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*In Memoriam
Dear Friends,

At long last, we are so pleased to bring you Anna Ziegler’s beautiful, moving, invigorating play—*The Last Match*.

Interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic mere days before we were to welcome our first audience, *The Last Match* remains a vital and relevant piece, with several themes brought into new focus by what this past year has brought us. While we are sadly unable to witness this piece together live and in-person, our steadfast director Keira Fromm has succeeded in taking an inherently theatrical play and—in partnership with award-winning HMS Media—creating a unique filmed stage production that retains the thrill of live theatre while embracing the tools of film. The result is truly a one-of-a-kind production for you to enjoy.

If you recall, we were so close to opening in 2020 that you had already received a version of *The Brief Chronicle* in your mailboxes and inboxes last year! We have republished some of the most important articles for you in this issue, but with new important updates. After their interview over a year ago, we checked in again with playwright Anna Ziegler and director Keira Fromm to unpack how the events of the last year have altered their perspectives on the play. We again offer an introduction to the world of tennis, shedding light on the sport’s origins, its history and some of the intricacies of the game that might be useful to know as you enjoy the play.

Following that, we delve into the challenging idea of theatricalizing sports onstage. From *The Wolves* by Sarah DeLappe at the Goodman, to *The Great Leap* by Lauren Yee at Steppenwolf to *The Last Match* at WT, plays that utilize athletics as a backdrop are able to capture a thrilling sense of drama and bring complex themes to the surface.

Finally, we will explore how the WT Education team (led by Director of Education Kelsey Chigas) has been able to continue their incredible work throughout the past year, almost 100% remotely, as shifting timelines for schools reopening resulted in a moving target for in-school programs as well as online classes.

After *The Last Match*, we close the 2020/21 Season with *Ride Share* by Reginald Edmund, directed by Simeilia Hodge-Dallaway—an intense, riveting thriller produced in partnership with Black Lives, Black Words International Project that is sure to captivate. As for next season, stay tuned for details! We can’t wait to share our exciting plans that include a compelling blend of stories both classic and contemporary—told with the artistry you’ve come to expect from WT.

Thank you for sticking with us this year. Your support means the world to us!

Michael Halberstam
Artistic Director

Kathryn M. Lipuma
Executive Director
STATE OF THE ART

by Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director

Almost a year ago now, in anticipation of the live opening of The Last Match, I wrote the following as part of my State of the Art letter:

“In unprecedented times, I think it is good to return to basics and ask the foundational questions presented in The Last Match. The most profound political battles are waged in the home and in the heart. Anna Ziegler asks us to consider what it means to age gracefully, how we are to balance career with ambition, what really matters at the end of the day and ultimately whether or not the legacy of achievement is more important than the legacy of genuine and integral human connection. It’s 90 minutes of exhilarating dialogue, unabashed theatrical staging and a dive into some of the most important themes and questions of human existence.”

My passion for the play has not changed and neither have my reasons for producing it.

What has changed radically of course is the world around us. We are still in the midst of a pandemic—one that we had initial hopes might be gone by summer. We have been through a bruising Presidential election, massive civil unrest and an assault on the US Capitol that left us all shaken and profoundly disturbed, and questioning so much of what many thought our country to be.

In a testament to the skill and prowess of the author, the play still holds and the questions remain relevant.

As the production took shape in the rehearsal room and in the theatre where director Keira Fromm, choreographer Steph Paul and their brilliant design team were adding the set, lights, costumes and sound, I realized that we were on the brink of launching something extraordinary and it was utterly devastating to think that all that beautiful work might be lost forever. So we immediately began plotting its return in some way, shape or form. We initially had hopes that we might be able to bring it to life in our beautiful Gillian Theatre as early as last June. As the fall approached, we hoped that perhaps early winter might offer us the opportunity to remount the piece.
Finally, it became clear that the pandemic was to continue much longer than we could have imagined and so we began plotting in earnest to preserve the production on camera this spring.

We have gone to extraordinary lengths to bring this piece to you via streaming. As I type, actors are actually masked, COVID tested (3 times a week) and working in person in our rehearsal rooms in preparation for filming in a few weeks. We have a new actor, Ryan Hallahan, and a completely new medium through which to communicate. Keira, in harmony with HMS Media, is creating a production just for streaming. She is preserving the sense of the theatrical and maintaining much of the conception of the original production, but she is using the tools of film in order to tell the story specifically for the medium. It is not a movie of the piece. Anna’s play is inherently theatrical, but by using direct address to the camera and playing with light and sound and the tools of film (close-ups, editing, multi-camera angles), we can bring you a unique evocation of what we’d hoped to deliver for you live without losing what made the production special. On the contrary, I think this is going to be even more special. The intimacy of playing for the camera allows the actors to draw you in with the power of their emotional convictions and the point of view of the director in shaping the camera choices brings you even deeper in Keira’s vision for the play. And of course, Anna’s beautiful words will still hold their power and can even be enjoyed on demand from the comfort of your living rooms.

