

Immediate Release

Young People's Theatre Presents  
World Premiere of  
**THE DARKEST DARK**

**Based on Commander Chris Hadfield's  
Bestselling Children's Book**

Directed by Jim Millan  
Feb. 20 – Apr. 2, 2023

**TORONTO, ON (Jan. 17, 2023)** – A groundbreaking adaptation of **Commander Chris Hadfield's** internationally bestselling children's book, [\*The Darkest Dark\*](#), is set to take flight at [Young People's Theatre \(YPT\)](#) this February. In this highly anticipated world premiere, director **Jim Millan** (Broadway's record-breaking *The Illusionists*), writer **Ian MacIntyre** (*The Beaverton*, *Degrassi: Next Class*) and world renowned illusionist **David Ben** weave multi-media and magic in an out-of-this-world theatrical experience. Featuring a cast that includes **Aurora Browne** (CBC's *Baroness von Sketch Show*, director of YPT's *Snow White*) and **Craig Lauzon** (CBC's *Royal Canadian Air Farce*), *The Darkest Dark* is presented on the Ada Slaight Stage **Feb. 20 – Apr. 2, 2023**.

Inspired by a true story, *The Darkest Dark* is set at the Hadfield Family cottage on Stag Island, Ontario in the summer of 1969. Apollo 11 is just days away from landing on the moon. A nine-year-old space-loving Chris (played by **Ziska Louis**) spends his days dreaming of becoming a brave astronaut. But at bedtime, the night closes in and so too does his fear of the dark, wreaking havoc on the sleep schedules of Mom (Browne) and Dad (Lauzon). For Chris, watching history in the making hinges on conquering his fear – and embracing the unknown.

"The creation of *The Darkest Dark* has been another challenging journey in my life," says Commander Hadfield. "Jim [Millan]'s thirty years of creating incredible theatre and expertise in the world of magic will provide the perfect vehicle to envelop audiences. As Canada's premier theatre for young audiences, YPT offers over half a century of expertise in arts and education. The commitment the company shows to child development through the arts gives me confidence that *The Darkest Dark* will be in safe – and extraordinary – hands."

In this sensory-rich production, audiences journey alongside young Chris as he battles his very real fear. "Every child knows what it feels like to be afraid of something," says Artistic Director **Herbie Barnes**. "This story illustrates that bravery is not the absence of fear, but rather, our ability to overcome it."

A Junior Library Guild selection, and named one of the Canadian Children's Book Centre's "Best Books for Kids & Teens" in 2019, Hadfield's *The Darkest Dark* has been inspiring children all over the world since its publication in 2016. "*The Darkest Dark* soars as an inspiration for children trying to overcome a fear as well as dreamers wondering if they will triumph. Of course, the lesson here is ageless." – *The Observer*.

*The Darkest Dark* reveals a universe where anything is possible, says Director Jim Millan. "Chris's imaginary trips to space are a surprising, hilarious and awe-inspiring adventure," he says. "His journey to overcome all his fears and worries is fueled with the same determination and hopefulness he has taught millions through sharing his deep love of space."

More than five years in the making, *The Darkest Dark* development process has been supported by **The National Arts**

**Centre's National Creation Fund.** This investment offered YPT an unprecedented opportunity to explore and pilot the integration of magic and illusion into this world premiere theatrical event.

*The Darkest Dark* cast also features **Hannah Forest Briand, Xavier Lopez, Shaquille Pottinger** and **Evelyn Wiebe**. Additional credits include: Set & Costume Designer: **Anna Treusch**; Lighting Designer: **Bonnie Beecher**; Sound Designer: **Deanna Choi**; Video Designer: **Daniele Guevara**; Apprentice Set & Costume Designer: **Joyce Padua**; Assistant Sound Designer: **River Oliveira**; Magic Consultant: **David Ben**; Dramaturgy: **Herbie Barnes, Stephen Colella** and **Allen MacInnis**; Auntie-in-Residence: **Kelly Brownbill**; Stage Manager: **Laura Baxter**; Assistant Stage Manager: **Troy Taylor**.

Special thanks to *The Darkest Dark* Production Sponsor, **Space Place (Planetarium) Canada**.

YPT's 2022.23 season is proudly supported by **The Slight Family Foundation as Lead Donor** and **BMO as Season Presenting Sponsor**.

