

00:00:00	Music	Music	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	<b>Speaker:</b> <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by <i>NPR</i> .
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:00:13	Jesse Thorn	Host	I'm Jesse Thorn, it's <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:00:14	Music	Music	"Huddle Formation" by The Go Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:21	Jesse	Host	Taylor McFerrin just recently started singing. He did it on his new album, <i>Love's Last Chance</i> . <i>[Music fades out.]</i>
			Before that, he was a composer, a keyboard player, a DJ, a producer. And before that, a world-class beatboxer.
			<i>[Taylor McFerrin beatboxing plays underneath dialogue.]</i>
			Like, an—like <u>very</u> , very good at beatboxing.
00:00:38	Clip	Clip	<b>Taylor McFerrin:</b> <i>[singing]</i> Something change—change—
			<i>[Beatboxing.]</i>
			<i>[Audience cheers.]</i>
			<b>Taylor:</b> Some— <i>[beatboxing]</i> .
			<i>[Audience member woos.]</i>
00:00:52	Jesse	Host	As an instrumentalist, McFerrin is brilliant. He creates lush, swirling songs. He blends jazz, electronic music, and hip-hop in the same way that, say, Flying Lotus, might.
			<i>[Electronic music plays underneath dialogue.]</i>
			In fact, his first album, <i>Early Riser</i> , was put out on Flying Lotus's label, Brainfeeder.
			<i>Early Riser</i> came out in 2014. A fascinating record made even more interesting because of the <u>other</u> musicians who contributed. Robert Glasper, Thundercat, Emily King, and... <u>Bobby</u> McFerrin, Taylor McFerrin's dad. And yes, <u>that</u> Bobby McFerrin.
00:01:34	Music	Music	"Don't Worry, Be Happy" by Bobby McFerrin. Whistling to a tune on top of a gentle, lightly sung beat. The song plays at a regular volume for a few notes, then fades down and plays quietly as Jesse speaks.
00:01:38	Jesse	Host	It's a little surprising, right? Here's Bobby McFerrin, one of the most talented vocalists... ever, and his son Taylor—a gifted musician—who waited 15, 20 years into his career to start singing. But guess what? Taylor is also great at singing! Take a listen to a track off of <i>Love's Last Chance</i> . This song is called, "All I See is You".
00:02:01	Music	Music	"All I See is You" off the album <i>Love's Last Chance</i> by Taylor McFerrin. A mid-tempo song
			<i>You got me looking in your eyes But I've got my lady on my arm So you have to move on</i>

00:02:22 Jesse Host *[Music fades out as Jesse speaks]*  
Taylor McFerrin, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's so nice to have you on the show.

00:02:25 Taylor McFerrin Guest Yeah, man. This is awesome.

00:02:26 Jesse Host So, I'm gonna get this out of the way—before we went on the air, you mentioned you grew up in San Francisco. I also grew up in San Francisco, and I think we went to preschool together?

00:02:37 Taylor Guest *[Surprised]* Really?

00:02:38 Jesse Host *[Amused]* Yeah, I've been saving it for the air!

00:02:39 Taylor Guest *[Laughs.]*

00:02:40 Jesse Host It's hard.

00:02:42 Taylor Guest Yesss.

00:02:43 Jesse Host I've been saving it for the air. You go to preschool in Glen Park, at Kid's Play?

00:02:48 Taylor Guest Dude. Yeah, when I was like four years old.

00:02:50 Jesse Host There you go. So, so did I. There you go.

00:02:51 Taylor Guest Wow.

00:02:53 Jesse Host We went to preschool together, folks!

00:02:54 Taylor Guest That's like real preschool. I thought you were gonna say the San Francisco school, which was like—ten—first grade and up.

00:02:59 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** No.

**Taylor:** But, like, for real—preschool.

**Jesse:** I'm talking about for real preschool, in a garage in Glen Park.

00:03:04 Taylor Guest Yeah.

00:03:05 Jesse Host In a nice woman's house, and my friend Evan's mom built a play structure in the backyard.

00:03:11 Taylor Guest I have a picture of me one of my best friends, Jonah Copy, from that era—

00:03:15 Jesse Host I went to high school with Jonah Copy.

00:03:17 Taylor Guest See? Alright.

*[Laughing.]*

This is a whole different vibe to this conversation, now. Okay. Yeah. I remember nap time. *[laughs]* That's like one of my earliest memories, is nap time at that, uh, preschool. Wow.

00:03:32 Jesse Host *[Finishes laughing.]* So, you grew up in San Francisco and I was thinking about, like—I think as a kid, I had a vague idea that your dad was a musician.

00:03:40 Taylor Guest Mm-hm.

00:03:41 Jesse Host But, you know, I don't think that was like, so unusual among people I knew. And then, your dad went from a successful, working musician to, uh, like an international celebrity—

00:03:53 Taylor Guest Mm-hm.

00:03:54 Jesse Host —a few years later.

00:03:55 Taylor Guest Mm-hm.

00:03:56 Jesse Host And I wonder, what was that like for you as a kid, when your dad—who—your dad, Bobby McFerrin, who had been, you know, had several records and had been a pretty successful, working musician, accidentally had—or, maybe intentionally—had an international mega-hit?

00:4:16 Taylor Guest It's funny, 'cause I've learned so much more about that era of his life and my family's life, as I got older, and how different it was. For me, it was awesome. I mean... I know, for him, he hated that song and... I think the story with that song was—

00:04:30 Jesse Host It's a really great song. *[laughs]*

00:04:31 Taylor Guest It is—well—

00:04:32 Jesse Host *[Through laughter]* I was—I was—I heard it, the other day, and I thought—I also heard, uh, the song “MMMBop” by Hansen—and the reaction I had to both of them was like, “You know what, that was a huge hit song.”

