

# A child's list celebrates the sublime

## A one-man show involving everybody

BY GWEN OREL

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Pretty much any show that makes a point of saying the words "ice cream" has its heart in the right place.

"Ice cream" is heard at least three times in "Every Brilliant Thing," by Duncan Macmillan with Jonny Donahoe, at Dreamcatcher Repertory Theatre.

It's item number one on a list a young boy makes for his suicidal mother, to remind her of wonderful things in the world.

One of the great things about this life-affirming play is that you can see the wheels turning in the heads of every audience member: "What's on my list?"

Me: Horseradish sauce. Benadryl anti-itch cream (four mosquito bites as I write). Skype.

The play understands how involving the subject is, and so it involves the audience immediately: Everyone picks two items out of a basket on entrance: slips of paper with numbers. They will be asked to read the slips when the numbers come up in the story.

The boy continues the list throughout his life.

The play is performed in the round, with some of the audience sitting onstage.

### HEAVY SUBJECT, FUNNY APPROACH

Clark Scott Carmichael is so relaxed that when an audience

### 'Every Brilliant Thing'

by Duncan Macmillan, with Jonny Donahoe

Through Sunday, Oct. 8

Dreamcatcher Repertory Theatre  
Oakes Center  
120 Morris Ave., Summit

Dreamcatcherrep.org  
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member reads a list item wrong, he goes with it. He seems to be having a ball up there.

The show begins light and interactive, and Carmichael's engaging, happy presence makes it all feel like a game. Being present with both Carmichael the actor and Carmichael's character puts the audience firmly on his side.

But mental illness and suicide and bipolar disorder are heavy subjects, and "Every Brilliant Thing" looks at them without flinching.

The young boy's only experience of death before his mother "did something stupid," as his father describes her suicide attempt, is when his dog, Sherlock Bones (represented by an audience member's sweater), has to be put down (a member of the audience plays the vet, using a pen as a syringe).

On the day his mother first attempted suicide the boy's father picked him up from school.

He enlists an audience mem-

ber to play himself in the car, asking "why" after everything his father says. But there is no answer. And in fact, he tells us, the scene didn't happen that way. They had driven in silence.

No matter how little acting anyone has done, everyone knows how to do that child's "why." It's haunting.

Carmichael endows his character at every age with dignity, simplicity and catchy enthusiasm.

When in college he reads "The Sorrows of Young Werther," he learns (and shares) that contagious suicide is called "The Werther Effect." After Marilyn Monroe's death, suicide went up by 12 percent, he tells us.

Throughout his life, the narrator adds to the list: "Number 9,994: Friendly cats. Number 9,998: watching someone watch your favorite film."

We root for him as he meets a nice girl (an audience member is tasked to play her).

We worry for him as things begin to go wrong.

Laura Ekstrand's direction is sensitive and specific, the pace and movement are seamless. Zach Pizza's lights and Jeff Knapp's sound create distinct spaces. The character has his own demons to face as he grows older.

But the play gives us lots of reasons to hope.

Add "Every Brilliant Thing" at Dreamcatcher Rep to your list.