



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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First Stage Children's Theater  
delves into the meaning of dreams  
in the world premiere of

## GOSSAMER

By Lois Lowry

Directed by Jeff Frank  
In collaboration with Oregon Children's Theatre

**September 19 – October 5, 2008**  
**Todd Wehr Theater, Marcus Center for the Performing Arts**

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

Milwaukee, Wisconsin (September 3, 2008) – Based on the book by Newbery® award-winning author Lois Lowry, an invisible dream-giver, a troubled child and a lonely, sensitive woman realize the haunting power of dreams and nightmares in First Stage Children's Theater's world premiere of GOSSAMER. The show runs September 19 through October 5, 2008 at the Todd Wehr Theater in the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, 929 N. Water Street in downtown Milwaukee.

First Stage's GOSSAMER is in collaboration with Oregon Children's Theatre of Portland, Oregon and First Stage Children's Theater. The collaboration includes a co-commission of author Lois Lowry to adapt her book for the stage, play development and associated educational programming. Oregon Children's Theatre will premiere GOSSAMER on October 18.

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*First Stage Presents Gossamer/add one*

GOSSAMER is the story of dream-givers; cabalistic beings who float through the darkness of night giving pleasant dreams to some, while helping others escape dreaded nightmares. In First Stage's GOSSAMER, Littlest is a tiny creature slowly learning her job of giving dreams to humans. Each night, she and her teacher Thin Elderly slide under the door and visit the home of the older Woman and the young boy John, where she softly touches beloved objects, gathering happy memories, and drops of old scents and sounds. Littlest pieces these bits together and presents them to her sleeping humans in the form of pleasant dreams. But the nasty Sinisteeds, dark and fearsome creatures that plague their victims with nightmares, are always working against the dream givers.

In GOSSAMER, we find each of the main characters facing their own fears, according to Jeff Frank, First Stage Children's Theater artistic director. "Littlest, the smallest of dream givers, fears growing up, John fears attachment and abandonment, and the Woman fears her own future, her loneliness, and the pain of love and loss that she has endured." Author Lois Lowry comments, "Their fears are all assuaged in that magical world, the Dreamworld, in which memory and yearning and symbols come together with no reliance on time or logic, in the place where things combine to bring solace to damaged souls." Lowry continues, "All of this is orchestrated by Littlest, the one who fears her own power until she comes to terms with it and accepts her own growth." The character of Littlest is the center of GOSSAMER. "Littlest is the heart and hope of the play," comments Frank. "She becomes part of John and the Woman as she guides their journeys. As she tries to figure out her place in the world, her discoveries lead to a greater faith in herself. This, in turn, leads to the restoration of hope for John and the Woman."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Lois Lowry is known for her versatility and invention as a writer. She was born in Hawaii and grew up in New York, Pennsylvania and Japan. After several years at Brown University, she turned to her family and writing. She is the author of more than thirty books for young adults, including the popular *Anastasia Krupnik* series. She has received countless honors, among them the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, the

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Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award, the California Young Reader's Medal and the Mark Twain Award. She received Newbery Medals for two of her novels, *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*. Her first novel, *A Summer to Die*, was awarded the International Reading Association's Children's Book Award.

Writing about both humorous subjects and serious issues has sustained Lois Lowry through her own hard times. Her son Grey was killed in the crash of his fighter plane in 1995. Lowry has acknowledged this as the most difficult period in her life, but through her steady work as an author, she has persevered. Lowry said, "His death in the cockpit of a warplane tore away a piece of my world. But it left me, too, with a wish to honor him by joining the many others trying to find a way to end conflict on this very fragile earth." Many of Lowry's works deal with somber topics, but Lowry manages to mix the comic and the tragic skillfully in a way that makes them enticing to readers both young and old. Following her characters as they cope with hard times, often with humor, helps her readers face the same issues. Lowry states, "My books have varied in content and style. Yet it seems that all of them deal, essentially, with the same general theme: the importance of human connections. I try, through writing, to convey my passionate awareness that we live intertwined on this planet and that our future depends upon our caring more, and doing more, for one another."

Today, Lowry remains active by continuing to write and speaking at personal appearances. She divides her time between a home in Cambridge and an 1840s farmhouse in Maine.

**ARTISTIC STAFF**

Director	Jeff Frank
Scenic Designer	Bruce Brockman
Costume Designer	Kim Instenes
Lighting Designer/Associate Artist	Jason Fassl
Sound Designer/Associate Artist	Josh Schmidt
Puppet Designer/Props Director	Mark Hare
Fight Director/ Associate Artistic Director	John Maclay

**ADULT ACTORS**

Woman	Flora Coker
Ensemble	Brian J. Gill*
Most Ancient	Richard Halverson*
Young Woman	Courtney Marie Jones
Thin Elderly	Mark Metcalf*
Fastidious	Laura Nicholas*

