PTP/NYC SEASON 34 1/2

A Small Handful directed by Jim Petosa

Premiering August 13, 2021 7:30PM
Streaming August 13-17, 2021

A Small Handful

three poems by Anne Sexton in speech and song

Directed by Jim Petosa

Presented in collaboration with Boston University Opera Institute, William Lumpkin, Director.

Company

Speaker - Paula Langton*

Soprano - Kaileigh Riess

*Company members designated with * are members of ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION*

Potomac Theatre Project (PTP/NYC) dedicates this season to the memory of Drue and Art Gensler in recognition of their continued support of the Middlebury College Theatre Department. Drue's creation of the Theatre Department's senior prize has helped to launch many graduates into the next stage of their artistic journeys. Art's ongoing support of student theatre internships has made possible the participation of every student who is a part of this season.

And, as always, much gratitude to Middlebury College itself, PTP's generous supporter for three+ decades.

A Note from the Director:

Poetry, even when read silently, is heard in the head. Its notes are heard, no matter how percussively, as music.
Its rhythms can be felt deep within the body.

Poetry invites the utterance of itself.

These three short poems by Anne Sexton are unquestionably poetic, but like many poems, they are dramatic.
They contain conflict, narrative, character, need, and ultimately, epiphany and resolution. All the stuff of drama.
This experiment in speech and song juxtaposes two actors' interpretations of the same texts. One speaks the written words. The other sings intentionally unaccompanied musical compositions of the same words.
Both reveal the essence of the texts they expose.

It is our hope that the journeys into each of the three poems through speech and song will bring us to a deeper experience and understanding of each one.

Jim Petosa

The Poems

I.

WHERE IT WAS AT BACK THEN

Husband,
Last night I dreamt
They cut off your hands and feet.
Husband,
You whispered to me,
Now we are both incomplete.

Husband,
I held all four
In my arms like sons and daughters.
Husband,
I bent slowly down
And washed them in magical waters.

Husband,
I placed each one
Where it belonged on you.
"A miracle"
You said, and we laughed
The laugh of the well-to-do.

II.

MUSIC SWIMS BACK TO ME

Wait Mister. Which way is home?
They turned the light out
and the dark is moving in the corner.
There are no signposts in this room,
four ladies, over eighty,
in diapers every one of them.
La la la, Oh music swims back to me
and I can feel the tune they played
the night they left me
in this private institution on a hill.

Imagine it. A radio playing
and everyone here was crazy.

I liked it and danced in a circle.
Music pours over the sense
and in a funny way
music sees more than I.
I mean it remembers better,
remembers the first night here.
It was the strangled cold of November,
even the stars were strapped in the sky
and that moon too bright
forking through the bars to stick me
with a singing in the head.
I have forgotten all the rest.

They lock me in this chair at eight a.m.
and there are no signs to tell the way,
just the radio beating to itself
and the song that remembers
more than I. Oh, la la la,
this music swims back to me.
The night I came I danced a circle
and was not afraid.
Mister?

III.

SEVEN TIMES (from THE DEATH BABY)

I died seven times
In seven ways
Letting death give me a sign,
Letting death place his mark on my forehead,
Crossed over, crossed over.

And death took root in that sleep,
In that sleep I held an ice baby
And I rocked it
And was rocked by it.
Oh, Madonna, hold me.
I am a small handful.

About the Author

Anne Sexton was born in Newton, Massachusetts and raised in Weston, Massachusetts. One of the most popular poets of mid-20th century America, Sexton's impressive body of work continues to be widely read and debated by literary scholars and cultural critics alike. According to Diane Hume George, "Anne Sexton's poetry tells stories that are immensely significant to mid-twentieth-century artistic and psychic life. Sexton understood her culture's malaise through her own, and her skill enabled her to deploy metaphorical structures at once synthetic and analytic … Sexton explored the myths by and through which our culture lives and dies: the archetypal relationships among mothers and daughters, fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, gods and humans, men and women."

