

Still Buffering 459: Lily Allen

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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: Taylor, it was a busy time on the internet.

Taylor: Yeah?

Sydnee: So much has been happening.

Taylor: There's always so much happening. What's caught your eye?

Sydnee: Well, okay. Let me just get this out of the way. Yes, a lot of things have been happening that we're not gonna talk about on a comedy podcast. I have no interest in discussing the government shutdown or the ending thereof. That is not...

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: A productive conversa—I don't think the internet needs to know our thoughts on that.

Taylor: No. I mean, you can probably figure 'em out, but... [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. So, yes. I mean, a lot of things have been happening that are actually, like, relevant to our lives and world events. But then also... [laughs quietly] but then also things that aren't necessarily relevant to our lives and world events have been happening as well.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: Um, and those are the things that are more fun to talk about.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: So, I believe you also noticed the person on TikTok who was calling... I don't wanna just say churches... worship centers.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: Religious and spiritual centers, asking for a can of formula for a crying baby. Not a real baby. It was just a recording of a baby.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But the—

Taylor: Just for added effect.

Sydnee: Not that she told them that. That would be wild. "Hi. Please send me a can of—"

Taylor: "I recorded my baby crying."

Sydnee: "Please send me a can of formula for my fake baby."

It was for a fake baby, but it was a social experiment.

Taylor: Yeah. And, I mean, now everybody's caught on to it, so I don't think can continue. But I think the evidence she collected was pretty powerful enough to make a point.

Sydnee: It was—her point was, if you call a church or another place of worship and say, "I have a baby. It's crying. You can hear it. There's the proof. Hasn't eaten since last night. I have no money. I'm not asking for money. I want one can of formula. I will come to you to get it. I just don't have the money to buy it. Can you help me?" Will they help you?

The answer, overwhelmingly, was no.

Taylor: Nope. Uh, yeah. Most—and it's, you know, you're saying worship centers, 'cause she didn't call all Christian establishments, but she called mainly Christian establishments.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And the ones that did say yes... the Buddhist temple said yes. The, um, Muslim—

Sydnee: There was an Islamic center, I believe, that said yes.

Taylor: There was an Islamic center that, um... there were a few—of the Christian churches, I think they were largely Catholic.

Sydnee: There were a couple Catholic churches I think that said yes. And then, like, a small Appalachian—something Christian. I'm not really sure. I don't know if it was a nondenominational Christian, or—I'm not really—I don't know. Something Christian.

Taylor: Was it like 5 out of 30, or 7 out of 30, something like that?

Sydnee: Something like that, yeah. Um, I—I don't think... okay. Let me say that on one hand, I'm not particularly surprised, because I think that the people answering the phone... are thinking very—I mean, you can hear it in their conversation. They just start off thinking pragmatically. "We don't have a food pantry. We don't have formula in this building. We don't have a program for that."

And so they start there. And I think a lot of people, if they were asked that question, would start thinking about resources first. So I don't fault people for starting on the—"I know that there's an issue. SNAP benefits aren't happening. What are the resources in my community to handle this issue?"

Like, I don't think you're a bad person if that's your first thought. But what the problem is is that nobody gets to the next level, which is if those resources are not providing, or if those resources are not exist—like, if they don't exist, this is a human being who needs food for their baby. That should be the next level. And it did shock me how nobody got there. [laughs quietly] Or so few people got there.

Taylor: Well, 'cause that's... there was some response from some of the churches, which ranged from, like, I would say a crappy response of, like, some feeble excuses, to full-on "This woman's a demon." [laughs quietly] "A temptress!"

Sydnee: "A witch."

Taylor: But—yeah, a witch! And then, like—then quoting the mistranslated Bible verse, "Though shalt not suffer a witch to live." That's not—it's poisoners is what the actual word means. It's allegorical.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: So it was never about witches. Let's just make that clear. But even the ones that try to say, like, "Well, you know, it could be a scam."

It's like, there is no way this—what scam would it be to get a single can of baby formula from a church?

Sydnee: Right. Like, what is the scam, there? You think she's gonna turn around the sell the baby formula?

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: You think that's the scam? And, I mean, even you did, okay. Play that out. Let's say she's trying to scam you out of a can of formula. She doesn't have a baby. She wants to sell the formula for money for drugs, or whatever you think it is. Okay. Who would buy a can of formula? Someone who has—

Taylor: Off the street.

Sydnee: Right. But, I mean, like, the thing is, if somebody is buying that can of formula, it's 'cause they need the can of formula for a hungry baby.

Taylor: Yep.

Sydnee: One way or another, however this scam works, a hungry baby gets fed at the end of it. Somebody gets formula for a child they don't have formula for. So what are you worried is gonna happen?

Taylor: I mean, if we feed one starving baby, all the other starving babies might call us up? Is that the worry?

Sydnee: I guess. Which, like, good?

Taylor: You don't pay taxes! [laughs quietly] That's the exchange, right?

Sydnee: I... I mean, I find that really disturbing. And I get—so, it's interesting. We at Harmony House, at the shelter for people experiencing homelessness where I provide care, we had this conversation as soon as EBT—it was clear that benefits were not gonna come through when they were supposed to. As soon as that happened, we all had this conversation internally.

Okay. We are not really—like, we are here to serve people who are unsheltered. However, we do have, like—a number of organizations in our community, including churches, often provide lunch. And we often have snacks. There are other, um—actually, like, a lot of restaurants and convenience stores in our community who will give us their surplus food, or free food. There's Big Loafer at the Huntington Mall makes extra sandwiches just to give to us, to give out to people.

Taylor: That's sweet.

