

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*...

PART EIGHT

NARRATOR (FINKLE)

Previously on 1993...

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

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)

FINKLE

...And I decide right then that I'm dedicating my album to Steven.

That every song will be about him.

That I'll call the album YOU and **he** would be the YOU in question

And then when I'm done with the album I'll put it on a master tape and I'll give it to him and I'll share it with him and he'll love it and he'll really know me and he'll fall in love...

(Radio static)

BYRON

... *Life is about evolution.* We are always all changing. ...For the first time in my life I felt some urgency to show up and raise my voice.

(Radio static)

BYRON

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....

(Radio static)

STEVEN

I want it.

I *want* to be infected.

INFECT ME.....

(Radio static)

BORIS

Loreena? It's your turn. Do you want to speak or pass?

Radio static echoes and channel changes one last time

FINKLE

And now, Episode 8: Final Episode- Low Romance-Disappear **or**
The Second Night I Spent with Steven.

♪ 1993 ♪

♪ 1993 ♪

♪ 1993 ♪

♪ 1993 ♪

FINKLE

Finkle here.

The second night I spent with Steven in 1993 happened in late September. It's early in the morning when Steven shows up at my apartment. He's skittish, he pushes his way in and tells me to lock the door. He starts looking around the place, scoping it out.

STEVEN

This place is kind of crappy.

I thought for sure you'd have a lot of fancy things.

Have you seen Loreena?

FINKLE

I tell him I haven't. Which is mostly true. I saw Loreena once leaving her place a couple weeks earlier. I said hi and she looked at me like she'd seen a ghost. She didn't seem to remember meeting me back in June when I helped Steven bring her into her apartment. She sort of ran ahead of me like she felt unsafe and I didn't have a chance to re-introduce myself. Looking back now I think she must have thought I was Steven for a second. I don't think that Steven and I look alike but maybe to other people we do.

This is probably a good time to explain that when Steven showed up at my apartment I didn't know he had killed Byron. I hadn't seen Steven since the first night we spent together in June – I had looked for him a little bit but he didn't seem to be around.

...But back to late September.

After looking around a little more Steven kicks off his shoes, lies down on the couch and within seconds is fast asleep.

That evening I ordered in chinese and we sat on the floor, got stoned and ate together.

I'm trying all this time to be super chill, like this is a normal thing to have him in the apartment, to be alone with him, like the last four years of obsessing over him had never happened. -But inside I'm terrified that at any moment he's going to just get up and leave. I don't know why he's shown up, I don't know what he needs, I don't know anything except that I'm the happiest I've ever been. But of course I'm not happy at all, I'm nervous and anxious and thinking about whether or not I'll have the guts to share my *album* with him. After all I am making it FOR him

and he's here right now. But then I think - it's not ready and none of it is any good anyway and I don't want to ruin the vibe.
I tell him - My friends ask about you.

STEVEN

Which friends

FINKLE

The guys we hung out with -

STEVEN

Oh yea they were cool enough. Do they live around here?

FINKLE

No that one we were hanging with was on the upper east and -

STEVEN

Right yea, maybe we should hang out with them or something.

FINKLE

Yea sure.

STEVEN

You think they want to hang now?

FINKLE

Um, I don't know I -

STEVEN

Call them.

I bet they are getting ready to go out and party. They're loaded right?

FINKLE

Um, I don't know, I think Jerry just kind of makes a living.

STEVEN

I'm rich. Not right now but when I'm 23. I have a trust fund blah blah blah I have the guy's card, the guy who handles the trust fund. I have his card in my wallet so when I turn 23 I can just pull the card out and call him and then boom, I'll be worth **25 million dollars**. Wild right? Soo? are you going to call Jerry or what?

FINKLE

I don't know whether to believe Steven or not.
I'm pretty sure he's lying to me.
I pretend to call Jerry but actually just dial the weather number and then tell him that no one is picking up.
So I guess I'm lying to Steven too.

STEVEN

Why didn't you stay that morning?

FINKLE

I don't know I wasn't feeling great- my eye-

STEVEN

Oh yea. It looks like its healed

FINKLE

Yea it's just a little tender still.

STEVEN

Where?

FINKLE

Just under my eye-

STEVEN

Like - *here*?

STEVEN touches FINKLE's face

FINKLE

yes just there.

