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Dramatic Publishing

Aura



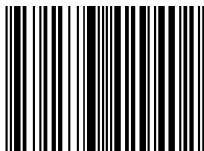
**Drama by
Tommy Lee Johnston**

Aura

Drama by Tommy Lee Johnston. *Cast: 2m., 2w.* *Aura* is the story of a pure soul, an eccentric man named Mike who can see color auras surrounding others, revealing their vitality—or imminent demise. It is a probing exploration of how Mike copes with knowledge that one should not even possess, let alone share. How does a thoughtful person live from day to day with a gift/curse of soul-wracking sensitivity and mind-numbing thoughtfulness such as this? Earl, a still young and vital senior struggling with his wife's recent death, meets Mike on his daily walk in the park, and Earl's world is forever transformed. Amanda, a young mom, and Dr. Emily Wallace, a psychiatrist to whom Mike turns for help with his unique visions, are both profoundly affected by Mike and are drawn to this kind and peculiar man with unique gifts. *Flexible set. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: AK5.*

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Drama by

TOMMY LEE JOHNSTON



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Aura received its world premiere at the Redtwist Theatre in Chicago on April 27, 2009.

CAST

Earl..... Larry Wiley
Mike Tommy Lee Johnston
Amanda/Dr. Emily Wallace Connie Anderko

PRODUCTION STAFF

Producers.....Michael Colucci, Jan Ellen Graves
Associate Producer..... Johnny Garcia
Playwright..... Tommy Lee Johnston
Director Jan Ellen Graves
Stage ManagerKate Guthrie
Assistant Stage Manager.....Ian Parry
Production Manager..... Maud Gleason
Set Designer Jan Ellen Graves
Set Carpenter..... Chuck Mac Faun
Scenic Change..... Jan Ellen Graves
Costume DesignerErin Fast
Lighting Designer Christopher Burpee
Sound Designer Christopher Kriz
Properties/Rigging Designer..... Deborah Lindell
Photos/Publicity/Programs..... Jan Ellen Graves

Aura

CHARACTERS

EARL: A widower in his mid-50s to mid-60s. He is a loner who is content sitting alone watching the birds and squirrels.

MIKE: In his early 40s, a little disheveled. He enjoys walking through the park listening to his headphones. Intelligent, yet mentally unstable, he mumbles to himself and has a tendency to ramble.

AMANDA: A young, attractive, single mom in her mid-30s. She has a 4-year-old son. She is very innocent.

DR. EMILY WALLACE: In her mid- to late-40s. She is attractive and intelligent, a psychotherapist at the Bentley Mental Health Center.

PLACE

Present day, on a bench in a park.

SET REQUIREMENTS

Aura is performed in one act. The play moves from scene to scene without pauses and use of transitional lighting. All scenes with Amanda and Dr. Emily Wallace appear onstage as Mike sees them in his own mind. Earl is completely invested in these scenes, but experiences them as simply storytelling from Mike.

Aura

AT RISE: Scene opens one early Monday morning in a park, lights up revealing an empty bench. There are sounds of birds chirping in the background. It's a beautiful day.

From L enters a middle-aged man, EARL, walking to the bench. As he's done many mornings before, EARL begins to remove items from his coat pockets, preparing himself for his morning in the park. He removes birdseed, throws a few to the ground in front of him and carefully places the bag on the bench. He then removes an old-fashioned thermos from his other pocket; he unscrews the top, and using it as a cup, pours himself coffee. He takes a couple of sips, pours the remaining coffee back into his thermos and closes it tight. From an inside pocket, he removes a small pair of binoculars, bringing them to his eyes and takes a quick scan of the trees above him. His attention is caught by one of the birds over head; he quickly finds it in his binoculars, smiles, and begins to make chirping sounds as if conversing with the bird. He laughs when the bird seemingly answers him back. He chirps, the bird chirps back. He chirps again, the bird again chirps back. Reaching into his last pocket, he removes a small bag of nuts that he begins to nibble on.

This entire routine has been witnessed by MIKE, who has been discretely watching from nearly offstage. MIKE is casually dressed and slightly disheveled, wearing headphones and mumbling to himself. He approaches EARL, gives him a smile and a nod, that EARL returns. He has almost completely exited the stage when he suddenly stops and turns, looking back. He stands silent for a moment, watching as EARL continues on with his day. He walks back towards

the bench until he stands directly behind it. He looks up at the birds as EARL does. His head follows EARL's, first up, right and then left. EARL places his binoculars on the bench next to him.

MIKE. Do you think they like you looking at them?

(EARL looks up. MIKE does not give him time to respond.)

MIKE *(cont'd)*. Not sure I'd appreciate you staring at me with those binoculars.

EARL. I really don't think they care too much. If they didn't like it, they'd fly away.

(MIKE begins to walk past ... stops, turns back.)

MIKE. Why do you stare at them?

EARL *(wishes he'd just go away)*. I don't know ... I guess I find them interesting.

MIKE. Don't you find people interesting?

EARL. Sure, but I can't exactly stare at people all day.

MIKE. Why?

EARL. It's just not polite to stare.

MIKE. I'm going to sit down.

