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## FST OPENS 17/18 MAINSTAGE SEASON WITH 8-TIME TONY AWARD-WINNING MUSICAL, *ONCE*

(Sarasota, FL) — Florida Studio Theatre (FST) kicks off the Mainstage Season with the 8-Time Tony Award Winning musical Broadway smash-hit, *Once*, running in FST's Gompertz Theatre from November 10 through December 31, 2017. Providing the soundtrack to this original theatrical experience are 12 cast members, each playing their own live instruments on stage. *Once* is the first production of the Winter Mainstage subscription. Subscribers see four Winter mainstage productions for as little as \$59. Subscriptions are available for purchase by calling the Box Office at (941) 366-9000 or online at [www.floridastudiotheatre.org](http://www.floridastudiotheatre.org).

Winner of 8 Tony Awards including Best Musical, *Once* tells the enchanting tale of a Dublin street musician who's about to give up on his dream when a beautiful young woman takes a sudden interest in his haunting love songs. As the chemistry between them grows, his music soars to powerful new heights. *Once* draws you in from the very first note and never lets go; an unforgettable story about going for your dreams and the power of music to connect us all.

Directing this emotionally captivating theatrical production is FST Associate Artist Jason Cannon. "It's a story about clinging to hope in the face of collapsing dreams," says Cannon. "it's a story about how the language of music can transcend cultural and linguistic barriers. It's a story about how love is the key to healing.." All sorts of love are healed and discovered in this show: Romantic love, yes, but also parent to child, Dubliner to Corkonian, friend to friend, widow to widower, Czech to Irish, even man to guitar!"

A large multi-talented cast draws from their experience as both actors and musicians to bring to life this heart-string-pulling story to life with musical direction by Darren Server. Server's previous FST credits include Music Direction for *Million Dollar Quartet* and *Older Than Dirt*. Server comments on the free-flowing melodic structure of this production. "There is a lot of room for interpretation with the actual music of the show. It does not come with a specific note-by-note arrangement that each performer must play consistently every night. These actors are given the chance to express their characters through their music in a way that feels most true to them in that moment on stage. It makes for an even more exciting audience experience, never knowing quite what note will come next."

Playing the role of Girl and making her FST debut is Elizabeth Nestlerode. Speaking to her stage preparation, Nestlerode states, "I've been spending a lot of time with the script. It's wonderful to be digging into such a well-crafted story and it's exciting to reacquaint myself with this character now." When I first saw the show almost 5 years ago on Broadway, I connected to Girl's direct, no-nonsense use of language as well as her musicianship."

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In the role of Guy, is returning company member, Ben Paul Williams. Audiences will recognize Williams from his role as Carl Perkins in last season's Mainstage hit, *Million Dollar Quartet*.

Also returning are company members, Sarah Hund and Emily Mikesell. Hund's previous credits include *Blue Eyed Bettys*, *American Pie*, and *Poems, Prayers, and Promises*. Mikesell recently appeared in *Older Than Dirt* and *Urban Cowboys*. Rounding out the cast and making their FST debuts are Chris Blisset, Nya Chambless, Seth Eliser, Nicholas Lerangis, Kent M. Lewis, Olivia Luera, Paul Michael Lincoln, Lauren Wainwright, Grant Alan Watkins, and James Young.

This Broadway smash hit runs from November 10 through December 31 in the Gompertz Theatre. Subscriptions for all four Winter Mainstage shows can be purchased for as little as \$59 by phone at (941) 366-9000 or by visiting us online at [www.floridastudiotheatre.org](http://www.floridastudiotheatre.org).

#### 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 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 five theatre venues: the Keating Theatre, the Goldstein Cabaret, the renovated Gompertz Theatre, the 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. Under Producing Artistic Director and CEO, Richard Hopkins, 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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