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Chemistry Abounds in Cast of the World Premier of **FIRST DATE**

A Collaboration Between The 5th Avenue Theatre and
ACT- A Contemporary Theatre

Book by Austin Winsberg; Music & Lyrics by Alan Zachary and Michael Weiner

Directed by Bill Berry; Musical Staging by Josh Prince

March 10 – May 20, 2012

(Thursday, February 16, 2012 – SEATTLE, WA) Sparks will fly this spring when **Eric Ankrim** and **Kelly Karbacz** go looking for love in *First Date*, a co-production between **ACT - A Contemporary Theatre** and **The 5th Avenue Theatre**. This hilarious, sexy new musical about one date, two people, and all the voices in their heads, also features Seattle stars **Benjamin Harris**, **Vicki Noon**, **Brandon O'Neill**, **Rich Gray**, **Greg McCormick Allen**, and **Sonya Meyer**, in roles including old boyfriends, ex-fiancées, best friends, and pushy relatives, not to mention fellow diners who intrude on the couple's blind date. The 5th Avenue's Producing Director **Bill Berry** directs this clever and quirky world premiere romantic comedy with musical staging by Broadway's **Josh Prince**. With a book by seasoned screenwriter **Austin Winsberg** and music and lyrics by the dynamic writing team of **Alan Zachary** and **Michael Weiner**, this irreverent comedy chronicles the perils and pitfalls of blind dating and the journey from "tragic mistake" to "true love." Or at least to a second date.

First Date plays **March 10 – May 20, 2012** (press opening March 29) at **ACT-A Contemporary Theatre** in the Falls Theatre (700 Union Street, Seattle 98101). Tickets (starting at \$15.00) may be purchased at both theatres via **The 5th Avenue Box Office**, 206-625-1900 or online at www.5thavenue.org; and the **ACT Ticket Office**, 206-292-7676 or at www.acttheatre.org. This is the second production produced in partnership by ACT and The 5th Avenue Theatre.

ACT Artistic Director **Kurt Beattie** says, "Starting our season with a world premiere musical like *First Date* is the perfect entrée to a year of new works being presented at ACT. It is fun, modern, and the songs are quite memorable. For us, it's a thrill to create something that we think will have a long life in the industry and to share in that with our partners at The 5th Avenue."

"This kind of on-going collaboration between two major regional theatres in unprecedented in Seattle, and quite possibly the country," said **David Armstrong**, The 5th Avenue Theatre's executive producer and artistic director. "It is because of this remarkable

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partnership that The 5th is able to explore and develop more intimate musicals, while still supporting ACT's mission of producing contemporary works."

About the Writers

Alan Zachary and **Michael Weiner** (Music and Lyrics) have been artistic collaborators since they met in high school. The musical duo is currently collaborating on the score for a Broadway adaptation of the Newline Cinema film *Secondhand Lions*, with a book by Rupert Holmes. Their songs have been translated into more than 20 languages, and they've developed properties for Warner Bros., 20th Century Fox, DreamWorks, Universal, Hanna-Barbera, and numerous divisions of the Walt Disney Company, including Disney Animation, Disney Channel, Disney Creative Entertainment, Disney Theatricals, Walt Disney Records, Disney Cruise Line, and Disney Parks & Resorts around the globe. Additionally, the duo has performed together at the Gardenia Club in Hollywood, the Duplex in New York, and the world-renowned Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. as part of the "Broadway Today & Tomorrow" series, celebrating the present and next generation of Broadway songwriters.

Separately, Alan Zachary contributed music and lyrics to DreamWorks Pictures' *The Time Machine*, and Michael Weiner composed the score for Fine Line Features' *Man of the Century* and for the original stage musical *Liberty Smith*, which has been seen at NAMT, NYMF and recently completed its successful world premiere run in 2011 at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C.

Though this is his first musical, book writer **Austin Winsberg** is a writer/producer for film and television, and is currently a consulting producer on *Gossip Girl*. Other TV credits include *Jake in Progress* (Creator/Executive Producer – youngest showrunner in ABC history), *Wedding Album*, *Still Standing* and *Glory Days*. Winsberg has written television pilots for ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX and ABC Family. He has also written movies for New Line, Dreamworks Animation and Disney. He is currently co-writing an animated film about a talking peacock for Warner Bros. He has also written, directed and mentored numerous plays for the Blank Theatre Company's Annual Young Playwrights Festival in Los Angeles.

