

Portland Center Stage at

THE **ARMORY**

TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS

Based on the book by **Cheryl Strayed**

Adapted for the stage by **Nia Vardalos**

Co-conceived by **Marshall Heyman, Thomas Kail,**
and **Nia Vardalos**

Directed by **Rose Riordan**

February 23 – March 31, 2019

On the U.S. Bank Main Stage

Artistic Director | Marissa Wolf

Managing Director | Cynthia Fuhrman

Scenic Designer Megan Wilkerson	Costume Designer Jacqueline Firkins	Lighting Designer Kristeen Crosser
Sound Designer Casi Pacilio	Stage Manager Janine Vanderhoff	Production Assistant Sarah Stark
	Casting Will Cotter Brandon Woolley	

CAST

Dana Green	Sugar
Leif Norby	Letter Writer #1
Lisa Renee Pitts	Letter Writer #2
Brian Michael Smith	Letter Writer #3

Performed with one intermission.

Original New York production by The Public Theater (Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director; Patrick Willingham, Executive Director). *Tiny Beautiful Things* is presented by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.

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

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FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MARISSA WOLF

In *Tiny Beautiful Things*, Sugar writes, “Be brave. Be brave enough to break your own heart. Look, we’re all going to die. Hit the iron bell like it’s dinnertime.” This full-throated appeal to life is precisely what makes our winter plays burst with luscious language, humor, and a wellspring of emotion. Built around powerful women — both seen and unseen on stage — the winter lineup offers an exuberant and passionate plunge into the depths of the human heart.

Kate Hamill’s adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, rendered with exquisite theatricality by director Eric Tucker, harnesses the playful, satirical writing of beloved novelist Jane Austen. We lean forward, rooting for the Dashwood sisters to scale the walls of their restrictive society with wit and intelligence.

Meanwhile, *Buyer & Cellar* is the best dish-session you’ve ever had! Directed with beautiful agility by Rose Riordan, this hilarious play takes wild turns that keep us on our toes, as the character Alex

finds himself inside a fantasy world shared with icon Barbra Streisand.

Intimate emotional landscapes finds new form in *Tiny Beautiful Things*, where we are invited directly into Sugar's home to encounter letters that range from the banal to the profound. Based on Cheryl Strayed's advice column, this play offers an unflinching look at our most private hopes and sorrows.

"Hit the iron bell like it's dinnertime."

Welcome to The Armory! We're so happy to ring out loud with you as we experience these plays together.

All my best,
Marissa Wolf

FROM THE DIRECTOR: ROSE ROIRDAN

If you are a fan of Cheryl Strayed's book *Tiny Beautiful Things*, you will understand when I say that this dramatization is less like a traditional play and more like documentary theater. The adaptation of the book to the stage is faithful in text, but dramatized in an ingenious way that allows us to hear from Sugar's readers.

The letters to Sugar are a glimpse into the soul of America in the middle of the night. Sugar's insightful responses are just the remedy we all need.

Creating the space for all these voices to live is a tricky task. Each letter has its own tone, yet they must live seamlessly together on stage. It has been a fun puzzle to figure out.

I very much look forward to sharing this with you. I believe we will all see pieces of ourselves in these stories.

I want to thank Cheryl for writing this book and sharing these stories with us. Finding some grace or redemption on the page is immensely healing.

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHERYL STRAYED

How did the stage adaptation of *Tiny Beautiful Things* come about and what was it like working with Nia Vardalos and the creative team throughout the development process?

I was first approached by Thomas Kail shortly after *Tiny Beautiful Things* was published. By that time he'd directed a few plays and was in the beginning stage of developing *Hamilton* with Lin-Manuel Miranda. He told me his friend Marshall Heyman had given him the book and he thought it'd make a great play. His email caught my interest, but I was so overwhelmed at the time, gearing up to shoot the film adaptation of my book *Wild*, that I didn't respond. Instead, I dragged Tommy's email into my "to do" file and proceeded to do nothing! About eight months later, Nia Vardalos posted a comment on my Facebook page. She said she and her friend Tommy Kail wanted to talk to me about adapting *Tiny Beautiful Things* for the stage. I messaged her and we decided to meet to discuss the idea.

