

Sawbones: Lisztomania

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Clint: Sawbones is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it!

["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

Justin: Hello, everybody, and welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your co-host, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: I'm actually— you know what I'm gonna do, Syd? I'm gonna lower my microphone volume just to a skosh, because that's the level of my energy, of my excitement, to be recording this podcast with my wife. We were on vacation. We had a beautiful time in—

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: South Carolina. Rejuvenated by the sun, the surf, the sand.

Sydnee: Mm-hm. And the doing of nothing.

Justin: The doing nothing.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: But here we are doing things again, because we can only keep up the doing nothing for about five consecutive days.

Sydnee: That's it. That's it. No, it's good to take a break and do nothing every once in a while, I think for all of us, turn your brain off for a little bit.

Justin: I didn't do *nothing*. I did nothing from the perspective of the capitalist machine.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Justin: I actually did important work on my soul.

Sydnee: Right. I read a book.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And I rested, and I stared at the waves and contemplated—

Justin: Prayerful contemplation.

Sydnee: Existence. Yeah, so it was a great—it was a great week of relaxation.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: But it's time to get back to business. There was a—

Justin: Back to business!

Sydnee: Now, a big event happened—

Justin: Crime doesn't rest, and neither do we.

Sydnee: A big event happened, all over, but especially here in our house. The other night, we had some friends over to watch—to watch a podcast.

Justin: To watch a podcast.

Sydnee: To watch a podcast.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Because it was a very special podcast.

Justin: Yeah, about Taylor Swift.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: And I recreated—we recreated that on this week's My Brother, My Brother and Me. Did I tell you that? I just... I took down the questions that Jason asked.

Sydnee: Uh-huh?

Justin: So, because I figured that's gonna be the most popular podcast ever, so I could learn through the masters. So, I was just asking—I just used those *exact* questions to—

Sydnee: I believe I told you not to do that.

Justin: You did, but... we made it fun.

Sydnee: Uh-huh. You gotta be careful, listen—

Justin: The football men will never listen.

Sydnee: No, the football men won't listen, but here's—

Justin: Captain Haddock from Tintin can't find me, Syd.

Sydnee: Listen, we have a—we have a Swiftie in our house.

Justin: Yup.

Sydnee: We have a daughter who's a Swiftie in the house. I have a—

Justin: It's coming from inside the house!

Sydnee: I have a sister who's a Swiftie. We have many dear friends who are Swifties. And you do not irritate them. Don't irritate them!

Justin: That's kind of my rule for all the women in my life, but yes, especially the Taylor Swift fans. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yes. But it was—it was a big event here in our house, because of all of our adjacent Swifties. Not that we're not. I appreciate her music.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: But—

Justin: I knew she would struggle when she walked in.

Sydnee: Yes, but I think that like we're talking about like the fandom.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: You know, and that this was a big moment. And this is adjacent to our topic, this is where I'm going with this. You're looking at me like, "What are you doing, Sydnee? Why are you talking about Taylor Swift?"

Justin: That's not from them, that's just for you.

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And I was—and I just think it's important to notice that this wasn't just about like, we like this person's music. She's like a cultural phenomenon, right? And so—

Justin: It's a moment.

Sydnee: It was a moment. So anything it—

Justin: It was a moment. It felt—I was embarrassed—here's how big it was. I was—I, a professional podcaster, was embarrassed it was happening on a podcast. [chuckles] I was like, we shouldn't do this here. We need a larger—

Sydnee: This is bigger than a podcast.

Justin: This is bigger than a podcast. I think I stood on the couch and said, "This can't be a podcast. I make podcasts."

Sydnee: [titters] "If this is a podcast, what do we do?"

Justin: [chuckles]

Sydnee: No, listen, everyone has a podcast, and there's space for all of us to do what we do.

Justin: I mean, in this exact moment, I cannot have you quoting the title of my failed podcasting book at me. I beg of you right now, this is—I'm so vulnerable. You do not understand how bad the green-eyed monster is running rampant in my soul, honey. You can't talk about the book right now.

Sydnee: There—we got an email from a listener, Kate, thank you, Kate, about a topic that—and I'll be honest, as I delved into it, I thought, ooh, this will be a fun little medical, weird, historical thing. And it's maybe not as medical as our usual topics, but it's interesting. It was treated as a medical issue at the time.

