

Still Buffering 476: Jesus Christ Superstar (1970)

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[theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind" by The Nouvellas plays]

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

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Tey, my fingers are, I think, permanently stained yellow. From—

Taylor: Okay, they... what's the reason for that? [chuckles]

Sydnee: I spent this weekend—okay, I foolishly saw a Tik-Tok about making dandelion wine, and thought, I can do that. It looks so easy. And the thing about that is that it was—I watched a video that was edited together to cut out the—like, I don't know how much time these tasks took. Do you know what I mean?

Taylor: Sure.

Sydnee: Because it was a well-edited video. So, it went from pick dandelions, here's a bucket of dandelions. Now pick the petals out of the calyx. So, the petals are the yellow part of the dandelion.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And the calyx is the little green part underneath. And you don't want the green part in there, because it's bitter. So, you've gotta get the yellow part out of the green part. And you don't have to be perfect about it. If you leave a few petals behind, that's not the end of the world. But you want to get most of the petals out. And I watched this in quick succession, and thought, ah, I can do this. I can—I can handle this. I am still picking petals out of dandelions three days later.

Taylor: I think... I think I know what happened here, and that's that you heard you don't have to be perfect. And you said, "Yes, I do."

Sydnee: [chuckles] That's every juicy little yellow petal—

Taylor: See, that's—

Sydnee: The other problem is, and I found this out after I picked them, if you're doing it alone—so like if you're working with a team, pick as many as you can and get it all done, and like process all at once. But if it's just you alone, it's recommended that like pick some, process. Then go pick more, and process. Because as they sit there waiting for you to pick the petals out, they close back up. [chuckles]

Taylor: Ah...

Sydnee: And then you've gotta open 'em and pull the petals out of 'em that way! So, I've been working on that for three days. I also—the Tik-Tok I watched didn't have amounts in it, and so I was like, I should probably find some like amounts. Because I don't want to just like, here's some petals, here's some water. Because you know, at the end, I might just have wine that tastes like water.

Taylor: Is it—well is this one—I'm assuming that you're working with like wild yeast, right? Like that's the fermentation—

Sydnee: No, you buy yeast. You buy like wine or beer yeast.

Taylor: Oh?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: So, are you cleaning the leaves thoroughly?

Sydnee: No, it just says you—it doesn't say anything about that.

Taylor: Hm, okay.

Sydnee: It says if you're worried about like dirt or pesticides or something, rinse them. But otherwise, don't worry about it.

Taylor: Interesting.

Sydnee: I know. And this is multiple recipes, so I don't know. But I've read— Yeah. Because I thought the same thing, don't I—but I do boil them for a very long time.

Taylor: Oh, well, that would kill anything.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: That makes sense.

Sydnee: So, that's it. Yeah, I—so, yeah. The process is, you pick a ton of dandelions. The amount that I'm seeing is that if I'm going to do a gallon of water, I need three quarts of dandelion petals.

Taylor: So, you're kind of making a dandelion kombucha, right? Because you're making a dandelion tea, and then you're—

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: You're adding yeast to it.

Sydnee: You boil them in the water, and then you let it sit and macerate for three days in the water, and just like stir it once a day. And then after three days, you add zest of orange and lemon. Bring that up to a boil again. And then after that's done, after it's come to a boil, you cool it back down and get all the solids out. And then to that liquid, you add a bunch of sugar. And then once that's all dissolved, then you can add in the fruit pieces, like pieces of orange and actually traditional raisins. Raisins are what are traditionally added to this. And then you let that sit and ferment for... like a week or two, until it stops bubbling.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: So, I have a carboy with an airlock, so I will dump the whole mixture into that. And then when it stops bubbling, then I take it out and get the pieces out and bottle it.

Taylor: That's, I mean, I bet that's going to be delicious. [chuckles] I wouldn't worry too much about having a little bit of green stem in there.

Sydnee: It does.

Taylor: Like, if it makes it move faster.

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, because that's the thing, like I still have a three day maceration process before I can even get to like dumping this thing in the carboy.

Taylor: Have you tried cutting them like between stem and blossom? Then it'll kind of pop off and you can just pull the green off.

Sydnee: I usually am just like kind of like two fingers, like you know, on the base of the flower, and popping them off that way. You know what I mean?

Taylor: But then you're still having to pick the individual petals.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I mean like if you cut it—like not pop it off—

Sydnee: Oh.

Taylor: Like from the base where all the petals are held.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: Because it's ultimately about yield. So, even if you're losing a little bit of petals by shaving 'em off that way, it'll be quicker.

Sydnee: It could be faster.

Taylor: This is one of those things, and I don't—I'm only speaking from my experience. I have not made dandelion wine, but I have made a lot of... a lot of various wines and tinctures and syrups in my time.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: And I remember realizing how important communication of like where the area for slight like not perfection is important. I had a thyme syrup on a—on a menu once, and I told the bartender like, "Okay, you just need to like pull all the thyme leaves and make the syrup." And I showed up like for my shift, and this girl was still pulling individual thyme leaves off of—

Sydnee: Oh, no.

Taylor: The branches. And they were all perfect. They were perfectly separated little pieces of thyme. And I'm like, "Well, that should have been done like three hours ago?" And she like, "Well, yeah, but like you told me to just harvest the leaves?" And I'm like, "Yeah, but like quickly!" And if you leave some behind, that's fine, and if you get a little branch, that's fine. As long as it's mainly leaves, and not a lot is lost and not a lot of branches, it's fine.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: It's important to remember that like it's not gonna—it's not gonna ruin everything if you get a little bit of green in there. A little bit of bitter might be a little nice, so don't—

Sydnee: I know.

