

ROZAR

Dutch National Opera Academy

Conrad Susa

Transformations

An entertainment in two acts from the book of Anne Sexton

First performed on 05. May 1973 at the Cedar Village Theater, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dutch première on 29. March 1977 at Theater Bellevue, Amsterdam (DNO)

First performance of this production on 07. February 2024 in Amare, The Hague

Production supported by Het Cultuurfonds

The Cast

Singer #1	Thalia Cook-Hansen Elisa Maayeshi	07.02 & 10.02 08.02 & 11.02
Singer #2	Hannah Gries Samantha Faina	07.02 & 10.02 08.02 & 11.02
Singer #3	Femke Hulsman Rommie Rochell	07.02 & 10.02 08.02 & 11.02
Singer #4	Stefanie Bruggeling Sterre Decru	07.02 & 10.02 08.02 & 11.02
Singer #5	Ilmari Leisma* Henrik Enger Holm	07.02 & 10.02 08.02 & 11.02
Singer #6	Marcelo Alexandre Jack Roberts	07.02 & 10.02 08.02 & 11.02
Singer #7	Wessel Wirken Cyprien Crabbé**	07.02 & 10.02 08.02 & 11.02
Singer #8	Fabian Homburg Jaap van der Wel***	07.02 & 10.02 08.02 & 11.02

*first year Master's student Royal Conservatoire The Hague

** fourth year Bachelor's student Conservatorium van Amsterdam

***first year Master's student Conservatorium van Amsterdam

Duration ca. two hours with one twenty minute interval

*The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment in the auditorium are forbidden.
Members of the audience are requested to turn off all mobile phones and to kindly refrain from using their screens.*



Portrait of Anne Sexton

© The Rosalie Thorne McKenna Foundation, Center for Creative Photography,
The University of Arizona Foundation.

TRANSFORMATIONS

The Gold Key Our need to understand ourselves.

Snow White The ambivalent relationship of mother and daughter.

The White Snake The divine madness of the artist.

Iron Hans Our ambivalence toward the insane.

Rumpelstiltskin The Doppelgänger inside us all.

Interval

Rapunzel The need of women for each other.

Godfather Death The fear of and desire for death.

The Wonderful Musician The selfishness of the artist.

Hansel and Gretel Mother love and cannibalism.

Briar Rose The ambivalent relationship of daughter and father.

Mother of the Insane

A note by the director

In her poetry Anne Sexton openly addresses the mental struggles she has been experiencing in her life. Her confessional way of writing brings her to express thoughts that some people don't even dare to think, let alone share with the world. In sharing her most intimate thoughts Anne Sexton explores the conditions for reaching one's full identity as a woman, and explores all the structures that prevent a woman from doing so. In *Transformations* this exploration happens through fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm that she rewrote to this end. Besides rewriting the fairy tales, Sexton also wrote a short prologue for each of them. These prologues provide the fairy tales with new contexts, drawn from psychoanalysis, such as bipolarity, incest and cannibalism. By changing the context and by rewriting the fairy tales of Grimm, she transforms them into metaphors of the human condition, seen from a female and psychoanalytical perspective. Conrad Susa selected ten of Sexton's fairy tales and set them to music. In his music he accurately follows the satire and the playfulness of the fairy tales as well as the depth of the unsettling prologues.

In this show Anne Sexton herself will take you on a journey through these fairy tales: The Golden Key, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, The White Snake, Iron Hans, Rumpelstiltskin, Rapunzel, Godfather Death, The Wonderful Musician, Hansel and Gretel, and Briar Rose. She is the Tale-Teller of Transformations, and she is accompanied by seven personalities. Anne controls the entire show and she decides when a prologue or fairy tale starts and when they come to an end. She does so by a mere switch of the lever. As the fairy tales start, Anne and the seven personalities step on the platform and the light changes; they have transformed into the fairy tale characters. It is not until the switch flips again, that we return to a prologue in which Anne Sexton is herself. The more fairy tales get told; the more the borders between the prologues and the tales seem to blur, and with it the borders between Anne herself and the characters she plays. Is she losing control over them? Are their fates intertwined? Or were there never borders to begin with?



