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FIRST STAGE's 2023/24 season filled with fun, excitement and adventure

-Season includes two huge musicals - The Lightning Thief and Diary of a Wimpy Kid - a world premiere inspired by the life and stories of Donald Driver - DREAM, QUICKIE! DREAM! - and so much more!-

Milwaukee, WI – May 1, 2023 – First Stage, one of the nation's leading theaters for young people and families located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, will present nine exciting, entertaining and inspiring productions in two different performance spaces for its 2023/24 season. The season includes two world premieres, four musicals and an exciting create your own adventure play. The variety and scope of First Stage's 2023/24 season will offer something for everyone as well as give families and Milwaukee theatergoers the opportunity to experience the exceptional theater First Stage produces.

First Stage's 2023/24 mainstage season kicks off in October at the Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater with the inspiring world premiere **DREAM, QUICKIE! DREAM!**, based on the books by Green Bay Packer legend **Donald Driver**, written by **Gloria Bond Clunie** and directed by popular Milwaukee actor/director **DiMonte Henning**. This production is co-commissioned by **First Stage** and the **Marcus Performing Arts Center**. The holiday season will be extra special with the hilariously joyful return of **THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER: THE MUSICAL**, directed and choreographed by talented Wisconsin actor/director and First Stage alum **Molly Rhode**, based on the play by **Barbara Robinson**, with book and lyrics by **Jahanna Beecham** and music and lyrics by **Malcolm Hillgartner**. Following that on the mainstage in February will be an action-packed, mythical adventure with **THE LIGHTNING THIEF: The Percy Jackson Musical**, adapted from the book *The Lightning Thief* by **Rick Riordan**, with book by **Joe Tracz** and music and lyrics by **Rob Rokicki**, and directed by First Stage Artistic Director **Jeff Frank**. The 2023/24 Todd Wehr season concludes with the hilarious, heartfelt musical **DIARY OF A WIMPY KID THE MUSICAL**, 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 **Michael Mahler** and **Alan Schmuckler** and directed by **Julie Woods-Robinson**.

Opening in October in the theater-in-the-round at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center's Goodman Mainstage Hall, and just in time for Halloween, will be the world premiere of a ghostly story with a historical twist, **THE FORGOTTEN GIRL** from the book by **India Hill Brown** and adapted by **Idris Goodwin**. The play was previously part of the Amplify Play Reading series and will be directed by **Jon Royal**. February will find Goodman Mainstage Hall filled with joy and laughter with the return of **ELEPHANT & PIGGIE'S "WE ARE IN A PLAY!"**, based on the delightful *Elephant & Piggie* books by **Mo Willems**, with book and lyrics by **Mo Willems** and music by **Deborah Wicks La Puma** and directed and choreographed by new **First Stage Associate Artistic Director Michelle LoRizzo**. Then opening in May 2024 will be the exciting create-your-own adventure story, **ESCAPE FROM PELIGRO ISLAND**, written by **Finegan Kruckemeyer** and directed by **Jeff Frank**. The production was previously part of the virtual 2020/21 season and will now come to life in Goodman Mainstage Hall and audiences will vote throughout the show to help decide what adventures hero Callaway Brown will take.

First Stage's award-winning **Young Company**, under the direction of Young Company Director **Matt Daniels**, will also present two Performance Projects at Milwaukee Youth Arts Center for the 2023/24 season, beginning in December with William Shakespeare's comedic drama **HENRY IV, Part 1**. The production will be directed by accomplished director/actor/educator **Marcella Kearns**. In March, the Young Company will present **AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE**, Arthur Miller's powerful examination of the intersection of politics and the public good, a play still relevant for our world today.

Tickets

First Stage offers three ways to purchase tickets for its 2023/24 season. **Family Packages** allow ticket buyers to choose just two or more plays in the season to save up to 30% off regular ticket prices, while also providing free and flexible ticket exchanges and priority seating. **The All-Access Membership**, available at \$75 per household, gives members two complimentary tickets to redeem throughout the season with an additional 20% discount off additional ticket purchases, discounts on Theater Academy classes, the annual Make Believe Ball and more. Family Packages and All-Access Memberships are on sale now. Single tickets to First Stage's 2023/24 season will go on sale **August 1, 2023**.

