

# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

# 2019 | 2020

Welcome to a season that was like no other. Full of immense triumph and incredible challenges, our 33<sup>rd</sup> season stands as a testament to the unwavering dedication of our supporters, generosity and creativity of our young people, and the ingenuity and grit of our talented staff.

First Stage touches hearts, engages minds, and transforms lives by creating extraordinary theater experiences for young people and families through Professional Theater Productions, Theater Academy Training and Theater in Education programming.

## WHAT'S INSIDE:

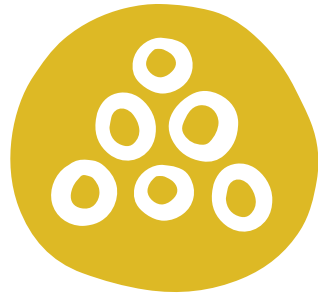
ROCKIN' FUNDRAISING RECORDS AT THE MAKE BELIEVE BALL

ELF - THE MUSICAL, THE HIGHEST GROSSING PRODUCTION IN FIRST STAGE HISTORY

SOARING SUCCESS WITH *ON THE WINGS OF A MARIPOSA*

 **FIRST STAGE**  
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH THEATER





**76,477**  
total audience  
members

**40,101**  
public audience  
members

**36,376**  
school audience  
members



**344**  
total performances



**141**  
young  
performers

**86%**  
of young  
performers  
are Theater  
Academy  
students

**34**  
adult actors



## 2019-2020 PRODUCTIONS

As a national leader in the Theatre for Young Audiences field, First Stage is committed to presenting professional theater productions that inspire and educate young people and families.

“ It’s not just who you cast, but the stories you choose to tell and how you tell them. First Stage empowers our children, heals wounds, finds common ground, and celebrates diversity. There are many good children’s theaters in the United States, but [First Stage] is so much more. ”

- YOUNG PERFORMER PARENT

“ Actors represented a diversity of people...age, size, race, etc...which means most students can see themselves represented in the actors. Awesome! ”

- EDUCATOR

“ I love First Stage because it teaches you many valuable life lessons. The best part about being in a show is all the great people you meet and the chance you get to be an actor on a professional stage. This experience means so much to me because it’s my first time being in a show! ”

- YOUNG PERFORMER



# FAMILY SERIES



Lucia Lozano interviews the creators of ON THE WINGS OF A MARIPOSA

## ON THE WINGS OF A MARIPOSA\*

▶ **PLAY PERFORMANCE PREVIEW VIDEO**



**TOTAL AUDIENCE: 11,396**

Alvaro Saar Ríos' bilingual world premiere production of ON THE WINGS OF A MARIPOSA beautifully elevated the Latinx community onstage for our entire community. This new production was an adaption of Wisconsin author Barbara Joosse's book *Ghost Wings* with new music composed by Latino Arts Strings Program Director Dinorah Márquez.

One of the show's largest accomplishments was the way in which it inspired **full community involvement** as well as successfully reached and welcomed new people into our theater and onto our stage. First Stage **partnered with area nonprofits** (Walker's Point Center for the Arts, the Milwaukee Public Library, and Latino Arts Strings Program) to help spread the word about our production as well as its several related community events – **a Mercadito featuring local Latinx artisans, Ofrendas and craft workshops** – and offer a community ticket discount. Intentional in reaching Spanish-speaking families, we created bilingual flyers and appeared on **Telemundo Wisconsin**.

- 317 new single ticket buyer households attended this production.
- First Stage piloted audition workshops at area schools to engage new young performers.
- Twelve of the 20 young performers (60%) in ON THE WINGS OF A MARIPOSA had never been on stage before.
- Theater Academy financial aid awards were offered to these new young performers to help further their training.

▶ **SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETED PERFORMANCE**

⊕ **SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE**    T **TECH TALKS**

In collaboration with



Supported in part by an award from



I grew in confidence to speak in front of people and appreciation of my culture.



The most valuable lesson I learned was the theme (your loved ones never leave you) and seeing how culture and traditions are deeply rooted in that firm belief. Also, being rooted in your culture helps you to connect with others.



It is endearing for me to be able to work with people who are underrepresented in our city to tell this story. The best moment of the show was performing for the Hispanic kids and seeing their reactions.

## ELF - THE MUSICAL

▶ **PLAY PERFORMANCE PREVIEW VIDEO**



**TOTAL AUDIENCE: 22,055**

Our holiday production, ELF - THE MUSICAL, **set new records** as our second full-length production (longer than our typical Theatre for Young Audiences adaptations), in addition to being the **highest grossing production** in First Stage's 33-year history.

On December 15, First Stage held its **annual Grandparents Brunch** inspired by ELF - THE MUSICAL. Eighty youth and their grandparents were treated to a delicious breakfast, fun crafts and a program presented by ELF - THE MUSICAL Director, Jeff Schaezke, actress Kamilah Lay, and Young Performer, Adelaide Schaezke. Guests learned the choreography to Sparklejollytwinklejingly, one of the dance numbers in the show.



Reinhart Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren s.c. and Associated Bank **sponsored our holiday show** for the 7th consecutive year! They hosted a beautiful dinner reception for their guests followed by a sold-out show. First Stage is so grateful for their partnership.

