PlayNotes

Season | 48 Issue | 6

Pictured: Sarah Lord * & Pascal Arquimedes* (*Member of AEA)

I AND YOU

Written by Lauren Gunderson

PS
PORTLAND STAGE

Discussion Series

Due to Covid-19 our regularly scheduled discussions are moving online. Head to portlandstage.org/senior-living to view our discussion schedule and Zoom links.

Join us for a Book Club-style **Page to Stage** with the Portland Public Library. Check out your copy of the script and join us two weeks before previews of each Mainstage Production. Scripts are available at the reference desk at the Main Branch of the Portland Public Library. This year discussions will be held over Zoom at 6pm. Feel free to come and chat about the plays with Literary Manager, Todd Brian Backus; his Directing and Dramaturgy Apprentices, and special guests. Visit portlandlibrary.com/programs-events/ for more information.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, Portland Stage is suspending in-person and online talkbacks for the **Artistic Perspective** and **Curtain Call**. At this time we are working to distribute interviews between Anita Stewart (Executive and Artistic Director), Todd Brian Backus (Literary Manager), and the Casts and Artistic Teams of each production. We hope as the Omicron wave recedes we can move back to in-person discussions and will do so as soon as seems safe and efficient.

Meredith G. Healy leads a conversation with the playwright, director, and cast of Rx Machina *by Caity-Shea Violette as part of the 2021 Digital Little Festival of the Unexpected.*

I and You

by Lauren Gunderson

PlayNotes Season 48 Editorial Staff

Editor in Chief
Todd Brian Backus

Contributors
Macey Downs & Meredith G. Healy

Magazine Layout
Taylor Kibbler

Copy Editor
Adam Thibodeau

Cover Illustration
Cody Brackett

Portland Stage Company Educational Programs, like *PlayNotes*, are generously supported through the annual donations of hundreds of individuals and businesses, as well as special funding from:

Maine Arts Commission

National Endowment for the Arts
arts.gov

The Onion Foundation
The Robert & Dorthy Goldberg Foundation
Margaret E. Burnham Charitable Trust
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Letter from the Editors

Dear *PlayNotes* Readers,

Welcome to our sixth issue of *PlayNotes* for the 2021-2022 Season!

In this issue, we explore the world of Lauren Gunderson's *I and You.* This play introduces us to high school students Caroline and Anthony, who appear to be an unlikely pairing on the surface. As the two work together on an English project about Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass,* they find common ground and begin to connect. We explore some of the topics they discuss in the articles "The Music and Musicians of *I and You*" (p. 16) and "About Walt Whitman and *Leaves of Grass*" (p. 22). "Liver Failure in Young People, and Waiting for an Organ Donor" (p. 14) explores Caroline's experience in depth and helps the audience understand her story. In "The Appeal and Allure of Sick-Lit" (p. 18), we consider why stories about young people with terminal illnesses are so beloved by young adult readers. We have also included an article about how young people come to understand mortality (p. 21). There are also interviews with playwright Lauren Gunderson (p. 8) and director Cait Robinson (p. 11) to get insight into the creative development of this production.

When compiling each issue of *PlayNotes*, we strive to provide articles and interviews that give you insight into what the process has been like behind the scenes (see articles in "Portland Stage's *I and You*"), contain pertinent information about the play's setting and major themes ("The World of *I and You*"), and provide deeper dives into specific subjects that compelled our literary department ("Digging Deeper"). We include a list of books, films, plays, and television shows that we hope audiences will access for more cultural content that relates to the play ("Recommended Resources").

We hope you enjoy this issue and we look forward to seeing you at the theater!

Sincerely yours,

The Portland Stage Literary Department
Macey Downs
Meredith G. Healy
Todd Brian Backus

About the Play

by Macey Downs

When Anthony unexpectedly barges into Caroline's bedroom cryptically repeating "I and this mystery, here we stand," her immediate reaction to verbally berate him (like a vicious dachshund nipping at his heels) seems warranted. Who is this boy from her English class that she's never met, and why did he choose her as his partner for this school project on Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*? More importantly, if he loves Whitman's poetry as much as he claims, why did he wait until the night before the project was due to tell her about it? Anthony and Caroline get off to a tumultuous start, but use Whitman's words in his poem "Song of Myself" to learn about each other. Caroline expresses her love of photographing the minute details of life, and also opens up about her experience being sick since childhood. She reveals that her chronic illness has now culminated in her being out of school indefinitely while she awaits a liver transplant. Anthony speaks about his relationship with his dad, a love of jazz, and a public secret. Over the course of one school night, *I and You* tells the story of two teenagers who argue about life and death, laugh about their guilty pleasures, and learn that they're more connected than they could have ever imagined.

Lauren Gunderson's *I and You* had a rolling world premiere, meaning that the same production was presented sequentially at multiple theaters. This rolling world premiere started in 2013 at Marin Theatre Company in Mill Valley, California, and went on to the Olney Theatre Center in Olney, Ohio, and Phoenix Theatre in Indianapolis, Indiana. The play has since been produced over 200 times across the country. Critics have praised the play for its wit, spirit, and surprising twists and turns. Patricia Leslie of *Washington Speaks* wrote of *I and You*: "Unforgettable. The end will leave you gasping."

Maisie Williams and Zach Wyatt in I and You, *Hampstead Theatre, 2018. Photo by Manuel Harlan.*

About the Cast and Characters

by Macey Downs

Name: Pascal Arquimedes
Character: Anthony
17 years old, but neat, poised, mature for his age. He's an "A" student and a team player. He's not really great around girls. He takes his homework very seriously. When he likes something (especially jazz music), he is all in.

Name: Sarah Lord
Character: Caroline
17 years old and absolutely not expecting company. She is sick but doesn't project that fact. She is cynical, over it, and doesn't let a stray "feeling" near the surface. Her room is her entire world.

Interview with the Playwright: Lauren Gunderson

Edited for Length and Clarity by Macey Downs

Lauren Gunderson.

Directing and Dramaturgy Apprentice Macey Downs spoke with Lauren Gunderson, the playwright of *I and You*, about the play and her career as a playwright.

Macey Downs (MD): ***One thing that we've been really enjoying in rehearsals is that the characters in this play have such strong personalities and quippy banter. How did you find their voices, and what was it like telling this story about two teenagers in the digital/social media age?***

Lauren Gunderson (LG): First, what's so fascinating is that this play is almost ten years old and what that means to me is yes, it feels very modern and the language is fizzy and contemporary, but there is hopefully a timeless core to it. It's easy to think of stories about young people as being very transient in terms of their contemporaneousness and what's trendy or cool about their language. But this story is trying to tap into that well, that reserve, of anxiety that young people have—of hope, of desperation to connect to know others, and to know themselves. That's how I found Caroline and Anthony, by connecting and remembering back to me being young. Even though our ridiculous phrases and words were different, the sentiment of being young is the same. I think that also speaks to why this isn't a play just for young people, but it is for all of us because all of us are that age at some point. And all of us—no matter if it's a mom or a grandma or a 12-year-old—should be able to see some of themselves in both of the characters. The truth is that I'm way more like Anthony than I am Caroline. So, Caroline was actually a stretch, and it basically meant that I had to not edit myself because I tend to be like, "Well, is this an appropriate thing to say?" Trying to make sure that my communication is very empathetic and very calming, and Caroline is not that. So, I'd be like, "Okay, go a little crazy, Lauren." But Anthony is much more of a do-gooder like I am, so it was easier to write him.

