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A tale as old as time blossoms at The Rose

Disney's Beauty and the Beast comes to life at The Rose

(OMAHA, Nebr.) Omaha-area audiences are invited to step into the enchanted world of *Disney's Beauty and The Beast* when The Rose's summer musical hits the stage on June 2. Featuring all the iconic songs from the 1991 Academy Award-winning animated film, including "Be Our Guest," "Gaston," and "Beauty and the Beast," this stage adaptation is sure to delight audiences of all ages while evoking nostalgia for fans of the original animated feature.

Disney's Beauty and The Beast is a beloved musical that combines captivating storytelling with memorable songs by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman. The stage adaptation of the beloved Disney classic tells the story of Belle, an intelligent young woman who feels out of place in her provincial French village. Her life is forever changed when she trades places with her father and finds herself the captive of a fearsome Beast who was long ago trapped in this form by an enchantress and will remain so if all the petals fall off a magical rose. Through patience and understanding, Belle and the Beast form a tentative friendship that changes them both for the better. As fear and prejudice threaten their world, they must learn what it means to love and be loved and remember that beauty is found within.

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The cast of the show is composed of local actors and young performers from the community. Leading the cast as Belle is Biannah Peji-Palm, whose heartwarming performance communicates Belle's desire for connection and a more meaningful life. Peji-Palm was last seen in The Rose's production of *Cinderella* as Gabrielle and in *The Sound of Music* as Sister Margareta. She most recently performed with the Omaha Symphony for their Lunar New Year Celebration. Playing the role of Belle is a dream-come-true for Peji-Palm who shares, "Among my earliest memories was performing in front of the television to Disney's animated *Beauty and the Beast* in my home in the Philippines." Peji-Palm's early love of performing transformed into an international onstage career encompassing ballet, voice and organ. After graduating high school at age 16, Peji-Palm toured the United States, Europe and Japan as a part of a performing arts group. She now works as the manager of The Rose Studios for Youth Artists, sharing her skills and expertise with The Rose's students. "I am grateful every day to still be involved with the performing arts and to witness young artists and dreamers find their voice," she says.

Director Matt Gutschick recognizes Peji-Palm's talents. "These cast members are being led by Biannah, who is among the most prepared and generous leaders you could possibly ask for," he says. "Everybody who has been in the room watching her work recognizes that she is an outstanding role model for our young artists and she is going to do an exceptionally wonderful job in this role."

Alongside Peji-Palm, Jesse Wohlman plays the role of the Beast with a blend of anger, vulnerability, and eventually, tenderness. A singer, actor, music educator and songwriter based in Omaha, Wohlman was last seen in The Rose's production of *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*. He has enjoyed working with a variety of performing arts organizations throughout the area, including Opera Omaha, the Omaha Symphony, Nebraska Opera Project, the Steamboat Symphony Orchestra, BLUEBARN Theater, Vesper Concerts, the Lincoln Crossroads Musical Festival and Salt Creek Song Festival, among others.

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Rounding out the cast are a talented ensemble of actors, dancers and singers who will transport audiences to the magical world of ***Beauty and The Beast***. Zach Kloppenborg's creative costume designs bring the Beast's enchanted household objects to life, including Lumiere – a candelabra played by Joey Galda; Cogsworth – a clock played by Anthony Holmes; a teapot named Mrs. Potts played by Zhomontee Watson and her teacup son Chip, played by Martin Prieto; Babette the feather-duster, played by Carli Tomac; and Madame de la Grande Bouche – a wardrobe played by Emily Hill Geist, among others.

With choreography by Sue Gillespie Valker and Aubrey Fink, and musical direction by Jerry Brabec, The Rose Theater's production of ***Disney's Beauty and The Beast*** promises to be a magical experience for area families. The entire production team has worked tirelessly to bring the beloved story to life on stage, with a set design by Jeff Stander that will transport audiences to the charming French village where Belle lives and the enchanted castle where she falls in love with the Beast.

"This is a powerful and uplifting story, and our goal is to make this production truly hopeful and really distinctive," says Gutschick.

The Rose's production aims to emphasize the theme of redemption through the power of love. Belle's journey teaches us that true beauty lies beyond mere appearances. Gutschick promises a unique focus on the deeper themes of love and beauty, making this summer premium musical a must-see event.

"This is a story that is really about overcoming the forces that dehumanize us," he says. "Whether it is the Beast, who has been cursed for an action he did as a child; or Belle, who the villagers have proclaimed as 'odd;' or the castle residents, who have been swept up in the consequences of the Beast's behavior, all of these individuals have lost a piece of their humanity and are striving to get it back. And so, we want to honor those strong sets of consequences while showing the development of every character."

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With dazzling costumes, intricate sets, and unforgettable musical numbers, the production design of ***Beauty and The Beast*** at The Rose Theater is sure to transport audiences to the enchanted world of Belle and the Beast. From the cozy French village to the enchanted castle, every detail has been meticulously crafted to bring this beloved story to life.

The idea of the enchanted rose originally presented in the animated film is expanded in The Rose's production, weaving its way throughout the show's design. From a castle being slowly torn apart by creeping rose vines to the thorny appearance of the Beast, elements of roses are pervasive throughout the costumes, set and props. Of course, a centerpiece of the show will be the magical rose itself, a dazzling spectacle of light, projection and artistry.

Disney's Beauty and The Beast includes all the favorite songs and moments that audiences love from the Academy Award-winning animated feature such as "Be Our Guest," "Gaston," and "Beauty and the Beast." In addition to those beloved songs, the musical also features new numbers written specifically for the stage adaptation, including "Home" and "If I Can't Love Her."

The Rose's production of ***Beauty and The Beast*** will build on these musical moments by incorporating fun, interactive experiences where audience members can become a part of the action. Attendees will be given props as they enter the auditorium and will be instructed on how to use those items to participate in the onstage action and choreography. "We want the audience to feel embraced by the experience of this," says Gutschick.

In addition, young audience members are invited to come in costume. As with all Rose productions, actors will sign autographs following the show. There will also be a post-show photo opportunity with Belle and the Beast after each performance.

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Disney's Beauty and The Beast is a perfect outing for families of all ages. The two-and-a-half hour show (which includes an intermission), promises to be a magical experience for all. The show runs from June 2 - 25, 2023, with performances on Fridays at 7 pm, Saturdays at 2 pm, and Sundays at 2 pm. The theater recommends that guests arrive at least 30 minutes before the performance start time to allow for parking and seating. ASL interpretation for the Deaf and audio description services will be available at the 2 pm show on Saturday, June 17. Additionally, a sensory-friendly performance will be presented at the 2 pm show on Saturday, June 24; see The Rose website at www.rosetheater.org for information.

Tickets for ***Disney's Beauty and The Beast*** are priced at \$32 for the main floor and \$27 for the balcony. 2022-23 Rose members will receive discounted tickets. Discounted tickets are also available at all area Hy-Vee stores. Groups of 10 or more should contact The Rose Box Office for information on group rates.

Disney's Beauty and the Beast is sponsored by Children's Hospital and Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Mutal of Omaha, the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

For more information, cast bios and tickets, visit www.rosetheater.org.

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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