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PONDLIFE
KAPPA
MIKEY & ADDIE

by Robert Alan Evans

SAMUEL FRENCH

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Author's Note

It's fun to look at your friends and decide what age they are inside. Some people I know are about five-years-old, still running around in circles, getting excited and hitting me on the head with rolled up bits of newspaper. Another person I know has the body of a forty-year-old, but is still about twelve inside; forever wandering around the playground looking at the tarmac and wondering who will be his friend. I also have a friend who is stuck at fifteen, listening to songs about misery and unable to throw away T-shirts that don't fit anymore. I think I am probably about ten. And that's what these plays are about. Being about ten.

Maybe being young really is easy for some people. I don't know. There were those ones who seemed to be good at everything. The ones who appeared to have a sophisticated grip on things that were, to me, a mystery; what clothes to wear, what music to listen to, who had snogged Bethan behind the bins. But I'm fairly sure that even they had moments of existential panic. When they were at home, staring at the ceiling, listening to the sounds of the house, surely they too wondered what it all meant and why things were the way they were. I, for one, had no idea, but one thing I knew for certain, was that it was not going to be easy and I would need all my wits about me, if I wasn't going to mess up and reveal the fact that I was completely and utterly confused.

When I was ten, I used to have the feeling that somehow I was being watched. We had bunk beds and I would sometimes lie in the bottom bunk and peel bits of woodchip from the wallpaper, then I would worry that the wall had people behind, just watching. They were scientists, I knew this because they had white coats on, were in a laboratory and some of them were wearing safety glasses (why they needed the glasses I never found out). And the wall would at some point lift up and reveal these people. They would confirm that my life so far had been an experiment. In some ways it would be a relief. Finally, it would all make sense. They would tell me that of course I was having these feelings, that actually everyone had them, that they had all just been pretending to see if they would still rise up in me. And they had, so the experiment was over. Everyone would be pleased with the results, pleased with me. What these feelings

were, I'm not quite sure, as a boy who was gay they were probably about desire, but what matters is that I thought I was the only one having them. A play is a good way to ask questions, especially of a young audience, to ask why things are the way they are, to show that being young is not easy, to take their lives and their problems every bit as seriously as most theatre takes the lives of older people.

The plays are also a result of working with Andy Manley and Gill Robertson and as such are also filled with some of their experiences. They introduced me to working with young people and for that I will be forever grateful. To learn how to keep a young audience entertained is to learn precision, how not to be self-indulgent and the importance of being completely honest with your audience. They know when you're floundering around and they love it when you respect their imaginations and give them something difficult.

Finally, a note on all three plays. They are storytelling pieces. They can be told in whatever way you want. One actor, two, thirteen, it doesn't matter. In France, *Pondlife* has been told by a man and a saxophonist, a woman with a projector and once by fifty school children. They are written to be performed in theatres with full lights, sound and set and also stripped back to nothing, in school classrooms and halls, where a live performance can thrill every bit as much. This flexibility was always a goal of the work and an attempt to get good stories to young people wherever they might be.

Robert Alan Evans
2016

PONDLIFE

Created by Robert Alan Evans,
Andy Manley & Gill Robertson

Written by Robert Alan Evans

First performed by Catherine Wheels Theatre Company
on 2nd May 2008

This story begins with two men.

About my age.

Two men. Walking towards each other. That's the beginning and the end of this story.

And I'll tell you where.

An airport.

The lounge. Busy with people. Kids screaming, grannies sitting, mums perusing the perfume aisle, spraying clouds of Chanel No 5, already on their holiday. All waiting to board. Waiting to fly away to somewhere else.

No one notices these two men.

Except the cleaner. Mopping away. Sees them walking towards each other.

Two pairs of shoes. White patent leather come all the way from Los Angeles and brown brushed suede come all the way from Edinburgh.

Walking. Closing the gap.

About to meet.

For the first time in thirty years.

Best friends they were once.

Swore an oath on it when they were ten. Sitting in the woods one evening. Sky above going dark.

Best friends forever.

Didn't know they'd have a fight. Didn't realise their friendship would end.

But our story starts before then. Before all that. Back when they first met.

School bell rings.

*

Simon and Martin. Standing in front of P6 after the Easter holidays.

Martin looking around to see who he might make friends with. Shirt ironed, shoes polished, tie on straight.

And then Simon. Different. Long hair a mess over green eyes, his tie on wrong. Like it doesn't really belong to him.

The two of them standing, shuffling under the gaze of P6. Everyone already settled, already friends.

'Now Martin, tell us where you've moved from.' Mrs Nangle the class teacher.

'Now come on Martin, don't be shy.'

Martin knows this is dangerous. Hasn't had time to get rid of his accent.

'Birmingham.'

The class start to snigger.

'What did he say Miss?'

