Episode 925: Liberty and Science Fiction: Bradbury, Rand, Heinlein

Guest: Brad Birzer

WOODS: Everybody loves this topic. I mean, libertarians and science fiction? You know, come on. If this ain't fish in a barrel, I don't know what is.

BIRZER: It was definitely a dream course, and I had a great time doing it, very much so.

WOODS: Well, I'm glad you're enjoying it because we're enjoying the content. And I've got McClanahan working on another course for us. I've got to get more econ. I've got — Murphy's doing his next history of economic thought course; everything is just falling into glorious place over at LibertyClasroom.com. But anyway, last time we had you on to talk about science fiction, we had people saying, Why didn't he talk about this one and that one and whatever. It's because they didn't realize that this is a series of courses. You hadn't even gotten chronologically to those "why hasn't he talked abouts." So in particular, you spend a good amount of time in this course on one of my all-time favorites. I wouldn't describe myself as a science fiction fan, really, but I am definitely a Ray Bradbury fan.

BIRZER: Nice.

WOODS: And I remember you and I were talking on Facebook about *Chronicles* magazine and how fond we were of it; we used to read it in the '90s. And I remember seeing an article by Ray Bradbury in *Chronicles*, thinking these are two glorious worlds coming together. So can you maybe start with that? Not even with his work but with the fact that he could — How could Ray Bradbury wind up in a magazine like *Chronicles*? Where is he coming from philosophically?

BIRZER: That's a great question, Tom. As a young man — he never went to college. In fact, he was not a fan of college, and he believed the best thing to do after high school was to educate yourself. But he had, being just I think a master of the word, even as a very, very young man — he had really devoured, for example, Albert Jay Nock. He loved Nock. He loved Nock's writings. He loved Nock's ideas. He read everything he could. I don't know for certain that he read people like Rose Wilder Lane and Isabel Paterson, but frankly I'd be pretty shocked if he didn't, especially given his own love of Albert Jay Nock. He also liked Mencken.

So he was very much — as a young man, he believed very strongly in a kind of, I would call it an American libertarianism. There's almost a naiveté and also kind of a glorious,

just anything-can-happen-in-America-with-liberty kind of feeling. As he got older, he was not always consistent. I don't think he ever really tried to be consistent in his own political thoughts, but I would say that 90 to 95% of the time, he would have fit in perfectly with what you're talking about, what Tom Woods stands for, what Liberty Classroom stands for, what this podcast stands for. That's just really who he was. He did not like being interfered with. He was not a friend of authority, so a lot of people that he not only read but liked — he was very close friends with Russell Kirk, for example — they just meshed. For him, life was about doing the right thing. It was about being creative, and you know, why would you ever allow any institution to mess with that? So he had an almost instinctive libertarianism in everything that he did.

So in *Chronicles* — I remember that article very well, Tom. I know I'm a little bit older than you, but when I was in Indiana working on my graduate degree, the business library there had *Chronicles* and of course it came out monthly, and one of my great treats was to go over Friday afternoons and give myself a break. And I would read *Liberty* and I would read the new issue of *Chronicles* and whatever *NR* was out that week. So I remember very well coming across that article by Ray Bradbury and just being thrilled about that.

WOODS: Well, he was apparently quite a foe of political correctness, which is a fun thing to learn about. I didn't know about his friendship with Russell Kirk. I do want to talk about Russell Kirk because I think a lot of people, if they have heard of him, they don't know about his fiction and his ghost stories and stuff like that, so let's get to that later.

BIRZER: Sure, yeah.

WOODS: All right, I consumed a lot of Ray Bradbury's short stories when I was growing up. Now, of course I read *Fahrenheit 451*, I read *The Martian Chronicles*, and those were great, but I always felt that the short story was the genre where his genius really came through. But in the longer books, in *Fahrenheit 451*, it's easier to glean, let's say, libertarian themes. But was I missing them in the short stories? I was only 11.

BIRZER: No, you weren't missing them. There are probably some subtle things there. I think most of his libertarianism really came out more in an expression of individualism than it did in, say, actual anti-government sentiment, though you can feel that very strongly of course in *Fahrenheit 451* and *Martian Chronicles*. But Tom, I think that's an incredibly astute observation about Bradbury, because even his novels were just compilations of his short stories. So that was really what he was good at. The very fact that it's called *The Martian Chronicles*, that was just a fancy way of saying I've put a bunch of my short stories together —

WOODS: That's right; that's right. But the *Fahrenheit 451*, that definitely is a full-blown novel.

