

Still Buffering 483: A Decade of the Met Gala

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

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Happy Memorial Day, Teylor.

Taylor: Uh, happy Memorial Day to you, Sydnee.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Are we observing it? I mean, we're observing it, but it's happening.

Sydnee: I don't know. People aren't working around me, and the kids are out— But the kids were already out of school. Their school ended Friday, so I don't know. It's raining, so the usual Memorial Day activities, I don't know.

Taylor: It's true. Everybody was very upset about that. Up here in New York, it's very— It's cold and rainy the last three days. It's like, well... Going outside and grilling and drinking 12 beers feels patriotic, but being inside and drinking 12 beers is sad.

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, it's raining, but it is warm here. It's probably in the 70s by now. So we could stand outside in the rain. I will say that it has been raining here for days, and it's going to continue to rain here, I think, for another three or four days. Which I thought we were in a drought, so I don't know what's happening. But I just gave up yesterday, and I went outside and gardened in the rain for a while. I had plants that needed to get in the ground, and I just did it. I planted corn.

Taylor: Corn?

Sydnee: [laughs] So...

Taylor: That's exciting!

Sydnee: I had this pack of different seeds that I started, and most of them were things that I'll actually eat. Like, I'm growing the usual stuff, tomatoes and peppers and zucchinis and rashes, broccoli, cauliflower, the usual. Lots of herbs. Anyway. But there was corn in it. And I was like, "Ehh, I'll start some little corn plants, see what happens." And five of them are very healthy corn starts now. Now, my understanding is, that is not enough corn to plant to make it actually create corn. Because it has to have a lot of it together to pollinate properly, like you need to have a dense amount of corn.

Taylor: Oh, okay. Interesting. You can't just have a little bit of corn?

Sydnee: Well, here is the only thing— So I am gardening the way I always garden, which is, "I don't know, I'm just gonna try it." And I'm not— It's the kind of thing where I would never make TikToks about it or anything, because I immediately would get 30 comments about how I'm doing it wrong.

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

Sydnee: And I'm not interested in that. I know. I know. But I'm gardening in a way that I can keep up with, and so if what I'm attempting to do doesn't work, then clearly it was not meant for me.

Taylor: Well, you don't really have cornfield space in your backyard.

Sydnee: No. Oh, I do not. No, I do not. I have a small, 4-by-4 box [laughs] that is now my corn box.

Taylor: A corn box!

Sydnee: [laughs] Now, I did— That didn't take up the whole— Like, I spaced 'em, but there was still a teeny bit of room left in the box. So I have a cantaloupe plant and a watermelon plant down in the corners of the box. And I'm just gonna let 'em— 'Cause it's on kind of a hillside. And I'm just gonna let 'em tumble down the hillside as they grow. If they grow.

But I remember, when we were growing up at our house on Belmont that no longer exists. Do you remember—

Taylor: [crosstalk]

Sydnee: Yeah. Do you remember, we accidentally had corn growing in the front yard of that house for a while?

Taylor: Oh, because we had the decorations, right?

Sydnee: We had some sort of fall decoration, and it accidentally— Like, we accidentally planted corn in the front flower box. And do you remember how tall that stalk got?

Taylor: Yeah, it did try.

Sydnee: It was a huge corn stalk!

Taylor: Well, maybe a couple corn— Who knows? Maybe.

Sydnee: So maybe five? Maybe five?

Taylor: Yeah!

Sydnee: I don't know.

Taylor: What is the magic number? Does the corn count? Does it look around and go, "Nope! No, not enough friends, cannot grow"?

Sydnee: I don't know why some people know things. Like, I've been gardening since— So six years now. And then before that, I had familiarity with gardening. We gardened with Pawpaw when we were little. I have some understanding of how plants grow. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I took some botany classes. I get it. I understand plants. I don't understand, though. There are some things people just know, and they'll just

drop on you as if it's common knowledge. And when I was joking about, "I grew these corn starts. I guess I'm just gonna plant 'em."

Do you know how many people immediately were like, "Not gonna be enough. You need more."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Immediately. "Not gonna be enough."

Taylor: Well. I don't— We missed out on the residual corn knowledge, somehow.

Sydnee: Yeah! I mean, corn is not a huge crop here. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, enough people don't know that corn needs friends!

Sydnee: Corn needs a lot of friends. I think that it's— Here would be my guess. Corn also probably does best in big, flat areas, right? That's why you see corn in places that are, like, flat.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And growing corn on a mountain is harder.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So...

Taylor: I bet! See—

Sydnee: So that's probably it, right? [laughs]

Taylor: I'd be really freaked out if I was climbing a mountain, and all of a sudden there was corn.

Sydnee: Corn!

Taylor: "This is not— This is unnatural."

Sydnee: Yeah. So I don't know— We'll see how the corn goes. I planted 'em anyway, gosh darn it.

Taylor: Maybe just—

Sydnee: And maybe I'll have some.

Taylor: Maybe *you* just need to go and hang out with the corn a lot. It's just a very extroverted plant. It likes to have a lot of people around. So just go stand in your corn field, and be like— Not a field. Your corn box. Go stand in your corn box, be like, "What's up? Hey. How's it going?"

Sydnee: [laughs] "Hey, corn." Well, it must flower, right? Does it flower?

Taylor: I think you should've figured that out before you planted it.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I like that you're asking *me* this.

Sydnee: [through laughter] I don't know. Does corn— Here's what I'm asking. Yes, corn has flowers.

Taylor: Oh. Corn flower. Ah.

Sydnee: A single corn stalk has separate male and female flowers.

Taylor: Interesting.

Sydnee: So... Well, then I can pollinate it myself. You know what I mean?

Taylor: How— Mm, no. No, I don't.

Sydnee: Okay.

