

**Ep: 12 – Carrie Coon: “Relaxed Readiness”**

**Date: 10/20/20**

**Featuring:** Carrie Coon and Cliff Chamberlain, with Audrey Francis, Caroline Neff and Mary Hungerford.

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**Carrie Coon:**

And I think that lesson, that I committed to walking in every day and making choices, even if they were bad—

**Audrey Francis:**

From Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, Illinois—

**Carrie Coon:**

And that’s the only way you walk into those spaces.

**Audrey Francis:**

This is *Half Hour*. Welcome back to *Half Hour*. I am Audrey Francis.

**Caroline Neff:**

I’m Caroline Neff.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

And I’m Cliff Chamberlain.

**Audrey Francis:**

This is the last episode of our first season.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

I don’t know where the time has gone, because it felt like yesterday was the middle of March. And I was coming back from New York sort of in this daze. And all of a sudden, we started making this podcast. And I have definitely got to say that, in a non-pandemic time, this would be one of my favorite things ever, in a year of a pandemic, it has been completely soul affirming, and I’ve loved every second of it. And I am so happy to be in this space with both of you and everybody that has been making the show.

**Caroline Neff:**

I absolutely agree. And we are going to take a bit of a break, just so that we can focus on what we’ve done, and we can focus on where we’d like to go in the future. But in early 2021, we’ll be returning with more conversations with Steppenwolf ensemble members, really vital artists in Chicago and beyond and other inspiring organizations.

**Audrey Francis:**

And we’ve also got a couple more Steppenwolf friends joining us as hosts!

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Yes!

**Caroline Neff:**

More hosts!

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

More hosts!

**Audrey Francis:**

[*Laughter*] So stay tuned for that, because it's a very exciting announcement.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

It's going to be—I can't wait, it's going to be incredible. And if you are listening to the podcast, you really don't want to miss those added voices. So, make sure that you're subscribed, either on Spotify or iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts and keep an eye on Steppenwolf's social media channels. We're on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.

**Audrey Francis:**

Go subscribe. And check out this interview because we—I loved listening to this conversation, Cliff, that you had with the one, the only: Carrie Coon.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

I loved having it. Carrie is a dear friend of mine, and so to sort of separate (I sort of mentioned this, I think talking to her) like being her friend and just sitting down for a conversation and trying to interview her was a unique challenge. But she's so great in both capacities: just as a friend, and as an interview subject. It was really great. I have such strong memories of her work over the years especially in, I think it was 2010, right? *Virginia Woolf, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* her, Amy Morton, Madison Dirks, Tracy Letts, Pam MacKinnon directed it. Edward Albee. It just was a phenomenon at Steppenwolf. And then they went to Broadway. I saw it on Broadway too, and they were just all fantastic. And she's talked about this before. I know it was a real career-changer, life-changer. It was cool to hear her talking about it.

**Audrey Francis:**

Also cool to hear her talk about *The Post*. So, I remember watching that movie in the theaters. And it's one it's cool to see somebody that you know, on the silver screen like that—well, for me it was cool to see somebody that I know. And then to see them sitting in between like Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep and doing such a great job. And then hearing her talk about that in the interview. I was—I was so grateful to hear this like, kind of, constant beginner's mind and this willingness to practice and also that kind of talk that maybe a lot of us artists need to have about just leaving our insecurity at the door sometimes.

**Caroline Neff:**

Mm hmm. And one of the things about that: I think Carrie is probably the first person that I've known as a civilian, to be sort of catapulted into fame. Like that was the first transition that I think I've ever gotten to witness personally with, as you said, you know, watching somebody that you know, on the silver screen when you were just like, you passed by them in Andersonville on accident. And I loved hearing about her preparation and the way it's evolved, but she used to sit—we shared a dressing room during *Three Sisters*. And she would sit for like 45 minutes before half hour and just sit in the corner and read poetry. And there's just—and hearing about the way that that sort of evolved into the way that she

prepares on sets and the way she prepares for any sport that she plays and excels in I just—there's a calmness and a level-headedness to her that she's just always had and I just am so grateful that I think she always will.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Yeah, totally agree.

