

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 redcircle.com/shows/half-hour-audio-hour, 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 "Alive With Pleasure", written by John Dayton Cerna, directed by Claire Johnson, and starring Jacquelyn Haas and Jacob Glass

Before we start, we'd like to briefly introduce you to John Dayton Cerna

After the production, stay tuned for an interview with John for more insight into the play and this process.

John Dayton Cerna penned and performed "The Flight of the Goddamned Butterfly" which ran for seven months at New York's legendary Rose's Turn. The play received a Mac Award as well as a special invitation to the "Just Add Water" Festival at New York Theater Workshop. About "Butterfly", the New York Daily News wrote, "Cerna writes with a wonderful sense of humor and humanity". Cerna's next play, "Not as Cute as Picture", played in New York City, Washington, D.C. and Fort Lauderdale, Florida. It was nominated for a GLAAD Media Award in the category of Outstanding Theater.

He is the author of two television pilots, including a comedy/drama entitled "To Be Or Not To Be Joanne" which Christine Lahti attached herself to. Ms. Lahti is a Golden-Globe, Oscar and Emmy Winner.

Also, he has penned two screenplays. One is entitled "Good Morning Angel", which Siobhan Fallon Hogan has attached herself to ("Men in Black", "Forrest Gump").

Additionally, Cerna has written promotional On-Air scripts for various clients, including HBO, PBS and even Ringling Brothers Circus. He was a regular featured columnist for The Washington Blade from 2002 - 2005. He wrote regularly about his experiences as a gay man navigating life in the modern world.

Cerna has been published online by Advocate.com. His story, "Victim and Bully No More", details a bittersweet reunion Cerna had online with a high school bully who had been relentless in victimizing Cerna and taunting him with anti-gay epithets and slurs. The story was Advocate.com's cover story for several months and it ended up on

several anti-bully websites.

Cerna studied playwriting at New York's Playwrights Horizon (his play "Arrive Dressed" received a special staged reading). Cerna also studied Theater Arts at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He can be reached at johndaytoncerna@gmail.com.

And now, Alive With Pleasure

SFX: 70's advertising type music. Sounds of an alley behind a building
Cigarette lighting, inhale. Metal door opens in distance, footsteps
approach, then another cigarette lights and inhale.

SAM
Mondays, huh?

LYDIA
Hm?

SAM
I was just saying... Mondays. Such a drag.

LYDIA
Oh. Drag, hm. Well now, see I don't mind Mondays. They're nice and close to the weekend, to the memories of the weekend, ya know? The real bitch is Tuesday. 'Cause Tuesdays are always out in the middle of nowhere, floatin' at sea. From Tuesday, the weekend is this tiny blurry island you can barely see. But the worse bitch is Thursday cause Thursdays always lyin' to ya, saying, "I'm Friday. I'm Friday." And I say, "Oh no bitch. You Thursday. You'll always just be Thursday and stop lying to me, you Thursday bitch."

He laughs.

SAM
I hear ya.

LYDIA
I just gotta laugh, you know?

SAM
Oh yeah. I don't laugh enough. I think not laughing gives you cancer.

He takes a huge drag of his cigarette.

LYDIA
Funny comic this morning.

SAM

Oh yeah? You mean like – a superhero comic? Or a standup?

LYDIA

No. The funnies. The paper. The comics.

SAM

Oh. Okay. I barely ever read paper.

LYDIA

Well. I like to. Old tradition. Coffee, paper in the morning.

SAM

Cool.

They take drags of their cigarettes,

LYDIA

You wanna hear the comic?

SAM

Oh yeah. Yeah, I'm sorry. Yeah.

LYDIA

Atilla the Hun sits in a diner. The waitress says, "What'll it be, Hun?"

SAM

Okay.

LYDIA

Do you get it?

SAM

Okay yeah, cause he's Attila the Hun and she calls him "hun"?

LYDIA

Right. The funny part is that most diner waitresses call you "hon", and he's already Hun 'cause he's Attila the Hun.

SAM

Yeah, I think I totally get it. Right. I just – I order in.

LYDIA

You order in? What do you mean, you order in?

SAM

I don't – I don't go to diners.

LYDIA

Ahhh... Well. If you did, your waitress would call you hon.

SAM
Okay. Cool.

Again they each smoke, taking long drags

LYDIA
What department are you in? Are you new?

SAM
I'm in I.T. New, yeah.

LYDIA
Oh. Nice. Welcome to the company.

SAM
Right on.

Sam takes a long, deep drag of his cigarette.

LYDIA
Can I ask you a question?

SAM
Yeah. Sure.

LYDIA
You just took an extremely long drag of that cigarette there. In fact, I think you smoked half of it in that one drag.

SAM
I know...

LYDIA
Are you okay?

SAM
Oh. Um...well. Just – yeah, I get nervous.

LYDIA
What – I mean if you don't mind my asking – what do you get nervous about?

SAM
Well. See. I'm not very good. At my job. Like, I'm still learning and the thing with I.T. is you have to be an expert. Or you're not really worth anything.

LYDIA

It's okay to still be learning, no?

SAM

I got the job through a friend.

LYDIA

But they still hired you. You obviously have something to offer this company.

