

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. 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 "The YouTube Comment Section of the Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald", written by Ryan Stevens, directed by Rashaad Bond, and starring Sophie Hernando Kofman, Dakota Pariset, Monica Villalba, and Ameer Ross

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

Ryan Stevens (He/They) is a playwright/director currently based in Atlanta. They are the Playwriting Fellow at Emory University. They received an MA in Theatre from USC and an MFA in Playwriting from UCLA. Stevens has worked with Silver Spring Stage, St. Croix Falls Festival Theatre, Impostors Theatre Company, Whiskey Radio Hour, Theatre Viscera, Festival D'Avignon, The Plagiarists Chicago, Philadelphia Dramatists Center, T. Schreiber Studio, and Theatre Above The Law among others. Their script Player King is published through Stagescripts, Ltd., and they participated in the 2019 Great Plains Theatre Conference.

And now, The YouTube Comment Section of the Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald

SFX: Stormy waves crashing over guitar music

Quinn Allen: (singing)

"The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down
Of the big lake they called Gitche Gumee
The lake, it is said, never gives up her dead
When the skies of November turn gloomy
With a load of iron ore twenty-six thousand tons more
Than the Edmund Fitzgerald weighed empty
That good ship and true was a bone to be chewed
When the gales of November came early"

DaleFan44:

They don't write 'em like this anymore.

Summer J:

My dad always loved to play this song. Didn't really get it as a kid – guess that's just because I was so used to it. Heard it on the radio the other day and felt like I was nine again.

GTS4:

"Does anyone know where the love of God goes when the waves turn the minutes to hours?"
Sick stuff, man.

Brandon E:

Hard to believe this is based on a real thing. Rest in peace to those sailors.

PunkRat:

The Headstones version is way better. Respect to the original, but that's my opinion.

TIMMAGEDDON:

I can feel myself getting more like my dad whenever I listen to this song. Sometimes I catch myself thinking in a way that would make young me disgusted. Thinking about what's necessary, about how I might be wasting my time, about how I should go check on the car's tires just because. How my knee aches and that means it'll rain later. Those guys on the Edmund Fitzgerald, I wonder if they thought about growing older. When it was clear what was happening, did they think about losing that future?

Whitney Glass:

Michigan represent!

Kicker1719:

I used to work freight and I've been on Lake Huron...rough times. Not a place you'd go for vacation. Still, I was always lucky. Plenty weren't.

Dean L:

All those dislikes are from people who hate the working class.

Thomas March:

This is a classic song ! Always loved this. Good job. Best, Thomas.

Daniel Parker:

THIS SONG KICK ASS. I WANT TO SHRED WITH IT ON BASS. BUT! MY WIFE IS STRUGGLING WITH FOOD POISONING. SORRY BOYS! YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT. I LOVE MY WIFE TOO MUCH!

Bro4Ever:

Why do you have to make things political @Dean L. ?

Dean L.

@Bro4Ever what do you mean?

Bro4Ever:

You know what I mean commie.

SFX: Sped up indistinct voices

[37 comments later]

If that's how you feel then I hope you're ready to defend your loved ones from Mao's Death Squads you Stalin lover!

Dean L.:

Lol

MusicFan99:

Lol

KJ McNeer:

Lol get a load of this lunatic

Bryn Lewis:

Do you ever wonder if you've met someone from these comments in real life? What if we were neighbors, or what if we went to school together, or were on the same flight? Is the world really as big as we pretend it is?

Bro4Ever:

This comment has been deleted for violating Youtube's code of conduct.

Sabrina Snell:

Is Gorbon Lightfoot still alive?

Devon P:

Gordon

Sabrina Snell:

Whatever is he alive or not

Squall W:
Just google it

Anna C:
"The lake, it is said, never gives up her dead, when the gales of
November come early."
Feels like the gales of November come earlier and earlier every year.

Fred McCarthy:
One of the saddest and most beautiful ballads ever wrote.

Freddie P:
Does anyone here play League of Legends

Camila N:
Saw Gordon Lightfoot live one night, live in Reno in 2012. He still
had it. What a master.

Bro4Ever:
If you're such a fan then name any other song he wrote.

Camila N:
Get fucked you little asshole.

Squall W:
Lol never heard that one, sounds like a classic

Igal Mszatski:
This sounds like a bad way to die. Would not want that.

Serena D:
What would be a good way to die? On the one hand, drowning is supposed
to be a
relatively kind death. The brain releases a lot of chemicals to let
you slip away
peacefully. On the other hand, they probably knew it was coming as the
boat slowly
sank. That dread and panic was probably more excruciating than the
drowning itself.

Quinn Faber: (singing)
"The wind in the wires made a tattle-tale sound
And a wave broke over the railing
And every man knew, as the captain did too
T'was the witch of November come stealin'
The dawn came late and the breakfast had to wait
When the gales of November came slashin'
When afternoon came it was freezin' rain
In the face of a hurricane west wind"

Hot Wings:
eez, that's a dark song. Good though.