MD: ***That's really cool to hear you say that because I think I've been feeling like Caroline is so bold and unfiltered that it's interesting that, even in your writing, you had to take out your own filter to get to that place.***

LG: Like, "What's a mean thing to say? Let's do that!" When I'm like, "No, you could never!" But that's part of being a playwright, that you can't agree with all of your characters' choices, or if you're a writer like me then they would be very boring. I want things ordered and safe in my life, but in my writing I have to be brazen and bold and rude and risky in order to get the characters through their journey to a place of understanding and resilience. But you kind of have to go through the fire to write that stuff.

MD: ***What did you learn about the play and playwriting from the rolling world premiere of* I and You*, as well as from the edits you continued making up until 2018?***

LG: Plays go through so many edits, and what was wonderful about that kind of coordinated three-stop world premiere is that I was able to make changes all along the way. So even

between the first and second productions, there was a lot of growth in the script and honing in on these really emotional moments which are most important to me about the story. A couple of years after we premiered, I wanted to make sure that the show had that lasting power and so I took out a couple of references to Facebook because the kids weren't using it anymore. You should never put a particular app into a script, it will phase out very quickly. And then as we went along there were some references to race in the script and I wanted to be a little more generalized about that as well, so that these roles could be inhabited by anybody. So, that was an even further progression about: how could we make sure that this script is affirming—as well as insisting on—diversity, but making sure that people felt really at home with the words that they were saying. Honestly, I made some more cat jokes and put various silly musical references in there as well. A lot of those edits came when we did a very big production in the UK—starring *Game of Thrones* actor Maisie Williams as Caroline—and so in preparation for that—and partly because it was in the UK and not in America—I got to see it with a different community reflecting back to me, like, "This is a very American thing to say and do." I learned a ton from that, and that production was just flawless. So, I was able to progress the script even further and just make sure that—all of the rhythms are really important to me in my writing—so just make sure those rhythms don't have a hitch in them. That was awesome.

MD: ***A lot of your plays grapple with themes of both feminism and science. What makes theater such a powerful medium to explore those subjects with?***

LG: What a great question! Its collectivity and its immediacy. That we are together, as an audience, as a congregation, and while making it as a creative team from director, dramaturg, performers, designer, stage management, the staff of the theater—administrative and front of house—we're all building this thing together. It takes a lot of us and that collectivity is something that is invigorating every single time I experience it. Then—of course—it's the collectivity of the audience and the fact that it is a bigger and bigger deal to come together in person and share an hour or two of not just your time, but your interest, and your empathy, and your care, and your quiets—you're giving your focus to someone else's entire life for a few hours, which is hard to do in this world right now. You're putting your phone down, that in and of itself is hard to do for more than ten minutes. The idea of that kind of focus—it's an ancient kind of focus—and I think it's critical for us to really say, "This world is about more than me and what I think and what I know." It's about learning about other perspectives. That's how we play out this theatrical experiment.

I think of every play as a theatrical experiment, where your part in the experiment is to show up, to give a crap, to pay attention, and to ask yourself, "What would I do if I were that person? How are they like me? How are they not? How do I understand what they're feeling? How do I make a bridge to their experience from mine?" That is why theater is not only a great and inviting and invigorating art form, but it's why it's good for society. Because it teaches us how to be better people. It teaches us how to be better citizens and friends and family members and community members, and that starts with being part of that experiment and saying, "Why do they feel that way? Why are they making those choices? What would I do if I were in that place? How do I understand them better?" Give of myself, that's what theater asks us to do whether you're onstage or off.

MD: ***I love that a lot of the things you were just saying—like this ancient kind of focus and bridging between different people—also are so many themes and experiences that Anthony and Caroline are experiencing in this play, too, and the ways in which the content informs the form and vice versa. That sort of communication between the content of the play and the form of theater is super exciting with this play in particular. Can you talk about what your career journey looked like up until now?***

LG: Sure! I feel incredibly lucky and part of that luck is I don't come from a well resourced family particularly. I don't come from a theater area—at least it wasn't twenty to thirty years ago—I'm from Atlanta. I don't come from a particularly arts-minded family. So it was just

parents who believed in me and supported my crazy whims, but also that bravado. I just had an undeserved level of confidence and a sense of like, "I dunno, let's try!" Just the adventure of saying, "I'm gonna write a play and submit it and we're gonna see what happens! If nothing happens, nothing happens, but if it does, whoo! Fun!" So I had that sensibility, I don't know where I got it from. I just really loved the art form.

I started on stage as an actor—I think a lot of us come to this through acting in some ways, whether it's school or wherever. So I kind of followed that instinct from a performance background and then found a wonderful theater in Atlanta, Georgia, called Actor's Express that does new plays—interesting revivals of older plays in a contemporary, cool way, but mostly newish and new plays. That's the first time that I'd realized that there are new plays and people still write them and that we should still write them. So the connected dots for me were, "Ohh, I should write them. Because I'm not seeing the roles that I expect for me. I see lots of male roles—and even the women's roles—are written by lots of men and that doesn't resonate. So, if they're not writing them, I will."

I found that luckily fairly early in high school, so I knew that I wanted to write and I started writing. And then because of that kind of brazenness, I was just like, "I'm gonna find a place to submit these." And some of them were chosen to be produced and developed and given awards, and that just kept the fire under me lit. So I kept writing more and more and more. I went from right outside of Atlanta to New York for grad school and found my way to California and San Francisco after grad school and had stops all along the way in regional theater. It's funny because regional theater is massive, it's like all of the country except New York—and not even New York State, New York City! And so, really hilariously, my career is everywhere except for New York. I've had some beautiful productions there and I love working there, but what that means is that I get to work with so many different communities, and so many different sizes of theaters and a diversity of audience members. It's incredibly powerful for me and incredibly confirming about why I do this at all. It's to reach a lot of people, and to have conversations across the country—and now across the world, which is really thrilling as well.

MD: ***Do you have any advice for young people pursuing a career in theater or playwriting?***

LG: Totally! There is voice advice and career advice. Voice advice is, look around and see what stories aren't told or aren't told in your mind with authenticity and tell them. Look around, see who is not centered, who doesn't get plays written about them, who's always the side character or offstage, and put them center stage and write them. Find genres that aren't as well told, like horror or romance or something. Surprise yourself! Delight yourself! But the truth is, write something you want to see. It really doesn't work if you don't want to see your own work, so write something that delights you, that makes you laugh, that makes you think, that challenges you. If you want to see it, then somebody else will want to see it. So, that's the kind of voice advice.

Career advice is much more technical—it kind of funnels down to find your community. Find the people that respect you, that can critique you respectfully and collaboratively. Because those collaborators are the name of the game. They not only make your work better, they make your art and the philosophy of theater better. So—yeah—find your people, and be kind, be talented, be patient, and have a little bit of bravado!

