

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:02	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye With Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:13	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:21	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Have you seen <i>Ramy</i> ? It’s a show on Hulu. It wrapped up its second season a few months back. It focuses on a guy named Ramy, played by our guest—Ramy Youssef. When the show kicks off, Ramy is in his late ‘20s. Living with his parents in New Jersey. At different times, Ramy wonders what to do about his career; about his love life; his family life—all stuff that’s pretty typical for someone his age. One of the things that makes <i>Ramy</i> the show unique, though, is how it talks about faith. Ramy the character is a practicing Muslim. His relationship with religion is more than just, y’know, like a thing his parents do. <i>[Music fades out entirely.]</i> He prays. He goes to a mosque. He doesn’t drink. Amid the Millennial existential angst and jokes about sex, the show also asks some probing, deep questions about faith. Recently, <i>Ramy</i> was nominate for three Emmys: Best Directing in a Comedy; Best Supporting Actor for the great Mahershala Ali; and Best Actor for Ramy Youssef. So. We took that as a chance to talk with him. He’s interviewed by Jordan Morris here. Jordan is my long-time friend and colleague. He cohosts <i>Jordan, Jesse, Go!</i> with me. Anyway. We’ll kick things off with a clip. This is from the show’s second season. In this scene, Ramy is talking with the imam at his mosque. 00:01:41 Clip Clip Imam: You’re not leaving the mosque, are you? Ramy: Um... no, no. I’m—I’m not leaving the mosque. Uh, I really didn’t want to come at first, but I’ve been starting to feel like I... maybe should talk to somebody. Imam: Yes! Your mom says you haven’t been going to work. You are feeling... sad since your grandfather passed. Ramy: No, I... I mean, yeah. I’m—I’m upset about that. But... I think it’s a bigger problem? Like, a—a problem that I’ve had for a while and... maybe I didn’t realize it or—or maybe it’s gotten worse? But... Imam: Mm-hm. Ramy: It feels like every time I get close to figuring something out about myself? I... end up in a relationship. Like, a—a sexual relationship? And it’s not just sex. It’s—it’s... it’s also porn. Like... like, a lot of— Imam: Okay! Okay! Okay! Okay! Enough. We don’t need... too many details.

00:02:42	Jordan Morris	Host	Ramy Youssef, welcome to <i>Bullseye!</i>
00:02:45	Ramy Youssef	Guest	Hey, thanks for having me.
00:02:47	Jordan	Host	So I wanna start by talking about the kind of comedy and pop culture you were into growing up? What was the stuff that you were into and was there anything in particular that made you think, "I wanna do this."
00:02:59	Ramy	Guest	The "I wanna do this" part was never really on the horizon for me? Immediately? I was kind of an avid, uh, I was really into cameras. I was kind of like an avid camera junkie. Like, I... I had bought one with first little bit of like, Eid money I'd saved up and birthday money and that was kind of my thing and then my uncle exposed me pretty early—probably too early—I think I might've been, like, nine or ten. And he— <i>[Laughs.]</i> There were two things that I remember. One really scared me, which is he showed me Pink Floyd's <i>The Wall</i> , the movie?
00:03:38	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Jordan: Oh, yeah, that's—yeah, that's too young. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:03:43	Ramy	Guest	Ramy: Which I don't— <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:03:45	Jordan	Host	Like, not—not—not supposed to happen. Yeah.
00:03:47	Ramy	Guest	Yeah. You gotta be in a college dorm room when that happens. You need some sort of psychedelic assistance to get through that. Let alone being, yeah. I think I was nine. And then pretty much in that same pocket of time... we started listening to a lot of Carlin. And I—that was... immediate love for me, was listening to Carlin records. Because he... obviously just had such a strong point of view but he also—in a weird way—sounded like a lot of people in my family. Like, my family was full of people who are very convicted in what they're saying and they kinda go on these rants and they're really funny. And everyone's really funny. And so that was kind of a—I remember those being, like, two really early things that I knew I enjoyed, but... the idea of doing it was not, um, it just didn't even seem possible.
00:04:40	Jordan	Host	The show is really funny. It has a lot of kind of great joke writing in it. But it also really is not afraid to go to some very serious and dark places? And something that I— <i>[Laughs.]</i> That I like about the show is that sometimes when it is at its darkest, the tension will be cut with a joke. I'm thinking of a specific moment from the second season where a character goes to the hospital and kind of everybody, y'know, is kind of worried about the character and kind of wondering what's gonna happen, and then... one of your friends starts making fun of you for crying during <i>Toy Story</i> ?
00:05:17	Clip	Clip	Speaker 1: I just want to prepare you guys, mainly Ramy, for what you're about to see in there. The man is essentially braindead. He's on life support. A complete vegetable. He's got lacerations all over his body and he's lost control of all of his motor functions. This isn't an easy image to take in! Look, Shea—I know you're spiritually strong. And you got broad shoulders. Look at this guy! He's not ready! We went to the movies! We saw <i>Toy Story 4</i> ? He cried! It's not even the sad one!
			Ramy: It's—it's really sad.
			Speaker 2: I'm sure there were emotional moments, Dr. <i>[inaudible]</i> . Can we go inside, please?

