DEBBIE HANNAN: If you're familiar with our usual podcast format, this episode goes somewhere a bit different. It's a surreal look at the personal politics of the US election and it contains the voices of real people giving their genuine responses to questions they've been asked, which may sometimes be insensitive or inaccurate, but are never scripted. It was recorded in late October one week before the election, and before the result was known.

Welcome to The Traverse Podcast with me, Debbie Hannan. Today I'm with Sarah Kosar. Sarah Kosar is a playwright from Pennsylvania who has lived in London for the past 11 years. She is known for her wild and surreal writing. She is the child of Trump voters and has recently got indefinite leave to remain in the UK – i.e. to stay away from the US as much as she wants. I'm speaking with Sarah today about the US election, and we’re going to go in deep!

DEBBIE: How are you doing Sarah?

SARAH KOSAR: Hey, Debbie, this is so cool to have like a bio about me, I never get this shit!

DEBBIE: That’s what I’m here for!

SARAH: But can I add one thing?

DEBBIE: Oh yes, of course.

SARAH: Okay, great, great, great, great. Uh, she is also the proud mother of Meatball. You know who Meatball is, don’t you?

DEBBIE: I did - so for our listeners, Meatball is Sarah's new puppy, who is a small…Pomeranian?

SARAH: You've got it.

DEBBIE: Let's just dive right in. How are you feeling about this election? Because it is soon. What's your thoughts?

SARAH: Yeah. Yeah. It's absolutely bonkers. Um, so as you said in the kind of intro, so I've just gotten indefinite leave to remain, which means I can be here forever. And this has been like proper 10 years coming. Usually you can get it in five years, but because of all the different visas I was on, it took much longer.

So, uh, it was my kind of longstanding, uh, plan to never go back to the Statse. So that's come at, you know, the perfect moment, you know, just thinking about how I felt in 2016 and then, sorry, uh, just like waking up and being like, okay, this is, this is reality. Now I can't wait, sorry, sorry. One sec. So do you know that Donald Trump is the first president in 120 years to not have a dog in the White House? Like what does that even say about him? Like, if I was Ivanka and my dad, doesn't like dogs. Like, do you know what I mean? Sorry, what were you saying?

DEBBIE: Um, I was just going to say like, yeah, your American-ness shows up a lot in your writing. I know that you say your voice is so American, you, you feel pressure when you come into a space in the UK to perform American-ness even more, has that intensified during the election run-up?

SARAH: I've worked really hard to get as far away from America as I could and almost become less American. But then in this time I feel like I've only sounded more American. And you know, voice is a very hard thing to change, especially when I was training as an actor and they didn't pass me cause I couldn't do accents. But you know, I can't get away from that. It's such a distinguishing feature that I have.

DEBBIE: So is everyone right now asking you about the election?

SARAH: Everyone's asking me and I just want to try to run away from it, but I just really, really can't. You're just like, I'm just trying to have a nice moment and it just won't stop. And I think it just reminds me of like the star Spangled banner often in school, it's just constantly, constantly, constantly played and you're always hearing, you know, this kind of patriotism drilled into you - and I'm not sure if you actually know this Debbie, but I was a Sequinette.

DEBBIE: Wow.

SARAH: Basically the Rockettes for a marching band, but we're covered in sequins. So we're called the Sequinettes. And as part of being in the marching band or being a Sequinette every year, you could audition to be the person that sang the national anthem before the football game kicked off. So it was like the biggest thing. And I'll never forget. I had practice for weeks, months leading up to it and there I was in the middle of the auditorium and everyone has to do it live with the entire band playing. So, I mean, if we're talking drama here, we're talking high mother-fucking stakes. Like, do not screw this up! Uh, so then I went up there and I started and I was like, okay, ‘Oh, say, can you see, By the by the dawn’s early light, What so proudly we…..uuuuuh’. So I lost all the lyrics! Just went from my head. Just no idea. After being pounded with patriotism my entire life. It was suddenly like, you are the worst American in the world and the worst singer, and you're never going to get this. And I continued to sing it four times and I never got it - and then they had to call it. But I remember as I was singing it, I like zoomed in on this drummer. And I was just looking at the drum as he was hitting it and hitting it and hitting it. And I could just feel the shame, just kind of mounting. And I was the drum just being beaten down - and I never got it.

