

Andrew

Hello everyone. This is Andrew Pond, Artistic director of Eclectic FULL Contact Theatre. Welcome to Season 3 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. This month's production is "Caleb and Rita", written by Jessica Moss, directed by Callie Wills, and starring Brian Balliance and Ashley Stenner

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

Jessica writes, performs, and produces. Some of her plays include Funnie (2022 winner of the Leah Ryan's FEWW Prize, O'Neill finalist), A Girl Lives Alone (SafeWord New Play Contest winner), Cam Baby (Toronto Fringe New Play Winner, Weissberger finalist), Polly Polly (Ed Mirvish Award for Entrepreneurship), Next to Him, We'll Make it Together, and more. Training: Juilliard.

And now, Caleb and Rita

A café. Door opens, shuts. Footsteps approach a table. An bell rings

TERRI:
Caleb?

ANDREW:
Yes?

TERRI:
You're Caleb?

ANDREW:
Yes. No, wait. What?

TERRI:
What?

ANDREW:
I'm sorry. No.

TERRI:
Are you /Caleb?

ANDREW:
No. Caleb? No. Sorry.

TERRI:
Oh. No, I'm sorry.

ANDREW:
That's ok.

TERRI takes a few steps away. Turns back.

TERRI:
You're really not Caleb? Because initially you said yes.

ANDREW:
Yeah, no, I, I didn't hear you properly.

TERRI:
But you said 'yes' anyway.

ANDREW:
I just didn't want to make a whole thing out of it.

TERRI:
You're not just...you don't just not want to have a date with me, so you're pretending to be someone else?

ANDREW:
What?

TERRI:
You're not pretending to be someone else now that you saw me in real life and you just don't want to have a date with me?

ANDREW:
...No...is that a /thing?

TERRI:
Good. It might be. With my luck. Haha! So you aren't here for a date.

ANDREW:
Uhh/hhh.....

TERRI:
You are!

ANDREW:
Well

TERRI:
So you're--

ANDREW:
I am here for a date. But I'm not Caleb.

TERRI:

Ah.

ANDREW:
I'm just another guy going on a Tinder date.

TERRI:
Mine isn't a Tinder date.

ANDREW:
Oh...ok.

TERRI: No, ok, it is.

ANDREW:
Oh!

TERRI:
I...yes.

ANDREW:
You just lied for no reason.

TERRI:
Sorry, I'm kind of thirsty.

ANDREW:
Right. Ok. Well. Good luck on your date.

TERRI:
And it's really not with you?

ANDREW:
Do I look /like the guy you are supposed to be meeting?

TERRI:
No. Well...I don't know. Maybe.

ANDREW:
I do?

TERRI:
Anyone can be anyone. Everyone lies in those things. High angle (she demonstrates). Good lighting. Old photo. Do I look like the girl you were supposed to be meeting?

ANDREW: Uh-

TERRI:
I do! You see, /anyone can be anyone.

ANDREW:
I...guess? Yeah, maybe. I mean. She was a girl...with...hair.

TERRI:
Uh huh.

ANDREW:
She's more...whimsical than you.

TERRI:
What is /that supposed to mean?

ANDREW:
She's just more, you know, she's like one of those girls. A (he makes an exhale sound, like a sweet high-pitched breath of a beautiful nymph-like very thin happy creature) type of girl.

TERRI:
How do you know that, /I could be whimsical?

ANDREW:
ust, I know. I never said/ you weren't.

TERRI:
Look, I can (She does the same exhale sound, like a sweet high-pitched breath of a beautiful nymph-like very thin happy creature). What was her name?

ANDREW:
Rita. I'm meeting a girl named Rita. Well, I'm meeting a girl whose profile name is 'Trick-or-Rita'. So I assume her actual name is Rita.

TERRI:
Maybe her name is 'Trick'. Maybe she is a trick. Maybe the whole thing is a trick.

ANDREW:
Uh.

TERRI:
Maybe it's a kid, like a twelve year old, who loves Hallowe'en and you made a date with a child.

ANDREW:
I don't /really

TERRI: MAYBE it's a forty-year old who is obsessed with Hallowe'en and she wants you to wear couples costumes and decorate the dog.

ANDREW:

Or maybe it's a girl named Rita.

