

STEPPENWOLF

HALF HOUR

Season 2, Ep: 1 – Jon Michael Hill: “I Don’t Get Bored”

Air Date: 3/30/21

Featuring: Jon Michael Hill and James Vincent Meredith. With Cliff Chamberlain, Audrey Francis, Caroline Neff, Karen Rodriguez, and Laura D. Glenn.

Jon Michael Hill:

And he stopped the exercise and looked over at me and he was like, “Do you feel that?”

Audrey Francis:

From Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, Illinois...

Jon Michael Hill:

And I was like, “Aw, man.”

Audrey Francis:

This is *Half Hour*.

[*Music Resolves*]

Audrey Francis:

[*News Bulletin Sound*] This just in: [*Laughter*] We made it to Season Two!

Cliff Chamberlain:

Yes.

Caroline Neff:

We are back. We made it through the winter, dreaming up some big, big dreams and we're so excited for the second season of *Half Hour*. We made it to the second season!

Cliff Chamberlain:

Second season, twelve brand new episodes. More conversations with members of our family at Steppenwolf and thought leaders and activists in the city and beyond and all sorts of inspiring artists and organizations.

Caroline Neff:

We have, when I say so much lined up for this season, it's actually an understatement. The fact that we were able to contain it in just twelve episodes is pretty remarkable.

Cliff Chamberlain:

Yeah.

Audrey Francis:

And I do feel like we're burying the lede a little bit because maybe even more exciting than that is that we've got some new members to our team. So okay, first returning from last season, you've got me Audrey Francis—

Caroline Neff:

And myself Caroline Neff—

Cliff Chamerblain:

And me, Cliff Chamberlain.

Audrey Francis:

But joining the team... Are you ready for it? New hosts.... drumroll please. *[Drumroll Sound]* Ensemble members Karen Rodriguez.

Karen Rodriguez:

[Air Horn Sound] What up y'all. *[Laughter]*

Audrey Francis:

And James Vincent Meredith.

James Vincent Meredith:

Doctors. *[Laughter]*

Cliff Chamerblain:

Good doctor.

James Vincent Meredith:

Hey, everybody.

Caroline Neff:

James and Karen: hi. It's so great to see you in our little green room. Welcome.

James Vincent Meredith:

I can't tell you how happy I am to join this party. I've been listening to you guys for this whole last season. Trying to pick up some tips. I love listening. You guys are awesome. I'm glad to be here.

Karen Rodriguez:

Yeah, me too. I'm so excited to see what we get up to in Season Two.

Audrey Francis:

Okay, so now that we're all here, should we get to episode one?

Cliff Chamerblain:

Yes.

Audrey Francis:

What are we starting Season Two out with James?

James Vincent Meredith:

Well, I'm excited because I just joined this mug. And I actually get to share this conversation that I had a couple weeks ago with my dude: big chocolate. My Steppenwolf ensemble member, fellow ensemble member: Jon Michael Hill.

Cliff Chamberlain:

Doctor, I love that you're joining the season and you are first up. First conversation. How was it talking to Jon?

James Vincent Meredith:

Man, it was great, because—it's crazy how we've known each other, you know, for a long time. We joined together, right? That was like 2007. And yet there were things that we brought up just in this conversation that we'd never discussed. And we've known each other for quite some time. So, it was awesome. It was eye opening, learning about his process. You'll hear it but he's just he's a cool dude. And a real just a nice guy.

Audrey Francis:

Yeah, I feel like every time I get to see Jon, I always kind of am intimidated by how cool he is. And then I leave the conversation, remembering that I think he—him and Cliff Chamberlain might be two of the nicest humans to ever walk this planet. James, Karen and Caroline—

Caroline Neff:

We've got work to do.

Karen Rodriguez:

[*Laughter*]

James Vincent Meredith:

I was going to say: we have work to do.

Audrey Francis:

Yeah, yeah. Should we listen?

James Vincent Meredith:

Let's do it man.