'Birmingham.'

'And does anyone know what you're called if you're from Birmingham?

No?

A Brummie, isn't that right Martin?'

Only someone who wasn't from Birmingham would say that, but Martin nods anyway, just wants to sit down.

Brummie. Brummie. It's racing round the class. Mrs Nangle saying something about spoons. About how Birmingham is famous for spoons and that makes everyone laugh more.

'Spoon face'

'Spoon boy'

'Class. Class. Now settle down. I don't want to hear any more remarks. Sharon MacGuinness and Colin Maxwell, that includes you.

Now, this is Simon.'

Simon nods. But doesn't say anything. The class stare, but he doesn't seem to care. He is staring at the poster of the solar system on the back wall. He just turns the collar of his jacket up and stands there. Waiting. Martin sees he has odd socks on. One brown, one green.

'Boys, you sit over there.' There are two spaces at the side of the class. Martin looks around, doesn't want to sit next to Simon, but there is nowhere else.

'Now class, as it's the first day back, I want you to draw your favourite day of the holidays. Let your imaginations run wild.

…

Not too wild Sharon.'

Martin gets up to borrow some colours. Maybe talk to some of the boys. But as soon as he approaches, each table seems to close up. No-one will let him near them. He goes back to his desk and there, in the middle, is the biggest pencil case Martin has ever seen. Old fashioned, like it's knitted, and overflowing with colours. Chalk pastels, oil pastels, huge fat felt-tips, everything you might need. Simon pushes them over.

'Thanks.'

'No problem', says Simon and gets back to his picture.

Martin gets to work drawing his pals playing football back in Birmingham. Then he notices Simon's picture. A blue sky with clouds drifting across the page, and something coming out of them. Soon it becomes a horse, a horse galloping out of the clouds. Strange but good. Really good.

'Hoh! That is amazing!' Judith Montgomery has come across, noticed Simon's picture.

'Miss! Look what Simon's done.'

The whole class stop.

'Simon McGurk! Well. Well. Well. It seems we have our very own Cézanne in the class.'

Everyone 'umms' and 'ahhs' at Simon's picture. Mrs Nangle sticks it up on the wall. Susan Topping says it's just like her horse Princess which she rides every weekend.

Only Sharon's voice can be heard complaining.

'It's meant to be your holidays. How's a flying horse your holidays?'

Breaktime.

Class pile out. Colin and Stewart barge past laughing. 'Out the way spoonface.'

Martin finally finds his way to the playground. A football's being kicked about. Thinks about joining in. In Birmingham

he would've been straight in there. Right at the front. Calling to his friends. Shouting for the ball.

…

Leaves it.

Sees Simon on the other side of the playground. Alone as well.

Lunch. Martin stands with his tray looking for somewhere to sit. Just a sea of faces, then he hears a voice.

Sharon McGuinness, waving at him, smiling. Anoushka Osborne sits beside her, flicking her hair. And at the end of the table Colin and Stuart are playing Top Trumps.

'Martin!

Hey Martin!

Over here.'

'Martin. We were just trying to remember where it was you were from again.

Where was it?'

'Birmingham.'

'Where?'

'Birmingham.'

'Will you say something for me?'

'Okay.'

'Say "My name's Martin".'

KAPPA

by Robert Alan Evans

NOTE ON THE PLAY

Kappa was originally performed directly in classrooms. The pupils didn't know anything was going to take place that day and their excitement at having a surprise story told over, under and around their everyday classroom space was truly thrilling. For the space of an hour Kappa is there with them and when he leaves it should feel that the story is continuing. It should feel that the seemingly normal world is full of secret stories, doorways and possibilities.

REHEARSAL NOTE

The play is written for one actor. For ease of reading, different characters lines are often finished with 'he said' or 'she said'. At the risk of stating the obvious it may be found that in rehearsals you don't need some or any of these, as the characters become more defined in the playing it will become clear to an audience who is speaking which lines.

Commissioned by Catherine Wheels and with Andy Manley,
first performed in classrooms across Scotland in 2007

A classroom.

A man enters.

He has been through a rainstorm and is dry now, but his hair has that look like it is still plastered to his head, cut asymmetrically.

He is wearing a suit which has overtones of the future, a strange cut, though on closer inspection it may be a suit that has just been personalised.

He walks to the wall, examines it. He steps back. Looks at the class.

He runs at the wall and hits it full pelt.

He falls to the floor.

KAPPA 'scuse me.

He recovers and inspects the wall again. Tries to push his hand through it.

You haven't seen a door here have you?

There should be a door here.

Right here.

None of you have seen anything have you? Out of the corner of your eye? It might look like the air was shimmering. Like a patch cut out of the air. A doorway. No?

I don't understand.

I set the energy momentum tensor.

I worked out the cosmological constant.

