

BASED ON BOOKS AND CHARACTERS BY MO WILLEMS
SCRIPT AND LYRICS BY MO WILLEMS AND ADAM TOBIN
MUSIC BY DEBORAH WICKS LA PUMA
DRAMATURGY BY MEGAN ALRUTZ

PRODUCED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH HIDDEN PIGEON, LLC.

NOVEMBER 21 – DECEMBER 28, 2025

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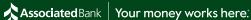




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## FOR YOUR INFORMATION

#### **ABOUT FIRST STAGE**

Since 1987, First Stage has grown to become one of the nation's most acclaimed theaters for young audiences and one of the largest theater companies in Milwaukee. First Stage is committed to new play development, presenting over 70 world premieres in our history. In addition to our professional theater productions for families, First Stage touches hearts, engages minds, and transform lives through its unparalleled Theater Academy, one of the nation's largest high-impact theater training program for young people, which fosters life skills through stage skills; and our dynamic Theater in Education programs that promote active learning in our schools and community, serving over 6.000 students in classrooms and with community organizations each year.

#### **ACTORS & PRODUCTION TEAM**

First Stage is a professional company employing members of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional Actors and Stage Managers. Actors' Equity Association, founded in 1913, represents more than 48,000 actors and stage managers in the U.S. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions, providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. Equity seeks to foster the art of live theater as an essential component of our society (www.actorsequity.org). First Stage employs members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, IATSE, Local #18. First Stage is an equal opportunity employer. Except in plays where race is an integral part of the narrative, casting is based on artistic merit and suitability for the role.

#### **INDUSTRY AFFILIATIONS**

First Stage is a member of Milwaukee Theater District, Milwaukee Arts Partners, and TYA/USA, the international association of theater for young audiences. First Stage is also a Cornerstone member of the United Performing Arts Fund.

#### **ACCESS FOR ALL**

We are dedicated to making theater accessible and welcoming for everyone in our community. For financial support, consider applying to our Access for All program, where qualifying families and individuals can enjoy discounted tickets and Theater Academy scholarships. Please visit www.firststage.org/access-for-all to apply.

#### **ACCESSIBILITY**

The Todd Wehr Theater includes barrier-free access and accessible seating areas. Infrared hearing devices are available in the lobby, as well as sign language interpreted performances. Sensory kits are available for patrons, including noise canceling headphones, fidget tools, and a social narrative are available. Please see our House Manager to inquire about these services. First Stage also offers Sensory Friendly Performances for most productions.

#### CHILDREN AT PERFORMANCES

While First Stage presents theater productions for families, these are not recommended for children under 3 years old. Children may sit in laps, but a \$10 lap ticket is required. Lap tickets can be purchased at the theater or by calling the Box Office at (414) 267-2966. Patrons are welcome to take breaks and watch the performance from the screens in the lobby.

#### **ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

The use of cameras, recording equipment, and other electronic devices is strictly prohibited in the theater during performances. Please silence all cellphones, watches, and other electronic devices during the performances.

#### **FOOD AND BEVERAGE**

Food and most beverages are not permitted in the theater. Water is permitted.

#### LATE ARRIVALS

Late arrivals are seated at the discretion of the House Manager as dictated by Stage Management.

#### LOST AND FOUND

Please report any lost or found items to the House Manager or call (414) 273-7121.

#### **SPONSORSHIP**

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#### **PLAYBILLS**

This program is published by Encore Playbills, providing quality playbills for First Stage, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Florentine Opera, Milwaukee Ballet, Marcus Performing Arts Center, Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, and Skylight Music Theater. For advertising information, visit encoreplaybills.com.





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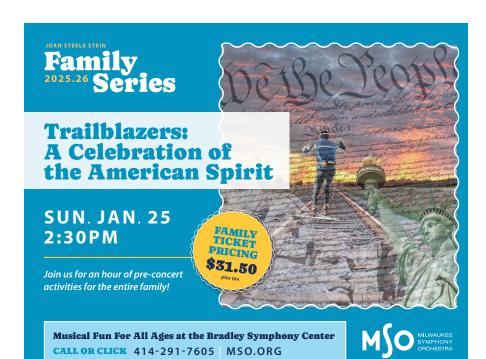
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presents



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Script and Lyrics by MO WILLEMS & ADAM TOBIN
Music by DEBORAH WICKS LA PUMA
Dramaturgy by MEGAN ALRUTZ

Director, Michelle LoRicco
Music Director, Bill Busch
Scenic Designer, Em Allen
Associate Scenic Designer, August Hendrix
Puppet Designer, Nicki Kulas
Costume Designer, Lyndsey Kuhlmann
Lighting Designer, Maaz Ahmed
Sound Designer, Kevin Alexander
Production Stage Manager, Kelly L. Schwartz\*
Assistant Stage Manager, Devon Wiensch
Audio Engineer/Deck Carpenter, Matt Whitmore
Head Electrician, Mandy Montanye

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

Produced by special arrangement with Hidden Pigeon, LLC.