STEVEN

You have really nice eyes. I didn't notice them before.

FINKLE

Thanks. I think you have really nice eyes too.

STEVEN

You do?

FINKLE

Yea.

*Shaky breath.
Tense music builds in the background*

STEVEN

Do you have to work tonight?

FINKLE

I called in sick.

STEVEN

...Cool.

So then you have to work tomorrow?

FINKLE

Yea probably.

The building background music stops abruptly

Do you want to watch a movie or something? I rented a couple things the other day from Kim's. You can choose one if you want.

Shuffling and handing over vhs tapes.

STEVEN

What's *Que-reel-le*?

FINKLE

Querelle. I've actually seen that movie like twelve times but I *love* it. It's Fassbender. Rainer Werner Fassbinder... based on the novel by Jean Genet. Have you ever read any Genet?

STEVEN

Genet? Jean Genet? Like – Genet upstairs?

STEVEN

Genet and I had a thing for a while. But I broke it off. I think I probably broke his heart. But this is his name on the book. Do you think he wrote it?

FINKLE

Well, not unless he's a ghost. Genet died in the 80's.

You have to read his books. I'm obsessed. I just finished this one.

STEVEN

Our Lady of the Flowers.

STEVEN opens and flips through the book.

FINKLE

It's pretty amazing.

Genet wrote it in prison.

His first draft was taken from him and then he rewrote the entire thing again on toilet paper.

The story was kind of like porn to him, there are these long passages where he describes jerking off to his own writing.

He needed to escape his surroundings you know?

STEVEN

No. He needed to be free.

(echoing) to be free... to be free.... to be free.... to be free.... to be free... to be free.

finkle

We watch Fassbender's *Querelle* together.

*VHS tape is put into into the deck
the opening credits of Querelle play*

"The thought of murder often evokes thoughts of the sea and of sailors what naturally follows thoughts of the sea and murder is the thought of love or sexuality."

"Querelle's great passion is his own body in repose. It is as if he's reflecting himself in his own image. He's looking at himself as if through a magnifying glass. He's scrutinizing the minute events like an etymologist. But how shining is his body in the glory of his proud movements?"

FINKLE

I remember the first time I saw this movie I felt something in my heart open.

It was as if the film publicly showed my private world.

Or the private world I was desperate to live in full of sexy self loathing men who both denied and exulted in their queerness.

Dirty, rough around the edges, mysterious, rebellious, sexy, painful, heartbroken, scary, wild...

I remember one scene in *Querelle* where two men who may or may not be brothers circle each other

One is a cop, one is a thug,

in what is a sizing up and a dance

Sound of this scene in the background

FINKLE

I remember searching for these men, or the ways I imagined them on the streets of New York, in the East Village, in Alphabet City.
I was looking for the sexy low lives.
I wanted to live a sexy low life.
I wanted to have a low romance.

(snaps back into the scene)

STEVEN

That movie was hot.
Wanna **smash?** (echoes) Wanna smash? Wanna smash? Wanna smash?

FINKLE

Sex with Steven was **disturbingly** dull.
Our bodies didn't fit.
Everything was a little dry-er than I'd have liked.
but it didn't matter.
I remember convincing myself that it was *perfect*.
Steven and I never talk about safe sex. It doesn't even cross my mind. I just want him so badly.

When I woke up, Steven was gone.
And so was my wallet.
And my copy of *Our Lady of the Flowers*.

I think about that night a lot.
I like to think he came over because he needed me.
I wonder if he was thinking about killing me.

About a month later I'm out to dinner at MaryAnn's on East 5th with Brooke when I start to get really nauseous. I presume it's from the tequila because I had like three margaritas, and just as a side note, tequila and I are not friends. Like if I have three margaritas I'm either puking or I'm saying the most nasty disgusting things to you.

Umm- anyway- We were celebrating – I had gotten a job working on a film in Miami. Which wasn't something I was even that interested in doing but the night shift job was killing me and I needed an exit strategy and this was it.

I was going to go home and live with my family, make a ton of money and then come back to the city. Nothing worked out this way but that's another story about another year or *years*...
We decided to let our lease go at 512. Brooke was going to move home to California – her father was dying of cancer and she wanted to be with him for as long as he had left.

When Brooke leaves at the end of November, we don't realize that we won't see each other for 20 years.