BIRZER: Yeah, probably in today's market it would be a novella, because it's not quite a novel, but yeah, I agree. And even that, though, started from a short story he wrote called "The Fireman." And it was an attempt to wonder what would happen if Joseph McCarthy — and not just McCarthy; it wasn't that personal — but if the whole movement towards some radicalisms in America, if we would essentially become

communist in fighting communism. That was a great worry of Bradbury, and he was — I don't know how much you know about this, Tom, and I don't want to repeat anything that your audience would know, but the FBI opened a file on Bradbury in the early 1950s, and there had been rumors that he was a communist. And it's amazing because you can go back — and now, the FBI, I don't know if they had to do this or if they do this because they want — you can go into the FBI archives online and read some of their old reports on people. But their complaint about Ray Bradbury was that he loved the Fifth Amendment and therefore he must be a communist [laughing].

WOODS: Oh, no, no, that's terrible.

BIRZER: Wow, yeah, so I guess that means Madison was a communist [laughing]. Let's hope that was just some idiot FBI agent, but I'm afraid it might be a little more serious than that. But anyway, yeah, that was the evidence against Bradbury.

WOODS: There's a line in *Fahrenheit 451* where there's an English professor speaking who says that the firemen — who were there of course not to put out fires but to set fires, to burn books — and this English professor says that the firemen aren't so necessary these days, and the quotation is, "So few want to be rebels anymore." So you don't even need them anymore. Man, that's just devastating.

BIRZER: Yeah. And that just sums up Bradbury. And the guy is interesting too, because as much of a rebel as he was, he never, ever became a cynic. He always had this optimism that in the long run, individualism, liberty, and creativity would win, that we would always be — granted, we may have momentary defeats, but in the long run we would win simply because the people who try and restrict us have no imagination and, therefore, they only have a certain set of things they can do and then they're done. And we who have imagination, according to Bradbury, we will win in the long run.

WOODS: I've read a bunch of collections of his short stories. In fact, I have a volume that I think may be his collected short stories, at least for a certain period. And I remember being in the sixth grade, and they gave us a list of books and you had to read X number of them and take a quiz on them, and you could pick whichever ones you wanted. So of course, when you're in sixth grade, what are your friends doing with the list of books? They're trying to find what is the shortest book on the list, then what's the second shortest. So anyway, with me — so of course those books, the shortest were already taken out of the library. So one day, at random, I picked out *The Illustrated Man* by Ray Bradbury, which always remained my favorite collection of his stories. And I became a proselytizer for this book. I said to everybody, Look, I know it's longer than these other stupid books, but you're going to love it. And I got a couple of them to believe me long enough to do it, and they came back and said, Whoa, I actually liked this book. I thought, Yeah, I know, let's keep it on the down-low here. Cool people don't like to — like I ever tried to pretend to be a cool person —

BIRZER: [laughing] Right.

WOODS: But you still don't want to go around saying, "I loved this book I was assigned for school!' But anyway, if somebody wants a good, easy entry point into Ray Bradbury and the brilliance of his short stories, I would highly recommend *The Illustrated Man*.

BIRZER: Oh, and just, you think about — and I think I was probably your age as well, Tom, when I first read it. But that opening where you're staying with this hobo who's got all the tattoos and suddenly as you're sleeping there on the ground with this hobo and his tattoos start coming alive, what a — it's just an incredible introduction to a story.

WOODS: Sounds like an LSD trip, though, doesn't it?

BIRZER: [laughing] Yeah.

WOODS: [laughing]

BIRZER: I don't think Bradbury was guilty of that, but yeah.

WOODS: Yeah, no, no, no, not that I have any experience with that. I'm just saying [laughing].

BIRZER: Right, I've got you, Tom.

WOODS: All right, so what is it about Bradbury that you would spend fully, I guess, 20% of a 15-lecture course on Bradbury in particular? Why is he the towering figure?

BIRZER: In large part, Tom, because he not only appeals to kids. If you pick him up today — you know, if I picked him up in my late 40s right now, which I do, there's still — the man could just write. And he could think. And one of the things that he does — so he always brings this optimism and this love of life — though he can be very dark too and I think that's part of his genius. But he appeals to so many different people, and I think it really is — and I know this could sound corny, but I think there is something about him that I think is an authentic American voice. I think there is something — I don't think of Europe; I don't think Britain could have produced him. I think the fact that he's from small-town northern Illinois and that he grew up in California, there's just something that you can see in that. It's there always. His love, for example, later of Ronald Reagan, which also, of course, northern Illinois boy, very similar lives that they had when they were kids. I think there's just something very American about him.

