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FIRST STAGE ANNOUNCES
THROUGH OUR LENS – A NEW VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE SERIES
-Featuring a New Membership program for the 2020/21 Season-

Milwaukee, WI – August 25, 2020 – First Stage, one of the nation’s leading theaters for young people and families, announces **Through Our Lens – A First Stage Virtual Performance Series** which will offer streaming plays, short-form episodic performances, new play readings and other signature theater events shared exclusively online. This new virtual series will also include associated live opportunities to engage audiences with artists or educators to enhance the experience. Due to ongoing concerns over rehearsing and performing theater productions for live audiences amid the coronavirus pandemic, First Stage is not currently planning to produce live theater performances in its upcoming 2020/21 season. A new membership program called the **Family All-Access Pass** will offer access to all virtual performances and other member benefits. Family All-Access Passes as well as single tickets to individual virtual performances will go on sale **Tuesday, September 1, 2020** at www.firststage.org.

“As we continue to monitor CDC guidelines while also working with our performance venues and our unions to ensure the safety of both the rehearsal process and performances, we are not able to predict when we will be able to safely return to in person rehearsals and/or present to a live audience,” said First Stage Artistic Director **Jeff Frank**. “While we are not closing the door to producing plays next season, we feel we must wait until we can rehearse, produce and present safely for all involved and in a way that is fiscally responsible,” Frank continued.

During the 2020/21 season, First Stage will produce and make available for online viewing a season of plays, new play readings and other signature theater experiences to engage young people and families in a way that mirrors a visit to the theater. “Though we may not be able to come together physically to enjoy the magic of live theater, we can still deliver the power of an interactive, shared experience by creating new work designed specifically to be shared through the emerging digital platforms,” added Frank.

Additionally, First Stage will focus its energy on its Theater Academy and Theater in Education programming. The current Theater Academy programs will continue with both virtual classes and limited in-person classes, which are adaptable to a virtual platform if the need arises. Its Theater in Education programs will work with school districts to deliver its arts-integrated curriculum virtually to students.

“As we adapt and create new theatrical forms, we are also taking this time to advance our work in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, deepening our connections in our community,” said First Stage Managing Director **Betsy Corry**. “This incredibly important work will involve all of us – administration, marketing, development, and our artistic and production teams – in the creation and delivery of programming and in community conversations. Together we will spend the next season finding our new way forward and we will all be stronger for it,” continued Corry.

FIRST STAGE’S 2020/21 SEASON

Virtual Season of Plays

Audiences can have their “favorite seat in the house” to interactive, shared experiences through new work that is specifically designed for sharing through the emerging digital platforms, engaging families in a way that mirrors a visit to the theater. Family All-Access Pass memberships and tickets are on sale starting Tuesday, September 1, 2020. First Stage’s Virtual Season of Plays is sponsored by **Children’s Wisconsin**, with additional support from the **United Performing Arts Fund**.

THE QUEST FOR SOLOMON’S TREASURE

DEVELOPED BY JOHN MACLAY, JEREMY TARDY AND JEFF FRANK

Written by John Maclay

Directed by Jeremy Tardy

Visual Effects by Jeremy Tardy

Director of Photography – Ryan Bingham

Gaffer/Grip/Assistant Director of Photography – Pierce Ellner

Production Assistant – Natalie Mayo

Streaming September 20 – November 1, 2020

Tune in to the world premiere of this seven-episode web series, streaming exclusively for First Stage audiences. Directed by First Stage alum and Hollywood actor **Jeremy Tardy** (*68 Whiskey, Dear White People, Ballers*) and written by First Stage Resident Playwright **John Maclay** (*GOOSEBUMPS THE MUSICAL: PHANTOM OF THE AUDITORIUM, NANCY DREW AND HER BIGGEST CASE EVER, ROBIN HOOD*), **THE QUEST FOR SOLOMON’S TREASURE** follows six Milwaukee young people as they work together to solve clues in the ultimate treasure hunt to save the day. With new clues revealed each week in these 15 to 20-minute episodes, audiences are invited to help us solve this mystery . . . and maybe even win fabulous prizes! It’s a little bit *Goonies*, a little bit *National Treasure* and one hundred percent Milwaukee. Suggested for families with young people ages 8+.

