

The West Wing Weekly  
3.07: "The Indians in the Lobby"  
Guests: Sumesh Hirway and W. G. "Snuffy" Walden

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, and I am an Indian in the lobby.

JOSH: And my name is Joshua Malina, and I'm a shirtless Jew. I'm just taunting the viewers, I've got my shirt on.

HRISHI: It's true.

JOSH: I can't lie to you.

HRISHI: You're wearing the Signal T-shirt, in fact.

JOSH: Yes, I am.

HRISHI: And your pink headphones.

JOSH: Again, yes.

HRISHI: I approve of the whole ensemble.

JOSH: Thank you.

HRISHI: That's stupid for me to say. "I'm an Indian in the lobby."

JOSH: No, it isn't! I have another Indian friend and -- did you bump at all on the fact that they are not "Native Americans" or not referred to as "Native Americans" at any point in this episode but only as "Indians?"

HRISHI: I did! I did.

JOSH: As did I.

HRISHI: At least I thought about it.

JOSH: I did too.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I guess it just wouldn't have worked for all the jokes about "two Indians in the lobby" being the beginning of a joke.

HRISHI: I guess so.

JOSH: "There's two Native Americans in the lobby..."

HRISHI: It seems it's just as cromulent of a set-up.

JOSH: Actually, you're right.

HRISHI: Here's a synopsis from TV Guide. I wanted to read this one because compared to the last TV Guide synopsis that I read which was quite expressive.

JOSH: Is this a bit more clinical?

HRISHI: This one is just like they barely showed up for work. Here's what they wrote: "It's the

day before Thanksgiving and the president is talking turkey to whoever will listen (and everyone must),” in parentheses. “Meanwhile, two Native Americans are encamped in the lobby. They’ve been stood up by the official who was supposed to meet with them and they aren’t about to leave, and C.J. is told to make the problem go away.”

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: That’s it.

JOSH: Uninspired, although the salient point, I think, being of this synopsis that the writer chose “Native Americans” in the lobby.

HRISHI: That’s true. That’s true. But then apparently walked away from their desk partway through the synopsis.

JOSH: That’s true. Yeah. Just kind of gave up.

HRISHI: Because there is no mention of Josh dealing with a 13-year-old boy who has been sent to Italy to escape punishment for murdering his teacher.

JOSH: Yes, a not-insignificant subplot.

HRISHI: Right. Plus, Sam’s interaction with Bernice to talk about the Poverty Income Index.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: And then the little points of Bruno and the first lady polling where the president should spend Thanksgiving, and Toby’s kind of only in there a little bit.

JOSH: Yeah, you’re right. I think this was one of those days where the guy was like “Ah, [expletive deleted] it. You know, ‘talk turkey,’ that was kind of cute...I’m going to go pick up my kid from school now.”

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: “I’m done with work today.”

HRISHI: “I got my one Thanksgiving pun in.”

JOSH: Yeah. All right! This episode has a story by Allison Abner and the teleplay is by Allison Abner ampersand Kevin Fall and, a-n-d, Aaron Sorkin.

HRISHI: Hm.

JOSH: So, Allison and Kevin working as a team and Aaron, ever the auteur, going it alone. It was directed by Paris Barclay, who was nominated for an Emmy for this episode. I’ve worked with him on *Scandal*. He’s a terrific director. Incredible résumé, directed 35 episodes of *In Treatment* and just take a look at IMDB -- many, many, many episodes of a lot of great shows. He’s a very funny and creative guy.

HRISHI: And in addition to the Emmy, he was also nominated for a DGA award.

JOSH: Aha!

HRISHI: A Directors Guild award.

JOSH: Sure. A DGA...A. And most recently served as an executive producer or a producing director of *Pitch* which has just been not picked up for a second season, sadly.

HRISHI: What was that?

JOSH: That was a TV series about a female pitcher...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh! Right.

JOSH: [cross talk] ...in the major leagues. Yeah, that a lot of people loved, there seemed to be a lot of love out there for it.

HRISHI: But not a lot of ratings.

JOSH: I guess not enough.

HRISHI: Well, should we start at the beginning?

JOSH: Let's start at the beginning.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: President Bartlet is boring C.J., and she's really kind of mean about it.

[Hrishi laughs]

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Were we talking about something?*

*C.J.: I don't know, sir. When I came in here -- back in the late '50s -- there was a purpose to it, but then one thing led to another and I blacked out. I mean, I can hang in there with the best of them, sir, but somewhere during the discussion of anise and coriander and the other 15 spices you like to use to baste a turkey, I simply lost consciousness.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: We've talked a little bit about the father-daughter dynamic between the two of them but I feel like it really comes out here.

JOSH: Yes, yeah there's a great little interaction when he's telling her that.

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: You know that line you're not supposed to cross with the president?*

*C.J.: I'm coming up on it?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: No, no. Look behind you.*

*C.J.: Yes, sir.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's pretty great.

JOSH: Yeah, I like the dynamic between them. I like the fact that she is just this side of grabbing him by the shoulders and shaking him and saying, "You're boring! And I want to leave."

HRISHI: And then when their scene ends, C.J. commits the classic mistake that we know from other *West Wing* characters always leads to your plans getting ruined.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: She announces that she's done and she has completed all of her tasks and thus she's

off.

JOSH: Indeed, yeah. She brought that one on herself.

HRISHI: It's never worked out.

JOSH: Lady, you're in the Sorkin universe now. Don't do a jig, don't get happy, don't talk about how you're done with work.

HRISHI: Mmhm.

JOSH: I, unlike C.J., could talk turkey preparation all day.

HRISHI: Oh yeah?

JOSH: Yeah. Have you cooked a turkey, do you cook turkeys?

HRISHI: I don't cook turkeys. For most of my life as a teenager and in my twenties, I didn't eat turkey, so I kind of skipped out on the time when maybe those responsibilities might have fallen to me.

JOSH: You were a full-on vegetarian?

HRISHI: I was.

JOSH: Hm. And you gave that up exactly when and with what bite of what food?

HRISHI: I gave it up, I don't remember. It wasn't anything significant. But I gave it up two years ago when I determined I was eating too much processed soy.

JOSH: Hm. What, were you growing breasts?

HRISHI: Possibly.

JOSH: I mean...

HRISHI: You would know, you've seen me shirtless more than anyone else.

JOSH: So you've never cooked a turkey?

HRISHI: I've never cooked a turkey.

JOSH: I learned something after watching that opening scene. I decided to finally determine -- there's been a question. I hosted Thanksgiving for years, and I still tend to. But I used to brine my turkey for 24 hours in anticipation of the Thanksgiving Day meal and cooking the turkey. Brining, I think, is supposed to -- I don't know if I understand the chemistry of it -- but I think the idea is to make up for the fact that white meat and dark meat cooks at different pace, and so by the time the dark meat is ready, the white meat is overcooked so if you brine it, the turkey absorbs water and salt and then has more as the water is given off as it cooks, it still retains more water than it would normally on its own. And I used to always brine the turkey, I thought it made for moist and delicious bird. And then my mother pointed out that I, of course, was always serving Kosher turkey and part of the koshering process to make a turkey Kosher -- it has to be slaughtered a certain way -- but it also has to be salted, packed in salt to absorb any blood out of it and so her point was that Kosher turkey is pre-brined.

HRISHI: Ha! Right!

JOSH: I can tell you're giving me that C.J. look. I can tell that I'm boring you much as President

Bartlet bored C.J. What I'm really saying is that I decided off this conversation we're having to finally Google it, and there seems to be a perhaps majority of opinion on the Internet that you should still brine a Kosher bird. That the koshering process doesn't make the bird absorb that much salt, and it's also a dry salting, so the wet brine process would still improve a Kosher bird. That's my point.

HRISHI: I see what you're saying. And you brine the bird while it's raw?

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Right. So, you're really following "raw-brinical" wisdom.

JOSH: [laughs] I'm going to give you a natural laugh. I'm not even going to say, "That's funny." I'm going to indicate how funny that is by laughing. Wow! I think that was well worth it.

HRISHI: Ah, now you know what the secret was behind my look.

JOSH: I knew something was going on...

HRISHI: [cross talk] I was looking at you blankly because I was trying to figure out what I could possibly say in return.

JOSH: [cross talk] Whoo! That's good stuff.