Originally commissioned and developed by Children's Theater of Madison, Dallas Children's Theatre,

First Stage, Main Street Theater, Seattle Children's Theatre, The Coterie, and The Rose.





























## FROM THE DIRECTOR, MICHELLE LORICCO

Welcome to First Stage! Thank you for choosing to spend the holidays supporting live theater and new works right here in Milwaukee. What can be more important than gathering together, especially for warmth, during this chilly time of year?

It's been such a pleasure stepping back into the world of Mo Willems. My directing debut at First Stage was *Elephant & Piggie's "We're in a Play!"*—and it's a delight to reunite with familiar faces, both onstage and behind the scenes, for this new adventure. We're especially thrilled to welcome back James Carrington and Rachael Zientek, reprising their roles as Elephant Gerald and Piggie for the third time on our mainstage.

The Pigeon Gets A Big Time Holiday Extravaganza! has been over a year in the making, created through a national collaboration of six theaters (including us!) and the wonderful folks at Hidden Pigeon Company. We first developed this piece as part of our 2024 Amplify Festival, then continued the process at The Coterie Theatre in Kansas City with my workshop partner, the incredible Khalia Davis. There is nothing like gathering a group of heart-forward people with a passion for serving young audiences. I know I am a more thoughtful theater-maker after being in the room with these changemakers from across the country.

Since then, Mo, Debbie, Adam, and Megan have sprinkled in even more Mo-ey magic—and now, we're thrilled to bring you the world premiere right here at home.

The holidays can bring big feelings for all of us... and sometimes big pressures. This story is a heartfelt reminder that the best part of the season isn't the presents, but being present—with the people (or pigeons, elephants, piggies, or squirrels) you love most. Whether you're seeing old friends, gathering with family or found family, or 'shaking it up' with us in this theater, your presence truly is the present.

From all of us at First Stage, we wish you peace, joy, and light—whatever you celebrate.

Merry Christmas. Happy Hanukkah. Joyous Kwanzaa. Happy Solstice. Feliz Navidad. Joyeuses Fêtes. Buone Feste. Happy New Year. Shaná Tová. Maligayang Pasko.

May your season be full of connection, wonder, and warmth.

- Michelle LoRicco, Director



### **ADULT PERFORMERS**

The Pigeon	Kailey Azure Green*
Elephant Gerald	James Carrington*
Piggie	Rachael Zientek 🏌
Understudy for The Pigeon	Ailie Snyder 🏌
Understudy for Elephant Gerald	Aundre Reid
Understudy for Piggie	Caroline Hansen

#### YOUNG PERFORMERS

	Hotdog Cast	Cookie Cast
Zoomy Squirrel	Ava Sabel	Adyson Ries
Zappy Squirrel Jule Jorda	an Schloemer 🏅	Juan Ramon Andrade Escobedo
Zoopy Squirrel	lelen Marotta ്X	Silvia Stoeger 🗡
Flappy Squirrel	Eviana Gibbons	Annabelle Miller 🗡
Catchy Holiday SquirrelRose	mary Marotta 🏅	Elise K. Fischer
Catchy Holiday Squirrel	.Bri Donahue 🏅	Fred Jones-Hartwig
Catchy Holiday SquirrelSava	nnah Carlson 🏅	Lis Rodriguez
In-Between Squirrel	arlie Machata 🏅	Alice Nguyen 🕺
Defining SquirrelV	alentina Vega 🏅	Jillian Vogedes 🗡

#### **CREATIVE TEAM**

Director Michelle LoRicco
Music DirectorBill Busch
Scenic Designer
Associate Scenic Designer August Hendrix
Puppet DesignerNicki Kulas
Costume Designer Lyndsey Kuhlmann
Lighting Designer
Sound Designer
Production Stage ManagerKelly L. Schwartz*
Assistant Stage Manager
Audio Engineer/Deck Carpenter
Head Electrician

## The video and/or audio recording of this performance by any means whatsoever are strictly prohibited.

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

X Students and alumni of First Stage Theater Academy, one of the nation's largest high-impact theater training program for young people



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## Jeff Frank, Executive Artistic Director –

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. Much love to his wife and children, who provide constant support and inspiration. Thank you for joining us for another season of inspiring and thought provoking work. We ask you to lean in and discover the magic of theater while learning more about your community and your world.



