

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:12	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team.
00:00:19	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. If you’re of a certain age, you will probably remember when ska music had its day. It was the mid-nineties. You’d get behind the wheel of your Isuzu Amigo. You’d reach for the dial on the radio, tuned to the modern rock station. Within a couple minutes, you’d be listening to No Doubt or Sublime or the Mighty Mighty Bosstones. It’s a time burned indelibly into all of our memories.
00:00:54	Music	Music	<i>[Music fades in.]</i> Maybe one of the most interesting acts from that time, though, were The Aquabats. “Martian Girl!” from the album <i>The Return of the Aquabats</i> by The Aquabats. <i>Well, here's a story that must be told It's kinda new, not very old About a female Martian with a wild grin Big orange eyes and green skin Blue was her hair...</i>
00:01:05	Jesse	Host	<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i> First, they took just as much influence from The Specials as they did from other, weirder bands like Ween and Devo. Second, they weren’t just a band. They were really an experience. For more than two decades, The Aquabats have performed in superhero outfits and fought elaborately costumed villains onstage. Sort of like a family friendly Gwar. Anyway. What follows is an interview with Christian Jacobs, aka MC Bat Commander, the band’s lead singer and front man. Christian isn’t just an onstage rock and roll with horns superhero. He is also the creator of the Aquabats’ TV show, and of <i>Yo Gabba Gabba</i> , the beloved kids’ show. Conducting today’s interview is my good friend and <i>Jordan, Jesse, Go!</i> co-host—and besides those things, perhaps most importantly, a teenager from Orange County in the mid-1990s—Jordan Morris. Before we get into all that, let’s kick things off with a song from The Aquabats’ new record <i>Kooky Spooky...In Stereo!</i> . This one is called “Pajamazon!”.
00:02:17	Music	Music	“Pajamazon!” from the album <i>Kooky Spooky...In Stereo!</i> by The Aquabats. <i>Put my pajamas on, I turn on Amazon Ain't never gonna go outside, go outside again With a point and a click I could order all of it</i>

Ain't never gonna go outside, go outside again

[Music fades out.]

00:02:32	Jordan Morris	Host	Christian Jacobs, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:02:34	Christian Jacobs	Guest	Hey! Thanks for having me! What's up, Jordan? How are you?
00:02:37	Jordan	Host	Well, I'm doing good. It's a thrill to talk to you. I've been attending Aquabats shows since junior high and, yeah, I'm just thrilled that you guys are still around and being super, super-weird. It's really cool.
00:02:51	Christian	Guest	Thank you! Hey, alright! Someone's gotta do it, right? <i>[Laughs.]</i> Did you grow up in Orange County, then, Jordan?
00:02:57	Jordan	Host	I did, yeah. So, I grew up in Mission Viejo. My mom still lives in Huntington Beach. And yeah, I was—I went to high school in, you know, 1995, '96, around the time of—you know, ska and punk and it was—it was a thrill. I was super-into that scene and it was like a big part of my growing up and just like awesome memories. I have nothing but awesome, fun memories attached to those times.
00:03:21	Christian	Guest	What a great time to be in high school, '95, '96, '97. Like, what—there was so much going on in that scene in Orange County at that time. Like, that's exciting to hear 'cause it was a lot fun, looking back. Like, wow! All the stuff that went down and different clubs popping up all over and live music and it was—it was pretty fun. An intense time. Good times. Right?
00:03:44	Jordan	Host	Yeah. Oh, absolutely. Before we talk about kind of your musical influences, I think it's important to talk about The Aquabats' pop culture influences. It is such a soup. It's a— <i>it's a gumbo of stuff. It's superheroes. It's Saturday morning cartoons. It's monster movies.</i> Yeah. I wanna hear about the role that stuff played in your life. Was it—you know—the pop culture you were ingesting as a kid? Is it something you got into later? What are your early pop culture memories?
00:04:17	Christian	Guest	Wow. So much. I mean, I was a TV kid like a lot of kids in that kind of golden age of—I don't wanna say golden age. Probably like silver age—silver age of television. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> You know, you have golden age of comics and then you have the silver age of comics, which is kind of like all the Marvel and, like, really when the X-Men came into, you know, power and all that. And similarly, with TV, there was so much going on in the seventies and weird stuff for kids. You know? And going way, way back—obviously <i>Sesame Street</i> and <i>Electric Company</i> and when Spider-Man would pop in from time to time and—you know, teach us about punctuation on <i>Electric Company</i> .

