Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
September 12, 2016

The Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences on Tour launches the second national tour of

Based on the *Elephant & Piggie* books by Mo Willems
Directed by Jerry Whiddon

Beloved Family-Friendly Musical Kicks Off 35 Week North American Tour
Includes extended run at The New Victory Theater, New York City

**September 13, 2016 – May 21, 2017**

(WASHINGTON)—The Kennedy Center production of *Elephant & Piggie’s We Are in a Play!* launches its second national tour from September 13, 2016 to May 21, 2017 as part of the Center’s Theater for Young Audiences on Tour series for young people and their families. Having completed its first national tour to 21 cities in 11 weeks last season, the production is now expanding to 35 weeks and will cover 48 cities in 27 states. The production will visit seven cities in Canada, including Ottawa and Burlington, and for the first time, play at the acclaimed Off-Broadway venue The New Victory Theater for a nine-show run, from January 28 to February 5, 2017. Commissioned by the Kennedy Center, the family-friendly musical made its world premiere in the Family Theater on November 23, 2013. The production is written by six-
time Emmy Award-winner and popular children’s book author Mo Willems and directed by Jerry Whiddon, with music by Deborah Wicks La Puma.

Based on Mo Willems’s beloved, award-winning, and best-selling *Elephant & Piggie* children’s books, *Elephant & Piggie’s We Are in a Play!* has the duo singing and dancing their way through peril and suspense, facing fundamental questions like, what do you wear to a fancy pool costume party? Should you share your ice cream? And how can two friends play with one toy? Backed by nutty backup singers The Squirrelles, the duo even gets the audience involved in the action.

*Elephant & Piggie’s We Are in a Play!* casting includes Christopher Michael Richardson as Elephant Gerald, Shinah Brashears as Piggie, and Justine “Icy” Moral, Jennie Lutz, Caroline Wolfson as the Squirrelles through December 16, 2016; Evan Casey as Elephant Gerald, Lauren Williams as Piggie, and Jamie Eacker and Jennie Lutz as the Squirrelles through February 5, 2017. The New Victory Theater performances will feature a live four-piece band. New and returning cast members will perform until May 21, 2017.

The creative team includes set design by Jim Kronzer, costume design by Frank Labovitz, lighting design by Kyle Grant, sound design by Elisheba Ittoo, with choreography by Jessica Hartman, dramaturgy by Megan Alrutz, and music direction by George Fulginiti-Shakar.

As the National Sponsor of Theater for Young Audiences on Tour, Bank of America has made it possible for the Kennedy Center to embark on this national tour. “Mo Willems is the prolific author-illustrator of dozens of beloved and wildly popular books which have received many of the highest honors for children’s literature,” said Mario R. Rossero, Senior Vice President for Education. “Because his work is both complex and simple, filled with sparkling wit and quirky characters, it became clear to the Kennedy Center that Willems’ musical would be perfect for the relaunch of the Theater for Young Audiences on Tour program, which has featured 41 tours playing in hundreds of cities, 49 states, and Canada, making original commissioned work accessible to more than 2 million children, teachers, and parents who may not have the chance to visit the nation’s performing arts center, but still enjoy and benefit from the experience of live theater.”
Rena DeSisto, Bank of America Global Arts and Culture executive, said of the project, “We are pleased to enter our eighth year of supporting Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences, and proud to be a part of a project that provides inspirational arts learning opportunities to students and families in communities across the country.”

Mo Willems (author/playwright), a #1 New York Times Bestselling author and illustrator, is best known for his Caldecott Honor picture books, Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!, Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale, and Knuffle Bunny Too: A Case of Mistaken Identity. His Elephant & Piggie early reader series have consistently topped the New York Times Bestseller lists, been translated into numerous languages, and have been awarded two Theodor Geisel Medals and five Geisel Honors since debuting in 2007. Mo began his career as a writer and animator for Sesame Street (PBS), where he garnered six Emmy Awards for writing. His TV career includes creating The Off-Beats (Nickelodeon) and Sheep in the Big City (Cartoon Network) and serving as head writer for Codename: Kids Next Door (Cartoon Network). After leaving television, he has continued to produce short animated films based on his books that have won numerous awards in festivals around the world. As a performer, Mo has appeared at numerous venues including the San Francisco Sketchfest, BBC Radio, and NPR. His first play Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Musical, also a Kennedy Center commission, was nominated for a Helen Hayes Award for best new play. A retrospective exhibit of his picture book art, Seriously Silly: the Art and Whimsy of Mo Willems, is on view at the New York Historical Society through September 25, 2016. Mo is honored to be working with the Kennedy Center again for this production. Banana!

www.mowillems.com

Deborah Wicks La Puma (music) is a composer, music director, and orchestrator. Her work for adults and children has been seen by thousands around the world, from Australia to Bahrain to the East Room of the White House, enjoying both popular and critical success. She also worked with Mo Willems on the world premiere of Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Musical at the Kennedy Center. Her other works for young audiences include the Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences’ commission of OLIVÉrio: A Brazilian Twist (with Karen Zacarias), Frida Libre (La Jolla Playhouse), Ferdinand the Bull (based on the book by Munro Leaf), Chasing George Washington: A White House Adventure (Kennedy Center), Einstein Is a Dummy (Alliance
Theatre) with playwright Karen Zacarias, and Nobody’s Perfect (based on the book by Marlee Matlin) with Doug Cooney, a musical in English and American Sign Language, commissioned by VSA and the Kennedy Center. Her awards include the Jane Chambers Playwriting Award, a National Endowment for the Arts’ New American Works Grant, two Parents’ Choice Awards, an iParenting Media Award, and two Helen Hayes nominations for Outstanding New Play. A proud Mexican-American who speaks Spanish and Portuguese, she is also a member of the board of directors of TYA USA/ASSITEJ International, ASCAP, and The Dramatist Guild.

