Scott Adsit: …careful. And fun. But there's nothing like performance going on anywhere. My parents didn't listen to music. They didn't obsess on anything apart from work and their kids, pretty much.

Andrew Clark: You went to Columbia College in Chicago for Film, initially. Was the goal to be a filmmaker at first?

SA: Yeah. I went to my dad's college in Green Castle, Indiana for a semester and realized that I didn't want to be my dad. Then I went to Columbia, which is like a great art school in downtown Chicago. It wasn't a great school when I went there. It's become a great school. It's become a great, wide school, but the theater department there was always great, and run by really talented people. A great thing there was, you could not be a teacher if you were not already working in the field you're teaching in. You had to have a job to have that job, which is cool, but also kind of cruel, I think, because it's a cruel business, and if you lose one job, it's like, "Oh, you're done."

AC: Really? Wow. You had some pretty great instructors, but when did you kind of get the comedy bug? How did you sort of fall into that?

SA: In junior high. There was an acting class that taught through improv, somehow. There was a teacher who was named Karin Little, who was a beautiful redhead who had been a Playmate. She was a centerfold in *Playboy*, and she had found herself teaching drama in a junior high. She was my first improv teacher, and from there I did some

performance in that realm, and then in high school I had the great luck of having a great theater teacher there who created an improv troupe, but a sketch troupe as well, for the school, and we would perform at assemblies and stuff. They allowed us to do satire about the school. So it was like a Second City thing in this high school, and we could make fun of the government, and religion, and things like that. They would try to put a reign on us, but they never did. *(laughter)*

AC: When you were training at Columbia, you had two sort of legendary instructors, Martin de Maat and Sheldon Patinkin. What were those classes like? Do you still draw on anything that you learned from them?

SA: I still consider Marty my guru. He was the guy who taught me everything I needed to know in level one. Everything after Marty's level one was just like honing the broad strokes he painted there. But Marty's in my ear all the time when I'm performing, and when I'm teaching especially. Marty was of the school of, you were pure potential, and you cannot do anything wrong. You can make better choices, but there's no "should have," there's only "could have." That was his whole philosophy. His approach was, you can do something that doesn't benefit the scene, but let's not call that "wrong," let's just call that what happened, and you might have a better time if you do it a different way next time. And so it was a very open and loving "huggy" way to teach, and that really sculpted me.

AC: And did you kind of accelerate pretty quickly? How long between…

SA: I was the best one right away! *(laughter)* No. What do you mean, “accelerate”?

AC: Well, a lot of people here would eventually like to be on mainstage in Second City here in Toronto or Chicago, but it’s a long way, a lot of classes…

SA: I did every step. I did. I was taking improv with Marty and other people at Columbia, and Marty also taught at Second City in Chicago, so he said, “Why don’t you come along and do classes there?” So I did that, and at that time the program was very small compared to what it is now. Right now, Second City’s an enormous monolith of teaching and business and offices. It’s very strange. When I went through, it was just five levels, eight weeks each, and you were done in less than a year, and the last eight weeks was performance. Every Monday night, you’d get a stage and an audience, and then during the week a couple rehearsals to fix what you had done. And so I did that, and then they hired me for the touring company, and I toured for like three years, and I went away to do a show at Steppenwolf and a few other little black-box shows in Chicago, and then I came back to work for another maybe four months.

And then they hired me for a thing, which was the third theater for the Second City in Chicago, which was out in the suburbs. It was a terrible idea. It was called The Second City Northwest in Rolling Meadows in a shopping mall. It was a theater in a shopping mall. And the only great thing about it was that nobody from management was there to watch it. So we did a lot of experimental stuff, and risked failure a lot. It was really fun. And then I went to ETC, which is the second stage, right next door to the main

stage, and I did three shows there and then came and did I think four shows in the main stage. So I did every step. There were other people, I remember Rachel Dratch joined our cast right out of the touring company. I think (Chris) Farley did the same thing, I think Tina (Fey) did the same thing.

AC: So that's sort of your class, Rachel, Tina…

SA: Rachel, Tina, Jon Glaser, Adam McKay…oh, Stephen Colbert, Amy Sedaris, Paul Dinello, Nia Vardalos…

AC: Wow.

SA: Ian Gomez. These are the people I toured with and did shows with.

AC: Wow. And you were in a couple of revues that are still spoken of, like *Piñata Full of Bees*, and *Paradigm Lost*, which are (spoken of) in hushed tones, because they're kind of legendary as setting a standard. Can you talk a little bit about how they happened?

SA: There had been one way of doing a show at Second City for a very long time, which was, scene, scene, blackout, scene, a long game, or mixing those things up within a running order. After the 35th anniversary of Second City, we'd done this show called *Old Wine in New Bottles*, which was the best of Second City from the last 35 years. And we did this show that had old material from the Eisenhower era, and while some of it was

fun, it was a little too reverent, and we chose what worked back then, but doesn't work now. It was kind of creaky and dusty, and we were a little uncomfortable with it. We were very proud to do good material from the old days, but it just didn't resonate with the audience.

So we decided in the next show to just do something completely different, and we tore down the back wall that had a door, a window, and a revolving door, which had been there since 1960, maybe. We tore it down. It had paint that made it about three or four inches thicker from all the paint jobs it's had. We felt very guilty about that, but we tore that down and we decided that the show would have a long-form structure, rather than scene, scene, scene, scene, song. So instead of having that structure of train cars on a track, it became dreamlike, and scenes could invade other scenes, and it was like a pop-up book. You would be reading this, and then it pulls to the side, and there would be a little scenelet popping out, and then we'd go back to the scene. We played with the form and changed it. I think they haven't gone back to the old structure since.

AC: No, it seems now like the old structure in some respects, because that's sort of '94, '95, or even sooner, maybe '93.

