

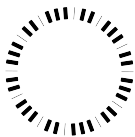
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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

SKELLIG

by David Almond

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ISBN 978-0-573-13232-2

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SKELLIG

Skellig was first performed at Young Vic, 66 The Cut, London SE1 on 21 November 2003. It was directed by Trevor Nunn with design by John Napier, lighting by Howard Harrison, music by Shaun Davey, sound by Fergus O'Hare, costumes by Elise Napier and movement by Kate Flatt. The cast was as follows:

COOT	Ashley Artus
MUM	Cathryn Bradshaw
DAD	Antony Byrne
MISS CLARTS / LUCY CARR	Sarah Cattle
MRS MCKEE	Noma Dumezweni
MINA	Akiya Henry
DR MCNABOLA / RASPUTIN	William Osborne
SKELLIG	David Threlfall
MICHAEL	Kevin Wathen
LEAKEY	Mo Zainal
UNDERSTUDIES	Chris Lennon, Cherry Menlove

CHARACTERS

MR STONE – An estate agent.

DAD – An ordinary man.

MUM – An ordinary man.

MICHAEL – An ordinary boy.

SKELLIG – A man/creature with wings. A mystery.

RASPUTIN – A science teacher.

THE YETI – A teacher.

MISS CLARTS – An English teacher.

LEAKEY – A boy, Michael's friend.

COOT – A boy, Michael's friend.

MINA – A home-schooled girl, Michael's neighbour.

LUCY CARR – A schoolgirl.

NURSE – A kind nurse.

OLD WOMAN – An arthritis patient.

DOCTOR MCNABOLA – A surgeon.

MRS MCKEE – Mina's mother.

SETTING

An ordinary street in a city in North Eastern England.

TIME

The present day.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The story of *Skellig* came to me out of the blue as I was walking along the street one day. It has many connections with my own life – like Michael, I had a poorly baby sister when I was a boy; the house in the play is very like a house in which I lived in Newcastle; my mother had terrible arthritis, just like Skellig; she was the one who told me what shoulder blades are for. But the novel came with its own energy and was entirely new to me. At times, it seemed almost to write itself. Not long after it was published, Trevor Nunn invited me to create a stage adaptation. As I wrote the play, and as we workshopped and rehearsed, I was constantly surprised and moved by what we discovered in this strange tale. It's set in an 'ordinary' street among 'ordinary' people

who go to school, who play soccer, who eat Chinese takeaway, who make silly jokes, who worry about death, who talk about birds and evolution and William Blake, but it seems to touch on something extraordinary. There have now been many productions of *Skellig* around the world. Each time I see this play, I see something new, and I ask more questions. I'm the author, but much of *Skellig* is a mystery even to me. Strange perhaps, but isn't that the way with the world and everything that's in it, and with life itself?

for Freya Grace

ACT ONE

NARRATION Just Imagine,

Said Mr Stone.

MR STONE You have to see it with your mind's eye.

NARRATION They called it a garage because that was what Mr Stone, the estate agent, called it.

MR STONE See it cleaned, with new doors and the roof repaired. See it as a wonderful two-car garage. Or something for you, lad – a hideaway for you and your mates...

MICHAEL It was more like a demolition site.

MR STONE Just see it with your mind's eye. Just imagine what could be done.

NARRATION All the way round the house, Michael kept thinking of the old man, Ernie Myers, who had lived there on his own for years.

MR STONE He'd been dead nearly a week before they found him under a table in the kitchen.

MICHAEL That was what I saw when Stone told us about seeing with the mind's eye.

NARRATION He even said it when they got to the dining room
There was an old cracked toilet sitting there in the corner, behind a plywood screen.

MR STONE Towards the end, Ernie couldn't manage the stairs, so his bed was brought in here, and a toilet, so everything was easy for him.

MICHAEL I wanted to get back to our old house again and back to my mates Leakey and Coot and a football match that lasted all day.

LEAKEY & COOT On me head! On me head!

MICHAEL But Mum and Dad just took it all in. They went on like it was some big game.

