

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. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:19	Jesse Thorn	Host	It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. Look at just about any greatest albums of all time list and you'll see a record called <i>Exile in Guyville</i> by Liz Phair.
00:00:30	Music	Music	"6'1'" from the album <i>Exile in Guyville</i> by Liz Phair. <i>I bet you fall in bed too easily With the beautiful girls who are shyly brave And you sell yourself as a man to save But all the money...</i>
00:00:46	Jesse	Host	<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i> It was Phair's debut record, released in 1993. It put her on the map as a singer-songwriter. The production was no frills. The songwriting was personal at some points, tongue-in-cheek at others. It inspired a bunch of bands. Foo Fighters, Courtney Barnett, even Olivia Rodrigo.
00:01:06	Music	Music	"brutal" from the album <i>Sour</i> by Olivia Rodrigo. <i>I wish people liked me more All I did was try my best This the kind of thanks I get? I'm relentlessly upset (ah, ah, ah) They see these are the golden years</i>
00:01:17	Jesse	Host	<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i> After the success of <i>Guyville</i> , rock writers and critics figured they had Liz Phair pretty much figured out. She was a heartfelt singer-songwriter. A rocker. Then, in 2003, she threw them a curve.
00:01:31	Music	Music	"Why Can't I?" from the album <i>Liz Phair</i> by Liz Phair. <i>Why can't I breathe whenever I think about you? Why can't I speak whenever I talk about you?</i>
00:01:41	Jesse	Host	<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i> Liz Phair recorded her first ever major label record, called just <i>Liz Phair</i> . She collaborated with writers and producers who had previously worked with Brittany Spears and Avril Lavigne. The album polarized writers at the time. Some thought it was a fun summer pop album. Others dismissed it as trivial. With her fans, though, it confirmed something they'd known for a long time: Liz Phair will not be boxed in.

And it could be that one of Liz's biggest fans is Louis Virtel. Louis is a friend of our show. He is also a brilliant writer and comedian. He

cohosts the podcast *Keep It!*. He writes for *Jimmy Kimmel Live*. He has one of the absolute best Twitter feeds in the game. So, when we heard about Liz Phair's brand new album, *Soberish*, we knew Louis was the perfect person for her to talk with.

[Music fades in.]

Before we get into Louis's interview with Liz, let's kick things off with a song off of *Soberish*. This is "Good Side".

00:02:45 Music Music

"Good Side" from the album *Soberish* by Liz Phair.

*Gonna leave you with my good side
Gonna leave you with my good side*

*So, I'm not calling, coming to the party
Thinking up ways to make you want me
I like what we had and that's as good as it gets
If we say goodbye now...*

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

00:03:08 Louis Virtel Host
00:03:10 Liz Phair Guest
00:03:14 Louis Host

Liz Phair, welcome to *Bullseye*.

Thank you, Louis! It's so nice to be here!

I'm thrilled to be interviewing you. Specifically, because I was thinking of what unites all of your albums and listening to that lyric from "Good Side"—"there's so many ways to *[censored]* up a life. I try to be original." You are one of the few lyricists I can think of who is reliably funny.

[Liz chuckles.]

Like, almost always there's a funny lyric. Like, I actually have to slap the table it's so good. How important is it for you to be funny when writing emotional music?

00:03:42 Liz Guest

Very important! Because it feels, to me, like when something's actually funny, it's been boiled down to its simplest form. It's like the essence of the thing. The least amount of words convey the most amount of human foible. And so, like, if you can be funny, if you can actually be funny in a song, you totally understand your subject!

00:04:06 Louis Host

Were you always funny, growing up?

[Liz laughs.]

You seem like you sort of stumbled into becoming a performer. So, I don't know that you're somebody who would be like a ham growing up, but you have this like sly sense of humor in everything you do. So, I was wondering if you were the funny person, growing up.

00:04:19 Liz Guest

I wasn't! I wasn't, Louis. I wasn't. I was surrounded by big personalities, though. My brother was hilarious. Hilarious. Huge, huge personality. My mom is pretty funny. She's pretty witty. My dad has good timing. He has good timing to tell a joke. And I was shy and probably just listened and absorbed all of their funniness. You know? And their love of wit. Their love of wordplay.

00:04:49 Louis Host

What's interesting to me is—speaking of your upbringing—this is one of the first albums of yours where I've heard you physically

