Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

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

Music fades out.

I’m Jesse Thorn. It’s Bullseye.

“Huddle Formation” from the album Thunder, Lighting, Strike by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

“Maybe you’re stuck at home, just like I am. If you are, now is a great time to watch Brooklyn Nine-Nine, if you haven’t already. It’s my favorite sitcom on network television. The premise for Brooklyn Nine-Nine isn’t really groundbreaking. Essentially, it’s: funny cop show. The 99 is a precinct in Brooklyn. But it could be in almost any big city. The cops are good at their job, and you’re reminded about that every now and then by a clever case solution or a quick-cut action sequence.

But neither of those things are really the point of the show. It’s a deeply warm, deeply funny office comedy with a lot of great jokes. So many jokes. The police at the precinct care about their jobs and they care about each other. The show was created by my guest, Dan Goor, along with Mike Schur. And Dan is now the day-to-day showrunner of the show.

Let’s listen to a little bit from the show’s latest season, which is airing now. The season kicks off with a kind of role-switch. Raymond Holt, the precincts Captain, is played by Andre Braugher. Holt has been demoted to patrolman for a year. That means Holt is now a subordinate to all of the detectives that used to work under him—including Jake Peralta, played by Andy Samberg. On the first episode of the new season, there has been a crisis. Someone attempted to assassinate a city counselor, and the shooter is still at large. The 99 is on it, with Peralta taking charge of the scene. But there’s one snag: patrol officer Raymond Holt is already on the scene, ready to take orders. Kind of.

Music swells and fades.

Raymond Holt: Detective, I thought I saw a clue on the sidewalk. I apologize for not properly securing the scene.

[Music ends.]

Jake Peralta: [Casually.] No need to apologize. I wasn’t even that mad.

Charles Boyle: You said you wanted whoever messed up off the case!

Jake: It doesn’t matter! The point is no one needs to get in trouble.
Holt: Look, you don’t need to pity me just because Madeline Wuntch demoted me for a year. I’ve been stripped of my accomplishments and lost the respect of everyone in my life, including my dog.

Jake: [Heartbroken.] Cheddar?! No!

Holt: Yes! Now, he only poops for Kevin.

Jake: [Disappointed.] Oh, sir.

Terry Jeffords: We don’t have time to take all this in. There’s a shooter on the loose. Are you guys gonna be okay working together or not?

Holt: Of course, we will! I took an oath to protect this city, no matter what my rank. I have no problem with Detective Peralta being my commander.

Jake: And I have no problem commanding him. Here, watch this. Captain, will you please lock down North 3rd Street, if that’s okay with you, Captain?

Holt: It certainly is!

Jake: [Beat.] Impressed?

Terry: You said “please”, and you called him “captain” twice.

Jake: [Defensively.] Yeah, we don’t have time for this, Lieutenant. There’s a shooter on the loose!

Dan, welcome to Bullseye. It’s great to have you on the show. It’s great to be here! Thank you so much.

So, when you conceived of Brooklyn Nine-Nine some years ago, in what I gather was series of breakfast meetings with Mike Schur.

[Dan agrees.]

What was the piece that made it make sense to you? I think the thing that really made it make sense to me was the fact that it was a police station—that we would be able to lean on the history of cop comedy and buddy cop comedy and also really utilize the sort of vocabulary of cop television shows as a shortcut, so that people would instantly recognize the world and feel comfortable in it.

One of the things about this show is that while not every episode is procedural in nature, most are driven by crimes and solving a crime—two thirds, maybe.

Yeah, I’d say a half to two thirds. I mean, one of the things we really tried to do, right off the bat, was say, “Look, there are three types of episodes we can do. We can do really police-y, crime-driven episodes. We can do office-driven episodes, that really feel like they’d belong on a show like The Office. And we can do relationship
episodes—for the A Story. And hopefully, every story—every, sorry, episode has some element of all three of those. So, you might have a story where Jake is catching a serial killer, Rosa has gone on a date with a—with a new girlfriend, and Scully and Hitchcock and Terry have to clean up the office for spring cleaning. Like, that would be a really well—in fact, I should write that down. That seemed like a—

00:04:24 Dan Guest Ah, okay. Great.
00:04:25 Jesse Host [Amused.] Good news.
00:04:26 Dan Guest Hopefully it won’t get edited out before—
00:04:28 Jesse Host Rival police sitcoms may steal those storylines. [Laughs.]
00:04:30 Dan Guest [Chuckles.] Yeah, those incredibly generic storylines.
00:04:33 Jesse Host You don’t get them. They’ll have to rename their characters, but I bet they’re willing to do it.

