

**Education  
Resource Pack**

**Lyric**



# **SEVENTEEN**

**by Matthew Whittet**



**Who says you're only young once?**



# Contents

Page 3: Production Information

Page 4: Character Breakdown

Page 5: Synopsis

Page 7: Exercise 1 - Letter to your future self

Page 8: Interview with Matthew Whittet

Page 10: Exercise 2 - Character Arcs

Page 11: Production images

Page 12: Exercise 3 - Park Party Playlist

# Production Information

## Cast:

Jess - Diana Hardcastle

Mike - Michael Feast

Tom - Roger Sloman

Lizzie - Sarah Ball

Ronnie - Mike Grady

Emilia - Margot Leicester

## Creative Team:

Written by Matthew Whittet

Directed by Anne-Louise Sarks

Designed by Tom Scutt

Lighting Design by Paule Constable

Sound Design by Nick Manning

Movement Director Imogen Knight

The Lyric Hammersmith production of *Seventeen* ran from 04 March – 08 April 2017

*Seventeen* was originally performed at the Belvoir theatre in Sydney with the following cast.

Mike - John Gaden

Tom - Peter Carroll

Jess - Maggie Dace

Emilia - Anna Volska

Ronny - Barry Otto

Lizzie - Genevieve Lemon

# Character Breakdown

Jess (17) The girl who wants to live for right now. She has a grounded, immediate, centred place in the world. She doesn't know what happens next, but she knows she's alive and has to get everything out of right now.

Mike (17) The charming alpha male who wants to lose himself tonight. He's in the closet, in love with Tom and antagonistic towards everyone. He fears he's going to be trapped forever inside his own secrets, and that he may never leave this town. He doesn't want to age. He wants time to stop. He and Jess having been going out for a while.

Emilia (17) The control freak and Jess's best friend. She knows what she wants to be when she's older and how she's going to get it. But she has no practical experience with being a teenager. She's never been drunk and she's secretly in love with Tom. She fears she's an emotional cripple, bottled up so tightly that she might explode at any moment.

Tom (17) Mike's best friend and the second fiddle who is desperate to grow up. He can't stand who he is and how he looks, and has a fear of always being inadequate. But tonight he's going to do something about it. He loves Jess, and he's going to tell her even if it destroys his friendship with Mike. He's scared of tomorrow, but wants to face it with everything he's got.

Lizzy (14) Mike's little sister. She's the watcher. She's full of life and uncontrollable – like an annoying version of Puck. She's wise beyond her years but hides it in being totally infantile. She knows something is happening with her big brother, but she doesn't know what it is. She knows she has to reach out to him tonight.

Ronny (17) The outsider. Ronny is a lost soul looking for reasons not to fall into an abyss tonight. He's run away from home due to his violent dad and has been living in the park for weeks. But he can't let anyone know the truth, otherwise he will fall apart. He has no friends in the world. But when they let him stay with them he sees his first glimmer of hope in years – just as school is ending forever.

# Synopsis

Seventeen is set on the last day of school in a park at dusk. The geographical location is not exactly defined but it can be assumed it is somewhere in England.

The action begins with Ronny staring into space. He is wearing a school uniform with only three signatures written in marker pen. In front of him is a sleeping bag. He looks to the top of the swings at the cross bar and begins to cry. He reaches in his bag to take something out when he hears music. He hides.

Mike and Tom enter drinking beer and listening to music. They are in good spirits and discussing their exams. It is clear that their intention is to spend the night getting drunk in the park, sleep there and watch the sunrise. Tom and Mike also discuss the fact that Tom will be moving away with his family. The boys then swap letters they were asked to write to themselves when they started secondary school and told not to open until they finished. As they read this and laugh at their former selves Lizzy enters. Mike is visibly annoyed at his little sister for being there. As this exchange takes place Jess and Emilia enter. Jess is talking to her mum on the phone. It is clear she has a difficult relationship with her mum. Emilia grabs her phone and hangs up. Emilia hands Jess a present it is the night before her 18th birthday. Mike calls Jess trying to find out where they are and they head off to find the boys.

After the girls leave Lizzy finds Ronny hiding behind the toilets. She notices he has lots of bags which she finds strange. Lizzie then runs off. Mike and Tom approach and Ronny considers running away but does not. He shouts after them. It is clear neither boy is pleased to see Ronny. Ronny awkwardly tries to befriend the two by complementing them and hints at being invited to their celebration in the park. Eventually out of grudging politeness the boys invite Ronny to hang out.

Jess and Emilia enter and complain about the fact they are meeting in a park when they could be in a pub. The group engages in various drunken shenanigans. Ronny dances like a maniac, they play on the swings and drink more. Emilia and Tom talk about growing up and Tom moving away and how sometimes he feels like he wants to be more like Mike. He wishes he was taken more seriously and felt more like a man. Emilia tells him that he is more of a man than Mike and gets upset and walks away.

Tom starts to read the letter he wrote to himself. Mike sneaks up on him and snatches the letter and starts to read it aloud. Tom gets very embarrassed. Emilia also talks about her letter it's clear she is very focussed and driven.