I'm sick all night and in the morning I have a fever.

The fever gets worse as does the nausea.

This goes on for several days and finally Brooke convinces me to go to the Doctor.

The Doctor asks me a lot of questions and in particular about my sex life.

Are you sexually active? Yes.

Do you have one partner or multiple partners? Multiple.

Have you had unprotected sex? Yes.

How often? A lot. I answer - Almost every time.

Until this moment in the Doctor's office I don't think I realized the choices I had been making – or not making.

They take a whole bunch of blood tests and give me an antibiotic.

A week later I'm called back to the office.

I remember sitting in the Doctor's office by myself.

I remember looking at their desk, which was mahogany.

Out the window I could see – It doesn't matter what I could see.

It's what I *heard*.

Beat.

First I hear the loudspeaker in the hall. (*female voice unintelligibly calls over a loudspeaker*)

Someone is paging a Doctor and it sounds relatively urgent.

I wonder what's happened and to who.

And then I hear the door to the office open (*door opens*) and then I hear what they say as they walk into the room.

Before they sit down.

Before they look at me.

As the door opens they say,

(*door opens*)

Ok, so your test came back positive for HIV.

(*door opens*)

Ok so your test came back positive for HIV.

(*door opens*)

Ok so your test came back positive for HIV

(*door opens*)

Ok so your test came back positive.

(*door opens*)

Ok so your test came back positive.

(door opens)

I remember that moment so vividly.

The moment the words were connecting to me.

As if it is happening right now for the first time.

(door opens)

Ok, so your test came back positive.

Words are *slower* than images.

They take a long time, in the scheme of things, to get from one person's mouth to another person's ear.

(door opens)

Ok, so your test came back positive for HIV.

Sound waves move like *water*.

A vibration is made.

It travels through the air

It vibrates again.

(door opens)

Ok, so your test came back positive for HIV.

(door opens)

Do words change shape as they travel through space?

(door opens)

Do words change meaning as they travel through time?

(door opens)

That night, I called my parents and told them.

My Dad tells me that "we are going to beat this thing." *(chuckles)*

My Mom is completely *silent*.

The silence is so heavy.

How long is this silence?

It's possible it was only a few seconds.

In my memory it stretches out *over decades*.

I don't know what she was thinking during that silence.

I don't know what she felt.

As I've gotten older I'm more and more clear that she was scared and sad and hurt and felt *powerless*.

At the time I heard judgement. Disappointment. I heard her say in her silence that I should never tell anyone. That I should be ashamed. That I, like her, should **stay** silent.

Avrom Finkelstein, no direct relation, founded the Silence=Death Project in 1987.

I was a junior in high school.

(recording)

"In the terms of the meaning of *Silence*, politically it has-it has two very specific meanings. Institutionally, *Silence* is about control. Personally, *Silence* is about complicity.

And I think as a Jew- and three of us were Jews, uh this was tremendously-- disturbing to us. Because to a Jew when you see something happening and you are silent about it, you are participating in it whether you want to or not, whether you know it or not.”

Silence=Death was the *slogan* of the AIDS movement which was beginning its true peak in 1993.

The eponymous image – The words in clear type and a pink triangle – a recognized acknowledgement to the persecution of LGBTQ by the Nazis was *everywhere*.

But somehow it never resonated with me.

Or rather, I didn't *let* it resonate with me.

I didn't want to see myself as one of those men marching and shouting and fighting for their lives.

Instead I chose to fight myself.

I've been determined all this time to keep my status as much a secret as possible – only telling those really close to me.

Swearing them into an implied secrecy.

HIV – something *whispered*.

Something **shameful** and **dirty**.

When I told guys I was dating a lot of times the guys would stop calling.

Or they'd say they were ok with it and then freak out in the middle of sex.

Or *they'd* be ok with my status and *I'd* freak out.

Or if they were positive too I wouldn't know how to process that either.

Was it safe for us to be unsafe?

Sometimes when hooking up if I wasn't asked, I wouldn't tell.

And sometimes I'd lie.

For twenty years I believed I'd put this into its place.

Undetectable.

Invisible.

Silent.

Seemingly Forgotten.

