



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contacts:

Cindy Moran, PR Consultant, cmoran@firststage.org, (414) 405-6290

Jennifer Hubbartt, Marketing and Communications Director, jhubbartt@firststage.org,
(414) 630-9132

**Amplify – First Stage’s second BIPOC Short Play Series
kicks off with
How to Actually Graduate in a Virtual World**

-Virtual production streams September 1 – December 5, 2021-

Milwaukee, WI – September 1, 2021 – The second season of **Amplify – First Stage’s BIPOC Short Play Series** begins today with the world premiere production of **HOW TO ACTUALLY GRADUATE IN A VIRTUAL WORLD** by award-winning playwright/actor **Nikkole Salter** and a collaboration with Milwaukee Black Theater Festival’s Youth Night. This timely play explores the experience of a group of high school students as they confront the reality that their high school graduation will be virtual during their pandemic school year. Tune in to find out how this group of friends – with a little imagination and a hefty amount of teamwork – finds a creative way to celebrate this year’s graduation. The Amplify series is sponsored by **Children’s Wisconsin**. This project is also supported in part by a grant from the **Milwaukee Arts Board** and the **Wisconsin Arts Board** with funds from the State of Wisconsin. *Suggested for families with young people ages 12+.*

Director/Artistic Inclusion and Community Engagement Director **Samantha D. Montgomery** shared her thoughts on the production: “This play shines light on the challenges that our youth are facing during this pandemic. It encourages them to let their light shine with determination during this difficult time, and not give up. It helps them realize that we see them and their efforts will bring them the promotion and visibility that they deserve.”

HOW TO ACTUALLY GRADUATE IN A VIRTUAL WORLD is free to stream on demand on First Stage's YouTube channel and premieres at **on Wednesday, September 1 at 7 p.m.** It will stream **September 1 through December 5, 2021.** For more information, please go to: firststage.org/events-tickets/2021-22-season/amplify-bipoc-short-play-series/

The Amplify series first launched in the spring of 2021 and begins its second season this fall. In this new series, three short plays have been created by Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) playwrights that center on the young person's point of view, amplifying the voices of these artists and young people throughout the Milwaukee community.

First Stage has had a long history of age-appropriate casting and of centering its work on the young person's point of view. Understanding the power of connection that young people feel when they see themselves and their stories on stage, the organization is excited to continue this series featuring newly commissioned work from noted BIPOC playwrights and directors. First Stage's commitment to commissioning work by Black, Indigenous and People of Color whose voices offer the organization an opportunity to expand its artistic horizons and develop its audience's perspective.

Artistic Director **Jeff Frank** commented on the next installment of the Amplify series: "I am thrilled that First Stage is able to offer the second season of our Amplify series. Each of these productions features the work of a national playwright using their voice to lift those of the young people of Milwaukee. Connecting these remarkable writers with our amazing young people and witnessing them all working together to create powerful plays that speak with authenticity has been an amazing experience. We can't wait to share their work with First Stage audiences."

BIOGRAPHIES

Nikkole Salter (Playwright) is an OBIE Award-winning actress and dramatist. Her plays include IN THE CONTINUUM (NY Outer Critics Circle's John Gassner Award for Best New American Play, 2006; Helen Hayes Award, 2007), REPAIRING A NATION, OF GREAT MERIT, CARNAVAL, LINES IN THE DUST and FREEDOM RIDERS. Ms. Salter is a 2014 MAP Fund Grant recipient, a Theatre Hall of Fame Seldes-Kanin Fellowship awardee and a recipient of the Global Tolerance Award from the Friends of the United Nations. Ms. Salter is also co-founder of The Continuum Project, Inc., a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that creates innovative artistic programming for community empowerment and enrichment. Its primary endeavor, The Legacy Program: Residency – a youth development initiative that uses the arts to reconnect descendants of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade to the specificity of their African ancestry – was featured on the PBS series, *Finding Your Roots*, hosted by Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Ms. Salter is an active member of the Actors' Equity Association, the Screen Actors Guild/American Federation of Television and Radio Artists and the Dramatists Guild. She received her BFA in theatre from Howard University and her MFA from New York University's Graduate Acting Program under the tutelage of Zelda Fichandler and Ron Van Lieu.

nikkolesalter.com/about

Samantha D. Montgomery (Director/Artistic Inclusion and Community Engagement Director) is a performance artist who is committed to the process of learning. She has worked in both traditional and non-traditional educational settings. Teaching is her passion, connectivity is her goal and working collaboratively in unity to nurture trust, acceptance, inclusion and community is her commitment. She has enjoyed working at First Stage as a Teaching Artist and is grateful for the opportunity to work as the Artistic Inclusion and Community Engagement Director. Samantha is a member of Actors' Equity Association. She holds a BA from Alverno College in Professional Communication, a MS from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in Administrative Leadership and Supervision in Adult Education and a MA from Alverno College in Education.

