

Still Buffering 422: Lady Gaga

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[theme music plays]

Sydnee: Hello, and welcome to Still Buffering, a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Tey, I'm assuming that you were enjoying the Super Bowl last night? [laughs quietly]

Taylor: That's an odd assumption, I think. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: No. Yeah. Um, I was—I was in the presence of the Super Bowl. Does that—

Taylor: What does that mean, in the presence of the Super Bowl?

Sydnee: The Super Bowl was on a TV in proximity to me.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: I don't know. It wasn't... I actually do—I like sports. I like sports! [laughs quietly] That feels like a weird thing. "I like sports!"

Taylor: I do a sport from time to time. Just a little sport on the side.

Sydnee: Yeah. Like, I like a good sporting event. And so I am one of those people who generally is saying, like, "I don't really care which team wins. I'm just hoping for a good game."

Occasionally I care which team wins. Although I will say that there are more NFL teams that I really dislike than teams that I really root for.

Taylor: Hmm.

Sydnee: Like... well, I don't wanna—although I'm about to say I don't wanna name any of 'em and, like, offend our listeners. But I feel like probably, like us, a lot of our listeners are not heavily invested in the NFL.

Taylor: Are we typecasting our listeners by saying that? [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, I mean, it's possible. Listen. I'm just gonna be honest. Never really been a Patriots fan. Just gonna say that.

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: Just gonna put that out there. Don't really love the Patriots. Have some issues with Tom Brady's wellness routine. [laughs]

Taylor: See, I wanted the... I know nothing about the NFL but I wanted the Eagles to win because I like Philadelphia and I wanted to see happy people in Philadelphia causing chaos.

Sydnee: I saw that—what was it? Was it that the mayor said "Don't climb light posts." Is that what I was watching?

Taylor: Begging. Begging the people of Philadelphia not to tear the city apart. Don't climb them. And so then there was the video going around where they didn't climb it. They tore it down and they were passing it around.

Sydnee: Oh no...

Taylor: Like they had a light post crowd surfing over the street. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: There are things... that reminds—that's sort of like parenting. Sometimes you say something like... I don't know. Like, okay. Charlie and Cooper wanted to have a slumber party in Charlie's room the other night. And, like, after we inflated the air mattress we were like, "Now, don't jump on the air mattress."

I don't know that it would've occurred to them how fun it would be to jump on the air mattress until I suggested that perhaps they shouldn't. I wonder if this was similar for the lamppost thing. Like, maybe you shouldn't have told people to leave 'em alone. Because now, like, "Oh, that's a great idea."
[laughs quietly]

Taylor: No, I think it's been a consistent problem. Like, to the point that they've, like, had to grease them in the past to try to keep people off of them. You know, like when you're trying to keep a squirrel out of your bird feeder. Uh...

Sydnee: I kind of love that.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I love the idea of greasing the lampposts to keep people from climbing them.

Taylor: Yeah. This was—this is like—this was a—a well-recorded activity, that—lampposts, cars... public structures... you know. That's...

Sydnee: I don't know. I mean, listen. I can—so first of all, the Super Bowl was not very exciting, so you know. It was—the Eagles just—it was a blowout, pretty much.

Taylor: Yeah, I... saw as much from social media.

Sydnee: The Chiefs remembered how to play football at the very end and did score some points finally, but it was too late. So—so there were—like, in our household there was some sorrow because Taylor's boyfriend lost, see.

Taylor: Okay, that's—I was trying to figure out why I kept seeing clips of Taylor Swift associated with the... I knew she was dating a football boy, but I wasn't sure—I didn't know he was playing.

Sydnee: Yes. He plays for the Chiefs, Travis Kelce. And so, yeah. And this would've been—I don't know. It's the same as last year. Last year when he won the Super Bowl, when his team won the Super Bowl, there was this

rumor that, like, after it was over he was gonna propose, and then it didn't happen. And so now the rumor was going around again this year. Like, if the Chiefs win... Travis is gonna propose. And... then they didn't win.

But I mean, again, like, I don't know why we thought that.

Taylor: Do you think he would've changed his plan if they didn't win?

Sydnee: Well, that's what I'm saying. Like, surely if he was planning on proposing, he'd do it whether he won the Super Bowl or not.

Taylor: Honestly, I feel like that would work either way for him. I mean, I guess if you're gonna propose, you'd hope you're at the emotional point where you know it's gonna be a yes either way. But you win the Super Bowl, it's like, "Hey. I just won the Super Bowl. Don't you wanna marry me?"

But then if you lose, it's like, "Wow, I just lost the Super Bowl. That's a big sad thing. You shouldn't say no to me on the same night."

Sydnee: Mm-hmm, it's a guilt thing.

Taylor: Yeah. I don't know.

Sydnee: I don't know. It was not a very—it was not a very fun game to watch. I—okay. Let me tell you about a better sporting event. Charlie's a cheerleader now. And we headed—we went to a fifth grade basketball game. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Oh. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Over at the Girls and Boys club. Um, this is how I spend some of my Saturday now, every weekend, is watching fourth and fifth grade boys play basketball while my daughter cheers for them. Which is fine, honestly. It's kind of an enjoyable way—the clock doesn't stop at that age of games, so they're fairly short. And the—it's kind of fun to see, like, the spectrum of talent that fourth and fifth graders present.

Taylor: I was gonna say, is that before anybody really *can* play basketball? 'Cause I feel like that would be enjoyable.

Sydnee: Well, so, okay. It depends. I have seen three of these games now, and there are definitely some people who are just, like—just figuring out the dribbling piece. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Hmm, yeah. I can see that.