Transformations dress rehearsals - February 2024 © Reinout Bos



Transformations dress rehearsals – February 2024 © Reinout Bos

Ensemble

A collaboration with the classical department The Royal Conservatoire The Hague

Antonio Ruiz *clarinet* | Josie McClure *saxophone* | Catarina Barroso *trumpet* |
Aaron Small *trombone* | Laura Alvarez *double bass* | Gonçalo Martins *percussion* |
Dimitris Pliatsikas *percussion* | Enrico Clerico *keyboards* | Saki Matsuoka *keyboards*

Creative Team

Sam Weller *conductor*
Rennik-Jan Neggers *director & set design*
Sanne Oostervink *costume & set design*
Jasper Nijholt *lighting design*
Tom de Ronde *physical dramaturgy*

Production Credits

Samo Vidic *assistant conductor*
Demi Wals *assistant director & stage manager*
Giuseppe Sapienza *production assistant*
Marta Liébana | Aarón Ormaza Vera *repetiteurs*
Astrid Vreeken *hair & makeup*
Nathalie Alink *wardrobe manager* | Mireille Alink *wardrobe assistant*
Maddalena Deichmann *production manager*
Anouk Boon *set workshop coordinator*
Bart Vilex *Royal Conservatoire The Hague technical coordinator*
Tom van Hoff | Maarten Spaans *Royal Conservatoire The Hague technical team*
Bob Walraven *lighting operator*
Matthias Konecny *surtitles coordinator* | Simon Heerze *surtitles operator*
Reinout Bos *production photography* | Bart Voorbergen *production videos*

Joyce DiDonato

Masterclass

14 MARCH 2024

11.00 — 13.00h

Bernard Haitinkzaal
Conservatorium van Amsterdam

The Montgomery – van Dooren Series

Open to the public

www.opera-academy.nl

About Conrad Susa

Conrad Susa was born in Springdale, PA, on 26 April 1935. Introduced to music at an early age, he performed with his local church, first as a choirboy and then as an organist while at Springdale High School. His music education continued at the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now known as Carnegie Mellon University), where he graduated Cum Laude in 1957. Upon completing his degree, Susa attended on scholarship the Connecticut College Modern Dance Festival, earning a diploma following studies on composing for dance performances. He also played for festival dance classes at that time. Susa continued his education at the prestigious Juilliard School under the guidance of William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti. His work as a composer began in earnest during this time, garnering him awards such as the George Gershwin Memorial Scholarship, two E.J. Benjamin awards, the Marion Ferschl prize, the Alexander Gretchaninoff First Prize, and a Ford Foundation Fellowship between his enrolment and completion of his MS degree in 1961. Also in 1961, Susa was chosen as one of ten composers selected by the Ford Foundation to participate in a festival honouring Igor Stravinsky in Santa Fe, NM. During this time in 1959, Susa also began to work with the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego as the Composer in Residence, a post he held until 1994.

Along with the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, he worked as the Musical Director for the APA-Phoenix Repertory Theatre Company, New York, NY (1961-68) and the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre and Academy. Susa also created compositions for theatre, documentary films, chorale groups and television (well over a hundred works). His works have been performed in Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, the Seattle Repertory Company, the American Conservatory Theatre, the Guthrie Theatre, the Center Theatre Group and the Mark Taper Forum, among others.

Alongside his compositions above, Susa composed five operas. His first opera, *Transformations*, based on poems by Anne Sexton (also his most performed opera) was commissioned by the Minnesota Opera in 1973. The Minnesota Opera also commissioned his next work, *Black River: A Wisconsin Idyll* in 1975 (libretto by Richard Street). In 1984, Susa collaborated with Street for the San Francisco Opera/PEPSICO Summer Fare joint commission of Federico García Lorca's *The Love of Don Perlimplin*, with Street adapting his libretto from Lorca's text.

In 1994, San Francisco Opera commissioned Susa's *The Dangerous Liaisons* (libretto by Phillip Littell). The original cast included Thomas Hampson, Frederica von Stade and Renée Fleming and was broadcast on the PBS program "Great Performances" later that year. The same year, Susa collaborated with Littell to compose *The Wise Women*, a retelling of the story of the Three Wise Men of Bethlehem.

