

# From small seeds, Children's Castle Theater grows like a weed

An upcoming showing of the original play "Jack Frost" is the latest offering of the family-founded, family-run theater company.

By LIZ ROLFSMEIERSpecial to the Star Tribune | JANUARY 25, 2013 — 6:24PM



LIZ ROLFSMEIER, STAR TRIBUNE

Rehearsing for a scene in "Jack Frost" for the Children's Castle Theater were, from left, Tori Partington, 9, and Jaylin Baah, 12, both of Farmington; Lexi Orlando, 9, of Rosemount; and Jayna Carlson, 9, and Carrie Buchman, both of Farmington.

What to do when your theater company has become so popular that you've got a giant cast? According to Director Kayla Yaeger of the Children's Castle Theater, you start writing your own plays.

When 130 people signed up to audition for the most recent production of the Farmington-Lakeville community theater, Yaeger and her sisters -- Heidi (stage director) and Rachel Schmidt (music director) -- decided to create an original musical, "Jack Frost," to accommodate the big crowd.

The play runs Feb. 1-3 and 8-10 at the Lakeville Area Arts Center.

Many cast members will take turns playing "yettis," tinier versions of the mythical yeti, Yaeger said, "very furry, horned, one-eyed creatures, one with abnormally large feet."

The mini abominable snowmen accompany Jack Frost, a kid kicked out of his village for creating a snowstorm. Frost does battle with Setta, a representative of spring. "They have a battle where she's growing flowers all over the place," Yaeger said.

Sam Howson, 17, of Burnsville, plays Jack Frost. He described his character as "very condescending, angry, bitter, kind of like a Scrooge. He's not a nice guy."

## IF YOU GO

**What:** Children's Castle Theater's "Jack Frost"

**When:** 7 p.m. Feb. 1-2 and 8-9; 2 p.m. Feb. 2-3 and 9-10.

**Where:** Lakeville Area Arts Center, 20965 Holyoke Av.

**Cost:** \$10 for adults, \$8 for kids 10 and under and seniors. Purchase tickets online at [www.startribune.com/a2020](http://www.startribune.com/a2020), or call 952-985-4640.

"We try to make Jack happy," said Natalie Adrian, 7, of Lakeville, who plays a yetti. "We help him try to not find signs of spring because he wants it to be cold."

Katie Baum, 11, of Farmington, plays a yetti chief. "We have to do a dance where we shimmy down," she said.

Dancing may be trickier for Josh Larson, 10, of Farmington, who plays a yetti with exceptionally large feet. He said he does much twisting, turning, hopping and dancing for his role. "I can do it with these feet," he said, pointing to his own, "so I think I can do it."

The play, Yaeger said, addresses the issue of bullying and relays the message "that it's OK to be different."

"Jack Frost is the kid who was bullied who becomes a bully himself," she said. "Setta's a kid who was bullied and decides to be a bigger person."

The Children's Castle Theater has been operating for two decades. Yaeger said casts have grown from about 40 members, when she and her family took over in 2005, to 80 to 100 a production now.

Formerly based in Farmington, the theater company moved rehearsals and performances to the Lakeville Area Arts Center this year, which Yaeger said has helped to attract interest, but she also attributes the increased cast sizes to ramping up production values.

"A couple of years ago, we really decided to focus on the sets and the costumes," she said. Her father, Gordy Schmidt, helps build sets, and last year for "Peter Pan" built a 24-foot pirate ship that spun around to reveal the Lost Boys' hideaway.

That was probably the most elaborate set the crew ever built. For this production, he helped build a snow tumbler to create a snowfall, a working fountain and a snowman that shrinks and grows.

"We're always looking for shows that have some kind of special effects," Yaeger said.

The theater is a family endeavor for directors and staff -- the sisters' mother, Janel Schmidt, sews costumes for all the shows. Family members also act. Howson's (Jack Frost's) brother plays one of the mean kids, and his mother sings and acts in this production.

Yaeger said including adults in the shows helps create more realistic casts, and "having the adults in the show makes the kids feel like it's a bigger deal," she said. "Also, they help kids remember the fundamentals. It gives a lot better production value in general."

Liz Rolfsmeier is a Twin Cities freelance writer.