

LOVE LETTERS

BY **A. R. GURNEY**

Directed by
Michael O'Neill

Lighting Design
Kia Rogers

Hair and Makeup Design
Erin Hopwood

Set Design
Jake Salgado

Costume Design
Maxine Devitt

MARCH 2-5, 2023

THE CAST

Part One

Andrew Makepeace Ladd IIILucas Phillips '26
Melissa Gardner.....Benry James '25

Part Two

Andrew Makepeace Ladd IIIJeff Helm
Melissa Gardner.....Nancy McCreary Waters

There will be one fifteen minute intermission after Part I.

LOVE LETTERS was presented at The Long Wharf Theatre, November 4, 1988 - December 11, 1988; M. Edgar Rosenblum, Executive Director; Arvin Brown, Artistic Director.

Special thanks to the R. K. Laros Foundation for their support of the visiting artists affiliated with this production.

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PRODUCTION STAFF

Director.....	Michael O'Neill
Technical Director & Production Stage Manager...	Alexander Owens
Scenic Designer.....	Jake Salgado
Costume Designer.....	Maxine Devitt
Properties Designer.....	Jake Salgado
Lighting Designer.....	Kia Rogers
Stage Manager.....	Gabby Piccolo '24
Backstage Crew.....	Maddie Perry '24
Producing Artistic Director.....	Mary Jo Lodge
Hair & Makeup Design.....	Erin Hopwood
Costume Crew Lead.....	Ceci Montufar '23
Lighting Board Operator.....	John Griffith '25
Sound Board Operator.....	Kate Stadter '26
Program Design.....	Matthew White* '23
Shop Assistants.....	Laura Coffey '26, Owen Eltz '26, James Hixenbaugh '25, Aven Lancaster '26, Lavender Layre '26, Timothy Mayrose* '23, Seamus McGee '26, Thalia Newman '23, Madaleine Perry '24, Sebastiano Riverso '24, Kate Stadter '26, Anthony Wanta '26, Professor Salgado's THTR 270 Scenic Painting course

* denotes a member of Alpha Psi Omega Honor Society

Theater Department Faculty

Suzanne Westfall, Professor of Theater, Department Head
Mary Jo Lodge, Professor of Theater, Producing Artistic Director
Michael O'Neill, Professor of Theater
Jake Salgado, Assistant Professor of Theater
Alexander Owens, Technical Director and Production Manager
Kathy Swan-Fisher, Adjunct Professor of Theater

THE COMPANY

Maxine Devitt (Costume Designer): Maxine is a recent graduate of Purchase College with a degree in theatrical design. Lately, she has been splitting her time working on both theater and television production. Latest credits include shopper for Paper Mill Playhouse's productions of *On Your Feet* and *The Sound of Music*, and costume production assistant on HBO's *And Just Like That*.

John Griffith '25 (Lighting Board Operator): John is a junior Theater major from Bryn Mawr, PA.

Jeff Helm (Andrew Makepeace Ladd III - Part II): Professor Helm is a faculty member in Lafayette's Mechanical Engineering Department. This is his eleventh production at Lafayette. He has been active both in front and behind the scenes, acting in College's productions of *Proof*, *Inherit the Wind* and *The Laramie Project*, designing the sets for *Black Comedy*, *Heddatron*, *Disgraced*, *Metamorphoses*, *Talk Radio*, *Frankenstein 2029* and *Ubu Roi*, and designing the robots for *Heddatron*.

Benry James '25 (Melissa Gardner - Part II): Benry is a second-year English and geology major from Washington, DC. Previously, Benry has performed as an ensemble voice in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, as #00 in *The Wolves*, and as the oracle Pythio in *Head Over Heels*.

Erin Hopwood (Hair and Makeup): Erin is a graduate of Kutztown University's Theater Department and has had the opportunity to work at several of the area's high schools, colleges and universities. Erin started designing at Lafayette in 2011 on the musical *Rent*, and she has costumed and/or designed make-up and hair for many department productions including *The Penelopiad*, *The Grinch*, *Metamorphoses* and this season's productions of *Arcadia* and *Head Over Heels*.

Mary Jo Lodge (Producing Artistic Director): Professor Lodge is a Professor of Theater at Lafayette, and a theater performer, director, choreographer and scholar. She has published numerous articles and book chapters on the musical, and has directed and choreographed a wide range of professional, college and summer stock productions. At Lafayette, these include *The Secret Garden*, *She Kills Monsters*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *The Wolves* and *Head Over Heels*. Her edited collection *Dueling Grounds: Revolution and Revelation in the Musical "Hamilton,"* was published by Oxford University Press in May of 2021. Her next edited collection, *Milestones in Musical Theater*, will be released by Routledge in June 2023.

