

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 <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and is distributed by NPR.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:00:12	Jesse Thorn	Host	I'm Jesse Thorn, it's <i>Bullseye!</i>
00:00:14	Music	Music	"Huddle Formation" by The Go! Team plays. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:21	Jesse	Host	Let's start taking bets for the next person to EGOT—win an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar, and a Tony. I think my money is on Daveed Diggs. That's because Daveed has one of the most <u>varied</u> resumes in entertainment. He starred in the original cast of <i>Hamilton</i> , playing Thomas Jefferson and the Marquis de Lafayette. He earned a Tony for that, so that one's already handled.
			He's an actor on screen, too. He was on <i>Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt</i> , on <i>Black-ish</i> . He's now starring in the Amazon series, <i>Undone</i> .
			He's also a writer. He and his friend Rafael Casal wrote the screenplay for <i>Blindspotting</i> —a movie about violence and gentrification in their hometown of Oakland. Diggs and Casal also co-star in the film, and it is <u>amazing</u> .
			And Diggs is also in clipping.—it's a rap group. He's the MC, along with the producers William Hutson and Johnathan Snipes—clipping gets called "experimental", often. The producers build their beats out of weird samples: beer bottles, alarm clocks. They collaborate with noise artists and Daveed never raps in the first person, which is... both <u>hard</u> and very unusual.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
			Their latest two records have been conceptual. 2016's <i>Splendor and Misery</i> was a grim sci-fi epic.
00:01:39	Music	Music	"Nothing is Safe" from the album <i>There Existed an Addiction to Blood</i> by clipping. begins playing quietly under Jesse's dialogue. Fast rap with intense, anxious electronic backing.
00:01:40	Jesse	Host	Their newest record, <i>There Existed an Addiction to Blood</i> , is a study in horror. Horror movies, horror soundtracks, horror rap. It drops October 18 <sup>th</sup> . Let's take a listen to the first single. It's called, "Nothing is Safe".
00:01:56	Music	Music	<i>[Music grows louder]</i>
			<i>Barely had to summon what was coming It was creeping on a come up Now it's right up in your face Face it, let it resonate Up in your bone a minute when you shiver Make a sliver big enough for it to have a space Ripped life slipping away Maybe you can make it out with just a little bit of grace But it truly doesn't give a fuck about the fear you feelin' It is here to make you understand that nothing is safe</i>

*Nothing is, nothing is safe  
Nothing is sacred  
Nothing is safe, nothing to pray for, nothing is safe, nothing is  
Nothing is*

*Death is comin' for you  
But you already knew that  
Thought the clique up brought you some safety up in this pack  
But that didn't add up, back up, stand up, strike a pose  
With your gat up, that's what they like, you suppose  
They gon' rack up, stack up that stuff that you stole  
But the fact of status wrapped up in black cold  
Caskets cannot be ignored  
Runnin' so fast should had an award  
Homies got gassed for cash from that score  
Y'all could have made a dash just after one more  
So your foot up on the gas and smash 'round the corner  
Only one man was sent to the coroner  
Wasn't part of the plan, but damn the fast foreign  
Whip was too quick to flip and fast-forward*

*The past smashed every wall, pillar and floorboard  
Ashes to ashes, dust in the lung  
Fire now on everything, gasoline been poured  
Last piece of action 'fore you succumb  
Just catch a glance of what could have done this  
Somethin' 'bout how he walks remind you of someone  
You look and see a gun, a man with no face  
A golden halo that could be the sun*

*Long ago you summoned what was coming  
It was creeping on a come up...*

*[Music fades down and plays quietly as Jesse and Daveed speak]*

00:03:11	Jesse	Host	Daveed Diggs, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> . It's so nice to have you on the show.
00:03:14	Daveed Diggs	Guest	Hey, thank you so much for having me, man. I'm very excited to be here.
00:03:18	Jesse	Host	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> So, I basically just wanted to start by asking you what kind of records you listened to when you were a, you know, 16-year-old—when it really counts.
00:03:29	Daveed	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> When I was a 16-year-old. That's—that's good. That <u>is</u> when it counts. Okay, so at 16 I was—so my uh... my mom was a DJ in the—in the 70's and early 80's.
00:03:41	Jesse	Host	<i>[Surprised]</i> Like a <u>disco</u> DJ?
00:03:43	Daveed	Guest	Yeah, yeah. At a little spot that's still in Berkley, called The Graduate. They used to have a basement that she used—used to be kind of, like, where she played. And then at a bunch of other clubs around the bay area, too. But my mom and dad met at—at this place, The Graduate.

And so, uh—uh, I grew up with her and then my dad's record collection, also. So, I—I—sort of my first love was always, like,

Parliament Funkadelic and... anything on the—one the funkier side of that disco stuff. George Duke, um... Herbie Hancock, like, a lot of the jazz fusion stuff. That's—so, I was always listening to that. But, then, at *[thinking]* sixteen...

00:04:18 Jesse Host Wait, I have a further—I have a follow-up question about your mom.  
00:04:21 Daveed Guest Oh, yeah.  
00:04:22 Jesse Host Was she like, a dance DJ? Was she like beatmatching and stuff? Was it like—?

00:04:24 Daveed Guest Yeah, oh yeah.  
00:04:25 Jesse Host —party forever type of DJ?  
00:04:27 Daveed Guest Yeah, yeah. She was a—she was a—in fact, like, the—the folklore about it is that... is that, uh, when my dad went up to the DJ booth and asked if she had to stand up there all night or got to dance, she—like—looped the bridge to Kano's "I'm Ready" and came out into the—into the crowd to dance with him.

*[Jesse laughing softly in the background.]*

So, like, you know. Uh—that song is, like, 20 minutes long, anyway, right?

00:04:52 Jesse Host *[Laughs through words]* Y-yeah, it's like—it's like one of those ones like "Love to Love You" that—  
00:04:55 Daveed Guest *[Chuckling]* Right, right.  
00:04:56 Jesse Host —you famously put on in the radio booth when you need to go use the bathroom.  
00:05:00 Daveed Guest Exactly, exactly. *[Laughs.]* So, yeah. No, she—she—she was the real deal.  
00:05:05 Jesse Host So, you—what—so, what were you listening to when you were 16?  
00:05:08 Daveed Guest Um—on top of that stuff... I was obsessed with E-40, of course—obsessed with anything Bay Area. Yeah, The Souls of Mischief, all of—all of that whole crew. The Mystic Journeymen. Like, Grouch and Eligh—all of that stuff. Zion I, anybody from the Bay, I was listening to. Mac Dre, of course.

Yeah, and then also... also big into, like, Cash Money Records, at the time. All of that stuff.

00:05:39 Jesse Host *[Teasingly]* Would you characterize yourself as "bad about it", at the time?  
00:05:42 Daveed Guest *[Laughs,]* "Bad about it." But that's No Limit, right? So.  
00:05:45 Jesse Host Oh yeah, it was. Yeah.  
00:05:46 Daveed Guest Uhhh...  
00:05:48 Jesse Host *[Rhythmically]* Would you say that when the light hit the ice, it twinkled and glistened?  
00:05:51 Daveed Guest There you go, that's exactly what I would say, every time I come into our new city.

Um, but uh, it—it—*[laughs]* yeah. But—I was also into No Limit, although if I had to choose, I was probably always more on the Ca\$h Money side. I—I think that always resonated with us more, in the Bay, because it was bouncy. In New Orleans—New Orleans and Oakland have a lot of—a lot of interesting intersection, musically, because they also have a lot of interesting intersection historically. So.

00:06:16 Jesse Host Yeah. Not—not least, Master P, himself.  
00:06:18 Daveed Guest Yeah. Master P, himself, living in Richmond. But that stuff—his was so much more, like, slowed down—all the No Limit stuff. So, I—I

loved the Cash Money side of things that still kept a lot of that New Orleans bounce feel to it. Not that I didn't love a lot of No Limit records, also.

And then, uh... I was always really into, like, Freestyle Fellowship and all the—the, sort of, L.A. underground scene stuff. Yeah. Those were probably the things that I was—I was most into at the time, but I was also just listening to everything. That was—me and—me and Bill who is in clipping. with me, now. But we, like—since we were... I don't know, probably ten or eleven years old, have been, like, going to the record store every Tuesday—back when new things used to come out on Tuesdays—and, just like, grabbing every, you know, CD we—we could get our hands on that we could afford.

*[Laughs.]* Um, like, scrounging through, like, the used bins and stuff to try and, you know. Get stuff that was a little bit old, but that, like, we could still—afford to get.

00:07:18 Jesse Host

Was being from Oakland, or being from the Bay, a big part of your identity as a teenager?