It just so happened that I was traveling to Los Angeles the next day to see the first cut of *Wild*, so I met Nia for tea in Santa Monica. I felt an immediate kinship with her — and also with Tommy, who I met several months later. Work began in earnest about a year later, when the three of us convened in New York City, along with Marshall Heyman. We sat around a table for the better part of a week tossing around ideas, reading the first draft out loud, making revisions to the script, and talking about what it could become. It was also during that time that *Hamilton* opened at The Public Theater. Tommy invited me and Nia to go see it. Neither of us had heard about the play because it was before word of mouth had gotten out about it and we were a bit skeptical — which makes us laugh now. We were both utterly blown away, of course.

What was your response as an audience member when you first saw this play on stage? What was it like to see someone else embody Sugar?

It's the weirdest thing in the world! It truly is. I feel honored by it and moved and also endlessly surprised. All those stories Sugar tells about her life — that is my life. It's surreal. There's a line in the play where Sugar says her name is Cheryl Strayed and it always makes me gasp.

So many of the questions to Sugar and your responses are incredibly personal, yet also universal. Sitting in a theater full of people connecting to these moments must be quite moving and powerful. What has surprised you about that? How has that affected you?

I've seen the play dozens of times and I never know how I'll respond. There have been times when I didn't shed a tear and times when I wept my way through it. The audience is a big part of the show because so much of the material is really deep storytelling. You can hear people listening and absorbing it and responding. Very often people cry and you can hear that. It's hard for me not to go to them and take their hand and tell them it's going to be okay. They laugh too, which is always a delight. It's an extraordinary experience, to be the author of those stories and to bear witness to their impact in the theater.

As a storyteller whose work has been adapted for both theater and film, what does theater bring to storytelling that is different from the page and screen? How do you think it served *Tiny Beautiful Things* in particular?

I'm simply astonished by plays and I'm in awe of the people who make them. I knew in a general way that a play gets made anew each time it's performed, but I never truly understood the complexity and nuance of that until I was so intimately involved in the process with Tommy and Nia at The Public. There is something so exhilarating about what happens in each performance. It's never quite the same. There is always the slightly different way a line is spoken or received. There's always a different feel in the theater. The experience is alive, there's no other way to put it. It's being made before our eyes, not only by the actors on stage, but also by the audience who is taking it in. I think that experience enhances the sense that these are collective truths that we're grappling with communally. It makes the book larger, in a way. Less about the struggle of the self and more about the struggle of us all.

What does it mean to you to have *Tiny Beautiful Things* produced in your hometown?

Everything! I'm so touched by it. It's really, really moving to me and I'm deeply grateful. I'm particularly excited that it's at Portland Center Stage at The Armory, where I have seen so many beautiful, powerful plays. I'm honored to be on that list.

You began writing the “Dear Sugar” column in 2010, the book was published in 2012, and the New York stage production opened in 2016. How has your relationship with Sugar evolved and do you find these stories resonating in a different way today?

So many of the stories in *Tiny Beautiful Things* are about universal human experiences that are timeless, but I will say that more people than ever before are thinking about the book and the play within a political context — specifically, the many calls to be compassionate, kind, and generous. They're thinking about those values in a way that transcends who we are in our personal lives, but also who we are as citizens. I'm glad of that. We need it. Imagine what the world would be if we led with love and kindness.

Interview by Claudie Jean Fisher, *Associate Director of Marketing & Communications*; Alice Hodge, *Marketing & Publications Specialist*; and Sharon Martell, *Director of Marketing & Communications*.

MEET THE CAST

Dana Green, *Sugar*

Dana is delighted to be back at Portland Center Stage at The

Armory. Other credits at The Armory include *A Life, Major Barbara, Constellations, Great Expectations, Othello*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Portland credits include *Scarlet* (Portland Playhouse); *d.b.* (CoHo Productions); *Gidion's Knot* and *The Realistic Joneses* (Third Rail Repertory Theatre); and *Dead Man's Cell Phone* (Profile Theatre). She has spent four seasons with the Stratford Shakespeare Festival and has performed at numerous regional theaters including The Old Globe, South Coast Repertory, Yale Repertory Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, California Shakespeare Theatre, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, Asolo Repertory Theatre, Court Theatre, Meadow Brook Theatre, and Shakespeare Festival of Dallas. Television credits include *Early Edition, Grimm, The Librarians, Here and Now*, and the upcoming Netflix premiere of *Trinkets*.

