00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	**Speaker**: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR. *[Music fades out.]*
00:00:12	Music	Transition	"Huddle Formation" from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. It's not that Shabaka Hutchings is eclectic. I mean, yes. The saxophonist and composer blends jazz, calypso, dance hall, hip-hop, African folk music, afrobeat. But that alone isn't what makes him so great. Shabaka was born in the UK, raised mostly in Barbados. He studied classical music in college—not jazz. And that's interesting but again, it's not the reason you should listen to his music. You should listen to the music of Shabaka Hutchings because he makes brilliant, beautiful songs. *[Music fades in.]* His music is vivid, complex, and hypnotic.
00:01:00	Music	Music	"Play Mass" from the album *Lest We Forget What We Came Here to Do* by Sons of Kemet. *[Volume decreases and plays under the dialogue then fades out.]*
00:01:10	Jesse	Host	As the leader of the band Shabaka and the Ancestors and Sons of Kemet, Hutchings has found ways to speak using the language of all these genres to make something that is entirely unique and entirely his. When he writes a piece like "Go My Heart, Go to Heaven". You hear the harmonized sax work of Ethiopian jazz legend, Mulatu Astatke. *[Music fades in.]* But the energy's different. It's cooler. More romantic. And a little disorienting.
00:01:37	Music	Music	*[Volume increases.]* *[Music fades out to be replaced by "My Queen is Mamie Phipps Clark".]*
00:01:49	Jesse	Host	Or, in the Sons of Kemet—the band more informed by his upbringing in Barbados—you might hear a dub song performed almost entirely by horns. And then Shabaka himself goes into a sax solo that's absolutely breathtaking.
00:02:04	Music	Music	"My Queen is Mamie Phipps Clark" from the album *Your Queen is a Reptile* by Sons of Kemet. *[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]*
00:02:14	Jesse	Host	The Sons of Kemet have a brand-new album. It just came out. It's called *Black to the Future*. I'm so excited to have Shabaka Hutchings on the show. Let's hear a song off the new record. This is "To Never Forget the Source".
00:02:28	Music	Music	"To Never Forget the Source" from the album *Black to the Future* by Sons of Kemet.

			[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]
00:03:03	Jesse	Host	Shabaka Hutchings, welcome to *Bullseye*! I'm so happy to have you on the show.
00:03:06	Shabaka Hutchings	Guest	Hi, yeah, thanks for having me. It's a real pleasure.
00:03:08	Jesse	Host	Your first instrument was the clarinet. How did you end up with a clarinet in your hand?
00:03:14	Shabaka	Guest	Well, I went to school in Barbados. I moved to Barbados from England when I was six. And that's where I picked up the clarinet. And in the school bands there, you normally have a whole bunch of clarinets. So, you'll have like 12 to 14 clarinets in the front row. Then like two saxophones, two trumpets, two trombones, a drumkit, maybe a piano, bass. So, they just had a lot of clarinets, I guess because they're cheap. *[Jesse chuckles.]* And you—you know, you get them in the kind of cadet bands, also, playing the marching stuff. I really wanted the saxophone, because I thought it was cool, but they were just like, "We only—we've only got two saxophones and you're getting a clarinet."
00:03:51	Jesse	Host	So, what kind of music was being played by *[laughing]* this band of two saxophones and 14 clarinets?!
00:03:59	Shabaka	Guest	Absolutely everything. Like, you know, we used to play like calypso songs. We'd play stuff like "Pomp and Circumstance". The kind of old colonial hits. We'd play some, you know, classical stuff. We'd play some reggae numbers. It was—you know, it was one of those like school variety bands where we just got arrangements and just played them.
00:04:22	Jesse	Host	I don't know if this is the case in Barbados—it is in the United States—that "Pomp and Circumstance" plays when everyone is doing like a graduation processional. You know, everyone wearing their mortar boards and accepting their diplomas. And I'm just imagining right now that scene—you know, the very dignified scene, but also with the addition of 14 clarinets.
00:04:45	Shabaka	Guest	Ah, yeah. It was a joyful sound if you like clarinets.
00:04:51	Jesse	Host	*[Chuckles.]* What kind of music was playing in your house when you were a kid?
00:04:55	Shabaka	Guest	Uh, well my mother used to play a lot of calypso and soca, reggae, but then a lot of soul. So, I remember people like, you know, Millie Jackson being played or people like Luther Vandross, but the radio was always on. And, you know, that was the '90s. So, on the radio was a lot of kind of hip-hop from that era. So, I remember hearing—and actually—no, I actually remember it being really diverse. I remember even hearing like a group like Westside Connection on the radio in Barbados. Outkast, Nas was there. Then you had lots of lover's rock and people like Toni Braxton, Brian McKnight—which was really fundamental to me, because I used to really listen to the melodies and I remember playing along with the melody to things like, you know, "Back at One" by Brian McKnight or "Unbreak My Heart" by Toni Braxton, and that was my first real introduction to playing the clarinet. It wasn't the repertoire that I had to play for the exams. It was me going home and then just playing along to the radio with all these melodies that I was—you know, that I loved.

