

WE PLAYERS PRESENTS

MOTHER & LEAR

PERFORMED IN UNIQUE AND INTIMATE BAY AREA VENUES

AUTUMN 2017

 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. As our friend Nader says, “Dementia and old age are not diseases, life and its realities are not looking for a “cure.” 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 PLACES

San Francisco Recreation and Park

The roots of San Francisco's Recreation and Park Department stretch back to the 1870s, when city officials, responding to residents' demands for a large public park, established a Park Commission to oversee the development of Golden Gate Park. Over the years, many more parks were added to the system, and playgrounds, athletic fields, and recreational facilities were developed under the auspices of the Recreation Commission. In 1950, the two commissions were merged, and the modern **Recreation and Park Department** was born.

SF Recreation and Park is proud to welcome more than 13 million visitors each year to Golden Gate Park, one of San Francisco's greatest treasures. From a vast, windswept expanse of sand dunes, park engineer William Hammond Hall and master gardener John McLaren carved out an oasis—a verdant, horticulturally diverse, and picturesque public space where city dwellers can relax and reconnect with the natural world. The rest, as they say, is history.

The Jewish Community Center of the East Bay

The JCC East Bay is a welcoming, inspiring home for people of all ages and life stages. Our mission is to create healthy communities inspired by Jewish values, culture and tradition. The JCC serves and reflects the diverse residents of the East Bay, providing high-quality programs and gathering spaces throughout the East Bay to advance, nurture, and evolve Jewish communal life and contribute to the vitality of the broader community. Learn more at jceastbay.org.

JCC East Bay

McLaren Park

Discover San Francisco's second-largest park! In addition to playgrounds, picnic areas and game courts, you'll find the Jerry Garcia Amphitheater, a golf course, McNab Lake and the newly renovated Coffman Pool. This immense Natural Area of scenic meadows, grassland and wetland habitat includes more than 7 miles of walking trails meander through its 312 acres, replete with native plants and wildlife. Established in 1927, the park is named for John McLaren, the "grandfather of Golden Gate Park."



Montalvo Arts Center

Located on 175 acres in Silicon Valley's Saratoga Hills, Montalvo Arts Center is a member-supported non-profit institution whose mission is to engage the public in the creative process. Acting as a catalyst for exploring the arts, unleashing creativity, and advancing different cross-cultural perspectives, Montalvo serves nearly a quarter million patrons every year with vibrant, relevant, and accessible arts and education programs. For more information, visit montalvoarts.org.

montalvo
ARTS CENTER

Mother Lear is also performed in a number of beautiful, private Bay Area residences.

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

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.



THE FACILITATORS

Nader Shabahangi, Ph.D received his Doctorate from Stanford University, is a licensed psychotherapist, and is cofounder of AgeSong, a bay-area eldercare lifestyle provider. His multicultural background has fueled his passion for becoming an advocate for marginalized groups and for creating programs with the purpose of caring more comprehensively for elders. As CEO, he ensures that the company's vision drives its decisions and plans for elder care services. In 1992, Nader also founded the Pacific Institute, a nonprofit organization that works to help elders live meaningful lives. He is a frequent guest lecturer, including presenting at international conferences on aging, counseling, and dementia. In 2003 he authored *Faces of Aging*, a book challenging stereotypical views of the aging process and of growing old. He is also co-author of *Deeper Into the Soul* and *Conversations With Ed*; both books examine dementia and its perception. In 2011 he published *Elders Today*, a photo and text book that cherishes aging and old age as a most desirable phase of our lives. Nader edited and published *Encounters of the Real Kind* in 2012. This book is a collection of stories and anecdotes that pay tribute to the deep and life-changing encounters between elders and those learning to become elders.

Shoshana Berger got her start as a writer for a magazine called *Bikini* (no jokes) for whom she interviewed Jeff Buckley and Allen Ginsburg. That led to writing for the *New York Times*, SPIN, WIRED, and a stint as the editorial director (more like "cool-hunter") for *Young & Rubicam*. With little more than a fuzzy idea and a boil in the blood, she went on to found *ReadyMade*, a national do-it-yourself design magazine. This venture was funded by 10 credit cards (her credit rating is excellent). *ReadyMade* was a finalist for National Magazine Awards in 2005 and 2006. After co-authoring the book *ReadyMade: How to Make Almost Everything* (Clarkson Potter), she sold the business and joined WIRED as director of special projects in 2011, and launched a new website, WIRED Design. She landed at IDEO in 2013 as editorial director and hasn't looked back.

