



CHILDREN'S THEATER • IN-SCHOOL EDUCATION • THEATER ACADEMY

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**First Stage Children's Theater kicks off its 23rd season with
JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS**

Book, music and lyrics by Joan Cushing

Adapted from the book by Barbara Park, illustrated by Denise Brunkus

Directed by John Maclay

Sponsored by Northwestern Mutual Foundation

**Todd Wehr Theater, Marcus Center for the Performing Arts
October 16 – November 14, 2009**

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

Milwaukee, Wis. (September 14, 2009) – The irreverent and irrepressible Junie B. Jones – the heroine of Barbara Park's popular series of books – is the star of this musical chronicling Junie B's kindergarten life as she awaits the birth of her new baby brother in First Stage Children's Theater's fall production, JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS. The show runs October 16 through November 14, 2009 at the Todd Wehr Theater in the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, 929 N. Water Street in 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.**

The spunky kindergartner Junie B. Jones is about to become a big sister, and she's not happy about the impending arrival one bit. That is, until she hears her Grandma Miller

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First Stage opens JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS/add one

describe her new baby brother as “the cutest little monkey.” Now she’s going to have the “bestest” Show and Tell ever – a monkey brother! That Grace and Lucille will be so jealous!

Junie B’s friends go bananas for the first glimpse of her primate baby brother, offering Junie B. their jewelry, snack tickets, even Grace’s brand-new pink hightop sneakers! Things spiral out of control, and Junie’s high-jinks land her in “the Boss of the School’s” office. It is up to Grampa Miller to help Junie understand how things got so mixed up.

The musical includes memorable tunes, including Junie B’s personal anthem, “The World According to Me;” the tender “Which Number Will I Be Now?,” during which Junie B. questions how her family will change with a new baby; and “Words! Words! Words!,” celebrating the humor of confusing phrases. Junie B. lives her life with irrepressible charm, and manages to learn important lessons on identity and change while enduring the inevitable trials and tribulations of childhood – all woven with a little mischief.

“We get to watch a truthful story of a young child coming to terms with a new baby – and ultimately finding that the new baby is a great joy for their family,” says **John Maclay, the show’s director and First Stage’s associate artistic director.** “So often we see children in literature depicted behaving as we would like them to behave, yet Junie B. gives us a hilarious view of how some five-year-olds actually behave.” Maclay continues, “Her world is ‘Junie-centric’ – a common trait in a young person her age. She is brash, energetic, funny and maybe just a little scheming. But really, really funny.”

First Stage Artistic Director Jeff Frank remarks on First Stage’s production of this show by saying, “Joan Cushing’s adaptation and music for this production are delightful. Her musical adaptation of MISS NELSON IS MISSING! in 2004 was a tremendous hit

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First Stage opens JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS/add two

for us.”

Frank continues, “With Junie’s character, Joan has managed to capture her vibrancy and zest for life, while also showing us the heart of a young girl who has genuine fears about the new arrival in her family. It’s this balance of humor and heart that makes the piece work so well.”

Author Barbara Park (born April 21, 1947) grew up in Mount Holly Township, New Jersey. From 1965 to 1967, she attended Rider College, later finishing her B.S. in 1969 at the University of Alabama. She is the author of the popular *Junie B. Jones* children’s series. She has received over 40 awards for her books, including *25 Children’s Choice* awards.

Playwright and lyricist Joan Cushing, a former elementary school teacher and cabaret performer, is best known for her political satirical revue, *MRS. FOGGYBOTTOM & FRIENDS*. She has adapted seven popular children’s books as musicals, receiving over 200 productions and two national tours, including *MISS NELSON IS MISSING!*, winner of the 2003 National Children’s Theatre Festival; *PETITE ROUGE: A CAJUN RED RIDING HOOD* (2007 NY Musical Theatre Festival); and *HEIDI* (with playwright Martha King De Silva). Other theatres which have produced her work include Seattle Children’s Theatre, Childsplay Theatre, Omaha Theatre Company, Children’s Theatre of Charlotte, Dallas Children’s Theatre, Orlando Shakespeare Festival, North Shore Music Theatre, Walnut Street Theatre, Stage One Louisville, Nashville Children’s Theatre, Oregon Children’s Theatre, Manhattan Children’s Theatre, and California Theatre Center. According to *TYA Magazine*, she is “the most produced playwright in children’s theatre.”

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First Stage opens JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS/add three

Director John Maclay has been with First Stage since 2003 and has most recently directed HOW I BECAME A PIRATE, WITNESS, PETER AND THE WOLF, FERDINAND THE BULL, GREEN GABLES and THE SHAKESPEARE STEALER. John has also directed productions of ROMEO AND JULIET and MACBETH for the Young Company, First Stage's pre-professional training program for high school students. As an actor, John has appeared at First Stage in A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD, THE QUILTMAKER'S GIFT, PERSEUS BAYOU, HOLES and MIKE MULLIGAN AND HIS STEAM SHOVEL. John is First Stage's associate artistic director and director of the Theater Academy, one of the largest theater arts training programs for young people in the nation. In addition to his work at First Stage, John serves as an adjunct faculty member of the UW-Milwaukee theatre department and has taught at Carroll College, Lawrence University, North Central College and the Interlochen Arts Academy.