00:05:56	Jesse	Host	Yeah, I do—I'm pumped about the idea of Babyface going back and remixing his production hits, just adding one clarinet.
00:06:05	Shabaka	Guest	Oh yeah. Or 14. *[Chuckles.]*
00:06:08	Jesse	Host	*[Laughing.]* Yeah, or 14, for that matter. Did you grow up with MCs around you? Is there—was there native hip-hop going on in Barbados?
00:06:17	Shabaka	Guest	Not at that time, no. It was just on the radio and I used to just record all the songs that I could and just play them back and I used to get in some trouble. I remember, actually, the guidance counselor had this ongoing feud with me 'cause I kept on—I was a massive gangsta rap fan and I used to learn all the words and write them down and just kind of recite them to myself in class. And one day she found my—she opened my desk, and she found my stash of hip-hop—hardcore hip-hop lyrics and she brought out the "Ten Crack Commandments" by Notorious B.I.G. and she kind of read them aloud. *[Laughs.]* And—yeah, I got into lots of troubles. She like forced me out the class and I was in detention for weeks and, you know, she was saying, "This guy is, you know, destructive and look at the lyrics and of this stuff." And there's nothing I could say in my defense other than, "I'm playing music in your school band, so I can't be all bad."
00:07:11	Jesse	Host	*[Laughs.]* Yeah, I feel like Biggie, in particular, loses a lot on the page. You know what I mean? *[Laughs.]*
00:07:17	Shabaka	Guest	Yeah. I mean, if you read it without the context and without the rhythm and the whole—the whole thing, it becomes—it has a different resonance if you just read the written lyrics. You know?
00:07:29	Jesse	Host	What else do you remember memorizing or transcribing?
00:07:34	Shabaka	Guest	So, I was a massive Tupac fan. I had pictures of him on my—you know, posters on my wall. I had kind of stickers on my books. So, *Me Against the World* was one of my favorite albums when I came out. I remember when Nas's *Illmatic* came out. You know, loving that. You know, the track—what's it? "Represent", I think it is. *[Jesse affirms.]* Toward the end of the album. This—yeah, this kind of—not—I didn't see as transcribing. You know, I didn't see it as even learning. I just loved it and played them all the time, these songs all the time, and then just knew them. Outkast's *ATLiens* was another, you know, seminal one for me where I just knew the album really well 'cause I just listened to it constantly.
00:08:14	Jesse	Host	Yeah, I feel like *ATLiens*—in fact, all three of those records that you just mentioned—I feel like *Illmatic* and *ATLiens* and also the Outkast album *Aquemini* like those are all records that I can listen to at any time. *[Shabaka agrees.]* Just—I'm glad to. Like, they're albums that I heard when I was 12 and that now that I'm recently 40, I can still play over and over and over in a way that I—you know—can't necessarily with *[laughing]* a lot of the records I loved when I was 12.
00:08:49	Shabaka	Guest	Yeah, they've definitely stood the test of time.
00:08:52	Jesse	Host	When you moved to Barbados from England—your folks are from Barbados, but you were born in the UK. When you move to

			Barbados from England when you were six, did you want to move? Did you like moving?
00:09:09	Shabaka	Guest	Um, I can't really remember. And I think at that age it wasn't really a matter of wanting to, it was just something that happened. I remember feeling sad that—you know, like friends that I had recently started to really form relationships with for the first time, I had to leave. But then it's like—especially when you get to somewhere like Barbados, which is such a radically different environment, it's like your—all your senses are overwhelmed with the difference. So, there's no real time or space for sentimentality. It's like, the sun, everything that you see is—you know, there's different colors, there's the beach, there's the carnival. There's—so, yeah, there wasn't a—there wasn't a sense of mourning. There was just a sense of the new environment. I always knew the plan. That's the thing. I think my life has been a life of plans. Like, my mother always explains to me why we were going—like, we were going because I would get a better education there than I would in England, considering, you know, our social and economic circumstance. And then I was always gonna come back to Britain when I was 16, do my A Levels, take a gap year so that I had the three years until I get home status. 'Cause if you're out of the country for a certain time, you lose it. And then I would go to university. So, I always worked towards those kind of imaginative goals.
00:10:28	Jesse	Host	Did you like those goals?