There should be a door here…to a different world.

He gets out his tiny notebook and tries to work out equations. They are long and complicated. He notices the class looking at him.

What?

…

Why are you all here?

Someone replies school.

School?! This is a school?

Ha! Ha!!

How old are you?

Eleven.

I suppose… So…this is what you learn in?

My school was different to this. In my school there would've been a screen here with the teachings and each of us was plugged into it. We used to learn numbers; quantum, field theory, dimensional physics. I loved that. Could beat anyone at numbers. That was before the power started going. Ha! *(he finds something amusing in the classroom)* They couldn't afford to keep the schools running see. The power would go and school would end.

I'd go back home to Mum.

Mum?

My Mum.

She would say 'Wash your hands.'

'Don't spit'

'Tidy your room.'

'Do your homework'

Or, 'where've you been I was worried sick?'

Sometimes she'd find something so funny she'd laugh, like she'd have to leave the table from laughing and sometimes she laughed until she farted and then I'd laugh and she'd laugh some more.

I was eleven, like you, when I lost her.

Lost her?

...

That's funny, isn't it.

Gets out a photo of his mother. It has been ripped up and stuck back together with tape. It is very worn and there is a piece missing.

See. This is my mum. You can't see her that well because of the piece that's missing but she has brown hair, curly.

And brown eyes.

And she's got a mole just here.

You haven't seen her have you? I mean I don't suppose you've seen anyone like that?

Course not.

This isn't her world.

Going back to the photo.

She said we had to be a team because Dad was away. Working. She said it was just the two of us against the world.

We were a good team.

Until the day she stopped.

I suppose that's what started it all. That's why I'm here.

I was eleven like you when it happened. I remember that night.

Coming home from school and it's pitch black from the power cuts.

Not even a candle lit and I think Mum must've gone out, but there she is sitting in the dark in the kitchen. Smoking.

And I know something's wrong.

When she sees me she crumples up this piece of paper, but then she just looks at me and hands it over and she says ‘I’m sorry’. Her last words. ‘I’m sorry’.

And I look at the paper and it says my dad is ‘deceased’. Deceased. My dad is dead.

So we sit there.

And I make Mum a cup of tea because she looks strange there in the dark and I light a candle between us, just to see each other, be a team, but Mum isn’t really there. She’s gone somewhere inside. And for the first time ever I feel alone.

Mum!

Mum?

Didn’t know what to do.

Us sitting there. Had to do something.

So I cleaned. I tidied. I swept up every bit of dust in the room and still Mum sat there.

I emptied her ashtray. Made more tea. Nothing.

Every day kept busy.

Every day kept hoping.

For weeks I kept hoping.

Why didn’t Mum say something?

Say something.

Please.

Please.

Don’t leave me alone.

Mum.

I didn’t know what to do. So I went to my room and lay down. I lay there and listened to the jingles.

FEELING BRIGHT AND BREEZY?
GET A SMILE THAT’S OH SO EASY.
MAKE YOUR MOUTH A PLACE PEOPLE WANT TO SEE
WITH TEETH SO WHITE DENTAL SURGERY.

And that's when it happened.

He makes a 'ping' sound.

The screen flashing in the corner. Covered in dust.

He finds a screen in the classroom and goes up close to read from it.

'Want to play?' it says.

Just like that.

Course everyone's connected to the screens. Got to be. Not allowed to turn them off. Don't even think they have off buttons. That's how you learn the jingles.

'Want to play?'

Want to play, question mark.

'How?'

'Plug in.'

So I do. The connectors are round the back and they're old. Boy, really old. Mark Sevens probably. Rusty too. But I get them in, and I feel the change, like you're slipping sideways out of your body and then… Oh! I'm in.

The web.

Far as the eye can see. Stretched out in front of me. All around, a look down and…

Eugh.

Right the way down, forever. *(He has vertigo)*

The web.

MIKEY & ADDIE

Created by Andy Manley and
Robert Alan Evans

Written by Robert Alan Evans

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The date on Mikey's birth certificate should be adjusted to make him around 10 years old at production.

Mikey is pronounced Mike-ee.

The show was originally performed by two actors. They split the lines, with one voicing Mikey's story and one Addie's, sometimes overlapping. However, this is flexible and left to the choice of the director.

First performed at the lmaginate Festival in May 2012, originally produced by macrobert and commissioned by the London 2012 Festival and (Scottish Government logo) supported through the Scottish Government's Edinburgh Festivals Expo Fund"

Okay.
So this will come together.
This story, like the universe comes together from lots of little bits. From seeing things. From connections. From the marks on the pavement. From a bag sitting caught in a tree. The first splodges of rain on concrete. From a bus trip to Glasgow and a trip back, silent. From all the millions of things that make up even one day on Earth.

Earth.

