

Children's Theatre Company

BEHIND THE CURTAIN BEYOND THE STAGE

SPRING | 2026



Photo of Cooper Lajeunesse, Anna M. Schloerb, and Zachary David Hodgkins in *Go, Dog, Go! • Ve Perro ¡Ve!* by Kaitlin Randolph

Lions and Tigers and Totos, Oh My!

Get to know the four-legged stars of *The Wizard of Oz*

As we journey down the Yellow Brick Road in CTC's production of *The Wizard of Oz*, two tiny terriers are putting on a paw-some performance for thousands of audience members this spring.

The role of Toto is played by two cairn terriers, Alfie and Nessa, who are trained by none other than Tony Award-winner Bill Berloni. William Berloni Theatrical Animals has trained animals for 33 Broadway shows and hundreds of off-Broadway and regional productions, national tours, television shows, movies, and even Super Bowl commercials.

Berloni has a soft spot for Toto, calling him "the only character who goes to Oz and doesn't need to learn anything." Read on to learn more about what it takes to prepare these terrier stars for their time in the spotlight!



Nessa stars as Toto in CTC's 2016 production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Photo by Dan Norman



Meet Alfie: Alfie was discovered through Southern Paws Rescue in 2022. His first role ever was as the Stray Dog in a production of *Annie* before moving on to understudying the role of Toto. He has now performed in *The Wizard of Oz* all across America.



Meet Nessa: Nessa was rescued in 2014 from Cairn Terrier Rescue USA. She has been starring as Toto in productions of *The Wiz* and *The Wizard of Oz* all over the country. She has followed in the footsteps of the great cairn terriers trained by Berloni before her, entertaining young and old in this classic story.

CTC: What is the training process like for both dogs?



Bill Berloni (pictured left): First, we only use adopted dogs. Once we make them healthy, we begin with a positive reinforcement basic obedience course in our training room at home. When we are sure they understand the basics, we start training them to do the same thing in different places with different distractions. If we feel they enjoy the work, we find a school production of *The Wizard of Oz* to try them out. That's

where we find out if they enjoy performing or not. If they do, they go into the roster of working dogs we own who live with us. If at any point of their training or career they decide that they don't enjoy the work, we retire them back to our farm.

CTC: What is the rehearsal process like once they are in the room with the cast?

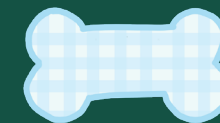
BB: Every human character that interacts with the dogs goes through individual training processes. We teach the actors how to be dog trainers and then bond them as friends to the dogs.

CTC: What does a day in the life look like for these two once performances begin?

BB: A day for the dogs is very simple. They sleep and rest as much as possible. They get plenty of exercise during the show, as well as a large amount of interaction with people.

CTC: Are there any other fun facts about these two dog actors that you would like to share?

BB: With recurring roles like Toto, we pass the role from one dog down to another. For years, Nessa was the lead dog while we trained Alfie in the role. Now Alfie is the lead, and Nessa is semi-retired and stands by just in case.



We hope you'll join us to see Alfie and Nessa in action at *The Wizard of Oz* this spring! Tickets are available at childrenstheatre.org or by calling our friendly Ticket Office at 612.874.0400.

Dogs in School

Bringing Go, Dog. Go! • Ve Perro ¡Ve! from the stage to the classroom

Like so many of our neighbors, CTC experienced significant upheaval in January and February of this year due to the federal operations in Minneapolis and the tragic events that unfolded in our community.

Multiple performances of *Go, Dog. Go! • Ve Perro ¡Ve!* were cancelled out of safety and solidarity with our neighbors. And over the course of the production's run, many schools cancelled their beloved field trips to the theatre as students opted for online learning and families chose to safely stay home.

Our lobby, normally filled with the sounds of giggles and laughter, was suddenly quiet. But while things looked different at the theatre, our mission remained the same. We got to work finding new ways to bring the transformative power of the arts to the children we proudly serve.

Thanks to some quick planning and creative thinking by cast and crew members of *Go, Dog. Go! • Ve Perro ¡Ve!* and CTC's Education team, CTC was able to offer classroom visits to schools who had to cancel their planned trips to the theatre. **When it came time to reach out to schools, every timeslot filled up nearly overnight.**



During each visit, cast members, a wardrobe assistant, and a CTC teaching artist piled into cars and traveled to schools across the Twin Cities area, acting out clowning moments from the show and encouraging students to laugh, shout, and play along. Each session lasted roughly half an hour, ensuring the teams could visit multiple classrooms at each school.

