

WHARTON CENTER TO OFFER SENSORY-FRIENDLY PERFORMANCES

EAST LANSING, MI – Wharton Center is proud to announce a new programming initiative: beginning in the 2017-2018 season, several live theatre productions will include Sensory-Friendly Performances for children and adults with autism spectrum disorder and other sensitivity issues.

“We know that for people with sensory sensitivities – a group that includes many who are on the autism spectrum – attending a live theatre production can be a minefield of potential challenges. Wharton Center’s mission is to make theatre accessible to everyone,” noted Executive Director Mike Brand. “In addition, we are hoping that the entire family can come to Wharton Center to relax and enjoy what we offer in a friendly, welcoming environment.”

Sensory-Friendly Performances feature accommodations such as:

- Lower sound levels and the elimination of potentially startling special effects and lighting.
- House lights and stage lights will remain on at a low level throughout the performance.
- Audience members may stand and move around as needed.
- There will be designated quiet and activity areas available to patrons.
- Trained volunteers and professionals will be on hand during the entire event.
- Sensory supports (earplugs, noise-cancelling head phones) will be available in the lobby.
- Trained volunteers will provide crafts and activities an hour-and-a-half prior to the performance to the end of the performance.

Wharton Center’s Director of Patron Services, Nina Silbergleit, said, “We have long been an advocate and provider of accessibility services for our patrons. Providing Sensory-Friendly Performances and the training for staff in regard to supporting patrons with sensory sensitivities is a wonderful opportunity to expand our existing services.”

This season, Wharton Center’s Sensory-Friendly Performances include:

- *Dr. Seuss’s The Cat in the Hat* on Sunday, October 29, 2017 at 1:00 p.m.
- *Clementine* on Sunday, March 25, 2018 at 1:00 p.m.
- *Disney’s The Lion King* on Saturday, July 21, 2018 at 2:00 p.m.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

This program will extend beyond the 2017-2018 season. "Ultimately, Wharton Center intends to create a sustainable program that will continue sensory-friendly offerings well into the foreseeable future," says Diane Willcox, Wharton Center's Director of Marketing and Communications. "It just makes sense when we know that according to the Center for Disease Control, a new case of autism is diagnosed in the United States every 15 minutes, and an estimated one of every six children is affected by neurological conditions that require treatment and special considerations. Our goal is to reach families and individuals affected by these issues and offer them a place in which they can feel welcome and comfortable."

Visit www.whartoncenter.com/sfp to learn more about Sensory-Friendly Performances. In addition, you can support this important program by making a gift to fund scholarship tickets. Wharton Center recognizes the financial challenges many families face when they have an individual with ASD or other disabilities. Budgets are often constrained due to the cost of specialized care and services. Your support will allow a family to receive scholarship tickets to attend a Sensory-Friendly Performance for free. This is part of Wharton Center's commitment to make live performances accessible to all.

Sensory-Friendly Performances are generously sponsored by Delta Dental of Michigan. Teri Battaglieri, Director of Communications, Corporate Citizenship and Philanthropy at Delta Dental says, "Delta Dental is proud to be the lead sponsor of this special program because we want every child, regardless of needs or abilities, to have access to the arts." Additional support is provided by the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs; MSU Office of the President; MSU College of Education; MSU Research in Autism, Intellectual and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (RAIND) program; and MSU University Outreach and Engagement.

In addition, Wharton Center has teamed up with a variety of community partners for guidance and outreach including the Mid-Michigan Autism Association (MMAA); Autism Alliance of Michigan (AAOM); MSU Child Development Lab; and Peckham, Inc. to help create this sensory-friendly initiative.

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