



Office address: 325 W. Walnut Street • Milwaukee, WI 53212
Tickets: (414) 273-7206 • Fax: (414) 267-2930 • www.FirstStage.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Erica Davis (414) 267-2931 or edavis@firststage.org

**First Stage presents the world premiere of
DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY**

An original play by Y York, commissioned by First Stage
Inspired by the life and art of Milwaukee collage artist Della Wells

Directed by Mark Lutwak

**October 28 through November 13, 2011
Todd Wehr Theater, Marcus Center for the Performing Arts**

This play is most appreciated by adults, teens and children ages 8 and older.

Milwaukee, WI – First Stage continues its 25th anniversary season with the world premiere of **DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY**, an original play by Y York inspired by the life and art of Milwaukee collage artist Della Wells. **DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY** runs October 28 through November 13, 2011 at the Todd Wehr Theater in the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, 929 N. Water Street, downtown Milwaukee. Tickets can be purchased in person at the Marcus Center box office at 929 N. Water Street, by phone at (414) 273-7206 or online at www.firststage.org.

DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY was part of the Kennedy Center's New Visions/New Voices Biennial Festival in 2010. The story glimpses the complicated family life of Tonia, a 9-year-old African American girl living 1960s Bronzeville Milwaukee, struggling to find balance between her parents' strategy of keeping a low profile and her own artistic soul. "The play is about how human beings use art to make sense of the universe and about the transformative power of art," said director, Mark Lutwak.

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

-more-

First Stage presents DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY/add one

support that they have shown us over the last twenty-five years," said Jeff Frank, First Stage's artistic director. 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.

Director Mark Lutwak is currently Director of Education at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park where he oversees programming that reaches over 58,000 young people annually in the Greater Cincinnati community. He is the former Artistic Director at Honolulu Theatre for Youth and has been a freelance director since 1976, with a focus on new plays and plays for families and children. He has directed over 20 plays by Y. T. S. S. York, including AFTERNOON OF THE ELVES at First Stage in 1996.

The adult actor cast of DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY includes **Tiffany Yvonne Cox** as Alma Bridge, **Chauncy Thomas** (Member of Actor's Equity Association) as Leon Bridge, and **Chinai Hardy** (Member of Actor's Equity Association) as Aunt Franny.

Young performer roles are double-cast. Young performers in the Miss Katie Cast are **Ashley Nord** (as Tonia) from Glendale, and **Matthew Wade** (as Theo) from Milwaukee. Young performers in the Miss Merci Cast are **LaNae Ramey** (as Tonia) from Milwaukee and **Dashaun McCray** (as Theo) from Milwaukee.

The Artistic Staff for DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY includes: **Collette Pollard** (Scenic Designer), **Daryl Harris** (Costume Designer), **Dennis Parichy** (Lighting Designer), **Matt Whitmore** (Sound Designer), **Michelle Hand**, Member of Actor's Equity Association (Stage Manager), and **Thomas Novak** (Assistant Stage Manager).

Tickets for DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY start at \$13. Tickets may be purchased at www.firststage.org or through the Marcus Center box office, in person at 929 N. Water Street, Milwaukee or by phone (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.

First Stage presents DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY/add two

Performance dates: **DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY** opens Friday, October 28 at 7:00 p.m. Other performances are held: Saturday, October 29 at 7:00 p.m.; Saturday, November 5 at 1:00 & 3:30 p.m.; Sunday, November 6 at 1:00 & 3:00 p.m.; Saturday, November 12 at 3:30 p.m.; Sunday, November 13 at 1:00 & 3:30 p.m.

Special events for DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY

Opening Night Reception : Friday, October 28 at 7:00 p.m.

Immediately following the opening night performance First Stage invites all patrons to attend the Opening Night Reception at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, 325 W. Walnut Street, located approximately 1 mile from the Marcus Center. Patrons will have the opportunity to meet and mingle with the cast and crew of **DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY** while enjoying refreshments, courtesy of First Stage.

Opening weekend: Friday, October 28 and Saturday, October 29

A drawing for a \$20 gift certificate to Rainbow Booksellers will be held immediately following each performance. Gift certificates may be redeemed for a book purchase at the First Stage merchandise counter in the lobby or at Rainbow Booksellers, located at 5704 W. Vliet Street, Milwaukee. One winner will be selected at each performance.

Extended Talk Backs:

Saturday, October 29 – The Process of Creation (following 7 p.m. show)

Playwright Y York, director Mark Lutwak and artist Della Wells will discuss the process of artistic creation.

Sunday, November 6 – Mental Health in the Home (following the 3:30 p.m. show)

Dr. Elizabeth Fischer, Psychologist, Children's Hospital; Della Wells, artist; Candy Newson; and Rhonda Gatlin-Hayes, Program Coordinator, Grand Avenue Club discuss issues surrounding mental illness in the African-American community.

What it Means to Fly – Art Exhibition

On view through December 31, 2011 at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, 325 W. Walnut Street, Milwaukee

What it Means to Fly is an exhibition of new work by Della Wells that was inspired by the creative process of First Stage's world premiere production **DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY**, original works by local African-American artists, and a large scale collage created by Wells in collaboration with Daniels-Mardak Boys & Girls Club students. The exhibition also includes work created by local artists with women residing in homeless shelters throughout the Milwaukee area as part of a program created by Brite-White Art Consulting. The Milwaukee Youth Arts Center is open Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

First Stage presents DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY/add three

FACT SHEET

Location: Todd Wehr Theater, Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, 929 N. Water Street, downtown Milwaukee

Dates: Friday, September 16 – Sunday, October 16, 2011

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

Performances:

Friday, October 28 at 7:00 p.m. (OPENING NIGHT)
Saturday, October 29 at 7:00 p.m. (PAY WHAT YOU CAN NIGHT)
Saturday, November 5 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.
Sunday, November 6 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.
Saturday, November 12 at 3:30 p.m.
Sunday, November 13 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.

Ticket prices: Start at \$13

Tickets and information: Call (414) 273-7206 or online at www.firststage.org

DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY is supported in part by a grant from the Milwaukee Arts Board and the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin.



Community partners for DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY include the Peltz Gallery and the Grand Avenue Club.

About First Stage

Celebrating its 25th anniversary in the 2011-12 season, 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).

First Stage presents DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T FLY/add four

About Della Wells

Born in 1951, Della Wells is a self-taught artist who began drawing and painting seriously at the age of 42. Since then she has created more than 2,000 images in various media. The Hurn Museum of Contemporary Folk Art considers Wells one of the leading African-American folk artists in America. Wells views her artwork as an extension of her long commitment to storytelling and folklore. Influenced by writers and popular television shows from her childhood including Dr. Seuss, James Thurber, Edward Lear, and The Rocky and Bullwinkle show, she often uses humor in her imaginative and colorful collages, pastels, paintings drawings, dolls and quilts. Her artwork bespeaks the nature of the struggle of seeking self-actualization and community both as a woman and an African-American.

###