



Transforming Lives Through Theater

Office address: 325 W. Walnut Street • Milwaukee, WI 53212

Tickets: (414) 267-2961 • Main office phone: (414) 267-2929 • Fax: (414) 267-2930

www.FirstStage.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Erica Passey (414) 267-2931 or epassey@firststage.org

FIRST STAGE ANNOUNCES its 25th ANNIVERSARY SEASON!

Celebrating 25 years of Transforming Lives Through Theater, this season includes the return of SEUSSICAL, an exciting world premiere and First Stage Family Packages!

Milwaukee – First Stage celebrates its 25th season in 2011-2012, continuing its mission of transforming lives through theater by creating exceptional theater experiences for young people and families through live, professional theater productions that engage, enlighten and entertain. First Stage's 25th season will include six Family Series plays at the Todd Wehr Theater at the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Milwaukee, as well as one First Steps Series production – geared towards children ages 3 to 6 – at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center. To thank the community for its support over the last 25 years, First Stage is offering its Family Packages with a savings of up to 50% off regular ticket prices, on sale April 4, 2011.

This milestone season kicks off on September 16, 2011 as SEUSSICAL™ returns to the Todd Wehr Theater by popular demand! First Stage's production first hit the stage in 2006, playing to sold-out audiences and critical acclaim. This family classic imagined by Lynn Ahrens, Stephen Flaherty and Eric Idle is based on the works of Dr. Seuss and will be directed by Tony Clements. The Cat in the Hat tells the story of Horton, an elephant protecting the tiny speck of dust known as Who. This roller coaster of adventure weaves storylines and some of Dr. Seuss's most famous characters together in exciting and unexpected ways! "This show reminds us that, 'a person is a person no matter how small' – something we at First Stage believe with all of our hearts," said Jeff Frank, First Stage's artistic director.

The world premiere of DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY begins October 28 and runs through November 13. This original play by Y York, inspired by the life and art of Milwaukee collage

-more-

First Stage 25th Season Announcement/add one

artist Della Wells, was part of the Kennedy Center's New Visions/New Voices Biennial Festival last year. This glimpse into the family life of Tonia, a 9-year-old African American girl living in the 1960s who struggles to balance her parents' strategy of keeping a low profile with her own artistic soul. With an uplifting and inspirational message, this play marks the beginning of First Stage's Wisconsin Cycle. Over the next six seasons, First Stage will develop and produce six plays that celebrate the history and people of Wisconsin. "It is our way of honoring our state and our community for the incredible support that they have shown us over the last twenty-five years," said Frank. With these plays and associated workshops, special events, and educational initiatives the Wisconsin Cycle aims to raise awareness about the rich heritage of our state.

'Tis the season in Room One for our favorite first-grader as First Stage presents JUNIE B. IN JINGLE BELLS BATMAN SMELLS from November 25 through December 24, 2011. Allison Gregory's treatment of the popular books by Barbara Park captures the spirit of the holidays as seen through the eyes of spunky, Junie B. with hilarious yet heart-warming moments. With the dreaded holiday sing-a-long looming (could it really be as bad as her past performances!?), and so many temptations at the school holiday gift shop Junie B. is a mix of emotions. When she gets stuck with tattle-tale (and nemesis) May for the Secret Santa gift exchange she discovers the gift of giving just in time for Christmas.

In January 2012, First Stage's **First Steps Series** presents DON'T LET THE PIGEON DRIVE THE BUS!, based on the popular books by Mo Willems, adapted by Ernie Nolan. This highly interactive production is perfect for first-time theater goers between the ages of 3 through 6 as they have a say in what Pigeon does during the show.

Other highlights for First Stage's 25th season include the timeless classic A WRINKLE IN TIME, adapted by John Glore, and CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY adapted from the Roald Dahl classic. Charlie Bucket trades his cabbage soup for chocolate and embarks on a daring adventure into Willy Wonka's world of wacky wonders. "Our design teams are ready for the challenge of bringing this world of pure imagination to life for you," said Frank. "How will we make Violet turn violet? What about the Chocolate river? The Oompa Loompas? The Wonkavator? I can't wait to see it myself!" Frank continued.

-more-

First Stage 25th Season Announcement/add two

The season concludes with a lively musical adaptation of DIARY OF A WORM, A SPIDER, AND A FLY on stage April 13 through May 13, 2012. Based on the popular children's books by Doreen Cronin and Harry Bliss, this adaptation features book, music and lyrics by Joan Cushing, who has created musical adaptations for two of First Stage's most popular shows – JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS and MISS NELSON IS MISSING.

FIRST STAGE'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

FAMILY SERIES AT THE TODD WEHR THEATER

First Stage's Family Series at the Todd Wehr Theater offers plays for every age range. Performances are located at the Todd Wehr Theater in the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, 929 N. Water Street in downtown Milwaukee.

SEUSSICAL™

September 16 – October 16, 2011

Music by Stephen Flaherty

Lyrics by Lynn Ahrens

Book by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty

Co-Conceived by Lynn Ahrens, Stephen Flaherty, and Eric Idle

Based on the Works of Dr. Seuss

Back by popular demand, this musical is as fun for children as it is nostalgic for parents. The Cat in the Hat tells the story of Horton, an elephant that resolves to protect all that live on the tiny speck of dust known as Who. Ridiculed by other animals and unwittingly admired by Gertrude McFuzz, Horton soon finds out that his newfound responsibility isn't as easy as he thought. Hold on as this roller coaster of an adventure weaves storylines and characters together in exciting and unexpected ways, introducing you to some of Dr. Seuss's most famous characters along the way. For everyone ages 3 and up.

DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY (World premiere)

October 28 – November 13, 2011

An original play by Y York, commissioned by First Stage

Inspired by the life and art of Milwaukee collage artist Della Wells

This world premiere production paints the humorous yet inspirational portrait of the life of 9-year-old Tonia, seeking to contain her intelligence and creativity in order to adapt to her family's lifestyle. When her attempts don't work out as planned, Tonia harnesses her artistic soul – and finds her family, friends and the world begin to appreciate her uniqueness. Discover with Tonia and her family that the best you can be is to be yourself. An inspiring, engaging and delightful

-more-

First Stage 25th Season Announcement/add three

look at family life. For everyone ages 8 and up.

JUNIE B. IN JINGLE BELLS BATMAN SMELLS

November 25 – December 24, 2011

By Allison Gregory

Adapted from the books by Barbara Park

It's Christmas season in Room One, and first-grader Junie B. is a mix of emotions. Visions of goodies from the school's holiday gift shop frolic about her mind. But, at the same time, she worries that the Holiday Sing-Along could resemble the disaster of skits past. And worst of all, the drawing for the Secret Santa gift exchange has stuck her with the least desirable name in the class – Tattletale May. Enjoy Junie B. learning to cope with her challenged holiday spirit, and you and your family will glow with Christmas warmth as everyone experiences the gift of giving. For everyone ages 3 and up.

A WRINKLE IN TIME

January 27 – February 19, 2012

Based on the book by Madeleine L'Engle

Adapted by John Glore

She is an outcast at school. Her father is missing. The town thinks her brother is some sort of freak. Meg Murry is angry at a world that makes no sense to her. But when a strange visitor arrives at her family's home on a dark and stormy night, she embarks on a wild journey through space and time to rescue her father from the evil forces that hold him prisoner on another planet. Before there was Harry Potter or Percy Jackson, there was Meg Murry – the original sci-fi/fantasy hero. Don't miss this production sure to propel your imagination on the journey of a lifetime. For everyone ages 8 and up.

CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

March 2 – 31, 2012

By Roald Dahl

Adapted by Richard George

Charlie Bucket's golden ticket is his passport into Willy Wonka's whimsical world of wacky wonders. Join Charlie and his Grandpa Joe as they take a daring adventure into the fantastical factory, filled with Oompa-Loompas, squirrels, chocolate rivers, and cotton candy dreams. This adaptation of the classic Roald Dahl has enough excitement to satisfy the sweet tooth of everyone in your entire family. For everyone ages 6 and up.

DIARY OF A WORM, A SPIDER, AND A FLY

April 13 – May 13, 2012

Based on the popular books by Doreen Cronin and Harry Bliss

Book, Music and Lyrics by Joan Cushing

-more-

First Stage 25th Season Announcement/add four

A masterful fusion of excitement and education, this adventure is as delightfully absurd and joyously playful as the wildly popular book series. Who ever thought that we could learn so much about ourselves by looking in on the lives of a non-arthropod, an arachnid and an insect? Walk alongside the worm, the spider and the fly as they learn to overcome many of the same life challenges that we face and emerge with a better understanding – and appreciation – for who they are. For everyone ages 3 and up.

FIRST STEPS SERIES at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

The First Steps Series are special productions geared toward children ages 3 to 6, introducing them to live theater in an engaging, interactive and lively environment. Performances held at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, 325 W. Walnut Street.

DON'T LET THE PIGEON DRIVE THE BUS!

January 14 – February 5, 2012

From the books by Mo Willems

Adapted by Ernie Nolan

Buckle up for this highly interactive adventure that puts you in the driver's seat. Everybody's favorite pigeon wants to drive the bus, and it's up to you to decide his fate. But the fun doesn't stop there. Should he eat a hot dog? Get a puppy? Stay up late? It's entirely up to you. Join the pigeon and all of his friends on this exciting audience favorite. But hold on tight. You never know where this unpredictable journey will take you!

First Stage Family Packages

To thank the community for its support over the last 25 years, First Stage is offering its Family Packages with a savings of up to 50% off regular ticket prices. Families can choose a minimum of three shows to comprise a First Stage Family Package. With a Family Package purchase, families also receive free and unlimited ticket exchanges, an invitation to free family workshops and a backstage tour, and more. Family Packages will go on sale to the general public on Monday, April 4, and will be available for purchase online at www.FirstStage.org.

About First Stage First Stage touches hearts, engages minds, and transforms lives by creating extraordinary theater experiences for young people and families through professional theater productions that inspire, enlighten, and entertain; unparalleled Theater Academy training that fosters life skills through stage skills; and dynamic Theater in Education programs that promote active learning in our schools and community. First Stage is a member of TYA/USA, the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, the Wisconsin Alliance for Arts Education and Americans for the Arts, as well as Theatre Wisconsin and Milwaukee Arts Partners, and is a cornerstone member of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF).

###