

SMFA Summit Interview with Erich Lane, premiering 27 May 2021, 5pm PDT

Bonnie Gillespie

Everyone, I'm super excited to bring to you one of my very favorite people. My fellow hand model Erich Lane.

Erich Lane

Hello. Yes.

Bonnie Gillespie

So, we'll get to that. Yeah. Erich and I go way back, and it is such a delight to get to spend some time with you today. I was saying before we started rolling you are one of the most positive people that I've ever known and ever worked with. And just in every environment that we've connected, you always bring this, the sense of glee and joy. And I want to talk about what that, what that is for you. What that work of that is because I'm imagining it's, it's not, maybe it is just your natural setting, but I believe that our mindset is managed. So, what is your, your worldview like?

Erich Lane

Yeah, I try to just be concerned with the present, like what's in front of me. You know what I mean? Like that is honestly like the biggest thing, like because that's that's all I can control, you know is what's right in front of me. You know, I try to not get too concerned about the future, you know, I know it's easier said than done, but, you know, all I can worry about is having a great Saturday, which today is Saturday when we're recording, or whatever the day is, I'm just concerned about having a great day today and embracing what's in front of me.

Bonnie Gillespie

It's simple and you're right, easier said than done because, especially I think as artists we can get in a little loop of all the what ifs because we spend so much of our lives in, what if. Because we, we make believe for a living. What, what do you find that helps you, if you do see your brain going in that direction to kind of like corral it back to the present moment?

Erich Lane

Yeah, I just I try to view... I try to think about what I can control, or what, what's in my power and like what can I do. And this industry, so much of it is like well I can't, I don't have any power over that. I don't, I can't control who they pick. All I can do is make sure I do the best audition. That I'm, you know, on brand, and I'm, I'm doing everything that's within my power, and that's all you can do. And it's, you know, it's lather, rinse, repeat over years, over a long time. You know? And you know you keep doing that, you keep meeting people and you just stay positive, if you can. You know, good things will will happen.

Bonnie Gillespie

So, talk to me about the the stuff that you can control because you're someone who didn't wait for permission to get to be seen. You created your own content, you put stuff out there. Talk a little bit about that process in your in your life and the role it plays.

Erich Lane

Yeah, I think, I mean for me like I I have to have creative outlets, you know, like, I just I have to have it. Like, you know, I'll find myself, you know, if I haven't been performing or, you know, whatever the medium is, I find myself I'm in almost a grumpy mood sometimes, at times, you know. At times, I'm like man what is up with me and it's like, it's usually like well I haven't been performing, I haven't been acting, I haven't been, you know, connecting with why I'm in this industry in the first place, you know? And it's coming back to that and, you know, whatever the medium is whether it's behind a microphone or, you know, if it's at a workshop, or, you know, this or that. Whatever it is, if I'm not performing, I'm... Sometimes I'm in, I'm not in the best mood for me, you know, and so it's just finding whatever avenue it is to perform and to reconnect with why I'm doing this and why I'm putting up with, you know what we got to put up with in the industry.

Bonnie Gillespie

We all know that. Yeah, yeah.

Erich Lane

All the unknowns, you know, and you know I used to do sketch so much and that was a great creative outlet for me you know? It's like, no matter what happens me during the week I know I'm going to be on stage Saturday night and I'm going to be kicking butt. And I'm going to be getting laughs, you know, and that reconnects me. That energizes me and focuses me to keep going.

Bonnie Gillespie

I love that so much because what I what I heard a little catch of in there is, even if it's a workshop, even if it's something that you're paying for an opportunity, some people would label that, you see that as an opportunity to create, to perform, to enjoy your craft and enjoy that, that interaction with an audience.

Erich Lane

Absolutely, absolutely it is no matter what it is now, it's in front of somebody which I was makes it even better.

Bonnie Gillespie

I think so many people would go okay a workshop, an audition, like that is all classified as I'm trying to get a result, I'm trying to book, I'm trying to get a meeting, I'm trying to like make

something happen. And it sounds to me like you really see that as I'm getting to perform and then let go.

Erich Lane

Exactly. Yeah, it took it took a while for me to have that mentality. I will say it took a while.

Bonnie Gillespie

How do you, how do you let go? Because we'll have people watching this who are newer at this and they're just like, if there's an audition it's so like, "I have to book this," or like, I, there's so results-oriented a setpoint especially at the beginning.

Erich Lane

Yeah, it's, I mean, you know I talk so much about the present, but there is a little bit of a long-term view as well associated with it, and it's, you know, showing up doing a great job booking the office, and not necessarily the role, you know? And just, you know, doing the best that I can, and controlling that. And, and that's that's the main thing is, there is a little bit of a long-term view about stuff, of course, you know? I think you'd be insane to not have that, but just being 100% concerned with the present, and, yeah.

