



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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First Stage presents
THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL FOR
YOUNG AUDIENCES

-Hit Broadway musical now created for young audiences has catchy original music, dancing and loads of positivity-

Milwaukee, WI – February 15, 2023 – First Stage is excited to announce that next up in their 2022/23 season will be **THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES**, based on the iconic animated **Nickelodeon** series by **Stephen Hillenberg**, with book by **Kyle Jarrow**. SpongeBob fans young and old will delight in seeing their favorite characters come to life on stage! The production features original songs by an array of legendary musicians including **Steven Tyler** and **Joe Perry of Aerosmith**, **Cyndi Lauper**, **John Legend**, **Panic! At the Disco** and **David Bowie**, to name a few. The musical production was conceived by **Tina Landau** and will be directed by **Tommy Novak**, (recently seen at First Stage’s production of **RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER™** as Sam the Snowman), choreographed by noted choreographer **Katelin Zelon**, with Musical Direction by area favorite **Paul Helm**. Milwaukee families will get to dive deep into the undersea town of Bikini Bottom with SpongeBob and his quirky circle of friends and neighbors – Patrick, Sandy, Squidward, Mr. Krabs and even Plankton – in this dynamic stage musical. Chaos erupts when SpongeBob and all of Bikini Bottom face the total annihilation at the threat of Mt. Humongous. Just when all hope seems lost, a most unexpected hero rises up and takes center stage. First Stage audiences will discover that the power of optimism really can save the world! Sponsored by **Molitor Foundation**.

THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES runs **March 3 – April 2, 2023**, at the Marcus Center’s Todd Wehr Theater, located at 929 N. Water Street in downtown Milwaukee. Tickets start at **\$32** and can be purchased in person at the Marcus Center Box Office at 929 N.

Water Street, by phone at **(414) 273-7206** or online at firststage.org. *Performance runtime is approximately 75 minutes plus intermission. Suggested for families with young people ages 6+.*

From Director Tommy Novak: “‘Who lives in a pineapple under the Sea?’ SPONGEBOB SQUARE PANTS!!!” I am super excited to be working on THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES at First Stage. The thing about SpongeBob is that he is a simple sponge with a huge heroic heart. When the world is a horrible, miserable place, we need optimism and positivity that only SpongeBob can bring to the any situation. Although we sometimes see the darkness of the future, SpongeBob is here to remind all of us that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and they will help us to find the flashlight to get us through it. They always see the bright side of the situation; help to motivate us with humor, relentless positivity and an absurd silliness. SpongeBob is the biggest example of “I can’t is not is my vocabulary.” There is no task too large or too scary. Any task can be accomplished with teamwork and a community of support. This show reminds us that we are a community responsible for working together and taking care of each other. Only when we put our collective brains and hearts to a task will we succeed. The world we live in is NOW. Don’t stress about the future and leave the Past behind you. Today is a gift and tomorrow is not promised, so live each day as if it is your last with a full heart of kindness, joy and laughter. “MAKE IT YOUR BEST DAY EVER!”

BIOGRAPHIES

Tommy Novak (Director) [Pronouns: They/Them] is thrilled to be back at First Stage again after recently appearing in RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER™ as Sam the Snowman. Tommy is a Non-Binary, Chicago-based theater artist, international director, vocal coach, movement specialist, performer and has performed all over the country and world. Recently, they were in the sold out critically acclaimed production of FIDDLER ON THE ROOF at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, playing the role of Avram. Tommy has been nominated for a Jeff Award for playing Max Bialystok for Night Blue’s production of THE PRODUCERS. Other credits include: Mr. Mushnik in LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS (Mercury Theater Chicago); Edna Turnblad in HAIRSPRAY (Skylight Music Theatre); Mr. Braithwaite in BILLY ELLIOT and Fatso O’Rear in DO RE MI (Porchlight); Anthony Dull in LOVE’S LABOUR’S LOST and Salisbury in KING JOHN (Utah Shakespeare Festival); Marcellus Washburn in THE MUSIC MAN, Baptista Minola in TAMING OF THE SHREW (Arkansas Shakespeare Theater) and Boss Elf in RUDOLPH IN THE RED-NOSED REINDEER™: THE MUSICAL and Friar Tuck in ROBIN HOOD (First Stage). Novak has toured nationally as an actor with Utah Shakespeare Festival as well as Arkansas Shakespeare Theater. Internationally he toured China as Horton the elephant in SEUSSICAL. In addition to performing, Tommy is private voice teacher, teaching artist and director. They are proudly represented by Paonessa Talent Agency. Follow Tommy on Instagram @Tommy.j.Novak tommynovactor.com

