

The West Wing Weekly
4.02: "20 Hours in America, Part Two"
Guest: Christopher Misiano

[Intro Music]

JOSH: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Today, we're talking about the second half of the season four premiere, "20 Hours in America, Part Two."

JOSH: The information is the same as Part One. It was written by Aaron Sorkin, it was directed by Christopher Misiano, to whom we will speak later in our episode, and it first aired on September 25th, 2002.

HRISHI: I love the NBC synopsis for "20 Hours in America." For both parts. Here's what it says. "Two hour season premiere sees president on campaign trail as probe of downed plane grows."

JOSH: That's the best they could do for a two-parter?

HRISHI: Couldn't even afford some definite articles.

JOSH: [chuckles] Yeah, really, whoever wrote this was on a deadline and had to hand it in in a rush.

HRISHI: It reminds me of one of my favorite scenes from *Arrested Development* when the Bluth family is trying to welcome Michael Bluth back and be less harsh to him. You know, they've pushed him away and now they're trying to get him back for their own self-interest, and they have a banner that says "Family loves Michael" [Josh laughs] and Will Arnett says:

[*Arrested Development* excerpt]

GOB: *Take a look at banner, Michael.*

[end excerpt]

[both laugh]

JOSH: That's brilliant.

HRISHI: In this episode, we see president on campaign trail as probe of downed plane grows.

JOSH: There you have it.

HRISHI: I like episode very much.

JOSH: [chuckles] I too. We're only eighteen hours short of being able to do it in real time, it occurs to me.

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah. I like Part Two even more than Part One.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: I don't know [cross talk] if there's any point in saying that.

JOSH: [cross talk] I don't know whether I can distinguish but well that could be interesting if you could tell me why. Actually I'm going to agree with you. Even as I was thinking that I couldn't even address it, there are elements to the second part that pay off.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: There's this feeling of multiple payoffs in this episode, one after another, layers of meaning and emotion that I appreciated.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think there's a lot of great writing, and there're a lot of great jokes and yeah, it's a lot of set up in Part One but here's where they land, as you said. One thing I was realizing is that Aaron is great at sticking a landing on an episode in general. I think part of the reason why people walk away from so many episodes of *The West Wing*, if not all of Aaron's episodes, walking away basking in some kind of glow of the feeling of whether it's a tragic episode or a funny episode or you know just like whatever the feeling is, he really manages to stick the landing.

JOSH: 'Stick the landing' is the perfect phrase, and I know we've discussed this before, there are times when I know what is coming, usually it's like a little comic thing. I know what the joke is going to be and then he actually makes me laugh out loud even though I knew what was coming. Most of the time you don't know what's coming with him. But, he can even say and it's basically that. I've seen someone do a round off into a backflip but when it's done perfectly?

HRISHI: You can't help but stand up and clap.

JOSH: Absolutely. And he does do that again and again. Not that it's always telegraphed. Lots of times like, for instance in this episode, there's a running joke. You know, there's that bet, which I guess is from [cross talk] the first part...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes

JOSH: Right. It's from the first part. And Josh and Toby are throwing rocks into a garbage can and Josh wins the bet, and as a result of which Toby has to introduce himself always adding:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

TOBY: I work at The White House.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And it's funny. And it's funny each time it comes up. And it's really funny when Tyler says:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

TYLER: People are gonna think you're a lot cooler if you don't say that yourself but rather let them find out on their own.

[end excerpt]

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: And then, all of a sudden, boom! It hits you at the end with actual emotion, I just get chills even as I'm talking about it, at the bar when...

HRISHI: ...right, when Josh waves him off and says "no you don't have to do it" and then Toby realizes "no, this is the moment when you do say that."

JOSH: And that's sticking the landing when you don't see it coming. It's like Aaron has taken what is a very solid running joke and made it powerfully emotional in that scene.

HRISHI: Yeah, what I love about this episode, I think this could sound like a criticism but I don't mean it that way, there are several scenes that feel like they should be the last scene of the episode. So many of the characters get their own moments of pay off, and, in another episode, maybe in a smaller episode, they would serve as the final scene and you'd walk away from that being like "that was a GOOD episode". But then the episode isn't over and it keeps going to the next one and it happens again.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: So it's not like in a *Lord of the Rings* kind of way where there are 16 endings and you're like "alright, get on with it already." It's just the quality of the final scene, you know the feeling of like the last bite of the ice cream cone and you're like "that was great." We get like six of them.

JOSH: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. There's the payoff to the search for a big brother and Dulé plays it beautifully and that really lands. There's the search for a replacement for Mrs. Landingham, and the way that plays out is, I think, very well executed, and then overall there's this entire like *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* storyline which pays off in multiple ways with Josh and Toby getting a little perspective to the tunnel vision of the campaign that they're in.

HRISHI: Mmm hmm.

JOSH: Which is why I completely agree with you that this is an even better episode than the first part because it's so satisfying on so many levels and always reminds me Aaron is such a masterful writer of dialogue that I forget how well he also plots things.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right. Ok, let's get into some of the more...

JOSH: Micro. We've done the macro.

HRISHI: We've done the macro. Exactly. Let's start with Charlie. You brought up Dulé's performance in that moment with Anthony. And this is definitely one of the scenes that I think of whenever we're asked the question "who's your favorite *West Wing* character?" and Charlie is my answer, or one of my answers.

[Both laugh]

JOSH: It's harder for me to imagine you picking [cross talk] a favorite *West Wing* character.

HRISHI: [cross talk] I know. Let's start at the beginning of the episode with the president meeting Muriel Keith, Mr. Keith, the guy who's met every president. This scene's so funny. But I just want to go straight to the part with Charlie talking about there's this superstition of like "you can't meet with this guy" so you start thinking like, "Ok, Charlie's superstitious," but then he has this weird little aside about the photographs.

JOSH: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

CHARLIE: *You ever see any pictures on my desk?*

PRESIDENT BARTLET: *No.*

CHARLIE: *You ever wonder why?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's like this funny little joke that you're like "Ok, Charlie's weird in a way that we didn't realize" and it's a funny moment [laughs] and then he tells Mr. Keith.

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

CHARLIE: You're spooking the hell out of the [cross talk] president.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: [cross talk] Just scheduling.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's really funny and I love those moments when Charlie is a little bit off the leash.

JOSH: Mmm hmm.

HRISHI: And it could be done, right there. That could be the end. But then, now to go all the way to the final scene with Charlie after his confrontation with Anthony and everything like that, the payoff of C.J. giving him a photo of his mom. I mean it comes from his sister, she says she's had it for a few days. But...

JOSH: When you reverse engineer this [expletive deleted] it's devilishly clever.

HRISHI: That was really touching and beautiful and it didn't feel, to me, contrived at all that it has this payoff.

JOSH: No, and part of that I think is because the distance between what you only realize was a set up by the time it's paid off, it was just a subtle moment of comic import early in the episode. It's very subtly done.

HRISHI: Ok so let me continue on this thread of Charlie unleashed.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: First, he kind of lets loose on Mr. Keith, freaking the hell out of the president, and even has a little bit of sass with the president....

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: ...himself. But then he also challenges Donald McKittridge. It turns out that Donald McKittridge, who is the Director of the White House Office for Presidential Personnel, had expressly told Charlie not to bring in Debbie but Charlie says "yeah well I brought her in anyway". And just that I think is, it speaks to how far Charlie's come in his job and how strongly he feels about doing the right thing. He's not afraid of like bucking authority.

JOSH: This is primo Aaron Sorkin territory: you've got loyalty, uprightness of character. You've got it all. This is his playground. And, you know, I also think there are a couple of instances in this episode that if they weren't executed so flawlessly might bug me, like there's a weird convenience to the convergence of President Bartlet and Charlie and Fiderer and then this guy walks in. And there's also the guy at the bar at the end is also sort of a convenient conversation to take place at that moment but...

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: In the hands of someone else I'd be like "really??"

HRISHI: We'd really feel the contrivance.

JOSH: Yeah. Exactly. But here as played, I love both scenes.

HRISHI: There's a little echo in that as well of "you two have a past?"

JOSH: [laughs] Yes.

HRISHI: Because when he comes out of the, he comes out of the Oval Office, after having kind of a not so great meeting with Debbie, or at least on the surface maybe not so great, and then he tells McKittridge, he's like:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: She didn't give you up.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Similarly how Charlie had not divulged the information about the country club.

JOSH: Right, we also get the payoff with remembering facts and figures and short-term memory [cross talk] and that whole thing, the way it's laid in is kind of brilliant.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Mmm hmm, exactly.

JOSH: I also noticed a tiny little detail that I thought's really representative of Aaron's writing in contrast to 98% of all other television, and that's, there's a moment when Sam I think is speaking to Josh. He seems to be worried about short-term memory loss. Is he speaking to Josh? And he says, "it's one of the effects of..."

HRISHI: And then he just cuts him off.

JOSH: And we get dot dot dot, right.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Essentially all other television would remind the viewer or, God forbid, it's a new viewer who doesn't quite understand something that's quite going on, would say "It's one of the effects of the MS that the President has that he didn't reveal" [laughs] you know.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right.

JOSH: Most television doesn't want anybody to be confused at any moment or have to fill in any blank and this is such an easy gimme, where he could say it, and I think it's just better writing...