Lizzie is starting to develop a bit of a girl crush on Jess. Ronnie suggests that they all do a trick, something that is special to them. Emilia and Jess pole dance and Tom sings surprisingly beautifully. Mike then suggests a game of truth or dare. When Tom asks for truth he deliberately asks a question, an embarrassing question about masturbation. Mike then dares Lizzie to do 10 star jumps naked which she does with gusto much to Jess's approval. Emilia is then dared to kiss Tom on the lips which clearly causes some awkwardness and causes an argument between Jess and Mike.

Tom finds himself alone again with his letter. Jess confides in him that she is fed up with the way Mike treats her and how she feels like she could get trapped looking after her mum and Mike forever. This heart to heart is interrupted by the sounds of Emilia calling for help as she is very drunk. Before she goes Tom asks her to read his letter. After this he confesses that he has feelings for Jess and he has for a while. Jess kisses him. They share a moment before Ronny interrupts to ask Jess to go to look after Emilia.

Whilst Emilia is being looked after by Jess she discloses that she has feelings for Tom.

Mike and Lizzy have a conversation about Mike's relationship with Jess. It is clear Mike is unhappy and Lizzy is worried about him and it's clear he is hiding something.

Ronny and Jess enter with a very drunk Emilia. The group try to help her. Mike starts acting strangely and insisting everyone drinks Tequila. Mike thinks he sees the police and the group scatter. Mike stays and shouts at them throwing a bottle which accidentally hits an approaching Ronny.

Whilst Emilia is looking after Ronny who has a cut head from the bottle he discloses to her-unaware of Emilia's feelings- that he saw Jess and Tom kissing. Emilia runs off with Ronny asking her not to tell the secret.

Emilia confronts Jess and is clearly very angry at her. Tom tries to draw Mike away and speak to him alone but Jess admits to the kiss. Emilia is furious at what she sees as betrayal by Jess. Jess tells Mike about the kiss and Tom declares he is in love with Jess. Mike is shocked and clearly distraught and he walks away. Lizzy follows. Jess tries to comfort Emilia but she is still very angry and discloses how much courage it took to admit her feelings for Tom to Jess. The stress brings on a nosebleed and under protest Emilia runs away. Ronny follows.

Mike confronts Tom who doesn't try to defend his actions but tells him what happened wasn't premeditated. Mike doesn't want to believe him but Tom talks about how Mike was always the confident one but also that he is selfish. Mike insinuates that Tom is jealous of him and tries to provoke a reaction going as far as asking Tom to hit him. Mike is incensed screaming at Tom to hit him and then kisses him. Lizzy is close by and sees this and takes Mike away by the hand.

Ronny enters looking for Emilia who enters carrying Ronny's bag under her arm. She confronts him and asks him if he has been sleeping in the park. Ronny protests and then admits that he has been sleeping there for the last week due to the fact his father is violent. He admits that he hates school and that only he and two teachers signed his shirt on the last day of school. He is scared about what the future holds. Emilia asks Ronny to stay with her and they embrace moving to the music enjoying the moment. Jess calls after Emilia asking if she can call her but it's clear something has changed.

Lizzy drags Tom to see Mike and implores them to talk. Mike talks about how Tom and he met. They met on the first day of secondary school and Mike hurt himself and Tom looked after him. He talks about how kind Tom is and says that he loves him but that Tom has broken his heart and they will probably never talk to him again. Tom is hurt but understands. Mike sees Jess as he is about to leave. She tells him that she loves her. Lizzy tells Jess how much she wants to be like her and leaves.

Tom and Jess stand-alone they discuss what their plans are. Tom talks about packing before going away. Jess talks about a lie in. The sun rises.



# Exercise 1 - Letter for your future self

In the script the characters write letters to themselves which they don't open for 6 years. Write a letter to yourself 6 years in the future.



# Interview with Matthew Whittet Writer of *Seventeen*.

## **How did *Seventeen* come about?**

*Seventeen* came about because I wanted to write a play for a bunch of older actors I was working with in Sydney. I've been writing plays with a teenage voice for a while now. I like teenage stories where people are going through real change. They are often quite normal stories, however I've often found people have these stories where one part of them dies and another part comes alive. I think it happens when you are just becoming a teenager and then when you are seventeen or eighteen then it doesn't happen as much for a while. So I had this idea were older actors got to transform in front of our eyes in a very simple way. I started working with these actors back in Sydney and I talked to them about their memories back when they were seventeen who was their first love who they wanted to be things like that. When I was going through the process I gathered hours and hours of footage and I needed to write a play and I thought I can't write a play about all of this so I started to think about seventeen year olds now.

So I wrote this very simple play about the last day of school. As I was writing it I realised there was all these similarities of what it was to be at the end of school and about to go into work and also about going into the end of work and about to enter the world of retirement. This is two times of life when people are changing. So I wondered what was universal about these two age groups and I guess that's when I started to write the play.

I guess I saw it as an opportunity to show these two generations going through a similar thing and it became about building a bridge in a sense.

