

Youngblood Monday Lunch: Episode 1

the world is full of by Mona Pirnot

presented by the Ensemble Studio Theatre

[Youngblood Monday Lunch Theme Song Begins]

Singer: [Sung] Lunch in the morning, lunch at night
Lunch whenever you feel that it's right
There's no bad time
For lunch.

Mysterious Voice: [Whispered] Also Time isn't real.

[Theme Song Ends]

RJ Tolan: Hello everybody, and welcome to the Youngblood Monday Lunch Episode One! My name is RJ Tolan, I'm here with Graeme Gillis.

Graeme Gillis: [Distant] Hello!

RJ Tolan: We are the co-directors of Youngblood, the company of early career playwrights at Ensemble Studio Theater in New York City.

When we are in normal times, and when the world is happening the way the world usually happens, we have a program every month, the first Sunday of every month called the Youngblood Sunday Brunch. And we do five short plays by the member playwrights of Youngblood around a theme, and we serve breakfast food and mimosas, and get everyone together. And it's a way for us to get our member playwrights a chance to see their work in a room with actors and directors and being worked on as a full play, and most importantly, to see their work in a room with an audience.

Obviously that hasn't been possible for over a year now, so that has shifted online, into podcast form. And we are sharing short plays by our member playwrights with you in this podcast. This is episode one. We have transformed from the Youngblood Sunday Brunch, into the Youngblood Monday Lunch. And if we can't be with you, in our theatre, least we can be in your ears. Still bringin' you, new plays.

[Distant chuckling]

RJ Tolan: An image that Graeme finds deeply, [More distant chuckling] deeply disturbing.
[More distant chuckling]

RJ Tolan: Graeme will tell you a little bit more about what is coming up in the rest of this series.

[Musical interlude]

Graeme Gillis: Allow me to set the scene. RJ and I, are standing six feet apart, in the lobby of the Ensemble Studio Theatre in beautiful downtown Hell's Kitchen. Because that's

where we keep our microphones. [Distant chuckling] Inside the theatre, stands the set of *Georgia Mertching Is Dead*. A play that we intended to strike, over a year ago. All is stillness. But within that stillness, the mighty heart of the Ensemble Studio Theatre, beats on.

To stand inside these walls? It's the greatest. And we wish you were here too.

Every addition of the Youngblood Monday Lunch has a theme. This theme is: Science. Which means it's part of the EST Sloan Project, a collaboration between the Ensemble Studio Theatre and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to present new plays about science and technology.

Before we begin today's play, we want to acknowledge that Ensemble Studio Theatre, and all of New York City, are located on Lenapehoking. That's the unceded traditional territory of the Lenni Lenape People. We at EST want to pay respect to the Lenape and acknowledge all Indigenous peoples that continue to live, work, create, and contribute here on Lenapehoking.

RJ Tolan: Because the First Light festival that this is a part of celebrates science, and scientists, and scientific advancements, we want to acknowledge that the field of science owes a tremendous debt to labor that was forced or exploited to the suffering of Black, Indigenous, and people of color. And we want to hold them in our thoughts and acknowledge them, and honor their sacrifices and contributions to the progress of science, and to the theatre we create to celebrate it.

Graeme Gillis: Today's play is: *the world is full of*, written and directed by Youngblood playwright, Mona Pirnot.

[Musical chime]

Microsoft Sam: [A robotic voice] Next time I'm sad, remind me of eels.

Remind me that eels live in four life cycles.

Remind me that first they live in the sea as little leaflike larvae.

Then they travel thousands of miles and become snaky see-through eels.

Then they grow fins and jaws and become yellowy brown eels and migrate for miles and miles and miles and miles until they decide to stop and stay in one place anyplace truly anyplace, you'd be surprised at the places they'll survive in - rivers ditches ponds lakes dry land - wherever it is they just find a place and stop.

And stay.

In that one place.

For years.

Until one day the yellowy brown eel decides to become a silver eel so it swims back to the sea and it's body turns black with a silver racing stripe and its stomach dissolves and it grows sex organs for the first time in its life and it finds its way back to the exact place where it was born and it has babies and dies.

That's the life of an eel.

Astounding.

Mysterious.

Remind me of that when I get sad.

Next time I get sad, remind me that a dying tree will donate its carbon to healthy neighbor trees who still have their whole lives ahead of them.

Remind me trees warn each other of danger.

Remind me that the oldest tree in the world is named Methuselah.

She's 5,000 years old.

She's a bristlecone pine.

She lives in California's White Mountains but her exact location is a secret.

Humans can't be trusted with it because, unlike trees, we're selfish.