On December 30, 2019, cast members – professional adults and young performers – of First Stage's hit-production of ELF - THE MUSICAL put together a treat for audiences at the Saint Kate Arts Hotel. The **cabaret** was a grassroots initiative put together by actors, Kelly Doherty (aka Deb/Mrs. Claus) and Adam LaSalle (aka Buddy), in order to raise funds for the **First Stage's Kid to Kid Fund**. They successfully raised more than \$600 in donations.

▶ **SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETED PERFORMANCE**



First Stage was a place that fostered my love of the arts. What I want to say to all the kids, but especially our young performers, never let anybody tell you no. Defy expectations.

KAMILAH LAY, FIRST STAGE ALUMNA & ELF - THE MUSICAL ACTOR



It's important to perform in this cabaret because the scholarship funds we raise make it possible for me and other students to continue our Theater Academy training. Thank you.

ELF - THE MUSICAL YOUNG PERFORMER







## A WRINKLE IN TIME

▶ [PLAY PERFORMANCE PREVIEW VIDEO](#)



**TOTAL AUDIENCE: 16,546**

When asked about their favorite character and why, students overwhelmingly agreed that Meg was their favorite for the following reasons:

“ Meg is just like me. I would stand up for my own brothers and sisters. I love my family, just like Meg. ”

“ Meg is brave and cares for her brother. ”

“ Meg goes through a lot and she got through it all and learned from what happened. And she was happy in the end which makes me think how I relate to her. ”

Sponsored by **ENERPAC TOOL GROUP**

▶ SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETED PERFORMANCE  
 T TECH TALKS

## THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL<sup>^</sup>

First Stage was greatly looking forward to premiering this production based on the true story of Alexandra Flynn Scott and written by James DeVita.

“ We are all so very disappointed, yes, but not disheartened. Alex’s story will be told, and perhaps it will be told at a time when we will need it even more than we do now. When we all get on the other side of [the pandemic], there will be much need in the world, much hurt and loss, and we will need Alex’s example more than ever then. So, I will look at this as an opportunity to share Alex’s legacy at a time when we will all be yearning for her inspiration, for her example of kindness and determination, and empathy. ”

– PLAYWRIGHT JAMES DEVITA

Sponsored by **Northwestern Mutual**

<sup>^</sup> = production cancelled due to COVID-19



Community Game Night participants at Kluge Elementary

## THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS

▶ [PLAY PERFORMANCE PREVIEW VIDEO](#)



**TOTAL AUDIENCE: 4,414**

Delivered in an entertaining way, this regional premiere production taught children how to work together and appreciate each other’s strengths all while championing collaboration with a diverse cast. THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS ran for twelve performances before First Stage needed to cancel the remaining performances due to the pandemic.

As part of our community engagement efforts related to this production, First Stage hosted three [Community Game Nights](#) across the city, made possible by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation:

- Kluge Elementary
- St. Augustine Preparatory
- Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

Through these events, First Stage invited families to come together for an evening of games and fun, where they were encouraged to work as a team and support each other. Families participated in five different games – giant Jenga, giant Connect Four, Charades, Cornhole, and an ultimate Rock, Paper, Scissors Battle Tournament – as well as shared dinner together as a community.

Sponsored by **Molitor FOUNDATION**

▶ SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETED PERFORMANCE  
 T TECH TALKS



# FOUNDRY STAGE SERIES

Forging the future of theater, this season's **Foundry Stage Series** featured two new play readings and a professional produced new musical theater production – **GRETEL!** – written by Jason Tremblay with Suzan Zeder and Music/Lyrics by Jenn Hartmann Luck. First Stage presented GRETEL! in our intimate theater space at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center.

## FOUNDRY NEW PLAY READINGS

### TIME WARP TRIO

adapted by Frances Limoncelli  
October 8, 2019

### THE GREAT IGNORED

by Finegan Kruckemeyer  
October 29, 2019

## GRETEL!\*

▶ **PLAY PERFORMANCE PREVIEW VIDEO**



**TOTAL AUDIENCE: 3,467**

“ [GRETEL!]’s honest in a way that such spare work often is. And it honors [First Stage’s] longstanding, always inspiring tradition of offering strong heroines. I’ve written about that, often enough. This play is among the few I’ve seen this season which makes me wish I was writing, still. ”

– MIKE FISCHER, FORMER ARTS CRITIC FOR THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

GRETEL!’s run was unfortunately cut short by the pandemic. For the ticket buyers whose performance was cancelled, First Stage made the archive video footage available for online viewing. This video had 369 views and 67 people watched the video in its entirety.

In conjunction with the production, First Stage offered free **“Courage in Storytelling” Workshops** inspired by the musical that explored the production’s themes of folktales, and the power of emotions.

**49%** of students who attended in GRETEL! and participated in its related workshops demonstrated mutual respect for themselves and others, as well as effectively collaborated in discussion by building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

“ I learned more about teamwork and how to be fair to other people no matter what happens in class or whatever. ”

“ The show was fantastic! My family liked being able to participate in the workshop before it to prepare for what was ahead. BRAVO! ”

“ Thank you for offering this workshop – we loved participating in it together as a family. ”



The Courage in Storytelling Workshops were funded in part by a grant from the Wisconsin Humanities Council, with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this project do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Wisconsin Humanities Council supports and creates programs that use history, culture and discussion to strengthen community life for everyone in Wisconsin.

