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Contact Lisa Elias 414.267.2944

First Stage Children's Theater
presents the "can't miss" holiday musical of the season,
Harry Connick, Jr.'s

THE HAPPY ELF

Music and lyrics by Harry Connick, Jr.
Book by Andrew Fishman

Directed by John Rando

Sponsored by EdVest

November 28 – December 24, 2008
Todd Wehr Theater, Marcus Center for the Performing Arts

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

Milwaukee, Wisconsin (October 31, 2008) - Milwaukee families can celebrate the holidays with First Stage Children's Theater's THE HAPPY ELF, a new musical by Grammy® Award-winning and Tony® Award-nominated composer and lyricist Harry Connick, Jr. The show runs November 28 through December 24, 2008 at the Todd Wehr Theater in the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, 929 N. Water Street in downtown Milwaukee.

This musical version of THE HAPPY ELF is the latest evolution of a notion that began as a song on Connick's best-selling 2003 CD "Harry for the Holidays." "I had this idea of an incredibly enthusiastic elf in Santa's workshop," Connick explains, "and after that, it was just a matter of sitting down and putting words and music to it." Next came an animated NBC television special and subsequent DVD, and now the stage production.

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First Stage Presents THE HAPPY ELF /add one

First Stage Managing Director Rob Goodman saw great potential in THE HAPPY ELF when it first appeared last year as a workshop production by Kansas City's Coterie's Lab for New Family Musicals. "We saw the great potential, especially in the phenomenal music," said Goodman. "What a great way to introduce kids to jazz. We wanted to take it to the next stage of development."

Tony® Award-winning Broadway director John Rando shared Goodman's response. "It felt like there were four or five potential holiday standards that Harry had created," he said of his response to the music Connick initially created. "At the same time, given its origin as a television special, there was simply not enough music in the earlier version. We needed to find places in the story where plot and character could be related in song, which was the key."

Working with Andrew Fishman, who wrote *The Happy Elf*, Rando and Goodman developed a revised version and presented it to Connick in a reading last May. Connick was so enthusiastic that he wrote six additional songs. Further work over the summer has yielded the nine-character play, with on-stage accompaniment by a jazz trio that First Stage will present in what Rando calls "a classic, old-school tryout."

The musical tells the story of Eubie, a North Pole elf whose constant exuberance can wear others out. Eubie's overly optimistic outlook is put to the test when he decides to bring Christmas joy to the sad little town of Bluesville, which has fallen into a state of permanent blues. If Eubie can fix Bluesville, he may win a coveted spot on Santa's sleigh team.

Goodman describes Connick as the perfect collaborator for a project of this kind. "Because of his own family, he understood how a musical of this type must work for kids of different ages as well as for their parents. And his feeling for children is so strong that we realized two of the characters had to be kids, for Harry."

Rando adds that First Stage is similarly ideal for creating a musical of this type. "They have strong production values, a strong audience base, a supportive community and 20 years experience in doing this work, plus an enormous educational component,

First Stage Presents **THE HAPPY ELF** /add two

which is key in the creation of a production of this type.”

“There is a hunger from the public for a show like this, with a strong message about friendship and caring and delightful, surprising music,” Rando continues. “As the father of a seven-year-old, I’m as excited as anyone that there’s a play that both he and I can enjoy.”

“People are looking for a real family experience,” Goodman agrees. “They want to laugh out loud, and be touched. Harry’s brilliant music makes a perfect package. I think THE HAPPY ELF will become a classic.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A career professional on the business side of the entertainment industry, Andrew Fishman has worked in non-profit arts administration for much of the past twenty-five years. As a writer, he has created numerous film and television projects including the original screenplay TON 80, which was purchased by Mad Guy Films in 1999 as a starring vehicle for its principal owner, Madonna. His relationship with Harry Connick, Jr. began in 2003 as a writer for the NBC special “Harry for The Holidays” with comedy sketches performed by Harry and his guests Nathan Lane and Whoopi Goldberg. The following year, the two joined forces for an animated holiday special “The Happy Elf,” based on a song by Connick. The show featured the voices of Harry Connick, Jr., Lewis Black, Carol Kane and Mickey Rooney. The special aired nationally in November 2005 and has gone on to become a top selling holiday DVD. Born in Massachusetts, Andrew grew up in Florida, but lived briefly in Whitefish Bay. His memories of Wisconsin are fond but dim since his family moved away shortly after he graduated from first grade. He is currently the Director of Programming for the State Theatre in New Brunswick, New Jersey where he lives with his wife and two small children.

