



Horsemen.

By Ben Macpherson

Directed by Jake Leonard

A Staged Reading
18th March 2022

Digital Programme

A Note from the Producer & Writer.

Thank you for coming to this staged reading of *Horsemen*, by supporting events like this you are taking an active role in creating new pieces of theatre and giving vital feedback to those of us mad enough to try and do that. The evolution of a play assumes many guises, from testing scenes at scratch nights or debuting songs at open mic events all the way through to full staged readings like the one you are attending. These events are crucial for the creative team to shape the work at every level, from the script to the staging. This project has been focussed on developing the script and starting to explore characters. Please take the time to complete the feedback survey after watching the play to help *Horsemen* develop. Thank you for coming and enjoy the show.



Ben Macpherson.

A Note from the Director.

Making a show about the end of the world feels worryingly on the nose at the moment. Luckily, it's been a lot of fun, so at least we'll go out laughing. Research and development is an important process where artists can try out ideas and get some feedback without the critical or financial pressures of putting it on for an audience as a finished production. It's something many projects don't have the luxury of time, space, or money to do. We're very grateful to all our supporters to have been able to do so.



And it's a good thing we've had that chance, given the number of creative ideas, questions, and existential discussions we've had in the rehearsal room. The cast have dived in and committed every step of the way, and it's been lovely to be a part of. But none of this would mean anything if the play didn't make us laugh or feel something (which is what it all comes down to in the end). So, again, we're lucky that Ben has made a story so full of heart, and that the cast have made these characters so human.

I hope you enjoy *Horsemen*, and that we get to do it again as a full-on production. We all need something to smile about, and remind us that we have a responsibility to ourselves, each other, and this place we call home.

Jake Leonard.

Creating Horsemen.

The first idea, that would turn into *Horsemen* came in 2020 with a callout for hopepunk audio pieces. The project included using live foley artists and the idea I kept returning to was coconut shells for hoof beats, (I was always a fan of Monty Python), The four horsemen of the apocalypse felt like the natural idea to explore but as I put pen to paper the idea kept growing.



Grow it did, as I took part in the Flux Theatre playwriting lab in 2021. That programme helped the first draft of *Horsemen* come together. Through this, an extract of the play was read and the actors and director told me “This could be quite funny,” which is exactly what you want to hear as a writer who’s spent a decade creating comedy.



I worked on the script, taking it from ‘could be quite funny’ to ‘generally humorous overall.’ Comedy was important to the project from the start. It’s the strongest tool we have to communicate ideas. The mixture of laughter and empathy allows the audience to be vulnerable and open to the story that is being told, something drama often has to work much harder to achieve.

In November 2021 I applied for a grant from Arts Council England to spend a period of time on research and development, ending in the staged reading of the text. The first full length performance. Part of this research period involved an amount of stress testing. The characters were all written to be fully trait blind so that anyone could take on any part, no matter age, sex or heritage. Two days before Christmas I received notification that I had been awarded the funding and that, along with hours of admin takes us to where we are now. I cannot wait to see where I get to take the project next.

Ben Macpherson

What is Hopepunk?

Hopepunk was identified as a subgenre of fiction in 2017 when fantasy author Alexandra Rowland shared on her blog “The opposite of grimdark is hopepunk. Pass it on.” All ____punk subgenres deal with disrupting society but whilst more well-known genres like steampunk or cyberpunk have a technology driven aesthetic, hopepunk is characterised by themes of hope, empathy and positive, but not necessarily pacifist,



resistance. It also highlights the role of community and collective response in contrast to ‘white-knight’ and saviour narratives. In 2019 Hopepunk was added to the Collins English Dictionary. The subgenre has been retroactively applied to a great many stories, movies plays and television shows. Further examples of Hope Punk stories and programmes include

TV

Parks And Recreation – NBC; The Good Place – NETFLIX; Queer Eye – NETFLIX; The Great British Bake Off – BBC/CHANNEL 4

Film

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, Avengers Endgame, Paddington, Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind,

Novels

The Goblin Emperor, Katherine Addison; *The Handmaids Tale*, Margaret Atwood; *The Discworld Series*, Terry Pratchett; *A Choir of Lies*, Alexandra Rowland; *Saga*, Brian K Vaughn

