

DIRECTED BY WYNNE CHAN





IN REPERTORY APRIL 19 - MAY 12

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ARTISTIC NOTE

By offering A. R. Gurney's *Love Letters* (1988) and Lloyd Suh's *The Chinese Lady* (2018) in tandem, The Pear brings together two one-act, two-character plays, each covering a lifetime. In both, an unconventional woman brings what director Wynne Chan calls "joy and disruption" to the life of a more disciplined man, as the confidence and exuberance of youth are followed by hard-won knowledge. And in both plays, prejudices and social constraints affect much of the action. Serious as those problems are, the characters' clear-eyed views of a limiting world are enlivened by their often comic and ironic awareness of their situations.

Gurney conceived *Love Letters* as a short novel but discovered that he had actually written a play. Many actors, famous and not, have taken on its two roles, Andy and Melissa, often as part of a rapidly changing cast. At The Pear, each on-stage couple is also a couple in real life, but they do not necessarily correspond in gender, race, age, or otherwise to the characters they are playing. As a result, we are kept aware that we are seeing a performance. Yet in a sense, letters themselves are performances—presentations and representations of something other than themselves.

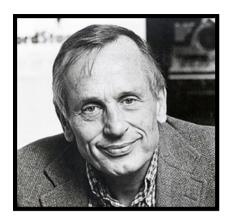
Andy and Melissa were born into wealthy WASP families in 1930 and are trained from childhood to follow the customs of a rigid society, and while Andy conforms, Melissa rebels. He values his stable family, while she feels that she has "no family" because hers is dysfunctional. Her rebellion may be a reason that Andy is attracted to her, but it is also a source of his worries about her. Without a support system, she is a "lost princess" he would like to rescue, but rescue comes at a cost.

Lloyd Suh has said that he wrote *The Chinese Lady* in "a different cultural moment" than today, but, if anything, it is more relevant now than six years ago, because the Covid epidemic and other events have intensified anti-Asian American and Pacific Island (AAPI) prejudices in the United States. The play begins with a true historical situation, the presence of Afong Moy on a stage in New York in 1834. She was the first Chinese woman to arrive in the United States, coming at a time when the aesthetic attraction of chinoiserie lingered and Chinese immigration was not yet seen as a threat, but also when Asians were often believed to be radically different from Caucasians.

As Suh says, the play is not "a recreation of history" but a play about today, so Afong and her interpreter, Atung, speak contemporary English, and the actors represent rather than embody them. That is, we always know that we are being shown an interpretation of events rather than a recreation of her show—which itself, as Afong says, takes place in a room "unlike any room in China" and is inhabited by a lady "unlike any lady to ever live." It too is an imagined construction, not an image of literal truth. The way she and the initially mysterious Atung react to their situations and to events in America pushes us into examining our own feelings more than those of her 1834 audience. Whether we are AAPI ourselves or not, we will certainly be moved by Afong's and Atung's emotions, insights, and desires.

Different as these two plays may seem at first, both ask us to examine America's past cultural prejudices and constraints but, more immediately, those of today as well.

-Susan Petit



ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

A.R. "Pete" Gurney (1930-2017) was born into a prominent Buffalo family. A graduate of Williams College and the Yale School of Drama, he taught humanities and literature at MIT in the 1960s and 1970s but also wrote plays in his free time. The Off-Broadway success of *The Dining Room* (1981), a serio-comic study of wealthy WASP society in decline, encouraged him to become a full-time dramatist, as well as a novelist and screenwriter. His witty plays reflect his upper-class background, viewed wryly from a detached but fond perspective. One trait he said he admired in that culture is its "commitment to duty," but his own difficult choice to become a playwright defied his family's traditions.

He said he was able to write *The Cocktail Hour* (1988), in which a young playwright confronts his family, only after his father's death, because his father thought that his writing was "embarrassing the family and using language which he thought was vulgar and unattractive." Gurney's best-known plays include the whimsical Sylvia (1995), in which a middle-aged man falls in love with the family dog, played by a human actor. Gurney was honored in 2016 with a lifetime achievement Obie award. He and his wife Molly lived in Boston until his theatrical success led them to move to New York City. They had four children during their 60-year marriage.

