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Imaginations ignite with theater for the very young: 'Firefly' show at The Rose introduces preschoolers to theater

Kori Radloff The Rose Theater

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Matthew Olsen as Park Ranger Glow in "Firefly" at the Rose Theater.

THE ROSE THEATER

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Bringing a two-year-old to the theater might seem like an odd idea, but at the Rose Theater, it is just another way of engaging young people and igniting their imaginations. The theater's First Stage Series creates theatrical performances

specifically for preschool audiences, incorporating interactive moments, flexible seating and a shush-free environment for an experience the entire family can enjoy. The result: moments of wonder and awe, and the spark of a lifetime love of the theater.

“These shows are interactive, sensory, intimate, and utilize the active minds and bodies of the young people in the audience to help tell the story. Children move, touch, smell, and use their own voices to bring these magical, immersive performances to life,” says TYA-USA representative Lauren Jost. Engaging young minds at this early age helps nurture their creative development, supports language development and encourages empathy.

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This spring, The Rose brings “Firefly” to preschool audiences. In the show, families are invited to join Park Ranger Glow on an adventure in the woods. The journey begins in The Rose lobby where kids will make their own badge and take the Park Ranger oath. They will then go on a “hike” up the theater’s stairway, painted with a woodland mural, looking for wildlife along the way. (Those with mobility issues will have a corresponding experience in The Rose’s elevator.) Finally, upon reaching The Rose’s Hitchcock Theater, families will enter a camp where they will hear crickets, smell the pines and be immersed in gentle darkness. Featuring shadow puppetry and sensory-filled moments of audience interaction, young people will meet a number of friendly creatures, including loons, butterflies, and — of course — fireflies.

“The magic of ‘Firefly’ is really driven by shadow puppetry,” says Rose artistic director Matt Gutschick. “It employs a lot of beautiful music and is just gorgeous. Families will love it.”

This play was not only written with the pre-K set in mind, but also was created by working directly with young people, seeing what resonated most with them and incorporating those elements directly into the show. Playwright Jessica Burrill-Logue held workshops with children where they played with glow sticks and shadow puppets, eventually working the best of those experiences into the production.

Burrill-Logue notes that “Firefly” was inspired by her own fear of the dark that she experienced as a child. She remembers fondly that her grandfather helped her overcome this fear by sharing the magic of fireflies with her.



Playwright Jessica Burrill-Logue.

THE ROSE THEATER

“My Grampy helped me by taking me on an adventure into the woods. He introduced me to the wonder of a world that comes alive at night,” she says. “I remember sitting there on a rock, and suddenly I was surrounded by fireflies dancing around me like the stars high in the dark sky.”

Theater can help young people understand the world around them and learn how to process their emotions. This is what motivated Burrill-Logue to create “Firefly”.

“I know that many children have this same fear of the dark, and I wanted to bring my childhood experience to life in a way that sparks wonder, beauty and creative play.”



Young audience members interact during a previous First Stage production at The Rose Theater.

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First Stage shows at The Rose, like “Firefly”, allow preschoolers the freedom to fully experience the story. Taking place in the theater’s black box auditorium, children are often seated right in the performance space where actors can speak to them directly. They might be invited to touch a puppet or prop, to stand up and take part in the action, or to shout out to the characters. With run times around 30-45 minutes, the shows are just long enough to hold a preschooler’s attention — without infringing on nap time!

“‘Firefly’ should be a really exciting, transformative journey for audiences of all ages,” says Gutschick.

"Firefly" has been designed specifically for first-time theater-goers with periods of gentle darkness and interactivity. It is ideal for young children ages 2 to 5 years old. The show, which is approximately 40 minutes long without an intermission, is presented on The Rose’s Hitchcock Stage.

"Firefly" runs March 25 to April 8, with performances on Saturdays at 10 a.m. and noon, and Sundays at 11 a.m. Tickets for are \$17 and are required for everyone over the age of 12 months. Members of The Rose receive discounted tickets to the production.

Contact The Rose Box Office at 402-345-4849 or visit **www.rosetheater.org** for more information.

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