Karen Rodriguez:

C'mon, Season Two. Let's go.

Audrey Francis:

Here's *Half Hour*, Season Two, Episode One. James Vincent Meredith with Jon Michael Hill.

Stage Manager:

Half hour, top of the show, please. Half hour. Half hour, please. Top of the show. Half hour.

James Vincent Meredith:

Jon Michael Hill.

Jon Michael Hill:

Doctor!

James Vincent Meredith:

Doctor. I guess the thing that I like to start out with because it's so integral to everyone's process, like kind of how they, you know, get into it, is how you get into it. When you get to that half hour spot. When you come to the theater. When you, you know, on the, you know, your process as you move through the day towards a performance, you know. What happens at half hour for you, Jon?

Jon Michael Hill:

Half hour. I'm trying to think. I've already been at the theater for a while when half hour hits, because... I think I discovered, maybe later in my career, that I like to be warm physically and vocally, and that requires kind of a lot for me. *[Laughter]* Some dudes can just walk in off the street and they're in it already and go full throttle the whole time. They'd be fine. I figure, why not just like, you know, grease the wheels. So usually, maybe an hour before half hour, I'm on stage doing movement, and vocal warmups. Getting onto the stage, getting in the space, and getting acquainted. Hearing how your voice sounds in that space is something that I've become more interested in. And then when you get down to the dressing room, whether you're sharing it with somebody or not, that'll change what's going on. When me and Grush were doing *The Tempest*—sorry, Stephen Grush is an actor; he lives in New Orleans now. But when we were doing *The Tempest*, we were roomed together, there was just a lot of music playing, a lot of pushups and pull ups—*[Laughter]*

James Vincent Meredith:

Yeah, I heard y'all's music. *[Laughter]* We all heard y'all's music.

Jon Michael Hill:

It was ratchet up in there. No, he's got really good—he's got really good taste. But like, say for *True West*, I was really like writing—the character was a writer—so I would be sort of journaling and working on my part—my hair—and stuff like that. It's really different for every show.

James Vincent Meredith:

Now you do a lot of on-camera stuff, you know. You do a lot of TV, you've done, you know, movies and stuff—

Jon Michael Hill:

I try, man. When they let me I do it. *[Laughter]*

James Vincent Meredith:

Yeah, yeah. So, when you do it, like do you have a different kind of pregame ritual from that as opposed to what you were just describing on stage? Like, do you like to get to set super early? Do you like to get there when you need to get there? Like—

Jon Michael Hill:

The routine is completely different. Like I move a little bit and vocally warm up, but it's mostly (with the television I've done) about the words. And I just really work on the scenes that we're doing that day, because you get them fast and furious. With a network show, they're churning out those scripts and the turnover is really quick. So, you get less time and less rehearsal. So, I really spend most of my time living with the words.

James Vincent Meredith:

So I imagine like, after seven seasons though, like, you know, from where you start, as far as the memorization, you know, on the quick, it's a bit easier, you know, with each season that goes by and each time you have to do that.

Jon Michael Hill:

So, here's the—it's like a bell curve. At the beginning of the season, you're bad at it. You're like really bad at it. You've had two months off, and you're like, "Oh my God, look at this monologue." A monologue in TV is like five lines but—[*Laughter*]

James Vincent Meredith:

Still, it counts.

Jon Michael Hill:

[*Laughter*] So at the beginning of the season, you're getting back into gear and then that brain—that muscle in your brain gets stronger and stronger. And then once you start nearing the finish line and the fatigue sets in after nine months of doing it, and everybody's ready to, you know, wrap for the season, then it starts getting harder to retain the lines and stuff. So, you kind of reach a strength towards the middle there. At least for me.

James Vincent Meredith:

Man. Yeah, no, I definitely want to talk more about *Elementary* later on.

Jon Michael Hill:

Oh, yeah.

James Vincent Meredith:

I guess it's a good place to also begin would be Waukegan. [*Laughter*] Waukegan, Illinois.