DAD I'll get that cornice back there. And dado. Aye, dado, that's the stuff. This wall, now. Imagine it gone, love. Whack! Imagine the space we'd open up.

MUM And there's a perfect little nursery.

DAD I'll paint a goal for him on the outside wall. I'll put a swing up for the little'n. And a blinking pond, eh? Fish and frogs and...

MUM Not too soon, though. Don't want any dangers in her way.

DAD No, that's right, no dangers. Like that garage, eh? That'll have to come down. Whack! A lovely bit of knocky down.

MUM Could we get it done in time?

DAD The basics, definitely. It's just routine, love. I can see it all. We'll get it ready. We'll get moved in. Then the baby'll come. Perfect, eh?

MUM We'd be moving just in time for spring...

DAD It'll be a big adventure.

NARRATION They bought the house.

They started cleaning it
And scrubbing it
And painting it,
Getting ready to move in.

MUM Ouch!

DAD What's up, love? Love, what's up?

MUM Oh!

NARRATION Then the baby came too early.

And she was already with them when they moved.
And there they were.

MICHAEL And here we are.

NARRATION So, it was the day after they moved in to Falconer Road.

It was still winter.

The others were inside the house with Doctor Dan, worrying about the baby.

MICHAEL I called him Doctor Death.

NARRATION Nobody else was there

MICHAEL Just me.

MICHAEL *moves towards the garage.*

NARRATION The timbers were rotten and the roof was sagging in.

It stank of rot and dust.

It was like the whole place was sick of itself.

MICHAEL *is about to slip inside.*

MUM Michael! What you doing? Didn't we tell you to keep out? Well, didn't we?

MICHAEL Yes.

MUM So keep out! All right? All right?

MICHAEL All right. Yes. All right. All right.

MUM Do you not think we've got more to worry about than stupid you getting crushed in a stupid garage?

MICHAEL Yes.

MUM You just keep out then. Right?

MICHAEL Right, Right, right, right, right. Then I went back to the wilderness we called a garden and Mum went back to the flaming baby.

MUM (*offstage*) Michael, are you coming in for lunch?

MICHAEL No, I'm staying in the garden. The garden! There was going to be benches and a table and a swing and a goalpost

painted on the wall of the house. But there was none of that. I stood there, kicking the heads off a million dandelions.

MUM *brings MICHAEL a can of Coke.*

MUM Oh, Michael. Sorry it's all so rotten and we're all in such rotten moods. You understand, though, don't you? Don't you?

MICHAEL Yes.

MUM *goes back inside.*

I finished the Coke, waited a minute, then went back to the garage. I didn't have time to dare myself or to stand there listening to the scratching. I switched the torch on, took a deep breath and tiptoed inside.

NARRATION Something little and black scuttled across the floor.

The door creaked and cracked for a moment before it was still.

Dust poured through the torch beam.

He felt spiderwebs breaking on his brow.

Everything was packed in tight.

Ancient furniture.

Kitchen units,

Rolled-up carpets.

Pipes

And crates

And planks.

He kept ducking down under the hose pipes and ropes and kit bags that hung from the roof.

The floor was broken and crumbly.

He opened a cupboard an inch, shone the torch in and...

Saw a million woodlice scattering away.

He peered down into a great stone jar and saw

MICHAEL The bones of some little animal that had died in there.

NARRATION Dead bluebottles were everywhere.

There were ancient newspapers and magazines.

He shone the torch on one and saw that it came from nearly

MICHAEL Fifty years ago.

NARRATION He was scared every moment that the whole thing was going to collapse.

There was dust clogging his throat and nose.

He knew they'd be yelling for him soon,

And he knew he'd better get out.

He leaned across a heap of tea chests

And shone the torch into the space behind and...

MICHAEL *shines the torch onto SKELLIG.*

SKELLIG What do you want?

What do you want?

I said, What do you want?

DAD Michael! Michael!

MICHAEL *backs out.*

Michael, man!

MICHAEL I know. I know.

DAD It's for your own damn good.

DAD *thumps the side of the trembling garage.*

Imagine what might happen.

DAD *thumps the side of the garage again.*

Imagine.

