

For Immediate Release

DATE: January 2018

CONTACT: Kori Radloff, korir@rosetheater.org, 402-502-4641

Rose Theater presents empowering and inspirational play with the world premiere of *The Meaning of Maggie*

Production gives new perspective to life with multiple sclerosis

(OMAHA, Nebr.) It's been a banner year for Maggie Mayfield in The Rose Theater's production of *The Meaning of Maggie*, being performed January 26 - February 11 on The Rose mainstage. Not only has the 11-year-old been Student of the Month, an official shareholder of Coca-Cola stock and the defending Science Fair champion, this is also the year that she learns why her cool-dude dad is in a wheelchair.

Based on the semi-autobiographical book by Megan Jean Sovern, *The Meaning of Maggie* is a story about growing up and staying positive amid insurmountable odds. The show opens on Maggie Mayfield's eleventh birthday. To her surprise, big changes are a-foot: her mom is starting a new job and her dad will be staying at home, due to issues with his health. Maggie (played by Mallory Vallier) takes it all in stride, although she wonders and worries about her dad (played by Ken Palmer).

"Maggie doesn't give up," said Sovern in a recent interview. "She goes to the edge of every earth to find what she is looking for. She is emotionally tough and filled to the brim with so many feelings."

Maggie is especially frustrated when no one in the family will explain what is going on or why their lives are suddenly changing. When she discovers that her father has multiple sclerosis, Maggie naively resolves to fix her father's legs and arms that are continually falling asleep. Eventually, she comes to terms with the understanding that the problem is not going to go away and that she and her family will face the disease together with bravery.

= MORE =

The Rose Theater
2001 Farnam Street
Omaha, NE 68102

t (402) 345-4849
f (402) 344-7255
www.rosetheater.org



***The Meaning of Maggie* has world premiere at**

The Rose Theater

Page 2 of 4

Contact: Kori Radloff, 402-502-4641

“This is a story about a child who has a problem that is actually unsolvable. Unlike many of the stories we present on The Rose stage, the world does not change for this protagonist. Maggie has to actually reorient herself to that insolvability, and by virtue of doing that, she finds a new way of being a part of the world and her family,” says Rose artistic director Matthew Gutschick, who also serves as director for the production.

While the story deals with a very serious topic, it still manages to find fun and humor in its every day moments. Maggie and her father joke about her passion for academics and his love of Neil Young. Maggie falls head-over-heels for Clyde, a boy in her class (played by Kyle Summers). She has frequent sibling squabbles with her sisters (played by Hayley Greenstreet and Kendra Gliem). Even in mundane caretaking chores, Maggie’s dad and mom (played by Kim Clark-Kaczmarek) steal a special moment or two.

“In my own life, almost every sad and scary moment was punctuated by humor and grace, and that credit is owed entirely to my parents, who never let us forget to be funny. So it felt really honest to tell Maggie’s story the same way,” says Sovern.

Playwright Victoria Stewart has adapted the novel for the stage. “Every book is personal to the author, but in this particular case, we were adapting a person’s life story,” says Gutschick. “We needed a playwright who would be able to translate this really unique, precocious voice to the stage. This story is told with a light touch and a deep humanity, and Victoria brought a deep sensitivity to the story being told.”

“The character of Maggie has this really unique, quirky voice that I wanted to embrace and capture,” says Stewart. “I felt like these characters were really authentic. Maggie has tussles with her sisters, she acts out and doesn’t talk to her parents for a week -- it’s just a really great depiction of a family. It has been interesting to adapt something that was so autobiographical to the author. It made it a lot richer to spend time with these characters who are based on real life people. It is just a really rich story.”

Gutschick has created a stage show that not only shares a true life experience of one family’s journey with MS, but also highlights the artistry of individuals living with multiple sclerosis. Ken Palmer, who plays Maggie’s wheelchair-bound father, is an actor who is living with multiple sclerosis and has offered his own insights from his own experience to the cast and crew.

