

00:00:00	Jesse Thorn	Promo	<p>Hey, all. Jesse, here. We're getting near the end of the year. I wanted to thank you for listening to <i>Bullseye</i>. Making our show isn't easy. We've got a very small staff that works tirelessly to book guests and edit interviews and keep things running smoothly. It is hard work that takes time, money, and effort. It's also incredibly rewarding. When I hear it that a guest is an NPR listener, already, it means a lot. And it means something to know that you're listening, as well.</p> <p>So, I'll get to the point. If you wanna show your gratitude, this holiday season, consider supporting the NPR Member Station in your area. Any amount. It's the single most effective way to keep shows like <i>Bullseye</i> going. It'll make a huge difference to public radio in your community. It makes a huge difference to us, too.</p> <p>To get started with your donation to an NPR Member Station, visit donate.NPR.org/bullseye or just text the word "bullseye" to the number 49648. We'll send you a text message with a link where you can find your local station and make your contribution. Message and data rates may apply.</p> <p>You can visit NPR.org/smsterms for privacy and text message terms.</p>
00:01:08	Music	Music	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:01:09	Promo	Promo	<p>Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.</p>
00:01:20	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[Music fades out.]</i> I'm Jesse Thorn. It's <i>Bullseye!</i></p>
00:01:21	Music	Music	<p>"Huddle Formation" from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team plays. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.</p>
00:01:29	Jesse	Host	<p>So, there's this show called <i>Steven Universe</i>. It's on Cartoon Network. You might have heard of it. It's a very special show. It's about a boy named Steven. He's about 11 years old, when the show starts. He lives in a seaside town with his dad. Pretty early on, Steven realizes that there's something about him that's special. He's half-human, half-Gem.</p> <p><i>[Music fades out.]</i></p> <p>Gems, in the world of <i>Steven Universe</i>, are these beings from another planet that have superpowers. And most of them want to destroy Earth, but three of them want to save it. So, together, Steven and the three Gems fight to—well, to save the world. But the show is about more than a fight for Earth's future. It's about more than just Steven, too. It explores the town he's growing up in. It profiles the guy who makes pizza. It's follows a child who is an onion. Very special show.</p> <p>The whole thing is created by Rebecca Sugar. Rebecca is a veteran animator who also worked on the acclaimed Cartoon Network show, <i>Adventure Time</i>. Her work on both shows have earned her six Emmy awards. Anyway, there has been <u>a lot</u> happening in <i>Steven Universe</i> world. This past September saw the</p>

release of the *Steven Universe Movie* and an accompanying soundtrack. Many of the songs were written and composed by Rebecca. Cartoon Network also just kicked off a special epilogue series, for the show. It's called *Steven Universe Future*. It's airing now.

And, by the way, one note. Rebecca identifies as a nonbinary woman and she uses both she/her and they/them pronouns. She's very chill about it. Whatever you prefer. Anyway. Let's take a listen to a little bit from *Steven Universe: the Movie*. In it, Steven has decided to follow a new Gemstone friend, named Spinel, to a far-off planet his late mother, Pink Diamond, enjoyed visiting. Spinel used to be Pink Diamond's playmate. And in this clip, tells Steven an important part of Pink's backstory.

00:03:30 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:03:31 Clip

Music: Slow, sorrowful chiming music plays.

Spinel: *[Wistfully.]* This was our garden. A special world built just for Pink and I.

[The music swells, creating a magical atmosphere.]

On Homeworld, Pink was so lonely and sad. But not here! Here, we would play for hours! *[A long beat as the music plays.]* Everyday was so much fun!

[The sound of footsteps as Spinel crosses the garden.]

At least, that's what I thought.

Steven: Did something happen?

Spinel: ... Pink wanted a colony. More than anything. One day, her wish came true! Blue and Yellow gave Pink her very own planet! Earth! I was so excited! *[Sorrow creeping into her voice.]* A brand new place to play!