SA: Yeah, like '96, maybe.

AC: And now, certainly in Toronto, that structure is also employed all the time.

SA: So it'll just come back around. It'll be a train…

AC: Someone'll tear down the set.

SA: And build the old set back up.

AC: When did you start teaching? I know you teach as well. You taught a workshop here just last weekend.

SA: Yeah, I teach workshops occasionally, when I go to festivals. I don't teach at home. I taught at Columbia to make a little extra money when I was touring, because touring doesn't pay. For a while, I was just trying to be Marty de Maat, teaching, and then I found my own way. But it's still Marty.

AC: And have you learned anything from teaching that's influenced you as a performer?

SA: Well, I recognize myself in every student making mistakes that I remember (making). And making mistakes that I still make now. So it's nice to be able to talk to myself out loud, and have somebody else listen, essentially, and have someone say, "In that moment you panicked because you couldn't think of what to say, or you had too many choices, or you couldn't remember anything—that person's name. Or you couldn't remember what the suggestion was. You couldn't remember why you're there." What goes on in your head still goes on in my head, so it's nice to talk about it with somebody.

AC: Is there any advice, because I find that with comedy in general, maybe improv particularly, it's a bit like when you first start doing it, you can accelerate pretty quickly, and make big strides, and then the further you go in honing your craft, the longer it is between those steps up, and the fewer people are able to make them. Have you found anything in your career that's allowed you to continue to grow and keep getting more and more to where you want to be as an improviser?

SA: I think I've improved since my Second City days, because I've started doing more just two-person shows, two-person long form for like an hour, just the two of us playing many characters, or sometimes just one scene for the hour. And that's helped me as an actor, and it's helped me enjoy it a little more. You start out learning the games and stuff, and then I found that I grew out of games very quickly. They weren't very interesting to me, because it wasn't about interaction, it was about being clever in the moment. And once you feel you're clever in the moment, then you can kind of move on from games, I think. If you're still having to prove yourself as being clever, then you keep playing games, but I think if you get past that, then you're like, "OK, what can I do with this now?" So I hope I'm getting better and better the more I do it.

We just did a show that we're taking to Broadway, John Lutz from *30 Rock* and four other improvisers and myself, T.J. and Dave, who you may have heard of, and Stephanie Weir and Bob Dassie. We're doing a show that'll be on Broadway and off, all at the same time, where we go into a theater that has a show up and running, and has a set, and we go in late nights and on Mondays when they're dark, and we're gonna improvise a two-act play based on the set. *(laughter)* We just walk in after the audience is

there, and we see the set for the first time, and we kind of peruse it for about thirty seconds, just to make sure we're not gonna trip, and then we start a play with no plan ahead of time. We know what we want to avoid, we don't want it to be sketchy, we don't want it to be driven by the need to be funny. We've done it four times, and it went really well. We were really, really happy with it, and it gave us what you're talking about, that next step. It felt like a rebirth for all of us. We're all very experienced people, and humble, and used to doing good work, and used to having a good show. This was like a wind under us.

AC: It's called *Stolen Houses*?

SA: *Stolen House*.

AC: *Stolen House*, yeah. Every person I've mentioned it to, their eyes just kind of light up as soon as you tell them the concept.

SA: Money in the bank!

AC: It just sounds so great. It's brilliant. When will it open, do you know?

SA: Our hope is to open it in December in New York on the 11th. There may be scheduling problems. We've got six people in three different cities, and we're trying to

get a window where we can get them all in one city, but then also have theaters that will say, “Yeah, come possibly break our stuff.”

AC: Yeah, I guess there are all sorts of legal issues, who knows?

SA: And personal issues. *(laughter)*

AC: *(to audience)* I think it’s time for a question. I’ve talked too long. Anybody have a question out there? Raise your hands. *(long pause)*

SA: Oh, this is gonna go well.

AC: They’re in quiet awe. *(to audience)* Yes, Robin, yep.

Audience member: I saw you perform in Chicago…

SA: Robin Duke, hello!

Audience member: How are you?

SA: I’m a huge fan.

Audience member: I’m a huge fan of yours. *(applause)*

SA: Thank you, yes.

Audience member: I saw you perform the “Nun” sketch in Chicago at the anniversary…

SA: You’ll have to narrow it down. Which “Nun” sketch? *(laughter)*

Audience member: It was the one with the record player.

SA: Oh yeah, OK.

Audience member: Could you tell us a little bit about the beginning of that, and where that came from, and the origin?

SA: Sure. The scene is called “Grandma’s Records.” There’s no grandma in it because it started out as a grandma, but we made it into a nun, because that’s a shortcut, I guess. The premise is that this Mother Superior has died, and (I’m) the priest, and Rachel Dratch is a nun, and Jenna Jolovitz is a nun. I’ve come up to her room to find some music to play at her funeral, and all of her stuff is kind of too sad. We go looking for her records, we find a box under her bed, hidden away, and we go through it, and every one of them is a novelty record that involves fucking. *(laughter)*

It largely came from Jim Zulevic, and it was a cast scene. There were only three characters, but then the other three were playing instruments on the side and singing the

records. And it was all very slapdash. Zulevic had a traffic cone we had stolen from the street as a megaphone, *(adopting 1920's phonograph singing voice)* so he'd sound like this. And Tina I think learned guitar or ukulele to do it. And Kevin Dorff was crumpling paper to sound like a scratchy record. *(laughter)* It escalated from a weird record to just getting dirtier and dirtier and weirder. We had all these ones we didn't even use, which are just crazy. I wish I could remember it…it was "Underneath the old tree/Kissin' and pitchin' woo/Na na na na, na na na na/'Cause she knew what to do…" *(laughter)* "They called her Backdoor Annie/She liked it in the fanny/*(laughter)* And they all loved her down at the dock." And the priest would grab the record and say, "Oh no, no, no!" I'd be panicked, and the two nuns barely noticed. It was about my panic. I'd just go back to the box and see, "This one might work!" *(laughter)* And I just kept going back for the same punishment. Every record was like, I think it's gonna be OK, and then it just turns…

