PORTLAND CENTER STAGE

Presents

Sex with Strangers

By Laura Eason
Directed by Brandon Woolley

October 10 – November 22, 2015

Artistic Director | Chris Coleman
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Directed by Brandon Woolley

Scenic Designer
Tony Cisek

Costume Designer
Christine Meyers

Lighting Designer
Kristeen Willis Crosser

Sound Designer
Scott Thorson

Stage Manager
Kelsey Daye Lutz

Production Assistant
Bailey Anne Maxwell

Casting
Brandon Woolley

THE CAST

Danielle Slavick....................Olivia

Christopher M. Smith..........Ethan

The Actors and Stage Manager employed in this production are members of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

Performed with one intermission.

*Sex with Strangers* was developed through Steppenwolf Theatre Company’s New Play Initiative, was presented as part of its First Look Festival of New Work and the world premiere was produced by Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago, IL; Martha Lavey, Artistic Director and David Hawkanson, Executive Director.

*Sex with Strangers* is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York.

*Videotaping or other photo or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited.*

FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
By Chris Coleman

How do we meet? How do we find a partner? How do we find meaning in our journey?

I remember having lunch with a pair of patrons several years ago and asking how they met (one of my favorite questions). They answered “in college in Michigan,” – he was a few years older and, shortly after graduation, was shipped overseas in the armed forces. So, for several years, all of their interaction was via the U.S. Postal Service. Clearly the pace of that courtship gave them time to get to know each other (or at least to know
what they were willing to disclose at that point), because the friendship, the partnership, stuck.

Times, tempos, technologies change.

In Laura Eason’s play, *Sex with Strangers*, she is tackling the increasing speed with which it’s possible to find yourself on intimate terms with a potential partner, using that interaction as a metaphor for what’s shifting in the larger culture. Speed, technology and anonymity can provide options, convenience and connections that might never happen in a lower tech setting. But what gets lost in the process?

And, if you’re an artist, what actually allows you to connect to the source of your inspiration, if you’re constantly hypnotized by the swift and shiny surface of the culture? I remember hearing Thomas Friedman, the award-winning columnist for *The New York Times*, speak about his need to shut down all of his technology at least two days a week in order to sense what was actually important to him. That – tension between loving Facebook and wanting to break up with it – is a real tension.

The characters in *Sex with Strangers* are wrestling with similar questions: what is going to satisfy me? What is the tension between art and commerce? And what are the layers of attraction within a single psyche?

Enjoy the dance.

– Chris Coleman
CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Danielle Slavick

Olivia


TV/Film: *While We're Young* (Noah Baumbach), *Adult Beginners*, recurring roles on *Hostages* and *Guiding Light; Unforgettable*. M.F.A. from the National Theatre Conservatory. Originally from Timberlake, Ohio, Danielle lives in Brooklyn.

Christopher M. Smith

Ethan

Christopher M. Smith is excited to make his PCS debut! Theater credits include: *Other Desert Cities* (Boston premiere), *The Pavilion* (Los Angeles premiere), *Orange Flower Water, True West, Tennis in Nablus* (New York premiere), *Eurydice,*
Antigone; and many others in New York and Los Angeles, including site specific productions of Fool For Love (set in an apartment in Brooklyn) and The Cherry Orchard (set in a Victorian-style house in Echo Park). Most recently he co-adapted and performed in a four-actor production of Washington Square by Henry James, with The Actors' Ensemble in New York. Film work includes: Something Blue (Best Feature, Sonoma International Film Festival), Wart and The Golden Age. He studied theater at the University of La Verne. Originally from Southern California, Christopher resides in New York City. www.christophersmithactor.com

DIRECTOR’S NOTES | by Brandon Woolley

Sex with Strangers. That title alone was enough for me to sit up and take notice. It’s alluring, intriguing and potentially dangerous. It’s why I wanted to direct this play, and probably why you’re sitting in this theater.

Laura Eason seduces us with her title and then drags us into two starkly different locations with two drastically different people. It’s easy to forget worldly troubles and outside responsibilities when you’re in a secluded retreat. But when you have to reenter the real world, with all its distractions and ugliness, people don’t always look or act the same. I was immediately interested in the way Eason sets up this idea of public versus private. Ethan is a “personality.” He has fans, supporters and even enemies. Olivia is “happily alone.” She’s a writer, an intellectual and an introvert. It’s an odd pairing to start with, but when there is an inherent physical attraction, something is bound to happen.
Sex can be easy.