Daina Michelle Griffith and Drew Leigh Williams in Gunderson's The Revolutionists, *City Theatre, 2018.*

An Interview with the Director: Cait Robinson

Edited for length and clarity by Macey Downs

Cait Robinson.

Directing and Dramaturgy Apprentice Macey Downs spoke with Cait Robinson, the director of *I and You*, during the second week of rehearsals about the play and her relationship with the state of Maine.

Macey Downs (MD): ***You first started at Portland Stage around 2010 as an intern! What has your experience been continuing to come back to one of the earliest theaters you worked at, and how have you grown as a director since then?***

Cait Robinson (CR): Coming back to the place that you started out as an artist is a wonderful experience! It's the people who supported you and developed who you are as an artist, so you have a shared vocabulary, and a shared memory, and shared interests with them. So it's really special to be able to come back. I think it speaks to what a good experience Portland Stage creates for people that people want to come back, either on staff or as artists or in other capacities. It's just been a really welcoming place. So that's great!

Since I was here, I've gotten a lot more reps in. I think that just working shapes who you are. Just by getting experience and getting in time. Seeing a lot of different kinds of other directors work, working in a lot of different kinds of theaters—Portland Stage is one theater, but they're not every theater, they have a lot in common with a lot of other theaters. So it's just about broadening your horizons and getting reps in. I believe in the value of showing up and doing the work and not judging yourself too hard, and just knowing that if you commit x number of years to directing, then you will learn things that you don't realize you're learning at the time. You will osmose and you will develop as an artist if you put in the time and the effort, and you're willing to just keep showing up.

MD: ***You also grew up in Maine and have kept coming back here over the course of your theater career, both as a director and now as the Artistic Director of Opera House Arts in Stonington. What makes Maine theater communities unique, and what keeps drawing you back here?***

CR: I think the audiences are very curious in Maine. They're very adventurous—more than anywhere else I've worked. Even across different parts of the state, they're just a very curious, adventurous group of people who are interested in all kinds of things—like a really broad diversity of material. I think that's pretty unique! I think there's such a thing as "midwest programming" and there's definitely such a thing as "DC programming" or "California programming." But we have a lot available to us by the broad taste of our audience. So that kind of keeps me coming back. I also think that I have an intuitive understanding of communities here because I grew up here and I spent so much time here that I can say, "Oh, that won't fly here" or "Oh, that would actually work really well" in a way that I can't always about other places.

Tod Randolph, Abigail Killeen, and Jennifer Paredes in The Clean House *Directed by Cait Robinson, Portland Stage Company, 2019.*

MD: ***On the flip side of that, sometimes there are things that the people who live here are not used to, but they would be really beneficial for these communities to see in the theater.***

CR: The more you come back to a place, the more you're in dialogue with an audience. When you're freelancing, you go somewhere and you do a show, and then you peace out. But when you keep coming back or you run a theater, you can start to get a sense of what people are interested in, what questions they have, what's going on in their community, and you can start to be responsive to that in your programming, or in your directing if it's a single production. Some things you just have a shorthand for. You can be like, "People are not going to dig this. I know these people! Even if I don't know every single one of them literally!" I think you can intuit it a little bit more culturally. So, I really enjoy that.

MD: ***And also being someone from Maine, I love to hear about artists who do understand these communities and are committed to Maine.***

CR: Yeah, Maine audiences are crazy! They're very open, they're very vocal, they're not necessarily polite. They're not prim and proper, they're just really down to get into the material, and if they hate something, they'll tell you. But if they love something, they'll tell you, too, and they'll keep showing up. I find that interesting—sometimes challenging, but interesting.

MD: ***What draws you to this play?***

CR: A few things. I love working on two-person plays. I love working on an actor-centered play where it's really about them being the virtuosic people that they are. They're so gifted. It sounds cheesy, but it's really an honor to be in the presence of people just doing what they do so well. So there's that. We're also in a time when there's been so much illness and death and isolation because of COVID, and we're doing a play that is about grief and healing and recovery and includes the fantasy of being able to be together when someone is dying. I find that very moving. So I'm especially moved by this story of "What if we could be together? What if we could connect during this transitional moment?" And it's just really funny! I love the comedy, I love the language that Lauren uses in it, so it's just a pleasure to work on, like a treat. It's just like a little cake of a play. The layers of it are so beautifully done.

MD: ***Is there a specific scene, moment, or idea from the play that you are most excited for people to see or experience?***

CR: I don't want to give it away, but there's something about being a teenager that this play captures. The feelings of awkwardness and hope and intense desire and sort of fluid social boundaries where sometimes they start talking and they can't stop. And they say something that embarrasses them, which I think is so relatable. No matter how old you are, if you remember your first kiss or your first crush or some of the social situations from your high school years, I think you'll really enjoy watching Caroline and Anthony experiencing some of those things in their own ways. So I'm excited to bring people along for that journey of those first blushes of feeling that they have.

MD: ***And there's definitely been like a feeling of catharsis in the rehearsal room of us all watching these moments and being like, "Oh, no! I remember this!"***

CR: I know! When you're a kid, you feel like you're the only person in the world who's ever been able to speak articulately around someone that you find attractive, or even just in general. So, there's something about seeing

them act it out onstage, and they're so funny, that I think it's really fun to go along with that. Not to have to relive it yourself, but vicariously enjoy their sweetness.

MD: ***Do you have advice for young people who have grown up in rural communities like you did, or outside of the NYC/Chicago scene, who want to pursue theater careers?***

CR: I think when you grow up in a really rural area, whatever you're exposed to can feel like the one way. Because there isn't that much available. There might be one art center or community theater or something in your town, and it's easy for that to feel all-encompassing. So, if you don't have a good experience with that—or if you do have a good experience with that—it can feel early on like it defines you. So, when I think about growing up in a rural area and wanting to work in the performing arts, I think about creating exposure for yourself where you're seeing a lot of work. You need to read a lot of plays. You need to see a lot of plays. You even need to watch stupid recordings that aren't very well done. So you're taking in content at the same time that you're getting ready to put out content. That's the biggest thing that I would say, keep filling your well or stocking your fish pond—whatever your metaphor is—keep it full for yourself artistically. Because when you're the only theater kid in your class, or when you're used to always getting the big role, or never getting the big role, it can feel so defining. So, it's just about broadening your horizons wherever you can and remaining curious.

MD: ***Yeah, I feel like I didn't even know directing was an option until I went to college. Theater is so much more. There is some reconceptualizing to what theater is, and what you want from theater is something that you find by expanding your horizons.***

CR: And if you know one way of working, that's not the only way. The promise that you show and the success that you have when you're young and you're growing up in a rural area is not indicative of who you can be. If you end up as "Tree #4" in the school musical, that doesn't mean that you're not going to end up as a really successful, valid, interesting performer. It's just where you are right now. But just read plays, it helps a lot!