TERRI:

Hm. Yeah. I guess. I mean. Anyone could be anyone.
(She laughs)

TERRI:

Rrrriiiiiitttttaa.

ANDREW:

That is, um, yes.

TERRI:

Hm. Or so she says.

ANDREW:

Uh.

TERRI:

OR SO SHE SAYS!

She realizes she has gotten way too into this. She looks around.

TERRI:

Sorry. I. Sorry. Oh god.

ANDREW:

Yeah, like Caleb is so much better.

TERRI:

Caleb is a great name.

ANDREW:

Pfft.

TERRI:

It's a great name.

ANDREW:

I know. Goddammit.

TERRI:

It is, right?

ANDREW:

It so is. You just know he's handsome. You just know it.

TERRI:

He is. Well. His pictures are.

ANDREW: Calebs are always handsome. There was a guy named Caleb in my high school, Caleb Jenn? He had a girl's last name, people sometimes called him 'Jenn', and like, it wasn't even a problem, it wasn't even a problem for him, because he was so ughghghghgh, just this you know, perfect milkshake of a man

TERRI:
Yes!

ANDREW:
-with his always wearing button downs with the sleeves rolled

TERRI:
Yes!

ANDREW:
-and his being into Neil Young.

TERRI: (claps) Yes! Yes! This Caleb's going to be like that too! I've always wanted to date /a Caleb.

ANDREW:
Every girl has 'always wanted to date a Caleb', it makes me sick. I'll bet Caleb's already met Rita, CALEB HAS ALREADY MET RITA! Oh no. And she fell for him, too, you know, she's only human, what woman could possibly resist a Caleb?

TERRI:
I couldn't.

ANDREW:
And now, they're all, I mean, he's like 'uhhh', and she's like 'ohhhh'-

TERRI:
She's like (she does the exhale sound and her voice changes. She's playing Rita now) 'You seem so confident...so worldly. Like a man who could fix something but also caress me gently'.

ANDREW:
Oh, yeah, and he's all (his voice changes too, and now he's Caleb) 'I'm glad we could do this before my trip to Guatemala to build houses out of waterbottles' - that's a real thing, you know/ I read an article about it.

TERRI:
I know, I read -yes, me too, that was /so cool!

ANDREW:
So cool. (back to Caleb's voice) - 'But don't worry, I'm only going

for two weeks because I have a lot going on here at home and I'm really quite settled and comfortable with my life. And I was captivated by your picture'.

TERRI:
(as Rita) 'Would you say it was...whimsical?'

ANDREW:
'Very whimsical. Just full of whimsy'.

TERRI:
'That's me'. Honestly, I totally hate the word whimsical.

ANDREW:
Do you?

TERRI:
I feel it's like a thing people only say about women? Like do you ever call a man whimsical?

ANDREW:
I never have, no.

TERRI:
'I'm just so whimsical' – and I feel it's said in a kind of diminutive way, in a way that minimizes things that make you interesting, or individual, or maybe neurotic, sure, but things that are particular to you, and it just puts you in a category of girl, when really, people don't fit in to categories that neatly – 'I'm a free spirit!'

ANDREW:
That's interesting, I'll take care to use the word more judiciously –

Bell rings

ANDREW:
and he's like 'I've been looking for a free spirit!'

TERRI:
'Have you really?'

ANDREW:
'I've just needed a woman to remind me that sometimes you should run through a public fountain, which I'm totally open to, because I wear a suit but I'm still super fun blah blah blah BLAH BLAH BLAH my name is Caleb'

TERRI:
'I only run through fountains! Or through antique stores! Or down cobblestone streets!'

ANDREW:

'That's exactly what I've been looking for. We'll go to Ireland together!'

TERRI:

Oh, I've always wanted to go to Ireland,/ it looks so beautiful.

ANDREW:

Me too, that's why I said it. 'We'll go to Ireland together! Caleb and Rita!'

TERRI:

'Rita and/ Caleb!'

ANDREW:

I fucking hate him. Calebs are, I mean, Calebs!! Arggggh!! You know, a girl meets a Caleb and she's (he does the RITA voice) 'Ooh, Caleb' (exhale sound).

TERRI:

Maybe not, /maybe she's really excited to meet you.

ANDREW:

No, she is, come on. If I know Rita, she'll fall right for him, she'll love, like, the fact that he plays soccer on Tuesday nights with-NO, lacrosse, he plays lacrosse, oh god I'm in so much trouble.

