

The West Wing Weekly
4.01: 20 Hours in America, Part One
Guest: John Gallagher Jr.

[Intro Music]

JOSH: Hello folks, and welcome back to the West Wing Weekly. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Today we're talking about the premiere of Season Four. It's called "20 Hours in America, Part One."

JOSH: It was written by Aaron Sorkin. It was directed by Christopher Misiano, and it first aired on September 25, 2002.

HRISHI: Part Two of "20 Hours in America" aired on the same date, but we're going to wait another week before we get into the second half of the premiere.

JOSH: That's right. We're pacing ourselves.

HRISHI: Coming up later, we'll be joined by actor John Gallagher Jr., who played Tyler, the young campaign volunteer who drove Toby, Josh, and Donna through Indiana. In this episode, the president campaigns in Indiana, and we discover that Kumar is reopening the investigation into Shareef's death. Josh and Toby get left behind by the motorcade, which means that a sleep-deprived Sam has to staff the president when he returns to the White House. There's other stuff that happens too, involving rolling pins and finding a big brother for Anthony, but these are the main plot points.

JOSH: Indeed. There's a lot going on. It's a biggie, this two-part season opener. Ambitious, broad in scope, takes us places we've never been before. We get out of the house, so to speak. I like it!

HRISHI: Yeah! It was nominated for Outstanding Art Direction, and this was one of the episodes submitted for Bradley Whitford's Supporting Actor Nomination that he got for the season, and The West Wing won Outstanding Drama for the fourth season, and this was one of the episodes submitted for that.

JOSH: That's right. I guess I'll talk about it when it's appropriate, but I was able to go to the Emmys for that fourth win.

HRISHI: That must have been exciting.

JOSH: It was. It was a lot of fun.

HRISHI: This episode takes place in Indiana, or a large part of it takes place in Indiana, that was actually shot in Pennsylvania. It was shot at the end of August in 2002. There's a note in the episode, at one point, Bruno mentions that it's six weeks until election, which would make it the

last week of September, which was also when this episode aired. Aaron wrote this so that when the episode came out, it was caught up in real time with the calendar.

JOSH: Right, that's cool. And I guess we're about six weeks out from a presidential election. And when it aired, it was about six weeks before the midterm elections [crosstalk]

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Midterms.

JOSH: of 2002, during George W Bush's first term. A midterm election that apparently marked the first time that a sitting Republican president's party gained seats. They gained eight in the House and two Senate seats, net.

HRISHI: So the trend is always that at a midterm election it swings the other way.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right. It's an interesting...the United States is bicurious.

BOTH: [laughter]

JOSH: And tends to swing the other way when given the opportunity. It's like, you know, checks and balances are built into the constitution, but they're also somehow built into the electorate, and it tends to swing like a pendulum as a natural check against unchecked power. Which is interesting. The whole episode begins with a rather lengthy frontl, and god knows I enjoy a lengthy frontl.

HRISHI: [laughter] I'm not gonna even dignify that.

JOSH: It's best not to. Just keep moving.

HRISHI: yep

JOSH: There's quite a bit of audio of the campaign stop before we see video.

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

CROWD CHANTING: Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Right, and we have a new kind of title card, for the first time we have a different font, and the president's schedule appears.

JOSH: I like that when we see these title cards throughout the episode, they're a little bit confusing, there's certain letters we're not maybe necessarily sure what they stand for, but we do notice that the schedule seems to be down to the minute, like, say, 12:52 and I like that it's - I think it's a subtle way to remind us how important that this job is that he's looking to fill.

is a lot of fun to watch. We also have, in the ever-expanding category of future-stars-to-be who appeared on The West Wing early in their careers, we have John Gallagher Jr.

HRISHI: Sometimes I wish that I had a little soundboard or sampler that I could put Josh samples into and I could play them back at appropriate times.

JOSH: Like Fred on the Howard Stern show.

HRISHI: Exactly. Yes. The moment when we talked about Mark Harmon:

[Excerpt from TWWW podcast, Episode 3.19, Enemies Foreign and Domestic]

HRISHI: Okay, so, Mark Harmon.

JOSH: Oh! Cutie!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I wanted to play that when you said “John Gallagher Jr.” I wrote in my notes, “Cutie!”

JOSH: [Laughter] He is. He’s a cutie. He’s a very talented guy, too. I’ve seen him in quite a number of things. I’ve never seen him on stage, which I hope to do sometime soon. Fan of him in The Newsroom and on The West Wing and in Olive Kitteridge. I don’t know if you saw that? Terrific made-for-HBO movie.

HRISHI: I liked him a lot in Short Term 12, too. Incredible movie.

JOSH: He’s a terrific actor.

HRISHI: I wrote about cute things in my notes a lot.

JOSH: Bring on the cute.

HRISHI: Okay, ready?

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Let’s start at the beginning of the episode, and when we get to it, we’ll get to it.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: There’s a neat thing that I noticed, a nice moment, in the president’s speech, in the cold open, he says “this is a time for American heroes, and we reach for the stars,” and I’d never noticed this before but as he says that, I realized, there are people holding the state flag of Indiana behind him. The state flag of Indiana, if you’re not familiar with it, is a blue field with a gold torch surrounded by stars, and there are these five lines radiating from the torch towards the topmost stars, and the torch kind of looks like a hand, it almost looks like a torch reaching

for stars.

JOSH: Interesting. He's good, that Aaron Sorkin.

HRISHI: I don't know if this is just a great coincidence, just nice visual symmetry, but, you know, I'd seen this episode so many times and I'd never noticed that before.

JOSH: It's great. It's great writing, too. And there are career politicians who employ terrific writers, but I wonder why there isn't a—not that there are a lot of Aaron Sorkins, but—why aren't they loftier? Why doesn't some smart person hire an Aaron Sorkin? Probably people have tried.

HRISHI: We should ask him about that.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Also in this cold open, we've got another future huge star.

JOSH: Huge! Amy Adams as Cathy.

HRISHI: Cutie!

JOSH: Cutie. There's a lot of cute in this episode.

HRISHI: [laughing] I know, that's what I'm saying! There's also a lot of harshness in this episode, the first of which comes in the cold open when Toby says

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

TOBY: Indiana's voting for Ritchie. If there was someone less competent than Ritchie on the ballot, that's who Indiana'd be voting for.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes. I had sort of a reverse Clinton-ai-yi-yi moment with their electoral certainty about having lost Indiana and writing it off, and that's why they're beating it out of Dodge and getting out of town pretty quickly. You know, the Clinton campaign having made, I guess, the inverse mistake of assuming certain states were in their pocket and not spending enough time in them, and just sort of, there's a little condescension from Toby and Josh sort of throughout the episode, there's kind of that sort of urban, as opposed to rural, tension and condescension, and I think that's played well, intentionally. I like seeing our guys get lost and getting their eyes opened.

