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CONTACT: Lydia Baxter  
Public Relations Associate  
(941) 366 – 9017 ext. 338  
Lbaxter@floridastudiotheatre.org  
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**SARASOTA FESTIVAL OF NEW PLAYS CONTINUES WITH THE  
RICHARD AND BETTY BURDICK NEW PLAY READING SERIES**

(Sarasota, FL) –Florida Studio Theatre announces its 36th annual Richard and Betty Burdick New Play Reading Series, which will present three new staged readings by modern American playwrights. Part of FST's *Sarasota Festival of New Plays*, this three-day series will take place in Bowne's Lab Theatre on April 29, May 6, and May 13 at 3 PM each day. This series is free and open to the public, but reservations are required. Reservations can be made online at [www.floridastudiotheatre.org](http://www.floridastudiotheatre.org), by phone at (941) 366-9000, or by visiting the FST Box Office.

As Sarasota's Contemporary Theatre, FST is at the forefront of presenting the best new plays written in America today. FST's New Play Development Program is dedicated to providing a forum for new works to be heard, discussed, and workshopped. Each year, playwrights from across the nation come to Sarasota for a week of rehearsals and the opportunity to see their plays on stage in workshop productions. Through the Richard and Betty Burdick New Play Reading Series, the public gets a first look at fresh, exciting plays in process.

Spearheading the New Play Development program are Associate Artists Catherine Randazzo and Jason Cannon. According to Randazzo, programs like the Richard and Betty Burdick Reading Series help "Expedite the development process for the playwright. Feedback from new sources, a theatre's specific region, area audiences, and artistic members of the theatre are invaluable to discovering the universality of the play as well." Both Randazzo and Cannon are looking forward to this year's series, for each play tackles issues and poses questions that affect almost every human being. Cannon is "Excited to see all three of these new plays in front of an audience, because they all tackle big, timely topics, and do so with theatrical vigor, humor, and courage."

This year's series begins on Sunday, April 29 with *The Whole Shebang* by Jason Odell Williams. In a small town in Ohio, high school senior Kate stops attending her AP Science class after her teacher lectures about humans' responsibility for climate change. While Kate's friends try to convince her to return to class so she can graduate, a lawyer persuades Kate to sue the school, setting off chain of events on a local and national level. This play inspires questions of self-sacrifice, responsibility, and the common good.

Following *The Whole Shebang* is Matt Lyle's *Big Scary Animals* on May 6, a comedic drama partially inspired by Lyle's own experiences growing up in East Texas. In the play, an older couple from the rural country unknowingly moves to Dallas's "gayborhood" to be closer to their granddaughter. What begins as polite dinner conversation with their gay, multi-ethnic neighbors careens out of control. A hilarious collision of race, sex, guns, and sports, *Big Scary Animals* examines shifting generational beliefs and how hard it is to raise a child, regardless of who you are and where you live.

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Capping off the Richard and Betty Burdick Reading Series is *Wednesday's Child* by Mark St. Germain on May 13. Bringing mystery and murder to life in a dramatic tale, this play challenges the distinction between "right" and "wrong." In *Wednesday's Child*, the investigation into the murder of a surrogate mother explodes the lives of everyone around her.

Each reading is followed by a talkback with the playwright, where audience members have the opportunity to connect more deeply with the plays by asking questions and providing valuable feedback. In this way, audiences are able to be part of the development and creation of exciting new plays that may one day be programmed into one of FST's Mainstage or Stage III Series. "The talkback [after last year's reading] for *Honor Killing* was memorable," recalls Jason Cannon, Associate Artist. "It was a crackling discussion, and a big reason that [FST] decided to include the play in [this winter] mainstage season."

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#### ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS

**Jason Odell Williams** is an Emmy-nominated writer and producer as well as an award-winning playwright and novelist. Hailed as a "postmodern Clifford Odets" by the *L.A. Times* and "this country's newest Eugene O'Neill" by the *Santa Monica Daily Press*, his latest play, *Church & State*, was recently nominated for "Best New Play" by the Off-Broadway Theatre Alliance as well as three L.A. Ovation Awards (Best Playwriting for an Original Play, Best Production of a Play (Intimate Theatre), and Lead Actor in a Play). After being selected as an NNPN Rolling World Premiere with productions in Los Angeles and Rochester, the play ran for over 100 performances Off-Broadway at New World Stages from March 3 - June 4, 2017. His play *Handle With Care* was a *New York Times* Critics' Pick, ran for over 100 performances Off-Broadway starring Carol Lawrence, has been produced 21 times in the last five years in the U.S. and Canada, and recently won three Theatre Bay Area Awards (Outstanding Production, Best Ensemble, and Best Actor).