So whereas we can safely all agree that we would be happier to be presenting this to you in person, rather than lamenting what we cannot change, we are making an amazing glass of lemonade out of a very potent lemon and we invite you to delve even more deeply into The Last Match.
Bobby Kennedy (BK): What do you both love about the sport of tennis?

Anna Ziegler (AZ): So many things. I love that it’s this intense psychological showdown that comes down to nerves and courage more than skill. I love that singles puts two people in an arena, facing off against each other but also against their own limitations. I love that a match can feel relentless and one-sided but then change on a dime. I love the profound human drama of it. But I also love that it’s the only sport where you can win more points and still lose. That feels very much like life to me. It’s deeply unfair and yet we indulge and even celebrate its injustices. For all these reasons, I didn’t enjoy playing competitive tennis. But I love watching it. And writing about it.

Keira Fromm (KF): I’ve been a fan of tennis since I was a teenager. I was a sporty kid growing up, and I remember joining my high school’s tennis team because it seemed an easier sport because there was less ground to cover. I couldn’t have been more wrong, of course; tennis is an incredibly difficult sport that requires peak athleticism and rigorous technical skill. Even though tennis never turned into a calling, I was glad to have been curious about the sport early on because it meant I got to grow up watching some of the greats play. One of the high points in my tennis watching career was being able to watch Venus and Serena Williams play a women’s final match at the U.S. Open in 2001. One of the most exciting things in tennis is a five-set match. In grand slam men’s tennis, the first player to win three sets wins the match. Oftentimes a player will win successive sets and win the match rather quickly. However,
if you get to play a fifth set that means two players are tied going into that final set and either player has a real shot at winning the match. Unlike baseball or football where if you’re significantly behind toward the end of the game you’re likely to lose; in tennis it’s still anyone’s game in that magical fifth set situation.

**BK:** Anna, where did the idea for *The Last Match* come from?

**AZ:** Well, I always knew I wanted to write about tennis someday for many of the reasons cited above. I had been a player and I was a big fan. And around when I had my first child, and felt I was closing a significant chapter of my life, Andy Roddick retired and gave a very moving speech on court at the US Open. That’s where the seed of *The Last Match* started to grow—with this notion of putting a huge part of your life behind you at a fairly young age. It got me thinking about tennis as a microcosm for everything. About how not to go gentle into that good night. About how to stay in the fight despite getting older. And about having to leave behind something you truly loved. It felt incredibly sad, and hopeful, to me. To think that life will continue to offer up wonders even after that thing that once constituted your identity has dropped away.

**BK:** Although it’s of course set during a tennis match, the play is about far more than just the game. What else did you want to explore and how did tennis lend itself to that exploration?

**AZ:** I’ve touched on a bunch of those things, but I’ll add that it’s also an exploration of why we want what we want, what drives us. And that applies as much to the tennis players in the play as to their wives. Why does Galina want Sergei? What does she see in him? What does he bring to her life that she needs? Why does Mallory so desperately want a child? Why does she love and stay with Tim? And I think both of the women come to see the answers to those questions more clearly by the end of the play.

**BK:** Anna, you acknowledge the fact that *The Last Match* is a very physical play, but you don’t prescribe in the text how to stage any of its physicality. Why did you want to leave that component open to interpretation?

**AZ:** I acknowledge that *The Last Match* could be a physical play, given its subject matter and setting. But it’s a memory play too, and I think different productions could make equally valid decisions about which of those to weight more. Ultimately, it’s two people telling the audience a story, which means it could be done on a bare set, without any bells and whistles. Is that the best, most dynamic version of it? I honestly don’t know. I don’t like to prescribe too much so that I can be excited and surprised by different directors’ interpretations.

**BK:** Keira, what were you looking to achieve in the design process for this production?

**KF:** *The Last Match* takes place both on the tennis court in a semi-final match at the U.S. Open, as well as in the minds of the players playing that match. I really wanted to create an environment where both the linear tennis court and non-linear brain space of the players could co-exist concurrently. That’s created a really exciting challenge for our design team. We know what a championship tennis court looks like, but what does the brain matter of two athletes look like? Finding that balance between each was our goal. I’m really thrilled by where we landed.

Over a year later, Kennedy caught up with Ziegler and Fromm again for some new perspective on the play and its journey to film:

**BK:** How have you two been staying artistically engaged during this challenging year?

**AZ:** Mostly I’ve called upon my good friend Denial. I try to tell myself that things will get back to normal soon and this is just a pause. If I were to let myself go deep into what-this-all-really-means I’d probably
be completely stymied (artistically and otherwise). I know that I can’t game out, any more than theaters can, what people will want to see when plays return, or when that will happen. All I can control is what I write...So I drink more wine and keep doing my work, sporadically, with some necessary blinders on.

**KF:** I was meant to be directing at American Players Theatre (APT) in Spring Green, Wisconsin last summer, but their season was postponed. However, one of the ways APT continued to engage their patrons was by presenting public readings featuring their core company members on the Zoom platform. They invited me to direct a series of comedic one-acts: *Overruled* and *Dark Lady of the Sonnets* by George Bernard Shaw; and *Swan Song* by Anton Chekhov. PBS Wisconsin picked up many of the readings for streaming on their website. It was a really great way to focus my energy, not to mention it’s incredibly funny material, which was a balm during this heavy moment in time. I was also able to develop a holiday show with APT for streaming this past December. The show, *Holidames: Tangled in Tinsel,* was a variety show of sorts — some holiday-inspired poetry, songs, scenes, nostalgic stories of the season. It was a joy-filled experience.