HRISHI: It is.

JOSH: ...to have him not say it.

HRISHI: Yeah because it reveals too that there's still a feeling, a little bit, within the staff of wanting to not necessarily articulate it.

JOSH: Right, they don't even want to say it out loud.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly.

JOSH: Right, so it's true to the moment and, you know, a nice little character touch that very few other writers would go for, at the risk of having [laughs] a single person not keep up.

HRISHI: Yeah. You know what's a trope in TV writing? Just thinking about what things would happen on another show. The thing that I'm so grateful that never, ever, ever, EVER have to deal with with Aaron Sorkin's writing is a scene starts and someone says something vague to another character and then the other character has to ask them what they mean. Like...

JOSH: "Explain it to me so that they understand, the people who are watching."

HRISHI: It's framed in a way that nobody ever actually speaks this way. Out of nowhere, someone will say, "It's never going to happen, is it?" "What's never going to happen?" Or, you know like, "It still hurts, doesn't it?" "What still hurts?" Like [cross talk] nobody just starts with like an unclear it.

JOSH: It's funny, actually.

HRISHI: Like with no antecedent, people will say "it" and then a character has to ask them the what [cross talk] they mean.

JOSH: [cross talk] to define it.

HRISHI: and then they can have some kind of weird exposition. It's so garbage [cross talk] and it's...

JOSH: [cross talk] It's funny

HRISHI: ...so prevalent.

JOSH: It's funny actually because Aaron does a different thing, which is that he has people say "What?" and then have them repeat what they've just said again. It's something he does which somehow, to me, elevates the conversation because there's usually a reason, at least that I'm imputing to the character, for why they want a hesitation they want another extra beat to think about what it is they've actually just heard. Something's just sort of thrown them off for just a nanosecond. And that's the, sort of, the way of the way of vamping.

HRISHI: Mmm hmm. And then the last moment of Charlie full on is, yeah, the scene with Anthony. I mean [sigh] it's so heart breaking. You know, C.J. is trying so hard. She's trying to make a difference in his life, she's trying to prevent him from having to go to juvie and I love that Charlie comes in, he defends her, he's righteous, but he's also trying to help this kid. Despite the, like, wrath that he's drawing on.

JOSH: Absolutely.

HRISHI: And he makes these great points like the line in the middle of his tirade, where he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

CHARLIE: You wanna be a punk? Fine. But I don't think you've got the size for it. You want to go to juvie, get out, deal and kill cops? Ok, but every time you do a crime, you get caught so I think you're going to have to do something else.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's such a great, [cross talk] such a great insight.

JOSH: [cross talk] Fantastic way to put it, to articulate it.

HRISHI: Yep. I love that scene. Ok, let's go to our three travellers on the road.

JOSH: I'm sure I've commented on this before. I like when we see them out of the workplace, I like when we see them with time on their hands. That is a luxury that these guys never have, and so that we don't get to enjoy what they might be like during downtime and, first of all, obviously, the two of them are bristling against the whole concept of downtime: they're desperate to be back where the action is, but they take little conversational detours that we've not observed before. I love the moment in the car when Josh and Toby are kind of bickering about Judaism, about what kind of Jews the two are. This is something, it's such a... Jews, sadly not at their best, can be very factional. When I listen to that moment, you know when, I can't remember what exactly provokes it but we'll drop in the clip where Toby says to him:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

TOBY: You know the ancient Hebrews had a word for Jews from West Port: they pronounced it "Presbyterian".

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It makes me laugh [cross talk] so hard.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah me too.

JOSH: It reminds me: there's a classic old Jewish joke. I'll give you the very brief version of it. You may have heard it. There's a Jewish guy who's on a deserted island for, like, twenty years and when they finally find him, "Unbelievable! You're still alive! How did you survive for all this time?" And he says, "well come, let me show you." And he goes through the woods with a machete, and they come to a clearing, and they see this big, beautiful synagogue that's made out of, like, palm fronds and coconut shells that he's put together and he's scrolled a Torah somehow and they go, "Wow, this is incredible." He says, "Yes, it took me five years to build it". "This is amazing, so your spiritual life kept you..." And he says, "No, no, no, come on, let me show you." And he walks further around the corner on the island and they see another, even grander synagogue that's he built out of similar materials and they're like, "I don't understand, what?" "This one took me twelve years to build." "I don't understand. Why two synagogues?" He goes "Well, this one, this is the one I pray at. That other one, I wouldn't go there if you paid me!"

HRISHI: [extended laugh] [cross talk] Wow!

JOSH: [cross talk] Jews need that, apparently.

HRISHI: Well, that's a ridiculous joke.

JOSH: Yeah, well to me, this is the, of course. [more laughter from both] And yet there's real truth to this joke and I think you see it in that little, in that car run.

HRISHI: I've always loved this joke, it's always made me laugh so hard, while also being a joke that I feel like I can't fully participate in. I still love it so much.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Because, certainly, the sentiment you know, like, you could replace Jews with anything, hipsters, New Yorkers, you know, and I've always felt like, when I lived in New York, everybody was quick to assert their New York seniority to anyone, whether or not they had arrived, you know, five minutes after them.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: "Let me tell you what it's like here."

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: But the thing that prompted and was, you know, going back from the previous episode when Toby is railing about Ritchie and they have that exchange that we talked about, where he says "oh I'll get some of those guys." He's like "Nobel prize? Great, I'm gonna get some of those." And Toby says, "no, no that's what he should be saying. He's saying 'Don't worry, I'll have Jews for the money stuff.'" And I love that now in this second episode, the second part, that little comment from Toby is still needling him that he's got to bring it up again. [cross talk] He's 'don't worry, I'll have Jews for this stuff'.

JOSH: [cross talk] It's stuck in his craw.

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah, you imply that you have a sharper sense of anti-Semitism.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And Toby drops that and Josh says:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

JOSH: And by saying things like that.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Oh, that's the other thing. And never one to pass up a chance to reference a musical, there's a specific song in *Falsettos* by William Finn called "Four Jews in a Room Bitching". And this little drive also reminds me of that.

[*Falsettos*, song "Four Jews in a Room Bitching" excerpt]

FOUR MEN: [sung] Four Jews in a room bitching
Four Jews talking like Jew-ish men.
I'm neurotic, he's neurotic,
They're neurotic, we're neurotic.
Bitch bitch bitch bitch
Funny funny funny funny

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But then Josh has this **horrible** moment of saying, he's like:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

JOSH: Mohammed Al-Mohammed El-Mohammed Bin Bazir doesn't make the distinction when he suits up in the morning.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: This like, just, ok, you're just gonna make up some, you know, name. It's just like so...

JOSH: Racist?

HRISHI: Racist. [both laugh] Yeah it's just like just so racist. Yeah, and I'm glad Toby just comes back with:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

TOBY: Well, as long as you have a good grasp of the complexity of that situation.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: What he's saying is utterly hypocritical because he's talking about making a distinction and he's just making up random, like, names that sound like, that make no distinction among the people he's talking about. And [cross talk] you're literally just putting words together.

HRISHI: [cross talk] exactly. Yeah.

JOSH: There's also a sense that I love in Richard's performance throughout both parts and his long trek that he's kinda just gutting through it. He's not necessarily fully engaged at all points. He's just so brilliantly Toby. There's even a moment before he really gets into it with the guy at the bar, when he orders his drink, where he kind of opens his eyes wide. It's just a little microexpression of "oh God, someone's talking to me". I mean, he ultimately does decide to engage but I can see a quick little moment where he's kind of, you know. Or maybe the expression is "oh my God, I can't believe it. I'm going to actually talk to this guy." But hey, yeah look at it, right when he orders his drink. It's very funny and classic Richard-slash-Toby.

HRISHI: That scene when Matt starts talking to Toby.

JOSH: Yes. John Connolly. Just, I thought he was very good in this scene, where it's like "Ok you're the, you know." It would be very easy, I think, to be bad in that scene.

HRISHI: I have to admit that I used to not fully buy this scene. When I first saw it, I think I didn't fully buy it because I didn't know that people talked like that. Like I didn't know that people would just be friendly and start a conversation with a stranger, telling them something about themselves, just unprompted and that seemed unrealistic. And then I met my mother-in-law.

JOSH: [laughs] Is that right?

HRISHI: Yeah and talking to her and [cross talk]...

JOSH: [cross talk] Is she a big drinker?

HRISHI: [laughs] I mean, she can chat up a wall. And probably get some reaction from the wall. I mean, she's just, in any context, will just start talking to people, and not in an annoying way, just in a genuinely, friendly, endearing way. I don't know. It seemed so foreign to me that I didn't buy it at first. And now, now that I've lived longer and been around more people and different kinds of people, I read the scene differently and I think "now I understand this guy's character more deeply." And I appreciate it.

JOSH: We actually interviewed Christopher Misiano about it a week and a half ago, so I re-watched it again before you and I were going to discuss it, and that scene actually grew on me just from those two viewings and that, I think, for me, it's because I do sometimes do that thing where I go "oh well this is very convenient," and then I check out a little bit. I'm like "oh, ok, this scene is, now he's gonna, you know." And I probably do this unfairly with the show, often, in my criticism. But sometimes on that second viewing where I've decided, "oh I already watched for my critical eye or whatever" and I just let the thing play over me? Things hit me emotionally because I've let go of "Oh I've gotta write down 'well this seemed very convenient.'" And this second time, it just, it kinda knocked me out. This is a great scene. [Hrishi laughs]

I have something going back, just a small thing about, I think they're dealing in this episode, as they were in Part One with, or maybe even an earlier episode, with the First Lady's unfortunate wording. What is it she said? "At this moment, I'm just a wife and mother," and there's some

political fallout because people are taking that as “I’m **just** a wife and mother and that’s not enough”.