00:07:24 Daveed Guest

It was... certainly, like, the bay at large—I was—'cause at that point, I think, my mom was living in El Cerrito and my dad was living in Oakland, so I was just kind of, like, this general East Bay kid. And I went to Berkley High School. So, that—that was definitely a—a big important thing, to me. Not as... I didn't shout it all the time, as much as I did, I think, when I left—when I realized, sort of, how different everywhere else was, it became like, "Oh, I actually have to." *[Laughs.]* "This is a thing I have to say, all the time, and wear on my chest, all the time. And, like, do—"

00:08:10 Jesse Host

You know, like—once I went to college, I, like, only wore—and pretty much to this day—will, like, only wear shirts that have some sort of, like, inside joke about the Bay on them. *[laughs]*

00:08:16 Daveed Guest

*[Laughs.]* You're describing an entire drawer with an It's It shirt on top, in my house.

Yeah. *[Laughing]* Yeah, yeah, exactly, man. Like—just... hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of them. And, like—and everything—everything Oaklandish makes, I have, you know? Like I—*[laughs]*

*[Jesse laughs.]*

00:08:33 Jesse Host

I need—I need all of it. I need people to know. I don't wanna have to tell you. Like, you should know as soon as I walk in the door *[laughing]* where I'm from.

It's funny, like I—I went to college and, uh, I was doing comedy and college radio, and my two buddies—who were both from Southern California, who I work very closely with—uh, they used to do this character that they called The City Critic, and it was just—one of them would say the name of a critic—of a city—and the other one would say "F minus."

*[Daveed laughs.]*

And then, like, eight years later, they said to me, "You know that was just our impression of you, right?" *[Laughs.]*

*[Daveed laughs.]*

00:09:06 Daveed Guest *[Laughing through words]* And I was like, “Sorry! Sorry I like where I grew up!”

00:09:13 Jesse Host *[Laughing through words]* Y-yeah, I know, right?! It’s like, so—I don’t know. We get such a bad rap for being haters, ‘cause, I guess, maybe we are, but...

00:09:15 Daveed Guest Yeah! I think it’s fair. *[Laughs.]*

00:09:27 Jesse Host Yeah, it’s pretty fair. I do, like *[chuckles]* still am constantly comparing everywhere to—to Oakland, being like, “Weeell, yeah. It’s not—it’s not Oakland, but I guess I will live here.” *[Laughs.]*

00:09:43 Daveed Guest You know, we were talking about the way that the *[stammering]* living and growing up, especially in—in the Bay, can lead you to ignore subgenre definitions and scenes in—in hip-hop.

00:09:44 Jesse Host Yeah.

00:09:55 Daveed Guest And I wonder how you see clipping., which is the hip-hop project that you’re best known for, fitting into the broader world of hip-hop? Because it’s very distinctive music.

*[Thoughtfully]* Yeah, I think it’s interesting. When we started—when the three of us: me and—and Bill Hutson, uh, who—we’ve been, you know, friends since third grade—and then Jonathan Snipes, who—he and Bill were roommates their freshman year of college. So, we’ve all been around each other a very long time.

And when we started working on clipping. in 2011, I guess was when I sort of came on board? It was like a noise remix project, before that. We were all just... we really wanted to work together, and we were searching for the way for the three of us to honestly participate in this art form that we loved so much. And we all made music in different ways, and I had been making, you know, rap music of my own for a long time and—and all—all of this other stuff. Bill had been making a ton of, like, experimental and noise music. Jonathan had a great elec-electro project called Captain Ahab.

And... this was, like, sort of an experiment in: well, what do the three of us, who all, you know, love rap music and participate in it in varying degrees—like, what’s the way for us to make something together? And, so, clipping. really evolved into this thing that is, like—it’s experimental in the sense that we are—we are constantly sort of trying a thing out and being like, “Does this equal a rap song?!”

00:11:19 Daveed Guest *[Jesse chuckles.]* And if the answer is yes, then I think we can put it on a album, you know? *[Laughs.]* So that’s—that’s kind of the hype. Like, we—we decided early on that there’d be no first person—I would never write in the first person. That was the first, sort of, huge experiment, right? If we remove first person narrative entirely *[a cellphone alarm goes off]* from rap music, is it still rap music? Because so—so much of the genre is kind of beholden to that. And to us, it still did.

It also involved, like, sort of using and examining different ways to use a bunch of... e-essentially, like, rap clichés, right? What are the trappings of a rap song that everybody will recognize? And if we, like, fill this song with no center, with them, will people still recognize it as a rap song?

00:12:14	Music	Music	So, it was— <i>[stuttering]</i> we had a whole bunch of conv- conversations like that. What is the, you know—instead of these hi- hats: these, like, ratchet snares or ratchet hi-hats, like—
00:12:16	Daveed	Guest	“Work Work” from the album <i>CLPPNG</i> . by the band clipping. begins playing quietly in the background. A bare instrumental that sounds like cymbals and chimes. If we roll a ball bearing around in this metal thermos—  <i>[Jesse laughs.]</i>  <i>[Amused]</i> But it makes something that is rhythmically similar, does that still <u>do</u> the same thing to us, when we hear it? <i>[“Work Work” increases in volume]</i>  <i>Holla out ya city if you'd ride for it</i> <i>Let 'em know why you'd die for it</i> <i>Same reason all these riders get [beat] so it's</i> <i>All medicinal – now what you wan' buy, homie?</i> <i>Bye, [beat] (bye, [beat]), mob [beat] (mob [beat])</i> <i>Boss talk (boss talk), game rich (game rich)</i> <i>Name game (name game), gang signs (gang signs)</i> <i>Work on the phone, call it base line</i> <i>Yup, line dance like a hoedown</i> <i>Pimps up, daytime, whole block a ghost town</i> <i>Ghost ride, Ghostface, Gs get ghost in a moment</i> <i>Pour a little for the ghost of the dead homie</i> <i>Deadpan voice singing Tin Pan Alley songs</i> <i>Panhandling in front of tourists with the camera phones</i> <i>Get it how you live</i> <i>Or live till you get it, get it in</i>  <i>When the stash low and it's no cash (get it in)</i> <i>And you riding, no Ls, no tags (get it in)</i> <i>And she looking like you ain't gon' smash (get it in)</i>  <i>[Music fades out as Daveed speaks]</i>
00:13:09	Daveed	Guest	It was a bunch of things like that and us sort of examining the—the things, other things, in rap that we love <i>[music fades out]</i> and figuring out how, then, we do a version of that that feels honest for these three people. And so that's—that's sort of what clipping. always was for us, but I think—in terms of the sort of genre defying aspect of it, it allowed us to just be like, “W-we should make—we should do something with this, because we love it.”  So, this whole... new album is kind of an homage to horrorcore, right? Which is a—a real, like, <i>[stammering]</i> I don't know. In my mind, is pretty Memphis-centric. Or, at least, you know, Three 6 Mafia being kind of like, the—the giants of it—not that there weren't also, like, The Gravediggaz out of New York, or whatever.  A-and—and, to a degree, like, The Geto Boys out of... out of Houston. I feel like I should say the Insane Clown Posse. <i>[Laughing]</i> ICP for <u>sure</u> . For sure. Yep.
00:13:59	Jesse	Host	
00:14:03	Daveed	Guest	
00:14:04	Jesse	Host	

00:14:05 Daveed Guest *[Laughing.]* Yeah! So, like, Bill and I grew up, like, going to get those Three 6 Mafia tapes from this liquor store in Emeryville. It's like drive through—like, mixtape/liquor store.

Uh, and so *[laughing]*—so, th-there's like a big love of that subgenre of hip-hop. So, a lot of this album was like, "Well, Jonathan scores a ton of horror movies. We're all genre-heads, like in terms of the art that we consume. What could be our contribution to this, sort of, splinter-sect of rap music that we love?"

So, I think that, uh—for us, like, a lot of it ends up—at least, in the beginning—being a pretty, like, intellectual process. Which makes sense, because there's a ton of... you know, useless degrees between the three of us.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

Um... so, like, when you get all three of us in a room, like, there's a ton of dissecting of a thing that happens? But, u-ultimately, I think what we're chasing is that—is a feeling that we feel when we listen to this music that we like. So, I—I—hopefully, at least for the people who really like it, the result is something that you feel and—and if you happen to notice all the, like, dumb, like, technical or referencing things that we're doing in there, that's cool, too. But we hope it doesn't rely on that.

00:15:25 Jesse Host I'm really interested in the idea of writing rap music without the first person; but I wanna talk a little about aesthetics, first.

00:15:31 Daveed Guest Mm-hm.

00:15:32 Jesse Host Did you listen to... noisy hip-hop or... noise music, before?

00:15:40 Daveed Guest Yeah, so, I—you know, because Bill was always—was, when he moved to LA, sort of started getting into the noise scene. So, I would go to his shows all the time, if he was playing in the Bay or—or down in LA, when I was there.

