Wonderful 271: The Historic Billabong Bill

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[theme music plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello, this is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: Welcome to *Wonderful!* show we talk about things we like that's good that we're into.

And... no artifice on this one. It's gonna be a straight over the plate... I feel like right after the MaxFunDrive, we bring it all. We put it all out there on the court.

Rachel: And thank you by the way.

Griffin: And thank you all. The Wonderful listeners came out so hard this year.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And it was genuinely humbling.

Rachel: It was, yeah. We really-

Griffin: To see.

Rachel: We really hustled this time because you know the community as a whole, and when I say community, I mean the globe.

Griffin: Yayuss.

Rachel: Not, not so spendy given the times.

Griffin: True, true.

Rachel: Which is totally understandable. **Griffin:** For sure, for sure.

Rachel: And so we really got out there and we, you know, we shook it.

Griffin: We shook the coconut tree.

Rachel: And our bodies.

Griffin: And our bod—Oh, you're sayi—Oh I—Okay.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: See, this is interesting 'cause my brain went to like, "We shook the..."

Rachel: No, and that's very sweet and I—

Griffin: But yours was more like a sexual...

Rachel: [laughs] Like, "She gets paid to dance."

Griffin: Right, right, right. Sure. I mean, that's cool. That's cool too it's—

Rachel: And that's-

Griffin: just interesting-

Rachel: ... what we did.

Griffin: ... that our brains went into those two-

Rachel: I regret this path. Anyway...

Griffin: Well, thank you all so much-

Rachel: Thank you.

Griffin: But I feel like after the MaxFunDrive, it's... You should really just do a... show 'em what they—

Rachel: I-

Griffin: ... paid for.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: This is... Now this is resetting the bar a little bit. Not bad, but just more...

Rachel: See, I thought that too.

Griffin: ... sustainable.

Rachel: I was like, "Alright, back to business." But then I thought like, "Oh, we just have all these new people that just became members."

Griffin: Oh I see. Oh, fuck!

Rachel: Do we need to, like-

Griffin: You're right!

Rachel: Keep the bar high, at least until they settle in and then [laughing] rip the rug out.

Griffin: And then we start. Then we throw them a, like, "Um, jujubes?"

Rachel: Question mark?

Griffin: Some jujubes, question mark?

"Did you listen to the episode today?"

"Yeah. Griffin talked about jujubes with a rising inflection for 15 minutes."

Rachel: "Which we're not really sure if he really likes them? Uh, because he kept using this tone the whole time?"

Griffin: "I mean, they're basically Dots, yeah?" "No, they're more licorice-y than Dots, even."

Rachel: I couldn't even-

Griffin: I like Dots. Well, I used to like Dots. I don't think my current teeth could handle... my current model of teeth could handle Dots.

Rachel: [laughs] Current teeth. Uh huh.

Griffin: Anyway, this is a show we talk about all that kind of stuff. I reserve the right to talk about Dots. Do you have any small wonders?

Rachel: Yeah, I'm going to say and I'm not going to get specific just to give some privacy to our son, but his school has parties occasionally—

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: ... to kind of celebrate the, you know, good actions of the class. And so they had one of those today. And Henry was so jazzed because they get to wear a costume if they want and bring a stuffed animal if they want.

Griffin: Or pajamas. That's an interesting choice.

Rachel: Or pajamas. Yeah. And Henry has had his outfit planned for, I mean, easily weeks.

Griffin: Over a month. Yeah.

Rachel: Yeah. And he was just so jazzed. And it was the best.

Griffin: That's the best. Any kind of special school day is good.

Rachel: Uh-huh.

Griffin: Like anything that's just enough to kind of break up the monotony a little bit.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Anything to hang your hat on, I remember as a kid, being like, "Hell yeah."

