

For Immediate Release

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World premiere of Jewish musical at The Rose

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(OMAHA, Nebr.) ***The Doll Maker's Gift***, a new Jewish musical, premieres at The Rose Theater, February 22 - March 10. This is the story of how our play grew from an idea to a production.

Roughly eight years ago, I was sitting in Shani Katzman's inspirational Torah class. She handed me a children's book, ***The Doll Maker's Gift***. "Read this aloud to the class," she said. "It's so full of Jewish values." She added, "I could always imagine this onstage with music."

I handed the book to then JCC Resident Director Fran Sillau who infused the project with vision and dogged determination. Fran traced the author, Sashi Fridman, to her home in St. Petersburg, Russia, and established a relationship. I contacted my theatrical attorney in New York, and she helped us obtain the book's underlying rights from Kehot, Chabad's publishing arm.

The Doll Maker's Gift is a pogrom survival story. To flee the encroaching pogroms, Papa goes to America and sends boat fare back to Mama and his two daughters, Rosa and Nora. But fares have increased, and there's money for only two passages. Zalushka the doll maker, who has always wanted children, comes forward to take care of Nora, so Mama and Rosa can go to America and send for Nora later. (Surprise ending, but no spoilers here.)

The Doll Maker's Gift will play to over 5000 area fifth and sixth graders, all of who will study a curriculum on its historical context. What was a shtetl? What is the result of hatred? Why do the Jewish people perform mitvahs, demonstrating kindness even under duress? What about America made it a beacon of hope for millions of immigrants?

= MORE =

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***The Doll Maker's Gift* at**

The Rose Theater

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The Doll Maker's Gift came to life. My partner in New York had access to Maury Yeston, one of the great living Broadway composers (*Titanic, Nine*). He led us to a protege, Brian Feinstein, who brought in the rest of our Jewish teammates: EllaRose Chary (co-bookwriter with Fran Sillau) and Sammy Buck (lyrics).

Not so fast! Agents. These established artists are represented by three separate agents in New York City. I have experience producing Broadway shows...that already exist. There are industry norms for producing new works, but I didn't know them. My theatrical attorney, Nan Bases, is one of the finest Broadway attorneys in existence...but I use her time sparingly as she often cheerfully lends a hand pro bono.

Step back. We raised angel funds from our Executive Producers Howard Kooper and Larry Kelberg. I spent almost one year interviewing other producers to learn about what legal agreements are necessary and how to negotiate deal points. I worked with the agents to negotiate a deal among the five of us. The writers automatically "own" a new work. For me to "vest" ownership in the musical, I needed to put on a production of at least 12 performances within two years of the script delivery date.

The artists took a year to write, coordinating schedules, calls and meetings. It's a creative process to put meat onto the bones of a storybook. We can read the book in ten minutes...what is the stuff that makes a 75-minute musical? How can the story retrain its teachable values? What dramatic conflict will keep the story compelling from beginning to end?

Enter The Rose Theater under Artistic Director Matthew Gutschick. In the summer of 2017, The Rose contributed space and staff to conduct a staged reading. The play is rehearsed professionally, but the actors read from scripts, with no physical elements like sets or costumes. Our New York-based artists came to Omaha to see this early "performance." Since Matt liked what he saw (and since he is the rare leader willing to take a risk on new work), he offered us a mainstage production, on-subscription in the 2018-19 season. Because of the generosity of the Jewish and arts community, our seats will be full of school children. We are also working on a cast recording...the best tool to help other theaters produce ***The Doll Maker's Gift*** nationwide. We are now cast, in rehearsal, and eagerly awaiting opening night, the fruition of many years' work. Next week, we will hear from our Jewish, New York-based artists. Not surprisingly, they have fallen in love with our city and our community.

I'll close with my best producorial line: tickets are available by calling The Rose Theater Box Office at 402-345-4849 or going to www.rosetheater.org/shows/dollmaker.

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