

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 "Confessions of a Character Actor", written by Aaron Leventman, directed by David Lipschutz and starring Judy Rossignuolo-Rice and Garvin van Dernoot. Before we start, we'd like to briefly introduce you to Aaron Leventmann. After the production, stay tuned for an interview with Aaron for more insight into the play and this process.

Aaron Leventman attended Columbia University's Graduate School for film where his thesis screenplay was given a professional reading at the Union Square Theatre in Manhattan. He moved to Santa Fe from Provincetown after his involvement as a writer/director/actor with the Provincetown Theatre Company. When living in Santa Fe, he performed with most of the local theatre companies in both classics and original plays. He's also appeared in industrials, commercials, short films, and features and is currently represented by Phirgun Mair Worldwide in New Mexico. He was proud to have been recently chosen as a fan guest host on Turner Classic Movies. <https://aaronleventman.com>.

Aaron has enjoyed over 40 productions of his plays all over the country, many of which are published and available on Amazon.com. He co-produced an evening of his own short works titled Almost Adults met with tremendous acclaim and included the Mayor declaring LGBTQ+ Theatre Day in Santa Fe on opening night for the first time in the city's history. His play Blanche in a Wheelchair was a finalist for the Samuel French OOB One Act Play Festival. His recent play Lovers and Survivors was performed at the Little Fish Theatre's Pick of the Vine Festival in San Pedro, CA and at the Secret Theatre's One Act Play Festival in Queens, NY then subsequently published by For Page and Screen Magazine.

He was the producer of a monthly online LGBTQ+ short play series which brought together talent and audiences from all over the world and was invited to participate in the South by Southwest Virtual Festival in 2021.

Aaron is also a playwriting, screenwriting, acting, and film history instructor at Santa Fe Community College, a film festival curator, and has a private writing coach practice.

And now, Confessions of a Character Actor

SFX of city bustle with 1960s music underscoring it. SFX of city bustle slowly fades out as 1960s music goes from being underscoring to a digetic change as if coming from a radio in the scene.

BERTHA: Davey, dear, will you turn that racket down? You're going to make me forget an ingredient.

DAVID: You will anyway.

BERTHA: David!

SFX of click of radio being turned off and very low footsteps

DAVID You're cooking today? It's like a 100 degrees outside.

BERTHA The oven's not working too well. It's either too hot or not hot enough. But when did that ever stop me from making my mandel bread anyways?

DAVID Ma, you burned that thing the last 2 times you tried to make it. Maybe it's time to try something else.

BERTHA That was because I was out of butter and used margarine but this time it will be perfect. I invited your Aunt Bessie over for tea and she's bringing Rebecca who just got a very nice position as a receptionist at a real estate office. You might like her, David. I hear she has a taste for the arts.

DAVID Ma, stop trying to set me up, okay? It never works out. The last time, Aunt Bessie's niece from Sweden thought I was ugly.

BERTHA How do you know?

DAVID Because she told me!

BERTHA But she couldn't speak English. And anyways you're not ugly. You're a handsome boy. You have your father's nose.

DAVID That's the problem.

BERTHA No offense but I think you haven't gone on a date in quite a while, am I right?

DAVID I'm busy, Ma. I gotta focus on my acting career.

BERTHA Well then maybe you'll hear from your big casting agent and have some news for us.

DAVID Don't remind me. I'm trying not to think about it.

BERTHA I have an idea. Why don't you do your scene from your try-outs for the film for everyone today.

DAVID They're not try-outs, Ma. They're auditions. And I'm definitely not doing a scene from the film.

BERTHA Well, okay then. Do something that you're working on in acting class. I'm paying all this money, I wanna see what you're getting out of it.

SFX of telephone ring (THE TELEPHONE RINGS.)

DAVID Saved by the bell. I'll get it.

BERTHA No, dear. I'll get it.

SFX: RECEIVER LIFTED

BERTHA Hello? (pause) Who may I ask is calling? Yes, one minute please. (pause) It's him. It's him.

DAVID Hello? This is David. Yes, Mr. Stanton. It was a pleasure reading for Mr. Loninger. ..He did?! Well, that's great news...Oh, it's THAT part? But I was reading for the insurance salesman...Oh, someone dropped out?... Yeah, of course I want it, but what do I have to do exactly?...Uh hu. Uh hu. Uh hu. No, it's no problem. I can do that. No, really. It won't be a

problem. Yeah, I can stop by and pick up the script. Sure, tomorrow's fine. Thank you, thank you Mr. Stanton. I won't let you down.