ARTISTIC STAFF

Director	John Rando, SSDC
Music Director	Richard Carsey
Choreographer	Wendy Seyb, SSDC
Scenic Designer	Beowulf Boritt, USAA
Costume Designer	Kärin Kopischke, USAA
Lighting Designer / Associate Artist	Jason Fassel
Sound Designer / Associate Artist	Josh Schmidt

MUSCIANS

Bassist	John Dominguez
Percussionist	Patrick Morrow

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ADULT ACTORS

Eubie	Jared Gertner*
Gurt	Laurie Birmingham*
Burt / Security Elf	Paul Helm
Gilda	Hannah Laird*
Santa / Mayor	Michael James Leslie*
Norbert	Bryce Lord
Ham	Harris Doran*
Female Understudy	Beth Mulkerron
Male Understudy	Todd Denning*

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

YOUNG ACTORS

North Pole Cast

Bluesville Cast

Curtis	Jacob Bern Bayside	Alec Aldred Waukesha
Molly	Madison Kitchen Shorewood	Rachel Schmeling Brookfield
Girl Ensemble 1	Alyssa Sylvester Racine	Allie Babich Hartland
Boy Ensemble 1	Teddy Warren Milwaukee	Teddy Warren Milwaukee
Girl Ensemble 2	Lydia Rose Eiche Muskego	Shanna Sweeney Waukesha
Boy Ensemble 2	Trevor Olds Hartland	Justin Gaworski West Allis
Girl Ensemble 3	Emilie Thomas Pewaukee	Jessica Schmeling Brookfield
Girl Ensemble 4	Kira Patterson Fox Point	Erin Stapleton Wauwatosa

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PERFORMANCE DATES

THE HAPPY ELF opens Friday, November 28 at 7:00 p.m. in the Todd Wehr Theater at the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, 929 N. Water Street in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The 3:30 p.m. performance on Sunday, December 21 will be interpreted for hearing-impaired patrons. The full schedule of family performances includes:

Fridays	November 28, December 5, 12 & 19	7:00 P.M.
Saturdays	November 29, December 6, 13 & 20	1:00, 3:30 & 7:00 P.M.
Sundays	November 30, December 7, 14 & 21	1:00 & 3:30 P.M.
Tuesday	December 23	7:00 P.M.
Wednesdays	December 17	7:00 P.M.
	December 24	1:00 P.M.
Thursdays	December 11 & 18	7:00 P.M.

TICKET INFORMATION

Ticket prices for THE HAPPY ELF start at \$12.50. Tickets may be purchased online at www.FirstStage.org or through the Marcus Center box office, 414-273-7206, or toll free at 888-612-3500. The number for TDD (for hearing-impaired patrons) is 414-273-3080.

ARTISTIC STAFF

John Rando, SSDC (New York, NY) – Director

John Rando made his Broadway debut directing Neil Simon's THE DINNER PARTY, starring Henry Winkler and John Ritter. Other Broadway credits include URINETOWN: THE MUSICAL (2002 Tony® Award, Best Director and Outer Critics Circle Award), the Tony® nominated musical THE WEDDING SINGER, the revival of Herb Gardner's A THOUSAND CLOWNS starring Tom Selleck, and DANCE OF THE VAMPIRES, starring Michael Crawford. Rando achieved prominence in New York as director of the David Ives' comedies: MERE MORTALS (Primary Stages, John Houseman Theatre), POLISH JOKE (Manhattan Theatre Club) and ANCIENT HISTORY / ENGLISH MADE SIMPLE (Primary Stages), as well as LIVES OF THE SAINTS (Philadelphia Theatre Company and Berkshire Theatre Festival). For City Center's Encores! series, John directed the highly-acclaimed concert version of Irving Berlin and Moss Hart's FACE THE MUSIC. Also for Encores! he directed OF THEE I SING, THE PAJAMA GAME, DO RE MI and STRIKE UP THE BAND. Additional Off-Broadway credits include PIG FARM (The Roundabout Theatre), BRIGHT IDEAS (Manhattan Class Company), Peter Ackerman's THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T SAY PAST MIDNIGHT (Promenade Theatre) and COMEDY OF ERRORS (The Acting Company). John has worked extensively in regional theatre including productions at The Old Globe Theatre, The Geffen Playhouse and The Alley Theatre, among many others.

