

THE HAMILCAST

EPISODE 249 TRANSCRIPT: HRISHIKESH HIRWAY PART 2

Lin-Manuel Miranda 0:00

[INTRO] Hi, I'm stage and stages Lin Manuel Miranda and you're listening to The Hamilcast.

Gillian Pensavalle 0:18

Hello, everyone. Welcome back to the Hamilcast. I'm Gillian and this is the second half of my conversation with Hrishikesh Hirway, you know from Song Exploder, The West Wing Weekly and a ton of other things. For real though he has the definition of nonstop. Last week in Episode 248 he told us all about his early connections to Lin and Tommy, how he created a song with Lin all about The West Wing... I'm sure you've heard it, his complicated feelings on musicals, and so much more. So definitely make sure you listen to that episode before listening to this one because if you don't, it'll be like trying to talk to Lin and Tommy without referencing The West Wing. It just.. it wont work. Oh, quick reminder that you can now get transcripts of new episodes as they're released, and the back catalogue episodes are being updated on an ongoing basis. All transcripts are at thehamilcast.com, as well as the show notes of the corresponding episode. If you're all caught up, I'll leave you to it. Here's Part Two with Hrishikesh Hirway.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:13

I would love to really get into the details of that. Of just the the Wait For It episode specifically because

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:19

Yeah

Gillian Pensavalle 1:20

When Alex Lacamoire came over, he had three episodes and basically did what you did with Song Exploder with the Schuyler Sisters and just sort of anything like he came... Alex Lacamoire is the most prepared, generous person.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:34

Yeah, I was so, I was honestly very jealous of those episodes and a little upset by them.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:39

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Did you listen to the Lacamoire episodes?

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:41

Yeah, yeah, I was like, I just.. Hamilcast just scooped scooped me. Like I was like, Oh, no Song Exploder, like just got scooped.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:42

No, I didn't even... wait a second. Wait a second. You knew about The Hamilcast back in July, whatever year that was when Lac came on?

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:56

Yeah. Because I heard those those episodes. I was like, Oh, no, this story is already been told. And you know, like, why can't he so he's so incredible. And so articulate in explaining process and explaining the decisions and stuff

Gillian Pensavalle 2:09

And thoughtful in how he does that. Like it's unbelievable.

Hrishikesh Hirway 2:12

Yes. Yeah. And, and, and I was like, Oh, and there's gonna be demos, you know, people are gonna hear versions like it was just I really felt like I was I was like, man, she stole my thunder.

Gillian Pensavalle 2:22

No! The world is wide enough because you got amazing demos and like like isolated vocals for Wait For It. So that's what I want to talk to you about because I wanted to like nerd out with you about this because to see, it's different for you. I think because you are a musician and I'm I know that you can do this. But for a complete outsider, and a complete just someone who loves it so much to see Lac say: Yeah, so that I did this, and just suddenly, like the music is there.

Hrishikesh Hirway 2:50

Yeah

Gillian Pensavalle 2:50

It was so wonderful to watch Song Exploder because I was like, This is what I try to do. And then to see you do it, but visually was like

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the greatest thrill to see it on Netflix for all to see. It was like it's the most wonderful thing.

Hrishikesh Hirway 3:06

Nick Lamarsh, who directed six of the eight episodes of the show, calls those moments like the superpower moments, where you're watching someone and you're like, Oh, this is just a normal person. And then they do something they like open their mouth and they sing and then you hear their voice. You're like, Oh, you have superpowers?

Gillian Pensavalle 3:22

Totally.

Hrishikesh Hirway 3:23

And Alex is absolutely that, you know, he sits down the piano and he like when I did it like this and that it's incredible.

ALEX LACAMOIRE 3:29

[AUDIO CLIP, PIANO PLAYS] This was really fun for me trying to figure out how to get the ensemble to just recreate this wall of sound and echoes. But I've liked the harmonies, the guys were singing against Burr. So if Burr is here, [plays piano, sings], DEATH DOESNT DISCRIMINATE - The gentlemen are harmonizing above Burr on [sings line again] the ladies up there [higher pitch] singing with Burr. And together they go [all sing] DEATH DOESNT DISCRIMINATE. And then you hear the baritone singing this. They go: WAIT FOR IT. That's baritones. The tenors with them go: [higher] WAIT FOR IT WAIT FOR IT WAIT FOR IT

ALEX LACAMOIRE 4:06

Ladies go: one, [sing, higher] WAIT FOR IT [beat] WAIT FOR IT. Sopranos up here: WAIT FOR IT altos: WAIT FOR IT. When you put them all together you get [all vocals stack] WAIT FOR IT WAIT FOR IT WAIT FOR IT WAIT FOR IT

ALEX LACAMOIRE 4:18

So what winds up happening is you go from unison, [singing] WAIT FOR IT, because that's the big first statement and then the echo is only one note: [altos sing] WAIT FOR IT And then you build two notes: WAIT FOR IT three notes WAIT FOR IT

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ALEX LACAMOIRE 4:29

So they start piling on top of each other to create a blossom, if you will. [all layers play together WAIT FOR IT, end of audio clip]

Gillian Pensavalle 4:57

In addition to sort of getting to hear these ideas, That sometimes might get lost in translation of actually making the song but are the things that inspired it, whether they're but whether they're, you know, lyrical ideas or creative ideas or just obstacles that have to be overcome, you know, I wanted to play this on guitar, but my guitar was in the shop, so I had to do whatever. In addition to finding out what those things are those sort of hidden secrets, I also wanted people to be able to hear what a song actually sounds like disassembled, because there's so much work that goes into each of those individual layers. And a lot of that detail gets lost. When it comes time to actually mix the song, you know, you just hear the finished version. And so many of those labored over details might influence how you feel about the song. But if you could actually hear it, with everything else stripped away, you might actually get an even deeper appreciation for this thing that's been created. And you get a little closer to hearing it the way that an artist who created it hears it. So that was sort of the idea that you you would get to hear these isolated tracks, which always just feels like a privilege, you know, when when you hear like the isolated vocals from like a Beach Boys song or something, you're like, Oh, my God, like, that is magic.

BEACH BOYS ISOLATED TRACK 6:12

Wouldn't it be nice if we could wake up In the morning when the day is new? And after having spent the day together Hold each other close the whole night through Happy times together we've been spending I wish that every kiss was never ending Oh, wouldn't it be nice?

Gillian Pensavalle 6:44

Those things that float around on the internet here and there. But like, every, every song has that or you know, almost all songs in modern music. So that was the idea. And so when Lin agreed to do the TV show, that's where it sort of started you know, we have to find a day where we could do the interview but then also I needed the stems the the isolated tracks,

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Gillian Pensavalle 7:06

I love how and so I mean, all of the artists that you work with on Song Exploder are so generous with the process and and what it took to make the super polished version like we hear all of the the nitty gritty stuff, and I do especially love that Lin and the Hamilton crew are so open with sharing all of that. Yeah, you know, Alex and I worked together a lot on what he would send me for his episodes and what he would and even like other musicians who I've worked with, who I've worked with, who I've had on the podcast, Scott Wasserman, Will Wells, that that is an ongoing conversation. And now Alex Lacamoire is in all of them, because he's the guy who says: Yeah, she can have this. But you know, like the dulcimer, like this, just the single isolated dulcimer in Wait for It

Hrishikesh Hirway 7:52

Right

Gillian Pensavalle 7:53

Scott Wasserman and I talked about that, and then suddenly Scott's like, oh, I'll just, I just have it on my computer. And I'll play it in the episode. And I'm like, and now I can't listen to wait for it without hearing that dulcimer so clearly.

Gillian Pensavalle 8:22

Yeah, that it really changes the way that you hear song

Gillian Pensavalle 8:24

It changes everything and like that, like the the string build at the end, like your heart shatters into a million pieces.

Hrishikesh Hirway 8:32

Mhm.

Gillian Pensavalle 8:32

Ah, it's the most beautiful thing.

Gillian Pensavalle 8:51

When I got the stems, what I actually ended up getting was a bunch of different tracks from different versions of the song I got. Let me see. I'm going to show you around when I just look in my notes here. Okay, yeah. So there are three different versions and you hear pieces

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of these in the in the episode. There were the stems from Lin's original demo that he wrote he sent me send me that broken down. Where it's just him. He's doing all the vocals and it's everything that he just made sort of on his computer.