Taylor: Don't break your heart over it. [chuckles]

Sydnee: I know, I need to—I've gotta speed up this process, because it's really, it's killing me. And I enjoy—it is very meditative to sit there and separate the petals out, that is a very like enjoyable process. But I don't know that I want to continue to do it for another two weeks, which is what-like...

Taylor: No... I don't—I think you—try cut—try cutting them. Like, you know what I mean, like cut it straight down.

Sydnee: I get what you're saying.

Taylor: Above the like, the bulkhead of like where the petals are held.

Sydnee: And I might get the little tips, because there are little pieces of the calyx that sort of curl around it, and I might get the very tips of those. But that wouldn't be the end of the world.

Taylor: That's fine. That's going to give you a little—like dandelion greens are pretty bitter, but I don't know, I feel like that—because you're making a wine, but it's not—I mean, a little bit of that kind of tanic, leafy bitterness would be nice.

Sydnee: Yeah. And I mean, there's plenty of sugar and fruit and stuff that go in it. I don't know, what's weird is that what you're supposed to do is you make it now, when the dandelions are blooming, this is the time of year where you look out and like they're everywhere. Like, I was worried I—I didn't want to pick all the ones from the yard, because I always feel like that's bad when foraging. Even if it's dandelions, which I don't know— [titters] I don't know what the—

Taylor: A weed? [chuckles] I think you can pick all the weeds. I think the weeds will come back.

Sydnee: But I—well, but I left some, because I was like, you know, I always—you always leave some, for the bees or whatever. And when I came out the next morning, my yard was just covered all over again with ones that have now opened. And so it's like, okay, I don't know what I was worried about, there's plenty of dandelions out here. [chuckles]

And as I'm picking them, I'm throwing like the pieces that I'm not using back into the—onto the ground, so I'm reseeding with the little bits I'm missing. But anyway, I—the fun thing is you make it now, and then you put it somewhere to continue to age for like six months.

So, the idea is that in the dead of winter, when it is very cold and you can't like, you can't even remember what spring felt like because it's so long ago, and it's so cold and you just want the sun to come back, you open a bottle of dandelion wine and you can--

You know, for just a moment, experience spring. Feel and taste and smell spring. And that to me is very appealing. So, I think December Sydnee will be very happy about all this. But April Sydnee is really not enjoying it.

[both chuckle]

Taylor: You know, there's a... I don't—I don't know the—what's the time frame on it. There's another thing that's like, that that kind of is tied into a lot of like solstice festivals, and sort of a... a Pagan thing, making nocino, where you harvest like—

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: Walnuts. And they have to—like the—it's to make a liqueur. And it sits long enough that like... I think that's it, you harvest it in spring, but you can drink it in fall.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: And it's also the same, like it's tied to like, here's something that we... that the product itself recognizes the turn of the seasons.

Sydnee: Well, that's—as I was reading more about it, like the guess for this is that it has Celtic origins. And so that would all make sense, if it was a Pagan thing. And I bet you're right, like the original recipe is probably just dependent on wild yeasts from the dandelions, and we probably didn't boil and all this other stuff. I think this is to make it a more sterile and like predictable product, you know?

Taylor: No, that makes sense. And that's definitely safer, because who knows what...

Sydnee: What wild yeasts will do, yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Who knows what wild yeasts will do? [chuckles]

Taylor: I mean, it would probably do exactly what you want it to do, but you know, it's a—if you're gonna—if you're gonna consume it, you're my sister, please be safe. That's fine.

Sydnee: Yeah, I don't—I like to—I have only ever tried like homebrewing and that kind of stuff from pretty like regimented like kits and things that come sterilized and prepackaged and stuff like that. I've just, I don't—I don't want to mess around with that. I would have to—if I was ever going to go like full brewing on my own, like homebrew, like set up an operation—

I would need a whole section of my house that is kept sterile specifically for that. Where like kids and cats cannot enter, and all the equipment—I would need my... I do have an autoclave, so I could—I could autoclave stuff. But... [chuckles] you know, for home use. But like, I would—I would want—I'd want a lab, basically.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Where I did that, if I was actually going to, you know, homebrew.

Taylor: It is interesting, though, that there is a lot of that sort of question mark up to nature, that is in like professional brewing.

Sydnee: Yeah?

Taylor: One of my favorite products is sherry, and I love sherry, it's all made in Portugal. And there's a lot of different kinds of sherry. I won't belabor you with the weird like categories, but there are like, there are styles that are made where basically like, well, we let the yeast ferment naturally, like they're open containers, until they build up a floor.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: Like you know, the kind of thing, like the yeast boat that builds up over top of it. And when it gets thick enough, it suffocates itself. And so then like the yeast dies off, because it makes—it farts out too much alcohol and it overgrows, so there's no oxygen. And so, that's it, it dies off. And it's an entirely an open air, natural process.

Sydnee: Huh.

Taylor: That just has been—and I'm sure the people that have done it, you know, it's one of those crafts that you just learn, you learn what to look for. You know when things look wrong and when things look right. And I'm sure they have a myriad of tests that make sure that things are safe and bodily. But the initial steps, there is wild fermentation, there is like open fermentation.

Sydnee: Hm?

Taylor: And they just have been doing it long enough that they can look at it and go like, "Yeah, that's good. Nah, that's bad." [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yeah, that is very cool. I wish—I feel like it's one of those things where once you really know the rules and you understand them, you can probably break 'em safely.

