

00:00:00	Music	Transition	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.
00:00:12	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.
00:00:19	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. This week, we’re taking a look back at two <i>Bullseye</i> interviews with stone cold music legends. Two music legends who happened to be from Cincinnati, Ohio—where this show just started airing. First up: Bootsy Collins, from 2011. Bootzilla. The pride of the ‘Nati. One of pop music’s greatest bass players. Legendary for his contribution to James Brown and The J.B.s and to Parliament-Funkadelic and to his own band, Bootsy’s Rubber Band, and to many, many, many years of hits. He’s the owner of one of the heaviest bass sounds in the world and one of the architects of funk. <i>[Music fades out.]</i> Earlier this summer, he dropped a new single, called “Stars”. It features Dr. Cornel West, Steve Jordan, Béla Fleck, and many, many more. <i>[Music fades in.]</i> It’s part of a fundraiser for the MusiCares COVID-19 Relief fund put on by the Grammys. Let’s listen.
00:01:16	Music	Music	“Stars” by Bootsy Collins. <i>As a people, we have crawled before The struggle is pretty hard to ignore And on occasion we take it for granted And we forget all the seeds that we planted Power to the people (yeah, come together) All colors</i> <i>Now, this thing can’t last forever Oh, we gotta forge a better way</i> <i>[Volume decreases and plays underneath the dialogue before fading out completely.]</i>
00:01:41	Jesse	Host	Bootsy Collins, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:01:43	Bootsy Collins	Guest	What’s going on, Jesse? How are you?
00:01:45	Jesse	Host	I’m doing good, man. How about you?
00:01:46	Bootsy	Guest	Oh, I’m doing really good man. And you know, just getting back out here on the road and doing that thing. And it’s coming—connecting with the people again. It’s a good thing.
00:01:56	Jesse	Host	I wanna ask you about learning to play the bass. I know that you’re somewhat older brother, who you played with for many, many years, was a guitar player. <i>[Bootsy confirms.]</i>

00:02:12 Bootsy Guest Was it that sort of classic situation where your brother got the glamor spot and you ended up playing the bass?
Well, not exactly. It was kind of more like he played guitar and I wanted to play guitar as well. So, I started off playing guitar. But one night, his bass player couldn't make a gig and I wanted to play with him so bad, it didn't matter what I played. You know. I could have played drums, or I could have played piano—which I had no idea how to do, at the time.

[Jesse chuckles.]

00:02:50 Jesse Host I would have told him, "Let me do it." You know. So, it really didn't matter, and we did this gig and I was playing bass and, you know, it just felt so right.
You've always said that you wanted to play bass the way that Jimi Hendrix played guitar.

[Bootsy confirms several times.]

00:03:12 Bootsy Guest I wonder both at how you ended up feeling that way and also whether your brother—being almost of another generation, but also being a guitarist—was on the same wavelength as you.
Well, uuum—I don't—probably not? Um. But you know, that's kind of—I came in at a time where Jimi was like god. I mean, I just felt like, "Man, this cat just—not only musically, but cosmically just opened the whole world up to me." You know? He made me see that I could not only play, you know, all these wild things and all these different, wild sounds that I'm hearing. He showed me that I could even dress as crazy as I wanted to, and I always looked up to him for that. Even when I was with James Brown, sitting on the back of the bus, you know. Popping acid and smoking weed and listening to Jimi Hendrix. That wasn't allowed on James Brown's bus!

[Jesse laughs.]

00:04:25 Jesse Host "Man, where are you from?" You know? "You don't do that!" But I did that. And I wasn't doing it to be snobby or, "Take this, James Brown!" Or none of that. It was just—that's what time it was! And that's where I was at. And that's where my whole heart was at.
When did you first meet James Brown, in person?

00:04:28 Bootsy Guest That was when—they were recording—what year was that? It was—they were recording "Licking Stick".

[Music fades in.]

