply reused accordingly . Elton John 's official website cites Kelly among the film 's cast of actors who " would grace any red carpet . " Kelly 's performance as Nala is responsible for introducing the actress to a younger audience . Previously , she had been better known for appearing in more adult @-@ oriented live @-@ action films at that time . In 2011 , Kelly revealed that fans of the film rarely recognize her speaking voice as the voice of Nala , although Robert DeSalvo of NextMovie.com claims that the actress " has a ... distinctive voice that The Lion King fans will instantly recognize as the voice of adult Nala . "

= = Characterization and themes = =

A straight woman character , Kelly described Nala as a sensible and nurturing yet authoritative character , while Amber Leab of Bitch Flicks described her as strong , independent and intelligent . According to Oh My Disney , Nala serves as " the proverbial glue that keeps The Lion King together " , from whose perspective the audience watches the film because she " says EXACTLY what we ' re thinking " . Occupying the role of the film 's female lead , Nala is The Lion King 's most important female character , who contributes to the film 's " small romance element " . Often identified as the film 's deuteragonist , Taylor Orci of The Atlantic felt that " Nala is really the agent of change in The Lion King " , dismissing Simba as a " rich , lazy boyfriend . " Leab observed that The Lion King 's male characters tend to " take the center stage " while " female characters take a backseat to the action . " Lenka Křivánková of Masaryk University wrote in her thesis " 1990s Hollywood Break @-@ Away Hits : A Feminist Perspective " that she was not particularly surprised by the film 's lack of strong roles for women because of its Shakespearean source material , dubbing the film " an old traditional fairy tale with all its traditional features " , including patriarchy and monarchism . Writing for the University of Waterloo 's Kinema , Vicky Wong believes that Nala reinforces the film 's " take your place " motif , reminding main character Simba of his responsibilities . In his book *Retelling Stories , Framing Culture : Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children 's Literature* , author John Stephens credits Nala with teaching Simba about responsibility ? " the lesson the hero must learn before he can become an adult " .

Including Nala , The Lion King has only three major female characters in comparison to the film 's total of nine male ones . Shepherd University 's Emmylou Allen observed that Nala is introduced " as a dominating young girl " who ultimately matures into " a strong woman " by the film 's conclusion . *Mouse Morality : The Rhetoric of Disney Animated Film* author Annalee R. Ward wrote that Nala 's role in The Lion King reflected " a 1990s feminist reversal " . In her book *Biblical Allusions* , author Lindsay Bacher acknowledged that Nala is often depicted as a stronger and more responsible character than Simba , despite observations that The Lion King 's female characters lack agency . Leab identified Nala as Simba 's " equal " who is " a more naturally sound leader throughout the film , while Simba tends to be comparatively a bit more immature and in need of multiple characters propelling him into responsible / rightful action . " Physically , Nala is also a stronger and more skilled fighter than Simba , proven by the character 's ability to overwhelm him in battle , which is reminiscent " of the physical power of lionesses in the real nature . " However , as strong as she is , Nala has little impact elsewhere ; author Brian K. Pennington wrote in his book *Teaching Religion and Violence* that " Nala 's assertions of gender equality are clearly groundless , since only a male lion can stop Scar . " New York 's David Denbey dismissed Nala 's athleticism as nothing more than Disney 's attempt to " disguise [the film 's] essential boss @-@ daddy ethos . " Bacher believes that had The Lion King featured Nala as the Pride Lands ' hero as opposed to Simba , the film could have avoided having a " patriarchal structure . " Leab concluded that " the main and most problematic aspects of the film " remain that The Lion King " boils down to the fact that an entire group of strong female characters are unable to confront a single male oppressor ; to do so , they need to be led by a dominant male . " Leab continued , " It almost sucks more that Nala is such a strong ... female character and still ends up constrained by this plot device " , accusing the film of depicting women as weak .