HRISHI: Yeah, they are absolutely incredibly condescending throughout the whole episode.

JOSH: And Donna quietly bears it. I also liked how that was sort of subtly woven through is this sense—you know, and Josh is condescending to her, as he often does—constantly telling her

what to do and then realizing she's already doing it. He's telling her whom to call next—oh, she's on the phone with that person now.

HRISHI: Jumping ahead, there's one spot in the diner—I love all the stuff in the diner, that part's also really funny—but there's a moment where Toby says, to one of the other restaurant patrons, he says

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

TOBY: Would you mind terribly if I changed the channel to CNN for just a minute?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I mean, the TV is like an older wood-paneled thing. What I love is he says

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

TOBY: I've been a little out of touch today I would like to check in with what's been going on.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought, "You're still a little out of touch."

JOSH: Well said. Yeah. I also like the couplet of Toby sitting down and asks what's your specialty and the waitress says

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

FIONA, DINER OWNER: Taking someone's order and giving it to 'em.

[end excerpt]

BOTH: [laughter]

HRISHI: It's so good.

JOSH: Incredibly funny couple of lines.

HRISHI: But my first instance in this episode of something I thought was very cute, was the button on the scene of the cold open, is somebody [crosstalk] saying, "you need a button?"

JOSH: [crosstalk] is a button [laughter] Very good.

HRISHI: She says

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

CITIZEN: You guys need a button?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Like, yeah, I guess they did.

JOSH: Ah, that's kind of brilliant. They might have been in the writers' room going, "my god we need a button. I've got it! A button."

HRISHI: It says "Bartlet for America."

JOSH: Nice!

HRISHI: Very Cute.

JOSH: I wonder why on my second watch I noticed that Aaron, through Josh Lyman, kind of tips his hand at the motorcade leaving without them. Josh mentions that it had happened before and I wondered why.

HRISHI: Yeah, I felt the same way. I'm like, you don't need to telegraph that moment, I don't think.

JOSH: No. I think it would have maybe landed more comically if it came more out of nowhere, if we weren't ahead of it.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. I think the thing that I liked least about this episode, along similar lines, although it doesn't pay off in this episode, when Donna says the thing about "I Don't Like Mondays"

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

DONNA: Out in the parking lot when you said it's Monday, I flashed on the song. A few days ago someone told me that a girl shot up her school one morning and when they asked her why, she said, "I don't like Mondays," and that's where the song comes from.

JOSH: yeah

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That ends up being foreshadowing for the second part of the premiere. To me it feels like a forced setup. But back to things that I do like.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Which is pretty much everything else.

JOSH: Yeah, these are great episodes. I love this. To me this is a very kick-ass opening to the

fourth season.

HRISHI: Absolutely. Also cute, Margaret's protective nature towards Leo. Really all the Margaret stuff, she's hounding him about eating a grapefruit. I thought that was very cute.

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

MARGARET: Speaking of health and fitness,

LEO: Oh, merciful god!

MARGARET: What did you have?

LEO: I had half a grapefruit!

MARGARET: Really?

LEO: You think I'm lying?

MARGARET: No.

LEO: Okay.

MARGARET: Yes.

LEO: I'll be in the sit room... [trails off]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then the part where Margaret is the assistants' human Wikipedia is hilarious to me.

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

SAM: Do we have some sort of condensed Readers Digest Index of, well, all human knowledge?

GINGER: We usually just use Margaret.

SAM: Ok well, we'll have to talk... [trails off]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, it's fantastic. I just wrote down I love Leo and Margaret's relationship. To me the bet part of the whole grapefruit thing is that it pays off in the Sit Room and Leo actually asks someone to get him half a grapefruit. He knows she's right. He's never going to give it to her, but he knows, "yeah, I really should."

HRISHI: There's another cute moment when we get Sam's introduction. He comes into the office and everyone's is telling him to go home and go to sleep. And Leo says "go to sleep," and Sam says "I'm not fighting with you" and he puts up his hand in this, like, almost petulant valley girl kind of way, that I thought way adorable. Also cute.

JOSH: I did too, actually, in fact I did it after watching it. Every now and then I'm just struck by a moment and I think what a great decision, like that would never have occurred to me, and I just want to see what it feels like to do it, so I did it a couple of times. I just thought wow, what a great, original choice to make during a scene. I loved it.

HRISHI: Can I see?

JOSH: No. It's not performance-ready yet, I'm sorry.

HRISHI: [laughter] I would love to see you do that.

JOSH: Nope. And I also thought Rob had a fantastic, we like to point out great bits of physical acting, and I thought his wakeup. You know, we hear his outgoing message saying, "if you really need me, scream" or whatever it is and then Josh screams for him and he does a fantastic bolt out of bed.

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

JOSH: [answering machine beep] SAM!!

SAM: [series of crashes] It's alright! It's alright, hang on!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And then in the subsequent telephone call, he's actually still a little bit out of breath. Very good physical acting from Rob Lowe in that scene. I loved it.

HRISHI: That's great, and I related to that very much.

JOSH: Is that you? Do you wake up that way often?

HRISHI: That's how I wake up all the time.

JOSH: Is that true? That's funny. I think of you as so measured and organized and in control.

HRISHI: I'm a really light sleeper, and I've relatively only recently discovered the timed "Do Not Disturb" function on the iPhone and so you know, I'd go to sleep and then someone would call, my parents would forget about the time zone difference and call early in the morning, or there'd be a news alert or something and my phone would vibrate, and I would bolt to suddenly waking up and bolting for my phone and then, yeah, I just feel like that's how I am all the time.

JOSH: I'm actually, once again in contrast to you, I'm quite the opposite, I'm a very, very heavy sleeper. Just recently there was a fairly significant earthquake and my wife woke me up to tell me that [laughter] because it really jolted her. And as she describes it, she woke me up and I said "What?" and she said "there's been an earthquake" and I said "should I be concerned?" to which she really had no response and I just rolled over and immediately went back to sleep.

HRISHI: I am jealous. It's probably been bad for my health but good for my work.

JOSH: Ah, there you go.

HRISHI: I'm currently operating on about eight hours of sleep over the past two days.

JOSH: Oh, that's horrific. That's terrible. You are the engine that keeps this going, so I salute you.

HRISHI: Thank you. Ok, back to the episode.

JOSH: Oh yeah. We talked a little about the Sit Room, and Leo sits down asks for a grapefruit.

HRISHI: Which is why it's called the Sit Room, by the way.

JOSH: Sit for citrus?

HRISHI: No, everybody's sitting in there.

JOSH: Oh I see, are you sure it's not for citrus?

HRISHI: It could be. Maybe they're very clever.

