

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: John Kelly
John Kelly PR
434-987-6513
john@johnkellypr.com

**UVA DRAMA TO PRESENT TONY AWARD-WINNING MUSICAL
*THE 25th ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE***

Beloved Tale Takes Audiences Inside the Lives of Adorable, Awkward and Angst-Filled Middle School Contestants As They Battle Nerves and Each Other for the Coveted Top Prize

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA – April 4, 2019 – Recite. Spell. Repeat. Wait. And hope against hope not to hear the dreaded “ding.” This is the formula for high-stakes spell offs at schools and in communities across America, and it’s the formula for one of the Broadway’s best-loved musicals – and the final show of the 2018-2019 Drama Department season!

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee has charmed audiences across America with its effortless wit and humor. Featuring a fast-paced, wildly funny, and touching book by Rachel Sheinkin and a truly fresh and vibrant score by William Finn, the show offers audiences an unforgettable experience, and just maybe, a moment in the spotlight to show off their own spelling skills! Winner of the Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Book, the show takes us inside the minds of six mid-pubescent as they face off in the spelling bee championship of a lifetime. While they candidly disclose hilarious and touching stories from their home lives, the tweens spell their way through a series of (potentially made-up) words, hoping to never hear the soul-crushing, pout-inducing bell that signals a mistake. Six start out. One remains standing. And five leave with nothing but a juice box as a consolation prize. The show is a riotous ride complete with audience participation, and a dynamic cast that will have you laughing and rooting for them all at the same time.

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, directed by David Dalton, will be presented April 18 & 19 at 8pm, April 23-26 at 8pm and April 27 at 2pm at Culbreth Theatre.

Tickets for *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* are \$16 for adults, \$14 for seniors, UVA faculty and staff and alumni association members, and \$10 for students. Tickets are available online at www.artsboxoffice.virginia.edu, by calling 434-924-3376, or in-person from noon until 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday at the UVA Arts Box Office, located in the lobby of the Drama building.

Director David Dalton and his design team are employing a “stage-within-a-stage” approach to creatively capture the inner lives of the bee participants captured in the fantasy sequences that are so important to the show. “The stage itself is a gymnasium,” he said, “and we have created

a stage within that gymnasium that, when it opens, summons forth a sort of magical or magically realistic fantasy or memory sequence that is often accompanied by songs. So, when the spellers think back to things that have happened in their pasts, or when they have fantasies about what they might do in the future, these take place in that inner stage.”

Dalton turned to etymology to build this inner sanctum. “One of the songs in the show, “Pandemonium,” is often accompanied by students reacting against the rules, or the announcer. I was looking for something that connected to the word “pandemonium,” and learned that it comes from Milton, who coined the term, defining it as “the capital of hell.” So, we have created a sort of childlike replication of this, complete with a fun surprise for one of the characters.”

The inner sanctum idea, Dalton said, represented the same thing that inspired him about the show overall – what does each speller or each adult in the cast need from the spelling bee. “They all come into it lacking something, either an appreciation or underrating of themselves, or a sense of identity and pride. They are fulfilled by this bee. The fantasy sequences and songs allow us to understand their pasts better, and to picture their futures.”

Another attractive element of the show, Dalton said, is that the fun is not limited to the actors on stage. “Volunteers are selected for every show to participate in the spelling bee, and they get the chance to interact a bit with the characters. It really adds to the fun. The show assumes the audience is there for the bee, so you have spellers entering and exiting the house throughout, which adds variety, excitement, and fun to what is already a tremendously fun show to begin with.”

Parking for UVA Drama performances is available at the Culbreth Road Parking Garage, conveniently located alongside the theaters.

To access photos of this production, visit
<https://virginia.box.com/s/2vb5q4rlckfurur0e9gvciu95pguqxtb>

For more information on the 2018-2019 UVA Drama season, visit
<http://drama.virginia.edu/current-season>.