But the reason I spend so much time on him in science fiction and in this course, not just because he's a libertarian, but — you know, Heinlein's probably more of a libertarian, but I think Bradbury in the long run is more interesting. And that's not — I love Heinlein. That's not a knock on Heinlein. But I think that Bradbury has more staying power. And one of the reasons that I do spend so much time on him, Tom, is simply because, probably more than any other figure in the 20th century, even more than C.S. Lewis, Bradbury at the time gave legitimacy to science fiction as a genre. So once Bradbury started writing, everybody suddenly said — and it's right at the same time that *Fahrenheit 451* came out, this is the same time the term "science fiction" actually became the term to describe that form of literature. So in large part, Bradbury was science fiction and science fiction was Bradbury. And even people — *The Atlantic*, for example, which kind of held its nose up at science fiction, now had

to take it seriously because Bradbury was writing it and they couldn't dismiss him. So that's why he's so important.

You even find it later — I mean, weird stuff. So for example — and I talk a little about *Star Trek* in the story. When William Shatner was asked to be Captain Kirk, he had not been in science fiction shows other than *The Twilight Zone*. He was mostly a Shakespearean actor in Canada. And when he read an essay by Bradbury saying, No, science fiction is a completely legitimate form of expression, that's when Shatner agreed to be Captain Kirk. Now, I don't mean to suggest, okay, that our life just changed dramatically, but it's a point I think that shows just how powerful Bradbury was as a figure.

WOODS: Right, no doubt, yeah. Wow, that's interesting. That's a major, major thing to take credit for.

BIRZER: Yeah. And of course, imagine how much we've become science fiction now. It's everywhere in everything, in every book. There's always some science fiction element, even in the most realistic novels. So it's a genre that's really been successful over the last 60 years.

WOODS: All right, there are a couple of people whose names will be known to most listeners, but I want to jump over to Russell Kirk for a minute, because you did after all write an award-winning book on Russell Kirk. And I didn't know until somebody handed me a book of his stories that he also had been a fiction writer, and I'm wondering what is significant about his work in this way. He's known as the great conservative thinker of the 20th century, but he writes fiction, and are we seeing any — I don't want to reduce everything to political themes. Like, I'm sick and tired of people who go to the movies and all they can say at the end was, "That was kind of a libertarian movie." Look, can you just turn that part of your brain off for two hours? But still, I kind of want to know if there's anything going on beneath the surface.

BIRZER: Of course. Yeah, so Russell Kirk, very interesting, Tom. Kirk even joked about this in his autobiography, that he would always be the two Kirks: the Kirk who wrote science fiction and horror, and then the Kirk who wrote on conservatism. And it is amazing to me — I guess I was fortunate having gotten to know Annette Kirk, his widow, during the 1990s. I came to his short stories pretty quickly. When I found out — after I had read *The Conservative Mind* and others but had not really thrown myself into Kirk, when I found out he had also written fiction, of course I just immediately gravitated towards the fiction. So in some ways, I encountered his fiction before a lot of his nonfiction works.

And he is very good. I don't — One of the things I tried to argue in my own book on Kirk is that he has all of the instincts of Ray Bradbury without quite being at that level. But I do think that he is at a very high level. So if we put, say, Bradbury or Flannery O'Connor at an A+ level, I think Kirk at his worst was probably around a B to a B+, and I think at his best he was between an A- and an A. So when he wrote really, really well, his fiction, it was excellent. But he could also —

And it's interesting that you say, Tom, you get tired of people talking about politics in art, when Kirk started writing, a lot of his short stories were basically just kind veiled allegories against the New Deal or against something. And they're fine, and of course I agree. Great, let's knock down FDR where we can. But the art isn't quite there. And as he progresses, his politics remains, but it becomes much more artful, so rather than it just being in your face, it actually, it's part of a story and I think there's a much greater depth to it.

But we recognize — we think about Kirk, we remember him as this conservative writer. But even someone like Stephen King has acknowledged that one collection of Kirk's short stories are probably — this one collection he wrote in the 1970s is probably one of the hundred most important books, Stephen King says, of the second half of the 20th century.

WOODS: Wow, that is an amazing testimonial.