For additional information about the 2023/24 season and to order tickets, please go to firststage.org or call **(414) 267-2961**.

Google Drive: Here is a link to photos and logos:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QBARMrwHcWfAP-Xs6GBH_REsyrldyDOH?usp=share link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QBARMrwHcWfAP-Xs6GBH_REsyrldyDOH?usp=share_link)

FIRST STAGE'S 2023/24 SEASON OF PLAYS

DREAM, QUICKIE! DREAM!

A story for all ages inspired by the Life of **Donald “Quickie” Driver**

By **Gloria Bond Clunie**

Co-Commissioned by **First Stage** and the **Marcus Performing Arts Center**
World Premiere

Sponsored by **Associated Bank** and **Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren s.c.**

Directed by **DiMonte Henning**

October 6 – 29, 2023

Marcus Center’s Todd Wehr Theater

Donald, a champion football player on the Green Bay Packers is a new dad! He is tired, frightened, frazzled and desperate to survive the night with a crying baby who refuses to sleep. As the night wears on, his younger self, Quickie, comes to his rescue! Together, they journey through childhood memories, sharing stories inspired by Quickie’s life to soothe his new son and help them all rediscover how to dream big! *Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 6 – 8 & 9 – 12.*

From Artistic Director **Jeff Frank**: Though his football career has ended, Donald Driver continues to be an inspiration for so many around the country and in our community. In 2021, Donald became the first-ever Cultural Ambassador for the Marcus Performing Arts Center – a wonderful fit given his passion for community engagement and the arts (marcuscenter.org/cultural-ambassador/). After that appointment, the Marcus Center arranged a meeting between First Stage and Mr. Driver, hoping to find a way to spread his message to an even bigger audience. I was immediately struck by his passion for young people and his hope that they can make a better future. His “Quickie” books were inspired by stories that he told his children in hopes of inspiring the values of hope, friendship, perseverance and hard work. It has been a joy to witness the collaboration between Mr. Driver and playwright Gloria Bond Clunie. Directed by DiMonte Henning, DREAM QUICKIE! DREAM! celebrates Donald Driver’s stories and proclaims the power and importance of our dreams. Whether you are a football fan or not, the show is super fun and inspiring – and certainly one for the whole family to share.

THE FORGOTTEN GIRL

By **India Hill Brown**

Adapted by **Idris Goodwin**

Presented by special arrangement with Scholastic Inc.

Directed by **Jon Royal**

October 20 – November 12, 2023

Goodman Mainstage Hall, Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

On a cold winter night, Iris and her best friend, Daniel, play in the freshly fallen snow in the woods when they stumble upon the gravestone of a young girl, Avery Moore. Strange things begin to happen, and Iris and Daniel research the area to find answers. They learn of their town's history of segregation and become determined to restore Avery's grave and pay proper respect for her and others buried there. A ghostly story with a historical twist, this empowering tale examines the connection of past and present, friendship and forgiveness. *Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 9 – 12.*

From **Jeff**: In browsing the [Niche Book Bar website](#), I came across this book and immediately fell in love and reached out about acquiring the dramatic rights. I'm excited to have nationally recognized playwright Idris Goodwin adapt this ghost story/mystery that is also grounded in the reckonings of our social history. It is a powerful examination of friendship, those who are overlooked and the price of both.

THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER: THE MUSICAL

Book and Lyrics by **Jahnna Beecham**

Music and Lyrics by **Malcolm Hillgartner**

Based on the Play by **Barbara Robinson**

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC. (broadwaylicensing.com)

Directed and Choreographed by **Molly Rhode**

November 24 – December 24, 2023

Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater

The horrible Herdmans are the worst kids in the history of the world. The entire town panics when these rowdy six siblings are cast in the church's annual Christmas pageant. It's up to good-hearted Mrs. Bradley to help the Herdmans – and the rest of the town – discover the true meaning of Christmas before it's too late. Silent night? Not a chance, but sometimes a little joyful noise is just right for Christmas. *Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 4 – 6, 5 – 8 & 9 – 12.*

From **Jeff**: THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER is a holiday classic, and this new musical version was a smash hit when we last brought it to our stage in 2018. Full of big laughs courtesy of the Horrible Herdmans, who stumble into the annual Christmas Pageant hoping for snacks, where they quickly wreak havoc. Yet somehow, they journey from singing "Die Herod Die!" to slowly discovering the true meaning of Christmas, and the community (and the audience) learn to look with fresh eyes as we journey with them. The show will not only make you laugh, but will melt your heart as well. It is a perfect show for the holiday season.