JOSH: Perhaps. He asks everybody to go around the table and he's checking on what I believe he calls the "quick sheet", so he wants a quick update on what's happening in the various areas of the planet.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: And Leo says let's go around for the quick sheet and Fitz says

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

FITZWALLACE: A small force of North Korean soldiers may stage an incursion into the DMZ.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And this was my big Trump-ai-yi-yi moment. I was thinking about President Trump asking people to go around and the Fitz version would be, that his response would be something more like "Well, the President of the United States has called the North Korean leader 'Rocket Man', and threatened to totally destroy his country before the United Nations."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And then Leo'd be like "Well, what else?"

BOTH: [laughter]

HRISHI: I had written down, "Pyongyang-ai-yi-yi."

JOSH: Yeah, there you go. Fair enough. I do like that when we get the update that Qumar has reopened their investigation into what has happened to Shareef, the meaningful looks between Leo and Fitz.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: They're very, very well done, and it's the kind of thing that could be overacted, or directed poorly, or like "we get it, they know something we know." It just, it's very subtly and well done. And I think maybe one of, you know, this is just my point of view, one of the really difficult things to do in film acting is a reaction shot. You know, we know exactly what this is. These two characters just know something. So does the audience. The other people in the room don't know what's been done, and so they're exchanging, it's just the kind of thing that could be a huge, big cheese sandwich, but it's very well executed here.

HRISHI: Yeah. Red Leicester.

JOSH: Mmm.

HRISHI: I agree. I love that eye contact is really all that we need. I thought it was a great use of the dramatic irony, recognizing the heft of the dramatic irony means you don't need to do anything other than make eye contact.

JOSH: Right, exactly, this is one of those situation where Aaron, the actors, and Christopher Misiano, the director, know that really what we just need is an exchanged look and the audience will do the rest of the work.

HRISHI: Mmhmm.

JOSH: for the moment to be meaningful.

HRISHI: There are a lot of funny Josh lines in this episode, starting from the very beginning as he's trying to explain what's going on with Toby to Cathy, Amy Adams' character, but then, especially when they're riding in the back of the truck, the whole exchange with Cap, when he's talking to Toby and he says

[West Wing 4.01 excerpt]

JOSH: [to Toby Ziegler] Think about the lovely Cathy. Farmer's daughter with a master's

*degree? Wholesome but, maybe not too wholesome. I think she liked you, too. [Turns to Cap]
How do you know Cathy?*

CAP: She's my girlfriend.

JOSH: That's great. She's really nice... Is that corn out there?

CAP: Nope!

JOSH: What is it?

CAP: Trees.

JOSH: Ok.

[End excerpt]

BOTH: [laughter]

HRISHI: The last "ok" as he...

JOSH: It's pretty fantastic. That scene also begins a little hat tip to Christopher Misiano. There's a really interesting shot where I guess they have a crane on the truck, because it starts with those guys in the back and the cab of the truck, and then it sort of goes up pulls back and lowers to see the two women through the windshield. It's just a nice piece of camera work.

HRISHI: Yeah, it really feels like we're being spoiled for a TV show. It's such a cinematic kind of level of production. It's a real location, it's a real truck, this is not some little setup with a projection screen behind it.

JOSH: Yeah. And again, it doesn't feel showy though; it doesn't feel there just for the sake of spending a little bit of money. It is a great, nice feel for that scene, for the open.

HRISHI: Yeah, and in fact I didn't even think about it, I didn't make a note of it at all, because I was just experiencing it and enjoying it, until you pointed that out, like, right, all that is incredible. That camerawork was so great and so fluid. Another great deployment of dramatic irony, is the part where we have seen the president and the staff on Air Force One, and then we cut back to Josh, Donna, and Toby arriving at the gas station, and Josh says

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

JOSH: Can we just call ahead and make sure that the plane's gonna be there when we get there?

DONNA: It'll be there.

JOSH: *Can we call ahead?*

DONNA: *I've been calling! I can't get anyone on their cell. They're in a bad calling area.*

JOSH: *Keep trying.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: We know the reason they can't get anyone on their cell is that they're already up in the air. They could have just flipped those scenes around. They could have showed "oh, they're in a bad calling area" and then gone to...

JOSH: The reveal.

HRISHI: The reveal, that, oh, they're actually on the plane. But it does a totally different thing to the joke, by having it in that order. If they'd been the other way around, it would have just been like "womp-womp" [sound].

JOSH: Yeah, that's right, that's a good point.

HRISHI: It's the dark chocolate version of the joke, I think. The more sophisticated palate.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: But when we are on the plane, I love this little bit of writing from Aaron for C.J.

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

C.J.: We've got a new addition to our running list of things Robert Ritchie's not. Speaking this morning at the Philadelphia Financial Council, the governor said, "I'm no scientist, but I know a thing or two about physics." So for the week, you can add scientist to doctor, mind reader, and...Chinese?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: "Chinese?" It really made me laugh.

BOTH: [laughter]

HRISHI: I love it because it makes you do the work. Now you have to then take that and fill in the blanks, imagine him saying, "I'm no doctor... I'm no mind reader... I'm not Chinese..."

BOTH: [laughter]

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: I love that. I've talked a little bit about those being some of my favourite kinds of jokes

from Aaron, like the one about the literacy rate in Sweden, that's pretty impressive, and Leo saying "Maybe, or maybe they can't count [laughter] either"

BOTH: [laughter]

HRISHI: I love that. You have to do the last step.

JOSH: Right. I like when President Bartlet is addressing the Air Wing Division, he steps off, I guess, the dais to take a call from Leo. Leo's updating him on what going on, the market's tanking, he mentions he has a meeting in a few minutes with Fitz. "What's it about?" "Doesn't matter." "What's it about?" "Nothing." "Leo, it's not nothing," and then Leo explains to him that Kumar is reopening this investigation, and we get a nice, subtle reaction shot from the president, and then he walks out under this enormous American flag, just as the Naval Chorus is singing "the truth goes marching on."

HRISHI: Right!

JOSH: It's just one of those timed brilliantly, perfectly, subtly, and it's a great image as well as an audio experience.

HRISHI: As you were saying, we get to go to new places, see things that we haven't seen, get a new set of flavours included in this episode of *The West Wing*. One of the new things is some of the music we get from Snuffy [Walden]. For the first time, he gets to bust out his acoustic guitar. You know, all the stuff in Indiana gets to have this whole other musical score. Snuffy's an incredible guitar player, especially in kind of a blues idiom, and it must have felt so great to suddenly have an opportunity to let that part of his natural musicianship out.

[*West Wing* episode 4.01 musical excerpt]

JOSH: That's right. When we spoke to Ellen Tottleben she was talking about how she enjoyed these opportunities to do something of the beaten path, I guess similarly Snuffy would enjoy when things go further afield and there's an opportunity for a little bit of a musical shakeup as well.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: One of the things I liked about this episode is that one of the veins running through it is this ongoing, on-again off-again argument between Toby and Josh about language,

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: about the messaging of the campaign. It's just a classic, I like when Aaron focuses on the power of language and the importance of it politics.