This season, First Stage continued our longtime partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM). Related to the production of GRETEL!, First Stage provided a five-week After School Drama Club at eight BGCGM sites which included curriculum from our “Courage in Storytelling” Workshops. Each participating site received five consecutive weeks of theater workshops. Workshops were underwritten and provided free of charge to BGCGM. In addition, the BGCGM participants connected their learning from the afterschool workshops by attending the preview performance of GRETEL!

First Stage’s annual Donor Preview Reception also took place on February 20, 2020 at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center and preceded the public preview performance of GRETEL!. Approximately 50 First Stage friends and donors attended the event and heard from Jeff Frank as well as from the composer of GRETEL!, Jenn Hartmann Luck.





# FIRST STEPS

100%

of teachers rated the experience of attending a First Steps production as beneficial for their students.

95%

of teachers stated that the First Steps production brought the story to life for their students.

73%

of teachers stated that attending a First Steps production was an educational experience for their students.

64%

of teachers stated that they are reading related books or exploring similar themes in their curriculum.

Geared towards our youngest audience members, the First Steps Series, sponsored by PNC, engages children ages 3-6 and their families in an intimate, interactive theater environment.



In order to further engage our youngest audiences, First Stage provided lobby experiences between the matinee and evening performances on Saturdays during the run of both First Steps productions. Families participated in self-guided activities at various stations set up throughout the theater lobby – including a Book Nook, Art Activity, You & Me Activity, Costume Corner, Numbers & Shapes Activity, and Puppet Theater. A First Stage Education staff helped to facilitate the lobby experiences.



My five-year-old son really enjoyed the lobby experience! The staff was wonderful and very engaging.



What fun! It was a delightful play and then my children were able to carry on the language and experience of seeing the production through play! Awesome! A + work to the First Stage teaching artist.

## ELEPHANT & PIGGIE'S "WE ARE IN A PLAY!"

PLAY PERFORMANCE PREVIEW VIDEO

TOTAL AUDIENCE: 10,443

“As Gerald was contemplating sharing his ice cream, one little one was shaking his head “no.” Then after seeing a reproachful look on his mom’s face and started nodding “yes.” ”

– STAGE MANAGER

“This production was outstanding. For most of my students, it was their first theatre experience. They were in awe. It was simple, creative, and totally entertaining. I had a hard time choosing between watching the expressions on my kids’ faces and watching the show myself. Both were enjoyable! ”

– EDUCATOR

- ▶ SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETED PERFORMANCE
- ⊕ SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE

## THE SNOWY DAY AND OTHER STORIES BY EZRA JACK KEATS

PLAY PERFORMANCE PREVIEW VIDEO

TOTAL AUDIENCE: 7,248

“When Peter whistled for the first time, one little boy yelled, “he did it!” When Willie was jumping through the pipe, a little girl said very sweetly, “you can do it, Willie!” ” – STAGE MANAGER

“My K4 students certainly enjoyed the show as we read many Ezra Jack Keats stories to prepare and even acted out a few before coming to the show! I am so pleased that we have such a WONDERFUL theater company in our city that focuses on young and school age children. It was such a great experience for our students to see a live performance! BRAVO! ” – EDUCATOR

- ▶ SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETED PERFORMANCE
- ⊕ SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE

# YOUNG COMPANY

Young Company is First Stage’s award-winning and nationally recognized training program for advanced high school actors. Young Company performs two to three performance projects as part of First Stage’s professional theater season.

## THE WINTER’S TALE

PLAY PERFORMANCE PREVIEW VIDEO

TOTAL AUDIENCE: 939

## YOU CAN’T TAKE IT WITH YOU^

Unfortunately, the last Young Company performance project of the season was cancelled due to the pandemic. They persevered under the leadership of Young Company Director, Matt Daniels, and pivoted their spring performance project to an online format. 580 people tuned in from the safety of their homes.



## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Through our Community Partnership Program (CPP), First Stage offered select “Pay What You Choose” theater performances at which audience members may attend at any dollar amount. In addition, First Stage broadened CPP this season with our “First Stage for \$5” ticket offer for every performance to families who presented their Wisconsin QUEST or ForwardHealth card.

We welcomed 1,462 audience members at our “Pay What You Choose” theater performances, and 48 audience members experienced theater thanks to First Stage’s “First Stage for \$5” ticket offer this season.



^ = production cancelled due to COVID-19



# 2019-2020 THEATER ACADEMY

*I can't is not in my vocabulary! I take risks!  
I conquer my fears! I am not afraid to lead!*

This season First Stage adjusted our school year Theater Academy session scheduling structure in order to provide students with increased contact hours in addition to a new class option. Instead of three six-week sessions with two week-long Spring Break sessions, First Stage increased to two eight-week sessions.

In addition, The First Stage Academy piloted two Performance Classes during the spring semester:

- Disney's JUNGLE BOOK, KIDS, with 32 students in grades 3 - 5; and
- FROZEN, JR., with 25 students in grades 6 - 8.

Both Performance Classes held daily rehearsals that culminated in a final performance. Both shows were sold out for all of their performances; however, FROZEN, JR. was postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak until a later date.

