

For Immediate Release

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***Goosebumps* director returns to her roots at The Rose Theater**

(OMAHA, Nebr.) When guest director Suzanne Withem started directing ***Goosebumps: The Phantom of the Auditorium – The Musical***, she felt like she was returning home.

“A great deal of my education background I got right here at The Rose, working as an actor, educator and stage manager,” she says. “I am thrilled to be back here.

Withem has been active in the Omaha theater community professionally and as a volunteer for most of her life. In addition to her work at The Rose, she has been involved with productions at The Omaha Community Playhouse, Nebraska Shakespeare, Bellevue Little Theatre, The Nebraska Theatre Caravan, Ballet Nebraska, Opera Omaha, The BlueBarn, and Bridget St. Bridget.

Goosebumps has provided Withem with an interesting challenge: creating a spine-chilling experience in keeping with the spirit of the original source material, while making the show fun and entertaining – and not too much for young audiences.

“We are presenting a play about a bit of a scary situation,” she says about the show. “I don’t want to pull punches and I don’t want to talk down to kids. 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. If we are too easy or too comfortable, we don’t get that feeling of excitement.”

With a cast that includes eight youth actors, Withem finds herself back in an education role, one that she is passionate about. “Education is the thing I care most about,” she says.

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It was at The Rose Theater where Withem discovered her love of theater. The daughter of educators who valued the arts, she imagined a life in the theater – but not a life centered around education. After graduating from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, she took a job at The Rose. Thrilled to be one of the few in her graduating class actually working in theater, she accepted the teaching aspect of the job a bit reluctantly.

“I ended up falling in love with teaching in a way I didn’t think I would,” she says.

While at The Rose, Withem directed several teen and youth productions while also appearing onstage in *The Wizard of Oz*, *Old Yeller* and *The Talking Eggs*, as well as participating in the Rose metro tour, *Elizabeth I*. She served as the children’s theater’s resident stage manager from 2008-2009. In the years since, she has led the production of *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Bellevue Little Theater and *Stupid F@#%ing Bird* at the Omaha Community Playhouse.

“One of the things that made me think Suzanne would be a really wonderful fit is that she has a lot of experience as an educator, as a stage manager, and as a director at this point in her career. Those skills all felt like they would feed a really unique production of this piece,” says Rose artistic director Matthew Gutschick.

Withem brings her teaching attitude to all of her work, giving the young actors in **Goosebumps** a unique opportunity to learn from an accomplished theater professional and enhance their talents, while having a positive on-stage experience. “Theater gives me the opportunity to pass along the lessons I learned about creativity, collaboration and communication,” she says.

The educational spirit extends to the young people in the **Goosebumps** audience, as well. “I think scary stories teach important lessons,” Withem says. “We are presenting a play about a scary situation with kids overcoming obstacles. I think it is a good thing for young audiences to see kids their age overcoming adversity.”

“Plus, 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 then they come out on the other side – they recognize just how brave and how resilient they really are,” she says.

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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. *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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