Michelle LoRicco (she/her/ ella), Director & Associate Artistic Director – Michelle is a passionate educator, director, and playwright who loves to create stories

on stage and in the classroom with people of all ages. She graduated from the University of Central Florida with her MFA, specializing in Theater for Young Audiences, and received her Bachelor's in Theater, specializing in Musical Theater, at Palm Beach Atlantic University. Michelle has worked in the Education Departments at American Repertory Theatre, Mill Mountain Theatre, The Kravis Center for the Performing Arts, Orlando Family Stage, and other non-profit organizations. Some of her directing credits include Elephant & Piggie's "We Are In A Play!", Emily Song and

the Queen of the Night, and Ride the Cyclone (First Stage), Luchadora and When Pigs Fly (Orlando Family Stage), Marvelous Corenlius, Goodnight Moon, and Orphan Sea (Hollins University), A Peter Rabbit's Tale and Tomás and the Library Lady (Mill Mountain Theatre). Next up, she will be directing The Pigeon Gets A Big Time Holiday Extravaganza! and choreographing Disney's Frozen for First Stage this season. This is Michelle's third full season as the Associate Artistic Director, and she could not be more grateful to serve the Milwaukee community alongside the incredible creatives at First Stage.



#### Rob Goodman, Founder

As the company's
 Founding Artistic Director,
 Rob has guided the vision of First Stage since its
 premiere season in 1987,

first as Artistic Director, then Managing Director from 2003-2012, and now in an emeritus role. Rob was also involved in the creation of the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center and Milwaukee Arts Partners, a consortium of the city's performing arts groups. He has directed over sixty productions, including twenty-five world premieres, and has worked with many acclaimed playwrights. Goodman has held many leadership positions throughout his career, including Vice-President of TYA/USA and Board Member of Tessitura Network. Goodman earned a BA from St. Cloud University and an MFA from the UNC-Chapel Hill. Rob is a decorated Vietnam veteran, and in 1990, he was ordained a Permanent Deacon in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. He is also a retired member of Actors Equity Association and the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers. A past arctic explorer and Vietnam veteran, Rob and his wife Mary now reside in Kayenta, Arizona.



#### Bill Busch, Music Director

– Bill is thrilled to return to First Stage for this world premiere production of *The Pigeon Gets A Big Time Holiday Extravaganza!* He

has served as Music Director/Conductor for numerous theater companies across the Midwest, including Skylight Music Theatre, Children's Theater of Madison. Madison Theatre Guild, MATC Theatre, First Stage, Sunset Playhouse, and the Marriott Lincolnshire. His directing credits include Most Happy Fella, Working, The Full Monty, Secret Garden, Finian's Rainbow, Tap Dance Kid, Footloose, and the world premiere of Anatole here at First Stage. Bill recently retired as Executive Director of Milwaukee Children's Choir and served for 18 years as Director of Music at Hales Corners Lutheran Church. He currently serves as Artistic Director/ Conductor for The Lutheran A Cappella Choir of Milwaukee. His favorite role is father to Emily and Adam and husband to the lovely and talented Rhonda Rae.

#### Em Allen (she/they), Scenic Designer

- Em Allen is a Scenic Designer currently based in Milwaukee with a B.F.A in Theatre Arts and Psychology from Lawrence University and an M.F.A in Scenic Design from the University of Washington, Seattle. Recent local Scenic Designs include Emily Song and the Queen of the Night and Elephant & Piggie's "We Are In A Play!" here at First Stage; The Last Five Years at Milwaukee Rep; The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity at Next Act; Topdog/ Underdog, Laughs in Spanish, and Stew at Milwaukee Chamber; No Wake at Third Avenue PlayWorks; and The Importance of Being Ernest, The Drowsy Chaperone, First Date, and Dial M for Murder at Racine Theater Guild, among others. Website: emallendesign.com

Nicki Kulas, Puppet Designer – Nicki has been working in different facets of props/ puppets for the past 17 years. As a freelance Props Designer and Artisan, she has worked with many theaters in Milwaukee, including Next Act, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Skylight Music Theatre, and Renaissance Theaterworks. She started her TYA journey with Children's Theater of Madison and is currently working at First Stage, where she is starting her twelth season as Props Director (formerly Props Master) building props and puppets for all shows. For eight summers, she called Winona, MN her home, where she served as the Props Artisan then Props Director at Great River Shakespeare Festival. In Milwaukee, she has had the opportunity to work on some great puppet projects with Kohls Wild Theatre at the Milwaukee County Zoo, props for *Penelopiad* under the Holton Street Viaduct, and art installations at the newly renovated 3rd St Market Hall.

