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FIRST STAGE **25th**

Transforming Lives Through Theater

Celebrating **25 Years** of **Transforming Lives Through Theater!**



Dear friends:

First Stage is honored to be celebrating 25 years of transforming lives through theater with you. Since our inaugural season our vision has remained the same: to touch hearts, engage minds and transform lives by creating extraordinary theater experiences for young people and families.

First Stage was created when the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, our founding organization, contracted me as the founding artistic director to develop a professional children's theater to serve families in the greater Milwaukee community. First Stage was born in 1987, incorporated in 1988 and has grown to become one of the nation's most respected children's theaters.

We owe the entire community a heartfelt thank you for our success. Mothers, fathers, grandparents, teachers and most of all the young people whose lives we touched and who touched us in so many ways, all recognized the value of our work in their lives. We received phenomenal support from so many foundations and corporations for the significant impact of our work. The mission-driven ethic and dedication of more than 200 people who served on our board of directors, the staff, actors, designers and directors all made a major contribution in defining First Stage as one of the leading professional theaters for young audiences. I also am grateful to the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra for being First Stage's collaborative partner in making our dream for the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center a reality.

I thank everyone for building First Stage and weaving it so tightly in to the fabric of our community over the past 25 years. Now, it's time for another 25 years.

Rob Goodman
Managing Director



ROB GOODMAN



JEFF FRANK

First Stage has become one of the nation's finest theaters for families; a recognized leader in young actor training, educational programs and new play development. As we celebrate our achievements, we want to thank you, our community. Your ongoing support helps us fulfill our mission, and provides inspiration for us to do even more.

The best way for us to say thank you is by dedicating ourselves to get even better as we move into our next 25 years. No matter the heights we've reached, we can still climb higher by expanding our reach, increasing access and scaling to new artistic and educational heights. We are rapidly growing our Literacy Residency programs and developing new Theater Academy programs for students with special needs. The Wisconsin Cycle, our new play development series launching this season, will present stories inspired by our rich cultural heritage, with associated events that allow us to connect even further with our community.

First Stage is most often the first theater experience for young people, and we want that experience to be transcendent. We are here for our audiences, our students, our schools and our community to inspire and offer hope for a brighter future both on and off stage and in the classroom.

With your continued support, First Stage will continue making a difference in our community through the stories we tell, the classes we offer, the people we inspire and the hearts we lift. Bring your family and join us this season and in seasons to come.

Jeff Frank
Artistic Director

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Theater FOR ALL AGES

First Stage strives to be the national leader and driving force behind the creation of the best and most innovative plays for family audiences.

First Stage opened its inaugural season on Oct. 5, 1987 with the world premiere of Ian Dennis' adaptation of "The Sleeping Beauty," followed by "The Adventures of Huckelberry Finn," a world premiere adaptation by John Leicht, and William Shakespeare's "Macbeth," each met with rave reviews from its new family audiences.

Since then, First Stage performances have engaged, enlightened and entertained more than 2.5 million parents, grandparents, teachers and children alike throughout south-eastern Wisconsin and beyond. It expanded from just three productions in its infancy to producing six productions at the Todd Wehr Theater and First Steps series productions at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, over 300 performances to more than 100,000 people each

season.

Young performers on stage

Unlike many other theaters, First Stage's professional theater productions use age-appropriate casting — professional actors to portray the adult-aged roles, and young people to play the roles of young people. Two casts of young people perform in rotation, to balance performance and school commitments.

"This is the strongest artistic choice that a children's theater can make," said Jeff Frank, First Stage artistic director. "We consistently hear that our use of young performers creates a production that rings more true and honest, and audience members can connect with our productions more strongly," he said.

Young people working alongside adult professionals also benefit greatly in terms of

their own personal development. "The skills gained through the rehearsal and production process — confidence, focus, cooperation — last a lifetime," said Rob Goodman, First Stage managing director. "This experience allows them to trust in themselves, believing that anything is possible," he said.

New play development

Throughout its 25 years, First Stage has remained committed to new play development; finding innovative ways to tell beloved stories old and new. This commitment has led to more



"THE SLEEPING BEAUTY," 1987

than 40 world premieres, many of which penned from James DeVita, First Stage's resident playwright since 1997. DeVita is a renowned Wisconsin actor, author and playwright. He premiered many of his works for young people at First Stage, including "Bambi: A Life in the Woods" (1994), "Treasure Island" (1996), "Tom Sawyer" (1999)

and "The Thief Lord" (2010). One of his most praised works at First Stage was the world premiere of "A Midnight Cry" in 2003, a musical based on the true story of a young woman's journey from slavery to freedom through the Wisconsin Underground Railroad.

"I can remember audiences rising as one at the conclusion of 'A Midnight Cry,'" said Frank, who directed this production. "Audiences of all ages were moved by the power of this piece."

