

The West Wing Weekly
5.10: "The Stormy Present"
Guest: Bellamy Young

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today we're talking about season five episode ten. It's called

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: The Stormy Present

[end excerpt]

JOSH: The Stormy Daniels.

HRISHI: [laughing] Jeez. This is a special episode of *The West Wing*, Josh, did you know that?

JOSH: Well, in the sense that they're all special Hrishi?

HRISHI: Even more special than that. This is the 100th episode of the series.

JOSH: Ooooh. You know, actually now that you say it, I think we had a cake.

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: I'm not joking either. I'm going to dig in the archives and see whether I can find pictures. I remember out in the west wing-- portico, is that just outside?

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: We had a 100th episode celebration cake.

HRISHI: And what did you get me for...Where's my cake?

JOSH: The cake is a lie.

HRISHI: We had *our* 100th episode recently and you also didn't get me a cake for that.

JOSH: Yesterday was my wife's birthday--the lovely Melissa--and it was, as she...as she says every year, another terrible one.

HRISHI: Did you get *her* a cake?

JOSH: Her birthdays are always terrible and mine are always great. And I think it's because she plans mine...

HRISHI: [laughs] Right

JOSH: Yeah...So what I got her...she loves German chocolate cake. But neither Avi, her son, nor I enjoy it. So I got her a *slice* of...

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: ...this is really bad...I got her a slice of German chocolate cake,

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh, no

JOSH: ...and after a day of her working very hard and not getting much of a celebration, I stuck a Shabbos candle in it because I hadn't bought any...

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: So she got a just single slice of cake with a big Shabbos candle shoved in it and the two of us sang to her and she said, "About par for the course."

HRISHI: OK. So you prepare for Melissa's birthdays the way you prepare for our podcast.

JOSH: That's about right.

HRISHI: Well this is the 100th episode of *The West Wing* and it is a special one. It is chock full of guest stars and a lot of plot.

Here's what's going on: A former president dies--Owen Lassiter--and when this happens there's a big to do, and we get all the former presidents; all the former living presidents let me clarify that...

JOSH: Oh if they'd only gone the other way it would have been a much more interesting episode, I think...

HRISHI: *West Wing Walking Dead* crossover!

JOSH: [laughing, then gasps] Walken Dead!

HRISHI: [laughing] So all the remaining living ex-presidents get together to attend the funeral. Meanwhile, there's also a protest in Saudi Arabia and the president has to deal with that while getting advice, both wanted and unwanted, from former presidents. And C.J. has to look into mind control. Josh has to deal with arbitrating a fight between North Carolina and Connecticut over a copy of the Bill of Rights that was stolen during the Civil War.

JOSH: [makes snoring sounds]

HRISHI: There's a lot of stuff happening

JOSH: No. That's true, quite a lot going on. And a great cast.

HRISHI: The cast is crazy. It does feel like they pulled out all the stops. As I was watching, I was blown away by how many people showed up. Of course, not all of them were as famous then as they are now.

JOSH: Correct.

HRISHI: So they had the big hitters--John Goodman comes back--and then we have James Cromwell as President D. Wire Newman, which is a crazy name right?

JOSH: Yes. [cross talk] DW. Very odd.

HRISHI: [cross talk] D Wire. W stands for Wire.

JOSH: Michael Hyatt was on D Wire.

HRISHI:[laughs]

[Excerpt: Theme music from The Wire]

HRISHI: It's going to be that kind of day, isn't it?

JOSH: I think so...It's all I've got.

HRISHI: All right. So we got the two of them, but then also Stephen Tobolowsky, one of my absolute favorites.

JOSH: Though I have to say, even though I think he's great, I didn't love casting him in this role, it was a little bit on the nose for me. I mean, he's great; he's great at playing eccentric characters; he's wonderful in everything he does. But I thought it was a little bit too too for me.

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

DR. MAX MILKMAN: Human identification at a distance where we use a variety of biometric technologies that focus on body parts; face identification; human kinematics...

C.J.: Kinematics?

DR. MILKMAN: Oh yeah!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Well, let's come back to that for a second...i want to mention some of the other great guest stars, I mean, we have Terry O'Quinn returning as General Alexander and Ron Canada returning as the Under Secretary of State...

JOSH: [interrupting, singing to tune of Canadian national anthem] Ron Canada

HRISHI: Doing his thing. Doing great work. Ron Canada comes back as Ted Barrow. And then we also have your former *Scandal* castmate, Bellamy Young.

JOSH: Indeed, the sitting president of *Scandal* as it came to a finish...

HRISHI: Spoiler alert!

JOSH: ...just a few months ago...Oops, spoiler alert. Also I die.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: But, yes, Bellamy Young, who not only appears on *The West Wing* but gets to name check Yale University, a school that you, she and I all attended.

HRISHI: It's true. She also gets to name check North Carolina, which is where she's from.

JOSH: Right. And a little bit later, if it turns out that she takes my call, we will talk to Bellamy Young about the experience.

HRISHI: I can't wait to see what the future holds.

JOSH: It's exciting.

HRISHI: Alright, well, ok, look you brought it up, so let's go right to Stephen Tobolowsky. He is fantastic, but, there was something...Stephen Tobolowsky, in your opinion, may be too perfectly cast in this role?

JOSH: Yeah, and maybe that's an unfair description. Or it's unfair to use that as a criticism. Basically, his storyline seems to be a stealth "Big Block of Cheese" C story...

HRISHI: Absolutely.

JOSH: ...kind of slid into this episode. And we know that C.J. thinks the whole thing's a little nutty. And so they get one of the great character actor, nutty, eccentric but intelligent guys, so he's great for it, it's just... Yeah I would almost rather see them defy expectation and cast somebody...and maybe what I'm really saying is that it could have been written differently...but have somebody come in and maybe surprise us with the impact of what they have to say about this topic that, has been suggested to us, is just kooky.

HRISHI: What did you think about Sam Lloyd when he was in the actual "Big Block of Cheese Day" episodes, talking about UFO conspiracy theories? Did you feel similarly? Because I also thought that he was well cast and was sort of like the perfect guy for that role. My issue with Stephen Tobolowsky wasn't that he was too right for it, but that it felt a little too much like an echo already of that character.

JOSH: I think probably you're articulating what I subconsciously was reacting to. I think you're right; it felt like a second iteration with a similar type of actor and a similar subplot.

HRISHI: Hmmm, yeah, a couple of episodes ago we talked about the sort of, the cover band aspect of season five as John Wells put it. And in the case of 5.08, I was saying, that I kind of liked how they were recalling some of the arcs, you know, the comeback arc from before, I thought they found a new way to do it with the shutdown and everything. I thought was an interesting and inventive way to bring back that kind of story line that we'd seen before. But here, maybe it doesn't feel as inventive; it feels more like a repeat.

JOSH: Yeah, especially, I think because they don't dig in very much. It's not paid off with big laughs or with any particularly interesting exploration of the subject. It feels like filler, and repetitive filler at that.