**Designer** – This is Lyndsey's 17th season with First Stage, where she has designed costumes for shows including Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, Holes, Gretel!, The Baker Street Irregulars, and both productions of Elephant & Piggie's "We're In A Play!". During First Stage's season, she serves as the Cutter/Draper in the costume shop. She received her MFA in Costume Technology and Design from Ohio University. Other local design work

includes 9 Circles, I And You, and Groucho:

A Life in Revue at Next Act, Ben Butler at

Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, and Back

Lyndsey Kuhlmann (she/her), Costume

#### Maaz Ahmed, Lighting Designer -

Home Again at Milwaukee Rep.

Maaz works as a Lighting Designer and served as the Lighting Supervisor at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in 2025. Recent designs include *Primary Trust* (Forward Theatre Company), *The Last Five Years* (Milwaukee Rep), and *The Elaborate* 

Entrance of Chad Deity (Next Act Theatre). Maaz also served as Assistant Lighting Designer on Come From Away (Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, des. Jason Fassl), Fat Ham (Goodman Theatre, des. Jason Lynch), and The Da Vinci Code (Drury Lane Productions, des. Lee Fiskness) last season. Upcoming designs include Ain't Misbehavin' (Milwaukee Rep) and Dinner with the Dutchess (Next Act Theatre). www.maazahmedLX.com



Kelly L. Schwartz\* (she/ her), Production Stage Manager – Kelly is thrilled to be returning to First Stage for her third season as Production Stage

Manager in the great city of Milwaukee. She has had the honor of previously working with Walnut Street Theater, McCarter Theater Center, and Indiana Repertory Theater. Kelly is a proud graduate of Butler University (Class of 2009). Go Dawgs! Thank you to her boys for letting her see the world through their eyes with so much light and love.



## Dev Wiensch (they/them), Assistant Stage Manager

 Dev is excited to be back at First Stage after growing up as a Young Performer here! They've worked on

stage management teams at the Milwaukee Rep, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Forward Theater, American Players Theatre, and the Denver Center. Dev would like to thank their parents, pets, and Simone for their unending support.

Mandy Leigh Montanye (she/her), Head Electrician – Mandy has worked as a Head Electrician/ Lighting Tech in most of the theaters, rock venues, and Summerfest grounds in the area for about 20 years.

In addition to playing bass in a few local punk bands, she skated in the Brew City Bruisers under the moniker "Mandini" for four years and is an okay tap dancer.



## Kailey Azure Green\* (they/them), The Pigeon

 Kailey is an actor and choreographer based in Chicago and is incredibly excited to be working with

First Stage for their first time! Kailey was last seen in Milwaukee as the title role in Henry V at Wisconsin Classic Stage. Other Wisconsin credits include Our Town, The Merry Wives of Windsor, The Rivals, Sense and Sensibility, and Love's Labour's Lost at American Players Theatre, and the title role in Peter Pan at Children's Theater of Madison. Trans rights are human rights. More info at kaileyazuregreen.com.



## James Carrington (he/him), Elephant Gerald

 James is ecstatic to be back at one of his favorite theaters in a dream play and role! James is an actor

and singer based in Milwaukee and a graduate of UW-Madison's Acting Specialist B. A. program. Some favorite roles include Matt in Mr. Burns: A Post Electric Play, Man 3 in The Ballad of Emmett Till, The Lion in The Wiz, William Barfèe in The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, Dun in Pipeline, Golden Thunder in Airness, Cuddy in Witch, The Narrator in Every Brilliant Thing, and most recently, Kenneth in *Primary Trust*. James has been fortunate to work with many Wisconsin theaters including: Milwaukee Chamber Theater, Renaissance Theaterworks, First Stage, Skylight Music Theatre, and Northern Sky Theater. Up next, James will be in And Then There Were None at Milwaukee Rep. Happy Holidays!



Rachael Zientek (she/her), Piggie – Rachael is SO excited to be back as Piggie after playing her in the First Stage productions of Elephant & Piggie's: "We

Are In A Play!" She was recently in Disney & Pixar's Finding Nemo TYA as Coral and up in Door County at Northern Sky Theater for their summer/fall season. She'll be seen next in Amadeus at Skylight Music Theatre. Thanks for coming, and enjoy the show!



