

For Immediate Release

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CONTACT: Kori Radloff, korir@rosetheater.org, 402-502-4641

Rose Theater spreads Christmas cheer with the return of *Elf the Musical*

(OMAHA, Nebr.) *Elf the Musical* returns to The Rose Theater, spreading Christmas cheer for all to hear, November 29 - Dec. 22, 2019. The show, which is based on the cherished 2003 New Line Cinema hit, was last year's holiday hit with a sold-out run. The Rose looks forward to sharing the production with even more family audiences in 2019.

“Yes, we are remounting the very popular *Elf the Musical*,” says Rose artistic director Matthew Gutschick, who is directing *Elf*. “While it’s true that one reason we decided to bring this show back is to allow audiences another opportunity to see a show that we are really proud of, I also feel that it is never a bad time to feature a play that focuses on the obstacles that kindness faces in the world, and the ultimate victory of kindness. That is what this piece is fundamentally doing -- and doing in a very bold way.”

Elf the Musical follows the story of Buddy (played by Dan Chevalier), an “elf” working at the North Pole who learns he is not an elf at all, but actually a human who crept into Santa’s magic bag of gifts when he was a baby. When he comes to grips with the reality of his enormous size and poor toy-making abilities, he embarks on a journey to New York City to find his birth father and discover his true identity.

“When Buddy gets to New York, there is this clash of cultures with his father, Walter Hobbs, and really, with the world. On one hand, we have Buddy, the world’s biggest optimist who believes fundamentally in the goodness of everyone, and he is faced with a world that has grown cynical and jaded, and worst of all – no longer believes in Santa Claus,” says Gutschick.

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The Rose Theater
2001 Farnam Street
Omaha, NE 68102

t (402) 345-4849
f (402) 344-7255
www.rosetheater.org



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On the streets of New York City, Buddy encounters individuals who are overwhelmed with the stress of the holidays, who have forgotten the Christmas spirit, and who are filled with negativity. As he wanders NYC, he finds himself at Macy's department store, where he is mistaken for an employee. When he eventually arrives at the office of his father, Walter (played by Anthony Clark-Kaczmarek), Buddy finds him ranting about Christmas being a complete annoyance.

"This show demonstrates a certain kind of antidote to that voice inside of us that says, 'the world is getting worse,'" Gutschick explains. "Yes, maybe that is true, but there is also this alternative point of view that little acts of kindness can create fuel for others to engage in the same sort of activities. That's what we see Buddy do, and ***Elf*** shows us the impact that can have on others."

Buddy's presence in New York creates a transformation. At Macy's, he inspires a merry makeover of the store and meets Jovie (played by Regina Palmer), another Macy employee working at the Santa's Workshop display. When they go on a date, things get off to a rocky start, until Buddy turns things around with a magical experience ice skating at Rockefeller Center.

"Audiences will first encounter these scenes that feel a little darker and more drab as we start them, but with Buddy's help and through musical theater magic, over the course of a song and dance, they transform into something bright and cheerful," says Gutschick.

Lighting designer Craig S. Moxon says, "I really wanted to create a stark and cold world, so that whenever Buddy comes into a scene, he fundamentally changes the whole atmosphere. Wherever Buddy goes, his optimism brings a sense of warmth and liveliness to the picture with his presence."

The set, envisioned by scenic designer Adam Rowe (who recently won an Emmy Award for his design of *Rent: Live* and was nominated for his work as the production designer of NBC's hit TV show, *The Good Place*), features a giant arched proscenium inspired by Radio City Music Hall, giving plenty of space for giant dance numbers. Audiences will experience a world greatly inspired by the world of Christmas presents and holiday wrapping paper, helped in part by two projectors mounted on the balcony that allow projection designer Brittany Merenda to showcase dynamic projections that practically sparkle on stage.

More than 60 pounds of glitter used on the set helps add to the spectacle, as well. Lighting designer Craig Moxon has created special lights he calls "glitter warmers" with the goal of making the entire set even more "sparklejollytwinklejingley." "We are putting even more glitter into this show, which I didn't even think was possible," he says.

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Gutschick notes that while the set may seem a bit similar to what was on stage last year, The Rose team has actually tweaked and modified the design. “The production concept for the show has not shifted radically from last year, but as with all remounts, we have the opportunity to take what we did last year and try to strengthen it,” he says.