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I'm going to say... I mentioned it on *Besties*, but I've been playing like a lot more *Minecraft* with Henry.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: And the music in the like, latest... All the Minecraft music is, I've always found to be exceptional, but the latest sort of batch of music is mostly composed by Lena Raine who was the composer of a game called *Celeste*, which has one of my favorite game soundtracks.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: Anyway, I have been listening to that while...

I've been writing a fucking lot over the last couple of months and so it's been really nice having good like background sort of vibe-y work music and this is like, peak stuff like—

Rachel: And I want to specify that that is a graphic novel and not like your memoirs. I don't want people to get too excited that a new original—

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: ... never-before-talked-about work from Griffin McElroy is coming.

Griffin: That's fair. That's fair. Yeah. No. I mean-

Rachel: Although...

Griffin: Although... No. Please God, no.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I'm so tired, y'all. My memory sucks so bad. A memoir from me would be...

Rachel: [laughs harder]

Griffin: David Sedaris, it would not be.

Rachel: Just like two-page chapters of like-

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: ... "I think I went to a birthday party at a McDonald's? First grade."

Griffin: I mean, I know I went to a couple of birthday- I know I actually went to quite a few birthday parties at McDonaldses. And I can recall them all very clearly.

Rachel: Well, so maybe your memory isn't bad. Maybe you're just choosy.

Griffin: But nobody wants to hear about that shit. Nobody wants to hear about the cool McDonald's birthday.

Rachel: I don't know. Did anyone pee their pants? **Griffin:** You gotta buy the book to find out.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I go first this week.

Rachel: Great.

Griffin: I'm going to talk about something that I sort of rekindled my love affair with over the MaxFunDrive, and that is the green screen or chroma key if you want to be—

Rachel: I would love to know more about this guy.

Griffin: I know! It struck me that like, this is a thing that I've had some passing familiarity and some experience with that I think everybody kind of knows the like, word?

But doesn't necessarily know like what the technology is or sort of where it came from.

Rachel: Yeah, I mean, I knew about it I think first in like, weather, right?

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: Like a meteorologist stands in front of a map and things move on it.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And then of course like when it came to movies, it was like crazy technology.

Griffin: Sure. I mean it's the basis of most sort of like CGI post-production stuff that happens.

Like you watch the making of a- Like any Marvel movie and you're going to see a lot of people doing big jumps in blue, wide-open blue spaces.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: With blue cubes everywhere.

But yeah, I... So, one of the most recent sort of additions to the studio is a green screen that I got, which I used during the MaxFunDrive a few times because it's nice to-

Like if you're playing a game or something instead of having your whole-ass rectangle of like your office in the background—

Rachel: Yeah! Uh-huh.

Griffin: Just being able to kind of be a little bit more efficient with the real estate.

And it's so easy to do this in your house now. It's kind of wild. It's kind of wild. I... So growing up, obviously, I went to a lot of radio stations and TV news stations.

And I remember being a kid and going to WOWK-TV and going to their like big green screen and walking in front of it and turning into a disembodied head and being like, "That's fucking crazy!"

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But now, like pretty much anyone can do that. A lot of times you don't even need the green screen because you know there's like wild AI technology that can determine what is background and what is person.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And sort of effectively do the same thing. Anyway, I've gotten way, way ahead of myself.

So if you don't have any experience with working with green screen, the basic concept is that you can layer two pieces of footage or two images by essentially creating a sort of background and foreground layer by basically erasing a certain range of color spectrum from what's in front.

So when someone stands in front of a green screen you delete all green and all of the green stuff goes away.

Rachel: Okay.

Griffin: And then it's basically, you know, a completely transparent sort of matte.

I don't have any background in like, post-production video stuff at all, but it really is so easy to do it on most modern computers now and that's why you see it used... I mean, I feel like pretty much every streamer at this point is like — or major streamer — is using green screen technology, but pretty much anyone can do it.

You could just buy a big bolt of any solid color fabric and kind of do the same thing with most webcams that are out now. Filmmakers have been using this kind of like, matte effect, since the early 20th century.