**BK:** Of course the desire was to have live audiences for this, Keira, but what about the play and your staging of it will allow it to translate to an on-screen experience so easily?

**KF:** So much of the experience of the play is a conversation with the audience about why we want the things we want and how the endless desire for more plagues us. Were we in the theater with a live audience, there would be a good deal of direct address from actors to audience. Since there is no live audience to play to right now, the cameras will become our audience surrogates. That creates a really exciting opportunity to explore breaking the fourth wall. Sort of like John Cusack in *High Fidelity* or *Fleabag* or *Ferris Bueller.* The moments when characters talk directly to the camera (to share insight, or a joke, or a longing) will hopefully establish an instant bond with viewers and a deepened relationship by virtue of the increased focus of really talking to the audience. This kind of energy strikes me as so uniquely of the film world, which I hope creates a really thrilling hybrid of a theater/film experience.
“It’s difficult for most people to imagine the creative process in tennis. Seemingly, it’s just an athletic manner of hitting the ball consistently well within the boundaries of the court. That analysis is just as specious as thinking that the difficulty in portraying King Lear on stage is learning all the lines.”
– Virginia Wade

The exact origin of the name tennis is unknown. An earlier version of the sport had been played since the Middle Ages, with King Henry VIII being an enthusiastic admirer. Called jeu de paume (“game of the palm”), it was initially played with a bare hand striking the ball, before racquets were adopted in the 16th century. During the Victorian era, the sport evolved to its current form and ‘lawn tennis’ became an incredibly popular middle-class activity. A shrinking workday and gradually loosening moral climate allowed both men and women to partake in the sport, even against one another, which was never tolerated in cricket or football.

Lawn tennis quickly spread beyond England and became a worldwide pastime. The All England Club in Wimbledon, London began hosting a major tournament in 1877, and tournaments also began in France, the United States and Australia. The International Lawn Tennis Federation formed in 1913 as an international governing body for the sport, and in 1924 the ILTF established the four Grand Slam tournaments—the Australian Open, the French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open—as the world’s premiere tournaments for amateur players. Winning all four of the tournaments in a calendar year remains the pinnacle achievement in the sport, one that only a handful of players have ever accomplished.

After achieving initial success at amateur events, the best tennis players would turn professional to support their careers, signing with a promoter or a professional league who organized matches and tournaments that offered prize money—unlike the Grand Slams where the prestige...
of winning was the only compensation offered. In 1968, the ILTF changed its rules and the Grand Slams began to offer prize money and started allowing professional players to compete, ushering in the “Open Era.” After decades of multiple professional tours competing for male players, the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) Tour was established in 1990, creating one league and an official season of tournaments. The ATP also standardized a ranking system for professional players, making the rank of #1 player in the world another career milestone. Meanwhile, frustrated at being offered by promoters a fraction of the prize money offered to male players, female players formed the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) and their own WTA tour in 1973. All four Grand Slam tournaments now offer equal prize money to men and women, although disparity in compensation persists on the rest of the tour calendar.

“When you do something best in life, you don’t really want to give that up—and for me it’s tennis.” – Roger Federer

Professional tennis has grown more and more physical over the years, with today’s top players being some of the fittest athletes competing in any sport. The tennis season is also longer than most, with tournaments beginning in early January and continuing until November. Given the physical demands and the lack of a lengthy offseason, injuries have become common—and sometimes career-altering or even career-ending. After a first round loss at 2019’s Australian Open, 3-time Slam winner Andy Murray broke down in his press conference, saying that a persistent hip injury might be forcing him to end his career. Some players elect to leave the game on top, like Pete Sampras did by winning the 2002 US Open and never playing another tournament. Others see younger players pass them in the rankings and eventually admit that it’s time to retire. Many former players stay involved as TV/radio commentators, become coaches for other players or show up a couple times per year at the Grand Slams to play exhibition matches with other legends of the sport.

“The first time you win, nobody picks you; the last time you win, nobody picks you... You’ve just got to pick yourself.” – Venus Williams

Tennis careers used to be short, with players turning professional in their late teens, peaking in their early 20s and then declining. Swedish legend Björn Borg retired at age 26. John McEnroe never won another slam after age 25. Steffi Graf won all her 22 grand slams before turning 30. Players with long careers like Jimmy Connors (who played until age 44) and Martina Navratilova (who retired at age 49) were rarities. Now, players’ careers are extending well into their 30s. Roger Federer and Serena Williams, both age 39, still compete at the highest levels of the sport. At the start of 2020’s Australian Open, half of the men’s top 10 were in their 30s.
Grand Slam tournaments feature a draw of 128 players, which make them the largest events of the tennis season. Multiple competitions are held during each tournament, including men’s and women’s singles (1-on-1), men’s and women’s doubles (2-on-2), and mixed doubles (a man and woman playing doubles together), as well as juniors, seniors and wheelchair events. The top 32 players in singles are seeded and arranged in the draw so that they won’t meet another seeded player until the 3rd round, which has the potential to keep top players in the tournament longer (and ticket sales robust). Four initial rounds of play whittle the field down to eight quarterfinalists, then four semifinalists and lastly two finalists competing for the title. A player must win seven matches over two weeks to be crowned a Grand Slam champion.