Taylor: Any gardening-related question, my answer is going to be no. [laughs]

Sydnee: So I pollinate— So I do this every year for my squashes. And I've tried it with my cucumbers to less success, but I do it with my squashes. So the flowers on a squash plant— Any kind of squash. Zucchini is what I do the most of, 'cause I love zucchini. I like to grow zucchini. You can tell, some of the flowers are gonna have a zucchini, there's a little swelling behind it. And then other flowers aren't. So if you pluck off one of the flowers that *isn't* going to make a zucchini, and I open up the petals so you just get the central area where all the pollen is, you can see all the pollen. And then you poke it down in one of the flowers—

Taylor: You make the flowers—

Sydnee: Yes, it— Yes.

Taylor: It's flower sex.

Sydnee: Yes. I'm pollinating them.

Taylor: When you smush your two Barbie dolls together to make them kiss. Just—

Sydnee: It's the same idea. So I take the flower, and I go— And I do this the whole gardening season. I go out every morning, and I check, "Do I need to water?" I water if I need to water, and then I go around and "Boop, boop, boop," pollinate all my flowers.

Taylor: [laughs] Just...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Going out and making all the flowers have sex.

Sydnee: It really does help! Since I started doing that, I have—

Taylor: Sure.

Sydnee: 'Cause otherwise, if it doesn't get pollinated, the little zucchini or squash or whatever won't develop. It'll just sort of die.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: So it has to get pollinated to grow.

Taylor: Well, there you go. Just make all your corn kiss.

Sydnee: I have a lot more plants down there that will hopefully attract more pollinators this year, but you never know.

Taylor: You should set up some beehives. There you go. On-site pollinators.

Sydnee: I— [sighs] My problem is my gardens are in the backyard, and my flowers are in the front yard. And I had— My front yard is chock-full of pollinators. All the plants that bees and butterflies and everybody loves. But they're all in the front yard. [laughs]

Taylor: Those bees aren't too smart, huh? They can't figure out front yard, backyard.

Sydnee: Well, I'm attracting them to the wrong place.

Taylor: Ah, dang it.

Sydnee: That's why my flowers are huge, but my food— I need more flowers around my food.

Taylor: Well, then just sprinkle some flowers around your food.

Sydnee: I think I'm going to. I accidentally grew a giant pot of borage. Are you familiar with borage?

Taylor: Do I know what borage is?

Sydnee: It grows edible flowers. You've probably seen it.

Taylor: Oh, okay!

Sydnee: I bet you've seen these little flowers, 'cause you work in fancy food world.

Taylor: Yes, absolutely. They're expensive!

Sydnee: Yeah. Yes. Well, I tossed all the borage seeds in a pot. I don't know how this happened. I thought we were tossing all the catnip seeds in this pot, but apparently my daughters got mixed up and tossed all the borage seeds in this pot. So I have this pot that is just exploding with borage. I have so many flowers on it. They're beautiful! On the same plant, they'll be blue, purple, or pink, or a mixture.

Taylor: Oh, wow.

Sydnee: Yeah. They're beautiful, and I have tons of them right now. So this morning, I made breakfast for the girls, and I made a little fruit platter for them, you know?

Taylor: Ooh!

Sydnee: 'Cause it's summer. I'm trying to keep them healthy. So I made this little fruit platter, and I decorated it with the little borage flowers.

Taylor: That's awesome.

Sydnee: And I was like, "Here." And I said, "And here's the best part. [whispering] You can eat the flowers!"

Taylor: They are tasty. They're a little spicy! [crosstalk]

Sydnee: They are. They're really good! The leaves are good, too, but I don't know how to process 'em, 'cause they're also furry. Kind of spiky.

Taylor: Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: So it's an unpleasant mouthfeel, but they taste *great*.

Taylor: Interesting.

Sydnee: They have this— People— I read they taste cucumber-y. I don't know. They reminded me almost melon-y. There's a sweetness to it.

Taylor: Well, if you can't eat them, you could always brew them as like a tea. Or a tisane, I guess, is what that is.

Sydnee: Mm. I wonder if it would make a good syrup.

Taylor: Oh, I bet. Absolutely.

Sydnee: You know?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I bet they would. But I have a giant pot of this now. I didn't mean to grow it, but it's there.

Taylor: That's— [crosstalk]

Sydnee: Yeah. But I'll keep you updated on the corn.

Taylor: [laughs] I'm very curious about your corn situation.

Sydnee: I have no expectation that this will work. I'm just putting that out there.

Taylor: It would be so exciting. It would be so nice to have corn in your backyard, though.

Sydnee: Can you imagine?

Taylor: Yeah. That would be great. And then you can—

Sydnee: And I also— No, go ahead.

Taylor: Well, obviously you can have— I don't know why, any time I think of eating corn, I think of this one time I was in Japan. It was early springtime-

esque. And at an izakaya, these little old ladies that knew the owner came in with a bunch of corn to offer him. It was just a local spot, like, "Here! Here's some corn we picked. You could have it." And they were pulling all the threads, the little corn silk, the threads, out of it. Which is kind of for young corn. And he mixed up some mayonnaise, and they were just twirling the corn threads in mayonnaise. And I was fascinated by it, and they caught me looking. And they were like, "Here, try some! This is a springtime-only—" Or not spring. I guess it was later in the summer. But this like, only when you harvest corn can you have this dish. 'Cause you can take the threads, and you can eat them this way. It was really good!

Sydnee: Really?

Taylor: Yeah! They were just like—

Sydnee: I mean, if I grow any corn, I'll do it.

Taylor: I think he just steamed them for a second, just so they were a little bit limp and a little warm.

Sydnee: Not quite so fibrous.

Taylor: Yeah. And you just twirled them up in little rounds, and just dipped them in the mayonnaise.

Sydnee: Interesting!

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I'll try it. I'm all about things that— I'll go out now, like yesterday out in the rain, and I just— With my little plant app, and try to find things that I can eat. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] That's cool! Be careful. Have fun, don't die. Happy snacking. What's that Alexis Nikole says?

