



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# First Stage kicks off the new year with hopeful production of **CARMELA FULL OF WISHES**

*-Imaginative set, costumes, sound and lighting brings popular children's book vividly to life-*

**Milwaukee, WI – January 3, 2023** – Milwaukee's First Stage, one of the nation's leading theaters for young people and families, begins the new year with CARMELA FULL OF WISHES, adapted by First Stage Resident Playwright **Alvaro Saar Rios**, (ON THE WINGS OF A MARIPOSA/ LUCHADORA!), from the popular book by award-winning children's author **Matt de la Peña**, with illustrations by **Christian Robinson**. In this beautiful adaptation, audiences will discover that it is Carmela's birthday, and her wish has already come true – she's finally old enough to join her big brother as he does the family errands! As they travel through the neighborhood, Carmela finds a lone dandelion growing in the pavement. Before she can blow its puffy white fluff away, her brother tells her she must make a wish. If only she can think of just the right wish to make! Delight in this moving ode to family, to dreamers and to finding hope in the most unexpected places. Sponsored by **PNC**.

**CARMELA FULL OF WISHES** runs **January 20 – February 12, 2023** at the Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater, located at 929 N. Water Street in downtown Milwaukee. Tickets are **\$28** and can be purchased in person at the Marcus Center Box Office at 929 N. Water Street, by phone at **(414) 273-7206** or online at [firststage.org](http://firststage.org). *Performance runtime is approximately 70 minutes, which includes a brief intermission. Suggested for families with young people ages 3+.*

**From Director Michelle Lopez-Rios:** "In CARMELA FULL OF WISHES, we take a big journey with Carmela on her birthday. Like the book, the play delivers a world that stimulates all the senses. The imaginative set, costume, sound and lighting designs of the production will play a vital role

in bringing this world to life. There are fields of bright orange marigolds, tastes of paletas (popsicles), smells of fresh laundry and the beauty of life by the sea. As she tags along to run errands with her Big Brother, we travel through the vibrant community that is their home. We watch as Carmela dreams up the perfect wish for her birthday and reveals what life is like for her family.

Family is at the heart of this journey. Mami starts off the day with chocolate pancakes and a charge for Big Brother to take care of his sister. Carmela and her brother bicker, tease each other as they make their way through the list of things to do and complicated conversations. We learn about their undocumented father and how her Big Brother is filling his shoes. We ache with her as she longs for her dad to be home and her family to be complete. It is a story that is familiar to too many youth in Milwaukee as they carry the weight of tremendous hardships in their daily life.

It is hard to understand a world that would separate a six-year-old from her Papi. It is a world where all the adults she knows work so hard, including her Mami. It is a world that forces her brother to grow up quickly and help her navigate tough questions. The story is necessary because it explores the difficult issue of immigration from the point of view of a child trying to understand why her father cannot be home with his family. It is a story that we all need to know and understand. As Carmela dashes along the streets on her worn green scooter taking in the world around her, we witness the deep and endless love of this family, and we feel the resilience of hope.”

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

**Matt de la Peña (Author)** is the *New York Times* bestselling, Newbery Medal-winning author of seven young adult novels (including *Mexican WhiteBoy*, *We Were Here* and *Superman: Dawnbreaker*) and six picture books (including *Milo Imagines the World* and *Last Stop on Market Street*). In 2016 he was awarded the NCTE Intellectual Freedom Award. Matt received his MFA in creative writing from San Diego State University and his BA from the University of the Pacific where he attended school on a full basketball scholarship. In 2019 Matt was given an honorary doctorate from UOP. de la Peña currently lives in Southern California. He teaches creative writing and visits schools and colleges throughout the country.

**Christian Robinson (Illustrator)** is an illustrator, author, animator and designer based in Oakland, California. He was born in Los Angeles and grew up in a small one-bedroom apartment with his brother, two cousins, aunt and grandmother. Drawing became a way to make space for himself and to create the kind of world he wanted to see. He studied animation at the California Institute of the Arts and would later work with the Sesame Workshop and Pixar Animation Studios before becoming an illustrator of books for children. The Christian Robinson for Target collection, released in August 2021, includes more than 70 items across home and apparel for kids and baby. His books include the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Last Stop on Market Street*, written by Matt de la Peña, which was awarded a Caldecott Honor, a Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor and the Newbery Medal, and the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *The*

*Bench*, written by Meghan, The Duchess of Sussex. His solo projects include *Another*, which was named a *New York Times* Best Illustrated Book of 2019, and the *New York Times* bestseller *You Matter*. His latest collaboration with Matt de la Peña, *Milo Imagines The World*, received six starred reviews and was a #1 Indie Bestseller and a *New York Times* bestseller.