Lin-Manuel Miranda 9:27

[DEMO AUDIO/ LIN SINGING] Theodosia writes me a letter every day I'm keeping the bed warm while her husband is away He's on the British side in Georgia He's trying to keep the colonies inline But he can keep all of Georgia Theodosia, she's mine

Gillian Pensavalle 9:43

Then I got the stems from from Alex's version where he orchestrated the whole thing he took it's a sort of a mix of Lin's original tracks, and then things that he added to it and then things that he's changed from, from Lin and then after that, I also got the stems from the Broadway recording, where it's the actual finished album version with the ensemble, and everything. And so it's a it was a lot of different layers from a lot of different versions. But there, those are all the ingredients that ended up going into what the song finally became.

Hrishikesh Hirway 9:49

[SONG EXPLODER AUDIO] When the drums come in It feels like a different language than the rest of the show. [drum track plays]

ALEX LACAMOIRE 10:35

It's funny, to me like the song with has that kind of like crazy Bonham drum sound. The guitar is by playing Rush.

ALEX LACAMOIRE 10:43

[isolated track plays] Dude, that's Rush, like 1981.

Lin-Manuel Miranda 10:52

Sorry, I don't know what that is. I'm laughing, but I don't know what that.

Hrishikesh Hirway 10:59

Really?

Lin-Manuel Miranda 11:00

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Yeah, I don't know any of those references. I don't listen to Journey, I don't listen to Rush. But yeah, I mean, we get to the same place. [end SONG EXPLODER clip]

Gillian Pensavalle 11:06

I'm just I'm grateful that this this thing that has become so gigantic, such a phenomenon and these people involved in it are still willing, all these years later, all these years after the Tonys to still want to discuss the breakdown of the different tracks and the different isolated versions of it and how it changed from one day to the next.

Hrishikesh Hirway 11:27

Yeah

Gillian Pensavalle 11:28

It's mind blowing to me.

Gillian Pensavalle 11:29

One of my favorite things on Song Exploder is to be able to show the really, really early, really rough stages of something. Like besides these isolated tracks, one of the things I'm always asking artists for is if they're willing to share some of those ideas, because I think there's something incredibly inspiring about hearing a song that you maybe love or just you know, knowing that the song ended up becoming like a, a track from this very accomplished artist that went out into the world, that it had this like kind of humble beginning or maybe any moment, basically, I edit. When I'm editing the show, I edit for the mistakes of in the story. Anytime that there's a moment of failure, or frustration. I try and include those all the time, I maybe over index for those, because I think it's so important whenever they can share that idea. You know, ultimately, if a song makes it to Song Exploder, it's, it's because it had a success story. Like it's a song that came out in the world. And it was big enough that I was like this is something that should be talked about. And so any moment that can that can be revealed where it was like, Oh, I made this wrong decision, or I did this thing that was bad, or this was a terrible idea, I think ultimately just does greater service to the idea of the success of the song because it shows, you know, despite that, despite that mistake, you overcame it, you figured it out, and then you got to this, this place. And so I'm really yeah,

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I'm really, really grateful for artists who are willing to expose that stuff and share that stuff. Because I think it really, one, it really flushes out the story. But I think it also does something for the people who are watching or who are listening to let them know that like, Oh, this thing that I was a little bit embarrassed about... Maybe actually, if I pushed through it a little further, there's actually something really, there's something golden in there. I just have to get past the roughness of the first kind of idea. Or maybe they've even gone several steps, and then they get stuck. And they're like, well, maybe I just throw it away. Now it's like no, or if you keep on going, maybe there's still something to be done with it. I always love that stuff.

Gillian Pensavalle 13:40

Do you say what you would love to have access to before you agree to have them on the show? Just say like I need at minimum?

Hrishikesh Hirway 13:48

Yes.

Gillian Pensavalle 13:48

Yeah, right.

Hrishikesh Hirway 13:48

Yeah, yeah, I'm even still, you know, because of the layers of communication that sometimes happen with artists, some of the stuff gets a little lost. But But really, having learned from experience, you know? Yeah, right away, the first thing I'm like, these are the things that I need. At a minimum, like you said, I need the stems from the song. And I need, you know, this much time for the interview. And then I asked, you know, then would you be willing to share, you know, this thing or that thing, this this kind of demo? A lot of that stuff I don't know about until after the interview happens, where they say, oh, and then I did this thing, and it was terrible. And then you know, and so I shelve that. And then later, I'll say, Well, I think that you shelved, any chance you'd be willing to share it with me, so I could include it in that part of the story. And I would say, you know, six or seven times out of 10. They say yes, not all the time for sure.

Gillian Pensavalle 14:39

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And I understand why when you're being so vulnerable to begin with. Right? And then to add more of that, I totally get it but I just think if if to share it with anyone, I mean, you're the guy because you take such care.

Gillian Pensavalle 14:51

Well, you know, actually Lin had told that story about the voice memo that he made, you know, and a lot of different contexts, like the story Wait for It to people who care, that had been told.

Lin-Manuel Miranda 15:03

[audio clip] I was on the train to my friend Jacob Robinson's birthday party, and he was having drinks in Williamsburg. So for me, it's like a solid hour, even if the trains are there when you want them to be. I had the bridge, just the music, the the minor chords [hums bridge]

Lin-Manuel Miranda 15:30

Maybe this wasn't in real life, but I was at the moment, I still had a separate iPhone, iPod, because the iPod could carry more music. So I was listening to the loop on the iPod. I listened to the loop and I listened to the loop. Then the chorus landed just as I was getting to the party. And I was like, I just was listening to the loop and then recording an acapella voice memo at the same time, and walking through the streets of Williamsburg going like [sings] Death doesn't discriminate Between the sinners and the saints [AUDIO CLIP ENDS]

Gillian Pensavalle 15:59

But it hadn't been told in a way where you have this sort of like primary source of the stuff, you know. And so one of the things besides the stems I really was hoping to get was this voice memo recording that he did, on his way to the party where he first came up with a song and because as far as I knew, nobody had heard that, despite everybody you know, despite people having heard about it, so I asked him, you know, would it be possible and that ended up being a month long search?

Gillian Pensavalle 16:27

Really?

Hrishikesh Hirway 16:27

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Yeah. Because the phone that he had recorded that on, you know, was like many phones ago.

Gillian Pensavalle 16:34
Uh huh.

Hrishikesh Hirway 16:34
And it was a voice, you know, like a random voice memo message stuck on a phone somewhere. Maybe it had been imported to iTunes or something somewhere, but then was it labeled? Who knows? Like, all? Like, where are you gonna find it? Like, that's a that's a whole day. Yes. Like, where are you gonna find this thing?

Gillian Pensavalle 16:52
Like file created day?

Hrishikesh Hirway 16:54
Yeah, exactly.

Gillian Pensavalle 16:55
And then go like, when's my friend's birthday? What year was that? Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle 16:58
And so, you know, there's someone that Lin works with us, like, he can help, you know, maybe like, track down, we go through the archives and find this thing. And I was like, Whatever it takes, like, just let me know, I am happy to like, hire someone to sort through things like what what can I do, you know, just to make this happen, and you know, whatever hard drive, I had no idea. And what ended up happening is, Lin found it, not only did he find it, he made a little recording on his phone of him finding it. And then he sent that to me along with the file. And so it was such an again, just an incredibly generous thing to do. Because now of you know, it's a television show. Now, instead of just playing the voice memo, I have this visual moment of him. Having that moment of discovery himself, and he gets to he sort of narrates the thing that I didn't get to have in the moment when I was actually interviewing him because we didn't have the file yet. There. So I'm out of breath here. You can hear how I'm out of breath. As I'm walking to the party, and, and

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that became one of my favorite moments of the episode. I wasn't even there for it, you know, he just, but he filmed and he said to me.

Gillian Pensavalle 18:11

Oh, my God, like, this is what I live for. I could do this for hours and hours just talking about what it was like, because I've been there in front of people saying, Let me pull my you know what, I could find that email. That's my favorite. Let me find that email. Yeah, for the dates of like when that conversation started, when that one track was sent, and then how all these years later it became it's like, just evolved into this thing that we're talking about still and making TV shows about?

Gillian Pensavalle 18:40

Yeah, that was an exciting moment. I hope people Yeah.

Hrishikesh Hirway 18:44

[song exploder clip] Do you think he's still have that voice memo?