TERRI:

Lacrosse is

ANDREW:

-oh god.

TERRI:

Very sexy

ANDREW:

OH GOD.

TERRI:

Maybe he's bad.

ANDREW:

Are you kidding, he's wonderful.

TERRI:

I know.

ANDREW: He's the captain, he moves around the field with the grace of

Baryshnikov, and Rita's just, (now ANDREW does the Rita voice) 'I never thought I wanted to date an athlete, but watching him go around the field, it just, I mean, it just makes me want him so much. He's like strong, but so tender. And he's amazing out there, when he runs?'

TERRI:
(as CALEB) 'Oh now, it's just a hobby. I am very modest'.

ANDREW:
'I'm telling you the truth right now, so please believe me'.

TERRI:
Oh.

ANDREW:
'It's hard to, I mean, I want to be so honest with you and that's scary, but I'm being honest when I tell you that I think you are wonderful, when I tell you that I am falling for you, so please believe me, because...I'm falling for you'.

TERRI:
Oh my god.

ANDREW:
What?

TERRI:
That's like the thing I've... I mean...

She is flustered. She kind of laughs.
He kind of laughs.

ANDREW:
Well, I mean, Rita. She's a nice girl, you know? I think she has an openness that- I've never been with someone who was really open and clear about their feelings, but Rita just

TERRI:
(as CALEB) 'puts it all out there'.

ANDREW:
(as RITA) 'Oh, now-'

TERRI:
'It's, it's scary at first, being confronted with feelings, you realize how much time and energy you spend hiding feelings, and dealing with other people's feelings is/ hard'.

ANDREW:

'I know, sometimes I worry that it's too much for you-'

TERRI:

'-and sometimes it is, I'm not going to lie'-

ANDREW:

-'Thank you for not lying'.

TERRI:

'I don't want to lie to you I love how honest we are with each other'.

TERRI:

'Rita!'

ANDREW:

'Caleb!' UGGGGGGHHH CALEB! UGGGGH, DATING!'

TERRI:

I know, dating. The worst.

ANDREW:

don't know why I'm even /trying.

TERRI:

-bothering, yeah. And I mean doing it online doesn't save anytime, because people just pretend right, when you're sitting at home making your profile you're like 'Oh, I like politically-minded articles and documentaries'-

ANDREW:

Is that supposed to be Caleb?

TERRI:

No, I'm not doing anybody right now, 'I want honesty and genuine connection', but then you meet the guy and he really just wants to think about nothing and be able to say he has a girlfriend.

ANDREW:

Yeah. I mean, I actually do like politically-minded articles

TERRI:

But you know what I/ mean.

ANDREW:

Totally yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah.

TERRI:

And people just lie. People just say things about themselves but they might not be true. They can be serial rapists, and this is part of an organ harvesting pyramid scheme, like they don't even keep all the

organs, some of them go to the serial rapist above them? Or they can come in and see me and decide they don't want to date me and now Caleb is sitting here pretending that he's somebody else. (She yells into the café) CALEB?

No answer.

TERRI:
But I mean, that doesn't tell you anything.

ANDREW:
Anyone could be anyone.

TERRI:
Exactly. That's good. That's a good one.

They both sigh.

TERRI:
Well.

ANDREW:
Yeah. I hope your date goes well.

TERRI:
Thanks.

ANDREW:
And I hope Caleb is Caleb and is totally perfect.

TERRI:
Eh, I don't need him to be perfect, I just need him to be himself. I hope Rita is whimsical.

ANDREW:
If she comes.

TERRI:
She'll come.

ANDREW:
Even if she comes, and even if she's wonderful, I could still mess everything up.

TERRI:
Oh, no you won't. You really won't. You'll be (she does ANDREW)
'Hello, I'm you, I'm here to meet this girl Rita'.

ANDREW:
That's not what I sound like.

TERRI:
'I have a job'.

ANDREW:
That's true.

TERRI:
'I'm not a part of an organ harvesting pyramid scheme'.

ANDREW:
Not that I know of, no.

TERRI:
'I know about ballet because I have appreciation for all the arts, and I'm trying to move past high school, but I think those years are pretty formative, and they tend to stick with you, even if you work to get beyond them'.