SAM

To be honest with you, I smoke 'cause I get nervous about losing my job. Maybe that's TMI.

LYDIA

TMI?

SAM

Too much information?

LYDIA

Oh. Right. It's not TMI. And I'm sorry that you feel that way.

SAM

Thanks. Appreciate that.

Beat. They smoke some more, taking long drags.

LYDIA

I know a lot of people feel that way about their jobs, like they could lose them in a flash.

SAM

It shouldn't be that way, you know? Your job should be like your thumb. It's just yours always.

LYDIA

I'm sure if you just keep working hard you'll be okay.

SAM

I appreciate that. But you know, they're talking about layoffs and I'm just--

LYDIA

I know, I've heard that.

SAM

And I'm last hired, you know?

LYDIA

How about this? How about we just talk about something else? Unless

you don't want to talk which I completely understand. Smoking sometimes is best as a solitary exercise.

SAM

No, it's cool. I'll talk.

LYDIA

I'm a big believer in solitude.

SAM

Oh yeah?

LYDIA

I despise isolation, but I adore solitude. They're different, you know.

SAM

Yeah, I guess I isolate.

LYDIA

Nope, can't do that. No man is an island.

SAM

Oh wow. That's – that's cool.

LYDIA

I didn't say that. You ever hear of John Donne?

SAM

Nope.

LYDIA

He was a poet. He wrote that. "No man is an island".

SAM

That's cool. I need to, you know, think about that because like I said I definitely isolate. I am kind of like my own little island. You know, like alone with my thoughts and just – it's easier to not get close to people. To stay like an island way out in the...Pacific Ocean.

LYDIA

Hm. Well, you ever see me again out here smoking you won't be an island in the Pacific Ocean. I'll make sure of that.

SAM

Okay.

She puts her cigarette out She makes for the doorway.

LYDIA

And don't be so nervous about things. Even if you lose your thumb, you can still make it in life.

SAM

Ha. Okay. Cool.

Door opens, closes. Music rises, falls

SFX: Alley

LYDIA

...yes, it's a hard month, Mom. There's gonna be a lot of pain this month...but she wouldn't want us to be in pain, right? Hm? Yes, I'm going to church on Friday, Mom, it'll be a tough day -- yes -- yes, I'll sit at the front. Mom, I'll be so close to that priest I'll feel his spit on me, okay? Hm? Mom, I don't need to ask the priest to make sure she's gotten into Heaven. How can she not be there already by now? Mom, no, there's no wait time. And anyway it's been five years. It's like the doctor's office, she maybe had to wait fifteen minutes to get into Heaven. Because -- okay -- okay, yes she did some bad things here on Earth, Mom, but that's ain't nothin' to God...

Metal door opens and closes in distance, footsteps as Sam speaks

SAM

...but dude when do I use the frying pan? Never. It was Billy, Kevin. Billy left the pan in the sink, dude...

LYDIA

Okay, Mom...

SAM

Yeah, dude, I order in, I don't even cook.

LYDIA

I'll talk to you tomorrow.

SAM

Okay, cool. Well, I'm glad you see the light. Alright, at least you understand.

LYDIA

I love you.

SFX: She hangs up

SAM

Later.

SGX: He hangs up. Both take out cigarette packs, open them, remove

cigarettes, light up and inhale.

LYDIA
Hello again.

SAM
Hey. How's it going?

LYDIA
It's going alright. How's it going with you? Are you still nervous?

SAM
Yeah. I kind of always am.

LYDIA
I'm sorry. I wish I could help you with that.

SAM
But you don't even really know me.

LYDIA
Well, I am your coworker. That's a start.

SAM
Yeah. But what's that? Just two people who work at the same company.

LYDIA
Well, it's a denominator. We have the company in common.

SAM
Okay.

LYDIA
May I suggest therapy?...for your nervousness. The company's insurance has a very good—

SAM
I don't know, I went to a therapist once.

LYDIA
Oh? Did it, did it help you?

SAM
He told me I was addicted to excitement.

LYDIA
Really. What did he mean by that?

SAM
Just that, I had to be excited about things. Or I...you know, just would

be very depressed.

LYDIA

What's wrong wanting to be excited about things?

SAM

No, like, see...I have to be excited. Like it's a thing. I had to learn to not get too excited... about stuff. He said. He said I had to be more "zen" about life.

LYDIA

"Zen"? Isn't that where you're not supposed to feel anything? I disagree with your therapist. I'm sorry. I know you paid for him and probably a lot – probably a lot -- but I strongly disagree with him.

SAM

But sometimes life is just not exciting. And he said I have to accept that. And sometimes I can't acc-no, like all the time I can't accept it.

LYDIA

I say, make it exciting.

SAM

How do you make life exciting if it isn't really exciting?

LYDIA

Pretend. Pretend you're in a movie and you're the main character and everyone around you is a supporting character.

SAM

Did you just come up with that?

LYDIA

My sister used to say that. She really would pretend she was in a movie all the time, and she was the main character of the movie.

SAM

Like, comedy or sad?

LYDIA

Both. Best kind of movie, don't you think? Where it's both funny and sad.

SAM

I don't know if I could do that. Pretend like that.