The Invisible Man was a very prominent sort of special effects case that used a lot of black sort of matte backgrounds to make their guy invisible, I guess. And then, Walt Disney did a lot of white screen shooting with real actors for a lot of the early live-action animated like fusion stuff—

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: ... that you see in a lot of Disney movies.

Rachel: Like when Gene Kelly, right, dances with the-

Griffin: Yes!

Rachel: ... the mouse from Tom and Jerry, which is named either Tom or Jerry. [laughs]

Griffin: Yes. [laughing] Exactly.

In the 1930s, RKO developed a blue screen process that allowed for sort of more refined, more dynamic layering. In 1940, there was a movie called *The Thief of Baghdad* that kind of was the first major motion picture to use... to really utilize this technology for its blue screen genie, which was apparently breathtaking. It won an Oscar for visual effects.

Rachel: Huh.

Griffin: What's really interesting about, like chroma key is it is kind of the backbone of a lot of visual effects stuff that exists, you know, today, as it's used. And it has, like over the last 70 years, really just escalated and grown in step with, like, technological advancements.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: When you think about like, you know, a hundred years' difference in visual effects from one sort of era of film to now—

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: ... it's fuckin' bonkers how much technology has changed. And not just like one specific kind. It's not like computers got better. Like optical printing technology advanced, and so people found clever ways to use that.

And then, you know, all the way up to, whatever, AI track—I don't understand anything about this world. I just find it really interesting how these different disciplines of science kind of came together to just keep making this one process more and more and more and more impressive and accessible.

So, green screen. Why, you may wonder, do people call it that despite the fact that you can do it with basically any color?

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: You could be sitting in front of a purple screen and then...

Rachel: I used to think it really like... It had to be green.

Griffin: No, it can be... It can be... It can be any color and the like process of removing one solid color range like you can do that with any color range. But there are several factors behind sort of why you mostly hear of green screen.

For one thing, for most of the history of cameras for broadcast purposes have used RGB sensors, so red, green, blue. So it makes sense that removing one of those channels is much easier and much clearer than like removing, you know, purple, which would land sort of somewhere in the middle of those.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Blue and green were sort of the most popular of those two colors for most purposes because for you know, most of video history they were thought to be sort of furthest from most skin tones. And of those two, blue and green, only one of them is a color that, like meteorologists and TV presenters and people who use this kind of stuff regularly, actually wear on their clothes. And that's blue.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: If you think of people... Just sort of your current garment selection, or most people's, green is a much less... So, it just kind of by process of elimination became green.

Because they didn't have to spend as much time, you know, policing what people wore on their sets because most of the—unless you're interviewing Matthew Lesko for the weather report like—

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah...

Griffin: ... usually not going to have to worry too much about their green clothes disappearing.

I thought that was really interesting and I just think it's neat that anybody can do this. And sometimes celebrities like put out, you know, videos of them doing stuff in green screen and then people do funny stuff with it because it's easy to do that too.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I like the democratization of special effects technology.

Rachel: This became a real thing, like when people started doing, you know, virtual meetings, too, during the pandemic.

Griffin: Oh, for sure, yeah.

Rachel: I remember our friend Bristol brought a green screen to one of our Zoom Hangouts.

Griffin: That was very fun.

Rachel: And it was like... It was just the absolute best for us.

Griffin: Yeah. I also liked mine. I forget the brand of it, but it like has a accordion sort of fold. So you just pull it up and you can just drop it back down.

Rachel: Yeah, it reminds me of like, the little like projectors, you know, in the classrooms?

Griffin: At class photo day? That is what it—

Rachel: Ohh, I didn't... I didn't even think of that.

Griffin: Oh.

Rachel: I was thinking more of like when you... when you would pull up a... like an overhead projector and it would shine onto the pull-down...

Griffin: I love that.

