

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.
00:00:13	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s the <i>Bullseye</i> Halloween Special. I’m Jesse Thorn. My first guest this week is Cassandra Peterson. You might know her better as Elvira, Mistress of the Dark. Probably the most famous Halloween character since Dracula. For 36 years, Peterson has rocked the giant wig, the tailored black dress, and the glossy black nail polish. She’s appeared on countless TV shows. She had her own movie. She’s performed live at theaters and amusement parks for years. This year’s Halloween’s gonna be very different. Instead of live shows, she’s doing virtual Halloween celebrations, recording music, and signing merch for fans. But she is, as always, Halloween’s most vocal champion.
00:01:24	Sound Effect	Transition	When Cassandra and I spoke in 2017, we kicked things off with a classic clip from the ‘80s. She’d just been hired to host the spooky B movie TV show, <i>Movie Macabre</i> . You see her on screen sprawled out on a red velvet couch, wearing all black. Cassandra Peterson transformed into Elvira.
00:01:25	Clip	Clip	Music swells and fades. Music: An eerie, unsettling soundtrack full of howling wolves, shrieking bats, and other atmospheric spooky noises.
00:01:53	Sound Effect	Transition	Elvira (<i>Movie Macabre</i>): Who’s there? Is that you? Mm, come in, darling! I’ve been expecting you. Oh, come in. Don’t be afraid. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> I won’t bite! And you’re bound to have a good time, or my name isn’t Elvira! <i>[The word echoes.]</i> Music swells and fades.
00:01:54	Cassandra Peterson	Guest	<i>[Chuckles and sighs.]</i> That’s hilarious.
00:01:56	Jesse	Host	Cassandra Peterson, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> . It’s so great to have you on the show!
00:01:59	Cassandra	Guest	Thank you! Wow, I forgot about that voice. My voice is, like—has since gone down about 12 octaves. <i>[Laughs.]</i> Oh my god.
00:02:04	Jesse	Host	Yeah! I mean, in listening to that, the first thing that I wondered was, you know, you’ve been doing this character—that’s 1981. So, you’ve been doing this character for 35 years.
00:02:16	Cassandra	Guest	<i>[Breathily, in surprise.]</i> I haaave.
00:02:17	Jesse	Host	What is different about Elvira, in 2017?
00:02:22	Cassandra	Guest	Hmm. Well, my voice is lower. <i>[Laughs.]</i> Like I said. So are a lot of other parts of me. We won’t go there.

[Jesse chuckles.]

Let’s see. My hair is maybe much higher than it was. I started out with very flat hair. It was a bouffant, but it was so low when I look at old pictures of me, I’m always shocked. I can kind of tell what year it is by how high my hair was. That’s kind of the only difference.

00:02:47 Jesse Host I like to imagine that you're just—you're adding onto it like the Winchester Mystery House or something.

[She laughs.]

00:02:53 Cassandra Guest It's just—each year a new layer gets added. I did for a while! I did do that for a while! My hair got so damn high, in the '90s, that I looked like Marge Simpson. It started looking ridiculous. I had to—I had to tone it down. And then we found the happy middle ground. Not too flat, not too high. Just right. And I've sort of stuck with that from then on.

00:03:13 Jesse Host The character kind of came out of something that you were doing at the Groundlings in the late '70s and early '80s, but it wasn't like a literal—you know, translation of something you were doing at the Groundlings. Where did—where did it come from?

00:03:26 Cassandra Guest Right. Not like Peewee, who actually developed his character there. I had a dopey, valley girl kind of character that I was using at the time in a couple of sketches. And she was kind of a bimbo. Kind of a smartass. Kind of a valley girl. And when I heard about this interview for a job—which, we're as Groundlings always looking for jobs—I decided I'd kind of go with that character. Use the valley girl thing and the smart-alecky talk and... I didn't know if it would work or not, but the director liked it! So, you know.

00:04:00 Jesse Host I mean, why wasn't it just—like, what led you to do that and not, uh, the Bela Lugosi voice, or whatever?

00:04:06 Cassandra Guest Well, that—

00:04:07 Jesse Host Like, *[in a Dracula voice]* "It's me! Vampira!"

00:04:09 Cassandra Guest That is what they kind of were looking for and they had a script that was an old Vampira script! And really the first lines in it were, *[with a Dracula affectation]* "Come in, darling. Drink a glass of blood." You know? And I have to say, the script was uuuh...

[Jesse laughs.]

Kind of bad. *[Chuckles.]* It probably played well and awesome in 1951, but it was, uuuh, really not that funny. It had some jokes in. So, being an improv person, I decided to just improvise! And... yeah. It wasn't like I was dying to get this job, really. Like, paid \$300 a week and it was on local TV and it wasn't like, "Oh my god! My big break!" So, I wasn't that thrilled about the whole thing. So, I just started improvising and kind of did the character that I was using at that moment in the Groundlings.

And the weird thing about that was that it really didn't go with horror movies at all. I mean, it was so... different from that. But they liked it! They liked the humor! And then they had to come up with a costume.

00:05:13 Jesse Host So, when they said, "Come up with a costume." Like, did they just give you \$100 and send you to Frederick's of Hollywood or whatever? And like...

00:05:24 Cassandra Guest *[Laughing.]* No, not exactly. They said, "You've gotta come up with a spooky looking outfit, because you're hosting horror movies after all."

And I said, "That's awesome, 'cause I love horror movies."

What I did first was go to my best friend at the time, who was a wonderful artist, and I sat down with him and I said, “We’ve gotta come up with a cool look, you know, that’s spooky and blah, blah, blah.” So, we talked about it and we both decided we were in love with Sharon Tate’s character in *The Fearless Vampire Killers*. And we were like, “Let’s go that way! I’ll have long, curly red hair and kind of a sheer diaphanous gown that’s tattered and kind of the dead girl makeup. You know, white lips and big black circles around the eyes.”

So, that’s what he drew up. I have that picture still. I just put it in my book that came out recently. And they hated it. They just took one look at it and said, “No! Are you kidding?! You have to have all black! You have to—you have to have black hair! Black clothes!” It was like, ugh. God. So typical. You know? Like, oh, what are we gonna do to update that look so I don’t look like I’m ripping off either of them? But when your parameters are all black with black hair, what do you do, you know? And you’re supposed to be some kind of a vampire or something.

So, my friend Robert and I came up with ideas to make it look kind of hip and ‘80s. Kind of punk, you know. There was no goth—we had—or we had never heard of goth movement at that time. If there was, it may have been over in England, but I’d never heard of it. So, we tried to do a little, you know, heavy metal. Little punk stuff here and there. Jagged edges, some safety pins, some bracelet—leather bracelets with studs on them. And then he happened to be the world’s biggest fan of Ronnie Spector, from the Ronettes. And he said, “I’ve gotta do your hairdo. You have to have Ronnie Spector hair.”

00:07:12 Cassandra Guest

And I thought—I was like, “Ronnie Spector hair? What do you mean?”

He goes, “It’s called a knowledge bump and that’s what we’ll do.”

[Jesse laughs.]

So, he actually bought the wig, cut it, and styled it into Ronnie Spector hair.

00:07:24 Jesse Host

When you started doing it, did you feel like, “Huh! This works!”

00:07:29 Cassandra Guest

No, I didn’t feel that way right away. I felt like an idiot.

[They laugh.]

I felt like, “This is ridiculous! This is not that funny!” When we started out—this was awesome—we started out, instead of laying on my red sofa that’s kind of become my signature sofa, I was standing under a streetlight. So, I kind of felt like I was a vampire hooker or something. I don’t know. It was odd.

00:07:51 Jesse Host

[Teasing.] It wasn’t chaste like the later iterations of Elvira.

