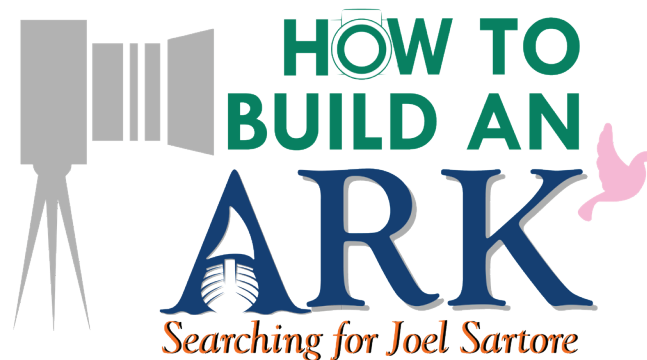


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***How to Build an Ark* focuses in on animals, art and activism**

**Rose Theater's latest world premiere features
Nebraskan photographer's work to eradicate extinction.**

(OMAHA, Nebr.) Whether online or in person, audiences at The Rose Theater's latest world premiere will be treated to a story inspired by the work of a local artist using the camera to raise awareness of endangered animals. ***How to Build an Ark: Searching for Joel Sartore*** opens Friday, January 22. The show follows the adventures of a young girl traveling through Sartore's photos on a quest to find the world's most interesting animal.

How to Build an Ark opens with young Vita and her mother enjoying a peaceful day in the park. When her mother decides she needs time to rest, she encourages Vita to take a picture if she sees anything interesting so she will have something to look forward to later, noting that she has a special affinity for the endangered. A butterfly appears and Vita tries to take its photo, but is unsuccessful. Magically, Camera appears -- an anthropomorphic character determined to give Vita a new perspective on the world and the animals living in it.

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Together, Vita and Camera travel through the photos in Vita's *National Geographic* magazine, encountering many different creatures, including a Frog, Bear, Naked Mole Rats, Salt Creek Tiger Beetles, a Sea Turtle, and more. With each new animal friend, Vita learns why the animals are endangered, a little about Joel Sartore's life, about Nebraska's endangered animals and work being done to help save the animals.

How to Build an Ark was inspired by the work of Joel Sartore, a *National Geographic* photographer and Nebraska resident who has spent years creating stunning photographs of animals. His unique artistic eye and sense of humor have been focused on endangered species as well as some more common creatures. The centerpiece of Sartore's work is his "Photo Ark" project, which is a groundbreaking effort to document species before they disappear.

Sartore admits that he never really imagined his work would inspire a stage play. "I was a field photographer for like 18 years for Geographic. There were no plays done on me that whole time," he says. "When I found out about the play, I was flattered. I thought that was great. It's fine. That's the truth; I thought, "Wow that's that's interesting. I can't wait to tell my wife, so she'll say, 'Oh now you're even harder to live with.'"

Sartore's work inspired local playwright Ellen Struve to create ***How to Build an Ark***. Struve's previous work includes *Recommended Reading for Girls* published by PlayScripts Inc. (O'Neill National Playwrights Conference Semi-Finalist, GPTC Stage Write Award), *Prince Max's Trewly Awful Trip to the Desolat Interior* (selected for the 2015 PlayPenn Playwrights' Conference, Great Plains Theatre Conference PlayFest Production), *EPIC* (GPTC PlayFest Production), *The Octopus Play* (EST/Sloan Commission), *The Dairy Maid-Right* (Mid-America Arts Alliance Artistic Innovation Grant), *Untitled Series #7* (Theatre Arts Guild Best Comedy), among others. She is a Nebraska Arts Council Individual Artist Fellow and WhyArts Resident Artist, with degrees from University of Iowa and School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

The show's creators hope to inspire young people to appreciate the world around them, to understand how our actions impact all the creatures in the world, and to help where they can. "That's what the Photo Ark is built for really, we're really hoping to give a voice to the voiceless," says Sartore.

