

Wonderful! 155: That's One Spicy Flu Shot!

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hello, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: In this show, we like to talk about things that we love and things that are good and things that we're into and challenging political—

Rachel: What?

Griffin: Religious, scientific, the crossroads between art and sex, and we get real with it, and we don't—

Rachel: Whoa...

Griffin: And lot of folks just sorta beat around the old bush, but we're not doing any of that.

Rachel: Cause people right now are looking for conflict, you know?

Griffin: They want— well, it's not— conflict is not the right way of thinking about it. It's more like conflict, but where it intersects with— it's the crossroads with beauty and art and science and religion!

Rachel: Welcome to our podcast, Crossroads.

Griffin: This one's called Podcast Crossroads and we talk about—

Rachel: Well meet you there.

Griffin: We'll meet you there. And it's gonna be a rough listen. We're gonna challenge some of your ideas about science and religion and sex and politics!

Rachel: [laughs] Maybe you don't wanna listen!

Griffin: Maybe you shouldn't listen.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But this episode I think we're mostly gonna focus on the things that we like and are good and things that we're into. And right now, I'm gonna ask you if you do have any of those small wonders.

Rachel: Uh, okay, let's see. My small wonder, I'm going to have to say, uh, if I had to narrow it down... so, let's say I'm picking just one, and there's a lot, you know, there's a lot of small wonders...

Griffin: Oh, this is so good.

Rachel: And so, if I were to, let's say, pick just one, I would say...

Griffin: Wow.

Rachel: One thing we haven't talked about... [laughs] We have a coffee grinder. And we grind...

Griffin: Wow, you are really scraping the bottom of the—

Rachel: The beans. [laughs]

Griffin: Rachel is pulling out a checklist of all the appliances in our house and she is crossing off the final one. Now we need to— wait, you haven't talked about our carbonator. We have a carbonator.

Rachel: I haven't talked about the defrost function on our microwave and maybe I should.

Griffin: Yeah, that's true.

Rachel: No, I like— we just kind of made the switch to whole bean coffee, like, years ago, and it just makes me feel very fancy when I grind those beans.

Griffin: And I notice virtually no difference.

Rachel: You say that, but if I were to switch...

Griffin: But if we went back to Folger's, my tongue would fall off, you're saying?

Rachel: Yes, exactly.

Griffin: I know I joke, but I do wanna focus on the carbonator because, um...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I mean, I have more or less stopped drinking soda. Like, if we go out somewhere and get some quick fast food or something like that, I'll get a soda, but like, I don't keep it around the house. And I think that's mostly because I had a really brutal kidney stone one time that I needed surgery for and the doctor was like, "No more brown sodas," and I was like, "That sounds made up, but okay," because I really—

Rachel: Yeah, that's a thing they say.

Griffin: And so, yeah, we do carbonated stuff, but like, I don't wanna go through, you know, four cans of LaCroix or Waterloo in a day, so we just got this little carbonator. It's nice. Just grab the bottle from the fridge with my lunch and just guzzle some of it down. It's fast. Although we're running out. We need to re-up the tank.

Rachel: Oh okay.

Griffin: I think we have one more tank. People don't give a shit about this, though.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Do you wanna hear my first thing?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Flu shots!

Rachel: Whoa...

Griffin: Flu shots. That's a big serious one, huh? You probably though I was gonna come at you with, like, Fritos Scoops.

Rachel: Is this a switcheroo? Are we on Sawbones?

Griffin: It's a, yeah, we're doing a trade. They're gonna talk about Fritos Scoops on the next episode and we're gonna talk about flu shots. No, uh, me and Henry just went to get our flu shots last Friday, which was not something I was looking forward to, because he has never loved a shot, but he has also never been sort of

old enough to be kind of cognizant of what is going on whenever the needle comes out.

Rachel: Yeah. When you bring— this is something I didn't think about, but when you bring the baby to the doctor to get the shots, the baby doesn't know what's happening.

Griffin: No, so like, not to get too graphic, but like, the needle goes in and there's like a second there where the baby's like, "Oh, huh." Because there's no looking at it and tensing up and freaking out and getting scared. Cause, you know, fear is the mind-killer. But he knew.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Basically from the parking lot, he was like, "Uh oh." And it was just me, because you know, you can't double up really whenever you go to a medical facility these days. So, I was not looking forward to it, and it was a genuinely not pleasant experience and— for him. For me I was like, fucking stone-cold big brave boy.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But when we got home, he was having trouble with it and he was like, "I really didn't wanna get that shot." And I was like, "But you were really brave," and he was like, "I really wasn't."