### ***The Darkest Dark***

Based on the book by Chris Hadfield with Kate Fillion  
Adapted for the stage by Jim Millan and Ian MacIntyre  
Directed by Jim Millan

#### **Public Performances:**

**Saturdays:** Feb. 25 & March 11 at 2:00PM & 7:00PM | Mar. 4 at 1:00PM | Mar. 18, 25 & Apr. 1 at 1:00PM & 4:00PM

**Sundays:** Feb. 26, Mar. 26 & Apr. 2 at 2:00PM | Mar. 5 & 12 at 1:00PM & 4:00PM

**March Break:** Mar. 14 & 16 at 1:00PM & 4:00PM | Mar. 15 & 17 at 1:00PM

#### **Recommended for ages 6+**

**Tickets:** \$10-\$45 (plus HST & service charges)

**Purchase Online:** [youngpeoplestheatre.org](http://youngpeoplestheatre.org)

**Box Office:** 416.862.2222

#### **MEDIA OPENING:**

**Thursday, February 23 at 7PM**

**RSVP to Clare Hill, Communications Manager**

[chill@youngpeoplestheatre.org](mailto:chill@youngpeoplestheatre.org) | 647.267.6550

**Photos:** Login **yptmedia** | password **yptphotos**

### **JIM MILLAN, Director and Playwright**

Jim Millan has a long series of innovative creations in theatre, comedy, magic and variety that has taken him from Canada to the West End, Radio City Music Hall, Broadway, Las Vegas and beyond. After founding Crow's Theatre in Toronto it quickly became one of Canada's new play innovators and incubators. Jim began a decades-long collaboration directing *The Kids in the Hall* comedy group for all of their live shows since 2000. Jim most recently directed Bruce McCulloch in his new one-man play, *Tales of Bravery and Stupidity*. Among his more explosive creations, Jim co-created *Mythbusters Live*, which sold out across North America and toured Australia and New Zealand; and served as the original Creative Director for *The Illusionists*, which set an all-time record for a magic show on Broadway. He has also been a creative producer of the Governor General's Awards Gala in Ottawa, creating original stage tributes for entertainers such Michael J. Fox, Martin Short, Sandra Oh, Andrew Alexander, Catherine O'Hara and Ryan Reynolds. Throughout his career, Jim has directed comedy, dramas, magic and musicals on five continents in 38 countries and 17 languages, and has premiered over 185 new works.

### **IAN MACINTYRE, Playwright**

Ian MacIntyre is a Toronto-based television writer and video game narrative designer. He wrote on four seasons of the Netflix original *Degrassi: Next Class*, for which he won a Writers Guild of Canada award, and has also written for animated shows including *Inspector Gadget*, *D.N. Ace*, *3 Amigonauts*, and finally the satirical news comedy *The*

*Beaverton*. Ian has developed series for Nickelodeon as well as CBC television. Ian is originally from Nova Scotia and is currently thinking about donairs.

#### **DAVID BEN, Magic Consultant**

David Ben was bitten by the magic bug at the age of 12 and now, 50 years later, he is still smitten with the craft. David has performed across Canada, the United States and numerous venues around the globe. His shows include *The Conjuror* (Shaw Festival, Theatre ROM, Soulpepper); *The Conjuror's Suite* (ROM, Charlottetown Festival); *Tricks* (Artworld, Soulpepper); *Natural Magick* (Luminato); *Card Table Artifice* (Luminato); and *Hocus Pocus* (Soulpepper). As a magic consultant, David has worked with the Shaw Festival, Soulpepper Theatre, and the Stratford Festival. David has also been the magic consultant on a variety of films, television shows, novels and museum exhibitions including *Kit Kittredge: An American Girl*, *Murdoch Mysteries*, Michael Ondaatje's novel *Divisadero*, and *Grand Illusions – The Art of Magic* (McCord Museum, Art Gallery of Ontario). He is also author of several books including the biographies of Dai Vernon, and Canadian media mogul (and amateur magician) Allan Slaight. David is the co-founder and current artistic director of Magicana, an organization devoted to the advancement of magic as a performing art.

#### **HANNAH FOREST BRIAND as Jane**

Hannah Forest Briand is a queer film and theatre actress with training from George Brown Theatre School, along with an extensive dance and movement background. Her on-screen credits include a leading role in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (Théâtre Français de Toronto); a recurring role in *Échec et Moi* (TFO); and the lead in the feature, *Camping Trip* (Fuica Productions). Hannah is fresh off closing the plays *Les Zinspiré.e.s : Dix-joncté.e.s* and *Flush* (TFT). A Québécois artist, she is proud to represent French Canadian works on stage and screen while also enjoying an expansive career in English.