The daughter of a successful businessman, Sexton's childhood was materially comfortable but not happy. Her relationships with her parents were difficult, perhaps even abusive. At age 19, she married Alfred "Kayo" Sexton II. While Kayo was serving in Korea, Anne became a fashion model. In 1953, she gave birth to her first child and in 1955, her second. Sexton suffered from post-partum depression, and after the birth of her first daughter she suffered her first breakdown and was admitted to a neuropsychiatric hospital. Other institutionalizations followed. Sexton struggled with depression for the remainder of her life. She committed suicide at age 46.

In treatment, her therapist encouraged her to write and in 1957 Sexton joined writing groups in Boston that eventually led her to friendships and relationships with the poets Maxine Kumin, Robert Lowell, George Starbuck, and Sylvia Plath. As Sexton told Beatrice Berg, her writing began, in fact, as therapy: "My analyst told me to write between our sessions about what I was feeling and thinking and dreaming." Eventually, Sexton's poems about her psychiatric struggles were gathered in her first book, To Bedlam and Part Way Back (1960), which recounts, as James Dickey wrote, the experiences "of madness and near-madness, of the pathetic, well-meaning, necessarily tentative and perilous attempts at cure, and of the patient's slow coming back into the human associations and responsibilities which the old, previous self still demands."

Sexton's work is usually grouped with other Confessional poets such as Plath, Lowell, John Berryman, and W. D. Snodgrass. One of her earliest champions, Erica Jong, reviewing The Death Notebooks, assessed Sexton's poetic significance and contended that her artistry was seriously overlooked: "She is an important poet not only because of her courage in dealing with previously forbidden subjects, but because she can make the language sing. . When Anne Sexton is at the top of her form, she writes a poem which no one else could have written."

The Composer

GILDA LYONS, (b. 1975), composer, vocalist, and visual artist, combines elements of renaissance, neo-baroque, spectral, folk, agitprop Music Theater, and extended vocalism to create works of uncompromising emotional honesty and melodic beauty.

The premiere of A New Kind of Fallout—Lyons' mainstage opera inspired by the life and work of Rachel Carson, written with librettist Tammy Ryan, and commissioned by Opera Theater of Pittsburgh—was described as "powerfully effective" (Pittsburgh Stage Magazine), "haunting" (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette) and "spot-on at re-creating the atmosphere of the early '60s" (Pittsburgh Tribune-Review).
As composer, current recording projects include the release of Lyons' work by Quince and entelechron in the upcoming season. Lyons' vocal collaboration with Laura Ward will be released on Lyric Fest's all-Hagen CD. Sing for Hope featured Lyons' Hold On on their most recent release, An AIDS Quilt Songbook. Lindsey Goodman's tour de force performance of Lyons' Chrysalis was released on Goodman's debut CD, reach through the sky. As composer and vocalist her works and performances are available on the Clarion, GPR Records, Naxos, New Dynamic Records, and Roven Records labels.

An active vocalist and fierce advocate of contemporary music, Lyons has commissioned, premiered, and workshopped new vocal works by dozens of composers. Of her performance in Daron Hagen's Shining Brow (Buffalo Philharmonic/Falletta) (Naxos) David Shengold of Opera, UK writes "Gilda Lyons's clear soprano compels admiration."

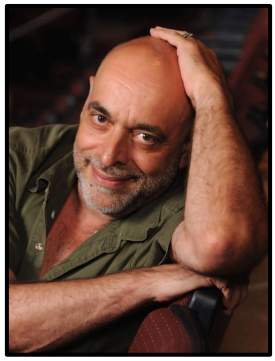
Lyons' music is published by Schott, E.C. Schirmer and Burning Sled. She received her Ph.D. in Music Composition from the State University of New York at Stony Brook and is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh and Bard College. Lyons made her professional debut as composer and vocalist with the American Symphony Chamber Orchestra in 1997, performing the world premiere of her orchestral song cycle Feis.