00:04:42 Music Music What year was that? That was '60-something. Um. I forget the exact year.
"Licking Stick – Licking Stick" by James Brown.

Oh mama, come here quick and bring that lickin' stick

[Volume decreases and plays under the dialogue.]

00:04:47	Bootsy	Guest	And when the band took a break, he called us in, and our rhythm section got a chance to play “Licking Stick”. I guess he was testing us to see—you know, what we—what we felt like with him.
00:05:03	Jesse	Host	Could you tell it was a test, at the time?
00:05:04	Bootsy	Guest	Oh no, no. Not at all. I didn’t—you know, I didn’t even care what it was, at the time. It was—
			<i>[Jesse laughs.]</i>
			It was like, “Man, I get the opportunity to play, you know, for James Brown.” I mean, you know—you know, it didn’t even matter what it was. You know. James Brown asked us to do this! And if we had never got to play with James Brown, that in itself probably would have been enough for me at the time. It was like—it was just incredible.
00:05:29	Music	Music	<i>[Music volume increases.]</i> <i>Mama, come here quick and bring that lickin' stick Now look here Junior don't kill me</i>
			<i>[Volume decreases and plays under the dialogue.]</i>
00:05:35	Jesse	Host	James Brown was famous for his incredible drive and perfectionism.
			<i>[Bootsy agrees several times.]</i>
00:05:46	Bootsy	Guest	That <i>[chuckles]</i> maybe even bordered on madness. Yeah. Yeah, I think you’re right. I think it did border on madness, because every time we’d play a show, you know, he’d... he’d call us in the back room and say, <i>[in a raspy voice]</i> “No, son you just ain’t got it. You ain’t got the one.”
			<i>[Jesse laughs.]</i>
			You know. I mean—eeevery show, we had to hear this. You know. And it was like... we <u>knew</u> we were killing him! We <u>knew</u> that the people were just amazed at, you know, our sound and what was going on. You know. At the show, we <u>knew</u> it! You know? And then he would call us back and tell us that and I didn’t realize ‘til years later that it only made me wanna practice that much harder. You know. Us, as a band, it made us wanna get us tight and play as tight as we possibly can. So, all of what he was telling us, he was using reverse psychology on us. And we didn’t have a clue! You know.
			<i>[Song fades out to be replaced by “Soul Power”.]</i>
00:06:51	Music	Music	It was more about, you know, this is James Brown telling us this! “Soul Power” by James Brown.
			<i>Go jump on my train when I'm outta sight Just check yourself, ha, and say Yeah, you're right Hah! Hey, hit me</i>

Hah, give it, put it there, hah

[Volume decreases and plays under the dialogue.]

00:07:10 Jesse Host They have this saying in baseball that winning is the best chemistry.

[Bootsy affirms several times.]

And I imagine that part of what made you feel good about doing—about working for, you know, a despotic ruler was the fact that you were in a band that was undisputedly the best. And untouched even since then.

00:07:38 Bootsy Guest And I wanted to know how to be and how you get to be the best like that. I wanted to know that. I wanted to feel that. I wanted to be a part of that. You know? I wasn't getting that from out there in the street. That part would have to come from James Brown, and I knew would—I knew who I was with.

[Music fades out.]

Even at that young age. And I wanted to get as much of it as I could.

00:08:02 Jesse Host When did you realize that this huge sort of schism in your career—this huge breaking point—was an opportunity for you to pursue being the Jimi Hendrix of the bass guitar?

00:08:20 Bootsy Guest *[Laughs.]* Well, you know I guess when it first happened, I didn't know what to think. You know. We were so messed up that, you know, on the ride home I thought, "Man, can you believe we just—you know, we're not playing with James Brown anymore!" You know. "We're on the way home. What were we gonna tell mama?" You know. That's, like, you know—that was my initial thought. Like, "What am I gonna tell mama?" You know? She—you know. She just knows I'm out here just having a—you know, a good time with James Brown. I'm gonna be with James Brown. This is going—this is forever, man!