So, I—I, yes—so, yes, I was listening to noise music through him, and then, like, you know the noisy hip-hop stuff—I listened to all hip-hop, *[chuckles]* so, like, if there was someone rapping on it, I was probably listening to it, you know?

00:16:03 Jesse Host I remember listening to... I mean, I think, obviously, you could say—you know, Public Enemy was a very—

00:16:11 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Daveed:** Right.

**Jesse:** —noisy band.

**Daveed:** Yeah. I mean...

**Jesse:** Um.

**Daveed:** Bomb Squad is, yeah. It's, uh...

00:16:15 Jesse Host But, like, I—I remember when I was in my late teens, early twenties, and the Cannibal Ox album came out.

00:16:21 Daveed Guest *[Groaning enthusiastically]* Oh, god, it's so good. It's still good. Have you listened to it, lately? 'Cause I did happen to listen to it, like, a few months ago. It's still so good, man.

00:16:28	Music	Music	<p>“Iron Galaxy” from the album <i>The Cold Vein</i> by Cannibal Ox fades in. Mid-tempo rap with drums, cymbal, and something reverberating in the background.</p> <p><i>Life's ill, sometimes life might kill Vordul Mega, five digits grab mics, mic strike type ill Is life real? Yo ock he builds When life feels like Earth don't spin, whirlwinds might blend Life's at a standstill, dangerous cause man kills And still cats visualize life ghetto like One mind, sometime these cats see life</i></p>
00:16:51	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[Music fades out as Daveed speaks]</i> The experience that I remember having was listening to it thinking, “That is genuinely amazing.”</p> <p><i>[Music fades out entirely.]</i></p>
00:17:05	Daveed	Guest	<p>That’s an extraordinary achievement. I do not ever wish to listen to that again.”</p> <p><i>[Laughs loudly in surprise.]</i> That’s so funny, ‘cause I had the total—and I guess this makes sense, right? But I had the total opposite experience. Well, not the opposite. I thought the same thing as you. It was like, “This is totally amazing. This is like—what an incredible thing. I <u>have</u> to figure out how to do this.”</p> <p><i>[Jesse laughs.]</i></p> <p>Which is kind of, I guess, as a rapper—right—that’s the first thought whenever I hear anything that I love that I’ve never heard before, or that I don’t know how to do, is like, “I gotta figure out how to do this. This needs to be part of my arsenal of things.”</p> <p>And, like, beyond just like, the—the sort of wild kind of musicality that El-P came up with for that band, there’s also, like, the... I love Vast Aire as a rapper. Like, I don’t know—th... there’s, like... a lot of technique, but also with a lot of space in it? And I—I remember listening to that album a lot to try and figure out—I don’t know, just wh—how do you say something that is... w-weird, like genuinely weird, but also super fly? ‘Cause so much about making a good rap song is having a bunch of lines that people wanna say with you. You know?</p> <p>And he was so good at that. You just wanted to, like, rap along with him all the time.</p>
00:18:23	Jesse	Host	Okay, well let’s talk about the first-person part of this.
00:18:27	Daveed	Guest	Mm-hm.
00:18:28	Jesse	Host	Because... as a fellow over-intellectualizer...
00:18:32	Daveed	Guest	<i>[Chuckles]</i> Uh-huh?
00:18:34	Jesse	Host	I wrote my undergraduate thesis at—I didn’t go to Brown, I went to UC Santa Cruz—um, but I wrote my <i>[chuckles]</i> undergraduate thesis about identity strategies in hip-hop and...
00:18:45	Daveed	Guest	Mm.
00:18:46	Jesse	Host	Identity and the first person is one of the fundamental... building blocks of all hip-hop. Like, all hip-hop from, you know, picking a—



			picking your own rap name—not using your own name, often—is... it is an act of saying, “I am this.” You know?
00:19:04	Daveed	Guest	Yeah.
00:19:05	Jesse	Host	And... I wonder to what extent you feel like... <u>that</u> act is removed from clipping. in choosing not to speak in the first person?
00:19:18	Daveed	Guest	<i>[Taking a deep breath.]</i> It is, to a degree. And, I think, you know, a big part of that, though, is because... hip-hop relies on authenticity, right? Even if it’s the imagined authenticity. Right? We have to, while we are listening to the song—and this doesn’t apply to—to real life—like, fundamentally, and I think practitioners tend to understand this. Sometimes fan don’t, but I think these days fans are getting more used to it. But, like—while we are listening to the song, we have to believe that Rick Ross knows the real Noriega.
00:19:52	Jesse	Host	Right.
00:19:53	Daveed	Guest	Right? W-we have to believe that.
00:19:55	Jesse	Host	Even if he was a correctional officer.
00:19:58	Daveed	Guest	Yeah. Exactly, but that doesn’t matter. What matters is: while we are listening to the song, it has to feel so genuine. Um.
00:20:04	Jesse	Host	Yeah, I think it’s like a kind of—it’s like a kind of, a hyper-reality. It’s different—
00:20:08	Daveed	Guest	Yeah.
00:20:09	Jesse	Host	—from the fiction of a film, generally, um.
00:20:11	Daveed	Guest	Right.
00:20:12	Jesse	Host	But—and it’s not literal truth, generally. Um. But it’s a—it’s a kind of thing that we—that feels purely real as an emotional and intellectual experience.
00:20:24	Daveed	Guest	Right, right. Exactly. I am such a <u>nice</u> person. Like—right? Like, just, <i>[laughs]</i> just as sort of a blanket statement. Right? And so are Bill and Jonathan, but we really wanted to make some very angry music. Or some very off-putting music, sometimes.
			What is the way that we can get away with participating in that, in this form of art that’s not, like... it’s—it’s different, in a sense, than noise—where, you—y-you know, because—because there’s this lyricist who’s going to be storytelling. Like, you—it—it’s different than any other instrumental music form, once you put somebody in the front saying things, right?
			And then, particularly with rap. You’re always going to assign the char—so, like—it—nobody, most people don’t even notice that we’re not speaking in the first person in this band. Like, it doesn’t—because we’re so used to just assuming—like, I’ll watch people write about clipping. all the time, where it’s like, you know, “Daveed is talking about... walking down a hallway in the depths of, like blahblahblah!” Like, <u>Daveed’s</u> not saying anything. Right?
			<i>[Laughing]</i> He’s literally just describing a scene, but we still get used to assigning a—a first person narrative to it. So, yeah, I think—I think we do remove some of that, but for us it actually ends up being more honest, in some ways, in that I don’t have to pretend that I am these things, and I can be very upfront about the fact that I am a storyteller, in this moment. Because we are only telling stories and most of them are, like... hyperreal to the point where you <u>have</u> to assume they’re fictional... unless... you know, I mean, unless—
00:22:00	Music	Music	“All Black” by clipping. fades in.

00:22:01 Daveed Guest —you a-also are piloting your spaceship into the depths of outer space.

00:22:03 *[Music grows louder]*

*Something within this one's different  
The others died so easily and he is so persistent  
He never did bleed out and fever couldn't kill his system  
Though it was pumped through all the vents  
In the event of a total loss of control*

*He quotes Kendrick's "Control" verse and spews his vitriol  
Into the echoes of the bowels of this floating metal hull  
And holds his pillow for dear life while he grinds his teeth at night  
And he rarely makes requests except to say, "Turn on the lights"*

00:22:27 Daveed Guest *[Music fades down and plays quietly as Daveed speaks]*  
Yeah, so, I think there's a lot of that going on there with us—was like, not wanting to front, because you can't in this artform.

*[Music fades out.]*

You really can't. And so... you know. It was a—it was again, for us, like, a way of honoring—we're kind of traditionalists in a lot of ways. And, like, literally the most radical thing we do is removing the first person from—from the—from the writing.

00:22:52 Jesse Host Do you think that part of the reason that it's a useful technique for you is that it can be hard to... make room for being a nice, sweet boy... in hip-hop?

00:23:06 Daveed Guest *[Beat.]* Maaaybe. Or maybe I haven't found a way to do it in ways that I like, right? Like... uh, Chance has found a great... way of doing that, right? Chance is—

00:23:16 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Daveed:** Chance is so—

**Jesse:** A-although, I mean...

**Daveed:** He is—

**Jesse:** *[Stammering.]* I am a huge fan, but I think the reaction to his most recent record, the negative reaction to his most recent record reflects the peril in doing that. Which is, like, either you get it perfect or...

00:23:30 Daveed Guest Right.

00:23:31 Jesse Host People are really gonna come at you.

00:23:33 Daveed Guest No, it's true. It's hard. Uh, yeah. I'm not saying it's not hard. Although I—I agree. It's a—it's a tricky line to walk. And I—but I think some people are—are figuring it out in ways that work for them, and I think certainly as—as time goes on and we get a little bit... you know—I am of an age, and I would assume so are you, and, like... where I'm from, like, really matters a lot in—in both my taste in rap music and, like, the way that I listen to it and the way that I identify with it.