HRISHI: The one thing I liked about it this is that this was sort of like the D story and the D for stands for DARPA, not to be confused with ARPA which doesn't have the D.

JOSH: [laughing] Nice.

HRISHI: But this whole plot is C.J. is investigating if the DOD funds mind control experiments and it's in order to answer a question from a reporter from *Backslash Magazine*, which is a publication that she clearly doesn't take seriously.

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

REPORTER: Randall Fiersten, Backslash Magazine.

C.J.: Backlash Magazine? Oh come on...who let you in here?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which is, you know, a little rude to one of your reporters in the briefing room. But what I like about it is that despite how dismissive she is, she's dismissive in tone, but then she doesn't dismiss the question...she actually follows through

JOSH: [cross talk] She takes it to Leo.

HRISHI: Right. She makes the appointment and she has the meeting. And then she even takes it to Josh to ask what she should do with the information that she's learned. That was a nice juxtaposition. She's sort of laughing about it and Josh even says "it will get out there and people will have the same kind of reaction that you do." But she did her job. She had a question from a reporter and she did her best to try and get them the information.

JOSH: That is so, I also liked the moment when Leo is just kind of staring her down, deadpan, and she says:

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

C.J.: You're not doing it on me right now?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That was great, yes.

JOSH: That was very funny

HRISHI: That was really good. Leo's "these aren't the droids you're looking for..."

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: ...moment

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But let's go to the beginning of the episode. I really love the transition from the title screen. We have the black screen with "The Stormy Present" on it and it looks like the camera pans up from the black screen to the desk with the paper where we see the hand writing the note. I just thought that was a really nice move and a nice way to take advantage of starting on all black and moving into the world of the episode seamlessly.

JOSH: I agree. I just realized also that I forgot to mention that the teleplay for this episode is by John Sacret Young, the story by John Sacret Young and Josh Singer and the direction by Alex Graves. And yes, Alex Graves' camera is on the move in this episode. Some--I've found--incredibly elaborate and impressive camera work, handheld or steadicam. Scenes of incredible movement and multiple speakers, and I could just...as I watched it, I could imagine--not that it took me out of the show--but I was imagining--since I am an actor--the amount of work it would take to...there were certain shots where so many different people spoke and they managed to time it where the speaker happens to be on camera as the apparatus is circling the entire group. I just thought that some of the timing is exquisite and must have taken many, many attempts.

HRISHI: Yeah there were some long takes that felt like of *The West Wing* that we had seen before but done in a new way.

JOSH: There's some Scorsesean shots in this episode

HRISHI: So the teaser starts with this letter and then it cuts between the letter and the president as he's getting ready. He's putting off returning a call to someone named President Lassiter. And then lo and behold, as we're seeing more shots of the letter, there's presidential stationery and we see the name Owen Lassiter, and this is the unseen figure that the president is not talking to on the phone.

JOSH: I enjoyed the extreme closeup of the fountain pen--I'm a big fan of fountain pens--but the all caps nature of what he had to write sent me into a Trump-ai-yi-yi spiral.

HRISHI: And then we just get a few shots of words: "America" "fundamentalism." And we get the sense that this is an *Important Letter*--Capital I, capital L--well, all caps, really, *IMPORTANT LETTER*.

JOSH: That's right. Did you pause and read a good chunk of it?

HRISHI: I did pause and read a little bit of it. Do you have the text?

JOSH: I do. What I saw read, "America, a country founded by refugees, populated by immigrants, made strong by the sweat of the tired, the poor until it became America. An idea..." I can't read my own writing "...a "flaine"...a city on a hill, a vision for all who believe in liberty, an experiment of Islam..."

HRISHI: [laughing] Hold on, hold on, let's fact check this because I don't believe that is what it said.

HRISHI: [laughing] An experiment...oh, no, no, no, that's...

JOSH: [cross talk] It's a cut?

HRISHI: [cross talk] It's a cut. It's a cut. It's a cut.

HRISHI: It's "an experiment in"...and then it goes to "of Islam."

JOSH: Well that makes more sense. I literally thought I was reading...I thought I was reading gibberish. I got the rest of it right, we'll end it at experiment then. What was "the floine?"

HRISHI: "An idea, a flame."

JOSH: "A flame," sure!

HRISHI: [cross talk] "An idea, a flame, a city on the hill."

JOSH: [cross talk] That's better writing than "floine."

HRISHI: This opening at first tricked me a little bit. I thought we were cutting between the present--the stormy present--and the past and that this was the president's predecessor writing him a letter and leaving it in the Resolute Desk. You know, there's a tradition of the outgoing president leaving a letter for the incoming president.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And it seems like that's where this letter is going. We find out later that, actually, former President Lassiter has built a replica oval office in his presidential library and that's where he spends his last days hanging out, and so, the letter is actually out in California, waiting for the president and this is...these two sequences are concurrent, but I didn't understand that at first when I was watching it. I thought we were...

JOSH: Look at them getting ahead of the audience.

HRISHI: Exactly, yeah. Despite that misunderstanding on my part, one thing that it did is set the tone of how this episode is concerned with presidents across all three moments in time: the past, the present and the future. Because in the scenes with the president, he's talking to Charlie and the subtext of their conversation is the question of his legacy.

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: It's a put up job, Charlie, a conspiracy. Official presidential portraits aren't official at all. It's Abbey who wants it. Send Mr. Barkofsky on his way.

CHARLIE: Every president has one, sir.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I'm not sitting for any portrait unless of course you dig up Gilbert Stewart [phone ringing] ...who did Lincoln...

CHARLIE: I have no idea

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then we get the first of many, many, many references to Abraham Lincoln and...

JOSH: The broken plate photograph.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: Have you seen it that one? I was lucky enough to see it at the National Portrait Gallery.

HRISHI: I haven't seen it in person, no.

JOSH: It is very impressive, by Alexander Gardner. It's the last photo taken before the assassination of President Lincoln, and it's a pretty trippy photo. There's a lot of character in that face and interesting that the plate broke and only one print, I think, was ever made of it.

HRISHI: And that the break goes through the president's head and then he would be assassinated by being shot in the head. It's just, an image that has...

JOSH: Worse for Jews, he was shot in the temple....Yep, that stays.

HRISHI: Mmmmm. Ok...

JOSH: That's our show, thanks to Zach McNeess & Margaret Miller.

HRISHI: So talking about the portrait means that the end of Bartlet's own term is kind of hanging in the air from the get-go, and then we find out that Lassiter has passed away...that president Lassiter has passed away and it really becomes...the whole episode becomes suffused with this idea of legacy. While we're talking about facts about Abraham Lincoln, the episode takes its title from a speech that President Lincoln gave, and then the president you know, is later going to be torturing the staff with trivia questions about Lincoln...

JOSH: ...and boring James Cromwell with actual quotes.

