

Andrew

Hello everyone. This is Andrew Pond, Artistic director of Eclectic FULL Contact Theatre. Welcome to Season 2 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 French Beans and Inner Peace, written by Elinora Westfall, directed by myself, and starring Maiko Terazawa. Before we start, we'd like to briefly introduce you to Elinora. After the production, stay tuned for an interview with Elinora for more insight into the play and this process.

Influenced by David Bowie, Virginia Woolf and Sally Wainwright, Elinora Westfall is an Australian/British lesbian actress and writer of stage, screen, fiction, poetry and radio from the UK.

Her novel, Everland has been selected for the Penguin and Random House WriteNow 2021 Editorial Programme, and her short films have been selected by Pinewood Studios & Lift-Off Sessions, Cannes Film Festival, Raindance Film Festival, Camden Fringe Festival and Edinburgh Fringe Festival, while her theatre shows have been performed in London's West End and on Broadway, where she won the award for Best Monologue.

Elinora is also working on The Art of Almost, a lesbian comedy-drama radio series as well as writing a television drama series and the sequel to her novel, Everland. Web: www.elinoralord.com Twitter: @elinorawriter

And now, French beans and Inner peace

(Bouncy music, teapot whistling, teacup being brought down, tea being poured, teacup set down on table, ceiling fan in background)

WOMAN

I was in the co-op the other day. The big one in town I was talking to my mom on the phone seeing's we're not allowed to go shopping together any more, which was a blessed relief. At first... until I realized I'd have to have her in my ear the whole way round and I wouldn't be able to concentrate on avoiding people, shopping and not catching bloody coronavirus from someone wearing a mask on their chin.

Ah, she's already lost the plot with this lockdown business and it was my fault. Really. The shopping thing. I made the mistake of ringing her up to ask what sort of beans she wanted because they'd run out of french beans and she'd underlined french twice on the list in pen. So she was obviously making a point. So I wanted to ask if any other bean

would suffice. An error on my part that cost me the good part of an afternoon. Before I'd even had the chance to mention the bean situation, she was already off again saying things like,

"oh it's like it was during the war. They'll be rationing everything next. Ration books! One square of lavatory paper! Each!"

I didn't point out that she hadn't actually lived through any world wars but I was obviously thinking it for a while because she said are you listening? And I said yes mom I'm just-- and I wanted to say stressed, depressed probably, but she'd only tell me not to be so bloody silly or she'd say something useful like start thinking positive or become a Buddhist and I couldn't cope with that as well as the bean situation. So I took my chance on mentioning it again.

"Do you want green beans or runner beans?" I asked. I thought if I asked directly this time instead of explaining the situation I might get a straight answer.

"French beans," she says because she hasn't been listening, so I say

"They haven't got any french beans mom; they've got green beans and runner beans."

And she says, "Oh don't bother." Like it's my fault and then moves on to the next item on her list, leaving me dithering by the tomatoes.

"What about sweetcorn?" she asks. "Have they got any sweetcorn? Oh only not the fresh stuff--the tinned. The fresh stuff gets stuck in my teeth."

So I say "Let me have a look," and she says,

"Only if it's no bother," and I make the mistake of saying,

"It's fine mom. I wanted to have a look for some tinned bits for Gillian anyway, so--" But she cuts me off because I've mentioned Gillian. UGH.

And my mom's already sniffing around that can of worms because Gillian's married to some abusive wanker and I'm clearly barking up the wrong tree with that one and she says,

"Gillian? Ugh. Why can't Gillian do her own shopping?" and I say,

"She can. I just thought I'd pick up a few things while I'm here as a surprise. Can't imagine she's got much spare cash, so I thought I'd help out." My mom does one of those "mmm's" that means she knows exactly what's going on and she doesn't approve but thankfully she takes it upon herself to change the subject and asks if they've got

any pork pies. The freshly made ones from the deli. The ones that my dad likes with a bit of picalilli. So I tell her the deli's not open and she says

"What do you mean it's not open?"

I tell her "I mean it's not open. There's a sign." I know there is because I've just passed it twice waiting for her to stop telling me about the war but she doesn't believe me and asks

"What does it say? This sign?"