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

**YOUNG ACTORS**

John

Littlest

Ensemble 1/Toby

Ensemble 2/Dowager

Ensemble 3/Soldier

**Day Cast**

Richard Heim  
Kenosha

Clarise White  
Cedarburg

Alexis Block  
Fox Point

Lauren Wimmer  
Pewaukee

Eric Schabla  
Milwaukee

**Night Cast**

John Brotherhood  
Wauwatosa

Casey Tutton  
Shorewood

Mia Imperl  
Oconomowoc

Maggie Shelledy  
Milwaukee

Sam Mullooly  
Wauwatosa

**PERFORMANCE DATES**

GOSSAMER opens Friday, September 19 at 7:00 p.m. in the Todd Wehr Theater at the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts. The 1:00 p.m. performance on Sunday, October 5 will be interpreted for the deaf and hard of hearing patrons. The full schedule of family performances includes:

Fridays: September 19 and October 3 at 7:00 p.m.  
Saturdays: September 20 at 7:00 p.m.  
September 27 at 1:00 p.m.  
October 4 at 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.  
Sundays: September 21 & 28 at 1:00 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.  
October 5 at 1:00 p.m.

**TICKET INFORMATION**

Ticket prices for GOSSAMER range from \$10.50 - \$33.50. Tickets may be purchased online at [FirstStage.org](http://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**

**Jeff Frank (Wauwatosa) – Director/Artistic Director**

Jeff has been First Stage's artistic director since February 2003. Previously he had

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served as First Stage's education director/associate artistic director. Jeff is a native of Wisconsin who earned a BFA in theater from UW-Whitewater and went on to the University of Utah, earning a MFA in child drama. Over the past several seasons, Jeff has directed many productions including SLEEPING BEAUTY, 12 DAYS – A MILWAUKEE CHRISTMAS, TUCK EVERLASTING, THUMBELINA, TOM SAWYER, SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON, LILLY'S PURPLE PLASTIC PURSE, A LITTLE HOUSE CHRISTMAS, THE HOBBIT, A MIDNIGHT CRY, THE MAGIC MRS. PIGGLE-WIGGLE! THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER, HOLES, MISS NELSON IS MISSING! and PERSEUS BAYOU.

**Bruce Brockman (Whitefish Bay) – Scenic Designer**

Bruce works as a professional freelance scene designer and scenic artist. Recent design credits include LES MISERABLES and WHITE CHRISTMAS for Music Theatre of Wichita, CAROUSEL for University of Michigan's Music Theatre Program and SEVEN GUITARS for University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where Bruce serves as Chair and Professor of Design. Other credits include: Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Montana Repertory Theatre, American Festival Ballet, Idaho Repertory Theatre, KUID Public Television and numerous productions for the University of Idaho and Oklahoma State University. Bruce has also served as the President of the United States Institute for Theatre Technology.

**Kim Instenes (Racine) – Costume Designer**

Kim is a freelance costume and make-up designer working for the Milwaukee/Chicago area. Her past design credits for First Stage include A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD, THE GIVER and PERSEUS BAYOU. Kim has also designed for productions at Milwaukee Shakespeare, the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Utah Shakespearean Festival and the Racine Theatre Guild, just to name a few. She is also the costume shop supervisor at the University of Wisconsin Parkside, where she has designed a number of productions including IMAGINARY INVALID, PRIDE AND PREJUDICE and THE TROJAN WAR.

**Jason Fassl (Milwaukee) – Lighting Designer/Associate Artist**

This is Jason's eighth production for First Stage Children's Theater. Some of Jason's previous First Stage designs include A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD, THE QUILTMAKER'S GIFT, GREEN GABLES, THE SHAKESPEARE STEALER, and A MIDNIGHT CRY. Other lighting designs this season include THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING and RUMORS at Peninsula Players, WELL and BROOKLYN BOY at Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, LOMBARDI and THE PAVILION at Next Act Theatre, GOSSAMER, Harry Connick, Jr.'s THE HAPPY ELF and WITNESS at First Stage, THE PERSIANS and THE TWO OF US at Renaissance Theaterworks, GREATER TUNA and

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GUYS ON ICE at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, THE MAIDS at Writer's Theatre and TRUE WEST at the Madison Repertory Theatre. Jason has also done lighting designs for The Pampered Chef, National City Bank, Kohl's and The Boys and Girls Club of Milwaukee.

**Josh Schmidt (Mequon) – Sound Designer/Associate Artist**

Josh is excited to return to First Stage after previously designing A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD, THE GIVER, LILLY'S PURPLE PLASTIC PURSE, 12 DAYS – A MILWAUKEE CHRISTMAS and THE WATSONS GO TO BIRMINGHAM – 1963. Recent work includes the successful world premiere and off-Broadway premiere of his first opera THE ADDING MACHINE at Next Theater Company. Regionally, he has designed at major venues in New York, Washington, D.C., Delaware, California and Wisconsin. He is a recipient of the 2003 – 2005 NEA/TCG Career Development Program Award and was named one of nine emerging designers in *Entertainment/Design* magazine in 2004.