But it came out of, I think Zulevic wanting to do dirty songs. *(laughter)* And we tried it many different ways, and finally we just came upon the nun thing, because habits are funny to look at, and you know who these people are. That's what I mean by a shortcut. The best thing was every night for about a month, we were trying new songs every time. Everybody would come in with three dirty, awful songs. *(laughter)* "Me Big Chief Ten-Inches…" *(laughter)* It got sillier and sillier, and the songs got shorter and shorter too. It was instantly dirty by the end. *(laughter)* And then the last one is a song that keeps sounding like the rhyme scheme keeps telling you it's gonna get dirty, and then it doesn't. It's all feint. And then it finally finishes, and it's like, "Oh thank God, that's a nice pleasant song." And then the nun who has barely said anything the whole time has the out, which is going, "I like the one where she takes it in the ass." *(laughter)*

AC: Great.

SA: *(to audience member)* Thank you!

AC: *(to audience)* Was there a question over here? Yep, hand the mic over.

Audience member: Hello.

AC: There you go. Thank you.

Audience member: Hello. Who were you in *Moral Orel*?

SA: Backstage, I was a producer and writer, and director. Onscreen, I was Orel's father, and his best friend Doughy, and the doctor in town, and ten or twelve other characters as well. But mostly Clay, his father.

Audience member: Oh, OK.

SA: Yeah.

AC: Can you talk a little bit about how that show came to be? For me, I kind of grew up with *Davey and Goliath*.

SA: It is very like *Davey and Goliath*.

AC: It was very spooky. They look virtually the same in presentation…

SA: Not legally, though.

AC: Of course. *(laughter)* And then that's a show that that you worked on with one of your long-time collaborators and friends…

SA: Lifetime partner.

AC: Dino Stamolop…

SA: No.

AC: Stamatopoulos.

SA: Yes.

AC: Alright. *(laughter)* So how did the show come about? How did it get created?

SA: Well, it started with Dino Stamatopoulos. He had a script lying around, and Adult Swim came to him because they'd liked *Mr. Show*, which we had both done. *(light applause)* Thank you very much. And they said, "Have you got any ideas?" And he had this old script lying around, it's a great story, I don't know if I'll tell it well enough, but he had written a script for Iggy Pop, a sitcom. *(laughter)* It involved Iggy playing a twelve-year-old boy in a family. *(laughter)* Iggy just had the lines a twelve-year-old boy would have in a sitcom, and it was Iggy Pop. *(laughter)* But Dino's sense of humor was such that, I think the pilot was, he was on the track team, *(laughter)* and somehow he…what was it…I can't remember how it happened, there's some logic to this, but the boy thought that because he was drinking urine, he was a better runner. *(laughter)* And so he started selling his urine to the other players, or other runners. And the team became really fast. *(laughter)* And it was just about the naughty weirdness of drinking urine. *(laughter)* Not a great script. *(laughter)* We certainly turned it into a *Moral Orel* script, though.

He had a meeting with Iggy Pop *(laughter)*, and they had lunch I think at some al fresco place, and he had never met him before, and he pitched the idea to him, and allegedly Iggy was so high *(laughter)* that he listened to the whole pitch and then said something like, "I'd fuck that girl." *(laughter)* That was the meeting. And so Dino had that script, and Adult Swim said, "Do you have anything?" And he shrugged and said, "Kind of." So he rewrote it to be a puppet show, a marionette puppet show, he thought that'd be a really innovative idea, and right when he was doing that, *Team America* was announced. *(groans)* So he said, "Alright, I'll just do a *Davey and Goliath* kind of thing." And that became a better premise, because then we could kind of base it on the idea of

morality, which is what *Davey and Goliath* was all about, and what every story is about, essentially. So we made this thing about hypocrisy. People might think it's about religion, and it is about religion, but it's also more so about hypocrisy, and how people say one thing and feel another, whether that's a good thing or a bad thing.

AC: It was on from like 2005 to 2008?

SA: It was a little earlier than that, I think. Three seasons.

AC: Were you always able to come up with new stories? I remember…

SA: It evolved. It originally was kind of naughty stories, like the urine thing. We thought, this is a little boy who's nothing but good, he's simply goodness. And so we kind of thought backwards. What's the worst thing he could do, and how could we logically get him there without him being evil? And so in the pilot we had him raising the dead accidentally. *(laughter)* Which we never went back to, the supernatural stuff, because we had decided that probably, at least in this universe, God doesn't exist. *(laughter)* And so magic doesn't exist, and all that. But people liked to assume that God does, because it gives them excuses to do awful things to each other.

So it evolved. My first script involved Orel getting caught masturbating over a woman while she slept *(laughter)* in her bedroom. Because I read an article about a guy who was caught doing that, and I thought that was the worst thing I'd ever heard of in my life, to wake up to some stranger wanking over you. *(laughter)* So we found a way to

make that make sense, because religion said it's OK. *(laughter)* The scripts were like that, and just kind of naughty and weird, and it had a message to give, but it was still kind of naughty and about actions rather than about characters. And eventually, the show evolved over the course of three seasons into a really kind of heavy drama about the characters. I remember in the third season…it became a very spiritual show, actually, but not about God.

