



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FIRST STAGE announces a return to live performances in 2021/22 season

*-Season includes popular holiday favorite, two world premieres and collaboration with
Milwaukee's Ko-Thi Dance Company-*

Milwaukee, WI – September 20, 2021 – First Stage is delighted to announce its safe and triumphant return to live theater performances in the 2021/22 season. Following an innovative virtual season of plays last year and the successful launch of the second Amplify – BIPOC Short Play Series in early September, First Stage proudly announces the full 35th season kicking off in November at the Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater with the perennial and beloved holiday favorite, A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS. With the start of the New Year, First Stage audiences will then go on a journey with the delightfully weird Watson family in THE WATSONS GO TO BIRMINGHAM – 1963. Following that in the spring will be the exciting return of the epic musical battle royale, THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS, after its world premiere run was cut short in March 2020 due to the pandemic. The mainstage season concludes with a cup overflowing with heart and inspiration in playwright/actor James DeVita's world premiere play THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL.

The season will also include two First Steps offerings: THE DANCING GRANNY, a collaboration with Milwaukee's Ko-Thi Dance Company, and the joyful LAST STOP ON MARKET STREET, adapted from the book by popular children's author Matt de la Peña. First Stage's award-winning Young Company will also present two Performance Projects at the newly renovated Milwaukee Youth Arts Center: the captivating contemporary play THE LARAMIE PROJECT as well as MACBETH, Shakespeare's gripping story of ambition and madness.

Looking ahead to next season, Artistic Director **Jeff Frank** commented, "After all of the challenges we faced this past year – and the resiliency our staff and artists have shown in the

face of those challenges – we are thrilled to return to the stage, and connect with our audiences once again, live and in person.”

Tickets

First Stage offers three ways to purchase tickets for its 2021/22 season. **The Family All-Access Membership** will give families the opportunity to purchase tickets at 40% off regular single ticket prices, receive discounts on Theater Academy classes, receive invitations to special Preview Events and more. The cost of the Family All-Access Membership is \$75 per household and are on sale now. Families can also purchase the traditional Family Package, which offers a 25% discount off regular single ticket prices when building a season package of three or more plays. Family Packages are also now on sale. Single tickets to First Stage’s 2021/22 season will go on sale **October 4, 2021**.

For additional information about the 2021/22 season, please go to firststage.org/events-tickets/2021-22-season/ or call (414) 267-2961.

Safety Precautions

As the house and stage lights shine once again, First Stage is implementing the following safety protocols as it welcomes audiences back for live performances for the 2021/22 season. These protocols were developed with the support of the City of Milwaukee Health Department and in alliance with other organizations within the larger Milwaukee arts community. First Stage patrons should review these protocols as they reserve their tickets and visit First Stage productions:

In accordance with Marcus Center for Performing Arts policies, upon entrance to performances in the Marcus Center’s Todd Wehr Theater, **patrons ages 12 and up will be required to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination or proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of their performance**. Audiences under age 12 **will not** need to show proof of negative COVID-19 test.

First Stage’s First Steps and Young Company performances held at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center will not require proof of vaccination or negative test results, but all First Stage productions will adhere to the following guidelines: socially-distanced seating; mask requirement anywhere inside the performance venue; limited capacity seating in the theater; digital playbills and paperless tickets; hand-sanitizing stations; there will be no intermission and concessions and merchandise will not be sold to alleviate congestion in the lobby.

To read the full list of First Stage’s Safety Precautions, as well any COVID-19 health and safety guidelines that evolve, stay up to date with the latest at: firststage.org/safety

FIRST STAGE’S 2021/22 SEASON

Family Series at the Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater

A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS

By Charles M. Schulz

Based on the television special by Bill Melendez and Lee Mendelson

Stage Adaptation by Eric Schaeffer

By Special Arrangement with Arthur Whitelaw and Ruby Persson

Directed by Jeff Frank

Live performances **November 20 – December 26, 2021**

Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater

Sponsored by Associated Bank, Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren

Come home for the holidays with First Stage and this treasured holiday classic. Everyone is giddy with Christmas cheer, but Charlie Brown has the Yuletide blues. Will directing the Christmas play help him get in the spirit of the season? Join Charlie Brown, Snoopy and the rest of the Peanuts gang as they learn the true meaning of Christmas. This is one holiday gift the entire family will treasure. *Suggested for families with young people ages 4+.*

“Charlie Brown is a study in perseverance and positivity,” said **Jeff Frank**. “No matter how many times Lucy pulls that football away, he has faith that one day he will boot that football through the uprights. No matter how many losses his team suffers on the baseball field, he remains hopeful that a victory awaits. All of us can identify with Charlie’s struggles. Life can be hard. We can lose our way and get discouraged. But this show reminds us that we are at our best when we come together, when we care for each other, when we take the time to really see each other.”

