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**UVA DRAMA TO PRESENT MJ KAUFMAN'S *HOW TO LIVE ON EARTH*
AND THE NEW WORKS FESTIVAL**

***How To Live On Earth*, Directed by Matt Radford Davies,
To Open on February 24 at the Ruth Caplin Theatre**

**The New Works Festival, Produced by Doug Grissom and Dave Dalton,
To Open February 25 at the Helms Theatre**

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA – February 11, 2022—The UVA Department of Drama will continue its 2021-2022 season with two exciting openings in a single weekend.

MJ Kaufman's *How To Live On Earth*, which examines the human fascination with new frontiers along with our often tenuous connections to the world where we live, will open on February 24 at the Ruth Caplin Theatre. The production will be directed by Matt Radford Davies.

The next night, February 25, marks the opening of the department's annual New Works Festival, which returns to live performance this season featuring five new one-act plays written, directed, performed, and created by UVA students. The New Works Festival will be produced by UVA Drama faculty members Doug Grissom and Dave Dalton.

How To Live On Earth is the story of four people shortlisted for the adventure of a lifetime. The place: Mars. The catch? They can never come home. In this touching story inspired by the Mars One project, the finalists grapple with how this one-way journey will change their loved ones and themselves, exploring our unrelenting focus on the next frontier and the question of giving one's life for something greater than oneself. For mature audiences.

Please note masks are required in all UVA Facilities regardless of vaccination status.

Davies, a Welshman born in England, currently teaches acting and directing in Mary Baldwin University's Shakespeare and Performance graduate program in association with the American Shakespeare Center at the Blackfriars Playhouse. Davies said he was first drawn to the play's central, existential questions in 2015 when he heard an NPR interview about the Mars One Project. Founded in 2011, the Mars One Project was the brainchild of a small, privately-funded Dutch organization with the goal of landing the first humans on Mars and leaving them there to form a permanent colony.

"One of the things they were talking about was why people would want to take a journey like this when there was a very good chance they would never come back," Davies said. Mars One was around the release of the film *The Martian*, based on the novel by Andy Weir, and, while the project was ultimately scrapped, the motivations of its would-be participants provide a fascinating jumping-off point for the

nine characters in this play and create formidable challenges for the director and his actors. “You have got to find a credible motivation,” Davies said, “for these characters to be heading off on what is, in effect, a prolonged suicide mission.”

Today’s reality-TV-dominated culture provides playwright Kaufman a perfect way to build the story through the creation of a Big Brother-style process in which “contestants” are chosen through an algorithm. “What you learn is that this algorithm moves people to the front of the line who, based on their backgrounds, don’t have much emotional gravitational pull to keep them here,” said Davies. “They are united by the fact that none of them feels that there is anything tethering them here.”

It’s a metaphor, Davies said, that only gets stronger the deeper you get into the play and the further he and his cast have gone into the rehearsal process. Each character goes through their own journey, some learning they are more tethered to their lives and to the relationships they have formed than they ever knew before. “It is about what you are leaving behind,” Davies said, “and what reminds you is worth staying here to fight.” He likens the characters’ journeys to the most historic discovery yet about their would-be destination. “The surface of the world of this play is pretty arid, not unlike the surface of Mars. But then in 2015, they discovered that there was water under Mars’ surface. So this whole play is about discovering where the ice and the water lies under the surface and melting it.”

Audiences in the Caplin will have a view from above this world, he said, as the design team is using the theatre’s hybrid thrust/amphitheater design to look down on the action, as if into a fishbowl. “They are very much like viewers of this experiment, overlooking a multi-level, almost maze-like set for what is a fascinating, sometimes tense and highly-engrossing, ninety minutes.”

This year’s New Works Festival will feature five plays written, directed, acted, and performed by UVA students that offer a refreshing and contemporary look at the world where they live and the issues they face on a day-to-day basis. “The students are responding to things from their personal lives, and they are responding to things from society,” said UVA Drama professor Dave Dalton, who, along with his colleague Doug Grissom, have served as producers for the project. “They are finding out how they react to those things as a citizen within the greater world while using theater as a way to talk about them.”

Dalton and Grissom have been working with the students since the beginning of the semester. Grissom focuses mainly on the plays themselves, as many of the playwrights are students in his beginning and advanced playwriting courses, and Dalton works more closely with the student directors, bringing his expertise in that role as well as experience in similar short play festivals. “I think the most rewarding thing is that we have encountered many of these students in our classes but seeing them produce something in this context often brings out a level of creativity we might not have seen from them before.”

This creativity, Dalton said, is exactly what draws audiences to this annual theatrical event. “They are going to see plays that are funny, they are going to see plays that are moving and relevant to contemporary lives. It is going to be an evening of theater that touches on a wide array of themes and covers a wide range of emotions, and I am very proud of all the work that has been done to make it happen.”

The **New Works Festival’s** five student-written and directed projects will include:

Bake for Life by Rainah Gregory, directed by Lexi Christie and Rainah Gregory

It's shoot day for a celebrity special fundraising episode of a baking show for suicide prevention. As the episode unfolds, Olympic athlete Kara is forced to confront personal realities while in the public eye. For mature audiences.

Born Under a Single Light by Karen Zipor, directed by Max Tankersely

After an invasion of her country and the disappearance of her husband, Krystina and her two daughters hide in a bunker, patiently waiting for the war to end. However, everything changes when her daughters rewire the radio and discover why they're really there. For mature audiences.

Dinner with the Devil written and directed by Laurel Voss

The daughter of Satan brings her girlfriend home to meet her father. For mature audiences.

This Is Not a Date by Tanaka Maria, directed by Charlie Mooz

This is Not a Date recounts a conversation between two queer people, a confession, and its subsequent aftermath as they navigate and talk through their confusing relationship.

Welcome to Clifton by Avery Erskine, directed by Emilia Couture

Welcome to Clifton moves backwards in time, exploring the lives of four college students as one of them comes to terms with her queerness.

Tickets for *How to Live On Earth* and the New Works Festival are sold through the UVA Arts Box Office and are available online at 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. Please note that some plays contain potentially distressing topics. For detailed information, visit <https://drama.virginia.edu/content-warnings>.

To access photos of *How to Live on Earth*, visit

<https://virginia.box.com/s/08ie12ri7h435hypxrlqtxw6j34gq4ck>

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