[Dan agrees with a laugh.]

Had you watched a lot of police television, dramatic or comic, before you undertook this effort?

00:04:44 Dan Guest I had watched—I mean, I had watched my fair share of Barney Miller. And I’d watched shows like Law & Order and—I think, really, in the police world—screen world, I was more familiar with movies. Like 48 Hours or Beverly Hills Cop. And the potential for comedy—or Die Hard. I mean, I’m a huge—I don’t know if you can tell from watching this show.

[They laugh.]

I’m a huge Die Hard fan. Lethal Weapon. There’s such a history of mixing the action and the comedy. And obviously, we wanted to be more comedy-focused.

00:05:27 Jesse Host I think on Parks and Recreation, the show that you worked on before this show, there is a whole world of sweet-tempered… try-hards, who identify very deeply with the show and its characters. Like, really, really deeply. Do police officers like your show?

00:05:45 Dan Guest You know, we have actually heard that a lot of police officers do like our show.

[Aloud]

But I think the people who—

00:05:58 Jesse Host [Chuckling.] Have you ever tried to use it to get out of a traffic ticket?

00:06:01 Dan Guest Uh—

00:06:03 Jesse Host Sorry, that’s a stupid question.

00:06:08 Dan Guest Not a traffic ticket, but murder. And it worked.

00:06:13 Jesse Host Congratulations!

00:06:17 Dan Guest Thank you! Now, hear me out—

00:06:20 Jesse Host I hope it was a righteous murder.

00:06:25 Dan Guest It was a right—righteous, but not int the sense of being justice.

00:06:30 Jesse Host Legal.

[Dan agrees.]

Yeah.
Dan Guest

Righteous like the old righteous.

[Jesse agrees.]

Like The Righteous Brothers who are murders, I imagine.
Yeah! I imagine the same.

[Laughs.] We’ve gotten that—and I’m always a little bit surprised when we do get that cops like it. We, early on in season one—we had a police consultant who was on the NYPD. Our main police consultants are here, in LA. And he said, “Heeey, uuuuh. A lot of the guys like the show. But there’s, um… a really big complaint.”

And I was like, “Ooh, man. You know. What did we do?”

And he’s like, “You’ve called Terry a Sargent, but his badge is—it’s not a Sargent’s badge. And everyone has noticed.”

[Jesse laughs.]

And I was like, “Oh! Oh! We can change that!” Now, our prop master—who’s an amazing guy—was horrified and embarrassed, but we did—[laughs] he’ll be so mad if he ever hears this. But we did change that out.

I think, though, the characters with whom—about whom we get that kind of comment—that comment about identification—are really mostly Rosa and Amy. And especially Rosa. So, we’ve really gotten—like, every time we’ve done a Comicon, we get really heartfelt and earnest and beautiful to hear comments about how meaningful it is to fans of Rosa and Amy to see them onscreen, especially to see Rosa—who’s out about her sexuality. And so that—that’s—it’s—I’d say, that’s where the point of identification is, less than cops. Who are like, “Uh, I really identify with Jake. I think that the way he solves cases is exactly the way I solve cases.”

Let’s talk a little bit about your life and the career that led to Brooklyn Nine-Nine. You went to an—a University called [pronouncing it purposely incorrectly] Har-vard.

[Dan agrees.]

Where a lot of comedy writers have gone. But you didn’t write on their famous humor publication.

The Lampoon.

The Lampoon. So—

I was trying to say that the way you said Har-vard. Um.

The Lampuuuune.

The Lampewrn.

Is that how we say it?

