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PROFANE YET PROFOUND: *HAND TO GOD* HITS FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

(Sarasota, FL) —Florida Studio Theatre (FST) opens its 2019 Stage III Series with *Hand to God* by Robert Askins, a dark comedy exploring the shockingly fragile nature of faith, morality, and the ties that bind us. An Obie Award winner and five-time Tony Award nominee, including Best New Play, *Hand to God* was the most produced play in the 2016-17 theatrical season. Called “A darkly delightful play” by *The New York Times*, *Hand to God* is a ribald and irreverent comedy that dramatizes the fine line between good and evil.

Hand to God starts playing in FST’s Bowne’s Lab Theatre January 16, and is part of a three-show subscription package, including the high-octane examination of judgment and redemption, *Cherry Docs*, and the Off-Broadway hit, *Buyer & Cellar*. Subscriptions for all three Stage III productions can be purchased for as little as \$49 at (941) 366-9000 or floridastudiotheatre.org.

“What this play does so well is to juggle humor—admittedly it’s jaw-droppingly raunchy and profane humor, but that’s the fun!—with big themes that we wouldn’t otherwise be willing or able to engage with in an intimate way,” explained FST Associate Artist Jason Cannon, who is directing *Hand to God*. “The play allows big scary themes to get close: death, depression, repression, guilt, hypocrisy, isolation, and desperation. *Hand to God* forces us to ask questions about these topics, but we are so busy laughing we don’t even realize how incisively we are being provoked.”

In the church basement of a little Texas town, something evil is afoot. Or, well, at hand. Shy, inquisitive teenager Jason finally finds an outlet for his burgeoning creativity at his church’s Christian Puppet Ministry after his father dies. But soon his hand puppet, Tyrone, goes rogue and takes on his own shocking and dangerous personality. As Tyrone’s influence over Jason steadily grows, Jason’s relationships with his secret crush, the school bully, and his widowed mother are thrown into jeopardy.

The New York Times dubs Robert Askins’ black comedy “Flat-out hilarious” and “Explosively funny.” Called “As touching as it is screamingly funny” by *Variety* and “The freshest and funniest Broadway comedy in years” by *TimeOut New York*, *Hand to God* is equally humorous and thought provoking. The play mines the psychology of grief and examines the moral ambiguity that permeates everyday life. Askins said, “The thing that you think [is good] can destroy the world, and the thing that you think is bad can save it. The play does attempt to show what I think most of America finds a problematic subculture—one that is striving for goodness.”

FST’s production of *Hand to God* features Harrison Bryan as Jason/Tyrone, Drew Hirshfield as Pastor Greg, Jessica Mosher as Jessica, Jason’s crush, Brenny Rabine as Jason’s mother Margery, and Tom Patterson as Timmy, Jason’s disruptive classmate. Bryan has performed regionally and Off-Broadway in *A Patron of the Arts* (Cherry Lane), *Brecht on Brecht* (Atlantic, PTP/NYC), and in MCC’s “FreshPlay

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Festival." Hirshfield has performed at regional theatres around the country, including Huntington Theatre Company, Geva Theatre Center, American Conservatory Theater, and Alley Theatre.

Mosher is a Canadian actress based in New York City who has performed in *Fun Home* (New York Regional Premiere, White Plains Performing Arts Center), *Crimes of the Heart* (Bristol Valley Theatre), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Savannah Repertory Theatre), and *The Red Coat* (Williamstown Theatre Festival Workshop). Rabine starred in productions of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *God of Carnage* at Capital Repertory Theatre, and *August: Osage County* at Arkansas Repertory Theatre. Patterson, who has also been seen in FST's productions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *Shotgun*, was in the Broadway production of *1984* and Studio Theatre's production of *Constellations*, for which he won a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Actor in a Play.

Hand to God is a delightfully heathen comedy that runs from January 16 through February 8 in FST's Bowne's Lab Theatre. Subscriptions for all three Stage III shows can be purchased for as little as \$49 at (941) 366-9000 or 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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