HRISHI: As I've told you, I think, in the past, my family's tradition on Thanksgiving is to watch "Shibboleth."

JOSH: Right! There is a Thanksgiving episode every season of *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Or, there has been thus far? Never mind...

HRISHI: Anyway, we watch "Shibboleth," but then because once you've started watching *The West Wing*, it's really hard to only watch one episode, afterwards we inevitably turn and watch "The Indians in the Lobby." And we talk about the Butterball hotline, and the joke in my family is we don't need the Butterball Hotline, my dad is the Butterball hotline.

JOSH: Awww. That's because he's a scientist.

HRISHI: He's a food scientist, and he knows all about this stuff. Which is another reason I've never had to learn anything about cooking turkeys. Because he's got it covered.

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: This time of the year, there should be a hotline you can call with questions about cooking turkeys, a special 800 number where the phones are staffed by experts.*

*CHARLIE: There is.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: What do you mean?*

*CHARLIE: The Butterball hotline.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Josh, I actually called the Butterball hotline.

JOSH: Did you actually?

HRISHI: I did. I tried to, but, you know, in the episode they indicate that it's open 24 hours, which is true for the week before Thanksgiving, but...

JOSH: [cross talk] Right. Not so much in May.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, and being May right now...

JOSH: What did you get?

HRISHI: I'm going to play you my call. It's enough to make me turn vegetarian again. It's all just too graphic, I think.

JOSH: But you are very much like my wife, the lovely Melissa, who will eat meat but she doesn't want it to look like what it is.

HRISHI: Mhm.

JOSH: I'm the complete opposite. If you could make a salad look like it had legs and wings that I could rip off, and a head that I could devour, I'd be way more into salad.

HRISHI: Can you make it move? Make it move a little bit.

JOSH: Yeah. Just jiggle it.

HRISHI: And scream when I put my fork into it. Ok, this is a long phone call, I'll skip around a little bit.

JOSH: I'm excited.

[Recorded telephone call with the Butterball Hotline, May 2017]

*HOTLINE RECORDING: [female voice] Thank you for calling Butterball. Our office is closed. Please call back during our normal business hours.*

*[call continues, unintelligible]*

HRISHI: It was 4 p.m.!

JOSH: "Please call back on Thanksgiving."

HRISHI: It was 4 p.m. I mean, I might be needing to cook a turkey for dinner! What I was really looking for was whether or not the information in the show was correct. This is sort of our running thing is, what did the episode get right, what did they get wrong? And so I was just curious if I could get somebody on the phone, what they would think about the...

JOSH: [cross talk] Cooking the stuffing in the bird.

HRISHI: Exactly, and the temperatures and stuff like that.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Here we go.

*HOTLINE RECORDING: If using an oven-safe meat thermometer, insert it deep in lower thigh pointing toward the body and not touching the bone.*

JOSH: [cross talk] Is it weird that I'm getting turned on?

*HOTLINE RECORDING: Do not add water to the...*

HRISHI: This is what I'm saying. It's graphic.

JOSH: Absolutely!

HRISHI: In all kinds of terrible ways. It gets worse.

JOSH: It does?

*HOTLINE RECORDING: Place turkey in a preheated three 325-degree oven. Use the following roasting times as a guideline: a 24 to 26-pound unstuffed turkey will take four and a half to five hours to cook. A 10 to 18-pound stuffed turkey will take three and three-quarters to four and a half hours to cook.*

JOSH: [cross talk] Somebody just [expletive deleted] it already.

*HOTLINE RECORDING: The turkey is done when the thigh temperature reaches 180 degrees on a meat thermometer. When the thigh muscle is pierced deeply with a fork, the juices should be clear and no longer reddish-pink. After reaching 180 degrees, move the thermometer to the center of the stuffing where the temperature should reach 165 degrees. The breast temperature should reach 170 degrees on a meat thermometer.*

[end telephone call]

JOSH: Hm.

HRISHI: So, confirmation from the Butterball hotline, but also confirmation that the phrase "meat thermometer" is really gross.

JOSH: It is gross. Although I really like my meat thermometer. I've got a high-end, very accurate meat thermometer.

HRISHI: Was it presented to you as a gift from the personal sous chef to the King of Auto Sales Phil Beharnd?

JOSH: Beharnd. Aaron was having fun in that scene.

HRISHI: He really was. One of my favorite things is when fictional characters make up aliases for themselves. Like the President calling himself...

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Joe Bethersonton.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's very Chevy Chase.

HRISHI: Yes!

JOSH: Chevy Chase in *Fletch*, right?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Fletch. Right! Do you remember his name in that?

JOSH: His name is Irwin M. Fletcher?

HRISHI: No, no, no, the fake name...

JOSH: No, there was a series of them.

HRISHI: Which one is your favorite?

JOSH: Well my favorite because I worked -- did I tell this story already? That I was a PA on *Fletch Lives*?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes!

JOSH: [cross talk] I did tell you that story. Well, I pitched him one that he used.

HRISHI: Which was what?

JOSH: Well, since I was a PA on *Fletch Lives*, the sequel, he was walking by me at one point and he said "Quick! Give me a funny 'M' name other than 'Malina.'" And I said...

HRISHI: He knew your name enough to make that joke?

JOSH: Indeed, he did.

HRISHI: That's great!

JOSH: And I said, "Mahatma?" And he says, "I love it!" And then he used it in the movie.

[*Fletch Lives* excerpt]

*FLETCH: Ah, Fletcher. Irwin M. Fletcher. Irwin Mahatma Fletcher.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's great! I was thinking of...

[*Fletch* excerpt]

*FLETCH: John Cocktosten.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I do remember that one. That's brilliant. John Cocktosten.

HRISHI: John Cocktosten is one of my favorites. I also love in *Arrested Development* when Jason Bateman as Michael Bluth says that his name is...

[*Arrested Development* excerpt]

*MICHAEL BLUTH: Chareth Cutestory.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Cutestory.

HRISHI: And one of my favorites of all time is from *A Fish Called Wanda*. Kevin Kline...

JOSH: "Disappointed!" That's Kevin Sorbo's defense, by the way.

HRISHI: Exactly. Kevin Sorbo, who we called out for his "disappointed" line, he says that it's a reference to Kevin Kline, he was paying homage to *A Fish Called Wanda*.

JOSH: I think I might believe him, too. Disappointingly.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah. But also in *A Fish Called Wanda*, Kevin Kline says his name is...

[*A Fish Called Wanda* excerpt]

*OTTO: Harvey Manfrenjensenden.*

[end of excerpt]



HRISHI: It is really good. Speaking of tropes used in *The West Wing*, I thought we should talk about this: the structure, the kind of most common structure, really the trope of character interactions and subplots in *The West Wing*. Which, I think, breaks down like this: White House staffer meets with somebody from outside of the White House who presents information to them that is inconvenient to the administration politically or, at first glance, is laughable. And then over the course of the episode, the outsider presents arguments, the White House staffer listens to them and is eventually moved to change their mind despite the original political inconvenience and decides to do something because they've been convinced.

JOSH: Yeah, we have sort of a double dose of that in this episode.

HRISHI: Right. I mean, it happens all the time. And it's a great set up and it's a great dynamic, and it's one of the reasons why I love the show, because -- and this is really I think where the fantasy of it lives -- is just that people listen, you know, and people's minds are changed.

JOSH: Maybe I can convince you that it's not why you love the show by the end of this episode.

HRISHI: Or maybe you won't, because it is just a fantasy.

JOSH: Oh, true.

HRISHI: I think the reason why we sometimes call out certain interactions and certain subplots for being exceptional, and really loving them, are the moments when that structure is subverted. For example, the "War Crimes" exchange between General Adamle and Leo, you know, that's one where instead of having this kind of pleasant exchange of ideas, and then Leo goes back and says to the president -- makes the recommendation based on what Adamle told him -- he has this horrible news, and he has this emotional reaction based on it. It ends up being something completely different, or I would even say, kind of often there are times when it goes the other way around: where the *West Wing* staff can't actually help the person that they're -- you know, the political inconvenience or some other obstacle shows up and they actually have to live in the kind of political quagmire that means like, "Well, we can't do..."