Taylor: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: So, that's what—I would have to like get super into knowing all the rules. I mean, because part of—

Taylor: Well, the—

Sydnee: Part of why you do it the way you do it, like from an industrial perspective, is to make the exact same product every time, because that's what the consumer expects. And once you start introducing wild yeast, then flavors can change and it isn't the same. And that's part of it too, and I don't care so much about that. But I'd want to feel really comfortable that I could keep things safe.

Taylor: That's totally understandable. I do like the kind of esoteric like, well, as the—as the world changes around you, the flavors slightly shift.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: And like, it's going to be a little different every time, to be like a unique expression. That's what capitalism takes from us, Syd.

Sydnee: That's true.

Taylor: [chuckles] I don't know, I just—I just throw that onto the end of most sentences to see if it lands. Who knows? "How was your day?"

"Oh, it's cloudy outside."

"That's what capitalism takes from us."

[both chuckle]

Sydnee: I'm trying over here, like I have obtained some ramp bulbs, and I'm trying to establish my own secret ramp patch.

Taylor: I love that.

Sydnee: Yeah. I'm trying two different things, because I've read a ton about like—because ramps are hard to grow. That's why they're expensive and sought after, is because if you find like a patch where they grow wild, you don't want anybody to—you know? You just leave it be and don't let anybody know that you have a secret ramp hideout. [chuckles] And I'm trying to make one in my forest, and then I'm also doing some container gardening of some ramps, to see if I can grow them. Because I can control the—they need a lot of shade and moisture and cool air, and that can be hard to replicate. You gotta have just the right area, so...

Taylor: There—

Sydnee: I'm working on it.

Taylor: They're most prolific in the Appalachians, correct?

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah, they grow wild in the Appalachian Mountains. And so, you, ideally, you want a north-facing hillside that's mostly shady, and a little bit of sun, but mostly shady. And so, that keeps the temperature down. They don't like real hot temperature. So, you get those real heavily forested areas of the Appalachian Mountains where they're just naturally covered by all the treetops, right?

Taylor: Mm-hm, yeah, that makes sense.

Sydnee: Like that's what, you know, that canopy is protecting them and allowing them to grow. Well, a lot of drainage, which is why the hillside is perfect, because they get, you know, they get a lot of drainage that way. So, near creek.

Taylor: That's very cool. And then you can sell them to some fancy New York City restaurateur for... \$5 a head or something.

[both chuckle]

Sydnee: I can be a ramp connection, Tey.

Taylor: Oh, yeah! [chuckles] I don't know, that's one of those things—I guess because we grew up with them. I mean, we didn't eat them, but I mean, I—enough that we knew that they were in the ground—

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: That like seeing them pop up on menus at higher prices, I'm like, I don't... I don't like that. [chuckles]

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: That is gross.

Sydnee: No, I am... I feel the same way. Like, I mean, they're good. They're very good. I don't—it's weird to me that they're like prized as much as they are, because as much as I do enjoy ramps, I don't find them like, this is the

best iteration of this flavor I've ever—you know what I mean? Like, I like them. I like them a lot. But I also have been to a lot of like picnics and cookouts and gatherings throughout my time here in Appalachia where I've eaten ramps. So, I've eaten ramps on many, many, many not bougie occasions, right? [chuckles]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I have—I have stood next to the smoker picking at pieces of meat, while I got ramps on my plate that I'm also eating with my fingers. So, I haven't—to me, it's not like a delicacy, you know? It's just like... [chuckles]

Taylor: Well, that's—I feel—I'll be quick, but there was this restaurant—it's no longer there, that opened in my neighborhood. And that the guy... oh, gosh, he had named himself Montana, that wasn't his birth name. And he was like—oh, he held himself as like this mountain dude. And he got like wood to build his restaurant from a reclaimed barn from Kentucky, like bought the wood.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: And it just, it was like "Appalachian cuisine," which I'm like, well, Montana's not Appalachia. I mean, that's just your name, but like that's—like, I don't—none of this really lines up.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: And they had like ramps on the menu for \$30 dollars, and I'm like, I don't like any of this. And they were selling like pork chow. Like it was like—the kind of like that, hey, this is like affordable food that you grew up with in certain areas of America, and now it's like expensive hipster food in a "reclaimed" barn from Kentucky. Like, I don't—

Sydnee: No...

Taylor: I don't like any of this. [chuckles] None of this is good.

Sydnee: No, I'm gonna tell you... wild onions grow like all over the place here, like they're in all of our yards, right? Like they're in—

Taylor: Oh, I remember like picking what we called onion grass as a kid, and just eating it by our trampoline on our hill in the backyard. [chuckles]

Sydnee: So, a lot of times as a kid, you don't realize that if you—if you dig down, and it doesn't take a lot of effort to pull them up out of the ground, they're pretty easy—just like onions, like the bulbs start to pop out of the top almost when they're ready.

If you pull those up and you get the whole bulb, it's a really nice onion, kind of garlicky onion flavor. It's not that dissimilar from a ramp. It's different. It's not as delicate. It's sharper, and I definitely would—like, you should cook these. It'd be a lot on your tummy to eat raw, I would think. Probably not the grass, but the bulb.

[both chuckle]

Taylor: That's why my tummy's made of steel, because I ate onion grass—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: For fun as a kid. [chuckles]

Sydnee: I would treat him more like a heavy-duty scallion, you know?

Taylor: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: Like, you could just take the real dark green tops and clip those into a salad or on top of something. It'd probably be like chives, it would work really well, you know?

Taylor: Oh, absolutely, yeah, very similar.

