



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contacts:

Cindy Moran, PR Consultant, cmoran@firststage.org or (414) 405-6290

Jennifer Hubbartt, Marketing and Communications Director, jhubbartt@firststage.org or (414) 630-9132

First Stage's Annual Fundraising event **Make Believe . . . It's a Ball!** **In Your Home**

-A Celebration of Artistic Director Jeff Frank's 25th Anniversary-

Milwaukee, WI – February 23, 2021 – First Stage, one of the nation's leading theaters for young people and families, will hold their 27th annual Make Believe Ball virtually on **Saturday, March 6, 2021** from **6:00 – 7:30 p.m.** First Stage invites patrons, Theater Academy families, First Stage alumni, their friends and families, as well as Milwaukee theater fans far and wide, to join them as they celebrate the 25th anniversary of Artistic Director **Jeff Frank** with the organization.

First Stage Founder **Rob Goodman** commented that, "Jeff is a phenomenal professional director, with a unique and creative gift at taking a stage play and turning it into magic. He is also a human being with a very large and wonderful heart. A heart that is able to see and create art in ways that touches people and moves them and transforms them beyond who they are when they walked into the theater. He is a human being that transforms the lives of children, from his work in the Theater Academy and in the Education office, Jeff is uniquely First Stage."

On this special evening, families will tune into an entertaining virtual program where they will see some of their favorite First Stage actors and be able to participate in a large online auction.

Make Believe Ball Event Honorary Co-Chairs **Jeff Frank** and his wife, **Sarah Hunt Frank** will welcome guests, before event hosts actor/director **Kelly Doherty** and First Stage alum, actor/director **Karen Estrada** take over, leading a program where they share some of Jeff's First Stage history with selected scenes and songs from the 50 plus productions he has directed during his First Stage tenure. Selected scenes and songs featured are from: SHREK, THE MUSICAL (2013/14 season); A MIDNIGHT CRY (2013/14 season); THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER (2009/10, 2013/14, and 2018/19 seasons); ROALD DAHL'S MATILDA THE

MUSICAL (2018/19 season); PETER PAN AND WENDY (2010/11 season) and TINKER BELL (2018/19 season) will be part of the program. The evening's festivities will also include a video of various alumni sending greetings, congratulations and warm wishes to Jeff. After the program, popular Milwaukee radio host and DJ, 88Nine Station Director **Jordan Lee** will lead a post-event virtual dance party.

First Stage Managing Director **Betsy Corry** stated, "First Stage is a national leader in theater for young audiences because of Jeff Frank's artistic vision, his integrity and passion for the mission of First Stage. First and foremost, he is a believer in young people and their capacity to be creative, empathetic, courageous individuals who will make our world better. He is a natural teacher and a fearless artist. First Stage is a home for so many young artists because of Jeff Frank's guidance and leadership. We are so fortunate that he has spent 25 years building this special place! I am delighted that Jeff will be honored for his many contributions to First Stage at this year's annual Make Believe Ball."

Caryn Esten, First Stage Board President, also commented that: "Jeff Frank is the consummate Artistic Director (and a downright amazing human being)! He is a master of his craft – showing an unwavering commitment to the performers, production artists and community lifted up by his creativity and leadership. I applaud his 25-year legacy and look forward to what is still to come. Bravo, Jeff!"

Added First Stage Playwright in Residence **John Maclay**: "Working in theater for young audiences, you meet a lot of people who have an incredible amount of heart. And you meet a lot of people who have an incredible amount of brains. And sometimes you meet people like Jeff, who have both."

First Stage invites guests to join them for this special evening to celebrate Jeff Frank's artistic accomplishments and leadership on **Saturday, March 6, 2021**. In a year we won't forget, this will be a special evening to remember. The event schedule is as follows:

Schedule of Events for First Stage Make Believe . . . It's a Ball!

Saturday, March 6, 2021 @ 6 – 7:30 p.m.

Virtual – in homes across Southeastern Wisconsin

6:00 – 7:00 p.m. – **Event Livestream Program** – Join hosts **Kelly Doherty** and **Karen Estrada** as they take attendees on an exciting virtual Make Believe Ball journey!

7:00 – 7:30 p.m. – **Dance Party** hosted by 88Nine Radio Milwaukee's **Jordan Lee**.

Attire: This year Ball attendees are asked to show off their **PaGLAMas** and glam out their pajamas! Pair comfy pajamas with glamorous accessories or a party dress with slippers – creativity has no bounds! Post your PaGLAMas on social media using #MakeBelieveBall and tag First Stage!

Tune into the Livestream Program here:

www.studiogear.events/firststagembb2021

Participate in the large online auction and make a donation in honor of Jeff Frank! A few featured auction items include:

- Private Dinner for eight with Chef Justin Carlisle, owner of Ardent and James Beard Finalist for Best Chef Midwest.
- A one-week stay in a four-bedroom, four-bath single-family home in Breckenridge, Colorado.
- Club Suite for 20 guests for a 2021 regular season game of the Milwaukee Brewers.

Participate in the First Stage online auction here:

www.bidpal.net/mbb21

Please note: The First Stage online Auction is live now and will close at 8 p.m. on Saturday, March 6.

Sponsors for this year's event include: Presenting Sponsor Northwestern Mutual; **Corporate Sponsors:** AO Smith Foundation, The ECAB Investment Group, BAIRD Private Wealth Management, KMPG, Studio Gear, 88Nine, Associated Bank, Johnson Controls, PNC and We Energies Foundation and **Family Sponsors:** The Esten Family, The Field Family, The Marschka Family, The Orr Family, The Pence Family and The Puechner Family.

Make Believe Ball Event Honorary Co-Chairs: Jeff Frank and Sarah Hunt Frank. **Event Hosts:** Kelly Doherty and Karen Estrada. **Event Committee:** Monica Arnstein, Lisa Boyce, Kelly Calvelli, Terri Field, Laura Hirano, Mary Kramer, Tonya Leuder, Melissa Marschka, Meredith Pence, Melissa Radtke, Kate Schroeder, Amanda Singh, Julia Westphal and Heather Whitmill.

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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.