Sydnee: And so, like, there was one game where the score was like—the final score was like... four to eight, I wanna say? So there's that level of intensity. Or there was another game where the final score was like... 42 to six. [laughs quietly]

But the best one, it came down to one point separated the two teams, at the buzzer. Like... the team that Charlie was cheering for won, and it was the most exciting sporting event I can remember seeing in my life, like, live.

Taylor: Wow!

Sydnee: These—these fifth graders, both teams were very good at basketball. I mean, for fifth graders. Like, I don't mean like they're professional level. But like, talented little basketball players. Very intense. Lots of hustle. Got really physical. That scares me. The kids fall a lot and I'm always, like, jumping off the bleachers thinking I need to go help, but then they get right back up and start running and I'm like, "Well, I guess they're okay."

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: But it was really, like... by the end, the entire crowd, like all these parents sitting there on a Saturday morning watching a basketball game, were so into this game. Like, so—like, my heart was pounding watching the end. Like, "What's gonna happen?! This is too intense, I can't—how are these kids—"

I felt so bad for the kids. 'Cause I'm like, I feel the pressure of this as an adult in the stands. And these fifth graders have to be over—but I don't know. Maybe it was just us. They didn't seem overwhelmed.

Taylor: Well, you know, at least—I don't think the stakes are that high when you're in fifth grade playing basketball, right? Like, it's not... they're not playing for a championship ring.

Sydnee: No. I don't think there are any, like, talent scouts at the Girls and Boys Club.

Taylor: They're all getting the same juice box and packet of cookies at the end of it. [laughs]

Sydnee: They have a concession stand there. They sell nachos.

Taylor: Ohh, nice.

Sydnee: Yeah! Or a hot dog so Cooper can grab a quick 10 AM hot dog if she wants it.

Taylor: And I bet she does always want it.

Sydnee: She does. Uh-huh. She does, yeah. Absolutely she wants that.

Taylor: I love that.

Sydnee: Uh-huh. Um, much—but it was a much better game than the Super Bowl. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs quietly] Well.

Sydnee: Unfortunately. The commercials—there were some commercials that were good. That's the only reason, right? Like, most of us... watch it.

Taylor: Yeah. I guess—well, I don't have a way to, like, stream it. So I figured some of the commercials would find their way to TikTok last night. I

didn't see many, but I guess that might take—that might take a 24 hour cycle.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah, that's probably true. A few of 'em have—there was... I don't even know what it was for. There was a weird one where instead of wearing cowboy hats, people's heads were like fleshy shaped—like, their flesh was shaped like cowboy hats. And I was only sort of watching, so I don't know what it was a commercial for, but I found it very upsetting.

Taylor: I don't like that description at all. That's... [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I'm sure it'll creep its way to TikTok, 'cause it was odd.

Taylor: I thought—one of the few that I did see was when—it's Seal, but he's also a seal.

Sydnee: That was upsetting.

Taylor: I didn't like that either.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: I saw that. Nope. No good.

Sydnee: No. Actually, we all looked at the screen and Cooper went, "I hate that!" And walked away. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] That's the correct response.

Sydnee: I was like, "I agree!"

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: "I agree! I hate this!"

Taylor: Creepy.

Sydnee: In the—there was a Rocket Mortgage commercial where they played Country Roads, so that was kinda fun.

Taylor: I did see that. I also saw clips of the whole stadium singing Country Roads. I don't know if that was with the commercial or just on its own.

Sydnee: I don't know... I... I assumed that Country Roads was just beloved here in West Virginia.

Taylor: No!

Sydnee: And then also in Munich. It's huge in Munich.

Taylor: And Japan.

Sydnee: What—what is it about Country Roads that has...

Taylor: It's just...

Sydnee: It is very much about—well, it says it's about West Virginia. It's not actually.

Taylor: [crosstalk]

Sydnee: But either way, like, it is a song that is stated to be about a specific place, where most people, statistically, most people haven't been to West Virginia.

Taylor: Yeah...

Sydnee: It's weird, right?

Taylor: I guess it's just one of those state of mind songs, you know?

Sydnee: Is it?

Taylor: Sounds like a song that's about some pastoral idea of where you grew up.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: A good chorus that everybody can kind of sway and sing to. That seems to be the international appeal.

Sydnee: It is the kind of chorus you can sway and sing to. And I guess if you've been—especially if it's, like, used in a drinking context...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But it's interesting, because it is about—it's about West Virginia. It wasn't, technically. But it's about West Virginia. Yeah. But it's beloved outside. I don't know. I thought that was very odd.

Taylor: No, it's—I—when my Japanese teacher knew it, I was blown away. But it was used as, like, an ending song for an old Ghibli movie, I believe.

Sydnee: I had no idea.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Interesting. Well, that was nice. That was a nice thing to see. And then there was—I tell you, the only other thing that really got me—there was a commercial for... an appeal to make women's flag football, like, a varsity sport at every institution.

First of all, I didn't know that—I mean, like, I am familiar with the idea of flag football, and so the idea that there are women playing flag football somewhere isn't, like, news to me. Like, okay, yeah, sure. I'm sure that—I didn't know there was this movement to make it, like, a varsity level sport. I didn't know that was, like, a thing. You know?

Um, but I was so filled with envy for young women who might have the opportunity in high school or college or whatever to play flag football. 'Cause had I been given the opportunity as a young woman to sign up for flag football... ohh man, I would've loved that.

Taylor: Now, specifically flag football? Or football in general?

Sydnee: Well, I would've preferred just football, 'cause then I could've tackled people. But...