Love Letters is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. www.concordtheatricals.com

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Lighting Designer Sonya Wong

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SHOW RUNTIME 100 minutes with a 15 minute intermission.



Cast

Bryan Moriarty and Vanessa Alvarez
Paul Braverman and Robyn Ginsburg Braverman
Curtis Murray and Naomi Evans
Chris Mahle and Kristin Walter
Michael Saenz and Michael Rhone
Joseph Alvarado and Eiko Moon-Yamamoto
Michael Champlin and Katie O'Bryon-Champlin
Fred Pitts and Kelly Rinehart
Max Tachis and Roneet Aliza Rahamim

The roles of ANDREW and MELISSA will alternate.

Performance Schedule

Fri., April 19: Moriarty & Alvarez

Sat., April 20: Braverman & Ginsburg Braverman

Fri., April 26: Murray & Evans Sat., April 27: Mahle & Walter Thurs., May 2: Saenz & Rhone

Fri., May 3: Alvarado & Moon-Yamamoto

Sat., May 4: Champlin & O'Bryon-Champlin

Fri., May 10: Pitts & Rinehart Sat., May 11: Tachis & Rahamim

Thank you to Joey Alvarado, Eiko Moon-Yamamoto, Joann Wu, Bryan Knauber, Megan Columbus, William Brown, and Sarah Conner-Brown for workshopping and developing the script for *Love Letters*.

Exchanging on April 19th



Bryan Moriarty (ANDREW) was last seen in The Pear's Noises Off! Previous Pear credits include The Millionth Production of A Christmas Carol, Enemy of the People, Pear Slices 2017, and Major Barbara. He has been performing at theatre companies across the Bay Area since 2012, and his other recent credits include Sunday in the Park with George (Los Altos Stage Company) and The Thanksgiving Play (City Lights Theatre Company). He will be seen next as the Monster in LASC's production of Young Frankenstein. Offstage, Bryan is a L&D content developer at Apple. He is also grateful to be sharing the stage with his wife, Vanessa, and for her constant support.



Vanessa Alvarez (MELISSA) returns to the Pear after last being seen in 2022's Pear Slices. A Bay Area native, some of her past work includes Nurse in Shakespeare in Love and Sunday in the Park with George; Connie Gonzalez in Roe; Woman 2 in I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change; Sherry in Distracted; Betty in The Great American Trailer Park Musical; and Daniela in In the Heights. Mucho love to her family and friends for their continued support on and off stage.

Exchanging on April 20th



Paul Braverman (ANDREW) is a Bay Area playwright and actor. His plays have received dozens of productions and readings in Bay Area venues, as well as nationally and internationally. He was a Heideman Award finalist in 2009 for The Alpha Bindleman, and several times has been a wild-card finalist at the world's largest short play festival - Short & Sweet in Sydney, Australia, most recently with Stuck in the Middle (The Hot Dog play). As an actor, favorite roles include Roberts in *Mister Roberts*, Lank in *Crazy For* You, and Moon in The Real Inspector Hound. He and his wife Robyn co-produce The Pear Theatre's annual festival of new play readings, Fresh Produce, having presented over 30 play readings since 2014. Paul is a member of The Dramatists Guild of America, and is a co-founding member of The Pear Theatre Playwright Guild.



Robyn Ginsburg Braverman (MELISSA) has enjoyed a lengthy career in voiceover work leading to supporting Pear Theatre, from co-founding through board membership and beyond. A lifelong fan of new works and artist development, she has been developing new works since 2002. For sixteen years, she was deeply involved with Pear Theatre's annual short play festival, Pear Slices, from naming through producing, designing, and directing. Along with her playwright husband Paul, she's brought Pear audiences dozens of full-length developmental readings of new works from the Pear Playwrights Guild beginning in 2002, which morphed into a multi-day event known as Fresh Produce. She currently serves as director and production coordinator. Robyn thanks everyone for their support of local theatre. Enduring love to Paul and the Tribe.