ANDREW:
That's true, how did you-?

TERRI:
I don't know, I just know! 'I read politically minded articles about developing countries'-

ANDREW:
Yes!

TERRI:
'Which I genuinely enjoy'.

ANDREW:
I do!

TERRI:
'And I know that that doesn't solve the problem, awareness is only the first step, but I still think it's important to be a citizen of the world in whatever way you can be' -

ANDREW:
Yes!

TERRI:
'-and I really do want an honest relationship, it scares me, but I am willing to try, and I'm not going to be perfect-'

ANDREW:
(as TERRI) 'But I don't need you to be perfect! I just need you to be you, and then whatever else there is that will still be perfect.'

Because I make mistakes too, sometimes I lie for no reason'

TERRI:

'Sometimes I avoid problems because I don't want to make them a /whole thing'.

ANDREW:

'Whole thing, I know, you do that, but we can work together. Sometimes I get really into a conversation I'm having and I just YELL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CAFÉ!'

TERRI:

'And I think that's totally freaking weird, I'm being honest-'

ANDREW:

'Thank you for being honest'.

TERRI:

'I never want to lie to you, but yeah that's totally freaking weird, but that's ok because, you know, you're whimsical, in a way, kind of'.

ANDREW:

'I don't /like the word whimsical'

TERRI:

'Like the word whimsical, I know'.

ANDREW:

'But I don't think I'm whimsical enough, guys want a girl who is really whimsical (he does the exhale)'.

TERRI:

'You're just the right amount of whimsical, too much whimsy will give you diabetes'.

ANDREW:

'But I am kooky, and quirky, in like the best way, and I don't mean that to diminish my neuroses, because I have those, but really, all my little stuff like that is totally adorable, even if its connected to deeper issues'.

TERRI:

It is?

ANDREW: (as TERRI)

'And I'm thirsty!'

TERRI:

I am thirsty!

ANDREW:
'So I'm going to order a latte'—

TERRI:
(No) Mmmm...

ANDREW:
'—a mocha'.

TERRI:
Eh
ANDREW:
'A black coffee and a glass of water and one of those peanut butter cookies'.

TERRI:
(Yes!) Oh!

ANDREW:
'And it's for...'

TERRI:
Terri.

ANDREW:
Andrew.

TERRI:
Hi.

Bell rings, cafe sounds fade

Andrew
Thank you for listening to Caleb and Rita, here on The Half Hour Audio Hour. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with Jessica Moss after the recording of this show.

Andrew
Ok, so just thank you so much for being part of Half Hour Audio Hour and for allowing us to be part of your show Caleb and Rita.

Jess_
Oh thanks I'm really grateful for the opportunity.

Andrew
Excellent. So my first question is how long have you been writing.

Jess_

Um, I've been playwriting with a concerted effort or at least like a degree of focus for about 18 years. Before that I think I thought I wanted to be a novelist. But yeah long time.

Andrew

Um, ah and and what inspired Caleb and Rita.

Jess_

Yeah I'm always really interested in time and space in my work such as it is in my work but um, and and thinking of ways of how to play with that theatrically and how to tap into more than 1 reality like more than just the literal time and space. It's something about like the limitation of theater taking that and using it and also exploding it at the same time and I feel a way to do that or to riff off of that is to have people who are not there be there in some way, to play with something where. It's not a two-hander because there's 4 characters but there's only 2 bodies. Um I'm also an actor and I like love to show off and I love playing multiple characters and I really like to give actors a chance to show off, so I felt with like okay so we have the restriction of only 2 performers. But they will each play a bunch of other people and in doing that they'll kind of realize that they are the people that they want to be and that they want to be with.

Andrew

That is awesome. That's wonderful and as as an actor myself I appreciate any writer that allows us the chance to like really go for it.

Jess_

Um, yeah so fun.

Andrew

So this play very obviously sits in the romcom genre, but I know that there are moments in the play I know that Ashley had spoken about sort of the whimsical rant that her character has where you kind of subvert or call out those those tropes that we have seen in rom -coms. Can you can you talk a little bit about your decision to to to to do that in this piece.