Cait Robinson in rehearsal with Jennifer Paredes and Michelle Rios for The Clean House, *Portland Stage Company, 2019.*

Liver Failure in Young People, and Waiting for an Organ Donor

By Macey Downs

"I've always been kinda sick but not you-can't-go-to-school sick, which sucks like so much. I mean I'm a senior. I have crucial things to do and then, out of the blue, my house is like this crappy clinic and my mom is on constant red alert and everything is so weird now." - Caroline, I and You

Over the course of *I and You*, Caroline opens up to Anthony about her experience with chronic illness. We learn that she has been mostly restricted to her room as she awaits a liver transplant, and there's no telling how long it will be until an organ donation that is the right fit for her will come along. Caroline is not alone in this—liver disease, while rare in children, is something that hundreds of young people across the country spend their childhoods managing.

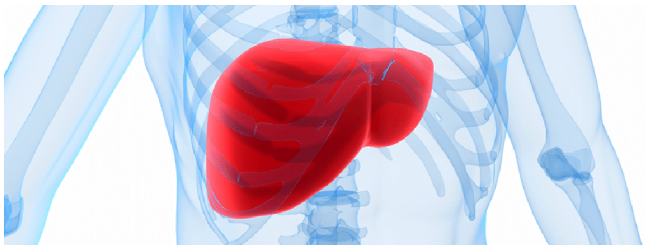
Livers & Liver Failure:
The liver is a football-sized organ located in the upper right portion of the abdomen, and is the body's second largest organ (behind skin). Livers regulate most chemical levels in the body. All of the blood that comes from the stomach and intestines passes through the liver, which processes that blood and creates nutrients for the body to use. Livers excrete "bile," which carries waste products away from the liver after this processing. Livers have more than 500 vital functions including:

- Clearing blood of drugs and other poisonous substances.
- Regulating blood clotting.
- Regulating the amount of sugar in the bloodstream, and storing sugar in the form of glycogen, which can be converted to glucose if the body's blood sugar is too low.
- Storing iron and other vitamins for use when the amount in the bloodstream falls too low.

The liver plays such an important role in the body that if liver disease sets in, it impacts several other organs (such as the kidneys, heart, and lungs). When liver disease becomes irreversible, the body has entered into liver failure. Because the liver performs so many complex functions, only a transplanted liver can replace it.

Liver failure in children can be either acute—meaning it comes on suddenly with no prior history of liver disease—or chronic—meaning it occurs when a long-lasting liver disease becomes much worse, either suddenly or slowly. Caroline's liver failure is most likely chronic, as she tells Anthony she's been sick "pretty much ever since [she] was born." Often when liver failure occurs in children, doctors can't identify the cause. A few possible causes are:

- A severe viral or bacterial infection in a baby leaves their liver scarred. For example, viral hepatitis (which causes the liver to be inflamed) may be present yet take 10-20 years before it progresses to the point of severe liver damage.
- Inherited conditions, such as hemochromatosis (which is having too much iron in the body), leads to scarring or enlargement of the liver.
- Biliary atresia—a disease that is present from birth (with symptoms appearing 2-8 weeks after birth)—blocks the baby's bile ducts. The bile becomes trapped in the liver, leading to scarring and eventual liver failure. This is the most common reason for liver transplants in US children; 85% of kids with biliary atresia need liver transplants before they are 20 years old.



Location of the liver in the abdomen.

Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Treatment
At first, symptoms of liver disease appear as flu-like symptoms, such as fatigue, nausea or vomiting, loss of appetite, and abdomen pain (particularly just under the right ribcage). As liver disease gets worse, symptoms can progress to jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes), dark urine, itching all over the body, bruising easily or excessive bleeding, and vomiting blood. Brain-related symptoms can also occur, including irritability, confusion, and unusual sleep patterns (such as feeling sleepy during the day but restless at night). Those with liver disease and chronic liver failure may experience these symptoms to varying degrees throughout their lives.

The early stages of liver disease are hard to diagnose, as they're too similar to other illnesses. As symptoms get more severe, children may be diagnosed through blood tests, X-rays, biopsies, or diagnostic surgeries.

Depending on the cause of liver disease in a child, treatments/maintenance can include:

- Surgery to repair or remove the damaged bile ducts, particularly for biliary atresia. In 15-40% of patients, this procedure doesn't work, and even in many where it does work, they still require a transplant down the line.
- Long-term care by a liver specialist, who may prescribe various medicines to treat or prevent complications. These medications more often focus on managing symptoms than healing the liver itself.
- A well-balanced diet with supplemental vitamins and minerals to maintain semi-equilibrium in the body. Children with liver disease have faster metabolisms than those without, and therefore require more calories.
- A liver transplant, which many who have chronic liver failure will need to survive.

Waiting for an Organ Donor:
As liver failure gets worse, it can cause further complications that would necessitate urgency around receiving a transplant, such as enlargement of the liver, fluid buildup in the abdomen, blood not clotting properly, internal bleeding, and infections. Even those with chronic liver failure may see their symptoms get worse very suddenly, or new symptoms appear. Once all other options are exhausted, patients will be put on the national waiting list for organ donations.

The national median wait-time for a liver transplant is around 10 months, meaning half of all liver transplants occur in less than 10 months, and half take longer than 10 months. Once on the waitlist, patients are told to stay as healthy as possible, and to be ready to receive the call to go into surgery at any moment, day or night. While organ donations have increased over the years, the need for a waitlist itself signifies a shortage, and there's always the possibility that someone on the list may die before they're able to receive a transplant. Waiting for a transplant may cause or exacerbate mental illness symptoms—one in four people waiting for a liver transplant have moderate or severe depression. However, especially as more individuals are becoming organ donors, the majority of people on liver transplant lists will successfully receive their transplant!

I and You shows the toll that living with chronic illness not only takes on people's physical health, but their mental health as well. In her conversations with Anthony, Caroline makes clear that she doesn't know how much longer she will be waiting for a liver transplant. She feels like she has been walking much of this journey alone, living with waves of debilitating symptoms while watching other people her age post about their high school communities on social media. Continuing to learn more about chronic illness in young people will hopefully make room for the myriad of experiences individuals have, and aid in the construction of better support networks.

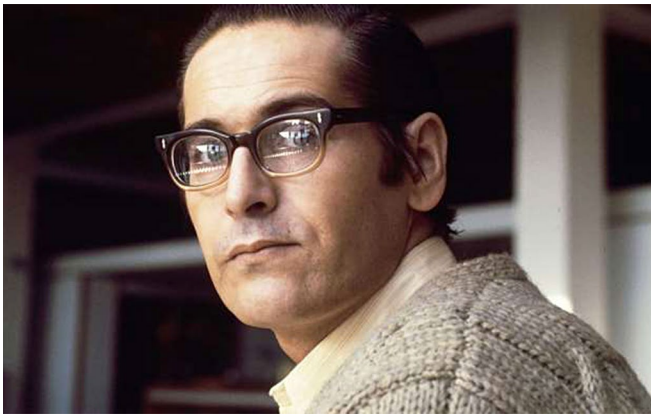
The Music and Musicians of *I and You*

by Meredith G. Healy

In *I and You*, Caroline and Anthony get to know each other first through a discussion about poetry, and then with a conversation about their musical tastes. After Anthony shares his love of jazz, Caroline is reluctant to share her love of rockabilly, declaring that when people can't agree on musical tastes it is a "relationship killer." Here is an overview of the artists and the pieces that they discuss.

