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FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE LAUNCHES “FST FORUMS” *An online Community forum where the discussion continues...*

(Sarasota, FL) —Today, Florida Studio Theatre launches a special online discussion about *Next to Normal* and the ever-present question raised in the musical: **What is “Normal?”** It also launches the beginning of year-long discussions to be held on FST’s new blog at **www.FST-BLOG.com**.

This online forum, moderated by Associate Director Kate Alexander and Literary Manager Amanda Cayo, will serve as a community discussion about the play, its themes, and the subject of mental illness. Through the story of *Next to Normal*’s Goodman family, writers Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey explore the effects that mental illness can have on a modern family. Steering clear of stigma and stereotype, this Pulitzer Prize-winning musical presents a narrative familiar to many of us, but rarely seen onstage.

FST invites the Sarasota community to read, discuss, and question the thoughts shared through this discussion. Readers can respond with their opinions through the comments, or even submit long-form posts at **www.FST-BLOG.com**.

Ms. Alexander invited four national and community leaders to begin the discussion by contributing blogs about *Next to Normal* and its themes. Those contributors include:

- Michael Hollinger, playwright of *Opus* and *Ghost-Writer*
- Emily Walsh Parry, Chair of *Sunshine From Darkness*
- Patrick Kennedy, Congressman
- Dr. Elaine Walker, professor and writer

Next to Normal is an emotional powerhouse of a musical about a suburban American family trying to take care of themselves and each other. It features music by Tom Kitt, with book and lyrics by Brian Yorkey. It won the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and was nominated for 11 Tony Awards. ***Next to Normal*** was chosen as “one of the year’s TEN best” by major critics around the country including the Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Rolling Stone and The New York Times. “A work of muscular grace and power. It is something much more than a feel-good musical; it is a feel-everything musical.” - The New York Times

Next to Normal is only the 8th musical in American history to be honored with the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The Pulitzer jury recognized ***Next to Normal*** for its subject matter and stated that it “expands the scope of subject matter for musicals.” The last musical to win the honor was Jonathan Larson’s *Rent* in 1996.

ABOUT FST FORUMS

Florida Studio Theatre’s mission is inspired from the wellspring of creators of theatre, the ancient Greeks. They saw theatre as a communal forum where we come together as a society to explore what it means to be alive, to be human. In the same vein, these discus-

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sions embrace the dialogue form of ancient philosophy – where we do not defend a “truth” or conclusion, but present ideas and an atmosphere of openness in the search for the ever changing definition of truth. Our destination is unknown, however we invite you to come along for the journey and join the discussion.

ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Known as Sarasota’s Contemporary Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre was founded in 1973 by 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 three theatre venues: the Keating Theatre, the Goldstein Cabaret and its newest space, the Gompertz Theatre.

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