

Episode 3.2 Buffy Sainte-Marie and Music Journalism with Andrea Warner

October 12, 2018

Hannah (Host):

[00:00](#)

[Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. I was delighted to hear how many of you also love Jurassic Park and it was really fun to watch it with Megan on Friday and then have a conversation about how the movie anticipates the deeply unethical approaches of Silicon Valley, like the ethos of "move fast and break things," because they literally move too fast and then a bunch of people die. In case you didn't know, it's very fun to consume media with smart people and then talk to them about it. That's my hot tip of the week. My other hot tip of the week is to remind you that the first ever live episode of *Secret Feminist Agenda* is happening on Friday, November 9th at 1:00 PM in the downtown Vancouver Public Library location, as part of the Vancouver Podcast Festival. It's part of the free programming of the festival, so you just have to show up. You don't have to register, but please do show up, otherwise I'll be very sad and lonely. There's a whole bunch of other stuff happening as part of the festival including master classes that you can take, and a ticketed evening shows at the Rio. It's all really awesome and you should go to vanpodfest.ca and buy tickets, please. We worked so hard on it. You're, you know what? Don't even need to beg you, cause it's just that good. Just go buy a ticket. Okay. I got really aggressive at the end there. Sorry. It's time to meet Andrea. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Andrea Warner is the author of *Buffy Sainte-Marie: The Authorized Biography*, which was just published in September, 2018 with Greystone and of *We Oughta Know: How Four Women Ruled the 90s and Changed Canadian Music*. A freelance writer, Andrea is also an associate producer at CBC music, a theater critic at the Georgia Straight, a radio columnist and the cohost of the weekly podcast Pop This. Her pronouns are she/her/hers and she is a settler who was born and raised in Vancouver on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh first nations. Pop culture, art and feminism. Make her happy. I sat down with Andrea in the spooky and super haunted basement of CBC, Vancouver to talk about her amazing new book, *Buffy Sainte-Marie: The Authorized Biography*. And we had a really great time and we laughed a lot. And here it is [Music: "The War Racket (Unplugged)" by Buffy Sainte-Marie]

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- Hannah (Host): [03:07](#) Hi, this is where the episode begins. [Laughs] We did it. Okay. So you know, you know how these episodes work. Just introduce yourself real quick.
- Andrea: [03:19](#) Sure. You're really like get, get right in here. [Laughs] Sorry. It's going to be mostly just as laughing, maybe for like a good 45 minutes. Yes, I'm Andrea Warner. I have written a book called a *Buffy Sainte-Marie: The Authorized Biography*, and I'm really, really excited about it and I love Buffy so much. And so, yeah, this was just my whole world right now, is just talking about how much I love Buffy Sainte-Marie, and that's really what the book is also. And I'm fine with that. Like, objective distance for journalism? No, sorry, none here.
- Hannah (Host): [03:58](#) Okay, that immediately leads me to like 17 questions.
- Andrea: [04:03](#) [Laughs] How did you get a job?
- Hannah (Host): [04:03](#) So let's [Laughs] Who hired you? Let's, let's just start right there with this question of objectivity in journalism. So you are a music journalist--
- Andrea: [04:16](#) Yes.
- Hannah (Host): [04:16](#) --by trade. And I think that there is a really interesting feminist ethics to refusing objectivity in a field like music journalism, where we know that objectivity is so often used to just reinforce existing standards of what counts as "good music," quote unquote. So can we start with like music journalism as a genre? You can talk a little bit about like, your approach to doing that kind of work.
- Andrea: [04:40](#) Sure, absolutely. I love talking about my lack of objectivity actually. Because I mean, you know, I, I tried to be as objective as possible about the actual music that exists, but I also, I've just run up, I mean, yeah, like I don't make it up. I just like, I haven't faked a band yet. No, like, I mean I try to like sort of approach, you know, I'm not going to turn my nose up at necessarily like, a sort of deep modern country band or like, you know, some sort of, you know, I love a good polka, whatever. I'm not, you know, I'm not, I'm not, I try not to be as a genre snob, as it were. But I also know that I've just been in so many arguments with so many white male peers, you know, and I'm constantly in the position of having to just advocate for some gender diversity and some racial diversity in what we're covering and, and, you know, and throughout, throughout my whole career. You know, this, this dates back to lots of different places, lots of different

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publications. I've, I remember at one point, like one of my editors sent me an email after I had submitted like, my 10 favorite records of the year and he was like, "you know, these are all women, right?"

Hannah (Host): [05:53](#) [Laugh]

Andrea: [05:53](#) I laughed so hard and I said, "Bingo!" Yeah. Like, I mean, you know, this idea that objectivity is sort of real, I think in any sort of journalistic sense, you can do your best to be representative, but we all know that no one has required anybody, particularly all of the white men in power, to be representative at all. Like just like the default is, "oh, you're a rock band? You must be five white guys." And I think we've seen that over and over and over again. And so I guess I sort of abandoned any of that a long time ago. If, if I am asked to cover something, or sort of assigned something in that respect, no problem. But when I have a choice, I think of it as like, both a political, moral, personal decision to really specifically cover bands that are comprised, ideally, of racialized women, queer folx. That's really going to be where I look. Objectivity? No.

