

# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT 2021-2022

First Stage's 35<sup>th</sup> season was marked by incredible joy as the lights came back up on our Theater Productions, as attendance increased in our Theater Academy Classes, and as our teaching artists returned to local classrooms to facilitate our Theater in Education Programs.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

*THE AMAZING  
LEMONADE GIRL  
INSPIRES MANY.*

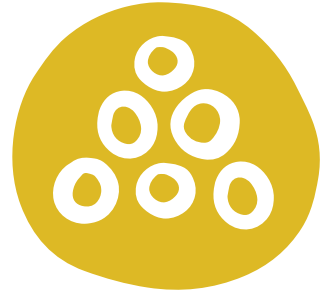
**NEXT STEPS  
STUDENTS FLOURISH  
WITH THE RETURN TO  
IN-PERSON CLASSES.**

**YOUNG STUDENTS  
FULLY ENGAGE  
WITH FIRST STAGE'S  
TOURING SHOW.**



THE AMAZING  
LEMONADE  
GIRL, 2022  
PHOTO BY  
PAUL RUFFOLO

First Stage touches hearts, engages minds, and transforms lives by creating extraordinary theater experiences for young people and families through Professional Theater Productions, Theater Academy Training and Theater in Education programming.



**33,073**

total audience members



**266**

total performances



**37**

adult actors



**89**

young performers



THE DANCING GRANNY, 2022  
PHOTO BY PAUL RUFFOLO

## 2021-2022 PRODUCTIONS

As a national leader in the Theatre for Young Audiences field, First Stage is committed to presenting professional theater productions that inspire and educate young people and families. This season, First Stage was thrilled to welcome our audiences back into our theaters.

# 2021-2022 SEASON OF PLAYS

## SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCES **10 YEARS**

The 2021-2022 season marked the tenth anniversary of First Stage's **Sensory Friendly Performances**. Thanks to the generosity of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF), specifically through Kasey's Fund, First Stage was able to increase the number of Sensory Friendly Performances we were able to present this season—one for each of our mainstage and First Steps productions.

At these select performances, children on the autism spectrum and their families were able to enjoy live theater in a welcoming environment featuring reduced seating capacity, lower sound, lights up, and quiet areas staffed by experienced educators. First Stage served 219 people with our Sensory Friendly Performances this season.

First Stage's Sensory Friendly Performances are a part of our **Next Steps Program**. Next Steps expands First Stage's Theater Academy Classes and Theater Productions by tailoring the curriculum and content specifically to the needs of young people on the autism spectrum and with developmental disabilities.

LAST STOP ON MARKET STREET, 2022  
PHOTO BY PAUL RUFFOLO



# 219

people served with  
Sensory Friendly  
Performances



THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS, 2022  
PHOTO BY PAUL RUFFOLO

## AMPLIFY SERIES

This season kicked-off with the second installment of AMPLIFY, First Stage's BIPOC Short Play Series that lifts the voices of playwrights and creativity of stage directors who identify as Black, Indigenous and People of Color. Deepening our commitment to new play development and our mission to ensure that the stories we tell and the tellers of those tales reflect our community, First Stage expanded this series to three new productions this season.

Many of the artists First Stage contracted for AMPLIFY were new to our organization, and we are honored that several have returned to work with us again. This season's production of THE LAST STOP ON MARKET STREET welcomed the return of two new AMPLIFY Series artists. Johamy Morales returned to direct and Postell Pringle returned to arrange the music for the production. Ty Defoe, the playwright of our inaugural AMPLIFY Series production, is also being commissioned to write a full-length piece for our 2023-2024 season.

AMPLIFY was generously sponsored by **Children's Wisconsin** and supported in part by a grant from the Milwaukee Arts Board and the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin.



STEP KIDS, 2021

## HOW TO ACTUALLY GRADUATE IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

By Nikkole Salter  
Directed by Samantha D. Montgomery

**AUGUST 18, 2021**  
and streamed through December 5, 2021

When Milwaukee High announced that graduation would 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—audiences learned how the pandemic affected them all. Is an achievement an achievement if it goes unacknowledged?

## STEP KIDS

By Tyrone L. Robinson and Postell Pringle  
Directed by Christopher Gilbert

**OCTOBER 2 - 3, 2021**  
and streamed through December 5, 2021

A group of seemingly unconnected high school students found common ground in the most unlikely of places—the audition for their school's competitive step dance team. As the students became unified through the power of rhythm and dance, they experienced the joy of finding their crew in this energetic performance.

## THE TALE OF LA LLORONA AS TOLD BY CONSUELO CHAVEZ

By José Casas  
Directed by David Flores

**OCTOBER 23 - 24, 2021**  
and streamed through 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 Hallows' Eve. To pass the time, they share some of their favorite ghost stories... but are they just stories?

“  
I think people should  
know how special  
First Stage is. It is a  
place where you can  
unapologetically express  
yourself through songs,  
activities and more

TATEIONA, YOUNG PERFORMER

# 2021-2022 SEASON OF PLAYS



I hope that our young audiences are able to see how this real life event affected each one of the characters and relate to their experience, because there are historical events taking place today. This play is an imitation of life. It gives a good example of family and how to love one another through these real life events—whether they be bad, great or whatever they are. These events have to be processed.

BRANDITE REED, CO-DIRECTOR  
OF THE WATSONS GO TO  
BIRMINGHAM - 1963

## 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

NOVEMBER 20 - DECEMBER 26, 2021

Audiences came home for the holidays with First Stage and this treasured holiday classic. Everyone was giddy with Christmas cheer, but Charlie Brown had the Yuletide blues. Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and the rest of the Peanuts gang learn the true meaning of Christmas.

