

MEDIA CONTACT:
Rebecca Pazienza
401-447-8009
mpazienza@gmail.com
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IBEX Puppetry's *Ajijaak on Turtle Island* Launches FirstWorks 2019 Frontier Series

Co-directed by Heather Henson, daughter of Muppets legend Jim Henson, and Grammy Award winner Ty Defoe, the environmental spectacle featuring an ensemble of Native American performers and an eco-focused story makes New England premiere in Providence

Providence, RI – **FirstWorks**, a Rhode Island non-profit dedicated to building community through world-class arts announces a residency with renowned contemporary puppet artist **Heather Henson** and her production company **IBEX Puppetry**. The residency will culminate in performances of the visually stunning puppet-based production, “Ajijaak on Turtle Island,” making its premiere with FirstWorks as part of a four-city national tour. “Ajijaak on Turtle Island” is co-directed by Henson, daughter of puppet legend Jim Henson, and Ty Defoe, a Grammy Award winner from the Oneida and Ojibwe Nations. **FirstWorks'** public performances of “**Ajijaak on Turtle Island**” will take place at the state-of-the-art Moses Brown School Woodman Center at 250 Lloyd Avenue, Providence on **Thursday, January 31 and Friday, February 1, 2019 at 7:00 p.m.** Tickets start at \$22.50 and are available online at first-works.org or by phone at 401-421-4281. This first performance in the 2019 FirstWorks Frontier Series offers an immersive spectacle for the whole family.

“**Ajijaak on Turtle Island**” features an eight-person ensemble including Native American performers and live musicians, indigenous songs and dances, video

projections, and soaring kites. The story follows the birth and migration of Ajijaak, a young whooping crane who is separated from her parents and must make her way with help from contemporary indigenous communities along her journey. Kites morph into soaring birds and branches transform into gentle deer in this spectacle of environmental theater.

The artist residency with IBEX Puppetry is presented as part of the **FirstWorks Frontier Series**, which introduces audiences to new works and artforms by cutting-edge artists. The residency will include film screenings, an artist's talk, hands-on workshops in area schools and dedicated Arts Learning matinee performances for K-12 students from across Rhode Island. This far-reaching program is part of FirstWorks' milestone 15th season.

"We are delighted to bring the community together around Heather Henson's return to Providence with a vibrant new performance, designed to inspire audiences of all ages," said Kathleen Pletcher, FirstWorks Executive Artistic Director. "FirstWorks has collaborated with Heather many times over the past fifteen years, and we are thrilled to host the only New England appearance of her newest theatrical spectacle as a highlight of our 15th season."

A graduate of Rhode Island School of Design, Henson uses full sensory, non-traditional storytelling tools to offer audiences a transformative experience. Her work is devoted to health and healing for the planet through artistic spectacle and discussion. In 2000, Henson created the multi-platform production company IBEX Puppetry, which is dedicated to promoting the art of puppetry alongside advocacy for the environment. Her storytelling has been heavily impacted by her sense of kinship with endangered whooping cranes. Inspired by the healing partnerships formed between cranes and teams of humans at The International

Crane Foundation where she is a trustee, Henson's puppetry brings animals and elemental forces of our planet out to frolic and fly among audiences.

“Ajijaak on Turtle Island” was written by Grammy Award winner Ty Defoe, with lyrics by Defoe and Dawn Avery, music by Avery & Larry Mitchell, Kevin Tarrant and Defoe, and is based on original storyboards written and drawn by Henson. Defoe, a writer and interdisciplinary artist from the Oneida and Ojibwe Nations is a practitioner of traditional hoop dancing, eagle dancing and a carrier of traditional songs. While creating “Ajijaak on Turtle Island” IBEX worked with members of the New York First Nations and urban indigenous communities to include dances inspired by the traditional songs and dances from the Ojibwe, Pawnee, Lakota, Ho-Chunk and Cherokee nations. Following their Providence debut, IBEX Puppetry heads off-Broadway to The New Victory Theater in New York City as part of a national tour.

Evening performance tickets to **IBEX Puppetry’s “Ajijaak on Turtle Island”** are available online at first-works.org or by phone at 401-421-4281. Advance tickets are \$22.50-40 (\$25.50-43 at the door.) Special discounts for groups of 10 or more, students, working artists and Native American community members are available by calling **FirstWorks** at 401-421-4287.

FirstWorks thrilling 15th season lineup also features groundbreaking hip-hop duo **Black Violin** with their “Classical Boom” tour on Wednesday, April 3, 2019 at 7:30 p.m. at The VETS (1 Avenue of the Arts, Providence, RI.) Tickets range from \$29-59 (including a \$4 facility restoration fee) and are available at The VETS Box Office by phone at 401-421-2787, or online at first-works.org and thevetsri.com. In partnership with Providence Performing Arts Center, FirstWorks presents **Complexions Contemporary Ballet**, America’s first fully multicultural ballet company in **“From Bach to Bowie”** on April 17, 2019 at 7:30 p.m. at PPAC. Tickets

range from \$25-74.50 (including a \$3 facility restoration fee) and are available at the PPAC Box Office, by phone at 401- 421-2787, or online at first-works.org and ppacri.org.

About IBEX Puppetry

IBEX Puppetry is an entertainment company devoted to health and healing for the planet through artistic spectacle, outreach, and devotion to the fine art of puppetry in all of its mediums. Founded in 2000 and receiving multiple UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionette) awards since its inception, IBEX Puppetry supports puppet art in the mediums of film, stage, gallery exhibits, workshops, and artist presentations. IBEX Puppetry produces Heather Henson's own Environmental Spectacles and Sing-Along events. IBEX also nurtures the creation and continuance of contemporary puppetry works by independent artists through the Handmade Puppet Dreams film series, The Puppet Slam Network and IBEX Presents.

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 500,000 participants. The FirstWorks Arts Learning Program reaches more than 4,000 students from public and charter schools across Rhode Island with transformative, arts-based learning experiences. FirstWorks is Founding Partner for PVDfest, collaborating with the City of Providence to produce an international arts celebration held each June that in 2018 drew 100,000 visitors to Providence to experience music, art and spectacular performances. Visit first-works.org to learn more.

Listings Information:

- WHO: FirstWorks Frontier Series presents **IBEX Puppetry's "Ajijaak on Turtle Island"**
- WHAT: A dynamic storytelling experience set to puppetry, Native American inspired song and dance, video projections, and soaring kites
- WHEN: **Public performances Thursday, January 31 at 7:00 p.m. and Friday, February 1 at 7:00 p.m.**
- WHERE: **Moses Brown School Woodman Center**, 250 Lloyd Avenue, Providence, RI

TICKETS: Advance tickets: \$40, \$22.50 children under 12.
At the door: \$43, \$25.50 children under 12.

PURCHASE: Online at <http://first-works.org> or call 401-421-4281

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