HRISHI: Minimizing.

JOSH: Right, and so apparently there are people protesting with rolling pins and what not, and it occurred to me as I’m listening, in the car, to *What Happened*, read by Hillary Clinton, her book about the 2016 campaign, this essentially happened to her, early in her career. In ’92, in response to a question about a possible conflict of interests between her work at an Arkansas law firm and her husband being the Governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton, she said:

[Archive of Hillary Clinton speaking, 18 March 1992, excerpt]

HILLARY CLINTON: I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas but what I decided to do was to fulfil my profession, which I entered before my husband was in public life.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And she was then, and has been since, often vilified and criticized quite harshly for that comment, which maybe was not articulated in the best possible way but was, I think, widely misread as a knock at stay-at-home moms.

HRISHI: Yeah, I remember that incident. And do you remember the aftermath? That there was actually a bake off? It was so ridiculous and really kind of, [cross talk] in my mind, a really shameful moment in American politics.

JOSH: [cross talk] Oy vey. I don’t remember that.

HRISHI: Oh, after that comment, it was, *Family Circle* magazine had a bake off between Hillary Clinton and Barbara Bush. It was the potential, like, First Lady Off.

JOSH: [high pitched] What??

HRISHI: As George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton were running against each other and it... [sigh] yeah... [cross talk] It was ...

JOSH: [cross talk] Wowza.

HRISHI: Yeah, just crazy.

JOSH: So presumably there’s a direct line. This is Aaron’s hat tip to that whole event.

HRISHI: Yes, it’s crazy. It goes on to this day.

JOSH: That’s a thing? It’s an ongoing thing?

HRISHI: Yeah. It’s ... I find it very frustrating.

JOSH: Yeah it’s odd.

HRISHI: Hillary Clinton’s comment was not very calculated, politically. I mean, that was, she put her foot in it, for sure.

JOSH: And then she had trouble with white women in 2016.

HRISHI: Yeah, [cross talk] you'd think like maybe this possible comment has chased her for twenty-four years.

JOSH: [cross talk] some residual damage.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean, people tried to create that impression of her as being somehow like anti-[sigh] family values.

JOSH: This is one of those examples that always makes me think "why on earth would anyone ever want to be a politician?"

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Can you imagine? I mean, public event after public event after public event. She wasn't even running for anything at the point that [cross talk] she said this.

HRISHI: [cross talk] right.

JOSH: She was just trying to support her husband. She stepped in at like just the possibility of being taken out of context, or being tired and saying something that wasn't quite what you meant, or just. And the stakes are so high and I can't...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It takes a certain person to even want to walk that particular minefield.

HRISHI: I think it's even worse to have to married to the person who's walking through that minefield...

JOSH: I'm sure.

HRISHI: ...because you're not running. You know, Caesar's wife must be beyond reproach and also stay home and make cookies.

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: As the saying goes.

JOSH: Yes. [laughs]

HRISHI: There's this one throwaway line in the episode that I love when he's telling Sam about the candidates that he's interviewed and he says about one of the women, he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET [reporting dialogue]: "You've got to be able to keep a lot of names and numbers in your head. Can you do that?" "Oh I should think so". Oh should you? Ok, well I'm going to interview a few more people and, in the meantime, you can get your ass back on the cover of the New Yorker where it belongs.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think that he's saying that she looked like Eustace Tilley, the mascot of the *New Yorker*.

JOSH: That's how I took it, yes.

HRISHI: Which is **hilarious**.

JOSH: I couldn't have told you the name. I'm impressed.

HRISHI: Oh, I looked it up, of course. I didn't have that off the top of my head.

JOSH: Nah, I'm impressed that you ever look anything up. That's what I meant.

[both laugh]

JOSH: I just wanna say I listened, or I'm almost through listening to, *What Happened*, the audiobook by Audible [Hrishi laughs] and somebody or maybe several somebodies....

HRISHI: Somes-body.

JOSH: [laughs] Somes-body mentioned, [laughs] [aside] very good, the book, *Ice Ghosts: The Epic Hunt for the Lost Franklin Expedition*, and that's by Paul Watson, and I have taken their recommendation, and I'm listening to that *Audible* book as well and enjoying it. Thanks for the book recs!

HRISHI: The tagline "See evil: *Ice Ghosts*".

JOSH: [laughing] That's right.

HRISHI: Part One was so funny. There were so many jokes. We talked about how funny it was. This episode still has some great hilarious moments in the middle of all these [cross talk] pay offs ...pays off.

JOSH: [cross talk] Indeed.

HRISHI: Like when they're talking about the gaffes of Rob Ritchie and you know Mexico as part of NATO and Josh is trying to, not defend him, but give context and Toby just says:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

TOBY: What, did they lop a chalupa at the Warsaw Pact?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs] It's sort of "casual Friday" for these two episodes and, to me, that's one of the refreshing things. It's, you know, warts and all. We're getting the less professional sides of these two super-efficient, professional people. Donna's the one who remains professional throughout.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And that's also a great pay off, I think. Their condescension towards the land they've been traveling through, and their condescension, as well, towards her.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And the pay off, you know, that scene she has where she says:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

DONNA: I'm writing letters on your behalf to the parents of the kids who were killed today. Can I have the table, please?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's just, there's this such a great lesson in perspective in this episode, and it is elegantly handled. A great performance by Janel.

HRISHI: She's the voice of reason and also [cross talk] the moral compass.

JOSH: [cross talk] and compassion.

JOSH: By the way, as I said, we spoke to Chris Misiano **before** the tragic events of Las Vegas and I watched this episode again today and that whole montage really got to me.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Just being presented with what appears to be an episode of domestic terrorism in this fictional world so soon after one in our real world, but also by this fictional president's response and, as we learned, Sam's words in his mouth and an incredibly moving sequence.

HRISHI: I was thinking about how differently a moment of domestic violence like that must have felt in 2002, even this to fictionalise it in this context. The context around it is so different than it is to have a story about mass domestic violence now has a completely different timbre because of the escalating frequency and severity in our own history. It's not like mass shootings hadn't happened, but the well of American reality, global reality, was different from when Aaron was pulling this, you know, into this story.

I was also thinking about, we haven't been doing this podcast that long, and this is the second time that we've had to record an episode in the aftermath of a horrible tragedy like this.

JOSH: Horrific.

HRISHI: I mean, in times like this, I am grateful for *The West Wing* because I can go back and listen to these words and, sort of, take some kind of comfort from them, because even though they aren't "real," the sentiment is real and I can still draw some feeling from it. You know, talking about the line of people who ran in:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

["I don't like Mondays", song by Tori Amos, plays in the background]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Three swimmers from the men's team were killed, and two others are in critical condition, when after having heard the explosion from their practice facility, they ran into the fire to help get people out. [Pause]

Ran into the fire. [Pause]

The streets of heaven are too crowded with angels tonight.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, that's what knocked me out, having President Bartlet talk about a time of heroes. And that's what we're getting now, story after story about people who run towards horrific violence and danger to save others. I was also struck, for some reason I was moved by the change in technology: in this fictional world of 15 years ago, we have a press secretary who's getting news in her ear and sharing it with the public as she's receiving it, and then, even after this, we get a scene in a bar where the guy's actually talking about how far the stock market has dropped. Yet he maybe hasn't even heard this news and now we're just in this world where, you know, an event's not even over and everybody's watching video of it [cross talk] on their screen.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right

JOSH: Everybody knows. We get almost just desensitized to the images. And it's just, you're right: it just feels like a different time, feels like a more singular event back then, rather than something that's part of our reality.

HRISHI: Yeah. There's this other strange parallel with this speech that the president gives and our reality, which is that the Prime Minister of England, Theresa May, recently gave a speech that seemed to borrow directly from this. You know, President Bartlet says in his speech:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

["I don't like Mondays", song by Tori Amos, plays in the background]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Every time we think we've measured our capacity to meet a challenge, we look up and we're reminded that that capacity may well be limitless.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Thinking about that in the context of Las Vegas, that's the kind of sentiment that I'm talking about. Those are the words that I turn to, even from a fictional source, and feel like there's some truth and resonance in that. But the Prime Minister talking about challenges facing the United Kingdom said:

[excerpt of Theresa May's keynote speech at the Conservative Party conference, Manchester, October 4th, 2017]

THERESA MAY: And it's when tested the most, that we reach deep within ourselves, and find that our capacity to rise to the challenge before us may well be limitless.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: A lot of *West Wing* fans in the UK caught that right away. Even after tweeting about it, ourselves, from our account we got, maybe, sixty more tweets saying, "have you seen this?" "have you seen this?"

JOSH: Well, this happens every episode. So let me also acknowledge the hundreds of people who pointed out that Aretha Franklin sings the song, "**Think**," in the *Blues Brothers*. And apparently, she does sing "Respect" in *Blues Brothers 2000*, a movie I'm not sure I've seen. So I was wrong on the song. I admit it. Stop telling me.

