# **Transcript - Leo Rising**

**Note: Episodes of Outside/In are made as pieces of audio, and some context and nuance may be lost on the page. Transcripts are generated using a combination of speech recognition software and human transcribers, and may contain errors.**

CONTENT WARNING: This podcast contains explicit language and reference to sex - though all in the second half of the show, after the break. Okay.

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**Sam Evans-Brown: Hi I’m Sam Evans Brown, and we’re on the show, in a studio and I’m joined by producer Justine Paradis**

**Justine Paradise: Yup. And our story today starts with a debate.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: A fight… if you will.**

[Bill Nye Saves the World Theme Music]

**Justine Paradise: You might be familiar with Bill Nye the Science Guy.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Bill Nye the Science Guy… Yeah a show on TVin the 90s**

**Justine Paradise: Yes, PBS, and this is his new show, 2017, on Netflix. It’s called Bill Nye Saves the World.**

Bill Nye: Now Sam,

Sam Reynolds: Yes sir.

Bill Nye: you’re an astrologer.

Sam Reynolds: That’s right.

**Justine Paradise: Bill Nye is hosting a panel about, and here, he’s speaking with astrologer Samuel Reynolds - about the validity of astrology.**

Bill Nye: You know, I don’t believe any of it.

Sam Reynolds: Yes, I do know that.

Bill Nye: And do you know why?

Sam Reynolds: Tell me, enlighten me.

Bill Nye: Well it just never has anything to do with anything. Only 12 types of people.

**Justine Paradise: So this panel is part of an episode of the show called “Malarkey”. Throughout the episode, Bill Nye has framed astrology repeatedly as a pseudoscience, basically saying...**

Bill Nye: It’s all crap. None of it’s true. And it wouldn’t matter.

Bill Nye: What’s your deal? You don’t believe it either?

Sam Reynolds: I use astrology. I think astrology is like a language. When you say for instance it’s a pseudoscience, right? I would have to first believe it’s a science. I don’t believe astrology is a science.

Bill Nye: What is it?

Sam Reynolds: It’s an interpretative art.

**Justine Paradise: I think that Bill Nye had expected to kind of mic-drop this moment by being like, it’s not a science, don’t claim it’s one, you’re falsely claiming this — and Samuel Reynolds is like, I actually don’t claim it’s a science.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Right.**

Bill Nye: So what service do you provide for people with your “art?”

Sam Reynolds: I use the cultural imagination that we know as astrology to talk to them about how their idea of themselves, their birth chart, syncs up their life experience. Basically, using biography as a means —

Bill Nye: In other words, you get them to tell them stuff about themselves —

Sam Reynolds: No, I tell —

Bill  Nye: — and you reinforce it —

Sam Reynolds: No

Bill  Nye: — with these astrological things in the background.

Sam Reynolds: No. It’s actually... [fades down]

**Sam Evans-Brown: He’s kind of a bully**

**Justine Paradise: Yeah not doing a great job of listening… but can I ask you something, real quick? What’s your sign?**

**Sam Evans-Brown: I’m an Aquarius. Which I knew at the drop of a hat... instantaneously.**

**Justine Paradise: Okay so you knew that off the top of your head. So do I. I’m a Capricorn. And this is unsurprising right? I think at least in our corner of the US, you would be pretty hard-pressed to find a person who did not know their sign.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Yeah I bet you my dad probably knows his.**

**Justine Paradise: Does he believe in astrology?**

**Sam Evans-Brown: No**

**Justine Paradise: Have you ever really looked into it beyond reading your horoscope in a magazine?**

**Sam Evans-Brown: No, not at all.**

**Justine Paradise: I’ll just note real quick that we just heard astrology framed as an art, not a science, but there are some astrologers certainly do think of astrology as a science, or as a means of making specific predictions, and therefore it could certainly be vulnerable to this criticism that it is a pseudoscience. But — I’m just gonna say — I don’t care! I don’t care. I am not interested in proving or disproving astrology on technical grounds. If we can put down down the science part for a second… what else could it be possible to understand?**

[Music]

**Justine Paradise: To me, the most interesting part of the Bill Nye show is this next exchange, when Bill Nye turns to another person on his panel: journalist and professional skeptic, Jamila Bey.**

 Bill Nye: How do you feel about this point of view?

