

A conversation for our times:

Considering the climate crisis, should we have a baby?

Artistree's upcoming production of 'Lungs' ties into its environmental theme

By Lauren Dorsey
Staff Writer

As part of a larger effort to connect its programming to social issues, Artistree is staging a two-person play, "Lungs," which follows a couple as they debate when and how to have children in a world plagued by climate change. The play, which will run from April 26-28, was written by Duncan Macmillan and originally debuted in 2011 in Washington, D.C. "All the pieces we're trying to do this year, and in the next season, [are] going to have some kind of social impact statement," said Matthew Robert, Artistree's theater artistic director and co-director of the play. "The main goal with Artistree and The Grange theater is to engage the community and give us space to have [these kinds of] conversations."

The show ties into Artistree's theme for its 2023/24 season — environmentalism through the arts — and builds off of the other programming the organization has planned around the topic. "This piece was perfectly what we were looking for," said the play's other co-director Jade Evangelista, who is also Artistree's theater associate director. Part of what made the

IF YOU GO

Play: "Lungs"
Artistree's The Grange theatre, South Pomfret
April 26-28
Tickets and showtimes at artistreevt.org

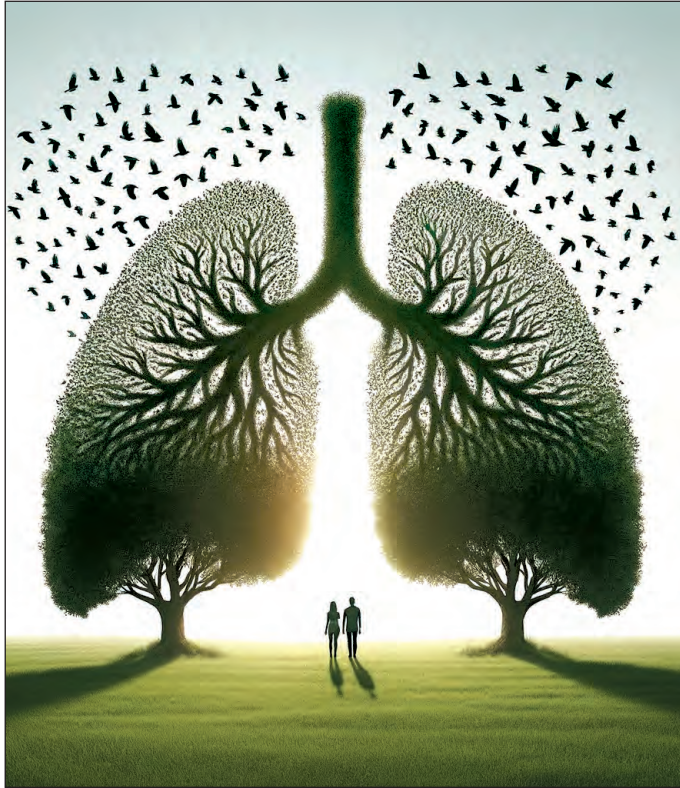
play a perfect fit was its resonance with Artistree's youth programming this summer, which centers on oceans, and the organization's mainstage production last fall, "Little Shop of Horrors," which Robert said, "was all about overconsumption and waste."

The show's appeal also lies in its potential to draw a different audience than Artistree's other productions. "This show is perfect for someone who might not typically attend the big extravagant musicals," said Evangelista. "It's really for someone who really enjoys theater for what it is at its core: storytelling."

In keeping with Macmillan's vision, the directors are stripping the production down to its bones, keeping only the elements that are absolutely necessary. "There's really no tech because the playwright [wanted] this show to highlight language and the conversation," said Evangelista. He's specifically requested no lighting, set specifics, costuming, and sound specifics.

The directors are, however, putting their own spin on the production, adapting some aspects of the play, which was originally set in the United Kingdom, to better reflect its Vermont audience. "We're not doing any accents," said Robert. "We're going to really set it in New England, and try to look at it from more of a New England lens."

Part of the reason for the shift is to emphasize the relevance of the onstage conversations to the local community. "This is a realistic piece that is going to look at a really specific issue that our generation and the generations to follow are all going to have to consider because of the state of the world: Do I want to have a family? Do I want to have a big family?" said Evangelista.



Artistree will be presenting a "Lungs," a two person play written by Duncan Macmillan that follows a couple as they wrestle with how and when to start a family in a world plagued by climate change. The play will star actors Sara Giacomini and Bradley Nowacek. Photo Provided



Neither of the play's two roles have names. Left, Bradley Nowacek will play "M" in the play. Although the play "Lungs" was originally set in the United Kingdom, the directors have chosen to relocate the setting to New England, so the actors won't be adopting any accents for the production. Right, Sara Giacomini will play the role of "W" in the production. While the play spends much of its time struggling with big questions, "W" also brings a few glimmers of humor to the show. Photos Provided

list. Although the play begins wrestling with monumental questions in almost the first line, Evangelista noted that it doesn't try to force oversimplified answers. "It's not preachy, as much as the description might suggest otherwise, because even the characters within the show struggle [with environmentalism]," said Evangelista. Throughout the play, the couple will let faucets run or a car idle while conversing. "They are discussing climate issues and also perpetuating some of the things we do as a society to not help solve the problem," said Robert.

The play doesn't shy away from this complexity, instead highlighting characters who struggle with the trade-offs necessary to be an environmentalist and who, occasionally, lapse from their commitments. "These are all hard habits that we're all struggling to change, because small changes can add up to so much more," said Evangelista. "It's just a really genuine look at people trying to make better choices for the environment while also talking about how hard it is and how much it affects younger generations."

Neither of the play's two roles, which Evangelista and Robert cast at the end of last week, have names in the script. "They're just referred to as 'W' and 'M', and traditionally, they're not even supposed to be listed in the playbill as either character," said Evangelista.

For "W," they chose Sara Giacomini, an actress and teaching artist based near New Jersey. "For W's character, we really were looking for an actress who was going to be able to speak quickly and speak her mind in an authentic way," said Evangelista. The "W" character also delivers much of the play's humor. "The few moments of laughing are so valuable, because they just help break up the material, and so 'W' really had to be able to land those," said Evangelista.

The directors selected Bradley Nowacek, an actor based in New York City, for "M." "We wanted to find someone who could portray not your stereotypical man, because he's actually the one who starts the conversation," said Evangelista. "Both of those actors had to really be able to relay the joy and the authenticity of these very big questions."

Ultimately, both directors hope that the play encourages audiences to think about the impacts their choices, even those as personal as starting a family, may have on the larger world. "We might not have the solutions for what to do next," said Evangelista. "But getting people to be aware of something or think about something differently is really half the battle when it comes to storytelling [and] theater."

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— Jade Evangelista, Artistree's theater associate director