

For Immediate Release

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Pandas provide enlightenment in world premiere of *Zen Ties* at The Rose

(OMAHA, Nebr.) In a gentle tale about patience and compassion, ***Zen Ties*** imparts universal lessons of wisdom and mindfulness in its world premiere performance at The Rose Theater, Feb. 20 - Mar. 8, 2015. This philosophical play follows two pandas as they encounter others in their neighborhood and discover people are not always what they seem.

Zen Ties introduces us to Koo, a young panda visiting her Uncle Stillwater. Blessed with the gift of gab, Koo talks a mile a minute, at least until Stillwater offers her a special challenge: to listen. As Koo attempts to speak using only 17 syllables at a time (exactly the number used in a traditional haiku poem), she is forced to thoughtfully consider the world around her. Stillwater quietly encourages young Koo to use compassion to better understand others and help make the world a better place.

Zen Ties has been adapted for The Rose stage by playwright Y York from the book by Caldecott Honor author and artist Jon Muth. "There is a theme that runs through all of Y's work," says Rose artistic director Matthew Gutschick. "She views the world with empathetic eyes, and it is that viewpoint that makes her the perfect person to adapt this story for the stage."

Zen Ties will be presented for the first time on The Rose stage, an endeavor made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. "This is a very special project for me," says York. "When I was presented with ***Zen Ties***, it was almost as if the characters were already dancing for me. I was excited to bring them to life on stage."

Guest director Jesse J. Jou returns to The Rose to lead the production of ***Zen Ties***. Jou was inspired by York's work on the script. "Even at a very early stage, you could tell Y had written something really, really beautiful. This script has great simplicity and great beauty. There is a powerful journey for each character to explore," he says.

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As Koo and Stillwater explore their neighborhood, they meet three children - Addy, Michael and Karl. They soon learn that Michael is preparing for a school spelling bee, but feels a little nervous. Stillwater decides to help Michael by introducing the children to Mrs. Whittaker. At first glance, Mrs. Whittaker appears to be a grouchy, unpleasant woman, but after showing her acts of kindness, the children learn that there is more to Mrs. Whittaker than they first imagined, and she may even hold the key to helping Michael with his spelling bee.

The play is a disarming story of compassion and friendship that reaffirms the importance of our connection to others. "This play has a gentle touch, a very loving touch," says Jou. "The spirit of the play, as embodied in the title, is about the ties we have with each other."

Zen Ties will work its gentle charm on families with children ages 5 and up with its patience and compassion. The show runs Feb. 20 - Mar. 8, 2015, with performances Fridays at 7 pm, Saturdays at 2 pm and 5 pm, and Sundays at 2 pm.

The 2 pm performance on Saturday, Feb. 28 will be interpreted for the hearing-impaired. The 5 pm show on Feb. 28 has been designated a sensory-friendly performance for children with sensory processing disorders, autism spectrum disorder and other special needs. For information on this performance, contact The Rose Box Office at (402) 345-4849.

Tickets are \$18 per person. Discount ticket vouchers are available at all area Hy-Vee stores for \$14 each. Members of The Rose receive four free tickets to the production.

Zen Ties is sponsored by Children's Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Baird Holm, the Nebraska Arts Council, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Opening night activities are sponsored by Kids Love Stickers, Powered by MediBadge.

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. 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.

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