The guy in charge of Adult Swim, Michael Lazzo, saw the first two scripts of season three, and he said, "There's no jokes in here, man! Come on, gimme some pee! Gimme some celebrities!" Something like that. And he cancelled us after reading those two scripts. He just hated them, because there were no jokes in them. That first one was about self-mutilation and masturbation and self-hatred and depression and loneliness, and it's probably the best script we had. It's really, really good, and Dino wrote it. He said, "I'm gonna cut your order from 20 to 13, and you're done." So we're kind of like, "Oh, that's too bad," because we wanted to make a five-year show. By that time we had a plan to turn it into the most realistic show on TV, but with puppets. But that third season, the humor came from the fact that these puppets were very deep and resonant.

So we make those two shows, and we turn them in to be approved, and Mike Lazzo says, "This is the finest thing we've ever had on the network. This is the best quality of anything I can think of on any network. You're still cancelled." *(laughter)* But we were really proud of where the show went. I think we looked at the original series, and it's kind of clunky, and the animation's not quite so fluid, and it's kind of rushed. And eventually we really started to care. And it became something we were really proud of.

AC: When you went to Los Angeles from Chicago, initially you'd come to work on something that Dino was working on.

SA: Yeah, Dino got hired by Robert Morton, who was (David) Letterman's first producer, to write a show for Barry Levinson, who's a film director. Barry wanted to do a show about backstage at *SNL*. So Dino was hired out of *Conan*, I think he was writing for *Conan* at that time, or no, he was writing for *Letterman* at that time, and they hired him to do this because he was also one of the head writers for *Mr. Show*. So he hired me and Stephen Colbert and Mike Stoyanov to sit in a room together and write this show. It was interesting because it was a show about backstage at *SNL*, and the characters therein. It was to be an hour-long comedy on ABC, shot in New York, and eventually Barry said, "I want you guys to star in this." So it was like the perfect thing to quit Second City for. We did it, and it was OK. It kind of evolved in the wrong way, because of outside influences. We didn't make the show we wanted to, and they didn't buy it anyway. But that's how I left Second City, and that's how I came to California.

AC: How did you survive as an actor? That can be tough. I know you had success doing commercials, but I think you kind of eventually…

SA: I quit doing commercials because I had too many of them, actually. I had done a lot of national commercials, and six were running at one time. During that, Tom Purcell, who's a great guy, he was the head writer for *The Colbert Report* and also for the new

show, we met on the street and he had some friends with him, and he said, “Oh, this is Scott Adsit. He’s a commercial actor.” And I quit that day. *(laughter)* And the universe got underneath me, and with the money I had made in commercials, which was a good deal of money for an actor, I started doing guest-star stuff and movies, and I made more money that next year. So the fates were in my favor at that time.

AC: Can you talk a little bit about how you came to be on *30 Rock*? Everybody loves that show, it was a wonderful show to watch, hopefully it was a lot of fun to make. Can you tell me how you got onto that show?

SA: Well, Tina at that point was the woman on *Weekend Update* that you respected or hated. She was kind of untested as a show creator, but she was head writer at *SNL*, and we had worked together at Second City, we were very close friends with her husband Jeff as well, and I got a call in the spring of 2005, I think, or thereabouts, and she said, “I’m creating a show, I’m gonna write a pilot. Would you want to do it?” And I said, “Absolutely, yeah, as a favor, I’ll do you a favor.” *(laughter)* And a few months later, I found myself auditioning for this part, and I got it eventually.

She kind of wrote it for me. I don’t think Pete is anything like me, but she thought I could play that part. The interesting thing was, I had also auditioned at the same time for *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*, which was Aaron Sorkin’s version of backstage at *SNL*, hour-long, and I was up for one of the leads in that, and they were inviting me back to the final call-back, and I had to do choose, because you have to sign a contract when you go to the final stage to commit. I had a choice between Tina and Aaron Sorkin, and Aaron

Sorkin had just come off *The West Wing*, which was a huge, respected thing, so he was the guy to bet on. And I loved Tina, so I just went with Tina, and God am I glad I did.

AC: Yeah. Because all the money was on *Studio 60* when it came out.

SA: Yeah.

AC: It got all the press, and basically immolated itself, and *30 Rock* was far more successful. As a character, it's interesting that you said he's nothing like you, because he's wonderfully stricken, if I could use that word. He's in a wonderful state of heightened panic and stress, and yet he's still trying. How do you create that character with Tina? She's written this character keeping you in mind…

SA: Yeah, she and (Robert) Carlock and their writers. It's on the page. They were really meticulous in that room, the writer's room at *30 Rock*. They honed these things and crafted them, and there's not much (that's) loosey-goosey. It's like *The Office*, Ricky Gervais's *Office*. It was very strictly written. People performed to the page. It wasn't improvised, though it seems like it was. Robert and Tina would bring these scripts to the table read that were pristine. They were like this beautiful ornate little toy carousel, and you don't want to fuck with that.

So the character was kind of there. I just pushed my energy into what was already on the page, essentially, which was nice guy, easily panicked, and eventually you learn more about…people say he's a straight man on the show, but if you listen to what he

says, his life outside the studio is insane. He's made terrible choices in his life, and regrets all of them, and keeps making them. *(laughter)* He's like everything that's weak about men, and self-doubting, and underhanded. He got involved with bum fights to feel better about himself. *(laughter)* And that's the kind of thing where if you'd follow Pete home, you'd see stuff like that all the time. But he became a straight man because at work he has to keep a lid on it.

AC: I just remember there was a line in an episode where Liz wants one of the assistants to dress more appropriately, and Pete's like, "Don't take that away from me." *(laughter)* That kind of thing. There's a lot of those great lines that you had.

SA: And then he's also a victim a lot. I think of the Best Friends Club *(laughter)*, which is Kelsey and Jane and Jack…I can't remember what I did, but they implied that he was responsible for something by knocking him out and putting a bag over his head and taking his pants down and putting porn next to him. And he just wakes up going, "What? What's happening?" *(laughter)*

AC: Sorry I'm fanning out here. I'll stop. *(laughter) (to audience)* There's a question? Yes.