Exchanging on April 26th



Curtis Murray (ANDREW) is honored to appear on The Pear stage for the first time. Previously he was seen as Mike Dillard/Tom in Working: A Musical and Chino in West Side Story with SCP. He moved to California a few years ago for love. Outside of theater he enjoys active sports, as well as attending movies and plays with his fiancé Naomi. This is their third performance together.



Naomi Evans (MELISSA) is so excited to be a part of Love Letters, her first show at The Pear! She was last seen as Madge Geisel in City Light's production of The Game's Afoot. A few other credits include Pearl in Miss You Like Hell (CLTC), Delores in Working: A Musical (SCP), and Seneca in Men on Boats (PAP). Naomi holds a B.A. in Theatre Arts from Santa Clara University, with a minor in Musical Theatre.

Exchanging on April 27th



Kristin Walter (MELISSA) is a frequent performer at The Pear, having appeared as Belinda in Noises Off, Frankie in Frankie and Johnny..., Debra in Kimberly Akimbo, and Jessie in Sweat. Other Bay Area credits include M'Lynn in Steel Magnolias, Siobhan in The Curious Incident..., Sherri in Admissions, and Amy in *Company* at Los Altos Stage Company and Rona Lisa Peretti in The 25th Annual... Spelling Bee at Foothill. In addition to her work onstage, she directed Puffs at Palo Alto Players and is the Education Director of Los Altos Stage Company/Los Altos Youth Theatre. She is thrilled to be performing again with her husband of 25 years, Chris Mahle, in support of the wonderful Pear Theatre!



Chris Mahle (ANDREW) has worked with The Pear since spring of 2016 performing with his wife, Kristin, in *Pear Slices*. Since then he's appeared on the Pear stage in *Eight Nights, The Thanksgiving Play,* and *Noises Off.* In each of these shows he's performed with either his wife or his son, Max. Other shows include *The 39 Steps* (Tabard Theatre) *Chinglish, One Man Two Guvnors,* and *Misery* (Palo Alto Players). Chris' day job is teaching Drama at JLS Middle School, and Stage Tech at Gunn High School.

Exchanging on May 2nd



Michael Rhone last appeared at The Pear as Frederick in the sold out production of Noises Off, and is currently performing as Oliver Hix in The Music Man at Palo Alto Players. Other recent credits include A Little Night Music (Fredrik) at South Bay Musical Theatre, Sunday in the Park With George (Jules/Bob) at Los Altos Stage Company, The Mystery of Edwin Drood (Rev. Crisparkle) at Foothill Music Theatre, and Fun Home (Bruce) at City Lights Theater Company.

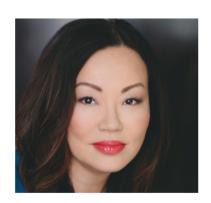


Michael Saenz is excited to be returning to the Pear Theatre. The last time he was seen on Pear's stage was for Shaw's Major Barbara where he played Stephen Undershaft/Snobby Price. Most recently, he has choreographed Young Frankenstein and Something Rotten with WVLO and is also a frequent performer on Bay Area stages, seen most recently in SBMT's Singin' in the Rain as the lovable goofball, Cosmo Brown as well as the taxi-flipping Chip in SBMT's On the Town. He would like to thank his husband for continually cheering him on and believing in him. #loveyoumeanit

Exchanging on May 3rd



Joseph Alvarado (ANDREW) is honored to be among the phenomenal cast and crew of The Chinese Lady, his first production with The Pear Theatre. He has performed on stages throughout the Bay Area and most recently appeared as 'Beau' and 'Mr. Upson' in *Mame* (42nd Street Moon). Some of his most cherished experiences include playing 'Resten' in *The Language Archive* (Masquers Playhouse), 'Jack' in *Aunt Jack* (New Conservatory Theatre Center), 'Chin' in *Flower Drum Song* (Palo Alto Players), 'Jacob' in *La Cage aux Folles* (Bay Area Musicals) and 'Bobby' in *Company* (City College of San Francisco). He was born, raised and is still living in San Francisco and shares his home with his 18-year old cat, Malcolm.