Bonnie Gillespie

I like that, because it's a little it's a little micro and macro at the same time. It's like the micro is I can only control this moment right now, but then the macro is big picture, "I'm having a good time, I'm, I'm showing what I can do, I'm, I'm making fans out of this office, booking the room, booking the office." It's a little both at once.

Erich Lane

Exactly, and it is, it's like, you know, getting the next audition, not necessarily this role, you know? And that's the main thing, you know? Like, now with like certain... if it's the first audition, I'm always like, okay, it's the first thing, you know, so much of it is going to come down to look, you know, this, that, you know, I can't control it. I'm already on to my next thing, you know? I'm already on what's up next, you know?

Bonnie Gillespie

I almost see that first audition, as: This is your chance to show them, "Here's what to expect when you call me in. This is what the Erich Lane experience is." And then from there, every time they call you in after, it's going to be from a more educated point of view.

Erich Lane

Right, which is freeing you know? It really like, it's freeing, you know? You just got to view it as "I'm getting to performed today. Someone believes in me that's bringing me in."

Bonnie Gillespie

So, talk a little bit about what you created when you were in a place of, "I'm not being invited in as much as I would like, what can I do, what can I build?" I know you mentioned sketch before but talk a little bit about some of those earlier decisions that you made.

Erich Lane

Sure, yeah, you know like, I... well, the hand model gig.

Bonnie Gillespie

Yeah, let's get into that.

Erich Lane

Yeah, that's that's a bit of a long story, so I'll try to, I'll try to shorten it. I don't know if I've told you this story but it's a...

Bonnie Gillespie

I can't wait. Let's find out.

Erich Lane

I was booked as the actual hand model on a gig. Right? And so, I show up, there was a costume fitting the day before, because they, they had me wearing this jacket. So, they had to try the jacket on and while I'm...

Bonnie Gillespie

You have to go to wardrobe as hand models because there's, there's, there's stuff.

Erich Lane

Exactly, they've got to see how it looks, you know. So, I show up to the fitting and the director comes up to me and he was like, "Hey, are you the hand model?" And I was like, "Yeah." He was like, "I think I want to have a separate camera crew follow you and get behind-the-scenes footage of you. Is that, is that okay with you?" And at first, I was just like, "No, like I don't know you. I don't know what you're gonna do with this footage. Like, I don't like, I don't really want to do any type of reality/documentary type of thing on my... like that just doesn't really, like, interest me too much." So, like, I'm not really feeling this you know? And he was like, "I'm gonna have a towncar come pick you up and take you to set in the morning," and I was like, "Okay, you know what, just, just say yes to the universe. Say yes to the world, you know? If I feel uncomfortable, I can get out of it, you know, but just say yes." So, the next morning, towncar comes to pick me up. There's a camera guy there, director is not there. I'm in the back of this car, and the camera guy was like, "Okay, can I get a shot of you just putting lotion on your hands?" And I was like, "What did I sign up for?"

Bonnie Gillespie

I know... "Is this pervy?" Like, "What's happening here?"

Erich Lane

"What is this? What am I doing?" And so, I get to set and the director starts interviewing me and he was like, "Talk to me about your routine." And I was just very much like, "I don't have a routine, like, I'm just a regular guy, you know," whatever. And so...

Bonnie Gillespie

There's no, there's no like coating your hands in Vaseline or sleeping in gloves or anything like that it's...

Erich Lane

Yeah. And so, he was kind of like, "I don't know, this is really funny," and I was like, "Well, I'm an actor, like, you know, I can make a character out of this and I'll be improvising. We can do whatever you want to do, but I'll be acting, you know?" "Oh, like yeah, that's great, like let's do that."

And so, we... and I was in Groundlings class at the time so it was actually, I was, you know, I was already in like improv, you know that zone. I try to be in there as much as I can because you have to improv a lot in this, in this business. And so, you know like, we shot it, we made a whole short film. That short film got into film festivals, and then it made its way to Comedy Central, and then we made a whole branded content series out of that.

You know, it all happened because I was just willing to say yes, and like roll with the punches, you know? And like you know you got to be ready to hit a home run. You know, because you never know what... what's going to come in front of you, who you're gonna meet, and yeah.

Bonnie Gillespie

What do you use as your, sort of your checkpoint for, "Is this a yes?" Because I know, especially early on for artists for creatives for storytellers, it is tempting to say yes to everything because you think if you say no to anything you could be cutting off an opportunity, but there is a little bit of discernment that is required. What do you look for to tell you, "Okay, this is a yes and I can always later say no." Like what do you do to negotiate that?

