



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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First Stage Children's Theater  
presents the much beloved story of humility, trust,  
and the true meaning of friendship in

## CHARLOTTE'S WEB

Based on the book by E.B. White  
Adapted by Joseph Robinette

Directed by Xan S. Johnson, Ph.D.

*Sponsored by Robert W. Baird & Co.*

**October 17 – November 16, 2008**  
**Todd Wehr Theater, Marcus Center for the Performing Arts**

*This play is most appreciated by adults, teens and young people ages six and older.*

Milwaukee, Wis. (September 17, 2008) – Based on the cherished tale by E.B. White, unlikely friends Wilbur, a runty pig, and Charlotte, a wise and loving spider weave a tale of friendship, hardship, and the never-ending cycle of life in First Stage Children's Theater's presentation of CHARLOTTE'S WEB. The show runs October 17 through November 16, 2008 at the Todd Wehr Theater in the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, 929 N. Water Street in downtown Milwaukee.

Set in 1953 in southern Wisconsin, First Stage's CHARLOTTE'S WEB brings to life the character of Wilbur, an affectionate, sometimes bashful pig who is befriended by Charlotte, a caring and imaginative spider who lives in the rafters above his pen in a magnificent web closely resembling a Native American dream catcher. Born runt-of-the-litter, the tiny piglet is rescued from the razor-sharp ax blade of Farmer Arable by

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*First Stage Presents CHARLOTTE'S WEB /add one*

his young daughter Fern who christens him Wilbur. When Wilbur grows too big for the Arable farm, he is moved to Uncle Homer's barn where he is destined to become a succulent holiday ham. Wilbur's character is sweet and affectionate, responsive to moods of the weather and the song of crickets, is hopeful, brave, subject to fainting from bashfulness and is loyal to his friends. Watching over Wilbur is Charlotte A. Cavatica ("but just call me Charlotte"), a large, splendidly agile eight-legged invertebrate who weaves friendly greetings like "Salutations!" Her character embraces some of the shared values in Native American culture as "keepers of harmony" and "caretakers of mother earth." She's a graceful and articulate spider, a true and trusted friend, an imaginative problem-solver, and a poet. When Wilbur learns the devastating news that one day he will become mouthwatering food on someone's plate, Charlotte dreams up an unusual scheme to save his life, drawing the barnyard clan into her plan, even the self-involved, gluttonous rat Templeton. She begins her quest by deftly spinning words in her magnificent, magical web, starting with "Some Pig," an almost Zen declaration of Wilbur's worth. With her extraordinary weaving skills, she pulls a publicity stunt on Uncle Homer and neighbors that sends Wilbur to the County Fair and, ultimately, saves Wilbur's life.

First Stage's production of CHARLOTTE'S WEB spins together certain elements of Native American culture, according to Xan S. Johnson, Ph.D., who directs the show. "Many farming areas in Wisconsin are rich with Native American effigy mounds which are protected by federal law. This translates into a moral partnership between farmers and Native Americans at one community level that exists both historically and currently." He continues, "In CHARLOTTE'S WEB I see the Arables and Zuckermans as accepting and respectful of effigy mounds on their farms, part of the responsibility for history and Mother Earth they share with Native America. It is the children, like Fern and Avery that would be most curious if given the chance to investigate. It is the children that would find befriending spiders so enchanting and rewarding." Johnson goes on to draw a parallel, "I see a strong circular connection between spiders, Native American culture, effigy mounds, spider web design, costume influences, and especially, in the leadership style of Charlotte. She is a true 'keeper of harmony' and a 'caretaker of mother earth.'"

*First Stage Presents CHARLOTTE'S WEB /add two*

First Stage's CHARLOTTE'S WEB is a tale of friendship on earth, affection and protection, adventure and miracle, trust and treachery, pleasure and pain, and the passing of time. It shows us, plainly and simply, that human beings must always be on the watch for the coming of wonders.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

E.B. White was born in 1899 in Mount Vernon, New York. Upon his graduation from Cornell University in 1921, White wrote for *The Seattle Times* and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and worked as an ad man before returning to New York City in 1924. He published his first article in *The New Yorker* magazine in 1925, then joined the staff in 1927 and continued to contribute for six decades. Best recognized for his essays and unsigned "Notes and Comment" pieces, he gradually became the most important contributor to *The New Yorker* at a time when it was arguably the most important American literary magazine.