## ***Seventeen* was originally done at the Belvoir in Sydney and has transferred to the Lyric did you have to change to play to translate to a British audience?**

Yes I had written *Seventeen* for a particular group of actors which has its benefits and drawbacks. This time round we had a chance to revisit the text. There was some basic differences. In Australia you can finish school at 17. Most people in the UK leave school around 18. So first of all I had to understand the differences here as you have to make sure it's all accurate. We changed some of the character arcs and also worked on the language to ensure none of the ridiculous Australianisms were sticking out. It is quite a different play – in essence it's the same but the text is quite different.

## **Moving away from the play you act as well as write. Do these jobs interact with each other?**

Absolutely. I like to think I've become a much better actor since I started writing in terms of understanding the process. Actors are very reactive you wait around for a job, you audition for it and you get it or you don't. Often actors come in at the end of a process. Writers have to be proactive and cut their own path. As an actor you are maybe two or three weeks ahead of yourself, writers maybe two or three weeks. It's a great way to survive as when I've not got any acting work I can work on writing projects. I also perform in a lot of things I write back in Australia. That's hard.

## **Do you find you write with yourself in mind?**

Yes and that's hard. Personally I think the best way to be as an actor is to be responsive to what others think is possible in you that you don't think is possible. I like being surprised and going 'Oh really you think I'm right for that role' that's when it gets interesting. However if you're writing for yourself you know what you are expecting of yourself so it's different. It's also bad because if you are writing for yourself you are tempted to say oh that's not very good I'll change that instead of making it work as an actor.



**In the play the characters write letters to themselves what do you wish you knew then that you know now?**

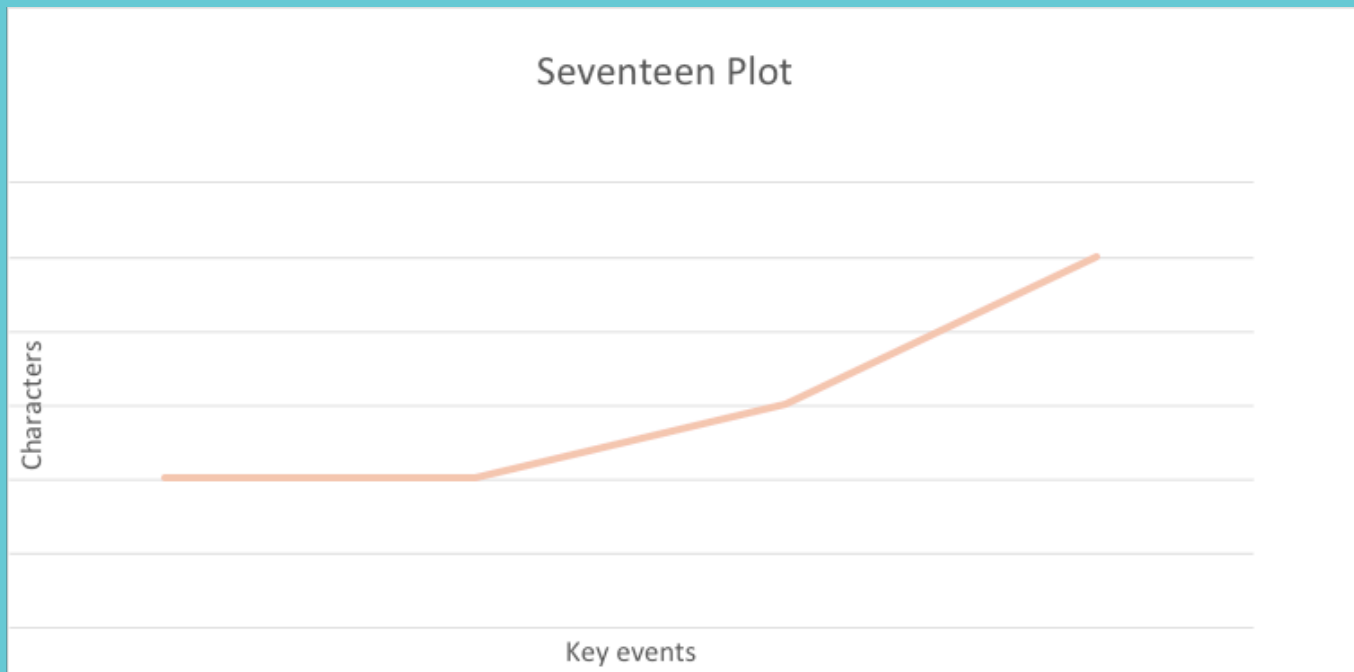
That's really hard I don't think I've asked myself that question. I've spent ages asking it of these characters and not answered it myself.

When I was seventeen I thought of myself as small and funny and I tried hard not to take up too much space in the world. If I could speak to my seventeen year old self I would just say relax it's going to be ok!



# Exercise 2 - Character Arcs

List all the characters in Seventeen along the X axis along the Y axis list the key events of the evening. Using lines show how each characters status is affected by these events.









# Exercise 3 - Park Party Playlist

Using the key events you have detailed in exercise two design a playlist for the night. Each piece of music should complement the action on stage.

Notes:

