

NEWS RELEASE

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The Rose Theater takes a whimsical ride down a rock ‘n’ roll rollercoaster in *Wonderland*

Musical twist on the classic Lewis Carroll tale features an on-stage rock concert extravaganze

(OMAHA, Nebr.) The Rose embarks on a whimsical rollercoaster ride down a rock ‘n’ roll rabbit hole in its latest production, ***Wonderland: Alice’s Rock ‘n’ Roll Adventure***, playing March 23 through April 8, 2018, on the Rose mainstage.

Wonderland puts a unique twist on the classic Lewis Carroll story. Each character is given a unique musical signature that follows them throughout the play.

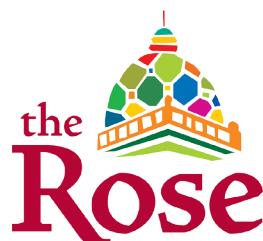
Representatives from The Rose first discovered the adaptation by Rachel Rockwell and Michael Mahler at a national children’s theater conference and knew instantly that they wanted to bring it to Omaha audiences. One of the attendees, Rose accessibility coordinator Fran Sillau explained, “Rachel Rockwell talked about how she really took great care but each instrument had a voice within the piece that was just an electricity in the room when it was performed.”

The ***Wonderland*** production team, led by guest director Justin Perez, hopes to transfer this same electric energy to The Rose mainstage. When audiences first arrive, they will instantly be struck by a giant mirror that encompasses almost the entire stage, a nod to the original source material, Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll. Imagined by scenic designer Adam Rowe and lit by lighting and sound designer Craig S. Moxon, the unique set allows for a parade of concert styles for many different musical genres.

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“Each one of these songs is stylistically different. So it’s not like you are just going to see one performer perform this one type of music. Each song is its own story within itself. So you will see a series of different lighting styles,” says Moxon. “I want each one to be different, to be its own individual concert, their own individual story. Something happens within each of these songs and it has an impact on Alice and the other characters. I want that to be reflected in that giant mirror – all these different viewpoints that are coming at her and how she is dealing with it.”

An added bonus to this production, **Wonderland** marks the first useage of The Rose’s upgraded lighting system. “The new sytem includes a lot of moving lights, LED instruments and digital technology. We now really do have the sort of thing you really would see in an arena somewhere. It is going to be visually stunning,” explains Moxon.

Rowe’s set design is unlike anything ever seen on stage at The Rose. The floor, as is customary at The Rose, is painted – this time to resemble a giant checkboard surrounded by a giant Cheshire Cat smile – but with the mirror, its design is reflected back to the audience. Almost every surface on the stage (including the floor and the props designed by Devon Denn-Young) is made to accept projections; projectionist Britney Merenda has been charged with filling the spaces with fantastic explosions of color, animation and rock ‘n’ roll designs. Merenda (whose work on past Rose productions includes *A Wrinkle in Time* and *The Grocer’s Goblin & the Little Mermaid*) brings her considerable expertise in projecting on unconventional surfaces to the production. Projections will not only be displayed on vertical surfaces, but through the use of a giant hanging projector, also on the floor itself and then reflected into the giant mirror so that they can be seen by the audience. In this way, the set pieces can become anything Perez and company want them to be, conveying any sort of feeling and vibe.

Rose Technical Director Greg Rishoi explains, “It is hard to fathom just how big the mirror actually is. It is 28 feet wide by 18 feet tall, and will be angled outward at the audience. It will feel very imposing but it’s going to be pretty awesome.” A drawbridge in the middle of the mirror can drop down for the cast to make entrances and close to conceal itself.

While the **Wonderland** script follows the traditional story of Alice in Wonderland closely, Rockwell and Mahler have added a rock ‘n’ roll twist. Alice takes on a pop musical theater sound. The Mad Hatter and White Rabbit have nods to the Beatles and Sgt. Pepper. The Caterpillar references Bollywood. The Queen of Hearts is a throwback to Joan Jett. Acid rock permeates the Cheshire Cat’s songs. Giant flowers dance to 80s-inspired music. It is the job of guest director Justin Perez (known to the cast simply as JP) to bring this rock concert to life on stage.

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“Through all this, Alice learns what her voice is and that is literally embodied in her music and her solos,” says Perez.

“JP directed *Big Nate* at The Rose several years ago, which had a rock concert on stage at the end,” says Rose Artistic Director Matthew Gutschick. “When we decided to do **Wonderland**, I knew he would do a great job with this production. I felt like this was a director who could not only be a ton of fun for our team to work with, but would also be able to speak to the vast imaginative possibilities of this production. These are skills that JP as a director really brings to the table.”

Adding to the rock concert feel is the very visible presence of the musicians. The set design features an orchestra pit that highlights, rather than obscures the live band. On stage actors at times enter the pit to sing or play music next to the band; at other times, band members may come and join the performers on stage.

“We have tried to blur the line between where the pit and the stage meet,” says Perez. “You will be able to see people in the pit while they are playing. There are times when characters might hop into the pit to play with the musicians there; other times, people might pop out of the pit and onto the stage. Our actors can walk around the pit, grab an instrument, play it, deposit it back when they are done. People will play all over the stage. It’s an idea of giving Alice this kind of rock-and-roll dream – that is sometimes a little nightmarish.”

One thing that struck everyone at The Rose was the way this particular script saw Alice take a journey, not just from one physical point to another, but also to grow as a person. As Perez explains, “So many adaptations of *Alice in Wonderland* are very static. Alice goes on this magical adventure; her goal is to get home, she does, and the story is over and back to life as it was.” Not so with **Wonderland**. As Perez continues, “In this version, Alice pinballs around these characters that are trying almost to win her over to their way of thinking, to their point of view of how the world works and what it means to be a fruitful adult. Alice starts the play saying, ‘I’m bored with my life. When will I grow up so I can live the life I see others living?’ As she crawls into the universe, our company of actors assemble. They take her down this little rabbit hole to show her what it might mean to grow up. What is beautiful is that we are given this prism of her musical sensibility through which characters that we know and love so much are kind of filtered through.”

Through her myriad adventures, **Wonderland** finds Alice discovering her true self. “At the end, she realizes that growing up is what she wants it to be, about finding my own voice, as opposed of trying to follow a path that others are creating for her,” says Perez.

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Although it is a classic story, Perez feels **Wonderland** is more relevant than ever to today's generation. "In the world that we live in now, one of the biggest problems is our youth's access to a bombardment of images and information, telling them how they should live and what they should look like. I feel that we have done our job if even one kid leaves the theater thinking, 'You know what, I'm going to march to the beat of my own drum and set my own course,'" he says.

At the end of the play, Alice finally sees her true self reflected in the mirror.

"For me, the mirror becomes a beautiful metaphor for Alice's journey," says Perez. "In the beginning of the story, she asks, 'When will I grow? When will my life have meaning and the excitement that I see everyone else's life having?' At the end of the play, she sees herself in the mirror for the first time and sees all her own potential, her own abilities, where she didn't before."

Wonderland runs at The Rose March 23 through April 8, 2018, with performances on Fridays at 7 pm, Saturdays at 2 pm and 7 pm, and Sundays at 10 am and 2 pm. (There will not be performances on Easter Sunday.) The 2 pm show of **Wonderland** on Saturday, March 31 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 7 pm show on Saturday, March 31 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 **Wonderland** 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.

Wonderland is sponsored by Children's Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, First National Bank, the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Special opening night activities are sponsored by Kiewit Companies.

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 *Pete the Cat: The Musical*, *Sherlock Holmes & the First Baker Street Irregular*, *Zen Ties*, *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.

