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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 7, 2016

FirstWorks' 2016-17 Artistic Icons Series kicks off with Cirque Mechanics

Redefining the American circus with PEDAL PUNK, an astoundingly athletic mashup of acrobatics, theatre and BMX biking

PROVIDENCE, RI – FirstWorks, a RI non-profit dedicated to connecting art with audiences, launches their 2016/2017 **Artistic Icons Series** with the Rhode Island premiere of **Cirque Mechanics' PEDAL PUNK** on **Saturday, October 29 at 7:30 p.m.** at **FirstWorks at The VETS** (1 Avenue of the Arts, Providence). Hailed as “the greatest contribution to the American circus since Cirque du Soleil” by *Spectacle* magazine, this steampunk inspired circus features spectacular feats on wheels of all sizes in a heart-racing ode to the bicycle. This marks the second appearance at **FirstWorks** by Cirque Mechanics, a wildly popular, Las Vegas-based circus arts company led by Artistic Director and Boston native, Chris Lashua. Tickets for the performance, presented by FirstWorks and The VETS, range from \$28-75 and are available for purchase at <http://first-works.org> and 401-421-ARTS (2787).

PEDAL PUNK is a dazzling whirl of acrobats, cyclists, and one-of-a-kind machines. This “engrossingly entertaining” spectacle combines inspired storytelling with acrobats and funambulists dangling and twirling from a massive, pedal-powered apparatus called the Gantry bike. Flying unicycles and floating trapeze artists also appear in this world inspired by steampunk culture, where cycling is the

way to escape a technology-obsessed society. Experience the excitement, artistry and thrill that occurs when man meets machine in a magnificent way.

“Cirque Mechanics’ *PEDAL PUNK* is not only a sensational circus arts theater, but a pulse-racing, extreme sports experience,” said **FirstWorks** Founder and Artistic Director Kathleen Pletcher. “Cirque Mechanics is the perfect example of our Artistic Icon: they push boundaries and redefine their art form at every step—or pedal push—along the way.”

Cirque Mechanics’ daring band of eleven clowns, contortionists, trampolinists, dancers and tricksters commandeer the Gantry for *PEDAL PUNK*’s non-stop antics. Weighing in at 3,000 pounds and with a top speed of five miles per hour, the Gantry steers like a bulldozer or tank, but is pedaled by just two people. The stage is littered with theatrical gadgetry made from bicycle parts that were reconstructed, or recycled.

The show is conceived and directed by Boston native and Cirque du Soleil alumnus Chris Lashua, who spent most of his formative years on a BMX (bicycle motocross). His passion and fascination with the world of cycling, and by extension the synergy between man and machine, led him to found Cirque Mechanics in order to explode the notion of the traditional circus and to merge acrobatic arts with the mechanical world. The Gantry bike, a self-contained, pedal-driven mechanical stage upon which Lashua continues to add newly designed, inventive pedal-dependent devices, is another example of Lashua’s restless mechanical genius.

In addition to their Artistic Icons Series performance at The VETS, **FirstWorks will host a unique Artist-Up-Close event** with Chris Lashua and members of Cirque Mechanics. The public is invited to this **Beer & Bikes** event at The Malted Barley (334 Westminster Street, Providence) on **Friday, October 28 from 5-8:00 p.m.** Grab a beer and a delicious homemade pretzel while learning about

Lashua's BMX past and how it influences his Cirque Mechanics present. There is no cover charge. This event is co-sponsored by the Rhode Island Bike Coalition.

About Cirque Mechanics

Cirque Mechanics has established itself as a premiere American circus, with its unique approach to performance, inspiring storytelling and innovative mechanical staging. Cirque Mechanics, although inspired by modern circus, finds its roots in the mechanical and its heart in the stories of American ingenuity. The shows, rooted in realism, display a raw quality, rarely found in modern circus, that makes their message timeless and relevant. The stories are wrapped in circus acrobatics, mechanical wonders and a bit of clowning around.

About FirstWorks

FirstWorks is a non-profit based in Providence, Rhode Island whose purpose is to build the cultural, educational and economic vitality of its community by engaging audiences with world-class performing arts and education programs. Since 2004, **FirstWorks** festivals, performances and programs have attracted more than 366,000 participants. The **FirstWorks Arts Learning Program** reaches over 4,000 students from public and charter schools across Rhode Island with transformative arts-based learning experiences. **FirstWorks** is Founding Creative Partner for PVDFest, partnering with the City of Providence to produce an international arts celebration held each June in downtown Providence. The 2016 PVDFest drew over 75,000 to experience music, art and spectacle. Visit <http://first-works.org> to learn more.

Listings Information

WHO: **FirstWorks Artistic Icons Series presents Cirque Mechanics *PEDAL PUNK***

WHEN: **Saturday, October 29 at 7:30 p.m.**

WHERE: **FirstWorks at The Vets** (1 Avenue of the Arts, Providence)

TICKETS: **\$28-\$75** (includes a \$3 restoration fee)

PURCHASE: Tickets are available at <http://first-works.org> and at the Vets Box Office: **401-421-**

ARTS (2787), 220 Weybosset Street, Providence

SPECIAL OFFERS: Save 20% on a "Four Pack" of tickets for the entire family with code SPOKES4*.

Ticket packages for the full **FirstWorks Artistic Icons Series** (Cirque Mechanics' *PEDAL PUNK*, Paul Taylor Dance and Rennie Harris Puremovement), start at \$72.75 and will be available through October 29. *Restrictions apply.

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