

For Immediate Release
April 7, 2022

PEAK PERFORMANCES AT MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY PRESENTS THE U.S. PREMIERE OF GANDINI JUGGLING'S *SMASHED2*, APRIL 21–24

***Smashed2* Continues the Acclaimed Company's Sly Exploration of Etiquette and Gender Roles, Applying Elements of Pina Bausch's Gestural Choreography to Their Wild Yet Precise Juggling Practice**

The Production Precedes the Return of Gandini's Work to The Metropolitan Opera in *Akhnaten*

PEAK Performances at Montclair State University presents **Gandini Juggling's *Smashed2***, April 21–24. In Gandini Juggling's hit *Smashed*, which made its US Premiere at PEAK Performances, the manipulation of forbidden fruit shrewdly explored the strained relations between seven men and two women—and kindly flayed traditions of juggling and circus. *Smashed2* is the dark art of juggling revisited. Continuing the exploration they began with *Smashed*, partners and Gandini Juggling co-founders **Sean Gandini** and **Kati Ylä-Hokkala** (respectively, director and assistant director of *Smashed2*) again borrow elements of **Pina Bausch's** gestural choreography and combine them with the intricate patterns and cascades of solo and ensemble juggling.

Performances of *Smashed2* take place at the **Alexander Kasser Theater** April 21 and 22 at 7:30pm, April 23 at 8pm, and April 24 at 3pm. Running time is 52 minutes, with no intermission. Tickets are \$50 (and free for MSU undergraduates, with valid ID) and can be purchased at peakperfs.org or 973.655.5112. The Alexander Kasser Theater is located at 1 Normal Avenue, Montclair, NJ, on the Montclair State University campus. Gandini Juggling returns to PEAK Performances as Gandini's virtuosic work is also showcased at The Metropolitan Opera in the return of Phelim McDermott's production Philip Glass's *Akhnaten* (May 19-June 10).

The magic of Gandini Juggling—beyond their sheer agility, their pairing of crudeness and grace—is their ability to make the relationship between performers, watermelons, oranges, and other rotund inanimate objects reflect the vast spectrum of human power dynamics and the joy, brutality, and sorrow of life. *Smashed2* lightly disrupts the rigid conventions of etiquette, dress, gender, and body language, resulting in a new hybrid of juggling, performed with meticulous unison and split-second timing.

"Gandini opens windows in the mind," *The New York Times* wrote of Gandini Juggling's *Smashed*. "Juggling becomes flights of inspired poetry, musical choreography with strong dance elements, crazy-comedy surrealism, breathtakingly dexterous virtuosity, darkly absurdist drama." With frenzied levity underlain by a dark lyricism—a result of their collision of juggling with Bausch-inspired dance—their latest work, *Smashed2*, reverberates in this disorienting era of celebratory return that carries with it the anxiety, loss, and pain of an ongoing crisis.

Sean Gandini says, “For those who saw *Smashed* at PEAK Performances in 2019, *Smashed2* is a response to that show, but also lives on its own. It continues our exploration of interpersonal relationships and power dynamics through juggling. There are questions of redemption and revenge, but there’s also a lot of fun juggling with fruits of different sizes. Kati and I can’t wait to share this piece in its North American premiere.”

Smashed2, which follows the U.S. premiere performances of Gandini Juggling’s *Spring* (2019) and *Smashed* (2018), is directed by **Sean Gandini** and assistant directed by **Kati Ylä-Hokkala**, and performed by **Kati Ylä-Hokkala**, **Frederike Gerstner**, **Luke Hallgarden**, **Valerie Jauregui**, **Sakari Männistö**, **Francesca Poppi Mari**, **Lynn Scott**, **Erin O’Toole**, and **Yu-Hsien Wu**. The *Smashed2* team includes **Ben Duke** (outside eye), **Guy Dickens** (lighting design), **Marina Arranz** (general manager), **Rae Lee** (executive producer), and **Axel Satgé** (tour booking and international development).

Smashed2 is the third of five PEAK Performances presentations that will be captured this season by **Alla Kovgan**, a filmmaker commensurate with the work being offered—and the state-of-the-art technology used to capture performance—at the Alexander Kasser Theater. Kenneth Turan of *The Los Angeles Times* called Kovgan’s 3D film *Merce* (2019) “a visual wonder,” and Tomris Laffly, in *Variety*, deemed it “spectacular,” writing “this is what an artform celebrating the very nature and a practitioner of another artform should look and feel like.” Marina Harss wrote in *The New Yorker*, “Kovgan’s film succeeds in a way that most dance documentaries do not: as an art object in and of itself.”

Working with Director of Photography **Mia Cioffi Henry**, Kovgan captured Donald Byrd and Spectrum Dance Theater’s *Strange Fruit* and Netta Yerushalmy’s *Movement* at the Kasser earlier this season. Following *Smashed2*, she will capture Familie Flöz’s *Hotel Paradiso* (May 5–8), and, concluding the season, Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane Company’s *Curriculum II* (June 9–12). The films will eventually screen on PEAK Performances’ PEAK Plus platform, which allows remote audiences to engage with the work of visionaries of contemporary performance.

