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Mom, How Did You Meet The Beatles?

*A True Story of
London in the 1960's*

by Adrienne Kennedy
and Adam P. Kennedy

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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FRENCH**

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MARA MANUS
Executive Director

Presents

MOM, HOW DID YOU MEET THE BEATLES?

By ADAM P. KENNEDY and ADRIENNE KENNEDY
Directed by PETER DUBOIS

with
WILLIAM DEMERITT, BRENDA PRESSLEY

Scenic and Costume Design	ALEXANDER DODGE
Lighting Design	MICHAEL CHYBOWSKI
Sound Design	WALTER TRARBACH
Production Stage Manager	ELIZABETH MILLER

General Manager
NICKI GENOVESE

Associate Artistic Director
MANDY HACKETT

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CHARACTERS

ADRIENNE KENNEDY – The Adrienne character is often hesitant, emotional, joyous and sad. The conversation with her son is the *first time* she has spoken about her time in London during the 1960s.

ADAM KENNEDY – Throughout the play, the Adam character is curious as to events he's heard something about. This is the *first time* he's heard the story from his mother.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

In London, in the 1960s, there was music everywhere. The Beatles, The Stones, The Supremes, James Brown, Aretha, Jimi Hendrix, music from the musical *Hair*, Dylan, etc.

Specific 1960s songs were used in the Public Theater production. I have indicated who the artists were so that the music can approximate these sounds.

Also regarding the Public Theater production: we used specific London scenes—pictures of The National Theatre, Primrose Hill, Maida Vale, Adrienne and Adam on Chalcot Crescent, The Royal Court, and the National Theatre.

(**ADRIENNE KENNEDY** enters center stage and remains there. **ADAM KENNEDY** is seated close to the wings [partially seen].

ADRIENNE wears a pretty dress—silver was popular—and perhaps ballerina shoes. **ADAM** wears dark trousers and a white shirt.

Throughout the play, **ADRIENNE** looks at the audience. There are only a few moments where she glances back at the actor behind her.

Behind **ADRIENNE** are scenes of London during the 1960s.)

ADAM KENNEDY. How did you come to work with the Beatles?

ADRIENNE KENNEDY. Joe [Joseph C. Kennedy] and I were separated and somehow you and I ended up living on Bedford Street for about eight months and I was miserable. I didn't see a way out. Gillian Walker came to see a production of *The Owl Answers* at the Theatre de Lys. She was a New York career girl with all this energy and enthusiasm and this love for *Funnyhouse*. She had already seen *Funnyhouse*. She told me she worked for Ted Mann's theatre Circle-In-the Square. She was Ted's assistant, but she was far more. She really was co-producer. I knew Ted Mann because I had studied at Circle-In-the Square...*Funnyhouse*...that's where *Funnyhouse* had its very first workshop production at Circle-In-the Square on Bleecker Street.

She said, "Maybe we could commission you to write a play." Bedford Street was only a stone's throw from Bleecker Street. So I walked around there. You were in school in kindergarten.

I walked around there and went up to see Ted. He said

I'd like to commission you to write a play. So...that just sounded so good to me. He said, "What do you want to write?" Well, a couple of years before, Joedy had given me a book about the Beatles...John Lennon's nonsense books. I was always crazy about this book. It's a little blue book. It has a photograph of John Lennon on the cover and these little nonsense verses. I was always just so taken with it. So I said I'd like to make a play of John Lennon's nonsense writings. I thought that really sounded great...maybe go to London and meet the Beatles or something. (*laughs*) It was crazy in a way, because I was in my mid-thirties. But...you know...that's what I said.

He said, "Well I know John Lennon's publisher. His name is Tom Maschler. I'll write to Tom Maschler and ask him...you know...maybe you could get permission to make a play out of John Lennon's nonsense book." He didn't say that's crazy or whatever. So Gillian wrote the letter, "a great idea," she said.

She wrote to Tom Maschler in London and Maschler... I think answered right away...and he said something like, "Tell her if she's ever in London to look me up." He said something like, "that sounds interesting. I can't make any promises, but tell her if she's ever in London to look me up."

Well I was a desperate person (*laughing*)...you know what I mean. And I thought I was going to get a Guggenheim. I was almost sure I was going to get a Guggenheim. And I'm stuck on Bedford Street. And there we were and I didn't know what I was going to do. So I said what I'll do, since I'm going to get a Guggenheim, I already had a Rockefeller Grant and, of course, Joe was giving me alimony...so, I'll take my little money and I'll go to London.

