

PROFESSIONAL TROUBLEMAKER



with LUVVIE AJAYI JONES

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Prove Yourself to Yourself (with Cynthia Erivo) - Episode 03

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Welcome to the Professional Troublemaker podcast! This is the place where we help you cultivate the courage, authenticity and audacity you need to use your voice, take up space and live a life that is so bold, even your wildest dreams say #goals. I'm your host, Luvvie Ajayi Jones, New York Times bestselling author, sought after speaker and side-eye sorceress bringing you thought-provoking conversations with amazing people who have taken action, and have consistently showed up with the courage and confidence they needed to become the fear-fighters they are today. Like the late, great John Lewis said, these are the kind of people who are "Never, ever afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

Before we jump into today's interview, know that this podcast is named after my second book, [Professional Troublemaker: The Fear-Fighter Manual](#), which hits bookstore shelves on March 2, 2021.

How would our lives be different if we were given permission to be disruptors for the greater good? How far will we have gone if we already knew that our jobs aren't to shy away from big things but to run towards them? How dope would our legacy be if we knew that FEAR is natural and we're actually supposed to do the things that scare us? How audacious would we be if impostor syndrome wasn't holding on to our ankles? In my new book, I talk about all these things and how my life has transformed as a result of being the person who committed to doing the things that feel bigger than me, doing the things that feel scary as shit and things that make me lose my breath.

This book is dedicated to my late grandmother, Funmilayo Faloyin, who was the professional troublemaker I looked up to when I was growing up. You know what you can say to an elderly Nigerian stateswoman who has been through the darkness of life and conquered all the mountains placed in her way? Not a damn thing. That spirit, those lessons and that fortitude is the energy I brought to this book. So you know it's anointed!

The Fear-Fighter Manual is game-changing, and I know it. So, if you value this show, if you value the guests and their stories, the lessons, the wisdom and inspiration I bring to you. If you've ever listened to something I said and wrote it down, YOU WILL LOVE [Professional Troublemaker: The Fear-Fighter Manual](#). If you want to commit to fighting fear, impostor syndrome and constantly finding courage in this scary world, this book is for you.

So, I need your help. I need you to help make this book a rousing success. I need you like I needed you for my first book [I'm Judging You: The Do-Better Manual](#). Y'all helped me change my life by supporting it, and making it a New York Times bestseller. And I need your help to do that again. Because this book

is needed and I think it will leave a mark on you. I know it, actually. We need to become professional troublemakers, and this manual that I wrote, this book that I wrote will help make it happen. So, be sure to preorder **Professional Troublemaker** TODAY wherever books are sold, or go to ProfessionalTroublemakerBook.com. You can get the hardcover, paperback or audiobook (which I narrated). So the URL is PROFESSIONALTROUBLEMAKERBOOK.com. I'm so excited for you to read it.

On this episode of Professional Troublemaker, I'm talking to my girl, my Naija sister **Cynthia Erivo**. This conversation is a long time coming, and I'm so excited to have her here. If you don't know Cynthia, I don't know what you're doing with your life, but as far as her official credentials go, Cynthia is a Tony®, Emmy® and Grammy® Award-winning actress, as well as Academy Award®, Golden Globe®, and SAG nominee. She played Celie in the West End and Broadway revivals of the musical "The Color Purple," and immediately started doing all the TV and movies. She was nominated for an Academy Award for her work in "Harriet," (That EGOT is coming soon, right?!) and she currently appears on the HBO series "The Outsider." I cannot wait to see her play Aretha Franklin on National Geographic's "Genius: Aretha" along with all of the other projects she's got in the works. And my favorite performance she's given ever was when she sang me down the aisle at my wedding in 2019.

Here's why Cynthia is a Professional Troublemaker and why you want to make sure you listen to this interview. First, as a Black woman in show business, she has been through it. She told me some stories in her interview about her coming up in London that I had never heard before that had me sitting here with my jaw completely dropped. And in spite of it all, she is so confident and completely unbothered about doing anything else but showing up, telling stories and doing her thing. She shows up as her best self and works harder than anyone I've ever seen. So, check out this conversation. It's really good, and I'm so thankful for Cynthia. For her vulnerability and sisterhood.

Conversation with Cynthia Erivo

- LUVVIE Okay. So this is much overdue, but the timing is perfect because Rants and Randomness is now Professional Troublemaker. Yes. And who better, who better to have on as the essential professional troublemaker than the woman who has every award known to man.
- CYNTHIA Quit.
- LUVVIE Every award and is out here. Cynthia doesn't belong in any boxes. Multi-hyphenate and even her hair makes trouble.
- CYNTHIA I mean, sometimes it does. Sometimes.
- LUVVIE Even her hair, because sometimes it's purple, sometimes it's green, sometimes it's pink. Any given day I'm always like, "I wonder what color hair Cynthia got?" You can't bet on it. So welcome to-
- CYNTHIA Yeah, I try.

LUVVIE ... Professional Troublemaker.

CYNTHIA But thank you. Thank you very much.

LUVVIE Oh my God. Think you're one of my main boos. Cynthia is one of my loves.

CYNTHIA I love you.

LUVVIE I love her so much. And I was like, "You could come on my podcast." And she said yes.

CYNTHIA Of course. We've definitely taken our time to do this. It's taken a while.

LUVVIE Oh my gosh. So yeah, so excited to have you on.

CYNTHIA Thank you for having me.

LUVVIE So my first question is, what did you want to be when you were growing up?

CYNTHIA I wanted to be a singer and an actress. And then at some point I changed that to a spinal surgeon and then I went back to being a singer and an actress.

LUVVIE Okay. Now talk about that. How did you go from singer and actress to wants to be a spinal surgeon?

CYNTHIA Well, I had this one year in high school, I call it a secondary school. Where I was obsessed with biology and was really good at it. I'm one of those kids that could really have gone either way. I could have done the biology of it all and the science of it all if I really buckled down. And when I was truly, truly applied, I was passing with flying colors. And I was doing that anyway, but I was really doing well. I realized that that was me, strangely enough, trying to fit in with everybody else, because the people in my class they were all super intelligent, wanting to be lawyers or nurses or doctors or vets or whichever.

CYNTHIA And I was like, "Well, I want to be a part of that." Because not many people wanted to be performers. There was only really me. And I was like, "Well, I could do this, spinal surgery."

LUVVIE So you were another failed doctor? Welcome to the club. The club is big.

CYNTHIA Thank you. Thank you so much.

LUVVIE There's so many of us. We're like, "We could have actually done..."

CYNTHIA We could have.

LUVVIE Actually let's be clear. I probably could not have. Let's actually, I was terrible in Science.

CYNTHIA Now come on. Wasn't it maths that you were terrible at?

LUVVIE I mean, I was okay. I was probably better at math than I wasn't chemistry though. Chemistry was a struggle for-

CYNTHIA But I think Chemistry was a struggle for most people. You really had to know what you were doing. I liked Chemistry though. But biology was really my bag. I can't even remember the name of this other science. What's the one with the P?

LUVVIE Physics.

CYNTHIA Physics. The worst. I hated it. I actually loved maths. I actually loved maths.

LUVVIE Really?

CYNTHIA Yeah. I was really good at it.

LUVVIE I was only good at algebra. Trigonometry and calculus, count me out.

CYNTHIA But I don't think trigonometry is necessary for anybody. It's ridiculous.

LUVVIE Is algebra really necessary?

CYNTHIA Not really, but it's fun to do when you know what you're doing. Yeah.

LUVVIE It is fun. Solve for X. Yes. I can do that all day. And then the other one is mm-mm (negative). Nope. So what was five-year-old Cynthia like?

CYNTHIA Five-year-old Cynthia was bubbly, chatty, would sing everything, probably hummed when she ate, nosy. Really nosy. I wanted to know about everything. I wanted to be in everyone's business. I wanted to hear what everyone was talking about. I wanted to see what everyone was doing. Yeah, that was her. I was fun. I'm not shy of shy or anything, ever.

LUVVIE Five-year-old Luvvie and five-year-old Cynthia would have been friends.

CYNTHIA I think so too, honestly. Honestly, five-year-old Luvvie and five-year-old Cynthia probably would have gotten into trouble a lot, but for nothing other than talking too much.