Katelin Zelon (Choreographer) (she/her) is a New York City-based choreographer, teacher and performer. She holds a Bachelor of Science in American Dance Pedagogy from Oklahoma City University, where she helped found, co-direct and choreograph the university’s Broadway Fun for Funds, an annual fundraiser for AIDS and HIV awareness. Favorite performance credits include: dancing at Walt Disney World, CHICAGO (Theater Downtown); CABARET (Clear Space

Theatre); A WONDERFUL LIFE (Fireside Theater); ANYTHING GOES (The Palace Theater) and BROADWAY BARES: STRIP U. Recent choreography projects include the U.S. premiere of the musical WIND IN THE WILLOWS (adapted by Broadway Workshop), TWITTER, Oscar Health Insurance and serving as Associate Choreographer for work on *The Daily Show* with Trevor Noah. Katelin served as assistant choreographer to Al Blackstone BROADWAY BACKWARDS (Al Hirschfeld Theatre), as well as the debut of his original Off-Broadway show, FREDDIE FALLS IN LOVE (Signature Theatre). Her choreography, which has been praised for its storytelling and ability to create pictures, has been featured in several showcases around the Tri-state area including The Young Choreographer's Festival, Choreographer's Canvas and Leg Up On Life's Matriarch. Additional projects include THE ADDAMS FAMILY (New Theater), The Maritime Aquarium ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW (The Maritime Aquarium) and events for The National Pole and Ariel Dance Competition. Katelin currently serves as an adjudicator for Dance Masters of America, Beyond the Stars and Nexstar Dance Competitions and travels the country teaching master classes and camps at various studios and theaters. Find out more about Katelin by following her @katelinzelon on Instagram.

Paul Helm (Music Director/Foley Artist) is elated and honored to be back at First Stage! Previous First Stage credits include A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS, BIG RIVER, CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG, JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH, BIG FISH, SEUSSICAL, U: BUG: ME!, MY SON PINOCCHIO, ALEXANDER . . . VERY BAD DAY, JUNIE B. JONES . . . MONKEY BUSINESS, THE HAPPY ELF, A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD and THE QUILTMAKER'S GIFT. Paul has performed, directed and music directed with the Utah Shakespeare Festival, Hippodrome Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre, freeFall Theatre Company, Sacramento Theatre Company, Arrow Rock Lyceum Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Fireside Dinner Theatre, Hope Summer Repertory Theatre and Bucknell University. Recent credits include MURDER FOR TWO, HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL, BRIGHT STAR, THE FANTASTICKS, SOUVENIR, CRAZY FOR YOU, SPRING AWAKENING, PUMP BOYS AND DINETTES, GUYS ON ICE and FOREVER PLAID. He was also a vocalist for DISNEY ON CLASSIC, a three-month symphony concert tour of Japan with the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. paulhelm.net

ADULT CAST

Doug Clemons (Squidward); **Jesse Bhamrah*** (Plankton); **Zach Thomas Woods** (Krabs/Ensemble); **Bree Beelow*** (Karen the Computer/Sea Anemone/Ensemble); **Lachrisa Grandberry*** (Mrs. Mayor/Ensemble); **Raven Dockery** (Puff/Sea Anemone/Ensemble); **Paul Helm*** (Foley Artist); **Jonathan Gideon** (Understudy for Doug Clemons); **George Lorimer** (Understudy for Jesse Bhamrah); **Zackary Simonini** (Understudy for Zach Thomas Woods); **Rachel Skowronski** (Understudy for Bree Beelow); **Sophie Michalski** (Understudy for Lachrisa Grandberry) and **Mireya Magallon** (Understudy for Raven Dockery).

