



MIDDLEBURY
PERFORMING ARTS SERIES

P R E S E N T S

Rachel Mars
*Your Sxxts Are Sh*t: Older Better Letters*

THURSDAY-FRIDAY, FEBURARY 29-MARCH 1, 2024

7:30 PM ET

WRIGHT MEMORIAL THEATRE



Your Sexts are Shit: Older Better Letters

Writer and Performer | **Rachel Mars**

Additional Letter Writer and Performer | **Lesley Ewen**

Dramaturgy | **Wendy Hubbard and nat tarrab**

Lighting Designer | **Alex Fernandes**

Sound Designer | **Dinah Mullen**

Producer | **Lucy Jackson**

Touring Production Manager | **Helen Mugridge**

With material from James Joyce, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Charles Bukowski,
Marcel Proust, Frida Kahlo, Georgia O'Keeffe, Gertrude Stein, Radclyffe Hall,
Eleanor Roosevelt, Brother Augustine, Anonymous

Please stay after the performance for a Q&A with the artist.



*Funded in part by the New England States Touring program
of the New England Foundation for the Arts,
made possible with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts
Regional Touring Program and the six New England state arts agencies.*

*The Middlebury performances are made possible with generous support
from the Paul Nelson Performance Endowment, the Middlebury College Theatre Department,
and the Rothbrock Family Residency Fund.*

*Please turn off all electronic devices prior to the performance, and refrain from texting.
Photography and the use of audio or video equipment are prohibited.*



Program Notes

From the Artist

Your Sexts Are Shit: Older Better Letters is the new solo show from Rachel Mars. It is an intimate, funny, filthy and moving show that triangulates the sex and love letters of long dead artists, contemporary sexts and a meditation on the construction of the queer female body. What role does writing have in creating our sexual identity? How do we write ourselves and for whom? How have newer, faster communication methods changed the way we write desire?

The show features an array of letters from dead writers, artists and a monk. They include James Joyce, Frida Kahlo, Georgia O'Keeffe, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mozart and Radclyffe Hall. I read them, and they are accompanied by slides of footnotes providing background information about the writers and the context they were writing in. The second element is a powerpoint of sexts sent to me by anonymous donation from platforms like whatsapp, Grindr and good old text message. The final element is a personal narrative about how I came to own and write my own female queer sexual desires.

Background:

In June 2016, immediately after the Brexit vote I was depressed and in upstate New York. In order to cheer me up, performer Scott Sheppard read me some of Joyce's sex letters to Nora Barnacle. They were extremely explicit and surprisingly beautiful. On my return I got in touch with two sexologists, Jana Funke and Lena Wanggren – who helped me to unearth sex letters dating back centuries. I also researched with friends and colleagues about how they were using short-form text communication to seek out - and maintain - sexual relationships. I did a call out for screenshots of sexts, and curated them to form one of the three elements of the work. I also knew I wanted to include some personal information, especially as queer female desire is often invisible and un-discussed. The result of all three elements is a kind of queer live archiving of longing, communication and the writing of pleasure.

Courtesy of our New England presenting partner, The '62 Center for Theatre and Dance, Williams College

Queer survival is an isolating experience. Unlike racial and ethnic identities where one is likely to be (but not always) born and raised into a community of those with similar life experiences, many queer folk were the only people 'like them' they were aware of growing up. Western societal norms baptize us with homo- and transphobia, as well as heteronormative relationship structures, and suddenly isolation becomes a mode of survival. Rejecting queerness that materializes in yourself and in others becomes a path to inauthentic acceptance. But what is community without authentic acceptance?

Oddly (queerly?) enough, feeling isolated as a LGBTQIAA+ individual is an experience that many queer folk have in common, a shared life circumstance that can be a starting point for connection. Despite being plagued by loneliness and isolation, queer folk still find each other, refusing to believe that they are truly alone and instead finding, creating, and manipulating pathways for communication

with one another. Queer love letters, zines, and sexts are among the countless examples of queers reaching out to one another, using channels of communication to build community in the face of existential violence...They say: if you are reading this, I am not alone and you are not alone. And you reading this, holding this in your hands, your hand will now help push things FORWARD.”