[Jordan chuckles.]

It was always, like, the best. You know? And so, it started early—the pursuit of things that were weird and unexpected in pop culture and then, you know, there was the Sid and Marty Krofft shows and everything from, you know, *Land of the Lost* to—and then we, you know, being in LA, growing up in Los Angeles, there was a weird stations and cable access and that's where I discovered shows like *Johnny Sokko and his Giant Robot* and *Ultraman* and all the, you know—the Japanese shows and there was a show that would come on every weekend called *The Family Film Festival* and the host of

the show also hosted another show called, like, *The Popeye Hour* or whatever and he would—anyway.

[Jordan chuckles.]

Long story short, so much weird stuff would come through like *Pippi Longstockings* and the, you know, *War of the Gargantuas* and the *Godzilla* movies, and then just *The Blob* and all kinds of, like, family films where, you know, giant monsters are smashing villages and, you know, little girls with pigtails are picking up horses and throwing them across the street. You know. Just weird stuff and myself and my brothers and my family, we always kind of gravitated towards that stuff.

[Music fades in.]

00:06:31 Music Music

So, yeah. And then punk rock happened and skateboarding and music and then it all just kind of crashed into everything and became—that's kind of what *The Aquabats* became.

"Idiot Box" from the album *The Return of The Aquabats* by The Aquabats.

*Now, now, now
I'm just a boy
I watch too much TV
Nobody knows, nobody knows
Casper the Ghost is so friendly
Nobody knows, nobody knows
Sitting in my living room
With nothing else to do
I think I'm going blind
Just like Mr. Magoo
I know every single ending
Of every Scooby Doo
Now*

*Turn off the idiot box (hey!)
It's a disease just like the chicken pox
Now, turn off the idiot box
Now*

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

00:06:57 Jordan Host

Was that stuff—watching, you know, *Ultraman* and *War of the Gargantuas*, was that, like, family viewing in your family or was it something you had to sneak late at night?

00:07:08 Christian Guest

My dad, you know, once a month or once every other month would say, "You guys are watching too much TV!" And he would do something like, you know, take the TV and hide it in the garage or—but we were pretty, like, wide-open to watch kind of whatever we wanted. You know? It crossed the line sometimes with some of the late-night shows, like *Benny Hill* or things like that would come on and my parents would be like, "You can't watch that," or—you know, which made us want to watch it even more. But for the most part, yeah. Even, like, war films—like, my dad was an extra in a couple of—when he was in the Army, he was in a couple of war

movies like *The Devil's Brigade* and so that was one thing. My dad and I would watch war movies and Westerns and so we didn't really go to the movies a ton, because—you know—not having the funds to take a family of five kids to the movies. So, we just spent a lot of time watching TV. You know. Just like Mike TV—

[They chuckle.]

—in *Willy Wonka*. Yeah, it's so—it wasn't stuff we had to sneak, per se, because I think a lot of—a lot of that stuff—which is kind of a big difference between our generations, is my parents were like, "Oh, that—you know—*Godzilla*? That's for kids." So, then they would leave the room. You know?

[Jordan agrees.]

And then—whereas nowadays, I wanna see what my kids are watching and watch it with them and if I don't like it then I don't want them to watch it, more—less about it being offensive or something, but more like being intellectually offensive. Like, "That show's poorly made. You're not watching it." You know what I mean? *[Chuckles.]* So.

[Jordan confirms.]

Which is totally different than my parents, 'cause again, I feel like parents these days are more like kids. Anyway. That's saying something about society, so maybe we shouldn't go down that road. It's a dark road, Jordan. It's a dark road.

[They laugh.]

00:09:01 Jordan Host

What about music? What kind of music was on in your house when you were growing up?

00:09:04 Christian Guest

So, yeah! Growing up music was a big thing. My early memories—my dad had this—he had, like, a wooden box of 7" records and he pretty much just gave it to us. Like, "Go for it! Do what you want!" And it had, like, a lot of fifties music—you know, Carl Perkins and Elvis—and he had these records that were like... they're kind of like Doctor Demento from the fifties. You know? Like, "Yakety Yak Don't Talk Back". But there were these ones where there would be like an announcer and he would say, you know, "Downtown New York is being attacked by—" And then he would like cut in lines from songs like, *[singing]* "One-eyed, one-armed, flying purple people eater." You know?