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Richard Carsey (Milwaukee) – Music Director

Richard is happy to return to First Stage, having previously music directed GREEN GABLES and HONK! He is currently Principal Conductor of The Skylight, where he also served as Artistic Director for nine seasons. Richard is currently the Pops Conductor for the Racine Symphony, as well as an active actor and pianist. He has appeared in productions at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Actor's Theatre of Louisville, Dallas Theatre Center and Hartford Stage Company - a recipient of Connecticut critics' "Circle Award" for outstanding touring production in 2005. Richard has also conducted for Cleveland's Lyric Opera, Florida State Opera, and Liceu Opera in Barcelona.

Wendy Seyb, SSDC (New York, NY) - Choreographer

Off-Broadway: WALMARTOPIA (Minetta Lane Theatre). Workshop: CHEER! (Richard Frankel Productions). Regional: THE TOXIC AVENGER (George Street Playhouse, NJ) and THE WORLD GOES 'ROUND (The Prince Music theatre, PA). New York Theater: SUCH GOOD FRIENDS (Julia Miles Theatre), BUT I'M A CHEERLEADER - (Theatre at St. Clements), SCHOOL DAZE A NEW DANCE COMEDY (37 Arts), DIE HARD: THE PUPPET MUSICAL (45TH Street Theatre), THE GREAT CONJURER (Kirk Theatre) and WEST BANK (La Mama). Dance Comedy: DRA GALA hosted by Bill T. Jones (Dance Theatre Workshop), HERE, Joyce Soho (Zipper Theatre). Winner of The Golden Nose Award, and Innovation Theatre Award nominee.

Beowulf Boritt (New York, NY) – Scenic Designer

Broadway: THE 25th ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE, LOVEMUSIK, JAY JOHNSON: THE TWO AND ONLY. Off-Broadway: more than 50 productions including THE LAST FIVE YEARS, SAINT LUCY'S EYES, HANK WILLIAMS: LOST HIGHWAY, MISS JULIE, PUBLIC, MTC, 2ND STAGE, NEW GROUP and MMC. 2007 and 2008 Barnum & Bailey Circus. Awards: Obie, Audelco, 3 Drama Desk nominations.

Kärin Kopischke, USAA (Fish Creek) – Costume Designer

Kärin is pleased to have designed at some of the finest theatres across the country, including world premieres at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, American Conservatory Theatre, the Goodman Theatre, the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Huntington Theatre Company, the Minnesota Opera, Kansas City Repertory Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, the Children's Theatre Company, Peninsula Players and classics and revivals at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Long Wharf Theatre, the Kennedy Center, Crossroads Theatre Company, San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, California Shakespeare Festival, Arizona Theatre Company, Milwaukee Shakespeare, The Skylight, Court Theatre and Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. She is a recipient of the Joseph Jefferson Award, the AriZoni Award and was nominated for the Prague Quadrennial. Kärin has taught costume design at several universities, including DePaul and Northwestern.

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Jason Fassl (Milwaukee) – Lighting Designer / Associate Artist

This is Jason's ninth production for First Stage Children's Theater. Some of Jason's previous First Stage designs include GOSSAMER, 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, and WITNESS at First Stage, THE PERSIANS and THE TWO OF US at Renaissance Theaterworks, GREATER TUNA and GUYS ON ICE at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, and the majority of productions at Fireside Dinner Theater. Jason designs lighting for corporate as well, including productions for The Pampered Chef, Northwestern Mutual, Johnson Controls, and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Milwaukee.

Josh Schmidt (Mequon) – Sound Designer / Associate Artist

Josh is excited to return to First Stage after previously designing GOSSAMER, 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 Theatre 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.

MUSICIANS BIOGRAPHIES

John Dominguez (New York, NY) - Bassist

John is thrilled to be back working with First Stage. He was previously involved with their productions of A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD, HONK! and SEUSSICAL and, until recently, was on the teaching faculty of Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra. John is the house bassist at the Fireside Dinner Theater, and was recently seen in the production of ELLINGTON at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Stackner Cabaret.