Sydnee: Yeah. So, anyway, like, we have food. We are a place where you can come get food. Not endless amounts, but we do have food. And I had this thought. "Oh. I can see people walking through our doors who are house saying 'I don't know what to do. I am not connecting with a local food pantry. I don't understand that process. I'm not really clear on how to access a food box.'"

Or a lot of the food that you get from food banks are things to cook, and in all honesty, a lot of the people I take care of are not gonna—they don't know how, and they're not going to cook. They're looking for things that are microwavable. You know? Or ready-to-eat type foods. And so we immediately recognize, we're gonna have people walk through the doors who need food, and we don't have enough food to feed everyone in the community, right?

So we decided on a two-tiered approach. One: if someone comes in hungry, you give them food, period. Like, that's number one. And in order to fill that gap, Justin and I spent an entire weekend, with our friends Autumn and Slice, making the most spaghetti I've ever made in my life, putting them in single serve microwavable containers, and filling our freezer at Harmony House so that if people come in and need meals, we handed them a stack of spaghetti containers. So you get food.

Two: we had one of our case managers in the shelter to explain the process of signing up for a food bank. So we can both give you a fish, and teach you to fish, all in one. Because we knew it wasn't sustainable that we hand out food forever, but we also knew that if somebody came in hungry, we were not gonna turn them away without food.

Now, if we could figure that out as a nonprofit who, I mean, honestly is barely scraping by, all these churches with all their tithes couldn't piece this together?

Taylor: I don't—I mean, there was a lot of points being made of, like, you don't even have to go—you could ask this question to, I mean... I would say, you know, you could ask this question to a random restaurant, but I mean, I've had people come in, especially when I work at—the branch of the restaurants that I work for now is a little bit more inside of a bar. But the one that I used to work at was, like, a—it was a shack that was sort of right up front, you know? Like a little pop up.

And people would come up sometimes and just be like, "I'm hungry. I don't have—" 'Do you have anything laying around' is usually the phrasing. Like, "Do you just have anything?" And it was like, "No, but I'll—I'll make you something." 'Cause, again, like you said, like, what—"Oh, no. I gave you a burger and fry." What—okay.

Sydney: I don't understand what—I mean, if you are part of—first of all, I don't think you should have to have a religious belief structure to believe in feeding someone who's hungry. But all of these people did have a religious belief structure. They're churches. It doesn't involve feeding the hungry? What does it involve?

Taylor: That seems to be, like, a big thing in the Bible, right? Like, it's been a while. We're not close friends, me and the Bible. But I'm pretty sure that's a significant theme.

Sydney: It's a main thing! It's definitely, like, a—it's, like, one of the bullet points. But I—yeah. And I think that, um...

Taylor: Well, but Syd, if you fed every hungry person, how would you buy your private jets?

Sydney: [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Have you ever seen—oh, I went down a rabbit hole. I was honestly looking for clips for a drag show. But there is, like—there's a back-and-forth conversation of two mega-preachers talking about why they need private jets.

And how—"Have you ever had the Lord speak to you, and you were on a crowded plane? And you're trying to channel the Lord, but there's a baby screaming. Have you—no, that does not work! We have to respect the Lord. And so we need the private jet so we can fully focus on the Lord when he speaks to us. We need that time to commune with the Lord." [snorts]

Sydnee: Do you think that the—okay. Did you see the video that the Catholic bishops made?

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: Okay. A bunch of Catholic bishops made a video, which I assume came from the top down. That tends to be how things work in the Catholic Church. Where they basically are all just speaking out against Trump's immigration policies.

Taylor: That's good.

Sydnee: It's just a big video of them saying, like, "This is wrong. We shouldn't do this. This is not what we're called to do."

I don't know. I don't know why, I don't know where it came from. I mean, I... I'm not questioning, like, their beliefs, and why. But, I mean, like, what was the "We gotta make a video about this"? How did that happen? I don't know. But do you think it might be that they saw all this buzz on TikTok. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: And they were like, "The Catholic Church is having a moment. This could be our chance."

Taylor: Get 'em back.

Sydnee: "We're recruiting!"

Taylor: Get 'em back to the Catholic Church.

Sydnee: That's what I'm saying! Did they see an opening to recruit? 'Cause, like, listen. There's not a lot of selling points. You know? [laughs quietly] There's not a lot that they have to market.

Taylor: No, no.

Sydnee: If you want to be Catholic, you can't just come to church. You have to, like, go through catechism and get baptized. It's like a whole thing.

Taylor: You gotta feel guilty about everything forever.

Sydnee: You have to accept purgatory as a thing.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: There's lots of, like—there's lots of rules. And church is... I don't wanna say it's boring. [laughs quietly] But it's not exciting.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Now, there is magic, so we have that.

Taylor: There is magic. Uh, you have to wait so long for a single sip of wine that really isn't even wine when you get to it.

Sydnee: It's blood.

Taylor: Yeah. So...

Sydnee: Uh, so I mean, I'm not... I can see where they see a marketing opportunity. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs quietly] You know, I don't... and any—look. If your structure of faith calls you to do good in the world, be a good neighbor, help your fellow man, like, I think that's beautiful. I don't say dismissively, like, I don't need that to try to do good. That's not—whatever makes you do good, the ends justify the means. I think that's great.

But what is the point of it if that's—what are you doing if that's not your whole thing? If the whole thing about being... I mean, I can speak for Christianity. Like, if it's not about being a kind, benevolent, giving, charitable person, what is it about?

Sydnee: I don't—I mean, that's when you've put too many... well, I don't know. I'm not—I don't go to church... unless I have to. But I would imagine that's when you've put too many layers between yourself and your faith.

Taylor: 'Cause that was one of those excuses that one of the preachers that made a response said. "Well, the only reason the Muslims were willing to help was because they have a tenet that's built in that says they have to help. So they have to do that."