			describe Chicago outside of maybe “Stratford-on-Guy” where you’re flying into Chicago. But I was surprised to realize I don’t hear you talk about Lake Shore Drive on other albums. What was it about recording this disk that made you go back to Chicago in the first place?
00:05:14	Liz	Guest	You know, I don’t know why, but I was nostalgic before 2020 happened. And then, through circumstances that overtook all of us, I became even more so. So, this has been a very nostalgic time for me, through accident and also by design. And it just—it felt like the right time to put to rest—I feel like I had to, in the interest of finding a good relationship, I had to—in my mind, at least—finish off any loose ends. Kind of put to bed everything that still was attached to me. Does that make sense?
00:05:54	Louis	Host	I mean, if you have loose ends, though, that’s really bad news for the rest of us.
			<i>[Liz laughs.]</i>
			Because nobody seems to have closed the door on relationships in songs in a way that you have. So, I’m actually discouraged by that answer.
00:06:04	Liz	Guest	<i>[Laughing helplessly.]</i> I’m sorry!
00:06:07	Louis	Host	When you make a record, do you dread headlines with plays on the word “fair”? Because, as your fan, I need you to know that I dread it. Like, it’s so constant.
			<i>[Liz laughs.]</i>
00:06:21	Liz	Guest	It’s like always “An A-Phair to Remember” or—
00:06:22	Louis	Host	See, no!
00:06:23	Liz	Guest	“Turnabout is Phair Play” or whatever.
			I have missed it! I feel like they were—I don’t know. They shrunk away in shame for how many awful puns they’ve made. But I was waiting for a new slew. Especially—I think—I think the universe is saving it up for my next book, which I’ve tentatively titled Phairytales. <i>[Chuckling.]</i> Because—I mean, it just like—it’s the elephant in the room. So, like, maybe it’s all just—it’s like the tide pulling way out before a tsunami. And when the second book comes, it’ll just be like Phairpocalypse. Phairitopia.
00:06:55	Louis	Host	No, I saw you mention this before and I assume this means it’s a companion piece to your last book, <i>Horror Stories</i> , which was—to my eye—specifically written to freak yourself out and revisit every horrible moment in your life.
00:07:08	Liz	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> Kind of! Yeah! Kind of. Yeah! My editor called it—
00:07:11	Louis	Host	So, what would be in a book called—
00:07:12	Liz	Guest	—my spell book. He felt that with each story, I was exorcizing a demon within me. Which is an interesting take. He grew up in Texas in like a Bible-thumping part of Texas.
00:07:26	Louis	Host	Oh, wow. But like if that’s the prompt of your book, to exorcise, does that mean your publisher got to push you to go even harder and reveal even more and basically make it even more awful for yourself? What was writing that book like and the process of pushback?
00:07:42	Liz	Guest	There were a number of situations in which I was either gently nudged or all-out kicked into the dark closet of my subconscious. You know? Where I didn’t wanna go. I think I feel pretty open, and I

have the reputation, artistically, of being open with—I don't know. Whatever is unresolved in your life. For good or bad. But this was a particular sense of you're copping out if you don't deliver the full—you know. I don't know. There was an expectation that I set up that I had to live up to. So, it was one of those where they're like, "This is what you need to do if you say you're gonna do it." Kind of thing.

Yeah! There was—especially in the #MeToo chapter, the hashtag chapter. That was hard. I wrote that in one, long, angry skree. Like *[grumbling]*—you know, like—'cause I didn't wanna do the assignment! I didn't wanna add that story, even though it's—it definitely needed to be there. That was one where my editing team was like, "I think you should do this." And I didn't wanna do it, which is weird.

00:08:59 Louis Host And, specifically, you wrote an album with Ryan Adams that was shelved and—what's it like having to write about someone—I'm sure because he's already in the news for this particular reason, so you have to respond to this preexisting perception of who he is or add to perception of who he's become. Is there a strange obligation to add to that narrative?

00:09:21 Liz Guest I felt an obligation—this is about a producer that I'd worked with, and the project never happened fully. It never got completed because we were having so many problems. And then I put it in the rearview mirror and like went on to something else. And then he was—*[sighs]* under investigation? Is that—? I mean, I'm trying to remember what the actual charges were. He wasn't actually charged, was he?

00:09:48 Louis Host Right. No. But like stories came out, etc. Yes.

00:09:50 Liz Guest Okay, so it was an exposé, and it was backed up by an FBI inquiry, whatever. And I realized that my obligation was to back up the women that had come forward to say that he had either prevented their career from moving forward or been emotionally abusive of his position, sexual harassment, job, that kind of stuff. And I had experienced enough with him that I felt if I didn't say, "Yeah, this is not off-character," then I wasn't supporting them. Does that make sense?

[Louis confirms.]

00:10:36 Louis Host Like if you had anything to say, you should say it. What's interesting is you're one of the few people I can think of who part of your legend is also wrapped up in the way you wrote—

00:10:41 Liz Guest *[Laughing.]* My legend?!

00:10:42 Louis Host Yes! *[Laughs.]* You're a desperado, Liz Phair.

00:10:44 Liz Guest *[Liz mimics a whipcrack and the opening chords of a wild west standoff while Louis laughs.]*

00:10:50 Louis Host No, I love it. A major part of your legacy is wrapped up in how you've written your famous music—that you were sitting around the apartment, and you wrote the tapes that became *Girly Sound*, which became *Exile in Guyville*. And you've written several albums since then. And my question is: when has writing been the most fun for you? And does anything compare to that initial experience where you're just saying, "*[Censored]*" it. I'll write whatever I want. There's no

00:11:16 Liz Guest expectation that anyone will hear this.” And then, lo and behold, it becomes a phenomenon.
I wish it happened that easily. That last part of your question sounds like heaven. Like, “I just wrote this easily and it became a phenomenon.” Like, god, I wish that would happen! It honestly is the most fun when I give myself a new challenge and because I’ve built up a number of skills over the years, I’m good at it without having to like learn every little bit and part. And I’m thinking specifically of a song that didn’t even really come out. It was an extra EP that was given when people bought my eponymous album, which was on Capitol—the *Liz Phair*, Liz Phair with the *Matrix* songs, with like—with “Why Can’t I?”

[*Louis affirms.*]

00:12:01 Louis Host And there’s this little song called “Jeremy Engle”. And it was on—I love that song! It’s a great song and so funny, some of the lyrics, too.

00:12:04 Liz Guest It’s so funny! And it’s like a little bit. It’s almost like a little comedy bit. And it came entirely unusually. I wrote this poem, this sort of spoken word poem in my mind, and then I put it to music in this funny way. I don’t write like that! This is a unique piece of writing. But it has continued to resonate—people who have no right to have even heard it have heard this song because it’s just so great! So, like when something unusual like that happens and it works, it feels like magic. And of course, I love it. ‘Cause it’s like being young again.

00:12:43 Louis Host Speaking of that album, the first track on it was called “Extraordinary”.