BIRZER: It is. And King has moved so far beyond any of that. That was in his younger days when he was writing who had influenced him. And King of course politically has become extremely left-wing, though in his earlier work, he is very libertarian. And I'm not sure what happened there and I haven't studied him well enough, but you can see that when you read King, King obviously follows a lot of the pattern that Kirk used. The difference between Kirk and King, Kirk might describe a rape scene, but what he'll do is he'll have a male gaze at a female and then he'll have a break in the writing, and then the next paragraph, the woman's waking up in a stunned daze. And you know exactly what happened, but he doesn't describe any of it, whereas King of course will give you three or four pages of what that rape was like. That's really the difference. And I think it's a huge difference, but they're both writing in the same genre, just approaching it in very different ways.

WOODS: All right, let's pause and thank our sponsor for just a minute.

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All right, let's move on to a couple of names that will be familiar to a lot of listeners. Of course Ayn Rand is quite familiar. Does she belong in the science fiction genre? Is it science fiction work that she's doing?

BIRZER: Oh, absolutely, Tom, but it's more than that too. Rand was very, very, very wise about the way she marketed herself and the way that she put her own writings forward. So when you look at *The Fountainhead*, for example, there are a lot of science fiction themes, but the story itself is not science fiction. But the fact that you have this architect who's kind of a futurist and he's employing all these Frank Lloyd Wright styles, but beyond that — and of course it has this total integrity. There's already kind of dystopia — there's kind of a democratic dystopia in that, especially when Howard Roark blows up his own building towards the end of the novel. That's a really important dystopian moment, I think. It's far more blatant, obviously, in book like *Anthem*, which is just pure science fiction, and then later on in *Atlas Shrugged*. *Atlas Shrugged* is dystopian, and of course that's a subgenre of science fiction, but there's so much in it, from the weaponry to what's going on in society, that really does have a strong science fiction element.

So I think that Rand, part of her success — obviously she has a huge following, but I think part of her mainstream success was that she also, at the same time that Bradbury and Heinlein and Lewis, whom Rand hated — but they're all making science fiction palatable to a broader reading audience, and Rand was very much a part of that movement, especially with *Atlas Shrugged* coming out in 1957.

WOODS: With her books, you don't have to fish around saying, What philosophical points is she trying to convey to the reader? There's no mystery there as there might be where, if Ray Bradbury indeed even had that sort of ambition, you might have to snoop around for it. But you don't exactly have to hire a private detective to figure out what Ayn Rand is up to. And that was one of the reasons that somebody like Bill Buckley felt that her work was simply without literary merit, because it consists of these wooden characters making long philosophical speeches.

And look, I'll just come right out and say it. I enjoyed her fiction work. Except I did not like *Anthem*. Everybody seems to like *Anthem*. I didn't like it at all. I liked her three larger books. So I'm not saying this as somebody who's a critic of Rand. I enjoyed her books. But when I saw those books translated onto the big screen, first, it's a problem of the actors weren't so good. But then I thought to myself, Maybe the problem isn't entirely the actors. Maybe it's that they're having words put into their mouths that no real person would say. Maybe they would deliver these words as a speech, but nobody would say them in their workaday lives, and it made the whole thing seem fake and unbelievable. So what do you think about the literary merit of her work?

BIRZER: Yeah, you know, Tom, I'm actually fairly sympathetic to it. I'm not a huge fan of all of her philosophy. I'm just way too Catholic to buy into a lot of her arguments. But I actually, if you look, for example — so ignore the speeches for a moment. But if you look at the plot of *Atlas Shrugged*, it is stunning. Just how things move from one point to another, how the whole thing unfolds, I think she is an absolute master when it comes to plotting a story. I think the same thing was true with *The Fountainhead*. I don't like her characters. I mean, some of them I like. I liked the pirate in *Atlas Shrugged*. The pirate, I thought he was really great. And I liked — sorry, I'm forgetting his name right now, but the industrialist — Rearden — at the beginning. John Galt I thought was pretty wooden. But even if you forget that, the plot is amazing, how she's laid it out.

And I think a lot of that comes from her own Hollywood experience, when she was doing scriptwriting in Hollywood in the 1930s and especially dealing with mysteries. You know, mysteries have to be really, really well plotted. And of course there's a lot in *Atlas Shrugged* that is a mystery. It's not so much of a mystery now, because we all know who John Galt is, but you can imagine the first few times people were reading that and trying to figure it out, what's going on. I think she does a great job of that.