Hannah (Host): [07:00](#) [Laughs] You're making me think of, I starting about two years ago, started making a real point of reading more work published by independent presses. And it was largely because I'd started working in a publishing department and I'd become more cognizant, you know, I'd always thought of myself as somebody who tried to read diversely, but I became more cognizant of like, the, sort of, multinational versus independent press dynamic in Canada. And was teaching my students that like, you know, indie presses are actually significantly more likely to take risks on, sort of, non-established voices and on stories that don't have, you know, an obvious marketability, but that the press believes in. And by virtue of shifting the lens of what I read and what I pay attention to, I realized that there was all of this incredible work I'd been missing because I hadn't been looking for it. And so there's that really interesting, like when you say, "this is the lens I'm going to use," I'm not going to claim that my lens is neutral, because nobody's lens is neutral and none of us can consume everything. So I'm going to have a lens and it's going to be specific, and by prioritizing looking at that stuff, like I'm going to find all of this incredible stuff that people are missing.

Andrea: [08:13](#) And I think that has been sort of my goal. Like particularly, you know, for the last six years I've, part of my job has been to focus on Canadian music. And so really unpacking what it is to be

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Canadian music, the things that get qualified and quantified as CanRock, you know, just like, I mean, that's like--

Hannah (Host): [08:30](#)

Nickleback?

Andrea: [08:30](#)

[Laughs] It's just like, it's just Nickelback.

Hannah (Host): [08:34](#)

[Laughs]

Andrea: [08:34](#)

But it's just like you see over and over again, sort of, what gets held up as, sort of, like institutionally sanctioned, for lack of a better word. And this, this idea of neutrality, like you said, once you actually decide that you are not, you're going to use a lens that is more specifically geared towards quote unquote "diversity." I had such a terrible, like, I know it's just, but like I, I mean I think even with indie rock in Canada, it's still so white. Like honestly, indie, indie rock in Canada is still so white. And so it was really, you know, I mean, I think I've been spending a lot of time over the last several years, of just thinking about my own, sort of, like, internalized racial bias. Like as a white person, you can't help but be inherently racist, just as part of like the, the structure of the world and, sort of, colonialism and all of these different things. And, and it's not, it's not like, it's not like a challenge to myself at all. It's like, "oh my god! There are all of these voices!" It's such a pleasure to expand beyond like the mirror, that you particularly have, and listen to so many other artists. And so that's one of the, you know, people often, people often ask me if I'm Indigenous because I do listen to Indigenous music, and I write about it, and I interview people so they can tell me about the Indigenous music that they're making. I'm always sort of like, you know, "no, I'm, I'm a settler." And, and, I, like, the presumption though, particularly of white people, that I must be Indigenous in order to listen to the music and want to make any space for it all. I mean, I think that speaks very much to Canada and it's problematic...It's just, it's just, yeah, you taught me that problematic is a thing to be solved, not just a description of like, a state and a, and that really Canada is the problematic that we are here to solve, I think.

Hannah (Host): [10:44](#)

Yeah.

Andrea: [10:45](#)

Yeah.

Hannah (Host): [10:45](#)

Yeah. I mean the like, you know, diversity as a niche, and particularly I think what's happening in lots of cultural industries, post Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is the, sort of, both necessary and worrisome treatment of

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Indigenous cultural production as a trend, is, you know, it's like, "yes, absolutely give your fucking money to Indigenous artists, do it forever, every day." But also I so worry about the treatment of, of Indigenous culture as trend rather than structural transformation towards the support of Indigenous creation.

Andrea: [11:20](#) Yeah, absolutely. And I think that we, I, I hope that we are starting, I hope. I don't know for sure, but I hope that we are starting to see like the absolutely there are these significant audiences that I think really do, they're ready to make a shift, to like broaden that lens, to broaden their capacity for empathy, their, their capacity...Just like, just the fact that I feel like even like 10 more people happen to be listening to the actual like words of these incredible Indigenous creators, and in that sort of like, true listening and not just not just like, so they can be like, "check the box" or whatever. Like "I, I like did this thing." I think we're starting to see like what it genuinely looks like to appreciate the art, listen to it, and then also amplify it as well. and I mean that's really sort of going to be one of the big cultural changes for, again, this problematic that we call Canada.

Hannah (Host): [12:21](#) [Laughs] I like that a lot. This problematic that we call Canada.