[*Music fades in.*]

00:12:51 Music Music And I wanna listen to a clip of that right now, if we could. “Extraordinary” from the album *Liz Phair* by Liz Phair.

Extraordinary
If you’d ever get to know me
I am extraordinary
I am just your ordinary
Average, everyday...

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

00:13:06 Louis Host Now, what’s interesting is this became a lightning rod album in your career—your pop turn where you had these producers who did Avril Lavigne’s music beforehand. And in the ensuing interviews afterwards, you would sometimes have contentious interviews with reporters and critics about it, but weirdly, “Extraordinary” to me almost seems to predict this kind of reaction, where the point of the song is, “I have more dimensions than you know. Stop pretending I’m just this one thing. Your perception is limited.”

00:13:40 Liz Guest So, was it in fact an unsurprising reaction to this album that you got?
Interestingly, Louis, I have been getting in trouble with the press—so, the media’s reaction—their initial reaction, let’s say—since the

first record. Everyone looks back at *Guyville* and says, “Is it hard to live up to this wonderful moment in your career?” And it is, in a way, but it’s also like a memory that when that first came out, people were upset that other critics liked it so much. There was a bunch of sort of controversy and this idea that I was a provocative artist. How dare she? She’s using her sexuality to garner all of this attention. And so, to me, I expect to come into contact with unexpected forces. I guess I’m a tripwire for it. I don’t know what that is about my personality that just keeps dragging into the wrong—I don’t know.

But *[laughing]* yeah, that was an interesting experience to have. And you’re right, there was a part of me that kind of expects to encounter upset press, explaining my work. And I almost feel like I haven’t done my Liz Phair job if I don’t get some. I almost feel inadequate if I don’t get some. And it’s not—I swear to you, I was not a kid that was like, “I’m gonna stir up controversy.” Like—you know? *[Chuckles.]* I was doing what every other rock kid was doing. I wanna be—there’s a splashiness to it, but it’s not intended to upset or cause ire. At least, not in my case.

00:15:24 Louis Host

It’s interesting to me that you have this interaction with the press, because you write like a critic, to me. And in fact, I remember you wrote a review of Keith Richard’s memoir years ago. It felt like you specifically have the literally skillset of a music critic. And I was wondering if it’s weird to relate to the people who are criticizing you, sometimes. If you read their writing and think, “Oh, that sounds like me in a way.” Or, “I could be doing that job.” *[Chuckles.]*

00:15:49 Liz Guest

I do think it’s weird and I think that it maybe is why we have a—it’s almost sibling-like. You know? The barbs that I have traded with the press have always been with a grudging acceptance of our familial relationship that ultimately writers are writers. I believe that. And I believe that dancers are writers. You know? When they—I really, truly believe that narrative underlies almost all the creative arts and that it’s broad. It’s a broad category.

And I would much rather be in fights with my peers than with the general public. Things like the controversy that you get when Dixie Chicks say something political, and their career is impacted in kind of a book burning sense. That gives me chills of terror. And it’s an entirely different thing to squabbling with a colleague. You know? That I kind of enjoy, if they’re good.

00:16:57 Louis Host

Yeah, I prefer to stay art-based too.

[Liz laughs.]

I don’t need any—don’t need anybody venturing into the Sinéad universe. Yeah.

00:17:02 Liz Guest

[Laughing.] Yeah! That’s—like, whatever that is. Like, the—you know. *[Giggles.]*

00:17:09 Louis Host

I have a question about the *Exile in Guyville* track, “Never Said”, which we’ll play a little bit of right here.

00:17:14 Music Music

“Never Said” from the album *Exile in Guyville* by Liz Phair.

*I never said nothing
I never said nothing*

I don't know where you heard it

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

00:17:34 Louis Host So, famously, this album is a list of responses to *Exile on Main St.* by The Rolling Stones. And “Never Said”, if I lined them up correctly, would be lined up with “Tumbling Dice”—which I have to recommend the Linda Ronstadt version above all others. But!

[Liz chuckles.]

00:17:58 Liz Guest Is that a direct response to that song, specifically? ‘Cause it’s, I think, one of the most interesting juxtapositions on the album. Yes, it is a direct response. And it was one that I had to take seriously, because I developed this idea that *Exile on Main St.* was actually the template for a perfect rock record. And it occupied the fifth position, which I made little symbols for. I called it a big song. It was like a big song. So, you’re supposed to lead off with a big song and then number five is really supposed to kick it in there. So, I knew “Never Said” had to be my version, my response, to “Tumbling Dice”. “Never Said” had to be like a big song. You know, kind of a big, rock—you settle into the pocket. You lean back on the downbeat.

And the way it lyrically mashed was the guy that I was writing about—my rockstar, my Mick Jagger in the neighborhood—had kind of been pulling back from me. Like our romance was not going the way I was hoping. *[Chuckles.]* And he was with this very sophisticated woman. I just assumed she was from like the east coast or something. She came into the bar with him. So... I made up in my mind, to cover my feelings, that I had talked about them. They were very—they were rockstars. This is so embarrassing that I’m actually answering this question! ‘Cause it’s so intimate!

So, I took “Tumbling Dice” to be like, “Look, lady, I like you, but I like all these other women too. You just gotta catch me on the right night.” You know? “Call me the tumbling dice. Like, you can be with me but like you gotta get used to women. I have a lot of women and I gotta be free.” You know? And so, I’m saying I never said anything ‘cause like I think he’s mad at me. But in retrospect, he was never mad at me. It was more like how I felt our separation could be most flattering. This is a fairytale! I made up a story about what was really happening, as like—‘cause I had been a little proud of our romance. Like their celebrity in the neighborhood made me feel like I had maybe talked a little bit about who I was dating.