Jamila Bey: Uh… I feel touchy-feely and weird and I want it replicated in a lab. I, you know—

Bill Nye: Yeah, can you make a prediction?

Sam Reynolds: Sure, I can make a prediction. But I don’t think everything, every aspect of knowledge needs to be replicable in a lab.

Bill Nye: It does in science. In science, in a lab, or a telescope.

Sam Reynolds: That’s… that’s.. Is all knowledge sequestered to science?

**Sam Evans-Brown: Oh good question!**

**Justine Paradise: Riiiight?**

[Outside/In Theme Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: You’re listening to Outside/In, a show about the natural world and how we use it — or, in this case, the cosmos and how we use it. I’m Sam Evans-Brown. Depending on who you ask, astrology is a science, an art form, a spirituality, a form of therapy… or, a pseudo-science, a scam, fortune-telling. But astrology is way more than a horoscope. On today’s episode, producer Justine Paradis takes a look at the celestial sky and explores astrology today. How do people use it, and what might that say about this cosmic moment?**

[Theme music fades]

**Justine Paradise: Astrology is experiencing a bit of a moment in popular culture. In fact, you could say that astrology is so hot right now. To demonstrate this, I present...**

Lizzo: Hey guys! It’s Lizzo. I’m floating somewhere in the cosmos.

**Justine Paradise: ...critically acclaimed rapper and singer, Lizzo.**

[A few seconds from Lizzo’s Hair Toss]

**Justine Paradise: Here reading a horoscope written for her by Chani Nicholas, the Oprah Magazine astrologer.**

Lizzo: Sometimes horoscopes scare the [bleeped] out of me. Everyone sees your success… but only you know the effort behind every win… damn this is [bleeped] deep bro. [Fades down]

**Justine Paradise: From the** [**New Yorker**](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/10/28/astrology-in-the-age-of-uncertainty) **to the** [**Atlantic**](https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/01/the-new-age-of-astrology/550034/) **to** [**Vice**](https://www.vice.com/en_in/article/d3ndxj/pop-astrology-millennials-memes-brands-boom-peak)**, you can find a kajillion articles within the last couple years all basically asking : why is astrology so popular right now, or alternatively, why do millennials love astrology so much?**

[Music]

**Justine Paradise: So, I will get to why astrology is having such a moment - and I would say, a pretty profound one, in terms of its 4000 year history.**

**But first I should say - astrology is not one thing. People have looked at the stars and created systems of meaning all over the world and throughout time. There’s the Chinese zodiac, the Mayans and the Aztecs also created their own systems - plus there’s Indian, or Vedic astrology.**

**But I’m going to be focusing on Western astrology in this episode. Western astrology is based on the tropical zodiac, thanks to some foundational texts written by Greek astronomer Claudius Ptolemy in the second century CE.**

**First, the basics:**

**From our perspective on Earth, over the course of the year, the sun appears to pass through a series of constellations - Aries, then Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, and so on. This is the zodiac belt.**

**Think of the tropical zodiac as a map of the sky over the course of one year.**

**In this map, the sky is divided into twelve equal parts, each one named for these constellations in the zodiac belt. Generally speaking, it takes about a month for the sun to move, as it rises and falls each night, from one region of the sky to another.**

**These regions are the signs - each with its own set of personality traits and meanings.**

**And what the question “what’s your sign?”  is asking: where was the sun at the moment you were born? So, for example, if you are born when the sun was moving through the part of the map called Aquarius — you are an Aquarius.**

**But on this map of the celestial sky, the tropical zodiac, astrologers chart the positions of not just the sun, but also the moon, and the planets and their relationships to each other. Each of the signs and each of these objects have personality traits and meanings and resonances, and astrology asserts all of that can give you information about you and your life.**

[Music fades]

**Justine Paradise: One criticism that figures — including Bill Nye — sometimes point out, is that the tropical zodiac does not reflect what is happening in the night sky anymore. It’s super old, remember — and the night sky is not static.  Earth wobbles on its axis — this is caused by uneven gravitation pulls on the planet from the sun and the moon. But what this means is, a lot  of things shifted  and now, the tropical zodiac and the sky don’t totally line up.**

Bill Nye: And what about the wobbling of the earth, and you know what used to be a Sagittarius is now… [fades down]

**Justine Paradise: That’s why you might have heard some people say that there ought to be a 13th sign: Ophiuchus.**

Sam Reynolds: Ophiuchus?

