



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**First Stage celebrates spring
with fun production of
DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE MUSICAL**

-Hilarious and heartfelt musical about friendship and surviving middle school-

Milwaukee, WI – March 6, 2024 – First Stage, one of the nation’s leading theaters for young people and families, is delighted to announce that DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE MUSICAL is the final production in their 2023/24 mainstage season. The play is based on the wildly popular *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* book series by **Jeff Kinney** and **20th Century Fox Films**, with book by **Kevin Del Aguila** and music and lyrics by songwriting team **Michael Mahler** and **Alan Schmuckler**. The production will be directed by noted director/educator/performer **Julie Woods-Robinson**, with music direction by Milwaukee musician/composer **Paula Foley Tillen** and choreography by Wisconsin director, actor and First Stage alum **Molly Rhode**. This entertaining and very funny musical takes us on a journey to an American middle school. Which to our protagonist, Greg, is the worst. He is determined NOT to be at the bottom of the popularity chart. He’ll leave that to his weird neighbor Fregley, or, maybe Greg’s best friend, Rowley Jefferson. But it’s not going to be Greg . . . no way. Will Greg’s plans lead him to sacrifice his one true friend? Can anyone avoid the dreaded Cheese Touch? Grab a hall pass, and don’t be late for an adventure familiar to anyone who survived middle school with this hilarious and heartfelt musical.

DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE MUSICAL runs **April 6 – May 5, 2024** at the Marcus Center’s Todd Wehr Theater, located at 929 N. Water Street in downtown Milwaukee. Tickets start at **\$20** and 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 firststage.org. *Performance runtime is approximately 75 minutes, which includes a brief intermission Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 5 –6, 7 – 9 and 10 – 12.*

Director **Julie Woods-Robinson** had this to say about the play: “I am thrilled to bring DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE MUSICAL to First Stage. The animated world of this beloved series comes to life around Greg Heffley – our feisty, awkward, eleven-year-old, anything-but-wimpy hero. Starring a large cast of young performers, this pop-musical twist on Greg’s story comes with many soon-to-be fan favorites like “Joshie Says,” “Mom Bucks” and “Better Than You.” My kids can't stop singing along . . . and neither can I!”

Added Artistic Director **Jeff Frank**: “‘Zoo-Wee Mama!’ The popular series by author/illustrator, Jeff Kinney, is the recipient of six Nickelodeon Kids’ Choice Awards and is published in 66 languages throughout the globe. Kinney so brilliantly captures the mayhem of middle school – a time when so much is changing so quickly, and you can often find yourself literally stuck in the middle. Greg Heffley fights tooth and nail to try to gain popularity, but in the end realizes that having a true friend is perhaps a better path to surviving the horrors of middle school life. First Stage is excited to be one of the first theaters to have the opportunity to bring this new musical to the stage following its premiere at Children’s Theatre Company in 2022.”

BIOGRAPHIES

Kevin Del Aguila (Playwright) is an Emmy®-winning writer and Broadway performer. He is the book writer of the off-Broadway musical hit ALTAR BOYZ (NY Outer Critics Award) and lyricist of CLICK CLACK MOO (Lortel and Drama Desk nominations). His other musical adaptations include the DreamWorks film MADAGASCAR and DOG MAN: THE MUSICAL. Kevin has written for numerous children’s television shows, including *Peg + Cat* (PBS), *Waffles + Mochi* (Netflix) and as head writer of *Blue’s Clues & You* (Nick Jr.). Children everywhere have heard Kevin’s voice as a Troll in the Disney movie *Frozen*.

Michael Mahler and **Alan Schmuckler (Composers/Lyricists)** are a songwriting team whose experience includes *The Secret of My Success* (NBC/Universal); animated feature *My Little Pony 2* (Hasbro, Ron Fair); music video *Lego Store: The Musical*. Musicals in development: NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM (Kevin McCollum) with Alan Menken, Shawn Levy and Bob Martin; AN AMERICAN TAIL: THE MUSICAL (CTC/NBC/Universal) with Itamar Moses; Frankenstein adaptation THE MONSTER (Chicago Shakespeare Theater) with Chelsea Marcantel. Winners of the Richard Rodgers Award for Musical Theatre. Mahler: lyrics: MISS SAIGON (West End, Broadway); music and lyrics, *October Sky* (NBC/Universal). Schmuckler: music/lyrics/song producer, *Kidding* (Showtime); music production, *Lego Store: The Musical*; winner, Kleban Prize in Musical Theatre, Webby Award (podcast musical *Wait Wait Don’t Kill Me*, Wondery Media). They are represented by ICM Partners.