LUVVIE Facts, actual facts. And then being really smart so you couldn't really checkup.

CYNTHIA Right? Like the two kids that are always talking and then when you have the conversation, they do something that makes you laugh even though you're supposed to get them into trouble.

LUVVIE [inaudible 00:05:16].

CYNTHIA You're supposed to yell at them and they do something silly and they're both really cute and small, so you're kind of like-

LUVVIE "Just fine."

CYNTHIA ... "Just go back to class. It's fine."

LUVVIE That is exactly it.

CYNTHIA Whatever.

LUVVIE So where did you grow up?

CYNTHIA Well, so I went to a school in South West London, and that's where I grew up. And then we moved when I was about 15 to East London. That's where I was until I was about 24 or 25. Yeah.

LUVVIE So then in high school you went back to the performing arts of at all?

CYNTHIA Yes I did.

LUVVIE You have a Nigerian mama?

CYNTHIA I do. I do.

LUVVIE How did she handle it? Was she cool? Was she supportive? Or was she like, "I want you to be a doctor."

CYNTHIA She was really supportive because she's a bit of a rebel herself. So she came over to London when she was about, I'm going to say 24. She came to London on her own. She came with one of her sisters, but they basically, her sister wanted to go do her thing and she went and did her thing as well. And she was sent here to do one thing and did something totally different because she wanted to. She was like, "I don't want to do this thing that is being asked of me. I know what I want to do. I want to do this."

And, I think, that because she was sent here to do something else that wasn't her passion, I don't think she ever wanted to inflict on me the same thing. So she just wanted me to do what I wanted to do, but do it really well.

LUVVIE And that's a privilege. That is a privilege that a lot of immigrant kids did not have-

CYNTHIA Did not have. And I'm very aware of that.

LUVVIE ... Parents were like, "Be a doctor." Come on, Edith Erivo!

CYNTHIA She did good. She did really good, because there was a moment when I was about like 18, 19 when I had just stopped for a little bit. I wasn't seeing really. And before I would do different talent shows and go to different spaces. I just needed to take a break and she noticed. And she was like, "I just want to make sure you're still singing." And just in passing. I think I was walking to the kitchen or something. And she was saying, "I was just making sure that you're still singing."

LUVVIE Wow. Oh my God.

CYNTHIA And I was like, "Damn it, yes I'm [inaudible 00:07:39]."

LUVVIE She convicted you in that moment.

CYNTHIA Yeah. Yes.

LUVVIE This voice that you have, first of all. [inaudible 00:07:47] This voice that you have. I was having a conversation with somebody and I was like, "I really deeply believe that God does give us gifts that nobody else has." Because you can practice until your face is blue and still not have this voice. Ain't no world in which I can be like, "Dedication will give me Cynthia Erivo's voice." Ain't no world. I need people to understand. Ain't no discipline or motivation going to actually give you a voice that sounds like Jesus cried on your freaking vocal chords. Okay.

CYNTHIA Not Jesus cried on your vocal chords. That is hilarious.

LUVVIE So I think I've seen a clip of you when you were like seven singing.

CYNTHIA Something like that. Probably.

LUVVIE So when did you actually first start singing?

CYNTHIA My mom thinks I started singing when I was about 18 months old, so like a baby. She writes in my book, Cynthia started singing when she was such and such, and she hums she eats. So that humming thing happened a long time ago. It started when I was young. I don't remember that. I only remember my first time singing out loud in front of people when I was about five. And I did Silent Night. [crosstalk 00:09:09] It might not have been. I don't think it was. What was the one when I was seven?

LUVVIE I saw something of you when you were young and I was like, "That's nuts." I can't remember.

CYNTHIA What did I look like? What was I wearing?

LUVVIE I don't remember this. I don't remember this, but-

CYNTHIA Because that is the only way I can tell you. If you can remember what I was wearing I could tell you exactly where I was.

LUVVIE So at five though, where was that?

CYNTHIA Five. It's primary school when I was a shepherd and they had asked me to sing Silent Night. I don't know why.

LUVVIE And then when you were seven?

CYNTHIA When I was seven, I can't remember what that was. I feel like it was a talent show or something or-

LUVVIE Am I making this up. I feel like I've seen something.

CYNTHIA I think what you're seeing, I might have been older and I put myself into like a stage school type thing. So I could do musicals and sing with people. And that might've been one of the videos that you saw. Because there's a video of me when I'm really young like that, I'm like 15 or something.

LUVVIE Okay. Maybe that's what I saw. So you knew you had this gift, you knew you had this voice and your mom was encouraging you. The power of the professional troublemakers on our lives who tell us, "You don't have to do what everybody else is doing. You don't have to be the doctor." She gave you permission to-

CYNTHIA Straight up.

LUVVIE ... to be this person. So when you graduate from high school, what did you do?

CYNTHIA I start, for some reason, don't know why. Because I didn't have the information that I needed to go on this path of performance. So I go to university to start studying the psychology of music or something like that. Music psychology. Music psychology. And essentially that is the way in which music affects the mind or affects the psychology of a person. So like a minor song, why does that make us feel sad? Or a major song, why does that make us feel happy? And then how that affects our social standing. What music does to us in social surroundings and almost like hierarchies.

And I was like, "This is great." But for me it was simple because I was also like doing backing vocals at the same time and singing. I was doing nightclubs at the same time. Singing behind people during the night and then at university in the daytime. So I'm watching the results of what music does to people. It's like, "Well, that's my job." And so writing these papers was like, "Okay, this is what happens when blah, blah, blah. And when you sing a minor note there's something that happens with the mind. [inaudible 00:12:03] put together and causes tears. And we attach the minor note to the sadness."

We know that's the stuff I was writing because I understood it. But I wasn't needing to think that much about it. I wasn't really needing to apply myself and I wasn't stimulated. So I knew something wasn't right. Year and a half goes in. I'm passing, it's fine. But I'm bored, very bored. It's not connecting enough. It just doesn't feel right. So I leave. There's a young actress company course at a theater called Stratford Theater Royal in East London. I go and do that. I sign up for it. And when I sign up for it and get ready to start, the day I start the tutor comes in, who's going to be taking the class for us. And I'm standing in the ticket office getting ready.

I don't know why I'm there. I'm probably talking to some of the ladies because I know them. It's like my local theater and I go there all the time, used to work there and all sorts. So the tutor comes in and it happens to be this woman called Ray McCann. Ray took me through a acting course when I was at 15. So I'm 20 years old now. This is a five years later. When I was 15 I did young actress course like a youth company that would take the main production from the main theater house at the Young Vic, and then create a youth production version of that production.

The production then was of Romeo and Juliet and I played Juliet in the youth production. Ray was the director of this youth production. Hadn't seen her for ages. Hadn't seen her at all for ages. That show finishes. It's really great. I have a great time and I don't see her again. Five years later, I bumped into her in the [inaudible 00:14:04] the ticket office of this theater where I'm doing this young actors company and she happens to be teaching it. She says to me, "Are you going to train?" I say, "What does that mean? What do you mean train?" She says, "Will you go to drama school?" I said, "I don't know how. What is drama school?"

And she goes, "Well, drama school is where you go to train if you want to be an actor. You should go to drama school." And I was like, "I don't know how that works so I don't think it's possible." She goes, "I think you should go to RADA." RADA is the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. And I was like, "No. First of all, it has Royal Academy in it. That means I'm not going to get in." So-

LUVVIE Because a Black girl in London.

CYNTHIA And East London is not going to get into the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. It's just not going to happen. That's like the automatic thing that I thought. That's a nonsense idea. I'm not going to do it. She said, "Well, if you don't apply then you can't come to this course." I was like, "What do you mean?" She said, "If you don't apply to this school, if you don't come to my office this afternoon and apply to this school, you will not come into this course." "Okay. Fine, fine." Not even thinking about it. Because I just want to do the course and I was annoyed. Highly annoyed. I was like, "Okay, fine. I'll apply." And to like spite her I didn't apply to anywhere else.

LUVVIE You just applied to RADA.