EARL. Well I don't know ...

(MIKE sits before EARL has a chance to say no.)

MIKE. You seem to have many friends here with you.

EARL. As long as you feed them, they'll be your friends.

MIKE *(slight pause)*. You think they know you?

EARL. Hope so, I've spent a ton of money on food for them over the years. That cardinal up there usually follows me here. Same time every morning, he swoops down as I enter the park.

MIKE. Because you have food. Is that why? You think if you stopped feeding him, he'd stop coming around?

EARL. I expect so.

MIKE. You've never tried it?

EARL. No.

MIKE. So you don't really know?

EARL. No! (*Beat.*) I guess not ... why would I stop? I like having him around. You ask a lot of questions.

MIKE (*pause*). I'm sure all your friends missed you on Friday.

EARL. Friday?

MIKE. I come by here every morning. I see you every morning, not Friday. You weren't here Friday.

EARL. No, I wasn't here Friday.

MIKE. You see me here every morning. I nod to you every day, and you nod back. We say hello every morning.

EARL. Yes.

MIKE. I keep coming around.

EARL. Yes.

MIKE. You don't even have to feed me ... I keep coming around.

(*EARL finds this amusing.*)

MIKE (*cont'd*). I've walked by here every morning for years, and other than rainy days, last Friday was the first time you've missed.

EARL (*cautious*). What do you want?

MIKE. Want?

EARL. Money?

MIKE. Money?

EARL. Money.

MIKE. No, I don't need money.

EARL. What do you want?

MIKE (*thinks*). How much?

EARL. How much what?

MIKE. How much money are you willing to give me?

EARL. I'm not willing.

MIKE. I don't want money ... why do you think I want something?

EARL. Don't you?

MIKE. Do I?

(EARL begins to gather his things.)

MIKE (*cont'd, chuckles*). Don't leave, it's OK ... I just want to sit for a minute.

(EARL concedes and stays.)

MIKE (*cont'd*). I've been walking through here for years; I've never missed a day.

EARL. Yeah?

MIKE. Don't you think you would've noticed if I missed a day?

(EARL sits quietly, not sure what to say.)

MIKE (*cont'd*). It's routine really, isn't it? Every day you come to the park, you talk to your birds, you feed your squirrels, drink your coffee, I walk by ... one of those things doesn't happen and something's not right. If you forgot your coffee, it wouldn't be the same, right?

EARL. Sure, I guess.

MIKE. If you forgot your feed, not the same, right?

EARL. Sure.

MIKE. If I didn't walk by?

(EARL does not immediately answer ... both men speak at same time.)

EARL.

MIKE.

Sure.

It's OK.

EARL *(slight pause)*. I guess so.

MIKE. I was waiting for the right time to say hi, people don't always want to be bothered. I don't think you like to be bothered.

EARL. You're right; I don't like to be bothered.

MIKE. I understand.

EARL. Do you?

MIKE *(slight pause)*. What do we do now?

EARL. What do you mean?

MIKE. Things are different now ... we've taken our relationship to a whole new level. Now we're talking. Should I stop and talk tomorrow, or should I just give you the usual nod and walk by?

(Rapid fire conversation.)

EARL. Do whatever you want to do.

MIKE. I don't want you to be insulted if I don't stop and talk.

EARL. I won't be.

MIKE. I wouldn't be insulted if you didn't want to talk.

EARL. You shouldn't be.

MIKE. Maybe we should have a signal, if you want to talk ... so that I know I'm not bothering you.

EARL. How about you just ask me, and I'll tell you.

MIKE. You could tug on your earlobe or rub your eye.

EARL. I could just tell you.

MIKE. Tap your foot three times if you want to and twice if you don't.

EARL. Or I could tell you.

MIKE. Maybe clear your throat or cough.

EARL. Now you're bothering me.

(Stop.)

MIKE. OK, it really doesn't matter anyway ... my name is Mike.

(Slight pause. EARL continues to look through his binoculars ... he does not respond immediately.)

MIKE *(cont'd)*. Do you want to tell me a little about yourself?

EARL. I don't mind if you stop and talk ... for a little bit. I don't mind that, but coming to the park is kind of like therapy for me; coming here, looking at the birds, feeding the squirrels. Do you understand?

(MIKE gives EARL a blank stare ... does not respond. EARL takes a deep breath and brings the binoculars to his lap.)

EARL *(cont'd)*. My name is Earl. Earl P. Hannigan. I live across the way at the Shady Grove retirement home, it's for the 50 and over crowd. They call it a "community," but it's a home. They've got it all there; hot meals cooked by a real chef, a large Olympic pool, workout room, satellite TV, it even has its own mini mall in there.

MIKE. Mini mall?

EARL. Yes.

MIKE. Olympic-size pool?

EARL. Uh huh.

MIKE. Satellite?

EARL. Yes.

MIKE. A lot of channels?

(*EARL does not answer ... just gives him a look.*)

MIKE (*cont'd*). Sounds nice.