Sydnee: Yeah. Be very—yeah. Tastes good. The white part I would do more—like what we did is we cooked 'em down with potatoes, like roast potatoes. Ooh.

Taylor: Oh, heck yeah.

Sydnee: *Delicious.* Delicious! Very—and I mean, they're everywhere. Like, we have so many, I mean, I still have tons out on the hillside. The girls went out and harvested tons of them and we were making dinner with them, but we still have tons left. We then took it all and pureed it into a soup. Ooh, delicious.

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: So, there you go. Those are my—those are my weekend adventures, I foraged and—[chuckles] someday I'll have wine. Two or three years from now. [laughs]

Taylor: You're gonna... fall to winter Sydnee is really going to appreciate your effort.

Sydnee: This is what I'm hoping. I'm hoping that I will look back on me and be like, "It was worth it. It was worth it. You did it." Either that or I will take a sip and go, "Ugh, what was I—" [chuckles] "What did I do all that work—I don't even like wine that much! I don't know what I'm doing." [chuckles]

Taylor: There are a lot of things like that in the liquor world that it's like, oh, you start it and you have to wait on it for... three months or six months or a year. And like it always sounds like something I want to do, but I can just not commit to that.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: Like, I've done some shrubs that are like month-long shrubs, where you just kind of wait 'til things break down and mellow out. And it is good, it is worth it, but that's one of those things where you can't be too excited about it, that you can just make it and shove it in the back of your fridge and be like, okay.

Sydnee: Yeah. Just—yeah.

Taylor: I'll forget about that for now. I'm not that excited about a beet shrub that I can't let it sit in the back of my fridge for a couple months.

Sydnee: That's like that cherry thing. You know what I'm talking about? There's that cherry thing.

Taylor: Oh? Cherry—it's got a cute little name, it's like—it's like a bop or a... What is it called?!

Sydnee: I know!

Taylor: Cherry...

Sydnee: Not a kick... Not a punch, not a—it is, it's something like that. Bomb? No.

Taylor: No, I—it's a—it's a Midwestern thing.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: It's where you take like, it's usually, what is it, whiskey?

Sydnee: Mm-hm. Yeah.

Taylor: And you infuse it with like cherries and sugar and orange peel.

Sydnee: Or like bourbon, yeah.

Taylor: Cherry bounce! It's cherry bounce, right?

Sydnee: Yeah, a bounce. See, the only reason I've never tried that is I don't really like cherry flavor. And so, I keep thinking like if I put all that effort in, and then it tastes like cherries, I wouldn't be happy. [chuckles] You know? Like I'd be like, "Ah, it tastes like cherries!"

Taylor: Well, I feel like a lot of it is like—like that kind of recipe is really close to like one of my favorite things, which is have you ever heard of rock and rye?

Sydnee: No, uh-uh.

Taylor: In not so long, and we have to talk about Jesus Christ, but—

Sydnee: I know.

Taylor: Rock and rye is, it's an old—like, it would be sold in bottles, like—I mean, there's still like two labels that still sell it in bottles, but like back in the day, like I don't know, the 1920s, it was a very popular product. And it was just that, it was like, usually, it was rye.

That would be infused with, rock candy would be the—rock sugar would be the sweetener. And then orange peel, sometimes cinnamon, different spices. But that's it, like you would just take a big vat of rye, throw in rock sugar to sweeten it, a bunch of spices and orange peel, and let it sit.

Sydnee: That sounds good.

Taylor: It's basically an old-fashioned in—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like in a bottle. And I love it, like that's...

Sydnee: That sounds very good.

Taylor: And you really—like there's nothing in an old-fashioned that you couldn't make ahead of time. There's nothing—

Sydnee: Yeah, that's true.

Taylor: A lot of cocktails had to have fresh—and you gotta—you could—you could just make a bottle of old fashioned, but rock and rye is kind of that. And I love that.

Sydnee: Hm!

Taylor: So, if you don't like the idea of cherry bounce because of the cherries, but you like the idea of putting a bunch of stuff in whiskey—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And having it for Christmas time, you should make some nice spiced rock and rye.

Sydnee: That I would like. I'll make that.

Taylor: Yeah. Get some—get some good like rock sugar, whatever spice profile you like, some orange peels, let it sit.

Sydnee: That sounds, yeah, that sounds up my alley. I'll have that to counter my dandelion wine that I inevitably probably won't like.

Taylor: [chuckles] I probably like—I love—I love floral, bitter things.

Sydnee: I think if I—if I pick as much as I need to, I should have like four or five bottles, so I'm happy to share. We'll see. We'll see what happens, but that's the goal.

Taylor: I'm curious. I'm excited.

Sydnee: So, it was also Easter weekend.

Taylor: It was.

Sydnee: Yes. So, obviously we have to talk about Jesus Christ Superstar.
[chuckles]

Taylor: Jesus, he comes back from the grave. Correct?

Sydnee: Yes. Spoilers. [chuckles]

Taylor: Oh, yeah. Sorry! If you haven't—[laughs]

Sydnee: If you—if you're not familiar with the story—

Taylor: Ah, this should have told you.

Sydnee: Yeah. The foundational story of Christianity.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: I will say, by the way, I was so disappointed, my favorite Easter thing like show every year is that big mega church, Church of the Rock, that puts on like the themed Easter pageants.

Taylor: Oh, is that where they do like Iron Man as Jesus? Or—okay, yeah.

Sydnee: I think Iron Man got crucified one year, Belle got crucified one year, from Beauty and the Beaster.

Taylor: [chuckles] Beauty and the Beaster? That's not the name.

