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THE DIARY OF
Anne Frank

***The Diary of Anne Frank* offers a modern perspective
on history at The Rose Theater**

High stakes historical drama is relevant for modern youth audiences

(OMAHA, Nebr.) A classic story set during one of the greatest turmoils of history is set to inspire new audiences when The Rose Theater brings ***The Diary of Anne Frank*** to the stage, February 28 - March 15, 2020.

The Diary of Anne Frank is a play based on the true story of a young Jewish girl living in Amsterdam during the Holocaust. When Anne's sister Margot receives notice that she is to report for deportation to a forced-labor camp, the Frank family goes into hiding in a secret annex above a factory. Young 13-year-old Anne finds solace by writing in her diary. Through her diary entries, Anne offers many details of her family's harrowing ordeal. The family must maintain complete silence during the time when the factory workers are present, as any sound might give away their location and lead the Nazi authorities to find them.

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The show's design features a juxtaposition of color, light and darkness to illustrate the imbalance of Anne's world and the injustices of the community at large. Background music sets a mournful, uneasy tone with compositions written and recorded almost entirely by Jewish artists. The set design features dark and gritty, almost brutalistic, architecture that is cracked and broken. The stage itself is off-balance to represent the off-kilter events going on in the world. Guest director Rachel Grossman explains, "There is an unbalanced-ness on stage. There is a lot of empty space and this overall sense of what isn't there and what we are not seeing."

As the story of ***The Diary of Anne Frank*** progresses, challenges arise among the varied personalities within the group. The constant threat of exposure looms large, but Anne's youthful spirit is enduring.

Costume designer Zach Kloppenborg has reflected each character's unique personality and spirit through a colorful costume palette. Each is dressed in a vivid signature color. (In the case of Anne, she is dressed in red with accents of plaid, as a representation of her original diary, which was famously covered in red tartan.) Kloppenborg explains that this contrast between the set and costume is intentional. "We wanted to use color in the costumes to show a vibrancy and resiliency," he says. "A lot of productions of ***Anne Frank*** show a degradation over time, and a weathering of the spirit. We wanted instead to showcase the hope inside these people."

It is this sense of hope that the show creators have attempted to highlight. Despite Anne Frank's tragic conclusion, everyone involved in the show believes the story is uplifting and full of inspiration for a modern audience. Actor Dani Cleveland, who portrays Anne's mother Edith, says, "Even though those people were in hiding, there was love in their family. They tried to create joy as much as they could. If we can be cooped up in an attic with people we don't necessarily know, surely we can be in this big world and love on people we don't know."

The Diary of Anne Frank cast members have been guided in the show's production by staff from the Institute for Holocaust Education and the Jewish Federation of Omaha. Individuals from the Jewish community attended rehearsals, taught traditional prayers and songs to cast members, and served Shabbat dinner at the beginning of Friday evening rehearsals. Grossman, who is herself Jewish, acknowledges that it is a new experience for her, just as it is for the rest of the cast. "This production is the first time I've been able to bring my Jewish identity into the theatrical process, and that is really exciting for me," she says. "IHE and the Jewish Federation have been amazing partners. It has been such a joy for all of us. It is just a great cultural exchange."

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Grossman has worked with IHE and the Jewish Federation to create a production that both honors the legacy of Anne Frank and also makes the story relatable to a modern audience while empowering them to take action. “When people come to see the play, it is a very specific story about a Jewish teenage girl living in extreme circumstances in a very specific time, and I want to be telling that story,” she says. “But it is also my hope that audiences of all ages are able to see themselves and hear themselves, and maybe be surprised and delighted by that.”

Grossman has incorporated a variety of methods to enhance audience integration with The Rose’s production of ***The Diary of Anne Frank***, beginning with a nontraditional approach to casting that includes actors and artists with diverse backgrounds that will help audiences better identify with the show’s characters. “It was essential to me to have a cast that looks like a diversity of people. We have to be able to see ourselves in that and expand it,” she says.

“In theater, our imaginations are really quite big,” says Grossman. “We don’t need actors to look a certain way for us to tell the story. We want to bring the cultural identities of the actors, the cultural identities of how we perceive one another, and what they can bring to these characters to expand our perceptions of these roles through their life experience. This is a diverse cast that has different perceptions, different understandings of how to interpret lines, how they see each other on stage, how they interact with one another. And that makes for a richer story, a new story. It’s not just the script and how it might have been interpreted over the years; it is new and unique for Omaha,” she says.