Erich Lane

I think it, you know like it kind of changes... for me it's... it changes, like the further I go in my career, you know? Like, like early on in my career, like, you know I was doing student films. I was doing, you know, like, non-pay webseries, you know, anything and everything to get as much footage of me on camera as possible and meeting as many people. And now like, you know, I'm at a place where I'm like, well, like, I don't know like, like, I kind of gotta be paid. You know, I'm at that place. But you know making sure that that you're not spreading yourself

too thin, because you ultimately, you know you do gotta get some rest. And you gotta recharge. And so yeah, so, it's just making sure you're not spread too thin. That's, that's the main thing I think, and knowing that, knowing what you can take on.

Bonnie Gillespie

And so of course, not getting spread too thin really does come from awareness of your capacity and being realistic. Not like, "Here's what 20-year-old me was capable of." It's like, "Here's what right-now-me needs in terms of rest and recovery time and just downtime, not being on."

Erich Lane

For sure, yeah, it's just very, very important. Gotta be able to recharge, you gotta be able to recharge, you know. But, but still like, you know, like pushing it, you know? I think you should push yourself as well. So, it's finding a balance... it really is just finding it.

Bonnie Gillespie

Again, it's like that macro, micro with this one it's... it's... I call it the aligned hustle. It's like, yes, hustle but hustle when it feels right. Don't hustle for hustle's sake.

Erich Lane

Right, exactly. It's like, because that's it's so easy to get burned out. And like, yeah, gotta recharge.

Bonnie Gillespie

I remember one of our early, early, early on experiences you, you're in the union and have been forever, in unions and, and all, forever, ever. I was casting something that was going to be nonunion, and I remember you came to me and said, "I want to help out but I can't audition for this. How can I still be a part of what you're doing right now?" And I always saw that as one of the coolest things that had happened at that point in my casting career. Because I was, I was like maybe five, six years into casting, at that point so still pretty early on.

And that was such a cool move because it showed me, like, "I want to be involved with the kinds of things that you're building and I want to stay on your radar, but I don't... I'm not gonna violate my no line and say yes," even though this is a cool like, you know, Yahoo project that, I mean, it was major. But it was major nonunion, and that no line also allowed me to go, "I know that when I'm casting Erich, it's got to look like this. It's got to be on this side of the union line." And I think that's such a great example of, of having your no line set before the conversation even comes up because I could have asked you to audition for it and you would have said no and, and, and if, if there are actors who go, "Oh, but you said no; you should go in anyway because you want to get in front of her." It's like, yours was, "Here's how I can help; let me help you with the session day. Let me be session runner," you know?

Erich Lane

Right, and it's, you know, like relationships are so important and just meeting people. And people remember that, you know what I mean? Like people really remember when you help out and you're like, "Hey, I can't help in this avenue, but let me know," like, "I want to help with this." And so, when things... things will always come back around. You know what I mean, so...

Bonnie Gillespie

So true.

Erich Lane

Having a micro and a macro...

Bonnie Gillespie

Again. Yes, yes. Okay, so now, tell me, tell me, because hand modeling is something that... I consider myself a retired hand model now because...

Erich Lane

It's always a hand model... you will always be.

Bonnie Gillespie

I will always be... it, yes, it's true, it's true. Tell me some of the crazier, wackier things that have happened in that part of your life because, I mean, certainly, I know from experience what some of the crazier things can be.

Erich Lane

Yeah, I mean, where do I start? Yeah, the one that always cracks me up was, I had a callback for a phone company. And so, they, you know, we, there was like maybe three or four of us in this... the waiting room of this really fancy building, and they brought all of us in, you know, they brought in one by one, so you know I'm sitting out there waiting and finally they bring me in. And there's this big like boardroom table, you know, it's like, it's almost like a big office meeting room and there's this piece of poster board on the table. And so, they're like, "Okay, we want you to just walk around and just put your hands on the, on the poster board for us," you know? And there's like maybe five or six people in the room, and I was like, "Okay." So, put my hands on the thing and they're all like standing behind me. And then I just hear this guy go. "Ooh, nice." I'm like, "Oh, man."

Bonnie Gillespie

It's full of creepy people just like, "Look!" Like, "Ooh." Like, I'm opening a can of Diet Coke over and over... they've rigged it so it opens over and over again. And they're like, "Can you open it slower? Can you go a little more seductively?" I'm like, like, "What the hell?" It's so weird.

