

Welcome to Hear/Now, a season of audio theater from Keen Company!

We're an award-winning nonprofit theater in New York City, championing identification and connection through stories about the decisive moments that change us.

I'm Jonathan Silverstein, the Artistic Director, and it's my pleasure to welcome you to *1993 by finkle*, the 1st production in our season of audio theater.

Join us in embracing the virtual Off-Broadway experience. Take a moment to find your seat, silence any distractions, and lower your house lights.

It's time to settle in for a night at the theater, and enjoy *1993*...

**NARRATOR (FINKLE)**

Previously on 1993...

*Music playing lightly in the background  
(Radio static)*

**GENET**

Where's Byron?

**STEVEN**

Out of town. Working the door in Philly at some club. He's been going every Sunday night for the last couple weeks. He lost his Sunday night gig in the city after - the *debacle* at the Gender Fuck Ball.

*Radio static and then the channel changes*

**GENET**

So you're free for the night.

**STEVEN**

I'm free whenever I want to be.

**GENET**

I thought you two were –

**STEVEN**

I don't want to talk about Byron.

*Radio static and then the channel changes*

**GENET**

Do you trust me?

Just trust me...

    Just trust me...

        Just trust me..

            Just trust me

*Radio static and then the channel changes*

**FINKLE**

...And then he tells us he's going to look for his boyfriend. Or Ex-boyfriend. Or something like that. He says it's hard to explain...

*Radio static and then the channel changes*

**GUY**

GIVE ME BACK MY WALLET!

**STEVEN**

I don't have your wallet!

I'm not a fucking pickpocket!

**FINKLE**

Their fight bleeds out into the circle around them infecting us.

Soon it seems like we are all part of the fight.

Steven at the center raging with a joy that like shines so bright it blinds me...

*Radio static and then the channel changes*

**FINKLE**

All I want is to find the courage to join them to be that free to touch Steven to *be* with Steven.

But something about him both terrifies me and attracts me in such a deep way I'm overwhelmed.

*Radio static and channel changes one last time*

♪ 1993 ♪

*(Theme Music Plays)*

**FINKLE**

And now, Episode 6; LOW ROMANCE - **SEIZE**

*Phone being dialed then two rings*

*Phone sex line music plays on the phone line*

**THE VOICE OF THE LINE**

Welcome to the Number, the only line for men seeking men.

Press 1 for live connections, press 2 for our locker room, press 3 to –

*Button Pressed*

**THE VOICE OF THE LINE**

Here's the next guy.

**BYRON**

Hello.

**RANDO**

Heeeeey!

Button pressed.

**THE VOICE OF THE NUMBER**

Here's the next guy.

**BYRON**

*Hello*

**RANDO**

Sup.

*Button pressed*

**THE VOICE OF THE NUMBER**

Here's the next guy.

**BYRON**

Hello

**FINKLE**

Hey

**BYRON**

You have a nice voice

**FINKLE**

So do you

**BYRON**

I think so *too*. (*FINKLE Chuckles*) You find me funny

**FINKLE**

You made me laugh

*Silence.*

**BYRON**

What brings you on?

**FINKLE**

I just got in.

**BYRON**

It's practically *dawn*...

**FINKLE**

Yea.

**BYRON**

So were you out partying?

**FINKLE**

I wish. Working. I work the night shift... At a hotel.

**BYRON**

And how was *work* last night.

**FINKLE**

Fine. Boring.

**BYRON**

BORING is the worst. Time slows down.

**FINKLE**

It felt like a long night, yea.

*Silence. deep breath*

**BYRON**

Are you still there?

**FINKLE**

Yea.

**BYRON**

Were you thinking about clicking off?

**FINKLE**

I was yea.

**BYRON**

Your honesty is *refreshing*.  
Shall we make a **deal**?

**FINKLE**

What kind of deal?

**BYRON**

Let's agree to stay on the line for *two* more minutes and at the end of that time, we can click off or we can renegotiate.

**FINKLE**

...ok

**BYRON**

ok. I have an egg timer. Hold on for a second. Don't *click off*.

*Sound of BYRON going to get the egg timer and returning to the phone.*

**BYRON**

Are you still there?

**FINKLE**

Yea.

**BYRON**

Alright. Two minutes on the clock. Starting (*Timer is wound and starts to tick in the background*)  
--- now.

**FINKLE**

What are your stats?

**BYRON**

Let's not talk about the physical. At least not yet. Isn't it nice to just imagine? Let's *live* in the mystery a bit longer. Let's fall in love with our voices.

