

Denis O'Hare and the Danger of Dinner Parties: Show Transcript

Lauren Ober: A couple years ago, Alice Wong received an invitation from the White House.

Alice Wong: In 2015, the White House hosted a reception in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Americans With Disabilities Act.

Lauren Ober: Yep, Wong uses a machine to help her breathe. But more on that in a bit.

Anyway, she was invited to the White House to help celebrate the anniversary of a landmark piece of legislation signed into law by President George H.W. Bush that prohibited discrimination based on disability.

When Wong got the invitation though, she kind of ignored it.

Alice Wong: I didn't reply because, you know, I don't fly because of my disability. And you know, there was no way I was going to go there.

Lauren Ober: But the Obama White House wasn't going to take no for an answer.

Alice Wong: They're like, oh wait. Actually we have this thing lined up for you. There's a telepresence robot.

Lauren Ober: A telepresence robot. So picture this — Wong was at home in San Francisco sitting in front of her computer. And using her computer's video camera, she beamed her face onto a device in the White House that looked like a large iPad on wheels. Which Wong could control from her keyboard.

She became the first person ever to visit the White House or meet the president by robotic presence. And she wants that experience memorialized on her epitaph.

Alice Wong: I was able to meet President Obama, which will be something that will be marked on my gravestone — met President Obama in 2015.

Lauren Ober: And all this happened because Wong is a tireless advocate for people with disabilities. And because of technology.

Alice Wong: Technology has a way now of really leveling the playing field for a lot of people with disabilities. So it's a really amazing time.

Lauren Ober: I'm Lauren Ober and this is The Big Listen from WAMU and NPR. Each week on The Big Listen, we invite you to eavesdrop on some of the great conversations happening in the wide world of audio today. And maybe, just maybe, we help you find some new things to listen to.

Alice Wong was born with a neuromuscular disability that affects the way her muscles work. And as we noted before, she also uses a machine to help her breathe.

Alice Wong: So I'm wearing a mask that's over my nose and it's connected to a tube and it gives me breaths of air. So just gives me additional support to help me breath and talk and save my energy.

Lauren Ober: And Wong needs to save her energy because she's a busy person these days. She's the founder of the Disability Visibility Project. It's an online community dedicated to recording and sharing

disability stories. Recently, the project partnered with StoryCorps to preserve oral histories of the disability community.

Clip from StoryCorps:

Cheryl Green: The only disability is a bad attitude. I love Stella Young's response, "No amount of smiling at a flight of stairs ever turned it into a ramp."

Lauren Ober: To date, the project has collected more than 140 oral histories of people with disabilities. Maybe you've heard some of them on your favorite public radio station.

Anyway, to further the project's mission of amplifying disability stories, Wong recently began the Disability Visibility podcast. They've tackled issues like violence on people with disabilities, Medicaid and healthcare reform and assistive technology.

Clip from Disability Visibility:

Alice Wong: So, Lateef, tell me a little bit about the types of assistive technology that you use and that you can't live without.

Lateef McLeod: The assistive technologies that I cannot live without are my power wheelchair, because that is how I get around, and the the Proloquo2go and Proloquo2Text apps on my iPad and my iPhone because that is how I communicate.

Alice Wong: Yep, I'm in a power chair too.

Lauren Ober: We'll chat more with Wong in a bit about why it's necessary for people with disabilities to control the disability narrative. But now we're going to hear from another woman working to flip the media script for a marginalized group.

Journalist Liz Plank came to prominence during the most recent American presidential campaign with a video series called 2016ish. The Vox series tried to explain just what the heck was happening during the campaign, but from a decidedly feminist and millennial perspective. For example, Trump's comment about grabbing women in their you-know-where.

Liz Plank: Dear GOP dudes who are suddenly realizing that Donald Trump is a flaming misogynist, after more than a year of women telling you he's, in fact, a flaming misogynist — thank you for joining us, welcome to the club, or as women call it, our daily lives.

Lauren Ober: Well, the election has come and gone, Donald Trump is president and Plank is back with a new video series and companion podcast, both called *Divided States of Women*. The podcast she co-hosts with Hitha Herzog. Both series examine the lives of women in 2017.

Liz Plank: It's almost impossible to be a female in America and avoid body negativity seeping into your psyche. Of course, some of us experience it more than others. But if you're a woman, your body is fair game for scrutiny in a way that men's are not.

Lauren Ober: Liz Plank, co-host of *Divided States of Women*, welcome to The Big Listen.

Liz Plank: Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Lauren Ober: So by my estimation I would say that you are a professional feminist.

Liz Plank: (Laugh)

Lauren Ober: Would you agree with that assessment?

Liz Plank: I mean I try. You know people ask me all the time, “When did you become a feminist?” And I want to ask them, “When did you decide you weren’t a feminist?” because that’s how it should work. You should have to explain why you’re not for gender equality and not why you fight for it.

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: But I would say that I was a feminist in utero because my mom was a hard-core feminist and she never let me be anything else but that.

Lauren Ober: You know there’s this shift now where women are, younger women are owning their feminisms. And men are claiming it as well. What do you think it means to be a young feminist in 2017?

Liz Plank: It means to be whoever you know, whatever the frick you want. And feminism, its popularity has always shifted over time, right? So remember when Time Magazine said that feminism was dead because Ally McBeal wore skirts or something?