00:07:54 Cassandra Guest

Nnnno—yeah, yeah, yeah. Later she got so, yeah. Exactly. Chaste.

[Jesse chuckles.]

But no, it was—I didn’t think it was working. I thought it was ridiculous. And the way I knew it was working is that a few weeks

00:08:17 Jesse Host into it, I got called by the *Tonight Show* to come on the *Johnny Carson Show*, with—you know, with Johnny Carson. I was like, “Oh my god. Why? What—why? What’s going on here?”
I feel like what a bizarre big break. Like, to get the call from the *Tonight Show* and you’re like, “Great, I’ve been—I’ve been a showgirl. I’ve been a—toured with a band. I’ve—like, I’ve been with the Groundlings for five years. I’ve been in movies. I’ve been—”
You know, all these things that you had done.

00:08:43 Cassandra Guest And they’re like, “Yes. Uh, we would like you to wear the local television dress?” Um.
Here’s a couple of things, though, that are very odd when I look back and I think about it. It didn’t come from just out of the blue. I was an actress; I was a comedian looking for work. But when I think about things from my childhood: number one, my mom ran a costume shop. My mom and my aunt. So, I dressed up in wacky costumes all the time and really awesome costumes, ‘cause they would sew me whatever happened to be hot at the time. Like, a *I Dream of Genie* costume or Ginger from *Gilligan’s Island*. So, they would make those costumes for me and I’d go out and—as young as second grade—I won costume contests. I won a \$100 bond dressed as Ms. Kitty, from *Gunsmoke*. You know, bar room girl. Here I was with garter belt, you know, high heels. And oh my god. And you actually—there’s a picture of you in the book that you mentioned, the coffee table book that came out last year.

00:09:27 Jesse Host Yeah, that’s the weirdest part.

00:09:33 Cassandra Guest As like a five or six-year-old dressed as—what’s it called? The Queen of Halloween or something like that?

00:09:34 Jesse Host Yes. I asked my mom to make me a costume. My first Halloween costume, when we lived in Kansas on a farm. And I guess we were so poor, she couldn’t afford fabric, because she made it out of crepe paper. So, she makes this black and orange costume for me with a crown and a scepter, because she asked me what I wanted to go as for Halloween and I said, “I wanna be the queen of Halloween!” So, I mean, really? That’s pretty odd, right?

00:09:40 Cassandra Guest Was the rest of your family life as a kid secure or happy or—?

00:10:05 Jesse Host Uh, it was pretty crazy. *[Laughs.]* It was, uh—well. I’d been burned when I was about—almost two years old. So, I was in and out of hospitals having surgery a lot. I had pulled a giant kettle of boiling water over on me when I was about two, out on the farm, and had—

00:10:10 Cassandra Guest Kettle of easter egg water, right?

00:10:30 Jesse Host Easter egg! Boiling water that my mom was making easter eggs, uh—

00:10:32 Cassandra Guest Which explains your lifelong antipathy towards easter and *[chuckling]* love of Halloween!

00:10:36 Jesse Host *[Dramatically.]* Yes, I hate easter and Christmas!

00:10:40 Cassandra Guest

Uh, no, I—yeah, I got burned and that was one of the reasons I think we eventually ended up moving even to Manhattan so that we could be closer to the hospital in Kansas City. But so, I had a lot of surgery and I had kind of an odd life. I... uh, when I went to school, I—my burns were very, very visible on my—on my neck and my shoulders. I got made fun of by kids constantly. So, I really, really went inward. Became very quiet, very shy, very strange. And so, I don’t know. It led me to become kind of a freak, back then, I think. I got into horror collecting—I think it was—was it either—*Famous*

Monsters, I think, of *Filmland*. That I got hold of a comic or a magazine. And then for Christmas I would ask for the Aurora model kits of Frankenstein and the mummy and Dracula.

00:11:56 Jesse Host Because kids were always calling me a monster! So, I thought, "Monster?!" [Laughs.] "That's awesome!" So, I don't know. I had—I was not a very social kid or teenager. That's for sure. I feel like *Famous Monsters of Filmland* is one of the original geek texts.

[Cassandra agrees.]

If there was only a few things that you could be a geek of, at the time, it was before geek culture as we know had been created. I mean, there's no Dungeons & Dragons or whatever. Right?

[Cassandra confirms.]

00:12:29 Cassandra Guest But you could go to a newsstand and get this movie monster magazine and it was, like, the—you know, it was the—it was the cultural exchange for geekdom. If—even if you didn't know another kid who was into it at your school, or whatever. And I didn't! Which was so weird. And girls doing that, at the time, I think was especially bizarre. But I had two things that I was really into when I was really young and that was the, like, famous monsters and collecting the monster models and all that. And then *Superman*! Oh, I was really into *Superman*. And I collected all those comics. My uncle owned a drugstore and I got to go to the drugstore and there would be a rack, you know, of comic books that spins around. And I got to sit there and read all the comic books. I didn't even have to buy them, because he'd let me read them if I put them back and didn't mess them up.

00:13:20 Jesse Host So, I was really into those two things when I was a kid. And there were no other—I couldn't find friends who were into that, too, really. There were a few boys who were into the *Superman* comic books, but nobody that was into the horror thing. You actually graduated from high school and went to Las Vegas to be a Las Vegas showgirl.

[Cassandra laughs and confirms.]

00:13:34 Cassandra Guest That strikes me as, like, the most astonishing amount of hutzpah for a 17-year-old to... Yeah! I don't know what the heck—I think it was really due to my art teacher who I had. This guy named Mr. Samuelson. And he was actually retired, but he came back. He was an older man and he came back to teach art at my high school and I remember, after I watched *Viva Las Vegas* with Elvis and Ann-Margret going, "You know what, alright, that's what I wanna do. Go to Vegas and be a showgirl."

My parents and my relatives looked at me like I was an idiot. I mean, they really did. They said, "You are not tall enough. You are not attractive enough. You're not thin enough. Where'd you get this ridiculous idea? You could never do this."

And he said, when that—he said to me, “What do you wanna be when you get out of high school?”

I said, “A showgirl in Las Vegas.”

And he said, “Well, go do it.”

And I said, “What do you mean ‘do it’?”

“You just—just go do it!”

I think he invented the Nike slogan. Just do it! He was ahead of his time. And I admired him so much and believed in him so much that I went, “Okay!” But I did have a coincidental thing happen, that summer before my senior year. I went to—or, during the spring break actually, of my senior year, my parents took myself and my two sisters on a vacation to California. And we stopped in Vegas and I begged my parents to take me in to see one of the shows, ‘cause I was so obsessed with them. And I put on a little wiglet and I put on my Frederick’s pushup bra and I had to look sophisticated, you know, because I had to go into a showroom and lie to them about my age. So, I had a fake ID that said I was 21. So that was awesome.

So, I go in with my parents and the maître d said, “Are you a showgirl in Las Vegas?” Of course, I looked like one. I had, like, three pairs of eyelashes on and, you know, cleavage and I— Like a shark’s teeth.

00:15:18 Jesse Host
00:15:19 Cassandra Guest

A wig. Yeah. Yeah. So, I said, “Uh, no. No, I’m not.” You know, I just tried to get away as quickly as I could. Next thing I know, we’re sitting at the table with my mom and dad. I’m drinking champagne and this woman named Fluff—I’ll never forget her name. Fluff— came out and she was the dance captain and she asked if I would like to go backstage. They were hiring showgirls for a new show that was coming out and would I like to audition? And I was—I was just—well, I started crying then, because I said, [*dramatically*] “No! I’m—I’m underage! I can’t—”

And they said, “Well. Don’t worry. We—I think we can still work that out.” And they did. They got me a contract. My parents had to sign off on it, get a lawyer. I couldn’t come in the hotel. I had to just come in the backdoor and do the show. Prancing around in just a G-string with a lot of feathers. And my parents certainly did not want me to do it. It took me three months of fighting, threatening, crying, screaming, running away to finally allow them to sign the contract. I mean, they finally just gave in because they were like, “What are we going to do? She’s gonna disappear.” I really made their life a living hell I’m sure.