Jeff Frank (Artistic Director) is recognized as one of the top directors in the field with an expertise in developing new work for theater for young audiences. He holds a BFA in Theater from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and an MFA in Child Drama from the University of Utah. Having served as First Stage's Education and Academy Director from 1996 – 2003 and as First Stage's Artistic Director since February 2003, Jeff remains committed to the power of theater to transform lives and is forever thankful to call First Stage home.

CAST

HOW TO ACTUALLY GRADUATE IN A VIRTUAL WORLD features First Stage Young Performers: **Maya O'Day Biddle** (Greenfield) as TT; **Jonae Thomas** (Sussex) as Jordan; **Christian Hughes** (Milwaukee) as Kenya; **Abby Wallace** (Milwaukee) as Shannon; **Nahjee Robinson** (Milwaukee) as Raynell and **Daisha Lafford** (Milwaukee) as TT/Workshop Alternate.

The Artistic Staff for HOW TO ACTUALLY GRADUATE IN A VIRTUAL WORLD includes: **Samantha D. Montgomery** (Director/Artistic Inclusion and Community Engagement Director); **Natalie Mayo** (Stage Manager and Sound Designer); **Nikki Kulas** (Properties Master); **Emily Adams** (Technical Director); **Steven Siegel** (Lead Carpenter); **Jacob Mitchell** (Location Audio Capture and Engineer), **Webster X** (Music) and **Traveling Lemur Productions, Inc.** (Film and Editing).

HOW TO ACTUALLY GRADUATE IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

By [Nikkole Salter](#)

Directed by [Samantha Montgomery](#)

Streaming September 1 – December 5, 2021

When Milwaukee High announces that graduation will be virtual, TT gathers friends to come up with a way to make the ceremony special. As they weigh their options – and battle invisibility, hopelessness and indifference – we learn how the pandemic affected them all. Is an achievement an achievement if it goes unacknowledged? Tune in and consider this question in this provocative short play. *Suggested for families with young people ages 12+.*

Additional productions in the 2021/22 Amplify – BIPOC Short Play Series are:

STEP KIDS

A one-act musical by [Tyrone L. Robinson](#) and [Postell Pringle](#)

Directed by [Christopher Gilbert](#)

Limited capacity live performances at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center:

Saturday, October 2 at 4 p.m. & 7 p.m. and Sunday, October 3 at 1 p.m. & 4 p.m.

Streaming October 11 – December 5, 2021

A group of seemingly unconnected high school students find common ground in the most unlikely of places – the audition for their school’s competitive step dance team. As the students become unified through the power of rhythm and dance, experience the joy of finding your tribe in this energetic performance. *Suggested for families with young people ages 10+.*

THE TALE OF LA LLRONA AS TOLD BY CONSUELO CHAVEZ

By [José Casas](#)

Directed by [David Flores](#)

Limited capacity live performances at the Marcus Center’s Todd Wehr Theater:

Saturday, October 23 at 4 p.m. & 7 p.m. and Sunday, October 24 at 1 p.m. & 4 p.m.

Streaming October 30 – December 5, 2021

Disappointed that a thunderstorm has stopped them from their traditional trick or treating, six middle-schoolers huddle together in a basement on what might be the last time they are together to celebrate All Hallows’ Eve. To pass the time, they share some of their favorite ghost stories . . . but are they just stories? *Suggested for families with young people ages 12+.*

Warning – the performance includes blackouts, loud noises and scary moments.

To reserve tickets for in-person performances or for additional information, please go to:

firststage.org/events-tickets/2021-22-season/amplify-bipoc-short-play-series/

or call **(414) 267-2961**.

###

About First Stage

First Stage is one of the nation’s leading theaters for young people and families. First Stage touches hearts, engages minds and transforms lives by creating extraordinary theater experiences through professional theater productions that inspire, enlighten and entertain. Its Theater Academy, the nation’s largest high-impact theater training program for young people, fosters life skills through stage skills and serves nearly 2,000 students each year. As Wisconsin’s leader in arts-integrated education in schools, First Stage’s dynamic Theater in Education programs promote literacy, character building and experiential learning throughout the curriculum, serving over 20,000 students each year. First Stage was selected to participate in the Partners in Education program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (2012)

and was the recipient of the Milwaukee Business Journal's Eureka Award, recognizing creativity and innovation in business, education and the arts for its Next Steps program for students on the autism spectrum (2013, 2015). First Stage is a member of TYA/USA, the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, the Wisconsin Alliance for Arts Education, Milwaukee Arts Partners and is a cornerstone member of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF). firststage.org