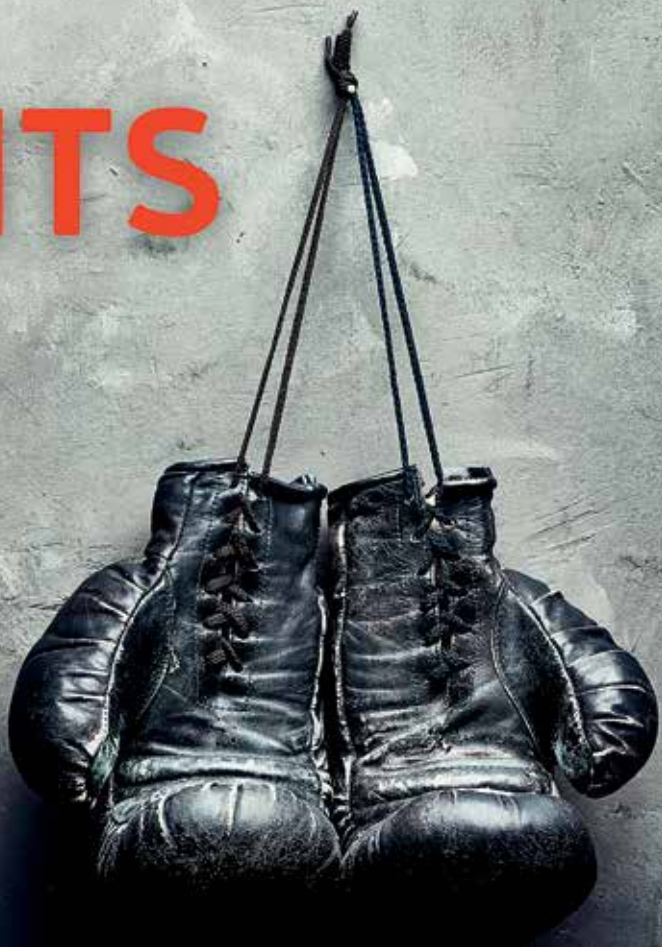


 **FOUR RIVERS**

# LIGHTS OUT



WRITTEN BY **HANNAH MCNIVEN**  
DIRECTED BY **BEN BARNES**





# Lights Out

**By Hannah McNiven: this production by  
Four Rivers opened at Wexford Arts Centre  
On October 28, 2022.**

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**Wexford Arts Centre**  
October 27th-November 5th

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**Watergate Theatre Kilkenny**  
November 9th

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**Garret Lane Arts Centre, Waterford**  
November 11th & 12th



Dawn is a boxer whose life is upended by a single punch. Sorensen, a man crippled by his own personal tragedy, is her psychotherapist. What happens when the thing you love most destroys you?

**“I LIKE TO HAVE THE FIGHT IN FRONT OF ME.  
I WANT TO LOOK MY ENEMY IN THE EYE.”**



Ben Barnes, Anthony Brophy and Sadhbh Malin working on the tense relationship between Sorensen and Dawn.

## **NEW PLAYS ARE THE LIFEBLOOD OF THE THEATRE.**

In the South East region Billy Roche and Jim Nolan have made their names and reputations with heart breaking stories of small town Ireland giving voice to the colourful and marginalised characters that people their plays. To paraphrase Patrick Kavanagh, they have made their Iliads out of ‘local rows’ and attested to the fact that the ‘Gods make their own importance’.

And while we continue to provide a platform for the work of established writers, it is as important now that we pay attention to new voices by bringing carefully curated productions of new work to the stage.

Emerging from the Wexford Playwright Workshop, supported by Wexford County Council and the Wexford Arts Centre, Four Rivers and its dramaturg, Louise Stephens, have been working with Wexford

writers, Eoghan Rua Finn, Dominic Palmer and Hannah Mc Niven over the past two years. Finn’s play *Amongst Men* and Palmer’s play *The Last Stand* will both be produced over the next Four Rivers production cycle and tonight you will see Hannah Mc Niven’s intensely moving new work, *Lights Out*.

