00:00:00	Jesse Thorn	Host	Hey, gang. It's Jesse. We're getting close to the end of the year: a time to think about what we're thankful for. A time to share joy and give back. Let's be honest, 2020 has been a challenging year for all of us. Public radio stations are no exception. During this time, please consider supporting your local public radio station. Every day they bring you the news you need to know—election coverage, the pandemic, everything else. They also bring you shows like <i>Bullseye</i> . We're incredibly grateful for that. Show your gratitude and support your local member station now. Go to Donate.NPR.org/bullseye and give whatever you can. And thanks.
00:00:38	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:40	Promo	Promo	Speaker: Bullseye with Jesse Thorn is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:51	Music	Transition	[Music fades out.] "Huddle Formation" from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team.
00:00:59	Jesse	Host	It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. Ani DiFranco moved out of her mom's house at 15 years old. She'd been writing songs for a year. As an up and coming singer-songwriter, she played house shows, cafes, slept on couches and floors. She also started her own record label, Righteous Babe. She released her own music through it, as well as work from Andrew Bird, Arto Lindsay, and Sara Lee. Around Ani DiFranco, there's a huge, passionate fanbase. She sold millions of records, hit a bunch of Top 100 charts, won awards and acclaim from critics. But maybe more than any other singer, Ani DiFranco is defined by her independence.
			When we talked in 2017, though, she'd just released an album that departed from that a bit. She collaborated with a big, diverse roster of artists. Justin Vernon from Bon Iver, Maceo Parker, Gail Ann Dorsey. <i>Binary</i> —which is what she called it—is an album about relationships, about coexistence, about the connections out there between all of us.
00:02:03	Music	Music	Here's a single from that album. It's called "Play God". "Play God" from the album <i>Binary</i> by Ani DiFranco.
			I was done at 16 Showing up for class I was out there in the ring Learning how to kick some ass I was done at 16 Using my momma's key It was all on me It was all on me
			[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue, then fades out.]
00:02:48	Jesse	Host	Ani DiFranco, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> . It's great to have you on the show.
00:02:50	Ani DiFranco	Guest	Hey, thanks!
00:02:52	Jesse	Host	So, how much do you tour, these days? As a person who once essentially lived on the road.

00:03:01	Ani	Guest	Yeah. I know. It's looking like very little, compared to life up 'til now. I just took six months off the road to be a mom and back up my fella. He was starting to spin out.
			[They chuckle.]
			Holding down the fort. So, yeah, that kind of thing never happened in my 20s and 30s. But now, you know, I do two or three tours in the spring, two or three in the fall. Sometimes a festival or two in the summer. It's a pretty—you know, reasonable pace. Just try to balance between, you know, being there for my kids and paying the bills.
00:03:41 00:03:45	Jesse Ani	Host Guest	How old were you when you started playing music professionally? Hm. Professionally. Hm. Like, uh I mean, I started playing gigs when I was nine. I befriended a fella who was in his 30s and he was a folk singer about town in Buffalo, New York. And I just became his sidekick. He was kind of a rough character and I think of, you know, a Pippi Longstocking as a sidekick served him well. And I was thrilled to be out in bars and sort of you know, seeing the world through his eyes. You know. The eyes of a singer-songwriter troubadour. And so, yeah. I mean, single digits. I started learning my craft—I mean, when I was a teenager I started getting my own gigs, in Buffalo. Then it kind of went from there.
			I mean, I remember thinking one night when I was teenager, I had just had a fight with my boyfriend and I was crying and I was distraught and I went up onstage—which maybe wasn't even a stage—at the Essex Street pub and I played a set of music and I—and I put my emotional drama down and I did my job. I was probably 16. And I thought that night, "I'm a professional." You know? "I found a way to do my job no matter what." And that's what you do. You just make a show no matter what the goddess gives you on that night.
00:05:12 00:05:15	Jesse Ani	Host Guest	Yeah, there's a saying theatre that you wipe your feet at the door. Right, there you go. That's a professional—I mean, probably a lot of people wouldn't have considered me a professional for many more years to come, but [chuckles]
00:05:25	Jesse	Host	What did audiences think about the fact that there was a nine-year-old onstage?
00:05:31	Ani	Guest	Well, you know, this is pre—yeah, you know, drunk driving awareness and therefore, you know, the sort of crack down on underage people in places with alcohol. So, yeah. I was—I was a kid hanging out in bars, in the '70s. Well, I guess it was '80s. Yeah, '70s, '80s. In Buffalo. And you know, even—even as a teenager, when I started getting my own gigs in bars—you know, it was kind of just under the radar. You know. The club owners, they knew I wasn't gonna drink. I wasn't gonna tell anybody my age. I was just kind of passing in the adult world. I knew the game already. So, you know, it was an era where that was possible.
00:06:19	Jesse	Host	That was right around the time your folks split up, right? Like, nine or ten?
00:06:22	Ani	Guest	Yeah. Yep. And, uh yeah, my parents were kind of embroiled in their implosion and I just sorta ducked out. And I was always a really self-sufficient kid. I had a brother who was more troubled and took more focus from my parents, so the fact that I just got good grades, didn't get in trouble, I was on my own and it was great.