00:16:29 Jesse Host

Well, let’s listen to Elvira. And my guest, Cassandra Peterson, has been Elvira the last 35 years or so. This is another clip from *Movie Macabre*—the television program that made her famous. Got her on the *Tonight Show* in the early 1980s. They showed, on the show, terrible often monster movies and horror movies. Elvira’s role on the show was to be entertaining enough that the movies were

00:17:09	Sound Effect	Transition	watchable, and this is Elvira's thoughts on the 1978 international smash hit, <i>Legacy of Blood</i> . Music swells and fades.
00:17:10	Clip	Clip	Music: Spooky organ music.
00:17:44	Sound Effect	Transition	Elvira: Big surprise finish. Wow, they really came up with a swell twist! Sure had me guessing. Suuure. <i>[Clears throat.]</i> I bet when this one played in the movie houses, they used the old cliché, "Absolutely, positively nobody will be admitted into this theater during the final ten minutes of this motion picture." Unless, of course, you have \$3.50 in your pocket! And then we just might reconsider. What a dumb movie! I'd call it an insult to your intelligence if you had any intelligence to insult! I mean, I get paid for watching this garbage, but what's <u>your</u> excuse!? Music swells and fades.
00:17:45	Cassandra	Guest	Oh my god. <i>[Jesse chuckles.]</i> I remember another— <i>[stammering]</i> that is so—it sounds so old and so horrifying. I remember one other joke from that, and it was <i>Legacy of Blood</i> and I said—I said, "You know what a legacy is, right? This is my leg, you see? And this is my other leg, y'see?" Oh my god. That's how bad the jokes were. Oh. God. It was Shecky Green time.
00:18:06	Jesse	Host	That's a—that's far below <i>[laughing]</i> Shecky Green, I hate to tell you.
00:18:09	Cassandra	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> Oh, thank you. <i>[They laugh.]</i> Yeah, maybe you're right.
00:18:13	Jesse	Host	That's sort of an aspiring Shecky Green situation!
00:18:17	Cassandra	Guest	Sorry. <i>[Laughs.]</i> It got better over the years, I think. I don't know. Well, I'm not sure. But.
00:18:23	Jesse	Host	When you were a showgirl, did you think that it was what you wanted it to be?
00:18:27	Cassandra	Guest	Uh, no. It wasn't what I wanted it to be at all. It was a really hard job. We did three shows a night. You had to get there early. I had to have body makeup put on, head to toe.
00:18:38	Jesse	Host	Because of your burns?
00:18:39	Cassandra	Guest	Because of my burns. And so, I had to come in really early. I had to be there all night. You would do three shows with this long break in between where you just sat around doing nothing. Everybody else was drinking and they'd go out to the bar and gamble and stuff. Not me. I'd sit in there staring at myself. You wore tons of makeup. You had all these rules. You had to smile all the time. You had to wear red lipstick. I was always on the borderline of getting kicked out for weight gain. If you went five pounds over your weight, you'd get a citation and then if you got two citations you were out. But it was hard work! It was hard work, and it was boring. All the—you're kind of doing the very same moves every single night on the stage. You just went off into, like, thinking about what you were

00:19:52	Jesse	Host	<p>gonna have for dinner after, what you needed to buy at the store. And by the time you got out, at night, it was four in the morning. Things were really kind of winding down. You went home. You slept all day. Got up again when it was almost dark—six or seven—and did it over again. And it was every single night. It was seven nights a week! There were no days off. It was ridiculous.</p> <p>We'll continue my conversation with Elvira after a quick break. <i>[In a Dracula voice.]</i> Turn the dial at your peril!</p> <p>My instructions said to do that in a Dracula voice, so. Hope you enjoyed my loss of dignity.</p>
00:20:13	Promo	Clip	<p><i>[In the Dracula voice.]</i> It's <i>Bullseye!</i> From MaximumFun.org and N! P! Rrrr!</p> <p>Music: Discordant, ominous music.</p> <p>Sidney Madden: On the next episode of <i>Louder Than a Riot</i>, the 20-year fight to clear the name of former No Limit rapper, Mac Phipps.</p> <p>Speaker 1: 'Cause me and my brother was close. The years that he lost, that's some of the best years of his life he then lost.</p> <p>Speaker 2: To me, it just hurts.</p> <p>Sidney: Listen now to <i>Louder Than a Riot</i>, the new podcast from NPR Music.</p>
00:20:34	Promo	Clip	<p><i>[Music ends.]</i></p> <p>Music: Dramatic, movie trailer–esque music.</p> <p><i>[The hosts use very "announcer" voices in this promo.]</i></p> <p>Mark Gagliardi: We interrupt the podcast you're listening to to tell you about another podcast! That's right: We Got This with Mark and Hal.</p> <p>Hal Lublin: That's correct, Mark! This is Hal. We do the hard work <u>for</u> you! Settling all of the meaningless arguments <u>you</u> have with your friends.</p> <p>Mark: So, tune in every week on the Maximum Fun network for <i>We Got This with Mark and Hal</i>, and all your questions will be asked... and answered.</p> <p>Hal: You're welcome!</p> <p><i>[Music reaches an apex and quiets down.]</i></p> <p>Mark: Alright. That's enough of that.</p>
00:21:05	Music	Transition	<p>Chorus: <i>[Singing]</i> <i>We Got This!</i></p>
00:21:06	Jesse	Promo	<p>Cheerful, bright music.</p> <p>This message comes from NPR sponsor, Microsoft Teams. Now, there are more ways to be a team with Microsoft Teams! Bring everyone together in one space with a new, virtual room.</p>

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00:21:37 Jesse Host *[Music fades out.]*
Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, you're in for a treat. We're listening to my 2017 conversation with Cassandra Peterson, the woman behind the queen of Halloween, Elvira. Let's get back into our chat.

What was it like to go from being, you know, a teen—very uncomfortable with your body on a literal farm in Kansas—directly to the demands of, like, the purest adult sexuality that—like, the most intense, like—a G-string and feathers, onstage in Las Vegas, in a hotel suite with Tom Jones.

[Cassandra laughs and agrees.]

00:22:26 Cassandra Guest Like, these kinds of things that are, like, the most grown up stuff. You know?
Well, it was scary. And—but I was pretty tough! I was pretty damn tough. Like I mentioned before—I don't know why. I think I took after my dad, who was this... Wow. My dad was like this tattooed, "I will kick your ass if you even look at me cross-eyed," kind of guy. And you did not mess with my dad. *[Laughs.]* Tattoos back when nobody had tattoos! My dad was covered with them and he was—didn't take any crap from anybody. I think I must have gotten it from my dad. And that was sort of like that, but you know, in the wake of the whole Harvey Weinstein thing, I've been thinking over the past, how many times I—wow, barely escaped with my... you know, life practically.

00:23:17 Jesse Host The situations I would get myself into were just frightening! And—man.
Well—"get yourself into", I mean, your work—it was your job to do, you know—to be an entertainer, you have to go to auditions. You have to go and network with people. Like, it's not a matter of it being your responsibility! It was a poisonous world.

00:23:34 Cassandra Guest It really was! And I—honestly, at the time, I didn't understand all the finer points that I'm now really, you know, as I got older do understand. But casting couch and all that? Boy, was that—that was, like, every damn job you went to! It was—and I was always going out for roles of like the hooker, the showgirl, the stripper. You know. That—it was all the parts that I would show up for. So, the times I've found myself in an office, like, at night with a guy standing up from behind his desk with no pants on or whatever—it was just like unbelievable! So many times!