**Audrey Francis:**

What a great conversation. I really loved listening to this

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Yeah, I really loved having it.

**Caroline Neff:**

Really great.

**Stage Manager:**

Company this is your half hour call. This is half hour til the top of the show. Half hour. If you have not signed in, please do so at this time. Half hour, half hour.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Good to see you.

**Carrie Coon:**

You too!

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

And good to talk to you. I realized I was like, “Oh, this is going to be interesting, because Carrie is one of my dearest friends.” But I also have, like, such a huge respect for you as an artist and as a human being. So, I was like, “Alright, this is going to be a fun one to figure out how to talk to you as someone interviewing you for *Half Hour* and also your friend.” So—

**Carrie Coon:**

You know all my dark secrets.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

I know all the secrets. And I have to pretend that I don't. [*Laughter*] So, the show's called *Half Hour*, right? Which is, as you know really well, that sort of magical time before a show starts in the theater. Right? So, start with half hour; what's your half hour routine?

**Carrie Coon:**

Well, I just—I was doing *Bug* before the pandemic hit. And Tracy, my husband (as you know), was in New York doing *The Minutes* with you. And so, I was a single mom, with a nanny, doing a play. And Haskell is two and a half now. So, he was, you know, two, and—

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Haskell is your son?

**Carrie Coon:**

Haskell is my son. And I didn't have a lot of free time. My nanny was coming in the afternoons, usually like three or four, before I had to go to work. So, I was getting up really early in the morning with him—six in the morning. Spending the entire morning with him. And then I was going to the theater—usually around five. And I would just try to immediately “Do not pass go; do not collect \$200; go to sleep.” So, if I slept, if I got to sleep, for a half an hour or an hour and woke up, and I feel, you know, pretty good. And so, I would try to do a 20-minute cardio workout to wake myself back up after napping. So, I would just do this cardio dancing in my room. And then that meant that once the half hour mark came, I didn't have a lot to do. I didn't have to wear a lot of makeup. I didn't have to do my hair, or anything. It wasn't this—there wasn't as much to get finished in that time period. So, I found in this particular process, I was listening to songs. And I was staying loose and dancing a little bit. And I—there was a particular opening phone call. And I would go through the opening phone call. And there's a final speech and I would look over the lines of that final speech and sort of go through those at least once in that half hour. And basically, try to stay loose because the show was really intense. And generally, as a woman, half hour involves a lot of other preparation that, as a mom again, I don't get to do that stuff. I don't get to come or two hours to the theater early now. So, my hair and makeup happens at half hour because that's what time I get to the theater now. So, it's changed.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Can you tell me more about that?

**Carrie Coon:**

Well, we're always having to put on, you know, fake eyelashes and layers of undergarments and wigs, and things that transform us. And not to say that men don't do that. But there's just more of it for us.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

I mean, I've—pants and a shirt. And some shoes.

**Carrie Coon:**

Right? Yeah. And I always see the guy—like dudes at half hour standing around by the coffee station, you know—

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Yeah!

**Carrie Coon:**

Eating a carrot stick. Checking their clock.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

I started one show with no shoes. I just needed to throw on like a shirt and pants. Done.

**Carrie Coon:**

[*Laughter*] Yeah, it never really feels that way. For me, especially when I was doing rep theatre in Wisconsin. You know, every look in those classic plays is a wig, and foundation and corsets and hoop skirts. And so, if you want more time to prepare, you've got to come in early to make sure you get it. And the same has happened to me in TV and film. Now, I don't—I don't really have time to prepare for the jobs before I get there. So, I have to rely on the work I've done to just be present in the present moment. And so now, if you catch me on a TV and film set waiting to be called to set, I will be sitting on

the floor of my trailer on a meditation cushion or a bunch of pillows and I'll be meditating. Or I'll be rolling my creaky old lady parts. [Laughter] Not old lady parts—but my muscles out on Yamuna balls because I found that that sort of release work, before I work, opens up my chest, opens up my back, so that I feel well breathed before I go on set. Because you know, as you pointed out, in that 30 seconds where everything is happening around you and you're supposed to focus (and that might happen at three in the morning)—the only tool I found that's been most—what's most useful for me is being able to drop my breath in, keep breathing, keep my body loose and key into the person that I'm acting with. And so that's all I do in my trailer, now, to get ready is I'm rolling and stretching and I'm meditating.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