00:06:52	Jesse	Host	When you say you were passing in the adult world—I mean, to some extent by the time you were a teenager, you were passing almost entirely in the adult world. Right? I mean, not just when you were in a club playing, but through the rest of your life.
00:07:07	Ani	Guest	Right. Yeah. I—actually, my mom—I ended up living with my mom in an apartment and then she bailed and went to Connecticut and I tried on small-town Connecticut for like three minutes and I said, "Neeeh." And I went back to Buffalo, at 15. I was—I struck out on my own. So. And you know, I was not legally emancipated. So, I—everything I did, from then on, was illegal. You know. My jobs, my apartments. I had to charm the various adults of the world into believing in me and taking a risk and giving me an apartment and a job and
00:07:50	Jesse	Host	Were you scared to do that or excited to do that?
00:07:53	Ani	Guest	I was excited. I came from a unhappy house, you know. My family. So, the freedom of—you know, of being self-directed, of being on my own, and I felt like I was choosing happiness. You know? I just wanted to go and be happy and not be involved in all that unnecessary sadness and strife. So, I was thrilled to be on my own.
00:08:21	Jesse	Host	You know, I thought of myself as a self-sufficient kid, when I was a kid. And you know, grew up with divorced parents in the city and I don't think it was 'til I was an adult that I really realized the extent to which what I saw as self-sufficiency was, in part, a kind of distrust of others and unwillingness to let them help me. [Chuckles.] And I wonder if you noticed that in your life, especially in your young life—that when you—when you're that young and you kind of make your own way so much, rely on yourself so much, that it can sometimes be hard to rely on others.
00:09:10	Ani	Guest	I—I—I get what you're spraying, totally. In fact, it's funny. Recently, I just—you know, I just put out this record called <i>Binary</i> and I'm doing these interviews and I'm talking to people about my deep thoughts about <i>[chuckles]</i> the binary universe that we live in and how everything is a relationship. Nothing—there's no such thing as a singularity or an individual. We only exist in relationship to each other. I mean, it's quantum physics and it's the emotional reality. It's the physical design as far as I know it of our universe.

And I was like, "Yeah. Right."

OnHerOwn."

You know, I spent a lot of years believing I was on my own. And I kinda am famous for it, in a way. Even above and beyond my art, often, which has kind of been a bummer. And looking back—which I have been lately, I'm writing a memoir in addition to just getting old [chuckles]—and you know, one of the things I realize more and more is that I was never on my own. You know. Even as an emancipated kid, I had Michael by my side. I had so many people at every phase of my life that helped me. I—this new record that I made, I have all these amazing collaborators, from the musicians who played on it to my husband who recorded it to Tchad Blake who mixed it. And they all contributed so much, and I believe helped translate these new songs, this new group of songs, so much more than on many, many of my records that I did on my own. You know?

