

## Still Buffering 320: Don Hertzfeldt

Published July 17, 2022

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**Rileigh:** Hello, and welcome to *Still Buffering*: a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I am Rileigh Smirl.

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Taylor:** And I'm Taylor Smirl.

**Sydnee:** Uh, I finally saw that new Doctor Strange movie.

**Taylor:** Oh!

**Rileigh:** Oh?

**Sydnee:** Did you all— have you all seen that one?

**Taylor:** I actually haven't yet.

**Sydnee:** You haven't?!

**Taylor:** I know! I don't know. I just... movies are expensive. Is it out— is it on the— the streaming services yet?

**Rileigh:** Now it's on Disney+, right?

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm, that is why I have seen it. [laughs]

**Rileigh:** I figured, yeah.

**Taylor:** Yeah, I was like, well, if Syd's seen it, it must be on a streaming service. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Yep. That's exactly— well, it was one of those things where I really wanted to see it, and Justin and I kept saying, like, "Well, we could talk to Mom

and Dad about watching the kids so we can have a date. But then if we're gonna have a date, like, do we want to spend it watching a movie?" 'Cause you can't talk through a movie. And that's just a long time to get to spend together and not be able to talk.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** If we got to spend big chunks of time, just the two of us, all the time, then I could see using a chunk of it for a movie. But... since it's so rare— I mean, it's been— I can't remember our last date. I don't— I hate to— if we're gonna ask for it, I hate to ask for it and spend it in a movie theater. That's just how I feel.

**Taylor:** Well, that's understandable. I was curious, though, 'cause I will— you know me. I seek out spoilers because I like to know what I'm getting into, so I know what happens in the movie. I'm surprised, Syd— did you like it? 'Cause I know you're a big fan of Wanda.

**Sydnee:** I, uh... which I guess, like, should we not spoil it? Should I be careful?

**Raleigh:** Uh...

**Sydnee:** I can talk in vague generalities.

**Raleigh:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** I think we'll just keep it vague.

**Sydnee:** Okay. I will not say what happened, but, you know, I will speak in generalities. I thought there were many elements of the film that I enjoyed. Um, Taylor, I think you particularly would like— as many people have already said, so this is not a spoiler at all— it's got a lot of horror elements to it.

**Taylor:** Yeah, well it's— Sam Raimi directs it, who's— *Army of Darkness*, *Evil Dead*.

**Sydnee:** And that is evident. Very evident. Like, there's some really... in particular towards the end, some very dark, cool moments that are very Sam Raimi. And, like, I enjoyed those things. I like horror movies so, like, I liked that

feel to a lot of it. Genuinely, there are scary moments. Genuinely, which is weird for a Marvel movie.

That being said... I have since read that Sam Raimi did not watch all of *WandaVision*.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** [laughs]

**Sydney:** Before this film was conceived. And, like, watched—

**Raleigh:** I binged all of *WandaVision* before I watched the movie so I could understand it better.

**Sydney:** So he— he watched, like, key moments, but not... and I think— I think that— and I don't mean this in an accusatory way. But I think that helps me understand why the movie treats Wanda the way that it does. And why I personally— because I loved *WandaVision*, because it's one of my favorite things that the MCU has put out there, I personally felt a little, um... disappointed. I don't wanna say— I mean, I'm not— I don't wanna say betrayed, because I don't feel like I'm owed anything.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydney:** You know what I mean? I don't have that relationship with these films. Where, like—

**Taylor:** Like, they wrote— the character is presented differently than you would've expected.

**Sydney:** Exactly. It just wasn't— I had such an emotional connection with Wanda by the end of *WandaVision* that I felt like she, as a person— that it wasn't true to her.

**Taylor:** I've seen a lot of people make that complaint.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. I just feel like they... they leaned so hard into the Scarlet Witch without the understanding for how Wanda is the Scarlet Witch and the Scarlet Witch is Wanda, and she can be both and— and how complex that's presented throughout, like that evolution in *WandaVision*. I don't know. I just... that's my— but, I mean, I still— I enjoyed the movie for the most part. I love watching Elizabeth Olsen onscreen. She's just— she's an amazing actor, and she's great, and I lo— I mean, we all know how I feel about Doctor Strange. We all know...

**Taylor:** I was— yeah. I would say this movie was—

**Sydnee:** The love I have for Benedict Cumberbatch. [laughs]

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** So, like, it was great. All that was great, but yes, I— I overall at the, like, the way that it— the plot was disappointing.

**Taylor:** Hmm.

**Raleigh:** I like the new character that was the other main character, but I don't want to name her, because I know that was a reveal.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Raleigh:** It's a reveal for people who know all the comic books and all the stories. It's not a reveal for people like me who are like, "Who is... is that a person who's important? Is that another character in something?" Someone who had not previously just been in the other, like, mainstream MCU movies. That's my knowledge.

**Sydnee:** I'll tell you why I was familiar with that character. Uh, Charlie and Cooper are huge fans.

**Raleigh:** Ohh, okay.

**Sydnee:** That character was featured in another Marvel property that was aimed at younger— a younger age group. And we have that— we have that doll upstairs.

**Rileigh:** I vaguely remember that now that you're saying that.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Rileigh:** Um...

**Sydnee:** So I immediately was like, "I know who that is. I got that doll!" [laughs] Um, I was excited to see that too.