Inspired by those memories, First Stage is launching The

“There is such a wide range of emotions from one play to the next and each one starts great discussions. It really opens up our family communication.”

— The Aldred Family

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25
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Wisconsin Cycle, a series of six new plays over the next six seasons celebrating the rich heritage of the state. "It is our way of honoring our state and our community for the incredible support that they have shown us over the last 25 years," Frank said.

The Wisconsin Cycle kicks off this season with the world premiere of, "Don't Tell Me I Can't Fly," a First Stage commission written by playwright Y York and inspired by the life and art of Milwaukee collage artist Della Wells.

A collaborative art

Often productions present opportunities to collaborate with other people or groups to create meaningful community connections to enhance the theater experience for audience members.

"First Stage fully embraces the fact that theater is a collaborative art," Goodman said. "It is through this collaboration that our most significant work has been created."

Just three of the many



"ZINK: THE MYTH. THE LEGEND. THE ZEBRA," 1997

significant collaborations throughout First Stage's history include:

"Zink: The Myth. The Legend. The Zebra," made its world premiere in 1997 in collaboration with the Zink the Zebra Foundation in Milwaukee. It is the story of the relationship of Becky, a lonely pre-teen girl with leukemia, to her guardian-angel herd of zebras on the African savannah. In Africa, Becky learns about Zink, a mythical polka-dotted zebra once an outcast but later a hero with the most courage and biggest heart.

"Einstein: Hero of the Mind" premiered in 2002, in

collaboration with the Milwaukee Mask & Puppet Theatre, who created puppets to portray the mysterious world in this production. In the play, a young girl gets magical help entering into Einstein's life and ideas and wrestles with the question of the moral and ethical questions raised by scientific discovery.

"Gossamer" made its premiere in Milwaukee in 2008. First Stage embarked on a long-distance collaboration with Oregon Children's Theatre to co-commission this play, based on Newbery-award winning author Lois Lowry's book of the same title. "Working with Stan Foote (Oregon Children's Theatre artistic director) to help Lois write her very first play, has been one of the highlights of my career," said Frank, who also directed First Stage's "Gossamer."

First Stage looks forward to the next 25 years of connecting with our community as we create the next great plays of the emerging generation.

For more information on how you can help support First Stage's new play development efforts, contact the First Stage Development Department at 414-267-2938 or visit First-Stage.org/supportus.

Fostering life skills through stage skills

Founded in 1992, First Stage Theater Academy teaches young people life skills through stage skills, serving approximately 3,000 enrollments per year, with students coming from communities throughout southeastern Wisconsin, northern Illinois and beyond.

First Stage Theater Academy offers a unique experience for students far beyond basic actor training. "We recognize that theater is a wonderful tool to develop skills not limited to the stage," said John Maclay, Theater Academy director and First Stage's associate artistic director. "We foster a positive atmosphere in which young people see that it is OK to take risks and be themselves. We build self esteem and cultivate the vital skills that will help young people throughout everyday life, such as collaboration, empathy, creative thinking and focus," Maclay said.

Unprecedented growth

Enrollment has grown tremendously since the Academy began 19 years ago. What started as six theater arts classes and a small



Photo by STM Creative

“First Stage gave me a sense of social awareness and emotional intelligence that have served me well. Everything from reading people's body language to helping to establish camaraderie in group settings to acknowledging and affirming others ... I use all of those skills every day.”

– D'Laney, Academy alum

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group of students has blossomed into a year-long schedule with three, eight-week sessions (fall, winter and spring), Spring Break and Summer Academy.

Most notably, First Stage and the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra forged a nationally recognized collaboration in 2002 to launch a successful \$12 million capital campaign to build the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, which opened in 2005. This new building allowed for additional rehearsal spaces that helped meet the demand of programming for both groups. Since then, enrollment in the Academy has increased by more than 85%.

Academy classes also are held at the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center in Brookfield and the Oconomowoc Arts Center to serve young people beyond the Milwaukee market. Most recently, First Stage concluded its first-ever Overnight Academy, in partnership with Carthage College in Kenosha.

Classes available to young people ages 3 through grade 12 include Parent-Child Drama; Creative Drama; Acting; Musical Theatre, Clowning, Auditioning, Stage Combat, Acting for the Camera, Playwriting and Shakespeare; and Year-round classes including Young Company, First Stage's most advanced actor training program; Organized Chaos, comedy improvisation teams; and Glee Club, our new show choir.

Scholarships through the Community Partnership Program

In 2004, First Stage developed the Community Partnership Program, made possible by the Burke Family Foundation and individual contributions, to serve low-income children in the city of Milwaukee.

A major initiative of the Community Partnership Program was to increase the number of Academy scholarships awarded to low-income students and enhance support services like transportation and meals to ensure success. Since 2004, enrollments funded by scholarships have increased



by more than 450%, allowing First Stage Theater Academy to award scholarships to anyone in need, never having to turn away a student because of an inability to pay.