Justin: Okay?

Sydnee: And I think it's relevant to things like, you know, fandoms like the Swifties. So, we're gonna talk about Lisztomania. Have you heard of Lisztomania?

Justin: Okay, when you said that, the only thing—and it's like probably a... I don't know, I hear the one part in that one Phoenix song where they say Lisztomania.

Sydnee: Right. But you don't know what they're referencing.

Justin: I don't remember the song. I remember that was the name of a song on the album as well. That's like literally, when you say Lisztomania, I hear, [sings] Lisztomania.

Sydnee: It's—

Justin: [sings] Lisztomania.

Sydnee: Yeah. It's interesting, because the—to me, the idea of like a fandom, like a collective, that's more than just like, "Hey, do you like this band? Oh, me too. Cool." But like... you know, like as a—as a force.

Justin: Yes, yeah.

Sydnee: It feels like a very modern idea, because I kind of connect it with the internet. Like, how do you coalesce that without the power of the world wide web?

Justin: That's—you know what I would say, Syd? I think that what the web has enabled us to do is make those sorts of connections, at that level of enthusiasm, about smaller things. You know what I mean? Like, Beatlemania, obviously, the one that pops in.

Sydnee: Sure.

Justin: I think that can happen on that scale, because of the size of the thing, right?

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Justin: And then you can have smaller and more niche fandoms, because it's easier for them to find each other these days.

Sydnee: Right. Which is—which is evidenced by the fact that, occasionally, TikTok will surface to me a clip from Grease 2.

Justin: Yes. It's also evidenced by the fact that I have a career where I'm gainfully employed doing what I do. Where, in a much more just age, I would have been some sort of... street clown. Or a poorly-regarded dock worker. [chuckles]

Sydnee: But this is not—this is not merely a modern convention, the idea of a fandom's obsessive—and when I say obsessive, I'm not—that can be like a critical term. I just mean something that would—your love for something would become so emotionally overpowering that you would demonstrate that in a very like public, dramatic fashion, of some way.

Justin: Sure, it's where—

Sydnee: Does that make sense?

Justin: Where do we go from, "This is the kind of music I like," to, "This is the only thing that I'm thinking about."

Sydnee: Right.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Okay. So, let's go back to October 22nd, 1811.

Justin: *Whoa!*

Sydnee: To the Kingdom of Hungary.

Justin: Sorry, I was thinking about doing more of a... time tunnel thing.

Sydnee: Oh, like a time tunnel.

Justin: [chuckles] Like I was thinking about more of a time tunnel, on Sawbones, that we could start doing.

Sydnee: Oh?

Justin: Okay, so can you say it again?

Sydnee: Okay. So, let's go back to October 22nd, 1811.

Justin: *Whoa...*

Sydnee: Oh, do I have to do it with you?

Justin: I would love—you're in—

Sydnee: I'd rather not.

Justin: You're in the time tumbler with me?

Sydnee: I'd rather not.

Justin: Sorry! What?

[group chuckle]

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: I'm just—

Justin: I appreciate your accent so much that I'm not gonna make you get the time tumbler with me. I'll steer the time tumbler, and you're cool, calm and collected.

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: You can steer, actually, and you're like focused.

Sydnee: Move to the left.

Justin: And I'll just like grab the walls like, "whoa." Okay—

Sydnee: Move to the—okay, I'm programming in the date. This is the last time. Tap-tap-tap, October 22nd, 1811.

Justin: Oo-aa-aah-whoa! *Whaa!*

Sydnee: Okay, we're in the king—

Justin: Oo-aa-aah-oo-aah!

Sydnee: Oh, we're still... we're still going?

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: We're in the Kingdom of Hungary. Franz Liszt is being born. I don't have a lot of details about the birth, but that's where our story starts. He's been born, and so everything can come from there. His father was an amateur musician, and so he encouraged Liszt to pursue music, because he loved music. He wasn't making a career off of it. That's... gosh, some things are just—

Justin: [sings] Careful the things you say.

Sydnee: But it turned out he was a prodigy. Hm... ten thousand hours.
[titters]

Justin: Ah, see, no, I do, I—you have to wonder—

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: It is like, "It turns out."

Sydnee: "It turns out."

Justin: [chuckles] "You know what's crazy, guys? I make my son play piano all the time—"

Sydnee: "And he's a prodigy."