**Rileigh:** Well, Tey, now it seems like you have to watch it.

**Taylor:** Now that I know it's on streaming, I will. Yeah. I'm excited.

**Sydnee:** You would appreciate it. I mean, I can see— the visual, the, um— the horror elements. All that stuff is very cool, and different. You know? Which I think is, like, the neat thing about the MCU is that we see from different directors these movies being slightly different things. You know? But... that— you know. Aside from— aside from the arc they give my beloved Wanda.

**Taylor:** [laughs] Well, I'm excited. I've been saving it, like, kind of, you know, finding... trying to find the time, so I'm glad it's out on streaming. The one opportunity I had to see a movie, I chose the other multiverse movie, whatever was *Everything Everywhere All At Once*. [laughs]

**Rileigh:** Ohh.

**Taylor:** Like, it was a competition of multiverse movies in the theaters for a moment.

**Rileigh:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Can I tell you that their concept of the multiverse is actually fairly similar.

**Taylor:** Yeah?

**Sydnee:** I was surprised. As we were watching it and they were sort of kind of— like, the exposition bits where they're kind of explaining to you how the

multiverse works and how people interact within it and all that kind of stuff. It's not— I mean, they're fair— they're similar concepts of a multiverse. It's like they've both arrived at this conclusion. Like, if there is a multiverse, this is probably how it works?

**Taylor:** Maybe they know something we don't.

**Sydnee:** I love the idea of a multiverse.

**Raleigh:** I can't... I sound very hoarse and tired, because I've just been really invested in another Disney multiverse, and that's the *Descendants* world. Um, I've been staying to watch the *Descendants* musical after our kids' preshow, and I did last night. And I just got so into those songs, and they let me dance with them onstage at the end, 'cause all the kids in my preshow are in it. So I was up there yelling and dancing and... love that music.

**Sydnee:** *The Descendants*'ll do that to you.

**Raleigh:** [laughs] It'll do that to you.

**Sydnee:** Uh, do you know what my kids are watching right now, Taylor?

**Taylor:** What?

**Sydnee:** Uh, well, they're in the middle of rewatching *Rejected* for the third time.

**Taylor:** Oh no! You let your kids watch *Rejected*?

**Sydnee:** Uh, my kids— you knew Cooper would love this stuff.

**Raleigh:** I knew Cooper would love that one, yeah.

**Sydnee:** You knew this would be right up Cooper's alley.

**Taylor:** I mean, I'm not— yes. I wasn't sure, because I guess there's not— I mean, there is, like... some gross stuff in *Rejected*. Of course you're referencing today's topic, which is the animated works of Don Hertzfeldt, of which *Rejected* is probably the most well known. Um... there's some bleeding anuses, you know?

**Sydnee:** I had not seen, I think, the entire thing. But I know I've seen— like, as I was watching, I was like, "Oh, I've seen parts of— like, this is familiar to me." I know I have experienced at least parts of this. Um, even if I hadn't ever seen the whole thing.

**Raleigh:** That banana was somewhere deep in my memory.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Taylor:** I was gonna— I think that— I mean, when did that come out? 'Cause that's been out for, uh, over a decade now. Um, I know that there was a period of time where I feel like if you were involved even tangentially with, like, geek culture, you just heard people say, "I'm a banana!" Or "My spoon's too big!" Just— that was just a thing. [laughs]

**Raleigh:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Yes. Yes, this is true. Um...

**Taylor:** [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly]

**Raleigh:** It seems like it should've been before me, but I know I heard people say "I'm a banana" that way, and I know I saw that banana when I was growing up.

**Taylor:** Well, it came out in 2000, so...

**Raleigh:** See, I would've thought I would've been way after that. But... maybe— maybe it was one of those things that it got put on YouTube or something when YouTube first started, like, being other things being put on YouTube, and people were rediscovering it.

**Sydnee:** Possibly. I mean, 'cause that's— I mean, that is how I experienced a lot of things where, like, people just sort of put random videos of part of something on YouTube, and then you'd find it and be like, "What was that?" [laughs quietly]

"Where— what did I just—" and it's labeled wrong, and nobody knows what it is, and it's illegal to put it there. And you're like, "What did I just interact with?" [laughs]

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** That's how mp3s were at first. [through laughter] That's how music was. Like, you would download a song and you're like, "That is not what I thought it was! And there's no way that's the right artist. What am I listening to? [pause] This is just a soundbite from a movie!"

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Um, no. But I had it when I turned on the TV, like, my search from where I had been watching those last night was still up. And there's one cartoon that I forget what it was called, but he, uh— it was done with Mike Judge.

**Taylor:** Oh yeah, he did work with— was it the animation show?

**Sydnee:** Yes. And it was, like, the first thing— and there's a picture of a unicorn on the little, like, image on YouTube. And as soon as that popped up on the screen both Charlie and Cooper were like, "We wanna watch that! What's that? That looks good! What is it?" [laughs]

And so I turned it on, and they loved it! And especially Cooper. Cooper was, like, yelling with laughter at parts of it.

**Taylor:** Oh, that's amazing.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. And so as soon as they were done they were like, "What's— we wanna watch more of whatever this is." [laughs] So... I knew all the bleeding in *Rejected* would appeal to Cooper.