HRISHI: Exactly. In terms of staying ahead of the audience, though, here's a moment where they really didn't. C.J. is in the press briefing, you know, giving some...we get a little C.J. exposition, but this is really...goes beyond I think. She says,

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

C.J.: Yes the president will be attending the annual gala at Ford's Theatre tonight. Yes, it's the theatre where Lincoln was shot. Yes, we're...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: The entire movie?

HRISHI: [Laughing]

JOSH: Or just select scenes?

HRISHI: But did we really need that?

JOSH: No! There's a lot of "we didn't need that." There's some clunky clunksters in this episode. I would highlight the situation room where Hutchinson, who I believe is the Secretary of Defense...

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: ...says "Sir, I don't need to remind you." First of all, if you're starting an explanation with "Sir, I don't need to remind you," there's already a problem.

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

HUTCHINSON: Sir, I don't need to remind you that any sort of chaos on the Arabian Peninsula could destabilize the entire Middle East, throw the global economy into crisis...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I wanted the President to turn to him and say "No, no you don't, because you're the Secretary of Defense and I'm the [expletive deleted] president. You certainly *don't* have to remind me of that."

HRISHI: So the president is planning to take what seems to be an annual trip to Ford's Theatre, and everybody is braced for the pedantry of his Lincoln trivia questions. But then the trip ends up being...

JOSH: [cross talk] You're saying he likes little kids?

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Sorry [laughing]

HRISHI: [laughing] I'm going to keep getting through this...

JOSH: [cross talk] I'm a little punchy.

BOTH: [laughing]

HRISHI: It's a trip to pay respects, he's making a trip to pay his respects to one dead president in a way, but then it's cut short by the death of another president. We get this little moment where they're getting ready to leave. Mallory shows up--we get the return of Mallory--and then a Secret Service agent walks by saying "The president is dead," and Leo goes "What?" But of course, it's not the actual president. It's an odd moment.

JOSH: I know, you would think it would cross someone's mind maybe to phrase it differently, too.

HRISHI: If you work in that White House, I don't know that you would call him "the president"

JOSH: Yeah I think not.

HRISHI: I think you might say "President Lassiter" or "Lassiter" or something to distinguish...your primary signifier when you say "the president"...

JOSH: I agree.

HRISHI: But you know, it gives a chance for Leo to react for a second.

JOSH: Right. There's also a really weird little interchange

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

JOSH: Republican

TOBY: Right Wing Republican

JOSH: Conservative

TOBY: Attila the Hun conservative

JOSH: Lunatic wife

TOBY: Lunatic, Lady Macbeth of a wife

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It was so clearly to let the audience know, so you have two characters, who know information already just saying it to each other.

HRISHI: A lot of exposition.

JOSH: Yeah, I'm surprised. Here's what I felt: I'm not a professional writer; I'm not saying I could do these things better, but there are moments I could find that could have just been edited out. There's...I know that...I think on a show like this, maybe overwriting initially, and then carving out and taking as much away as you can from what you've told the audience, is valuable.

And, you know, there is a scene with Toby, who's just gotten out of the car and he's accompanying this coterie of people who have worked for Lassiter and is kind of giving the lowdown about this Madame Tussaud's exhibit he feels he's surrounded by, and one after another, we're finding this one was a McCarthyite, and just clearly, these are hard right people, and this was a hard right administration, and it was just so much of a better dramatized way of letting us know the information that the writers wanted us know than this little few lines between two characters who of course would know who President Lassiter is and would have no reason to talk about him the way they were.

HRISHI: You don't think even in the moment of someone's death that you would give a recap like that conversationally? I think the subject of President Lassiter's ideology is interesting because, well, there's two things. One, he is described as this staunch conservative, this Attila the Hun conservative. But the text of his letter "America, a country founded by refugees, populated by immigrants..." These are not the phrases that I would immediately assume a conservative would write after the word "America" period. And at the end of the letter, he writes "Men seek to douse the flame, douse the ideal; to return to a different age entirely; to return to the age from which our forefathers fled. Fundamentalism is a vision; an ideal as rigid as democracy is flexible, and we cannot let it overcome what we have worked so hard to earn. Jed, go see Lincoln and listen."

The way that he writes, doesn't sound like he and the president are so far off. And then, in fact, the way the president describes him several times in the episode, makes me think that actually they're really similar.

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: He was an arrogant bastard, a pompous high and mighty know it all.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So far, I can imagine a lot of people thinking the president is that way.

JOSH: [cross talk] Sure, fair enough.

HRISHI: and certainly...he doesn't act so different from that...in this episode...and then he continues...

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: He used to call me in the residence and wake me up in the middle of the night to pontificate on Teddy Roosevelt or whatever president had a birthday that week.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's exactly what Bartlet's all about.

HRISHI: Yeah. So between the letter and that, either the point was to show how similar these presidents are, that presidents, despite their party affiliation--you know, present company excluded--that presidents have this weight of carrying the fate of the nation with them, and that unifies them in more ways that it separates them, even if they're constantly being compared in distinction from one another, there's this thing of...I think maybe there's some element of this episode that shows how these presidents...what the president says toward the end... when he says...

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Now I realize the men on this plane are the only others who've been there before...meaning, well, I wish I'd taken more of his calls.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, I liked that very much. I like that whole sense--as I always do with *The West Wing*-- of the enormity and the singularity of this job and I like seeing the president sort of sitting with that, as he's surrounded by that small Boys Club that know...

HRISHI: [cross talk] John Goodman's pretty big, actually, and James Cromwell is very tall.

JOSH: I like that...They're a just a great visual pairing Martin Sheen and James Cromwell. I wanted him to pat him on the head and say

[Excerpt from *Babe*]

JAMES CROMWELL (as Arthur Hoggett): That'll do pig. That'll do.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [Delightedly] I have that too! I also had a “that’ll do Jed” moment, but I’m gonna get to it later. The thing I was wondering though, about this, about ideologies...I didn't know if the intention was to show how these two presidents actually were very similar, you know all these ways the president describes him and sounds like Bartlet, or if there was just some kind of disconnect between illustrating what his ideology was. You know, on the one hand, we're being told he's a conservative, he's a conservative, he's totally different, he's ideologically the opposite of everything this administration stands for. But then the actual messages we were getting from that president don't sound like that at all. I didn't know ... I didn't know, exactly what to make of that disconnect. But I felt a disconnect.

JOSH: You're right. Those things ran to counter purposes.

HRISHI: The “That’ll do, Jed Bartlet.” President Newman and President Lassiter had a relationship as well. We hear James Cromwell say

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

NEWMAN: I was livid. I wanted to call the White House, call CNN. There was Lassiter on the phone telling me to can it.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Then we get the president going to this Woodrow Wilson quote which feels a little bit like a non sequitur to me. He says,

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: “Is the present war a struggle for a just and secure peace or for a new balance of power? There must be not a balance of power, but a community of power. Not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.”