PEAK Performances’ Commitment to Health and Safety

To help protect the health and safety of audiences, artists, staff, and PEAK’s greater community, patrons are required to wear masks—at all times—for all performances. Additionally, all performances will require proof of full vaccination to attend. Audience members will be asked to show proof of vaccination before entering the theater. These guidelines may evolve depending on health and safety recommendations.

About Sean Gandini (Director)

Sean Gandini was fascinated by magic and mathematics as a child growing up in Havana. In the 1980s, he was a regular performer in London’s Covent Garden and toured with various theater groups. Since then, Gandini has spent the last 25 years researching and contributing to all aspects of juggling; he is a prolific creator, and his work also extends to choreography and directing. Throughout his career he has collaborated with many other acclaimed artists, including pioneering American musician Tom Johnson and the influential British choreographer Gill Clarke. With Gandini Juggling, co-founded with Kati Ylä-Hokkala in 1992, Gandini continues to perform at many of the most prestigious festivals and

venues throughout the world, reinventing and reinvigorating juggling for the 21st century. In 2016 he worked as choreographer on the Philip Glass opera *Akhnaten* for the English National Opera and won an Olivier Award for Best New Opera Production. In 2018 he directed *Spring* in collaboration with choreographer Alexander Whitley.

About Kati Ylä-Hokkala (Assistant Director/Performer)

Kati Ylä-Hokkala is one of her generation's iconic jugglers. As a co-founder of Gandini Juggling, she has not only built a reputation as a highly skilled technical juggler but is also renowned as one of the leading innovators in dance-juggling. Ylä-Hokkala began her professional career in the 1980s, performing with the influential Ra-Ra Zoo. In 1991, with Sean Gandini, she co-founded Gandini Juggling. Since then she has been instrumental in the company's experiments into the possibilities of juggling, including working to create unique "two-person sharing" juggling patterns. A former rhythmic gymnast, Ylä-Hokkala has a distinctive ability to combine movement with extremely complex coordination that is second to none. In this she has crafted an intimate and extensive knowledge of the relationship between dance and juggling. Knowledge that has ensured that Gandini Juggling's work is always of the highest technical standard. Ylä-Hokkala's own performances are always accompanied by a unique calm precision, a precision that comes from decades of throwing while standing on one leg. She has used this same calm precision to steer Gandini Juggling for the past 25 years. Ylä-Hokkala has performed in all of Gandini Juggling's works since 1991, performing in over 2,500 shows throughout the world—in art galleries and palaces, in town squares and stadiums, in intimate theaters and on the stages of some of the world's most iconic venues. In recent years she has co-directed many of the company's pieces.

About Gandini Juggling

Formed in 1992 by world-renowned jugglers Sean Gandini and Kati Ylä-Hokkala, Gandini Juggling continues to be at the forefront of contemporary circus, reinventing and reinvigorating juggling for the 21st century.

Ferociously prolific, Gandini is constantly creating new work, which ranges from edgy visual art experiments to family-friendly entertainment, from narrative-infused dance escapades to humorous shenanigans. *Liberation* calls them the "Kings of Juggling" whose works are "...marvels of originality," while *The Guardian* says of the company, "juggling that is not just artful, but art."

Since the company's inception, the Gandinis have performed over 6,000 shows in 50 countries. They continue to perform at many of the most prestigious festivals and venues throughout the world. Their work transcends cultural barriers: the simple pleasure of watching people move while keeping objects in the air has a natural theatrical quality that has beguiled audiences globally.

Gandini continues to collaborate with a wide range of leading artists ranging from ballet choreographers to computer programmers, from costume designers to set makers, mathematicians to composers. They have spent several seasons working with symphonic orchestras, their choreographed juggling patterns lightly meshed to canonical classical works.

Their latest project, *LIFE*, is partnered with the Merce Cunningham Trust (New York, USA) with artistic collaborators Jennifer Goggans and the Pulitzer Prize–winning composer Caroline Shaw.

About Alla Kovgan

Alla Kovgan is a Boston-based filmmaker born in Moscow, Russia. Her films have been presented worldwide. Since 1999, Alla has been involved with interdisciplinary collaborations, creating intermedia performances (with KINODANCE Company), dance films, and documentaries about dance.

Kovgan is the director of *Cunningham*, a 3D cinematic experience about legendary American choreographer Merce Cunningham, orchestrated through his iconic works and performed by the last generation of his dancers. This poetic film tells a story of Merce’s becoming Merce and traces his artistic adventures over three decades of risk and discovery (1944-1972). Integrating live action, archival, animation, and graphics allows the viewers to “step inside” the dance, creating a visceral journey into the choreographer’s world. A breathtaking explosion of dance, music, and never-before-seen archival material, *Cunningham* is a timely tribute to one of the world’s greatest modern dance artists.

About PEAK Performances

PEAK Performances is a program of the Office of Arts + Cultural Programming (Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director) at Montclair State University and has been honored by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts with previous Arts Citation of Excellence and Designation of Major Impact. Programs in this season are made possible in part by the Alexander Kasser Theater Endowment Fund, PEAK Patrons, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and the FACE Foundation.

Funding Credits and Acknowledgements

This season of PEAK Performances is made possible, in part, with funds from The Alexander Kasser Theater Endowment Fund, PEAK Performances patrons, and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.



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