HRISHI: If it's not too much, I'd like to also point out another parallel, that I was thinking about while watching this episode, between the show and reality. When Toby's listing off more of these confusing statements by Ritchie, or just mistakes, he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

TOBY: What I care about is when he was asked if he'd continue the current U.S. policy in China and he said, "First off I'm gonna send him a message 'meet an American leader.'" I don't know what that means but everybody cheered.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Donald Trump gave a speech and he, pointing to his military commanders, he said:

[excerpt of Donald Trump speaking at a photo call with the press before a dinner at the White House with military leaders and their spouses, Thursday 5th October, 2017]

TRUMP: You guys know what this represents?

REPORTER: Tell us, sir.

TRUMP: Maybe it's the calm before the storm.

REPORTER: What storm, Mr. President?

TRUMP: You'll find out.

[end excerpt]

[both laugh]

JOSH: Now, **that's** responsible leadership. That's not unsettling at all as an electorate to hear from your president.

HRISHI: I mean, it's a president basically giving us the reality TV version of "coming up next time". [cross talk] You know, trying to keep you on the edge of your seat.

JOSH: [cross talk] Oh, presidential cliff hanger.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: No, and I can imagine people going "That's the kind of talk we need from a leader." I don't know what it means but...

HRISHI: "You'll find out." Like he's like, "oh, threatening." Who is he threatening? [sigh]

JOSH: Perhaps this is why his own Secretary of State appears to have referred to him as either a moron or a [expletive deleted] moron.

HRISHI: Yeah. Here's something that I want to make sure we talk about. At the end of that great scene with Lily Tomlin, you know, Sam asks him:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

SAM: Was she funny?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's just a great bit of Sam insight: you know, he knows what to say to the president to get him to respond and then he, and the president, goes and chases after her, asks her what the dollar is doing and he gives that great gesture to Charlie of, like, pointing to her. That scene ends and they say, Nancy, played by Renée Estevez, Martin Sheen's daughter, she comes back and she says:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

NANCY: Mr. President, the First Lady is back.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: [chuckles] Bring her on.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And we never actually see the interaction between them. But, in the original version of the show, when it aired, that scene did play.

JOSH: [high pitch] What??

HRISHI: Yeah, there is a scene...

JOSH: Have you been watching your DVDs?

HRISHI: I don't think it's on the DVDs.

JOSH: Oh.

HRISHI: It's not in the deleted scenes as far as I can tell. Somebody has uploaded it onto YouTube. And we'll put the link up too, but if you search for... the title of it, I think, on YouTube is "Medea /Jackass scene from *The West Wing*" Let me text it to you, because it is worth watching. It's only a minute and a half scene but this follows the president saying, "bring her on."

JOSH: What's the provenance of this scene? It was in the original?

HRISHI: If you look on IMDB, under alternate versions, it says "the first airing of the episode 20 Hours in America contained a scene between President Bartlet and the First Lady, in which they good naturedly tease each other, calling each other 'Medea' and 'Jackass.' This scene was not included in subsequent reruns because of commercial limitations and was also not included on the DVD."

JOSH: Huh. Well, that's interesting.

HRISHI: So we'll link to that and everybody should go watch it. Oh, here's a thing. In the scenes in the Situation Room, one figure is notably absent, which is John Amos' moustache.

JOSH: Ahhh, it is gone, isn't it?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Hmm. I wonder if you can see on IMDB what other role he played where he had to shave for. [laughs]

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Probably some forensic IMDB work to be done there.

HRISHI: Maybe it was to throw Qumar off the scent.

JOSH: [laughs] Qumar! That might be it.

HRISHI: Disguised. Oh one thing I wanted to mention about Theresa May nicking the little bit from this episode: I can't be too mad about it because Sam even says in this episode:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

SAM: Good writers borrow from other writers. Great writers steal from them outright.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ohhh. Nice catch.

HRISHI: In the episode from which she is taking lines, they are giving her permission to do so.

JOSH: Apparently, she is a great writer.

HRISHI: Exactly! Or her speechwriters are.

JOSH: That's right. By definition. By the Sorkinian definition.

HRISHI: Ok. Let's take a break. There's still a lot to say about this episode, but we're going to continue the conversation with Christopher Misiano after this.

[ad break]

JOSH: Joining us now is a friend of mine, and the director of this two part opener to the fourth season of *The West Wing*. He's the co-executive producer of *The West Wing*, producing director, guy who directed many, many episodes of the show, fabulously talented guy: it's Christopher Misiano. As I wrote to him, when I sent him an email, I said, "Would you come on and discuss "20 Hours in LA?" I've somehow become very provincial.

HRISHI: Wrong season.

JOSH: Oh, is there that?

CHRISTOPHER: [cross talk] It's exactly the same.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, that's the season one with the Bob Balaban/David Geffen episode

JOSH: So there was more of a reason for me to say that than I even realized.

HRISHI: Yes, yeah.

JOSH: Ok, I thought I pulled that out of thin air.

HRISHI: It's a funny little repeat that we get "20 Hours" both times.

CHRISTOPHER: Exactly.

HRISHI: Did you guys discuss that at all, Chris, by the way? Did you discuss the title having "20 Hours" being a repeat from that previous episode?

CHRISTOPHER: No, not at all, actually. I don't remember any discussions, and, you know, most of the time I didn't get to have much discussion about the script, and I was just thinking about that before we started to talk. It's a different world nowadays that you, kind of, get these scripts and there's seventeen thousand meetings about them, and tone meetings, and everybody's breaking it down, and so on. And that didn't happen at *The West Wing*, as I remember it. The script came out, you got it, you knew what it was and everybody went off to make it. And it was a very different thing. It was a lot of fun and very heady stuff. September 10th is the anniversary of the last day of filming of this episode.

JOSH: Hmm.

CHRISTOPHER: We were in Washington D.C., and it was the one year anniversary of September 11th the day we flew out. And, you know, one of the stories that came out of this was that we had film. And so, we filmed and, we filmed that last, you know, scene with the bus and the three of them arriving and deciding to get off the bus, and then walking at dawn over the bridge. And that was the last scene we filmed in the episode. And so we've sent the film back to L.A. and they x-rayed it and it was damaged, and it was that last crane shot that took them over the bridge and into the city. And it looked as if a light had broken and was, like, swinging across the road and flaring us out. And so there was panic, as you might imagine, I mean, because it was, it had to air somewhere, September something. So we were simultaneously trying to get it repaired somehow.

This was in the days, you know, I mean this was about fifteen years ago, exactly. So there wasn't as much digital that would have helped. So they sent it to the company, as I understood it, that had restored *Citizen Kane*. And that was happening. And, meanwhile, I was going to Griffith Park, with the idea of, maybe, using a roadway in Griffith Park and putting up lampposts in order to intercut something to try to make, you know, if this footage was not usable at all. And so, remarkably, just in time, they fixed it.

JOSH: Wow.

CHRISTOPHER: And it was usable. So I was definitely relieved.

JOSH: And it is a fantastic beautiful final image for the episode and for the whole two-parter. It looks almost like an Impressionist painting.

CHRISTOPHER: It was a spectacular night. And it was a glorious way to end. And doing that as the last shot was perfect, but the September 11th anniversary was right there. And they said they wouldn't x-ray it, but I think the fact it was September 11th made it so that they were not letting anything through.

HRISHI: Right.

CHRISTOPHER: So that was that.

HRISHI: It must be so rare on a shoot to actually have that kind of moment of finality where the last shot that you get is also the last shot of the episode.

CHRISTOPHER: It's true, although it is one of those things that occasionally you shoot for. You kinda shoot, you know, it's like actually I'm starting to direct an episode of something tomorrow...

JOSH: Got anything for me?

CHRISTOPHER: [laughs] Always pitching!

JOSH: Of course.

CHRISTOPHER: I would love nothing more, Josh.

JOSH: I kid. [beat] But let me know.

CHRISTOPHER: And we've scheduled it so that the last scene up is the last scene in the episode. So it's nice when you can do that.

HRISHI: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER: It's really good.

JOSH: I feel like we should back all the way up and get your origin story. When did you first meet Aaron? How did you come aboard? How were they fortunate enough to get Christopher Misiano on this project?

CHRISTOPHER: Well, it was **my** good fortune and what happened was, basically, I had had great luck to actually wind up working on an episode of *ER*, and I had come out of *Law and Order*, and whatever, and I was desperately trying to find, you know, more work and I was not that far into my directing career and somebody, a writer, liked something he had seen that I had done, and whatever, and I wound up getting a call from *ER*. They sent me over there, I interviewed. It went well and I wound up working with John Wells. And then after a couple of years... he used to do a thing where he would put directors on a deal, where he would sign you to do, like, six episodes of

television for that year for his company. And I wound up with one of those deals. So one year, I guess I did two episodes of *ER*, two episodes of *Third Watch*, and it was the first season of *West Wing* and I had seen that pilot, I was crazy for it, and I got two episodes of *The West Wing* and that was for that first season. And, for me, you know, when I was 18 on Long Island, I was an elected Democratic committeeman. I had been incredibly passionate about politics in my, you know, and went through the 1968 riots in Chicago, and the Convention, and stuff, up until 3 in the morning. And I always loved it. So, for me, this was, you know, a passionate topic. And so I was anxious to get there, and was very excited, and so I got those two assignments. And I didn't know Aaron, I didn't know Tommy. I just knew John.