I didn’t—I did a lot of comedy performing. I did improv. And I was friends—Mike was on The Lampoon. I was friends with a lot of people on The Lampoon. But yeah, I came at writing more from a performing standpoint. I did a lot of plays and improv. So, I came at it from that—from that point of view.

As a kid, I was really into writing. And I was actually just telling my daughters this, because they’re both into writing, but I was always
scared to write comedy. I think I thought of myself as— I wanted to seem smart and I wanted to seem serious, but really I was just scared. I was scared that I would write—I would write something I thought of as a Woody Allen short story and it would not be funny. And I identified, I think, to some extent myself, as a funny person. And the idea that I would try, and fail was—it’s classic underachiever kind of... mentality. I always wrote as if it was gonna be read by somebody. You know? Which was a mistake. I was never free about the way I wrote.

But I also wrote—I wrote—in 7th grade, I had—man, I don't wanna bore people with my whole creative writing history, but I had—took a creative writing class, and I produced a book. You—of poems and short stories. It was called Dodecahedron. Which is a 12-sided figure. I had read that that was the case. And the main poem went, “Dodecahedron. 12 angry men. Dodecahedron. Sit in judgment of one.” I mean, I was so ridiculous self-serious! And then again—

[Delighted.] Was it about a jury?!

It was about a jury passing a death sentence on a guy. I mean, it was just ridiculous. And, again, I was a guy—who—I was kid who joked around a lot. It wasn't like I was wearing all black and, you know, quoting Camus at people. I just—I think I just had some insecurity that made me write like I was Thomas Mann.

[They laugh.]

You ended up getting a job on Parks and Recreation before it had a name or even actors attached to it—when it was—

Dan: Untitled Mike Schur, Greg Daniels—

Jesse: The vague idea—yeah.

Dan: Yeah.

Like, the idea—the vague idea of a spin-off of The Office. Like, The Office was successful. They had given some people from The Office the opportunity to make a show vaguely in the mold of The Office—maybe an actual spinoff of The Office. It wasn’t clear.

Yeah, so, I’d known Mike for a long time. I’d known him in college. We’d done a lot of comedy together. And he asked me and Charlie Grandy—the guy who had been my writing partner. We were no longer writing partners—to come out and we interviewed for jobs at The Office and at this putative Mike Schur, Greg Daniels project. And I think from very early on, Mike knew that it—he wanted it to be about government. About—not necessarily exactly what about government, and it wasn’t clear who the lead was gonna be. And then I think they met with Aziz—I think shortly thereafter. But they might have met with him just before then.

So, they knew they wanted Aziz in the world. And they met with Aubrey. Really early on we all met with Aubrey. And then we—

Aubrey Plaza.

Aubrey Plaza, sorry. And knew that we wanted her to be a part of it. And then when it became clear that Amy was available—

Amy Poehler.

Sorry—Amy Poehler. [Laughs.] Uh, was available and interested, it was like such a no-brainer. I mean, it was so huge. Ironically, as somebody who was working on the show, it was really difficult,
because I had quit my job at Conan. My wife had quit her job as a lawyer. And this show, this—had been given a 13-episode order, but when they hired Amy… she was pregnant, and they cut the order back down to 6 episodes. And so—and you’re paid by the episode. So, all the sudden, this new life became very scary, where we went from having two jobs to having half of one job.

But that actually meant—ended up being really wonder, also. Not only because Amy had a baby, which was wonderful for her, but I got to work on The Office for a couple of months—sort of as a consultant, which is an ironic title because I was really just—it was, like, more that I was a student. And got to learn how they made that show and sit in the writer's room and pitch jokes, but really sit with Mindy Kaling. Sit with Lee and Gene—Gene Stupnitsky and Lee Eisenberg—these are all, like, really excellent writers who were there. And so, it felt like I got a little bit of a head start when we started Parks and Rec up. I’d already been in a room where we were writing—where we were breaking stories in the Greg, Mike—Greg Daniels, Mike Schur—manner and where we were writing talking heads and sort of approaching comedy in that way, maybe.

Was there a realization or any talk about the tone of Parks and Rec and what became, I think, the most distinctive thing about the show—which was its unusual, sweet, earnestness, in the context of a—you know—in the context of a comedy show written by a bunch of comedy snobs?

