

Christine

This podcast is produced on the ancestral homeland of the Nooksack and Lummi people. They have been its' stewards since time immemorial, respecting the land, river and ocean with the understanding that everything is connected, related and alive. We acknowledge the elders and their collective and individual plights and achievements. We consider the legacies of violence, displacement, migration and settlement that bring us together today and we pursue ongoing action to build lasting relationships and grow together so that all may prosper.

(interlude music plays)

Neil

WCLS in Whatcom County presents Library Stories, a podcast to open your eyes to all the ways your local public libraries matter. Join us as we reveal the power of sharing at the library. I'm your host, Neil McKay, Online Experience Coordinator for the Whatcom County Library System and today...

And today... Hi folks. Usually I'd be sitting here with my boss, Mary Vermillion, but not today. Today I'm excited to be here with Claire McElroy. Hi, Claire.

Claire

Hi Neil, how are you?

Neil

I am great. So, Claire, tell me a little about what you do for the libraries, the Whatcom County Library System and for Whatcom READS?

Claire

OK. Well, let's see. First, I'll start with what I do for the libraries. I am the Adult Programming Coordinator for the Whatcom County Library System. And for Whatcom READS, I don't know. We were just trying to figure out what word best describes what I do for Whatcom READS. We came up with point person, conduit, organizer.

Neil

I said bottleneck, but that's not always there.

Claire

I think that's probably my least favorite. I like conduit myself, but yeah, I think maybe point person or organizer of Whatcom READS would be accurate. So that means that I just do a lot of the logistical wrangling, setting up of programs for Whatcom READS.

Neil

Give me a brief description of what Whatcom READS is.

Claire

OK, Whatcom READS is our all-county community read. Every year we choose a featured title, one book that the whole county reads together. Well, we hope the whole county reads it together. That's the idea. And then this culminates in author events with the featured author in the month of March and of course this year it's *No Two Persons*, a novel by Erica Bauermeister.

Neil

And Erica is a regional author.

Claire

She is. She is from Port Townsend. So yes.

Neil

We've had her here in at Whatcom County several times. One thing I want to make sure we clarify is this isn't just a Whatcom County Library System event. How, who all is involved?

Claire

Right. Right. This is all libraries throughout Whatcom County, so it's the county library system. It's Bellingham public libraries. It's academic libraries like the Northwest Indian College, Western Washington University, Whatcom Community College and Bellingham Technical College. And of course, we cannot leave out our community partner, Village Books, who is our beloved independent bookstore here in Whatcom County. And they do so much to support Whatcom READS.

Neil

Yes, yes, they do. We couldn't do it without them. So that's all the libraries and Village Books, it doesn't include the little free libraries.

Claire

No.

Neil

We should think about trying to get them involved somehow next year.

Claire

Yeah, that that could be fun.

Neil

It would be an interesting cause. Well, we'll talk about that.

Claire

Yeah, we could get a copy of *No Two Persons* or the copy of next year's book, which is still a secret. We could get that in every little free library. Wouldn't that be something?

Neil

Right. So, every year we reveal the secret, when, where? Where? Tell me. When do we reveal the secret of what next year's book will be?

Claire

The big reveal happens at the main event at Mount Baker Theatre. This is what happens. They do it this way every year, the featured author, the last thing they do before they exit the stage that evening is announce the next year's title. So, this year Erica Bauermeister on March 14th at the Mount Baker Theatre, will announce the 2026 title.

Neil

And nobody knows that except for a select few people right now.

Claire

It is one of the most highly guarded secrets in the country, if not the world.

Neil

OK. At least the county. Earlier this week, I got to go to the Mount Baker Theatre and do a walk through with one of our Bellingham Public Library partners Miranda Leon Jones and another participant that is going to bring something new to the to the Mount Baker Theatre event, yeah.

Claire

Right. Yeah. This year we've got a whole new thing happening with the Mount Baker Theatre event.

Neil

So tell us. Tell us what this new thing is.

Claire

The new thing. So typically the Mount Baker Theatre event is, really it's the author standing up doing a presentation or doing an in-conversation with someone else, just to really talking about their book or whatever they have planned for the audience for that evening. This year, before Erica Bauermeister does her presentation, her talk about *No Two Persons*, we have the Bushwick Book Club Seattle musicians who are going to perform music inspired by *No Two Persons* and I am not as familiar with Bushwick I think as you are and you have some, now you have some special intel with Bushwick, because you got to spend some time with Wes Weddell.

