

Andrew

Hello everyone. This is Andrew Pond, Artistic director of Eclectic FULL Contact Theatre. Welcome to Season 4 of The Half Hour Audio Hour. Every month, we'll be featuring a different playwright, allowing you to not only hear their work, but to find out a little more about them and their process. If you enjoy what you hear, please remember to like, follow, and subscribe to our podcast. And feel free to leave a review! You can help us out in continuing this work by heading over to tinyurl.com/EFCTHHAH, where you can sponsor us through a onetime or recurring donation and become our partner in highlighting the voices and stories of women, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ artists.

This month's production is "MEMENTO MORI", written by Donna Latham, directed by Dylan Young and starring EFCT company member Maiko Terazawa, Camille Jones, Eric Young, and Monica Szaflik

Before we start, we'd like to briefly introduce you to Donna Latham. After the production, stay tuned for an interview with Donna for more insight into the play and this process.

Donna Latham's a playwright and former ghost tour guide whose play ALL THE WAY BACK received the Prize for Climate Justice. Her play AND WE WILL SHARE THE SKY received the Kennedy Center's David Mark Cohen Playwriting Award. She's a resident playwright at Rising Sun Performance Company in NYC and a proud member of the Dramatists Guild. A history geek, she grew up in a haunted house in the wilds of Chicagoland and has been fascinated with the veil between life and death forever. She's grateful for this spectacular experience with Eclectic Full Contact Theatre.

And now, Memento Mori

[SFX: Haunting, melancholy 19th century music.]
[SFX: Boisterous mayhem of drunken ruffians. They dump CAPTAIN RUNDLE's body with a horrifying thud. Pounding on door, footsteps running off]

ANNABELLE
Lucretia, help!

[SFX: Running footsteps, door opening]

LUCRETIA
Corpus bones! Who the devil—?

{SFX: Racket of grunting ANNABELLE dragging
CAPTAIN RUNDLE onto a chair.

ANNABELLE
Wretched scoundrels dumped this poor soul at our doorstep. Like a
busted sack of gravel.

LUCRETIA
Holy Mother Mary...

ANNABELLE
There's blood clotted round his neck—

LUCRETIA
Blood crusted at his mouth—

ANNABELLE
Stomped and battered as an old boot.

LUCRETIA
Poor soul's met a terrible end. His face wears the very image of
torment.

ANNABELLE
Despicable! I'll blot the blood from his nose.

LUCRETIA
Is he a corpse for a Memento?

ANNABELLE
I reckon so. But whose dang corpse?

LUCRETIA
Who so inhumanly deposited this broken, desecrated body? Has he no
loved ones?

ANNABELLE
Phew! Gawd, what a stench. Reckon he done drowned hisself in a vat of
moonshine mash.

LUCRETIA
There's no note. No name, no address. Who—?

ANNABELLE
Search the feller's britches and waistcoat.

LUCRETIA
Turn his pockets inside out. No pocket watch...

ANNABELLE

Not even a calling card. A big ole heap of nothin'. Blast furnace in hell.

LUCRETIA

Not one clue to the poor soul's identity.

ANNABELLE

Well, I'm rendered thoroughly kumfumbled. (To CAPTAIN RUNDLE.) I'm awful sorry for the terrible treatment befell ya'll, Mister.

[SFX: Creaks as CAPTAIN RUNDLE sits up in the chair.]

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

All right, then. Sitting straight and tall once again. Quite kind of you, my dear. And it's Captain.

LUCRETIA

Shroud Monsieur for now. And wash him later.

ANNABELLE

And then—?

LUCRETIA

Someone's sure to come for their dearly departed.

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

I hope...

ANNABELLE

From your sweet lips to the eager ears of God.

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

I'm afraid Mrs. Rundle will be terribly distressed.

ANNABELLE

Mrs.—?

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

My wife, Louise Rundle. We live in the white cottage. 'Round the corner. Well, she does.

LUCRETIA

After five years in this city? I'm still unaccustomed to its rough ways.

MONSIEUR

Louise doesn't like when I tipple at the tavern.

LUCRETIA

We never should have left—

ANNABELLE

Hush, Lucretia! It's not so! We fashioned a righteous life here.

LUCRETIA

If we hadn't journeyed here to start our business?

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

Insists nothing good comes of carousing.

LUCRETIA

The calamitous event wouldn't have—

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

Indeed.

[SFX: Explosion. Blazing fire.]

LUCRETIA

The fire that— No, no, stop. Mustn't think about it.

ANNABELLE

Ain't that the truth, Dearheart?