Buddy’s dad quickly demonstrates the reason he is on Santa’s “naughty” list with his pessimistic attitude and workaholic habits. His wife Emily (Melissa King), and son Michael (Tyson Bentley) are desperate to spend time with Walter during the Christmas season, but the busy businessman has no time for holiday happenings.

“This is a family who is really struggling with connection,” says Gutschick. “There is a lack of connection inside their home, and Buddy helps them find that. In fact, as we go through the show, he helps all the characters find that.”

New York’s negativity eventually starts to impact Buddy. Excited to go to work with Walter, Buddy is dejected when he accidentally shreds Walter’s holiday book project when trying to make it “snow” inside his office. When Walter explodes with anger and boots Buddy from his workplace, his apartment and his life, Buddy finds himself alone in New York City, save for a collection of fake “Santas.”

Through a series of twists and turns, Buddy reunites with his half-brother Michael, who tells him that they saw Santa’s sleigh land. Buddy realizes that Santa’s sleigh has run out of the Christmas spirit that allows it to run. It is up to Buddy to reinvigorate Christmas spirit throughout the world, as only he can – through the magic of song.

“All of these songs are really, really fun. They are jazzy tunes with a fun score,” says Gutschick.

Sixteen pit musicians led by music director Jerry Brabec will provide accompaniment for a wide range of choreography styles, ranging from traditional musical theater, to acrobatics to figure skating on stage, all led by choreographer Sue Gillespie Booton. Many of the numbers feature props pulled from the set and used in unique ways – from garland jump ropes and candy cane tools – and all the numbers highlight the talents of the cast – many of whom are Rose students. Choreographer Sue Gillespie Booton notes that audiences will be treated to completely new dance numbers in the remounted show. “If you saw it last year, you are going to see new stuff,” she says. “We’ve added some music, especially in the finale -- it’s an all brand-new number.”

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While the majority of the adult cast is the same as the 2018 production (costume designer Sherri Geerdes actually exclaimed with glee during an interview, “The best Buddy in the whole world is coming back!”), most of the youth performers are new to the production. “That’s really the great thing about this show,” says Brabec. “The student actors are almost all entirely new. They bring a whole new energy and new life.”

The idea of using your unique talents may just be the overarching theme of ***Elf the Musical***. “Yes, this story and these songs are about delight and about joy, but they are also about living your life fully and being really present. Buddy takes the risk of not being ‘cool.’ In a world that might be steeped in irony, Buddy is the least ironic figure you can imagine, and that earnestness has a lot of value,” says Gutschick. “Buddy plows through that boundary and helps others do the same thing.”

“***Elf the Musical*** is basically saying that it is okay to live as you are in our world, regardless about messages that tell you to hide your feelings, your delight, and even your sadness sometimes. The piece says to take the risk of being fully there,” he explains. “It’s a message the world is really hungry for.”

Audience response to last season’s production of ***Elf*** was record-breaking, and the 2019 production is on track to be just as popular. Most performances have limited availability. Due to popular demand, additional performances have been added on select Saturdays at 7 pm.

In the end, Gutschick hopes ***Elf the Musical*** brings a little holiday joy to Omaha. “I hope that when audiences leave, that Christmas spirit is just a little more alive for them,” he says.

Elf the Musical runs at The Rose Nov. 29 – Dec. 22, 2019, with performances on Fridays at 7 pm, Saturdays at 2 pm, select Saturdays at 7 pm, and Sundays at 2 pm. The 2 pm show of ***Elf*** on Saturday, Dec. 14 will be interpreted for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and captioning devices will be available, if needed. This show will also include audio description services for audience members who are blind. Contact The Rose Box Office at (402) 345-4849 for more information.

Tickets for ***Elf the Musical*** are \$27 for main floor and \$22 for balcony. Members of The Rose receive discounted tickets to the production. Ticket supply is limited, and those interested in seeing the show are encouraged to contact The Rose Box Office as soon as possible for best seating.

Elf the Musical is sponsored by Children’s Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Hy-Vee, Omaha Steaks, the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

The Rose is a collection point for ConAgra’s Shine the Light on Hunger campaign. Audiences are encouraged to bring pantry items with them to the show.

