

Still Buffering 323: Elliott Smith

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[theme music plays]

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 Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: We're— we're back!

Taylor: I mean, they probably don't think we went anywhere, but we did.

Sydnee: That's true.

Rileigh: Yeah, to them— to them we never left.

Sydnee: That's true, that's true. That's what Nicolas Cage says. "I'm back. Not that I went anywhere."

Taylor: [laughs quietly] That's what he says.

Rileigh: What he says.

Sydnee: That movie is so good.

[pause]

Taylor: You should name the movie.

Rileigh: I was gonna say, you can't just do that thing that Dad does. Like, "Oh, that movie. Oh, you remember that movie."

Taylor: "The one with Nicolas Cage, you know?"

Sydnee: "You know, the one movie."

Raleigh: "Just the one that he's in."

Taylor: "And he's real intense in this one."

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] *The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent*.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: That was a fantastic film.

Taylor: I enjoyed it very much.

Sydnee: I've seen it twice so far. [laughs quietly] And it hasn't been out long enough for me to have already seen it twice. We almost watched it a third time the other night. Justin was like, "Do you wanna just watch that movie again?" I'm like, "I do love that movie."

Uh, so we have not been— we have been releasing episodes, but they were recorded in advance, which is not usually our style.

Taylor: Yeah. It was for a good reason, though. Raleigh was— was traversing the globe.

Raleigh: I was abroad.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: Abroad, all one word. Not... a broad.

Sydnee: Not a broad. [laughs]

Taylor: I mean, you are a broad.

Sydnee: You are a broad. [laughs]

Raleigh: [simultaneously] I am a broad. [laughs] I was a broad abroad.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] There you go.

Raleigh: Um, no. I was—

Sydnee: Why didn't you do a blog called that?

[all laugh]

Raleigh: I don't know.

Taylor: I'm sure nobody has thought of that ever. I'm sure there is no blog out there called that.

Raleigh: Yeah, I bet no one has ever done that before.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: Entirely original thought.

Sydnee: If it is, then TM, TM, TM.

Raleigh: TM, TM. No, I, uh— I was in England for three weeks.

Sydnee: How was it?

Raleigh: Hot. Of course the one year— I was supposed to have gone for the last two years, and finally this year it's like, well, things I guess are safe enough for you to go now. So I go, and of course the year I get to go, England has a historic heat wave. It was the hottest it has ever been there. Uh, and also Oxford has no air conditioning, so. [laughs]

Sydnee: Or at least Exeter College doesn't, I guess. Maybe others do.

Raleigh: It seems like all the colleges are... old. [laughs] So.

Sydnee: [laughs] Well, they are old.

Raleigh: They haven't been updated much since.

Sydnee: They've been there a while. [laughs] Since they were built?

Rileigh: Yeah. I mean, now they have, like, fire alarms. That's an update, I would guess.

Taylor: That's good.

Sydnee: I bet they've been updated some.

[pause]

Taylor: That— well, if you took the time to install fire alarms, I feel like leaving out air conditioning is just personal.

Rileigh: It feels intentional.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: It's— I think it fits— like, I always think that, like, British people are kind of tougher. Like, you know, stiff upper lip, keep calm, carry on, that whole thing. "We don't need air conditioning, we're fine."

Rileigh: Are window units not a thing there?

Sydnee: I mean, I'm sure they exist. I don't know.

Rileigh: Like, could they not at least have gotten, like, I don't know, the little ones that go in the windows?

Taylor: But don't they have, like, a fancy code? Like maybe window units would take away from the aesthetics of the historical buildings.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: I wonder about that. Yeah, that's a good point.

Rileigh: That's true. Windows also didn't open very much.

Sydnee: [simultaneously] It would not look as appealing.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: The dreaming spires of Oxford, and the window units among them.
[laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Rileigh: That's true. Although my window to my room was above a chocolate shop, not Oxford, so...

Sydnee: That's cool, though.

Rileigh: Yeah. I don't know how, uh... how dreamy it was, being above the Newks.

Sydnee: Did you get on the roof?

Rileigh: No?

Sydnee: Hm.

[pause]

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Sydnee, did— did you?

Sydnee: I would— that would have been against the rules, so no.

Taylor: Ohh, okay.

Sydnee: That would've been a rule break.

Rileigh: That's really been my favorite thing about this whole trip, is going on the same trip that Sydnee did, is the whole time I was— before I went was, "Do all these things I did," and then after I've been back it's "Why didn't you do all these things I did?"

Taylor: Because they were all illegal, or dangerous, or both. [laughs]

Raleigh: And pre-pandemic. There were still so many things you couldn't do!

Sydnee: Aw, I'm sorry.

Raleigh: It's okay. I understand it. That country was a lot smarter than us in their lockdowns.

Sydnee: You went to pubs. You went to pubs.

Raleigh: I did.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: I did.

Sydnee: You went on day trips.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: You went to London.

Raleigh: I did.

Sydnee: Yeah. You did— that's the— it is not as important that you break the rules. It's just important that you had fun.

Raleigh: Thank you.

Sydnee: That's all I encouraged you to do, was not just study. Studying's fine, but don't just study.

Raleigh: I didn't do much studying, I'll be honest.

Sydnee: That's fine, too.

Raleigh: I went after I graduated, and the graduate program there— because it's mostly adults, and yes I am an adult, but I mean adults, like...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: ... actual adults. Like, these are people that are—

Sydnee: [through laughter] Actual adults.

Rileigh: —like, high school teachers, college professors, going to, like, you know, extend their education on a specific topic to get, like, you know, extra certification or a pay raise or whatever, at their own institution. Um, so I was the youngest one, probably by about... ten years at least, in all of my classes. But you don't have to write the essays, because the professors are like, "Hey, you're all adults. You're choosing to be here. Write 'em if you want. I can't stop you. You're not getting graded for this."