LYDIA

Try.

SAM
Mm.

Beat. They smoke

SAM
You know how a lot of people say “it’s all too much”?

LYDIA
What’s all too much?

SAM
Life. But see I think a lot of the time, it’s all too little. I mean, I wake up, I go to work–

LYDIA
Are you liking your work?

SAM
Not really. Most people don’t. Like statistically speaking, most people kinda actually hate their work. Why do you think I smoke, you know?

LYDIA
I thought you smoked because you’re nervous.

SAM
Yeah and because I don’t like my work.

LYDIA
Well, I smoke because I like to smoke. I know, it will most likely kill me but I like living and living would not be exciting if I didn’t smoke.

SAM
Oh yeah? Smoking is exciting, okay. What do you smoke, what brand?

LYDIA
Newports.

SAM
Salems.

LYDIA
Hm. Didn’t Salem have that ad where like two people are in a boat smoking and they have their heads all thrown back laughing like lunatics – Ha ha ha ha haaa!

SAM
Yes!

LYDIA

A little before your time, no?

SAM

Oh I love vintage crap. "Alive with pleasure". That's what the ad said, right?

LYDIA

Yes. Alive with pleasure, that's right. But with an exclamation point. Very emphasized. So you see? Your life is exciting. You're smoking Salems and you are alive with pleasure.

SAM

I'd like it to be that.

LYDIA

You have to think of all the things that make life pleasurable. Then life won't feel like "too little".

SAM

It's just – see, it's hard for me to do that. Like, just this morning I get news on my phone and did you hear about a bomb killed a hundred and twenty-five people in like Armenia or Afghanistan? ... Something with an a. And I don't know... like I pray to God and I thank Him for guiding me... and having a plan for me...

LYDIA

You do?

SAM

Yeah I mean it's stupid but–

LYDIA

It's not stupid. God isn't stupid.

SAM

I mean, my Mom kind of made me believe in God before she died so I, you know, I made this "vow"–

LYDIA

I'm sorry she died.

SAM

Thanks.

LYDIA

Yes, I'm very sorry.

SAM

It's okay. She had a rare blood disease. I mean, she didn't suffer for long.

LYDIA

Oh I'm glad about that.

SAM

Thanks.

LYDIA

But now -- I don't understand. Are you faking it? A belief in God, for your mother's sake?

SAM

I don't know if I'm faking it. I mean, I really want to believe. But I think maybe God is more...energy than, like, a person.

LYDIA

Sure God is energy. A great and powerful energy at that.

SAM

But like anyway, people in Armenia just boom lost their lives in a half a second. I mean, why am I special? Why did God decide I don't get blown up in Armenia? Or maybe I will. You know... If I ever visit Armenia.

LYDIA

Or maybe She's trying to tell you something.

SAM

Who's she?

LYDIA

God. Oh, I'm sure God's a she. Or, if you really wanna get to the nitty-gritty, I'm sure God is both a He and a She.

SAM

Non-binary.

LYDIA

Yup, so God is actually Them. Probably.

SAM

Well, okay, so, what is God trying to tell me?

LYDIA

How damn lucky you are. Right here. Right now. Oh-so-lucky that you didn't get blown up today into a billion bits by a big bomb in Armenia. And to be grateful for that.

SAM

I guess I see your point.

LYDIA

You're welcome.

They smoke,

LYDIA

What about sex?

SAM

I don't - have that. A lot. Like at all. Wait, why am I telling you that? Why are you asking me that?

LYDIA

We were looking for things that make life exciting. Weren't we?

SAM

Yeah, no. I don't - have that a lot.

LYDIA

I don't either but when you do...isn't it exciting?

SAM

I'm a little embarrassed.

LYDIA

So you don't have someone special?

SAM

Me? No.

LYDIA

Don't you want to?

SAM

I guess. I mean I did.

LYDIA

You did, huh?

SAM

Yeah. But I -- I let her go.

LYDIA

Why?

SAM

Why? Because ... it's hard to admit this.

LYDIA
Tell.

SAM
She wasn't — oh man.

LYDIA
What?

SAM
She wasn't. Like, the greatest-looking girl.

LYDIA
Oh.

SAM
Please don't judge me.

LYDIA
I--no. What makes you think—

SAM
She was a total sweetheart. I mean, she loved me so much, the things she did for me. But when I looked at her, I -- this is gonna make me sound like -- shit--

LYDIA
She didn't look like an aloof model on a runway, stunning every man with her impossible beauty.

SAM
Well yeah.

LYDIA
And that's what you want.

SAM
That's what I want to look at when I look at my wife.

LYDIA
Oh. So you wanna be married.

SAM
Someday.

LYDIA
To a supermodel.

SAM

If I could. Is that so bad? Is it?

LYDIA

So you tossed out the best girl that ever happened to you because she wasn't Iman?

SAM

Iman? What's--who's Iman?

LYDIA

You've got a lot to learn about life.

SAM

See, I hate it when people say that to me, I'm twenty-seven.

LYDIA

I'm fifty-seven; I've still got lots to learn about life.

SAM

Alright well ... gotta get back.

LYDIA

Okay.

SAM

See ya.