= MORE =

***The Meaning of Maggie* has world premiere at**

The Rose Theater

Page 3 of 4

Contact: Kori Radloff, 402-502-4641

A relatively simple set design by Bridgette Dreher draws focus to giant panels of vibrant, almost psychedelic, art. These images are replicas of artwork created by Elizabeth Jameson, an artist living with MS who transforms her own brain scans and MRIs into visual art that look like people dancing, pulsing hearts and more. These images have been enlarged for The Rose stage by scenic charge artist Lauren Crabtree. Crabtree explains that each painting requires multiple layers of diluted paint on a semi-transparent fabric to achieve the rich, vibrant colors. She worked alongside lighting designer Craig S. Moxon so that the paintings almost glow as they are lit on stage.

The play takes place during the 1980s, both because that was the time when Sovern was the age of the title character, but also because less was known about MS and its treatment during that time. “The unknowns that the family are dealing with in the story are very different than they would be today. They can’t just go to Google and get the answers to their questions,” says Gutschick.

“I think everyone who sees ***The Meaning of Maggie*** will see something they recognize from their own lives,” says Gutschick. “It’s about the fundamental human truth. It’s not a situation that any of these people would have chosen for themselves, but they are richer because of these experiences. It is my hope that people who are living with this set of circumstances are able to see themselves on stage, but also, that all of us who grew up in families that we think of as kind of quirky are able to see ourselves through a gentle lens.”

The Meaning of Maggie runs January 26 through February 11, 2018, with performances on Fridays at 7 pm, Saturdays at 2 pm and 5 pm, and Sundays at 2 pm. The 2 pm show of ***The Meaning of Maggie*** on Saturday, February 3 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, February 3 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 ***The Meaning of Maggie*** are \$20. Discount ticket vouchers are available for \$16 at area Hy-Vee stores. Members of The Rose receive four free tickets to the production.

The Meaning of Maggie is sponsored by Children’s Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Oliver & Ferrol Barklage Foundation, Baird Holm, the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Special opening night activities are sponsored by Kiewit Companies.

= MORE =

The Meaning of Maggie has world premiere at

The Rose Theater

Page 4 of 4

Contact: Kori Radloff, 402-502-4641

About Victoria Stewart

Victoria Stewart graduated from the University of Iowa Playwrights' Workshop. Her plays include *Rich Girl* (co-produced by George Street Playhouse and Cleveland Playhouse), *Hardball* (Live Girls! Theater, SPF), *800 Words: The Transmigration of Philip K. Dick* (Caravan Theatre, Workhaus Collective, Live Girls! Theater), *Live Girls* (Urban Stages, WHAT, Stage Left), *Mercy Watson To The Rescue* (Children's Theatre Company, to be produced by Marin Theater Company in 2014), *The Last Scene* and an adaptation of Henry James' *The Bostonians*. She also collaborated on *Fissures (lost and found)* produced at the 2010 Humana Festival. Recently, she wrote a screenplay for HBO and co-created *Clandestino* about the INS raid in Postville, IA. She has received the Francesca Primus Award, a McKnight Advancement Grant, the Helen Merrill Award, and the Jerome Fellowship. She is a satellite member of the Workhaus Collective and a member of WGA West.

About Elizabeth Jameson

Elizabeth Jameson is an artist who specializes in the intersection of art and science. She transforms her brain scans into provocative images that challenge how society views the brain, disability and illness. Since her diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis, she has continually undergone brain scans to track the progression of her disease. She began using art to reinterpret these images. Her work invites people to discuss what it means to live in an imperfect body, and to stare directly at the beauty and complexity of the imperfect brain with curiosity. As her disease has progressed, Jameson's practice has evolved. She now uses storytelling, technology, and design to focus on expanding the narrative of illness. She is currently working on a project aimed to transform the untapped potential of time spent in waiting rooms of clinics. She is an ePatient scholar and advisor for Stanford Medicine X, and publishes articles about patient-centered healthcare, design, and the arts on her blog, Mind on Fire.

About Multiple Sclerosis

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system that disrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body. The cause of MS is still unknown – scientists believe the disease is triggered by an as-yet-unidentified environmental factor in a person who is genetically predisposed to respond. The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted. Most people with MS are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50, with at least two to three times more women than men being diagnosed with the disease.

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.

###