Neil

Wes Weddell, the Associate Director of the Bushwick Book Club, he came up to the Mount Baker Theatre to meet with Miranda Leon Jones and me. And well he came up to meet with Miranda, and I happened to tag along, but they got together to do a walk through with the Mount Baker Theatre staff to make sure that all of the settings, all the mics are going to be in place, all the lighting is right, all the furniture where people are going to be moving, it's just was a really fun thing for me to be in that backstage.

Claire

Yes, I always love it whenever I get to be backstage at the Mount Baker Theatre, and I want to take this opportunity to thank **Miranda Leon Jones**. She's the Event Coordinator for Bellingham Public Libraries. And it's really thanks to her that we're going to have this unique and special component of the evening event with Erica Bauermeister at the Mount Baker Theatre. So thank you, Miranda, for introducing us to Bushwick.

Neil

Yes, what a wonderful thing. Thank you, Miranda. But then after our walk through, I got to sit down with Wes Weddell and conducted a little interview. So that's what's coming up on this episode. That's the exciting thing, not that interviewing Claire isn't exciting, but I'm expecting we'll have many interviews with Claire because she's pretty good in front of a mic.

Claire

Well, shucks, thank you, but I'm excited to hear how the interview went with Wes, because I think you get to learn a little bit about what they do and who's maybe going to perform at the Mount Baker Theatre so.

Neil

That's right. We don't want to reveal that yet because we want you to listen to the interview. But the Bushwick Book Club is a really unique organization.

Claire

Yeah. It's such a cool idea. It's really, really cool idea too.

Neil

It's a nonprofit. And it gathers musicians, singers, instrumentalists.

Claire

MHM.

Neil

And they all read a book together. It's like a little book group. And then they write music inspired by the book.

Claire

Mm-hmm. It's such a neat and just a unique concept I think.

Neil

And they perform regularly in Seattle. Every year they have a theme, this is a step outside of their normal season to come up to Bellingham and Whatcom County. And to do this performance at the Mount Baker Theatre with local musicians. Most of the musicians who are going to perform their original compositions are either living in Bellingham or have spent time living in Bellingham.

Claire

And yeah, and Erica has great familiarity with Bushwick because she has, Erica Bauermeister, excuse me, because she has worked with them before, and she was just delighted whenever we told her that Bushwick was going to be opening up for her this year, so that's exciting too.

Neil

Yeah, I imagine that would be, it would kind of be a real honor to have to, to be there, hearing these musicians performing songs based on your book for the first time in front of an audience.

Claire

Yeah.

Neil

I mean, what a thrill that would be if you were an author.

Claire

Mm-hmm.

And if you think about it, it piggybacks nicely with the art challenge that we do with Allied Arts, because that's the thing that happens every year too, is the community is invited to create visual art that is then exhibited at the Allied Arts gallery and the author gets to view all of these pieces of art that are inspired by their book, and so this year Erica gets to have that experience as well as hearing these songs that are written inspired by her book. So, I mean, for an author, I feel like that would just be, there would be no greater gift than that. So, you know, I think it's very exciting.

Neil

Yeah. Well, we'll see what Erica thinks about it because we'll be listening to her talking right after she's heard these songs for the first time.

Claire

That's right, that's right.

Neil

But that isn't the only thing that's happening with Whatcom READS. We have other events coming up leading up to this culminating author talk, can you?

Claire

That's exactly right. We have actually a lot of things happening leading up to Erica's visits. We have some hands-on artsy programming that that are happening, programs that are happening. We have our buoy painting workshops that are happening at multiple branches and throughout our library system and that's in partnership with SeaFeast. These little repurposed buoys provided by Lummi Fish Supply. We're decorating them, we're painting them and they are going to be part of a much larger art installation that's going to be

SeaFeast, but it's also going to be exhibited all across Whatcom County at some point. So, you have an opportunity to come to one of our library branches and create and decorate one of these buoys and knowing that it will be part of a community collaboration through SeaFeast. We also have bookmaking workshops.