Sydnee: Yeah, that's what she says. I know, 'cause I saw this flower. It was a really pretty magenta-color flower, and it had these frond leaves. And it had what looked like bean pods hanging off the side of it. And I was like, "Oh, that looks

edible! Mm, let me check it on the plant app. It is toxic. Do not eat it. But it's very pretty!"

Taylor: Good to know.

Sydnee: Yeah. But I looked at this, and I was like, "Oh! That looks like food!" Not food.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Not food. It is in the legume family, which is cool. But not food.

Taylor: Danger bean!

Sydnee: Danger bean. It's a danger bean. [laughs]

Taylor: Don't eat that danger bean.

Sydnee: Which I never think about beans like berries. I know that berries, like, just 'cause it looks like food doesn't— Right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Berries, mushrooms. These are things that could look very similar, and one is yummy and one can kill you. Apparently, beans too.

Taylor: Beans feel like a very benign... Like, an evil bean, didn't know that they existed.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. I know.

Taylor: Now I do.

Sydnee: Now— Yeah. There are evil beans. [laughs]

Taylor: To be fair, I am not in a position to come across some wild beans in New York City. It's not a... [laughs]

Sydnee: I would bet there aren't a lot of plants that you're gonna encounter out in the wilds of Brooklyn that you could just eat.

Taylor: No. No, and even if they are plants that grow in the ground that are usually edible, especially in my neighborhood... This was a thing that a lot of people will just try to plant in their backyards. Like, "Oh, I have a yard. I can plant back there." This specific area, because we're so close to a Superfund site, all of the soil is dangerous to grow things in. All of it.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: If you want to have a garden in Bushwick, you have to seal off the ground soil and lay soil down on top of it, so that it cannot connect with the actual ground soil. And *then* you can plant. But I've had friends that have made that mistake in the past. Of just planted, thinking, "This is fine!" And then someone that is more knowledgeable – the same people that I guess have the corn knowledge – also have know the soil in Bushwick is toxic knowledge. Be like, "No, no, no. Don't eat any of that."

Sydnee: "Don't do that."

Taylor: "It's too dangerous." You don't want to dig in it! You don't want to be chilling in the soil.

Sydnee: No, that's what the raised beds are for. And I will say, I was in a similar situation here. Not 'cause the soil is toxic, but because there's so much fill dirt on these mountain areas to level ground, and fill dirt is like clay and rock, and it's just ungrow— Nah, stuff grows in it, but not the stuff you want to eat.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: So a lot of my— Now, I have rehabbed a lot of my backyard where the place I am growing corn is a mixture of like, I added some soil, and then I dug into the earth and slowly have rehabbed it. So...

Taylor: That's nice.

Sydnee: I'm getting there. I'm working on it. [laughs] There are also— This is

cool. There are indicator plants. You can go— And I found a lot of these out on the mountainside that will tell you, “These will not grow if there are toxic levels of heavy metals or whatever in the soil.” So this is a good indicator plant; if you find this growing somewhere, this is healthy soil.

Taylor: That’s very cool.

Sydnee: Yeah. Isn’t that neat? I know. I’m learning all about the things I can’t eat. [laughs]

Taylor: [through laughter] That’s good— That’s the thing you should learn first! That’s the whole education that comes before you think, “And then I *can* eat this.”

Sydnee: “I can eat this. And I can’t eat this.” I’m trying to gather all the nettle I can, ‘cause nettle season’s almost over.

Taylor: Oh, no. You gotta dry some. Gotta make nettle tea.

Sydnee: I did!

Taylor: Oh, that’s right. You told me.

Sydnee: Yeah. Cooper loved it. So that’s why I’m gathering bunches and bunches of it, so that I can have enough to last us through non-nettle time.

Taylor: To get through the long non-nettle season.

Sydnee: I have a— Usually, I try to grow all my herbs from seed, and most of them are doing pretty well. But I didn’t do lemon balm this year, because I never use it. Because I don’t drink tea, and so it was just like I would grow this beautiful lemon balm, and it would sit there, and then that would be it. So I didn’t bother. And now, of course, Cooper’s really into tea. So I bought a lemon balm start, and I’m gonna make some tea out of that and see if she enjoys that as much. Because then, I can just— When I run out of nettle, I’ll just do that.

Taylor: I love lemon balm.

Sydnee: I can keep that indoors all year.

Taylor: You can do it. That seems fun. Make a jam. You can make a syrup.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Infusion.

Sydnee: Could make a curd, lemon curd.

Taylor: Oh, just a lemon balm curd. Lemon and lemon balm.

Sydnee: Yeah. I like that. Yeah. But I'm trying. We'll see.

Taylor: Well, that's very cool.

Sydnee: I'll let you know about the corn. Do you know when you plant peas, it's just a pea? It's just a dried pea?

Taylor: Just throw a pea in the soil?

Sydnee: That's what it is. If you see a pack of pea seeds in the store, and you open it, it's just little teeny, dried peas! Which makes sense, but I hadn't thought about it 'til I opened one, and went, "Aw!" [giggles]

Taylor: Do you instantly feel dumb for buying a little package of peas, when you could just plant some peas?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Maybe they're special! They're special peas.

Sydnee: They're special peas.

Taylor: They're peas that have been raised their whole life to just grow more peas.

Sydnee: [laughs] Probably not. They're probably [through laughter] just dried peas.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I guess I could've— You could buy a whole bag of peas, or can of peas or whatever you prefer, and then just let 'em dry? I guess you got a food dehydrator.

Taylor: Well, but maybe— If they'd been cooked before, is that— That feels like maybe that would— I don't know, maybe? They can't grow, if it's—

Sydnee: Probably not?

Taylor: So you don't want a can of peas.

Sydnee: I doubt these have been cooked.

Taylor: A can of peas have been cooked.

Sydnee: Yes. And so frozen ones have too, right?

Taylor: Yeah. Maybe if you get the dried peas...

Sydnee: I'm sure I could just buy dried peas. There are seeds everywhere, Taylor. [laughs]

Taylor: I don't—

Sydnee: There are seeds all around us!