That's just not true for kids, now. You know? *[Laughs.]* Um, because—because the internet. And so, like, I think that is one of those things that... is also going to change, I think? As, just like,

there are more and more participants in the genre who are making things where they're really nice, you know?

Like, but, probably because I'm a little older, like, my taste in rap music tends to be stuff that skews a little darker, I think. But that is certainly, like, the—the world that—that clipping. wants to inhabit, because it was part—part of what we were trying to do, was make, like, really aggressive, scary stuff. And so, I think it does—it does help with that... uh, because no one's going to believe me—just rapping as myself, in that same way.

00:24:54 Jesse Host

Even more with Daveed Diggs after the break. Coming up: Daveed Diggs is on Sesame Street, too! He's a true Renaissance Man! We'll talk about it when we come back. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and *NPR*.

00:25:05 Music Music  
00:25:06 Jesse Promo

Fun music plays in the background as Jesse speaks.  
This message comes from *NPR* sponsor, Zip Recruiter:

00:25:39 Promo Promo

Hiring can be a slow process. Café Altura COO, Dillon Miskiewicz, needed to hire a director of coffee, so he went to Zip Recruiter and posted his job and found the right person in just a few days. Find out why four out of five employers who post on Zip Recruiter get a quality candidate within the first day. Try Zip Recruiter for free at [ZipRecruiter.com/bullseye](http://ZipRecruiter.com/bullseye). B-U-L-L-S-E-Y-E.

**Felix Contreras:** Did you know about the Cuban connection to Cuban jazz?

*[Music fades in.]*

00:26:00 Promo Promo

Or how mambo influenced early rock and roll? I'm Felix Contreras, host of *NPR Music's Alt.Latino* podcast. I'll tell you about all those exciting stories and much more in some special programming I've cooked up for Latino Heritage month. Listen and subscribe to *Alt.Latino* from *NPR*.

*[Ocean sounds in the background.]*

**Speaker 1:** *[Piratey voice]* Ahh. There's nothing quite like sailing in the calm, international waters on my ship, the *S.S. Biopic* (*bi-AH-pic*).

*[Ship's horn toots.]*

**Speaker 2:** *[Piratey voice]* Avast! It's actually pronounced... "BI-oh-pic."

**Speaker 1:** No, ya dingus! It's "Bi-AH-pic!"

**Speaker 2:** Who the hell says that? It's "BI-oh-pic!" It comes from the words "biology"—

**Speaker 1:** It's the words for "biography" and "picture!"

*[Car horn honks.]*

**Speaker 2:** If you—

**Dave Holmes:** Alright, that is enough! Ahoy! I'm Dave Holmes; I'm the host of the newly-rebooted podcast formerly known as *International Waters*! Designed to resolve petty—but persistent—arguments like this! How? By pitting two teams of opinionated comedians against each other with trivia and improv games, of course! Winner takes home the right to be right.

**Speaker 1:** What podcast be this?

**Dave:** It's called *Troubled Waters*! *[Car engine revving, driving off.]* Where we disagree to disagreeeee! *[Voice trails off into the distance.]*

00:26:50 Jesse Host

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest this week is Daveed Diggs. He's an actor, writer, and rapper. He was in the original cast of *Hamilton* and won a Tony award for that. He's also the MC for the experimental rap group clipping.. They have a new album dropping later this month called *There Existed an Addiction to Blood*. Let's listen to another single off the record. This one is called, "La Mala Ordina".

00:27:13 Music Music

"La Mala Ordina" from the album *There Existed an Addiction to Blood* by the band clipping. plays. Unsettling, tense music like one might hear in a horror movie.

*The bags on the table ain't for weight, they for body parts  
Victim skin stretched across the wall, call it body art  
Bodies for the pile, bring em out stacked on a dolly cart (Yeah)  
Anybody out there ain't on drugs yet they should prolly start (Start)  
This too real, talking bout your life's a movie when the party start  
(Turn up)  
But you ain't pick a genre, lil' [beat] that wasn't hardly smart (No)  
The script was [beat], your third act really drags, the structure falls  
apart  
So here the fixer come, clipping limbs to serve em à la carte*

*The horror show was so wack, you said you'd never go back  
But you standing over the stove talking bout you really know crack  
(What you know)  
Crack is what a skull do (Yep), so if someone getting brained  
That mean it was nice to know you, the spinal fluid a go-to  
To thicken the pot, the clique out in the whip whipping the snot  
Out a submissive till he [beat] blood—you thought they was [beat] a  
thot?  
You got your rap [beat] [beat]ed up; matchstick tucked up under the  
tongue  
Pour the oil, smell the sulfur, then you run (Run)*

00:28:06 Jesse Host

*[Music fades out as Jesse speaks]*

I had a listener—sometimes I will post, "So-and-So's coming on the show, what should I ask them about?" on twitter.

*[Daveed chuckles.]*

And, generally, what I'm just trying to do is just, kind of, get a sense of what people are interested in about their career. But I had a

listener named Pamela Council who replied to my tweet and she said something that I thought was so... beautiful and insightful. She wrote—and it could also be interpreted as insulting, but I don't think she meant it as insulting—

*[Daveed laughs.]*

—so, I'm just going to say that ahead of time. But she said, "Let's talk about the merits of authentic, feel good corniness, because he's a little corny, but yet we stan."

*[Daveed laughs.]*

And *[laughs]* and I was like—I feel like that really captures that feeling of... finding a place to... make art that is true to yourself and complex and rich and reflects the experience of, not just yourself, maybe, but your community, as well—

00:29:03 Daveed Guest  
00:29:04 Jesse Host

Mm-hm.  
—while also... honoring... values of, like, wanting to be a good person and nice *[beat]* in spaces where sometimes that is not encouraged.

00:29:14 Daveed Guest

Yeah! That's a good... no, that's a—that's a really—that's a very sweet tweet. Although, I—I—like, my immediate reaction was, like, "*[bleep]* you mean, corny?"

*[Jesse cackles.]*

00:29:25 Jesse Host  
00:29:27 Daveed Guest  
00:29:28 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Uh, so, hey.  
You're right to have that reaction!  
You know. And then I listened to it for real—  
**Daveed:** —and saw—

**Jesse:** But on the other hand...

**Daveed:** —saw—saw the other side.

00:29:32 Daveed Guest  
00:29:34 Jesse Host

**Jesse:** Yeah, you're on Sesame Street. *[Breaks into laughter.]*  
Oh! For sure!

I think that's the kind of corny she means. I think she means it with—with very deep love.

00:29:34 Daveed Guest

Oh, no, I—I—I—I would assume so. I hope so. I'm gonna—I'm gonna live with that. I'm gonna say that that's the case. But no. I think that, um—I—you know what's wild? *[Laughs.]* Um. I went to a—I went to a Mozzy concert in LA, aaaand—who is just among my favorite rappers, maybe ever, but for sure right now. And me and Bill went to this Mozzy concert and afterwards, my friend Dage, who was DJing the whole night and is from Oakland, you know, was there. And he—he came off stage and we're talking, and this dude comes up—he, like, everyone's sort of leaving the club and he walks up to me and he's like, "Oh, hold up—hold up, I know you. You on TV, right?"

I was like, "Yeah, yeah."

He said, "*[Sucks teeth.]* You Mr. Noodle."

00:30:25 Daveed Guest *[Jesse laughs.]*  
 I was like, *[laughs]* “Uh—huh—y-yeah!” And just, like, lost it, right? It happened at a Mozzy concert. You know what I’m saying? Just, like, among the more gangsta rap of gangsta raps you can get in 2019. And he started calling his friends over! You know, like— ‘cause he has kids! He was like, “I look at your face all day, man. My kids love you.”

Uh... and that—*[laughs]* that, to me... there’s just so many weird moments like that, in my life, that have—that have—have happened that I just... you kinda gotta love it, right? I grew up watching the BET Cypher and being like, “I gotta be in one of those.” The one I was in was with all the rest of the cast of *Hamilton*.

*[Jesse chuckles.]*

You know what I’m saying? Like, that was how I ended up on a BET Cypher.

00:31:06 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Daveed:** After having—

**Jesse:** Your musical theatre friends.

00:31:10 Daveed Guest **Daveed:** —made rap music...  
 Yeah! Me and my musical theatre friends did a BET Cypher, after making rap songs since I was... 15 and never having done a musical! Until—until I was in *Hamilton*. *[Laughs.]* You know? Like—that was what it took to get me on the BET Cypher.