The Last Match takes place at the US Open, the final Grand Slam tournament in the calendar year, which is held over two weeks in late August and early September including Labor Day weekend. The tournament uses hardcourts, a playing surface made of concrete or asphalt and covered with an acrylic material. The Billie
Jean King National Tennis Center in the Queens borough of New York City has hosted the tournament since 1978. Arthur Ashe Stadium seats 23,771 spectators for the highest profile matches. At the 2019 edition of the tournament, a record 737,872 people attended the two weeks of matches, and over $53 million in total prize money was awarded to players. In 2020, the tournament was played in empty stadiums with no fans allowed on site due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The Last Match explores what’s racing through the heads of top athletes during a high-stakes competition like the US Open. What is a player thinking about when they’re playing well? What’s happening in their head when they’re making mistakes? Tennis, with its captivating swings in momentum, provides the perfect background for this exploration of what it takes to achieve victory in sport and in life.

“If you can react the same way to winning and losing, that’s a big accomplishment. That quality is important because it stays with you the rest of your life, and there’s going to be a life after tennis that’s a lot longer than your tennis life.”

– Chris Evert

“Tennis uses the language of life. Advantage, service, fault, break, love—the basic elements of tennis are those of everyday existence, because every match is a life in miniature.”

– Andre Agassi
LEAN FORWARD AND ENGAGE!

Partake in these exciting events and conversation materials, tailored to enhance your WT experience before and after the show!

VIRTUAL TALKBACKS

Want to discuss *The Last Match* with fellow audience members and the WT Artistic team? Join us every Sunday between April 28 - May 30 at 3pm CST for a Virtual Talkback, live over Zoom! Ticket holders for *The Last Match* will receive invitations and links via email.

THE GREEN ROOM

*Featuring: The Last Match* playwright Anna Ziegler

Wednesday, April 21 at 7:00pm CST

Previously exclusive to season package holders and donors, *The Green Room* is now open to all! Join us live with playwright Anna Ziegler and submit your own questions! Learn more and watch the recording, if you missed it, at writerstheatre.org/TGR.

MORE TO EXPLORE

Looking for ways to engage further with *The Last Match*? Visit writerstheatre.org/the-last-match-audience-guide to access conversation starters, media and interactive primers on the subjects and themes of the play!
Proudly part of your supporting cast.

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THE LAST MATCH

Writers Theatre would like to acknowledge the following individuals who supported the original cancelled production of The Last Match and thank them for their continued support:

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WRITERS THEATRE SALUTES

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Writers Theatre is thrilled to have support from ComEd as Corporate Education Sponsor for the 2020/21 Season. ComEd is a longtime supporter of the arts in Chicagoland, and Writers Theatre is honored to partner with a company that acknowledges the power of theatre education, as it emphasizes collaboration, cultivates self-expression, encourages imaginative inquiry and promotes civic responsibility and social justice. The 2020/21 Season marks ComEd’s sixth season as part of our family of supporters, and Writers Theatre is extremely grateful to once again have ComEd’s partnership.
My, how time flies! This February marked five years in the stunning theatre building supporters and artists alike have come to know as Writers Theatre. The state-of-the-art space designed by Studio Gang Architects has been featured in several “Best Theatre Spaces” lists, received the National Honor Award for Interior Architecture and achieved LEED Gold Certification. It has become indelible to Glencoe and the Chicagoland theatre community – and because of our patrons and donors, this architectural dream has thrived. While we wish we could be celebrating this momentous anniversary in person, we cannot wait to do so when it is safe to gather. Enjoy this look down memory lane and know your impact shaped this legacy!

Supporters fill the Litowitz Atrium at the Grand Opening Gala (photo by Abby McKenna); Completed building by Studio Gang Architects (Blessing); beam signing in the Green Family Rehearsal Room; Some items placed in the WT time capsule.
DID YOU KNOW....?

• 27 productions have been produced in The Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols Theatre and The Gillian Theatre spaces, including the recently filmed and streamed One-Man A Christmas Carol and The Last Match.

• 11 gold shovels were used for the 2014 groundbreaking ceremony along with 5 pairs of gold scissors for the ribbon cutting celebration in 2016.

• 35 staff, building committee members and other personnel instrumental to the project signed a ceiling beam in the Green Family Rehearsal Room (have you ever seen it?!).

• Writers Theatre buried a time capsule during the build process—is set to be opened in 2116!

