



# THESE FAMILIAR SPIRITS

book & lyrics by gordon leary

music by julia meinwald

## about the story

after the death of their friend ann putnam jr, a group of childhood friends (who also happen to have been the witch trial accusers) return to salem in june 1716 to attend her funeral. unbeknownst to them, the women are joined (and overseen) by the spirits of their three friends who have passed on since their last meeting. the women's awkward and tentative reunion leads them to spending the afternoon among the survivors of their accusations. the women return to the walcott family home and start to ease into their old dynamics. when talk turns to what brought them together in the first place, tensions begin to rise. some regret their work, some feel justified in retrospect, some still believe. after dark, the night is interrupted by an old friend who links the worlds of the living and dead.

a story about reckoning with the past in order to reckon with the present.

[think *the crucible* meets *the big chill* about trauma.]

## about the songs

for the better part of the piece, the language of the living is spoken and the language of the dead is sung. the songs follow to the goings-on of the living, sometimes recognizing what the two worlds share, sometimes commenting on what the dead see. the languages mix when the space between the worlds is bridged.

## characters

### living

- **mercy lewis allen** // 43, of boston, ma. slightly tamed by life but still bubbling with rebellion. in childhood, she was sent to salem after her family was killed and worked for her cousins, the putnams.
- **mary walcott farrar** // 41, of ashford, ct. as cool and calm as she's always been, for better or worse. in childhood, she was kind of unremarkable and cousins with both ann and sarah.
- **elizabeth hubbard bennett** // 41, of gloucester, ma. not as dangerous as she used to be, or that's what she tells everyone. in childhood, she was the orphan niece & maid of the salem physician who diagnosed witchcraft.
- **elizabeth "betty" parris barron** // 33, of sudbury, ma. spoiled by her father and then her husband. in childhood, she was daughter of salem's strict new minister and played fortune telling with her cousin abigail.
- **sarah churchill andrews** // 49, of berwick, me. still an awkward fit with the group, and not just because of her age. in her youth was a maid & cousins with mary and was pressured to join the younger girls.

### deceased

- **ann putnam, jr** // 37. recently deceased having reckoned with what she'd done with those in salem but not with the other accusers. in childhood, she was the glue that held the group together. (the angel on the shoulders of the living.)
- **abigail williams** // 19. everything is unfinished and still fresh. in childhood, she was betty's cousin, best friend, maid, and possibly bad influence. (the devil on the shoulders of the living.)
- **susannah sheldon** // 23. grounded not by grace but by necessity. in childhood, her family fled to salem from attacks in maine and lived in poverty. (the ground beneath the feet of the living.)

### straddling the line

- **martha "mary" warren** // 44. a specter of her former self. in childhood, she was already barely there.