

British Theatre Guide

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Dear Evan Hansen

Book by Steven Levenson, music and lyrics by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul

ATG Productions and Gavin Kalin Productions present the Nottingham Playhouse production

Grand Opera House, York

24–28 June 2025

Dear Evan Hansen is by now a global success, and at this point, the show's first UK tour is coming to a close, with only a couple of weeks left to catch it. Since its première in 2015 and garlanded Broadway run from 2016, it has amassed a legion of fans—largely members of Gen Z who find solace in its story of awkward late-teen schoolkids struggling to make friends in an age of online interaction.

Despite the show's fame and reach, I managed to go into it almost entirely oblivious to its plot, which is the way I'd encourage everyone to encounter it. So without getting too specific: the eponymous Evan Hansen (Ryan Kopel) is an anxious high-schooler living with his divorced mother, Heidi (Alice Fearn). His therapist has encouraged him to start each day writing a letter to himself—hence the show's title—explaining why today is going to be a good day.

We see Evan go about his daily life, finding it hard to fit in as the new school year begins, fretting about making friends and talking to his crush, Zoe Murphy (Lara Beth-Sas). Then a tragedy happens: Zoe's brother, Connor (Will Forgrave), takes his own life. From these simple beginnings, a larger machinery is set in motion, drawing Evan into an embellished version of real events, through which he finds himself suddenly achieving everything he thought he wanted.

The plot moves propulsively forward, examining the outpouring of social media emotion which follows the tragic event. This momentum is crucial, as any opportunity to reflect would surely make Evan's actions look questionable at best. As well as the pace, humour helps sell this. Despite the apparently grim—and unquestionably serious—subject matter, there's a lightness of touch and a borderline daft comedy running through a lot of the show.

Much of this is brought by the character of Jared, played by Tom Dickerson with exuberant cheek. "Sincerely, Me", which sounded to me almost like a lost Ben Folds song, is a particular stand-out here, letting Dickerson, Forgrave and Kopel cut loose with some fun choreography and interwoven lyrical lines.

Kopel, as Evan, is a force to be reckoned with. He masters the part's challenging singing range, reaching up into head voice and falsetto territory, with aplomb, and sells the emotion of his songs well, leaning forward onto tiptoe as he reaches their peaks. He brings an odd, nervous, jangling energy to his acting, too, with twitchy impulses offset by a generally blank expression. Not once but twice in the show, he wrings humour from different and unexpected intonations of the simple phrase "I know": a straight-faced, sadly downbeat sort of inward sigh.

Lara Beth-Sas, usually the ensemble's dance captain, stepped into the role of Zoe in the performance I saw, and was also deeply impressive, putting over solos like "Requiem" and "Only

Us" beautifully. Zoe's journey, being talked away from her initial principled stand, in some ways provides the moral heart of the piece.

The other characters circling Evan's story are Zoe and Connor's parents, Larry and Cynthia (Richard Hurst and Helen Anker), and Evan's mother, Heidi. Hurst portrays the stoically grieving father excellently, and gets to show a hopeful, human side in the duet "To Break In a Glove".

Given the show's focus on the younger generation, it's notable that the opening number, "Anybody Have a Map?", kicks us off with a rumination on how hard it is for parents to engage with their children, and this might be the subplot running through it all. In Anker and Fearn's hands, the song is powerfully delivered, and Fearn in particular gives a moving sense of a mother trying hard but ultimately, like the children her generation has birthed, human and prone to mistakes too.

Vivian Panka rounds out the core ensemble as Alana Beck, a fellow pupil who is quick to claim close friendship—or at least 'acquaintance' with her deceased sometime classmate. Michael Bradley's band is tight and includes well-orchestrated, soaring strings which add hugely to the poppy score.

Adam Penford's direction wisely keeps the pace high and, along with Carrie-Anne Ingrouille's unfussy choreography, maintains movement around the stage, even when the bulk of a scene basically involves two people in separate spaces conversing over voice chat.

Much like the similarly successful *La La Land*, to which songwriting duo Pasek and Paul also contributed, if you pause to think too long about it all, it risks becoming deeply unlikeable. But the quality of the performances all round here, the humour of Steven Levenson's book, the momentum of the story and musical numbers and the intriguing and somewhat unexpected plot all add up to an enjoyable, stirring show which whizzes past much more quickly than its near-three-hour run-time might suggest.

If you have a chance to catch this in York or Edinburgh, its last stop on the tour, I'd highly recommend it.

Reviewer: [Mark Love-Smith](#)