Cast

Paula Langton* (Speaker) Theater credits: *The Winter's Tale* (Hermione), *King Lear* (Regan), *All's Well That Ends Well*(Lord II and Mariana), *Measure for Measure* (Isabella), *Richard III* (Rivers, Mayor, and Second Murderer), Actors' Shakespeare Project; *Metamorphoses* (Juno), Teatro Eos in Stromboli, Italy, and Teatro Nacional at the Great Theatre of the World Festival in Lisbon, Portugal, the Wimberly Theatre with BU; *Scenes from an Execution* (Galactia), *Much Ado about Nothing*(Beatrice), *The Tempest* (Miranda), Shakespeare & Company; *Taming of the Shrew* (Kate), Boston Theatre Works; *Twelfth Night* (Maria), Counterpoint Theatre;*Twelfth Night* (Feste), Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company; *King Lear* (Edgar), *Henry V* (Bardolph, Westmoreland, Michael Williams, and Captain James), Company of Women. Other: LaMama e.t.c., New York Theatre Workshop, Hasty Pudding, Charles Playhouse, Boston Playwrights' Theatre, Nora Theatre, Gloucester Stage Company, Coyote Theatre, Potomac Theare Project. Film: summer 2005 documentary *Giving Voice: An Actor's Journey with Kristin Linklater*.

Kaileigh Riess (Soprano) has been seen most recently in the roles of Maria Bertram (*Mansfield Park)* and Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress)* with the Boston University Opera Institute. Kaileigh completed her education at Northwestern University (BM Voice Performance, BA English Literature) and the University of Southern California (MM Opera), where she performed the roles of Blanche (*Dialogues of the Carmelites*), Laurie (*The Tender Land),* La Contessa (*Le nozze di Figaro*) and Morgana (*Alcina*), among others. This 2020-21 season, Kaileigh was named the 3rd place winner in the Jensen Foundation Vocal Competition, a Boston District winner in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and the 1st Place winner of the inaugural Wilkinson Young Singers Fund, and she continues to compete as a finalist in the Lotte Lenya Competition in New York City this August. This summer, Kaileigh sings as a vocal fellow with The Music Academy of the West, and will be featured in the 21st Century Liederabend (Beth Morrison Projects) and throughout their summer programming.

Artistic and Production Team



Jim Petosa (Director) Jim Petosa is Professor Emeritus with Boston University's College of Fine Arts. He served as a professor and as director of the BU School of Theatre from 2002 – 2018. He also served as artistic director of the Boston region's New Repertory Theatre from 2012 – 2018. Petosa has directed Tom Stoppard and André Previn's *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour at NYC's Town Hall* and the operas *Carmen (Peter Brook adaptation)* and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat among others*. PTP/NYC credits include *Monster, Spatter Pattern*, *A Question of Mercy*, *Therese Raquin*, *Somewhere in the Pacific*, *Marisol*, *Dog Plays*, *Statements After an Arrest*, *Good*, *Brecht on Brecht*, among others. He also served as Artistic Director for the Olney Theatre Center, where directing credits include *Democracy*, *Brooklyn Boy*, *Copenhagen*, *The Laramie Project*, *Art*, *The Miracle Worker*, *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* (won a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding MusicalProduction), *Theatre J's Collected Stories* (received a Helen Hayes nomination for Outstanding Direction), and Look! We Have Come Through! (Charles MacArthur New Play nomination, Co-created with Carole Graham Lehman). A member of the Actor's Equity Association and the Society of Directors and Choreographers, Petosa is the current President of Stage Source, the New England association of theatre organizations and practitioners. He teaches acting and directs for the Boston University Opera Institute.

Cheryl Faraone (Founder and Co-Artistic Director PTP/NYC)) is a co-founder of Potomac Theatre Project and has produced all of PTP/NYC's 34.5 seasons and directed many shows for the company, including *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* and *Arcadia by Tom Stoppard; Serious Money, Vinegar Tom, After-Dinner Joke* and *Mad Forest by Caryl Churchill;* Sarah Kane's *Crave, Territories*, *Lovesong of the Electric Bear*, *Politics of Passion: the Plays of Anthony Minghella*, *An Experiment with an Air Pump*, *Perfect Pie*, *Stanley* and many more. Previously, she directed and produced for eight seasons with the New York Theatre Studio. For the Olney Theatre Center in Maryland she directed *King of the Jews*, *The Real Thing* and *Anna Karenina*. In New York, she worked on the Broadway productions of *The American Clock* and *An Evening with Comden and Greene* with producer Arthur Cantor and at the Public Theatre. Her work at Middlebury College, where she is professor emeritus and taught theatre and women and gender studies for 35 years, includes the direction of 30 productions, including *Julius Caesar, Men on Boats, Enron, Stupid Fucking Bird, As You Like It,, The Good Woman of Setzuan*, *Jumpers*, *The Five Hysterical Girls Theorem*, *An Experiment with an Air Pump*, *Top Girls* and numerous others. She is a graduate of Catholic University and Florida State University's School of Theatre, and has been involved with ART/NY, the League of Washington Theatres and TCG. She is a member of the National Theatre Conference.

