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FST ANNOUNCES ONLINE WINTER PLAY READING SERIES

(Sarasota, FL) – **Florida Studio Theatre** (FST) announces its **2021 Winter Play Reading Series**, presenting online readings of five new plays in progress written by some of the country’s top playwrights. Starting January 29, FST audiences will get a first look at a wide range of plays currently in development at FST—from a drama exploring American identity to a modern adaptation of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. Professional actors will bring each play to life, and audiences will have a chance to engage with participating playwrights following each reading. A full schedule of FST’s Winter Play Reading Series immediately follows this release. These online readings are available for a suggested \$10 donation to attend each event. All donations will go to support **FST’s Playwright Collective**, a select group of artists dedicated to developing new work for FST’s stages. For more information or to register, visit FloridaStudioTheatre.org or call FST’s Box Office at 941.366.9000.

“Since we ‘pressed pause’ on live productions at FST last March, we’ve really focused our time and resources into our New Play Development program,” said **Catherine Randazzo**, FST Associate Artist. “After months of development, these plays are now ready to be shared with our audience, who often help playwrights see their work in a new light. The plays featured in our Winter Reading Series explore themes that impact the world we live in—love, loss, personal and collective responsibility, and American identity, both in the past and the present.”

Kicking off FST’s Winter Play Reading Series on Friday, January 29, 2021, is *Last Call at the Old Slave Quarters Lounge*, created by **Kenneth Jones** (*Alabama Story*). This bold new work in progress is set in a popular Mississippi restaurant steeped in unsettling history. When long-buried secrets are unearthed, they challenge the status quo of three generations of a family of restaurateurs, revealing conflicting views on heritage, community, and responsibility.

Next up is an online reading of *The Drolls* by **Deborah Brevoort** (*The Women of Lockerbie*) on Friday, February 5, 2021. Set in Puritan-ruled London in 1659, this comedy follows three “drolls”—street performers plying their forbidden trade in London’s back alleys—named Cox, Littlewood, and Etherge. As the trio avoids being caught by Constable Cowly, they engage in an epic battle between the competing art forms of dramatic tragedy and lowball comedy.

Rachel Lynett’s (*Well-Intentioned White People*) loose adaptation of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, currently titled *As You Are*, will be read online the following Friday, February 12. In this play with music, an apartment community is stuck inside trying to find joy amid great loss. Orlando, a recovering addict, struggles to pay rent and “earn” his stay while also trying to woo Ros, an artist looking to capture the perfect moment with her camera. Meanwhile, Silvius, a high school teacher, tries his chances with exhausted nurse Phoebe, and Audrey, a classically trained musician, tries to come to terms with being “good” but not “great.”

Written by **Jason Odell Williams** (*Handle With Care*), *America in One Room* is a play in progress inspired by the 2019 convention of the same name. When eight strangers receive an invitation to the America in One Room convention, which promises debate on a wide range of topics, they are

hesitant to participate. However, as each personality files into the aptly-titled Liberty Room, their insecurities, strengths, weaknesses, and hopes for the future are put on full display. Presented on Friday, February 19, *America in One Room* dissects recent headlines and our nation's past to answer the question: what does it mean to be an American?

Jones, Brevoort, Lynett, and Williams are all members of **FST's Playwright Collective**, a select coalition of artists developing new work for FST's stages. FST provides Collective members with the opportunities, resources, and creative feedback needed to develop their new plays all the way from inception to production.

Bringing the series to a close on Friday, February 26, is *American Rhapsody* by Florida-based playwright **Michael McKeever**. Starting with the Moon Landing in 1969 and ending in the near future of 2032, *American Rhapsody* tells the story of the Cabot family. As America evolves into a new identity, so does the family. Members of other races and sexual orientations marry into and redefine who the family thought they were—all set against the backdrop of the ever-changing landscape of the American zeitgeist.