HRISHI: Yeah, I really loved the exchange between Josh and Toby when they talk about the advisors; it suddenly felt very brutal too. They're talking about why do we cite his advisors by

name and Josh says, "it's our way of calling him a puppet right?"

[Excerpt from 3rd Presidential Debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, 19 October 2017]

HILLARY CLINTON: [fades in]...President of the United States and it's pretty clear, it's pretty clear ...[fade out]

DONALD TRUMP: [speaking over the top] No puppet! No puppet. You're the puppet!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: "It's his way of saying I think that it's great Bartlet's a Nobel Prize winner, when I get elected I'm gonna hire some of those", and Toby actually challenges him and says, "no no, that's what he should be saying"

JOSH: Indeed

HRISHI: Like this is Josh's version of he's insulting him by saying "oh I'm gonna hire some of those" and Toby says, "no that would actually be great if he wanted to hire [crosstalk] some"

JOSH: [crosstalk] that's exactly what he's looking for

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

TOBY: No. No. Should be what he's saying, what he's saying is eastern education isn't for real men but don't worry I'll have Jews for the money stuff.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Whoo, yeah, that's an intense line of dialogue.

HRISHI: That is rough! And to think that this is how Toby really regards Robert Ritchie. By the way, just on the side, Kid Rock's real name is Rob Ritchie and he's currently running for senator, right?

JOSH: [slight laughter] Yes, and I think equally qualified, these two.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: How weird is that?

HRISHI: It's so weird but it just makes it really funny every time they talk about Rob Ritchie and I switch from The West Wing to the news and they talk about Kid Rock's campaign.

JOSH: Yes, I think everybody when they see the image of Kid Rock should think Robert Ritchie.

HRISHI: Another great throw away line, I love it so much because is the kind of thing I ask all the time to myself usually

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

TOBY: What's a hoosier?

[end excerpt]

BOTH: [laughing]

JOSH: I was surprised Toby was asking that though [laughter]

HRISHI: Right [still laughing] and to ask it of Tyler

JOSH: Of Tyler

HRISHI: [laughing] Maybe that's what made it even funnier, that that's who saying it

JOSH: But that's a great movie, though

HRISHI: yes!

JOSH: Hoosiers

HRISHI: yeah, Gene Hackman

JOSH: Gene Hackman. Jinks! You can't speak until the season is over.

HRISHI: [laughing] Gene Hackman basically plays [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] having jinksed you I feel I actually have to say your name now and un-jinks you, this is like a thing from my childhood, so I have to say Hrishikesh Chandra Hirway.

HRISHI: [laughing hard]

JOSH: That was not, that was not well pronounced.

HRISHI: It was cute.

JOSH: I was trying to roll my r [laughing]

HRISHI: [laughing] Also very cute [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] Give it to me again, say it again

HRISHI: Chandra

JOSH: oh yeah, I'm the American version, I'm Charles [pronounced trying to roll the r]

HRISHI: [laughing still]

JOSH: We basically have the same middle name.

HRISHI: It's true.

JOSH: Ok, now you may speak.

HRISHI: Ok, thank you. Here's a part I had a question about. The president, when interviewing one of the potential secretary's, talks about intellect versus memory. He says, "it will be important that you have a good memory for names and numbers and dates, things that I'm not great with" and the interviewee responds "oh I'm surprised that man of your intellect would have trouble with that" and he says

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

BARTLET: It's not intellect, it's memory. It's a different gift, a wonderful one, I've never had it.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: but he remembers, again going back to [The West Wing episode 3.14] Hartsfield's Landing, he remembers where all the pieces are on David Wheaton's board. He says to Toby, he says "don't cheat, I know exactly where the pieces are on the board, I know exactly where the pieces are on Sam's board, I know exactly where the pieces still are on David Wheaton's" and I know that chess might occupy a slightly different part of the brain than just pure memorization of dates, but memory is certainly a part of something like that.

JOSH: Well, actually, I wonder. It's funny that you bring that up because I have an excellent memory for dialogue, which is good considering that I'm an actor, and a terrible memory generally and it also ties into a comment. I wanted to thank everybody first of all, we had a tremendous response to our request for people to take our survey, the Radiotopia and The West Wing Weekly survey, we had thousands and thousands and thousands of you actually took time to respond. I appreciate it. I was enjoying, as I do, sifting through the thousands and thousands of comments that we got and of course, as usual, I enjoyed the negative ones more that, I mean I appreciate the positive ones more, but I enjoy getting into the mire of people's negative responses and maybe most of the time I agree with what's being said. Look there's real substance...[crosstalk]

HRISHI: [crosstalk] either way, the positive and the negative comments, you agree?

JOSH: ah yeah, I think the show's great so the people who just said that, I was like "yeah, it really is, isn't it" but then when I read negative stuff about myself, usually I agree and I don't care or I agree and I ponder. I try to filter it and think about maybe there are certain things I can

improve on and I take it in. But almost always, even usually there is substance to it so I sort of get it, sometimes I just shrug, some people think I'm annoying, what are you going to do, I can't address every single thing—but one person specifically said they were getting tired of my mentioning my inability to remember something earlier in the season or in another season and they said, a backhanded compliment, “given your apparent intelligence I no longer buy it, I feel it's disingenuous” and so they were raising that issue of memory and intelligence and I know it's not a put on. But it had me pondering whether memory and intelligence or to what extent they're intertwined. I tend to think of them as sort of independent of each other, I mean having a good memory I think maybe helps you create the illusion of being more intelligent than you are because instead of having to go to the external hard drive, it's in your head.

HRISHI: This is how I've been skating by for a long time. I can remember things and I think that lets me BS my way into seeming smarter than I actually am.

JOSH: Well, you do seem very smart and I think maybe I am changing my opinion; part of intelligence is the retention of knowledge.

HRISHI: Ah! I don't know, maybe. I agree with the president, intellect and memory are completely separate and but yeah, I also think you're correct that you can use memory to try and fake it.

JOSH: Ok fair enough and now I've done what a certain number of our responders [laughing] object to, which is take us on a tangent, so bringing us back to the show. I do love these interviews on Air Force One, particularly the first, in which President Bartlet just tries to impress this candidate for the job with the fact that he's got a really cool plane that has [crosstalk] an apartment and an operating room on it and she just is not affected by his stuff.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] yeah.

HRISHI: [laughing] or even the jokes about the stuff, I mean, you know

JOSH: Right, no. She's not charmed by him, she's not impressed by him, doesn't seem all that interested in the job.