#### **AURORA BROWNE as Mom**

Aurora Browne is proud to be one of the co-creators, writers, executive producers, directors and stars of CBC's multiple Canadian Screen Award-winning *Baroness von Sketch Show*. In 2019, Aurora appeared as the co-host of CBC's *The Great Canadian Baking Show* Season 3. In addition, she has appeared on *Run the Burbs*, *Nurses*, *The Writer's Block*, *Man Seeking Woman*, *Orphan Black*, *The Gavin Crawford Show*, *InSecurity*, and *Corner Gas* among others. Aurora was also a co-creator, co-writer, executive producer and co-star of the hit web series *Newborn Moms*, which appeared both on CBC's and ABC's digital channels. An alumni of The Second City Toronto Main Stage, Aurora has been nominated for many Canadian Comedy Awards for her work in Toronto's red hot live sketch and improv scene. She was a nominee for the 2000 Tim Sims Encouragement Fund Award and in 2008 won the Canadian Comedy Award for Best Female Improviser. Aurora is a long-time member of the award-winning Toronto theatre company VideoCabaret. Aurora recently directed YPT's holiday production of *Snow White*.

#### **CRAIG LAUZON as Dad**

Originally from Ottawa, Craig is of mixed settler and Anishinaabe descent. Craig is a member of the sketch troupe Tonto's Nephews, and is the former Artistic Associate of Native Earth Performing Arts. Theatre credits include: *Where the Blood Mixes* (Soulpepper); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Stratford Festival); *The Drawer Boy* (Theatre Passe Muraille); *Thunderstick* (Persephone Theatre); *King Lear* (National Arts Centre); and *Trudeau and Levesque* (VideoCabaret).

#### **XAVIER LOPEZ as Herbie**

Originally from Vancouver, Xavier completed his BFA at the University of Victoria in 2012 and quickly made his way to Toronto. His work can be seen in *Y: The Last Man* (FX); *Sort Of* (CBC); *Blue's Clues & You* (Nickelodeon); *Titans* (Netflix); and *Pretty Hard Cases* (CBC). Xavier also lent his voice and performance to 'Paolo' in the video game *Far Cry 6* (Ubisoft). Theatre credits include *For Both Resting and Breeding* (Talk Is Free Theatre); *No Clowns Allowed* (Blood Pact Theatre); and *Jesus Hopped The 'A' Train* (Soulpepper), where he was nominated for a Dora Award in the category of outstanding performance in a lead role.

#### **ZISKA LOUIS as Chris**

Ziska is an actor, musician and physical theatre performer born in Switzerland and raised in Wales. From a young age they began performing in the National Youth Theatre of Wales, going on to graduate from Manchester School of Theatre. Select credits include: *Russell's World* (YPT); *Back to the Future* (Secret Cinema Presents); *dead born grow* (Frantic Assembly); *Kindertransport* (Capitol Theatre); *Little Gem* (Theatre Clwyd).

### SHAQUILLE POTTINGER as Keith

Shaquille is a graduate from the University of Toronto, Sheridan College, and the Soulpepper Academy. He hails from the various plots of suburbia North America has to offer, but distinctly caught the acting bug in Barrie, Ontario. When he isn't acting, Shaquille also enjoys writing for stage and screen. And when he isn't writing, he's probably catching Pokémon. Selected credits: *Peggy Pickit Sees the Face of God*, *Negro*, *Drowning*, *King Lear* (Soulpepper); *Ragtime: A Concert Performance* (Theatre Calgary/Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra); *The Lost Heroes of Oro* (Theatre by the Bay); and *There is No Word for Wilderness* (Animacy Theatre Collective).

### EVELYN WIEBE as Cindy

Recent graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada (Montreal), Evelyn has had the pleasure of working with a number of directors and coaches, including Philip Akin in his production of *7 Stories*, and David Latham in his production of *Macbeth*, in which Evelyn played the role of Lady Macbeth. Evelyn has appeared in CBC's *Murdoch Mysteries*, and is the lead in the short film *I Wanna Be Famous* (Humber Film School). Recent theatre credits include *The Judas Kiss* (Talk Is Free Theatre).

### About Young People's Theatre

Young People's Theatre (YPT) has launched the next stage in the company's 57-year history, co-led by Artistic Director Herbie Barnes and Executive Director Nancy Webster. This new era also marks the unveiling of YPT's expanded and renovated theatre complex, more than 10 years in the making. As Canada's largest and oldest professional theatre for young audiences, the company produces and presents a full season of theatre and arts education programming, serving approximately 150,000 patrons annually. With the purchase of a multi-use building across the street from its historic theatre, YPT 161 Studios, YPT has expanded its footprint, increased its accessibility, refreshed its lobbies, and upgraded the theatrical equipment capabilities of its 450-seat Ada Slight Stage and 115-seat Studio. United in vision, the two facilities now anchor the corner of Front and Frederick Streets in downtown Toronto creating Canada's largest theatre complex for young people. [Learn more.](#)

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### Connect with Young People's Theatre



### Media Contact:

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