So I walk back over to the sign and I say "It says it's not open," and she says "Well what good is that?" and I want to say I don't bloody know but I decided to be tactful.

"I think they're just focusing on essentials."

But she's having none of that. "Well, this is essential! To your dad," She says. Then there's one of those pauses again only this one goes on so long I thought she'd hung up but then she asks "Would you mind getting a jar of picalilli anyway? If they have one?" She asks as if she thinks I'm just standing in front of the pork pies but I can't actually be bothered to buy them so I asked. She wants to text me a list so I can shop with both arms. But that's a no because according to her. It's easier like this otherwise she'll have no idea what they have and I could turn up with god knows what? and then she's going on about the beans again and just when I thought I was nearly done. Are you sure. Haven't got any french beans have you asked and I say no I haven't asked and I have no intention of asking though I didn't say that last bit out loud. She says well ask you never know so I say I will but I'll have to hang up. Which she agrees to but make sure I'll ring her when I'm in the car. So I can let her know how I get on which I thought was a bit much considering I'm 35 and she only lives around the corner by the time I've dialed and she's answered all'll be on her doorstep but I agreed just to get her off the phone.

But I wasn't going to ask anyone so I bought a bag of grain beans and pinched one of those paper bags. So I can pour them in the car and say I found some loose I haven't heard yet whether that worked or not.

(Sipping tea as bouncy music fades in)

Andrew

Thank you for listening to French beans and Inner Peace , here on The Half Hour

Audio Hour. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with Elinora Westfall

after the recording of this show.

Andrew

So Elinora thank you so much for being here and also thank you so much for letting us be part of "French Beans and Inner Peace."

Elinora Westfall

Thank you so much for picking it up and inviting me.

Andrew

Oh it was my pleasure believe me. so how long have you been writing?

Elinora Westfall

Ah I've been writing I don't think I've ever not written. Since I was old enough to hold a pen I was like writing things. No one could read what it said but in my head it was amazing. And I've just. And I've always written I remember running out of paper when I was little and crawling under my bed and peeling a bit of wallpaper off and making tiny books. Scrawling on the wallpaper over the over the Pink Flowers. So yeah, I've always written.

Andrew

That's that's really that's really great. So so what inspired "French Beans and Inner Peace"?

Elinora Westfall

Um, it well I'm slightly hesitant to say that the mother in it was sort of vaguely inspired by my own mother and the sort of things she would say to me, but um, overall I think it was just... Like despite how terrifying the world was and everything happening because I wrote it during lockdown I just have one of those moments where I thought life is just bonkers. It's just gone completely... I don't know, mental and ah. Yeah, despite the awful things were happening, there were still those moments where everyone was looking out for each other and everyone was doing things for each other. Particularly...like I live in a really small town and everyone was checking up on the old people and we were having like social distance dancing in the street and stuff and I thought I want to write a monologue that's actually quite funny for a change while the world was falling apart. Obviously I thought I'll write a comedy.

Andrew

Um, obviously um, it's it's It's very it. It is very interesting. Um I've I noticed it during lockdown and I've noticed it even more so having done this project now, that there seemed to be this very short turnaround time where it's like oh this is awful. But then oh this is awful. But we're also going to, I Don't want to say mock it, but create things that were looking at the comic side of it and it seemed to be a very short turnaround in that, and I'm always interested in um, finding out, especially from people who do the creative side of

it, Why you think maybe that was... maybe that was?

Elinora Westfall

Yeah I don't know I think that might have been at some sort of collective coping mechanism. Maybe we all just thought sort of oh God Everything's falling Apart. We need to I don't know panic and then sort of calm down a bit and go oh. Actually I can sort of see the funny side of these strange dark moments. But yeah I Really do think it was a coping mechanism of some sort something. You know all of our brains just clicked and went no we needed something we need some levity in this otherwise it's all going to go downhill very fast.

04:19.12

Andrew

I I'm I 100% in agreement with that. Um, please please let's try to find the funny side of this.

Elinora Westfall

Yeah There must be something.

Andrew

Somewhere.. yes.

Elinora Westfall

Yeah.

Andrew

Is this the first audio play that you've written?