Lin-Manuel Miranda 18:47

[sings under breath] Death doesn't discriminate between the sinners and the saints, it takes and it takes and it takes, we keep living anyway. And we cry and we break and we make mistakes. And the reason I'm still alive, damnit, and I'm willing to wait for it. I'm willing to wait for it [talking] I'm out of breath because Im walking to the party. Found it. [end of clip]

Gillian Pensavalle 19:11

I don't know if Lin was thinking about this. I'm gonna say that he was

Gillian Pensavalle 19:15

Okay.

Hrishikesh Hirway 19:16

In the moment when he finds the voice memo and recorded himself and said found it, sent it back to me. He is wearing the same shirt that he's wearing when we filmed our interview.

Hrishikesh Hirway 19:26

You know what, Lin...

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Hrishikesh Hirway 19:27

And so there's, there's wardrobe continuity, even though it was maybe, oh, no, I can tell you. I think it was seven weeks apart from when we had filmed originally at the mansion to he sent that. And so I was like, Did he put on that shirt? Was he already wearing that shirt? That you know, so when you cut it together, it looks like it's all happening. You know, even though it's like it switches from one camera to like the phone, but still, I'm just like, oh, he's wearing the same shirt.

Gillian Pensavalle 19:56

That is the definition of chess, not checkers. That is unbelievable.

Gillian Pensavalle 20:02

There's certainly also a chance that he happened to just be wearing his favorite shirt on both days, but I'm not gonna I'm not gonna buy into that. I'm gonna say he was thinking about what he wore and then put on the same shirt and just, like incredible professional courtesy.

Gillian Pensavalle 20:16

I am with you on this. I will go down that road with you. No question. Absolutely.

Gillian Pensavalle 20:20

Yeah, but I don't know how much people even. I mean, it's the thing because he's wearing the same shirt. Nobody's gonna notice probably. But if people are gonna go back and watch that episode, or watch that episode for the first time, I would just love love to point out that little bit just look, you can see you can tell because of the color on his shirt has this little like blue and white stripe. And he's got it's the same color in both both parts of the episode.

Gillian Pensavalle 20:42

Well, I'll tell you not remembering what he was wearing. And any of the scenes. It was just what it felt like. Yeah, it felt like he it was that night or maybe the next day.

Hrishikesh Hirway 20:52

Yeah

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Gillian Pensavalle 20:52

Because the "found it" seems it doesn't now that I know it has the weight of all these months. Yeah, it makes sense. But in the moment, it feels like up here it is. Got it. I just needed to get on a computer or something. Yeah, you know, it's easier to search email on a computer than a phone and it did feel not immediate, but not months and months later. Yeah, I don't know. Maybe subconsciously it was because my brain knew on some level. He was wearing the same shirt. But I don't know.

Hrishikesh Hirway 21:18

Yeah

Gillian Pensavalle 21:19

That Lin. Also, a lot of people think that I'm saying chestnut checkers.

Gillian Pensavalle 21:23

Oh, chestnut checkers. They're delicious.

Gillian Pensavalle 21:26

I prefer the ones from New Hampshire.

Gillian Pensavalle 21:29

They're a holiday treat. Chestnut checkers.

Gillian Pensavalle 21:31

Yeah. Delicious.

THE WEST WING CLIP 21:32

CJ: I don't think you understand how the President feels about his home state. He's in New Hampshire, Bartlett. It's been home for centuries. He's a Democrat, elected to the State House with close to 60%. And the fact that the states and plays real embarrassment for him. He doesn't want to campaign there because that's embarrassing, too. But we really // JOEY: CJ. I'm trying to tell you it's not in play anymore. //JOSH: Joey, No kidding. If you ask the president which he'd rather win New Hampshire or the election, you'd have to think before he answered, put a pin in it. We'll come back after prep. Thanks.

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Hrishikesh Hirway 22:03
Can I tell you one story?

Gillian Pensavalle 22:04
Yes, of course.

Hrishikesh Hirway 22:05
One of my favorite experiences after the TV show came out. Immediately after the TV show came out. It was I just felt so lucky and happy about this. Tommy, Alex and Lin included me in a group text after the show came out. And the three of them were just making fun of each other mercilessly.

Gillian Pensavalle 22:24
Oh, my God.

Hrishikesh Hirway 22:25
Um, Lin texted me, the day came out and said, We all woke up at six in the morning, like it was Christmas. And watch the episode together.

Gillian Pensavalle 22:35
That's amazing.

Hrishikesh Hirway 22:36
Which is so sweet. And then yeah, they included me in a group text where the three of them were just ragging on each other the whole time and, and I just, you know, I just got to sit there and watch you know and read it was really, really fun and just like so sweet to just I don't know get to witness their, their dynamic

Gillian Pensavalle 22:58
Yeah.

Hrishikesh Hirway 22:59
And and in some small way, like just to get to be included in it was, that was one of the best things you know, outside of anything about making the episode itself.

Gillian Pensavalle 23:08

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It's a true Ginger, get the popcorn moment. Because you're just sitting there like, oh, wow, this is really how it is even even via text.

Gillian Pensavalle 23:15

Oh, and the number of west wing gifs that were sent in that or you know, countless?

Gillian Pensavalle 23:20

Yeah. Okay, Hrishi, the moment of truth. Are you ready to take some questions from the Patreon peeps?

Hrishikesh Hirway 23:25

I'm ready. Hit me.

Lin-Manuel Miranda 23:27

[patreon peeps intro] Patreon peeps wonder powers activate. If I were Shockwave, this would be much more impressive.

Gillian Pensavalle 23:55

Christy says: You, like Gillian have become friends with people you once only knew from a fan perspective. You and Josh accompanied my morning walks in Saudi Arabia. I remember the day I realized that I could hear that you two had morphed from co hosts to really, really close friends. Thanks for your passion for the West Wing and letting us all come along for the deep dive.

Gillian Pensavalle 24:14

Aw, that's sweet. I mean, honestly, I think the Josh and I were already friends before we started the podcast. But maybe we hadn't quite figured out how to express that in the show from from the get go. Because certainly, you know, doing The West WIng Weekly at that time was my first experience having any kind of conversational, anything from me, you know, in that format, like I had been doing Song Exploder for for over two years at that point. But as we've discussed, I wasn't in it. So maybe that was something that we that I figured out better as we went along.

Gillian Pensavalle 24:47

Well, here's something I wanted to ask you and thank you, Christy for reminding me. What was it like for you to hang with Bradley Whitford

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or Richard Schiff? I mean, people who you were you started the podcast because you were fans of theirs and now they're talking about moments that they created with you.

Gillian Pensavalle 25:02

Yeah. I mean, so actually, here's the funny thing. So in the pilot of that TV show that Josh and I created this, you know, it was Celebrity Celebrity. Celebrities playing Celebrity. There was a West Wing team that had Bradley Whitford and Richard Schiff on it. So I ended up getting to meet them back in 2014. Years, you know, before the podcast started, which was very, very, very exciting. But, you know, still, I got to meet them in the context of, Oh, I'm the executive producer of this pilot that you're in, so it gave me some armor, you know, it gave my fandom some some armor. So that I didn't just, like rush out naked, and just be like, I love you, you know, I could be like, Oh, thank you so much for being here. Really appreciate it. Such a big fan of your work, you know, like, I could professionally say that. And, and so by the time we got to the, to the podcast interviews with them, I you know, I'd had a moment to kind of like, okay, yeah, I've met these people. We're doing this. And, and let's just see how it goes. So it's, it's a thrill, because they're both such intelligent speakers, you know, they are true crafts people too. And that's really wonderful. Like, it's really nice to be able to ask somebody like Richard Schiff about very specific decisions that he made, and know that like, those were all decisions, you know, and then he can give you the answer. The reason why he decided to do this microscopic little change or micro expression, you know, yeah, so it's, it felt less like an indulgence of my fandom, and more an indulgence of the thing that I really wanted to get most, which was that kind of first person perspective on the reason why creative decisions were made. I will say, I think the, you know, when we were in the process of making the podcast, I, you know, kept it together for the most part again, because I had this, you know, job to do. The moments where I would kind of be like, Yo, what is happening would be some some of the moments outside of that. I remember we did a live taping with Allison Janney

Gillian Pensavalle 27:21

I mean

Hrishikesh Hirway 27:22

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We surprised the audience. She they we didn't announce that she was going to be there because we had announced with Aaron Sorkin and the show sold out before we had confirmed Allison. And so so I suggested to Josh that we just not mentioned it wasn't going to change anything. And so then we could just do it as a, you know, just for that moment. Again from from Privateers: for the surprise

THE WEST WING CLIP 27:43
For the faces, the surprise.