He puts out his cigarette and exits.

LYDIA

Supermodel.

SFX: Alley sounds fade as music rises, then music fades as alley sounds return

LYDIA

Mom, it's okay, you don't have to apologize to me...cry, Mom, cry and don't be sorry about it. It's only been five years, feels like yesterday, I know. She's still so close. It's alright, it's gonna be alright. I feel it too, Mom, but I'm at work, you know, I have to - keep it together. We're gonna make it, Mom, she's with us. She's guiding us and she's telling us she's - she's in a new body, Mom. A new, beautiful, shiny lovely body. You have to believe that. Okay?

SFX: LYDUA hangs up. Door opens and closes in distance, footsteps as Sam enters. He lights up and inhales.

LYDIA

Hello again.

SAM
Hey.

LYDIA
I want to say I'm sorry.

SAM
For what?

LYDIA
I didn't mean to – I shouldn't have told you that you got a lot to learn about life. That wasn't my place.

SAM
It's okay. Anyway, maybe I do, I don't know...

LYDIA
And also, the truth is if you want to go after a supermodel you have every right to do that. We all have the right to pursue happiness the way we want to. You have that right.

SAM
I'm never gonna land a supermodel anyway, so it's – it's stupid.

LYDIA
It is not stupid. I'm going after Denzel Washington, if I can't have him I may as well end it.

They smoke in silence for a bit.

SAM
I thought of ending it once.

LYDIA
Oh no.

SAM
Yeah. TMI?

LYDIA
Nope. When?

SAM
'Bout...two years ago.

LYDIA
Why?
SAM

Why? I was um... living out West, with my Mom. My parents had just split

for like the third time. My Mom was really down, she was out of work, it sucked. And I was doing my best to help, odd jobs, but I was just – I was so miserable. I had no frikkin direction...

LYDIA
No self-esteem.

SAM
Yeah. Yeah, exactly. No self-esteem, that's right. I had all these fantasies about being something more than I was, but even if a fantasy gets fulfilled it doesn't mean self esteem will just magically appear with it.

LYDIA
That's right.

SAM
I mean, I had little to no work, and fantasies, and a miserable mother who drank to go to bed each night and I just had it and I woke up and I had this insane dream that became so real, that I would drive my car all the way out to the desert in Nevada and just keep driving, until I ran out of gas. And then I would just sit in the car and melt, you know? Just dry up, die of thirst. Die, and be done with it.

LYDIA
But you never did that.

SAM
Nope. But man, I had it planned. I really did.

LYDIA
I'm glad you didn't.

SAM
You are? Why?

LYDIA
Because nobody smokes in this damn company. I'd be out here alone every time I came out here.

SAM
Ha. So I guess I have a reason for living after all.

LYDIA
'Course you do. Keep my ass company.

They smoke for a bit.

SAM
Um...So.

LYDIA
Yes?

SAM
When I came out here, you were on the phone. And um... you sounded kind of like, maybe you were crying a little.

LYDIA
I was. It's a tough day.

SAM
Oh. Are you okay? Are things -- okay?

LYDIA
It's just an anniversary. A difficult one.

SAM
Oh. Like as in someone died?

LYDIA
Yep. Five years ago to the day.

SAM
Oh wow. I'm sorry.

LYDIA
Thank you.

SAM
Was it someone...you were close to?

LYDIA
We were close. As children and teenagers. But we grew apart. We became very different people. And I---I tried to help her but -- I'm sorry, I must sound so cryptic.

SAM
She your friend?

LYDIA
She was my sister.

SAM
Oh wow. I'm sorry.

LYDIA
Thank you. So yes, it's still very hard because I loved her -- love her, I still love her because I do believe she's -- around me -- but she pushed me out of her life when she was alive and I did the very same

thing in return. My only sibling.

SAM

What was her name?

LYDIA

Oh thank you for asking. People don't ask that. Jackie. Jackie Crackie was her nickname.

SAM

Oh yeah? Why's that?

LYDIA

She smoked crack.

SAM

Oh my gosh. Is that what --?

LYDIA

Part of it. I mean. If she hadn't been...You know, if I get emotional, I apologize, it's-

SAM

No, it's fine...

LYDIA

--it's just very tough to talk about. Not the easiest thing to talk about.

SAM

But, you know, those are the best things to talk about. The not-easy things. Right? Nobody want to talk about the not-easy things to talk about. Like if I talked about my Dad.

LYDIA

Oh? Talk to me about your Dad. Please?

SAM

Okay well, he loved me, but he didn't know how to show it and it screwed me up a lot. It got me really lonely and you know, I was always searching for someone else to...validate my existence, to prove I was worthy of being alive. But then, when I hit like, I don't know...last year. I forgave him.

LYDIA

You did.

SAM

Yeah. I did. He was dying, see, cirrhosis.

LYDIA
Oh my.

SAM
Yeah.

LYDIA
I'm sorry.

SAM
And you know, I suddenly realized, fuck it if he can't say I love you to me. I will say it to him. And he was lying there, in that tight little hospital cot. And he couldn't make any sounds because of -- everything, the drugs, you know... and I looked him right in the eye, and I said, "I love you, Dad." And I'm telling you, his eyes just totally brightened, like as of someone added extra brown paint to his eyes and they widened, and his eyes were drilled into mine, and I swear, he heard me. He got it. And I got it. So what if he never said it to me? So what? I said it -- to him.

