

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 My European Love, written by Irina Serebriakova, directed by Natividad Salgado, and starring Dana Pepowski

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

Iryna Serebriakova is a Ukrainian scriptwriter and playwright. Her dramedy "Tinderland" won the "Transmission.UA: drama on the move" contest co-organized by British Council (2021) and was selected to represent the new Ukrainian drama in the UK. After the beginning of the war, she wrote several plays exploring its consequences. "In Instagram We'll Live Forever" is a story of five Ukrainians. They are strangers to each other. Each one because of their own circumstances has to leave the country amidst the war. On the Polish border, they meet at the railway station. The play had stage readings in Estonia, Kazakhstan and France. Recently, one of the projects where she participated as an author was premiered in Romania.

And now, My European Love.

(Sound of Tchaikovsky playing, then news report about Ukraine. Both fade as sound of plane landing fades in and then fades out)

Marina.

The war brought me love. But I fell in love with a coward.

It's a very cold spring. I can't get warm. When I turn on the hottest water in the shower, it still feels cold to me.

They save on everything here. On heating. On water. On electricity. On kind words. On being nice.

I'm cold. I'm cold all the time. Not because of water but because of their greed. They are ready to kill themselves for 10 euros, and it feels so disgusting just to be around them.

It's not fair what I say: now in Ukraine, people can kill for 10 euros as well.

Christian came to the station to pick me up.

(Sound of car)

Well, his son was driving. Christian and me, we got into the back

seat.

(Car drives, sound of engine from inside the car)

Christian held my hand, and I was afraid to breathe. I was afraid to look at him. I couldn't believe that it was true and we were finally together. We were going to his house. I couldn't believe my good luck. It is strange to talk about good luck when there is a war at home. Still, I was happy. And then, he said: "Marina, the seat belt." I barely arrived and I had already done something wrong. We were in the back seat. Who on earth uses the seat belt in the back seat? I looked at Christian and saw that he was not joking. I also saw that he was wearing a seat belt. I could not believe my eyes. I fell in love with a coward. Is this a man? Is it possible for men to tremble for their lives like that, at a speed of 40 kilometers per hour?

Our men are not afraid of anything. Our men are not afraid even of the war. Our men take bombs with their bare hands. Our men are heroes. Ivan said: why are you here? Go back to your country. To your heroes.

Boy, you are right. You are 100% right. You're 200% right. But I will not go anywhere.

Marina.

On the way, I asked to stop at a supermarket. Christian didn't want to. He said that he had everything at home. He also said that I should not spend money. Ivan was waiting gloomily in the car.

(Sound of supermarket)

I went to the supermarket anyway. I didn't know what to buy. I walked among the shelves, and I was just glad that there was a supermarket. You can come there. And you can buy something – anything you want. Here are the shelves, with different kinds of bread on them. Canned food. Here is the fridge with cheeses. Here's the ice cream fridge. I will go here every day, like to a museum. I had money in Ukraine. But this spring I didn't eat every day there.

On the other hand, in Ukraine, taxi drivers were giving me cigarettes, saying "Babe, you can smoke in the car." Because we all were home. You can smoke in the car when you are home. You can drive without seat belt. In the back seat, in the front seat, or even at the wheel – without seat belts. Who cares about seat belts in our country? Who cares about seat belts if there's a war?

However, it was like that even before the war. Maybe our people are afraid of something, but surely not of a car accident or death from cigarettes. "Babe, you can smoke in the car," taxi drivers told me in

a distant peaceful life. Does “babe” sound like harassment for you?

You know what? Do you want to know the truth? I liked it. I only now realize how good it was to be among my people, who fear neither God, nor devil, nor a car accident, nor the harmful effects of smoking. For whom I am “babe”, and therefore I am still young and have my whole life ahead of me.

I felt like I had my whole life ahead of me until I met Christian. I was a young doctor, and he came to hold a seminar for us, Ukrainian doctors. He is 18 years older than me. I fell in love – irresistibly, madly, for the rest of my life.

He said he loved me too. I was not insane to suffer for years because of a man who didn’t care about me at all. No, he gave me hope. He said he loved me. He said that I am talented. That I was meant to be fucked by him. All these things men say when they have an erection.