**Taylor:** Yeah, there's— that's what— when I was watching, like, oh, this is one that Sydnee at least— it's safe to have on with the girls in the room. Unlike some of my choices. But then when there was all the bleeding I was like, "Or is it? I don't know." It's cartoon violence.



**Sydnee:** The, um—

**Raleigh:** Cooper loves cartoon violence.

**Sydnee:** And she loves bleeding. The "My anus is bleeding"... really got her.

**Taylor:** [giggles]

**Raleigh:** She liked that?

**Sydnee:** Oh yeah!

**Raleigh:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Charlie after— after the first few times was just sitting there with her eyes covered.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** And Cooper's just like— like, literally, she was laying on her stomach with her, like, chin propped up on her fists, you know? Watching it with a big smile, just laughing and, like, kicking her legs. Like, "This is amazing! [laughs] Where has this been my whole life?"

**Taylor:** I love that. I— that makes me very happy. That makes sense, though. I think— especially *Rejected*, 'cause some of the— some of his other work that I really love is a little bit more serious. There's a little bit more narrative to it. And I think *Rejected* actually has a very, like— a sophisticated narrative to it? But the individual shorts are just— just pure glee in how bizarre and wacky and fun they are.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Raleigh:** Yeah. Um, do you want to explain, just for everyone listening at home, like, the plot of the... I guess the big animated shorts of Don Hertzfeldt's that we're talking about?

**Taylor:** Yeah, uh— the three that I sent y'all— and I don't know if you got around to all of them— uh, were *Rejected*, *It's Such a Beautiful Day*, and *World of Tomorrow*. Um, which are, like, my three favorites. He has a ton of shorts and other animated work. *Rejected* is the one that really put him on the scene, got him, you know, big, like, Oscar noms and stuff. Uh, and that is the— the plot is, it's a bunch of rejected cartoons from an animator. Like, the first are for the Family Learning Channel, and that's kind of like a TLC parallel. And then, like, he goes on to sort of, like, a— whatever, home, like... Johnson & Johnson kind of commercials. But they're all, like, fake, and the plot line is this animator is making these cartoons and getting more and more, what, frustrated or— or upset at working in advertising. And, you know, his artwork is becoming more and more unhinged. Uh, and you're just seeing the cartoons. Um...

**Sydnee:** I have to admit, I had a moment where I was sitting there thinking, "Is the Family Learning Channel real?"

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** "Is this real?" Because... and— but you know what? It occurred to me— which of course I figured out, like, this isn't real. Like, I got there. [laughs quietly] But I had that moment because that sort of— not exactly like the cartoons that are presented in *Rejected*. But that kind of absurdist thing is used today, sometimes. Like, you do see ads or little clips that have nothing to do— but like, they're an ad for something, but don't have anything to do with— like that, what we're seeing is sort of like that idea. That now we use.

**Taylor:** Well, and that's actually, uh... I don't know if it's a bit of controversy, but it's been pointed out that, like— you remember the Pop-Tarts commercials that were all stick figures, very simple drawings?

**Raleigh:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** And they were kind of weird, and not really about Pop-Tarts. Um, and looks exactly like Don Hertzfeldt's style. Those came out after *Rejected*, and I'm

fairly certain they had at least talked to— like, Don Hertzfeldt does not do advertising. He doesn't. He's very stern about that. But, like, they seeked him out to do commercials and he said no, and so they're like, "Well, we're just gonna take your style and do something like it."

**Sydnee:** Oh, gosh.

**Taylor:** I think his— I mean, specifically *Rejected* had such a big impact, it was so popular and so well known that, like, a lot of commercials kind of pulled from that unironically. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Well, I mean, I do— even if the style is different, it's that idea. That sort of— like, that idea is a huge idea that we accept as commonplace now. But, like, to advertise something by creating something that is memorable and, like, you have an emotional response to, and you immediately will latch on to, but doesn't necessarily have anything to do with what you're promoting. That idea is pervasive. And it just makes me wonder if this is where— if this was sort of the birth of it, you know?

**Taylor:** Hmm. I mean, it definitely inspired a lot of that. Which is funny, 'cause the work itself is very much about the struggle of doing work that you're not passionate about just for money, you know? Working in advertising. Which is, once again, something he's very much against. I saw him speak a while ago. I think it was right after *It's a Beautiful Day* came out. He had, like, a... a showing here in New York. And he made this statement that has stuck with me for so long.

He was talking about why he doesn't want— like, what— just what commercial art feels like for him. And he used— he said, you know, it's like, "Imagine your favorite thing in the world is to go on, like, a lovely walk in the woods, you know? You go for a lovely walk in the woods every day and you see the trees and you smell the grass and it's so nice. And then someone says, 'Alright, you love walking. I'm gonna pay you X amount of money to walk around this one square city block wearing a sandwich board. Well, you love walking, so you should love this. You should love this job.' But it's not the same thing, you know?" That that's kind of— and he was like, "I'd rather— I'd—" he made the point, he was like, "Honestly if at some point my own art doesn't pay the bills, I'd be more likely to go work in a coffee shop than, you know, go to advertising."

And afterwards there was, like, a little meet and greet, and you could get him to sign your stuff. But I was working in a coffee shop at the time, and I said "I really appreciate what you said there," 'cause I was like, "I work in a coffee shop because I can't make money on my art."