LYDIA
And he said I love you back.

SAM
Yeah? I mean -- do you think he did?

LYDIA
Of course he did. With his eyes. That's what you were seeing.

SAM
Yeah. You're right. He died, like, twenty minutes later.

LYDIA
What a gift. What a gift you got from him, and from yourself.

SAM
Yeah. Yes. Thanks. For telling me that. I mean, I guess I knew it but you're saying it like that --

LYDIA
Sometimes that's what we need. For one other person to just shed a light.

SAM
Yeah.

Lydia puts her cigarette out.

LYDIA
I should get back.

SAM

Man, I am so sorry.

LYDIA

For what?

SAM

I totally – I never asked you more about your sister. I just talked about me, and my Dad.

LYDIA

That's alright. I asked you to.

SAM

No, no it's not. I should have let you go on. Man, I do that. I'm – fuck –

LYDIA

Don't beat yourself up.

SAM

But that's what I do. I do. I want to know about someone else but all I do is talk about me.

LYDIA

That's not all you do. We've been having a very...back-and-forth conversation.

SAM

Yeah. I guess that's true. We've gotten kind of deep.

LYDIA

What's wrong with getting deep? Shouldn't people try to get deeper with each other?

SAM

Yeah. I mean, most people talk about the weather and politics and –

LYDIA

Oh, I try not to talk about politics.

SAM

I mean, we can if you want.

LYDIA

No. Unless, of course you voted for him. The one who, by some Satanic miracle, actually won.

SAM

Uh...yeah. I voted for him. What does Satan have to do with it?

LYDIA

How can you vote for him?

SAM

I like him.

LYDIA

Why?

SAM

He tells the truth.

LYDIA

He doesn't tell the truth; he tells lies.

SAM

He speaks his mind.

LYDIA

He is morally deranged.

SAM

No he's not.

LYDIA

He advised another man to grab women by the vagina.

SAM

No.

LYDIA

No?

SAM

Okay yeah, he said that, what he said, but it was a joke, you know?

Locker room talk.

LYDIA

How many locker rooms you been in?

SAM

I don't know. I mean, a lot I guess. I was on track and field.

LYDIA

How many times in one of those locker rooms you hear a man say to grab a woman by her pussy?

SAM

Well, okay. None.

LYDIA
None!

SAM
But it's gotta happen. Guys say that.

LYDIA
But why should any "guy" say that?

SAM
Cause it's a joke.

LYDIA
It's a joke.

SAM
Yeah.

LYDIA
It's a joke to molest someone else. It's a joke to grab another person's genitalia.

SAM
No. I mean. I-I gotta go.

LYDIA
You can't joke about crap like that!

SAM
I don't! I don't make jokes like that!

LYDIA
So why vote for someone who does?

SAM
I wanted to shake things up!! I wanted a change!

LYDIA
Change for the worse!

SAM
Gotta go.

Quickly, Sam puts his cigarette out, Hurried footsteps, door opens and closes

LYDIA
Change for the worse...

SFX: Alley sounds fade as music comes up, then music fades as alley sounds return. Sound of Lydia lighting up and inhaling. Then door opens and closes in distance. Footsteps as Sam enters.

SAM

Do you not want me to smoke out here anymore?

LYDIA

Never said that. It's your smoking break area too. Not just mine.

SAM

Okay.

He taps his pack, pulls a cigarette, and lights up. Takes a deep drag.

SAM

So um, I was thinking...

LYDIA

Yes?

SAM

You're Black, and---

LYDIA

Oh. Yes. I am Black. What is your point?

SAM

I haven't made it yet. I'm, like, about to.

LYDIA

I'm sorry. I stepped on you.

SAM

You're Black, and I'm White...and we're getting along. For the most part. I mean, even though -- okay we voted differently.

LYDIA

Indeed we did. We did vote differently.

SAM

But we're getting along. Kind of. I mean, we know a lot about each other, you know about my Dad, I know about your sister. We, I don't know, we've shared a lot. Right?

LYDIA

Yes. No, you're right, despite -- what you said -- I am getting along with you.

SAM

And...I was just thinking, that if you took you and me, and you multiplied it by like 9 billion. Can you imagine? There could be peace, for, like, everyone.

LYDIA

If everyone just smoked together.

SAM

Yeah. Seriously. Alive with pleasure.

LYDIA

Hm. Well. You're not seeing a lot of that now.

SAM

Well then, we have to, I don't know, make a podcast or something.

LYDIA

A podcast, huh? (she laughs). I don't mean to put your generation into a box but...

SAM

Oh, I don't need a generation to help me identify and cope, you know?

LYDIA

Well, your generation wants to make everything a podcast.

SAM

But it would be great. A younger White Guy and an older Black Woman standin' around smoking together. And talking.

LYDIA

If you say so. Do I have to be "older"?

LYDIA

Well, I am.

SAM

We could change the world.