[Jordan chuckles.]

He would cut in lines from different songs and that was a record we listened to a lot, so between those records and then what musically was happening in Los Angeles at the time with KROQ and new wave and punk and also Dr. Demento on KMET, there was just like this kind of avalanche of weird, fun music that was happening, like, in an undercurrent of the pop culture in LA for kids. Which—it wasn't really made for kids, but there was so much weird stuff going on in the late seventies in music that was theatrical and weird and—you know, punk was theatrical. It was, like, very—it wasn't

necessarily super-musical, but it was very theatrical. And so, a lot of that stuff was really attractive to me as a young kid. So, even just listening to the music, you could kind of visualize what these singers look like or, you know, you'd listen to something weird on the radio from Brian Eno, you know? *[Singing.]* "Baby's on fireee," you know? Like, "Throw him in the well—" Like, these weird songs! And it just really added to the imagination of everything.

Anyway, I could go on and on about, like, musical influences but that—at a young—really young age, became a big music fan. Like, really into music. So. But mostly weird stuff. You know? Like, "Double Dutch Bus" or Frankie Smith and, like, Weird Al and Barnes & Barnes. And like, the—just things like that. And then plugging it together that one of the guys in Barnes & Barnes was Billy Mumy from *Twilight Zone* and *Lost in Space* was like, "Woah! Yeeeah! Wow!" You know? "Amazing!"

00:11:32 Jordan Host

Was the idea of band-as-superheroes—you know, was that part of the original concept or did the, you know—did that layer come later?

00:11:44 Christian Guest

So, we started in '94 and right around that time in music, there was this kind of burgeoning indie scene going on in Southern California. Rocket from the Crypt and, like, indie music and there was kind of also this resurgence of surf bands, like The Mummies and The Phantom Surfers and there was this—there was this surf scene going on and I was getting real—'cause I really loved The Ventures, growing up. That was, like, one of my favorite bands. Like, the instrumental surf band, The Ventures. And they just kind of stood above all the other surf bands. They're like—basically the best surf band ever is The Ventures. You know? So, you know, and I was learning how to play some of their songs and there was this scene going on with The Ventures, but at—or with surf music, but it was kind of an older, a little more snootier scene. It was a little more, like, over-21 crowd that—you know, they would quiz you on if you had pre-CBS amps or, you know, what year is your Fender Jazzmaster made?

[Jordan chuckles.]

You know what I mean? It wasn't really—it wasn't super-inclusive. And then you would go to ska shows and it was like anyone could go. There was guys, girls. Anyone—everyone was accepted. If you—whoever—whatever you wanted to do or be or dress like, it didn't matter. As long as you were there, you were a part of this scene. And I kind of felt like I was obviously too young to be part of the original punk scene, but that kind of ska scene in Orange County, at that time, was so inclusive and so—like, there was no fights. 'Cause it was just a bunch of nerds. Like, it was just a bunch of people that wanted to have fun together. And so, when we started The Aquabats—the idea for The Aquabats, we—I was kind of coming off the, "Let's do something that's like The Stingrays. Or, you know, the Aqua Velvets. Or The Mummies. You know. The Somethings." And then we kind of bounced some names around and the idea—it definitely didn't take shape from the beginning. It was just kind of like, "What if we just called it The Aquabats?"

And then, you know, my roommate, Chad—who's also known as Crash McLarson in the band. The bass player. And then our other buddy—our surf pal, Boyd—he was like, "Okay, cool! Rad!" And then Chad knew some people and said, "Okay, guys. Hey. I got us a gig for this Saturday."

And we were like, "Dude, we haven't even written any songs!"

And he's like, "That doesn't matter! If you have a name of your band, just book a show and you'll figure out the songs along the way."

So, we literally had one practice and we—and we... we wrote, like, three or four songs and they were really dumb and then that next Saturday, we played a show. Like, literally we came up with the idea—The Aquabats, the name of the band—and then we had a show that next Saturday. And the way that it kind of morphed into what it is, is Boyd—our surfer buddy who played trumpet, also known as Cat Boy in The Aquabats, he showed up and he—his day job was he worked at a wetsuit factory. And he showed up with these neoprene silver *Buck Rogers*-looking helmets and he made, like, sideburns on them 'cause of course this was the nineties and if you go back and watch any nineties movies, you'll see that sideburns were pretty cool. [Laughs.] But just—it's kind of hard to watch now, but they—you know, they had these like *Dawson's Creek*, James Van Der Beek sideburns on this *Buck Rogers* helmet. And we were laughing so hard, 'cause it was so dumb.

