

Still Buffering 486: Queens of the Dead (2025)

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[theme music plays]

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

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Tey, there's been a lot of togetherness on the internet... and in real life.

Taylor: [laughs] There has been. We're having an international sleepover, as some people have referred to it.

Sydnee: Oh, is that? I have not heard that, but I guess that's accurate.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, people are—I like—so, all over TikTok, there are Europeans discovering America. I mean, not, like... [laughs quietly] not like in the first time, like, that they thought they did.

Taylor: [laughs] Not Columbusing America.

Sydnee: No, not Columbusing. Thank goodness. [laughs quietly] Uh, no. But they've come here for the World Cup, and they're in all different states. Is that 'cause the World Cup is being—I guess it's being played in a bunch of different states.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So that's why.

Taylor: Yeah, it's played—I mean, it—yeah.

Sydnee: But then are some states just hosting countries?

Taylor: I don't... I'm not exactly sure. I think it's that each, like—like, cities are given a team to host.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And that's where that team plays a lot of their games.

Sydnee: And that's why there are odd pairings of countries and states.

Taylor: Yeah. Like, I believe it's like—it's not just like a bunch of Scottish people randomly came for one game in Boston. I think the team from Scotland is being hosted in Boston.

Sydnee: [laughs] A bunch of Scottish people randomly coming to Boston sounds like the weird beginning of a story. [laughs]

Taylor: Which I would like to read. But I don't think that's—I think it's because that's where the team is hosted. Same with, like, the Algerian team is being hosted in... where is that one? That's not in Texas, is it? No.

Sydnee: Are they in—

Taylor: No, Japan's in Texas. They are in...

Sydnee: Is it, like, Kansas or something?

Taylor: Kansas sounds right. Somewhere in the...

Sydnee: Somewhere over there.

Taylor: Somewhere in a big plain state.

Sydnee: Yeah, I saw the video of all the Scottish guys in the bar in Boston singing Country Roads, which was a weird...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That was weird. Country Roads—that song is big everywhere.

Taylor: It's weirdly big everywhere, because I don't—it is Kansas. They're in Kansas. Sorry. But, uh, I don't know if you remember this. This might've been after you weren't in my Japanese class anymore. But I remember learning in Japanese class that because of a certain movie that did a translated version of Country Roads as its, like, theme song, that was very popular in Japan, Japanese people all know Country Roads.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, I remember being in Munich at the Hofbrauhaus, and they started playing Country Roads, and everyone in the room was singing. Every person there knew the words. And it blew my mind. I stood up and, you know, I maybe had a beer or two and I was like, "I'm from here! This is about—it's me! This is for me!" [laughs]

Everybody was like, "What?"

I was like, "Yeah! That's me! West Virginia!"

Taylor: "It's written about me specifically!" [laughs]

Sydnee: "This is my song!" [laughs] Yeah. Everybody knows Country Roads.

Taylor: I love that. I saw that video too, and I saw some people in the comments trying to claim it was about Western Virginia. I was like, absolutely not.

Sydnee: So—

Taylor: I don't—as a rule, I don't engage in comment conversations at all, but I was like, I spiritually need you to know that that's not correct. [laughs]

Sydnee: It—so—okay. He is referencing some things that are not in the state of West Virginia.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: So he was looking at Virginia countryside and making some of those references. This is absolutely true. Um, but Virginia didn't fit into the rhyme scheme. [laughs] So... West Virginia. Sorry.

Taylor: It's ours.

Sydnee: Also, like, I mean, I don't know. I've never seen an interview where he, like, broke it all down. I know that people will say, like, you know, technically he's talking about Virginia. But also he says miner's lady.

Taylor: Yeah. I don't think there were a lot—the whole mining image isn't really associated with Virginia. Not as much. Is it?

Sydnee: No. Not that—right. Not that mining doesn't happen there, but when you think coal mining, you think West Virginia. So, like, that clearly is a reference to West Virginia. So I—yeah. I mean, that song's about West Virginia, and everybody thinks that—I mean, like... stuff takes on a life of its own. It's about West Virginia! Sorry! If you're from Western Virginia, you don't get this one. You can have other things, but you don't get this. It's ours. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, I think in the grand scope of things that West Virginia actually gets, let West Virginia have this one.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Right?

Sydnee: Yeah. Like, Virginia, you're doing better than us on, like, every metric. So... what do we have? We have Country Roads, and that we were on the right side of the Civil War. That's the two things we have over Virginia. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And I will say, that second one is pretty big!

