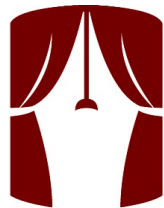


# NEW STAGE *Theatre*

Founded in 1965, New Stage produces five plays each year in its subscription series, in addition to a Holiday show, an annual SchoolFest matinee, and a kids-only summer camp show that features local area

talent. Main stage productions range from master works to contemporary classics to new plays. All carry the mark of professional quality for which the theatre has long been recognized. Additionally, the theatre presents a second season called Unframed at New Stage Theatre Series featuring cutting-edge plays directed and performed by local artists. Mississippi audiences are bred on the rich literary heritage of the state – William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Richard Wright – and they respond to the dramatic event that is rooted in the playwright's words and vision. Our emphasis on new work evolves from this heritage; therefore, our special programming of The Eudora Welty New Play Series provides the creative meeting of playwright and the performing artists that nurtures the art of the dramatist and the present and future vitality of the American theatre.



FONDREN  
THEATRE  
WORKSHOP

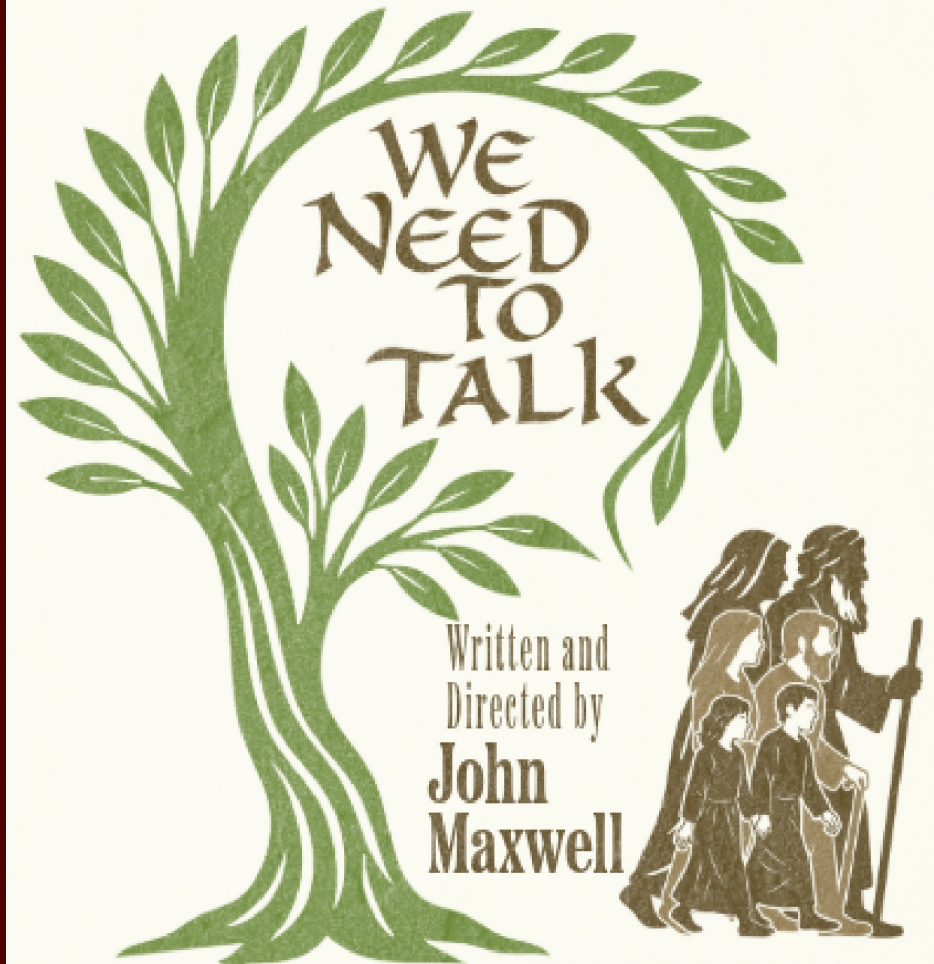
Founded in 2003, FTW is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to creating a true theatre community, with an emphasis on sharing the creative process, as well as the art we create, by and through the presentation of

theatrical productions, workshops and other events to further the literary and cultural advancement and economic development of the community. FTW specializes in promoting works by emerging playwrights, supporting local charities and school theatre programs, and establishing a strong, vibrant theatre community in the heart of the State Capital of Mississippi. For more information or to get involved, please visit [www.fondrentheatreworkshop.org](http://www.fondrentheatreworkshop.org), or email [fondrentheatre@gmail.com](mailto:fondrentheatre@gmail.com), or Find Us on Facebook under Non-Profits. To make a tax-deductible donation to FTW, please scan the QR code below.