Leif Norby, *Letter Writer #1*

Leif was last seen at Portland Center Stage at The Armory in *A Christmas Memory/Winter Song*. Other appearances at The Armory include: *Astoria: Part One and Two, Wild and Reckless, The Oregon Trail, Our Town, Cyrano, Othello, Anna Karenina, Sunset Boulevard, The 39 Steps, Ragtime*, and *Guys and Dolls*. Other recent Portland appearances include: *Adroit Maneuvers* (Lighthouse Productions); *Man of La Mancha* (Lakewood Theatre Company); *In the Next Room* (Profile Theatre); *The God Game* (Brandon Woolley prod.); *Mr. Kolpert* and *Mystery of Irma Vep* (Third Rail Repertory Theatre); *And So It Goes ...* and *Red Herring* (Artists Repertory Theatre); and *Beauty and the Beast* (Pixie Dust). Television credits include *Portlandia* and *Leverage*. Leif is a proud member of Actors' Equity and sends love to his wife, Susie.

Lisa Renee Pitts, *Letter Writer #2*

Lisa is overjoyed to return to Portland Center Stage at The Armory! She was most recently seen in *JAW* (2018 and 2015) and won a Drammy Award in 2008 for her performance as Mrs. Muller in *Doubt*. In 2017, Lisa made her Broadway debut in the Tony Award-nominated *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage. Favorite credits include *A Raisin in the Sun* (Virginia Stage Company), *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* (Syracuse Stage), *Intimate Apparel* (San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Award), and *Watching O.J.* (Ensemble Studio Theater/LA). Film/television credits include the role of Dr. Dre's mother, Verna, in *Straight Outta Compton* (Dir. F. Gary Gray); *True to the Game* (Dir. Preston Whitmore); *XX* (Dir. Karyn Kusama); *Baselines* (Pilot); *Workaholics* (Comedy Central); and *General Hospital* (ABC). Her extensive voiceover work includes narrating more than 80 audiobooks spanning all genres. Lisa holds a B.F.A. from Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University.
lisareneepitts.com

Brian Michael Smith, *Letter Writer #3*

Brian is most known for his groundbreaking role as transgender police officer, Toine Wilkins, on Ava DuVernay's *Queen Sugar* (OWN). Recent TV appearances include *Chicago P.D.* (NBC), *Homeland* (FOX), and a recurring role on *Blue Bloods* (CBS). Recent theater credits include *A Real Boy* (Ivy Theatre Company at 59E59 Theaters); Mitch Albom's *Duck Hunter Shoots Angel* (Penobscot Theatre Company); and Brad T. Gottfred's *Women Are Crazy Because Men Are A**Holes* (June Havoc Theatre). Born and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, he studied theater at Kent State University

and trained with Terry Knickerbocker at William Esper Studio in New York City. Brian is a teaching artist, youth mentor, and an advocate for LGBTQ youth and better representation on television and film.

MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM

Cheryl Strayed, *Author*

Cheryl is the author of the number one *The New York Times* bestselling memoir *Wild*, *The New York Times* bestsellers *Tiny Beautiful Things* and *Brave Enough*, and the novel *Torch*. Strayed's books have been translated into nearly forty languages around the world and have been adapted for both the screen and the stage. The Oscar-nominated movie adaptation of *Wild* stars Reese Witherspoon as Cheryl and Laura Dern as Cheryl's mother, Bobbi. The film was directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, with a screenplay by Nick Hornby. *Tiny Beautiful Things* was adapted for the stage by Nia Vardalos, who also starred in the role of Sugar. The play was directed by Thomas Kail and debuted at The Public Theater in New York City to a sold-out run in 2016. Strayed's essays have been published in *The Best American Essays*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post Magazine*, *Vogue*, *Salon*, *The Sun*, *Tin House*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and elsewhere. Strayed holds an M.F.A. in fiction writing from Syracuse University and a bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota. She lives in Portland, Oregon with her husband, the filmmaker Brian Lindstrom, and their two children.