Ailie Snyder (they/them), Understudy for The Pigeon – Ailie is ecstatic to be returning to First Stage after four years! With their last show here in 2021 as a

young performer, Ailie is currently in their final year at UW-Milwaukee earning a BFA in Musical Theatre with a Dance minor. Previous credits include: Ralphie Parker in A Christmas Story: The Musical (Waukesha Civic Theatre), Ensemble in Rent (Outskirts Theatre), and The Captain in Dames at Sea (UWM). They would like to thank their friends and family for their support!



Aundre Reid (he/him), Understudy for Elephant Gerald – Aundre is very excited to be making his First Stage debut! A Milwaukee Native, he went

to college at American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York City for musical theatre, then transferred to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to pursue training in Versatile Voice. You may have last seen him in *The Wedding Singer* (Ensemble) with Bombshell Theatre Co. or *All Is Calm* (Ensemble) with Vanguard Milwaukee. Aundre would like to thank his friends and family for the support and First Stage for the opportunity!



#### Caroline Hansen (she/her), Understudy for Piggie

 Caroline is very pleased to be a part of her first production with First Stage.
 She is new to the Milwaukee

area, but you may have seen her in *Rent* with Outskirts Theatre Co. or *Lungs* with Vanguard Milwaukee this past year. She would like to thank Michelle for this opportunity and is extremely grateful for the immense love and support from her friends, family, and Michael. Enjoy the show!

#### **HOTDOG CAST**



#### Ava Sabel (she/her), Zoomy Squirrel –

Ava, a sophomore, has huge-mongous excitement for this show! Some of Ava's favorite past roles include

Gurgle in *Disney & Pixar's Finding Nemo TYA*, Bobby in *Urinetown*, and Amanda in *Matilda*. She would like to thank her family and the cast and crew for making this a special holiday season!



## Jule Jordan Schloemer (she/her), Zappy Squirrel

- Jule is thrilled to return to First Stage! She made her debut in *Elephant & Piggie's* "We Are In A Play!" (Delivery

Dog) and more recently performed in *Pete* the Cat (Elouise/Mona Lisa). She thanks her family and friends for all the love and support of her passion for musical theater!



Helen Marotta, Zoopy Squirrel – Helen is a 12-year-old actor who loves singing, reading, drawing, and all things creative. She likes hanging out with her

friends and sister (who is also in the play).

Helen also enjoys playing volleyball and spending time in nature. She loves First Stage and is honored to play this part.



Eviana Gibbons, Flappy
Squirrel – Eviana is excited
to be back at First Stage!
She was previously in The
Best Christmas Pageant Ever
(Gladys) and Disney &

Pixar's Finding Nemo TYA (Pearl). Favorite roles include Annie (Molly, Pepper), The Lion King (Timon, Zazu), and Spamalot (French Taunter). Eviana wants to thank First Stage for this opportunity!



Rosemary Marotta, Catchy Holiday Squirrel – Rosey, a ninth grader, is excited to make her First Stage debut this holiday season! She is an enthusiastic actor who

has honed her skills at First Stage, Drama Jr. (Shorewood), and Second City (Chicago). Rosey loves writing songs and has performed at Girls Rock Camps in LA, Madison, and Milwaukee.



Bri Donahue, Catchy
Holiday Squirrel – Bri is
excited to return to First
Stage after playing an elf in
Rudolph the Red-Nosed
Reindeer™: The Musical!

Favorite roles include Lumiere (Beauty and The Beast Jr.), Nemo (Nemo Jr.), and Milky White (Into the Woods) at Creator Collaborative. She thanks her family and CC team for their support!



Savannah Carlson, Catchy Holiday Squirrel – Savannah is excited to reprise her role this holiday season! She was previously in Elephant and Piggie's

"We Are In A Play!" (Squirelle), The

SpongeBob Musical (Perch Perkins), and Pete the Cat (Elouise) at First Stage. She was also in A Christmas Carol at Milwaukee Rep the last three winters.



Charlie Machata, In-Between Squirrel – Charlie is a sixth-grader and is thrilled to join First Stage alongside an amazing cast in this world debut musical.

He would like to thank his family for their constant support and the team at Creator Collaborative Studio for inspiring his passion for acting.



Valentina Vega, Defining Squirrel – Valentina is a fifth grader and thrilled to be in her second Mo Willems show at First Stage after playing Ice Cream Penguin

in Elephant & Piggie's "We Are In A Play!". She was also in Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer™: The Musical (First Stage) and A Christmas Carol (Milwaukee Rep).