JOSH: [cross talk] Nothing's going to happen.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, nothing's going to happen. And those are the ones I like the most. Even though this is kind of like -- the ones where everything goes as planned is kind of like the real DNA of the show.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: I like the exceptions to the rule.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: But yeah, so we get a double dose of it in this episode. We get really maybe even a triple dose, actually.

JOSH: Ok, C.J. and the Native Americans in the lobby. We have Sam and Bernice, and the third is...?

HRISHI: Kind of. This one is a little bit of a twist on it.

JOSH: [cross talk] A little reach? Give it to me.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Is Josh and the Italians and the Georgia prosecutor. Right? Do you think

that one doesn't qualify?

JOSH: [cross talk] I don't know. I'm open to it.

HRISHI: This one follows the same kind of setup. This thing has happened, it's now in Josh's lap, he has to deal with it. Their job is to say, "You need to extradite the kid." The person on the other side says, "No, we won't and we can't, and these are the reasons why." Josh doesn't need to be convinced of the reasons why not to execute a child because he already believes in them.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And instead of a nice sort of moral, straight path towards a solution, they have to do this slightly shady business of...

JOSH: [cross talk] Essentially bribing him.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, bribing the prosecutor, the DA.

JOSH: Mmhm, yeah. Well, it's interesting, that's more of a subversion of the trope, I think, than...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: And, I think also...

JOSH: [cross talk] As such, the most interesting of the three.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. Though certainly the most interesting morally. I mean it's not such a huge lesson that Native Americans got screwed and they've been, you know, served injustice after injustice.

JOSH: Yes, it seems to be a bit more of a revelation to C.J. than I would have anticipated.

HRISHI: Yeah. Also, back to the turkey, isn't this whole salmonella of it all kind of surprising that that would be a revelation to the president? I mean, this is a guy who knows the surface temperature of Mars off the top of his head. He doesn't know that you have to cook food in order not to get sick?

JOSH: Yeah, to the point where he's not a hundred percent sure that Josh isn't pulling his leg about it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: [cross talk] When he talks to Leo. I was also disappointed that he says "bacteria" when he means "bacterium," singular.

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*BUTTERBALL HOTLINE: Two main bacterial problems are salmonella and campylobacter jejuni.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: All right, well, first of all, I think you made the second bacteria up, and second of all, how do I avoid it?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's true. Although I do really like that joke.

JOSH: [cross talk] For a Latin scholar.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. I do like the joke about campylobacter jejuni.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Speaking of my dad who is a food scientist, I asked him if he could tell us what campylobacter jejuni is.

JOSH: I'd be happy to talk to him.

HRISHI: This'll be cute.

JOSH: He's guaranteed cute.

[phone call with Sumesh Hirway]

SUMESH HIRWAY: Hello?

HRISHI: Hi, Dad.

SUMESH HIRWAY: Hi.

HRISHI: I've got you on speakerphone, you're talking with me and Josh.

JOSH: Hi there!

SUMESH HIRWAY: Hi Josh, how are you?

JOSH: Good. Good to speak to you.

HRISHI: Dad, can you tell us about campylobacter jejuni?

SUMESH HIRWAY: Yes. It's very common bacteria in poultry, and people get infection using what we call cross-contamination -- that if you used a chicken cut with a knife and then you used the same knife later on to cut vegetables, so you get the infection and it gives you, after five days or so, diarrhea and it's very watery and the diarrhea could be fatal sometimes.

HRISHI: Whoa!

SUMESH HIRWAY: So...yeah.

JOSH: So, cook your stuffing outside of the bird.

HRISHI: Dad, what do you do? Do you cook stuffing inside the turkey or outside the turkey?

SUMESH HIRWAY: I cook inside the turkey. Some people do outside, but inside is the method because you want the juices from the meat get into the stuffing and give us the flavor.

HRISHI: You just have to be careful with your meat thermometer.

SUMESH HIRWAY: Yes. Because you want to make sure that it's cooked to the temperature, like 180 degrees minimum.

HRISHI: Dad, what's in your brine?

JOSH: That's kind of personal.

SUMESH HIRWAY: Brine is consisted of salt and sugar, and it gives the flavor as well as it extracts the proteins from the meat, so it tenderizes the meat.

HRISHI: I meant what's in your brine recipe?

JOSH: We're looking for family secrets.

SUMESH HIRWAY: In my brine recipe I use salt, sugar, and allspice, or I will add fresh rosemary and thyme.

HRISHI: You are a Simon and Garfunkel fan, I know.

JOSH: No parsley and sage.

SUMESH HIRWAY: Right, and a little bit of black pepper.

HRISHI: Alright. Thanks, Dad!

JOSH: Fantastic.

HRISHI: Thanks, Dad. We'll talk to you later.

SUMESH HIRWAY: Ok, thanks, bye.

[end of phone call]

JOSH: Oh my God. That was awesome on every level.

HRISHI: You got a little glimpse at the end of my dad's infectious giggle.

JOSH: That was fantastic.

HRISHI: That's what my dad's laugh sounds like. He basically sounds like the Pillsbury Doughboy when he laughs.

[Clip: Pillsbury Doughboy laugh]

JOSH: That whole interaction was great. We got our first two mentions of diarrhea on the podcast, and the fact that you laughed the first time he said it delighted me. Just classic fun father-son...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, before it turned fatal!

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah, it took a real left turn.

HRISHI: But you'll notice my dad also said "bacteria," though. Thank you for not correcting him in the middle of his call.

JOSH: Huh, maybe that's some casual Latin.

HRISHI: Mhm. "Caz-Lat."

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: So, let me get to our third phone call.

JOSH: What?

HRISHI: Yeah, I've got another phone call here that I recorded. It's a very quick one. In the spirit of the president calling the Butterball hotline, I just called a bunch of places. Here we go. Ready?

JOSH: Sure.

[sound of phone ringing]

*FEMALE VOICE: Thank you for calling DeKalb County.*

[end of call]

JOSH: What?

HRISHI: Oh, I called DeKalb County. The information line. Just so everyone could hear that it is, in fact, pronounced “de-KAB.”

JOSH: Ohhh!

HRISHI: When you’re in Georgia, it’s “de-KAB.” There are so many mentions of “de-KALB” county in this episode...

JOSH: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That for anybody from Georgia, or really just familiar with Georgia, it’s probably like fingernails on a chalkboard.

JOSH: I’ll bet it is. Or a “chawlk-board.”

HRISHI: In other parts of the country, the “L” is pronounced: “de-KALB.” But they’re talking about Georgia here, so they should be saying “de-KAB.”

JOSH: Yeah, they should’ve gotten that right. I like how in attempting to aid President Bartlet in his fake identity during that phone call, Toby calls Charlie in to get the zip code.

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*TOBY: Zip code, Fargo, North Dakota, right now.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Because that is the point upon which all credibility will be won or lost.

JOSH: [cross talk] Right, right. It would’ve fallen apart if he had made up a zip code. I don’t know whether it’s intentional or not -- there’s a fantastic, I feel, tiny little detail that works as a button on that whole phone call scene. The comic tension of that scene being that the President of the United States, in all his glory, is pretending to be just a regular Joe calling the Butterball Hotline.

HRISHI: [cross talk] A regular Joe Bethersonton...

JOSH: [cross talk] As he leaves the Oval Office to go talk to Abbey, he reaches for the doorknob...

HRISHI: [cross talk] I love that! Yeah!

JOSH: [cross talk] And of course the attendant, I think the Marine waiting outside, opens it for him, so he doesn’t get it.

HRISHI: [cross] Yes!

JOSH: [cross talk] And I thought, we get right back into the contrast of being the president and not a regular person. You don’t even open doors for yourself, there’s somebody there waiting on you.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes.

JOSH: I loved it as a button.

HRISHI: I loved that too. I noticed that moment, but I didn't have the intelligent connection of putting it together, like the contrast with the Joe Bethersonton. That's great, because I did love that moment. There are a couple of strange moments at the ends of scenes, like a few moments where I felt like I didn't know exactly what they were going for, or where a look seemed to last too long or the scene even seemed to last a little bit too long. There are three instances of this: one is Toby walking out of the Oval Office when he escapes the president telling him about turkey preparation, you know? He comes in, does that reverse, he's like, "Please tell me everything."