LYDIA

Well. The world does need some changing now, doesn't it? But not the way you want it changed, my friend. Not with him. And don't hate me for bringing this up again...

SAM

But you will.

LYDIA

I will. But you been able to find any other man who makes a joke about grabbing a woman's pussy.

SAM

Uh no. I wasn't looking.

LYDIA

You won't find any. It's a rare pig who makes a joke like that.

SAM

Okay fine.

LYDIA

You wanna rare pig leading the country?

SAM

Look I don't care anymore okay?

LYDIA

You don't care?

SAM

No. They're talking layoffs again and honestly I don't care right now about the thing he said, I care about I might be getting canned and that another thing in my life just dissolves away again. Like so many other gigs I've had, and girls, and dreams. Just dissolve away.

LYDIA

Don't feel sorry for yourself now...

SAM

Excuse me? I'm allowed.

LYDIA

But you can't. You can't! I know! You see, pity was a very dark ocean for me, a planet I constantly found myself crash-landing on.

SAM

Yeah but why is pity a bad emotion?

LYDIA

It's not, per se, but it's like booze. You get too much of it in you, you get too drunk to drive.

SAM

So you're not scared about the layoffs.

LYDIA

I've been laid off before. I've been spat out, shat out, kicked around, lost a lot, lost my sister, lost so much and look at me! I'm still here, still standing, enjoying my cigarette.

SAM

Look, I voted for him because I honestly believe he cared about jobs in this country but you, you think I'm an asshole for voting for him. You don't want-

LYDIA

I never said you were an asshole. I simply, gently, asked you how you could vote for someone who told another man to grab women by their "pussies" and you said it was just "locker room talk" and I hope I made you aware that no, no "guys" are talking that way in locker rooms, telling each other to molest a woman whenever he wants and anyone who makes a joke like that in my presence? Will get bitch-slapped. I will. And nobody ever best try to pull that shit on me, any man try to grab my genitals will get -

SAM

Okay, okay...

LYDIA

Will get it in the groin, my knee will go into his groin and cause serious pain and even possibly damage because ...

SAM

Fuck, man! It was just a joke!

LYDIA

Really?! It's no joke!!

SAM

Yes it is! You women take everything so seriously!

LYDIA

We "women"? Oh you are not going there, reducing this to some gender-

SAM

Why do you have to keep pressing the subject!

LYDIA

Because! It's what that rapist did to my sister, he grabbed her pussy and he shoved her down and raped her, right before he killed her!

She finds it hard to steady herself. She sits down on the metal chair. She puts her head in her hands and bawls.

SAM

Shit.

SAM

Shit. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

she continues to cry.

SAM

Fuck man, I hate heartbreak! Do you need a napkin? I don't have one but I have some Subway napkins in my drawer I can go get 'em.

LYDIA

Yes please.

SFX: Hurried footsteps, door opens and closes.

LYDIA

Oh Jackie, see, I can say this to you now, 'cause you know it... You know that if you hadn't been high you never would have gone with that man. 'Cause when you're high bad things happen. Ain't got no judgment. You might have sniffed that he was a killer had ya been sober and clean. Woulda walked away. Coulda walked away. But the drug...it carried you right into his arms...into a killer's arms. And you know, it's funny...I'm glad you were as high as you were because maybe you got numb, nice and numb, numb numb numb before he put that knife in you. Oh Jackie...just as long as you didn't suffer much none. Just as long as you didn't feel nothin'...then I'm okay. Just know I loved you, even though I was a million miles 'way from ya, my heart was still locked into yours. 'Cause that's family, whether we like it or not, our hearts are all locked into each other's hearts, we can't help it, nope, can't help it at all...

SFX: Door opens and closes in distance. Hurried footsteps. As Sam re-enters.

SAM

Here ya go. Just...take as many as you want. They always give you so many at Subway. I guess they think you're just like the messiest eater ever.

She takes a bunch of napkins and wipes away her tears.

LYDIA

Thank you.

SAM

Sure. Of course. I'm really - sorry - that you um, that you have a broken heart.

LYDIA

Ah yes, but the cracks in a broken heart? That's how God gets through, through those cracks. She's gonna get through 'em. But you gotta let Her get in there, get into those cracks.

SAM

Me? Oh. 'Cause, yeah, I have a broken heart too.

LYDIA

Sure ya do. You can't lose two parents and not have a broken heart.

SAM

I just wanna get some peace is all.

LYDIA

God's gonna find you some peace, I promise you that.

SAM

Okay. Well. I hope you're right.

LYDIA

I know I'm right. Sit.

He grabs a metal chair, pulls it towards her. He sits

LYDIA

What's your name?

SAM

I'm Sam.

LYDIA

Lydia.

SAM

Cool. Good to know you, Lydia.

LYDIA

The fake plants around us, they look so real today. Don't they? Like, fresh-watered and alive. Not fake, not plastic. Real. You hear that, sister? And all because of a young man named Sam. And me. Together. What did he say? A Black woman and a white man smokin' together, and talkin. Oh, it's a lovely thing when human beings come together. Like I'm always together with you, sister. Always.. Always with a broken heart, that's true. Always with that. But Hopsteppin'.

SAM

Hopsteppin' huh?

