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RLT PRESENTS 'THE SECRET GARDEN'

Show Promoted By Walton Arts Center As Part Of Artosphere Regional Festival

ROGERS, Ark. — Rogers Little Theater will present the enchanting musical *The Secret Garden* for two weekends starting April 30 at the historic Victory Theater in downtown Rogers.

RLT has partnered with the Walton Arts Center and the Tea Room at Vinson Square so that *The Secret Garden* offers new and inspiring experiences including “Light Evening Tea” prior to the Friday and Saturday night performances.

Seats are general admission for *The Secret Garden* performances April 30-May 2 and May 6-8, with all shows starting at 8 pm except for the May 2 show at 2 p.m. A special Mother's Day Brunch and Show is scheduled for May 9 at 1 p.m.

“Some of the most beautiful music ever written for Broadway is in this musical,” said Juan Martinez, director for *The Secret Garden*. “The music is challenging and does such a good job in expressing the story, and this cast of children and adults has the stellar vocal talent to make this show a success.”

Based on the novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* is a classic of children’s literature that was turned into a musical by Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Marsha Norman (author of *‘night, Mother*) and composer Lucy Simon.

“Many of the 16 actors sing at least one solo or duet containing musical passages weighted with emotions ranging from love and hope to fear and despair,” Martinez said.

The Secret Garden story begins with an 11-year-old girl named Mary Lennox who is forced to leave the English colony of India after her parents have died of the cholera. Mary returns to Yorkshire, England to live with her bitter, reclusive uncle Archibald Craven, and his invalid son, Colin Craven.

“This show is not just about a garden, though the garden is a welcome theme. It teaches us among other things that a little bit of care goes a long way,” said Juan Martinez, director for the musical. “The show also includes multicultural influences through the presence of characters that played a part in Mary's life in India.”

Mary, in a sense, rescues everyone from a spirit of despair that was cast over the household when Archibald's wife, Lily, died 10 years earlier. Archibald had locked up Lily's garden and said no one was to ever go into it again.

Dr. Neville Craven's envy over his brother Archibald's estate gets the best of him and he orchestrates keeping Colin, heir to the estate, locked in his bedroom. The rest of the household fears a perceived illness will cause Colin to die if he were to go outside. Martha, the maid, encourages Mary to befriend Colin as the whimsical Dickon – brother of Martha – helps Mary restore the garden that ultimately casts the “magical spell” needed for Colin's recovery. Flashbacks, dream sequences, and a strolling chorus of ghosts dramatize the musical's compelling tale of regeneration.

In line with the show's English theme, The Tea Room at Vinson Square is offering “Light Evening Tea” with scones and other food items from 5:30-7:30 p.m. on the Friday and Saturday night performances only.

“Involving a downtown business in this way demonstrates RLT's commitment to building community through unique partnerships. It's a perfect tie-in. What can be more English than tea time?” said Richard Dean Prudenti, executive director of RLT and assistant director for *The Secret Garden*.

The Tea Room at Vinson Square is at 107 W. Elm St., just around the corner from The Victory Theater. The Light Evening Tea (\$7.95 per plate) includes finger sandwiches, fresh fruit with poppy seed dressing, choice of hot or cold tea, or soft drink, and scones. For reservations, call The Tea Room at 633-8832.

The Walton Arts Center has partnered with RLT to promote *The Secret Garden* as part of the new Artosphere: Arkansas' Arts and Nature Festival, which is designed to celebrate artists – influenced by nature – who help inspire us to live more sustainable lives. For more information on Artosphere, go to www.artospherefestival.org.

Artosphere offers five weeks of free or low-cost programs all over the region, said Peter Lane, president and chief executive officer for The Walton Arts Center.

“This is a new kind of festival for Arkansas,” Lane said. “We feel that the festival is a way to engage new audiences and inspire people to see nature, the environment and sustainability through a different lens.”

Tickets for *The Secret Garden* are available at the RLT Box Office, 116 S. Second St., or via the RLT Web site, www.rogerslittletheater.org. General admission is \$15 adults, \$8.50 children. The Mother's Day Brunch and Show costs \$42, and will be handled by Pfeffer's Catering.

For more information, contact the RLT Box Office at (479) 631-8988 or visit the RLT Website at www.rogerslittletheater.org.

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