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: At the end of that scene, he has a little joke,

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*TOBY: You know about the new OMB definitions?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: I know they're coming out. What's it going to look like?*

*TOBY: That depends. You want more poor people or fewer poor people?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Fewer poor people.*

*TOBY: You got it. Thank you, Mr. President.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's like a funny little joke between them. But then he walks out and he gives the president a look, like kind of over his shoulder as he's walking out. And it was a little bit inscrutable.

JOSH: But not in a good way.

HRISHI: I just didn't know what it meant. Like I didn't know if he was...

JOSH: [cross talk] You weren't intrigued?

HRISHI: Yeah, if you go back and look at that one. I don't know what that one meant. And then the other two were just moments where it felt like the scene kind of lasted a little bit longer than - I was like, "Ok, I'm just watching this part now."

JOSH: Is one of them with C.J.?

HRISHI: No, actually. Is there one with C.J.?

JOSH: It just ends on her and a look. The camera just stays on her a little bit too long so it's a little bit like the end of a soap opera scene.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah! Exactly!

JOSH: [cross talk] Where they just hold on the person and you think...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh! Yes, I do know what you're saying.

JOSH: [cross talk] "This isn't realistic. Somebody would say something in that beat."

HRISHI: [cross talk] I know which scene you mean. It's when Mark, the reporter, comes in and they have that awkward exchange about Canadian Thanksgiving.

JOSH: [cross talk] Canadian, yeah. And then he walks off.

HRISHI: And she turns and she stands there and she looks at them kind of awkwardly, and she doesn't cross the room back over to get to them, and she doesn't say anything, she's just standing there with her hands folded.

JOSH: Right. It's very odd, and I know I've sometimes had moments like this as an actor. That's where usually I'm desperate for them to say, "Cut!" And when they don't I just turn and say, "I would like to say more, but I don't have any more lines."

HRISHI: Right!

JOSH: "So I'm just going to stand here."

HRISHI: Yeah. That's exactly another example, absolutely. I remember that one but I hadn't grouped it in here, but, yeah totally. Then another one is Russ Angler who comes in to talk to Josh about the situation with the the kid from Georgia.

JOSH: Right.

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*JOSH: What do I do now?*

*ANGLER: I'd talk to the Chargé d'Affaires at the Italian Embassy.*

*JOSH: I want to do it today.*

*ANGLER: I'll set it up.*

*JOSH: Thank you.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And they just kind of hold on Angler's face in a way where he's just looking at Josh, and maybe it's fractions of seconds here, but it is too long.

JOSH: I think it's not characteristic of *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: Right, yeah.

JOSH: So for whatever reason, maybe it was a combination of the director and the editor of this episode, there are moments that feel slightly off. Or different.

HRISHI: Yeah, and then the last one was in the airport when Josh is at LAX and it's supposed to be Hartsfield, I think, right?

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And he has the scene with Farragut, then he gets the ginger ale that he ordered, and now it's kind of like, "Oh! He's really going to actually drink the ginger ale." Farragut leaves and he takes the ginger ale, and he turns and he drinks it. And they show him picking up the drink and drinking it. And I'm like, "What am I getting from this?"

JOSH: That moment was weird for me too, but I wrote down, "big, fake ice cube." Because I think you can tell there's one of those big plastic ice cubes that they don't want to melt because they're making a TV show and it doesn't have to actually perform the function of an ice cube. I think if you go back and look at it...

HRISHI: I'm going to look.

JOSH: There's obviously not a lot for us that we feel to dig deep into this episode, so we're just picking up on all the little weird things. There's another thing in that scene, prior to that scene or at the beginning of that scene, rather, when he's first entered the terminal and we get the hustle and bustle, and a sort of an overhead shot of the hustle and bustle of the terminal, there is one woman who, I guess, is really late for a flight, and there's some really weird background acting as she runs like a crazy person through the terminal.

HRISHI: I didn't see that.

JOSH: [cross talk] I'd encourage you to go back and look at it. Because it's just...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: [cross talk] It's just a weird, weird run.

HRISHI: So I feel like I would like to dig deeper into the issue with the Native Americans, but they really don't give us that much.

JOSH: It's pretty surface level. I mean, I like the idea that these are unresolved issues for centuries now in the macro and then the treaties they've been talking about over many, many decades, and I like when the woman has that line about...

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*MAGGIE MORNINGSTAR CHARLES: We've been waiting for 15 years, C.J.*

*C.J.: Fifteen years?*

*MAGGIE MORNINGSTAR CHARLES: Yeah. So, you can see why we don't mind hanging around here for a little while.*

*C.J.: Yeah.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I like that whole kind of setup. That said, it sort of serves as another dose of that trope you described without really digging too deep into anything other than what we know already about the plight of Native Americans.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And how they've been treated.

HRISHI: Yeah, I have issues with this on a couple levels. C.J. says...

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*C.J.: Indians on the day before Thanksgiving. Wow. Ironic.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I mean, that's just a weirdly cheap thing to actually have to include in there. It's like "Yeah, we get it." But then also I am a little bit bummed, like there is so much to talk about, and it would be a legitimate subplot to spend a lot more time on and to get deeper into, but it feels like it is just a glancing look at it, and the fact that it is set up as a Thanksgiving thing feels like essentializing in a way. It's like, "Oh, it's the one day of the year when we think about the people



who we screwed over.”

JOSH: Right, and we think about them at a fairly shallow level. The episode doesn't then go on to do some sort of deep dive -- revelatory deep dive -- that ends up being a fairly glancing look at their plight and it serves ultimately, I think, most to develop C.J.'s character.

HRISHI: Huh.

JOSH: We're supposed to be taken with her, because she is outraged on their behalf.

HRISHI: Right. Don't you think that it would be more significant, or more respectful, to dive into an issue about Native American affairs on a regular episode, not a Thanksgiving episode?

JOSH: Yes. It's almost like the episode excuses itself by having that little change where they're like, "Wow, Native Americans and Thanksgiving, how ironic." It's like, "Ok, now we can go on and do the mini Native American plot on the Thanksgiving episode. Because we acknowledge it."

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. Any nice things to say about the topic?

JOSH: I will say this: I like the filling in of some of the lines in the portrait of Bruno.

HRISHI: Yes!

JOSH: I think I've gained some respect for him. Not that I didn't have respect for him, but just the fact that he takes what Toby's giving him with respect to the bad news that by the new metrics, it appears there are four million more poor people in the United States and he just immediately flips it and knows exactly how to spin it.

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*TOBY: What the hell are you...*

*BRUNO: Are you telling me this formula has been broken for years and the other guys haven't fixed it?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It doesn't even take him half a minute to think about. He knows exactly how to kind of turn it on its head and knows exactly how we'll position it.

HRISHI: Yeah. That's probably my favorite part of the episode where he says, "I'll sell the other thing."

JOSH: Yeah, exactly.

HRISHI: And then he's able to do it right there.

JOSH: We didn't touch on the scene, which I do like -- I think it's kind of cute and funny -- the scene where President Bartlet lays his elaborate trap to catch the fact that Abbey has been told about the polling numbers.

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: We've got polling numbers...*

*ABBEY: Which say Camp David is fine!*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: J'accuse!*

ABBEY: *Oh, brother.*

PRESIDENT BARTLET: J'accuse, mon petit fromage.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It is great how he springs to action.

JOSH: Yeah. He just lights up. "I've got you!"

HRISHI: And I like "mon petit fromage," too.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: They're just on fire. I feel like the last few episodes their dynamic is so great and I think we've talked about this in the past, but Abigail is especially Katharine Hepburn-y in this scene. There's the end of one of her lines, she goes into a vibrato that's very Katharine Hepburn.

*[The Philadelphia Story excerpt]*

*TRACY LORD: I should think that of all people, a writer would need tolerance. The fact is you'll never, you can't be a first-rate writer or a first-rate human being...*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: At the end of her long rant, she's like...

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*ABBEY: To say nothing of the fact that I have been subpoenaed to answer questions before Congress on how I secretly kept you alive. So, explain to me now how what I did is out of line.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's pretty good.

HRISHI: I would love to see Abbey and Jed do a Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn movie.

JOSH: Yes! Yes!

HRISHI: Ok, so we've got the kid in Italy. Do we want to talk about that some more?

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: My favorite part, I think, of the whole subplot around the 13-year-old who shoots his teacher is the scene at the Italian Embassy.

