

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 one-time or recurring donation and become our partner in highlighting the voices and stories of women, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ artists.

This month's production is "Eight One Eight Two", written by Rishi Chowdhary, directed by Joel Willison and starring Ronnie Lyall, Rachael Proulx, and Ravi Kalani. Before we start, we'd like to briefly introduce you to Rishi Chowdhary. After the production, stay tuned for an interview with Rishi for more insight into the play and this process.

Rishi Chowdhary was born in Mombasa, Kenya to Indian parents and moved to Miami, Florida at a young age. Later, while in New York, he wrote his first short play, Color Me Desi, which was produced by Desipina & Company. Recent works include Power 1996, Gimme The Light and Mas-Scott. Rishi enjoys weaving nostalgia, comedy and personal experiences into his plays. He thanks Eclectic Full Contact Theatre for giving voice to Eight One Eight Two..

And now, Eight One Eight Two

SFX: Bollywood music on the radio, KAJAL is pacing back and forth. Sirens outside the window SANTOSH ENTERS KAJAL turns off radio.

KAJAL

Thank God you're home, Santosh! Have you heard the news?

SANTOSH

Yes! Everyone was talking about it at Kadiri's shop. I

quickly paid for my paan and hurried home.

KAJAL

This all seems to be very serious!

SANTOSH

How did you find out?

KAJAL

I was outside checking on my garden; I'll have to update you later about that...anyway, Manju came out of her apartment and told me there is chaos in Nairobi. She didn't have many details though.

SANTOSH

Have you tried calling your sister and other family there?

KAJAL

I did but I keep getting the busy signal. Everyone is probably trying to call each other. I hope they are safe!

SANTOSH

Let's check if there's more about it on the radio.

SFX: Click of the radio turning on, static

KAJAL

I hope we can get the signal here in Mombasa.

RADIO:

This is the Voice of Kenya, Nairobi. You are hereby informed that everybody is requested to stay at home. There should be no movement in town. The government has now been taken over by the military until further notice. There should be no movement of persons or vehicles from one place to another.

2.

The police should now assume their role of civilian until further notice]

SFX: SANTOSH turns off radio.

KAJAL

What does it mean?

SANTOSH

The military has taken the government. This is a “coup d’etat!”

KAJAL

Sounds like the name of a villain in a Bollywood movie.

SANTOSH

It’s French!

KAJAL

Why do the French want to bother us here in Kenya? They should go coup d’etat somewhere else.

SANTOSH

They aren’t French. From what I heard at the shop, members of the Kenyan Air Force have taken the Air Base and it sounds like they now have the radio station and are taking Nairobi.

KAJAL

Do you think they will make their way here to Mombasa?

SANTOSH

I don’t know. We’re a few hundred miles from there. Depends on how much success they have or if they have supporters here. Either way, there’s been too much uncertainty in the country recently. Where are the kids, Kajal?

KAJAL

They are playing in their room. They can’t hear us. They

were asking if we'll go to Lighthouse later to have coconut and mahogo. Sunday tradition, you know. I told them we'll see.

SANTOSH

Okay good. Kajal, I've had something on my mind, and with what's been happening today, I realized on my drive home that now is the time to discuss an important matter with you...

SFX: SANTOSH'S FATHER ENTERS with a cane.

SANTOSH'S FATHER

What's all this raula! I was in my happy place on my bed reading about the one year anniversary of Prince Charles and Lady Diana and their fairy-tale wedding with their twenty-seven wedding cakes and keep getting interrupted.

SANTOSH

Papa-ji, there's some news we need to tell you about\

SANTOSH'S FATHER

That we are finally going to see Disco Dancer at the drive-in cinema today. I read in Filmfare that Rajesh Khanna makes a special appearance! It's sure to be the best film this year.

KAJAL

I thought this years biggest Bollywood hit was going to be Namak Halaal! Amitabh and Shashi Kapoor. A comedy masterpiece!

SANTOSH

Listen you two, enough with the fantasy worlds. I need us all to focus. The country is under high alert. There's a coup d'etat!

KAJAL

It's French! Like Frere Jacques!

SANTOSH'S FATHER

What! Where?

SANTOSH

Here! Well, not here in Mombasa but here in Kenya. In Nairobi. Members of the Kenyan Air Force have staged it.

KAJAL

I wish they would just fly their coup'd-etat away like Alouette, the French bird!

SANTOSH'S FATHER

Air Force? Probably just some rogue officers that lost their way. I am sure our great nation will deflate them soon.

SFX: Telephone Rings, KAJAL Walks to phone

KAJAL

Yay Bhagwan! The telephone is working again! How did people ever survive without this thing connected to their wall.