Sydnee: Marty McFly got crucified one year in a—

Taylor: Oh, no...

Sydnee: Back to the Future parody. Yeah... Buzz Lightyear got crucified. [chuckles] Yeah! Anyway, they didn't do anything like that this year, they just did like normal just like sing songs. I know, heartbreaking! Heartbreak—like we, every year, this is probably what we look forward to most on Easter. [chuckles] I mean, the kids like the baskets and all that, but—

Taylor: I just want to know who—like who el—who could have been crucified this year, that wasn't?

Sydnee: I don't—I mean, what major—

Taylor: A KPop Demon Hunter character? That was big.

Sydnee: Ah, that would have been perfect! And they could use the songs.

Taylor: That was—that was—maybe that wouldn't have been on the property list, because it's demonic somehow?

Sydnee: I don't know.

Taylor: I don't know, the main characters being half demon.

Sydnee: Well...

Taylor: Not Christian enough.

Sydnee: Not Christian enough. Not like Jesus Christ Superstar.

Taylor: [chuckles] Not like Iron Man.

Sydnee: Yeah. [chuckles] I will say, Tey, I listened to the soundtrack for Jesus Christ Superstar, which of course is a musical, and then they made it into a movie. And it's gone through many, many iterations over the years of like, they've done like live performances around Easter on networks with like whoever the popular artists are of the time.

Most notably last year, Cynthia Erivo was Jesus, which obviously a lot of people had strong feelings about. [chuckles] Because why not have strong feelings about who we cast as Jesus in Jesus Christ Superstar? It's not like there's other things happening in the world. But the music, when I was a teenager, felt very like... like I was breaking a rule or something, you know? Like, "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, rock and roll Jesus? This is so bad."

Taylor: Was that the thing that made it feel controversial, just that it was like rock overlaid on Christianity?

Sydnee: Yes. I mean, that was what made it feel controversial to me. And as far as I know, that was all they had to make it controversial. Like, I don't know why else it would have been controversial. Because if you look at like the story and the—what the lyrics are and all that, it's not like it's—they're not taking any liberties. It's just the story of the Bible, I mean—[chuckles] It's just the crucifixion.

Taylor: Yes, but I don't know, and maybe this is because I went into this. You know, we had that really interesting discussion last week, we were talk—[chuckles] involving Scrubs.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Now, is this trying to—is this propaganda for something they want us to believe? Like, "Eh, you can't do anything about the medical system, it is what it is." And I've developed that eye later in life, where I look back at a lot of the properties I liked as—when I was younger and go like, I think this was propaganda, I just bought it.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And so, I always watch things with that eye. And specifically something like Jesus Christ Superstar I'm like, is this trying to make Jesus cool? Is this a buddy Christ reformation? And I watched the movie, the original movie—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And I don't know! Because I feel like—and maybe it's not necessarily in the script, although I kind of think it is, in that like I, having watched it, I left with a kind of... There's a—there's an intonation where it is unfair that this is the story that these characters have been forced to play. It's unfair to Judas, it's unfair to Jesus. It's an unfair ask.

Sydnee: Hm.

Taylor: That, I don't know, maybe I was reading too much into it. But like, I think that there's some really interesting bits in the lyricism where it's like—maybe it was more aware of the hypocrisy of Christianity. Like how much Jesus talks about, "You're not going to remember what I said, like you're not going to care about what I did." Like, that's true, right? Like we've seen as Christianity advance, like nobody cares about the message of Jesus Christ, they care about the bloody sacrifice.

Sydnee: Yes. Well, and leveraging that to build megachurches and tax free, you know, businesses and... Yeah, but like, I know what you're saying, I wonder though, from that perspective, I—hear is what's hard for me to reckon with.

I felt like, as a young person listening to it—as a young person who, I would say I was at that phase where like we had gone to church growing up, I was a teenager, and so I was questioning everything that authority figures told me, because that's what you do. You know, normal. And part of that was religion.

And I was at a—you know, our parents weren't making us go to church at that point, so it was like thank goodness, church is boring, I don't want to go. And I remember listening specifically to like Gethsemane and thinking like, oh, man, he's just like a—he feels like a guy, and it is really unfair. And he doesn't want this, and he has to.

And man, that really sucks. And empathizing with the human Jesus in that moment., is it—is it making me question the hypocrisy of the church, or is it pushing me closer to faith? I don't know. Because I remember thinking that very strongly. like I empathize with this figure in this moment, strongly. And what did that do to me? I don't know.

Taylor: Well, and I think to build on that—[chuckles] not to be that guy, but I felt myself empathizing with Judas, in that—

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: You know, Jesus had all these followers in Jesus Christ Superstar. They're just rolling around like, you know, "Oh, bless me, Jesus. Love me, Jesus." Like, Judas is his believer, and he keeps saying, "I know you want me to do this. You need me to do this." It's like I feel like Judas is a victim in that like he doesn't want to do it, but he knows this is what has to happen for the story that's being told.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And again, this is not me projecting on the Bible as a whole, I think this is in the context of Jesus Christ Superstar, that Judas is conflicted about the fact that, to be true to what Jesus wants, he has to betray him. And so, he plays his role.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And it leads to his death. And that leads me to—it leads to the obvious question like, hey, if I was an all-powerful god that could just like snap my fingers and be like, "Everybody love each other," why would I do this? Why would I make people suffer? Why would I need bloody sacrifices in my name? Why would I write a story that is a tragedy if I had the ability to write the universe in whatever way I chose?