The thrill of this play is not just that we get to watch two people engage in intimate ways on stage, but that we get to witness what happens after the fact. They have things in common that make a relationship seem like a good idea; but life experience, baggage and ambition always seem to get in the way. What happens when your new lover finds out you may not be exactly who you say you are? And what’s more important: Developing a meaningful relationship, or pursuing your dreams? Are these ideas mutually exclusive, or can they somehow coexist?

These are the questions that Olivia and Ethan are forced to answer once the afterglow of a snowy, secluded writers’ retreat fades into the distance and they are thrust back into their own busy worlds.

Relationships are hard.

I’m excited about digging into the gritty, sexy, startling world of sex with a stranger turned lover, turned career maker, turned ... ? In the end, the sex can be great, the journey can be fun, and the outcome can be scary.

The question is: Will it be worth it?

FEATURE | A Practical Guide to Sex with Strangers from Public Relations and Publications Manager Claudie Fisher

Relationships in the Digital Age
When Sex with Strangers had its world premiere at Steppenwolf
Theatre Company in 2011, playwright Laura Eason spoke to Artistic Director Martha Lavey about the public versus private self:

**LE:** I feel like it’s such an interesting time now. People who are in their early twenties have, for the most part, lived a lot of their life online. They know things about people before they meet them, they Google everybody, there’s so much information they bring that the blank moment that used to happen doesn’t happen so much anymore. Those of us who are not in our early twenties anymore came of age at a time where the internet was not so prominent. The experience of encountering someone totally new to you, without being able to read up about them or find out information about them meant that you could meet them in the moment. That experience is going away. Encountering someone really fresh is going away. We used to be able to choose what we would disclose and when we would disclose it and how we would disclose it. Now, particularly with Facebook, you meet someone for two minutes at a function and you can go online and look at pictures of their children. It’s just incredibly interesting how we’re moving through the world and what that means about how we come to know each other.

**Know Your Partner’s History**
You’re already familiar with Laura Eason’s writing if you’re a fan of the Netflix political drama series *House of Cards*. Eason was a staff writer on the show for two seasons, and has sole writing credits for some particularly memorable scenes (such as Season 2, Chapter 17, when Claire reveals she had an abortion during a live CNN interview). *Sex with Strangers* was the
writing sample Eason gave to showrunner Beau Willimon to get the gig on *House of Cards*. Speaking of Emmy Award-winning shows, the 2014 New York premiere of *Sex with Strangers* was directed by David Schwimmer (who played Ross in *Friends*) and starred Anna Gunn (best known for her role as Skyler White on *Breaking Bad*). *The Hollywood Reporter* asked Gunn about the differences between playing Skyler and being on stage as Olivia in *Sex with Strangers*. She said it was like breaking new air: "Skyler was so shut down and closed off — that was part of the storytelling and character, so I had to abide by that, that was my job. But then I'm able to take full breaths, stretch and be open, fun and loose and all those different colors — because Olivia changes, she's like a little girl sometimes and then she stands up and roars like a lion."

**The Game has Changed**

According to *Author Earnings*’ January 2015 report, 18% of the titles on Amazon’s Book Bestseller List were self-published. That number increases to 33% for e-book titles. Of course, those numbers only represent a small section of the industry, and they’re debatable because all the avenues for production and distribution make output difficult to track. But you don’t need numbers to know the game has changed. Blogs emerged in the 1990s, opening up the floodgates to a new avenue for story sharing (in 2014, there were over 172 million blogs on Tumblr and 75.8 million blogs on WordPress alone). And e-books have become mainstream with the help of brave DIY authors and digital pioneers, such as Stephen King, who became one of the first major authors to release a title exclusively as an e-book in 2000 (his novella *Riding the Bullet* sold 500,000 units in the first
24 hours at $2.50 a pop). Interestingly, King made headlines again in 2013 when he released the print-only Joyland, telling Wall Street Journal that his fans could, “stir their sticks and go to an actual bookstore rather than a digital one.” Even for established authors, the myriad options — self-publishing/traditional publisher, e-book/print, blog/novel — provide exciting and daunting opportunities. And then there are the overnight sensations; the bloggers turned best-selling authors. One of the more infamous is Tucker Max, whose tales of sexual exploits spurred on by a bet scored him a long stint on The New York Times’ Best Sellers list — his true tale is much like the path of Ethan in Sex with Strangers. The publishing industry is a complex, ever-changing world, full of hard choices and unanticipated plot twists — a perfect setting for a steamy, layered, provocative drama.

