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The Rose Theater monkeys around with *Curious George & the Golden Meatball*

(OMAHA, Nebr.) Curious George, the inquisitive, lovable monkey-star of books, movies and award-winning PBS television show jumps, flips, skips and turns onto The Rose stage in a musical adventure the entire family will enjoy. ***Curious George & the Golden Meatball*** features many familiar faces from the beloved book series by H.A. Rey as George learns about meatballs and the “secret ingredient” to cooking. This loveable adventure for young audiences is sure to leave them singing and swinging in their seats.

“In ***Curious George & the Golden Meatball***, George’s curiosity -- and his big-hearted desire to help his friend -- takes him on a whirlwind, worldwide adventure from New York City to Europe,” says Rose artistic director Matthew Gutschick.

Audiences will quickly learn that in the world of Curious George, “all-you-can-eat meatball day” comes around just once a year. For an inquisitive, lovable, little monkey like George, the day ranks right up there with his birthday. George loves helping his friend, Chef Pisghetti, cook up delicious meatballs and serving them to a hungry crowd. On this meatball day however, something’s different. There are no crowds, and Chef is devastated.

“What draws me to the story is that George and his friends are some of the most selfless people and characters you will see,” says director Stephanie Jacobson. “They are always doing something to help their friend succeed, they are always doing something to make other people feel better.”

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George is determined to find a way to help his friend. They soon learn the reason the crowds are staying away; they are mesmerized by Phinneas T. Lightspeed and his “Meatballs O’matic” machine.

“To be clear, there really isn’t an antagonist in the show,” says Jacobson. “It’s really more of a situation where Chef is feeling hopeless. And George comes up with a wonderful idea that he can win the contest with Chef’s meatballs and reinvigorate his desire to cook again, because that’s what makes him happy. It brings up the idea of what does it mean when we cook for people, what does that mean, how does it show love. It is just such a beautiful thought.”

With Chef Pisghetti vowing never to cook again, George takes it upon himself to find a solution to the problem. Determined to motivate his friend, George enters the Chef’s scrumptious meatballs in the world-famous Golden Meatball contest.

“Curious George is trying to help Chef win an annual contest for the best meatballs. So he goes on this wild journey that takes him to Rome to win the Golden Meatball,” says Gutschick.

The seven-member ensemble features the talents of Anna Jordan (George), J. Isaiah Smith (Man in The Yellow Hat), Aaron Mann (Chef Pisghetti, Doctor, Delivery #3), Al Kroeten (Phinneas T. Lightspeed, Painter #4, Delivery #4, Cook), Jessica Logue (Netti, Painter #5, Delivery #5), Kim Clark-Kaczmarek (Chef O’Malley/Cook/Delivery #6/Nurse), and Michael Miller (Doorman/Cook/American Tourist/Frankie Sidecar).

What can I say, this cast loves to monkey around! It’s an incredibly talented group of folks,” says music director Jerry Brabec.

Choreographer Sue Booton notes that Jordan has a particular challenge in her role as the title character, because Curious George does not speak. “One of the cool things to me is that Curious George doesn’t talk. But yet, he can create a plan and achieve a goal and finish the line. They are just getting to it in their own way. That’s what make Curious George so awesome -- he can make all these things happen without saying a line,” she says.

“We are delighted to have such a talented creative team and cast to bring Curious George to the stage,” says Gutschick.

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Scenic designer Nevena Prodanovic has envisioned a hand-drawn world that hints at life in New York City and Rome. Bright colors and textures that appear almost like crayon drawings pop vibrantly from the stage, lit strategically in a design by Matthew Benes. Costumes designed by Erin Bragg complement the design and help bring the characters to life in a bold way. Cartoonish sound elements designed by Christy Hernandez help accentuate the show's comedy. Together, the design works to enliven the world of Curious George.

"Everyone is so used to the cartoon and the movie, and people are expecting to come in and see exactly that cartoon, but we are leaning really heavily into the illustrative quality of that. It will absolutely have the heart of the original stories, the TV show and the movies, but it will be its own show," says Jacobson.

In the end, like all Curious George stories, a peaceful resolution is achieved amid a lot of monkeying around, and a lesson is learned. As Gutschick says, "This is a story about sacrifice, bumbling things and putting things back together again, and definitely a story about being curious about the world."

Curious George & the Golden Meatball runs at The Rose April 20 - May 6, 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 ***Curious George*** on Saturday, April 28 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, April 29 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 ***Curious George & the Golden Meatball*** 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.

Curious George & the Golden Meatball is sponsored by Children's Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Runza, the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Special opening night activities are sponsored by Kiewit Companies.

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