Speaker 1: You cried at the previews.

00:05:52 Jordan Host *[Ramy laughs.]*
I'm really wondering about crafting those moments. Like, how do you decide... what moment needs some humor and... when to kind of pull back and just be serious?

00:06:04 Ramy Guest Yeah. Um... *[Laughs.]* The, um... *Toy Story* moment is definitely a moment I love and it's cool that you pointed it out, because it's actually that moment was born on set. And I think—it actually—I really remember how that moment came to be because we're standing in a hospital. Someone's been hurt. And we run the scene twice. And our show finds these pockets where we're really sitting in grounded stuff, but obviously the overall arc—and there's so many things that are clearly kind of funny about where we're at overall—that we'll find ourselves for a scene or two where—yeah, we're sitting in some grounded emotional stuff. But there was something about being in the hospital; we're walking around; and it really hit my head, where I was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. This cannot feel like... a procedural. This can't feel like *E.R.*"

[Jordan laughs.]

[Through laughter] You know? Like—like, it's—it's—I get it. We're here. The situation why we're here is super funny. The reason that brought us into the hospital is super funny? But this hospital scene—in and of itself—we can't forget that we're a comedy. And I think that they're—a lot of it comes from reflections on the dramedy genre as it is? To me? Because I think I've... y'know, like anyone else, we've all kind of been in a little bit of an era of it. We're watching it and I think something that I've always wanted to protect with this show is to make sure that we're never forgetting to go for the joke? And be okay with going for even a joke that might feel like a bigger joke. 'Cause I don't mind that.

Because... as long as it's coming from the right place and as long as the situation is honest, I like that. And I never wanna forget that. And so that's—that is a good example of a moment where I don't wanna be taking myself too seriously. I don't wanna get kind of lost in the soup of... the palette of what we're building. 'Cause it's—it is real to me, the emotion. The journey.

We're really trying to—on this show—strip back performance and look at ego. And I'm not talking about, like, acting performance. I'm talking about the performances that humans do as we kind of figure out who to be and how to be. And so... that can get heady? And I, uh... I'm just not smart enough to stay in the heady space, so I need to make sure that we are finding the joke. *[Laughs.]*

00:08:20 Jordan Host Typically, when a stand-up comic gets a show and, y'know, and their name is on it—y'know, the character they're playing is also a stand-up or they're an actor or something kind of showbiz-adjacent. But yours isn't. Did you ever consider making the character you play on *Ramy* part of showbiz? Or was that something you wanted to stay away from?

00:08:44 Ramy Guest Well, the goal was to... bring some humanity to a type of character that we've not seen before. Y'know, to bring a relatability as we look

as this Arab Muslim man; this Arab Muslim family. And I think there's probably nothing less relatable than watching someone struggle at an open mic.

[Jordan laughs.]

