

## For Immediate Release

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### ***Disney's Descendants* makes magic as The Rose Theater opens 2021-22 season**

(OMAHA, Nebr.) A popular Disney Channel movie franchise promises audiences a magical journey to fairytale lands when ***Disney's Descendants*** comes to life on The Rose Theater's stage in their 2021-22 season opener. The show opens Friday, September 10 and runs through October 10, 2021 at Omaha's Rose Theater.

The Rose is among the first theaters nationwide to present the stage version of this popular, Emmy®-nominated Disney Channel Original Movie musical.

Guest director Katherine M. Carter returns to The Rose after directing this summer's original concert, *Misunderstood: Heroes & Villains*. She is excited about the opportunity to create the stage version of this popular Disney hit. "On the stage, the first thing I did as a director, out of college, was create a company that was dedicated to adaptation to the stage," she says. "I think it is one of my favorite ways to look at stories that we know, through a new medium, because when we change mediums, new things are revealed."

The stage adaptation combines elements of the first two ***Descendants*** movies, melding together plot lines and musical hits to create a spectacular live experience that is certain to have families dancing in the aisles.

"I was taken by the fact that the stage adaptation isn't actually just the first movie. It's has a little bit of all of them, especially the songs," Carter explains. "There are songs there from the second movie, even though it follows most closely to ***Descendants*** first movie storyline."

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“When you come to see **Descendants**, you’re actually seeing a story that is reminiscent of the first movie, but isn’t word-for-word. It actually includes a large part of the plot of the second movie -- and songs from the second movie,” she continues. “This adaptation spans the **Descendants** canon; it is not the one story.”

**Disney's Descendants** follows the teenage children of Disney villains Maleficent (of *Sleeping Beauty* fame), *Snow White*’s Evil Queen Grimhilde, Cruella De Vil (from *101 Dalmations*), and *Aladdin*’s Jafar as they attend high school alongside the children of Disney heroes. The villains are banished to The Isle of the Lost (about as far from a Fairy Tale as you can get), as a result of a spell by the Fairy Godmother. These “Villains’ Kids” — Mal, Evie, Jay and Carlos—have learned to survive on the challenging streets of the island using their quick wits and more than a touch of deviousness. Meanwhile, in the nearby shimmering kingdom of Auradon, the children of the most regal of royals from famous fairy tales enjoy a life of privilege and prestige.

When Ben, the son of Belle and her Beast (and soon-to-be heir to the Auradon throne) optimistically decides to open the barrier and invite exchange to students to join Auradon Prep School, the fairytale folks’ core beliefs challenged: are people born “Rotten to the Core,” or is it possible to leave your history and heritage behind?

Audiences can expect a certain level of young love that is typical of Disney romance, but **Descendants** focuses much more on the ideals of friendship and camaraderie. “Yes, there’s like the adorable romantic things. And, yes, we have our high school crushes and our hearts are broken. All that stuff is there and it’s great,” says Carter. “But what’s more prevalent in **Descendants** is this intensity of ‘friend love,’ and this idea of being there for your friend, and loyalty and camaraderie, and lifting one another up.”

At the height of the show, both the “VKs” and the traditional heroes are faced with some important conundrums: are their destinies determined by their parents’ paths, or is it possible for them to strike out on a new life journey? Can a young person stand up to the world and declare that the status quo is wrong? Can the world really be changed? And can two opposing sides work together to make that change?

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“At the heart of it **Descendants** starts because a young person decides to question his parent’s choice and says, ‘Why are we separated from these people? This is wrong, I’m going to change it,’” says Carter. “How incredible it is to hear this story from a group of young people growing up and investigating their world. And, in **Descendants**, it just so happens to be a Disney World. I am thrilled to be able to have these very real, very prevalent, and very current issues of questioning and stepping away from what the last generation did to blaze your own trail -- as seen through the incredibly colorful, vivid, out-of-this-world lens of Disney.”

Carter walked a careful line between being faithful to the portrayals from the movie that fans are accustomed to, balanced with a new, creative perspective on the **Descendants** story. Drawing inspiration from notes by the playwrights found in the script, which reads, “Though the portrayals of these characters are beloved and iconic, do not feel locked into those casting choices as you cast your production. Auradon and the Isle of the Lost are diverse communities with inhabitants of all races, ages, abilities, body types, and gender identities.”

To this end, Carter has incorporated gender-inclusive casting processes. “My approach is to find a group of human beings to storytell. I want to find the best group of humans I can get together to tell the story. When I’m casting, I cast actors whose take on the role I’m excited about. I’m looking for confidence. I’m looking for the person I want to play ‘make believe’ with in a room. I don’t bring an actor to role; I bring a role to an actor,” she says. “I think what is interesting for **Descendants** specifically is there are two female-presenting young people playing traditionally male-presenting roles and using he/him pronouns. At The Rose Theater, we cast the most talented individuals for these roles, and this time, they happen to be these four individuals who aren’t two boys and two girls.”