[Louis hums in understanding.]

00:20:13 Louis Host So, does that make any sense?
00:20:17 Liz Guest Yeah! It’s going awry and you’re addressing that and—
I had maybe worn the fact that I was dating someone that people would be interested to know I was dating a little bit too loudly. So, I was assuming that that’s why we were estranged. But actually, no. The “Tumbling Dice” thing shows that he’s just a rockstar and that’s the life. I’m no more problematic than any of the other women who are pissed at him all over the country.

00:20:40	Louis	Host	And for those who can't see our Zoom right now— <i>[Liz breaks into laughter and tries to respond but can't speak through it.]</i> Liz just did a shruggy shoulder thing, as if she was Joan Collins on <i>Dynasty</i> . Like she was strutting into whatever Wicker Park Bar wearing a full—
00:20:49	Liz	Guest	'Cause I'm still hurt!
00:20:50	Louis	Host	—fuchsia pantsuit with giant shoulders or something.
00:20:52	Liz	Guest	<i>[Chuckling.]</i> I'm still hurt! Like how could he not recognize the diamond in the rough that I was? <i>[Louis chuckles.]</i>
00:21:00	Louis	Host	How could he not love me? Oh well. But we recognize it. Don't you understand? That's the triumph of this moment.
00:21:04	Liz	Guest	That's all that matters, Louis. That's all that matters.
00:21:07	Jesse	Host	Even more on tap with Liz Phair. Stay with us. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:21:15	Music	Transition	Cool electronic music.
00:21:16	Jesse	Promo	This message comes from NPR sponsor Discover. Discover matches all the cashback you've earned on your credit card at the end of your first year, automatically. With no limit on how much you can earn. It's amazing because of all the places where Discover is accepted. 99% of places in the US that take credit cards. So, when it comes to Discover, get used to hearing "yes" more often. Learn more at Discover.com/match . 2021 Neilson Report. Limitations apply.
00:21:52	Promo	Clip	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> Music: Bouncy, lighthearted music. Speaker: The economy is changing so fast right now. And sometimes it seems like there's something new to worry about every day. On <i>The Indicator from Planet Money</i> , we bring you human stories and easy to understand explanations to help you make sense of these crazy times. All in just ten minutes a day. That's <i>The Indicator from Planet Money</i> .
00:22:16	Jesse	Host	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. Our guest is Liz Phair. She's a veteran singer-songwriter who recorded songs like "Supernova", "Never Said", and "Why Can't I?". Her newest record, which just came out, is called <i>Soberish</i> . Interviewing her is writer and comedian Louis Virtel. Let's get back into it.
00:22:35	Louis	Host	I always think it's funny that critics seem to ask you, "Now how do you feel like <i>Exile in Guyville</i> all these years later?" But I'm more curious, what do you think about the self-titled album all these years later? Because your style, as a writer, I think has evolved since then in a major way, too.
00:22:49	Liz	Guest	Yeah! It has. That still feels like I was enthralled to classic rock a little bit more, then. And I've crossed some kind of line into—much more interested in design, the drama in... I don't know—soundscaping, I guess? The sort of operatic, more—longer

compositions, I'm interested in. And whatever section of that I might cut off as a song. I loved, at the beginning of this new album—*Soberish*—running into the studio to tell Brad that “Old Town Road” was like the biggest song in the country. And it's two minutes long. I'm like, *[dramatically]* “Do you understand what that means?! We are free, my friend! Like take off the shackles of the three-minute pop song!”

Like, I just felt like we had full license to say something is as compelling even if it's pushing the boundaries of format. And I believe we're living in that time, right now. And that, you know, any kind of experimental—I believe that the '60s to '70s are happening again. Everyone has their own take on post-COVID. I'd be very interested to know your take, Louis, in particular. What do you think is coming? Like what decade are we in for and do you believe there is a—an historical precedent?

00:24:19 Louis Host

Oh, that's a great question. Well, I feel like we all live in Pinterest Board Universe, where every decade is occurring at all times.

[Liz giggles.]

Like everyone is constantly a little bit aware of every decade now. I don't know that there's a lot of comprehension about whatever—the '50s, the '70s, even the '90s. But I feel like it's never fair to say we're in one wave, because it's like there's always an excuse to bring back something retro and on TV and movies, we capture those aesthetics so specifically nowadays. You know?

[Liz confirms.]

So, I feel like we're gonna unfortunately get everything. So—and fortunately get everything.

00:24:54 Liz Guest

What are you planning to do for this next decade? What's your spirit animal gonna be?

00:24:59 Louis Host

Oh god, well—something in the back of my head is I just want more people to know about Cass Elliot.

[Liz laughs and affirms.]

I don't know what I wanna do. I just wanna get her face out there. So, it's a late '60s thing I'm very concerned with right now.

00:25:10 Liz Guest

Cass Elliot? Okay!

00:25:12 Louis Host

Yeah. Yeah. Do you have any like figures you were obsessed with that you wish more people knew about?

00:25:19 Liz Guest

Um, I just enjoyed the Franca Sozzani—the designer, the fashion designer.

[Louis affirms.]

Franca. Italian *Vogue*, the editor of Italian *Vogue*, who was such a groundbreaking eye. I don't know, like I'm thinking of women who have recently either sort of culminated their careers—I guess I'm looking at the end of my career, so I'm looking into all the people that designed their career really well and ended really well so I can craft—you know, I'm obsessed with that. The tale.