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And it was so sweet though, I told Rachel, he was— there were, like, other kids who came in to the office, like right after us, and so they were waiting to get their shots, and Henry was like crying right after he got the shot and as we were walking out into the lobby I was like, "Now, listen buddy, if you can, do you think you could, you know, stay calm while we're in the lobby so you don't scare the other kiddos? Because they're about to go in and get their shots." And he did, and it was so sweet. It was like the best kid shit ever.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But I talked to him about it, and I was like, trying to calm him down well, well after the fact, about the shots. And I was, like, explaining why flu shots are important and why they're good, and in doing so I, kinda like, got myself

hyped up about how amazing— well, vaccines in general are amazing, but the flu shot specifically is kind of a cool thing.

Rachel: Yeah. Can I confess something to you? Like, I realize that I didn't really start getting flu shots until recently.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: It, for a long time, I just thought, "Well, I never get the flu, so I'm not gonna get the shot," because I was a younger person and I just didn't think about those things. And now I just, like, I feel like why not though, dude?

Griffin: Why not is a good question.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: They're fairly inexpensive and they help you not get the flu, which is a real tough customer. It is, yeah, the flu is nothing to mess around with. Anything you can do to limit your exposure or chance of catching the flu, or limit the severity of the flu if you do catch it, is a good thing, even in years where, you know, the flu vaccine is not the most effective.

There is a huge— I don't want anything I say here to be taken as, like, so maybe skip it sometimes, because I get the flu shot every year, because I don't like getting sick. And the CDC recommends that, like, pretty much folks in every category get the flu shot since it's our best weapon against the flu spreading. It's especially important this year because, you know, you don't want to soak up any hospital resources that you don't have to in a time where the COVID 19 is kinda popping off again. So, I guess I would encourage you here at the top to go get one if you have not already.

So, the CDC and the World Health Organization recommend pretty much everybody over the age of 6 months to go get it. They do use embryon-ized... is that the right word? I dunno. Fertilized, maybe? I dunno. Chicken eggs, to create and develop the flu— but even if you have, like, a severe chicken egg allergy, they still say, "Hey, you should probably get the flu shot." The only people that shouldn't are people who have been allergic to, like, past flu shots with a similar cocktail.

And the efficacy and effectiveness are two different, kinda of like, measurements of the flu shot. I'm still having some trouble, like, telling the difference between the two. But the efficacy is kind of easy to measure comparatively, because it just

looks at the antibodies in people's blood after they get it. The effectiveness is, like, the observed effect that the flu vaccine has on limiting the flu that season. So, that was like, tough to say, because the flu has pretty wild... I think it's antigenic drift? Which is like, it mutates a little bit, and so now the flu shot may or may not be so effective. Sometimes it's tough to know if somebody actually has the flu if it's like, shifting. But the variability is a pretty wild swing.

So, to give you an idea: in 2004, the CDC published— the CDC always publishes this table of effectiveness estimations for past flu shots. 2004, it was 10% effective. Which still, like, represents an enormous amount of flu prevention. In 2010, it was 60% effective.

Rachel: Whoa!

Griffin: In 2010, do you think when you got the flu shot you were just like, "Ooh! Ooh, damn! That's a good— that's a one-a spicy meatball. That's a good-ass flu shot right there!"

Rachel: Your food tasted better.

Griffin: Your food tasted better.

Rachel: You could run faster.

Griffin: You got three inches taller.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: So, the wheels of invention sorta started spinning, unsurprisingly, during the Spanish Flu in 1918, which was a bad one. And just, doctors and pharmacists were just throwing spaghetti against the wall to see what stuck and made people not die. And the only thing using, like, medical technology of the day, that seemed effective was blood transfusion from recovered people to, like recent victims of the Spanish Flu.

So, that kinda got the wheels spinning and in 1931 a dude named Earnest William Goodpasture, who was at Vanderbilt, discovered that he could grow viruses in hen's eggs, along with some other colleagues. And other folks kinda took that discovery and started to run with it, including Jonas Salk, who invented the Polio vaccine which saved approximately 55 billion people and is one of the greatest inventions in the history of mankind.

In the 1940s, the US military took sort of what all these different scientists were working on and developed a flu vaccine for folks in World War II to use, and then shortly after that it became widely available. But yeah, I just think— I dunno. The way I pitched it to Henry is like, there is a— it's so tough, because you don't wanna scare him. Like, there's certainly enough things out there to scare him that we try to limit his anxiety over while still being, like, on the playground like, "Hey, you gotta keep your mask on, you gotta stay away."

Rachel: Because he will do that. He will, like, sneeze once and he'll be like, "Oh, I'm sick, I have to get under a blanket." He's hyper sensitive right now.

Griffin: So, when we take him to the park, we do need him to stay away from other folks, but you know, we don't wanna scare the shit out of him for the rest of his life.

