



PLAYWRIGHTS' CENTER
IMAGINING THEATER FORWARD SINCE 1971

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Mat Smart's "Eden Prairie, 1971" upcoming in the Playwrights' Center's Ruth Easton New Play Series

(Minneapolis, MN—January 17, 2017)—Core Writer Mat Smart lives in New York now, but spent a handful of years in Minnesota as a Jerome Fellow and a McKnight Fellow in Playwriting at the Playwrights' Center. Smart's time in Minnesota inspired the new play he will be workshopping at the Playwrights' Center in February, called "Eden Prairie, 1971." Part of the Ruth Easton New Play Series, the play will have public readings on **Monday, February 6 and Tuesday, February 7 at 7 p.m.** at the Playwrights' Center, 2301 E. Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis. Reservations are recommended and can be made at pwcenter.org.

"Eden Prairie, 1971" is a beautifully etched play that challenges notions of bravery and the true cost of freedom. On the night *Apollo 15* lands on the moon, a draft dodger steals home to Eden Prairie, Minnesota from Canada, risking arrest to deliver a message to a young woman from his high school class.

Playwright Mat Smart will collaborate with director Henry Wishcamper** and dramaturg John Olive on the workshop; Billy Mullaney, Meredith Casey and Christina Baldwin* make up the cast (**Member of Actors' Equity Association; **Member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society*).

"The play came out of a collision between two distinct experiences I had while living in Minnesota," says Smart. "The first is, I read a bunch of old letters at the Minnesota Historical Society of soldiers writing home to their families during the Korean War and Vietnam War. Those really spoke to me. To read a 20-year-old's perspective on going to war—whether it was his own choice or because of the draft—it made me wonder what would happen today if young Americans faced a draft. The second is the time I spent kayaking close to the Boundary Waters, which made me think about citizenship and how these serene, lily pad covered waters are all that separate the United States from Canada. What did it cost those young men, during the Vietnam War, who decided to leave rather than fight?"

"In some ways, the characters' big questions about bravery and duty are universal," says Playwrights' Center Producing Artistic Director Jeremy B. Cohen. "But they are also dealing with very specific consequences unfamiliar to people who grew up in a post-draft country. The play unfolds in real time over the course of one long scene, and this construction works so well to draw us in to the struggles the characters are going through."

Mat Smart received the 2015 Equity Jeff Award for Best New Work in Chicago for "The Royal Society of Antarctica" (Gift Theatre), which was developed at the Playwrights' Center in PlayLabs 2013. Other plays include: "Naperville" (Slant Theatre Project, upcoming at Theatre Wit), "Tinker to Evers to Chance" (Geva, Merrimack Rep), "Samuel J. and K." (Williamstown Theatre Festival, Steppenwolf) and

“The Hopper Collection” (Magic Theatre, Huntington). Mat is a former Jerome Fellow and McKnight Fellow in Playwriting. An avid baseball fan and traveler, he has been to all 30 of the current MLB stadiums, all 50 states and all of the continents.

The Ruth Easton New Play Series at the Playwrights’ Center, now in its 12th year, provides selected Core Writers with 20 hours of workshop time to develop a new play in collaboration with top-notch actors and other theater artists. Plays receive two public readings, giving audience members a unique and immediate way to experience new work and a chance to be part of the creative process. Plays recently seen in the Ruth Easton New Play Series that have full productions this theater season include George Brant’s “Marie and Rosetta” Off-Broadway at Atlantic Theater and Carlyle Brown’s “Finding Fish” at the Illusion Theater in Minneapolis.

The 2016-17 Ruth Easton New Play Series will also feature “The Sea & The Stars” by Harrison David Rivers on March 6 and 7 and “Minneapolis/St. Paul” by Lee Blessing on April 3 and 4. Details at pwcenter.org/ruth-easton-series.

All events in the Ruth Easton New Play Series are free and open to the public. Reservations are recommended; reserve your spots at pwcenter.org or by contacting the Playwrights’ Center at (612) 332-7481 or info@pwcenter.org.

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Photos of the playwright and previous Ruth Easton New Play Series readings are available at pwcenter.org/media-room or by contacting Jessica Franken at jessicaf@pwcenter.org.