LUCRETIA

What's done is done.

ANNABELLE

Got that right. Now this here feller? Deader than a crawdaddy in dry dirt.

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

Tut-tut, no need to be crass.

LUCRETIA

Mercy. Where are we to store you, Monsieur?

ANNABELLE

Got us a right full house tonight.

LUCRETIA

Forgive me, Monsieur. I mean no disrespect. But I've no time to dilly-dally. The thunderstorm rustled up a hellish heat, and many souls beckon.

ANNABELLE

Reckon it's hotter than blazes. Gonna have to shroud the poor devil right here.

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

Must you? It's terribly humid. Dear?

ANNABELLE

It's Annabelle.

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

Annabelle, won't you get a message to Louise?

[SFX: A musical interlude.]

(SFX: Music fades as footsteps approach the door)

LOUISE

I—I can't thank you enough, Lucretia. For tending to my darling Captain.

LUCRETIA

My pleasure. I know the comfort these images provide. If only—

LOUISE

Must be so hard for you. All by your lonesome here.

LUCRETIA

Well....

ANNABELLE

Plenty of company here, Ma'am.

LUCRETIA

I'll send for you when the daguerreotypes are ready.

LOUISE

Bless you.

(SFX: Door closing.)

[SFX: Metallic clatter of posing stand.]

(LUCRETIA sighs and pants as she struggles to attach CAPTAIN RUNDLE to the posing stand.

ANNABELLE grunts and curses under her breath as she assists her, the sound of cuffs being tightened)

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

My dear Annabelle. You're strong as a quarryman.

LUCRETIA

Dapper again, eh? He hails from the peninsula of Cornwall and will sail back to his people for burial. Mrs. Rundle wishes a lifelike pose to remember her

husband.

ANNABELLE

She don't much care for the repose of eternal slumber? Can't say as I blame her. It's final.

LUCRETIA

I fashioned a portrait of the Rundles earlier.

ANNABELLE

Dang, I missed it. How'd you pose them?

LUCRETIA

Nestled together on the sofa like lovebirds. With a halo of roses above them. A private keepsake for the grieving widow.

ANNABELLE

I will ever adore your tender heart.

LUCRETIA

A Memento works wonders. It soothes the mournful soul. If I could shift Time's sands, I'd—No! No, Lucretia! Smother that thought.

ANNABELLE

You conjure magic with daguerreotypes. I kiss your artist's hand.

[SFX: ANNABELLE kisses LUCRETIA's hand.]

LUCRETIA

My hand.... It tingles so....Almost as if... Death is an inevitable part of life. So I tell myself. Don't I, Captain Rundle?

ANNABELLE

Guess he's plum tuckered with the heat prostration.

LUCRETIA

So I tell myself in these unending, sleepless nights. But I find no Balm of Gilead.

ANNABELLE

Death is ever nippin' at our heels.

LUCRETIA

It's inevitable. Perhaps if I claim so often enough? I'll believe it.

ANNABELLE

Well, heck. That ravenous beast can kiss my big round bum.

[SFX: Cranking of metal on the posing stand.]

LUCRETIA
Ouch!

ANNABELLE
Careful, Lucretia.

LUCRETIA
Pinched my fingers in the crank.

ANNABELLE
Those delicate hands are an artist's tools. And that knowing eye...

LUCRETIA
I wish to capture the deceased's essence. Transform a bereaved lover's melancholy ache.
Create joy in remembrance. Wish I'd created an image of my own beloved
—Oh, why
must my mind ever stray to what I forbid it to?

ANNABELLE
Drawn to it. Like a tongue. Yep. On one of them grievous canker sores.
Jest leave it be.

LUCRETIA
What's done is done.

ANNABELLE
Ain't never gonna be undone.

LUCRETIA
I've not a moment for self-pity! Humidity is having its way with him.

ANNABELLE
Rub the peppermint oil under your nostrils right quick. It's the only Balm we got round here.

LUCRETIA
Let's affix his neck first.

{SFX: Body being moved}

ANNABELLE
Now suck in that breath real, real hard, Dearheart. Poor feller's ripe as a rotten goose egg.

[SFX: Cranking of metal on the posing stand.]

LUCRETIA
Hold your breath. Hurry!

ANNABELLE
A few more twists of the crank.

LUCRETIA
(Still struggling.) Quickly!

[SFX: Frenzied cranking of metal on the posing stand.]

ANNABELLE
Attached! Like a cocklebur on a billy goat's fur. No disrespect meant, Cap'n.