It sounds to me like—and this makes so much sense because of the things that I've seen just by working with you or, you know, even things—I think that a really funny quote that Tracy had about *The Post*, you working on *The Post*. And that, you know, “Everybody's nervous around Steven Spielberg, except for you.” But it sounds like ease and relaxation is really a big part of your prep. And I see that because you're so easy, in the best way, as an artist. Really—

**Carrie Coon:**

Thank you.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Fluid, and. Now you said too, you said “now” in terms of film and TV. Does that mean “now” as in like today? How have things changed—?

**Carrie Coon:**

I mean now as a mother.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Ah.

**Carrie Coon:**

I mean now that I have a kid. And now—I don't know how I was spending all this luxurious prep time before I had a toddler. Because now when I—you know, when I went back to work—I went back to work on TV and film when Haskell was eight weeks old. So, I was still breastfeeding. I hadn't lost weight. I mean, I'd lost some, but not a lot. And I didn't—and I was totally unprepared for the job I was doing. And I became one of those actors who was learning lines in the hair and makeup trailer, which I had never been. And it wasn't a comfortable feeling for me. I didn't like doing that. And yet, there were days when I just had to say, “I have to eat and sleep. And these lines will come when I get to work. And I'll just trust that they'll be there when I show up and do the best I can.” And I had to really—I can't be as hard on myself. And I just don't have the time.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Oh. And is there some—is there a freedom in some ways—

**Carrie Coon:**

Yes!

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

To that? A little bit? To be like, “Oh.” Because, I remember as a younger actor, that sort of “learning lines in the makeup trailer”—I definitely had an opinion about that.

**Carrie Coon:**

Yes, me too.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

That I look back on with, I don't know, realizing, “Oh, I had a lot to learn myself about how everything works and that people's processes sometimes mean that is a necessity,” especially in terms of what you're saying as a mom. And what was that project that you were working on?

**Carrie Coon:**

*The Sinner.*

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

*The Sinner.*

**Carrie Coon:**

That was my first real network TV show.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Right.

**Carrie Coon:**

Which is—it's a different world than what I'd come from. I'd come from a really *auteur*, what is the word? Sort of sophisticated television that, you know, that nobody watched?

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Prestigious?

**Carrie Coon:**

Yeah, Prestige TV is the word I can't think of, because I can't think of words, also, now that I'm a mom.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

There really is a unique difference to those styles of production, aren't there?

**Carrie Coon:**

Not the least of which, is the quality of the writing, often. And I was also one of those people, because I come from the Steppenwolf Theatre and because I'm married to a playwright, that always had a lot of fidelity to the language. And I didn't respect it when I saw people improvising on set. And then I did a show where, you know, the writing was good, but it was appealing to a different kind of audience than I had been appealing to before. And I found that often what that translated into was some—it felt overwritten. And sometimes it felt like I was repeating myself as a character. And because I was, I was very, I was well-respected by the creative team. I mean, just, that's the kind of environment I was in, I was working with people who respected the artists. And so, they gave me the freedom to say, “I don't—this isn't, this line isn't really working.” And for the first time, I found myself doing more of that rewriting, on set, in a way that I had never done in the previous shows I've worked on. Which again, is

just, like you say, about the style of the show. It's not a knock on the writing or anything like that—the writing staff. It was just, I felt like I needed to take that responsibility for the language in a way that I hadn't before.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Right. And gosh, I mean, I know that one of those prestige shows was one of my favorite shows ever. And it's such a fun and surreal experience to watch a show with one of your dear friends, and just purely like the show, right? And that's *The Leftovers*. Can you tell me what your experience was like with that coming right out of ...*Virginia Woolf*? And what that time in your life was like?