But then in 2013 Brooke calls me and tells me she's coming to town for business and would like to see me. She mentions that there is an exhibit at the New Museum, which is my favorite museum in the city, – 1993: Experimental Jet Set Trash and No Star. That's the title of the show, taken from the 1993 Sonic Youth album of the same name. She suggests we should go to that – since that's the year we lived together.

When we see each other in the lobby of the museum, we both laugh. We look our ages, which gives us both a shock. You know that feeling right? Like you don't realize how old you are until you see a friend who's the same age? I don't know, does that make any sense?

The docent recommends we start the exhibit on the top floor.
As soon as we walk off the elevator we are faced with a *wall* of twelve televisions. The TVs are authentic early 90's. Clunky, awkward, halfway to today's modern.
Each television is airing content – stories, music, events about that month in the year 1993.

♪Gonna take you back, gonna take you back to ...♪
Collage of sound bytes/stories of that year overlap each other.
Cacophony of news from the end of the year
Ruth Bader Ginsburg is sworn into the supreme court
Donald Trump gets married at Plaza – 1000 guests attend – December 20th
Michael Jackson false allegations
Clinton accused of philandering and Hillary denies
Philadelphia movie is released
Christmas day – North Korea has one or two nuclear weapons, CIA state dept disagrees
December 31 – Brandon Teena raped and murdered

FINKLE

I'm instantly taken back to the year.
And just as instantly I'm thrown into an unexpected mid-life crisis.
I realize that there's been this dull but insistent gnawing that's grown over the years.
A Need to tell.
I realize *Silence=Death* isn't an immediate equation.
Like all of life, it is slow.
Silence is the **virus** within that's grown and spread over time
HIV never made me sick, I was beyond lucky, but **Silence** has.
Silence infected me.

What has silence stopped me from saying?
From doing?
From becoming?
How would my life have been different if in 1993 I'd shared my pop album with anyone?
If I'd embraced my queerness?
If I'd not been ashamed of my status?
Who have I infected with my Silence?

Silence.

Uh, there are probably some loose ends you would like me to tie up so I'm going to do my best right now.

Byron wouldn't be found until early 1994 when I presume Loreena (or someone else?) called the Police. I don't know exactly what happened. Loreena was never mentioned in any of the news stories and by then I had moved out of the building so I never really knew for sure. Loreena, i hope, ended up with Boris I have this image of them in Boris's apartment in Queens and Boris is making a delicious meal and she's ... happy.

Genet, Genet just disappears.

And Steven - you know, I've made up many stories about what happens to Steven but I guess I wonder now -

What do *you* think should happen to him?

What do you think Steven deserves?

Who are you?

Who are you?

Who are you?

Who are you?

♪SONG - U♪

♪~♪

U

Oh how I wonder what it is you see

Oh how I wonder what it is you see

U

Could you describe it in words to me?

Could you describe it in words to me?

U

Oh how I wonder what it is you hear

Oh how I wonder what it is you hear

U

What does the world sound like through your ears?

What does the world sound like through your ears?

U

What will you remember from this age?

What will you remember from this age?

U

Can you remember love as much as the rage?

Can you remember love as much as the rage?

U

What do you keep in your memory?

What do you keep in your memory?

U

What parts of you do you set free?

What parts of you do you set free?

U

Do you want to go back in time?

Do you want to go back in time?

U

Or are you afraid of what you will find?

Or are you afraid of what you will find?

U

Or do you try to stay in the now

Or do you try to stay in the now

U

If you do that, can you show me how?

If you do that, can you show me how?

U

Where in your body do you hold pain?

Where in your body do you hold pain?

U

Is it in your Ears, eyes, heart or brain?

Is it in your Ears, eyes, heart or brain?

U

Can you breathe into it really slow?

Can you breathe into it really slow?

U

Can you heal yourself let it go?

Can you heal yourself let it go?

♪ let it go

let it go

let it go♪

(spoken) I think this is the end. I'm just going to leave it here.

♪ let it go

let it go

let it go♪

END.

This has been Episode 8 of 1993 by finkle.

Directed by Jonathan Silverstein.

All voices, music, sound, noise, and silence created and compiled by finkle.

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This performance is part of Keen Company's Hear/Now Season of Audio Theater, led by Artistic Director Jonathan Silverstein.

The Season's Audio Consultant is Garrett Schultz.

The Hear/Now theme is composed by Billy Recce.

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