00:04:43 Taylor Guest Yeah.

00:04:44 Jesse Host It's great. *[laughs]*

00:04:46 Taylor Guest Well, you know, there's nothing wrong with—with just a care-free song that's not meant to be, like, super deep. One thing about my dad is, he made it his own lane as like a straight-up solo act, where he'd go onstage as him and a mic. And he had this incredible ability to kind of like, do the baseline, supporting parts, and the lead, and like—chain. You know, switch between them so quick that it really felt like a full song.

But, as a solo artist, he had to be really diverse in how he entertained people for 90 minutes. So, he would do these super heavy jazz songs. He would do, like, a—improv opera.

*[Jesse chuckles.]*

00:05:24 Taylor Guest You know, where he'd like, sing the man or female part. He'd do crowd interaction stuff. And a lot of his stuff was really light-hearted. And the “Don't Worry Be Happy” song, I guess, was just kind of one of the... funny moments of his show, because—the other thing is, he also hated that people thought he was Jamaican, for years, 'cause he's like, singing in a Jamaican accent. And, but really, his show, he—he like, he does, like, the whole entire *Wizard of Oz* in like, a condensed, 20 minute version.

Like, his—his performance style is really meant to be diverse and meant to be just, like, kinda joyful. And I think the way that song happened was—there was a—that record was already cut, but they had, like, ten more minutes of studio time. And he was like, you know, whatever, let me just do that one thing I've been doing for fun. And then, you know, that's how it goes. That's like the ultimate lesson in the industry, is like, the thing you take the least seriously is probably gonna be, like, *[laughing through his words]* your most successful thing.

But he really, I know he really battled with the success of that song, because he had never toured that album. He, like, was getting lots of the success and he realized he was gonna, like, go crazy and turn into, like, a horrible human being if he, like, toured it and... like, maybe even took on the persona of, like, the voice he did in the song—like, there's so many w-ways he could have gone. So, he decided not to even tour that record. When he went back, he just went back to his regular show of doing whatever he wanted.

And I never—never saw him perform it after it came out, until, like, a few years ago. He, like, didn't even perform it. So, it's—it's a trip.

For him—this is, like, super heavy, but, for me, as a kid? It was awesome.

00:06:55 Jesse Host *[Laughs]* Was it cool ‘cause you were like, “That’s my dad on the radio”?

00:06:58 Taylor Guest Nothing seems as strange to you, as a kid. Everything is just happening, you know, like, “This is supposed to—this is what my life is.” But the stuff that I did notice was, like, all the sudden we got, like, a—a real TV. You know?

00:07:09 Jesse Host *[Laughs.]*

00:07:10 Taylor Guest And then, like—we would, like, all sudden, like, we got, like, a car. You know, it was all this stuff that, as a kid, would get you super hype. And, you know, we started being able to go on vacations, and I was just old enough where stuff like that was amazing. And also, just crazy stuff, like, he started working with Pixar when they first started off.

We all got—I got to go see, like, the first Pixar short films. Um, and, like, he was just working with really cool people, uh, so I—it—it was—it was like the perfect thing to happen, as a kid.

00:07:38 Jesse Host Did you have music education, as a kid? Did you, you know, were you playing instruments at home? Was your... was your dad, uh—what’s the movie where J.K. Simmons is being mean to the...?

00:07:50 Taylor Guest *[Unsure]* Oh, yeah...

00:07:51 Jesse Host Drummer. *[laughs]*

00:07:52 Taylor Guest It was so not like that. Um. I had no—I took piano lessons in grade school, but I didn’t—I wasn’t really into music. I—I didn’t think I was gonna be a musician, until high school. Or—I didn’t fall—I fell in love with music in eighth grade. Specifically, I had a hour long bus ride to school, which was crazy, ‘cause school started at 7:15, and I lived in Minnesota, at the time. I was the first kid on the—the first kid picked up on my bus route, so I was the earliest, in the morning.

Thinking back, there was, like, these Minnesota winters where I was, like, walking through, like, two feet of snow to my bus stop. *[laughs]* That was like, ten blocks away, and then I’d be on an hour-long bus ride to school. But it—it introduced me to albums, because it was, like, the perfect length to listen to a CD.

That’s when, like, my mind got blown. Like, I got into Stevie Wonder, at that time, and I would, like, listen to full albums and be like, “Woah.” It, like, really moved me in a—in a special way. But then, I—you know, I grew up just on radio stuff. Then I was like, “I wanna get into hip-hop. I like making beats.” I was like the beatboxer kid in the cypher with my friends. And I was *[laughs]*, I realized it’s always the beatboxer in the group of friends that turns into the producer.

*[He and Jesse laugh.]*

So, I—in, like, junior year, in high school, I started getting little samplers or beat machines, or whatever, and started making tracks. But yeah, I had no formal training and I still kinda suck at a lot of, like, theory and—and playing. But, uh, I figure out how to make it work, somehow.

00:09:22 Jesse Host When you were beatboxing, primarily—and, I mean, I remember, in my young 20s, hearing a—hearing about your reputation as a—as a beatboxer.

00:09:30 Taylor Guest Mm-hm.

00:09:31 Jesse Host Were you *[laughs]* were you self-conscious or self-aware about the idea that you were carrying on a family legacy?