Jess_

Um, sure I don't know if it was conscious but I think it's kind of related to what I just said um, usually I'm writing about identity and reality because I really struggle with both both of those things constantly and and I think there's something about the idealism of a Rom -com um, particularly someone who watches them. And like thinking about the type of people in those movies and the type of people who deserve love or who can fall in love or who there would be someone out there for and then thinking about the type of person that I am and that I can't stop being and that I feel trapped as um and I think a

lpt of the best rom-coms kind of bring this up in some way like or they're about learning that this idealized thing of love can happen to us. Like in you know in the immortal words from Bridget Jones's diary, just as we are. Or with all the neuroses that Sally Albright in When Harry Met Sally has, we're still deserving of something that feels so idealized and something that only happens to the beautiful people. Um, so it's such a good vehicle to deal with the question of is this who I really am? Is this who I'm supposed to be? Is this the way life is going to be? Because I think a lot of us connect that idealized person to the person who will love and be loved and struggle with feeling it for ourselves. Does that make any sense? It's like little weird.

Andrew

No, that makes that that makes 100 % sense that's and and I I love that idea, because I I agree with you I think that some of the best examples of rom-coms are those that focus on the the people that are that are not quote unquote the beautiful people or that that have these sort of ideas about wait this is supposed to be the perfect thing and can I find something that works for me or is that even a thing that I--Is the quote unquote perfect idea of love even something that I want? Because does that work in real life type of thing? To me, that's the difference between like ah like a really good rom-com and 1 of the hallmark Christmas movies.

Jess_

Right.

Andrew

Well now since you since you said you love them I'm sure that you've got an answer for this next question which is what is your favorite rom com.

Jess_

Okay I have tiers so I'm just in the list a few but I'll do it really fast because I'm impossible.

Andrew

That's okay, this is this is your interview. You do it.

Jess_

Alright, so my top tier are when Harry Met Sally and Four weddings and a Funeral. These are not deep cuts by the way like I'm about to list like a bunch of basic movies that everyone has seen so it's not that exciting. But.

Andrew

Hey, Four weddings and a Funeral is a brilliant show.

Jess_

It's so incredibly the the movie I've never seen the show because like

can't kind of bear it. But I really would love to um, create the musical of 4 weddings and a funeral. That's my dream job because I love the movie so much. Um, and when Harry Met Sally, pretty much everything by Nora Ephron. Heartburn is a really good book. Not as much a good movie but the book is perfection and then I have this tier of like are they rom coms? Which I think are some of the best movies ever made, and I would put like the Apartment in there, Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice, Punchdrunk Love um, Broadcast News, Raising Arizona Holly Hunter made both of those movies in the same year which is like amazing. Enough Said which is a great James Gandolfini performance, and a great Julia Louis Dreyfus performance. There's this really great old movie that I'm obsessed with right now called I Know Where I'm Going. And then Moonstruck, My Best Friend's Wedding, Down With Love. Um, Clueless, Bridget Jones's Diary like there's so many good ones. That's all that I wrote down before I started this because I was like I'm going to start making a list.

Andrew

No, that is I like the fact that you have tiers.

Jess_

Yeah, always.

Andrew

I like and I love I Love the movies that you threw into the are they rom coms?

Jess_

Ah, a rom com plot in another movie is so like Hitchcock does it all the time like the 39 steps has it the Lady Vanishes... but like it's a great thing to have like a really adorable, wonderful love story happening inside another genre of movie is like such a delight when that happens.

Andrew

Yeah, yeah, absolutely um I mean you can You can throw in like really odd ones like African Queen as as well.

Jess_

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Andrew

that's that's awesome but Jess I really want to thank you for allowing us to ah be part of Caleb and Rita it's ah, an absolutely wonderful script. The moment that ah everybody who was making the decisions of what went into this season read it, it was one of the top picks across the board. So I want to I want to say thank you for letting us be a part of it. It's been a really wonderful experience and we really are very grateful.

Jess_

Oh well. Thank you so much and um, it's really you know it's such a rare thing to ever like hear your work done and um so thank you as well for doing it and to the great actors in Callie for all of their hard work.

Andrew

We hope you enjoyed Caleb and Rita. Next month, we will be presenting Stork Patrol, written by Debra Cole. If you enjoyed what you heard, 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. And head over to eclectic-theatre.com to find out about our serialized audio dramas, Deep Shadows, Bloody Bay, Clusterf**k, Monocyte, and Throwing Shade. On behalf of myself and everyone here at EFCT, thanks for listening..