Rachel: Yeah. [laughs]

Griffin: But it is kind of empowering to say, like, "Here is a thing that you can do and it's gonna hurt for a little bit, but then, like, you are made more invincible, more protected to this thing that's out there." And that's one way to sell it to a child, but it's also a way to kind of, I dunno, conceptualize it yourself that just makes the flu shot seem like such a rad thing.

Rachel: Yeah. You know what, and I am very appreciative of things I can control right now.

Griffin: Oh god, yes.

Rachel: And the flu shot is like a, "Oh, here's something I can do that's proactive and kind of incredible."

Griffin: Yeah. I don't wanna tell tales out of school, I am no scientist, I'm no doctor, but when I did get the flu shot, I was like, "Mm. Oh, this feels like a good one."

Rachel: Does it feel good this year?

Griffin: Oh, it feels good this year.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I will say the shot didn't hurt at all, and I think it's maybe because I was trying— me and Henry got them at the same time and I was trying to put on a brave face. But it didn't hurt this year, so I dunno. Maybe they got smaller needles.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [laughs] Do you wanna tell me all about your first thing?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Okay. You have your computer closed. I don't know if you're trying to save battery or if it's like an eco-friendly thing.

Rachel: [laughs] I don't wanna distract myself. I don't wanna get, like, a little notification and you're, like, talking about something important to you and I'm like, "Ooh, a sale!"

Griffin: "Ooh, there's a new Foxtrot comic strip. Just gonna check in on Doonesbury."

Rachel: [laughs] I get email alerts about Doonesbury.

Griffin: Yeah. We all do. So, what's your first thing?

Rachel: My first thing is poetry corner!

Griffin: Oh boy.

Rachel: [sings] A-ba-ba-doo-ba-ba...

Griffin: Da-ba-dum-dum-dum-dum-babada-bum-bum-bum...

Rachel: We haven't done a song in a while. I wanted to do one.

Griffin: [very low-pitched] Bum-bum-bum-bum...

Rachel: Oh. Griffin has tremendous range. He doesn't make a big deal out of it—

Griffin: [very high-pitched and squeaky] Ba-bum-bum-dooby-doo-boom-boom...

Rachel: You think Griffin can only go high, right? "I've only heard him go high, I bet he just goes high."

Griffin: [sings] Like thiiiiis!

Rachel: But he goes low, too.

Griffin: [sings] But I can get down low...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Poetry.

Rachel: Uh... [laughs] the poet I am bringing is Kevin Young.

Griffin: Okay. Okay.

Rachel: He is a black American poet, has published eleven books, is currently the poetry editor for the New Yorker.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Little magazine.

Griffin: I've heard of it. Funny strips. Talk about— you wanna talk about Doonesbury? These strips blow Doonesbury out of the water.

Rachel: [laughs] You know, a lot of comic strips need, like, seven or eight panels? New Yorker is just like, "Hey, here's some people on a street," and you're laughing already.

Griffin: They're saying something so erudite. And it's like, a gut-buster.

Rachel: [laughs] So, Kevin Young gave this interview— so he has had just a number of accolades. He was a professor of English and Creative Writing at Emory, he was a finalist for a National Book Award...

Griffin: For American Idol Season 4.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Got just barely beaten out by Bo Bice.

Rachel: That season is such a touchstone for you.

Griffin: I don't know if— I don't know about Bo Bice of Season 4 of the American Idol. Well, hold on, okay, let's do this. 1 was Kelly Clarkson, 2 was Clay Aitken, Ruben Studdard, 3 was Fantasia Barrino, I think? 4 is, I think I fell off at 4, honestly.

Rachel: I watched the Taylor Hicks season, was it Taylor Hicks?

Griffin: That may have been 4. Yeah. What were you talking about?

Rachel: [laughs] He actually grew up in Topeka, Kansas. His father was an ophthalmologist, his mother was a chemist, and they moved, like, half a dozen times before he was ten and then ultimately settled in Kansas. Which is not actually where he ended up. He ended up going to Harvard and then got his MFA at Brown. So, not currently in Kansas, but I appreciate the midwestern roots.

Griffin: Absolutely.

Rachel: So, I found this interview with him in Entertainment Weekly in 2018.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: You don't see a lot of poets in Entertainment Weekly.

Griffin: They— poetry can be entertaining. [laughs] On occasion.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah, but usually it's like, you know...

Griffin: The new Marvel movie.

