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**UVA DRAMA TO PRESENT MARY ELIZABETH HAMILTON'S *16 Winters, or the Bear's Tale***

**High-spirited Play with Music Imagines the 16 Years Between Acts of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Offers Springboard for Timely Issues Like Long-Term Isolation**

***16 Winters, or the Bear's Tale*, Directed by Kate Eastwood Norris,  
To Open on April 21 at 8PM at the Culbreth Theatre**

**CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA – DATE** –The UVA Department of Drama will wrap up its 2021-2022 season with a fun and timely tale that uses Shakespeare as a springboard to comedy while exploring issues that range from patriarchy and repression to how we re-engage with ourselves and the world around us following our own pandemic hibernation.

Mary Elizabeth Hamilton's ***16 Winters, or the Bear's Tale***, set in the 16 years that pass between Acts 3 and 4 of Shakespeare's play *The Winter's Tale*, will be directed by Kate Eastwood Norris and opens on April 21 at 8pm at the Culbreth Theatre.

Condemned by her husband for infidelity, the queen of Sicilia has faked her death and is waiting it out in a cabin in the woods in the heart of Bohemia. The king is feeding his guilt through rock music and the ghost of his dead son. His abandoned daughter, wanting more from life, runs away looking for love, and before long, everyone is pursued by a bear. Full of mistaken identity and male privilege gone wrong, this comedy-drama explores the reimagining of social constructs and how we create a new path in the wake of repression. The play is intended for mature audiences. **For detailed information, please read the content warning at <https://drama.virginia.edu/content-warnings>**

"The timing of this was remarkable, in a way," said Director Eastwood Norris. "I cannot stop thinking about these characters being stuck with each other for years, and our own collective experience of COVID – and particularly how it put us in the position of doing a lot of talking and not a lot of doing, and how the world started to question how it was before." Eastwood Norris offered the Black Lives Matter movement as example: "Coming as it did in the midst of this incredibly introspective period, it really made people stop and think, and at least look at the way things are and come to the realization that they don't necessarily have to be that way. It gave us space, on so many levels, to try and figure out how we want the world to be moving forward."

The company discussed how they can bring their own pandemic experiences to their roles. "We would talk about how they had this firsthand experience of what it was like to be bored for months and months," said Eastwood Norris. "Then we got to think about these characters going through 16 years of just waiting around to get back to their lives, and wondering who they are going to be when their time comes around. The young people portrayed in this play have been doing nothing but talking and arguing and self-medicating. What is going to happen when spring actually comes? Are they going to continue

talking and complaining or are they going to try and change the things they have been complaining about?"

The seasonal aspect of the story is something Eastwood Norris relates to in a profound way. "I hate winter. For me it is just a time of waiting, and when spring comes, there is this huge sigh of relief for me. I feel like I can actually exist. So we are hitting that metaphor pretty hard."

Another aspect she plans on hitting hard is its comedic content. "My academic focus is on comedy," she said. "I write the majority of my papers about it and I teach a course on comedic theory at universities around the country. So if there is anything funny in this play, I am going to find it and put it on stage!"

The good news is that there is no shortage of comedy here to share. "With all the complexity and the issues the play tackles, it might be easy to think that you are in for a heavy night of theatre with this play," she said. "But this is definitely a fun and lighthearted theatre experience. The truth is not nearly as painful when it comes served as a joke." Eastwood Norris adds, "I am really interested in the power of theatre as a form of entertainment and not just a form of social justice. Everyone involved in this production is really looking forward to giving people a reason to come together and laugh, particularly as that experience has been so hard to come by for so long. There is something really wonderful about the sound of infectious laughter bubbling up from an audience, and I am so proud to be able to give people a reason to experience that."

The production is not rooted in Shakespeare as much as it borrows from the Bard's practices. Music and song run freely throughout the play, composed by local musician Paul Curreri with assistance from Drama undergraduate student Sarah Harden, lending a quirky and riotous counterpoint to the grief and isolation. Actors have been encouraged to find the epic poetry in their characters. "I've told my actors to play their characters for all they are worth, which is pretty Shakespearean," says Eastwood Norris. "I think of them more as archetypes in that they expand the possibility for a character instead of diminishing them as stereotypes tend to do."

Another Shakespeare-influenced element is the scenic design by School of Architecture undergraduate student Jackson Key, who employs mobile scenic elements to inspire audiences to imagine fuller worlds. On the Elizabethan stage, Eastwood Norris observes, "the sets were presented on bare platforms with individual set pieces moved in and out, asking the audience to be responsible for filling in the blanks in the ways audiences did in Shakespeare's time." The set features a hybrid of forest and theater that allows for the play's titular Bear to roam freely in and out of scenes, a constant reminder that this forest, and this planet, is shared space, and humans "are fellow creatures on the same planet as opposed to the most important creatures," she adds.

Tickets for *16 Winters, or the Bear's Tale* are sold through the UVA Arts Box Office and are available online at [www.artsboxoffice.virginia.edu](http://www.artsboxoffice.virginia.edu), by phone at 434-924-3376, or in person at the UVA Arts Box office located in the lobby of the Drama Building. Hours of operation are noon to 5PM, Tuesday through Friday. Free parking for UVA Drama performances is available at the Culbreth Road Parking Garage, conveniently located alongside the theaters.

For more information on the 2021-2022 UVA Drama season, visit <https://drama.virginia.edu/current-season>.