Taylor: I mean, I understand that. I understand the concept. I don't—

Sydnee: It's funny, when you buy a pack of wildflower seeds, if you ever look, a lot of 'em are like, "These look like eatin' seeds!"

Taylor: It's just sunflower seeds. It's like, "Ah, yeah. It's right there in the name! Geez."

Sydnee: [laughs] "Ah! I didn't have to buy these!"

Taylor: "I didn't think about that."

Sydnee: [laughs] "Why did I buy these? Could've just gotten the whole bag, and eaten some."

Taylor: "One for me, one for the earth. Two for me, two for the earth."

Sydnee: [laughs] Tey, I feel like we should start talking about our topic now, because it's a big topic this week.

Taylor: It is! And it's a little different.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: We're talking—

Sydnee: We're talking about— Go ahead.

Taylor: Well, yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: We're gonna talk about the Met Gala, but not just the most recent one, but an overview of the last ten years of the Met Gala.

Sydnee: I, in preparation for this, I was trying— I'm bad at YouTube. I was trying to watch videos about the Met Gala. And I watched historical videos. I know a lot of— [laughs] Charlie and Cooper looked at me at one point, and went, "What are you trying to do?"

And I was like, "I keep ending up watching these videos about the Met Gala that start back in the beginning of the Met Gala. The history of the Met Gala. And I'm just trying to look at the wildest outfits from the Met Gala."

And they were like, "Why didn't you just say that?" Anyway, I eventually got there. But I also learned a lot about the history of the Met Gala. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah? Well, I read some articles about its start, and how it's grown over the years and changed.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. I think it's an important— I will say, my cultural concept going into this of the Met Gala was like, I understand it was to raise money. I understand it's for the museum. I got that. But I also thought, "Well, it's like a lot of galas. A lot of galas, the *point* is to raise money for something, but it becomes more about the event itself than about the cause, at some point." And I won't level that criticism just at the Met Gala. I think there are a lot of galas— When you get to be a grownup, people invite you to galas.

Taylor: Uh, well, asterisk on that. When you get to be a certain type of grownup. Me, as a grownup, have never been invited to a single gala.

Sydnee: Okay. Well, I live in a smaller town, and I get invited to lots of galas.

Taylor: See, now, I feel like living in New York City, there is a proportionately higher amount of galas. So I think this is— It's less about location, and just a difference between me and you. You're the type of person that gets invited to galas. Me? No galas.

Sydnee: Well, but I mean, I don't go to galas. I just— I think I—

Taylor: [laughs] [with posh accent] "Oh, I don't *go* to the galas. I'm just invited to so many!"

Sydnee: I'm not gonna go. Yeah, well, I think there is an assumption that if you're a physician, that you have a lot of money that you want to give to this gala.

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: And that you're gonna wanna come dress up fancy.

Taylor: I don't think people make the same assumption about food service workers. [laughs]

Sydnee: I think it's— Because it's primarily me, not Justin, getting invited to the galas. And so I think it's because locally, I'm a doctor.

Taylor: That makes sense.

Sydnee: And people are like, “Oh, well, we invite all the doctors and lawyers and people we assume have money, we want to invite to the gala.”

Taylor: Well, I think it’s great that you’re invited to galas. I’m sad that I’m not invited to galas; that’s all.

Sydnee: Well, I have no interest in dressing up, is the thing. I go to one gala every year. One gala. It’s the Fairness Gala to raise money for Fairness West Virginia. Because they’re a great LGBTQ lobbying organization, but more importantly, it’s themed.

Taylor: Mm!

Sydnee: And so it’s more like a costume. *Not—*

Taylor: You like a themed event.

Sydnee: Yeah. Not just fancy dress. ‘Cause I don’t want to wear a fancy dress. But I *will* wear a costume, and so that’s fun.

Anyway, so I think a lot of galas become more about rich people want to dress up. You know? As opposed to the cause. And the cause becomes secondary. So my impression of the Met Gala is that’s the epitome of that idea. It is no longer about whatever we’re trying to raise money for here; it is just about see-and-be-seen in the most ostentatious display of whatever.

Taylor: I would say yes and no. Because specifically, historically, the Met Gala is for the costume institute at the Met. It’s not for the museum as a whole. It is *specifically* for the part of the museum devoted to costume and garment preservation.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And I think, in that sense, because clothing is a functional thing – we wear it every day – we don’t really think of the art behind it. And I love the *concept* of viewing clothes as art. And there are amazing artists that are as talented, if not more so, than our big-named artists that just happen to work in textiles. So I think that is true.

And the fact that that would be paired with an invitation to wear ostentatious gowns, couture pieces, pieces that take thousands of hours of beautiful hand-beading... To me, it kind of operates like it's a gallery show, where the gallery is a red carpet instead of walls of the gallery. So I don't— Now, I say that, and I'm not fully in support of it and its modern iteration. But I think the basis of that, as why the outfits are so ridiculous and expensive and ostentatious, I like that. As far as giving a platform for the high end of textile art.

Sydnee: It is weird to— As I was watching the history of it, you are right in that it is specifically to fund that piece of the museum. Not the museum as a whole. And also, they *have* to fund themselves. There is no other funding source. So from the original— 'Cause the collection was housed elsewhere. And it's sort of the beginnings of the Met Gala, which was back in 1947. They had to move the collection— The Met agreed to house it there, to move the collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. But they had to fund moving it themselves.

Taylor: Oh, wow.

Sydnee: And they needed to raise 150,000 dollars, in 1947 money, to move this entire collection. And the only way they thought to do it was, "Well, let's hold a huge gala and educate people about fashion history, and as art." And that was the original thing, was they showed— One of the things that stood out to me was some golden sandals from Thebes were in the collection. So the history of things we put on our body, and how we've made it, and how it's evolved over time. And hopefully, a bunch of rich people will come, and it'll be a big, high-society event. And then we can fund moving the collection.