Ceci Montufar '23 (Costume Crew Lead): Ceci is a Government and Law and English double major. She has worked on costumes for several Lafayette productions. She is also involved in the Forensics Team and the Yleana Leadership Foundation.

Alexander Owens (Production Manager/Technical Director): In his time at Lafayette, Alexander has collaborated on a successful grant for the creation of the Immersive Arts Lab, developed a fellowship for Engineering students interested in theater, constructed a swimming pool onstage for *Metamorphoses*, and oversaw the move into and opening of William C Buck Hall.

Michael O'Neill (Director): Professor O'Neill most recently directed *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* in the Weiss Theater. His forthcoming book, *Buffalo, Broadway, and Beyond*, which chronicles the theater history of his hometown through the lives of Buffalo's most accomplished theater artists, includes a chapter on A. R. Gurney, Jr. Professor O'Neill is the author of *Lost Again: A Novel in Stories*, available through amazon.com. Website: www.redhand-writing.com

Maddie Perry '24 (Backstage Crew): Maddie is a junior Mechanical Engineering and Theater double major, in her 7th year working backstage. She served as Assistant Stage Manager for *The Wolves* and *Head Over Heels* (where she was also Assistant Technical Director), while also working as a Scene Shop Assistant.

Gabriella Piccolo '24 (Stage Manager): Gabriella is a junior Mechanical Engineering major with a minor in Theater from Staten Island, New York. Previously she has worked on the College's productions of *Arcadia* and *The Wolves*. This is Gabriella's first show as stage manager.

Lucas Phillips '26 (Andrew Makepeace Ladd III - Part I): Lucas Phillips is a first year student from Newport Beach, California. Some of his previous performances include Banquo in *Macbeth*, Oliver Rivers in *Puffs*, Karl the Giant in *Big Fish*, Gangster Two in *The Drowsy Chaperone*, and Ted in *Peter and the Starcatcher*. He plans to major in Mathematics.

Kia Rogers (Lighting Designer): Kia is a New York City based lighting designer and a member of LAByrnth Theater Company and a Creative Partner with Flux Theater Ensemble, both based in NYC. International credits: Lighting Designer for *The Baby Monitor*, *Rome and Cagliari, Italy 2021*, and *Belgrade, Serbia, 2019*. Associate Lighting Designer for *Slutforart/98.6* in Gothenburg, Sweden, 2011. Film credits: *Georgia & Me*, *Happy Days*, *Way Down* and *Hot Angry Mom* web series. Awards: Outstanding Lighting Design for *Real*, 2019 and *Jane The Plain*, 2014 by the New York Innovative Theater Awards, Outstanding Lighting Design for *Mr. Toole*, 2016 by the Midtown International Theater Festival.

Jake Salgado (Set Designer): Professor Salgado is a Pennsylvania based designer and technician for plays, musicals, and live events, and he is thrilled to join this production in his role as scenic designer. Jake is the newly appointed Assistant Professor of Scenog

raphy at Lafayette, and he designed *Head Over Heels* for the Theater Department in November. His most recent previous works, prior to joining Lafayette, include scenic designs for *Sanctity*, an original piece performed by Atlanta based Ballethnic Dance Company, as part of the 2022 Kennedy Center series, *Reframing The Narrative*, Crane River Theater's Summer production of *Sister Act*, in Kearney, NE, and the 25 year anniversary production of *Rent* at the University of Georgia.

Kate Stadter '26 (Sound Board Operator): Kate Stadter is a first year student and intends to double major in History and Computer Science. This is her second show at Lafayette.

Nancy McCreary Waters (Melissa Gardner - Part II): Associate Professor of Biology and Faculty Health Professions Advisor Nancy McCreary Waters discovered theater accidentally, when cast as Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Other performances ensued both collegiate and at summer regional Actors' Equity theaters; favorites are Molly in *The Mousetrap*, Van Helsing in *Dracula*, Perdita in *A Winter's Tale*, Louise in *Gypsy* and Honey in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolfe?* Additional representative ensemble roles include *The Music Man*, *Pippin* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, all shows for which she also did choreography, a position she executed at Lafayette with Suzanne Westfall's direction of *The Canterbury Tales*. Appearing onstage at Lafayette as Lucy Brown in *ThreePenny Opera*, the last-ever-performed Faculty Show, and as Eva in *Evita*, she was directed more recently by Mary Jo Lodge in *Hear me Roar*, by Michael O'Neill in *Sonnets from Shakespeare*, by Suzanne Westfall with Ed Kerns in *Frankenstein 2029* and by Megan Schmidt '17 in the film short *Benny*. She is elated to work at her advanced age with this talented cast and crew of *Love Letters*.

