

The West Wing Weekly
1.07: "The State Dinner"
Guest: Lyn Paolo

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina. Today, we're talking about Episode 7, Season 1 of *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: The State Dinner.

JOSH: It was directed by Tommy [Thomas] Schlamme and written by Aaron Sorkin and Paul Redford. It aired originally on November 10, 1999.

HRISHI: It's worth noting that on this episode Alice Daniels, the Costume Supervisor, and Lyn Paolo, who's the Costume Designer, they were nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding Costumes. And Lyn Paolo is the Costume Designer for *Scandal* as well.

JOSH: She's a lovely person, and a little bit later we're going to catch up with her and talk to her about her work on this episode.

HRISHI: Do you guys work together a lot? Is it like hair and makeup where you see her on every episode?

JOSH: No. She's too important for me. [laughing] No, she is the ultimate eye and I will occasionally, at the beginning of the season, have a big fitting with her and then later in the season as I put back the weight that I lost in anticipation of the season I'll have a second fitting where she let's out all my suits. Somebody like Kerry Washington probably sees her much more frequently throughout the season, I'm sure for every episode.

HRISHI: You're just wearing a suit. You're not wearing special fancy dresses every time.

JOSH: Yeah that's true. Although, you know, she has a great eye for detail and how character informs dress and vice versa, and so for instance, when my character became the Attorney General of the United States, as he likes to point out—

HRISHI: On *Scandal*, David Rosen—

JOSH: Yes. He was making a little more dough and bought slightly nicer suits; and so as I came up in the world I started to express that in the clothes I was wearing.

HRISHI: Well, what did you think about this episode?

JOSH: I felt this episode was a bit thin.

HRISHI: Wow. Really?

JOSH: Are we gonna fight?

HRISHI: Maybe... yeah...

JOSH: For me it was a little bit diffuse. There was a lot going on, which is not something to which I object, but almost all of it took place off camera and I felt, in this particular instance, it was a little bit of a weakness. There was a lot going on and for me, a lot of it strained credibility.

HRISHI: Hmm. I think I liked it because ... I think my favorite episodes of *The West Wing*, the ones where there's an admission of how difficult the job is and sometimes you end a day and you don't have a victory.

JOSH: Bartlet, dealing with so many things that are out of his control, finding himself powerless to do much about crises spinning out around him. That landed for me and I did enjoy the episode and I get that. For some reason, there were just little things along the way that didn't feel quite right to me. You know they're having the standoff in Idaho and Mandy, the paid political consultant, throws her hat in the ring for how it should be handled. I didn't buy it, I thought, 'Really?' and then her big innovation is 'Send in a negotiator.' Is that really... Is that a revelatory approach to a hostage situation?

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

JOSH: There's no way this'll end good. All that's left is to end it fast.

LEO: I agree.

MANDY: What about a negotiator?

MILITARY GUY: Negotiate what?

MANDY: A peaceful settlement.

JOSH: This is a standoff with federal officers, a peaceful settlement is put your guns down you're under arrest.

MANDY: I think it would be wise if we demonstrated that we exhausted every possible peaceful solution before we got all Rambo'ed up.

BARTLET: Alright, Mandy, thank you.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Not so much that it's a... that it was so innovative to send in a negotiator that nobody ever thought of it, but more the idea to try and come out with a peaceful resolution... to not Rambo up as she says.

JOSH: I don't know, you know, Josh comes out of the Oval and says 'The President's decided to go with your plan.' I'm like what... what's her plan? Send in a negotiator. I just didn't buy that this is her plan. The Mandy Plan, having someone negotiate a hostage crisis...

[Laughter]

HRISHI: I thought that... I didn't think that she was trying to come up with it, it was more just that she was advocating, let's not go in with guns blazing, let's try and find a peaceful resolution for it, even though her reason for it is because she's thinking about the PR possibilities and how the thing is going to play. She offers this tactical strategy, but it's actually, you know, it's in service of this kind of public appearance thing. I don't know, I really liked it.

JOSH: Well, for me it makes it... Made that even more of a hard buy, that the President is swayed by the optics of this life and death situation, that seems out of character for Bartlet.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Hmm... I don't know.

JOSH: But this is one thing in a long list of credibility issues that I believe this episode has.

HRISHI: Alright, maybe I'm just too deep in, I loved all of it, I bought it.

JOSH: Did the Idaho situation remind you of the Oregon situation?

HRISHI: Sure, of course—

JOSH: Of this year, right—

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: The wait and see approach was certainly employed in this most recent situation at the National Wildlife Refuge.

HRISHI: However, the militia in Idaho in *The West Wing* are much better prepared than the Oregon folks.

JOSH: That's right, someone mentioned starving them out and the response is they have five year's worth of supplies.

HRISHI: As opposed to the "please send snacks" strategy of the Oregon militia.

JOSH: That's right. That is a salient point.

HRISHI: I was gonna say that this was like an, A-plus episode for me, I really... it was like, so good.

JOSH: Don't get me wrong, I thoroughly enjoyed it, but I was thinking, eh, judged against its own potential, it's not a great episode.

