

00:00:00	Music	Music	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org 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" 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.
00:00:22	Jesse	Host	My guest, Steve Buscemi, doesn't need that much of an introduction. He is one of the most memorable actors ever. He's had hundreds of parts—leading parts in stuff like <i>Reservoir Dogs</i> , <i>Ghost World</i> , <i>Boardwalk Empire</i> . Iconic supporting parts in <i>Fargo</i> , <i>The Sopranos</i> , and—of course— <i>30 Rock</i> . So, we'll skip the long intro and talk about his newest work.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
			It's a TV show called <i>Miracle Workers</i> , a comedy created by the hilarious Simon Rich—the same person behind <i>Man Seeking Woman</i> and a bunch of brilliantly written works you might have seen in <i>The New Yorker</i> , or on one of his many books, <u>or</u> heard on this show. Each season, <i>Miracle Workers</i> tells a different story with the same cast. Season one was set in Heaven, which is run kind of like a soulless megacorporation with an absentee CEO. Steve played God. Literally God.
00:01:14	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:15	Clip	Clip	Music: Peaceful, serene music.
			Speaker 1: Explain cows.
			God: I don't wanna do this, anymore.
			Speaker 2: Tell Mom and Dad what a cow is.
			God: It's like a big dog you can drink from.
			Speaker 3: And what's a dog?
			God: A small cow you can be friends with.
			Speaker 1: Tell them about giraffes. What's a giraaaaaffe?
			God: It's just a tall dog with—
			Speaker 3: Louder. Speak up.
00:01:37	Sound Effect	Transition	God: <i>[Louder, frustrated.]</i> Tall dog with a leg for a neck. Music swells and fades.
00:01:38	Jesse	Host	Season two takes place in the dark ages. In fact, that's what it's called— <i>Miracle Workers: Dark Ages</i> . Steve Buscemi plays a peasant named Edward, whose last name we cannot say on the

radio. That's because it describes his profession. He's scoops up human waste with a shovel. "Shoveler" is actually the second word in his last name, and I bet you can guess the first.

Let's hear a clip from the show. In this bit, Ed is training his daughter in the family business. They're just about to make their rounds in the village, with their shovels and cart. But before she goes off on her own, to work, Ed gives her the rundown. Music swells and fades.

00:02:18 Sound Effect Transition
00:02:19 Clip Clip

[The sound of birds chirping and chickens clucking.]

Edward: Well, you know the shoveler's pledge: anytime, anywhere, even if it's big.

Alexandra: That's the pledge?

Edward: Yeah! It's easy to remember, because it doesn't rhyme.

[Thumping sounds of the cart moving.]

Edward: First job. Big moment!

Alexandra: *[Sighs.]* Okay. Let's just get this over with.

Edward: Woah, woah, woah, oh—woah, easy there, cowboy! I gotta teach you the technique! Alright, now, never turn your back on the cart. And always lift from your neck. The neck is the body's power center.

Alexandra: Why are these shovels so short?

Edward: Well, this way we have to stoop over more and it's harder.

Alexandra: Those are negatives.

Edward: That's the way my dad taught me! I remember what he said, just before he died of shoveling: "Son, I feel weird." Music swells and fades.

00:03:04 Sound Effect Transition
00:03:05 Jesse Host
00:03:10 Steve Buscemi Guest
00:03:11 Crosstalk Crosstalk

[Laughs.] Steve Buscemi, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's really great to have you on the show.

Thank you so much!

Jesse: How did—

Steve: Nice to be here.

How did you end up making this very specific television program with the great Simon Rich?

Well, so, this is—it's an anthology series, so this is actually the second season. The first season was just called *Miracle Workers*, and it took place in Heaven, as if Heaven was a corporation, and I played God. And—but he's a very... disinterested God. Not terribly bright. And very secluded, kind of depressed, confused about how Earth just all went wrong. *[Chuckles.]* And he's ready to give it up.

00:03:12 Jesse Host
00:03:21 Steve Guest

And it's up to his angels to sort of convince him that it's a worthwhile endeavor to keep Earth going.

00:04:04 Jesse Host He's sort of like a sweatpants God.

00:04:06 Steve Guest He is, yeah. He's, sort of, just... just kind of gave up. *[Laughs.]* You know?

00:04:11 Jesse Host He's ready to pivot to a restaurant.

00:04:13 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Steve:** He is, yeah.

Jesse: He's just like, "Eeh, I'm going to bail on this."

Steve: Yes, yes, he wants to—he wants to destroy the Earth and open up this crazy restaurant somewhere in space.

Jesse: *[Laughs.]*

00:04:21 Steve Guest Um, and... the second season takes place in the dark ages, hence the title, *Miracle Workers: Dark Ages*. So, it's the same cast. And that was Geraldine Viswanathan that you heard in the that clip, and also Daniel Radcliff is in the series and John Bass and Karan Soni. So, it's all the same cast, and we all play different characters, now. And so, if the listeners couldn't tell from that clip, I am the town *[censored]* shoveler.

00:04:55 Jesse Host As evidenced by your surname.

[Steve agrees.]

Which, as was the custom at the time—

[Steve laughs and agrees.]

—reflects directly your occupation.

00:05:02 Steve Guest Yes, and Geraldine plays my daughter and John Bass plays my son. And Daniel Radcliff—in the first season, yeah, he played sort of like... this helpless angel who's, like, overwhelmed and—but in this one, he plays a spoiled prince who lives—who lives in a castle. And so, it's sort of a role reversal for us both.

00:05:27 Jesse Host You bring a lot of, kind of, casual humanity to this role that otherwise could be very broad. Like, it could be a big goof around.

[Steve agrees.]

But it requires you to do these big idea things in the plainest, most human way possible.