HRISHI: And I think about how he's giving her the full Bartlet in that moment and she's giving nothing back and it just fizzles but then the other moment where we get the full Bartlet is at the end with the new congressman, Peter Lien, and he's both being complimentary and also he's giving him a hard time,

JOSH: Right

HRISHI: He's giving him a hard time to a third party, which is another, like, fun President Bartlet move, to say to Leo

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

BARTLET: Peter's family fishes in Galveston Bay, but they don't catch marlin. It's a sore spot and he doesn't like to talk about it

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Leo doesn't even know that there is a joke happening. This is really where we are getting the full thing

JOSH: Yeah, he's at eleven.

HRISHI: Yeah, and in contrast the congressman, he rolls with all of it, and he loves it. He matches him for all of the questions he asks, and when he gets serious and earnest as well, saying "you know your responsibility isn't just symbolic". You understand why the president has affection for him because he can give him the full Bartlet and he can [crosstalk] take it.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Take it.

BOTH: [laughing]

HRISHI: Also, with that last set of scenes, when Sam finally starts staffing the president, there's a line in this that I think about all the time. When the president says,

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

BARTLET: Just rock'n'roll Sam

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Sam's trying to figure out where to stand,

JOSH: Right. I like that.

HRISHI: and he says, "just rock'n'roll". I think about that all the time. I'm often self-conscious about that, about my physical space, my corporeal occupation of the physical space, [crosstalk] and every time I'm like where should I be? I was at a party at a stranger's house earlier this week for rosh hashanah and I was like "where should I go", I didn't know, and I thought, "oh, just rock'n'roll". It comes up all the time, it's not a big line but for some reason that phrase "just rock'n'roll Sam" is always in my head.

JOSH: [crosstalk] well said

JOSH: It's a good line, and thanks for mentioning rosh hashanah. Let's do a little off ramp into another area that some people really don't like [laughter]. Shana tova, this is our first episode that we are recording since the New Year. It's now, for us Jews, 5778, the frustrating thing is that I am still writing 5777 on all my cheques.

HRISHI: oh! Every time.

JOSH: Ahh, it's an Abba joke.

HRISHI: It's a what joke?

JOSH: An Abba joke. It's a dad joke in Hebrew.

HRISHI: Ahh [laughing] I was like wait, I was like going dancing queen?

JOSH: [laughing] Oh yeah.

HRISHI: I was like I don't see the connection with ABBA. Ok. Also cute! C.J. saying,

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

C.J.: I love dry rub! They take the meat and [phone cut off]

[end excerpt]

BOTH: [laughter]

HRISHI: I mean not the hang up being cute but her saying "I love dry rub". It was very cute.

JOSH: It was very good.

HRISHI: Another great, just comic like little bit was the president and Larry, when they're talking about the affair that has come out in the paper, the president says,

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

BARTLET: I don't think a lot of blind loyalty but I think a lot less of blind betrayal.

LARRY: That's why I haven't gotten married yet sir.

BARTLET: Yeah, that's probably why.

[end excerpt]

BOTH: [laughing]

HRISHI: It's really good and then this episode ends with,

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

BARTLET: What's next?

[end excerpt]

[ad break]

JOSH: Joining us on the podcast now, I'm such a fan of this guy, it's John Gallagher Jr. We're here to discuss his Sorkin origin story, he plays Tyler on both parts of "20 hours in America", but you also know John; he's a Tony winner for playing Moritz in the original Broadway production of Spring Awakening; you also saw him on Broadway in Jerusalem, Long Day's Journey, American Idiot; you know him from films like The Belko Experiment and 10 Cloverfield Lane and all sorts of things. You seem to work non-stop and I'm excited that we're going to get to talk about your early TV because it looks to me that The West Wing had to be one of your first credits.

JOHN: Yes, oh yeah, definitely. It was early television work for me for sure, I was but a young teenager at the time. I think I was 17 or 18 around the time of filming.

HRISHI: How did you get the job?

JOHN: I started acting pretty young, I did my first play off Broadway in New York when I was 15. It was called Current Events and it was written by David Marshall Grant. He gave me my first kind of real job that helped me get my equity card when I was young and I was at the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York and so that really was such kinda a kick-start for things because I had been living in Delaware where I grew up and I met a manager out of Philadelphia who started sending me into the city for auditions, and for awhile it was lot of just kind of toy commercials and kind of things that were like "here's what kids go on" and I went to this call for David's play, for a workshop of it, and ended up doing it at MTC and that was how I started meeting playwrights and getting in for kind of cooler, more prestige projects and around that time it when I went and tried out for The West Wing, which I knew very little about at the time. I knew how successful it was but I was 17 or 18 and I was playing in bands and I wasn't a lot of television and so I was criminally unversed in the show, like I didn't really, I knew it was successful, I knew it had won a bunch of Emmys and that it was in it's fourth season but that was about it, at the time, that I knew. So I don't know if that helped me because kind of went in and was like "whatever, what is this show?". I remember that I was sick as well for my audition, I had like a cold or something and I would drive from Delaware to Trenton, New Jersey to take the train up to New York for an audition and I would come right back, so it would be, for one audition, it would be about 10 hours or so [crosstalk] of travel

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Man!

JOHN: and hustling and bustling and that was just one them that I thought "oh sure, this is a show, it's is very successful and everybody loves it", and I read the sides and thought they were hilarious and that really was. I mean without knowing it I had seen A Few Good Men and so I didn't know that I was familiar with Aaron's writing until I started kind of putting the pieces together as a young man going "oh this is the same person that wrote this" and I had actually watched Sports Night and did not connect that it was the same guy. I watched that with my dad and I loved it, and so Josh, I have been a fan for a long, long time.

JOSH: Is your dad John Gallagher?

JOHN: John Gallagher Sr., yes

JOSH: Deductive reasoning

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

BARTLET: My powers of deduction are not to be mocked.

[end excerpt]

JOHN: He still lives in Delaware, he's a local kind of musician and sound man in the Delaware region but we loved that show, so I started getting really excited about the idea "gosh, what if I got this part, wouldn't that be cool?" and then I found I got it and I was really surprised because it was one of those, you know when you go to an audition sick it this weird kind of thing happens where you kind of cross over into this nether sphere where you're like "I don't even know what I'm doing, I hope that I'm saying the lines right, I just want to get through this". And then I got it.

JOSH: And what was it like?

JOHN: Well because I was still a minor, my mother, we had to go to set together and it was taking place in Indiana but they were subbing Pittsburgh for Indiana, so they were shooting in Pittsburgh. I remember they were like "well we can give you kind of payment to rent a car or we'll just get you a plane ticket" and growing up in my house we're like road trip obsessed so I remember my mother and I made like a fun thing out of it, we're like "let's not take a plane, lets get a car and we'll drive from Delaware to Pittsburgh, sure, why not?" So my mother and I packed up this rental car and drove from Delaware to Pittsburgh for about a week I guess of shooting, that it was, for that part.

