

Wonderful! 393: A Nap on a Fuzzy Belly

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[theme music, "Money Won't Pay (feat. Augustus)" by Bo En plays]

Rachel: Hi, this is Rachel McElroy.

Griffin: Hello! This is Griffin McElroy.

Rachel: And this is Wonderful!

Griffin: Welcome to Wonderful, a podcast where we talk about things that we like, that's good, that we're into. We do it. We do it all, folks. We run the gambit. What are you into? Sports? We do that sometimes. Movies? Uh-huh, we've seen 'em.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Children's playground games? Inexplicably, sometimes, yes.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: I like to think that we are the most versatile, well-rounded podcast on the planet. When people ask us what this shows about, that's exactly what I tell them.

Rachel: Sometimes people pick one thing, and they say like, "Hey, I like this thing, and I'm only going to talk about this thing."

Griffin: Nope!

Rachel: And we're like—

Griffin: Why?

Rachel: But there's a big world out there?

Griffin: Why pigeonhole yourself in there?

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Like shows that talk about murders, and it's like...

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: There's a lot of other stuff going on? Like people are doing other stuff that's not murders.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Do you know what I mean?

Rachel: I do.

Griffin: We're really behind on Only Murders in the Building.

Rachel: We are.

Griffin: We're like at four or five.

Rachel: Well, you know what happened.

Griffin: I kept leaving freakin' town.

Rachel: And Love Is Blind happened.

Griffin: And Love Is Blind happened. Love Is Blind came storming in.

Rachel: And we got sucked right in.

Griffin: Good God. Good Jesus Christ, God.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: God in heaven and Jesus!

Rachel: We are behind, so I know right now we could be telling you like how it ends up, I think, at this point, maybe?

Griffin: We haven't finished it.

Rachel: But we are still at a point where they like just tried on their wedding clothes. And so, we're still behind.

Griffin: This is maybe our Small Wonders, just, it's... it's such a mess, and it's so weird. It's such a weird season, and the cast is—the vibe is so weird!

Rachel: It's these—usually, people are able to kind of dig their way into the chemistry they found in the pods, like—

Griffin: Sometimes, yeah.

Rachel: This season, it seems like as soon as they left the pods, all chemistry disappeared for every couple. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah. And I guess that it is ultimately kind of... and I feel this way about Married at First Sight, too, it is—when it continues to fail this instantly and this spectacularly, at some point, you gotta kind of hang up the whole premise of the show.

Rachel: Well, and what was—

Griffin: Maybe love is blind. I don't think so, because like 97% of the people who see each other for the first time are like, "Oh..."

Rachel: I was—[chuckles] I was telling Griffin that I really want them to chase that hypothesis, in like a scientific way.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And it's like Nick and Vanessa at the beginning like, "Oh, God, we're so close! All right, okay, let's spend 15—okay."

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: "All right, you go back to the lab. All right, so, with this much research and—" You know, and like really treat it as if like they're working for the National Science Foundation.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And they're under a deadline. [chuckles]

Griffin: Also, a lot of wild, sort of casual, pretty hyper-conservative like values being espoused offhandedly.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: In a way that is so, I don't know... demoralizing, I guess is the word that I'm looking for? [chuckles]

Rachel: It was shocking! I think there's this assumption among younger people that it was, you know, our parents or our grandparents' generation that had a really like conservative perspective on like what a relationship and a marriage and parenting should look like.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But like, a lot of what they were saying was like, oh, that's people said 100 years ago. [chuckles]

Griffin: Oh, wow, that's like 100 years old, that idea. We've both been listening to Claire and Emma on Love to See It.

Rachel: Love to See It, yeah.

Griffin: Who, I think, best in the game.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Honestly, I think when we made the decision to stop doing The Bachelor, you know, podcast, to stop doing Rose Buddies—

Rachel: Just reality dating—

Griffin: Reality dating in general as like the sole focus of our show. I think it was partially like we listened to them, and other shows like them, and were like, okay, this—they know exactly what the fuck they're doing. They are very, very, very good at this.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And it's—hearing them talk about Love Is Blind is such a treat. But yeah, wild season, man.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So wild. Do you have any other Small Wonders that you wanted to do? Or should we just hop right into it?

Rachel: Let's get into it, man.