00:09:45 Taylor Guest Your father’s gift as a—whatever the vocal equivalent of a *[laughs]* multi-instrumentalist is.  
No. It’s funny. I totally didn’t—

*[Jesse laughs loudly.]*

I really didn’t. And now, when I think back, I’m like, “That’s... that’s kinda whack, actually.”

*[Taylor laughs as Jesse cackles in the background.]*

Um. I’ve always been—thought of myself as a producer. I always made beats, first. It’s what I spent the most time doing. I don’t think I ever practiced beatboxing. Kinda—I kinda was known that I could beatbox, in high school, but it wasn’t like—I didn’t think I was gonna make a career out of it, or anything.

But, um... once I started doing live shows—my first band, I was in—I realized beatboxing was the only thing I could, like, hang with real musicians doing. So, it turned into kinda, like, my ability to get onstage. And then I—there was a period, in New York, in like the early 2000s, when I did get—I think—pretty good, in terms of the ratio of beatboxers in the world. I felt like I had my own little style. There was like these beatbox competitions and, like, I’d be on some shows and stuff.

00:10:37 Taylor Guest And that was a lot of fun. I guess I took it a little bit serious, at that point. But I was only ever really good doing it in a completely freestyle format with, like, a singer and a keyboard player and kinda, like, just being a support. When it got to, like, the—the real—when beatboxing really blew up and it turned into competitions and “how many songs can you do” and all these sounds and all this stuff—I never practiced any of that type of stuff. So, I never—for some—I never really thought of myself as a beatboxer, at all. It was just something that I did. But then, it’s been in my bio and it’s been, like, such a forward part of how I’ve been presented, over the years.

00:11:24 Jesse Host I guess if I really think about it, I don’t... like that, that much. But, it also just kinda doesn’t bother me.  
It’s interesting that you said that beatboxing was the first thing that you could do, onstage, and hang with... quote-unquote “real musicians”.

00:11:33 Taylor Guest Yeah.

00:11:34 Jesse Host Because... that feels like a... tension through your whole career—that you’re a very gifted musician. I’m gonna stipulate that. But, if your buddy—the other guy in your band—when he’s not touring with you, is touring with Chick Corea.

00:11:52 Taylor Guest Mm-hm. *[Breaks into light laughter].*

00:11:54 Jesse Host *[Laughing]* You know what I mean?

00:11:55 Taylor Guest **Taylor:** Yeah.

**Jesse:** Like—

**Taylor:** It's the truth.

**Jesse:** The—like the level of... there's—there's not a lot of room for punk rock.

**Taylor:** Yeah

00:12:02	Taylor	Guest	<b>Jesse:</b> <i>[Laughing]</i> You know what I mean? It's crazy. I think about that all the time. I'm always telling Marcus Gilmore—who you're referencing—
00:12:07	Jesse	Host	Yeah.
00:12:08	Taylor	Guest	—and tours with Chick, I'm like, "How do you come off tour with Chick and play with me, man?" <i>[Chuckles.]</i> but, it's—it's—I'm much more at peace with it than, um, like, at this point in my life, I'm like—I'm around so many crazy talented musicians that don't necessarily, like—their productions, when they play me, like, their beats, you know—or, everyone has, kind of, their special skill. And being a producer first is kind of finding this weird middle ground where it's like—what I'm good at is the finished products, not, like, the individual elements that go into it.
			I don't play keys at a super high level. I don't play drums at a super high level. My gift is, like, putting things together and just, like, working with sonics, in general. So, it's like, I have to keep reminding myself that that's what I'm good at, sometimes. And when I'm around people that are just—can just immediately do something that's super impressive, that you can tell is, like, one of the best in the world... it's a strange thing. 'Cause it's like, some part of your ego wants to be like, "I wanna be one of the best in the world." But then it's like, "Show me." And it's hard to, like, <u>show</u> someone, sometimes, when you are a producer.
			But, then at the same time, if you have a track that you put on in the club, or that—just a song you make that travels around the world and it's moving people, it's kind of like they're having that experience I had, on the bus as a kid, where, like, it's just—everything's hitting you. It's giving these emotions. You can, like, zone out and have all these thoughts. So... it's a strange—it's a strange thing to be... the focus of—when you also wanna be a performer, a little bit. But I don't know. It is what it is.
00:13:40	Jesse	Host	I mean, I feel like that is also one of the central tensions between hip-hop and jazz—
00:13:46	Taylor	Guest	Mm-hm.
00:13:47	Jesse	Host	—is that, you know, in jazz... chops are a big deal.
00:13:53	Taylor	Guest	Yup.
00:13:54	Jesse	Host	They're not the only deal, but they're a really big deal.
00:13:56	Taylor	Guest	Yeah.
00:13:57	Jesse	Host	Hip-hop aesthetics are much more about—I mean, broadly, pop aesthetics, like how much emotion does it give you in the here and now?
00:14:06	Taylor	Guest	Yeah.
00:14:07	Jesse	Host	Does it make you dance? But, also, the refinement of sound. I remember trying to explain to, you know, my dad or something like

that, as a 20-year-old, why—if Questlove could play the drums for a hip-hop song, why all hip-hop acts don't just have drummers. And it's like, well, Questlove is the only drummer who is both great at drumming and so completely obsessive about, like, placing microphones—

00:14:38 Taylor Guest  
00:14:39 Jesse Host

Yeah.  
—and exactly the sound that he generates, that he can generate a perfect snare drum, every time. Like, a hip-hop producer finds that one on some, you know, uh, O.V. Wright song—

00:14:52 Taylor Guest  
00:14:53 Jesse Host  
00:14:57 Taylor Guest

Yeah.  
—and pulls it out and uses it over and over. *[Laughs.]*  
Yeah. It's crazy. It's—I totally—I definitely felt that tension, growing up. Like, my dad was not into hip-hop—anything that's like a loop, he's like definitely bored by the second loop. *[Giggles.]*

00:15:07 Jesse Host

Was he full-on against it? Like, was he—was he like, “uh *[mumbles]* why are they swearing?”