Bill Nye: Oh yes! You’re the 13th sign!

Sam Reynolds: There is no 13th sign. You would be under the 13th sign [fades down]

**Justine Paradise: But forget that. There is an astrology that’s tied more closely to the constellations — it’s called the sidereal zodiac — but the tropical zodiac is not. It’s meant to be tied to the cyclical nature of seasons on Earth. So, once a Capricorn, always a Capricorn. But enough with the technical basics of astrology.**

Nick Campion: There are things in astrology I take seriously and things which really annoy me and which I don’t take seriously. But for about the last 20 years, my sole interest has been in it as a cultural phenomenon. What’s it doing, what’s it claim? What’s it’s nature?

**Justine Paradise: This is Nick Campion. He’s an associate professor of cosmology and culture at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and program director of their master’s degree in cultural astronomy and astrology. He practiced astrology until the 1980s, and he’s a historian. Starting millennia before Ptolemy, astrology’s use and meaning has changed, over and over and over again.**

[Music]

**Justine Paradise: It’s been respected, as a symbol of wisdom...**

Nick Campion: The Islamic caliphs in the 8th century... there’s this huge cultural flowering, with astrology as a very important part.

**Justine Paradise: It’s also been a way of finding meaning outside of the boundaries of religion. So it has also been suppressed...**

Nick Campion: Christianity is very hostile to astrology. It’s polluted by its association with pagan religion. But also Christians tend to see act of astrological prediction as second-guessing god’s right to control the future.

**Justine Paradise: It’s been used in medicine...**

Nick Campion: Every herb, every plant, in fact, every part of every animal, relates to a star, planet, and zodiac sign.

**Justine Paradise: In medieval Europe, astrological predictions were practically an extension of the weather.**

Nick Campion: An almanac would contain good days for planting, good days for traveling, and so on

**Justine Paradise: Shakespeare used astrology to leave clues for the audience -**

**Nick Campion: Romeo and Juliet...**

[Sounds from movie version of Romeo and Juliet]

Mercutio: A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life.

**Justine Paradise: And even relatively recently, in the 1600s, some astronomers still dabbled.**

Nick Campion: Galileo, who’s the first man to use a telescope, and Johannes [Kepler](https://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/09/science/400-year-old-horoscope-shows-kepler-s-sideline.html), who gave us the laws of planetary motion, were both practicing astrologers

[Music fades]

**Justine Paradise: But around the time of the Salem Witch Trials, people started to feel a little icky about astrology… Like…Magic isn’t real. In England, laws against witchcraft shift away from “it’s illegal to be a witch” to** [**it’s illegal to mislead people by telling their fortunes**](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo4/5/83/section/4)**, for instance.**

Nick Campion: You find astrology scarcely exists among educated people. mainly to be laughed at at how stupid people can be.

**Justine Paradise: And this brings us to what I would argue is the foundational reason astrology is experiencing a moment right now. It started in the 1800s. We’re in England. 1800s. The Industrial Revolution and intense urbanization. A lot of really obvious inequality. Think Charles Dickens. This is when political economist Karl Marx is looking around at society and putting his ideas together.**

Nick Campion: How is it fair that some people are born to wealth and privilege, vs poverty and destitution, living in the slums?

**Justine Paradise: And this is when a man named Alan Leo comes into our story.** **Alan Leo’s last name - is not a coincidence. he is in fact a Leo - and he’s the one who invents the idea of being a Leo. He was born William Frederick Allan in England, and he’s sometimes called the father of modern astrology.** **Alan Leo joined a spiritual movement called theosophy.**

Nick Campion: Yes. I see the theosophists as almost an alternative revolutionary tradition to Marxist and socialist movements.

Justine Paradise: Really?

Nick Campion: Yes, so Marx and the socialists says society can only be reformed, or revolution can only happen in the case of Marxists, through altering material circumstances. So you alter the material conditions of people’s lives.  You give them enough money, means of production, and we will end up with a better society. Now the critique of that position is that you can engineer such reforms or promote a revolution, but if people internally are still the same, then you'll end up reproducing the same problems.