And he looked at me and he was like, "No, that's not bad! I wasn't saying it was bad!"

And I was like, "No, no, no, I didn't think you were saying—"

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** "I was agreeing with you!" He was a very— a very kind, uh, man. But...

**Sydnee:** Well, I think that's an important message, though, that we don't ever hear enough of. Um... like, given a megaphone. Which is that you can do something that has value, that isn't monetary. That just because, like, things— that is such our measure of whether or not something is useful or successful or if you should be doing it. Like, "Well, are you making money off your art? Okay, then you're successful, so you can keep doing it. Oh, you're not making money? Well, you should do something else."

Without that sort of idea that, like, well, maybe making money off something isn't the only way it can have value. That's fine. We do things to make money to survive. We— that is the— that's the time and place we live. But we could also do things that have other value for us, for others, for society as a whole, and it has nothing to do with monetary value. And we almost never talk about that. Like, especially to inspire young people. The way we inspire young people is to say, "Get a good job and make money. You know, make a good life for yourself. Buy a nice house. You know, have a... a fancy dog." I don't know. What do people want?  
[laughs quietly]

**Taylor:** A fancy dog?!

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** A fancy dog.

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] I don't— I don't know! What are the things people want?

**Taylor:** That sounds like an alien just answered that question.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** [laughs]

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** "What do humans want? Hmm, fancy dogs."

**Taylor:** "Fancy... dogs." Yeah, well, you know—

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Some humans do want fancy dogs!

**Taylor:** Do you— do you want a fancy dog? Is this a you thing, Syd?

**Sydnee:** We know— we— you know that I don't do fancy, and I also— I'm sorry, this is not— man, I'm gonna get us canceled. I am a cat person, personally. I have nothing against dogs, I just prefer cats. I would rather own a cat than a dog. Please don't cancel me for saying that.

**Taylor:** I think that's okay. I think you just can't— you just can't not like dogs.

**Sydnee:** I— I did not say that. I don't have anything against dogs. Dogs are fine. I just would prefer to own a cat. I'm very busy, and I... cats are lower maintenance.

**Taylor:** Fair.

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly]

**Taylor:** Well, I've been reading this book. It's by Jerry Saltz. It's called *How to Be an Artist*, and reading that while rewatching some of these was interesting, 'cause it's just... so much art.

Uh, but in it he talks about— he says the phrase— 'cause it's all just about inspiring you to be an artist. But he says, you know, you're making art, not product. And I feel like that's the line that gets lost. I don't— art is a different thing. Art is its own impulse, it's its own need met. It doesn't have to sell, it doesn't have to make money. It's not part of the process. But I think that those lines get so blurred in today's capitalist heckscape where it's like, no, anything you do needs to be justified by money.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Taylor:** And, you know, I even find myself, like, sometimes putting time into art that's not really art, it's product. And it's like, well, I know this will sell. And I'm like, why— but why? There are so many other ways, easy ways to make money that there's so much less effort. I should just do the art that makes me happy making art, and then go— you know, I work at a restaurant. That makes the money. That's the thing that makes the money. [laughs quietly]

**Raleigh:** You know, I've seen people recently talking about that same concept with video games and video game art. That the reason that people sometimes will, like, go on and on about, uh, art in indie video games, smaller video games, is usually because the people making those games are not working for big companies that are tasked to make this art and make this money and continue this game series, or whatever. They're doing it because they care about, like, the story they're telling, and they're there for the creation of the whole thing. Um, and that it's rare to see that same kind of, like, real excitement for, like, big, mainstream video games and their art style anymore. That, like, obviously they look good, but there's no, like... there's no oomph there. You can tell with some of the smaller games that, like, it's someone who is involved in it and cares about it. Like, it's interesting you say that, that you can tell it's a difference between someone who's doing it as a job and someone who, like, yes they might make money from it, but they also care about the whole process of it.

**Sydnee:** Um, I want to explore this more, and also, um, I want to talk more about the idea of how this sort of inspired— I think some of the stuff I watch with my kids has been informed by this. Anyway— but before we do that...

**Raleigh:** Let's check the group message.

**Sydnee:** Uh, so it's summer, and for me that means a little bit more traveling. And one of my favorite things to do when I'm traveling is listen to podcasts, and there's no better way to listen to podcasts— or whatever you like to listen to, audiobooks, music, whatever— than Raycon wireless earbuds. Raycon's everyday earbuds look great, they sound better than ever, and my favorite part is they have optimized gel tips for perfect in-ear fit. I can't tell you— there's nothing worse than when you're riding on a plane, let's say, and one of your earbuds pops out, and then you gotta search under the seats. Well, you're not gonna have that problem with Raycon. Plus, they give you eight hours of play time and a 32-hour battery life, so you can marathon that entire podcast series if you want to, no problem. Plus, Raycons start at about half the price of other premium audio brands. What a deal.

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**Sydnee:** So, one thing that we're kind of hitting on— before we stop talking about capitalism— is—

[all laugh]

**Raleigh:** Let's talk about capitalism!

**Sydnee:** Nope! But I think what's interesting is, what you're hitting on is that— that dissonance between doing something because it's what you love, or it has other value, and then doing something for money— is it exists in everything we do, really. Like, I found it— I have found it in medicine, right? Like, I love taking care of people. Having to do it as a job for money, and because in this country it is such a... it is su— like, we are moving towards a consumer model. "I am selling you medical care. You are buying medical care from me." I don't see it that way, but that is the framework we have. And so when your experience with your doctor feels impersonal, that's why, because that's the framework.