Sponsored by AssociatedBank Reinhart  
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

## THE WATSONS GO TO BIRMINGHAM - 1963

Based on the book "The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963"  
by Christopher Paul Curtis  
Adapted by Cheryl L. West  
Original Music by Paris Ray Dozier  
Directed by Brandite Reed and Jeff Frank

JANUARY 21 - FEBRUARY 13, 2022

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, Mama and Daddy decide the family needs to pay a visit to Grandma Sands in Alabama to set him straight. Mama, Daddy, Kenny, Byron, and their younger sister, Joetta, head south on a cross-country journey and toward a moment in American history where the world seemed to changed before their eyes.

Sponsored by NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT for the ARTS  
arts.gov

## 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

MARCH 5 - APRIL 3, 2022

These three fierce warriors returned 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!

Sponsored by Molitor  
FOUNDATION





## THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL

Based on the true story of Alexandra Flynn Scott  
By James DeVita  
Directed by Molly Rhode

APRIL 22 - MAY 15, 2022

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 reminded audiences that a single person can change the world—one act, or even one cup, at a time.

Sponsored by 

## INSPIRATION AND IMPACT OF THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL

This spring marked the long-awaited world premiere of **THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL**, commissioned by Northwestern Mutual, written by James DeVita and based on the true story of **Alexandra "Alex" Scott** – about her life and her legacy, her humor and her heart.

Shortly before her first birthday, Alex was diagnosed with a type of childhood cancer called neuroblastoma. When she was just four-years old, she started a simple lemonade stand to raise money for cancer research. From there, Alex's lemonade stand snowballed. Her efforts turned into an annual event that garnered country-wide financial and media support. Before she passed away at the tender age of eight, Alex met her goal of raising \$1 million to support cancer research. Her legacy lives on in the **Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation** – which is one of today's leading funders of pediatric cancer research in the U.S. and Canada raising more than \$200 million so far, funding more than 1,000 research projects and providing programs to families affected by childhood cancer.

It was clear that Alex's story needed to be told on stage to inspire and remind young audiences that a single person can change the world.

THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL's development began back in 2016. After years of writing, revising and gathering feedback from public readings of the play as well as from Alex's parents, Liz and Jay Scott, the play was set to open on April 24, 2020 but was postponed by the pandemic. As the playwright wisely shared in 2020, **“Alex's story will be told at a time when perhaps we will need it even more than we do now. When we all get on the other side of this, there will be much want in the world, much hurt and loss, and we will need Alex's example more than ever.”**

He was right. Alex's legacy was shared at a time when audiences needed her example of kindness, determination, and empathy even more.

Young audience members (4th grade students from St. Anthony School) shared the following feedback after attending THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL:

**“The lesson was that even if you are struggling in life, there is always a way to help others and yourself. Alex taught me to never give up on anything.”**

**“What I learned was to never be jealous and just remember how much your parents love you. Be grateful for what you have. Alex was brave, strong, and thoughtful. She thought about others before herself. She even raised a lot of money for other kids who were**

**sick and for kids who had other sicknesses or cancer just like her. It is always better to have a friend to keep you company because it can give you and the other person lots of joy when you are going through a lot. They can cheer you up and make you feel better.”**

**“The lesson of this story is to never give up on your dreams.”**

**“It taught me to always be brave and nice to other people in your life.”**

**“Alex showed me that when something goes bad, you can make it good and you can do what you set your mind to.”**

**“I learned about helpfulness and determination in the play.”**

**When the quality of the message and the acting invokes kindness, compassion and such positive actions, I think you should be made aware. Thanks so very much for the quality of performance that First Stage has become known for. We are yearly ticket holders and will continue to enjoy future performances with our ten grandchildren.**

PAM KANIA

THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL also inspired several children to start their own lemonade stand to raise funds for Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation. First Stage heard from a grandparent who brought her family to see THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL. Her two granddaughters and their friend were so inspired by the story that they had set up their own lemonade stand to benefit Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation. They produced their own posters, speeches, painted rocks, had Alex's book on display, and set up their stand with three huge canisters of lemonade. Their efforts raised more than \$600 for the foundation.

## 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

**FEBRUARY 12 - MARCH 6, 2022**

Kids and adults danced in their seats as Ananse, the clever spider of African folklore, tried to trick Granny into dancing away from her garden so he could take her vegetables. But his plan backfired when he was drawn into the dance himself.

Sponsored by  PNC

## LAST STOP ON MARKET STREET

By Matt de la Peña, Illustrations by Christian Robinson

Adapted by Gloria Bond Clunie

Directed by Johamy Morales

**MAY 7 - JUNE 12, 2022**

One Sunday morning, CJ and his Nana set out in the rain on their weekly bus ride across town. Along the way, CJ wondered why they didn't own a car, or headphones, or an iPad like his friends. Most of all, he wished they didn't have to journey to the scary last stop on Market Street. Their trip through the bustling city becomes an exciting magical adventure that helps CJ solve a mysterious riddle and make unexpected special friends as he discovers a wonderful new way to see the world!

Sponsored by  PNC



**This collaboration has been a great opportunity to showcase both organizations and the storytelling in a very human way. It's cool to be able to step into this realm with First Stage and to be able to create something that is centered around family and community while highlighting traditions, cultures and art forms that are oftentimes overlooked and underappreciated. I'm really proud to have been able to partner with First Stage on a production specifically like this.**

DEMAR WALKER, KO-THI'S ARTISTIC DIRECTOR,  
AND CHOREOGRAPHER/PERFORMER IN  
THE DANCING GRANNY

DANCING GRANNY, 2022  
PHOTO BY PAUL RUFFOLO



## PAY WHAT YOU CHOOSE

First Stage ensured that young people and families who otherwise would not be able to afford to attend live theater were able to share the experience of live theater. Thanks to "Pay What You Choose" performances, "First Stage for \$5" ticket offers, and a select number of free preview performance tickets to our nonprofit partners and Theater Academy families who receive financial aid, **nearly 2,000 young people and families** experienced our Theater Productions this season.