Sydnee: I mean, I think—and it's certainly, if you look at like especially when the movie was made, that would be a time where all that would be questioned as part of faith, right? Like, you know, Jesus is kind of like a hippie... I don't want to say cult leader, that's loaded, but that he is sort of portrayed that way, right?

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydnee: Like, they're all long-haired and robed and wandering around and singing together. [chuckles] You know? Like, it has that vibe. But like at the same time questioning traditional religion and opening yourselves up to spirituality and other ways of—like, it would have been very of the time, of the moment.

I do think it's interesting, because what Judas is mainly saying throughout the show is, "If you just—why are you making it about you? Why does it have to be about you as god? If you just teach the lessons, like we're doing something good here, we're teaching good stuff. This is good stuff, we're helping people, people are hearing the message, people are following us.

But every time you call yourself god and make it about you, then you draw the attention of the Romans and you're going to get yourself killed, and then it's about you. And it was never supposed to be about you, right? It was

supposed to be about these lessons. Why are you making it about you?" Which is an interesting and very human question to be asking.

Taylor: Well, and I think that's kind of epitomized in that. And it's early on in the show, there's the exchange of lyrics where, you know, Mary is anointing Jesus with the oils and Judas makes the point of like, "Why are we spending money on oils? That could be used to feed a few people."

And I was kind of shocked. It's just been that long since I've listened to the musical, where Jesus' response is like, "Do you think we can actually—there will always be poor. We can't take care of all the poor."

There will always be suffering. So like, this doesn't matter." I mean, the insinuation is, "Who cares if we spend a little bit of money on anointing oil?" And I'm like, oh, I don't... I don't think that's good? I think Judas had a point!

Like, isn't that your kind of like, your hardline philosophers? Where like every indulgence you make, you should be aware of the human suffering incurred by that indulgence? Like, I don't need a—I don't need a human to do that. I would hope the merciful son of God would be aware of that.

Sydnee: Ah, but that's, I—well, I don't know, because that's like—I mean, I don't want—I am not equipped or knowledgeable enough to get into a theological discussion. But my—what I would put out there as a suggestion is that Christianity doesn't necessarily believe that you should think of things that way, that every indulgence contributes to the suffering of others.

But that enjoying God's creation, enjoying your life, finding joy and happiness, taking care of yourself sometimes as well as others, is fine. Like, it's part of it. I do think that's baked in. And I'm not saying good, bad, indifferent, but I do think that runs counter to some of the philosophy that you're talking about.

Taylor: No, I agree with that. I guess—I guess it's... it's a point where I ultimately believe—like, I don't—I don't believe in any sort of god. Like, I don't know if... We don't need to go into our personal theologies, but like Earth is my god.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: Like, I think the Earth is great. I think the things that grow on it, the things that live on it—I don't need to look up to heaven to be like, wow, this place is amazing. Like, you can look at... plants, you can look at animals and be like, this is beautiful.

This is... something amazing designed this. I don't think there needs to be a god in the sky, I just think nature is amazing. That being said, I think if you're gonna take the burden on like—of a—of a god that has a logic to it, in a sense, like, I don't—maybe earthly comforts should be on the wayside, like... it's... I don't know.

It was—it was just such a—like, I was... it was early—it's early in the play that that lyric is said. And it's like, I don't think I like a god—I don't like a Jesus that accepts people will always suffer, people will always starve.

Like, there are enough—there are people like you that work all day, every day to take care of people. I think with the understanding that people will always starve, people will always suffer, and yet I wake up every day and I do everything I can.

Sydnee: I don't know—and I know that that is—and again, not a theologian, I have not read the Bible. I mean, I've read bits and pieces, like I'm familiar. But we were raised Catholic, so the Bible was read to us in church.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: In small sections, by the priest.

Taylor: [chuckles] I forgot all the lessons, I just hung on to the guilt for a couple decades.

Sydnee: Out of a book that is called a missal. I always find it interesting when a non-Catholic has to encounter it—

Taylor: Pew! Pow! [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yeah. "This little book, it's called a missal. No, not like that kind of missile." It's the book that the priest tells you what page to turn to, and then he tells you what's in it. He reads it to you! Or somebody does. [chuckles] We don't even get to read it ourselves.

Taylor: It was better when it was in Latin, and I didn't have to pretend to understand it. Once I started understanding it I'm like, this doesn't make sense, why couldn't he just make the lepers not be lepers? All of them.

Sydnee: I mean, the—yes. Yes. Just fix all of it. But I mean, free will, we had to learn for ourselves. Sort of. Maybe. Hm... Anyway. [chuckles] But I do believe that that is a—that's a—that is gospel, like it's paraphrased gospel. But what he's saying there is something that is in the Bible.

Taylor: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: And I don't know—I mean, if the point is supposed to be that self-flagellation does not help anyone, you know? That like joining suffering, depriving yourself to be part of the suffering of others does not ease their suffering. I don't know if that is the larger point. Like, doing good things, yes. But "so we shall also starve to be one with those who starve" would not be something that I think is like a Christian teaching. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Oh, I agree with that. And there's a big difference between starving and anointing yourself with holy oils. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yes. No, I agree. I wonder if that's not where that text is supposed to be going... But I don't know, because I mean, what you're pointing out is that we can take these words on this page—that have been translated, by the way, so already we don't know what they originally said.

And also, we don't know what the person writing them actually heard— [chuckles] or why they wrote them. So like, all of that's called into question. And then we can put them into any song or show or movie, in the—on the lips of anyone we want, and get a different meaning and a different understanding that fits our needs, right? I mean, that's the problem.