Andrea: [12:24](#) [Laughs]

Hannah (Host): [12:24](#) So the Buffy biography fits in so interestingly, we have this conversation because one of the, one of the amazing things about it is the way, you know, talking about, sort of, Indigenous culture being treated as a trend, is the way that it reminds us that like artists like Buffy have been doing this work for decades and decades, and have not been-- I'm going to back up and ask you questions about like the writing of the biography and the process, but like we're just, I don't, linear interviews? Pshaw! One of the things that both blew my mind and was also like, oh, of-fucking-course is like, Buffy being not treated as, as canonical and artist as she should be. Right? Not a Bob Dylan or Joni Mitchell is not an accident. It was a deliberate project that was part of a larger project of colonialism. Like, and this is the thing that like, I find myself yelling at people a lot lately. It's like, it's not a fucking accident. It's not like white people are like, "oops, sorry, I oppressed you by accident." Like it's on purpose and it's deliberate and like, that the, the history that this book unpacks includes like these decades of incredible music, and activism, and teaching, and art, and also these like deliberate and systemic barriers.

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Andrea:

[13:47](#)

And I mean, it doesn't get much more deliberate than like literal presidential black listings in the states. You know, that is, that is something that I think doesn't really, it doesn't really get talked about enough. You know, we sort of, even right now, everyone's always on this like, "oh, you know, we were so afraid of fascism." Fascism has really been part of our world for a long time. It just often hasn't impacted white people in North America. [Laughs] Well it's just, I just like, and this is the sort of thing that sort of, I just, it just continues to, sort of, floor me even from some really well meaning white people still, just deep in the silo of whiteness. And it's like an echo chamber of, of like, I dunno what's the whitest store? Like, I dunno, like just like an echo chamber of Ikea flashing back at the JJ...Well, no! Like [Laughs] like an echo chamber of like, like a literal white store. Like, I mean, just like, I just like, just like in servitude of whiteness is just, yeah, it's, it's kind of that. Gnah! That's the sound I make now "gnah!" Or this idea that, well, we don't know Buffy as well as we know, sort of, like established icons like Neil and Joni because you know, her songs were more niche. Her songs were this, her songs were that. No, no, no. I mean it's the same way [Laughs] you know? Yeah. It's all, all the no, middle fingers, and unhappy faces that you could possibly think of because people don't really want to think about how they'd been complicit in fucking bullshit. You know, like, I mean, that's like, honestly, no one wants to think about that they're listening trends. And I'm talking specifically about white people right now, that they're listening, that they're, they're things that they value have been informed by racist structures, sexist structures. We all know, and well, maybe we don't all know. Probably everybody listening to this podcast knows that like, you know, this idea that like books written by women are for women, books written by men are for everybody as if, you know, again, this most stupidly ridiculous sort of gendered approach to what qualifies also as like highbrow and lowbrow, all of these different things, that has all impacted Buffy's legacy. It's, you know, if as if like, the government wasn't a big enough thing to be up against you, you know, she's also really genuinely up against this, sort of, cultural institution of a systemic racism and sexism. So I mean, how she has really like honestly, like the fact that she is so beloved and that she is, she is an icon in, in various different communities, and she's absolutely an icon to, I think, a number of us who just have seen her, her value, and see this value in her songwriting, and her truth telling for so long, and her advocacy and her resistance, you know, we're not like afraid of the ways in which she challenges institutionalized authority. If anything, that's an inspiration to many of us, I think. So, I just, and you know, rock music is just filled with this. It's like, it's so irritating. It's so annoying and it's so frustrating to

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just like, I just, it's an irritating, annoying and frustrating, and it just like, it really like I can't even like, I'm so vexed by the state. Like truly, like just so vexed by like, just everything that I, for whatever reason, have decided that I participate in and, and value. Like music. I mean I love music. I guess the thing that I don't love is the music industry. And probably like partly as a fat woman who has sort of experienced a bit of othering in different ways throughout most of my life you know, I, it doesn't, it doesn't phase me to sort of like want to go in and fuck stuff up. I like it. And I think that that's also what I respond to in a lot of musicians, and my life has been pleasantly informed and guided by musicians who do have a history of fucking stuff up. And, and Buffy, she wouldn't ever really, I don't think describe herself as someone who is like, continuously like, just fucked stuff up. And I mean that in like the best way. Not like, not like she's fucked up herself, but she has like gone in and truly like fucked shit up. And I love that. And I think that not enough people spend time thinking about what it is that she has done with that work.

- Hannah (Host): [18:33](#) So I read the biography this summer, on my glorious two-week vacation, during which I read like 10 books. It was the best. I recommend vacation really highly--
- Andrea: [18:43](#) [Laughs]
- Hannah (Host): [18:43](#) --if it is something that is accessible to you.
- Andrea: [18:46](#) [Laughs]
- Hannah (Host): [18:46](#) I really hope it's something that's accessible to you.
- Andrea: [18:49](#) [Laughs]
- Hannah (Host): [18:49](#) And it blew my mind on so many levels. But the thing that I kept, just as I was reading, I kept being like, "wh-- I I didn't, what? I didn't know that. What?" How did she, how did she do so many things? Every chapter is like, "and then she did this incredible thing and then she did this incredible thing."
- Andrea: [19:10](#) And it's like she has a secret triplet of people great triplet of like people, like she's been cloned or something and it's, she hasn't, but yeah, she has managed to do all the things.
- Hannah (Host): [19:19](#) Fucking wild. And like, the point, like there's, you know, there's a chapter that's like, oh, and then she started writing music for movies and she wrote like, "Love Lifts Us Up Where We

Belong." I'm like, "Stop it, Andrea.! It's just blowing my mind really consistently. So let's take a step back. I would really love you to tell the story of how you came to write the biography and then also talk a little bit about what the actual process was like, because I think that is maybe one of the, the, sort of, most exciting things about this project is, is how, sort of, you and Buffy went about collaborating on this.

