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Singing spooks, fantastic phantoms and things that go bump in the night *Goosebumps* musical is scary fun at The Rose Theater

(OMAHA, Nebr.) The Rose Theater is scaring up some frightful fun and musical mayhem this Halloween season with its upcoming production of ***Goosebumps: The Phantom of the Auditorium – The Musical***, playing Oct. 26 through Nov. 11 on its mainstage. Based on the popular book series by R.L. Stine, the musical promises to combine horror and humor that kids of all ages will enjoy.

“I remember the ***Goosebumps*** stories,” says guest director Suzanne Withem. “In fact, while they weren’t forbidden, I was strongly discouraged from reading them because my mom thought they would be a little too scary for me. So I read them in secret! I remember being just terrified of the stories, but that didn’t stop me from loving them.”

The Rose hopes to provide just the right mix of fright and frivolity in the 75-minute production. “R.L. Stine has said in interviews that he wanted these books to be comedic in nature. As Stephen Colbert has noted, it is impossible to be scared and laughing at the same time. If you think back to the first time you read the ***Goosebumps*** books, it was probably this duality that made them so fascinating. It is also what made them feel like they were – regardless of the spook factor – still a little bit safe to you as a young reader,” says Matthew Gutschick, Rose artistic director.

In ***Goosebumps - the Musical***, strange things are disrupting the rehearsals of the Woods Mill Middle School musical. Rumors about the script are flying, hinting that the show is cursed. Throughout the school, students wonder if the interruptions are coincidence, not-so-silly sabotage or puckish pranks. Or, could it be that the curse of the Phantom is real?

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“**Goosebumps** follows two students in particular – best friends Brooke and Zeke,” says Gutschick. “The school play that their teacher has chosen has a really dark history. When it was performed earlier in the 20th century, it may have led to a student’s disappearance, and no one is sure where that student went.”

It isn’t long before Brooke gets a chilling note in her locker with a warning to stay away. It won’t be the last warning the cast and crew receive, as the Phantom makes his presence known throughout the school. At the same time, a new student named Brian joins the show’s crew (and steals Brooke’s heart) while Brooke’s understudy seems determined to grab the spotlight. And, throughout it all, Zeke keeps disappearing. As the students rehearse the play-within-a-play, it is uncertain whether the show will go on.

The majority of the roles in **Goosebumps** are played by student actors ranging in age from 12 to 16. The decision to use age-appropriate casting for the show was one that Gutschick and Withem decided early in the production process. “Matt and I talked about how it would be a great opportunity to cast youth actors, and I totally agreed with that. They bring a wonderful energy to the show,” says Withem. “We are presenting a play about a bit of a scary situation, with kids overcoming obstacles. We get to present it to kids, with kids, and I think that ability to relate to experiences will be stronger when audiences get to see kids their age overcoming adversity – and having a great time singing and dancing, too.”

While **Goosebumps** may induce, well, goosebumps, there are plenty of light-hearted and even silly moments in the show. A moment of blossoming young love lends one such moment of levity to the show. “My favorite part of the show is the song ‘Babbling Brooke,’” says 15-year-old Audrey Saucier, who plays the role of Brooke. “This is a scene where Brooke and Brian meet for the first time. It’s really awkward because we both realize that we like each other, and we don’t know what this feeling is. We keep saying things that we don’t mean, and it’s just really awkward. It’s an uncomfortable song, and I just love it!”

Heavily inspired by *The Phantom of the Opera*, **Goosebumps** finds its characters on a spine-tingling adventure to determine what is behind the mysterious goings-on and phantom sightings, a journey that twists and turns through hidden passages, eerie elevators and black-as-night basements – with just the right amount of silliness to balance the scares. “Things will be flying out, things will disappear. There are fun little tricks happening all the time,” says technical director Greg Rishoi.

“These characters are so brave,” says Withem. “They bump up against conflict that is going to prevent them from performing this play that they are crazy excited to perform. And they push through to solve the problem and figure out how they can overcome these various obstacles, whether they be scary, or disciplinary or just difficult to do.”

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And, of course, there's a phantom.

As the mystery unfolds, the phantom is spotted throughout the school. Who can be behind the creepy mask? Is he an agent of good or of evil? And will he permit the show to go on?

Costume designer Erin Bragg is responsible for bringing the phantom to life. "Naturally, I have been researching *The Phantom of the Opera* and all the different masks the production has had. In the end, I thought it would be really neat to do a take on the comedy and tragedy masks, rather than the traditional Phantom mask. It's also a nice tie-in to the theater theme that runs throughout **Goosebumps**."

In presenting **Goosebumps**, The Rose also throws open its backstage doors and lets audiences get a glimpse of the world of theater. A mock pulley system almost identical to one found backstage at The Rose is featured center stage for most of the show, and hanging lights are visible above the set, giving the audience the impression that they are seeing behind the scenes. "There is a lot of heightened realism in this show. There are things you see in everyday life – especially those of us who are theater folks – things like scripts, posters, call sheets, cast lists, all kinds of things like that. It's the things we work with every day," says props mistress Devon Denn-Young.

Goosebumps shines a spotlight on many of the roles that typically stay behind the scenes. Lighting designers, set designers and stage managers take center stage as they prepare the play-within-a-play. The show even references age-old theater superstitions about saying the word Macbeth and wishing each other "good luck," believed by many thespians to bring bad luck upon a show.