HRISHI: Okay.

JOSH: But maybe I'll ruin your enjoyment of it, or you'll enhance my enjoyment of it as we discuss.

HRISHI: Okay

JOSH: Even right off the bat... So we open with, C.J. is being sort of hectored by a variety of reporters about what the women at the State Dinner are going to be wearing.

HRISHI: And we get great tech specs right away. This is the fashion version of our tech spec talk.

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

C.J.: The First Lady will be wearing a Carmen Marc Volvo silver and black gown with a matching bolero.

REPORTER 1: Shoes?

C.J.: I believe she'll be wearing shoes, yes.

REPORTER 2: C.J....

C.J.: Black suede and velvet Manolo Blahnik slides with a rhinestone and mother of pearl toe buckle.

REPORTER 1: Accessories?

C.J.: Gabrielle Sanchez freshwater pearl necklace with tourmaline beads. I'm also told to inform you she will be carrying a Christina Bomba silk pleated organdy drawstring evening bag.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Here's my complaint though, C.J. is clearly irked by having to deal with the fashion of the State Dinner, but she's talking to *InStyle* magazine and *Mirabella*, did she think they wanted to weigh in or ask her questions about the nuclear ban treaty? This is her day, she's got fashion reporters and lifestyle reporters – what does she expect them to ask her about?

HRISHI: You don't appreciate her being contemptuous?

JOSH: Either don't let them in, or let them ask their questions.

HRISHI: Alright. Fair enough. C.J. gets frustrated with the fashion reporters but then she walks away from them and we really get led into the episode. There's this cool device of C.J. as the Press Secretary has to be informed of everything because everything coming up could possibly lead to a question from a reporter, so she has to know everything in order to do her job. So, we get this little rapid-fire thing where everybody's coming in to C.J. to give her another piece of information and they're essentially synopsisizing the episode to come by telling her what the major plot lines are and she's digesting it so that she can then talk to the White House press pool.

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

C.J.: So, let me see if I have this. A hurricane's picked up speed and power and is heading for Georgia. Management and Labor are coming here to work out a settlement to avoid a crippling strike that will begin at midnight tonight. And the government's planning a siege on 18 to 40 of its citizens all the while we host a State Dinner for the President of Indonesia.

TOBY: Yeah

JOSH: You got it

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I read somewhere, I think a little interview with Pat Caddell, who is a famous pollster, I want to say for Carter, and a consultant on the show, that Aaron's marching orders to the staff were give me a multitude of crises. That was his original idea for this episode, that the State Dinner would be taking place in the midst of multiple crises unfolding around them and around the world.

HRISHI: Yeah. It definitely felt like everything was hitting the fan at once, and in the middle of it we've got the State Dinner for the new Indonesian Prime Minister...

JOSH: Siguto

HRISHI: Siguto. And there's this part where Toby and Sam are talking about the language of the speech that they're writing and sort of how... tough it should be...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

SAM: Do you really think it's a good idea to invite people to dinner and then tell them exactly what they're doing wrong with their lives.

TOBY: Absolutely, otherwise it's just a waste of food.

SAM: Toby...

TOBY: We're not telling them how to run their lives.

SAM: [READS] It's time for your government to live up to the promise enshrined in the hearts and minds of your people, as well as the laws of your land.

TOBY: Friendly reminder.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It blows up in his face and he should have seen it coming a mile away and I think you wind up feeling it ought to blow up in his face.

HRISHI: Yeah. I'm realizing that in a lot of parts of this episode there's a lack of foresight. The diplomatic interest of having Indonesia there as your guest, it's important because you want to foster this relationship and you want to foster the idea of these first

steps towards democracy, it's in America's best interests. So, when Toby decides to go off and criticize them with a toast, he's lacking the foresight to see how that's not going to play well, especially when he has to turn around and then try and ask a favor of this guy to let his friend out of jail. That seems to be a recurring thing in this episode. We already talked about Mandy, let's send in the negotiator, because she wants to solve a PR problem and of course that doesn't end up going well, it doesn't go at all the way that she planned. Leo tells President Bartlet...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

LEO: I just wanted to let you know, we're going to clear out a battle carrier group from the Norfolk naval yard.

BARTLET: Because of the hurricane.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Of course the hurricane ends up reversing course and once again, there's this lack of foresight and disaster comes with it. I mean, not that you could really predict that a hurricane is going to reverse course, but yeah, they're trying to solve something, they're trying to address these problems, but in the end there's a turn of the screw and everything changes.

JOSH: Well, let me try and address a couple of those.

HRISHI: Okay.

JOSH: You're not going to have anyone over for a State Dinner if you stick to the moral absolutism that Toby might espouse at times. Nor could we be a guest to anyone else... and it's Bambang who eventually points out our own checkered history with Native Americans and throws it back in Toby's face.

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

BAMBANG: Does it strike you at all hypocritical that a people who systematically wiped out a century's worth of Native Americans should lecture the world so earnestly on human rights?

TOBY: Yes, it does.