Their water is not just cold, but sticky. You take a shower, and then you want to wash off not only dirt and soap, but also this water. It feels like water remains on the skin, like a film. It makes my skin itch. I feel bad. I will get used to it. Or I won’t get used to it.

I never unpacked the suitcase. I cannot. It’s like I’m waiting for something. The suitcase remains here, I sometimes take something from it, but to unpack it properly – no, I cannot. I can’t believe I finally have a place to live. I cannot believe there will be no need to rush and run away again. Today I had a bad dream. A rocket hit here. Who should I tell about this? Christian?

Well, I was talking about Christian and me. About his love. No, about him saying he loved me. Then it turned out that he didn’t love me. And not even his wife.

Yes, he was married. He and I, we didn’t care about that. He loved not his wife but his son. Every day he only talked about him. “Ivan this. Ivan that. Ivan is sad today. Ivan got a bad grade at school. Ivan burst into tears in class. Ivan doesn’t know if he wants to be a boy or a girl. Or a non-binary person. He doesn’t know if he wants a relationship with boys or girls. I have to be there for Ivan to support him.” Lord!

Yes, he named his son Ivan. He is a fan of Russian culture. Tchaikovsky, Dostoevsky and so on. Tchaikovsky and Dostoevsky are at least dudes I know. But Christian also mentioned writers and composers that I had never even heard of – although I grew up inside Russian culture, like all Ukrainians.

In my youth, I looked at Christian with my jaw dropped and I thought: how educated he is. Now I think that the war started because of people like Christian. Who

pretended to be educated, civilized people with a broad outlook. They take only what they want from Russia: beautiful girls. Gas. Classical music. They have the luxury of choosing what to take from Russia. They never had to face the real Russia wholly, as it is.

When the real Russia came to us, Ukrainians, we had no luxury to pick up what we want and what we don't want. We faced not the Russia-for-export, but drunk, dirty and cruel Russia. With weapons. If people like Christian didn't mess around Tchaikovsky, Russian missiles wouldn't have hit Ukraine. I know, it's not fair what I say. We are all unfair.

Anyway, Christian liked everything Russian. Language, culture. He also liked Russian names. And he named his son Ivan.

I must say that this name did not bring good luck to the boy. Ivan always had some problems. The problems were mainly European. European problems it's when people are too well-fed to be happy. They cannot just be grateful to life, to society, to parents. They don't know how to appreciate what they have.

And you know what? I have a feeling that the more he was caring for Ivan, the more problems Ivan had. Maybe I'm just jealous. Because my father didn't care for me like that. And you know what? If my brother and I said that we haven't decided which of us is a boy and which is a girl, if we said that we want to fuck people of our own sex, our father would have said that we are sick. No... He would not have said anything at all, because what is there to talk about. He would have just beaten us properly. And the problem would be solved once and for all.

But Christian took all these teenage whims seriously. He was really worried. "Ivan says I'm a piece of shit, not a father. I should pay more attention to him." Right. If they call you shit, you have to become even more careful and delicate. You have to crawl even lower than before.

In politics, Europeans do the same. When someone goes wild, they make even more concessions. So as not to upset the terrorist.

Putin is right. Or Lukashenko. Who said that? I don't remember who said it, but it's true: they don't have balls here in Europe. You know that phrase that "Europe is very concerned"? Do you know that this phrase became a meme in our country?

In our country, when someone wants to say "Get lost with your problems, I don't give a damn," they say "I am very concerned." It's a way to say "fuck off," but you don't want to be rude, you want to keep it nice. "Concerned." Europe... Cowards incapable of anything! Pathetic impotent...

(Sound of pages turning)

I was born here. Now in this city, there is...

He yawned and went to his room. You know, I'm not offended. Why should he care where I was born? I was born in some city, with a name he will never be able to pronounce. Will he ever go there or what? Even I will never go there. He simply makes it clear: he does not give a damn. Rudeness is normal for youth.

I don't know much about children and teenagers. But I think it's normal when you can scream and cry, and be gloomy and rude. When you can directly say that you do not like a certain person and you are not interested in this talk. It is precious when you can go to your room and slam the door, because you have your own room. I didn't have my own room when I was a child...

Being yourself and saying what you want means you are free. In Ukraine now freedom is a luxury.

