

Frozen fever has hit Canadian theatre. Here's what Elsa and Anna are up to

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Jessica Gallant, left, is Anna and Kaleigh Gorka is Elsa in the Theatre Aquarius production of Disney's Frozen. DAHLIA KATZ/SUPPLIED

Across the country, Canadian theatres are embracing their inner snow queen with productions of Disney's Frozen. If you don't have children in your life – or if you've somehow managed to go the past 12 years without hearing Let It Go – Frozen tells the story of two princesses in a fictional, vaguely Nordic kingdom called Arendelle. Anna, the younger of the sisters, is playful and loquacious; Elsa, on the other hand, is frosty and aloof. (She also has magical winter powers that threaten to freeze everything – and everyone – she loves.) Here's how five directors across Canada are staging Frozen – complete with fake snow, magical costume changes and Easter eggs for Frozen's most ardent superfans.



Gallant dances as Anna with other cast members in the Theatre Aquarius production. DAHLIA KATZ/SUPPLIED

the Aquarius and Neptune productions – including a shared Elsa, Hamilton native Kaleigh Gorka – this year's staging is mostly new. But Webb's experience directing Frozen on the East Coast helped map the most efficient way to build the show this time around.

"We staged Let It Go on Day 1," he revealed. "There are flying costume pieces, and projection mapping. We revisited the blocking we did the first time around, but tweaked it for the bigger stage here. That gave us a sense early on of what our plan would be for this show. It's so epic that no matter how much you schedule and budget for, you run out of time."



Frozen at The Grand Theatre in London, Ont., stars Mark Sinongco as Kristoff and Chariz Faulmino as Anna. DAHLIA KATZ/GRAND THEATRE

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Puppets, puppets and more puppets in Regina

Regina's newly renovated Globe Theatre will stage Frozen in-the-round in the new year, with nationally acclaimed director Jillian Keiley at the helm.

But this Frozen has a twist. While the show regularly uses puppets for Sven the reindeer and Olaf the snowman, Keiley will collaborate with the Old Trout Puppet Workshop, a southern Alberta-based puppet company known for its intricate marionettes.

"I needed a very specific design element for this, and because the Globe is in the round, you can't really use projections, which is normally how the show is done," said Keiley. "The Trouts were very keen to do it. And there's something gorgeous about doing it in such a restricted space.

"Disney also has to approve everything," she continued, "which is a really interesting problem in terms of artistic freedom. But I don't mind that. It's exciting to think about this show blossoming all over the country – it's about ice, it's about cold. Nobody knows this stuff better than Canadians."



Alba Evora Weiler, left, plays Young Elsa and Oakan Oyafuso plays Young Anna in the Grand Theatre's production. DAHLIA KATZ/GRAND THEATRE

to get right isn't Let It Go, but the moment when Anna thaws back to life toward the end of the show.

"It's this huge, epic moment," she said. "It's the act of Elsa touching Anna and infusing her love into her that thaws her. I wanted that to be just the two of them, which leaves them very exposed to do a complete magical costume change with 839 people staring at them."



Chelsea Rose Winsby is Elsa in the Arts Club Theatre Company's production of Frozen in Vancouver. MOONRIDER PRODUCTIONS/SUPPLIED

"Frozen is a really big part of tiny human culture," she said. "I think if you were born after 2012, it's just part of you."

Corcoran's Frozen process came with all the usual questions – how do you honour the original cartoon while creating a fresh piece of work? How the heck do you stage Let It Go? – but the onstage journey was complemented by her son's occasional presence in rehearsals, she said.

"It's been really meaningful to be able to acknowledge my professional and personal lives in this way, and to have my four-year-old understand what it is I'm doing on these nights that I'm away from him," she said. "He earned his special thanks credit really well – he loves the story, and it's been so much fun to share with him the full process of how you put a show together."

A second crack at Frozen, a year later

Jeremy Webb, artistic director of Halifax's Neptune Theatre, knows Frozen well – his home theatre in Nova Scotia staged it last year. But when the opportunity came to direct it again for Theatre Aquarius in Hamilton, he jumped at the chance – and he's already considering when Neptune might get to stage it again.

"It's an event for the young people in the audience," he said. "That is a huge part of what theatre is meant to be. They will always remember being 5 or 6 and being sat next to their mom and dad, or maybe their grandparents. That's an incredibly moving thing for us to get to be a part of."

While there's some crossover between

An ice-cold Frozen in Whitehorse

In January, Yukon Theatre for Young People will stage Frozen in Whitehorse, at a time of year when the city experiences just a few hours of sunlight a day.

"It's the Yukon, it's winter and it's perfect," said director Gabriel Hopkins. "So we've got to make it work if we can."

The decision to program the show was somewhat spontaneous, he said – the availability of the rights to the show coincided perfectly with a small winter performance slot at the Yukon Arts Centre.

"Thematically, this story fits beautifully into our locale and this time of year," he said. "Sales so far have been incredible – part of that's the timing, and of course, this movie has been out for 12 years. I think it's a lot of people's favourite of Disney's more modern animated movies. It's a great opportunity to give the kids something on stage that came out while they were growing up."

Underlining Frozen's sisterhood in London

At the Grand Theatre in London, Ont., artistic director Rachel Peake is reminiscing not about Frozen's icicles and expensive special effects, but the vibrant sisterhood at the centre of the story.

"This is a story about true love in all its forms, and the idea of pushing aside romantic love in favour of friendship, and the love between siblings, and the love between families," she said. "It's so beautiful at this time of year, when people are thinking about these things more often than normal."

According to Peake – whose Frozen also played at Edmonton's Citadel Theatre earlier this year – the hardest moment

A love letter to childhood in Vancouver

Ashlie Corcoran, artistic director of Vancouver's Arts Club Theatre Company, incorporated her four-year-old into Frozen's rehearsal process. After all: What better a test audience than someone from the demographic for whom the film was originally created?



Synthia Yusuf plays Anna and Kamyar Pazandeh plays Kristoff in the Arts Club Theatre Company's production. MOONRIDER PRODUCTIONS/SUPPLIED