**94%** of students experienced improved self-confidence.

**92%** of students experienced growth in teamwork.

**91%** of students were more open to trying new things.

**Our teachers at First Stage give us the best gift of all – the courage to make a better world.**

– ACADEMY STUDENT



“First Stage has always been a haven for me....it's the perfect place.”  
– ACADEMY STUDENT

“First Stage has taught me how to love myself and others.”  
– ACADEMY STUDENT

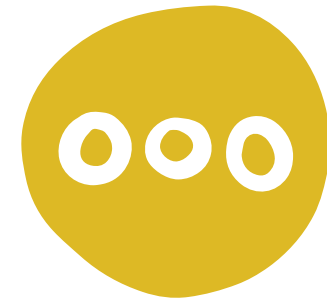
“In a time when I felt so unimportant, First Stage gave me a place every week where I could go play a role and be a part of something and feel needed.”  
– FIRST STAGE ALUMNA



**1,575**  
unique students



**2,173**  
total enrollments



**104**  
unique classes



**75**  
teaching artists





## YOUNG COMPANY

Young Company members complete college-level training in Voice, Movement, and Shakespeare as well as electives ranging from Auditioning to Stage Combat to Dialects. Young Company hosted master classes with the following guest artists:

- **Jeremy Tardy** - Acting Shakespeare
- **Carolyn Hoerdmann** - Acting Chekhov
- **John Maclay** - Dialects
- **Chris Flieller** - Scenework
- **Josh Krause** - Acting Foundation

In late September of 2019, Young Company attended the Utah Shakespeare Festival High School Acting Competition and brought home two trophies and two certificates including a first place win in the Overall Division Sweepstakes. Young Company Members also attended a five-day American Players Theatre program in August 2019.



# 66

Young Company members

# 2

performance projects



## BARD-O-THON

On Saturday, April 25, the day began with Young Company Members breaking out into virtual rooms and performing as many monologues as they had memorized, followed by a virtual workshop lead by First Stage Alum and guest artist, **Jeremy Tardy**.

Their final showcase went virtual this year with a Facebook Livestream. More than 100 people logged on to watch 50 Young Company Members deliver Shakespeare monologues from basements, to bedrooms, and backyards. These young people displayed an incredible depth of understanding with their pieces and entertained online guests for an hour.

After the presentation, Young Company Director, Matt Daniels led a Sonnetpalooza, through which current Young Company Members were joined by alumni to perform as many Shakespeare sonnets as possible. It was incredible!

**504** Shakespearean monologues performed

**\$16,102** raised

## NEXT STEPS

41 UNIQUE STUDENTS (44 ENROLLMENTS)

This season, First Stage piloted a new structure for our school year Next Steps programming – instead of facilitating Next Steps classes at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center on Saturdays, First Stage took our Next Steps classes out into our community.

First Stage has heard repeatedly from Next Steps parents how much they wished their child had Next Steps at their school, and now this year, First Stage was excited to start exploring that option. First Stage facilitated Next Steps during the school day at Longfellow Public School for their 5th-8th grade Autism Unit – serving 15 students.

Through a series of weekly workshops, students explored First Stage’s production of THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS with arts-integrated lessons and musical theater classes tailored to the students’ specific needs and abilities. Classes were scheduled to run once a week from February 25 to May 19, 2020, but were cut short due to COVID-19 and ran through March 10. Their class was going to perform their culminating project for the rest of the school this May.

“ I just wanted to thank you so much for all you have given my daughter over the past couple of weeks as an intern. The experience of working with the Next Steps students has been life changing for her. It’s given her new skills, confidence, responsibility, and she’s had a blast while doing it! Thank you so much for believing in her and allowing her to do something different at a place that she calls her second home. I hope she’ll be able to have many more of the opportunities in the future. Thanks again. ”

– NEXT STEPS INTERN PARENT



First Stage should open up a school. [Next Steps] was great for our daughter. Her confidence has grown and she is really developing. It has been a great experience for her!

– NEXT STEPS PARENT



Thanks for your excellent programming, First Stage! You have helped my son to be a more confident human.

– NEXT STEPS PARENT

## FAMILY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Through our Family Partnership Program, First Stage provides need-based scholarships, transportation, and additional resources for students who need them in order to attend the Theater Academy. No student is turned away for their inability to pay for classes.

Our Theater Academy’s Family Partnership Coordinator also worked with financial aid recipients and their guardians to offer a wide-range of family programming including backstage tours, pre-show workshops, and invitations to see our preview performances for free. One-hundred, thirty-nine Family Partnership Program students and their guardians attended our free preview performances this season.

**195** students received scholarships

**\$116,470** total scholarships awarded





**87**  
schools



**9,476**  
total students



**1,591**  
total workshops



**328**  
Milwaukee classrooms

# 2019/2020 THEATER IN EDUCATION

This season, First Stage reached more than 30 Milwaukee neighborhoods with in-school Theater in Education programming.

By cleverly blending the arts with standard curriculum, First Stage Theater in Education programs provide the opportunity for students to learn traditional academic subjects through creativity and self-expression. All of First Stage's programs are directly linked to the Common Core State Standards, Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills, and ReadyGen Standards.



This year has been **PHENOMENAL!** We **ALWAYS** have a fantastic First Stage teacher with wonderful lessons/activities/experiences for the students, but there was something special about this year! Lessons were well prepared before but well adapted during – they were engaging, fun, flexible, exciting, and animated.

– CLASSROOM TEACHER



# LITERACY PROGRAMS

First Stage added to the Literacy Programming options we provide City of Milwaukee schools for free and highly reduced CPP pricing. First Stage's Literacy Programming varies in program length and student grade level: Little Actors (grades K3-1; 6 weeks), Literacy Plus (grades 1-8; 8 weeks), and Early Literacy Residencies (grades K4-5; 14-weeks).