HRISHI: Your first episode was "Mr Willis of Ohio," right?

CHRISTOPHER: That's correct. I had seen the episodes that came before and they were all these... you know, Tommy's episodes started with that incredible Steadicam, one that introduced everybody in the place. And then they did the one in the bowels of the Biltmore, where they went down through the kitchens, and into the basement, and they ran the 200 extras around from this theater down to the end of the scene. And, you know, everybody was... unbelievable things that they were doing and, for me, I was really anxious to get my script and then I got finally, I don't know if it was right away or a few days in, I got the teaser, and I went running to my office and I opened it up, and it was seven people for six pages at the card table! [Josh and Hrishu laugh] And I was like [cross talk], "Noooooo, what am I going to do? This is ..."

JOSH: [cross talk] "Where's my walk and talk?" It's a sit and talk.

CHRISTOPHER: You know, so my heart sank a little bit. So, I never otherwise would have thought to bring a crane into Leo's office but I had to do something.

JOSH: Well you already rented the thing. You gotta use it.

CHRISTOPHER: It was wild, I was just like "How am I going to make this feel like *The West Wing*?" But anyway... So that was my introduction and I guess that was a funny day 'cause you know, there's a lot of coverage in that and I had this big sheet of shots and stuff. And Richard Schiff was making fun of me that I should have been more prepared and busted my balls, you know, so [cross talk] it was a good day at the office though.

JOSH: [cross talk] Sounds about right. Yeah it felt like a good fit immediately?

CHRISTOPHER: It did. There were two things that happened that day which were funny to me because Martin is a brilliant actor but I had been told that occasionally he had directorial ideas and that sometimes they weren't always exactly right on, and so you remember, in that episode, he is doing the trivia with everybody. And Martin pulls me aside and he says, "I got a great idea." And I was like, "Ok Martin, what is that?"

JOSH: Here we go...

CHRISTOPHER: And he says, "I think that we should put a bowl of strawberries right in the middle of the table." Because one of the trivia questions was "what fruit has its seeds on the outside?" And he was like married to the idea that we should have the strawberries...

JOSH: The answer's right in front of their faces.

CHRISTOPHER: [laughs] Yeah, and I was like "You know, Martin, I think we'll... no." "Ok. Never mind, I won't do that."

JOSH: I notice through seven seasons, he never directed an episode.

CHRISTOPHER: No that's correct. I don't think he really wanted to. I think he knew better than that. And then I also knew, leaving that day, I went home a little disappointed because I knew time was an issue and it had been a long day, and I had done a bit of coverage on Richard Schiff and somebody in the middle of the last take opened the door, and then closed the door, and it distracted a little bit, and I couldn't go again, because that's a long scene. It was like every take was ten, fifteen minutes and I couldn't give him the extra take and I knew it bristled him. You know? Sometimes you're never quite sure if you lose somebody right away from one of those things, or not. But it seemed to have worked out in the end.

HRISHI: But that wasn't your fault.

CHRISTOPHER: It wasn't my fault, but I couldn't give him the other take. You know, it's like you have to make a decision "do you have it and you know you need to go on?" or "can you give the actor that extra take?" And I just knew I didn't have the extra fifteen minutes.

HRISHI: I guess it's kind of like in this episode when Sam is told, in the Oval Office, "everything is the President's fault."

CHRISTOPHER: That's correct.

HRISHI: If you're the director, if something doesn't happen, somehow it's still your fault.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, [laughs] in the end, if the play goes over and ruins the take and you have to go "ok I got it." That was, you know, you're to blame because the sun set or whatever, I mean that's the way it feels sometimes, at any rate. But that was the origin story and, the next year, I got a call to go out and produce on *ER*, to be a producing director. I only think how funny it is now, because I loved *ER*, I think it was also a terrific show, and I was thrilled, but I did say in that conversation with John Wells, "By the way, is there any way I can still do an episode or two of *The West Wing*?" And he was, "Well, we'll see. We'll see what happens. We can maybe try and make something happen." And, as it turned out, and I don't know exactly how, but I went out there to produce on *ER*, and I directed three episodes of *ER* in that season, and four episodes of *The West Wing*, because I think, somehow, they were finding people that fit in and that they felt either got the rhythm. Tommy always talked to me about "Mr. Willis" and, you know, he liked it but the one thing was there was one shot where Mr. Willis wanders off into the crowd after saying goodbye to Richard Schiff, and he just walks down the hallway, and I let it run for a little while. It was really not much of a, I mean, I didn't think about it too much, but he loved that moment. And I think, you know, it's amazing what can just touch somebody.

HRISHI: Huh. And so did you guys start to develop, you and Tommy Schlamme, start to develop a shorthand in the course of those episodes as you were directing?

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah, I think really quickly it happened that then the next year I was, in the off season, I got traded to *The West Wing* from *ER*. I heard Eli Attie refer to this moment at the beginning of the third season where, you know, Alex Graves and myself were brought on to support Tommy and we actually, Alex and I, were basically doing about six, sometimes even seven, episodes a year, and Tommy was then doing some lynchpin episodes. He would do like three of them. And I think he, kind of, navigated the editorial world and, you know, working with Aaron, trying to get things out of the room and so on. So it was a great time and the shorthand between Tommy and I, I think, sort of came quickly. And, as I say, there wasn't a whole lot of discussion about what you were gonna do. It wasn't like you had to show "oh here's the location I picked," you know, "to do this" or whatever. If you had a question, I mean I remember a little golf cart ride. And it was all the way at like "Night Five" and I was talking to Tommy about the last shot, which I wanted to be this little pull out from the room and then it drifts out the window and then it leaves Bartlet, I think, as he takes a cigarette, and it comes out of the room. But I had to put it on a techno-crane and I had to pull the camera out of the room and we had to have a window that swung closed around the lens, and then we had to digitally put in the glass that would be there, and whatever. And it was not quite as easy fifteen years ago as it is today. And so that was a big

discussion, and he was like, “Well, why do you want to do this?” And he said, “Tell me why you think it works.” And I was like “I just want to see that little man stuck in the cage at the end of that episode and I feel that that’s...” If I could have kept pulling out from the White House, you know, digitally, I would love to have set that window into the White House but it just made me feel that claustrophobia that I felt he would have at the end of that moment.

JOSH: That’s fantastic I love hearing about things like that. So when you approach a script, do you just do a slow read through and visualize everything, and take a note, and think “ok, this moment, I’m feeling this?” At what point does something like that come to you?

CHRISTOPHER: For me, I’m a slow reader to begin with, and then when I approach a script, it’s almost an endless process at the beginning because I can’t stop visualizing: “Ok, where is the behavior? Where are they in this room? How is this gonna work? What is the complication?” And I do, I see it in photographic terms. I came from being a cameraman, a camera operator, a director of photography, and stuff and I also studied acting for, you know, a time. I wasn’t very good Josh, but I studied it...

JOSH: [laughing] It hasn’t held me back. It shouldn’t have held you back.

CHRISTOPHER: [laughs] But I was once told by, the guy who gave me my first directing assignment was a guy named Ed Sherin, at *Law & Order*, and he after it was over and he had directed me, he called me into his office, he sat me down, he said “So you wanna be an actor?” he goes “you could be an actor.” I said “really?” He goes “Yeah, you could make a living as an actor.” I said “really?” He goes “yeah, not a good living.” So [laughter] but he gave me a directing assignment at that moment, and that was an incredible gift but, where were we? I do, I read through it. I kind of see it visually almost immediately, but then I go through the room and I kind of want... The one thing I was struck by watching the second episode of this thing is how simply it’s put together. It’s actually, there’s not a lot going on. And there’s not the normal *West Wing* energy of it. It was just, for me, sort of responsive to the piece. I just really, for the most part, as a director, I think, Brad Whitford once said to me, “You know what you are?”

JOSH: Booooo. [Christopher hoots with laughter] Carry on. Sorry, carry on.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh yes, I forgot [both laugh]. He once said to me “you know what you are? You’re a Shaker director.” And I took that as an interesting comment, and somewhat of a compliment: it’s like there’s not much adornment. It’s like, I’m actually just trying to stay out of the way of the script, which in *The West Wing*’s case is the best thing you could do.

HRISHI: And also all your sets are made from wicker.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah, there you go.

JOSH: In my book, you’re a mover and a shaker.

CHRISTOPHER: Awwww, you are the kindest. But you know, with Aaron, it was just such a gift that I was just in awe of the piece and the cast. I mean, the cast, as you look at it, I was like “Oh my God.” Revisiting the episode is like fun, because you see how incredible. I mean I actually marvelled a little bit at watching it at how fast those people were between doing comedy and drama.