When I turned 30 and I went to get an agent who told me, "30 years old! Get out of here! Go back to Kansas! You're washed up! You're through!" I mean, literally, like that.

I really thought, "Well, this is it. I'm 30. I'm still playing sexy. I'm not gonna get any parts. This is over." And that interview with that guy came one week exactly before I got the Elvira part. So, I'm so glad

he didn't become my agent, or I would be paying—you know, I would have been paying him, like, 10% or 15% or whatever it was back then.

00:24:45 Jesse Host You own Elvira, right?

[Cassandra confirms.]

00:24:49 Cassandra Guest That's a big deal. It's a very big deal. To own the licensing of any character is a very big deal, because I don't think they're—Peewee is one of the only people who—I call him Peewee and he calls me Elvira. It's so weird. That's what we've always called each other.

[Jesse laughs.]

00:25:04 Jesse Host It's just—you know. It's one of those—I don't know. You have to be one to know one. Despite having known each other for 5 years before those characters existed. *[Chuckles.]*

00:25:08 Cassandra Guest Yeah! I know. We still—I'm always like, *[trailing off softly]* “Hey, Peewee,” and “Elvira”—

00:25:12 Jesse Host If you're wondering, Charo also calls him Peewee.

00:25:14 Cassandra Guest *[Laughs.]* Well, she's almost in that—she's almost in our club. It's a very exclusive club. Only a few people.

00:25:19 Jesse Host Charo is basically that only without a government name. *[Laughs.]*

00:25:23 Cassandra Guest Exactly. I mean, there are a few people. There's like maybe—I don't know, Alice Cooper. Maybe Jean Simmons. Who can kind of—have made their living off of this character that they invented, and they own the rights to. And I don't know any other people that do that. But it's fantastic if you can do it! It's funny, you don't make as much money as you could by selling it out. Maybe. But in the long run, you do make more money and you have more control. Much more control. So, I am glad that I hung onto that name. It's paying off bigger as the—you know, older I get and the longer it's been around.

00:26:02 Jesse Host I mean, we talked about coffee table book. We have pinball machines, right? What else are we looking at?

00:26:07 Cassandra Guest Yeah, I have a new—I have a new one coming out again. Uh.

00:26:10 Jesse Host There's the annual show at Knott's Berry Farm, when it's transformed into Knott's Scary Farm.

00:26:14 Cassandra Guest Right. There's slot machines. I—slot machines are awesome, I'll tell you. I have five video games and then I've done I think four slot machines. I have another one coming up. Those are awesome. I have a new line of clothing, through Pinup Girl Clothing. I have a new line of jewelry—all kind of spooky goth jewelry from Sweet Romance. I—just Funko toys are very big right now. I have a whole new line of action figures coming up. Oh my gosh! I could go on forever! Merchandizing the living hell out of this thing!

[They laugh.]

00:26:46 Jesse Host I mean, it's kind of an amazing thing to create something that has such an indelible impact. It—you must also sometimes feel like subsumed by the hugeness of this character that you played! Like, what—“How is it possible that this weird version of me is such a huge force in the world and I am—I am but a human being?”

00:27:15 Cassandra Guest I do feel that way once in a while. I'm going, "When did this take off? When did it get on a train and just start going?" And I didn't know, you know? It just—I'm over here and she's over there. I don't know. It was odd. People were always saying, earlier on—well, I was always feeling, "I should do something else." People were saying, "Don't you get bored doing this Elvira character all the time? It's always Elvira. What—" You know.

And I was thinking, "Yeah, I should go out and expand myself and do some other TV shows and some other things as different characters." And I very quickly found out that, you know, I got hired for a pilot. I went in to do the pilot. It was during October. Killed my Halloween season. I got paid scale. The pilot didn't go. Ruined a whole Halloween for me. I made about a tenth of what I would have been making that month. And I went, "W-what the hell am I doing? I mean, I'm not Bill Shatner trying to get away from *Star Trek* for the rest of my life. You know? Why not just jump on this character and ride it!"

00:28:15 Jesse Host I mean, you like it. Right?

00:28:16 Cassandra Guest I love the character! I love the character, actually. It gets a little tiresome during Halloween right now, I gotta say.

00:28:24 Crosstalk Crosstalk *[They laugh.]*
Cassandra: I love it too much.

Jesse: Yeah, you were telling me you—this is the time of year when you sleep four hours a night.

00:28:28 Cassandra Guest I really do. I'm so messed up, I don't know if it's day or night 'cause in addition to doing two shows a night, I do 7AM drive time radio interviews and I do TV shows for—just one—did one for the Syfy channel. I do this and that all day long, in addition to doing the two shows at night, which really kick my butt.

00:28:49 Jesse Host And these are—these are full production shows. You're singing and dancing in these shows, in addition to—you know, this isn't just you coming on, saying a couple of one-liners and walking offstage while someone else does something.

00:29:02 Cassandra Guest No! I wish I could be Cher where I just stand in one spot and sing, you know? And kind of don't move. That's awesome. People are gonna always—she's 71 and she still does a show! And I go—she flies in on a thing, she's just standing. They drop her down. She stands—I love Cher, don't get me wrong!

00:29:14 Jesse Host I say you Solomon Burke this thing! Solomon Burke would just perform from a throne! You've got that red sofa. Just have them bring in on the sofa, set you down at the back, and have those half-naked dudes dance.

00:29:26 Cassandra Guest *[Laughs.]* That is a good idea. Let me tell you, if I do any more live stuff, it will be like that. 'Cause I have spent this year dancing. I mean, I was a former dancer. So, I still like to dance. I still like to do it. But I don't dance all year. Then I dance like crazy for a month—and I'm not dancing that big, but just enough to end up with cortisone shots in my shoulder, cortisone shot in my good. At the chiropractor every single day. Bruises from head to toe. I'm a mess! I'm like, "I can't do this anymore!"

00:29:55 Jesse Host Your Elvira schtick fits so squarely with this original form of fandom, right? This original geekery—the one that you had when you were a kid. *Famous Movie Monsters* and Frankenstein model kits. And

you've been part of that world since you started doing Elvira. You know, as a—as a performer. As a celebrity. And it must be amazing to hear the stories from people who tell you what this supremely silly character means to them.

00:30:36 Cassandra Guest It really is weird, the stories I hear. And now I'm kind of used to it, but starting several years ago, people telling me how my character changed their life! And I'm going, "How the hell did it do that?!" You know. But they said it gave them strength, gave them courage, gave them power to kind of stand up to bullies. Stand up to, you know, the hypocrisy that was kind of happening around them. Showing them that women can be sexy and strong at the same time. Because—not just because you're sexy, you're a bimbo, you're an idiot. But you can be strong, and you can be sexy, and you can use your assets for—to make you more powerful. It's really crazy how many people say that!

I've had people even tell me that I have kept them from committing suicide, which I just—you know, I can't believe. But I've had people tell me that many, many times. I don't know how a character like that can influence someone so much, but I'm learning that I guess it—you know, it can. It's weird. It's so strange to me. But I'm happy for it and it makes it the thing about Elvira that I like the best: that I've actually changed some people's lives for the better. And in fact, possibly saved some lives, for crying out loud! You gotta be pretty happy about that.

00:32:01 Jesse Host Cassandra, thank you so much for taking all this time to be on *Bullseye*. What a—what a great joy to get to meet you.

00:32:06 Cassandra Guest Thanks! This was fun, talking like this. *[Laughs.]*

00:32:10 Jesse Host Cassandra Peterson, friends. Elvira! So much fun. Before we go out, I wanna play a little bit of a brand-new song she recorded. It's sort of an impassioned plea. Yes, be safe. Stay home. Wear a mask. But please, don't cancel Halloween.