It's like, you don't? Are you saying you don't? [laughs]

Sydnee: So, okay. Now, listen. What you're getting into, though, is why probably a Catholic would be more likely to respond. Because of that fundamental difference in teachings in Catholics from Protestants, which is in the Catholic Church, your belief is all good. That's great. But if you don't do good acts, then your faith is a dead—

Taylor: Yeah. You've got a ledger. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. It's a dead faith is what they—that's the Biblical reference. Your faith is dead without good works. Whereas in the Protestant belief system, the belief is the thing. That's enough. That's it. And you don't have to do anything in particular to support that belief. The belief—as long as the belief is there, you're going to heaven. You're good. It's kind of a raw deal.

Taylor: God doesn't want you to do good. He just wants you to like him.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Okay. Is what you're saying.

Sydnee: Well, no. Believe that he is the son of God and the way and the... only through him are you saved, and blah, blah, blah. All that stuff. But, like, in the Catholic doctrine, you have to show that you have that faith by doing acts of

goodness in the world. And if you're really good, you get to go to purgatory. It's kind of a raw deal, if you think about it. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, there's not much winning in the Catholic Church. I think that's why... [laughs]

Sydney: [laughs] That's why we're bad at recruiting!

Taylor: That's why there's so much drinking in the Catholic Church. Also that.

Sydney: I mean, that's it. I mean, that's the thing. Like, that's why the... I mean, numbers have been declining over the years. It's like, I don't know what your selling point is here, other than we have no problem with alcohol. There is that. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah. We like that a lot. I don't know. I mean, I think that... if you felt the need—if you felt the calling to respond to it and not just sit with yourself and, like, "Why... " 'Cause again, with absolutely no religion—I'm not a religious person. I would feel bad if somebody came to me for help and I turned them down. I mean, that would—I would sit with that. Like, I don't know what scenario a mother with a crying baby could walk up to me on the street and say "Can you buy me baby food?"

I'd be like, "Yeah." Like, I don't know. Like, I don't... if you can't sit with that and, like, turn inward and think about your own actions, I don't know why you're in church, in charge of a massive parish.

Sydney: I think—I mean, and I'm one who, like, I will give people money if I have it. I often don't have cash, so I'm often saying, like, "I don't have any cash," 'cause that's the truth. But if I do, I give people money. And I don't—you know what? Whatever they spend it on, I'm not gonna question.

Taylor: Nope, same.

Sydney: And I'm not gonna ask them. I don't care.

Taylor: You know, when it's the dead of winter and somebody wants money and I give 'em money and they, like—"Ooh, they might go—go buy alcohol."

It's like, yeah, maybe! Probably make 'em feel a little better being out on the street when it's 20 degrees outside. I know scientifically it doesn't help, but it makes you feel okay.

Sydnee: Yeah. And why was I—whatever I was gonna do with that money, was it inherently better? Probably not.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: Yeah, no, I don't care. I will give—if someone needs help and I have help to give, I will give it. And if I don't have help to give, I'll probably try to figure something out. I don't understand why—and maybe, again, maybe this is the difference in upbringing. Those feel like the opportunities you wait for, right? Like, I trained for this. I went to Mass for this.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I went to CCD for this. I went to confession, and communions, and the World Catholic Youth Conference, to prepare for this moment. Somebody needs help and I'm gonna help 'em.

Taylor: I built the foundation of my life on a thick layer of shame that means that I will always have to respond to this moment. [laughs]

Sydnee: But, like, I just feel like that's when it's like, "Game on! That's right! I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna live the faith. Everything that I sang about in those looong Masses... I'm gonna live it right now!" Why don't you feel like, "This is my moment. I've been waiting for this."

Taylor: Well, yeah! And again, like, if people without religion can respond in those moments just 'cause they're, I don't know, humanist—I guess that's how I would identify myself—like, when I was naive and young in New York, so many people would tell you, like, "Oh, you can't give money to the homeless people because that's just... you'll run into a hundred a day. You'll never have money."

And I remember at some point having the thought, like, I'm gonna give a dollar to every—'cause, you know, I work in restaurants. I always have cash on me. It's like, I'll give a dollar that everybody that asks. How much money is that, really?

And you know what? I mean, again, New York City, a big concentration of people that might be asking you for cash. And I commute every day. I commute on the subway. Maybe once a day. Maybe. Most days not at all. Like, I give whenever somebody asks, but it's not... this villain that they make of like, "If you—if you—" [laughs] "If you teach one man to fish, they're all gonna want to learn how to fish!" Okay?

Sydnee: "It's terrible!"

Taylor: [laughs] Alright.

Sydnee: I mean, yeah! Well, I don't—and if people know that I will help them if they're in need and word gets out and more people come to me for help, I'm glad that I'm the kind of person that can help them. I'm glad that I am privileged enough to have help to offer. I'm glad that people felt comfortable asking me for help. That's a—man. That's an honor. If you are the kind of person, if somebody says "I feel like I can trust you enough to be vulnerable and ask you for help," what a compliment. What a kindness that person is paying you to say "I trust you enough to be vulnerable with you and show weakness." What an amazing compliment.

Taylor: You know, I've never—I've been in situations where I've been, like, paycheck to paycheck, but I've always been lucky enough to keep a roof over my and, you know, stay fed. But I feel like I've been in moments of... what, emotional need. And sometimes just the act of having somebody provide for you... just the fact that someone will is almost more powerful than the help they provide, you know?

Sydnee: Well, it tells you what you deserve. You deserve help. You deserve care. You deserve food. You deserve safety.