• There are exactly 100 books lining the corridor shelves to represent every show Writers Theatre produced before the building opened, with the 100th title being Arcadia to commemorate the first production in the new space.
WT Education reaches 11,500 students a year throughout Chicagoland. Our programs include Write On!, a customizable artist-in-residence program that pairs teaching artists with schools and community organizations to explore performance and text with a focus on encouraging young people to find their creative voices; The Novel Series, a cutting-edge theatre and literary arts curriculum designed to allow students to explore literature and the art of bringing text to life; The MLK Project: The Fight for Civil Rights, a touring performance written by Yolanda Androzzo that chronicles a student’s journey as she learns about the Civil Rights Movement; a student matinee series; ACTIVATE, a wrap-around in-school residency in conjunction with matinees, designed to deepen students’ experience with plays on our stages; and the WT Youth Council, an artistic leadership advisory board for motivated, passionate high school students interested in hands-on, in-depth exposure to arts administration.

Our audience engagement programming includes: Sunday Spotlight, featuring an expert in a field relating to the themes or setting of our productions; From Page to Stage, a public collaboration between Writers Theatre and select North Shore libraries and community partners that explores the literary and theatrical themes of our stage productions; The Making of... series that provides access to the process behind crafting our productions; Pre-Show Conversation: Up Close, pre-show discussion designed to provide context for the production; and Post-Show Conversation: The Word and The Artist, a facilitated post-show discussion of the play. All of these events are free and open to the public. For more information, visit writerstheatre.org/events.

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For more information on any of these programs visit writerstheatre.org/education
WRITERS THEATRE MISSION STATEMENT

Writers Theatre was founded to explore productions in which the word on the page and the artists that bring the word to life hold primary importance. Central to this mission are three important core values: valuing text, both classic and contemporary, as the fundamental source of inspiration; creating deliberately intimate performances where audiences are face-to-face with powerful stories; and honoring the time and commitment of our artists by remaining at the forefront of industry compensation. With a reputation for consistent artistic excellence, innovative educational programming and strong ties to our community, Writers Theatre has built an award-winning repertoire and today, serves as a vital and highly-regarded company in the Chicago theatre community.

WRITERS THEATRE HISTORY

In 1992, Writers Theatre was founded in order to create an environment where the written word and the nurturing of artists were the foundation of all productions. We opened our first venue that year in the anteroom of a newly opened bookstore in Glencoe on the North Shore of Chicago. The limited space available gave way to a new aesthetic that has been a company hallmark ever since—intimacy.

Under the artistic leadership of Founding Artistic Director Michael Halberstam, who continues in that role to this day, WT became a welcome addition to the already vibrant Chicago arts community. The Theatre quickly garnered significant critical acclaim and established a reputation as a home for world-class art and artists, opening a second performance space in 2003. Our inviting 108-seat Tudor Court space continued the company's trademark level of intimacy while allowing for a new scale of production and affording the opportunity to expand audiences, programming and educational outreach.

Acclaimed by The Wall Street Journal as “America’s number one theatre company” in 2016, Writers has offered more than 100 productions, including 27 world premieres. We have garnered numerous awards and accolades, including 133 Joseph Jefferson Award nominations and 26 Awards, as well as multiple citations of Artistic Director Michael Halberstam for excellence and contributions to the field, including The 2010 Zelda Fichandler Award and the 2013 “Chicagoan of the Year in Theater” Award from the Chicago Tribune. In 2007, Writers debuted nationally with a New York premiere of Crime and Punishment, followed in 2011 by a Lincoln Center Theater production of A Minister's Wife—the musical adaptation of George Bernard Shaw’s Candida, conceived and directed by Halberstam.

In February 2016, Writers Theatre opened a new, state-of-the-art facility. This established the company’s first permanent home in a new theatre center in downtown Glencoe, designed by the award-winning, internationally renowned Studio Gang Architects, led by Founder and Design Principal Jeanne Gang, FAIA, in collaboration with Theatre Consultant Auerbach Pollock Friedlander. The new facility has allowed the Theatre to continue to grow to accommodate its audience, while maintaining its trademark intimacy. The new facility resonates with and complements the Theatre’s neighboring Glencoe community, adding tremendous value to Chicagoland and helping to establish the North Shore as a premier cultural destination.
The Woman’s Library Club of Glencoe shares the space at the theatre center holding meetings, luncheons, book clubs, bridge and other events at the building.

- The Woman’s Library Club of Glencoe, a 501(c)(3) organization, was incorporated on April 18, 1872. The WLC owns the land on which the WT theatre center sits and has provided use of the land to WT without charge.
- WLC is the third oldest woman’s club in Illinois for philanthropic, educational and social endeavors. The WLC book collection was donated to Glencoe to form the nucleus of the original library for Glencoe. WLC’s first building was used as a library until the current Glencoe Public Library was built.
- WLC members meet regularly to pursue the Club’s philanthropic, intellectual and social activities. For a full list of WLC activities and a current calendar, check wlcglencoe.com.
- Club members also staff the North Shore Exchange (an upscale consignment shop). This 501(c)(3) shop is a charitable arm of WLC and is located at 372 Hazel Avenue in Glencoe, 847-835-0026.

Membership in the Woman’s Library Club of Glencoe is open to all women interested in furthering the club’s goals. The current membership consists of over 120 women living in 10 area suburbs. If you are interested in becoming a member, pick up an application in the Writers Theatre lobby, email wlcglencoe@gmail.com or visit the website at wlcglencoe.com.