And...it was just a desperate move, a totally desperate move. I was walking down the street, on a Tuesday. We went to London on Thursday. And on Tuesday, I was

walking down Bleecker Street...Gillian said we could spend the last night in her house at the Dakota, which turned out to be very strange, because that's where John Lennon was murdered.

I was walking down Bleecker Street and I saw Diana Sands. Diana Sands always regretted that by the time *Funnyhouse* reached Off Broadway she couldn't be in it. She was on Broadway in *The Owl and the Pussycat* with Alan Alda. Diana was the original Sarah in *Funnyhouse*. She said, "Adrienne, I've always felt so terrible about it...where are you going? She was going to Circle-In-the-Square too. She had an appointment with Ted Mann.

As we walked I told her I was going to London in a few days. She said, "I've just come back from London and I want to give you a list of people you can look up there." She'd been doing *The Owl and the Pussycat* in the West End.

She said where will you be the last night here? The... last night...was a Wednesday. I told her the Dakota at Gillian's. She came to the Dakota and brought a long list of all these people. I remember she told me to call Ricki Huston first because she had a child your age. So I had all these people in the theatre to look up.

With that list and this message from Tom Maschler, on the strength of that I pulled myself together and took us to London in search...of...something.

We stayed at the Dakota the last night. I've always that that was very strange. The Dakota, I don't know if you remember...the Dakota had some rooms...rooms up on the top floor that servants used to sleep in...babysitters and housekeepers. Some tenants had a room like that. Gillian's friends used to stay in that little room. They were enchanting little rooms. We stayed in that little room upstairs for our last night.

And then we set off...we left in the morning for London. And I remember being at JFK. It was November...something like November 27, 1966. It was November 26 or November 27. And you were so

trusting. You were just...you know...I said, "Adam; we're going to London." And you were always just so trusting. And we're at the airport and I'm talking to you about going to London. And we got on a plane and went to London. We...I think had about four hundred dollars maybe five but no more. I didn't know. I just wanted to change my life.

Gillian had given me the name of what they called a "bed-sit." They didn't call them pensiones; they called them bed-sitters. A writer she knew lived in one in Earls Court. She told me to go there and ask form him. It would be a place to stay.

(London theme music begins playing.)

We arrived in London at about ten o'clock at night. And I went to this bed-sit and I asked for this writer. A woman said he wasn't there. And she was hostile... the woman who ran it. You could tell she was shocked that I was Black and that I was asking to stay in this bed-sit. I said, "Well, doesn't this writer live here?" She said, "He's not here." He's in Paris or something like that. "You can't stay here."

Gillian had another name written down...the Basil Street Hotel. I didn't know the Basil Street Hotel is one of the fanciest little hotels in London. So it's ten o'clock at night. We're trudging with our suitcases looking for a taxi.

(London theme music begins to fade.)

I don't know a soul in London. All I have is addresses, Diana Sands' theatre connections. So we go to the Basil Street Hotel at about eleven at night. And they were so nice. This beautiful little hotel. It's right around the corner from Harrods.

I'm sure by now it costs a fortune. And it had these enchanting little rooms with wall paper...

(Tea dance music begins playing.)

...like an Agatha Christie novel...Colonel so and so

came down for breakfast. They gave tea dances. We were only there about two weeks, but they gave tea dances in the afternoon and Colonel so and so is dancing with his wife. And they were so nice to us. I think they were nice to us because...*(pause)*...you didn't see many American Blacks in London. And I think people were just a little taken aback. I really do.

(Tea dance music begins to fade.)

I think I had the letter from Tom Maschler, but I'm not sure. But I certainly had his address, Bedford Square and the name of the publisher, Jonathan Cape. And I had Ricki Huston's address. The very next day I called Tom Maschler and I called Ricki Huston.

(Ricki's theme music should be in the realm of Jagger, Hendrix, Aretha, the Supremes.)

I had seen Ricki's picture many times...on the cover of *Life* magazine...in magazines skiing with John Huston...at home with John Huston. She answered the phone. I couldn't believe I was talking to her. She said, "Darling, I give teas on Sunday. You're a friend of Diana's. Please come by. Come by on Sunday."

I called Tom Maschler. He said he couldn't see me until that next week. We went to Ricki's on Sunday. The Hustons lived in Maida Vale No. 31 on the canal... Little Venice. The rooms were palatial and filled with art objects. She was very beautiful...with three beautiful children...Tony, Anjelica, Allegra. A governess lived with them. They seemed to like us. And they particularly liked you. I don't want to underestimate that. People were taken with you. I had you dressed up in this little blazer and shirt. It was very expensive. Not that it cost as much as Prince Charles...but it was expensive. When Joedy came from Sierra Leone they liked him too. Ricki put his picture on her dresser. So Ricki sort of took us on as her American friends...her Sundays at four.