MICHAEL *grabs his arm, stops him.*

MICHAEL Don't. I understand.

DAD It's coming down, the first damn chance I get.

MICHAEL Is she going to die, Dad?

DAD Die? What do you mean, die? Dan's just told us – she's doing fine. They'd have her in hospital if she wasn't. Wouldn't they? Well, wouldn't they? Come on, get that dust off before your mother sees.

In the kitchen.

NARRATION The next morning before breakfast.

MICHAEL What's going to happen to the garage now? When are they going to clear it out?

DAD When we can get someone to come. It's not important, son, not now.

MICHAEL OK. Shall I stay off school so I can help?

DAD Aye, you can take Ernie's toilet out and scrub the floorboards round it.

MICHAEL I'll go to school.

I wanted to stay at Kenny Street High, with Leakey and Coot, so I didn't mind that I had to get the bus through town. I watched the people getting on and off,

NARRATION Reading their papers,

Picking their nails,

Looking dreamily out the windows.

MICHAEL You could never know, by looking at them, what was happening in their lives.

NARRATION He wanted to stand up and say,

MICHAEL My sister is ill and it's the first day I've travelled on the bus from the new house to the old school, and...and...there's a man in our garage!

NARRATION But he didn't

He just went on looking at all the faces and swinging back and forward when the bus swung round corners.

MICHAEL I knew if someone looked at me, they'd know nothing about me either.

Bus bell.

In school assembly.

RASPUTIN Come along now. Lift up your hearts and voices.

ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL,
ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL...

School bell rings.

In the school corridors.

THE YETI Keep to the left, you horrible people! Leakey and Coot!
Keep your feet to yourselves, you horrible pair!

School bell rings.

In the classroom.

MISS CLARTS And, oh, it was so sad. Poor, poor Icarus. He was young and bold and without fear. He flew so high, almost to the sun, and the wax melted and his feathers fell away from his arms, and he began to tumble through the air. He dropped like a stone past his father, Daedalus, into the deep blue sea... Now, there's a story for you, Michael... Michael?

NARRATION But Michael couldn't concentrate.

Not with so much going on.

School bell rings.

He couldn't even concentrate on football.

A football game.

LEAKEY On me head! On me head! Yeah! It's in!

COOT It's not! It didn't cross the line!

LEAKEY It did, man, it did! It was miles over! Wasn't it, Michael?
Michael?

NARRATION He walked to the edge of the field and stared over the town towards his new home.

LEAKEY What's up with him?

COOT Who knows? He was always a bit...

MISS CLARTS You OK, Michael?

MICHAEL Fine, Miss.

MISS CLARTS And the baby?

MICHAEL Fine too.

MISS CLARTS If there's anything you need to talk about...

MICHAEL No. No, Miss. Nothing.

***MICHAEL** runs and slide tackles **COOT**.*

It did cross the line! It did cross the bloody line!

School bell rings.

Home, same afternoon.

DAD Michael! Come here. Look. Hold your nose.

He sits on the toilet and grins.

Make a nice water feature, eh? Or a garden ornament. Hey, and have a look at this. Ready?

*He picks up a carrier bag of dead pigeons, shows them to **MICHAEL**.*

MICHAEL Yuck. What are they?

DAD Dead pigeons. Found them behind that old gas fire. Look at this one.

MICHAEL That's a pigeon?

DAD Aye. Been there a long time, that's all. Nearly a fossil. Feel it. Go on, it's OK.

MICHAEL It's hard as stone.

DAD That's right. Hard as stone and black as blinking coal. School was OK?

MICHAEL Aye. Leakey and Coot said they might come over on Sunday.

DAD Great! Just what you need.

***MICHAEL** continues to inspect the pigeon in his hands. He throws it up, catches it feels its dead weight, throws it up again.*

MICHAEL Where's the baby?

DAD Eh?

MICHAEL Where's Mam? Where's the baby?

DAD At the hospital.

MICHAEL The hospital?

DAD Just a checkup, man. Look, I'm going to have a bath. I'll make tea for when they're back. It's routine, son. Little baby, few days old...