00:04:29 Sound Effect Transition

Steven: So, why didn't you go with her?
Music swells and fades.

00:04:30 Jesse Host

Rebecca Sugar. Welcome to *Bullseye*. It's so nice to have you on the show.

00:04:32 Rebecca Sugar Guest

Oh, I'm so glad to be here.

[Rebecca makes several sounds of acknowledgment as Jesse speaks.]

00:04:34 Jesse Host

I have three kids. And they're all at the beginning of watching a television show age. So, I've seen a lot of children's television, lately. Relatively speaking. And children's TV shows, especially animated shows, tend to be pretty short. They tend to have a lot of action that takes up time. And they tend to have really simple conflicts. And especially—these days, the ones for very young kids are a little better about this. They're almost always about rescuing someone from peril. But almost all of them, like, the central conflict is a violent conflict.

[They both laugh.]

It's resolved through violence. And for a show about... a bunch of characters with semi-magical powers—space powers. Somewhere along the line between technological and magical powers—that's not usually what *Steven Universe* is about. And I wonder if that was a choice?

00:05:40 Rebecca Guest

Oh! Yes. Of course. I think... it's exciting for me, as a cartoonist, to be drawing characters that are experiencing really interesting emotions, really human emotions. Cartoons are so expressive. So, from the very beginning, I wanted these characters to have a huge amount of emotional range that you could see on their faces and in their body language, though. That's just exciting for me to draw. But also, I think, more often than not—oh, how do I put this? I think maybe the reason a lot of kid's cartoons have conflicts that are that simple is not because kids are interested in conflicts that simple, but because they're simple enough for adults to understand.

[Jesse chuckles.]

Because these are adults pitching ideas to other adults for what a children's show should be. And a lot of the time, I find that it can be hard to pitch to an adult a complicated idea. *[Laughs.]* A complicated emotional idea. Much harder to pitch it to an adult than to explain it to a kid who—I think—is more personally connected to wondering how their friend is feeling than being in out-and-out brawl... with laser guns. That's just—happens not nearly as often, I think, in the life of a child.

00:06:54 Jesse Host

[They both laugh.]

I guess it depends on how you're raising your kid—in what context—and that kind of thing. But.

[Rebecca agrees.]

00:07:02 Rebecca Guest

Yeah. Or about how many lasers are around the house. Right. Yeah.

00:07:04 Jesse Host

What shows did you watch, as a kid?

00:07:07 Rebecca Guest

Oh my god. Well, how young are you thinking? *[Chuckles.]*

00:07:10 Jesse Host

I don't know, what are the ones that, like—I mean, like, for me? I have the most vivid memories of watching *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* with my mom, every Saturday morning.

[Rebecca hums in agreement.]

And I have other vivid memories of watching *Batman* and *Tiny Toon Adventures*, afterschool.

00:07:28 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Rebecca: Oooh.

00:07:32 Rebecca Guest

Jesse: Like, those were the ones that I remember watching, most vividly, after school.

Uh-huh. I think, when I was young, or—I was also very lucky. My dad is a really huge fan of animation, and so he had the whole collection of *Looney Toons* on laserdisc, when I was young. And we would—

00:07:44 Jesse Host Wait. On laserdisc?
00:07:45 Rebecca Guest Yeah.

[Jesse cackles.]

And we would pour over them. And I would watch those with my dad, and I found those fascinating. And he also had, like, Canadian NFB shorts? Like, independent animation? That I would watch when I was young. He had a copy of... you ever see—there's a version of *Beauty and the Beast* that switches from being animated to storyboards, to rough animation?

00:08:05 Jesse Host No!
00:08:06 Rebecca Guest It's like this sort of behind-the-scenes cut of it. That was the only copy we had. So, I never really got to think of animation as a magical thing that was a real. Like, I always understood that it was drawings and that it was a job someone had. Even when I was, like, five. And I really wanted to do it. That's what I really remember: watching a lot of *Looney Toons*.

My grandparents had a tape of *Betty Boop* cartoons and Fleischer *Superman*.