Taylor: I was gonna say, I feel like flag football would be difficult for you, Syd. There's a—[laughs quietly] there's a level of physical restraint that, you know...

Sydnee: I mean, I bet they run into each other and fall down some anyway.

Taylor: Hmm.

Sydnee: But you just—I mean, I would—I would love... I would have loved to play football. I would have very much enjoyed football. And if flag football was the option, I would've played that.

Taylor: Well...

Sydnee: Soccer was as close as I ever got. Soccer gets pretty physical. *Fútbol*, not football.

Taylor: [laughs quietly] The logical sport you would play that's called football.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I did play that. And you can, like, ram into people. But you really don't wanna kick people. 'Cause, I mean, kicking doesn't—that's no fun. You wanna, like, throw your body into people.

Taylor: Well, *you* wanna throw your body into people. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: That's a *you* thing.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I mean, you can do that, Syd.

Sydnee: Okay, well...

Taylor: It's—there are repercussions, but you don't need a sport to just throw yourself into people.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] I was trying to convince—as we were watching the basketball game, Cooper was sitting there and I said, "Would you rather—would you wanna do any of the things that are happening here? Do you wanna play basketball? Do you wanna be a cheerleader? Any of these things? Those girls are flipping. Do you wanna learn the flips? Any of this appeal to you? I don't know. You're in first grade. What do you wanna do?"

And she was like, "Ehh. I wanna play a sport where you can tackle people."

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I was like, "Yeah, I hear that. I feel it. But there's not... hmm." That was the best I could offer. I was like, "Soccer?" [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, start—start learning all the rules of flag football now, and then use your—your sway, your platform, to help get that flag football... ordinance? Law? I don't know.

Sydnee: Surely it does not take legal action! Surely!

Taylor: Yes. Just—just all of the—all of the madcap laws that are being placed right now, just try to sneak that in there. "No more pennies. Girls play flag football."

Sydnee: Were pennies banned? Was that one of them?

Taylor: He left the Super Bowl early to get rid of pennies.

[pause]

Sydnee: Well...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Okay. I feel neutral about this one.

Taylor: I like—I like a penny. I know that they're, you know...

Sydnee: I feel neutral about the pennies. I'm not heavily for or against pennies. I understand the rationale that they don't really make sense, in terms of what they're worth now and, you know, as currency. Like, I get that. But I also think, like, why are we... why?

Taylor: Apparently it costs us more to make pennies than a penny is valued.

Sydnee: Yeah. It also cost us, like, 15 million dollars for him to be at the Super Bowl, so there's that.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Maybe... that would've saved some pennies.

Taylor: I don't think that... I just—I don't know why pennies. Like, "Well, I can't stay at this game. I'm gonna go kill the penny!"

Sydnee: I don't know. I mean, if only it was just stuff like that, though. Right? Like, I would take it. If it was just like a weird, silly four years of like—

Taylor: Yeah, yeah, that's true.

Sydnee: You know what I mean? Like, we eliminated the penny and we got rid of daylight savings time. Okay.

Taylor: And he wants to do something about peanuts? He wants to restore the glory to the nut?

Sydnee: The beautiful nut.

Taylor: The beautiful nut.

Sydnee: Yeah... now, see, that's a weird one because, like, first of all... I... it puts me in a position to decide if I'm pro or anti peanut?

Taylor: Well, I—I mean, I... I was pretty sure most of us are pro peanut. I thought it was just, but then when people are anti-peanut, it's usually 'cause they're allergic to peanuts.

Sydnee: And they could kill them.

Taylor: Yeah. So that's like a... like, I love a peanut. But a peanut could murder you. So I think you win in this situation.

Sydnee: Well, that's the thing. Like, I don't... I understand—there are moments where, like, it would be really easy—because packing lunches is a pain in the butt. And so it would be really easy to, like, slap a peanut butter sandwich together and throw it in my kid's lunch. I understand that that is like—man, I have had that thought. "I wish I could just send you with a peanut butter sandwich."

I have never once thought it would be worth it to endanger the life of another child!

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: To send you with a peanut butter sandwich! 'Cause obviously no! Obviously, like, I'll take an extra few seconds and make something else.

Taylor: He's... he is—

Sydnee: 'Cause it's life or death! Like, that's an easy one. That's an easy one!

Taylor: Yeah, it's like a survival of the fittest philosophy of some kind, probably.

Sydnee: I don't—you are not gonna get a big crowd of people who are like, "That's right! Put peanuts back in schools!"

Like, that's not gonna...

Taylor: I don't know. I—somehow it—the, you know, pro-America crowd I think can be convinced that our disdain for the peanut is somehow anti-American, and not just common sense to not kill children. There are lots of things that that sentence I just said would describe.

Sydnee: I know. I know. [sighs] I mean, there are lots of other nut butters, too. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: There are a lot of nut butters out there.

Sydnee: And, like—

Taylor: Sun butter.

Sydnee: There's sun butter. We did that for a while. Um... but then there is just other—I don't know. Like, right now my kids are on a soup kick. I just divide a big ol' can of Campbell's chunky chicken noodle soup up between two thermoses every morning, and they love it, so.

Taylor: Oh, that's nice.

Sydnee: Yeah. They're just on a soup kick, so there you go. No one is harmed by this soup. [laughs quietly] How 'bout that? Um...

Taylor: What can you do? [laughs]

Sydnee: You know who also—who also performed prior to the Super Bowl last night?

Taylor: Uh, I...

Sydnee: It was Lady Gaga. Who we're gonna talk about.

Taylor: I figured that was the lead-in.