Taylor: That is a pretty big one, honestly. [laughs]

Sydnee: I know! Like, let's not get snooty. We left you all. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. For, like, really good reasons.

Sydnee: Yeah. To oppose slavery. So... let's not pick a fight. Let's be friends.

Taylor: Let us have the song.

Sydnee: Let us have the song. Let's be friends. Just like all the Europeans on TikTok.

Taylor: We are comfortable sharing the song with the rest of the world.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Yeah. It's been incredibly heartwarming to see just—I don't know. Like, yeah. Like, the—like, seeing your own country through somebody else's eyes and, you know, usually—I'm used to getting the videos on TikTok where it's like, "[mocking] I'm in an American grocery store, and look how big everything is, 'cause everything's so stupid and big and full of fake things."

And it's like, you're at, like, a Sam's Club. Like, yeah, that's—they sell bulk. I don't know what to... what to tell you.

Sydnee: Yeah. That's, like, the thing. Not every grocery store is like that.

Taylor: Yeah! Like, it's usually so negative, or is trying to make fun of it. So it's really—it's really heartwarming to see someone just go to the Waffle House and be like, "Wow." [laughs] "These waffles!" [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. I love watching people discover Waffle House. I love watching people discover ranch dressing.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I had this weird moment where everybody was trying ranch dressing, and they were like, "Oh my god. This is incredible."

And I was kind of laughing, 'cause you know, it's funny. It's meant to be kind of cute. And then I thought, ranch dressing is incredible. Like, I don't eat a ton of it. Like, I don't put it on—I don't usually order it with my salad. I usually get, like, a vinaigrette or something. But I also think part of that is because we're supposed to be, like, embarrassed of our love of ranch dressing. Like, I didn't want to be like, "I'm an American, I eat ranch dressing." Like, "Oh, no, I'll take the raspberry vinaigrette."

But, like, ranch dressing tastes great! It does. Sorry! It tastes great! It is delicious. Europeans are right.

Taylor: Yeah. I mean, I think that there is an interesting phenomena that I think happens specifically surrounding, like, I don't know, lowbrow American cuisine, and I'm using quote-y fingers when I say that. Because I... I despise the attribution of anything as lowbrow just because, I don't know, it's not—it's usually just not related to people that make money and have money.

Um, but it's something that separates us from a lot of other cultures, where you have a lot of respect and a lot of, like, love around their, like, simple, like, classic, like, cheap foods. You know?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And, like, people will go to other countries and marvel at, like, street food in other countries. I don't know. I think there are so many dishes that, like, we hold up as, like, fancy French cuisine, and I'm like, well, no. That's... that's like a struggle meal. That's a meal that's made out of the leftover bits of animals because that's what they had, and that's all they could use.

Like, there's a lot of that, where other cultures can lift up their, you know, more... their poor man's cuisine as sort of like a bedrock of their culture. And we don't really do that here. It's also sort of made fun of, or associated with some sort of lack of intellect. And I really... that makes me very sad,

'cause I think that our, like—our culture—we talk about how, oh, America doesn't have culture. It's like, well, we do! But we don't treat it very well.

Sydnee: No, I think you're—it is very true. 'Cause a lot of these things that we're supposed to be embarrassed about, it is a socioeconomic divide that we're really making. Like, you know. Ranch dressing is like a perfect example. It is sort of a joke, and I don't know if Europeans even realize that. Like, the type of person who would always order ranch dressing.

You are kind of making fun of them, as if they don't know about good food. And what you're really calling attention to are socioeconomic and racial strata as to who's most likely to order ranch dressing. And that's—I mean, and that is what we're supposed to be, like, looking down on. Denying the fact that it's delicious.

Waffle House—you can get a really great breakfast [laughs quietly] at Waffle House. I mean, if what you want is, like, your standard American greasy diner breakfast... you get that at Waffle House! And, like, bacon's great. And they'll cook your eggs right, most of the time. And the waffles and the pancakes—it's all good! Chicken and waffles is delicious. It is. These are good things! And they're cheap things, usually, but they're good things.

Taylor: Well, and you know, it's, uh—I hope that we can all have a greater appreciation for the Waffle House. And, uh... [laughs] after we've seen Germans enjoy it, now. maybe we can.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Give it the respect it deserves. Is Waffle House the one with that insane organization system for how people—how they place orders?

Sydnee: Oh, I don't know.

Taylor: Where, like, they put the plate down. I think it's the Waffle House. I watched a video of somebody going through it where it's like, how they mark plates to let the cooks know what they need to cook.