A cocophany of sounds. Radio waves. People. Traffic. Noise. Then up. Go up and just the sound of birds swooping. Clouds flying by. Up more. More. The thrum of ozone and then…

Ah.

Out.

There it is. Earth. Getting smaller below you.

Silent.

Spinning.

A little bubble of blue ocean and white cloud. A gem. Suspended in the black of space.

Then out further. Our sun.

Giant burning thing.

Imagine standing near to the sun.

If you could.

If you were fireproof. What would that be like?

Pull out once more.

Past Mars. A little more.

And there is a man.

Encased in a spacesuit.

We can't see his face.

Just the cut of the sun reflecting off his helmet.

Why would a man be here?

Floating off.

We could call out to him, but no sound would escape.

Space is a vacuum. We are all lost in it.

The man. Lost.

*

Then back. Back back back. Quicker quicker quicker.

Come on come on!

Flying back towards earth, the wind a sudden rush in

your ears as you fly in.

Towards land.

A continent.

A country.

A town.

A street.

A house.

A house.

Mikey's eyes

Addie's eyes

open at exactly the same time that morning. No one knows it. Not even them. But they do.

*

Mikey sits up in bed.

Hits his head on Pluto.

It swings.

He stills it.

Looks down the line of planets that hang from his ceiling. Stretching towards the sun.

The sun, made from a mixture of bubblewrap and plaster of paris. He imagines it burning. A tiny ball of flame suspended in his room. That would be cool.

Around the planets are the stars; Polaris, Sirius, Alpha Centurai. Ninety five of them hanging from the ceiling. Silver foil catching the light.

And there, in the middle of it all hangs his dad, a small plastic astronaut.

Mikey touches his dad with a thought. 'I hope you're okay up there. God speed.' That's what people said at NASA and in books. God speed.

And with that he's up.

*

Addie has brushed her teeth, combed her hair and looked at herself in the mirror for eight seconds.

She had managed to ignore her little brothers for the whole of breakfast, which was a miracle really as they kept firing imaginary lasers at each other.

She had stared straight ahead and imagined they were dead.

It had worked.

Now she has laid out everything she needs for the day ahead. There are two baseball caps which she has personalised herself. They have 'Playground Monitor' written on the front and two ears, like fox's ears, stuck on the top. She doesn't really know why, but they look amazing and they'll certainly stand out in the playground. Then there are her handheld warning signs. Attached with elastic. One is red and says 'No' and the other green and says 'Yes'; they were to encourage good behaviour. And finally 'The Rules'. Her dad had let her print out thirty copies to stick around the school.

1. No running or dangerous behaviour (Addie would decide what was 'dangerous').

2. No littering.

3. Climbing frame time will be managed by a rota. That way, everyone would get a turn.

4. No throwing balls into girls' faces.

5. No loitering.

It was perfect. She was going to be the best Playground Monitor ever.

*

Mikey walks through his kitchen with his mum's cup of tea. He likes to be so smooth that it doesn't even ripple.

He takes the step into the hall without raising the cup and walks along the hall like that. The hall half painted. One wall a kind of pink and the other bare plaster with patches of colour everywhere. His mum's testers. She had never decided which colour to do it.

The front room ahead. Boxes overflowing out of it. You couldn't actually get into the room. It was like the opposite of a room.

'The Box Heads'? No.

Up the stairs.

Careful. Careful.

His mum's door. Not a drop spilled.

'The Doors'? Already done.

His mum is sitting up in bed.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Halfway to his mum he is weightless. Floating the tea in towards her.

She has to do the same. She nods her head slowly. Gives the thumbs up. He launches the tea towards her. She takes it and the spell is broken. Gravity back.

'Thank you Mikey.'

'Mission Control. Mission accomplished.'

'I washed your shirts. They're on the drier.'

'Yes ma'am.'

'And don't forget the money for the school trip. It's on the table.'

'Chhhhhhh, message received Houston. Ending radio contact.'

*

They both leave their houses at exactly the same time.

Addie power-walks. She hardly notices the other groups of kids meandering their way to school. She wants to put up her rules before anyone gets in.

Mikey meets up with Stevie and the two of them walk in silence. Both of them trying to think of a name for their band.

'Blue,' says Stevie.

'No. Rubbish.'

'Tropical Delight.'

Mikey just laughs.

'Tropical Delight?'

'We could wear Hawaiian shirts.'

'Why?'

'Dunno. Just thought of it last night.'

'What about The Box Heads?'

'Squid-face!'

They pass by an old woman.

'Tartan Trolley?'

They had been doing this for weeks now, but nothing seemed right.

They were playing the school fair in two weeks and they didn't even have a band name.

Gordon joins them. Silently pulling up beside them. One foot on the pedal ready to hop off. He just rolls along next to them.

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