Justin: "It turns out, I'll be darned, he's a prodigy at it." [chuckles]

Sydnee: And he was. He was performing publicly by the age of nine. Should we tell our kids this?

Justin: Honey, you joke, but every time I read a story like this, I'm like, six! We're hosed! No way! We're done! It's over! We missed it!

Sydnee: I know. [titters] He was composing by eleven.

Justin: *Eh*, Charlie just turned eleven! We're hosed!

Sydnee: [titters] And there was a—

Justin: We whiffed it!

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: She was proud that she made her bed today! We've screwed up!

Sydnee: Aw... she was. It was so sweet. They're reading a book in class about the importance of making your bed, or something, I don't know, anyway. So, and there's a story where he did a public concert where he was eleven, and Beethoven was there. And afterwards, he like came up on stage and gave him a kiss on the forehead. Like, "Yes."

Justin: Talk about a different era, huh? [chuckles]

Sydnee: [titters]

Justin: "Excuse me! Excuse me?!"

Sydnee: Although—

Justin: "Mr. Beethoven, what are you—that's my son!"

Sydnee: It is possible that this story is untrue.

Justin: [chuckles]

Sydnee: Anyway, the point is, he was celebrated—

Justin: I like that at the end of the anecdote, after I've already done the jokes. That's much better, thank you.

Sydnee: No, that's good. That's good. I like to—I always like to note that on Sawbones. We try to only spread truth. And so, when I tell a story that like—

Justin: Now more than ever.

Sydnee: Historians debate this, like it may be, but probably not. But like, it's not—the point is, he was celebrated. After his father passed away, he had like this period of his life where he was sort of like introspective and wandering and drinking and smoking. And he wasn't sure what, I don't know, "Music, is this my thing?" And... you know. You know! We all go through it, right? Like that—

Justin: Yeah, I've been there.

Sydnee: Yeah, right? And then he saw the great violinist, Paganini, perform in 1832. And he realized, "He is great at that, and I want to be great like that. But—"

Justin: "We should start a band!"

Sydnee: No, he didn't start a band.

Justin: Oh...

Sydnee: He just said like, "I want to also be a virtuoso. A genius." And—

Justin: Dang, that's all it took, huh? [titters] Yeah.

Sydnee: And so, he started practicing a lot more and, you know, composing a lot more, and performing a lot more. He married a Countess, and that was a big deal. He challenged another pianist, Thalberg, to a public—

Justin: Sorry, I didn't, I... sorry, say it again? He challenged what?

Sydnee: Another pianist?

Justin: Oh, okay. Sorry, go ahead. I'm sorry, I misheard.

Sydnee: This is Sawbones.

Justin: And I misheard.

Sydnee: Yeah, we don't—we don't do genital jokes on Sawbones. [titters]

Justin: I did—I wasn't even, I just misheard.

Sydnee: I know that on some of your other podcasts, that sort of humor, that sort of toilet humor—

Justin: You're brining puerile energy, Squid. Sorry, it's not me.

Sydnee: [titters] So, he challenged another pianist, Thalberg, to a—

Justin: What?

Sydnee: Thalberg. Thalberg.

Justin: Thalberg! Okay—

Sydnee: That was his name! His last name! I don't—

Justin: It's just hearing! It's just hearing!

Sydnee: To a public piano duel, because he had criticized him. He had said some stuff like, "I don't know, I think it's kind of boring." And everybody—and the other guy was like, "Excuse me? Just because you're all dramatic doesn't mean I'm boring. I'm just really good at this." And so then they had a public duel, like where they played pianos.

Justin: The play—they saw—they tried to see who could play the quietest. It was a pianisting contest.

[pause]

Sydnee: Do you feel good about that?

Justin: Yeah, actually, I do.

Sydnee: All I could think of—I was picturing this, a public piano duel. And you know, in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*—

Justin: Hundred percent. Daffy versus Donald?

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: One of the craziest scenes. That it even exists is, honestly, kind of a wild thing. But yes, a hundred percent, honey, it's frame by frame burned into my memory.