Paula J:
My buddies and I used to get drunk around Christmas time and put this on. We'd sing along and then try and write our own verses. This is the only one I remember:
And with everyone dead their loved ones go to bed
In a world that's a little bit colder
And they know in the morning, with cold daylight dawning
Their loved ones will grow no days older.
I forget the rest.
It's not as good as Gordon Lightfoot's verses, but hey, what could be?
Not a songwriter,
just a fan.

Mabel McElveen:
I covered this song. It's on my channel. What a fun, beautiful song!

Theo Kennedy:
I've listened to every cover of this song I could find on here, but none of them come close to the original. The detached authorial tone still can't hold back an awed, reverent current of emotion. Like looking at a beautiful painting of the worst suffering, you can't help but shut up and experience it.

Tex:
They should hang this song in a museum.

Joni C:
Fun fact: Lake Superior can reach temperatures so low that a corpse won't float to the top. Lake Superior really literally won't give up her dead.

Quinn Martin:
"Lake Huron rolls, Superior sings
In the rooms of her ice-water mansion
Old Michigan steams like a young man's dreams
The islands and bays are for sportsmen
And farther below Lake Ontario
Takes in what Lake Erie can send her
And the iron boats go as the mariners all know
With the gales of November remembered"

Sandra Thornsonn:
My sister passed away from esophageal cancer a few days ago. When we were kids, we

found this record at a yard sale and our mom had bought it because she liked Gordon Lightfoot. Anyway my sister and I liked the song because it felt, I don't know, definitely not innocent, but simple? In a good way. Anyway, she passed away. She was my older sister. I knew her for my entire life. These past few days are the first days I've ever experienced in a world where she isn't. And that's awful. This wasn't my favorite song as a kid, and it wasn't hers either. So I don't know why it popped up in my head a few days ago, but it did. And here I am, it's four a.m., and I'm just sitting at my dinner table crying. I have work in the morning. But I can't stop listening.

And what's weirder: I'm writing all of this for a bunch of strangers to read. Gordon Lightfoot isn't going to read this. I doubt anyone in my family will read this. Who are you people? Half of you don't even have your real names listed, I didn't know you were allowed to do that any more. So I'm just venting to all of you. Maybe stop reading? We don't actually know each other. But if you've read this far, thanks for reading. It's a lot cheaper than therapy. I'll miss you, Cassie. I don't know what I'm hoping to get from typing out everything that comes to my mind. But I've been grieving silently and all to myself so far and that hasn't worked either.

SFX: Stormy waves crashing over guitar music. Music fades, waves continue then fade

Andrew

Thank you for listening to The YouTube Comments Section of the Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald, here on The Half Hour Audio Hour. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with Ryan Stevens after the recording of this show.

Andrew

Okay, so ah Ryan I want to thank you first off for ah doing this interview but also for allowing us to be part of your show the Youtube comments section of the wreck of the fit Edmund Fitzgerald. Which is almost as long as the song itself.

Ryan

Thank you I'm thank you all for including it I'm happy to hear it and see it find such a great home.

Andrew

Now tell me when did you start writing.

Ryan

I started writing ah just in general like in high school I knew I wanted to be a writer of some sort for a while I was pretty sure I wanted to be like the the next great American novelist as so many people believe um. And then in college I got more involved with theater and got more involved with like the department's theater program at University Of South Carolina and also with like student theater independent theater and in that I started writing more plays, writing more for the stage and I realized that that was a lot more enjoyable and exciting for me. So I've been writing for the stage since I want to say 2013, 2014 somewhere in there.

Andrew

Excellent, cool. So I have to ask what inspired the Youtube comment section of the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald

Ryan

Well, you know there's are are a lot of like 10 minute play opportunities out and about in the theater world and I think that a 10 minute play is such an interesting like structural thing. I always wonder like what is it about this particular story that like can only be done in 10 minutes why not make it like longer like why not you know if it's so brief than what? what are we even exploring? so whenever I do a 10 minute play I try to consider like what is time doing with it and I thought that like just spending a brief little blip of time just like dunking headfirst into something as like nebulous and. Overwhelming as you know the the comment section on a Youtube video would you know for a song that's not the shortest in the world. But it's certainly shorter than a full length play. You know a short little dip in time you know that experience of being on Youtube pulling something up and then like well why listen to this I might as well see what the people are saying trying to recreate that Experience on stage was sort of the idea.

Andrew

Um, so I have to ask what led you to choose that song.

Ryan

Yeah I think the main thing was that there was kind. There is a narrative in the song. So ah, you can't say that the show doesn't really have a plot ah because at least if nothing else you have the plot of the song to it. and I think that the wreck of the Edmund

Fitzgerald being the sort of like this folk adjacent song Attracts a certain kind of like narrativizing from the people that listen to it. The the experience of listening to that song is to like imagine the whole story playing out and sort of find some way to like put yourself in the shoes either as like empathizing with the people who work there or just like. I don't know connecting emotionally with the whole thing. So It's ah it's a song that I think pulls people in in one way or another so it felt like that would be a good leg up for the script to have going for it.

Andrew

Ah, excellent, Excellent. So so comment sections since we're on this subject the comment sections get a lot of ah Criticism. Ah. And a lot of love which is kind of surprising to me. But what are your thoughts on the usefulness or lack thereof of comment sections.