JOSH: That's awesome, and you do drive on the show

JOHN: Yes! But I remember that they called me and they were like "we want to know if John has any experience with a stick shift?" which I did not and I had actually gotten my license rather late so I was really nervous about driving on camera. I was like "what if I, oh gosh, what am I going to do?" You know you want to please; you want to be eager to please and I thought about saying "of course drive a stick shift", I'll figure it out when I get there, but my mother reminded me that it that was very difficult and something that I was probably not going to be able learn on set, so they had to go out, they really specifically wanted a Jeep Wrangler for this character, and they had to go out, for some reason I guess, they had a really hard time tracking down an automatic one, but they finally found one that they could use in Pittsburgh that was automatic and I remember I already was a little embarrassed of like "oh god they had to go out and find this Jeep just because I can't drive stick shift,

JOSH and HRISHI: [laughing]

JOHN: I'm so high maintenance. I was really insecure about that but the scary thing about that was that, on one of the first days of shooting, even though they got me the automatic, I remember that we were doing a rehearsal and it's this scene where I drive up in the Jeep and I park it and I get out because I've spotted my ex on [crosstalk]

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Kiki [laughter]

JOHN: on this country road, yeah Kiki [laughter] and I'm going to confront her and we're doing the rehearsal and I was really quite nervous. I had done a Law and Order and some small bit parts in New York but being kind of on an exterior shoot outside, on location, big successful show, very intimidated by the actors that I have to drive around in this Jeep, and I got out of the Jeep once they yelled action on rehearsal and I turned it off but I believe I didn't put it in park [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] [laughing]

HRISHI: [crosstalk] [big intake of breath] oh no! [laughing]

JOHN: and we were on this slightest rise on this hill and I got out of the Jeep, and the Jeep started rolling down this road and around this bend with the stars of the show in the front and back seat, and I heard it kind of happening behind me and the next thing I knew two people were running over and somebody jumped into the Jeep and put it in park and stopped it and it was, it was crisis averted thankfully but his whole scenario went through my head of what if I, what if I had killed the stars of the biggest [crosstalk]

HRISHI: [crosstalk] oh man!

JOHN: [crosstalk] show on network television!

ALL: [laughing]

JOSH: [still laughing] I want to see that footage so badly

JOHN: I know, I wish they had that cut

JOSH: I feel it would have worked in the show, sort of, that's kind of the flavor of the episode too, where things just keep going wrong

JOHN: The character is so incompetent anyway, it really made sense. I was method acting, actually

JOSH: Was the rest of the cast nice?

JOHN: Very nice. Absolutely nice. I was quite starstruck

JOSH: Not by Brad?! [crosstalk] By Richard, I hope

JOHN: [crosstalk] no but yes, oh sure, By all three. I was starstruck by Janel, all of them. I was so kind of, I mean, you've seen the episode, it was an interesting time in my life. I don't know what thinking, I had this...

JOSH: it's a great hairstyle

JOHN: Oh my goodness, I think I was going for a Jim Morrison but it was more of a kind of David Partridge, [laughing] I honestly don't know...

ALL: [laughing]

JOSH: it's very 70's

JOHN: ...what was happening

HRISHI: it's find it really convincing, it was great for the role

JOHN: yeah, it was like kind of, I could have been like David Cassidy's stand in

JOSH and HRISHI: [laughing]

JOHN: yeah I was playing in this punk band in Delaware and though that I was really super cool and I think the kind of strangeness of this kind of nerdy kid with this long, with these long flowing locks was just a weird visual that they saw the tape and thought "this is the weird kid for this gig"

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOHN: but I was really starstruck but the girl that played Kiki, Danielle Harris, because I got there and I remember getting the sides, you know, that they give you with your dialogue and seeing the call sheet and looking down the list of actors and I didn't know necessarily who was playing any of the other parts, and I like horror movies a lot and Danielle Harris was in Halloween 4 and 5

JOSH: [crosstalk] Oh [sound of realisation]

JOHN: [crosstalk] as a young girl, she was very young at the time, and I was like "oh my god, Danielle Harris from the Halloween movies is playing my ex-girlfriend" so I was freaking out about that. And then I freaked out, I remember, it's strange the things that kind of stick out in your memory but I remember the very first, this will also kind of localise it time-wise for everyone since I think it was the summer of 2002, the very first iPod I ever saw was Bradley Whitford's iPod, and I remember getting into the cast van outside of the hotel one morning, and he had this white, light up device with this luminescent screen and I was like "what's that?" and he's like "oh man, this is the iPod, you can put like 1000 songs on there".

JOSH: [laughing]

JOHN: and I'm like "what?!"

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOHN: and I remember he was scrolling through songs and then he stopped on a John Prine record, and John Prine is one of my favourite songwriters, and I remember he was like "how old you? You know who John Prine is? Wow man, that's pretty cool" and I'm like "yeah, my parents play music" and we like geeked out over John Prine lyrics for a minute, I remember. And I remember going home and being like "I've got the in with Whitford now!"

[John Prine song Angel from Montgomery excerpt, plays under talking]

Make me an angel that flies from Montgom'ry

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] That's great.

JOHN: I remember one of the crew guys had worked on all the George A Romero movies, like he had worked on Dawn of the Dead and Day of the Dead, a lot of horror movie stuff for me as a teenager there, and my mum and I on a day off, exploring scenic Pittsburgh, we drove out to Monroeville, to the Monroeville Mall where they shot the original Dawn of the Dead because this gaffer told me where it was, he was like [imitating the gaffer] "hey man, if you like Dawn of the Dead, go out to Monroeville, the mall's still there, that's where we shot it."

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: [laughing] That's awesome.

JOSH: Was Aaron Sorkin around at all?

JOHN: He wasn't on set cause I think he was back home writing,

JOSH: Yeah, trying to coming the third episode of the season. [laughing]

JOHN: with the rest of the season. But I do remember a couple of, you know whenever there was questions, like we would rehearse and Bradley or Richard or Janel would be like "can you guys make a note that we have to ask Aaron about this?" and they were like "yeah, absolutely" and they would write it down and eventually there would be a call or somebody would bring out a phone and they'd put it on speaker and everyone would circle around it would be Aaron on the phone back in L.A., kind of giving notes to everybody, and I think he even maybe listened to us run through it once or twice so he could just kind of hear what was happening dialogue wise. That really struck me too was the command that everybody had of the language, that was hypnotic, hearing the way that obviously now these people have being doing these roles for 4 or 5 years and so it's that thing where it's in their bones, and in their muscles, and it just kind of like the reason why that show, I mean the show is so good in so many ways but the way all of you,

all of those actors, just played those parts, it was so effortless and so natural and so kind of, I mean you get addicted to listening to them speak it, and I remember that being such a treat, just listening to them do the scenes, and then when it came my turn to speak being like “oh god, I wish I didn’t have to interrupt this with my take, my teenage take on this dialogue.” [laughing]

JOSH: Well that’s one of the things I love about your performance and his writing for you, is that it’s not in the traditional Sorkin mode, like a lot of times actors drop in and then they’re right in that sort of familiar pattern, but he’s doing a different thing and you do a different thing with it but make it very natural. It’s a very good fit.