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I don't know what that has to do...

JOSH: A little World War I nostalgia

HRISHI: Sure, but I don't know what that has to do with-like Lassiter and Newman talking about his MS?

JOSH: The question of the protests in Riyadh, is that what it was supposed to overlap with?

HRISHI: I guess so, but the antecedent was not clear. And then the president says, "Oh what the hell, Woodrow Wilson didn't have all the answers." OK. And then it goes on. Newman says, "No. Neither did Lassiter, God knows, and, then again, neither did I." And then he ends it with

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

NEWMAN: But at least at the end, we were all asking the right questions.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: What does that mean?

JOSH: Yeah, I don't know...

HRISHI: To me, this felt like *West Wing Mad Libs*.

JOSH: Yeah, it certainly didn't work for me either. It felt like...I loved the images I was seeing and couldn't quite figure out what I was being told, or how I'm supposed to feel about it, or what they're even referencing.

HRISHI: What questions? What are the right questions? And who is "we all?"

JOSH: I just took it as this very superficial, "Hey, we all tried our best." You know, it didn't feel like a trenchant moment of deep analysis. It was kind of like "Hey, we have our differences but we all really tried to be good presidents."

HRISHI: I guess that I felt like it was supposed to land with this sort of profundity...that...

JOSH: That was missing

HRISHI: Yeah, to be delivered like that...It's like opening up a beautifully wrapped package and then finding out that the box is empty.

JOSH: [cross talk] My wife experienced that yesterday.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: That's not true: I got her a lovely necklace. Let the record show that I bought her a lovely rose gold necklace.

HRISHI: That's nice because her store is called "Isarose"

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: Let's move on a little bit from the question of the presidents to the other stories. There's the protest in Saudi Arabia, which is interesting because this episode was created so many years before the Arab Spring. But in it, the protesters are calling for free speech and free elections, but the interesting part is that they're also very anti-American.

JOSH: Yes. Prince Batar has that outgoing burn on Americans as he walks out of the Oval. I kind of liked that.

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

PRINCE BATAR: Mr. President, when these schoolboys wish to denounce us, know what they say? They call us Americans.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Boom.

HRISHI: I like the idea that, it wasn't sort of... these were demonstrations for ideals espoused in American values in the Constitution, the document that's being fought over in this episode. And yet they're couching it in anti-American rhetoric.

JOSH: I also liked how the episode danced around, very lightly on the fringes, the possibility of American intervention in foreign elections. And, I thought it was an apt conversation, given where we stand today. That said, it didn't get into it too deeply, and that's one of the reasons why I didn't love this episode particularly, is that it doesn't dig in too deeply anywhere; it doesn't get a lot of traction on any of these plots.

HRISHI: There's one part while discussing this plot that, actually, frankly, really just bothered me. While they're on Air Force One, and the two presidents are having their first conversation about this. You know, DW has some opinions, having had some experience with this under very different circumstances in a different time. We can imagine...He was president in the 80s I would guess...

JOSH: back when *Heathers* first came out.

HRISHI: Right [laughs] I think, he would have been president before Lassiter and I think Lassiter only served one term, so he was probably president, maybe 91 to 95 or 80 to something like that ... In any case, it was a different time, and he's trying to urge one course. But then Toby drops this little bit of blatant racism where he says

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

TOBY: In the deserts of Arabia are there any rational decisions?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I know. Whoops.

HRISHI: What the [expletive deleted] Toby? For a guy with such a finely tuned sense of anti-semitism, he's pretty cool with some blanket racism. I mean, he's... It's not the first time we've heard some...

JOSH: [cross talk] also true

HRISHI: ...pretty virulent anti-Arab sentiments from Toby, and I guess that's not so unrealistic from him but it just seems like a crazy thing to talk about while these two presidents are trying to have a nuanced conversation about diplomacy and what role the country should have, if any. It just seems like a crazy-ass thing to throw out there.

JOSH: That said, I kind of like it when our characters, our heroes show their not so pleasant sides, and I do think it's in keeping with what we've heard from Toby, alas. Drunk Toby was cute.

HRISHI: Drunk Toby was cute...

JOSH: Pantry raid! [laughing] Although clearly Johnny Walker Blue no longer a sponsor of the show. It's just Jack Daniels for Toby.

HRISHI: Did you catch this? The president said "The world's certainly turned upside down since Owen Lassiter's time"? And I thought, they are making a *Hamilton* reference.

[*Hamilton* excerpt]

*ENSEMBLE: [singing] The world turned upside down
The world turned upside down*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh. Yup, fair enough, I didn't catch it as I listened.

HRISHI: Prescient in all kinds of ways, referencing Arab Spring, referencing *Hamilton*.

JOSH: Uh hum

HRISHI: And then there's a C story, which is this Bill of Rights fight. Frankly, it is a little bit hard to even imagine beyond the funeral and the Saudi Arabian protests that we need more stories, but we have both the Bill of Rights story and the MK Ultra DARPA mind control stuff.

JOSH: Right

HRISHI: Again, Lincoln figures into this plot, but the Bill of Rights was mailed to North Carolina by George Washington and then it was stolen during the Civil War and Josh has to serve as a referee from the two states to try and duke it out.

JOSH: Mediate this argument over ownership.

HRISHI: Duke being a college in North Carolina. Umm...

JOSH: Boom.

HRISHI: So Bellamy Young plays the representative from North Carolina.

JOSH: Yay!

HRISHI: And when she and her counterpart from Connecticut find out that Josh is actually from Connecticut as they slowly tease out that he went to Yale, she's horrified, the dude is thrilled and then we get a little...Josh says "Go Whalers" weakly, which is a little callback...

JOSH: [cross talk] *Go Whalers Weekly*. Our next podcast.

HRISHI: It's a callback to earlier in the episode where he talked about it with C.J. and Donna. C.J. asks

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

C.J.: Didn't North Carolina steal the Whalers?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which is true, by the way: The Hartford Whalers moved to Raleigh in 1997.

JOSH: Angela Blake had some line about a rally in Raleigh. I really wanted it to devolve into a Marx Brothers routine. I was disappointed that it didn't go further. I wanted more language play...

HRISHI: By the way, Josh calls Connecticut "The Nutmeg State" you know, when he's talking about the Whalers: "There's not a lot to get excited about in the Nutmeg State." I thought it was interesting that Connecticut isn't really called "The Nutmeg State." Its nickname officially, I think is now "The Constitution State."

JOSH: Ahh

HRISHI: I didn't know if it wasn't a nice little Easter egg that they didn't use that, or if it would have been too much because they were already talking about the Bill of Rights in this dispute, but the license plates for Connecticut say "The Constitution State."

JOSH: Speaking of nutmeg, Sean Spicer went to Connecticut College...

HRISHI: Tying in all kinds of things...

JOSH: Really, really pulling it together.