Griffin: I do want to say, we got some feedback in the email—
Wonderfulpodcast@gmail.com, we encourage you to send in your Small Wonders for us to consider at the end of the show—hat perhaps next year, if it becomes an annual tradition, we find different verbs, rather than "smash or pass."

Rachel: [chuckles] You knew—

Griffin: There was some good stuff that was suggested. A couple different people pointed out "trick or treat" would have been maybe better for the Halloween—

Rachel: Oh, wow, yeah.

Griffin: Yeah, no, it was right fuckin' there!

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: And I can't... I can't help but agree. I can't help but agree.

Rachel: Wow, yeah.

Griffin: So...

Rachel: That would have been so much better.

Griffin: I enjoyed the format, but I do think the vernacular could be tightened up.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: You go first this week.

Rachel: Yes. So, this—actually, this is—my topic this week was just kind of pushed to me by YouTube. It just kind of showed up in one of my suggested videos.

Griffin: Yeah?

Rachel: And then I had to watch every video in the playlist.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: There is a... a platform called Musora, that does online music education.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And it's been around for like 15 years, almost. They started with Drumeo in 2012.

Griffin: Cool.

Rachel: And then they added piano instruction in 2016.

Griffin: Was that Pianoeo? Pianoeo?

Rachel: Pianote.

Griffin: Pianote. Okay, that's a good one.

Rachel: And Guitareo in 2017.

Griffin: [spoofing Super Mario] It's-a me!

Rachel: [chuckles] And then Singeo in 2021.

Griffin: Yeah, cool.

Rachel: And that's kind of the focus of that platform. Like, it's music instruction, it's like a subscription service, like you sign up, whatever. They're not advertising with us; I'm not trying to get you to sign up.

Griffin: No.

Rachel: But what they started doing about a year ago in August 2024, was something they call Covers on the Spot.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And what this is, is they bring in a pretty established band. And because this business, this Musora, is located in Canada, it's located in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: It's a lot of like Canadian bands.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And most of them, I have not heard of.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: I don't know if that was your experience when you looked at it?

Griffin: Absolutely not, I have not heard of—I think the Spin Doctors rolled up for an episode and—

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah.

Griffin: Obviously, there's some name recognition there.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But yeah, most of the bands I had not heard of.

Rachel: But so, like a relatively established band rolls up. They go into a, like a music studio, and there is somebody sitting in a booth, and this person is Ron Jackson. And he plays for them like a famous pop or, you know, rock song. And then it's their responsibility, over that day, to develop their own version and cover it, kind of in their style.

Griffin: When Rachel first mentioned this to me, it sounded a lot like the... I think it was called Undercover? That... was it The A.V. Club used to do? I think it was A.V. Club. Where they would have like a list of songs for the season, and then when a band came in, they had prepared like their version of the song.

Rachel: Oh, okay?

Griffin: The kind of like, I mean, it's on the tin, on the spot, sort of challenge, surprise nature of this series really, really, really sets it apart and makes it something really, really fun to watch.

Rachel: Yeah! The way the videos are structured is you get to watch the band hear the song for the first time.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And sometimes they don't know it, but most of the time, they will recognize it within the first few seconds. And they'll listen to it all the way through, and then they kind of have the option to listen to it again.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And they intentionally pick songs that are way outside the genre that the band usually performs in.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: So, just for an example, I don't know which ones you watched, but some of the most kind of obvious different ones, they have a jazz band covering Nirvana's Heart-Shaped Box.

Griffin: That's probably pound for pound my favorite episode.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Just because, one, like everybody in the band is so immensely talented.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: The bassist in that jazz band is one of the fuckin' craziest performers I've ever seen, like the way he just takes it on a walk. That version absolutely rules.

Rachel: There's a hard rock trio called Bad Money, that I didn't hear of, that covers Adele's Someone Like You. [titters]

Griffin: Oh, I didn't see that one?

Rachel: And so, they really speed up the tempo, they add a lot of drums. And it's two front men, and so they split the verses, and then they share the chorus together.

Griffin: Okay?

Rachel: This indie Vancouver band called Peach Pit covers Nickelback's How You Remind Me.