It's an insane, insane pursuit. To go out and do comedy. And so *[through laughter]* to try and endear people to a family that they haven't met before and then you got the dude runner-on doing standup, it's like, uh... it's—it's—it's—that's fanatic behavior. Y'know. So I did not want to reinforce any sort of stereotypes of that. But I'm just... do we really need more—like it—at a certain point, it starts to feel boring to me. And I always wanna make sure anything that I'm doing is actually making a contribution. Y'know. So I kind of felt like those boxes are more than checked.

And also—y'know—I released my standup special after my show came out. Which is kind of a—that speaks to streaming? And it speaks to kind of how the business has shifted? You used to kind of... need to make a national debut in like a bigger way with a standup hour before having a series. So it felt a little weird, 'cause it's like, no one really knows me as a comic anyway. Which—I like that. Y'know, that was—I was very purposeful about like not putting out any standup. I never really—I didn't play the online game or anything like that. But there was a lot of reasons where... I felt like it would hurt the character to go down that path.

00:10:17 Jesse Host

We've got more Ramy Youssef still on tap. One question he struggled with early on in making the show: would he be comfortable praying in front of a camera? More on that after the break. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:10:33 Promo Clip

Music: Quiet, serious music plays in background.

Speaker: Black voters play a crucial role for any Democrat who seeks to win the White House. But some big divides amongst that block and some serious ambivalence could determine who is elected president this November. Listen now on the *Code Switch* podcast from NPR.

00:10:52 Promo Clip

[Music fades out.]

Music: Guitar strums as singer counts out "One, two, one two three four." Up-tempo guitar and harmonica music plays in the background.

Justin McElroy: Hi, everybody! My name is Justin McElroy.

Dr. Sydnee McElroy: I'm Sydnee McElroy!

Justin: We're both doctors, and—

Sydnee: Nope. Just me.

Justin: Okay, well Sydnee's a doctor and I'm a medical enthusiast.

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: And we created *Sawbones*, a marital tour of misguided medicine!

Sydnee: Every week I dig through the annals of medical history to bring you the wildest, grossest—sometimes dumbest—tales of ways we’ve tried to treat people throughout history!

Justin: Eh, lately we do a lot of modern fake medicine. ‘Cause everything’s a disaster. But it’s slightly less of a disaster every Friday, right here on MaximumFun.org, as we bring you *Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine*. And remember:

Sydnee: Don’t drill a hole in your head.

[Music ends.]

00:11:35	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Our guest is Ramy Youssef. He’s the creator and star of the TV show <i>Ramy</i> , which you can watch on Hulu. <i>Ramy</i> is also nominated for Outstanding Actor in a Comedy Series at this year’s Emmys. He’s being interviewed by my good friend and cohost Jordan Morris. Let’s get back to their conversation.
00:11:55	Jordan	Host	I definitely wanna take some time to talk about what I think is one of the funnier performances on the show? It’s from a comic named Steve Way? Tell me more about him and how he got involved in the show.
00:12:05	Ramy	Guest	Yes. So Steve and I... I first met Steve in third grade. He came to our school. He has muscular dystrophy. And his condition was getting worse. It’s degenerative. And he had to come to our school for a few months while they built a ramp at the school that was closer to his house. And so that’s when I met him. In that—in that gap of time. And we became friends. And... he was the—he was so cool. It was like, “Oh man, there’s a kid in a wheelchair.” He kind of had that energy? I don’t know what other towns are like. Our school, it was kind of cool. If you had a wheelchair; if you had a cast; if you had glasses; braces; it was kind of that age where—for whatever reason—

[Jordan chuckles.]

—it’s, like, kind of dope? *[Laughs.]* You know? And no one’s like turned on each other yet?

[Jordan laughs.]

Y’know, you get later towards high school and then everyone—then the ragging starts? But at that time I was like, “Aw, sick.” Y’know. He’s rolling through. And I remember being really kind of fascinated by him. Talking to him. And then... and then when the kind of middle schools merged, we started going to the same school. And we lived close to each other and so... yeah, we just became really good friends. And we go to school together. A bunch of days. And it’s—there’s this shot in the show of me riding on the back of his electric wheelchair. Y’know. Stepping up on it—

[Jordan laughs.]