#### **COOKIE CAST**



Adyson Ries, Zoomy
Squirrel – Adyson is so
excited to make her First
Stage debut! She's involved
in many productions in the
community and at her

school where she is a junior. She was recently in *Mean Girls* as Janis and Portia in *Something Rotten*! Enjoy the show and have a happy holidays!



Juan Ramon Andrade
Escobedo (he/him), Zappy
Squirrel – Ramon started
theater classes at age four.
He instantly felt at home
and has grown his passion

for theater ever since. Among his favorite performances are Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*, Bill Sikes in *Oliver!*, and Jimmy Biddle in *Pete the Cat*. He wants to thank his family and teachers.



Silvia Stoeger (she/her), Zoopy Squirrel – This is Silvia's fifth holiday show at First Stage – her favorite was Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer™: The Musical!

She was recently seen as Colin Craven in The Secret Garden at Forte Theater and Rusty in Footloose at Creator Collaborative. Next up, she'll be in A Rockin' Midsummer Night's Dream at Skylight!



#### Annabelle Miller (she/ her), Flappy Squirrel

 Annabelle is excited to be performing in her third First Stage production! Previous: Disney & Pixar's Finding

Nemo TYA (Squirt) and The Best Christmas Pageant Ever. Other roles: Lago in Aladdin Kids, Peach in Finding Nemo Jr., Hazel in Newsies Jr., Violet Beauregarde in Willy Wonka Kids, and Dear Edwina Jr.!



#### Elise K. Fischer (she/her), Catchy Holiday Squirrel

 Elise, an eighth grader, is thrilled to be in her third
 First Stage show! She wants to thank the Creator

Collaborative Studio for teaching her important lessons in singing, dancing, and acting to tell stories. Never has a day come in Elise's life that isn't filled with the magic of musical theater!



Fred Jones-Hartwig (she/her), Catchy Holiday Squirrel – Fred is excited to make her First Stage debut! Fred is a junior in high school. Some shows she

have been in include *A Chorus Line* at her school and *Newsies Jr.* at Fall Patio Players as well as many others. She hopes you enjoy the show!



#### Lis Rodriguez (she/her), Catchy Holiday Squirrel

 Lis, a freshman, is grateful to be apart of First Stage this season. Lis was last seen in First Stage's

Esperanza Rising. Outside of theater, Lis enjoys photography, music, and hanging out with the people she cares about.



#### Alice Nguyen (she/her), In-Between Squirrel

– Alice is thrilled to return to First Stage for her third holiday show! She has also appeared in *Frozen Jr.* with

Bombshell Theatre Co. and Fiddler on the Roof with Skylight Music Theater. Offstage, ten-year-old Alice is the student council president. She enjoys writing, playing percussion, and crafting.



Jillian Vogedes (she/her),
Defining Squirrel – Jillian,
a sixth grader, is thrilled to
be returning First Stage!
Favorite roles include: Olive
Biddle in Pete The Cat and

Ice Cream Penguin in Elephant & Piggie's "We Are In A Play!" at First Stage; Nipper in Oliver! and Student Ensemble & Summer Hathaway (u/s) in School of Rock: The Musical at Skylight Music Theater.

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#### **MEET THE WRITING TEAM**



Mo Willems – Mo Willems is all about letting imaginations run wild. He is the beloved artist and author behind #1 New York Times bestselling and Caldecott Honors-awarded picture books like

Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! and the Knuffle Bunny series. His celebrated Elephant & Piggie early reader series has earned him two Theodor Seuss Geisel Awards and five Geisel Honors. Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! was the inaugural inductee into the Picture Book Hall of Fame. And, in 2023, Mo was the recipient of an Eisner Award for his book, The Pigeon Will Ride the Roller Coaster! Mo has published more than 70 children's books - more than 50 of them New York Times bestselling titles - in 26 foreign language translations. In addition to his literary awards, Mo has won six Emmy Awards for his writing on Sesame Street, where he began his remarkable career. Mo also has created three television specials, six animated series, seven musical adaptations, five licensed theater productions, and three touring exhibits. Over the last decade, he has become the most produced playwright of Theatre for Young Audiences in the U.S., having written or co-written four musicals based on his books. Mo loves playing in new sandboxes. He regularly collaborates with other globally renowned artists and organizations to create bright and innovative new works in the worlds of classical music, opera, comedy concerts, dance, painting, and digital content. Mo's art has been exhibited around the world, including in major solo retrospectives at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta and at The New York Historical, In 2023, Mo co-founded the Hidden Pigeon Company to extend the reach of his beloved characters and stories across multiple platforms. Mo Willems is a former child.