Sydnee: That's cool.

Rileigh: So I— I didn't. I just, you know, talked in class.

Taylor: [through laughter] I was gonna ask, did you— did you write any of the essays?

Rileigh: No.

Taylor: Aw. You mean—

Rileigh: No, I did not.

Taylor: You could've just written an essay for fun and you didn't?

Rileigh: I could—[laughs quietly] I could've written an essay for fun, and if I wasn't about to start law school, I may have been more inclined. But also, part of me was like, "I'm gonna have to read 500 pages every week for the rest of my life. I'm done!" [laughs]

Sydnee: Taylor, do you feel like you've reached the point of being an actual adult?

Taylor: Hmm. You know...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I feel like yes, in that, like, I don't— I'm not one that, like, subscribes to, "Oh, I have to do some adulting today." Like, every day of my life is adulting. I am an adult. I just think that I don't care about being an adult in the way that I thought or perhaps was taught an adult is. Like...

Sydnee: I— yeah. No, I know what you're saying. 'Cause I was sitting here thinking, am I an actual adult? And by all standards, sure. I'm responsible for small humans. That's very adult.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I do doctor stuff. I guess that's adult-y. But I don't know— I am operating under the theory— I don't think anyone ever feels like whatever you thought adults were like when you were a kid. I feel like that's a moving target. I still don't feel like I'm the adult that I thought adults were when I was a child, and so I don't know when that... when do you, like, look at yourself and you're like, "Yes. Adult, yes. Firmly planted in adulthood."

Taylor: I used to be sad thinking about how, "Wow, there's someday I'm gonna wake up and I'm gonna want to not read my comics anymore and get rid of all my action figures, and I'll have to buy a bunch of clothes that are beige, and that's gonna be sad for me. I hope that day doesn't come."

And then it didn't, is the thing! I don't know. I still like all those things. But yeah, like, I don't— I'm an adult in that, yes, I'm in my 30's firmly and I pay my taxes. I don't know, what else do you want from me? [laughs]

Raleigh: It's been funny watching that thought process take place real time with Charlie, because I remember she used to say I was also a kid when she was little, and I was. I was, like, 16. Um, but then I turned 18. She was like, "Well, no. You're still basically a kid. When you're 21 you'll be an adult."

And then I turned 21 and she's like, "Well, no. Adults are more, like, hmm... 22, 23."

And I said, "Okay. So in less than a month when I'm 22, I'll be an adult?"

"Hmm. Well, maybe more like 24, 25."

She just refuses to acknowledge that I am no longer also a kid with her. I think she thinks we're on the same wavelength, like, socially and culturally.

Sydnee: You're on her team. [laughs]

Rileigh: Yeah. So I can't be an adult, because she's obviously still a kid, so gotta wait for her to catch up. Which, if I do, and I want until she's 18 then, you know, yeah. I'll be in my 30's, paying my taxes, so there we go.

Sydnee: Is that when you're an adult? When you pay taxes?

Rileigh: I mean, I pay taxes right now, so does that make me an adult?

Taylor: Well, I just feel like that's as much of, like, adult-y-ness that I'm willing to, like... like, that should— I don't need to prove it beyond that. I pay my taxes. I pay my bills. I support myself. I'm allowed to do whatever I want outside of that.

Sydnee: Yeah, I don't know. I saw somebody tweeting about how, like, you should have adult friends who talk about, like, cardio and... finances, or something.

Rileigh: Stocks.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Rileigh: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah. I feel like—

Sydnee: And I was like, "Oh. I do not... if that's— if that's the marker, I'm not there."

Taylor: Can you imagine having an— and I'm saying this as somebody that runs, like, five miles a day— having an extended conversation about cardio?

Sydnee: [holding back laughter] No!

Taylor: What is that? [laughs quietly] If I heard that taking place at, like, the table next to me at a restaurant, I'd be like, "Oh no. The invasion has begun! The

aliens are here! [through laughter] They're trying to— they're trying to fool us, but clearly those are not humans, 'cause they have had a 30-minute conversation about cardio!"

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: I've had an extended conversation about cardio before.

Taylor: What?!

Raleigh: Yeah...

Sydnee: Maybe you'll be an actual adult before we are. [laughs]

Raleigh: I mean, it's been a while since that happened, but I have had one in my life.

Taylor: I mean, it sounds like you were forced, though. Perhaps not enjoying it. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: No, I'm ashamed to admit that out loud. [laughs] It was fu— I mean, in the moment I was engaged in this conversation.

Sydnee: Well, I think that's the important thing, is that you're enjoying it. I think that there are— like, if that is adulthood, I don't know that I would ever enjoy that conversation. So then it's like, well, when do I become an adult, then?

Raleigh: I mean, I'll never enjoy a conversation about stocks or investments, to I'm only halfway there.

Sydnee: But we've also established, like, I don't like small talk. I don't understand the purpose.

Taylor: Sydnee likes to get *real* real fast.

Sydnee: I do! I do want to—

Raleigh: "Hi, I'm Sydnee. Nice to meet you. What's your deepest fear?"

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: "Do you have any childhood traumas you'd like to share with me?"

Taylor: "If you had to murder one person in this room, who would it be? Just go! Just say it, go!"

Sydnee: I like to get into— like, I was at a gathering last night— a very small gathering, not a big party. Just, you know, some friends. Our kids were there.

Taylor: [simultaneously] [posh voice] A gathering.

Sydnee: It wasn't a wild party. The kids were present. Some other kids were present.

Rileigh: Don't worry, we know you did your wild partying on the roof in Oxford.

Sydnee: I... I will deny that— there's no proof. But, like, I was talking about, like... how— I was having a lot of conversations about improvements we could make for, like, medical outreach in our community, and, like, innovative ways to help people experiencing homelessness. Like, these are the conversations I wanted to have in this room. I didn't wanna talk about, like... the cheese. The cheese was great, but I didn't wanna talk about the cheese. Like, I ate some cheese while I talked about other things.