Nia Vardalos, *Adaptor & Co-Creator*

Nia is a Canadian-born actor, writer, and director for both film and stage. She wrote and starred in the hit film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, and its sequel, which earned her an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Screenplay, a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actress in a Motion Picture Musical or Comedy, and an Independent Spirit and People's Choice Award. Stage credits include Jennie in Theatre20's *Company*, directed by Gary Griffin, and writer and actor for twelve of The Second City's revues (Jeff Award winner). Additional writing and acting film credits include *Connie and Carla* and *I Hate Valentine's Day*. Film and television acting credits include *My Life in Ruins*; *For a Good Time, Call ...*; *Graves*; *The Catch*; *Jane the Virgin*; and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. She is the author of *Instant Mom*.

Marshall Heyman, Co-Creator

Marshall is an editor and writer living in New York City. He writes the daily "Heard and Scene" social column for *Wall Street Journal*. Over the years, he has contributed to such publications as *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *InStyle*, *W*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Cosmopolitan*, *New York*, *Slate*, and many others. He has also written for television.

Thomas Kail, Co-Creator

Thomas directed the Off-Broadway and Broadway productions of Lin-Manuel Miranda's *In the Heights* and *Hamilton*, for which he received the 2018 Tony Award for Best Direction of a Musical. Other Broadway credits include *Lombardi* and *Magic/Bird*. Off-Broadway credits include *Faust*, *The Wiz*, *Broke-ology*, *When I Come to Die*, *Family Furniture*, and *The Tutors*. He co-created and directed

the world premiere of *Tiny Beautiful Things*, adapted by and starring Nia Vardalos, and directed the world premiere of *Dry Powder*, starring Hank Azaria, Claire Danes, John Krasinski, and Sanjit De Silva at The Public Theater. In addition to numerous awards, he was the recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors Award in 2018.

Rose Riordan, Director

Rose is in her 21st season at Portland Center Stage at The Armory, where she serves as associate artistic director. She most recently directed *A Life*, *Kodachrome*, *Our Town*, and *The Oregon Trail*. Other directing favorites include: *The Typographer's Dream*, *LIZZIE*, *The Mountaintop*, *The Whipping Man*, *The North Plan*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *A Christmas Story*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *The Receptionist*, *How to Disappear Completely and Never Be Found*, and *The Pillowman*. In 1999, she founded the annual JAW: A Playwrights Festival. JAW has been instrumental in developing new work for The Armory repertory, including this season's production of *A Life* and Storm Large's *Crazy Enough*, as well as *Kodachrome*, *The People's Republic of Portland*, *The North Plan*, *The Thugs*, and *A Feminine Ending*. She enjoys being part of a company committed to new play development and having a beautiful building in which to work.

Megan Wilkerson, Scenic Designer

Megan is thrilled to make her Portland Center Stage at The Armory debut. Portland credits include designs at Third Rail Repertory Theatre, Teatro Milagro, Profile Theatre, Portland Playhouse, and Artists Repertory Theatre. Regional credits include shows with

Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, and Michigan Opera Theatre, to name a few. Outside of theater, she works as a commercial exhibit and environments designer, as well as an educator. A resident artist at Artists Repertory Theatre, Megan's work has been most recently seen for *Skeleton Crew* and *Small Mouth Sounds*, and for the upcoming *A Doll's House, Part 2* and *The Revolutionists*. Megan is a proud member of United Scenic Artist Local 829. meganwilkerson.com

Jacqueline Firkins, *Costume Designer*

Jacqueline is excited to return to Portland Center Stage at The Armory this season. Set and costume designs include work for Goodman Theatre, Writers Theatre, Court Theatre, J. Paul Getty Museum, Victory Gardens Theater, Northlight Theatre, Chicago Children's Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, The House Theatre of Chicago, Hartford Stage, Long Wharf Theatre, Dallas Theater Center, Portland Stage Company, Arts Club Theatre Company, Marin Theatre Company, Shakespeare Festival St. Louis, Idaho Shakespeare Festival, Westport Country Playhouse, Shakespeare & Company, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Yale Repertory Theatre, and The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey. Jacqueline is a recipient of a Princess Grace Award, as well as Black Theatre Alliance, Jessie Richardson, Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, and SAT awards for excellence in costume design. She's on the fulltime faculty at the University of British Columbia.