This year, First Stage also had the opportunity to expand our Little Actors language comprehension residency into early childhood classes throughout the Harambee neighborhood, and beyond. We were able to start a significant relationship with Penfield's Early Childhood Center providing adapted programming for their students throughout the school year. Penfield's teaching staff shared with us that they were so grateful that First Stage teaching artists were so patient and kind with their students. From our teaching artist's perspective, it was special to see the teachers being so actively engaged with the lessons – playing with great gusto, and sometimes having just as much fun as the kids!

First Stage also facilitated Family Literacy Night events for participating schools this year – serving 125 individuals with an exciting storytelling experience that provided youth and their families the opportunity to participate in dramatic activities and bring stories to life.

**46%** of Literacy Plus students experienced growth in language comprehension skills.

**87%** of classroom teachers reported observing their students achieving English Language Arts curricular goals following the Literacy Plus Program



Your First Stage teaching artist did an amazing job interacting with my students, encouraging them, and positively refocusing when needed.

– CLASSROOM TEACHER

## PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

The Partnership Program provides tickets and transportation to a First Stage theater performance, pre/post-show workshops, arts-integrated lessons, and professional development opportunities for teachers. Students develop strong personal connections to the themes explored during a First Stage performance and utilize their theater experience as a springboard for an integrated learning experience. Classrooms also receive a week-long "Teaching through Theater" program that enhances students' comprehension of traditional academic topics. All classroom teachers are provided with curriculum guides and professional development offerings in arts-integration.

Partnership students increased their understanding of the production's concepts by **20%**.

**79%** of classroom teachers reported observing their students utilizing teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking skills throughout the Partnership Program.



I learned how to feel what someone else is feeling in a bad situation and respect what they're going through.

– LITERACY PLUS STUDENT



I like that the play was an example of a book. It gave the students the ability to make a connection to literature.

– CLASSROOM TEACHER

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Through our Community Partnership Program (CPP), First Stage offered highly subsidized and free Theater in Education programs for classrooms across Milwaukee.

First Stage provided full or partial Partnership, Literacy Plus, Little Actors programming and Literacy residencies to **5,534 students** in **219 classrooms** at **26 schools** during the 2019/2020 school year.

### PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

**84% ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED**

**94% MINORITIES**

**17% SPECIAL NEEDS**

**10% LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT**

## KLUGE ELEMENTARY

We also served approximately 50 students through the afterschool programming (After School Drama Club and After School Theater Academy Classes) we provided for Kluge Elementary's Community Learning Center (CLC) this academic year. Both afterschool programs taught students beginning acting skills, fostered life skills through stage skills, and encouraged students to take risks, conquer their fears, and be leaders in and out of the classroom.

On March 10, 2020, Kluge students and their families gathered at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center for their After School Theater Academy Final Presentation, a pizza party, and field trip to see First Stage's regional premiere production of THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS. During the presentation, Kluge students shared what they learned during the afterschool Theater Academy classes – including actor warm-up exercises, theater games as well as a scene or musical number they rehearsed throughout the session – with their families and other students from First Stage's partner schools. First Stage provided Kluge students and families free transportation.

After attending the Theater Academy presentation, a parent shared with our First Stage staff: "Thanks for your hard work with the students; especially my girls! They all did a great job!"





Danielle Jordan, First Stage Costume Crafts Artisan

## PANDEMIC RESPONSE

First Stage is incredibly grateful to the heroes among us who are keeping our community safe, healthy, and fed throughout this challenging time. To aid the cause, [First Stage joined forces with the Milwaukee Rep and Milwaukee Ballet to make masks and face shields for our fearless frontline workers.](#) This cumulative effort, thanks in part to funding from the Northwestern Mutual Foundation, has resulted in the creation of more than 10,000 pieces of PPE that have been donated to Children’s Hospital, Froedtert Hospital, and the Medical College of Wisconsin.

First Stage was also the beneficiary of an unexpected heroic effort done to help our organization navigate through this crisis. Knowing that First Stage faces significant revenue loss due to the pandemic, 14-year-old Casey Westphal organized a [virtual talent show](#) to raise vital funds for First Stage. His virtual talent show featured current and past Theater Academy students and young performers.

First Stage Artistic Director Jeff Frank was overwhelmed by the outpouring of support and love. In response, he shared: “ I can’t thank you all enough! It had been a hard day and then I discovered this. Thank you for uplifting me and the rest of the First Stage family! You are all amazing, and I promise you – we will work through this together, keep fighting, and find even more ways to connect through the power of theater. ”



**First Stage is such a monumental part of my life that I had to do something.**

– CASEY WESTPHAL

## THE MOVE TO VIRTUAL

The pandemic struck right in the height of our spring in-school programming and forced First Stage to cancel nearly 600 in-school workshops. Even so, First Stage has remained dedicated to our mission of transforming lives through theater. This crisis has not changed our role, but rather the way in which we reach young people and their families. Over the past few months, First Stage has been finding ways to pivot our programming to virtual platforms.

**FIRST STAGE AT HOME:** First Stage’s Theater in Education department created this online resource based on past First Stage productions and designed to spark imagination and dramatic play in new and engaging ways. Every Tuesday on our website, First Stage uploads new arts-integrated content free for educators and families to explore together. This includes theater games, activities, videos, and readings of our favorite stories by First Stage Teaching Artists.

