

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	<b>Speaker:</b> <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> 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 <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Freddie Gibbs, the rapper, grew up in Gary, Indiana. It’s about an hour outside of Chicago. A rustbelt town. It also happens to be the home of Michael Jackson, of the Jackson Five. Freddie will be the first to tell you Gary is a pretty rough place. Growing up there, he didn’t really think much about becoming a rapper. Like, not once when he was a teenager. He was a good athlete, for one thing. But—like a lot of kids in his neighborhood—he had a hard time staying out of the streets. It wasn’t until he was a grown man that he learned he had a gift for rhyming, a sense of rhythm, and a voice that commands attention.
			Freddie raps about the streets, about the time he spent there, about the friends he knows who still are there. About friends he lost.
			<i>[Music fades in.]</i>
00:01:12	Music	Music	And if there’s a central theme in Gibb’s music, it’s pain. “In My Hood” from the album <i>The Miseducation of Freddie Gibbs</i> by Freddie Gibbs.
			<i>Independent women that’s holding down their household My ghetto soldiers that struggle to bear their heavy load I do this for y’all, all my people dead and gone And my dogs doing sentences behind the wall I’m just a rebel...</i>
00:01:27	Jesse	Host	<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i> A few years back, his career took an interesting turn. He started collaborating with Madlib, a producer and sometime MC from California.
			<i>[“In My Hood” fades out to be replaced by “Deeper”.]</i>
			A guy who makes impressionistic, sometimes strange beats, who’s known more for working with artsier, weird MCs, like MF DOOM. The album that Freddie and Madlib made together was <i>Piñata</i> , a record where two very different artists each thrive in their own element. It probably shouldn’t work, but it does.
00:01:57	Music	Music	“Deeper” from the album <i>Piñata</i> by Freddie Gibbs and Madlib.
			<i>Uh I loved her and she loved him, so I never touched him She’s got his baby in the oven, so it’s—him Ain’t tripping ‘cause you got a—, I just think you rushing But leaving him to be with me ain’t part of our discussion</i>
			<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue, then fades out.]</i>

00:02:08	Jesse	Host	The music is strange and beautiful. Freddie still raps about the streets, there's still that same pain there, it just hits you harder. I talked with Freddie in 2019, when he'd just released <i>Bandana</i> , his second album with Madlib. He's since released another record, called <i>Alfredo</i> , which he made with another critically acclaimed producer: The Alchemist. <i>Alfredo</i> has earned Freddie his first ever Grammy nomination. Anyway, let's kick this interview off with a song from <i>Bandana</i> . This one's a single from it: "Half Manne Half Cocaine".
00:02:39	Music	Music	"Half Manne Half Cocaine" from the album <i>Bandana</i> by Freddie Gibbs and Madlib.  <i>...that never learn</i>  <i>Bridges burn, tables turn</i> <i>They will never learn (Never learn)</i> <i>Not about an almighty dollar, it ain't my concern (Ain't my concern)</i> <i>Who she gave that—to outside of me ain't my concern (That ain't my concern)</i> <i>I just—in a 458, that's what I deserve</i>  <i>I deserve</i> <i>Big old house and two—making grits</i> <i>Leather seats in the new candy-painted whip</i> <i>I came out the womb on some gang—</i> <i>Ho, I knew you was off, you could take a lick</i>  <i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue, then fades out.]</i>
00:03:02	Jesse	Host	Freddie Gibbs, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> . Thank you for coming on the show.
00:03:04	Freddie Gibbs	Guest	Aw man, appreciate y'all having me, man.
00:03:06	Jesse	Host	Grateful to have you. I have to say, when you made your first record with Madlib, I was like, "Well, they're both good. But that's not the team that I would have—like, if I was playing fantasy rap basketball, I would not have put any money on Madlib and Freddie Gibbs making a record together.
00:03:24	Freddie	Guest	Me neither! I wouldn't.
00:03:26	Jesse	Host	Were you—were you even—did you—were you familiar with his music before the two of you got together?
00:03:32	Freddie	Guest	Somewhat, but not as familiar as I am now. But a little bit. You know what I mean? But I just look at it as a miracle, man. You know. We came together for some reason, but you know, to—you know, make classics. And I think, you know, everything we've done so far have been classics. So, it was worth it.
00:03:50	Jesse	Host	How did you—how did you—how did the two of you meet, the first time you met in real life?
00:03:54	Freddie	Guest	Oh, Lambo and Egon put us together, pretty much.
00:03:57	Jesse	Host	That's your respective managers.
00:03:58	Freddie	Guest	Yeah, yep. They—you know, they've been working together and been cool, you know, for years and—you know, it was just a mutual thing. It was easy. We met at like The Do-Over, like drinking sangria or something like that. That sound good. I think I want some of that right now.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

00:04:15 Jesse Host I think I want—after I leave here, imma go get sangria drunk. It's extremely hot in Los Angeles, today.

*[Freddie agrees.]*

00:04:21 Freddie Guest What did the two of you talk about when you first sat down together? Do you remember?  
Me and Madlib?

*[Jesse confirms.]*

00:04:36 Jesse Host Ummm... that's a good question. Really nothing, man. Just about like music that we liked. You know what I mean? I found out that his musical palate is huger than most people's.  
And what kind of things were you surprised to hear that he was into?

00:04:39 Freddie Guest Like the 808 type of music. A lot of newer music—like Lil Baby's and Da Baby and, you know, the Migos. You know, stuff like that. Like, you know, he really into that type of stuff.