THE WATSONS GO TO BIRMINGHAM – 1963

Adapted for stage by Cheryl West

Based on the book by Christopher Paul Curtis

Directed by Aaron Todd Douglas

Live performances **January 21 – February 13, 2022**

Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater

Supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts

Ten-year-old Kenny chronicles the events of a fateful summer for the Watson family of Flint, Michigan. When Kenny’s older brother Byron starts getting into too much trouble, Momma and Dad decide the family needs to pay a visit to Grandma Sands in Alabama to set him straight. Momma, Dad, Kenny, Byron and youngest sister Joetta set out on a cross-country journey, heading south and toward a moment in American history where the world seems to change before their eyes. *Suggested for families with young people ages 8+.*

“The Watson’s Go to Birmingham – 1963 is one of my favorite books of all time. It is laugh-out-loud funny. The self-proclaimed “weird” Watsons are an amazing family; and it is a joy to spend time with them. Like any family they are facing internal challenges as each of the children grow up, but they fight to stay together. We follow young Kenny’s journey as he tries to make sense not only of his mixed up family, but also the mixed up world in which he lives. In his search for perspective, Kenny provides us all with a deeper perspective on family and on our collective history.”

THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS

By Drew Daywalt

Illustrated by Adam Rex

Book and Lyrics by John Maclay, Music and Lyrics by Eric Nordin

Directed by Kelly Doherty, Choreography by Molly Rhode

Live performances **March 5 – April 3, 2022**

Marcus Center’s Todd Wehr Theater

Sponsored by The Molitor Foundation

These three fierce warriors return to the stage for a rematch after their brief battle was cut short in March 2020. From the Kingdom of Backyard came Rock, from the Empire of Mom’s Home Office came Paper and from a messy village in the Junk Drawer Realm came Scissors. They were the strongest, smartest and fastest in all the land. Though they searched far and wide for worthy opponents, no one could beat them . . . until they met each other and a musical battle royale began to see who would come out on top! *Suggested for families with young people ages 4+.*

“Clever, funny, raucous and joyful – just a few of the words that come to mind for this world premiere musical returning to First Stage. **John Maclay** and **Eric Nordin** combined their talents to bring the irreverent humor of author **Drew Daywalt** to the stage in glorious musical form. In their search for individual glory, our heroes discover that healthy competition and friendships are perhaps the greatest glory of all.”

THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL

Based on the true story of Alexandra Flynn Scott

By James DeVita

Directed by Molly Rhode

Live performances **April 22 – May 15, 2022**

Marcus Center’s Todd Wehr Theater

Sponsored by Northwestern Mutual Foundation

Meet Alex Scott. She has a story to tell – about her life and her legacy, her humor and her heart. The story of a young girl fiercely determined to make a difference despite the challenges

she faces. Alex's true story reminds us all that a single person can change the world – one act, or even one cup, at a time. *Suggested for families with young people ages 7+.*

“The key tenet of First Stage productions is that we present stories from a young person's point of view, and in THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL audiences meet a young woman with a remarkable story to tell. With the help of a magical group of folks, Alex weaves us through the ups and downs, the highs and lows of her inspiring life. Every time I hear her story, it kindles deep inside me a desire to be better and to do more. She reminds us all that we are capable of doing great things if we are willing to believe.”

First Steps Series at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

THE DANCING GRANNY

A collaboration with Ko-Thi Dance Company

By Mansa Ra, adapted from the book by Ashley Bryan

Directed by Samantha D. Montgomery, Choreography by DeMar Walker

Live performances **February 12 – March 6, 2022**

Goodman Mainstage Hall, Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

Sponsored by PNC

Kids and adults will be dancing in their seats as Ananse, the clever spider of African folklore, tries to trick Granny into dancing away from her garden so he can take her vegetables. But his plan backfires when he is drawn into the dance himself. “Shake it to the East, shake it to the West, shake it to the one that you love best!” *Suggested for families with young people ages 3 – 7+.*

“We are honored to work with our friends at Ko-Thi Dance Company to bring to life this adaptation by beloved author/illustrator Ashley Bryan. This show will make you want to get up and move!”