(Sound of train yard)

I remember the evacuation train. I entered the carriage. No, "entered" is the wrong word. They pushed me there – the people who were also trying to get inside. I thought there was no place but I got there somehow. Moreover, more and more people were squeezing in. War makes everyone very compact. (points to the suitcase) You have a life, an apartment, and books. Many things. And then, the war comes. You have to leave. And then, it turns out that you don't need most of these things. You can pack everything in one suitcase. Maybe in two suitcases. Or maybe in a suitcase and a backpack.

We are all more compact than we imagine. We need less than we think. I definitely don't need an apartment in the center of a bombed-out city... Here I was standing in a carriage with my suitcase, in which I had packed my whole life. I looked around. I saw people with babies. I saw gloomy teenagers with dark circles under their eyes. I saw people with dogs. In my carriage, I counted seven dogs.

(Sound of train moving)

I thought it would be "fun" to ride in our evacuation train. To be serious, I thought it would be hell. Dogs will growl and bark. Babies will cry. Teenagers will talk back to their parents and complain. Adults will quarrel.

And you know what? It was not the case. Not at all. During the entire journey, not a single dog yelped. Not a single dog shitted in the carriage. Not a single child cried. Not a single teenager complained that he is bored because his phone died. Everyone was polite and kept quiet. Only having travelled for three hours, I noticed that there were eight dogs in the carriage. Not seven, but eight.

The eighth dog was lying right at my feet! He lay so still. I noticed him only when I stepped over his paw: we were all riding standing up, and I was trying to move my feet at least a tiny bit. I felt that I stepped on something soft. I saw a dog's paw sticking out from behind someone's bag. The dog didn't even whine, just moved his paw as far as he could.

It would be easier for me if babies cried, teenagers argued, and dogs barked. That would be fine! This is normal for dogs, babies and teenagers. It felt creepy because of this silence, because of the fact that even stupid creatures were afraid and tried to become silent and invisible.

Our children quickly learned not to cause problems. Not to occupy much space. To be as comfortable as possible, not to be a burden, because parents are having the hard time. To be polite to everyone. Who knows who is in front of you? A drunk Russian soldier with a machine gun. Or a Ukrainian border guard – not drunk, but also with a machine gun. They can shoot you down. They may not let you leave the country. People with guns always cause problems. Therefore, you should be polite and quiet. The children quickly understood this. It breaks my heart.

When here in Europe, babies cry, and youngsters slam doors, I am happy for them. They are free to do at least this. They are not afraid to be shot down by some Ukrainian or Russian jerk with a machine gun. When a person takes a gun, he always becomes a jerk – sooner or later. It's good that children here have some the freedom to show their character. I am happy for them.

But because of this Ivan, we broke up back then. At that moment, I had never seen this spoiled kid, but I already hated him with all my heart.

Back then, Ivan had a "crisis" again. He had a "hard time." There was simply no "good time" for him. And then, Christian said that I didn't fit into his life. Ivan with his tantrums and escapes from home fit into Christian's life. And I didn't.

Maybe Ivan has nothing to do with that. Maybe Christian left me, because he had dozens of young doctors like me who were eating from his hands. Or maybe Christian was simply hiding behind a troubled child, to look better in his eyes and mine. Maybe, in fact, Christian did not choose a wife or a son, but his comfortable life, in which he did not want to change anything.

All the same, I thought that this Ivan is a little bastard.

I don't have children, I don't know much about them. Maybe I am totally wrong, but I got the feeling that Europeans made themselves slaves to their children. Moreover, they raise children specifically in order to become their slaves. This is some kind of perversion.

Maybe Europeans aren't perverts, and their children aren't monsters. It's just me, I am angry, because once I had my heart broken by an indecisive little man who used his child as a pretext.

What did I talk about before? About fears. Our people are brave. No one was afraid of Covid for example. In Europe, they are so scared for their lives. As if someone was going to kill them. They tremble for their lives. For their small, cheap comfort, furnished from IKEA. No, I'm wrong. The furniture here is not from IKEA. But they tremble so much for everything. For their so-called rights, for example.

When the Covid pandemic started, Christian called me. When European men have problems, they always call women and complain to them. Christian was okay with the fact that previously, he had pushed me away and returned to his wife and son. He should have expected support from them, not from me. Nevertheless, when he had problems, he always called me and complained. That time as well. There were no vaccines yet. There was only a lockdown, and Christian said he suffers from it.