00:08:30 Jesse Host I was about to ask that. Like, did you ever watch those—I mean, look. I know you were in a laserdisc home.

[Rebecca agrees amusedly.]

But [laughs]—we're not all quite so fancy, Rebecca! But did you ever watch those cartoons that you bought on a VHS tape for \$2.99 at the drugstore?

00:08:50 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Rebecca:** Mm-hm.

Jesse: That were, like, out of—out of copyright, you know, *The Sunshine Makers*.

Rebecca: Oh!

Jesse: And then, like, two *Woody Woopeckers*.
I—not so much as a child, but when I was an adult I did! We—Ian Jones-Quartey, who is—I ran the show with for many years, but also is my significant other—he had this copy, this rip of one of those. Of *The Snow Queen*. The version from—the version from the 50's, that—it's just—the quality of it is pretty poor, 'cause it's the VHS rip, but the movie is so cool. And it was hugely influential to Miyazaki. One of the Fleischers working on it. I—a lot of *Steven* is influenced by it too. There's some really good stuff floating around. [Laughs.] On those—on those bootleg tapes.

00:09:45 Jesse Host Did you watch the kind of kid's cartoons that are hyper-gendered?
00:09:52 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Rebecca:** Mmm. Mm-hm.

Jesse: Things with—you know—pink princesses and guys in robot suits shooting each other?

00:10:00 Rebecca Guest Well, I didn't—I didn't like... the stuff for girls. And I remember, when I was young, understanding that that was incorrect. I watched a show called *SWAT Kats*, which I knew I was not supposed to be watching, when I was a kid. And I found, at one point, a little diary I

had where I confessed—tearfully confessed that I’d been watching *SWAT Kats*.

[They both laugh.]

But I—but I thought it was cool! I wanted to watch something with action in it! And that was a big goal, when I was working on *Steven*. I didn’t want anyone to feel alienated the way that I had. I wanted people to feel like they were supposed to be watching the show. And that the elements of it—when there were gendered elements of it, that it was always coming with a big asterisk that says, “But you—but it’s for you! But this is for you!”

00:10:53	Jesse	Host	What does that—what does that mean? What’s an example of that asterisk?
00:10:57	Rebecca	Guest	Ah, oh gosh. Well, there are many, many princess elements to Steven, as a character. And even... pink, as his color. None of that... is related, in his mind, to... girl or female, as a concept. He relates pink to power and, now, also to danger. But... and he’s gone through many things that are, technically, princess tropes that he can’t quite figure out how he fits into—he’s not necessarily against it. He doesn’t have that association with it.
00:11:35	Jesse	Host	What’s an—what’s an example of that?
00:11:37	Rebecca	Guest	Are people caught up? This is gonna be pretty spoilery.
00:11:39	Jesse	Host	Yeah, so—spoiler alert, gang.

[Rebecca laughs.]

I think we—we’re gonna have—we’re gonna have two categories of people listening to this: people who are deeeefinitely caught up—they’ve made their voices heard to me—and then people who are pretty chill about spoilers. *[Chuckles.]*

00:11:53	Rebecca	Guest	Right. Um. A lot—thematically, a lot of the story, in <i>Steven</i> , is related to <i>Sleeping Beauty</i> . He’s being raised in his—you can’t see me doing air quotes—“cottage”, you know, by his sort of three fairies, so to speak. And eventually, he’s brought back to the palace, where he finds out that he’s royalty amidst the celebration that just makes him confused. And then he goes through this gauntlet of having mice make his clothes and being locked in the tower and throwing a ball and all of it is just more and more and more... difficult, for him, because that’s just not who he is.
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And a lot of that related to just how much I loved those stories and those movies, when I was younger, but didn’t really understand how I fit inside of them.