00:25:50	Louis	Host	Now, that's interesting to me, because you just said, "I'm looking at the end of my career," when it's like—you—you clearly are—like, you're—but you're like 54?
			<i>[Liz cackles.]</i>
00:26:09	Liz	Guest	The end of what?! But you also are threatening to retire, and I saw that in a recent interview, that you would maybe do one more album. Now where does this come from? 'Cause, as you know, this is—in case it doesn't read, this disturbs me. Because there's like a whole rigmarole that I always forget when I take time off about how to put a record out. You have to—like, there's a game. There's two sides of this. There's making art and then there's getting in the record-buying game or selling game. You know? Like that side of it is hard for someone like me to break into. So, people have to work really hard, 'cause it's just too—I don't know. Unexpected? Maybe? Like, you think you know what you're getting and then you get—you crack my song open a little bit and you're like, "What?" <i>[Laughing.]</i> You're like, "What did you just say?" You know.
00:26:49	Louis	Host	Speaking of what else is coming, you mentioned having a book called <i>Phairytales</i> , but did you ever go on into what would be in that book, specifically? Would this be the opposite of <i>Horror Stories</i> in that, "Here are the highs of my life." Or would it be fantastical? What would it be?
00:27:02	Liz	Guest	It is! It's interesting. It's about the way my brain works when I am having—whenever I'm having the best time of my life, I have helped concoct that moment. There's a bit of lying to myself that's occurred. Like, I've almost told myself a fairytale of what the best day that could occur in this circumstance would be. So, it's all about this—I'm capturing moments that are legitimately cool. You know? Big, glory moments, rock and roll moments. But that also I have woven into a story of how I want this to go and whether or not they actually do go that way or if it's unexpected how they end up going.
00:27:43	Louis	Host	What is a glory moment you're looking forward revisiting?
00:27:46	Liz	Guest	Everyone— <i>[chuckles]</i> I don't wanna say what they are. Like, someone just asked me one, so I'm gonna use that one. There was a point at the beginning of the pandemic that there was this phosphorescent algae bloom happening along the Pacific Ocean. And I realized that, though we were all locked in our houses, I could escape at night and go down to the beach. 'Cause we lived nearby. And there was this entirely nocturnal side to my community that I didn't know existed. So, getting to know the characters that I would see repeatedly or like the drama that was happening in the middle of the night during the beginning of the pandemic, when everyone was specifically at home. It was just interesting.
00:28:30	Louis	Host	And speaking of the pandemic, how does it feel to have this album out right now when we're having this convalescent moment as a society and maybe looking forward to, you know, being alive? And looking forward to experiencing art again. Does it feel fortuitous that it would come out now?
00:28:45	Liz	Guest	Um, the <i>Soberishness</i> of it, certainly. Because I think we've all clung to a life raft or two in our own lives of like how we're gonna weather this assault on our mental health. I hope I'm not wrong to be excited to think that I can be a teenager again, that I can feel that sense of—I recognize a sense of, "Oh my god, I can go out!"

But I'm also scared of doing something wrong. *[Chuckles.]* Like, that feels very young adult to me. So, I hope it's gonna be like that. I don't know. I mean, I hope America can back that up and people can experience a relatively unperturbed decade.

00:29:29 Louis Host Coming up, you're also gonna be performing and supporting Alanis Morissette on tour, and I just read an awesome transcript of a chat you had with her at *The LA Times*. And, man, you guys really seem like kindreds or something.

[Liz confirms.]

Like you're very kind of thrilled to find each other and thrilled to relate to each other. Is that surprising and have you made surprising friends out of colleagues over the years that you didn't expect?

00:29:54 Liz Guest I recognized Alanis as a kindred spirit when she first released *Jagged Little Pill*. When that album—I specifically remember I had already moved out of the Wicker Park bohemian scene, in Chicago, into my grownup Lincoln Park, new mother home. You know? Like I'm a young married! And it was like I recognized why she was putting this out. I recognized the person that she was and the bravery, I guess, for—it just—it resonated with me. I'm so excited to go out with her and Shirley. They are both tremendous women for different reasons. And they're both really supportive and inclusive.

I'm—I think it's gonna be high, gay, old times in the old town tonight! Like we are gonna get into trouble probably more than any other tour I've ever been on. I'm actually super grateful that I named it *Soberish*, because I think that's almost—I was gonna be more sober when I first named it *Soberish* than I'm gonna be on this tour.

[They chuckle.]

00:31:09 Louis Host Clever. Nicely done.

[Liz agrees.]

Obviously, the *Jagged Little Pill Musical* will be back on Broadway shortly, which brings me to your origin story, which feels very suited to a musical. Could you absorb or watch your story unfold in like a Broadway format? 'Cause to me it feels like a perfect fit. Like a—you know, a Carole King *Beautiful* sort of situation.

00:31:30 Liz Guest I think that it would be a really good idea. I think it would be a great show. I wanna see like—I mean, who is the right person to do that?

[Laughs.] You know? Like—

00:31:43 Louis Host Amazing question. Yeah.

00:31:44 Liz Guest Good idea, Louis. *[Laughs.]* No, 'cause you really—you don't wanna spoil whatever personal—a show like that can feel almost like it has this stamp of approval, that that's what it's about.

[Louis hums in agreement.]

Or it can be a totally different take. It can be something—either way is effective, I just—I would wanna be careful. I feel like *Exile in Guyville* has a space to it. An airiness where nothing's happening, in a way.

[Louis agrees.]

00:32:25 Louis Host So, how do—how would you do that? What—you know, would it feel like the album if you filled all that in with dialogue? Yeah, I don't know how you would do "Shatter" in a Broadway show.

[Liz laughs.]

Just like living in the—yeah. The atmosphere of a song for a while. But maybe you'd be breaking new ground in that way.