Andrea:

[19:56](#)

Yeah, absolutely. So Greystone had done sort of a, a call out, just a very, like, casual one, a looking for pitches about Canada 150. And I emailed Jen Croll back, the editor, my editor, and, said, "hey, I have an anti-150 project. Would you be interested? And she's like, "sure, send me the information." So I just sent her like a really brief email saying like, "I'd like to write a book about the 150 best Canadian musicians who aren't straight white men." That was my pitch. And she's like, "Great idea. We don't do list books, but would you," [Laughs] "But would you be interested in writing a biography of any of these people sort of at the top of your list? What about like Buffy Sainte-Marie?" I was like, "well, yes," because I've literally been planning in my head a Buffy Sainte-Marie biography for a long time. Like I, after our first interview together in 2015 for Power in the Blood, I was just, we didn't want to get off the phone with each other. And, we're, we had only been talking for like 20 or 30 minutes and it was just such a great conversation. And when I got off the phone, you know, I had already done a lot of research, but I was really frustrated by actually like, how little information, like truly sort of like interesting, broad sort of like life encompassing information that I could find about her in a lot of my, sort of, normal resources because, you know, hey, guess what? Rolling Stone hasn't covered her. New York Times has barely covered her. Like all of these different, sort of, like magazines of record, and I like, let's face it, white record, have really ignored her for so long. And so, you know, when I, when we got off the phone, it happened to be the week that my first book came out and people were like, "oh, what are you going to do next?" Cause that's what they ask you immediately. [Laughs] So I was like, "Well, you know, I mean at some point I'd love to write an authorized biography of Buffy Sainte-Marie." You know, authorized was really important to me because I don't want to be a white woman, just like unauthorized telling this like, incredible Indigenous artist, and activist, and icon's story. You know, I really wanted, I wanted to spend time with her. I wanted to hear what she had to say, and I thought that there would be, I thought that there would just be like, a ton of information that wasn't already out there because I hadn't been able to find it. And so I already had this in like my mind, and so Greystone was like, "okay, cool, we'd be super into that. Can

you see if she would be interested at all, or her team?" And so I emailed her team, and you know, I sent along some of the things that I've written in the last couple of years and, and they already knew about those things cuz Buffy, I had become Twitter friends, like after our first interview, and I'd written a lot about power in the blood when it came out. So yeah, they said "We're interested. Actually, can you meet with Buffy in person?" And it turned out she was coming to Richmond, like, like just next door to Vancouver, a few weeks later. And so we did. And we hung out for two hours and it was amazing. And the very first thing she said to me was, "I'm such a fan of your writing. I love your book." And I lost my, like I just lost my mind and I'm still, I still have this like sort of giddy, stupid expression on my face right now. But I can't help it because every time I hear her say that, I'm like, "Oh man, that's what the fuck is my life. Like how is this, how is this even happening?" And so we talked for two hours, and just had a really lovely time. And it was very difficult to, she just kept wanting to talk about my book.

Hannah (Host): [23:27](#) [Laughs]

Andrea: [23:27](#) And I was like, I was like, "yeah, but we're here to talk about your life and whether or not I'm gonna write your life." But anyway, so it was great. And a few weeks later we decided to start doing our, our interviews. We did twice a week, for two hours at a time. Like being, you know, when you were in like high school and you had like a new best friend, you were just like getting to know each other so in depth. That was, that's I would say that's actually my interview style. [Laughs] There is--

Hannah (Host): [23:54](#) So, what boys do you like?

Andrea: [23:54](#) [Laughs] Pretty much, yeah. I tend to be personable, and we really like laughing a lot together. And so we just really quickly built up a nice sort of shorthand, I think. And I really wanted to create an established like, a place of trust where she could be vulnerable with me, where we could talk about difficult things, where we could dig into the meat and bones of like, a lot of aspects of her life that, you know, she hadn't gone on the record with before. And I wanted to, I don't know, I really wanted to approach it with a lot of respect and tenderness, because she's such a generous, warm, joyful person, you know. And there's such like, there's such a lovely little kid heart in her, and it's so nice and it's such a, such a pure thing. And you think about how that has managed to survive a lot of the trauma that she's come out of, and I just, I don't know, I just really, I love that and I really want to honor that as much as humanly

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possible, you know? And so we, yeah, we talked twice a week for two hours at a time for six or seven weeks. Then I went on tour with her for a few days in New York in, in that area and that was mind blowing cause I've never done that whole thing where you like, climb into a van with the band and go on the road. That's not my life. I do most of my interviews over the phone, maybe over Skype. If I'm at home, I'm wearing no pants.