Elinora Westfall

Ah, no, it's the first. It's the first comedy I've ever written in any sort of thing ever. But I've written a few audio plays, audio Dramas and I've written audio books and things like that before. Um, but yeah it was. It was a surprise to suddenly find a comedy on my laptop screen.

Andrew

Um, so so since this is not the first audio play that you've ah written what is it about writing for audio that you enjoy?

Elinora Westfall

Um, it's definitely the dialogue because I'm I'm so I love Dialogue that I just I So I've spent my pretty much my whole life like writing down it just streams and streams of dialogue. um like just from my own head or. But I don't know like pretending I'm doing something else and actually I'm writing down what other people are saying um and in secret. Um, and I think that's what it is. It's just it's so the tone and just the words and it that's all it is.

And it's just...that makes me quite excited that I can just write this

huge like long lengthy... I don't know it makes me want. It's sort of like a process that makes me so excited I sort of want to bite it. I don't know if it be sound bit odd bit. I Like like it really like oh this is just really exciting. Okay I don't have to think about all the um I don't know, like I don't have to stop and think oh they need to walk over here and do this or pick this up or this needs to be lit in a certain way.

All all that's taken away and I can just focus on how it sounds and what the words are and I think that's quite nice.

Andrew

That's that's wonderful and so it it I'm I'm dialogue is my favorite thing to write as well. So I understand I I'm completely with you with the with the I you you want to bite it thing I I.

Elinora Westfall

Um, yeah, I'm so glad.

Andrew

I have I've never described it that way before but I I know that I know the the the feeling that you're talking about where you like write something and you're like oh yes, um yeah, ah, that's that's usually when I run and inflicted upon somebody else, you got to listen to this.

Elinora Westfall

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I can so relate, yes.

Andrew

Um. So yes, So so so that's what you enjoy, But what? what are some of the challenges though that you find about writing for audio as opposed to other types of ah writing.

Elinora Westfall

Um I think. It's probably sort of the the same thing actually because it's all dialogue you have to be so specific and the amount of times I go over it and go over and you know and needs to be another full stop or take bits out or I think it's the it's how specific it is and it's also... There's like a switch. I feel like there's a switch in my brain where I'm writing I don't know something for Stage or or screen and I'm writing that and then I have to sort of do this whole mental flip or switch and think okay now I have to write in this completely different way that's sort of bare bones in a sense and I think that's particularly challenging. There's nothing else apart from the dialogue and that's that it's wonderful, but it's sometimes a bit like oh God I Really need to get this right.

Andrew

No I know that makes perfect sense.

Elinora Westfall
Oh good

Andrew
Yeah now now we we we talked a little bit about how the play is set during the lockdown and it it. It is a comedy during during the lockdown. Um, though it's not specifically about about the lockdown. It's just that's the setting that we find ourselves in. As things are opening back up. Do you think that we're going to see sort of like the the pandemic genre sort of like all of a sudden jump out and everyone's going to be trying to to to write plays about what it was like during the or is that or is this something where we're sort of all kind of like you know what? let's just not talk about it. Ah.

Elinora Westfall
Um I think it might be the latter.

Andrew
Yeah, yeah, you you don't You don't think this there's ah ah, a big market for people to go out to live theater and see a bunch of people trapped in a trapped in an apartment.

Elinora Westfall
Um. Yeah they'll be like am I at home? or am I did I leave the house?

Andrew
Yeah, my my hope my hope is that you're right? um.

Elinora Westfall
Yes, I think I sort of... I think people will be ah changed within themselves and how they write and how they see the world and other people and I think there'll be a lot of ah, people writing about their experiences but not necessarily lockdown or Covid related and I think they'll be, whether they realize it or not the way they ah think and view the world and people and how they create and what they create might be Different to what it would be what what it would have been before Covid ever happened. So I think there's I think that will definitely happen. But I think I I don't know I can't see lots of people flocking to go and see ah what they can see by looking out the window.

Andrew
Um, yeah.

Elinora Westfall
It may be, I don't know. re-traumatizing.

Andrew
So now do you have any upcoming projects that you'd like to promote?

Elinora Westfall

I do um I'm I'm miss old person that's always doing lots of things but the main thing I'm doing at the moment is I'm I'm actually writing a television drama. Ah a it's ah it's called the Spinning House and it's um, it's. Ah, women's set in a category ah high category women's prison. So obviously America had orange is the new black and went ah Australia had Wentworth and England had Bad Girls a very long time ago and I'm sort of bringing that back can I try and doing that.