[Music fades in.]

00:32:40 Music Music Speaking of that album, I wanna play a clip from—well, one of the great songs just period, "Divorce Song". "Divorce Song" from the album *Yo Yo Buddy Yup Yup Word to Ya Muthuh* by Liz Phair.

*And when I asked for a separate room
It was late at night, and we'd been driving since noon
But if I'd known how that would sound to you
I would have stayed in your...*

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

00:33:06 Louis Host This song to me—for you—is like your "Both Sides, Now" by Joni Mitchell in that it's one of the first things you released, but it's about experience and the weight of experience. And I'm wondering, does this song grow with you? Do you feel this song more as the years go on or are you like more alienated from it all these years later?

00:33:30 Liz Guest *[Beat.]* I would—I would say that I feel like I understand what I'm talking about so much better. And the way I perform it live, though, is the way I wrote it. Which was before I had any knowledge of like what actual ripping apart of long-term relationships is like. But there was a kind of a sense, even when I was young—'cause I don't know about you, but I went through shorter, multiple relationships when I was young. I'd be like, "Two years! Duh-da-da-duh-da." You know what I mean? *[Chuckling.]* Like, I was like—and... I think even then, the sense of recklessness at how precious human intimacy is, when you find it, and what a leap of faith it is to get naked with someone and like really share. And that you are being kind of reckless and—

Like, I do think that there is a recognition, even amongst the most liberal pirates—which I consider young adults to be—that it does matter. That like the echoes of this will stay with you. You don't just get out of something and not feel it. You know? It will be with you forever. All your actions kind of do add up. There's something beautiful about thinking about the early work coupled with the later work, where the actions—the consequences have landed and you're like, "Oh! Well." *[Laughs.]* "This is what it looks like! When you've blown your life up!"

[Louis chuckles.]

00:35:04	Louis	Host	Like, yeah. It's interesting.
00:35:05	Liz	Guest	The comeuppance records, later on. Yes.
00:35:10	Jesse	Host	The comeuppance records, later on! Inevitable.
			We'll finish up with Liz Phair after a quick break. Still to come: the time she wrote a song about the late Lou Reed then played it for his widow. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:35:23	Music	Transition	Cheerful, upbeat music.
00:35:24	Jesse	Promo	Support for <i>Bullseye</i> and the following message come from Culturelle. Culturelle wants you to know that an estimated 45 million Americans may have IBS, according to the International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders. Culturelle IBS Complete Support is a medical food for the dietary management of IBS. It's designed to relieve symptoms like abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhea, and constipation in a safe, well-tolerated, once daily dose. Save 20% with promo code "radio" on Culturelle.com .
00:36:04	Promo	Clip	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> <i>[Background music.]</i>
			Will Campos: Since the dawn of time, screenwriters have taken months to craft their stories! But now, three Hollywood professionals shall attempt the impossible: break a story in one hour!
			<i>[Music change.]</i>
			Freddie Wong: That's right! Here on <i>Story Break</i> , I, Freddie Wong—
			Matt Arnold: —Matt Arnold—
			Will: —and Will Campos—
			Freddie: —the creators behind award-winning shows like <i>Video Game High School</i> —
			Matt: —have one hour to turn a humble idea into an awesome movie.
			Will: Now, an awesome movie starts with an awesome title.
			Matt: I chose <i>The Billionaire's Marriage Valley</i> .
			Freddie: <i>[Stifling laughter]</i> Mine was <i>Christmas Pregnant Paradise</i> . <i>[Everyone laughs.]</i>
			Matt: Okay, next we need a protagonist.
			Will: So, I've heard Wario best described as <i>[laughing]</i> Libertarian Mario. <i>[Someone laughs.]</i>
			Freddie: And of course, every great movie needs a stellar pitch.
			Will: In order to get to Heaven, sometimes you gotta raise a little hell.

Freddie: Ha-ha, that's the tagline! [*Someone laughs.*] Check out *Story Break* every week on MaximumFun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.

[*Music ends.*]

00:36:53	Jesse	Host	It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. Our guest is Liz Phair, the singer-songwriter behind the legendary rock album, <i>Exile in Guyville</i> . She has a new record out called <i>Soberish</i> . She's being interviewed by Louis Virtel.
00:37:07	Louis	Host	Are there any songs you don't like performing anymore?
00:37:11	Liz	Guest	The only song that I don't like performing lately was "Flower" or "Hot White [<i>Censored</i>]"—"H.W.C" if you need to edit that out. Because Trump felt like so douchey guy, like... horrible person that it wasn't fun to bring forward the submissiveness, the surrender. It felt jarring. Didn't feel right. I don't know why. But I know that it was a strong instinct that like the world doesn't—because that was always a political play. That song was always political in some ways. So, the play changes. Like, so how I play acted in songs, how I've sort of taken on a persona or a side of myself will sometimes strike the wrong way. It's very interesting.
			You have to—songs are—I don't know. They feel like they're always changing what they mean to you at different times in your life, in front of different crowds. I like that about them. They're complex. They're like—you have to keep tending to your little living plants or something. You know? They're alive. They don't take a lot of attention, but they're alive.
00:38:37	Louis	Host	Luckily, though, on this album, you do have a song called "Bad Kitty" that will satisfy the fans of the profanity and the—how is that song, where you describe your p***y—beautifully, by the way.
			[<i>Liz laughs and agrees.</i>]
			How does that song stand apart from these other ones that you feel reticent about performing?
00:39:00	Liz	Guest	Um, "Bad Kitty" has—I hope—a sort of a post-sexism feel to it, because it makes sense; it doesn't make sense. Life makes sense; life doesn't make sense. All my resolve is both still manifest and also thrown to the wind in that song, just like cast off like, "Wah!" So, I—that is the perfect description of, I guess, the hot girl in middle age. It's just kind of this like, "Eeeh! I'm a goddess but I've gotten a little reckless because it all doesn't really [<i>censored</i>] matter and I am an older goddess now."
			It's like there's a—I don't know. I like—it encapsulates something that you don't see a lot of. You see more of it now, in TV, film, music. The experience of middle age while undefeated. I don't know. It's interesting.
00:39:59	Louis	Host	You brought up Brad Wood before, who you've now collaborated with on this album. The last time you worked with him was <i>Whitechocolatespaceegg</i> , correct? Which is your third album.
			[<i>Liz confirms.</i>]