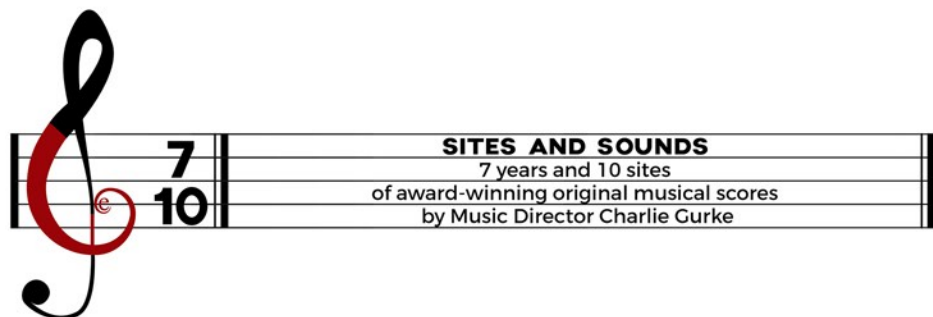
Alanna McLeod wanted to be an actress when she grew up. While this dream never quite manifested and she found herself studying cognitive science in college and then found her way into world of marketing and advertising, she remains fascinated by the theater. Today, she is the San Francisco Producer of Re:Imagine | End-of-Life - a community-driven, city-wide festival exploring death and celebrating life. It features an emergent network of artists, storytellers, healthcare professionals, religious communities, and innovators, banding together to amplify the end-of-life conversation. Having experienced significant loss in recent years (to put it lightly, her family went extinct), Alanna's understanding and empathy enable her to connect deeply with others on this difficult topic.

Brad Wolfe uses insights from the fields of positive psychology, business, and sociology to design meaningful cultural experiences and spark innovation within organizations and communities. In partnership with IDEO, he recently launched a new brand called Re:Imagine, which works with cities to hold meaningful conversations around taboo topics. Be on the lookout next April in San Francisco for the Re:Imagine | End of Life festival, exploring death and celebrating life via art, experiences, and conversation. Brad's background in palliative care stems from his role as founder of the Sunbeam Foundation, a 501(c)3 that identifies and supports cutting edge research for rare and underfunded pediatric cancers, which he founded in memory of his friend Sara. Brad graduated with an M.A. in Organizational Behavior from Stanford University and received his M.B.A. from Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley, where he has served as coach/lecturer on the topics of design and innovation. He is a contributing writer on positive organizational psychology for the Greater Good Science Center and is the author of the Young Adult award-winner, *Breakfast on Mars* (Macmillan, 2014).

Alisa Mallari Tu is currently the executive director of Gordon Manor, a memory care and assisted living community in Redwood City. She has been working with people living with dementia and their families for over 20 years. Alisa holds degrees in both Human Biology and Medical Anthropology.

Thomas Varner has spent years in hospice work and has worked closely with numerous people during the dying process. Thomas has served as a Hospice Aide, Chaplain, Bodyworker and Psychotherapist.

ON THE HORIZON



Join us in launching a new tradition and celebrate another year of creative adventures with We Players! Join us for **Sites and Sounds**, a music concert and rockin' party aboard the historic ferryboat *Eureka*.

Thursday November 9
Cocktails at 6:30
Concert at 7pm
Then Rock the Boat! 8-10pm

We Players' composer and music director Charlie Gurke brings together an ensemble of his favorite musical collaborators to perform arrangements and interpretations of music from the past seven (!) years of We Players productions. We'll take trips back to Ithaca and Illyria, to Denmark and Scotland and Verona - with selections ranging from *Hamlet on Alcatraz* (2010) to *Romeo & Juliet* (2016), and everything in between. Tickets on sale now at weplayers.org/sites-and-sounds-2017

Stay tuned for news about our 2018 performances! Be sure to join our mailing list to be among the first to hear the latest from We Players.



RESOURCES

We have been meeting so many incredible people and discovering a myriad of resources through our *Mother Lear* research and outreach. While the following list is partial, we are excited to introduce you to some of the inspiring people and organizations that we have encountered thus far.