THE 2016-17 RUTH EASTON NEW PLAY SERIES

December 5 & 6 at 7 p.m. "Wink" by Jen Silverman
January 9 & 10 at 7 p.m. "queens" by Martyna Majok
February 6 & 7 at 7 p.m. "Eden Prairie, 1971" by Mat Smart
March 6 & 7 at 7 p.m. "The Sea & The Stars" by Harrison David Rivers
April 3 & 4 at 7 p.m. "Minneapolis/St. Paul" by Lee Blessing

"Wink" by Jen Silverman

Sofie is an unhappy housewife. Gregor is her bread-winning husband. Dr. Frans is their psychiatrist. Wink is the cat. And Gregor has just skinned the cat. A dark comedy about the complicated and dangerous territory of the human heart.

"queens" by Martyna Majok

The lives of two generations of immigrant women in Queens collide in a series of small apartments. When you are working so hard to move forward in America, what cannot—and should not—be left behind?

"Eden Prairie, 1971" by Mat Smart

On the night *Apollo 15* lands on the moon, a draft dodger steals home to Eden Prairie, Minnesota from Canada. He risks arrest to deliver a message to a young woman from his high school class. This beautifully etched play challenges notions of our own bravery and the true cost of freedom.

"The Sea & The Stars" by Harrison David Rivers

Simon is a lifeguard. Finn is terrified of water. Both are adrift, with broken hearts, returning to the tiny beach town of Jupiter and to families who need them. A play about love, karaoke, and the sea.

"Minneapolis/St. Paul" by Lee Blessing

A celebrated crime novelist leads two different lives, one as Randall, the middle-aged husband and father, and the other as Mandy, the newly-wedded wife and stepmother. In a play that is both poignant and biting funny, Mandy/Randall struggles with the complexities and repercussions of an identity too vast to fit within binaries.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS' CENTER

The Playwrights' Center champions playwrights and new plays to build upon a living theater that demands new and innovative works.

One of the nation's most generous and well-respected theater organizations, the Playwrights' Center focuses on both supporting playwrights and moving new plays toward production at theaters across the country. The Center has helped launch the careers of numerous nationally recognized artists, notably August Wilson, Lee Blessing, Suzan-Lori Parks, Jordan Harrison, Carlyle Brown, Craig Lucas, Jeffrey Hatcher, Melanie Marnich, and Kira Obolensky. Work developed through Center programs has been seen nationwide on such stages as Yale Rep, Woolly Mammoth, the Guthrie, Goodman, and many others.

Programs and services

The Core Writer program gives 25-30 of the most exciting playwrights from across the country the time and tools to develop new work for the stage. All Core Writers receive play development workshops at the Center, in collaboration with prominent directors, actors, dramaturgs, and designers. Selected work by Core Writers makes up the Center's formal season of public readings: the PlayLabs festival and the Ruth Easton New Play Series. Core Writers are also promoted by the Center and provided opportunities through an extensive network of colleges and universities, cultural institutions, and producing theaters.

Fellowships, made possible by the McKnight and Jerome foundations, provide more than \$315,000 each year for residencies, commissions, and development funds. Through these fellowships, the Playwrights' Center functions as a home for:

- Jerome Fellows (four emerging American playwrights);
- Many Voices Fellows (two early-career playwrights of color, one Minnesota-based) and Many Voices Mentees (two Minnesota-based beginning playwrights of color);
- McKnight Fellows in Playwriting (two accomplished Minnesota-based playwrights);
- McKnight National Residency and Commission (one playwright selected annually from an impressive national pool); and
- McKnight Theater Artist Fellows (three exceptional Minnesota-based theater artists, other than playwrights).

Membership is open to all and provides more than 1,700 playwrights worldwide with tools, resources, and support. Benefits include a database of playwriting opportunities, online and in-person seminars and classes, access to readings with professional actors, dramaturgical services, and more. In addition, the Playwrights' Center's New Plays on Campus program serves dozens of colleges and universities nationwide, providing script-matching services, arranging playwright residencies, and offering immersive apprenticeships to student playwrights.

Local and national partnerships elevate the role of living playwrights. The Center works with several theaters each year to develop work for their stages. Recent collaborations include partnerships with Denver Center on Idris Goodwin's *Victory Jones and the Incredible One Woman Band*, Marin Theatre Company on Carson Kreitzer's *Lasso of Truth*, Mixed Blood on Aditi Kapil's *Brahman(i)* and *Shiv*, Pillsbury House Theatre on Tracey Scott Wilson's *Buzzer*, and The Walker Art Center and Elevator Repair Service on Sibyl Kempson's *Fondly, Collette Richland*. The Center also flies in 10-15 artistic leaders each year to meet writers and hear their work. The newly-launched Regulars program brings together a group of nearly 100 producing theaters in the United States who seek the support of the Center in order to meet new writers, develop their work, and move them into production.