Susa was actively involved in music education. He served as the Resource Personnel and Field Director for the Artists in School Program at Lincoln Center (1967-72) and the Director of West Coast Services for Young Audiences, Inc. (1974-79). From 1988, Susa served as Professor of Composition at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, a position he would hold until his death on 21 November 2013.



Transformations dress rehearsals – February 2024 © Reinout Bos

About Anne Sexton

Anne Sexton was born in Newton, Massachusetts and raised in Weston, Massachusetts. One of the most popular poets of mid-twentieth-century America, Sexton's impressive body of work continues to be widely read and debated by literary scholars and cultural critics alike. According to Diane Hume George, "Anne Sexton's poetry tells stories that are immensely significant to mid-twentieth-century artistic and psychic life. Sexton understood her culture's malaise through her own, and her skill enabled her to deploy metaphorical structures at once synthetic and analytic. Sexton explored the myths by and through which our culture lives and dies: the archetypal relationships among mothers and daughters, fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, gods and humans, men and women. She perceived, and consistently patterned in the images of her art, the paradoxes deeply rooted in human behaviour and motivation. Her poetry presents multiplicity and simplicity, duality and unity, the sacred and the profane, in ways that insist on their similarities – even, at times, their identity. In less abstract terms, Sexton made explicit the intimacy of forces persistently treated as opposites by the society she lived in."

The daughter of a successful businessman, Sexton's childhood was materially comfortable but not happy. Her relationships with her parents were difficult, perhaps even abusive. Sexton's closest confidante was her maiden great-aunt. She attended boarding school and after graduation enrolled in Garland Junior College for one year. Sexton later described Garland as a "finishing" school. At the age of 19, she married Alfred "Kayo" Sexton II. While Kayo was serving in Korea, Anne became a fashion model. In 1953, she gave birth to her first child and in 1955, her second. Sexton suffered from postpartum depression, and after the birth of her first daughter she suffered her first breakdown and was admitted to a neuropsychiatric hospital. Other institutionalizations followed. Sexton struggled with depression for the remainder of her life. She committed suicide at the age of 46.

In treatment, her therapist encouraged her to write and in 1957 Sexton joined writing groups in Boston that eventually led her to friendships and relationships with the poets Maxine Kumin, Robert Lowell, George Starbuck and Sylvia Plath. As Sexton told Beatrice Berg, her writing began, in fact, as therapy: "My analyst told me to write between our sessions about what I was feeling and thinking and dreaming."

Her analyst, impressed by her work, encouraged her to keep writing, and then, she told Berg, she saw (on television) "I. A. Richards [a poet and literary critic] describing the form of a sonnet and I thought maybe I could do that. Oh, I was turned on. I wrote two or three a day for about a year." Eventually, Sexton's poems about her psychiatric struggles were gathered in her first book, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960), which recounts, as James Dickey wrote, the experiences "of madness and near-madness, of the pathetic, well-meaning, necessarily tentative and perilous attempts at cure, and of the patient's slow coming back into the human associations and responsibilities which the old, previous self still demands."

Sexton's work is usually grouped with other Confessional poets such as Plath, Lowell, John Berryman and W. D. Snodgrass. In an interview with Patricia Marx, Sexton discussed Snodgrass's influence: "If anything influenced me it was W. D. Snodgrass' *Heart's Needle*. ... It so changed me, and undoubtedly it must have influenced my poetry. At the same time everyone said, 'You can't write this way. It's too personal; it's confessional; you can't write this, Anne,' and everyone was discouraging me. But then I saw Snodgrass doing what I was doing, and it kind of gave me permission." Sexton's books after *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* included *All my Pretty Ones* (1962), *Live or Die* (1966), which won the Pulitzer Prize, *Love Poems* (1969), the play *Mercy Street* (1969). *Transformations* (1972), a series of retellings of Grimm's fairy tales is often described as her least overtly "confessional" and most feminist work. Sexton's last published collection was *The Death Notebooks* (1974); posthumously published volumes included *The Awful Rowing toward God* (1975), *45 Mercy Street* (1976) and *Words for Dr. Y: Uncollected Poems with Three Stories* (1978).