Jon Michael Hill:

Wauk-town!

James Vincent Meredith:

Young man, Jon Hill walking around downtown Waukegan.

Jon Michael Hill:

No one calls it Wauk-Town, but I think it's funny. [*Laughter*] Yeah, man. What do you want to know about Waukegan? It's still there.

James Vincent Meredith:

So, you're growing up, and there's something in you that kind of lights that creative fire—that gets you thinking about performance. Was there one particular experience? Was it a general, gradual interest into the arts and particularly acting? Was there one moment?

Jon Michael Hill:

There is sort of a moment but I'm trying to go back to, honestly, the root of performance before I even knew what like theater was and all that. And some of it has to do with music and music videos, you know. As a five-year-old watching Michael Jackson, I used to learn all that stuff. So, my mom would

make me do the Michael Jackson routine when you're in the parking lot of Six Flags. And, you know, you get a crowd around. People stop, walking by and check out what's going on. That's probably my earliest memories of performing. But also, I, you know, I was really into action figures, and it came down to storytelling. I would, you know—there were bad guys; there was good guys. I put them on teams, and I would basically make a movie in my head. So then fast forward to first grade, we had this, I think we were learning to write, and we had to write a story. So, I wrote a true story about my brother getting lost at Lincoln Park Zoo. And the elementary school—Andrew Cooke Magnet School—turned it into a play. And I didn't even know they were doing that. So, all I remember is sitting in the all-purpose room, they called it, we're in the auditorium looking up at the stage, and they're about to do a play. And it's the thing that I wrote. And there's animals running around. And then this actor came on stage. He's supposed to be playing my brother, and he said, "I'm lost." And I was sitting there, and it hit me like a truck. I was like, "Oh, I believe that he's lost. This is what theater is? This is amazing." And so, I was like, "I want to get up on stage." So, the next year I was in, what was that, *Wizard of Oz*, I was I was in the Lullaby League, doing pirouettes and stuff. And it just—my love for it kind of grew. And then watching like *Star Wars*, and *Mad Max* made me want to be in films and stuff. But I really just, you know, stuck with theatre. I loved becoming someone else. That was the whole thing. Investigating this other life and trying to inhabit it to tell the story. So that started pretty early for me.

James Vincent Meredith:

Was the love of music there at the same time? Did that come a little later?

Jon Michael Hill:

Yeah. So, I was always... I think I credit this to my dad, because he's a great musician; he could play pretty much anything you put in front of him. Bass guitar is his main instrument, and he can sing his ass off, I give him that. So, they had me and my brother playing instruments really every year, starting in first grade. So, I was a clarinet guy first. And then saxophone. Played that all the way through high school. And picked up guitar in college. But yeah, so... I think theater was my main focus, but music is a different thing, man. If you can create something from scratch, much like a writer in isolation, that can get you through some tough times, like I... have you ever heard of an actor say, "When I'm down, I just sort of do a monologue in my bedroom, and I feel better?"

James Vincent Meredith:

[*Laughter*] Uh, no. [*Laughter*]

Jon Michael Hill:

It's just different. You kind of need other people there.

James Vincent Meredith:

Sure. I noticed you kind of work a lot—I've listened to a lot of different things. And this past summer, you had some music that was on your, your Instagram account.

Jon Michael Hill:

Oh man.

James Vincent Meredith:

You know, that was really like, emotive, you know. Just given what we're dealing with right now. You know, dealing with, you know, black and brown bodies being murdered and how we all... You know, the process that we all go through as we cope with that. And you mentioned music, and it seems to me that

you—it has really lit a fire musically, you know. Not that you weren't already working it but it seems like a lot of your music that I've heard is very on the moment right now, and is really kind of expressing a lot about what's going on in you.