—and kind of going down the middle of the street and like, that’s—
[Laughs.] If you talk to anyone from our town who was around for those, y’know, ten years, that was just how we went around town. Y’know, that was—that’s just—that’s the mode of, y’know, get on the back of Steve’s chair. And then once Bluetooth speakers started, y’know, getting, we’d pop that in there too and just—and just have a party. [Laughs.]

00:14:00 Jordan
00:14:03 Ramy

Host
Guest

[Jordan laughs.]

Well what kind of music are you guys rolling to?

I mean, y’know, we’re doing some Jersey—y’know, we’re getting some Bruce going.

[Jordan laughs.]

But Steve is really into rap. And so Steve is like, Biggie, Tupac, California rap scene? That’s all Steve. And so we’re catering to that. Um... so we... really... in high school, then, we kind of start working together a lot because we had an amazing television program in my high school. It changed my life. Because we learned how to do stuff that I now know because I learned how to do it then. Y’know? I learned how to edit on Final Cut Pro when I was, like, 14 in a way that—I’m in the edit now and I’m like, “Hey, can I just—can you give me the mouse?” Y’know? Like, it’s like that level of—that’s how much we got to suck this in. And take it in. We’re like, running the morning announcements at our school. We’re doing all this stuff. It’s me and Steve and our now-writing partner, too, Jonathan Braylock. Our buddy Cal Colidge. We’re doing all this stuff, and it’s a blast.

And then... yeah, and then I kind of find myself at this point with my show. Seven, eight years later. And... it’s funny because we’re making this show and so much of the premise that we went down was... I don’t want this to be framed off of whiteness. Y’know? I want everyone in the show to be an insider and an outsider within the same culture. ‘Cause so much of the original pushback when I started talking about this show was kinda like, “Well, can he be a neighbor to a white family or can—maybe there’s two best friends. One’s white and one’s Arab—” y’know, it was like that kind of stuff. And we kind of felt like, no, we—I—we want the tension to kind of be within the community. That’s what’s interesting. We wanna be enveloped in this whole thing. But then there was this really funny convo where we’re like, yeah, but, y’know, there’s always like the ethnic best friend and there’s gotta be a white best friend. Y’know, the white best friend being the—

[Jordan chuckles.]

—kind of minority. And then, y’know, I framed it like and I was like, and the real cool, y’know, best minority friend is gonna be Steve. Y’know, that’s the move. That’s our white guy. Y’know. And it’s... it’s amazing. It’s—it’s—it’s—it kind of was this thing where I pitched it to the network. They thought the premise was cool. But they were also like, “Who’s gonna play Steve?” Y’know? [Laughs.]

[Jordan laughs.]

00:16:27 Jordan Host And—
00:16:30 Ramy Guest “I know just the guy!”
[Through laughter] Yeah! Like, no, no, no, it’s the actual Steve!
Y’know, and they don’t know him. And of course they don’t know
him, because... when you look at the places we started doing
comedy, you can’t get in there if you’re able-bodied. Y’know, it’s
these little crevices in New York. These tiny little places and I don’t
blame—look, it’s New York architecture. Y’know. I mean, you—
there are so many things that we’re constantly doing to make the
world more accessible. But New York is—it’s—architecturally—it’s a
challenge. There’s not even alleyways for the trash. Y’know? I
always think about that. I’m like, I remember I went to Chicago and I
was like, “Oh my god, there’s no trash on one-third of the sidewalk!”

[Jordan chuckles.]

And they’re like, “Well, yeah, there are alleyways.” Y’know.
[Laughs.] So this is what we’re up against. So no one knows him
because he’s not at the comedy clubs. Steve is mainly doing
standup at some random spots in Jersey and then at our annual
charity show, the one that we really kind of got started. It became...
an excuse for him to run a long stand-up set. So I’m at this spot of
getting to put together the show, and... yeah! It was so exciting to
bring him in!