About the Cast

Tacoma native **Eric Ankrim** is stepping into ACT's spotlight as Aaron, just days after his final curtain call as curly in The 5th's *Oklahoma!* He has previously been seen on The 5th Avenue stage in *Into the Woods*, *Miss Saigon*, and *The Rocky Horror Show*. Ankrim has been seen previously in ACT's *A Christmas Carol*, and has performed all over the Seattle area including Seattle Rep, Seattle Children's Theatre, The Empty Space, and Village Theatre. Ankrim recently directed the widely acclaimed *Spring Awakening* with Balagan Theatre Company which, due to popular demand, will be remounted in April.

New Yorker **Kelly Karbacz** will be joining the cast as Casey. Karbacz has performed on Broadway as Maureen in *Rent* and Louisa in *The Sound of Music*. Other stage credits include work at Ford's Theatre, Kirk Douglas Theatre, and the New York Musical Theatre Festival, as well as multiple workshops for new works. She has guest starred on *Law and Order*, *Without a Trace*, *Regular Joe*, *Queens Supreme*, *Third Watch*, *Undeclared*, and *Hopewell*.

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A show that calls for dozens of quirky roles demands some of Seattle's most versatile actors. The cast includes **Benjamin Harris**, **Vicki Noon**, **Sonya Meyer**, and **Brandon O'Neill**. *First Date* marks Harris' first 5th Avenue appearance. He has been seen on stage at Seattle Rep, Indiana Rep, and in many productions at ACT. Vicki Noon recently finished a well-received run as the titular heroine in *Annie Get Your Gun* at Village Theatre, after returning to Seattle following her national tour as Elphaba in *Wicked*. Her other tour credits include *Mamma Mia!* and *Cats*. Noon began her career in the title role of *Violet* at ACT at age 13. Sonya Meyer joins *First Date* directly from *Oklahoma!* where she was featured as Gertie Cummings. Crowd-favorite Brandon O'Neill was most recently seen at The 5th as Prince Christopher in *Cinderella*, as well as in *Saving Aimee*, *Disney's Aladdin*, and *Guys and Dolls*, among many others.

Sharing the role of The Waiter are **Rich Gray** and **Greg McCormick Allen**. Gray will open the run, then pass the check to Allen on April 14. Gray last appeared with The 5th Avenue in *Saving Aimee* and has performed at ACT, Village Theatre, and Showtunes among others. Allen was last seen as Lionel in *Cinderella*, which marked his 20th performance at The 5th Avenue Theatre. His other roles at The 5th have included *Guys and Dolls*, *Wonderful Town*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

About the Director

Bill Berry is the Producing Director of The 5th Avenue Theatre, where he has directed acclaimed productions of *On the Town*, *West Side Story* (*Seattle Times* Footlight Award), *Wonderful Town* (*Seattle Times* Footlight Award), *Smokey Joe's Café* and *The Wizard of Oz*. He also directed *On the Town* at Paper Mill Playhouse. His re-imagined production of *Cabaret* received awards in St. Paul and Houston and has been performed at The 5th Avenue Theatre, The Ordway, the American Musical Theatre of San Jose and Theatre Under The Stars. Berry also produces and directs the education and outreach programs for The 5th Avenue Theatre. He has significantly expanded the scope and impact of these initiatives including spearheading the creation of Fridays At The 5th, The 5th Avenue Awards honoring excellence in high school musical theater, the Show Talk series and substantially increasing the reach of The 5th Avenue Theatre's Adventure Musical Theatre Touring Company (AMT) throughout the Northwest. In addition to directing these productions, he has written the book for two AMT productions: *Klondike*, the story of the Alaskan Gold Rush, and *Journey West!*, a musical based on the Lewis and Clark expedition.

About the Musical Staging

Josh Prince returns to Seattle to join the creative team behind *First Date*. Prince was at The 5th Avenue Theatre previously as the choreographer for the pre-Broadway engagement of *Shrek, The Musical*. Additionally, Prince provided the choreography for the Broadway, US National Tour and the West End production of *Shrek, The Musical* for Dreamworks Theatrical. Prince recently returned from Beijing, China where he choreographed the premier of the new Chinese musical, *The Joker's Game*. Off-Broadway, he choreographed *The Kid* with The New Group. During his career in New York City, he lent his talents to *The Bridge Project* directed by Sam Mendes, *The Jerry Springer Opera*

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starring Harvey Keitel at Carnegie Hall, *Camelot*, starring Gabriel Byrne, with the NY Philharmonic at Lincoln Center and *All Singing All Dancing* at Town Hall. He has also choreographed the Spring Gala at The Kennedy Center hosted by Liza Minnelli.