Sexton's work was enormously popular during her lifetime and she was the recipient of numerous honours and awards, including the Frost Fellowship to the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Radcliffe Institute Fellowship, the Levinson Prize, the American Academy of Arts and Letters travelling fellowship, the Shelley Memorial Prize, and an invitation to give the Morris Gray reading at Harvard. She also received a Guggenheim Fellowship, grants from the Ford Foundation, honorary degrees and held professorships at Colgate University and Boston University. Despite her many achievements, critical discussions of her work tended to focus on the apparently autobiographical elements of her verse. Dickey's admonishment of Sexton's second book was somewhat typical: "Miss Sexton's work seems to me very little more than a kind of terribly serious and determinedly outspoken soap-opera."

Yet Sexton's canniness about the power of fiction, the uses of fact and imagination, and the poem – or poet – as essentially performance mean that no simple equations between poet and poem, life and art, can be drawn. In an early essay on both *Bedlam* and *Pretty Ones*, Beverly Fields argued that Sexton's poetry is mostly misread. She contended that the poems are not as autobiographical as they seem, that they are poems, not memoirs, and she went on to analyze many of them in depth in order to show the recurrent symbolic themes and poetic techniques that she felt make Sexton's work impressive. Recent scholars such as Gillian White have focused on Sexton's manipulation of voice and audience to suggest her work warrants more, or different, scrutiny than it has previously received.

One of Sexton's earliest champions, Erica Jong, reviewing *The Death Notebooks* assessed Sexton's poetic significance and contended that her artistry was seriously overlooked: "She is an important poet not only because of her courage in dealing with previously forbidden subjects, but because she can make the language sing. Of what does [her] artistry consist? Not just of her skill in writing traditional poems ... But by artistry, I mean something more subtle than the ability to write formal poems. I mean the artist's sense of where her inspiration lies ... There are many poets of great talent who never take that talent anywhere ... They write poems which any number of people might have written. When Anne Sexton is at the top of her form, she writes a poem which no one else could have written."



Haydn *L'isola disabitata* – January 2023 © Reinout Bos

About DNOA

A partnership of the **Conservatorium van Amsterdam** and the **Royal Conservatoire The Hague**, the Dutch National Opera Academy is a two-year master's programme offering a wide-ranging curriculum encompassing all aspects in the training of an aspiring opera artist. In addition to a focus on refining technical skills, students are supported in developing a very clear sense of vocal and artistic identity, and how these attributes can best be united to meet market demands and expectations. The programme is tailored so as to enable young artists to enhance chances of success in a competitive field as they transition from full-time education to the workplace. DNOA graduates can be found in many of the world's leading opera houses. The programme mounts several full-scale productions each season and enjoys close ties with the wider world of opera.

For more information, please visit www.opera-academy.nl

DNOA 2023/2024

Conrad Susa

Transformations

An entertainment in two acts from the book of Anne Sexton

Sam Weller *conductor* & **Rennik-Jan Neggens** *director*

Conservatoriumzaal, Amare, The Hague | 7, 8, 10, 11. February 2024

Rossini

L'occasione fa il ladro

Burletta per musica

Benjamin Wenzelberg *conductor* & **Daniel van Klaveren** *director*

Bredeweg Festival, Amsterdam | 26 April 2024

Monteverdi/ Elena Kats-Chernin

Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria

Tragedy with a happy end in one prologue and three acts

A collaboration with **Residentie Orkest**

Karel Deseure *conductor* & **Mart van Berckel** *director*

Conservatoriumzaal, Amare, The Hague | 26, 28, 30 June 2024

About the performers & Creative team

For more details about the current DNOA singers please see :
opera-academy.nl/our-students/

Sam Weller *conductor*

Sam Weller is a conductor based in Sydney and Amsterdam, dedicated to sharing his passion for orchestral music with the wider world.