Erich Lane

Yeah, I had to like, I had one of my first gigs... actually my first gig as a hand model I was... I think I mentioned this in "Handy", but I was David Spade's hand double. And, so like I was... uh... David, David Spade is kind of thin, you know, and so I was a little heavier than him. And so, like I just remember like, first off, they shoot all of his stuff first, you know, they have, they have us get there super early. And they shoot all of... which is, you know, I understand. But I'm like, "Why do I have to get here at 9am?"

Bonnie Gillespie

In case, in case. Like, you never know. Yeah.

Erich Lane

Exactly. So, I remember, like the sun was setting and they're like, "We gotta get, you know, we're losing the light," you know? As soon as he was... "We gotta go; we gotta get this," you know. And it was just this mad dash to get the like pour shots. And I just remember the AD had to come up to me like, "So, um, David's physique is just a little. So, we're gonna need you to just, just, like, could you just, you know?" I was like, I, "Yeah, man. You don't need to... just say it." Like I don't care, like...

Bonnie Gillespie

So basically, they're saying, "Suck in your gut"?

Erich Lane

"Suck in your gut." Like, just say it. Like you don't need to like, you know? I remember that, that was pretty funny.

Bonnie Gillespie

Like doing that makes it easier to take.

Erich Lane

Like, yeah.

Bonnie Gillespie

"Clearly, we're different body shapes; I get it."

Erich Lane

Just rip the Band-Aid off and just tell me.

Bonnie Gillespie

That is hilarious. Oh my gosh.

Erich Lane

And I mean, you know, that's another example of just rolling with the punches and not taking offense, you know? And just like be like, "Okay, I get it," like, it's, it's all good.

Bonnie Gillespie

Yeah. I got told, "You're never gonna book anything with food because you make the food look really small, and we need smaller hands to hold the food so the food looks big." But I killed in tech, because I could hold a pager or back then one of those clunky-ass, big cell phones because we're talking the '90s, you know, like I could hold those things and make them look smaller, which was an advantage. But... and, what it was like, I remember my agent talking to me about how, you know, "Your fingers are really long." Like it was, like she was breaking something to me and I'm like, "I, I know; it's, it's okay."

But what I love about it is the, the way I am totally dispassionate about information about my hands. If we can get like that about our acting career, about feedback on how we look, like, not at our hands, but at our face, or at our body like, you know, those types of things that we'll let sit with us, or will sting. Like an agent will say, "I can't sign you because..." and they'll list off something that you're like, "Yes, that's a flaw." Like, there's a way to just make it, "Okay, it's data."

Erich Lane

Yeah, my, my old acting coach, Bernie Hiller, who I love, like he used to always say, "Find the lesson, not the pain." You know, so it's like, find, you know, find, like, don't be concerned about if something stinks, you know, just find what you can do about it, and just do that. You know, I remember one of the, let's see, I had a meeting with an agent, this was a long time ago. I think I was... yeah, I was 25, and I was about to turn 26. And I remember the, the agent, like, you know, she had me tell her my age, you know, and I said it. I don't think you... oh no, that's casting that you don't have to say it, right?

Bonnie Gillespie

In fact, it's illegal for a casting director to ask you that.

Erich Lane

Right. Yes, yes. And so, I remember she asked me how old I was. And then she said, you know, "Well, I have a theory that if, if you're 26, and you have no network credits, then acting is a really good hobby." And I just was like, "Oh, wow. You've got to be kidding me." And you know, you just take it. People can say things that can sting but you just got to be like, "I don't care. I don't care what your opinion is, I'm moving on. I don't want to work with you now anyway."

Bonnie Gillespie

Better to learn that strong opinion of that person before you sign on and you're repped by them and they are out talking on your behalf to casting. Like, that energy is like, "Great. I'm so glad we now know in this meeting that we are not going to work together."

Erich Lane

Right, and it also was just like, "You just had me say my age. Like... you, you knew what you were doing."

Bonnie Gillespie

Yeah, you used it as, like, a stopper. It was a way to just, like, get the, "I'm not gonna rep you because... but, but first I'm gonna insult you."

Erich Lane

Yeah, yeah. And so, you know it was just like okay, "Find the lesson, not the pain." I don't, I can, I know who I don't want to work with.

Bonnie Gillespie

That's a perfect example of finding the lesson because if the lesson is, "Not you. We were, we are not going to work together," that is a fine lesson. It doesn't have to be, "What can I change? What do I need to do differently?" It's actually, the lesson is in this, "We're not going to collaborate. Cool. Hundreds of other agents out there. We're good."

Erich Lane

"Moving on. Moving on to the next thing," you know?