SFX: phone receiver being put down.

BERTHA Not good news, huh? Well, you I'm sure you did your best. You're in a tough field and maybe next time the outcome will be better.

DAVID Uh, Ma...?

BERTHA Meanwhile, now that you have the summer free, maybe you could work at your uncle's shoe store. Then you could maybe have enough money to get your own place. Not that I don't love having you here, Davey, but a boy your age should...

DAVID Ma! I got the part.

BERTHA WHAT?!! You got the part?! What are you, crazy? You're walking around here like you just got a death sentence and you got the part? What did he say? Tell me everything.

DAVID Well, it's a new movie with Gene Roth.

BERTHA Gene Roth? Who's that? I never heard of him.

DAVID Ma, he's been on Broadway. He's a stage actor. This is his first film. He got a Tony award for the last Arthur Miller play.

BERTHA Arthur Miller. Very impressive. So what's the part? Do you have many lines?

DAVID Yeah, a few, but, uh, well, it's not the part I read for. So what part is it? Well, it's just one scene. (pause) It takes place in a public bathroom.

BERTHA A public bathroom?

DAVID And I'm this student, and I buy the services of a. well, you know..

BERTHA What? I don't get it.

DAVID Ma, your bread. Should you check on it?

BERTHA It needs another 20 minutes. So what are you buying from this man in the bathroom?

DAVID Hey, why don't I make my famous cole slaw for everyone today, the kind with raisins in it? You like my cole slaw.

BERTHA What is it, David? What's going on?

DAVID In the scene there's this guy standing in the bathroom, and he's a ...you now. He's a male prostitute. (pause) I hire a male prostitute. That's my part in the film.

BERTHA I don't think we'll be telling your Aunt Bessie about this one. (pause) A MALE prostitute? Who ever heard of such a thing?

DAVID They're all over Times Square. They wear tight white pants and leather jackets.

BERTHA And how would you know?

DAVID I go there to see theatre, Ma. I lot has changed since you and Dad used to take there when I was little

BERTHA I'll say. That's probably why I never go to Times Square. So what kind of movie is this? (in a hushed voice) A dirty movie? You wouldn't, David, would you?

DAVID No, it's a regular movie, Ma. A Hollywood film, shot in New York. The director is British.

BERTHA Well that figures.

DAVID Whatever that means. Anyway, he just made the newcomer Brenda Farling a star in his last movie. She won the Oscar for Christ's sake.

BERTHA And now he's doing a film about male prostitutes? What's this movie about, anyways?

DAVID They won't tell me yet because it's top secret but they say that it deals with very important social issues.

BERTHA Maybe these are social issues we could all do without. David, you should be doing Shakespeare for goodness sakes.

DAVID Doing Shakespeare doesn't get you a card for the Screen Actor's Guild. Ma, it's a good part. It's small, but a good part.

BERTHA So what else happens in this scene?

DAVID You really want to know?

BERTHA Yeah, I want to know.

DAVID Well, he wants money. And I don't have money because I'm a poor student. So I give him my watch, and then I, uh, you know, we, uh....Really, Ma. Do I have to say it?

BERTHA In a public bathroom?! Feh! What if someone walks in there who has to use it for what it's for?

DAVID Ma, no one uses this bathroom for what it's for. It's a movie theatre in Times Square. It's disgusting in there.

BERTHA Well, that's ridiculous. You can't show that kind of stuff in a Hollywood movie.

DAVID Ma, it's 1968. You can now. They changed the rules in Hollywood and now you can. When was the last time you went to the movies?

BERTHA I took you to see The Sound of Music at Radio City Music Hall. The Rockettes did a show afterwards. Don't you remember?

DAVID Ma, I was like 3 years ago.

BERTHA Well, I don't like the kind of films they make nowadays with hippies with long hair causing trouble for everyone else. No offense but I liked it better when they didn't show so many things and left it to your imagination. But you don't really have to do that to the man in the movie, right? I mean, you're not really going to...

DAVID No, Ma. Of course not. They fake it. It's called acting.

BERTHA Yeah, but you've never...have you, David?

DAVID Ma! That's what you do in acting. You substitute the emotion of something that you know about for whatever you're playing in the scene, that maybe you don't know.

