

The Barteau Family Makes Christmas A Special Production

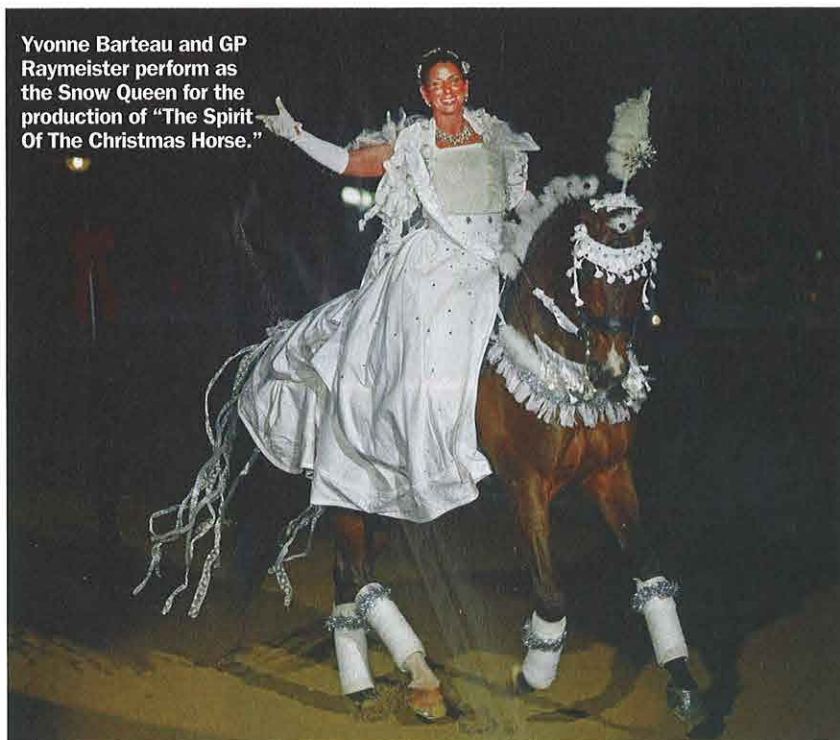
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With horses to ride, lessons to teach and barns to manage all year long, many professional riders and trainers enjoy a little downtime during the holidays.

But Yvonne Barteau, Grand Prix rider and trainer at KYB Dressage in Maple Park, Ill., went the opposite route when she decided to create an elaborate Christmas production on horseback filled with lights, fog, snow, music, singers, costumes and just about every horse and rider in her barn.

"The Spirit of the Christmas Horse" started in 2011 as a present for Ginna Frantz, the owner and founder of Grand Prix Equestrian, where KYB is based.

"It was a surprise for [Frantz], and it was really hard to have practices and get it all set up [without her knowing]," said Barteau. "She was just blown away."



Yvonne Barteau and GP Raymeister perform as the Snow Queen for the production of "The Spirit Of The Christmas Horse."

Last year, Frantz and her husband, Jeffrey Breslow, were the only guests for the performance, which was held in conjunction with the barn Christmas party.

"It started as a small thing and got out of control," said Barteau. "I was in equine theater for many years, and I don't think there's ever been a Christmas show like this."

This year, instead of one performance, Barteau and her crew decided to expand it into a three-night production with the first two nights as a fundraiser for the young riders who train at KYB.

"The kids actually like it. Rather than horse shows all year where no one's really clapping or having fun and the dress code is pretty dull, you get ribbons on their horses and big fancy dresses," said Barteau. "And learning new things: how to decorate the horses and how to work with music."

Barteau said one scene calls for 12 horses in the arena at the same time for a ball, and there is a quadrille performance as well as a pas de deux. Barteau's husband, Kim, demonstrates liberty work with a Friesian, and Yvonne rides the Grand Prix stallion GP Raymeister as the Snow Queen.

"He's such a good sport—he's stuck doing the Snow Queen again," joked Yvonne. "The story has everything: orphans and villains and magic. We have a villain who runs around in the dark. You always have to have a bad guy."

Kim, Yvonne and their four children all work with dressage horses in some capacity. Jamie Lawton also trains at KYB Dressage, Jessica Lawton manages the Grand Prix Equestrian barn, Cassandra Barteau trains and rides professionally, and Kayla Hudi Barteau competes as a young rider. Despite the demanding environment of the equine industry, Yvonne makes sure the entire Christmas season is observed.

"I love the holidays. I'm busy all year, but it's a different busy. It's a fun busy. I'm in a less nose-to-the-grindstone mood," she said. "Christmas is the only holiday I really celebrate. I decorate the house like a department store. The day after Thanksgiving, the decorations go up, and then nothing but Christmas music is played until everybody is ready to pull their hair out here. All day we're riding with Christmas music on. It makes the whole holiday time from Thanksgiving to Christmas one big fun time." 🎅



Violetta Talley and Moonlight Sonata take a bow after their performance as part of the fairy quadrille.