“I’ve always been a huge fan of *National Treasure*, *Goonies* – and the energy of a long quest filled with challenges and riddles and cliffhangers,” said Jeff Frank. “I also fondly remember gathering with my family every Sunday night for *The Wonderful World of Disney*. It was appointment TV – and family together time. For years, I’ve wondered if we could capture some of that magic in a story set here in Milwaukee. After conversing with First Stage Playwright in Residence John Maclay and Actor/Director Jeremy Tardy – the answer was a resounding yes!”

“With the help of a group of amazing young people, we crafted a series of seven 12 to 15-minute episodes which take them to Milwaukee neighborhoods and through moments in our history. The

audience is invited to join in trying to solve these locally inspired clues; to come together as a family and celebrate this uniquely Milwaukee adventure,” continued Frank.

THE QUEST FOR SOLOMON’S TREASURE features First Stage Young Performers **Charles Elliot** (Milwaukee) as Grayson, **Milo Elliot** (Milwaukee) as Kendall, **Terynn Erby-Walker** (Milwaukee) as Olivia, **Alice Rivera** (Milwaukee) as Selma, **Lucia Santana** (Milwaukee) as Alina, **Lina Singh** (Milwaukee) as Frannie, and **Collin Woldt** (Muskego) as Jordan.

THE GIRL WHO SWALLOWED A CACTUS (IN YOUR HOME)

By Eric Coble

Directed by Jeff Frank

Featuring Milwaukee actress and First Stage alumna Karen Estrada

Streaming November 2 – 22, 2020

School is out. Which is great except . . .there’s nothing to do. Sound familiar? And like you, Sheila and her friends are searching for something interesting to explore. What happens next? A walking, talking, and surprisingly well-dressed coyote shows up and the kids find themselves on the adventure of a lifetime! It’s exciting! It’s funny! It’s magical! Families will love this innovative, streamable production – made just for you! Suggested for families with young people ages 7 – 15+.

“With theaters and other live entertainment venues across the country remaining closed, we saw a delightful opportunity to pilot this one-person, online-only play, made available to us by popular playwright Eric Coble,” said Jeff Frank. He also added, “It has been a blast working with Karen. She is always so inventive and engaging. I couldn’t have asked for a better actor to work with on this new adventure of rehearsing and ultimately recording virtually. We hope this play will provide a fun, engaging and unique experience for families from the comfort of their homes – and look for a guest appearance from Karen’s cat!”

SHE KILLS MONSTERS: VIRTUAL REALMS

By Qui Ngyuen

Presented by First Stage Theater Academy’s Advanced Acting students

Directed by Coltyn Giltner

Streaming November 13 – 22, 2020

Sponsored by **The Molitor Foundation**

A comedic romp into the world of fantasy role-playing games, SHE KILLS MONSTERS is a high-octane dramatic comedy laden with homicidal fairies, nasty ogres and ‘90s pop culture – a heart pounding homage to the geek and warrior in us all. Please note: this production contains some mature language and mild adult themes. Suggested for families with young people ages 14 – 18+.

“This remarkable production has struck a resonant chord with the young people of America, and we are thankful that the playwright has created this new version especially for digital rehearsal and delivery. It is packed with magic, wonder and power,” explains Frank.

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Marcella Kearns

Presented by First Stage Young Company
Streaming December 4 – 13, 2020

Betrayal. Love. Disguise. Join our award-winning Young Company as they present one of Shakespeare's earliest and least performed plays. Suggested for families with young people ages 13+.

"THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA is a comedy about young people making mistakes as they venture into the world on their own for the first time, making it incredibly relatable for our high schoolers who are about to embark on college adventures," said **Matt Daniels**, director of First Stage's Young Company, the advanced actor training program for high school students. "As one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, the language is immediate and accessible, and the play's heroine, Julia, is the prototype for some of Shakespeare's greatest leading ladies, including Viola in TWELFTH NIGHT and Rosalind in AS YOU LIKE IT. Plus, there are hijinks with a dog named Crab!" Daniels continued.

ESCAPE FROM PELIGRO ISLAND – A CREATE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE PLAY

By Finegan Kruckemeyer

Stream it live January 29 at 7 pm, January 30 at 1 & 3:30 pm, February 5 at 7 pm, and February 6 at 1 & 3:30 pm.