Rachel: Yeah, here's the new Robert Downey Jr. film.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Not like, here's this great poet that we talked to. But he gave an interview about poetry and you know, you know me, I love like a, I love a clever turn of phrase, but the thing I like about Kevin Young is that he really identifies moments to kind of pay attention, you know, in his poetry. He like, gives kind of a unique perspective and it's not like he's super clever with language as much as he's like, "Hey, look at this thing and I'm gonna talk about it in a way that's meaningful."

So, in this interview, when he was asked about poetry, he said, "A poem can provide testimony. A poem can provide solace, it can provide connection. But it

can also provide a sense of something you knew was there, but you couldn't quite put into words. I think they can often articulate for you, and this is true for the poet and for the reader, something you didn't quite know. The sense of mystery but also of revelation is what I turn to poems for. They're able to embody experience. We need more of that."

Griffin: Absolutely, we do.

Rachel: Yeah. I felt like he really got, kind of the thing... cause I, you know, it's not like I exclusively read poetry. I appreciate a lot of forms of literature. But there's something about poetry for me, and I feel like he really kind of captured it.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So, I'm gonna read a poem of his called Expecting. I wanted to give just kind of a content warning in that this is about pregnancy, specifically his wife's pregnancy.

"Grave, my wife lies back, hands cross
her chest, while the doctor searches early
for your heartbeat, peach pit, unripe

plum—pulls out the world's worst
boom box, a Mr. Microphone, to broadcast
your mother's lifting belly.

The whoosh and bellows of mama's body
and beneath it: nothing. Beneath
the slow stutter of her heart: nothing.

The doctor trying again to find you, fragile
fern, snowflake. Nothing.
After, my wife will say, in fear,

impatient, she went beyond her body,
this tiny room, into the ether—
for now, we spelunk for you one last time

lost canary, miner of coal
and chalk, lungs not yet black—
I hold my wife's feet to keep her here—

and me—trying not to dive starboard
to seek you in the dark water. And there
it is: faint, an echo, faster and further

away than mother's, all beat box
and fuzzy feedback. You are like hearing
hip-hop for the first time—power

hijacked from a lamppost—all promise.
You couldn't sound better, break-
dancer, my favorite song bumping

from a passing car. You've snuck
into the club underage and stayed!
Only later, much, will your mother

begin to believe your drumming
in the distance—my Kansas City
and Congo Square, this jazz band

vamping on inside her.”

I love the tension of that poem.

Griffin: That's one of my favorite poems I think I've ever heard in my entire life.

Rachel: [laughs] There are a lot of poems about pregnancy. Not a lot from the male perspective, which is exciting about this one, but also just kind of the tension of that experience in the room when you're, like, waiting for that baby's heartbeat. And then just kinda the way he describes it. Like, it's not overly sentimental. It's not like, you know, "this being, transcending us and embodying our spirits as one," you know?

Griffin: No, it's about— I mean, it more sort of accurately encompasses— that's not, when we're in the room for an ultrasound, I'm not like, "Oh holy endeavor!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: For me, it's like, "Oh shit, oh shit, oh no, oh please, oh god... Yeah!" It's like absolutely mortal, existential terror to, like, the most... excitement.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah, and I also wanted to use this poem to say that Griffin and I are expecting another child.

Griffin: Yeah, baby! I— okay, so I really, really wanted Rachel to announce that— well, first of all, this is our first time talking about this outside of our private, like, family group. And I really wanted Rachel to announce it in a joke that she told me while we were lying in bed one night. It was fairly recently, after the first ultrasound. And I like to say, once I have consumed a large meal and I'm feeling kind of sick, I will sometimes do a Dave Matthews impression.

Rachel: Yeah. I feel like our listeners know this. I have mentioned this before.

Griffin: Where I, you know, "I ate too much!" And Rachel turned it back on me in a way that is— I'm bringing this up, I'm making such a deal about it because it's the hardest I've laughed this entire awful, rotten year. And I'm hoping that Rachel can sort of recreate the delivery.

Rachel: Uh, yeah. It was one of those— so, when I tell a joke to Griffin that is gonna involve some voice work, I have a tendency to kind of play it out in my head and figure out if I can pull it off. And so, I was laying there and I was thinking about it and we were quiet... and then I was like, talking about how my stomach hurt, and then I was like, um, "I ate too much... because I'm having a baby!"

Griffin: [laughs]

Rachel: [laughs] And Griffin was like, "That has to be how you tell—"

Griffin: The poem was beautiful. Literally, maybe my favorite poem I've ever heard in my entire life. But I do think we missed a trick.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: By not—

Rachel: Now we've done both.

Griffin: Now we've done both.

Rachel: Now we've done it my way and your way.

Griffin: So, we're having a little boy.

Rachel: Yeah, another baby boy.

Griffin: Another baby boy. And due next April Fool's Day.

Rachel: Due April Fool's Day. Most likely will be here earlier. Probably on my birthday.