I wouldn’t say we were comedy snobs. But, uh, we just liked laughing at things and comedy in general.

But, like, there had been a certain kind of earnestness in American sitcoms, but it was mostly—like—very special episode type stuff.

And that was a different kind of—like, there are people who worked on every episode of Punky Brewster who are great at doing that. That probably wasn’t the kind of people who were working on that show, and it wasn’t the kind of earnestness that I saw in that show, as a viewer. I feel like, from the outside, someone had to choose—at the end of the day this show is a show about loving people who care about each other, even more than most sitcoms.

I mean, I think that that… came from the people writing it. I think that is true of Mike, you know? I think that he is a goodhearted person and I think it came from the way in which we wanted people to root for the characters. And I think that…I think Mike and I think the writers in general had a belief that government can be good and can do good things, and therefore the way in which those employees were portrayed—in the same way that we can’t portray our police officers as being completely—the ones we’re following, at least—as being completely incompetent, or else we sort of lose the faith of the audience, I think. I think that that was true, also, for these civil employees. And I think it had to do with the casting, too.

I think that Amy Poehler… is able—I think it’s sometimes difficult to be a person who can be funny while being nice. And while doing good. And I think Amy and I think Andy Samberg also are people who are just—they—there’s a decency to them and the way in which they do comedy is not hurtful. And it sometimes feels
disingenuous when it is. I mean, Andy—the other day, a couple years ago, rather—was—had to do a roast. I forget which one of the roasts. And he went up there and he roasted himself. Or there was one where he roasted himself and the other one where his roast was just saying nice things about the victim of the roast.

[Jesse chuckles.]

It’s like—it’s—it was like he was physically incapable of being a mean person.

We’ll wrap up with Dan Goor after the break. Stay with us. It’s Bullseye, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:16:02 Jesse Host

Carrie Poppy: [Making static microphone noises] This is NASA, uh, I see a flat Earth, but we should lie to everybody about it and say it’s round. 10-4.

Ross Blocher: Maximum Fun brings you the latest podcast, an exposé on the flat Earth.

Carrie: I want to take advantage of humankind and make them believe a lie so that they will trust us with the government.

Ross: It’s all an elaborate lie, and when you get on a plane they purposefully fly you farther than you need to go.

Carrie: It’s disgusting. It needs to be stopped. And if you listen to Oh No, Ross and Carrie!, we will tell you the truth behind the lies.

Ross: Just kidding!

Carrie: No, we won’t do that. We will just tell you the truth behind the truth, because what we do is we look at extraordinary claims!

Ross: That’s right, we’ve gone undercover with alternative medical treatments, fringe religious groups, fringe science claims, the spiritual, paranormal. We’re there to check it out and let you know what happens.

Carrie: Is the Queen Mary haunted? I don’t know! Find out!

Ross: We show up. We make friends. We learn what happens when you ask questions, and we tell you all about it.

Carrie: And we get all that funky stuff done to us.

Ross: It’s Oh No, Ross and Carrie!

Carrie: At MaximumFun.org.

Music: Mysterious music plays.

Speaker: Listen to Planet Money for all kinds of weird and interesting stories that just happen to teach you a bit about money and the economy and how the world works. Planet Money, from NPR. Subscribe now.

[Music fades out.]
I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to Bullseye. I'm talking with Dan Goor. He co-created Brooklyn Nine-Nine, which is in the middle of its seventh season, right now, on NBC.

I had a few jobs in city government and I really liked them and liked the people that I worked with. And one of the reasons was they're largely civil service jobs that people get because they applied for them that are stable and they didn't get them 'cause they knew somebody. And so, it's just like a real broad group of people from the place where you live. And they're all pretty committed and hardworking and competent. And you're like, “This is a great place I live in.”

People have much more complicated feelings—like, there's this—there's a pretty simple story that you can say, “We're telling a story about government and how the people there are decent.” And certainly, there are people who hate government and you had—you know, Ron Swanson on the show, who hated government despite working in it.