(Ricki's music begins to fade.)

By the next Tuesday...I think it was the next Tuesday... I took you...Tom Maschler said he couldn't see me until like 5:00 pm. He said, "I'll see you at the end of the day." He said, "I want to tell you...I can't promise you anything except that you can come by." I said, "You told me, if ever I was in London, I could look you up." (*laughs*) He never dreamed that I was flying to London then. It was just a little crazy.

So we went...I came up from underground. His office was on the right, Bedford Square. We went in and I left you sitting in the little lobby. It was dark. It's December now...a week later [*after leaving New York*]. It's the first week in December and it's dark and cold. I went into his office. He turned out to be a young man about... twenty eight...dark-haired, intense.

He said, "What are you doing here in London?" I said I have a Rockefeller Grant and I'm probably going to get a Guggenheim and I'm just here for a little while. I told everyone that, I was just there for a couple of weeks. I told everybody that, because I really didn't know. I had already sent him twenty pages. I don't know when I did that. I think I did that from New York. I just sat down real quick and sent him twenty pages of the *Lennon Play*.

He said, "I can't give you money and I can't give you the rights to make a play out of John Lennon's *In His Own Write*. But what I will do, I will tell John. I will tell John about you." He said, "That's all I can promise you." He said, "But you will have to finish the whole thing, and I can't pay you." He said it was nice meeting me. So we left.

(*Tea dance music begins playing.*)

So we were there at the Basil Street Hotel. We went to Ricki's the next Sunday and that gave me a sense of security. Ricki was like that. She either embraced you or I guess she didn't pay any attention to you. But she embraced us.

...I remember that Christmas we went to the pantomime Cinderella at the Palladium. Do you remember that?...

(Tea dance music out.)

We were still at the Basil Street Hotel. Then...an American couple, Ann and Carlton Colcord, had produced *A Rat's Mass* in Rome. I had corresponded with them. They knew what I looked like from a photo I had sent them. They had lived in South American and now lived in Rome.

ADAM. And you had never met them?

ADRIENNE. I had never met them. We were standing on the corner facing Harrods...all these kinds of...I don't know...these weird occurrences. We were standing on the corner facing Harrods, starting to cross the street and go to the Basil Street Hotel, and this man was standing next to me. He said, "Aren't you Adrienne Kennedy?" And I said, "Why, yes." And he said, "Well, I'm Carlton Colcord."

(London theme music begins. It should be in the vein of The Byrds, music of the era.)

He said he too was staying at the Basil Street. He said, "Ann and I are thinking of moving to London. Ann's coming here in a few days, and she's going to stay at the Basil Street Hotel. We have two little children. In fact, we have a little boy who's Adam's age."

It had always been on my mind that we should go back to New York and I began to feel like we couldn't stay at the Basil Street Hotel. I began to feel like maybe we should go back to New York. But I'd given up that little horrible apartment on Bedford Street. So I couldn't go back.

The apartment we lived in before Joe and I separated, four hundred Central Park West had been so beautiful.

We had Ricki's teas and everybody was nice to us.

Then we stayed at a bedsitter on Queensgate Terrace. You walked out and there at the corner was Kensington Palace. I was excited...then Janet Miguell, Ricki's friend, who helped run the Leslie Waddington Art Gallery said, "You and Adam can stay with us for a while."

She lived in an apartment across from Olympia. We saw a boat show there once. The apartment was a kind of building I'd never seen...gigantic, red structure with large, wandering apartments. Janet and Gina [*Ricki's best friend*] lived there. Gina was a painter who later married an Olympic athlete. Large paintings were on the walls.

I kept working on the Lennon pages and working on the pages and working on the pages. Then I forgot about it. I said, "Maybe I should go back home." I called up the Guggenheim. I said, "I know you don't announce the Guggenheim until April first"...and this was January... "but do you think I'm going to get a Guggenheim?" A secretary said she did not generally give out that kind of information. But she said she would talk to the Foundation and find out. (*laughs*) I don't know why I did these kinds of things. Here I am in London [*in January*] and I need to know whether I'm going to get the Guggenheim in April. (*More laughter*) I don't know where I got that from. My mother would die. I mean I don't know where I got the nerve to do things like that.

Someone called me. "You are going to get a Guggenheim."

ADAM. So how much was that worth? How much was the Guggenheim?

ADRIENNE. It was eight thousand, five hundred dollars, which was a fortune back then. People lived on eight thousand, five hundred dollars. I knew it was enough money for us to live on for a year. Joe was giving me money each month. I had a Rockefeller grant. Rockefeller grants were three thousand, five hundred

dollars. But I had spent quite a bit of the Rockefeller grant already.