I was heartbroken because he left me. He ruined my life. I stopped trusting people in general and men in particular. And still I loved him, in spite of everything. That was the worst part. All the time I waited and hoped: Christian would come back.

And here he called me because he wanted support and compassion. From me, whom he humiliated and abandoned. Of course, I had to sympathize with him, because their European problems are really important: he could not go to the gym and to the concerts of his favorite artists. I had to sympathize with the fact that Christian was not allowed in nightclubs... That's all you need to know about Europeans.

But he said interesting things then: "Why should I be locked at home if I'm not ill? Whoever is ill, they should be treated. The state must treat him. The state to which I pay taxes. They must treat those who are ill, instead of locking everyone at home. Let the ill, the elderly, and people from the risk group stay at home, but why should we, the young, suffer because of the restrictions?"

Here, despite all my pain, I almost burst out laughing. "We, the young." He was 50 years old. At the age of 50, they consider themselves young in Europe. Eternal kids who never grow up. Peter Pan, damn him.

I know I am wrong about Christian, because love cannot be objective. The war gave me back my love. Christian called on the first day and said: come.

His wife at that time left him for a fitness instructor, with whom she fled to Italy. And then, Christian remembered me. I know, I am evil and cynical. My broken heart was not Christian's fault. It just happened that way. He came to my aid when the war started. He called

me. He said he loved me all these years. But another part of me keeps whispering, "It's only because his wife left him. Only because the son has grown up. I was his plan B all the time." Damned Europe, where people don't do anything spontaneously, but only by calculation.

He turned out to be a coward who uses a seat belt even in the back seat of a car. A coward who rides a bicycle in a helmet! Have you ever been to Ukraine? Did you see someone on a bike wearing a helmet there??

I loved him madly, blindly for years. Because he was far away. Because we couldn't be together. Now, living with him, I saw that he is a coward. That he is boring and greedy... You can love a jerk, you can love someone cruel, but how can you love a coward? How to have a fuck with him?

Sometimes, I want to grab him by the collar and shout: wake up! Who cares if you crash in a car or not if no one needs you? What difference does it make whether to die or not, and how you die? What difference does it make if no one cries for you? (pause) Whom am I fooling? I will cry for him. I will.

People here in Europe are not bad. Many of them are even good. They are just different. They are not like Ukrainians.

Ivan lives with him. At the age of 18, he continues to "search for himself." God knows what they mean by that. Living on his father's expense perhaps... I know that they can live with their parents and "look for themselves" until they are 30 years old. Ivan is looking for himself. So far, he has found the car his father bought him.

(Sound of dishes)

Ivan, dinner. We have dessert.

When I asked to stop at the supermarket, I didn't know what to buy. It was difficult for me to get used to the fact that all those foods could be bought just like that. I was walking around like in a museum. Just looked around. Finally, I bought ice cream. For all of us.

After that first dinner at their house, Ivan went out on the terrace with me and said that he could see right through me. I am a Russian prostitute. I seduced his father because I just need money. I ruined his parents' marriage...

"A prostitute"? Well, I am not offended by that. I have nothing against prostitutes. But "Russian"? For them here we are all the same. Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Moldova – all this for them is a kind of a big vague spot on the map.

You know, you have a Russian name.

I looked at that young cute face and wanted to break Ivan's nose or jaw. The only thing that stopped me was that Ivan looks very much like his father. The same eyes. The same cheekbones. Same lips. I am a cosmetologist and I know everything about lips. I watched how the lips of my beloved man, but thirty years younger, uttered these terrible painful words.

What could I have said? That his parents' marriage didn't end because of me? That this marriage was doomed because his father picked young interns from all countries of the former Soviet Union? (to Ivan's picture) You know, he loved the Russian language. He never learned it or knew it, but he said he liked the way it sounded. It turned him on, you see? I liked that he liked my language. It seemed to bring us closer together. I didn't understand then that he was fucking girls all over Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. A Slavic woman is a brand. Just like there is an "Asian woman" brand. These rich, clean-shaven men don't consider any of us human. They do not see the difference between Korean and Vietnamese women. Between Russian and Ukrainian women. Between me and other Ukrainian women. For Christian, I only embodied his fetish: he liked girls who spoke Russian. Not only me, but dozens of other girls embodied his fetish: young doctors with a Russian accent and big tits.