And we did one read on camera and... everyone’s just like, “What—
whoa!” Y’know? I think everyone knew right away, um... they’re
just—this dude’s magic. And it was interesting, actually, because
we had him scripted for... starting episode two or three? Yeah, we
had him scripted starting episode two, actually. And the network
was like, “Oh, we gotta get him in the pilot!” And we’re like, “Yeah!
We’re gonna put him in the pilot!” Y’know, we were doing reshoots
on the pilot, like, “Yes! We’re gonna get him in!” It was that quick. It
was just this, um... immediate kind of gravitation. And... and yeah.
It’s—Steve’s always just been... we’ve just always really gotten
each other and it’s just—we’ve always just had so much fun
together? And it’s kind of surreal to be able to do it at this level.

00:18:25 Jordan Host And I think that’s a good segue to talk about the fact that you—
you’ve directed quite a few episodes of your show. And I wanna ask
what it’s like directing and more specifically, what it’s like directing
Academy Award winner Mahershala Ali.

00:18:40 Ramy Guest I mean, I think what’s been really cool and... I started feeling this as
I was getting my legs under me during season one? I’m so... the
directing to me is an extension of the writing. And I’m very...
protective over the writing. And I’m very... particular about things
that mean something to me, like, I—I remember... getting really
hung up on—there would be references to how we’re talking about
God and... and there’s just small things where I know, “Oh, actually,
this person would gender God and say ‘he’.” This character would
not gender God and just say ‘God.’” And it’s—and I would get
obsessed over something small like that as we’re putting together
outlines as a writer’s room.

And I got to a certain point where I was like, “I need to write every
single outline. Because I’m just gonna have a panic attack if—if—
[Laughs.] Like, I’m gonna go nuts if this stuff—” And because it was

my first time, too, I kind of felt like it had to be perfect from the outline? And then you kind of do it more and everyone's like, "Ah, you figure it out on set." And I was like, "Well, I don't—that's not me." Like, I'm not—I wanna be—I wanna know what's going on, y'know, before we get there. And I got really particular about these details in a way that I didn't know I would be. 'Cause in my life, I can be kind of a slob. Y'know. I can just kind of... y'know, whatever. It's like I'm not gonna clean my place unless someone's coming over. Y'know? I'm—I—like, it's... then you get into making something creative and all of a sudden I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I'm kind of obsessive, actually. About how these things go."

And so it translated on set. And so I was on set and I realized, "Oh wow, I'm really clear about... what I need things to look like." In a way that I didn't know I would be. Y'know? And then all this stuff that we had made... we'd worked on all these things. What was kind of encroaching on ten years ago where I was really kind of doing the filmmaking stuff more seriously and I realized, "Oh man, I know how to do this! I know what shot we need! I know all that."

And so I started feeling really confident about it. And I got the opportunity to direct one of them in the first season, which was one that I wasn't in. And then we entered the second season and I actually wrote— *[Laughs.]* I mean, it's twofold. But I love the ensemble on this show so much? I love their storylines as much as I love my storyline, if not more sometimes. Because I just... I'm just obsessed with these actors. And so I'm going into the writing and I'm like, "Oh, man, I wanna write... a bunch of standalones that I'm not even in?" 'Cause those are the ones I wanna direct. I don't wanna direct myself as much? I wanna direct the ones I'm not in. So I kind of go into it with that, and then we get Mahershala in our lap. And then we realize we have Mahershala for three weeks and he's gonna be in six episodes. So this is like kind of a daunting, um— *[Laughs.]* Crossboarding situation. 'Cause we need to really knock out a lot of scenes. And then it became clear, "Oh, actually, I'm gonna direct the ones that he's in and most of the ones he's in, I'm in, 'cause I don't wanna put—" *[Laughs.]*

00:21:14 Ramy

Guest

[Jordan laughs.]

"—y'know, a director in this situation where I'm like, 'Hey, so, this week show up Tuesday at 6AM and then Thursday at 10PM and—' Y'know, if someone—it's not fair to make someone else go crazy. I'll do it." So... I got this opportunity in my hands to work with him and to... direct him and... it couldn't have been more amazing. I mean, he... the questions that he asked... were all the right ones. And it was also really cool to... answer those, but then also to kind of feel like... there were moments where he'd be uncertain about something and I kind of had to kind of... guess... "Okay, is he uncertain because it's poorly written?" Which sometimes would be the case. "Or is he uncertain because... y'know, he's doing something that's a little bit different."