And I was talking to a fella from Italy the other day, 'cause I'm about

to go to Europe, and he said, "But your 800 number is 1-800-

			And now, when I look over my life, I realize I much prefer community relationship unity, not—not—I hope I'm never solitary again.
00:11:27	Jesse	Host	How did that "on my own" spirit, when you were a young woman, affect your life? Like, when you were a teenager and in your early 20s?
00:11:36	Ani	Guest	Well, like you say, it was my life that created that spirit. I mean, I kinda had to be. It was out of necessity that I was self-sufficient as a kid and then you move into your young adult life and you do what you know. You know? Before you deconstruct it and reconstruct yourself. So, I think, you know, my instinct was just—you know, when I started playing music as a job, I—my instinct was, "I don't need a record company. I'll just make a record and I'll just sell it to the people who want it." And you know, I don't need this and that the other. I can—you know, I can produce my own record. There it is. Bada-bing. You know.
00:13:00	Jesse	Host	And just—I was carrying my "I got this" spirit into my work and I think it got me, you know—it got me a ways but then, you know, looking back I wish now that I had let other people in sooner. That I had trusted and, you know, branched out from that sort of fearful emancipated child. 'Cause I think that would have helped my art. It would have helped me to grow in ways that I didn't on my own. We'll have more with Ani DiFranco after a break. Still on the docket:
00.10.00	00000	11000	that time Ani jammed with Prince. I mean, can you imagine Prince asking you to like—just come over?! It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:13:16 00:13:17	Music Jesse	Transition Promo	Bright and upbeat synth string instruments. 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. Collaborate live. Drawing, sharing, and building ideas with everyone on the same page. And make sure more of your team is seen and heard with up to 49 people onscreen at once. Learn more about all the newest Teams features at Microsoft.com/teams.
00:13:48	Promo	Clip	[Music fades out.] Music: Eerie, unsettling music.
			Sidney Madden: Since the 1980s, hip-hop and America's prisons

have grown side-by-side.

Rodney Carmichael: And we're gonna investigate this connection to see how it lifts us up and holds us down.

Speaker: Hip-hop is talking about what we live. Trying to live the American dream, failing at the American dream—

Sidney: I'm Sidney Madden.

Rodney: I'm Rodney Carmichael. Listen now to the *Louder Than a Riot* podcast, from NPR Music.

Sidney: Where we trace the collision of rhyme and punishment in America.

00:14:18 Promo Clip

[Music ends with the sound of sirens and a slamming cell door.]

Music: Upbeat, fun music.

Lisa Hanawalt: Does our podcast deep dive into the weirdest Wikipedia pages we can find?

Emily Heller: Yeees! Do we learn about scam artists, remote islands, horrible mascots, beautiful diseases, and mythical monsters?

Lisa: Yes, yes, yes, absolutely, and yes! Do we retain any of this knowledge?

Emily & Lisa: Eeeeh?

Emily: Probably not. I'm Emily Heller.

Lisa: I'm Lisa Hanawalt.

Emily: We make art! And comedy. And TV shows. And also, the podcast, *Baby Geniuses*. For the past eight years, we've been trying to learn new things about the world and each other every episode.

Lisa: But let's be honest, this podcast is mostly about two friends hanging out, shooting the breeze, and making each other laugh. We're horny. We like gardening and horses. And we get real stupid on here.

Emily: But like, in a smart way!

Lisa: Yeah.

Emily: Join us! Every other week on Maximum Fun.

Music: Baby Geniuses, tell us something we don't know!

[Music ends.]