00:10:30	Shabaka	Guest	Um. It wasn't a matter of liking them or not liking them. And it—I guess it's strange if, you know—like to say, and I—you know, I kind of find myself while I'm saying them going, "Huh. Did you like them or not like them?" They were just—they were just what happened. You know. It was just me and my mother and it was like we were a team. Like, we were doing—we were in it together. It was like, "We're gonna go to Britain at this point. You're gonna do your A Levels." And I was like, "Yeah. Cool." That's what it was. It was just about that sense of striving for something. You know? There was always that sense instilled in me that, you know, we're working towards something. It wasn't just a case of, "We're in a specific place because we are, you know, native to that space."
00:11:13	Jesse	Host	You were an only child. That must have led to a fair amount of at home by yourself clarinet time.
00:11:22	Shabaka	Guest	Yeah. I mean, I love being an only child. I can't imagine it any other way. I'm really kind of happy being by myself and I—you know, I just remember—you know, my mother didn't let me watch the TV in the week. She didn't let me play video games. So, I only had TV on the weekend and—I mean, when everyone had like a Sega or something or Nintendo X, she finally let me have a Gameboy with *Tetris*. You know? *[Jesse chuckles.]* And her whole thing was like, you know, "You've got better things to do. Like, you can read these books. You can play your clarinet." And I really enjoyed playing the clarinet. I loved the physical feeling of it. I loved playing to the radio. So, you know, that's what I did.

			And I was—you know, I was really content. You know. I didn't feel like there was anything lacking.
00:12:05	Jesse	Host	I have a friend and colleague named John Hodgman who's a comedian and he has—he's an only child and in one of his acts, he made himself the president of the Only Children Supersmart, Afraid of Conflict Narcissists Club.
			[They laugh.]
00:12:24	Shabaka	Guest	Sounds about right.
00:12:26	Jesse	Host	*[Laughing.]* Yeah. There is a special thing to being an only child, where you do like learn to live within yourself, but it can also be hard to figure out what to do when you're outside of that context.
00:12:40	Shabaka	Guest	Yeah. I mean, my mother is an only child also. So, it's like two generations of only children, so it's pretty deeply ingrained.
00:12:48	Jesse	Host	So, at what point did you switch from the very cool clarinet to the extremely cool saxophone?
00:12:58	Shabaka	Guest	There was never a solid switch. I always wanted a saxophone and in the last year of being in Barbados, I was able to borrow one to play in the Calypso Tent, which—it's a big achievement. And the Calypso Tent's these I guess calypso variety shows is the best way of putting it, where you have like 12—10 to 12 calypsonians who do a song each. And then there's a break and then they do another song. And the whole island will come out to see, you know, one of maybe 20 of these tents that happen all across the island. And then judges pick the best of them to go into Calypso Semi-Finals and then Finals. So, I was playing in the band in my last year of Barbados, so it meant playing—you know—every week. You know, playing for all of these calypsonians. And, you know, they don't use clarinets. I was able to borrow a saxophone. And from that point, I was like, "I need to get a saxophone no matter what." So, I got to England and I was able to get a real crappy saxophone at 16, practice really hard on it, and then I did a church concert when I was about 17 and we earned about £1,800 in £3 tickets in a church that could only fit about—you know—100 people. So, it was really selling tickets to people that would never be able to come. My mom was, you know, selling tickets to people in the grocery store in the lines. She would just turn around and show them the program and say, you know, "Come—you know, give me £3. My son's trying to buy a clarinet." So, at that point, you know, I had a saxophone and was practicing it, but I was a clarinet player, and my passion was the clarinet. You know, I started that journey. So, I decided that actually I wanted to see it through. So, I studied the classical degree on clarinet, in university—not because I wanted to be a classical clarinetist, but I just—I thought if I started this procedure of learning the instrument, I wanna see what it is to actually study it in its native habitat. You know, i.e., the conservatoire, and see if I can actually do the work to—you know, to hang with the kind of greats of that instrument.
00:15:01	Jesse	Host	One of the things that always shocks me when I think about the playing of classical music is that—you know, the goal in some ways to reproduce this idea that was in the composer's head—and the composer's been dead 250 years and at the top of the page it just says, "andante" or whatever and so it is like this weird—it is like this weird dialogue with a ghost that is through the medium of

			generations of classical musicians that went before you. Right? Like, it's like a crazy game of telephone where you have a score, and the score has a little bit of guidance. You know. It has that "andante" on top or whatever. *[Shabaka agrees.]* But then you have to figure out what it means to be faithful to that work.