DEBBIE: That's a tragic tale, friend. So - bit of a technical one. How do you feel about the electoral college system?

SARAH: Yeah, I think it's actually really awful because it isn't about the popular vote. It isn't about who actually the American public wants - it's just an old timey thing of, like, how many points each state gets. But shouldn't everyone really have an equal voice? And I mean, actually even thinking about it, Meatball elected me to be his owner. Do you know what I mean? Like, he wanted me to be the one in power because I had his best interests at heart. I know when he wants to be held. I know when he needs a little snuggle wuggle. I know when he needs me to hold his paws.

DEBBIE: Sarah.

SARAH: Sorry, sorry. Sorry. Oh yeah. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry.

DEBBIE: It's okay. It's okay. Sorry, I need to drag it back. I guess that the dog angle is one. Um, what, what's your take on Trump?

SARAH: My take on Trump. I mean, I feel like, you know, he's, he's Trump, right? Like what is there even really to say, you know what I mean? Like… Oh fuck! Oh God, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Hold on one second. Meatball’s literally just peed all over the ground. Just one second. I just need to get this wiped. Come here! Okay. You're going to pee over there now. Okay. Right. Good boy. Good boy. Good little boy.

DEBBIE: Could Sam maybe take Meatball? Is Sam around? He just, he’s great but I don't want to record him eating.

SARAH: Oh, okay. Hold on. Sam, Sam. Sam, can you get Meatball?

DEBBIE: Sarah, we've only got like 20 minutes, so, sorry.

SARAH: Sorry, sorry. No, it's good. Okay. You don't have to take them. It's okay. Wow. Nothing. It's all right, Sam. Sorry. Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry. Sorry. We're ready to go right to ready. We're ready. I'm sorry. I'm trying to get it.

DEBBIE: It's hard to get to like the heart of the election issue. Isn't it. And, um, let's get a really, let's get a big finisher question for the end. Um, what would you say if Trump won?

SARAH: Grrrrrrrrrrrr! No, no! NO TRUMP! Honestly. Don't you think I could do voiceovers for kids? Well, I… do you need me to do more on that question?

DEBBIE: Yeah. We just need a really clean one sentence, do you know what I mean?

SARAH: Uh, like, like, uh, I'd say you can tell me what to say if that's easier?

DEBBIE: I mean, no, I mean, like have a think about it. Yay. We're just under time pressure now.

SARAH: Okay. Um, I'm still like, I don't even know what to say. Sorry. Um, just like trying to like, just do a voice note or WhatsApp voice note, like how we do, and I can just like…

DEBBIE: Maybe even you could write the response, you know what I mean?

SARAH: How do I feel about Trump when it just gets to like you're right.

DEBBIE: Just becayse you’re a writer, Or like, maybe you want to just write out a bit, so yeah. Because I understand it’s a lot of pressure, when you’re recording.

SARAH: Yeah, sure. Yeah. Yeah. I've just got Meatball’s vet appointment, but, um, I could, I'm sure I can do it. Like, you know, I'll do it. I'll do it. I'll do it. I'll do it.

DEBBIE: Like, just a speedy one to finish us off.

[Music]

SARAH: Really? Oh, what am I going to even do? Meatball, come here. Why are you sniffing there? Are you sniffing there? What did she say? Yeah, we can just ask other people for the answers, sniff around for other answers. We don't have to answer everything. [Meatball yaps] Wait, what do you mean? [Meatball yaps again] Yeah. Yeah. Well, okay. Yeah. Yay. Yeah. Okay. We'll ask other people. We don't need to talk about, how do you feel about the election? If we can't think of anything, we don't want to talk about it. Like we can, we can just, we'll just talk to other people. You're absolutely right.