And Jesus Christ Superstar, I think, can go both ways. I have seen productions of it that I think are very much like, "And Jesus is awesome." And that's the message of the show. "Isn't he cool? Wasn't Jesus great? Don't we love Jesus?" And it is being used as a very like straightforward...

I don't want to say recruitment, because I don't always think it's insidious, but like, "Go Christianity." I do think I've seen that. And then I've all—I also think you're right, there are more nuanced portrayals in Jesus Christ Superstar where it is being used to not undermine, but definitely question, definitely raise questions.

Taylor: Well, that's—I don't—again, like I just, I didn't watch the Cynthia Erivo one, I watched the original like, I don't know, what was that, in the '70s?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And I don't... I feel like it sounds like such like a petty little edgelord thing to say, like, "I empathize with Judas." But I did! I was like, this is a... his character is really important to the story, because he's constantly pushing back against like there's the cult like, "Hosanna, Hey Sanna." Like, "Oh, you're God, you're a superstar."

And he's just like, "What's the point of this? Like, shouldn't we just be doing good?" Like you said, like it's... it's not about you, it's about the message. And I think that that's one of those things that I think anybody that's ever, I don't know, questioned "how do I do good in this world," there's the dual understanding of, "I can't fix it.

But I have to do what I can." And if we all agreed on that, if we all understood that we'll never be the superstar, we just go about our little lives and do good, we would, net effect, have a better world. The problem is, is that the sort of, the... the blueprint that this supposes is like, oh, we need a godlike figure to come and remind us all to be humans every now and then, right?

Because that's the hero myth, which I think Jesus Christ Superstar is an early iteration of that. It's like, the hero myth is always that we need somebody bigger and better than us to come along and remind us of our goodness. But they have to be bigger and better than us. I disagree with that as a core understanding of our—[chuckles] of us.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, I think—I definitely think that you could—you could interpret the entire thing as a criticism of like, Judas thought he was along for the ride of like, we're going to make life better for people, we're gonna fix things and make life better. And ultimately, the message of Christianity is that, I mean, take care of each other, but this isn't the life that matters.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's the next one. So, that's—you know, I mean, like it... undervalues the experience of Earth in comparison to the one after.

Taylor: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: Which, of course, if you are not somebody who believes that way, is gonna rub you wrong. It's going to feel wrong, right? It's gonna feel...

Taylor: Well, I mean, I don't know? I guess—I guess if that's your belief system, and I don't, I'm not here to judge anybody's belief system, then I would still bring it back to, why does Jesus need anointing oils? Why does the church need palaces of gold? Why do they need mega churches and yachts? If we all are in agreement that this world doesn't matter... I respect all belief systems. If that is your belief, I will respect that. Why are you living in a mansion?

Sydnee: I mean, you know, it really is interesting, especially if you like fast forward to today when you have the Pope who is very clearly criticizing those power structures.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Openly criticizing these things, and calling it all into question. And then saying like really radical stuff like, "How can you close your hands in

prayer when they're covered in blood?" Whew... Wild. Wild, Pope Leo.
[titters]

Taylor: [yells out] Chicago Pope!

[both laugh]

Sydnee: Wild!

Taylor: [chuckles] We did that. I'm not even from Chicago, but I'll claim him!

Sydnee: That whole exchange, "God does not hear the prayers of those who wage war."

"Yes, he does!" That was their response, "Yeah, he does! Shut up..."
[chuckles]

Taylor: Well, I mean, I—that's—I don't know. It's kind of wild, because I'm not—I'm not religious in any way. When like a—the church, I think, sure, they—I think they provide you with a structure to your life and some hope and some understanding. And that's not bad. None of that's bad.

Even if it's all false, even if it's a story. If it's a story that enriches your life, I don't think it's bad to tell. I think that's okay. Lots of us get in situations that are incomprehensible unless you just hope that something better awaits you. It's an okay story to tell. But I do think it still is propped up on like, "And we get money for it."

So, when those guys are calling you out and being like, "Hey, there's a balance here we have to maintain—[chuckles] we have to like give some back to get what we get. Now that you're just using our church to like wage unnecessary bloody war, we gotta call you out a little bit." Like, that's when you know it's bad.

Sydnee: Yeah, right?

Taylor: That's when you know you've gone off script.

Sydnee: I just think—I mean, the thing to me that's always been interesting about Jesus Christ Superstar, one, I do—like, I think the music is good, by the way. I do enjoy it a lot.

Taylor: Oh, it's amazing. It seems like a whole cast of people that are getting to sing as loud as they want, constantly, which is great.

Sydnee: Yeah. It's fantastic.

Taylor: And they're all very good at it. [chuckles]

Sydnee: I always wanted to play Judas, that's the one I'd want to play.

Taylor: Really?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Ah?

Sydnee: I mean, when I was a teenage girl I sang Mary's songs, because I felt like that's what I was supposed to do. But you know—

Taylor: I was going to say, I remember you singing Mary's songs.

Sydnee: Yeah, but no—

Taylor: No, Judas is the best—I mean, I...

Sydnee: It'd be the most fun to play, I think.

Taylor: I think that's the best character. It's the most interesting character in the show.

Sydnee: Yes, just from like a theatrical perspective, that is the part I'd want to play.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: Yeah, but I think it's always been interesting that like you will see church groups perform Godspell, and they would never—I mean, I've never seen like organized religion embrace Jesus Christ Superstar in the way that I feel like Godspell was, because it was like the softer, gentler version. But it's very similar.

