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Gentle classic spreads message of acceptance

Winnie the Pooh illustrates a world of welcome at The Rose Theater

(OMAHA, Nebr.) Everyone's favorite silly old bear brings his friends from the Hundred Acre Wood to The Rose when *Winnie the Pooh* opens March 22.

Winnie the Pooh creates a musical menagerie of lovable stuffed animals to the stage. From Pooh to Piglet, Eeyore, Rabbit, Kanga and more, audiences will be delighted by this adaptation of A. A. Milne's classic stories.

Rose artist educator Michael Miller not only leads the cast as the show's director, but also works as the theater's literary manager, the person responsible for locating scripts for The Rose's season line-ups. "We went hunting to find the right script, and we read several," says Miller. "We wanted to find a script that really represented these classic characters."

The result was an adaptation by le Clanche du Rand, which draws on the original source material's charm and adds a unique sense of frivolity that audiences of all ages will enjoy. The script is filled with the books' tongue-in-cheek spelling and grammatical errors and features familiar stories of the lovable bear.

The music of *Winnie the Pooh* draws upon Milne's poetry as the basis for most of the song lyrics. Musician Adam Sherrerd returns to The Rose stage for *Winnie the Pooh* and will accompany the actors live as he interacts in scenes with the various characters. (And, although Tigger is not included in this script adaptation, Miller notes that Sherrerd's costuming is a nod to the flighty feline.)

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Winnie the Pooh combines a gentle philosophy of friendship with a good dose of playfulness. “This story has a lot of frantic-ness about it. There are a lot of characters miscommunicating and running all over,” says Miller.

In the show, Winnie the Pooh (the famous bear of “Very Little Brain”) is singing happily that “Isn’t it funny how a bear likes honey” when the “terrible trouble” begins. When a new visitor to the Hundred Acre Wood -- Kanga -- comes to the forest with soap for baths and spoonfuls of “Strengthening Medicine,” Pooh and his friends decide that something just must be done about this strange new creature in their midst.

As the adventure continues, it isn’t long before he and Piglet are off to catch a Heffalump. A rousing number led by Rabbit finds audience members pulled into the show as his “Friends and Relations.” When Eeyore arrives, Pooh quickly discovers that he has lost his tail. As the chaos unfolds, Pooh and friends soon learn to accept the things that are new and to be more welcoming to newcomers to their community.

Miller has drawn inspiration for the show’s staging from the book’s original hand-drawn, water-color illustrations. Images such as Piglet struggling with a balloon larger than himself and Pooh getting his head stuck inside a “hunny” pot are just a few of the stage moments directly influenced by the storybook’s pictures.

Miller notes that it took a special kind of cast to bring the ***Winnie the Pooh*** characters to life. “We have this wonderful cast of tried and true Rose performers who know our stage, who know our audience, who know our community and know what it feels like to perform in our space. They all bring a vibrant energy to the stage,” he says.

Carina DuMarce makes her debut on The Rose’s mainstage in the title role. DuMarce and Miller worked together earlier this year in the First Stage Pre-K production of *The Little Engine That Could*, and Miller notes that he had no doubt she would make the perfect Pooh. “Carina has this wonderful way of balancing enthusiasm and grounded-ness, and all those things that will make Pooh a beautiful, calm and collective, thoughtful presence in the midst of all this chaos,” he says.

Stephanie Jacobson plays Piglet, a very stressed-out, excited and excitable sidekick to the silly ol’ bear. She is joined by fellow artist educator Brian Guehring in the dual role of Rabbit and Owl. Rose veterans Kim Clark-Kaczmarek as Eeyore and Kanga, and Anna Jordan as Christopher Robin and Roo complete the cast.

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“This team is embracing their characters so wonderfully and so passionately,” says Miller.

Winnie the Pooh also highlights the work of The Rose’s technical apprentices, who are showcasing the skills they have perfected during the past season. Elton Wayne Bradley serves as lighting designer, Christy Hernandez serves as sound designer, and Austin Watson serves as props master for the show.

“It is incredibly exciting to feature this new and fresh group of designers -- the apprentices who have been working at The Rose all season,” says Miller. “These people have come and worked with us at The Rose. It is such a great opportunity to shine a spotlight on the new artists who will be the next generation of people doing this work and allow them to show what they have learned from all the amazing artists we have working here at The Rose.”

Costume designer Sherri Geerdes is leaning heavily on the original book illustrations to create costumes that seem to have leapt off the pages of the storybook. The costumes balance a fine line between standard costume pieces and plush caricatures. They also feature crosshatching to give the illusion that they are actually hand-drawn.

Scenic designer Lindsey Purvis continues this sketched look with a set that expands the simple watercolor world of the original books onto the grandeur of The Rose stage. Trees that appear hand drawn transform the space into the Hundred Acre Wood with giant trees on tracks that can move to create windows into various scenes.

As a story that has delighted generations of children for more than 100 years, *Winnie the Pooh* is perfect for families of all ages. The show runs approximately 65 minutes without an intermission.

Winnie the Pooh runs March 22 through April 7, 2019, 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, March 30. 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, March 30.

Tickets for ***Winnie the Pooh*** are available for \$20 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.

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Winnie the Pooh is sponsored by Children's Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, First National Bank, 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.

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