Hrishikesh Hirway 27:45
Mary-Louise Parker.

Gillian Pensavalle 27:47
Yeah.

Hrishikesh Hirway 27:49
And anyway, after the show, we went out with Allison Janney and Melissa Fitzgerald. Josh, myself, and my wife, Lindsay. And, you know, we got a really late late night dinner. And at a certain point, it was like I was I had to just check in with myself because I am. I'm talking about I'm talking about Game of Thrones theories. I was talking about Sansa Aria with Allison Janney and like, we were just just creating joke theories and and I was like, I can't believe this is happening. That was a really the moment where I kind of allowed myself to be knocked out by the thing in a way that I had kind of avoided previously.

Gillian Pensavalle 28:34
Wait a second. Are you saying that like one of my all time heroes Allison Janney is also House Stark? Is she? Because I'm like unabashedly House Stark

Hrishikesh Hirway 28:43
Yeah, I mean, we were this was a I forget what season of Game of Thrones we were on. But it was like it was deep in you know the Aria Sansa relationship and like, yeah, we're like, That can't be right. Right. It's gonna be there. They still love each other. It was.

Gillian Pensavalle 28:57

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Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Aria's not gonna turn on Sansa. There's no way. I know. She's an assassin. But...

Hrishikesh Hirway 29:02
It was, that was amazing.

Gillian Pensavalle 29:03
You got to have that conversation with Allison Janney like at a dinner.

Hrishikesh Hirway 29:07
Yeah, it wasn't it. You know, it wasn't even a table. It was like this late night situation. So it was like in a lounge. So we were sitting sitting on like, like, these sort of low chairs on an eating off of what was basically like a coffee table. And it was, you know, like a 10 o'clock on a Friday night or whatever. And, and so it was really loud in there. And so we're, like, acted like leaning in close. So we could like yell in each other's ear so we could be heard. And I was like, this is just, you know, having this conversation.

Gillian Pensavalle 29:36
What is that life? That's so crazy.

Hrishikesh Hirway 29:39
Yeah. Yeah. I think that another one that felt really special to me was, you know, like, when I was 13, I remember I got a Metallica t shirt because I really I really loved Metallica. That was like when they were like Enter Sandman was out. That's the Black Album, right? The Black Album. Yeah. And I was very excited about it. And then there was a day when, you know, James Hatfield and Lars Ulrich were here in my garage. Like they were sitting, you know, they came, they would, they did separate interviews, but the Metallica did an episode of Song Exploder. And the, the way that band had sort of, like, influenced the course of my life just by having that, you know, like I had, and having a Metallica t shirt that I wore. Like, for a while I was like, Oh, this is the shirt that I'm most excited to wear. You know, that like the one that's like the shirt that you pull out of the laundry first totally, like, that was the shirt for me. That was that was another moment where, you know, in the context of the thing, everything was fine. But then later, I was like, What just happened?

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Gillian Pensavalle 30:39

Right? Yeah, well, it's funny because Jillian with a J, not me, I've asked you plenty of questions. Um, she's saying: You're such an excellent podcast host and guests. And she's saying shout out to all the Gilmore guys episode. Her question is, what is your dream Song Exploder quote "get"? Whether you've gotten them already, or if they're on a list?

Hrishikesh Hirway 30:59

Hmm. Well, I will say, when I first started the show, I did have like, a dream wish list and my actual wish list is so so so so long, you know, there's just I mean, that's part of the fun of the show is just constantly daydreaming of like to and hopefully, who could we possibly have? Who might say yes

Gillian Pensavalle 31:19

Half of my wish list is our cast members from the West Wing? Right? They could totally be on The Hamilcast right?

Hrishikesh Hirway 31:24

Yes, actually. I mean, they, they pretty much universally are all enormous Hamilton fans.

Gillian Pensavalle 31:29

That's my in. Yeah, it's like them and like Mark Ruffalo, because he I know he went to the show once.

Hrishikesh Hirway 31:35

One of the artists who had been on my wish list from the very, very, very beginning was Bjork. And then she did the podcast after after a few years. And that felt really exciting to be able to, again, to quote, Toby, you know, I love crossing things off my list.

THE WEST WING CLIP 31:53

AMY: You like lists. // TOBY: Yes. // AMY: And like crossing things off. // TOBY: I'll let you know if it happens.

Hrishikesh Hirway 31:59

And to be able to cross that off the list was just that felt huge. She's a huge, huge influence on my own music, and just such an

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incredible artist. So that was a big one for me. In terms of people who still have not been on the podcast, I mean, one another name on that list is Radiohead. I don't know if that will ever happen. But that would be incredible, too.

Gillian Pensavalle 32:22
Yeah.

Hrishikesh Hirway 32:22
Other ones that had been on that list that have happened with DJ Shadow. And The Roots. Questlove's liner notes, were part of the inspiration for the show the way that he would talk about rich songs. And what went into them was like, oh, if there were a full length version of these little paragraphs, like, that's what I would want. And, and so you know, from the beginning, I tried to get him and then eventually, eventually did get to interview him at, at 30. Rock. There's still a very long list of names, Dream guests.

Gillian Pensavalle 32:52
Yeah. You know, I used to hear early on it went from like, how can you talk about this thing, week after week? And I'm like, well, it's an onion. So there's plenty of things to to talk about. And then people started coming over. And then it was like, well, there's a revolve. Like, I want to talk to every Lafayette/Jefferson, and everyone involved and everyone who made the thing and all the musicians, every drummer, every you know, everyone in the string section from all the tours like that it just keeps growing and growing. Yeah. And I remember after Lin came over for the first time, there were people who were like, Oh, so like, that's it now. Right? And I was like, No.

Hrishikesh Hirway 33:27
Right.

Gillian Pensavalle 33:27
I love the show. I love what Lin created. I'm what Lin has done for this podcast is invaluable. It's immeasurable. There's no way I can be I can express my gratitude enough truly.

Hrishikesh Hirway 33:37
Right.

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Gillian Pensavalle 33:38

But to think that I'm going to stop because Lin came over is insane to me. Like I'm because he came over the means, I'm just getting started. So. It's always this ever growing list of people who are just like, Oh, you know, it would be great to talk to this person and great to talk to this person. And I feel like you will fall in love with songs or artists or realize, you know, what's a great song? You know, it's a song that like, even if it was a song that didn't resonate with you, until, that's been out for years that just now you're like, you know, who would be great to talk about or talk to? It's just a never ending list?

Hrishikesh Hirway 34:13

Yeah. There's like I said, there are lots of West Wing people who I actually, I when I saw the show in London, it was with Richard Schiff, and Josh Malina and Eli Addy, writer of the West Wing

Gillian Pensavalle 34:24

Of course

Hrishikesh Hirway 34:25

Yeah, we all we all went together. I mean, this is this is a flex but you know, like, we went to do a West Wing Weekly live event in London and Tommy Kail said let me set you guys up so we got like incredibly nice treatment you know, they they had tickets for us they like scooted us past the entire line we brought up brought us up to like a special room where they had you know, drinks for us just just for us and our and and my wife, Lindsay and Josh's life wife, Melissa and Eli's wife, Allison, we're all with us. And, and they just treated us incredibly well. And and then you know, when it came time for the show that they escorted us to our seats, incredible seats, that, you know, intermission they escorted us back to that little like, room with the little bar and, and then brought us back

Gillian Pensavalle 35:13

Super VIP.

Hrishikesh Hirway 35:14

Oh, and then after the show, they were like, would you like to come backstage? And so then we got to go backstage and then. And then they

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were like, would you they're like, oh, Hrishi, you know, would you like to go to the orchestra pit? Would you like to go in? And you know, and it was just amazing. It was amazing. like to have that experience of Hamilton alongside people from the West Wing.

Gillian Pensavalle 35:34
Right? Right.

Hrishikesh Hirway 35:35
It was like two dreams coming true simultaneously.

Gillian Pensavalle 35:38
Totally. Like, how do you like where do you even look? How do you collect yourself in that moment?

Hrishikesh Hirway 35:41
Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle 35:42
Was that your first time seeing the show?

Hrishikesh Hirway 35:44
No, that was my third time seeing the show.

Gillian Pensavalle 35:46
What was your first time seeing the show?