Kristeen Willis Crosser, *Lighting Designer*

Kristeen is thrilled to return to Portland Center Stage at The Armory after designing lighting for *Buyer & Cellar*, *Sex with Strangers*,

and *Mary's Wedding*. Regional theater credits include lighting designs for A Contemporary Theatre and Triad Stage. Her Portland area ~~design~~ credits include ~~work-at~~ designs for *I and You* and *Between Riverside and Crazy* at Artists Repertory Theatre; *The Night Alive* and *Or*, at Third Rail Repertory Theatre; *Snow White* and *Little Red "Riding Hood"* at Northwest Children's Theater and School; *Goosebumps the Musical: Phantom of the Auditorium* and *Fly Guy: The Musical* at Oregon Children's Theatre; *Buried Child* and *Thief River* at Profile Theatre; *The Outgoing Tide* and *Luna Gale* at CoHo Productions; and *Oedipus El Rey* at Milagro Theatre.

Casi Pacilio, Sound Designer

Casi's home base is The Armory, where credits include sound design for over 40 productions and 12 seasons of JAW: A Playwrights Festival. National shows: Holcombe Waller's *Surfacing* and *Wayfinders*; *Left Hand of Darkness*, *My Mind is Like an Open Meadow* (Drammy Award, 2011), *Something's Got Ahold Of My Heart*, and *PEP TALK* for Hand2Mouth Theatre. Other credits include Squonk Opera's *Bigsmorgasbord-WunderWerk* (Broadway, PS122, national and international tours); *I Am My Own Wife*, *I Think I Like Girls* (La Jolla Playhouse); *Playland*, *10 Fingers*, and *Lips Together*, *Teeth Apart* (City Theatre, PA); *2.5 Minute Ride* and *Fires in the Mirror* (Profile Theatre). Film credits include *Creation of Destiny*, *Out of Our Time*, and *A Powerful Thang*. Imagineer/maker of the Eat Me Machine, a dessert vending machine.

Janine Vanderhoff, Stage Manager

Janine is thrilled to be back for her fourth season at Portland Center Stage at The Armory. She recently stage managed *A Christmas Memory/Winter Song*, *The Color Purple*, and *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill*. Other favorites include: *Wild and Reckless*, *The Oregon Trail*, and *Great Expectations*. In New York, Janine worked on *The Lion King*, as well as with many Off-Broadway and regional companies. Portland credits: *Sweeney Todd* (Portland Opera), *Play*, *How to End Poverty in 90 Minutes*, and *The Other Place* (Portland Playhouse). Touring: *The Graduate*, *Cats*, *The Vagina Monologues*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, and *Show Boat*. Production management: *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* "Democalypse 2012 Republican National Convention" (Tampa, FL); Straz Center (Tampa, FL); The Fox Theatre (Atlanta, GA). Proud NYU graduate and AEA member.

Sarah Stark, *Production Assistant*

Sarah is a recent Portland transplant from Chicago, where she graduated from the University of Chicago with a degree in theater studies. She has previously worked as a production assistant at The Armory for productions of *Twist Your Dickens* and *A Life*. Regional and Chicago stage management credits include: *Silent Night*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *Porgy and Bess* (The Glimmerglass Festival), *Little Shop of Horrors* (American Blues Theater); *Civility!* (The Syndicate); *Ellen Bond*, *Union Spy* (The House Theatre of Chicago); *Love's Labour's Lost*, *She Kills Monsters*, *Belleville*, *Urinetown: The Musical* (The University of Chicago). Sarah is thrilled to be continuing her work and education as a stage management apprentice at The Armory this season!

THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS OF *TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS*

FINLEY FAMILY FOUNDATION

As board members and longtime fans of Portland Center Stage at The Armory, we're thrilled to sponsor *Tiny Beautiful Things* and help bring Cheryl Strayed's insightful and human stories to the stage. Now, more than ever, we need to be reminded that we are so much more alike than different.

RITZ FAMILY FOUNDATION

We are pleased to sponsor *Tiny Beautiful Things*, a play selected by Portland Center Stage at The Armory's former Artistic Director Chris Coleman, and to support The Armory's new Artistic Director, Marissa Wolf. We look forward to being as stimulated and entertained in the future as we have in the past.