

Roxy's conjures up stage version of 'Hocus Pocus'

BY DAVID BURKE
Eagle correspondent

When the movie "Hocus Pocus" was released in mid-July 1993, it didn't exactly conjure up big box office sales.

Released in the mid-summer to avoid competition with its own "The Nightmare Before Christmas," the Disney comedy about three bewitching sisters was in fourth place for movies its opening week ("Free Willy" was No. 1), and dropped out of the top 10 after two weeks.

But thanks to a loyal following, including brisk home video sales and constant autumn showings on cable television, "Hocus Pocus" has become an unexpected staple.

"As 'Home Alone' is to Christmas, 'Hocus Pocus' is to Halloween," actress Jen Bechter said. "It has that big of a following." "People just love it," added co-star Jenny Mitchell. "It's part of the magic of Halloween."

Roxy's Downtown is capturing that magic with its own version of "Hocus Pocus," opening this weekend and continuing into November, with several sold-out shows already and performances added.

Billed as an "unauthorized musical parody," director Rick Bumgardner said the show has added 14 musical numbers – all 1990s hits.

"We have materially



Courtesy photo

The Halloween favorite "Hocus Pocus" opens this weekend at Roxy's Downtown and continues into November.

altered what people know of this movie," he said.

But the Sanderson sisters remain the focus of "Hocus Pocus." Bechter plays the Bette Midler role of Winifred, Mitchell plays the Kathy Najimy part of Mary, and Julia Faust takes the Sarah Jessica Parker role of Sarah. They lead a nine-person cast.

Bumgardner, also artistic director for Roxy's, said the actresses in the stage parody make the characters their own.

"The audiences will recognize the characters for sure, but the ladies have put their own personal spins on who these ladies are," he said.

"Hocus Pocus' is such a classic that everyone knows, and I didn't want

to stray too far from the classic character she is, because everyone loves her," Bechter said of Winifred. "But with our own spin and having music and laugh lines-parody of 'Hocus Pocus,' it gives me time to step away from what people know of her and add bits of hilarity and things people haven't seen of Winnie."

"We're just trying to keep the things the audiences love about the characters," Faust said. "Sarah Sanderson's very sensual. In the movie she's very petite, and I'm very full-figured. The way I would portray sensuality is a little bit different. I'm trying to stay true to what the character makes me feel."

Roxy's is rating the stage show PG-13.

"There's nothing raunchy in this show, but I think the adult humor will go over the heads of kids under 13," Bumgardner said. "We're doing a little more adult version than the Disney movie – we're not trying to hide necessarily what they talk about. We've inserted laugh lines and songs into the course of the show that will make it a much more palpable performance for an adult audience."

Midler sang the R&B classic "I Put a Spell on You" in the movie, which Bechter recreates, but the rest of the musical selections, backed by music director Andy Bowers and a four-person band, is

'Hocus Pocus'

When: Oct. 11 to Nov. 3, at 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Sundays, Oct. 13 and Nov. 3; 6 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 20; additional performance at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 30

Where: Roxy's Downtown, 412 ½ E. Douglas

Tickets: \$20-\$30, by calling 316-265-4400 or roxydowntown.com

from the 1990s, with songs such as the Backstreet Boys' "Everybody" and the Christina Aguilera-Lil Kim-Pink mashup "Lady Marmalade."

"It was difficult, but it's

a blank check to do basically what we wanted," said of the music he and Bumgardner chose.

Mitchell, who is also the choreographer, said the nostalgia factor should appeal to Gen-X, Gen-Y and millennials.

"It's done so beautifully by inserting all pop music from the 1990s," she said. "You'll watch the show and everybody will go, 'Oh, I love that song,' and want to sing along."

Both the plot and the music are "something people can relate to and love from their childhood that now they can latch onto in their adulthood that's just fun," Mitchell added. "It's one of those things that kids and adults can just sit back and watch and enjoy it."

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CityArts | 334 N. Mead

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Science Fest

Saturday, October 12 | 1-5 p.m.
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Engage in hands-on science activities, including biology and STEM-related fields. Sponsored by K-State Research and Extension – Sedgwick County and Kansas State University.

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