00:08:56 Jesse Host And you're sending checks home, too.

00:08:58 Bootsy Guest Uh, yeah! Yeah. For the first time in my life! I mean, a real check, you know? And so, you know, we get home and I get through that phase of it, and then—you know—we get straight to rehearsing. You know. Putting a band back together and putting shows together. And so, you know, that part—you're talking about getting to the Jimi Hendrix phase of it I think kind of evolved as the band evolved. When we got with George Clinton, I think that was when I first realized I can do this now. This is the time to do this. It was in the perfect situation with the perfect freak, you know. George himself, who was not only behind it but was instigating it.

00:09:54 Music Music "Up for the Down Stroke" by Parliament.

Talking 'bout he's mad

Let's take it to the stage, Jack, come on

And get up for the down stroke

Get up for the down stroke

Everybody get up

[Volume decreases and plays under the dialogue.]

00:10:07 Bootsy Guest I gave to George any and everything that I could come up with, and he was open to accept it and, as a matter of fact, he wanted to see

			<p>what I had to bring to the table. And so, that inspired me. He allowed me to go in the studio and experiment. You know. He didn't look at me strange when I started bringing pedals and hooking up the bass to it and he—he wanted the experiments.</p>
00:10:31	Music	Music	<p><i>[Volume increases.]</i></p> <p><i>Get up</i></p>
00:10:34	Bootsy	Guest	<p><i>[Volume decreases and plays under the dialogue.]</i></p> <p>You know. It was like, "Bring everything you've got, because George wants it." So, he was the whole opposite of what James Brown was.</p>
00:10:42	Music	Music	<p><i>[Volume increases.]</i></p> <p><i>Party</i> <i>It's all about party, yeah</i> <i>Having a party, y'all</i> <i>Get up for the down stroke</i> <i>Get down on the real side</i> <i>Get up for the down stroke</i> <i>Everybody get up</i></p>
00:11:09	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[Volume decreases and plays under the dialogue.]</i></p> <p>That was "Up for the Down Stroke" by Parliament—one of the first songwriting collaborations between George Clinton and my guest, bassists Bootsy Collins.</p>
00:11:18	Music	Music	<p><i>[Volume increases.]</i></p> <p><i>Everybody get up</i> <i>Get up</i></p>
00:11:20	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[Volume decreases and plays under the dialogue.]</i></p> <p>It seems like George Clinton's great revolution was that he brought in all these brilliant, brilliant players.</p> <p><i>[Bootsy agrees several times.]</i></p>
00:11:41	Bootsy	Guest	<p>You know, notably among others, Fred Wesley from The J.B.s. I mean, Gary Shider.</p> <p>Yeah. Well, actually, I brought Fred and Maceo—you know, when I came. 'Cause we was with James Brown. I had always spoke with Fred and Maceo about, "Would y'all play in my band once I get it together?" And this that and the other.</p> <p>And they said, "Sure, man." You know, 'cause—you know, didn't nobody really believe it. You know. But when I got with George and I called him and they were so sick and fed up with James Brown, they was like, "We're ready, man. We're ready." You know. "What do you need us to do?" They came straight to Detroit and they joined the mothership.</p>
00:12:14	Jesse	Host	<p>It seems like the revolution really was George Clinton realized he could be the guy who could tell all of these other brilliant musicians, "Hey, why don't we try doing something crazy together?"</p>
00:12:26	Bootsy	Guest	<p>Yeah. Yeah. Well, you know what? It wasn't even about George saying, "Hey, let's try something crazy." He already had the crazy going on. It was just giving us an outlet to be crazy. And he would</p>

allow us to do any and everything we wanted to do. And to have this kind of referee in your corner—you know, people just don't get that. You either have, "No, you can't do this, and you can't do that."

[Music fades in.]