BAMBANG: You humiliated my President tonight, and for no other reason that to show off. And now you want me to do you favor? Go to hell.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I agree with you there. Is there some great lack of foresight in the send in a negotiator plan? It didn't land to me like, what a stupid plan, of course they shot the negotiator and it would have gone so much better if they'd just rushed in guns blazing... this is why part of it didn't work for me... some aspects of this episode... and shouldn't the Navy have a sense of the weather? Why were they ahead of the curve, the beginning of the hurricane and then it moves east and it completely caught us by surprise. And there's even, and I think this is a mistake because for me it highlit it, if that's a word... there's a little, I wanna' say, three or four line interchange between Leo and Bartlet about the Navy getting caught off guard.

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

BARTLET: Without warning?

LEO: Yeah.

BARTLET: The hurricane just shifted direction without any warning?

LEO: *It's not an anomaly, but it's unusual.*

BARTLET: *I would think!*

[end excerpt]

[Laughter]

JOSH: Yeah I was already thinking that, I don't think I needed two of the main characters to say wow this is really unusual.

HRISHI: I still love this episode, but you are making it harder for me to love it.

JOSH: I don't know, this felt like one of those less than the sum of its parts episodes.

HRISHI: Well, one of the things about Mr. Bambang's line is that it nicely sets up this thing that the First Lady says later. The First Lady, played by Stockard Channing, she makes her first appearance on *The West Wing*, and she says...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

ABBEY: *It's our history. For better or worse, it's our history. We're not gonna lock it in the basement or brush it with a new coat of paint. It's our history.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think that's just a great way of approaching the reality of American politics. You have to acknowledge what's actually happened in order to move on and address it.

JOSH: This is Abbey Bartlet in response to the gold Vermeil issue.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: Another subplot that takes place completely off camera. And you're right, had Toby continued that conversation with Bambang he might have said something along those lines, because what's being thrown in his face, while not ancient history, is early American history and the idea that you acknowledge it and learn from it and perhaps, move on from it, might have been a reasonable argument for him to make in response rather than standing there completely with egg on his face.

HRISHI: Did you know what Vermeil was before you watched this episode?

JOSH: Indeed I did.

HRISHI: You strike me as the kind of person who would.

JOSH: Thank you, you're kind. Well, my wife's store, Isarose, in the Pacific Palisades, we sell some jewelry, some of which is gold and some is gold Vermeil.

HRISHI: See, I thought that you might know because of your wife's store and the reason why I suspected is because of the day when you accidentally started texting me photos of things that were meant for her. You were sending me photos of inlaid China and things like that, that were supposed to be for the store.

[Laughter]

JOSH: I believe I was sending you some Limoges Zodiac Eggs we were thinking of buying.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That's right. That is exactly right.

JOSH: That was embarrassing. I'm much more careful now, making sure I'm texting the right person.

HRISHI: Why was that embarrassing? That was great. It gave me insight that you would probably be the kind of person who knew what Vermeil was without them having to explain it.

JOSH: I'm one of those people who has no interest in giving his friends insight into him in any way.

[laughter]

HRISHI: Too late! About the Vermeil thing... The action, the protest is off screen, but I would say that isn't really where the action is, the action is really between C.J. and Danny.

JOSH: Yes. Sparks.

HRISHI: I think the whole thing is the protest is so minor, it's so small that really he is, as she says...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

C.J.: You're a rabble rouser, you know that? You rouse rabbles.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Because, you know, just like we were talking about earlier, C.J. has to be prepared for any question that might come up from the press, either with a statement or to be ready to make a statement and just by getting the question from a White House reporter it's now a real issue. He's just given them a platform. And he's just doing it, it seems like, to mess with her. Whereas before, we had this sort of like, inkling that their relationship was maybe a little bit more, that he got to receive some sort of special treatment, as you put it, this is the downbeat to their relationship.

JOSH: And I noticed that C.J. was less put off when Danny asked her what she was going to wear to the State Dinner than when the reporters were asking about the First Lady and the others.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah. Speaking of flirting, I think my favorite moment in this episode is something that I'm not sure I would have noticed if it hadn't been for our conversation with Janel Moloney and her revealing that from the first episode, every single one of her moves was motivated by the idea that Donna was in love with Josh. There's a thing that she does where she adjusts Josh's tie...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

DONNA: The kitchen guy doesn't speak English.

TOBY: You're kidding me.

DONNA: Well, no. He speaks Batak and Portuguese so I wouldn't look down your nose.

TOBY: Is the bar open yet?

DONNA: Yeah

TOBY: Make this work.

DONNA: I'm sorry.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh yeah. I definitely noticed that and then later Josh adjusts Sam, so it's a bit of a love triangle.

[laughter]

HRISHI: In this scene she apologizes and just before she leaves the room, she touches his tie, just touches it and straightens it. And it's such an intimate gesture. There's something about the absentmindedness of it that makes it even more intimate. I really love Donna in this episode and despite the fact that she has to take on these lines about sorcerers being beheaded, whatever...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

DONNA: I just thought you might like to know that in certain parts of Indonesia they summarily execute people they suspect of being sorcerers.

JOSH: What?

DONNA: I read it.

JOSH: They summarily execute people they suspect of being sorcerers.