Sydnee: Oh, I didn't know that.

Taylor: And they'll put down, like—like a syrup packet, and then, like, a ketchup packet, and it'll face certain directions on the plate.

Sydnee: That's cool.

Taylor: And this will tell the cook, so they won't have to look at the ticket. They'll just see the plate and know, "Okay. This is eggs this way, toast this way, this side." And they'll make it.

And I guess part of the reason behind it is it's like, it just—it gets around any sort of, like, mechanical error.

Sydnee: Hm.

Taylor: Like, if the printers go down, you know, if someone can't read, it doesn't matter. Like, you can look at this plate and you could interpret what it's meant to be, and then you make it.

Sydnee: That is kind of cool.

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, that is a cool idea. Like they have a secret language.

Taylor: Right? Well, and it was really impressive, too. 'Cause, like, I've worked a deep fryer. I've worked in a fry kitchen before. And it's like, that would be really hard to, like—to work that high volume and have an intricate series of symbols that you must decipher, order to order. That's really impressive.

Sydnee: It is really impressive. I mean, I think—so, I've seen TikToks. There are people going into grocery stores, but they're not—like, they're usually just sort of, like, looking around like, "I can't believe all the things you can buy here."

Not, like, in a bad way. Now, I will say, I've seen a couple where they're like—and it's not in a critical way. They're just like, "Oh my god. Look, you can just walk in here and buy guns. Look, they've just got guns right there."

And again, they're not even really criticizing. But I don't know that... I don't know that that should make us feel proud. Like, 'That's right. Right there at the Walmart.'

Taylor: No, you can criticize that one. That's fine.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Don't make fun of the big bags of potato chips. Make fun of the guns.

Sydnee: Yeah. You can give us a hard time about that. But I've also seen, like, videos set to music of people just, like, filling a cup up with ice and getting a free refill.

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: And, like, yeah! It is pretty cool, isn't it? [laughs] Free refills are pretty great! [laughs] That is a—I like that too.

Taylor: There was a collection of interviews with people in Japan—in Texas, but that's where the Japanese team is. And they were all asking them like, "Oh, what have you been enjoying?"

And every single one of them is like, "Burger. Steak. Beer. Beer. Steak. Steak and beer. Steak and burger." It's like... [laughs] you know what? Good for you. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yep! Well, I guess you're in Texas.

Taylor: You're in the right place for it.

Sydnee: Yeah. It is—I mean, it's funny. Justin and I were just talking about this. Because—do you remember, um, that movie with the puppets? Team America, Police—World Police? Remember that movie?

Taylor: Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: Okay. And, like, there's that song in it that I can't say 'cause it's got a curse in it. But it's America Eff Yeah. And it's a joke, right? I mean, it's obviously—they're not literally saying that. They're saying, like, that's the way Americans act about America, is that sort of sentiment. And I was thinking, like, the reason it's—the reason that it's funny—if you think it's funny—but the reason it's funny is that there's a truth there. That Americans do kind of have that attitude sometimes. Like, "We're doing this 'cause it's cool! America!"

Like, that is a truth. And there are lots of negative—there's lots of negative things you can say about that. Lots of ways that that's harmful and dangerous, and it can turn into a lot of bad things. But underneath it, there's a grain of something that could just be who we are and be okay. Which is sometimes we just do stuff 'cause we can. [laughs quietly] And that doesn't always have to be a bad thing, right? Like, the idea, like, I don't know, "I could... I could make the biggest butter sculpture" is such an American thing. You know what I mean? But whatever. It doesn't hurt anybody.

And there's that element in this country. Like filling up a Big Gulp free refill. [laughs quietly] That it doesn't all have to be evil and bad. Some of it is. Maybe a lot of it is. But if we could just harness whatever that is underneath. 'Cause that also leads to, like, scientific innovation and, like, space exploration, and cool stuff too, right? Like, should we? Well, I don't know. But we could! [laughs]

Taylor: No, I think that there's been a common sentiment among Americans that are grateful to be seen in somewhat of a gentler light. Saying like, "Hey, we're not bad people. We're just under bad management."

Which I think is—you know, it's—obviously we have a real problem right now with sort of a tide of political opinions and cultural opinions that are very bad. But I do believe in the goodness of more people than not. Like, I think

that's true worldwide, and I have to apply that to my own country as well, you know. That I think most people here—and that's really the thing. You know, it makes me kind of feel like, I don't know. What I loved about, like, No Reservations, like, Anthony Bourdain's show was, you know, he was going around the world and eating. But he was always with just, like, regular people.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And the thing that that show kind of—it felt like the thesis statement was, like, anywhere you go, people are kind of just like you. They want to have a drink. They want to have a good meal. They want to dance to a song they know or sing along. You know, they want to share their culture and they want to see somebody like what they have to offer. Like, that is who most all of us are.