Various voices: The new president of America! / Trump has just been re-elected…./ Is Joe Biden.... / Thank God. / I totally called it. / Trump won. / Well, I was actually rooting for Kanye. / I don't care.

SARAH: On Meatball’s counsel we took our snouts to the park, to the Zooms, to the WhatsApp voice notes. To hear what people think of the newly elected president. It's November, 2020. Today. We've just found out –

HANNAH: It’s October.

SARAH: Oh no, no, no. It's November. It's November.

HANNAH: Oh yeah, got it!

SARAH: It's *November* Hannah. Yup. Today we found out Biden won the US election. How do you feel? What are your feelings right now?

HANNAH: I feel, I feel relieved.

MAN 1: Good for the world. It's good for America. It's not like, the American empire continues.

SARAH: Okay. What do you think about Trump winning?

MAN 2: I think it was obvious.

SARAH: I was going to just ask everyone how they would feel hypothetically when they find out the results. But Meatball’s always two paws in front of me. He let me know that shows like *The Apprentice* and *RuPaul's Drag Race* tapes the finalist both winning and losing. Then they decide which reaction to air later when they've decided who the real winner is, baby. So even though the results haven't happened, that's not going to stop the two of us! Biden has won - how do you feel?

WOMAN 1 [American]: Thank God. Thank every higher being that was able to make this happen.
MAN 3 [Brirish]: America went from electing its first black president to his first internet meme president to its first dementia patient president. But still no First woman.
WOMAN 2 [American]: Is this really progressive? Is this the future that I dream of? No.
MAN 2 [American]: I feel a sense of general sadness for the US - it's a country that tells itself so many myths and Biden is not going to be the one who is going to be telling truth about those myths. Instead, he's going to be just trying to prop them back up. Am I happy that he won? Totally.
WOMAN 3 [American]: Now we finally go to sleep and start dreaming again.
SARAH: Biden won!
MAN 4 [British]: Oh my God. I don't care.
SARAH: And Trump won.
MAN 4 [British]: Trump won. Oh my God. I don't know.
WOMAN 4 [American]: Having a joke in office and you know, America continuing to be a joke.
MAN 5 [American]: I have a migraine - I have a fucking migraine.
MAN 6 [British]: It was obvious from the moment he got in the first place, the Americans want a boisterous more on the head of their, their administration. That's what they'll get. He'll be out in four years and we'll get somebody else.
MAN 2 [American]: I guess this is the most appropriate ending to the year of all time…
MAN 5 [American[: When Trump won and Hillary lost. And it was just the worst feeling I had, I had a terrible migraine.
SARAH: And can you say, like, ‘I have a migraine’ again, but like really loud, really angry. Like, like he's given me another migraine. Like that's what I want to hear and kind of put in.

MAN 5 [American]: I have a migraine. I have a fucking migraine!

