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FST OPENS 2012 MAINSTAGE WITH PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING “NEXT TO NORMAL”

(Sarasota, FL) —Florida Studio Theatre presents the Southeastern Regional Premiere of the contemporary rock musical ***Next to Normal***.

Next to Normal is an emotional powerhouse of a musical about a suburban American family trying to take care of themselves and each other. It features music by Tom Kitt, with book and lyrics by Brian Yorkey. It won the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and was nominated for 11 Tony Awards. Performances begin in the Keating Theatre November 2 - January 7.

“When I saw *Next to Normal* in New York, I knew it was extraordinarily special,” said Artistic Director Richard Hopkins, who will also be directing this project. “It’s an amazingly, emotionally-challenging, heartbreakingly beautiful show, that says its okay to feel things - it doesn’t always have to be happy-go-lucky. At its core, we have a family who loves each other but the question is: can they help each other? Ben Brantley of The New York Times said that this show is more than a feel-good musical; it’s a feel-everything musical. That’s the best description of the play I’ve heard.”

Next to Normal was chosen as “one of the year’s TEN best” by major critics around the country including the Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Rolling Stone and The New York Times. “A work of muscular grace and power. It is something much more than a feel-good musical; it is a feel-everything musical.” - The New York Times

The principal cast is comprised of Broadway actress **STACIA FERNANDEZ** as Diane, Broadway actor **LEO DAIGNAULT** as Dan, New York actress **ASHLEY PICCIALLO** as Natalie, Broadway actor **MIKE BACKES** as Gabe, New York actor **JAMES LaROSA** as Henry, and New York actor **SCOTT GUTHRIE** in the roles of Dr. Fine and Dr. Madden.

STACIA FERNANDEZ (Diana) is somewhat of a Broadway veteran, coming to Florida Studio Theatre on leave from the Broadway cast of *Mamma Mia* (where she’ll return in late January). Other Broadway: *The Drowsy Chaperone* performed the Tony award-winning role, *Swing*, *Tom Sawyer*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *The Beauty and the Beast*; Off- Broadway: *Lonestar Love*. National tours: *Evita*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Jerome Robbins Broadway*, *Heartstrings*. Regional theatre: *Lucky Guy*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Guys and Dolls*, *CATS*, World Premiere of *Prince and the Pauper*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *The King and I*, *Anything Goes*, World Premiere of Alan Ayckbourn’s *Dreams from a Summer House*. Movie soundtracks: *The Shaggy Dog*, *Enchanted*.

LEO DAIGNAULT (Dan) has appeared on Broadway in *Avenue Q* and toured nationally with *Avenue Q*, *The Full Monty*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *Miss Saigon*. Mr. Daignault originated the role of Jinx in *Plaid Tidings* at Pasadena Playhouse and in *Forever Plaid* in Boston, San Diego, Tokyo and Chicago, where he won an Ollie Award for best vocal performance by a male. His film and television credits include *How to Marry a Billionaire: A Christmas Tale*, “The Sopranos,” “Silk Stalkings” and “Pensacola: Wings of Gold.” He was also one of

-MORE-

Rosie's Broadway Boys appearing on "The View" and "The Rachael Ray Show".

ASHLEY PICCIALLO (Natalie) is a graduate of Montclair State University with a BFA in Musical Theatre. Select Theatre Credits: *Hair* (Sheila Franklin); *Side Show* (Daisy Hilton); *Cold As Ice* (Laurie Beechman Theatre, Producer Nancy Kerrigan); NJ Premiere of *See What I Wanna See* (Kesa/Wife/Actress); *Always... Patsy Cline* (Patsy Cline); and the NY Knicks Halftime Show at Madison Square Garden. TV Credits: NBC's America's Most Talented Kid (Finalist). Ashley is also a singer songwriter and has self-released two albums.

