

For Immediate Release

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

***Havana Hop* combines a hip hop beat with lessons for life**

Audiences encouraged to dance in the aisles at latest Rose Theater production

(OMAHA, Nebr.) Audiences will be dancing in the aisles at The Rose Theater's upcoming production of ***Havana Hop***, while also learning important lessons about self-confidence and perseverance against a background of multi-cultural heritage. This interactive play performed by a single actor will rock the mainstage at The Rose February 10-19, 2023, helping families learn a little about Cuban-American culture, with a hip-hop beat.

"Havana Hop this is a mix of salsa, music and hip hop all run through the lens of the story of a young girl who is trying to find her unique way of being in the world," explains Rose Artistic Director Matt Gutschick.

Writer and performer Paige Hernandez brings the story of young Yeila to life onstage in a dynamic participation play, where one actress creates three generations of family members on a discovery of her multi-cultural heritage.

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The Rose Theater
2001 Farnam Street
Omaha, NE 68102

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



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“This a beautiful, uplifting tale,” says Gutschick. “There’s a really, really fun energy to the piece.”

In ***Havana Hop***, Yeila dreams of being a superstar, but her lack of confidence gives her awful stage fright. With advice from her mother and mentors, she begins a journey to find her roots, get confidence and be amazing. Throughout the show, audience members are encouraged to move along with Hernandez as she shares Yeila’s journey of cultural discovery through music.

Hernandez tells audiences, “In ***Havana Hop***, we learn a little bit about culture, confidence and cool moves, so make sure you bring your dancing shoes!”

The show is just one way that families can use theater and the arts to introduce children to cultures other than their own, teaching them important skills such as empathy, respect for others and believing in yourself.

Hernandez is an actor, dancer, choreographer, playwright and self-described “B-girl” who fuses theater and hip-hop for packed houses. Her inspiration as a writer and performer comes from her own background. The show, ***Havana Hop***, tells a story of a young girl’s passion and fuses it with culture and family history. Using props, music, dance and costumes, Hernandez transforms into different characters throughout the story. By the end of the performance, young people learn that the differences that divide us can only make us more well-rounded if we accept them.

“Everyone deserves to see, hear, and experience their story on stage as part of the American Theatre canon,” says Hernandez.

Havana Hop invites audiences to dance along as the story of self-discovery unfolds. The show draws on hip hop culture to tell a story that is relatable to young audiences.

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“You can have theatre pieces with anyone in the audience, ages 6 to 60. The work is sophisticated. It has education at its base. And it’s based in more of the old school roots of hip hop: peace, love, unity and having fun,” says Hernandez.

This style of theater – known as hip hop theater – incorporates a fun and innovative approach as a way of empowering young people through the tenets of the craft: DJ’ing, breakdancing, emceeing, beatboxing and rap and the cultures of African, African American, Caribbean and Latino immigrant communities in the United States.

“The arts can be transformational in helping young people gain empathy and understanding for others in their community,” says Gutschick. “Hip hop theater allows kids to think about important societal issues in a fun, engaging way.”

Hernandez says her favorite works of theater support people of color in a positive and unprecedented manner. “I’d love to see more of my experience as an American on the stage: a gumbo of ingredients, people of all backgrounds, music and visuals of many cultures, complicated and hopeful stories, and an oh-so-fly execution,” she says.

Hernandez is a multidisciplinary artist who is critically acclaimed as a performer, director, choreographer and playwright. Paige is also known for her effective fusion of theater, hip-hop, dance and education. She has performed on many stages throughout the country including The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and The Lincoln Center in New York City. As a master teaching artist, Paige has taught more than 10,000 students throughout the country, from Pre-K through college. *The Huffington Post* named Paige a “classroom hero” because of her outstanding arts integration and work with STEM initiatives. Paige was recently named a “Top Theatre Worker You Should Know” by *American Theatre Magazine* and a “Rising Leader of Color” by Theatre Communications Group.

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“We are thrilled to bring Paige to Omaha audiences to share this important work of theater,” says Gutschick. “It is The Rose’s mission to help young people discover their voice, and the message of ***Havana Hop*** is a truly inspiring way to address ideas of self-confidence and culture.”

Havana Hop is just the first Rose production for Hernandez; she has been co-commissioned by The Rose and three other theaters to create a theater piece based on Maya Angelou’s poem, *Life Doesn’t Frighten Me*, which will be produced by The Rose in the 2023-24 season. Hernandez will work directly with children in the Omaha community to generate the content of the play, using the poem and the illustrations by Jean-Michel Basquiat as inspiration and source material.

“Paige will be directing our upcoming production of Maya Angelou’s *Life Doesn’t Frighten Me*, and we will get a lot of time with her in the fall, which is really really exciting,” says Gutschick. “We are thrilled that she was willing to share ***Havana Hop*** with us this season and that we get to share that with our audiences and introduce her work – and the concepts of hip hop theater – to our community.”

“To say that this project feels like a perfect fit is an understatement! I have been a lifelong fan of Maya Angelou, Jean-Michel Basquiat and specifically of Angelou’s poem, *Life Doesn’t Frighten Me*. I have taught this poem for many years and look forward to putting my mindful hip hop aesthetic into a devised children’s theatre piece,” says Hernandez.

Havana Hop will be presented Feb. 10 - 19, 2023, with performances Fridays at 7 pm, Saturdays at 2 pm & 5 pm and Sundays at 2 pm. Interpretation for the Deaf and audio description services for the blind will be offered at the 2 pm show on Saturday, Feb. 18. A sensory-friendly performance will be offered on Saturday, Feb. 18 at 5 pm.

With its interactive format and participatory presentation, ***Havana Hop*** is appropriate for all ages, especially younger children. The show is expected to run approximately 60 minutes.

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Tickets for **Havana Hop** are available for \$25 by calling The Rose Box Office at (402) 345-4849 or online at www.rosetheater.org. Rose members receive four free tickets to the production. Discount ticket vouchers are available at area Hy-Vee stores.

Havana Hop is sponsored by Children's Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

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. It is The Rose's goal to inspire young people to discover the magic of theater, to find their voices and enrich their communities.

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