LAST STOP ON MARKET STREET

Book, Music & Lyrics by Gloria Bond Clunie

Adapted from the book by Matt de la Peña and illustrated by Christian Robinson

Directed by Johamy Morales

Live performances **May 7 – June 12, 2022**

Goodman Mainstage Hall, Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

Sponsored by PNC

Six-year-old CJ is visiting his boisterous Nana, reluctantly accompanying her on a bus ride that he finds loud, gritty and weird. Guided by his veritable force-of-nature Nana, CJ travels a little closer to his roots and sees that things are not always what they seem. All aboard for this hip-

hop, eclectic, heart-thumpin', toe-tappin' joy ride! *Suggested for families with young people ages 3 – 7+.*

“Author Matt de la Peña has quickly become one of the best and most popular writers for young people – and it makes sense. He paints a vibrant picture of the world around him. Throughout this story CJ begins to see the beauty all around him – and in so doing reveals it to us as well. I love his relationship with his Nana and how she gently imparts her wisdom to young CJ.”

Young Company Performance Projects at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

THE LARAMIE PROJECT

By Moisés Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project

Directed by Elyse Edelman

Live performances **December 3 – 12, 2021**

Goodman Mainstage Hall, Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

Sponsored by UPAF

In October 1998, 21-year-old Matthew Shepard, an openly gay college student, was brutally beaten and left to die on the plains outside Laramie, Wyoming. Hailed as one of the most captivating and encompassing pieces of contemporary theater, THE LARAMIE PROJECT is a breathtaking collage that explores the depths to which humanity can sink and the heights of compassion of which we are capable. *Warning: This play is based on a true story, and includes strong language and mature content that some may find upsetting, including descriptions of homophobia, violence and death. Suggested for families with young people ages 13+.*

“THE LARAMIE PROJECT is an incredibly powerful piece of documentary theater which remains relevant 20 years after the events it discusses,” said **Matt Daniels**, Director of the Young Company/First Stage Artistic Associate. Directed by YC alum **Elyse Edelman**, who is herself a master of transformation, a handful of student actors will play dozens of the citizens of Laramie, WY as they explore the story of Matthew Shepard, who was lynched simply for being gay. This piece is a perfect fit for the Young Company’s signature minimalist, actor-driven performance projects, and I can’t wait to see it myself!”

MACBETH

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Marcella Kearns

Live performances **March 25 – April 3, 2022**

Goodman Mainstage Hall, Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

Sponsored by UPAF

Tempted by an evil prophecy from a trio of witches, and encouraged by his Lady ever deeper into his own dark ambition, Macbeth rages a bloody path to the throne of Scotland. Infamously known as the cursed Scottish play, Shakespeare's darkest tragedy is filled with ferocious battles, supernatural horrors, famously gorgeous poetry and some of the Bard's most vivid characters. *Suggested for families with young people ages 13+.*

"More than 400 years after it was written, Macbeth remains scarily of the moment. This exploration of ambition and its pitfalls is one of Shakespeare's tightest plays, and will be expertly led by longtime YC faculty member **Marcella Kearns** with fight choreography by **Christopher Elst**. This play is fast, furious and terrifying, and a great way to welcome YC's award-winning Shakespeare chops to the remodeled Goodman Mainstage Hall, where battles for the vast Scottish landscape will be right in the audience's lap."

For more information about any of the offerings for First Stage's 2021/22 season, please visit firststage.org or call (414) 267-2961.

Please note: All dates and times are subject to change based on CDC guidelines or mandates. Please check website for most current information. firststage.org/safety

As was previously announced, the 2021/22 Amplify – First Stage's BIPOC Short Play Series includes:

HOW TO ACTUALLY GRADUATE IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

By Nikkole Salter

Directed by Samantha D. Montgomery

Streaming **now – 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+.*

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 Hallow’s 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.

For more information on the 2021/22 Amplify – First Stage’s BIPOC Short Play Series, please visit: firststage.org/amplify

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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