**Alvaro Saar Rios (Playwright)** is a Playwright in Residence at First Stage. Other plays he has written for First Stage are UNMUTED, ON THE WINGS OF A MARIPOSA, MOLE HILL STORIES and the award-winning LUCHADORA! His plays have been performed in New York City, Chicago, Hawaii, St. Louis, California, Arizona and all over Texas. He is a Resident Playwright at Chicago Dramatists, and in his past life, he drove tanks for the U.S. Army. Mr. Rios and his wife Michelle Lopez-Rios are the founders of The Royal Mexican Players. Alvaro has an MFA from Northwestern University and teaches playwriting at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. [alvarosaarrios.com](http://alvarosaarrios.com)

**Michelle Lopez-Rios (Director)** is an artist, teacher and community activist. She is an Associate Professor of voice and speech at the Theatre School at DePaul University Theatre School. Prior to that she was head of the BFA Acting Program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Michelle is an associate teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework. She currently serves on the board of the Voice and Speech Trainers Association and is a featured coach on [accenthelp.com](http://accenthelp.com). Coaching credits include: Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Goodman Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Houston Shakespeare Festival, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, among others. Michelle has collaborated on many theatrical projects for social change. She is a co-founder of the Royal Mexican Players with Alvaro Saar Rios. For over a decade they have offered workshops, devised community productions and produced original works. Her one-woman show 500 YEARS was developed in Bogotá, London and Milwaukee. Michelle worked with 371 Productions to devise and direct a live multimedia performance of *Precious Lives*, a popular weekly podcast about gun violence and young people in Milwaukee. Directing credits include: THE MOLE HILL STORIES (First Stage); PRECIOUS LIVES: THE LIVE SHOW (371 Productions); ENFRASCADA (Renaissance Theaterworks); DECAFFEINATED TRAGEDY (2009 Prague Fringe Festival Inspiration Award); ONE HOT TEXICAN SUMMER (OR THE SUMMER I FOUND OUT I WAS MEXICAN), NUESTRA VOZ, NUESTRA HISTORIA and A TRIP THROUGH THE MIND OF A 'CRAZY' MEXICAN (Royal Mexican Players). A proud member of Actors' Equity for over 20 years, she has also performed at Mark Taper Forum, First Stage, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Next Act Theatre, A Contemporary Theatre, Court Theatre, Troy Rep and Ojai Shakespeare Festival. [michellelopezrios.com](http://michellelopezrios.com)

### **ADULT CAST**

**Karen Estrada\*** (Mami/Bodega Owner/Old Woman); **Parker Muñoz** (Papi/Señor Lopez); **Isabelle Hughes** (Understudy for Karen Estrada) and **Adrian Feliciano** (Understudy for Parker Muñoz).

\*Appearing through an Agreement between First Stage and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

## YOUNG PERFORMER CASTS

Young Performer roles are double cast. Young Performers in the **Nieves Cast** include: **Isabel Scardino** (South Milwaukee) as Carmela; **Stephanie Santoyo-Bustos** (Milwaukee) as Paleta Lady; **Helen Paloma Marotta** (Milwaukee) as Flower Girl; **Thomas Bastardo** (St. Francis) as Big Brother and **Marko Van Slyke** (Milwaukee) as Anatoli.

Young Performers in the **Paletas Cast** include: **Isabella Dixon-Ruiz** (Milwaukee) as Carmela; **Tiana Dixon-Ruiz** (Milwaukee) as Paleta Lady; **Marilyn De La O** (Milwaukee) as Flower Girl; **Steven Cuevas Ruiz** (Milwaukee) as Big Brother and **Aria Domena** (Oak Creek) as Anatoli.

Please note: To find which cast is performing on a specific performance day, please refer to the website on the show page located here: [firststage.org/carmelafullofwishes](https://firststage.org/carmelafullofwishes)

The Artistic Staff for **CARMELA FULL OF WISHES** includes: **Michelle Lopez-Rios** (Director); **Regina Garcia, USA** (Scenic Designer); **Jazmin Aurora Medina** (Costume Designer); **Danielle Jordan** (Puppet Designer); **Christine Chiles Twillie** (Sound Designer); **Noele Stollmack, USA** (Lighting Designer); **Michelle Begley**, Member of Actors' Equity Association, (Stage Manager) and **Carrie Johns** (Assistant Stage Manager).

**Tickets start at \$28** – Tickets may be purchased at [firststage.org](https://firststage.org) or through the Marcus Center Box Office, in person at 929 N. Water Street in downtown Milwaukee or by phone (414) 273-7206 or toll free at (888) 612-3500. The number for TDD (for deaf and hard of hearing patrons) is (414) 273-3080.

**COVID Protocols:** First Stage is no longer requiring proof of vaccination upon arrival, and masks will be optional in the theater, unless the community level in Milwaukee County is rated in the High category, as determined by the CDC. First Stage COVID safety protocols and updates can be viewed here: [firststage.org/covid-19-safety-protocols/ - performances](https://firststage.org/covid-19-safety-protocols/-performances)

**Security at the Marcus Performing Arts Center:** Upon entry to the Todd Wehr Theater, attendees will walk through a security scanner to check for any items not permitted in the building. While purses and small bags are allowed, please leave larger bags, backpacks or other items at home. [Review Security Procedures at the Marcus Performing Arts Center](#). Please allow ample time for parking and security checks before the performance.