Andrew

That's a that's exciting.

Elinora Westfall

1 yeah, very different from writing comedy things about beans?

Andrew

Yes, I would think so.

Elinora Westfall

But but there will be some comedy aspects. And that's more me writing about prisons. Well not writing about prisons right about drama.

12:33.82

Andrew

And of course um this now brings us to the most important question of the whole interview which is what is the 1 thing that if they don't have it at the grocer you won't substitute something for.

Elinora Westfall

See I was quite excited about this question because I feel very strongly about it and and it's potatoes. But it's a very specific type of potato.

Andrew

Okay, what what type of potato Must they have.

Elinora Westfall

Well I don't know if you have it in America because I did try and hunt them down in America once and they're called Maris piper potatoes. Do you have those?

Andrew

No no, what are they.

Elinora Westfall

It's just they are... I'm gonna sound like a chef or something. They are an all rounder. They're a floury potato but they're particularly nice and ah they're very, they're the best ones to use for making roast potatoes and um I know an alarming amount about potatoes. So.

Ah, yeah, that... see lockdown makes you insane.

Andrew

Um, I yeah you know you know that that is so much more interesting than someone talking about their sourdough starter.

Elinora Westfall

Um, yeah, that's hilarious yeah.

Andrew

The the sheer number of people that I knew who were like I'm going to learn how to make sourdough I'm like okay I I completely side.

Elinora Westfall

That's hilarious yeah.

Andrew

Yeah I completely sidestep that whole thing I was like was like no I'm going to learn how to make audio drama. Thank you.

Elinora Westfall

yeah yeah

Andrew

Um, but it but see you you chose potatoes.

Elinora Westfall

Yeah, I don't know what that says about me but yeah.

Andrew

So So it's that So It's that kind of if they don't have that Potato, You're not getting to some other kind of potato.

Elinora Westfall

No yeah, yes that it's that bad I've actually got quite um, like angry. Not not outwardly, but inwardly like furious like well you don't have Maris pipers? I'm not coming here again.

Andrew

Um, ah that that that

Elinora Westfall

On my blacklist.

Andrew

I just now picture I Just now picture you actually having like up on your refrigerator, a list of of of stores with with certain ones crossed off in black marker just like never again, no!

Elinora Westfall

Um, yeah, yeah, yeah, violently crossed off.

Andrew
with with deep feeling. It's like.

Elinora Westfall
Yeah, yeah, you have to have deep feeling when it's potato related.

Andrew
I I you know I'm I'm of Irish Background I feel what you're saying um, it's excellent.

Elinora Westfall
Did you know? I've got a question for you can I ask you a question. It's it's Irish related Did do you know you know you know the Irish Potato famine. Do you know? do you know why that happened.

Andrew
I I have my I have my own I have my own funny reason for it. But what? what? why don't you tell me.

Elinora Westfall
2 it's it's because they only grew one type of potato which was the lumper potato and that potato got a disease and then it spread to all the other potatoes because they weren't growing any different varieties so they all but wiped down.

Andrew
Apparently we should have been growing the one that you liked

Elinora Westfall
Yes, exactly if they'd any listened.

Andrew
See I I have a much more I have a much more inappropriate answer which is that we discovered you could make vodka out of them and so and so we just... So the Irish just juiced all the potatoes and ran out.

Elinora Westfall
I think that's a Much better answer.

Andrew
You know you're right I don't know what this interview would have ended up being if it had been done at like 3 in the morning year time. Um, it's it's it's it's already gone pretty well off the rails at the end of its ah...I Love it. I Love it. I Love it? Well Elinora, thank you Very very much for coming and doing this and for allowing us to be part of your of of this of this piece. Ah I I We really do appreciate

it. It's been an absolute blast I Love the script and ah thank you so much for for doing this.

18:35.66

Elinora Westfall

Oh, well thank you so much for everything-- putting it on, inviting me. Thank you.

Andrew

We hope you enjoyed French beans and Inner peace. Next month, we will be presenting You Can Try It, written by George Freek

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.