

Kids' TV show 'LazyTown' searching for new host in New York

By CATHERINE MCALOON
SPECIAL TO THE DAILY NEWS | AUG 22, 2011



Kelsey Lidsky and Alison Franck watch Sarrah Long, 12, audition for the part of Stephanie on 'LazyTown' at the Three of Us Studios. (Enid Alvarez)

Standing on a purple X in front of a camera staring me in the face, I feel like anything but a TV star.

I'm wearing a pink wig and an ill-fitting pink satin dress with three people waiting for me

to sing. I believe I look quite ridiculous. My singing voice is even worse.

I've been dreading my singing debut — the get-up-and-dance tune "Bing Bang Rock" — all morning, but there was no hiding now.

The pianist starts the vamp that is my introduction and I make an impulsive decision to go all out, belt out the silly song and add in goofy dance moves to match. My voice strains as I try to hit the high notes, but I add a spin to distract my audience.

It's clear by this point, I wasn't made for the part.

If I had a day job, I'd keep it.

The creators of "LazyTown," a TV show for children, are looking for their next Stephanie, a girl who loves to sing and dance. From all over the East Coast, girls ages 12-18 came into the Three of Us studio in Chelsea to audition for the part.

The show, recently picked up by the preschool-kids' TV service Sprout, encourages preschoolers to be active and healthy in a fun, interactive way. Each show ends with a dance number to "Bing Bang Rock."

Stephanie is the show's wildly energetic and cheerful host, inspiring the citizens of LazyTown to get moving.

Julianna Rose Mauriello, a native New Yorker, has played the character of Stephanie since 2004. At 19, she has aged out of the role.

One other thing: Stephanie is known for her signature pink wig and an outfit to match.

Young, thin girls with a whole lot of talent confidently walk into the studio, and I have to audition next to them. Stephanie is 10 years old in the show, so in addition to being able to sing, act and dance, those auditioning must look very young.

While I did some acting and dancing in high school, most of the girls I'm trying out with

have unbelievable talent and are pros when it comes to the auditioning process.

Talent aside, physical characteristics alone set these girls a level above me. This was the first time in my life I was too tall and too curvy.

They come in without an ounce of fat on their bodies, and start singing "Bing Bang Rock" while kicking, spinning and dancing.

An 11-year-old who seems quite nervous begins to sing and Alison Franck, the casting director, stops her.

"Honey, I need you to theater-act. This is for young kids. Be animated," she coaches. The girl loosens up and continues with her audition.

Allie Gorenc, 15, sails through "High Hopes" in her musical-theater power voice, but Franck instructs her before she starts on the bubbly "Bing Bang Rock."

"Have the energy of a cheerleader. I'll tell you if you need to tone it down," Franck says.

That's just what Allie does. Her rendition of the tune puts a smile on all our faces.

I watched dozens of auditions all morning, and then it was finally my turn. I put on the hot pink wig and the pink-striped satin dress.

Each audition consists of three short scenes, two songs and two short improvisations. The process seems pretty simple, but once I'm on the audition stage, my nerves start kicking in.

"How tall are you?" Franck asks.

When I answer that I am 5-foot-4, Franck responds, "You're too tall for Stephanie."

I start on the scenes with one of the casting members, Kelsey Lidsky, who has a talent for great voices that fit the scenes. That section is a piece of cake. What I'm really dreading is the singing portion.

After hearing the song at least 30 times throughout the morning, I could probably sing it in my sleep.

My singing is clearly under par, but we all laugh at my absurd performance in an outrageous pink outfit. I like to think that they were laughing with me, rather than at me.

Apparently, my audition isn't as tragic as I thought, since staffers tell me they've seen worse tryouts.

The pianist, Eugene Gwodzdz, says: "You could be good with some voice lessons!"

I know that I've come nowhere near the girls who have shown their stuff during the day, but it was fun to let go and be as goofy as I pleased for a good 30 seconds.

Although I didn't completely bomb at my audition, I'm not looking to start a career in show business. Plus, I don't think a pink wig is really my look— unlike some of these girls. If they're lucky, you may see some of them on TV or in musicals around town in the next few years:

Allie Gorenc, 15, Manalapan, N.J.

Allie played Sage Snyder for five years on CBS' "As the World Turns," and also participated in community theater. She has been singing for the past 10 years and dancing for the past six. Her take on "LazyTown": "Everyone is themselves, and they're all friends having fun. Plus, I like the songs."

Amanda Mengotto, 16, Forked River, N.J.

Amanda just signed with an agency, so this is her first big audition. Before this, she participated in school plays. In addition to acting, Amanda has been playing piano and singing since she was little, and dancing since elementary school.

Hannah Rosenthal, 18, Manhattan

Hannah is part of the theater program at the University of Michigan and hopes to have a career in production. Although she sings, dances and acts, Hannah has the most dance experience, specializing in tap and ballet.

Alexis Molnar, 15, Bedminster, N.J.

Alexis has been in a Nike commercial and a music video for the artist Sia. She loves Stephanie because of her optimism. "She's really happy-go-lucky," Alexis says. "That song's going to be in my head forever now."

Sarrah Long, 12, Dublin, Ga.

Sarrah, who says she's been dancing since she could walk, was especially excited for the "LazyTown" audition because she is a fan of the show. "Me and my little sisters used to watch it together. It was our favorite," she says.

Kristina Lachaga, 16, Flemington, N.J.

Kristina played Baby Louise on the national tour of "Gypsy" for nine months. How much can she relate to Stephanie? Well, she has her own pink wig at home.

Stephanie Ferro, 13, Middle Village

Stephanie has been singing, acting and dancing since she was 3. Stephanie has been in "Life on Mars" on TV and the movie "When in Rome." About the audition: "At first, I was really nervous, but then it was fun."

Nicole Bocchi, 13, Jamaica Estates

On Broadway, Nicole was Jane Banks in "Mary Poppins" and Cindy Lou Who in "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." Even with her impressive background, Nicole found the lyrics to "Bing Bang Rock" tricky. "I was kind of nervous about the lyrics, but I'm happy with the audition," she says.

"LazyTown" didn't find a new Stephanie at the audition, but they chose Catherine Missal, 12, of Somerset, N.J., to play a new character: Stephanie's little sister, Tiffany.
