

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.
00:00:13	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.
00:00:18	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Glynn Turman is a brilliant actor who’s lived an extraordinary life. His first big role was at the age of 12. He was in the original Broadway production of <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> . He performed alongside Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, and Louis Gossett Jr. In 1975, he starred in the hugely influential film, <i>Cooley High</i> , a classic if you haven’t seen it. And in 1978, he married Aretha Franklin. Aretha Franklin! Look, I could go on. He played Mayor Clarence Royce on <i>The Wire</i> , Doctor Senator on the most recent season of <i>Fargo</i> . Just the other week, he portrayed Mose Wright, the great uncle of Emmett Till, in the ABC miniseries <i>Women of the Movement</i> . When I talked with him last year, he’d just finished performing in the Academy Award nominated film <i>Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom</i> . It’s a film adaption of the August Wilson play of the same name. It focuses on the blues singer, Ma Rainey—played by Viola Davis—her piano player, Toledo—played by Turman—and Levee Green, her saxophone player—played by the late Chadwick Boseman in his final role. The story is about the fateful recording session from <i>Mother of the Blues</i> by Ma Rainey in 1927 Chicago. Before we get into our interview with Glynn, let’s hear a clip. In this scene, the band is arguing over which version of the song to play as they wait for Ma to show up. And Toledo, Glynn’s character, has just about had it with Levee’s attitude and wants everyone to take the job more seriously.
00:01:56	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:57	Clip	Clip	Toledo (<i>Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom</i>): It ain’t just me, fool! I said everybody! What you think, I’m gonna solve the colored man’s problem all by myself? I said we! You understand that? <u>We</u> . That’s every living colored man in the world gotta do <u>his</u> share, got to do <u>his</u> part! I ain’t talking about what I’m gonna do. What are you gonna do? Or Cutler, Slow Drag, anybody else? I’m talking about what all of us gonna do together. That’s what I’m talking about, <i>[censored]</i> .
00:02:26	Sound Effect	Transition	Levee: Then why ain’t you just say that, then? Music swells and fades.
00:02:28	Jesse	Host	Glynn Turman, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> ! It’s great to have you on the show.
00:02:31	Glynn Turman	Guest	Thank you. Thank you for having me.
00:02:33	Jesse	Host	When you’re doing August Wilson, do you have to—do you have to modulate what you’re doing to match the language? The language is so extraordinary.

00:02:43	Glynn	Guest	Well, yeah, the language is extraordinary. And you know, you wanna be to true to it. You wanna be true to the words. You know. Almost right down to the—to the periods and the commas, you know. If you've had any vocal training, this is where it comes in handy—knowing breaths and pauses and so on so forth. So, it's like, yeah—August makes you use all of your—all your technical skills.
00:03:11	Jesse	Host	Can you give me an example? Like what's a line where... you are—
00:03:16	Glynn	Guest	Well, just—what you just heard. “What you—what you gonna do, what I'm gonna do. Talking about everybody. What everybody gonna do?” That whole soliloquy was a breath exercise. You know? Where you take the pause, how that pause comes up. So, it's almost like a—playing a musical instrument, you know?
00:03:36	Jesse	Host	You've been acting since you were 12 years old, but when you got your first part—which was in the original production of <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> —it wasn't because you were a kid who aspired to be an actor. How did you end up going to the audition?
00:03:54	Glynn	Guest	Well, it was because of the friendship between my mother—who was a single parent, she and I living in the West Village in the '50s and she, being friends with Lorraine Hansberry, who was of course another Black woman living in the same neighborhood. And so, a friendship developed between those two and it just so happened that Miss Hansberry had written this play and that there was a part for a little boy, my mother said, and she said that, “Miss Hansberry wanted to know if you'd be interested in trying out for the part. Auditioning.” And I had no intention of being in a play.
			And so, my first question was, “Well, I'll do it if it doesn't interfere with my baseball game on Saturday. Will it interfere with the game?”
			<i>[They chuckle.]</i>
00:04:59	Jesse	Host	And my mother says, “If you get this it could very well interfere with your baseball game on Saturday.” And then, so—
00:05:02	Glynn	Guest	It'll interfere with two baseball games on Sundays. Yeah, right? <i>[Chuckles.]</i> So, uh, at any rate I auditioned, and I didn't know what those other kids sitting the hall waiting were sitting there waiting for, because I had read the play and I knew there was a role for just one little boy in it and my understanding was that that was me. So, what were these other guys doing sitting out there waiting for? You know. But so, it was a good thing I didn't know what an audition was, because I might have gotten nervous if I knew that we were all competing for the same role.
00:05:34	Jesse	Host	Was your mom like a super hip lady?
00:05:38	Glynn	Guest	Yes, she was a super hip lady. Yeah. She had super hip friends. You know. James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry. You know. Jack Klugman, Brett Somers. All these people were her friends in the neighborhood of the village where I grew up.
00:05:54	Jesse	Host	Did your mom work?
00:05:56	Glynn	Guest	She was a post office worker, actually. I remember helping her try to pass the test remembering all the zip codes of Manhattan and having to pass that test. But that came afterwards. She—you know, was a waitress at—sometimes some of the restaurants that you may know about in the village back in the day, you know, any kind of jobs that could keep us in our humble apartment along West 10 th