BERTHA But David, you can't do this part. You'll forever be thought of as the feygelah in the bathroom. Who will hire you after that?

DAVID Mom, no one's hiring me now anyway. I'm a quirky little guy.

BERTHA You are not. You look just like your father when he was your age. You'll be a great leading man.

DAVID Stop it, Ma. I'm a character actor. So what have I got to lose? Some of the best in the business are character actors anyway. Johnny Seven, James Millhollin, Elisha Cook, Jr., Jonathan Harris. They're the best there is.

BERTHA I've never heard of those people.

DAVID Well, they're the kind of people you'd recognize but don't know by name. And that's what I am, Ma. At least that's what they tell me. But, you know, I don't care. If it's my big break then so be it. Maybe it'll make history for being the first film to show ...well, you know, in a movie.

BERTHA What a thing to make history for. David, you're still young. It took your Cousin Melvin until he was 41 to break into the women's garment business. You have plenty of time.

DAVID I can't, Ma. I can't wait anymore. It doesn't matter what the part is. If I do a good enough job with it someone will see it and put me in something else. That's how it goes.

BERTHA Well, who is this character, anyway? He gives up his watch for a...a...

DAVID They don't give you a lot from the script but I think he's just this kid. This lonely kid. He goes to school in the Bronx but lives in Brooklyn. And no one knows his secret. So he has to go to Times Square to live out his secret life. He goes to these dirty porno theatres and sits by himself. He never talks to anyone but just sits in silence and watches the screen and people around him. But one day, he's just so lonely that he can't take it anymore. So he meets this stud in the bathroom who has like dirty blonde hair and wears a cowboy hat, and he has these piercing blue eyes. He wants to be with this guy so bad that he just can't take it. He just can't take it so even though he doesn't have any money he gives this guy his watch that he got for his bar mitzvah because he'd give that up just so he can be with this guy for just 5 minutes. He wants to so bad that he just can't stand it. (pause) Forget it, Ma. I'm not doing the part.

BERTHA What do you mean you're not doing it? After all this?

DAVID You're right. I'll never get a part after this. I'll be thought of as the feygelah in the bathroom. (pause) Ma, I AM the feygelah in the bathroom.

BERTHA I know, Davey. (She sighs.) Well, maybe now you'll meet someone nice and not be alone like me.

DAVID You're not alone, Ma.

BERTHA You know, I think you should do this movie. At least your poor mother will get to see you on the big screen. I'll close my eyes during the dirty part.

DAVID It's not that big of a part, Ma. You'll close your eyes and miss my whole scene.

BERTHA Well at least I'll know it's you up there.

DAVID It mainly happens off camera, in the shadows, so you don't see anything.

BERTHA Thank goodness for small miracles. Anyway, what's that line from that movie? There are no such thing as small parts?

DAVID Only small actors. It's Norma Desmond in Sunset Boulevard, Ma. And she was wrong. There are such things as small parts. They only asked me because everyone else turned it down. I know I'm not that good.

BERTHA Nonsense, David dear. You're a regular Paul Newman.

DAVID Come on, Ma.

BERTHA Fine, you'll be one of those people no one's heard of. But you'll have respect. And that's what everyone wants, anyway. Look at Marilyn Monroe. She wanted it her whole life and never got it.

DAVID Marilyn Monroe? (he laughs) You're right. Ma. I hate to say it again but you're right.

BERTHA See, you gotta listen to your poor mother every once in a while. And I'm not that out of step with the times. I'm more modern than you think.

DAVID Yeah, you're a regular Thoroughly Modern Milly.

BERTHA I always liked that Julie Anderson in that movie.

DAVID It's Julie Andrews, Ma.

BERTHA That's what I said.

DAVID Anyway, what do you think?

BERTHA Am I happy that you're following your dream? Yes. Am I thrilled that it's doing a meshuggina movie? Maybe not so much. (pause) Can I live with it, Davey? Are you asking me if I can live with it? (pause) Give me time. The good news is I've lived through worse.

DAVID Ma, I think your mandel bread is burning.

BERTHA I left it too long in the oven again. Let the whole thing burn. Your Aunt Bessie is getting Sara Lee when she comes over for tea. Your mother is not such a good cook anymore since your father died. A Jewish mother who can't cook. I'm better off dead. I tell you, Davey, I'm tired of always trying to get it right.