CYNTHIA I just applied to RADA. I auditioned for RADA the first of it's four rounds. First round goes well, I get to the second round. Second round, they asked me if I would apply to any other drama school if I didn't get into this one. And I went to say yes to give a PC answer. "Yes I would." Because I love drama. I love acting. The word yes was there but what came out of my mouth was no. I remember this. I remember it. I remember going... They also, "You know if this doesn't work out, would you apply to any other drama schools? And would you try again for something else?" And I went, "No. I wouldn't. I don't really want to go anywhere else. So."

LUVVIE Wow.

CYNTHIA Silence and then laughter. Because I think it was probably one of the most honest moments they'd had that day because I was not pretending. And I had already made a decision that the only thing that I was going to be, was I was doing this with myself because I was determined that I was not going to get in. So it didn't matter if I was just me.

LUVVIE Right. You were just like, "I'm just going to show up because I was going to lose."

CYNTHIA Yeah. I didn't dress up. I remember I had tracksuit bottoms on, I had an easy top and I remember I had a headscarf on the top of my head. I was that. That's how I turned up to this thing. And they were like, "Oh great. She's here." In their eyes, wonderful, she's here to work.

LUVVIE Wow.

CYNTHIA So all these things I thought were counting against me were actually like, "Tick. Great. She here to work. Tick. Great. She's honest. Tick. Great. She's good to work with people." That's what was happening. So audition two goes really well. They put me in audition three. Audition three is working with everybody and working through speeches that goes really well. Auditioned four you work for the day. And then your last thing of that day is to say whatever speech you've rehearsed or learned in front of the faculty and everyone who might be in your year that year.

Yeah. So you've got like 30 other kids or something like that looking at you whilst there's the whole staff looking at you, reading your speech or saying your speech. So it comes to this speech and there's another woman who's doing the same speech as me. She gets it before me. She starts speaking these speech and she goes blank. No lines. She goes blank. And pauses for a second. And I feed her the line.

LUVVIE Wow.

CYNTHIA Well. We do the same speech. And the thing is my brain doesn't go, "Oh no. She'll fail then I can do the speech. Now that's great." My brain goes, "Give her the line, you know the line." So the line comes out before I can even think about it. It's an automatic like, "Here's the line, here's the line, here's the line. And she got back on and then she continued the speech. It was just sort of like a natural sort of like-

LUVVIE Let me help you out.

CYNTHIA ... "Let me help her out." And we both ended up in the year.

LUVVIE Oh my God. So when you got the acceptance to RADA...

CYNTHIA They called me. They called me. I remember it was Saturday morning. I had sort of just gotten up and gotten ready. I remember my curtain was still closed. I remember the day was sunny. I was upstairs in my bedroom and the artistic director of the school called me and said to me, "Hey, I'm just calling you to let you know you did really well at these auditions and I'm wondering if you would like to be a part of this year's intake of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts?"

And I asked him if he was serious. "Are you serious?" He said, "Yes." I was like, "No, but really, is this for real? Like for real this is real?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Yes. Okay. Yes." That's how I found it. And then the acceptance letter came and it was wild because I really didn't think I was going to get in at all. And that sort of begins the story, really. And here's the thing, by no means was this school perfect. But it really was the beginning of me understanding that when I'm myself, that's when I'm at best. And the times when I doubt whether I know I could do something I'm always proved wrong.

LUVVIE I recently posted about this prayer that I do about let my helpers find me. And how it is my anchor prayer for moments where I'm about to go into something that feels really strange. And what I'm seeing, what I'm hearing is you keep finding helpers who were like, this woman said,

"You're not going to take this class unless you apply to the school." And that is what forced you to apply to the school that you didn't think you could even get into. And then ended up showing up with the attitude and get in.

CYNTHIA What I say it was I went in with like. I remember I sat in and there was this wonderful woman who I think is still working and her name is Joan Oliver. She has the biggest smile and these really cool glasses. And I remember she just was so Northern Black woman, who I think was just like, "This girl. I know this girl." And I think she was at the table doing the interviews with me with like two other people. And I think she was like, "I recognize this girl. I recognize this girl and I think I get her."

And I, all through my, it's a three year course, and all through those three years we would talk to each other. And I think I still have her number. And we would text from time to time. I think she was my caretaker at this time. She was my helper.

LUVVIE She guided you through the whole?

CYNTHIA She did. Yeah. She was [inaudible 00:21:42].

LUVVIE I assume that RADA does that have a lot of Black folk in it?

CYNTHIA I was one of four in my year.

LUVVIE So a lot of people who think about just arts and being Black in the arts are thinking of the US lens. And I think people have a lot of misconceptions or actually no idea what it's like in the UK. How did that unfold for you as one of four in a class of what? 30?

CYNTHIA Yeah. In a class of 34. I was one of four Black people.

LUVVIE Shit. How was that?

CYNTHIA Odd. Very odd. A lot of microaggressions, a lot of misunderstandings, a lot of assumptions that I was aggressive. A lot of assumptions that I had issues with other people. A lot of assumptions that I didn't need the help that everybody else needed and I was efficient and strong on my own. A lot of assumptions that the characters I would play were "strong Black women." And it took a lot to like [inaudible 00:22:56] against it. And actually I'm only now coming to like the understanding of some of the racist things that were happening, to be honest. Silly things like when I first got there just before I started going, I landed a job as backing vocalist for a really big band here in the UK.

And that gig would have paid for my entire time there. So I asked if I could do it. They said, "No, you can't do it." When I got there, I realized that they had let a white boy go and do a play for two weeks. Basically the length of time he was doing the play was the length of time I would have done my gig. My gig would have paid for me to be at RADA. His play was just like a frivolous thing that I don't know whether they paid him or not. But it was a thing that he wanted to do. And I guess his play was worth more than my gig. And he was an Etonian boy who didn't really need the help, to be honest.

LUVVIE And you with the single mother who was like, "I need to get every dollar I can get."

CYNTHIA Yeah. And then I realized they started punishing me for it. They punished me for it.

LUVVIE How?

CYNTHIA I didn't realize until the very end when I left that they had punished me for it. End of the first year, you sort of like do presentations and obviously they cast things and they kept giving me like the smallest, smallest roles in these things. When I came to the end of my time there, because I'm a big mouth, I went to the artist director and I asked him what their plan was with me. Because it felt like at every turn they were failing. Like, "What were you planning to do with me?" I left slightly early because I had landed my agent and I had a show to go to.

And so I had done everything that was necessary in that year. And the next thing that they were doing was like a showing for people to get agents. I didn't need to do it. I already had mine and I already had a play to go and do. So I asked him what on earth was going on and what they wanted me to do. Because when we went into the third year and we were doing all of these shows there was a musical. The assumption is, well, there's a couple of kids. And our year was particularly musical, but there's one girl here that really does these musicals. And that's what it is. They gave me the smallest role again in this musical. Gave these other girls I need not describe to you what they look like, the main roles, all of whom got ill-

LUVVIE All of them got... Look at that spirit.

CYNTHIA ... They got ill. And then they asked me, instead of taking them out and just asking me to play these roles, they asked me... And I was foolish for doing it in the end, because now obviously your hindsight's 2020, you look back and you think, why the hell did I do that? And why did I feel strong enough to go? Absolutely not do it yourself. Asked me to sing for them. I would sing because they both lost their voice, I sung, they lip-sync.

LUVVIE Wait. So they were onstage.

CYNTHIA Lip-syncing to my voice for this musical. So I remember at the end of this, I asked assistant director what they planned for me. He said, "Well, in that first year there was an issue with you wanting to go off and do the backing vocals for the group. And we just didn't think that you were a hundred percent committed to doing this. So we didn't feel like you were ready to do any large roles. So we've given you the small roles." Not realizing that, that gig I wanted to do it because it would have paid for everything. So I didn't have to worry about. I ended up working through the whole entire time. I was working the entire time.

But when you're working the entire time and you're doing basically a... It's like your day starts at like 8:00 doesn't finish till like 6:00 sometimes 7:00. And when you're doing shows, sometimes it ends at 9:00. So you're doing like round the clock. So it means that you're five days a week doing that. Sometimes you're working on the Saturdays because you have to come in and then I worked on a Sunday. And then there are days when I would finish working at RADA. I finished doing RADA and then go and do a gig at night. That's what I was doing. But had I have just done

that, I would've been like, I might do a Sunday job just for spending money. But [crosstalk 00:27:56] pay for it.