*[Breaks into laughter again, then responds emphatically several times as Jesse speaks.]*

00:31:26 Jesse Host I was so moved by your movie *Blindspotting*, which you co-wrote with Rafael Casal, and also co-starred in with Rafael Casal. And... I think I was watching it as that tweet about the merits of corniness... came in. And... it described something that I felt very powerfully, in the film, which is—you know, I... interview a lot of people, on my show, who are from... y-you know, *[stammers]* tough, urban worlds. And I, myself, am as well. And one of the things about, uh, being an artist—or even, just, aspiring to be an artist—is that it is fundamentally corny.

*[Daveed chuckles.]*

Like, there is a corniness to saying, “I want to make art about—” It’s very—you’re very vulnerable in—in doing that. And one of the things that I hear stories about—and I’m very interested in hearing stories about, from guests on my show—especially ones wh-who grew up in situations where corniness was even, potentially, dangerous... is—everyone has their own way of getting themselves the space to... be... an artist.

Even if you’re a rapper who became a rapper to be—to launder drug money... everyone has a way to, like, make some room for themselves to be outside of the—the stream of—of danger in doing this thing that is, you know, not always super welcome.

And in some ways, as I was watching *Blindspotting*, I found myself looking at this story through that lens: that your... character—though he is a convicted felon, um, who’s, you know, been convicted of a felon-felony because he beat the crap out of somebody—that, like, what he is trying to do i-in the story, is within the system and within the community that he grew up in, he is looking for a way to... be a little corny, like, be an adult, grown up, nice person. Which is really tough, sometimes.

00:33:40 Daveed Guest Yeah. Yeah, that’s a great lens through which to watch that show, and that—what’s interesting—what’s so interesting about... you know, spending years with Rafael writing that film, because... it took us ten years to—to make it. Uh, w-we—*[stammering]* we were—we’re both people who at some point in our—in our formative years, like in our teenage years—became enamored with language; and that, and the various different ways of using that, was sort of the—the way... that we found that space for ourselves, you know? Along with a lot of other—along with having very supportive parents who were also weirdos. And like, all of these other things, you know?

00:34:25 Jesse Host Right.

00:34:26 Daveed Guest Ummm—and along with also being in—which, uh, of the—of the, like, sort of tough places you can grow up... the Bay Area is a—is a special one, in some sense.

00:34:35 Jesse Host Right.

00:34:36 Daveed Guest Senses, right? Because, like, e-everybody’s smart and everybody reads. And everybody, like—you—you know what I’m saying? Like, a lot—there are things that are dangerous in other places that aren’t as dangerous there, I think?

00:34:47 Jesse Host Yeah, I mean, I think of—you know—I grew up across the street from the most dangerous housing project in San Francisco, but I also grew up... within walking distance of the, you know, the Mission Dolores and, uh, legit rich people. *[Laughs.]*

00:35:01 Daveed Guest Right. Right, right. Exactly. It’s always all on top of each other, and so—and with the history that it—that is woven through—you know, we’ve always been in the the—like, the Black Panther Party, right? With—that is literally woven into the bones of Oakland and, like, they put such a premium on education.

Like, there’s a reason that we get a lot of... of really interesting, exciting artists from—from that area, is because I think we’re all used to living with those... dichotomies. But, I—I think also, you know, some—back to the language thing, we... we both were using that as a tool to find—to find our way out of these things. Or to—to muscle our way through these moments, right? Where, like, “Well, I have to—I have to—of course I’m an artist. Like, I’m—I make rap songs. Or, um, you know. Or I’m doing this poetry slam thing, and that’s like a cool thing to do, here, so I can be cool, and you expect me to be a little bit weird. But I also—but you—you’re gonna accept it, because of this virtuosity, right?”

I say this all the time. Like, virtuosity trumps everything. *[Laughs.]* And so, if you’re really good at a thing, people will sort of let you do it, no matter how weird they think you are.

00:36:11 Jesse Host Right.

00:36:12 Daveed Guest But I... you know, Miles and Collin don’t have that language that we do. They—they are good with words, but they don’t have... you

know. They're not—even though they're the ages we are, they're not at the point that we are, now, having done so much analyzing of our childhood and stuff. They're still living in the—in the moment, where the—where the danger and the threat it so real. And so, that was always an interesting thing to try and navigate while writing that film, is like—just sort of trying to remember what it was like to feel that way, but then also put it into the... heads of people who, like, have not traveled as much as we have and whose worlds are significantly smaller than ours are.

00:36:53 Jesse Host

I was very grateful in watching *Blindspotting* to see... the subtlety of the way that, uh, race is depicted and described, in the film. You know, in that struggle for corniness, I often think how lucky I was that I was white, because while being white, in some ways, alienated me from the community around me...

00:37:18 Daveed Guest

Mm-hm.

00:37:19 Jesse Host

Um... it also gave me the opportunity to hide in that alienation. Like, I think I learned very quickly that as long as I didn't look like I was trying to be down—

00:37:28 Daveed Guest

Mm-hm.

00:37:29 Jesse Host

—everybody would think I was just *[laughing through words]* wandering through.

*[Jesse laughs quietly.]*

00:37:34 Daveed Guest

You know what I mean?

00:37:35 Jesse Host

Yeah. Yeah.

*[Laughing]* I was just lost or whatever. And if I could get enough chin-up, eyes-straight, you know, enough shoulders-back—nobody would think I was the kind of lost where I should get jumped. I figured that took—

00:37:46 Daveed Guest

Right, right.

00:37:47 Jesse Host

—me a little longer. That took me 'till I was—'till I was 16, but...

00:37:49 Daveed Guest

Right, but same, you know what I'm saying? Like, I used to—I used to wear—I went from—from, when I was, you know, 13 all the way through high school, I only wore, like, loud colored pajama pants. That was my thing.

*[Jesse laughs in surprise.]*

00:38:04 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Right? That was it. To school. All the way through high school, you know what I'm talking about? And like—

**Jesse:** *[Through laughter]* And you're telling me—

**Daveed:** —I would wear these...

**Jesse:** —and you're telling me, Daveed, that you had musical theatre friends?!

**Daveed:** Yeah, right?

**Jesse:** Yeah?!

**Daveed:** *[Laughing]* Exactly.

**Jesse:** *[Laughing]* The pieces just start fitting together!



00:38:12 Daveed Guest Yeah, right? And I, like, and I'm wearing all these crazy colored hats and stuff. Like, I—I—I looked like an insane person, but part of that is—is the costume of it, right? People can't—because you don't have to say anything, then. And I am terribly shy. Still. To this *[laughs]* day. And so, uh, I—I think when you—when you put all of that on display, uh, and you do feel like it's a representation of yourself—because I loved those clothes, you know? And I could afford—it was a way for me—I could wear these wild things that I—that were seven dollars.

00:38:43 Jesse Host Right.

00:38:44 Daveed Guest At Target. You know what I'm saying? Uh—when you put all of that on display, you don't—no one really asks you to explain yourself. They assume everything they're gonna assume. And, like... again, virtuosity. I was, like—I—was—I was doing school plays, at the time. I was pretty good. I was also, like, winning poetry slams and making rap songs and doing that. And I was on the track team and I winning a lot of races. So, I was jock, too. You know? So, like, I could put on this, sort of, wild show all the time that didn't require anything from me, except the costume, and allowed me to just walk through the world as who I was, in a lot of ways. Um. And not—not have to confront it, so much. *[Laughs.]*

00:39:21 Jesse Host You've lived away from the Bay Area for most of your adult life.

00:39:25 Daveed Guest Mm-hm.

00:39:26 Jesse Host Uum—how has your experience of... the Bay Area and, particularly, the East Bay, where you grew up... changed with time away? What does it feel like to go back?

00:39:41 Daveed Guest Yeah... well, it's a trip, you know, and I go—my family's all still there, so I go back often. But it is... w-witnessing a place that changes so rapidly—and I think also not being... in the middle of it while it's changing? Like, the changes just feel so drastic and so fast, to me. Um...

00:40:02 Jesse Host It's kind of like a—it's kind of like having a niece or nephew who's—

00:40:05 Daveed Guest Yeah.

00:40:06 Jesse Host —going from toddler to preschool to...

00:40:08 Daveed Guest Yeah, exactly. You're just like, "Yeah! *[wistfully]* They grow up so fast."

00:40:13 Jesse Host *[Laughs.]* But... But it's like the combination of the—of the—of the speed of the change and that there is, like, a little—that you're checking in inter-intermittently, in a way.

00:40:19 Daveed Guest Right. Exactly. And—and I think... *[clicks tongue]* it's, uh, some of—uh, you know, it's hard to deal with—you know. So much of *Blindspotting* was about that, too, right? About, like, trying—these two guys trying to—uh, everybody, really. Everybody in that film is trying to find space for themselves in a—in a place that is changing... u-under their feet, that they don't really have any say over.