In its establishing phase Four Rivers will continue to produce well-loved work from the Irish canon but increasingly we want to focus on new work that gives voice to the concerns and the stories of an Ireland and a region which is rapidly changing in the third decade of the 21st century. Stories that perforce must leave the dramas that animated our 20th and early 21st century writers -and which created a rich source of dramatic literature- in the rear view mirror as they move into an uncertain but exhilarating future.

**Ben Barnes**  
**Artistic Director**



Director Ben Barnes and Stage Manager Jess Fitzsimons Kane.



# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WHAT YOU LOVE MOST ALSO DESTROYS YOU?

Back in the early summer of 2020, we all know the world was a very different place. While essential workers risked their lives to keep the rest of us safe, many of us sat at home feeling distinctly useless. As artists, it is sometimes difficult to fathom what purpose we serve in the world. And yet, the abject fear of losing our outlets – music, film, television, theatre – losing the things that kept us sane as we were confined, made art seem all the more important.

It was, therefore, something of a relief when the Wexford Arts Centre put out a call for participants in their Playwrights' Studio. It's easy as a writer to flit from one idea to another when there is apparently no endpoint. But, suddenly, we had deadlines to aim for and theatre professionals to show our work to. With encouragement from the likes of Billy Roche and Thomas Conway – both highly experienced individuals keen to promote new writing – the process of creating *Lights Out* began in earnest.

The first few drafts of the play are almost totally unrecognisable from the play you see today. It had another title. The boxer, Dawn, had a different name. And the biggest difference of all was that the play was a monologue instead of a two-hander. The story, however, was essentially the same: a successful female boxer's neatly constructed life is shattered by a single punch. The carefully cultivated hard exterior is chipped away to reveal the strengths and vulnerabilities that make her a human being; the powers and weaknesses we all battle with as we navigate life's challenges. Yet, while I believed in her story, the way I was telling it felt wrong. Why would someone who

had so assiduously built her protective walls willingly reveal her truth to an audience? Like many of us who hold onto the things buried deep within us, it was not in her character to unburden herself. She had to have a good reason for doing so. She needed someone to expose that which festered within her. Very quickly, I came to realise that, as a boxer, my main character was lacking something crucial. She needed an opponent. Thus, the bones of *Lights Out*, as it is now, were born.

Though it may surprise you, the inspirations for Dawn were not the Irish female athletes who have represented us with such commitment and dignity. She came from an article about professional British boxer Shannon Courtenay who was introduced to the sport in her early twenties and took the ring by storm. Similarly, Sorensen, Dawn's intellectual opponent for each round of action, began his life in *Lights Out* after I read a profile of psychodynamic counsellor and writer, Jonathan Asser. Each of these individuals supplied the kernel out of which these two wildly different fictional characters grew. With each successive draft of the play, new elements were added as old were stripped out.

As a new playwright, the successive changes that came with re-drafting were something of a surprise. In November 2020 when the "completed" pieces were sent in for the performed reading that eventually took place in March 2021 – with professional actors and direction – there was a certain amount of self-congratulation going on. I had finished writing my first full-length play! Little did I realise I would still be working on it almost two years later.



Dawn and Sorensen reach a crossroads in their relationship.

But I was glad to continue working on it once it was picked up by Four Rivers Theatre Company; especially when there were seven other plays written during the Playwrights' Studio workshopping phase. Indeed, several of these pieces are currently in the process of being produced here in Wexford. It really shows the wealth of talent but also support which writers in this county are afforded. This encouragement and support is needed to get any theatrical piece off the ground; particularly coming out of our most recent phase of history. It's also markedly special for me that *Lights Out* was picked as the first original play to be produced by Ben Barnes and Four Rivers.

Once it was chosen, the play then went on to be workshopped in July 2021. Ben and I worked with actors Eloïse Stevenson and Ronan Leahy for a week in which each scene, each line of the play was analysed. Though challenging and stressful, the play that started the week (draft six) was a much stronger piece by the end of it (draft eight).

Since then, there have been at least six more drafts. I've gone on to work with

dramaturg Louise Stephens with whom I have had many long and in-depth discussions. Her experience, expertise and encouragement have all been invaluable as I attempt to do justice to the powerful woman I hope I have created with Dawn.

