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AMPLIFY BIPOC PLAY SERIES

returns to First Stage for fourth season

-Featuring three play readings by BIPOC playwrights Ty Defoe, Alvaro Saar Rios and Marcus Yi-

MILWAUKEE – June 15, 2023 – First Stage, one of the nation’s leading theaters for young people and families, is delighted to announce the fourth season of their **Amplify BIPOC Play Series** beginning **November 4, 2023**. In support of First Stage’s ongoing commitment to the development of new work, with an intentional focus on lifting voices of diverse playwrights and artists, this season’s Amplify Series will be presented as readings of three new plays, all held at the [Milwaukee Youth Arts Center](#). The Amplify Series is supported in part by a grant from the **Milwaukee Arts Board** and the **Wisconsin Arts Board** with funds from the State of Wisconsin.

First Stage Artistic Director **Jeff Frank** shared his thoughts on this year’s Amplify Series: “As we continue to expand our efforts to lift the voices of underrepresented playwrights and stories, it is especially exciting to me that all three Amplify readings this season will feature strong, young female protagonists. Harmony must navigate the transition from the reservation and the only life she has known to the big city of Milwaukee where she discovers her voice, her heritage and her destiny. Similarly, Esperanza is uprooted from her life and travels on a journey where she discovers a new depth of understanding of herself, her family and her world. Finally, Emily Song discovers her true power on her 12th birthday and uses her musical, magical powers to save the world. Collectively, we are so excited to hear feedback from our audiences on these new world premieres in process – all of which are slated to be part of our 2024/25 season at First Stage.”

The 2023/24 Amplify BIPOC Play Series will feature [BIG CITY HARMONY](#), [ESPERANZA RISING](#) and [EMILY SONG AND THE SHADOW QUEEN](#). (*Titles are subject to change pending availability of rights.*)

A talkback will follow each reading, allowing audiences opportunities to share their voices with the playwright and artists – helping shape the development of the plays and potential future productions at First Stage.

These new play readings will be [Pay What You Choose](#) events. Doors will open approximately one hour prior to each reading. A minimum suggested ticket price is \$10, but attendees may pay any amount you choose. Patrons are encouraged to arrive early and may pre-order tickets by phone at (414) 267-2961. [Learn more.](#)

2023/24 AMPLIFY BIPOC PLAY SERIES

BIG CITY HARMONY

By **Ty Defoe**

Directed by **Johamy Morales**

Saturday, November 4, 2023 at 7 p.m.

Located at the [Milwaukee Youth Arts Center](#)

Harmony, a young Anishinaabe girl, moves from the reservation to the big city with her family, learning valuable lessons in her own culture as she navigates adventures while trying to make friends at a new school. Taking place in the future, Harmony shares the ability to shapeshift with her Grandmother Hazel and learns to speak the language of wolves aiming to release her own voice into the wild!

Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 7 – 9 and 10 – 12.

From Jeff: Playwright Ty Defoe and Director Johamy Morales weaved magic together in our virtual production of COPPER HORNS IN WATER in 2021, and we are thrilled to have them together again as we enter the fourth year of our partnership with Indian Community School. This powerful tale of how Harmony finds her voice and her way will receive a full production in our 2024/25 season, but now is your chance to get a sneak peek and help the team finish the journey through your feedback.

ESPERANZA RISING

Adapted by **Alvaro Saar Rios**

From the book by **Pam Muñoz Ryan**

With original music by **Dinorah Marquez**

Directed by **Michelle Lopez-Rios**

Wednesday, December 13, 2023 at 7 p.m.

Located at the [Milwaukee Youth Arts Center](#)

First Stage Playwright in Residence **Alvaro Saar Rios**, with frequent collaborator and composer **Dinorah Marquez**, combine their talents to bring a new fast-paced theatrical version of the

powerful story to the stage, underscored with original music.

Two young storytellers, with the help of an ensemble of actors, take the stage and begin to weave the tale of Esperanza – a wealthy Mexican girl whose privileged existence is shattered when tragedy strikes, and she and her mother must flee to California. Forced to work in a migrant labor camp, Esperanza must learn to rise above her difficult circumstances and discover what she's truly made of. Set in the turbulent 1930s, and based on the popular book by Pam Muñoz Ryan, *ESPERANZA RISING* is a poetic tale of a young girl's triumph over adversity.

Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 7 – 9 and 10 – 12.

From Jeff: Alvaro Saar Rios and Dinorah Marquez are a powerhouse creative team – and it has been thrilling to watch them work together on this new adaptation of one of the most beloved books in young adult literature.

EMILY SONG AND THE SHADOW QUEEN

By Playwright and Composer **Marcus Yi**

Directed by First Stage Associate Artistic Director **Michelle LoRicco**

Sponsored by **Molitor Foundation**

Wednesday, April 24, 2024 at p.m.

Located at the [Milwaukee Youth Arts Center](#)

Since her mother's death, Emily Song's home has always been a musical vacuum. Her father banned music from their lives for as long as she can remember. But that doesn't stop Emily from secretly taking singing lessons online. On her 12th birthday, Emily's powers manifest and she discovers she is a music mage: a sorcerer who can cast magical spells through music. When her father is kidnapped by a mysterious entity known as the Queen of Shadows, Emily must figure out how to use her newly discovered talent to save her dad, and New York City from total destruction.

Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 7 – 9 and 10 – 12.

This reading is part of the **TYA BIPOC Superhero Project**, a new initiative led by playwright and educator **José Casas**, designed to give playwrights of color more access to mainstream/regional [Theatre for Young Audiences/USA](#) (TYA/USA) theatres. In an effort the TYA/USA is calling the largest and most comprehensive partnership of theatres ever undertaken in the field, 20 playwrights of color will be commissioned by 24 theatres to develop their work in a one-week residency. All the commissioned works will feature stories of BIPOC superheroes, and the project will culminate in a year-long celebration with productions, co-productions and a published anthology of all the plays. First Stage is honored to serve as a commissioning theater and overjoyed to be working with playwright/composer Marcus Yi.

To learn more about First Stage's 2023/24 season, please visit to 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

About Amplify BIPOC Play Series

The Amplify BIPOC Play Series launched virtually in the spring of 2021 during the pandemic and featured the world premiere virtual productions of COPPER HORNS IN WATER by First Stage alum Ty Defoe and UNMUTED by First Stage Resident Playwright Alvaro Saar Rios and composer Deborah Wicks La Puma. A second Amplify Series was offered virtually in the fall of 2021 and included the world premiere virtual productions of HOW TO ACTUALLY GRADUATE IN A VIRTUAL WORLD by Nikkole Salter, STEP KIDS by Tyrone L. Robinson and Postell Pringle and THE TALE OF LA LLORONA AS TOLD BY CONSUELO CHAVEZ by José Casas. These virtual productions were all well received, both critically and with audiences, and reflected First Stage's commitment to commissioning work by Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) whose voices offer the organization an opportunity to expand its artistic horizons and develop its audience's perspective. All productions were offered for free to viewing and in-person audiences. Last season's Amplify Series were in-person play readings held at Milwaukee Youth Arts Center and included HIDDEN HEROES by Shá Cage, FRANKIE: THE UNTOLD STORY OF A GURL

FRANKENSTEIN by José Casas and THE FORGOTTEN GIRL by India Hill Brown, adapted by Idris Goodwin. THE FORGOTTEN GIRL was also part of the inaugural World Premiere Wisconsin festival and is included in First Stage's 2023/24 season running **October 20 – November 12, 2023** in Goodman Mainstage Hall at Milwaukee Youth Arts Center. firststage.org/events-tickets/amplify-play-series/