Taylor: And I feel like there's a—it's a lot easier to figure out the tools you need to help yourself once you realize that other people will help you, too. Like, it's not just like someone goes, "Oh, well I guess I can just, you know, keep asking for help and everyone's gonna take care—" this fake person that the, I don't know, certain people like to build up in our minds that just takes and takes. It's like, no. Once you realize you're in a community of people that will take care of you, usually the response is you want to take part in it, and that also involves, like, finally being in a place mentally or financially or physically to start figuring out how to take care of yourself. It's a good step.

Sydnee: I think the people who created this mythological person who will just keep asking and never—you know. I think that these are the same people who were probably getting in fistfights over bear-shaped cups last week.

Taylor: [laughs] Ugh! I am so sorry to the Starbucks baristas, because however you feel about Starbucks as a massive conglomerate, look. They're picketing right now, and I support it. Don't go to Starbucks. I don't think you should right now.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: You really shouldn't have been going for a while, now.

Sydnee: I agree.

Taylor: But the baristas are just people that need jobs. Um, and why have they become the cultural battleground that Starbucks is?

Sydnee: I am so confused about—okay. I didn't know that there were special cups coming out. I didn't... shame on me. I didn't know that was, like, a thing. I knew that, like, there's a time of year where you can get a peppermint mocha. I knew that was a thing. But I didn't know that there were special cups associated with the holidays, so that was something I learned.

I also learned that if they're shaped like bears, and then you call them bearistas, it's the bearista cup, see? It's fun.

Taylor: Oh, okay.

Sydnee: Yes. That was the—everybody kept saying—I heard people saying bearista cup, and I was thinking, like, "Why is it the barista cup? Like, what's... " and then I realized it's a pun. A bear-ista.

Taylor: And it has that little beanie on, so it looks like a little...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... hip barista. That cup—

Sydnee: It's a little barista, but shaped like a bear.

Taylor: That cup is available on, like, Amazon and Alibaba in, like, mass numbers. It's just people are fighting over the—and I don't know why Starbucks—like, individual Starbucks are only getting, like, a handful of these cups.

Sydnee: Why—why—why—well, I mean, I don't even know how to ask why. Like, there's always something like this, right? I don't understand it. I don't think about going to Starbucks and buying merchandise. It never would occur to me. This is a subculture that I didn't know about, that there are people—like, I know that there are people who, like, really love Starbucks. Like, I knew that. But I didn't know that there was, like, a devoted fan base for their merch. This is news to me.

Taylor: Is it the same people, though? Because I always have the same confusion over, like, whatever the limited Stanley is, you know?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Like, I feel like there was a Stanley that everybody was freaking out over. The same people, there was, like, a specific Trader Joe's tote bag that was, like, free that people—I saw videos of people getting trampled over. I'm not sure what this is, like, culturally that is, like...

Sydnee: Is it a status symbol of some sort? Like if you have a bearista cup do you take it to work and everybody's like, "Ohh."

Taylor: But these aren't signs of sta—'cause, like, when I think of status it's like, "Oh, you got a... " I don't know the bags. You've got a... a bag that's hard to get that is a lot of money.

Sydnee: A... Louis Vuitton?

Taylor: [wheeze-laughs] I don't think it's that. I don't think it's that.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I mean, I'm sure that's very expensive, but then there's, like, one bag that you literally have to be—you have to spend enough at their stupid store so that they're like, "We personally invite you to spend a stupid amount of money on a bag that you don't get to pick out. You don't get to pick the design or the color.

We're just gonna bring you a box and say 'This is your bag.' And you must buy it." And I don't—

Sydnee: Is that [crosstalk]?

Taylor: Is it—maybe? Yeah?

Sydnee: Or do they just do the scarves? Or do they do both?

Taylor: I don't know.

Sydnee: I don't know.

Taylor: I don't follow any of this, and I would take it as a sign that this is somebody I should avoid at all costs if someone actually cared—like, somebody actually went through this cycle. But is this like they—is this the—the... the middle America version of that? You want the bear cup because your Starbucks only got four, and so if you can get one of them... for five fleeting moments of your life, you will feel like you matter.

Sydnee: I don't know. I really—it just—it was news to me that they had merch people fought over. I mean, I guess everybody does.

Taylor: And the anger is that the Starbucks baristas are buying the merch before...

Sydnee: Before they open.

Taylor: ... the regular customers. And customers are lining up at midnight to get the bear cup.

Sydnee: Yeah! They were sitting out in the cold waiting for the bear cup.

Taylor: [sighs] Like, I don't...

Sydnee: It was a weird cognitive dissonance. Like, to see—

Taylor: [laughs] It makes me really sad.

Sydnee: At the same time that I'm being inundated with, like, the real—like, I am face-to-face with the reality of what the lack of EBT did. I mean, I'm watching it. Not—I'm not personally experiencing it. But I am—I know the people who are. I'm watching it in real time. I'm talking to them and interacting with them on a daily basis. And then I'm looking at TikTok and I'm seeing people, like, ready to throw down over a bear cup that they waited eight hours in the cold for. And I don't know how to... reconcile... I don't know what to do with any of that. I don't know what to do.

Taylor: I feel the same. I mean, I am always, forever on the baristas' side in any situation. Because in general I'd say, hey, you work there. You put in the hours. If you want first dibs on the merch, I don't really know why Starbucks would distribute five. It feels like you're trying to incite—[laughs] incite a riot. Why would you only give small locations, like, two bear cups? Have a correct supply chain or don't put them out at all.

But if the baristas want to have it, that's fine. But specifically Starbucks baristas, like, how many... like, how many cultural moments have they had to wade through? 'Cause I remember years ago when, like, the red cup came out that didn't have specific Christmas language on it, so people were, like, rioting, and they were ordering drinks but then not paying for them to make a point. And then there was the whole—

Sydnee: The Charlie Kirk thing happened at Starbucks!