DONNA: They behead them.

JOSH: Sorcerers?

DONNA: Gangs of roving people beheading those they suspect of being sorcerers with, you know, what's that thing that Death carries?

JOSH: A scythe.

DONNA: They're doing it with a scythe.

JOSH: Well, thanks for the heads up.

DONNA: I just thought you might like to know who's coming over for dinner.

JOSH: You bet.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Despite that beheading stuff, which is ridiculous, you really do see her doing all kinds of important work. Like she tracks down Charlie's grandparents and she's arranging the translators even though she doesn't have all the right intel. You see how much of an important part of the machine she is.

JOSH: At the risk of piling on, did any of what she had to say, then mixed in with all the inability to communicate, language-wise, did any of this episode to you smack of mild xenophobia?

HRISHI: Huh.

JOSH: Because that struck me a little bit too. I felt like some of the characters were not, given their roles in our government, might have had a more inclusive, less phobic reaction to others. There's one line during the funny translation scene where Toby kind of starkly tells the kitchen worker...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

TOBY: You might want to take a crack at English one day seeing as how you live here.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That set me back a little bit.

HRISHI: I caught that, and I was like, is that the position that Toby would take? Certainly, yes, you've mastered two very difficult languages, but the way he puts it is a little bit... harsh.

JOSH: That's what I felt. Tonally, it felt a little bit jarring coming from Toby.

HRISHI: I can't imagine that he would be an absolutist when it comes to immigrant assimilation and stuff like that.

JOSH: Have I ruined the episode for you, yet?

HRISHI: You're... you've taken some...

JOSH: I'm trying.

HRISHI: Yeah, you've taken some shots. I'm not feeling as good as I was when I finished, you know, the ending is so good, I thought...

JOSH: That I will say...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

BARTLET: Can you tell us what's going on?

HAROLD: Well, we're looking at I guess 80 foot seas with winds up to 120 knots. We're shipping solid green water over the bow and we've got a fire in the engine room. We lost our running lights and may get run over by an aircraft carrier that can't see in the dark.

BARTLET: Well, I don't know, man. Sounds pretty bad, Harold. I think I'd ask for my money back.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's a beautiful piece of writing and acting... even the guy...

HRISHI: Signalman Third Class

JOSH: Nice, Signalman Third Class Harold Lewis, as played by Jeff Williams, entirely in voiceover, he's good, and it's again a testament to Aaron's writing and this cast and their acting that... at this point I was fully bought in and it's a quiet, very impactful scene, and most of the rest of the staff is just in a semi-circle behind him as the President tells this sailor...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

BARTLET: I'm going to stay right here, as long as the radio works, ok?

HAROLD: Yes, Sir.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Very compelling, very powerful. I'm not going to ruin that for you.

HRISHI: Ok, thank you. Knowing how names figure in Aaron Sorkin's work, I'm wondering if it meant anything to you that Signalman Third Class...

JOSH: Harold Lewis

HRISHI: Harold Lewis, like Lance Corporal Harold Dawson, one of the characters in *A Few Good Men*, and in both cases these Harold's are relatively low-ranked servicemen who are in over their heads... and just like how, psychiatrists are always named Stanley, I thought it was interesting that they were both named Harold.

JOSH: Oh yeah, I'm sure there's an entire treatise to be written about Aaron Sorkin and the naming of characters.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I mean, he makes up a cellist, Yo-Yo Ma, what a crazy name!

[Laughter]

JOSH: Just kidding. By the way, you wanna' talk about the difference between seasons one and two of *The West Wing* and the, I guess, level of popularity and success, in season one there's a mention of Yo-Yo Ma playing Bach at the State Dinner. In season two, Yo-Yo Ma shows up and plays the cello in an episode.

HRISHI: He plays Bach, in fact.

JOSH: Ah, very nice. Where do you stand on Bartlet telling the Indonesian prime minister that he's going to play Bach concertos instead of concerti, as a music guy, is that acceptable?

HRISHI: Yeah, that's fine.

JOSH: Ok. Just looking for something else to complain about.

[laughter]

HRISHI: I love when people call more than one cello, celli, I love that.

JOSH: I love when baseball players refer to the various stadia. I think I got that from Tom Lehrer.

[laughter]

HRISHI: You know that octopi is not the plural of octopus.

JOSH: I do know that because my wife just read a book called *The Soul of an Octopus* and now all she talks about is octopuses.

HRISHI: Did you hear about that octopus that escaped out of its tank?

JOSH: Yes! Apparently they are incredibly smart, they just have very few venues in which to show their intelligence.

HRISHI: Yeah if we lived underwater, they would be our overlords.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: They absolutely would be our overlords.

JOSH: One of the many reasons I refuse to live underwater.

[laughter]

JOSH: Let me ask you this, why does Danny have free access to C.J.'s office?

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

DANNY: That's a nice dress.

C.J.: You're not supposed to be back here right now.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: She's sitting there and she's working and he just shows up... he's a reporter... let me ask you this, more access credibility issues, Laurie comes to the White House, to the State Dinner, a professional call girl, under an alias. Where's the guy at the door demanding to see... what is going on?