And it was a huge success, and they raised like 350,000 dollars to move the collection. And that was why they were like, "Okay, well, clearly, if we're gonna be self-sustaining, we gotta have this giant party every year." So it makes sense to me. The beginnings of it totally tracks. Educate people, display these beautiful works of art, and get rich people to come pay for it.

Taylor: Yeah! Sure.

Sydnee: Makes sense. Yeah. And I think it, today, has become wholly something different.

Taylor: Absolutely. I mean, even— And I guess it results in higher donations, but

I was curious. The original— The first gala in what, '48, ticket cost was 50 dollars. And I don't—

Sydnee: Yes. 50 dollars a ticket.

Taylor: I was like, "Well, obviously, but that's 50 dollars back in the '40s. What is that today?" It's about 700 dollars. Today's ticket prices are about 100,000 dollars. So it's not— [through laughter] It has not gone up in cost in any way. And a lot of those big jumps in price have happened in the last five to ten years. It's gone up by tens of thousands of dollars every year.

Sydnee: That was— In the histories I was watching, it looked like in terms of the importance of this event, it kind of waxed and waned in those early decades, depending on who was in charge of it, the themes. They would have, the year that Princess Diana attended it, elevated it immensely. And so it was more in the zeitgeist because of that, different guests and stuff. But it was really when Anna Wintour started doing the corporate sponsorships that things changed.

Taylor: Vogue got involved.

Sydnee: That— Yes, and you had to buy a table for like 175,000 dollars, or whatever it was. That was when— Because then at that point, the point they were making is that it shifted from high society went – like, if you were rich, you could go. In the early days of the gala, you just had to be rich enough to afford to go. Anna Wintour shifted it into, "Well, somebody has to be rich enough to pay for this table, but then the person who comes doesn't necessarily *have* to be rich enough. We want high-profile people."

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: So then you start getting all the fame-os in there. Because, you know, if you're super famous, you might not necessarily want to pay that money to go to the Met— that might not be your interest. But if a band buys a table, and then calls you and is like, "Please come for free, and we'll make sure you have beautiful clothing to wear, and we'll sponsor your whole evening, and we'll put you up in whatever to represent us at this huge high-profile event."

Then you're like, "Okay, fine. I'll go."

And then, of course, Anna Wintour also I think approves the guest list, right? She has to say yes?

Taylor: She has to say yes, and I think she also has to approve your outfit, right? Or at least some concept of it.

Sydney: Does she? See, I didn't know that.

Taylor: Or— I believe that's true. But there's some fashion review ahead of time.

Sydney: Mm. I mean, I knew there— I know there's themes, and— There's the theme, and then the— There's two things.

Taylor: Well, I—

Sydney: The title, and then the tagline? [laughs] You know what I'm saying?

Taylor: It always goes— It's always paired with the exhibit that opens in may.

Sydney: Right. Right.

Taylor: There's always a big exhibit that opens. And the Met Gala will take the theming of the outfits from whatever that is. I was trying to figure that, is there always a secondary theme? I think that's maybe specifically in years where they want to either focus what the gala theme is a little bit more, or in years where maybe the exhibit theme is a little but unattainable— Like the Sleeping Beauties year, where the whole theme of the exhibit is outfits that are too fragile to wear anymore.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: It's about fragility. Which I guess you could make a whole theme around that, but we tacked on it like, "Ehh, garden of time. Mm, put on some florals." Kind of made it so that there would be a more cohesive through line in what people are wearing to the gala that complements the exhibit, but doesn't necessarily have the *exact* same constraints.

Sydney: That makes sense. Because yeah, I also would imagine that would help if— It seems like Anna Wintour liked the costumey element of it, and that really

has like— She is the reason that it went from just “wear a nice outfit” to costume level. And sometimes, the theme is a specific designer. And if you’re just wearing stuff by that designer, that’s not nearly as interesting as if you give it sort of an extra tagline. Like, “It’s this designer, but also [chuckles] something weird.”

Taylor: Yeah. I feel like, in that sense of the costuming is, do you feel over the last ten years there’s been a rise, and then perhaps a downturn, in that? Because that’s what I was looking, back in— We decided arbitrarily on ten years, starting with the 2016, which was the Man Versus Machine year. Where I was kind of— There were a few looks that fed into that theme, but I was a little bit disappointed for such a cool concept that it wasn’t as costume-y as some of the more recent years. I felt like, you know, Heavenly Bodies, that was 2018, that was that year that everyone was like, “Oh, my God. This is insane. These outfits are amazing.”

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: Which was immediately followed up by the Camp year, which was also another year where a lot of people got it wrong, but in a weird way, all the people getting it wrong was camp in and of itself. [laughs] There was just a lot that was enjoyable that year.

Sydney: What did— Was Jared Leto part of that?

Taylor: Yeah. When he was holding his own head? Yes, that was camp.

Sydney: When did he dress as a big cat, or something?

Taylor: Did he dress as a cat for the— There were cats in the Karl Lagerfeld year. That was 2023.

Sydney: Maybe that was when.

Taylor: Because Karl Lagerfeld famously had a cat. Doja Cat came as a cat. But did he come as a cat that year too? Possible.

Sydney: There was one year he dressed in just a full-on cat outfit.

Taylor: It would make sense for it to have been.

Sydnee: Like, mascot-looking. Yeah. Which, what does he— I wonder if he's— Is he trying to make comment— Is he doing commentary? [laughs]

Taylor: Was he doing a comment?

Sydnee: Is he trying to say something? Was he doing a comment, or is he just like...?

Taylor: I mean, I think if it was—

Sydnee: "I'm weird." [laughs]

Taylor: What was the Karl Lagerfeld year? Just famously, that man liked cats. And everyone kept saying, "That would be a funny take on the theme, is come as one of his cats." And Doja Cat did, but in a beautiful, fashion cat.

Sydnee: Like fashion cat. [chuckles]

Taylor: Maybe Jared Leto just showed up as cat cat. I don't know.