Taylor: The Charlie Kirk tea thing. Yeah, there were being, like, filmed and—

Sydnee: That was weird, too! Yeah, why was Starbucks the battleground for that culture war?

Taylor: It's—I don't—I think if you are—

Sydnee: That's weird!

Taylor: —if you are... if you take a job at Starbucks, you are signing up for some weird psychological front lines that no one making minimum wage deserves. Minimum wage with no tips, 'cause they're not allowed to accept tips there. That's a lot of corporate coffee shops, but...

Sydnee: That's so weird. That is weird. Now that you say that, it is weird that, like, Starbucks has become—I mean, I guess 'cause, like... it is, like, the—it is a third space. It is a, like, social—like, societal meeting space. It is the forum. It is the public forum. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [through laughter] Is that it? It's the forum?

Sydnee: It's that forum of today.

Taylor: Like in a Socratic sense? [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. It is the—the public forum is Starbucks. That is where we meet and we lounge and we discuss and debate, and we solve the problems of now.

Taylor: I think if you...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: ... make any scene in a Starbucks over anything, you should be banned from Starbucks forever. And maybe public life in general. Nothing should ever matter enough that happens in a Starbucks.

Sydnee: I don't... I don't know. I was never a person—I'm not saying I have never had Starbucks. Of course I've had Starbucks in my life. I was never one to, like, want to hang out in a Starbucks. Like, I know a lot of people, especially in med school—man, everybody would go study at the Starbucks. I never wanted to go be at a Starbucks. I have been inside them. I was not a person to, like, frequent chilling in a Starbucks, you know? That was not me...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Not my bag. I don't know.

Taylor: Well, that probably ties back to the Catholic thing. I was chilling in bars. That was my third space. [laughs]

Sydnee: There you go, yeah.

Taylor: It's not technically a third space but, you know.

Sydnee: Yeah. Bars.

Taylor: No, I just—I don't know. If your biggest concern in life is a bear-shaped cup... I am not one to play the pain Olympics, but I think in this specific case, you need to step back and look at how lucky you are that all you have to worry about is a bear-shaped cup.

Sydnee: Is this where the kids would say, "Touch grass"?

Taylor: Is that... I guess so. But I feel like touch grass is, like, if you're too—maybe? Yeah, I guess.

Sydnee: I think this is a touch grass moment.

Taylor: I feel like grass isn't enough. Go do some good. Go do some good for your community. [laughs]

Sydnee: Maybe you need to touch grass and then go do good.

Taylor: Yeah. Do both. Do both.

Sydnee: I don't know that touching grass literally means touching grass.

Taylor: Well, I mean, I think it just means, like, get—get back to, you know—look—yeah.

Sydnee: You need to be grounded.

Taylor: Yeah. Look at what actually matters in life. That cup is gonna—it's gonna give you a little jolt of... of... good feelings for five minutes. And then you're gonna go back to the same—whatever dead space you live in that made you believe this cup was going to change your life. You're gonna go right back there.

Sydnee: And this is my parental instinct kicking in. That cup's gonna be a pain to clean, because of its odd shape. And my kids would put something in it that would stick to it. I guarantee you they'd wanna make something and then, like, squirt chocolate syrup or something in there, and then my scrub sponge wouldn't fit.

Taylor: Not gonna fit in there.

Sydnee: Down in the crannies. And so then I'd just have this dirty bear.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Dirty, dirty bear!

Sydnee: That's all I could think was like, "I don't want that cup in my house! I'm gonna have to clean it!"

Taylor: Well, like, all I can think of is, like, you want—just go to the corner store and get yourself a honey bear.

Sydnee: Oh!

Taylor: Put—just—

Sydnee: Eat all the honey.

Taylor: Drill a little hole in the top. Yeah, you got honey. Make yourself a honey la—as many honey lattes as you want. And then you got a little bear cup.

Sydnee: And then drink out of the bear.

Taylor: DIY. DIY bear cup. I've done that at the bar whenever I make honey syrup. I... will save the bears, and use my heat tool to burn a little hole through the top so we can pour it from the honey bear.

Sydnee: It's like your Temu Starbucks bear cup. [laughs]

Taylor: It's not even Temu! It's like, it's just—it's even lower, lower tier. [laughs] It's a repurposed...

Sydnee: That's great.

Taylor: But that's—you know what? That's fine. 'Cause it's more joy, 'cause you did it yourself.

Sydnee: We still haven't talked about Lily Allen. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: No. That was the—gosh. You know...

Sydnee: That's okay.

Taylor: There's a lot going on in the world, culturally, physiologically, metaphysically. Lily Allen's in there.

Sydnee: She's in there. Uh, Lily Allen released an album. [laughs quietly] West End Girl.

Taylor: Is it an album or is it just an attack on David Harbour? [laughs]

Sydnee: I have—is there any... I don't know if you would know this off the top of your head. Has there ever been an entire album devoted to, like, how crappy another person is? I mean, even if you think about something like Beyoncé's Lemonade, like, there are crimes listed.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But then there's also redemption, you know? Like, it's the whole story. It's not just "This person's a jerk."

I feel like this album is just like a re—like, just reiterates and reiterates and reiterates.

Taylor: I mean, I think that's a great parallel to draw, 'cause that would be my response, but you're right. Like, Lemonade is about betrayal, but also working through it. There was an arc to the story of Lemonade.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And I think there's an arc to the story of this album. It's just coming to terms with, "Yep. You're a big ol' jerk, and this is everything you did."

Sydnee: "And we're done."