**Mark Hare (Milwaukee) – Puppet Designer/Props Director**

Mark currently serves as First Stage's props master. Last season, in addition to his prop master duties, Mark designed scenery for First Stage's 12 DAYS – A MILWAUKEE CHRISTMAS, IF YOU GIVE A MOUSE A COOKIE, CLICK CLACK MOO: COWS THAT TYPE, 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 ten summer seasons, Mark has been the prop master for American Players Theatre.

**John Maclay (Wauwatosa) - Fight Director/Associate Artistic Director**

John has been with First Stage in varying capacities since 2000 and has recently directed FERDINAND THE BULL, GREEN GABLES, THE SHAKESPEARE STEALER and numerous productions for First Stage's Young Company. His work has also been seen in various forms at Bunny Gumbo Theatre Company, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Defiant Theatre, The Skylight, Milwaukee Shakespeare (which he co-founded in 2000), Bialystock and Bloom, Festival Theatre, Interlochen Arts Academy and many others. At First Stage, John serves as associate artistic director and as director of the Theater Academy. John also serves as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and is vice president of the newly formed Lake Geneva Theatre Company. In addition to coordinating the fights for GOSSAMER, this season John will also direct PETER AND THE WOLF (a collaboration with the Milwaukee Ballet and the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra), WITNESS and HOW I BECAME A PIRATE.

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### **ACTOR BIOGRAPHIES**

#### **Flora Coker (Milwaukee) - Woman**

Flora is excited to return to First Stage Children's Theater having previously performed in LILLY'S PURPLE PLASTIC PURSE. She moved from Virginia to Milwaukee where she was a member of Theatre X from its founding in 1970 to its close in 2004. Flora helped create original plays with Theatre X, touring nationally and in Europe and Japan. Other Milwaukee theaters she has appeared with include Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Milwaukee Mask and Puppet Theatre, the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Next Act Theatre and the Florentine Opera Company.

#### **Brian J. Gill (Milwaukee) – Ensemble**

Brian is thrilled to be back at First Stage where he recently appeared in A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD. At First Stage, he also teaches Shakespeare classes for the Theater Academy. Brian's Milwaukee credits include Milwaukee Shakespeare and Renaissance Theaterworks. Chicago credits include the Goodman Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Victory Gardens, Drury Lane Oakbrook, Remy Bumppo Theatre Company, Apple Tree and Provision Theater. Regional credits include Theatre at the Center, Indiana; the Illinois and Texas Shakespeare Festivals; and the historic Ford's Theatre in Washington D.C. Brian trained at the Globe Theatre, London, with the first International Artistic Fellowship.

#### **Richard Halverson (Milwaukee) – Most Ancient**

Richard has an MA in music history and theater arts from the University of Minnesota. Following his service in the Army he joined the Cleveland Play House as an apprentice in 1957. The following year he became a member of the Actor's Equity and remained a member of the Cleveland company for 30 years. During that time he also acted for The Missouri Repertory and the Kansas City Lyric Opera. He arrived in Milwaukee in 1988 and has acted with the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Next Act Theatre and the Skylight Opera Theatre. Among his favorite plays are THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST, DANCING AT LUGHNASA, TWELFTH NIGHT, THE SUNSHINE BOYS, TRYING, THE MYSTERY OF IRMA VELD, NOISES OFF, THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES, GREATER TUNA and AMADEUS.

#### **Courtney Marie Jones (Milwaukee) – Young Woman**

Courtney is returning to First Stage Children's Theater after performing in A YEAR WITH

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FROG AND TOAD. She was most recently seen at Door Shakespeare and she has also performed with Milwaukee Shakespeare, the Skylight Opera Theatre and Quasi Productions. Recent credits include: Texas Shakespeare Festival, In Tadem Theatre, the national tour of A CHRISTMAS CAROL and the Racine Theatre Guild. Favorite roles include: Lady Mortimer/Lady Percy in HENRY IV PART 1, Constanze in AMADEUS, Catherine in PROOF and Sally Bowles in CABERET. She received her BFA in Musical Theater from the UW-Stevens Point. Courtney has also built costumes for Lyric Opera, The Met, the New York City Opera and various Broadway shows.

**Mark Metcalf (Bayside) – Thin Elderly**

This is Mark's seventh appearance at First Stage. Most recently he was title character in THE GIVER. He also appeared as characters Captain Jaggery in THE TRUE CONFESSIONS OF CHARLOTTE DOYLE, the Old Man in A CHRISTMAS STORY, E in EINSTEIN: HERO OF THE MIND, several characters in A MIDNIGHT CRY, and Mr. Sir in HOLES. Mark has appeared in films including "Animal House" and television including "Seinfeld" and "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," as well as more than 100 plays in the course of 37 years as a professional actor. Mark now runs an educational program for the Milwaukee International Film Festival called the Student Screenwriting Competition, from which he produces a short film each year from screenplays written by high school students.

**Laura Nicholas (Lake Geneva) – Fastidious**

Laura returns to First Stage after previously appearing in THE GIVER. She has also appeared in the touring production of AND THEN THEY CAME FOR ME and is First Stage Theater Academy's associate. Laura is originally from Pennsylvania and has worked in New York City and Chicago.

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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