SFX: KAJAL answers the phone.

KAJAL

It's Pushpa Bhen-ji!

SANTOSH

Is your sister OK?

KAJAL

She says they are OK but there is looting in Westlands...and...and it's spreading...Indian businesses and homes are being targeted as well.

SANTOSH
The Air Force?

KAJAL
University students are getting involved also. Oh my! There are reports of some killings as well!

SANTOSH
Killings! How horrific! This is very concerning! Tell them to lock up and stay safe!

SANTOSH'S FATHER
That is terrible! How can this be happening here!

SANTOSH
Papa-ji, I'm not sure what the outcome of this will be but we need to start thinking about the future. Our future. The children's future.

SANTOSH'S FATHER
Our future is here in Kenya! We are survivors...have been ever since the Indians came here in the 1890's with the British to build that railroad to Uganda. The conditions they dealt with would put this coup'd'etat to shame!

SANTOSH
Yes, but since Kenya's Independence, things have changed. Many Indians have left...and you saw what happened ten years ago with Idi Amin leading a coup'd'etat in Uganda and expelling Asians.

SANTOSH'S FATHER
That man was a lunatic and an evil dictator!

SANTOSH
Crimes are increasing. We are still a small minority here.

SFX: KAJAL hangs up phone and rejoins.

KAJAL

Sounds like everyone is accounted for and they are staying safe. She will call back in a little while to give another update. I hope those goonda's don't make their way here.

SANTOSH

With everything that's been happening lately, I was just telling Papaji that we need to begin to look at opportunities for our future elsewhere.

SANTOSH'S FATHER

Elsewhere? Where else can we go?

SANTOSH

We can go to America!

KAJAL

America? Do they even know what makhi-di-roti and chole bhature is there?

SANTOSH'S FATHER

What are you going to do there? Eat at Ronald McDonald's with their Ronald Reagan and Ronald Isley of the Isley Brothers? You've lost your mind Santosh!

SANTOSH

Vishal is there!

KAJAL

Your brother can't support all of us.

SANTOSH

Vishal will try. He can get us started. All the support we provided him over the years to go to medical school...he is doing well there!

SFX: SANTOSH'S FATHER sits

SANTOSH'S FATHER

I'm happy for my son but I belong here in Kenya. I came from Punjab in 1928 and this has been my home for over fifty years.

KAJAL

Papa-ji is right. Our families are here. Our lives are here.

SANTOSH'S FATHER

My bed is here!

KAJAL

My garden is here!

SANTOSH'S FATHER

My bed is here!

KAJAL

My garden bed is here! Our friends are here. And don't forget about the Rotary Club!

SANTOSH

I realize that but we can't only consider our comforts of the past and present.

KAJAL

What about the Day Care that I run and your managerial job? What will we do there? How will we make money?

SANTOSH

We have some money saved. We're hard working people. We'll find jobs, Kajal. We'll do whatever we have to.

KAJAL

I don't know. This sounds like such a big change. Where would we even begin? What about all our things?

SANTOSH

It's not something that will happen overnight. We'll need to plan everything and Vishal will need to help coordinate the sponsorship paperwork. This will take time but it will be an investment.

KAJAL

And the kids? They're growing. Such a change might be very confusing for them.

SANTOSH

The kids will do well and enjoy there. I've read about their good schools and universities. Also, they have built a huge amusement park called Disney World in Florida.

KAJAL

Now who's dreaming of the fantasy worlds?

SANTOSH

They've got rides and characters dressed as mice, dogs, chipmunks and ducks. It's fun for children.

KAJAL

ChipMUNKs! Haven't you forgotten we are in Kenya?

SFX: KAJAL walks to window and throws it open

KAJAL

The Mara is right out there with lions, giraffes, cheetahs and MONKEYs! You can go on Safari whenever you want.

SANTOSH'S FATHER

Listen to Kajal, Santosh. Don't be a Dumbo, we've got plenty

of elephants here!

SANTOSH

Animals aside, the future for the kids would be better there. We are still young and can do this if we start planning now. It's a sacrifice worth making.

SANTOSH'S FATHER

I'm not young anymore. I'm not strong like I used to be.

SANTOSH

You provide this family with strength and inspiration in other ways. You made the decision to move from India to Kenya years ago when it was even tougher to do it back then.

SANTOSH'S FATHER

Yes, I did what was necessary then...but America is a very different place from here.

KAJAL

Being different isn't necessarily a bad thing but it does help to have familiar things around. Do they have beaches and palm trees like we do here?

SANTOSH

Miami has one of the best beaches in the world! And lots of palm trees. We can still do the Sunday tradition of getting the children coconut. And maybe have new traditions, like pizza night!