LYDIA

Oh yes. You gotta hopstep, 'specially with a broken heart. Gotta keep hopsteppin'.

SAM

When I went back to get the napkins, I was told I have to see Human Resources. I think I'm getting laid off.

LYDIA

Well. Welcome to the adventure of life. You get laid off, you just...get on a river and flow. And you'll get to the next destination just fine, Sam.

SAM

I think...I think you're right. Life is like, one destination to another.

LYDIA

We never really land.

SAM

Yeah. Yeah. I mean like, even death, is like another destination.

LYDIA

Yes it is.

SAM

So even when you think you're all settled in, like - bam! -- you could die.

LYDIA

That's right.

SAM

Well. I should get up to Human Resources. Face my fate.

LYDIA

Alright. You take good care and don't you dare tell yourself that this job was all you are. Alright?

SAM

Okay.

LYDIA

And we'll do that podcast one day.

SAM

Yeah! Sounds good. Goodbye.

He gets up from his chair and walks to the exit as she stands up from the chair. She watches him go. He stops at the exit. He turns, rushes to her, and embraces her. Then, he leaves. Lydia takes out her pack of cigarettes. She takes out a cigarette. She lights it, takes a big drag.

LYDIA

God, honey? You bless that boy. He been through a lot. Keep him

hopsteppin'. Hopsteppin' with a broken heart. Oh yes, hopsteppin' with a broken heart...

SFX: Alley sounds fade as music comes up, then fades.

Andrew

Thank you for listening to Alive With Pleasure, here on The Half Hour Audio Hour. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with John Dayton Cerna after the recording of this show.

Andrew

So John I just want to say first off thank you for being here to do this interview but also thank you for letting us be part of your show alive with pleasure. We really do appreciate it.

John Dayton Cerna

Oh my gosh. It's It's totally my pleasure and an honor. So it's It's really good to be here and I'm I'm grateful to be here.

Andrew

Great. Well how long have you been writing.

John Dayton Cerna

Oh gosh you know I've been writing a long time I was writing little poems when I was in third grade you know like the ball went down the hall and would read them in front of my classmates in the middle of class and things like that I um. I've always, um, had you know, an ah ah ah, an instinct or a feeling that I needed to write things down I've kept a lot of journals and whoever's listening I recommend that whether you're a quote unquote writer or not.

Andrew

Just.

John Dayton Cerna

Ah, journal journaling really helps in terms of just figuring out your life and who you are and how you really feel about things. Um I ah, you know my first play that I ever wrote and put on stage was way back in. Um. 1990 oh gosh something I think it was not wow I'm getting old um, not like 191995 and it was called the flight of the god damned butterfly and it was a he. It was a yeah and.

Andrew

Um.

John Dayton Cerna

Actually recently just recently wrote a screenplay based on it and I'm going to have a reading of it in New York with ah Mario Cantone who some of you may know anyway, um so that ran for seven months in New York City which was really exciting and um I also have been an actor.

Andrew
Ah.

John Dayton Cerna

But um I've really been zeroing in on on writing and I just find it to be so fulfilling. So yes I've been doing it for quite some time and just really honing in on, You know in my voice and trusting my voice I'm surmising that many writers are kind of in a constant um place of doing that right? trusting your voice and writing and realizing it and then and then putting it on stage if you can and then hey. The audience might actually get it and and then you're and then you think to yourself. Okay, maybe I'm doing something right? but.

Andrew

That is that it's always nice when when people get it. It get what it is that you're trying to put across you know Assert certainly got to feel better than languishing and obscurity.

John Dayton Cerna

Yes, indeed Yes indeed I Yes, yes, that's true.

Andrew

Um, so so what inspired alive with pleasure.

John Dayton Cerna

Well to be honest with you. Um I've always been fascinated by taglines by advertising taglines because we're so we're so they're pervasive. We're so permeated by them and um and then I remember I remember was thinking about that. It's It's actually you know a tagline of a cigarette. Um alive with pleasure exclamation point and I was thought to myself. What's what is what's that I mean can we can any of us really be alive with pleasure and if we can is that a short-lived thing is that like. That last an hour does that can that last a lifetime. Um, what about loss what about grief what about pain What about broken promises I mean how how can we love our lives with pleasure if there's so much that's unpleasurable and then I thought about smokers because Tagline deals with smoking so I thought about 2 people who are smoking together but don't know each other and that would occur in a smoking area because there's so many smoking areas in the world right? where you are designated if you're a smoker to go smoke. So I started to ruminate about these 2 people who are smoking in the same smoking area but have like they don't know each other at all and what happens if they start to talk and what happens if they're very different at least externally right? Like what if one of them is very much younger and 1 is older and what if 1 is. Female and the other is male and what if one of them is black and the other is white and so I started to play with that and I started to explore that and and that's how the play really came to be what it is now.

Andrew

Um, it. It. It is interesting. Um, the this the setting being a ah a smoking area because it is it is at at once both A very. Individual and solitary act and yet very social in the fact that especially now smokers have to go to a place to do it. They have to congregate in a specific play. It's not like when I was a kid and you could just light up in a restaurant by yourself. You know and you're now forced to almost be but part of this group now which is which is is very interesting.