And so I am trying to move out of that and provide medical care for free, so that I can... do better, and find joy in it once more. Um, I think the thing is, art has the ability to challenge that head on, 'cause it's the most dissonant. It's the most clear, I feel like. I feel like 'cause it is— it's more pure than a lot of— you know what I mean? It's like self-expression.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** It's— it's such a pure example of that. Which makes me wonder if that's often where we see, like, the beginnings of, like, revolutionary movements and thought. Is in the artistic world. Because you have that, that very clear dissonance between "I'm doing this for money," "I'm doing this to self-actualize."

**Taylor:** Yeah. Well, and that's— 'cause it's just two different head spaces, you know? Like, you can't... you can't— sometimes work that means something to you can accidentally be very popular and sell. [laughs] But that's, you know. If you start out— it's— it's sort of an opposite direction. 'Cause when you wanna make something that sells, you look at what's selling currently. What are the current trends? What do most people like? What will appeal at the widest level? And you come inwards with that.

Whereas the way you make stuff that, I don't know, means something, is you have a conversation internally with yourself. Like, "Where am I at right now? What am I feeling? What am I struggling with? What am I frustrated with?" Or you don't even ask yourself questions, you just start making something, and then it goes somewhere. And then it goes inward to outward instead of outward to inward. I don't know. And, I mean, that's— I have so much respect for someone like Hertzfeldt, because, you know, his work— it's not— it has very strong, like, narratives and meaning, and it's very powerful. And it's art. It's, you know, it's enjoyable, I don't think it's high-brow and snooty by any means. It's not. It's very communicative, you know?

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Raleigh:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** No, it definitely is. I mean, obviously, like, we enjoyed it, but so did my seven-year-old and my four-year-old.

**Raleigh:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** You know? And there has to be, at that age for it to be enjoyable, it has to be communicating something, you know? They're not going to look at



something that is high-brow and snooty and enjoy it, and they did. Um, so I think it definitely does that. It strikes me almost as like, um— you know in like a fashion show when they do, like, couture that people aren't really meant to wear? It's more like to move fashion in a direction? Sometimes it reminded me kind of of that. Like, this is moving art and animation and our thoughts and, like, humor and our view of things. It's moving us closer to something, you know? It's, like, changing the zeitgeist.

**Taylor:** Well, and it— especially when you consider how resistant he is to more modern animation techniques. Like, a lot of his stuff he shot on— what is it? It's like a camera that they used to shoot *Peanuts* back in the day?

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] Yeah.

**Taylor:** Uh, it's incredibly labor intensive. Like, especially for a simple— I mean, I say simple. I mean, simple in the fact that it's stick figures, not simple in what's going on. But it would be so easy to animate that in a very simple computer program, and instead this is single cell, everything's hand drawn, hand shot. The effects he gets in some of them, in like *It's Such a Beautiful Day* where you get the little kind of halo, little holes. Like he's shooting through paper, and that's sort of just a technique that kind of just came up with. I mean, it's so fascinating. And I think it is that. It's, once again, instead of just looking around like "What's popular? What's working? What sells?"

It's like, "What direction do I want to move in? What do I personally respond to artistically? And this is it. This is what I like. I'm gonna do this."

**Sydnee:** And I will say, there's definitely a lot to think about and discuss in the end of *It's Such a Beautiful Day*. [laughs quietly] That, I will say, Charlie and Cooper watched the end of it with me. [laughs quietly]

**Taylor:** Oh. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** And that was like much, I think. I think they were both having, like, mini childhood existential crises.

**Raleigh:** Having to ponder, like, their mortality and their existence.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. Like...

**Taylor:** Yeah. That— that one is definitely— I mean, it's probably— 'cause, you know, that's— it was originally three separate short works, and then they collected— he collected it, re-edited it all together into that, like, what, hour long kind of full-length feature? But that's probably my favorite piece of his. It is very heavy, but I don't know. There's something so beautiful about that one. I mean, 'cause it's also— that work specifically is sort of— it's telling the story of this character, Bill, who has... they don't really say specifically what his condition is. Like, perhaps a brain tumor, but also a family history of mental illness. And just sort of as he is struggling through his life, his adult life, and then going into his childhood and his family members' pasts, it's just so... sad. [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** It is.

**Raleigh:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** But in such a beautiful way. Something about the style, you know? There's this concept in cartooning. It's— if you study comics at all you've had to read *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud. [laughs] Which is a great book. But, like, the passage in it that I'm thinking of is how— he talks about how we connect with things. It's almost like a parallel to, like, the uncanny valley kind of idea. If you have a very simple style of cartooning, drawing, whatever, you know, like a smiley face, we can all connect to that. We can all project ourselves into that. The more specific you get, the harder it is to project on to. So, you know, going all the way up to realism, where you recognize that as a character separate from yourself. You might relate to them after learning about them, but you're not gonna relate to them just looking at them. But we can all see ourselves in very simple forms. You know, it's kind of like the Mickey Mouse idea. Just, you know, very simple.

And that's, I think, what's one of the things that's really powerful about Hertzfeldt's design is in these, like, little kind of sad meandering stick figures, it's very easy to see yourself, and in a very sympathetic way.