**Carrie Coon:**

That time in my life is the reason why I'm working right now. Because, as you know, ...*Virginia Woolf* went to Broadway, and that's the reason I was able to have these meetings with these casting directors who were—who had seen the play in New York. And what actually happened is: I booked *The Leftovers* and I shot the pilot, but then I booked *Gone Girl*, and in the pilot I only have one scene, and that was going to be my first television series. But in the interim, I went to film school with David Fincher and I learned so much, even just about the vocabulary, because I didn't even have the vocabulary for being on a set. I had done commercials and one guest star spot on NBC. Well, two at that point.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Can you just tell me, you've said this to me before but it's such a good story, about David Fincher: he was asking you to do something specific.

**Carrie Coon:**

Yes.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

And can you tell that story?

**Carrie Coon:**

Sure, I can. [*Laughter*] It's a popular story that David Fincher does not remember. Okay. [*Laughter*] So now I feel like I've made it up. I was on—it was my first—we had done a lot of exteriors. So that's getting in and out of cars. And going in and out of doors. We were in Missouri. But I hadn't done a scene yet where I had real dialogue with someone. So, we were doing our first scene in the bar, we were in Missouri. So, I was working with Ben and, I think, Kim Dickens. And so, I was at the bar and I had a magazine; I was supposed to look up at a particular time, say my line and look back down. It was very prescriptive, which David's direction can be. And he kept saying, "I'm not getting enough screen direction." And he was trying to have me make an adjustment, and the DP make an adjustment, but I didn't know what screen direction was. So, I was just trying to look up in the right moment. And then he finally—I heard him in video village, say, "You can't do it," and move on. And I was of course, humiliated and scared. And Ben was being really sympathetic and sweet to me.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Ben Affleck for our listeners.

**Carrie Coon:**

Ben Affleck, my brother. The next—I think it was the next day, I think it wasn't that night, everybody was being awfully sweet. The whole cast was amazing, because they were so happy that it was my first job.

They were all really, really excited for me. And they were being awfully kind. And the next day, I went to David and I said, “Look, you know, you hired someone who's never made a movie before. And there's certain vocabulary that I don't know. And I'm telling you that if you can explain to me what it is, then I can do it.” And from that day, from that moment on, he would say, “Carrie, come here, look at the monitor. See this frame? This is why I need you to glide out on your right foot really smoothly.” Or you know, Ben would say, “Carrie, this is super tight, you really shouldn't move.” So, they were—they really took me under their wing, and I got better. I got better as the movie went on. And I learned a lot. And then, right after we finished shooting (because the shoot extended into *The Leftovers*; I kind of went right into *The Leftovers* that same—this week we wrapped) then suddenly I was on TV and we did four takes of something the director said “Okay, we're moving on.” I was like, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa! I just—I was just warming up!” So, then I had to adjust back to the pace of television. And for me as an actor, what happened in the real world is that *The Leftovers* started airing before *Gone Girl* came out. And I would see it and I thought “Oh my gosh, *Gone Girl*, I'm just making these faces.” I felt like my work in *Gone Girl* was not subtle and wasn't very interesting. And then I would see *The Leftovers*. And I saw that I had gotten better for having made the movie. But of course, they came out in the reverse order in the world so. And no one else is paying attention to it in that way. Nobody in the world had that thought but me. But I was really—it was really obvious to me that I had, you know, that I had started to learn some things about being on camera.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

You know, that really feels to me like a moment in time where you either take hold of your own career and say to him, “I need you to help me with this. And I want I can do this. Just resp—you know, look me in the eye and tell me what's up.” Or you could choose to be like, “I can't do it. I'm going to slink away I shouldn't be here.” As a testament to you, I think that you just, like, stood up and did the work.

**Carrie Coon:**

And I learned that lesson, Cliff, at Steppenwolf doing ...*Virginia Woolf*.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

How so?

