



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**First Stage Offers Holiday Gift to the Milwaukee Community**  
**CHRISTMASTOWN COMES TO FIRST STAGE**

*-A free virtual holiday special featuring music, humor and a healthy dose of magic-*

**By José Casas, Jeff Frank and Samantha D. Montgomery**

**Directed by Jeff Frank**

**Milwaukee, WI – December 10, 2020** – First Stage, one of the nation’s leading theaters for young people and families, was very excited to produce RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER™: THE MUSICAL for the holidays this season and delight Milwaukee audiences once again with Rudolph’s charming story. Well, we all know what happened in 2020 to alter schedules, change lives and generally upend life. But undaunted, the fine folks at First Stage still wanted to spread some of that contagious First Stage positivity combined with a dash of holiday cheer! First Stage has created a 30-minute virtual special featuring some of the iconic characters from RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER™: THE MUSICAL. Thanks to the generosity of **Associated Bank** and at a time when we need it most, First Stage offers this gift to the community – a virtual special filled with music, humor and a healthy dose of magic.

When the folks at Christmastown get the news that First Stage won’t be able to share Rudolph’s story on stage for audiences this season, the Misfit Toys, the Elves and Sam the Snowman decide to come to Milwaukee to help out – sure that they can help First Stage find a way to spread some holiday cheer. Incorporating some of the beloved songs from the show, the special shares their journey from their misadventures around the office and the shops to their discovery of the world of First Stage and Milwaukee to their efforts to cheer Milwaukee’s young people and their families.

**CHRISTMASTOWN COMES TO FIRST STAGE** will stream **for free** via First Stage’s YouTube channel as one of First Stage’s [Signature Theater Events](#), part of **Through Our Lens – A Virtual**

**Performance Series** in the 2020/21 season from **December 13, 2020 – January 2, 2021**. The site can be accessed at: [First Stage YouTube channel](#). *Performance runtime is approximately 30 minutes. Suggested for families and audiences of all ages.*

In addition to streaming CHRISTMASTOWN COMES TO FIRST STAGE, First Stage supporters can also receive their very own **“Merry Fun” Box** straight from Christmastown. For a donation of \$30, patrons will receive a special Christmastown “Merry Fun” box filled with wonderful surprises for their child, including a special note from Santa. Donations need to be received by **December 15**, so that the “Merry Fun” box can be shipped in time for the holidays. Quantities are limited, so don’t delay to receive something magical from First Stage and Christmastown this holiday season. To order a “Merry Fun” Box, go to [CHRISTMASTOWN](#). The donation of \$30 helps support the HOPE Fund, a special relief initiative to help First Stage endure the financial effects related to COVID-19 during the 2020/21 season. To learn more on how to donate directly to this special relief fund, please go to [The HOPE Fund](#).

When asked how CHRISTMASTOWN COMES TO FIRST STAGE came about, Artistic Director **Jeff Frank** had this to say: “We have been honored to have our RUDOLPH production become the model for the national touring version of RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER™: THE MUSICAL and we received permission to create this new holiday special which celebrates the collective spirit of Rudolph’s story, the magic of First Stage and the wonder of Milwaukee.

As we searched for the right fit for a virtual holiday event for our audiences, an offhand comment by our Properties Master **Nikki Kulas** about how it would be nice to have Bumble working in the shop to get things down from the high shelves, inspired an idea. What if we explored a scenario that when we let Santa know we weren’t going to be able to share Rudolph’s story on stage this year that he sent some of our friends from Christmastown down to First Stage to help out and maybe spread a little holiday cheer? And of course we’d want to document the process.”

Jeff continued, “So I came up with the idea of a faux documentary in the style of the hit TV show *The Office*, recruited playwrights **José Casas** and **Samantha Montgomery** to help me flesh out the story and build a script – and in a few weeks we were filming! I love that audiences will get to see not only some of our amazing young performers, but many of our staff members who are usually behind the scenes.

We are also incredibly thankful for the folks at **Associated Bank**. Through their sponsorship we are able to share this special with our community at no cost to our audiences. We hope that they find some holiday cheer and that perhaps viewers will come back to watch future virtual productions during the rest of the season.”

To view a trailer for CHRISTMASTOWN COMES TO FIRST STAGE, please go to: [CHRISTMASTOWN COMES TO FIRST STAGE trailer](#)

To view images for CHRISTMASTOWN COMES TO FIRST STAGE, please go to:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IeRXs56QjMfCHkKspRn3y5PB2aCU2TVR?usp=sharing>