00:15:12 Taylor Guest

*[Definitively]* Yes. Do you remember when, like, Tha Dogg Pound, or, you know, Snoop and Drake came out on the west coast, it was like the biggest thing ever. Caused a big stir in the political community. I went to a really hippie, small school where there were, like—had parent's meetings about, like, we shouldn't let our kids listen to this type of stuff.

And then my dad grew up fairly, like, Christian-values and, like—the first time he found, like, my stash of—

*[Jesse laughs.]*

—you know, hard-core hip-hop stuff, he literally, like, threw it away. So, he was not into it at all.

00:15:47 Jesse Host

I remember sitting my dad down when I was 16, or whatever, and playing him—back to front—*Me & Jesus the Pimp*, by the Coup. He was not skeptical, necessarily, of hip-hop, but I just wanted to—to convey him what it meant to me. And I wonder if there was anything that you ever tried to sit your dad down *[laughs]* like, in a chair, and be like—

*[Menacingly]* “You're gonna listen to this whole song, dad. And you're gonna give it a fair shot.”

00:16:16 Taylor Guest

I don't know if I did that with a whole record. The—the problem is, the swearing. He's so—

00:16:21 Jesse Host  
00:16:22 Taylor Guest

*[Chuckles.]*  
—it's his, like—the—the—with him, there's too many things that, like, even if he would dig the music, he would, like, it would be over as soon as the—the language was vulgar for more than, like, a few minutes. I more, probably, played to him individual tracks that I thought he would like, sonically. But I—I—honestly? I don't think I ever played him a hip-hop song where he was like, *[cheerfully]* “Actually, this is pretty great.”

Although, you know what's a good one? Even though there's some swearing in it, is the—that Arrested Development, “Everyday People”. Uh.

00:16:54 Jesse Host  
00:16:56 Taylor Guest

My mom loved that one.  
That one comes on during, like, Thanksgiving and stuff, 'cause that's just kind of, like, an undeniable—you know.

00:17:00	Jesse	Host	<i>[Rhythmically]</i> I was resting at the park, minding my own—
00:17:02	Taylor	Guest	Yeah, exactly. <i>[laughs]</i>
00:17:04	Jesse	Host	—business as I picked up the treble tone.
00:17:06	Taylor	Guest	Yep. That’s a great one.
00:17:08	Jesse	Host	<i>[Laughing.]</i> Sorry. I think I just, um, embarrassed myself permanently, forever—
			<i>[Taylor laughs through Jesse’s next several sentences.]</i>
			—by demonstrating that I know the lyrics—
00:17:16	Taylor	Guest	Yeah.
00:17:17	Jesse	Host	—to the verses of “Everyday People” by Arrested Development. I also owned the second Arrested Development album, Kevin. Put that on <i>NPR</i> . <i>Zingalamaduni</i> . I owned it! <i>[Triumphant]</i> Owned it! Listened to it!
			I wanna play a song that your dad cut—
00:17:34	Music	Music	“Jubilee” by Bobby McFerrin fades in. An upbeat, fun song with a light drumbeat that plays quietly as Jesse and Taylor speak.
00:17:35	Jesse	Host	That you got guest vocals credit on—
00:17:37	Taylor	Guest	<i>[Chuckling]</i> Okay.
00:17:38	Jesse	Host	—when you were—it was 1982, so...
			<i>[Taylor laughs.]</i>
			<i>[Amusedly]</i> You definitely couldn’t talk. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:17:42	Taylor	Guest	Yeah.
00:17:43	Music	Music	<i>[“Jubilee” increases in volume. A chorus of “La, la, la” plays in the background as a louder voice sings a sustained “la!” every few seconds. The chorus of “la, la, la” continues quietly as Bobby begins singing]</i>
			<i>Here's more than you will need Take a joy-filled, feed on some happy fuel Feel however you feel your feelings through And to it be true, welcome in the new</i>
			<i>Where happiness abounds There it can be found Here, here inside the heart And when nothing comes apart There's a brand new star arising!</i>
			<i>[Music fades to a quieter volume and plays in the background as Taylor speaks]</i>
00:18:27	Taylor	Guest	Yeah, that’s funny. I—I guess the story with that is—is my mom and my dad’s manager are doing—singing the “la”s in the background and they’re—one of them’s holding me. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:18:36	Jesse	Host	Awwww.
00:18:38	Taylor	Guest	So, I’m in the room.
			<i>[Jesse giggles. The music fades out entirely.]</i>
			I don’t know if I was actually doing the “la”s, though.
00:18:44	Jesse	Host	<i>[Finishing laughing.]</i> That’s the sweetest thing in the <u>world</u> .