“ PEARLS is excited about the continued blossoming of an official partnership with First Stage. During the 2021-22 season, we had the opportunity to expose our girls & families to the world of theater. A vital part of our work at PEARLS is to create opportunities for girls to immerse into different career fields and even just seeing a theatrical production, representing such diversity, has opened their minds to the possibilities of what their own success can look like. There's been great feedback from girls interested in learning about what goes into a production, and we look forward to deepening that education with formalized workshops this fall! ”

— MALAYIA ROPER, PEARLS FOR TEEN GIRLS, INC.,  
PARTNERSHIP MANAGER

# 2021-2022 THEATER ACADEMY



“ [My children] come to First Stage and are encouraged to discover themselves and to hone their identity. The worldly practice of identifying both one’s strengths and weaknesses is rare, but at First Stage, they do both regularly and, most importantly, without judgment! [First Stage] teaches the skill of self-critique without self-criticism

STACY MADSON, 2021 FAMILY OF THE YEAR AWARD RECIPIENT

One of the nation’s largest high-impact theater training programs for youth, the Theater Academy teaches life skills through stage skills to young people ages 3-18—offering a challenging curriculum taught by professional teaching artists.

Thanks to First Stage and Milwaukee Youth Arts Center safety regulations, First Stage was able to return to in-person Theater Academy Classes starting during summer 2021 with very few classes needing to be switched to virtual.

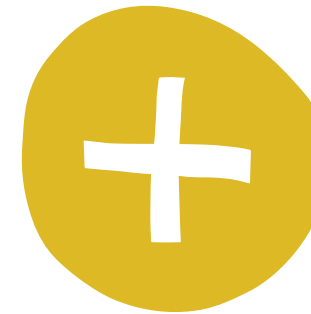
Some of our most popular classes this season were the following:

## HIP HOP DANCE FOR MUSICAL THEATER & DIVING INTO DIALECTS

These two electives allowed students to focus on a specific area of their craft.

## ADVANCED MUSICAL THEATER

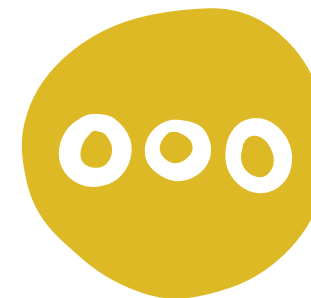
This class allowed students to hone their singing, dancing, and acting skills, as well as learn more about the audition process, audition materials, reading music, and understanding the business of being a musical theater performer.



**1,455**  
total enrollments



**971**  
unique students



**157**  
unique classes

“ Thank you for showing such dedication and love for the students and the arts. It has been a very difficult 18 months for our young people, and students who love theater lost so much during the pandemic. Thank you for helping to put some of the pieces back together again! ”

“ Our child feels empowered and has an outlet for his story-telling and imagination, and he meets other kids who feel the same way. Thanks for all you do! ”

“ The Academy pushed my daughter to step out of her comfort zone, while building her confidence. From our perspective, it seemed like the class seemed to be a supportive, creative space where students could learn, laugh, be themselves, take a few risks, and voice their ideas. We believe our daughter felt challenged, valued, proud of her classmates, proud of herself, and happy. That’s a whole lot of good in four short weeks. Super impressed all around. Thank you. ”

“ My daughter absolutely loved her first Performance Experience Academy class. She had a lot of fun and gained confidence. She was excited to go every morning and happy when she got home. Her group’s performance was very well done, particularly considering the amount of time they had to prepare. I couldn’t have asked for a better experience for her. Thank you! ”

“ My children feel very confident after Academy classes and enjoy the opportunity to act and explore. We also appreciate the focus on self-esteem and caring for others. ”

“ I was thoroughly impressed with how the classes were run and what my daughter was able to accomplish in such a short time. She’s already asked me if she can sign up for more. ”



I CAN'T IS NOT IN MY VOCABULARY!

I TAKE RISKS!  
I CONQUER MY FEARS!

I AM NOT AFRAID TO LEAD!

Program evaluation demonstrated the following skill development in our Theater Academy students this season:

**95%**

of Academy students experienced growth in teamwork

**93%**

of Academy students were more open to trying new things

**72%**

of Academy students experienced improved self-confidence



## YOUNG COMPANY

Young Company is First Stage's award-winning and nationally recognized training program for advanced high school actors. This season, Young Company members completed up to 300 hours of college-level instruction in Voice, Movement, and Shakespeare as well as electives ranging from Auditioning to Stage Combat to Dialects.

This season Young Company made the voyage out west once again to perfect their craft and perform the words of the Bard for many of their peers and adjudicators from around the country at the Utah Shakespeare Festival High School Competition. They returned home with five trophies and three scholarship awards – including the 1<sup>st</sup> Place Sweepstakes Trophy for the overall winner.

“ Beyond all of this though, my greatest pride comes from watching these young people comport themselves as pillars of grace and goodwill as we traveled across the country to share our work and take in the work of others. They were constantly complimented, not only for their skill and talents, but for their sense of ensemble, their obvious care for one another, and their behavior in the hotel, on the shuttle and airplane, and in the theater. It is clear that First Stage has been true to its motto. These students are living embodiments of life skills through stage skills, and the fact that their stage skills were so well regarded means that their life skills are sure to take them far. ”

– MATT DANIELS, DIRECTOR OF YOUNG COMPANY



52 Young Company members

2 Performance Projects



Young Company Members shared about their experience in Young Company:



First Stage truly feels like a second home to me. The people and teachers here are so welcoming to every person who walks through the doors of First Stage. It's really amazing to be able to work with a theater company that is teaching young performers the proper tools they need to go into the performing arts industry. In Young Company, we get to dive into the deeper meanings of Shakespeare's texts. There's a lot of really beautiful, hilarious, and frightening things in Shakespeare's plays and I love all of it.