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: And then you know three or four years ago Time Magazine also decided that feminism had to be banned as a word because it was so overused and so popular that we’re sick of hearing it. We don’t need it anymore which is equally...

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: Disturbing! And so feminism goes through waves and now we’re going through this interesting wave where it is extremely I think popular and it’s accepted and you know how I know that?

Lauren Ober: How?

Liz Plank: Because I went to....

Lauren Ober: Tell me.

Liz Plank: ...a young women conservative conference...

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: ...in Dallas and almost every single woman I spoke to identified as a feminist.

Lauren Ober: Oh interesting.

Liz Plank: Some of them wholeheartedly.

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: Others sort of say, “Well, I’m a second-wave feminist or I’m a first-wave feminist.”

Lauren Ober: Right to qualify it.

Liz Plank: They had to qualify it and say this is what feminism means to me.

Clip from Divided States of Women:

Conservative: This whole third wave stuff that's going on I really don't identify with that.

Liz Plank: What don't you like about the third wave? Like it's just I've heard that a lot just today, like the third wave seems like it's turning a lot of people off. What words come to mind when I say third wave feminism?

Conservative: Something that I deal with a lot; I'm from Columbus which is super LGBT-friendly. I don't personally agree with like just walking around naked and like. I know it's like anti-objectifying but walking around like that and like (sighs) I don't know. That's just not my thing and it makes other people uncomfortable. And I have; my little brother is trans so I love the LGBT community and it's not...I'm not a homophobe or a xenophobe or any of that. But it just. There are things like we can't push our beliefs on you so...

Lauren Ober: Everyone's working definition of their own brand of feminism is going to be different. So then how do you bridge that if we're talking about "women's issues" then how do you square partisanship within that?

Liz Plank: Right. Feminism has, whether it's conservative women, whether it's progressive women, one of the things that it consistently has done over the course of history is often leave people out. I don't think that we should blame feminism necessarily for doing that. Feminism by definition is looking at all forms of oppression and how they impact women for all women and how those oppressions intersect. And so if we want to talk about first wave or second wave feminism which many of these conservative women identified with, first wave and second wave feminism left out a lot of people. And you know intersectional feminism or the wave of intersectionality that came after that is much more inclusive and sort of an upgrade of feminism. And actually a lot of people would look back at what feminism was for first wave and second wave and say that wasn't really feminism.

Lauren Ober: Right. One of your podcast episodes you talk about guns and particularly how the NRA approaches female gun ownership but also how it could be a feminist issue.

Clip from Divided States of Women: *"Manny is modeling the Belladonna by Camelia Banks, a beautiful functional everyday bag with many organizing pockets. The concealed carry pocket is padded to reduce gun visibility and enclosed with a three-sided heavy duty zipper for top, left or right-hand access. Made of vegan leather and sold with a..."*

Lauren Ober: You are sort of delving into all the crossroads I feel like with your podcasts.

Liz Plank: Yeah and it's really fun because my co-host Hitha Herzog you know, we are really good friends and. And she obviously is conservative and I'm not. I'm Canadian, at least that's how I label myself, which basically means communist, really. Let's be honest.

Lauren Ober: (laugh)

Liz Plank: So we have really interesting conversations where sometimes we do agree and sometimes I'll take a more conservative viewpoint and she'll take a more progressive viewpoint on something. Our

next episode we feature a conversation with Esther Perel about you know cheating and this new glass ceiling that women have finally broken through which is the cheating gap. Aha.

Lauren Ober: (laugh)

Liz Plank: So many different reactions to that. It's been so interesting to ask women. So many women react.

Lauren Ober: Just smash right through it.

Liz Plank: Yeah great, whatever, finally. So empowering!

Lauren Ober: I'm cheating on everybody now. Cheating on my bosses. Cheating on my dog.

Liz Plank: Like us acting more like men is not actually equality, in terms of doing their bad behavior. Or mirroring it. So we you know had a really interesting conversation. She's married and I know that she's very traditional in her approach to marriage. She agreed with Mike Pence's rule about, you know, her husband not meeting up with women if there's.

Lauren Ober: (laugh)

Liz Plank: Which I find, you know, ridiculous! And I told her if I cheated I feel like I could never tell you. And she said, "You know what? I cheated on my last relationship." And we sort of had this exchange of you know so it's really, really fun.

Lauren Ober: (laugh)

Liz Plank: It's a lot of. Of genuine surprises about sort of you know the multi-faceted perspectives and experiences that women have.

Lauren Ober: I feel like I would be remiss if we didn't talk about sexual harassment in the workplace.

Liz Plank: Yeah. Really is that coming up?

Lauren Ober: It's interesting that all of this is coming out in this like firehose blast it seems. Obviously, workplace harassment is not new. Women have been experiencing this for as long as they have been in a workplace but now you know these very high profile cases. And I wonder what you think all of that can be attributed to? Because again, like we said, this is not the first time that men have been accused. I mean people are listening, I guess.

Liz Plank: Right. Yeah. I mean what was really interesting was you know obviously the me too hashtag with millions of women using it to talk about their trauma and talk about traumatic experience that they've had was incredibly powerful. But I also to be completely honest with you, it was powerful but it also felt like we've been. We've done this before.

Lauren Ober: Yeah.

Liz Plank: Women are talking about this all of the time.

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: And a year ago almost exactly women were talking about this because the current president of the United States of America was accused of very similar you know crimes by multiple women.

