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First Stage Co-Commissions Play; Plans Workshop in August

MILWAUKEE, Wis.— First Stage Children’s Theater is teaming up with Oregon Children’s Theatre to co-commission GOSSAMER, a play based on two-time Newbery Medal-winning author Lois Lowry’s newest book. Lowry will be writing the stage adaptation, which is her first play.

The theater companies have many commonalities that make them ideal partners: a commitment to age appropriate casting, acting schools that prepare students for the stage, youth involvement in the writing process, a commitment to develop new work and programming that gives voice to the disenfranchised. The Artistic Directors of both theaters for youth, Stan Foote, of Oregon Children’s Theatre, and Jeff Frank, of First Stage Children’s Theater, share a high regard for Lowry’s work and a common vision for GOSSAMER. Foote and Frank have a mutual respect for each other’s work and each other’s companies that moves them to partner on this project and many other projects in the future. They cemented their partnership at New Visions/New Voices 2006, a biennial national working forum for plays-in-progress for young audiences at The Kennedy Center, and commissioned Lowry to adapt her book into a play.

From August 13 to 15, First Stage will bring Lowry and Oregon Children’s Theatre’s Foote to Milwaukee for the first of three script development workshops. On August 13 and 15, from 1 to 5 p.m., the directors and actors will work on sections of the script with Lowry present. There will be a full reading of the script and a discussion will follow. On August 14, Lowry will have time to rewrite portions of the script for the August 15 reading. This process will afford Lowry time and

insight allowing her to further develop the script.

The second workshop, a staged reading of GOSSAMER, will take place in Portland on March 10, 2008, which First Stage's Frank will attend.

First Stage and Oregon Children's Theatre are submitting GOSSAMER to the New Visions/New Voices program at The Kennedy Center in April 2008. With the exception of the few workshops already planned, GOSSAMER is being created in the digital world of e-mails and phone calls because the collaborators are spread across the country. Through the workshop, the collaborators hope to gather insight on balancing the fantasy and reality in this play. At times they are separate, but fantasy and reality must also collide in complex ways.

First Stage plans to bring GOSSAMER to the stage in September 2008, and Oregon Children's Theater will present GOSSAMER in October 2008.

"Lois creates really powerful stories and she is never afraid of dealing with controversial issues. This play is about a sense of hope of what can be, without sugarcoating the serious theme," said Frank. "She creates this fantastical world with a blending of wonder and some harsh reality. GOSSAMER really shows how memory informs who we become and how we cope."

As the newest dream-giver, Littlest must learn to help humans through the challenges of life by offering them dreams collected from the fragments of their memories. She must also protect them from the evil Sinisteed and the nightmares they inflict. It is a big job for such a tiny being, but with the help of her mentor, she gives strength to a lonely older woman and the troubled young boy she is caring for, helping them to face their histories and to move beyond them to new places of hope.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lois Lowry was born in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1937. Her father was in the military, so

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much of her youth was spent living in different places, including New York, Pennsylvania and Japan. At the age of nineteen she was married and between 1958 and 1962 she gave birth to four children: Alix, Grey, Kristin and Benjamin. Her family moved to Maine in 1963, and Lowry received her bachelor of arts from the University of Southern Maine. Today Lois Lowry lives in Cambridge, Mass. with her dog Bandit.

She has published novels known for expressing realistic life experience. Lowry believes that her books vary in content and style, but that all of her books essentially deal with the importance of human connection.

Lois Lowry is the author of more than 30 books for young people. Her first book, “A Summer to Die For,” was awarded the Reading Association’s Children’s Book Award. Lowry was honored with the Newbery Medal for two of her books, “Number the Stars” in 1990 and “The Giver” in 1994. She also wrote the “Anastasia Krupnik” book series, “Autumn Street” and “Rabble Starkey.” “Gossamer” is her newest book.

First Stage Children’s Theater is Milwaukee’s premier, professional family theater. Founded in 1987, the mission of the company is to touch hearts and transform lives by creating exceptional, professional theater experiences for young people and families. First Stage is member of Theater Communications Group (TCG), ASSITEJ/USA, AATE and Americans for the Arts, as well as Milwaukee Arts Partners and Theater Wisconsin. First Stage is a cornerstone member of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF).

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