LUCY

“ I would not be the person I am today without First Stage. First Stage has not only taught me how to grow as an artist, but it has taught me how to grow as a person. It has really been a transformative experience for me. ” – MAX

“ ...Young Company has taught me that it is never just about the finish, it is always about the journey, and in the good times and difficult times of the last four years, that lesson has always carried me through. We owe so much to the efforts of First Stage and our Young Company teachers. ” – LIAM

“ Because of Young Company, I have not only worked on acting skills but I also now have more confidence. Young Company has given us a safe place for expressing ourselves without fear or judgment—and that's a rare thing. It is a brilliant program and I'm so grateful to be a part of it. ” – ROSE

## THE LARAMIE PROJECT

By Moisés Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project  
Directed by Elyse Edelman

DECEMBER 3 - 12, 2021

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.

“ Characters come out crisp and distinct in a flurry of monologues that etch their way around a large, expansive narrative exploring the lives of Shepard, his murder and the people of the town where it happened. The Laramie Project is a dense and massive drama of tremendous emotional weight that can feel stagnant at times. Edelman has set a talented cast pacing and tangling and tumbling through the deep end of human love, beauty and brutality in a way that deftly holds the attention from beginning to end. ”

– RUSS BICKERSTAFF, SHEPHERD EXPRESS

## MACBETH

By William Shakespeare  
Directed by Marcella Kearns

MARCH 25 - APRIL 3, 2022

Tempted by an evil prophecy from a trio of witches, and encouraged by his Lady ever deeper into his own dark ambition, Macbeth raged 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.



## BARD-O-THON

Forty-nine young company members performed a record-setting total of 641 monologues on Saturday, April 23, 2022. The fundraising efforts of these talented young people raised more than \$16,000 to support Shakespeare programming at First Stage. In addition to performing as many monologues as humanly possible, Young Company members also participated in a masterclass facilitated by Actor James Ridge – a favorite of [American Players Theatre](#).

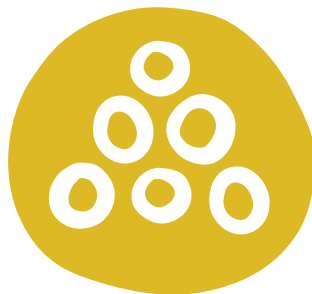


## NEXT STEPS



16

unique students  
(21 enrollments)



219

people attended  
Sensory Friendly  
Performances

Next Steps expands First Stage's Theater Academy Classes to young people with developmental disabilities – both verbal and non-verbal students, students with classic autism, PDD-NOS, other sensory processing disorders and Asperger's – allowing each student to take his or her "next step" as an artist and as a person. Students experience the joy of acting and musical theater with a team of professional teaching artists with special education training.

First Stage's Next Steps Program also includes our **Sensory Friendly Performances** that provide accommodations to create a welcoming theater experience for children on the autism spectrum and their families.

“ Next Steps has made me feel a bit more comfortable. ”  
– NEXT STEPS STUDENT

“  
It was nice to have a safe place  
where the teachers and students know  
how to help my son and to be around  
other kids who have the same types of  
goals and mindsets.  
”

NEXT STEPS FAMILY

Feedback from Next Steps families:

“ My child never used to act his emotions out before Next Steps. He would just yell them, but now he will facially show the different emotions he's feeling. ”

“ Next Steps really made an impression on my son. He looks forward to acting and genuinely wants to go to class. ”

“ After participating in Next Steps, my son is more imaginative. He has always been factual, but now he plays pretend with his sister much more. He used to just tell her 'go away' right away. But now after Next Steps, he plays with her for more prolonged amounts of time. ”

“ It's too bad that it takes our family an hour to get to First Stage's Next Steps classes, but our daughter loves them so much that it's worth it. This is the one thing she is most excited about. ”

“ My daughter is not shy anymore. She seems to be getting a lot more out of the whole Next Steps experience now. ”



## FAMILY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Thanks to our community's support, First Stage has never turned a student away due to their family's inability to pay for classes by providing financial aid awards and other logistical support, as needed. Financial aid is based on each student's family and financial situation, Federal Adjusted Income, and past Academy experiences. Prior to COVID-19, First Stage provided an average of more than \$100,000 in financial aid to nearly 400 students (more than 600 enrollments) per year.



61

students  
received

147

scholarships

\$27,700

total scholarships  
awarded

# 2021-2022 THEATER IN EDUCATION



86

schools and organizations



44%

City of Milwaukee Schools

First Stage serves as Wisconsin's leader in arts-in-education programming. By cleverly blending the arts with standard curriculum, First Stage Theater in Education Programs provide the opportunity for students to learn traditional academic subjects through creativity and self-expression. All of First Stage's programs are directly linked to the Common Core State Standards, Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards, 21st Century Learning Skills, and ReadyGen Standards.

The pandemic has proven to be incredibly challenging for the education sector. The flip-flopping between in-person and virtual, cancellations, staffing shortages and loss of connection have been difficult for educators and students alike. Given so much uncertainty during this time, First Stage has remained committed to being a certainty for those we serve through our Theater in Education Programs.

This season, First Stage provided the following programs and more:

## GOLD FIELD TRIP PACKAGE

This literacy-based residency included a field trip to the theater and four weekly workshops leading up to the performance to ignite students' love of reading by connecting our professional theater productions with the English Language Arts curriculum, while simultaneously developing students' social and emotional skills. During the workshops, students actively explored books and stories that were thematically related to the theater production they attended. They acted out stories from different characters' perspectives, adapted and performed books as plays, and participated in improvisational scenes based on literary themes. Following program participation, First Stage expected that 50-60% of students would demonstrate growth in language comprehension as measured by an Observer's Guide for younger students and a post-program writing reflection for older students.

## YOUNG LEADERS RESIDENCY

Through drama activities, books, and creative writing activities, students explored the true stories of six young leaders and their contributions to society (Louis Braille, Ruby Bridges, Greta Thunburg, Jahkil Naeem Jackson, Malala Yousafzai, and Amanda Gorman). Lessons were designed to enhance literacy, creative and critical thinking skills as well as one's own change-making ability.

