

Gillian Anderson Listens to Fleetwood Mac and Loves Toni Morrison

The London-based actress finds time for cultural enrichment between starring in “Sex Education” and “The Crown.”



By Bruce Fretts

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When she was cast as a sex therapist raising a teenage son in the Netflix comedy “Sex Education” (which debuts its second season on Friday), Gillian Anderson didn’t need to do much research. “I’m a mom of three kids, I’ve been in therapy since I was 14 and I have sex,” said Anderson. “I spent more time working on the balance of her as an appropriate professional and an inappropriate parent.”

More preparation was required for her forthcoming role as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in another Netflix series, “The Crown” (created by Anderson’s real-life boyfriend, Peter Morgan). “I did a lot of research and reading,” she said. “I’m asking for as much help as humanly possible.”

Still, Anderson has found time to consume other cultural offerings and discussed some of her favorites in a recent telephone call from London, where she is based. These are edited excerpts from that conversation.

1. **“The Fact of a Body” by Alexandria Marzano-Lesnevich** “It’s weird: I’ve done a lot of dark, gruesome series, and I’ve never been able to stomach murder stories. But somehow in turning 50, I’ve become completely fascinated, if not obsessed, with them. This is a study of a particular crime, but it’s also a memoir.”
2. **“Maiden”** “I pretty much only watch documentaries. This one’s about the first-ever all-female [yacht] crew to enter the Whitbread Round the World Race in 1989. It’s the most incredibly moving story about how a handful of 20-somethings were celebrated for their guts and perseverance despite initially being ridiculed.”
3. **Fleetwood Mac’s “Landslide”** “I could listen to it every day. I find it heartbreaking, classic and inspirational. If there were a soundtrack to my life, this would be it. The lyrics are actually quite depressing, but at the same time, I somehow find the song uplifting.”
4. **Gabriela Hearst** “She’s the most incredible women’s wear designer. Year after year, she’s created some of the most beautiful and ethically sourced collections, and she works really hard to make her products sustainable. She’s a force of nature and a thoroughly decent human being.”
5. **“Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am”** “I’ve always been a huge fan of hers as a writer, woman and advocate for change. She was one of the most interesting, intelligent and talented writers of the last century. This doc celebrates her with so many articulate champions speaking about her.”
6. **Darren Waterston** “He’s at the pinnacle of his career. His paintings are ephemeral and jewel-like. He’s about to launch his reimaging of Whistler’s Peacock Room at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It’s an extraordinary piece.”
7. **AJ Tracey’s “Ladbroke Grove”** “I listen to this song a lot in my car. There’s a BBC Radio 1 live video recording of it with Jorja Smith on YouTube. The two of them together are incredibly sexy, cool and talented.”
8. **“The Confessions of Frannie Langton” by Sara Collins** “It’s a debut novel about a former slave who becomes a lady’s maid in London. She falls deeply in love with her mistress and is accused of murdering her and her scientist husband. It’s a well-crafted, searing depiction of race, class and oppression.”
9. **“The Forgotten Masters: Indian Painting for the East India Company”** “This hidden gem is at the Wallace Collection in London. It’s a collection of artwork that illustrates both the beauty of the natural world and the social reality of late 18th- and 19th-century colonized India.”
10. **“Believed”** “It’s a podcast about Larry Nassar’s systemic sexual abuse of gymnasts who trusted him. This is clearly a time in history where victims of abuse feel empowered to come forward and expose their abusers publicly. And this podcast is, as much as anything, a celebration of the very courageous women who got to have their day in court.”