John Coltrane (September 23, 1926 - July 17, 1967) was an American jazz saxophonist, bandleader, and composer. Coltrane studied clarinet and alto saxophone as a child, and moved to Philadelphia at the age of 17 to further his musical studies at the Ornstein School of Music. He joined Miles Davis's quintet in 1955 and subsequently gained recognition as a musician. He is known for his avant-garde style of improvisation and the development of his "sheets of sound" approach, in which he employed cascading, rapid chord progressions. Coltrane won a Pulitzer Prize and a posthumous Grammy Award.

Miles Davis (May 26, 1926 - September 28, 1991) was an American jazz trumpeter, bandleader, and composer. Davis started playing the trumpet as a teenager, and moved to New York City at the age of 18 to study at the Institute of Musical Art (now Juilliard). He explored the trumpet's middle register and harmonies, and had a direct and unornamented style. His album *Kind of Blue* (1959) is extremely popular due to its accessible melodic style; John Coltrane and Bill Evans were both part of the sextet that recorded this album. Davis won seven Grammy Awards and was posthumously inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2006.



Bill Evans (August 16, 1929 - September 15, 1980) was an American jazz pianist. After receiving a degree in music teaching and completing a stint as a flutist in the Fifth Army Band, Evans entered the jazz scene as a pianist, where he was immediately praised for his technique and harmonic approach. He was featured on Davis's *Kind of Blue*, and was influenced by classical pianists like Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Aleksandr Scriabin. During his career, Evans was the recipient of five Grammy Awards.

"Great Balls of Fire" is a song written by Otis Blackwell and Jack Hammer and performed by Jerry Lee Lewis. It is known as Lewis's signature song. The song was released in the US on November 11, 1957, and reached number two on the Billboard Hot 100. It has since been famously covered by Dolly Parton, Conway Twitty, Sha Na Na, Mae West, Rolf Harris, and the Misfits.

Jerry Lee Lewis (September 29, 1935 - Present) is an American singer, pianist, and early rock artist. Lewis began playing piano at a young age, and was influenced and inspired by the Black musicians with whom he interacted. He signed with Sun Records in Memphis, Tennessee, and is best known for his rockabilly (a mix of rhythm and blues and country music) style. He also has great charisma onstage, and his most famous songs are "Great Balls of Fire," "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," and "Breathless." Lewis won two Grammy Awards and was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1986. He was also the center of a public scandal that almost ended his career when he married his 13-year-old cousin in 1958.

A Love Supreme is a 1965 jazz album by John Coltrane. Born out of Coltrane's struggles with substance use, the alburn focuses on his spirituality, and was recorded during a single session on December 9, 1964. During the recording of the album, the musicians tried to imitate the intimate feel of a jazz club, creating a free and flexible atmosphere to help shape the four parts: "Acknowledgement," "Resolution," "Pursuance," and "Psalms."

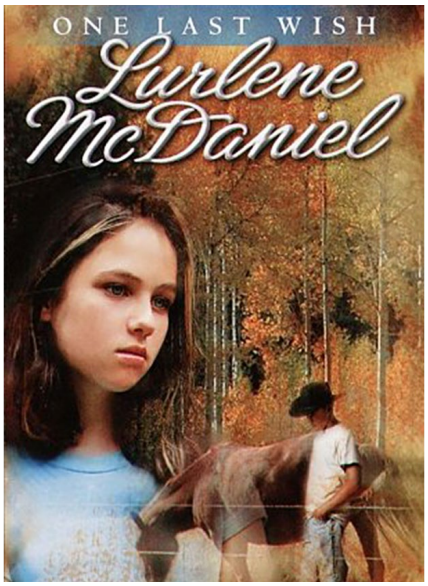
The Appeal and Allure of Sick-Lit

by Meredith G. Healy

An awkward teenage girl captivates a popular jock and ends up teaching him important lessons about himself as he falls for her. Then comes the reveal that she has a terminal illness and their time together is limited. This is the trajectory of many novels that fall into the category that has come to be known as "sick-lit." Lauren Gunderson's *I and You* has many similarities to this genre.

"Sick-lit" is often thought of as a subgenre underneath the broader young adult (YA) fiction classification. In an article entitled "'Nothing Feels as Real': Teen Sick-Lit, Sadness, and the Condition of Adolescence," Professor Julie Passanante Elman defines sick-lit as "a genre of adolescent fiction that fused illness and romance narrative to reinforce the interdependent norms of able-bodiedness, heteronormativity, emotional management, and maturity among American youth," and then goes on to say that "[t]een sick-lit depicts its chronically ill protagonists, who are usually white middle-class females, merely as vehicles for well people's emotional development rather than as self-actualized women with their own experiences, perspectives, and emotional needs." Popular examples of books in this genre include *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012), *Five Feet Apart* (2018), and *A Walk to Remember* (1999). These books have collectively earned hundreds of millions of dollars since their release, and their subsequent film adaptations were all incredibly popular at the box office.

Even though it may seem like this subgenre is a relatively recent development in the literary world, these types of novels have existed for decades. One of the earliest examples is *Love Story* (1970), which told the story of Oliver and Jenny who fall in love and navigate her cancer diagnosis. There was also a film adaptation due to the book's popularity. In the 1980s and 1990s, author Lurlene McDaniel made her name by writing stories often featuring a young, beautiful, dying teenage girl and is credited with turning this general plot formula into a genre in its own right. McDaniel was



Cover of Sixteen and Dying *from the trilogy* One Last Wish *by Lurlene McDaniel.*

originally inspired to write stories about young people with different, often terminal, illnesses after her son was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. In her 35-year career, she released over 75 novels with titles like *Please Don't Die, Sixteen And Dying, If I Should Die Before I Wake* and *She Died Too Young*. Although McDaniel was best known for writing about teenage girls and their cancer, often leukemia, diagnoses, she did occasionally branch out and write about HIV/AIDS or teens in need of an organ donation.

The appeal of these stories to adolescents and teenagers can perhaps be explained by the intrinsic curiosity humans exhibit surrounding mortality and death. There is also an element of catharsis in reading sad stories about a character whose fate has no lasting impact on the reader's own life. With the influx of sick-lit novels and films, several journalists have reflected on their own obsession with these books as teens. The consensus from these journalists is that sick-lit narratives allowed them to begin testing out feelings of grief with the safety net of the fictional events. Another benefit to reading sick-lit is that the content opens up an opportunity for teens and parents to discuss heavy or taboo topics, such as illness, sex, mortality, and mental health.

However, there are also some reasons to be skeptical of some of the elements related to this subgenre, in both the narrative structure and the authors who are responsible for writing the stories. For instance, there are few, if any, successful authors with disabilities writing sick-lit. Thus, there is a lack of representation and people with lived experiences telling these stories. Additionally, these books are often guilty of romanticizing illness and utilizing the trope of a sick girl saving a healthy and unaware boy. The girl is generally used as a tool to teach her potential partner to be more kind and empathetic to people from different backgrounds and experiences. There is also a concern that these narratives might perpetuate some dangerous mainstream ideas that society holds about illness. For instance, this subgenre may reinforce the cliche that those with illness or disability are weak, innocent victims who we should both pity and look to as beacons for how to lead an inspirational, albeit short, life. Additionally, even though these books often involve romance, there are very few examples of queer storylines or interracial relationships.