## TOURING SHOW

This 35-minute performance was a fun and interactive take on well-known stories such as *The Three Little Pigs*. Students were invited to step into the story through storytelling, song, dance and tactile experiences. As evidenced from a comprehensive post-program survey, First Stage expects that 50% of classroom teachers would report observing their students utilizing English Language Arts skills while participating in the First Stage Touring Show.

“  
It's more crucial than ever to be able to come alongside schools and work with their young people through an art form that encourages collaboration, ensemble, and finding joy again.  
”  
FIRST STAGE TEACHING ARTIST



TOURING SHOW, ADVENTURES WITH THE THREE LITTLE PIGS

First Stage evaluated the Gold Field Trip Package and the Touring Show this season, and results demonstrated the following:

### GOLD FIELD TRIP PACKAGE

84% of students demonstrated growth in language comprehension skills following participation.

Students also shared the following about their experience with the Gold Field Trip Package:

- “ I learned about how to unlock my imagination and use communication skills. ”
- “ I learned how to imagine things in my mind better and if something does not work, that is ok. ”
- “ I learned how to be creative, act and share more about myself. ”
- “ I learned cooperation and togetherness – how to work together as a team and find solutions. ”
- “ I'm more confident now. ”
- “ My favorite part was that we got to do fun activities like drawing, acting, playing and more. It was very fun! I like First Stage. ”
- “ My favorite part was when we went in a circle and created a story. ”
- “ My favorite part was pretending to be the characters and acting them out. ”
- “ My favorite part was going on the field trip to watch the play. ”



967

workshops



9,631

students

## TOURING SHOW

60% of classroom teachers observed their students utilizing problem solving and critical thinking skills while participating in the First Stage Touring Show.

54% of classroom teachers observed their students utilizing English Language Arts skills while participating in the First Stage Touring Show – 45% of whom reported their students utilized these skills at the highest level. 60% of teachers also reported that their students learned new vocabulary from the Touring Show.

55% of classroom teachers reported that the First Stage Touring Show directly connected to their curriculum and/or social themes.

Classroom teachers shared the following about their experience with the Touring Show:

“ I love the interaction between the performers and the students. It was appropriate for first grade and they were engaged the entire time. ”

“ We thoroughly enjoyed the performance. My students felt connected to the performers and the interaction level made for a pleasurable experience for all. My class was fully engaged the whole time. Thank you! ”

# SPECIAL EVENTS



It is with great optimism, coupled with prudent safety measures, that we now move forward in creating incredible in-person theater experiences for our community once again – as only First Stage can do.

JEFF FRANK,  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

## IMPACT EVENT



35 PARTICIPANTS

The ghost light was officially moved aside on September 30, 2022 as First Stage welcomed 35 friends back into the newly renovated Milwaukee Youth Arts Center for our 9th annual ImpACT Event. This event cultivated old and new friends all while raising \$1,500 in critical funds to support First Stage’s mission of *transforming lives through theater*. Attendees heard updates from First Stage’s leadership and program staff, and enjoyed an inspiring keynote address from **Christopher Gilbert**, and a performance by our young performers. Artistic Director, Jeff Frank shared a recap of First Stage’s unique 2020-2021 season and brought the lights up on the incredible work that continues at First Stage – revealing the 2021-2022 season of plays as well as shared more about First Stage’s Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice (EDIJ) journey.



If you were unable to attend, please enjoy our [ImpACT Event Highlight Video](#).

## WINE TASTING & DINNER



112 GUESTS



\$90,235 RAISED



On Saturday, November 6, 2021, guests spent “An Evening in the City of Lights” with First Stage at the University Club of Milwaukee - Country Club for our 12<sup>th</sup> annual Wine Tasting & Dinner Event. Along with the five-course Parisian-inspired dinner imagined by Chef David Magnasco of **The Chef’s Table**, guests also enjoyed world-class wines – during the pre-dinner tasting and course pairings.

The traditional fun and games also returned as attendees tried out their aim with an Eiffel Tower Ring Toss and hoped for a winning combination for the Wine Suitcase Raffle. Of course, the highlight of the evening was the performance by First Stage Young Performers, Bryn Dresselhuys and Michael Loomans. Bryn and Michael sang “Light” from the musical **NEXT TO NORMAL**, and shared the impact of their First Stage experience.

“I wouldn’t be the same person without First Stage. First Stage has given me more than just a stage to perform on, it has helped me discover a whole new me. Being a kid is hard, and trying to find where you fit in and what your drive and purpose is, is even harder. I was really a shell of myself when I was away from theater, but coming back to First Stage and performing, renewed my happiness and built up my confidence. First Stage is a safe place, where we can be who we want, and feel completely free of judgment. It really is the best place to be.” – BRYN

“Because of First Stage, I am able to walk confidently in a room and not be shy to make friends, speak up, and not be afraid to make mistakes. It may sound cliché or boring, but it is so true. First Stage truly can change your life. I have made so many cool connections and found some of my closest friends doing theater. It has opened so many doors for me. There’s no better place to be than First Stage.” – MICHAEL



## MAKE BELIEVE BALL

In 2020, Make Believe Ball guests “rocked out” with the theme of **THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS**, the new musical that premiered at First Stage. On Saturday, March 5, 2022, Make Believe Ball guests gathered once again at the Hilton City Center to “let the good times roll” as we celebrated the return of this totally rad musical that closed much too soon due to the pandemic.

Guests dusted off their tracksuits, sequins, leg-warmers and shoulder pads and enjoyed dinner, dancing, kids’ activities, and special performances by First Stage young performers and **Roll Train** – all while raising more than \$160,000 to support First Stage’s mission of transforming lives through theater.