Rachel: ... screen in the classroom.

Griffin: Did you ever have any sort of green scr—we had it at our high school news program. So we did a lot of really—

Rachel: No...

Griffin: ... pretty stupid shit with it.

Rachel: Our high school didn't have like a news program of any kind.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: There was no video work at our school. There was morning announcements and it was done over like an old-fashioned, like, PA system.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: There was no like, news channel.

Griffin: The fuckin' Star Wars kid thing, of me.

Rachel: That was something you put on the air at your school?

Griffin: Yeah, that was for the weekend... Like, "There's a Star Wars movie coming out this weekend."

Rachel: So you said... [laughs]

Griffin: So, we did a skit.

Rachel: [laughing harder] So you said...

Griffin: I don't think it was my idea. I don't think I wrote that particular skit or sketch.

Rachel: Because when I saw that video, I thought, "Oh, this must have been for some class and Griffin didn't realize this video was being taken."

Griffin: Oh no.

Rachel: You said, "Okay, put it up."

Griffin: Yeah...

Rachel: [as high school Griffin] "I'm doing some good work out here."

Griffin: Yeah. You didn't like it ...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: It sounds like you didn't really like it or think it was very... uh, think it was very good.

Rachel: [still laughing] No, it was very good. You were dedicated.

Griffin: Oh, it was very good? Then why would I be concerned about whether or not people saw it or not, honey?

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: If it was very good?

"This is very good. I don't want people to see it." That doesn't sound right.

Rachel: [continues laughing]

Griffin: So what could the other thing be? [inaudible talking to himself]

Rachel: You're just, I think, ultimately a braver person than me.

Griffin: Oh.

Rachel: It's very, um, risky.

Griffin: I guess courage to-

Rachel: Risky to take your interests that are maybe not universally popular and share them—

Griffin: Star Wars.

Rachel: ... with a broad audience.

Griffin: Yeah. No, for sure. [sarcastic] Like *Star Wars* is pretty like underground shit.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: But you're right about that. Well, I'm gonna wrap it up here, I think. Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[ad break]

Rachel: Can I tell you about my thing this week?

Griffin: I would love for you to do that.

Rachel: It has been, I don't know, I want to say over a year, since I have brought a musical group. And so I got on the internet and I went to the *Tiny Desk Concerts* because that's kind of a good way for me to find out about, like hip bands.

Griffin: For sure.

Rachel: And just last month, March 2023, a band called The Beths was on *Tiny Desk Concert*.

Griffin: You... The extent to which you are batting a thousand-

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: ... with bringing musical acts on this show that I'm immediately like, "Yeah, I'm gonna listen to this forev—I'm gonna listen to this band forever," is... it's wild, babe.

Rachel: Can I... Can I say something... controversial?

Griffin: Uh-huh. Oh yeah.

Rachel: I think I've got pretty good taste.

Griffin: I think you've got exceptional taste.

Rachel: I'm just going to say that and that is-

Griffin: I think *Tiny Desk Concert* also has very good taste.

Rachel: [laughs] True, true.

Griffin: But there's not a complete overlap.

Rachel: They are... They are doing kind of the initial pass for me.

Griffin: Sure.

Rachel: Which is helpful.

Griffin: And then you polish it up from there.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Not everybody makes the cut.

Rachel: It's true. So The Beths have actually been a group since 2014.

It is a New Zealand indie rock band. They all, well, all except for the drummer, met at the University of Auckland. And their first album came out in 2018.

So they've been around for a while, but I think just the nature of them being a New Zealand band is why, like, we were a little bit slower, maybe?

Griffin: Yeah, maybe.

Rachel: To hear about them?

Griffin: Also, because I don't have literally any avenue for hearing about new music other than you on this show.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: That's the only other reason that I have for—**Rachel:** And video games!

Griffin: And video games, yeah, sure.

Rachel: Yeah. So their first album *Future Me Hates Me* came out in 2018, which is a great name for an album, by the way.