**Justine Paradise: So, Alan Leo and the theosophists, especially a woman named Helena Blavatsky — they start to get interested in ideas of cosmic destiny to explain why someone might be born into a destitute position. Ideas like karma, and reincarnation - ideas borrowed from Hinduism + Buddhism … And this leads Alan Leo to astrology.**

Nick Campion: So he really developed idea of individual in astrology in a new way, need to understand oneself spiritually - He also as part of the same process really simplified astrology.

**Justine Paradise: So Alan Leo - introduces the Sun Sign.**

Nick Campion: The sign that the sun is in at your birth becomes fundamental way of understanding you personality, current spiritual existence.

**Justine Paradise: Previously, the sun sign was just part of that bigger astrological map, but today it’s the thing that you know off the top of your head: that you’re an Aquarius, or a Cancer. And this is a big, big change.**

[Music]

**Justine Paradise: Rather than using the stars to read your destiny and perhaps the future, the difference is: using the stars to look inward. Instead, with the Sun Signs, we each become a type. And we use astrology as a means to understand the self. By the 1930s, the first 12 paragraph horoscope column was printed in a newspaper.**

Nick Campion:  That’s when we really get this shift towards people saying, ‘I’m a Taurus, what are you? Hey, we’re compatible.’ That would not have happened prior to this time.

Justine Paradise: That is wild that that's just 100 years old! that's how people think of astrology, is oh I'm capricorn, I'm a cancer.

Nick Campion: it's incredibly recent! I mean, there is a lineage. Astrology always held this potential, but then there's definitely then this radical emphasis towards the individual.

Justine Paradise: So this was very self-focused, and work on yourself and your future will improve.

Nick Campion: Exactly, we're talking about the beginning of the Century of the Self, and parallel to the beginnings of psychoanalysis.

[Music]

Nick Campion: So, the idea that inner development is a precondition for wider revolution then becomes extremely strong in 1960s,

**Justine Paradise: So, the next step is kinda obvious. An astrologer named Dane Rudhyar connected the archetypes of the zodiac to the archetypes of Carl Jung, the psychoanalyst. And a new kind of psychological astrology started to take off… a new way of understanding yourself.**

Nick Campion: So he says look, if someone is psychologically unaware, they will be living out a fated existence, and you can make predictions. But as soon as someone becomes psychologically aware — or to individuate, as Jung called it — then they are changing their future, then astrologers task is to illuminate the person as to their options. Where they can go, what they’re like, how they can understand themselves, how they can change.

Justine Paradise: Kind of sounds like therapy.

Nick Campion: Therapy indeed!

[Music]

Nick Campion: The client goes to astrologer not for a set of predictions but for a counseling session.

**Justine Paradise: And you can hear this influence. You can hear it in what astrologer Samuel Reynolds said to Bill Nye.**

Sam Reynolds: It’s the marriage between math and myth. The idea that we look at our cultural imagination with myth and mythological stories and marry it to what we now know as science and astronomical phenomena.

Dorothy Morgan: We get to learn about ourselves… there’s so many things here. Oh, that’s why I do that. And then all of a sudden you recognize something about yourself. If you could study your chart for a year, that’s worth like 10 years of psychotherapy…

**Justine Paradise: And you hear it if you go visit an astrologer for a birth chart consultation, like I did, with astrologer Dorothy Morgan.**

Dorothy Morgan: We all have our own signature. Like a fingerprint.

**Justine Paradise: She used my birth chart to start a conversation about my life.**

Dorothy Morgan: My question for you is: do you take your time making decisions about things?

Justine Paradise: I would say yeah...I feel like making decisions….

**Justine Paradise: The experience - mostly felt like a conversation with a friendly and curious counselor, but just using the stars and planets as a starting point to talk about my feelings.**

Dorothy Morgan: Okay wonderful. Yeah okay.