Hannah (Host): [25:32](#) [Laughs]

Andrea: [25:32](#) So, you know, this is like a, just a different, it's like a different system altogether. And then, then when we got back, we resumed interviewing, but like, once a week, and then I went on the road again for a couple of days, and then I wrote solidly for three months. Yeah, it was June through the end of August of last summer. Not last summer I guess, but the 2016. No wait, 2017. Oh my, god, I forgot what year it is. 2017, 2017. No. What is time? This is, I'm literally asking this question of Anndrea Jin all the time.

Hannah (Host): [26:06](#) [Laughs]

Andrea: [26:06](#) Who, who's--

Hannah (Host): [26:08](#) Like, "your recording is too long," and be like "what is time?"

Andrea: [26:08](#) What is time, Andrea Jin, who also like, has just suffered through like, recording the audiobook with me. So she really knows my, "what is time," but yeah. Anyway, so that's, and, and we just built like this really lovely friendship early. Very early on Buffy asked me, "are we writing a book or are we just becoming really good friends?" And I know.

Hannah (Host): [26:33](#) [Sings] Why not both?

Andrea: [26:33](#) That's what, I was like, "Eee! both? I dunno." Anyway, you know. And she just like had such funny demands. There she was like, "well, you're going to be part of the book, right? Like you're in the book." And I was like, "no, I'm not in the book." Like, "this is about you, and I will do..." Like, I think, and I think what I managed to achieve is that, you know, her voice is very well represented, but I think that my voice is still there as well just because that's the kind of writing style that I have. Yeah, I don't, I'm like, it's not like it's ego-driven, but I don't necessarily, I, I can't really just turn off my writing voice.

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- Hannah (Host): [27:05](#) Yeah. It really struck me when I was reading like the, the fine balance in biography as a genre, between not erasing yourself as the writer but also creating like some level of transparency so that the subject is the thing that shines through and like you are very present in the like forward and afterward. Right. And like the forward is the sort of more like, let me tell you about what it is like to be around Buffy in these events. And the afterward is like, let me tell you a little bit about what it's like if I'm getting this straight, the afterwards where you're like, let me tell you about what it's like to collaborate with her. Cuzit sounds like you sent her drafts and she read them and gave you feedback on the language. And so you're very present in those. But I agree like you're there in the rest of it. Like you're a very clear voice telling a story, but it's not about you and how her work makes you feel and how like it's not about centering yourself as the writer. It is about centering her but never in a way that sort of again makes claims to objectivity.
- Andrea: [28:06](#) Well thank you. Because I really, that's like my goal for every piece of writing that I do is that. You know, I'm there, I'm not, I can't, I can't just erase myself and nor do I want to, but I really always want to centre the subject. Like that's always, that's my goal always as a journalist, I really...You know how some pieces, like when people do Q & A's and they, the, the writer leaves in like, "that was a great question." That makes me vomit. I like, I just can't handle it and I, it's too much. It's too much about you at that point. And I really do think that, you know, that question of objectivity is that it's not, it can't be about my ego in this piece. Like it has to be, in any piece, like whether it's this biography or any other book, like, I really do want it to be about the person that I'm writing about and I really want it to be about their art, and their thoughts, and their feelings. And maybe I've once left it in. Like a, like "that's an interesting perspective" or whatever, but I take out anything that is like sort of that ego-driven. And again, I know white men leave it in. I get it. Like I, I understand that I should probably leave that kind of stuff in, but I don't care. Like, I just let these guys get their ego gratification where they can. Like I'm, I'm fairly, I'm fairly centered in myself. I'm okay. You know?
- Hannah (Host): [29:31](#) [Laughs] Yeah.
- Andrea: [29:34](#) [Laughs]
- Hannah (Host): [29:34](#) I also, I also laugh because I was at a really great event last week that was Jen Sookfong Lee in conversation with Miriam Towses talking about Miriam's new book, Women Talking, which is, you know what, I'll talk about books on this podcast more this

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season, but it's so good. But Jen, because it was a conversation between the two of them, the audience had the opportunity to submit questions in advance, but there was no Q & A during the event itself. And Miriam was doing the thing where like Jen would present her with a question and she would say, "oh, that's a really good question." or, "Oh, that's a really interesting question." And there was only one question that she did not say that about, and it was mine.