Cast members worked with students to read the book, *Go, Dog. Go!*, in both Spanish and English, stopping occasionally to perform a scene from the stage production. Dogs sang through the "moonlight" song, "Guau Guau", and in several workshops, teaching artists brought along brightly colored scarves for students to use as props and explore color in a more active way.

Several classrooms also had students joining in the fun over Zoom, as some families were opting to attend class virtually and remain sheltered at home. The actors ensured every child felt included in the workshop, clowning up close to the camera and having virtual students participate in call-and-response.

In the end, we were able to bring *Go, Dog. Go! • Ve Perro ¡Ve!* to 265 children across five schools. Because of the continued support from friends like you, these teams at CTC had every resource they needed to join together when students needed us most, and ensure every child had access to the joyful theatre experience they deserved.



"Children's Theatre Company made an enormous impact on my kindergarteners. During this school year, my 5- and 6-year-olds have been exposed to trauma and stress that no one, let alone a child, should ever have to experience. My students were coming to class with shoulders raised and jaws clenched, but not when CTC came to our classroom. **My students were engulfed in laughter and joy for the entirety of the *Go, Dog. Go! • Ve Perro ¡Ve!* performance in room 101.** To this day, they giggle about the funny dogs that came to school. The incredible actors of CTC allowed my students to forget about the weight of their worries and stress and enter into a world of imagination and fun. The performance was in both Spanish and English, so it was accessible for all students in our classroom. **The impact is invaluable and we are so grateful to CTC for bringing the art of theatre into our classroom. Thank you for allowing my students to feel like 5- and 6-year-olds again."**

– Kindergarten Teacher, Risen Christ Catholic School

A Welcoming Home for All

Providing accessible theatre experiences through Sensory Friendly performances

Every child deserves to experience the magic and joy of live theatre.

As part of CTC's commitment to providing accessible theatre opportunities for every member of our community, audience members of all ages are invited to attend Sensory Friendly performances throughout the year.

In addition to audio-described and ASL-interpreted performances, CTC proudly partners with Fraser, a local mental health and disability services nonprofit, to provide two Sensory Friendly performances of each production in our season.

During these performances, sensory modifications are balanced with preserving the engaging theatre experiences you know and love. Modifications may include house lights being left on low or changes being made to lighting strobe effects, sound effects, or actor-audience interactions.

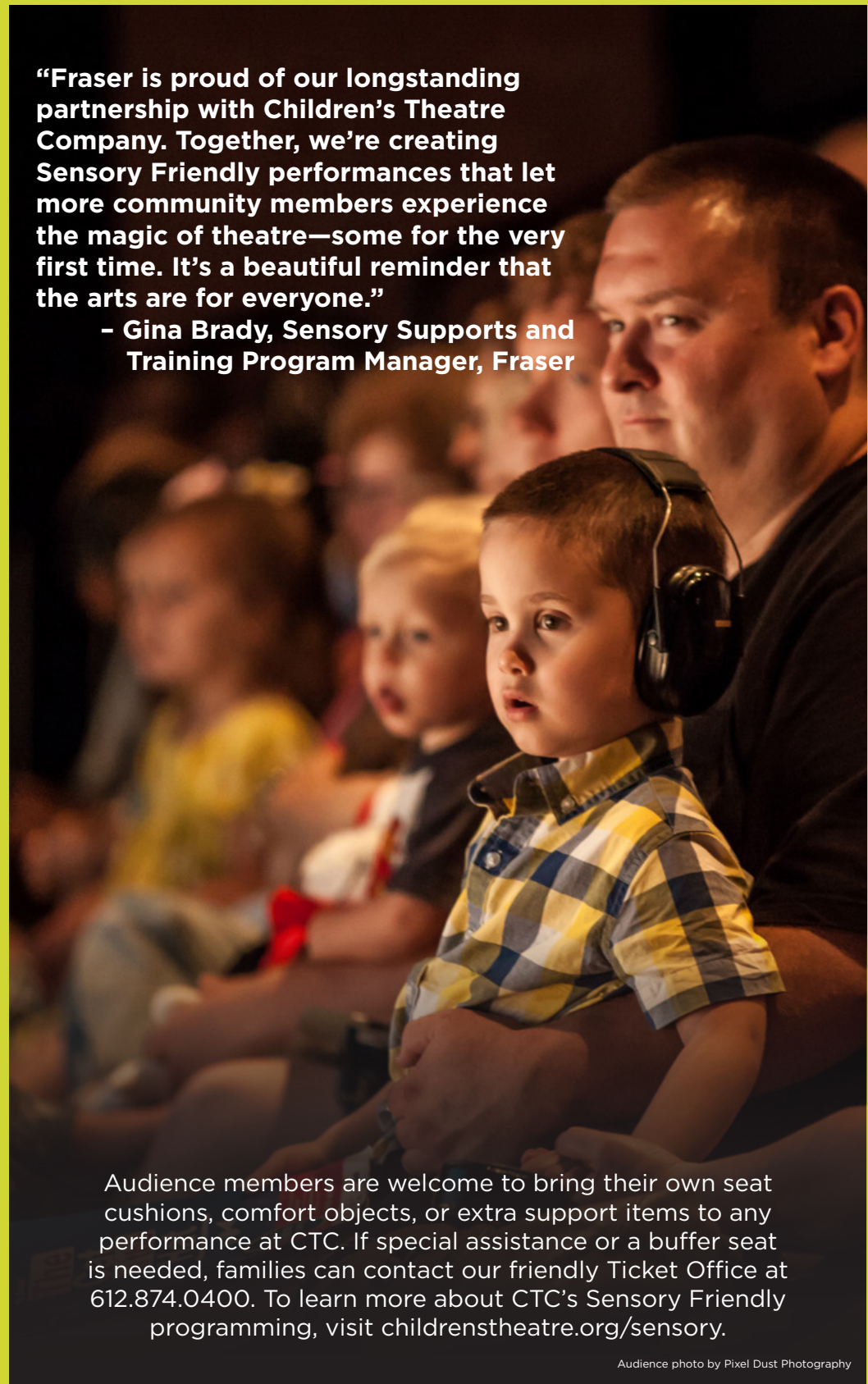
Audience members can access our Concierge and Accessibility Services Station in the Red Lobby, where we provide fidgets, disposable ear plugs and noise-reducing headphones, assisted listening devices, weighted blankets, and other sensory supports that can help make a performance the most enjoyable experience possible for children and families. And if an audience member needs to take a break during a show, every child and adult has access to the Quiet Room, located at the back of our UnitedHealth Group Stage.