Because that is what I initially set out to write: a woman that was the most powerful person in the room. Not because of birth, wealth, marriage or intellect but because she had the physical strength to challenge a man. It's rare to see a woman who has that capability. It's rare for a woman to feel unbeatable. It's rare for anyone to feel invulnerable. And yet, sometimes, it is when we reveal ourselves to those we trust, that we can gain the strength to continue.

In writing *Lights Out*, I have exposed a little bit of my own fears and weaknesses to you, the audience. I hope I can trust you with them. And I hope you will look to the women on your left and right and be the person with whom they can be their truest and best selves – no matter your own gender.

**Hannah McNiven**

# Lights Out

By Hannah McNiven

## CAST

Dawn ..... Sadhbh Malin  
Sorensen ..... Anthony Brophy

## CREATIVE TEAM

Director ..... Ben Barnes  
Set and lighting ..... John Comiskey  
Costume ..... Frances White  
Sound ..... Ollie Dempsey  
Movement Director ..... Libby Seward  
  
Stage Construction ..... Stagelt  
Stage Manager ..... Jess Fitzsimons Kane.  
Boxing Consultant ..... Anthony White  
Photography ..... Colin Shanahan  
Running Time Approximately 80 minutes (no interval)

## FOR FOUR RIVERS

Artistic Director ..... Ben Barnes  
Producer ..... Heather Hadrill  
Production Management ..... Mark Redmond  
Communications ..... Tom Mooney  
Social Media/Design ..... Darajane O'Sullivan  
Graphic Design ..... Elishka Lane Barnes

Four Rivers is supported by the Arts Council of Ireland, Wexford Co. Council and partners with Wexford Arts Centre and the National Opera House. Special thanks to the Georgia Southern University Campus, Wexford, for the use of their facilities and, early in the project, Na Fianna Boxing Club.









## HANNAH MCNIVEN

### Writer

Hannah McNiven is a Wexford-based writer. Her work was long-listed (2017) and shortlisted (2018) for the Colm Tóibín International Short Story Award. In 2019, her short film, *The Lady on the Hill*, won the inaugural Wexford Film Fund and has gone on to feature in a number of film festivals. In 2021 it was runner-up at the Jim Sheridan International Short Film Competition, chosen by Jim Sheridan. Hannah has also published three novels with Poolbeg Press; *The Loves of Mrs McAllister* (2020), *The Birds of Bachelor Lane* (2021) and *Grey Horses* (2022). *Lights Out* is her first professionally-produced play.



## BEN BARNES

### Director

Ben Barnes is the Artistic Director of Four Rivers which is dedicated to developing new and established work in and for the South East. He is a former Artistic Director of Opera Theatre Company, the Abbey Theatre and Theatre Royal, Waterford. His award winning productions - Irish Times Awards and Canadian MECCA Awards - have been seen in major cities all over the world and his most recent credits include an American production of *The Crucible* and *Madama Butterfly* for Irish National Opera at the BGE which was filmed by RTE, *More Stately Mansions* for the Eugene O'Neill International Festival, *Blackbird* by David Harrower and *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* for Four Rivers.



## SADHBH MALIN

### Dawn

Sadhbh Malin is an actor and writer from Dublin and is a 2020 graduate from The Lir Academy BA in Acting. At The Lir, her theatre credits included: Tamsin in *Wishlist* directed by Gerry McCabe, Anna in *Anatomy of a Suicide* directed by Tom Creed, Lancelot in *Merchant of Venice* directed by Lynne Parker and Catherine Rooney and in *Seabind* directed by Louise Lowe. Since graduating, Sadhbh's credits include various roles in Corn Exchange's *Dubliners* directed by Annie Ryan and Maud/Dolly cover in the Gate Theatre's *Steward of Christendom* directed by Louise Lowe. Television and film credits include: *Conversations with Friends*, *Thicker than Water*, *Quicksand* and *Love Rosie*. As a writer Sadhbh is in development for her debut play *FUSS*, funded by the Arts Council and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Arts Council.