Jeff Kinney (Author, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*) is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Diary of an Awesome Friendly Kid* series. He is a six-time Nickelodeon Kids’ Choice Award winner for Favorite Book and has been named one of *Time Magazine’s* 100 Most Influential People in the World. He lives in Massachusetts where he and his wife own a bookstore, An Unlikely Story.

Julie Woods-Robinson (Director) is a professional actor, director and teacher who aims to inspire creators, artists and life-long learners through the arts. She holds a BFA in Drama from New York University and an MFA in Theatre for Young Audiences from the University of Central Florida. Julie specializes in community collaboration, devised works, puppetry and musical theatre. Favorite directing credits include SHREK, JR. (Orlando REP Youth Academy), TUCK EVERLASTING (Timbercreek HS), THE HELLO GIRLS (Windermere HS *Applause Awards Winner), and NANCY DREW AND HER BIGGEST CASE EVER (A.D., Orlando REP). In addition to her work as a director, Julie, with her husband, Jordan Woods-Robinson, runs Book From Tape, a film and TV acting studio based out of Atlanta, GA and Orlando, FL. Julie is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association and is best known for her role in *Finding Nemo: the Musical* (Nemo) at Disney's Animal Kingdom. For more information, please visit juliewoods-robinson.com/

Paula Foley Tillen (Music Director) has been a professional musician in the Milwaukee area since 1980. She has acted as music director for hundreds of metropolitan area theatre companies from the junior high to professional levels and has been active at Milwaukee *ComedySportz* since 1985. She has served as lead teacher at Pink Umbrella Theatre, Brookfield Center for the Arts, First Stage Theater Academy and director of music at Southminster Presbyterian Church in Waukesha. In addition, she remains much in demand as a musical director, pianist, vocal coach and accompanist. From 1998 – 2013 she was a founding member and composer-in-residence of the only professional women's vocal ensemble in the Midwest, the Milwaukee Choral Artists. Notable recent theatre credits include musical direction for All In Productions' HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH, Milwaukee Opera Theatre's *Zie Magic Flute* and UWM's THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD. Her arrangements and compositions are found in the catalogues of Treble Clef Music Press, Santa Barbara Music Publishing, Alliance Music Publications and Hal Leonard Publishing, as well as online at sheetmusicplus.com and sheetmusicdirect.com. Her music has been performed by community, high school, university and all-state choirs around the USA and Canada, and has been performed locally by The East Side Chamber Players, Master Singers of Milwaukee, Skylight Music Theatre's *KidsWrites* and *Song Book* and Kohl's Wild Theatre at the Milwaukee County Zoo. Paula is a nationally certified teacher of yoga and meditation; you can take her classes at the Wisconsin Athletic Club Wauwatosa and Brookfield.

Molly Rhode (Choreographer) is a Wisconsin-grown actor/director/choreographer and much of her artistic education took place at First Stage. She first appeared as a Young Performer in 1990, then became an Academy student, and later an adult actor and Academy Lead Teacher. She is indebted to the many mentors who she met in the Todd Wehr Theater. Her First Stage directing credits include THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER: THE MUSICAL, MISS NELSON IS MISSING, ANATOLE, LITTLE CRITTER and THE AMAZING LEMONADE GIRL. Molly has worked in theaters across Wisconsin and is the Associate Artistic Director at Northern Sky Theater in Door County. Her new musical, GIRLS ON SAND, co-authored with Lachrisa Grandberry and Alissa Rhode, will premiere at Northern Sky's Gould Theater in July.

ADULT CAST

Karen Estrada* (Mom/Mrs. Clayton/Mrs. Ira/Fregley's Mom) and **Todd Denning*** (Dad/Mr. Huff/Mr. Underwood). **Understudies: Saralynn Evenson** (Understudy for Karen Estrada) and **Shayne Patrick** (Understudy for Todd Denning).