*Appearing through an Agreement between First Stage and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

YOUNG PERFORMER CASTS

Young Performer roles are double cast. Young Performers in the **Sponge Cast** include: **Gracie Halverson** (Madison) as SpongeBob SquarePants; **Gavin Miller** (Wauwatosa) as Patrick; **Natalie Ortega** (Grayslake, IL) as Sandy; **Savannah Carlson** (Mequon) as Perch Perkins; **Lorelei Wesselowski** (Milwaukee) as Ensemble; **Grace Nealy** (Waukesha) as Ensemble; **William Swoboda** (Whitefish Bay) as Ensemble; **Terynn Erby-Walker** (Milwaukee) as Ensemble; **Taylor Arnstein** (Fox Point) as Ensemble and **Elliot Lippman** (Shorewood) as Ensemble.

Young Performers in the Starfish Cast include: **Thatcher Jacobs** (Fox Point) as SpongeBob SquarePants; **Zachary Church** (West Bend) as Patrick; **Naima Gaines** (Milwaukee) as Sandy; **Lainey Techtmann** (New Berlin) as Perch Perkins; **Isabella Schmitz** (Port Washington) as Ensemble; **Ceci Cornell** (Elm Grove) as Ensemble; **Terrance Ilion** (Fox Point) as Ensemble; **Sophia Lohse** (Whitefish Bay) as Ensemble; **Evie Patrick** (Whitefish Bay) as Ensemble and **Abram Nelson** (Whitefish Bay) as Ensemble.

Please note: To find out which cast is performing on a specific performance day, please refer to the website on the show page located here: firststage.org/spongebob

The Artistic & Creative Team for **THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES** includes: **Tommy Novak*** (Director); **Paul Helm*** (Music Director); **Katelin Zelon** (Choreographer); **Kristin Ellert** (Scenic Designer); **Jason Fassl, USA** (Lighting Designer); **Gabrielle Tifft** (Assistant to the Lighting Designer); **Erin Paige-Bhamrah** (Sound Designer); **Theresa Ham** (Costume Designer); **Isabel Patt*** (Stage Manager) and **Rachel Campoli** (Assistant Stage Manager).

*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

Tickets start at \$32 – Tickets may be purchased at firststage.org or through the Marcus Center Box Office, in person at 929 N. Water Street in downtown Milwaukee or by phone (414) 273-7206 or toll free at (888) 612-3500. The number for TDD (for deaf and hard of hearing patrons) is (414) 273-3080.

COVID Protocols: First Stage is no longer requiring proof of vaccination upon arrival, and masks will be optional in the theater, unless the community level in Milwaukee County is rated in the High category, as determined by the CDC. First Stage COVID safety protocols and updates can be viewed here: [firststage.org/covid-19-safety-protocols/ - performances](http://firststage.org/covid-19-safety-protocols/-performances)

Security at the Marcus Performing Arts Center: Upon entry to the Todd Wehr Theater, attendees will walk through a security scanner to check for any items not permitted in the building. While purses and small bags are allowed, please leave larger bags, backpacks or other items at home. [Review Security Procedures at the Marcus Performing Arts Center](#). Please allow ample time for parking and security checks before the performance.

Digital Playbill: The digital playbill includes artistic/actor/designer and cast bios. To view the digital playbill when it gets posted closer to the show opening, please go to: firststage.org/about-us/media-center/playbills/

Please note: Please refer to the digital playbill for updates on any cast changes as well as for the appropriate pronouns for actors.

