



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## First Stage and Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra announce: **3.5 MILLION DOLLARS AWARDED FOR TWO ENDOWMENTS FOR ADVANCED THEATER AND MUSIC TRAINING**

**Milwaukee, WI – February 15, 2024** – In a joint announcement today, First Stage and Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra (MYSO) are proud to announce that Milwaukee philanthropist Anthony Petullo has made a stunning donation to both organizations in the amount of \$3.5 million dollars (\$1.75 million designated to each organization to be made over four years) for the creation of two brand-new endowment funds: **Anthony J. Petullo Endowment for Advanced Theater Students** at First Stage and **Anthony J. Petullo Leadership Fellows Endowment** at Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra. This unprecedented donation to each organization will have a significant impact for First Stage and MYSO to continue offering their nationally recognized training programs for young people and to grow these programs in the future.

Asked why he wanted to create two such endowments, **Tony Petullo** shared: “As a passionate supporter of the arts, I’ve witnessed firsthand the transformative power of theater and music in shaping young minds and fostering creativity. Investing in the future of these talented individuals through advanced theater, music and leadership programs is not just a philanthropic

gesture – it’s a commitment to nurturing artistic excellence and cultivating the next generation of leaders and storytellers.”

“Creating these endowments for First Stage and MYSO was inspired by my belief in their mission and their proven track record of empowering young people. Legacy gifts hold a unique significance – they transcend individual lifetimes, leaving a lasting impact that continues to enrich lives long after we’re gone. I urge fellow donors to consider the profound legacy they can leave through such gifts, ensuring that the arts thrive for generations to come.”

First Stage is proud to utilize the **Anthony J. Petullo Endowment for Advanced Theater** to provide financial assistance to students who participate in First Stage’s advanced theater training programs. These programs include First Stage’s Young Company, School Year Intensives and other future initiatives. This transformative contribution allows First Stage to provide comprehensive training opportunities that not only hone artistic talents but also foster crucial life skills. Through these programs, participants will develop leadership qualities, enhance social skills and cultivate a deep sense of empathy and creativity. By investing in Milwaukee’s youth through theater education, First Stage aims to empower them to become influential leaders within their communities, equipped with the tools to inspire positive change and make meaningful contributions to society. This endowment donation represents a significant step forward in First Stage’s mission to nurture the next generation of dynamic and socially conscious leaders.

Managing Director **Daniel Grambow** shared why this gift is so important to First Stage: “We are thrilled to announce a transformative endowment gift that marks the beginning of a new era for our Academy programs. This generous contribution will enable us to unlock unprecedented opportunities for creative exploration and innovation, ensuring that First Stage becomes a place of endless possibilities for the next generation of theater professionals.

Tony’s legacy through this gift will not only support access to our nationally recognized theater training programs but elevate the work of our Young Company and programs to come! I personally am filled with gratitude to receive such a gift and equally filled with excitement for the next generation of First Stage artists.”

At Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra, the **Anthony J. Petullo Leadership Fellows Endowment** will provide financial assistance to Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra advanced musicians in the orchestras, including Senior Symphony, Chamber Orchestra, advanced chamber music, jazz and steel pan studies, and other programs. The purpose of the Anthony J. Petullo Leadership Fellows program is to create and advance opportunities for the development of leadership skills with advanced MYSO musicians through a curriculum that includes musical and organizational leadership skills. Additionally, the program provides MYSO members the opportunity to engage in leadership training and gain hands-on experience in the music world. Petullo Leadership Fellows have the chance to assist in MYSO programs, collaborate with their peers on community projects, engage with mentors and participate in leadership workshops.

“We are deeply grateful to share this news of an extraordinary endowment gift from Anthony Petullo,” said **Linda J. Edelstein**, Chief Executive Officer of the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra.

“The Anthony J. Petullo Leadership Fellows program will transform the lives of advanced Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra students through a curriculum that develops music and leadership skills. And it will transform our community by paving the way for generations of leaders. This is the beginning of a beautiful melody. Our students and our community thank Tony for composing it.”

These legacy gifts will have great impact on the two core tenants in the thriving youth-oriented **Milwaukee Youth Arts Center**. As collaborative partners in a facility designed for state-of-the-art youth theater and music training, both organizations look forward to deepening their joint venture through these two new endowments.

If donors would like to join Anthony J. Petullo to support First Stage, please e-mail Director of Development and Alumni Engagement **Kelly Gerlach** at [kgerlach@firststage.org](mailto:kgerlach@firststage.org) or call her at: 414-267-2938.

If donors would like to join Anthony J. Petullo to support MYSO, please e-mail Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra Chief Philanthropy Officer **Joe Phillips**, at [joephllips@myso.org](mailto:joephllips@myso.org) or call: 414-267-2952.

Here is a Google drive with photos for both First Stage and MYSO, logos and photos for Tony Petullo, Daniel Grambow and Linda Edelstein:

[drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kVmHDzY9THfZqanICy7eysz59Nk5N\\_I-](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kVmHDzY9THfZqanICy7eysz59Nk5N_I-)

To learn more about First Stage’s current and upcoming productions and theater training programs, please visit: [firststage.org](http://firststage.org)

To learn more about Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra’s current and upcoming events, public performances and music training, please visit: [myso.org](http://myso.org)

### **About Anthony J. Petullo**

Anthony J. Petullo is an arts advocate, community volunteer and mentor. He is a trustee of the Milwaukee Art Museum and the president of a charitable foundation. A graduate of the University of Illinois, Petullo served as a United States Navy officer, worked as a corporate marketing manager and was an entrepreneur for more than thirty years. He lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

### **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](http://firststage.org)

### **About Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra**

Since 1956, the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra (MYSO) has been nurturing, challenging and inspiring young minds through music, profoundly changing lives and our community for the better. MYSO has grown from one orchestra and 30 students to become one of the largest and most respected youth orchestras in the country. MYSO serves 900 young musicians yearly, ages 8 – 18, who come from more than 200 schools, 90 zip codes and as many as 14 counties throughout southeastern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. We reach an audience of 25,000 through more than 150 public performances.

Our programs include more than 40 ensemble and enrichment training options, ranging from symphonies, string orchestras, jazz and steel bands to music theory, composition, international tours and more, providing high quality experiences for students of varying skills and experience.

The importance of MYSO as a catalyst for youth development and community change has not gone unnoticed. In the 2015 – 16 season, MYSO received the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, the country's highest honor for after-school youth arts and humanities programs, presented by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. MYSO is a proud founding member of the United Performing Arts Fund, a member of the League of American Orchestras and Association of Wisconsin Symphony Orchestras. MYSO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. For more information about MYSO and its many programs, please visit [myso.org](http://myso.org)