Griffin: On Rachel's birthday, March 29th.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: So, this is also our way of announcing that our schedule's going to be very erratic starting end of March 2021 and then from that point onward, forever, probably just a little more erratic than it is now. Because we'll have two of them.

Rachel: We've very excited, though.

Griffin: We're extremely, extremely excited.

Rachel: And I wanted to share because obviously it's something that is impacting our lives a lot and I would like to be able to talk about on this show, I think.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So, thank you, Kevin Young, for your poem. [laughs]

Griffin: For your poem. It made me very emotional in a way I don't think a poem on this show has done before.

Rachel: [laughs] It's hard for me to read any poem right now.

Griffin: Yes. Oh, by the way, when Rachel cried about the umbrella...

Rachel: The umbrella poem. [laughs]

Griffin: The umbrella mom poem. If you're just wondering, yes, there was a certain amount— this applied some English to that particular ball.

Rachel: A lot of times, I read a poem and I think, "Oh, this'll be good," and then I try to read it out loud and I'm like, "Oh, this is much harder." [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah. Hey. Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[ad break]

Griffin: Hey, I got a Jumbotron here and this one is for Carmel and it's from Kirsten, who says, "Having a mom that I can give flowers to in Animal Crossing and in person was something I never expected, but am so happy I can do. Whether it's baking D&D cookies—" That stands for, um, that stands for Dragon fruit and... there's not a lot of foods that start with D. If you really think about it.

Rachel: Durian.

Griffin: Durian. Oh god, what a bad cookie that would be. "Watching our fave shows, or laughing so hard that we cry over our favorite podcasts, I'm incredibly lucky to have you in my life. Thank you for always being my wonderful mom. I love you." That is so sweet. Rachel and I are back in Animal Crossing.

Rachel: We are!

Griffin: I am doing a big, a really, like, 2 million bell reno product on my entire island. Just tearing it down to the studs, and I did sort of run dry. Run the coffers dry. And got a letter in the mail that was like, "Hey babe, love you," and it didn't have anything in it. And then I got a second one immediately after that was like, "I forgot" and she sent 100,000 bells. Can you guys believe that? What a woman.

Rachel: Hey, you financially backed a lot of my early projects, so I was happy—

Griffin: And I told you, it's not a loan. This was a gift.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Do you wanna read this other one?

Rachel: Mine is a loan.

Griffin: Great.

Rachel: This one is for Ian and Aaron. It is from Tan Man with a Plan Stan. “Life basically went into hard mode last March with tornadoes destroying our neighborhood and the pandemic delaying y’all’s wedding for a year, but next year we’ll be back to getting South Centrals and photos at Crying Wolf, chunky Sunday shakes on the reg, and finally celebrating your marriage with all our friends. You two are the best. Love.”

Griffin: That is a good Plan Stan. I like that. We don’t really have a roadmap—well, especially post April 1st 2021.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But we need some things on paper. Things like chunky milkshakes.

Rachel: I know. It’s very important to have things to look forward to, and all of these are good things that you mentioned.

Griffin: Yes.

[Maximum Fun ad plays]

Griffin: Can I tell you about my second thing?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: I’ll try and keep it short. I feel like we’ve— we went long with our baby announcement.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Mine is a videogame franchise that I believe you’ve had some exposure to. We’ve played it a bit. It’s LittleBigPlanet.

Rachel: Oh yeah, you love the LittleBigPlanet!

Griffin: I adore this entire franchise. It's one of my favorite, it's like one of my favorite game franchises from a developer called Media Molecule, who is like one of my favorite developers. They're based in... somewhere in England, I can't remember. And yeah, I just, I adore it. It is a series of games that has had three main installments and a few, like, portable games and a few, like, there was a kart racer and there's like a, there's some new game coming out on the new consoles coming out next month.

But these games are all about creation and creativity and imagination through the lens of like, a platformer. Like Mario, if you're not, like, well-versed in the parlance of video games. The first one came out on PlayStation 3 all the way back in 2008 and I remember really looking forward to it because it just looked so cool and the idea behind it was really, really special.

Everything in the game is customizable. Like, you can make your own levels, but also, like, you can change Sackboy, who is this little woolly knit protagonist, change his face and his body parts and you can put costumes on him, and you had stickers that you could put all over Sackboy or you could just stick all over the level if you were feeling like, you know, being artistic while you were jumping around death pits or whatever. And it was a bonkers amount of artistic creativity that then sort of got more and more sophisticated.