Tell us what you think of the show! Find us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

CREATIVE TEAM BIOGRAPHIES

Laura Eason
Playwright
Laura Eason is the author of 20 plays (original work and adaptations), a musical book writer and a screenwriter. Selected productions include Sex with Strangers (Second Stage, NYC; Signature Theatre, DC; Steppenwolf Theatre, Chicago; Sydney Theatre, AU; published by Overlook Press); The Undeniable Sound of Right Now (Rattlestick Theatre and Women’s Project
The Theatre, NYC; Rising Phoenix Repertory, NYC; *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Hartford Stage, CT; New Victory, NYC; People’s Light, PA; Actor’s Theatre of Louisville; Kansas City Repertory Theatre; Repertory Theatre of St. Louis; Denver Center for the Performing Arts, published by Dramatists Play Service) and *Around the World in 80 Days* (New Vic Theatre and Royal Exchange Theatre, UK; Lookingglass Theatre; Center Stage (Baltimore), published by Broadway Play Publishing).

She wrote the book for the musicals *Days Like Today*, music and lyrics by Alan Schmuckler (Writers Theatre, Chicago) and *Summerland*, music by Jenny Giering, lyrics by Sean Barry (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre commission). Additional plays include: *The Vast In-Between* (Denver Center commission, also developed by the Vineyard Theatre, NYC), *Remarkable Invisible* (Ambassador Theatre Group commission), *Every Reason to Hope and Believe* (Repertory Theatre of St. Louis commission), *40 Days* (NEA grant, developed by New York Theatre Workshop and Lookingglass Theatre), *Plainfield Ace* (developed by Two River Theatre, NJ and Atlantic Theatre Company, NYC) and an adaptation of *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates* (Arden Theatre commission), among others. As a screenwriter, Laura wrote on season two and three of the Emmy-winning Netflix show *House of Cards*. She is an ensemble member and former artistic director of Chicago’s Lookingglass Theatre (2011 Regional Tony Award). In New York, she is a member of Rising Phoenix Repertory, New Georges and an alumna of Women’s Project Playwright’s Lab.

www.lauraeason.com and @LeasonNYC on Twitter.
Brandon Woolley
Director
Brandon is a director and producer in Portland, Oregon. *Sex with Strangers* marks his Portland Center Stage directing debut. He most recently self-produced and directed *The God Game* by Suzanne Bradbeer. Later this season he will direct *The Few* at CoHo Productions and *The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler* with Post5 Theatre. He has directed/produced shows at CoHo Productions (*International Falls*), Theatre Vertigo (*The End of Sex*), Bag&Baggage Productions (*Dial M for Murder*) and Portland Center Stage (JAW kickoff events, 2012-2015). Brandon has worked with Rose Riordan on multiple shows at Portland Center Stage as an assistant director (*LIZZIE*, *The Whipping Man*, *Red*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and *A Christmas Story*). He has also collaborated with Third Rail Repertory Theatre, Broadway Rose Theatre and Live On Stage. Brandon is the producing associate at Portland Center Stage. He’d like to thank Rose and Chris for this incredible opportunity. Much love to Sean, Mom and Brittney.

Tony Cisek
Scenic Designer
Tony Cisek has collaborated with PCS on the productions of *Our Town*, *A Small Fire*, *The Whipping Man*, *The North Pool*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, *The Christmas Story* and *Frost/Nixon*, as well as the premieres of *A Feminine Ending* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Tony’s work has been seen Off-Broadway and regionally at Roundabout Theatre Company, Arena Stage, Guthrie Theater, Goodman Theatre, Ford’s Theatre, South Coast Repertory, Milwaukee Repertory Theater,
Cincinnati Playhouse, Alliance Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Center Stage (Baltimore), Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Syracuse Stage, New York Theatre Workshop, Cleveland Play House, Folger Theatre, The Kennedy Center, Round House Theatre, Studio Theatre, GALA Theatre, Berkshire Theatre Festival and Signature Theatre. He has received four Helen Hayes Awards in Washington, four Drammy Awards in Portland, and a Barrymore Award nomination in Philadelphia. www.tonycisek.com