LUVVIE And then they punish you for the shit?

CYNTHIA And they punished me for it. They took it out on me as a student.

LUVVIE I'm blown. I'm not shocked. I'm just blown because hearing these experiences is so deeply infuriating. It's like, "What the hell?" So you left RADA. You finished RADA. What happened next?

CYNTHIA I finished RADA, left RADA, went to do this little tiny play in Brighton, which is like 20 minutes outside of London. Like a little seaside town. Brighton is one of my favorite places in the world. It's like so simple. It's just this little seaside town with like piers and candy floss and all of that stuff. But it's just lovely. And I remember loving this play. And it felt like that play led to like an English touring theater thing where I was playing Constance but it's like D'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers and Constance.

And I was playing that woman. And that was an interesting play because again, surrounded by all the white guys and again, lots of microaggression and lots of terrible things said, one guy who was playing D'Artagnan, and so we did a lot of work together onstage. I remember we did a sword fight. One of the rules of sword fighting is that your partner should always know what is going to happen. You practice it, you practice it in the speed you're going to do it and the speed should not change when you're on stage. It's just like a trust thing. Right?

One day he just decides that he feels like going faster. Doesn't tell me, I realize maybe by the second hit that he's moving at warp speed. So I'm petrified onstage doing this. And I was like, "Dude." At the end of it I was like, "What the heck happened? And why won't you tell me that you're going to do that, that fast?" "I just felt like you could take it."

LUVVIE What?

CYNTHIA [crosstalk 00:30:00] scared. Yeah. I remember well just before an entrance on stage the two of us, he said, "So why do you talk the way you talk?" I said, "What do you mean?" Well, I mean like, "Is that because you went to RADA?" Meaning, meaning I sound too well-spoken for a Black girl.

LUVVIE Right.

CYNTHIA And the only way I could sound like I sound, is because I've gone to RADA.

LUVVIE Because you were trained in RADA.

CYNTHIA Because I was trained at RADA, not realizing that I had aunties who would be like, "Don't you ever leave off the t at the end of a word can't. And don't you ever say the word ain't." Which is why whenever I say that word it doesn't sound right on me. He doesn't realize that's it had nothing to do with RADA. Like when I was at RADA, you had these like RPE lessons or accent

lessons and I didn't have to do RPE. I didn't really have to do that because the way I naturally spoke just was sort of like that. That's just what it was.

I mean, it was just a weird thing. It was a weird thing. He had a perceived notion about what Black people sounded like, looked like, were like. And assumed that I was that until I was like, "Why'd you keep imagining me like that?" He would pretend to be a rapper when he spoke to me.

LUVVIE Oh God. God, Chad. Jesus. And how long did you have to work with him?

CYNTHIA It was a good few months. It was a good three or four months. Because we toured the show. Yeah.

LUVVIE Jesus. So in all of this, you're just trying to do your good job, face your front.

CYNTHIA I'm just trying to do my job, face my front, mind my business, do my job. That's what I'm trying to do.

LUVVIE And you have to do with all the white boys, because, what the hell?

CYNTHIA And also it's like you're dealing with it because not a lot of the jobs that come out and maybe it may be changing now, but not a lot of the jobs while I was coming up, had space for Black girls. They just didn't. You'd have the smaller roles. Like you'd be the best friend or you'd be like the small role in that. It was really interesting. You're watching TV and you're basically watching the same period drama over and over again. And I can't see me in it. Basically, anywhere before the seventies or sixties, we did not exist in the UK, apparently.

LUVVIE Wow.

CYNTHIA Which is just like, "That's not true because I know that my mom was here when she was 24." So that was way before. Like, "What are we talking about here?"

LUVVIE All across the world Black folks in the diaspora just got to deal with the same shit. All across the world our struggles are so parallel. So, then, how did you get, you started doing the play? Like *Color Purple* the play?

CYNTHIA Yes.

LUVVIE Where were you at that point?

CYNTHIA I remember I was in the middle of touring *Sister Act* and someone said that *The Color Purple* was coming to London. And I was like, "I want to do that." And I was determined. So I track it and kept asking when it was coming. And then finally it landed and they said *The Color Purple* was coming to London. It's going to this little theater called the Menier Chocolate Factory which is a little 200 seater theater. And I was like, "Okay, great. I want to do it. I would like to do this show because I don't know why." My gut and my heart were like, "You're supposed to do the show. You have to do this show."

LUVVIE You're supposed to do the show.

CYNTHIA Yeah. And they wouldn't see me.

LUVVIE Wait. Why?

CYNTHIA I don't know. I don't know. I think that they assumed that a Black girl who had gone to RADA and had done big old musicals could not connect to the character Celie. Couldn't connect. What they didn't realize was I was a Black girl who was raised by a single mother and who put herself through the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. That's what I was.

LUVVIE They assumed you were posh and came from this really privileged background and were like, "She can't be Celie because, no." Meanwhile, you're like, "I lived in the hood in London."

CYNTHIA Yeah.

LUVVIE So they refused to see you. How did you end up cutting through it?

CYNTHIA I got my agent to badger them consistently. And then a friend, who is now a friend of mine, but someone, his name is Jason Pennycooke, who also actually was part of the Young Actors Company. So he had seen what I could do before. And he had taken a lesson for us and he taught. He put in a good word for me with the artistic director of the theater and said, "Hey, you should really see this girl. Just see her." So I get this message. They want to see me. They send me four scenes and for one of the songs from the show and another song. So I have to do two songs and four scenes. I think I've got like two nights to do it two nights to get it ready.

LUVVIE Challenge.

CYNTHIA Yes. I was like, "I know what you guys doing and I know you're trying to trip me up here, but what's going to happen is I'm going to learn this like the back of my hand and you won't have a reason to say no." And that's exactly what happened. So I remember I was lying on my bed and learning these scenes. Going over them and over them and over them and over them. And then I go in, John Doyle is my director. That I think his name is... I remember there's a producer sitting in the back of the room and then the artistic director is sitting at this desk in this audition room. Lights are sort of low. So it's not like bright lighting, which is really nice. It's like an evening audition.

So I go in and I do these scenes and John sort of disarms me because he's really gentle. He's like this older Scottish man who I love dearly. He's the most wonderful kind person. And we do these scenes and then he starts talking to me about my life. I think what surprises him is that I can connect to this person. But what he sees in front of him is someone who has done this musical. So at this point, I started this nail business a long time ago. So I walk in with nails and, I think, I had come off stage or had come from something. So I was all done up at my nails are done up.

So not because of this, but it's just because I was doing something. So I do this and it sort of cuts through and he sort of like, "Tell me about yourself. Tell me about where you come from. Who

your parents are. Tell me about you." So I explained to him, "Well, my mom raised me, my dad disowned me. This is my life. I put myself through RADA. I do musicals. I do because I love singing. And I love the idea of being able to join everything together." And he was like, "Huh, okay." I sing the song. The music supervisor and the MD are crying.

And I remember leaving the audition thinking, "Okay, I think this went well. I think this went well." A month or two goes past. I do this other little play at another theater called the Soho theater. And then get a call saying that *The Color Purple* is happening and you have the role. Yeah. And I was so excited. Like that was all I wanted. Just do this show at this 200 seat theater. That's what I wanted. I didn't know what that would lead to. I can't tell you why I was so determined to do the show. I can't say that it was just because I love to play.

I loved this show and I loved what it stood for. I loved the characters, I loved the music, but I just knew that I needed to be doing this show, this time, this place.

LUVVIE That was God and the universe.

CYNTHIA Yeah. And [crosstalk 00:38:59]-

LUVVIE It's like, "I want you to do this thing and be in this place because this is the door opener for you."

CYNTHIA Exactly.

LUVVIE Because some things we do we don't even know what is pushing us to do it. We have no clue why all of a sudden, this is the thing we're honing in on. And we're like, "Why do I care so much about this?"

CYNTHIA Why do I care?