Richard Romagnoli In 1986 Richard Romagnoli co-founded and has since been the Co-Artistic Director of the Potomac Theatre Project. PTP/NYC; Director, For PTP/NYC, private and public Zoom productions of Pinter's *Press Conference/Party Time,* Howard Barker's poem *Don't Exaggerate*. His most recent 'live' production for the company was 2019's *Havel: The Passion of Thought*. For PTP and other theatres he has directed multiple productions of Howard Barker's *The Castle, Scenes from an Execution, The Europeans, A Hard Heart, Pity In History* and *The Possibilities*. He has also directed Barker's *Judith, Gertrude— The Cry, Victory: Choices in Reaction* and Barker's poems 'Gary the Thief,' 'Plevna: Meditations on Hatred, 'and 'Don't Exaggerate.' For the worldwide 2010 Barker celebration "21 for 21", he directed *Judith* with Jan Maxwell, Alex Draper and Stephanie Janssen. Other playwrights directed for PTP include Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, Gore Vidal, Vaclav Havel, Pavel Kohout, Snoo Wilson, Howard Brenton and Tariq Ali. In Washington D.C. he has directed Dumas fil's *Camille* (with Jan Maxwell), Pinter's *The Homecoming*, Coward's *Private Lives,* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* for the Olney Theatre Center, and has also worked with Project Y in D.C. and in Boston for Whistler in the Dark. He is a professor emeritus of theatre at Middlebury College in Vermont, where he directed numerous plays, including, most recently, *Major Barbara, Havel: The Passion of Thought, Glengarry Glen Ross, The Antigone Project, Flare Path, Mendel, Inc., Pentecost, The Castle, Victory, Scenes From An Execution,* Tom Stoppard's *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour (EGBDF)* and the American premiere of Peter Barnes' *The Bewitched* (*Scenes* and *Bewitched* were both performed at the Kennedy Center as part of the 1996 and 2006 American College Theatre Festivals respectively; *Pentecost* received ACTF's 2014 Outstanding Production of a play award). He's developed new plays at The Young Playwright's Festival at the Public Theatre and the Shenandoah Playwrights Festival. Romagnoli is an associate of Howard Barker's The Wrestling School and cofounded The Barker Project with Robert Emmet Lunney and Jan Maxwell. He trained at the School of Theatre, Florida State University. He is a member of the National Theatre Conference.

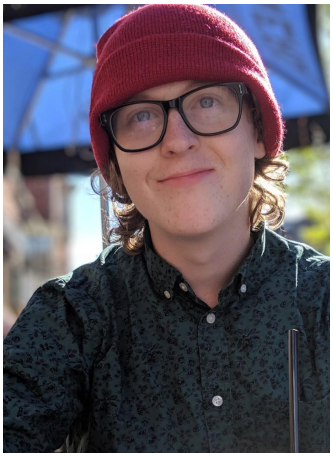
Courtney Smith (Production Designer) Courtney Smith is a scenic, media designer, and technician for live performance. He is currently the Production Designer for the Department of Theatre at Middlebury College. Courtney's designs have received several Meritorious Achievement Awards from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. Additionally, his work received a "Distinguished Achievement Award in Scenic Design" from the Kennedy Center in Washington DC. Credits include Potomac Theatre Project (NY), Warren Miller Performing Arts Center (MT), Southwark Playhouse (UK), The Bushwick Starr (NY), Roundabout Theatre Company (NY), New York City Opera (NY), Playwrights Horizons

(NY), Classic Stage Company (NY), Cedar Lake Dance (NY), Marvel Repertory Theatre (NY), Mount Baker Repertory Theatre (WA), Montana Shakespeare in the Parks (MT), Coeur d'Alene Summer Theatre (ID), and Idaho Repertory Theatre (ID).
Courtney is a member of United States Institute of Theatre Technology (USITT) and received his MFA in scenic design from the University of Idaho.