Sydnee: Yes, that's—and that is exactly what I'm picturing these two doing. If you're interested, because I was reading like, who won? Like, who did—who did critics think was better between these two guys? Whose music, by the way, I was not familiar with prior to researching this episode. Who was better? And it seemed like it was kind of a draw. Like there were people who said Thalberg is like the like more trained, like better, like classically better, of the craft. But that Liszt brings this sort of like new dramatic energy to it that was intriguing. And so—

Justin: [spoofing an Italian accent] And he's doing stuff with the face! You wouldn't believe, he pulls these faces! He's like, "Ah! Or "Whoa!" It's amazing!

Sydnee: This isn't far off from why it was popular. We're gonna get into this.

Justin: [chuckles]

Sydnee: So anyway, I guess it was kind of a draw. Everybody was like, "I don't know, they're both good at piano. Why did we do this?" That was kind of the sense.

Justin: "Because we like piano!" And everyone was like, "Yeah!" And someone was like, "Somebody, please invent TV!"

Sydnee: [titters] But then, after this, this is when his life started to change. So, he was like, I said he had married this Countess, and things weren't going well. So, he had separated from the Countess. He was out there on his own. He's a single guy again... you know, composing and—

Justin: Oh, listen, you don't need to tell me how it is when you're a single guy out there composing on the town. [chuckles]

Sydnee: And he's touring Europe, and he does all these concerts in Berlin, in the winter of 1841, into 1842. And at this time, he becomes very popular. Like as he's touring a lot and performing a lot—

Justin: It just gets like—

Sydnee: People really start to notice him. So, I don't know if it's his new like single guy energy?

Justin: Maybe it is... You know, the piano is such a sexy instrument, a romantic instrument. You have to have extremely long fingers, from what I understand, to be really proficient at it, and people love that. And that could be at the mystery of the that.

Sydnee: So, I don't—I don't know that it was that, because there were—

Justin: It could—it might not have been that.

Sydnee: There were lots of, I mean, at the time—

Justin: I don't have all the answers, obviously.

Sydnee: The idea of somebody like touring and playing piano would not be weird, right? There were lots of... you know, composers. There were lots of people doing that. So like, why was he attracting so much attention? And so, it's interesting, if you read about his performances. First of all, like, I mean, I guess he is just coming off of this like broken marriage, so maybe it is sort of like that "I can do it with a broken heart" energy.

Justin: Okay, we love that.

Sydnee: Right? Yeah.

Justin: Oh my gosh, I could be the next [Ms. Liszt??].

Sydnee: But there also is a lot written about the way he performed. So at the time, performing your classical music, you would sit and you would play your songs, and it was all very buttoned up. And you know, I mean, it was a—it's a conservative affair. Like you're not—you dress nicely, you sit with your—

Justin: It's chamber—it's chamber music.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: This is a chamber.

Sydnee: And this was not the way Liszt performed.

Justin: Oh...

Sydnee: So, it is noted that he was very handsome.

Justin: Oh my.

Sydnee: You can look up pictures of him and decide for yourself.

Justin: You know I am right now!

Sydnee: And he was thought to be very handsome. He had long hair and very nice features. And as he would play, it was described that he would toss his long hair back frequently.

Justin: Ah, this dude!

Sydnee: And run his hands through his hair.

Justin: Oh, this looks like kind of your—kind of your type of guy, Sydnee. He's like kind of dashing.

Sydnee: Does he look—oh, I didn't think he looked like you?

Justin: No, no—ah, . thank you. No, like your kind of guy, where it's like that dark, broody guy. You like that kind of like effeminate, broody guy energy.

Sydnee: And he did have a dark—

Justin: I mean, look at this man! Look at this man! He looks like... I mean, like, what would you say? Like a sad—okay, kind of like...

Sydnee: I don't know, he's got Tam Lin energy in that picture.

Justin: It's like a little—he does look like Tam Lin. Like kind of like a Roger Daltrey in like his older era. And younger, he's kind of like... a little bit Draco Malfoy-coated, I would say, if that makes sense? A little bit.

Sydnee: So, he's got—he's got kind of—kind of like the aristocratic nose.

Justin: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: You know?

Justin: Very elegant. He looks cool. Looks like a cool dude, honestly. Even in his older years, his hair just kind of got like wilder. I don't know, man.

Sydnee: Yeah, so he's got like—yeah, he's got like the long hair. And he would like, as he would play, he would, first of all, he would make—like he would look at the crowd, he would make eye contact. He would make faces in reaction to his music. It wasn't just sort of like the like... grimly, you know, focus, like pounding away at the keyboard. He was like—

Justin: Before it was like—yeah, it went from like—

Sydnee: He was putting his whole body into it.