I and You exhibits many of the tropes found in sick-lit stories. Caroline, a teenage girl with a potentially terminal illness, connects in an unexpected way with Anthony, a popular male classmate. Gunderson leans into this subgenre's tropes, and then surprises the audience when Anthony has just as much to teach Caroline about life as she has to teach him. When this idea gets turned on its head, it becomes clear that there might be more to Anthony's visit than meets the eye.

Author John Green with actors Ansel Elgort, Shailene Woodley, and Nat Wolff at a press event for the film adaptation of The Fault in Our Stars*, 2014.*

Glossary

by Macey Downs

American Girl dolls: A line of 18-inch dolls that portray 8- to 14-year-olds. It includes numerous collections, such as look-alike dolls and historical dolls accompanied with books, clothes, and accessories specific to their time periods.

The Original Historical American Girl Dolls.

Churn: To produce, proceed with, or experience violent motion or agitation.

Detritus: Miscellaneous remnants.

Expressionist: A modernist movement, initially in poetry and painting, that began in northern Europe at the start of the 20th century. It presents the world solely from a subjective perspective, distorting it radically for emotional effect in order to evoke moods or ideas.

Key Club: An international service organization for high school students that encourages leadership through helping others.

Minutiae: Minute or minor details.

Nine volt: A common, rectangular battery, mostly used in smoke detectors, gas detectors, clocks, walkie-talkies, electric guitars, and effects units for altering the sounds of musical instruments.

Ray-Bans: An American-Italian brand of luxury sunglasses, known for their Wayfarer and Aviator lines.

Ray-Ban Wayfarer sunglasses.

Rockabilly: A subgenre of rock 'n' roll, with roots in the American South during the 1950s, that draws on both rock and country music.

Elvis Presley is one of the most famous rockabilly artists.

Sonorous: Full, or loud, in sound.

Triage: The assignment of degrees of urgency to wounds or illnesses to decide the order of treatment of a large number of patients or casualties.

Verve: The spirit and enthusiasm animating artistic composition or performance.

The Psychology of Understanding Death

by Meredith G. Healy

Coming to terms with, and understanding, death is a difficult thing to do. This is especially true for young people. What happens after one dies has long been one of life's mysteries, and this question proves especially compelling for young children when they first start to grapple with the idea of death. How early do children start thinking about this concept, and how does our understanding of death develop and mature as we get older?

The earliest research on this topic was done in the 1930s. In the 1950s, renowned psychologist Jean Piaget posited his theory of cognitive development, and other researchers were then able to link the emergence of the understanding of death to this theory. Piaget's theory has four operational stages: the sensorimotor stage, the preoperational stage, concrete operations, and formal operations. Research suggests that children develop an understanding of death gradually, over a number of years. Children are first able to consider death during the preoperational phase. These are the years when children develop a sense of time and begin to form memories. Death, however, does not preoccupy their thoughts. In fact, many three-year-olds do not understand that death is irreversible and final, but over 50% of four-year-olds are able to grasp this concept. Around five years old, children begin to understand that death means the end for others, but as they are still in a self-centered stage, they do not believe death is inevitable and will happen to them.

Children are able to acknowledge that they are unique beings, and this coincides with an awareness that everyone, including them, will die at some point. Dr. Anthony, a researcher and psychologist, noted that this stage also brings about what he called "eight-year anxiety," which occurs when children begin to fear death. He referred to this phenomenon as "eight-year anxiety" because a death phobia often presents itself when children turn eight years old. It might be for this reason that children this age can become very preoccupied with death and the rituals surrounding it.

There are other factors besides age that contribute to how a child comes to understand death and the components surrounding it. Dr. Essa and her colleagues reported that "young children who have a life-threatening illness seem to have an earlier grasp on the finality of death." Children who have experienced the loss of a parent, sibling, or grandparent at a young age will also begin to consider death earlier than those who have not experienced such a loss. Family culture, including a belief in the afterlife, also contributes to a child's understanding of the finality of death.

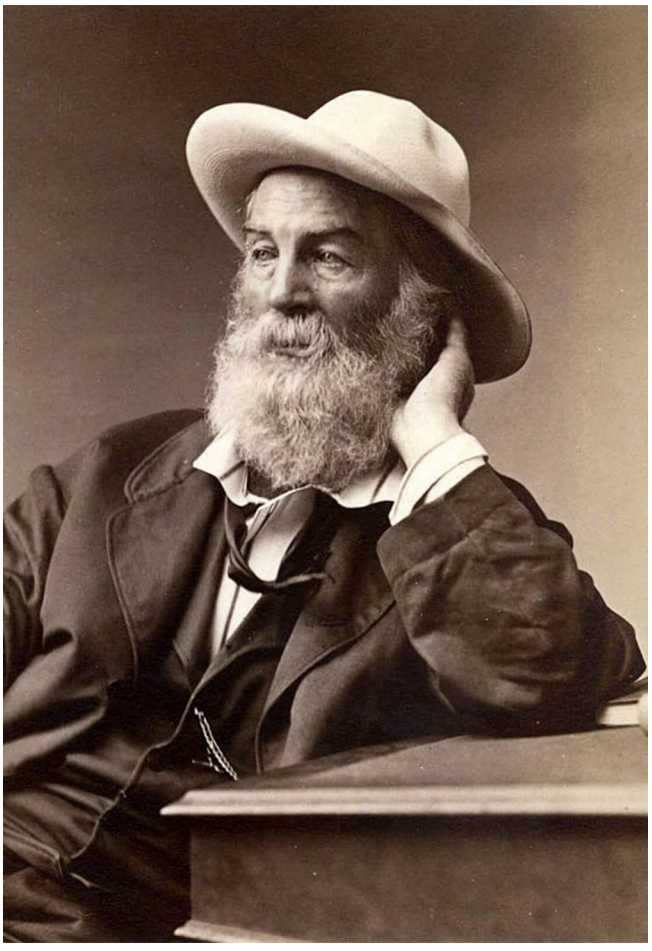
Understanding and coming to terms with death is a lifelong process. It is one that we begin to ponder at a young age, and our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about the end of life continue to develop as we grow up. A young person's understanding of death can be influenced by a number of different factors: their age, cultural or religious background, personal experience with illness or death, and the way that death is talked about in the family. Having open conversations with young people about the finality and inevitability of death when they ask about it is important, and can help aid the grieving process when they experience a loss for the first time.

In *I and You*, Caroline says she has "been sick pretty much ever since [she] was born." It is clear from her conversations with Anthony that she spends time thinking about mortality, and understands the impact that her illness has on her family. Her personal history has certainly influenced the way she approaches her daily experiences and the way that she looks at life—and death.

About Walt Whitman and *Leaves of Grass*

By Meredith G. Healy

Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, in Huntington, Long Island, New York, as the second of nine children. From childhood, his parents instilled a love of American democracy in their children—to further illustrate their patriotism, three of his brothers were named George Washington Whitman, Thomas Jefferson Whitman, and Andrew Jackson Whitman. Whitman's father worked in real estate as a carpenter, and in 1823, when Walt was three, the family moved to Brooklyn in the hopes of taking advantage of the need for houses in the growing borough. At 11, he initially started working in the office of a law firm to help contribute to the family's finances, but then settled into a job in the printing industry.