And he admittedly was like, "I've never been on a show like this. I've never been on a show where... we're shooting in this way where—" 'Cause sometimes we'd read out a scene and I'd be like,

“Alright, y’know, forget all that. Let’s try this.” And hew as kind of like, “Really?” And I’m like, “Yeah, dude, I don’t care about the script. I mean, this isn’t—” like—that’s not—like, I’m obsessive about the script but then also when we’re on set, if it’s not working I’m not going to, y’know, we need to make this work. That’s all—that’s our main duty. And so we’re kind of working in this way that I think was... he’d also just come off *True Detective*. And over there, a script is biblical. And then we’re in this situation where I’m like, “Dude, this writer sucks. And that’s me.”

[Jordan laughs.]

Y’know, and I’m saying that out loud. *[Laughs.]* I’m like— *[Laughs.]* Y’know, trashing myself. And so... it’s just—it was so fun. It was actually... just this really cool experience of... watching him—especially by even by the third day he’s just—he’s... transformative. Right? So first two days, he’s like, “Oh, huh. Hm. Huh.” And then by day three... he’s giving me an idea that’s in the voice of what the show is. *[Laughs.]* And I’m like, “Oh my god, this guy’s unreal.” *[Through laughter]* Like, he just learned our language and taught me a word.

00:23:48 Jordan Host

I’d love to hear more about the character he plays on the show? If people haven’t seen it yet. And I was curious if there was any real-life inspiration for him.

00:23:58 Ramy Guest

Yeah. The real-life inspiration for him, y’know, he plays a Sheikh that... Ramy meets and... the inspiration is the... teachers that I have met in my life. Who... are amazing. Are people who are actually kind of these hidden gems that embody what I think true spirituality is and true religion is. Y’know, I think that the issue with religion is that it’s become an industry and it’s become a culture and both of those things are really damaging and they’re... and they’re not, like—and this is all of them. They’re a particular type of violence.

And I’m not talking about violence in terms of violent acts; I’m saying they’re used violently against people in emotional ways. There is... this judgment that is... leverage that turns into this crazy ego power that basically all religions have established some version of and some form of. And it kind of becomes this supremacy. And so... because of that... you watch anything with a religious figure and he—they’re always crooked! And I get it! Because so many of them can be. And it’s such a vulnerable space because you’re basically... a religious figure is someone who’s guiding people... in dealing with the unseen. And I think that’s super real and I also think that’s a very sensitive, private place. And so so many people have been hurt following a leader like that. And so... kind of all the media and the art, for the most part? It’s like—“He’s a priest! But he’s doing cocaine.”

[Jordan chuckles.]

Or he’s—y’know, like, you know it. You know the thing. And oh, but he’s—he’s... touching kids! He’s this. He’s that. These are all real things. These are all pervasive in various cultures. So there’s no denying any of those things. But I have met teachers who... you sit in the room with them and you’re like, “Oh, this is... this is the thing

that everyone's trying to get." *[Laughs.]* Y'know it's not— *[Laughs.]* It's—this is... whoa. I've only... I've only ever had fast food and this is a meal. Y'know. This is the real—it's almost like... so many other experiences I'd had, I was, y'know, someone told me it was water but it was actually soda. And then it's like, "Oh, whoa, no, this is water. This is like..." and it's such a difference. It's like your whole body feels it.

00:26:50 Ramy Guest

And so I know these people are real and then it's... can we craft that on screen? Can we make that? Can we show... someone who doesn't feel cheesy? Still feels like a real person? 'Cause I'm not trying to create like a mystical character, either. Right? And especially—it's like, you have Mahershala Ali playing it. I'm not trying to... dig into the "Magical Negro" trope. Obviously. Like, that's like... this can't be a joke. But how do we craft a character who feels sincere? Who feels... like this thing that—this character, Ramy, is really actually striving towards?