- Andrea: [30:15](#) [Laughs]
- Hannah (Host): [30:15](#) She didn't like it. [Laughs] I was like, "cool, cool, cool. Yeah, that's fine." That's fine. That is why I'm an academic and not a journalist. That's fun. But that does like, that, sort of, we had a, we had a conversation one evening in a tent at the PNE as we are wont to do, about sort of authorized biographies versus you know, a critical analysis of, an artists oeuvre.
- Andrea: [30:45](#) Yeah.
- Hannah (Host): [30:45](#) [With an exaggerated accent] Ouvre.
- Andrea: [30:45](#) [Laughs] Phlegm in your...
- Hannah (Host): [30:45](#) It's high quality audio recording. And you've said that for you personally, the authorized is always more interesting, and it reminded me of another conversation that I had, you know, you and I, it was actually one of our book club meetings, where somebody else there was asking if you as a journalist have ever had anybody get upset about something that you wrote and you were like, "no, it's not really how I write."
- Andrea: [31:15](#) Yeah.
- Hannah (Host): [31:15](#) And so that, that, you know, that seems to be all sort of of a particular theme in your approach to journalism, right? That, that you want to write work that is based on a like, consenting relationship with your subject.
- Andrea: [31:30](#) [Laughs]
- Hannah (Host): [31:30](#) Yeah. Just tell me, tell me a little bit more about that, that sort of ethos in your work.
- Andrea: [31:35](#) So I am lucky, I guess, in that I don't often choose to interview people whom I hate and whom I am fundamentally in opposition to. So I think that that's where that difference comes

in. You know, like I, I get, I'm pretty privileged in my position of like, getting to talk to artists who are usually making really cool stuff. Like, the one time that I accidentally agreed to interview a misogynistic electronic artist, I didn't know. Like I just, we were like, "oh we need electronic coverage." I was like, "okay fine, I'll this guys come into town, I'll interview him." And then I did like more research before the interview and I found out like, sort of, this like weird, troubling information. And again, I was a bit younger so maybe now I would approach it differently, but instead of just like calling him out on his like grossness, I asked him to talk about all the women in his life who have informed his music and made him a different person. And so I, I sometimes have like a softer approach that is, it's, I think it's effective in its own way. It's just less about sort of like direct conflict. I'm also not really like, I don't really like fighting with people. I don't mind telling people that they're wrong about things. Like, obviously like if you are a white supremacist you are wrong. If you're a sexist you are wrong. Like, I don't mind having those kinds of conflicts cause that's easy. That's not really a conflict. That's like, oh you're an idiot. Okay.

Hannah (Host): [33:02](#) [Laughs]

Andrea: [33:02](#) Like, that's you know, whatever. But I think like that sort of consent based-journalism, it's not that I avoid talking to sort of people who are presented as controversial. It's just that I don't particularly find what they do controversial because I'm usually on their side. Like feminism is not controversial, sort of, you know, issues around racial justice, and equality and social justice, those are not controversial issues for me. So people don't usually get mad at me. I also try really hard to respect people's, you know, basic humanity as much as humanly possible.

Hannah (Host): [33:42](#) Pah-shaw!

Andrea: [33:42](#) I know that seems pshaw, but like, you know, I, I try as much as I can to create space where like their humanity is preserved within the work that I'm creating. So for example, like just basic stuff like pronouns. Like, I mean asking people their pronouns, like that kind of stuff. It's, it's really...And it's not the, that, it hasn't been the way it's been since the beginning of my career, but like I want to do the work of, of changing alongside and hopefully help bring along change in our culture and in particularly journalism. And I think why like authorize it and like, you know, Buffy like, taking an active interest in sort of like, the thing that we made together. Like, it wasn't her ever being like, "oh you can't write that cause that's too harsh." Like, she was

never ever interested in sort of like, modifying my voice or my like, critique of something. It was always often from like a, a copy editing standpoint. She's like, "they're missing the P there," or, or just like herself wanting to sort of further expand upon an idea, restate something a little bit differently. You know, she also took a bit of time, I think, as well throughout the book to change a few of her positions on a few things throughout the book and just be like, or just like come deeper into her like position, you know? So it was, it was kind of, kind of, you know, sort of like people growing together. And that's what I like to think about with journalism as well is just, you know, that's kind of important. And when I do write things that people get mad at me about, it's always usually editorials. And so I, you know, I will and have written editorials sort of condemning various things like, you know, again, misogyny. Who knew? In support of feminism, like a dragging the, the music industry and it's sort of like a gatekeeper bullshit. That's what people get mad at me about, but the subjects never get mad at me. Although I guess when I write theatre criticism, sometimes people, sometimes playwrights get mad at me when I say that their work is too is racially insensitive and too white. I will say sometimes theater critics, meh, I don't care. But like I mean that's white people don't understand particularly, particularly when it's a person of color who's like taking the time, like, I'm not a person of color, but like I think about like sort of the generosity of a person of color taking the time to tell you that what you're doing is not sensitive, is not racially sensitive, requires a further examination of perhaps your own bias. White people so often get so up in their whiteness about that and refuse, refuse like just feel so "oh, attacked" or whatever. And I just, I try really, really hard to like, like, I think of it as like a gift and I think of it as like something that someone can give me. And so even like, as a white person calling out what I see as like, you know, racist works by white people, that's, that's just like, that's part of my job. Like I have to, I have to tell that person that that plays racist because it is, and they are often working in such a like, an insular and white environment because nobody's told them, and they don't understand that their racial bias is really like peeking out here. So those, those people would get mad at me sometimes, but that's okay.