**Carrie Coon:**

Because when I got that job, I had auditioned for Steppenwolf, numerous times. Erica Daniels had really championed me; she had been one of my judges at the URTA auditions when I went to grad school. So she was one of my first connections in the business when I had no idea what Steppenwolf was because from a small town in Ohio. So, I didn't know enough to be afraid or intimidated by who my judges were. Just a great gift to me. So, I finally was going to play a role on the main stage at Steppenwolf, after auditioning and getting called back for other things. And I knew that I had to accept that I belonged in that room, or else I was going to walk in feeling really intimidated by Amy, by Tracy, by Madison who had been working in the city longer than I had. And I knew that I would get in my own way if I felt insecure, and I just had to put that away. And I think that lesson that I committed to walking in every day and making choices, even if they were bad, and just being bad and knowing that Pam would—trusted me with the job and was going to help me edit the performance. And that's the only way you can walk into those spaces where some opportunity is open for you and it's new and you have a lot to learn or else you're going to shoot yourself in the foot.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Yeah, failing, big and bravely is one of the things that I still am learning in lots of spaces, but at Steppenwolf, in that Yondorf rehearsal room, is the one place where I feel like I can do it the most.

**Carrie Coon:**

You identified that for me when you were in one of your processes, you've actually said—I said, “How's it going?” And that's what you said, that you had chosen to be big and bold and terrible to see what would happen.

**Stage Manager:**

Company this is your fifteen-minute call. Fifteen-minutes until the top of the show. Fifteen, fifteen.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

You and I have talked about this a lot. The link between athletics—team sports, specifically—and theatre. Because I know, you coming out of Ohio, you played soccer at the University of Mount Union. Right?

**Carrie Coon:**

I did.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

What about athletics and soccer did you love, and do you see still in your work as an artist?

**Carrie Coon:**

Hm. I do feel that, that my—the fact that I was an athlete has put me in my body in a way that I think supports acting, particularly acting on stage. But I also think time on stage is helpful to prepare one for being on TV and film, because you have to use your whole body in space. You're storytelling with your whole body in space. And every movement you make signifies. And when you're in the theater, you get to become aware of that and how you're diffusing a story, or sharpening it with your body. And I think that actually does add to precision on camera, even when it's often face—you know, you're often shooting in three quarters or tighter. So, I always felt that just being rooted in my body was a really important part of my process. And as I've continued to work, my process has gotten so much more, starting from the outside instead of the inside. So, I'm working more outside-in than inside out than ever before. And as I get older, it just gets more and more like that. And also just to be on a field is present—is being present, because you're—those decisions are not conscious decisions. You practice a set of skills, and then you go out to play a game and you have to not think about those skills; you have to look at the field that's in front of you and make those decisions really quickly. And that feels the same as scene work. It's a kind of listening, though sports maybe are more visual. It's a kind of awareness that I think translates well. And, and it was—and now that you bring it up, it's—I remember, it's been a long time, but I would do the same thing. I would stay loose. You know, I would stay engaged with the people on the team. I was always a team captain and occupied a leadership position. And I'm an Aquarius; I'm very egalitarian. I was always—I always had good sportsmanship. And I didn't want my team to behave badly. But I also didn't want them to be mistreated. So, I was always checking in with the other athletes. You know, who was getting—who was getting a hot head, who wasn't getting it done, and just sort of “What's going on,” you know, “how can we get you to this place we need you to be in?” And so, I think that isn't different than being in an ensemble, now that you say it.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Yeah.

**Carrie Coon:**

But yeah, staying loose. And I'll say this: I worked with Meryl Streep in *The Post*, and I know people love to hear these little tidbits about how people work. I'm not comparing myself to Meryl; in fact, I did it once as a joke and she almost... [Laughter] I said "I've been watching Meryl. I think I'm ready for the next one." She was like, "Watch it little girl." [Laughter]

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

What's your Meryl story?