And that was what I really told Mahershala when I pitched him on playing this character. I was like, "This is what I'm trying to do." And he reached out about the show just to say, "Hey, this show is cool." *[Laughs.]* Because he's a practicing Muslim. And he appreciated our approach to... faith. Y'know, that it wasn't an erasure and that it was, y'know, about this synthesis. And so when I told him, "Do you wanna do this character? This is what I want. This is the goal. I haven't seen this goal accomplished in the way that I think we could do it." And he was like, "Whoa. Um... I don't know. I gotta pray on this." And when he said that, I was like, "Oh, this character's gonna be good." *[Laughs.]*

[Jordan laughs.]

Like, the fact that he didn't say "yes" right away? The fact that he didn't like just jump at it? I was like, "Oh my god, this is gonna be awesome."

00:28:17 Jordan Host

Your character in the show is on a very specific faith journey. And it got me wondering about you. Where are you at with your... faith? Y'know, having done two seasons of this show where you're exploring these issues?

00:28:35 Ramy Guest

[Pause.] Yeah. It's—it's a really... it was a really, um... difficult thing on a level—continues to be a difficult thing. Making this show where I am touching on so many things that are real to me in real life. And the... like, I had this big kind of... battle of filming myself pray. Because... prayer has always been such a personal thing for me. And... it kinda just feels weird to shoot it and then... y'know, you get paid. Y'know? You're not getting paid. It's like... y'know. I'm—I'm—it's not like *[through laughter]* you're making like this crazy amount of money or something like that. But it's like, oh, wow, I've like... I've—I've monetized this thing that's really dear to me and really important to me.

And so I had this big debate, like, should I—is this really what I should be doing? 'Cause this isn't a joke. And I netted out, obviously, doing it and a big part of that was, again... the... imagery of this ritual. The imagery of... my language and... my faith and... my culture. Has been... just... put through the... the disposal. The wringer. Like, you—it just looks so bad. It's so, so—it's so ugly out

there that, y'know, yeah. I—I... I'm gonna do it. Like, I am going to do this thing that, um... has really just been mine. And for me. And I'm going to put it out there and I'm gonna show someone do it and then go get fired from their job when their startup goes under. I'm gonna show someone pray to process a bad date. And I'm gonna show somebody doing that because I want those images out there. Y'know?

And it... and it means... it means more than, y'know, me feeling a little uncomfortable about that. And so... what comes with that kind of tradeoff, though, in real life and with my spiritual practice is I'm kind of... I'm trying to figure out, okay. Like, I still need this to feel private. And I still need this to feel... like it's mine. Y'know, this—this kind of private connection and this personal thing. And so in a way... *[Laughs.]* Especially because of—like, we talked about those left turns that the Ramy character really takes? Um... so much of my life now is like, “Well, I really wanna be... way more grounded and connected to my faith than this character is.” Y'know?

And it is a motivator for me to continue to dig deeper and a reminder for me to continue to dig deeper. And I think, too, so many of the conversations that I've been able to have with... the various... people who... watch this show and are Muslim? They've made me even... more connected to my faith. Because the diversity of conversation and opinion and... debate and... love and critique and all of these things? Yeah. It's like—I almost feel more solid about what I believe than I ever could have.

00:32:03 Jordan Host
00:32:07 Ramy Guest

Well, Ramy, thanks so much for hanging out with us on *Bullseye!* Thanks. Thanks. This was really, really great questions. Yeah. Really, really awesome. Really good to talk to you.

00:32:15 Jesse Host

Ramy Youssef. You can watch seasons one and two of *Ramy* right now on Hulu. As we said before, Ramy is up for an Emmy for his role on the show. The winners will be announced next month. Jordan Morris is a podcaster—my cohost on the comedy podcast *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*. He's also one of the writers on the upcoming series, *Earth to Ned*. It's a space alien Muppet talk show. It's appropriate for Jordan, who created the scripted comedy podcast *Bubble*.

00:32:45 Music Transition
00:32:47 Jesse Host

Upbeat, cheerful music.

That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is produced out of the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Where today, it was 90 degrees and a little rainy. Which I guess means that we live in Florida now! I don't know. The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kauwling are our associate producers. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Our interstitial music is by Dan Walley, 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. You can keep up with the show on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Just search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. And I think that's about it. Just remember—all great radio hosts have a signature sign-off.

00:33:38 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]