Alex Draper* (Associate Artistic Director and actor) Alex Draper is a founding member and the Associate Artistic Director of PTP/NYC, appearing most recently in their productions of *The House in Scarsdale: A Memoir for the Stage, Arcadia, No End of Blame, Judith: A Parting from the Body, Pentecost, Gertrude-The Cry, Serious Money*, and *Plevna: Meditations on Hatred*. Theatre credits include the New York premieres of *Terrorism* (New Group/Play Company); *Get What You Need* (Atlantic); *Rose's Dilemma* (MTC); *Endpapers* (Variety Arts); *Saint Crispin's Day* (Rattlestick); *The Pitchfork Disney* (Blue Light); and *Oedipus*(CSC/Blue Light); revivals of *Waiting for Lefty* and *Golden Boy* (Blue Light); and *Scapin* and *The Triumph of Love* (CSC); and regional productions at Yale Rep, Williamstown, Arena Stage, the Westport Playhouse, The McCarter, The Huntington, George Street, and The Berkshire Theatre Festival. Film: *The Witch in the Window, No Pay, Nudity, Yellowbrickroad, Joshua, Hysterical Blindness, Simply Irresistible, The Photographer, Kalapani* and *Hard Shell.* TV: *Chicago Med, Taken, The Good Wife, John Adams, Sex and the City, Law and Order, Law and Order SVU, Law and Order: CI, Suddenly Susan* and *Ed*. Alex trained at the Yale School of Drama and Middlebury College, where he is currently Chair of the Department of Theatre.

Devin Wein* (Stage Manager) is thrilled to be a part of her sixth PTP season. Off-Broadway credits include: *The Havel Plays, The After Dinner Joke, No End of Blame*, and *Pity in History* (Potomac Theatre Project), *Two By Friel, Three Small Irish Masterpieces, Rebel in the Soul*, and *The Dead, 1904* (Irish Repertory Theatre), *Ironbound* and *Undeniable Sound of Right Now* (Women's Project and Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre), *Phalaris' Bull* (Theatre Row), *Allegro* (Classic Stage Company), *Scenes From a Marriage* (New York Theatre Workshop), *Threepenny Opera* (Atlantic Theatre Company). Regional: *The Underpants, The Whale Song,* and *Devilfish* (Perseverance Theatre), *Legacy* and *The Visit* (Williamstown Theatre Festival).

Caroline Armour (Social Media/ Prod. Coordinator) is excited to participate in her first season of PTP. She has performed in *A Monster Calls, Mamma Mia, Find Me, Alice in Wonderland*, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Caroline went on to become the Assistant Director for *A Midsummer Nights Dream, In The Heights, Spring Awakening, Lord of the Flies, Puffs*, and *Matilda*. Previously she wrote and directed a production of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and a stage interpretation of *The Office*. Caroline is currently working on her BA in Theatre and French at Middlebury College.



Kevin Dunn (Lighting designer) is a Lighting designer based in Boston, Massachusetts. Recent design credits include *Our Town* (The Barnstormers Theatre), *The Half Life of Marie Curie* (BU School of Theatre), *Mansfield Park* (BU Opera Institute), and *I Am Antigone* (Theatre for the New City). They have been the recipient of the Don Childs Award for Excellence from the Stagecraft Institute of Las Vegas and an Honorable mention for the KCACTF Barbizon Award for Excellence in Lighting Design at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC. They received a Bachelors of Fine Arts in theatrical design from Salem State University and are currently pursuing a Masters of Fine Arts in lighting design at Boston University.

