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The Rose's *Huck Finn* is an American classic with modern relevance

(OMAHA, Nebr.) The classic American novel about life on the Mississippi finds a new voice in The Rose Theater's production of ***Huck Finn***, playing February 24 - March 12. The 70-minute production based on the Mark Twain classic addresses issues of inequality that feel as relevant today as in the Civil War time period when the story takes place.

"Huck Finn feels like a piece that is always of the moment," says Rose artistic director Matthew Gutschick. "We are excited to present this classic piece of American literature that remains current and relevant."

Huck Finn is an adaptation of Mark Twain's novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, written by playwright Eric Coble. It opens to find Huck Finn just after the conclusion of Twain's other classic, *Tom Sawyer*. Huck has come into some money he and Tom discovered, which led to him being adopted by two elderly sisters: the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson. He struggles with the idea of getting "sivilized," but finds friendship with the sisters' slave Jim. When Huck's drunkard father tracks him down and threatens to hurt Huck's new family if he doesn't hand over his money, Huck fakes his own death and takes off on the Mighty Mississippi.

"In this piece, the river really represents freedom," explains director Tyrone Beasley. "Huck is more comfortable on the river than on the land. We've tried to reflect this in our design choices, with the metaphor of the land representing social bondage and cruelty."

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The design choices in the show were deeply influenced by painter and muralist Thomas Hart Benton, an American artist at the forefront of the Regionalist art movement in the 1920s who was so inspired by Mark Twain's writings that he did an entire series based on *Huckleberry Finn* and even provided illustrations for Twain's books. (Benton's paintings can be viewed at Omaha's Joslyn Museum.) Scenic Designer Chris DePriest has incorporated Benton's fluid, bold style and rich tones into the set design for ***Huck Finn*** with a gentle facade of houses and trees painted in an almost folk-art style. These simple set pieces will move fluidly across the stage to represent Jim and Huck's travel on the Mississippi River.

Lighting Designer Laura Hensley plans to complement DePriest's designs with a vivid color palette. "The land equals bondage, so when Huck is on land, the colors are bland -- but not boring. Since the water equals freedom, the lighting for the river scenes is vibrant with saturated colors. It is really beautiful," she says.

Huck Finn features a good deal of mischievous fun, but doesn't shy away from the important social issues that have made the original book one of the most banned publications in American history.

"As a slave, Jim is, of course, in bondage. But Huck is in a kind of social bondage. He struggles with the issue of slavery. As he helps this slave run away, he knows in his heart he is doing the right thing, even though in his society, this is considered unacceptable. At the same time that he knows he is doing right, Huck feels bad for helping Jim," says Beasley.

Beasley and the cast of ***Huck Finn*** have also taken their role as a children's theater very seriously as they introduce the concept of slavery to a young audience.

"At first, we struggled with the idea of portraying slavery on stage," says Beasley. "It is a travesty that we don't celebrate. But as we develop a shared acceptance of history, we can also share acceptance of where we go from here."

"It is my hope that we give a great deal of dignity to the character of Jim," he adds.

Costumes designed by Erin Bragg add to the Civil War-era flair of ***Huck Finn***. The stage will be filled with big hoop skirts and fantastic wigs on the female characters, and period clothing and uniforms on the men. Bragg sees her designs as adding to the characters' personalities, with characters dressed in colors that reflect their inner motivations. "Jim's soul comes from the sky, so he is dressed in light blue," Bragg explains. "Huck comes from the earth, so he is dressed in earth tones."

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Due to its complex storyline, references to slavery and other social issues, and other story elements suited to a more mature audience, ***Huck Finn*** is recommended for families of children ages ten and up. The show is approximately 70 minutes long without an intermission.

Huck Finn runs February 24 through March 12, with performances on Fridays at 7 pm, Saturdays at 2 pm and 5 pm, and Sundays at 2 pm. The 2 pm show on Saturday, March 4 will be interpreted for people who are deaf or hard of hearing; this show will also include audio description services for audience members who are blind. The 5 pm show on Saturday, March 4 is designated as sensory-friendly, with special accommodations made for families attending with a child on the autism spectrum. Contact The Rose Box Office at (402) 345-4849 for more information.

Tickets for ***Huck Finn*** are \$20. Discount ticket vouchers are available at all area Hy-Vee stores. Members of The Rose receive four free tickets to the production.

Huck Finn is sponsored by Children's Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Kiewit Corporation, Humanities Nebraska, the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Special opening night activities are sponsored by Kiewit Companies.

About The Rose

The Rose Theater is one of the largest and most accomplished children's theaters in the nation, with a reputation for enriching the lives of children and families through top-quality professional productions and arts education. In 2016, *American Theatre* magazine named The Rose one of the 20 top children's theaters in the United States. The Rose is committed to making the arts accessible to all children, providing opportunities for thousands of children throughout the community to attend shows and participate in classes each year. Over the course of a year, approximately 70,000 people attend the public performances held at the theater, and nearly 30,000 students attend field trip shows annually. The theater strives to introduce young people to a mix of both traditional favorites and ground-breaking original productions. A number of plays and musicals have made their world premiere on The Rose stage, including *Pete the Cat: The Musical*, *Sherlock Holmes & the First Baker Street Irregular*, *Zen Ties*, *Buffalo Bill's Cowboy Band*, and *The Grocer's Goblin & The Little Mermaid*. We take pride knowing that The Rose is the place where children of all ages experience theater for the first time, and we are dedicated to helping them appreciate theater for a lifetime.

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