**FIRST STAGE ON STAGE:** First Stage Playwrights in Residence, some of our favorite composers, and Artistic Director Jeff Frank, have made selected scenes and songs available on First Stage’s website and free for families to explore at home and then share with the wider world. The available scenes and songs are from previous First Stage theater productions – THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS; NATE THE GREAT; LOVABYE DRAGON; and more.

First Stage’s Theater Academy moved our School Year Intensive and Young Company classes online in order to provide students with a way to continue their learning virtually with their Theater Academy community. In addition, the Theater Academy strove to reach out to all of our students with opportunities to connect through our daily Beginning of Day and End of Day live streaming on YouTube.

[▶ PLAY SUMMER THEATER ACADEMY VIDEO](#)



First Stage has been on a steep learning curve since COVID-19 hit. So far, we have received the following feedback regarding our virtual programming options:



The teacher to student interaction has been great. Every child has an opportunity to answer questions, demonstrate actions, and give ideas.



I thought that the Advanced Musical Theater teachers did a great job creating activities. The auditions and feedback were great for kids to do.



Seeing friends, maintaining a sense of creativity from home, individual ‘coaching’ meeting prior to final monologue presentation, positive attitude/energy of the group was great!



My son felt connected to his teachers, classmates, and First Stage. It gave him an outlet, other than school, to do thing of value independently.



My child liked having the interaction, even through a screen. This was not something I considered enrolling in before this and now we will be regular on line or in class participants.





# IMPACT EVENT

91 GUESTS

On September 19, 2019, 91 community leaders, First Stage advocates and other guests came to the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center to learn more about First Stage at [our annual ImpACT event](#). The event raised more than \$8,000 and cultivated old and new friends. In addition to learning about the many ways First Stage fulfills its mission of transforming lives through theater, event attendees were treated to our special guest and Keynote Speaker, Kathy Thornton-Bias. Thornton-Bias is the 15<sup>th</sup> President and CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM) and the second female to lead the Clubs since its founding in 1887 by Annabell Cook Whitcomb.

Thornton-Bias spoke of how the arts are critical for youth development along with family engagement as the supporting foundation.

“ We’re making a very concerted effort to work with partners like First Stage to bring best in class agencies to our kids. We want our kids to have the best arts education, the best theater education, and the best music education and we have great partners in Milwaukee that do just that. ” – **KATHY THORNTON-BIAS**

To talk about the value of family experiences at First Stage, the Singh Family – Shantanu, Amanda, Lina and Oscar – spoke about their family’s time at First Stage.

The Singh Family was introduced to First Stage seven years ago when Lina took her first Theater Academy class at age four. Since then, the Singh Family has had hundreds of interactions with First Stage – through various volunteering opportunities, the Theater Academy (both Lina and Oscar take classes), and Theater Productions (attending performances as a family, and performing).

“ The arts are a vital piece of our family culture, and it is woven into most aspects of our lives. The many shows we have seen at First Stage are excellent opportunities for our family to connect and learn, to be entertained, and are a regular part of the intergenerational family experiences we cherish.

The curation of stories that First Stage brings us season after season, are fun and fabulous and entertaining, while also being thoughtful, provocative and critical.

All of these voices, all of these characters, in all of these productions, are invited into our family discussions and become a part of our shared experiences. We draw on these stories to expand our worlds, to understand things we haven’t yet experienced, and to figure out ways to express the things we are just beginning to feel. Our world is exponentially larger and better because of theater.

We are grateful to First Stage and the people here who care deeply, with such integrity about our children, our city and our world. First Stage is a treasure, and we support First Stage so as many young people as possible can experience top-notch theater and have access to incredible theater education. ” – **THE SINGH FAMILY**

Make Believe Ball, 2020



Scott Penniston & Kathleen Dohearty Penniston, and Lynne & Cody Pearce

## WINE TASTING & DINNER

135 GUESTS | \$105,000 RAISED (A NEW RECORD!)

**CHEERS TO 10 YEARS!** On Saturday, November 2, 2019, First Stage hosted its 10<sup>th</sup> annual Wine Tasting & Dinner at the University Club of Milwaukee – Country Club. This special evening began with an exclusive wine tasting and silent auction leading into a five-course gourmet dinner paired with exceptional wines and prepared by renowned Executive Chef David Magnasco of [The Chef’s Table](#).

“ The First Stage Wine Tasting and Dinner is a highlight of the year! It encapsulates the magic of First Stage through friends sharing an unparalleled coursed dinner, wine pairings and its signature auction items. It’s a warm, rich and lively event that raises dollars for the best children’s theater there is! ” – **KATHLEEN DOHEARTY PENNISTON**

[▶ LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR 2019 WINE TASTING & DINNER](#)



## MAKE BELIEVE BALL

414 GUESTS | \$211,544 RAISED (A ROCKIN’ NEW RECORD)

**LET’S GET READY TO ROCK!** On March 7, 2020, 414 guests gathered to experience a glam rock evening, while exploring First Stage’s new musical, THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS. Families, decked out with sequins and sneakers, enjoyed a special night filled with kids’ activities, a large silent auction, a live auction, dinner, and of course, dancing!