These adjustments and additional supports have been carefully chosen to remove barriers that have historically prevented some audience members from fully enjoying live theatre. Over the years, we seen an increased interest in Sensory Friendly programming from audiences with varying sensory needs and sensitivities. Last year, a total of 3,827 audience members attended these performances, a 57% increase in attendance over the previous season.

More Sensory Friendly opportunities will be available in our upcoming 2026-2027 Season. Thanks to friends like you, we have the tools and resources we need to ensure CTC remains a welcoming home for every audience member.

“Fraser is proud of our longstanding partnership with Children’s Theatre Company. Together, we’re creating Sensory Friendly performances that let more community members experience the magic of theatre—some for the very first time. It’s a beautiful reminder that the arts are for everyone.”

– Gina Brady, Sensory Supports and Training Program Manager, Fraser



Audience members are welcome to bring their own seat cushions, comfort objects, or extra support items to any performance at CTC. If special assistance or a buffer seat is needed, families can contact our friendly Ticket Office at 612.874.0400. To learn more about CTC's Sensory Friendly programming, visit childrenstheatre.org/sensory.

Announcing the 2026-2027 Season!



September 8-October 18, 2026



October 13-November 22, 2026



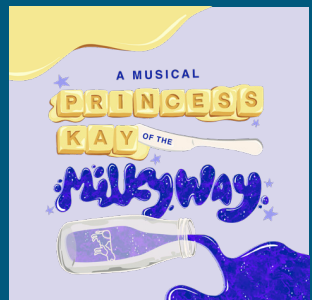
November 3, 2026-January 3, 2027



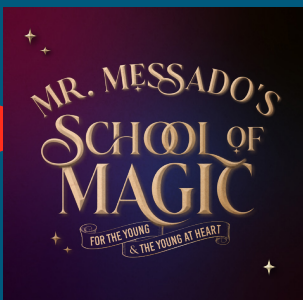
January 12-February 7, 2027



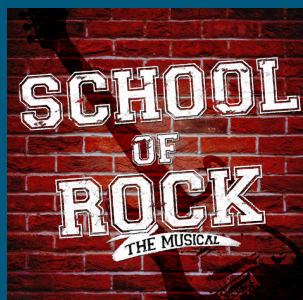
January 22-31, 2027



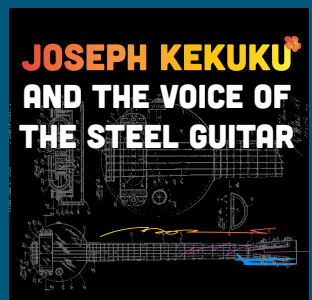
February 23-April 4, 2027



March 12-21, 2027



May 4-June 27, 2027



May 14-23, 2027

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