Taylor: "But I'm still way cooler than you'll ever be." [laughs]

Sydnee: It is relentless.

Taylor: And I love that for her, honestly. But I have to say—and, you know, I know we were talking about, like, Lily Allen's whole catalog, as much as we're talking about the new album.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Just from what I can discern about Lily Allen from all of her other albums, why would you cross her?

Sydnee: I don't know. I mean, and it really—it's funny because, like, especially with this most recent album, it's not what you think of as, like, diss tracks.

Taylor: Mm-mm.

Sydnee: Because it's not—it's not upbeat. It's not, like, fast-paced. It's not loud. It's not—she doesn't sound angry or, like... tough. It's chill. It's always very, like, matter of fact, chill, laid back. "I'm gonna eviscerate you."

Taylor: Well, that's—she's not insulting him about him. She's just telling the world specific details about things he did to her. Like, just truths.

Sydnee: She reminds—

Taylor: And that is—[wheezes]

Sydnee: Yeah, she reminds me of, like, you know when you're watching some sort of, like, action movie and there's, like, all the people who, like, are looking tough and are, like, ready to fight? And then there's the one person who's gonna kick everybody's butt who's just sort of standing there nonchalantly because they're not worried, because they know that they're going to handle this. That's the vibe I get from her. "I'm not concerned. I will handle this now."

Taylor: Oh yeah. Well, and it's like, "I'm not gonna call you a... an a-hole. I'm going to specifically and melodically explain what you did to me, and the entire audience is gonna go, 'Wow, what an a-hole!'" [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. Um, I don't even—yeah, I don't even know where to start. It really—like, she enumerates his crimes very well. I feel bad for her. Some of it is

heartbreaking. But she doesn't—you know, it doesn't come across as self-pitying, to me.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: It's not pitiful, even though there are moments where I'm like, "Oh... oh..." [laughs quietly] Um... she does name check the mistress.

Taylor: But is there just one? Because it seems like she's—she names one, but there's multiples in this.

Sydnee: Well, I definitely think that's what's—yes, that's what's been insinuated is that there were multiple.

Taylor: Yeah. But I don't feel like she—that's the thing. Like, what is the song that's specifically about the mistress? She's not cruel to the women involved, which I appreciate. It is very clear that, you know... 'cause that happens so often where it's like, "Oh, the woman led you astray. She's the vixen in this situation." It's not that.

Sydnee: No. It's not that. I do—that was the only thing, though, that I maybe took a little issue with was, don't... once you say her name, you know it was, like, every—the media was off and running trying to figure out who it is, you know? And, like, find this person. And, like, maybe just pull—like, again, like a Lemonade parallel, just do a Becky with the good hair. You know? And let us all wonder, who's Becky with the good hair? But her name's not Becky. Like, her name was not literally Becky.

Taylor: Have they figured out who the mistress was? I didn't go down that—I didn't look, 'cause I felt like... I assumed it was a stand-in name.

Sydnee: Uh, I'm pretty sure that's her actual name.

Taylor: Oh no.

Sydnee: I thought that they found her and she commented. I thought I read that in one of the—I was reading different news stories about it and I thought that they actually did find... um, one of the other women.

Taylor: [sighs]

Sydnee: I mean, like, 'cause it's—you know, it's David Harbour's fault.

Taylor: Madeline. I was trying to—I was like, "Maddy, Mary, Madeline." Yes. It's not her real name.

Sydnee: Oh, okay.

Taylor: That is not her real name. I just did a quick search. No. I'm not gonna say her real name, but there is—that is a stand-in name.

Sydnee: Well, that's good. That's better. I thought—see, from the initial reporting I thought it was her real name, and I was gonna say, "Oh, don't do that." So that's better. Well, I apologize, Lily Allen.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: You did do a Becky with the good hair.

Taylor: Yes. People have figured out who this particular Becky with the good hair is. But that's not Lily Allen's fault.

Sydnee: No. No, that—yeah. Because, I mean, the—I don't know. Man, I tell you, I shouldn't be—in this day and age, I shouldn't have the ability to hear this kind of stuff about, like, a celebrity and go, "Aww." [laughs quietly] I should be past that.

Taylor: I understand.

Sydnee: You know? Um, but I definitely had a moment. "Aww. Him, too?"

Taylor: I don't... I was talking about this with some friends the other night. How, like, you know, *Stranger Things*' final season is about to come out. And it's like, each star of that show, with the exception of the always-glorious Winona Ryder, has just taken turns [wheeze-laughs] like, doing something insane? To, like—I still kind of want to see the show but, like, I don't know! Now it's like, you all could've waited until it dropped. There's not gonna be another season. Do all your crazy stuff after that.

Sydnee: I love that, like, Winona Ryder, I mean, very famously, though, did get, like, arrested for shoplifting. And, like—

Taylor: You know what? Who would have the—if Winona Ryder stole—she could walk into my house, look at my TV and say, "I am taking this." And I said—I would say, "As you should," and never say another word about it.

Sydnee: No, but I love that, like—and don't get me wrong. I don't care. I don't care that Winona Ryder—she stole, like, some shirts or something. I don't care.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That does not—this is not—I think she's great. It doesn't bother me.

Taylor: She was just doing it for the game. I don't care. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, it doesn't bother me. But I think it's funny that, like, she definitely did—and, I mean, like, there were photos and everything. Like, she definitely did shoplift. And we're all like, the only one who's never done anything crazy is Winona Ryder! [laughs]

Taylor: I mean...

Sydnee: Like, that says a lot about the rest of you guys! Like, what are you all doing?