			[maore on acr]
00:15:03	Jesse	Promo	Hey, all. It's Jesse again with a reminder that now the end of the
			year is a great time to support your local NPR member station. Do it
			now. Go to Donate.NPR.org/bullseye and thanks.
00:15:16	Music	Transition	Thumpy and relaxed music with light vocalizations.
00:15:20	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to Bullseye. I'm Jesse Thorn. We're listening back to
			my 2017 conversation with the singer-songwriter Ani DiFranco. She
			just announced she has a new album, her 22 nd . It's called
			Revolutionary Love and it's coming out this January. Here's a single
			from the new record. It's called "Contagious".
00:15:38	Music	Music	"Contagious" from the album Revolutionary Love by Ani DiFranco.

They go low, you go high You bring more than your own supply That dirty game...

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

00:15:59	Jesse	Host	My—my friend, John Darnielle, who's in a band called The Mountain Goats—or he sort of is a band called The Mountain Goats. He's been complaining lately about doing press for his new album and people asking him about everything other than his art. And so, he happened to have commented that—I had posted that I was gonna be interviewing you today and he commented that he thought a song that you wrote, called "Hypnotized", was a genuine masterpiece. And so, I thought we would take a listen to it and maybe talk about it a little bit.
00:16:35	Music	Music	"Hypnotized" from the album Reprieve by Ani DiFranco. So that's how you found me Rain falling around me Looking down at a worm With a long way to go And the traffic was hissing by And I was homesick And I was high
			I was surrounded by a language In which I could say only hello And I thank you very much But you spoke so I could understand And I drew a treasure map on your hand
			And you were no picnic You were no prize But you had just enough pathos To keep me hypnotized Hypnotized
			[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue, then fades
00:17:34	Jesse	Host	out.] When you write in the first person, are you usually writing about yourself?
00:17:39	Ani	Guest	Mmm yes and no. I mean, what is "myself"?
00:17:48 00:17:53	Jesse Ani	Host Guest	[They laugh.] Wow! We're gonna go full NPR, Ani. Thanks. I mean, I guess technically I often am writing about myself, but I might have conflated myself with someone else. Or I might just be really writing from another point of view, but I find the first-person—I like the immediacy of it. I'm writing a—I'm writing from what I know. You know? And it's—some of it I lived and some of it
00:18:25 00:18:26	Jesse Ani	Host Guest	people very near and dear to me lived. Do you like to write beautiful songs? Oh yeah. I mean, that's the most uplifting feeling. [Sighs.] You know. Especially you know, a lot of my art and I think art in general comes from struggle, you know? Comes from pain. And when you take your pain, and you turn it into something beautiful and useful? It's like—that's—other than my kids, that's my deepest
00:18:55	Jesse	Host	joy I've ever known. I read a really interesting interview that you did in—now, more than 20 years ago, I think. It was mid-1990s. And one of the things that you were talking about was how much of yourself you lay out onstage. And the way that you relate to audiences, onstage. And

essentially, you said that the thing that kind of powered you through a performance was looking into the eyes of the people for whom you were performing.

And I think that is a fair description of, you know, what you were doing on your records, too. Like, you were really looking into the eyes of your audience in a way that few musical artists are... are interested in or willing to, whatever the case may be, do. And I wonder if that became more difficult as you kind of had the twin situations of getting more famous and becoming more of an adult—getting older?

00:20:09 Ani Guest

Yeah. I do—I do feel like that did become more difficult. I mean, literally the obsessive eye contact and figuratively the obsessive engagement with others and exposure. It all tends to compound and become exhausting. I think also there was an element to it, when I was young, that was kind of aggressive. You know? I was aggressive about, "No! Look at me!" [Laughing.] You know? "You!" And I would—I wouldn't stop until I had everyone in the room engaged fully. And, you know, I would just sort of approach my audiences with a mental bullwhip. And now, I feel... once again, like because I'm in a safer, more empowered place, I have an opportunity to be more gentle. You know, with my ideas, with my art. You know. With my eye contact.