ANNABELLE
Ready for the shoulders? Lemme jest blot my brow. Rub some peppermint oil under my nostrils.

LUCRETIA
Belly's swelling. Soon his uniform won't fit round his middle.

ANNABELLE
Crankin' lickety-split.

[SFX: Frenzied cranking of metal on the posing stand. Then, grinding and sudden halt of sound.]

LUCRETIA
About to burst his buttons!

ANNABELLE
Dang-diggity crank jammed.

LUCRETIA
Hold tight, Sir. I'll oil the crank.

[SFX: Glub, glub of oil oozing onto crank. Then cranking resumes]

ANNABELLE
Brilliant, Dearheart! Quick as greased lightning. Tell you what. Fixin' to get things done? Takes a good Southern woman.

LUCRETIA
Perfect! He's proud and tall.

ANNABELLE
You fixin' to make a standing portrait? For Cap'n's comrades?

LUCRETIA

He was a man of vitality and action.

ANNABELLE

Chopped down like a pawpaw tree by unknown ruffians.

LUCRETIA

His widow hankers for a portrait in his fire brigade uniform. Pin a badge on his shirt,
Now position his hat just right.

ANNABELLE

Dignified as all get-out. Ready to hop the last train to glory.

LUCRETIA

May his dear soul rest in peace.

ANNABELLE

More dapper with the eyes propped open. Don't ya think?

LUCRETIA

Rouge his cheeks....

ANNABELLE

He's gray about the gills. No disrespect intended, Sir. Just the nature of the beast.

LUCRETIA

Rouge his mouth... I'll add a rosy tint to the image later.

ANNABELLE

Cap'n, ya'll pure elegant as ever. Just a tad blue round the gullet.

LUCRETIA

A spray of lavender beneath his collar sweetens him right up.

[SFX: Metal cuff pops open and RUNDLE's arm flies up. Women scream, then laugh)

ANNABELLE

Reckon I'm a silly goose.

LUCRETIA

Mercy!

ANNABELLE

Nearly tinkled in my knickers. Cap'n popped loose from the cuff. Death chill stiffened
him up but good.

LUCRETIA

I thought he had risen from the—

ANNABELLE

My heart like to burst through my bazooms.

LUCRETIA

My teeth are chattering loud enough to rouse the dead.

ANNABELLE

Got enough to rouse in these parts. Law! Mouth's dry enough to spin cotton.

(They laugh again for a few beats.)

LUCRETIA

Some days these ghastly duties wind me a bit tight.

ANNABELLE

And carcasses piled like bricks around us.

LUCRETIA

I'll tackle the stench straight off. I don't much wish to add myself to the body count.

ANNABELLE

I'll fancy up Mrs. Brant, yes? Iron her Sunday-go-t'meetin clothes so's we can deck her out nice and purty. While ya'll make Cap'n's portrait.

LUCRETIA

Clip some fragrant rosemary from the kitchen garden...

ANNABELLE

Lily of the valley too.

LUCRETIA

A bit of sage...

ANNABELLE

All's beastly with the stank round here. Foul enough to knock a dawg off a gut wagon.

{SFX: Wind}

LUCRETIA

Once I ensure a just death for my charges? I fancy a walkabout. Straight into the storm.

ANNABELLE

We'll stroll arm in arm, Dearheart.

LUCRETIA

Yes, in the cool, fresh air.

ANNABELLE

I must get my lady outside in the daylight. Ya'll spend entirely too much time hunkered in darkness.

[SFX: Haunting, melancholy 19th century music.]

[SFX: Camera flash]

[SFX: Howling wind.]

LUCRETIA

Oh, it's just the wind. Almost as if I hear your voice, Captain.

[SFX: Howling wind.]

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

Kind Lucretia, let me breathe a message in your ear. The missing love you spoke of?

LUCRETIA

Yes?

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

Selselfame whom cruel fates devoured in the shipyard flames?

[SFX: Blazing fire.]

LUCRETIA

What of her?

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

She came home to you.

LUCRETIA

No, she—.

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

The love for whom you have not wept—

LUCRETIA

My love perished in the inferno. Death denied me a daguerreotype.

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

She is with you always.

LUCRETIA

My love is gone. I must accept that finality.

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

She is ever at your side.

{SFX: Wind and music fade}

LUCRETIA

Would that she were. Now, hold that pose, sir. And...hold it....

{SFX: Camera Flash}

ANNABELLE

Kind Lucretia-

LUCRETIA

Splendid!

ANNABELLE

I will always adore your tender heart.

LUCRETIA

Your face is tranquil as moonlight, Captain.