DAVID Ma, I think you get plenty right. (pause) And you're not a bad cook. Your brisket's not half bad.

BERTHA So what's the name of this great masterpiece you're going to be in?

DAVID Sex at Midnight.

(Pause.)

(Silence. Then Bertha starts to laugh. It develops into an all-out belly laugh. David starts to laugh with her.)

SFX 60'S MUSIC FADES UP AS LAUGHTER FADES OUT.

Andrew

Thank you for listening to Confessions of a Character Actor, here on The Half Hour Audio Hour. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with Aaron Leventman after the recording of this show.

Andrew

So Aaron first thing I just want to say? Thank you so much for allowing eclectic full contact theater to be part of your show the confessions of a character actor. We really do appreciate it.

Aaron Leventman

Oh it's It's an honor for me. It's always you know writers always appreciate opportunities like these so and to work with a new company new for me that I hadn't worked with before so it's It's really a pleasure. So thank you.

Andrew

Wonderful! So tell me how long have you been writing.

Aaron Leventman

Well I'm going to age myself. But I've been writing a plays for 40 years and you might think I'm not that old but I started in high school. I had been acting since I was about 7 or eight years old I was in a children's theater group in in Boston where I grew up and I was exposed to a lot of great theater and and film and other kinds of culture. My parents used to take me to to plays growing up into into great films growing up in the in the great city of Boston. And then when I was in high school because of that exposure I realized that I wanted to tell my own stories and my high school had a playwriting competition where if you wrote a play and submitted it to them and whoever won got to have their play performed at the high school and they did this for my junior and senior year. And my plays were never accepted. Those 2 years I wrote these really dark plays one was like a lesbian vampire play and the other was this kind of dark series of monologues about people with like mental health issues which I didn't know anything about at the time. But. So they weren't chosen. But then when I was in ah college I continued to do theater even though I was actually a film major and I took a playwriting class and I wrote a one-act play that was well received and it actually got performed as part of a theater festival like at my college at Uc Santa Cruz and then I was kind of often running and then you know I went to film school. After college and was working on screenplays. But then when I moved back to Provincetown 13 years after living in New York I joined their theater company and started writing plays again and getting them produced and acting again and I realized going back to my my first love of theater was what I really wanted to do so here we are.

Andrew

Awesome

Aaron Leventman

And I've been doing it ever since. So it's really twenty years that I've had plays produced. You know since that period of time when I started writing plays again.

Andrew

Um, that's wonderful. So what inspired confessions of a character actor.

Aaron Leventman

Well I've you know is someone that has you know studied film. You know, worked in film in different aspects my whole life I've always been really interested in the period of time in the late sixties when the Hays code was lifted in Hollywood and the MPAA rating system went into place where you could start showing you know, different kinds of content dealing with you know, sexuality and morality in a way that you couldn't prior to the late 60s and one of the films that sort of stood out for me during that period was *Midnight Cowboy*. Um because it was the first Oscar movie to get an X rating and it was I think one of the first movies I believe in Hollywood to show a gay sex scene. Not explicitly. But um.

That that movie always has stood out. It's always been one of my favorite films and um I think it was one of the first adult movies I probably saw so and there's a scene in the movie where the actor Bob Balaban who is a great character actor in his own right, plays a scene very similar to the part that David gets cast in in *Confessions of a Character Actor* where he plays this gay kid that you know picks up John Voigt in a bathroom in a Times Square movie theater and tries to pay for services. It happens very differently in the movie than it does in my play but I read an interview with Bob Balaban and I've read probably everything you can about *Midnight Cowboy* and he said that was his first break was that he got cast in this this would turn out to be the first X-rated Hollywood movie. You know in a gay scene and he his first fear when he got the part was oh my god what am I going to say to my mother and um Bob Balaban is not the character of David at all in *Confessions*.

But um, that interested me I guess in part because you know I was raised with a Jewish mother who was very encouraging of me to go into theater. Both of my parents were. And um I was also reflecting on the period of time when my father passed away and my mother you know was alone and continued to support me during that time wishing that my father had seen what I was doing with my you know career in theater and so I think the play is kind of reflecting on all of those things and also the fact that I'm a character actor I've been told you know on I'm the quirky Jewish guy that David gets called on you know because refers to himself in the play I think that's something that I relate to and I've kind of owned that to myself as an actor that that's the kind of actor I am and kind of love that. And I also love character actors and think they are the backbone of the film industry in many ways.