00:05:47 Steve Guest Well, if it was just—you know—jokes, I don't think I'd be interested. But what I loved about playing God was that *[laughs]*, you know, that he really did have, you know, this inner life that I found very sympathetic. You know. Even though he could be the biggest jerk, you know, a lot of the times. And in this season, I loved—I don't usually get to play a dad, you know? And so, in this one I have a couple of kids and he's, *[laughing]* you know, he is a pillar of the community! People depend on him. And he's very proud of what—of what he does.

[Jesse chuckles.]

And, um, so that was—you know—that was really something that I could hold onto and just always play that.

00:06:32	Jesse	Host	There is a scene from <i>Miracle Worker's</i> second season that I wanna play, I that I think reflects the esteem in which your character is held by the community. So, basically, your character and his daughter are out doing their work—which involves shoveling—and the cart into which they shovel that which they shovel runs into the prince, played by Daniel Radcliff—and he is not actually injured, but long story short, in order to not embarrass himself in front of <u>his</u> dad—the king—he orders your character to be executed. And so, these are what he believes will be his last words to his kids, before his execution.
00:07:15	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:07:16	Clip	Clip	<i>[The sounds of a crowd in the background.]</i> Edward: Just remember this life advice. If you work hard and be kind, everything will always go your way. Guard: Bring out the prisoner. Edward: Gotta go. Alexandra: Dad! Why did you take the blame?! Edward: <i>[Sighs.]</i> For the same reason I do everything. Because I'm your father. And I love you. Alexandra: I'm so sorry. Everything I said, I— Edward: <i>[Interrupting.]</i> No, no, no, no. It's okay. It's okay. The truth is, you're too smart for this job. <i>[A long, low note swells in the background.]</i> Edward: You get your brains from your mother. Before she died, I promised her I'd do my best for you. I taught you everything I knew, this morning. And I know you'll succeed at whatever you do. Guard: <i>[Clears throat pointedly.]</i> Edward: <i>[Cheerfully.]</i> Gotta go.
00:07:54	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:07:55	Steve	Guest	<i>[Jesse laughs.]</i> And happily, he goes! <i>[They both laugh.]</i>
00:08:00	Jesse	Host	I just—the—what's lovely about this character is, like, he has the toughest job that exists in the world, and also does not question any of the tough parts of it.
00:08:11	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Jesse: Like, he uses it—
00:08:13	Jesse	Host	Steve: No, he loves it. He uses like—like a dustpan to do his shoveling. <i>[Steve laughs.]</i>

A wooden dustpan. And is completely taken aback when his daughter suggests maybe they should use a long-handled implement. He's like, "Well, stooping! That's, like, part of the thing!"

[Steve agrees.]

"You know, you've gotta stoop!" And he really finds satisfaction in the, sort of, bounds of his world. That, like, he provides this service. He does this thing. And there's literally a scene where you're walking down the street and you say, "Could life get any better?"

[Laughs.]

00:08:47	Steve	Guest	He's—you know, he's working! <i>[Laughs.]</i> And he's providing for his family. And now his daughter is working with him. It's—life couldn't be better for him.
00:08:56	Jesse	Host	Your dad was a civil servant. He was a—he worked in the sanitation department.
00:08:59	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Steve: Yeah!

Jesse: In New York.

Steve: You know, when Simon first told me about my character for this season, as I'm hearing him talk, I—you know—I said, "Well, this guy reminds me a lot of my dad!"

00:09:10	Steve	Guest	You know, my dad did 30 years on the Department of Sanitation, in Brooklyn. And we were—we were well provided for. And, you know, he didn't have the most impressive job, <i>[laughs]</i> you know, that you wanted to brag about to your friends, but I never heard him complain. He just—you know, he really just—and I think he did enjoy what he did. I mean, he later became an assistant foreman and then a foreman, and—he passed away about five years ago, and at his wake I got to meet a lot of his friends that he worked with. And just to hear, you know, the stories about him and the way that they talked about him and how he really cared about the people that he worked with. And he had a—he had a good time, at work, and it was a job. But he took it seriously and I think he was—I think he felt good that he was—that he was able to—you know, he had four kids. And <i>[laughs]</i> and he provided well.
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00:10:17	Jesse	Host	Did you go into the civil service, which you did as a young man, in part because of his influence?
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00:10:23	Steve	Guest	It was—yeah. It was directly because of him. I mean, he made me—he made me and my brothers take whatever civil service exam came up, when we turned 18. And for me, it was the fire department. So, I took the test really kind of just to please him, but he made sure that I trained for it and he made sure that I was able to get older copies of the written exam. Which is—the written exam, it's pretty easy, but there's always a couple of, like, trick questions. And if you don't study the older exams, you won't be ready for them and you'll miss them on the—on the test. And I scored—you know, because of that, I was able to score high on the written exam.
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I did okay on my physical. And my name was put on the list, and it took four years for me to get hired. And by that time, I was—I was moving furniture, I was trying to do standup, I had moved into the city. And I was just exhausted and just looking for a change. And I thought, "Okay. I'll be a—I'll be a firefighter." And—not really

understanding what the job called for. But then, of course, once I took the job, I really fell in love with it. And, you know, just really admired the people that I was working with. And I did it for four years, and... and it stayed with me, all this time.

00:11:53 Jesse Host

Did you think about going to college, when you finished high school?

00:11:55 Steve Guest

I did. I went to Nassau Community College for one semester. And wasn't even taking any theatre classes. I was just, you know, taking some... liberal arts classes and it just—I mean, there were a couple of interesting classes that I wished I had, you know—if I could have just taken those classes, it was—there was, like, a jazz appreciation class and... there was a literature class. But then I also had to take biology and some other things, and I just thought, "This is like high school again." And I dropped out after a semester. And then figured out that, "Yeah, I think I do wanna be an actor."