HRISHI: Ok, now that is a good point. There's going to be some pretty heavy security if you're going to get invited to a State Dinner.

JOSH: One would think. One would also think that she would have had to know enough ahead of time to bring her passport or whatever it is you need to get to the White House and she might have, maybe let him know that she's coming to the White House? It's a nice reveal when it turns out that she's on the arm of David Rasche...

HRISHI: Her date, his name is Carl Everett.

JOSH: Yes, Laurie arrives on Carl Everett's arm.

HRISHI: Ok, I wasn't thinking about this one too closely here, but how do you show up to the White House as somebody's plus one with no background check. I don't know, Josh, you were invited to the Correspondent's dinner.

JOSH: And I'm not going.

HRISHI: And you're not going.

JOSH: Is it here we pay tribute to what a good father I am. I am not going because my daughter's school has a very important daddy-daughter event.

HRISHI: Which is so sweet and so infuriating.

JOSH: Yes because think of all the people I could connect with and get on to our podcast.

HRISHI: Yes, exactly. I had offered to go in full David Rosen cosplay outfit and see if anybody would notice, but apparently you didn't think that was a very good idea.

JOSH: By the way, if you want to know what the full David Rosen cosplay outfit is, it's a Hugo Boss suit and old age makeup.

[laughter]

JOSH: I have been to the White House. I went to a Chanukah party. The White House Chanukah party. Say it with me, Chanukah... and there was a lot of waiting in line and showing ID.

HRISHI: You did have to show a lot of ID?

JOSH: I think I might have had my passport with me and it certainly didn't strike me as the kind of place where, like, I'm gonna' make up a funny name.

HRISHI: Right. And they expected you, they were like, ah yes, you are on the list. [cross talk] You couldn't bring just an anonymous plus one if you wanted.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yes, yes.

JOSH: Uh, no, I think they frown on that.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Oh she's with me...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: The Sam and Laurie scene is getting a little ragged around the edges by this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah, I'm over it. I'm over it.

JOSH: That's how I felt.

HRISHI: I was over it after the second episode, really.

JOSH: I can't even tell in this episode whether we are to believe that there's anything romantic between them.

HRISHI: I think there is.

JOSH: Neither of them seems particularly, to me, interested in the other. I don't know why she's hanging out with him because all he really does is sort of obnoxiously lobby

her to not do what she's chosen to do with her life, so he's just a drag. I couldn't even quite tell if we're supposed to still think there's potential romance here or just a really messed up friendship.

HRISHI: It starts off in the diner it seems like they are just friends, seems like they are just pals.

JOSH: Although they are eating pickles at each other, which to me is suggestive.

HRISHI: That's true, it is, it's a little, there is some of that going on, but you know, they're friends but they're friends who have had sex.

JOSH: Mmhmm. I've heard of those.

HRISHI: So you were surprised by Sam's offer?

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

SAM: I'll give you ten thousand dollars not to go home with that guy tonight.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Again, it didn't seem like it came out of his moral stance on her being a prostitute, it really just seemed like he was incredibly jealous at that moment.

JOSH: That is true and in a very ham-handed way he offers her money to do something she doesn't want to do because he feels she takes money to do something she doesn't want to do.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Not a great thought process. I think in a way, I'm anxious, I think Rob is terrific in this show, I'm anxious for him to move on to other things. I think Sam Seaborn really comes more alive and more fully realized later on.

HRISHI: Absolutely. That's been maybe the most surprising takeaway for me in re-watching this time around is how much it doesn't feel like Sam is the character that I think of, yet. He seems sort of on the peripheries. It doesn't feel like Sam has emerged yet.

JOSH: While we're on it also, and we like to do our little crossovers with real life... I'm sure everybody listening knows there is a situation that's come out in the last few weeks about this conservative MP, the Culture Secretary, John Wittingdale...

[News excerpt]

REPORTER: The story first surfaced on Byline.com, that John Wittingdale, in late 2013, had a relationship with a woman who was a prostitute. Wittingdale's office has told Newsnight he had no idea his girlfriend at the time was a sex worker at the London Retreat...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Again, it's just another one of those weird *The West Wing* life imitates art crossovers.

HRISHI: The opposite of ripped from the headlines, ripped from the plot lines.

JOSH: Yeah, exactly. Well said.

HRISHI: There's a new step in this episode with the President and Leo. I felt like with this little exchange where President Bartlet just says, he says...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

BARTLET: What do I do now?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Leo says...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

LEO: Go back to the party

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: This is different from asking for advice. This is the President saying literally what do I do and it shows to me how much he relies on Leo's support.

JOSH: I do want to point out, I feel like, while we have not been Moira Kelly-bashing, we've been negative largely in our response to Mandy and I want to point out, I thought she had a great moment...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

MANDY: What happened?

JOSH: They shot the FBI negotiator, he's in critical condition.

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, President and Mrs. Bartlet accompanied by President and Mrs. Rahm Siguto

JOSH: Mandy?

MANDY: I... should call... get on the phone... I'm gonna throw up.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Her reaction is, I thought, very real and very compelling and it was a nice little moment from Moira Kelly, who is a good actor.