Hrishikesh Hirway 35:48
My first time was seeing it in New York. I think in... Let me see.

Gillian Pensavalle 35:52
I love how you have everything just at the ready. So searchable. I love that.

Hrishikesh Hirway 35:56
The Fall of 2016. So So shortly after the original cast, kind of like all accident, yeah, I'll tell you, there was kind of embarrassingly, I went in and out. And I think in the intermission, I put somebody I like, texted Josh, I think, or maybe I even tweeted at him. I was like, Oh, so this is just songs, like, all the way through. Like, I

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didn't realize that there weren't also parts in between the songs where people talked.

Gillian Pensavalle 36:26

So when you were listening to the album, you assume that there were scenes in between those

Hrishikesh Hirway 36:30

Yeah I just thought those were the songs. And then yeah, there was stuff, you know, like, like, My Fair Lady is a musical that I grew up with that movie. And I knew all of those songs. And I watched that movie with my sister, you know, when we were kids, like, over and over and over again, it was like one of three VHS tapes that we had. And so that really informed my sense of like, what a musical is like, and what how it works. And it's like, okay, there's 12 songs in this two and a half hour thing. And there's a lot of talking in between those, like Hamilton has a lot of songs, but like, yeah, there must be some talking right? But just when they went from one song to the next song to the next song, I think by song three, I was like, Oh, it's just the songs, just songs. I kind of I, I did not know that musicals could also work like that. It's like, it's like, I was like, Oh, that's more like opera.

Gillian Pensavalle 37:17

Sure.

Hrishikesh Hirway 37:18

Yeah. But that's what I thought. I know. People are gonna really dunk on me for this. But

Gillian Pensavalle 37:22

No, not on this podcast

Hrishikesh Hirway 37:24

I mean, I feel embarrassed that I did not realize that that is, you know, I'm too old to not know.

Gillian Pensavalle 37:29

But I get it. This is new territory for you.

Hrishikesh Hirway 37:31

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Is there a term for these two different types of show? Is it even fair to classify them as two different types of show where they're, you know, musicals that have talking in between the songs and then musicals that are just music, wall to wall?

Gillian Pensavalle 37:44

I guess you would say sung-through. It's sung all the way through.

Hrishikesh Hirway 37:46

Okay. Wait, I'm gonna doing a little research here. Now, in the Wikipedia article for sung-through Yeah. The adjective or adverb sung through describes a musical, musical film, opera or other work of performance art in which songs entirely or almost entirely stand in place of any spoken dialogue.

Gillian Pensavalle 38:04

But that's like, in conversation with us. It's not gonna be like on the playbill, like Hamilton, a sung through story of

Hrishikesh Hirway 38:11

Yes.

Gillian Pensavalle 38:12

You know,

Hrishikesh Hirway 38:12

Yeah. But so what are what's the opposite of that? What's it? What's it called when it's not sung through

Gillian Pensavalle 38:20

A musical?

Hrishikesh Hirway 38:21

Okay. All right.

Gillian Pensavalle 38:23

So, so I feel like I'm the wrong person to ask

Hrishikesh Hirway 38:25

No, no, that makes me feel better, because then that makes it seem like the sung through version is the exception, and I wasn't totally

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bonkers to think that there might have been, there was it's an exception. The fact that it's sung through

Gillian Pensavalle 38:39
you are not bonkers,

Hrishikesh Hirway 38:40
Okay. Okay. Okay. But yeah, so that was my experience. I was like, Okay, I am I, but I bought I bought those tickets, you know, the prices had started to just kind of come down a little bit, they were still very expensive. But I was in New York for, for some live events that I was doing some like Song Exploder live event. So I was there by myself. And I had a couple of days in between things. One of the things was some like, weird event that I got paid well for. And so I was like, You know what, I'm just gonna use this money and buy a Hamilton ticket.

Gillian Pensavalle 39:14
Nice. Susan says, You have such amazing chemistry with both Josh and Sameen. And you interview all levels of talented and famous people with ease yet you seem like an essentially shy, unassuming kind of guy. Did you have to work at being such a great conversationalist? And how do you manage to get so much great information from your guests?

Hrishikesh Hirway 39:34
So it's such a nice thing for her to say. Um, I think the you know, the most important thing for an interviewer is to genuinely be interested in what your guests have to say. I mean, like, you can't substitute for that. And so I guess I'm lucky in the sense that like, I only interview people who I'm choosing to interview it's not a job where you know, producer has picked somebody for me to interview and then they hand me a fact sheet and they say, okay, go talk. These are all people who I'm legitimately interested in. And, and that's really like the most important ingredient in for a good interviewer i think is just like, actually care about what the person has to say. And I think also, I think I've learned a lot from therapy, about how to ask questions, and how to listen to people and how to make space for them to say more or to to recognize that there's more to ask. When somebody says something good, that there's actually maybe something even better not to just like, let it drop necessarily. That has been

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really important. It's been a surprising way to kind of learn about my job. But but one that's been really invaluable.

Gillian Pensavalle 40:54

Kelly says in all caps, and like a ton of exclamation points: Yes. First time West Wing watcher and the West Wing Weekly listener here. What are some of the things you're most surprised about or proudest of that resulted from the West Wing Weekly podcast endeavor?

Hrishikesh Hirway 41:11

Okay. So personally, I'm really proud of the episode that we did for 17 People. It's a great episode. But what ended up happening on the podcast was a little bit. I don't know, it just it felt really, really satisfying to me. I don't know how satisfying or like, how much it mattered to other people. But personally, I really loved it. It felt like it fulfilled some some kind of implicit promise of the podcast, I thought. So in the episode 17 People, the character Ainsley, who is a republican woman who has been hired into work in the White House Counsel's Office says that she's going to visit Smith to speak on a panel about the Equal Rights Amendment, she is going to view her position against the ERA. And Sam is surprised by that and they have a little argument about the about the era and she delivers like a very you know, West Wingy, he is like very like articulate, like, what like sassy but well reasoned version of why she's against the ERA,

THE WEST WING CLIP 42:17

SAM: how can you have an objection? // ANSLEY: Because it's humiliating, a new amendment, we vote on declaring that I am equal under the law to a man I am mortified to discover, there's reason to believe I wasn't before. I am a citizen of this country, I am not a special subset in need of your protection, I do not have to have my rights handed down to me by a bunch of old white men. The same article 14 that protects you protects me. And I went to law school just to make sure. And with that I'm going back down to the mess, because I thought I may have seen there, a peach. // SAM: I could have countered that but I'd already moved on to other things in my head.

Hrishikesh Hirway 42:58

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She mentioned that the other people in the panel are that are going to be in the panel in the you know, in the show are Gloria Steinem and Rebecca Walker. So we had Rebecca Walker, on the podcast to rebut Ainsley. And that was so satisfying, because, you know, it always, it always rubbed me the wrong way a little bit that it's like, well, there's a level of authority that happens in the West Wing, you know, it is fiction and all that, but, but when you have a character who you really love, put forth an argument, in a way, you know, and they win the argument you're like, it's hard not to have it feel like it's influencing people. And but I didn't want people to be influenced against the idea of the Equal Rights Amendment, despite what she's saying.

Gillian Pensavalle 43:44
Totally. Yeah.

Hrishikesh Hirway 43:45

And, you know, are there practical reasons for why she's wrong? So I also had the the president of the ERA coalition on and, you know, she's a constitutional scholar and lawyer, and, and between the two of them, they kind of dismantled the argument, you know, and it really felt exciting to me, because it basically wasn't just a commentary on what other content within the episode, it expanded beyond what was in the episode, it took the ideas from the episode and then continued the conversation and presented something different. And while still like, absolutely, you know, we got the person who she said that she, you know, if the if the episode had somehow continued and followed Ainsly to Smith, maybe you would have seen this conversation happening. But we got to actually do that on the podcast. That was something that was really, really thrilling for me.

Gillian Pensavalle 44:40
Yeah. And that was really wonderful, because I remember watching it for the first time, just completely enraged. Like, I was just like, wait, I'm sorry.