John Dayton Cerna
That's right exactly.

Andrew

Um, so now was this was this script written I having read it. It. It was very obviously written to be done on stage as opposed to. Ah, ah, originally as opposed to done as an as an audio piece am I am I right? about that?

John Dayton Cerna
Yes, that's correct. Yes.

Andrew

Yeah, um, so have you written anything specifically for audio.

John Dayton Cerna

You know, um I actually I did write a story. It was a radio show that I did years ago and it was a story I wrote true story about how I actually lived for two weeks with one of the models from the prices right? um named Holly yeah

06:34.14

Andrew

Um, oh yeah, Holly!

John Dayton Cerna

yeah, holly the redhead Yeah. And it was called the hollyway and she actually lived on a street called Hollyway They named the street after her believer or believe but that's it's kind of very much an L a thing anyway. So I I wrote about my experience. Yeah, kind of kind of bonding with her and getting to know her and Burying her dog after her dog died and going to her dog's funeral. Yeah, so it was yeah it was quite a story so I actually um, knew someone who worked at a radio station and said you know this would be a great audio play and I said or story. So I wrote it like as a radio play and I I did I you know I pretended to be some of the characters like Holly because I was also an actor at one time I I may have mentioned that already and if I have I apologize. But um, yeah, so that was really fulfilling but that was really the only experience. The rest as far as in terms of my writing I'm I'm really writing for the stage I've written a couple of

screenplays a Tv pilot and a couple of books. So um, yeah, that but that was the only time I really wrote something to be heard.

Andrew

Interesting. So so what was it like writing since since you write primarily for the stage or screen or Tv what did you find challenging about writing for audio versus those other medium.

John Dayton Cerna

Well, of course you know it's that thing right? where you you know they're not going to see any of it and so I had to put my my self in the mind of the audience who is going to be listening and you know and figure out. Okay, how am I going to convey this To the audience who are only listening as they're in their car or what have you and so that was that was really I actually I I loved that I Thought that was really exciting. Um I Love the idea of Radio plays or Audio it's it's It's almost more intimate in a right like it's It's almost more intimate and I really um I found it to be challenging but at the same time rewarding?

Andrew

I have heard that from and a numberoff writers when ah in talking to them about about this is that audio is to a great extent. Almost a 1 on 1 type of thing with an audience member because they're all by themselves listening to it and so it's really it's it's really just this 1 person interacting with this piece Which I find very interesting to think about that you can be listened to by millions of people but not all at the same time.

John Dayton Cerna

Unlike in the theater right? where you're surrounded by an audience and as an audience member you kind of become part of that audience and you're part of a whole and that's that's also what I love about theater But what you're saying is very true. It's it so it has a certain intimacy that is found I think not and many other ah platforms or mediums. Yeah.

Andrew

So um, so so tell me do do you have any upcoming projects that you'd like to promote.

John Dayton Cerna

Well um I actually it's funny because in two days there is going to be the world premiere of a 2 act drama that I wrote for the stage it's a play called the art of raising anything. It's a 2 act drama for the stage and it's premiering. It's having its world premiere At the vortex theater in Albuquerque New Mexico and it's very exciting. It's like the oldest black box theater in New Mexico and they've been around for 47 years and um You know they do a lot of classics and plays that have been produced before but but and 1 of the things I

love about them is they do new works they they look for new works and so lo and behold my play was chosen by the vortex to be produced by them and I'm opening their season and it runs um. Um, if you're in New Mexico and Albuquerque check out my play. It runs from February second until February eighteenth Thursday Friday Saturdays and Sundays.

Andrew

Oh that's amazing congratulations.

John Dayton Cerna

Yeah, no thank you so much. It's very exciting.

Andrew

Um, and now this of course brings us to what is the most important question of this entire interview. Um, because as you as you mentioned you know the inspiration for the play was the ol Cigarette Slogan alive with pleasure. So the question is what's an old slogan from your childhood that you remember.

John Dayton Cerna

The first thing that comes to mind is hold the pickle hold the terrace, special orders don't upset us. All we ask is that you let us serve it your way have it your way at burger king I make your way my burger King and I think it's that's good. Yep.

Andrew

Oh Wow You know? what's amazing. You know what's amazing to me is that I remember.

John Dayton Cerna

It's burned in my brain.

Andrew

What came before the whole have it your way thing that got sung and then as soon as you started singing it I'm like all right see Yes, see it's.

John Dayton Cerna

Ah, yeah, see how it our throw comes back so easily. It's kind of scary that. Yeah yeah.

Andrew

ut John once again I want to say? Thank you so very much for allowing us to be part of your show alive with pleasure. It's a wonderful show I I really enjoyed it the from the first time that I read it and ah. Um, behalf of myself and everyone at Andrew. Thank you? So so very much.

John Dayton Cerna

You are so welcome and it's just an honor to have you guys be so

involved this way. So thank you so much.

Andrew

We hope you enjoyed HAlive With Pleasure. Next month, we will be presenting That Time of Night, by Luke Brett, And don't forget to head over to eclectic-theatre.com to find out about all our other shows and projects.

On behalf of myself and everyone here at EFCT, thanks for listening