HRISHI: Yeah, that must be tough, I mean you get this all the time where people conflate your character with you.

JOSH: Absolutely. I don't really mind it, because I don't care whether people hate me. I just usually say, you understand I don't write them, I act them out. I don't care whether people like the characters I'm playing. It may or may not be the goal of the people writing my characters, but as an actor I just act what's on the page and let people respond how they do, I don't care about being likeable. I don't care what people think or ascribe to my character or think about his motivations, it just doesn't matter to me. I guess you get a little proprietary about a character in terms, sometimes, of thinking well, I don't think he would do that, and there's a certain continuity you want as an actor and way down the line there's some specific situations in *The West Wing* that we can discuss with some of the cast about how they felt about the way their plot lines and their character's decisions went, but other than that I don't worry too much about how people respond to a character I'm playing.

HRISHI: It makes me wonder whether Mandy was supposed to have been written like that. If the idea was let's have this person who can sometimes drive a wedge between the staff or be a foil or cause frustration for Josh in a not necessarily charming way.

JOSH: That's a fascinating question and when we get Aaron on here I don't know whether he'll want to discuss it, but it would be certainly interesting to delve into that.

HRISHI: In the meantime, let's pose it to our listeners. Let us know on our website or on our Facebook page, do you think that Mandy is supposed to be likeable or she's supposed to be unlikeable?

JOSH: This is the first episode, even not loving her subplot, I felt compassion for her. Josh is really mistreating her in this episode.

HRISHI: You think so?

JOSH: Look, they're ex-lovers. He's not rooting for her or buoying her in the workplace at all to the point where she explicitly says to him...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

MANDY: Do you really believe that or are you just pissed off because I got in the game?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: This is her step up, whether you buy it or not, to the big leagues, she's in the Oval Office and gets the President's ear and actually affects his decision, an unfolding crisis of life and death and Josh Lyman's just irked by it all, to the point where he actually says yeah it does bug me, and then she leaves and he mutters to himself, yeah it really does, or something like that.

HRISHI: Hmm. I didn't take it like that. I thought that he was more bothered by the idea that, it wasn't about her personally, it's more just that he really felt like he knew what the right answer is. I think he makes a good point. He says...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

JOSH: This isn't abstract, Mandy, this isn't a theoretical problem. The FBI says come out with your hands up, you come out with your hands up, at which point you are free to avail yourself of the entire justice system.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And he's used to be advising at this level. Here's somebody without this kind of experience who's coming in and trying to influence decision in a way that I would disagree with. I don't think that it's particular to Mandy, I think that he would be as dismissive to anybody.

JOSH: To me in this episode, he seems like he's annoyed slash slightly threatened by Mandy. When he tells her that the negotiator has been shot and is in critical condition he seems to have absolutely no empathy for the fact that she's going to feel guilty for how it unfolded. He just lays it out there with an, I think, unspoken kind of I told you so...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's rough. I don't know if he does treat everyone that way.

HRISHI: Well, should we end just as negatively as the episode does, on a downer.

JOSH: I can see a positive place to end it. There's a lovely scene between Stockard Channing and Martin Sheen in which we see the extent to which Abbey knows her husband and understands him completely.

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

ABBEY: One of the things that happens when I stay away too long is that you forget that you don't have the power to fix everything. You have a big brain and a good heart and an ego the size of Montana. You do, Jed! You don't have the power to fix everything. But I do like watching you try.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: All this stuff happening on a world stage and then there's this little, beautiful, human moment between the President and his wife.

HRISHI: The 'I do like watching you try' line was pretty special.

JOSH: Ok, we're going to take a quick break now to thank our sponsors.

HRISHI: And when we come back we'll talk to Lyn Paolo about her Emmy-nominated work on this episode.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: We're joined now by Costume Designer Lyn Paolo, whose work you've seen on more shows than we have time to name, including *ER*, *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* and of course *The West Wing*. She's the Designer for *Scandal*, where she continues to work with Josh, and in collaboration with Kerry Washington she's created a line based on Olivia Pope's looks for The Limited. She's working right now on the upcoming show, *Animal Kingdom*, but we managed to get her on the phone in a break between fittings. Lyn, we're talking about episode seven of season one of *The West Wing*, 'The State Dinner', do you remember working on that one.

LYN: I do remember, and I actually watched it last night to remind myself of the horror of it all, and I say that jokingly, but we had not a lot of time to get everything done, not the least of which was the Indonesian costumes.

HRISHI: I hadn't even considered that part. I was just thinking about, you know, the First Lady's dress.

[Laughter]

LYN: Yeah, the famous cleavage dress.

JOSH: I have something called *The West Wing, The Companion Book*, published by Warner Brothers, and you say in it: "We had to fit Stockard only an hour before she went to the set, so we had the famous cleavage dress, which Stockard loves, but the rest of America was very upset because the First Lady should not have cleavage. We got more letters about that dress than anything else. So really did it in fact cause an uproar?"