00:04:51 Jesse Host Yeah, I mean I think that there is—there was a certain kind of underground hip-hop fan who defined their hip-hop fandom by what they weren't into. And I can't imagine Madlib being that kind guy.  
00:05:04 Freddie Guest I never liked that. Yeah, that's the beauty of it. I never liked that. I never liked—because I've always been so—such a versatile fan of rap. You know what I mean? I like all kind of rap. I mean, I like Pharoahe Monch and I like Offset. *[Chuckles.]* You know what I mean? So, I mean, is that weird? Why do you have to be one thing or into one thing or confined to one thing? I thought that's what, like, hip-hop was trying to fight against. That's what like—that's like Pimp C and guys like that were trying to fight against. They didn't want it all—you know, the radio and all of that stuff to be all East Coast at that time. You know. I felt like they fought to get it more diverse and it's like now we kind of like did like a 180. You know what I mean?  
00:05:48 Jesse Host You grew up in Gary, Indiana. Were there MCs in Gary that you knew about when you were a kid and a teenager?

00:05:56 Freddie Guest Yeah, definitely. Definitely. There was guys rapping before—definitely before I was rapping. Mainly the rap guys that are, you know—came out of Gary was like guys in the streets, because to rap at that time you had to kind of be in the streets. So. Most of the, you know, rap coming out of Gary at that time was like hardcore street gangster-ass rap, you know? That's what I—that's what we was around. That was our environment. So.

00:06:23 Jesse Host Was—you—do you mean that you had to be in the streets to rap, 'cause that was what was expected of those records? Or simply because there wasn't anybody giving anybody a record deal—?

00:06:33 Freddie Guest Correct. There wasn't anybody giving anybody a record deal, so it's like—you know, the guys that could afford studio time and the guys that, you know, could be in studios were like, you know, gangsters. You know what I mean? Like it wasn't too many roody-poo guys like in those studios at that time. It's was—it was gangsters funding those studios, funding the building, funding the equipment. You know what I mean? So, it was like—kinda had to be, you know, a man of respect to be in those environments, period.

00:07:04 Jesse Host I feel like when the midwestern people that I know grew up with—you know, certainly everybody grew up with—in the '90s, anyway—with the hip-hop from New York and Los Angeles, to a certain extent. Right? But it feels like, in other places besides those places, it is really treasured that there is hip-hop that is not from those places from all over the country. Like, you know, in Kansas City, they love E-40.

*[Freddie agrees.]*

You know, like I'm from the Bay Area and I love E-40—I'm from the Bay—I mean, also 'cause he's great. But because I'm from the Bay, right? But like, those guys always got love in Kansas City, Missouri, because that was—you know, that was from a place outside of New York or LA. Like, it was not just New York or LA. And the same with southern hip-hop, I feel like, in the Midwest.

*[Freddie agrees.]*

00:08:09 Freddie Guest Like, there was a kinship not because everybody was physically close, but just because there was an understanding like, "We are all not from New York or LA." *[Chuckles.]*

Right. Yeah. And you know what, man? Like, you know, the Midwest really is I think the biggest rap consumer region. You know what I mean? Like, I can really see—gauge an artist's popularity or reach, so to speak, like when I see if they can like do shows in like Chicago and like Ohio and Detroit. You know what I mean? Because I feel like those are like—they're consumer regions more so than they are regions that produce homegrown rap or hometown hero. It's hard to come out of the Gary, Chicago, and the whole rustbelt because it's like when you pop out, you're—you know, they try to kill you.

*[They chuckle.]*

00:09:20 Jesse Host You know what I mean? So, first of all—so. And it's difficult. A lot of the times, they're more into outside music more so than championing their own music. You know. At home. You know. I mean, I had to like—you know, move to the West Coast to start getting, you know, musical notoriety. If I didn't then, you know, I'd probably be in somebody's prison or six feet deep. There were a few big, national acts from Chicago.

*[Freddie agrees.]*

00:09:39 Freddie Guest Common and Twista, Do or Die. But not—I'm struggling to think of more besides that, pre-Kanye. You know. More than—more than 10 or 15 years ago. You know, there was Bone Thugs, who were from Cleveland. Right?

00:09:41 Jesse Host Cleveland, correct, yeah.

There were a few here and there, but when you started rapping, did you think of, being a guy from Gary, rapping was like a way that you could actually make a lifelong career?

00:09:55 Freddie Guest Yeah, definitely. When I started doing it, I knew that I could do it. I can be a career artist and I knew that I could, you know, generate a decent amount of money off of it. And, you know, I just came in with

the sense—since I listened to so many different kinds of music, coming up—different kinds of genres, I mean, of rap and music, period, coming up—I feel like my style, you know, is very versatile. I feel like I could rap on like different kind of beats. You can put me on an 808 Mafia beat and then I can go, an hour later, and go make a song on a Madlib beat. I don't like to be confined to a region nor do I like to be confined to a certain sound. You know what I mean? At the same time, I don't wanna be all over the place. I want you to know—when I put my signature on something, you know. But I wanna—you know, I just try to be the most—the most versatile artist in the rap game, period. You know. I kind of look at it like positionless basketball. Like, how Kevin Durant has made basketball positionless. You know what I mean? He can shoot, put the ball on the floor, and—you know, go to the post, defend, and he's seven feet tall. And there's like nobody that can stay in front of him.

I try to treat rap like that. Like, “Hey, I'm from Gary, but like what does that really mean?” You know what I mean? I'm from a small town in the rustbelt. You know what I mean. So—with limited opportunity. And the greatest artist ever to grace music period is from there as well. You know? And he made music like—that's like regionless, you know what I mean? It's just like a world thing. It's—you know. This—with that kind of—you know, spirit, I feel like I just carried that into my music as well. Like, I don't even look at it like I'm from nowhere. Like, I'm from everywhere. You know what I'm saying? Like, I can go anywhere I wanna go. You know. Do anything I wanna do, musically. I don't put a cap on myself, musically or in any kind of way. You know?