LUVVIE Why do I care? And then you find out why you care. Because the show premieres [crosstalk 00:39:23]-

CYNTHIA Sold out basically every night. They decide, I don't know why they do this. But Ben Brantley from the New York times does a review, comes to see the show in London. Which is really strange and odd. Because that never really happens. You don't get someone from the US coming to review a play. There's no reason, but he does. He comes to do this review and he gives it like a love letter. It's like a love letter. It's like a lovely, lovely review of this show. A lot of the English reviews were not very nice at all.

LUVVIE Really?

CYNTHIA Oh my God. One of the reviews complained that it wasn't violent enough.

LUVVIE What?

CYNTHIA For real. One of the reviewers complained that it wasn't violent enough. Mind you, the version you see on Broadway is less violent.

LUVVIE Correct. Than the book.

CYNTHIA Than the book. Then the version I did in London. Like in London at one point, I'm thrown on the floor by Mister. Like thrown to the floor. I'm chuffed to the back of the wall many times. Grasp up in my hand. It wasn't violent enough for this person. One reviewer said they didn't understand why I didn't get grayer. Mind you Celie only gets to age 45. She gets age 45 tops 50. So I don't know how gray you need her to be.

LUVVIE They didn't even look the [inaudible 00:41:09] at the end of the show was what they wanted. They wanted Celie to look just downtrodden and devastated.

CYNTHIA Yeah. They didn't like the idea that this woman actually was lovely by the end of the show. One reviewer referred to us as a gospel choir.

LUVVIE I hate everybody. I do, I do. I hate people.

CYNTHIA And I was like only the UK. Even though the thing was sold out people were-

LUVVIE Every night.

CYNTHIA Every night people were like stamping. I'd never seen an English audience respond to a show the way they responded to this show like people stamping on the floor and like standing ovations. They don't do that. But before our show that standing ovations were not a thing. It's not a thing. They don't do that very often here at all. And every night we would get it and every night people would stamp on the floor and get up in the middle of the song. It was really wild. I'd never experienced it like that before.

LUVVIE Because the Brits are very restraint people.

CYNTHIA Yeah. Yeah. Especially when it comes to watching shows they sort of like, "Let's sit back, wait, finish, let everyone get things done and they will applaud afterwards." That's usually the sort of manner. But this was totally different. It was like mania. It was crazy. But for some reason the reviewers, it's like they didn't like that.

LUVVIE They didn't like it. They were like, "No. This is a Black production. People are liking it. Let's throw it all the shade on it."

CYNTHIA But this was one New York review just changed everything. And my producers were like, "I think we should take this to Broadway. Yeah. And so they asked me this on the... Is that the opening night or first preview? And I was like, "I thought they were joking." So when they said to me, "Hey, would you come with us if we took it to Broadway?" And I was like, "Sure. I mean, if you'll have me."

LUVVIE You do like you all bullshitting. Okay.

CYNTHIA "Sure. Thank you so much for saying that. Yeah. I'd love to." Not realizing that that was a real question. Not realizing that it was a real question because a couple of months later. I get called

into the artistic director's office to tell me that the show was going to Broadway and that they're just looking for a theater. I was like, "Oh." And he said, "If we find this theater john does not want to do this show without you. So if you would come with the show?" "Okay. Okay."

LUVVIE And what year was this?

CYNTHIA This is 2013.

LUVVIE Seven years ago.

CYNTHIA Seven years ago. And then it took another year for everything to be sorted. And then 2015, I flew out.

Imagine being in an online space where people's foolishness doesn't make you want to fight the air. That might sound impossible with your current choices for social media, but I was sick of wading through nonsense to find like-minded people, so I created my own online community. And if you are the kind of person who is striving to be a professional troublemaker and fight fear, we need you to join us in that community, because you need people to cheer you on.

[LuvvNation](#) is my online community and app that is a safe space in a dumpster fire world. It's the place for the most thoughtful, funny, most chill deficient people on these interwebs. We're a community that comes together to make each other better with curated conversations, opportunities to connect, and challenges to help us transform and do better in every area of our lives. So, I want you to come in there, join us. Become a citizen of LuvvNation. So go to luvvnation.com, that's luvvnation.com L-U-V-V-N-A-T-I-O-N. Download the app in the App Store or on Android, it's on iOS and Android and come on through! All right. Back to the podcast.

LUVVIE So tell me about that moment. About actually, how was it to be like, "I'm leaving home."

CYNTHIA Petrifying. Petrifying. Absolutely petrifying. Because I'd never done that before. It's not just leaving home and going across to moving in the same country to another city or something. I'm leaving the country to go to another country.

LUVVIE The continent.

CYNTHIA Yes. I'm leaving the continent to move on over to another continent. I was like, "What? I don't know if I can do this." Because I really didn't believe it was happening until we started organizing my ticket. And I was like, "Ooh."

LUVVIE And during this time, what was your mom saying?

CYNTHIA I think she was just really, really proud. And she used to making sure that I had the things I needed and she was just really sweet. And, again, I don't think any of us really understood what was happening until the ticket was in my hand and I had to go to the airport. Like my mom got to the airport, everyone was a mess. And my best friend came with me to the airport. My mom came with me airport. My sister, I think, had to work that day, but saw me off of a door and was in tears, but couldn't show the tears. So she tilted her head up. She was like [crosstalk 00:45:38] okay, hilarious.

And I think we'll, just sort of hit us because I was leaving. Now, I didn't know it was leaving to begin a new life. I didn't know that. I just knew that it was leaving with this plane and I would be away for a while, which is a big deal in itself. But it was so odd. It was odd. And like 50/50 whether I was getting to be on that plane or not. Yeah.

LUVVIE At this point you are what? 27?

CYNTHIA Yeah.

LUVVIE You're 27.

CYNTHIA Yeah. Yeah.

LUVVIE You're leaving home for the first time.

CYNTHIA Yeah.

LUVVIE To go pursue a dream you wouldn't even think was real until you were getting on the plane.

CYNTHIA Right.

LUVVIE And you show up to the United States, you show up to New York.

CYNTHIA Yup.

LUVVIE And everybody loses their shit. I remember when *The Color Purple* started and because *Color Purple* was one of my favorite movies, one my favorite books. And me being like, "Oh my God. I will eventually go watch this on Broadway." I never got a chance to, funny enough because trash. I was like, "Damn it. I didn't have plug." Again, because *Color Purple* was always sold the heck out.

CYNTHIA I know. It was wild.

LUVVIE *Color Purple* was always sold and I have the plug. Right? And I was like, "Dang, one day." Right? So how was it when the show started in New York for you?

CYNTHIA Wild. Because you just have no expectation of what's going to happen. You start the show and you're like, "Okay, this is going to be really cool. We'll see what happens. People might like it. People might not like it." We open, the show happens, standing ovation in the middle of the

song. And I was like, "How do I do? What do I do? What do I do? What do I do? What do I do?
And I'm like, "Okay, I need to move the story forward. I need to move the story forward."

LUVVIE In the middle of a song, standing ovation?

CYNTHIA I'm here it happened and at the end of the song "I'm Here," people go up. This is not the end of the show.

LUVVIE You're right.

CYNTHIA This is not the end of the show. We have a good, like 10, 15 minutes left of this show at this point. It's just the song. And people stood up. I was like, "Oh, okay. This might be a thing. This might be a thing. But who knows?" Second night, same thing. Night after that, same thing. By the time we get to opening night, people are like, "I think it's *Color Purple*. I think it's *Color Purple*. *Color Purple* [inaudible 00:48:24]." And I'm like, "I'm just here minding my own business singing these."

LUVVIE Singing my song. Doing my job.

CYNTHIA Singing my song, doing my job. That's all I'm doing. I had no idea how much of an impact it would make. To this day, people are like, "Yeah, you might not have known this, but I've seen the show five times." In places that I would never expect, people that I would never expect to have seen the show have seen the show.

LUVVIE And how long did you actually end up playing Celie on Broadway? How long were you with the show then?

CYNTHIA 14 months.

LUVVIE How many shows a week?

CYNTHIA Eight shows a week.

LUVVIE Jesus.

CYNTHIA Eight shows a week. And, I think, someone said we did 463 performances altogether. I'm going to be harsh on myself and say maybe I did 400 of those 463.