**Sydnee:** I think that's true, and I think especially in the context of, like, trying to tackle mortality and [laughs quietly] all of, like, human existence and, you know, time ending, to see humanity as something as simple as a stick figure is pretty—

I mean, I think that's a very powerful, humbling... I don't know. I think that's a good— that makes sense. It computes to me.

**Rleigh:** Well, it allows I think for whatever the meaning of it, of any of these stories, are his style and using those simple figures allows for the message and the meaning to be center. Because it's being told on this, like, sort of simple foundation that what you're looking at isn't key. It's, like, what the meaning of all of it, I guess. It's a little bit easier to digest all of that looking at it through stick figures.

**Sydnee:** It's also interesting, the idea that as humans we can create something this simple, and then it lasts throughout all of time, is sort of a powerful idea. And it lasts because we made it, and that is it.

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Which is a big idea.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** And maybe— maybe too big for my seven and four-year-old.

**Taylor:** Yeah. I forgot— yeah, that's right, the whole ending where he doesn't die, and then there's the whole passage of "He lives forever." That's— I didn't know if that was a comment on, like, animation, or if it was more just like, "Well, we don't ever want anyone to die. It would be sad if he died here. Oh, but what's the opposite? He goes on forever. He lives eternally." [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Rleigh:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And watches the stars go out. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I know! I was waiting— after it ended, I was waiting for Charlie and Cooper to look at me and be like, "So, do the stars go out, or... "

**Raleigh:** "What's up with that?" [laughs]

**Sydnee:** "Like, when does that happen?" I'm like, 'Uhh, anyway... "

**Taylor:** Did you— did you get to see *World of Tomorrow*? Any of that, either of you?

**Sydnee:** I watched— I didn't watch the whole thing. I watched clips of it.

**Raleigh:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Because we got— honestly, I got stuck with the girls watching what they wanted to watch.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** So I did watch more. I watched other things that you did not tell us to watch, because they wanted— yeah.

**Raleigh:** Right.

**Sydnee:** We watched, like, the Simpsons one.

**Taylor:** Oh, that's right, yeah.

**Raleigh:** Not just *The Simpsons*. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** We just— we just watched *The Simpsons* for a while. That's—

**Taylor:** That's not really the same thing, but alright.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] No. We watched the— that one made me laugh out loud. Have you seen that one?

**Taylor:** I have not.

**Sydnee:** I would recommend it. He did— like, he did one for *The Simpsons*, and it's—[through laughter] it's very funny. And it's that same style. Like, the Simpsons become redrawn in his style and, um, he's just— I don't know. It's just— I found it hilarious.

[pause]

**Taylor:** Well, I was— I was— the *World of Tomorrow* is— it's got a little girl character as at least the main character for the first two episodes, so I thought the kids would maybe enjoy that, but— I mean, that's—

**Sydnee:** I'll have them watch that next. I mean, 'cause they were loving everything we watched. I just— I was stuck in that YouTube thing of whatever image they liked is what they wanted to watch next.

**Taylor:** Well, and it's very specific, like, where he puts the— I think the only place you can stream the full *It's Such a Beautiful Day* and *World of Tomorrow* is on his Vimeo, which is— it's so random that he's got a Vimeo. Like, not— which is good. I mean, it's— he's one of those that's very controlled about, like, the format you watch something in kind of matters, you know? And so I guess he has—he just happens to like the way things look on Vimeo. Um, it is a more attractive interface than, say, YouTube, 'cause you don't have the other things to the side and beneath it. It's kind of a— a black box.

**Sydnee:** Sure.

**Raleigh:** Right.

**Taylor:** Um, but that one, too, deals a lot with mortality and eternity.

**Raleigh:** Can I ask maybe a silly question, but something I couldn't stop thinking about? Kind of, like, the logistics of short film in this era. What— where did these get, like... published for the first time? You know what I mean? Like, were these in all, like, in film festivals? Because in my mind, today the short shorts I'm aware of are way shorter, and they're just usually those, like, little Disney animated shorts they put before other Disney movies. Like, that's about the extent of shorts that I'm familiar with today. Or anything that gets, like, put on YouTube,

that then becomes popular on YouTube. But obviously this was before that, so are these, like, film festival hits that then became more widely distributed?

**Sydney:** That's a good question, and I do not know.

**Taylor:** Um, *Rejected* was released in theaters. I don't know if it was, like, part of a series of shorts or just on its own. Um, and a lot of the other— like, the— *The Meaning of Life* or, like, the things that eventually became some of the bigger works, those were released at film festivals, like released at Sundance and stuff. So yeah. I mean— and even so, like, a lot of— there is stuff that— some of the other shorts have ended up YouTube, but a lot of the stuff is kind of... I think there's been more venues that it could've been released on. He's just had more purposeful control over that.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Taylor:** Um, I think even, like, the having stuff streaming is a relatively new development, because I remember when he spoke he was specifically— he said that he, you know, knew some of the stuff was up on YouTube, and that's fine, but he prefers to have that, like, you know, the DVDs. I have the DVDs. [laughs quietly] Where you can have some— some control over how it's looked at. But...