00:32:24 Music Music "Don't Cancel Halloween" by Elvira.

*I'm the queen
Of Halloween
COVID-19
Ruined everything*

If they cancel Halloween...

[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue and then fades out.]

00:32:44 Jesse Host It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Every now and then, we find a guest with a story about a song they love. We call it The Song that Changed My Life. And this week, boy have we got a treat for you.

I went on Twitter and asked, "What comedian loves the 'Monster Mash' the most?" And it turns out—I kind of knew this going in—all comedians love the "Monster Mash". I don't know why that is! But the universal love for the "Monster Mash" is overwhelming. One particularly vociferous response I got was from the brilliant Andy Daly. Andy Daly, of course, a brilliant comedian and actor. In my opinion, one of the funniest people in the world. You've seen him on *Mad TV*, *Eastbound & Down*. He plays the terrible doctor on *Silicon Valley*. And for three years, he starred on the comedy central show,

Review. He played a critic willing to review pretty much anything that life has to offer—even something as simple as eating pancakes.

00:33:51	Sound Effect	Transition	A <u>bunch</u> of pancakes. Music swells and fades.
00:33:52	Clip	Clip	Music: Bright, orchestral music.
00:34:14	Sound Effect	Transition	Forrest MacNeil (Review): I have now eaten ten pancakes! And on the bright side, I can see the light at the end of this disgusting tunnel. But... it has now been 45 minutes since I started eating, and the pancakes are no longer hot. These aren't food. Music swells and fades.
00:34:15	Jesse	Host	So, now, with a special Halloween edition of The Song that Changed My Life, we present to you: Andy Daly. Take it away, Andy.
00:34:22	Andy Daly	Guest	Hi, I'm Andy Daly and I would like to speak with you about the "Monster Mash", which is a song that changed my life. It's hard to think about the first time I heard the "Monster Mash", because I feel that the "Monster Mash" is one of those songs that has always been with us, you know? I think it's a song that I was born knowing. Like the national anthem. It's just—it's just—it's in your bloodstream. It's a part of the culture. I do know that the first time I paid a lot of attention to the "Monster Mash" was when I was in a band, in high school, and we were hired to play a Halloween party. And the very first thought that we all had was, "Well, we gotta learn the "Monster Mash". We're gonna play a Halloween party, we gotta know that song." And so, I really drilled down on it. I played drums and it's a great drum part. If you're not gonna start it off with chains on the ground and blowing bubbles in a straw—which shouldn't do if you're playing a party, 'cause that's just—people don't know what's happening. <i>[Spooky sound effects fade in.]</i> It starts off with a fill and then a drum groove—bum! Keh-keh! Keh! Bummm! Keh-keh! Keh! And if you're playing a Halloween party, people should know right away. "Oh. Oh! It's the 'Monster Mash'." "Monster Mash" from the album <i>The Original Monster Mash</i> by Bobby Pickett and the Crypt-Kickers. <i>I was working in the lab, late one night When my eyes beheld an eerie sight For my monster from his slab, began to rise And suddenly to my surprise</i> <i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i> Well, we're hearing a guy doing his best Boris Karloff impression, that's for sure. And we're hearing a very basic song, musically. I mean, they knew what they were doing. They were like, "We are not

00:36:02	Music	Music	<p>attracting too much attention to any of the musical aspects of this song. It is all about the Karloff and it is all about the words.” <i>[Volume increases.]</i></p> <p><i>To the master bedroom where the vampires feast The ghouls all came from their humble abodes To get a jolt from my electrodes</i></p>
00:36:12	Andy	Guest	<p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i> Nobody in our band could do a real Boris Karloff impression. But our bassist is the one. It fell to him. And I couldn't really hear. I was behind the drums and, you know, we didn't have monitors or anything, but <i>[laughing]</i> the audience seemed to be enjoying it!</p>
00:36:26	Music	Music	<p><i>[Volume increases.]</i></p> <p><i>The zombies were having fun, the party had just begun</i></p>
00:36:32	Andy	Guest	<p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i> I've always been very impressed that this guy, in the middle of doing this Boris Karloff impression throughout the song, suddenly and without warning jumps into a Dracula impression! A Bela Lugosi impression! That's when Dracula asks the question, <i>[in a Dracula voice]</i> “Whatever happened to my Transylvania twist?”</p>
00:36:49	Music	Music	<p><i>[Volume increases.]</i></p> <p><i>Whatever happened to my Transylvania twist?</i></p> <p><i>It's now the mash, it's now the monster mash</i></p>
00:36:54	Andy	Guest	<p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i> I'll tell you this: about five years ago, when my daughter was five years old, it was around Halloween time and I made a Pandora playlist—you know how—you know how Pandora worked. You can type in an artist or a song or a type of song. And I typed in “Monster Mash”. And it became this playlist of Halloween novelty songs, from the '50s and '60s, of which there are a surprising number! There were quite a few of them! You've got, uh, “Monster's Holiday”, “Teenage Brain Surgeon”, <i>[laughs]</i> it was—what, the “Monster Swim”? Which, by the way, the same people who brought us the “Monster Mash” also brought us a song called the “Monster Swim”, which is equally fantastic.</p>
00:37:38	Music	Music	<p>“Monster Swim” by Bobby Pickett</p> <p><i>We do the swim! It's a poolside smash The monster swim! It's bigger than the mash</i></p>
00:37:47	Andy	Guest	<p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue; eventually, it fades out to be replaced with “Monster Mash” again.]</i> I think that this is true—that Halloween and Christmas are the only two holidays that have songs written about them. Unless you kind of count “Peter Cottontail” for Easter, but not really. That's a stretch. And if I had to pick between the two, I would take the Halloween songs anytime over all of the Christmas songs.</p>

I am delighted to hear Halloween novelty songs at Halloween time. I look forward to this time of year that I can play them all the time. Whereas my attitude toward Christmas music is a little more like, “[Sighs heavily.] Here we go.”

00:38:20 Music Music

[Laughs.]
[“Monster Mash” volume increases.]

*...all were digging the sounds
Igor on chains, backed by his baying hounds
The coffin-bangers were about to arrive
With their vocal group, 'The Crypt-Kicker Five'*

00:38:32 Andy Guest

[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]
If I were to try to make the case to somebody who tells me, “I don’t wanna hear the ‘Monster Mash’, I’m not interested in the ‘Monster Mash’. [Chuckling.] I’m sick of the ‘Monster Mash.’”

I would say, “That’s crazy!” Because [laughing]—the “Monster Mash” is full of so many characters that you are free to imagine and imagine them outside of this song. Like, what’s up with the Crypt-Kicker Five? What other kind of gigs do they play? What’s up with the Coffin Bangers? I wanna know more about the Coffin Bangers? What do you mean the zombies are having fun? What does that look like?

When Dracula says, “Whatever happened to my Transylvania twist?” and then the answer is, “It’s now the mash,” I’m really curious about that! That opens up a whole—what do you mean?! How did the Transylvania twist become the mash?! This song is chock full of ideas [laughs] and imagery and characters. And then, of course, it ends with an invitation for us, the living, to also enjoy the monster mash, which is a beautiful way for the song to end.

00:39:33 Music Music

It tells a story and it’s an invitation to dance. This song has everything. [Giggles.]
[Volume increases.]

*Then you can mash, you’ll catch on in a flash
Then you can mash, then you can monster mash!*

00:39:40 Jesse Host

[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]
Andy Daly, with the song that changed his life: the “Monster Mash” by Bobby “Boris” Pickett and the Crypt-Kickers. If you haven’t seen Andy Daly in his television show, *Review*, please go check it out. He also has a comedy album out, called *Four More Sweaters: Monsters Take Your Questions*. In it, he plays four different characters in front of a live audience taking questions from them. One of the characters is L Ron Hubbard. Oh! It is so funny. It is so funny. And both of his sweaters themed albums are two of the funniest comedy recordings that exist.

