



Michelle LoRicco was photographed by Nathan Berry at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center in July. The backdrop was the lounge area just outside of Goodman Mainstage Hall. "The shoot was wonderful," Berry says. "Michelle has a very fun and bubbly personality, which made the shooting process very enjoyable." / Photo by Nathan Berry

Michelle LoRicco

Director/Educator

It's almost as if Michelle LoRicco, the new associate artistic director of Milwaukee's renowned and second-largest theatre company First Stage, was meant to be here.

LoRicco is an Orlando native with a BFA in musical theatre, an MFA specializing in Theatre for Young Audiences, and some high school theatre teaching experience. Along with directing "Elephant & Piggie's 'We Are in a Play!'" for the mainstage this season, her responsibilities include new play development, casting, and community engagement.

"First Stage has a reputation nationwide," LoRicco says. "When I was studying theatre for young audiences in Florida, it had already made an impression on me as a place with a really strong education and academy program. They do a lot of new work and tell stories of populations that need their voices to be heard, which is part of my personal artistic mission."

While working at the Orlando Repertory Theatre — a theatre for young audiences — LoRicco met First Stage Artistic Director Jeff Frank, who was there to direct "Nancy Drew."

"I loved his directing," she says. "I already knew him as a pioneer, somebody who's really moving things forward in our field."

As one more bit of serendipity, in January LoRicco directed "Luchadora!" by Alvaro Saar Rios, a First Stage resident playwright. "In the play, the wrestlers travel to Milwaukee for their championship match," she says. "Everything was saying, 'Hey, this job!' I saw the First Stage opening and reached out."

The position is ideal for someone who's hyper-focused on the welfare and development of kids. "Some are here because they want to pursue a career in theatre," she says. "They want to get their degree and pursue regional and Broadway opportunities. Kids are also here because this is a safe place, a place of belonging. Their friends are here; they can be themselves. They can be silly and also have in-depth conversation about the world, and work with facilitators trained to have those conversations with them through creative play."

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2023-24 Season Notes

- In "Elephant & Piggie" (Feb. 24-March 17), Gerald the Elephant and Piggie the Pig are best friends in a musical adventure. "Gerald has social anxiety, and Piggie can party," LoRicco says. "There's a point in the play when their friendship is ebbing and flowing, and they're like, 'Wait, there's an audience here!' The major theme is how you treat your friends. What do you share with them? What happens with conflicts? If you fight with your friends, will you ever see them again?"

- In the Amplify Reading Series, produced by LoRicco, playwrights of color are invited to tell stories for the populations that need more exposure. LoRicco will direct "Emily Song and the Shadow Queen," a new anime-style superhero musical that First Stage commissioned from Marcus Yi; the playwright will workshop it with First Stage's young performers. MKE

First Stage
 firststage.org, (414) 267-2961

"Dream, Quickie! Dream!" Oct. 6-29, Todd Wehr Theater

"Forgotten Girl," Oct. 20-Nov. 12, Milwaukee Youth Art Center

"Best Christmas Pageant Ever," Nov. 24-Dec. 24, Todd Wehr Theater

"Henry IV, Part 1," Dec. 8-17, Milwaukee Youth Art Center

"Lightning Thief," Feb. 3-March 3, Todd Wehr Theater

"Elephant & Piggie," Feb. 24-March 17, Milwaukee Youth Art Center

"Diary of a Wimpy Kid," April 6-May 5, Todd Wehr Theater

"An Enemy of the People," April 19-28, Milwaukee Youth Art Center

"Escape from Peligro Island," May 10-June 2, Milwaukee Youth Art Center

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