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## **New Stage Theatre Announces Arts-in-Education Touring Productions for 2016-17 Season**

JACKSON, MISS.—New Stage Theatre, a professional theatre located in Jackson, Mississippi, announces its productions for its Arts-in-Education statewide touring program available to schools, libraries, and community centers during the 2016-2017 school year.

This season, New Stage will present *The Selfish Giant* and *Oh Freedom! The Story of the Underground Railroad* as touring productions. All productions are available for bookings through May 5, 2016. Both shows will be performed for Mississippi schools by the professional actor's company, a racially diverse company of four young actors who have recently graduated from college with degrees in theatre.

The greatest collaboration against racism in American history, before the Civil Rights Movement, was the Underground Railroad. People of all ethnic backgrounds, of both sexes, and from North and South came together to resist the oppression of slavery by helping escaped slaves make their way to free territory in the years before the Civil War. *Oh Freedom! The Story of the Underground Railroad* celebrates these alliances by combining the many stories with songs of the period. Famous participants like Harriet Tubman and Harriet Beecher Stowe are represented as well as lesser known heroes of the movement like John Rankin, whose house on a hill was a beacon for freedom; the mysterious "Peg Leg" Joe who moved among the plantations teaching slaves to escape and "*Follow the Drinking Gourd*," a song designed to show them the way; and Henry "Box" Brown who had himself put in a box and mailed to freedom. The production will encourage student audience participation in the singing of traditional spiritual, "*Oh, Freedom*." The story inspires all to work together for the good of all as it celebrates a time when Americans were at their courageous best, supporting one another—regardless of background, ethnicity or gender—in the cause to extend to all Americans our greatest, most inalienable right: freedom. *Oh Freedom! The Story of the Underground Railroad* is best suited for middle and high school audiences.

Oscar Wilde's classic children's story about *The Selfish Giant* who wouldn't share his beautiful garden becomes a joyous play that touches on themes of friendship, empathy, sharing, and kindness. The Selfish Giant comes home from a long trip to find children playing in his garden. He kicks them out, threatening to bring them to justice for trespassing. But a harsh winter—in the form of comic characters Frost, Snow, and North Wind—brings the realization to the giant that the children who used to trespass in his garden implanted friendship in this special place. The Giant's heart melts in a life-changing moment, and spring, along with the children, returns to his garden. Audiences will celebrate the gentle message of empathy and kindness in this beautiful show with universal themes. *The Selfish Giant* is best suited for elementary school audiences.

All touring productions will be performed by New Stage's Professional Acting Company members Jake Bell, Christan McLaurine, LaSharron Purvis, and Hope Prybylski. *Oh Freedom!* is directed by New Stage Resident Teaching Artist Chris Roebuck and *The Selfish Giant* is directed by New Stage Education Director Kerri Courtney Sanders.

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New Stage is offering the tours to schools and communities for \$575 - \$775, depending on travel distance. The price includes the performance and a post-performance question and answer session with the company. A comprehensive study guide for teachers is provided prior to the performance. Various workshops for students and teachers are available with or without a performance. Workshops available include Basic Acting, Acting Shakespeare, Drama in the Classroom, Dramatizing Stories, Improvisation, and Stage Combat. Integrating Drama into the Classroom, Stage to Literacy, and Teaching Shakespeare Workshops are also available for teachers as professional development.

New Stage has a strong reputation for presenting quality performances and has been touring successfully to high school and middle schools since 1990. The tours travel throughout the state, from Clarksdale to New Albany to Gautier and most of the public school districts New Stage visits are to underserved audiences. During the 2015-2016 season New Stage performed *Androcles and the Lion*, *Mississippi Talking*, and *Walk, Don't Ride!* 73 times for 54 schools in 19 school districts. More than 22,000 students were delighted, entertained, and educated by New Stage Theatre's professional acting company.

Leigh Butler, a teacher at Marshall Elementary in Jackson, said "*Androcles and the Lion* gives a great message to all; great way to incorporate the theatre/visual arts into the curriculum. Very well-done performance, particularly the message portrayed in the play."

After seeing *Mississippi Talking*, Shemeka from Laurel Middle School in Laurel, responded with, "My overall reaction to *Mississippi Talking* was AMAZING. The actors were engaging and energetic. The sets were simple, which helped me focus on the acting. The old time costumes helped bring the story to life."

When *Walk, Don't Ride! A Celebration of the Fight for Equality* was performed at South Jones High School in Ellisville, teacher Congetta Geiger said, "*Walk, Don't Ride!* was extremely informative and entertaining. As a history teacher, the educational value was fabulous. Excellent production quality! It captured my students' attention and created conversations for the classroom. Extraordinary!"

On Thursday, October 27 at 4:30 p.m., New Stage Theatre will offer a free preview of this season's touring shows. Teachers will be treated to a scene from *Oh Freedom! The Story of the Underground Railroad* and *The Selfish Giant* as well as a brief presentation from Education Director Kerri Sanders on workshop and residency options New Stage can bring to your school. The teachers will also be able to attend that evening's performance of *Our Town* at no charge. A fun and informative evening is guaranteed. For reservations for the free preview performance, call Education Assistant Betty Wong at 601-948-3533, ext. 233. Deadline to register is October 24.

New Stage Theatre was chartered as a not-for-profit organization in 1965, producing its initial season in the winter/spring of 1966. Founded by Jane Reid-Petty with the assistance of the American National Theatre Academy and Actor's Equity Association, dedication to professional excellence in theatre arts was part of the theatre's original mission. New Stage's education department was founded in 1989 and received the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in 1995 for its efforts to introduce tens of thousands of young Mississippians to live theatre.

The New Stage Arts-in-Education touring program is sponsored by Entergy Mississippi, Blue Cross Blue Shield of MS, The Selby and Richard McRae Foundation, and The Chisholm Foundation.

For pricing, more information or to schedule a tour or workshop please contact Education Director Kerri Sanders at 601-948-3533 ext. 232 or [ksanders@newstagetheatre.com](mailto:ksanders@newstagetheatre.com) or Education Assistant Betty Wong at 601-948-3533 ext. 233 or [bwong@newstagetheatre.com](mailto:bwong@newstagetheatre.com).