Jon Michael Hill:

Thanks for saying that man. Yeah. So I find Hip Hop is able to do that for me more so than most other things, because I can sort of start with the music and all of that, you know, frustration can come out, and emotion can come out, in the chord progression and the drums. And then when it's time to lay down the lyrics I'm, you know, I work slowly and every word I put down is calculated, so it takes a while. But once that bed, that foundation of the music is there, it sort of opens you up to speak your mind and be free. And this—I'm really working to have like six songs out in 2021. I don't know if anybody wants to help me record them or whatever.

James Vincent Meredith:

Well, you know, I'm really good at that karaoke. So, you know, if you need me for, you know, any melodies...

Jon Michael Hill:

Speaking of... [*Laughter*] Y'all don't know this, but James used to have us all going to the Copa Lounge on Wednesdays after the show. And if you haven't seen his James Brown...

James Vincent Meredith:

I don't think I was the only one who was up there on that stage. [*Laughter*] I think a lot of us were on that stage. You know this. Michael McKean was up on that stage once.

Jon Michael Hill:

Yes, he was.

[*Music*]

Stage Manager:

Fifteen minutes, please. Fifteen minutes to top of the show. Fifteen.

James Vincent Meredith:

So, let's fast forward a little bit. So, you go, eventually do you go to Northwestern or you go to U of I?

Jon Michael Hill:

You know, I went to U of I.

James Vincent Meredith:

I'm just you know...

Jon Michael Hill:

We're talking to another alum here.

James Vincent Meredith:

But you know, you know, you read stuff and like, you know, "Let me ask him because, you know, maybe I sure don't remember Northwestern but, you know, maybe I misread something."

Jon Michael Hill:

Well, I did do something that's sort of tied to Northwestern before I went to college called Cherubs.

James Vincent Meredith:

Oh Cherubs, sure.

Jon Michael Hill:

And the Cherub program, and they take the, you know, kids between their junior and senior year in high school. You're basically in a theatre boot camp for like, a month or two. And it was, you know, one of those pivotal moments in my life. I just was around people that were committed to doing that for the first time.

James Vincent Meredith:

Right on.

Jon Michael Hill:

It was wild. Yeah, these teenagers... fucking hormones raging it was nuts. But the work was challenging. Very challenging. And I had a professor. There was this one guy, he made masks. He was an incredible—Jonathan Becker—he's an incredible artist. And he was doing this exercise that, now having joined Steppenwolf, and we talk about ensemble work, that was like my first experience with an ensemble dynamic. He was doing this exercise where you were, you know, the actors were in a circle, and you step into the space. And if anybody else steps in, you immediately have to balance it out. There was no conversation about who's going to jump in next, you just sort of had to go on impulse. And every time I stepped in, he would sort of say, "Nope, that wasn't it, step back out." And after a few times of trying to jump in and do the exercise to get shut down [Laughter] I got frustrated and I was like, "Alright, well, I'm just not gonna go in. This motherfucker keeps pushing me back out." And then this moment happened where I was like, "Oh, but I do want to go in." But I ignored it, because I was being a little asshole. And he stopped the exercise and looked over at me and was like, "Do you feel that?" And I was like, "Aw man." He was like, "Alright, so keep the egos out of it, and keep going with the exercise." And, you know, he could have been gaming me from the beginning. But it's still—the lesson still got through to me, that you do listen to impulse. And even if you get frustrated, you continue to participate. You know what I mean? And work with the other people and collaborate. So that same instructor told me at the end of the program, "Hey, you got all the tools. If you want to do this for a living, you should look into it." And that's why I started looking at schools and fortunately, U of I worked out.

James Vincent Meredith:

So, you're down there and how does Steppenwolf get in your ear?

Jon Michael Hill:

Alright, so there might be a couple different ways because Robin MacFarquhar was my movement teacher and like combat coach, and he had done the fight choreography for *Clockwork Orange* at Steppenwolf with Terry Kinney. But then my history teacher, Peter Davis was dramaturg for Bruce Norris's *Unmentionables* that Anna Shapiro was directing. This is in 2006. And they had been auditioning, auditioning, and they needed this young, like, West African kid. And Erica Daniels reached out to him was like, "Is there anybody down there that can audition?" And he'd seen me in a bunch of stuff. And Peter recommended me, so I got to audition. And Erica Daniels was there; Bruce was there; Anna was there. And I worked on the accent for as long as I could. [Laughter] And went in and just did my best. And it worked out and that sort of changed everything.