HRISHI: I thought this was a nice little moment Toby, while drunk on the plane, starts singing "Suicide is Painless"

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

TOBY: [singing] Suicide is painless...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which is the theme to *M*A*S*H*

JOSH: Of which television series Aaron Sorkin is a big fan

[Excerpt: Suicide is Painless]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: When I was growing up, I didn't know...I never knew the theme song to *M*A*S*H* actually had words. [song plays unintelligibly in the background] I thought it was just an instrumental song that was written for the show. It's one of those things that, years later, when I found out...It's like when you discover that the sample from a hip-hop song exists as another, whole other song in its own right from years earlier.

JOSH: Right. I wrote my first piece of fan mail--possibly my only...no I can think of a couple others-- to Gary Burghoff who played Radar on *M*A*S*H*.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: I'm pretty sure I thought he was Jewish, he's actually a devout Christian...but I was a big fan of his, possibly in part, because I thought he was Jewish.

HRISHI: Did you invite him to your Bar Mitzvah?

JOSH: I did not. But I got a sweet postcard, signed postcard back with a cute signed picture of him on the front....

HRISHI: [cross talk] Aww, that's really nice...

JOSH: [cross talk] ...which I thought was nice.

HRISHI: There's one thread that I wanted to mention, something that's disconnected from all of these four plots because it's actually a really nice moment. We find out from Mallory that Leo's ex-wife is getting remarried. She's braced herself to try to give him this information knowing how painful it's going to be, and she's worried. And I think Leo does this really wonderful thing of lying to her.

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

MALLORY: Mom's getting remarried

LEO: I know that.

MALLORY: You know that?

LEO: She called me.

MALLORY: She called you? She said she didn't.

LEO: Mal, I appreciate the concern. I'm fine.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's clear, Leo's just sort of saving face here.

JOSH: Absolutely. That was my favorite scene of the episode, actually.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, me too.

JOSH: Lovely acting between Allison Smith and John Spencer. Just a nice, light touch on this scene, which could have been played differently. It could have felt clunky.

HRISHI: Yeah, this is one of my favorite moments from this episode as well. Especially the end of it, he says that he's sorry that he and Mallory haven't spent more time together, and he's talking about at the Ford Theatre, and he gets up and he leaves the frame and she leaves the frame and the camera just doesn't move and it stays on his desk and his chair and in a very light way, we are just reminded of the weight of his job--the reason they got a divorce in the first

place--and they never state it explicitly, and I thought they communicated that visually in a really poignant way.

JOSH: Great choice by Alex Graves.

HRISHI: Yeah. My other favorite scene besides that one was one we touched on earlier, when the president says that he wishes that he'd taken more off Lassiter's calls, that he regrets having kind of ducked his calls in the past.

JOSH: And his wife, his widow, really lays into the president.

HRISHI: That's true.

JOSH: Also, I know, this is two in a row where I've been really negative about episodes. It was almost like a *Twilight Zone* episode where we realize that she's walking into a facsimile of the Oval Office that Lassiter had built for himself and he's got jars of dirt...for some reason, it made me actually laugh a little. There was something...it was so weird.

HRISHI: I think it was supposed to be weird. I think...at least I certainly felt something for him at that moment. This guy had sort of built a shrine for a job that he no longer has, and then inhabits it, like he still sits at the desk, he still wants to be the president. It made me...I thought it was actually quite sad.

JOSH: My office at home, of course, is a perfect replica of David Rosen's office--the Attorney General's office--on *Scandal*, so I totally get it.

HRISHI: [laughing] And that's why you sleep in a trailer outside of your house.

JOSH: [laughing] That's right. I don't know. I feel like it was supposed to land, it was supposed to be compelling or something. It just felt like, "Oh, he was *that* guy, oh and please, see his dirt collection." [laughing] Maybe I'm just watching too much *West Wing*. Maybe it was just one too many, and I've been watching it too often, and I didn't give it the respect it deserves, but it just landed...really odd.

HRISHI: No, it did feel like his love of the job had turned to some eccentric habits. When she says,

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

MRS. LASSITER: And to Europe. Any spot where American boys had shed blood. Even the Civil War. He'd fill a jar, come back to this room...this oval room he'd had built...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Then she says, "He'd come here to think. He took to eating here and sleeping here, even after the operation." And that's where he died.

JOSH: We buried him, as he requested, in a clown suit. It just all seems so inane to me. I feel like it was supposed to really hit home, what a beautiful thing he'd done, but I was like "What the hell?"

HRISHI: [laughing] Oh my gosh. Josh, remind me to make a note somewhere to ask that you don't deliver my eulogy.

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah, yeah, well, I'm going to go many years before you, I think we both know that, but you're nice to make the point anyway.

HRISHI: [laughing] I'm nice to talk about me dying before you?

JOSH: Yeah, I appreciate that; it gives an old man a lift.

HRISHI: Alright maybe he wasn't crazy, Josh. Maybe he was just under DARPA mind control.

JOSH: Boom.

HRISHI: Let's take a break and then, and then when we come back, we'll speak to Bellamy Young.

[Ad break]

JOSH: Joining us now is a friend of mine and a fellow Gladiator. She played MaryLou Meriwether on this episode of *The West Wing*, but she's probably best known as President Mellie Grant from *Scandal*. It's Bellamy Young.

When you told me you didn't watch *The West Wing*, you've never watched it.

BELLAMY: No, isn't that terrible? But then I don't watch anything.

JOSH: [cross talk] No.

BELLAMY: [cross talk] I watch, like, *The Daily Show* and John Oliver. There is no TV show I've watched in its...I am not a completionist for any TV show, period, not even *Scandal*. There are still some I haven't seen of *Scandal*.

JOSH: I've seen five *Scandals*. No, I'm just kidding, but there are a lot of episodes I haven't seen of *Scandal* too. I mean, once you get some distance, maybe, but while you're working on something. I guess you and I are similar, as opposed to the rest of the cast which fetishized watching the show that we were shooting. It's like "Hey, we're done with work! Should we all go

watch what we did at work?" I think if you are a big John Oliver and *Daily Show* fan that I think you would be a fan of *The West Wing*. I think you oughta give it a shot sometime.

BELLAMY: I re-watched our beautiful, the episode we're going to talk about today, last night and I have to say I was so moved!

JOSH: [cross talk] Oh that's sweet.

BELLAMY: I wound up years later...a year later, dating Josh Singer for many, many years. Josh Singer, who wrote this episode. That camera work? Can we talk a second about Del Ruth?

HRISHI: Thomas Del Ruth.

JOSH: Oh! Thomas Del Ruth. Very good.

BELLAMY: That cinematography was...it was all just breathtaking, oh my God, what a show, you guys. Even to get to have just have a couple of silly scenes in season five, just to have been there at all...

JOSH: How did you get the job?

BELLAMY: Josh Singer, that we were just talking about, we were at a mutual friend's birthday party in L.A. and there was a North Carolina storyline and he went back the next day to Laura Schiff who was Casting Associate with John Levy, and was like "Do you know this Bellamy Young girl, 'cause she's from North Carolina. Maybe she'd be right?"