**Carrie Coon:**

So, I just noticed that Meryl Streep, her takes are always different. She always makes a different choice from take to take. And I noticed in one—you know, there's all this stuff going on around her in this walk and talk scene she had with Tom. And I just saw her sort of, kind of, moving her body in this sort of undulating way and noticing details of things. And she was kind of stretching her arm up a little bit. And she was really just staying loose, present, really looking at the things that were in front of her. It felt movement that was also maybe mildly in character to who she was playing. But it was definitely just, you know, keeping her body loose, getting ready for go. And that felt really—that was really affirming, in a way, to me because I thought "Yeah, I mean, this person has been doing this for a long time and doing it very well." And there's something to that relaxed readiness, which is, I think, very much the athlete's space as well.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Well, I've also got to just say like it's—when we did *The March* together, we would do *The March*, right? A matinee of *The March* and then how many of our cast members, at least fifteen sometimes, would walk down Halsted and play Ultimate Frisbee—

**Carrie Coon:**

Right.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Right. Between shows, a bunch of us would play between shows, and you were good. [Laughter] And you're fast, really fast.

**Carrie Coon:**

I was fast.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Alright, I have one more question for you. I think you are one of the most fully rounded people that I know, in terms of your art, and, you know, who you are as a friend and who you are as a mom, and especially who you are as a full human being. And I know that on your social media platforms that you are, you have this really strong voice and something that I respect a lot, and just wanted to hear like how important it is to you to be that as well as being an artist.

**Carrie Coon:**

Well, it's funny how, on the social media, there's always—there's this accusation that artists are somehow part of this elite class. Which [*Laughter*—anybody who's actually an artist, you know—the Actors Equity, health insurance is about to go bankrupt. And if you're not working, you don't even qualify for it anyway. So—

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

And I'm living in my in laws house so— [*Laughter*]

**Carrie Coon:**

Exactly. Exactly. So it—we don't—we're not elitist. [*Laughter*] And I think just like a plumber, or a teacher, we get to have political opinions. And not all artists, especially those who are in the public eye, choose to engage in that conversation. But frankly, I'm not important enough that people care. And I don't—I don't care if people like me. Once I turned 30, I realized that I had been living my life in a way that I was worried that I was going to disappoint other people. And that does not an artist make, because you can't make choices, you know, especially as a woman, if you're trying to guess what other people want from you. And, and it was hard to learn that stuff. It took all of my 20s. But man, I just don't care anymore. And it is so liberating. And so that does—that is part of why I'm choosing to engage politically in social media. Though, I'll tell you this, I'm also prepared to completely walk away from it. I get closer to that every day, it's really time consuming. It's a negative space. And when I think about what I want for my child, who is ostensibly screen free (we haven't used screens with Haskell, we're trying to wait till he's three) so he hasn't seen TV shows or movies (though he's seen some of his teachers on video, and some like musicians that he really loves playing instruments), but when I read about psychologically what that does to us and what it's doing to our dopamine and our attention spans and what else I could be doing with my voice, I'm leaning toward getting away, getting off of it all and seeing how productive I can be. But I do think that when I—if I am away from it, that the work doesn't stop, obviously, being a better citizen.

**Stage Manager:**

Company this is your five-minute call. Five minutes to the top of the show. Five minutes til the top of the show. This is five.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

So, the end of *Half Hour* ends with a lightning round.

**Carrie Coon:**

Oh boy.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

So, do you have your lightning round skills present? And are you ready?

**Carrie Coon:**

We'll see. I'm the mother of a toddler and I got up really early, but I'll do my best! [*Laughter*]

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

No, you're so ready. If you have been reading children's stories—although I bet Haskell probably—

**Carrie Coon:**

Haskell won't let me read to him anymore. He memorizes every book and then he reads them to me. Yeah.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

I mean, that kid you know, he's gonna be—

**Carrie Coon:**

Oh, gosh, he really is a piece of work.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Okay.

**Carrie Coon:**

But in a different way than yours are a piece of work.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Yes, because mine are definitely pieces of work.

**Carrie Coon:**

Yes. *[Laughter]*

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Oh, gosh. Okay. Ready?