They got so many different rules and regulations that they really cut the musicians creativity off. George was the complete opposite. He was voting for your creativity. He was—you know, he was like a fan of your creativity. He wanted you to bring it all and he was rooting for you.

00:13:19 Music Music

"Mothership Connection" by Parliament.

Hit it fellas!

*If you hear any noise
It's just me and the boys
Hittin' that (groovin')
You gotta hit the band*

All right, all right, Starchild here

00:13:38 Jesse Host

[Volume decreases and plays under the dialogue.]

One of the things that's really amazing to me about P. Funk when it really got rolling, in the mid-70s, is that it was—it was so broad.

[Bootsy agrees several times.]

In that there were these—there were these Parliament records that were just like a heavy, funky version—great radio music. And then there's these—there's these Funkadelic records that are just insane!

[Bootsy agrees with a laugh.]

00:14:22 Bootsy Guest

And you've got a group and all the lady singers have a group and Fred Wesley has a group and everybody's making music together in all these different avenues.

Yeah. Yeah. Well, again—you know, that was—I think that was more of the genius of George's mind, where he saw—he saw, like, Berry Gordy saw, but only it was like his freak flag. He just—he just flew it. Not only he flew it—he was a part of it. He was—he was in it and he was encouraging it. And his whole house was what you got. This was George's house. He had all of these different groups sign to these different, major labels. These are not small labels. I mean, major label companies that George, you know, hooked up and had us sign to. And that was incredible.

00:15:16 Jesse Host

More with Bootsy Collins still to come. After a quick break, the star sunglasses and why Bootsy Collins put 'em on. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:15:27 Promo Clip

[Music fades out.]

Music: Relaxing, thumpy music.

Speaker: Some days, reading a bunch of headlines just isn't enough. You need to let the news sink in. On *Consider This*, NPR's

new daily news podcast, we can help you do that. Each day, in about ten minutes, you can find out not just what happened but why and what it means. *Consider This*, new episodes every weekday afternoon, from NPR.

00:15:50 Promo Clip

[Music fades out.]

Music: "Baby You Change Your Mind" by Nouvellas.

Raleigh Smirl: I'm Raleigh Smirl.

Sydnee McElroy: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor Smirl: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: And together, we host a podcast called *Still Buffering*, where we answer questions like...

Raleigh: Why should I not fall asleep first at a slumber party?

Taylor: How do I be fleek?

Sydnee: Is it okay to break up with someone using emojis?

Taylor: And sometimes we talk about buuutts!

00:16:12 Promo Clip

Raleigh: Nooo, we don't! Nope!

[Sydnee and Taylor laugh.]

Sydnee: Find out the answers to these important questions and many more on *Still Buffering*, a sisters' guide to teens through the ages.

Raleigh: I am a teenager.

Sydnee & Taylor: And I... was... too.

Taylor: Butts, butts, butts, butts butts!

Raleigh: No... *[Laughs.]*

Music:

*Baby, you change your mind
Far too many times
Over and over again
Over and over again*

00:16:33 Jesse Host

[Music fades out.]

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, we're hearing my 2011 conversation with the one and only Bootsy Collins. He's one of pop music's greatest bass players. He's played with James Brown, Parliament-Funkadelic, Snoop Dog, you name it. Let's get back to our conversation.

When was the first time you put on your star sunglasses and became the Bootsy who we know as Bootsy?