James Vincent Meredith:

So, you do that. Great reviews. I saw it. It was incredible. Just—

Jon Michael Hill:

You saw that?

James Vincent Meredith:

Yes, dude, I did see that. I don't see everything, but I saw that. And I was like, "Who is this dude?" [Laughter] And then, I don't know about how you found out, but I knew it was like right after that new year that I got contacted. How did you get into the ensemble?

Jon Michael Hill:

So, man, people ask you, "How did it all happen?" I'm sure it's different for everybody. I got into that play. I really tried to be like a sponge and watch how Amy Morton worked. And Rick Snyder. Shannon Cochran was a beast; it was such a good cast. And I think Amy recommended me to Martha Lavey. She had a conversation with her. And now this is all unbeknownst to me. I just went through the process, you know, trying not to get fired, having a good time. And then yeah, it was over my winter break from U of I during my senior year that they—Martha actually invited me to do a reading of *Medal of Honor Rag* with Tracy. And that's all—and she was like, "Just come into my office beforehand, and we'll chat." And I was like, "Oh, cool." Unsuspecting. I get up there, and Amy's in there. And they asked me to join and I was just like, blown away, and then had to go in the bathroom, collect myself, and then go do a reading with honestly, one of the best stage actors in the world: Tracy Letts. And I just, you know, it was a really special, special day.

James Vincent Meredith:

Wow. What were you? Were you 20? Were you 21?

Jon Michael Hill:

I was 20... I turned 21. Oh, during *The Unmentionables*. Yeah, I was 21.

James Vincent Meredith:

So, you know, you just, and you know, all the people, "Oh yeah, he just came out of school, he wasn't even out of school yet. Now, he's, you know, doing this" like. But I think there is something that they saw, certainly Amy saw, and Martha and everybody that's like you just, you know, when you know, you know. I look at what you've done, and I look at, you know, *Kafka on the Shore*—look, I had some challenges because I'm not very cerebral. I remember talking to you afterwards and saying, "So, uh could you break this down for me?" Which you did. And then you know, *Head of Passes*, you know, *Tempest*, *Hot "L" Baltimore*, *Superior Donuts*, right. And all a lot of those with Tina Landau. So, you guys have had like an amazing kind of connection, really. Tell me a little bit about working with her.

Jon Michael Hill:

Yeah. All right. So, I think I should go back to the first time I worked with her. I had just joined the company. I had moved to New York to do some stuff. I was working in a taco restaurant, sort of at the counter. And I got an audition for one of Tarell's plays—*In the Red and Brown Water*. So, I—the appointment comes in. And Tina Landau is directing; Tarell's gonna be there. And I, I remember sitting at the register, working on those lines every day, getting ready for this audition. And it was one of those where his words, sort of cast the spell, and I was able to, you know, really sort of put my best foot

forward in that audition. It worked out. And I've never been in a rehearsal room like that. Tina has a knack for putting together ensembles that are generous, every one of the cast members is generous of spirit, will give of themselves and take risks and support each other. And actually, me and her, I guess maybe she knew I could sing from the audition. But we sat and composed all of that music in that play. So, she sat at the piano, and was just like "Sing whatever melody comes to your head reading these words." And we just started from scratch there, and then looped in the other cast members and built harmonies on top of that. It was at a time where I would go home then and record, you know, my own vocal versions of it and send it to her. So, there was like this kind of *simpatico* from the beginning. Not only onstage, but with the music stuff, too.

James Vincent Meredith:

It's incredible, the trust too, you know, that you guys have to have with each other, you know, to collaborate in such a way that, you know, you just trust each other. So, one of those plays is *Superior Donuts*.

