**Lost at Sea Review**\*\*\*\* Broadway Baby, 08/04/2016
http://www.broadwaybaby.com/shows/lost-at-sea/711143

On 10 January 1992, the container ship Ever Laurel, several days out from Hong Kong en route to Tacoma, Washington, hit a storm in the North Pacific Ocean. A dozen containers were washed overboard, one of which contained 28,800 “Friendly Floatee” children’s bath toys that came in the forms of red beavers, blue turtles, green frogs and yellow ducks. For some unknown reason the container cracked open and the toys escaped, with the plastic ducks – their shape apparently offering the most water and wind resistance – ending up being washed ashore not only around the Pacific Ocean, but even eventually as far away as Ireland and the UK. For oceanographers it proved to be an invaluable opportunity to study and model ocean currents on a global scale.

Those ducks are a significant inspiration behind this beautiful, endearing and fun show from Catherine Wheels Theatre Company, which underscores not just the fact that some 70% of the planet we arrogantly call “Earth” is, in fact, covered by water (in places far deeper than Everest is high), but that we’re all connected by it. This heart of this production – played out on designer Karen Tennant’s vast global map (onto which audience members are initially requested to place a small yellow plastic duck handed to them earlier before sitting around its edge) are the stories of just one connection between two people: the young man following his itinerant engineer father around the globe, who briefly becomes famous as “Duck Boy” after collecting almost 100 of the Friendly Floatee ducks from an Alaskan beach; and a similarly-aged girl living on Harris, Scotland, who becomes fixated on finding one of the ducks before they’re predicted to arrive on British shores.

The first rule of beach-combing, we’re told, is that everything has a story; but arguably a far more important message comes later, that we shouldn’t take our troubles out on the ocean. The sea may not be the most instantaneous of communications – we hear of a message in a bottle which takes 11 years to be found – but it one that connects us as much historically as geographically.

Under Gill Robertson’s uncluttered direction, performers Ashley Smith and Laurie Brown easily hold the audience’s attention, as we constantly flip between the two tales (each rooted in a small part of the set at either end of the performance space). It helps that there’s plenty of audience participation within the brightly-lit space, not least a game of Pass the Parcel which is used to reveal the fate of many of those plastic ducks during their years in the oceans of the world. Yet just as importantly, Morna Pearson’s sharply observed script is willing to pause for some quieter character moments, giving some depth and reality not just for the interest of the older members of the audience, but also to underscore the serious points that can, perhaps, only be so openly made in theatre supposedly aimed at children.