00:17:00	Bootsy	Guest	<p>Wow. Um. It was in 1975. That's when I first put them on, because I stumbled across—well, first of all, I went out looking for two things. One thing was a person to make the star bass, which I call the space bass, and the star glasses. I knew that I needed these things. I used to draw them all the time, at school. Star glasses on the stickman, you know. And he had a star guitar. I used to draw that all the time. I never knew it would wind up being me! But when I got the opportunity, when George gave me the opportunity to do a solo thing, I was like, "Man, I can't look like anybody else. I gotta—you know, I wanna through stars. You know, I wanna—not only see through stars, I wanna have star glasses on that would—that are like mirrors so when the kids look at me and my face, they see themselves."</p> <p>So, this was a whole concept that I kind of had dreamed up. I was on a mission, 'cause I was—you know—recording a record at this particular time, in 1975—I was recording a record and I'm thinking, "Okay, pretty soon we're gonna have to take pictures for this and I gotta have these two things that I know I need." And so, our manager—George's manager, who actually wound up managing me—lived out in LA. So, I got a chance to come out to LA and stay for a couple of weeks. So, in that couple of weeks, I'm trying to find this person that makes these star glasses. Who's gonna make these star glasses?</p> <p>So, I'm walking up and down the street broke as heck, you know. And wanting these star glasses. So, I happen to wind up in a place called L'Optique Boutique and I asked him—'cause they had so many different, weird glasses. Actually, they had Elton John's glasses in the—up in the window. And I was like, "This is the place. This is the place." I went in there and start talking to the guy and we got to kicking it and he realized I was an up and coming musician that really didn't have no money, but the idea sounded great to him. And he put it together for me for \$250.</p>
00:19:22	Jesse	Host	<p>It was—it was a movement that really—that really had ten solid years. And...</p> <p><i>[Bootsy agrees several times.]</i></p>
00:19:43	Bootsy	Guest	<p>I wonder if it was hard for that to stay together when everyone was so much doing their own thing and also <i>[chuckles]</i> everyone was <u>so</u> high.</p> <p>Wow. Um. I would probably say the first—probably the first five years, it really wasn't hard. I think it became really hard when everybody started realizing money is being made. That's when—and that's usually when, you know... well, especially back in that—in that time. That's when the problem really started. You know. And then the other problem was George was having more fun than anybody!</p> <p><i>[Jesse chuckles.]</i></p>
00:20:24	Jesse	Host	<p>You know? And... He's supposed to be steering the ship!</p>
00:20:25	Bootsy	Guest	<p>Yeah! He's supposed to be—you know, he's in command of the ship and he's acting a bigger fool than anybody! You know. Which</p>

was fun! It was—it was funny as heck! But at the same time, wasn't nobody—you know, everybody felt like they wasn't getting paid. And I think that was the last five years of what you—what you're talking about.

00:20:45 Jesse Host

I get the impression that maybe George Clinton was the kind of guy who—rather than being—rather than maliciously taking money for himself, he was simply operating on the principle that we should just spend whatever we need to spend to do anything that we can think of.

00:21:07 Bootsy Guest

And then funk it.

00:21:09 Jesse Host

Including *[laughs]*—including, like, motherships and just drugs for everybody.

[Bootsy agrees.]

And then—and his plan was just, “Well, we'll just try and make enough money to cover that.” *[Laughs.]*

00:21:20 Bootsy Guest

Well, you know, he didn't even have a plan. You know. It was more like... you know, back in the day when you would come to somebody's house, you know, you would come in. You know. It was like—you know, “Here, take—have a joint. Come on, have a seat.” You know? And then you would kick it. You would crack jokes and, you know. So, that's George's whoole mentality. You know. It wasn't about no business! You know, he wasn't—James Brown was like a businessman. You know? George didn't wanna have nothing to do with the business! You know.

He was just out to have a good time on the mothership. He was, you know, the director. You know. He was—you know—driving the mothership. He was just having a great time! You know. And as long as everybody could roll with that, then—you know, we'll all have a great time. You know. And I think that was a—I think that was a great opportunity and that was a great time and a great vibe that George had. You know. But at the same time, you know, everybody was... you know, was getting hit with bills and couldn't pay this, was getting married and having babies, and the responsibility thing started kicking in and George—you know, he's not responsible for nothing! You know. And he'll let you know that.

[Jesse laughs.]

00:22:48 Music Music

“Freedumb” by Bootsy Collins.