The other thing I would say — and this is quirky, and I've been really — understandably, I've been attacked by followers of Ayn Rand for this, but I really think that what she's doing with those speeches is she's giving us a very medieval way of writing. That is, she's writing mythology, ancient or medieval, and I think she's — if you look at what's happening with *Atlas Shrugged*, all of the good guys are for all intents and purposes Norse gods. And they even go up to their mountain — if we think about the classical mythology, they go up to Olympus, and they watch the world destroy itself, and then

they come back down to fix it. I really think she's telling in *Atlas Shrugged*, as much as it is science fiction, it is absolutely a mythology. And I think that's what she's doing. These are gods giving speeches. They're delivering homilies from on high. And I think if you approach it that way, it becomes less boring or less wooden.

WOODS: Well, even though it's wooden, I still like the speeches.

BIRZER: What they say are generally good, right [laughing]?

WOODS: Yeah, in fact, I think — see, I haven't read *For the New Intellectual*, but I think that's a collection of some of the speeches, actually.

BIRZER: Yeah, I think that's right, Tom.

WOODS: So you can read them outside the context of the fiction books.

BIRZER: It's been a while since I've looked at it.

WOODS: But Francisco d'Anconia's speech on money that he gives at the party —

BIRZER: On money, right.

WOODS: — is a tremendous speech. So I'm not saying the speeches are bad; I'm just saying they're not plausible.

BIRZER: Right, right.

WOODS: You know, people don't do that. And if they did, you would run away — even if they're good speeches, you would think, This guy is a ponderous, annoying, self-absorbed jerk. Even though he's brilliant, brilliance is not enough for me to want to hang around with somebody.

BIRZER: Yeah.

WOODS: So of these works — now, have you read all of her fiction? Have you also read *We the Living*?

BIRZER: I have, yeah.

WOODS: Okay, okay.

BIRZER: I've read everything of Rand.

WOODS: What's your favorite?

BIRZER: *We the Living*.

WOODS: Isn't that funny? Yeah, I've kind of felt that way too.

BIRZER: I think in large part — it's an autobiography, really, of life in Soviet Russia. And there are elements of it, again, as a Catholic, I don't like, but I also understand where Rand is coming from, and I can see a reaction against any form of religion in the way that she absorbed that kind of anti-religious attitude. But regardless, yeah, I think *We the Living* is really a moving novel about real people who were caught in a real struggle.

WOODS: All right, as I say, even despite all the criticisms, I'm a fan of hers. I like the books. I found them totally thrilling and absorbing, even though you're right; there are parts of it that I just roll my eyes at. Totally agree. But there's a figure I have not read at all that everybody sort of assumes I must have read, and that's another person who figures in this course, and that's this Robert Heinlein, whom I know almost nothing about except the titles of the books and — well, I know more now that I've listened to your course, let's say, but two weeks ago I knew nothing about. So why don't you say something — because last time, people were upset that he wasn't mentioned when we talked last time, but that was because your course didn't go up to that point.

BIRZER: Yeah, you know, and I could have, Tom, because really when I stopped the first set of lectures, Heinlein had just started writing. So I could have, but I thought it would be better, because he's so associated with the '60s, to put him in there.

Heinlein's a really interesting guy in every way. Weirdo, eccentric, entrepreneur. Good guy, I think overall, despite his many kind of quirks. But really an American individualist, much like Bradbury, but more hardcore. Bradbury always had this kind of optimistic view of the world, and I think Heinlein had a pretty dark view of humanity and of the world. There really — one of his famous early novels, which would not have won him any literary acclaim, was a book called *The Puppet Masters*, and it later came out as a movie probably when you were in college, Tom. And it's okay. The movie's not great. But the story is pretty good. It's an anti-communist movie; you know, what happens if we're taken over bodily by some foreign entity, and clearly there it was communism.

But Heinlein's a mixed bag in the way that he writes, only because — So he starts off with kind of juvenile, fun, action science fiction, and then he gets into much more philosophical science fiction. So *The Puppet Masters* is his first kind of good work, but it's not great. But then he writes *Starship Troopers* and then *Strangers in a Strange Land* and then *Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, and in each of those — now, he himself would have been a very, very strong — in everyday, he would have been a very strong, straight-down-the-line, kind of Goldwater libertarian. But in his writing, he liked playing around with different ideas.

So in *Starship Troopers* — which has been made into an absolutely terrible movie. The novel is actually quite good. But in *Starship Troopers*, he plays around with the idea of: what if we in the future lived in a classical republic? And he makes Argentina that republic. And then in *Strangers in a Strange Land*, he plays with the idea — and it's all bad — what if we had a world government? And then in *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* — that's his most Randian novel, and it's very pro-Ayn Rand — there you have a revolt, just like America's revolt in 1776, but it's a revolt on the moon — and that is, the moon is revolting from the Earth. But it's essentially the same story with a lot of science fiction elements thrown in. That's his most libertarian novel, I think by far.