Christine Meyers
Costume Designer

Christine Meyers is a costume designer, production designer and cinematographer who has created for opera, theater, dance and film. Current pieces include Napoli at Oregon Ballet Theatre and the upcoming indie film I Am That (production/costume design). Her work spans genres, ranging from a collaboration with dance company Zoe|Juniper, to a music video for The Head and the Heart's "Let's Be Still," to Crayola at Oregon Ballet Theatre and Tartuffe at Seattle Shakespeare Company. She has created dissolving dresses for an Alice in Chains video, Lesson Learned, and costumes for classic Handel opera in Germany. Regional credits: Seattle Repertory Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Book-it Repertory Theatre and The Huntington Theatre. Broadway credits: Matilda (assistant design) and How the Grinch Stole Christmas (associate design). Film credits: 48hour film short Lethal Cotillion (costume design), which was selected to screen at the Cannes Film Festival in 2008, and the independent feature film Bhakti Boy (cinematography).
Kristeen Willis Crosser

Lighting Designer

Kristeen is thrilled to be designing for Portland Center Stage this season. She was privileged to win 2014 Drammy Awards for Outstanding Scenic Design (*Gidion's Knot*) and Outstanding Lighting Design (*A Bright New Boise*). She has designed for several area theaters, including Artists Repertory Theatre's *The Cherry Orchard* and *Eurydice*, Third Rail Repertory Theatre’s *The Night Alive* and *Belleville*, Northwest Children’s Theater’s *Willy Wonka* and *Pinocchio*, Profile Theatre’s *Buried Child* and *Thief River*, CoHo Production’s *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* and *The Outgoing Tide*, and Miracle Theatre’s *Mariela in the Desert* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. She was also recently nominated for a Los Angeles Ovation Award for her lighting design of *Foxfinder* in Pasadena. She thanks her husband, Mike, for all of his love and support.

Scott Thorson

Sound Designer

Scott Thorson has been living the dream as a sound engineer at Portland Center Stage since 2010. PCS credits include live audio engineer for world premiere musicals *Somewhere in Time* and *LIZZIE*, sound designer for *The Mountaintop* and *The Typographer's Dream*, live translations for *Chinglish*, associate sound designer for *The People's Republic of Portland* and four seasons of *JAW*. Other Portland designs include *Sweet and Sad*, *Noises Off*, *Middletown* and *The Night Alive* (Third Rail Repertory Theatre); *Ivy and Bean* (Oregon Children's Theatre); *Uncanny Valley* (Hand2Mouth Theatre); and *Fish*
Girl as part of the Fertile Ground Festival (Best in Fest, San Francisco Fringe). He holds a degree in architecture from the University of Oregon and is a proud Kenton resident. Many thanks to Casi for her mentorship and much love to Alice.

Kelsey Daye Lutz
Stage Manager
Kelsey Daye is a North Carolinian dairy farmer’s daughter. PCS credits include: stage manager for The Lion, The People’s Republic of Portland (second engagement), Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike, The Typographer’s Dream, The Last Five Years and A Small Fire, and production assistant for Clybourne Park, Venus in Fur, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, The North Plan and Anna Karenina. Kelsey Daye is a graduate of University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She would like to thank her boys for all their unconditional love, and Shamus for being wonderful.

Bailey Anne Maxwell
Production Assistant
Bailey Anne Maxwell is thrilled to be joining Portland Center Stage for another season, after acting as production assistant for Other Desert Cities, Twist Your Dickens and Dreamgirls last year. Bailey most recently worked as a production assistant with Artists Repertory Theatre on The Motherf**ker with the Hat, Foxfinder, Ten Chimneys, The Lost Boy and Seven Guitars. Bailey has recently enjoyed being the stage manager on Tamer Tamed and the assistant stage manager on Taming of the Shrew with Portland Shakespeare Project. She has also worked with
Profile Theatre as a stage management apprentice on *Buried Child* and *Eyes for Consuela*. Bailey is a Linfield College graduate and a proud member of the EMC program.

**SPONSOR STATEMENTS**

**Paul and Tasca Gulick**
We are thrilled to be sponsoring Laura Eason’s *Sex with Strangers* for several reasons. The subject matter, dealing with the impact technology can have on a budding relationship, is timely and compelling. Another reason is our excitement to be a part of director/producer Brandon Woolley’s Portland Center Stage directing debut! Brandon has worked as an assistant director, alongside Rose Riordan, on some stellar PCS productions such as *The Whipping Man* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Lastly, we are longtime supporters of Portland Center Stage because they continue to produce well known and loved classics, along with exciting new works, while never forgetting to push the boundaries.

**Sharon Mueller and Reynolds Potter**
We are longtime fans of Portland Center Stage and always happy and enthusiastic to support their productions.