The adult actor cast of JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS includes **Elaine Wyler** (as Mrs./Grandma Miller), **Beth Mulkerron** (as Mother/Ensemble), **Rick Pendzich** (as Father/Principal/Ensemble), and **Robert J. Spencer** (member of Actor's Equity Association, the union of professional Actors and Stage Managers, as Grampa Miller/Ensemble).

Young performer roles are double-cast. The young performers in the "Awesome" cast of JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS includes **Kamilah Lay** of Milwaukee (as Junie B. Jones), **Alison Pogorelc** of Milwaukee (as Lucille), **Payton Wade** of Milwaukee (as Grace), **Timothy Reese** of Waukesha (as Crybaby William) and **Matthew Welden** of Muskego (as Meanie Jim). The young performers in the "Brilliant" cast are **Mari Duckler** of Mequon (as Junie B. Jones), **Taylor Anne Stefanski** of Racine (as Lucille), **Danielle McKnight** of Dousman (as Grace), **Austin Zdziarski** of Oak Creek (as Crybaby William), and **Nicholas Gray** of Mequon (as Meanie Jim).

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First Stage opens JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS/add four

The Artistic Staff for JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS includes: **Paul Helm** (Music Director), **Molly Rhode** (Choreographer), **Brandon Kirkham** (Costume/Scenic Designer), **Kurt Schnabel** (Lighting Designer), **Ernie Brusubardis** (Sound Designer), **Mark Hare** (Props Director), **Sarah Hoffmann** (Production Stage Manager, member of Actor's Equity Association, the union of professional Actors and Stage Managers) and **Matt Grundman** (Assistant Stage Manager).

Tickets for JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS start at \$10.50. Tickets may be purchased online at www.FirstStage.org or through the Marcus Center box office, in person at 929 N. Water Street in downtown 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.

Performance dates: JUNIE B. JONE'S AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS opens Friday, October 16 at 7:00 p.m. Other performances are held: Saturday, October 17 at 3:30 p.m.; Sunday, October 18 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.; Saturday, October 24 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.; Sunday, October 25 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.; Friday, October 30 at 7:00 p.m.; Sunday, November 1 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.; Saturday, November 7 at 1:00, 3:30 and 7:00 p.m.; Sunday, November 8 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.; and Saturday, November 14 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m. The performance on Sunday, November 8 at 3:30 p.m. is interpreted for the deaf and hard of hearing patrons.

Special events for JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS

Friday, October 16 at 7:00 p.m.: 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, approximately one mile from the Marcus Center. Patrons

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First Stage opens JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS/add five

will have the opportunity to meet and mingle with the cast and crew of JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS while enjoying refreshments, courtesy of First Stage.

Friday, October 16 through Sunday, October 18: First Stage will celebrate special family and friends, including grandparents, aunts and uncles, or close family friends by offering patrons “Junie B.’s Grown Up Goody Bag.” These goody bags will be offered to the first 40 families to enter the theater for each performance between October 16 and 18. Goody bags will include special coupon offers and giveaway items from local establishments, including Rishi Tea and the Florentine Opera Company.

Friday, October 30 at 7:00 p.m.: Join First Stage for “Junie B.’s Big Fat Halloween Party.” Children are encouraged to wear their Halloween costumes to this performance; all children in costume will receive a coupon for a free cookie to redeem during intermission. Winners will receive a free First Stage t-shirt, and one grand prize winner will also receive a copy of the book “Junie B. Jones and a Little Monkey Business.”

FACT SHEET

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

Dates: Friday, October 16 through Saturday, November 14, 2009

Description: In this hilarious musical, the spirited kindergartner Junie B. Jones – from Barbara Park’s popular series of books – is anticipating the arrival of her new baby brother, whom she’s convinced is a REAL MONKEY! It’s a musical journey with lessons of identity and change, with a whole bunch of “monkey business” thrown in for fun.

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First Stage opens JUNIE B. JONES AND A LITTLE MONKEY BUSINESS/add six

Performances:

Friday, October 16 at 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, October 17 at 3:30 p.m.

Sunday, October 18 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.

Saturday, October 24 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.

Sunday, October 25 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.

Friday, October 30 at 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 1 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.

Saturday, November 7 at 1:00, 3:30 and 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 8 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.

Saturday, November 14 at 1:00 and 3:30 p.m.

Ticket prices: Start at \$10.50.

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

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 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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