Adam Tobin – Adam Tobin is thrilled to work with Mo Willems on realizing his beloved characters and to partner again with Deborah Wicks La Puma. Previously with Wicks La Puma, Tobin wrote the

script and lyrics of *She Persisted: the Musical* based on Chelsea Clinton's book (Bay Area Children's Theater, Atlantic for Kids), which was a New York Times Critic's Pick, as well as *She Persisted Jr* (iTheatrics) and *The Velveteen Rabbit* (Palo Alto Children's Theatre). Tobin is a Senior Lecturer teaching screenwriting at Stanford University; he lives with his "business person" wife Amy and their two charmingly skeptical teens.



#### **Deborah Wicks La Puma**

Composer, Arranger, and
 Orchestrator Deborah Wicks La
 Puma is one of the most produced
 Theatre for Young Audiences artists
 working today, and a recipient of

the Harold Oaks Award for Sustained Excellent in TYA. Some of her most popular musicals include Ella Enchanted (based on the book by Gail Carson Levine), Oliverio: A Brazilian Twist, and Einstein Is A Dummy with playwright Karen Zacarías, and the off-broadway hit She Persisted (based on the book by Chelsea Clinton) with playwright Adam Tobin. Deborah has created three musicals with bestselling children's author Mo Willems: Elephant & Piggie's "We Are In A Play"; Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Rock Experience and Don't Let The Pigeon Drive The Bus: The Musical. On the small screen, she has worked with Willems on the adaptation of Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Underground Rock Experience (released 2022 on HBOmax), and the upcoming animated series Unlimited Squirrels. A proud Mexican-American and "Navy brat" who grew up in Brazil, Portugal and California, La Puma is a member of TYA/USA, ASCAP and The Dramatists Guild. Mother to three daughters and Mimi the Cat, La Puma lives in Southern California with her PR agent and loving husband, Chris.



Megan Alrutz – Megan Alrutz is an artist, educator, dramaturg, and scholar with over 20 years of experience in theatre, media, and interdisciplinary performance for youth and families. She has directed

and created several nationally recognized theatre pieces and interactive installations, with a special focus in theatre for the very young, experimental, and community-engaged performance projects, and visually dynamic staging. Megan is a long-time collaborator of author/illustrator Mo Willems, working as producer, dramaturg, and/or director on his musicals, interactive engagements, museum exhibits, television and film. She is professor and associate chair of Theatre & Dance at the University of Texas at Austin. Megan is a co-founder of the Performing Justice Project and the Center for Imagining and Performing Justice. She has authored/co-authored three books that dance at the intersections of theory and practice: Devising Critically Engaged Theatre with Youth: the Performing Justice Project; Digital Storytelling, Applied Theatre, & Youth; and Playing with Theory in Theatre Practice.

#### Sammy Brown, Director of Production

– Sammy is elated to continue their First Stage journey after joining as Director of Production last season. Sammy has served as a Production Manager, AEA Stage Manager, and Event Coordinator with organizations nationwide, including (selected credits): Baltimore Center Stage (Mexodus), Chicago Shakespeare Theater (Shakespeare in the Parks, Six), the Los Angeles Actors' Fund, Theatre SilCo (Constellations), Mill Mountain Theatre (A Chorus Line), Norwegian Cruise Line (Swing!, Blazin' Boots), South Coast Repertory (Madwoman in a Volvo), the New York Musical Theatre Festival (Summer Valley Fair), and Williamstown Theatre Festival. MFA; University of California, Irvine. BS; University of Evansville.

#### Pat LoRicco (he/him), Technical Director -

Pat is thrilled be with First Sage for his second season, and to continue his work to help support and grow First Stag's mission. Pat recently earned his MFA in Technical Direction from West Virginia University, where he was the Technical Director for shows such as *Ride the Cyclone, Measure For Measure, The Skriker*, and *Sweet Charity*. He has also worked as the Technical Director at West Virginia Public Theatre (WV) for *Sherlock Holmes* and *The Mountaintop*, and as the Scenic Designer for Midland Center for the Arts (MI) productions of *Newsies* and *Rock Of Ages*.