Griffin: And this is like—my favorite part of this series is the moment the song that they've been assigned starts playing.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Because you will see, especially in like a bigger band, just this wave of realization kind of like go across everyone's faces. And so like when this band realized, like, "Oh, we're doing Nickelback," it was like, "Oh, okay, okay, we can do something with this." There are definitely ones where like—there was one where the drummer of the band looked like he was going to cry like the entire time because of the song that they had been assigned.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But sometimes they're stoked! And sometimes they are not stoked. But the result is always like at least pretty interesting.

Rachel: And that's why I think like part of what really works, especially for somebody like me who doesn't recognize a lot of these bands, the song is usually pretty recognizable.

Griffin: For sure. There was a—there's like this dark alt-rock duo, I can't remember the name of the band that does it. But they get assigned A Thousand Miles by Vanessa Carlton.

Rachel: Yeah!

Griffin: Which they turn into a—

Rachel: I think that was the one the drummer was really bummed about. [chuckles]

Griffin: Maybe. But they turned it into a minor key kind of like rock song, and it fucking shreds, it fucking rules. It's so good.

Rachel: Yeah. So, I was looking—it's hard to find a lot about this, because, one, it's only been around for a year, and also, it's in Canada, so I can't find a lot of US coverage of it.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: But I will say, I looked up the guy, Ron Jackson, who sits in the booth, and is at least presented as the one picking the songs—

Griffin: Yeah?

Rachel: He's the media director at Musora. Before he joined the—and this is from his LinkedIn. [chuckles] Before he joined Musora in January 2024, he was a high school English/musical theater teacher for eight years. [chuckles]

Griffin: That rules! That rules! Oh, man, that makes—there's one episode that is so out of left field, where they get the lead singer from Marianas Trench to do Defying Gravity.

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: And it's—he doesn't change the key, which is fucking nuts!

Rachel: [chuckles] Yeah. So, they have the option, when they do it, to change pretty much as much as they want.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: So they can like deconstruct the arrangement, they can transpose it into their own musical style, they can... take their own aesthetic and swap it out.

Griffin: There—

Rachel: There's one I really liked, there's this band, Ider, who is this like dream pop band. It's these two women.

Griffin: I was just about to bring this one up, yeah.

Rachel: Uh-huh! And they cover Weezer's Hash Pipe.

Griffin: Yeah!

Rachel: [chuckles] It's amazing!

Griffin: But they make—they change—they change some of the lyrics to make it sort of fit in this like dream—

Rachel: Yeah! That line that... it goes like, [sings] "Come on and kick me."

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: They change it to, "Come on and kiss me." [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, yeah, like it's little subtle stuff, but—

Rachel: But they still say "ass wipe." [chuckles]

Griffin: Their version is really good!

Rachel: It's beautiful!

Griffin: It's really lovely!

Rachel: Yeah, I—so, there's not a ton of videos, because, again, this just started like a year ago. So, I just kind of like cruised through most of them yesterday and today.

Griffin: It's a good watch. The individual moments of like realization and the performances are very, very good. I am also like so infinitely and forever, will be fascinated by like bands and band members who are able to communicate in this like telepathic shorthand for how they want to like approach playing a song.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: So many examples of it. In basically every episode, you will see like the drummer like say something, with words I don't even necessarily understand, and immediately like the bassists and guitarists are like, "Oh, okay, yeah. The—yeah, we'll put that down like that." And just, I don't know, the way it comes together is so—

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It really seems like magic.

Rachel: Watching the process is maybe the best part, because you see how the band kind of works through putting a song together.

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: And like, sometimes the first time they're listening to it, they're already kind of on their instruments, kind of like coming up with what it might sound like. Sometimes they like are very faithful to the song at first, and then try and figure out how they're going to change it. I mean, it's just, it's really fascinating. And so far, every band seems to have like a lot of fun.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And it's just delightful to watch.

Griffin: We should play a clip from one of the—if you were to pick one of the songs that you think is like—

Rachel: Oh.

Griffin: Kind of like the most...

Rachel: I think we should do that Hash Pipe one!

Griffin: Yeah, let's play a little bit of... Ider was the name of the band?

Rachel: Yes.

Griffin: Their cover of Hash Pipe.

[a cover of "Hash Pipe" by Ider plays]

Griffin: So lovely, so beautiful. If you were on this show, what cover would you want to do?