For WLC news, activities, and events calendar, visit www.wlcglencoe.org
THE LAST MATCH
BEYOND THE STAGE

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IN MEMORIAM
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ARTISTS COUNCIL

The Artists Council is a select group of our most devoted supporters, whose extraordinary annual contributions sustain the Theatre and enable it to realize ambitious artistic and institutional goals. Members of the Artists Council are granted unparalleled access to the creative process as well as the unique opportunity to forge a personal connection with our art. We gratefully acknowledge our Writers Theatre Artists Council members who made commitments in the period between November 1, 2019 and February 1, 2021.

$50,000 and above
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JAIME FREEMAN

Jaime Freeman of BMO Harris Bank grew up in Glencoe and Winnetka, and now lives in Winnetka with her family. She attended Boston College and then received her MBA from Northwestern. Jaime has fond memories of attending WT performances when she was younger and is now thrilled to have the opportunity to become an integral part of the WT community. She has been with BMO Harris nearly 15 years, and her past and current board experiences, as well as leadership positions within those boards, will bring great depth to our group. Her excitement is infectious!
In December 2020, Writers Theatre learned of the passing of one of our Trustees, Roberta Olshansky. Roberta joined Writers Theatre’s Board in May of 2015. She had the ability to make everyone feel as if they had known her for years at first meeting. She would often stop by the Box Office, just to say hello and lend words of support. She developed friendships with members of WT staff that continued even after they left the organization. Her most recent work with WT included an increased dedication to strengthening EDI and anti-racism work. Roberta was also a long-time member of the Glencoe Woman’s Library Club (WLC); the club owns the land where our building is housed and shares the facility. A passionate advocate for both the WLC and Writers Theatre, she was instrumental in bringing the two organizations even closer together.

Roberta was a force of nature. She advocated for causes she believed in with power, generosity and absolute commitment. Roberta dedicated her life to the personal well-being of others and always led from a place of love. She will be deeply missed by all who knew her.
OUR HANDS embrace THE ARTS.

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THE NEW NARRATIVE

By Shana Laski, Dramaturgy Intern

How high-intensity athletics are finding successful avenues into theatrical dialogues

Portraying sports onstage is an increasingly popular framework in which to set plays dealing with complex issues.

In the last ten years alone, narratives about soccer, swimming, basketball, football and tennis players have successfully played stages nationwide. From the pool to the pitch, the field to the locker room, playwrights of all backgrounds are using the ambition, passion and deep comradery between teammates in athletics as a vehicle through which to tell profound human stories. Furthermore, each sport offers a unique element to the drama of the stories. The Last Match by Anna Ziegler tells a story much deeper than a high-level tennis match, brilliantly melding the complex psyches and personal lives of athletes to the energy of their sport.

The way sport is embodied onstage and whether it is a literal or more abstract presentation of the action can vary from play to play. In Yellow Card Red Card, Melisa Tien opts to keep the soccer ball invisible while in Sarah DeLappe’s The Wolves, actors were required to master ball handling and precise drills as an
ensemble. Ruby Rae Spiegel’s *Dry Land* implies swimming is happening, while Lucas Hnath’s *Red Speedo* incorporates water into the space, with some productions allowing the audience to watch the actor swimming throughout the show. With her play *FLEX*, Candice Jones includes stage directions that indicate real basketball is taking place onstage with specific references to shots that could be made or missed depending on the performance and how to proceed with each outcome. In contrast, Lauren Yee explains that for her play *The Great Leap*, she was very interested in “how to put basketball—or at least the feel of basketball—onstage, when I wasn’t really interested in re-staging a basketball game.” Yee decided that the pacing and energy of the sport was more important to emulate than scoring literal points for the audience.

The ages of the central characters in these plays and the levels at which they are competing also vary. *The Wolves* and *Yellow Card Red Card* dramatize teams of teenage girls and young women, all dealing with the pressures and pitfalls of girlhood and growing up. Though the stories in each play differ widely, the goals of these playwrights were similar. DeLappe is quoted saying, “I think I was interested in having a story filled with young women in which they weren’t girlfriends or daughters or love interests or sexual objects, but where they were athletes. Where it was about their bodies, but about their ownership of their own bodies, and the strength of their own bodies.” Similarly, Tien was interested in creating “a play-and-sporting-event-in-one that explores what happens when young women in a socially and culturally restrictive environment begin to recognize their own agency.” For many women, sports are the first (and sometimes only) outlet in which they can break out of the expectations set for them by their surroundings. In each of these plays, the sport in question is conflated with the opportunity to better at least one character’s social standing through higher education scholarships and the ability to escape or change their current lifestyle, ultimately exploring how girls claim ownership of their lives and bodies. Despite the reality that resources and attention are disproportionately allocated to men’s leagues and most famous sports stories in the media have young male protagonists, theatre has been placing female athletes at the forefront of athletic narratives, creating uniquely women-dominated casts, crews and productions at large.

