



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**First Stage kicks off 2022/23 season with
fun, family-friendly musical:
ARTHUR™ AND FRIENDS MAKE A MUSICAL!**

-Featuring original music, colorful sets, costumes and puppets-

Milwaukee, WI – September 14, 2022 – First Stage kicks off its 2022/23 season with the delightful world premiere production of **ARTHUR™ AND FRIENDS MAKE A MUSICAL!**, written by First Stage Resident Playwright, lyricist and actor **John Maclay**, with Music and Lyrics by actor, composer/lyricist, writer and First Stage alum **Brett Ryback**, adapted from the books and characters created by **Marc Brown** and directed and choreographed by Bay Area Children’s Theatre Artistic Director **Khalia Davis**. The popular children’s animated series *Arthur*, based on the popular book series, stars Arthur and his family and friends and together they creatively solve problems, learn to get along and appreciate each other’s differences. The First Stage production **ARTHUR™ AND FRIENDS MAKE A MUSICAL!** will feature the beloved characters along with catchy original music, whimsical sets, colorful costumes and fun puppets. Audiences will discover that big things are happening at Lakewood Elementary School – Mr. Ratburn’s class is asked to write and perform a big show for all of Elwood City. Everyone is so excited – everyone, that is except Arthur. What should he do? Arthur feels more and more nervous as the big performance gets closer and closer. With the help of his family and friends Arthur learns the importance of being his best, unique self. Sponsored by **Children’s Wisconsin**.

ARTHUR™ AND FRIENDS MAKE A MUSICAL! runs **October 7 – November 6, 2022** at the Marcus Center’s Todd Wehr Theater, located at 929 N. Water Street in downtown Milwaukee. Tickets start at \$32 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 90 minutes, which includes a brief intermission. Suggested for families with young people ages 5+.

From Director **Khalia Davis**: “*Arthur* was such a beloved part of my childhood so to get the opportunity to celebrate the legacy of the books and television series by expanding the world into a fun, family-friendly musical, is a dream! I am most excited for audiences to see their favorite characters in new, timely stories that maintain the beautiful essence and spirit of the work. Theater is often a tool we can use for young people to show a representation of their own lived experiences. In our show, we explore the pressures young people face to get everything right and the friends and family that support and care for them as they learn it isn’t always about being the best at something or being right all the time. It is about staying true to who you are and what makes you special, allowing that part of you to shine brightest.”

Added Artistic Director **Jeff Frank**: “I am so thankful to the writing team of John Maclay and Brett Ryback, director Khalia Davis, producer Todd Gershwin, and of course Marc Brown, for their contributions over the last couple years as we have workshopped and shaped the show. There is a reason *Arthur* is the second longest running animated series ever. Marc Brown paints a world that, although populated by animals, speaks with truth and respect to the joys and challenges of growing up. Like all of us, Arthur has fears and doubts, but with the help and support of his friends and family Arthur rises to the occasion and discovers the power in his own story.”

BIOGRAPHIES

John Maclay (Playwright/Lyricist) is a playwright and lyricist with over a dozen plays and musicals that have been produced throughout the U.S. and Canada. In addition to ARTHUR™ AND FRIENDS MAKE A MUSICAL!, John is the playwright of THE LEGEND OF ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS (with Eric Nordin), GOOSEBUMPS THE MUSICAL: PHANTOM OF THE AUDITORIUM (with Danny Abosch); GERONIMO STILTON: MOUSE IN SPACE, JUST A LITTLE CRITTER MUSICAL and NATE THE GREAT (both with Brett Ryback); NANCY DREW AND HER BIGGEST CASE EVER (with Jeff Frank); ANATOLE (with Lee Becker and James Valcq); CINDERELLA: THE REAL STORY (with Rayven Cece Craft, Austin Nelson, and Emma Swain), THE REVOLTING TEENS OF SHERWOOD, ROMEO AND JULIET WALK INTO A BAR and APOLLO AND THE TRIALS OF HERCULES (all three with Joe Foust). John’s new one-actor play, HOPPER, received a professional reading this past year at Pasadena Playhouse featuring *Breaking Bad*’s Betsy Brandt, directed by Tony nominee Thomas Sadowsky. John worked with First Stage in one form or other from 2000 – 2018, in roles ranging from Academy Director to Director of Artistic Development, while directing or appearing in dozens of First Stage productions. Last season, GhostLight Records released the studio cast album of GOOSEBUMPS THE MUSICAL: PHANTOM OF THE AUDITORIUM. The album features Broadway stars Krystina Alabado, Alex Brightman, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Will Roland, Stephanie Styles, Noah Galvin, RL Stine himself, First Stage Theater Academy alum Alex Gibson, and is now available on all streaming platforms. He also has an amazing family and a very cute dog named Winston. johnmaclay.com