Sydnee: I didn't know what was happening. It was—so, like... you turn the Super Bowl on long before it starts, because there's all this stuff leading up to it, right? Like, there's all these Super Bowl-adjacent, like, talking bits and musical bits, and some of the commercials start early, and... like, the ones that are like four-parterers that happen throughout the whole Super Bowl. Anyway.

So—and then, like, that's when you're eating, like... pizza... and stuff.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: So we had all this on before. You know, the whole thing. The thing. And Lady Gaga shows up with her piano. And I think it was something about first responders or something, because she was surrounded by, like—there were, like, firefighters and police officers, but there were also military people. I don't know who everybody was. But there was—I think it was some sort of, like... hero thing?

Taylor: That's nice.

Sydnee: And she was singing a song. Yes. I don't know. It was on there across the room and I was like, "Lady Gaga's happening over there. What is happening?"

Taylor: She's a—her and the Super Bowl go way back. I recently watched her documentary, *Five Foot Two*, and uh, it's all about her lead-up to playing—to headline the Super Bowl halftime show a few years ago.

Sydnee: Oh yeah? Oh, I didn't know that. Was there a lot of, like, drama around it? Or is it just... or is it just sort of like a behind the music kind of—

Taylor: Yeah, it's very, like—it's just sort of a slice of—slice of life, but the most exciting, insane life you could possibly live, because you're Lady Gaga.

[laughs] She's, like, releasing an album, and planning for the Super Bowl, and also... [quietly] I don't know. Like, just... you know. [normal volume] Jet setting around the world. Singing on rooftops.

Sydnee: Was she touring at the time, too?

Taylor: This was filmed right before Joanne came out. So she was not on tour. But she was... doing the whole press buildup for that, and releasing a single. And, uh, you know. Just... living that Gaga life.

Sydnee: Yeah. Um, I will say that I think it is impressive—when did—Tey, do you know, like, when... I feel like Lady Gaga has been around my whole life, but I know that's now true. When did the—like, you know what I mean? Like, she feels like such a presence. When was her first album? When did Lady Gaga become Lady Gaga?

Taylor: Uh, I believe—'cause she's, uh—she's my age. I think it was around, like, 2005, maybe? She started poppin' off? Or at least started recording.

Sydnee: That's wild. She's... she's—oh, it was a tribute to New Orleans that she was performing.

Taylor: Oh, nice.

Sydnee: As I was looking up to see. I didn't know. Like I said, the sound was barely on and I just looked over and I was like, "There's Lady Gaga and a piano and a bunch of people standing around." But I didn't know what was happening.

Taylor: Yeah. The Fame came out in, what, 2008? So that's around the time that... you know, we got Just Dance and Poker Face.

Sydnee: Um... I think it's kind of impressive how quickly she's become a, uh... like a cultural force.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, I feel like she ascended from just—I don't wanna say "just pop star," like that's not a big deal. But you know what I mean? Like, there are some people who are like, really talented artists and we think of them that way. And then there are other people who become, like, a whole other entity unto themselves. And I feel like she very quickly became this thing, this idea, this concept that is Lady Gaga.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: Beyond her human self. Her birthday is the day after mine.

Taylor: Oh.

Sydnee: I mean, in 1986, so also... [laughs quietly] also three years later. But... but I didn't know we almost shared a birthday.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: A fellow Aries.

Taylor: That's very Aries energy. I can see that.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I can see that. I wonder if she would like to tackle people, too.

Taylor: [laughs] Well, she's very small. I don't know if that would be a good thing for her to do. And I think she has some... some medical issues that might interfere with her ability to tackle people .

Sydnee: Oh. But... that is—all that is true. I will say, this is the problem, though. My ability to tackle someone—whether or not it would be wise, whether or not I am strong enough, whether or not the other person could overpower me, none of that ever plays into my impulse to tackle someone.

Taylor: Okay. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] That's—see, that's the problem!

Taylor: It's not that you think you can. It's that you think you should.

Sydnee: It's the—it's the impulse that—it's the anger dictates.

Taylor: We have—

Sydnee: There's also this voice in my head that's always like, "But your will is stronger." [laughs quietly]

Taylor: See, we have the opposite reaction. 'Cause I think the moment that you're like, "I could just tackle them." I, like—that is more physical contact. I think—like, I wanna run... run far away from this person. I want—that's... you have fight, and I do the flight.

Sydnee: I was about to say, I don't... this is very true. I don't know if I have a flight instinct.

Taylor: Yeah. Sometimes, you know, you're just mid conversation with someone and it's a bad conversation and you just... turn around and run in the opposite direction.

Sydnee: No. I don't have that instinct.

Taylor: Oh. Well.

Sydnee: I only have the fight part.

Taylor: It's good that you don't act on that, probably.

Sydnee: No, it's true. I mean, like, verbally.

Taylor: Yeah. I mean, like, the—you know.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah, no, not physical. No, I don't get in physical fights. I have the impulse.

Taylor: [through laughter] You're really stuck on this.

Sydnee: I don't. But I just wonder if Lady Gaga feels the same. This reminds me of the interview, the very famous interview where they are asking her if she's trans.

Taylor: Oh yeah. Is that the one where she's got the diamond in her mouth the whole time? I think so. Yes.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: That's Anderson Cooper asking her, right?

Sydnee: Is it Anderson Cooper?

Taylor: I think it is.

Sydnee: I don't remember. But, like, they're asking, like... doesn't—does he say directly, "Do you have a penis?"

Taylor: Um... I don't...

Sydnee: Or does she say it first?