HRISHI: Oh yeah I think we, or I am, I’m always shocked at that. And how quickly, how it doesn’t always feel like dramatic tonal shifts, either.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, it’s weird if you think about it. In this second part, there, the moment where he interviews Fiderer. That scene. And the tone of that scene, and then how proximate you are to the speech that he gives about the angels. I mean, those things are actually in screen time not very far apart, and the tone of them is so vastly different. But it works. And Martin, there were

several moments where I thought “he really made me laugh,” you know. And you know Richard Schiff: in the first episode there’s a moment, I don’t know if you guys remember where they’re going over the diesel thing, when they’re driving in the car and the guy keeps saying “diesel” and there’s like one shot of Richard at the very end where the guy says the “diesel” one more time and he just throws him a look [all laugh] and it’s great. [cross talk] Love that.

JOSH and HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: So with this episode: this is a two-parter, really it feels like a movie in a lot of ways. And, as far as I know, at this point, you had done, you know, single episodes of TV. Because of the scope of it, did it feel like a totally different kind of directing assignment?

CHRISTOPHER: Well, it did for me, not because of the two-parter of it. We went out to Pittsburgh to film and then we were finding all of those locations. The opening scene where we’re in the field with the crowd, and the buses, and, I mean, it was all real. We had 600 extras that day. We held a raffle and we had big screen TVs.

JOSH: And the losers had to be extras on *The West Wing*.

[all laugh]

CHRISTOPHER: Well, you know, in the outskirts of Pittsburgh, it was a big deal. [cross talk] And it was like...

JOSH: [cross talk] Fair enough.

CHRISTOPHER: And so we gave away prizes and things, and they got to be there. The scope of what you’re managing at that point, and the reality of, you know: you’re gonna bring the 600 people in, you’re gonna have the buses that bring the 600 people in, be a big part of the canvas of the layout of everything there. And all the banners, and the scale of it was a little larger than anything than I had certainly done at *Law & Order*.

[laughter]

JOSH: Are you walking around with a megaphone directing 600 people? How do you communicate with such a mass of people?

CHRISTOPHER: I don’t think I actually walked around with a megaphone. I think I left that to Doug Ornstein.

JOSH: AD, First AD.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, indeed, and who did a brilliant job. And I just really dealt with the actors and I think actually I feel that day I made Amy Adams’ career. [laughter]

HRISHI: Well, let’s talk about that for a second.

JOSH: Yeah you got John Gallagher Jr., and Amy Adams: two future stars.

CHRISTOPHER: Amy came to me and she said “I don’t know, but if you can get me out just a little early, I have to make a plane because I have an audition with Steven Spielberg.”

HRISHI: Oh! For *Catch Me if You Can*!

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, *Catch Me if You Can*.

HRISHI: Right.

CHRISTOPHER: So she was auditioning for *Catch Me if You Can*. So I feel a little pride.

JOSH: Absolutely.

HRISHI: Do you have any say when you're directing an episode on the casting for certain parts, guest stars, things like that?

CHRISTOPHER: Well, again, in this regard, at that time, yes. Which is a little different than now. Now, it's a more of a collaborative and you do a lot over videotape and people are recorded and you don't get to sit in a room with them. But in those days, you actually, you did. Aaron sat in the room there and he often read with people and stuff. But you were, clearly, a big participant and had a voice, and participating in that process, you know.

JOSH: And John Gallagher Jr. plays Tyler in both parts, this young, you know, teenager that's taking them through their version of *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, also would become a major Sorkin player in *Newsroom* but also starred on Broadway in *Spring Awakening* and *American Idiot*. Just a great actor.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah. And he was quirky as could be in that part and just quite funny. And it's no wonder that Aaron saw something in him and tapped him again. It's great.

HRISHI: We were just talking about Evan Rachel Wood in "Black Vera Wang," which you also directed. You know, Josh was saying that, even in those few scenes, you could tell this was [cross talk] a huge star.

JOSH: [cross talk] Star quality. Absolutely. She's got that X factor on screen.

CHRISTOPHER: It's funny, I'm forgetting. I'm blanking, to be honest.

JOSH: She played C.J.'s niece, Hogan.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh right.

JOSH: In "The Black Vera Wang."

CHRISTOPHER: Oh my God, there you go.

JOSH: You are a star maker! I'm just waiting for it to kick in for me.

[laughter]

CHRISTOPHER: You're a star already.

JOSH: Any day now!

HRISHI: You can come and direct episodes of the podcast any time.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh that would be fun. I listened the other night to the Marlee Matlin one, which was really fascinating. I loved that. I loved actually hearing them talk about the airport scene which was with the napkin and the water. Hey, that was a nice thing, Josh, with the callback to the Bartlet napkin. That was... that was...

JOSH: Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER: [laughs] Very good. I didn't think of it at the time but there you go.

JOSH: So I want to talk about a sequence in this. I'm on my first re-watch since they originally aired. I don't know, do you go back and watch the show? I know you did for our purposes today, but was that the first time in years that you had seen this episode?

CHRISTOPHER: Yes. It was the first time in years that I had seen this episode. Yeah. I don't re-watch much, although occasionally I've tried to sit my son down to see a... You know, he's 13 now, I'm hoping he's getting around to [laughs] to thinking I've done something good.

JOSH: My kids are 19 and 15, and I'm 0 for 19 and 15 years on that attempt. So I wanted to ask you, there is a sequence in this episode that made me cry as I watched it today, and completely out of the blue, unexpected, I mean, I'm like a rock. You don't expect Josh Malina to cry. [Hrishi laughs] But it's the transition, and I'm curious how you put together a sequence like this so artfully. It's a transition from C.J. at the podium: she's reconvened the press corps because there's breaking news; these two pipe bombs have gone off during a swim meet, and then there's a transition along with music, "I Don't Like Mondays," and it transitions into the Bartlet speech. It's just, the entire sequence is so beautifully done and I found it incredibly moving and it seems like a daunting task to take what you, whatever you had on paper and figure out how to bring that to life the way you did.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah, well, thank you. This is funny, when I first arrived at *West Wing*, Tommy Schlamme recounts to me that one of the things I said to him that I was nervous about was that I was transitionally impaired. [laughter] Because, at *Law & Order*, you never needed a transition because you always had those black cards that went:

[excerpt *Law and Order*]

[sound effect] boom boom

[end excerpt]

CHRISTOPHER: And it was a hard cut. And so I was like, I was still, you know, I was a little bit of a newbie director. I had fifteen episodes or whatever under my belt, you know, and I knew that this was different, and so I worked a little at trying to get better at that. But, for some reason, the "I Don't Like Mondays" was another, it was Aaron's gift. I mean he had planned that right from, because it gets mentioned in the first episode when they sit down [cross talk] at the barbeque stand for the dry rub, they talk about that song.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. Mm hmm.

CHRISTOPHER: And Donna says it, you know, talks to Josh about it. So it's a call back and it was always intended to be in there. And the rain, always, you know, as well as anybody that, for Aaron, rain is a big signature in these big emotional or dark moments in life. So that was also written into the piece. And I don't know why but somehow I did, I always kind of knew that I wanted to go from that pixilation. You know, I always was sorry I couldn't get tighter before it happened. It was a little... y'know whatever. I wanted it to be even a little bit more seamless than it is, but it worked well enough and I was pleased with the way that transition worked. And it was just sometimes it was a gift of the location that we wound up finding: that Comfort Inn that they go into, that had that skylight. And I realised that, with that sky light, that that image of the rain would carry forward, and so we put that TV in that spot, and that is one of my favorite images. Those three [cross talk] ...

JOSH: [cross talk] oh it's beautiful.

CHRISTOPHER: ...you know, going over... and moving over to that TV to take a look at it and that then platformed into the... I mean, it was beautifully photographed too, I think. You know, actually, we had a different DP, in Pittsburgh, he's a big-time director now, actually: Phil Abraham. He was a director of photography, who had done *Sopranos*, and he worked with us on the Pittsburgh part of

that, and then Thomas Del Ruth did the Biltmore Hotel for the speech. And it was just was really kind of [cross talk] magic.

JOSH: [cross talk] It's gorgeous.

CHRISTOPHER: It was pretty.

HRISHI: I had a small question about a transition: it's hard watching it on Netflix knowing sometimes when... sometimes it's very clear, "ok, this is an act break, this is where a commercial would have gone." But there's a moment in Part Two, after the confrontation between Charlie and Anthony when Anthony mouths off to C.J.

CHRISTOPHER: Right.

HRISHI: After Charlie walks off, it fades to black and then we come back out of the fade to black on another scene and I couldn't tell. For some reason, to me, that didn't seem like an act break. Do you happen to remember if that was in the middle of the act, you know that they went fade to black?

CHRISTOPHER: No, no I don't think so. I think it ends on a shot of Allison. [cross talk] And then I think it did go to commercial at that moment, if I'm remembering correctly.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. Ok. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER: Actually where I am working I'm gonna be working with Dulé, tomorrow, and so that's fun. That was a great moment for Charlie. It was fun. I got to do the panic button where Charlie first got his [cross talk] you know his game on, you know.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right, in the bar. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER: And then he becomes a tough guy here, you know, and he really pulled it off and it was surprising for that character I thought.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Charlie's whole arc across these two episodes is so fantastic.

CHRISTOPHER: I just loved every minute of working on the show and I just could not believe the gift of getting to do this. It was really just, you know, "you got to do the two parter." I was supposed to do the first episode that season and I, you know, was like walk in and you kind of go. It's like "Isaac and Ishmael," which was like I was scheduled to do the fourth episode of the season, and we were already into production and whatever, and then all of a sudden we get called into the princip-... into Aaron's office. It's like ok. Things have just changed and we are going to do something special. And I was like, "ok, here we go."