00:11:51	Jesse	Host	Did you know when you were a kid that Michael Jackson and Jacksons were from Gary?
00:11:55	Freddie	Guest	Yeah, definitely. Hell yeah. Hell yeah. Yeah. Definitely. I—that was—I mean, it—they're just the pride and they're still to this day the pride and joy of Gary, Indiana. No question. For forever. They put the city on the map. If the Jacksons never came out of there, it wouldn't be the same, wouldn't have that same aura.
00:12:16	Jesse	Host	It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Freddie Gibbs.
00:12:31	Freddie	Guest	Your life had already gone down a few different paths before you started getting serious about having a rap career. Initially, you were an athlete, right? You—you had a football scholarship. Yeah, I wanted to—yeah, I was playing football at Ball State University. Shout out to Ball State. I remember Muncie, Indiana. Shoutout to Muncie, Indiana.
00:12:40	Jesse	Host	Shout out to David Letterman.
00:12:42	Freddie	Guest	Yeeeah, David Letterman. He's definitely the most famous alumnus from that school. But yeah, man, I—you know, when there, played ball for a year, wasn't doing everything that I was supposed to do. Got kicked out of school.
00:12:54	Jesse	Host	Did you like college? Were you regretful when you got—
00:12:57	Freddie	Guest	No, I didn't like college. It was wack. I didn't wanna go to school no more, man. I didn't—I didn't wanna do any more scholastic activity after I left high school. I was like, “Nah, man, I don't wanna do homework. Any of that.” I was ready for the world. You know? Make money and just start having things. I thought that, you know, once you become an adult you just start automatically having things, but

that's not *[laughs]*—that's not the case! You know what I'm saying? I'm like, "Damn. Where my car? Apartment?" I'm like, "Okay. I wanted the 40 acres and a mule I thought I was supposed to get!" You know what I'm saying? But, you know, there's steps to getting to the things you want in life. You know. I was ready—I was trying to skip a lot of steps; you know what I mean? Skipping school. You know, selling crack. Selling heroin to get a leg up. All of that stuff was—could have been a detriment, you know, to my life.

00:13:43 Jesse Host

How did you end up rapping? Were you writing verses before you went away to college?

00:13:48 Freddie Guest

Rodney Allen. I used to read—my friend Rodney Allen, my boy Rod, I grew up with—we grew up on the east side of Gary. One day, you know, I was working in this—after I got kicked out of college or whatnot, you know what I mean, I'm like 19, 20 years old. So, I'm working at this janky shoe store called Payless.

*[Jesse snorts.]*

00:14:12 Jesse Host

You know, I have my—  
I'm familiar with the store.

*[Freddie agrees with a laugh.]*

00:14:15 Freddie Guest

Purveyor of vinyl shoes.

My uncle worked there. You know what I mean? So, you know, my mom kind of made me work there, too. 'Cause you know, she knew I was—you know, out here trying to be Tony Montana. *[Chuckles.]* You know what I'm saying? So, she was like, "Nah, you're about to go somewhere and get a job real quick." So, I was working there, and my homeboy was like walking through the village, you know, laughing at me. Everybody was laughing at me 'cause I was working this janky job and, you know, wearing a tie, looking stupid. So, he was laughing at me and then he was—he had these CDs in his pocket, and I was like, "What is this?" You know, I picked up a CD. And I was like, "Man, this is crazy, dog." I was like, "You got your face on a CD? With a barcode on it and all this? You signed with a record label or something?"

He's like, "Nah, I did all this myself."

And I was like, "How'd you do this?"

And he was like, "Man—alright, man, just come ride with me. I'll show you, you know, how you do it." And he a barber. You know what I mean? So, I was going to his basement and getting my hair cut and so he'd be cutting my hair, I'd be soaking up the game. I would just be letting him just talk about it. Then he started talking about the studio he's going to. And he introduced me to this guy named Finger Roll that had a studio, in Gary. And once I started, like, going up there with him, I would just go—I wasn't even thinking about rap and—you know what I mean. I didn't know if I wanted to get into this from the rap way, the executive way, or be a DJ, or something, or—I was like, "Maybe I'd be his manager or something like that." But once I got in there, man, and then like I was there at Finger Roll's Studio and I would just start seeing, like, the caliber of

rappers that was coming in there. And I'm like, "Man, this ain't good. This thing ain't good."

*[Jesse wheezes with laughter.]*

You know what I'm saying? And I was like, "Man, I could do this!" You know what I'm saying? And once I started getting in my head that I could do that? Then it was a wrap. You know what I mean? And you know, the—you know, the outside forces of things that I was going through in my life, you know, gave me some things to rap about. You know what I mean? Like, I was working odd jobs. I was selling crack. You know what I mean? Losing crack. You know what I mean? Getting beat up by drug dealers for owing them money. I was—you know, beefing with gangs from across the tracks, so it was like I had all of that—all of that pain crumbled up. You know, I was defeated. So, I used all of that to, you know, become undefeated. So, I just started like—everybody that was like dissing me, like—and they was making music, too. So, I just started like dissing them back, making diss raps of other rappers in Gary and stuff like that. And, like, I was like putting my phone number on this, like I had balls. You know what I mean? Like everything I was doing was ballsy. It's like, man, at that point I ain't really care if I get killed or not. You know? It was—the music was kind of like a manifesto and then, like, you know Lambo found it. And being an intern—'cause I put my phone number on it. And then he called me, and the rest is history, and we've been rocking ever since.

00:17:02 Jesse Host

Did you know, at the beginning, what kind of instrument you had? I mean, did you ever have a moment where—'cause, look, I'm a professional public radio host. Right?

*[Freddie confirms.]*

I'm supposed to have pipes. And I'm fine. I do—I do okay in that department. I'm not unqualified for that job. But you're putting me to shame, here.

00:17:21 Freddie Guest

You think so?

00:17:22 Jesse Host

I think so.

00:17:23 Freddie Guest

Aw, no way.

00:17:24 Jesse Host

Yeah.

*[They laugh.]*

I think you—I think you've got a heck of an instrument, there! I feel like the first time—if I was you, you know, you sound different inside your head and outside and all that stuff, but like, the first time I talked into—rapped into a microphone and played it back, I'd be like, "Oh yeah. I sound pretty good!"