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

YOUNG PERFORMER CASTS

Young Performer roles are double cast. Young Performers in the **Cheese Cast** include: **Ryan Stepanski** (New Berlin) as Greg Heffley; **William Swoboda** (Whitefish Bay) as Rodrick Heffley/Joshie; **Benjamin Luther** (Pewaukee) as Manny Heffley; **Gwen Madson** (West Allis) as Rowley Jefferson; **Samika Sabesan** (Brookfield) as Chirag Gupta; **Caroline Juergens** (Madison) as Patty Farrell; **Eric Damon** (St. Francis) as Charlie Davis; **Aria Pruefer** (Germantown) as Yvette, Tween Girl; **Layla Turner** (Watertown) as Pauline, Tween Girl; **Paxton Haley** (Milwaukee) as Claire, Tween Girl; **Zoe Smith** (Milwaukee) as Fregley, Tween; **Grayson Scott** (Whitefish Bay) as Chris Hossey, Tween Boy; **Noah Sims** (Milwaukee) as Lionel James, Tween Boy; **Layton Lal** (Whitefish Bay) as Bryce, Overgrown Kid; **Elliot Lovitz** (Fox Point) as 8th Grader/Ensemble/Lin Manuel Miranda and **Blue Madson** (West Allis) as 8th Grader/Ensemble.

Young Performers in the **Middle Cast** include: **Harper Fornstedt** (Milwaukee) as Greg Heffley; **Alex Radtke** (Cedarburg) as Rodrick Heffley/Joshie; **Beckett Patterson** (Glendale) as Manny Heffley; **Marko Van Slyke** (Milwaukee) as Rowley Jefferson; **Mohul Narayan** (Menomonee Falls) as Chirag Gupta; **Jenna Krysiak** (Oak Creek) as Patty Farrell; **Julius Newman** (Milwaukee) as Charlie Davis; **Cece Golbuff** (Whitefish Bay) as Yvette, Tween Girl; **Hattie Dye** (Milwaukee) as Pauline, Tween Girl; **Maggie Dentice** (Franksville) as Claire, Tween Girl; **Lainey Techtmann** (New Berlin) as Fregley, Tween; **Liam Owens Meyer** (Wauwatosa) as Chris Hossey, Tween Boy; **Mason Litzsey** (Wauwatosa) as Lionel James, Tween Boy; **Kian Sheldon** (Muskego) as Bryce, Overgrown Kid; **Lio Landis** (Milwaukee) as 8th Grader/Ensemble/Lin Manuel Miranda and **Lucy Kuhnen-Grooms** (Shorewood) as 8th Grader/Ensemble.

Please note: To find which cast is performing on a specific performance date and time, please refer to the website on the show page located here: [DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE MUSICAL](#)

The Artistic and Creative Team for **DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE MUSICAL** includes: **Julie Woods-Robinson** (Director); **Paula Foley Tillen** (Music Director); **Molly Rhode** (Choreographer); **Casey Price** (Scenic Designer); **Jason Orlenko, USA** (Costume Designer); **Jason Fassl, USA** (Lighting Designer); **Kevin Alexander, USA** (Sound Designer); **Kelly L. Schwartz*** (Production Stage Manager) and **Aminah Rockett** (Assistant Stage Manager).

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Tickets start at \$20 – Tickets may be purchased at [firststage.org](https://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.

Security at the Marcus Performing Arts Center: Upon entry to the Todd Wehr Theater, attendees will walk through a security scanner to check for any items not permitted in the building. While purses and small bags are allowed, please leave larger bags, backpacks or other items at home. [Review Security Procedures at the Marcus Performing Arts Center](#). Please allow ample time for parking and security checks before the performance.

Digital Playbill: The digital playbill includes artistic/actor/designer and cast bios. To view the digital playbill when it gets posted closer to the show opening, please go to: [firststage.org/about-us/media-center/playbills/](https://www.firststage.org/about-us/media-center/playbills/)

Please note: Please refer to the digital playbill for updates on any cast changes as well as for the appropriate pronouns for actors.

Enrichment Guide: An Enrichment Guide for the production will get posted here: [DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE MUSICAL](#)

Group Sales: Groups of 10 or more receive 15% off single ticket prices on most First Stage performances at the Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater. Call **(414) 267-2961** or email ticketmanager@firststage.org for more information.