JOSH: You had to be prepared for that kind of thing on this show.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah, it was fun.

JOSH: And just for the plug, you're going to be working with Dulé on *Suits*, yes?

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, that's correct.

JOSH: Excellent. Just keep an eye on him because he likes to sneak out of scenes so he doesn't have to stay too late on a day of shooting. I don't know if you remember that. I just want to remind you. Keep an eye on him.

CHRISTOPHER: I am familiar with all- you know, he's not really the only one, Josh.

[they all laugh]

JOSH: How dare you!?

CHRISTOPHER: I remember, sometimes, I don't know, there was an evening in a bus, in the parking lot of Griffith Park when we were working with Janel that I was about to kill ya.

JOSH: [laughs] I've blocked this. I don't remember it.

CHRISTOPHER: Really?

JOSH: What was I doing?

CHRISTOPHER: You were making her laugh, you were making her crazy, and it was a big scene for her. I don't know and it was just... it was like I was going to wring your neck.

JOSH: It's too little, too late, but I apologize. I'm sorry.

CHRISTOPHER: [laughs] There was one thing on Air Force One too with [cross talk] with Mary McCormack.

JOSH: [cross talk] That I remember. Oh.

CHRISTOPHER: [cross talk] you remember this thing?

JOSH: Oh no, I'm thinking of something else. I don't know if you were directing, but there was an Air Force One day where I put Vaseline on C.J.'s phone that she had to answer and...

CHRISTOPHER: I think this was the day.

JOSH: Oh yeah. It was not good. It was a bad thing. It shut down production for a while. [all laugh] I got in trouble that day. I crossed the line.

CHRISTOPHER: [laughing] Oh my God.

HRISHI: I had a question about one scene when our waylaid characters are trying to get back and they're on the train. When Toby and Josh and Donna are on the train part of their journey. I was wondering, how did you do that? Because it doesn't look like projection, it looks very real and I was trying to figure out, it can't be on a train, right? I mean, what did you do for that?

CHRISTOPHER: We were on a train.

[all laugh]

JOSH: I have the same question. How is there continuity then? You're looking at Donna and you're looking at Josh and they seem to be roughly in the same geographical area but...

CHRISTOPHER: We filmed it for real, so I mean we basically got on the train and we kept going. And you know, I forget if we figured out if there was a loop to that train. I think not. I think we just backed up. It was an old train. It was some kind of defunct, you know, line or whatever. But that was a beautiful train. I loved the inside of that train and I really liked that scene too. I mean, it's a ... especially in current contexts with Trump, you know. I felt like, if you listen to what Toby is railing against, a talking hairdo from Florida, you know, the kind of things that he has on those little pieces of paper, they really seem like tweets, you know, almost. Way too familiar.

JOSH: Yeah, no, this is what we on the podcast call Trump-ai-yi-yi moments. There's so much, there are plenty of them in *The West Wing*. I had the same thing too. I guess Toby is talking at one point about just the meaningless [expletive deleted] that Ritchie sometimes says, and even though it's meaningless, his supporters cheer. So it doesn't matter that it's meaningless.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah. He says something like:

HRISHI: "I'm gonna send him a message: 'meet an American leader'"

CHRISTOPHER: "Meet an American leader." And it's like, I don't even know what that means! And it's true and it's exactly the same thing. It's crazy. And if you actually dissect that last speech that Toby has as they get out of the bus and go over the bridge, it's just, you know, if you have a leader with gravitas. [sigh] You know, and who really cares about people, and you know, I mean, this is like...anyway, it's just an ai-yi-yi moment.

HRISHI: Exactly. So, you shot that on a train? The reason I thought it couldn't be a train was, not only the continuity aspect, but also knowing how often takes run long. I mean you guys have to balance a lot of things and just shooting something with this much dialogue might take a lot of time. I was thinking about the lighting: how do you get the natural light from outside, and how do you make sure that stayed consistent as the day wore on?

JOSH: They've got lights out there, on the train. Right? Attached to the train?

CHRISTOPHER: No, we, in this case, I mean, in a lot of cases, we've done it on subways and we did it in *ER*. We used to ride on the 'L' train and it's on a loop in the middle of Chicago. And you just, you get a train, and you get on it, and you ride it. And you know in this case it was, you know, I mean, there will be light changes and a lot of times, the Director of Photography can do a little F stop change as you're going, it gets a little darker, it gets a little lighter in the room so you're balancing the light occasionally and so on, but, y'know, it's not awful if you're not in and out of tunnels and that kind of thing and so you just have to pick your path. I mean the hardest part of the train was trying to get the comic timing [cross talk] on the...

JOSH: [cross talk] That's the.. Yeah, I was going to ask about that. It's a great moment when Tyler says, "Oh you're going to be fine as soon as you're 98 miles" and points the wrong way. So you had to get the train to start on time.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah, you had to get the train to start on time, which was not easy. It's a big train and that was the hardest part of the train, I think. I was kinda- it moved a little slower than you had wanted it to, but it was the best we could do.

JOSH: I had that thought for a moment too, like "Why don't they jump off?" But then I was like, "it's Josh and Toby, they're not going to jump off of a train moving at any speed."

CHRISTOPHER: The only excuse I had for them not jumping off was the fact that Donna was already on the train.

JOSH: Ah ok, there you go.

CHRISTOPHER: There you go. So I was like the boys won't leave her alone. [laughs]

JOSH: Although they probably would have, Josh and Toby.

CHRISTOPHER: Probably, probably would have.

JOSH: It's a really funny moment.

CHRISTOPHER: How good is Janel? I just like "Oh. My God."

JOSH: Great episode for her.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah, she delivers.

CHRISTOPHER: Even in that train sequence, there's a little moment where she just moves herself away from them. I don't know if she remembers, she just kind of organized, it's like they're going, they start to go at it, and she just, like, she's had enough already.

JOSH: Right, without telegraphing it.

CHRISTOPHER: She platforms it just a little bit with that kinda. And it was very subtle but it was just beautiful. Those are the moments, you know, and it's the one thing I thought about this script, in particular, and when I thought about, "wow, could this show be on now?" It wasn't really, there wasn't a lot plot in this, you know? There was a lot of character beats. There was a lot of slow moments. It didn't have, like, a driving force behind it, and yet it still was interest... I mean the fact they sit in that Jeep, Josh, and they have a debate about the friction between Brighton Beach Jews and Connecticut Jews.

JOSH: [cross talk] Love that.

CHRISTOPHER: [cross talk] Where else are you going to find that?

JOSH: Right. And the truth is moments like that, and episodes like these two, maybe wouldn't have worked in the first season, but we've travelled with this band of people, and we've come a certain way, that you now have the space and the area you can give to these kinds of moments and these kinds of episodes, that they've been earned. And it's nice, to me, watching them to feel a little bit more character stuff happening, and character stuff happening outside of the normal workplace.

CHRISTOPHER: Absolutely, I agree totally. I mean, you had to earn your way there with other things. But, once we got there, it was just, like, lovely to have that time.

HRISHI: I had a question about Sam in this episode

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah.

HRISHI: And I guess more largely about Rob Lowe and the direction of the show. In this episode, Sam says, when he's talking to Mallory at the end, he says that he needs to get back in there. He talks about how.... I love the exchange where he says, "I never realized that Josh was smarter than me."

CHRISTOPHER: Right.

HRISHI: And then talking about, he's like, "That's where the action is; I need to get back in there." And this is a spoiler for anybody who doesn't know what happens with the show but, I think at this point, everybody does: Rob Lowe is going to leave and, to me, this felt like [cross talk] since I know what's coming.

JOSH: [cross talk] Thank God.

[all laugh]

HRISHI: I felt like that little bit of dialogue was setting up what was eventually gonna to be Rob Lowe's departure from the show. And I was wondering if that was explicitly the case, if you knew

that? Could you give us a little bit of information about that moment and whether or not that was... if you guys were in fact setting the table for what was gonna happen?

CHRISTOPHER: You know, look, I, those things actually, it's funny to say but, even though I was an executive producer on the show, that would happen above my pay grade, in some sense, and so that would be purely an Aaron, and a Tommy, and the network, and there would be a whole host of things that would, people that would be involved, but it wouldn't come even as far down the chain as me and Alex, or whatever, you know. I don't think it was. I don't think it was that at all. I think that it was without consideration that Rob was thinking of leaving or anything. At that point, I didn't really feel any of that. And, I don't even remember exactly when he left. Do you guys remember?

HRISHI: It's, you know, about ten episodes...

CHRISTOPHER: [cross talk] ten episodes?

HRISHI: [cross talk] ... fewer than ten episodes later.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh, I think that that probably happened pretty quickly in its, how it developed and how he decided to leave. So, I don't think it was, and there was any planning, I think it's just that was what was in the script and it didn't have any implications.

HRISHI: Oh I see, ok, so maybe no decision like that had even been made yet by the time you were making this.

CHRISTOPHER: That's correct. I don't think that that was... they were near making that decision, or he was near making that decision, at that point. That's at least my belief. But he was loved. I mean, he and Allison Smith in that little scene in there when she comes at the end and is that green dress and you know they have that nice little moment there, that's a nice little scene that you referred to.