We were just lucky. Now I felt we could stay in London. So I went out looking for apartments. You know there was this big racial thing in London. And there weren't many American Blacks...when I showed up people seemed a little...

ADAM. When you say there was a big racial thing, what do you mean?

ADRIENNE. People were very aware that you were not white. At that time a lot of West Indians were moving to London. You know there was a tradition of Africans living and going to school in England, Cambridge, Oxford, and University of London. But now the British thought too many West Indians were moving to London. It was very much in the air.

People would be surprised that I was Black. I would call first after seeing an apartment in The London Times. I didn't know what I was doing.

(Primrose Hill music begins. It is joyous.)

So Janet Miguell said, "Adrienne, I don't think you know how to find an apartment in London. I'll find you an apartment." She made a few phone calls. Then she said, "You should live up in Primrose Hill. A lot of Americans live up there. It's not expensive but it's beautiful. Some writers live there but it's still working class."

So I went up there in a taxi. It seemed far away. We went up this street; I think it's called Albert Road. There was the Zoo and Primrose Hill. Janet told me Karl Marx once walked there and Sylvia Path had lived on Chalcot Square. She had found an apartment for us. She said, "They're thrilled. I told them you're a Guggenheim Fellow. They have a pretty little apartment at the top of their house." I remember it was seventy pounds a month, which was about two hundred and ten dollars.

So we went there. They said you're a writer and a Guggenheim Fellow. They let us move in right away. It was on the corner, 39 Chalcot Crescent. You went up the stairs to the top floor of their house. It was a beautiful little living room, hallway, kitchen and a bedroom that faced a garden.

The day we moved to Primrose hill I got a phone call. "Hello Adrienne, this is James Earl Jones." We had met when Ellen Holy had introduced us backstage at a production of Macbeth that Joe Papp had done in Washington Square Park. I remembered his unusually intense brown eyes. "I'm in London and I don't know anyone."

My new friends all wanted to meet him. Ricki invited a group to her house. Jimmy was preparing to do a movie in France with the Burtons, a Graham Greene novel. His mention of the Burtons reminded me of my obsession with Elizabeth Taylor. "Jimmy, when you're making the movie with the Burtons, could you get me Elizabeth Taylor's autograph?" "I will," he said matter of factly. He came to London several times while filming the movie, once bringing with him a man who was writing a book on Africa. Finally at the end of the summer Jimmy came to London again. Would he be going back to France?

"The filming is over," he said. "Did you ever get Elizabeth Taylor's autograph?"

"No. I wanted to because I knew you really wanted it, but I felt funny asking her for an autograph."

(Primrose Hill music begins to fade.)

The man Jimmy had brought to visit was Alex Haley. He came up the stairs full of energy, carrying books under his arm. He sat on a gray silk couch and we talked about young marriages, which we both had experienced. He told me that he was writing a book that would trace his ancestors back to West Africa. Although I had been to West Africa with Joe for six

months and knew it had changed my entire consciousness, I still laughed. The idea of a person tracing his family back that far was funny to me. "You shouldn't laugh," he said very genially, "in fact you should trace yours." I never forgot it.

After we'd been there for about four months, the family decided they didn't like having visitors in their house. It wasn't renovated. And when we went up the stairwell we passed by their upstairs rooms.

It was near July, the landlord said, "Mrs. Kennedy, there's a man down the street and he's stationed in Nigeria. They have two floors and they're for rent. It's only five pounds more than this and it's all furnished." And I'll never forget. I went down there and looked at it. "I called the agent for you and I told him you're an American, you're over here on a Guggenheim and he said he'll lease it to you for a year." So we took our suitcases and went to No. 35. And to me it was like Shangri-La. It was a beautiful two floors of a house with a garden, two baths, beautiful bedrooms. It was furnished very traditionally. There was a living room that faced the garden.

The dining room had a mantle piece, striped wallpaper and a big dark dining table with chairs. And the living room had a settee. It wasn't a couch, it was a settee. And striped gold wallpaper. Then you walked down three steps and there was a kitchen. It faced the garden. And you walked down about five or six more steps and there were two bedrooms, with two baths. Your room faced the garden. To me, it was like heaven.

I never heard from Tom Maschler. I had forgotten, really, about the Beatle thing. Anyway, Billie Allen had said to me, "You've got to call up Nan Lanier when you're in London." Well I had never called Nan Lanier.