This year’s Make Believe Ball rock n’ rolled past our fundraising record, and raised \$211,544 – through sponsorship, live and silent auctions, donation appeal, raffle, and various smaller fundraisers throughout the evening. Proceeds directly support First Stage’s mission of touching hearts and transforming lives, providing professional theater productions that inspire, enlighten, and entertain; unparalleled Theater Academy training that fosters life skills through stage skills; and dynamic Theater in Education programs that promote active learning in our schools and community.

First Stage looks back with great fondness and gratitude for all who made our annual fundraiser such a success.

“ Our family had such a great time at the Make Believe Ball, you could feel a certain energy and excitement this year with everyone bringing their personal style and rock ‘n roll flair to the event. The musical number by the young performers was electric and energized the crowd! And, as always, the dancing was a favorite part of the night for our family... we could have danced all night long in our sneakers! It has become even more apparent to us in the last few weeks how fortunate we were to have the opportunity to celebrate with the First Stage community and make memories with our family and friends. ”

– **MELISSA AND CHRIS MARSCHKA, MAKE BELIEVE BALL CO-CHAIRS**

Thank you to our all of our volunteers, committee members, and generous sponsors who made this year’s Make Believe Ball truly one to remember!

PROUD CORNERSTONE MEMBER



UNITEDPERFORMINGARTSFUND

## UPAF CONNECT

An initiative of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF), UPAF Connect creates access and connects Milwaukee area non-profits to the arts. First Stage is fortunate to have served 266 youth and adults from the following community groups with tickets to the theater and various theater workshops and residencies:

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Milwaukee

Boys & Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee

Dominican Center For Women

Grand Avenue Club Inc

La Casa de Esperanza

Life Navigators

Meta House

Milwaukee Water Commons

PEARLS for Teen Girls

Penfield Children’s Center & Montessori

Ronald McDonald House Eastern Wisconsin

Sojourner Family Peace Center

St. Augustine Preparatory Academy

United Community Center

Unity in Motion



# DONOR LIST

This season, more than ever, demonstrates the incredible belief our donors have in our mission and First Stage could not be more grateful for our donors' support in this uncertain time. Thank you for your generosity and helping us continue transforming lives through theater!

 Individuals who make a leadership gift of \$1,000 or more to First Stage's annual campaign are truly making a difference in the lives of children in our community!

\*\* Denotes donors who make monthly gifts to First Stage. These donors are members of GEMS – Giving Every Month Society.

## VISIONARY (\$500,000+)



## SPOTLIGHT

(\$100,000-\$499,999)

The Burke Foundation  
The Shubert Foundation, Inc.

**Thank you for your support of First Stage! It's because of you that I get to have this epic opportunity to be a young performer. I love First Stage because I can be myself. Thank you!**






– YOUNG PERFORMER

## MARQUEE (\$20,000-\$99,999)

Bader Philanthropies, Inc.  
Isabel Bader   
In honor of Rob Goodman  
City of Milwaukee Community Development Block Grant  
Greater Milwaukee Foundation  
*Enerpac Tool Group*  
*Gerda A. Debelak Fund*   
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Mary Vandenberg and Keith Mardak   
Melitta S. and Joan M. Pick  
Charitable Trust


Milwaukee County Arts Fund (CAMPAC)  
The Molitor Foundation   
Northwestern Mutual Foundation  
PNC  
Stephens Family Foundation   
Wisconsin Arts Board

## GOODMAN (\$10,000-\$19,999)

Amy and Robert Arzbaeher   
Associated Bank  
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The Harley-Davidson Foundation  
Kery and Russell Kafka   
Meier Family Foundation   
Milwaukee Bucks  
National Endowment for the Arts  
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Sheehan Family Foundation   
Stackner Family Foundation  
Bert L. and Patricia S. Steigleder Charitable Trust  
Wells Fargo  
Frank L. Weyenberg Charitable Trust

## IMPRESARIO (\$5,000-\$9,999)

Astor Street Foundation   
Emory T. Clark Family Charitable Foundation   
Ralph Evinrude Foundation, Inc.  
William N. and Janice V. Godfrey Family Foundation Trust   
Les Paul Foundation  
Lubar Family Foundation   
Macy's  
Maihaugen Foundation   
George L.N. Meyer Family Foundation   
Milwaukee Arts Board  
Laura and Al Orr   
Anne and Ben Swoboda 

Tate Family Foundation   
Weyco Group  
Wisconsin Humanities Council

## PRODUCER (\$2,500-\$4,999)

























Anonymous (2)   
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The Gardner Foundation  
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Amy and Darren Goldstein   
Greater Milwaukee Foundation  
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Heather and Austin Ramirez   
The Severson Family   
Marcy and Ken Stanczyk   
Susan and Brian Stief   
Kristyn Harrell and Michael Stull   
Suzanne Clausing and Kevin Walsh   
We Energies Foundation












**You don't know what you do for the children at First Stage. I mean... you do, but you don't know the impact. You give then the chance to meet new friends, unlock new talents, and experience true happiness. Thank you!**

– YOUNG PERFORMER

## ARTISTIC DIRECTOR (\$1,000-\$2,499)

Anonymous (1)   
The Angresano-Mersky Family   
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David Olson   
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Target  
Vidyasagar Thirumurthy   
Kristen and Steve Thomas   
Christine, Todd, Tyson, Leila, Charlotte, and Isabelle Townsend  \*\*  
Anne Callan Trunzo and Bob Trunzo   
Julie and Jim Tynion   
In memory of Larry Bensman  
Richele and Tim Westlake   
Julia and Ben Westphal   
Stacy and Blair Williams   
The Willenson Family   
Kate and Don Wilson   
Jill and Brian Zempel 