Bragg admits that her costume designs have been directly influenced by members of The Rose staff. "I am really inspired by the people that I work with, so many of the costumes reflect the staff here at The Rose," she says. "They are basically little versions of ourselves, the theater professionals here at the theater. For example, Craig, our lighting designer, loves the Steelers, so the lighting designer in the show will wear Steelers clothes. The character of Brian is modeled after Matt Gutschick – I feel like Matt has an old soul, and that's how I see this character. Nearly everyone on stage has a doppelganger in the theater. There are the people I work with every day, and they inspire me! This is my tribute to them. It's been really fun."

Goosebumps: The Phantom of the Auditorium – The Musical runs 75 minutes without an intermission and recommended for children of all ages, especially those who love being just a little bit scared. Parents should consider their children's maturity and tolerance for gentle scares; the show does not contain violence or gore, but does have a spooky vibe that may be unsettling for younger audience members.

"It's **Goosebumps**. Let it be scary. Let it be startling," say creators John Maclay and Danny Abosch in the introduction to the script.

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Withem has embraced this sentiment. “I don’t want to pull punches, and I don’t want to talk down to kids because I think being a little bit scared – walking that line between what is going to make people a little bit nervous, but then overcome that – I think that’s really important,” she says. “If we are too easy or too comfortable, we don’t get that feeling of excitement. We want to raise the stakes and make them important.”

Tickets for ***Goosebumps: The Phantom of the Auditorium – The Musical*** are \$20 per person. Discount ticket vouchers are available at all area Hy-Vee stores for \$16 each. Members of The Rose receive four free tickets to the production.

“Throughout this process, I have thought to myself, ‘Why do kids like being scared?’ I think it is the adrenaline rush you get when you are scared – it’s fun to be scared. It’s also great to be on the other side of scared. Kids are incredibly resilient, and when they are put into scary situations that they know are not life-threatening, but are terrifying in a fun way, and they come out on the other side – they recognize how brave and how resilient they really are,” says Withem.

“So, the questions the audience will be living with are: Will the play go on in the school? Will everyone make it through rehearsals alive? And will there be singing and dancing?”

The answer to at least that last question is a resounding YES.

Goosebumps: The Phantom of the Auditorium – The Musical runs Oct. 26 – Nov. 11, 2018, with performances on Fridays at 7 p.m., Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 5 p.m., and Sundays at 2 p.m. Interpretation for audience members who are deaf or hard of hearing will be offered at the 2 p.m. show on Saturday, Nov. 3. Audio description services for audiences who are blind or have low vision will also be available at this performance. A sensory-friendly performance will be presented at the 5 pm performance on Saturday, Nov. 3.

Special opening weekend activities are sponsored by Kiewit Companies. On Friday, Oct. 26, children are encouraged to wear their Halloween costumes and participate in a pre-show costume parade across the stage. There will also be an opportunity to trick-or-treat around the theater following the show. On Saturday, Oct. 27, storyteller Dorothy Rieke will tell ghost stories between the 2 pm and 5 pm performances. Contact The Rose Box Office for more information.

Goosebumps: The Phantom of the Auditorium – The Musical is sponsored by Children’s Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Security National Bank, the Nebraska Arts Council, and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

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About Goosebumps

Goosebumps is a series of children's horror fiction novels by American author R. L. Stine, published by Scholastic Publishing. The stories follow child characters, who find themselves in scary situations, usually involving monsters and other supernatural elements. From 1992 to 1997, sixty-two books were published under the *Goosebumps* umbrella title. Various spin-off series were written by Stine: *Goosebumps Series 2000*, *Give Yourself Goosebumps*, *Tales to Give You Goosebumps*, *Goosebumps Triple Header*, *Goosebumps HorrorLand*, *Goosebumps Most Wanted* and *Goosebumps SlappyWorld*. Another series, *Goosebumps Gold*, was never released. *Goosebumps* has spawned a television series and merchandise, as well as a feature film, starring Jack Black as Stine. *Goosebumps 2: Haunted Halloween* is currently running in cinemas. The horror comedy film is a sequel to 2015's *Goosebumps* with Jack Black reprising his role from the first film.

Since the release of its first novel, *Welcome to Dead House*, in July 1992, the *Goosebumps* series has sold over 400 million books worldwide in thirty-two languages, becoming the second-best-selling book series in history. Individual books in the series have been listed in several bestseller lists, including the New York Times Best Seller list for children.

About R.L. Stine

"Why do I write these creepy books?" R.L. Stine asks. "I just like to scare people!"

He has been scaring people all around the world for a lot of years. So far, he has sold over 400-million books and his books have been translated into 35 languages, making him one of the best-selling authors in history.

Born Robert Lawrence Stine in Columbus, Ohio in 1943, R.L. Stine started out writing jokes and funny stories. He moved to New York City in the mid-1960s, after graduating from The Ohio State University. In 1986, Stine published *Blind Date*, his first horror novel for young adults. He launched his popular *Fear Street* book series three years later. Beginning in 1992, Stine found international acclaim writing the *Goosebumps* series, which spurred the creation of additional series and nearly 200 books. The books, which he produced through his wife Jane's Parachute Press book-packaging company, targeted the tween market. The first title, *Welcome to Dead House*, was quickly followed by more novels. At one point, Stine was writing one or two books each month. Each title featured the trademark elements of the series: Page-turning plots and daring cliffhangers at the end of each chapter. *Goosebumps* soon became a literary phenomenon. The books became bestsellers in the United States and abroad, and were eventually translated into 16 different languages. *Goosebumps* was turned into a television series as well. The tremendous popularity of the series turned Stine into one of the most successful children's writers of all time, drawing comparisons between Stine and adult horror writer Stephen King.

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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