I think we played Little Big Planet 3 together pretty soon after we started dating and by that point, like, they had added things like logic gates and wiring and motherboards, all represented like very visually and tangibly, so like, you put a physical piece of wood in the world and then stick these little chips to it to, like, create logic. So, you could create really, really advanced stuff. Like, people were taking this platform game creation toolset and, like, recreating Doom. Like, making first-person shooters and interactive chess boards and doing all this wild stuff from it.

I spent a lot of time making levels in LittleBigPlanet 2, and I actually learned a lot about programming through this, like, visual, tangible method of creating logic in the games, which was really, really cool. There's some concepts, like, AND/OR gates and IF/THEN switches that are, like, actually very universal programming concepts that I feel like I had a leg up whenever I started to take a look at learning programming, because I kinda knew that stuff from this very cute

platforming video game. It's also, like, a really fun co-op game, which me and Rachel really enjoyed.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: You don't really like a lot of complexity, I feel like, in a game and this one has—

Rachel: Yeah. I just like it to be fun, I like it to be rewarding, you know? I don't like to feel like the game is really making me work for it.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: And so I really appreciate this one.

Griffin: We also really liked Yoshi's Woolly World.

Rachel: Yeah, it felt similar.

Griffin: There was like, Kirby's Epic Yarn. I feel like anything that has a very arts and crafty vibe.

Rachel: Yeah, I like that kinda tactile, like, "Oh, I could just reach in there and hold these things."

Griffin: And that's absolutely what this game's all about. Like, you ride around on a giant skateboard because you're supposed to be, like, two inches tall. It's very, very cute. The aesthetic of this game is, like, out of control. It has this kind of like general, hyper-upbeat, oddball creative energy that almost kinda gives me, like, a Bake Off vibe. Like, that level of always stay posi sort of intention. It is narrated by Stephen Fry, who is always talking about shit like The Dreamiverse and talking about all that stuff. The story of the games is they're always about sort of like creativity realized in some hyper-stylized way, and it's kind of like this weird ouroboros because these creative communities formed around the games in a way that was kind of unprecedented at the time.

Like, I mentioned the people doing, like, stretching the boundaries of what people could do with the toolset in a way that was kinda mind-boggling, but then you would get groups of people, communities who would congregate online. There was like a web portal where you could comment on people's levels and follow

them and add them to playlists and, like, favorite creators and stay in communication with them. So, people would get together, and I remember this one project where, like, 32 different creators got together and recreated Super Mario Bros. Each taking one level and viewing it through a different artistic lens.

Rachel: That's very cool.

Griffin: It was this hugely ambitious thing, but it was really fucking rad.

Rachel: Can you talk about the time period for this, too?

Griffin: Yeah. So, the first game came out in 2008. I think LittleBigPlanet 2 was a few years after that.

Rachel: That's what feels so notable about it, for me. In that, like, people weren't really doing that then. I feel like they're doing that now, but I feel like it was just really clever to create this whole community that's, like, all about making levels.

Griffin: Absolutely. This was pre-Minecraft blowing up. So like, the idea of people congregating online to collaborate on an extremely ambitious creative project was kind of unheard-of. And right now, Media Molecule has put out a game called Dreams, which is basically the same thing. It's like LittleBigPlanet's creative aesthetic and huge ambitious toolset, but they've kind of just removed the platformer side of things entirely, so you can make whatever. And there are people making movies, people are making, like, big ambitious roleplaying games. People are making all kinds of wild shit in a way that would be way too complicated for me to explain. I think we did an episode of The Besties on it.

But the best thing about these games and the thing that was most formative for me was the soundtracks, which introduced me to so much cool music. They're hip as fuck. The Go Team, Battles, Passion Pit. There were themed DLC, so there was a Marvel downloadable content pack where now you could, like, put Marvel shit in your levels. There was a Muppets content pack that had like, the Muppets theme in it that you could put in your levels, which was so delightful. Crystal Castles, CSS, so many dope-ass cool bands that were fairly underground. I remember one of the theme songs to one of the games was Sleepyhead by Passion Pit, which was, like the summer jam of 2010 or whatever year that came out, and here it

was like, the first time I heard it was in a trailer for this video game. The music was so, so, so cool and yeah.

Rachel: That's so cool. It's too easy to feel, like, endeared to creators when they, like, they don't have to make something cool and just, they do, and there's kind of a low bar I think that they could have met easily, and then they just added all this stuff that made it so unique and, like, heartwarming.

Griffin: And there's a certain amount of— and I don't wanna get, like, shitty game journo about it, but there's a certain amount of crassness that you kind of have to like, accept for pretty much all video games that come out. Like, a certain amount of, like, these are the decisions that you made to justify the enormous cost that goes into making video games. And it is so, I will say, so completely hidden in these games because it is so celebratory of, just, human creativity and artistic endeavors that it's kind hard to see the, you know, price gouging that's going into it.

