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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Next Stage presents 'Join or Die,' a documentary on
2 community, democracy, and the power of joining together

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4 TEXT BODY:

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5 Next Stage Arts, 15 Kimball Hill, presents a special
6 screening of the documentary *Join or Die* Sunday, Jan. 18, at 2
7 p.m.

8 Directed by Rebecca Davis and Pete Davis, *Join or Die*
9 (93 minutes, 2024) is a timely and deeply engaging film that
10 explores a simple but powerful idea: joining a club can help save
11 American democracy. The film follows Harvard social scientist

12 Robert D. Putnam, author of the book *Bowling Alone*, as he traces
13 the decades-long decline in civic engagement, social connection,
14 and community life in the United States — and examines what
15 this erosion means for the future of democracy.

16 Blending “social science with humor, warmth, and
17 striking visuals,” *Join or Die* asks three urgent questions: What
18 makes democracy work? Why is American democracy in crisis?
19 And most importantly, What can we do about it?

20 Along the way, Putnam’s story is enriched by voices from
21 across politics, public health, economics, and culture, including
22 Hillary Clinton, Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek
23 Murthy, Eddie S. Glaude Jr., Raj Chetty, and Priya Parker.

24 The film also spotlights grassroots organizations across
25 the country that are actively rebuilding civic life — from bowling
26 leagues and cycling collectives to mutual aid groups and labor
27 alliances.

28 Premiering to strong acclaim at the South by Southwest
29 Film Festival, the film has been praised as both “galvanizing” and
30 “hopeful.”

31 “Days later, I am still thinking about *Join or Die* and its
32 message about community,” Slash Film’s Ryan Scott wrote in his
33 review. “I am going to join a club, maybe even start a club. [...] I
34 am going to do my part for democracy [...]. If that isn’t the mark
35 of a good documentary, what is?”

36 *Milwaukee Magazine* reviewer Archer Parquette wrote:
37 “It’s hard to watch without feeling the personal impact of
38 Putnam’s ideas in your own life — the social disconnection, the
39 apathy, the cynicism — and as the credits role, you might just
40 find yourself wanting to join a bowling league.”

41 “At a moment of deep polarization and widespread
42 social isolation,” wrote organizers in a news release, *Join or Die*
43 offers a call to action. They said the film reminds audiences
44 “democracy doesn’t begin at the ballot box, but in
45 neighborhoods, clubs, congregations, and community spaces
46 where people choose to show up together.”

47 Doors open at 1:30 p.m. Advance tickets are \$10, and
48 can be purchased at nextstagearts.org.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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