Grossman further explains, “When plays from other time periods are produced, often there is a layer of ‘let’s produce history,’ and it can be hard to connect to the characters in the show because they don’t talk like us, they don’t look like us. With Anne Frank, I hope that at one point, everyone in the audience can see someone on stage and say, ‘oh, gosh! That reminds me of myself, or my father, or my mother, or my next door neighbor, or my auntie.”

As audiences pass through The Rose lobby, they will encounter images of Holocaust survivors and informational panels helping explain the historical context of the show.

Theatergoers might be surprised when they enter The Rose auditorium to find that ***The Diary of Anne Frank*** begins with modern-day teens texting on stage. Grossman has integrated a framework that begins from the moment families enter the theater -- they will find the show’s three teen actors onstage as modern students, working on a class assignment about Anne Frank. As the show begins, they morph into the characters in the story.

“We have this pre- and post-show coda to the show that involves contemporary teens as a way of actually inviting the teens into the dialogue around the story,” says Grossman.

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At the end of the show, young audiences are encouraged to take action in their own way through a takeaway piece within the program highlighting ways that even the youngest members of the community can make their voices heard. “It is a call to action,” says Grossman. “How do you investigate? How do you relate? How do you act? We are expanding the representation of this historical event so we can find ourselves within it.”

“There are these amazing quotes from Anne’s diary in the play. For example, Margot says, ‘Just because someone is young, it doesn’t mean they don’t have anything to say.’ I just love that. Anne and Margot -- they wanted to make change in people’s lives,” says Grossman. “So how can we inspire young people to use their voice, to be that upstander, that ally? I want people to consider what their values are and how they will react to the world around them. I want them to make that connection -- that you are living now, Anne was living then. Really bad stuff was happening to Anne, and some not really great stuff is happening now. And most importantly, we can do something about it.”

In the end, Anne’s legacy is one of empowering youth. Grossman has summarized the key points of ***The Diary of Anne Frank*** in a summary included in the show program: “Through the words of a gifted young writer we learn about the realities of a family surviving in close and claustrophobic circumstances in order to survive. Anne’s passionate and inquisitive voice, vivid observations, and optimistic spirit challenges us to see a tremendously troubling time through a young person’s eyes. Her story compels us consider what actions we might be taking in our own times to create positive change.”

The Diary of Anne Frank is recommended for families with children ages 8 and up and is 90 minutes long without an intermission.

The Diary of Anne Frank runs February 28 through March 15, with performances on Fridays at 7 p.m., Saturdays at 2 p.m., and Sundays at 2 p.m. American Sign Language interpretation and captioning services for audience members who are Deaf or hard of hearing will be offered at the 2 p.m. show on Saturday, March 7. Audio description services for audiences who are blind or have low vision will also be available at this performance. The performance on March 7 will also be designated sensory-friendly.

Tickets for ***The Diary of Anne Frank*** are available for \$20 by calling The Rose Box Office at (402) 345-4849 or online at www.rosetheater.org. Rose members receive free tickets to the production.

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The Diary of Anne Frank is sponsored by Children's Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Kiewit Corporation, the Nebraska Arts Council, and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. School field trips to see the show are being funded by the Holland Foundation, the Omaha Public Schools Foundation, and the Shirley & Leonard Goldstein Supporting Foundation.

Special thanks to show partners, the Institute for Holocaust Education and the Jewish Federation of Omaha. A lobby exhibit featuring photos of survivors A special Jewish Heritage Day event for children ages 8-14 will take place following the production of ***The Diary of Anne Frank*** on Sunday, March 1 at 2 pm. Local theater artist Jennifer Castello will walk students through a creative journaling workshop, giving time and space to process their theater experience and explore how journaling can help people find and refine their voice. Limited space is available. For information, visit www.jewishomaha.org.

About The Rose

For 70 years, The Rose Theater has been providing Omaha-area families with the best in live theater and arts education. The Omaha Theater Company was one of the first in Omaha to offer classes in the theater arts, and today The Rose stands as a leading program and training ground for young artists interested in pursuing a career in theater.

Students enrolled in classes at The Rose learn from some of the best educators in the region. Rose teachers include professional actors, accomplished dancers, award-winning playwrights, highly-decorated directors, renowned choreographers and more. Rose classes encourage creativity and imagination while enriching the understanding and enjoyment of theater. Many classes offer performance opportunities, and all classes promote ensemble work and skill development. Dance, acting and voice classes emphasize technique and professionalism, giving students the tools they need to succeed in the classroom, their schools, in the community, and on stages around the world.

Onstage, The Rose 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. 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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