The Creative Team

Dominick Amendum will serve as music supervisor with orchestrations by **August Eriksmoen**. **R. J. Tancioco** joins the team as the associate music director and conductor. The design team for *First Date* includes **Matthew Smucker** (Set Design), **Frances Kenny** (Costume Design), **Alex Berry** (Lighting Design), and **Kai Harada** (Sound Design).

About ACT – A Contemporary Theatre

Located in the heart of downtown Seattle and serving a population of curious, open-minded, and brave audiences, ACT - A Contemporary Theatre is the only local theater dedicated to producing contemporary work with promising playwrights and local performing artists since 1965. A theater of new ideas, ACT serves as a cultural engine that makes plays, dance, music, and film that touch us. Because contemporary life demands examination, ACT is driven to inspire and strengthen our diverse community through works that advance our understanding of human life. With more than 100,000 people who attend shows annually, ACT is an interactive community where artists and the public witness, contemplate, and engage in dialogue on today's thought-provoking issues, ideas and art, presented with intelligence, insight, and humor.

About The 5th Avenue Theatre

The 5th Avenue Theatre is one of the nation's premier incubators for new musical theater. Since 1995, the celebrated company has produced 14 new musicals. Five have moved on to Broadway premieres, earning a combined 14 Tony Awards, including two for Best Musical (*Hairspray* and *Memphis*). The 5th Avenue Theatre is also known for its world class, critically acclaimed productions of musicals chosen from both the contemporary canon and the Golden Age of Broadway.

Unique in its Chinese-inspired design, this exquisite theater opened in 1926 as a venue for vaudeville and film. In 1980, the non-profit 5th Avenue Theatre began producing and presenting top-quality live musical theater. Today, under the leadership of Executive Producer and Artistic Director David Armstrong, Managing Director Bernadine Griffin and Producing Director Bill Berry, The 5th Avenue Theatre attracts an annual attendance of more than 287,000 and ranks among the nation's largest and most respected musical theater companies.

In addition to its main stage productions, The 5th Avenue Theatre is also committed to encouraging the next generation of theatergoers through its extensive educational outreach program which includes: The Adventure Musical Theatre Touring Company, The 5th Avenue Awards Honoring High School Musical Theatre, the Student Matinee Program, and Spotlight Nights. For more information about The 5th Avenue Theatre, its season and its programs, please visit www.5thavenue.org.

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FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: Sparks will fly this spring when **Eric Ankrim** and **Kelly Karbacz** go looking for love in *First Date*, a co-production between **ACT - A Contemporary Theatre** and **The 5th Avenue Theatre**. This hysterical, sexy new musical about one date, two people, and all the voices in their heads, also features Seattle stars **Benjamin Harris, Vicki Noon, Brandon O'Neill, Rich Gray, Greg McCormick Allen,** and **Sonya Meyer**, in roles including old boyfriends, ex-fiancées, best friends, and pushy relatives, not to mention fellow diners who intrude on the couple's blind date. The 5th Avenue's Producing Director **Bill Berry** directs this clever and quirky world premiere romantic comedy, with musical staging by Broadway's **Josh Prince**. With a book by seasoned screenwriter **Austin Winsberg** and music and lyrics by the dynamic writing team of **Alan Zachary** and **Michael Weiner**, this irreverent comedy chronicles the perils and pitfalls of blind dating and the journey from "tragic mistake" to "true love." Or, at least, to a second date. *Contains mature content.*

WHEN: **Previews:** March 10- 28, 2012
Opening Night: March 29, 2012 (*press night*)
Closing Performance: May 20, 2012

SHOW Tuesdays & Wednesdays – 7:30 PM
TIMES: Thursdays & Fridays – 8:00 PM
Saturdays – 2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Sundays – 2:00 PM & 7:00 PM
No evening performances on March 18, April 8, and May 3, 2012.
Added 2:00 PM matinee performances on April 5 and May 3, 2012.

WHERE: **ACT – A Contemporary Theatre** in the Falls Theatre,
700 Union Street, Seattle 98101

TICKETS: To purchase tickets (\$15-\$69) or information, please contact either organization:
The 5th Avenue Box Office
(206) 625-1900 / (888) 5TH-4TIX, www.5thavenue.org
ACT Ticket Office
206-292-7676, www.acttheatre.org

SPONSORS:

Special thanks to The 5th Avenue Theatre's 2011-12 season co-sponsors Safeco Insurance and US Bank, and media sponsor, the *Seattle Times*. Additional thanks to *First Date's* production sponsor Union Bank.

ACT gratefully acknowledges the generous support of its 2012 Season Sponsors: ACT Foundation, ArtsFund, The Eulalie Bloedel Schneider Artists Fund, The Mayor's Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs, and The Shubert Foundation.

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