But all of them, no matter what he's doing, he's always trying to play with forms of society and forms of government. And a really interesting guy. I can see why libertarians both kind of love him and distrust him, only because they know personally he's a libertarian, but he doesn't always write as one.

WOODS: Ah, okay. Now, looking over this array of authors and this period of time, what do we walk away with? If we're trying to say there's something meaningful in what's being written here that should have a special meaning for libertarians, what would those things be? And is it different from any of the themes that you talked about in the earlier course?

BIRZER: It's a continuation of those themes, Tom, and especially the idea that, I think by its very nature, science fiction allows a true kind of individualism to come out, and therefore a lot of people, like Lewis, like Heinlein or Bradbury or Rand, those who are not leftists, they found a niche there where they could write and be accepted, and their ideas, like *Fahrenheit 451* or *Atlas Shrugged*, could be accepted as something that could be taken seriously. No other genre of literature really allowed that. Even the mystery genre, which seemingly should have been able to allow that, was often dominated by Marxists. It was often used as a critique of capitalist society. And so in the mysteries, you can have some libertarians, but for whatever reason, a lot of leftists gravitated towards the mystery field and the film noir, as well. And I love all that, but it's definitely got a much more left-wing tinge than any science fiction ever did — which is also one of the reasons it took a while for science fiction to be accepted, because it did take some of those ideas that were not leftist very seriously.

But in the 1950s and '60s, one of the things I was trying to do with this set of lectures, Tom, was just to show — so it's definitely a part of a whole, so we're in the middle of the story here and we still have to complete the story. But in that middle of the story, we find that in times like the 1950s and 1960s, that not only had science fiction become legitimate, but in so many ways, because so many writers were libertarian, libertarianism became widespread as well in the 1950s and '60s. And people would pick up Rand because they know it's a novel that's selling well, are reading it in part because it's science fiction, in part because it's a bestselling novel, but as they're doing so, they're obviously absorbing a lot of libertarian ideas. And the same thing was true with Heinlein and with Bradbury, and even in *Star Trek*, which was not yet — Roddenberry, the founder of *Star Trek*, was by no means a libertarian, but even within that, there are a lot of libertarian themes that are being explored.

So the point I was really trying to make with this set of lectures, Tom — again, middle of the story — is that it's no accident that we're going to find the rise of the Libertarian Party and of the libertarian movement in the 1970s, very strongly, and into the 1980s — and I don't want to say it's only because of science fiction, but I want science fiction to be a very important part of that story as well.

WOODS: Well, Brad, it's great material. Everybody's raving about it, as usual.

BIRZER: Oh, thanks, Tom.

WOODS: Looking forward to what you produce next.

BIRZER: It's a labor of love.

WOODS: I'm glad. I'm really glad that that's the case. I'm supposed to be having, if we can just get the scheduling right — you know, Dave Weigel at *The Washington Post* has a book coming out on progressive rock; did you know that?

BIRZER: Yes, I have a copy.

WOODS: Okay, now, I'm supposed to — In fact, that's a good point. I've got to — before I go on my trip tomorrow, I'd better run over to the post office and check the post office box, because he was supposed to send me one. Anyway, why am I thinking of this out loud right now? Anyway, I'm going to have him on soon, but I'm seeing — I've got tickets to Ian Anderson later this year —

BIRZER: Oh, nice.

WOODS: — with a couple of the girls, and I'm also — two shows for the ARW version of Yes.

BIRZER: Oh yeah.

WOODS: And one of them — I think I may have emailed you about this; I can't remember. Or maybe it was Dave I emailed about this. I got the VIP meet-and-greet package.

BIRZER: Oh, that's fantastic.

WOODS: Oh yeah. Yeah, that's right. Yep, that's right.

BIRZER: Good.

WOODS: Yeah. I mean, sometimes you've got to just splurge.

BIRZER: That's right. No, that's well worth it.

WOODS: Yeah. They just need to stay in good health between now and then, right? Just cross our fingers and it's gonna be great.

BIRZER: Yeah, absolutely, Tom.

WOODS: Anyway, good. Good, good. All right, anyway, we'll have to talk more soon, but thanks a lot.

BIRZER: Thank you so much, Tom.