Alongside Faline from *Bambi* (1942) and Maid Marian from *Robin Hood* (1973) added , Nala

belongs to a trio of Disney heroines who , after having been separated from their love interests for several years , eventually reunite with them . Stephens believes that Nala and Simba 's separation allows the characters to fall in love " properly " upon reuniting as young adults . Because The Lion King is loosely based on William Shakespeare 's tragedy Hamlet , Nala is considered to be the film 's " representative " of the Hamlet character Ophelia , Hamlet 's love interest . Both characters ' relationships with and opinions of their love interests are similar , however , there are several differences between the two women . While identifying Nala as " the closest character in The Lion King to Ophelia , " Shepherd University 's Emmylou Allen acknowledged in her article " Shakespeare in the Pride Lands " that " their similarities are not as great as their contrasts . " Unlike Ophelia , Nala does not succumb to insanity , nor does she eventually die . Instead , Nala establishes herself as " a physically powerful ally " by encouraging Simba to return to Pride Rock , and helping the character overthrow Scar . Additionally , Nala is a more stubborn character than Ophelia , the latter of whom is quite passive and obedient . While Ophelia is raised by a single father , Nala is raised solely by her mother , which inspired Allen to believe that Nala is a manifestation of how Ophelia would have turned out had she been raised by a woman instead of a man , concluding , " Nala is able to show the potential that Ophelia could have had . " .

= = Appearances = =

= = = Film and television = = =

A young Nala debuted in The Lion King (1994) as the best friend of Simba , who she often accompanies on his adventures throughout the Pride Lands . Simba invites Nala to visit the forbidden Elephant Graveyard with him , despite his father Mufasa 's orders . The cubs are soon ambushed by Shenzi , Banzai and Ed , a trio of hyenas chosen by Simba 's treacherous uncle Scar to kill Simba in order to improve his own chances of becoming king , but are ultimately rescued by Mufasa . The following day , however , Nala is devastated to learn from Scar that both Simba and Mufasa have perished during a wildebeest stampede . With both Simba and Mufasa dead , Scar usurps the throne and becomes king . Several years into Scar 's tyrannical rule , which has left the kingdom barren and starving , a desperate Nala ventures into the jungle in search of help , where she attempts to eat a warthog named Pumbaa ; little does she know that the warthog is actually a friend of Simba 's , who is in fact alive and well . While defending Pumbaa from Nala , Simba recognizes Nala , and the two finally reunite only to argue over why Simba is refusing to face his responsibilities and return to Pride Rock . Upon learning that Simba has eventually decided to return to Pride Rock and face Scar , Nala travels back to the Pride Lands to assist him . Surprised to find Simba alive , Scar forces his guilt @-@ ridden nephew to " admit " to the pride that he is responsible for Mufasa 's death , which was in fact caused by Scar himself by throwing Mufasa off a cliff into the stampede . Upon learning the truth , Simba forces his uncle to admit his crime to the pride , and a battle ensues between the pride and Scar 's army of hyenas . Simba eventually defeats Scar and becomes king , with Nala ultimately becoming his queen .

In the film 's first direct @-@ to @-@ video sequel The Lion King II : Simba 's Pride (1998) , Nala appears in a less prominent role as Queen of the Pride Lands and mother of Kiara , the spirited daughter of her and Simba . Nala observes that Kiara , of whom Simba is very protective , has inherited her father 's rebellious personality and love of adventure . When Kiara befriends Zira 's son Kovu , a young lion from an exiled pride of Scar 's followers known as the Outsiders , Nala is much more tolerant of their relationship than Simba , and convinces him to offer Kovu a chance to prove himself trustworthy . In The Lion King 1 ½ (2004) , which focuses instead on Timon and Pumbaa 's friendship , Nala 's role is virtually identical to that of her appearance in The Lion King because filmmakers simply reused most of the character 's footage from the first film .