Hrishikesh Hirway 44:49

It's also now I have to say, you know, here we are in December 2020. It's also very exciting to see so many of the people that we had on as guests now. being tapped for these positions in the Biden,

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upcoming Biden administration. You know, Ronald Klain is one was a frequent guest on the show, and he is now going to be Leo, he is going to be the, you know, the chief of staff to President Biden. And it just now changes the, I don't know changes the timbre of all those conversations like suddenly just like how the West you know, with the benefit of the West Wing Weekly, looking at the West Wing, in its rear view, you can say, Wow, look at this, this person, you know, like Elizabeth Moss. To say like, Hey, now we're going to talk about you know, Zoey In this episode, but we're talking about it in a context where like, The Handmaid's Tale exists, and she has become this incredibly celebrated, accomplished actor. With like, who's won so many awards. It feels different to look at that performance and talk about it now. And I'm excited about the idea that someone could go back to another episode that I was really, really proud of, was the episode that we did, on the debate, the live debate episode between Alan Alda and Jimmy Smits where Vinick and Santos go head to head. We did. We did two episodes on it when we did with Lawrence O'Donnell talking about the actual crafting of that episode. But we did a second episode. Yeah, I'm thrilled about how this one turned out. We had Ronald Klain, who's going to be the chief of staff. But he also has served this role previously, where he has been in charge of debate prep for every single Democratic presidential candidate since 1992. He was the person in 2012, who led President Obama's debate camp. And then alongside him, we also had Beth Meyers, who in 2012, was in charge of Senator Mitt Romney's debate prep. So we had the two people who were in charge of these these candidates, commenting so then we we had them basically, do a play by play evaluation of the debate, and talk about what lines worked like basically the way that when an actual debate happens, and you might watch it on the news, and you have all these sort of pundits saying, like, Oh, this is what that person did that landed, this was a, this was a win for them. This was not a win for them. We had them evaluate the show, in the same context. And and we did it in this bipartisan way. And it was really exciting. It was also sweet in some ways, because despite their differences, politically, the two of them know each other and like, got along. And it was that was really, that was where I felt like we had crossed, we were crossing back and forth between the threshold of fiction and nonfiction back into fiction. And that was, I just loved that episode.

Gillian Pensavalle 47:49

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Yeah, exactly. just bringing the real world into this really idealistic world. I mean, after the 2016 election, it was hard for me sometimes to watch the West Wing. It was it was like watching science fiction, like how could people in the White House care this much? Speak this way. And there were moments for me where all of that just felt so far away. So for you to bring people in from the real world to say like, it's not it's not that kind of fiction. Like, there we are.

Hrishikesh Hirway 48:20
Right. These people exist in the real in real life.

Gillian Pensavalle 48:22
Yeah, it was nice to see that that people with character and heart and a certain level of you know, intelligence are they're here. They're real.

Gillian Pensavalle 48:31
I needed it to

Gillian Pensavalle 48:32
Yeah, I'm sure it was helpful. So thank you for that. Maggie saying The West Wing Weekly turned me on to Song Exploder and I have discovered some great artists. My question is, what is your biggest lesson you learned since starting doing podcasts? Also, I thought your decision to step back from Song Exploder was a brave one. As you focus on the West Wing Weekly, did you learn anything about yourself during that experience?

Hrishikesh Hirway 48:54
Well, so the reason why I actually took a year off from hosting Song Exploder was, although I could not announce it at the time was because we were starting to work on the television show. And I didn't know what the commitments were going to be or what the schedule was going to be. But I was ready to change things up and make room for how that show might take over my life. Plus, at that point, I had hosted and produced, you know, every episode for five years, and I was curious to see if it could be sustainable without me in the same you know, in the driver's seat in the exact same way. I still was, you know, still my show. It was still essentially like me in the driver's seat, but I was shifting some of my priorities. So So, Tao

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Win another musician took over as the as the host, and Christian Koons, who had been an assistant producer on the show took over producing her episodes. And, and I wanted to see if the show could still feel like the same show like if basically the building blocks of what I had set up in those previous five years, were strong enough that it could withstand a personnel shift in that way, you know, these are the point, like the kind of the template of what the show was, had been established over 150 episodes. And like we've talked about, it's not like you hear the interviewer most of the time, you know, with, with very rare exceptions, do you ever hear a question or anything like that? So in some ways, it's not that jarring. But, you know, how would that work? And, and I was so excited that that she said, Yes, and we got to do that for a year. That being said, it was nice to come back to it to I think, also just like, just to get a just to get a break, just to be like, I mean, I'd done 150 episodes, without stopping, you know, two to three episodes every month, for 60 months. And so just to stretch my legs for a second, and, you know, take a walk in this, like, Netflix TV world. Was was interesting. And you know, and I got to be like, Oh, I'm just the executive producer of the podcast, and not the host.

Gillian Pensavalle 51:07

But that's still hard. Just for people who don't know like, you have to record labels are tough to deal with like to get the permission to use all the music and to even like, you, requests you need, like we talked about earlier, a lot of things to make these episodes happen. So it's not like you're saying like, hey, do you want to like me saying like, hey, do you want to be on the pod? Like, when are you available? And then we just have these conversations. Like there's a lot of prep that goes in and a lot of hoops to jump through before you can even start recording. So

Hrishikesh Hirway 51:36

Well, unfortunately, as as executive producer, all that stuff was still my job.

Gillian Pensavalle 51:42

Of course it is. That's what Im saying, like... you still have to do all that

Hrishikesh Hirway 51:45

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Okay. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Essentially, all I did was take myself out of the most fun parts of the job.

Gillian Pensavalle 51:53

So I'm so I'm so glad you got Lars and James before you stepped away from..

Hrishikesh Hirway 51:56

Yeah. There were definitely some some in there that I was like, I can't believe I'm not doing this episode.

Gillian Pensavalle 52:03

Like who?

Hrishikesh Hirway 52:03

Oh, like Bon Iver? Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, that that was that was a hard one. There were a couple where, I mean, there were a couple where I was like, Okay, I need to do this one. Because it just made sense. Or it was like a continuation of conversations that had happened from years before. That day actually was was a really strange set of circumstances. The day that Tao was interviewing Bon Iver was the same day that I was interviewing in LA in person, I was interviewing Robyn, so there's no way to do both of those anyway. And luckily, luckily, it worked out. I'm really thrilled with how both of those episodes turned out. But um, but But yeah, that's one I wish I wish I had the chance to interview Justin Vernon.

Gillian Pensavalle 52:52

Laurie says: Yay, I love you. I would like to know where your love/appreciation for puns and wordplay came from. Because I have to say, your Home Cooking, every episode of Home Cooking is punnier than the last.

Hrishikesh Hirway 53:07

I think I I think actually in an episode of The West Wing Weekly, Josh and I talked about this. But at some point I I realized maybe this is a very simple realization that other people have made but I was like, people who love puns, what they really love are coincidences. Puns are just basically verbal coincidence. And you get to exploit that coincidence in a fun or funny way. That's what a pun is. And I think I like and that's what I like about wordplay in

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general. Wordplay is about like, taking this thing that means this in one context, and then using it in this other because coincidentally, they are the same word, you know, the meanings are totally different. And I've been, I guess, that's been something I've been obsessed with forever. As far as I can remember. I mean, my band is called The One AM Radio and that was named that that came out of now I'm doing the thing where I'm answering the question from South by Southwest where it's been your band's name come from?

Gillian Pensavalle 54:04

It's great, because nobody asked it and now its coming up organically

Hrishikesh Hirway 54:07

yeah, you know, The One AM Radio, I liked the idea of that name. Because it took that idea of like, AM I in both directions, both late at night. 1am. And also AM radio. The thing that, you know, I grew up listening to when I was a kid, in the back of my dad's car, you know, we would go pick up my mom from her night night job. And he would be listening to like, either sports, radio on WEEI, you know, like AM Sports Radio, and then it would switch to like the shadow and just the feeling of that filled me with such nostalgia especially like going from, from contemporary Sports Radio to like then an old radio play, something like that. It's like even in that moment in the 80s that was already an element of nostalgia and nostalgia was something that I really wanted. You know, that was that was some thing that I was writing about that was something that like my music was about, or just having that feeling. So I wanted to capture that a little bit that AM radio, but then also like that feeling of, of being awake, you know, late at night and, and I could sort of merge those two, with this name of this band, The One AM Radio, and, you know, maybe somebody would only get one would only read one meaning, and maybe somebody would only read the other meaning. But for me, it existed in both worlds. And, and I just, I like the layering of meanings. And it's, again, part of the reason why I love Hamilton so much, because you can experience the song and never know, all of the different layers of meaning that have been built on top of it, and still have a great experience. But for someone who does, like you said, it's an onion. I think that's what it is. It's like, like, a pun is basically a verbal, a little verbal onion. I mean, it's not as big as that. It's like a little verbal shallot. So that's what I, I don't know,

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I'm, it's kind of like what cleverness is, there's a scene in Fight Club, you know that they're on the plane.