Audience member: I'm waiting for the…

SA: You got the pipes, man, do it!

Audience member: Yeah! How's it goin'…Paul…

SA: Wow!

Audience member: P, P, P…

SA: Wow. Traffic on the ones.

Audience member: I think my personal favorite *30 Rock* episode had Weird Al in it. My head exploded when I saw the photograph of you and Tina and Weird Al. And I was just curious about what that was like, to be around him.

SA: He turned out to be the nicest guy we ever had on the show. *(laughter)* He was generous, and a fan, and excited to be there, and then he knew his stuff, and he was just a pleasure to be around. I wasn't sure what to think of him before he got there, because parody's not my favorite genre, but I like it, and he's the best at it. I was thrilled that he was a nice guy. Really nice guy. Are you a fan of his?

Audience member: Big time. Name a song, I'll sing it for you. Just kidding.

SA: Not gonna do it. Not gonna do that. *(laughter)*

Audience member: JK!

AC: *(to audience)* Another question? Yeah, right over there.

Audience member: My question's touching on doing voice acting for video games. I saw you did the voiceover for Baymax in Disney Infinity.

SA: Yes.

Audience member: I saw that's the only credit you have for games, and if that's something you want to do more of, or the difference between film…

SA: It's good money, I'll say that.

Audience member: There you go.

SA: It's better money than you'll probably make for a feature. Yeah, I think so. It depends on what it is, but if you get a *World of Warcraft* or *Call of Duty* or something, they got the money, they got the time, and they like your talent. What was the question? *(laughter)*

Audience member: Just the differences between film, doing a voiceover for film acting, and for games.

SA: Well, the game I did was just like interstitial stuff, just saying, "This may be considered unhealthy," that kind of thing. *(laughter)* Or, "This makes me a better health care companion," that kind of thing. So it's not integral to the plot, if there is a plot. *(laughter)* It's just proving that they got the actual people to join, pretty much. I do have friends who do voiceover for games, and it's all they do, and they're so happy about it. You go in, and you just get a list of things to say, pretty much. You're just reading a list, essentially, and trying to emote as much as you can. In film, you're doing a performance, and your character has an arch, and you have relationships, and it is about acting and reacting. That's probably gonna change with video games getting more sophisticated. They will eventually be movies that you get to play.

So I think they're gonna get more and more similar *(someone sneezes)* bless you, as it goes on. I didn't get credit for this, at least on IMDB, but Kevin Dorff from Second City and I were hired to write all the dialogue for a pinball machine called Medieval Madness *(laughter)* from Bally/Midway, which was based in Chicago. So we got to write that list, and then we also did the voices, and we brought Tina Fey in to do the female voices. And so if you go find *Medieval Madness* right now, you can hear two *30 Rock* people before *30 Rock*, and the great Kevin Dorff, who's a writer for *Conan* and he's doing something else right now too, I can't remember. *(to Andrew)* Do you know? *(pause)* It's one of the best pinball games ever made. *(laughter)* That's not my opinion. You go on Youtube, there are channels devoted to it. They have refurbished parts you can buy. You can send away for these parts, because they've molded them and copied them, and you can get better. Also, an independent company, not Bally, put out the very same

game, only now it's all digitized. It's a more reliable game, but it has the same action, if you will.

AC: And that's not your only thing, because with *Big Hero 6*, there are *Big Hero 6.*…

SA: Oh, I've got dolls!

AC: Like, dolls and…

SA: I've got dolls that talk with my voice in my house right now, and action figures that talk. It's great.

AC: Do you leave them places for people, or do you give them away as gifts?

SA: You lift the toilet seat, you hear my voice. No…

AC: Oh, you're kidding!

SA: They're a good gift, I'll say that. *(laughter)* And then I also will occasionally leave voice messages for the kids of my friends. That's really fun.

AC: That's really cool. That's a great movie. Did you enjoy, I guess it's a silly question, but how'd it feel to be in a movie that you know there's probably a kid watching it at

every minute of every day, and you probably grew up watching the same thing, *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* and all that, so is it kind of neat for you to know that that's gonna be there…

SA: Is it kind of neat?

AC: Yeah!

SA: It's ridiculously neat! *(laughter)*

AC: I'm understating it.

SA: I'd done a stage show in California, I was visiting California. I did one night of a thing called "Celebrity Autobiography" where I played several different characters, but not very broadly. Two people from the casting department at Disney Animation were there, not to cast anything, but just to go see a show, and they heard my voice, and the light turned on in their heads, and they invited me in the next day, and I had an hour-long audition in the booth at Disney Animation, which is amazing, because you walk into Disney Animation and the walls are covered in Disney art, and there's old cells lying around. Behind a boiler was a bulletin board with original *Lady and the Tramp* art on it. Just kind of like, "Get this out of the way." *(laughter)*

So I'm aware that it could go either way. It could be one of those movies that people just forget, and it could be a classic, it could be whatever. Who knows when

you're doing it. But just like doing a play, you don't know what the response will be, but the process is really enjoyable. Before it opened, we did a screening party at Disney Animation for the cast, and about thirty crew members, department heads, for the first time the movie had been seen by anyone but the editors. And it was the final lock on the print, which was finished I think three hours before the party.

They gathered the cast, and there were nine of us gathered there, and we had never met each other before. And so we were this family without ever having met each other, and we came together very nicely, and we all kind of felt like we knew each other. It was very strange. Lasseter, John Lasseter, who's in charge of Pixar and Disney Animation, stood up before the screening and said to the nine of us, "You are now part of something larger. You are on the same shelf as Pinocchio and Peter Pan and Snow White. You are in with them. You are them." That was devastating to hear. *(laughter)* That floored me. The guy in charge is saying, "You are a Disney classic." I still don't believe it. It was one of the greatest honors of my life, that moment.