Taylor: Well, he asks the question, like—or I think it's framed as, "There is a rumor that you might have a male appendage."

Sydnee: Oh, is that what it is? Okay.

Taylor: And her response is just, "What if I did?"

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Which is great.

Sydnee: See, the combativeness in that. The complete, like, "I don't care." That is something I connect with very strongly. I love that. And that, I wonder—I feel like that interview plays heavily into when she became an icon.

Taylor: Well, that is the—that kind of—the combination of... of, like, creativity, but also with a very direct, like, sense of how we do things, is really powerful. From watching that documentary—and then there was a quote from this, uh—from the show she did recently, they kind of align with the same mindset. Where, like, she's saying a—they were having her... sing with this, like, diamond-encrusted microphone stand.

But they said, "Well, when you practice for the rehearsal, use a regular one so we don't have to repair the diamond one." And she was like, "No, I'm gonna practice with the one I'm gonna perform with, so I know the weight, so I know how it moves." And they're like, "But what if it breaks?" And she says, "You'll fix it."

[laughs quietly] Like, it's... it's... "C'mon, people. We have a job and we're gonna do it right." [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs] "You'll fix it."

Taylor: There's a scene in the documentary too where she's like, doing a costume change in the rehearsal, and it's a jacket and it has kind of a fussy lining in it. And she stops and she's like, "This has to go. This will slow us down. This will get in my way."

You'd think, like, for someone that has such spacey, wild, crazy, artistic ideas, that stuff would—the very practical, like, bare-bones of, "This is how we have to do things... " but she's very much that. And she's not mean about it, but she is just on top of it.

I feel like that's very... in line with your energy too. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] I don't know. I've wondered that about myself. 'Cause, see, as you're saying this, you know who else is an Aries is Mariah Carey.

Taylor: Oh. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Like, notorious for this sort of... like... like, she has somebody who, like, brings her a drink on set and she just, like, opens her mouth and they

just walk over and put a drink in her mouth. Like, and I wonder if I had had any sort of, like, amazing talent or skill, like, to back it up—'cause that's the thing, and that's what Lady Gaga has and what Mariah Carey has, right? If you're gonna be like that, I think that... like, culturally—I'm not saying that these are any rules. But I feel like this is sort of what we've dictated as a society.

You've gotta have a talent to back it up.

Taylor: Well—

Sydnee: If you're gonna be that way, you gotta be able to deliver. And that's the thing, is that they both deliver. And so... you get to be demanding.

Taylor: Yes. I think that you also have talents. I think specifically talents in the performing arts fields tend to garner a lot more of that, you know... the ability to put that aura out there. I don't think you—even if you're the most smartest, best doctor in the world, you can't just stand there with your hands up and look at your nurses and say, "Put my gloves on."

[laughs]

Sydnee: I—you know?

Taylor: Or can you? I don't know. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well... well, okay. Now, you say that. And that makes me think, like, I do think there are surgeons who have that attitude. Not to throw shade on surgeons, but like, if you look at... personality types, people who go into surgery... some of them, some of them, can have a little bit more of that god complex thing that all doctors get accused of having. I mean, and I think you gotta have a little bit of that if you're gonna cut into human bodies and feel okay about it, right? You gotta be pretty confident. [laughs quietly]

Um, but I do think some of them get treated a little bit that way. Like, I can think of people that I have worked with who get a little bit of that diva status, like, at work. Like, get catered to, in the ways that you would cater to the—I mean, it's not like with... you know. It's not by filling your rider or something.

But—[laughs] you know what I mean? Like, there are doctors who get catered to a little bit.

It is not me. And I cannot imagine a family doctor ever getting that kind of... I don't know. 'Cause I... 'cause I have, like, a really great bedside manner? [laughs] I don't, like—what? Like, you know what I mean? Like, what would that look like? I don't know.

Taylor: I think it's just—I guess it's just, how far—if you have that natural sense of confidence... you know, that—you enter a room and are just like, "I'm the only one that can fix this particular problem. I'm the only one that can make the right decisions here."

Uh, there's a lot of people that will just kind of naturally respond with, "Okay. Yeah. Probably so. Like, you seem to know what you're doing. I don't. So already." So whether you're faking it or you're, you know, telling the truth... I think... I think that is the overlap there, with you. [laughs]

Sydney: That's true. And I mean, I guess it's a little bit of arrogance, too.

Taylor: Well, arrogance... has a negative connotation. I think confidence is just knowing what you can do, and not being afraid to have other people know that.

Sydney: I—I agree with you. And when I—and I should clarify, when I say that, I do not mean that in a negative way about Lady Gaga.

Taylor: No.

Sydney: At all. I... know that I recognize arrogance sometimes, and I... like it? And so that is... my own—I mean, like, for me it is not entirely negative. I find it as an attractive quality sometimes, that kind of arrogance. Not—not complete. I don't mean like a jerk who's always a know-it-all. You know what I mean. Like, not—but like, a touch of it? Just a touch of it? I'm like, "Okay. Alright! I like that."

But I think it's because I connect with it.

Taylor: Yeah, well, you know. I mean, you know, you... [crosstalk]

Sydnee: Anyway.

Taylor: And that's the thing. Like, I don't... none of the—none of her behavior I think is... bad, in any way. It's just absolutely in control. And I mean, that's how... I was thinking back on her career, how easy it is for her to massively change up her whole thing. A lot of her albums sound very different. Her look is changing. When I was watching the movie it centers around her releasing Joanne, which was a big departure for her. She's very pared down. You know, it's a lot of, like, jean shorts and t-shirts, and, you know, the music has sort of a country influence at times.