I had only done a little bit of acting in high school. Although, it's something that I had always wanted to do when I was kid. You know, and as a kid, I did school plays and... but it wasn't until my senior year in high school that I started to, like, really do—really check out the theatre department. Anyway, I then—again, at the advice of my dad, he said, "Well, you should take acting classes, you know? There's—" But I was living in Long Island. I had no idea that these things even existed, you know? I ended up going to the Lee Strasberg Institute, on a six month—like, a fulltime course. Like, four acting classes a week and a movement class and a speech class and it was great!

00:13:26 Jesse Host

Even more with Steve Buscemi still to come. When we return from a quick break, we'll look back on the first ever movie in which he acted: one that ended up being a pivotal moment in the history of American queer cinema. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:13:42 Promo Promo

Music: Quiet, bluesy music plays.

Gene Demby: What's good, y'all? As you know, February is Black History month, and all throughout that month NPR's *Code Switch* is going to be running a special series about the history of black resistance. Because as long as black folks have been oppressed in this country—which is, you know, forever—we've also been fighting back. Listen and subscribe.

00:14:01 Promo Promo

[Music fades out.]
[A quick, energetic drumroll.]

Music: Exciting techno music plays.

Jarrett Hill: Hey, I'm Jarrett Hill, co-host of the brand-new Maximum Fun podcast, *FANTI!*

Tre'vell Anderson: And Tre'vell Anderson. I'm the other, more fabulous, co-host, and the reason you really should be tuning in!

Jarrett: I feel the nausea rising.

Tre'vell: To be *FANTI* is to be a big fan of something, but also have some challenging or "anti" feelings toward it.

Jarrett: Kind of like Kanye.

Tre'vell: We're all fans of Kanye. He's a musical genius, but, like, you know...

Jarrett: He thinks slavery's a choice.

Tre'vell: Or, like, *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. Like, I love the drama, but do I wanna see black women fighting each other on screen? [*Singing.*] Hell, to the naaaaaw. To the naw-naw-naaaw.

Jarrett: We're tackling all of those complex and complicated conversations about the people, places, and things that we love.

Tre'vell: Even though they may not love us back.

Jarrett: *FANTI!* Maximum Fun! Podcast!

Tre'vell: Yeah!

[*Music fades out.*]

00:14:49 Jesse Host Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm here with the actor Steve Buscemi. He has, of course, performed in literally hundreds of films and TV shows. These days, you can see him on TBS. He stars alongside Daniel Radcliff in the brilliant comedy series, *Miracle Workers: Dark Ages*.

[*Steve agrees several times as Jesse talks.*]

I read this great profile that John Lahr wrote of you for *The New Yorker*, 15 years or so ago. And he basically—he described your dad encouraging you to take acting classes in a way that I loved reading, 'cause it's—you know, you—in my job, you hear lots of people describe what their parent's relationships were to their artistic aspirations, right? And basically, you had been hit by a bus when you were a preschooler, and there was, like, a little bit of money that was in a—like, an educational trust fund kind of deal. Right. I got a—I got a settlement, yeah.

00:15:41 Steve Guest
00:15:43 Jesse Host And your dad—at least as John Lahr described it—basically said, "Look, you should take acting lessons. You don't—don't become an actor. But you gotta do something!" [*Laughs.*]

00:15:56 Steve Guest Well, yeah. I mean—
00:15:57 Jesse Host Like, "This is like something you care about!"
00:16:00 Steve Guest So, here's the thing—when my dad was growing up, he had two best friends. One became a firefighter and one became an actor. So—not that I had, like, a connection into the business, but I actually knew somebody. My uncle Pete, you know, [*chuckles*] he was my dad's best friend—Peter Miller. He was an actor, in the '50s. He was, you know, he had a little part in *Rebel Without a Cause*. He was in Robert Altman's first film, *The Delinquents*, and he had a great part in that. Did a bunch of TV, when that was—you know, like—really kind of coming into its own. And then—and then he left and he—and he became an investment banker.

So, by the time I wanted to sort of go into acting, he wasn't in the business anymore. But I would talk to him. And my idea was that I had to get out to Hollywood. Like, that's where you become an actor. I had no idea, you know? And my dad was—he was trying to keep me in New York so that when my name came up for the fire department, that I would be in New York.

[Jesse chuckles.]

But he knew I liked acting and he knew—he actually knew about acting classes, because of his—because of Pete! Peter Miller went to the neighborhood playhouse. I think we did check that out, but then I ended up interviewing at the Lee Strasberg, but my dad also told me, you know, “Yeah, take acting classes, because it's good just for life.” You know? And I told them that on the interview.

[Laughing.] And I got a very stern look, you know, from the person interviewing me, saying, “Now, if you come here, you have to want to be an actor.”

00:17:40 Jesse Host

And I was like, “Yeah, yeah, of course I do! Yes. Yes.”
[Laughs.] That's like the first thing they tell you at acting school.

[Steve chuckles.]

There's like a long series of classes for the first few weeks where just, basically, every teacher is just giving you lecture on why you shouldn't become an actor.

[Steve agrees.]

00:17:59 Steve Guest

But you made it through that!
I somehow—you know, I mean, I had the money to pay for a fulltime *[laughs]* six-month course and I loved it. You know. It really—

00:18:10 Jesse Host

Did you think you were good at it?

00:18:12 Steve Guest

[Draws in a long breath.] It took me a while to even do anything in the classes. I used to just sit there. But in one of the classes, they did improvisation, and I found that I was kind of okay at that. And then once I started, you know, doing some scene-work... I just felt like I, you know—that I really, really loved it. One of the earliest scenes I did was from *A View from the Bridge*, with Linda Hamilton. And it was exciting! You know, and then—you know, in acting class you can, you know—you get to do things that maybe you wouldn't normally do in the course of your careers. And it was also—I learned about playwrights that I knew nothing about, you know. So, it was a huge education, for me. And... it was exciting, and it was fun!

00:19:02 Jesse Host

Did you have a particular aspiration or idea of what your career would be?