AC: Wow. That's terrific.

SA: Yeah. *(applause)* Oh, don't! It's my honor. It did nothing for you. *(laughter)*

AC: ***(****to audience)* Another question? Yeah, Robbie, right there.

Audience member: Maybe you already answered with the…oh, hey.

SA: You don’t have to use your diaphragm now.

Audience member: I know. No technique needed. Maybe you already answered with the pinball machine, but what’s the weirdest gig you ever had where it’s like, “I never thought comedy would take me to this area”?

SA: I did a cautionary film for alcoholics, children of alcoholics. *(laughter)* They’d be shown in halfway houses and recovery centers. It’s about the abuse that children go through with alcoholic parents, and I played an abusive alcoholic father. *(laughter)* Yeah. I hit my wife, and I mistreat my kid. I was a terrible man. *(laughter)* That was very early, that was one of my first gigs. But it was fun. *(laughter)*

AC: I recall an anecdote I heard maybe on a podcast about an audition for children’s theater where you did a monologue from Pinter’s *The Homecoming*.

SA: Oh, God. Yeah.

AC: Is that true?

SA: You’ve really done research!

AC: I’d like to know from you what that was like.

SA: I think I had stopped doing Second City touring to do some shows around town, and then I was between gigs. So a friend of mine said, "You should go audition for this children's theater. They pay." So I found myself in this empty apartment in Chicago auditioning for two people who were very eager, and they didn't tell me what I needed to do before I got there. I thought I might just be a talker, or sing a song. So I did sing a song, and I read one of their scenes, which is all about being eager. *(laughter)* And it's all very bright and positive. "Pollution is no good," or whatever it was about. *(laughter)* And then they said, "We need to see a monologue," and the only monologue I had, because I'd just done *The Homecoming* at Steppenwolf, and I knew the monologue of the 70-year-old abusive father *(laughter)* named Max, who was cockney. *(laughter)* One of his lines is, "You drown in your own blood." *(laughter)* He says to his son. *(laughter)*

So I did that monologue for the children's theater, and there was kind of a long pause after I finished, and they said, "OK, now we want you to speak passionately about something." And I was so turned off by the audition that I spoke passionately about how awful this audition was. *(laughter)* And how much I didn't want to be in the show. I did not get the job. *(laughter)* So we all won. *(laughter)*

AC: Do you have an approach to auditioning? For actors, so much of your career is spent going out for parts that you often don't get, even if you are gifted. So what's your approach to auditions and that part of the business?

SA: It can feel like you're stepping up to the plate, and you're supposed to hit a home run, and that's true. There's a pass/fail element of that, which is like crippling. So

eventually, I realized that I loved to perform. So I think of the audition as today's show. Just go do your show, it's a five-minute show, enjoy it. Do your shtick, and then the show's over. And the audience either likes it or they don't. If you don't get that job, then hopefully you'll have another show tomorrow, or next week, next month. Occasionally, you'll get a job that'll last more than five minutes, and they'll pay you for it. But the audition is a show, it's a job, and you go do your job and have fun doing it, because you love to perform. I also don't prepare well enough, generally. So I don't know the script as well as I should, and I fumble for a bit. I usually have to do it at least twice, because I screwed up. It's not like they say, "Try it with a little more energy." No, it's me just not getting through the words, because I don't prepare well enough, because I think I've got it when I don't. So that's what I need to improve.

AC: OK. That's great. So that's the sort of self-knowledge that comes over time, doing auditions, that sort of thing. Great. *(to audience)* Another question? Yep. Right there. Taylor.

Audience member: I was just wondering if you could talk a bit about your experiences on *Mr. Show*.

SA: Yeah! Dino Stamatopoulos was writing for that show from the beginning, and I was in Chicago and he was in L.A., and when I moved to write with him, Bob Odenkirk was a fan of mine through seeing me at Second City. So they said, "Come join the cast." So I joined the last half, I think, of the last season. I didn't do a lot. I did about six shows or

something. But that was a real learning experience, because those were all really, it was like Python, I think. Apart from the fact that the writers were not all performers in a regular way, there were really intelligent sketches that they really put their hearts into, and it was a lot of silly but intelligent and dirty (sketches), and whatever they thought was funny was what they did.

And they were at a disadvantage, because HBO did not like the show. They didn't want to promote the show. It was a very, very cutting-edge show at the time, because the people involved were all underground comedians who are now mainstream and fantastic. Paul F. Tompkins was a writer on that show, and Patton Oswalt, and the performers were Sarah Silverman and Jack Black and Jay Johnston, and all these amazing people. So I got to kind of observe that. And then occasionally, I would walk onstage with them, but mostly it was me just watching how great they were. And then occasionally they'd say, "Alright, now you're in this." So it was a thrill. And I felt cooler having been there.

AC: You were sort of at the birth of what they would call alternative comedy on the west coast. It was really coming out of *Mr. Show* and then I guess Largo before it. Were you active in Los Angeles performing in that scene as well?

SA: I was more at the IO in Chicago doing improv. I was not a standup, never was. Dino and I tried it for a little bit, but we didn't like it because of the atmosphere backstage. It was not pleasant to be backstage at a comedy club. And also, we just didn't enjoy it. It wasn't that satisfying to us. Half the audience, when we'd perform, hated us. *Hated* us. And the other half adored us. So we figured we were doing it right for the kind of

comedy we wanted to do, but it wasn't our goal. So I did a lot of improv, and then I worked as a mercenary as an actor, going in whenever I was needed or wanted.

AC: A lot of people will go to Los Angeles, more so people in America, because they don't need to organize a visa and things like that, to learn comedy. Do you think that's a good choice? It seems like Los Angeles and New York can be tough places to learn. Or is that a misunderstanding?