“Adaptations allow us another lens into the story, another way of experiencing this journey with the characters. And that is what this cast is going to do. They’re going to take us on their Descendants journey and how they each identify with these characters,” says Carter.

The world of Auradon and the Isle of the Lost comes manifests on stage through the talents of guest scenic designer Bridgette Dennett, who has designed a larger-than-life castle on The Rose stage. Hidden panels, rooms and cubbies throughout the set allow for seamless transitions to the many recurring locations, including the hallways and classrooms of Auradon Prep, the Tourney field, dorm rooms and more. Lighting by Matt Benes creates a magical aura in each of these spaces as the story progresses. Costume designer Sherri Geerdes has created a wardrobe that references the traditional fairytale characters, juxtaposed with a healthy dose of 80s punk band.

“The clothes are insane in the best way,” says Carter. “They’re stunning.”

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Musical director Jerry Brabec leads the ***Descendants*** cast with a pre-recorded musical track that Carter calls “out of this world.” The music has a pop/techno sound that was created by more than 35 artists, including Johan Alkenas, Adam Anders, Aristeidis Archontis, Antonina Armato, Howard Ashman, Peer Astrom, Stephen Mark Conley, Doug Davis, Charity Daw, Andrew C. Dodd, Josh Edmondson, Pipo Fernandez, Nikki Hassman, Samuel Hollander, Ben Hostetler, Tim James, Hanna Jones, Jack Kugell, Craig Lashley, Andrew Lippa, Jeannie Lurie, Alan Menken, Grant Phillip Michaels, Anthony Mirabella, Shayna Mordue, Chen Neeman, Susan Paroff, Shelly M. Peiken, Joacim Persson, James K. Petrie, Adam Schlesinger, Adam Schmalholz, Tyler Shamy, Jodie Shihadeh, Nikki Ann Sorrentino, Thomas Armato Sturges, Ali Dee Theodore, Matthew Wong, and David Zippel.

The fun plot, active choreography (by Rose favorite Sue Gillespie Booton), catchy music and villainous performances, combined with a healthy dose of theater magic and special effects, promise a fun outing for Omaha-area families.

As the playwrights note in the ***Descendants*** script, “At its core, *Descendants* is a musical about empathy, tolerance and acceptance. We hope this show can be a reminder that no matter where we come from, we are better together.”

#### **INFO ABOUT COVID PRECAUTIONS**

Originally scheduled for June 2021, The Rose moved ***Descendants*** to Fall 2021 due to COVID concerns. “***Descendants*** is definitely going to be a big musical, and it is a show that we have been excited about for a long time,” says Rose Artistic Director Matthew Gutschick. “We hope that this show functions as a major celebration for our community.”

Masks are required for all audience members, visitors and Rose staff, regardless of vaccination status, for the safety of young audience members and others who are not yet eligible for the vaccine. The theater is thoroughly cleaned before and after performances. The ventilation system at The Rose has been completely updated to greatly improve indoor air quality. Audience members are asked to self-screen for a fever and symptoms of illness prior to arriving at The Rose. Those with fever or other symptoms may exchange their ticket at no cost.

#### **TICKET INFORMATION**

***Disney's Descendants*** will weave its magic at The Rose, September 10 to October 10, with performances on Fridays at 7 pm, Saturdays at 2 pm, and Sundays at 2 pm. The 2 pm show of ***Descendants*** on Saturday, September 25 will be ASL-interpreted for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Contact The Rose Box Office at (402) 345-4849 for more information.

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Tickets for **Disney's Descendants** are \$27 for main floor and \$22 for balcony. Members of The Rose receive discounted tickets to the production. Ticket supply is limited, and those interested in seeing the show are encouraged to contact The Rose Box Office as soon as possible for best seating.

**Descendants** is sponsored by Children's Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Mutual of Omaha, the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

On opening night, audience members are encouraged to wear **Descendants** costumes and walk the red carpet in front of The Rose and pose for "paparazzi." Opening night activities are sponsored by Kiewit Companies Foundation.

For more information, visit [www.rosetheater.org](http://www.rosetheater.org) or call The Rose Box Office at (402) 345-4849.