EARL. Nice? Yeah, except it's littered with old people. Don't like being around them, don't need to know what ailments they have, don't need to know how many pills they take in a day. I swear you ain't anybody unless you're taking at least 10 pills in that place ... and the smell, ever smell a room full of old people? If you know of a retirement home that doesn't have any old people, call me. I'm too young to be in that home. There you go, now you know a little bit more about me

MIKE. But you stay?

EARL. Where am I going to go?

MIKE. I'm over there, (*Points to the other side of the park.*) opposite side of the park. It's not as nice as yours. We don't have a pool, workout room, or mall. We do have a library though ...

EARL. Other side of the park? (*Looking over, first squinting and then with his binoculars.*) ... Oh, you mean Bentley?

MIKE. Yes, Bentley. Don't be scared of me, we're not all crazy in that home. There are crazy people in that home, I've seen them, and frankly, they scare me, but I'm not one of them.

EARL. Why do you live there?

MIKE. I guess somebody thinks I'm crazy. You think I'm crazy?

EARL. I don't know you. You don't look crazy.

MIKE. Plenty of crazy people walking around that don't look crazy.

EARL. So you are crazy?

MIKE. Nah ... I'm not crazy, misunderstood maybe, but not crazy. A lot of misunderstood people live in that place; they're just not rich enough to live anywhere else. If you're

rich you can afford to be crazy ... hell, they won't even call you crazy, they call you eccentric. Those doctors over there, they think I got something.

EARL. What?

MIKE (*laughs*). They've come up with dozens of disorders I could have: multiple personality disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, delusional disorder, depression. I think I'm driving them crazy trying to figure out what I have. (*Slight pause.*) They give me pills to take, study me, talk to me, and in return, I can live there.

EARL. ... You just don't seem ...

MIKE. Crazy? Give me time ... I'm not shopping cart crazy, you know? Pushing the cart, collecting cans, dumpster diving ...

EARL. ... And they're not crazy?

MIKE. It's not for me to decide that. I'm sure people walk by here every day thinking you're just some crazy old guy who comes to the park to feed the squirrels and talk to the birds. Sounds a little crazy, but it doesn't make it so.

EARL. Hell, that does sound crazy.

MIKE. Doesn't make it so, right? Plus, I know your not. You are exactly the way I imagined you to be.

EARL. Is that right?

MIKE. I don't need to tell you who you are ... you already know that.

EARL. What did you imagine me to be?

MIKE. Exactly who you are.

EARL. And you know?

MIKE. Yes, I do. Earl is two people: the person he really is and the person he wants everyone to believe he is.

EARL. My multiple personalities?

MIKE. No, that's what I have, apparently; you're just like everyone else.

EARL. I am?

MIKE. The real Earl is the Earl you rarely are. That's the Earl you can be ... say with your wife, someone you trust to let your guard down. You know what I mean by that?

EARL (*slight pause*). Yes, I guess I do.

MIKE. We trick ourselves sometimes, we pretend to be someone else for so long we forget who we really are ...

EARL. Why do they think you're crazy?

MIKE. A lot of the usual crazy things; talk to myself, spend hours in seclusion, anti-social stuff. And then there's the thing ... I call it the thing ... They don't even know what to call it.

EARL. The thing?

MIKE. The thing.

EARL. A thing?

(Long pause, as EARL waits with much anticipation.)

MIKE. Yeah, it's very interesting this "thing" that happens to me from time to time. Actually, it happens more than I would want and has become far less interesting to me as time goes by, until this morning when I woke up. It's very real, but nobody else can even begin to admit that it's remotely possible for this to happen. I realized it when I was a kid. Do you even want to hear this story, Earl?

(EARL doesn't have a chance to say "not really" before MIKE kicks into the story.)

MIKE (*cont'd*). When I was a kid, every Sunday after church, I would run over to my grandmother's house to spend some time, eat lunch and help with anything she might need around the house ...

EARL. Sounds like you were a good grandson.

MIKE. My grandmother usually waited for me on her front porch. On this particular Sunday, though, she wasn't out. I could usually see her from down the street waiting for me. I ran in, calling out her name. I found her in her room on her bed asleep, her breathing was heavy, she didn't look well. I sat down next to her and placed my hand on her arm. I felt a warm rush run through my body and I could see a strange yellow haze around her ... now this is important, it was a foggy yellow-like haze. It was an unusual feeling. (*Becomes emotional and lets out a strange whimpering sound.*)

EARL (*uncomfortably looking around*). We don't have to talk about this.

MIKE (*as quickly as the whimpering began, it stops*). I was only 8 and didn't have much of a logical explanation as to what was happening, but what I did know was that she was dying. I picked up the phone and called my dad; by the time he arrived, she had passed. When she died, as she faded away, so too did that yellow haze around her. That's when it started. I see colors around people all the time; it's taken me a while to understand what they mean, but after many years I've gotten very good at deciphering them.

EARL. OK.

MIKE. It's life; the colors are about life, and we all have them. I see yellow every day. It's a pretty color, but it's death ... People are dying every day, I see them every day. There's not much I can do about it, sometimes it's too much ... I've learned to tune it out, most days I do ... but today ... you see why they think I'm crazy?

EARL. Yes.

MIKE. You think they're right?

EARL. Yes.

MIKE. Are you scared of me?

EARL. No ... should I be?