There is an outlying group that has none of that inside of them, that doesn't want to share, that doesn't want to connect, that doesn't know what it is to have a great night just because you had a great meal, you got a little drunk, and you sang a song together. And somehow those people are the people that are in charge of us all. And that's really depressing. Because the stuff that makes us good is just that simple stuff.

"Hey, we cook this one thing really well and we have a whole culture around it."

Or "Hey, we—you know, we have this, like, I don't know, this is the things that we make as the people—the lowest rungs on the ladder, and this is what we get our daily enjoyment out of, and we will share it with you."

And that's... that's true across—around the world and across the board.

Sydnee: It is. And it's—I tell you, being able to lock on to that message and spread that I think is the only way that we push things back in the other direction in this country, and that we start to get leaders who maybe reflect what we really believe, and what we really want to see. I think the problem is that we have a lot of people on the left who I think share that—everything we're talking about, like making fun of America and being embarrassed and

ashamed of America, on the left we really embodied that hard for a while there, right? Like, we're sorry about everything. Yes, you should hate us. Yes, everything we do sucks. Everything about us is terrible.

And while there are many things you could point to to say, well, that is terrible. That is awful. That is something we should reject and not like in our history, in our present, in the way we're headed. All that being said, that's not a—you can't unite people around that. You're never gonna be able to build something, a movement, a coalition, something that can change fundamentally how we do things in this country. You're never gonna build it around self hatred and shame. You're only gonna build something if you find the unifying things that we can love and celebrate and embrace, and moving forward with that messaging. You know?

Taylor: Well, and that's so true, because the—the culture, like—and by that I mean, like, the stuff we make, the stuff we eat, the stuff we enjoy—like, that shouldn't get tied on to, like, some sort of political message, 'cause that's what happens, right? You say, well, America's bad. You throw it all out. And so the only way to be a good leftist is to reject everything about where you come from. I think that's what's been so refreshing about watching my mayor, Mamdani, enjoy the Knicks so much. [laughs]

Sydney: [laughs] Like, I was watching—I was out at bars watching basketball games all week and feeling a part of something. And it felt really beautiful. Because, like, yeah, he's our—you know, he's our progressive mayor. But, like, he was so psyched for this win, and so the whole city was psyched. And, I mean, you know, coming back from the game the other night, like, everybody on the train was just, like, hugging each other and high-fiving each other. Everybody was just so... it's like, oh, we're a community. And I don't care how you feel about sports. You can love it, you can hate it. But, like, to have something that, like, brings a bunch of people together to just express joy feels like something that we haven't had in so long.

Sydney: Mm-hmm. No, I think you're right. And it really—what we need to remember is that the elitist outlook—and that really is born of, like, wealth and privilege—it's present on the right and the left, and it can be draped in different, you know, belief structures and different books that you read or

activities that you do for fun or holidays that you celebrate. But at the end of the day, that is the divide. It's the ruling class that are powerful and wealthy, and hoard that among themselves, and then the rest of us. And I think the more we focus on that as opposed to, you know, who goes to church and who doesn't, I think that's the way we move forward.

Taylor: Mm-hmm. It's a cliché thing to say, but it's true. Like, we have more in common than we have different. Those are the weirdos. Those are the weirdos. The people that would rather send a penis-shaped rocket into space or become a trillionaire instead of solving world hunger. That's freak behavior, you know.

Sydnee: It is. I mean, and people who do that should never be celebrated by our culture.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: No. Or held up as examples for our children, ever.

Taylor: Well, and I promise these are people that have never just marveled at a Waffle House. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. So please, European visitors to the US, please continue to share these things. I will warn you that you're going to be here for the Fourth of July, I believe.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And, uh, things get pretty buck wild. [laughs quietly] Like, as wild as it already is, it's gonna be the Fourth of July, and Americans get really excited about that. And then also it's the 250th anniversary of America, and it's the Fourth of July.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: There's a... the octagon is being constructed on the White House lawn.

Taylor: I... uh...

Sydnee: So. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah. That's—I guess that's sort of the... talking about, like, the America Eff Yeah type of American culture. That's specifically what that is, in the worst way possible.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Whatever that thing is.