00:15:49	Shabaka	Guest	Yeah! And this is the—for me, the incredible aspect of it and actually where it intersects with the African concept of ancestral worship, because you are actually trying to tune into the energy of something or someone that has—that has something that's come before you. And to do that, you've got to really lose your sense of self and try to imagine and picture yourself within their mental space. And then I guess the more you—the more you do that and the more you can actually find how your own personality intersects with that energy space that you're trying to get yourself into—what I always remembered is someone telling me that Bach never wrote expression marks. He never wrote articulation marks because he actually trusted—he worked with the performers and he trusted them to actually interpret it—his music—in a way that was faithful to them and that way would be in tandem to—of what he was, you know, about. So, I've always taken the attitude that, you know—and I think maybe it got me sometimes less scores on like exams because I would take liberties with expression marks because I thought it should go in a certain way. But I just thought, "I'm never gonna be a classical musician anyways. So, I can kind of do what I want." *[They chuckle.]*
00:16:58	Jesse	Host	What did you think were the skills that you were gaining by putting yourself through—other than a degree—by putting yourself through this, you know, rigorous education with no intention of becoming a classical musician?
00:17:09	Shabaka	Guest	I guess it was like an initiation. It was like I was sacrificing myself for the clarinet. You know? For this instrument or just an idea that I'm going to learn it just because. And one of the big skills that I learned was the ability to listen laterally. And it's something that I can't remember the name of the visiting conductor, but someone told me my first year of university where they were like, "If you're in an orchestra, you've gotta be able to hear every aspect of what is being performed." So, there might be 40 people onstage. If you really know and understand the music, you've gotta be listening to hear what that—you know—that French horn is doing way in the back. You've gotta hear what the violas are doing all while playing. So, you've really got to listen in a holistic way. And it opened me up, because at the time I was listening to my contribution and trying to get it right. And then all of the sudden, I was like, "But can I hear what's happening—you know, way across the hall?" And that's a skill that I've taken onto the bandstand when playing, you know—when playing jazz or playing any kind of music, which is you need to actually hear what's happening within the—you know, within your environment.

00:18:19	Jesse	Host	Did you at some point decide that you wanted to be a jazz musician, in deciding that you did not want to be a professional classical musician?
00:18:28	Shabaka	Guest	No. I really—and this is really the honest answer—I really just didn't think about it that much. I just came out of college and started gigging, whatever I could do to make—you know, to make money. I didn't know what it was to be a jazz musician because I didn't do the jazz course. I didn't feel like my kind of chord changes playing was as good as everyone else who did the course and were practicing changes and giant steps and *[inaudible]* and all these tunes, you know, day after day. So, I just thought, "You know, I'm never gonna be as good as those jazz players who really, really learned the language and the tradition. But I've got a passion for music and I know how to—you know, how to speak my mind, musically. So, you know, I'll just do what I can do. And even up to now, it's like the fact that people call me a jazz musician—you know, I find it strange because I've always thought—I've always seen my defects. If you're looking at the specific, you know, music. Like, if you're looking at *[inaudible]*, specific form, I feel like my language is limited within that specific form, but my understanding of the music—in terms of how much I've listened to it and understand the inner workings of it on a creative level—I think is large. You know. Like, we can go into another conversation about the word "jazz" and the limitations of our—you know. And I think my misgivings about how I was placed within that history came from actually the thing that—from my knowledge—musicians like Miles Davis and Charlie Parker, Coltrane, why they've tried to actually reject the term, because it is not—it felt like if you understand a certain vocabulary, you're that type of musician as opposed to if you have a certain approach to creativity and to—an awareness of the past and a way of molding the past to your personal journey.
00:20:15	Jesse	Host	We'll finish up with Shabaka Hutchings in a minute. When we return, Shabaka tells us how he's been keeping busy during the pandemic. Turns out, he's been teaching himself to use a digital sampler. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:20:32	Promo	Clip	**Speaker**: This message comes from NPR sponsor Fidelity Wealth Management. VP Dylan Sanders shares why it's important to understand clients' values. **Dylan Sanders**: At times, it feels difficult to work towards just a dollar amount. And having a conversation about what wealth is for brings excitement and purpose to all the work in getting there. **Speaker**: To learn more, go to Fidelity.com/wealth. Fidelity Brokerage Services LLC, member NYSESIPC.
00:21:02	Promo	Clip	**Yowei Shaw**: I'm Yowei Shaw. **Kia Miakka Natisse**: I'm Kia Miakka Natisse. **Yowei**: We're the hosts of the NPR podcast *Invisibilia*. **Kia**: You can think of Invisibilia kind of like a sonic blacklight.

