

Every Brilliant Thing is a play by Duncan Macmillan with Jonny Donahue. The first performance of Every Brilliant Thing, a Pains Plough and Pentabus Theatre Company production, took place on 28 June 2013 at Ludlow Fringe Festival.

The play is an adaptation of playwright Duncan Macmillan's short story Sleeve Notes. Macmillan worked with Pains Plough Artistic Director George Perrin over ten years to turn the story into a play.

The production runs for approximately 75 minutes with no interval.

The play opens with the line "The list began after her first attempt. A list of everything brilliant about the world. Everything worth living for."

The first entry on a seven-year-old child's list of everything brilliant about the world: 'No. 1 Ice-cream'. The child's mother is in hospital, having made an attempt on her life.

The story of the play is told by one actor, with the assistance of audience members. There is audience interaction, throughout the production some audience members are called upon to read out loud items from the list of brilliant things, which have been handed to them by the actor. At other times, audience members are enrolled as characters in the story, and are invited to play a role in a scene. These scenes are improvised, but directed by the actor, and form a central part of the production.

The stage has been transformed into a theatre in the round for this production. The set designer Kathryn Sproul has created a space to have additional seating on stage for audience members, creating a performance space surrounded by seating.

The house lights remain on during the performance, as stipulated by the playwright. The playwright also notes that 'the play should always be set in the country it's being performed in and references should be amended to reflect this.'

Every Brilliant Thing references self-harm and suicide throughout the production. Playwright Duncan Macmillan has said of the play, 'With Every Brilliant Thing, I felt there should be a way to talk about depression and suicidal depression because it's so common, but to talk about it in a way that is constructive and complex and nuanced and grown up and unflinching. But also accessible and funny.'

The production references songs and artists significant to some of the characters in the story: Cab Calloway, Nina Simone, Ray Charles (Drown in My Own Tears), Curtis Mayfield (Move on Up), Billie Holiday (Gloomy Sunday), Etta James (At Last), John Coltrane and Ella Fitzgerald (My Melancholy Baby).

At one point the audience is invited to join in with singing Wham's Wake me up before you Go Go.

Every Brilliant Thing contains the following moments:

The euthanising of the characters pet dog “.. and inside that needle is an anaesthetic called pentobarbital. The dose is large enough to make the dog unconscious and depress his brain, respiratory, and circulatory systems, and to put him to sleep forever.”

“I held Sherlock Bones, who I’d known my entire life. I held him as he died. I thought about the walk we’d had that morning and about the smell of him in my room. His toys in the garden. All the things that could now be thrown away”

The characters mothers second attempt “you took three week’s worth of anti-depressants, a packet of aspirin and half a tub of antihistamines. You’re probably healthier than I am. If you’re going to kill yourself go jump off a bridge”.

The narrator discusses a book called The Sorrows of Young Werther where the author discusses suicide being contagious. He also mentions the “complex realities of suicide and the impacts of those left behind”.

“The real risk, that I’d felt my whole life, was that I would one day feel as low as my mum had and take the same action.”

The last time the mother attempts is detailed specifically. “I wasn’t around for the last time. I was in Australia with work and when I got the call I was on the beach. ... A neighbour complained about the exhaust fumes and eventually the police cut through the garage door. Hosepipe through the driverside window”

The production contains a couple of reference to sex, when the word is read out as no. 9996 on the list. No. 10,000 on the list of brilliant things is ‘Waking up late with someone you love’.

The production makes mention of some other well-known peoples students may or may not be familiar with: Andre Agassi, Susan Sarandon, Christopher Walken and Gustav Mahler.

Whilst the production deals with depression, manic behaviour and the difficult topic of suicide the overall uplifting emotion that the narrator deals with is trying to find joy. Understanding that with sadness comes moments of joy, of finding the light in Every Brilliant Thing.