Google Drive: Here is a link to rehearsal shots, photo credits, rehearsal footage, headshots and the show logo: drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dtagTVUEhr1Y0T_AuYNJ01ErvgFOo1iP

Special events for THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

Pay What You Choose Performance: Friday, March 10, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

Pay What You Choose tickets are available on a first come, first served basis with a minimum suggested donation of \$5 per person. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. on the day of the performance. Patrons are encouraged to arrive early. Tickets may also be reserved in advance by phone at **(414) 267-2961**, weekdays 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. For more information, please visit: firststage.org/events-tickets/tickets-offers/pay-what-you-choose/

Sensory Friendly Performance: Saturday, March 18, 2023 at 3:30 p.m.

A Sensory Friendly Performance with accommodations for families with children on the autism spectrum will take place on Saturday, March 18, 2023 at 3:30 p.m. Sensory accommodations include a quiet area staffed by an experienced educator, lower sound, house lights up and more. Tickets for Sensory Friendly Performances are \$10. Order online or by phone at **(414) 267-2961**, weekdays 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. to reserve tickets. To learn more visit: firststage.org/plan-your-visit/sensory-friendly-performances/.

ASL Interpreted Performance: Sunday, April 2, 2023 at 3:30 p.m.

This performance will be sign language interpreted for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Assistive listening devices are also available at the Todd Wehr Theater. To learn more, please visit: firststage.org/plan-your-visit/accessibility/sign-language-interpreted-performances/

FACT SHEET

About: THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

Based on the Series by **Stephen Hillenberg**

Book by **Kyle Jarro**

Original songs by **Yolanda Adams, Steven Tyler and Joe Perry of Aerosmith, Sara Bareilles, Jonathan Coulton, Alexander Ebert of Edward Sharpe & The Magnetic Zeros, The Flaming Lips, Lady A, Cyndi Lauper, John Legend, Panic! At the Disco, Plain White T's, They Might Be Giants and T.I.**

And songs by **David Bowie, Tom Kenny and Andy Paley**

Additional lyrics are by **Jonathan Coulton**

Additional music by **Tom Kitt**

Musical production was conceived by **Tina Landau**

THE SPONGEBOB MUSICAL FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES is presented by arrangement with **Concord Theatricals**.

Nickelodeon, SpongeBob SquarePants and all related titles, logos and characters are trademarks of Viacom International Inc.

Directed by **Tommy Novak**

Choreographed by **Katelin Zelon**

Sponsored by **Molitor Foundation**

Location: Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater, 929 N. Water Street, Milwaukee

Live Performances: March 3 – April 2, 2023

Description: Are you ready, kids? Dive into the undersea town of Bikini Bottom with SpongeBob and his quirky circle of friends and neighbors – Patrick, Sandy, Squidward, Mr. Krabs and even Plankton – in this dynamic stage musical with songs from music's most legendary artists. Chaos erupts when SpongeBob and all of Bikini Bottom face the total annihilation at the threat of Mt. Humongous. Just when all hope seems lost, a most unexpected hero rises up and takes center stage. The power of optimism really can save the world! *Performance runtime is approximately 75 minutes plus intermission. Suggested for families with young people ages 6+.*

Performances:

- Friday, March 3 at 7:00 p.m. – *OPENING*
- Saturday, March 4 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, March 5 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Friday, March 10 at 7:00 p.m. – *PAY WHAT YOU CHOOSE PERFORMANCE*
- Saturday, March 11 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, March 12 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Friday, March 17 at 7:00 p.m.
- Saturday, March 18 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m. – *SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE AT 3:30 P.M.*
- Sunday, March 19 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Friday, March 24 at 7:00 p.m.
- Saturday, March 25 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, March 26 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Friday, March 31 at 7:00 p.m.
- Saturday, April 1 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, April 2 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m. – *ASL PERFORMANCE AT 3:30 P.M.*

For more information, please visit 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