00:12:47	Jesse	Host	How did you think about the way that you fit inside of the super-gendered world of children’s entertainment? As a—you’re a nonbinary woman, that’s how I’ve heard you describe yourself—is that right?
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00:12:59	Rebecca	Host	Mm. Mm-hm.
00:13:00	Jesse	Host	So, like—what did—what did it mean, to you, when you were a kid or even, like, a teenager? Was it just, “something’s wrong about this”?

00:13:08	Rebecca	Guest	I would... I would find it beautiful and distant. I would feel a sort of yearning, like, “Oh, oh, what a lovely... thought. What a lovely way to be. For someone else.” And I would <i>[chuckling]</i> find myself really interested in all the side-characters, with the weird designs.
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[Jesse laughs.]

Like, I wanna know what—you know—what that maid is doing. I wanna know what the—what the cook is doing. Who's he in love with? You know? [Laughs.] The people running around and getting flustered that aren't in the center of the story. That's how I would feel. I wanted to—with *Steven*, also—put more of a spotlight on those characters. The characters in *Steven*, that are equivalent to that kind of royalty, are not nearly as important as—you know—the butler and the maid.

[They both laugh.]

And the characters—the knight, the people who would be side-characters are the main characters of my show.

00:14:08 Jesse Host

Do you remember an early—a time early in your career when... you... got a big feeling, from your childhood, that you put into story? Yeah! Yeah. I think the one that I keep returning to is that when I—when I was a kid, I left a stuffed animal in the garden. And I didn't find it until—I don't know how many months—later. Maybe it was a year. You know how things feel like a year when you're [laughs]—when maybe it was two weeks. I don't know. But it must have been a while, because when I found it again, it had been lying upside-down, and the sun had faded its belly. It was a black rabbit. And now it had this light grey belly, when I turned it over. And it was the first time I ever realized that things could change without me. And it wasn't that it was worse or better, it was just different, and I wasn't there to see that happen. And I never really forgot it. And I—and I also felt bad that I had been so careless. I thought I cared so much about this toy. And I hadn't even realized that it was gone.

00:14:20 Rebecca Guest

And I wrote a song about it called "Everything Stays", for *Adventure Time*. And then, as we were working on the movie, it slowly dawned on me that I was writing about it again. About this... this person leaving a toy in the garden. And something about that just really stuck with me. I think it was a turning point, as a kid, where I my first existential crisis—but I think I also realized that I could—I could make a mistake, a bad mistake, that would—I could leave something behind, in that way. I think I realized—isn't there a point where you're a child, where you realize that you're childish? That must click at some point.

00:16:10 Jesse Host

I don't know. It really... must have rattled me, because I keep talking [laughs] about it in my stories.

Do you feel like you have to do a lot of work to access those feelings that you had and those memories? Or do you feel like they're particularly present, in you?

00:16:26 Rebecca Guest

[Beat.] I don't know. I think, more often than not, I tend to write about what I'm going through, at the moment. And then try to find some way to connect that with the past, if I can. A lot of the show was an interesting process, 'cause it started out with me writing about my childhood with my brother, *Steven*—my younger brother. And I wanted it to be about the—about this formative time when I was just becoming a teenager and he wasn't quite there, yet. He

was younger and I was—and I was drawing, and I was becoming this role model and, you know, I wanted to be a good role model.

And Steven and the Gems are all based off some aspect of that. But Steven was with me, on the show. He's our lead background designer. So, as the show was becoming more and more difficult and I was buckling, a little, under a lot of that pressure, he was there for me in real-time. And the story ends up reflecting that, a lot, as the—as the Gems start to... unravel and Steven steps up to be there, for them. That was very much what was happening, at that moment. Not, necessarily, what had happened.

Although, that also happened when we were that age. There—you know, being a teenager was a little tough on me, and he was such a—this reliable source of positivity. And if I was ever having a bad day, he'd just throw on a video game that he knew I liked, and I could always count on him. And it just stayed true. The past, the present, the future.

00:17:55 Jesse Host
00:18:00 Rebecca Guest

What kinds of things about teenagerdom were particularly difficult? Oh, gosh. Let's see. *[Laughing through their words.]* What a question!