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: [cross talk] I think he's at the Italian Embassy. And, when he speaks to his counterpart there, Alberto Fedrigotti.

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*ALBERTO FEDRIGOTTI: Is there a crime that girl could commit that would have justified what the father did?*

*JOSH: See, it's problematic when other people make my argument for me.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I really like that whole scene. But when Fedrigotti says that about...

JOSH: [cross talk] Oh, it actually is Alberto Fedrigotti!

HRISHI: [cross talk] That really is the guy's name.

JOSH: [cross talk] There's a whole Sorkin story to that name.

HRISHI: Really? So, I heard that, and I thought about it, and I was like, "Alberto Fedrigotti..." and I was like, "Is that the name of somebody else who's famous?"

JOSH: He's in a *Sports Night* episode.

HRISHI: Yes! That's what it is! Pete Sampras plays against Alberto Fedrigotti in the tennis match.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And Sampras is supposed to put him away.

JOSH: Right. But he won't, he just keeps fighting back.

[Sports Night excerpt]

*DANA WHITAKER: Jeremy, what's his name?*

*JEREMY GOODWIN: Alberto Fedrigotti.*

*DANA WHITAKER: Alberto Fedrigotti just took Sampras to a fourth set.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Maybe I'll have to write to him, because I think there's some story behind it. Like he knew someone named Alberto Fedrigotti.

HRISHI: That's great.

JOSH: So, there's a couple crossover moments, then, from *Sports Night*, Alberto Fedrigotti being one and also just the fetishizing of turkey.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Because there's an episode, "Thespis" episode where Dana is thawing a turkey out, a frozen turkey, up on the lights in the studio, and of course, it plummets to the desk on camera.

HRISHI: Yeah, and if she had called the Butterball hotline, they would have told her that that is not a recommended way of defrosting. Probably.

JOSH: I would think so. I would think not, yeah.

HRISHI: Anyway, when the Italian Chargé d'Affaires slash tennis star Alberto Fedrigotti is telling Josh the father said, "This is my child, I will punish her any way I choose." Immediately in my head popped in the 10,000 Maniacs song...

["What's The Matter Here?" by 10,000 Maniacs excerpt]

*That young boy without a name anywhere I'd know his face In this city, the kid's my favorite I've seen him, I see him every day*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Nice. Natalie Merchant. Haven't thought about her in a long, long time.

HRISHI: She sang a song about hitting your children. About parental abuse.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: That's all I had. It made me think of that song.

JOSH: I liked Bruno's kelp story as well.

HRISHI: I did too!

JOSH: I actually really did like that. How do you come up with that? I mean, the whole fact of it being about sailing is very Aaron.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: But the specificity of it. And I like Ron Silver's delivery.

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*BRUNO GIANELLI: So, I take a boat hook on a pole and I stick it in the water, and I try to get the kelp off when seven guys start screaming at me, right? 'Cause now the pole is causing more drag than the kelp was. See, what ya gotta do is you gotta drop it in and let the water lift it out in a windmill motion. Drop it in, and let the water take it by the kelp and lift it out. In and out, in and out until you got it.*

*The voters aren't choosing a plumber, Mr. President. They are choosing a president.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He does these hand motions showing like, "Come on." He's completely right, and it's just like, "I'm now gonna just show you how this works. Let me tell you how politics works." I mean, he really lays it out: "Get out of politics is my advice, if you don't see..." But I like the specific story.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I like the philosophy behind it, too. That anywhere you can pick up just a little bit of speed, a little bit of headway, why not do it?

JOSH: Right, and he says to him, I think twice...

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*BRUNO GIANELLI: ...when it costs us nothing? When we give up nothing?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I think in a world where they're so used to, and we're going to see as with the Josh subplot, there's bargaining and selling and buying and trading this for that. He's saying, "Come on, this is a freebie."

HRISHI: Yeah. When he was telling the story, it felt like a *Sports Night* story, and even the way that he delivered it, while still being so distinctly Ron Silver, I suddenly had an image of when he said...

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

*BRUNO GIANELLI: Sometimes I have difficulty talking to people who don't race sailboats.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I could hear Josh Charles saying that line.

JOSH: That's funny.

HRISHI: Or really, Dan Rydell, I think. I don't know if there's anything to this, if this is worth talking about, but I saw a thing that the original title of this episode was "The Butterball Hotline" and then it was changed to "The Indians in the Lobby," but I couldn't find confirmation of it. But it was a thing, like a little ghost remnant from like a Television Without Pity post. But, I mean, I'm sure titles change all the time.

JOSH: Maybe they would have had to clear Butterball, it being a brand name.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Maybe they couldn't.

HRISHI: Or it's ok to use in the text of the episode, but not the title? Something like that?

JOSH: Well, that's an interesting question. They probably would have had to clear it for the mention altogether.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Ok, let's take a quick break and when we come back we'll be chatting with *West Wing* composer W. G. "Snuffy" Walden.

JOSH: As you know, The West Wing Weekly is part of Radiotopia, from PRX, a curated collection of cutting-edge podcasts made possible by the Knight Foundation. On May 12, we joined a few of our fellow Radiotopia shows for a live event at the theater at the Ace Hotel in downtown Los Angeles where we interviewed composer Snuffy Walden. Before he joined us, we began by serenading the audience with our own rendition of *The West Wing* theme as played by Hrishikesh Hirway on melodica, by Joshua on a kazoo shaped like a trombone, and for the final three notes, Helen Zaltzman on glockenspiel. Here we go!

HRISHI: Thank you very much and welcome to a live taping of The West Wing Weekly. I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Coming up later, if he hasn't run away from that butchering of his notes, the man responsible for *The West Wing* theme, Snuffy Walden. So, why is it important to talk about the music of *The West Wing*? It's really like another character on the show. And even if you haven't watched *The West Wing*, if you aren't an obsessive fan who's seen every episode many, many times, there's a good chance that the music of Snuffy Walden has been a part of your life in some way.

JOSH: Here's a partial list of the shows for which he's written music: *Under the Dome*, *Nashville*, *Friday Night Lights*, *In Plain Sight* – I was very good on that – *Once And Again*, *Roseanne*, *Ellen*, *I'll Fly Away*, *Huff*... it goes on and on and on, so if you haven't watched *The West Wing*, first of all, do so quietly in your seat. But Snuffy's music no doubt has touched your lives.

HRISHI: So, please welcome Snuffy Walden.

JOSH: This is exciting.

HRISHI: Yeah. You know what's not a good idea? Is to play the music that somebody else has written on an instrument that you don't know well in front of over a thousand people for the first time.

WALDEN: I'm going to give notes.

JOSH: I can say that I played the Ace Hotel. It was trombone kazoo, but I played the Ace Hotel.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for joining us.

WALDEN: Absolutely. It's my pleasure.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for sitting through that. We were wondering if you could start by telling us how you first met up with the creators of *The West Wing*, Aaron Sorkin and Tommy Schlamme?

JOSH: Can we pop in before that and find out why his name is "Snuffy?"

WALDEN: Oh, no!

HRISHI: Sure. Yeah. Let's go to the beginning.

WALDEN: Ok, I was born William Garrett Walden, and in the South, the biggest manufacturer of snuff is a company called Levi Garrett and Son. So, my grandfather, my mother were nicknamed "Snuffy" and "Levi," and I picked it up when I was five and it just kind of stuck.

JOSH: You picked up the habit?

WALDEN: I picked up the habit.

HRISHI: Any actual relation to Levi Garrett?

WALDEN: None at all.

HRISHI: So it's just a nickname.

WALDEN: [cross talk] It's just a nickname.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Because of the proximity?

WALDEN: [cross talk] And during the summer I was "Snuffy" and at school I was "Garrett" and then music took over the summers.

JOSH: So you were "Snuffy" before you were a musician?

WALDEN: Yes! Absolutely!

JOSH: That's like fate. Your parents turned you into a musician by naming you "Snuffy."

WALDEN: Right, right.

JOSH: Tell us, even before you got into scoring for TV, what was your early musical career or musical pastime?

WALDEN: I dropped out of pre-med to play guitar in a strip joint.

JOSH: Are you listening, kids?

HRISHI: Follow your dreams.