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: And the kinds of stereotypes and victim-blaming that are put out into the ether on cable news, on mainstream media you know Lou Dobbs shared the private information of one of the women who accused Donald Trump, which is, you know, that's *why* women don't report!

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: And so, even then. Back then, the biggest thing that Donald Trump was saying, and the biggest thing that all of his surrogates were saying on television was, "If this happened, why didn't the women talk about it at the time?"

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: That's why! 'Cause Lou Dobbs is going to tweet out to millions of people your private information!

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: That's why women don't report. And so again, after the me too hashtag which was brave and powerful and I was so proud of all of the women who came forward with these really traumatic experiences, I wanted a paradigm shift. I was, you know, okay we know that women go through all of these experiences.

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: We know these women are incredibly unsafe in the world. Where's the conversation with men?

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: What are the men doing?

Lauren Ober: Right.

Liz Plank: And. And reading our stories is unfortunately not enough. Most sexual violence if you combine both genders because there are male victims, still 78% of sexual violence is perpetrated by men in this country.

Lauren Ober: Sure. Liz Plan, co-host of *Divided States of Women* from Vox Media. Thanks for hanging out with us. It's been a pleasure.

Liz Plank: Thank you so much. Thank you it was great talking with you.

(music)

Lauren Ober: Liz Plank is the host of *Divided States of Women* from Vox. To find out more about the show, check out biglisten.org.

Remember our pal Alice Wong from the top of the show? She's the person behind the Disability Visibility Project, which showcases disability politics, culture and media. And not long ago, Wong started a podcast delving into issues affecting the disability community.

She says she was trying to fill the void she saw.

Alice Wong: The reason why I do what I do is because I grew up with very few images of myself, very few stories that really resonated with me as a disabled person. In most mainstream media, most of the reporters and editors are not disabled. So they're going to be covering the story, or interviewing a person with a disability in a different way.

Lauren Ober: Not only did Wong rarely see images of herself in mainstream media, but she also never heard anyone who sounded like her. Especially on the radio.

Alice Wong: You know, radio I think has certain ideas about what's good radio. And I think that's where in a lot of ways a lot of voices, and different voices. You know there are people who are nonverbal who do communicate. And sometimes we leave them out of radio.

Lauren Ober: Wong's show, Disability Visibility, obviously features voices from people with audible disabilities. But she wants to hear more of that on the air. So she wrote an essay about it titled "Diversifying Radio With Disabled Voices."

Here she is reading from that.

Alice Wong: On radio, I want to hear people who lisp; stutter; gurgle; stammer; wheeze; repeat themselves; pause when needing to breathe; make noises when they talk; salivate and drool; communicate, enunciate, and pronounce differently; use different speech patterns and rhythms; use ventilators or other assistive technology; use sign language interpreters or other people that facilitate speech; use computer-generated speech. I want to disrupt what's thought of as the default public radio voice. I want to challenge listeners as they ride the subway, jog on their treadmills, drive on their commute, even if the sounds and words we create might require greater concentration and attention. I believe our stories are worth the effort.

Lauren Ober: Alice Wong, blowing up public radio voice one sentence at a time. We're going to take a little break right now. But when we come back, we'll talk with Tony Award-winning actor Denis O'Hare on how to extricate yourself from a bad dinner party situation.

Denis O'Hare: Do you have kids?

Lauren Ober: No, no.

Denis O'Hare: See, get yourself a kid. I have a six-year-old and it's brilliant. You just kind of go, oh my god, I have to check in.

Lauren Ober: But first, science journalist and numbers enthusiast Joel Werner on how average stories featuring math tend to go.

Joel Werner: The crazy mathematician who's you know on the borderline of sanity who's coming up with these magical ideas. And you know, that's not really true. And it's not how numbers work.

Lauren Ober: That's coming up in just a sec. Stick with us. This is NPR.

NPR Sponsorship Message

(Music)

Phil: Hi Lauren! The podcast I really like listening to is the Dork Forest Radio Show by Jackie Kashian. She's a standup comic based in L.A.

"Welcome to the Dork Forest! Jackie and her pals will never bore us. Shameless confessions about our obsessions. Will make us laugh and sigh." (jingle)

Phil: Her podcast is about everything from interviewing Frank Zappa's kids.

Jackie Kashian: What about you? What do you love?

Moon Zappa: Well I'm so worried that I don't qualify for dorkdum because I...

Jackie Kashian: You aren't alone.

Moon Zappa: I love something and then I, I move on. I have a lot of things that I love like I'll go through a phase of say betting.

Phil: To talking about video games. And my name is Phil in Minneapolis. And that's that. Thank you.

Lauren Ober: Hey, pals. Welcome back to The Big Listen. I'm Lauren Ober and if you have dork tendencies like our pal Phil from Minneapolis, tell us about them. Call up the Pod Line and recommend your favorite show. The number is 202-885-POD1. And that's that! Just like Phil said.

I am a person who tries to have as few dealings with numbers as humanly possible. I was trash at math in school. I'm pretty sure I cheated on a multiplication test in third grade. Sorry Miss Barone.

So I try to stay away from figures to the extent that I can. Not Joel Werner. He's a former research scientist turned journalist so he's comfortable with numbers. And at some point, he realized there was a dearth of stories about math and statistics. So he made a show to help correct that.