Brett Ryback (Music & Lyrics/Music Director) is an actor, composer/lyricist and writer. He originated the role of Marcus Off-Broadway in MURDER FOR TWO. Other acting credits include A CHRISTMAS CAROL (First National Tour), THE HISTORY BOYS (Ahmanson), THE LIEUTENANT INISHMORE (Mark Taper Forum) and the world premieres of SHREW!, THE PRINCE OF ATLANTIS, DR. CERBERUS and IMAGINE (South Coast Rep). Recent TV/film appearances include: *Mom*, *Modern Family*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *Hail, Caesar!* and the Lifetime movie *The Assistant*. His plays and musicals include: PASSING THROUGH (Goodspeed); JOE SCHMOE SAVES THE WORLD (NAMT 2016, ASCAP/Dreamworks Workshop); LIBERTY INN: THE MUSICAL (Ovation Award nomination: Best Music/Lyrics); DARLING (Weston Playhouse New Musical Award); THE TAVERN KEEPER'S DAUGHTER (Best Musical, Pasadena Weekly); NATE THE GREAT (South Coast Rep, First Stage). His plays WEIRD and A ROZ BY ANY OTHER NAME are both published in "The Best American Short Plays 2007-2008." Brett co-created and starred in *In Strange Woods*, a musical podcast that hit #1 on Apple's fiction chart. He is the recipient of the ASCAP Foundation's Cole Porter Award. He created the online accompanist website PlayThisForMe.com and he teaches musical theatre at the University of Southern California. brettryback.com

Khalia Davis (Director/Choreographer) (she/her) is a multidisciplinary artist and Artistic Director of Bay Area Children's Theatre where she recently led the world premieres of a KIDS PLAY ABOUT RACISM, which brought together over 40 theater producing partners and was viewed on Broadway on Demand nearly 80,000 times during its limited run then became a free resource for educators and their students, and THE IMAGINARIES: AN IMMERSIVE MUSICAL, an original new work created by the newly-formed BACT Writer's Room. As a director and arts educator, she has worked with prominent theaters such as Bay Area Children's Theatre, Atlantic Theater Company's Atlantic for Kids, New York City Children's Theater, Disney Theatrical Group, Spellbound Theatre and more. As a producer, Ms. Davis has helped organizations reach hundreds of thousands of young people through, interactive "edu-tainment" with the nationally known Story Pirates, generating new digital pre-school content with Spellbound at Home, and a children's web series chronicling the experiences of a little black puppet girl named Nia living through the COVID-19 pandemic with her personal web-based company, Kids at Heart Productions. Before assuming her new role as Artistic Director, Ms. Davis served as the Director of Inclusion and Education with Brooklyn Children's Theatre restructuring their children's musical theater programming through an anti-racism lens. She made her professional theatrical debut at 13 years old launching a life-long career as a performer, splitting her time between California and NYC. Proud board member for TYA/USA, Spellbound Theater and The Story Pirates. Awards: 2019 Emerging Leader Fellowship-TYA/USA, 2019 NYCCT Leader Fellowship, 2021 Corey Medallion Award-Children's Theatre Foundation of America. BA in Theater Arts from the University of Southern California. khaliadavis.com

ADULT CAST

James Carrington, Member of Actors' Equity Association, (Mr. Ratburn); **SaraLynn Evenson** (Mom/Queen) and **Zach Thomas Woods** (Dad/Baggy pants). **Derrick Carroll**,

Understudy for James Carrington; **Brandite Reed**, Understudy for SaraLynn Evenson and **Jonathan Gideon**, Understudy for Zach Thomas Woods.

YOUNG PERFORMER CASTS

Young Performer roles are double cast. Young Performers in the **Elwood Cast** include: **Vivian Madson** (West Allis) as Arthur; **Silver Anderson** (Milwaukee) as Muffy; **Alice Rivera** (Milwaukee) as Francine; **Gia Deacon** (Milwaukee) as D.W.; **Ryon Davis** (Milwaukee) as Buster and **Charlie Cornell** (Elm Grove) as Brain.

Young Performers in the **Lakewood Cast** include: **Sanaiah Hibbler** (Oak Creek) as Arthur; **Niamh Mayne** (Elm Grove) as Muffy; **Lucia Santana** (Milwaukee) as Francine; **Layla Katers** (Kenosha) as D.W.; **Alex Radtke** (Cedarburg) as Buster and **Jaloni Brown** (Milwaukee) as Brain.