[pause]

Rileigh: I like talking about cheese.

Taylor: I like talking about cheese.

Sydnee: *You* like talking about cheese?

Taylor: Yeah! Well, hey, you know, before I was a vegan I was— I mean, I've worked in restaurants for a long time. I have strong opinions about cheese. Maybe that's the difference, though. Like, you think cheese is small talk. Have you ever talked to somebody that's really into cheese?

Rileigh: Big cheese talk.

Taylor: Cheese is their thing.

Sydnee: Oh no. See, I don't know. I don't know how I could handle that. I do like to eat cheese. I like cheese. Just I— I recognize that there are different kinds of cheese. [laughs] I know that.

Taylor: I think it's all relative. You know, that's small talk for you, but for someone that's really invested— say, a cheese monger, I bet a cheese monger would have very serious conversations about cheese, and the state of cheese, and how can we advance cheese forward? So, you know what? Don't discount cheese talk!

Sydnee: That's— okay. Well, I mean—

Taylor: Your— *your* thing is cheese talk to somebody.

Raleigh: However, if someone came up to me and said small talk to them was that they work in finance and they want to talk to me about my investment opportunities and what I'm doing with my money to make the most out of my money, I'd be like, "No thank you!"

Sydnee: Well, but that person's trying to sell you something.

Raleigh: Well, or it's like one of those finance bros that comes up to you at a bar like, "Hey, I work in... stocks. At a hedge fund."

Sydnee: [snorts]

Raleigh: "What are you doing with your money? I bet you don't know anything about investments. You're a woman. Let me teach you." That's not small talk to me.

Taylor: No.

Raleigh: That's infuriating.

Sydnee: Well—[pause] has that ever happened?!

Raleigh: To someone.

[all laugh]

Taylor: Theoretically, yes.

Rileigh: We were talking about people that want to talk about stocks and finances and how it makes them an adult!

Taylor: That's true.

Sydnee: I was trying to picture someone walking up to you and saying, "Hi. I work in... stocks." [laughs]

Rileigh: Hey, I'm moving to DC. I'm trying to prepare myself for all the people I'm going to meet.

Taylor: I mean, I will say, I've definitely heard, like, finance bros talking at a bar, like, while I'm bartending, having that conversation where they're both talking about things that I know nothing about, and they're very excited about it. And to that, I mean, like, that's— you're enjoying the conversation. That's something you both can relate on. That's fine.

Uh, but maybe it's— it's not that there's any, like, topics that these are adult topics and then these are, like, silly childhood topics. Is that whatever you're passionate about, it's good to talk to people that are passionate about the same things. There's just no, like, right or wrong there. Just talk, you know...

Sydnee: Well, yes.

Taylor: Some that qualify you an adult and some that qualify you as a non-serious person.

Sydnee: Exactly.

Rileigh: Our mom really likes talking about salmon.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Yeah, that's true!

Rileigh: That's good.

Sydnee: And I think that's fine. If it pleases you to talk about cardio, Rileigh, please talk about cardio. And Teylor—

Rileigh: [simultaneously] I mean, I haven't in a while.

Sydnee: —if you would like to have an extended conversation about cheese, have that conversation!

Rileigh: It was just we were at the gym—

Teylor: [simultaneously] You won't stop me!

Rileigh: —so it fit the scenario.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Teylor: Well, that is true. I mean, there's not much else to relate over when you're at the gym.

Rileigh: Exactly. Talking about various kinds of cardio. [pause] Cons, pros.

[all laugh quietly]

Rileigh: What we enjoy, what we don't enjoy. Anyways...

Sydnee: Anyway, we have talked long enough about...

Rileigh: Talk.

Teylor: Other things.

Sydnee: ... talking. Um, what are we— what is our topic today, Tey?

Teylor: Uh, our topic today is the musician Elliott Smith. He's a, uh— I was introduced to his music actually not till college. Uh, so Elliott Smith passed away in 2003, I believe. And I actually didn't— like, my freshman year of college was 2004, so my freshman year roommate was a huge Elliott Smith fan and introduced me to him, and it was, you know, after most of his music had come

out at that point. He had one posthumous album. But, uh, it has been something that I feel like it was later in my life that I actually then revisited his music and kind of connected with it, and really love it now.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. I remember, um, Elliott Smith was a very popular artist among— especially, like, I had friends who their thing was they were into music, you know? They were... they—

Raleigh: That was their small talk.

Sydnee: That was their small talk. And they were into— not just into music, but like, especially— and this a very 90's thing— they're into music that *you* don't know about. [laughs] *You* don't know about this music. And Elliott Smith was very big among— but I didn't listen to Elliott Smith. I, like— the first reason I sought it out— 'cause I would hear it, like, on a mixtape. I would hear an Elliott Smith song. But I sought it out because Ben Folds wrote a song to Elliott Smith after he passed away.

Taylor: Oh, really?

Sydnee: And I was like, "What's this song about? Oh, it's about Elliott Smith. Oh! Maybe I should check Elliott Smith out." And that was kind of how I... got back into— so, years later.

Taylor: Well, he had— I mean, that's, you know, part of what inspired me to bring this to the table was Raleigh, you were talking about how Phoebe Bridgers was influenced by Elliott Smith pretty strongly. Um, yeah, his first— like, he had— I mean, he had, like, six studio albums. But he first, like, hit the mainstream with the song "Miss Misery" because it was on... oh, gosh. He played it at the Oscars. What soundtrack was it on? Um... was it *Good Will Hunting*?

Sydnee: I can look it up for you.

Taylor: I think it might've been...