00:17:43 Freddie Guest

*[They laugh.]*

That's how I—that's how I felt! I was like, "Aw man, that ain't—that ain't bad!" I mean, my first rap was probably like some like 50 bar *[blows a raspberry]* freestyle type thing. I didn't know what it was. You know what I mean? But it was definitely unstructured. But it was good! You know, I had patterns and I'm—you know, lightyears ahead of the rapper that I was at, you know, 23 years old. But you know, at the time, man, you know—I was lightyears ahead of the

[chuckles]—the guys around me. So, I stood out instantly. And there was just a—you know, I try to trace back to where the rapping ability came from for me, 'cause I really don't know, man. You know? I look at it like the Virgin Mary, baby Jesus. I woke up with this stuff one day. Because I definitely wasn't the guy at school beating on the desk rapping in school. I never had the dream of being a rapper at all, period. I always knew, coming up in my life, that I was gonna be somebody, some—something of notoriety, but I didn't know what it would be.

Hopefully, I thought it would be an athlete. That's my dream. I still dream about being an athlete. Everyday go to the gym and workout like I'm [laughs] going to the NFL. But I didn't know what—you know, where I would make my mark in life, but I knew I would make it in some kind of light. But definitely not rapping, man.

00:19:01 Jesse Host  
00:19:04 Freddie Guest  
00:19:06 Jesse Host  
00:19:07 Freddie Guest

Was there like a Gary, Indiana section in *Murder Dog*?

There was! I was in it.

That's a rap magazine.

Yeah, I was in it! It's crazy you say that. That's the first magazine I was ever in was *Murder Dog*. And I was in there 'cause my buddy, Finger Roll, like he was getting—he was one of the, you know, main producers in the area at that time and he was getting notoriety 'cause he was working with a lot of guys from Chicago, like Drama Ward and Twista and guys like Traxster—Legendary Traxster, shout out to Traxster. You know, just to see Finger Roll rubbing elbows with guys like that was motivation because, you know, those were the guys—you know—from the area that you looked up to, that you learned to be like. You know. The Twistas, the Crucial Conflicts. You know what I mean? When it came to making music, you wanted to be, you know—especially from a local standpoint, you wanted people from the local standpoint to just talk about you like they talked about them. You know.

00:19:52 Jesse Host

They used to have *Murder Dog* at the—you know, like at the—at the bookstores that would have a lot of magazines. Like your Barnes and Nobleses or whatever, that have those racks and racks of magazines there'd be *Murder Dog* there and you'd go and sit there and hope nobody kicked you out while you were reading it. And, you know [chuckles], the great thing about *Murder Dog* was like not only would it be like—coming some San Francisco, I would—you know, you'd read about all these rappers from the film world or these rappers from HP, this is the Oakland thing, you know. Whatever.

But you would get—I'd be like, "Oh these are the dudes that are happening in Memphis. This is what's happening in Cincinnati." Or whatever. And it was like a window into another world! You know, 'cause you know about the dudes from your city mostly, but you're like, "Oh, this is everywhere!" Like, this is—every place has its dudes.

00:20:46 Freddie Guest

That's how I learned about the Bay, *Murder Dog* magazine. I would be like, "Damn, man, the Bay has sooo many rappers." I'm like, "They're they own world." It's crazy. I'm like, "These dude's is rich!" 'Cause the Bay was the first guys really that I looked at. Them and like Three 6 Mafia or, say, Memphis or something like that. 'Cause I was looking at it and I was like, "Damn, these guys don't have like major record deals. But these dudes is rich. How do I do that?"



00:21:11 Jesse Host Your first record deal was not that long after you started rapping.

*[Freddie confirms.]*

And it was with a huge record label. You moved out to Los Angeles to work on the record. That's what brought you out here to southern California.

00:21:24 Freddie Guest Yeah, straight from high school, straight to the league.  
00:21:26 Jesse Host Yeah, and—

*[They chuckle.]*

That record deal lasted years.

00:21:31 Freddie Guest Not really.  
00:21:32 Jesse Host How long until—  
00:21:34 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Freddie:** A year.

**Jesse:** How long until you gave up?

00:21:36 Freddie Guest A year. About a year. Yeah, I'd say about that. About 11 months, I'd say.

00:21:42 Jesse Host You talked about going straight from high school to the league. You know, there's people—there's people who, at that age—and you were, what, like in your very early 20s? Right?

00:21:51 Freddie Guest Yeah. Maybe 20, 21.  
00:21:54 Jesse Host Hit the big time that way and when it doesn't work out, when they can't cut it in the NBA, it's tough to readjust and figure out what the path is. You know what I mean?

*[Freddie agrees.]*

*[Chuckling.]* Like, if you think, "Oh, well, I can just do it," but when—if that doesn't happen, it's hard to figure out how you go play in Italy or whatever and come back in two years, after you play here in the D league or whatever. And I wonder what it was like for you, a guy who had not spent half your life planning this out to, like, get the big break and you never—you never put out a record on that deal.

00:22:35 Freddie Guest Uh, yeah. It was, um... heartbreaking. I'd definitely say one of the most, like, darkest points in my life. I could—you know, I could sit up and, you know, try to act hard and say it was easy to shake off, but that was heartbreaking, man. Like, to get dropped from your record label, I was like, "Man, that's the first thing I'm really about." And you know, I'd been kicked out of school. Like, no, nothing's really like working out for me in life. And I'm like, "Man, this is the first thing that I'm doing that I'm exceptional at." I'm like, "Bro, I'm great at rapping." Like, you know, I'm like, "Man, there ain't that many people that can rap as good as I'm—as I can rap."

