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## Hop to it: 'Havana Hop' combines a hip hop beat with lessons for life

Kori Radloff The Rose Theater

Feb 7, 2023



Writer and performer Paige Hernandez brings the story of young Yeila to life onstage in a dynamic participation play, where one actress creates three generations of family members on a discovery of her multi-cultural heritage. Yeila dreams of being a superstar, but her lack of confidence gives her awful stage fright. With advice from her mother and mentors, she begins a journey to find her roots, get confidence and be amazing.

Eric P. Mull

Kori Radloff The Rose Theater

**A**n important life lesson combined with a hip-hop beat? That's what audiences can expect when Havana Hop comes to The Rose this month.

Audiences will be dancing in the aisles at the Rose Theater's upcoming production of "Havana Hop," while also learning important lessons about self-confidence and perseverance against a background of multi-cultural heritage. This interactive play performed by a single actor will help families learn a little about Cuban American culture, with a hip-hop beat.

"'Havana Hop' this is a mix of salsa, music and hip-hop all run through the lens of the story of a young girl who is trying to find her unique way of being in the world," says Rose Artistic Director Matt Gutschick.

The show is just one way that families can use theater and the arts to introduce children to cultures other than their own, teaching them important skills such as empathy, respect for others and believing in yourself.

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Hernandez is an actor, dancer, choreographer, playwright and self-described "B-girl" who fuses theater and hip-hop. Her inspiration as a writer and performer comes from her own background. The show, "Havana Hop", tells a story of a young girl's passion and fuses it with culture and family history.

Child development experts share that giving children opportunities to experience a variety of cultural experiences can help them develop a sense of pride in themselves and a sense of understanding of people who are different from themselves.

“It is important to teach children that differences in people do exist and that these differences are not bad,” says

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Writer and performer Paige Hernandez.

Eric P. Mull

"Havana Hop" presents this serious topic in a light-hearted manner, inviting audiences to dance along as the story of self-discovery unfolds. The show draws on hip-hop culture to tell a story that is relatable to young audiences. This style of theater — known as hip-hop theater — incorporates a fun and innovative approach as a way of empowering young people through the tenets of the craft: DJing, breakdancing, emceeing, beatboxing and rap and the cultures of African, African American, Caribbean and Latino immigrant communities in the United States.

“The arts can be transformational in helping young people gain empathy and understanding for others in their community,” says Gutschick. “Hip-hop theater allows kids to think about important societal issues in a fun, engaging way.”

Hernandez is a multidisciplinary artist who is critically acclaimed as a performer, director, choreographer and playwright. She is also known for her effective fusion of theater, hip-hop, dance and education. The Huffington Post named Hernandez a “classroom hero” because of her outstanding arts integration and work with STEM initiatives. She was recently named a “Top Theatre Worker You Should Know” by American Theatre Magazine and a “Rising Leader of Color” by Theatre Communications Group.

“We are thrilled to bring Paige to Omaha audiences to share this important work of theater,” says Gutschick. “It is The Rose’s mission to help young people discover their voice, and the message of 'Havana Hop' is a truly inspiring way to address ideas of self-confidence and culture.”

"Havana Hop" is the first Rose production for Hernandez; she has been co-commissioned by the Rose and three other theaters to create a theater piece based on Maya Angelou’s poem, "Life Doesn’t Frighten Me," which will be produced by The Rose in the near future. Hernandez will work directly with children in the Omaha community to generate the content of the play, using the poem and the illustrations by Jean-Michel Basquiat as inspiration and source material.

“To say that this project feels like a perfect fit is an understatement! I have been a lifelong fan of Maya Angelou, Jean-Michel Basquiat and specifically of Angelou’s poem, 'Life Doesn’t Frighten Me.' I have taught this poem for many years and look forward to putting my mindful hip-hop aesthetic into a devised children’s theatre piece,” says Hernandez.

"Havana Hop" will be presented Feb. 10 through 19, with performances Fridays at 7 p.m.; Saturdays at 2 and 5 p.m.; and Sundays at 2 p.m. Interpretation for the deaf and audio description services for the blind will be offered at the 2 p.m. show on Feb. 18. A sensory-friendly performance will be offered on Feb. 18 at 5 p.m. The show is expected to run approximately 60 minutes and is appropriate for all ages.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit **[rosetheater.org/shows/havanahop](https://rosetheater.org/shows/havanahop)**.

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