Jon Michael Hill:

Uh-oh.

James Vincent Meredith:

We do it at Steppenwolf, and then we go east. You are so smooth, that I would never have thought that you really had any nervousness about being up on that stage. I was nervous as all get out. But you just went up there and did your thing. Like, was the process different? Now you're on Broadway as opposed to, you know, our sandbox.

Jon Michael Hill:

Damn, I'm really trying to remember if there were nerves about getting up there for the first time in front of a Broadway audience, and I honestly don't think there were, more than any other night. So, it you know, the trick is to make it look smooth and effortless. But every time before I step out there, it's not quite panic, but I actually think I care too much about the audience's experience. Amy Morton has a healthy disinterest in the audience from night to night, because you never know what you're going to get from them. You really need to be focused on the people on stage with you and that's it. But I don't know, I'm always like, if there's a kid out there that's a skeptic, maybe doesn't like theater, and we can go out there and give them something real that they can't really deny, and it sparks something in them, that would mean the world to me.

James Vincent Meredith:

It wasn't your first time out east. I mean, you've done *Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Delacorte.

Jon Michael Hill:

Oh, yeah.

James Vincent Meredith:

So, I mean, you had done... You had worked out there before, so I guess it wasn't, you know, out of the blue.

Jon Michael Hill:

I forgot—shit man. I forgot about that. Yeah. I did *Midsummer* out there when I was a baby. Um—

James Vincent Meredith:

See that's—you've done so much. See. I would put that like literally like at "One A" on my list. He's like "Did I do that? I guess I did." [Laughter]

Jon Michael Hill:

I played Puck in the park. That was so crazy.

James Vincent Meredith:

So, you do *Donuts*. And then you start working on *Elementary*. As you begin that process, and then you move forward, the seasons go by, how was it being in a show for that long?

Jon Michael Hill:

One thing about me is I don't get bored. If I'm—if I have nothing going on, I am content to have nothing going on for the time being. But most of the time I find something that interests me. And even though I think the character arcs on *Elementary* from Marcus Bell might have been too few and far between to fulfill, you know, the actor's itch, I started shadowing the directors in like season two. Because Lucy started directing in season two. And I was like, "Well, if they're going to give me an episode one day, I'm probably going to have to do my due diligence." So, I started, you know, shadowing, learning as much as I could, started writing. So, I actually feel like those seven years weren't only spent getting comfortable in front of the camera, but they were also honing other tools for the toolkit, you know what I mean?

James Vincent Meredith:

And so, you did direct. You directed, what, in August of 2018?

Jon Michael Hill:

That's right. So that was season six. I think it was Episode 19 or something. "The Worms Crawl In; The Worms Crawl Out." That was a crazy episode.

James Vincent Meredith:

That was the title of it?

Jon Michael Hill:

Yeah, that was the title of it. [Laughter] Sorry.

James Vincent Meredith:

I saw you looking around for a minute

Jon Michael Hill:

I'm not going crazy. That was the title.

James Vincent Meredith:

I was like "What's he talking about?"

Jon Michael Hill:

It was—there was more sort of CGI, and art projects and all kinds of crazy stuff in that script than any of our others. And I was just like, "Wait, are they... Maybe they're trying to like, trial by fire, break me in." You know, "Oh, you want to direct? We're going to give you this." It was nuts. So anyway, I learned a lot doing that. And I kind of have the bug, I want to do it more.

James Vincent Meredith:

I know just about to ask if you wanted to do it again. Yeah?

Jon Michael Hill:

I have a lot to learn. But I do want to do it again. And I'm too much of a student of film to let that experience just sort of be a one off.

Stage Manager:

Five minutes. This is your five-minute call. Five minutes.

James Vincent Meredith:

Well, hey, there's something we do at the very end of these.

Jon Michael Hill:

Uhuh?

James Vincent Meredith:

They're called lightning round—lightning round questions.

Jon Michael Hill:

Oh no.