00:18:51	Taylor	Guest	<i>[Caught in laughter again]</i> Also, what I like about it—no swearing!
00:18:52	Jesse	Host	Yeah. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> Definitely no swearing. <i>[Delighted]</i> That's good.
			<i>[Giggles.]</i>
00:19:01	Music	Music	We'll finish up with Taylor McFerrin after a quick break. Stick around. It's <i>Bullseye</i> from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and <i>NPR</i> .
00:19:03	Jesse	Promo	Relaxing music plays in the background as Jesse speaks. Support for this podcast and the following message, come from Sierra Nevada Brewing Company. In 1980, with a few thousand dollars and used dairy equipment, Ken Grossman founded Sierra Nevada Brewing Company. Ken's award-winning ales propelled him from homebrewer to craft brewer. Today, Ken and his family still own 100% of the company: one of the most successful independent craft breweries in America. More at <a href="http://SierraNevada.com">SierraNevada.com</a> .
00:19:31	Promo	Promo	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> <i>[Energetic music with an electric keyboard plays under dialogue.]</i>
			<b>Sam Sanders:</b> Emmy, Grammy, Tony and Oscar winner, John Legend, has a saying: "Luck is just opportunity meeting preparation."
			<b>John Legend:</b> By the time I was in that room with Lauren Hill, I was ready for her to hear me. By the time I was in that room with Kanye, I was ready for him to hear me.
			<b>Sam:</b> John Legend, on the secret to his continued success, next time on <i>It's Been a Minute</i> from <i>NPR</i> .
00:19:52	Promo	Promo	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> <i>[Sweet, gentle piano music plays.]</i>
			<b>Janet Varney:</b> <i>[Sweetly]</i> Hi, I'm <i>The JV Club</i> podcast's Janet Varney, and I used to suffer from indecision. I couldn't choose between Star <u>Wars</u> and Star <u>Trek</u> —whether to call or text, or the best way to cook my eggs. But now, thanks to my weekly dose of <i>We Got This</i> , on Maximum Fun? My decisions are made <u>for</u> me! Thanks, Mark and Hal!
			<b>Mark Gagliardi:</b> Warning, <i>We Got This</i> may cause: shouting, phone throwing, the illusion that the hosts can hear you, laughter on public transit, and death.
			<b>Hal Lublin:</b> <i>We Got This</i> with Mark and Hal. We know what's best.
00:20:24	Jesse	Host	<i>[Chord comes to a resolution and ends.]</i> It's <i>Bullseye</i> , I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Taylor McFerrin. He is a singer, songwriter, and DJ. He's also the son of the singer Bobby McFerrin. His new album is called <i>Love's Last Chance</i> .
			When you were a... teenager and a young adult, were you making beats on a hardware machine? Were you—did you have, like, a MPC Sampler, or something like that? Or were you doing it in software?

00:20:50 Taylor

Guest

I had a really weird... experience, 'cause I never... [sighs]. See, if I could go back in time—although, I mean, I guess it's all for the best, but—I totally got... I would always just believe magazines of what new stuff was coming out, that it's actually as dope as that—th—that—what it was saying. And same when I'd go Guitar Center. They'd totally, like, sell me—

[Jesse chuckles.]

—like, “This is the one.” When, really, like, I always—I should have got an MPC, 'cause the—the first real beat machine I got was a— or, like, what I thought was a SP-808? Actually, that's not true. I got a SP-202, which—it went on to, like, become the 404 which, like, Madlib made all of the *Madvillain* album on. You know, it's, like, actually a great beat machine.

But, the SP-808... was really meant to be, like, a performance sampler—where it had a lot of sample time, but only had four tracks that you could loop, and the sequencer was trash. Like, if you tried to actually run four samples altogether with anything more than, like, a—a bar loop of what was meant to be, like, kicks and snares—it would, like, freeze and stutter and all that stuff, where the MPC was, like, the ultimate sequencer.

All the earlier drum machines were a little bit before my time, but I never really learned how to, like, make beats, like, quote-unquote “the right way”. So, I ended up always getting these keyboard work stations. My dad got a new keyboard, at some point, and he gave me a Roland XP-80, which was, like, actually a really amazing keyboard, for the time. But, um—and then eventually, in high school, I had a Korg Triton, but they all had trash sequencers. It was, like, not—and they didn't—the Triton had a sampler.

00:22:32 Jesse

Host

Wh-what is a sequencer, for folks who don't know?

00:22:34 Taylor

Guest

It's where... you know, you have a bank of sounds—the MPC's famous because you can—you take a record, you play stuff, and then you sample off the record and, like, you—you can edit. You can find a little drum loop, but then, like, chop the kick and have that be on one track—have the hi-hat be in another, and then—you've probably seen, you know, for people listening, like, they have the little pads and you play it with your fingers, but you can record it in a way where—whatever you play—it records it and plays it back.

But a sequencer, you can, um, you know, set the time of a loop. You can quantize the sound—which means it's gonna be—just fit perfectly on a grid, in a mathematical sequence. Or it could have a human feel. But, the reason the MPC was legendary is it had, like, a rock-solid sequencer. Like, it would never hiccup. It could—it had a really good feel for the quantization and everything. And also, there's a sound quality element that goes into all these samplers, as well. Like, the MPC was a 16-bit sampler, which still had a little bit of grit... a little bit of lo-fi to whatever you put in it. It wasn't gonna be as pristine as what you put into it, and, like... the, uh, SP... 1200, before it. I think it was a 12-bit sampler. So, when you hear beats from that era, they sound even more lo-fi. That was, like, the Pete Rock era. He was famous for that.

Yeah. There's—there's so many things that got—like, the MPC... is, like, has the aesthetic that was, like, the perfect balance. Where, like, it's still—all those records made on that still sound super modern, but they hit, like, hit you in the chest. It sounds great.