Clip from Sum Of All Parts:

Joel Werner: This story starts with a number. Well, actually a string of numbers. Six, 23, 89, 15, 26, 53.

Justin Zobel: From the point of view of history, the main transition was June 23, 1989.

Joel Werner: At 3:26 in the afternoon and 53 seconds, you see, that string of numbers, it's a date and time string and it represents the exact moment in time that Australia first connected to the Internet.

Lauren Ober: Joel Werner, host of Sum of All Parts, welcome to the Big Listen!

Joel Werner: Thanks so much for having me.

Lauren Ober: Okay so Joel I feel like I don't need to tell you this but one of the first rules of radio is don't put numbers on the air!

Joel Werner: (laugh)

Lauren Ober: Because it's really hard to understand numbers with our ears, right? So...did nobody tell you that?

Joel Werner: I like setting myself challenges. What can I say you know?

Lauren Ober: Right.

Joel Werner: No I understand that often people have bad high school experiences or they're just like, you know, math is a four-letter-word kind of thing. But there are wonderful stories from this world that are being ignored because of that fear and because they don't put numbers on the radio thing and all of that. And I kind of, yeah seize the moment to try to tell some of those stories.

Lauren Ober: That's interesting that you say it's really like our collective trauma around high school and middle school math that makes it so that we don't put, or that we don't report stories about numbers.

Joel Werner: Yeah or if we do, it's the *Beautiful Mind* kind of you know, it's the crazy mathematician...

Lauren Ober: Right.

Joel Werner: Who's like on the borderline of sanity who's coming up with these magical ideas. And it's like you know that's not really true and it's not how numbers work. And whether you like it or not, math and numbers are woven into the fabric of everything you do every day.

Lauren Ober: When you mentioned crazy mathematician I thought, well that is actually how I think of anyone who goes into math is like naturally they have like wild hair, and they're just scribbling in the very, very late hours just like formula after formula after formula. Why do you think we have, and I say we, but maybe it's just me, but have this idea of math being something that's on the fringes?

Joel Werner: You know I think sometimes that that idea, that sort of caricature of the crazy mathematician is kind of true. One of the stories I tell this season is about a musician Robert Schneider from the American band Apples in Stereo. And he kind of gave up music to go and follow a career in number theory. And he got obsessed.

Clip from Sum Of All Parts:

(music)

Robert Schneider: And Ohm's Law is the fundamental law of electronics.

Joel Werner: Basically it's an equation that describes in numbers how electricity flows.

Robert Schneider: And it's so simple! Just three things in it with an equal sign. And when I saw this law on the page it completely blew my mind because I realized in that moment that everything that I thought was important, everything I had tried to do that was beautiful, all of my friendships, my band, friends that I traded music with, listened to the radio, recordings on some tape machines, microphones, the flickering lights, the red lights flashing.

(music stops)

All of this stuff was existing against the backdrop of this simple mathematical equation and it's not just that. My brain was an electrical system. My thoughts and my mind somehow were being supported by

this equation. It's this crazy loop of electricity that our entire existence is completely wrapped up in and all of this stuff was contained in a simple equation that was just algebra on a page!

Joel Werner: Mathematics took over his life and maybe in those cases I think it is its own world, in a way. So it is a language that other people, that normal people like you and I don't speak. And so maybe there's a tendency for some people to kind of just immerse themselves in that world. But also there's just like real normal people who are using math and using it in really interesting ways in their everyday life! And you know they're a bigger part of the story I think than the caricature of a mathematician.

Lauren Ober: Yeah. Yeah. You know, speaking of music there is so much in your episodes that's related to music, where the sort of confluence of music and numbers. I mean you have a story about trying to figure out this mysterious Beatles chord. And then you have a story about you know how data sonification was used to make a song out of somebody's grand mal seizure.

Clip from Sum Of All Parts:

(clicking sound)

Joel Werner: The clicking of a Geiger counter where faster clicks indicate higher radiation levels. This was one of the earliest and most practical examples of data sonification. Brian's work on the other hand is much more song-like.

(music)

Brian Foo: Initially I was very interested in learning how to make music. You know I had a particular skillset which was computer science and I wanted to figure out a way in which I could learn music and so you know I did some research into data sonification and you know I wasn't very kind of satisfied with the current state of data sonification. I think a lot of times it's almost like listening to a chart, you know? So the question I always had is like: Why make it into sound if it's already fine as a chart? So I kind of used that as the challenge for this project to make kind of meaningful data music essentially."

Lauren Ober: And it's so interesting. Do you think music can be used to explain math and numbers in some way, that that's sort of a good proxy for us laypeople?

Joel Werner: Absolutely. Like I think there's definitely a connection between science and music like Brian made, the lead guitarist of Queen, also happens to have a PhD in astrophysics.

Lauren Ober: When did they find the time? (laugh)

Joel Werner: Yeah right. Brian Cox, the BBC's sort of poster boy for science, was in the band D:Ream. Do you remember D:Ream they had that horrible song in the 90s (singing) 'things can only get better?'

Lauren Ober: (laugh) No, but I was sure hoping you would sing it!

Joel Werner: Yeah, yeah. I've gotten over the whole thing. Singing on radio! I'm putting numbers on radio, I'm putting bad singing on radio as well. (laughs) So yeah, I definitely think there's a synergy between maybe the parts of your brain that understand science or understand numbers have some connection to sort of learning and playing music. And this is me just speculating now. So please, listeners, don't take this as gospel!