Yeah, so, you know, that... speaks a lot to—as somebody who, like, wears Oakland on their chest all the time, you know—to come back to Oakland to find a place that is so drastically different from the one I grew up in, in a lot of ways, is hard. And I find myself, when I'm back there, walking a lot, because when you walk through neighborhoods, when you don't just get from where you are to

where you're going, you—I actually get to see the things that are the same? And that there's some comfort in that, you know?

So, I'll, like... you know, instead of driving a car or taking a Lyft, or whatever, I'd, like—will just walk as much as I can from—because then you get—then it does feel gradual, in some ways. “Oh, well this—this block is really built up, but all these houses are the same, and like, some of the same people still live in them.”

So, i-it—but yeah, it's—it stresses me out and, like—you know, just changes plans. I had always... thought I would, like, raise kids in—in Oakland. And maybe I will, but I don't know. It's—it, like, it's—it's hard to get a sense of that place, now, for me. Not that I don't still love it and—I think the thing that keeps me most grounded, too, is I still work with a lot of kids, there. You know? I'm try—I try do, like, fundraisers at high schools, there, whenever I can and I—and I'm working with Turnaround Arts at Vincent Academy—which is right in West Oakland and—and, like, the... the kids are still the kids, you know?

00:42:02	Daveed	Guest	The—they're the same... sort of, like, wild, intellectual, curious... you know, just like—unable to sit still. Like, it still feels—that's where I still feel the energy. I mean, it's where hyphy came from, right? Like, I—you still feel that, when you work with kids. And so, that—that keeps me feeling very connected to the place, I think.
00:42:33	Jesse	Host	My experience is... both my parents still live in San Francisco, where I grew up.
00:42:39	Daveed	Guest	Mm-hm.
00:42:40	Jesse	Host	And... my mother still lives in the neighborhood that grew up... in.
00:42:44	Daveed	Guest	Mm-hm.
00:42:46	Jesse	Host	And... she's still my mother, and she's lived in the same flat for 30 years.
00:42:53	Daveed	Guest	Yeah.
00:42:54	Jesse	Host	And... she has my name on the lease, because she thinks that her rent control is my inheritance.
00:43:00	Daveed	Guest	<i>[Laughing]</i> Uh-huh?
00:43:02	Jesse	Host	<i>[Beat]</i> But I feel like I've gone through so many... extraordinary emotional changes over just being in that place—where there was a time where I almost, like, I could—felt like I couldn't be outside—
00:43:15	Daveed	Guest	Mm-hm.
00:43:16	Jesse	Host	—because it was so upsetting, to me. And I don't—and I'm not trying to be histrionic about it. Like...
00:43:20	Daveed	Guest	No, no. I—I get it, 100%. And San Francisco, also—you're from San Francisco—where it's even—it's even crazier. I—I—you know. And I didn't—I never <u>lived</u> there... That's not true, though. For a little while, my dad lived in—in like the Castro area. Just for, like, a few years. And I was already in college, by then, but I—yeah. San Francisco... you know. I don't know, like—what—what—w-whoooo <u>lives</u> there, anymore? I don't—? <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:43:48	Jesse	Host	Yeah. <u>Very</u> rich people.
00:43:49	Daveed	Guest	Your mom!
00:43:50	Jesse	Host	Actual rich people and my mom and no one I went to high school with.
00:43:53	Daveed	Guest	Yeah. <u>Literally</u> no one. You can't.
00:43:55	Jesse	Host	Everyone I went to high school with left for Oakland... ten, fifteen years ago and left Oakland... for Vallejo—
00:44:04	Daveed	Guest	Right. Exactly— <u>oh man</u> . That's exactly it.

00:44:06	Jesse	Host	—five or eight years ago and—and now have all just left the Bay, forever.
00:44:10	Daveed	Guest	Right. Yeah. Both of my parents live in—in Richmond, now. Uh, so, they didn't quite make Vallejo. They're on this side of the bridge, still, but—but yeah. Yeah. It's... it's—it's wild and it is... it is, like, <u>sad</u> . Most—not even mostly, but for—one of the reasons it is sad is because, like, you know—you <u>loved</u> this place so much and now everybody's coming here and taking away everything that you love about it and telling everybody else to come here. <u>And</u> we don't get to experience these nice things, either, right?
00:44:43	Jesse	Host	<i>[Sadly]</i> Yeah.
00:44:44	Daveed	Guest	Because, like, we can't afford to live—so, it's like... it's not that I wouldn't have also enjoyed, you know, an organic grocery store when I was, like, <i>[laughing]</i> growing up in Oakland. We probably would have used that, but we didn't have access to it, then. All these new people have access to it, but <u>we</u> don't have access to it. Uh, <u>and</u> you change—you culturally changed the place so much that, like, I—I don't know if I even <u>wanna</u> live there, right? Maybe I should go to Stockton, where all of my friends live.
00:45:15	Jesse	Host	So, yeah. It's tricky. We'll finish up Daveed Diggs after a quick break. Still to come: we haven't talked about <i>Hamilton</i> , so we will talk about <i>Hamilton</i> . I know how to keep <u>my</u> job. Stick around, it's <i>Bullseye</i> , from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and <i>NPR</i> .
00:45:28	Music	Music	Calm music plays as Jesse speaks.
00:45:29	Jesse	Promo	This message comes from NPR sponsor, smartwater:  Smartwater is for the curious drinkers—the ones who are always looking for ways to make things a little bit better. That's why smartwater created two new ways to hydrate: smartwater Alkaline, with 9+pH, and smartwater Antioxidant, with added selenium.  And now, you can order smartwater by saying, “Alexa! Order smartwater!”  smartwater: that's pretty smart!
00:45:56	Promo	Promo	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> <i>[Sound of a roaring crowd.]</i>  <b>Announcer:</b> Macho Man to the top rope!  <i>[Clanging sound.]</i>  <b>Announcer:</b> The flying elbow! The cover!  <i>[Thumps and grunting. The crowd chants “One! Two! Three!” in the background. The bell rings.]</i>  <b>Announcer:</b> We've got a new champiooon!  <i>[Theme music fades in.]</i>

**Reporter:** We're here with Macho Man, Randy Savage, after his big win to become the new world champion! What are you gonna do now, Mach?

**"Randy Savage":** *[Gutturally]* I'm gonna go listen to the newest episode of the *Tights and Fights* podcast! Oh yeah!

**Reporter:** Tell us more about this podcast!

**"Randy Savage":** It's the podcast of power, too sweet to be sour, funky like a money, woke discussions, man! And! Jokes about wrestler's fashion choices—myself excluded, yeeeah.

**Reporter:** I can't wait to listen!

**"Randy Savage":** Neither can I! You can find it Thursdays on *Maximum Fun*. Oh yeah, dig it!

*[Music fades out.]*

00:46:42 Jesse Host

It's *Bullseye*, I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Daveed Diggs. He's a rapper who fronts the group clipping.. He's also an actor who's appeared on *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmitt*, *Sesame Street*, *Undone*, and others. He also starred in and co-wrote the movie *Blindspotting*, which is tremendous.

His big break? Playing Thomas Jefferson and the Marquis de Lafayette in the original cast of *Hamilton*.

00:47:10 Daveed Guest  
00:47:11 Jesse Host

When you started workshopping *Hamilton* with—  
Mm-hm.  
—Lin Manuel Miranda, who—

*[Daveed chuckles.]*

—wrote the show... and you had never—you had never done Broadway in any capacity...

00:47:19 Daveed Guest  
00:47:20 Jesse Host

Yeah.  
What led you to believe that it was something that you should... put your heart into and not something that you should keep at a-arm's length?

00:47:28 Daveed Guest

*[Sighs.]* It's so funny. So, like—Tommy Kail, who directed the show, told me about the idea. We were doing a *Freestyle Love Supreme* show—we were in New Orleans, rapping at the Superbowl. We were doing this, like, Live on ESPN, like, sort of—This is Your Life—style game with sport celebrities. So, *[laughs]* we're down there doing this, u-u-uh, indisputably corny thing.

But, again, like, framing is everything and—one thing *Freestyle Love Supreme* does very, very well—and this is... *[stammers]* woven into the bones of this show, is that, like—that is another space where corniness is—is okay, in some ways. In—in all ways, as long as it's real. As long as it's honest and as long as it's virtuosic, right?

00:48:12 Jesse Host

Yeah.

00:48:13 Daveed Guest Um... So. We're doing that and Tommy describes to me this show Lin's working on. Oh, he's writing this, like, you know—rap musical about Alexander Hamilton.

And I—the first thing I said to him was, “That’s a terrible idea. Continue.”

00:48:26 Jesse Host *[Laughing.]* Also, my first reaction.

00:48:29 Daveed Guest Everybody's first reaction! It's a horrible pitch for a show. Um *[laughing]* a-and, especially if you know anything about rap music, right? It's like—it's even worse then. Because all you can hear, in your head, is the, like—the advertising for—is—is—the, like... “History through hip-hop!” Right? It's just, like...