Sydnee: Cat cat. [laughs] I'm pretty sure that he did— I'll look at what year it was. I saw— 'Cause in some of the videos I was watching about it, they were talking about Jared Leto's outfit. And I assumed it was when he carried his own head, but that— [laughs] "Met Gala head." If you look it up, "Jared Leto Met Gala head" pops right up. Yeah, he did dress as a giant cat. When was that? Yeah, I think it was Karl Lagerfeld.

Taylor: Well, that would make sense. I mean, that's great.

Sydnee: He wanted it to be like a real cat. Yeah.

Taylor: So he was just a cat.

Sydnee: It was projecting the essence of Choupette?

Taylor: Yes, that's the cat. So there is a cat.

Sydnee: Yes. Yes. So there you go!

Taylor: Well.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I guess that's an homage. [laughs]

Sydnee: And he came as a cat.

Taylor: He wasn't making commentary. He was just like, "Oh. This guy had a cat that he loved. I'll be the cat."

Sydnee: "And I'll be a cat."

Taylor: I think it was just like— Do you think that he was upset that he wasn't the only one that had that thought?

Sydnee: That Doja Cat did it too? If you're Doja Cat, though, you *have* to.

Taylor: Yeah, it's right there in the name.

Sydnee: Yeah. You're Doja Cat.

Taylor: Well, and I liked her cat better, 'cause her cat was sparkly.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah. No, she was the superior cat. Yeah, I mean, it's tough, though. Because I do think, if it's a fundraiser for a very— I think it's an important idea, like you said, that fashion is art. That a lot of time and creativity and skill goes into the creation of these different garments, and so preserving them and having the exhibit, all of that is meaningful and important. But do you think it's just become— To me, it's so closely now tied to Anna Wintour not just as a person, but as a caricature, you know? Sort of the mystique about her.

Taylor: Well, I mean, it's... [sighs]

Sydnee: Like, you can't have garlic and onions at it.

Taylor: Well, it's become, I don't know, a coveted achievement in the one percent. That's—

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: I would imagine, and I'm not a historian of the Met Gala, but I would imagine back when it was somewhat more affordable, and you did just, "Hey, I'm a rich person and I can buy a table," especially with the fact that it used to be so much more New York centric, it used to be the high society of New York...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: It also used to have just a lot more *artists* present. Like, yeah, you're the rich guy. You buy the table. But you fill that table with Andy Warhol and all of his crew. You fill it with the who's-who in the art world. That's more of the— It's about appreciating the *art* of fashion. And it's gotten— I agree with you, now it's very much just a celebrity event. Influencers are there.

It's the prestige of being invited. It's a very, very exclusive club, and most of you aren't invited. And I don't know if that feels as cool as it used to. We used to kind of put up with the extravagance of it, because it felt like something inspirational and artistic, and kind of pushing the envelope of what fashion can be. But now that it's just— You know what, the turning point was probably Kim Kardashian ruining the Marilyn Monroe dress. The year that the whole theme was preservation, where it stopped being about the art, and it started being about the celebrity wearing the garment.

Sydnee: Well, and I mean, the presence of a Kim Kardashian figure being there at the gala, that's odd to me too. I don't know what— We're trying to— There's some sort of level of class or taste that Anna Wintour feels like you should have to meet to attend this, right? She has— I don't know what her bar is, but there's a bar she has placed on this. And only people who meet that get to come. And Kim Kardashian does. And everything that the Kardashians are. So what is that? I don't know what we're celebrating. And I was looking through a lot of the outfits from this past year, and I don't know who half these people are. And they're not famous in the traditional sense. Maybe they're rich; I don't know. Maybe they're socialites? Maybe that's why they're there? Are they influencers? Is *that* where we are now?

Taylor: I mean, partially, yes. The— I was looking back at some of my favorite— Who consistently served some of my favorite looks over the years. I mean, Zendaya's always shown up.

Sydnee: Always, yeah.

Taylor: Multiple years, when I was looking, I was like, "That's my favorite look. That's my favorite look." Janelle Monáe, who was there this year. And I think one of two people that this year – God, what a great theme – and I felt like everybody looked bland. *No one* did anything interesting, except for like— Oh gosh, what's her name? Emma Chamberlain? She was the one in the painted dress.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And then Janelle Monáe, in that insane techno, but it also had grass, and that look. There were some looks this year. But she's always showing up. But I always feel like her looks are always high art, and that's what it *should* be.

Sydnee: Or Cardi B. Did you see Cardi B's outfit?

Taylor: Oh, for this year? No, I didn't.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I loved her—

Sydnee: Look it up.

Taylor: A couple of her looks were amazing. Hmm.

Sydnee: Uhh, hold on. Where would be that...? Yeah, it was a Marc Jacobs dress, but it was inspired by surrealist artist Hans Bellmer. I thought it was very cool. It was a very odd, but then if you look it— I wasn't familiar with that artist, Hans Bellmer, but then when I was looking at the art and then this... It was just a really, I don't know. Let me send you a picture.

Taylor: Let me look at it. Oh, wow, yeah. That's very cool.

Sydnee: I thought it was very cool, because it wasn't— A lot of people were like, "Well, it's not pretty."

And the comment somebody made was, "Well, but does art have to be pretty?" And I thought, "Now, see, that's an interesting—"

'Cause we assume, "Well, clothing has to be pretty." Well, does it? What's pretty? And it's art, so does it— Art doesn't have to be pretty. I don't know; I thought it was a very smart— I mean, a lot of people thought the big blobbiness of it was hot. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, but she's consistently been somebody that I think gets it. I was trying to think of the one, 'cause I was thinking of the one where she was all red, and it was kind of padded. That was Camp. That was 2019. So she sort of came as her own red carpet.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And that's one of those— I don't mind if it's a celebrity, or even an influencer. I just wanna see somebody that gets it, you know? Speaking of that Camp, Camp and Heavenly Bodies are probably two of my most favorite years in the last decade. But the Gaga performance. And it was a performance.

Sydnee: Yes!

Taylor: Where Gaga had several different reveals, and it just kept going.