HRISHI: Yeah that was wonderful and I felt a bit like, "Whatever happened with Mallory?" I mean, we know she was dating the hockey player but it's great to get them back.

JOSH: I like Rob's reaction very much when she tells him that they've split up. [cross talk] It's terrible. I like ... I find that very well.

CHRISTOPHER: [cross talk] Oh I'm [laughs]

CHRISTOPHER: I love that line Aaron wrote:

[West Wing Episode 4.02 excerpt]

MALLORY: Richard got traded to the Blackhawks.

SAM: For a Zamboni battery?

[end excerpt]

[all laugh]

CHRISTOPHER: It's really good.

JOSH: It's a great line.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah, it's terrific. There was so many little comic moments that things are so funny. I think the episode is so, you know, that speech that Bartlet gives, and I know that those

lines have been used elsewhere occasionally, and whatever, but that speech that Bartlet gives is the lynchpin for the episode, it kind of gets you know most of the thing. But it was like the little moments that got me this time watching it. There are all these little comic things like Martin's... there's a moment where Dulé says, "Fiderer is here" and he's at the coffee thing and he just goes, "really?" and...

[all laugh]

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly!

CHRISTOPHER: And he does that so great and then when she stands up at the end of that piece and goes "well let's do this again."

JOSH: Right? "Every now and then."

CHRISTOPHER: It's just, you know, there's nobody better at doing that stuff. It's just great.

HRISHI: Did you ever get starstruck by any of the guests that would come in? I mean, at some point, I'm sure you got used to having people like Martin Sheen and Allison Janney around, but when Lily Tomlin shows up for the first time... did you ever have moments on *West Wing*, or any of your shows, where you fanboy out a little?

CHRISTOPHER: To be completely honest, I think one of the big things on *The West Wing* was that almost everybody, no matter who they were, when they came into that place, they were intimidated by **it**. It was an amazing group of actors, who had created an amazing world, and Aaron's words were so precise, and so regarded, and so treasured, that they knew all of that coming in, and so you could see that even enormously experienced actors, who passed through there, just a little off at the beginning. Just very cautious and a little tentative.

HRISHI: Similar to our podcast, very daunting.

JOSH: Yeah, you always seemed very comfortable working with me, Chris.

[all laugh]

HRISHI: Thank you for overcoming any nerves you might have had, you know, to get on the microphone.

CHRISTOPHER: I'm sorry, Josh: did we actually work together?

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: Oh, I'm sorry. I remember. Yeah, I remember fondly. [Christopher laughs] You bastard.

CHRISTOPHER: I just know that we made some mistakes in the poker and I apologize for it. [Josh laughs] I didn't get everything right. I tried. I really did.

JOSH: You did very well.

[all laugh]

CHRISTOPHER: I'm still trying to... [cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] Thank you so much for... [laughs]

CHRISTOPHER: I'm still trying to figure out how to, you know, correct the police officers in "Celestial Navigation" for you but I don't know what to do.

[all laugh]

HRISHI: Ohhhh, snap.

JOSH: Oh dear.

CHRISTOPHER: Anyway.

JOSH: Thank you for finally joining us. We've wanted to for a long time, to have you.

CHRISTOPHER: Well, you know I was sitting at home, wondering if I had somehow offended you. Because I was, like, wow, all these... everybody's going on. I can't believe I directed 35 of these things, I can't believe that...

JOSH: It's because I keep asking you through Facebook and you don't check your Facebook messages.

CHRISTOPHER: I know, yeah, it was like, "who's sending me something on Facebook??"

JOSH: I didn't have your email. Well this was a fantastic interview. Will you join us again in the future?

CHRISTOPHER: I would love to. Can I tell you one more story?

JOSH: Please, are you kidding?

HRISHI: Yeah!

CHRISTOPHER: About this one, "20 Hours," when it premiered, Aaron had an enormous preview party, a premiere party, that year in his backyard of this house that he had. And I was directing that day. And Tommy Schlamme, God bless him, came to me. I was on my last scene or whatever, but it was somewhere around eight o'clock, and he said, "You should go to the party." And I said, "But I" and he said, "I'll finish the scene. You go to the party." And you know and I was, kind of, new to Hollywood, I was only in the area for a couple of years and I was kinda like, "Wowee, this is so..." I went and I called my wife and said, "We're gonna go to this party" and she was like, "Oh my God" and whatever, and so we ran home and drove over to this thing and it turned out to be in Aaron's backyard. And there were huge screens up all over and a bar, and things, and food, and it was crazy. It was so, such a Hollywood scene and I was "Oh my God" and I guess I got there...like, you know, we were in the middle of the second episode already. So I was hiding behind posts and you know, like, scared. I didn't really want to see anybody. I didn't know what the reaction would be.

JOSH: Sure.

CHRISTOPHER: I was like, you know, a little tentative, and a little "Oh boy... I'm not sure this is... I'm not comfortable" and so at the end. The show ends and there's a big round of applause and everybody's like, you know, whatever and I'm peeking round and Aaron finally spots me and he goes "come here, come here, come here" and it's like you know 'cause, you know, I didn't have all that much contact with Aaron on a daily basis I came over and you know he said "I want to introduce you to somebody" and he goes and he gets Warren Beatty and [all laugh]

JOSH: I just have to have him.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh my God! I was like, and he brings Warren Beatty back to me and he says, "This is Christopher Misiano. He directed the episode." And then Warren is like going, "Oh my God how long did you have to edit that? How long... I can't believe you could do things this quickly. And oh my God, it's so great, how do you make all those choices that fast?" and whatever. At which

point, my wife, Hillary, comes over and Annette Bening is standing like, y'know, five feet away or whatever but my wife Hillary, who is six feet tall and quite lovely, makes her way over and I say, "Oh by the way, Warren, this is my wife, Hillary," and Warren leans into me and he shakes my hand while looking at my wife and says to me, "Wow, you don't make any mistakes, do you?"

[all laugh]

JOSH: Oh, that's a good story.

CHRISTOPHER: And so he flirted with my wife right through me, while he was holding my hand.

JOSH: That's a pro.

HRISHI: Did you say that's a pro or that's a bro?

JOSH: Eh, both.

CHRISTOPHER: Either one I guess. Oh my God. Anyway, well there you go.

JOSH: That's a great story. Thank you so much. Well, Chris, you're a wonderful guy, you're a fantastic director. We've been enjoying your work for the entire podcast. I'm delighted that we finally got to talk to you, and these two episodes I think, in particular, are exquisite.

CHRISTOPHER: Thank you so much. It was great to talk to you and I look forward to doing it again and to working together again.

HRISHI: And does it for this episode. Thanks so much for joining us. We'll be back next week to talk about "College Kids," episode three.

JOSH: In the meantime, check out Hrishi's other podcast, the award-winning one, Song Exploder. And you can catch me, once again, on Thursday nights on ABC at 9/8 Central, on *Scandal*.

HRISHI: The thing I always find confusing about *Scandal* is I never know what your position is in the government.

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah, I know.

[Excerpts from *Scandal*]

DAVID ROSEN: How is the Attorney General of the United States supposed to do his job when he's in some weird dirty sex trance?

[segue]

WOMAN: Well this idiot is...

ROSEN: Is the Attorney General of the United States...

[segue]

ROSEN: As the Attorney General of the United States...

[segue]

ROSEN: What does that say?

WOMAN: David Rosen.

ROSEN: *It doesn't say Attorney General.*

WOMAN: *Nope.*

[end excerpts]

[both laugh]

HRISHI: It's the reason why you love those cold opens where everybody says what their title is.

JOSH: Yeah, that must be why, you're right. 'Cause I do one of those every episode. It's clear at this point that Shonda Rhimes is, essentially, just pranking me [cross talk] by having me say ...

HRISHI: [cross talk] [laughs] Exactly, she has to be.

JOSH: At table reads, I try to get everyone to say it in unison. They'll say... [cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] That's great.

JOSH: "...don't you know I'm the..." And everyone just says, "Attorney General of the United States." Let's get back to your podcast though. A couple of days ago, I listened to Sara Watkins and the Dropkick Murphys episodes.

HRISHI: Oh, going back in the catalogue?

JOSH: Yeah, I go all over and just pick ones, randomly, that strike me. It's such a great podcast.

HRISHI: Aw thanks.

JOSH: [chuckles] I just really am a genuinely huge fan of it. Sometimes seeing how the sausage is made ruins something, but in Song Exploder it always enhances my appreciation of the song and the artist. Always.

HRISHI: Thank you. And I feel better about the runner up for the name of the show, which was, originally, "Sausage Exploder."

JOSH: [laughs] That's a whole other podcast.

HRISHI: Song Exploder, like The West Wing Weekly, is part of Radiotopia, a curated collection of extraordinary, cutting edge podcasts, made possible by the Knight Foundation and by listeners like you.

JOSH: You can check it all out at radiotopia.fm. This podcast was brought to you with the help of Zach McNees and the recently married, Huzzah!, Margaret Miller.

HRISHI: Congratulations.

JOSH: Woo! You can buy a pin, or a challenge coin, by clicking on the merch button on our website, thewestwingweekly.com.

HRISHI: And we hope that you do.

JOSH: Yeah we do.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

CHRISTOPHER: What's next?

[Outro Music]