We have something on February 22nd at the Whatcom Museum. We have a very special program coming up with an interview with Jayne Entwistle and Thom Barthelmess, who is our Youth Services Manager for the Whatcom County Library System. Jayne Entwistle is a celebrated audiobook narrator and actress. And of course there is a story in *No Two Persons* that features an audiobook narrator, and so we thought what a great way to tie, what a great program to tie in to *No Two Persons* is having Jayne Entwistle sit down with Thom and talk about what it's like to be an audiobook narrator and what it's like to be part of an ensemble cast for an audio book, because of course *No Two Persons* won an audio, Audi Award for an ensemble cast performance because the audiobook, if you haven't listened to the audiobook of *No Two Persons*, I highly recommend it because it's phenomenal. We also have a virtual program about bibliotherapy that's going to be on March 1st and that is also going to be a fabulous program because that is all about how books can heal us. Emely Rumble is a licensed therapist and bibliotherapist specifically. She's going to be joining us virtually from New York, and she's going to talk to Meagan Wheeler, one of our PSA's in the Mobile Services team and our Jail Services Librarian.

Neil

That's right. She just recently stepped into that role.

Claire

Yes. So, Meagan and Emely Rumble are going to talk about Bibliotherapy and how we can be healed through reading. So those are just some of the examples I know I've probably talked way too long because you probably want to get to your interview with Wes, but there's a lot happening. I encourage everybody to go to [whatcomreads.org](http://whatcomreads.org) to see the calendar of events.

Neil

OK. Well, that's great. So yeah, check the calendar events, find something that interests you. We have so many events that I have to give credit to Claire for setting up and coordinating all of these events. It's not an easy job. I couldn't do it. I can barely do what I do.

Neil

So, having said all of that, I think we need to listen to Wes Weddell, the Associate Director of the Bushwick Book Club Seattle. You know, he's very passionate about what he's doing and coming up to Bellingham and providing this amazing kind of one-of-a-kind presentation. So make sure you guys all show up at the Mount Baker Theatre. Tickets are free, but you got to get tickets, is that right?

Claire

That's right. You gotta register through the Mount Baker Theatre website. The event is on Friday, March 14th at 7:00 PM. Doors open at 6:00 and you are not going to want to miss it this year because it's going to be different and just going to be a very special night.

Neil

It's going to be more.

Claire

Yes, it's going to be more, that's right.

Neil

That's great. OK. Well, thank you, Claire, for stepping in here and chatting with me.

Claire

Of course, my pleasure.

Neil

In my studio. Someday we'll show people what my studio is.

Claire

We'll just let them use their imaginations right now.

Neil

Yes, it's marvelous.

Claire

It is.

Neil

All right, we'll get on to it. Let's go listen to Wes.

Claire



Alright.

(Interlude music plays)

Wes

My name is Wes Weddell. I am Associate Director of the Bushwick Book Club Seattle nonprofit organization that stages events of original music inspired by books. We're really happy that Whatcom READS reached out about a musical component of the big culminating event at this year's Whatcom READS with Erica Bauermeister. We've worked with Erica before when she was part of Seattle 7 Writers. We're going to have six different musicians who've all read *No Two Persons* who are going to write an original song inspired by the experience of reading it and debut at live on stage at the Mount Baker Theatre on March 14.

Neil

This is great. Well, tell me more about what the Bushwick Book Club Seattle is about.

Wes

Yeah, the premise is original music inspired by books. Our Executive Director, Jeff Larson, who's a Western graduate and former resident of F St. here in Bellingham discovered the idea in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn when he lived there for a while. So, we've sort of borrowed the name from them to start our chapter, and musicians read a book and whatever experience they have of reading it, whatever inspires them, love it, hate it, indifferent. You can go general themes. You can pick a couple of words on one page that reminds you of your grandfather, whatever it is. You have to write a song inspired by it and perform it live with other musicians on the show date. We've done a main stage concert series for 15 years.

Neil

I came down last year to watch a performance based on.

Wes

*I Sing the Salmon Home*, Rena Priest's anthology of Washington State poets when she was State Poet Laureate.

Neil

That's right.

Wes

Yeah, that was part of our season last year. All of our titles in last year's main stage season were animal connected. We're doing all banned books this year for our 15th season. Felt like the time to do it and we do partner events as well. We've worked with a number of different library systems or arts and literature organizations. This idea of art inspiring art and keeping the conversation going and it's great to watch the songwriters connect with one another, but it's also great to watch the audience connect to the songs and the audience in reading the book can come and sort of experience the same source material, and it and it's such a neat conversation about process and I think it really lets songwriters engage with other readers, but people who maybe don't write songs in a way that is harder to do without that commonality.

Neil

And what brought you up to Bellingham today?

