



Theater

'Frozen' at Seattle's Paramount Theatre: Let go of prior expectations as Disney's blockbuster film hits the stage

Feb. 10, 2020 at 9:36 am | Updated Feb. 10, 2020 at 5:10 pm



Caroline Bowman as Elsa in the North American tour of "Frozen," at The Paramount Theatre through March 1. (Deen van Meer)

By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Special to The Seattle Times

Theater review

Aside from the problematic implications of Disney's [princess culture](#), lately Disney seems to be suffering from creative bankruptcy, preferring to cash in on [sequels](#) and [adaptations](#). Although I appreciated the “sisters before misters” message in “Frozen” when the movie came out, I expected the musical to be another frame-by-frame recreation of a hit film, fit only for families with princess-obsessed children. But surprisingly, theatrical “Frozen” succeeds on its own merits.

After opening on Broadway in 2018, the stage adaptation of Disney's animated feature “Frozen” is touring North America, playing at The Paramount Theatre through the end of the month. It contains all the hit songs from the movie, plus a dozen new ones by the same team. But where the movie pretended to be a typical love-at-first-sight Disney story until the reveal of the big twist, the musical never lets its focus stray far from the sisters' relationship.

By eliminating snow monsters and streamlining subplots, the primary story of sisterhood gets more room to breathe. My 11-year-old daughter said it felt like the creators originally wanted “Frozen” to be a play instead of a movie. And maybe she's right; the same writers worked on both, and the Broadway version feels like the stronger of the two projects.

The story remains intact. Separated from her magical sister since childhood for her own safety, lonely Anna precipitously falls for Prince Hans. Her sister Elsa responds with an outburst that plunges the nation into enchanted winter, then runs away. Anna goes after her, befriending ice-seller Kristoff along the way. In the end, Hans is revealed to be a villain, and the act of true love that will melt the spell is revealed to be not a romantic kiss, but a sisterly sacrifice.





Caroline Innerbichler as Anna in the North American touring production of "Frozen," at The Paramount Theatre through March 1. (Deen van Meer)

"Frozen" earns immediate emotional buy-in with the child performers' "Do You Want to Build a Snowman?" Child Anna (Arwen Monzon-Sanders, alternating with Stella Cobb) is a spunky, rambunctious font of butt jokes that cracked up my tween (and plenty of adults). The panicked screams of Young Elsa (Jaiden Klein, alternating with Alyssa Kim) when Anna is injured are real enough to set parental hearts racing.

As adults, Anna (Caroline Innerbichler) continues to provide the comedy with awkward snorts and a lusty streak that (mostly) goes over kids' heads. You almost don't notice her perfect Disney princess voice until the second act, when she gets a new duet with Elsa. Elsa (Caroline Bowman) has a smoother, rounder voice than her cinematic counterpart, but still delivers diva power in the centerpiece "Let It Go" and the new "Monster." Her sobs at Anna's apparent death were the most heartbroken I've heard since Ewan McGregor's Christian watched Satine die in the movie "Moulin Rouge."

ADVERTISING

Hans (Austin Colby) manages to charm, especially in "Love is an Open Door," despite

the audience already being on guard against his duplicity. Kristoff's (Mason Reeves) best moment comes when the energetic dancing of "Fixer-Upper" segues directly into a solo reprise of "What Do You Know About Love?" and you believe he's just discovered he's in love with Anna. Generally, "Frozen" lacked the automaton precision of most Broadway performances, instead offering more of these moments of genuine emotion — a net gain in my opinion.



Collin Baja as Sven and F. Michael Haynie as Olaf in the touring production of "Frozen," at The Paramount Theatre through March 1. (Deen van Meer)

Designed by Michael Curry, who also worked on "The Lion King," snowman Olaf and reindeer Sven bridge the gap between performance and production. Bunraku-style, Olaf is manipulated by the costumed performer (F. Michael Haynie), who masterfully voices the role. My daughter found it a bit strange at first. But by the end, she agreed that whether you focus on the actor or the puppet or try to watch both, what you remember after the show is the character, Olaf.

Sven is worn by a single, athletic performer (Evan Strand, alternating with Collin Baja) on hand-stilts. Baby Yoda from "The Mandalorian" has accustomed audiences

to adorable puppets, but Sven's soulful facial expressions and ungainly reindeer gait are uncanny and a little scene-stealing. Reindeer plush toys were a hot item at the merch table during intermission.


Audiences expect high production values from Disney, and "Frozen" delivers. There are as many special effects for snow as there are words for it in Arctic languages, each one reflecting Elsa's emotional state. Elsa's ice palace is now my daughter's dream home. And Elsa's transformation in the middle of "Let It Go" was met with a collective gasp, followed by cheers.

Officially, "Frozen" is recommended for ages 8 and up. With an 8 p.m. curtain, it certainly could be a challenge for very small children. But it doesn't feel nearly as long as its 2-hour-15-minute run time. Counter to the movie logic that stuffs the back half with action scenes, "Frozen" strips down the plot to spend more time with the sisters' feelings — and it works. As a parent, I've spent years resisting the Disney Princess juggernaut, so I hate to admit it. But sometimes Disney really does know how to make magic.

"Frozen," through March 1; The Paramount Theatre, 911 Pine St., Seattle; tickets start at \$25; 206-682-1414, stgpresents.org

***Gemma Alexander** is a Seattle-based freelance writer; gemmaaleealexander.com.*

Most Read Entertainment Stories

- 1 What did our Dinner at a Movie pair think of the 2020 Oscars? Moira Macdonald and Bethany Jean Clement had plenty to say.
- 2 Janelle, Eminem and Utkarsh: 5 biggest moments from the 2020 Oscars
- 3 'Parasite' wins four Oscars, and a full list of winners at the 92nd Academy Awards  VIEW
- 4 Small-town theater, saved! Thousands rally to donate and keep Kingston's Firehouse

Theater in business

- 5 Ticket Alert: Rage Against the Machine announces reunion world tour with a stop in Tacoma

 [View 2 Comments](#)

ADVERTISING

Contact ▼

About the Company ▼

Advertise ▼

My Account ▼

Today's Front Page

f Facebook

🐦 Twitter