Sydnee: I don't... I will say, like, if it could've just been that... [laughs quietly] I could live with that.

Taylor: What? Just, like, the UFC fighting?

Sydnee: Like, I mean, the results of getting President Camacho essentially is we just have a UFC fight on the White House lawn in honor of America's 250th anniversary.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: Okay. You know? There's a—like, 'cause there's a piece of it that makes sense. [laughs] For us. Like, it's not—like I'm saying, like... it's a—it's a little ranch dressing. Like, it is—like, okay. I mean, like, it's so obvious. But it also isn't completely off base. I'm not saying it's, like, that's what I would've picked. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: No. Well—

Sydnee: And I'm not gonna watch it. I've never watched UFC in my life. This isn't gonna be the moment I start. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, and I mean, if whatever went on last night with the birthday party or whatever—like, there were people—like, the wrestlers loudly shouting horrible, racist things on stage and getting mass applause for it, so.

Sydnee: Oh, I didn't even know that.

Taylor: You know. Yeah. No, I don't... it's, uh... that is a stage for the—whatever deplorable reduction America's become in certain people's minds, it's right there. That's where it is. And unfortunately that's the—that's a big stage that a bunch of people are seeing. So I'm glad that all these little stages all around the rest of the country are being given to us. Was it Tennessee? I don't know where—where were there were people from that were being offered moonshine for the first time. And, uh, it was some Italian men trying moonshine, and they were—[wheezes] they were con—

Sydnee: What'd they think?

Taylor: Confounded is the only word. Like, the first guy tried it and he, like, just immediately reacted like, "Oh, god."

And then he passed it off to his friend, and his friend was like, "Oh."

But then the first guy took it back and was like, "Well, I want more! But. What is this?" [laughs]

Their brains were just flatlining.

Sydnee: Like, don't ask questions.

Taylor: It was apple pie moonshine.

Sydnee: Ahh, there you go.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's dangerous.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: It tastes delicious.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Until you forget who you are.

Taylor: That's a traditional art form here in America that we should really lift up more often. [laughs]

Sydnee: I think so.

Taylor: I thought it was cool.

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, as long as you're doing it right. 'Cause if you do it wrong, you can make somebody go blind.

Taylor: Well, you know, kind of on this discussion of how, like, our image has sort of been hijacked and used by people that seek to control us in certain ways, and separate us from who we really could be. The history of moonshining and how it lines up with the history of NASCAR will always be one of my favorite—like what you were saying. Like, Americans just kind of do things.

Like, that's—if you want to figure out, like, what is an America I can hope for, that's it. Because moonshiners, like, were trying to figure out how to outrun the cops over state lines, and so they started taking pieces off of their car to make them as light as possible so they could, like, carry as much moonshine, but also make their car go super fast. And all these moonshiners, you know, they'd have, like, their buddy that would get real good at driving so they could outrun the cops, and soup up their cars certain ways, and they all had these souped up cars. And they were like, "Well, we should race these. See whose moonshining car is faster."

And so they would, you know, all meet up and, like, go out on a dirt road and race their moonshining-mobiles. And that is where NASCAR came from.

Sydnee: It's really wild, too, because... like, I would never have thought, like, let's watch some cars drive fast in circles, but...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: It's a whole thing.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um, I... can we—are zombie movies American?

Taylor: Um—

Sydnee: Nah, I don't think we can claim that.

Taylor: No. I mean, it's kind of—you know, I think it's the same as, like, asking "Is punk rock American?" Like, there were definitely other people that did it—that were doing it around the same time, invented elements before us. But you can't argue that Americans didn't do it in the loudest, most, like, iconic way.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And I think George Romero is the king of zombie movies. So that's—we can claim that.

Sydnee: Yeah. And this movie that we're talking about today was made by his daughter.

Taylor: Which is so cool!

Sydnee: I know. It's funny, I didn't realize that when I picked it, and then when the title screen came up and it was Tina Romero, Justin was like, "Is she related?"

And I was like, "Oh. I don't know!"

And then I googled it. I was like, "Oh my gosh!"

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: "This makes total sense!"

Taylor: I love that.

Sydnee: I had set the bar so low for this because when I first looked it up, and I was looking for movies for us to watch this month, it gave it like a five out of ten on IMDB, and so I didn't think it was gonna be very good. I was so wrong. I thought it was great. And then I looked back—on Rotten Tomatoes it's got, like, 84% or something, so.

Taylor: Hm.