Wes

I'm up here today because the, we did a site visit at the Mount Baker Theatre. Kind of walked through all the logistics that we're going to need for the show on March 14th. Make sure that theatre knows how to best take care of all the people involved in the production side, but also all the people who are going to come enjoy these songs, and also the presentation in Q&A with author Erica Bauermeister.

Neil

That's great. And so, you met up here with Miranda Leon Jones from the Bellingham Public Library. And I got to follow you guys on a walk through, which brought me backstage, which is all this fun. You know, that the Mount Baker Theatres is haunted?

Wes

It doesn't surprise me one bit. It's kind of got that vibe there and I look forward to how all of the residents of the space exert their presence in the music and the words they're going to have on March 14<sup>th</sup>.

Neil

That's great. And you're going to be the emcee who brings the musicians on stage for the first half of the program, but did I hear right that you're also going to be participating in the music?

Wes

You did hear right. We made a point of booking a number of Whatcom area, in fact the majority of Whatcom area musicians for this that's only appropriate for Whatcom READS but Miranda let it be known when she first reached out to us about this, that that there might be space for me to do a song and I had to say yes. I love the premise. I love the venue, I love all the organizations involved and so it was an easy yes.

Neil

So, since you're creating a song based on the book that I can assume that you've read the book, what do you think of it?

Wes

I have read the book. That is a very essential component of this process. One of the things we stress to our musicians when we book them for events is you have to read the book, do not cut that corner. So I have read the book. I have enjoyed the book. I've really liked the way that Erica had dealt with the way that different people have different experiences of encountering the same piece of art. The book follows a number of different people who have all read or encountered the novel within the novel here and what happened to them, the way they interface with it, the way that some of their paths intertwine and are connected and that's such a fertile thing for getting a bunch of musicians together who are all going to have their own different experience of reading this book and their own different experience of creating an original song inspired by it.

Neil

I have to ask you the question that we've been asking all sorts of folks. In the book *No Two Persons*, the premise is that one book can affect different people in different ways and basically no two people read the same book. But what is the book that maybe changed your life or made such an impression on you?

Wes

I love the question. It's a difficult one to answer and I'm glad it's difficult because that means I'm fortunate enough to have had really wonderful life changing experiences with a lot of different books. The title that is popping into my head right now is the Sparrow by Mary Doria Russell and it's a book that I encountered because the Bushwick Book Club Seattle did a night of original music inspired by it in our early years. It was probably around 2011 that that happened. And I hadn't encountered a book that made me think about spirituality in that way, in the way that it did it was it was such a beautiful story. I love good

stories. I love good stories in songs as well as in prose. But I don't come from a particularly religious background. And I love the language and the prompts involved in this book that that made me think about our paths.

Neil

That's great. That's wonderful.

Wes

I don't know. I gave you the answer you most wanted, but there you go.

Neil

It's perfect. It's perfect. So, Wes, thank you for sitting down with me, and I'm really looking forward to seeing you in March. Who all is going to be performing music at the event?

Wes

The musicians that you'll be hearing from on March 14th include me, Cat Beulah, a 15-year resident of fair city of Bellingham and regular contributor Bushwick Book Club Seattle. Sarah Gooden, Lewis Ledford, Marie the band and Marie Eaton. Marie, the person and rumor has it Marie will be bringing along a special guest to play with her.

Neil

OK, great. Well, I'm looking forward to being there. I hope the whole audience, my whole audience is going to show up and thank you for sitting down with me.

Wes

You're very welcome. Thanks for the time.

(Interlude music plays)

Neil

Well, that's our show. I'd like to thank our guests WCLS Events Coordinator Claire McElroy and Bushwick Book Club Associate Director Wes Weddell. Thanks once again to Bellingham Public Library Events Coordinator Miranda Leon Jones for bringing the Bushwick Book Club to Whatcom READS for the first time ever to join author Erica Bauermeister. You're not going to want to miss this event at the Mount Baker Theatre on Friday, March 14th. Make sure to get your ticket to this free event by visiting

Whatcomreads.org or mountbakertheatre.com. Of course I have to thank my boss, Mary Vermillion. She was not on the mic, but she was as always an important part of this podcast.

The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership. Thanks for joining us, friends. We'd love to hear from you. Find my e-mail link and previous episodes of this podcast at [wcls.org/podcast](http://wcls.org/podcast). This is Neil McKay for the Whatcom County Library System saying take care until next time.