Rachel: Oh, don't do this to me.

Griffin: I'm just trying to provide some space so we don't go straight from the musical clip, right into the audio break for the—for the advertisement break. You know what I mean?

Rachel: I mean, the idea is that they pick something really outside of your comfort zone. So like the idea of me picking something I'd want to do—

Griffin: Yeah, that's a fair point.

Rachel: [chuckles] Is kind of against the conceit of the show.

Griffin: Well, I've assigned you the... Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego theme song, done by Rockapella. And that's your version.

Rachel: [chuckles] I've always—

Griffin: You have two hours.

Rachel: When we did karaoke one time, I really wanted to do Kesha.

Griffin: Mm-hm.

Rachel: But that's—she does some very complicated stuff.

Griffin: Oh my god, yeah, Praying?

Rachel: And I had no idea, until I tried. So, that would be probably my hill to climb.

Griffin: Yeah. Can I steal you away?

Rachel: Yes.

[theme music plays]

[ad read]

Travis: Hi! I'm Travis McElroy, and I'm here with Maria. And we're excited, because this is Member of the Month. Maria, thank you so much for being a listener and a supporter of the show.

Maria: Hi!

Travis: How did you find out about the shows?

Maria: When my daughter was in high school, we kind of connected over TAZ. And she introduced me to Shmanners and Sawbones.

Travis: What made you decide to become a Max Fun member?

Maria: I kind of decided that, with the economy being so difficult, it was worth me giving up my Starbucks to join in with you guys.

Travis: Well, Maria, I owe you a cup of coffee then. At some point, I'll get a cup of coffee into your hands to pay you back.

Maria: [chuckles] Okay.

Travis: Maria, again, thank you so much for your support.

Maria: Thank you very, very much for your time and getting a chance to be the Member of the Month. My daughter was shocked when she found out about it, so I can't wait for her to actually maybe catch a little bit of this. I can rub it in her face a little bit.

Travis: That's what we do it for. Thank you, and thanks to everybody for your support. Maria, have a great month!

Maria: You have an amazing month as well.

Speaker: Become a Max Fun member now at maximumfun.org/join.

[break]

Mallory: Hey, there! Do you like books about various shades of gray?

Brea: Maybe 50 of 'em? Or books about winged men searching for soulmates.

Mallory: Is your E-reader full of stories that would pair well with Barry White in the background?

Brea: We're Brea and Mallory of Reading Glasses, and we have a brand-new show for people who crave reads with just a dash of sriracha sauce.

Mallory: That's right! Every other Friday, we dive into books that could be measured on the Scoville scale, and talk to the people who love them.

Brea: You can find our new show by visiting maximumfun.org/spicy. That's maximumfun.org/spicy.

[break]

Griffin: I got something for you.

Rachel: All right?

Griffin: And for the audience.

Rachel: Okay?

Griffin: And it is called my segment. And this week, my segment is a movie.

Rachel: Ooh?

Griffin: And the movie is My Neighbor Totoro.

Rachel: Oh, God...

Griffin: It feels like cheating. It feels like we have at our disposal, like this quiver of arrows, and each arrow is all the Studio Ghibli movies.

Rachel: Yeah, you've—

Griffin: Because you could do a segment on pretty—I did Spirited Away, which is my favorite.

Rachel: Okay, I was gonna say, you've talked about Miyazaki before.

Griffin: Yeah, Spirited Away is my—is my favorite. I think it's like a... a true masterpiece, one of the greatest films ever made.

Rachel: Yeah, that's a real like chunky plot, too.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: There's a lot going on in that one.

Griffin: Which is why I think My Neighbor Totoro is a really interesting compliment to that, because—

Rachel: Yeah, yeah! I mean, definitely heavy.

Griffin: It's heavy, but it—also, there are some pretty key differences between that and Spirited Away. And also between that and a lot of the other animated films that were coming out in the early '90s, you know, in the—in the West. And I want to get into all of that.

I just like... I think Totoro has this place of kind of cultural significance that... I don't know, made it something I wanted to talk about. I also have been

playing a lot of that Japanese Rural Life Adventure game on my phone a lot lately, and My Neighbor Totoro, is a pretty solid Japanese rural life adventure. And so, the synergy there made sense.