THE LIGHTNING THIEF

The Percy Jackson Musical

Book by **Joe Tracz**

Music & Lyrics by **Rob Rokicki**

Adapted from the book *The Lightning Thief* by **Rick Riordan**

THE LIGHTNING THIEF is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals.

(concordtheatricals.com)

Directed by **Jeff Frank**

February 3 – March 3, 2024

Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater

As a son of Poseidon, Percy Jackson has newly discovered powers he can't control, monsters on his trail and is on a quest to find Zeus' lightning bolt to prevent a war between the Greek gods. Featuring a thrilling original rock score, this musical adaptation of the *New York Times* bestseller is an action-packed, mythical adventure for Percy fans of all ages! *Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 7 – 8 & 9 – 12.*

From **Jeff**: I'm a huge fan of Greek mythology and loved what Rick Riordan created with his Percy Jackson series. And this musical adaptation quite simply ROCKS! The writers were able to condense the epic first book into 75 minutes of powerful music, ingenious storytelling, high action and compelling and heartfelt characters. I'm looking forward to bringing the show to the stage with the same sort of bold theatricality that made this season's production of THE HOBBIT shine so brightly. Though a book targeted at middle-schoolers, I think this is a show for the entire family!

ELEPHANT & PIGGIE'S "WE ARE IN A PLAY!"

Based on the *Elephant & Piggie* books by **Mo Willems**

Published by **Hyperion Books for Children**

Book and lyrics by **Mo Willems**

Music by **Deborah Wicks La Puma**

This play was commissioned by and first produced at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. ELEPHANT AND PIGGIE'S WE ARE IN A PLAY is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI). All authorized performance materials are also supplied by MTI. (mtishows.com)

Directed and choreographed by new First Stage Associate Artistic Director **Michelle LoRizzo**

February 24 – March 17, 2024

Goodman Mainstage Hall, Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

When Elephant Gerald and Piggie the Pig get together, anything is possible. These two pals and their devotion to each other through ups and downs will remind you of how good it feels to put friends first. Bring your "bestus" friends and share in all of the pachydermal peril and swiney

suspense as Mo Willems' cherished characters make the leap from page to stage in this rollicking musical adventure. *Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 3 – 6 & 7 – 9.*

From **Jeff**: We're thrilled to welcome back Elephant and Piggie to First Stage in our newly renovated Goodman Mainstage Hall at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center! Mo Willems is unrivaled in his writing for young audiences, having created some of the most amazing characters and stories – and Elephant and Piggie and their unexpected, beautiful friendship are certainly at the pinnacle of his work. Paired with composer and First Stage friend Deborah Wicks La Puma (ELLA ENCHANTED, UNMUTED), they have created a fast-paced and fun vaudevillian style musical for our youngest audience members and their families. Joined by the Squirrelles and some surprise appearances from a few other folks, they sing and dance their way into our hearts while exploring the trials and tribulations of being “bestus” friends.

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**

Produced by special arrangement with **Kevin McCollum** and **Buena Vista Theatrical**

Diary of a Wimpy Kid is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC.

(broadwaylicensing.com)

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

Directed by **Julie Woods-Robinson**

April 6 – May 5, 2024

Marcus Center's Todd Wehr Theater

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. *Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 5 – 8 & 9 – 12.*

From **Jeff**: “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 The Children's Theatre Company in 2022.