ANNABELLE

How could I ever leave you?

LUCRETIA

And...another!

{SFX: Camera Flash}

ANNABELLE

Hope you don't mind, Cap'n. Jest gonna stand behind you for a moment.

CAPTAIN RUNDLE

Jolly good.

LUCRETIA

One more!

{SFX: Camera Flash}

ANNABELLE

A Memento works wonders.

LUCRETIA

And now... I'll view your image, Monsieur.

{SFX: Image sliding out of camera}

LUCRETIA

Annabelle! My love!

ANNABELLE

A Memento soothes the mournful soul.

LUCRETIA

You—

[SFX: Blazing fire.]

ANNABELLE

I walked through fire.

LUCRETIA

You came home—

ANNABELLE

Fierce as a squall.

LUCRETIA

Came home.

ANNABELLE

Strong as a quarryman.

LUCRETIA

Came home to me.

ANNABELLE

With no earthly need of a body. Evermore.

LUCRETIA

Evermore, my love.

[SFX: Soothing 19th century music.]

Andrew

Thank you for listening to Memento Mori, here on The Half Hour Audio Hour. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with Donna Latham after the recording of this show.

Andrew

All right? So Donna I just want to say thank you for allowing eclectic full contact theater to be part of your show memento morey and. Letting it be part of our half hour audio hour podcast. Thank you so very much for that.

Donna

Oh thank you I Love this experience.

Andrew

Excellent. That's what I like to hear. Ah we do our best? Um, so how long have you been writing.

Donna

Well like most writers I know I've really written since childhood and that's when I would write short stories and plays to act out with friends. We would put them up in basements or backyards. I would always take the weird character roles. But since then I've written many nonfiction books for middle grade readers and probably for like the last fifteen years or so I've focused on writing plays.

Andrew

Wonderful. Because I am old and not as up on this What constitutes middle grade at this point and in in time. Because I know what I would have thought that when I was back in school. But what is what is middle grade nowadays.

Donna

Um, I'm going to say that these the reading levels of these books are like fourth to eighth grade and there a lot of them are hands-on explorations of science and nature and the natural world.

Andrew

Oh awesome that is that is great. You know if I if there had been stuff like that when I was in fourth Eighth Grade I'm might have liked science. Um, that is that's wonderful. So.

Donna

Right? ah.

Andrew

So what led to you going from writing those kinds of books to plays.

Donna

I've always loved plays and um I kind of wrote them hand in hand for a long time and then kind of took that leap of faith that I would just write plays.

Andrew

That's that is that's awesome. So what inspired memento Mori.

Donna

That is such an intriguing question I grew up in a haunted house and I love a spooky story. I Love things that are horror adjacent and that have heightened

sensibilities and that kind of gothic sensibility where you're at and the edge of your seat knowing something terrible is going to happen but not knowing when or who will bring that about um and I also Explored the idea that ghosts and souls of our departed loved ones are all around us like in our hearts and memories or out there in the ether. So I decided to center a sapphic love story and since my vibe is historical works and I'm really a history geek I set it in a nineteenth century post-mortem photography studio so a play about death Took life from there.

Andrew

As you do. where else would you set that? It is a wonderful story and a very unique place. There's not a lot of theater or stories or anything out there about this particular. Profession which is a very unique and interesting and unusual profession. Um, so I found that very very Interesting.

Reading the script you have instead of I mean you do have stage directions but they're all set up as sound effects. The sound of this happening the sound of that happening So This was obviously written to be done um or it seems like it was written to be done as an audio Production as opposed to a stage Play. So My question is what led you to write this story in that form as opposed to as a as a stage play itself.

Donna

I Love Radio plays and audio plays and I wanted to create a really immersive intimate experience. Um, so it's really different from if This were produced on the stage. This is an invitation for the audience. The listener to leap into the world of this play and then conjure up their own vivid images so that was a challenge I gave myself in creating this world and. And here's a shout out to our wonderful voice actors who brought such raw emotion humor and humanity to the world of this play.

Andrew

They've all given wonderful performances which everyone listening to this interview will have heard ah prior to listening to this interview so they all know what you're talking about. And from a practical standpoint as ah as a person who runs a theater company I do appreciate ah not having to figure out how to find a a body poser from the Nineteenth century. In order to to to weekend at Bernie's poor captain Rundle on stage. So I thank you for that? Ah, ah, ah, that's I got to tell you there's there's ah the.

Donna

Ah, absolutely. Ah.