Justin: It was like [sings] bum-bum-bum-bah. And he made it more like, [sings] bum-bum-bum-uh-uh-uh-uh.

Sydnee: Yeah, a little—yeah, he put a little spice in it. And he would like toss his hair around, and he would make eye contact.

Justin: You've made that—I've think you've mentioned that tossing of hair so many times, people are starting to get suspicious.

Sydnee: Well, they talk about it! Like if you read in the articles about it, like he would, that was a big thing. The fact that he would like—and like people would write about watching the performance, and how many times he like ran his fingers through his hair, and then began to play again. And as he began to do these concerts all over Berlin, he got a reaction that previously we had not seen to other, you know, great pianists and performers of the time.

Justin: Okay?

Sydnee: And hence, the beginning of Lisztomania. So, I want to tell you about this cultural phenomenon, Lisztomania, and what, you know, what we sort of draw from it today. But before we do that, we gotta go to the Billing Department.

Justin: All right, let's go!

[theme music plays]

[ad reads]

Justin: So far, this—honey, you said it was light on the medical, but like I do not know why this man could possibly be medically related?

Sydnee: So, people began to attend his concerts in droves, because they heard about, you know, how great his music was, but also how like handsome he was, that was big thing. And they started to observe, especially women, reacting in a way that at the time would have been very...

inappropriate and odd for women to act in public, at some—especially at a piano concert, right? So, women began to fight over like getting closer to him, trying to get to the front row, trying to get his attention during the performance.

Justin: Oh, trying to jockey for position.

Sydnee: He noticed this, and would begin to like sort of stoke that by leaving his gloves or his handkerchiefs.

Justin: Oh my gosh, I love that.

Sydnee: Where women could like fight to get to the stage and get them.

Justin: Or so—or so inclined men, Sydnee, let's—this is an enlightened era.

Sydnee: Yes. Certainly, certainly. But women begin to like fight over these things that he would leave behind. And I mean to the point where they describe situations where like he left a handkerchief on the piano, and women like tackled each other, grabbing at the handkerchief, and ripping it to shreds so they could each get a piece of his handkerchief.

Justin: Whoa? Oh, I do appreciate that.

Sydnee: There was another performance where he had a glass of water, and he, at the end of the performance, he left some of the water still on stage. And women rushed the stage to take a sip from the glass—

Justin: That is so romantic, I love that.

Sydnee: That his lips had touched.

Justin: I love that.

Sydnee: And again, I know that this sort of like behavior like kind of, you know... fans of a musical artist—or like at a concert, people kind of going wild. This doesn't sound odd by today's standards, right? Like we all go to concerts and we see our favorite artists, and we're screaming and we're

yelling. Now, I have never attempted to rush the stage at a Weezer concert to like grab... Rivers' glasses or something. Like, I wouldn't do that, but—no, I would never. I would never. I would never. But I can see where like, again, by today's standards, the idea that a fan would really try to get close to someone. I mean, like, we know that happens. We see that happen.

Justin: When Travis is at Fallout Boy, he isn't thinking it's an arms race, or a scene, he's thinking, "It's a concert, and I'm enjoying it. But I'm not gonna try to go up there with my best friends, Pete and the gang."

Sydnee: And the gang?

Justin: "And join them on stage."

Sydnee: Mm-hm, I wondered how many names you were gonna be able to drop there.

Justin: You would think because of the Teen Titans episode, I would—I would know more, but...

Sydnee: I don't know. There was... there was a—people noted that he would smoke cigars. And so it was not uncommon for him to like toss his cigar stubs out for women to like battle over, to keep as a souvenir. I mean, can you—I mean, that's a little grody to me, like...

Justin: That's kind of grody.

Sydnee: "Can I take home your...."

Justin: "Hey, let me have your stubbins."

Sydnee: Cigar stub.

Justin: "Let me have your stubbins."

Sydnee: And women began to like, I love this, to wear little cameos of him. So like—

Justin: Merch?

Sydnee: Yeah, this is like merch. No, literally, like the, he—there was merch made around him. Which, again, at the time, this was very odd. This is not—

Justin: I mean, my man is—

Sydnee: We're—it is eighteen—early 1840s, in Berlin.