It just let me know, like, no matter how polished I was or skillful I was at rapping, I had to learn the business. The music business was about to take me on a ten-year journey to get to where I wanted to be in the game. I had to really, you know, sit and look myself in the mirror and see if I wanted to go on that journey. If I go—if I was to get in the DeLorean right now and go back to the—that time, I would be like, "Hey, bro, it's gonna take you ten years to get here, but look! It's all gonna be fine!" You know what I'm saying? Like, you just gotta go through a grind. Are you willing to

sacrifice it? You know what I'm saying? Like, I feel like—I wish I could do that for every artist. Like, man, picture yourself ten years later or six years later or seven years later and then go back in time and see where you'll be at.

00:23:57 Jesse Host I feel like when—we're about the same age, and like I lately have been thinking like, "Oh! I guess... I did those things that I set out to do when I entered the real world." But the pain that I remember most vividly was not about how hard I had to work, because I loved doing what I was doing. It was—it's easy to work hard when you love what you're doing. I mean, it's still hard, but... but the thing that I remember being the most painful was feeling like if success was a ten and I was at a one, I wished that I could see when I had made it to two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten. Like, I wished that I knew when I was working hard—I could see directly the fruit of my labor and like that I, "Oh, I moved up a rung, today." Whereas I—for most of that time—I really felt like I wasn't sure whether I was throwing my work into a hole.

I wonder if that was part of the challenge for you is that like so much of that is you don't know that it's gonna work. You know what I mean?

00:25:01 Freddie Guest Right, man. I mean, you know, yeah. Definitely, man. You start feeling like you're doing this music for nothing when you're not—when you're not getting the notoriety or the—or the praise that you, you know, deserve.

00:25:12 Jesse Host And you were—I mean, like, look. I'm a public radio host. I knew that if I became successful when I was 60, I'd still have a 20-year career ahead of me. *[Laughs.]* You know what I mean? It would be—it would be better for me to be 60 than to be 28 or what—however old I was. You're a rapper, and you know it's only recently that rappers over 25 has been a thing. You know what I mean?

00:25:32 Freddie Guest Yeah. Pretty much. Yeah. It's—it's crazy. You know, the game's getting—definitely getting younger and younger, but I think that rappers are only not happy nowadays if they're—if they don't have any money. You know what I mean? Or they're not generating money or generating funds. But as long as you're doing that, I think the popularity thing is a little bit, you know, low on the scale, now, because—you know, I feel like when I got dropped from our first record deal, I didn't know that you can make money in the music industry without having a record deal. You know, I mean, and so I looked at the guys in the south. I looked at the guy in the Bay. You know, their business models and took things from those and kind of created my own, you know. And with the implementation of streaming, it definitely changed the game. So, I got to a point where you know I was making a lot of money and didn't really care about moving to the next level of notoriety or fame with the music. You know, I mean you can get content.

So, you know, when I start working on this last project, I was like, "Alright, let me not be content and let me try to like step things up a notch." Because like I said, I'm musical, I'm a rapper. On a lyrical level, there's not many—you know—people that can—you know—compete with what I do. So. The remainder of the projects that I'm, you know—be putting out, I think they just deserve the best looks, best window of opportunity.

00:26:55 Jesse Host What do you think you learned about rapping in that time? I mean, you got your big break when you had been rapping for *[laughing]* a year! Or something.

00:27:03 Freddie Guest Um, I learned about—uuh, definitely—um, taking your time, ‘cause I used to like write every rap in like three minutes, five minutes. Like, I was like running a race. I think that’s what made me so good at it. Like, being in a room with other rappers and just trying to compete, that competitive spirit. I’m a real competitive guy, so that really made me better at it. Just being around different producers, you know, I was—you know, fortunate enough to be around guys like Just Blaze and DJ Quik and you know all kind of different guys that I learned different things from, different tricks, learned how to record, how to do this with my voice, how to do that with my voice. Learning when to breathe, learning when to—you know—pause and not say a word. Like, being more melodic. Just being able to, you know, witness my own development is crazy, ‘cause I can just go back and listen to where I was, what—the way I was recording five years ago, when I was making—even the way I was recording when I was making *Piñata* is like night and day compared to the way that I recorded when I made *Bandana*.

00:28:09 Jesse Host I think you have a really distinctively flexible style, as a rapper. Like, there’s a long tradition of gangster rappers with powerful voices and declamatory styles. You know. People who are making pronouncements.

*[Freddie agrees.]*

Whether that voice is deep and rich or, you know, whether it’s Eazy-E and it just cuts through everything, right? And I can see your connection—you know, I hear Scarface when you’re rapping, you know? Maybe the most beautiful rap voice that’s ever existed.

00:28:47 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Freddie:** I love Scarface.

00:28:49 Jesse Host **Jesse:** One of the—one of the greatest rappers ever. But I also hear, especially on these Madlib records—Madlib beats are going all over everywhere. You know, it’s not *[laughing]*—it’s not—it’s not the most straight ahead beats in the world to rap over.

*[Freddie agrees.]*

And you maintain that feeling of effortlessness even when you’re rapping double-time, when you’re fast rapping, and that is like—to maintain your personality and your presence while moving through styles in that way and keeping your voice, metaphorically speaking, what it is when you’re bending and flexing to these wild Madlib beats is a really impressive thing to me.

There’s not a lot of rappers who can be that flexible and remain themselves.

00:29:38 Freddie Guest Right. Yeah, like and *[censored]*—there ain’t a lot of rappers that can work with Otis, period. You know what I mean? Like, I feel like if you can’t mold yourself to those beats and just get in his world and just accept it then, you know, I don’t think you’re gonna come out successful.