That's how I imagined it in my darkest moments. As for Christian, he said he cheated on his wife only with me. He said he didn't fuck anyone else. I don't believe him. If I don't believe the man I love, what is my love worth?

What else could I have said to his son? That I don't need their money? That I had work, business and friends at home? After all, he has a point here: I no longer have a job or a business. I have a refugee visa in my passport. But it's not my fault.

At home, I had work and friends. I was someone. I am a doctor. However, it turned out that doctors in Ukraine are paid little. You treat someone's cancer – and you get two hundred or three hundred euros a month for it. In this country, even social assistance for refugees is bigger. You just do NOTHING and you get five hundred euros. You cure people of cancer and you get three hundred euros. Something is wrong with this world.

No, it's not that we do nothing at all here. We are reading the news feed. We reload it 24 hours a day. Then, we watch YouTube. A psychologist from YouTube tells how important it is to stop reading the news feed and start living. For this, they pay 500 euros per month. More than I could earn treating people with cancer...

My friend Anna said that I was worth more. I resigned from the

polyclinic and became a cosmetologist. For erasing wrinkles from people's faces, for enlarging lips, they pay more than for cancer treatment.

I started by enlarging the girls' lips. They paid well for it. Then, I opened a cosmetology clinic of my own. That's how I met your father. He came to us with seminars...

I had a job. I was a doctor, boy. I was a good doctor. Then I was a good cosmetologist. Very good.

Also, I had friends. Best friends in the world. I had Slava. The name "Slava" means "glory." We studied at the medical university; he was a surgeon. He discovered that it pays much better to enlarge women's breasts than to cut out cancerous tumors. Slava became a plastic surgeon. He specialized in breast lifting and augmentation.

Slava and I, we made similar career leaps. We changed the field of activity. Looking back, I think we did it because of the money.

But not only because of money. We liked beauty. We liked to make people beautiful. Through blood and pain. Through bruises from injections and scars from operations, because beauty comes only through pain. All these people, supposedly "naturally beautiful" – I wish you knew how many surgeries and injections they underwent. There is no other way to beauty, only pain. The bruises disappear, the scars disappear and pure beauty and youth remain. Slava was like a sculptor. Sculptor of female breasts. I was like a painter of female faces.

Boy, you ask: if no one in our country is afraid of death, if I am not afraid of death, why didn't I go to the front? After all, I am a doctor. Maybe I would be useful there.

(Sound of firing and bombs)

The thing is that Slava went there. He volunteered. No one expected this from him. He was fragile. Delicate. He knew how to talk to people. Knew how to cut people if they asked for it and paid for it. But he did not know what to do when there is chaos and slaughter around.

(Larger explosion)

That's why, after a couple of weeks, they brought Slava back to our city in a closed coffin. What remained of him could not be shown to people. Slava was an aesthete, he would not like it if people vomited seeing his body.

I am not afraid to die. But I don't want my death to be useless and stupid. To die not heroically, but from the friendly fire, because the frontline is chaos where Ukrainians are shooting at Ukrainians, that would be sad.

Slava wouldn't want that for me.

Boy, I'm telling you this: I had work and friends at home. Yes, Slava died, but I have Anna. Haven't I told you about Anna yet? You would like her. All men liked her. Anna is my friend. She worked as a psychologist. She knew how to listen to people. They thought: finally, there is a person who really cares.

But many people came to her for another reason. Anna had very beautiful lips. I made her these lips. She had very beautiful breasts. Slava made her these breasts. That's why men liked her. Slava made my breasts as well.

Friends are not random people you add on Facebook. Real friends are carved into your body forever. Maybe not forever, but for a long time.

Slava said that every woman has two best friends: woman's best friends are her breasts. My best friends, what do you think of them? Do you like them?

Slava made breasts for Anna and me. Now he is gone.

He won't understand about Anna. About Slava. He won't understand. And this is good. They don't need it here. They don't need to know that. This pretty boy doesn't need to know that there is pain worse than your broken heart. Worse than any misunderstandings with your father. Worse than all your conflicts with peoples, parents, and society. There is much worse pain. I know what I am talking about. That's why I sometimes consider myself better than them – these clean and well-fed people who live here.