Right. Or because he—he worked in it because he hated it was the—at least, the original intent.

Yeah. [Laughs.] But people have much more complicated feelings about police officers.

[Dan hums an agreement.]

And I wonder if that was something that you were thinking about right from the start, or whether it was something that you sort of realized in the—in the course of making the show?

It's something we really realized in the course of making the show. I think the Black Lives Matter movement… obviously, these problems… have been around forever. But the sort of national prominence and place in the headlines really started around our season three or four? Two or three. And so, it wasn't really a thing that we were thinking about. I mean, we were thinking about aspects of the police and the way in which they deal with the public and we wanted to make—we never wanted to glorify police violence in any way or make them bad cops. It was really important to us that they were good cops. It was important to us that they followed the rules but were smart.

And some of that was also—Andy's really doofy. And so, we wanted to make sure—we thought he was only believable as a cop if we made him a good cop. If he's, like, bad as a cop and also a total doof, you're like, “Eh, there's no reality to this.”

And in some ways, this show—you know, you're as much in dialogue with a history of police television shows as you are in dialogue with actual police officers.

[Dan agrees.]

As the show presented itself at the—at the very beginning. Right. Right. And then—so, the other thing that happened was—I think, from the very beginning, unintentionally we kind of created a group that models—and also Holt. So, Holt, as the dad, was a tough kind of dad. And he wanted—he wanted them to be best
precinct in history, 'cause this was his shot. So, right away, the directive from the top was, "I want the best cops there—I want the best precinct ever." And the directive from the bottom, from Jake was, "I wanna be the best cop ever."

So, you know—and their—and their conflict was over method, but never about an illegal method. And, you know, it actually ended up being one of the things that I think people really like about the show, because it—ultimately, obviously it meant that everyone became—was on the same page. But, as writers, it was very difficult, because very quickly—what's the conflict between a person who wants their squad to be great and a squad that wants to be great? And then you have to find, sort of, interpersonal conflicts and/or circumstantial conflicts to help create stories.

So, we were really modeling—I think in some ways unintentionally—what good cops should be like. But then, always showing—I mean, in our first seasons, we often had them deal with bad cops or dirty cops and have to make moral decisions. I think our second episode was called "The Tagger" and in it a Deputy Commissioner is asking for special privilege—special favors for his son, who is spray-painting penises on police cars. And Holt stands up to him and says, “We’re not gonna do the wrong thing.”

So, it’s a thing we were aware of on some level and were trying to navigate on some level. And then once it really came to prominence and was something we were reading about and caring about a lot, we really became committed to doing an episode that dealt with it head-on. And it just took us a while to figure out how to do that episode—how to do that episode in a way that was meaningful, but also still funny, still felt like Brooklyn Nine-Nine. And then, ultimately, that led to the episode “Moo Moo”, where Terry is racially profiled. Terry, while wearing civilian clothing, is racially profiled by an NYPD officer.

00:22:16 Jesse Host Were you scared to do something—like, did you have—ever have the—

00:22:23 Dan Guest [Decisively.] Yes.

00:22:24 Jesse Host —the feeling like, “Mmm.”

00:22:25 Dan Guest I don’t wanna do after school—like, after school special.

00:22:27 Jesse Host Well, either that or just, like, [uncomfortably] "Uuh, the—let’s just make this a world where only goofy things happen." [Chuckles.]

00:22:33 Dan Guest Yeah, yeah. But we began to feel like, “It’s gonna seem like our heads are in the sand.” And one could certainly look at the fact that we’ve done 143 episodes and there are plenty of episodes where only goofy things happen, so maybe—maybe our heads are partially in the sand, still? But it was a story we really wanted to tell. And we felt like we couldn’t avoid telling it. We had to figure out how. And once we figured it out, we were really happy with the outcome.

00:23:00 Jesse Host How do you check in that when you are writing storylines about such a diverse group of characters and you yourself are, like, a classic caricature of a guy who would be the boss of a sitcom—

[They chuckle.]
In that you’re a—you know, a straight—a straight, white guy who went to Harvard and, like, got a job right out of college with his improv buddy.

Yeah. I thought you were gonna say, “Stunningly handsome.”