FIGHT CLUB CLIP 56:05

Narrator: Tyler, you are by far the most interesting single-serving friend I've ever met... see I have this thing: everything on a plane is single-serving... // Tyler Durden: Oh I get it, it's very clever. // Narrator: Thank you. // Tyler Durden: How's that working out for you? // Narrator: What? // Tyler Durden: Being clever. //Narrator: Great. // Tyler Durden: Keep it up then... Right up.

Hrishikesh Hirway 56:26

And I have been so haunted by that little exchange for my whole life. Because like, I think cleverness is something it's like, a gear that I naturally try and gravitate towards. Like, that's something like, my instinct is like, oh, it would be more clever. Like, yeah, this is clever. But it would be more clever, you know, or like, or like, Oh, yeah, this is cool. But what it could be clever, if this other thing were layered into it, you know, like that, that double meaning. And sometimes the value of cleverness feels very hollow. And I think I also, it also ends up getting in the way, the same thing that I was saying about, like being obsessed with these, like creative obstacles, and saying, like, oh, it needs to be like this, and this and this, and then you do it like that, you know, having these, like, part of what excites me about that part of why my instinct goes in that direction is because I think there's something clever if you can do it, and, and clever, sometimes feels at odds with pure or like, just honest, and straightforward. And a lot of times, pure and straightforward and honest, is the thing that's going to be much more meaningful and much more appreciated by people. But that need to be clever, or that desire to be clever. For me, I think I end up shooting myself in the foot a lot, um, because of it. So I A lot of times, I wish I could turn it off. But, um, but so some extent, I've resigned myself to just accepting that that's just part of how my brain works, especially like in music, you know, I think like, a lot of times the way that I write, or just.. god, I remember, Okay, so here's a very specific example. This is not this is not a pun, exactly, but it feels related to this. So I made a record as The One AM Radio, you know, back in 2004, I made a record and it was called A Name Writ in Water. And I liked that title. It was a, it was about a lot of feelings of impermanence, and forgetting things and

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losing things and stuff like that. And, and the title was referenced to Keats. And I ended up doing a remix record. A bunch of tracks from from that record got remixed by a bunch of different artists, really cool artists. And I put that out as a separate release. I titled the record, that remix record On the Shore of the Wide World, which is another Keats reference. And I was looking at it the other day, and I was like, why the hell did I not just name it? A Name Writ in Water, in parentheses, remixes? You know, like, that's what it is. And, and, and I'm asking people to do more work to, like, make the connection that like, Hey, this is a thing. And then there's this other companion thing that goes with it. I could have named it used the same name. And like, probably, it's just like, bad branding and marketing, but for the sake of being like, Oh, look, I've made another Keats reference. This was A Name Writ in Water, This is On the Shore of the Wide World . It's the, you know, it's where these two things connect is just so dumb, in retrospect, but I had done it because I felt like I needed to be and it needed to have this layer of meaning to it. That was as deep or whatever had as much that was equivalent to what the album was. It was just stupid

Gillian Pensavalle 59:44
But it's your thing.

Hrishikesh Hirway 59:45
I know. But but it was like, I guess from what I mean, is there such a big part of any creative pursuit where you're just trying to convince someone to buy into it, you know, to listen to it. In this case, like actually, like, buy a record that I was selling in record stores, and to put additional obstacles in the way between what that person might understand and like the thing that you've made, is just doing a disservice to yourself. And I think I didn't always recognize that because I think if I had just gone, the more straightforward path, it would have felt somehow, like lazy, or like, like, not. Yeah, not smart enough. not clever enough. And so I always had to introduce this, like, extra layer of meaning. And I just feel like it was sometimes or often to my detriment, and like, and like some part of my brain gets to be like, hey, like, that's like a cool little thing. That's another nod to Keats like, well, that's cool, but it feels like a Pyrrhic victory.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:00:42

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Yeah, I hear you. I hear you on both sides of it.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:00:45
Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:00:45
Also that was a really good impression of Abby when she cut the tie. Game on boyfriend. Anesa says, first of all, how exciting that you're here. Anesa, I agree. Anesa says, will you be doing more podcast episodes of Partners, and she says, I love the West Wing Weekly podcast and loves the educational aspects that you brought in to learn about more of the issues on the show, which we just talked about. And she says, You are a great interviewer.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:01:09
I really loved making Partners, too. I mean, that was, in my mind, it was a relationship exploder because it likes Song Exploder it's like a non narrated podcast, where I've cut myself out of the interviews and presented the guests stories. But that was a show that was inspired really by the old couples, in When Harry Met Sally, the little interstitials

Gillian Pensavalle 1:01:34
The minute you said old couples I was gonna say please say When Harry Met Sally, yes,

WHEN HARRY MET SALLY CLIP 1:01:37
Man: We were both born in the same hospital. Woman: Nineteen twenty one. Man: Seven days apart. Woman: In the same hospital. Man: We both grew up one block away from each other. Woman: We both lived in tenements. Man: On the lower east side. Woman: On Delancey Street. Man: My family moved to the Bronx when I was ten. Woman: He lived on Fordham Road. Man: Hers moved when she was eleven. Woman: I lived on a hundred and eighty third Street. Man: For six years she worked on the fifteenth floor as a nurse where I had a practice on the fourteenth floor in the very same building. Woman: I worked for a very prominent neurologist. We never met. Man: Never met. Woman: Can you imagine that? Man: You know where we met? In an elevator. In the Ambassador Hotel, in Chicago, Illinois. Woman: I was visiting family. He was on the third floor I was on the twelve. Man: I rode up nine extra floors just to keep talking to her. Woman: Nine extra floors.

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Hrishikesh Hirway 1:02:24

I used to watch that and think that would be a good podcast. Just hearing these two people talk about how they met and and their love for each other. And you know, how they how they feel about each other. The first time they saw each other is kind of like romance this little like miniature romantic comedy within the overall movie. Those moments are so effective, I think such like beautiful framing device in that in that movie. I mean, that's an example where it's both clever and direct and like straight to your heartstrings, you know?

Gillian Pensavalle 1:02:52

Right

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:02:52

So the original idea for Partners was that it would be that that I was going to interview couples, maybe you know, I was going to try and do something but then, but then I thought again, you know, like, Well, is there another layer to it? And I started thinking about how partnerships that are outside of a romantic context, share so many similarities to romantic partnerships. And wouldn't it be nice to treat creative partnerships and business partnerships, like they were romantic comedies. And basically take this When Harry Met Sally sort of format of these, these couples of telling their meet cute and origin stories. And without making it explicit, or anything like that have that same kind of approach, take this first idea that I had of like, hey, let's do this, let's have a podcast about romantic couples treat it the exact same way, but have it be about you know, the founder, co founders of Instagram, or something like that, and that that's what partners was, and I really, really loved doing it. It was the thing that I was gonna, that, you know, came out right after The West WIng Weekly ended. Then home cooking started. And that ended up you know, and so I didn't end up doing more episodes of partners. Because Home Cooking came right on the heels of I was gonna do these eight episodes, those eight episodes came out, they ran from February to May. And so I'd already done all the interviews by the time the show, you know, started coming out. And then Home Cooking was sort of a response to the pandemic. I think if the pandemic hadn't happened, then yes, there would have been more episodes of Partners probably already by now at least they'd be in the works. But

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um, but that show basically went on the backburner a little bit because it felt like there was another podcast to be made that responded to this unique, extraordinary moment that we were in and and, and that wasn't going to be just four episodes. Again, it was gonna be a limited series, but as the pandemic stretched on the podcast stretched on as well. And so I would like to make more episodes of Partners someday but um, but it just didn't feel like the right moment right now.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:04:56

It's almost like the accidental pilot of Partners was the Lin and Tommy ep of The West Wing Weekly

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:05:00

Oh Yeah, I mean, yeah, that it's been that was so nice to do to hear their, their back and forth and yeah, I actually at one point thought it was like could I go back and re edit my conversation with them to make that into a Partner's episode? It doesn't quite have like 100% of the ingredients, but it has like 75% of the ingredients.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:05:22

Yeah I feel like they'd both say "No, we'll make time."