Andrew

Beauty of of audios. It's amazing. What we can get um when you don't actually have to see it. So um, and I also do think that you know in a

lot of ways. All kidding aside I do think that.

Donna
Hope for sure.

Andrew
You know these--and I'm going to start using this term because you and a number of the actors have used that--horror adjacent stories do very well in audio they lend themselves very well to that that medium for exactly, I think, the reason that you said which is it becomes a very immersive intimate experience which helps that suspense or you know the the Thrill. Or the the horror adjacent aspect to these really hit home I think a lot harder than if you're in a even if you're in a darkened theater when you're surrounded by a bunch of other audience members and you're watching people up on stage.

Donna
Right? There's something really different about hearing this in your ear that makes it a really heightened experience.

Andrew
Um, absolutely so do you have any upcoming projects that you'd like to promote.

Donna
Oh thank you for asking? Um, currently the ah senior University Of Greater Atlanta is doing a reading of my play. The haunted widow Lincoln which is another historical ghost story. This one is about um. Mary Todd Lincoln's years after president Lincoln's assassination her insanity hearing in Chicago and then her confinement in an asylum in Batavia and then ah next season next year I'm really looking forward to the Alton little theater in Alton Illinois is producing widow Lincoln um, and Alton happens to be the site of one of the Lincoln Douglas debates so that's really cool.

Andrew
That's awesome. That is wonderful.

Donna
Isn't that amazing. So very very, really excited about that and then just one more I'll tell you about next month I'm going to perform my piece Selkie at water street studios in Batavia. Ah Illinois. Um, with the fantastic collective water street writers Selkie is a lyrical tale of loss and revenge and later this summer rainy day arts in San Francisco will produce Selkie in their Mythology monologue showcase. So I'm looking forward to that too.

Andrew
Wonderful. So so because this um episode is going to come out in may by next month you mean in may

Donna

Yes, I mean May? Yes, thanks.

Andrew

When will that be happening.

Donna

Um I want to say it's may nineteenth I'm just looking at my calendar really quickly here. Ah yes, it may nineteenth.

Andrew

Excellent. So everybody listening to this episode has not missed it so head to Batavia if you can um, excellent, wonderful. So this is going to be very.

Donna

Um, beautiful Batavia.

Andrew

This is this is gonna be a very interesting question for you considering ah the writing that you do and sort of what it is that you really enjoy. But what is your favorite ghost story.

Donna

Ah, this is really tough but I'm going to go with Poe's Legeia because I am intrigued with that obsessive perhaps opium addled creepy narrator. And I love the the heightened gothic language. Um, and I'll always as far as film ghost stories go I'll always have a place in my heart for the sixth sense which I admit I've watched jillions of times.

Andrew

Yes.

Donna

And I always discover a new moment I think that's just a lovely film.

Andrew

Yeah, say what you want about stuff that came after but that movie is quite amazing and.

Donna

It really is.

Andrew

Any any movie that has a twist at the end of it that I didn't see coming I stand up and applaud because I had no idea what was coming at the end of that movie.

Donna

Right? I'm right there with you that just took me totally off guard.

Andrew

I was like what how and then when they go back and they show you all of the stuff and you're like oh nobody ever interacted. Oh how did I Miss just and really, Going back to your the the first answer that you gave you when it comes to ghost stories. You really can't do much better than Poe.

Donna

You really can't He's kind of the definitive horror or horror adjacent guy. So I'm always going to return to those stories.

Andrew

mean you want to you want to talk about somebody who really knew how to just psychologically creep you out.

Donna

Right.

Andrew

So Donna I just want to say? Thank you once more for being part of this and for letting eclectic ah be part of this really really. Wonderful and lovely script Memento Mori. Ah it. It was an absolute joy to be part of and it's such a ah lovely story and I'm so glad that we got to. Help present it and on behalf of myself and everyone here at EFCT I just want to say Thank you so very very much

Donna

Thank you I Just love this experience and I'm really grateful for the chance to work with you.

Andrew

We hope you enjoyed Memento Mori. Next month, we will be presenting Confessions of a Character Actor, by Aaron Leventman, And don't forget to head over to eclectic-theatre.com to find out about all our other shows and projects, like the first Annual Playground Festival, presenting three amazing new shows for families all about the importance of Being Yourself. Running at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. 5/25-6/2 with a special 2 pm show on Memorial Day May 27th. Whether you have kids, know kids, or happen to be three kids in a trench coat, the Playground Festival has something for you. Tickets and info at eclectic-theatre.com. It's more fun than a Slip and Slide! On behalf of myself and everyone here at EFCT, thanks for listening