Other plays explore the lives of adult athletes. There are preconceived notions, especially by Americans, that professional athletes live lives of leisure and ease outside of competition, but these plays encapsulate the psychological duress that athletes endure in order to be the best by any means necessary. *Red Speedo* features a professional who has spent his life devoted to the craft of his sport. The stakes are incredibly high for this character at the peak of his career and grappling with the ‘what ifs’ of losing the thing he has spent his life building. This also applies to the quasi-professional careers of collegiate athletes, as demonstrated by Andrew Hinderaker’s *Colossal*. This play tackles toxic masculinity and homophobia in the world of college football, as well as the sky-high expectations and risks that these athletes shoulder every time they take the field. The playwright problematizes the expectation of men to be “invincible” on and off the field despite physical, emotional or mental pain. The intimacy between the characters is at odds with the aggression, danger and masculine
energies tied to the game itself, which manifests in the contrasting “violent and grand physical gestures” of football onstage and moments of tenderness among teammates and family.

Though most of these plays are identified by the sport they depict, they are all about so much more than a game. For example, The Great Leap places a Chinese American teen in the heart of Tiananmen square in the summer of 1989, playing an exhibition game with a local university against Beijing right as the student protests against the Communist Party were reaching a fever pitch. Basketball is this boy’s ticket to engage with his mother’s culture first-hand and tells a story of belonging, perseverance and finding one’s place in the world. Yee engages with her experience as an Asian American, thinking about what it would be like “going to a country you’ve never been to, but at the same time, feel a deep connections towards because of what you look like, where your parents are from, and what that experience must be like; going in as the enemy, but also looking like the team you’re playing against.”

The Last Match tells the stories of two professional male athletes and the way their sport has become inextricably linked to their identity and sense of self. Playwright Anna Ziegler’s focus on tennis was also rooted in the fact that she “didn’t really want to write a play that was a typical sports play. I wanted it to be a play where the sport was very clearly a metaphor.” The mind of the tennis player from moment to moment is what fascinated Ziegler and compelled her to write this structure-shattering, innovative piece: “Tennis is full of all these momentum swings and why does that happen? It’s so psychological. The fun I had was trying to figure out what players are thinking of when they have those swings.” She emphasizes that her play is about “ambition and never being satisfied... about hard work, and where it can take you and where it sort of stops short. How much do we have control over? And in the end it really does come down to our personalities, and how we’ve been formed as people is sort of what determines what happens to us.”

Clearly, none of these works could be simplistically labeled as a “sports play.” They all demonstrate that no athlete’s life is always centered around their sport because, as Ruby Rae Spiegel said, “nobody lives a one-issue life... We have so many intersecting concerns and problems, and so even though it might seem like a lot... You don’t categorize people like that when they’re real people.”

Angela Alise (#00) in The Wolves by Sarah DeLappe, directed by Vanessa Stalling at Goodman Theatre (February 9–March 11, 2018). GoodmanTheatre.org/TheWolves
SHIFTING TO THE DIGITAL CLASSROOM

Writers Theatre Director of Education Kelsey Chigas sits down with Marketing Assistant McKenzie Wilkes to discuss the transition to online classes.

McKenzie Wilkes: What has the shift from in person to digital learning been like for you as a teaching artist?

Kelsey Chigas: Well I think to start, the blessing in disguise that has come out of this situation is having to navigate this shift – because we haven’t had any other choice – has really necessitated a reexamination of our core values and what our mission is as the education department of Writers Theatre. I think we did a great job with aligning our programming before, but having to do everything digitally and basically having to flip the script to find a new way of approaching our pedagogy has made me take a step back and really look at our core values to find out how we can still meet and align with these goals and mission even if the method changes out of necessity.

From a logistical standpoint, it’s been challenging! So much of what we do is ephemeral and depends on in-person interaction - the growth, the magic that happens in the classroom – often comes out of those interactions. So trying to capture that aspect of it and still allow for students to connect with each other and the material, to still allow students to have multiple artistic avenues into exploring text and art have been what my focus has been on. How do I use these new tools and this different platform to meet these goals and what are the benefits to digital learning that help amplify these goals that maybe we couldn’t do when we were only in person?

MW: On that note, have you noticed if there’s a difference in the kind of art that students are creating? Do you think what they want to talk about is changing, or are you still seeing similar themes in their work in the classroom?

KC: I would say both. It’s impossible to ignore what’s happening. We feel it, students and young people absolutely feel it. I’ve experienced students talking frankly about how they’re struggling with remote learning, the pandemic and the isolation – feeling like they’re missing out on classroom interactions and milestones that we all experience when we’re young. I was just talking to a student the other day who is struggling with the fact that her high school graduation is going to be virtual this year.
They’ve definitely made art that is responding very specifically to the isolation and the need for connection that they’re going through now – that radical empathy that we’re all growing in real time. At the same time, I also have seen and experienced a lot of students wanting to engage with and make art that is purely escapist – fantastical, irreverent, lighthearted, silly, weird – you name it. So I think using our programming that we facilitate with students has been just as useful in unpacking the current moment head-on, but it’s also created a solid container for students to go off into other worlds they’re creating and really lean into art, stories and characters that allow them to experience something different than the monotony of their day to day virtual learning.