WALDEN: And I just kind of followed it for years and only got into scoring because somebody

came and saw me live and said, “Ry Cooder’s priced himself out of the television and film business, would you be interested in doing television scores?” So...I said, “Yes, sure.”

JOSH: And what did that lead you to? What was that first...?

WALDEN: The first show I ever auditioned for was a little TV show, and they only met with me ‘cause my name was Snuffy and they wanted to see what a “Snuffy” looked like, and it was a little show that a couple of guys introduced over at ABC and they didn’t think it would go, and we did a pilot and it got picked up and that was a show called *Thirtysomething*.

HRISHI: Not a small deal.

JOSH: I was a huge fan of that show.

HRISHI: And so, did you feel prepared for what that was going to lead you to?

WALDEN: [cross talk] I didn’t have a clue what I was doing. But for me it was kind of like being in a band. You’d sit with the film, and, I wasn’t trained, I didn’t go to music school or anything, I was just a guitar player. So I would just look at the film and play with the film until I got moved, and then try to finesse that to make it work.

HRISHI: What was that like? I mean, my whole life with music has been based around a computer, but when you were working on *Thirtysomething*, what was your actual physical situation like?

WALDEN: Well, I had a guy who could look through a little window through a door and when I would go punch, he’d go into record. And I actually just played everything live in those days, it was right before computers came out. And it was a little maddening, a little crazy, and I did a show right after that -- that January right after we debuted *Thirtysomething* in ‘87 and it was a little show that debuted after the Superbowl called *The Wonder Years*. So that was my first year in television.

HRISHI: Doing both shows at the same time?

WALDEN: Both shows.

JOSH: So, did you ever do a little show that just wound up being a little show?

WALDEN: I did a bunch of those.

JOSH: [cross talk] Ok.

WALDEN: [cross talk] I did a bunch of those.

JOSH: [cross talk] I know I have.

WALDEN: [cross talk] But you don’t know any of those names.

HRISHI: Well, let’s get to a little show called *Sports Night*. For that, you made this music:

[Sports Night theme excerpt]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So how did that happen?

WALDEN: I haven’t heard that in years!

JOSH: That is so *Sports Night*.

WALDEN: So fun, so fun. You know, that all happened in a funny way. I was on a vacation with my family, and I got a call from my agent and they said, “There’s this writer, his name is Aaron Sorkin and he’s...”

JOSH: [cross talk] Little writer.

WALDEN: Little writer. Well, I didn’t know Aaron!

JOSH: He was little.

WALDEN: I was still doing little shows. So, he sent me this script and I got the script, and I forgot to ask him if it was a half-hour or an hour drama, and I got this 58-page script and so I assumed, “Well, this is an hour drama because it’s 60 pages.” And it wasn’t until I actually met Aaron a couple of days later that I realized it was a half-hour. And he talks really fast.

HRISHI: They were going to squeeze all 58 pages into 30 minutes.

WALDEN: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: And so how did you get that job? Was it discussing? Did you have to give an idea of what you would do for it?

WALDEN: You know, Aaron just liked *Thirtysomething* and that’s why he called me and we never did anything besides just, “Well, let’s do the job.” So, it just kind of happened. I had no idea who he was, so it didn’t scare me too much at the time.

HRISHI: Did you have to convince anybody else to get the job? Or once Aaron decided he wanted you because of *Thirtysomething*, that was it?

WALDEN: I think Tommy Schlamme was a little reticent, but Aaron was the boss, so what can you do? Actually, I didn’t know how intense the show was until I went down one day to the set and literally got dizzy watching Tommy wander through halls and following people with scripts this long and it was really fun. I just thought it was a great show and couldn’t believe that they were going to do a half-hour comedy without a laugh track. It was amazing to me. ‘Cause I’d done a few.

JOSH: Early on, you know, we had it. And they’re hard to watch now. I think the first seven or eight episodes of the show, we did it in front of a live audience as if we were making a classic comedy, and so we had the actual audience, their laughter recorded, and then it was sweetened. Aaron and Tommy were completely against this from the get-go, but Aaron didn’t yet have the sort of weight that he would eventually have as a monster TV writer. And so I think losing the argument with them week after week, he finally just...you know how they say you can -- if you turn up one degree at a time, you can boil a frog? I might be making this up. I don’t know why anyone would say that, but...

HRISHI: They’re French?

JOSH: Without the frog realizing it – the way got away with getting rid of the laugh track was they just dialed it down a little bit each episode until finally ABC realized there was no laugh track any more. And it greatly enhanced the show, I think.

WALDEN: Well, I didn’t get to see them on the air, I was too busy working.

JOSH: That’s one of the nice things about doing this podcast is that I know you, and I’ve spent



time with and I've chatted with you, but a lot of times the people who work on a show and provide the different layers don't see each other that often. They're maybe not even physically in the same space.

WALDEN: But I see you every day. I'm looking at a screen, you guys are like family to me, you know. You're in my house every day.

JOSH: That leads me to an interesting question, I hope. I, as an actor, always appreciate somebody of your talent and stature making my performance better. Are there certain actors where you're like, "Oh yeah, I'm gonna have to score that scene." Are there problem actors where you're like, "We're going to have to add something to this?"

WALDEN: Yeah. I've had people say things to me like, "Well, put music in there." I said, "Well, why?" He said, "Well, for entertainment value." So, yeah, there have been some, but not many. I've been really blessed to work with great material.

HRISHI: So, you did two seasons of *Sports Night*. The crazy thing about the story of *The West Wing* is that – and *Sports Night* – is that the second year of *Sports Night* and the first year of *The West Wing* happened at the same time. I guess you were doing *Wonder Years* and *Thirtysomething* at the same time, so you're used to the insane idea of working on two TV shows at once?

WALDEN: Yep. That was pretty crazy. I had 10 shows on one year about the I think the second year we did *West Wing* and that was pretty crazy. But what happened -- it was a weird thing. Aaron said, "Well, we're doing this pilot, and it's going to be about the White House and it's probably going to be a guitar show, so you can play guitar on it." And I was like, "That's great!" So I said I'd love to do it. I hadn't seen the script or anything. And about two months into the summer they came and they said, "Well, you know, we've been working with John Williams music in this show and it's really working well." Now I didn't read music and had never done an orchestral score but they said, "Would you, you know, could you do this?" And the answer for an out of work musician is always, "Absolutely!" So I had to figure it out.

HRISHI: And how did you figure it out?

WALDEN: A lot of fear, a lot of late nights, a lot of fetal position on the couch. Really, since I didn't study music, I don't know kind of how to do it in the traditional way, and for me it's always about playing with the picture and the characters until an emotion begins to happen, and then develop that. The truth is if you listen to the score of *West Wing*, it's very simple. It's a very simple melody and, and hopefully it strikes the heart of people and, and that's what I did, and then figured out the rest. Listened to different scores, and classical composers, and said, "How do I do this?"

HRISHI: And so what were you listening to? What was the compass for you to figure out how to get to where you had to go?

WALDEN: I'd done a series with a dear friend of mine, James Horner, who was one of my favorites and I listened to a lot of James's music and I listened to a lot of Aaron Copeland and just tried to imagine the kind of scope and the instrumentation I would need for a show like this rather than being an acoustic guitar player, which is what I was.

HRISHI: Let's listen to a little bit of Aaron Copeland. This is a piece: "Fanfare for the Common

Man”.

[“Fanfare for the Common Man”: excerpt]

WALDEN: [cross talk] I wasn’t that good.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That was sort of the spirit you were...

WALDEN: [cross talk] Yeah, the French horns is a very Americana sound and basically what I wrote was not written as a main title. They had about three or four people who were writing main titles for the show. And we were scoring so fast, we did the first three episodes together before we ever had a main title. And Tommy Schlamme came over to my studio, and I was playing him the closing of the third episode. It was when Dulé came in and Bartlet was doing his first television broadcast from the Oval Office. And I was playing this cue and Tommy looked at me and said, “That’s our theme!” So that’s not even the theme that was on the first couple of episodes. We had to score it a few days later.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Could you explain that? You said that three or four people were working on the main title?

WALDEN: Well, they had talked to other composers about doing orchestral scores and they were cutting in pieces of John Williams and a show like that and Aaron was having a lot of success, everybody in town pretty much wanted to go for it.

JOSH: Aaron told me when I asked him that, at one point, they even went to Randy Newman, who wrote a song called “This Is Our House”.