DANCE TO YOUR DADDY,
MY BONNIE LADDIE;
DANCE TO YOUR DADDY,
MY BONNIE LAMB.

MICHAEL My hands were trembling.

NARRATION He went out past Ernie's toilet,

The old gas fire,
The dead pigeons.
And tiptoed inside.
He told himself,

MICHAEL I'm stupid.

NARRATION He told himself,

MICHAEL I'm dreaming.

NARRATION He told himself,

MICHAEL I won't see him again.

NARRATION But he did.

MICHAEL *shines the torch on SKELLIG's face.*

SKELLIG You again?

MICHAEL What you doing there?

SKELLIG Nothing. Nothing, nothing and nothing.

MICHAEL They're coming to clear the rubbish out. They're going to knock the whole place down.

SKELLIG You got an aspirin?

MICHAEL An aspirin?

SKELLIG Never mind.

MICHAEL You're not Ernie Myers, are you?

SKELLIG That old git? Coughing his guts and spewing everywhere.

MICHAEL Sorry.

SKELLIG What do you want?

MICHAEL Nothing.

SKELLIG You got an aspirin?

MICHAEL No.

SKELLIG Thanks very much.

MICHAEL What will you do? It'll all cave in on you?

SKELLIG Nothing. Go away.

MICHAEL You could come inside.

SKELLIG *laughs but doesn't smile.*

SKELLIG Go away.

SKELLIG *picks a bluebottle from the front of his suit and pops it in his mouth.*

MICHAEL Is there something I could bring you?

SKELLIG An aspirin.

MICHAEL Something you'd like to eat?

SKELLIG Twenty-seven and fifty-three.

MICHAEL What?

SKELLIG Nothing. Go away. Go away.

***MICHAEL** backs away, out of the garage, and hears his dad singing "Dance to Your Daddy" in the bath. A blackbird sings. **MINA**'s head appears over the top of the wall into the back lane.*

MINA Are you the new boy here?

***MICHAEL** spins.*

Are you the new boy here?

MICHAEL Yes.

MINA I'm Mina. Well?

MICHAEL Well, what?

***MINA** clicks her tongue and shakes her head.*

MINA I'm Mina, you're...

MICHAEL Michael.

MINA Good. *(She jumps down.)* Nice to meet you, Michael.

***MINA** disappears behind the garden wall.*

DAD

YOU SHALL GET A FISHY WHEN THE BOAT COMES IN

NARRATOR When he came down from his bath, Dad started moaning.

DAD There's no bread, no eggs, not a bit of decent nosh.

NARRATOR And in the end he said...

DAD I know, let's have a takeaway.

NARRATOR He took the menu for the Chinese round the corner out of the drawer.

DAD We'll get it in for when your Mum gets back. What d'you fancy?

MICHAEL Twenty-seven and fifty-three!

DAD That's clever. You did that without looking. What's your next trick? (*he writes*) Special chow mein for Mum, spring rolls and pork char siu for you, beef and mushrooms for me, crispy seaweed and prawn crackers for the baby. And if she won't eat them, we will, and serve her right, eh? She'll be back on boring mother's milk again.

MICHAEL I ran round to collect it.

At the Chinese takeaway.

NARRATION Spring roll, pork char siu, prawn cracker, special chow mein, beef and mushroom. OK.

MICHAEL *returns with the food.* MUM *and the baby are home again.*

MUM Hello! We're home again!

They eat at the table.

School was OK, then?

MICHAEL Aye, fine.

MUM And the journey?

MICHAEL Fine and all.

MUM Good lad.

MICHAEL Is she OK?

MUM Aye. They're keeping an eye on her, though.

DAD *eats voraciously, swigs brown ale.*

DAD Champion nosh, eh?

He sees MICHAEL has left some food on his plate, reaches for it.

Aha! Extra twenty-seven and fifty-three!

MICHAEL *covers his food with his arm.*

MICHAEL You'll get fat.

MUM Fatter!

DAD I'm famished. Worked like a slave for you lot today.

He reaches out and tickles the baby.

'Specially for you, little chick.