			[Thoughtful music fades in.] **Yowei**: When you switch us on, you will hear surprising and intimate stories. **Kia**: Stories that help you notice things in your world that maybe you didn't see before. **Yowei**: Listen to the *Invisibilia* podcast, from NPR
00:21:25	Promo	Clip	**Music**: Cheerful, upbeat music. **Speaker**: The 2021 pin sale has begun. Thank you so much to everyone who participated in the Max Fun Drive. This is the last year for a while that we'll be doing pins for Max Fun Drive and the 5th year that we'll be selling pins and donating all proceeds to charity. The past year proved what we already knew: that having access to the internet at home is a necessity—for work, school, healthcare, and keeping in touch with family and friends. So, the proceeds from this year's pin sale will go towards Everyone On: a nonprofit working to bridge the digital divide. We're grateful that, with your support, we'll be able to help low-income folks gain access to affordable computers, internet services, and digital literacy programs. The sale will run until May 28th. Folks at the $10 monthly level and above will have access to all of the pins from the drive. That's 38 pins, one from every show on the network. We also have a special 2021 Max Fun Drive pin that all members can purchase. Go to MaximumFun.org/pinsale for more info. And to learn more about Everyone On and support them directly, you can go to EveryoneOn.org. *[Music fades out.]*
00:22:37	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Shabaka Hutchings. He's a saxophone player and composer. He fronts the bands Sons of Kemet and Shabaka and the Ancestors. He's one of my favorite jazz musicians. Sons of Kemet have a new record that just came out last week. It's called *Black to the Future*. You can buy or stream it now. Let's get back into our conversation. Let's play a little bit of the first single from this new Sons of Kemet record. The album's called *Black to the Future* and the song is called "Hustle".
00:23:12	Music	Music	"Hustle" from the album *Black to the Future* by Sons of Kemet. *I've been doing milage with my phone on silent* *Hear no, see no, felt the violence* *God got my blessings on autopilot* *Why ain't no one tell me peace of mind was pricey?* *I could dance with the devil but that's unlikely* *Might go broke but that's unlike me* *I was born from the mud with the hustle inside me* *Feeding my soul* *I go make nothing something* *Show you my lows…*

			[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]
00:23:39	Jesse	Host	I'm very interested in the intersection between hip-hop and jazz, because I think we're a pretty similar age and when I was a kid there was a lot of very corny talk about the intersections between hip-hop and jazz. This was sort of right up there with people saying that rappers were poets. You know, you're like, "Well—but how—can we just have rappers be rappers? Like can that be a good thing?" *[Chuckles.]* But I feel like in the last—maybe even just in the last 10 years, there's been such a blossoming of the intersection between those two kinds of music as jazz musicians especially, who grew up listening to hip-hop, become adult proficient jazz musicians and let that inform their music. When you put a rapper on a record like this, what's your responsibility as a musician? I mean, it's—you know, a rapper is writing their verses necessarily, right? So, how does that change what you're doing when there's—when there's someone spitting bars on top?
00:24:43	Shabaka	Guest	For me, they're musicians. Like, the decision to call them a rapper is a—it's a culturally specific, you know, designation. If you just see them as musicians who use words and you're not necessarily listening—obviously there is a dimension where I listen to the narrative and the lyric, but there is a greater dimension where I'm listening to the accentuations in their rhythm and seeing how that reacts to the—to the band. And I think that's what—you know, that's the element that I'm more so interested in. And that's the element that I think, as a group, we try to really sink into how we can play off the accents in the rhythm. Like, when you hear a rapper, it's like *[rhythmically]* ba-da-dadadada, ba-da-dada, da-da-da, da-dadada-da-da-dada. You know, it's not notes is in it as with a saxophone, but if the notes aren't the focal point, if the rhythm is the focal point within a time space, then it's so much information to just bounce off and be fed by. It just changes your whole way of responding. You know?
00:25:41	Jesse	Host	Yeah, I mean, I feel like the element that people who don't listen to a lot of hip-hop lose from the performance of an MC is almost always flow. Like, to a certain extent people who aren't really fluent and listening to hip-hop might lose words or lose lyrics. Like, you hear sometimes, "I can't tell what they're saying." Right? But in general, I feel like the piece that goes missing when people—especially when people intellectualize hip-hop—is that sort of style element that is the most important part *[laughs]* of a rapper. *[Shabaka agrees.]* Right? Like the "Ten Crack Commandments"—like, Biggie's lyrics, if you look at them on a page—I mean, there's cool stuff in there, but pretty unremarkable, but the thing that is amazing about Biggie is his style. Right? His voice and the way he uses his voice.
00:26:35	Shabaka	Guest	Yeah, the approach, the approach to rhythm—like how you're actually using your voice as a drum within a given pentameter. You know, that is the important thing and people have been saying it. You know? Like, "Oh, look at his flow." And that's the—that's where your thoughts should be orientated. But this is the whole thing with the clash of cultures is that it's a clash of priorities. Like, what the priority is. If you're looking at that music and actually, you're not aware of the subtly and flow, all you hear is the grid. All you hear

			are words in relation to a grid and nothing else, then you won't get it. It'll be invisible. But as soon as you actually perceive, you know, the existence of a world of flow and a world of inflection, then it becomes a completely different art form.
00:27:28	Jesse	Host	So, Sons of Kemet is a relatively small group with two drummers. You know, James Brown famously toured with two drummers. I think that was primarily so that he could fire one at any time. *[They chuckle.]* Without having to fly a new guy in. *[Laughs.]* What is your goal in having this relatively small group that has two drummers?