Eiko Moon-Yamamoto (MELISSA) is a multihyphenate artist born in Tokyo with roots in Seoul and Hawaii. Recent credits: Sleeping Beauty (Presidio Theatre), Cymbeline (San Francisco Shakespeare Festival), Clue, Follies (San Francisco Playhouse), Into the Woods (Mountain Play), Disenchanted! (3Below), and the world premiere of Downtown Crossing (Company One), and M'Lynn in Steel Magnolias (Sierra Repertory). They've performed in workshops/ readings at The Pear, Magic Theatre, Playwrights Foundation, Crowded Fire, ZSpace, Marin Shakespeare, PlayGround, and The Ground Floor at Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Upcoming: Bright Star (42nd Street Moon) and The Truer History of the Chan Family (film). Eiko is a proud member of SAG-AFTRA and Ring of Keys. eiko@eikoyamamoto.com | @eikoyh

Exchanging on May 4th



Michael Champlin (ANDREW) Is thrilled to be returning to The Pear, the place he met his wife, with whom he has the joy of sharing the stage today. He has been seen in TheatreWorks' In Every Generation, LASC's one-man show, Thom Pain (based on nothing), PA Players' Doll's House Pt. 2, (SFBATCC Award winner), and most recently at San Jose Stage in People Where They Are and Hangmen. Next up, Michael and Katie will be collaborating again on Murder on the Orient Express at Palo Alto Players. Much love and thanks to Katie, Jack, Henry, & Cain!



Katie O'Bryon Champlin (MELISSA) recently served as the director for Pear's production of Noises Off-- but it's been awhile since she has been seen onstage for the company! At The Pear's old location she appeared as Varya in *The Cherry Orchard* (alongside her husband Michael Champlin), as June in The Fifth of July (alongside Michael Champlin) and as Elinor in Northanger Abbey (where she first met Michael Champlin!). It is a special honor to share the stage with him again in Love Letters. Next month, Katie will be directing *Murder on* The Orient Express at Palo Alto Players, and later this year she will be appearing in *POTUS* at Pacific Repertory Theatre. Much love to **Jack and Henry!**

Exchanging on May 10th



Fred Pitts (ANDREW) is excited to be back at The Pear where he was last seen as Johnny in Frankie and Johnny in the Claire de Lune. He was worked with several bay area theater companies including San Jose Stage, City Lights, Palo Alto Players, Shotgun, Los Altos Stage, African-American Shakespeare and New Conservatory Theatre. His first solo show entitled Aren't You...? just completed its fourth run at The Marsh (SF, Berkeley). He hopes you enjoy the sow. He is as curious about this project as you are.



Kelly Rinehart (MELISSA) is thrilled to be back at the Pear Theatre. Even though she has no idea what is about to happen. Previously, she played Frankie in Frankie and Johnny in the Claire de Lune, playing opposite her husband in that production as well, and was part of the ensemble for Pear Slices 2011. She was most recently seen as Laurie in *Pipeline* at the African-American Shakespeare Company and Jane/Judith in To Master the Art at Contra Costa Civic Theatre. She has worked with Altarena, Dragon, Custom Made, Hillbarn, Palo Alto Players, Ragged Wing, SF Olympians Festival, and Those Women Productions, among others. Her day jobs include being a speech-language pathologist specializing in AAC (augmentative alternative communication) and a teaching artist doing improv with youth in long-term hospital stays.

Exchanging on May 11th



Max Tachis (ANDREW) is excited to return to the Pear after *Taking Steps* (Tristram) and *Geeks vs. Zombies* (Loomis). He has been seen most recently in *Mrs. Christie* (William/Collins) at TheatreWorks, *Waiting for Next* (Marcus) at City Lights Theater Company, and *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* (Ira) at Hillbarn Theatre. His voice can also be heard as part of the audience laugh track in *Conan Without Borders: Greenland*.



