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For Immediate Release

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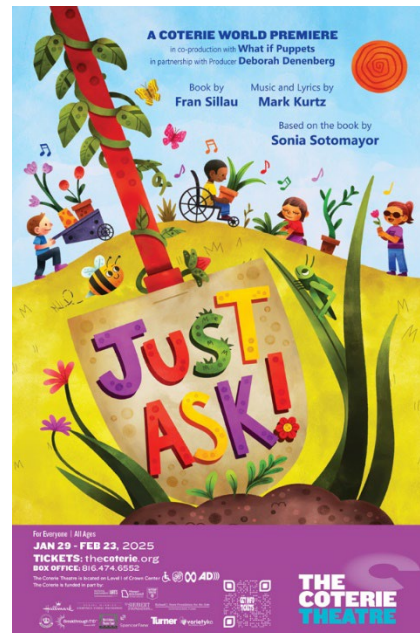
MEDIA RELEASE

The Coterie to Receive \$20,000 Award from the National Endowment for the Arts

Kansas City, MO – The Coterie Theatre is pleased to announce it has been approved by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for a Grants for Arts Projects award of \$20,000. This grant will support the world premiere of *Just Ask!*, a new musical based on the best-selling book by Sonia Sotomayor. The NEA will award 1,127 Grants for Arts Projects awards nationwide totaling more than \$31.8 million as part of the recent announcement of fiscal year 2025 grants.

“The NEA is proud to continue our nearly 60 years of supporting the efforts of organizations and artists that help to shape our country’s vibrant arts sector and communities of all types across our nation,” said NEA Chair Maria Rosario Jackson, PhD. “It is inspiring to see the wide range of creative projects taking place, including The Coterie and What if Puppets premiere production of *Just Ask!*”

Jonathan Thomas, managing director of The Coterie, said, “We are very proud of our history with the NEA, having received more than twenty awards for new works, social justice productions, and stories of underrepresented communities. We are grateful for their commitment to making theater accessible to all communities.”



The Coterie Theatre partnered with What iF Puppets and producer, Deborah Denenberg, on the premiere of *Just Ask!*, which will be performed on The Coterie's mainstage, located on level 1 of Crown Center, for families with all ages, January 29 - February 23, 2025. Based on *The New York Times* best-selling book by Sonia Sotomayor, the stage adaptation is written and directed by Fran Sillau and features music, lyrics, and music direction by Mark Kurtz and choreography by Courtney Stein Cairncross.

The charming story follows a delightful group of young people with different abilities as they get to know one another while working together to create a garden. Young Sonia is new, and there is something she hasn't told the others about herself. Will they accept her? With multicultural music and joyful choreography, this world premiere musical illustrates how to "just ask" about what makes each of us unique.

The cast of the world premiere of *Just Ask!* features Andrea Hobley (as Sonia), Jen Benkert (as Actor #1: Julia), Elise Natalya Bowles (as Actor #2: Rafaela), Lola Kernell (as Actor #3: Grace), Morgan Lynn Sterrett (as Actor #4: Bianca), Ismael Michel (as Actor #5: Manuel), and Loren Wendelburg (as Actor #6: Jordan). Cori Anne Weber will serve as understudy for Sonia and Actors #2,3,4 and Alex Jaguar will understudy Actors #1,5,6.

The artistic and production company includes Fran Sillau (playwright/director), Mark Kurtz (composer/lyricist/music director), Courtney Stein Cairncross (choreographer), Mackenzie Goodwin (production stage manager), Derek Trautwein (technical director), Paula S. Wallace (scenic/properties designer), Fabian Rosales (sound designer), Megan Reilly (lighting designer), Taylor Adams (costume designer), Mike Horner (lead puppet designer and builder), What iF Puppets production team (assistant puppet builders), Morgan Lynn Sterrett (wardrobe supervisor/production assistant), and Betsy Wendorff (assistant stage/deck manager).

For more information on other projects included in the NEA's grant announcement, visit [arts.gov/news](https://www.arts.gov/news).

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