Justin: Yeah, but my man's inventing the enamel pin game. Like, represent. Like, I—

Sydnee: He did!

Justin: Respect to you, my friend. Thank you for that. Thank you for those pins. They put a lot of food on my kids' plates. Thank you.

Sydnee: [titters] Can you imagine that? That was the origin of this, where all of these ladies dressed in their finery, you know, usually very demure, very mindful. And instead, they are screaming and yelling, throwing things at the stage, tearing at his handkerchiefs, and wearing dainty cameos with his face depicted on them, to his concerts.

Justin: You ever think about—sorry, brief aside.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Justin: Just about the demure thing. If you think about language and how like ideas get attached, and how hard it is to like trace the origins of language, because it's so malleable. And obviously, things have not been on the TikTok scale of like virality, where we can spread the idea so quickly. But like, it's wild to think that there will be a time, and it may not be permanent, but there will be a time where like, as a culture, if someone mentions the word demure, it will be tied to the word mind—like someone else will say mindful.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Justin: And in fifty years, we may still be doing it, and not know why we do it.

Sydnee: And no one will know why.

Justin: It's just like, I don't know, man, we just always say demure and mindful together. I don't—I don't know why we do it. [chuckles] That's just the way—I feel—it feels weird if someone says demure and I don't also say mindful at some point.

Sydnee: One woman famously gathered one of his cigar stumps, this was a common thing, and put it in a locket. And had it monogrammed, like diamond encrusted, "FL."

Justin: That's cool.

Sydnee: Franz Liszt. And wore it around. Which, again, by today's standards, this is very like...

Justin: Honestly, babe, by today's standards, I'm jealous. We don't get anybody like this. You know what I mean? Like...

Sydnee: Because you don't—well, I mean this—and I think, I don't know, that would be—I guess you could generate that energy with a live podcast. But like, he's playing piano.

Justin: It's different.

Sydnee: And again, there's something—there was something there was something very physical about his performance that—I mean, that's clearly communicated. There was something about it that elicited passion in the audience.

Justin: With all due respect, I don't actually need my wife to sit here and just explain to me why playing piano is so much more sexy than podcasting. I do get it, but I would love to move on.

Sydnee: [titters] So, in response to all this, in response to these performances, the, you know, excitement around him, there were fainting spells. There were ladies not acting the way ladies act. So, there was a writer, Heinrich Heine, who would write these—there were these inserts that would kind of go in like newspapers of the day.

Justin: Okay?

Sydnee: To like fill you in on popular culture things that were happening. And he wrote musical—they were called, this is a French word, [futons??]. Futons.

Justin: Futons.

Sydnee: Futons?

Justin: Futons.

Sydnee: So, little inserts about like, "Hey, I saw a concert, and here's what it was like," kind of thing, right?

Justin: Gotcha.

Sydnee: Like, review—little reviews. Little reviews. I get the sense, reading them—I read through a bunch of his about different composers. And there—like there's a little bit of like, I don't know, E News energy to them.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: You know what I mean? And just a little—a little catty. Just a little.

Justin: Yeah, a little bit.

Sydnee: Yeah. And in them, he coined the term—like, he watched Franz Liszt perform, and he said it has invoked a Lisztomania.

Justin: That's really good.

Sydnee: And I think what's important to understand about that, because when you hear Lisztomania, in this context, and then, of course, you think Beatlemania, because we exist now. And it doesn't feel like, okay, so what's the big deal? Everybody really loved it. And he said Lisztomania. To use the word mania at this time and place in history—

Justin: Because—

Sydnee: Was a big deal.

Justin: Right. If I had to guess, the—it's sort of one of those things where like the mania—the teeth have been taken out of the word, because it has been used in this PopSci sense, for so many years.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: Is that right?

Sydnee: Yes. Nowadays, we can say mania at the end of anything, you know, like—

Justin: Because of this! I mean—

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: You know, probably in part because of this. Like, obviously, there's different like—appending "mania" did not begin with Lisztomania, I would guess.

Sydnee: Right.

Justin: But like, for sure.

Sydnee: Yes. And so, you can say—you can say that at the end of something now, and it doesn't necessarily mean something major. Now, at the time, the idea of a mania was a lot—I mean, it was a medical condition.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: The idea that someone was manic, experiencing mania over something, or experiencing just the concept of mania, would mean that they were acting in a way that was irrational, maybe... confusing, maybe dangerous?