LUVVIE Holy shit.

CYNTHIA I may have done a couple more than that, but I definitely did about 400.

LUVVIE In 14 months?

CYNTHIA Yes.

LUVVIE That's some serious stamina. How did your voice... I record an audio book for three days my voice is tired. I'd be like, "Ooh, Lord." I'm like, "Hoo, I just put in some work guys. I just really did a lot of work and I'm doing a vocal rest now. Thank you." And you [inaudible 00:49:55] you doing eight shows.

CYNTHIA Eight shows a week. It was nuts. And Christmas time is the worst because, you don't do eight shows a week you do like 16 shows in a row. They just do it weirdly. So that you can get Christmas Day off or Christmas Eve off and New Year's Eve or New Year's Day off. So the schedule changes, so you end up doing like between 11 to 16 shows back to back. And it's so awful. That is an awful situation to be in.

LUVVIE Jesus. That just made my throat hurt. That just made my throat hurt.

CYNTHIA I was tired. I was really like a shell by the end of it. I was a total shell.

LUVVIE When did you finally know It was time to move on?

CYNTHIA I'm going to say we were supposed to finish November 2016, which would have been a year from when we did it. And then they asked if I would extend through to January. So January 8th was when I was done.

LUVVIE 2017, your birthday?

CYNTHIA January 8th, 2017, my birthday. And that was the end of it.

LUVVIE You and I met a month later?

CYNTHIA Yes.

LUVVIE I was like, "Damn it." We met at The [Makers](#).

CYNTHIA It was at The [Makers](#).

LUVVIE It was at [Makers Conference](#). And I think somebody was like, "Oh, you got to meet Cynthia Erivo." And I was like, "I know who Cynthia Erivo is." And then we met and I was like, "Oh my gosh. She's like my long lost sister."

CYNTHIA I know. It was so crazy. It was so crazy. Hit it off straight away, could have known you for years. It was [crosstalk 00:51:44].

LUVVIE It was my long-lost sister. And we look alike.

CYNTHIA It was so weird.

LUVVIE Was the same size. And I was like, "Oh my God, this is amazing." I remember I was like, "You have to meet other people that I know." And I pulled you into the hallway.

CYNTHIA You pulled me into the hallway. Yes.

LUVVIE And I think I called Boz. I called Boz and Yvonne. And I was like, "You all have to talk to her because she needs to be a part of Voltron because she's everything." And sure enough. Literally I pulled you into the hall and I was like, "Oh, I got somebody for you to meet right now." And I was like, "People who you will also love dearly." And that's how our love story began. From *The Color Purple*. So *The Color Purple* opened up all these doors for you?

CYNTHIA Yeah.

LUVVIE And honestly you all know everything that's happened ever since like Cynthia has had this supernova growth in her career. And is now a superstar. You won an Emmy-

CYNTHIA I did.

LUVVIE A Grammy and a Tony.

CYNTHIA Yes. All for *The Color Purple*?

LUVVIE All for *The Color Purple*.

CYNTHIA Yeah. It was really wild.

LUVVIE That's nuts.

CYNTHIA It is nuts.

LUVVIE All you're missing is the O to become an EGOT. And that's going to happen. Because the African grandmama was already praying about it.

CYNTHIA It's true.

LUVVIE It is prayed about. Mamma Is currently praying about it. For you in this journey, even just looking back and reflecting, what do you think is something that has changed you or something that you've learned about yourself and about the world?

CYNTHIA A few things have changed me, actually. I think what I have learned is that, you can only really be as true as you can for yourself that people will perceive you how they wish until they meet you. You see what I'm saying?

LUVVIE Yeah.

CYNTHIA That's something I've definitely, definitely learned. And I think that I have learned that I really like myself. I like myself and I don't have to force anybody else to like me too.

LUVVIE Yes. Yes indeed. And you've done some really big things in life. One of the things that I even talk about in my book is just the audacity to even dare do big things. And sometimes you've been

forced to do those big things. Sometimes push you. Because then that's a gift in itself. How do you now, like at this point in your career, how do you now commit yourself to not being afraid of even bigger things?

CYNTHIA I just am not afraid of it. I've got to a place, and I was at this place a long time ago, where things just sort of happen sometimes. And the opportunity sort of like turn up and they go, "Hi, would you like to take this opportunity here?" And I make a decision immediately and I go, "Yes." Because what I don't want to live with is, "I wish I would have... I really should have... I could have... Why didn't I? I don't want to..." If something works, then something works. If something doesn't, then it doesn't. But at least I know that I will have tried.

LUVVIE It's that it's better to live a life of, "Oh, well." Instead of, "What if?"

CYNTHIA Yes.

LUVVIE It's like never thinking that, "If I had only made this move how would my life be different?"

CYNTHIA Right. Right.

LUVVIE And that's real. We got to honor that. How do you make sure you betray yourself less in this process?

CYNTHIA Make sure that I have really wonderful people around me who aren't afraid to go. "Mm. No. Not quite Cynth." Yeah. And not being afraid of hearing, "Mm-mm, no. Not quite Cynth. And I make a point to have those people around me. Because I'm not very good with, I don't know what it is, but I'm allergic to people that are like, "Yes, yes. Everything you do is right. Yes, yes, yes." Because now I don't believe you at all. I would rather someone say, "We could do it like that, but this works better."

LUVVIE Yes. I like "no" people around me. Tell me no.

CYNTHIA I do. Tell me please. Tell me no, because then I can avoid that. That is great. Tell me no. I would rather that.

LUVVIE Because if you're full of yes people, you're going to be doing all types of shenanigans that nobody's checking you on.

CYNTHIA Right, right.

LUVVIE And you'll be out here just bogus.

CYNTHIA And I get people around me that have more experience than I do. I try to find people who know more. I don't want to be the cleverest person in the room. I don't want to be the person that knows the most. I just don't. Because if I'm the person that knows the most, I'm not learning. That allows me to not betraying myself because it means that I'm consistently learning from those who know more than I do. And I love that. I love that. It makes me happy to-

LUVVIE Listen.

CYNTHIA ... know less. Because that means my mission is to consistently learn.

LUVVIE It makes me happy to know less because my mission is consistent... That's a jam. That is a jam honestly. And I think you and I have this conversation all the time about the landmines of the glow up. Right?

CYNTHIA Yeah.

LUVVIE I think once you stop being the underdog you becomes a target.

CYNTHIA True.

LUVVIE And listen, me and you are deeply connected in many ways, as you know.

CYNTHIA Yes.

LUVVIE How do you anchor yourself in the tough moments when you're attacked?

CYNTHIA Yeah. Sometimes it's very difficult to anchor yourself because you're human and shit hurts. You know what I mean? That stuff hurts. And you can't pull everyone aside and go, "Now wait a minute. That's actually not true. And that's not what happened. And here's who I actually am. And please see me for who I actually am. And please meet who I..." You can't do that with everybody. All you can do is consistently show up. And show up with your best self. That doesn't mean perfect.

But show up with your best self, show up with the best of intentions every single time. And then keep doing the work. Keep doing good work. Keep showing up in a way that shows that you're human and that your humanity is what you put first. And other's humanity is what you put first. Understand that those people who might attack you don't actually know you. And so you don't know them, they don't know you. I don't know what they're going through. They don't know what you're going through. And that's okay.

And so hopefully one day they might come back and go, "Oh actually she's not so bad." But that is not for you to fix or solve, yours is to make sure that people who have made the effort or who want to know more about you, want to learn you more, get the opportunity to do so. If you shut down, there are people in the world who are looking at you and using you as their inspiration and using you as a way to move forward, who won't have anyone anymore.

LUVVIE That's real shit. That's real shit. And I think also the whole humanizing each other and humanizing us. That's also why I was like, "People don't know your background." Again, just like how people thought when you went to audition for *Color Purple* that you come from the super privileged background, and then you see the past Cynthia who's dripped in the jewels and you were like, "Listen, this is who she is today." who you were yesterday is this girl. And you've talked about even growing up without your father. And listen, we have that in common too. And dealing with that in this process. How do you think that's actually showing up now?

CYNTHIA Me not growing up with my father?