Nobody on earth funnier than Andy Daly. What a—what a funny man. I also cannot recommend enough his podcast, *Bonanas for Bonanza*, with the great Maria Bamford and Matt Gourley, where

they—in character—recap episodes of *Bonanza*. Television’s longest running show, maybe? No, that’s *Gunsmoke*. Anyway, it’s a great show.

00:40:34 Music Transition
00:40:39 Jesse Host
00:40:47 Promo Clip

Thumpy, relaxed music with light vocalizations.

Even more of the *Bullseye* Halloween Special after the break. Stay with us. It’s *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Music: Jaunty swing music plays.

Annabelle Gurwitch: Hi. Are you someone who thinks that when one door closes, another one opens?

Laura House: Someone who always sees the light at the end of the tunnel?

Annabelle: If you answered yes to one or both of these questions, good for you!

Laura: We are not those people.

Annabelle: Nope! I’m Annabelle Gurwitch, and I’m a “You know that other door opening? It probably leads to a broom closet” kind of person.

Laura: And I’m Laura House! When I see a light at the end of the tunnel, I assume it’s a train! Headed right toward me!

Annabelle: Laura and I have created a brand-new podcast for people like us! It’s called Tiny Victories. We’re sharing personal tiny victories, or things we’ve read or seen that inspire resilience.

Laura: So, if you’re looking for a tiny reason to get outta bed each week, subscribe to Tiny Victories.

Annabelle: Available on Maximum Fun, or wherever you get your podcasts!

Laura: Let’s get tiny!

[Music fades out.]

00:41:34 Jesse Host

You’re listening to *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. We’re doing a special Halloween episode for all you boys and ghouls out there. *[Sighs.]* Wow. Look, I don’t know how to say this. Every October, people watch classic horror movies. Sometimes new horror movies. It’s a proud tradition for many of us. And I, personally, am terrified of horror movies. I do not like being scared. Neither does my producer, Kevin. We are total wimps. And since this is NPR, it is entirely possible that you can relate to us. Scary stuff is very scary! But there’s more to the Halloween spirit than just getting scared. And movies help you with that! What’s Thanksgiving without *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*? Christmas without *Charlie Brown*? The 4th of July without... I don’t know, I guess *Born on the Fourth of July*?

Anyway, we brought in two resident film experts, here at Maximum Fun, to talk about movies—spooky and ookie! April Wolfe is a writer who has reviewed movies for *The Atlantic*, NPR, and *LA Weekly*.

She also co-wrote a horror movie, called *Black Christmas*, that came out last year. She hosts *Switchblade Sisters*, a feminist film podcast. She is joined by Alonso Duralde, film critic for *The Wrap*, *Reuters*, and more. He's a panelist on the Max Fun movie podcast, *Who Shot Ya?*.

Anyway. Let's get into our conversation about how Halloween and film.

00:42:57 Music Transition
00:43:02 Jesse Host

Thumpy transition music.

April, Alonso, thank you so much for joining me on *Bullseye*. Always a joy to see you guys.

[They thank him.]

00:43:19 Alonso Duralde Guest
00:43:20 Jesse Host
00:43:21 Alonso Guest

So, I—here's the first thing. We're talking about Halloween, but I wanna make it clear: I'm very afraid to watch scary movies. I feel ya. I'm—

Oh, thank god.
I'm a total wuss, too.

[April laughs.]

It is a thing now where not just my husband but other critics we know like to sit near me at horror movies that I have to review, because I'm the lowest bar of scared.

[Jesse laughs.]

00:43:42 Jesse Host
00:43:44 April Wolfe Guest
00:43:51 Jesse Host
00:43:58 April Guest

And so, watching me is part of the show. Whereas April is like—she is a tough mama Jama, over there.

April, it's like your—borderline your thing.

I think it is—it is my thing. I think it's probably been my thing since I was three years old. So.

Is that common among film critics? How many film critics do you meet who love horror movies?

Um, I think that more recently it's become more of a thing. You have some younger film critics who are, you know, kind of getting reared and blogging and they have these fringe interests. But I don't think that that was the norm before. Kenneth Turan even wrote something today about how he doesn't review them, and he just doesn't want to. And I totally respect his decision. I have a very different opinion, obviously, but it's—I would say it's becoming more en vogue.

00:44:27 Alonso Guest

Yeah, genre got a lot more legitimacy I think with the sort of internet generation of film critics. And even before that, like, the zine era of film critics where they were sort of unapologetically all in for that. And in fact, maybe even started with horror movies and then started branching out to the rest of it. Whereas, I think a lot of your traditional critics are more involved in the canon and, you know, they'll talk about horror in terms of, like, *[pretentiously]* "Oh, yes, *Eyes Without a Face*," or, you know the—or *Nosferatu* or the—even the universal horror films. But yeah, I'd say now your young internet folks were weaned on Wes Craven and Tobe Hooper and those guys.

00:45:01 April Guest That's true. And you also have the women who are coming in who have a brand-new take on all of these things that I think a lot of people weren't even thinking about.

00:45:09 Jesse Host You, April, were almost literally weaned on horror movies. Right?

00:45:14 April Guest *[Laughing.]* Yeah. Yeah, I was. I know. I think I'm probably a weirdo.

00:45:19 Jesse Host Yes, no, it's very weird.

00:45:22 April Guest *[They laugh.]*
I always make this joke that everyone I know saw *Back to the Future* when they were kids. And I was watching *Sleepaway Camp*.

[Jesse laughs.]

And I—you know, I didn't see *Back to the Future* until this past year. And yes, that's my admission as a—as a film critic, that it took me quite a long time. But I was like, "I don't know, there's some mixed messages for women in that film." You know?

[They laugh.]

00:45:47 Alonso Guest That's—I just have a different outlook on things, I think. Whereas I didn't see *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* until I was in my 30s, 'cause I was just a big chicken and I had lived in Texas and I still wouldn't watch it.

00:45:56 Jesse Host My wife went to a children's birthday party, as a kid—and I'm talking about I believe it was her eighth—or it was an eighth or ninth birthday party, where the parents showed *The Shining*.

[Alonso and April make sounds of shock.]

00:46:20 April Guest And she was sincerely traumatized by it and has been ever since. I don't think she has watched a horror film since then.
I just got giddy thinking about that.

[Alonso and Jesse laugh.]

00:46:31 Alonso Guest I know that if I had children that I wouldn't be—like, I would not be allowed to do that, now. I'm sure that someone would just call the cops, but I'm like, "*[Gasps.]* What a cool thing to introduce your children to!" *[Laughs.]*

00:46:37 Jesse Host Yeah, April at eight would have forced a friend to go with her to dress as the twins from *The Shining*, probably.

[April agrees with a laugh.]

00:46:54 April Guest So, now that we have established a baseline for tolerance of scariness. April, in deference to the fact that it is actually the Halloween season—

[April confirms.]