Special events for DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE MUSICAL

Pay What You Choose Performance: Friday, April 12, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.

Pay What You Choose tickets are available on a first come, first served basis with a minimum suggested ticket price of \$10 per person. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. on the day of the performance. Patrons are encouraged to arrive early. Tickets may also be reserved in advance by phone at **(414) 267-2961**, weekdays 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. For more information, please visit: [firststage.org/events-tickets/tickets-offers/pay-what-you-choose/](https://www.firststage.org/events-tickets/tickets-offers/pay-what-you-choose/). This Pay What You Choose Performance is sponsored by First Stage's Inclusion & Accessibility Partner, **Children's Wisconsin**.

Tech Talk: Sunday, April 14, 2024 following the 3:30 p.m. performance

Stick around following select performances for First Stage Tech Talks, an extended talkback featuring special guests to give audiences a glimpse at the behind-the-scenes magic of First Stage productions. This Tech Talk will feature special guest **Kelly L. Schwartz**, Production Stage Manager.

Sensory Friendly Performance: Saturday, April 20, 2024 at 3:30 p.m.

A Sensory Friendly Performance with accommodations for families with children on the autism spectrum will take place on Saturday, April 20, 2024 at 3:30 p.m. Sensory accommodations include a quiet area staffed by an experienced educator, adjusted sound and lighting, and more. Tickets for Sensory Friendly Performances are \$10. Order online or by phone at **(414) 267-2961**, weekdays 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. to reserve tickets. To learn more visit: firststage.org/plan-your-visit/sensory-friendly-performances/.

ASL Interpreted Performance: Sunday, May 5, 2024 at 3:30 p.m.

This performance will be sign language interpreted for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Assistive listening devices are also available at the Todd Wehr Theater. To learn more, please visit: firststage.org/plan-your-visit/accessibility/sign-language-interpreted-performances/

FACT SHEET

Title: DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE MUSICAL

Book by **Kevin Del Aguila**

Music and Lyrics by **Michael Mahler** and **Alan Schmuckler**

Based on the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* book series by **Jeff Kinney** and **20th Century Fox Films**

Diary of a Wimpy Kid is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC.
(www.broadwaylicensing.com)

Additional Orchestrations by **Christopher Jahnke**

Originally commissioned and produced by The Children's Theatre Company
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Directed by **Julie Woods-Robinson**

Location: Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater, 929 N. Water Street, Milwaukee

Performances: April 6 – May 5, 2024

Description: Middle School, ugh. It's the worst. Greg is determined NOT to be at the bottom of the popularity chart. He'll leave that to his weird neighbor Fregley, or, maybe Greg's best friend, Rowley Jefferson. But it's not going to be Greg . . . no way. Will Greg's plans lead him to sacrifice his one true friend? Can anyone avoid the dreaded Cheese Touch? Grab a hall pass, and don't be late for an adventure familiar to anyone who survived middle school with this hilarious and heartfelt musical. *Performance runtime is approximately 75 minutes, which includes a brief intermission. Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 5 –6, 7 – 9 and 10 – 12.*

Performances:

- Saturday, April 6 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m. – *OPENING PERFORMANCES*
- Sunday, April 7 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Friday, April 12 at 7:00 p.m. – *PAY WHAT YOU CHOOSE PERFORMANCE*
- Saturday, April 13 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, April 14 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m. – *TECH TALK FOLLOWING 3:30 PERFORMANCE*
- Saturday, April 20 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m. – *SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE AT 3:30 P.M.*
- Sunday, April 21 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Saturday, April 27 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, April 28 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Saturday, May 4 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, May 5 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m. – *ASL PERFORMANCE AT 3:30 P.M.*

For more information, please visit firststage.org or call (414) 267-2961.

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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 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 autistic young people. 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 ensures that all programming is not only accessible to its community but that it is reflective of the community it serves. In order to do that, First Stage relies on its community of donors. With an annual operating budget of \$5 million, more than half of First Stage's revenue comes from generous contributions from individuals, corporations, foundations, government sources and the United Performing Arts Fund. Join First Stage's community of donors with [a contribution today](#) and transform lives through theater.