The Artistic Staff for **ARTHUR™ AND FRIENDS MAKE A MUSICAL!** includes: **Khalia Davis** (Director/Choreographer); **Brett Ryback** (Music Director); **Arnold Bueso** (Scenic Designer); **Jared Gooding** (Lighting Designer); **Jason Orlenko, USA** (Costume Designer); **Elisabeth Weidner, USA** (Sound Designer); **Kelly L. Schwartz**, Member of Actors' Equity Association, (Production Stage Manager) and **Carrie Johns** (Assistant Stage Manager).

Tickets start at \$32 – 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.

COVID Protocols: First Stage is no longer requiring proof of vaccination upon arrival, and masks will be optional in the theater, unless the community level in Milwaukee County is rated in the High category, as determined by the CDC. First Stage COVID safety protocols and updates can be viewed here: [firststage.org/covid-19-safety-protocols/](https://www.firststage.org/covid-19-safety-protocols/) - [performances](#)

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/)

Google Drive: Here is a link to headshots for the Playwright, Music Director and Director and the show logo:

drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nHdf0LBWG_EyIQXOHw7awi4rt-o3w3Us?usp=sharing

Special events for ARTHUR™ AND FRIENDS MAKE A MUSICAL!

Pay What You Choose Performance: Friday, October 14, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.

Pay What You Choose tickets are available on a first come, first served basis with a minimum suggested donation of \$5 per person. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. on the day of the performance. Patrons are encouraged to arrive early. firststage.org/events-tickets/tickets-offers/pay-what-you-choose/

Sensory Friendly Performance: Saturday, October 22, 2022 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 30 at 4 p.m. Sensory accommodations include lower sound, house lights up, a quiet area staffed by an educator experienced with the care of students on the autism spectrum and other developmental differences, and more. Tickets for Sensory Friendly Performances are \$10. Order 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, November 6, 2022 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. firststage.org/plan-your-visit/accessibility/sign-language-interpreted-performances/

FACT SHEET

About: ARTHUR™ AND FRIENDS MAKE A MUSICAL!

Book and Lyrics by **John Maclay**, Music and Lyrics by **Brett Ryback**
Adapted from the books and characters created by **Marc Brown**

Directed and Choreographed by **Khalia Davis**

Music Direction by **Brett Ryback**

Sponsored by **Children's Wisconsin**

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

Live Performances: October 7 – November 6, 2022

Big things are happening at Lakewood Elementary School! Mr. Ratburn's class is asked to write and perform a big show for all of Elwood City. Everyone is so excited! Everyone, except for Arthur. What should he do? Arthur feels more nervous as the big performance gets closer and closer. With the help of his family and friends Buster, Brain, Francine, Muffy – and even little sister D.W. – Arthur learns the importance of being his best, unique self. All aboard for an

incredibly fun ride with this world premiere musical! *Performances are approximately 90 minutes, which includes a brief intermission. Suggested for families with young people ages 5+.*

Performances:

- Friday, October 7 at 7:00 p.m. – *OPENING NIGHT*
- Saturday, October 8 at 1:00 & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, October 9 at 1:00 & 3:30 p.m.
- Friday, October 14 at 7:00 p.m. – *PAY WHAT YOU CHOOSE PERFORMANCE*
- Saturday, October 15 at 1:00 & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, October 16 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- Saturday, October 22 at 1:00 & 3:30 p.m. – *SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE at 3:30 p.m.*
- Sunday, October 23 1:00 & 3:30 p.m.
- Saturday, October 29 1:00 & 3:30 p.m.
- Saturday, November 5 at 1:00 & 3:30 p.m.
- Sunday, November 6 at 1:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m. – *ASL INTERPRETED 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

First Stage is one of the nation's leading theaters for young people and families. First Stage touches hearts, engages minds and transforms lives by creating extraordinary theater experiences through professional theater productions that inspire, enlighten and entertain. Its Theater Academy, the nation's largest high-impact theater training program for young people, fosters life skills through stage skills and serves nearly 2,000 students each year. As Wisconsin's leader in arts-integrated education in schools, First Stage's dynamic Theater in Education programs promote literacy, character building and experiential learning throughout the curriculum, serving over 20,000 students each year. First Stage was selected to participate in the Partners in Education program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (2012) and was the recipient of the *Milwaukee Business Journal's* Eureka Award, recognizing creativity and innovation in business, education and the arts for its Next Steps program for students on the autism spectrum (2013, 2015). 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