So, the stuff I was using—my dad gave me this keyboard—I cut a sample on it. It had all these drum, like, preloaded drum sounds in that, which you couldn't make sound hard-core—

00:24:18 Jesse Host  
00:24:19 Taylor Guest

*[Laughs.]*

—or, like, have a real vibe to it. So, all my, like, beats in high school sounded super...

00:24:23 Jesse Host  
00:24:26 Taylor Guest

Everything you make sounds like a David Sanborn album.

Right.

00:24:27 Jesse Host  
00:24:28 Taylor Guest

*[Yelling]* What's wrong here?

The only thing I got out of it was that I got really good at playing drums on keyboards. And, to this day, I'm trash trying to play drums on pads, but I've, like... I just did a show with Robert Glasper and Derrick Hodge where I literally just was the drummer, on key drums. *[laughs]*. And, like, we listened back and it's, like—sounds legit.

In a way, it helped me that I didn't have an MPC, 'cause I probably would have gotten so into sampling. And, instead, because I was working off key stations—keyboard workstations—I started enjoying actually writing songs and, like, learning how to play chords and scales and all that this stuff. Which ended up being more valuable.

And the SP-808, even though it was horrible as a sequencer, was amazing as a live performance tool. This one weekend, I was able to go to a studio and they had all these vintage synths. I just, like, played—I sampled myself playing all these synth sounds, and I used those sounds—live—in all these bands, for years, where it was like, "I have this crazy, weird arpeggio that, like, fits over this one song."

I had, like... eight zip disks for—full of just random samples that, like, served my live music career for probably ten years. So, it all worked out, but I always feel like... no one ever explained to me that I should have got an MPC, from day one.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

00:25:45 Jesse Promo

Then, maybe, I would have—I would have been producing for, like, atmosphere in Minnesota, when I lived there, you know?

00:25:51 Jesse Host

I'm Jesse Thorn. It's *Bullseye*. My guest is musician Taylor McFerrin.

00:26:12 Taylor Guest

When you became an—an adult, you played with bands for a long time. During that time, were you thinking about who you would be if you were performing as yourself and not performing with a band?

No. Everything in my career has happened really, kind of, naturally, as the progression. I—I really needed to be in every band I was in to, like—I definitely gained some sort of perspective or production technique or... just knowledge of music by—from my bandmates that would play me all this new stuff. Like, I needed every single experience to be able to get to a point where I could do anything solo.

I—there was an era, in New York, where... I was in a bunch of bands at once and they all, kind of, dissolved really naturally in, like, a six-month period. So, then—that was just, like, the seas parting, for me to, like, finally just do my own thing. But I had all the tools I needed.

‘Cause, normally, in those bands, I was also the one recording the band and, like, mixing all our stuff. So, I also knew how to just, like, do the finished product all on my own. It was kind of like—right when the bedroom producer era was really picking up steam. So, it just—I didn’t really have to think about it, too much. It kinda—all my other projects just fell apart and I was like, “Welp, here we go.”

*[Laughs.]*

00:27:10 Jesse Host Did you have... goals for your music, when you became an adult? I mean, like, I imagine after... you know, you hit our mid-twenties, you’re like, “Well, I guess my music career isn’t going to lead to me being a famous pop star.”

00:27:30 Taylor Guest Mm-hm.

00:27:31 Jesse Host So, did you have ideas of what you wanted to be?

00:27:35 Taylor Guest I always thought what I was doing was just kinda... cool, you know? The—the barometer for me was more—there was always, like, the generation ahead that I really respected and the biggest thing for me was... to start to be a part of that, like, club of people that I was, like, at their shows and then they started knowing my stuff, and then we start collaborating. Then you just feel like you’re a part of the musical moment of that time. And when you live in New York, that’s, like, a really powerful thing, you know? ‘Cause just like, this—you’ve played the smallest, crappiest clubs. All the sudden you play a slightly bigger club that you saw this artist you love like a year earlier, and you’re like, “I can’t believe we’re playing here.”

And then five years later, you look back and be like, “I can’t believe I was, like, even excited to play that club.” But just, that progression is really fun. And now, I think most of the artists... that I’ve loved over the years, they just made exactly what they wanted to hear. And, um, that music usually stands the test of time better, anyways.

So, I—in a way, I feel lucky that I never got sucked into a project that seemed like it was gonna make me a lot of money or make me super famous, that was totally trash, you know? ‘Cause, since I stuck with it and have always done what I enjoyed, I found I got to a point wherein I could sustain my lifestyle doing what I like to do.

You always wanna be more and more—you know, it’s not like I don’t wanna be more and more successful and make more money, just so I can, like, travel and do vacations and stuff, but... you can—you can get sucked into some weird roads. And I’ve seen a lot of my friends that, like, they get a record deal and a record that doesn’t even come out. Or they move to L.A. because these producers convince them they’re gonna, like, blow them up and then it’s just like—they don’t actually have any sort of vibe in the studio and the music’s just not good. So, even if it’s some older producer that probably had some hit, like, in the late 80’s, early 90’s, so they have some clout—there’s all these, you know... people to believe—

00:29:28 Taylor Guest *[Jesse laughs.]*  
*[Chuckling]*—all the time that can just, like, kinda lead you astray. So, I don't know.

I... I remember when I wasn't famous by the time I was 20, and I was like, *[darkly]* "I'm never gonna be famous," you know?

I cared more about it, at that time. But, uh, that was when I first moved to New York and, um.