00:15:23 Christian Guest

And he was like, "I made them for everyone in the band!" And we wore these silver helmets and then that's basically—The Aquabats were born from there. And then—because people would ask why do you wear these helmets or why are you dressing like this and it—we just kept pushing it further and further and further into the lore of the superheroes. You know?

00:15:46 Jordan Host

So, the ska scene that you were a part of really, like, blew up in a big way—you know—in '95, '96. Do you remember the first time you thought, "Oh! Maybe this is going to become, like, a thing."

00:16:04 Christian Guest

Yeah! You know, when No Doubt's record, *Tragic Kingdom*, hit and it was a—"I'm Just a Girl" was the first big hit and then I listened to the record after I'd heard on the radio the single and I was like, "This is gonna be so huge. This is gonna—this is good. This is a good thing." But again, I didn't think like, "We're next in line," 'cause I always thought The Aquabats were—we were not poised to take U2's crown of, you know, legitimate rock and roll. We were always gonna be kind of on the fringe, I guess, because—because of the nature of the costumes. It's just like Devo. I mean... which was a band, obviously, that we idolized and loved as kids, but you know, Devo never really—I mean, "Whip It" was a mainstream hit for sure. And "Whip It" was a bigger hit than any of our songs had—would ever be. They were playing on different levels and people don't really wanna—they don't really wanna mess with that.

But definitely when No Doubt got big and then Sublime's single hit, that actually started a little bit of a bidding war between a lot of bands in Southern California. A lot of record companies were coming to bands and saying, you know, Reel Big Fish got pulled in and Save Ferris and a number of, you know, our contemporaries

that we were playing with almost every weekend were getting signed to label deals. And we were... we weren't, like, expectatious—is that a word?

[Jordan chuckles.]

We didn't really expect it to happen, but I remember we played a show at The Glass House in Pomona, and Paul Tollett, who is—you know—the creator, you know, of Coachella, the Coachella music festival and he was the president then of Goldenvoice Promotions Company. Goldenvoice was the big, you know—a Goldenvoice show, they always had the coolest shows, best bands, especially punk stuff. And he came to us and he said, "I wanna start a record label and I wanna sign you guys."

And we were like, "Woah! Paul Tollett! This is legit!"

And he said—he was like, "A few years ago, I had the same feeling that I get when I watch you guys with another band. And I wanted to start a label with this bad and I just never—I never did it. And I kind of regret it. But I get that same feeling when I see you guys play." And that band was No Doubt. And they were already, like, super-big at that point. And then—and we did get some other offers from some other labels, but once someone like Paul Tollett asks you to be a part of his label, we were like, "Okay. We're in. We're totally in."

[Music fades in.]

And that was the record that became *The Fury of the Aquabats!*, which was our hit, "Super Rad!", and you know, "Martian Girl!" and some of those other Aquabat hits.

00:18:52 Music Music

"Super Rad!" from the album *The Fury of the Aquabats!* by The Aquabats.

*I've got a small friend
Who has a fat friend
Who had a big friend
Who gave birth to many friends
With our flashlights to the sky
We waited for them to land*

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

00:19:03 Jesse Host

Even more to come with Christian Jacobs. The Aquabats have fought literally dozens of monsters onstage night after night, telling story after story. How did they keep track of all of it? Is there an Aquabats show bible? We'll find out. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:19:23 Music Transition
00:19:24 Jesse Promo

Thumpy music.

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

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00:19:58 Promo Clip

[Music fades out.]

Music: Upbeat music.

Speaker 1: This episode of *Life Kit*, we're getting intimate.

Speaker 2: Exploring yourself is a really great way to one, pass the time. *[Laughs.]* But also, just to get to know yourself better.

Speaker 1: Understand the power of touch and self-pleasure—how self-appreciation can spark deeper engagement with ourselves and the world. Listen now to NPR's *Life Kit*.

00:20:18 Promo Clip

[Music ends.]

Jesse Thorn: Hey, it's Jesse. What you're about to hear is real.

[A telephone rings.]

Chris: Hey, this is Chris.

[Whimsical music cues in.]

Jesse: Hi, Chris. It's Jesse calling from Maximum Fun.

Chris: *[Chuckles.]* Hey, Jesse.

Jesse: I heard that you got into a car accident.