**Carrie Coon:**

Okay.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Here we go. Favorite Steppenwolf production you've ever seen?

**Carrie Coon:**

That I've ever seen. Oh my gosh. That I've ever seen. Lightning round is cruel! Oh, do you know what I loved? You know what I loved? *American Buffalo*. I thought was stunning. That's one that stands out for me.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Toughest experience at Steppenwolf?

**Carrie Coon:**

Toughest experience at Steppenwolf. *The March* was hard because we were trying to figure it out and it was getting rewritten a lot. And it was hard to be present when I was speaking, often, not to a scene partner but just to the audience.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

What's your most prized piece of play memorabilia?

**Carrie Coon:**

Oh my gosh. I've gotten—I haven't got—I'm so not sentimental anymore about memorabilia. I did come across something Madison had given me on opening night which was I think maybe a little toy rabbit. And he—it was like this little—it was like a book of—a tiny book of photos that goes on a keychain and he did not remember giving it to me but I love that I had it and that we couldn't remember what the hell he was thinking.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

What's with all these amazing things people are giving you that they don't remember?

**Carrie Coon:**

[*Laughter*] I don't know.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

David Fincher doesn't remember his lesson to you, Madison doesn't remember his gift.

**Carrie Coon:**

I think what it is speaks to is the narrator who is perhaps fabricating a bit of personal history.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Maybe. [*Laughter*] All right, what job didn't you get that broke your heart?

**Carrie Coon:**

I can't think of anything.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

You've gotten all the jobs.

**Carrie Coon:**

It's funny, all the jobs that I get, I think are for me. And all the jobs I don't get I know are for someone else. I have a very good attitude about it.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

That's a great answer.

**Carrie Coon:**

It's the "other people's blessings" adage. And it's what—I asked Andre DeShields, when I was doing *Our Town* in Madison, "What's the best advice you could give someone who was just beginning?" And he said that. He said "It's other people's blessings. And you just have to acknowledge that that's not yours and that yours is coming." So, I've tried to trust that and be genuinely happy for other people as you pointed out.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Other people's blessings. Okay, what's the last song you listened to?

**Carrie Coon:**

Oh, I've been listening to "Amelia." But from the Herbie Hancock tribute album to Joni Mitchell. I've been a little obsessed with it. It's feeling very sad to me. And she doesn't sing it. It's a cover song by—I don't know if it's Luciana Souza or... I have to look it up. But, "Amelia."

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Who's your favorite writer?

**Carrie Coon:**

I love Henry James. I don't know if he's my favorite. But I'm reading a lot of Gilded Age material right now. And I loved a *Portrait of a Lady* in college. And I'm rereading it now. And I love it.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Favorite place to unwind in Chicago?

**Carrie Coon:**

My house. My house is such a calming place. It's such a welcoming space. And we—whenever we come back, and we've been gone a long time, we don't want to go anywhere.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Well, that's a great thing to have.

**Carrie Coon:**

For a pandemic? Absolutely.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

What animal do you most identify with?

**Carrie Coon:**

What animal do I identify with? I'd either say—I can be standoffish like a cat, but it's not because I'm actually standoffish. It's because I'm distracted and withholding. *[Laughter]* Or perhaps something very nerdy. Is an owl nerdy?

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

It can be. It's often drawn with glasses. But you know, are glasses nerdy? I don't think they should be.

**Carrie Coon:**

I know they transform a nerdy girl into a hot girl in a movie.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Or Superman into a Clark Kent.

**Carrie Coon:**

Right. They're a great disguise.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Favorite moment of any live theatrical experience, whether you were performing or not.

**Carrie Coon:**

Performing or not. I can say that, as one might imagine, the opening night of ...*Virginia Woolf* on Broadway was a pretty extraordinary night just as an actor who grew up in Ohio, who never aspired to be on Broadway because it didn't even feel real or attainable to me. That was an extraordinary moment. And because, you know, because Edward Albee was still alive. And that was one of the last times he was really publicly available in a way that felt like he was, you know, vibrant and still writing. And so to have him come up on stage with us was just extraordinary. And it was so surreal to think that I—that it was me. You know that I was there. And knowing what a—that 99% of actors in the world would have traded places with me. Even if that was the end, you know, of their career. It was really extraordinary.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

It was extraordinary. You all were so good in that play.