Ryan

Right? I mean I definitely don't think you should go to them for like life advice or ah constructive criticism I don't think that they should be. You know the oracle or um, you know they're not the dear Abby of the world. But I think the thing that's interesting about comment sections And it's the reason they are both like maligned and also so interesting is that anyone with an internet connection can get in there. is that there is truly no barrier to entry Beyond being able to log on and having the will ah or inspiration or gumption or I don't know like bile necessary to motivate you to start typing those keys. And because of that it's so you know open to any and all perspectives on humanity. anything that has a comment section and has you know more than a handful of comments. You're going to get such a wild ah cross section of humanity and people interacting with it.

And you're going to get people who interact in bad faith, you're going to get people who are looking for arguments and you're going to get people who are treating it like confession. I really think you know there's any song on Youtube just about if you dig probably not even for that long. You're going to find someone sharing like a heartfelt memory from a long time ago

Ah, and even for like you know clips from movies people want to open up about their connections with something. I think they're like anonymity on the internet for all of it's like complexity and being sort of a double edged ah Blade or you know more than two edges. There's edges all over the place for that thing. But I think that like The anonymity gives people the freedom to like admit things they may not be able to like say face to face in person.

Um, and again that can be negative when people are like trolling and inciting like with violent language that they would never say to your face, or it can be more positive and like cleansing and the notion of like well I need to get this off my chest. I know the people in Youtube are. At worst they might ignore me or you know and I can

handle that. So I think there's something really like kind of beautiful in the way that people can use a comment section to just really work through something and then just go be on their merry way and the next comment is like a spam ad for Spanx or something and that's just the nature of the internet.

Andrew

Ah, ah, ah yeah, that though I mean that's that's definitely it. Ah and it is interesting How and and I can I can say this in in this because anybody Who would be listening to this interview has already heard the episode. I think it's very interesting that that's exactly how you end this script is that you end it with this very heartfelt confession by a character to these strangers on the internet that was brought on by seeing and hearing this song I think it's It's very interesting though for for all the silliness and and and everything that is n in this script that that's how you--That's the the the factor of the comments section that we end on

Ryan

Yeah I mean it felt like that would be the way to end it and to like keep going after that and to like cheapen it with like a joke comment next felt like it would be I don't know disingenuous so I wanted to end it on something like sincere and like positive on the nature of like what it means to be able to say anything anytime you want.

Andrew

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

Ryan

I have I'm under commission for theater above the law in Chicago to do an adaptation of the great Gatsby that should be going up sometime in 2024 for their next season. Um, that's very tentative. We don't have exact dates for that. And that is that's the main thing I have on the horizon right now. Um, and that in this this episode this recording I'm very excited for.

Andrew

Cool, excellent, Wonderful Um, and this is of course the most important question of the entire interview. Um, you know, given that you've chosen. Ah a song that is is very well known by a certain group of people but not necessarily You know like widely known, especially probably not at this point what is a song that you love that most people may not know

Ryan

Right? Great I you know I really deliberated on this one? Um, but I think given the the Youtube adjacent nature of you know this whole project I want to talk about the song. It's called ah plastic love by Maria takayuchi. It is a city pop song which is like city pop is like

a japanese ah strand of pop from the 80 s um which it's I mean it's very like glitzy and like disco adjacent with like like a string section and I also don't speak fluent japanese but I you know the chorus isn't english and that's good enough. The reason I bring it up is because for a while there was some like. Hitch in Youtube's algorithm and so for a lot of people. It would come up as a recommended like next video no matter what else you were watching. like you could be watching political commentary. You could be watching like ah like a lecture on like Keats or you could be watching like how to repair a lawnmower and you're going to get a recommended video for Plastic love by Maria takayuchi. And I think that like you know I was exposed to it because I just kept seeing the dang thing in the corner I was like who is this lady why is she keep why does she keep being recommended to me I listen to it I was like it's pretty good song so it's it's a darn song kind of music I wasn't really familiar with before. um and I think that that bug no longer exists. And I want to make sure that Maria still gets her attention even though she's no longer being accidentally boosted.

Andrew

Ah, that's that's awesome. I think it's just you know what I hope that I hope she has ended up gaining you know wide international fame because of Youtube's messed up algorithm.

Ryan

I Hope so you know there should be more happy accidents on the internet. There should be more like positive whoopsies.

Andrew

es yes, and it would be very nice if some if ah, some of the problems with the internet platforms would result in good things like that. Um I now.

Ryan

Right.

Andrew

Now I have to go check out this song? Um, Ryan I really once again, want to thank you for ah letting us be part of your show the Youtube comment section of the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald it's been absolutely just ah, a blast and. We really do appreciate it on behalf of everybody here at EFCT. Thanks so Very much.

Ryan

Oh thank you. It's been my honor and pleasure.

Andrew

We hope you enjoyed The YouTube Comments Section of the Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald. Next month, we will be presenting The Meeting, by Rachel Feeny-Williams, And don't forget to head over to eclectic-

theatre.com to find out about the return of Chicago 24, our overnight theatre festival, taking place December 11th, as well as all our other shows and projects.

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