In 2016 Sam founded Ensemble Apex, which has been hailed as “one of the most exciting new ensembles on the Sydney scene” (*Limelight Magazine*). The orchestra creates exceptional orchestral music moments for newcomers and seasoned concert-goers alike. Apex has presented sold-out seasons since 2016. Highlights include Béla Bartók’s *Miraculous Mandarin* at Sydney Town Hall, Rhapsody in Blue with Simon Tedeschi, Strauss’s *Eine Alpensinfonie* and most recently a critically acclaimed production of Verdi’s *Messa da Requiem*, which received a credit as one of the most exciting performances of 2023 in the Australian Book Review.



Sam Weller – January 2024

Rennik-Jan Neggers *director & stage design*

Rennik-Jan Neggers (1993, Helmond, the Netherlands) is an up-and-coming stage director in music theatre. This season he will make his main-stage debut in Germany with the production *The Apple Tree* (Bock) at Stadttheater Bremerhaven and stage *Transformations* (Susa) at the Dutch National Opera Academy. With his chamber opera group SALIX kameropera he recently created the celebrated production *The Bear* (Walton) which is still touring. He studied *Regie für Musik- und Sprechtheater, Performative Künste* with Professor Sebastian Baumgarten at the Theaterakademie August Everding in Munich.

Before pursuing his interest in theatre, he graduated as Master of Science in Cultural Sociology from the University of Amsterdam in 2016. During a stage-directing internship with David Bösch at the Dutch National Opera (DNO), he acquired his first theatre experiences in opera. At DNO he then got to know the chief dramaturg Klaus Bertisch and subsequently worked for him as assistant dramaturg. Here, he also worked as assistant stage director for the production *Juditha Triumphans* staged by Floris Visser. Simultaneously, Rennik-Jan started to focus more on staging his own projects, mainly in music theatre but spoken theatre as well. In the past years he has made productions for the Dutch National Touring Opera (*Die schöne Magelone*, Brahms), the Dutch National Opera Academy (*Un mari à la porte*, Offenbach), the Delft Chamber Music Festival, the Theaterakademie August Everding (*Ariodante*, Handel, *Das tote Brügge*, Rodenbach, *Pierrot Lunaire*, Schoenberg and *Geschichten, die keine sind*, Musil) and SALIX kameropera (*Non muore mai*, Respighi and *Le Bal Masqué*, Poulenc). SALIX kameropera is a theatre group for young opera talents that he started and of which he is the artistic leader. Over the past years he has participated in workshops by Andreas Homoki, Ted Huffman, Katie Mitchell and Jan-Philipp Gloger.



Rennik-Jan Neggers – January 2024

Sanne Oostervink *costume & stage design*

Sanne Oostervink graduated in Theatre Design from the Utrecht School of the Arts in 2011. Following that, she obtained her degree in hairstyling and makeup at l'Accademia della Scala in Milan in 2012. As a costume and set designer, she has worked on various projects, including children's theatre performances at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and educational productions for the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra.

Furthermore, she has designed costumes and sets for performances by the Amsterdam Andalusian Orchestra, Theater de Meervaart, Theater Sonnevank, Bos Theaterproducties, Oorkaan, and the Cello Octet Amsterdam. For Okater, she collaborated on designing and fully producing costumes and sets for the award-winning production *Masote's Dream* in South Africa. In Oslo, she collaborated with the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra and Oorkaan, contributing to the design and production of sets and costumes. In 2015, she was a finalist for the Dutch Opera Design Award.

For Baroque Opera Amsterdam, she designed costumes for the opera *Acis and Galatea*, directed by Julien Chavaz. Additionally, she works as a hairstyling and makeup designer for NOF (Nouvelle Opera de Fribourg in Switzerland). Last year, she designed costumes for both *Hänsel und Gretel* and *The Rape of Lucretia* for the DNOA.



Jasper Nijholt *lighting design*

Jasper Nijholt is a passionate lighting designer who graduated from the Amsterdam University of the Arts. His passion for lighting started early on. In the past years, Jasper has developed his portfolio to both national and international productions. He has worked on a large variety of projects, ranging from opera to museums to stage artists. Due to his experiences with different genres he brings a fresh look along with innovative ideas. In cooperation with a creative team, he creates lighting designs that add an extra dimension to a project.