Acknowledgements

A project like this involves so many people, some who you will see on stage, some who have worked behind the scenes and some who have supported in ways they might not even have realised. Thank you to Arts Council England for funding this project and to our partners NonSuch Studios for hosting us during this process and Relish Theatre for their guidance in sustainability. Thank you to Tom Platinum Morley for his photography and Neil Munro for Videography. Special thanks to Rob Ellis, Matt Miller, Rachel Ramchurn and Zoe Smith for guidance with funding applications along with the attendees of Relish Theatre creative coffee mornings for moral support. Finally, we would like to thank friends and families for all the support they provide. Inevitably someone will have been missed but rest assured we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Cast & Crew



George Attwell - Front Desk

George is an actor and writer from Birmingham. His recent credits include *Hansel and Gretel* (Insane Root Theatre) and *Opa* (Attenborough Arts Centre) and he is the co-director of Paperback Theatre and Little but LIVE! festival in Birmingham. He will shortly be touring *Twelfth Night* nationwide this summer with The HandleBards.

Marilyn Ann Bird – War

Marilyn is a Nottingham-based actor and voiceover artist. She trained at Birmingham School of Acting and has a degree in French and German from the University of Nottingham. She co-runs improv theatre company MissImp. She performs regularly as part of Rhymes Against Humanity and *IT'S A TRAP! The Improvised Star Wars Show*, which has just been nominated for Best Improv Show at Leicester Comedy Festival.



Dawn Butler – Keola

Dawn trained in Nottingham and has worked with *Hull Truck*, *Birmingham Rep*, *Yorkshire Women Theatre* and *Nottingham Playhouse's Roundabout*. With Birmingham's OJS she performed in *Two; Beautiful Thing*; and *Di and Viv and Rose*, and with Wolverhampton's Arena in *There is None Who Does Good*, *Burning Books* and *The Librarian*. She recently took the title role in *The Mother* at Hereford's Courtyard and produced and performed in her own play *Deep Breaths*. T.V. includes *The Locksmith*, *Family Affairs*, *Emmerdale* and *Doctors*.

Matt Miller – Pestilence

Matt is a devised theatre maker, performer and spoken word artist. Their work is often rooted in autobiographical experiences and their most recent show *Fitting* used storytelling and stage magic to explore non-binary gender experiences. They have been artist in residence at Live Theatre and Alphabetti Theatre and currently a member of Nottingham Playhouse's Amplify programme.



Kate Spencer – Death

Kate is a Nottinghamshire based actor, theatre maker and lecturer. She trained at Rose Bruford College, London and Columbia College, Chicago. She is a 2022-2023 New Associate of New Perspectives theatre company and recent credits include *Sky Comedy Rep* at Birmingham Rep and *Coronation Street*, ITV.

Emily Webster – Famine/Rene

Emily is an actor from Chesterfield. Her past credits include *Ring* (Misplaced Films). Upcoming projects include - *Marigold in Earwig* (Time and Again Productions), which launches in Manchester before heading to the Edinburgh Fringe. *Horsemen* is Emily's first R&D project and would like to thank the NonSuch staff and *Horsemen* team for making it such a positive experience.



Jake Leonard – Director

Jake is a freelance theatre director from Leicester. He is a member of the Young Vic Directors Program, Nottingham Playhouse's AMPLIFY, Nottingham Queer Arts Collective, and Curve Connect. Past credits include: *A Self Help Guide to Being in Love with Jeremy Corbyn* (UK Tour), *Powered by Fairydust* (Live & Local), and *Roti Moon* (Upstairs at the Western). Jake was long-listed for the Royal Theatrical Support Trust Sir Peter Hall Director Award in 2019 and 2021.



Ben Macpherson – Writer & Producer

Ben is a Nottingham based writer, performer and theatre maker. He's created work for over a decade covering everything, from sketch comedy on BBC Radio 4 to poetry with Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature. His debut solo show *The Fall of Byron Montrose; Poet, Gentleman Lover* had a sell-out run at the 2017 Edinburgh Fringe Festival and he has produced and performed in Leicester Comedy Festival Best Improv Show nominee *IT'S A TRAP! The Improvised Star Wars Show*.