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

**José Casas (Co-Playwright)** is a playwright, director and actor, as well as an assistant professor of playwriting at the University of Michigan. He is a board member of the Children's Theatre Foundation of America and Spinning Dot Theatre, where he is also a resident artist. Casas is also a member of AATE, the Dramatists Guild and TYA/USA. He has a BA in dramatic arts from the University of California, Santa Barbara; an MA in theatre arts from California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA) and an MFA in playwriting from Arizona State University. His plays, which have been performed across the country, include *la rosa still grows beyond the wall*, *all brown*, *all chingon*, *aDoBe*, *a million whispers all at once*, and *antonia: a latina hip-hop Antigone*. His plays *la ofrenda* and *somebody's children* received both the Bonderman National Playwriting for Youth Award (2005, 2009) and the AATE Distinguished Play Award (2007, 2010). His plays published by Dramatic Publishing include *la ofrenda*, *somebody's children*, *14* and *alex: a conversation about nothing*, which is included in *The Bully Plays*. His book, also published by Dramatic Publishing and co-edited with Christina Marín, *Palabras del Cielo: An Exploration of Latina/o Theatre for Young Audiences* showcases the work of playwrights writing Latina/o Theatre for Young Audiences (LTYA) as well as the work of scholars exploring the subject.

**Jeff Frank (Artistic Director/Co-Playwright/Director)** is recognized as one of the top directors in the field with an expertise in developing new work for theater for young audiences. He holds a BFA in Theater from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and an MFA in Child Drama from the University of Utah. Having served as First Stage's Education and Academy Director from 1996 – 2003 and as First Stage's Artistic Director since February 2003, Jeff remains committed to the power of theater to transform lives and is forever thankful to call First Stage home.

**Samantha D. Montgomery (Co-Playwright/Assistant Director)** is a resident teaching artist at First Stage. She is dedicated to motivating young people to remain committed to their goals during times of uncertainty. She teaches that commitment is key to obtaining what you desire. She is a member of Actors' Equity and has a MS from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and a MA from Alverno College.

## **ADULT CAST**

The adult cast for **CHRISTMASTOWN COMES TO FIRST STAGE** includes: **Zach Thomas Woods** as Sam the Snowman/Charlie in the Box and **Robby McGhee** as Boss Elf.

## **YOUNG PERFORMER CAST**

First Stage Young performers featured are: **Max Larson** (Milwaukee) as Spotted Elephant; **Reese Bell** (Cedarburg) as Doll; **Marin Wheeler** (Cedarburg) as Elf; **Lucia Harris** (Fox Point) as Elf; **Amirah Muhammad** (Milwaukee) as Elf; **Alex Radtke** (Cedarburg) as Elf; **Nolan Zeller Mayer** (Milwaukee) as Elf; **Greta Carlson** (Fox Point) as Elf; **Ailie Synder** (Milwaukee) as First Stage

Student; **Ryan Bennett** (Mequon) as First Stage Student; **Ryann Schulz** (Wauwatosa) as First Stage Student; **Madison Jones** (Milwaukee) as First Stage Student and **Evie Patrick** (Whitefish Bay) as First Stage Student.

The Puppeteer Ensemble includes: **Nikki Kulas, Melissa Hunter, Jeff Frank** and **Lilly Frank**.

This production also features many members of the First Stage staff.

The Artistic Staff for CHRISTMASTOWN COMES TO FIRST STAGE features Includes: **Jeff Frank** (Artistic Director/Co-Playwright/Director); **Samantha D. Montgomery** (Co-Playwright/Assistant Director); **Jeff Schaetzke** (Music Director); **Ami Majeski** (Choreographer); **Brandon Kirkham** (Original Costume, Scenic and Puppet Designs); **Traveling Lemur Productions, LLC** (Directors of Photography/Film Editors); **Jacob Mitchell** (Location Sound Engineer); **DiMonte Henning** (Camera Operator); **Natalie Mayo** (Musical Numbers Sound Engineer) and **Leah Dueno** (Production Assistant/Wardrobe).

For more information about any of the offerings for **Through Our Lens – A First Stage Virtual Performance Series** or about buying a Family All-Access Pass, please visit [www.firststage.org](http://www.firststage.org) or call **(414) 267-2961**. To see the schedule the 2020/21 Virtual Season of Plays, please visit: [firststage.org/virtualseries2021](http://firststage.org/virtualseries2021).

## **FACT SHEET**

### **About: CHRISTMASTOWN COMES TO FIRST STAGE**

**Dates:** Streaming December 13, 2020 through January 2, 2021

**Description:** When the folks at Christmastown get the news that First Stage won't be able to share Rudolph's story on stage for audiences this season, the Misfit Toys, the Elves and Sam the Snowman decide to come to Milwaukee to help out – sure that they can help First Stage find a way to spread some holiday cheer. Incorporating some of the beloved songs from the show, the special shares their journey from their misadventures around the office and the shops to their discovery of the world of First Stage and Milwaukee to their efforts to cheer Milwaukee's young people and their families. At a time when we need it more than ever, First Stage offers this gift to our community – filled with music, humor and a healthy dose of holiday magic. *Performance runtime is approximately 30 minutes. For families and audiences of all ages.*

**Tickets and information:** Free to stream on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com). For any questions, please call **(414) 267-2961**.

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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). [www.firststage.org](http://www.firststage.org).