Chris: Yeah, I was listening to *[laughing]* *Stop Podcasting Yourself* and I just laughed so hard that I, uh, slammed into a construction barrier. And, uh... *[Laughing.]*

Jesse: *[Laughs.]* Do you remember what it was that was so funny?

Chris: I will never forget, I'm sure! They started talking about Vegas and the, you know, if it happens here it stays here and that slogan. And Graham was talking about, "Oh, you know, wasn't there some other slogan for another commercial?"

[Stop Podcasting Yourself audio cuts in.]

Graham Clark: Oh, it was like a commercial for food and it said, like, "Whatever's in there stays in there." I can't remember what it was. Clams or something?

Dave: Clams?!

[Jesse and Chris laugh. Call audio cuts back in.]

Chris: It's just so ridiculous and, man, I got lightheaded I was *[breaks on a laugh]* laughing so hard. Next thing I know—*[chuckles]* smash! So, yeah. They are—they are just brilliantly funny.

Jesse: So, I talked to Dave and Graham from *Stop Podcasting Yourself*. We would like to pay your car repair bill. Is that okay?

Chris: That—I mean, that would be super-nice, Jesse. I really—I—thank you. I appreciate that.

[Music fades out.]

00:21:32 Jesse Host It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, we're listening to my pal Jordan Morris's conversation with Christian Jacobs. Christian is the front man of the band The Aquabats, who got their start in the ska scene of the mid-1990s. They've since evolved into a genre-bending, family-friendly touring band with a truly bonkers stage presence. Christian also created *The Aquabats* TV show and *Yo Gabba Gabba*, the kids' show that aired on Nickelodeon for nearly a decade. Let's get back into it.

00:22:03 Jordan Host The Aquabats eventually made their way to TV. There was an Aquabats TV show that existed on a network that I don't think is around anymore, called Hub. Right? Am I getting that right?

[Christian confirms.]

00:22:29 Christian Guest You now do the show online, but I'm wondering about that first incarnation of it. What was it like pitching the band to a network and was it a hard thing to explain to TV executives?
Absolutely! So, right around '97, '98, I kind of could see that, like, the only way The Aquabats could become something that we could call a career is—because the music industry was so fickle and changed—was if we kind of steered it into the TV. It just made sense! And so, early on—like, this is 1998—we started floating it out there that The Aquabats were gonna do a TV show. And this is before the internet. This is before social media. This is before even, like, really, people had cell phones. I mean, some people did, but they were out of our tax bracket. You know? I mean, they—you just—it just wasn't a thing. But we just started floating it out there. And you know, we talked to some people and managers and networked a little bit and eventually we ended up pitching our show to Disney—Buena Vista TV—and we had a deal with Disney in 1998.

In '99, we did a pilot for *The Aquabats!* TV show and it was pretty bad. It was pretty terrible. And it wasn't exactly what we wanted to do. And it just—it didn't get picked up and it didn't really go anywhere. But it became kind of an obsession and, you know, that obsession eventually led to creating *Yo Gabba Gabba* with my friends and some of the guys in the band. And with the success of *Yo Gabba Gabba*, we were starting to get asked, like, "Well, what else do you guys have?" And it'd been long enough away from 1998—in fact, it had almost been a whole decade; 2008 was when we did another pilot for *The Aquabats!* and then we got a deal with The Hub. So. Um. It was just one of those things that I always thought The Aquabats could—if it could make it onto the screen, people would understand it a little bit more and realize that it wasn't so serious and it's—it wasn't taking ska seriously. It wasn't taking music seriously. It wasn't—definitely we weren't taking ourselves serious. It was just something that was fun.

So, yeah. It was hard to explain to people in the beginning... what we were trying to do, because reality TV at the time—like, *The Real World* was so popular and everyone we pitched was like, “Why don’t you guys just make it a reality show about your band?”

And we were like, “Nooo, nooo, no. No reality, please!” Like, enough with the reality stuff! We wanted to make the, like, anti-reality show. We wanted to make something that was surreal and weird and like the stuff we watched as kids. You know? Like Sid and Marty Krofft and *Johnny Sokko* and *Ultraman*. Like, that’s what I wanted to make. And I felt like there was a whole big generation that grew up watching reality shows that would watch The Aquabats version of *Ultraman* and be like, “Wooah! This—now we’re talking! Like—there’s no made-up drama!” You know what I mean? *[Laughing.]* It’s just silly! So, anyway. That—what—it was a tough sell, and it took a long time to actually get it going. And we, you know, fortunately, *Yo Gabba Gabba* was a really great hit and it helped—it helped us to kind of stay alive.