**Riley:** It's just interesting to me, 'cause I feel like that medium of short animated film has taken on such a different context than what I was prepared for watching these. Um, because I watched a lot of videos very similar to this. I don't know if— you all were probably too old. But there was a series on YouTube for a while when YouTube was first a thing called *asdfmovie*, which was very similar animation style to Don Hertzfeldt, kind of a bunch of little shorts put together in one long short. But stuff like that just was on YouTube. You know, it wouldn't have ever been considered for nominations for awards or anything like that. It just went viral on YouTube, and it was watched a lot and put on, you know, Tumblr a lot. Um, and then there are the— like I said, the tiny Disney animated shorts.

But I feel like it's such a— a good venue for communicating messages and stories like that. 'Cause we've talked about how I think animation is, you know, a powerful way of telling stories, and sometimes you use that for adults messages and people are able to move past thinking it's for kids and, um, sometimes

people forget that. But I feel like it's lost that— that whole world isn't as prevalent now, I guess, I feel like is what I'm saying.

**Sydnee:** It's— that— you know, if you think about it, that structure and length is also— it's, like, disruptive in and of itself, because it doesn't naturally fit into, like, how we pay for things, you know? I kind of like that about it. Like, it's— it's short for, like, going to the movie theater. But when do we— like, when do we watch that on TV, per se? You know what I mean? Like, how exactly do you distribute that? I guess, like, DVD makes the most sense. But then nowadays— it's really interesting, because it is kind of like, even its form is disruptive.

**Rileigh:** Yeah. Everything about it is speaking to that message of working against what is just most popular to the consumer and most convenient to make money. Um, like, that's really neat.

**Taylor:** Yeah. Well, and I think it leads to an interesting conversation about, like— I mean, it does kind of come back to art vs product. Like, product needs to be accessible. Having that, you know, everything available on a subscription service or on the internet makes the most sense in that aspect. But then when you think of art, like ooh, art, it's in a gallery, you have to go seek out the art, you know? You have to know where to find it. It's part of paying respect to the art. And I don't know— you know, I don't know where— because the medium can be— it's animation. It can be streamed, it can be released easily on the internet. It's an interesting, like, resistance of like, just because it can be viewed at all hours of the day at all time if I want it to be, does that mean that I want to be, or that it has to be? Or can I say no, no, you need to— you know, you need to watch it the way that I'd like you to watch it, 'cause it's art and I put a lot of work into it, and that's part of the experience. I don't know.

**Sydnee:** It's a tricky question, 'cause on the flip side you do want— the more people that can experience things like that, I think it's important as humans to experience those things, so. I always hear that— it's the same argument— we've talked about that a lot with, like, um, stage shows, with musicals and plays. Everyone needs to experience some of these works.

**Rileigh:** I was just talking about that. What is the— what profits are we harming if we release some of those old pro shots from shows that have been, like, off Broadway for decades? You know what I mean?

**Sydnee:** But it's hard, 'cause there are some who would argue, like, you're supposed to experience that in the theater. That's how the medium works. And I understand that, as someone who loves theater. But I also want everybody to be able to experience that, and not everybody can go to a theater. And so, you know, it's a tough... I don't know.

**Taylor:** Well, and I don't think— I mean, I feel like my opinion on that is— 'cause I know just recently, like, there was some John Waters movies were being shown in a theater. And I've seen them plenty of times at home, but I was like "Oh, but the opportunity to see, like, *Pink Flamingos* on a— in a theater scale, that's a nice opportunity. I want to take advantage of that."

If you really love something, you're still gonna seek it out, you know? If you see that DVD of a play that you could have access to and it's affordable, that doesn't mean that one day if you are in the place or have the money or the opportunity, you're not gonna see it live. Like, you know, if anything I think it creates an audience.

**Raleigh:** Yeah. MTV professionally recorded *Legally Blonde: The Musical* all those years ago, and I watch it all the time. But if I had the opportunity to see the touring version of *Legally Blonde*, you know I'm gonna be right there. You know I'm gonna be seeing that.

**Sydnee:** And if I ever get to see *Spongebob: The Musical* on stage...

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** There you go.

**Sydnee:** Front row, right here. I am not joking. [through laughter] This is completely—

**Raleigh:** Our tastes are very questionable.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] This is completely earnest. Um, I also wanted to say, Tey, do you— you probably wouldn't have looked into this. Um, but this felt to me like— Don Hertzfeldt had to have been a huge inspiration for the cartoon *The World*



*According to Gumball*. My kids love that show, and it felt— like, as I was watching I was like, "Ohh, this is where—"

**Rileigh:** Yeah!

**Sydnee:** Doesn't it feel so... similar?

**Rileigh:** Now that you say that I can definitely see that, yeah.

**Taylor:** I don't— I do not know *The World According to Gumball*. Um, I know the cartoon, but that's... oh, is there, like, a special feature? That's the one with, like, the little blue guy, right?

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Rileigh:** Uh-huh, yeah.

**Taylor:** And everything's very weird? Like, the characters?

**Sydnee:** All the characters are weird. They use different, like—

**Rileigh:** [simultaneously] It's just that vibe, that everything's absurd.

**Sydnee:** —animation sort of style. Some people are in color, some people are sort of drawn, sometimes—

**Rileigh:** Some are, like, claymation-type stuff.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, some are claymation. Sometimes, like, realistic, like hyper-realistic. I mean, like, it's all... the backgrounds are all different too. And the— it is somewhat surreal all the time and, like, the characters say random— I don't now. It just— it's more, um, orderly, because it's for kids. So, like, it— you know, there is a plot that's very obvious, for children. But also it has that feel. I just felt like whoever made *The World According to Gumball* had to have watched this— you know, these Don Hertzfeldt things and thought, "Oh! I want to do something like this for children."