In the late 1930s, White turned his hand to children's fiction and wrote his first book, *Stuart Little*, which was published in 1945, and then wrote *Charlotte's Web* in 1952. Both works went on to receive high acclaim and in 1970, jointly won the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, a major prize in the field of children's literature. White also edited and updated *The Elements of Style*, the handbook of grammar for writers of American English, for which he received accolades.

In 1978, White won a special Pulitzer Prize for his work as a whole. Other awards he received included a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1963 and memberships in a variety of literary societies throughout the United States.

White died in 1985 at his farm home in North Brooklin, Maine, after a lengthy battle with Alzheimer's Disease.

**ARTISTIC STAFF**

Director	Xan S. Johnson, Ph.D.
Scenic Designer	Sarah Hunt-Frank
Costume Designer	Rachel Healy, USAA
Lighting Designer	Michael Rourke, USAA
Sound Designer	Ernie Brusubardis
Props Director	Mark Hare

*First Stage Presents* **CHARLOTTE'S WEB** /*add three*

**ADULT ACTORS**

Mrs. Arable / Goose / Narrator 4	Alison Mary Forbes
Homer / Old Sheep	Bo Johnson*
Mrs. Zuckerman / Narrator 3	Elaine Wyler
Charlotte / Narrator 1	Thirza Defoe*
John / Templeton	Todd Denning*
Narrator 2 / Uncle the Pig / Announcer / Reporter	Allen Edge*
Male Understudy	Michael Cotey

\*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional Actors and Stage Managers.

**YOUNG ACTORS**

Wilbur

Fern

Avery

Lamb

Ensemble / Fair-Goer

Luvry

Spider 2 / Gosling /  
School Girl

Spider 3 / Gosling /  
School Girl

Spider 1 / Gosling /  
School Girl

**Terrific Cast**

John Filmanowicz  
Pewaukee

Taylor Vraney  
Menomonee Falls

Reuben Smith  
Slinger

Natalie Alteri  
Brookfield

Reid Joseph  
Waukesha

Nevin Langhus  
Milwaukee

Madalyn Mainwood  
New Berlin

Lauren Simmons  
Milwaukee

Josie Trettin  
Whitefish Bay

**Radiant Cast**

Avi Borouchoff  
Milwaukee

Marion Frank  
Wauwatosa

Jerel Ballard  
Milwaukee

Jenna Verstegen-Ehlinger  
Richfield

Brandon Marchand  
Franklin

Teddy Warren  
Milwaukee

Emily Zaffiro  
Milwaukee

Mieko Kuramoto  
Whitefish Bay

Alison Pegorelc  
Milwaukee

*First Stage Presents CHARLOTTE'S WEB /add four*

**PERFORMANCE DATES**

CHARLOTTE'S WEB opens Friday, October 17 at 7:00 p.m. in the Todd Wehr Theater at the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts. The 3:30 p.m. performance on Sunday, November 16 will be interpreted for the deaf and hard of hearing patrons. The full schedule of family performances includes:

Fridays:           October 17 and November 7 & 14 at 7:00 p.m.  
Saturdays:       October 18 and November 8 at 3:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.  
                      October 25 and November 15 at 1:00 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.  
                      November 1 at 7:00 p.m.  
Sundays:         October 19 and November 2, 9 and 16 at 1:00 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.

**TICKET INFORMATION**

Ticket prices for CHARLOTTE'S WEB range from \$10.50 - \$33.50. Tickets may be purchased online at FirstStage.org or through the Marcus Center box office, 414.273.7206, or toll free at 888.612.3500. The number for TDD (for deaf and hard of hearing patrons) is 414.273.3080.

**ARTISTIC STAFF**

**Xan S. Johnson, Ph.D. (Salt Lake City, UT) - Director**

Dr. Johnson is a playwright, a researcher, a theater consultant and a tenured full professor at the University of Utah. A Wisconsin native, he has received several awards including the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE) Special National Recognition Award for outstanding work in the field of child drama. He has participated in several professional and community organizations, and is currently involved with the International Association of Theatre For Children and Young People, the International Amateur Theatre Association, and is the Past President of the AATE. He received his BA in speech and theater from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, his MA in modern theatre and directing from the University of Nebraska, and his Ph.D. with research focus in child drama, child psychology and experimental theater from Northwestern University.