Sydnee: Oh, that one was incredible.

Taylor: It was incredible not just because of the looks, and the telephone, all of that weirdness. It's that, to me, I love camp. And when I think of camp, there are lots of bits that define a medium. One of my favorite bits that is a camp thing is where the joke just goes on a bit too long. And there's a sort of uncanny valley of humor, where it's like, "Oh, it's not funny anymore. Oh, God, it's still going on." And then it comes back around, and it's funny again. And I love that.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And that Gaga performance where she *just kept* revealing a new outfit, it's like, "It's gone on too long. Oh, it's still going. Oh, now it's— It's camp now." [laughs]

Sydnee: "Now, it's funny again." Yeah. Yeah, she was willing to get all the way through it. Yeah.

Taylor: Well, that's such a cool element. It's such a deep understanding of the theme.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: It's not just about the look, it's not just about the costume. I'm paying homage to an *element* of this concept.

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah, no, I thought that was incredible. And I do think, if that is what— If the art is the people attending, if that is part of it, the art is the event, it is— I don't know, this is very meta. Then people have to meet that expectation. And so I guess I understand, on some level, the vetting. But then it just doesn't—I don't always see that result in the people who are there. You know?

Taylor: Well, absolutely. I mean, especially this last year. 'Cause I don't know, this year was financed by the Bezos. They paid enough money to get to chair the Met Gala.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Two of the— That's all we have, is the people that aren't the one percent, is that usually, it just continues to be true, is that art and culture is made by the people that are rarely in the economic bracket to afford such things. That's been our currency. You have all the wealth, but we've got all the art, and the good ideas, and the creativity. So there's a bit of a symbiotic relationship that has to happen. It's why artists used to have patrons, you know? Now that rich people can not only buy their way into the art events, but define what art is, it just kind of shuts the door permanently.

I mean, I think, as kind of a sideline observation that is on the same argument, I noticed when I was looking back at my list of people that I thought were the standouts year after year, largely it was Black creatives. Which I think was highlighted with the Black Dandyism year. It was also an amazing— That was a *fantastic*— [crosstalk]

Sydnee: That was a great year.

Taylor: It was so good.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: But it is like— The years where it was the American focused, the two-year exhibit, so much of what we're talking about, American fashion and American culture, we're talking about stuff that was Black culture and Black fashion.

Sydnee: Yeah. Absolutely.

Taylor: And that is— That's the sort of way in that you've had to rise up in society. And now that the people at the top are kind of putting a cap on it, and buying their way in, and buying control of it, it's a bit of an apocalyptic thought. And I think that's why this year was so dull! [laughs]

Sydnee: I think so too. And I think that's also why I don't know— I don't know how a protest within the context of the Met Gala can land. You know?

Taylor: There was a turning point where maybe AOC wearing the "tax the rich" dress... Specifically in the context of the American-themed gala, maybe you could call it bad taste. Maybe it was poignant. I think there was an argument there either way.

What, Sarah Paulson? I've loved Sarah Paulson as an actress in the past, but wearing the dollar bill mask, and what is it, the Fecale Matierel, whatever the brand is. Very talented designers. But wearing that to this year, it's like, I don't... Okay, yeah. Is it a commentary, or are you just flaunting the fact that you can afford to be there?

Sydnee: Yeah. And I don't know how you— I mean... [sighs] That's not— It doesn't really fit the theme, per se, for one. And so I don't know how you justify it, other than, "Well, I just wanted to protest."

And then I always wonder, "Well, if you wanted to protest, why'd you go?" I don't know. And I like her a lot, and I like what she does, and I don't know what the— I'm not gonna sit here and be like, "But that was the wrong way to protest." I don't know. Protest however you want. But did it help? [laughs] Did it make a difference?

Taylor: No. Well, I mean—

Sydnee: You know what I mean? Is that the— I don't know. I just don't know how you *go*.

Taylor: I think, over the last couple years, we've kind of had this sideline conversation about performative— Not performative protesting and what people are doing in the streets; I think that's important. But the celebrity moments of, "Oh, I'm making a statement." Like, does this do anything? And I feel like the real-world evidence that it does not is that the stakes have only gotten higher for those of us on the margins. Things have only gotten worse. I don't think you're five million dollars from billionaire status, but you're willing to wear a dress that was incredibly expensive and make some vague statement about the uber wealthy? I don't think that matters anymore. I don't think we need to applaud this. We're starving off the crumbs, so we're gonna just refuse them. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, and it really— I think what it underlines is that the only action that will matter is collective action. And individual protests like that, they call a lot of attention to you.

Taylor: Exactly.

Sydnee: But an action that could have mattered was if everyone had said, "You know what? Actually, if the Bezos are chairing this, we will not attend." Collective action would have mattered. Like, "No. We can't— We don't. What, Jeff Bezos, I mean, to have the amount of money he has is unethical. It is wrong, and we will not be a part of that. We will not submit to that." *That* action would have been meaningful.

That would have been a powerful action to take. "This event cannot take place without all of us, who dress up and are famous and make headlines, without all of us attending. And so we won't. Take him off, or we won't attend." That could have been a powerful— But that's not gonna happen, because the same people who are making these statements are part of that class. And so I don't know. But individual protests like that can only ever be so much. If you want to change things, you have to take collective action.

Taylor: Well, exactly. And I'm sure that there would probably be some sort of— I don't know what it would look like to do something as a person. When you've got

all those cameras on you, maybe there's something you could do that would move the needle.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: But that's not it, you know?

Sydnee: No. No. That just isn't it.

Taylor: That is like... [laughs] And especially the year that like— I don't know, what's the... Laura, Lauren? What's the Bezos wife name?

Sydnee: Oh, Mrs. Bezos. I don't remember.

Taylor: Madame X? That was what her—

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: 'Cause I was bummed that, as an art history nerd, I wanted to see references to different moments in art history. There's so many things to draw from. And I think that one of the most obvious and kind of boring things you could go with is Madame X. Which was a scandalous portrait of being a woman that was— I mean, the whole reason it was scandalous originally, when she had one shoulder strap down, it was like, "Ooh!"