Walt Whitman, 1872.

Through his late teens and early twenties, Whitman worked as an educator on Long Island. It wasn't until 1841 that he began working fulltime in journalism. From 1841 to 1859, he held editorial positions at seven different newspapers in Long Island and Brooklyn. During this time, he became well known for his support of reform in the social, political, and economic realms, and was fired from his job as the editor of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* for supporting anti-slavery groups. Whitman also began publishing stories and poems in newspapers and magazines, but it wasn't until 1855 that he published Leaves of Grass, his first volume of poetry.

The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was self-published. It contained 12 unnamed poems, and the cover featured an image of Whitman. The collection is a departure from traditional poetic style; Whitman abandoned the use of rhymes and a specific meter in favor of free verse and wrote many of the poems in the first person, as is examined by Anthony and Caroline for their English project in *I and You*. The use of "I" in his poetry allows the poems to have a sense of timelessness, with the past, present, and future all informing each other. *Leaves of Grass* initially did not gain much notoriety, but fellow poet Ralph Waldo Emerson was quite taken with it. In a letter to Whitman, he described it as "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom" to come from an American author.

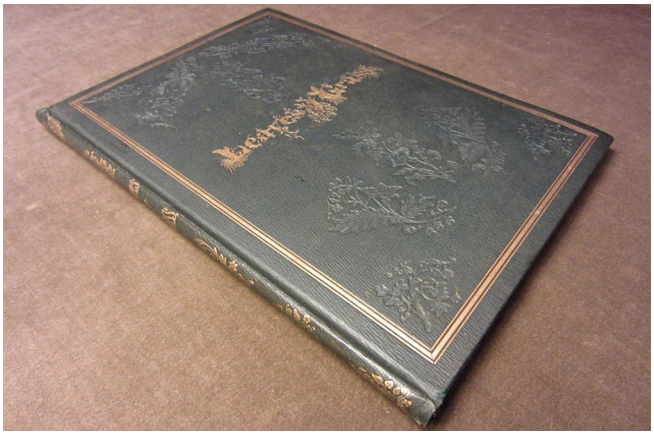
Up until his death in 1892, Whitman continued to edit, write new poems for, and publish new editions of *Leaves of Grass*. In total, the book went through nine different iterations (the original, five revised editions, and three reissued editions) during his lifetime. The book changed and grew as Whitman did, and is comparable to a series of self-portraits. Some of the major topics he discusses are love, sexuality, democracy, social issues, and

CARVER HOSPITAL, DC WHERE WHITMAN WORKED AS A VOLUNTEER NURSE DURING THE CIVIL WAR.

everyday life. The third edition (1860-61) of the book was met with some hesitancy due to the inclusion of new poems about a same-sex love affair between two men, which many believe to be based on Whitman's experience as a gay man. The fourth edition (1867) included poems that Whitman wrote about the Civil War: *Drum-Taps* (1865) and *Sequel to Drum-Taps* (1865), which were likely influenced by his time working as a volunteer nurse in DC during the war.

Despite his anti-slavery sentiments, Whitman was in many ways a product of his time with respect to his opinions about Black Americans. As was the case with the majority of White Americans during the Civil War, he was wary of the threat that free Black workers imposed on working-class Whites. Thus, even though he has been labeled as an abolitionist, he was not supportive of true racial equality because of this fear that Black workers would endanger the class position of himself and other White people. Whitman also viewed the displacement of Indigenous People as an inevitability as the country continued to expand and invite more European immigrants. This point of view is expressed in the poems "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" and "Song of the Redwood-Tree." Modern scholars have noted the confusion that this contradiction causes, and many question how he could be so seemingly anti-slavery and anti-racist in his writing, while simultaneously harboring personal prejudices and racist views.

Whitman's health began to decline in 1872, and he suffered from a major stroke in January 1873 that left him partially paralyzed. He moved to Camden, New Jersey, in May of 1873 to be with his brother and mother, whose health was also rapidly declining. She died shortly after his arrival. In 1884, after the first real financial success from an edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman was able to buy his own cottage in Camden where he resided for the last eight years of his life. The final authorized edition, known as the "deathbed edition" of the collection, was published in 1892, the year of his death, and contained new poems about mortality. Whitman is remembered as one of America's most influential poets, notable for his ability to write accessible, understandable poems that spoke to the American dream of democracy.



FIRST EDITION OF LEAVES OF GRASS, 1855.