“My family loved the theme this year! It was an incredible venue, dinner and entertainment! We absolutely loved the Roll Train performance and that they taught the kids a dance. We also, of course, loved the First Stage performance! It was fantastic!”

– MAKE BELIEVE BALL GUEST



260  
guests



\$160,375  
raised



WINE TASTING & DINNER, 2021

# EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND JUSTICE

First Stage understands that the best theater productions and programs help foster change and advance the conversations that our community must have at any given time. A well-done piece of theater can provoke discussion, foster understanding, and inspire change. When we come together to experience our common humanity through theater, we walk away with deeper insight – and ultimately, with our thinking transformed.

In addition to expanding the **AMPLIFY Series** this season, First Stage also created the new full-time position – the Director of Artistic Inclusion and Community Engagement – to connect First Stage’s artistic projects to the needs of Milwaukee’s racial and ethnic minorities. Samantha Montgomery was promoted to this position at the beginning of our 2021-2022 season. In her tenure at First Stage, she has worked as a resident teaching artist, director and actor and has also led our cross-departmental Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice (EDIJ) committee for more than a year. In her new role, Montgomery continues to lead our EDIJ committee while serving as a resource, guide and strategic planner. She plays a key role in First Stage’s ability to better serve Milwaukee as we broaden our reach and deepen our impact through long-term, sustainable partnerships. Through her work, she is helping First Stage to become a fully inclusive, equitable and just community – one that values a diversity of perspectives, traditions, ideas and contributions.

Over the past two years, First Stage’s EDIJ Committee has been meeting weekly to create our Anti-racism, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Justice (EDIJ) Strategic Action Plan. The tactics and objectives contained within this draft have been guiding First Stage’s Artistic and Programmatic choices as First Stage moves forward.

Examples of the Artistic and Programmatic changes that have taken shape during the 2021-2022 season include:

- 1 Ensuring that First Stage’s “Pay What You Choose” performances, at which audience members may attend at any dollar amount, take place during easier times for families to attend (i.e., Fridays instead of weeknights).
- 2 Eliminating our tiered ticket pricing. With general admission, families were able to get the best available seats in a first come, first serve basis.
- 3 Adapting our rehearsal schedule to better serve our actors and young performers. Instead of rehearsing six days a week, we rehearsed five days a week. Instead of running the traditional 10-out-of-12-hour technical rehearsal, we reduced it to an 8-out-of-10-hour tech rehearsal. Overall, our rehearsal process went from four weeks to five weeks – incurring additional cost for our company but better serving our artists and young performers while ensuring our artistic integrity.
- 4 Mandating that representation is in the audition room for all adult and young performer auditions. Likewise, a member of our EDIJ Committee was present for all second interviews for open positions.
- 5 Evaluating our lesson plans not only on an individual scale (ensuring state standard and in-house guideposts are met) but also as one whole collective of work, to assess the diversity of voices, stories, and overall representation. First Stage will continue our work of updating lesson plans to reflect our perpetual growth of social awareness.

First Stage looks forward to continuing to work together with our community in order to build a better future for all of us. [Learn more here.](#)



## COVID RECOVERY

Two years after the start of the pandemic, First Stage is still recovering. As predicted, First Stage’s ability to resume operations to a pre-COVID-19 level is slow moving and largely relies on circumstances out of our control—continued concerns around variants, constituents’ varying comfort levels with in-person gatherings, and the shifting landscape of the education sector. First Stage is taking measured steps as we grapple with continued reduced revenue and increased expenses. Our income (from contributed sources and earned revenue streams of ticket sales, academy tuition, and in-school programs), although growing, is not increasing at the pace that our expenses are climbing. We anticipate that this predicament will persist throughout the 2022-2023 season and likely continue into the following season. First Stage Board and staff leadership are starting to work with a consultant to create a Bridge Plan that will focus on operational decisions that will need to be made over the next two years—including succession planning and focusing on regaining financial stability.

## NEW SPACES

### MILWAUKEE YOUTH ARTS CENTER RENOVATIONS

First Stage continues to call the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center (MYAC) home. MYAC went through renovations this season that increased its space, security and technical features—including a new theater-in-the-round for our First Steps Theater Productions for our youngest audiences and our Young Company Performance Projects for middle school and high school audiences.

### NEW PRODUCTION SHOP

Well before COVID-19 hit, First Stage was preparing for our current scene shop’s lease to end and searching for a new location to call home. In July 2021, we found a new location but it needed a build-out before we moved in. After a long process marked with set-backs of material shortages and increased costs, First Stage is grateful to finally be able to call our new location home for our production shop and staff. This new space elevates our working spaces with cleaner, more adequate storage for our set pieces and props, and has well-defined spaces for our prop shop staff. We are excited for the increased safety and efficiency this new space provides to the craft of creating theater.



**“The process of increasing our Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice competencies at First Stage has been rewarding, complicated, challenging, uncertain, and enlightening. There were moments when we did not know what to say, what action to perform, nor which path would lead to the best outcome. However, we knew that our intention of creating an inclusive and diverse environment where bravery and safety thrive would need to be accompanied by building strong relationships inside and outside of our organization. We understood that our aim was to share diverse stories, use our power for accountability, and encourage our community inside and outside of First Stage. We have learned that during moments of uncertainty, to take a moment to gain clarity, and then proceed with the necessary action. The load is made lighter when we carry it together.**

SAMANTHA D. MONTGOMERY, DIRECTOR OF ARTISTIC INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# DONOR LIST

Thank you to our community of donors for helping First Stage continue transforming lives through theater! Below is the list of donors of \$1,000 or more to First Stage's 2021-2022 Annual Campaign.