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:05:24

Yeah

Gillian Pensavalle 1:05:24

We'll do it again. Michelle says this week, I really listened to the Hartsfield Landing West Wing Weekly episode after watching the TV episode and the special. I was walking in my neighborhood and laughing out loud remembering how much I loved your banter with Josh. During that episode, you asked him to rank the pranks from CJ and Charlie, my question, Michelle's question, has Josh ever pranked you or vice versa?

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:05:46

Um, thank God. No.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:05:50

On both counts?

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Hrishikesh Hirway 1:05:51

Uh, no. I mean, I would never dare prank Josh because I do not want to open that door.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:05:56

The Wrath from high top the thing

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:05:58

Exactly. I mean, that is just a dangerous path to set upon. So no, and for some reason, he has let me just sort of let me live my life without subjecting me to the kind of torment that he that he seems to give all of his coworkers on TV shows. I've managed to escape.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:06:20

Okay, good, yeah, I'm not a prank or either.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:06:22

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I will. I am a big teaser. As you know, like, if you listen to Home Cooking like there's a lot of teasing that goes on back and forth in in that show, but um, but not so much pranking.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:06:35

No, I'm not. I don't even in movies. I don't like the jumpscars for some reason, I associate pranks with like, a jack in the box.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:06:43

Yeah

Gillian Pensavalle 1:06:44

Or somethings gonna jump out at me.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:06:45

Yes

Gillian Pensavalle 1:06:45

I don't know why that is. But like, that's where my brain goes when I think of pranks

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:06:49

Yeah, yeah. Oh, I used to. I used to prank my mom all the time. And it would always be the same prank. I don't know. Like, maybe realize.

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I guess I guess I was I used to do this one prank where I would put pillows in my bed. like as if it were me. And then call for my mom. And then when she would come into the room, I would jump out from behind, you know, from the closet or from the doors and they would be like, No, I was here.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:07:16
Suprise Im totally fine.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:07:17
Yes. My mom was my favorite person to prank.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:07:21
And she was fine with it. I mean, that's pretty harmless.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:07:23
Yeah, yeah, that that was that was the extent of it. I mean, she she was a big kid or two. She's did a lot. Yeah.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:07:30
That's like the purest prank I've ever heard. Actually. It's, um, Pauline says, I love Song Exploder. I love Partners. I've just discovered your music. In particular, your work with the video game of The Red Lantern. She says she loves it. She says, here's my question. It seems to me that a video game soundtrack is a really specific genre of music that has to follow many rules. What was your process for writing music for The Red Lantern? And how is it different from writing music for a film or an album.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:08:00
So this is the only video game that I've ever scored. So I don't think that I can speak with authority about how it usually goes, I can only talk about this specific experience. But we know one thing is that you don't know how the story is going to work, you don't know how long someone's going to stay in a particular moment. As opposed to with film or TV, where you know, it's very much like, the scene starts here, then this happens, then this happens. And then it ends here and you need to like hit this beat. And you need to make sure that by the time this happens, you we have this sort of emotional sense. You don't know what someone's going to do or how it's gonna

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feel. So in some ways, things have to be a little more open ended. Also, they have to be made to survive looping.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:08:46

I was just gonna ask about the looping.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:08:47

Yeah, there's times when if someone's staying in one particular moment, like can this track loop a few times and not feel like you're gonna go out of your mind from the repetition. So in some ways, you have to kind of be more restrained, or that was the approach that I took, at least, you have to be more strained, especially with melody. Because if it's just if it's a very hooky melody, and then suddenly you're hearing it for the sixth time in a row, he might, you know, start to be like, Oh my gosh, I'm just, you know, it's distracting you from the game. So the tracks also had to be long enough to that, when the loop happens, it doesn't feel it doesn't feel like you're hearing something over and over and over again. But you also have to build something so that it can loop and so trying to make an arc for a song, you know, where it has an intro and a middle and a, you know, something like a bridge and, and then it comes to a resolution and then starts all over again and still haven't make sense. That was a new kind of challenge.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:09:43

How long are the pieces until they have to loop?

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:09:46

For this game what I you know, the tracks went between one and three minutes, I would say

Gillian Pensavalle 1:09:53

Really? I used to play video games a lot more. The Sonic soundtrack like all of that like I know a very, very well, but I feel like the newer games now are more like that's just sort of like where you are in this world. So it's not necessarily like a boop, boop, boop, boop, boop, boop, it's more like a feeling.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:10:11

Yes exactly. Yeah, that was the that was the biggest mission of, of the score was just to like, make sure that feeling existed.

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MUSIC 1:10:17

[The Red Lantern music plays]

Gillian Pensavalle 1:10:33

All right, so Deb, last question. And Deb says this is the most important question. What is your favorite type of pasta?

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:10:39

Oh, like my favorite pasta shape? Well, okay, I'll tell you, I know what the answer is.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:10:44

Okay.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:10:45

My favorite pasta is gnocchi. Particularly, there was a restaurant where I first experienced gnocchi pan fried. And that was amazing. Because you got to have the differentiation and texture within pasta, you know, pastas, usually you have to rely on the stuff that's mixed in with the pasta for that kind of textural excitement. But the pan fried gnocchi was you know, had these like sort of crispy burnt sides.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:11:17

Oh, yeah.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:11:18

And but then it was still soft in the middle and then and then I would often get it with the, with an arrabbiata sauce. And like a spicy a spicy tomato sauce. And that way, like that's a sauce that doesn't have a lot of stuff in it, like doesn't have a lot of textural variation, but because the gnocchi itself has some. It totally worked.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:11:44

Can I ask what restaurant this?

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:11:46

Yeah, there's, well, there's a place in Los Feliz is called Farfalla

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Gillian Pensavalle 1:11:50

So it's not just a clever name, saying Wayne's World.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:11:53

Yeah exactly. Yeah, that place was great. But there was a there was a place where I first had pan fried gnocchi was a restaurant that's gone now. It was it was on Melrose. And it was years ago, I mean, years and years ago. But it inspired me to go and look for start looking for gnocchi in like refrigerated section, like like fresh pasta from the grocery store. And then I would try and make it at home. So that's really now the place where I get it. Because I don't live in Los Feliz anymore. And certainly now nobody's going restaurants much I'm not to make it at home. It's really that's really fun.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:12:28

Gnocchi for the win, and I, you're not wrong. I know its an opinion, I'm just saying you're on the right track with that one.

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:12:35

Thank you.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:12:35

I cannot thank you enough for spending your entire afternoon with me. This was this really meant a lot to me. Thank you so much. I just I'm really grateful to be able to talk with you and like nerd out with you about all of this stuff. I'm sorry if I, I don't know. had zero chill and sort of..

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:12:56

You have nothing to apologize for me just cut you off.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:12:59

Okay, thanks

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:12:59

Thank you so much for having me. It's been so much fun.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:13:02

Thank you. I it feels like we're gonna be like friends after this. That's how it feels for me.

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Hrishikesh Hirway 1:13:06

Oh, yeah. Are we not? I feel like we already are.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:13:09

Okay, great. Okay, so can you want to tell the people where they can find you or other things are working on or just like all the all the plugs

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:13:15

So it'd be great if people would watch the Wait for It episode of Song Exploder on Netflix features Lin Manuel Miranda, Tommy Kail and Alex Lacamoire, if they haven't seen it yet, plus all the other episodes. Now besides the initial batch of four, a second batch of four episodes are out. So there's eight episodes featuring Alicia Keys and Dua Lipa and REM and Nine Inch Nails. It's just a wide variety of artists and I hope you'll watch all of them. You can also listen to the Song Exploder podcast and you can check out the other podcasts Partners ,West Wing Weekly, and Home Cooking I'm on Twitter @HrishiHirway. My name starts with an H so hopefully you can find it and Instagram at @HrishiHirway too

Gillian Pensavalle 1:14:01

Thank you again. So so much this is like this was a big thrill for me. And listeners. Thank you so much for listening and Patreon Peeps. Your amazing questions week after week. Thank you so much. And yeah, I love you all for listening. I will talk to you so soon I am G dot Pen

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:14:18

and I'm H dot H

Gillian Pensavalle 1:14:19

Okay, what's next?

Hrishikesh Hirway 1:14:20

Okay great.

Gillian Pensavalle 1:15:01

[WEEKLY OUTRO] The Hamilcast is brought to you by my love of the thing (TM) My complete lack of chill Please join me in raising all

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