WALDEN: Pretty heavy competition.

JOSH: No, apparently it was a pretty good song, but it wasn’t what they were looking for. And what you gave them is what he was looking for. I’m interested in the nuts and bolts of -- I just don’t really know how it works -- first on a regular TV show and also, I’m curious to know, we’ve talked to so many people involved in making the show and during the Sorkin years, there seems to always have been a very significant time crunch. And it seems to me composing music to specific scenes without adequate time would be quite challenging. Is it different working on an Aaron show from another show?

WALDEN: Oh, absolutely! I mean, when we first started doing those shows, I had a full orchestra and after six episodes we didn’t have time for an orchestra, there wasn’t even time to get the music written, so I would sometimes end up with a day and a half, two days from the time I saw the film to the time I had to deliver it. So, you know, pages were coming out at the spotting sessions. They would say, “We’re going to shoot this scene and it’s going to be in here.” So it was pretty crazy.

HRISHI: How much music would you have to write typically for one episode? How many minutes of music?

WALDEN: It started much heavier. What happened with the show is as it developed -- we started with about 20 some-odd minutes of music in the show. But the characters became so well-developed and the more developed they became, and the more richness we had to them, it took less and less music. Because, really, you had to be very careful in those moments, they

were so subtle and there was so much dialogue and it really became a blessing to me because when those day-and-a-half turnarounds came, you know, I didn't have to write 20 minutes of music.

HRISHI: Yeah. I want to go back to that first version of the theme when you didn't even know it was a theme. So, Tommy came to your studio? Is that right?

WALDEN: Right.

HRISHI: And I have the first version of the theme...

WALDEN: [cross talk] Uh-oh.

HRISHI: [cross talk] ...as it was in season one. This is the first time you hear the title, this is what it sounds like.

[The West Wing theme excerpt]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That little "do-doodle-do."

WALDEN: It's a little flatter, yeah.

JOSH: It's so inspiring, there's a little piece of confetti that just waved down. I was like, "My God!" That almost brought me to tears. Oh my God, this guy can score anything! My God, music is powerful!

WALDEN: Well, that was a MIDI sketch I had to do of the orchestration, because when the first episode went on, we hadn't yet been able to actually score the main title, so I had to do it in my studio all with synths.

HRISHI: And so, did it feel like it was an incomplete piece of work that you were putting out and putting onto TV?

WALDEN: It didn't then, but because we haven't gone in with an orchestra yet. We had actually gone in and scored the first three episodes with an orchestra, but we hadn't played that piece of music. And so it came to life on the stage. I mean a friend of mine, Brad Dechter, helped me with it and helped me organize it for the orchestra.

JOSH: How many pieces?

WALDEN: I think it was about 50 pieces that day.

HRISHI: Was it easier not knowing that you were making a theme song? Was there different pressure? Your theme eventually ended up encompassing so much of the spirit of the show and making Josh cry because of that confetti. But at first when you were writing it, since you were just writing an episodic cue...

WALDEN: Well I was in a panic, anyway, I was trying to write to this show that was so huge in scope and so wonderful. But it organically came out of the characters and the story. It really did. I mean, it happened in the third episode and it's just what I heard and I played it and like I said, Tommy picked it and then I went in and my biggest compliment, actually, was when we scored it, Aaron really hadn't heard the piece, I don't think, until we scored it, and we went in with an orchestra and scored it and I turned around, I played it for Aaron not knowing if he was going to

throw something at me, and he had tears in his eyes. And that was the greatest compliment he could have given me.

JOSH: And then is there ever any tweaking? Do they say, “Thumbs up, that’s it!” or is there dialogue?

WALDEN: [cross talk] No. Rarely ever.

JOSH: So did Tommy and Aaron have the musical vocabulary to communicate? Or how would they communicate with you specifically about a piece of music?

WALDEN: You know, we would discuss it, but we’d always discuss it in relation to the emotion of the character and the fabric of the story. They never said, “Oh! We want more French horns here.” They were never like that. They were always very respectful of the process and spoke to me about the emotion we were trying to capture and usually would tell me the full backstory behind the moments we were talking about.

HRISHI: The time pressure aside, what was the hardest part about making the music for the show?

WALDEN: Not stepping over the amazing performances. I mean, the characters were so wonderful and the performances were so great. You just had to barely, lightly touch on it otherwise it would just overdo the moment. And that was probably the hardest thing, being as subtle as it needed to be.

JOSH: We had Tommy Schlamme on the podcast, and that’s one of the things he said. He felt that the show developed and matured so that you could be sparer and sparer as the actors more fully inhabited the world.

WALDEN: I didn’t have to do much toward the end. There were some big moments, but my job got easier as it got harder as well, as the time crunch got...

JOSH: And while you were scoring *The West Wing* what else were you working on? Because it seems like when I look at the list, there’s a lot of overlap.

WALDEN: I was doing *Sports Night*, *Rosanne*, *Drew Carey*, I think, *Providence*, *Roswell*, and a couple others. We had about 10 shows on one year.

JOSH: That seems superhuman. Was that fun?

WALDEN: No! I wouldn’t call it fun.

JOSH: How do you keep everything straight? Do you ever get writer’s block? Or you just can’t afford to?

WALDEN: All the time, but what happens it, you just gotta make sure every show you’re doing has a different instrumentation and a different feel. So you don’t find yourself writing something for *Sports Night* that you played last week on *Roswell*. You gotta be careful about that.

JOSH: Are you super disciplined: “I’m going to sit down and do this now?” Do you have inspiration and wake up and hum into a mike?

WALDEN: [cross talk] Panic. Pure panic and fear is the biggest motivator I’ve ever had.

HRISHI: So with *Thirtysomething*, you’re writing everything on guitar and you were recording it

yourself. When it came time to write these orchestrated pieces for *The West Wing*, were you still using the guitar as your main writing instrument?

WALDEN: No, I was mostly playing it on piano. After I started doing a few television scores and they were all guitar scores, I figured if I didn't figure out some other instrument, I was going to be washed up in a couple of months, so I bought a piano and played a score for a show called *I'll Fly Away* the first time I ever played it on piano, so I just had to invent myself every time.

HRISHI: And, when you were then having to work on the episodes, and you had such a short turnaround time, and you can't record with an orchestra, how did you still make is sound decent with that kind of timeframe?

WALDEN: You know, I don't know how. I had a great team of guys who I worked with, engineers and MIDI wranglers and stuff. I had an interesting thing happen. We just -- for a quick plug -- we just are about to release a double *West Wing* CD after 15 years.

JOSH: Right on!

WALDEN: That'll be out in July. But I sent it to be mastered and the guy, the mastering engineer, who does this all day long, said, "This is all an orchestra, right?" He couldn't tell between the orchestral pieces and the pieces I did at my studio. So it was a lot of great technology and a lot of great guys who I worked with.

JOSH: Let's keep plugging the album! I'm curious, actually. How does a double album of music from *The West Wing* work? What are the...?

WALDEN: Well, I mean there's seven years of episodes.

JOSH: [cross talk] Right.

WALDEN: [cross talk] It's not like there's two weeks to write a double CD. There's so many different themes and so many different stories and I don't know how many episodes we did, about 180?

HRISHI: 154.

WALDEN: 154? A lot!

JOSH: Don't tell them that, we want to do 180 of the podcast. We're going to start making up episodes.

WALDEN: Ok. I'll score them.

JOSH: 180. That sounds good.

WALDEN: There was a lot of material. The hardest thing was going back and trying to pick pieces and select pieces that moved me still and that I could remember some of the time helped. I mean, I had to go back through seven years of material so that was a lot of work. And I had a lot of help there.

HRISHI: So we're on season three right now of the podcast and I wanted to...

JOSH: [cross talk] Of 12 seasons.

WALDEN: Of 12 seasons.

HRISHI: I wanted to focus in on one moment from an episode we talked about recently called

“Ways and Means” On that episode, the thing that was amazing to me listening to that is, it’s in the third season, at a certain point I sort of felt like we’ve heard everything from your bag of tricks and now it’s just a matter of rearranging those things, but then I realized that you’re still coming up with new themes and new ideas. I wanted to play this piece from that episode.

[music from The West Wing episode 3.03 excerpt]

HRISHI: [cross talk] And that kind of piano figure, that like arpeggio...