The next time I inevitably get sad, remind me that writer and podcast producer and personal hero LuLu Miller says that fish don't exist.

Woah. That's provocative.

When I told my Aunt Amy that fish don't exist, she said, "Yeah they do I caught one yesterday."

But what writer and podcast producer and personal hero LuLu Miller means is that a lungfish is more closely related to a cow than it is to a salmon.

A coelacanth is more closely related to a human than it is to a tuna or a trout.

We call those things in the water fish.

But those things in the water can have (evolutionarily speaking) less in common with each other than they do with species who live on land.

So why do we call all of those things fish?

We don't call everything that flies a bird.

It begs the question do fish even exist?

It's more than semantics. It's existential.

I'm not doing the best job explaining it

LuLu does the best job explaining it.

Read LuLu's book.

Y'all should read LuLu's book.

I love LuLu's book because it's mostly about science but it's also about her.

The balance of nonfiction and autobiography is really affecting.

In one chapter she's like "I tried to kill myself as a teenager" and in the next chapter she's like "Okay here's more science."

I hope LuLu wouldn't mind me mentioning her suicide attempt.

It's certainly not a spoiler.

Mention of suicide should never be described as a spoiler.

I only hope that if she were to hear the way I talk about her she would understand how much I was helped by her book.

Her book gave me hope during the worst year of my life.

Her book is a new release.

Next time I get sad - and I will, I will get sad.

I get sad.

I get so so so so so so sad.
Let me tell you real quick how sad I get.
I get so sad I can't speak. I get so sad I can't move.
I get so sad I lay on the floor and watch the dust until my boyfriend is like, "Hey bee bee, maybe you should take a shower."
Next time I get that sad, remind me that technology is cool.
People like to say technology is scary, but I think technology is cool.
Last year I discovered an album made with artificial intelligence.
The album used an AI program to write new arrangements for old folk songs.
I love this album. I love it very much.
My favorite song on the album is the AI orchestrated cover of Amazing Grace.
I played it for my mom on a car trip and she said, "I don't like it. It makes me think of the end of the world."
Then she fell asleep and I drove down I75 listening to artificially intelligent Amazing Grace and crying because it was so unpredictable it was beautiful.

Technology is amazing.
How sweet the sound.
That saved a wretch like me.

Technology is helpful.
I didn't know what exactly a wretch was until I Googled it just now.
Wretch.
An unfortunate or unhappy person.
Yeah that's me LOL.
Next time I'm feeling like a wretch, remind me of Microsoft David.
This is Microsoft David speaking now.

Microsoft David is a text to speech tool that I find helpful.
I like to have Microsoft David read my words back to me because he's not emotive and is good with rhythm.
But sometimes he's says read [Pronounced 'red'] instead of read [Pronounced 'red'].
Okay, it seems he can only ever say read [Pronounced 'reed'].
Wait why did he just finally say read [Pronounced 'reed'] instead of read [Pronounced 'red']?

Hey listen to that.
Now he's got it.
This is surprising.

The next time I'm sad, remind me Microsoft David will surprise me.
Surprises are important when you are depressed.
Because depression is like blah blah blah who cares what's the point I'll be sad forever nothing ever changes etc.
When I'm sad I think I can see the future and the future is sad.
Surprises remind us that we cannot see the future.

When I get sad and think that I am a sad psychic who can see the sad future, remind

me to go to Talktotransformer.com.
Talktotransformer.com is full of surprises.
It is my favorite website.
It is a simple looking website.
It is user friendly.
This is what it looks like.
There is a text box.
Under the text box is a button that says "complete."
You write a sentence in the text box.
You press the button that says "complete."
Then an artificially intelligent neural network will finish your thought. It will generate sentences to follow your sentence.
The AI was trained with language from millions of websites until it learned to simulate writing like a human.
It can almost write like a human.
But not quite.
It almost always gets weird.
Here's an example.

I typed in the text box, "It almost always gets weird."
Here's what the AI said.

Quote.

"It almost always gets weird when people start talking about how much they love kids. I don't always see that. I see it when people say they love little children, young children, teenagers, teens with different characteristics than usual teenagers. So I was really glad to hear P say he loves kids. And I think you guys who love kids know what I mean when I say that I have absolutely no reservations about calling him one of the good ones."

End quote.

ha ha ha Isn't that great?

ha ha ha Isn't that unsettling?

I love that website so much ha ha I love that website so much I've lost days to it hahahahahahahahaha oh man.

It makes me laugh.

It's good to laugh.

It hasn't been so easy to laugh lately

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: It hasn't been easy.

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: It's been hard.