[Music]

**Justine Paradise: So now, people engage with astrology on a variety of levels — that includes a sort of surface, entertainment level with 12-sign magazine horoscopes, or a very deliberate, one-on-one consultation with a professional astrologer. But now, there’s also Internet astrology culture, and that’s coming up next after the break.**

<<<<<<<<<<<<< BREAK >>>>>>>>>>>>>

**Content Warning: Welcome back. Just a quick reminder that this podcast contains explicit language and talk of sex and sexuality - and all that starts up pretty soon in this half.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Welcome back to the show. I’m Sam Evans-Brown, a show about the natural world? And how we represent it in star charts? Today on the show, producer Justine Paradis is exploring what astrology is and how it is used.**

**Justine Paradise: If you’ve got the time, the date, and location of your birth, it is very easy to go onto the internet and look up your complete birth chart — not just your sun sign, but your moon and rising signs, the planets, their exaltations, the aspects, and so on. And for that reason, astrology has been meme-ified. There are tons of people playing around with their interpretations of the the signs as, I don’t know, Office characters, the signs as cocktails, as perfumes, as Bjork songs…. And a lot of people have observed this is especially happening among women, young people like millennials, and queer people. And one of the places you can see that is online, on dating apps.**

Lex Ads: Show me Love. Scorpio, Lesbian, Calm boi… looking for stable relationship, community or girl to fuck good.

[Music]

Lex Ads: Make me start smoking again, and read in my bed.

Lex Ads: Queer Scorpio fat hippie. Looking for conscious and open connection. Want to explore, and watch the stars from the bed of my truck.

Lex Ads: Sleeveless in Seattle. 32yo masc of center yt Piscean looking for Maximal silliness and a flirtatious eyeroll…

Lex Ads: Actions not words. Love, not hate. Come say hi.

Lex Ads: Very giving in bed but don’t be afraid to top me top me top me baby.

**Justine Paradise: You just heard a excerpts of a few different personal ads from Lex, a dating app for queer women and gender non-binary people. It was founded by Kell Rakowski.**

Kell Rakowski: It started because i had just come out, and i was just teaching myself more and more about lesbian history and culture, so I was just finding all these really cool images of lesbians, digging through internet...

**Justine Paradise: The idea, Kell says, started five years ago, when putting a lot of those images of lesbian history and culture on her Instagram account, Herstory.**

Kell Rakowski: ... and along the way I came upon this lesbian erotica magazine called On Our Backs - and in the back of every issue, were personal ads written by lesbian bisexual women looking for love. Hot sex. Friends.

[ads]

**Justine Paradise: In November 2019, Kell launched her dating app, Lex, and the design reflects the feeling of those original historical ads she found. No pictures. Just words.**

 Justine Paradise: So… turning to astrology, um —

Kell Rakowski:  Yes…

Justine Paradise: We know that astrology is used in dating generally.... Like Scorpio seeks Gemini or something… but i keep hearing that this is especially a thing in “queer dating culture” — I don’t know if that’s… what is your experience, do you think that's true?

Kell Rakowski: Uh. Yes.

[music]

Justine Paradise: How often do you see it?

Kell Rakowski: I would say half of the time...

[Ad montage]

Nick Campion: I think astrology has certainly in its modern form, has actually been quite radical in its attitude to gender.

**Justine Paradise: That’s historian Nick Campion again. He says there might be a reason that astrology lends a sympathetic framework towards queerness or marginalized identities.**

Nick Campion: You may be biologically male or biologically female, but in your birth chart, the planets are gendered. And so the moon and venus are female, mars and saturn are male, and so on. And so there’s always been an understanding in astrology, going back to earliest times, that there is an internal feminine and internal masculine. And so I think for this reason, probably, astrology offers an instantly sympathetic framework for self-understanding to people that don't feel like they fit into binary male/female situation.

[Music]

**Justine Paradise: Obviously not all queer people are into astrology. In fact, on Lex, some people make sure to explicitly say that. Here’s Kell Rakowski again.**

Kell Rakowski: I just found one right now: "astrology is alienating and not my thing"

**Justine Paradise: But astrology can serve as a shorthand. Rather than say, I’m an emotional, family-oriented person - you instead might say, I’m a Cancer sun. It’s a signifier. And that high degree of specificity that is made possible in part  by the Internet — again, because anyone with their birth information can easily get access to a complete birth chart for free — means you can get real detailed on the apps.   That hyper-specificity of astrology kind matches the other ways people are already using language in terms of describing their own identities.**

Kell Rakowski: I’ve been saying that really part of the reason why personals and Lex has taken off is because queer people have their own language within a language and I think the language of astrology is also kind of packaged within that…

**Justine Paradise: And this actually reflects what the astrologer Samuel Reynolds said on that panel with Bill Nye.**

Samuel Reynolds: It’s using the language of astrology as a means of talking with them about, dialoguing with them about themselves and their lives. So it’s a language.