**Because of the positive and transformational experience our daughter had at First Stage, our family is committed to supporting First Stage financially. Our monthly commitment is a gift that allows children throughout our community to experience what our daughter did, to thrive in a place of acceptance and belonging, and to learn priceless life skills through stage skills. We are proud to support First Stage!**

– GEMS DONORS

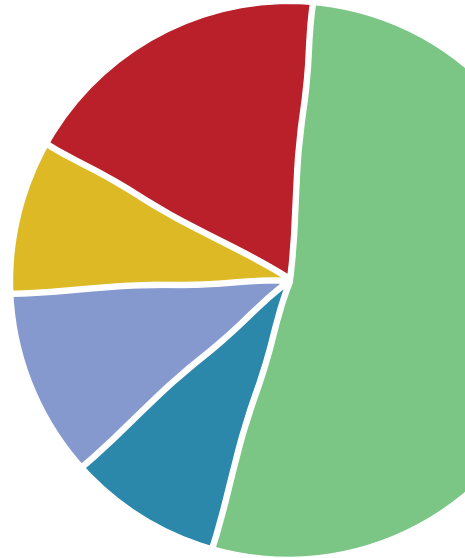


# FINANCIALS

2019/2020 SEASON

## 2019/2020 EXPENSE BREAKOUT

- 53% Production
- 18% Academy
- 11% Management & General
- 9% Education
- 9% Fundraising

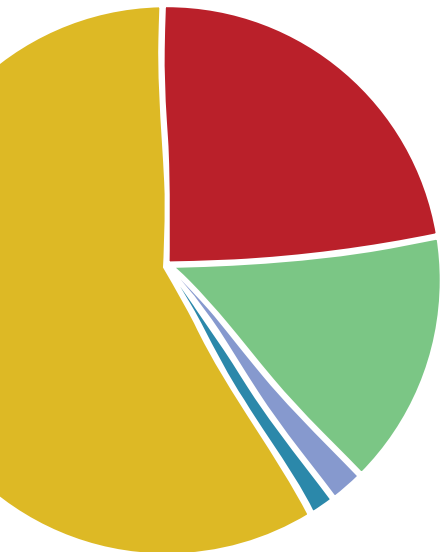


# OPERATIONS BUDGET: \$5,404,000

YEARS WITH BALANCED BUDGET: 19

## 2019/2020 INCOME BREAKOUT

- 59% Contributed
- 24% Tickets
- 14% Academy
- 2% Education
- 1% Other Earned



# BOARD LIST

## 2019/2020 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

- Alex Kramer, *President* | Managing Director | BMO Private Bank  
 Caryn Esten, *President Elect* | Vice President, Strategic Planning & Performance Measurement | Froedtert Health  
 Darren Goldstein, *Treasurer* | Partner | KPMG LLP  
 Tami Martin, *Secretary* | Vice President, Professional Development | TriCity National Bank  
 Kristin Severson, *Vice President of Governance* | Community Volunteer  
 Karen Guy, *Vice President at Large* | Community Volunteer  
 Chris Marschka, *Vice President at Large* | Senior Vice President | The PNC Financial Services Group

## 2019/2020 DIRECTORS:

- Nicole Angresano | Vice President Community Impact | United Way of Greater Milwaukee  
 La’Ketta Caldwell | Director of The Arts | Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee  
 Sally Cartwright | Sales Director | ManpowerGroup  
 Suzanne Clausing | Assistant to the President | We Energies  
 Brian Gilpin | Intellectual Property Patent Attorney | Godfrey and Kahn  
 Eleanor Hannan | Student Representative  
 Dan Kempken | Vice President & Controller | A. O. Smith  
 Kate Ketelhohn | Student Representative  
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 Eric Maassen | Partner | Foley & Lardner LLP  
 Sagar Murthy | CIO | Jason Industries, Inc.  
 Melissa Nelsen | Director of Special Projects | Betty Brinn Children’s Museum  
 Laura Orr | Vice President, Strategy & Governance | Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin  
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Photos by Paul Ruffolo, Lindsey Abendschein, Danielle Jordan, & Chelsea Ann Bell Photography. Cover: Niya Maria Iniguez in ON THE WINGS OF A MARIPOSA, 2019. | Page 3-4: Zephaniah Singh Ponder in THE SNOWY DAY AND OTHER STORIES BY EZRA JACK KEATS, 2020. | Page 6: Amirah Muhammad, Annie Sturtz, Grace Scott, & Madison Jones in ELF - THE MUSICAL, 2019. | Page 7: Lamar Jefferson\* in THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS, 2020. | Page 10: Natalie Ford\* & Alice Rivera in GRETEL!, 2020. | Page 12: James Carrington\* in ELEPHANT & PIGGIE’S “WE ARE IN A PLAY!”, 2019. | Page 13-14: Aura Grant in Disney’s JUNGLE BOOK, KIDS, 2020. | Page 15: Kyra Mathias & Lee Lepianka in THE WINTER’S TALE, 2019. | Page 27: Rachel Whyte, Adam LaSalle\*, & Marques Causey\* in ELF - THE MUSICAL, 2019. \*Member of Actor’s Equity Association