Hannah (Host):

[37:08](#)

Yeah. It's a really interesting sort of the, the, the relationship between the generosity of doing work, sort of, in collaboration with your subjects in the interest of like, building something together. Which is I have been thinking a lot about lately, is sort of like, how much can we all orient the work that we're doing towards like building better things as opposed to tearing things

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down, because it feels like we are living in a very intense moment of historical like, just burn everything to the fucking ground. Like, and I got a tattoo of a match, so like I'm onboard with just, just burn it all day. We did a bad job. Start over. But there is, there is actually I think a continuity as you pointed out between, you know, the kind of journalism you've been talking about and the generosity of critique. When that critique comes from a place of like, I want us all to have something better.

Andrea: [38:02](#) Yeah!

Hannah (Host): [38:02](#) Like, I want us to have a better world in which people are not walking around telling stories that harm other people. I want us to, to collectively figure out a way that we can all do better and be part of the project of doing better. And that's got to involve critique. Like, critique can't be left out of the equation because otherwise there will only be, like nobody will ever tell you that you are fucking up and you need people to tell you.

Andrea: [38:29](#) I really value when people tell me I fucked up. I guess I haven't, I haven't yet, I'm sure will be at some point, been publicly shamed as it were. Quote unquote "the public shaming," that we are all meant to apparently fear. But you know what? It only becomes a public shaming when you double down on your wrongness and refuse to just say, "Oh wow, I hadn't realized that," or "I hadn't thought about it that way. Thank you so much. I'm going to think about it." You don't even, if you're too like, up in your business to even be able to say, "I'm sorry," at the least just say you're gonna think about this. Like, you're going to internalize this, and like, ideally that's not just lip service. Ideally you are going to spend some time with that. It's like, the very least that you can do. But I really [laughs] we have seen over and over again, people really aren't interested in doing the very least.

Hannah (Host): [39:21](#) [Laughs]

Andrea: [39:21](#) [Laughs] But, you know, I mean I think like, like in terms of like, that building up instead of tearing down, that's like something that was a takeaway from me from Buffy. In the book, like, and I talk about this in the afterward, in the editing process, I had described her as sort of dismantling something or whatever. I can't remember the language exactly. And in the editing process, she crossed that out and she was wrote "building up instead of, and in spite of," or whatever. You know, like just, she really reframed my own language, I thin, and my own approach in that moment. And that is such an incredible gift because you know, I can't, I'm not really good to anyone if I am just angry

and in destructor mode all the time. You know, I, I like the idea of us having, sort of, solutions-based approaches to life, and I like the idea of like, yes we do have to burn it all down, like I get like there's like so many things, yes we have to burn it all down. But like as part of that, like no one is standing there being like, "oh, and we just don't know what we'll build next." No, no. Like we take our leadership and take our cues from Indigenous culture, like moving forward and sort of like, this sort of matriarchal fashion, which isn't to say, oh we only care about women. It's just that we lead with a different kind of energy. We have a relationship to things that have deep roots, as opposed to, sort of, this patriarchal structure that is just built on tiny egos and small dick energy. Like that, we need, we need a little more in our world. We need to, sort of, be embracing so many different avenues of, of that kind of matriarchal and let's dare say genderqueer and nonbinary leadership. I, and I think that those are avenues that really behoove us as a society, cuz it hasn't, it hasn't really worked very well for a lot of us for a very long time. And, and I, you know, I just, I just look around all the time, and I, I think of sometimes I think of like some of my relatives who are sad, toxic white men, and I know why they are sad, toxic white men because they have every institutional advantage and have still not been able to make it work for them. But at no point have they said to themselves, "oh, maybe these institutional advantages are actually there to not benefit me." Like, "they're there to benefit me, but if I can't make it work, nobody else can as well. And let's tear it down and let's build something new." I don't think like it, you know, the destructor mode, I like it. I like the idea of like wearing giant combat boots and, and like living my best life stomping around all over the place, but I also really like the idea of just like, being in constant rebuild mode, as well. And like, I dunno, I'm not, I'm not very interested in upholding like everything that's come before. Like, I really, maybe everything that came way, way before, like maybe like, you know, when we really talk about what decolonization is, we look at like what is a precolonial life? And like really think about what sort of dreams can come through like different types of leadership. I really think like, you know, Buffy's Cradleboard Teaching Project could be it. Cuz in the, in the Cradleboard Teaching Project, one of their units is on like, three or four different types of leadership through various Indigenous groups. It doesn't have to all look, the way that we've seen it, which is often the only thing we're seeing is grossness. You know, like we're seeing it violently at work this week particularly, and particularly the last couple of years. And we've seen over and over again that it's like a very corrupt judicial system throughout like, most of North America. It's not fair. Nothing is fair, and that's because it's by design by people

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who don't want it to be fair. We can take that back. We can burn that down, burn that one down. Other stuff we can build together. I think.