Jerry Whiddon (director) is the former producing artistic director/founding member of Round House Theatre and Street 70 Theatre. He has acted, directed, and taught in D.C. and NYC. His recent directing credits include Guys and Dolls (Olney Theatre); Tiny Tim’s Christmas Carol, Give a Pig a Pancake, and The Night Before Christmas (Adventure Theatre); Belle of Amherst (Bay Theatre); Nixon’s Nixon, Orson’s Shadow, and One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest (Round House); and Speed the Plow and Lost in Yonkers (Theatre J). Some of his favorite roles include Seagull on 16th Street (Trigorin), Blackbird (Ray), A Body of Water (Moss), Tabletop (Marcus), Wintertime (Francois), and Underneath the Lintel (solo). His film, television, radio, narration, voiceover work includes Heart and Soul—Biography of Frank Loesser, The Wire, An American Affair, My One and Only, A Woman Named Jackie (NBC), The Pelican Brief, On The Block (Yeager Films), and Parade of Witnesses (PBS). Other work includes All My Sons, American Appetites, and A Lesson Before Dying for VOA/LA Theatre Works. He has coached in the corporate world and taught at the University of Maryland, Catholic University, George Mason University, and Round House.

The tour for Elephant & Piggie’s We Are in a Play! gives performances for public and school audiences. A listing of public performances follows. Please contact the individual venues for ticket information. This schedule is subject to change.

For a behind-the-scenes look into the creation of the original Kennedy Center production of Elephant & Piggie’s We Are in a Play!, please visit the Kennedy Center’s ARTSEDGE site. For more information on Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences on Tour including a listing of school performances, please visit www.kennedy-center.org/kctyaontour.
**Elephant & Piggie’s We Are in a Play!**

**PERFORMANCES OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

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*Elephant & Piggie’s We Are in a Play!* is presented through special agreement with Music Theatre International (MTI). All authorized performance materials are also supplied by MTI.

**KENNEDY CENTER THEATER FOR YOUNG AudiENCES ON TOUR**
Kennedy Center’s Theater for Young Audiences on Tour brings original Kennedy Center productions for students and families into communities and performing arts centers around the country. Artistic teams consist of carefully selected professionals from all corners of the nation who possess extensive experience with both youth and adult theater. The teams strive to create shows that are delightful, educational, and provide a foundation for a life-long appreciation of the performing arts for audiences of all ages. Adding to the Theater for Young Audiences experience are Kennedy Center Cuesheet study guides, ARTSEdge online content and post-performance question-and-answer sessions with members of the cast and company. For more information on ARTSEdge, please visit ARTSEdge.kennedy-center.org.

EDUCATION AT THE KENNEDY CENTER

The Kennedy Center retains its commitment as the nation’s cultural center to educating and enlightening children and adults in Washington and around the country. The Center’s national education programs include: Ensuring the Arts for Any Given Child, which works with 23 municipalities and their school districts around the country to develop a long-range strategic plan for arts education; ARTSEdge, a website that offers standards-based materials for use in and out of the classroom; Partners in Education, which forges relationships between an arts organization and its neighboring school systems to build effective arts education programs for teachers and teaching artists; Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network, works with 30 state organizations on arts education policy issues; Explore the Arts, which provide insight into the cultural and historical context of the works presented on stage and sparks dialogue between audiences and the artists who have created the performances through participatory workshops, demonstrations, panels, master classes, and open rehearsals; Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards, which acknowledge teachers of grades K-12 whose efforts have made a significant impact on their students; and Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences on Tour, which brings original Kennedy Center productions for students and families into communities and performing arts centers around the country.

In and around D.C., the Kennedy Center’s programs include Changing Education Through the Arts, a program that works with seven schools in the area to affect long-term change in school culture through professional learning in arts integration; Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers, which trains Washington-area educators to teach the arts or other subject areas through the arts; and Washington, D.C. Partnership Schools, where the Center provides resources and teaching artist residencies to 22 elementary, junior, and senior high schools in Washington, D.C. The Center also mounts more than 100 events and performances of theater, music, dance, and opera throughout the season for more than 100,000 local school-aged children.

In addition, the Center offers multiple skill development programs for young artists and professionals both locally and nationally, including the National Symphony
Orchestra’s Youth Fellowship Program, Summer Music Institute, and High School Competition; Washington National Opera’s Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, Opera Institute, and Kids Create Opera Partnership; the biennial New Visions/New Voices forum for development of new plays for young people; Exploring Ballet with Suzanne Farrell; Betty Carter’s Jazz Ahead; VSA’s Playwright Discovery Program, Young Soloists, and Visual Arts Programs; arts administration internships; and the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival which impacts hundreds of thousands of college-aged theater students across the country and marks its 49th anniversary in 2017.

**FUNDING CREDITS**

Bank of America is the Presenting Sponsor of Performances for Young Audiences and the National Sponsor of Theater for Young Audiences on Tour.

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Kennedy Center education and related artistic programming is made possible through the generosity of the National Committee for the Performing Arts and the President’s Advisory Committee on the Arts.

For more information, please visit the Kennedy Center [website](http://www.kennedy-center.org).

Discover the Kennedy Center on social media:

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