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By [Matt Bieker](#)

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The Sierra School of Performing Arts' *The Wizard of Oz* isn't just kid stuff.

Director: Janet Lazarus

Starring: Nicole Delbridge, Brad Fitch, Thomas Thompson, Thomas Chubb

The Sierra School of Performing Arts has been a fixture—and a product—of the local theater community since 2005. Since its inception, a dedicated group of parents, teachers and theater professionals have relied on donations and borrowed stages to offer Reno's aspiring actors a place to hone their craft. SSPA has recently acquired its own dedicated rehearsal space and is preparing for its summer performance of the Broadway musical, *The Wizard of Oz*.

"It's classic and popular and a wonderful story with great music," said Janet Lazarus, director and founding member of SSPA. "That's what draws me to a show."

SSPA was founded in response to a lack of opportunities for stage acting in Reno at the time. With many long-time members returning year after year, the company has steadily increased the scope of its performances to include full-scale musicals. This year's budget is an estimated \$75,000.

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"Most people assume that we're all kids, and it's a school, and it's a school production, but it's not," said Lazarus. "Yes, we are committed to having children in our production, but this is a full-fledged community theater, with adults, on as close to a professional level as we can get."

Lazarus and the production team have been working since November to bring Dorothy's classic adventures to the stage, employing set builders and costume designers from the community to turn the stage at Bartley Ranch into a real-life Oz.

Dorothy, portrayed by actress Nicole Delbridge, is a former pupil of Lazarus, who was on the theater faculty at University of Nevada, Reno for several years.

"I've had some important roles, but they were more supporting, so this is my first big role," said Delbridge, who studied vocal performance at UNR. "I've wanted to be Dorothy for a long time. I've been in the *Wizard of Oz*, like, three other times before this, in middle school and in high school, but I never was Dorothy."

Originally from Spring Creek, Delbridge found a love of theater—and specifically musicals—that has made her a dedicated member of SSPA for five years now. As Dorothy, she shares the stage with Brad Fitch as the Cowardly Lion, Thomas Thompson as Tin Man, and Thomas Chubb as Scarecrow, not to mention Chewy, the trained dog playing Toto.

"Everyone who has helped is so passionate about putting on a good production," said Delbridge. "I think it's just been really awesome to see the kids come back every year and grow. It makes me jealous because I wish that I would have had the care and passion from these adults who put this on."

The show includes over 50 other cast members, a nine-piece band, and a production team of 15 people. With over 150 different costumes and set pieces created by the designer at Brūka Theater, SSPA is expecting record turnouts.

They're also expecting ticket revenue to allow them support and train an even greater range of talent.

"Now that we have a space, we'd like to do more productions in a year," said Judy Davis Rounds, former president of SSPA and one of the production managers for the show. "We have classes starting in September. ... We'd love to make money to get a dance floor so we could offer dance classes here as well."



Molly Stewart, Thomas Chubb, Thomas Thompson, Nicole Delbridge and Brad Fitch rehearse *The Wizard of Oz*.

The Sierra School of Performing Arts presents *The Wizard of Oz* at the Robert Z. Hawkins Amphitheater, Bartley Ranch, at 7:30 p.m. Aug. 12-14 and 19-21. Tickets are \$15-40. Visit

<http://www.sierraschoolofperformingarts.org/shows.html>.

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