Sydnee: Was it? That feels like the right time period. [pause] "Miss Misery" movie.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm. *Good Will Hunting*, I believe.

Taylor: Ah, okay.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Yes. Uh, yeah. He... [laughs quietly] I like his recounting of his— he didn't want to perform it at the Oscars. It was kind of a... I mean, you read his writing. Obviously from his music he was sort of a shy— a bit of a— a trouble— I mean, very troubled guy. But he didn't really want to perform at the Oscars, and basically he was told by the label, like, "You sing your song or we'll get somebody else to," so he kind of had to. And he just— talking about having to perform for a room of people that didn't show up to see him, and how it was sort of like walking on the moon. That it was nice for a night, [through laughter] but he wouldn't want to do that again.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Which I could see that.

Sydnee: I can see that. I can see that. That would be rough.

Taylor: I think that's an interesting trajectory for a career. Like, very early on, that was one of the, you know, big things that he did, and then had— you know. Most of his bigger albums came out after that, but what a weird trajectory.

Sydnee: That is a really weird way to go. And jarring. I'm sure that that was hard to deal with, like, from that standpoint, you know?

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Also trying to— I mean, I don't get the impression that he was trying to chase that kind of experience ever again, but it's hard not to compare that to everything else you do.

Raleigh: Right.

Taylor: Right.

Raleigh: I will admit, I had never heard of Elliott Smith, or heard Elliott Smith, I think. Usually with some of these artists that you all bring that I don't think I've listened to, there's usually at least a song or two that I actually have heard, I just

didn't know it was that artist. I don't think I'd ever heard any of his music before this.

Taylor: Really?

Rileigh: Um, but I do very much see how Phoebe Bridgers was inspired by him after listening to it. I really enjoyed it, for the same reasons and in the same capacity I enjoy listening to Phoebe Bridgers. For that kind of, um... mellow, lyric-focused, indie kind of music that's different from... I don't know. You know what I mean. Like, I don't wanna say it's all— it's all different. But you know— it doesn't— like, yes, it's indie. But not in the way that, like, there's a formula to some things being indie, if that makes sense.

Sydnee: No, that's true. I mean, 'cause indie is a diverse group of music.

Rileigh: Yes. And there are a lot of, like, more mainstream, I guess, popular groups that, yes, do indie music. But it all follows a same similar sort of sound and pattern, and this feels... different. I enjoyed it. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: I'm glad. Syd? Well, you said you listened to some before.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm, yeah. I had listened to some. I— like, especially I knew "Say Yes" right away. That was probably the one that I knew the best. I think it must have been on mixtapes, or it permeated popular culture somewhat, too.

Taylor: It's one of my favorite songs. And that's also the one I associate most with my roommate, because she had a "Say Yes" tattoo. It was just the words "Say Yes."

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah. I thought that was really beautiful.

Sydnee: Now, I really enjoy— it was music— so, when I listened to it when I was younger, it was like... [sighs] it was my music to be sad to. It was in my— not the only one. But, like, you know, you had a collection of music that, like, this is the music I will listen to when I'm sad.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, you know, it's hard to really— I mean, I feel like you have to talk directly when you talk about Elliott Smith. And that is— that's the role it's

played in my life. Like, Elliott Smith was a very troubled figure. He battled with substance abuse, depression, anxiety, his entire life. His music feels like just constantly trying to grapple with really hard feelings, and I think that that's the role that it's served in my life. Is it's kind of like, you know— it's the company for those feelings. Like, when you feel alone in those feelings, that's when I can put on his music and I feel a little less alone. Because even if he doesn't have answers, he's there with me in those songs, you know?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Well, and I think there's great value in music. I mean, obviously there's the concept of catharsis, you know. Allowing yourself to feel the thing you're feeling, not running away from it and even setting up an environment, including music, that, like, encourages that feeling. Just feel it. Just be in it. You're sad, you're down, this is how you're feeling. Just be there. Um, which there's value in that. And then, like you said, it reminds you that you're not the only person to have ever felt this way. You're not the first, you won't be the last, and that doesn't— instead of sounding like it— you know, that doesn't make you feel smaller. It makes you feel less alone.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Raleigh: There's also always been something very touching to me about listening to someone go through the same hard things you have, or feel the same not good feelings you have felt. But make something good out of it. In the sense that, like, you're listening to music that is good music that you enjoy listening to that is beautifully written, or tells a good story, or has really great, you know, backing vocals and music and all that stuff. Like, being able to make something out of those bad feelings into... art. I've always found to be inspiring. Like, hey, this person felt how I did, but look what they did with it.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. And that's hard, too. Like, it's hard to imagine. Especially, like, comparing it to times where I've been really down in my life. I— it's amazing to me that people can make things. And Taylor, you probably are— I feel like sometimes you're creating art from that place. I don't wanna assume that about you, but I feel like sometimes you are creating art from, you know, feeling down or negative emotions, and always think that's amazing, 'cause it's not a skill I have.

Rileigh: Yeah.

[pause]

Taylor: Well, I mean, I feel like it's sort of a— it's a survival mechanism. [laughs] You know? It's like, I have this thing, and it's too heavy to carry, and I can't— I need to put it down in a way that I can separate it from myself, you know? Sort of capture it in something and move it away. And that's what— I guess maybe that's— yeah. Like, with Elliott Smith I feel like a lot of his songs are encapsulations of a— of a feeling that maybe he allowed himself to sort of get through by putting that down. Um, I don't know. I mean, I feel like when I listen to his— all of his music makes me very sad. Like, it's hard for me to listen to when I'm not in that place. It's hard for me to just put it on and chill. I will go to that place when I listen to his music, actually.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: But I think it's— it kind of makes me sad, looking back on it, because it's just like this... this discography of struggling, you know? He has so many songs about sort of being, like, left behind or— or relationships ending. And, you know, that, like... it's just like, how— like, just how lonely and how alone he felt in his music. Um... I mean, it just— it makes me very sad. But I also think there's a lot of strength there, too. Because he just kept fighting. He just kept making music. He just kept trying to grapple with these really big feelings, and I think— I have a lot of respect for that, you know?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I know what you mean, though. I, um— I put off listening to the music at first. [laughs quietly] Because I knew that's where it would take me. I was familiar enough to know what would happen, and it was the same way. Like, no, I'm feeling good right now. I'm not ready for this. [laughs] I don't wanna go to that place just now. I had to wait till I was in a mindset where it was like, okay, I'm ready. I can go where this music is gonna take me.