I would say in some ways that’s not much of a departure from what our program elicited before – we always had a healthy blend of trying to hold space for students making art about themselves and the world while also allowing them to let their imaginations roam free and revel in the possibility of all these worlds they could create. The urgency of both of those have definitely been amplified.

**MW:** It sounds like it’s been such a fruitful shift! Do you find that being able to connect digitally with students makes the classes more accessible, or are there hindrances?

**KC:** I do think in some ways virtual learning has made teaching and arts education more accessible, in that it doesn’t require students to be participating in-person, but it has laid bare the inequity and lack of access to the necessities of digital learning – reliable internet, working computers, microphones, cameras. All the things you need for remote learning to work.

I think one of the biggest challenges has been for students that struggle a little more with having attention on them. In person, we get to warm them up because they’re surrounded by their peers and on their feet creating art; the idea of just being the person in the camera with everyone’s attention on you can be really overwhelming or isolating for a student. Getting students to turn on cameras and engage has been one of the biggest barriers, not just for me but for classroom teachers, other arts organizations and youth programs. But that has shown me that the simple act of turning the camera on to let themselves be seen, witnessed, and vulnerable with their peers – that’s a new measure of growth we’re seeing in our programs.

**MW:** How do you think this type of learning is going to impact how you create classes going forward? Do you think that virtual learning will become a standard form of teaching even when we’re going into in-person classrooms again?

**KC:** I think ultimately the goal of any education is to provide as much access and as many avenues into learning as possible so that we’re meeting students where they’re at in any shape and form. I think that now that we know we have this capacity to offer programming virtually, if there are students who are better served through that format I think it’s absolutely worth considering how to incorporate that into our planning moving forward.

When I think about WT specifically, I think some of the ways in which we’ve pivoted and utilized technology in a more intentional way in our programming is definitely something I want to hang on to, even after we’re all back in person.
**MW:** To end on a fun note, what are some of your favorite moments in class?

**KC:** There are so many – one game I often play is called “Enter The Frame” where students leave their camera space empty and then I give them a prompt to enter the space with that specific type of energy – something like, “enter the frame like you’re late for a test.”

One of my favorite ones to get them using not just their bodies and facial expressions, but to help them think outside the box and about their intentions is, “enter the frame as if you’ve never seen a computer before.” I facilitate some questions about the computer and I’ve had a lot of students sniff the computer, playing with it – and there was a student who in the middle of this accidentally signed off Zoom during this exercise and when he came back he typed in the chat, “my dang nose closed the window!!” He was really committing to exploring this computer!

That’s a silly one but there are lots of funny moments about technology going awry in class. I think students really recognize and appreciate some of the unexpected humor that comes from all of us being at home and letting each other into a slice of our home lives every day.

**MW:** I feel like having this creative space where they get to just explore and see their friends and make art is probably a really fulfilling experience to have in their weeks! They get to just create and be weird and be kids with our programs.

**KC:** Oh yeah! I think the students come alive during those theatrical, exploratory games because it gives them a reason and a space to be silly during a time that has felt so heavy and serious. Even though this school year does not look like a normal school year with WT education, what I’m trying to make sure is that all students have the same quality of artistic and educational experience in these programs – that they’re still empowered and have the agency to explore the questions they want to in these residencies in the same way we would be ensuring in the classroom. When so much is out of our control, it’s important to hone in on what we do have control over.
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Try your hand at a custom cocktail—specially created for each of our productions by Mixed metaPours!

BACKHAND SMASH

1 TABLESPOON (OR ¼ WEDGE) OF KIWI FRUIT
1.5 OZ. GIAMBRONE LIMONCELLO
.5 OZ. GALLIANO
.25 OZ. SIMPLE SYRUP
2.0 OZ. LEMON-LIME GATORADE
1 OZ. TWISTED ALCHEMY LEMON JUICE
TOP WITH SPARKLING WATER

MUDDLE KIWI IN ROCKS GLASS. COMBINE REMAINING INGREDIENTS, ADD ICE. STIR WELL.
HATE TO HYDRATE?

This refreshing mocktail will help you stay calm, cool and collected even in the midst of a tense game (or while watching an intense theatrical event!)

1 CUP ICE
2-3 OZ. COCONUT WATER
1 CUP FRESH OR FROZEN PINEAPPLE CHUNKS
1/2 OZ. TRADER JOE’S “NO JOKE GINGER” JUICE SHOT

Blend in blender or smoothie maker for 10 seconds or until slushy. Serve in hurricane glass.
YORSH, MINE AND OURS

1 BOTTLE CHILLED AMERICAN BEER (BLUE MOON WORKS GREAT!)
1 OZ. RUSSIAN VODKA
FRESH APPLE SLICE FOR GARNISH.

POUR BEER INTO PILSNER OR BEER STEIN.
ADD VODKA. NO NEED TO STIR.
GARNISH WITH APPLE SLICE.

All of our signature cocktail creations are designed by WT Cocktail Consultant Cheryl Rich Heisler & Mixed metaPours.
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