**Sarah L. Hunt-Frank (Wauwatosa) – Scenic Designer**

Sarah L. Hunt-Frank has designed for such theatres as the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Next Act Theatre, Renaissance Theaterworks, The Skylight, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Bialystock and Bloom, The Milwaukee Ballet, and Florentine Opera Company. Sarah's previous work at First Stage Children's Theater includes A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD, THE QUILTMAKER'S GIFT, LILLY'S PURPLE PLASTIC PURSE, GREEN GABLES, TOM SAWYER, THE SHAKESPEARE STEALER, THE TRUE CONFESSIONS OF CHARLOTTE DOYLE, PERSEUS BAYOU, THE BFG, THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER, A MIDNIGHT CRY and THE WITCH OF BLACKBIRD POND.

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**Rachel Anne Healy, USAA (Chicago) - Costume Designer**

Based in Chicago, Rachel's costume designs have been seen on various stages including the Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Writers' Theatre, Chicago Children's Theatre, Court Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Appletree Theatre, American Theatre Company, Next Theatre and Remy Bumppo Theatre. Regionally, she has designed with the Alliance Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, American Players Theatre and Long Wharf Theatre. Currently, Rachel's designs can be seen at Milwaukee Repertory Theater in STATE OF THE UNION and THE CHERRY ORCHARD, and in the Goodman Theatre's premiere of Naomi Iizuka's GHOSTWRITTEN. Rachel is also a professor at DePaul University teaching costume design and rendering techniques to theatre designers.

**Michael Rourke, USAA (Skokie, IL) – Lighting Design**

Michael has designed over twenty productions for First Stage, most recently HANA'S SUITCASE and 12 DAYS – A MILWAUKEE CHRISTMAS. Over the past 30 years, he has designed more than 300 productions around the country. He and his wife, Barbara Reeder, base their company – Reeder & Rourke Lighting Design Unlimited, Inc. – in Chicago. They specialize in performance lighting design and direction. They also provide consulting services for lighting system acquisition and renovation. Michael teaches as an adjunct faculty member of The Theatre School at DePaul University and has a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Virginia.

**Ernie Brusubardis (Shorewood) – Sound Designer**

Ernie composed music and served as music director/sound designer for First Stage productions of SLEEPING BEAUTY, HANA'S SUITCASE, BUNNICULA, SMOLDERING FIRES, THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS, THE TRUE CONFESSIONS OF CHARLOTTE DOYLE, BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA and THE BFG, to name a few. He has spent his entire life making music. Born in Latvia, Ernie started playing the piano at age five. When he came to Milwaukee, he continued his studies, earning a BA and MA from the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music. He has conducted symphony orchestras, including the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. Ernie has been a choral conductor, a teacher at University School and music director for many Milwaukee theaters. His compositions include several musicals, CD releases and soundtracks for theater.

**Mark Hare (Milwaukee) – Props Director**

Mark currently serves as First Stage's props master. In addition to his props master duties, Mark designed scenery for First Stage's 12 DAYS – A

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MILWAUKEE CHRISTMAS, IF YOU GIVE A MOUSE A COOKIE, CLICK CLACK MOO: COWS THAT TYPE, AND THEN THEY CAME FOR ME: REMEMBERING THE WORLD OF ANNE FRANK, TWO DONUTS, MUFARO'S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS, SEUSSICAL and puppet design for THE BFG. Mark also designed scenery and props for BUNNICULA. For the past eleven summer seasons, Mark has been the props master for American Players Theatre.

**ACTOR BIOGRAPHIES**

**Alison Mary Forbes (Milwaukee) – Mrs. Arable/Goose**

Alison is delighted to return to First Stage Children's Theater after appearing in last season's THE QUILTMAKER'S GIFT. Alison has performed across the Midwest in theaters such as Milwaukee Shakespeare, In Tandem, Off the Wall, the Minnesota Centennial Showboat, the Illusion Theatre and the Margolis Brown Theatre Company. Favorite roles include Mollie in THE MOUSETRAP, Perdita in THE WINTER'S TALE and Sally in YOU'RE A GOOD MAN, CHARLIE BROWN. Alison holds a BA in theatre from the University of Minnesota and has taught for First Stage Theater Academy. Coming up, look for her third reprisal of Trixie Schlaarb in In Tandem Theatre's A CUDAHY CAROLER CHRISTMAS, and back at First Stage as the Brontosaurus in THE DINOSAUR PLAY.