**Taylor:** I mean, I think it was— I feel like his work is... I'm sure I'm not alone in that, like, it was a big deal when I was in school. Like, it was a reference point to

my entire class of cartoonists, so I would imagine it probably was a big deal to a lot of animators.

**Sydnee:** I would think. And I can see— I can see, Tey, as I was watching it. It's fun when I watch these things that I had never seen— I have seen some of this stuff, like I said. But not— I didn't know who did it. I didn't know the name Don Hertzfeldt. I didn't know that sort of concept of what his work is. Um, but seeing it and knowing you, it's fun to see, like, "Oh, this is part of Teylor."

**Rileigh:** Yeah.

**Teylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Like, I recognize this part of Teylor. This is where this inspiration— you know, this is what you connected to. This is part of you.

**Rileigh:** Yeah.

**Teylor:** Aw. I— I appreciate you all for taking some time to watch it. Yeah, I mean, it's one of my favorite things. I don't know why I haven't brought it up before, but you know.

**Rileigh:** I really enjoyed it. Again, I don't know why I would've seen *Rejected* at some point. I don't think I'd seen all of it, like every part, but specifically that banana. Like, 100% as soon as I saw it I was like, "I've seen this before. I know this."

**Sydnee:** I've seen "My anus is bleeding."

**Rileigh:** [laughs]

**Teylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I know I've seen that. [laughs]

**Rileigh:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Like, that hit— like, that struck— as soon as I saw it I was like— unless you've just said it. I don't know, maybe. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Well, it's funny, 'cause I feel like that was one of the other ones that if you knew, you knew, and that was just a joke you could make. But maybe that was the one that you said less, because if you were in mixed company and you just said "My anus is bleeding!" People might look at you a little funny, you know?

**Sydnee:** That's true.

**Raleigh:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** The other ones are a little bit more innocuous.

**Sydnee:** It's gonna be fun when Cooper starts yelling that.

**Raleigh:** In school.

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Taylor:** Or—

**Raleigh:** Well, thank you, Tey. I really enjoyed it.

**Taylor:** Yeah, no, thank you. I appreciate— thank you for watching them. And Sydnee, I'm so glad that your— your girls enjoyed, uh, some of it. Yeah, they don't need to watch the stuff that makes you contemplate existence. Just the fun stuff, with bleeding butts.

**Sydnee:** I'm gonna watch *The World of Tomorrow* before I let them watch it. 'Cause they were finding lots of other things to enjoy in the meantime. [laughs]

**Taylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Uh, Raleigh.

**Raleigh:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** What's next?

**Rileigh:** So, I thought we could talk about, um, one of my favorite musical artists, Phoebe Bridgers. She has an album that's one of her— not her most recent album, but one of her most popular, called *Stranger in the Alps*. Um, that has very quickly, as I've gotten more into it, become one of my favorite albums. So... I thought we could talk about her.

**Sydnee:** Sounds good. Alright, well, Teylor, thank you again.

**Teylor:** Thank you.

**Sydnee:** Uh, like Teylor said, Don Hertzfeldt. Uh, some things are available on YouTube, but then Vimeo is where you can watch everything streaming.

**Teylor:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** So please check that out. It was wonderful. And your kids may or may not enjoy it, but I would watch it first.

**Teylor:** [laughs] There is some bleeding.

**Sydnee:** There is.

**Teylor:** And some existential dread.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, both. [laughs]

**Teylor:** My favorite things!

**Sydnee:** So you be the judge of what your kids will enjoy. [laughs] Bleeding or existential dread. Uh, thank you to Maximum Fun. You should go to [Maximumfun.org](http://Maximumfun.org) and check out all the great shows there. Uh, you can tweet at us @stillbuff. You can email us at [stillbuffering@maximumfun.org](mailto:stillbuffering@maximumfun.org), and thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

**Rileigh:** This has been your cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I'm Rileigh Smirl.

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Taylor:** And I'm Taylor Smirl.

**Raleigh:** I am still buffering...

**Sydnee and Taylor:** And I... am... too.

[theme music plays]

**Sydnee:** [singing unintelligibly]

**Taylor:** [laughs]

**Raleigh:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Can't wait to hear Cooper start quoting this.

**Raleigh:** I know.

**Sydnee:** You know she's gonna. She just was laughing with such glee at the bleeding.

[theme music ends]

**Ben:** A man goes to the doctor and says that he's depressed, and that life seems cruel. The doctor says, "Ah, the treatment is simple. The great clown Pagliacci is in town tonight. Go and see him and you will surely feel better."

The man bursts into tears and says, "But doctor, I am Pagliacci!"

"Ah, okay," says the doctor. "In which case, try listening to the *Beef and Dairy Network Podcast*."

[air horns]

[music plays]

**Ben:** The *Beef and Dairy Network Podcast* is a multi-award winning comedy podcast, and you can find it at [Maximumfun.org](http://Maximumfun.org), or wherever you get your podcasts.

[music and ad end]

[chord]

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