I think I had a bit of a rough time, as a bi teenager. 'Cause I knew, right from the start, I knew what was going on. But when I would try to talk about it, people would—people would shut me down pretty quick. And that became very confusing. I got a lot of bad advice that just kept living in me. Really until my late 20's. Things like, "Oh," you know—well, mainly like, "who cares?" Mainly, like, the eye rolls. Which I was like, "Yeah—I guess it's—yeah, I guess, who cares?"

And at that point, I think I internalized—I would stop caring about my own feelings. 'Cause I was just like, "Well, who cares?" Like, I really absorbed that. Which I think was people's way of saying, "I don't mind." You know. At the time. But it wasn't particularly helpful. And then people saying, "Well, you'll figure it out when you end up with someone." Which... made me pretty confused, because I felt like I needed a relationship to tell me who I was. And I think I... I made decisions that would have—I would have made better decisions if I had trusted myself. I learned, I think, from that to not trust myself. Because I thought that this made sense, and hearing from everyone around me that it didn't... made me pretty unsure of my own ability to make sense of anything.

00:19:28 Jesse Host

More with Rebecca Sugar after a short break. Stay with us. Still to come: Rebecca will talk about how she deals with feedback from fans who don't always see things the same way she does. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

00:19:42 Music Music
00:19:44 Jesse Promo

Upbeat transition music.

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00:20:21	Promo	Promo	<p>[<i>Music fades out.</i>]</p> <p>Music: Rock music plays.</p> <p>Robin Hilton: Who dropped the most memorable album or song in 2019? Was it Lil Nas X? Lizzo? Billy Eilish? Or maybe someone you've never heard of? I'm Robin Hilton. Join NPR Music as we look back at the defining trends and artists of 2019. Listen on <i>All Songs Considered</i>, with new episodes each week.</p>
00:20:36	Jesse	Promo	<p>[<i>Music ends.</i>]</p> <p>Hey, gang. It's Jesse with a quick reminder. We're in the middle of the holiday season and it's a great time to donate to your local NPR Member Station. They're the reason you're listening to <i>Bullseye</i>. And we need their journalism now, more than ever. Go to donate.NPR.org/bullseye to give. And thanks.</p>
00:20:53	Promo	Promo	<p>Music: "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw. A jaunty, jazzy tune reminiscent of the opening theme of a movie.</p> <p>Speaker 1: [<i>Severely distorted.</i>] I've got a message for you.</p> <p>April Wolfe: Hi! It's me, April Wolfe! The host of <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> and co-writer of the new horror film, <i>Black Christmas</i>.</p> <p>Katie Walsh: And I'm Katie Walsh. Film critic and occasional host of <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>.</p> <p>April: We're here to announce that, for one episode, we <u>will</u> be doing something a little different. Much like Jeff Goldblum in David Cronenberg's <i>The Fly</i>, I will be going through a truly disturbing transformation!</p> <p>Katie: April will transform from the interviewer into the interviewee. I will be asking her all about her new film, <i>Black Christmas</i>, her writing process, and ongoing existential dread.</p> <p>April: But I will also be discussing John Carpenter's perfect masterpiece, <i>Prince of Darkness</i>.</p> <p>Speaker 2: You guys seen any movies you like?</p> <p>Katie: So, tune in to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> for a one-of-a-kind episode, with April Wolfe. And me! Katie Walsh.</p> <p>April: See you then!</p> <p>Speaker 3: Only the corrupt are listened to, now!</p>
00:21:39	Jesse	Host	<p>[<i>Music ends.</i>]</p> <p>Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest, Rebecca Sugar, created the Cartoon Network series <i>Steven Universe</i>. The show has been turned into a feature film, which came out earlier this year. And the latest chapter in the <i>Steven Universe</i> series is called <i>Steven Universe Future</i>. It's airing now, on Cartoon Network.</p>

I think it's pretty unusual that *Steven Universe* is a story that is about a boy who's, you know, main role models and protectors and family members are all—present as women.