00:27:54	Shabaka	Guest	Communication. You know, I find whenever you get a second drummer, it releases the drums from being a timekeeping instrument. You know? It means that they can actually have a dialogue and it's that communication that means that actually we, as instrumentalists, then have another force to communicate with. And obviously, if there's one drummer there'll be communication happening, but there's just another level of communication when you get two drummers together. Unless the two drummers have been given specific parts and they're locked into a kind of a set groove. I like to tell them just not to do that as much as possible. You know. And there was even a period when I was telling them if they could pretend that they're percussionists and just think about what they're doing on isolated bits of the kit as opposed to playing the drum set, that would be better.
00:28:43	Jesse	Host	Let's hear another Sons of Kemet track. Maybe something from their 2018 album, *Your Queen is a Reptile*. There's a song—so, each of the tracks on this record is named after sort of great women from the African diaspora, from the history of the African diaspora. This track, "My Queen is Ada Eastman" is named after your grandmother, right?
00:29:12	Shabaka	Guest	My great grandmother.
00:29:14	Jesse	Host	Great grandmother. *[Shabaka confirms.]* Tell me what you knew about her.
00:29:19	Shabaka	Guest	Well, when we first moved to Barbados, we stayed at her house for a couple of months before—as we got settled. And, you know, she was alive for the whole time that I was in Barbados. So, she lived 'til she was 103. And I just knew her as a—you know—incredibly lucid and hardworking, you know, woman. One of my earliest memories of her is on—his her on top of the roof, you know, fixing the house. You know. With a hammer. And that must have been when she was like, I don't know—like late 80s. She was always just walking around the neighborhood. Everyone knew her. She used to walk around, you know, get lost and then people would just kind of guide her back to her house. And she was really a matriarch. She, you know, she owned three houses just from working and working and working. She—I think she kind of—when she retired, then we moved to America and then worked for 20 years thinking back to Barbados and, you know, kind of kept doing odd jobs. So yeah, it was really—I just knew her as someone that was really serious about providing for the whole family.

			[Music fades in.]
00:30:21	Jesse	Host	Let's hear Sons of Kemet and "My Queen is Ada Eastman".
00:30:25	Music	Music	"My Queen is Ada Eastman" from the album *Your Queen is a Reptile* by Sons of Kemet.
			[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue, then fades out.]
00:30:52	Jesse	Host	So, I've heard you describe Sons of Kemet relative to your other records as being relatively Caribbean. What does that mean for you?
00:31:07	Shabaka	Guest	It means that when I'm sitting down to compose just the foundational music, the music that formed initial impetus and thinking about my memory of the Caribbean and allowing that memory to inform the underpinning of the music. And when the band takes it and then interprets it in their ways, then it drifts off into something else. But at least the very foundation of the music, a lot of it—especially in the early albums—was formed from my recollections of the Caribbean, and that might be something as simple as the baseline or the very initial clave that I ask the drummers to play or the—you know, the melody line. I like the idea of mystery in music. So, I don't like things to be clear-cut. So, me saying that the bad has a Caribbean underpinning in terms of the compositional structure doesn't mean that you're necessarily gonna hear it directly. But there's gonna be something in there that you can actually unpick and link back to the Caribbean if you, you know—you know where to look.
00:32:15	Jesse	Host	I find the music kind of mesmeric. You know? Sort of like what they call spiritual jazz. Like it is—it's an experience that kind of grabs your head and drags it along. Do you have an idea of what experience you want the audience to have when you're making music?
00:32:34	Shabaka	Guest	Not when I'm making it. I don't really think about the music or about the audience when I'm making—well, when I'm making it, do you mean when I'm writing it or when I'm making it as in recording it or performing it?
00:32:46	Jesse	Host	Either way.
00:32:47	Shabaka	Guest	Well, when I'm playing it live, I'd really like the audience to be engrossed in our world, because that's what I like to happen when I go to concerts. I think the performers aren't necessarily doing their job if you're able to switch off and then think about something else. You know? I like to feel like the performance grabbed me and it's engaging me fully. And that can only happen when I know that the performer's engaged with the music fully. So, I'm trying to actually just really be as deep and committed to the musical experience from my side and then I think that if the audience is tuned into that level of commitment, then they'll be sucked in also. And then the band'll be sucked in and then all of us will communally be in this like musical vortex. And then we can start having fun. You know.
00:33:34	Jesse	Host	You have several bands. Another one of them is called Shabaka and the Ancestors. This is with a group of South African musicians. Did you meet them in South Africa?
00:33:49	Shabaka	Guest	Yeah. There was a period when I was going backwards and forwards to South Africa maybe a couple of times a year, spending a couple months each time, because I was seeing a lady in South

			Africa. So, it was kind of a long-distance relationship, going backwards and forwards.