MIKE BACKES (Gabe) Original cast *Jersey Boys* Las Vegas (Swing), Tours: *Rock Of Ages* (Joey Primo), *Footloose* (Ren), *Grease* starring Frankie Avalon, (U/S Danny/Ensemble). Regional: *Rent* (Roger), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Peter), *My Way* (Young Frank), *Smokey Joe's Cafe* (White Guy) and most recently was lucky enough to become a member of *The Broadway Boys* of New York City.

JAMES LaROSA (Henry) returns to FST after playing Abraham in *Altar Boyz*. Winner of the Payne Award for Outstanding Featured Actor in Music Theatre, select theatre includes: *HMS Pinafore* (City Center), *The Melody Lingers On* (National Tour), *Wildcat* starring Robert Cuccioli (Julia Miles), *Singin' in the Rain* (Forestburgh), *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (Barter), *Gypsy* (Arkansas Rep) & *Working* (Di Capo). Select Film/TV: Primetime: *What Would You Do?* (ABC), *Fugitive Chronicles* (A&E) and *Mourning on Charlotte St.* (Freedomland Films). Graduate of NYU & the "FAME" school.

SCOTT GUTHRIE (Dr. Madden/Dr. Fine) is a New York-based actor who recently starred as Berger in *Hair* at the New Bedford Festival Theater. He has also toured nationally with *Forever Plaid* and *South Pacific*. Off-Broadway: Jerome Kern's *Cabaret Girl* (Jim Paradené-New York Premiere). Other regional and NY credits include: *Plaid Tidings*, *A Chorus Line*, *The Full Monty*, Noel Coward's *Sail Away*, and *The Threepenny Opera*.

RICHARD HOPKINS (Director) is the Artistic Director and CEO of Florida Studio Theatre. Since his arrival at FST in 1980, Mr. Hopkins has guided the theatre from a small touring company to a nationally recognized regional theatre, which impacts over 160,000 adults & children annually. He has directed more than 100 productions in FST's three theatres. He has worked at numerous regional theatres including Capital Repertory, Blowing Rock Theatre, TheatreWorks Palo Alto, The Players of Columbus, Delaware Theatre Company, Long Island Stage, and many others. Mr. Hopkins began his professional theatre career as a resident actor with the Asolo State Theatre in Sarasota, Florida. He was a founding director of what is now American Stage Company in St. Petersburg and served as its Producing Director from 1974-1980. Mr. Hopkins has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Virginia Commonwealth University. Mr. Hopkins is the recipient of numerous awards including the Arts Leadership Award from the Sarasota Arts Council & the Richard G. Fallon Award for Artistic Excellence from the Florida Professional Theatre Association.

The rest of the creative team includes: **AIMEE RADICS** as Music Director, **STEPHEN HOPE** will assist with Musical Staging, **DALE JORDAN** as Scenic Designer, **SARA J. HINKLEY** as Costume Designer, **DAVID M. UPTON** as Lighting Designer, and **ERIC STAHLHAMMER** as Sound Designer.

Next to Normal had a surprising and highly unlikely route to Broadway. The musical began in 1998 as a 10-minute workshop sketch Kitt and Yorkey developed in their first year at a BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop in Manhattan, about a woman undergoing electroshock therapy, and its impact on her family, called *Feeling Electric*. Out of that idea, the show was born. After a debut in the 2005 New York Musical Theatre Festival, it eventually reincarnated as *Next to Normal*.

The revamped musical opened at Off-Broadway's Second Stage Theatre on February 13, 2008. Producer David Stone, who had been guiding the musical since 2005, took the unexpected step of bringing the show to Washington D.C.'s Arena Stage where it was significantly reworked again, and then back to New York and to Broadway, where it opened to rave reviews on April 15, 2009. This unusual trajectory from a New York Off-Broadway premiere to an out-of-town regional theatre engagement and then back to New York has been unprecedented.

Next to Normal is only the 8th musical in American history to be honored with the Pulitzer Prize for Drama (reserved mostly for Ameri-

can plays). The Pulitzer jury recognized ***Next to Normal*** for its subject matter and stated that it “expands the scope of subject matter for musicals.” The last musical to win the honor was Jonathan Larson’s *Rent* in 1996.