00:40:23	Liz	Guest	<p>Now, working with an old collaborator—are you immediately daunted? Are you immediately like, “Well, this has to measure up to some legacy we already have.” Like, “Why add to this?” Or do you just go in thinking, “Well, this is somebody I trust.”</p> <p>I did. I went in thinking, “I know he’ll make it sound good.” Like, Brad and I don’t get into fights about whether it sounds good. He always makes everything sound good. We do get into fights about like what we think cool is. Like, his idea of what cool is and what my idea of what cool is are different. Sometimes. So, that would be the area. But like, it’s such a pleasure to go into the studio with someone that you’ve known through your musical collaboration after a gap of like 20 years and just have that trust that it doesn’t matter what we do, ‘cause whatever we do—if we’re both happy with it, it’s gonna be good. That was fun.</p>
00:41:06	Louis	Host	<p>Did you have any memorable, productive arguments?</p>
00:41:10	Liz	Guest	<p>Mm-hm. There was a beautifully resolved one that could have become an argument—the story of “Hey Lou”, that song. It had entirely different lyrics, different melody. It was about a different thing! And I wasn’t happy with it. I just thought it wasn’t good enough. I’m like, you know—this is like—let’s only put on stuff that we feel surprises us and delights us. And <i>[chuckles]</i> it had been a little awkward ‘cause he was kind of like, “Tap, tap. Are we gonna get anything done <u>again</u> today?” ‘Cause I was worrying over this song. And he was working on a loop. And he goes, “Check this out. When I play this loop in the chorus, you hear this artifact—that it sounds like you’re saying <i>[high pitched]</i>, ‘Hey, Lou!’.”</p> <p>‘Cause it went like <i>[singing the chord progression]</i>, “Hey, Lou!” <i>[Singing the chords.]</i> “Hey, Lou!”</p> <p>And he just looked at me and he goes, “Wouldn’t it be a gas if this were a song about Lou Reed from Laurie Anderson’s point of view. And just that instant connection of, “That’s a brilliant idea.” And we’re like in this SNL writers’ room and we just dropped everything.</p> <p><i>[Music fades in.]</i></p> <p>And really started laughing so hard there were like tears running down our cheeks.</p>
00:42:26	Music	Music	<p>“Hey Lou” from the album <i>Soberish</i> by Liz Phair.</p> <p><i>Are you on the junk again? Your eyes look dead But your mouth keeps moving on and on We’re losing all of our friends Pretty soon, it’s gonna be just you And me, across the table</i></p> <p><i>Hey, Lou Hey, Lou</i></p>
00:42:49	Liz	Guest	<p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i></p> <p>Writing the lyrics—you know, he’d say something, and I’d be like, “No, that’s too harsh. We’re not putting that in.” ‘Cause, you know, we had like a vague sense that Laurie Anderson might hear it</p>

someday. She really was going to, though. That was scary. So, that was just the best part of songwriting. It was the first song that Brad and I ever wrote together. We'd never collaborated on anything before. And for it to be spontaneous and hilarious and cute and adorable and just timeless, because the characters involved are people that we know and love—it was—what isn't magical about that?

00:43:26 Louis Host No, you both had this baked-in knowledge base around Lou Reed and Laurie Anderson, I take it?

[Liz confirms.]

Like, did you both—have you discussed him before? How did this—how did this synthesis occur?

00:43:36 Liz Guest I mean we—I don't think we did, this time around, but we both had discussed them before, because we idolized them. One of the things that Brad and I have in common is that we both liked Laurie Anderson and Lou Reed before they got together. Like, so—like, they really were our sort of favorite celebrity couple and we shared that.

00:43:55 Louis Host She is a pretty intimidating celebrity, though. Did you just say she almost heard your song? Or did you get feedback from her?

00:44:00 Liz Guest Oh no, I sent the letter and the whole album, actually. And the video. And I did not hear back, which I took as a tacit—I know it was a good email. So, I took that as, "I don't like it."

[Louis laughs sadly.]

"But I'm not gonna stop you." Like, "I respect your artistry, but I'm not gonna engage with you." So, I felt that was very good. That was a definite good outcome, compared to what could be.

00:44:28 Louis Host That's about as close as you wanna get to someone like that. It's like just like I don't need to meet Fran Lebowitz. You know what I mean?

[Liz cackles and agrees.]

Like, I don't need—I don't need to hear how—I don't need you to do the dismissiveness thing at me. *[Laughs.]*

00:44:37 Liz Guest Right?! Yes! I don't need to be dismissed that out of—like, that easily. 'Cause they could just both like, "Bing!" And like—

00:44:44 Louis Host *[Laughs.]* Yeah. You'd be toast.

00:44:47 Liz Guest There goes—yeah, absolutely toast! And that's what we love about them. That's why I couldn't get up to meet Joni Mitchell. You know? That what—like, that glued me to the couch. The opportunity that I had to meet an idol and I was like glued to the couch—so intimidated.