[Rebecca agrees.]

Basically, the Gems are this—like, they're like a—space people, aliens, who wouldn't be female gendered on their home planet, but on Earth they present as women. And—
They're perceived as women. Yeah.

00:22:33 Rebecca Guest

[Rebecca agrees several times as Jesse speaks.]

00:22:35 Jesse Host

Yeah. And those are not mothers. Like, I think that feels really unusual and significant, to me. Like, it's—there aren't that many stories about that kind of thing. And, like, I—like, you are an older sister and had a relationship that was not maternal but was protective of your little brother. But, like, did you think about anywhere else where that kind of story existed?

00:23:11 Rebecca Guest

No, I wanted it! I wanted that visual. And I think it says a lot that you never see... just an image or an aspirational story about... a young boy looking up to—looking up to women. You know, even as someone who—I was about to be running a television show—I mean, just, how do you—how do you navigate a world where no young boy has ever seen an image where the correct thing to do is to just listen to what a woman has said? *[Laughs.]* I mean, that's—when you see that zero times—not that it's zero times, but it's rare. And what you—what you get a lot of are... of boys hanging out with each other and influencing each other and looking up to men.

Which, I'm—there are so, so, so many men that I look up to. There's surely nothing wrong with looking up to men. But I think it would do a lot of good to just put the idea out there that taking direction from a woman is a sign of strength and—or taking—and taking direction from a nonbinary person who people perceive as a woman is a sign of strength. I mean, that would be great!

[They both laugh.]

Uh, that would just be great! I would like for—and I think that, as someone who's been leading a team, I feel like we're all so strong, together. I don't see why that can't be something that's out in the world.

00:24:47 Jesse Host

I mean, I think that there have—there has been a lot of progress, in the time since I was a kid, you know. In the last 30 years or so. In terms of having feminist messages in children's entertainment. But those feminist messages are almost always coming from women to girls.

[Rebecca hums an agreement.]

And it feels consequential, to me, to choose to have a show where the mentors—of different kinds, right? Like, these three characters who are the, you know, fairy godmothers of Steven are all, like, you know. They're all dopey in their own ways, in addition to being heroes.

00:25:38 Rebecca Guest Certainly.

00:25:40 Jesse Host *[Rebecca agrees several times as Jesse speaks.]*
But, like, all of—all of them are serving as an example to Steven, who's definitely a boy. And I, like—I thought, you know, in my own childhood, as a boy, there was no example of that. Maybe there were some great moms. But even those moms were, like, such a traditional and specific set of mom-values. Which are like great values. But, you know, like everybody loves nurturing. But, like, that's pretty—was generally pretty much it. *[Chuckles.]*

00:26:11 Rebecca Guest Right. That's the thing.
00:26:13 Crosstalk **Jesse:** Yeah.

Rebecca: Yeah. And Gems are not—not inherently nurturing at all.

Jesse: *[Laughing.]* No.

00:26:19 Rebecca Guest **Rebecca:** That's actually really, really tough for them. *[Laughs.]*
I actually—I liked the thought of them having to discover that. I mean, Steven is the one who is like that. That was very much by design. I wanted to give all of the really incredible, maternal traits to Steven. You know. His healing abilities and his ability to calm situations and bring people together and unite everyone. All of those—all of those things. 'Cause those are wonderful, powerful things. But they don't have to be... gendered, necessarily. They don't have to be something only a mother can do.

00:26:51 Jesse Host What are the special qualities of animation relative to regular film stuff or a book or even a comic that you wanted to take advantage of, in making *Steven Universe*?

00:27:05 Rebecca Guest Oh! Well. Animation, I think—for a long time, I would get frustrated with the fact that people think of animation as a genre instead of a media. *[Stammering.]* They think of animation and they think of princess movies and they think of animated television shows being a certain thing. And they think of shows that are targeted at boys and shows that are targeted at girls. And for good reason, 'cause that's—the reason that those are the way they are is because of a lot of things you were talking about earlier. Because of marketing and because of demographics that are—relate to advertising. And how these things all came to be.