Juliana Gessner (they/them), Scenic Charge Artist – Juliana joined First Stage this August as Scenic Charge Artisan, and is excited to be back in Milwaukee where they grew up. Juliana was previously the Scenic Charge at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and is also a freelance Scenic Designer with recent credits including The Marriage of Figaro, Songbird (UW-Madison's University Opera), Dance Nation, Joe Turner's Come and Gone. and Orlando (UW-Madison's

#### Olivia Bastien (she/her), Properties Artisan

– Olivia Bastien is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Design and Technology. This is her third season as Properties Artisan at First Stage. Credits include Properties Designer for Witch, Tidy, Cost of Living (Renaissance Theaterworks); A Moon for the Misbegotten, Laughs in Spanish (Milwaukee Chamber Theatre); Hello, Dolly!, Fellow Travelers, Once Upon A Mattress (Seagle Festival).

**Jenny Thurnau** (she/her), Costume Shop Manager – Jenny is excited for another season with First Stage. She has worked previously in various roles at Milwaukee Repertory Theater, American Players Theater, and Eastern Washington University, among others. Jenny received her M.F.A. in Costume Design from Western Illinois University.

#### Lyndsey Kuhlmann (she/her),

Cutter/Draper – Lyndsey is in her 17th season as the Cutter/Draper in the costume shop. As Cutter/Draper, she helps bring the Costume Designer's vision to life by creating the patterns and process for built garments, conducting fittings, and seeing that all costumes are completed on time. She holds a Masters of Fine Arts in Costume Technology from Ohio University.

#### Michelle Verbos (she/her), First Hand -

Michelle is joining us for her 16th season as First Hand. Her main duties are to assist the Cutter/ Draper with cutting out and constructing the costumes and performing alterations. She is the Costume Coordinator for our Young Company and has been the Costume Designer for several shows during her time here at First Stage as well as the annual Winter/Spring musical at Nicolet High School.

#### Kasey Brown (she/her), Costume Crafts Artisan

– This is Kasey's first season at First Stage! Originally from Grand Rapids, Michigan, she holds a BFA from Western Michigan University and a Masters in costume design from Virginia Commonwealth University. As the Costume Crafts Artisan, she works in the costume shop and helps to create all the costume pieces that aren't traditionally sewn such as hats and other accessories! She also continues to work as a freelance costume designer.

#### Alexa Farrell (she/her), Wardrobe Supervisor

– Alexa is thrilled to be joining the First Stage company. Previous costume credits include, Annie, Grease, The Addams Family, et al. Being part of the theatre community has given her many opportunities such as coaching individuals for audition prep, directing, acting and designing. Theatre is important now more than ever. Thank you for supporting the arts.

#### Kalyn Diercks (she/her), Wardrobe Assistant

– Kalyn is excited to be returning as First Stage's Wardrobe Assistant. During show runs she can be found backstage making sure everyone looks their best: helping actors to get dressed, running quick changes, and maintaining all of the costume pieces you see onstage. In between shows, she works in the Costume Shop altering, building, and organizing costumes for the next production.

University Theatre).

## PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS



- The Pigeon Gets a Big Time Holiday
   Extravaganza! is based on The Pigeon,
   Elephant and Piggie, and Unlimited
   Squirrels books by Mo Willems. Which Mo
   Willems character is your favorite? Why?
- 2. Elephant Gerald, Piggie, The Pigeon, and the Squirrels are getting ready for the holidays. What holidays do you celebrate? How does your family get ready for the holidays? What holiday traditions does your family have?
- 3. Elephant Gerald and Piggie are bestus best friends, and they love to play together. What are some things you like to do with your friends?

## POST-SHOW QUESTIONS

- The Pigeon has big feelings and gets frustrated and angry sometimes. What do you do when you have big feelings? What makes you feel frustrated and angry?
- Elephant Gerald and Piggie are trying to find the best holiday present for each other. If you were getting a present for your bestus best friend, what would you get them? Why?
- 3. The Pigeon travels all the way to the North Pole because he wants to drive Santa's sleigh. Have you ever traveled far from home? Where did you go?

#### **WHO SAID IT?**

- "Since you got all dressed up and came all this way and sat in your seats I think it's a good time to ask: CAN I DRIVE THE BUS?!"
- 2. "Skepcurious. Not a word, but you get it."
- "Paper! A lot of paper! I love paper! It is one of my three favorite things from trees along with mangoes and something else!"
- 4. "What if everything is perfect and shiny and perfectly shiny?
- "Huh. Sounds like you're in between a mountain and a mole hill. That's kinda the sweet spot. In-between."
- "I made a big, dramatic off-stage intercontinental journey to seize my fate, to make the future the PRESENT... and what do I have to show for it?!"
- 7. "It seems we are at an impasse."
- 8. "Two presents! And two is exactly seven times bigger than one!"



21



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