Roneet Aliza Rahamim (MELISSA) is a native Bay Area theatre artist. She was last seen on The Pear's stage in their brilliant production of *Taking Steps*. Other Pear credits include *August: Osage County,* and *Arcadia*. She has performed most recently with City Lights Theater Company in their production of *Nora: A Doll's House*. Roneet's directing credits include *12 Angry Women* (Foothill Theater), *Twelfth Night* (Palo Alto Players), *The Thanksgiving Play* (City Lights), and was assistant director for *In Every Generation* (TheaterWorks Silicon Valley). www.Roneet.com

PRODUCTION TEAM

Wynne Chan (Director) is a Hong Kong-American director and performer. She is thrilled to return to The Pear to direct these two beautiful shows. She was last seen on The Pear stage as Aphrodite, Apollo & others is *Metamorphoses*. Favorite credits: Directing *Tell Me on a Sunday* by Andrew Lloyd Webber (SDC Productions), associate directing *Chinglish* by David Henry Hwang (San Francisco Playhouse), directing *The Language Archive* by Julia Cho (Masquers Playhouse), and performing in *Assassins* by Stephen Sondheim (Hillbarn Theatre). As a director, her goal is to tell more Asian and Asian American stories. Later this year, she will be directing *She Kills Monsters* by Qui Nguyen (Plethos Productions) and *Dragonbeard* by Clara Hsu, the first original Cantonese play in the Bay Area. See what she's up to at wynnechan.info or follow her on Instagram: wynne.chan.

Sonya Wong (Lighting Designer) is a lighting designer and actor based in the Bay Area. She graduated from UC Irvine with honors in lighting design & technology and a minor in linguistics. She is excited to be working with The Pear again after having designed *The Piano Teacher* and *Three Tall Women* in 2022. Other lighting design credits include *The Madwoman of Chaillot, The Macbeth Project, Two Sisters and a Piano*, and *Agnes of God*. In her free time, Sonya enjoys casual gaming, reading, and playing badminton. Website: www.sonya-wong.com

Kelly Weber Barraza (Stage & Production Manager) is ecstatic to be in her 10th season here at The Pear Theatre. Some of her favorite Pear productions are *Noises Off, Taking Steps, Eight Nights, August: Osage County,* and *What You Will* to name a few. Other favorite productions: *Bright Star* (PAP), *Yellow Face* (LASC), *The Bridges of Madison County* (SBMT), and working with the "Misfit of Magic", Ed Alonzo. Kelly gives her love to her incredibly supportive husband, Michael, and their fur babies: Kiyap, Sopaipilla, Houdini, and Baxter.

Louis Stone-Collonge (Set Designer and Technical Director) has been involved in local theatre on and off since 1979 when he would tag along with his father building sets with Montalvo Players in the Carriage House Theatre at Montalvo. He is founder of The Audacity Performing Arts Project serving Title 1 schools in the South Bay since 2012 with arts education and performing arts programming. In addition to working at Audacity and The Pear, Louis currently serves as technical theatre coach at Cupertino High School and technical theatre advisor at Stratford High School. He holds a degree in Religious Studies from San Jose State University, he has been sober for 12 years and we dare you to ask him about why he likes Michel Foucault or why he likes Gramsci's take on hegemony. Louis shares his chaotic and charmed existence with his beloved wife and life partner, Michelle, their daughter, Caitlin, and two ridiculous Italian Greyhounds.

Daniel Cai (Assistant Director) is in constant pursuit of theatre that is experimental in form and rejects simple resolutions. He is unreasonably excited by workshop rehearsals, ensemble movement, and scene transitions. Informed by his hyphenated identities, he cares deeply about representation and filling in incomplete narratives. When not making art, he makes self-driving cars at Waymo. Previously, he graduated from Stanford University where he found his family away from home with the Asian American Theatre Project, serving on the Board for two years and as Artistic Director for one. Selected credits include: *Caught* by Christopher Chen (director), *The Good Person of Szechwan* by Bertolt Brecht (assistant director), and *Durango* by Julia Cho (technical director). Daniel is equal parts thrilled and humbled to be making his Bay Area theatre debut and wishes to thank the Pear for this opportunity!

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