LYN: It really did and it was fascinating because it was Stockard's very first episode and she flew in from New York and her deal was not set and so, as often happens, costumes were scrambling and we had about 15 or 20, maybe more, dresses in the room and really that was the only one that worked and I was supremely nervous about the cleavage. And Stockard was like "well, you know, it's okay. Women have breasts, it's gonna be fine". But we did get a lot of backlash. I re-watched the show last night and thought... well, it looks fine to me now and looking back at it, but at the time, there was a great deal of controversy about it, which was sort of... I don't know, really interesting, but then recently with Mrs. Obama showing her arms for a portrait you got that same backlash and I thought... oh my gosh, these poor First Ladies, what they have to go through.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: People have a very set conception of how the First Lady should dress and comport herself, I guess.

LYN: It was... it was an interesting moment in my career because I thought... I've offended every American I know.

JOSH: No, I think, I'm guessing most people appreciated it. She looked... she looked fantastic.

LYN: I think she looked amazing, I was really... I looked at it last night and thought well, I don't know what all the fuss was about at the time, but yeah... it was um... it was a challenging episode on many levels, but that was uh... sort of the backlash, as it were.

HRISHI: I had a question about the dress itself. C.J. says that it's a Carmen Mark Volvo dress. Is that accurate?

LYN: The thing about Aaron that's absolutely amazing, and I adore that man, is that whatever we were doing for the costumes on the show, I would get this sort of cryptic call from him going, "you know, Lyn, what do you think the ladies are wearing?" like that, you know the way he talks, and I would tell him, you know I'd say, "well, I think it's going to be this and these are the shoes and this is the..." and he would always write it in, which is why, you know, the Vera Wang dress episode was about a Vera Wang dress so... because that's what she wore... so he was always very inclusive in that way. And even, you know, the discussion in the episode about the Indonesian national dress...

[West Wing Episode 1.07 excerpt]

C.J.: Mrs. Siguto will be wearing a traditional silk Kebaya in dark purple with an overlay of black silk lace.

[end excerpt]

LYN: You know, I showed Aaron pictures and then he included that as well, so, it's kind of a lovely thing when your producer... writing producer, goes to all that trouble to make sure, you know, everyone who's helped you too on the show gets a little bit of a shout out.

JOSH: How many background do you think you had to...

LYN: Oh my God, it was in the hundreds, definitely in the hundreds, Josh...

JOSH: Hundreds?

LYN: Hundreds.

[laughter]

LYN: And the thing that, and honestly I keep harping on it, but it wasn't just the gowns for the ladies and the Western dress, but I was on the phone with the British Embassy, the British Consulate and the Indonesian Consulate here trying to get anybody to give me research and we ended up asking someone from the Indonesian Consul to come to the set and help us and I... couldn't find any appropriate, you know, national costumes from the Indonesian area so we ended up making everything.

JOSH: Wow.

LYN: When you look at the episode, you don't see it, you know. It's sort of an interesting thing and... a thing that I struggle with, that you put all this work into something and then it's sometimes not seen because the camera only sees what it sees, yeah? And the lens is only pointed in one direction, so... we didn't see all these amazing, bright, vibrant costumes that we created for the episode that was... they were just stunning.

JOSH: Ahhh... oh, that is, that's... that's painful.

LYN: It was sort of heartbreaking. I mean there's one shot I think, their first lady's being seated, but other than that... and the other sort of quirky costume thing that happened, we went rather long that day and um... our band, who was supposed to be the Marine Corps band, halfway through the day, had to leave because they had another gig somewhere else and no one had done the shot of them yet and um...

JOSH: They had a Bar Mitzvah to play.

LYN: Yeah...probably

[Laughter]

LYN: And they're you know, head to toe, in the full Marine dress, and um... over lunch I was in the trailer with my crew fitting extras who had no idea how to play the instruments, we just did a quick shot of the band and completely re-altering all those uniforms to fit people that you know, obviously were never gonna fit in them, and at one point we just split the back of a jacket and sort of pinned it down the backs, we had no more time left so someone's sitting there, I think, playing away with the violin and the whole back of their jacket is wide open. Brilliant.

JOSH: That's... That's fantastic. Let me ask you this, cause it is a little bit of a heartbreaking story to have made all these beautiful, to have constructed these costumes and then for them not to be seen much. What happens when you've built these beautiful, authentic Indonesian pieces? What happens to them?

LYN: Well, everything ends up down in the Warner Brothers – because that was the company, you know, who produced the show – costume department, and it's sort of an interesting thing because even last week I was walking downstairs at Warner Brothers pulling pieces for an episode of *Scandal* and there was Abbey Bartlet's dress still hanging down there, still you know, just being used by other shows I imagine at this point, and it made me a little bit sad because I would imagine it should probably be in an archive or something, so..

JOSH: The Smithsonian, one would hope.

LYN: Yeah, after this I might pop up front and mention to them that it's down there.

HRISHI: I always assumed that when you had something like that, some outside designers, uh... dress that it might be a loaner and then you have to give it back afterwards.

LYN: It was a really interesting time because you know, it was, I think, what was it? The first season, episode six or seven, something like that?

HRISHI: Episode seven.