I love these games, I adore them. I've been jonesing actually to go back and play some of them. Because they're just, I love that these games exist, I love that the developer exists, and I'm looking forward to the new one that comes out here in a couple months, I think.

What's your second thing? You've closed your computer again. You really, really got some... you got some distractions on there. You playing Farmville? What's up?

Rachel: I'm down to 19%, Griffin.

Griffin: Oh okay. See I wondered if that was maybe a factor.

Rachel: I didn't wanna stress you out.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: [laughs] My second thing is something that I actually had you do a little bit of earlier in the poetry corner, and that is scat singing.

Griffin: Okay. I will be curious to hear about scat singing.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I feel like I know a lot about scat singing, scat singing...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: From, like, the time period where it was a thing, but I don't know anything about the origins of scat singing.

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah, no, I... this is one of those things, you know, it's kind of like when you watch just any kind of good improvisational work, whether it's like comedy or music, and you think, like, "Oh, that doesn't seem that hard," and then you try and do it yourself...

Griffin: It's very difficult.

Rachel: Yeah, it's very diffi— especially for an extended period of time. I mean, everybody can—

Griffin: Anybody can skoodip-bap-bap.

Rachel: Yeah, right?

Griffin: But then, try to do that for 16 bars and it's...

Rachel: [laughs] So, a lot of people, like, associated this with Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong, but there is a suggestion that it's been around a lot longer. If you look at some of the earliest examples, you'll find, like, performances in like the 1910s. And there was an interview with Jelly Roll Morton, who's a jazz pianist, who said that he cites Joe Simms of Vicksburg Mississippi. It's like, it's a very, like—

Griffin: Very specific origin point.

Rachel: Yeah. I mean, if you think about it, all we have are recordings, you know?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So, it's difficult—

Griffin: I would trust the word of fuckin' Jelly Roll Morton over most people. I feel like Jelly Roll Morton probably knows about the origins of scat more than anybody I've ever met in my entire life.

Rachel: This Joe Simms, at least according to Jelly Roll Morton, was actually an old Canadian. And there was a suggestion that he was doing this, like, in Mississippi and New Orleans and then people kinda picked it up and took it all over.

Griffin: Like, as a goof?

Rachel: Well, I don't know his intentions.

Griffin: "I can do jazz and bebop with my mouth! Isn't that funny?" And people in the audience were like, "No Joe, this is... this is good stuff, man."

Rachel: "This is something though, what you're doing."

Griffin: "Lay this down, Joe."

Rachel: This is something I feel like is definitely an acquired taste. I feel like people a lot of times find it kind of disruptive when they're listening to, like, a jazz song, especially one that has, you know, like a lyrical song. But if you think about it as improvisation in the same way that a jazz musician would improvise, then it's a little more palatable, I feel like.

I was reading this description saying that, this is an article I found from The Independent, "It grants the singer the status of a solo instrumentalist like any other in jazz, thereby by extension the social structures and power relations that condition them." This, just like, this opportunity to just kind of, like, break free and do a little... do a little be-bap-bap-ba-doo. You know?

Griffin: Yeah. I think... I think the issue, the reason it hasn't broken so big is one, I feel like most of my exposure to this has been like at kind of shitty, fancy bars where there's just like a sort of Sausalito... I think that's the name of the band from Lost in Translation.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: That's just like, somebody out there not really putting in the most passionate performance, but then the other exposure that everyone has is the song I'm The Scatman. Which is a jam.

Rachel: Which is a jam, yeah.

Griffin: But it's— it can't be the only sort of cultural exposure this great nation of ours has to scat.

Rachel: I was also I was reading the differences kind of in scat performances, that I thought was really interesting. There were different styles, kind of depending on what band the singer was performing with. So, there was like a suggestion that, like, you know, Ella Fitzgerald was performing with these swing-era big bands and so, she was doing a certain kind of scatting to kind of line up with those big bands, whereas Sarah Vaughan was accompanying these small combos, and kind of the differences in scatting based on the kind of music you were performing with. Which, you know, is something that you wouldn't really think about, but you know, different types of instruments would motivate you to make different kinds of noises to, like, blend in with the band, you know?

Griffin: I mean, you think about, like, beatboxing, which I think you could make the logical leap to, I think it's really easy to say, like, "Oh, there's really just one type of beatboxing," because that's all you hear, and that's all that you do when you try to beatbox. But then you hear a Biz Markie do it and it's like, "Oh, actually shit, wait. Oh fuck."

Rachel: Yeah. I feel like it's the kind of thing that is very rewarding to kind of dig into, because the more you listen to it, the more you realize how unique each person's style was. I wanted to play a little bit, Ella Fitzgerald of How High the Moon, and about a minute and a half into this song, she goes for it. And I wanted to share a little bit of that, in case anybody hadn't heard her version.