00:29:49 Jesse Host And that was despite the example of, uh, having a dad who—the thing that—getting famous was, like, his least favorite part of his whole career.

00:29:58 Taylor Guest Yeah... It was. Ah—he—I think he finally, as he got older, learned to, like, appreciate all the amazing stuff it brought to his family and his life, you know? It was more that he was such a serious—he took his craft so seriously. And, you know, he was—got to that point where he was onstage and cutting records with Herbie Hancock and, like, all the top dudes in the world.

And—there's a feeling of, just, having that respect and just being one of the guys, that I think having a pop hit that was not his intention kinda robbed him of, just, that feeling of, like, "I'm cool"?

*[Taylor and Jesse both laugh.]*

Or—it—half about being cool and half about just like, you know—it takes a lot of effort to get to the point when you're, like, really great... on a level where you get to play with cats like that and they think you're great, as well. So, I totally get why it bugged him out.

00:30:55 Jesse Host Did you ever feel self-conscious playing with... guys who had—like, you went to the New School, right?

00:31:02 Taylor Guest Yeah.

00:31:03 Jesse Host And you went to the New School, as a liberal arts student.

00:31:06 Taylor Guest Yep.

00:31:07 Jesse Host There are these dudes who went, and women who went, to the—uh, New School's jazz program—which is very famous—

00:31:12 Taylor Guest Yeah.

00:31:13 Jesse Host —who have extraordinary ability—have extraordinary virtuosity on their instruments.

00:31:19 Taylor Guest Yeah.

00:31:21 Jesse Host And... you know, or have been groomed to become—whatever, the vanguard of the next generation of jazz, or whatever, right?

00:31:30 Taylor Guest Yeah.

00:31:31 Jesse Host And I wonder if you ever felt self-conscious as a non-virtuosic performer, stepping into—especially, specifically jazz context. 'Cause, like, you go play a show with... Robert Glasper, or something. That dude's one of the big names in jazz.

00:31:50 Taylor Guest Uh-huh.

00:31:51 Jesse Host Capital "J", Jazz.

00:31:52 Taylor Guest Yeah.

00:31:53 Jesse Host And he's super good at it. *[Laughs.]* And you're like, "Well, I know some really cool synthesizer patches."

00:31:59 Taylor Guest *[Laughing]* Yeah, yeah, yeah. Um. I don't think about it that—well, yes. They—

00:32:05 Jesse Host Did you—when it happened, did—the—the question is, retrospectively, did you?

00:32:09	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	<b>Jesse:</b> Feel self-conscious?
00:32:14	Taylor	Guest	<p><b>Taylor:</b> Yeah—I—I still <u>do</u>, um...  I—at—sometimes, but, it's like—I feel like I'm... I'm—most of the cats, especially in the newer generation, that are playing jazz—they all grew up listening to these same records as we did. Just like they're all listening to Snoop and Tribe and J Dilla and all the Soulquarians stuff. Um... so, my—I feel like, my role, in those type of groups, is to bring an element of, like, that album experience to a live show. 'Cause a lot of times it's these, like, in-between sounds and, uh, atmospheric things that are happening on a record that make it have, like, a—a slightly more depth to the sonic experience.</p> <p>So, I enjoy knowing that I'm adding that to, like—when I play with Glasper, like, that's basically my role in the band is, like... I know when to sit out. I know when they're like going off on some epic journey that I can't, like, I can't—I can't even keep up with, like, all the changes and, like, what's happening. Like, I understand it as a listener, I'm like, "I know what they're doing."</p> <p>But I don't have the chops to be, like, that instant like, "Oh, here we go, there. There, there. And now I'm doing my solo." But I also know that, in <i>[stammers]</i> in a studio setting, I can do lots of crazy chords. It's kinda like... I understand a lot about theory and feel, um—enough to sit down and—and make crazy stuff in the studio, but... I've put in my hours to get—be comfortable in <u>that</u> setting. So, I'm not gonna beat myself up for not being able to match someone that put their time into, like, being able to take a crazy solo and hear exactly what's happening in real time and adjusting.</p> <p>It's like... I—I'm working on that. Maybe in, like, 20 years I'll be, like, an epic piano player and just do straight solo piano shows, you know? <i>[Chuckles.]</i> If I tried it—if I just put aside production and just focus on that? I feel like I could be a really good piano player. But... I always have the deepest experiences with music listening to albums, and I really care about textures and—and sounds, the silent qualities, so—if that's what I'm gonna bring to a—a jazz gig, even if it's just, like, some weird outro when we settle into, like, a groove. Um, I'm totally cool with that.</p>
00:34:26	Jesse	Host	You spent nearly 20 years as a—maybe it was a little more than 20 years—as a—as a beatmaker and producer and keyboard player and beatboxer, before you made this record.
00:34:40	Taylor	Guest	<i>[Softly]</i> Mm-hm.
00:34:41	Jesse	Host	And on this record, you are all of those things, but you're also the primary singer. Were you scared to start singing... as a singer, when you had 15 or 20 years of skill at all the other things that you did? <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:35:02	Taylor	Guest	Dude. It's like—it held me back, really. Um. I gave up on trying to do it about three years ago. Like—the initial plan was to sing on this record, when I started making it, and then, like, a few years in, I was like... <i>[Beat.]</i> It gets really frustrating, because I'm around so many amazing musicians and singers, where it's, like, hard not to compare yourself.

