

## Geva Theatre presents World Premiere of Dan O'Brien's *Newtown*, beginning April 16

**Rochester, N.Y.** — Unflinching and lyrical, and derived closely from documentary source material, **Dan O'Brien's** *Newtown* portrays four parents whose lives are changed forever as they search for hope and healing in the context of the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. *Newtown* will be directed by Geva's Artistic Director **Elizabeth Williamson**, who has collaborated with O'Brien for many years, including on the Off-Broadway premiere of his play *The Body of an American*, which received the inaugural Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama Inspired by American History, the Horton Foote Prize, and the PEN Center USA Award. *Newtown* will be on the Wilson Stage from April 16 – May 12. Tickets are on sale now, visit [GevaTheatre.org](https://www.gevatheatre.org) or call the Box Office at 585-232-GEVA(4382).

*Newtown* received the prestigious Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation's Theatre Visions Fund Award, which supports the world premiere of only one play per year around the country. The award of \$50,000, one of the largest awards for playwriting in the country, includes \$25,000 to support this world premiere production, \$10,000 for the playwright, and \$15,000 to help Geva commission two new plays.

"I'm delighted to welcome Dan O'Brien back to Geva, where he previously premiered his plays *Key West* in 2002 and *The House in Hydesville* in 2009," said Elizabeth Williamson. "This is one of the most powerful plays I've read in years, and we have an extraordinary cast of Broadway veterans bringing these characters to life for the first time here in Rochester."

### About the Playwright & Director:

**Dan O'Brien** (he/him) is a playwright, poet, nonfiction writer, and former Guggenheim Fellow in Drama & Performance Art. His play *The House in Scarsdale: A Memoir for the Stage* received the 2018 PEN America Award for Drama. His play about the Battle of Mogadishu and the haunting of war reporter Paul Watson, entitled *The Body of an American*, was produced off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane Theatre by Primary Stages & Hartford Stage (*NY Times* Critic's Pick), in London and Northampton, England (Gate Theatre & Royal & Derngate), and around the US. *The Body of an American* received the PEN Center USA Award for Drama, the inaugural Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama Inspired by American History, the Horton Foote Prize, and was shortlisted for an Evening Standard Prize in London. *Dan O'Brien: Plays One* is published by Methuen / Bloomsbury. A collection of his essays, *A Story That Happens: On Playwriting, Childhood, & Other Traumas*, described in the Times Literary Supplement as "a book for our times," was published in 2021. O'Brien's debut poetry collection *War Reporter*, praised in the Guardian as "a masterpiece of truthfulness and feeling," received the UK's Fenton Aldeburgh Prize. His other poetry collections are *Survivor's Notebook*, *Our Cancers*, *New Life*,

and *Scarsdale*. O'Brien is the recipient of numerous playwriting fellowships and residencies including the Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University, the McKnight National Residency and Commission from the Playwrights' Center, and a residency at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in Italy. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, actor, writer, and producer Jessica St. Clair, and their daughter Isobel.

**Elizabeth Williamson** (she/her) joined Geva as Artistic Director in 2022, to launch the theatre's 50th Anniversary Season. An Obie Award-winning director, Williamson is known internationally for her work as a dramaturg, director, adapter, and producer. Broadway: Matthew López' *The Inheritance* (Tony, Olivier, Critics Circle, Evening Standard, GLAAD, and Drama Desk Awards for Best Play, Outer Critics Circle Honoree), *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* (Tony Award for Best Musical), *Anastasia*, *Some Like It Hot*. West End: *The Inheritance*. Off-Broadway: Sarah Gancher's *Russian Troll Farm*, Dan O'Brien's *The Body of an American*. Regional: About Face Theatre, ACT, the Alley, Cal Shakes, Court, Hartford Stage, the La Jolla Playhouse, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Pioneer Theatre, Steppenwolf, Theatre de La Jeune Lune, TheaterWorks Hartford, TheatreSquared, the Westport Country Playhouse, Williamstown Theatre Festival. Williamson previously served as Associate Artistic Director and Literary Manager at Pioneer Theatre Company in Salt Lake City and as Associate Artistic Director and Director of New Play Development at Hartford Stage. She received a 2007 NEA Fellowship in Literary Translation and is a member of SDC and LMDA. Education: M.St., Oxford University; B.A., Bennington College; trained at the École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq.