KAJAL

Would our house be able to have a garden?

SANTOSH

A garden and a yard! The climate is great there. You can have flowers and grow vegetables and sitaphal and ...you know what else..

KAJAL
What?

SANTOSH
MANGO Trees! We can grow our own there. Think of the varieties...Carrie...Keitt...Tommy Atkin...Valencia Pride!

KAJAL
Mango's all the time and homemade Mango Lassi and Mango Achaar!

SANTOSH
Absolutely! The 1980's in Miami, Florida. It will be exciting!

KAJAL
Mombasa to Miami.

SFX: SANTOSH'S FATHER stands from chair and pounds cane on floor

SANTOSH'S FATHER
Snap out of it Kajal! Santosh is hypnotizing you with his Mango sorcery.

SANTOSH
I'm not hypnotizing anyone. Things are pretty crazy out there! I'm thinking realistically. I know it's been tough since Mummy-ji passed,
This could be an opportunity for you to be with your sons again.

SFX: SANTOSH'S FATHER sits again

SANTOSH'S FATHER
She is dearly missed. We shared many great memories watching you boys grow up here in Mombasa.

It would be nice for us to be together again. Kajal, what do you think?

KAJAL

I agree about doing what's best for our family. I also need to consider my sister and other family here. This type of change is scary to think about but so is what's happening out there. Let's ask Vishal to get the sponsorship paperwork started so we have that option and then discuss this further.

SANTOSH

That's fair, Kajal. Let me make the call and then we can check on what's happening in Nairobi.

SFX: SANTOSH walks over to the phone and dials one number.

SANTOSH

Jambo, Operator. I need to reach my brother in America. In Miami, Florida. The number is 000-1-305-652-2818

SANTOSH

They are working on the connection.
What was it that you wanted to tell me about your garden?

KAJAL

The garden? Oh yes! I was happy to see that the daffodils are coming up. They still have a little time but should be there soon.

SANTOSH'S FATHER

Daffodils are wonderful. They have good meaning. Rebirth.

SANTOSH

(returning to call)

Thank you. Yes, I'm ready to send a transmission across for Him. Today's date, August 1, 1982...

SFX: Bollywood music up, then fade....

Andrew

Thank you for listening to Eight One Eight Two, here on The Half Hour Audio Hour. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with Rishi Chowdhary after the recording of this show.

[Andrew]

So, first thing, Rishi, is I just want to say thank you so much for letting the Eclectic Full Contact Theater be part of your show 8182. We really do appreciate it.

[Rishi]

Absolutely. I appreciate you guys including it. And yeah, I think I was very happy to be part of it and I thought the director and the cast did a phenomenal job.

[Andrew]

Excellent. So how long have you been writing?

[Rishi]

I have been writing since 2005. I'd say well, before that I wrote a couple of sketches when I was in university. I was part of like the Indian Students Association at Florida International University and we would do some cultural shows and I would write some sketches there.

But it was just more, just something for fun. But really the first time I wrote a play was in 2005. I was working in New York and I had met a group of South Asian theater and acting people who are very talented and I started going to their shows in 2003.

From 2003 onwards I was like going to their shows in the city and really kind of got into it and they suggested oh, you know, we have this annual event called 711 Convenience Theater. It was 711 when it plays on the set of a convenience store showcasing South Asian and Asian American immigrant stories. So I would go to their shows and they said oh, you know, one year if you have a story try to write one and you know, if it gets selected, you submit it and if it's selected, we'll include it on the show.

And so that's what I did and in 2005 they actually selected my play and it had a little run in the lower east side for a few weeks. And that was the first time I wrote a play. It was just such a great experience.

I was very excited to be part of the event. It ran in their Best of Festival in 2009 and then from there I kind of went on my way with trying out writing plays.

[Andrew]

That's awesome. That sounds amazing. So what inspired 8182?

[Rishi]

So what inspired 8182? I'd say my parents. Number one.

Not that long ago I was part of this new voices project here in Raleigh, North Carolina and that's where I live. And it was a new voices like theater development project that they were running for six months and is part of the program yet to write a 10 minute play. And it just so happened that during that time I was starting to document a lot of the history of my parents moving from Kenya to America and like what all the challenges were, what all day endured. And just kind of trying to especially now I feel like you know we're losing a lot of history and I just don't want to lose anything. So I'm trying to get as much of it as I can from my parents and start documenting things and even going back to like when our family moved from India to Kenya which is a little trickier. We don't have as much data on that but while my parents are here you know I'm trying to get as much of that data as I can.