—Hale Polebaum-Freeman '06.5 (they/ them)
Librarian & Primary Instigator of Williams' Circulating Zine Collection

Works Consulted

Duncombe, Stephen. 2017. *Notes from Underground: zines and the politics of alternative culture*.
Third Edition ed. Portland, OR: Microcosum Publishing.

Treleven, Scott. 2014. “The Lowest of the Lowest of the Low: A New Cautionary Tract from the Salvation Army.” In A. Bronson and P. Aarons (Eds.), *Queer Zines 2* (pp. 240-241). New York, NY: Printed Matter, Inc.

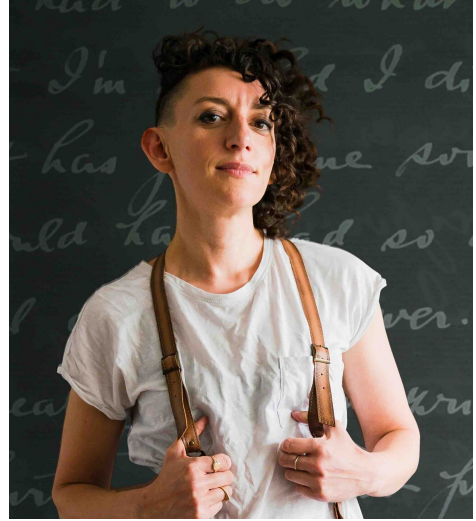
Fake, Edie. 2014. “Fruity Zine Love Poem Essay.” In A. Bronson and P. Aarons (Eds.), *Queer Zines 2* (p. 244). New York, NY: Printed Matter, Inc.

Wilde, Chris. 2014. “From Ephemera to Eternity: The Queer Zine Continuum.” In A. Bronson and P. Aarons (Eds.), *Queer Zines 2* (pp. 246-247). New York, NY: Printed Matter, Inc.



Biographies

Rachel Mars is an award-winning performance maker and writer. Her shows combine theatre, comedy, storytelling, and live art practices. She was on the first Writers Lab UK and Ireland in 2021, the Royal Court Playwriting Course in 2021, and a finalist on 4Stories 2022. She has won a Total Theatre Award, the Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award, and is often funded by Arts Council England. She is currently co-writing her first musical for Home Theatre, Manchester. Her first TV comedy/drama was optioned by Hillbilly Films. In the past, her work has seen her inviting children to smash up her dad's bad pottery with hammers, learning to play Roller Derby, and unearthing historical sex letters. She has performed all over the UK and internationally including at the Barbican, South Bank Centre, and festivals in New York, Austin, Seattle, Melbourne, and Brisbane. She is committed to representations and explorations of queer female identity, using theatre and comedy as tools for provoking new arenas of empathy and understanding. Rachel is an artist fellow of Birkbeck University's Centre for Contemporary Theatre. Praise for Rachel's work: "A triumphant show dripping with uninhibited desire"—*The Guardian* on YOUR SEXTS ARE SH*T. "Magnificent, angry, slyly funny, and necessary."—Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian* on ROLLER. "Immensely charismatic, very funny and artfully crafted with the ear of a poet"—NPR, Boston on OUR CARNAL HEARTS.



Helen Mugridge is an experienced creative production manager. Her previous credits include: F*ck Miss Saigon Play (Royal Exchange, Manchester and Young Vic (YV)); 40/40 (Two Destination Language, UK tour); A Dead Body in Taos (Rachel Bagshaw with Fuel, UK tour); Oh Mother (Rash Dash, UK tour); Cupids Revenge (New Arts Club, UK tour); FORGE (Rachel Mars, Transform Festival); Chasing Hares, Best of Enemies (YV); RED, Likely Story (Wales Millennium Centre); Gaping Hole (Rachel Mars and Greg Wohead, Ovalhouse, London); Little Wimmin, Figs in Wigs (UK tour inc., Southbank Centre); Class, Scottee (Edinburgh, Canada, and UK tours); Atomic 50, interactive installation for Waltham Forest Borough of Culture; Les Voyages, Company XY (Greenwich and Docklands International Festival); Idol (Jamal Gerald, Transform Festival and Theatre in the Mill Bradford); I'm a Phoenix, Bitch (Bryony Kimmings, Grand Hall, BAC, and International dates); Fat Blokes (Scottee, Edinburgh and UK tour); The Shape of the Pain (Rachel Bagshaw and Chris Thorpe with Chinaplate, Edinburgh, Germany, and BAC); Golem, 1927 (West End, The Space/BBC, UK, and International tour).