WALDEN: [cross talk] It was a different moment. You had to play different music.

HRISHI: [cross talk] And so where would you go to get new ideas? Were you again listening to other music or was your inspiration just from the show itself?

[end excerpt]

WALDEN: You know, the film tells what to play, it really does. I mean, you can play three pieces of music and one can be totally wrong, one could be mediocre, and then one will move you. I’ve always been driven by the film. For me, it’s like being in a band. It’s like you’re responding to the things that you’re being fed and you’re having a dialogue, and that’s really what I tried to do every week, and I wasn’t able to do it great every week, but I think I ended up with a couple of CDs worth of good music.

JOSH: We’re going to buy it.

WALDEN: You’re going to get it free.

JOSH: Do you go back and watch and listen ever?

WALDEN: I’ve never watched *The West Wing*. I...

JOSH: GET OUT! GET! OUT!

WALDEN: It’s true. I just couldn’t go back and watch the work. I knew we were doing something truly magical, and I knew it was special, but because I’m so self-critical about the work, I just can’t go back because I can’t watch the show, I can’t enjoy the episode because all I can see is, “Oh, what should I have done there?” and, “How could I have turned this?” So I generally don’t watch my work.

JOSH: So, you’ve watched, obviously you watched the pieces over and over and over and over and scored them, and then...

WALDEN: [cross talk] And then I never see them again.

JOSH: [cross talk] Final product, screw it!

WALDEN: [cross talk] No!

JOSH: [cross talk] That’s fascinating!

WALDEN: I get to see it once. I get to see it the first time we look at it, and then I never see it in that way again.

JOSH: It’s a very good show.

WALDEN: I’ll try to check it out.

JOSH: I think you’d like it.

WALDEN: I'll check it out

HRISHI: There's even a podcast you can listen to accompany your watching.

WALDEN: Just don't put my music on it and we're fine.

JOSH: That's fascinating! And do you feel that way about everything you've done?

WALDEN: Yes.

JOSH: So, do you ever watch TV? Because with the odds of something coming on that you've scored, what do you watch?

WALDEN: I watch *The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell*. That's all I watch.

HRISHI: Do you feel like you have a sense of the impact that your music has had on other people? Even just specifically limiting it to *The West Wing*? There was a time when we first started the podcast and we would talk about the music, multiple people wrote to us to tell us that one of their favorite activities was to make up lyrics to your theme.

WALDEN: Like Randy Newman, right?

HRISHI: Yeah. So, we got curious about what some of these lyrics were, and we had people send us their versions of the theme song. We asked them to sing it to us and then...

WALDEN: [cross talk] Do you have some tonight?

HRISHI: Yeah, we edited a few lines from a bunch of them together, so this is a little sample of the sing-along version of *The West Wing*.

[The West Wing Theme plays throughout while different listeners sing various lines.]

LISTENER ONE: [sung] *The We-eh-est Wing*

LISTENER TWO: [sung] *Some of it is in Latin*

LISTENER THREE: [sung] *You are champions of smart repartee*

LISTENER FOUR: [sung] *Charlie and C.J., Toby too*

LISTENER FIVE: [sung] *Richard Schiff is bald*

LISTENER SIX: [sung] *Bradley Whitford and Martin Sheen*

LISTENER SEVEN: [sung] *It's time*

LISTENER EIGHT: [sung] *And will Donna and Josh ever do stuff to each other?*

LISTENER NINE: [sung] *Martin Sheen.*

[end of clip]

HRISHI: My favorite is the guy at the end who does the last three notes and says, "Mar-tin Sheen."

JOSH: "Mar-tin Sheen."

JOSH: I have a very special relationship to the theme because when I joined -- well first, I was a huge fan of the show, although I made an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to be on the first season while I was making the second season of *Sports Night*. That didn't work. But, I would ultimately weasel my way onto the show and I was a huge fan of it already, I watched all the

episodes. Aaron hired me on a kind of provisional, “You’re going to do six episodes” – thanks for coming! So now if only the theme were playing, I would be crying, instead I’m mad. So I did my six episodes and then kind of the way I discovered that, in fact, I would become a regular is that there was a knock on my door and there was a delivery guy and Aaron sent me a VHS tape and I didn’t know what it was. I put it in and it was the credits of the show, but I was now part of it. And to see my name and my image to your theme, I did cry. And I rewound and went over and over and over and over it. It was a little pathetic and narcissistic.

HRISHI: Eventually coming up with lyrics when you sang your own name over the theme...

JOSH: Over and over and over, yeah. But somebody said to me, “It’s so iconic. It is *The West Wing*.” And when I think of *The West Wing*, the first thing, in my mind, I hear the theme.

HRISHI: Also, did you know that for Lin-Manuel Miranda’s final curtain call of *Hamilton* he did his curtain call to theme for *The West Wing*?

WALDEN: I heard that, yeah. I know. That was a real honor.

JOSH: That’s pretty awesome.

WALDEN: Yeah.

JOSH: Did you call him up? Were you like...?

WALDEN: No.

JOSH: No, I was going to ask if you asked him to pay for the rights. Which leads me to a tactless question, but I can’t be the only one who’s curious: every time I hear that theme or any of the other, like, forty themes is that a ka-ching, ka-ching moment for you?

WALDEN: For my agents, it doesn’t really for me. I give it all up to them, they take 90 percent.

JOSH: That’s beautiful. I wanted to know!

HRISHI: It’s a very sweet thing that you’re doing to support your agents. So, you don’t watch the show, back to my original question.

WALDEN: [cross talk] I will! I will at some point. I really will, I’ll sit down once I’m done writing music and I’ll...

JOSH: [cross talk] You’re planning to watch the show you just haven’t gotten around to it?!

WALDEN: [cross talk] I’m planning to watch the show! I just haven’t gotten around to it.

JOSH: I don’t buy it!

WALDEN: Well, I’m working, you know. I’m busy.

JOSH: What are you working on?

WALDEN: I’m working on the album, and doing a couple of other TV shows, and just had a pilot picked up this morning for CBS.

JOSH: [cross talk] Does it have a part for a middle-aged Jew?

WALDEN: [cross talk] Right, right, right...

JOSH: [cross talk] No, does it have a part for a middle-aged Jew? Let’s talk about it.



WALDEN: [cross talk] Of course it does! It's about Navy SEALs. How do you look in a SEAL outfit?

JOSH: [cross talk] The animal seals?

WALDEN: [cross talk] No, the Navy SEALs.

JOSH: I'm starting to look more and more like a seal, maybe not a Navy SEAL. What's it called?

WALDEN: It's called Untitled Navy SEALs Project for CBS.

JOSH: Sounds good!

HRISHI: That is catchy!

JOSH: They've got me on the description. Do you have themes of other shows that are favorites of yours? Do you watch any TV? Do you own a TV?

WALDEN: No!

JOSH: Have you heard of TV?

WALDEN: I heard of TV. It's like what are your favorite kids? I mean they're all...

JOSH: [cross talk] I can tell you: my daughter Isabel.

WALDEN: *West Wing* was one of those shows, it was kind of like *Thirtysomething* and there were a couple of shows like that, that you really became a family. And *West Wing* was special that way, *West Wing* was special that way, *My So-Called Life*, shows like that that I was really involved with the creative team and really became friends with the cast and stuff. But they're few and far between, to be honest.

HRISHI: But, so, back to my original question, do you feel like you have a sense of the impact that your music has had on other people? Do you have a sense of the legacy of it?

WALDEN: Only because of what I've been told by people. I mean, I'm always amazed when people write and, you know, people get married to *The West Wing* theme and, and they ask me to play it on guitar, so I have a sense of it. I can't wait to see the series, I hear it's great.

JOSH: Until about season four, episode six, it's fantastic. And then it kind of levels off.

WALDEN: But it's not about you...

JOSH: No, no. No.

[end of interview]

HRISHI: Hey, before we wrap up I just wanted to say thanks for listening, and leave a note for us on our web site or on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram with your thoughts on this episode. We'd love to hear from you. And tune in next week, we'll be joined by another special guest:

JANNEY: Hi, this is Allison Janney.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

WALDEN & AUDIENCE: What's next?

HRISHI: Thank you guys so much.

[The West Wing theme plays]

[Outro Music]