ESCAPE FROM PELIGRO ISLAND
A Create Your Own Adventure Play
By **Finegan Kruckemeyer**

Directed by **Jeff Frank**

May 10 – June 2, 2024
Goodman Mainstage Hall, Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

Callaway Brown – an unlikely young hero – has been stranded on a desert island, and it's up to YOU to decide what happens next! In this interactive production, audience members vote on Callaway's actions in an energetic romp through time and space. Will Callaway time travel to the Wild West and meet a talking horse? Develop superpowers and fight crime in the future? Or have a crush on a vampire? The choice is yours! *Suggested for adults, teens and children ages 6 – 8 & 9 – 12.*

From **Jeff**: First produced in our virtual 2020/21 season, we're bringing back this create your own adventure live on stage in the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center's Goodman Mainstage Hall. Throughout the production, the audience will vote multiple times as to the course of action for our hero Callaway Brown. With over 1,000 different possible combinations of choices, no two performances will ever be the same! I hope audiences will come back more than once to witness the magic of this show. This fast-moving, boldly theatrical rollercoaster ride of a production is suitable for the entire family. Whether the story takes us under the sea, to the old west, to battle an aging vampire or to save the world, there is something for everyone. Filled with laughter and adventure while celebrating Callaway's discovery of becoming who they were meant to be.

Young Company Performance Projects

Young Company Performance Projects are actor-driven presentations using elemental production values. By stripping down to a nearly bare stage, the connection of actor to audience is enhanced, and the words of the play come alive in exciting ways, allowing First Stage's award-winning students to showcase their graduate level skills with full-length material, from Shakespeare to American classics to pieces commissioned specially for them.

HENRY IV, PART 1
By **William Shakespeare**
Sponsored by **UPAF**

Directed by **Marcella Kearns**

December 9 – 17, 2023
Goodman Mainstage Hall, Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

With his crown under threat from enemies both foreign and domestic, Henry IV prepares for war. As he prepares to defend his crown, his son Prince Hal bails on his responsibilities at Court to hang out in taverns with a gang of ne'er-do-wells, chief of whom is the notorious Sir John Falstaff. With the onset of war, Hal must confront his responsibilities to family and throne. Power, honor and rebellion reign in this second of Shakespeare's historical epic of royal succession. *Suggested for adults and teens.*

From **Matt Daniels**, Director of the Young Company: This play is a perfect vehicle to showcase the Young Company's award-winning Shakespearean prowess. Full of soaring language, epic battles, and hilarious hijinks, this play has something for everyone.

AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

By **Arthur Miller**, adapted from **Henrik Ibsen's play**

AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE MILLER is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC, servicing the Dramatists Play Service collection. (dramatists.com)

Sponsored by **UPAF**

April 19 – April 28, 2024

Goodman Mainstage Hall, Milwaukee Youth Arts Center

What happens when one man's quest to do right is seemingly at odds with the best interests of his community? Can reason and science win out over rumor and fear? When Dr. Stockmann makes a literally poisonous discovery, his brother, the Mayor, begins a war of innuendo and half-truths that threatens to tear their family – and their community – apart. *Suggested for adults and teens.*

From **Matt**: There may be no finer adaptation of Ibsen's searing examination of the intersection of politics and the public good than American master, Arthur Miller's. This play has questions that we still have trouble answering more than a century after Ibsen first asked them. Looked at through the eyes of the next generation as represented by the Young Company, they become even more urgent.

For additional information about the 2023/24 season, please visit to firststage.org/ or call (414) 267-2961.

Amplify Reading Series

Understanding the power of connection that young people feel when they see themselves and their stories on stage, First Stage is excited to begin the next phase of the Amplify series featuring new and developing work from traditionally underrepresented playwrights and directors whose voices offer an opportunity to expand First Stage's artistic horizons and develop its audience's perspective. For the 2023/24 season the focus shifts from producing short plays to continuing to present readings of three plays in various stages of development.

The Amplify Reading Series gives First Stage a chance to explore new work that is being considered for a full production while also engaging the community in discussion about the process of developing new plays.

From Jeff: “We’re excited to continue our investment in new play development and in lifting up the voices of underrepresented artists. We also look forward to engaging our audiences in conversation about the work as we consider selections for future seasons.”

Please note: Dates and titles are still being finalized for the Amplify Reading Series. Please visit firststage.org/ for the latest updates.

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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