Griffin: That's a very good name.

Rachel: And then 2020 *Jump Rope Gazers* came out. And then the newest album came out in 2022 and it is called *Expert in a Dying Field*. And I wanted to actually play a little bit of the title track off of that album, "Expert in a Dying Field."

["Expert in a Dying Field" plays]

Griffin: It's... it's so... it's so good.

Rachel: I know.

Griffin: It's giving me... Like Courtney Barnett, is giving me always...

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah.

Griffin: It's... it's so good.

Rachel: Yeah. No, I was getting... You know, it's interesting they toured for a long time with Death Cab for Cutie.

Griffin: Okay!

Rachel: And it does, it has that kind of like old indie rock. And when I say old, I mean, like you know...

Griffin: Early aughts?

Rachel: Yeah. Griffin: [laughs] Yeah.

Rachel: Like, 15, 20 years ago sound, which the label, Car Park Records describe The Beths as "cerebral indie rock meets power pop."

Griffin: That's good, yeah.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: For sure.

Rachel: Yeah. They also compared The Beths to Soccer Mommy, which I thought.

Griffin: Okay, yeah, for sure.

Rachel: Which I thought, like, okay, maybe that's... There's something about this that feels like, of the time, you know?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And I think that's what it is.

Griffin: It's a weirdly, like, melodic is the word that I feel like I use to describe this particular sector of indie rock.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Where it's just... It's got a catchy fuckin' riff that you can... that you can bop to.

Rachel: Yeah. So the song I've played, "Expert in a Dying Field", it's actually... It's interesting. It speaks to kind of the lyrical power of the group because they talk a little bit about the meaning of that concept. And so the lead singer, Elizabeth Stokes, said that in—

Griffin: It's a great name.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: What a name!

Rachel: I mean, the group is called The Beths. Her name is Elizabeth.

Griffin: Oh, okay! Sure, sure, sure, sure.

Rachel: She said in an interview, "Your entire life feels like you're learning how to live in the world, and then the world changes. You've become an expert in something that no longer exists. It's hard to deal with that sometimes."

And then she talked specifically about the pandemic and how that kind of became more relevant to more people. It says, "You have more time to think and to dwell on old memories and people that you aren't in touch with anymore and everything feels like it's changed."

"It feels like we're really living in a different world. We've all had to grieve a little bit for something that doesn't exist anymore. Big things and small things."

Griffin: Yowza!

Rachel: Uh-

Griffin: I mean, yes.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But yowza.

Rachel: So there's that component.

Rachel: And then there's also in this article from the Australia New Zealand, like *Rolling Stone*... chapter [laughs]...

Griffin: And that's called ...?

Rachel: No, The *Rolling Stone* specific to Australia and New Zealand, I don't know what to call that.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: It's just like a sect of *Rolling Stone* that exists purely for that region.

Griffin: Okay.

Rachel: Talks about how it can be kind of like a post breakup anthem of like, you have all this useless information—

Griffin: Oh, yeah.

Rachel: ... about a former partner. And it's now obsolete because you're not in that relationship anymore.

Griffin: I don't think I have that.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: We've been together for over ten years now.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: My memory, like as discussed earlier, my memory's not useful. Lots of Rachel data, but that's highly pertinent. Those are useful—

Rachel: Very useful, I would say.

Griffin: I'm... I have a lot of STEM sort of education in Rachel. I...

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: These skills are... On the daily I'm using these things.

Rachel: Mm-hmm. So yeah, so they're... they're huge. The Beths are huge in New Zealand. They won Album of the Year, Best Group and Best Alternative Artist at the New Zealand Aotearoa Music Awards? Sorry, that's like a language that I don't speak.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: But yeah. Just it... Like they became enormous. And part of that was because in the 2020-2021 period New Zealand had like a globally recognized response to COVID.

Griffin: Oh, sure.