THE WATSONS GO TO BIRMINGHAM - 1963, 2022 PHOTO BY PAUL RUFFOLO

A.O. Smith Foundation  
 Albert Young ✂  
 Alicia Pilarski-Haller ✂  
 Amanda and Shantanu Singh ✂  
 Amy and Darren Goldstein ✂  
 Andrea and Jim Emling ✂  
 Anne and Robert Trunzo ✂  
 ANON Charitable Trust ✂  
 Anthony Petullo Foundation ✂  
 Arzbaeher Family Foundation ✂  
 Associated Bank  
 Astor Street Foundation ✂  
 Autism Speaks  
 Bader Philanthropies, Inc.  
 Badger Meter Foundation, Inc.  
 Becky and Dan Kempken ✂  
 Bert L. and Patricia S. Steigleder Charitable Trust  
 Betty Jo and James Nelsen ✂  
 Camille A. Lonstorf Trust  
 Carla and Burt Bartlett ✂  
 Caryn and Jim Esten ✂  
 Children's Wisconsin  
 Christine A. Symchych and James P. McNulty ✂  
 Christine, Todd, Tyson, Leila, Charlotte, and Isabelle Townsend ✂  
 Clare M. Peters Charitable Trust  
 Colleen and Grant Billings ✂  
 Corrie and David Prunuske ✂  
 Dawne and Ray Manista ✂  
 Donna and Donald Baumgartner ✂

Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin  
 Gene and Ruth Posner Foundation, Inc.  
 Generac Power Systems Inc.  
 Giltner and Waddell Families ✂

**“Thank you for supporting our young people and their dreams, aspirations and hard work – especially in a time when it seemed impossible to dream and hope.”**  
 BETSY CORRY,  
 MANAGING DIRECTOR

Greater Milwaukee Association of Realtors Youth Foundation  
 Greater Milwaukee Foundation  
 Bernard J. and Marie E. Weiss Fund  
 Briggs & Stratton Fund  
 James S Berkes and Mary Beth Pieprzyca Berkes Fund ✂  
 Kopmeier Family Fund ✂  
 Marianne and Bruce Miller Fund ✂  
 Nile and Carol Soik Family Fund ✂  
 Richard and Joy Teschner Fund

Green Bay Packers Foundation  
 Greg Miller and Nicki Shay ✂  
 H.H. Camp Foundation ✂  
 Hauske Family Foundation ✂  
 Heidi and Josh Wheeler ✂  
 Heil Family Foundation ✂  
 Herzfeld Foundation  
 Hunzinger Construction Company  
 Hupy and Abraham, S.C.  
 Isabel Bader ✂  
 Jana and Jeff Spence ✂  
 Janet and Gregory Schmeling ✂  
 Janis and William Annesley ✂  
 Jennifer and Tom Florsheim ✂  
 Joe & Palma Troiano ✂  
 Julie and Barry Mainwood ✂  
 Kapco Inc.  
 Karin and Teddy Werner ✂  
 Katherine and Christopher Hermann ✂  
 Kathy and Mark Kindler ✂  
 Katie and Jeff Ruidl ✂  
 Kery and Russell Kafka ✂  
 Kohl's Cares  
 Kris and Mark O'Meara ✂  
 Kristen and Steve Thomas ✂  
 Laura and Al Orr ✂+  
 Laura Reyes and David Elario ✂  
 Lauren Pagenkopf and Michael McCafferty and Family ✂  
 Laurie Baker ✂+  
 Lenore and Bob Swoboda ✂

Les Paul Foundation  
 Linda and Don Burns ✂  
 Maihaugen Foundation ✂  
 Marcy and Ken Stanczyk ✂  
 Margaret Sohm ✂  
 Martha Gienke ✂  
 Mary and Alex Kramer ✂  
 Mary and Rob Goodman ✂  
 Mary and Ted Kellner ✂  
 Mary Jo and Guy McDonald ✂  
 Megan and Timothy Lantz ✂  
 Meier Family Foundation ✂  
 Melissa and Eric Nelsen ✂  
 Melissa and Patrick Horne and Family ✂\*  
 Melitta S. and Joan M. Pick Charitable Trust  
 Michael LaMontagna ✂  
 Milwaukee Arts Board  
 Milwaukee County Arts Fund (CAMPAC)  
 Mindy and Brent Sullivan ✂  
 Moya Mowbray and Roland Schroeder ✂  
 Nancy and Mike Carter ✂

National Endowment for the Arts  
 Nicholas Family Foundation ✂  
 Nicole and Eric Maassen ✂  
 Northwestern Mutual Foundation  
 Peck Foundation Milwaukee, Ltd ✂  
 Physicians Realty Trust  
 Pieper Electric, Inc. / Ideal Mechanical  
 PNC  
 Ralph Evinrude Foundation, Inc.  
 Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren s.c.  
 RitzHolman  
 Sally and David Cartwright ✂  
 Sandy and Jim Metzger ✂  
 Sara and Nathan Manning ✂  
 Sarah J. Hammes ✂\*  
 Sheehan Family Foundation and Beechwood Sales & Service ✂  
 Shyam Singh and Family ✂  
 Stackner Family Foundation  
 Stephens Family Foundation ✂  
 Sue and Curt Culver Family Foundation ✂  
 Susan and Shawn Puechner ✂  
 Suzanne Clausing and Kevin Walsh ✂

The Angresano-Mersky Family ✂  
 The Burke Foundation  
 The Corry Family ✂  
 The Dizard Family ✂  
 The Florsheim/Yeager Family Fund ✂  
 The Frank Family ✂  
 The Franks Family ✂  
 The Gardner Foundation  
 The Gilpin Family ✂  
 The Marschka Family ✂  
 The Mathews Family ✂  
 The Molitor Foundation ✂  
 The Puelicher Foundation  
 The Severson Family ✂  
 The Shubert Foundation, Inc.  
 The Swoboda Family ✂+  
 Tom Connor ✂  
 Vidyasagar Thirumurthy ✂  
 Wauwatosa Savings and Loan Foundation ✂  
 We Energies Foundation  
 Weyco Group  
 William N. and Janice V. Godfrey Family Foundation Trust ✂