Lauren Ober: (laughs)

Joel Werner: But I also think that you know when you think about what math is, it's us making up these symbols that we then try to put together in a way that explains something in the natural world. Right? So it's just like a language we use to try to describe things that happen. And like writing music is kind of like that as well. Like making an instrument is a way to harness the sound. Like it's a physical way to harness the sound or writing notation is a way to sort of write down a description of something that happens like sound waves, you know?

Lauren Ober: Right.

Joel Werner: And so maybe there's a connection there. Maybe it's like it's both this way of us trying to harness something in the natural world that's otherwise indescribable but it's more felt.

Lauren Ober: Right. Right it's some type of translation.

Joel Werner: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely.

Lauren Ober: Yeah. That's interesting! You know you obviously don't just talk about music. You also have an episode about netball. (laughs)

Joel Werner: (laughs) It's like a game you're intimately familiar with I'm sure.

Lauren Ober: Well. Well you know, little-known fact, I worked for two years in a British boarding school so I'm intimately familiar.

Joel Werner: Ah! Yes, so netball is. I asked some of the best players in the world how to describe what they do and without exception they each said, "Well, it's essentially basketball."

Lauren Ober: (laughs)

Joel Werner: But the difference is you can't bounce the ball and you can't move when you have the ball and there's no backboard. You know I didn't set out to do a netball story. (laughs)

Lauren Ober: (laughs) So many people have said that before!

Joel Werner: I know, right? You just, you're down the rabbit hole and suddenly it's 3am and you are ears deep in a netball story! (laugh)

Lauren Ober: (laugh)

Joel Werner: Mitch Mooney, he told me that he'd gone and studied how biologists study the way that fish school and then applied that science to analyzing Australia's opponents in netball.

Clip from Sum Of All Parts:

(netball court sounds)

Joel Werner: Inspired by research like Ash's, Mitch Mooney starts to figure out how the science of collective behavior could give the Australian netball team a competitive edge.

Mitch Mooney: We wanted to know a bit more about New Zealand so what tendencies do they have. Were there any things that they typically did that could give it some sort of knowledge that we could use.

And I thought well if we actually looked at a team like New Zealand, like England, like Jamaica as a biologist does.

(music)

As, like, a school of fish as a collective behavior as opposed to individuals doing stuff, maybe that can actually give us some sort of advantage on the court. Maybe we could come up with a strategy that might be able to address the collective behavior more so than the individual.

Joel Werner: And I almost dropped the phone. You know it's that moment where you're sort of like "Maybe there isn't going to be a story here. Maybe I'm just like going down a dead end." And suddenly this guy says, "Yeah I've been using fish science." (laughs) And you're like, "Bingo!"

(music)

Lauren Ober: Joel Werner is the host of Sum of All Parts from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. To find out more about the show, hit up biglisten.org.

It's time for another quick break. But when we come back, we'll talk to actor Denis O'Hare about his murder mystery podcast, *Deadly Manners*, which is set at a pretty swanky dinner party.

Denis O'Hare: You know, as we go along, people start dying. People start dying. It's a locked-room mystery. And so we run around and trying to figure out who, we try to eliminate people as suspects. And you know, at the end there's a shocker. There's a twist. I'm just going to say that.

Lauren Ober: Well you'll just have to stick around to find out! Stay put. This is NPR.

NPR promotion for *Wow in the World*

(music)

Rachel: Hi I'm Rachel and I live in Arlington. So lately, I've been really into this podcast called *The Axis of Ego*. It's kind of about everything. And that's why I like it so much because the topics vary so drastically from baseball to online dating.

Tom Garrett: *Not that long ago I, like many people, considered using dating websites to be the equivalent of wearing a big flashing sign that says: "I can't function in normal society." Today however, I realized that the fact that I can't function in normal society is merely a coincidence. The reality is that the easiest and simplest way to meet people is through these devices to which we're tethered 24 hours a day.*

Rachel: But they're all really relatable and light and just easy to listen to. And also the host Tom has really great stories and funny outlooks and just interesting facts. So yeah! Give it a listen.

Lauren Ober: Hey, pals! Welcome back to *The Big Listen*. I'm Lauren Ober and if you're like our friend, Rachel from one of the many Arlingtons of America, who knows which one, and you too love a quirky little indie podcast, give us the scoop! Call the Pod Line and leave a message. The number is 202-885-POD1. Cool.

If you've watched TV or movies in the past decade, chances are you've seen Denis O'Hare in action. The Tony Award-winning actor has been in everything from Milk and Dallas Buyers Club to This Is Us and American Horror Story, where he played a transgender bartender named Liz Taylor.

Clip from American Horror Story:

Denis O'Hare: No pity party in my bar! Especially when the guest of honor can't see that he's the luckiest man who ever checked into the Hotel Cortez.

Lauren Ober: But recently, O'Hare turned his focus to audio. He's one of the stars of the campy murder mystery podcast, Deadly Manners. The show's ensemble cast also includes LeVar Burton, Anna Chlumsky and RuPaul, to name a few. O'Hare plays Bill Billings, husband of blueblood hostess, Veronica Billings, who is played by Kristen Bell.

Clip from Deadly Manners:

Levar Burton: Veronica rejoined her husband, who sat at their grand piano, playing a jaunty tune.

Kristen Bell: Keeping the spirits up, too, I see?