I feel like I sort of took a page from my mother's book when I was young. And she was a very engaging person and a strong feminist and a, you know, an architect when there were no women architects. And my father was very gentle. He was very passive. He was very kind and quiet, and I feel, as I get older, I feel like I am on this sort of trajectory from my mother to my father. And now, I like to engage with people in a more gentle way. You know? And I think I—I mean, I hope that after empowering my tribe and connecting, you know, and finding my chosen family that now my new challenge is building more bridges. You know. Trying to connect with those outside of that tribe. Trying to speak a progressive idea to a conservative person, for instance, and have it be heard. You know. That's my new dream.

00:22:29 Jesse Host

Let's hear some more music from my guest, Ani DiFranco. She has a new album called *Binary*. This is the most recent single, which features Justin Vernon. It's called "Zizzing".

00:22:42 Music Music

"Zizzing" from the album *Binary* by Ani DiFranco, featuring Justin Vernon.

Air flush with water Skin slick with oil Power poles zizzing in the fog like Tesla coils

Sweeping patterns, glistening crystals What we call music in the air Whiskey dripping down your temples Mosquitos in your hair

And in the background a riverboat is sounding its goodbye Our magic should be more powerful as the years go by Where did I go so wrong with you? Tell me, where did I?

			[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue, then fades out.]
00:23:59 00:24:05	Jesse Ani	Host Guest	How do you decide when somebody gets to be a guest on an Ani DiFranco album? Umm, when they call me back?
00.24.03	AIII	Guesi	
			[They laugh.]
00:24:08	Jesse	Host	Uh-huuuh. Did you call—did you call Justin Vernon? He's probably best known—for folks who don't immediately recognize his name—for his hand or passudence or compething along those lines. Ben lyer
00:24:21	Ani	Guest	his band or pseudonym or something along those lines, Bon Iver. Yeah, his handle. Brilliant to have a handle. Should've thought of it a long time ago, myself. A little separation. Yeah, I mean, he was somebody I met during the <i>Hadestown</i> project—Anaïs Mitchell's wonderful folk opera that she brilliantly constructed and brought Justin into and myself. Um, yeah. So, this time out with this new record, my strategy was just, "Don't be alone. You have brilliant, beautiful friends. Call them." And so, that's what I started doing! As I was, you know, making the recordings I was just dreaming and scheming like, "Ooh."
00:25:52	Jesse	Host	You know, usually on many a record I would have done—what was about to up come there in the track was a chorus of Justin's voices that he added to the choruses of the songs, of that song. And I just—I said, "Can you be a string section with your voice?" Question mark. "That's my only—that's it. That's all I'm telling you." And normally I would do that with myself, you know. My own—my little bullet mic, you know, choruses have been on a lot of records. But once again, this time out I was like, "Maybe I should just make a few calls. Connect with some of my friends." And I'm so happy I did, 'cause they all brought their spirit to the record and it's so much better for it. I am very interested in the particular friends who have helped you along your road. I know that when I first encountered your music, because when I was in high school, my then girlfriend, now wife, definitely loved you more than me.
			[Ani laughs.]
00:26:22	Ani	Guest	I—the thing that struck me was like, "Huh. She's friends with Prince, huh?" [Chuckles.] So, how did you become friends with Prince? Prince was so cool.
			[Jesse laughs.]

I mean, how exactly? How does a little White girl from Buffalo get such vivid, brilliant company? Um. I mean, I guess maybe the connection point—he was struggling, you know, on his label— Warner Brothers—having a hard time with old major label industry, feeling a bit chewed up and spit out. And he, you know, at that time I was sort of getting on the covers of magazines for Miss Righteous Babe and he said, in the media—our conversation started in the media, really. He said, in some interview, "I wanna be on Righteous Babe."

[They chuckle.]