**FINKLE**

I like that.

**BYRON**

Let's first talk in a whisper.

*(whispering)*

**BYRON**

Whispers always make me think of secrets. Tell me a secret.

**FINKLE**

I don't have any secrets.

**BYRON**

*Everyone* has a secret.

**FINKLE**

What's yours?

**BYRON**

I once slept with Liberace.

**FINKLE**

What was that like?

**BYRON**

Surprisingly ... *vanilla*. Now what's your secret?

**FINKLE**

I *hate* gay culture.

**BYRON**

Go on.

**FINKLE**

I hate that to be gay I have to be all these certain things. Like I have to have a good body and I have to do drugs and I have to love dance music - I do love dance music but I feel like I have to *love* love it? I have to dress a certain way and have a certain haircut and - I just always feel like I'm on the outside. Like I don't fit in.

**BYRON**

It just sounds to me that you are hanging out with the wrong gays.

**FINKLE**

Maybe.

**BYRON**

You sound young. Are you? young?

**FINKLE**

I'm 21.

**BYRON**

Twenty one years olds are *plaguing* my life. But how refreshing to know you're thinking about who your people are. Not every 21 year old is thinking about these things. Some 21 year olds I know only think about *themselves* and what they can **get** from others. But I digress. 21 is gorgeous darling you have time to find your gay friends. Who knows, perhaps your gay friends will hate dance music and love *country* music.

**FINKLE**

I doubt that.

**BYRON**

What I'm saying is - you just don't know. You'll change over time. *Life is about evolution*. We are always all changing. For example just this year I've been going through a metamorphosis. A transformation. I've been trying to find my **authentic** voice. At first I thought I'll return to my roots as a performer but something... well then suddenly I woke up In April and I could hear a voice inside myself telling me that I must go to the March in Washington. That I must *show up*. Up until this year I didn't have a political bone in my body I'm not old, but time is ticking away faster and faster I feel. For the first time in my life I felt some urgency to show up and raise my voice.

*(Recordings from the March begin in the background)*

*(Marchers singing)*

♪ God bless america my home sweet home

God bless america my home sweet home. ♪

Marcher 1: "To be at the march today means I can be transgender and I can be a butch lesbian and I don't have to choose one or the other I can be all of who I am at the very same moment and celebrate it with one to two million of my other sisters and brothers"

Marcher 2: "We are brave enough to live in the light

We are brave enough to step out of the closet

We are brave enough to recognize that we love each

That we have the right to love each other

That we have a duty to love each other



And you some day will all be free  
And some day we shall all live in the light!"

♪♪ Have faith in you and the things you do  
You won't go wrong, oh-no  
This is our family jewel

We are family  
Yeah, yeah, sing it to me  
I got all my ♪♪

**FINKLE**

That sounds *so* amazing. I wish I had gone

**BYRON**

Tell me.

What part of town are you in?

**FINKLE**

East village. well, Alphabet City. You?

**BYRON**

I as well.

**FINKLE**

Neighbors.

**BYRON**

Maybe we know each other.

**FINKLE**

That's hot. Maybe I see you at my gym.

**BYRON**

I don't go to the gym. Perhaps I've seen you out at a club or -

**FINKLE**

I don't really go to clubs that much. Sometimes I'll go to Wonder Bar, cuz it's so close- -

**BYRON**

I live very close to Wonder Bar too--

**FINKLE**

-And there's this guy I -

**BYRON**

-A guy?

**FINKLE**

It's-it's just a guy I'm interested in, he never notices me but he always goes there.

**BYRON**

*Unrequited* love.

**FINKLE**

Yea. *(pause)* What street are you on?

**BYRON**

5<sup>th</sup> street

What street are you on?

**FINKLE**

-5<sup>th</sup>.

**BYRON**

I live between A and B

**FINKLE**

So do I.

**BYRON**

Now you're just playing along,

**FINKLE**

No! I do. I just moved here a few months ago... Well the beginning of the year.

**BYRON**

From where?

**FINKLE**

From my *dorm room* at NYU?

**BYRON**

Steven?

**FINKLE**

Wait, *what*?

**BYRON**

Are you Steven?

**FINKLE**

You know *Steven*?

**BYRON**

Do *you* know Steven?

*Mystical music builds in the background then...*

*The egg timer goes off.*

**BYRON**

That's time.

Shall we renegotiate?