Gibson Grimm (Digital Technician) is a Theatre and Film double major at Middlebury College from Jacksonville, Florida. His Middlebury acting credits include *Giants Have Us in Their Books, The Bacchae 2.1, Untitled Romantic Comedy, Working*, and the First Year Show. He recently directed *I and You*. Outside the department, he is a member of Middlebury Discount Comedy, is a Social Activities Co-Chair for MCAB, and co-hosts a radio show.

David Gibbs (Press Representative) (he/him) is the founder of DARR Publicity, a boutique press agency specializing in theater, dance, film, music-driven shows and unique theatrical experiences. Clients include The Amoralists, Company XIV, Ice Factory Festival, La MaMa, Molière in the Park, New Ohio Theatre, Pig Iron and PTP/NYC. David has publicized shows at many Off-Broadway and Off-Off-Broadway venues throughout NYC. His clients have won Drama Desk, Lucille Lortel, Obie and Off Broadway Alliance Awards.

HISTORY OF THE POTOMAC THEATRE PROJECT

81 productions, 1987–2020

Howard Barker

Judith: a Parting from the Body (NY premiere)
Gertrude -- The Cry (American premiere)
No End of Blame: Scenes of Overcoming
The Castle (American premiere)
The Possibilities
A Hard Heart
Scenes from an Execution
The Europeans: Struggle to Love (American premiere)
Plevna: Meditations on Hatred (World premiere)
Gary the Thief (American premiere)
Victory: Choices in Reaction
Pity in History (World premiere)
Don't Exaggerate

Harold Pinter

Mountain Language
The New World Order (American premiere)
One for the Road
No Man's Land
A Kind of Alaska and other works

Caryl Churchill

Vinegar Tom
The After-Dinner Joke (American premiere)
Mad Forest
Serious Money
Far Away

Neal Bell

Somewhere in the Pacific
Therese Raquin
Spatter Pattern
Monster

Snoo Wilson

Vampire (American premiere)
Lovesong of the Electric Bear (American premiere)

Tom Stoppard

Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth
Arcadia

Pam Gems

Stanley
Piaf

Anthony Minghella

Cigarettes and Chocolate (Amerian premiere)
Politics of Passion: The Plays of Anthony Minghella

Havel: The Passion of Thought (Vaclav Havel, Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett—American premiere)
Crave (Sarah Kane) American premiere
Pentecost (David Edgar—NY premiere)
Trial of the Catonsville Nine (Daniel Berrigan)
The Best Man (Gore Vidal)
A Question of Mercy (David Rabe)
Magnificence (Howard Brenton)
A Narrow Bed (Ellen McLaughlin)
Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act (Athol Fugard)
Masterpieces (Sarah Daniels)
A Poster of the Cosmos (Lanford Wilson)
Manny and Jake (Harvey Fierstein)
The Good and Faithful Servant (Joe Orton)
Ghosts (Henrik Ibsen)
Rain. Some Fish. No Elephants (Y York)
Marisol (José Rivera)
The Dog Plays (Robert Chesley)
Family Life (Wendy Hammond)
Closetland (Radha Bharadwaj)
Good (C.P. Taylor)
Plenty (David Hare)

Scotland Road (Jeffrey Hatcher)
Measure for Measure (Shakespeare, adapted by Chris Hayes—Premiere)
Perfect Pie (Judith Thompson)
The American Dream (Edward Albee)
An Experiment with an Air Pump (Shelagh Stephenson)
Territories: The Spoils & A Light Gathering of Dust (Steven Dykes)
Brecht on Brecht (Bertolt Brecht/George Tabori)
The House in Scarsdale (Dan O'Brien)

PTP/NYC wishes to express gratitude to the Performers' Unions:
ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION
AMERICAN GUILD OF MUSICAL ARTISTS
AMERICAN GUILD OF VARIETY ARTISTS
SAG-AFTRA
through Theatre Authority, Inc. for their cooperation in permitting the Artists to appear on this program.
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Potomac Theatre Project (PTP/NYC)

Season 34.5
July 9 to August 17, 2021

Lunch
By Steven Berkoff
July 9-13

Standing on the Edge of Time
July 23-27

A Small Handful
by Anne Sexton and Gilda Lyons
August 13-17

www.ptpnyc.org

Keep an eye on our website for news of 2022. Thank you for being with us this season!