00:45:01 Louis Host Oh. Where were you? What was the situation?

00:45:04 Liz Guest I was with Michael Penn. I think we were mastering the music we'd done for the—my pop album. The Liz Phair *[inaudible]*

00:45:12 Louis Host Yes, "Friend of Mine". One of my favorite Liz Phair songs.

00:45:13 Liz Guest But I don't think it—maybe it was that night. I get really confused about nights. But anyway, we were in a studio where Joni Mitchell was also recording. And Michael came into the room where I was sitting, just off the kitchen, and he goes, "Joni's in the kitchen. Come now. Like, now." And I felt like in a dream where trying to

move 'cause the spider's coming and you can't get up off the stairs. Like, I was like, [*makes sounds of straining*]. You know? Just like trying to go meet Joni Mitchell. And it killed me! It just—everything that she is and represents in culture just was in the air around us. It was just like—it was heavy with just—it is like meeting a demigod or something. It's exactly—

00:46:02 Louis Host

It does feel like a disruption in this spacetime continuum.

[*Liz agrees several times.*]

To meet somebody like that—like it's not supposed to happen, really.

00:46:08 Liz Guest

Yeah! And like they do carry with them everyone else's expectations that they collected that day or that week. Like, you can see in the way they react to you. And... yeah.

00:46:20 Louis Host

I'm actually a little—not surprised that you would be that stunned by Joni Mitchell—but I associate your like upbringing with like male classic rock, really. But like was Joni—you know—a template-like person for you? The 50th anniversary of *Blue* just happened, so I've been mainlining that album again.

00:46:37 Liz Guest

Me too! And it's so funny, because I was a *Court and Spark* person. That's what I grew up with.

[*Louis makes a sound of intrigue.*]

So, I have this weird—*Blue* just wasn't my thing. And I actually said it aloud to my publicist, 'cause she was asking about quotes and stuff. I'm like, "I'm a *Court and Spark* person." And I've been so ashamed by that response. Like, thinking that like somehow the forces—the wind whipped up and like the witches of the west coast were like, "She is not one of us!" You know?

[*Louis chuckles.*]

And I've been like literally listening to *Blue* over and over again like weeping at its glory and its beauty. So, yeah. I'm deep into the Joni Mitchell catalogues.

00:47:18 Louis Host

Have you switched over as a—to a—to be a *Blue* person?

00:47:20 Liz Guest

[*Cheering.*] Yes! I know!

00:47:21 Louis Host

You think—oh wow! I'm—I kind of thought that was impossible for a *Court and Spark* person.

00:47:25 Liz Guest

No! Nooo, I am fully—I feel—yes. My reeducation is complete. I am deeply attuned to why, not just that I love it. But it is kind of like if I wrote *Guyville*, I should only care about *Blue*. Like, it is—

[*Louis laughs.*]

Do you know? It's almost—yeah.

00:47:48 Louis Host

I always felt like I was not sophisticated enough for *Court and Spark*. 'Cause there's like songs on that album where like Berkeley College students sit and figure out the chords and like unpack, musically, how she broke the system.

[*Liz cackles.*]

00:48:05 Liz Guest And I'm like, "I kinda just wanna talk about being in California. Like that's it." You know? *[Chuckles.]*
[Laughing.] Yeah, the like—just pour some more—yeah. That's—exactly. But I see now that the unusual arrangements of *Blue* are more sophisticated because they are heedless of tradition and canonical song structure. That is why they are so sophisticated. 'Cause at first listen, you think, "Okay. Not really finishing that song. Okay." You know what I mean? And like now I feel the deep drama across the arc of the album.

00:48:35 Louis Host If you were in a shark tank situation and Joni were the shark, what song would you play for her of yours?

00:48:42 Liz Guest To soothe her?!

[Louis confirms.]

00:48:45 Louis Host Oh, *[censored]*. If she's the—
 I do feel she is that dismissive, too. I feel like she's that level.

00:48:47 Liz Guest Oooh god. God. God. Oh. I—maybe "Little Digger"? It's possible she would find—I don't think structurally she would care, but I think she might find the subject matter interesting.

00:49:01 Louis Host Liz Phair, thank you for joining me on *Bullseye* and thanks for the awesome new record, *Soberish*. And thanks for spilling everything in this book, *Horror Stories*. You really left it out on the floor, and I remain worried about you.

00:49:13 Liz Guest *[Laughs.]* Thank you for this great interview, Louis. I really appreciated it.

00:49:17 Jesse Host Liz Phair, everyone. Her new album is called *Soberish*. You can buy it from your local record shop. Our thanks to our pal, Louis Virtel, for conducting the interview. Louis, one of the funniest people on earth. He co-hosts the podcast *Keep It!* on Crooked Media. You should check that out. And for goodness sakes, you should follow Louis on Twitter, because the level of humor and insight in his tweets is just breathtaking. *[Chuckles.]* It's a real—it's a real kick in the pants to everybody else on Twitter.

00:49:48 Music Transition Thumpy electronic music.

00:49:50 Jesse Host 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 Los Angeles, California. We are, once in a while, inside the office these days. My producer, Kevin, was at our office overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park and he saw a man riding his bicycle down the ramp that goes into the lake to scare away geese or something. But then his bike fell over in the water, and he got all gross and wet. So, our thoughts are with that guy.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producer is Jesus Ambrosio. Production fellows at Maximum Fun are Richard Robey and Valerie Moffat. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it. The Go! Team's new record, *Get up Sequences Part One*, is out now! It is hot. Go get it. Go! Team, they rule.

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. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:51:07 Promo

Promo

Speaker: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[Music fades out.]