

ARENDELLE CASTLE YULE LOG

CUT PAPER EDITION

PRODUCTION NOTES

Hand-crafted from paper with custom designs by Walt Disney Animation Studios' acclaimed visual development artist Brittney Lee ("Frozen," "Frozen 2" and production designer on "Myth: A Frozen Tale"), the Arendelle Castle Yule Log: Cut Paper Edition, brings a festive spirit to the holiday season. Using stylized cut-out art for the shapes of the fire combined with traditionally drawn and digital visual effects, and a hearthside tableau with silhouettes of "Frozen" favorites Anna, Elsa, Olaf, Kristoff and Sven, the scene is set for an inviting and warm holiday gathering, with just a touch of snow provided by Elsa. Fire, lighting and other visual effects complete the picture and bring some holiday magic direct from Arendelle to your living room. Brittney was inspired by the charade scene in "Frozen 2" and her experimental work on "Myth: A Frozen Tale," along with a desire to create the feeling of looking into a homemade diorama, as part of her process in designing this unique holiday treat.

Veteran Disney Animation effects animator Dan Lund, and visual effects supervisor Darin Hollings from the Studio's Creative Legacy team (who first suggested Brittney as the right artist for this new Yule Log installment) worked closely with Brittney (in her role here as creator and production designer) to help her achieve the look and style that she wanted for the Yule Log. Amy Astley, Senior Vice President of Publicity and Communications, Creative Legacy and Brand Strategy, Walt Disney Animation Studios, executive produced the project, with Angela D'Anna serving as associate producer. Thomas Rickert was the editor and Gabe Guy oversaw the re-recording mixing. "Frozen" veterans Peter Del Vecho (producer) and Michael Giaimo (production designer), also lent their expertise.

Brittney Lee was just wrapping up art direction assignments on the 2021 Disney features, "Raya and the Last Dragon" and "Encanto," when she was approached about bringing her unique talents to this year's Disney+ Yule Log edition.

"The original concept was to make everything from cut paper, but things morphed and evolved a bit from that as we brought in our visual effects experts" recalls Lee. "The starting point for me was building an actual diorama with five main structural layers including a hearth. The dimensions were approximately 32 x 20 inches, and my husband helped me rig it with real LED lights. Each layer was then photographed individually and digital files were created to get it ready for animation, ambient effects and compositing by Darin and Dan.

"For the final Yule Log, I cut out three levels of flames inspired by the beautiful digitally animated fire demos that Dan Lund had created. Using that as a template, I cut out negative and positive shapes and photographed them in a variety of experimental ways. I backlit the negative pieces so that it would feel like light was projecting through them. The end result was a stylized effect

that had a texture and ambient glow to it, and felt a bit more tactile than a real fire. It's a literal representation of what we were going for. It feels like you are looking into something that is homemade and flickers like a candlelight."

"Dan has been a part of the 'Frozen' team for as long as I have and knows my aesthetic language," observes Brittney. "We've been on the same journey of figuring out Elsa's magic and all kinds of things. For the fire in the Yule Log, he noticed that my cut paper flames had a split in the middle. He really liked that design element and the kind of mid-century feel that it evoked, so he made sure to maintain that with his animated effects. He used different colors and values to preserve and reinforce it. The end result is my original paper cutouts with Dan's visual effects melded together in a magical way. It's a joint loving team effort. I gave Dan and Darin something to start with, but I think it's magic because of them."

Brittney admits, "Working with paper is something that I really love. It's a weird passion of mine. I enjoy it because it's tangible and I like to be away from the computer sometimes.

"Christmas is my major holiday," she adds. "In my tiny little house, I have at least two Christmas trees every year. We don't have our own fireplace so I always end up putting a yule log on TV to have a fire burning. I'm very excited that I get to have a unique yule log this year based on my creations. I think the best compliment for our work came from Amy (Astley) during a review session on Zoom where she said that it felt so cozy, she just wanted to get a blanket and snuggle up. I share that sentiment, and hope that everyone finds it warm and inviting and a nice little piece to have on during the holidays."