LUVVIE Yes. Because I know I have daddy issues all day.

CYNTHIA It's shown up in, I think, the determination to really do well. Part of it is almost like an FU. Like, "You're going to miss me." But yeah. There's that. There is also the... I don't know. There's the want for acceptance and the want for people not to reject. Because mine was a real true rejection. So there's that sort of fear that, if I do something wrong I'm going to be totally rejected.

LUVVIE Yes. Abandonment.

CYNTHIA Yes. Yes, yes. And then you have to sort of like offset that with, you're okay. One person did that. One person doing it does not mean that everyone in the world is going to do that. That doesn't mean that everyone that shows up in your life is going to do that. So you're consistently having to reassure and therapy is a really good thing too.

LUVVIE Amen. Can we say amen for therapy?

CYNTHIA Amen for therapy. Because sometimes we, and listen Black women out here, I'm speaking to you all. A lot of us need the help. Please go get some help. Please go seek it. Don't be ashamed of it. Don't be ashamed of it because it really is saving our lives. To save your life.

LUVVIE Yeah. Here's the thing, anybody who's any type of visibility I need you to go to a therapist.

CYNTHIA I need you to go therapy.

LUVVIE You should just go. Because let me tell you, the stuff that comes with this shit is trash.

CYNTHIA It's a lot. Some of it is just absolutely trash. Some of you just to be like, "I, ugh." You're consistently trying to prove. There's like the proving of yourself over and over again. It's never really enough. And so you have to find a way to get to understand that You're never going to prove yourself enough. And so all you have to do is prove yourself to yourself.

LUVVIE Prove yourself to yourself. Yes. That's huge. That's huge.

CYNTHIA You can't prove for anyone else's. It doesn't work.

LUVVIE That's it because you'll be constantly chasing their approval [crosstalk 01:02:06]

CYNTHIA And you don't even know what they exactly want. That you don't know what they're waiting for you to prove.

LUVVIE Correct. They don't know what they want you to prove? Hell, they don't.

CYNTHIA No.

LUVVIE And one of the things that I love about you is your style.

CYNTHIA And thank you.

LUVVIE First of all, Cynthia you don't know.

CYNTHIA Well, what you have to tell me.

LUVVIE Next time I see her, I'm taking her shoes.

CYNTHIA You mean all of the shoes?

LUVVIE Listen, the few of them. I'm just letting you know that right there, because we also wear the same shoe size, which again, I'll probably [inaudible 01:02:42] see that are literally the same size and everything.

CYNTHIA That's true.

LUVVIE I should do. I'm going to be shipping you a pair of shoes and I think you would actually really like that. I think are fire. They fire, but your sense of style is dumb. First of all, Cynthia shamed me on the IG Live. We randomly got on a few months ago because it was in beginning of the quarantine. Actually it wasn't a few months ago because it's shit. What is time at this point? That was like March 2020.

CYNTHIA Was that March?

LUVVIE That was like March or April.

CYNTHIA Was it?

LUVVIE It was on. And then I was still in my auntie robe mode where I was like in the mode of like, I'm not getting dressed for anything and I didn't even have on my wedding rings and I didn't have on any of my earrings. And Cynthia is on this live in all the drip. Okay. All the drip actually typically is. And she's like, "Luvvie, where are your jewels?" And I'm like, "Yes, by my bed." And she was like, "Ma'am, I'm going to need you." And she shamed me. And ever since I've made sure that I've had on my wedding rings and all my jewels every day.

CYNTHIA Good. Good. It's necessary

LUVVIE Every day since I've been like, let me not shame Cynthia."

CYNTHIA It's necessary. I'm proud of you. I'm seeing all the drip, I'm ready to [crosstalk 01:03:48] with you.

LUVVIE All right. The Priti's jewels are on me and ready.

CYNTHIA Good.

LUVVIE Ready to go.

CYNTHIA [crosstalk 01:03:56] because she knows like, I don't know, I think, I just like us when we're in gold and we're dripping and we look good and we feel good. I think it's like-

LUVVIE Luxury.

CYNTHIA Yeah. Real or not, If it makes you feel good, you'll probably also look good too. And I don't mean look good. I mean look good. You know what I mean? That will come through.

LUVVIE So wait, how long have you actually been collecting jewelry?

CYNTHIA At this point, for a few years. But it really ramped up 2017, 2018. Yeah. Yeah. it got a lot. Cause I loved jewelry. Here's the thing, I love jewelry full stop. So I was collecting costume pieces when I was about 15, 16. And obviously because I was doing backing vocals, you would need earrings, you would need necklaces, you would need all of that bangles, all that stuff. So I would wear them for shows and whatnot. And then I left to come here and was like, "Oh, I need jewelry." And I really enjoyed wearing pieces that would be loaned to me.

And then I was like, "I want my own stuff. And obviously I've been piercing my ears for a really long time. And now I currently have 21 piercings in my ear.

LUVVIE You have 21 ear piercings? Bro. Cynthia. Okay. So I told you I got my cartilage Pierced, right?

CYNTHIA Yeah.

LUVVIE That took the earring out.

CYNTHIA What?

LUVVIE My ears couldn't handle it. After a year it just did not heal properly.

CYNTHIA Okay. So it means you have the wrong jewelry. Did you have a stud in it or did you have a ring?

LUVVIE So I had a stud at first. Right?

CYNTHIA Yes.

LUVVIE And then Priti made me a ring at the beginning of the year. She actually made me a diamond ring for it. My ears, it just was not healing. It was just like it kept on being red and so I took it out. And I was like, "Dang it." And I had a nose ring a few years ago, also. Nose ring also didn't. I was like, "I don't think my body loves piercings."

CYNTHIA You act so. Did you take care of them after you got them pierced?

LUVVIE I feel like I did. I mean.

CYNTHIA When you say, "I feel like I did." That means no. Because you'll know if you're taking care of them. That is, "I feel like I did" is not the same as, "Yes, I did take care of them." So that might be why.

LUVVIE Well, I felt like [crosstalk 01:06:28].

CYNTHIA No, no, no, no. Tell me what your method of taken care of these piercings were.

LUVVIE See how my voice got high pitched. That's how you know I ain't even talking. Yeah. I don't know if I did that much actually. You're right. [crosstalk 01:06:45]. You're right. You're probably right.

CYNTHIA Yeah. So get your piercing back and just take care of it. And here's the thing-

LUVVIE What does that mean? What do I got to do?

CYNTHIA I mean, you'll piercer will tell you. But you Castile soap is really helpful to keep it clean. You just lather it up and put it on the piercing both sides when you're in the shower every morning and at night. If it gets really odd our piercer told me, use crushed up aspirin. Just put it on like a paste and it should take all of the issues away immediately. Saline water also helps you get like Saline pads. Usually they'll send you away with some and you can just keep it clean. And that's what you do. Rotate, if you have an earring in your ear. In your nose, you leave it alone.

LUVVIE Okay.

CYNTHIA Yeah. This one healed really quickly. This one was healed with-

LUVVIE Septum? Piercing?

CYNTHIA Septum. That was my septum. This one healed very quickly.

LUVVIE So yeah. So far my drip has just been in the nappy. I mean I have two ear piercings. I've had two year piercings out. My first one, of course, when I was like three months, second one at nine. All the other piercings since. Yeah. My aunt got my ear pierced. I'm pretty sure my mom was not happy about it. But I was actually the cool kid in class with two ear piercings. Because everybody was like, "You got two of them?" I was like, "Yeah." But the rest of the jewels are the bracelets, the rings. I'm a fan of necklaces. My everyday is three necklaces. I'm always like-

CYNTHIA I want to see you with another piece, a chunkier piece. Yeah. You see these? These are like-

LUVVIE The medallion.

CYNTHIA Yeah.

LUVVIE Is that Foundry?

CYNTHIA That's Foundry.

LUVVIE She made me a ring.

CYNTHIA I know.

LUVVIE Oh my God. It's so beautiful.

CYNTHIA That's a good piece to have. Foundry is a wonderful piece because it also comes from such good energy. She's such a sweet person.

LUVVIE Yeah. Beth is dope.

CYNTHIA That is amazing.