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: Dangerous to themselves, perhaps. Acting in a way that could cause themselves harm, acting in a way that might bring harm to others. I mean, if you said someone was experiencing mania, you would take that very seriously.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: You know, if you got a—well, you wouldn't get a phone call, but if you got a letter. [titters] Like, "I'm so sorry, dear lady, your cousin is experiencing mania," you'd be very upset by that, right? Like that would—that's not something that you would—

Justin: "It is—I will mention, it is Lisztomania. But still, a mania."

Sydnee: [titters] But the other—the other connotation with mania isn't just that it was a medical condition that would need to be treated in some way—and perhaps especially among women, not just treated, but maybe we needed to put you somewhere to keep you away from people, right?

Justin: Oh, no.

Sydnee: So like, a woman experiencing mania this time in history may be institutionalized, because she is a danger to the fabric of society at that point. Because the other thing about mania is that it was thought to be contagious.

Justin: Oh?

Sydnee: So, if I, as a big Liszt fan, show up at the concert, and I am a woman, and I am, you know, I—probably not throwing underwear. I don't—I

didn't read any reports of that. Probably like throwing my handkerchief, right? Like I don't know.

Justin: Petticoats, petit fours, all those old...

Sydnee: And I'm wearing the cameo, and I'm screaming. And I'm doing unseemly things for a lady of the time. Perhaps the lady next to me, who otherwise is an upright citizen—

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Would do the same thing. And so, when he wrote that there's a Lisztomania, this was a big deal. Because what he is saying is, he is invoking something in society that will change the way people act, specifically women, and other women will also become infected with this.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And we will begin to see changes among the way our ladies behave. And this is a call to action, in a sense. "We must stop this. We've got to stop people."

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And I will say, I mean—

Justin: I would be interested to test the contagious theory in a—just like get a Liszt fan in a room with someone who's never heard his music before. And just see if she could like... just stand near her long enough. Like, "You get it, right? *Liszt*. Right? Franz Liszt?!"

Sydnee: "Look at his hair!"

Justin: "*Right?*" No, no, no, you can't have any—

Sydnee: Oh?

Justin: It's got to be contagious, right? So she can't be reacting to—

Sydnee: So you just have to be near.

Justin: You just have to be near the person who has Lisztomania, just to see if they like get it. It's like being a Doors fan, you know what I mean? They're not made, they're born. You know, you just are a Doors fan, or not. Maybe it's like that? It's just like, you're around the person and you're like, "I don't know who Franz Liszt is or what he does, but I am crazy about him."

Sydnee: "But I am sold. Get me a lithograph."

Justin: [chuckles] "Get me a lithograph and an enamel cameo! I'm crazy for this guy."

Sydnee: "I'm in for it. Where are his cigar butts?"

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: So—[chuckles] and if you look at some of the critics of the time, they—a lot of them talked about how his music was different. Sometimes it was discordant. Like he was experimenting with different styles and different compositions that were unique, and not everybody liked him. Like, if you read a lot of the music critics, they will all say—and again, largely men. So, I don't know if that—if that colors their review. But they would say like it's not really for everyone. This isn't as easily digestible as a lot of the music at the time, which everyone would say like, "That was beautiful."

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: It wasn't always beautiful. Sometimes—

Justin: It was a little more challenging.

Sydnee: It was challenging.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: And some—and that spoke to the culture of the time. A lot of people think that it had to do with the attitude of people in northern Germany and the Berliners, and that they had a different—like that we were changing society at this point. They were looking at like challenging conventional ways, and that this was sort of a counter-culture. Liszt represented a counter—and so, the mania that evolved around him was, it's like we're using this as an excuse to be new and different and change.

Justin: Oh? And so we're using the mania as a way to like tamp down this like social shift that we're not maybe crazy about.

Sydnee: But people took that really seriously. There was a, in a Munich paper in 1843, one reporter said, "Liszt fever, a contagion that breaks out in every city our artist visits, and which neither age nor wisdom can protect, seems to appear here only sporadically in asphyxiating cases, such as appeared so often in northern capitals, need not be feared by our residents with their strong constitutions." So you see Munich, Southern Germany, saying, "We will not be infected by the contagion of—"

Justin: "We are safe from him!"