This movie, My Neighbor Totoro, it's about a family. The family is two young girls, two sisters, their father and their mother, who is hospitalized. And they are living in the Japanese countryside, in the 1950s. And during their sort of move to this new—this new, you know, town that they are living in, while settling in, they encounter these big, fuzzy forest spirits.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: The biggest and fuzziest of which is Totoro, who is just this huge, round friend who lives in a hollow camphor tree, in the woods behind this family house. And the movie is just kind of about the handful of encounters that these girls have with Totoro and his fuzzy friends, as they are dealing with kind of this series of pretty basic childhood dilemmas. Like finding you're footing in this new area, or dealing with like a family member being sick and away.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And that's pretty much all that's going on in the movie. And I think that that is very rad. I think it's easy to understand why Totoro is such an icon. Because he is like, you know, a big, adorable, soft friend.

Rachel: Mm-hm.

Griffin: May, the younger sister, upon first meeting Totoro, takes a nap on his belly, while they're like in the woods. And I think that that—seeing that scene really instills within everyone a secret wish in their heart to take a nap on like a big Totoro belly.

Rachel: 100%. What do you think Totoro feels like?

Griffin: Like a...

Rachel: Do you—like, what's the texture? Like, if you had to put like a similar animal.

Griffin: I mean, I think if you could put shag carpeting on a... gosh, I don't know. If a bean bag chair could breathe, like one of those *big* bean bag chairs.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: They probably make Totoro bean bag chairs. Almost definitely, right?

Rachel: Yeah. Yeah, I'm just wondering, is it like a—like a cat fur? Or is it like a—

Griffin: I'm imagining a deep pile on Totoro.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I'm imagining a—cleaning a Totoro, I think would probably take a lot of time.

Rachel: Yeah. [chuckles]

Griffin: Totoro is not actually pulled from like pre-existing mythology. The character of Totoro was created by Hayao Miyazaki for the purposes of the film. But Totoro, and, you know, all the other creatures that they meet in the forest are inspired by Shinto folklore, what are called Kami, which are basically spirits that inhabit natural, you know, elements, parts of the world. And you know, kind of ties into this belief in Shintoism, of like peaceful coexistence with the natural world, which is a constant like recurring theme in Miyazaki's work and in Studio Ghibli's movies. Which it is able to kind of like execute and realize so well, because it is the best animation in the world.

Like it is the most detailed and loving, like painterly animation that anyone has ever made, in the history of mankind. When you read a plot synopsis of My Neighbor Totoro, it doesn't sound like a story, it doesn't sound like a

particularly like cogent plot. Which is kind of one of the things that makes it so sort of like memorable, and so like transportive while you're watching it.

Rachel: Well, and it like speaks to this time period... when kids just kind of ran around.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: You know? Particularly like during the day, but like this idea that like you would leave your house, and you would maybe be gone all day.

Griffin: Right, yeah.

Rachel: And so like, not having a real specific objective or like through line feels kind of like, well, yeah, no, that's kind of what being a kid was like back then. [chuckles]

Griffin: Yeah, for sure! I think that that's—I think that's a great observation. I think, you know, it captures a bit of the experience of like unencumbered rural life, and like what—the freedom that that allows you as a kid, and like what you do with that freedom. And how kind of scary that can be, a little bit, sometimes.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But it's basically just sort of a series of almost disconnected events that kind of capture this transformative time for these two young girls, with this backdrop of, you know, mystical, adorable forest creatures popping in from time to time. It makes it kind of a tougher hang for like really young kids, because Totoro ain't in the whole flick.

Rachel: Yeah. [chuckles]

Griffin: I was shocked the first time I watched it, that this dude rolls up like a half dozen times total.

Rachel: Yeah. And the mother's illness is like of real concern to the kids.

Griffin: Yes.

Rachel: And that's kind of a hard like sell to your children.

Griffin: That is a tough hang. But it makes those moments where Totoro does show up—like the bus stop scene is so unforgettable. Like, it really makes the movie come alive, because these kids are dealing with this somewhat heavy stuff.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And they've been kind of like... trying to get home, waiting on their dad's bus, so they can talk to him.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: And they don't really have a way of getting in touch with him. And then, boom! Totoro is there. And boom! There's a cat bus. And holy shit, like—

Rachel: Cat bus.