And how unafraid she is—not even unafraid, how insistent she is on constantly... reinventing herself. Not just for the sake of reinvention, but because that is what she wants to do. And so that's how it progresses. And, I mean, how do you... how do you stay alive in the music world? Constantly reinvention, but purposeful. That takes a lot of confidence to say, "Yeah. This—the meat dresses and the crazy shoes? That was working great for me. But what if we get rid of all of that? What if we don't make dance music for, like, two whole albums? What about that? What if I go sing onstage with Tony Bennett for a while?"

Sydnee: I mean, and it really—it showcases, for one, what a talent she is. Because I think the ability to be that, you know, versatile, to change up your style and your, you know, your influences and all that, and your whole presentation, your persona, obviously speaks to underlying musical skill. You understand music inherently, and what to do with it, and how to perform. You must get that on a basic level to do that. Um, and you're exactly right. Like, being able to change is how you stay alive, and you're not a gimmick. That's the other thing. You avoid it becoming gimmicky.

Wearing the meat dress could've just been a gimmick, and she could be remembered as, "Remember that one artist who wore a meat dress?"

You know what I mean? Like, it... it's a... to walk that tightrope and pull it off, to wear the meat dress but then later [laughs quietly] do something else,

and still be relevant for all of it, is tricky. And she does it by, I think, being incredibly skilled underneath it.

If her music wasn't so good, if she wasn't so talented, she couldn't pull all that off.

Taylor: Absolutely. Well, and there's such a—there's such an idea behind it. 'Cause her looks were so flashy at first. It's almost like she went, "Okay. I want you to look at me."

And then when we're all looking she said, "Okay, now I want you to listen to me." Then we're all listening. And then she said, "Okay, now I want you to understand me." And did some more personal projects. And that's... you know. A very well thought out plan that from the outside just looks very... artsy, and like, where is she going next, and who knows? So unpredictable.

Sydnee: But I'm sure—and part of it is creativity, but I'm sure part of it also is like, understanding the business, and understand—you know what I mean? Like, I think there's a real understanding of what it—part of that too, I will say, like, as we're talking about Lady Gaga, a lot of what we're saying could apply to Madonna.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And I do feel like—I mean, I don't know if she's ever said this, but I feel like in some ways, um, Madonna sort of set that kind of mold for people. Like, if you want to stay relevant, here are some tricks. Here are some ways. And I imagine that artists like Lady Gaga have seen that and thought, "I know—" you know.

Taylor: I'm sure.

Sydnee: I see the difference. You know what I mean?

Taylor: There are only so many artists that fall into that kind of pantheon. Like, David Bowie would be the same. Somebody that just... changed a lot, look-wise, sound-wise, but always seemed to be doing something that felt authentic, not just change for change's sake. But apparently Madonna and

Lady Gaga... not had beef. I think Madonna maybe considered Lady Gaga a bit of a copycat... for a while. But... it's hard to say that. [laughs]

Sydnee: No. I don't think... I don't see copycat. I think that we pull from people, like, that we—that inspire us. I mean, 'cause, like... you know. There are a lot of references in Madonna's work to, like, early—like, she was obviously very influenced by Marilyn Monroe, who was not a singer, but still. Like, I mean, you know, you see—you see echoes of—and, like, now, like, Sabrina Carpenter did something that was very... what was it on? Was it on her Christmas special?

Yeah, it was the opening of the Christmas special. It was very Madonna, um... Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend. Like, that—melding those together. And then now it's Sabrina Carpenter. Like, that's what you do. You pull from people you... like, that inspire you. Um, I imagine that Lady Gaga had to have been somewhat inspired by Madonna, 'cause just when she grew up and being into music, how could she have not?

Taylor: Well, and she wears her influences—she always has been very open about them. Like, you know, even—we just—we planned to do this episode a week ago, and then she dropped Abracadabra, which has that wonderful, like, Siouxsie and the Banshees, like, clearly sampling that bit. But that's a great reference. That's a great touch point for that song.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. I, uh... I—one of—so I... first of all, let me say that I just learned what Poker Face was about.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Or what... [laughs quietly] and what the lyrics actually are, very recently.

Taylor: Yeah?

Sydnee: I had no idea. I've never looked at the lyrics, and I...

Taylor: Has she confirmed that?

Sydnee: She acknowledged it.

Taylor: Okay, she did. Alright.

Sydnee: Yeah. I believe—yeah, she confirmed that recently, which is why I found out about it. That was probably the first song that I heard that I was like, "Ooh. Who is this?" Like, that was—I think that was my introduction to Lady Gaga was Poker Face.

Um, and I thought that was great. And, uh, then we did, um... we used Born This Way when we did The Bully Plays. It was a bunch of plays, like, in children's theater. I directed, gosh, a million years ago. Like, before I had kids. That's how long. It feels like in the before times. Before I had children. Um, and they're a bunch of little short vignettes that are anti-bullying messages, and then they're presented as a collection, like an anthology of The Bully Plays. And you can actually pick and choose. Like, there's a ton of them in there and you can pick and choose which ones you want to put together into your show, right?

'Cause otherwise it's, like, four hours long. But anyway, there was one where, like, the whole premise is that there are gay kids, and they're being bullied by what they—they kind of paint 'em as zombies. All the other kids who just, like—they're like prejudice zombies. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs quietly] Ahh.

Sydnee: They're like zombie bigots. And then they—and they're all black and white. And then, like, they learn to, like—they learn acceptance, and then everybody ends up in color by the end. And you're supposed to, like, get creative with costumes. Like, everybody gets infected with the color. And then they're all, like, cured. The zombies are cured. And now they're fully fledged kids.