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: It's been so hard.

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: I showed a draft of this play to my boyfriend.

I played him a demo recording.

He liked it.

Yay.

He did have one thought.

He's full of good thoughts.

He's like a super successful playwright so I usually listen to his thoughts on plays LOL.

He said it was effective to find out who the speaker was partway through.

He said it was effective to catch up to the play and find out that the speaker is not a robot expressing robot thoughts but a person expressing sadness and veiling it through a robot voice beep beep boop boop

He did wonder if the play wanted to pull back the veil.

He talks like that.

He'll say things like, "I'm finding out what the play wants to be."

He talks about his plays as if they make choices outside of him and his main job is to listen.

He asks, "What does this play want?"

Does it want to pull back the veil?"

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: I know what he's getting at.

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: I know what he means.

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: But I disagree.

I don't think plays want things.

I think playwrights want things.

Or don't want things.

And I don't want to talk about it.

I want to laugh hahahahaha

I want to laugh hahahahah It feels so good to haha to laugh ha ha.

hahahahahaha hahahahaha hahahahaha hahahahaha hahahahaha hahahahaha hahahahaha hahahahaha hahahahaha

hahahahaha

oh man. phew.

That's good stuff.

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: Where was I?

Oh yeah.

I was talking about the thing I don't want to talk about hey let me just say a few more things about eels. Eels are not defined by time Eels defy time Eels have secrets And trees are selfless And fish might not exist And robots write music And robots can say hello, hello, And neural networks make us laugh hahaha and there are always more surprises Some of them are not the good kind but some of them totally are.

The world is full of wonder the world is full of wonder Let me end with a scene between me and my mom.

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: Picture this

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: My mom and I are walking.

It's incredible that we're walking.

It was hard enough to get out of bed that day.

But there we were.

Me and mom.

Walking.

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: Picture it

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: I say to my mom, "Mom"

"What are we going to do?"

She said to me, "Mona",

"We'll do what we've done before"

"We'll go on"

"We'll keep going on"

"As long as there are still things to love about the world, we'll go on"

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: There was silence. Picture silence.

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: Then she said, "Mona"

"Living with the world is like living with anyone else who you love."

"It's not always easy.

You don't always like them.

But as long as you love them, you keep going"

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: She said, "Mona?" I said, "Yes?"

She said, "Do you still love the world?"

I said

[Silence]

Microsoft Sam: "Yes"

[Musical chime]

[Ethereal music playing underneath]

Graeme Gillis: You've been listening to episode one, of the Youngblood Monday

Lunch. *the world is full of*, a new play written and directed by Youngblood playwright,

Mona Pirnot.

[Ethereal music ends]

Graeme Gillis: Music by Peter Mark Kendall. Sound design by Caroline Eng.

RJ Tolan: The staff of Ensemble Studio Theatre are

Artistic Director: Billy Carden

Executive Director: Susan Vitucci
Associate Artistic Director, Co-Director of Youngblood, and Program Director of the EST
Sloan: Graeme Gillis
Director of Play Development and Associate Director of EST Sloan: Linsay Firman
Co-Director of Youngblood: RJ Tolan
General Manager: Liz Uchtman
Production Manager: Jack Plowe
Development Manager: Aaron Hock
Brand Marketing Manager: Harrison Densmore
Communications and Audience Services Manager: Samantha Sembler
Finance Director: Jonathan Suárez
Literary Associate: Nikomeh Anderson
Production and Operations Producing Apprentice: Mariel Sanchez
Development Assistant: Joey Nasta
and Facilities Manager: José Sanchez

Graeme Gillis: EST is encouraging all of our audiences to support Black Girls Do Stem. They're a non-profit organization that envisions a future with equitable representation for Black women in all of the S.T.E.M fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Their mission is to inspire curiosity in all these S.T.E.M fields among Black girls in every community through access, education, and opportunity. You can find them at: bgbstem.com. We encourage you to support their important work and a more equitable future.

RJ Tolan: Thank you so much for being here for episode one of the Youngblood Monday Lunch! Stay tuned, keep an eye on this podcast space. Hit the subscribe button. [Distant chuckling] We hope we will hear you again...[More distant + close chuckling] from within your ears. [Snorting]

[General distant laughter and whooping]

Graeme Gillis: [Distant and laughing] Thank you everybody!

RJ Tolan: ...In the near future.

[Cackling and wheezing]

RJ Tolan: [Distant] PERFECT!

Graeme Gillis: [Distant] Yeah. Done!

RJ Tolan: Unimprovable!

[Youngblood Monday Theme Song trill]

Singer: Lunch!

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