## ANTHONY BROPHY

### Sorensen

Anthony's recent theatre includes *Last Orders* at the Dockside and *Anna Karenina* at the Abbey Theatre, *Blackbird* – directed by Ben Barnes – at the Theatre Royal and *Defender of the Faith* with Decadent Theatre Company. Recent film and television includes *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Crown*, the Sundance award winning *Snipers Daughter* and *Penance*. As a writer, his play *Chicane* was shortlisted for the Stewart Parker Award and The Royal Exchange's new writing competition. His first two novels, *Sumer of Stan* and *The Vasectomy Kid* were shortlisted for the IWC's Novel Fair. His short fiction has been published in *Rose and Books Ireland* magazine.



Rehearsal: Director Ben Barnes with Anthony Brophy, Sadhbh Malin and stage manager for Lights Out Jess Fitzsimons Kane.



Sorensen (Anthony Brophy) in Lights Out is a psychologist with unorthodox methods who is prepared to explore even the most hopeless of cases and present Dawn (Sadhbh Malin) with the most challenging opponent of her life so far.

# CREATIVE TEAM

## JOHN COMISKEY

### Set and lighting

John has worked extensively in theatre, music, film and television. He has won Best Design at the Irish Theatre awards (for *Copenhagen*) and has been nominated several times for Best Lighting Design. He curated and designed the first Irish participation at the Prague Quadrennial exhibition of world theatre design in 2007.

Film directing credits include the award-winning dance drama *Hit and Run*; documentaries on German singer Agnes Bernelle and the history of Ireland's mental asylums; the original concert film of *Celtic Woman*; and the live transmission of the *Eurovision Song Contest*. Music projects have included *Antarctica* with David Power and Linda Buckley; *Ich Liebe Dich* with Gavin Friday; *The Well* and *The Frost is All Over* with Tony MacMahon.

## FRANCES WHITE

### Costumes

Frances's first experience of theatre was as a volunteer at Wexford Festival straight from school. She went on to be trained at Wimbledon Collage of Art, studying costume. She worked in the London West End and The R.S.C in the Barbican. Most recently she has been working for the Blackwater Opera Festival in Lismore, Irish National Opera and Wexford Festival Opera.

## OLLIE DEMPSEY

### Sound

Ollie Dempsey is a Wexford based musician songwriter and sound engineer who has been recording and mixing audio for over 30 years.

As technical manager of the Wexford Arts centre for 13 years and house technician of the National Opera House for another 5, as well as countless shows in venues around Ireland since the early 2000s, he has worked with a who's who of artists from all over the world. Ollie spends most of his time entertaining as a singer and guitarist, and working freelance, programming editing and mixing sound for various productions.

## LIBBY SEWARD

### Movement Director

Libby is a movement director, Feldenkrais practitioner, dance artist, choreographer, collaborator, mentor and head of movement at the Gaiety School of Acting. Movement directing credits for Opera and Theatre include: *Madama Butterfly* for Irish National Opera; *Vagabones* for Opera Theatre Company; *King Arthur*, *La finta giardiniera* and *Ormindo* for RIAM; *La bohème* and Monteverdi's *Orfeo* for Opera Theatre Company; Eric Sweeney's *The Invader* for Theatre Royal Productions, Waterford; *The Spanish Tragedy* for Dublin Youth Theatre; *Re-imagining Beckett* with Ben Barnes for Imagine Arts Festival; *Noël* with Eoin Colfer; *Dreamland* for Jim Nolan. Libby delights in collaborative exchanges with artists from a broad spectrum of disciplines, significant projects include: *Anáil Na Beatha* with visual artist Alanna O'Kelly as part of *Coming Home: Art and the Great Hunger*; *Stormy Petrel* and Post GPO: Witness History Public Art Commission; *Closer Encounters* for Imagine Arts Festival. Libby has enjoyed joining Four Rivers, Ben Barnes and the creative team to bring *Lights Out* to the stage



Ben Barnes directed a cast led by Irish stage legend Marion O'Dwyer (as Mag), with Sarah Madigan, Mark Fitzgerald and Tiernan Messitt-Greene in the Four Rivers' production of Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*.



Described as a provocative, shocking, dark and beguiling play, *Blackbird* by Four Rivers was also staged at Wexford Arts Centre, in November last.





# Wexford Arts Centre

[www.wexfordartscentre.ie](http://www.wexfordartscentre.ie)

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