MICHAEL Fatso.

DAD *grabs his belly.*

MUM See?

DAD *dips his finger into the sauce at the edge of MICHAEL's plate, licks his finger.*

DAD Delicious. But enough's enough. I've had an ample sufficiency, thank you.

DAD *goes to the fridge, takes out brown ale.*

Now, where's that cheese?

MICHAEL *clears the dishes, puts what is left of twenty-seven and fifty-three into the waste bin.*

NARRATION He put what was left of twenty-seven and fifty-three in the outside bin.

And he saw Mina again,

Sitting in a tree.

MICHAEL I'm just going out for a while!

No answer. MUM and DAD are engrossed in the baby.

MICHAEL *goes to MINA. He stands beneath her in her garden.*

What you doing up there?

MINA Silly you. You've scared it away. Typical!

MICHAEL Scared what away?

MINA The blackbird.

She drops to the ground.

Never mind. It'll come again.

The blackbird squawks.

That's its warning call. It's telling its family there's danger near. Danger. That's you. There's three tiny ones in a nest up there. But don't you dare go any nearer. This is where I live. Number seven. You've got a baby sister.

MICHAEL Yes.

MINA What's her name?

MICHAEL We haven't decided yet.

MINA *clicks her tongue. She opens her sketchbook and shows MICHAEL what's inside.*

MINA This is the blackbird. Common, but nevertheless very beautiful. A sparrow. These are tits. And look, this is the goldfinch that visited last Thursday.

MINA *slaps the book shut.*

Do you like birds?

MICHAEL I don't know.

MINA Typical. Do you like drawing?

MICHAEL Sometimes.

MINA Drawing helps you to see the world more clearly. Did you know that? What colour's a blackbird?

MICHAEL Black.

MINA Typical. I'm going inside. I look forward to seeing you again.

I'd also like to see your baby sister if that can be arranged.

MICHAEL I tried to stay awake that night.

NARRATION But it was hopeless.

He was dreaming straightaway.

He was dreaming that the baby was in the blackbird's nest in Mina's garden.

The blackbird fed her on flies...

And spiders...

And she got stronger until she flew out of the tree.

And over the rooftops and onto the garage roof.

Mina sat on the back wall drawing her.

When he got closer, Mina whispered,

MINA Stay away! You're danger!

Baby crying and MUM cooing.

NARRATION Then the baby started bawling in the room next door,

MICHAEL And I woke up.

DAD snoring, baby crying, MUM cooing, birdsong.

Aspirin.

MICHAEL *gets out of bed, fetches the aspirin from the table drawer and goes outside. He retrieves the takeaway from the waste bin and goes towards the garage. He switches on his torch.*

I must be stupid. I must be going round the stupid bend.

He creeps into the garage, comes to SKELLIG.

SKELLIG You again? Thought you'd gone away.

MICHAEL I've brought something. Aspirin. And number twenty-seven and fifty-three, spring rolls and pork char siu.

SKELLIG Not as stupid as you look.

He reaches for the trays but he is too weak.

No strength.

MICHAEL *holds the trays while SKELLIG eats.*

Aaaah. Oooooooh. Put the aspirin in.

MICHAEL *puts them in the Chinese sauce and SKELLIG swallows them. He belches and slumps back against the wall.*

Food for the gods. Twenty-seven and fifty-three.

MICHAEL *stares at him.*

Had a good look?

MICHAEL Where you from?

SKELLIG Nowhere.

MICHAEL It's coming down. What will you do?

SKELLIG Nothing, nothing and nothing. Leave the aspirin.

MICHAEL *puts the jar on the floor and has to push aside a little heap of hard furry balls. MICHAEL holds one up to the torchlight.*

What you looking at, eh?

MICHAEL Nothing. There's a doctor comes to see my sister.

I could bring him here to see you.

SKELLIG No doctors. Nobody.

MICHAEL Who are you?

SKELLIG Nobody.

MICHAEL What can I do?

SKELLIG Nothing.

MICHAEL My baby sister's really ill.

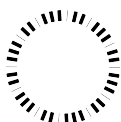
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