Donations to FTW sponsored by ONECAUSE  
Fundraising Solutions

## FONDREN THEATRE WORKSHOP IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NEW STAGE THEATRE



Written and  
Directed by  
**John  
Maxwell**



DEVELOPED THROUGH NEW STAGE'S  
EUDORA WELTY NEW PLAY SERIES

# WE NEED TO TALK

Written and Directed by John Maxwell

## CAST

Sarah #1 ..... Tessa Bennett  
Abraham #1 ..... Mac Mitchell  
Sarah #2 ..... Ashia Benford  
Abraham #2 ..... Joseph Frost  
Sarah #3 ..... Wendie Sheppard  
Abraham #3 ..... Ward Emling

There will be a 15-minute intermission.

***Please silence and refrain from using all cell phones or any other portable electronic devices. Please do NOT take video or photographs.***

***We Need to Talk*** was developed and presented as part of  
New Stage Theatre's Eudora Welty New Play Series.

## PRODUCTION CREW

Assistant Director/Stage Manager ..... Elizabeth Thiel  
Production Managers ..... Malaika Quarterman, John Howell  
Lighting Design and Stage Electrician ..... Antonio Juarez  
Set Design ..... Richard Lawrence, Malaika Quarterman  
Set Construction ..... Richard Lawrence, Antonio Juarez  
Sound Design ..... Nate Quarterman, Callie Jackson  
Sound Board Operator ..... John Howell  
Costume Design ..... Malaika Quarterman  
Fight Coordination ..... Allie Bennett (SAFD)  
Media and Poster/Program Art Design ..... Opie Cooper  
Promotions/OneCause Coordinators... Amy Smith, Diana Howell  
House Manager ..... Diana Howell  
Box Office/Concessions ... Diana Howell, FTW Board Members

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

WE NEED TO TALK is fiction. It is based very loosely on the story of Abraham and Sarah as told in the Bible, in the book of Genesis (Chpt. 11, Verse 26-Chpt. 22). At the start of this project in the late eighties (yes THAT long!) I tried to encompass the entire story of Abraham's journey with his wife Sarah as told in the Good Book. After offering a copy to a cherished friend, Ivan Rider, he suggested that I whittle it down to a manageable tale. Ultimately, I decided to only include the personal challenge of Abraham and Sarah at the expense of the rest of this immense story. Immense is, of course, an understatement in that it is the seed of three great religions in this world today (Jewish, Christian, Islam). And by "only include," I mean just that. I concentrated only on those two people, Abraham and Sarah, as they navigated their relationship through impossible odds. What was it like to be given an impossible "mission" from an "impossible source" out in the fields one day? What was it like to have to tell family that they were to "pick up and leave" without warning of any kind to be led into a famine? The story is rife with challenges all through this impossible story...up to the ultimate challenge of possible human sacrifice. Anachronisms abound. Tomatoes? Knitting? But this is not a story about that. This is a story about a universal struggle, modern and ancient, in handling what fated results gives us in challenge. If we are human, we make mistakes, as Abraham and Sarah certainly do. Ultimately what are we, as human beings on this planet, expected to be? I am a man of devout faith. But even without that, what are we in this universe we live in? Are we no better than our own failure, or can we rise above that to be the impossible? I think this, as much as anything, is what this "tale told" is about. Hope you enjoy. - **John**

## SPECIAL THANKS

Control Systems, Inc. (Parking Lot); Securitas Security Services; For New Stage Theatre: Bill McCarty, III, Francine Reynolds, Dawn Buck, Xerron Mingo, and Joey Nelms; Doug Boone and Fondren Renaissance Foundation; Walt Grayson and WJTV; Jessica Wilkinson and WLBT; Anna Christine Hillbery and Riverside Theatre; Ida Wells APAC; Brooke Roebuck and OneCause Fundraising Solutions

**AND TO OUR GENEROUS PRODUCTION DONORS:** Anonymous, Kurt Proctor, Amy Tofte, Corinne Sampson, Jane Waugh, Cecil Fox, Charles Mortimer, Lee Paris, Amy Simpson, Bruce Welch, Dorothy Triplett, Joseph Reiff, Amanda Myers, and Malaika Quarterman

**ASHIA BENFORD (Sarah #2)** is a local actor, director, and theatre educator. Her stage credits include *Chicken and Biscuits*, *Race*, *9 Parts of Desire*, *Mahalia: A Gospel Musical*, *Hairspray*, *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, and *Is God Is*. Her directing credits include: *Matilda the Musical*, *Pipeline*, *Sunset Baby*, *For Colored Girls...*, and *Top Dog/Underdog*. She has recently joined the theatre department at Wells APAC, where she teaches elementary, middle, and high school students. Benford also holds an MA in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and is a therapist at Progressive Counseling, where she utilizes theatre and therapy to help clients rewrite their stories, express their feelings, and create meaningful change.