A life-changing experience

Many current students, as

well as alumni, credit First Stage with helping them build the skills needed to overcome obstacles, face challenges head-on, and accomplish their goals. At each session, students begin by reciting the "First Stage cheer," written by Academy students years ago, which describes what the Academy has instilled in

them. This motto exhibits the very spirit of the program has inspired so many over the last 19 years:

"I can't" is not in my vocabulary!

I take risks!

I conquer my fears!

I am not afraid to lead!

First Stage Theater Academy is currently accepting registrations in its 2011-2012 School Year programs. For more information, call 414-267-2970 or visit FirstStage.org/theateracademy.

66 *In school I try to be like everybody else and I don't feel comfortable in my own skin outside of First Stage. But when I come here I am just myself and it feels so good to be here and to be able to just be me."*

– Austin, Theater Academy scholarship recipient

Theater IN EDUCATION

First Stage has offered Theater in Education programs throughout its 25 years to incite young people's excitement for learning and help classroom teachers explore curriculum using interactive, imaginative and integrated methods.

Through theater productions, classroom workshops and residencies, First Stage encourages students to experience their world differently

and find new connections to their school curriculum.

Serving nearly 20,000 students each year, First Stage is Wisconsin's leader in arts-in-education programming. First Stage uses theater to teach academic subjects, help children learn critical literacy skills and improve state standardized test scores. As schools are forced to spend less on arts programming, First Stage blends the arts with existing curriculum making it a win-win for teachers that are required to cover a great deal of material and students that thrive when they are allowed to express themselves and use their creativity in the classroom.

Community Partnership Program

With the support of the Burke Foundation, First Stage developed the Community Partnership Program in 2004 to further the social, academic and emotional growth of low-income children in the city of Milwaukee.

In addition, First Stage is grateful to the Northwestern Mutual Foundation, the Harley-Davidson Foundation and the Herzfeld Foundation in their support of the Community Partnership Program, which has served more than 18,000 children through First Stage's Theater in Education programs alone since 2006.

"Exceptional arts education can be transformational for a child by instilling them with self-esteem and leadership skills, and no organization inspires kids to imagine and grow the way that First Stage does," said Deanna Tillisch, Northwestern Mutual Foundation vice president.

Theater in Education programs available through support of the Community Partnership Program include:

Connections program

The Connections program provides curricular and theatrical experiences to city of Milwaukee classrooms. Since 2004, the Connections



Northwestern Mutual Foundation
congratulates First Stage for
25 years of providing arts
education to Milwaukee youth.



As one of the nation's most acclaimed children's theaters, First Stage helps create characters on the stage while building character that extends into the classroom. Thank you for inspiring kids through arts education.



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on
25 years
*of transforming lives
through theater*

program has touched the lives of nearly 14,000 students. This program has served low-income students from schools located in the central city, 75% of which are minority students.

Literacy Residency programs

Created in 2006, the Literacy Residency programs (formerly the S.C.O.R.E. program) are year-long arts integration lessons designed to develop critical English literacy skills and improve state standardized test scores.

The Early Literacy Residency (K4 – 1) and the Literacy Residency (grades 2 – 6) use active learning techniques to appeal to all types of learners. Skills addressed include drawing conclusions, sequential order, story comprehension, listening and oral language skills and problem solving.

“Our Literacy Residency programs simply make learning fun for students,” said Julia Magnasco, First Stage education director. “The lessons the students receive coincide with the teacher’s curriculum, and the teachers can adapt the same approaches to their curriculum in their lessons as well.”

First Stage acknowledges the support of PNC as First Stage’s Early Childhood Series Sponsor, supporting the Literacy Residency programs and other early childhood initiatives.

Boys & Girls Club programming

First Stage has partnered with the Daniels-Mardak Boys & Girls Club since 2005 with an after-school program, reaching 250 students each year. Smaller groups of students work with First Stage to present a fully-staged production including set, props and costumes. The primary goal of these sessions is

to develop students’ emotional intelligence including self-awareness, respect for self and others, responsibility to self and others, teamwork and understanding and effectively processing emotions.

Bully Ban Workshop

Most recently, First Stage introduced the Bully Ban Workshop to schools. Created in 2008 in response to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction’s mandate on bullying prevention programming in the classroom, the Bully Ban Workshop examines the different forms of bullying that occur, while promoting respect and tolerance among classmates and teaching tactics in problem solving, positive conflict resolution and overcoming obstacles.

For more information on how to bring First Stage’s Theater in Education programs to your school, contact the Education Director at 414-267-2971 or visit FirstStage.org/inschooleducation.



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After 25 years, there’s just one thing left to say:

Encore!

Godfrey & Kahn congratulates First Stage Children’s Theater on 25 years of breathtaking performances and engaging educational experiences that have never failed to inspire, enlighten and entertain.

Thank you.

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FIRST STAGE 25th

Transforming Lives Through Theater

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