00:29:53 Jesse Host I read a great interview where what you said that when you first started working with Madlib, you listened to one of his

			collaborations with MF DOOM and you said to yourself, "Alright, I'm better than that." Right. I did.
00:30:06	Freddie	Guest	<i>[Jesse laughs.]</i>  I was like—I was like, "I could rap like this! I mean, I could rap better than this." Like, I was like, "This what everybody tripping over? Madvillain?" I was like, "Madvillain?!" I was like, "Okay, yeah, this is cool." I was like—that was the thing.  I was like—and Lambo was like, "Yeah, man, this is a classic right here, man. It's—this dude, he's stuck in London, he can't come back, and everybody want another album from him." And all of this. And you know, it was kind of like—I felt like Lambo was like challenging me. I like when people challenge me. I like when people tell me not necessarily saying he said I couldn't do it, but just like I like when people put a roadblock in front of me so I could be like, "Alright, let me knock this <i>[censored]</i> out of the way." And Lambo and Egon never said, "We gotta top this," but they always put that <i>[censored]</i> in my face. Like, "This is a classic." You know what I mean?  And I'm like, "I don't give a <i>[censored]</i> about that." Oh, I'm sorry. I'm like, "I don't care about that."  <i>[Jesse laughs.]</i>  You know what I mean? Like, Madvillain. I'm like, "Alright, that's cool." You know what I mean? Let me show this dude, like, how to really—put some real pain on here instead of all these, like, goofy cartoon metaphors and stuff like that. He's cool, you know what I mean, but I'm like, man, I'm about to like talk about some real stories, some real crime stories, some real street stories, some drug tales, some—you know what I mean? Some shootouts. Like, I'm about to give you all of that. Ain't nobody ever gave you that on no Madlib piece.
00:31:19	Jesse	Host	We'll finish up my interview with Freddie Gibbs after a quick break. We'll talk about why he starts every live show with a prayer backstage. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.
00:31:32	Music	Transition	Bright, uplifting music.
00:31:33	Jesse	Promo	This message comes from NPR sponsor NerdWallet: a personal finance website and app that helps people make smarter money moves. Have new money goals this year? Whether you want to use credit card points to plan a family vacation abroad—once it's safe—or take advantage of low mortgage rates to refinance and save for your child's education, NerdWallet is the best place to shop financial products to help make your 2021 money goals happen. Discover and compare the smartest credit cards, mortgage lenders, and more at <a href="http://NerdWallet.com">NerdWallet.com</a> .
00:32:10	Promo	Clip	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> <i>[Radio interference followed by laidback music with a snare drum beat. A phone rings as the DJ speaks.]</i>

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**Oliver:** Every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

[Music suddenly gives way to static and a dial tone.]

00:32:56 Promo Clip

**Music:** Relaxed music.

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00:33:16 Jesse Host

[Music fades out.]

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Freddie Gibbs, the rapper. We talked in 2019. His latest album, *Alfredo*, is nominated for Best Rap Album at the Grammys. We wanna let you know that this next segment features some talk about sexual assault, though there is no description of a sexual assault.

00:34:04 Freddie Guest  
00:34:05 Jesse Host

I know how much you love Scarface. I do, too. The rapper, Scarface. And one of the things that I love about Scarface, as a rapper, is his music never feels like it could come from anyone else. It's always very deeply personal. And when he raps about street stuff, which he still does now as a—you know, I guess Face is probably in his mid/late 40s, now.

Uuuh, yeah. Yeah, about that. Mm-hm.

Something like that. When he raps about street stuff, even when he was younger—much younger—you never felt far from the pain and regret that that stuff engenders even in a person who succeeds or makes it out or any of those things. Like, you never lose sight of the sad part of being involved in street stuff. Which is, you know, even if you're the world's greatest drug dealer and you didn't get caught

00:34:49 Freddie Guest and you didn't go to jail and you got rich, you still—at some point—handed drug to somebody's mom or dad or whatever. There's always pain involved, you know, that you never could shake. You know. Dealing with that lifestyle. It's no happy ending to that lifestyle, man. So, you know, the best thing—you know—you could do is—you know, if you gotta deal with that or be in that life—is to, you know, make you enough for you to like start something else or start another business. I mean, it may not make as much money as that, initially or whatnot, but do something with you. You know, become an entrepreneur. You know what I mean? Really, that's the main thing. You know. You gotta hustle, just hustle yourself up a business. You know what I mean? Like, trying to be a career drug dealer is dangerous. And it's dangerous not just to you but your family, man. 'Cause you're gonna be—you're gonna be gone. Like, it's inevitable. You're going to jail. Like, eventually. You still rap about street stuff.

00:35:36 Jesse Host

*[Freddie confirms.]*

00:35:47 Freddie Guest Why is that—why is that important to you? Why is that the choice you made instead of—instead of preferring to leave that behind? Correct. Um, I mean really man I'm not far removed from it. You know, I mean a lot of my friends are still in the streets. The rap game has afforded me to be able to not be in the streets, but you know, a lot of my close friends are still living those lifestyles. You know what I mean? I'm definitely not on the corner or riding around selling drugs all day. You know. I'm a functioning musician with two kids. You know what I mean? I'm on the road or I'm *[chuckling]* on daddy duty. But once that's a part of you, it's never gonna leave you. You're always gonna have those stories. It's always gonna be those street undertones and you know, I come from a place—a place of underdogs. So, I'm always gonna be thinking with that underdog mentality. I'm always gonna feel like I gotta rebel or I gotta resist or you know, it's somebody putting something in my way. You know what I mean? Like if I try to run up the room and you put that chair in front of the door. You know what I mean? Like, imma knock the hell out of that chair. You know what I mean? With all my might. You know what I mean? Or if you tell me the door locked, imma kick the door down. Imma kick a little bit harder. You know what I mean? Because, you know, at that point—you know, I'm fighting for my life.

00:36:57 Jesse Host You were acquitted a few years ago of sexual assault in Austria. And you—very much to your credit—have talked publicly about the fact that you don't want your story to be shown as an example of accusations of rape frequently or regularly being false. Which they're not.