**Carrie Coon:**

We got great reviews and then Hurricane Sandy hit [*Laughter*], and we never recovered.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Oh, man.

**Carrie Coon:**

And we closed early. You know. Bette Midler kicked us out.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

I didn't know that.

**Carrie Coon:**

Yeah, we closed early.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Oh my gosh.

**Carrie Coon:**

They moved Bette Midler in. Yeah. We never—we didn't make money and it was—

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Wow—

**Carrie Coon:**

A critical success but an absolute failure.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Wow. Wow. Okay. All right. If you were a character in a play, what would your character's description be?

**Carrie Coon:**

Oh, like if I as a person—

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Yeah.

**Carrie Coon:**

Was a character in a play. [Laughter] Carrie: 44. Attractive, but not pretty. Average height. Average looking. Secretive.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Phenomenal. [Laughter]

**Stage Manager:**

Company this is your places call. Places please, for the top of the show. Have a good one everyone. Places, please. Places.

**Audrey Francis:**

And that's it for this episode of *Half Hour* brought to you by Steppenwolf Theatre Company.

**Caroline Neff:**

Thanks for listening.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

And thanks again to our guest this week: Carrie Coon.

**Audrey Francis:**

This episode of *Half Hour* was exclusively sponsored by Helen Zell.

**Caroline Neff:**

If you want to catch Carrie Coon in a Steppenwolf show, she's about to appear in Steppenwolf Now (Steppenwolf's virtual season) in *Red Folder* by ensemble member Rajiv Joseph.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

So, whether you're local or you live far away from Chicagoland, you can now experience Steppenwolf right from your couch.

**Audrey Francis:**

Steppenwolf Now memberships are just \$75 and for a limited time, we're extending *Half Hour* listeners \$10 off when you use the code HALFHOUR (all caps, no space) at [steppenwolf.org/now](http://steppenwolf.org/now).

**Caroline Neff:**

*Half Hour* is produced by Patrick Zakem; mixed and edited by Matthew Chapman.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

The theme music for *Half Hour* is by Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen.

**Audrey Francis:**

Today's stage manager was Mary Hungerford.

**Caroline Neff:**

Special thanks to Erin Cook, Joel Moorman, Kara Henry, Gin To—

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

And all the folks at Steppenwolf.

**Audrey Francis:**

Follow us on Twitter @Steppenwolfthtr or on Facebook and Instagram.

**Caroline Neff:**

And you can always get in touch by emailing [halfhour@steppenwolf.org](mailto:halfhour@steppenwolf.org). Till next season. This is Caroline Neff—

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Cliff Chamberlain—

**Audrey Francis:**

And Audrey Francis. A lifetime to engage, half hour to places.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Oh, one more thing. Some of you who work in the performing arts might know that October 10, was International Stage Manager Day. This day originated in the UK in 2013 to bring attention to the often underappreciated work of stage managers across the theatre industry.

**Audrey Francis:**

We want to take a moment to recognize and celebrate the stage managers who were a part of Steppenwolf's season when COVID forced us to close our doors.

**Caroline Neff:**

Please join us in saying a huge thank you, and to raising a glass for Laura Glenn, Chris Freeburg, Michelle Medvin, Jacqueline Saldana, Kat Barrett, Jaclynn Joslin, JuJu Laurie, Zavarie Irons, Mary Hungerford, and to our rockstar Stage Management Apprentices Rafael Zhang, Anisha Banerjee, and Nikki Konomos.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

And finally, we would be remiss if we did not mention Steppenwolf ensemble member Malcolm Ewen: the only stage manager in our ensemble.

**Audrey Francis:**

All of our love and thoughts are with Mal as he calls G-O's on cues from above.

**Caroline Neff:**

We love you and we miss you, Mal.