Recommended Resources

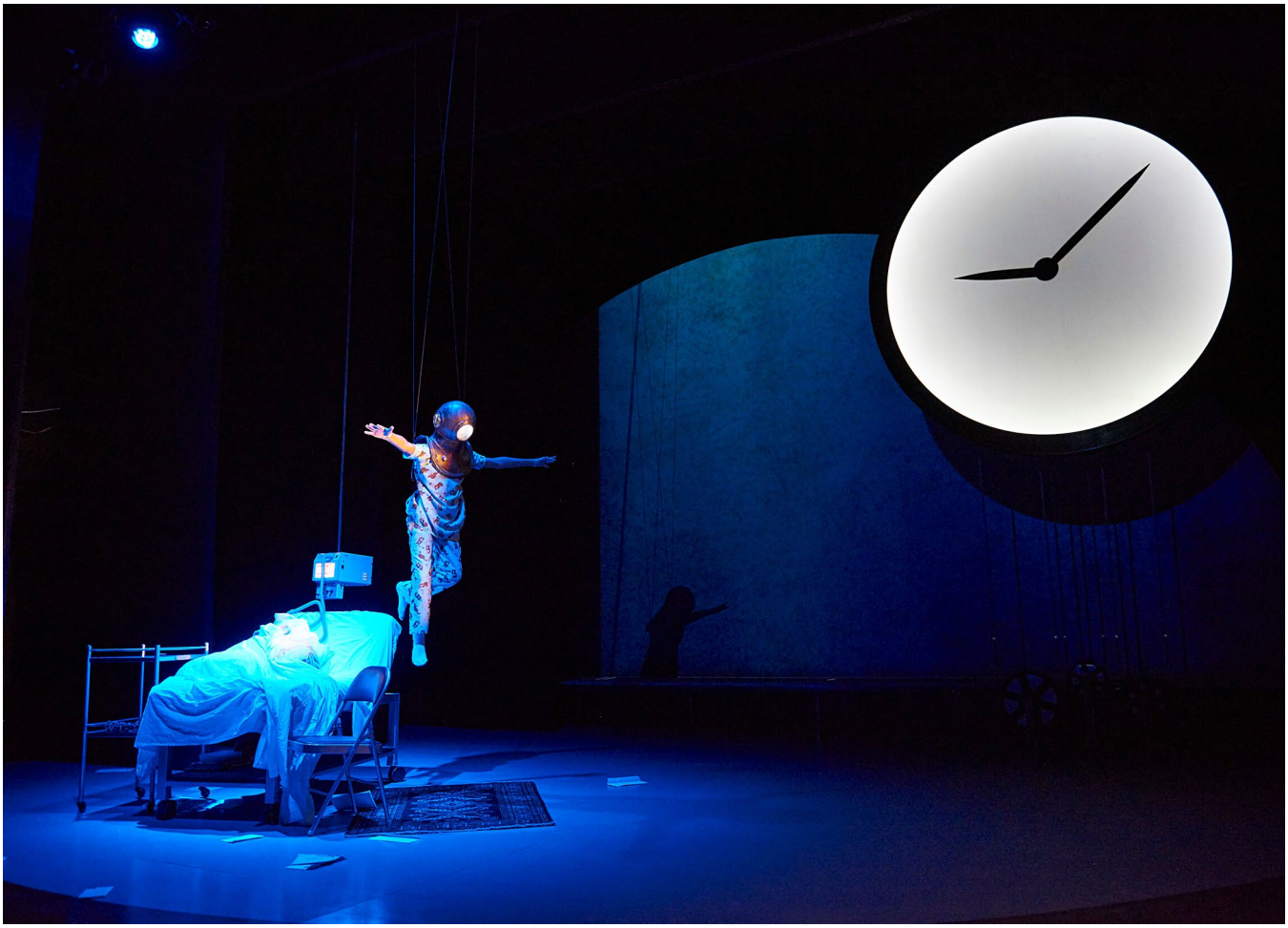
by Editors

Books:
The Fault in Our Stars by John Green
Five Feet Apart by Rachael Lippincott
Looking for Alaska by John Green
This Star Won't Go Out: The Life and Words of Esther Grace by Esther Earl

Plays:
Mary Jane by Amy Herzog
Read to Me by Brendan Pelsue
Ring Around my Finger by Brenda Withers

TV:
Red Band Society

Film:
A Walk to Remember
Love Story
Me and Earl and the Dying Girl
My Sister's Keeper



Lukis Crowell in Read to Me, *Portland Stage, 2019.*

Portland Stage Company
Education and Outreach

Join Portland Stage as we discuss, debate, and explore the plays on our stage and in the classroom! Portland Stage is dedicated to bringing exciting theater, inspiring conversation, interactive experiences, and thought-provoking literature to a wide audience of youth and adult learners. Whether you take part in a discussion, subscribe to *PlayNotes*, take a class in our Theater for Kids space, or bring a group of students to see a performance, there is something here for everyone. How would you like to participate?

Student Matinee Series
The Portland Stage Student Matinee Program annually provides more than 7,000 middle and high school students from Maine and New Hampshire with discounted tickets for student matinees. This season, we are offering this program digitally. Portland Stage can send you the video in a way that works best for your group. We would be happy to do a workshop with you too!

Play Me a Story
Experience the Fun & Magic of Theater on Saturday Mornings at 10:30am with Play Me a Story: in your living room! All ages can enjoy a free performance of children's stories on Facebook live. Ages 4-10 are welcome to participate in an interactive workshop over zoom for $5. Build literacy, encourage creativity and spark dramatic dreams!

After School Classes
After school classes at Portland Stage produce a safe environment for young people to find a higher sense of play, stretch their imaginations, and gain valuable social skills such as listening, risk-taking, ensemble building, public speaking, and leadership through storytelling. These classes are wildly fun, creative, spontaneous, and begin to build skills for the young actor or non-actor's voice, body, and imagination. Visit our website for this year's offerings!

Vacation and Summer Camps
Our theater camps are fun, challenging, and enriching. We use stories of all kinds to fuel these active, educational and lively, process-based week-long school vacation and summer programs for youth. Theater for Kids works with professional actors, directors, artisans, and composers. Students are invited to think, speak, and act, and even sing imaginatively, critically, and creatively in an environment of inclusivity and safe play.

Virtual Portland Stage PLAY
An interactive dramatic reading and acting workshop for elementary school students in grades K – 5. Professional teaching artists perform children's literature and classic poetry for the entire school, and then work with select classrooms in workshops based on the stories. Actors actively engage students in small groups/workshops using their bodies, voices, and imaginations to build understanding of the text while bringing the stories and characters to life. PLAY helps develop literacy and reading fluency, character recall, understanding of themes, social emotional skills, physical storytelling, and vocal characterization. The program also comes with a comprehensive Resource Guide filled with information and activities based on the books and poems.

Virtual Directors Lab
Schools get access to a 50 minute filmed production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* performed by professional actors/teaching artists. After the performance, students engage directly with the text in an interactive virtual workshop with the actors and creative team. In these workshops, students practice effective communication, creative collaboration, rhetoric, and critical analysis. The program also comes with a comprehensive Resource Guide filled with information and resources about the play we are focusing on. Directors Lab puts Shakespeare's language into the hands and mouths of the students, empowering them to be the artists, directors, and ensemble with the power to interpret the text and produce meaning.

Portland Stage Company
2021–2022 Staff

Anita Stewart *Executive & Artistic Director*

Artistic & Production Staff

Meg Anderson *Props Master*
Todd Brian Backus *Literary Manager*
Daniel Brodhead *Production Manager, Lighting & Sound Supervisor*
Hannah Cordes *Education Director*
Ted Gallant *Technical Director*
Nate Genrich *Carpenter*
Myles C. Hatch *Stage Manager*
Meg Lydon *Stage Manager*
Julianne Shea *Education Administrator*
Susan Thomas *Costume Shop Manager*

Affiliate Artists

Ron Botting
Peter Brown
Daniel Burson
Maureen Butler
Ian Carlsen
Hannah Cordes
Moira Driscoll
Abigail Killeen
Callie Kimball
Daniel Noel
Ed Reichert
Hans Indigo Spencer
Dustin Tucker
Bess Welden
Monica Wood
Sally Wood

Administrative Staff

Paul Ainsworth *Business Manager*
Cody Brackett *Marketing Associate*
Chris DeFilipp *House Manager*
Nolan Ellsworth *Front of House Associate*
Marjorie Gallant *Graphic Design Associate*
Beth Given *Development Director*
Lindsey Higgins *Development Associate*
Mical Hutson *Marketing Director*
Zoë Lewis *Executive Assistant*
Jennifer London *Company Manager*
Martin Lodish *Finance Director*
Renee Myhaver *Assistant Box Office Manager*
Donald Smith *Audience Services Manager*
Madeleine St. Germain *Front of House Associate*
Nathan Sylvester *Front of House Associate*
Adam Thibodeau *House Manager*
Shannon Wade *Front of House Associate*

Intern/Apprentice Company

Julian Bencze *Costumes Intern*
Casey Boriskie *Stage Management Intern*
Sophia B. Diaz *Education Apprentice*
Macey Downs *Directing & Dramaturgy Apprentice*
Savanna Genskow *Props Apprentice*
Meredith G. Healy *Directing & Dramaturgy Apprentice*
Audrey Kastner *Electrics Apprentice*
Taylor Kibbler *General Intern*
Katie Ludlam *Company Management Intern*
Jessica Mount *Education Intern*
Mallory Topel *Stage Management Intern*
Kelly Yamahiro *Costumes Intern*