**TESSA BENNETT (Sarah #1)** is thrilled to be returning to the stage after a decade of neglecting her dramatic side. She was most recently seen in FTW's production of *A Winter's Tale*. Before that, she appeared FTW's *Assassins*, and New Stage's Unframed's *Circle Mirror Transformation*. After studying Theatre, Social Work, and receiving her Master's in Education at Belhaven University, she now naturally spends her time running Just Vanilla bakery in Fondren. Thank you to John for finally taking the bribe, and to husband Kyle for making her life easier than harder most of the time.

**WARD EMLING (Abraham #3)** is a 1976 graduate of Millsaps College and trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. He has been active in Mississippi theatre since 1973. He has appeared in productions at Murrah High School, Little Theatre of Jackson, The Millsaps Players (under the direction of Lance Goss), The Jackson Symphony, New Stage Theatre, The Back Alley Theatre (Los Angeles), The Mississippi Opera, and The Mississippi Shakespeare Festival. He made his Fondren Theatre Workshop debut earlier this year in *The Invention of Language*.

**JOSEPH FROST (Abraham #2)** is a playwright, director and actor living in Jackson, MS, with his wife Shannon and five kids. He has performed in 75 productions, written 20 plays, and specializes in devised theatre. Joseph is the artistic director of the floodlight theatre company and is the Lead Theatre Arts Teacher at Ida B. Wells Academic and Performing Arts Complex. He previously appeared in FTW productions of *Arcadia*, *Dinner With Friends*, *Assassins*, and *The Bald Soprano*, as well as New Stage productions of *Twelfth Night*, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, *Million Dollar Quartet*, *And Then There Were None*, and *The Crucible*.

**MAC MITCHELL (Abraham #1)** is an actor and playwright from Jackson, Mississippi who teaches at Belhaven University and at Saint Augustine School, where he devises new plays and adaptations with students from 4th-12th grade. He is also an MFA student at the Hollins University Playwright's Lab. He played Father in Belhaven University's production of *Eurydice*, Ferdinand with MS Shakespeare Festival's production of *The Tempest*, and also appeared in John Maxwell's *A Christmas Tale*.

**WENDIE SHEPPARD (Sarah #3)** is making her FTW debut with this performance. She previously appeared in New Stage's Unframed production of *BOY*. Other acting credits include Pat Nixon in the SETC award-winning show, *Tea for Three*, and Elizabeth Taylor in *Aunt Jane of Kentucky*, where she was recognized for an "Outstanding Feature Performance" at the 2023 Mississippi Theater Festival. She is the mother of three grown children and "Gus-Gus" to eight amazing grandchildren. She would like to thank John Maxwell for trusting her with such a special character and giving her an opportunity to work with an incredible cast.

**ELIZABETH THIEL (Assistant Director/Stage Manager)** is excited to return to the Warehouse! She received her BA in Theatre from the University of Alabama. She assistant stage managed for *Hell in High Water* at New Stage in 2019, and previously and stage managed for John Maxwell's 2023 production of *A Christmas Tale*. She would like to thank John for another opportunity to work together!

**JOHN MAXWELL (Playwright)** is a Mississippi-born, Governor's Award-winning playwright, actor and director whose works have been critical and popular regional, national and international successes. Best known for his one-man show, *Oh, Mr. Faulkner*, *Do You Write?*, many of his other plays have focused on biblical characters or themes, and have been presented in a number of churches statewide and regionally as part of John's Fish Tale Theatre Group. In addition to directing, he has acted in numerous New Stage Theatre shows over its 60-year history, including *RED*, *Greater Tuna*, *All My Sons*, and *Shakespeare in Love*. His play *Buck Nekkid for Jesus*, originally produced by New Stage Theatre in 1996 and again by Fondren Theatre Workshop in 2012, is currently being made into a feature film produced and directed by Travis Mills, with filming to begin early 2026.