00:27:17	Jesse	Host	I believe that was the point where I wrote him a fax or something. I was like, "Call me." You just mailed him a contract like, "Let's do this!" Yeah, exactly. The contract says, "You can have whatever you want. You can get out whenever you want." That's what my contracts were like, on Righteous Babe. It's nice to have an artist run label, by the way people. Um, but then I don't know. I showed up in Minneapolis one summer and I had the wonderful Maceo Parker on tour with me and we were doing shows out and we were playing out in the ballpark in Minneapolis. And up drove this white limo and there was a tizzy backstage and everybody was like, "Ani, Ani! Come now. Come now!"
00:27:20	Ani	Guest	
			And I go over and the window [mimicking the sound of an automatic window rolling down]. And there he is, in—like, you know—electric purple, just lying prone on a white shag carpet in the bottom of this limo. And it was just amazing. He invited me to Paisley Park the next day to play on his record, which was ridiculous. And that next day happened to be the 4 th of July and next thing I knew, we were up on his—the roof of Paisley Park watching the fireworks and then we had a jam session.
00:28:56	Jesse	Host	You know. It was Prince and Larry Graham and Maceo Parker. And me! [Laughs.] And it was like, "Oh, wow. How does that happen?" I don't know. I was just really fortunate to have been, you know, some kind of acquaintance to him and to have been in his company over the years. He was a really powerful spirit. You're listening to Bullseye. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking to Ani DiFranco.
00:29:24	Ani	Guest	I like the idea of you, Prince, Maceo—Maceo Parker, of course, legendary for having played in both Parliament Funkadelic and the JBs—and Larry Graham, who played in both his band, Grand Central Station, and with Prince and originally with Sly and the Family Stone—touring as, like, a funk package tour to [chuckles] you know Oh man. Gosh. I'll sign up. Like the Concord Amphitheater. I'll sign up yesterday. Well, I'll tell you. Just—I'll just—I don't—wouldn't usually do this, but it's just—it's one of my happiest little moments in my life, when after that night was coming to a close and I was saying goodbye to Prince, I had showed up with like a fourstring tenor guitar. Like, you couldn't have a more yokel, like a folky, yokel ax hanging off of me. And I'm in that company. And he was, you know—Prince was just kind of jamming around songs that ended up being, you know, the Musicology Tour. And he likes to do
00:29:27	Jesse	Host	
00:29:28	Ani	Guest	

that kind of just woodshed songs and see what comes up and get ideas for the tour and so we were jamming on that stuff and I had my tenor, twangy guitar and I was just, you know, trying to—trying to sit in there. You know. How—in whatever way that I could instinctually devise. And as we were parting company, I was like, you know, "Wow! What the heck. I can't believe I just—buh-de-buh-

de-buh, with my stupid little guitar."

			And Prince said to me, "That was the funk. That was the funk you played."
00:30:52	Jesse	Host	I was like, "Woah. Sir, thank you, sir." [Laughs.] "I'm glad I pleased you." I got the nod. I got the nod that night, from Prince! Well, Ani DiFranco, I'm so grateful that you took the time to talk to me.
			[Music fades in.]
00:30:58 00:31:00	Ani Jesse	Guest Host	It was really nice. It was really nice to meet you. Aw, Jesse. It was a pleasure. Thank you. Ani DiFranco, from 2017. As we said before, she just announced a brand-new record set to come out early next year. It's called Revolutionary Love. Let's listen to one more single from it. This is "Do or Die".
00:31:13	Music	Music	"Do or Die" from the album Revolutionary Love by Ani DiFranco.
			Do you ever just want to give up? Well, me too Are you shocked by what people get Get used to? Do you wake up in a cold sweat? Well, that's sane At least you got a little brain left You got a little brain 'Cause there's foxes in the hen house
00:31:49	Jesse	Host	[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.] That's the end of another episode of Bullseye. Bullseye is created out of the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where I am working on the puzzle, "What do you serve for Thanksgiving when there will be a total of five people at the dinner table and three of them are under ten and only eat cream cheese on rice cakes?"
00:32:46	Promo	Promo	The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kauwling are our associate producers. We get help from Casey O'Brien and Kristen Bennett. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks very much to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it. If you wanna hear the latest about what we are up to, you can keep up with the show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post our interviews in all of those places. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature sign off. Speaker: Bullseye with Jesse Thorn is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
			[Music fades out.]