LUVVIE Beth is dope. Actually, I'm overdue. When my book comes out, I'm actually going to gift myself with a chain. I haven't been Priti. Now officially get me professional troublemaker. The chain. Right? Like what this looks like. I might have to design that and gift myself.

CYNTHIA Yeah. You should.

LUVVIE So what are you doing to take care of yourself? What's your self-care?

CYNTHIA I'm currently, right as we speak, getting a pedicure.

LUVVIE You all the flex. You will not be getting the pedicure. That's a flex. That's a flex,

CYNTHIA I'm taking care of myself. When I finished *Aretha* I really wanted to like return to myself. The thing I do is my nails and I hadn't had my nails on for such a long time. So I flew my manicurist in, so it was all very safe. Everyone has to be COVID tested and all of that stuff. So I promise I was doing the guidelines and whatnot. And I've been tested almost every day to make sure I was safe.

LUVVIE Everyday. Jesus.

CYNTHIA Oh my goodness. This nose has seen some swabs. I've been tested so often at this point, it's ridiculous. But yes, safe as houses. And she came to do my nails. Yeah. All of that stuff and making sure that I... I don't know, I just take care of myself. Eating good food. I work out, you know I work out. And for a while during quarantine, I really just stopped for a second. I just needed a break. But, when I got back to do *Aretha*, I needed to work out. I just needed it. I was craving it. And that is my thing now. That really does take care of me. It really starts the day. Yeah.

LUVVIE Now I got a Peloton now. I finally got one.

CYNTHIA I'm going to convert the entire world into having a Peloton.

LUVVIE I'm a Peloton now and I've literally only done three workouts. I said, "Bless it."

CYNTHIA Come on.

LUVVIE I mentioned on social media that I got a Peloton. Because I have the same username everywhere. I got all these requests and I was like, "I'm not going to add people, random people. So you all can judge my inactivity."

CYNTHIA No. That's what will help get on the bike.

LUVVIE You know who's now addicted to it. To working out?

CYNTHIA Who?

LUVVIE Carnell. Carnell gets on the Peloton every day, he's lost 25 pounds.

CYNTHIA I'm telling you that thing is good. I'm telling you right now. People don't believe it. Someone was like, "So Peloton, is it really that good? Is it really that good?" I'm like, "Yes. Yes it is." Because it's not just the bike. It really is to feel comfortable.

LUVVIE It's the people who...

CYNTHIA Yeah. There is the culture of it but everybody is an individual on their thing. And everyone has their own stories. They genuinely have their own stories. And everyone has come to the Peloton, all those instructors have come to the Peloton on their own, having dealt with whatever they've dealt with. Robin, who's an amazing trainer on there, is about to be a new mom. But I was riding with her a year ago when she had just gotten married. And she's brilliant. And she was a lawyer at one point and then her life was totally different and she changed it completely.

Then Alex, who, I think, recently just lost someone and has veterans in his family, he works as well. Tunde who is newest to the Peloton. Maybe he's like...

LUVVIE Tunde, he's a whole vibe.

CYNTHIA Her story to get to fitness is really inspiring. It came from a place of, "I couldn't be this person anymore and I wanted to change my life." So she changed her life. Starts through fitness and is now one of the most favored people on Peloton. The personalities are really wonderful to be a part of and it doesn't feel like you can't reach it. It doesn't feel like a goal that people can't reach, because they make it so easy. I can tell someone, "Just take 15 minutes."

LUVVIE That's true.

CYNTHIA Take 20 minutes.

LUVVIE I'm going to let you shame me into doing more of it. That's how I was going to get on it.

CYNTHIA And just start small. Because the thing is, people think you have to go on and do a 90 minute ride. You have to do a 60 minute ride. No, you can [crosstalk 01:12:54].

LUVVIE I did 20 minutes. Of course, I laid out for an hour afterwards, but...

CYNTHIA Here's this ride, some of them 20 minute rides will do that to you. Some of them are tough.

LUVVIE I did a Tunde low impact ride and I was like, "What?"

CYNTHIA Definitely you're asking for trouble. If you do any Tunde ride, you're asking for trouble. None of the rides are [crosstalk 01:13:16].

LUVVIE I was like, "Jesus."

CYNTHIA None of them actually.

LUVVIE The recovery was just... But yeah, I'm actually going to get back to it. It's a good move, but...

CYNTHIA It's amazing.

LUVVIE So my final question for you is, what does it mean to you to be a professional troublemaker?

CYNTHIA I think it's kind of awesome for me to be a trouble maker, professional troublemaker. I think it allows people to not be so afraid of being different, trying different things. Shaking up the zeitgeist a little bit. Creating in different ways... I don't know. I think it brings me a kick to show people alternative ways of being their best selves.

LUVVIE That's so clutch. That is so clutch. And that's actually the spirit of why I called my second book, Professional Troublemaker. Because I think the disruptors in the world like yourself disrupting, usually looks like just owning what you're dope at. It means doing the thing that nobody might've done that you saw them do in the way that you're doing it and not apologizing for it.

CYNTHIA Exactly.

LUVVIE And not apologizing for it. And I am just honored to watch you live life out loud, to gift us with your gifts. I'd be like, "Lord Cynthia be slayed us with the songs." But even beyond that, you just such an amazing person.

CYNTHIA Thank you.

LUVVIE So you sang me down the aisle. I was so afraid. I can't, it's like I actually got out of my own body. You singing me down the aisle, actually was like, "I have to not listen to Cynthia right now because how will crumble into tears." I was like, "Focus, focus. I can't." And it was such a gift on such a special day for me.

CYNTHIA It was wonderful that day.

LUVVIE It meant the world. And your friendship is one of the gifts that I hold dear and cherish.

CYNTHIA I love you Luvvie.

LUVVIE I love you so much. And I'm so excited for whatever's next. I know Edith's your production company.

CYNTHIA Yeah. Edith's Daughter.

LUVVIE After your-

CYNTHIA My mother.

LUVVIE ... mother. And I want people to follow what you're up to. So don't worry. We're going to put all the ways people can follow you, support you. And at any time that you need our help, our voice, our energy, our loud cheers. You have it.

CYNTHIA Thank you.

LUVVIE We will continue to loud everything.

CYNTHIA Thank you.

LUVVIE Everything. And I'm just so proud to exist in this time and plane with you.

CYNTHIA Thank you. Thank you very much. I love you very much so, and I'm just going to keep trying to make everyone proud, trying to make myself proud, having a good time and telling all the stories that [inaudible 01:16:11].

LUVVIE That's it. And I can't wait to see you again because Lord knows [crosstalk 01:16:15].

CYNTHIA I know, we need a hug.

LUVVIE Were supposed to kick it this year and stuff and then quarantine happened.

CYNTHIA Just ruined it and...

LUVVIE Just ruined it. I think the last time I saw you was when I was in your apartment last year when I brought you some Naija food.

CYNTHIA And you did me such good. That was goodness. I basically ate off that food for about three days.

LUVVIE [inaudible 01:16:37] Good. Good, good.

CYNTHIA It was some good food. That was some good food. Thank you.

LUVVIE More to come and I will see you one of these days, once the world opens up or once I get tested eight times.

CYNTHIA Lord.

LUVVIE And there's no COVID.

CYNTHIA Yes. It will all be okay.

LUVVIE Yes.

CYNTHIA It will all be okay.

LUVVIE Bye boo.

CYNTHIA Bye.

Oh, my God I love her so much! That is truly what it looks like to be a Professional Troublemaker as a life habit. One of my biggest takeaway quotes from what Cynthia said is, "You're never going to prove yourself enough. And so all you have to do is prove yourself to yourself." As y'all start to embark on this fear-fighter journey, you just have to be able to know your values and look at yourself in the mirror at the end of the day with pride. And she embodies all of that so well.

Be sure to follow Cynthia on social media. She's [@cynthiaerivo](#) on Instagram, and be sure to scan her feed for any videos of her singing. She's amazing. Vocal chords blessed with Jesus' tears. It's a fact. Make sure you check out what she's doing next. Thank you to Cynthia for blessing us with that conversation.

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Until next time, have the courage to speak your truth and show up as yourself. Create good trouble.