Oh, yeah! Most—most television writers are known for their good looks, first and foremost.

I live in a bubble.

How do you check in that when you have—for example, you know—Stephanie Beatriz’s character coming out as bi, and she herself is bi. Or Andre Braugher—a big part of his character, from the beginning, has been his husband and the—you know, around the edges of his experience as a police officer and him wanting to be a good police officer, has always been because he was the victim of discrimination within the police department, for both race and orientation reasons. How do you keep that ship on track in a way that is both, kind of like, sees people for who they are and is not patronizing?

I think the—there are several things. I think, one: really striving towards having a lot of diversity on the staff and the crew is very helpful and being open to everyone’s opinions and ideas and viewpoint. And then, two: really being in communication with the actors, themselves. So, for Rosa coming out—I mean, Stephanie herself was so integral to helping us break that story and to talking about what she felt was really important for that character to say. She wanted the character to say, “I’m bisexual.” And to use those words. Because that’s a thing that a character—a main character on a TV show who gets to live, has almost never said before. And she knew that. And it was important to her that those words were said.

And similarly, when we broke the story about Terry being racially profiled, we spent a lot of time talking to Terry about his own experiences with that. And then, the thing that actually broke that story open was a conversation with Andre. He said, “Every time we’ve portrayed Captain Holt having to deal with racism or homophobia, he’s taken it. And he’s taken it for a reason, and the reason he’s taken it is that he believes he will be more effective if he can make systemic change. And the way for him to make systemic change is to—is to climb up the ranks and then eventually be Commissioner and make systemic change.”

So, we had this argument. And it’s an argument—it’s a legitimate argument on both sides, and we had this argument between Holt and Terry. It was the only time we’ve really ever done this in an episode. They’re sitting in two chairs, opposite of each other, having an argument over the course of an entire act. And Terry basically says, “I hear you. But I think it’s BS! I’m gonna hand in the complaint, consequences be damned.” And then, at the end—because the—I think the thing that we’ve really learned, when we do these episodes, is not to sugar-coat anything. At the end, Terry has made the report. The guy has been demoted. But Terry was up for a promotion of his own, and he doesn’t get it. And he says to Holt, “Do you think it’s because I handed in that complaint?”

And Holt says, “I don’t know. Maybe. Probably. But I’m proud you did it.” And you see that the world isn’t—it’s not all roses and
unicorns and candy canes. And there are consequences—crappy consequences, sometimes. But they have each other's back.

Well, Dan, I'm so grateful you took this time to talk about your life and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. I love the show so much. Like—

Oh, that makes me so happy.

I watch—really, really do watch every episode and I'm really grateful you came in.

I'm so flattered that you asked me and thank you so much. I love your show, and this has been a blast.

Dan Goor! *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* airs Thursday nights on NBC. You can stream all seven seasons, including the new episodes, right now, on Hulu.

That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is currently produced out of the [chuckling] homes of me and the staff of MaximumFun, in and around Los Angeles, California.

Now, normally we would give you an update on what's happening outside our office, in MacArthur Park. But instead, here at my house my wife overheard this exchange between my six year old son and eight year old daughter, after my daughter noticed that there was some whipped cream in the fridge: she said to him, "Hey, I noticed we have a little something that goes on top of hot cocoa? In a blue spray bottle in the fridge?"

My son, Oscar, said, "GATORADE?!"

The show's 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 fellow is Jordan Kauwling. 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 we have decades of interviews in the can. If you're home and bored or doing important work and want a less important distraction, check out our back catalogue. Like, if you like *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, we had one Stephanie Beatriz, who plays Rosa Diaz. She was absolutely wonderful. She's a gifted actress and a really cool, funny lady—who actually was the inspiration for her character being bi, because she, herself, is bisexual. And we also had Terry Crews—perhaps the most magnetic human being on Earth. Certainly, one of the top ten most defined sets of pectoral muscles on Earth. He talked about all kinds of things, including but not limited to, his love of minivans!

Find those on our website—the *Bullseye* page, at MaximumFun.org. We're also on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. 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.

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

[Music fades out.]