Rachel: In that like it did not become a serious problem because of the precautions they took early on.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So they were able to like, do shows.

Griffin: Cool.

Rachel: Which was great for them and kind of helped them get to where they are now.

So *Expert in a Dying Field* came out 2022. And it's an incredible album. I've listened to every song off of it now. Their music often has this kind of like somber quality, but they like intentionally on this album kind of strove to do something that was a little more fun and poppy.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And I've really super enjoyed it.

Griffin: Can we play that other song that you sent me too?

Rachel: Yes! So the other song, it's actually a really cool music video too. So the other song is called "Knees Deep." And it, the video, is them bungee jumping from the Auckland Harbor Bridge.

And they were able to do videos like that because apparently in New Zealand you can get little grants of \$5,000 or \$8,000 to make music videos. They have, like public funding available that you can apply for.

Griffin: [softly] That kicks ass.

Rachel: And you can use that funding to make music videos. So they... that's how they did that video.

But I love that song. So yeah, we could play a little bit of "Knees Deep."

[A little bit of "Knees Deep" plays]

Griffin: Good band. Good band.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Liked all their songs on Spot—that's the only way I know to like not lose the music that I'm like, "Oh, this is good. Just liked all that shit on Spotify. Looking forward to listening to that for a long time to come."

Rachel: Yeah. So they are about to go on a U.S. tour, actually.

Griffin: Oooh?!

Rachel: For those of you that are excited about this band, they start their U.S. tour in Bonnaroo in June.

Griffin: Oh, fun!

Rachel: And they are traveling the country into October. They're actually going to be in Baltimore in August.

Griffin: That's dope.

Rachel: But yeah, apparently they do a really great live show. Their new album has a big fish on it and at their live shows for this album they like bring out a big, inflated fish and just have it on stage with them.

Griffin: I love that. They're having fun.

Rachel: They seem very fun. Yeah.

Griffin: Thank you to Bo en and Augustus for the use of our theme song, "Money Won't Pay," you can find a link to that in the episode description.

Got a bunch of new merch over at mcelroymerch.com.

Rachel: Gotta get that stink spray.

Griffin: [sighs]

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: I don't think—I... So I personally am not gonna get the stink spray.

Rachel: Yeah, uh-uh.

Griffin: 'Cause I'm a very sort of aromatic individual, but from what I understand, it's quite pleasant to the... to the smell, in moderation.

Rachel: Yeah, based on the live show, it sounds like the kind of spray that you should spray into a room and then leave that room for maybe 10-15 minutes and come back and then it's going to be just right.

Griffin: Ohh wow, that's interesting.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Or do it outside on yourself and then come into the room.

Rachel: [laughs] Yeah.

Griffin: But please be careful. We also have a "keep your grades up" pin that I'm a huge fan of.

Rachel: Oh, good.

Griffin: Yeah, all that's at mcelroymerch.com. We got some shows coming up very, very soon, actually.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: Next week we're going to be doing *MBMBaM* in Austin at the Moontower Comedy Festival. We are going to be in San Jose and Denver, at the end of the month doing *MBMBaM* and *TAZ*. And then we just announced like a bunch of shows from now until like summer-ish.

And you can find all of those over at themcelroy.family. Or mcelroy.family, either one of those.

Rachel: I'm guessing you're gonna make some changes to your costume for this tour?

Griffin: Yeah, man. I'm gonna I'm... I'm thinking about just sort of like taking up a residency at like a Billabong somewhere.

Rachel: [laughs] Uh-huh. Do they still have those?

Griffin: They do. They have one special one.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And it's here in DC, and you can go there and train and study.

Rachel: Joe Biden put together legislation to protect that Billabong.

Griffin: The Billabong... it's a historic Billabong.

Rachel: The Billabong bill.

Griffin: The Billabong bill.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: Bye everyone.

Rachel: Bye.

[theme music plays]

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