But it was also a painting of a woman who was famous for being famous. She was a socialite, and a professional pretty lady. And so it's almost like, your lack of knowledge about art history made this reference kind of a joke on yourself. 'Cause her big thing is she wants to inspire rich people to not be ashamed of her wealth. She's made that statement, like, "Why can't we enjoy the things that we've worked for?" Like, what? And in the fashion world, and in the text—

Sydnee: Let them eat cake! [laughs]

Taylor: Absolutely! Well, but specifically— And this is to go back to when we were first talking about it. Fashion is an underappreciated art form. 'Cause it's also, you know, the amount of work that goes into good tailoring, to the textile arts, they've largely been arts that have been done by women who always, any

time a woman is doing an art, it's a craft. It's not an art. But then when a man starts doing it, it's an art.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: Tale as old as time. To specifically choose that as your model while you're making these statements, while you're representing the gala that's devoted to an under-recognized art form, is just so many layers of irony that I just... [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, she took a cue from Melania Trump's anti-bullying campaign.

Taylor: Oh, exactly. [laughs] Be best.

Sydnee: Be best. [laughs] That was before her big thing was robots.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Now, it's robots. It *was* "Don't bully," and now it's... [as Melania Trump] "The robots are here. Surely."
Okay.

Taylor: I think—

Sydnee: Well—

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Anyway.

Taylor: And it's a cold comfort, as things only get more expensive and harder. We can only comfort ourselves by knowing they'll never be artists, they'll never be cool, they'll never have anything interesting to add to the conversation. And I think part of the reason that it's such a vetted interest in them to destroy culture is because if we don't have anything to measure it up against, we don't know what we're missing out on. That's the only way AI art takes off, right? If we forget what real art looks like. If we forget what real expression looks like, we might accept the banal imitation. But don't let that happen to you. [laughs]

Sydnee: Don't. Jeff Bezos still sucks. Elon Musk sucks. [chuckles] Just throwing him out there, as long as we're talking about... [laughs]

Taylor: That's— But you know, again, somebody who— It doesn't matter how much money you have; you'll never be cool. You'll never be funny, you'll never do something that genuinely makes people feel joy or laugh. Well, there—

Sydnee: You can't buy those things.

Taylor: There's one thing that you could do. But I can't say that on this podcast. [laughs]

Sydnee: So, this has been... [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, thanks, Tey. That was fun. I'm always fascinated by the Met Gala, and obviously I don't know as much about the fashion and art end of it, just the pop culture end. But it was really interesting. And the videos about it, learning the history of it, was really cool.

Taylor: Do you think that, if it moves forward the way it is, do you think it will sustain the cultural hold it has? Or do you think it's maybe...?

Sydnee: I think the inclusion of Jeff Bezos is gonna be— I think this could be a reckoning. I think it kind of depends on what they do next. I think you're gonna get a lot of backlash, and a lot less interest in it. Because it will— I mean, that's the thing. It's not just about the protest. It's not about that people will stop paying attention to it out of protest. It's that they'll make it boring.

Taylor: Yeah!

Sydnee: And people will stop paying attention to it because it will be boring. So, I don't know. I think it depends on what happens next.

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: Mm. Also, I mean, there's climate change and everything, so who knows?

Taylor: [laughs] That's—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: We're not gonna be willing to pay the 500-dollar subscription fee to see what rich people are wearing on the [laughs] AI-generated carpet.

Sydnee: Exactly. There it is. Once it's all AI-generated, nobody's gonna watch it, so...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Tey, I have a fun idea for what we should do next.

Taylor: Okay. Well, this was a fun idea. What's up?

Sydnee: So you've watched *Euphoria*, right?

Taylor: I'm sorry, I have. I can't look away. It's almost done, and then I can put it down forever.

Sydnee: So I am *aware* of *Euphoria*. And I think I maybe, back in the first season, watched one episode, possibly.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: But that's it. That's my entire— And then exposure has just been through TikTok and stuff. So I am not watching *Euphoria*, but I understand it is about to end. For good? End for good?

Taylor: I think so. This is supposed to be the final season, final episode next week.

Sydnee: So I am going to watch just the final episode of *Euphoria*.

Taylor: [laughs] Okay.

Sydnee: With no context, other than what I have just sort of osmosed through social media, and through the zeitgeist. I am going to watch it. I will give you what I am assuming this show is about, based on my limited knowledge.

Taylor: Okay. And have a review of *all* of *Euphoria* based on *the* final episode by Sydnee McElroy.

Sydnee: Yes. And I'm going to watch it completely out of context. I think it's a show about high schoolers who do drugs and have sex.

Taylor: Yep.

Sydnee: I think that's what the show is.

Taylor: Great.

Sydnee: So I'm going to watch the finale.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: And then we'll talk about it. And you can actually be the knowledgeable person who has watched the show, and I will give you my thoughts. [laughs]

Taylor: Here we go. [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: Alright. Excellent. Very excited.

Taylor: It goes there.

Sydnee: Oh! So it's like *Degrassi*!

Taylor: Yep. Exactly like *Degrassi*.

Sydnee: Good. I have missed *Degrassi*, so I'm looking forward to this *Degrassi*-like show, *Euphoria*.

Taylor: Great. Wonderful. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, thank you, Tey. Thank you, listeners. You should go to MaximumFun.org and check out a lot of other great podcasts on our network that you would enjoy. And you can email us at StillBuffering@MaximumFun.org. And thank you to the Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

[theme music plays]

Taylor: This has been *Still Buffering*, a 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.

Sydnee: Yeah. I assume there's a lot of high school drama, and like, breakups.

Taylor: "Oh, no, I didn't do my report on [unintelligible]!"

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: [unintelligible]

Sydnee: Somebody's protesting GMO foods in the cafeteria.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: Perfect, perfect. Very exciting.

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