Matthew White* '23 (Program Design): Matthew is a senior Government/Law and Theater double major. Matthew has music directed for the Lafayette Mar-Keys, is a member of APO, an Excel Scholar, and an Arts Houser.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As an ongoing exercise in my World Theater class this semester, the students—all thirty-six of them—have been taking quizzes in the form of writing letters on marbled stationery. Look closely at the dozens of letters littering our stage, and you might find a scrawled message to Andy explaining the climactic scene of the classic Chinese play, *The Circle of Chalk*, or a penciled note to Melissa describing Bertolt Brecht's influence on Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit*. This exercise in creating props demonstrates at a most basic level the relationship between the classroom and live production fundamental to theater education. It provided me, moreover, a window into a world where my students and just about everybody else communicate by text, IM, Instagram, Email, and TikTok. As one of my World Theater students confessed, "I've never written a real letter before." Our steadfast Technical Director, Alex Owens, has handled an entire new production in our season schedule with his usual organizational magic and made *Love Letters*

In a 2014 television interview, A. R. Gurney described *Love Letters* as a tribute to the lost art of letter writing. "A lot of yourself went into these letters," the playwright said. "I tried to work with the essential element of that kind of letter which really isn't written anymore." One of the great discoveries *Love Letters* can provide my students and our audiences is the power of intimacy captured in the act of putting pen to paper, preferably in a disciplined cursive style, with the goal of revealing that intimacy to a reader who very likely would return the favor. The letters between Andy and Melissa chronicle the complexities of a relationship lasting over fifty years and mirror the changing world of the twentieth century in which the polite and genteel customs of the privileged class—including letter writing—began to dissipate and disappear. Gurney is able to convey all this through written words read aloud as we listen to what is said as much as to what remains unsaid.

Gurney originally conceived *Love Letters* as an epistolary novella, but when he submitted the manuscript to *The New Yorker*, he promptly received a rejection in which the editors curtly reminded him that the magazine does not publish plays. This inspired him to read the piece for an audience at the New York Public Library with Holland Taylor as Melissa and Gurney himself as Andy. That initial success led to a production of *Love Letters* at Connecticut's Long Wharf Theater in 1988 and one year later off-Broadway and Broadway productions. *Love Letters*, which was a finalist for the 1988 Pulitzer Prize in Drama, quickly became a theatrical phenomenon fueled largely by established stage, screen, and television stars eager to test their acting chops performing a piece where the playwright insisted they not memorize their lines. The event—Gurney always referred to *Love Letters* as an event and not a play—featured, among others, Colleen Dewhurst and Jason Robards, Lynn Redgrave and John Clark, Stockard Channing and John Rubinstein, Jane Curtin and Edward Herrmann, Kate Nelligan and David Dukes, Polly Bergen and Robert Vaughn, Timothy Hutton and Elizabeth McGovern, Swoosie Kurtz and Richard Thomas, Elaine Stritch and Cliff Robertson, Nancy Marchand and Fritz Weaver, and Robert Foxworth and Elizabeth Montgomery.

Over the subsequent four decades and into the present day, as witnessed by this performance at Lafayette College, *Love Letters* has become an international success and the most performed of Gurney's fifty works for the theater. I am particularly gratified to direct a dual cast of two promising young actors and two seasoned veterans as Melissa and Andy. This amazing quartet eloquently delves beneath the sparkling wit we expect from Gurney to reveal the sadness and remorse that no one, not even the very rich, can completely avoid.

I am particularly grateful to my faculty colleagues and dear friends over many years, Nancy McCreary Waters and Jeff Helm, who demonstrate every day in the lab, the classroom, and the rehearsal hall how the sciences and engineering continue to enhance the theater experience for our students and our audiences. I also would like to thank Assistant Professor of Theater Jake Salgado for stepping into the job of scenic designer for *Love Letters* with little notice but with a lot of patience with this particular director's unconventional ideas.

Gurney grew up in my hometown of Buffalo, New York, which in *Love Letters*, is thinly and ironically referred to as the Land of Oz, and I count among the most memorable moments of my long career a lunchtime interview I had with his sister, Evelyn Gurney Miller, at the Saturn Club on Delaware Avenue in Buffalo as part of my research on the then recently deceased playwright's formative years for my forthcoming book, *Buffalo, Broadway, and Beyond*. Evelyn has since passed, but I have thought about her often during the rehearsal process of *Love Letters*. I can only hope that a bit of her graciousness and tactful honesty help illuminate your experience of the lost world of defiant aristocratic naivete to which *Love Letters* masterfully pays wry homage.

-Michael O'Neill

**Special thanks to:
The Paul ('88) and Karyn Staubi Endowment for Theatre Arts
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In the theater, an angel is a divine person who makes generous donations so theater can happen right here on earth. Support from our Angels has brought in professional designers and choreographers, supported our students competing in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, and sponsored lectures by playwrights.

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