"I just realize with every animal that I look at, there's great intelligence there. Just because we don't speak their language doesn't mean that a mouse doesn't understand its environment and what's going on on the smallest animals, you know," continues Sartore. "When we see these news stories: "Oh my gosh birds can talk to each other." "Oh my gosh, elephants can can mourn over their dead." Of course they can, of course, it's not a surprise. It's just people don't give them any credit. My job is to give them credit."

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Sartore's experience with National Geographic is reflected in the show's set, which features a giant golden-yellow proscenium frame, reminiscent of the magazine's iconic border. Actors will climb on platforms adorned with barrel-o-monkeys cut-outs and a functional playground slide, while interacting with animals portrayed both through puppetry and people.

The show is directed by Rose Artistic Director Matthew Gutschick, who has led the cast through a challenging rehearsal schedule that included both online and in-person rehearsals.

"Once we realized that this season would need to be different we knew that our plans had to be adjusted," says Gutschick. "We wanted to make sure that we would have the option to produce shows. We had to think about things that could be done with social distancing and what we could do to provide a digital version of the shows if seeing theater in-person wasn't an option."

Actors in ***How to Build an Ark*** will wear clear masks that have been incorporated into their costumes. They have worked on blocking to keep actors socially distant as much as possible, something the small cast size helps to facilitate.

"I think it is going to be kind of cool to see the show on stage. I wonder if people will even notice that the actors' blocking is different. It has been a fun artistic challenge," says Gutschick.

Recognizing that not all families may feel comfortable coming to the theater in person at this time, The Rose is producing a digital version of ***How to Build an Ark*** that can be viewed at home. As a world premiere show created by the artists at The Rose, the theater was able to work out streaming rights for the show. A three-camera film crew will record the show in the days before opening night, resulting in a high-definition, professional-quality video with a mix of close-ups and wide shots for at-home viewing.

The Rose plans to make the fully-edited digital version of the show available approximately two weeks after opening night, with availability projected for Feb. 5, if not sooner.

A family can purchase a digital ticket for \$30. In addition, The Rose will monitor local COVID statistics each week; should levels reach an unacceptable level, audiences planning to see the show in person will be offered a digital link or a chance to reschedule to a later (hopefully safer) date. Says Gutschick, "If there should be any disruptions to our ability to actually have live performances, people will still be able to enjoy the show from home."

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Due to Omaha's mask ordinance, audience members are required to wear masks while inside the theater. Other safety protocols in place at The Rose include:

- One-way traffic flows, with ticketholders entering on 20th Street and exiting on Farnam. Inside the theater, audiences will enter through the center doors only and exit using the side hallways
- Families will be directed to specific, socially-distant seating areas within the theater
- Significantly fewer tickets are available for each performance, allowing for fewer people inside the building overall.
- Floor markers throughout the theater indicate safe distances between parties.
- The theater will utilize touchless ticketing, checking ticketholders' names off a list, rather than taking tickets.
- Programs will be available digitally through The Rose website.
- No concessions or boutique items will be sold.
- Booster seats will not be available to borrow, but families are welcome to bring their own.
- The theater has engaged in enhanced cleaning procedures.

For additional information on The Rose's safety protocols, please visit <https://www.rosetheater.org/about/the-rose-experience/the-rose-theater-a-safe-space/>.

How to Build an Ark: Searching for Joel Sartore is recommended for families with children of all ages and is 60 minutes long without an intermission.

How to Build an Ark runs Jan 22 - Feb 21, 2021, with performances on Fridays at 7 p.m., Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 5 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, Feb. 6. 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, Feb. 6. Captioning and audio description are also available on the recording of the show; please ask The Rose Box Office for information.

Traditional in-person tickets for ***How to Build an Ark*** are available for \$20 by calling The Rose Box Office at (402) 345-4849 or online at www.rosetheater.org. Discount tickets are available at area Hy-Vee stores. Rose members receive free tickets to the production. For digital ticket information, please call The Rose Box Office or visit <https://www.rosetheater.org/box-office/digital-opportunities/>.

How to Build an Ark: Searching for Joel Sartore is sponsored by Children's Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Baird Holm, Security National Bank, the Nebraska Arts Council, and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Opening night is sponsored by Kiewit Companies. Union Pacific serves as the video sponsor.

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About The Rose

For more than 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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