00:19:08 Steve Guest

No. No. I mean... I knew I liked comedy. And I had—you know, some designs on becoming a standup, because I love standup comedy and I would see that some standups would then get a series or they would, you know, be a guest star on a series. And I—

[Steve agrees several times as Jesse talks.]

00:19:30	Jesse	Host	This was like in the—in the late '70s or so. When that was—when that was truly—that was like the era of get on <i>Carson</i> , get invited to the couch, get your own sitcom.
00:19:40	Steve	Guest	Yeah, if you look at Freddie Prinze, he was 17 years old when he did <i>The Tonight Show</i> , and then he got his own series. I was—you know, I mean, yeah, he was young, but he had—like—a life experience! I was this, you know, kid from Long Island, and I was trying to do standup at age 18. I used to sit in the back of The Improv, in New York, and just watch—you know—people like Paul Reiser and Jerry Seinfeld and Gilbert Gottfried. And every once and a while, I would get on—just, late at night. But it was great experience to, like, see them and that's really what I wanted to do.
			But standup, for me, it was hard for me to find my own voice. I didn't like the aloneness of it. And I realized, you know, once I started taking the acting classes was that I liked being with other people. You know. And so, a little later on—after I had moved to the East Village—I met people like Mark Boone Junior and this wonderful comedian actor Rockets Redglare and—who was in a lot of Jim Jarmusch's early films. And we all just started to write and perform our own work. So, that was a huge thing for me—to not only be acting, but also to be writing! And improvising and then being in a community of people who were all just trying to do their own work and—yeah, this was like the early '80s, in the East Village, and it was just an amazing time to be there, 'cause—you know, in terms of music and art, performance art, dance. And it took me a while to, sort of, find my way. But after a while, I was—I was in the thick of it.
00:21:36	Jesse	Host	<i>[Steve agrees several times as Jesse talks.]</i> I actually—I found a clip of you and Mark Boone Junior, who had a double act for a long time. <i>[Steve makes a sound of surprise.]</i> And I watched it—it was—it's recorded in the—in the late '80s, which I imagine was towards the end of your run. But it's such a great piece. It's like a 13-minute scene with the two of you. And it was, like, recorded on a—you know—maybe a prosumer VHS camcorder or something like that. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> Like, it's not the finest video, but I sat—I sat at my computer screen and watched it on YouTube all the way through, 'cause I found it so compelling.
00:22:12	Steve	Guest	Oh, wow.
00:22:13	Jesse	Host	And it was a lot less—when I heard that you had been in a double act, I presumed something a lot jokier and standupier than what it actually is. Which is very theatrey. <i>[Steve chuckles.]</i>
00:22:30	Steve	Guest	It's a real scene. Yeah, we never considered ourselves standups. I mean, it was always these little theatre pieces. Mostly shorts, but we did do a couple of feature-length plays. And yeah. It was—I mean, it was—there was all—it was always infused with humor. But the humor came out of the characters' personalities or the situation that they were in.

00:22:56	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[Steve agrees several times as Jesse continues.]</i> So, I'm gonna play a little clip. So, your character is a professional panhandler. His character is, sort of... is apparently, maybe I professional panhandler, but is dressed very nicely.</p> <p><i>[Steve chuckles.]</i></p> <p>Relative to you. You're wearing, like, torn jeans and a beanie and stuff like that. And he's wearing a coat and tie. And he comes up to you as you're asking passer's by for change and giving them a— giving them a line about you'll—your wallet got stolen, and so forth. And asks you for money. Which you're not nuts about.</p>
00:23:32	Sound Effect	Transition	<p><i>[Steve laughs quietly.]</i> Music swells and fades.</p>
00:23:34	Clip	Clip	<p>Steve: <i>[In a New York accent.]</i> If you're gonna stick around here, maybe I should give you some advice. Or else you're gonna die out here, alright? Look. <i>[Thumping sound.]</i> Whenever somebody passes by, even if they don't give you nothing—alright? Always say have a nice day, god bless you, whatever.</p> <p>Audience: <i>[Laughs.]</i></p> <p>Steve: Because, tell you what—even if they don't give you nothing, alright!? 'Cause maybe they pass you by in the morning, right? They don't give you nothing. But if you're nice to them, then maybe later on, on their way back, they remember you. People appreciate a little courte-ism, you know what I'm saying?</p> <p>Audience: <i>[Laughs. One audience member's drawling laugh rings out above the rest.]</i></p> <p>Steve: You understand how it works? I mean I—you know, I kind of know this scene. I mean, I know how to deal with people is what I'm trying to say, you know? <i>[Beat.]</i> Hey, what are you staring at?</p> <p>Audience: <i>[Laughs.]</i></p> <p>Steve: I ain't no freak! Get out of here! Hey, get out of here, man!</p> <p>Speaker: <i>[Yelling.]</i> Go on! Get outta here! Huh?!</p> <p>Steve: It's alright. It's alright. I know that guy. It's—</p> <p>Speaker: Come on!</p> <p>Steve: He's a creep. He's alright.</p> <p>Audience: <i>[Laughs.]</i></p> <p>Steve: <i>[Yelling.]</i> Hey! Have a nice day! <i>[Slapping noise.]</i></p>
00:24:24	Sound Effect	Transition	<p>Audience: <i>[Laughs.]</i> Music swells and fades.</p>

00:24:25 Jesse Host *[Chuckles.]* There was a point—I read somewhere that the two of you were doing 40 minutes of material, every week.

00:24:33 Steve Guest We—yeah, for a while. Do you remember the club Folk City? It was this music club, you know, in The Village. I mean—

00:24:40 Jesse Host Yeah, a very well-known club.

00:24:41 Steve Guest Yeah! I mean, mostly a music club. *[Chuckles.]* And—but they had a—like, a comedy night, each week, and then they had a theatre night. And we were booked for months. Like, three months. And we had to come up with a new show each week. And we usually waited ‘til the last minute.