Sydnee: Clearly other people agree. This is actually a good movie.

Taylor: No, I loved this.

Sydnee: I thought it was really—it was funny in a—like, truly funny. Not just, like, goofy, silly. 'Cause sometimes with zombie movies you can make 'em—your funny version can just be, like, the zombies look silly, or they fall apart, or you—you know? Or whatever. But, like, this genuinely had a good sense of humor.

Taylor: Mm-hmm. Well, and it—it felt like it was aware of the culture that it was representing without kind of—you know, like, there's a trend now, I think, where young—like, movies that are trying to represent queer culture always kind of feel a little bit like this dialogue was written by a machine.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Like, there will be, like—I mean, I guess there were some, like, pronoun jokes in this, but not really. Like, it just felt more like actual conversation that people would have as you're trying to educate somebody on, like, I don't know, how to refer to somebody. But it didn't feel like that, like, cliché. Like, these felt like real characters, which I liked.

Sydnee: Well, and I feel like that was kind of part of it. There were some moments where there were some conversations being had between older and younger members of the queer community that I thought were not, like—the whole thing is a little campy and silly. But these were real conversations that were being had. I think that's why they didn't—they came across so well, is this felt like genuine stuff that people are talking about and trying to figure out. And then those conversations are set in a drag queen zombie movie.

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah, the basic premise is just like a classic zombie movie setup, with the overlay of it's at a gay club. But it's, you know, there's a show that's supposed to go on, and a zombie outbreak happens in the middle of it. So you've got your ragtag cast of characters sequestered inside of a club while they're trying to figure out how to survive the zombie outbreak.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Which maybe was caused by tainted drugs? That's sort of the implication at the end.

Sydnee: Yeah. I think that's what we're supposed to believe, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. But I, um—I actually found it kind of moving at times.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I got a little teared up at times, just because, I don't know. I think when it's zombie—zombies are never zombies in these movies, right? Like, zombie movies are always about something, I think.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and it makes sense. Like, the Romero legacy is that. Like, he was—that was the kind of iconic thing that his movies did. Was like, hey. The zombie horror represents overconsumption. And, like, you know, this rise of the 80s era of consumerism.

Sydnee: And this—I think if you take that and then see it through a queer lens, there's a lot of opportunity to talk about big things that have happened in the queer community, and then are ongoing. Um, in a way that is really, like, fun to watch and relatable, and an easily digestible serious conversation. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Yeah. Well, like, what are the zombies—like, these zombies in this movie, they're specific zombies. They are tied to their phones, right? Like, they all kind of carry around their phones 'cause I guess that's that residual memory they still have of their humanity. They're not very good at being zombies. I will say that.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: That kind of lowered the tension a little bit, in that these are not specifically very scary. They're kind of dumb. They're just really dumb, useless, dangerous, but not, like—like, they will bite you, but you kind of have to let 'em get real close. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. They're slow-moving zombies. They're distracted by club music.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. They threw a rave and all the zombies came. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Mm-hmm. [laughs] Well, that was the power of music. That scene actually, uh—it was such a silly scene, but it choked me up, because it made me think of—gosh. I feel like you would know this better than I would. I think it's a Dan Savage quote where he talks about how during the AIDS epidemic they would take of their—they would march during the day and take of their friends, and at night they'd dance.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Because the dancing was the thing they were trying to save. That even though that felt like, you know... maybe that felt like it was the wrong

thing to do when you're in a state of mourning, to dance, but that's what you have to do. And so when everybody's just—you know, the chips are down and no one knows what to do, the one lady that's a DJ was like, "Well, I'm just gonna play some music." [laughs] And she does! And everybody starts dancing. And that's actually the thing that kind of saves the day, because that draws all the zombies away from, you know, the car where two other characters are stuck, and, you know.

Sydnee: Well, and our main—one of our main characters, like, re—like, finding his drag persona again. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And being willing to come out in drag and perform once more was, like, key to their survival.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um, I think that's very intentional. It's funny that you mention that, because I was watching that, and I said to Justin, like, I wonder if this is a little bit about HIV. Like, just a little. Or not about it, but, like, intentionally, like, knowing that that's part of this story. Like, if we're gonna tell stories about the gay community, especially being under threat, like something you don't quite understand yet and you don't know—I mean, you think about, it's—in this, it's an infection. Like, and the fear, especially in the 80s around it. I feel like if you're gonna tell this story, that's gonna be underneath it a little bit. You know what I mean?