And it's like—it took me so long to get to the point where I'm like, "I'm down to play my beats to anybody, so why am I gonna just put

on top of those beats, like, something that I have—” [chuckles]. You know, I’ve tried to sing at different times, but I just never felt like I found my voice, or, like, my approach, or any of that stuff. And, really, all the vocals on this record were done, probably, eight months before it was finished.

It—it felt like I just barely found this... way that... it sounded like me. It sounded not super developed, or anything, but it sounded, at least, honest. And, um, I just made a decision that I was like, “If I’m gonna make... kind of, the album I envisioned,” I’m like, “I don’t think I can make it, on this record, but I’m never gonna make it, if I don’t put myself out there.”

And I just tried to look at it as... in—when I first started making beats, the first few years, I never wanted to play anything for people. And then at a certain point, you start, like, being like, “Yo, check this out.” You know, to your close friends. And then you find this weird comfort zone when you’re finally wanting—wanting to play stuff. And I—I realized that... I’d just—I was just at that stage, with singing, where it’s like that first—all these songs are, like, my first, like, “I guess I don’t hate this.” [laughs] Like, “I guess I’m down to play this phase.”

00:36:42 Taylor

Guest

Or—the main thing I gained from producing for so long is, like—I—I still remember what that feels like, to be super insecure and shy, but also enjoy something in a way where you’re like, “But I can see where I’m gonna go with this.” Um.

So, this record is really strange, for me. ‘Cause it’s like, *Early Riser* felt like a—a lifetime of development in presenting something that felt like, kind of—not a finished product, but, like, a *mature*... presentation of where I was at. And this record’s like the [stammers]—totally opposite energy of—of an experience for me, where I’m like, “I like all these tunes, but it’s not like I toured these songs for, like, a year or two and, like, figured out how I really even wanted to sing them.

This album is like—alright, I think [laughs]—this album is me in the studio literally recording the first times where I... felt like I liked it, but I still didn’t even have the years or experience to, like, have any perspective on it to be like, “This is me on a good day. This is, like, me using this technique. This is, like—I can hear the difference with this mic.”

There’s, like, so many elements that are really—earlier in the—in the development of me as a singer, so... And, even now, like, I’ve probably done, like, 12-13 shows with this material. And in my brain, I’m like, “I could perform these songs all probably a lot better now, even, um...”

00:38:07 Taylor

Guest

But, moving forward, I realize what I did with this record that I—I’m probably gonna change on the new one, is that—I basically, like... produced this album around my singing in terms of, like, I chose tracks that I thought my voice would sound the best over and then... I think the difference between this album and *Early Riser* was: I had a total freedom of, like, any style, ‘cause I wasn’t thinking I’d sing over it.

And so, I think the next album I'm gonna, like... be as wild as I wanna be, production wild—wise—and force myself to grow as a singer to, like, match the production a little bit more, and be more experimental with, like, effects and, like, weird stuff.

It's probably the most important thing I've done, for myself, but it's—it's been a interesting experience sharing it with people, 'cause it's almost like... I don't even—I don't know what this music even sounds like, is how it feels [*laughs*] to me. Um. So, it's been an interesting experience, but it's—it's, like, been really important for me.

00:39:03 Jesse Host

Well, Taylor McFerrin, I am so grateful to you for taking all this time to be on *Bullseye*. It was really nice to get to talk to you and to, I guess, see you after 34 years. [*Chuckles.*]

00:39:12 Taylor Guest

[*Laughing*] Yeah. Man. That's such—you blew my mind, with that—

[*Jesse cackles.*]

00:39:19 Jesse Host

—to start this off. Changed the whole vibe. I was saving it up, Taylor!

[*Taylor chuckles.*]

Saving it up!

00:39:30 Music Music

Taylor McFerrin! *Love's Last Chance* is his new album. It's great. His 2014 record, *Early Riser*, is beautiful. Go give both a listen. Relaxed music plays under dialogue.

00:39:33 Jesse Host

That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, produced at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) headquarters, overlooking MacArthur Park, in beautiful Los Angeles, California—where there are tire tracks in the grass a long, straight, muddy line across the park. And, uh, Kevin—my producer—saw a squirrel run down the tire track like it was a squirrel highway.

It's written in my script: "Life in the fast lane."

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. He has, perhaps, too much power on the program. Jesus Ambrosio is our associate producer. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Our production fellow is Jordan Kauwling. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Thanks to Dan for sharing it with us. He's made a bunch of music that he made for, uh, *Bullseye* available on Bandcamp. Uh, just search for DJW, there. It's called, like, *Music for Bullseye*. It's pay-what-you-want.

Our theme song is "Huddle Formation" by The Go Team. Thanks to them and Memphis Industries, their label, for letting us use it. Great song, great band.

And before you go! *Bullseye* has been around forever and a day! I am bald now and didn't used to be. That means we have done hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of interviews, including more than one with Lynda Barry, who just won a MacArthur Fellowship, a Genius Grant, and I agree—she is a genius. Two of my favorite



*Bullseye* interviews in the history of the program, so go listen to Lynda, because she is an amazing human being.

All our interviews are available on our website or in your favorite podcast app. You can also find us on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—both of the interviews from this week’s program are in YouTube, if you want to share them. Just search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. You can keep up with the show on any of those platforms.

We’re also, these days, on [NPR.org](http://NPR.org)! You can go find them in [NPR.org](http://NPR.org), if you want to.

I guess that’s about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature sign-off.

Upbeat music plays.

**Speaker:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by *NPR*.

*[Music fades out.]*

00:41:40 Music  
00:41:41 Promo

Music  
Promo