I mean, it's not that, other than that one's rock music and one is theater music. [chuckles] You know? Like, I... it's still, let's take—you know, Jesus is a little different in that one, he's a clown. But... it's still, let's humanize Jesus a little bit, let's connect with Jesus. Let's talk to his followers. And then let's crucify him at the end. [chuckles] It's the same story.

Taylor: Well, and I don't—I'm not familiar with Godspell, so I can't make the comparison. But it did—it did stand out to me that it felt like, and maybe this is just because I haven't watched it in so long, that like it felt a very reluctant Jesus and a very relatable Judas, which was not what I was expecting on the rewatch.

I was like, oh, yeah, this is like woo-woo rock and roll Jesus propaganda. It's like, no, I feel... I think that Jesus was stuck with a story that he knew he had to finish, but he didn't want to. And Judas was the only one that kind of saw the bigger picture and thought that it wasn't—it would give a whole bunch of power to Christianity—

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: But that the lessons would be lost, which is what he sings.

Sydnee: It's interesting, because it kind of got—like, I definitely think there was a time where it was pretty controversial from the like Christian church perspective. And it was around the same time that like Last Temptation of Christ came out, which was even more controversial because it showed Jesus having like a relationship with Mary Magdalene.

But the whole point of the movie was that like the Devil showed Jesus, you know, if you don't do all this, you could just like have a life. You could just like marry this lady that clearly likes you, and you could have kids. And you have a life. Or not.

Which is like a more powerful—again, I feel like, well, that's a more powerful message, isn't it? But no, the church was like, "No, no, no! Aah!" [titters] But it all, I don't know, I always thought it was interesting. Now, I will say, I did not feel bad listening to it because of our parents, because our parents very much liked Jesus Christ Superstar, so there was no...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It wasn't like in our house it was banned, it just, I knew that it was like, ooh, we're not supposed to listen to this, it's rock and roll Jesus.

[both chuckle]

Taylor: No, no, and I don't know, even as like a not particularly religious person, I've always had a certain amount of like sympathy for Jesus. Like, I don't know, I think that even if you were just a—if you did exist and you were just a human born, and you got saddled with this impossible weight—this is—this is a testament to me just being old. Every time he says like, "It's been three years, it feels like 30." Like, man, you're so—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: It's only three years. [chuckles]

Sydnee: I know.

Taylor: It's not that long.

Sydnee: I know!

Taylor: I feel—I feel bad for the character of Jesus. He showed up, he flipped tables at the—at the temple. I agree with that. You know, punish the money lenders, hang out with hippies and sex workers. He didn't do anything wrong. No problems with Jesus. [chuckles]

Sydnee: No. No, I mean, yeah, I agree with you. Well, thank you for watching Jesus Christ Superstar. [titters]

Taylor: It was—it was a good way to spend my Easter holiday. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yeah, I think it's a—I think it's an appropriate Easter. [chuckles] I mean, it's, you know, it's just the Bible. I don't know why everybody got so worked up.

Taylor: Well, but again, like I don't—maybe it's because I come with a critical eye, but I did feel like, I don't know, I think it's a little bit more self-aware than I used to think it was, of the sort of... Like, Judas is oddly like aware of the hypocrisy to come. And when I look at when this musical was written I was like, oh, that's not—it's gotten so much worse. And that's exactly what Judas is singing about.

Sydnee: He is. And I mean, Judas is also given the perspective of somebody who's singing from now. Like, his song, like he says specifically, "If you'd come today." So, he is singing from... today. Whatever today is that you're watching it.

Taylor: Did you not—I mean, I guess you didn't rewatch the movie, but like when he's going to like to betray Jesus and the tanks roll over the hills—

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Taylor: And then the bombers shoot off after him, like it felt very like—

Sydnee: Well, yeah.

Taylor: Like, that's... And this was the '70s, so like it's way more on the nose now. But, you know—

Sydnee: It is.

Taylor: Christianity literally powers bombers these days.

Sydnee: Mm-hm. Well, Tey, I think we need something lighter next.

Taylor: Yeah, you think? [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: All right, well, I brought up perhaps covering The Shins.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: They're going on tour with Weezer. Weezer has a new album out. We've talked about Weezer forwards and backwards, but we have not talked about The Shins.

Sydnee: Yes, we should talk about The Shins.

Taylor: Their debut album, Oh, Inverted World. But—

Sydnee: Okay.

Taylor: We can—we can focus on that and then listen to—

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: Some more of their hits.

Sydnee: Perfect. Excellent. Well, yes, that will—that should be lighter for next week.

Taylor: All right. [chuckles]

Sydnee: In the meantime, thank you, listeners, for joining us. You can listen to a lot of great shows that you would enjoy at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org. You can email us—no, that's where you can email us, at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org, is what I just said. You can go to maximumfun.org—

Taylor: I can't listen to you get it wrong because then I get it wrong! It's okay that you get it wrong, but then I'll get it wrong.

Sydnee: Oh, no...

Taylor: Keep talking.

Sydnee: And thank to The Novellas for our theme song, "Baby, Change You Change Your Mind."

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering.

Taylor: And I am, too.

[theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind" by The Novellas plays]

Sydnee: Yay! We did it. [chuckles]

Taylor: [unintelligible]

Sydnee: We landed it.

Taylor: [unintelligible]

Sydnee: I know, I know, I said—and then I was like, what did you just say? You didn't say anything that was right. [chuckles]

Taylor: It all got there. The important stuff got there. The Fun Drive's coming up in like a week. We gotta get—

Sydnee: I know.

Taylor: We gotta get our stuff together.

Sydnee: We gotta get our—we gotta get it together!

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