Rileigh: Yeah, I didn't know to expect that? So I was just kinda...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [through laughter] Oh no, I'm sorry!

Raleigh: I was just kinda vibing. I was, um, making friendship bracelets. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: For— for your kids, and for my friends. And just, like, you know, braiding the strings and picking out pretty colors. And then I turn it on in the background while I'm making them. Then all of a sudden it's like, "Oh... wait a minute. Oh no. I don't wanna make friendship bracelets anymore! I just wanna lay on my back on the floor of my bathroom and... feel." [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah...

Sydnee: Yeah, we probably should've warned you. [laughs]

Raleigh: I should— well, we talked about how, like, Phoebe Bridgers got inspiration from Elliott Smith. And that's— 99% of Phoebe Bridgers music also puts me in that mindset, so I should've known. I should've thought about it. But I wasn't thinking. I just turned it on like, "Doot doo doo, this'll be good to listen to while my hands are busy." Nope.

Sydnee: But it's— I did kind of take that for granted. I forget, and that's the whole premise of our show, so I shouldn't, that you are so much younger than us. And, like—

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: [through laughter] Hi, welcome to *Still Buffering*.

Sydnee: I mean, when—[laughs]

Raleigh: That's our catchphrase. "I forget you're so much younger than us."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: When I told Justin, like, the topic is Elliott Smith, I mean, Justin is of our generation, Tey, so he instantly went, "Oh. I can't with you right now. Like, I'm not listening with you. I'm not—" 'Cause he knew. Like, "I'm not ready to go there."

'Cause, like, immediately that's, to our generation— for the most part. I don't wanna sound like I'm saying it's all just sad music. But a lot of it is sad. And so it's shorthand for "This is going to be sad."

Taylor: It's said, but, I mean, it's deeply honest. I think that's the thing. It's like, when you say sad music, you know, you kind of get this, like, "[sarcastically] Oh, emo? Oh, it's about being bummed out?"

And I don't think that's the part that catches you about it. I think it's that in the sadness, in what he's singing about, there's these really heartbreaking moments of hope, or these moments of sort of relief, even. You know? Like, I don't know. I think about, like, "Let's Get Lost," like a beautiful place to get lost. Like, he's singing about an oblivion, but he's so, like... almost, like, relieved at that thought. And I think that's— there's a lot of, like, kind of painful truth about, you know, grappling with— it's not just "I'm sad and someone broke my heart."

It's— it's like a much more severe step beyond that, you know? Like, where— is there a point where an end is release? Or is there a point that I get to put this down for good? And maybe that sounds like heaven. I don't know. I mean, it's— yeah. [through laughter] It's heavy stuff, I'm sorry!

Raleigh: Oh, I think that's what hits so hard about it, is that it's someone being openly honest about things that you probably have maybe thought but never, you know, wanted to talk about or be honest about, because they're scary, sad things. So you put them away and you don't talk about them. But then you hear someone being willing to talk about those feelings that we probably have all thought about but don't wanna put out there. And it's like, "Oh, man. There it is. There's my— all my worst thoughts, in words."

Sydnee: Yeah. It's very raw.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's very raw. And, I mean, I think it highlights the difference between someone singing about being sad, and someone singing about depression. Or

something— you know, something like that. Which is— it's a different thing. Sadness is tied to something. "I'm sad because, you know, someone broke up with me."

Depression is another thing. That's not just "I'm sad 'cause."

Rileigh: I kept being reminded of the— I know I've mentioned Phoebe Bridgers several times, but it kept reminding me of her song "Funeral," which is about her singing at a funeral for a kid who's only a year older than her. And, you know, life, and realizing, like... mortality, and how your life affects other people, and stuff like that. And it kept reminding me very much of that song. Not just the way it sounds, but in the way that it's about something more than, like, a temporary sadness from a breakup or something like that. It's about realizing something about life that is inherent and permanent that's not always fun to realize, but is, like, real. I can see that very much, how it is influenced her, not just in the style and sound of the music, but the way to write, I guess.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydney: Well, and I wonder, too, if that for all these reasons— Tey, was Elliott Smith something you listened to, like, regularly? Or, like, you dip into and then have to step away from? You know what I mean? 'Cause, like, some CDs back then, like, they were on regular rotation in my car. And even when I did listen to Elliott Smith, it was not something that I would just, like, pop on when I was driving around. You know what I mean? It was— it's a very intentional, like... I wouldn't put it on at a party. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Oh, that would be a— that would be a party foul, pretty intensely I think. [laughs]

Rileigh: That'd be a different kind of party.

Sydney: Well, even, like— even, like, one of those—

Taylor: [crosstalk] *Basement on a Hill* at a party. Like, "Oh. Oh no."