00:34:03	Jesse	Host	A distinctly long-distance relationship. *[Laughs.]*
00:34:06	Shabaka	Guest	Oh yeah, it was so long. *[Laughs.]* Very long-distance relationship. Yeah, and like I just had a lot of really amazing experiences with musicians when I was there and I remember I would come back to Britain and just be telling everyone, "You have no idea how much fun I'm having in Johannesburg or Cape Town. Like, there's some really amazing musicians." And people are like, "Oh, yeah, yeah. Cool. Yeah. You know. I'm sure they can play." And I was thinking that, "No, you really don't understand. Like, these guys are like amazing." Like, the experiences I'm having are like phenomenal. And people are like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." So, at some point I was like, "I really need to just document what's happening, because I'm going over there and actually getting so inspired and blown away by the creativity and just the vibe and the energy that was out there, musically. So, I can put together some of just my favorite musicians to play with that I played with in various different formations. I made that first album.
00:34:58	Jesse	Host	What's different about playing with musicians in South Africa who are part of a kind of another parallel jazz tradition? Like, you know, there are—there are these sort of continua of jazz that are running next to and intersecting with American jazz. South Africa is another one with a long history going back into the '50s. *[Shabaka agrees.]* How did—how do you feel like they were different than the people you were playing with in London?
00:35:29	Shabaka	Guest	Well, for one, it felt like the spirit of the music that a lot of them was playing came from a different era. So, I would go over there, and it was—you could tell that the foundations were in the kind of '60s impulse. Like, Pharoah Sanders, Alice Coltrane, vibe—you know, Albert Ayler—that was the spirit. You know, not necessarily that their music sounded exactly like that, but it kind of felt more like that was the connection. At the time, in London, I was playing a lot of music that was—you know, it had a kind of—just influences of electronic music. I was playing lots of stuff that kind of was like rocky and, you know, Sons of Kemet and The Comet is Coming. So, the music that was playing at that time wasn't coming from that space specifically. Also, just the way that the musicians contextualized their music in terms of how they spoke about its meaning and its purpose was just very different. A lot of musicians were talking about music and healing. They were talking about music and ancestral connections. You know, about the music in relation to a spiritual realm, which just wasn't the conversations that I was having in London.
00:36:41	Jesse	Host	It seems like, in naming the band Shabaka and the Ancestors—naming your record *We're Sent Here by History*—you are

			investigating in a way that's parallel to your Sons of Kemet work the kind of long arc of time. Like a flattening of a big circle of life. And that doesn't seem that different from some of the aesthetics of the music. Like, that mesmeric quality that I described in your records, like it could feel like you are passing through time and also staying in one time at the same time. You know what I mean? *[Shabaka confirms.]* What do you want to find when you're recording that kind of music? Like what are you looking for?
00:37:25	Shabaka	Guest	I guess we're looking for the timeless. We're looking to be in a space where we're outside of time. You know? Where that concept—where time stops. And when I've actually had my most profound experiences onstage, there is definitely that sensation of being beyond the linear time structure. You know? There comes a point, when I'm having—you know, when I'm deep in the music and all the situation is right. So, when my relationship to my instrument, on a physical level, is operating at—you know—perfect capacity, I am listening and engaging with all my bandmates and I feel like I am sunk. You know? I'm a part of the fiber of the music. Like, there's no disconnection between what I'm doing and the resulting sound. The audience is kind of giving the energy and there's a kind of interplay between us. You know? At that moment, it feels like when everything rises up and actually comes off the stage—that it could one minute that goes by, it could be an hour, it could be a day. It—you know, the idea of time—just finishing it. It just becomes an experience. And that's what—that's the experience that I'm trying to chase.
00:38:41	Jesse	Host	Have you had that experience consuming art made by other people?
00:38:46	Shabaka	Guest	Yeah. And it's—it happens very rarely. And I'm incredibly grateful when it happens. I've had it with a Björk concert. I've seen Bjork three times, but I saw her for the first time in Glastonbury, when she was on the—I think the Volta Tour. And there was just a moment in that—in that performance when I—and that I was a massive Björk fan. Like, really. It's like—you know, *Vespertine*, I think I listened to it every day for about—a couple of years. You know? Like, I was really, really, really into it when—you know, at that—at that period. So, when *Volta* came out, I was just kind of starting to get into that record. It hadn't hit me in the same way that *Vespertine* hit me, but at that particular performance, it clicked. And I went so far into the music that I really lost myself. At some point, it's like I came back to myself and my hands were in the air and my eyes were shut and I was just like—my mouth was open. *[Chuckles.]* I was just kind of like, you know, swinging around like some kind of possessed dude and I was just like, "Oh my god, what has this—you know—woman done to me?"