00:48:48 Jesse Host Exactly!

00:48:49 Daveed Guest It's this stupid ploy to try and get kids to read books.

00:48:52 Jesse Host “You thought Shakespeare was the original rapper!?”

00:48:55 Daveed Guest Right. “Turns out—!” *[Laughs.]* You know.

But I—he—he was like, “Well, will you come up to Vassar and do this... a—a workshop of it?”

And I asked him if he would pay me and he said, yes. And so, I said, “Absolutely! I don't have any money, what are you *[laughing]* talking about?”

*[Jesse laughs.]*

“Send me the stuff!”

And then Lin sent me all of his demos, which is all him doing every part of every song, uh, with, like, beats he made—this is before Alex Lacamoire had—had fully orchestrated everything, so, like, a lot of them were just, like, sort of kick-snare and, like, horrible piano sounds—style beats he had made on Garage Band. And they... w-were so good. The music was so good and... it is because it was honest.

00:49:32 Daveed Guest It was because Lin—who is an incredibly virtuosic writer and performer—didn't pretend to be anything that he wasn't. He is a—a—a man who is a nerd about history and a nerd about rap songs. And this was both of those things stuck together with as many historical references that I didn't catch as there were hip-hop references that I did. You know?

And so, because that one—e-even when listening to those early versions of these—those songs, it was just like, “This is so—it's so good! Yeah! I'm totally down to be part of this terrible idea!”

*[Jesse laughs.]*

And I didn't think anybody else would like it. Like, I—y-you know, you do a lot of things with your friends that you're like, “This is brilliant!” and no one cares. *[Laughs.]* So, this was like a—gonna be another one of those things, for me. Like, “Yep, I'm totally down for this ride. Imma do this... this really dumb idea for a show, with my friends, because it's a good show that should exist and they want me to be in it and that's amazing.”

00:50:30 Music Music

And then it was—*Hamilton*.  
“Guns and Ships” from the Broadway show *Hamilton* fades in.  
Begins as incredibly fast rap from Lafayette (speaking in a French  
accent) with fast-paced orchestral backing.

COMPANY:  
*Lafayette!*

MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE:  
*I’m takin this horse by the reins  
Making redcoats redder with bloodstains*

COMPANY:  
*Lafayette!*

LAFAYETTE:  
*And I’m never gonna stop until I make ‘em  
Drop and burn ‘em up and scatter their remains, I’m*

COMPANY:  
*Lafayette!*

LAFAYETTE:  
*Watch me engaging ‘em! Escaping ‘em!  
Enraging ‘em! I’m—*

COMPANY:  
*Lafayette!*

00:50:40 Music Music

LAFAYETTE:  
*I go to France for more funds*

COMPANY:  
*Lafayette!*

LAFAYETTE:  
*I come back with more*

*[Music shifts, becoming slower and more intense]*

LAFAYETTE AND ENSEMBLE:  
*Guns  
And ships  
And so the balance shifts*

GEORGE WASHINGTON:  
*We rendezvous with Rochambeau  
Consolidate their gifts*

LAFAYETTE:  
*We can end this war at Yorktown  
Cut them off at sea, but  
For this to succeed  
There is someone else we need:*

WASHINGTON:  
*I know*

00:50:57	Music	Music	<p>WASHINGTON AND COMPANY: <i>Hamilton!</i></p> <p>LAFAYETTE: <i>Sir, he knows what to do in a trench Ingenuitive and fluent in French, I mean—</i></p> <p>WASHINGTON AND COMPANY: <i>Hamilton!</i></p> <p>LAFAYETTE: <i>Sir, you're gonna have to use him eventually What's he gonna do on the bench? I mean—</i></p> <p>WASHINGTON AND COMPANY: <i>Hamilton!</i></p> <p>LAFAYETTE: <i>No one has more resilience Or matches my practical tactical brilliance—</i></p> <p>WASHINGTON AND COMPANY: <i>Hamilton!</i></p> <p>LAFAYETTE: <i>You wanna fight for your land back?</i></p> <p>COMPANY: <i>Hamilton!</i></p> <p>WASHINGTON: <i>I need my right hand man back!</i></p>
00:51:17	Daveed	Guest	<p><i>[Music fades out as Daveed speaks]</i></p> <p>You know, the thing that—that drew me to it <i>[music fades out]</i> was that there weren't any lies in there. It was just—it all felt super authentic coming from my friend, who I knew pretty well.</p>
00:51:30	Jesse	Host	<p>Yeah. What was it like to be the first rap music that... 70% of the people—</p> <p><i>[Daveed laughs.]</i></p> <p>—sitting in the theatre had ever... experienced in a—in a deep and meaningful way?</p>
00:51:48	Daveed	Guest	<p>Pretty... <i>[laughing]</i> I guess if—if I'm being honest, like, pretty frustrating, at—most of the time, for me. I will say, like—hopefully, and what I think did happen to some degree... and we get this with clipping., too—like, to some degree, like, I—hopefully it's a gateway drug, right? It's kind of a good—<i>Hamilton's</i> a good gateway in both ways. It is good—it's—it's good if you're a hip-hop head who has never been into musicals and it's good if you love musicals and have never listened to rap songs.</p>
00:52:19	Jesse	Host	<p>For real. Like, I feel like I wanna stipulate, having said that 70% number, like—I don't think... Busta Rhymes was out at the, you know, revival of <i>Thoroughly Modern Millie</i>, or whatever.</p>
00:52:30	Daveed	Guest	<p>Right. Right.</p>

00:52:31 Jesse Host  
00:52:32 Daveed Guest  
00:52:33 Jesse Host  
00:52:35 Daveed Guest

And it must have been awesome—

And he—

—for him to see that, in that context, too.

Yeah, oh yeah! I mean, and he's—he—when we did it at the Public and he sat in the front row the—the first time he came. Which, you know, there were—they would of course gotten him better seats. That's not a great place to sit, necessarily, in the theatre. And it was so nerve-wracking for us, 'cause here's this hero of ours with, like, 20 gold chains on, uh, sitting right in the—in the very front, where the stage lights are actually hitting him as much [*laughing*] as they're hitting us.

[*Jesse laughs softly in the background.*]

Uh... and so, you do the whole show for Busta Rhymes, and they asked him if they could move him to a better seat, at intermission, and he said no. Y-you know, he wanted to be right up in it.

And then he would just come back to the Public and hang out with us, like, throughout that run. And so, that—that was amazing! But yeah, I think... so you got validation from things like that. From—from people who are, sort of, uh, revered in the hip-hop community kind of being like, "This is really great to see us, up here, finally. To see us represented in a way that doesn't feel corny to us, but also—y-you know, is crossing these lines."

So, that was—that was dope, but I think... you know, it's hard for me to take compliments, in a situation like that. When there was that whole thing going on about me being, like, the fastest rapper on Broadway. Like? Cool, I'm the only rapper on Broadway?

[*Jesse laughs.*]

Uh—what do you mean? That's not... that's not an honor?

[*Laughs.*] I don't—? Like, what are you talking about?

[*Jesse and Daveed laugh.*]

00:53:56 Jesse Host  
00:54:00 Daveed Guest

T-twist is—Twist is not doing *Into the Woods*.

Yeah. That's what I'm saying. Like, what are you talking about?! The words per second, that you're quoting, don't matter! That's not a thing!

And I can point to—and also, that's that song! Like, "Guns and Ships" is light work for me, right? I'm from Oakland. We've been rapping fast—I've been rapping fast since I was a child. Like, this is—y-you know. So, like, things like that, where people are giving you compliments on things, I can't—I don't know how many times I had to hear, "Oh my god, what I love about this song—I don't like rap music, but I love this, because I could follow the story and I understood every word."

And I just—it makes you wanna strangle an elderly person.

[*Jesse giggles.*]

Which is not a good feeling to have, right? But like...



00:54:36 Jesse Host A-an elderly person who's doing their best to be nice to you, but's just—

00:54:40 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Daveed:** Doing their best!

00:54:42 Daveed Guest **Jesse:** —just doing a terrible job!  
And you recognize it and so you calm that immediate instinct and you don't strangle anybody, and you say, "Thank you so much."

But—a lot of my time there was a lot of that, right? A lot of this... sort of, frustration with n-not even being able to enjoy other people enjoying the work, because I don't think they know enough *[laughs]* to enjoy this for the same reasons that I enjoy it, which is so dumb. Like, what a horrible way to think about something, but I couldn't help it. You know?

00:55:16 Jesse Host So, yeah, it was—it—it was a-a lot of that, a lot of that element of it was really frustrating.  
More than anything, I mean, like... with Lin Manuel Miranda, who created this show, like, he's a man so passionate. I've only met him in real life one time, but—

00:55:25 Daveed Guest Yeah.

