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FIRST STAGE COLLABORATES WITH LOCAL, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR TO STAGE *LOVABYE DRAGON*

Wisconsin Author Barbara M. Joosse and First Stage Executive Artistic Director Jeff Frank create an enchanting musical adventure for young audiences

MILWAUKEE, Wis (January 5, 2026) – First Stage presents *Lovabye Dragon*, an enchanting musical adventure based on the *Dragon and Girl* books by best-selling Wisconsin author [Barbara M. Joosse](#). Running January 24 – February 15, 2026 at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center’s Goodman Mainstage Hall, this show is the perfect introduction to theater for young audiences.

Originally developed by First Stage in 2016, *Lovabye Dragon* was adapted for the stage by First Stage Executive Artistic Director Jeff Frank in collaboration with author Barbara M. Joosse, featuring infectious music and lyrics by Nathan Meckel and Nashville children’s music group The Happy Racers.

This enchanting musical tells the story of an unexpected friendship between a lonely girl and an even lonelier dragon. Together, they embark on a grand adventure to the farthest far away—only to face their greatest challenge yet. **Brought to life with an impressive 14-foot dragon puppet designed by [Brandon Kirkham](#),** *Lovabye Dragon* is sure to lift spirits and have audiences smiling, singing, and dancing along

“I started working on the musical with Jeff Frank a number of years ago, and it was the most exciting thing I’ve ever done in my whole career,” shared author Barbara Joosse. “I’ve written 58 books for children—a lot over my lifetime—and these are my favorites. They are full of magic and magic gives you hope that something can happen in the future, especially if you have a dragon for a best friend.”

All performances will feature interactive, hands-on lobby activities starting one hour before showtime. Led by First Stage teaching artists, these family-friendly experiences will include literacy adventures, STEM challenges, and sensory play—all designed to spark creativity and connection.

Directed by Marion Frank, the production features adult performers Christopher Feiereisen* as Troubadour, Bree Beelow* as Mother / Bad Hat, and Jesse Winberg as Father / Dragon. They will be

joined by 10 young performers in two alternating five-person casts, continuing First Stage's tradition of youth-focused theater. [Full cast and creative team listed here.](#)

"First Stage has always been my second home," said Marion Frank. "I am delighted to be making my professional directing debut with Lovabье Dragon."

Recommended for families with young people ages 3-8 and brave explorers of all ages. The show runs approximately 55 minutes with no intermission. [Tickets can be purchased here](#). Prices range from \$24 to \$45 for most shows. The [Pay What You Choose Performance](#) is Friday, January 30 at 6:00 p.m., the [Sensory Friendly Performance](#) is Saturday, January 31 at 3:30 p.m., and the [Sign Language Interpreted Performance](#) is Sunday, February 15 at 1:00 p.m.

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About First Stage

Founded in 1987, First Stage is one of the nation's leading theaters for young people and families, and a driving force behind the creation of the best and most innovative plays for family audiences, theater training programs for young people, and education initiatives for its schools and community. First Stage ensures that all programming is not only accessible to its community but that it is reflective of the community it serves.

First Stage creates theater that honors young people's perspectives and sparks meaningful conversation. The company has produced more than 70 world premiere plays addressing issues relevant to today's youth. Its nationally recognized Theater Academy—one of the largest of its kind—serves students ages 3–18, building life skills through stage skills, including the Next Steps Program for neurodivergent students. As Wisconsin's leader in arts-integrated education, First Stage's Theater in Education Programs reach more than 10,000 students each year by blending theater with classroom learning.

First Stage is a member of TYA/USA, Milwaukee Theater District, Milwaukee Arts Partners, and is a cornerstone member of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF). For more information, visit firststage.org

About Barbara M. Joosse

Barbara Joosse is an award-winning American children's author known for heartfelt, imaginative stories that blend wonder, empathy, and a touch of magic. With more than fifty-seven books published worldwide and translations in nearly 30 languages, her work spans picture books, historical fiction, and magical realism. She is best known for the beloved bestseller *Mama, Do You Love Me?*, though she often says her favorite book is always the one she's writing next. A lifelong Wisconsin resident, Barbara lives in Port Washington along Lake Michigan, where the beauty and moods of the lake continue to inspire her storytelling.

About The Happy Racers

The Happy Racers are a high-energy band creating smart, playful music for kids and families alike. Known for catchy songs and joyful performances, the trio—Nathan Meckel, Mark Niemiec, and Layne Ihde—blend strong musicianship with a healthy dose of goofball fun. Their debut album Ready Set Go featured the fan-favorite "Lovabье Dragon," which received national airplay on SiriusXM's Kids Place Live and later inspired the creation of the musical. From albums and festivals to film, theater, and stages across the country, The Happy Racers deliver music fueled by heart, humor, and fun for all ages.

About Jeff Frank

Recognized as one of the top directors in the field with an expertise in developing new work, Jeff holds a BFA in Theater from the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater and an MFA in Child Drama from the University of Utah. Jeff served as First Stage's Education and Academy Director from 1996-2003, followed by a long tenure as Artistic Director before becoming Executive Artistic Director in March of 2024. As Jeff enters his 30th season, he remains committed to the power of theater to transform lives and is forever thankful to call First Stage home.

LOVABYE DRAGON

By Jeff Frank and Barbara Joosse with Music by The Happy Racers

“Let’s Go” and “We Want Your Gold” by Nathan Meckel

Lyrics by N. Meckel, B. Joose, T. Matthews, B. Glover, and B. Collin

** Appearing through an Agreement between First Stage and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States*