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About the Creators

THOMAS MEEHAN, 1929–2017 (Book) won the 2003 Tony® Award for co-writing the book for *Hairspray* after having won the 2001 Tony® Award for co-writing the book of *The Producers*. He received his first Tony® Award in 1977 for writing the book of *Annie*, which was his first Broadway show, and he has written books for the musicals *I Remember Mama*, *Ain't Broadway Grand*, *Annie Warbucks* and the American version of *Bombay Dreams*. His recent works are *Annie*, *Chaplin*, *Elf The Musical*, *Young Frankenstein*, for which he co-wrote the book with Mel Brooks, and *Cry-Baby*, co-written with Mark O'Donnell. Mr. Meehan holds the distinction of being the only writer to have written three Broadway shows that ran more than 2,000 performances.

BOB MARTIN (Book). *The Drowsy Chaperone* (Book, "Man in Chair"), Tony® Award, Drama Desk Award, Theatre World Award, NY Drama Critics' Circle Award. Selected regional: *The Drowsy Chaperone* (L.A., Toronto, London), L.A. Stage Alliance Ovation Award, L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award, Olivier nomination; *Minsky's* (Book, L.A.); Second City Toronto (performer 1994-2000, artistic director 2003-2004). Selected television writing.

MATTHEW SKLAR (Music) is a Tony®, Emmy®, and Drama Desk Award-nominated composer. His works include the Broadway musicals *Elf* and *The Wedding Singer* (Tony Award Nomination for Best Original Score, Drama Desk Award Nomination for Outstanding Music). He also wrote the music for *The Rhythm Club* (Signature Theatre), *Judas & Me*, and *Wicked City* (American Stage Company). Matthew received a 2015 Primetime Emmy® Award Nomination for Outstanding Music Direction for the critically-acclaimed NBC stop-motion animated TV special "Elf: Buddy's Musical Christmas", starring Jim Parsons. He adapted and arranged the music of Marvin Hamlisch for the Emmy Award-winning documentary film *Marvin Hamlisch: What He Did For Love*, seen on PBS/American Masters. Matthew has contributed original songs/music to *Sesame Street*, *Wonder Pets!*, and the NBC Broadcast of *The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade*. His music has been performed by major orchestras, including the Atlanta, Baltimore, and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestras. As an 18-year-old freshman at New York University, Matthew began playing keyboards for the Broadway production of *Les Miserables*, eventually conducting the show at 21. He has also been a keyboardist, conductor, and/or arranger for many Broadway productions including *Shrek*, *Caroline, or Change*, *Nine*, *Oklahoma*, *42nd Street*, *Putting It Together*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *On the Town*, *Titanic*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Sunset Boulevard*, and *Miss Saigon*. Matthew also appeared onstage as "Oscar" in the Broadway revival of *42nd Street*. Awards include the ASCAP Richard Rodgers New Horizons Award, the Gilman/Gonzalez-Falla Theatre Award, and the Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation Award. Matthew is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild, ASCAP, and the American Federation of Musicians, Local 802. His music is published by Warner/Chappell Music. Matthew was educated at The Juilliard School of Music (Pre-College Division), the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, and New York University.

CHAD BEGUELIN (Lyrics) is a four-time Tony® nominee. His works include *Disney's Aladdin* (Tony Award nomination for Best Book and Best Original Score, Drama Desk Award Nomination for Best Book and Outstanding Lyrics) and *The Wedding Singer* (Tony Award nomination for Best Book and Best Original Score, Drama Desk Award nomination for Outstanding Lyrics). His play *Harbor* premiered Off-Broadway at Primary Stages. Chad also wrote the book and lyrics for *Judas & Me* (NYMF Award for Excellence in Lyric Writing), *The Rhythm Club* (Signature Theater) and *Wicked City* (American Stage Company). He is the recipient of the Edward Kleban Award for Outstanding Lyric Writing, the Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation Awards, the Gilman & Gonzalez-Falla Musical Theater Award and the ASCAP Foundation Richard Rodgers New Horizons Award. Chad is a graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts Graduate Dramatic Writing Program. He currently lives in New York with his husband Tom and their Yorkshire Terrier, Bailey.

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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.



Elf the Musical, by the numbers:

- 29 cast members
- 16 members of the orchestra pit
- 100+ costumes
- 60+ pounds of glitter used on the set
- 700 feet of wrapping paper used in the show

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**Please note: High resolution photos are available at
<https://www.rosetheater.org/connect/media/#showphotos>**