And so, as someone who also got a chance to grow up on independent films and, you know—I thought, even from when I was very young, “That's not—animation doesn't have to be any of these things! It can be so many other things! It can be so many other types of art.” But when I got closer to the opportunity to make an animated show, for television, I flipped on it completely. And I got very excited about the way that people think of what television animation is supposed to be and what animated movies are supposed to be. And instead of trying to avoid all of this tropey language, I wanted to take it and scramble it and play with it!

To make something for Cartoon Network, there are certain expectations for what a show on Cartoon Network is going to be. What it's going to mean and who it's going to be for. And that became very exciting, to me. Because I could say something not only about what I wanted to do, but about what people expect, what

people take for granted, what people consider to be what you are supposed to see, when you watch an animated television show. I wanted to shine a big light on that.

00:28:48 Jesse Host Because your show represents things and people that are so infrequently represented on television—especially kids television—it is, like, immensely important to a lot of people. And... I wonder—I mean, I'm sure—or at least I hope—that you're very proud of that. But I wonder how comfortably you wear that knowledge.

00:29:22 Rebecca Guest Aah! Well, I mean—I respect fans. I respect being a fan of something so much, and I respect navigating being alive as a—as a person who is queer and gender-expansive. I respect that immensely. And relate to immensely. So, those two things together—it all makes absolute sense, to me. I really try—I speak... I say this in terms of what I'm doing, but also the show is so much a reflection of the entirety of the staff. And we're all really writing about ourselves and our loved ones. And a lot of this very true in our lives. And... I have really felt... determined to make sure that we are making the art we want to make. And that that's not being bent or altered to be what someone might consider... more accessible. Because what we have to say has not been said, because that happens so often.

Or that it's just simply not been allowed to be possible, at all. So, I don't know if I'm proud. I'm very proud of what we've been able to accomplish, on the show. And I'm very moved at how the show has been received. And also, it's been a big arc, for me, because—as a bisexual person and a nonbinary person—I was... I was closeted up until really very recently. And it's because I have—it's because of the show and people reaching out to me saying, "I relate to these characters. I understand what you're talking about" that I have found a community that I didn't have before. So, when people tell me that the show has done that—that it helped them come out to their families or find people who understood them, for the first time [*getting choked up*]—I mean, I... I respect that so much because it's also true for me.

And I understand how much that's meant, because I—my life has changed so much by being able to speak about this, openly. And being able to understand that anyone might be interested—which, for a very long time, I just thought, "No one wants to hear about this." I had just—I had just absorbed that. And I'm just very moved. And when I meet people who talk about how it affected them, specifically... I just—I love to get to meet people one-on-one and hear about it. Because I understand.

And I didn't really have the tools to talk about a lot of this until... until now. And, in part, until [*chuckling*] making a bunch of cartoon characters to explain how I felt. Which is what I was always definitely going to do, because that's the kind of art I like. I only like art if it's coming from an honest place. I just really didn't know that people would understand. And it's really life-changing. So... yes. I'm proud. And I'm moved. And I'm grateful. I'm just so grateful... that people [*laughs*] that people saw it. Like, they saw that, in it. And they understood, even at a time—we started this so—we started this in 2012, when so many of these things—we couldn't actually—it took so long to be able to say these things. And even before we

could, people knew. And I was finding people who... *[chuckling]* who were already excited, even about what we were able to do, then.

00:33:03 Rebecca Guest

I mean, it's—there's so much to say about it. But I understand the gravity that it has. It really has it, for me too. And I'll always appreciate... everyone to whom the show is meaningful. I would have appreciated it even if they were just wacky cartoons and they just liked them as cartoons—even that, I would have understood the immense gravity of that. That would have been—that would be enough. 'Cause that's how I already felt about cartoons. But to also get to know that we, on the other side of this cartoon, that we're people and that we found each other. Oh my gosh!

