FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A Soul-Satisfying New Musical about Hope

*The Spitfire Grill* opens at Kennedy Theatre

The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa’s Department of Theatre and Dance is proud to present the Hawai‘i state premiere of the new musical *The Spitfire Grill*, directed by Professor of Theatre Lurana Donnels O’Malley, on the Mainstage at Kennedy Theatre. Music direction is by Ike Webster, choreography is by Amy Schiffner.

Performances will take place September 15, 16, 22, 23 at 7:30 p.m., and September 24 at 2:00 p.m.; free pre-show chats will be held Sept. 16 and 23 at 6:45 p.m. The September 23 pre-show chat features American Sign Language (ASL) Coach Emily Jo Noschese and Hand Ninjas sharing the process of interpreting *The Spitfire Grill* in ASL. Performances on September 22 and 23 will be ASL-interpreted thanks to an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access and Success (IDEAS) grant from the UHM Office of Student Excellence, Equity, and Diversity.

At its premiere, *The New York Times* called *The Spitfire Grill* “soul-satisfying.” Director O’Malley says she was drawn to the piece not only because it addresses current social issues including the economic struggles of small towns, veterans and PTSD, as well as women’s oppression and empowerment, but also because it has strong and memorable roles. O’Malley says, “Even though the characters all have demons to face, there is beauty and light as well. The transformation, compassion, and redemption in *The Spitfire Grill* are uplifting. I’m excited to bring the first production to Hawai‘i, I don’t think it will be the last.”

*The Spitfire Grill*, called Best Musical of 2001 by *New York Magazine*, is based on the 1996 film by Lee David Zlotoff. With book and music by James Valcq and book and lyrics by Fred Alley, it tells the story of Percy Talbott, a young woman fresh out of prison, who makes her way to Gilead, Wisconsin to start a new life, inspired by a page in an old travel book. Both the town and Hannah’s Spitfire Grill have seen better days, but Percy’s
arrival is the catalyst for change. Filled with heart, passion, and folk-based songs, *The Spitfire Grill* is a hopeful musical about transformation in difficult times.

According to Music Director Ike Webster, the show’s Americana music is “a foot tapping, clap along, get-up-and-dance kind of music, but the melodies hide deeper emotional truths.” Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* wrote at its premiere that the music has a “gentle American vernacular and charm.” *The Spitfire Grill* is a collaboration between the UHM Department of Theatre and Dance and the UHM Department of Music. Webster, a graduate student in directing with extensive credits in London, impressed DHT audiences as Music Director for *All Shook Up*; he will act as both director and music director for DHT’s *Charlie Brown Christmas* this winter. Webster is collaborating on *The Spitfire Grill* with Joseph Stepec (Assistant Professor in the Department of Music and Director of Orchestras); they will work with an all-student orchestra to create the show’s folksy music. Laurence Paxton, Chair of the Department of Music, will assist in coaching the vocal performances.

*The Spitfire Grill* features a strong ensemble cast of seven players. Jorin Young, a sophomore theatre major who recently starred as Ti Moune in *Once on this Island* at Kaimuki High School, plays Percy. The show features three UHM MFA Acting graduate students: Christine Lamborn as Hannah (who had a busy 2016-17 season playing Antonia in *Twelfth Night* and in the kyogen production *Power and Folly*); Rachael Uyeno as Shelby (recently Feste in *Twelfth Night* and Benvolio in HSF’s recent *Romeo and Juliet*); and new arrival Emily Steward, in her O‘ahu premiere as Effy. Steward is a new student from Florida, and recently played Antipholus in *The Comedy of Errors* in Chicago. Akea Kahikina, a native of O‘ahu, is just beginning the MFA program in Hawaiian Theatre, and recently played Sky Masterson in *Guys and Dolls* at the University of Miami, where he received his BFA in Musical Theatre in 2016. Jeff Brackett, a math major at UHM, was just seen as Cinderella’s Prince in *Into the Woods* at Chaminade, as Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, and as Sky in DHT’s *Mamma Mia* in 2016. Keita Beni, who completes the cast, is a PhD student in Theatre who played Lord Indra in *Subali-Sugriwa: The Battle of Monkey Kings*. Lamborn, who plays Hannah, the Grill’s owner and a character decades older than herself, observes, “Although this musical is set in Gilead, Wisconsin, I think everyone in Hawai‘i will recognize the feeling of living in a small town where everyone
knows everyone.”

The Kennedy Theatre Advance SuperSaver Sale offers Adult Tickets to *The Spitfire Grill* for $16 until September 1, 2017, a savings of 35% off the regular price. They are available online at http://manoa.hawaii.edu/liveonstage/subscribe/

Regularly-priced tickets to *The Spitfire Grill* will go on sale Sept 11: online at etickethawaii.com, by phone at (808) 944-2697, at official outlets, and at the Kennedy Theatre Box Office during sale periods only.

**EVENT:**
*The Spitfire Grill*

**PRESENTED BY:**
UHM Department of Theatre + Dance

**WHEN:**
September 15, 16*, 22, 23*, at 7:30 p.m.
Matinee Sep. 24 at 2:00 p.m.
* 6:45 pm - free pre-show chat
& Translated in American Sign Language (ASL)

**WHERE:**
Kennedy Theatre Mainstage
1770 East-West Road, 96822

**REGULAR TICKET PRICES:**
$25 Adult (*$16 SuperSaver Adult until 9/1/17*)
$22 Senior, Military, UH Faculty/Staff
$20 UHAA
$15 Students/Youth
$8 UHM Students with Valid ID
Ticket prices include all service fees.

**PURCHASE INFO:**
Tickets are available online at etickethawaii.com, by phone at (808) 944-2697, at participating outlets and at the Kennedy Theatre box office. The box office is open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday during show weeks, with extended hours on performance dates.

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