This is our old illusion. We love martyrs. We love ourselves in the role of martyrs. If you are a martyr, you are better and wiser than people who live well.

In lucid moments, when my heart is calm and quiet, I know it's just an illusion. I know that I am no better than Christian and people like him. I'm bad too. I am bad in a different way, but also bad. And, of course, it is not their fault that they do not have a war. It is not their fault that they did not see what I saw. I am glad it didn't happen to them. Even in my bad moments, I wouldn't wish it to happen to anyone. I'm telling the truth. I do not envy your beautiful houses. Your supermarkets full of food. Where you can buy everything, even ice cream. I'm not jealous. I am happy for you that you have all these. And we have a war. That's why you, Ivan, will never understand me. Maybe that's a good thing, because understanding would be too painful for you, and you're, after all, just a kid who likes ice cream. You are still a child, because you grow up slowly here – if you grow up at all. That's good too. I am glad you can afford it.

What else could I say to him? That we are arguing because of an indecisive little man who isn't worth it? Who is now sitting in the living room, drinking his evening beer, not giving a damn about any of us.

I didn't say any of that. I stood silently and listened. I watched his lips move. Christian's lips.

(Sound of door closing)

Then, I went out for a walk to calm down.

(Sound of footsteps)

I wandered around the neighborhood for about ten minutes.

(Sound of outdoors, nighttime)

This is a prestigious residential area with private houses, gardens, and lawns. Dusk was falling on this cute cozy world. I thought how good and peaceful it was to be here. Just walk around. No explosions on the horizon. No police on these streets. How good that there are no police and military patrols.

In Ukraine, they can shoot you down in the dark simply because you're outside at night. Ukrainians are shooting Ukrainians who look suspicious and didn't get home before the curfew. They can shoot you. Not the Russians, not on the front line. Ukrainians, in a peaceful-for-now city, can shoot you like a dog. You won't understand, will you? You don't shoot even dogs here.

You have no checkpoints here. No one will stop you. They won't point a machine gun at you for breaking the curfew – because you don't have a curfew here! It sounds crazy: after dark, you can go out on the streets, and you will not be arrested for it. You won't be punished for it.

I breathed in the evening spring coolness and thought that I could be happy here. For the sake of this freedom and peace, I can tolerate Ivan. After all, I can understand him. He did not invite me here. Why should he love me? I will do without his love.

So I thought, and with each step, I got better. With each step, it became clearer to me why I am here. It doesn't matter if I love Christian or if he loves me. I'm here for my own sake. I want to live normally. That's why I came. I deserve a life in a country where at least there is no war.

I quickened my pace and straightened my back. It was as if I was flying.

Then, it felt like hitting a wall. I realized that I was lost. All the houses and yards were exactly the same in this damned, licked-up pretty neighborhood. There are two kinds of districts in this goddamn city. Either ancient slums, or these licked-up rich little cottages. They seem to be printed on a 3D printer. I left the house without my phone. Fucking foreign country. Fucking foreign city. If you are outside without a phone, you feel so helpless.

I had given up hope of finding Christian's house and was just walking straight ahead. Why the police don't patrol the streets in this goddamn city? Where the hell are the police? Where are the taxi drivers who smoke and allow passengers to smoke in the car? Where is someone to ask the way?

Then, this Ivan found me. He said, he was worried for me because I went out without a phone. He said, Shall we go home? I almost cried. He said "home" as if it was my home too. I will have a home. For this night. For a week. Maybe for a long time. When the war started, I forgot how to make plans. Ivan said, "I'm sorry that everything happened this way." I didn't know what he was talking about. About the war, about the fact that I came here, or about the fact that we had a fight. But somehow, his words made me feel better. And we went home.

At home, Christian finished his beer. He just smiled at us. He didn't even notice that I was out for a long time. I thought that we have at least something in common with Ivan. We both love this aging indecisive softhearted man who will trade us both for his comfort.

It is not their fault that they are like this here. We are all looking for some security, some warmth and peace.

I looked at Christian and thought that he was still incredibly handsome. I'm biased, I know. Love cannot be objective. But he is handsome, really. I say this as a cosmetologist.