Griffin: Everything's so fun and good and nice now. I think more than like, you know, Totoro or the design of the spirits, or anything else, it is the genuinely sort of pleasant, unthreatening vibe of the movie that really makes it a classic. One of my favorite Roger Ebert reviews of all time is what he wrote about My Neighbor Totoro.

And he spends the whole review kind of pointing out these little details that stood out to him, apart from sort of like traditional Western animated movies and storytelling at the time. Things like how the dad in this movie is really nice! And when the girls come to him, telling him like, "We met these forest spirits," he's not dismissive, he's not shitty about it.

Rachel: Yeah. [titters]

Griffin: Instead, he takes them into the woods to like give thanks in front of this big tree.

Rachel: Which was super rare in that time period!

Griffin: Extremely rare in this time period.

Rachel: Parents were the worst in that time period. [chuckles]

Griffin: So, so bad! The element of like, "The grown-ups don't believe in us, and so like we're gonna do our own thing," is like not really part of it. That really never comes up.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: He points out this one really great moment like at the beginning of the movie, they show up at their new house, and there's a pillar holding up the like awning of their porch. And they shake the pillar, and they see that it's kind of wobbly, but it doesn't fall down, and the house doesn't collapse.

It's just like a little detail that happens. Another thing he points out is like the mom's illness in this movie is treated as sort of a fact of life. It is the reason why she's not at home right now. It is not this sort of Damocles kind of swinging over their heads, like at any moment, your mom's gonna—your mom's going to die.

Rachel: You do, yeah, you—and like, I have been trained so much that when I first started watching the movie—especially like, you know, when you think about Disney films—

Griffin: Right.

Rachel: You're like, oh, the thing is gonna be that she dies.

Griffin: Things that feel like—

Rachel: Yeah. [chuckles]

Griffin: In most like movies that I had seen before this movie like, oh, well, that's a Chekhov's gun, and there's another one and there's another. But it's not, it's just like...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It's just like these kids' lives.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: This is a quote from Ebert's review, he said, "It is a little sad, a little scary, a little surprising and a little informative, just like life itself. It depends on a situation instead of a plot, and suggests that the wonder of life and the resources of imagination supply all the adventure you need."

Rachel: Ah...

Griffin: *Ah!*

Rachel: That's really good.

Griffin: The fuckin' best! It's just a spectacular, just truly timeless classic that is slow and gentle and lovely from minute one. Aided by the fact that the theme song goes so fuckin' hard.

Rachel: [laughs]

Griffin: [sings] Totoro, Totoro!

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: I just, I really, really, I love it a lot. And you know, even in the tremendous canon of Studio Ghibli movies, it's so unique. And so like... it's so special, and so unlike anything else I think I've really ever seen.

Rachel: It says a lot, because they are kind of slow, like these Miyazaki movies, you know? Like, I wasn't sure if Big Son was gonna like it.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: But it's so like magical and surprising. Like, even though it's a very quiet movie, it still like really pulls him in.

Griffin: Yeah! Well, and I think it also like... the way that it depicts the challenges that these girls face is so realistic and it is so relatable.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: It is not that there is some villain out to get them. It is not that there is some threat looming that they are afraid of. It is like, they are living their lives, and there's little complications sometimes that can be... a little bit scary when you're a kid, and you don't really know exactly what to do. And their mom is sick, so like that support system is not where they need it to be. And that hits so... that hits so hard because it is so realistic, because it is not... exaggerated in some way that makes it feel like, oh, well, this is just like a silly story.

Rachel: Yeah. The kids aren't like super precocious, you know, or like, I don't know, they don't seem like hugely remarkable. They're just like... kids, you know?

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And it's nice to see that in a movie.

Griffin: Yeah. I love Totoro!

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: I really, I do like all the Ghibli movies, but I don't know, it's a really good one. And I think that, I don't know, it always makes me happy when I see someone with like a Totoro backpack out in the world.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Because it makes me feel like, hey, you get it, you know what's up.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Do you want to know what our friends at home are talking about?

Rachel: Yes, please!

Griffin: Andrew says, "My Small Wonder is watching traffic part for emergency vehicles. I moved to a smaller city a few years ago, Brisbane to Hobart, Australia, and watching lanes of traffic part down the middle to let an ambulance through is so satisfying. It's an amazing show of humanity to see people delay themselves for a few seconds to help a stranger they know nothing about."