SARAH: Okay, great.
MAN 5 [American]: He's given me a migraine. He's given me a fucking migraine!
HANNAH: Part of me hopes Trump would just like run off to Scotland and go on his golf course.
SARAH: So I would love for you to just do that again for me just saying that line. But like as if Trump is just a little child and you're telling him to just go run off to his golf course, can I get that from you?
HANNAH [in a patronising tone]: Trump go run off to a golf course!
SARAH: And would you be willing to say like, I'm really thrilled Trump won.
HANNAH [deadpan]: I'm really thrilled Trump won.
SARAH [on voice note]: Hey dad, I'm recording this podcast project. And I wanted to see if you could just voice, note me over your thoughts as if Trump has just won. And also as if he hadn’t won. Um, and let me know if you're happy for me to say that you're my dad. Um, or if you want to be anonymous. Okay. Thanks so much. And if you can't do it, no worries. No stress.
SARAH’S DAD: The America that I’ve experienced a wonderful country. I was shocked that Joe Biden was elected president of the United States of America, a 78 year old washed up politician of 47 years, who accomplished very little except making himself wealthy. He's a corrupt, inept, mentally challenged and physically unable to campaign individual. He had no viable creative plan for COVID, only criticism. He wants open borders, free education and healthcare for illegal immigrants, higher taxes, closing of the country and destroying our fracking and energy strengths. He's chosen a disappointing and unimpressive woman as his vice-president. This is extremely frightening. The chances are good. She will be our president due to Joe's age health and mental weakness. Joe has no enthusiasm, energy and dedicated love for our country. He's a puppet to the extreme left that is driven to destroy our wonderful country. God help us.
I was not surprised that Donald Trump was re-elected as our president. He was an independent businessman four years ago, stated his goals and achieved all those plus many more. He does not possess a pleasant personality, but I didn't vote for that. He acts as a common man and not a politician. He won because of his energy, enthusiasm, love of his country and a desire to make life better for the people of the United States of America. He closed our borders, lowered taxes, worked at lowering healthcare and prescription costs resolved the world issues created dialogue with foreign leaders and reduced world fear. He eliminated terrorists and returned our troops. He strengthened our military and created Space Force. He's creating school choice and has made huge opportunities for Blacks and Hispanics that has not been seen before and has lowered unemployment for them and for women. He created new and relocated businesses and has the lowest historic unemployment in the history of our country. He changed our NAFTA rules, China and other high tariff of foreign countries. And it makes America great again. And number one, he dealt with an historic pandemic and did as well as anyone could in this unprecedented time. He's been treated unfairly since day one of this election by the fake press, but has been strong, endured undue criticism, maintained his love of our country, God and for the betterment of the people of the United States of America. Thank God he saved our country from a left socialist communist future.
SARAH [distorted]: That was, um, that was my dad. Can you take this filter off me, Richard? Okay, thanks. Uh, uh, that was not performed or produced. Uh, that was my dad, reading his own words out loud that he chose to write and voice note me with. Me and my dad don't agree on anything, uh, politically or, you know, we, we, I guess like we don't really even, uh, I mean, Meatball? Come here quick, quick, quick hooky. Good boy.
DEBBIE [on voice note]: Hey, Sarah, uh, just would really love you to send a few more like election thoughts along when you get a chance. Uh, we've just really got a time pressure on no, so yeah, if you've got anything else you want to add? Um, yeah. Let, let me know.

DEBBIE [on voice note]: Hey Sarah, can you please just send me over a voice note when you get a second? Bye.
DEBBIE [on voice note]: Hey Sarah, just checking in. Uh, you doing okay?. Um, okay. Let me know. Bye.
DEBBIE [on voice note]: Sarah. Can you please just send me like one voice note with an opinion on the election? Just like, and anything. Trump is bad, whatever. Just, yeah, please. Thanks.
[Dogs barking]
SARAH: Shit, shit shit! What are we going to do about Debbie? You say, who do we say? I don't know what to do. Please, I need you right now. The dogs. We talk to the dogs who give us the answers. Okay. Let's let's go find the and the dogs.
SARAH [over dogs barking]: Hi dogs. I'm Sarah. I meet ball's mama. Hey. Yeah. Yeah. He said I should talk, uh, talk to you all. Um, we're looking for a quick sound bite, um, on the, on the us, what you think we're looking for? All different opinions. Did you hear that Trump, he doesn't have a dog in the White House! He is the first president in 120 years to not have a dog.
[Dog barks] I know, he thinks dogs are phony. I mean, what if your dad didn't want you around?
[Dog whines] What have you done thought you were following me? I don't need a dog in the way now. Meatball, boy, are you trying to say something?

MEATBALL: I've been trying to tell your mama, give me your phone. Debbie. This is Meatball. I got a scoop for you. I’ve got better than the comment about the election you wanted. I got breaking news from talking to the dogs. And you can share it with the world first. We've noticed that one, Ivanka’s growing longer ears she’s can’t hide behind her hair any more. Two, she's developing a snout and she keeps barking any time Melania comes near. Obviously, Ivanka Trump is turning into a dog! It's not going to be great for her relationship with her father...
SARAH: Join us for part two, where Meatball and I investigate whether Ivanka Trump is really turning into a dog. And if Trump's final executive order before the election has anything to do with it…