[Music fades in.]

00:25:37

Music

Music

So—and get a—and get a TV show.
“Best Day of My Life!” from the album *Radio Down!* by The Aquabats.

*Today's gonna be the best day of my life... by far!
I've no particular reason why I think today's gonna be so nice
But today's gonna be the best day of my life... so far!*

*No, it's not my birthday or the end of school
And I didn't win the lottery or anything that cool*

*I didn't get a trophy for something great I've done
But, I say today's gonna be so great, it's only just because:*

*Just because I feel like having the best day I can
And if you don't like it, then I guess that's your problem*

Today's gonna be the best day of my life... so far!

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

00:26:27

Jordan

Host

Because this interview is for NPR, I am contractually obligated to try and find your personal pain.

[Christian agrees.]

To prove that, you know, within every clown there is a sad clown. I think I actually found the way in and I—and I wanna ask you about the song “Best Day of My Life!”, which I think is just a terrific Aquabats song and...

[Christian chuckles and agrees several times as Jordan continues.]

In the song, the narrator is talking about how the coming day is going to be the best one of their life. And they don’t have any

evidence to back this up. It's just, "This is gonna be the best day." And they keep saying and it and they keep saying it until it kind of sounds like madness. It kind of sounds like this character's going insane trying to stay positive and... to me, that seemed like the narrator could be a—you know, a guy who has to dress up like a superhero and make people laugh every night, even though he maybe doesn't want to.

00:27:29 Christian Guest

Hey, now! *[Laughs.]*

00:27:30 Jordan Host

[Struggling for words.] You—do you ever have to, like, summon the goofball when you don't feel like being a goofball?

00:27:38 Christian Guest

Oh! Absolutely! I mean, they have that thing, Cameo, now. And this isn't like a shameless plug for, "Get a Cameo with the Bat Commander," but you know, I'll get some orders to draw, you know—to be the Bat Commander and to give a message to someone's birthday or something. And that's awesome, because—especially with last year, not being able to tour and there's no money coming in for a lot of bands and musicians, like, things like Cameo have been really helpful. But you know, the—it's just like, I gotta draw that moustache on, sometimes every day during the week. And I—when we're on tour, too, sometimes. Just. *[Sighs.]* You know. Like, you'll play a show, and you'll go check into the hotel in the middle of the night and you walk up and you—I've got my moustache and my blacked-out tooth, and I'll be like, "I have a reservation."

They're like, "Nope! Sorry! No reservations!"

[Chuckling.] You know what I mean? There's just times where it's very—Aquabats is very *Spinal Tap*. It's very, like—all that stuff is real, like—you know, going to a hotel and you don't—they don't have your reservations, but your rival band is at the same hotel and they've got checked in and they're playing down the street at the bigger venue and—like, all those things in that movie are so genius, 'cause it's so real. But you know, growing up—not to go off on a tangent, but if NPR wants some pain, I'm gonna—I'll unleash a little bit. But—

00:28:52 Jordan Host

Yeah! Let's hear it.

00:28:53 Christian Guest

You know, growing up, my parents were very, like, super-positive people and very, like—always wanna be positive and always tried to look at the good in everybody and in people. And then eventually, what was weird is my parents got divorced and that was right around the time I was—you know—neck-deep into skateboarding and punk rock and it was—it was a painful time, because I always thought my family was gonna be together and we were like this positive unit. And then when life slaps you a different tale, you know, how do you stay positive? And I got really into like negative music—heavy metal and really fast, hardcore Agnostic Front and all those, like, New York hardcore bands. And I just was—I was just unhappy. You know? And I just realized that, like, even when things are the worst, if you can turn it positively you're just gonna end up being happy.

And I've had plenty of pain and plenty of things happen and—but just, like, the worst time in my life when I reacted with negativity to negativity—it just made things worse. And I'm grateful to my parents, you know, my family, for raising me to believe that things

are always gonna get better. And to count your blessings when things are good, because they're probably gonna get worse soon. Like, they had like that—there's a song "Hello, Good Night!" from The Aquabats where I talk about that—you know, that song where when things are going good, just look around the corner 'cause something—something's coming around the corner. But when things are bad, don't worry. It's gonna get better.