People here take great care of themselves. They last longer than us. As if they put themselves in the refrigerator and freeze from everything: from stress, from the hot breath of life, from pain. They protect themselves in order to preserve youth. Very wise of them. Christian took me to the cemetery to show his mother's grave. I was amazed at how long all these people lived. I read the dates on the tombstones: 1895-1987. 1938-2022. 1910-2005. I began to think that they know what they do. They know life better than us.

Maybe this cold weather and cold attitude, which prevails in Europe, is actually useful. I say this without irony. I do not judge them. Who am I to judge them? There, at home, I was selling people youth. (points to her face) A little injection here, tightening there, removing this wrinkle - and you look five years younger. It gives you wings, because you seem young to yourself, which means that there is

so much ahead.

At home, people first kill beauty and youth with cigarettes, tantrums, insomnia, chaotic life, and then come to me to get everything back. You can never get everything back. But I can do something. In fact, I can do much...

Here, they have a different way: they protect the good things they have. They stick to their good things and don't waste them.

In our country, we waste everything we get. Even when there is a chance, the one in a million, the last chance to be happy and to live well, we waste it. In order to come back to a ruined country where you are driven by drunk taxi drivers who call you "babe" and smoke while driving.

We quit everything in order to go to a military hospital instead of having our own cosmetology clinic. You will say: nobody in their right mind would do that. You are damn right.

But I'm happy I'm not like those Europeans who are afraid of everything and care only for their ass. Who tremble over money and comfort. I'm not afraid to waste my chance to be happy. Is this happiness? This dollhouse. Someone else's child who will never grow up. A foreign country. And a man whom I love infinitely. But I only love him when he is far away. Only when I can't be with him.

(Sound of picking up luggage)

He is so handsome. He will be fine without me. Another woman will be happy to take my place. Maybe another woman from Ukraine. He will not suffer when I am gone. Here they don't know how to suffer. Above all, they love themselves, not their wives, children or their country. Maybe they have a point.

We love our country – and it brings us nothing but blood, pain and death. Maybe our way of loving is somehow wrong and destructive.

Here, people do the right things. But sometimes you do not what is right, but what your heart wants.

Boy, take care of yourself, okay?

(Sound of footsteps leaving)

And then he said: Marina.

He said, "Don't leave us. If it's because of what I said then, forget it. It's not true, I know it. About money and everything. And seat belt in the back seat is stupid, I think so too. Dad is worried about you, that's why he said that. Everything here is not like you expected, but..."

(Sound of suitcase being placed on the floor and unzipped, fading into Tchaikovsky and news report)

Andrew

Thank you for listening to My European Love, here on The Half Hour Audio Hour. Next up is a brief interview we conducted with Iryna Serbriakova after the recording of this show.

Andrew:

So Ira, I want to say thank you first off, for being part of the half hour audio hour and also for allowing us the chance to present your play, My European Love. My first question is, how long have you been writing

Ira:

If we are talking about theater plays? I would say that I started in 2018, 2019. Before the war in Ukraine. I was writing mainly comedies, sometimes dark comedies, sometimes dramedies, but there was always this comedy element because humor is very important to me. And also before the war, I wrote a dramedy, Tinderland. It's about searching for love in a digital world. It's about communication, about feelings, how and why we understand or misunderstand someone how we fall in love, how we can be disappointed and disillusioned. So this sphere of love and feelings was always interesting for me.

Andrew:

Well, that is definitely obvious in the script that we have now, My European Love, and this may be an obvious question, but what inspired you to write My European Love?

Ira:

I wouldn't say that I was inspired because in my mind, inspiration is about inventing something which never existed, which never happened. And if we're talking about this text, it is a story of someone. I know I changed all names, but the story is an evidence. Some elements, some situations are taken from other people, but again, these are real people and this is their experience. This is what happened to them. This is how they are talking about it, this is how they feel about it. And the main storyline is a story of a woman. I know the question for me might be why this particular story? Because I heard many stories about people who had to live in Ukraine because of the war, and I also had to live in my country. So I have many stories. And why this particular story?

Ira:

I felt it very important to show the main character. She was interesting to me because she's not a victim. She might be someone not very nice. She might be too judgmental, sometimes too opinionated, but she's not someone weak. She's someone bold, she's someone who is not

afraid to make choices. Maybe these choices are not always good, not always safe, not always ethical, not always wise, but she's someone who can make these choices, who has guts to make these choices. It was important to me to show this character who despite the war, despite the status of refugee, refuses to be a victim.