In the Netherlands, Jasper has made lighting designs for the Dutch National Opera, Theater Alliantie, Opera2day, MORE Theaterproducties, Toneelmakerij, Froukje, Son Mieux, amongst others. For the Dutch National Opera Academy Jasper created the lighting designs for *Postcard from Morocco* directed by Robert Chevara and the Triple Bill *L'isola disabitata* directed by Michiel Dijkema. Internationally he has participated as Associate Lighting Designer in the production of several musicals in Teatr Roma Warsaw, including *Aïda*. For the opera productions *King Roger* and *Die tote Stadt* in Teatr Wielki, Jasper was part of the lighting design team as Assistant Lighting Designer.

Tom de Ronde *physical dramaturgy*

Tom de Ronde is an actor, theatremaker and a physical dramaturg. In 2021 he graduated from the Mime Opleiding at the Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten. After graduating, he created and performed the performance *After The Echo* with his mime collective DeRonde/Deroo and won the Best of Fringe award Amsterdam.

De Ronde has collaborated with Davy Pieters, Fabian Santaciel de la Quintana, Moniek Merkx, The Ulrike Quade Company, Tryater & Het Houten Huis, amongst others. Next to his own theatre company he is part of an other theatre company SCHWUNG.

The body and movement are always his starting points. The work he creates is visual-poetic, unpredictable and absurd. One of his all time inspiration sources is "the human who tries". Someone who tries and fails, but tries again and again. And despite the failures, continues to try.

Tom's performances are deliberately clumsy and sometimes unpleasant. It seeks to confront life and its contradictions in an inventive way. It focuses on the gray areas of our existence. Next to the theatre work that Tom does, he also works in film.

Demi Wals *assistant director*

The Dutch assistant director and stage manager Demi Wals is an interdisciplinary artist in the dance-, opera-, theatre- and film industry. She graduated from Lucia Marthas Institute for Performing Arts with a double bachelor degree. She worked as a dancer and dance captain in the Donizetti productions *Anna Bolena* and *Maria Stuarda*, directed by Jetske Mijnsen at the National Opera in Amsterdam. After these experiences, she joined Theater Münster as the assistant director and production manager of Leonard Bernstein's *MASS*, directed by Tom Ryser.

Besides that, she has played roles in Dutch series and written short stories about love and relationships for the women's platform Cycle Care. Her screenwriting debut was *De Verhalen van Lola*, where she also performed the leading role.

Samo Vidic *assistant conductor*

Samo Vidic lives and works in the Netherlands as a student of the Royal Conservatoire The Hague. In addition to composition studies with Mayke Nas and Peter Adriaansz, he is a student of orchestral conducting with Ivan Meylemans and Alex Schillings.

Starting his musical path with violin studies, he demonstrated a fascination for musical arranging and composition in elementary school. He continued his studies in the department of music theory and classical singing at the Conservatory for Music in Ljubljana, earning the Škerjanec prize in recognition of his accomplishments during this period.

Prior to his arrival in the Netherlands, he pursued composition studies at the Academy for Music in Ljubljana under the guidance of mentors Uroš Rojko and Vito Žuraj. His compositions have been featured at contemporary music festivals, competitions, and various concert events in Slovenia, Croatia, Slovakia, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United States.

In his role as a conductor, he has collaborated with De Ereprijs Orkest, Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice and Ensemble Academy. Additionally, he has assisted in projects with the Residentie Orkest, Het Zeeuws Orkest, the Conservatory Orchestra, and the Dutch National Opera Academy.

Acknowledgements

The DNOA would like to thank the following for their support:

Het Cultuurfonds

The Services Departments of the Conservatorium van Amsterdam and the Royal Conservatoire The Hague

The voice departments of Conservatorium van Amsterdam and the Royal Conservatoire The Hague

The Classical Department Royal Conservatoire The Hague

Daniele Zamboni

Programme Credits

About Anne Sexton – *Poetry Foundation*

About Conrad Susa – *Museum of Performance + Design*

DNOA design – *Marshall Light Studio*

Programme design – *Lisanne de Haan*

Editor – *Paula Best*

Rehearsal & production photos © *Reinout Bos*