I just—I like having that perspective and I've been able to, like, really see that happen with my career and it hasn't all—it's not picture perfect. We're not—you know, the biggest band in the world, but it's kind of crazy to think that we've been a band for 25 years and we're still doing it and kids are liking it. Young kids are into it. Like, moms that used to come to our shows when they were in high school are now, like, driving their high school kids to our shows. It's just weird, you know? But that—there is that pain and the, like, "Why are we still doing this thing?" That we definitely went through as a band and we had members drop out and when Travis left the band it was like a big—it was like a big bummer, you know, for me. It was—it sounds really dumb, but when Travis left and joined Blink and they became, like, the biggest band in the world—like, that was really hard on me. Like, I—it was—I don't know if the other guys even cared, 'cause they saw it coming. *[Chuckling.]* I didn't see it!

[Jordan chuckles.]

I didn't see it coming, you know. I didn't see it coming. You know. Like—times like that were dark. There were some dark times for The Aquabats. Like, "Why should we—why are we doing this? Like, this—no one is gonna ever get it. We'll never become as popular or as financially stable as a Blink-182 or some of these other bands that were our contemporaries. Why are we still doing it?" And then it always flopped back to, like, when we're not doing it, it's worse. If that makes sense. When you're not—when you're not being positive and you're giving into the negative energy, it makes things way worse. But just keep doing it! Having fun and it just—it will rise. You know? It will just—you'll get out of the pit, like Bane or whatever. *[Chuckles.]*

00:32:19 Jordan Host

I think it's really important to talk about The Aquabats' live shows. What can you hope to see when you go to see The Aquabats?

00:32:27 Christian Guest

We have so much fun when we play. Like, we like to move around. We like to dance. We like to encourage people to dance. But for a long time, you know—since the late nineties, we've been doing, like, video screen behind us. Which now every—it's kind of every band does that, but you know, we're kind of playing at like it's a kid's show in a way, because we'll—sometimes in between songs we'll cut to, like, a homemade commercial for a product that doesn't exist. Monsters will come out on stage or guests or—and usually it's—if there's someone backstage that is our guest musician, but it's usually like our road crew, you know, putting on costumes and wigs and playing characters. And so there's, like, a big theatrical thing that goes on in between songs, but then we really try to, like, have blocks of songs to play the songs that people came to see.

So, it's not just like we're playing a song and then we stop and then tune a guitar and it's quiet and then we play another song. It's like,

in between the song sets, we're doing things like—you know—having a karate demonstration or a giant dinosaur has come out and we have to find a way for it to get off the stage or Danny DeVito will show up and, you know. Who knows?! Like, so much weird stuff happens at our shows that a lot of times we don't even really plan for it until the very last second. Like, even sometimes literally while we're onstage something will happen and it just feels organic to, like—anything could happen at any moment. But it's also very family-friendly. And that's definitely by design. We wanna keep things inclusive.

You know, the 'X' on the hand for the all-ages. Like, I took that to heart as a teenager and I—'cause I wanted to go see shows and there were shows I couldn't go see. And so, we wanna keep the, like, content and even the bands that open up for us and we work together really inclusive so that literally you could have the youngest kids come and the oldest kids come, and everyone would have fun still. You know? If that makes sense.

00:34:34 Jordan Host

Yeah. You mentioned that some of The Aquabats', you know, villains are kind of like *[chuckling]* improvised on the spot or improvised, you know, 20 minutes before showtime. There is so much storytelling within the band. Is there an Aquabats continuity? Do you keep track of all the villains and their backstories or, you know, does it all just kind of, like, go away when the show's over?

00:34:59 Christian Guest

I think—yeah, definitely we keep track of it. And sometimes it—sometimes if we're playing, you know, close enough they'll be like a continuation. And we've done stuff where we had two shows in a row where, like, the—it was like a "to be continued" between the same guy or the same bad guy. But yeah, there's—and for a while, it was a catalogued and I think there's a fan Wikipedia online that—they've done a good job of like, you know, laying down who these bad guys are and where they came from and what their backstories are and just based on little stuff we've said. And even *[laughing]* if it's like we just made it up on the spot, you know. Like we were in England and we didn't have a bad guy and one of our friends—he's like the sixth member of the band; his name is Matt Gorney. He's like—we're like, "We don't have a bad guy for tonight's show."