Sydney: Even one of those intense 90's parties where people were just sort of sitting around, having, like, intense conversations, I still wouldn't have put on Elliott Smith. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: You know, I will say, it was a very kind of creeping presence in my life in that, like, when my freshman year roommate introduced me to it... like, she had a certain sort of sadness in her that we never really could, like— that was not a thing we talked about. But I felt like she kind of gave me something and said, "You'll need this at some point." And that was it, you know? And, like, as I got older and, I don't know, dealt with my own problems... Elliott Smith was music that... man. I don't wanna get too heavy, but I feel like when I'm at that place that I don't think I can get out of and I feel very alone, and it just feels dark, it's a voice that's there in the darkness with me. And I think that's the power of art, really. It's that he's been gone for a long time now, but... when I need him, I can still put him on when things are really bad. And he's not gonna tell me how to get out of there. But he is going to be right there, and sort of make my feelings feel... not completely insane, you know?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And I think that that's... that's usually when I need his music. It's not— maybe it's not— there are songs I can listen to that I enjoy. I think some songs— there are some pos— like "Say Yes" I think is a really beautiful—which is funny, 'cause it still has some heartbreaking lyrics in there. It's still about a breakup. But it's a really hopeful song in a lot of painful songs. So there are some songs that I have on mixes that are just— you know, they're nice to have on. But some of the harder songs to listen to I feel like I— I kind of— they're— they're... a bit of a life raft for me. And I can think of, you know, also bummer, one of the only other people I've listened to with somebody was an old friend of mine. I talked about him a bit on the, um, Against Me! episode, a friend who's no longer with us. And we used to be able to sit and listen to Elliott Smith together, and we had a joke. Like, if you ever listened to too much Elliott Smith, you gotta text me, 'cause that's a sign. [through laughter] Like...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And, uh, you know, he did end up taking his life. And one of the last conversations we had was he texted me, "I've been listening to too much Elliott Smith lately. We gotta hang out."

And I said, "You tell me when, buddy. I'll be there."

And then I just, you know, didn't hear from him for a while, and he was gone. Um, and I just— so it's... I don't know. It's— now it's weird that I use it as a way out. But it still is that kind of connection to the music, but also to my friend, you know?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: I'm sorry, Tey. Thank you for sharing that.

Taylor: Sorry. I feel like that got—[through laughter] that was way too heavy for this show.

Rileigh: No, I think— I think we— yes, we talk about things that were silly that meant something to us that we, like, you know, thought were funny or that we goofed about. But I think it's also important to talk about the things that are meaningful to us for a lot more... meaningful reasons.

Sydnee: And I think if we're gonna talk honestly about, like, why Elliott Smith's music connected with you and other people, a lot of people, so strongly and, I mean, just the legacy that he left behind, I think we have to talk about those heavy things. Those rea— I mean, I think we would not be doing his memory justice if we didn't talk openly about that stuff.

Taylor: Well, and I think that there's a lot of— you know, for a lot of people, not just me, there's a lot of shame around those kind of feelings, you know? Like, it's hard to— it's hard to feel that vulnerable around people. Especially people that don't contemplate, you know, those sort of things. Like, it's just... it's hard to have that conversation, but you can kind of have that conversation with him, even though he's still not— he's not here anymore, with his music. And that's... for me, I use it as a tool.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: I think that's good, though. I think it's like the story of the guy who's down in the hole and he can't get out. Have you guys ever heard that story?

Rileigh: Sorry?

Taylor: No?

Sydnee: Like, people come by and, like, throw money down the hole and, like, pray for him, and all this different stuff. And then a friend comes by and jumps down in the hole with him. And he goes, "Well, now what? Now we're both in the hole."

And he goes "Yeah, but I've been down here before. So I can help you get out."

Rileigh: Oh.

Sydnee: It's a nice story. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Now you're tearing up a little bit there, Syd.

Sydnee: [through laughter] Shut up!

Taylor: [through laughter] Hey, I am too!

Rileigh: About this metaphorical guy in a hole.

Sydnee: It's a good story!

Taylor: But that's what— you know, I think that's— that is... that is a good story. And I do think that's what— I don't— I don't know if I know how to make work that [through laughter] inspires... I don't know if I can make work that has hope.

But I feel like, you know, I try to make work that says, "I've been there." [laughs] Like, I don't know if I'll ever get out of the hole, but I can tell you what it's like, and I can tell you that you're not— you're not crazy for being there.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Rileigh: Well, there is something hopeful in that on its own, that you're not the only person to have felt this way, 'cause a lot of times that's how bad feelings feel. So I think on its own, that showing people your vulnerability, and that is hopeful for a lot of people.

Taylor: Well, and it's so often that we feel like the only things you can share are good things. That's— that's, you know, share your successes, share your triumphs, share the good things about you, but the bad things you need to hide.

Those have to stay, you know, shoved down. And that's just not a— especially when you have hard stuff. I mean, that's just not a way to live, you know? Elliott Smith had a really— I won't go into detail, but, like, a very— a lot of trauma in his childhood. And, you know, having to— he used substances to sort of mitigate his feelings for a lot of his life. When he... he... uh, when he died, he was actually stone sober, and it removed— I mean, he was on a lot of, like, psych meds, but he was not drinking, he wasn't on drugs, he wasn't— he wasn't, like— he was free of salt and red meat. I don't know. He was, like, on this fully cleanse of everything that's bad, and that's when everything kind of caught up to him. And that kind of has a... that— that makes me feel very complex things. Because it's like, you know, so often when you're somebody that suffers from addiction, you're told that the thing you're addicted to is the problem. If you got rid of that, that's your thing. You gotta get rid of that, and then you can be a person again.

And so you try, and you do that. You're like, "But maybe the reason I sought this out is because there are these things that I'm not allowed to talk about, and they hurt so badly, so I found a way to mitigate them. That's the problem."

And when you treat, like, the only problem is just, "You do drugs" or, you know, "You're an alcoholic," so you stop doing the thing, and now you're just alone in a room, with all the lights on, with the horrible things that happened to you. And that's... that's not— you know, that's— you're not gonna survive that.