Andrew:

Well, that certainly comes across in this play. She is definitely not a victim and certainly not weak. The next question I have for you is what led you to write this piece as a monologue rather than using multiple characters?

Ira:

The text is based on the experience of someone I know and I had access only to her point of view. I was thinking of what you're asking about. It would be very interesting to me to, to have other characters, to have the point of view of this man, of his son of maybe his ex-wife, because I am sure that their point of view would be different. And it would be very interesting to see how these visions, this philosophies of life, this approach, how they collide. But I didn't have access to these people and I decided that if one of the characters, the main character is I am talking to, I should either get the evidence from others or I should not give them stage at all because I did not want to, to invent their parts of, dialogues, their phrases. So, for me the choice was, either to talk to everyone involved, and in this case it would be a theater play with, multiple characters or if it's impossible and it was impossible. So as it was impossible, I concentrated on, someone I was in touch with, someone I could listen to because, in the play is documentary and it is documentary, it didn't feel right to me to invent something about people I couldn't meet, about people I couldn't talk to.

Andrew:

Well, that makes a lot of sense. It's also very interesting then how your main character will make some kind of, as you said, judgmental statement about the other people. But then many times she'll just switch back and say, oh, I'm being too judgmental or I'm not being fair. So it's interesting that you almost are able in a monologue to get both points of view through one character. I find that very interesting. The last question that I have for you is, do you have any upcoming projects?

Ira:

Yes, I finished a new text Women in the Dark. It's about female experience of consequences of the war. Well, it's, it sounds very global, but in fact it's about the everyday life in Kyiv during the severe blackouts because the power stations are attacked constantly and there is not enough energy, not enough electricity, and it affects all people, all citizens of Ukraine. And I collected the messages, the letters the diaries the dialogues of people who are living in Kyiv

now. And the situation is very hard. For example, often you cannot buy even food, even if you have money, because to pay for the food by your bank card, you need to find a supermarket which has electricity. If they don't have electricity, you cannot pay. You cannot pay by cash because to get the cash from the cash machine, you need to find the cash machine which is connected, which has electricity.

Ira:

It's not always possible. You cannot always buy food, even if you have money and you don't always have money because many people cannot work. If your job was connected to computers, to the internet, to something online, something digital, in the situation of a blackout, you cannot work. If you were web designer, if you were writing code, if you were writing texts for websites, if you were a photographer, you cannot work without a computer, without electricity and without internet. Also, you cannot always go to the pharmacy if you need something which is vital for your health, but you cannot buy it because the pharmacists are locked and so on. This is what people in Kyiv are facing. Despite all this, despite the fact that objectively this life is quite sad, quite hard, despite this, in the texts I got from my friends, I saw hope, I saw humor.

Ira:

For example, my friend comes home from work and she sees that in her place there is electricity, there is a schedule of blackouts, but in many cases the schedule is useless because it is not expected, because there are constantly new attacks and it scares. So according to the schedule, you are supposed to have electricity, but you don't have it, or vice versa. According to the schedule, you are supposed not to have electricity, but you have it. So people just live according to the circumstances. And my friend comes home and she sees that there is electricity at this moment, and she goes immediately to the kitchen to cook something because she doesn't know when the electricity turns off. It can happen any moment. She doesn't know how much time she has, she needs to do it very quickly. And she's cooking and she's talking to the food she's cooking and she says, please, please, yes, yes, please. Faster, faster. We're almost there. Yes, yes. And at this moment she notices that she's talking loudly and her neighbors might hear her and they might think that she's making love, that she's having sex because it sounds like this. And she says It's fine, it's fine that my neighbors think that I'm making love. So Women in the Dark is about blackouts and hope and humor.

Andrew:

<Laugh>. Well, I have to say that is a wonderful story to end this interview on. That sounds like a, a wonderful show and really love to get a chance to read it and or see it performed. Ira, thank you very much once again for being on the Half Hour Audio Hour and for giving us the chance to be part of My European Love. I really do appreciate it. And on behalf of everyone here at E F C T, I want to thank you

very much for being part of this project.

Andrew

We hope you enjoyed My European Love. Next month, we will be presenting Caleb and Rita, written by Jessica Moss. 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..