Taylor: Exactly. Like, I don't—like, there's been—it's... and so much of the rest of the cast, to me—I know they're not children anymore. They are all adults. But they're children to me, so it's like, oh. I mean, they're kids.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: They're kids that have grown up on TV. That is an incredibly damaging way to grow up. But David. David! [laughs] You're one of the few adults in the room.

Sydnee: It's so hard, too, because his character I love so much. And, like, anybody who's kind of like a lovable mess, any character that's, like, the lovable mess, um, I'm always gonna, like, be very drawn to and identify with. And that was just... that was just devastating.

Taylor: Yes. I do think that sometimes fiction allows us to separate from the reality of what a lovable mess actually is to know. You know?

Sydnee: I guess that's true.

Taylor: Like, I think that if you actually—if you actually knew his character in *Stranger Things* in real life, that still might be how you categorize them, but it would be with a lot of asterisks.

Sydnee: Hopper would never do this to Lily Allen.

Taylor: Well, his whole thing is that he's, like—he's a good dad.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: He would never.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I agree. Well, we can separate art from the artist in this instance. [laughs] But not with Lily Allen! 'Cause the art and the... the artist, the art are the same. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yes. It is odd, to me. And, I mean, I guess... I guess that there are a number of women in music who... it's the same thing. Like, there are just certain people. Like, I don't understand why you would take the risk of, like, screwing them over. I mean, 'cause, like, obviously Lily Allen's gonna write an entire album about you where she's just, in a very chill way—very pleasant music. Like, a lot of the music has a similar vibe to me. You know what I mean?

Like, a lot of the songs—like, we're not going, like, up and down and fast and slow a lot. It's all kind of a similar chill sort of vibe. It's the kind of music you could, like, put on in the background at, like, a party or something, and it would create a good atmosphere. And then you'd listen to the lyrics and be like, "What?" [laughs] "Whoa!"

Taylor: She has—and this is not an insult in any way. She has the "I'm not trying very hard" cadence.

Sydnee: Yes. Yes.

Taylor: Like, it is the cool girl who's just standing there. She's just explaining a situation. And along the way she's saying devastating things about everybody involved.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: But she's so nonchalant about it. And I love her music for that. Like, pre-this-album, I think she's always had that vibe.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Like, it is just the coolest girl in the room, over a glass of wine, telling you everybody's business, and I love that. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: It is interesting, though. 'Cause that's definitely, I mean, a way that women have expressed, like, their displeasure with men, or exerted some sort of power through that. I mean, like, Taylor Swift is obviously a great example of that with her music. Stevie Nicks. Like, it's the same thing. "I'm gonna aggressively sing a song in your face about you, and everybody's gonna love it."

Taylor: Yeah. But that's—

Sydnee: "Deal with it."

Taylor: But... I never thought I'd say Taylor and Stevie Nicks have something in common, but the thing—that is—aggressive is the word. Like, they are...

Sydnee: That's true.

Taylor: ... displaying their emotions. They are emotionally involved in the situation. Lily Allen is always too cool for emotions, almost.

Sydnee: It is—I mean, it doesn't feel—and, I mean, I guess what's cool about that, though, is when I said, like, I don't... I mean, I feel bad for her,

conceptually. Like, as the human. Like, that a bad thing happened to her. You know? I mean, like, I feel—that sucks. Like, she went through a—I mean, that's awful. It sounds terrible. But the music does not evoke that in me, because she does not feel... sad? You know what I mean? She's not looking for you to pity her in the music.

Taylor: No.

Sydney: She's not even looking for you to be angry on her behalf. And there is something very cool and very powerful about that. 'Cause what it says is, "I've handled it. I'm just telling you about it."

Taylor: "All of my messy emotions I worked out in my private space. I'm gonna reserve all my skill and all my poise and all my structure to eviscerate you, calmly, in the public space." [laughs]

Sydney: Yeah. "And y'all can feel about it however you want to. I'm fine. I'm doing good, now." [laughs]

Taylor: Well, I mean, one of her iconic songs, the F You song, like, that's... like, it's a very melodic, calm, adorable song that still... like, it comes from a place of anger, but a place of very resolved anger.

Sydney: Yeah. Yeah, and I think—I mean, I think there is a power in that, especially as a woman. Where, like, "I am not hurt by this anymore. I'm not saying that it didn't hurt at some point, and I'm not saying that I did rage or throw pillows or scream at some point. But I am saying that now, I'm fine. And I am going to deal with you in the way you should be dealt with. And I feel nothing."

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydney: That is a very powerful position.

Taylor: I just... I don't understand how he—how did he fumble that? 'Cause I did see their house tour video.

Sydney: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And I've never thought, like—there's never been a couple that's inspired me more to think "That's all I want from life." Just somebody that you build a beautiful house with, where you're allowed to, like, have discussions about the wallpaper and, like, the china patterns you use, and you build a beautiful home. And you're both creative and successful, and that's it. We did it. We have the space, we have the castle, we have each other. Great work. High five each other, and then... don't... don't ever be mean to each other. That's what you want! [laughs quietly]

Sydney: I mean, you know, it's because... I guess on the outside, like, you never really know what's going on with famous people. We paint all these pictures of them and, you know.

Taylor: Of course, of course.

Sydney: Right? And we don't know what's going on inside. But, I mean, I think the other thing is just, like, 'cause that's humans, right? Like, we mess things up, and... [laughs quietly] we make dumb choices, and we hurt each other. And that's, I mean, we just do that. Even if everything was perfect. I don't know. I don't know if it was or not. But even if anything was perfect, and wonderful, and lovely, like, that is so often the story. And we just can't help but break it.

Taylor: You would just think if you're going to get involved with a, uh, artistic sniper rifle like Lily Allen, you would think a little bit before—[wheezes] that is a man's audacity. Like, "Alright. I'm gonna fumble this." I think that's scarier than Taylor Swift. She's gonna write an angry song about you, but it's gonna be emotional enough to be like, "Well, I left some wounds."