Sydnee: No. I think what you're saying is very astute. It's something that I talk about in, like, my job, in the work I do, a lot. Which is, we have this sort of societal expectation that, like, just kind of "Get your act together," you know. "Stop using drugs," or whatever you're doing. Like, get your act together and you'll be fine. And that is such a flawed way of looking at things, and such a flawed approach to— especially people who have undergone trauma. It's just not... it's not helpful. It's not accurate. And it's part of the greater push to just, like, be happy all the time and be okay. We're all pushed to, like, be okay, get to okay. Like, don't be sad. Be happy, don't cry. Be happy.

Which is a very, I mean... that's something I fight against actively as a parent. Don't tell my kids that. Say, "It's okay that you're sad. It's okay. We can be sad right now. We won't be sad forever. We'll be happy again, but you can be sad right now, and you can cry."

Raleigh: Well, I think that's maybe one thing that is hopeful and maybe good about my generation and the upcoming generation, is I don't think that's as

prevalent among a lot of young people. Not adults not telling them to feel that way, I mean the idea that we can share our bad feelings with each other and feel them together, I think is a lot more common among young people now maybe than it was when Elliott Smith was writing music, and when people were listening to Elliott Smith's music. Not that it's still not prevalent to listen to, but I think being open about those things and not being ashamed to talk about those feelings, and sometimes it even gets to the point where it's like, "Yeah, we're all in therapy. Let's all, you know, [laughs quietly] we're all there together. Let's talk about it. Like, we're all not doing great. That's okay. Let's get it out there."

I've had lots of those conversations with my friends, and even on the internet sometimes that's kind of the consensus is like, "Hey, we're all not doing great. What's going on?"

So I think that's maybe one thing that is getting better? Not necessarily among... older generations. Not your all's, but, you know...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: Adults that— that still want to push that "Be happy."

Sydnee: Our generation is not there.

Taylor: Well, yeah. I mean, 'cause that's what you do. You wouldn't say, "Hey, I'm feeling really scary things I want to talk about." You say, "Hey, do you want to listen to some Elliott Smith?" And your friend would go, "Yeah, I do, actually. And then you'd— the words would fill in the void of the things you don't feel comfortable saying out loud. So that is a good advancement.

Sydnee: It is. Well, and I would say even a step away from that, I feel like the way— when I think about the way Justin and I cope with stuff and the way we talk about stuff, it's this sort of, like, sarcastic nihilism is kind of the— "Well, of course! Of course we feel crappy. Isn't that the thing? Yep. We— yeah, ha ha, oh well. That's life."

Which is a very Gen X kind of perspective, and again, not healthy. Not healthy or helpful to say, like, "Yeah, you're just supposed to feel crappy, ha ha. That's life."

Because that sort of, like, laughing about it is your way of hiding the fact that, like, I feel really bad! [laughs quietly] And I don't— I can't say that, because I am still in a boomer world where you're not allowed to say "I feel sad. I feel down. I can't— I need help. I can't get out of this." So I just sort of make a sarcastic joke about it, and then we all go "Yep, that's the truth."

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and I do really admire that about the younger generations, that instead of it being like, "Hey. You should be happy." Or even, like, "If anything's wrong, that's a you problem."

Instead of pulling back and like, "No, look at the world right now! Like, look at everything we're dealing with, look at how unfair it is. It would actually be less sane to be okay with this." [laughs] It would be a sign of you not, like, coping well if you think that the world right now is something that you could just be happy in 100% all the time. Like...

Sydnee: I think that is absolutely the truth. I think that is one thing that I try to keep in mind as I get older, because I think you're in danger of getting locked into those ways of thinking that you developed when you were younger, um, that aren't always healthy. And I should say, like, Justin and I talk like that, and then we acknowledge that that's not healthy, and then we actually, like, try to move forward and be better. [laughs quietly] So I don't wanna act like we don't cope with our feelings. I feel like we're both very good at that. I'm getting better. Justin's better than me.

Taylor: I think it's interesting. You still frame it as better or being better, like it's something that you're doing wrong. I think that's interesting. 'Cause... you know. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. I feel like things like this have been said to me before. You sound like a therapist. [laughs]

Taylor: I— hey. [laughs] I've been in therapy for many years.

Sydnee: You— yeah. Yeah. No, I know what you're doing there. I— I know this.

Taylor: I'm just saying, it's not about being better. It's accepting that you're maybe not okay. It's a good step.

Sydnee: But better at expressing emotions, coping with emotions, like, being open about things. And I think it's important. Your generation is more willing to question constantly, and that's something that I try to continue to do, even as I age, is just because things have been this way, just because we've been told that this is how we should, this is whatever, does not make it right. Like, question it, all of it. Question the whole status quo. Whatever it is, question it, question it again, and if it's not working, let's dismantle it and rebuild it into something better.

Taylor: Well, and that's something— you know, there's a lot of— there are a couple songs that Elliott Smith has that reference being quiet. And, like, not making a sound. And those songs always hit me personally, because sometimes I feel like, you know, that dark place that we've talked about, that's the problem with that place. Is that when you're there you— you feel like you're alone, and there's no light, so you don't know otherwise. And you just have to be quiet. But when you speak up and say "Hey! I'm down here!" I think you realize that so— if other people answer you, so many more people are down there. A lot of us are down there at different points in our life, and there's a lot of, you know— that that's really the— maybe we can't do anything about getting out of it as individuals, but if we stopped feeling like you're the only one down there, and that it's weird to be down there, like, you know, it's using your voice, it's speaking up, it's recognizing that a lot— there's a lot of reasons why it's okay to feel this way.

This is a place that a lot of people end up, and, you know, maybe we can't— maybe we can't turn the lights on, but we can— we can call out to each other and comfort each other in the dark.

Sydnee: I think that's really beautiful.