00:46:54 April Guest What is a recommendable, genuinely scary film for Halloween?
Aw, see that's a hard one. Because I mean, I don't often get scared by horror films. But there are ones that still really creep me out. And I still think that *Don't Look Now* is a classic for a reason. And I think that that one is—it's fantastic performances and it's also genuinely creepy 'cause it's all set in Venice and you have, you know, all

			these twisty, turny pathways and some—you know—person in like a red jacket. You know? Being chased. And it's genuinely creepy. And there's some religious stuff in there, too, if you're into that. You know.
00:47:28	Jesse	Host	What's the premise of the movie?
00:47:30	April	Guest	God. Donald Sutherland [<i>chuckles</i>]—he's in Venice. He's working and there's like a child who dies, I believe. And he keeps seeing this, uh... this person who he thinks might be his child, in his child's jacket. And at the same time, there's news about this kind of killer going around Venice. So, you have all of this atmosphere of just death and, you know—very Edgar Allen Poe, I would say.
00:47:03	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:47:04	Clip	Clip	[<i>Low, atmospheric noises. Distantly, the sound of someone crying.</i>]
			John Baxter (<i>Don't Look Now</i>): It's okay. It's okay. I won't hurt you. Come on.
00:47:20	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:47:21	Jesse	Host	Are there horror movies that I could watch and enjoy, as a person who is afraid of horror movies? I'm not, like—look. I—I'm—it's not pathological or anything, my avoidance of horror movies.
			[<i>April agrees.</i>]
00:47:38	Alonso	Guest	I would say there are some old-school films that are kind of creepy and atmospheric but aren't gonna give you necessarily nightmares. Like, the original <i>Cat People</i> , for instance. It's very shadowy and very—there's a lot of implication involved, but it still sets this tone and it's very kind of haunting and creepy.
00:49:01	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:49:02	Clip	Clip	[<i>Haunting, echoing screams overlapping one another.</i>]
			Speaker (<i>Cat People</i>): What is the matter?
00:49:12	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:49:13	Alonso	Guest	And then, you know, my suggestion for like a Halloween movie for people who don't really like horror movies is <i>Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein</i> .
			[<i>They laugh.</i>]
			Because that way you get Dracula and the Wolfman and Frankenstein, but it's an Abbott and Costello movie. So, you know, the stakes are never that bad and you're never gonna be, like, too hiding your face in your hands.
00:49:29	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:49:30	Clip	Clip	Chick (<i>Abbot and Costello Meet Frankenstein</i>): Listen. You're making enough noise to wake up the dead!
			Wilbur: I don't have to wake them up. He's up. I saw a hand.
			Chick: [<i>Disdainfully.</i>] You saw a hand.
			Wilbur: Uh-huh!

Chick: Where?

Wilbur: Right over there.

[Thumping.]

Chick: Let me see it. I don't believe you. Where is it?

[Moaning.]

Wilbur: I saw a hand there!

Chick: You don't know what you're talking about! You're all excited reading this legend. Now, listen. Listen, Wilbur. I know there's no such a person as Dracula! You know there's no such a person as Dracula.

Wilbur: But does Dracula know it?
Music swells and fades.

00:49:50 Sound Effect Transition

00:49:51 Jesse Host

Are there things that are adjacent to the kind of horror themes that we're talking about that people could look at, in the Thanksgiving time and enjoy, that aren't simply—I mean, *Charlie Brown* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.

00:50:14 Alonso Guest

[They hum thoughtfully.]

I mean, what are your thoughts about—have you seen *Trick or Treat*?

00:50:17 April Guest

Trick or Treat I think was fun. It's like a glossy anthology series. There's tons of great horror anthologies coming out, right now.

00:50:27 Alonso Guest

Yeah, *Trick or Treat* is Michael Dougherty's film and it's more about the idea of Halloween than necessarily being a horror film. And there are some scares in it, but if you want a movie that really kind of celebrates the way we celebrate Halloween in this country and the autumnal-ness of it and that kind of thing, that might be a good one to start with. And, you know, and I think that John Carpenter's *Halloween* is—I mean, it's scary, but it's scary in a way that has been so often copied that it's kind of in our collective DNA now, that you're kind of ready for it. Because even if you haven't seen *Halloween*, you've probably seen *Halloween* just from all the people who've been aping it over the years.

00:51:09 April Guest

It's fun to kind of dissect the aesthetics of it. Once you're—once you're past the scares, it's great to just see what these filmmakers are doing because horror is a place where filmmakers can experiment. And once you can get past the scares, you get some really amazing cinematography and effects and performances and storytelling. And that's one of my favorite parts.

00:51:31 Alonso Guest

There are also some interesting movies about the making of horror movies that, you know, might be enough of a remove that make it more palatable. So, you've got *Hitchcock*, from a couple years ago, which is based on Stephen Rebello's book, *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho*. There's—what's the one about the making of *Nosferatu*? With Willem Dafoe and John Malkovich?

00:51:50 April Guest

I was—I looking at it earlier—yes!

00:51:51	Alonso	Guest	<i>[Interrupting.] Shadow of the Vampire!</i> Yeah. So, you know, there—you can always—you can always step back a bit. And there are a lot of interesting documentaries about, like, certain horror series. Like, there's one called <i>Never Sleep Again</i> about the <i>Nightmare on Elm Street</i> films that is quite lengthy but really goes into a lot of detail. I did a screening for Out Fest once of the very gay <i>Nightmare on Elm Street 2</i> and the guys who made that film came in and showed some clips. And there's another long one I think called <i>Crystal Lake Memories</i> , all about the Jason—the <i>Friday the 13th</i> movies.
00:52:21	April	Guest	Oh, see I haven't seen that last one. It's on my list now.
00:52:25	Jesse	Host	Tell me what's gay about <i>Friday the 13th 2</i> .
00:52:27	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	April: Everything!
00:52:28	Alonso	Guest	Alonso: No, no, no. <i>Nightmare on Elm Street 2</i> . It is super gay. It's this teenager who is confused about his feelings. There's a gym coach who hangs out at leather bars and whips students with belts.
00:52:41	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:52:42	Clip	Clip	Music: Ominous, pitchy music.
			Speaker (<i>Nightmare on Elm Street 2</i>): No! Nooo! Nooooo! NOOOO!
00:52:50	Sound Effect	Transition	<i>[The music swells to a crescendo.]</i> Music swells and fades.
00:52:51	Jesse	Host	Okay. I know that you two are sitting here staring at me: a man of whatever the opposite of steel is. A man who walks—
00:53:01	Alonso	Guest	<i>[Giggling.]</i> Butter.
00:53:02	Jesse	Host	—terrified through life. Okay?
			<i>[April agrees with a giggle.]</i>
			But I presume that some of our listeners love being scared at the movies. If you were going to recommend one golden strength, super scare movie—which is a well-known category.
00:53:23	April	Guest	<i>[They laugh.]</i> It's on IMDb I think. Yeah.
00:53:26	Jesse	Host	What would it be? And I'm gonna start with Alonso, because I think this question's gonna be harder for Alonso.
00:53:30	Alonso	Guest	Uh, yeah, I was gonna say, this is—I think we'll let April wrap this baby up. Um. Hmm. I'm trying to think of like the times I've been most afraid in a movie theater. I mean, <i>Aliens</i> was one of them, but you know, I think again that's another movie that's been borrowed from so much that you've definitely seen it at this point.
00:53:46	Jesse	Host	That's also—that also falls into the category of movies I should not have seen when I was 11.
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>
			Oh boy.

