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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

School of the Performing Arts in the Richmond Community (SPARC)

October 11, 2023

Contact: John Tong

SPARC Announces New Director of Programs, Liz Earnest

[Richmond, VA] – SPARC, a nationally recognized provider of community-based arts education programs for young people, is pleased to announce the appointment of Liz Earnest as the new Director of Programs. In this role, Liz will provide leadership for all aspects of SPARC's programs and management of the organization's faculty, teaching/production artists, and support staff. Liz brings a wealth of experience and expertise in arts education management and is poised to lead the organization to new heights.

Liz holds a BFA in Theatre Performance from Virginia Commonwealth University, where she received the four-year Provost's Scholarship and graduated summa cum laude. Eight years ago, Liz joined the full-time staff at SPARC as Education Coordinator and eventually was promoted to the role of SPARC's first-ever Associate Director of Programs. In 2022, Liz completed the Emerging Nonprofit Leaders Program, an initiative of the Community Foundation for greater Richmond.

"We are thrilled to have Liz assume this critical role" said John Tong, Executive Director of SPARC. "We believe that her vision and leadership will be instrumental in driving our organization forward and continuing our mission to profoundly impact the lives of young people through exceptional performing arts education."

As Liz steps into this new role, SPARC also extends their sincere gratitude to Evelyn Francis, who has been an invaluable part of our organization for the past three years. Evelyn has made significant contributions to SPARC's success, ushering in comprehensive integration of Creative Youth Development (CYD) practices and developing a foundational model for SPARC based on Universal Design for the Performing Arts.

In reflecting on her time at SPARC, Evelyn shared the following thoughts:

"I feel so honored to have been part of SPARC during this pivotal time in the organization's history, and to lead such a phenomenal group of program staff who worked tirelessly to rebuild programs after the pandemic brought everything to a screeching halt. I know that all the groundwork we were able to lay in the past few years will provide a firm foundation from which to grow and continue to meet the needs of the Richmond community. I am thrilled to be handing the reigns over to Liz. Her passion, expertise, and deep commitment to Richmond youth and families will make her an excellent leader in this next act at SPARC."

When asked for her perspective on the new role, Liz shared how this work is especially personal to her. "I am grateful and excited to serve SPARC and the Richmond community as Director of Programs. My first connection to SPARC occurred when I started acting classes at 15 years old, so this feels like a full-circle moment. In partnership with our amazing team, I am honored to continue to shape the place that has shaped me, and to deepen our commitment to supporting a new generation of young people and their dreams."

Founded in 1981 by Richmond actress Jeri Cutler-Voltz, SPARC (School of the Performing Arts in the Richmond Community) provides transformative performing arts education to more than 1,500 students each year. Through SPARC's highly skilled teaching artists who intentionally integrate the arts with youth development principles, students discover their creativity and build critical learning and life skills that carry into adulthood. SPARC offers a wide range of theater training levels, from introductory classes to auditioned productions and provides numerous educational and community outreach initiatives.

For more information about SPARC and their work, please visit www.sparcrichmond.org or contact John Tong at jtong@sparcrichmond.org or (804) 353-3993, ext. 225.

[End of Press Release]