Bonnie Gillespie

So, as we're having this conversation, the industry is really coming back. We are really starting to see things pick up in a major way. I know you've always been down with like get your self-tape turned in, like so that when things shifted into self-tape-land, like, that didn't feel jarring to you, that's something that you're like, "Yeah, I got that." What is, do you feel, the the next pivot in the industry? And I mean, I know we can go so many different ways, but where do you see us headed?

Erich Lane

Oh man, that's such a good question.

Bonnie Gillespie

And there's no right answer because, who knows, right?

Erich Lane

Yeah, man, I don't know. I feel like, probably the next step will be like a show that's on social media. That would be my guess. I mean that's the way things are going.

Bonnie Gillespie

Yeah, for sure. Do you, do you have a big social media following? Do you try and like cultivate that kind of experience?

Erich Lane

You know what I probably should put more effort into it, but like, I, you know I... it's not something that I really concern myself with. And I'm, you know, I feel like if, if that's something that people want to do, they should do that, you know. It's just not, it's not something that I'm like, I'm super concerned about it in my day-to-day operations, you know what I mean. And so, and I always find myself like when I do make a post, I'm always checking like, "Oh gosh, how many people liked it, blah blah blah blah," so I'm like, I can't imagine doing that, like, all the, you know. Because that would, that I feel like I would have to post so much, that I just, for... to lose that, that, you know obsessiveness over a post.

Bonnie Gillespie

And also, it's a little bit like when you were like, "Hey, every Saturday I go and I do my sketch show and I connect with the audience." I think for people who are big into social, that's their version of that.

Erich Lane

Absolutely.

Bonnie Gillespie

They make it a job; it's just that that thing that they do. And it's not for everyone and I think that's important to note because I think so many people get in their head like, "I have to be everywhere. I have to do all the things." And it's like, you're actually not even going to be able to do all the things.

Erich Lane

Yeah.

Bonnie Gillespie

There's just not room.

Erich Lane

Right, exactly. And yeah, I just, like, you know, it's definitely a place where I could grow, you know. It's definitely an area that I could work on for sure, if, if I, you know if I really focused on it. Like I think I can grow a following, I think I could, I don't know, but.

Bonnie Gillespie

I would imagine. I'm thinking just the behind-the-scenes of even hand modeling stuff. That's so, like, it's so bizarre.... Well, you know from, from "Handy", like it's just, it's so bizarre to people, to even, like, "What, what exactly is happening?" And of course, you could make so many things extreme and... okay I'm now... I'm going into producer mode so let's not do that.

Erich Lane

Yeah, but, you know, like you're right. Like it you know if it's something that you don't think it's you or you don't vibe with, don't do it, you know. Like you don't have to do it.

Bonnie Gillespie

So, what advice would you give, we'll wrap on this, for anyone who's, who's watching this going, you know, I, "I'm tired. It's a lot." Or "I'm intimidated. It's overwhelming." What, what advice do you have for sticking with this long haul through all its dips and ups and downs?

Erich Lane

It's, it's getting back to what we said earlier, you know, you have to I think everyone has to have a creative outlet, you know. And you, no matter what it is you have to have a creative outlet. Whether it's writing, you know, posting something on social media, whatever it is, find where you kick butt and do that, you know? No matter the size of the audience. Doesn't matter, be like, "Okay, I know that this is why I should be doing this." You know?

Bonnie Gillespie

Yes, performance for an audience of like... well we've both done black box small theater, audience of four or five people, same performance as if it's a hundred. Like, you put your energy into it because that's still an audience. That's still connection.

Erich Lane

Absolutely, absolutely.

Bonnie Gillespie

So, taking that to social even if it's like, "I got two likes and one of them's my mom." Good job. I'm glad your mom hit like.

Erich Lane

"Great. You got a like, and it was about performing," and, you know what I mean? Like, that was the main thing. It was you performing.

Bonnie Gillespie

Beautiful, beautiful. Erich let everybody know where they can keep up with you. I know social maybe not so much but, please, if people do want to find you.

Erich Lane

Yes, please find me I'm just at @ErichLane, Erich with a C H. I'm not super present; I am on there. I don't post a heck of a lot, so it's, I'm not the most exciting follow. But when I do post something, it'll be funny. It'll be good, you know, but might take me a while to post.

Bonnie Gillespie

Love it, love it. Thank you so much for doing this, I appreciate you so much.

Erich Lane

Thank you, Bonnie. It's so great to see you and catch up and I'm so excited for you and for everybody and yeah... keep at it, guys!

Bonnie Gillespie

Thanks.