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New Stage Theatre Announces Arts-in-Education Touring Productions for 2017-18 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 2017-2018 school year.

This season, New Stage will present *Oh Freedom! The Story of the Underground Railroad*, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* and *Julius Caesar* as touring productions. Both shows will be performed for Mississippi schools by the professional apprentice 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*, written by Peter Manos, 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.

The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, adapted by Joseph McDonough, is the original short story that made Mark Twain famous. In this lively leaping stage adaptation the classic story comes to life as we explore the themes of honesty, transparency, and following the golden rule. Jim Smiley has built quite the reputation as a betting man. He will bet on everything from a horse race to a chicken race and anything in between. If you let him, before you know it he will have you gambling with the very shoes on your feet! What happens when Jim’s “good luck” comes abruptly to an end? Audiences will experience first-hand the importance of being honest, showing kindness, and a gentle reminder to treat others the way you would like to be treated. *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras* is best suited for elementary school audiences.

William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* tells the tale of the fall of one of Rome’s greatest leaders. It is a political drama of the mighty brought low, but it is also a deeply personal tale of seduction and betrayal. As the play opens, Julius Caesar returns in triumph from a civil war. Even Caesar’s closest friends, fear this means the end of democracy in Rome. The crowds demand that Caesar be made a king. But crowds are often fickle, and there are many who think themselves clever enough to sway them. In the end, all audience members are invited to judge who, indeed was “the noblest Roman of them all.” *Julius Caesar* is best suited for middle school and high school audiences.

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All touring productions will be performed by New Stage's Professional Acting Company members Kyle Parker Daniels, Jessica Debolt, Brianna Hill, Xerron Mingo. *Oh Freedom!* is directed by New Stage Resident Teaching Artist Chris Roebuck and music directed by New Stage Education Director Sharon Miles. *Jumping Frog* is directed by New Stage Education Director Sharon Miles.

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 Creative Drama, Basic Acting, Stand Up With Shakespeare, Dramatizing Stories, Playwriting 101, and Stage Combat. Teacher Workshops are available for schools as staff 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. In the 2016-2017 season, the professional apprentice company performed *The Selfish Giant* and *Oh Freedom!* to 57 schools.

Brittany Green, a teacher at Northwest Rankin Middle School in Flowood, said "It was very moving, educational and inspiring to the viewers. Costumes and performers were great! Very Educational! Your actors and actresses are amazing! Their characters truly came alive! Voices are beautiful!"

Angie Fletcher, who teaches at Oak Park Elementary in Laurel, said "I loved this production, the powerful message and the music. New vocabulary words were introduced to the students as well as important historical facts. It was important that the kids got to engage in the talk back session. Wonderful production!"

Clinnesha Sibley, a teacher at Piney Woods School in Piney Woods, commented "The historical accuracy and cultural relevancy was excellent. The value, I believe, is that the students were able to learn more about themselves and where they come from. Positive. I was happy the students were given an opportunity to see another side of the performers and learn about their process; particularly the research. Anything that allows them to see the presence of African Americans on stage and in stories that capture what it means to be a person of color in America. Whether the play is historical or contemporary, if our students see reflections of themselves – the entire experience resonates with them more."

Come to New Stage Thursday, October 27 at 4:30 p.m. for a 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 Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* as well as a brief presentation from Education Director Sharon Miles on workshop and residency options we can bring to your school! 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.

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, 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 Sharon Miles at 601-948-3533 ext. 232 or smiles@newstagetheatre.com or Education Assistant Betty Wong at 601-948-3533 ext. 233 or bwong@newstagetheatre.com.

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