Denis O'Hare: I may not love these parties of yours. But I do love you. And it pains me to see you so upset.

Kristen Bell: What are we going to do?

Lauren Ober: What are we going to do? Denis O'Hare, welcome to The Big Listen.

Lauren Ober: Denis O'Hare, one of the stars of the Murder Mystery podcasts at Deadly Manners, welcome to the Big listen.

Denis O'Hare: Thank you. Happy to be here.

Lauren Ober: Give us a synopsis of Deadly Manners, this murder mystery podcast you're starring in.

Denis O'Hare: Well I don't want to give away too much. I have to be careful.

Lauren Ober: No, I know. Major spoiler alerts that you'd have to dance around it.

Denis O'Hare: But it basically is a festive party being given by a very wealthy couple who are politically connected and it's of course a strained marriage and I play the husband who's a little bit in the background, a little bit of a milquetoast. And my very powerful, glamorous, charismatic wife is in the foreground and all of her kooky guests are in the foreground. And you know as we go along people start dying.

Clip from Deadly Manners:

Kristen Bell: (Spoon tapping on glassware) Attention. Attention. Attention everyone. (clap, clap) As you may have noticed there is a bit of a storm raging around us. Rest assured should roads become undrivable you are all welcome to stay here until it lets up. I can't afford to have anything happen to any of you. Literally. (laughter) Perhaps I should go grab some candles just in case.

Levar Burton: Veronica left, and the guests chattered on. Forks feeding into hungry mouths, plates being scraped, glasses clinking together. The sound of a soft piano. It was a lavish affair, and everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves until.... (crashing sound) (shocked gasps) The power went out completely.

Various guests: "Where's the light?" "This isn't good." "Turn the power back on."

Levar Burton: And then. (two bangs) (gasp)

Various guests: "What was that sound?" "Was that a gunshot?" "It couldn't be." (shriek)

Levar Burton: When the lights came on a shriek was heard from a nearby room. (knocking) In the billiards room. Everyone found an astonished Veronica standing over the dead bleeding body of the formerly fabulous Enrique Ensemble. A bullet hole through his head. A silver pistol on the ground beside him.

Denis O'Hare: It's a locked-room mystery and so we run around and try to figure out who, we try to eliminate people as suspects and then of course your suspect dies and you're like, "Oops he didn't do it!" Unless he's *really* clever.

Lauren Ober: Right.

Denis O'Hare: And you know at the end there's a shocker. There's a twist! I'm just going to say that. There's a twist.

Lauren Ober: (laugh) So Deadly Manners takes place around this dinner party. And it's a very upscale dinner party. It's very fancy. I'm sure people were wearing gowns and tuxes.

Denis O'Hare: Amazing, elegant.

Lauren Ober: Right. Right. People were sort of smoking cigarettes out of a holder or something like that.

Denis O'Hare: People with colorful socks.

Lauren Ober: Yes. (laugh)

Denis O'Hare: I definitely had good socks on.

Lauren Ober: Exactly they were not drinking beer at this party.

Denis O'Hare: No.

Lauren Ober: It was sort of they were drinking claret or something. I'm wondering have you ever been to just a horrendous dinner party? Obviously not one that ends the way this dinner party ends.

Denis O'Hare: In murder.

Lauren Ober: In murder. But have you had some trashy ones?

Denis O'Hare: I have.

Lauren Ober: Yeah.

Denis O'Hare: I've been to, I mean, I'm in the sort of fundraising nightmare world where as an actor oftentimes benefits, award ceremonies, fundraisers, things like that.

Lauren Ober: Yeah.

Denis O'Hare: But you know it's always chicken.

Lauren Ober: (laughs)

Denis O'Hare: You never get enough food and at the same time you overeat which is impossible. You have the bread and the butter and you go, "I never eat bread and butter but now I'm going to eat it because I'm desperate to do something." Then you're always next to somebody who doesn't know how to have a conversation and so you know you're pulling teeth for an hour and a half and it's just (sighs). My favorite one ever was I was doing one for Roundabout.

Lauren Ober: Roundabout Theater.

Denis O'Hare: Roundabout Theater and I was doing Assassins. I had a huge red beard, like this crazy red beard.

Lauren Ober: (laugh) Cool.

Denis O'Hare: And I played Charles Guiteau. It was a real beard. And you know there was only nine of us in the play. And as part of our punishment you know we had to go to a fundraiser. And you know I was next to someone and she was literally married to an 80-year-old and she was 30. And she was nice.

Lauren Ober: (laugh)

Denis O'Hare: And she turned to me and she goes, "What do you do?" And I went, "Ah well I'm an actor." "Oh are you in anything now?" I'm like, "Uh, well funny you should say that I'm in Assassins which is being done right now at Roundabout which is the theater company that we're here for in the fundraiser." And she turned to her husband and goes, "Oh, did we see that one?" He went, "Yeah." And she goes, "Oh yeah. I didn't like that one."

Lauren Ober: No!

Denis O'Hare: And then she goes, "Which one were you?" I said, "I'm the one with the big beard." And I turned and I never talked to her again. I was like nuh-uh. I'm not playing. But that's what these things are. You sit at these things and I did one for the ballet once where all the young ballet dancers, New York City Ballet, were coming up to me because they liked American Horror Story and I was sitting with the old fogies. This man next to me you know was so rich and so irritated that these kids knew me.

Lauren Ober: Yeah.