**Justine Paradise: Kell said this wasn’t exactly the original intent of the name of the app, but the app is literally Lex, short for Lexicon - which means language**.

[Music fades]

**Justine Paradise: Having said all that, I am not arguing here that astrology is necessarily a  positive force all the time. There are times when it can get very powerful in people’s lives — and at times maybe too powerful.**

Haidee Chu: It felt like an easy outlet because i didn't have to be vulnerable \*\*with someone else, I could just pull up an app.

**Justine Paradise: This is Haidee Chu, a journalist living in NYC, speaking with our producer Sara Ernst. Her sun sign is a Libra, but she also really identifies with her rising sign Gemini.**

Haidee Chu: Gemini is two sided. You have two faces.

**Justine Paradise: Part of the reason that Gemini resonates is because it helps her deal with questions of identity.  Haidee lives in the states now, but she grew up in Hong Kong.**

Haidee Chu: How I act there is so different than how I act here just because of my surroundings and what it necessitates… Like, do I identify as asian asian, or asian american. Am I Chinese enough?  Where do I fall in the color lines in terms of American racial discourse…

**Justine Paradise: Haidee’s interest in Western Astrology really peaked halfway through college. It was a time when she was dealing with a lot of uncertainty - in her life, and in her personal relationships. That’s when she started using an app... which offered daily horoscope advice for different parts of her life, like friendships, career, love... She says it was very very literal about  how she should live.**

Haidee Chu: I depended on it to help me read the situation. I would allow horoscopes dictated my entire day, my entire mood. my use peaked, it was when it was the most toxic in my life. it was a toxic love.

[Music]

**Justine Paradise: One of my favorite horoscope to read each week are those published on the Cut with New York Magazine. And they are written by Claire Comstock Gay. The kind of horoscopes she writes are very different than those Haidee describes. Rather than specific advice, Claire’s horoscopes are really lyrical, they’re practically poetry prose.**

Claire Comstock Gay: I'm really all about feelings, less about negotiating for raise at your job.

**Justine Paradise: Haidee’s description of her over-reliance on her daily horoscope - reminded me of part of my conversation with Claire.**

Claire Comstock Gay: I think we have a hard time dealing with unruly feelings and the ways that we contradict ourselves and the ways we have so much trouble interacting with other people. And so what Astrology is really great at saying is there are so many ways to be a person, to feel, to desire things in the world. and they're all natural, they're all fine, of course they're all different, because it's set up this way.

Justine Paradise: another way I've also heard it described free therapy!

Claire Comstock Gay: Totally! On the one hand I think that's so totally true… and I also think that can go a little bit… you know it depends on the person… I think there’s a lot of… right just to talk about myself: oh i'm a sagittarius, therefore you can never rely on me. I'm naturally flaky, you must deal with that. I don't want to say astrology is great about just encouraging you to lean all the way into your worst impulses. And so it still requires a lot of hard work on an individual's part.

**Justine Paradise: And eventually, that is what Haidee Chu found too. At first, when she tried to stop using astrology, she deleted the app - but she kept re-downloading it and starting up again. Getting out of her toxic relationship with astrology took a real active participation in her own life — and an acceptance that certain things were just beyond her control**

Haidee Chu: Sometimes I would be like, wow I actually haven't checked my horoscope in two weeks. there are times where I would check my horoscope multiple times a day. Going from that to never checking was a very liberating feeling definitely for sure.

**Justine Paradise: Even though she thinks of that period of daily horoscope readings as a toxic dependency, Haidee still uses astrology. But it’s more casual — less literal, less frequent. And it’s more about finding ways to be a better person.** **I like this story because it’s almost like Haidee went through a journey that reflects the story of astrology over the past hundred years or so: from literal predictions and in simple sun sign horoscopes to a humanistic or transpersonal astrology... one that starts a conversation about one’s inner life, and connect with other people.** **Here’s NY Mag astrologer Claire Comstock Gay again.**

Claire Comstock Gay: You know astrology does open up this really wonderful space of being a full human person, in a world that wants to make it difficult for us to do that… and by us i mean anyone, but women, young people, queer people, right?