I never could have imagined that I would get to feel this way.

00:33:44 Jesse Host

[Rebecca agrees several times as Jesse speaks.]

When you're telling really personal stories, which you are on this show—you're telling your personal stories and your colleagues are telling theirs—and, you know, you're creating this show by weaving these really deep, personal meanings together... you're also presenting it to people who are different from you. Have different experiences, have different ways of thinking about things, have—you know, whatever. And they experience it differently.

Is that hard for you? Especially in the context of those people who experience it differently... might still be, you know, a lot of those people are the people who are being profoundly affected by the show. So, like, if someone is hurt by it or angered by it and it's because they see it differently than you do *[laughs]*, 'cause they're different from you, right? Like, are you able to—are you able to be okay about that?

00:34:50 Rebecca Guest

Yeah, I think it made me very nervous, earlier on. I've had to really figure out how to navigate that. And I think, at this point, I really think about it as if I am... friends with the audience. *[Stammers]* I think of art as communication, as—the cartoon as communication—like I'm—like I'm speaking to someone across a table and I'm trying to get them excited about what I'm excited about, as genuinely as possible. I'm not gonna try and say the thing I think they wanna hear, 'cause that's not a good conversation. I'm not going to only talk about myself, 'cause that's also not a good conversation. You know. I want the show to feel like a connection that I want to have with my audience.

But, at a certain point, you know—there are—there are friends in my life who don't, necessarily, understand everything about me. And they're still my friends, right? And I could trust someone and know that, maybe, our closeness ends at a certain point. And I don't... do cartwheels trying to explain myself to that person, 'cause that's fine. And then there is a certain point where there are people in my life who are not my friends. And I maybe just don't approach that, at all. And maybe don't trust that person, because maybe I can't.

So, I understand that—if that's how I'm gonna approach a conversation with someone—I've really started to speak, if I'm going to speak from the heart, I'm speaking as if I trust the person

that I'm speaking to. And if I can't, I've accepted that that interaction was a failure.

[They both laugh.]

But it's not going to stop me from speaking to people who I trust and who trust me. I have to have that conversation, and if I'm not, where is it going to be? So, I need to just accept that not everyone is having that same conversation, with me. Not everyone is on the same page 100% of the time. And it... can't stop me from having a meaningful discussion, to be afraid of a person that I can't trust, because our audience is just so massive.

[Music begins to fade in.]

00:36:59	Jesse	Host	Well, Rebecca, thank you so much for taking all this time to come on <i>Bullseye</i> . It was so nice to get to talk to you and get to know you.
00:37:04	Rebecca	Guest	Oh, yeah. Thanks so much for having me!
00:37:06	Jesse	Host	And thank you for your wonderful work, as well.
00:37:08	Rebecca	Guest	Aw, thanks.
00:37:09	Music	Music	Percussive, relaxing music plays.
00:37:18	Jesse	Host	Rebecca Sugar. If you haven't checked out <i>Steven Universe</i> before, it's worth getting into. The first four seasons are streaming, now, on a bunch of different platforms. So is the <i>Steven Universe</i> movie. The <i>Steven Universe: the Movie</i> soundtrack is available to buy, now, in both a standard and deluxe version. The deluxe version has eight bonus tracks!
00:37:39	Music	Music	Chiming, celestial-sounding transition music.
00:37:45	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is produced at MaximumFun.org world headquarters, overlooking MacArthur park in beautiful Los Angeles, California—where, this past week, a Filipino-American youth group held a rally just outside the office, only a few hours before we recorded our interview about Imelda Marcos.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio is our associate producer. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Our production fellows are Jordan Kauwling and Melissa Dueñas. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use it.

And one last thing—we've done a lot of interviews in our show's almost two decades. They're available on our website, MaximumFun.org—which, recently, got a refresh! It's looking very nice! We're also on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Just search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. You can keep up with the show there.

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

00:38:49	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
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[Music fades out.]