

WE PLAYERS PRESENTS

MOTHER & LEAR

PERFORMED IN UNIQUE AND INTIMATE VENUES

 We Players

We Players Presents

 MOTHER
LEAR 

Adapted from Shakespeare's *King Lear*
by Ava Roy and Courtney Walsh

With
Courtney Walsh as *Lear*
and
Ava Roy as *Cordelia*

THE PRODUCTION

"Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" - Shakespeare

Death and Dying

"Death is inevitable. Death will come whether we prepare for it or not. The body is fragile and vulnerable. There are many causes of death." - from The Nine Contemplations of Atisha, courtesy of the Zen Hospice Project

Choosing to look at death directly can require great courage. Openly discussing death and end of life care doesn't exactly come easily in our modern times and in our culture. To contemplate our own death and the loss of those we love, to openly discuss death - whether it be to share our own wishes or to hear the fears and hopes carried by the ones we love - can be uncomfortable, even scary. But perhaps it can also be a joyful experience. A life-affirming experience. Yes, these conversations can be avoided, but only for so long. How might we benefit from embracing the topic rather than evading it? If we step up to the edge of this "undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveler returns," and willingly look into the vast expanse, what might we discover about ourselves? How might the conversation bring us closer to those we love? How can we prepare for the unpreparable?

Perhaps engaging these questions about aging, illness, and end of life can help us embrace our vitality more fully and savor each moment with greater relish!

With *Mother Lear*, we hope to inspire audiences to personally embrace these questions and to instigate these conversations with their loved ones. We hope to support the incredible work of so many innovative organizations and visionary individuals who aim to change the experience of dying. We all age and we all deal with loss - loss of things, of our faculties, of loved ones, of life. Let us celebrate the time we have on this miraculous planet. Let's comfort one another, connect, and heal through sharing in this most fundamental human experience.

-Ava Roy

Memory and Loss

Every good play takes the artists involved on a journey, but the preparation for *Mother Lear* has been exceptional. Because there are so many living with dementia and because their caretakers are so deeply affected, we feel a special responsibility in telling this story. Through video, interviews, reading and visits, we have immersed ourselves as witnesses. What emerges repeatedly is the uniqueness of each person's manifestation of dementia, and the struggle for those left on the shore by the journey of "the long goodbye." Exhaustion, frustration and sadness seem universal; but also moments of humor, absurdity and tenderness. At the same time, the human brain's responsiveness to poetry, music and language inspires us.

My personal fears about aging center around loss of agency. As a parent, I am accustomed to being in charge. But in witnessing stories about dementia, I have observed a role reversal that, although unsought and often excruciating, can illuminate a different way for a child to see a parent. I do not wish the stress upon my children, but I know that if I experience dementia, they will be forced to reckon with me as a person in a way that is unfathomable in my present state. And if released from the constant awareness of protecting them, I would exist in a way that is impossible for me now. I am filled with awe and respect for those who are negotiating the challenges of a new parent-child dynamic, and so grateful to them for sharing their stories.

Art, through poetry and drama, is uniquely suited to helping humans navigate the unfathomable. Art invites us to surrender our grasp on the concrete and knowable. Poetry frames our feelings in rhythms and images that resonate in the deepest parts of our brains. Drama allows us safely to experience, in the physical presence of others, that which is otherwise too close, too dangerous, or too mysterious, embracing us in a communal response. Thank you for your generosity in being here. And special thanks to William Shakespeare, for providing us with his words when our own fall short.

-Courtney Walsh

THE PERFORMERS

Courtney Walsh is delighted to return to the incomparable We Players. After earning a B.A. in Theater Studies at Yale University, she acted professionally in Los Angeles. During an acting hiatus, she earned a law degree to represent children in child abuse cases, and returned to the stage in 2006. Since then, she has appeared on national and international stages, both in English and French (including Berlin, Amsterdam, Paris, Montpellier, Cardiff, Athens, Corfu, Sydney, and Auckland). Bay Area credits include: Cutting Ball Theater (title role in *Phèdre*); Marin Theatre Company (*Native Son* – West Coast premiere); San Francisco Playhouse (*Jerusalem*, and *Seared* – world premiere); We Players (*Romeo and Juliet*); New Conservatory Theatre Center (*Dear Harvey*), and many others. For *Moby Dick – Rehearsed* at Stanford Repertory Theater (where she has been a core company member for ten years) she won Theatre Bay Area Awards for Outstanding Production, Directing and Acting Ensemble. Her solo show *Clytemnestra: Tangled Justice* has toured eight countries over three continents. Courtney periodically teaches a CSP Drama course at Stanford University and workshops on acting in the U.S. and Europe. She is also a mother of four and a competitive equestrienne. Find her at courtneywalsh.net

Courtney Walsh appears in this production courtesy of Actors' Equity Association.

Ava Roy is the Founding Artistic Director of We Players. Her unique style of interactive, site-integrated performance aims to highlight the historical and natural treasures of the local landscape and encourage new ways of experiencing and appreciating these places. She is an alumna of Stanford University, where she founded We Players in the spring of 2000. She holds a BA in a self-designed major: Ritual and Performance in Aesthetic Education, 2003. Since 2008, she has pioneered unique partnerships with both the National Park Service and the California State Park system, creating large-scale performances at park sites throughout the Bay Area. Inspired and guided by Shakespeare since her teenage years, Ava has explored many characters from the canon ranging from Juliet to Henry V, Mercutio to Lady Macbeth. In addition to her love of Shakespeare, classic literature, historic sites, crumbling buildings, and majestic natural landscapes, Ava likes espresso, salt spray, and sunshine. She is a yoga teacher, a sailor, and in her next life, plans to live in the ocean.



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SPECIAL THANKS

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We are committed to keeping both our ticket prices affordable and our performances extraordinary. To do this, we need to supplement our box office income through sponsorship and individual giving. We Players patrons are our triumphant heroes who listen, advise, and cheer us on! They are champions of a visionary creative culture in the Bay Area. They are people like you! Visit weplayers.org/donate for more.

If you would like to learn more about how to volunteer with or support We Players please contact our Associate Producer, Britt Lauer, at britt@weplayers.org.

ABOUT WE

We Players presents site-integrated performance events that transform public spaces into realms of participatory theatre. We bring communities together, reclaiming local spaces for public discourse and civic celebration through art. Extending the transformative powers of performance beyond the stage, we invite our collaborators and audience to engage fully and awaken to the spectacular world around us.

The company's site-integrated focus and commitment to engage with history and ecology, build community, and use art to foster a personal connection with place has led to unprecedented partnerships with

the National Park Service, California State Parks, and San Francisco Recreation and Parks.

Production history highlights include: *Hamlet on Alcatraz*, *The Odyssey on Angel Island State Park*, *Macbeth at Fort Point*, *Ondine at Sutro*, *Romeo and Juliet at Villa Montalvo*, and many more.

We Players produces performance and engagement programs that are accessible to the diverse population of regular park visitors, and also draw local visitors to park sites specifically to experience our work.

WE PLAYERS

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