Denis O'Hare: And finally he turns and said, "Who are you supposed to be?"

Lauren Ober: (laughs)

Denis O'Hare: And I said, "No one. Don't worry. I'm no one." He was so enraged.

Lauren Ober: Right. Right.

Denis O'Hare: That he didn't know who I was.

Lauren Ober: Right.

Denis O'Hare: And other people did. It was hilarious. So yes, I've. I've been at many, many dinner parties like that where I would like to be the murderer.

Lauren Ober: Yeah (laugh). I'm normally making great acquaintances with the bathroom in those situations.

Denis O'Hare: Now why is that?

Lauren Ober: If I had a full glass in my hand I couldn't say, "Oh I have to go refresh my drink." But I can always say, "Excuse me, I just need to head to the restroom for a second." And then hang out in there for twenty minutes. (laughs)

Denis O'Hare: Do you have kids?

Lauren Ober: (laughs) No. No, no.

Denis O'Hare: So you get yourself a kid. I have a six-year-old. And it's brilliant. You just kind of go, "Oh my God I need to check on him. I need to check in."

Lauren Ober: I need to check in, right. But I do have to say when I was younger my parents never checked in with the babysitter, not once. Not ever. They were like, "We don't care if you burn the house down. We're getting away from you."

Denis O'Hare: They went to better parties obviously. They wanted to be at those parties.

Lauren Ober: (laugh) Perhaps. Perhaps.

Denis O'Hare: We're at the wrong parties.

Lauren Ober: I know. Well you're at parties. I'm just you know. I'm at home watching you on television.

Denis O'Hare: (laugh)

Lauren Ober: (laugh) Well I feel like I would be remiss if I didn't ask you what you were listening to because you did mention you were a podcast fan. And I feel like this is a safe space you can tell us what you're listening to.

Denis O'Hare: Yes. Well I'm a political guy so I listen to a lot of politics. There's one amazing one called I think Stories from Abroad.

Clip from Rough Translation:

(music)

Gregory Warner: This is Rough Translation. It's a show from NPR bringing you familiar conversations from unfamiliar perspectives. I'm Gregory Warner.

Denis O'Hare: One was about two guys in prison who were reading *Anna Karenina* to each other doing it by tapping on the wall in Morse code, which I absolutely adored.

Clip from Rough Translation:

Gregory Warner: One evening when the guard is at the other end of the line of cells just out of earshot the guy in the cell next to Mohamed whispers.

Mohamed Barud: So he was saying learn A, B, C through the wall. Learn A, B, C through the wall. I didn't understand it. Learn A, B, C, through the wall, how can I? I look at the wall between us so. But then he knocked on the wall and he did this (tap, tap, tap).

Gregory Warner: And when Mohamed leaned over to the wall he could hear this sound (tap).

Mohamed Barud: That's a sharp and then (tap, tap) and then (tap, tap)

Gregory Warner: A code.

Mohamed Barud: I said, "Yes I understand now." And he started just A (tap) B (tap, tap) C (tap, tap, tap) D (tap, tap, tap, tap) E (tap, tap, tap) and F (tap, tap)

Gregory Warner: First an alphabet and then words. (tap, tap) What was the first sentence that you heard?

Mohamed Barud: Nabad. Which means "peace" in Somali, and It means "How are you?" also. (tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap) Now I could repeat that word all day long without doing anything else."

Denis O'Hare: I listen to The Daily. I listen to Slate's Political Gafest. I listen to Serial. Not Serial but the...Can I swear on radio?

Lauren Ober: I mean we can bleep it yeah.

Denis O'Hare: The ---town.

Lauren Ober: S-town yup.

Denis O'Hare: S-town sorry. There you go S-town which was unbelievably good. Oh that was so good. Selected Shorts, I like that.

Lauren Ober: Have you ever read for them?

Denis O'Hare: A lot.

Lauren Ober: Yeah.

Denis O'Hare: A lot. I've probably done, gosh, at least ten or eleven times. I love Selected Shorts.

Lauren Ober: Well you have a great voice and you're a great actor.

Denis O'Hare: Oh thank you.

Lauren Ober: That makes sense.

Denis O'Hare: There's another one where as an actor it's an opportunity to do things you don't ordinarily get to do.

Lauren Ober: Yeah.

Denis O'Hare: My. My favorite ever was doing a Neil Gaiman story where he curated the evening.

Lauren Ober: Oh.

Denis O'Hare: And it was a story he wrote for Ray Bradbury.

Clip from Selected Shorts:

Neil Gaiman: It was a 90th birthday present for a friend of mine and it was written as a tribute to him, to all of the things that he'd made, to all of the things he'd created and it was written as a warning to me and because I started finding myself losing things and I didn't want to lose him.

Denis O'Hare: I'm forgetting things which scares me. I'm losing words although I am not losing concepts. I hope that I'm not losing concepts. If I am losing concepts, I am not aware of it. If I am losing concepts, how would I know? Which is funny because my memory was always so good. Everything was in there. Sometimes my memory was so good that I even thought I could remember things I didn't know yet. Remembering forward. I don't think there's a word for that, is there? Remembering things that haven't happened yet? I don't have that feeling I get when I go looking in my head for a word that isn't there as if someone must have come and taken it in the night.

Denis O'Hare: I was just geeking out because I love Ray Bradbury and I love Neil Gaiman.

Lauren Ober: Yeah, yeah.