FST expresses its gratitude to the Performers' Unions—Actors' Equity Association, American Guild of Musical Artists, American Guild of Variety Artists, and SAG-AFTRA—through Theatre Authority, Inc. for their cooperation in permitting the Artists to appear in this program.

FST's Winter Play Reading Series, featuring online readings of five new plays in progress, begins January 29, 2021. Following each reading, FST audiences will have the chance to give feedback and ask questions of the playwrights. A full series schedule follows this release. These online readings are available for a suggested donation of \$10 per event. All donations will go to support **FST's Playwright Collective**, a select group of artists dedicated to developing new work for FST's stages. For more information or to register, visit FloridaStudioTheatre.org or call FST's Box Office at 941.366.9000.

ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Florida Studio Theatre (FST) is Sarasota's contemporary theatre. Founded in 1973, FST has grown to a village of five theatres located in the heart of Downtown Sarasota. Each theatre is small in size and large in impact— providing intimate and engaging settings for high-quality, professional performances.

Today, FST has established itself as a major force in American Theatre. FST is the largest subscription theatre in the state of Florida and among the largest in the country, serving more than 230,000 live attendees each year across its six core programs: Mainstage, Cabaret, Stage III, Children's Theatre, The FST School, and New Play Development.

Even with its growth, Florida Studio Theatre remains firmly committed to making the arts accessible and affordable to as many people as possible. Under the leadership of Producing Artistic Director Richard Hopkins, FST develops theatre that speaks to our living, evolving, and dynamically changing world. Hip and historical, entertaining and challenging, we are the theatre where the street meets the elite — where everyone is welcome to engage in the art of theatre.

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FST'S WINTER READING SERIES

Last Call at the Old Slave Quarters Lounge - January 29, 2021 at 3PM

By Kenneth Jones

A bold new work in progress set in a popular Mississippi restaurant steeped in unsettling history. When long-buried secrets are unearthed, they challenge the status quo of three generations of a family of restaurateurs, revealing conflicting views on heritage, community, and responsibility.

The Drolls - February 5, 2021 at 3PM

By Deborah Brevoort

Cox, Littlewood, and Etherge are "drolls" — street performers plying their forbidden trade in London's back alleys while avoiding the ill-intentioned Constable Cowly. Cox and Littlewood are more than happy to entertain the English citizens with low-brow humor and silly voices; Etherge is not. When Etherge finds the work of a seminal writer known as Shakespeare, Etherge and Cox engage in an epic battle between the competing art forms of dramatic tragedy and lowball comedy.

As You Are – February 12, 2021 at 3PM

By Rachel Lynett

In a loose adaptation of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, an apartment community is stuck inside trying to find joy in the darkest of situations. Orlando, a recovering addict, struggles to pay rent and "earn" his stay while also trying to woo an artist, Ros, who's looking for the perfect moment to capture with her camera. Silvius, a high school teacher, tries his chances with exhausted nurse Phoebe while Audrey, a classically trained musician, tries to come to terms with being "good" but not "great." Throughout this play with music, each character attempts to adjust to what it means to find joy amid great loss.

America in One Room – February 19, 2021 at 3PM

By Jason Odell Williams

When eight strangers receive an invitation to the America in One Room convention, promising debate on a wide range of topics, they are hesitant to participate. However, as each personality files into the aptly-titled Liberty Room, their insecurities, strengths, weaknesses, and hopes for the future are put on full display. Inspired by the 2019 convention of the same name, *America in One Room* dissects recent headlines and our nation's past to answer the question: what does it mean to be an American?

American Rhapsody – February 26, 2021 at 3PM

By Michael McKeever

Starting with the Moon Landing in 1969 and ending in the near future of 2032, *American Rhapsody* tells the Cabot family's story. As America evolves into a new identity, so does the family. Members of other races and sexual orientations marry into and redefine who the family thought they were—all set against the backdrop of the ever-changing landscape of the American zeitgeist.