JOSH: And I'm romantically interested in her.

BELLAMY: Well, he thought that the guy whose birthday party we were at, he thought that we were...that there was something a-brewin', and he actually lobbied for and it came down to two of after the auditions, and he lobbied for the other person, but of course, he had at that point, like Alex Graves thought...Alex Graves thought he was such a pissant but it actually worked in my favor that he lobbied against me. So I wound up getting the job.

JOSH: Nice.

HRISHI: So at that point you were doing episodes of all kinds of different shows. Your credits up until *The West Wing* you've been all kinds of places.

BELLAMY: [laughing] Always the bridesmaid, Hrish.

HRISHI: [laughing] Well, you can't say that anymore.

JOSH: Yeah, you're coming off playing the President of the United States. You really can't say that anymore.

BELLAMY: Well, now, no, thank heavens, but then, yes, and to my utter shock, I had forgotten that I was blonde on this episode. So as many guest stars, there were also iterations of hair color because it just kept changin'.

HRISHI: Would it change for the part? Did they ask you to be blonde?

BELLAMY: NO! I recommend experimenting with your hair in your teens, like don't wait until your employment depends on it. It really was a bit of a [expletive deleted] show. But yeah, there I was. MaryLou Meriwether was some odd, unnatural blonde color.

HRISHI: What did they tell you about the scene and the part when you showed up to do it?

BELLAMY: Well, not much. It wasn't a secret...you know, *Scandal* got so, you know, watermarked pages and made up sides, secretive, and it wasn't that secretive, but it really was kept under wraps, but I did a little, I tried to do a little digging and Josh certainly done all his research, and it was also fun to play, you know, something in the North Carolina vein that was wonderful, and the character, oh, Michael, what was her last name, that was on there, Joshy?

HRISHI: Hyatt.

BELLAMY: Yeah! She was getting to play a character that was actually from Asheville, which is my hometown and that made me very, very proud. So it felt nice to sit in the fake White House and talk about things from my home ville.

JOSH: And reminisce about the Confederacy.

BELLAMY: Of course! God bless it! [laughing] Bless its heart!

HRISHI: I feel like there's early indications that the scene is meant to be read as comedy. I mean, right away, just when they introduce the characters

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

JEFF FAIRFAX: We bought it legitimately

MARYLOU MERIWETHER: You stole it.

JOSH: Well, I think we're off to a promising start.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Even before that, I like that when Josh comes in, there's a look that you give your counterpart from Connecticut across the table when it's about to get started like you give him a look of like "All right. This is it. Now it's happening for real."

BELLAMY: Also, you know...you know lawyers, they love to fight. So it's like "ting ting I heard the bell, so let's get it on" you know?

HRISHI: But then the characters are named MaryLou Meriwether and Jeff Fairfax from Fairfield.

BELLAMY: [cackling] I know, man, it goes fast

JOSH: That's either comic or just lazy.

BELLAMY: It's just icing...such icing. It's probably homages though. I bet, if we get Joshy [Singer] on the show, he will tell you that he knows a MaryLou Meriwether and she was his third grade teacher and she changed the course of his life, he was gonna be a mathematician and she's why he writes, or something like that, you know?

HRISHI: Had you ever met Bradley Whitford before?

BELLAMY: No! And he was full swagger, right? 'Cause there was such a dapperness to Josh Lyman and so I was a little nervous and also, being Southern...we all three went to college together, you guys! I didn't realize that...

JOSH: That's right, I mean, yeah. Let's not miss an opportunity to mention that We. Went. To. Yale.

BELLAMY: But when I got to college, like nobody would let me finish a sentence, 'cause I talked real sloooow and I didn't finish... and they were out the door and gone to the dining hall and not having any of me. So I just wanted to show up and like hold my own with Bradley and like get all this content across in some sort of human way. But you know, he was so difficult and just diva fits all the time.

JOSH: Thank you, that's what I wanted to hear.

HRISHI: When Josh and I were speaking about the episode earlier, you got to hit both sides. You were playing a character from North Carolina but you got some good Yale content in this scene as well.

BELLAMY: [laughs] It's true, it's true. Much dismay, I have to say, that's what it is. I was like "UGH" but Josh--Singer--is also a Yalie so he's very proud.

HRISHI: [cross talk] look at that

BELLAMY: [cross talk] yeah, look at that

JOSH: 'Cause we went to YALE.

BELLAMY: You guys might have overlapped. He's younger than old people like us--me and Josh [Malina].

HRISHI: Did you two know each other? You overlapped when you were at Yale.

BELLAMY: I am proud to say that I was a member of the Hot Box Chorus when Josh Malina was Nathan Detroit in *Guys and Dolls*.

HRISHI: Oh!

JOSH: One of only nineteen times I have played that role.

BELLAMY and HRISHI: [laughing]

BELLAMY: Well, you're good at it! You have all the little hat tricks and you're funny.

JOSH: I have I have seemed like an old Jew ever since I was a young Jew. That has never changed.

BELLAMY: He was in his senior year when I was a freshman and everyone was in awe because he was like, the dude. And then he went off and did Broadway. Everyone was very...oh, Josh Malina...

JOSH: It wouldn't take long before you would graduate and take over Broadway.

BELLAMY: Well...take over is a bit of hyperbole, but I got there. I'll take that. Maybe we'll all go back, that would be nice.

JOSH: Well, do you miss that?

BELLAMY: Yeah of course! I miss New York most of all, you know and getting to do Broadway in New York is like the best way to be here, so...what a joy all the time. And I mean that was the joy too of *Scandal*. The Tweeting--the advent of Tweeting makes it all feel like theatre again, to hear how everything lands, you know, it's a big part of why we do all this.

JOSH: And you're in New York now and you're going to see *Scandalites* Katie Lowes and Adam Shapiro in their Broadway debut in the musical *Waitress*.

BELLAMY: Tomorrow! I can't wait!

JOSH: I saw them a couple of weeks ago. They're brilliant. They're incredibly great. It was a very joyous experience to go see them.

BELLAMY: I have to feel it's an infection...they were born-born-born to be doing what they're doing right this second.

JOSH: And to continue on our tangent...you're in New York, or you went to New York for a performance that you were a part of.

BELLAMY: Yeah! I did!

JOSH: What was that?

BELLAMY: I did a performance on Saturday in the Hamptons for a charity called WordTheatre. They bring beautiful literature into underserved schools in Los Angeles and also help with the Pushcart Prize, so this was a benefit for the Pushcart Prize for funding and for publication and whatnot, and it was really lovely. Six piece orchestra, eight actors. We were reading the work of Brian Doyle, an incredible author I highly recommend you do check into.

HRISHI: So, let me get back to your college days for just a second. So you were a freshman, Josh [Malina] was a senior, so I'm guessing you didn't hang out.