VISUAL EFFECTS: BRINGING BRITTNEY'S CUT PAPER DESIGNS TO LIFE

Integral to bringing Brittney's cut paper diorama concept to fruition were two talented visual effects experts from the Walt Disney Animation Studios team. Dan Lund has been a special effects/visual effects animator since he joined Disney Animation in 1989 on "Beauty and the Beast." Darin Hollings first came to Walt Disney Animation Studios in 1996 and has been a visual effects supervisor on a wide variety of live-action and animated features as well as special projects for Disney Parks all over the world.

Hollings recalls, "I've been a Brittney Lee fan ever since I helped mentor her in one of the first Disney training programs we conducted at Walt Disney Animation Studios. She was kind of a superstar before she even started in the program, and all the other trainees knew who she was and had a lot of respect for her. She directed a paper cut 30-second short film of 'Hansel and Gretel' over a six-week period, and it was impressive and very imaginative.

"For this edition of the Yule Log, I suggested that Brittney come up with something that involved paper cuts," continues Hollings. "Brittney presented six possibilities and one of them was a backlit kind of favorite built with these different levels of paper, almost like a pop-up book, but with a light source behind it. That kicked us off to our starting point."

According to Dan Lund, "Brittney and I had recently collaborated on 'Myth,' and what's great about her art is that it has such a specific design sense. I love the challenge of finding new shapes that still evoke her design. They're very simple, and yet very sophisticated at the same time. It was fun to be able to experiment with her notion of the diorama and the hand cut

elements. The challenge was to take her hard edged designs and combine it with the softer edged elements of the fire and the snow.

“We really wanted all of the effects to feel handcrafted,” he adds. “All of the sparkles, and light flares on the snow are hand-drawn so that the flakes feel like they’re catching light from the fire or the moon. Brittney even cut out paper shadows to give it the feel of a true shadow box. We wanted people to feel that it’s dimensional and the whole thing is sitting on their table at home with a lit candle behind it. Almost like a performing centerpiece.

“Brittney built the fire in three layers,” Lund continues. “We called it the orange, the purple and the white layer, and we laid them on top of each other by adding transparency. Whenever two layers would cross, you’d get a new sort of texture or density. We wanted to keep it flat and graphic. There was a lot of back and forth between my drawings and her cut outs from textured paper. It was flattering to have her design something that she wanted me to animate. We would then add some sparkle, blurs and blooms. Darin was the master of all the assets and ultimately made it look like a diorama. Brittney was inspired to hand-cut paper shadows which were added to create the ultimate effect.

“I love that this Yule Log is more of an impressionistic piece,” he concludes. “We didn’t just zoom in on a fireplace, but rather the whole piece evokes a special feeling like a diorama come to life. I hope people turn it on and don’t ever want to turn it off, because it’s like a piece of art.”

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER:

BRITTNEY LEE (Production Designer) has been lending her skills as a visual development artist, art director and production designer to features and short films from Walt Disney Animation Studios since February 2010. Most recently, she was the production designer on the groundbreaking 2019 VR animated short, “Myth: A Frozen Tale,” which premiered on Disney+ earlier this year. Other recent feature credits as a visual development artist include “Encanto,” “Raya and the Last Dragon,” and “Frozen 2.”

Her first assignments at the Studio included work on “Wreck-It Ralph” and the Oscar®-winning short “Paperman,” both of which opened in theaters in November 2012.

As visual development artist on the Academy Award®-winning 2013 Disney feature, “Frozen,” Lee was responsible for providing foundation designs for what moviegoers actually saw on the screen. She focused on the colorful cast of characters, helping to design costumes and hairstyles. Lee also contributed to the interior design of Elsa’s extraordinary ice palace. She also played a key role in contributing art designs and concepts for Disney’s 2016 Oscar®-winning “Zootopia.”

Prior to joining Disney, Lee spent several years as an artist for Three Rings Design, a small game company in San Francisco. She attended the school of film and animation at New York’s Rochester Institute of Technology, studying character animation – a career she knew she’d pursue from the moment she saw “The Little Mermaid” at age 6.

Lee, a native of Sharon, Penn., is married to husband David Suroviec, who also works at Disney Animation. They have an orange cat named Popoki. She recently provided illustrations for the

2019 Disney Press publication, Mary Blair's Unique Flair: The Girl Who Became One of the Disney Legends.