HRISHI: Whenever I think of you in this episode, I always think of the part about the writ of injustice

JOSH: [laughs]

[West Wing episode 4.01 excerpt]

TYLER: Place me under arrest Kiki, let’s everybody do that, let’s everybody get a writ of injustice, lock me up and throw the book!

JOSH: Tyler.

[end excerpt]

JOHN: ok, I think there’s like a misquote there.

ALL: [laugh]

JOSH: He’s mixing.

JOHN: Mixing and matching, trying his best.

HRISHI: I’m curious, after that week of shooting ended; did you stay in touch with Aaron? How did it end up coming to be that you ended up being in The Newsroom?

JOHN: Absolutely all coincidental, because I never actually met him, you know, cause he never came to set and I never went to a premiere or anything because I went back home to Delaware and then several months later I moved to New York full time to start trying to do plays in the city and we didn’t cross paths again until 2011 when I had my Newsroom audition.

JOSH: And did he make the connection?

JOHN: He didn’t! And I’m so, I get so tongue-tied and bow down to people that I admire so much that I don’t wanna, like I didn’t ever want to bring it up and so when I got cast in The Newsroom, I guess we did 9 or 10 episodes for the first season and I never said anything to Aaron,

JOSH: [same time as Hrish] you're kidding?!

HRISHI: [same time as Josh] oh my god

JOHN: he must just, he must know and he's a very busy man with a mind that works a mile a minute and he's got this whole season to write so I don't want to even to think that I could take up the time to go talk about the thing we did back in the day on the show, he's had a few successes since then, a lot has happened, there's some Oscars and other things are going on in there and then, the last episode, we were shooting the finale of Season 1 of The Newsroom and I remember he came on the set and I heard from the studio entrance, I heard his voice go "where's John Gallagher?"

JOSH: [laughing]

JOHN: and my first thought is of course "I've really screwed up, I've done something wrong, I'm getting fired from the show" and he came and he found me on set and he couldn't believe it. He was like "do you know what one of our writers just told me?"—

[JOSH and HRISHI laughing]

JOHN: —"You were on our season premiere, season 4 of The West Wing!" He didn't realize it. He had been watching me play Jim Harper [JOSH and HRISHI laughing] for a season of filming without connecting [crosstalk] at any point. I had kind of gone back to Delaware and disappeared after that for a little while so, yeah, he had no idea it was me.

JOSH: [crosstalk] That's wild.

HRISHI: That's so funny! Because when I saw the first episode of The Newsroom that was the first thing I thought, I have to reconfigure my whole sense of how those events, in my imagination I thought this was long [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] It's the same character, the same guy? He's changed his name,

HRISHI: relation-~~friendship~~ that had kept going. Yeah, it was like you know who'd be good for this character, there was, get me that kid who was so good, [crosstalk]

JOHN: [crosstalk] the kid in that act years ago, he's been waiting for his moment.

HRISHI: Yeah, I thought for sure.

JOHN: I think it was one of those things where, because I actually wasn't, I was doing a play, and I was not really, technically available for The Newsroom which at the time was called More As This Story Develops, was the working title of the pilot, and it was one of those things where I bugged my agent, I remember emailing her cause I had seen online that I think that they had Jeff Daniels and that Alison Pill had joined, and I was starting to get really just kind of envious, I thought "oh man, Aaron Sorkin is doing a new show for HBO, that sounds so cool and I think I'm

doing this play so I'm unavailable but I just wish I could read it, just as a fan of the writing." And I remember asking my agent if she had access to the script and she said "oh sure, I don't think you're available but I'll send it your way" and then I read it and of course I wrote back and I was like "there's this character Jim and he's amazing, I would just love to get a chance to audition for that" and that was kind of how the ball got rolling to get in the door for trying out for The Newsroom.

JOSH: What were you doing on stage in New York?

JOHN: I was doing Jerusalem, the Jez Butterworth play [crosstalk] with Mark Rylance, yeah

JOSH: [crosstalk] with Mark Rylance. Oh, I really, really wanted to see it and I wasn't able to.

JOHN: Oh, it's just a tremendous play. Talk about another kind of writer I am absolutely in awe of Jez Butterworth, the playwright, who did that play. There's every now and then, I'm sure your utterly familiar with this, where you read a lot of scripts and some of them are cool and ok and then every now and then you get something that totally stops you in your tracks and just absolutely knocks you off your seat and the pilot of The Newsroom was on of those, and Jerusalem, that play by Jez Butterworth, that was one where, you know it's a three-act play and I remember reading it on my phone, which I hate to do because I start going cross eyed but I couldn't put it down, but I was doing and that was right around the time I started going in and trying out for The Newsroom and I remember, that I think it was my first audition, I knew that Greg Mottola was going to be in the room cause he was directing the pilot and I don't know if this was a thing where he did it kind of to see how I reacted but, I had no idea that Aaron was going to be in there and, when I went in to my audition,

JOSH: We hear that a lot. And did he read with you?

JOHN: and he read with me! And I immediately kind of this "ok, you have to chill, you have to chill, this is no big deal, you know, it's just like any other reader, you know it's just like if it was anybody else in here" but it's great because he's kind of this secret amazing actor too, cause at table reads and stuff he'll fill in for any actor that is maybe absent from the read or a part that hasn't been cast, so he's actually an incredible scene partner, so it's great to have him in the room as a reader cause, and of course he knows how it's supposed to sound and everything, he wrote it.

JOSH: Yeah, he's a great actor. I saw him in a production of his own Hidden In This Picture at the West Bank Café, god knows how many years ago, and he was great.

JOHN: That's amazing!

JOSH: yeah, now he's always like the guy at the bar in his, for some reason he just likes to sort of lurk in the background in one scene of everything he writes but he can act! The guy can act.

JOHN: Absolutely.

HRISHI: Do you know if he'd ever seen you on stage?

JOHN: I think he saw Spring Awakening if I remember correctly. I think that he had seen that and he might have seen the Green Day musical, he might have seen American Idiot too, but I'm not entirely sure.

HRISHI: I know that he has filled his casts with theatre actors and I always wonder, how much of it is people that he has actually seen on stage and how much of it is, when it comes time to cast people, if he just likes knowing that someone has stage experience or if it's just a coincidence that the kind of actors he gravitates towards happen to also be the kind of people that have done theatre work?