Patrick Morrow (Austin, TX) – Percussionist

Patrick is happy to be back in Wisconsin after spending the past two years as a freelance drummer in Austin, Texas, and touring drummer for The Two Timin' Four. Patrick was previously involved with First Stage for the productions of HONK! and SEUSSICAL. Prior to moving to Austin, Patrick was in the band for HOLLYWOOD SINGS at the Fireside Dinner Theater. He has also performed with rockabilly legends Wanda Jackson, Dale Hawkins, Joe Clay, and modern roots/rockabilly artists Big Sandy & His Fly-Rite Boys.

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ACTOR BIOGRAPHIES

Jared Gertner (New York, NY) – Eubie

Jared's Broadway credits include William Barfee in THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE for the last year of its run. Prior to that, he spent a year playing Barfee in the San Francisco Company and The Boston Company productions of SPELLING BEE, for which he won an IRNE Award for Best Actor. This past summer, Jared played Seymour in LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS at the Paper Mill Playhouse and created the role of Warren in the premiere of Adam Gwon's musical ORDINARY DAYS at Pennsylvania Centre Stage. Other NY credits: The Off-Broadway run of the improv show DON'T QUIT YOUR NIGHT JOB; the premiere of the play ANATOMY 1968 (Theatre Row, SPF); the premiere of the musical CORDUROY (TheatreWorks USA); MY FAVORITE YEAR (Musicals Tonight!); and MINIMUM WAGE (NY Fringe). Regional: Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, The Repertory Theatre of St Louis, Paper Mill Playhouse, Pennsylvania Centre Stage, Orpheum Theatre (Omaha) and 11th Hour Theatre Company (Philadelphia). Film: *The Suicide Auditions* and *Between Love and Goodbye*. Education: NYU's Tisch, CAP21. Jared is also a theatre educator and has taught young performers in NYC and around the country.

Laurie Birmingham (Milwaukee) – Gurt

Laurie Birmingham is happy to return to First Stage after most recently appearing in BUNNICULA. Some of her local theater credits included the Milwaukee Repertory Theater's productions of EURYDICE, RICHARD III, A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN, THE MEMORY OF WATER, DANCING AT LUGHNASA, YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU, BURIED CHILD and THE FOREIGNER, among other. Additional theater credits include TARTUFFE and CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF at Alabama Shakespeare Festival, A WINTER'S TALE, MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR and TWELFTH NIGHT at Utah Shakespearean Festival and Asolo Theatre Company's NICHOLAS NICKLEBY and THE IMMIGRANT. Laurie has also performed in productions at the Pioneer Square Theatre in Seattle, The Roxy Theatre in Atlanta, and The Pantages Theatre in Los Angeles

Paul Helm (Wind Lake) – Burt / Security Elf

Paul is excited to be back at First Stage where he has previously appeared in A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD, THE QUILTMAKER'S GIFT and SEUSSICAL. He has also performed, directed and music directed with the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, The Skylight, Florentine Opera Company, American Folklore theatre, Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse, Greenbrier Valley Theatre and the UW-Platteville Heartland Festival. Recent credits include SOMETIMES A SONG: THE MUSIC OF DAN FOGELBERG; JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT, I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE; THE MIDNIGHT ANGEL; THE SOUND OF MUSIC; PATIENCE; SOUTH PACIFIC; LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS and THE WIZARD OF OZ. Upcoming productions include GUYS ON ICE (the Milwaukee Repertory Theater), THE MAGIC FLUTE (Florentine Opera Company), THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE (The Skylight), THE PRODUCERS, FOREVER PLAID and YOU'RE A GOOD MAN CHARLIE BROWN (Heartland Festival).

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Hannah Laird (New York, NY) – Gilda

Hannah is very excited to be in Milwaukee performing for First Stage's THE HAPPY ELF. Most recently Hannah appeared in the a cappella musical IN TRANSIT (Ali) at the York Theatre Company in New York City. She is also an original cast member of FINDING NEMO – THE MUSICAL (Nemo/Deb) at Disney's Animal Kingdom. Other credits include A CHRISTMAS CAROL and THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST at Great Lakes Theater Festival, GREASE at Carousel Dinner Theatre, Cain Park's SECRET GARDEN, SONGS FOR A NEW WORLD, tick, tick...BOOM! and BAT-BOY, as well as several roles at The Eugene O'Neill Musical Theatre Conference. Hannah is a graduate of The Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatory of Music.