SA: Well, I think you've gotta go where it is. You learn by doing, and you learn by watching people a lot better than you, and then talking to them and bothering them and asking them advice. So you've gotta go where your craft is being forged, not where they feel it's finished. You've gotta find places where it's still being hammered out and new things are being tried. I don't think you're gonna find that in a suburban comedy club. I don't think you're gonna find that in class. You're gonna find that by being in the places where they do what you want to do, but they're doing it very raw.

AC: When you were starting out, like we talked about how people trained, it was a much narrower pool, so to speak, and there were classes, because they needed people. Now, we were talking a bit earlier, it's really become a big machine. What do you think the dangers are for an aspiring comedian now that it's become improv for everything?

SA: Second City used to be a mecca where people from all over the country would come and join a very small class of people. I don't think there was a time when I was coming

up where we had more than sixty students at a time, and classes that had fourteen people, and maybe five of those. I don't know what the math is on that. Now it's a thousand students, more than that, and classrooms and theaters, and they took over the entire Piper's Alley, which is the building they're in, which had been mini-shops and theaters and a movie theater. Second City now owns all of that, because Andrew Alexander wanted to expand.

So now it's this monolith of money. It's making lots of money from students. A huge part of their business is going out and doing industrials and making shows just for the money. The thing that I loved about Second City when I first started going there as a kid was that it seemed like it was art. It was just for us in that room. It was really clever people doing what they thought was funny, and it was, for a lack of a better term, art. Eighty percent of the business at Second City now is not art. It's commerce. What's happening on the stages, the two stages there in town, is still very artful and very passionate. They're doing all that for the same reasons we always did it. But on the other side of the wall is an office complex, until it burned down recently, on Sheldon Patinkin's birthday. And I thought, "Oh, there's Sheldon saying hello to the business side." I don't recognize it very well anymore. I sound like an old man saying that.

AC: Well, Toronto has I think about 1500 students or so a year, but a lot of them, maybe their goal isn't necessarily to be a comedian or to be an actor, it's sort of really a big, broad offering.

SA: It's become something much larger. There are many people who would say, "Isn't that great? It's become something much broader, and it helps a lot more people." When I went through… *(adopts old man voice)* "When I went through," it was (about) how to be a Second City performer. It wasn't even about improv, it wasn't about being a better actor. Don DePollo said to me, "This is not about how to act, this is not about being a giving improviser, this is not about any of that. This is about how to be successful on the Second City stage." And I took that to heart. Now it's a bunch of other stuff, which is benefiting people who love doing it, and I don't begrudge them that. It's just not what I recognize.

AC: *(to audience)* Another question? Yes, Robin.

Audience member: Where is it happening now, would you say? Something that's like Second City at the beginning? Do you know of any place…

SA: UCB, maybe, although they don't have a resident company. They've got a bunch of people coming in, and I think there's monthly shows that you can rely on, the Harold night and the Maude night are weekly, which are sketch and improv. And then other people have running shows, like Chris Gethard has a show that runs there. There are a few people who have generally monthly shows. I've got a few shows that run whenever I can, and then one is every month.

AC: Is that "Rapid Water"?

SA: “Gravid Water.”

AC: “Gravid Water,” yeah.

SA: It’s one of my favorite improv things I’ve ever done. There’s an old improv game called “Playbook,” where someone stands onstage with a scene from a play, and they read one character, and the improviser doesn’t have a book, and they just try to make a scene out of it. So we took that premise and we give a Broadway performer or a film actor, whoever, an experienced actor, a scene to memorize, which she will do. She only gets a list of her lines from this play, and she memorizes them and prepares as she would, and comes ready in some kind of costume if need be. And then she’s put onstage with an improviser who sees the scene for the first time along with the audience. There’s no book. It’s pretty foolproof. I think it’s only failed once, because of Chevy Chase. *(laughter)*

Chevy was batting cleanup. Everybody was so excited to see him. He came on to improvise. And he did not get his first few laughs. You could see the laugh he was going for, and it didn’t hit, and he went into his panic mode, which is to get rude. And he started calling his partner, a lovely young actress who never came back, lovely woman, intelligent and a great actress, and they had a domestic scene, and every line was pretty much about what a cunt she was. *(laughter)* And it was heartbreaking, because everybody was so happy to see him, and then they just turned on him, and they should’ve. So that was the only time it didn’t work. *(laughter)* Every other time I’ve seen it or done it,

there's something about it that is really entertaining. If you get a chance to see "Gravid Water," it's fantastic.

AC: Great. *(to audience)* Another question? Eric.

Audience member: I was wondering: if you were to give one kind of piece of advice that you'd like us to take away as actors and writers, what would that be?

SA: Be someone that people want to work with. Don't be an asshole. *(applause)* Yeah, non-assholes! Have an ego. Be confident about yourself. Know your skills, and then try to get more. But at some point, as an actor and a writer, there are people who are just as good as you who can do the job just as well as you. But you'll have an advantage if you're someone that people want to spend fourteen hours a day with. So be a nice person. Maintain your ego, and defend yourself, but don't be an asshole. There's no joy in that for anyone who hires you.

AC: Are you ever surprised by the fact that many of the people you find yourself working with later, you worked with X many years ago when you were both starting out, that those relationships continue for such a long period?

SA: Well, Second City is kind of like a fraternity. Those people tend to have similar projects as they go on. So I do run into a lot of Second City people, and people I didn't work with, and we have like an assumed relationship sometimes. And then there are

people like, I did a reading of Shakespeare, a staged reading with Richard Kind, who I know very well at this point, but it's a big thrill, because he was one of the people I first saw on the stage there. You know who Richard Kind is? *(laughter)* Robin does, yes! Yeah, I run into people like that all the time, and Columbia people as well.