[They laugh.]

00:25:04 Jesse Host You know? But that’s when you—you know, you get real inspiration, yeah.

I mean, that is, like, bananas! It’s hard enough to—ask, go ask somebody that writes for *Saturday Night Live*. It’s hard enough to come up with five minutes of material a week.

00:25:16 Steve Guest *[Laughs.]* Much less half an hour or 40 minutes! We recycled some earlier things! But yeah. But, basically we would—we would come up with, you know—we really tried to come up with new material each week.

00:25:25 Jesse Host By that point, did you think, “Ah, I’m gonna be a theatre actor.” Or “I’m gonna be a film actor.” Or well, you’re just happy to be doing stuff?

00:25:33 Steve Guest I was just happy to be doing anything! You know. The fact that I could perform was just everything to me. I mean, yeah. I had designs on wanting to do TV or—and, at that time, independent film was just starting to come into its own. You know. And, yeah. I wanted to work with the people that I saw around me. Like, you know, Jim Jarmusch, Susan Seidelman. You know, she was making films. And people like Betty Gordon and Sarah Driver. Eric Mitchel. And then I started to work with some of them. And that was very exciting.

00:26:16 Jesse Host Did you feel like you were as cool and sophisticated and accomplished as they were?

00:26:22 Steve Guest Oh! No, no. I felt—I really didn’t know anything. You know. I moved into the East Village I think around 1978, and because it—you know, the rent was so cheap. And it took me so long to realize that this scene was happening around me. And then I, you know, I liked it, but I had no idea how to, you know, approach it or how to get noticed. And I was very shy. And it was really just—I just got lucky that I had some good friends. One of them was a firefighter who lived in my building, Dennis Gordon. And he was a pretty hip guy. And he just *[laughing]* knew, like, the places to go and he would bring me along. And then he introduced me to another firefighter who was an actor, Dean Tulipane.

He was doing some theatre, and so I ended up—you know—doing some stuff with him and his troupe. And slowly, it just kind of snowballed. But I was, you know, I was still on the fire department and kind of juggling doing that and then doing these shows. And then starting to do film.

00:27:31 Jesse Host Your wife passed away last year and the two of you were married for, like, 30 years.

[Steve agrees.]

00:27:37 Steve Guest You must have met her around that time.
Yeah. We lived across the street from each other *[chuckles]* on East 10th Street. And she was also doing work. She was a brilliant choreographer, dancer, performer, performance artist, filmmaker. And she combined everything. And I—we literally met on the street. I have to say, I was a little bit of a stalker.

[Jesse laughs.]

00:28:07 Jesse Host Because I lived across the street—is it—does it count as stalking if you're watching from your window? You know?
00:28:09 Steve Guest *[Breaks into laughter.]* Weeell—uuuh...
Little bit. Okay.

[Jesse agrees, laughing.]

It's not like I was standing outside her building. But I literally would just, like, get up in the morning and see if she would be on the street and I would notice what time she'd come out of her building. Then I would—I had a dog, and I would hurry up and get my dog and walk the dog at that moment, hoping to see her. And I have to admit, I also knew roughly what time she'd be coming home from work. *[Chuckles bashfully.]* And again, I'd be out there with my—with my dog, Chief. And those were the beginnings of these little conversations that we would have. And she had actually seen—she had seen me in a play—John Jesurun, who is a brilliant playwright, director. He was doing a series at the time, called *Chang in a Void Moon*. He would write a new show each week, that we performed on Monday nights, at the Pyramid Club.

And then he was doing some other, longer plays. One was called *Dog's Eye View*, that we did at La Mama. And Jo saw that—Jo Andres, my wife. And she told me what she did. And so, I would check her out. I would—and... you know, I mean, I fell in love with her when I first saw her. Seeing her onstage was just like, "Oh my god!" Like, and she's also this, like, brilliant performer. So, yeah. That was a—that was a magical time.

00:29:31 Jesse Host Did you ever dance in one of her shows? She was maybe best known as a—as a choreographer of kind of, like, event dances. Like, performance art dances with projections and stuff like that.
00:29:43 Steve Guest Yeah! I danced in a couple of her pieces. And... she was a real taskmaster.

[They laugh.]

And... but it was great. I loved—I loved the precision of her work. A lot of dancers, you know, at that time it was—it was more... yeah, I don't know. I really don't know a lot about dance. But more like freeform or contact improv or, you know, choreography that I probably wouldn't know how to do. But Jo's choreography was very precise and, you know—and she just taught me how to do it and I—yeah, there were a couple of shows where I got to dance with her. And it was... it was wonderful.