BELLAMY: [cross talk] Yes!

HRISHI: So at what point when you were both professional actors, when did you actually reconnect? Was it not until *Scandal*?

BELLAMY: Not until *Scandal*, no. And we shared a trailer freshman...freshman year...first season.

JOSH: It was freshman year.

BELLAMY: And I was terrified. Because...you seem to be in separate studios today, but I know you have to share space sometimes, Hrish, and he....has he played pranks on you?

HRISHI: Mercifully, no.

BELLAMY: Oh...well you have it coming. He had us living in fear. I wouldn't even pee in my trailer, I was so terrified that whole first year...

JOSH: [cross talk] I would.

BELLAMY: [laughing] I KNOW!

JOSH: [cross talk] All over the place.

BELLAMY: That was...that's really the first time. I didn't even see you on *The West Wing* because I was there for four seconds.

JOSH: That's right, we didn't cross paths there.

BELLAMY: Yeah, but that was it.

HRISHI: Josh will do little things, all over texts and stuff like that to trick me, but nothing physically catastrophic yet.

JOSH: You went from lawyer and White House visitor to *The West Wing's* White House to the Commander-in-Chief in *Scandal's* White House. It took you awhile but what a...

BELLAMY: It's just a little American dream!

JOSH: Exactly! American dream fulfilled. How much fun was it, and I know the answer to this, but was it as much fun as you made it look to play the President of the United States?

BELLAMY: When Shonda Rhimes writes your words, yeah. I mean, it really deeply was, and she's writing them in her own response, you know, to the state America is in at the moment, so it felt wonderful. Also, that whole last season of our show was about women in power and gender roles, a lot about race, a lot about class, whatever, but there were just some beautiful moments that I'll never forget. And even last night, re-watching "The Stormy Present" whoah, every time they would cut to even the fake Oval, that Lassiter had built for himself, in wherever, in California, there were such pangs in my heart. I really miss Mellie's oval. It was something special.

JOSH: Well, you could build one at your house! It's not a terrible idea.

BELLAMY: [laughing] That wouldn't be weird at all.

JOSH: No. Well that's one of the things I discussed with Hrishii. I'm not sure how that part of the episode was supposed to land, but I found it *really* weird. I was like "Wow, that guy was a madman."

BELLAMY: Yeah, like with his hospital bed there. I don't know if anyone's ever lost anybody but, like, just having a hospital bed in your house is like heavy enough but for him to have built a fake Oval and then put his hospital bed in it, it was...that was big, that was big.

HRISHI: It got dark, yeah.

BELLAMY: So, that's my future. Yay, we planned it!

HRISHI: So as you mentioned, Mellie Grant was also from North Carolina.

BELLAMY: [cross talk] Do you...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Do you end up having to play characters from North Carolina a lot?

JOSH: Or do you think that you have a multi-state range as an actor?

BELLAMY: Exactly! I think it's just, you know, my limited acting. You know, Mellie had literally, nothing at the beginning and she was only supposed to be there three episodes so, I don't mean to underestimate Shonda as a writer, ever in my life, ever, ever, but I can't imagine she put that much thought into Mellie's bio for the pilot or anything like that. But we would all sit down--Josh can back me up on this--we would all sit down and table reads and there would be little bits of our truths in our character all of a sudden. I mean North Carolina, geography is a very obvious example, but really little bits of our deepest souls that we thought we were hiding from the world, you know, passing and it's all good and notices that bit. And then it would become like a character part and a plot point that we'd be like [gasp] because Shonda goes to sleep and she goes to this planet where all the truth is and she brings back what she wants and she writes it right down. So, you know, I think season, I don't even know, three, maybe, it turned out that Mellie was from North Carolina and I was delighted 'cause it always pleases me, 'cause, you know, I love Asheville.

HRISHI: That's good, because, I hear, being from North Carolina helped you get this part, so it was an asset, but I wasn't sure if you were feeling like you get typecast as a North Carolinian.

BELLAMY: I'm with Josh, as long as I'm working I don't really care why. If it's because...I like to work. If that's my niche, I'm ready to fill it.

JOSH: [cross talk] Hear hear!

HRISHI: And when you were doing this and you finally got the script did you look into any of the the stuff that you had to talk about?? Do you know general orders

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

JEFF FAIRFAX: ...in the Declaration that all confiscated Rebel property belonged to the Union.

MARYLOU MERIWETHER: Which is trumped by Special Order 88...

JOSH: Special Order 88?

MARYLOU MERIWETHER: *Hmmm. Issued by a Union General, all archives and other property entrusted to Carolina must be returned. Besides, the Bill of Rights made 100 unconstitutional; it violated due process.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Did they give you any background on the stuff that you had to deliver?

BELLAMY: NO! Zero, in fact I feel like the sides were slightly different, and I tried to look into what they were, and when I got there, there was this thing...probably I didn't even have a cell phone at that point; I'm not very technologically advanced, so it was just sort of going on what was in front of me and I'm sure Josh explained it to me. He was on set because John Sacret Young was off and it was his first time on set, so I know he was probably all too happy to explain all those orders to me

JOSH: [cross talk] Oh, that's sweet.

BELLAMY: Yeah

HRISHI: I was going to read General Order 100 that gets cited...

BELLAMY: [crosstalk] Oh! READ IT!

HRISHI: I think that, specifically, it's Article 31 from this Order that's the appropriate one here. It says, "A victorious army appropriates all public money, seizes all public movable property until further direction by its government, and sequesters for its own benefit or of that of its government all the revenues of real property belonging to the hostile government or nation."

BELLAMY: [cross talk] So pillage!

JOSH: [cross talk] Essentially, yeah.

HRISHI: [continuing] "The title to such real property remains in abeyance"--which, I think means, it belongs to Beyoncé--[cross talk] "during military occupation..."

JOSH: [cross talk] [laughing]

BELLAMY: [cross talk] Definitely. Beyoncé.

HRISHI: [continuing] "and until the conquest is made complete."

BELLAMY: Interesting. "Until the conquest is made complete." That's the trickiest part I feel of that whole definition. Because when in the world, whenever, is a war ever compete, or, yeah, that's interesting.

JOSH: Put more succinctly: to the victor go the spoils.

BELLAMY: Exactly.

HRISHI: But I think this idea--when the conquest is made complete--when the Civil War ended and North Carolina did not secede along with the Confederacy, and the Union remained whole, then, really, the conquest was complete at that point, and I feel like they should have gotten their Bill of Rights back.

JOSH: It's a reasonable idea.

BELLAMY: [cross talk] Nahhhhhhh. Who in power--now whose quote is this?--"that the people in power will never cede power willingly" that I've bastardized so wretchedly. Who's going to win and then be like, oh, "Here's your stuff back." Nobody. No human body. Maybe a dolphin.

JOSH: Dolphins are really great about getting stuff back to you.

BELLAMY: They're so kind...very fair minded.