Andrew

Absolutely. As one character actor to another I fully endorse that view. So what led you to decide to write this as a radio play, and what do you enjoy about writing for audio?

Aaron Leventman

Well, it's actually very new to me. It's like just something I've just started doing the last year and it's in part because I think this probably started before covered but I feel like during covered the whole podcast radio theater is kind of exploded.

And you know during Covid when people were having to find creative ways to do theater I did as a play series on Zoom for example, as a lot of people did. But I think people have been rediscovering radio theater because of that period of time and now it's continued everyone listens to podcasts you know in radio theater is now emerged from that and it's a great opportunity now for playwrights that I wanted to be a part of so I looked at this play and a couple of my other plays that are very dialogue heavy because that's how I tend to write and thought these could easily be radio plays

And it's having to kind of rethink writing because you know because I used to write screenplays where it's kind of the opposite of radio theater where you have to, you know write visually. Here you have to reverse it and you have to reverse you know visual cues into dialogue so having to rethink that way was really kind of fun and it was really going

back to when I first started writing. Because that's the kind of writing I did was very very dialogue heavy and now I get to do it Again. So.

Andrew

Awesome! So do you have any upcoming projects that you'd like to promote.

Aaron Leventman

Yeah I have a few. Um so I have ah a play ah called Blanche in a Wheelchair that I wrote that's been done before New York and it's being done as part of a disability awareness theater festival in Austin Texas this summer and I actually have another radio play that's going to be produced. Ah, the plays called Don't You Remember Me and it's a rewrite of an older play that I wrote written for audio theater. It's being produced by kunm's um annual 40 year old audio festival I think it's going to be done in in June out of Albuquerque and um. I also have another play that I wrote that I'm trying to get launched. That's about my experiences of working as a queer teenager in a arthouse movie theater in the early 80s in Boston and about a kind of devious story that comes from the 2 characters working in that theater and the the way they're exploited by the manager but I won't say too more about that. And I'm hoping to get that done at some point in the next year and then I have I also teach playwriting and I'm actually starting a I'm hoping to start a whole sort of playwriting teaching platform online to start teaching you know to to students all over the country until that's like going to be developing throughout the next six months

Andrew

Ah, that's that's wonderful. That's amazing. So we have now gotten to the crux of this entire interview and um, it'll be very interesting to get your take on this. who is your favorite character actor.

Aaron Leventman

It took me a second to to answer this um or to think of ah an actor mine would be Thelma Ritter um she's kind of I kind of think of her as like the quintessential character actor from that period of time where she was making films in the 50 s and 60 s if you look at her performance and like. Pick up on south street and rear window through like Oscar caliber performances but she is she is always the kind of backbone to the films that she's in as we were talking before about character actors and she's always been my favorite. Um, and if I had to pick a second choice...There there are a lot of great character actors in the seventy s that were in a lot of those kind of street films like you know Serpico and you know prince of the city. Um, but the actor Brad Dourif he was in One Flew Over the cuckoo's nest and Eyes of Laura Mars and

He's always interesting and creepy and and funny and also a little sexy in some weird way and ah, he's somebody that I've always been been fascinated by so he would be my second choice and also just to mention all the great character actors that were on the I love Lucy show In the 50 s that were on a lot of Tv from that period of time and of course I I can't remember their names you know, true to the character actor form. But um, yeah.

Andrew

I'm a little disappointed considering the the way that they're described in the play that everybody could come up with somebody's name I was really expecting everybody to answer Well it was the guy in the show remember? He played the I don't know what his name is, but it's the guy who did the thing. Um, but I I think it's I think yeah that that guy. Yeah, um, well.

Aaron Leventman

They call him the it's the it's the the that guy actor or even it can be and that going to play to women too. But it's that guy.

Andrew

Like I said Aaron thank you so much for letting EFCT

Aaron Leventman

Oh it's been a pleasure. Thank you, Thank you so much for for doing this these series of interviews as part of your podcast I think it's ah going to be a great addition. So I appreciate it.

Andrew

Wonderful! Well thanks, very much and I I Hope you enjoy the way it sounds when we put it all together

Aaron Leventman

Oh I'm sure I will thank you.

Andrew

We hope you enjoyed Confessions of a Character Actor. Next month, we will be presenting Finding Mother Courage, by Pam Kingsley, 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