00:53:53	Alonso	Guest	But I'm gonna go with—and this is a controversial choice, because this is not a director that I generally like—Zach Snider's remake of <i>Dawn of the Dead</i> . That movie made me sweat a lot.
00:54:05	Jesse	Host	Really?
00:54:06	Alonso	Guest	Yeah. The tension mounts in a way that I just—I literally remember sitting in an air-conditioned theater and just sweating, I was so nervous and uncomfortable and, "Euugh! Get out of the thing!" So, that's my vote.
00:54:19	Jesse	Host	April, you're gonna have to pick a different Zach Snider movie.
00:54:24	April	Guest	<i>[They laugh.]</i> Nooooo! <i>[Laughs.]</i> Uh, I mean. I don't know how to narrow it down. I do have to say that probably <i>The Descent</i> screwed me up the most. Because I have a problem with claustrophobic stories where you can't see what's in the dark and you have all of these women who are spelunking and they are in this kind of dark cave area and, you know, one of them gets hurt and it's not an easy thing to get back up to the surface. And so, they're kind of trapped. But then at the same time, there might be something down there with them and I think that the direction and cinematography of that, it <u>really</u> chilled me. It scared the excrement out of me, because it is—there's so much darkness and there's something about the things that you cannot see that scare me more than, you know, the monsters or the blood. That's what really gets me.
00:55:20	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:55:21	Clip	Clip	<i>[Wet cavern noises.]</i>
			Speaker 1 (<i>The Descent</i>): <i>[Panicked and breathless.]</i> Dead animals. Hundreds of them.
			Speaker 2: This is not good guys.
			<i>[The sound of a knife being unsheathed.]</i>
			Speaker 1: Can we get out of here? Which way?
			Speaker 2: Come on.
			<i>[Discordant music swells.]</i>
			Speaker 2: I don't know.
			Speaker 1: What do you mean you don't know?!
			Speaker 2: There's no breeze! It could be any one of these tunnels! Take your pick!
			Speaker 1: <i>[Screaming.]</i> Helloooo!
00:55:41	Sound Effect	Transition	<i>[An inhuman shriek echoes back at them.]</i> Music swells and fades.
00:55:42	Jesse	Host	I shouldn't watch <i>Man on a Wire</i> right? That would scary.
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>

00:55:48	Alonso	Guest	'Cause he's so high up there, he could fall. Right? Well, it's not as scary as <i>The Walk</i> is, because—you know—he didn't take the camera with him on the—on the wire. But Zemeckis fakes that so well that it's just like, "Aaaaah!"
00:55:58	Jesse	Host	I'm afraid watching the biplane movie that they show at Hurst Castle, 'cause I'm so afraid of heights.
00:56:06	April	Guest	<i>[Alonso laughs.]</i> This is—this is a brand-new dimension to you that I did not foresee.
00:56:10	Jesse	Host	I know I present like a real macho man.
			<i>[They all laugh.]</i>
			No. You may have just been thinking of Kai Ryssdal.
00:56:19	April	Guest	<i>[Alonso laughs.]</i> Oh. Oh, god, yeah. Sorry. Sorry.
00:56:21	Alonso	Guest	Now, that's a man.
00:56:22	Jesse	Host	<i>[Music fades in.]</i>
00:56:31	Alonso	Guest	Well, April, Alonso, thank you so much for giving us this worthwhile guide to the world of Halloween film, on <i>Bullseye</i> . Happy Halloween!
00:56:32	April	Guest	Thank you!
00:56:33	Music	Transition	Thumpy, synth heavy, distorted music.
00:56:40	Jesse	Host	Maximum Fun's April Wolfe and Alonso Duralde. April is the host of <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> , a terrific show where she interviews female filmmakers about genre movies they love. Alonso co-hosts the Max Fun podcast <i>Who Shot Ya?</i> —he, Drea Clark, and Ify Nwadiwe, talk movies new and old every week on that show. Go check out those shows. <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> , <i>Who Shot Ya?</i> , they're both awesome. The other day, Arnold Schwarzenegger quoted Ify on Twitter. I'm not entirely sure why, but it was a solid quote.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
			You're listening to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. Our very special Halloween episode is nearing its grim conclusion! But first, a recommendation from me, your host. It's called the outshot.
			When Jay Hawkins wrote this song, in 1955, he thought he was writing a blues ballad. I mean, a bit of belter, but pretty straightforward. I mean, the guitar solo in that 1955 recording? It's borderline jazzy.
00:57:45	Music	Music	"I Put a Spell on You" by Jay Hawkins from the 1955 recording.
00:57:06	Jesse	Host	<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i> By the time Jay Hawkins cut "I Put a Spell on You" the second time, in 1956, it was a whole new thing. He was gonna lay it down straight again. The plan was, he would see if it would hit on a bigger label he'd signed to, Okeh Records. But the producer brought in some food and he brought in a case of wine.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>

Italian Swiss Colony Muscatel, specifically.

[Music fades in.]

00:58:39 Music Music

And everybody got so hammered, that Hawkins didn't even remember making the record that ended up defining his career. "I Put a Spell on You" by Screamin' Jay Hawkins.

*I put a spell on you
Because you're mine
Stop the things you do
Watch out
I ain't lying
Yeah, I can't stand...*

00:59:16 Jesse Host

[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]

When Screamin' Jay Hawkins performed, he'd step out of a coffin dressed like a Halloween version of a voodoo priest. I mean, a loopy, stereotypical witchdoctor pastiche. Condemned by the NAACP, at the time.

It was all delivered with tongue in cheek, but also with enough gravitas and oomph that Jay kind of pulled the whole thing off. I mean, with that big, powerful voice he had. His hero was Paul Robeson. You couldn't really think that it was just a novelty song. It's a remarkable trick to imbue what was basically a culturally problematic joke with genuine power and menace. And it's the contrast between light and dark, the chiaroscuro, that makes it work.

01:00:12 Music Music

And the result of all that is one of the best singles of the 20th century.

[Volume increases.]

*I ain't lying
Ohh, oh
I love you
I love you
I love you, anyhow
I don't care if you don't want me
I'm yours right now
I put a spell on you*

01:00:39 Jesse Host

[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue and then ends.]

In the 60 years since that song came out, everyone on Earth has covered it. I mean, the dynamics between that seductive build up and the booming chorus are just irresistible to singers. Van Morris, Annie Lennox, Bette Midler, Buddy Guy. But there is only one version that's better than the original.

[Music fades in.]

Hawkins imagined "I Put a Spell on You" as a straight blues ballad. That's the reading Nina Simone gave it. There isn't even a little bit of wink in her voice. Though, there are some strings on the intro.

01:01:14	Music	Music	<p>"I Put a Spell on You" by Nina Simone.</p> <p><i>I put a spell on you because you're mine You better stop the things that you do I ain't lying, no, I ain't lying</i></p>
01:01:45	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i></p> <p>I can't think of another singer besides Nina Simone who could sell the totality of this song, while doing it so straight. I mean, there are singers who could sing it seductively. There are ones who could get silly, like Screamin' Jay. But Nina isn't just cooing or even belting. The juice in her version comes from the intensity of her sincerity. There's hurt. There's power. Control. Abandon. Nina Simone felt deeply. You could hear it in her singing. Coming from a Black woman in 1965, this novelty song—this goofy hit record—becomes something much more.</p> <p>Nina manages to frame her powerlessness as power. Her fear as a demand. And with all due respect to the great Screamin' Jay Hawkins: that's something only Nina Simone could do. That's my outshot.</p>
01:02:50	Music	Music	<p><i>[Volume increases.]</i></p> <p><i>You hear me, I put a spell on you, because you're mine</i></p>
01:03:11	Music	Transition	<p><i>[Music ends.]</i></p> <p>Upbeat thumpy music.</p>
01:03:16	Jesse	Host	<p>That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i>. <i>Bullseye</i> is created in and out of the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where I carved pumpkins with my children, this past week. Or—more accurately—carved pumpkins for my children. They kind of decided that the way we were gonna it was they were gonna give me orders and I would have to do most of the carving. But the joke's on them, because the pumpkins rotted almost immediately, and I do not know what the difference is between a jack-o-lantern that rots three weeks later and one that rots three days later. And mine were the latter category!</p> <p>Our 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 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. Great band. Go buy their records. If you wanna keep up with the show on social media, we're on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Just search for <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i>. You can always grab a <i>Bullseye</i> interview from YouTube if you wanna share it with a friend.</p>
01:04:32	Promo	Promo	<p>And I think that's about it! Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.</p> <p>Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.</p>

[Music fades out.]