Taylor: I think specifically—like, absolutely. At least it's, like, with an awareness, you know.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: A glance to that. 'Cause, like, there was one line that really struck me. It was right before she starts playing her music. One of the characters says "This is life or death," or something like that. And she says, "For us, it's always both."

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Like, for queer people, it's life and death. Because, you know.

Sydnee: It was really well written. I mean, it really, like—Justin was laughing at me, 'cause I was kind of—like, I said, I was kind of crying through parts of it. But, I mean, it is. It's very smart. Um, when the older queen sacrifices herself.

Taylor: Nina West as Ginsey Tonic. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. That was—that was fantastic. That was, like, a really beautiful moment.

Taylor: I teared up at that.

Sydnee: Leaved her wig there. Leaves the wig behind. Like, pick up the wig and carry on. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, and even—and right before she sacrifices herself, there's a line. And this was definitely one of those lines where it's like, this is not written for other people to gawk at what they think queer people are. This is written for us. Because when... what's her name?

Sydnee: Seancé? Samoncé?

Taylor: Samoncé?

Sydnee: Samoncé.

Taylor: Her and Nina West are on that platform, and they're, you know. She's trying to give her her courage back. Ginsey Tonic says something on the lines of "Your generation is always, like, waiting for a handwritten invitation to belong."

And I thought it was an interesting comment that I think this is just clearly something this movie wants to say. But it is that, like, we find so many ways to separate ourselves and exclude ourselves from the conversations, or feel

like we don't belong, or feel left out, has become, like, so much of what gets, I don't know. What the algorithm drives is the ways in which you don't belong. Or the outrage cycle around things. And it's like, you know. You just—you show up and you belong. That's what you do. Like, you come to our places and you're one of us. It used to be just that simple.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. And I think it can be, I think, too. Like, it can still be that simple.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And I think a lot of the—I think you're exactly right. A lot of the stuff people get kind of hung up on, like, "Well, but I don't belong because—" man, and I feel like I can talk about this specifically. This one piece of it. Um, during Pride month, there are always endless TikToks from people who are bisexual saying that because I'm a bisexual woman but I'm married to a man, I don't belong, and people won't let me in, and I'm not really part of the community. And it's like, well, did you decide that? 'Cause I'm part of the community. 'Cause I just—'cause I show up, and I'm there, and that's that. And I don't—I feel like that narrative is not generally true.

And I'm not saying there isn't anyone ever out there who's looked at a bisexual person and said "Well, no, listen. If you're in a straight-passing relationship, you're straight." Sure, sure. I know those people exist. Absolutely. But I do not feel like the entire queer community is rejecting me, or people who identify like me. I do not believe that.

Taylor: No. And that's—it's like a lot of things. I feel like the answer is, go—just go to a gay bar. Go to a queer party. Go to a drag night.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And that's where you'll—that's where your community is. It's not in your phone. It's not in people trying to make increasingly controversial or hot take statements to try to get engagement. A lot of these problems don't exist in the real world. They exist just in this theoretical space where we're trying to define the boundaries of what is and isn't queer, which is silly,

'cause that's not how real life works. Like, that's—it's like, "Oh, can I bring my straight boyfriend to Pride?"

It's like, is he cool? Will he hang? Sure.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I don't—like, that's how most places work. Like, I've worked a lot of queer parties [crosstalk].

Sydnee: Does he wanna come? [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah! [laughs] Like, you know. It's like, if you're there and you're being awful—and that can be a person of any—any gender or sexual persuasion—then we don't want you there. If you're here and you're being cool, then we want you here. That's it! [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, that's fine. Who cares?

Taylor: That's community.

Sydnee: My straight husband doesn't like crowds. [laughs quietly] And he's an introvert. And so he prefers to stay at home a lot.

Taylor: Well, you know.

Sydnee: But I would bring him if he wanted to come.

Taylor: Well, that's the thing. Like, I don't—make sure he tips the queens. That's—but you should do the same, and so should the rest of us. I don't know. Behave!

Sydnee: Yeah. And he always comes to Pride in the Park with me so he can drive me home after I've had my prosecco.

Taylor: Hm. See, that's fine. I really—I thought it was—I mean, the entire cast, outside of—we have—it's funny that there is token straight man, right?

Sydnee: Yeah. You've got token straight man. There's one, right? Like, that's it. There's one token straight man, and then everybody else is part of the queer community.

Teylor: Yeah. Drag queens, lots of trans people. Even, like, some trans people that they don't explicitly feel the need to say "This is a trans man." Like, one of the actors in it is a trans man. I just know him from other things. And I'm like, oh, that's so cool. Like, it's just... all queers, but no need to, like, make a big deal out of it.