Lily Allen is just gonna—she's gonna stitch herself up and be like, "Okay. Let's talk about you." [laughs]

Sydney: [laughs] It was a very—it reminds me of Hamilton writing the letter of everything that Burr has ever done to him.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: Like, "Oh no. It's not one thing. Let me send you a cataloged list of every insult."

Taylor: Keeping an inventory in my mind palace of everything you've done.

Sydnee: Yes. "Here's my personal injury list on an album for all to hear."
[laughs]

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: No, I think that's great. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, just because I—it's my favorite, I'm curious what your favorite Lily Allen song is. But I told you what my favorite song was, that I don't think you'd listened to yet. Which is not from this album.

Sydnee: Oh, not from this album, yeah.

Taylor: But Hard Out Here is the name. Can't say the name of the full verse, but... [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I don't—I mean, it's hard because, like, I liked several songs on this album. I mean, I liked—the album in general is, like, a vibe. Um, I liked Tennis, and I liked the one that—the collaborative one she did with the other artist. What was that one called? I forget. There's one that she did with, um—there's somebody else on the song. Uh... but anyway, I know that the one that—the, uh—I don't even know if I can say the one on our podcast. The one that seemed to get the most play. The... P Palace. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [wheezes]

Sydnee: I don't know if we're allowed to say that.

Taylor: I don't—let's not try it.

Sydnee: No. Anyway, my point is, I don't know that any song has ever—of hers has ever quite approached F You for me.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That song, for me, is so joyful. [laughs quietly] But...

Taylor: Do you think we'll ever get, like, a stripped down, like, "Now I'm confronting the emotions through my music, not after I process it" Lily Allen album?

Sydnee: I don't know. I mean, I feel like if your relationship with art is a certain way... you know? I mean, I don't know. I feel like that's something you could speak to more than me. Like, I know—I create things, but I don't know. They're sort of, like, nonfiction-y, kind of often—in a certain way. And I think it would be really hard for me to completely step out of the way that I tend to make things and do it in a different way. So, I don't know. Like, this is her relationship with art. She processes stuff, and then comes out with these sort of, like, chill, nonchalant, targeted jabs.

Taylor: Well, I'm—

Sydnee: I don't know. Do you think you could shift, like, the way you create that way?

Taylor: I mean, I guess that would feel like... trading in all my—all of my well-tested armor for something different. I wouldn't like that, yeah. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yeah, I don't know. And I don't necessarily think it's, like, a, um, a mark of a good or a bad artist to be able to complete—you know what I mean? Like, I think you can—

Taylor: No, if anything I think it's what makes her unique is that, like, we're so used to that, like, raw, and we love the raw. Which I don't—I think there are a couple songs on this particular album that you can tell that there is sadness. There's a lot of sadness there.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: And regret. But, like, it... the overarching trait is that "I've processed it, and I just need the world to know that this is why you're bad." [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And that's powerful. That's what sets her apart.

Sydnee: Yeah. And I think if you know what you're doing, and it's how you tend to, like—it's your relationship with art intrinsically is that, why not stick to it, you know? It brings you joy to create. It brings the audience joy to listen to.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Win-win.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Except for David Harbour, who I think took an L on this one.

Taylor: I don't... I'm never gonna be concerned with redemption of a... a man. [wheeze-laughs] So...

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: Sorry, Dave. You know...

Sydnee: Yeah. Right before the release of this season of Stranger—right before he was gonna be in front of press. [laughs]

Taylor: I mean, I'd say "You could've thought that out." But you could've probably thought, like, "Who am I going to—" I know part of it was that he wanted to open the relationship and she was against it. Who are you going to open the relationship to that is better than Lily Allen?

Sydnee: I don't know. Madeline.

Taylor: Madeline.

Sydnee: Uh, well, Tey... [laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Um... what are we gonna talk about next week?

Taylor: Uh, you know, we said we were done with spooky stuff. This is not spooky season, but it still is spooky. Um, the new Silent Hill game. Well, it's not new. It came out a couple months ago. But Silent Hill f. We are both in the

position to now play. So I think... I think you'll like it, Syd. Uh, it's got some good feminist themes. And I am struggling my way through it right now, so I would love to talk about it.

Sydnee: Alright. Let's do it. 'Cause Justin has been trying to get me to play it. I was worried it would be too scary, but I am gonna try it.

Taylor: Ehh, it may be scary. There's good scares. But, uh, also it's, you know—it's very different from classic Silent Hill.

Sydnee: Excellent. Alright. Well, we will talk about Silent Hill f next week. And in the meantime, Lily Allen uses a lot of expletives. I don't know if that sort of thing matters, but it's marked helpfully on her songs with an E.

Taylor: Yes. And when she does curse, it's still, like, really calm. Like, it's, you know...

Sydnee: Yeah. Not making a big deal about it. It's just kind of part of it. It's just there.

Taylor: The coolest girl in any room, Lily Allen.

Sydnee: Um, but thank you, listeners. Thank you for listening to our show. You should go to Maximumfun.org and check out all the great podcasts there that you would enjoy. 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 Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering...

Taylor: And I am too.

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: That one song. [unintelligible]

Taylor: [laughs] Let's just call it that from now on.

Sydnee: Well, no, that sounds like somebody else [unintelligible].

Taylor: Ooh, yeah. No, I don't like that at all, actually.

Sydnee: Yeah! I don't even want to make those references. We're past that.
But...

Taylor: Cat Palace.

Sydnee: Ugh! Ugh.

Taylor: No. Agh. We're not doing better.

[chord]

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