*[Freddie agrees several times.]*

Any more than other accusations of major crime. Nobody ever tells somebody that just got robbed that they're lying that they got robbed. But there was a lot of exculpatory evidence in your case that eventually led to you being found not guilty. And if I didn't—if I didn't—personally, if I didn't believe that exculpatory evidence, you wouldn't be here.

00:37:42 Freddie Guest Correct. Appreciate that. *[Chuckles.]*

00:37:44	Jesse	Host	<p>But, you know, you were well into your career when this happened. It happened thousands of miles from where you live, in a country where you don't speak the language. You know, you were—you were arrested in France and eventually extradited to Austria. And you spent a lot of time either living in Europe, because you weren't allowed to leave Europe, or in jail in Europe. To what extent did you trust that there was an end to that in sight? I mean, I presume that you knew yourself to be innocent, but beyond that, to what extent did you think this will have an end?</p>
00:38:32	Freddie	Guest	<p>I thought it was gonna end with me doing ten years in Austrian prison. The fact that I knew that I was innocent was the hard part, because it was like, "Okay, damn. If I'm—I don't even know this girl." Like, I never—I never even gave her a high five. You know what I mean? Like, if she walked in the room, I probably wouldn't even be able to tell you what she looks like right now. I'm like, "Bro, if they can endite me all the way over here—" And—you know—muster enough whatever—'cause it was 0.000 evidence whatsoever linking me to this. So, whatever they mustered up to get a grand jury in another country to endite me on something that I definitely didn't do after they've taken my blood, my saliva, my plasma, my semen, all my body fluids to see if it matched the DNA that they already had there for the rape and it's a 0000 match? And you have no evidence of me even touching this girl? If you can do all of that, y'all gonna fry me. I'm going to jail.</p> <p>I know I'm going to jail, because... I'm already in an impossible position. I shouldn't even be here. You know. So, the whole time I'm thinking—my notion was like, "Man, somebody got it out for me. There's gotta be—this is—I don't—it's some... it's just bigger than the Austria government." Like, this bigger than, you know, Brown. You know what I'm saying? Like, I was like, "Man, this—some power that be—I don't know, man." 'Cause I'm like, "This is totally ridiculous." If I was any other person, if I wasn't Black, if I—I don't know, maybe if I was a—I think about this. Maybe if I was a more popular rapper, maybe I wouldn't have been in that position. Maybe if I wasn't a street rapper I wouldn't have been in that position. Because one of my first hearings in France, one of the first thing they said, "Aw yeah, he—" They gave my—they gave a whole gang history on me. "He's in a gang from Gary, Indiana. He had gang ties. Mob ties. No, we can't grant him a bill."</p> <p>I'm like, "How does that come up in a rape case?" You know what I'm saying? I just was always thinking that, like, "Man, if I was this person or that person I wouldn't be in this position." You know. I hate to reiterate it, but you know, I look at the way things were handled with like A\$AP Rocky. Like, he had a whole presidential recommendation! You know what I mean? You know, for something that—you know, he actually—you know did—was found—</p>
00:41:08	Jesse	Host	<p>By all accounts he did. Yeah.</p>
00:41:09	Freddie	Guest	<p>Yeah, he did! Got—you know, found guilty of. Like, I'm not—you know. It was a lot of people comparing my situation to his and I'm like, "Man, hold up." Like, <i>[chuckles]</i> ain't no comparison, dog. You know what I mean? Like, you know, like—my situation was totally—I was, you know—first of all, wrongfully accused, man. And just—my country that I pay taxes to, they didn't really help me. You know what I mean? I feel like I didn't get really any support from the rap</p>

community like that. You know what I mean? There was a couple—you know, *[stammering]* guys that I—you know, deal with personally, you know, they gave me—you know, they showed me love. But you know, for the most part. And I—and I don't, you know, it don't matter, man. You know what I mean? 'Cause, you know, I'm not—I'm not crying for the, you know, support of the rap community at all. I could care less. But I'm saying like, you know, when there's something like that on the line...

00:42:07 Jesse Host

I mean, the thing that I thought about was that while, you know, you went... you were arrested while on tour in Europe, years after the incident had been alleged to have happened. And by the time you were arrested and ended up having to spend, what, like six or nine months in Europe?

*[Freddie confirms.]*

Addressing the situation. You had a kid that was back home without you. That was the first thing that I thought of, as the—as the parent of three, like, beyond being in jail for a significant portion of that time and having to deal with living in a foreign country without any means of income and—etc., etc., etc., it was just like you couldn't be there for your kid.

00:42:55 Freddie Guest

Right, and I was just feeling—I was just seeing my world just crumble, man. Like, from that. Man, I'm like—man. That was—that was probably the worst thing, the biggest thing that happened. And having to like, fly my daughter and her mother over there to France and to Austria and my mom. That was—that was crazy, having to fly my mom over there and, you know, just—*[sighs]*. Man, you don't know jail until you do jail abroad, because *[chuckles]* it's a whole different thing, man. And you damn near gotta be rich to do jail abroad. You know what I'm saying? Like, that could have collapsed my whole career. You know. Thank god it didn't.

00:43:31 Jesse Host

Did it change the way you approached your music career and your art? When you—when you came through it?

00:43:41 Freddie Guest

Uuuh, I'm not gonna say it changed—the way I approached my career definitely changed. The way I approached people, everyday people—it was definitely a dark, dark period after that, psychologically, where I didn't know if I even wanted to even be in the music industry or be in the rap game, period. 'Cause I'm like, "Man, this is a—this is—this is a hazard to this job. Like, if I woman could just say... *[sighs]* that I—you know, raped her out of the blue, man I can get locked up and go through all of that? I don't wanna go through that no more, man." That was mental anguish, physical anguish. You know what I mean? I'm like, "I don't wanna go through that no more."