JOHN: Right, yeah, I've always wondered that too because we certainly, a lot of the main cast of The Newsroom are theatre vets, people who have done a lot of time on stage. Particularly Jeff Daniels and Sam Waterston and Tommy Sadoski and Alison, all of them have done a lot of theatre. I guess it helps maybe sometimes to know actors that aren't going to be scared of trying to get a 10-page scene in a day,

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And when you shot The Newsroom did you have significant rehearsal time built in to the shooting day?

JOHN: It wasn't a lot, it was very much, I remember the first read through, I remember going out to LA, I think, for the first table read, when we were about to start actually going into full production of season one, and I remember Aaron saying "just really make sure you have your lines learned when you come in for the day and pick up your cues and those are the only two things I'm going to tell you. Just know it when you show up and pick up those cues." and I remember kind of going home and being "ok, you gotta learn it, you gotta pick up those cues"

JOSH: [laughs] Gotta learn the [expletive deleted] out of this.

JOHN: So everybody really would show up ready to rock, there was never kind of "oh let me kind of fumble through it in a rehearsal" and then go to hair and make-up and kind cram it while I'm, that's what you have when there's a rewrite. Cause that's what you have to do every now and then, it's rare because the stuff usually really stays the same because he knows exactly what he's trying to say with a scene. But every now and then, you now how you all kind of show and be like "by the way we did get a big rewrite."

JOSH: Here's this!

JOHN: That's when you run back to your trailer crying and start trying to memorize it within the hour.

HRISHI: Let me ask you about, after you finish filming this, at that point I'm guessing you did

connect that Sports Night, A Few Good Men, and The West Wing was all Aaron Sorkin, did you start watching the show more seriously after that?

JOHN: I did. I remember a couple of years after that, that I did that. I got the DVDs; this was when I was doing the DVD in the mail program from Netflix, back in the day! And I tore through it. I guess I was in, maybe halfway through season 2, I mean I was absolutely binge watching it and I was sitting on the couch crying at episodes and just thinking “this is best thing I’ve ever seen” and somewhere along the way it clicked with me that in another couple of seasons a teenage version of me was going to show up, and that was very, very jarring to suddenly be actually really going back to the start and watching the show and kind of being like wow, I can’t believe that I was so, kind of, blissfully ignorant at the time to be part of what is an absolute legacy and I mean I think has already gone down and history and will only continue to do so. You know a show like The West Wing is just going to always be one of those moments that gets pointed to, to just say look at this incredible thing that happened as this moment in history. I wonder if there are times where maybe it was better I didn’t really know, that I wasn’t sure of what I was going into, cause sometimes you kind of come into something and you’re like ok, now I’m on this show and I’m going to show them how it goes. There certainly was none of that for 17-year-old Johnny Gallagher that was not happening in my brain, I was mostly just hoping that everyone on set liked me.

ALL: [laughter]

HRISHI: I was going to ask you, do you have any specific memories of working with Christopher Misiano?

JOHN: I just remember him being super easy going and really, really kind and for a teenager coming into this big moving train, I just remember thinking “oh god, I just hope that I don’t screw up anything” and that fear that you don’t really belong and you’re going to be able to keep up, and the director really being the person that you always look to for a little bit, for that guidance and that appreciation stuff and he was just so nice to me.

JOSH: A very chill guy.

JOHN: Very chill. Very, very cool. And to see the way that the A team, to see the that way Bradley and Richard and Janel, to see the way they all respected him it was clear that there was this real simpatico, easy going thing happened cause Richard would do, they would do a take and Richard would improvise stuff. I mean I remember very vividly that when he whacks that guardrail with that branch, [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] It’s so good.

JOHN: it wasn’t in the script. He totally improvised that during rehearsal and everyone was dying and cracking up and laughing, [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] I love that scene.

JOHN: and he was like, you do that; you gotta do that when we roll it.

HRISHI: Awesome. That's great. [laughs]

JOHN: Chris was great. Really, really kind to me. Nothing but great memories of that, sometimes you go into things and you do walk away like kind of scarred, by like "oh god, someone was meant to me and I wasn't good enough" or this or that but everyone was really sweet. It was a positive experience all around.

JOSH: You've got a lot going on. Can you tell us about whatever you'd like to talk about that you have coming up?

JOHN: I've done a couple of things coming up that I'm really excited about. I shot this big budget sort of action thing over the summer, called *Underwater*

JOSH: [at the same time] Is this the *Underwater* thing? That looks really, that looks interesting.

JOHN: It was really exciting. It was really fun, I had never anything of that kind of scope or scale and it's an incredible cast: Kristen Stewart and TJ Miller, Vincent Cassel, this actress Jessica Henwick and this really tremendous actor Mamoudou Athie. That was really fun to shoot and then I shot a couple of other movies last year. I shot a movie called *Sadie* with Melanie Lynskey, who's one of my favorite performers kind of ever. And then I did this film called *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* with a really great director called Desiree Akhavan and I just filmed a movie with Sam Rockwell over the summer called *The Best of Enemies*.

HRISHI: Oh wow

JOSH: Right, that looks interesting too. Your career's on fire.

JOHN: I'm very, very lucky. I'm super thankful. At times I almost can't believe it cause I did about 7 or 8 years of theatre straight, and there were times there when I really wrestled with wanting to do other things, I thought "oh gosh, if only someone would give me a chance to do some screen work or something" and it really paid off. I have been able to get into more film and television stuff which I always dreamed of with stars in my eyes and, I've been really, really lucky that I get to kind of do both, which is always been the ultimate dream.

JOSH: Thank you so much for joining us.

JOHN: My pleasure, thank you for having me, it's great to relive that, it almost feels surreal, it almost feels like it wasn't quite me, like I'm talking about somebody else's life so it's really cool to get a chance to relive it. A trip down memory lane.

JOSH: So that was exciting. What a great episode. Jam packed!

HRISHI: Thanks so much for joining us, and we'll be back next week with Part Two of 20 Hours in America. Until then, find us on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook or leave a comment on our

website TheWestWingWeekly.com

JOSH: The West Wing Weekly is part of Radiotopia, a fabulous selection of story driven podcasts. You can check out Radiotopia at Radiotopia.FM. Radiotopia is brought to us by the Knight Foundation and listeners like you [laughs] I've always wanted to say that. Not you, you.

HRISHI: Thanks so much to Zach McNees and Margaret Miller as always for helping us make this show. And thanks to Krista Clark and Evie Pierce for continuing their work on the transcription project on the website.

JOSH: And everybody else who pitched in and actually transcribed an episode. Unbelievable. Hrishi and I remain blown away by everyone's willingness to do a good thing.

HRISHI: Ok

JOSH: Ok

JOHN: What's next?

[Outro Music]