00:30:29	Jesse	Host	I wanna play a clip from your film debut, which was a movie called <i>Parting Glances</i> , from 1986. And I watched some bits of this online, today, and number one: you were—you were very pretty. You're a pretty dude.
00:30:45	Steve	Guest	Wow! Well, thank you!
00:30:46	Jesse	Host	<i>[Laughs.]</i> Yeah, like, you—your character in the—your character in the film is, like, a rock singer.
			<i>[Steve agrees.]</i>
00:30:56	Steve	Guest	And... you wear it well.
00:30:57	Jesse	Host	Why thank you. You're a very convincing rock-and-roll heartthrob. And this was one of the first—this film came out in the mid-80s. '86. And it was one of the first independent films to deal directly with the AIDs crisis.
			<i>[Steve agrees.]</i>
00:31:16	Steve	Guest	And I wonder, before we play this clip from it, how you ended up being in the movie? Well... when Boone and I were doing the shows at Folk City, there was another troupe that—they were doing shows there. Mainly improv. And one of the actresses was named Kathy Kinney. And she took a liking to us, to Boone and I, and Kathy and I became pals. And she was friends with the—Bill Sherwood, who wrote and directed <i>Parting Glances</i> . And he had been looking, you know, to fill this role of this character of Nick. And she told Bill about me! And he came to Folk City to see me perform. And then he asked me to audition for the film, which I did. And he told me that if he hadn't seen me already onstage, he would not have given me the part based on my audition.
			<i>[Jesse laughs.]</i>
00:32:14	Jesse	Host	'Cause I, you know, I was—I guess I was terrible <i>[laughs]</i> at—on the audition. But that's how it came about. Your character had AIDs and was dying of AIDs.
			<i>[Steve confirms.]</i>
00:32:23	Steve	Guest	You must have, at the time, living where you did—in that time and place—you must have known people who were sick. Do you know, at that time, I only knew one person who was sick. I had certainly, you know, read about it and there was, like, this... you know, fear in the air about, you know, how bad is this going to get. And I was reading about people being sick and dying, but at that point, I hadn't known anybody. It wasn't until a few years later that a lot of our friends that we knew in theatre and the dance world and in the performance world were getting sick and dying. Bill Sherwood among them. You know, he only made the one—the one film.
00:33:04	Jesse	Host	I just had a family friend pass away from complications of HIV, and he had been HIV+ since about when this movie came out.
00:33:15	Steve	Guest	Oh, wow.
			<i>[Steve agrees several times as Jesse talks.]</i>

00:33:16	Jesse	Host	<p>And had a rich and incredible life. You know. Far outlived his own expectations, certainly. Anyone else's as well. But I remember, even being a kid as—yeah, I was born in 1981, so this was really when I was, like, in elementary school that it was really heavy.</p> <p><i>[Steve expresses surprise.]</i></p> <p>And, like, I remember just—it would just be someone I knew at church was gone. You know, someone that—it was—I think, sometimes, for people who are... people who are younger or maybe didn't grow up in urban areas with big gay populations or whatever, it's kind of hard to describe how scary it was, then. I mean, like, I—as somebody who had no idea, basically, what sex was, 'cause I was eight or nine—even for me, it was very scary. 'Cause it was my neighbor and my mom's friend and, you know, etc. etc.</p>
00:34:16	Steve	Guest	<p>It truly was scary. And especially in the beginning, when there was so much that was unknown about it. And it truly was—it felt like it was a death sentence. If you had it, it meant—you know—you had, like, a year or two, at best. And it really did—it kind of swept through the community that I was in. You know, we lost some really wonderful and talented people that—it was—it was very traumatic. You know. It was—it was—it was really... that was, I think, the roughest part of, like, living during that time. You know, was losing so many amazing people.</p>
00:35:06	Jesse	Host	<p>Let's play a scene from <i>Parting Glances</i>, with my guest Steve Buscemi. He plays in it a character named Nick, who is the ex of one of the leads, whose name is—whose character's name is Michael. And they're friends and have some feelings for each other. And Michael is caring for Nick, who doesn't really have anybody else to care for him. And this scene is at Michael's partner Robert's going away party.</p> <p><i>[Steve agrees.]</i></p> <p>And he's going overseas. And Steve—Steve's character runs into a younger guy, at the party.</p>
00:35:45	Sound Effect	Transition	<p>Music swells and fades.</p>
00:35:47	Clip	Clip	<p>Nick: There's nothing like—well, he was a freshman at NYU. I'm hanging out in the Village.</p> <p><i>[Music plays softly in the background.]</i></p> <p>Speaker: I'm a Columbia freshman.</p> <p>Nick: Will you shut up a minute. I'm hanging out in the Village, and I'm a couple years older than Michael, and I see this Midwest, nerdy-type kid walking down a street. So, I chat him up a little bit. He don't know anything. I mean, the whole scene is happening four blocks away from where he's going to school, and he don't even know it. So, I show him around. You know, we got bar-hopping that night. Terry had this place over on Barrow Street. So, we go there. There's a party going on. Michael went wild. He almost flunked out, his first year. We tore this town apart. And that's what you need.</p>

			Find somebody your own age and get your hair messed up a little bit.
00:36:25	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:36:26	Jesse	Host	Even more with Steve Buscemi after the break. Stay with us! It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:36:33	Promo	Promo	Music: Uplifting, orchestral music plays.
			Moujan Zolfaghari: Hey everyone, Moujan Zolfaghari here with the cast of <i>Mission to Zyxx</i> !
			The Cast: <i>[Speaking out of sync and staggered.]</i> Hello!
			Moujan: Our fourth season premieres on February 19 th , and for those of you who aren't familiar with the show, we decided to ask one of our characters to give you a quick recap of what's happened so far.
			<i>[Distant cheering.]</i>
			Moujan: So, say hi, C-53!
			C-53: <i>[Voice distorted electronically.]</i> Hello. How may I be of service?
			Moujan: C, can you tell us what's happening in the Zyxx Quadrant, leading up to season 4?
			C-53: <i>[Pleasantly.]</i> Certainly. The evil Nermut Bundaloy—not to be confused with the nonevil Nermut Bundaloy of no relation—murdered his fellow counselors and crowned himself emperor of the galaxy, with the help of myself and the rest of the crew of <i>The Bargerian Jade</i> . Xemonite Cleptics that are not the emperor and an ancient, cosmic entity known as Beano into a chasm, aboard the gigantic Planet Crusher Crusher—a machine built to crush Planet Crushers, which in turn which were designed to crush planets—resulting in implosion, created a vast celestial object with unknown powers. We're currently in search of our formal rebel commander, Seesu Gundu, who may yet reunite our fractured galaxy. Is that sufficient?
			Moujan: Yeah! All clear to me! <i>Mission to Zyxx</i> Season 4 debuts on February 19 th , on Maximum Fun.
			<i>[Music ends with a triumphant chorus of trumpets.]</i>
00:37:32	Promo	Promo	Speaker: NPR Music wants to hear your songs. If you're an on the side musician, enter the Tiny Disk Contest! Just send us a video of you playing an original song behind a desk, by March 30 th . Learn more at NPR.org/tinydeskcontest .
00:37:46	Jesse	Promo	Hey <i>Bullseye</i> listeners, it's Jesse! I just wanted to break in here, for a second, and let you know that MaximumFun.org has a brand-new show that I think you will really like! It is called <i>FANTI</i> . It's about that stuff in popular culture that we love, but maybe doesn't love us back. Our problematic faves, our favorite problematics. It's hosted by Tre'vell Anderson and Jarrett Hill, and both of them are brilliant and hilarious. Like, deeply insightful into things, but also very, very