00:39:50	Jesse	Host	So, you've been—I presume, like many of us—mostly isolated for a year and a bit. *[Shabaka confirms.]* Your music is so—like, feels so communal to me. *[Chuckles.]* Like, you know, there's plenty of singer-songwriters and rapper

			producers who I am sure are just holed up in the studio, knocking out songs and feeling great. You know what I mean? *[Shabaka confirms with a chuckle.]* But I have a hard time imagining your music existing without collaborations with other people—direct collaboration with other people. So, how have you managed to find that, you know, inside your apartment?
00:40:30	Shabaka	Guest	It's been real ups and downs, this pandemic—this last year—in that it's—for me, it's about searching for what makes me feel happy. You know? And that sounds simple, but it's like real simple and it's also really complex, because obviously, you know, we're not playing with people and I don't like the idea of playing with people over the internet. So, I really got down to what does it mean to play for myself. You know? Like, what does it mean to find the joy of making music without an audience? And actually, without an audience, there's a lot less intensity. *[Chuckles.]* You know? There's a lot less of that kind of trajectory where the music rises and rises and rises to climax. There's a stillness. So, first of all it became about not necessarily playing the clarinet or the saxophone as much—which was a shocker to kind of realize, that I didn't wanna play these instruments. I started to practice the—you know, the shakuhachi and I practiced shakuhachi more. A lot of little flutes that I've gotten over the years, just playing them for my own pleasure. Then it meant that when I went back to the saxophone, the clarinet, I was partially kind of finding new things to play. And yeah, it's like the more I become comfortable with, you know, playing for myself, then I think the more power I'm gaining so that when I actually play and communicate with other people, I've got a more solid underpinning of actually what I have to say. But also, I've spent a lot of time just learning new technologies, so I've—you know, I've been learning the NPC. You know, I've been through a big kind of pathway. Like, up until this pandemic time, I was the guy that just played the instruments. Like, I didn't own a microphone. I didn't really use—I kind of knew how to use Logic in terms of just cutting up files and sending them to people if I needed to, but I wasn't really adept to any music production technology. And I'd always known that I should have, but I could just be practicing my horn, so I just never got around to it.
00:42:29	Jesse	Host	I like this new NPC Shabaka Hutchings. NPC is a digital sampler beat machine. It really evidences the maxim that I just invented that all things bend towards J Dilla eventually. *[Laughs.]*
00:42:46	Shabaka	Guest	Oh yeah. And—yeah, just the story of him just making that last album on his hospital bed, you know, it's always stuck with me. It's like, what is this machine? And for me, this is the—this is a thing that I've thought of for so long. Like, how do you humanize the machine? You know? How do you get an android's approach where you have the tech—like, we are within the technological realm, but how do you get a machine that can actually be fit for purpose for human—you know, like human qualities. And I feel like J Dilla is someone who could do that. He kind of took the pentameter and he twisted it and worked around it. So, yeah. It's like I've done so much of the human element in terms of making music. I feel like now I'm

			in a good space where I can actually start, you know, looking into the machine *[laughs]* and seeing like where my role can be. ‘Cause I don’t just wanna make beats. I—you know, I don’t—I’m not a beatmaker. But I think there’s something that I’ve got to offer that realm. You know? But I just need to learn it first, before I can come out.
00:43:45	Jesse	Host	Well, I’m looking forward to it, Shabaka. And congratulations on *Black to the Future*. It’s a really spectacular record and I love your work. So, thank you for coming on *Bullseye*. It’s nice to get to talk to you.
00:43:56	Shabaka	Guest	Ah, thank you.
			[Music fades in.]
00:43:58	Jesse	Host	Shabaka Hutchings. His band, the Sons of Kemet, have a brand-new record. It’s called *Black to the Future*. You can buy it wherever you get new music. It's pretty spectacular. Let’s go out on one more song from Sons of Kemet’s album, *Black to the Future*. This one is called “Throughout the Madness, Stay Strong”.
00:44:18	Music	Music	“Throughout the Madness, Stay Strong” from the album *Black to the Future* by Sons of Kemet.
			[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]
00:44:39	Jesse	Host	That’s the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created out of the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where I got two beds that I bought at auction for a total of $30, powder-coated the other day in a place called Pico Rivera: an industrial town here in the Los Angeles basin, and man. *[Chuckles]*. If you’ve never gotten anything powder-coated, I can’t recommend it highly enough. The show 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. Production fellows at Maximum Fun are Richard Robey and Valerie Moffat. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by the band The Go! Team. Thanks very much to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it. They have a new single called “Pow”, from their upcoming LP, and it jams so hard, and the video is so cool. So, go check out The Go! Team and their new single, “Pow”, if you need to get pumped up for your day. You can also keep up with our show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post our interviews in all of those places. And I think that’s about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.
00:46:02	Music	Music	*[Volume increases.]* *[Music fades out.]*