Not only did it like affect my... you know, affect me psychological with, you know—with wanting to be in the rap game. It affected, you know, the way I treated women. You know? I didn't wanna—I kind of—I didn't even wanna deal with, you know, the mother of my child. I'm not gonna say that I resented women, but it was some kind of—some kind of form of resistance. You know what I mean? For a little while. You know what I mean? I don't know. I just, like—I didn't wanna, like, go out. I didn't wanna chill. I didn't wanna go on dates. I didn't wanna, you know—it was just like really me. It was a—it was a form of depression, I'd say. You know. It was affecting



everything from, you know, my sex life to all kind of—all kind of things. You know. And it'll have you, like, looking for love—you know, in the wrong places.

00:45:22 Jesse Host I was reading an interview that you did with—actually, with NPR, with Frannie Kelley and Ali Shaheed Muhammad and one of the things that you said was that you prayed before shows. And the way you described it struck me, because... you didn't describe praying for success in the show or, you know, to have a great show or to even like, you know, "Allow me to share my gift," or something that you hear people talk about how their relationship with god is, you know—which people have gifts, you know. And they should share them. I'm—I get that. But the thing that you said you prayed for was—"execution" was the word that you used. Which is to say the, like—to be able to do the thing that you were there to do.

00:46:21 Freddie Guest And I was—I was really struck by that.  
Right. Yeah. Um. When I go do a show, man, like—it's crazy that you mentioned, like, gifts people have and they wanna share them. I guess I am sharing a gift, but you know, I kind of put the crowd on mute. I got a game plan of what I wanna see done out there or what I wanna do or what I wanna come across with. I just find, like, a point in the back of the crowd that I wanna, like—it could be a nail on the wall, it could be anything. You know, I just wanna find something that I wanna look at all night and I look at that. I don't even think about the crowd. Of course, I can like physically hear them and see them, but you know, mentally I'm locked in a whole 'nother zone. My preparation for it is, you know, similar to a ballplayer or a boxer. I wanna execute the game plan. You know. I wanna do everything that I said I wanted to do. If I said wanted to do these three songs acapella back-to-back, without taking a breath or without taking a break, I'm gonna do that.

'Cause it's just me and the DJ up there. You know, no theatrics. You know. You ain't got no, like, blimps flying down like Travis Scott and all these—you know, all these guys with all this stuff these guys got, and those fireworks and all that. Not yet, at least. But you know, I just wanna see—I just want people to leave with the thought that—you know, physically, it ain't that many human beings that can do what he did onstage, rapping. You know.

00:47:43 Jesse Host You know, I—it just occurred to me, sincerely, what it reminded me of. And that was: I grew up with a parent in AA and I used to go to meeting with him. And they always do the serenity prayer, in AA—which—the thrust of which is simply the will to change the things I can change, the—you know—the serenity to accept the things I can't and the wisdom to know the difference. I'm getting it wrong, sorry everybody who's in the program. *[Chuckles.]* But, you know, it's like—it's like what you are asking God for in that prayer is to let you be within yourself and do this thing that you can do. Like, you're not asking for special powers or anything. You're just asking to be able to do the thing that's within you.

00:48:35 Freddie Guest Yeah, just let me control what I can control and anything that I can't control, just let it be. Like, if the light man fall down off the *[censored]* damn curtain, that's on them. You know what I mean? *[Chuckles.]* Like, I pray he be alright. You know what I mean? Like, I can't—you know. You know, I perform with a lot of big festivals and things of that nature and I see a lot of other guy's—you know—

shows. They got dancers, you know. And I think I've seen Drake come on with like 30 hammer dancers one time. You know what I mean? You know, I gotta perform—I gotta—*[laughs]*.  
*[Interrupting.]* Hammer dancers, specifically?  
**Freddie:** Probably so.

00:49:01 Jesse Host  
00:49:03 Crosstalk Crosstalk

**Jesse:** They were wearing—were they wearing harem pants or—? How do you identify a—?  
00:49:08 Freddie Guest  
Yeah, and I gotta perform before—you know—a lot of that stuff sometimes. Sometimes after some of that stuff. So, it's like—you know, being in a lineup with that, I gotta give them something raw. You know. That's what I feel like I've been doing the past ten years.  
00:49:20 Jesse Host  
Well, Freddie Gibbs, I really appreciate you taking all this time to talk to me on *Bullseye*. It was really nice to meet you and get to talk to you.  
00:49:25 Freddie Guest  
Thank you, man. I opened up, man. Soon my girlfriend's gonna break up with me, man. I'm talking about all these girls. But I don't care.

*[They laugh.]*  
00:49:34 Jesse Host  
Freddie Gibbs, from 2019. His newest album, *Alfredo*, is up for Best Rap Album at this year's Grammys, which are taking place in March. Let's listen to a song from it. This one is called "1985".  
00:49:45 Music Music  
"1985" from the album *Alfredo* by Freddie Gibbs.

*Joe Pesci, pushing product*  
*You're sweeter than, sweeter than Joe Exotic*  
*On the run like Assata, so pull the police*  
*As I'd be chilling in La Habana (up in La Habana)*  
*Police caught him with a whole thing*  
*Now they snitching man, whole gang working*  
*Gangland, made a lane in it*  
*If my name in it, it's a gang murder*  
*All my reps in the crack files, I got 'em up out the vault*  
*I'm the reason your mama be smoking that Brillo and be ripping*  
*them car antennas off*  
*Geekers beaming up to Scotty in my crack lobby*  
*I can smell the 'caine burning*

00:50:12 Music Transition  
00:50:15 Jesse Host  
Mellow, thumpy music.  
That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where just this very week, my daughter learned to ride a bike. And only two days later, when the road in front of my house was blocked by an enormous crew cab pickup truck, she screamed, "Hey, get out of my way! I'm biking here!"

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 and Kristen Bennett. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by the band The Go! Team. Our thanks to The Go! Team and to their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use it all these years.

00:51:20 Promo Promo

If you wanna hear the latest about what we're up to, you can keep up with our show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post all of our interviews up there. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff. **Speaker:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*[Music fades out.]*