Recorded episodes available through February 14, 2021

Callaway Brown – an unlikely young hero – has been stranded on a desert island, and it's up to YOU to decide what happens next! In this interactive production, audience members vote on Callaway's actions in an energetic romp through time and space. Will Callaway time travel to the Wild West and meet a talking horse? Develop superpowers and fight crime in the future? Or have a crush on a vampire? The choice is yours! This is create-your-own-adventure theatre, through your computer or your phone – you'll be voting on the path for our hero. But think carefully before you make your choice. Callaway's fate is in your hands! Suggested for families with young people ages 6+.

Playwright Finegan Kruckemeyer (First Stage's THE SNOW, 2015; ANTARCTICA, WI, 2018) brings this unique, engaging set of livestream performances. At each performance, the audience will be voting at critical times as to the choices protagonist Callaway Brown should make – and the actors will need to respond in the moment and plunge forward. No two performances will be the same. "A part of the magic of live theater is the danger of it all. What happens if something goes wrong? In the digital realm, it may feel that some of that magic and danger is gone. Well – that is definitely not the case with ESCAPE FROM PELIGRO ISLAND the actors will need to be on their toes at all times!" explained Jeff Frank. "This is a show you'll be able to come back and watch repeatedly if you hope to see just some of the adventures of the hero. Truly inventive, consistently engaging and always funny," he continued.

Foundry Readings and Signature Theater Events

Continuing First Stage's commitment to new play development and forging the future of theater through emerging plays, artists and engaging experiences beyond the stage, First Stage offers these Foundry Readings and Signature Theater Events to stream for free, with additional educational programming and behind-the-scenes opportunities. These events will be included with Family All-Access Pass memberships.

FIRST STAGE YOUNG PERFORMER VIRTUAL SHOWCASE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MILWAUKEE BLACK THEATERFESTIVAL

Directed by N'Jameh Camara and Ann Joseph Douglas

Streaming September 6 – 13, 2020

In celebration of the Milwaukee Black Theater Festival – Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Bronzeville Arts Ensemble, Lights! Camera! Soul! and artists Sheri Williams Pannell, DiMonte Henning and Malkia Stampley – First Stage proudly offers the stage to our BIPOC Young Company and Theater Academy's Advanced Acting students to share their voices through monologues, songs and poetry in a virtual showcase. In addition, the showcase will feature a virtual production of Idris Goodwin's short play ACT FREE, presented through *Free Play: Open Source Scripts Toward an Antiracist Tomorrow* – a collaboration between Idris Goodwin and TYA/USA. Join us as our young people speak from their hearts through their art.

Artistic Director Jeff Frank remarks, "First Stage is proud to have been asked to contribute to the first Milwaukee Black Theater Festival and thankful for the opportunity to amplify the voices of some of our young people. The young people are fortunate to have the guidance of directors N'Jameh Camara and Ann Joseph Douglas on this journey during this critical moment in time."

APOLLO AND THE TRIALS OF HERCULES

A world premiere play by Joe Foust and John Maclay

Directed by First Stage alumni Elyse Edelman and Hal Sansone

Streaming September 11 – 13, 2020, featuring live online discussion with playwrights and directors on September 13 at 7 pm

Apollo's father has gone missing and the 14-year-old is trying to find answers – to who they are, who they will become, but mostly what happened to their Mythology professor father? Suddenly Apollo is swept away on the adventure of a lifetime where all things become clear. OK – to be honest, things get really confusing for a while. There's the Underworld, different gods appearing, a cyclops, but ultimately Apollo finds the path forward. From the writing team that brought you the rollicking adventure ROBIN HOOD comes another instant classic filled with mischief, mayhem, fighting, fury and just pure fun. We urge you to watch the capture of this live reading and then tune in, listen to the creative team and share your thoughts. Help us craft the next great First Stage world premiere. For families with young people ages 9 – 18+.

YOUNG COMPANY PRESENTS SCENES AND MONOLOGUES FROM UTAH SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL'S HIGH SCHOOL COMPETITION

Streaming October 10 – 24, 2020

The award-winning Young Company – First Stage's advanced actor training program for high school students – traditionally travels west to perfect their craft and perform the words of the Bard for many of their peers and adjudicators from around the country. This year, the competition is going virtual! Tune in for a showcase of scenes and monologues from Shakespeare's repertoire, performed by the most accomplished high school actors in our region.

First Stage will continue to seek out additional interactive and engaging virtual productions and programs, with additional performances to announce over the next several months.

For more information about any of the offerings for First Stage's Through Our Lens – A New Virtual Performance Series or about buying a Family All-Access Pass, please visit www.firststage.org or 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