Nan Lanier was Tennessee Williams' cousin. She's my

age. She was divorced...had been married to a minister in New York. I can't remember his name. Nan was one of the founders of the American Place Theatre. And Nan Lanier loved *Funnyhouse*. When I called her. She said, "Adrienne, I've been wondering how to find you." She said, "Billie told me that you're over here. Where do you live?" And I told her 35 Chalcot Crescent. And she said, "Well, we live right above you. We live in Hampstead. All you have to do is just walk up the hill and then turn the corner and there we are." By now it was summer. It was warm outside. So I took you and we walked up the hill...and there she was.

You see it was an atmosphere...She was an exile...She was divorced. She had children. All these people were running around her house. It was a huge house. You know, she's the rich American divorcee. You see there were so many people that were like me, people who were in London because London had this aura and they were coming to look for something.

She asked what I was doing. I told her I had these pages of a *Lennon Play* and that I had met once with Tom Maschler. And she said, "Oh, Adrienne. I can help you. Victor Spinetti. You know him. He was in both Beatle movies. *Help* and *Hard Day's Night*." And this is just what she said, "He's my dearest friend and he knows the Beatles very well. I know he would love to work on a project like this." (*laughs*) And we had just walked up the hill to say hello to her. There was something in the air, Adam. There really was something in the air...

Nan went to the phone and called him. He lived near Baker Street. She said, "He can't come over right now. But he wants you to come down to the theatre to see him tomorrow. He's in *The Odd Couple* on Leicester Square." You know, the famous square where all the theatres are. You were in school. I don't think I took you, but I'm not sure.

So I went down to see Victor and he was excited. He said, "Nan says you have an adaptation of John Lennon's nonsense book. John is a friend of mine. What I'll do is I'll go out to"...I think they lived someplace called Weybridge... "I'll go out to Weybridge and talk to John. And I'll find out if he would like to work on something like this." I think he called John...he did! He called me up and he said, "I've called John and he's very interested in this." So Nan Lanier's all excited now. She calls to tell me that Victor's called up John and John is very interested.

In the meantime, mother had brought Joedy from Washington. She was on her way to France. The very night that mother was leaving she was going to get up at 3:30 a.m. and take the boat train to France... I'll never forget...she was so excited. Ricki Huston, that very same night had these tickets to a reading. I asked mother did she want to go. She said, "No. I'll stay here with Adam. You go, because I have to get up at 3:30 a.m. because I'm going to France." And she was like a teenager. She was so happy. She said, "I'm going to France." She was going to meet Louise Kent and another friend in Paris. It was 1967. She was sixty. She was so excited. I'll never forget it.

(Primrose begins again.)

That summer we used to go to Primrose Hill. That summer you played with Bobby and the girl from Kansas. She used to dress you up...you used to dress-up and put on plays. It was the most enchanting thing. She was an American girl and she was from Kansas, her name was Dorothy. She used to dress you up in all these costumes and you used to put on plays out in the street. And her parents were so excited that she had an American child to play with.

So everything just seemed...wonderful. We went to Ricki's almost every Sunday; Ricki was a very intuitive person. She knew that when I came to London I only had a little money. She sensed it. She was just like that.

I'm sure she wouldn't have been surprised if I had gone back the next week.

That summer, Ricki had parties in her backyard. Well, it wasn't a backyard. It was a huge garden. That's where her son Tony kept his falcons. And there was a pond. That was the summer that James Fox drove us home in his purple Lotus.

I went to this reading with Ricki. It was on the river. And Ricki said, "Oh, there's Kenneth Tynan." Tynan was the most famous drama critic in the world at the time and his office at the National Theatre was next door to Laurence Olivier's. Also, Kenneth Tynan had pieces in *The New Yorker* constantly.

(Primrose Hill music begins to fade.)

I had never met him, but I had met his wife at Actors Studio once...his ex-wife. She was a playwright. We went over to say hello to him and he said he had never seen *Funnyhouse*, but Ellen Holly, who had a leading role was a friend. He asked what I was doing in London. I told him about the Beatles project and that Victor Spinetti had mentioned it to John Lennon. And *(laughs)* he said, "Larry [*Olivier*] would like that." And he told me to come and see him tomorrow or maybe the day after.

I went by his office at the National and he said he had mentioned the project to Larry and Larry was very interested. Then he said Larry wasn't there right now, but he would like to meet me. And I'm thinking to myself, *(laughs)* Laurence Olivier, Heathcliffe, wants to meet me. Here I am at the National Theatre, in the famous Old Vic, historic famous Old Vic... Laurence Olivier...Vivien Leigh and John Gielgud. I'm sitting in the National Theatre talking to Kenneth Tynan. You know me better than anyone else, Adam. You can imagine already what state I was in.

Tynan said he wanted Victor and me to come by in a few days. Nan played a big role in all this. Nan called

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