Hannah (Host): [43:38](#) A couple of years ago I was visiting some friends in London, and we were talking about like just the fundamental violence of imperialism and capitalism and the world order as its run. And she was like, "yeah, but we have literally no other models."

Andrea: [43:55](#) Yeah.

Hannah (Host): [43:56](#) And I was like, "ah, no, we do! We do have other models." We have like incredible models and in this incredible historical moment, those of us, there's this part in the Buffy bio where Buffy says like, like, "whiteness is capable of incredible violence and it has been violence against racialized folks and Indigenous folks and it has been the violence of white people against other white people." Like, we have just been killing each other for so long that we forgotten that there are other ways to be. And here's this incredible moment in which like, white people who are like just crushed under the toxicity of our own culture, are being like, incredibly generously offered an opportunity to like, opt out of that and to try to put ourselves in service of, of something else. And most of us are treating that like, like it's an absolutely unbelievable demand rather than the most incredible, incredible gift and incredibly generous possibility. And not all like absolutely there sir. There are absolutely some Indigenous people who are like, actually, if you could just all fuck off, that would be great. And like super fair, like super duper fair. and then some people being like, we're going to rebuild this and you are allowed to come along if you want. And it's like, shit can wait. [Laughs]

Andrea: [45:20](#) Yes. Can we, please? Like, this would be amazing. This, this idea like, I do keep having people say to me as well like...So at the book launch, you know, we had this incredible, incredible welcome from Musqueam chief, former chief Gail Sparrow. And as someone said to me just yesterday, "well, you know, I didn't agree with everything she said, but I really appreciated hearing her speak and hearing her, her perspective on a lot of things." And I thought, "do you have to say that I didn't agree with everything she said? Because I don't care." Like I, like, whiteness centers whiteness first, and decides, you know, what it agrees with based on whiteness. If we can remove that or not even like, if we can just delay that impulse, as white people, to, to just put ourselves first like, "oh, but I don't agree with it." Like no one cares. No one cares what you agree with. Like, you know what, white people had a lot of time to get shit right and

they've not done it. We've not done it. We are not good at it. And Buffy always, always, always is trying to remind me "it's not about whiteness, it's not about whiteness and cause they've been killing them their own as well." And yes, like obviously agree with her, but I also feel like, just as a white person, I sort of have to, have to talk about whiteness cuz that's sort of my obligation as a white person. So like you know, so for example, if you are given this opportunity where an Indigenous person, a racialized person, any kind of identity that's like a marginalized identity, tells you something, please do not center whether or not you agree with them, because it doesn't matter. Like you have to, you have to listen to the message and you have to spend some time with that message, I think. And that's the best thing that like, that's the best thing that white people can do as a first step. It is certainly not the last step. But as a first step, we need to make space where we're actually listening to people tell us things that are important. Like our whole lives have been shaped, as least in North America and often like in, in sort of certainly many European cultures, again, everything is in service of whiteness. And I know it takes like a bit of time to sort of like, step away from that a little bit, but I think it will, it really will make a tremendous amount of difference in like, our ability to be allies in creating and in helping and being invited along into something new. Like we like, white people can't take ownership of it, we, all we can do is help. And we have to like own our desire to help, but we can't be in charge of it. Like we, like, no. White people need to sit down for a little bit. In the same way that I always believe white men need to sit down permanently, white people in general really need to sit down for a little bit and like just, do some listening for like, I dunno what, like 2000 years. What do you think we owe? Like, yeah, like I think like, I mean a long time.

- Hannah (Host): [48:29](#) Yeah.
- Andrea: [48:30](#) A really long time. Yeah.
- Andrea: [48:31](#) Yeah. If we could just sit down until the waters aren't poison anymore and then--
- Andrea: [48:37](#) Actually that's a pretty great time frame. Yeah, that's a pretty great time frame.
- Hannah (Host): [48:40](#) Okay.
- Andrea: [48:41](#) [Laughs]

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- Hannah (Host): [48:41](#) Well that was great and I think we've really talked about that biography. I think we can all agree. [Music: "The War Racket (Unplugged)" by Buffy Sainte-Marie]
- Hannah (Host): [49:09](#) If you'd like to learn more about Andrea's work, you can find her on Twitter @_AndreaWarner, so her name, but with an underscore at the beginning. And of course you can buy *Buffy Sainte-Marie: The Authorized Biography*, literally everywhere, because it's a huge deal and she's a huge deal. I mean, they both are. Andrea and Buffy, both huge deals. You can find show notes and all the episodes of *Secret Feminist Agenda* on secretfeministagenda.com. You can follow me on Twitter @hkpmcgregor, and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda. Also, you can rate and review the show and you should do that. Do it. Do it. Do it. The podcast's theme song is "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans off their album, Chub Rub. You can download the entire album on freemusicarchive.org or follow them on Facebook. Andrea's theme song was "The War Racket (Unplugged)" by Buffy Sainte-Marie, obviously. *Secret Feminist Agenda* is recorded on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh first nations where I'm grateful to live and work. This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]