Anyway, we did that, whatever the thing was. And then we ended it with, like, a big musical number to Born This Way. [laughs quietly] With all the kids dancing in their new rainbow shirts.

Taylor: That would get you in a—

Sydnee: And it was just—I still remember, like... using that moment and that song, and all the kids doing, like, a flash mob. [laughs]

Taylor: That's adorable. That would get you in trouble now, I guess, in the school system. But...

Sydnee: Well, yeah. Those were sort of my early—and then for me, I gotta say, like, the first time I heard the song Edge of Glory I was like—I think that was when... my initial inclination was like, "Oh, this is like some fun dance music. This artist makes some fun dance music."

And there was something about Edge of Glory that really switched for me to like, "Oh! Well, this is—this is extra. This is more." You know what I mean? Like, this isn't just like, "I wanna turn on this music and dance."

I don't know why, but that was the song for me that got me really interested in Lady Gaga as like, I wanna engage with more of this, not just what happens to, like, come on the radio. Like, I wanna find out more about this artist, because that song—there was something about it that felt more epic.

Taylor: Hmm. Yeah, I—I also remember the first time I heard Poker Face. It's such a strange memory, because I was abroad at the time. I was in a gay club in Dublin. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I—there was a drag queen lip syncing to it. And I don't know why, when I first heard the voice, I thought it was like a—I thought it was a man's voice. Like a high-pitched, you know, man's voice.

Sydnee: Yeah, I can see that. Yeah.

Taylor: But it was sort of just because she sings with so much... what? I don't know. I don't know musical terms. The way she's using her voice could seem kind of androgynous. And I thought "Oh, that's cool. You know, that's interesting."

Um... but, uh, but then when she started coming out with her music videos for that—what was the—the Fame Monster? Was that the first one?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Taylor: Um, the visual language that she would use was so interesting to me. You know, I was always more into, I don't know, grittier rock or grunge or whatever. But I was so enticed by just how—how... how much narrative she pumped into her videos. And you could tell there was always a very deep idea behind all of the symbolism, the weird... I don't know. There was always something that felt magical about her visuals.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. I agree. Uh, her visuals in her videos and then in her public appearances, obviously.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um, and I think, you know, a big part of her as a, again, beyond her as a person but her as a concept, has been her advocacy. Like, just her unflinching advocacy. And I think what's been—there are a lot of artists that that applies to, right? Especially there are those, like, female pop stars who become quickly, like, loved and embraced by the gay community. And so, like, I think there's always that line, like, they embrace and love that part of their fan base. But is it just like, "Oh, you love me so I love you back"? Or is it advocacy?

'Cause those are not necessarily—I mean, they can both exist. But they don't necessarily. And I think what's cool about Lady Gaga is that it's been pretty unflinching, and I think that the interview she does where—you know, that famous interview, really showed that. Like, it's not just "You like my music so I'm here for you."

It's "No. This is who I am. This is part of what I care about, and I'm willing to put myself on the line for this."

Taylor: Well, and I mean, she came up as, like, a New York City club kid. Maybe the difference is music that the community sort of is like, "Oh, this is fun pop music."

Versus music made by somebody in the community.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: She's never—you know, I think she's bi? Um...

Sydnee: I feel like I have also read that. I feel that. But I don't know.

Taylor: She's def—

Sydnee: I don't know.

Taylor: I—I mean... she's definitely not straight. I feel like that's a safe statement to make from... many things she's said. [laughs]

Sydnee: I don't know. I mean... I don't know. You know, it's so hard. I feel like the conversation—what we're... it's so... there's been so much discussion about celebrities', like, sexual orientation, in a way that has not been thoughtful.

I don't mean what we're doing right now. But I mean, like, that exists, right? Like the Taylor Swift thing. There is so much conversation about Taylor Swift's sexuality that I don't think is being done in a very, like, thoughtful or sensitive way to the fact that like, this is a real human. And, like, this isn't really our business. And so I don't wanna fall into that trap.

Taylor: Well, no. Lady—

Sydnee: I don't really know. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Lady Gaga has talked about being with women before, openly.

Sydnee: Oh, has she? See, I don't know.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know what she has ever said.

Taylor: I just don't know if she's ever given herself, like, a specific label. But...

Sydnee: Yeah. And you don't—you certainly—I would never want to put a label on anybody. But yeah.

Taylor: Yeah. No, I think it's more that, you know, that—well, again, I mean, the same way that like, David Bowie had identified as bisexual, but then also he just stopped wanting to answer that question. Just like, why does it matter? And I don't know. I think that... it's one of those... there's enough evidence to be like, yeah, she's part of the community. [laughs] She's not just a—a straight girlpop who's like, "Oh, this is nice. The gays like me." [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah. No, I mean—

Taylor: Like she famously said about Katy Perry, Lady Gaga did when asked about her. She said, "You know what? I don't think she ever kissed a girl." [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: I... I can see that, uh, statement. I can understand that statement. [laughs] That's like a... the, um... uh, what was it? Where Sabrina Carpenter, why does nobody ever think she's a lesbian? [laughs quietly] That was on Saturday Night Live. I think—oh, what's her name? The really funny new cast member did that. But yeah, nobody ever has rumors about her. And it's like, yeah, no, I have never thought that. [laughs]

Taylor: No. No.

Sydnee: I've always kind of just thought like, well. I mean...

Taylor: And she covered—

Sydnee: Not that it's a problem.

Taylor: No. But she—

Sydnee: You can be straight. It's fine. It's okay to be straight.