Michael James Leslie (New York, NY) – Santa / Mayor

Michael James Leslie is a Cornell Law graduate who made his show business debut in the Broadway revival of HAIR. He then became the Lion in the original Broadway production of THE WIZ. Michael originated the role The Voice of the Plant in LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS in Los Angeles, London (Olivier Award for Best Musical), and the recent Broadway production and national Tour. Other productions include the Broadway production of SENATOR JOE, the national tour of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, SWEENEY TODD, GUYS AND DOLLS, BOYS FROM SYRACUSE, AIN'T MISBEHAVIN', MAN OF LA MANCHA, JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR, THE MUSIC OF ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER, CALL ME MADAM, ONCE ON THIS ISLAND, ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, MY ONE AND ONLY, ALL ABOUT US, A CHRISTMAS CAROL and AN EVENING WITH SIR TIM RICE. Michael has performed as a guest artist with Peter Nero and the Philadelphia Philharmonic, and on tour with recording star Stephanie Mills. He also appeared on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* in duet with LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS star Ellen Greene. In December 2005, Michael was nominated Best Supporting Actor by the *Denver Post* Ovation Awards for the Broadway Tour of LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS.

Bryce Lord (Milwaukee) - Norbert

Bryce is happy to be back with First Stage after previously appearing in HONK! He has also appeared onstage at The Skylight in WHITE CHRISTMAS, ROMEO AND JULIET, FLOYD COLLINS, ANYTHING GOES and LADY, BE GOOD. Other theater credits include Milwaukee Shakespeare's CYMBELINE, 1 HENRY IV, TAMING OF THE SHREW, MACBETH and MERCHANT OF VENICE for Milwaukee Shakespeare, Bialystock & Bloom's BATBOY: THE MUSICAL and THE JAMMER, and Sunset Playhouse's FOOTLOOSE, among others. Bryce has also directed and choreographed productions in the Milwaukee area for Boulevard Ensemble Theatre, Sunset Playhouse, Shorewood Players and Falls Patio Players.

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Harris Doran (New York, NY) - Ham

Harris Doran recently finished playing Jerry in LOVE JERRY at the New York Musical Theatre Festival (Outstanding Individual Performance Award). Other credits include: HAIR (Claude, Actors' Fund Concert, Broadway), AMADEUS (Mozart, Pittsburgh Public Theatre), CABARET (Emcee, Pittsburgh Public Theatre), OLIVER (Deaf West, Ovation Award Nomination), AMERICAMISFIT (Baltimore's Center Stage), BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS (Pioneer Theatre), A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, THE SEAGULL, WAITING FOR GODOT. Film & TV: "Order of the Serpentine," "2+1," "The Black Donnellys," "Malcolm in the Middle" and "Any Day Now." Upcoming: Ariel in the Bermuda Festival of Performing Arts' THE TEMPEST. Training: The Juilliard School.

Beth Mulkerron (Wauwatosa) – Female Understudy

Beth is honored to be working with First Stage Children's Theater again after previously appearing in GIGGLE, GIGGLE QUACK and A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD. Beth studied Musical Theatre at Cincinnati's Conservatory and received her BFA from Florida State. Career highlights include New York City's Off-Broadway musical REDHOOK, performing in concert with Davis Gaines and voiceover credits that include NBD's *Ed*. Additionally, Beth has performed in various performances at The Skylight or as Fay in Windfall Theatre's ANYONE CAN WHISTLE.

Todd Denning (Cudahy) – Male Understudy

Todd is proud to say that he has been a part of the First Stage family for ten years. In that time, he has worked as an actor, director, stage manager, teacher, fight choreographer, sound designer and engineer. Todd is also the co-director of the Young Company of the First Stage Theater Academy and has directed several Young Company and Classical Company Class productions, including MACBETH, THE CRUCIBLE, TARTUFFE, INHERIT THE WIND and TWELFTH NIGHT. Todd most recently appeared as Templeton and Mr. Arable in First Stage's CHARLOTTE'S WEB. He was also the director of last season's mainstage production of THE QUILTMAKER'S GIFT, and this season he directed GIGGLE, GIGGLE QUACK from First Stage's First Steps series. Todd holds a BA and MFA from the University of California-Irvine.

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,

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First Stage Presents THE HAPPY ELF /add ten

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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