*FINKLE takes a deep breath and... Click.*

**THE VOICE OF THE NUMBER**

Here's the next guy.

♪ 1993 ♪

*(Theme Music Plays)*

**FINKLE**

Finkle here.

Ok, so in case it wasn't clear, that's me on the call with Byron.

Did that really happen?

I mean, Probably. A lot of times I would "run" into people I knew on the phone lines.

I like the idea that Byron and I intersected here.

I think about Byron in this moment a lot actually - in 1993 he would have been around the same age I am now.

I just want to take a sec and highlight the importance of the phone lines, at least to me, in 1993. It should go without saying that this was pre-internet, pre cell phones.

I remember first discovering the phone lines through i think the back of the Village Voice, (*sigh*)

I miss the Village Voice. I used to *love* you know walking by one of those plastic containers on the street, you know those boxes, and just like grabbing the Voice. and i sort of read it like a messed up way. I would probably start at the back and look at all the ads for escorts and ..

umm.. phone sex lines... and then I would read Rob Breszny's horoscope and then Savage Love and then Michael Musto's column of course and sometimes if I was in the mood, I would read Michael Finegold's reviews and see what she had to say about the *Theatre*. Another place I also learned about the phone lines or was a good place for me with the phone lines was on- Channel 35.

Channel 35 was basically the first gay TV channel. It was public access. It had all sorts of great programming on it, including Gay USA with Ann Northrop and Andy Humm which you can still watch today on Youtube, they are still recording. umm -Men and Film and ofcourse what I considered the center piece of its programming - the Robin Byrd show. And during commercials for the Robin Byrd Show there'd be ads for phone sex lines. My favorite one was *The Number* - mostly because they gave free codes away in the Voice and on TV and I could access it for free. It was completely addicting. I could spend hours and hours on it and not once hook up. You know, which was fun, it was more about the adventure, the possibility. And the voices. (*sigh*) The quality of people's voices, the different qualities of people's voices. I just *love* hearing a stranger come through the line. Like, Who are they? What do they want? What will they say? What won't they say? Will they hang up or stay on? And who would I be? Like each time I could completely make up a story about myself or I could be completely honest, either way it didn't really matter.

A quick note about time before we jump back into the story.

My timeline is a little murky in this part of the story.

Actually, to be truthful... the timeline is murky for the rest of this piece. (*Chuckles*)

I'm going to say this next scene happens in July, but it could have been June. It could be that this next scene happens right after ... my phone call with Byron...

Anyway we are going to jump into the scene already in progress. It's between Steven and Byron. We're in Byron's apartment, Byron is – well, I think you can figure out what's happening.

*BYRON wipes STEVEN'S skin to clean it*

**BYRON**

And how did this happen?

**STEVEN**

I don't know I was standing at the bar having a drink and this guy just came out of nowhere and punched me.

**BYRON**

Without any prompting?

**STEVEN**

I was just standing there.

**BYRON**

He didn't say anything to you.

**STEVEN**

I don't remember. Ow!

**BYRON**

I'm sorry it's going to sting I can't do anything about—

**STEVEN**

Just – give me a little bit of a -warning

**BYRON**

**Warning:** I'm going to clean your wounds, or should I say your new wounds with rubbing alcohol. It's as if you can't go out these nights without coming home with some kind of bruise.

**STEVEN**

People like to attack me I guess.

**BYRON**

*Or* is it the other way around?

**STEVEN**

You think I'm *starting* fights with people.

**BYRON**

Yes.

**STEVEN**

Why would I do that?

**BYRON**

You tell me.

**STEVEN**

I don't start fights with people –

**BYRON**

You're angry about something.  
That much I know for sure.

**STEVEN**

I'm not angry about anything!

**BYRON**

It's alright to be angry. It's what you do with your anger that's important. For example, I channel my fury into my work with ACT UP.

**STEVEN**

Oh *god* here we go again.

**BYRON**

You should come with me to a meeting.

**STEVEN**

I don't want to go.

**BYRON**

Just one meeting and if after that it's not for you, I won't bother you again.

**STEVEN**

No.

**BYRON**

Ever since your refusal to come to the March with me back in April -

**STEVEN**

Stop hanging that March over my head like it makes me a bad person for not going with you.

**BYRON**

I don't think you're a bad person but I *do* think it's important to stand up for something you believe in. What *do* you believe in?

**STEVEN**

I'm not having this conversation with you right now.