Sydnee: "Lisztomania, like the Northern Germans will." But I think that if you then like fast forward—so, eventually, and I will say like, Liszt was very popular for quite a while. He ended up with this sort of tortured romance, where he fell in love with a married woman, and she had to go get her marriage annulled by the Catholic Church. And then they—

Justin: Ooh, spicy.

Sydnee: Eventually refused. And so, then he entered like a monastery for the last of his life, and just composed away in a monastic cell somewhere, writing his tortured songs all by himself. And so, he was this very romantic figure. You know, people were interested by that, intrigued by that. Eventually, obviously, his popularity waned, and there were other musical artists. But it does sort of give us a road map for when you fast forward to like Beatlemania, where you saw, you know, people at Beatles concerts, famously, acting much the way that we described these people at Liszt's concerts, you know, behaving. And I think what it just sort of underlines is

this idea of mania being used as a way to stoke fear about cultural change and shift. People are acting in a new way.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And we can use popular culture to help explain that for us, or give us like a cover. "I'm only acting that way because I'm so wild about this music."

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: When really, we're acting that way because we're changing, we're moving forward, we're progressing. And I think that's really fascinating. Nowadays, we don't hear the word, you know, if—I don't think anybody says Swiftomania, about Taylor Swift.

Justin: I bet you could Google it. There's gotta be something, right?

Sydnee: But I mean, it's the same idea. People were super excited to watch that podcast, who would never watch that podcast, because they love her so much. And so, but when you hear that, you don't think like, "Oh my goodness, they're dangerous." Although... although, I would say, echoes of this during the election, when Taylor Swift famously came out and told people to vote, and then you heard a lot of voices from the conservative side saying like, "Taylor Swift is indoctrinating people and she's dangerous."

Justin: Right, right, right.

Sydnee: It's the same idea. It's the same—we're calling on that same idea, that people really loving something, and using it as a way to explain them moving forward and progressing and changing culture and society. There are always going to be establishment voices who say, "This is dangerous."

Justin: Hey, I have a question, as we were looking at the—you were talking about some of those individual anecdotes, and they're very specific. And it made me wonder like, this is somebody who was, you know, making merchandise, had different ideas about like how to grow his career. Do you wonder about if the—his people or him himself were like fanning these

flames? Like, were these stories encouraged? Like you think about who is in charge of history for this stuff, I wonder if some of these specific stories were preserved because he or like the people managing him like wanted the narrative.

Sydnee: I definitely, and I'm not an expert on Liszt, certainly—I've read some—I've read a lot about him to research this episode, but I'm certain there are people who know a lot more about him than me, obviously. But I got the impression, from what I read, from quotes from him, from people writing about his performances, that he was, if not encouraging, certainly not discouraging this sort of discourse around him.

I think he did understand that he was doing something beyond playing music. That performing and becoming a cultural figure is more than just whatever your craft or skill is. That you can build something around it that can change the way people see you, and see music and see culture. I think he understood that.

And you know, I think in the—in the grand scheme of artists and performers, there are differences in that, right? Like there's some people who just grind away and are super-skilled, and do what they do so well, but aren't necessarily trying to build a culture around them. And then there are other artists who pursue that. I always think of Jimmy Buffett when I think that.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Jimmy Buffett was beyond a musician. He built a lifestyle. And Franz Liszt did it too.

Justin: Thank you so much for listening to our podcast. We hope you've enjoyed yourself. I sure enjoyed having you here, if I'm being honest.

Sydnee: Yeah, and I'll do—I'll get more medical next week. I was just so fascinated once Kate told me about Lisztomania, and then I started reading—

Justin: It's your show.

Sydnee: About it, and—

Justin: Do whatever you want, it's your show.

Sydnee: I think the idea of mania—

Justin: If the—hey, listen! If the—if the Kelce brothers can do an episode about Taylor Swift on their football show, certainly, we can do one about Lisztomania?

Sydnee: We'll get—we'll get more medical next week. Don't worry, I'll get—I'll get something gory or gooey or bloody for you.

Justin: Thanks so much for listening. Thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song, Medicines, as the intro and outro of our program. Thanks to you for listening. That's gonna do it for us, until next time. My name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: And as always, don't drill a hole in your head.

["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

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