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#### **About the Creators**



##### **NICK BLAEMIRE** (Book, Additional Lyrics)

Nick Blaemire is a writer and performer based in Brooklyn. At 23 years old, Nick wrote the score to the musical *Glory Days* (book by James Gardiner, OBCR on Ghostlight Records). Since its historic one night engagement on Broadway, it has had over 40 productions all over the world. He has also written book, music and lyrics for four original musicals: *A Little More Alive* (commissioned by Broadway Across America, produced at Williamstown Theatre Festival, Kansas City Rep and Barrington Stage, optioned as a feature film); *Soon* (premiered at Signature Theatre, won the Stephen Sondheim Young Artist Citation); *Fallout* (with Kyle Jarrow, in development); and *Space Dogs* (with Van Hughes and Tina Landau, in development). Other writing projects include the film adaptation of the novel *This Song Will Save Your Life* and a romantic comedy for Universal Pictures. Nick has released two pop EPs, both available on iTunes and Spotify. As an actor, he recently completed the National Tour of *Falsettos* as Mendel and was nominated for a Drama Desk Award for his performance as Jonathan in the Off-Broadway Revival of *Tick, Tick...Boom!*. He is repped by CAA and Authentic. @nickblaemire



##### **MADELINE SMITH** (Music Adaptation, Vocal and Incidental Arrangements)

Broadway: *Waitress* (Piano/Conductor sub), *War Paint* (Key 1 sub). Off-Broadway: *Rags Parkland Sings the Songs of the Future* (Ars Nova), *Skin of Our Teeth* (Theatre for a New Audience), *Futurity* (Soho Rep/Ars Nova), *1001 Nights* (Atlantic Theater Company), *The Light Princess* (New Victory Theater), *An Octoroon* (Theatre for a New Audience). Regional, etc.: *We Live In Cairo* (ART), *Loch Ness* (FLMTF), *Ragtime on Ellis Island*. Adaptations: *Frozen JR.* and *Frozen KIDS* (Disney); B.A. from Harvard University.



**MATTHEW TISHLER** (Music & Orchestrations) Matthew Tishler is a 20x multi-platinum songwriter and music producer, with a specialty in family entertainment for film and television. Over the past 8 years, his songs have been featured in hit TV shows, movies and on dozens of #1 albums around the world.

Matthew has written and/or produced hundreds of songs for Disney, Nickelodeon, and Dreamworks, including music for television series *Shake It Up*, *Austin & Ally*, *Live & Maddie*, *A.N.T. Farm*, and *The Lodge*; as well as the theme song and several original songs for the comedy series *Bizaardvark*.

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He co-wrote and produced theme song "Take On The World" for *Girl Meets World*, the highly anticipated and enormously successful spinoff of 90's favorite *Boy Meets World*.

Matthew is writing and producing the original songs for Disney Junior's *Fancy Nancy*, an animated musical series based on the best-selling books of the same name. As well, Matthew is writing and producing the original music for Disney Junior's upcoming *Mira, Royal Detective*.

Additionally, Matthew's music is featured in successful Disney Channel Original Movies, including *Teen Beach 2*, *Lemonade Mouth*, *Radio Rebel*, and multiple songs performed by Ashley Tisdale in *High School Musical* spin-off, *Sharpay's Fabulous Adventure*. He also produced two songs written by Tom Kitt & Brian Yorkey for the DCOM adaptation of Disney Theatrical's stage musical *Freaky Friday*; and has an original song featured in 2019's *Descendants 3* film.

Matthew's songs have been recorded by numerous teen stars, including Dove Cameron, Ross Lynch, Laura Marano, China Anne McClain, Zendaya, Bella Thorne, Olivia Holt, Jordan Fisher, Sofia Carson, Sabrina Carpenter, Rowan Blanchard, and JoJo Siwa.

His international songwriting placements are ubiquitous. In Asia, Matthew has worked with a who's-who group of A-list artists, including BTS, Namie Amuro, Kumi Koda, EXILE Atsushi, Tohoshinki, Happiness, Crystal Kay, EXO, Taeyeon, AOA, Taemin, Seohyun, Red Velvet, TVXQ, SHINee, BoA, Joey Yung, LuHan, Stray Kids, and TWICE.

Standout pop music moments include: "Finally", the title track of J-Pop queen Namie Amuro's final album, which sold 1.1 million units in 6 days (2.6 million to date) – breaking a 13-year sales record in Japan and certification as the top-selling album in Japan for 2017 and 2018; EXILE Atsushi's single "Itsuka Kitto," which debuted at #1, enjoying sales of over 1 million units and certification as that year's #5 biggest-selling album in Japan; "Dimple", released by world-famous K-Pop boyband BTS – selling over 1.5 million copies worldwide; and LuHan's "Reloaded" EP, containing 5 of Matthew's songs, which sold 4.5 million digital downloads.

Born and raised in Toronto, Canada, Matthew now lives in Los Angeles with his wife and 2 dogs.

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### **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 *Van Gogh & Me*, *The Meaning of Maggie*, *Pete the Cat: The Musical*, *Sherlock Holmes & the First Baker Street Irregular*, *Zen Ties*, *Leo Lionni's Frederick*, *A Palette of Possibility*, *Thumbelina*, *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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**Please note: High resolution photos are available at  
<https://www.rosetheater.org/connect/media/#showphotos>**