Raleigh: I agree. Thank you for introducing me to this for the first time.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Well, thank you for listening. And I will say that I still think, like, I love a lot of his songs. I sent you all a playlist. But I do still think that, like, maybe it's because it's the one that I can listen to the most that "Say Yes" is still my favorite song that he's made, because it's— it is a— it's a reminder, you know?

Sydnee: Of— of— that is probably, if you had asked me before you sent me a playlist, I would have also said "Say Yes." I also would say I really liked, on the list you sent me, or sent us, "Fond Farewell."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, I like that one a lot too. But I'd say "Say Yes" was kind of already my favorite.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Well, and I do— his— I think it was his high school has a plaque dedicated to him, and it uses a lyric from "Waltz #2" that I really love, which I still— I feel like— you know, it— I feel like it was probably a way that Phoebe Bridgers felt, and I think a lot of us feel. That's, "I'm never gonna know you now, but I'm gonna love you anyhow."

And that's very much how I feel about Elliott Smith.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Well, thank you, Tey. I really appreciate you being so open and sharing this.

Raleigh: Me too.

Taylor: Thank you for listening, [laughs] and sorry for— for, uh, jumping you with a very heavy musician. I should've given you a warning, Raleigh. I'm sorry.

Raleigh: It's okay. I do it to myself with other musicians. Um, I should've done my research.

Taylor: You know, I don't think I would've even thought. I think it's one of those— and maybe this is also to the culture of, like, it not being the best to hide this kind of stuff. But I think I sort of partitioned him off as "Don't bring that to the table. That's a bummer." But you talking about Phoebe Bridgers I'm like, "Oh, this is a way. [through laughter] This is a way I can introduce it."

Sydnee: But these okay, 'cause it's okay to be sad sometimes. As Daniel Tiger tells us.

Taylor: Oh, okay. [laughs]

Raleigh: Daniel Tiger does say that.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Good, I'm glad.

Sydnee: Yeah. Uh, Raleigh.

Raleigh: Yes.

Sydnee: What's next?

Raleigh: So, I wanna talk about a movie that we all watched together, *Not Okay* on Hulu. It's a new one that it's also very Gen Z. It says millennial. It's very Gen Z, I think.

Sydnee: It is.

Raleigh: Um, so... I wanna talk about it.

Sydnee: Excellent.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Well, I think that'll be a great thing to talk about. And I think relevant points after this conversation.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: Tey, is there a way to make— I am about to sound very old.

Raleigh: Yeah you are!

Sydnee: The playlist that you made us—

Taylor: Are you gonna ask— yes, I think I shared the Green Day one, too. I mean, it's— all music sharing software is not the best, but I made a playlist on Spotify. I think I can share it on the internet, on Twitter.

Sydnee: Yeah, that's what I was gonna ask, if there was a way to do that.

Taylor: You can share it from the @stillbuff Twitter, probably. Um, but also I think if you can find it— if you use Spotify, you can find me, and it's there too. Either way.

Sydnee: Okay. Yeah, I don't know— I don't know. I still just download albums to my phone when I want to listen to them.

Taylor: [through laughter] You still use Apple Music.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Yes.

Taylor: I mean, I don't know.

Sydnee: Spotify makes 'em random! And I don't want 'em—

Raleigh: Not if you—

Taylor: No, you just have to toggle something off.

Sydnee: Oh...

[pause]

Raleigh: If you get regular basic Spotify, yes, you can't always pick the exact song. But if you get premium— I pay five dollars a month for my Hulu and my Spotify. And then it's not random. I just listen to the songs I want.

Taylor: I don't know what supports the artist the best, I guess, so that's also something to consider. But I don't... I guess...

Raleigh: I mean, if you're paying for every album you listen to to download it.

Sydnee: That's gotta be good for the artist, right?

Taylor: I would hope that's better.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know.

Raleigh: Also in the long run, Spotify maybe, you know... if you wanna jump on the bandwagon. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: But I want the whole— I wanna listen to it, like, as an album! Like, I wanna— I just downloaded Beyonce's new album and I wanted to *listen* to it, like the whole thing.

Raleigh: And you can do that on Spotify.

Taylor: Well, I hate to be that guy, but I tend to listen to Spotify to get used to an artist, and then I try to make a point of ordering their vinyl.

Sydnee: Hm. Their vinyl, huh? [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, that's why I said "That guy."

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: See, there's her whole album.

Sydnee: I've got that too, on my Apple Music.

Raleigh: And you just hit play and it starts from the beginning.

Taylor: That makes me feel better. If I listen to something on Spotify I will give them money somehow. I will buy merch, I will buy a t-shirt, I will buy an album. Just, you know... it's how I get to know the songs.

Sydnee: Yeah, I getcha. Alright. Well, thank you both. [laughs] Thank you, Tey.

Taylor: Thank you.

Raleigh: Yes, thank you, Tey.

Sydnee: And, uh, thank you, listeners. Um, please— you should listen to Elliott Smith, but, you know, do know what you're heading into. It's heavier.

Taylor: Hey, if you're sad and you need some company, he's good company for that.

Sydnee: Yes.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, thank you to Maximum Fun. You should go to Maximumfun.org and check out all the great podcasts there. You can tweet at us @stillbuff. You can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org, and thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

Raleigh: This has been your cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I am Raleigh 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: I need to really figure out how to interact with music on the internet better.

Raleigh: Maybe just a little.

Taylor: [laughs quietly] Let's all go back to Napster.

[music plays]

John: Hey, it's John Moe, host of *Depresh Mode*, a podcast about people's mental health journeys. Guess who we got. Guess who? It's Jamie Lee Curtis!

Jamie: I look at life now as the game of Guess Who? Which is simply the process of elimination. I know what I don't like. That's how I found out who I am.

John: Jamie Lee Curtis on addiction, show business, and fooling people, all on *Depresh Mode* from Maximum Fun, wherever you get your podcasts.

[music and ad end]

[chord]

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