funny. They're also really good pals. So, the two of them have a wonderful, warm rapport. And I can't recommend this show highly enough. We've been—we've been working so hard on it, and I really think you're gonna like it.

It's called *FANTI*. It's a combination of "anti" and "fan". It's spelled F-A-N-T-I. And you can find it in your favorite podcatcher. And I encourage you to do so! The first episode is about Kevin Hart and his prodigious talent and his many half-assed apologies. And, uh, *[laughs]* I think—I think you'll really like it! So, search for *FANTI* in your favorite podcast app.

00:38:55 Music Music
00:39:00 Jesse Host

Chiming electronic music.

It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest, Steve Buscemi, is an actor and director. He's starring on the TBS series, *Miracle Workers: Dark Ages*. It's running now, on TBS.

I think you kind of made your film career with *Reservoir Dogs*, which came out a few years later.

[Steve agrees.]

00:39:22 Steve Guest

And how did you get that part?

I auditioned for it twice. The first time I auditioned for it, it was with Seymour Cassel. I was working with Seymour on Alexander Rockwell's film, *In the Soup*, and they brought us in together. And then, I guess a few weeks later, I got a call back. And like I—you know, like I said, I was not a great auditioner. So, I just, you know, I wasn't sure at all if I was going to get the part. And then I was invited to do a workshop of a few scenes, in the Sundance Lab. And Quentin was going to be there. But the condition was, you know—it didn't necessarily mean that I got the part. But I just wanted to go, and I just wanted to work on the scenes. And if I didn't get the part, fine.

And it was at Sundance that Quentin told me that I—that I had the part. And that was very exciting, because I really felt like this is—I felt like the movie was special. I, you know, I thought it was a really, you know, so uniquely written and very funny and—but then also, you know, really horrifying. You know.

[Jesse chuckles.]

00:40:43 Jesse Host

You know, and Quentin did that—you know, he did all of us actors a favor by putting, you know, our names up on the screen. You know, in like the opening credits, you know. Like, right—like, right below our faces. So, yeah. That really opened a lot of doors.

How did being in that movie change your career? What happened when you were in a very hot indie movie and your name was printed underneath your face, in the, you know, introductory sequence?

00:40:57 Steve Guest

Well, I mean it was great, because casting directors knew me, now. And more directors knew me. But even before that happened, for me it was just a huge step to be working with people like Harvey Keitel. You know. Harvey actually—he was one of the producers on the film, and he paid for Quentin and Laurence Bender, the producer, to come to New York to see New York actors. Because

they were gonna cast it all out in LA. So, if Harvey hadn't have done that, I never would have even been considered for the film. And so, just to be working with somebody like him—and Eddie Bunker, who I knew from the movie *Straight Time*, that was—you know, Lawrence Tierney and, you know, and I was just starting to get familiar with Tim Roth's work.

And so, for me it was just very exciting to be in a movie like that and to work with that caliber—that caliber of people. And then to be, you know, with Quentin who was—it was his first film! And his, you know, enthusiasm for what he was doing was sort of contagious. You know, we all felt excited to be doing this. So, even if the film didn't, you know, make us—make a splash, for me, it was already successful, because I just—you know—loved doing it so much. And it really felt like, "Oh, I'm—you know, sort of in a bigger league, now."

00:42:33 Jesse Host I feel like it really set a template for your later performances, in that you have a remarkable quality of sweetness, onscreen, and—I don't know, maybe it's because you—I mean, you have such beautiful eyes. Like, that's one of your calling cards onscreen. And maybe it comes from that. Maybe it's something you're doing on purpose. I don't know. But the fact that you are so convincingly sweet, while also being able to be a murderous psychopath...

[Steve makes a concerned "hm" sound, causing both of them to laugh.]

Really—like, I was thinking about what's the—what's the connection between—what's the connection between the TV show and some of that past work, and it's that, like, you have such a convincing sweetness that, like—that is what—like, you had this series of roles where you were, in some capacity, *[laughing]* murderous.

00:43:30 Steve Guest Generally. But, like, the audience wants to stay with you! But it's funny, I don't see it as—I mean, I'm glad you see, like, a sweetness in, like, Mr. Pink or my character in *Fargo*, 'cause I don't—I don't see the sweetness in them!

00:43:40 Jesse Host But, I mean, like—that's the thing that is special about the performances!

00:43:43 Steve Guest Well, but what I do feel like is that these guys—that they're real people. That nobody, you know, becomes a criminal because they think it's, you know, cool. You know. It's... there's something—there's a desperation behind it and there's always a backstory that made me feel sympathetic towards, like, who this person might be. And so, I always try and, you know, kind of keep that in mind.

00:44:12 Jesse Host Did you have to re-steer the ship away from psychopaths, five years after *Reservoir Dogs*?

00:44:20 Steve Guest Yeah, you know, after a while it gets...

[They laugh.]

I mean, I had—I had played plenty before then, too. But just not in films that people really knew. But, yeah. It was sort of a thing with me. Whenever I would get a script I would, sort of like, see what page I get beaten up on.

[Jesse laughs.]