### **The Cast & Creative Team:**

The cast is made up of **Kate Abbruzzese** as Naomi (Off-Broadway: *Richard II* and *As You Like It*, The Public Theatre), **Max Chernin** as Ethan (he/him) (Broadway: *Parade*, *Bright Star*), **Kellie Overbey** as Sarah (she/her) (Broadway: *The Coast of Utopia*, *Twentieth Century*), and **Jonathan Walker** as Matthew (he/him) (Broadway: *The Assembled Parties*, *Twentieth Century*).

The creative team includes Scenic Design by **Nick Vaughan** (he/him) (*Jane Eyre*, Geva Theatre, *The Royale*, Lincoln Center Theater), Costume Design by **Ilona Somogyi** (she/her) (*Jane Eyre*, Geva Theatre, *The Body of an American*, Hartford Stage/Primary Stages), Lighting Design by **Emma Deane** (she/her) (*Dial M for Murder* and *Jane Eyre*, Geva Theatre), Original Composition & Sound Design by **André Pluess** (he/him) (Broadway: *The Minutes*, *I Am My Own Wife*), Dramaturg **Fiona Kyle** (she/her) (*Jane Eyre*, Geva Theatre and Oregon Shakespeare Festival), and Assistant Director **Olivia Spenard** (she/her). **Julia Bregy** (she/her) is the Production Stage Manager, **Kevin Gregory Dwyer** (he/him) is the Assistant Stage Manager, and **Kaylyn N. Nichols** (she/they) is the Production Assistant. Casting by The Telsey Office (**Karyn Casl**, CSA.).

**ENGAGEMENT AT GEVA: Programming presented in conjunction with Newtown**

**Geva Insights** | Tuesday, April 23, Following the Performance • FREE

Immediately following the performance of *Newtown*, there will be an on-stage conversation with Commissioner **Isiah Santiago** who was elected to the Rochester City School District Board last November when he was 19 years old. He has advocated for youth in Rochester for the past three years and is the founder of We Got This, an organization working to end gun violence by allowing youth to get involved in art and music.

**Mondays at Geva | Monday, April 29, 6 - 8 p.m. • FREE**

For *Newtown*, Mondays at Geva features a collection of 26 artworks created by Rochester based artist, **Henry Avignon** - that were presented to the families of the victims of the Sandy Hook mass shooting. These pieces are generously loaned to Geva Theatre for this exhibition by Constellation Brands, Henry Avignon, and Kelly McCormick Sullivan, aunt of victim Catherine Violet Hubbard, who will also speak at the event.

**TICKET AND PERFORMANCE INFORMATION**

**When:** April 16 - May 12, 2024

**Where:** On the Wilson Stage, 75 Woodbury Boulevard, Rochester, New York 14607

**To Purchase:** Tickets may be purchased [online](#), by calling 585-232-GEVA(4382), or in-person from the Box Office. *All prices, dates, and times are subject to change.*

**Accessibility:** Learn about our accessibility options [here](#).

Geva's 51<sup>st</sup> Season is sponsored by ESL Federal Credit Union with Honorary Season Producer Dr. Dawn Lipson. *Newtown* is presented with support from media sponsors Channel 10 WHEC-TV and Warm 101.3. Geva is proud to partner with the Mental Health Association of Rochester for this production.

*Newtown* is derived closely from research into the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. *An Unseen Angel: A Mother's Story of Faith, Hope, and Dealing After Sandy Hook*, by Alissa Parker, and "The Reckoning," Andrew Solomon's profile of Peter Lanza in *The New Yorker*, have been particularly helpful sources. The names of characters and some details of history have been altered because the play is ultimately a fiction, and imagined by necessity.

*Newtown* is sponsored by The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation's Theatre Visions Fund program.

**About Geva Theatre**

Founded in 1972, Geva Theatre is a not-for-profit, professional theatre company dedicated to creating and producing professional theatre productions, programs, and services of a national standard.

Geva offers a wide variety of educational, engagement, and literary programs, nurturing audiences and artists alike. Geva Theatre sits on the ancestral and unceded territory of the O-non-dowa-gah, or "the people of the Great Hill." In English, they are known as the Seneca

people, “the keeper of the western door.” They have stewarded this land through generations, and Geva pays respect and gives thanks to their elders, past and present.

Geva is under the leadership of Artistic Director Elizabeth Williamson and Executive Director James Haskins.

Find out more about Geva Theatre at [GevaTheatre.org](http://GevaTheatre.org) or by connecting with us on social media. Facebook: [facebook.com/gevatheatrecenter](https://facebook.com/gevatheatrecenter), Twitter: [@gevatheatre](https://twitter.com/gevatheatre), Instagram: [@gevatheatre](https://instagram.com/gevatheatre), LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/company/geva-theatre-center](https://linkedin.com/company/geva-theatre-center).

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