**Digital Playbill:** The digital playbill includes artistic/actor/designer and cast bios. To view the digital playbill when it gets posted closer to the show opening, please go to: [firststage.org/about-us/media-center/playbills/](https://firststage.org/about-us/media-center/playbills/)

**Please note:** Please refer to the digital playbill for updates on any cast changes as well as for the appropriate pronouns for actors.

## Special events for CARMELA FULL OF WISHES

**Pay What You Choose Performance: Friday, January 27, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.**

Pay What You Choose tickets are available on a first come, first served basis with a minimum suggested donation of \$5 per person. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. on the day of the performance. Patrons are encouraged to arrive early. Tickets may also be reserved in advance by phone at **(414) 267-2961**, weekdays 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. For more information, please visit: [firststage.org/events-tickets/tickets-offers/pay-what-you-choose/](https://firststage.org/events-tickets/tickets-offers/pay-what-you-choose/)

**Sensory Friendly Performance: Saturday, February 4, 2023 at 3:30 p.m.**

A Sensory Friendly Performance with accommodations for families with children on the autism spectrum will take place on Saturday, February 4, 2023 at 3:30 p.m. Sensory accommodations include a quiet area staffed by an experienced educator, lower sound, house lights up and more. Tickets for Sensory Friendly Performances are \$10. Order online or by phone at **(414) 267-2961**, weekdays 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. to reserve tickets. To learn more visit: [firststage.org/plan-your-visit/sensory-friendly-performances/](https://firststage.org/plan-your-visit/sensory-friendly-performances/).

**ASL Interpreted Performance: Sunday, February 5, 2023 at 3:30 p.m.**

This performance will be sign language interpreted for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Assistive listening devices are also available at the Todd Wehr Theater. To learn more, please visit: [firststage.org/plan-your-visit/accessibility/sign-language-interpreted-performances/](https://firststage.org/plan-your-visit/accessibility/sign-language-interpreted-performances/)

## **FACT SHEET**

**About: CARMELA FULL OF WISHES**

Adapted by **Alvaro Saar Rios**

From the book by **Matt de la Peña**, Illustrated by **Christian Robinson**

Published by G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers

*Carmela Full of Wishes* was Co-Commissioned by and received its World Premiere Productions at Chicago Children's Theatre, Jacqueline Russell, Artistic Director; and The Rose Theatre of Nebraska, Matt Gutschick, Artistic Director

*Carmela Full of Wishes* is presented through special arrangement with, and all authorized performance materials are supplied by TRW Plays 1180 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 40, New York, NY 10036. [www.trwplays.com](http://www.trwplays.com)

Directed by **Michelle Lopez-Rios**

Sponsored by **PNC**

**Location:** Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater, 929 N. Water Street, Milwaukee

## Live Performances: January 20 – February 12, 2023

**Description:** It's Carmela's birthday, and her wish has already come true – she's finally old enough to join her big brother as he does the family errands! As they travel through the neighborhood, Carmela finds a lone dandelion growing in the pavement. Before she can blow its puffy white fluff away, her brother tells her she has to make a wish. If only she can think of just the right wish to make. Delight in this moving ode to family, to dreamers and to finding hope in the most unexpected places. *Performance runtime is approximately 70 minutes, which includes a brief intermission. Suggested for families with young people ages 3+.*

### Performances:

- Friday, January 20 at 7:00 p.m. – *OPENING*
- Saturday, January 21 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, January 22 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Friday, January 27 at 7:00 p.m. – *PAY WHAT YOU CHOOSE PERFORMANCE*
- Saturday, January 28 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, January 29 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Saturday, February 4 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m. – *SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE AT 3:30 P.M.*
- Sunday, February 5 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m. – *ASL PERFORMANCE AT 3:30 P.M.*
- Saturday, February 11 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, February 12 at 1:00 p.m.

For more information, please visit [firststage.org](http://firststage.org) or call (414) 267-2961.

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### About First Stage

Founded in 1987, First Stage is one of the nation's leading theaters for young people and families, and a driving force behind the creation of the best and most innovative plays for family audiences, theater training programs for young people and education initiatives for its schools and community. First Stage ensures that all programming is not only accessible to its community but that it is reflective of the community it serves.

First Stage produces plays that honor the young person's point of view, include diverse and traditionally underrepresented voices and inspire meaningful conversations. First Stage has presented more than 70 world premiere productions that address important subject matters relevant to today's youth. The Theater Academy is one of the nation's largest high-impact theater training programs for young people (3-18 years old). Through a challenging curriculum taught by professional teaching artists, the Academy nurtures life skills through stage skills and includes the Next Steps Program that tailors Theater Academy classes to the needs of young people on the autism spectrum and with other developmental disabilities. As Wisconsin's leader in arts-integrated education in schools, First Stage's dynamic Theater in Education

Programs cleverly blend theater activities with standard curriculum – allowing more than 10,000 students annually to learn traditional academic subjects through creativity and self-expression.

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](http://firststage.org)