*May you live as long as you want,
But never want as long as you live, baby
While living in a world of freedom*

00:22:58 Jesse Host

[Volume decreases and plays underneath the dialogue.]

You've been recording regularly through your entire career. And I think that your new album, which is called *The Funk Capital of the World*, is kind of different. There's this thing called the Griot, which is a kind of—a West African tradition of storytelling that a lot of, like, culture theorists point to as the source for a lot of African American musical culture. It's a kind of storytelling that's married with music.

[Bootsy affirms.]

And there's a lot of storytelling on this record. There's Al Sharpton talking about James Brown.

[Music fades out to be replaced by

There's a—there's' a really great track with Samuel L. Jackson talking about growing up.

00:23:40 Bootsy Guest
00:23:41 Music Music

Samuel, yeah.

"After These Messages" by Bootsy Collins (ft. Samuel L. Jackson).

*Let me drop a little knowledge
about how I got from Chattanooga, Tennessee to
big city, LA*

00:23:50 Jesse Host
00:23:54 Bootsy Guest

[Volume decreases and continues underneath the dialogue.]

Why did you wanna make that the centerpiece of this album?

Well, mainly because I felt like it was time to—I call it, "Spreading hope like dope." [Laughs.] You know. It's like, I felt like—you know, I wanted this record to be bigger than a me record. And meaning bigger than just me putting out a Bootsy record or a Bootsy Rubber Band record. I wanted it to be something totally different. And I need to get storytellers, because I felt it was really necessary for not only today, but the generations to come. So, it will kind of point back to where I got my funk from and how we grew up. I think this album points to that. And that's what I was really happy about doing.

00:24:51 Jesse Host

Bootsy, I have one last question I wanna ask you, and I have to admit it is a question I have—I have wanted to ask you for at least 20 years.

00:25:01 Bootsy Guest
00:25:04 Jesse Host

Wooow! Wow. I hope I can answer it. Jeez.

I think you can. Bootsy.

[Bootsy affirms.]

00:25:10 Bootsy Guest
00:25:13 Jesse Host

You're a superstar right?

[Laughs.] Uuuh, twinkle, twinkle, baba!

[Laughs.] Bootsy Collins, thank you so much for taking the time to come be on *Bullseye*.

00:25:18 Bootsy Guest

Aw! Thank you so much! Keep that funk alive, baby!

00:25:21 Jesse Host

[Music fades in.]

Bootsy Collins. We mentioned it at the top of the show, but he's got a new single called "Stars" out now. He's using it to raise money for folks working in the music industry who've been impacted by the pandemic. And goodness knows that folks working in the music industry have been impacted by the pandemic. We'll have a link to support the cause on the *Bullseye* page, at MaximumFun.org.

00:25:42 Music Music

"Bootzilla" by Bootsy Collins.

*I wanna be your toy.
I wanna play for you
Created by Funk-A-Tech Incorporated*

00:25:50 Jesse Host

[Volume decreases and continues underneath the dialogue.]

That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is produced from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where my daughter, Grace, and I

just completed our greatest project. Our magnum opus. Which is, from our friend, Mark Frauenfelder—Boing Boing’s book, *Maker Dad*. It’s like a little gimble thingy that you attach to a kite string and then you attach a tiny USB camera to that and then you fly the kite and you shoot stable video from a kite. Did this all with a hand drill and some superglue.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kawling are our associate producers. We get help from Casey O’Brien, who—judging by his social media presence—is currently at a lake house somewhere in Minnesota, going insane.

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. You can also 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.

00:27:00 Music Music

[Volume increases.]

*Comes this remote-control unit
Oh yeah! I'm programmable!*

00:27:04 Promo Promo

[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]

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

00:27:11 Music Music

[Volume increases.]

*...the makers of funky things to play with
Trademark Funk-A-Tech Incorporated, baba
Pull my string*

[Music fades out.]