Rachel: Oh, I—this is a big thing for me too.

Griffin: Oh, for sure.

Rachel: Like, I... I don't know, like driving can be so aggressive and so selfish. Like you will see people make choices that are just full-on dangerous.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: And so it's kind of refreshing to see people recognize like, oh, this is a caring and important thing to do, and actually deliver on it.

Griffin: Yeah. And it happens more often than not, right? Like, can certainly recall times where like ambulances have been laying on the horn as someone's like, "Sorry, man, I gotta turn left here."

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: But most of the time, like they do get out of the way, and that is nice.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Jameson says, "My Wonder is Rotel cheese dip. Any day can be a Super Bowl party if you just make Rotel dip. Not sponsored."

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: "Life Hack: use spinach to line your tortilla chips to add more veggies, or throw a scoop of dip onto a bed of veggies for a fun salad move." Not sponsored, Jameson, this is also not sponsored.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: We are not sponsored by Rotel cheese dip.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But I mean, when you roll up to a party... and they have a big bowl of cheesy dip?

Rachel: Oh, for sure.

Griffin: The best.

Rachel: I mean, in Texas, they call that queso.

Griffin: They do call that queso there.

Rachel: And it's one of the things that I miss a whole lot.

Griffin: Yeah, arguably the thing we miss the most.

Rachel: I get very confused still, when I go to an event and there isn't just like chips and guac and salsa and like queso there.

Griffin: Yeah.

Rachel: Because that's such a standard at every event you go to in Texas.

Griffin: Hey, thank you so much for listening to our program. Thank you to Bo En and Augustus for the use of our theme song, Money Won't Pay. You can find a link to that in the episode description. Thank you to Maximum Fun for having us on the network. Go to maximumfun.org, check out all the great shows that they have popping off over there.

We've got some new merch in the Merch Store, coming next month, which is probably in a day or two, when you are hearing this episode, when it goes live. That's over at mcelroymerch.com. Our touring season has come to a close, but we do have one more special program on the books, coming up December 6th, in lovely Huntington, West Virginia. Candlenights is back, home for the Honda Days, as we go to the Keith Albee. And we—

Rachel: Are those tickets still on sale?

Griffin: They are on sale!

Rachel: *Ooh!*

Griffin: And they are flying. They are flying fast.

Rachel: How big is that theater?

Griffin: The Keith Albee is a decent size. We've never done a show there; it has been kind of difficult to get in there in the past.

Rachel: Did you do the TV show there?

Griffin: We did a bit from the TV show in there, yeah.

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: But it's a lovely venue, and we are so excited to be doing Candlenights in person again. We haven't done it since like Covid shut down stuff happened, and we started doing all those virtual like live ones. If you... if you're able to come, December 6th, you can grab a ticket. We are also putting up a video on demand version of the show on, I believe, December 19th. You can buy a ticket for just that, for the video on demand.

And if you do buy a ticket to see the show in person, you get the video on demand ticket as well. And all of the proceeds go to benefit Harmony House, which is an incredible organization in Huntington that we have partnered with a bunch of times, that works to end homelessness in the area by providing permanent housing and so many other support systems.

Rachel: Yeah, they do everything, man. Like, it is—from what I've seen like of the work of Harmony House, they are like a one stop shop for people. Like, they provide so many supportive services, and meals and clothing. And it's just incredible.

Griffin: It is incredible. And they also need help with funding in the current climate, so...

Rachel: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah, you can find tickets to that, I believe it's bit.ly/candlenights2025. And hope to see you there, it's gonna be a really fun time. That's it! Thank you so much for listening. Have a spooky time. Have a spooky—what day does this go up? Have a spooky time. Safe! This weekend, huh?

Rachel: [chuckles] Safe?

Griffin: Safe, but spooky. Get scared, but not of real dangers that you've put yourself into.

Rachel: Mm-hm.

Griffin: Safe, smart, protect, your treasure.

Rachel: Your treasure?

Griffin: I don't know.

Rachel: [chuckles]

Griffin: Bye!

[theme music, "Money Won't Pay (feat. Augustus)" by Bo En plays]

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