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UNO Theatre Launches UNO Summer Musical Theatre Academy

Begins with Q Smith Workshop and rehearsals for Fame June 6

OMAHA, Neb. – The University of Nebraska Omaha College of Communication, Fine Arts, and Media, The School of the Arts, and UNO Theatre in partnership with Omaha Public Schools and Omaha South High School will launch the new UNO Summer Musical Theatre Academy on Monday, June 6, 2022.

The new summer program for Omaha high school performers and theatre technicians kicks off with a workshop led by Broadway standout, Q Smith, from the cast of *Come From Away* and *Fame* rehearsals led by Seattle based director Vincent J Orduna.

The work will culminate with performances on July 1 at 7:30 pm and July 2 at 2:00 pm in UNO's Black Box Theatre on the Dodge campus and on July 3 at 8:30 pm at The RiverFront's new Gene Leahy Mall Performance Pavilion as part of the grand opening weekend.

The production features 46 high school performers and technicians representing 21 Omaha area schools. A professional orchestra will be led by Tyler Gruttemeyer, Director of Vocal Music at Omaha South High. The dance infused score will feature the work of Omaha Choreographer Domanic Brown who is also affiliated with Omaha South.

The SMTA is led by UNO Theatre in partnership with organizations and individuals from Omaha's education, arts, and philanthropic communities.

Community partnerships for young people is a major focus of UNO Chancellor, Joanne Li, "This program is an amazing way to connect Omaha's artistic youth with professionals. This kind of experience is so important to their development letting the students engage with Omaha's vibrant arts culture while building a deeper connection with their community."

Omaha Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Cheryl Logan has brought resources and strong support to the summer program. "We are proud to offer a wide range of opportunities for students in Omaha Public Schools. Partnerships like this extend learning beyond the classroom and into the summer, connecting talented artists throughout our community. It is a joy to watch, and the experience instills a lifelong appreciation for the arts in our young people."

Dean Michael Hilt from UNO sees the summer program connection to long range pursuits.

"For years, middle- and high-school students have enjoyed performing in musical theatre. The Omaha metropolitan area is a hotbed for such activity, and it has been a dream at UNO to allow those students to continue those experiences in college. Through the College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media, we are seeing our vision come to fruition. It is our plan for the Summer Musical Theatre Academy to become an annual showcase for the best young musical theatre performers in our city."

Omaha South High School has hosted OPS summer musicals since 2016. Arts Curriculum Specialist, Rebecca Noble, has been a major advocate for that program.

"The Summer Musical Theatre Academy is a game-changer for high schoolers in our community who aspire to a career in musical theatre. Students hone their skills and refine their craft, working with professionals who inspire, educate, and challenge them to be disciplined artists. It raises the bar for these young performers and provides the tools for them to be competitive in college, conservatory, and career paths."

Nationally recognized conductor, Hal France, joined the UNO Theatre faculty to build a musical theatre program, he serves of Director of the new summer program.

“Our goal has been to offer this tuition free. We wanted every talented young person in the metro to have equal access. Generous donations from private citizens has helped us achieve this.”

Preparation began in the shops of UNO Theatre in May led by veteran set and costume artists, Grant Hilgenkamp and Char Willoughby. Academy students are building the new production. They will be involved in all the areas of the show including performance, lighting, sound, hair and makeup, wardrobe, and stage management.

The Design Team for Fame includes UNO Set Designer, Jason Jamerson, Costume Designer, Jocelyn Reed, Lighting Designer, Rick Goble and Sound Designer, Bill Kirby of the Blue Barn Theatre.

The RiverFront is a transformation of 72-acres in downtown Omaha, renovating and interconnecting three previously existing city parks: Gene Leahy Mall, Heartland of America Park and Lewis & Clark Landing. The project spans from the Missouri River eastward into the city’s urban core, extending to 13th Street. The Metropolitan Entertainment & Convention Authority (MECA) is managing park construction, activation, and maintenance. The RiverFront, will be a highly programmed green space, rich with native plantings and permanent amenities, is scheduled to reopen (in phases) starting with Gene Leahy Mall this July.

FAME THE MUSICAL

Based on the film and television series of the same name, Fame, the Musical follows students at New York’s High School of the Performing Arts through their four years. We see them coming to terms with life and relationships; we see those who persevere, who are resilient - and those who are not.

Originally conceived by David De Silva, Fame the Musical features a book by Jose Fernandez, lyrics by Jacques Levy and music by Steve Margoshes. This musical also features the Academy Award-winning song “Fame,” written by Dean Pitchford and Michael Gore. Fame The Musical is produced by special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI). All authorized performance materials are also supplied by MTI.

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