Voiced by actress Gabrielle Union , Nala reprises her role as Queen of the Pride Lands in the television series The Lion Guard , the 2016 premiere of which was preceded by the made @-@ for @-@ television film The Lion Guard : Return of the Roar (2015) . Set within the same time frame

as The Lion King II : Simba 's Pride , the show revolves around Nala and Simba 's son Kion who , being their second @-@ born cub after Kiara , has been appointed The Lion Guard responsible for protecting the Pride Lands . Although a fan of the Lion King franchise , Union avoided watching previous Lion King films in preparation for the role because she wanted to " put [her] own stamp " on the character .

= = = Musical = = =

In the Broadway musical adaptation of The Lion King , the role of Nala was originated by Trinidadian @-@ American singer Heather Headley . Her Broadway debut , at first auditioning for the role proved a challenge for the singer due to her Ragtime contract , which her agent was eventually successful in getting her released from . Director Julie Taymor felt that Nala 's journey in the film was underdeveloped and among the story 's weaker elements , and thus decided to " strengthen " the character 's narrative for Broadway .

= = Reception = =

Critical reception towards Nala has been generally mixed ; both film and feminist critics have accused the film of lacking empowering roles for female characters , including Nala . James Berardinelli of ReelViews appreciated the fact that " after three animated motion pictures centered upon the love of two people from different worlds " , the love story between Nala and Simba has been relegated to that of " a subplot . " Desson Howe of The Washington Post advised parents to remind their daughters that despite the fact that Nala " pads in the supportive shadows , awaiting her inevitable marriage to Simba , it doesn 't mean human girls can 't grow up to be monarchs too . "

Nala 's role and demeanor during the film 's romantic " Can You Feel the Love Tonight " sequence has drawn criticism in regards to her " submissive behaviour " . The New York Times ' Janet Maslin cited the film 's lack of a strong heroine among its weaknesses , dismissing Nala and Simba 's interaction throughout " Can You Feel the Love Tonight " as " obligatory " and " gratuitous " . Joel W. Martin wrote in the Journal of Religion and Film , " One song later , [Nala and Simba] have fallen in love . Playing one day , they literally tumble down a hillside in the jungle , and he ends up on top of her . This time , she does not bear her teeth , but instead , shows ' bedroom eyes ' " . Martin ultimately accused the scene 's " reversal of positions " of " establish [ing] male dominance . " Criticizing the film for " being merely distracting when it could have been both meaningful and instructive " , Robert Humanick of Slant Magazine wrote , " Small potatoes , then , when Simba 's former childhood friend and betrothed queen Nala ... unexpectedly reappears in his duty @-@ free , protein @-@ rich life , demanding he return to his kingly responsibilities and coaxing the lion to sleep tonight with arguably the most blatant ' fuck me now ' face to ever appear in a PG @-@ rated film . "

However , the character has garnered positive reviews as well . Sara Franks @-@ Allen of ScreenCrush wrote that " If being a Disney princess is about being a good role model for little girls , then Nala has a lot in her favor " , elaborating , " She 's strong enough to take down Simba , ventures out on her own to find help for her pride and calls Simba out for ignoring his responsibilities . " Meanwhile , Ella Ceron of Thought Catalog ranked Nala 14th on her list of " The 16 Most Awesome Female Characters From Disney Movies " . Responsible for introducing the seasoned actress to a younger audience , Kelly 's vocal performance as Nala has garnered critical acclaim . Writing for The Washington Post , Desson Howe hailed Kelly 's voice acting as " terrific . " Jeremy Gerard of Variety commended Kelly for voicing the character " beautifully " . PopSugar ranked Kelly among the website 's " Favorite Animated Voices " , writing , " there are a lot of great voices in Disney 's The Lion King ... but Moira Kelly has a unique quality to her voice , and I remember reveling in it as a youngster anytime the adult Nala was on the screen . " Official Disney Blogs published an article entitled " We All Thought it ? But Nala Actually Said It " , which cites the character 's most revered quotes . The blog also ranked Nala eighth on the website 's " Definitive

Ranking of Disney Cats " list . In a 2014 interview , actor Eddie Redmayne admitted that Nala was his first " celebrity crush " , having been specifically attracted to the character 's " sweet " face and singing voice , referring to the experience as his " sexual awakening " .