**Matt Lyle** is originally from East Texas and is a Summa Cum Laude graduate and winner of the Outstanding Theatre Graduate Award from Stephen F. Austin State University School of Theatre. He co-founded Bootstraps Comedy Theater in Dallas, Texas, for which he continues to serve as Artistic Director. In 2007, *The Dallas Observer* named Bootstraps as "Best Small Theater Company" and Matt as "Best New Playwright." He worked with several theaters in the Dallas/Fort Worth area as both actor and director prior to his relocation with his wife, Kim, to Chicago. Matt is a member of The Dramatists Guild and a graduate of the Sketch Writing Program at Second City. His plays have been produced in Dallas, Chicago, New York, Florida, and the University of Michigan. His award-winning play, *The Boxer* (a silent film on stage) had its New York premiere at the New York International Fringe Festival. In 2010, he premiered a follow-up silent film onstage, *The Better Doctor*, which WBEZ/NPR listed in the "Top Five Most Overlooked Shows of 2010," which was, presumably, a compliment. He was also the head writer and the host of *The City Life Supplement*, a live, monthly variety show/podcast that ran for three years in Chicago.

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**Mark St. Germain's** play *Freud's Last Session* ran for two years Off-Broadway, closing July 24th, 2012. His play *Becoming Dr. Ruth* premiered in July 2012 at the Barrington Stage Company in the Berkshires, played at Hartford Theaterworks, and was brought to NYC to the Westside Theatre. *Scott and Hem in the Garden of Allah* co-premiered in the summer of 2013 at the Contemporary American Theater Festival and Barrington Stage Company. *The Fabulous Lipitones*, a musical comedy co-written with John Markus, premiered at the Theatrical Outfit in Atlanta in summer, 2013, and then at Goodspeed Playhouse. Mark's other plays include *Camping With Henry and Tom* (Lucille Lortel and Outer Critics Circle Awards), *Ears on a Beetle*, *The God Committee*, *Out of Gas on Lover's Leap*, *Dancing Lessons*, and *Relativity* (World Premiere at Florida Studio Theatre). Mark wrote the Tammy Wynette musical *Stand By Your Man*, which began at the Ryman Theater in Nashville. With composer Charles Strouse, he co-wrote the book for his adaption of Dreiser's *American Tragedy*. With composer Randy Courts, Mark has written the perennial musical *The Gifts of the Magi*, as well as *Johnny Pye and the Foolkiller* (AT&T Award Grant) and *Jack's Holiday* (Playwrights Horizons). Television work includes Writer/Creative Consultant for *The Cosby Show* and Dick Wolf's *Crime and Punishment*. He co-wrote director Carroll Ballard's film *Duma* and produced and directed the documentary *My Dog, An Unconditional Love Story*, with Richard Gere, Glenn Close, Edward Albee and others. Mark also wrote the award-winning children's book *Three Cups*. Mark is an Associate Artist of the Barrington Stage Company, a recipient of the William Inge Festival's New Voices Award, and a member of the Dramatists Guild and the Writer's Guild East. He is an alumnus of New Dramatists.

#### ABOUT THE SARASOTA FESTIVAL OF NEW PLAYS

The Sarasota Festival of New Plays seeks to provide a forum for playwrights of all ages to develop plays that can be fruitfully produced. From our young playwrights to our emerging adult playwrights and seasoned play-writing veterans, the Sarasota Festival of New Plays seeks to broaden the breadth and depth of thought in American theatre by encouraging people of all ages and all perspectives to write plays. New Play Development is the lifeblood of FST. It is a year-round activity that is fully integrated into each of the theatre's other programs. FST's approach to new play development focuses on the continued life of the work. Aside from presenting world premieres, FST frequently provides plays with their second, third or fourth productions. Examples include *Black Pearl Sings!* (2009), given its third production at FST, and one of the top produced plays nationally in 2010. The 2014 selection *Dancing Lessons* went on to rave reviews for FST. In addition, in partnership with the National New Play Network, FST has presented the rolling world premieres of *Shotgun* by John Biguenet (2010) and *Doublewide* by Stephen Spotswood (2017).

#### ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Known as Sarasota's Contemporary Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre was founded in 1973 by artist, Jon Spelman. Starting out as a small touring company, FST traveled to places such as migrant camps and prisons. The company then acquired the former Woman's Club building, becoming the first permanent venue. Shortly after Producing Artistic Director, Richard Hopkins arrived, the building was purchased and 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 five theatre venues: the Keating Theatre, the Gompertz Theatre, the Parisian style Goldstein Cabaret and John C. Court Cabaret, and Bowne's Lab Theatre.

Even with its growth, Florida Studio Theatre remains firmly committed to making the arts accessible and affordable to a broad-based audience. 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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