LYN: Yeah, so the show... we did not have a massive budget on that show, nor did we have some of the contacts that I might have now, later on in my career. And we were a very budget-conscious show at the time and we did not get to borrow things. It was literally me running around Beverly Hills purchasing things um... Now with the advent of social media, I would probably have much more access to designers than I had back then. We were just very budget conscious at the time.

JOSH: Well, kudos to you because it sure... it does not look like they are scrimping on budget at all. It looks grand and lush, you did a very good job, I guess.

LYN: Thank you.

JOSH: Working on a budget.

HRISHI: Could you talk to us about how you came to *The West Wing*? How you got the gig?

LYN: I'm always grateful to *The West Wing* because every other job I've ever gotten has been because of *The West Wing*, including *Scandal*, but um, I was working on *ER* for John Wells, and I'm not fond of going to parties or any of that stuff, but I was invited to

a... say goodbye to one of our actors from *ER* party, and I sort of forced myself to go. So I went to the commissary that night and John Wells, um... who was the Executive Producer of the show, turned to me and said "So I think we're going to have this new show, would you be interested?" and I said, "Yeah, I guess". [Laughs] And that was my interview, right there. So of course, I, you know, I met Aaron and I knew Tommy Schlamme from our many projects together in the past and Aaron just said "Oh I love her, it's great". And that was it, there was no presentation, no interview process, I just kind of walked into it, which was... really, when I look back, sort of amazing at the time, I just didn't think anything of it. But that was it, unbelievable really.

HRISHI: Was there a learning curve for you once you got on the show? Was it different from the experiences you'd had before?

LYN: Oh, absolutely. The thing about *The West Wing* that I loved was that we were all careful and precise. We wanted to do a great job, you know, we wanted to present *The West Wing* in as true a light as we could so we all spent a lot of time doing research, which is one of my favorite things to do and not something that I get to do so much anymore because some of the shows I work on now, that is not the point of view. But on *The West Wing*, and specifically with Aaron, he wanted everyone to come to the table in a concept meeting with as much knowledge about what would really happen in *The West Wing* and so... I loved that and I learned so much... I mean even just this episode, having to research, you know, another country's costumes, it was... a joy and researching the uniforms and researching, you know, what would a First Lady wear? What have previous First Ladies worn to these State Dinners? We did a lot of research on all of that and we did throughout the whole, I think what was it, seven seasons?

HRISHI: Speaking of the seven seasons, I was wondering, what was it like to dress Josh on *The West Wing* versus how you dress Josh on *Scandal*?

[Laughter]

JOSH: Both such... Just such an exciting opportunity for you, both.

[Laughter]

LYN: No, the stories that we could tell, my friend. You know, they're two different people and uh... I think we're more dapper now, don't you Josh?

JOSH: Indeed, yes I think so... well, it speaks to what you were saying earlier, the DC of *The West Wing* and the DC of *Scandal* are sort of inverse challenges; one you were trying to be as authentic as possible and doing a lot of research; on the other you're sort of allowed to be more fashion-forward and kind of drive the look.

LYN: Exactly. And both are wonderful ways to work, I'm really loving being on *Scandal* and... and having this new sort of DC vibe going on and you know we were a lot more sloppy on *The West Wing*, everything was late at night, I mean I always remember you always had your jacket off and your tie loose...

JOSH: That's right.

LYN: We don't do a lot of that, you're so fancy now. It's really interesting because I know I got the job on *Scandal* because of *The West Wing*, because Shonda loved *The West Wing*

JOSH: Helped me, too

[Laughter]

LYN: It helped us all, that's what I'm saying, it's the gift that keeps on giving. But yeah it's fascinating to be in these two worlds, it's sort of the same world, but... to tweak them differently, it's really fun.

HRISHI: For this episode, you were nominated for an Emmy and I was wondering if you remember that moment when you found out that you were nominated?

LYN: I was a little bit shocked when we got nominated because to me it just felt like, you know, it was just an, for me it was just another episode, I didn't really think of it in terms of the costumes. Stockard and I laughed afterwards when I didn't win and said that we probably thought her cleavage had lost it for me, which was something that we really enjoyed giggling about in the room. I do remember that the night of the actual Emmy ceremony I got a call from Aaron asking me "are you going to be there because I really need you to tie my bow tie" and I was like "yeah, yeah I think I'm going to be there", [Laughs] so um... that's a very fond memory. It was a lovely moment, and especially for my crew, they worked terrifically hard. It was, as you know Josh, just challenging to get all of that done in such a short amount of time, so... it was lovely watching it last night, I actually cried at the end. Such a moving... and the writing is you know, Aaron is just a master, fantastic work.

HRISHI: Yeah. Well, thanks so much Lyn for talking to us. And thanks to all of you for listening to the episode. If you'd like to discuss it with us or with other listeners, you can make a comment on our webpage, thewestwingweekly.com or on our Facebook page, facebook.com/thewestwingweekly. You can also find us on Twitter: I'm @hrishihirway, Josh is @JoshuaMalina, and Lyn is @lynpaolo. The podcast is @WestWingWeekly.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

LYN: What's next?

[Outro Music]