Aging With Dignity's "Five Wishes"

An advance healthcare directive, also known as a living will, personal directive, advance directive, medical directive or advance decision, is a legal document in which a person specifies what actions should be taken for their health if they are no longer able to make decisions for themselves because of illness or incapacity. In the U.S. it has a legal status in itself, whereas in some countries it is legally persuasive without being a legal document. Aging With Dignity is a private, non-profit organization with a mission to safeguard the human dignity of people as they age or face serious illness.

Right to Die Initiatives

The right to die is a concept based on the belief that a human being is entitled to end their own life or to undergo voluntary euthanasia. Possession of this right is often understood to mean that a person with a terminal illness should be allowed to end their own life or to use assisted suicide or to decline life-prolonging treatment. The question of who, if anyone, should be empowered to make this decision is often central to debate.

Re:Imagine is co-created by a loose network of interested artists, storytellers, healthcare professionals, innovators, designers, organizations and individuals, banding together to amplify the end-of-life conversation. Re:Imagine was created in collaboration with IDEO, where it was inspired by OpenIDEO's End of Life Challenge. The End of Life Challenge reached thousands of online and offline participants around the world, helping remove the taboo around death and dying to create a global and solutions-oriented conversation. Re:Imagine builds on that experience, bringing forward optimism and innovation and providing a platform for many outstanding organizations and individuals working to elevate this topic.

AgeSong is the leading eldercare lifestyle provider in the San Francisco Bay Area. AgeSong enables residents to customize their lifestyle based on personal preference, religious affiliation, and medical needs. Care choices range from short-term rehabilitation to permanent residence. AgeSong's fundamental belief is that through providing elders with the opportunity to live a balanced lifestyle, elders can be who they truly are. In paying attention to the needs of the individual and of the community, AgeSong offers complete lifestyle options including balanced nutritional selections, mental health and physical fitness programs, engagement activities, and continued learning and teaching opportunities.

The Palliative Care Program at UCSF

UCSF Medical Center's Palliative Care Program is dedicated to relieving pain and suffering and providing compassionate care and comfort for seriously ill patients and their families. Palliative care can be helpful for people at any stage of a serious illness and can be provided concurrently with curative medical treatment. The goal of palliative care is to maximize a patient's comfort, by providing expert pain and symptom management, offering guidance with treatment decisions so that treatment aligns with a patient's goals for care, and helping families cope with serious illness. All patients can ask their doctor or nurse for a consultation with the Palliative Care Program.

Zen Hospice Project

The mission of the Zen Hospice Project is to help change the experience of dying. We create a space for living that offers the opportunity for individuals, their loved ones and caregivers to find comfort, connection, and healing in this shared human experience. Through our pioneering model of care, we inspire each other to live fully.

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Kate Smith - with immense gratitude for her keen insight and bold truth, Debbie Degutis, Peter Phleger, Rush Rehm, Charlie Gurke, the incomparable "La Norma" and her daughter Elissa, Jennie Brick and Joanne Butler, Joey Daley and Molly, Pam White and her family, Molly's Movement, Helen Lindberg, Eloise Tweeten, Carlton Senior Living - Poet's Corner, Zen Hospice, Geoff Dunlop, Teepa Snow, Kristin Belfy and Kay, Alzheimer's Research UK, Healdsburg Senior Living, Sunrise Petaluma, Diane Rea and Phil Ginsburg of SF Recreation and Parks, Kelly Sicat, Angella McConnell, Kelly Hudson and all of the incredible people at the Montalvo Arts Center, Amy Tobin, Josh Langenthal, Rebecca and Andy Popell, Dana and Lloyd Taylor, Julie Parish, David Bullard, Cherie Sorokin, Charlene Li and Come Ligue, Susan Miller-Davis and Jonathan Davis, 42nd St Moon, Jane Hammond Events, and Covington & Burling LLP. Extra special thanks to all of the incredible discussion facilitators and gracious hosts. Special thanks also to John Hadden for his work as adaptor and co-creator of King Fool, an earlier work by We Players dealing with similar themes and also inspired by Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

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 and California State Parks.

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

2017 marks our 10 year anniversary working in partnership with the National Park Service and our first time working with the SF Recreation and Park Department. We love to play in the park!

SUPPORT WE

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 us at info@weplayers.org, or call our Managing Director, Lauren Hewitt, at 510-710-5584.

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