**BYRON**

Not now, not ever. You're not interested in the *world* around you, you're only interested in yourself. How can we progress if you don't -

**STEVEN**

We we we. *We* are not a **WE**. Just because you let me live here with you doesn't mean that you and I are a "we".

**BYRON**

We share the same bed.

**STEVEN**

Because you don't have another bed.

**BYRON**

You could sleep on the couch.

**STEVEN**

It's not comfortable.

**BYRON**

You know what? I just hit my limit.

*(pause)*

Just now.

I've let you take advantage but starting now that is going to change.

I have made a decision.

You need to start paying rent.

**STEVEN**

That wasn't our deal.

**BYRON**

You wouldn't have to pay a lot.

**STEVEN**

You don't need the money.

**BYRON**

I *beg* your pardon.

**STEVEN**

You don't need the money. You have a *lot* of money.

**BYRON**

What gave you that impression?

**STEVEN**

It's not an impression. It's a fact.

**STEVEN**

I found it. I know where you keep your **pot of gold**.

**BYRON**

What pot of gold?

**STEVEN**

In the closet behind the false wall. In the – antique thingy.

**BYRON**

The *samovar*.

It's for tea. From Russia. It's a gift.

**STEVEN**

-*"from Russian royalty"*.

**BYRON**

Yes A Czar.

**STEVEN**

I counted it you know. There's forty-seven thousand and four hundred and fifty-two dollars and 23 cents in there.

Where'd you get all that cash?

**BYRON**

That is none of your business. You shouldn't have been snooping around.

**STEVEN**

I couldn't help myself.

**BYRON**

Don't touch that money! That money is for the future.

**STEVEN**

Isn't that how you pay for everything? For me?

...

**BYRON**

I don't know that you should stay here anymore.

**STEVEN**



So now you're kicking me out.

**BYRON**

I want my key back.

*Now.*

Give me my key.

My key.

**Now.**

**STEVEN**

I'll have nowhere to go.

**BYRON**

Of-course you do.

Just go downstairs and knock on Genet's door.

Won't *he* let you in?

**STEVEN**

I don't even know –

**BYRON**

Don't. Lie. To me.

You think I don't know?

You think I'm blind?

I have eyes and ears everywhere.

You think it wouldn't get back to me.

**STEVEN**

We just fucked once in like March when you were in Philadelphia. That's all.

I don't even think about him anymore.

**BYRON**

Darling, don't.

I *know* the spell Genet can cast.

You're still under it.

I can see it on your face now so clearly.

You're not angry.

You're hurt.

Come here.

**STEVEN**

No.

**BYRON**

Then I'll come to you.

**STEVEN**

Don't.

*BYRON grabs a hold of STEVEN and tries to hug him.  
STEVEN resists.  
heartbeat grows louder*

**STEVEN**

Get OFF OF ME!

I DON'T WANT YOU TOUCHING ME!

**YOU REPULSE ME!**

*STEVEN pushes BYRON off with such force that BYRON stumbles backwards, he hits something  
and falls to the floor.  
BYRON tries to catch his breath*

**STEVEN**

Ever since the Gender Fuck Ball -  
When you shit yourself on stage in front of everyone.  
The shit dripping down your legs and how you ignored it.  
And then how you slipped on it.  
Seeing you on the ground, covered in your own AIDS shit.

*Music builds*

**BYRON**

Stop. It's enough.  
My greatest embarrassment.  
Help me up.  
Help me.  
Steven.

*BYRON struggling to get up through out.*

I'm sorry you're in pain.  
Genet hurt you.  
I warned you about him.  
I warned you and you chose not to listen.  
Your first heartbreak I imagine.

You know he's – you know he has AIDS too.  
I should have told you that from the start.  
I found him on the stairwell, covered in his own shit.  
That's what gay men do for each other in the age of an epidemic, we clean up each other's shit.  
Would you do that for him?  
Would you do that for me?  
Why do I even need to ask? That night at the club, where were you when I needed you.  
I called for you and you didn't come.  
What does that say about you?  
And what does it say about me that I let you stay here all this time and never once spoke to you about this.  
I want you out of my apartment not because you broke my heart  
But because I believe now you have no heart.  
I believe that *you* are a **sickness**.  
Now.  
Give. Me. My. Key.

**STEVEN**

It's right here. In my pocket. Come and get it.

**BYRON**

I'm not afraid of you.

**STEVEN**

Maybe you should be.