Lucy Jackson is a London-born, Brooklyn-based independent performing arts producer who supports playwrights and multidisciplinary artists to develop, produce, and tour new work. She is currently the Producing Director of The Bushwick Starr, and produces national and international touring work for Rachel Mars and Salty Brine's Living Record Collection. Work in the UK includes nine years at the Edinburgh Fringe, Latitude, and VAULT festivals, and new plays at the Finborough Theatre, Bush Theatre, and Theatre503. Previous roles include New York Producer for Los Angeles Performance Practice, Producing Director for The Assembly, Development Director for the New Ohio Theatre, and General Manager/Touring Producer for the TEAM. She co-teaches a class in Creative Producing at The New School and is a member of the Creative Independent Producer Alliance (CIPA).



Special thanks to our additional partners:

Kristy Bright, Assistant Professor of Anthropology
Karin Hanta, Director of Chellis House; Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies
Mikaela Taylor, Special Collections Public Services and Outreach Specialist, College Libraries
Feminist Action at Middlebury
and the

Middlebury College Theatre Department

Claudio Medeiros, Professor of Theatre/Department Chair
Michole Biancosino, Associate Professor of Theatre
Robin Foster Cole, Costume Shop Director
Jim Dougherty, Co-Technical Director/Facility Manager
Alex Draper, Professor of Theatre
Mark Evancho, Professor of Theatre
Summer Jack, Visiting Assistant Professor of Theatre
Katie Knauber, Associate Costume Director
Allison Rimmer, Co-Technical Director/Production Manager
Olga Sanchez Saltveit, Assistant Professor of Theatre
Courtney Smith, Production Designer
Dana Yeaton, Associate Professor of Theatre
Mirjam Brett, Academic Coordinator



**Our thanks to the 2023-2024 members
of the Performing Arts Series Society (PASS)
for their support of the series and arts at Middlebury.**

Learn more or join PASS now at go.middlebury.edu/givepass

Producers

Estate of Olin C. Robison
Rothrock Family Fund
Jean B. Seeler '60
Sunderman Family Concert Fund

Partners

Cathy Lee '92 & Darius Nassiry
Marny & Rob Lichtenstein
Paul Nelson

Advocates

Buz & Angelika Brumbaugh '91
Magna & David Dodge
Elizabeth Karnes Keefe &
Thomas Keefe
Daniel Raabe

Patrons

Anonymous
Cyndy Bronson Altman '71
George & Paula Bellerose
Sue Burdick '63 & Chuck Burdick '63
Louise Cadwell '71 & Ashley Cadwell '70
Susan & George Cady Jr. '72
Lara Calfee
Carole Cavanaugh & Nobuo Ogawa
Dick Conrad '59 & Judith Irven
Ann Cooper
Allison Coyne Carroll
Eric Carroll
Bob DeMarco & Diane Dressler
Stephen & Emmie Donadio
Gregory Donadio
Lyn DuMoulin
Judy & Liam English Jr. '63
Emory & Diana Fanning '71
Cheryl & Peter Farris-Manning
Roger Foster Jr. & Baibe Grube
Diane & Vaughn Gooding Jr. '71
Ross & Amy Gregory
Roger & Connie Greguski
David Hamilton Jr. '95 &
Hillary Hamilton '95
Carol Harden '70 & Alan Moore '69
Peter Haskell
Doreen & James Hogle
Richard Hopkins & Gayle Muenchow
Carolyn Jackson '61 & Will Jackson '51

Patrons, cont.