And he's like, "Don't worry. I got something." And he came out in the middle of the show and he had this silver spandex suit on that we had used, like, for an alien but he'd turned it inside out so that the—his, like, chest was showing. His hairy chest. He had a moustache. His hair was slicked back. And he had, like, Chiclets on his teeth. Like, basically Freddie Mercury. But he was holding a loaf of bread and he said, "I'm Breadie Mercury."

[Jordan laughs.]

And he started—he started throwing bread at people in England. And it was at that moment I saw people switch. Like, "Okay. I like these guys." *[Chuckles.]*

00:36:23 Jordan Host

[Laughing.] "This I like!"

00:36:25 Christian Guest

"They know they're stupid, but they're actually kind of smart, too." So, it was just—you know, dad jokes and Breadie Mercury. And anyway, yeah, there is—there is some—we do try to keep track of—especially the monsters or the bad guys that resonate or, like,

00:36:47 Jordan Host people that people like. You know. So, I'm sure we haven't seen the end of Breadie Mercury. *[Giggling.]* Part of the Bat Commander's look was—it's a—it is quite a look. There's a drawn-on handlebar moustache, but also one of your teeth is blacked out. *[Chuckles.]* How do you—how do you black out a tooth every night?

00:37:02 Christian Guest Back in the day, we didn't have—no one had facial hair. I didn't have a moustache. But we showed up to play a show—and this was, like, *The Fury of the Aquabats!* 1997 tour. And someone had, like, taken a sharpie and, like, drawn a moustache on the picture and blacked out a tooth and drawn funny beards on the picture. So, that night for the show, we drew moustaches on ourselves with magic—with Sharpies. With a magic marker. And just to match the poster, because it was just silly. You know? Someone had vandalized our poster and instead of, like, getting negative about it, we just used it as like, "Oh! That's a good idea!"

[Jordan agrees.]

00:37:58 Jordan Host So, we just went for it! Anyway! For some reason, it stuck, and it just felt right for my character to have a moustache and a blacked-out tooth. So, literally to this day, I still—I use a Sharpie. I use a Sharpie on my moustache and a Sharpie on my tooth. Keeping it real.

00:37:59 Christian Guest You just gotta dry your tooth off and just, you know, scribble it on there and then it just brushes right off. It's harder to get off your face—your skin than your tooth. It'll come off your teeth pretty easy. Yeah, I believe it.

00:38:09 Jordan Host But uh, people are always like, "Isn't that—you know, aren't you gonna die from that?"

00:38:10 Christian Guest I'm like, "Well. *[Laughing.]* I've been doing it for 20 years. So. There's something in Sharpie that's either preserving my life or building this giant tumor behind my glasses or something. I don't know. Who knows?" One day I'll just drop dead from Sharpie poisoning, but—kids, don't try this at home. Or—if you do—uh... make sure you have your parents' permission.

[They chuckle.]

00:38:38 Jordan Host Christian. Thanks so much for being on *Bullseye*.

00:38:40 Christian Guest Thank you, Jordan! This was awesome.

00:38:43 Jesse Host Christian Jacobs, folks. The Aquabats' new album is called *Kooky Spooky...In Stereo!*. It's their first in nearly ten years. We'll have a link to buy it on the *Bullseye* page at MaximumFun.org.

[Music fades in.]

00:39:01 Music Music Let's go out on one more song from the new record. This one is called "Skeleton Inside!" "Skeleton Inside!" from the album *Kooky Spooky...In Stereo!* by The Aquabats.

*Help me! Help me!
There's a skeleton inside me
Skeleton inside me*

			<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i>
00:39:10	Jesse	Host	Jordan Morris, who conducted our interview, is not only the co-host of the comedy podcast <i>Jordan, Jesse, Go!</i> with yours truly, he is also the co-author of the new graphic novel <i>Bubble</i> . You can pre-order it now at your favorite book or comic store. It's really great. I've read it.
00:39:29	Music	Transition	Relaxed, cheerful music with light vocalizations.
00:39:32	Jesse	Host	That's the end another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created in the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, everyone is buzzing about the film <i>Santa Jaws</i> . It's a movie about a shark who wears one of those red Christmas Santa Claus hats on his fin. <i>[Chuckling softly.]</i> It's a real movie. I don't know. This is what my kid is into.
			Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kawling are our associate producers. We get help from Casey O'Brien and Kristen Bennett. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it. You can also keep up with our show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post all our interviews there. And I think that's about it.
00:40:33	Promo	Promo	Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff. Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>