*Maniacal laughing*  
*The two struggle and we hear intense grunting*  
*Byron then yells*

*As the screams fade out we hear a long piece of saran wrap being pulled out of a container.*  
*Sound of wrapping the saran wrap around something.*

**STEVEN**

This is going to take forever.

**GENET**

Not as long as you think.

**STEVEN**

You've done this before?

**GENET**

Keep wrapping.

**STEVEN**

Why have you been ignoring me?

**GENET**

I've been busy.

**STEVEN**

Yea ok but I know you've seen me out and you've –

**GENET**

I haven't seen you.

**STEVEN**

I've knocked on your door. I know you've been home and –

**GENET**

I never heard you knock. I wasn't there.

**STEVEN**

I just thought we – was I wrong to –

**GENET**

I told you I don't

**STEVEN**

but I thought we were like, like you and I we –

**GENET**

We had a fun night

**STEVEN**

But it felt like more to me.

**GENET**

It wasn't.

**STEVEN**

I don't believe you.

**GENET**

Did you do this to get my attention?

**STEVEN**

I don't know why I did it.

He made me so angry.

And the next thing I knew my hands were around his neck and I just kept squeezing until he stopped moving.

It was like - once I started I couldn't stop.

**GENET**

*(smelling the air)*

I can smell...Byron.

We're gonna have to clean the apartment again.

He never let me come in here you know.

He didn't trust me.

It's local lore that Byron had a pot of gold hidden somewhere in here.

I'm guessing you found it

I'm guessing that's how you plan to pay me huh, from his pot of gold.

**STEVEN**

If there was a pot of gold I would have found it.

I snooped through *everything* here.

I'm really good at snooping.

When I was living uptown last year.

I was living with this really old guy who lived in a duplex just off the park.

Right across from the Met.

I found all his shit.

He had this jewelry, like *family jewels* that he kept under a floorboard in the kitchen.

Isn't that crazy?

He was a crazy fuck.

Kinky as shit.

Anyway, I found those.

I had them appraised.

They are worth a ton of money.

I put them into a safe deposit box.

That's why I was so glad when you gave me back my wallet.

That's where I was keeping the key.

He told me something about you.

**GENET**

What did he tell you?

**STEVEN**

That you are, that you have - ...do you?

**GENET**

...have what?

**STEVEN**

... .. AIDS.

**GENET**

I told you I didn't.

**STEVEN**

Are you telling me the truth?

**GENET**

Don't you trust me?

**STEVEN**

How can I know if I can trust you?

After we spend one night together you ignore me for months and months and then the only reason you even showed up today is because I said I would pay you to help me.

**GENET**

You must trust me enough to know I won't turn you in.

**STEVEN**

I know you won't turn me in because this is what you do for a living. You kill people and take care of their bodies.

**GENET**

That's not what I –

**STEVEN**

Don't lie to me.

Beat.

**STEVEN**

It's not like I care anyway.  
I want it.  
I *want* to be infected.

**GENET**

No one wants to be infected.

**STEVEN**

I do.  
I want to be dirty.  
And dangerous.  
Deadly.  
***INFECT ME.***  
It's really hot in here.  
I'm going to take all my clothes off.  
You should too.

*Melodic music plays and crescendos as the two fuck on Byron's bed.*

**STEVEN**

Thanks.

**GENET**

Drink up.

*Sound of STEVEN drinking.*

**STEVEN**

I missed you.

I'm shivering.  
That just came out of nowhere.  
Hold me tighter.  
Tighter!

...Your chest hair is going grey.  
I bet you're old enough to be my Dad.  
I don't have a Dad.  
**Dad. Daddy.** You hate when I call you Daddy.  
But you are such a Daddy.  
I've always liked older guys.

But I think you're the only guy I've ever loved.  
Do you love me?  
Do *you* love me?  
Do you  
Do -  
(*breathing*)

**GENET**

Kid?

**STEVEN**

I'm so tired suddenly.  
Did you – did you put something in the water?  
(*yawns*)  
Did you?  
Tell me.  
I can't keep my eyes open.  
Fuck you!  
--  
I will fucking  
Find...  
You...  
And...  
Kill ...  
You...

*Sound of deep breathing, sleep.*

**GENET**

Sorry kid, but a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.  
(*smells the air*)  
Now, where oh where are you hiding the cash?

*Beat.*

*Genet gets out of bed and is rustling around the apartment*



This has been Episode 6 of 1993 by finkle.

Directed by Jonathan Silverstein.

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Thank you for listening. I look forward to joining you at the virtual theater again soon!