\* GEMS (Giving Every Month Society)- Individuals who participate in our recurring giving program via monthly payments



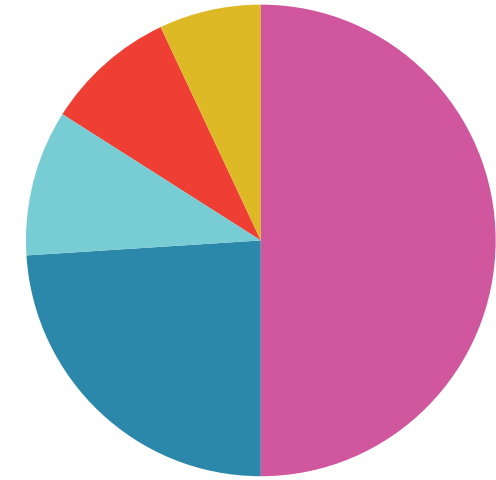
✂ Ovation Society - Individuals who make a total gift of \$1,000 or more to First Stage's Annual Campaign

+ Contributing Members - Individuals who have contributed \$100+ and have Family All-Access Memberships for the 2021-2022 season



## 2021-2022 EXPENSE BREAKOUT

- 50% Production
- 24% Management & General
- 10% Fundraising
- 9% Education
- 7% Academy



## OPERATIONS BUDGET: \$4,265,337

YEARS WITH BALANCED BUDGET: 21

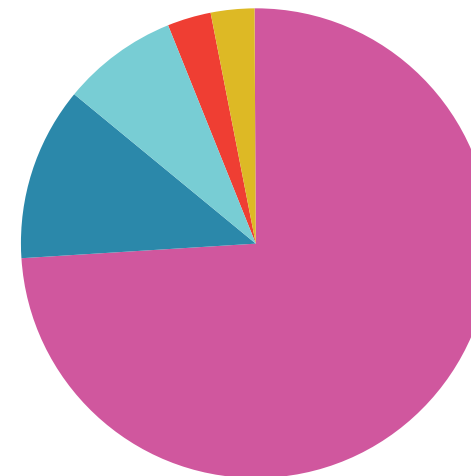
26%  
Earned  
Revenue



74%  
Contributed  
Revenue

## 2021-2022 INCOME BREAKOUT

- 74% Contributed
- 12% Academy
- 8% Tickets
- 3% Education
- 3% Other Earned



\*unaudited numbers



### 2021-2022 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

Caryn Esten, *President* | Senior Vice President and Chief Strategy and Transformation Officer | Froedtert Health  
Chris Marschka, *President Elect* | Senior Vice President | The PNC Financial Services Group  
Darren Goldstein, *Treasurer* | Partner | KPMG LLP  
Tami Martin, *Secretary* | Vice President, Professional Development | TriCity National Bank  
Laura Orr, *Vice President of Governance* | Owner | Forward Governance Consulting, LLC  
Karen Guy, *Vice President at Large* | Community Volunteer  
Alex Kramer, *Vice President at Large* | Managing Director | BMO Private Bank

### 2021-2022 DIRECTORS:

Nicole Angresano | Vice President Community Impact | United Way of Greater Milwaukee  
Sally Cartwright | Vice President of Business Development | Lee Hecht Harrison, LLC  
Suzanne Clausung | Community Volunteer  
Ellen Dizard | Attorney | We Energies  
Bryn Dresselhuys | Student Representative  
Brian Gilpin | Intellectual Property Patent Attorney | Godfrey and Kahn  
Dan Kempken | Senior Vice President | A. O. Smith  
Tim Lantz | President | Caresyntax Corporation  
Eric Maassen | Partner | Foley & Lardner LLP  
Sagar Murthy | CIO | Jason Industries, Inc.  
Melissa Nelsen | Community Volunteer  
Lauren Pagenkopf | Owner and Principal | Laurus Consulting, LLC  
Kathleen Dohearty Penniston | President | Branigan Communications  
Alicia Pilarski, D.O. | Associate Chief Medical Officer & Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine  
Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin  
Corrie Prunuske | Vice President & General Manager/Customer Business Unit CBRE | Johnson Controls  
Shantanu Singh | Assistant General Counsel | Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance  
Jeff Spence | Director | Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District  
Scott Stiverson | Senior Vice President & Director of Portfolio Credit Risk & Marketing Analytics | Associated Bank  
Brent Sullivan | Managing Director Consumer Equity Trading | Baird  
Christine Bestor Townsend | Counsel | Ogletree Deakins  
  
Jeff Frank | Artistic Director  
Betsy Corry | Managing Director  
Rob Goodman | Founder



**FIRSTSTAGE.ORG**

325 W. WALNUT ST. | MILWAUKEE, WI 53212

Photos by Paul Ruffolo. Cover: Pietja Dusek in THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL. Page 2: Marina Murphy in THE DANCING GRANNY. Page 4: (upper left) Selena Deer in LAST STOP ON MARKET STREET. (lower left) Cast in THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS. (upper right) Vivian Madson, Silver Anderson, and Riley Meskin in STEP KIDS. Page 7: Zephaniah Singh Ponder, Paisley Luna, and Krystal Drake\* in THE WATSONS GO TO BIRMINGHAM - 1963. Max Larson (center) and cast in THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS. Nolan Zellermayer in A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS. Page 8: Sanaiah Hibbler and Maia Scherman in THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL. Page 10-11: DeMar Walker in THE DANCING GRANNY. Page 14: Jonathan Edwards in MACBETH. Page 24-25: Paisley Luna and Krystal Drake\* (back), Cynthia Cobb\* and Zephaniah Singh Ponder (front) in THE WATSONS GO TO BIRMINGHAM - 1963. Page 26: Madison Jones and Samantha D. Montgomery\* in LAST STOP ON MARKET STREET. \*Member of Actor's Equity Association