[excerpt of Ella Fitzgerald scatting in How High the Moon plays]

Rachel: There's a lot that's impressive to me. You know, I was thinking about, like, I have kind of an aversion to jam bands. And there's something very jammy about scatting. But I dunno, I feel like it's so clever and it demands so much quick thinking to get these sounds to come out of your mouth that you're not entirely sure that your mouth can make, you know? [laughs]

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: I just, I find it very impressive and very charming, and I realize how hard it is every time I try and do it myself.

Griffin: I feel like any kinda good improvisational vocal performance is rare, but like, just fucking rips. Like, I remember watching this YouTube of this woman backing up a fairly gospel-y soul band and she was, like, just sort of doing improvised runs, and then she tried harmonizing with herself.

Rachel: Whoa...

Griffin: Through like, singing one note, but then you know how you can kinda like whistle one note but hum another, like [demonstrates]

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Kind of like doing that, with her voice, while she was doing a run, and the rest of the band was like, "You're fucking wild, are you kidding?" It's one of my favorite YouTube videos. Any kind of, like, really good improvised vocal performance is really something to watch.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Our friends at home are talking about some stuff. Can I tell ya?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Cody says, "Howdy, my small wonder is things being described as 'an absolute unit'. I taught my little brother how to say it, and hearing him call my chocolate cake 'an absolute unit' is marvelous."

Rachel: I feel you're the first person I've ever heard do that. Is that a thing?

Griffin: I got it off the internet, for sure.

Rachel: Oh, okay.

Griffin: Like most things. Like most things anybody says these days.

Rachel: Now, there are definitely some cats I have seen that fit that description.

Griffin: I like describing little kids as an absolute unit.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Not all kids— there is— you really appreciate this when you have a kid, like, in a daycare setting or something like that, seeing them in some sort of social environment where you know all the kids are roughly the same age group, but one of them is just fucking huge and your kid is quite small, and you're like, "You're the same— you have the same birthday!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It's wild— just, kids grow— it's not, like, a read on any particular child, it's just they all grow at weirdly different rates.

Rachel: It's true.

Griffin: It's so— man, kids are crazy. Maddie says, "Since working from home in my, quote, 'home office', my desk is over a floor vent. When I turn the heat on, I get a direct source of warmth directly to my feet. It makes getting out of bed on a cold and gloomy fall morning a little more wonderful."

Rachel: Oh, that is nice.

Griffin: I had this in my, uh, apartment in Chicago. I had a little office and it was all hardwood floor everywhere and there was a little vent right under my desk. And oh, God, it was so good. You have to be careful, though. You had to be careful.

Rachel: I lived in a place with radiators in Chicago, which was a wild experience.

Griffin: Ooh. I don't know that I've ever had that. It would scare me.

Rachel: It is kinda scary. [laughs]

Griffin: My papa Crawford had a huge floor vent, like a huge one, and it was right between the living room and the dining room. Like, huge, enormous, metal floor vent, almost like a subway cover, I remember stepping on that so much, and even when the heat wasn't on, in bare feet, walking on like a floor vent

doesn't feel great, but when the heat was on, it was just like stepping on a waffle iron. That's the evil version of this.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But that house was always quite warm, so. Thank you to Ben and Augustus for the use of our theme song, "It's a Departure", off of the album Putting the Days to Bed, and thank you to Maximum Fun for having us on the network.

Rachel: Yeah. I would encourage everybody to go to MaximumFun.org and find a new podcast today. Another charming one I would recommend, Can I Pet Your Dog?

Griffin: Oh, yeah.

Rachel: People like dogs!

Griffin: I was— sorry. I was answering the question. Yes. You may pet the secret dog that I have kept in this house under your nose without your knowledge for going on four years now.

Rachel: Man, that is some good cleanup work you've been doing around the house.

Griffin: His name is Brisket. He's a Shetland... Terrier.

Rachel: That's so good.

Griffin: He is cute as a button and—

Rachel: Very quiet.

Griffin: He's so quiet. He actually doesn't bark or make any noises.

Rachel: He just does a little throat clear.

Griffin: He does that every once in a while. He'll cough and I'll be like, "That was me!" You know how I do that every now and then?

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah. It's weird. I don't know why you do that.

Griffin: Anyway, come on out, Brisket! [barks loudly] Oh no.

Rachel: Hold on.

Griffin: Oh no.

Rachel: You'd think I woulda noticed that.

Griffin: No, no. This isn't Brisket.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Folks, wild dogs have entered the studi— argh!

[theme music plays]

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