			Or see what page that I'm trying to kill somebody. Or when I get killed. And after a while, I was just like, "I have to—I do have to steer this in another direction."
00:44:49	Jesse	Host	You just start looking for dads.
00:44:51	Steve	Guest	Yeah, or comedies! Or something! You know, I mean, I was so—it was—it was so much fun, like, you know to work with Adam Sandler on his films. Even though, in his first film, I did play a psychopath. But!
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>
			In <i>Billy Madison</i> . But yeah, I mean, I—you know, I love doing all sorts of genres and characters and... yeah. I think mixing it up is really important.
00:45:20	Jesse	Host	You have so many memorable roles that I wish I had time to ask you about. But I wanna focus on the crème de la crème, which is the time you were on <i>30 Rock</i> .
00:45:30	Steve	Guest	<i>[Surprised.]</i> Okaaay.
			<i>[Steve agrees several times as Jesse continues.]</i>
00:45:32	Jesse	Host	<i>[They laugh.]</i> Which is, like, maybe my favorite TV show of all time. And on it, you were a— <i>[laughs]</i> you were a private detective. A somewhat dopey private detective who—
00:45:43	Steve	Guest	For some reason, Alec Baldwin's character kept hiring!
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>
00:45:46	Jesse	Host	Yes! Yeah. Exactly. And it ended up becoming, like, this truly—well, I'm gonna play—I'm gonna play a scene from it.
			<i>[Steve agrees.]</i>
			And we will talk about it. The episode was called "The Tuxedo Begins", and Alec Baldwin's character, Jack Donaghy, has his phone stolen at knifepoint in a construction tunnel. And he hires your character, who is a—you know—55ish-year-old Steve Buscemi, to recover the phone.
00:46:21	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:46:22	Clip	Clip	Music: Jazzy, film noir inspired music.
			Lenny Wosniak: You got mugged, huh, Mr. Donaghy? And you caught the guy who did it. Good for you.
			Jack Donaghy: <i>[Groaning.]</i> Oh, no, Len. Tracy is helping me with this.
			Tracy Jordan: But I can see how you went there! I have a criminal skull shape.
			Jack: Len, Commissioner Kelly and I are friends. We have competing columns in <i>Irish Arguments Weekly</i> , America's only all-caps magazine. But Ray hasn't returned my phone call, and I know that you were once a police officer.

Lenny: I was part of a special taskforce of very young-looking cops who infiltrated high schools.

[The music swells as we transition to a flashback.]

Lenny, disguised as a teen: How do you, fellow kids?

Teen: What?!

[A whooshing sound as we return to the present.]

Lenny: So, I'm glad you called me, Mr. Donaghy. I checked with my contacts on the force and got you this free pamphlet.

Jack: Len...
Music swells and fades.

00:47:01 Sound Effect Transition

00:47:02 Steve Guest *[Jesse giggles in the background.]*

But you know what's amazing about that is that—you know, that was really, kind of like, a throwaway, you know—like, not scene—it was like four seconds.

00:47:13 Jesse Host Yeah, at most. *[He continues laughing in the background.]*

00:47:14 Steve Guest I'm amazed that, you know, that it's had... this—the traction that it's had, like all these years.

00:47:21 Jesse Host How do you feel about the lasting testament of your brilliant artistic career almost certainly being you in a backwards baseball hat, holding a skateboard off your shoulder, saying, "How do you do, fellow kids?"

00:47:33 Steve Guest I'm holding two skateboards.

00:47:34 Jesse Host *[Bursting into laughter again.]* Oh, thank you!

00:47:37 Steve Guest Um, I love it. I love it. And, you know, that character—I was, you know, I was—I did it—it was either in, like, in the first or second season. And then I started directing a little bit on the show, and it was really just supposed to be like a one-off. And I rarely campaigned for parts or for, you know—but I remember talking to Robert Carlyle, one of the creators of the show, and brilliant writer and I sort of was planting in his ear, like, "Can we bring him back?"

[Jesse chuckles.]

And I saw—like, the look on his face was like, "*[Beat.]* Yeeah, okay. Why not?" And then he did! In a big way.

00:48:16 Jesse Host He's like, "Weird priority, but okay!"

[Steve agrees and they laugh.]

Well, Steve Buscemi, I'm so grateful to you for taking the time to be on *Bullseye*. I've so admired your work for so long, and it was really nice to get to talk to you.

00:48:28 Steve Guest Thank you so much. It was—it's really wonderful to talk to you. Thank you.

00:48:32 Jesse Host Steve Buscemi. *Miracle Workers: Dark Ages* airs Tuesday nights, on TBS. It is super funny. You can also check it out on [TBS.com](https://www.tbs.com).

00:48:42 Music Music Easy transition music.

00:48:45 Jesse Host That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is produced at MaximumFun.org world headquarters, overlooking MacArthur Park in beautiful Los Angeles, California—where some local teens were spotted by my colleague Daniel, playing on the barge that's in the lake. I'm told—it says here on this paper—folks around the office are calling them The Barge Boys.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio is our associate producer. We got help from Casey O'Brien. Our production fellows are Jordan Kauwling and Kristen Bennett. Welcome to Kristen! Great to have her here, in the office. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. He makes all those beats for the show and if you go over to Bandcamp, you can find a compilation he made of music from *Bullseye* that you can buy on a pay-what-you-will basis. And you can listen to it while you're studying, or whatever. Freestyling. Whatever you want. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Our thanks to The Go! Team and to their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use it.

And one last thing: there are decades of interviews in the annals of *Bullseye* and its predecessor, *The Sound of Young America*. They're all on our website, MaximumFun.org. We also have a bunch of stuff with Simon Rich, who is the creator of *Miracle Workers*. Not just interviews, but also him reading a number of pieces he's written for his various, spectacularly hilarious books. We are also on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Just search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* and keep up with the show there.

00:50:26 Promo Promo And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

Speaker: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[Music fades out.]