**Justine Paradise: And for some, with the right approach, there’s a freedom there.**

Claire Comstock Gay: And I think Astrology, it’s kind of a way for a person to live on their own terms. Which is a little bit funny ‘cause that's opposite to what a lot of skeptics think about astrology. Right, that we just think that there’s no free will, and the planets telling us everything to do… which is really one of the more frustrating things to me, because that’s obviously not what astrology’s about at all. But I think there's something really nice to think there's something bigger than us — and not just us but bigger than our student debt... bigger than, you know, the patriarchy.

[Music]

**Justine Paradise: That desire… to feel like you’re part of something bigger, to find a system for navigate your own unruly emotions or understand the roots of trauma… It doesn’t just lead people to astrology. You could use a different personality metric to do those things- perhaps the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, which comes from a similar lineage as modern astrology. You Could use Tarot, or the Enneagram. You could look at it through a more scientific lens, like the workings of the brain through neuropsychiatry. You could go to therapy. And in fact you don’t actually have to pick just one. There are plenty of people who use a combination of these things, trying to explain something that, at least for me, no one system can really encompass the experience of being an emotional human being and how to live a good life.**

[Music]

**Justine Paradise: Which, brings us back to that moment on Bill Nye Saves the World.**

Bill Nye: Jamila, you’re a skeptic. How do you feel about this point of view?

Jamila Bey: I feel touchy-feely and weird and I want it replicated in a lab. Um, I —

Bill Nye: Can you make a prediction?

Sam Reynolds: Sure I can make a prediction. But I don’t think that every aspect of knowledge needs to be replicable in a lab.

Bill Nye: It does in science. In science! In a lab! Or with a telescope —

Sam Reynolds: Is all knowledge sequestered to science?

Jamila Bey: No!

**Justine Paradise: But, earlier in the episode, Bill Nye really sounds like that’s what he believes - that knowledge is sequestered to science. ...**

Bill Nye: People, we want critical thinking skills! We want you to understand the world around you through the process of science! Don’t be confirming your biases - question things!

**Justine Paradise: It’s the sort of thinking that might have lead  evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, rto famously describe constellations as “of no more significance than a patch of curiously shaped damp on the bathroom ceiling.”**

Sam Reynolds: That's often a bent that many skeptics will take. What's empirical is real, when most of human behavior and history is not empirical or has any basis in empiricism at all.

**Justine Paradise: This is astrologer Samuel Reynolds. I called him up a while back to ask him about being on the show with Bill Nye**

Justine Paradise: what do you think in essence if you were to say it in a sentence or two, what did bill nye get wrong?

Sam Reynolds: He reduces cause and effect as the key way in which people have more fulfilling lives. That if people just knew better, they would behave better and we would have a better planet. It's an incredibly naive view.

Justine Paradise: I think you said something on the show you said people need meaning… people need story.

Sam Reynolds: That's how we live, that's how we often experience, you know? No one says… well I hope! You don't say to your lover, ‘The pheromones that I’m getting from you coupled with the harmonic and serotonin levels that are spiking, just make me completely aroused by you.’ No you say, ‘I love you.’ That has more meaning. It’s much more subtle and internal. Those are the things that absorb the minds of astrologers.

**Justine Paradise: This is kind of why I think that it actually DOES matter that astrology is, at least abstractly, connected to the stars. Meaning. There is something about believing that you have a place, cosmically. In astrology, there’s a belief in a universe that is not meaningless and disconnected, stars grouped like stain on the bathroom ceiling, but inherently meaningful and connected. Stars grouped like a Lion, or a Hunter, like a pair of twins. If you’re looking for spirituality and meaning, but the traditional sources of spirituality reject you because of your sexuality or gender.**

Sam Reynolds: It frees you from the constraints of your tradition. It’s not ladened with traditional baggage. There’s no heaven or hell.

**Justine Paradise: Maybe astrology is a way to find meaning that’s freer from judgement. One astrologer, Chani Nicholas, wrote an article titled, “Why Do Queers Love Astrology?” And in it she wrote, quote, maybe it’s because we need to know that no matter the rejection we face here on Earth, there is a place for us among the stars.”**

[Music]

**CREDITS**

**Today’s show was produced by Justine Paradis with me Sam Evans Brown, Sara Ernst, Taylor Quimby, and Jimmy Gutierrez.**

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**Claire Comstock Gay is also coming out with a book next spring - Madame Clairevoyants Guide to the Stars.**

**Erika Janik is our Executive producer.**

**Maureen McMurray is in retrograde.**

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