**Bo Johnson (Milwaukee) – Homer/Old Sheep**

Prior to CHARLOTTE'S WEB, Bo was on stage in WELL at Milwaukee Chamber Theatre. You may have also seen him last season in First Stage's production of 12 DAYS – A MILWAUKEE CHRISTMAS and SLEEPING BEAUTY. Bo's other First Stage credits include LILLY'S PURPLE PLASTIC PURSE, A CHRISTMAS STORY, BUNNICULA, MISS NELSON IS MISSING! THE UGLY DUCKLING and ANIMAL FARM. Years ago Bo served as technical director, production manager, and props master for the company and he also enjoys spending his summers teaching for First Stage Theater Academy. Look for him again in the world premiere of First Stage's HOW I BECAME A PIRATE, later this season. You might also catch him singing and playing rhythm guitar in the band, Random Maxx, which plays regularly in the Milwaukee area.

**Elaine Wyler (Cedarburg) – Mrs. Zuckerman/Narrator**

Elaine is very pleased to be back with First Stage Children's Theater. She was last seen as Ramona's mom in RAMONA QUIMBY. Her local and regional work over the years has included work with Cedar Creek Repertory, Acacia Theatre Company, Renaissance Theaterworks, Madison Repertory Theatre, Theatre X and, of course, First Stage Children's Theater.

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**Thirza Defoe (Giizhiigoquay) (Milwaukee) – Charlotte/Narrator**

Thirza is from the Ojibwe and Oneida tribes of northern Wisconsin and she is widely known as a hoop dancer and storyteller, which have awarded her recognition in both the native community and throughout the world. Thirza is a graduate of the California Institute of the Arts where she received her BFA in theatre and is currently working on her MFA at Goddard College in Vermont in writing. Her acting credits include the starring role and narrator in the Emmy® award-winning, *People of the Forest* (PBS educational documentary). She is currently debuting her multi-media performance show, *Roots Before Branches*, performed at the National Museum of the American Indian.

**Todd Denning (Milwaukee) – John/Templeton**

Todd is thrilled to be back with First Stage, having most recently directed First Stage's production of THE QUILTMAKER'S GIFT. He has been a teacher for First Stage's Theater Academy, a fight choreographer, a stage manager, and has acted in several productions including TOM SAWYER, A MIDNIGHT CRY and CHARLOTTE DOYLE. Todd has directed Classical Company productions for the Theater Academy including this summer's production of MACBETH. He is currently co-director of the Theater Academy's Young Company with Theater Academy Director and Associate Artistic Director John Maclay. Todd received his MFA in acting from the University of CA – Irvine. His regional acting credits include Utah Shakespearean Festival, South Coast Repertory, Georgia Shakespeare, Tennessee Repertory Theater and Milwaukee Shakespeare.

**Allen D. Edge (Milwaukee) - Narrator/Uncle the Pig/Announcer/Reporter**

Allen is an ordained minister, a talented actor, director, producer, and stand-up comedian with over 38 years in the performing arts. He's worked with the Goodman Theatre, the Black Ensemble Theatre Company, First Stage Children's Theater and the Steppenwolf Theatre Company. Allen has performed his special brand of humor at the Comedy Café in Milwaukee, the Apollo Theatre in New York and as the opening act for Patti La Belle. He was also featured in a number of commercials and films, including *Barber Shop 2* and Tyler Perry's *Meet The Browns*. Allen has a Bachelors of Arts degree in Theatre from Columbia College Chicago. He is also the founder and president of Transitions Edge Productions, Inc.

**Michael Cotey (South Milwaukee) – Male Understudy**

Michael is excited to be making his debut with First Stage. Other Milwaukee credits include TWELFTH NIGHT at Milwaukee Shakespeare, COMBAT THEATRE at Bunny Gumbo, and Michael played the role of Alan Stange in EQUUS at In Tandem Theatre.

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He also performed in TAMING OF THE SHREW and TITUS ANDRONICUS at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival. Michael recently received his BFA in acting from UW-Milwaukee. University credits include THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE, OF MICE AND MEN, WEST SIDE STORY, THE LIAR, FROM THESE GREEN HEIGHTS, NICKEL AND DIMED and THE DUMB WAITER, which he also produced and co-directed. Michael is looking forward to his appearance as Johnny Reeves in First Stage's production of WITNESS in January.

First Stage Children's Theater is Milwaukee's premier, professional family theater. Founded in 1987, the mission of the company is to provide professional theater productions for young people and their families that engage, enlighten and entertain, Theater Academy training that fosters life skills through stage skills and dynamic in-school education programs that provide learning through theater. First Stage is a member of the Theater Communications Group, 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).

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