James Vincent Meredith:

The point is, you don't think about them too much. You just kind of think the first thing that comes to mind.

Jon Michael Hill:

Okay.

James Vincent Meredith:

No pressure. All kind of pressure. Okay. What was your welcome to Steppenwolf moment? You know, they have a thing at the NBA where somebody gets blocked, you know. Or, you know, somebody gets sacked. Just beat down. And it's like, "Welcome to the NFL," you know. What was your "Welcome to Steppenwolf" moment?

Jon Michael Hill:

Ah man? I actually don't think I should say what the real first one is, but I'll tell you after because I don't want to get nobody in trouble. But during *Unmentionables*, there was some shenanigans going on. And Rick Haefele has a bust of Larry from *The Three Stooges* backstage. And that goddamn Larry head would show up where only I could see it on stage. [Laughter] And I would have to try not to piss myself.

James Vincent Meredith:

What job didn't you get that broke your heart?

Jon Michael Hill:

[Laughter] There's a few of these. But they're mostly... I wanted to play Cory in *Fences* with Denzel. And Chris Chalk got that. I wanted to do Finn's role in that *Star Wars* movie with Oscar Isaac. Which ones are those? Did you see those?

James Vincent Meredith:

Awakened. Spirit Awakens or something? Force Awakens.

Jon Michael Hill:

All of those. Yeah, John Boyega got those. And I don't need to go into more. But yeah, there's a bunch of them.

James Vincent Meredith:

What animal do you most identify with?

Jon Michael Hill:

Black Panther.

James Vincent Meredith:

What's your most prized piece of play memorabilia?

Jon Michael Hill:

When I was at Cherubs, we did *Animal Farm*. And they built these like masks but they also built these stilts that you held in your hands and you kind of hunched over. I played Napoleon the pig. And I still have one of those stilts. *[Laughter]*

James Vincent Meredith:

What do you daydream about?

Jon Michael Hill:

Ah man. I daydream about politics, honestly. I daydream about the future of my career. Probably too often. *[Laughter]* And I daydream about having a farm ranch type situation when I'm older. Where I can just be around the animals, and read and drink good whiskey.

James Vincent Meredith:

If you had a superpower, what would it be?

Jon Michael Hill:

I'm leaning towards the Luke Cage type indestructible thing, but you know what? Flying is just too amazing. I'm sorry. It's just to be able to just lift off would be, that would be it.

James Vincent Meredith:

What is one thing you do every day without fail?

Jon Michael Hill:

First thing that came to my mind is not what I should say. *[Laughter]* I mean...

James Vincent Meredith:

What can you tell us that you do?

Jon Michael Hill:

[Laughter] I definitely watch sports. I watch people talking about sports. I watch football. I watch basketball. I can't help it.

James Vincent Meredith:

No, I get it. Sports, sports. I'm waiting on a Tottenham score soon as I get off here.

Jon Michael Hill:

[*Laughter*] It was a tie.

James Vincent Meredith:

I know. What's your favorite place to unwind in Chicago?

Jon Michael Hill:

Well, unfortunately, a pandemic took this one from us. Cafe Marie-Jeanne. Have you been there?

James Vincent Meredith:

Dude, the owner, dude man, we used to live in the same apartment.

Jon Michael Hill:

Really?

James Vincent Meredith:

Mike Simmons. I mean, same apartment building. That place was incredible.

Jon Michael Hill:

I loved that spot. And they got the porróns where you pass it around and try to, you know—

James Vincent Meredith:

That place was incredible.

Jon Michael Hill:

So that's one and you know, Front Bar is a close second. I thank Anna every time I see her for getting Front Bar done. I love that place.

James Vincent Meredith:

Lastly, if you Jon Hill, were a character in a play, what would your character's description be?

Jon Michael Hill:

[*Laughter*] Thinks he is funnier than he is. Awkward. Loves being around people whether they want to be around him and not. Loyal.

Stage Manager:

Places, please. Places, please, for the top of the show. Places, please.