Sydnee: No. And some of it—like, I do appreciate the jokes that are, like you said, they're for us. Like, you know that things are gonna get better when a competent lesbian shows up.

Teylor: [laughs] Margaret Cho as Pops.

Sydnee: [laughs] Like, that's—I—doing theater, and especially right now doing a show, like, there are so many times. If you have ever seen a stage production of anything, of any level, there is—backstage, there is a competent lesbian or bisexual who is making that happen for you. At least one. Maybe multiple. But somewhere in that equation. [laughs quietly] You see one backstage with their carabiner and their headset and you know, like, we're gonna be fine. We're gonna be fine. I bet you got a roll of tape hanging off your pants, there, don't you? Yep, you do!

Teylor: [laughs] Aww, that's my girlfriend.

Sydnee: [laughs] You know everything's gonna be okay now.

Teylor: Yeah. And, I mean, that whole sequence where—'cause it was like, who is trying to cut through this gate? Like, she's using some sort of saw to get through the metal door. It's like, oh, yeah. No, she would have just power tools on hand. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yep. No, I love it. Yeah. It was really—I found it incredibly enjoyable. Funny. I mean, really genuinely good dialogue. Suspenseful in a fun way. Not in like a—I mean, it's a zombie movie, so, like, I couldn't show it to the kids, but it's not scary.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. I really—I would—If you are a fan of those kinds of horror movies, I would definitely recommend this one.

Taylor: Mm-hmm. And it's definitely a movie that, even if you don't like scary movies, there's nothing scary about this movie.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: Despite that there are zombies. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. 'Cause even the zombies just kind of look like—they all kind of remind me of Michael Jackson in Thriller.

Taylor: Yeah. I was gonna say, it is very clear that that is a drag queen's interpretation of a zombie. I don't know who did the makeup on this. They did an amazing job. But because it's so, like, shiny and metallic...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, if you saw that in real life you wouldn't think, "Oh, that's a zombie."

You'd think, "Oh, that's somebody doing a drag zombie look." [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. Zombie drag. Yes.

Taylor: Yes. It's very, very, uh, attractive zombie makeup. [laughs]

Sydnee: It is attractive zombie makeup, yes. Very, like... the contouring is intense. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. Like, very shiny, like, holographic highlight. Okay.

Sydnee: [laughs] Everybody's had their buccal fat removed. [laughs]

Teylor: Yeah. Yeah. It's very, very pretty.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Teylor: Thank you.

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Yeah, I would—oh.

Teylor: Oh no, I was just saying, I can't believe I didn't know this movie existed. I'm so, so happy to know that it does now.

Sydnee: I know. It does feel like it was kind of made for you, so I'm glad.

Teylor: Well, and it's set in Brooklyn, too. I was like, I don't... this is—it's a zombie drag queen movie set in Brooklyn. How do I not—how did I not hear this was being filmed? It's at least supposed to be in my neighborhood. I don't think this was actually filmed in my neighborhood. Just by the architecture, this did not seem familiar enough.

Sydnee: Okay. I—yeah, I can't tell. I didn't know. It was good. It was—yeah. I would highly recommend it. Alright, what are we doing next for our queer horror month?

Teylor: Well, I guess we're really watching a lot of movies just with no knowledge, which is usually something we don't do. But, uh, I still haven't gotten around to watching They/Them, which is a queer slasher film.

Sydnee: Alright.

Teylor: And, uh, I don't know. I guess now's the time to watch it.

Sydnee: Alright, we're gonna check it out. Maybe we'll be pleasantly surprised again.

Teylor: It may be two for two.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah. But in the meantime, if you have not seen Queens of the Dead, I would highly recommend it.

Taylor: Mm-hmm. It's streaming on Shudder. I don't know where else.

Sydnee: Yeah. That's where we watched it was Shudder, but I think it's available several different places.

Taylor: Mm-hmm. Definitely worth a watch.

Sydnee: Yeah, absolutely. Alright. Well, thank you, Tey. Thank you, listeners. You should go to Maximumfun.org and check out a lot of other great podcasts 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: We're gonna have to watch it again [unintelligible].

Taylor: Yeah. That does feel like that would be, like, [unintelligible] Pride viewing.

Sydnee: Right?

Taylor: Movie night.

Sydnee: I think it's gonna become part of my rotation. It really—it made me laugh out loud, and very few things do.

[chord]

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