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IMAGO THEATRE

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'Frogz' delights young audience

By Kristen Roderick

Betsie Andrews warned a theater packed with young students that as soon as the curtain opened, it would be magical.

It's what they had been waiting for. More than 1,000 students were bundled up on the cold February afternoon to scramble into the auditorium and balcony to see the show.

"This is the fullest this has been," Andrews, an organizer for the Fox Theatre's "By the Bus" series, told the students.

About 1 p.m., the show began to a trio of actors dressed as frogs. Any time a frog moved, the students would squeal with delight.

The intro was fitting, as the performance was called "FROGZ." The show initially appeared in Hutchinson in 2008.

It's from the Portland, Ore.-based Imago Theatre. There is a cat trapped in a giant paper bag, orbs running through the audience and more.

As soon as a couple of colorful lizards got on stage, the students "oohed and ahed" at the colors. They screamed when the lizards wiggled off stage.

"It's coming!" One student yelled from the middle of the auditorium.

"I loved it," Sierra Yoder, 5, a kindergartener from Haven Grade School, said. "My favorite part was the lizards."

Her classmate, Tyson Harper, 6, enjoyed a penguin game of musical chairs toward the end of the performance.

There was no dialog in the afternoon performance – but it didn't matter. The students from Hutchinson, Haven, Hesston, Buhler and Windom ate up every minute.

"That collective energy and enthusiasm is so electric," Randy Mathews, executive director of the Fox Theatre, said. "You witness that and remember why you do this for a living. The reaction to what's going on stage – you realize that for some of the kids, it's opening up a whole new world."

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And that's the focus for the By the Bus series, which invites students to shows at the Fox Theatre. Before the performance, Andrews encouraged students to look around at the architecture of the historic theater. Maybe one day they will want to be a part of a stage production there.

Normally students from nearby schools like Lincoln Elementary will walk to a performance, but bitter cold air forced them to ride a school bus. But Mathews said it was among the smoothest the seating has gone for the students.

"Some schools and teachers have been to enough that they know the routine," he said.

The By the Bus series is made possible by a grant from the Herman, Esther and Henry Stallman Foundation.