AC: And I guess working with Tina, that must have been…did you learn anything about making a show, working with her and seeing what she went through to keep that going?

SA: I saw firsthand that the mood, the tone, and the personality of a set and a workplace trickles down from the very top. And Tina's a very smart and patient and witty person, and that was the personality of the whole show. I think when you've got someone in charge who's less so, it's probably an unhappy set. If someone's really, like I'm sure the *Family Guy* set is really silly and drunk. *(laughter)* I think that's what I learned. If you're in charge of something, your personality infuses everybody you're in charge of.

AC: It looked, at least from the outside watching the show, that it went out almost at exactly the right time. Was that how the cast felt, maybe? Or were people wanting another few years? You don't want to overstay too long, right?

SA: We went out at a good time, I think, yeah. Unfortunately, the writers' strike cut us off at the knees one year, and we missed out on a whole bunch of episodes. We only did half a season for the last season, just because I think Alec wanted to go do some other stuff before the spring. I felt we were right on the edge of overstaying our welcome,

because the characters have to get broader and broader and broader and broader. We were a cartoon at the end, and a very smart and funny cartoon, but the longer you're on, the more extreme each character's personality has to get, because you have to keep surprising the audience without breaking the character. So I think we went out at exactly the right time, because everybody was still intact, and it was still really funny. And I think the last episode was really great, because I think everybody ended up in the right place. The fact that Grizz has a sitcom *(laughter)*, and Tina's writing for it, and Tina has two adopted children that are Jenna and Tracy, that's brilliant.

AC: Just quickly, there were two live episodes you did of the show.

SA: Oh god, yeah.

AC: What was that like? Bicoastal, too.

SA: It was a thrill to be in (Studio) 8H. I grew up watching *SNL*, and I auditioned for *SNL* in '95, and got very, very, very close. It came down to me and one other guy, and he got it. And so it was always kind of a ring I didn't quite catch. And so it was a thrill to be there on the stage, and that live feeling of running from set to set and doing a quick change, it was like *SNL* camp. You get a fantasy *SNL* camp, where you get to play like you're on *SNL*. *(Sound of sneezing)* Bless you. It was thrilling because it was the largest live audience I've ever played to, and it was great because I had almost no responsibility.

If it failed, it wasn't because of me. So I could relax and enjoy myself and do whatever silly thing I was doing.

The best part was that our surprise guest for the west coast feed, for the second one we did, was Paul McCartney. So he came and rehearsed with us and hung out with us, and I got to be in his presence, for a while at least. He's so nice. There's a long story attached to him and me, but it ends with, at the end of the whole thing, we're standing next to each other on home base. They're saying good night. And the credits roll, and people start dissembling, and Tina turns around and thanks Sir Paul, and he bends down and gives her a kiss, and she goes, "Oooh," and she runs off. And Paul and I are still standing next to each other waiting to get down. And in that (moment of) "What do we do now," I said to him, "Hey—"pointing to my cheek… *(laughter)* And he leaned over and he kissed me. *(laughter, applause)* Thank you. And I thought, "Well, that's fine. I literally can pass away now." *(laughter)* But then, John Lennon's writing partner looks at me and he goes, "Hey." And I leaned over and I gave Paul McCartney a kiss. *(laughter)* So every "yes or no" decision I'd ever made in my life was trying to get to that point. *(laughter)* So this is all gravy, right now. *(laughter)*

AC: *(to audience)* We have time for one or two questions, because Scott's heading off to the airport in a second. Yes. Don't hurt yourself.

SA: Hi!

Audience member: Hey, how's it going?

SA: Pretty good. What do you think? How *is* it going?

Audience member: It's going great.

SA: OK, good.

Audience member: I think one of my biggest questions is, throughout your career and everything you're doing now, when it all gets too much or you just get super drained out and you're just like, "I can't do this anymore," what gets you going, or what motivates you to keep going?

SA: My friends, and performing with them, and seeing them surprise me. It's improv. I think improv is just the biggest joy in my life that isn't my family. I think supporting someone onstage and watching them do great is a great thrill for me. And then also having the same back from them, and getting the ego rush of a laugh or whatever.

Audience member: Thank you. That was so nice.

AC: Great. *(to audience)* Alright, one last question over there.

Audience member: You've worked with quite a lot of people in the past. Is there anyone that you haven't worked with that you really would like to, or maybe even someone that you wouldn't ever want to work with again?

SA: Chevy Chase. *(laughter, applause)* The Pythons would be a thrill. I did a thing in Atlanta recently where I was actually onstage with Terry Jones performing scenes from *Life of Brian* and *Holy Grail*. It was a huge thrill. God, I've met some heroes, it's amazing. I was onstage with Terry. Terry was playing Mandy, Brian's mother, and I was playing Brian. And I'm standing closer than I am to you, and he's *(adopts high-pitched old British woman voice)* doing that voice, you know? *(laughter)* And I'm getting to hear that firsthand, and he's talking to me, and then I get to say Brian's monologue. That was thrilling. That was an event in Atlanta, and at the end of that they said, "Would you like to come back next year and do the same thing with Terry Gilliam and John Cleese?" And I said, "Yeah, I think I would." *(laughter)* So those are big thrills for me. Albert Brooks, maybe. He's another huge hero of mine. And Mike Leigh, I think is a filmmaker I'd want to work with more than anybody.

AC: Great. Well, Scott, for me it's always a great pleasure when someone who's work I've admired also turns out to be kind and generous and intelligent…

SA: You get assholes in here? Do they just mistreat everybody?

AC: I will not name any names. Sometimes it would be me bringing out the worst in someone, but it's been great to have you. Thank you so much.

SA: Thank you! *(applause)*