Taylor: [laughs] It's fine.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: No, but I think that—I mean, Gaga's made music that is... it's for—it's not just fun dance music. It's for people to feel... like, there's a lot of uplifting, really beautiful, like... if you're feeling down—I mean, and not just for the queer community. She's covered some tough topics. Domestic violence, assault. She's got songs that I think you could only write those lyrics if you're coming from a place of deep understanding.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. And I think that that authenticity... it makes it—she never feels in her advocacy, when she speaks out, when she talks about things that are important, it never feels pander-y. It never feels, you know, like she... like this is a PR thing. It always feels authentic.

Which is part of, like, why I think she has such a devoted following. 'Cause people—we can sense that, right? We can tell in-authenticity pretty easily. And—well, I used to think we could, but Donald Trump's President, so maybe people can't. But...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: But some of us can! [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, I mean, it's interesting. I think one of the big parts of it is that she's had—I don't—anything she's done I don't think would ever qualify as a flop. But she's had things that have been more or less commercially successful. I mean, come on. She just was in the Joker movie that did not do well.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: I have—like, it never seems to touch her. You know.

Sydnee: No, it doesn't.

Taylor: I think Joaquin Phoenix probably had a harder time walking away from that film than she did. It was like, "Oh yeah, that happened. Anyway, I'm doing this now." [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I think you're exactly right. I think you're exactly right.

Taylor: Like, it's always she did the thing that she chose to do, and that's what she's going to keep doing. How people choose to respond to it is none of her business.

Sydnee: Which, you know, we talked about that. Like, that idea of an artist last week when we were talking about David Lynch. And I think it's that similar thing. Like, "I am making this." She makes things, and I think, you know, we've talked about what is art? Like, is it something that communicates something? I often think of art that way.

And so I imagine she is putting it out there thinking it will communicate, there will be people who will pick up on this. But if other people don't, that's fine too. Like, that's not... you know? "I'm not making it so you'll like it."

Taylor: Well, that's—and I think that's the hardest way to orient a creative brain, is to say not "What do people want? And then I'll make that so people will like what I do." But "What do I want to put out there? And the right audience will find it."

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: It's hard to think that way. Especially in the age of constant feedback. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, I mean, it takes a lot of guts, and a lot of talent. And a lot of confidence. Which again, you know, we kind of come back around to. Obviously she has all of that.

Taylor: A singular artist.

Sydnee: She really is. She—there will—there is nobody that you can, like, toss into a bucket with her, and I think that's quite a compliment.

Taylor: Is it weird to say, though, as much as I love her music, my favorite thing she's ever done—I mentioned it when we were talking about it last week. It's that one season, the season Hotel on American Horror Story.

Sydnee: She was really great on that.

Taylor: She's so iconic in that! [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: She is! Well, I think she's good at, like—she knows what she is. Like, what her, you know, public perception is. And she plays into it at times. Like, she embraces it. And I think that's cool.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: You know. I think that's a cool thing to do. But anyway, it's always fun to listen to Lady Gaga again, and talk about how great she is.

Taylor: Well, and I feel like with as much as you've been on your—your magical journey, you should love Abracadabra. A lot of people are saying it's a sonic spell. That's what—she gave us a protection spell for dark times.

Sydnee: Ohh! Well, I didn't think about it that way. I'll listen to it again with that in mind. Um... continuing on with lighter topics...

Taylor: [laughs] Continuing on with singular artists. Singular, unique creations.

Sydnee: Yeah. Next week I want to talk about Degrassi. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Wonderful.

Sydnee: Specifically I should say—I feel like we should be a little specific about this, because there was a lot of Degrassi, right?

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: We were into Degrassi: The Next Generation. Correct?

Taylor: Yes. But then there's—

Sydnee: That is—

Taylor: —there are several iterations of that, I believe. Right?

Sydnee: The one that you and I engaged with is the one that Drake was on.
[laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: I don't know how else to—I don't know—like, I don't know the other actors that were on it, and so I don't know how else to explain. It was the one where Jimmy... [laughs quietly] Jimmy the basketball player who, you know, now is Drake...

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: That one.

Taylor: That one. Alright.

Sydnee: [laughs] I don't know how else to describe it. That's the seasons that we watched. Those are the seasons we watched. Those were the ones that were of the right age for us. There were ones that were before, when we were little. And then there were ones that have come since that I am—I... I don't wanna say I'm too old to watch. But like, I don't know, at some point I stopped watching.

Taylor: I know I have no—I have no idea how long it continued after that.
[laughs] After that very specific, like, two to three years of watching Degrassi.

Sydnee: Is there any chance it's still on?

Taylor: Probably. Maybe.

Sydnee: I don't know. We'll find out before next week. [laughs quietly]
Alright. Well, thank you, Tey. And I can't imagine anybody hasn't listened to Lady Gaga, but certainly if you haven't, go back to the beginning. And then listen to all of it, and then become obsessed. And you can be a Little Monster too.

Um, but thank you, Tey. Thank you, Maximum Fun. You should go to Maximumfun.org and check out all the great shows that you would enjoy. And you can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org. And thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, Baby You Change Your Mind.

Taylor: This has been Still Buffering: your cross-generational guide to the culture that made us.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I am still buffering...

Taylor: And I am, too.

[theme music plays]

Taylor: [unintelligible]

Sydnee: [unintelligible] Well, I guess—

Taylor: Two singles [unintelligible].

Sydnee: [unintelligible] little tidbit.

Taylor: People are calling it [unintelligible]. She's going back to her roots. Her spooky roots. [unintelligible]

[chord]

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