Audrey Francis:

Yes, James! Great job!

Karen Rodriguez:

[*Laser sounds*]

Cliff Chamerblain:

I loved hearing you and Jon talk about *Superior Donuts*. I mean, just selfishly because it brought up so many good memories for me. That was my first mainstage show at Steppenwolf. And I just remember how good he was and how good you were, but I specifically remember a couple of his lines. And I was, you know, I was sitting in my dressing room, and I could hear his stuff coming through the speaker of the monitor. And knowing every time he was going to get it to a couple of those lines, and he would nail them every night and it was so—I mean, he was a stunning in that play.

James Vincent Meredith:

There's that "Patchouli." Every time. "Patchouli"

Cliff Chamerblain:

Oh, yeah.

James Vincent Meredith:

That line from that show. Like he just—the word—he just pops it and it brought down the house every single time. I just love—we didn't really get into it on to get it on the half hour—but he really has a lot to say about travel also, like places that he's been, you know, he's, you know, parts of Africa. He has this ranch that he loves, like the three something... I mean, I can't remember. But it's a ranch that he goes and he because he just loves horses and just hearing him talk about how he decompresses and kind of how that feeds into his creative process is just awesome.

Audrey Francis:

So cool. So, if someone wanted to listen to Jon's music, where should they do that?

James Vincent Meredith:

So, the best place for now is on his Instagram, which is @JonHillM. The letter M.

Karen Rodriguez:

Also, I'm pretty sure we scrounged up some amazing pictures of Jon back in his Cherub days. [Laughter] Super cute. [Laughter] And also as a young dude playing Puck in NYC that we're going to share on Steppenwolf's, Instagram, so go check that out, y'all.

Cliff Chamerblain:

How about when he just casually forgot that he played Puck in the park in New York?

James Vincent Meredith:

Yeah, I mean, he's just dropping diamonds.

Cliff Chamerblain:

As cool as it gets.

James Vincent Meredith:

It's like, "Let me kick let me pick that up, dude."

Audrey Francis:

Thanks for the great conversation, James. Awesome job. And that's our time for today. Thanks for listening to this episode of *Half Hour* brought to you by Steppenwolf Theatre Company.

James Vincent Meredith:

And thanks again to our guest this week Jon Michael Hill.

Karen Rodriguez:

If you want to see Jon perform, you can see him now and *What is Left, Burns* by James Ijames, part of Steppenwolf NOW: or virtual season of six exclusive digital works from some of the most exciting voices in the American Theatre performed by Steppenwolf ensemble members.

Cliff Chamerblain:

Steppenwolf Now memberships are just \$75 but for a limited time, we're extending an exclusive deal for *Half Hour* listeners \$25 off when you use the code HALF HOUR at steppenwolf.org/now.

Caroline Neff:

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

Audrey Francis:

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

James Vincent Meredith:

The voice of this episode's stage manager is Laura D. Glenn.

Karen Rodriguez:

Special thanks to Erin Cook, Joel Moorman, Kara Henry, Christopher Huizar, Kerstin Adams, Madeline Long, Corinne Florentino—

Cliff Chamerblain:

And all the folks at Steppenwolf.

Caroline Neff:

You can follow us on Twitter @Steppenwolfthtr or on Facebook and Instagram.

Audrey Francis:

And you can always get in touch by emailing halfhour@steppenwolf.org.

Caroline Neff:

We love mail from listeners. If you email us, we will respond. Beware. [Laughter] Hit us with questions thoughts, memories or truly whatever's on your mind.

Karen Rodriguez:

And in two weeks, we will be back with a conversation with the one the only ensemble member Amy Morton.

Cliff Chamerblain:

Till next time friends. This is Cliff Chamberlain—

Karen Rodriguez:

Karen Rodriguez,

Audrey Francis:

Audrey Francis,

Caroline Neff:

Caroline Neff,

James Vincent Meredith:

And James Vincent Meredith. A lifetime to engage; half hour to places.