JOSH: You break up with a dolphin, you get your record collection back immediately.

BELLAMY: [cross talk] immediately. They don't wanna carry it.

JOSH: [cross talk] I love that about them.

HRISHI: OK, here's another Yale tie-in

[West Wing Ep. 5.10 excerpt]

JOSH: You know, one of my law school classmates published an article on the constitutionality of Lincoln's General Order.

MARYLOU MERIWETHER: Akhil Amar?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's a real person

BELLAMY: [cross talk] That's a real person.

HRISHI: [cross talk] who was actually an advisor. He's a constitutional law professor at Yale.

JOSH: He wrote that pro-Kavanaugh piece, didn't he?

BELLAMY: [gasps] Did he?

JOSH: I think so. [cross talk]

BELLAMY: [cross talk] Wowsers trousers.

JOSH: I think he was a colleague of Kavanaugh's, of Brett Kavanaugh's and wrote a pretty positive piece.

HRISHI: He wrote "A Liberal's Case for Brett Kavanaugh" for *The New York Times*

BELLAMY: [cross talk] Faaaascinating. Well you know...

HRISHI: [cross talk] He was also an advisor for *The West Wing* on this episode, you know, at this time

BELLAMY: 'Cause Joshy was deep friends with Lawrence Lessig, who's a big think tank kinda guy so I bet that maybe that connection was through there.

HRISHI: It also gives us a little more insight into Josh Lyman's biography because...

BELLAMY: [cross talk] Ah, ha

HRISHI: [cross talk] ...Akhil Amar graduated from Yale Law School in '84, so now we know that Josh is class of '84 which is pretty much in line with Brad, too. Brad was class of '81 at Wesleyan. If you want to check out Akhil Amar's book on the Constitution, you can *America's Constitution*. And while we're talking about books--or while I'm talking about books--I'm gonna bring up another book. In 2010, there was a book published, it's called *Lost Rights: The Misadventures of a Stolen American Relic* by David Howard, and It's a book that charts the whole story of the purloined Bill of Rights, and over 100 years its journey and the North Carolina's attempts to try and get it back, which took a really long time and lots of court of appeals even as recently as in the mid-2000's it was still under debate.

JOSH: [scoffing] "Purloined?" Where did you go to college? Oh, that's right: Yale.

BELLAMY: [laughing] That just makes me want to listen to the *Rent* soundtrack, I have to say.

HRISHI: I'm assuming that's...that's a song or something.

JOSH: That's a musical, Hrishi.

BELLAMY: Yeah. We'll get it for you. We'll send it to you. You'll be charmed.

JOSH: This was an awesome conversation. Whether or not we touched on the episode enough...

BELLAMY: I'm going to say, I think we were a little off-topic for your deep dive, so everybody who's an enormous *West Wing Weekly* fan, I am very happy to be here and sorry that we didn't give you as many juicy stories

HRISHI: And if anybody wants to keep up with you, they can follow you on Twitter "@bellamyyoung."

BELLAMY: [cross talk] it's true.

HRISHI: [cross talk] We'll put a link to that up on the site too.

BELLAMY: Lovely, and thanks for that and thanks for having me on you guys. You do such a good job with this and I'm so glad that it exists in the world.

JOSH: Thanks Bellamy.

BELLAMY: I swear to God, I'm going to go back in and go deep. It's too good, the show. I think I need it.

JOSH: I think you'll like it. Start at the beginning.

HRISHI: There's a podcast you can listen to while you're watching.

BELLAMY: Exactly! A companion piece! I love it.

[Outro Music]

JOSH: I forgot. We did one scene that I particularly didn't like in an episode that I did not particularly like, was the, I thought, again, the wholly incredible scene between Angela and Josh suddenly just talking at each other with information about the Bill of Rights. It was just weird and phony.

HRISHI: Really? I liked that she comes in and checks on him and... you mean, you can't believe that she has all of the information at her fingertips?

JOSH: Yeah. "Let's just... let's just talk at each other a bit about the Bill of Rights." I don't know, I just didn't feel...there is a life missing in that scene.

HRISHI: I actually liked that scene; I thought it was nice. I like the part where Angela says,

[West Wing Episode 5.10 excerpt]

ANGELA: *You're going to lecture me on equal rights?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Once again, Josh puts his foot in his mouth.

JOSH: Certainly, she makes a good point there.

HRISHI: And that she, as a native North Carolinian knows why it's important for the North Carolina to get the copy of the Bill of Rights back because they need to be reminded of what it says and what it's for.

JOSH: [exasperated] I guess. I don't know. It just didn't feel like a burning issue altogether.

HRISHI: Well no, it was a stealing issue.

JOSH: Boom. [laughing] You're quite right. I didn't, I guess that subplot was not compelling enough to hold up...

HRISHI: [cross talk] multiple times

JOSH: [cross talk] or to justify this scene. Yeah. For better or worse, this was another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*. Thanks for listening.

HRISHI: I thought it was interesting. I like, I like talking about this. I mean, I actually have to say that even the moments that I don't love I find instructive. I think it's neat to try and parse what didn't work and why. There were plenty of things we had to criticize about Sorkin's writing during the years he wrote it as well, and I found that stuff interesting to talk about too.

JOSH: Fair enough. It's also possible that--unremarked upon--I'm not in this episode and that means I didn't get paid for that week, so it's possible I just have negative associations with the entire enterprise.

HRISHI: But you did get cake.

JOSH: I did get cake.

HRISHI: I didn't realize that you weren't in this episode. I'm so sorry to say.

JOSH: Yes...there are different...this is earlier in my career so I wasn't what is called "all episodes produced" which not only suggests, but states, in your contract that you will get paid for all episodes whether or not you appear in it. In *Scandal* days, If I... at a certain point, if I

wasn't in an episode, I still got paid, so I was delighted by those episodes. And back in *The West Wing* days, not in it, no paycheck, so it was a higher stakes game back then.

HRISHI: Interesting. I mean, several characters throughout the episode say "Will" and so I just thought they were referring to you.

JOSH: Will they? Won't they?

HRISHI: Thanks so much for listening. We'll be back next week to talk about episode 11. Thanks so much to Zach McNeas and Margaret Miller as always for helping us make this show.

JOSH: The West Wing Weekly is part of Radiotopia, a magnificent mélange of fine podcasts that you can sample at Radiotopia.FM.

HRISHI: And you can tell us what you thought about this episode on our website, thewestwingweekly.com or on our Facebook page, or you can tweet at us @WestWingWeekly.

JOSH: And you can listen to Hrishi's award winning podcast, *Song Exploder* anywhere fine podcasts are given away.

HRISHI: And you can see Josh on *To Tell the Truth* which just aired this past weekend.

JOSH: [laughing] I was pretty great back then, I'm anticipating.

HRISHI: I hope everyone DVR'd it. Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

BELLAMY YOUNG: What's next?

[Outro Music]