And as I was documenting that information I was like I was part of that program and I was like oh this you know this seems like a great story to write about. This whole story you know the day that they really when I was interviewing my parents and my dad told me the story of well you know it was this day in particular the day of this coup d'etat that they really really seriously started talking about moving our family to America for kind of a better future. So really they were the inspiration and their stories inspiration and that's what led me to write this play and currently now I'm trying to develop it into a full play. I've almost written the first act now.

[Andrew]

Oh wow that's that is that's all well I'll tell you this right now when you finish it we'd love to read it.

[Rishi]

Oh excellent excellent I'll definitely pass it along and say I still got a lot of ways to go but and the interesting thing about this play too is there's a lot of family history there's just a lot of nostalgia and just research that's involved too so it does take me a bit of time but I'm slowly working through it.

[Andrew]

That's awesome. I saw that the script said it was based on a true story. I didn't realize it was based on your story. That's really amazing. So now I know that

we're doing this as an audio script but I see by reading it that it was written as a stage play. Have you written for audio?

[Rishi]

I have not before just recently there was another audio theater festival where I had to reformat a play that I was trying to submit to an audio format so that was new to me but this was really I just tried to do that a couple weeks ago but this was the first time I was ever involved with an audio play and and I did enjoy it because I feel like you know there's obviously we get a little bit more time to work through it and there's you can edit it I also like the fact that you know like you guys were talking about adding like the sounds after the fact like the sirens you can you have a little more flexibility with what you can do sound wise which is which is exciting I'm looking forward to seeing how that all plays out and I also think like I do love obviously seeing theater on a stage but some of my some of my plays when I have seen them perform live inevitably I feel like a line or like maybe a few lines will get like lost in the movement or the shuffle whereas I feel like in this audio format they just like you know they're coming out all the lines

[Andrew]

right so do you think do you think that this is a medium you might actually write more for in the future

[Rishi]

yeah I think I'd be interested in it now that I've gotten a feel of how this whole process works I think getting to see like do you and Joel and the cast and everyone and how how it all comes together I it was maybe harder for me before to envision like oh how is all this gonna work in fact even when I was selected for this I was like hmm but now that I've seen the process I'm like yeah I would definitely be interested in doing that more and submitting more for that awesome

[Andrew]

So speaking of future projects, do you have any projects coming up that you'd like to promote?

[Rishi]

I do gave a short play called power 1996 which takes place in Miami in 1996 it is running as part of the chain theaters summer one act festival in New York City in August from the middle to the end of August it's actually just got three productions but they're kind of spaced out towards the end of August so that's what I've got coming up

[Andrew]

that sounds great now this brings us to the most important part of this entire interview which is of course the the show is written takes place in 1982 so the big question that we have is what's your favorite memory of the 80s

[Rishi]

so I would say really for me I feel like the late 80s was probably the most memorable for me probably I think I'd probably have been like 10 11 4 5th grade ish I guess I don't know how wrong then but it was probably it was it was just being a kid in the late 80s running around the neighborhood my friends go I remember one of my real close friends at that time lived across the street from a bunch of tennis courts and we would go there we'd collect all the balls that got hit out of the courts and we'd go back to his house and he had a swimming pool in the backyard but it was not filled it was just a kind of an abandoned swimming pool we turned it into like an American gladiator obstacle course because that had just come out in the late 80s and we would just come up with all these crazy games with all these like random tennis balls and we create these obstacles and it was just fun kind of just running around and doing all these things in the late 80s and when we weren't doing that it was we'd come back to like my house and I had just got a the original Nintendo and and playing some of those games that had just come out in the late 80s like RBI baseball tech mobile RC program those are like our go to games we would just sit there for hours and do that so I think just yeah being a kid in the late 80s um I think that was like it just there's a lot of memories for me from that time

[Andrew]

that's that's awesome and it's I weep that video footage of whatever you all were doing in that abandoned video in that abandoned swimming pool is not available but that is one of the great but that's one of the great things about the 80s is if you could have you got to do crazy stuff and there was no one around to record it

[Rishi]

exactly no one around to record it and it was just like honestly after school we would just go around to like the school's playground or the tennis courts and the backyard just kind of we'd be we'd be able to just move around freely and and everything was okay you know

[Andrew]

yeah no I I totally understand what you're saying well yeah Rija again as I said thank you so much for letting us be part of your show eight one eight two it's a wonderful show I'm really glad that we got to be part of it and that uh you you are

part of the half hour audio hour and behalf of myself and everybody here at EFCT thank you so very very much

[Rishi]

and thank you very much for the opportunity I'm looking forward to hearing the final product once it's edited and I'm sure it's gonna be great

Andrew

We hope you enjoyed Eight One Eight Two. Next month, we will be presenting My Daughter Is a Demon, by Marshall Logan Gibbs, 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