



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Michelle LoRicco joins First Stage as new Associate Artistic Director

-Position will play critical role in new play development, casting and community engagement as First Stage moves forward-

Milwaukee, WI – July 19, 2023 – First Stage is delighted to announce that **Michelle LoRicco** has recently joined the organization as the new Associate Artistic Director. LoRicco will work directly with First Stage Artistic Director **Jeff Frank** to deliver a season of programming that entertains, enlightens, provokes and inspires. She will also manage the day-to-day operations of the Artistic Department, oversee audition processes, serve as lead producer for First Stage’s Amplify Reading Series and Goodman Mainstage Hall productions, as well as associate produce productions performed at the Marcus Center’s Todd Wehr Theater.

LoRicco comes to First Stage with a deep background in theater as a director, teaching artist, playwright and performer. She received her MFA in Theatre for Young Audiences from University of Central Florida (please see full bio below). She began her new First Stage position in March of 2023, will continue in a hybrid fashion with the start of the 2023/24 season and will be fully in-person beginning in January of 2024.

When asked what excited her about her new position, LoRicco commented: “I am thrilled to join the First Stage team as the new Associate Artistic Director. For over a decade, I have worked with and for youth, using First Stage as a guiding light that has had a significant impact on my work. When I was the Artistic Resident for Orlando Repertory Theatre, Jeff Frank came to direct one of my favorite productions to date, *NANCY DREW AND HER BIGGEST CASE EVER*. What impressed me the most about him wasn’t just his involvement in the commission and adaptation of one of my favorite series, but also his ability to lead the cast, crew and creative team with a strong vision and an inclusive approach, making him a true trailblazer in my book. Now, I feel incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to partner with Jeff and the amazing staff at First Stage.

I see the Associate Artistic Director position as a conduit, or a channel that connects people together to create magic onstage. First Stage is already one of the nation's leading children's theaters, and I am excited to bring my network of connections across the country to collaborate with talented artists who share our mission to touch hearts, engage minds and transform lives through extraordinary theatre experiences. One of my leadership goals is to facilitate collaboration between departments and the artists involved in each First Stage production. However, the part of my new role that excites me the most is the opportunity to foster a stronger connection between First Stage and the wider Milwaukee community.

As the leading producer of First Stage's Amplify Reading series, I am fully committed to providing a platform for marginalized voices in our community. Moving forward, my personal mission will be to create more professional opportunities for BIPOC emerging artists to showcase their talents and present excellent storytelling that sparks meaningful conversations across generations.

I truly believe in the power of theatre. It is an artform that mashes up all the ways humans can express themselves. For me, theatre is an incubator for humanity's most significant questions, and I strongly believe that young people deserve an equal share in those conversations. Growing up in any era can be daunting, and that is why the world needs more joy, imagination and safe spaces – all of which have been a priority of First Stage for the last 36 years. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to such important work and to help First Stage continue this legacy.”

Added Artistic Director **Jeff Frank**, “Michelle's exceptional skills as both an educator and a theater artist – combined with her commitment to community engagement and ongoing DEI and Intimacy training – make her uniquely prepared to step in and help First Stage continue to build our artistic vision for the future while leading the way in casting, new play development and cross-departmental integration. We are thrilled to have Michelle as part of the First Stage team.”

LoRicco just finished directing the Summer Theater Academy's successful production of KISS ME KATE with the Company Class. She will also direct and choreograph First Stage's 2023/24 production of ELEPHANT & PIGGIE'S, “WE ARE IN A PLAY!” running February 24 – March 17, 2024 in the Goodman Mainstage Hall at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center. In addition, LoRicco will direct the Amplify Series reading of EMILY SONG AND THE SHADOW QUEEN which will be presented on April 24, 2024 at the Goodman Mainstage Hall.

For more information about First Stage's 2023/24 season, please visit: firststage.org/2023-2024-season-of-plays/. Family Packages and All-Access Memberships are on sale now.

Michelle LoRicco biography

Michelle is a passionate director, teaching artist, playwright and performer who believes that audiences of all ages deserve their stories to be told in authentic and innovative ways. Before her time at First Stage, Michelle served as the Theatre Program Director at Patrick Henry High School, where she produced shows while teaching Theatre I-IV, Entertainment Design and Tech and Film Studies for three years. She holds an MFA in Theatre for Young Audiences from the University of Central Florida and a bachelor's in musical theatre from Palm Beach Atlantic University. She has worked as the Education Associate at Mill Mountain Theatre and served in the Education Departments of several organizations, including the American Repertory Theatre, The Kravis Center for the Performing Arts, Orlando Repertory Theatre, Virginia Children's Theatre and Children's Impact Network.

As a playwright, Michelle has developed plays for the Orlando Repertory Theatre's Writes of Spring program, a writing competition which takes creative writings from K-12 students that culminate in a fully produced play. Her original play WHEN COQUIS SING, was produced as a part of Orlando REP's celebration of International Women's Voices Day 2018, and later chosen as a finalist for *Childsplay's* 2019 Write Now Competition. She has been commissioned for Endstation Theatre Company's Playwrights' Initiative in partnership with Kids' Haven to develop NICO AND THE VOLCANO. Michelle has a heart for producing new work for young audiences. She began as Associate Artistic Director for the inaugural season of UCF's Pegasus Playlab 2018; and she has been involved in the Hollins Playwright's Lab since 2018.

Link to headshot for LoRicco can be found here:

drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Z9iuxZICGovD0y7YVpy2o5MU7W9SzaxK?usp=sharing

For more information about Michelle LoRicco, please visit: michelleloricco.com/

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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 produces plays that honor the young person's point of view, include diverse and traditionally underrepresented voices and inspire meaningful conversations. First Stage has presented more than 70 world premiere productions that address important subject matters relevant to today's youth. The Theater Academy is one of the nation's largest high-impact theater training programs for young people (3 – 18 years old). Through a challenging curriculum taught by professional teaching artists, the Academy nurtures life skills through stage skills and

includes the Next Steps Program that tailors Theater Academy classes to the needs of young people on the autism spectrum and with other developmental disabilities. As Wisconsin's leader in arts-integrated education in schools, First Stage's dynamic Theater in Education Programs cleverly blend theater activities with standard curriculum – allowing more than 10,000 students annually to learn traditional academic subjects through creativity and self-expression.

First Stage is a member of TYA/USA, the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, the Wisconsin Alliance for Arts Education, Milwaukee Arts Partners and is a cornerstone member of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF). firststage.org

First Stage's Inclusion Statement

Inclusion is a core value at First Stage:

We believe that all voices must be heard and everyone must have access to the same opportunities.

We believe that collaboration of diverse voices in our organizational discussions creates more successful, meaningful work and that diverse voices across First Stage's community should carry equal weight in all levels of decision-making: Institutional, Programmatic, Artistic, Governance and Fiscal.

We believe in maintaining a sustainable environment where everyone's talents, skills and perspectives are recognized, utilized and appreciated and where the needs of every individual are supported and that the right conditions are in place for each person to achieve their full potential.

We believe that continually investing in an authentic, healthy and lasting relationship with Milwaukee's diverse community will spark collaborative action towards creating a socially just society in Milwaukee and beyond.