00:55:26 Jesse Host He's a man so obviously passionate.

00:55:29 Daveed Guest Yeah.

00:55:30 Jesse Host About everything in the world that he's passionate about.

00:55:32 Daveed Guest *[Chuckling]* C-correct.

00:55:33 Jesse Host You know. *[Laughs.]* Like he's got a nuclear reactor inside of him—

00:55:36 Daveed Guest Right.

00:55:37 Jesse Host —that's always pushing him forward and—and I can see that combined with the fact that this is his—his creation, you know? In some ways it's like a magnum opus... I see that driving him through any obstacle in carrying this show.

00:55:53 Daveed Guest You are—you know, his buddy who's in it.  
Mm.

00:55:54 Jesse Host And, while, I—you have a great investment in it, having been part of it for quite a long time and, you know, through the development of—of it, and so forth, and—and being onstage, you're not the creator of it.

00:56:04 Daveed Guest Right.

00:56:05 Jesse Host And you're not—also not that guy. And that sounds like a lot of work to do—

*[Daveed laughs.]*

—in addition to the work—like in addition to the—I mean this very sincerely—in addition to the work of being on Broadway, which is really hard work.

00:56:15 Daveed Guest Right.

00:56:16 Jesse Host Like, the work of, you know... the emotional work of knowing the different ways that your work is being received—that your art is being received and having to accept some of the ones that you're less comfortable with, in order to go on, the next day.

00:56:34 Daveed Guest Yeah, what, uh, what a very astute observation and what a—I don't think anyone's ever said that to me or acknowledged that, to me, and that is so real, um, for everybody involved, right?

Uh... and... that is... you know, I mean, you—you navigate that with—with anything that you're work—as an actor, with anything that you're working on that's not—that you didn't write, yourself. You know, or that isn't something deeply connected to you from its inception, but, yeah—so, that—part of that is inherent, in the job, right? You are a vessel. You're—you're creating with somebody else's words and ideas and funneling that through all of your experiences, and that's what you put out, onstage.

Um, and so—then another part of the job is interacting with the public, as they relate to that. For most things—most things aren't *Hamilton*, so most things don't get that much attention, so the job is way less. When something gets that much attention, it's great. It's wonderful. It's good for everybody, when it does, but it is a lot of work to, sort of, navigate all of—all of the attention that it gets, on it.

Uh, my brother—for a little while—was living in New York, my younger brother, and even the—and I—I was still doing the show. This is, like, close to Tony Awards time and, like, we—you know... I—still, I chose—we finally found a time to go just get lunch. And we go somewhere and just get some sandwiches or something, to go, and we're walking around the street, like, around the—the... like, uh, Flat Iron area and we got—you know, I was getting stopped, like, every—every thirteen seconds by people being like, "I never do this, but *[laughing]* can I take a picture with you?"

00:58:10 Daveed Guest

*[Still laughing]* Or like, "I'm so sorry. I know you must hate this, but—" Which is a funny way to start that interaction, but everybody does it and I guess I would probably do it too, you know: with an acknowledgement that you must hate this and then also the admission that you're gonna do it anyway.

But, my brother, after we had been hanging out—and I didn't even notice it, anymore, at this point. My—after we'd been hanging out for, maybe, an hour, he was like, "This is awful. *[Laughs.]* Like, being with you on the street is awful."

*[Laughs.]* And it was kind of a moment, for me, where I was like, "You're right! You're right, it is." But I am, you know, I'm out here as—as an ambassador of this show—also, like... none of this is—is about me? As much as everybody thinks it is, right? None of the acclaim felt like it had anything to do with me, really, because, for me, performing this character was a—was a pretty weird, like, off-shoot of all of the things I thought I was doing with my life.

And it's just like, not to be ungrateful for it—it changed my life in all of the right ways and, like, I had a wonderful time doing it—but, again, like, accepting accolades for it were—particularly at the time, and I'm—I'm—I'm learning, more, to cope with it, now. With some distance, I can understand more, um, sort of the importance of that—of—of the moment, but it was—it was hard in a lot of ways to—to receive all of that for a thing that felt like had the least to do with me of any of the art I had ever made, in my life. *[Laughs.]*

00:59:42 Jesse Host

Daveed Diggs, I'm so grateful to you for coming on *Bullseye*. I—I so enjoyed the chance to get to talk to you.

00:59:49 Daveed Guest

Me too, Jesse. I'm a huge fan of the show and have been listening for a long time—

00:59:52	Music	Music	<p>“Blood of the Fang” from the album <i>There Existed an Addiction to Blood</i> by clipping. begins fading in very softly. Somewhat eerie a capella singing/speaking that plays quietly—almost inaudibly—under Daveed and Jesse speaking.</p> <p><i>SAM WAYMON:</i>  <i>By the Christians, it is written</i>  <i>That in the black Myrthian age</i>  <i>There existed an addiction to blood-blood-blood-blood</i></p> <p><i>DAVEED DIGGS:</i></p> <p><i>Drink it up!</i></p>
00:59:53	Daveed	Guest	—so it’s—it’s really great to get to be on here.
00:59:55	Jesse	Host	<i>[Scoffs]</i> Pssh, you’re playing, dude. That’s not true.
00:59:57	Daveed	Guest	Nah, man. No, it is. That—I—I gotchu—I got your—your episodes downloaded on the phone, bruh.
1:00:03	Music	Music	<p><i>[Music increases in volume as a hip-hop backing with a heavy electronic beat drops in]</i></p> <p><i>DAVEED:</i>  <i>Fifty years 'bout enough, time to come back</i></p> <p><i>SAM:</i>  <i>[With an eerie reverb]</i>  <i>Blood, blood</i></p> <p><i>DAVEED:</i>  <i>They want to call the bluff</i>  <i>Okay then, time to come back, whattup</i></p> <p><i>SAM:</i>  <i>Blood</i></p> <p><i>DAVEED:</i>  <i>Hail King Huey, do it for fluid, you knew it was moving forever</i>  <i>Loop it, the truth is, the movement was really too clever</i>  <i>Who is the newest to do it, pursuing a useless, polluted, agenda?</i></p>
01:00:23	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[Music fades down and plays quietly as Jesse speaks]</i>  Daveed Diggs—clipping.’s new album, <i>There Existed an Addiction to Blood</i>, comes out this October 18<sup>th</sup>, just in time for Halloween. You’re hearing the third single from the record, right now. It’s called, “Blood of the Fang”.</p> <p>Daveed’s new show on Amazon, <i>Undone</i>, is breathtakingly beautiful, but let me just say that if you missed <i>Blindspotting</i>—his film that he made with Rafael Casal—it is, man—it is so great. Make it a priority, in your life to watch it.</p>
01:01:52	Music	Music	<p><i>[Music increases in volume]</i></p> <p><i>DAVEED:</i>  <i>This ain't the shit they taught you when you went to kindergarten</i>  <i>What you need to know is in the</i></p> <p><i>SAM:</i></p>

*Blood*

DAVEED:

*Queen Angela done told y'all, "Grasp at the root"  
So what y'all talking 'bout, "Hands up, don't shoot"?*

DAVEED:

*Look back, blood on the ground  
Look straight, they still shooting  
Jump back, still here  
Now what that tell you 'bout death?  
Death ain't [beat], you got to  
Drink it up, drink it up*

*["Blood of the Fang" crossfades into the next song]*

01:01:27 Music Music

Calm music fades in from "Blood of the Fang" and plays as Jesse speaks.

00:01:29 Jesse Host

That's it. That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is produced at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) world headquarters, overlooking MacArthur Park in beautiful Los Angeles, California where careful observers have noticed that The Barge—which is a large, floating raft that resides in the lake—has moved! Our guess? It came unmoored and now it's locked to a pole on the opposite side of the lake. If you're feeling brave, you can go out on there. Walk on it. See how you feel.

The show's produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Park updates are his fault.

Jesus Ambrosio is our associate producer. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Our production fellow is Jordan Kauwling. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also called Dan Wally—by his mom and stuff. Thanks to Dan for sharing it with us. Our theme song is "Huddle Formation" by the great band The Go! Team. Our thanks to The Go! Team and Memphis Industries, for letting us use it. You should go buy a Go! Team album. There's all—they're all great.

Before you go! We have almost 20 years of *Bullseye* archives available, to you. You can find them on our website, [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org). You can find them on our YouTube channel. Just search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. Now you can find them on [NPR.org](http://NPR.org)—or, at least, some of them. Uh—find us on Facebook. All kinds of great stuff!

If you're feeling Oaklandish, why not check out my buddy, Oakland resident W. Kamau Bell! That was a great interview—a couple great interviews, with Kamau.

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

01:03:06 Promo Promo

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

*[Music fades out.]*