Don Jamison & Christina Root
Michael Katz & Mary Dodge
Jason Kelley
Drew & Izzy Kervick '00
Carlie & David Krolick
Russell & Linda Kulas
Perry Lessing & Louisa Burnham
Andrea Leung
Richmond & Eleanor Littlefield
Helen Marsh & Charles Sabukewicz
Michelle McCauley & Kevin Kite
Joe & Leila McVeigh '98
Joel A. Miller
Brett Millier & Karl Lindholm '67
Rebecca Mitchell & Andrew Demshuk
Sally & Al Molnar
May Morris
Lorrie Muller
Diane Nancekivell & Thomas Baskett
Marijke Niles
Kevin & Garreth Parizo
Albert & Marcia Perry
Barbara Perry
Peter Erly & Heather Briggs '75
Alan & Cynthia Rubin
Nancy & Ronald Rucker
Robert R. Ruggiero & Elizabeth Stabler
Liza Sacheli
Robert S. Schine
Cindy & Michael Seligmann
Gail D. Smith
Elizabeth Stahl & David Zarowin
Rebecca Strum
Patricia Thompson
Linda Tublitz
Thomas Turley
Nicole Veilleux
Alice White '76 & Don Monroe
Jeffrey Williams
Mary & Tim Williams
Susan Wilmer '83 & Henry Wilmer Jr. '76
Marjorie & Malcolm Wright
Janie C. Young

Scholars

Brigid Armbrust '25
Megan Balparda '26
Xander Bowles '26

Scholars, cont.

Josette Chun '26
Aaron Cohen '25.5
Greta Costello '26
Maeve Fitzgerald Shea '24
Adam Gips '26.5
Camilo Gonzalez-Williamson '24
Ryan Greguski '25
Nayeli Guerrero '27
Josh Harkins '25
Abigail Hernandez '26
Emi Kawahara '25
Catherine Kish '24
Rachel Lafferty '25
Mishal Lalani '26
Bo Liu '23.5
Peyton Mader '24
Dira Mahmud '25
Olivia Maloney '26
Nathaly Martinez '24
Julianna Martinez '24
Edith Mauch '27
Carter McPhedran '24.5
Spencer Messier '24
Marco Motroni '25 *
Daniela Ortiz '26
Chandra Panjiyar '24
Claire Perry '25.5
Zhizhong (ZZ) Pu '24
Leslie Ramirez '25
Emme Richards '26
Camiel Schroeder '26
Yuvraj Shah '26
Cleo Shaw '27
Francis Shiner '23.5
August Siegel '25
Mehr Sohal '26
Tejas Srinivasan '24
Tyler Stark '27 *
Alex Stimpson '23.5
Yikai Sun '25
Ryan Ulen '26
Archana Vaithilingam '27
Bailey Walker '24.5
Benjamin Weiss '25
Kaylynn Xia '24
Samanyupratap Yadav '24

**Performing Arts Series Interns*



Join or renew NOW for the 2023–2024 season!

Learn about PASS at go.middlebury.edu/pass,
the box office, or via brochures in the lobby.

ACCESS TO THE ARTS IS IMPORTANT TO US

The following services are available at Performing Arts Series events.
See an usher, the Box Office, or visit go.middlebury.edu/artsaccess for more information
on our accessibility services.



Accessible parking, seating, and
restrooms are available at all
venues.



Relay calls welcome via the Vermont
Relay Service (711).



Assistive listening devices are
available at most events.



Sign language interpretation or real-time
captioning available at select shows.



Large-print programs are available
at most performances.



Low-cost or free transportation available
through Tri-Valley Transit, 388-2287,
www.trivalleytransit.org/

MAHANEY ARTS CENTER

Pieter Broucke, Associate Dean for the Arts
Liza Sacheli, Director, Mahaney Arts Center
Allison Coyne Carroll, Director, Performing Arts Series
Molly Andres, Arts Events Manager
Mark Christensen, Concert Hall Technical Director
Christa Clifford '93, Associate Director of Operations and Finance
Leeza Robbins, Box Office Manager

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Middlebury College sits on land which has served as a site of meeting and exchange among indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The Western Abenaki are the traditional caretakers of these Vermont lands and waters, which they call Ndakinna, or “homeland.” We remember their connection to this region and the hardships they continue to endure. We give thanks for the opportunity to share in the bounty of this place and to protect it.