All 4 shows of the Mainstage Season – ***Next to Normal***, ***The Last Romance***, ***Next Fall*** and ***Jericho*** – will be presented at both FST’s Keating Theatre and Gompertz Theatre. Single tickets range from \$19-\$40 for regular performances. A subscription to all 4 plays of the Mainstage Season ranges from \$39-\$61. Both subscription tickets and single tickets may be purchased from the FST Box Office in person or by calling (941) 366-9000 or online at www.FloridaStudioTheatre.org.

ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Known as Sarasota’s Contemporary Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre was founded in 1973 by Jon Spelman. Starting out as a small touring company, FST traveled to places such as migrant camps and prisons. The company eventually settled down into a permanent home, acquiring the former Woman’s Club building – now renamed the Keating Theatre. In the years that followed, Florida Studio Theatre established itself as a major force in American Theatre, presenting contemporary theatre in its three theatre venues: the Keating Theatre, the Goldstein Cabaret and its newest space, the Gompertz Theatre.

Even with its growth, Florida Studio Theatre remains firmly committed to making the arts accessible and affordable to a broad-based audience. Under Richard Hopkins, Artistic Director and CEO, FST develops theatre that speaks to our living, evolving, and dynamically changing world. As FST grows and expands, it continues to provide audiences with challenging, contemporary drama and innovative programs.

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*Interviews with the cast and creative team can be arranged by calling (941) 366-9017 x338
Press photos will be available by Friday, October 21*

A full production schedule follows below:

Next to Normal

Performance Schedule

November 2 – January 7, 2012

Keating Theatre

Tickets: \$29-\$40

Wednesday	November 2	8:00 PM
Thursday	November 3	8:00 PM
Friday	November 4	8:00 PM
Saturday	November 5	2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Sunday	November 6	3:00 PM & 8:00 PM

Tuesday	November 8	8:00 PM
Wednesday	November 9	8:00 PM
Thursday	November 10	8:00 PM
Friday	November 11	8:00 PM
Saturday	November 12	2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Sunday	November 13	3:00 PM & 8:00 PM

Tuesday	November 15	8:00 PM
Wednesday	November 16	8:00 PM
Thursday	November 17	8:00 PM

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Friday	November 18	8:00 PM
Saturday	November 19	2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Sunday	November 20	3:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Tuesday	November 22	8:00 PM
Wednesday	November 23	8:00 PM
Thursday	November 24	NO SHOW - THANKSGIVING
Friday	November 25	8:00 PM
Saturday	November 26	2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Sunday	November 27	3:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Tuesday	November 29	8:00 PM
Wednesday	November 30	8:00 PM
Thursday	December 1	8:00 PM
Friday	December 2	8:00 PM
Saturday	December 3	2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Sunday	December 4	3:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Tuesday	December 6	8:00 PM
Wednesday	December 7	8:00 PM
Thursday	December 8	8:00 PM
Friday	December 9	8:00 PM
Saturday	December 10	2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Sunday	December 11	3:00 PM
Tuesday	December 13	8:00 PM
Wednesday	December 14	8:00 PM
Thursday	December 15	8:00 PM
Friday	December 16	8:00 PM
Saturday	December 17	2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Sunday	December 18	3:00 PM
Tuesday	December 20	8:00 PM
Wednesday	December 21	8:00 PM
Thursday	December 22	8:00 PM
Friday	December 23	8:00 PM
Saturday	December 24	NO SHOW - CHRISTMAS EVE
Sunday	December 25	3:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Tuesday	December 27	8:00 PM
Wednesday	December 28	8:00 PM
Thursday	December 29	8:00 PM
Saturday	December 31	2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Sunday	January 1	3:00 PM
Wednesday	January 4	2:00 PM
Thursday	January 5	8:00 PM
Friday	January 6	2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Saturday	January 7	8:00 PM