Denis O'Hare: It was so much fun.

Lauren Ober: It sounds like it.

Denis O'Hare: But those are my podcasts, almost all the political ones, I really enjoy those. And I listen to one for a while of great books and they were talking about Beowulf.

Lauren Ober: Mm-hum.

Denis O'Hare: But I don't know. I found it oddly boring...

Lauren Ober: (laugh)

Denis O'Hare: and I'm surprised because I'm a geek and I was like oh my God.

Lauren Ober: You're like I don't know how Beowulf was boring? You know I loved it in high school!

Denis O'Hare: Beowulf's fantastic! How could it not?

Lauren Ober: (laugh)

Denis O'Hare: And there's. Hey! There's my next podcast.

Lauren Ober: Yeah.

Denis O'Hare: (spooky voice) Beowulf.

Lauren Ober: (laugh) Denis O'Hare, one of the stars of the murder mystery podcast, Deadly Manners, thank you so much for hanging out with us. It's been an absolute pleasure.

Denis O'Hare: Totally my pleasure. Thank you for having me.

(music)

Lauren Ober: Denis O'Hare is one of the stars of Deadly Manners from The Paragon Collective. To find out more about his work or any of the shows he mentioned, check out biglisten.org.

Well we've almost reached the end of this week's episode. What? Get out of here. No it's true. But before we let you go it's time for: Chartography.

Chartography is our 60 second map into the Apple podcast charts. But we're not looking at number one or even number 100. We're looking at number 289. And if your podcast has reached number 289, well congrats to you! You'll never want for anything anymore.

Okay so this week's 289 is called The Vanished. Okay, it's about can you guess? Can you guess? Any guesses what it's about? It's about missing people. It is a podcast hosted by a woman who does not give her last name. Marissa. Rissa? I don't know.

Marissa Jones: You can see this for yourself if you look it up.

Lauren Ober: She's literally just looking back at old case files of people who are missing.

Marissa Jones: This is someone's life and it's important.

Lauren Ober: So I listened to an episode about a young woman named Morgan who up and left to go to Atlanta to seek fame and fortune.

Sherri Sichmeller: You know doing what nineteen-year-olds do.

Lauren Ober: And the gist of it was basically that she probably was being trafficked in some way and she ended up in Gainesville Florida and she ended up sort of bopping around the south and then she goes missing.

Sherri Sichmeller: We're not exactly sure what happened.

Lauren Ober: So there were all these clues that the police were looking at; cell phone pings.

Marissa Jones: And there's been no activity on her phone since that time.

Lauren Ober: Handwriting and fake social media accounts.

Marissa Jones: Morgan frequently posted on Facebook.

Lauren Ober: Social media accounts that get shut down and then get opened back up.

Marissa Jones: Her last Facebook posts were on February 25th.

Lauren Ober: The person that they interview on The Vanished is the missing woman's mother.

Sherri Sichmeller: You know 'cause I was worried.

Lauren Ober: Talking about her missing daughter and how no one can find her and they don't know where she is. And I just could not imagine -- not being a parent -- what it would be like to have your child up and go missing.

Sherri Sichmeller: I knew she shouldn't go.

Lauren Ober: And you have no idea where they are and no one is helping you.

Sherri Sichmeller: The police were called while we were there. And they just never came.

Lauren Ober: So maybe you're a super sleuth and you want to help solve all these these missing persons files. Then yeah. The Vanished. Get to it.

(music)

Lauren Ober: Want to listen to "The Big Listen" on the go? Well you can! Just go to Apple Podcasts or NPR One or any fine purveyor of podcasts and hit subscribe. Then we'll slide into your feed every week automatically. Also, when you're subscribing, leave us a little review. Please and thanks.

Also, check us out on Facebook and Twitter. We're at @hearbiglisten, that's H-E-A-R Big Listen. We're almost as hilarious as that photo of the president trying to do that weird handshake in Asia. Should you want to send us a love note or three, our email address is biglisten@wamu.org.

The show today was produced by Daisy Rosario, Poncie Rutsch and Abby Holtzman. Jayk Cherry mixed the show. I, Lauren Ober, was avoiding math at all costs. David Schulman composed the theme music. Other music in the show came from Army Navy — the band, not the store. "The Big Listen" is the brainchild of boss lady Andi McDaniel and her boss man JJ Yore and is produced by WAMU and American University, and distributed by NPR in Washington, D.C., Capital of America.

And now a few final thoughts from Alice Wong, founder of the Disability Visibility Project. Through a partnership with StoryCorps, Wong is working to lift up the voices of the disability community. And she's trying to counter the lack of coverage of disability issues.

Alice Wong: It's absolutely true that anybody can become a member of the disability community at any time. All it takes is a chronic illness, a car accident to become a part of our community. People want to separate and kind of distance themselves from people with disabilities is part of the reason why there's such little coverage.

Lauren Ober: With the StoryCorps collaborative and her podcast, Wong is bridging that distance between those who are disabled and those who are not. In a way, her work is a love letter to her community.

Alice Wong: I can't tell you how much I love my community and how much I want to share this beautiful community. There are a lot of folks who just don't have an interest or whatever. But they are losing out on an amazing, vibrant, really beautiful and dynamic population that's really changing the world.

Lauren Ober: And Wong is big part of that.

Thanks for hanging out, friends. Til next time, keep listening America. This is NPR.