Street. You know. So, she did many different jobs, but she died while working in the post office, which was—working the post office, you had a sense of stability. You know? I was able to lead the play on Broadway—*Raisin*—which was bringing in a steady income—a steady check, which was a good check and that kept us afloat until she was able to get on her feet with what she was aspiring to do. And then I left the play, because I wasn't interested in following that path of a—of a performer, you know. I was interested in other things. You know. In the—as a kid growing up in Manhattan. You know. I was interested in—like I said—ballgames and I was interested in certain degrees of thuggery and *[laughs]*—so, but I kept getting these roles.

After, of course, I did *Raisin*, you know, I became the go-to Black kid. You know. Whenever there was a part that needed a child of color. And so, I ended up doing a lot of—a lot of different things. You know. Working with David Susskind, who was a prolific producer at the time. A lot of television was live television and, you know, *Playhouse 90* and stuff like that. So, I—you know, I ended up working with James Caan and Robert Redford in a piece called *Black Monday*. That was about integrating the schools. And believe it or not, Redford and Caan were bad guys. You know. They were good old redneck boys trying to keep us from integrating the schools. You know. And I recently ran into James Caan and was able to bring—mention that to him, and we were on a plane coming back from someplace not too long ago. And we had never met, and I introduced myself and said, “Do you remember that David Susskind piece that we did called *Black Monday*?”

And it came to him right away and goes, “Woah! Oh my god! Yes! I remember that.” You know. So, we walked down memory lane on that. It was a lot of fun.

00:08:30	Jesse	Host	I mean, it occurred to me that—given what a phenomenon <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> was almost immediately, you know it was nominated for a number of Tonys and so on and so forth. You know. It was the first African American woman to have a play produced on Broadway and Lorraine Hansberry immediately became famous. She was still in her 20s, I think. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> It must have been crazy to be a 12-year-old and like—you know, I don't—I don't know who was stopping by backstage. For some reason, in my mind—
00:09:01	Glynn	Guest	Oh, everybody. Yeah. Yeah.
00:09:03	Jesse	Host	Yeah, it's like Don Newcombe or something like that. But that must have been bananas!
00:09:08	Glynn	Guest	It was crazy. You know, it was wonderful. And you know, the thing is—you know, as a kid, you're not really easily impressed. I was—I knew from the reaction of my aunts and uncles and so on and so forth the significance of who these people were. You know. We had their records in the house. We had Lena Horne's records we played. You know, in the—in the house. You know. Lena Horne would come by and Sarah Vaughan, you know, would come by. Sammy Davis Jr. Sammy Davis Jr. was one of my favorite cats, because Sidney kept, in his dressing room, a 45. A colt 45 in the holster that he would practice drawing on. You know. He would—you know, draw—his quickdraw. And Sammy Davis, come to find out, was the fastest quickdraw in the country at that time. And he

had demonstrated these skills on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. A whole segment of him just doing all these fantastic tricks.

Now, you know, back in the day when I was a kid, everybody wanted to be a cowboy. All kids wanted to be a cowboy. You know. And I was no different. And so, when Sammy would come by he'd come into Sidney's dressing room. I'd come in—ease in and just kind of sit on the floor in the corner like a fly on the wall. And Sammy was teaching Sidney how to be a quickdraw. And he'd do these remarkable tricks with this—with this 45 and this black holster. And Sidney would try to copy the whole thing and Sammy would say, you know, say, *[in a nasally voice]* "No, man! Not like that! Let me show you. Take—" You know. He'd go and do his thing. *[Laughs.]* He'd pull the pistol out just as quick as lightning. You know. And Sammy—and then Sidney would try it. You know. And then when they would leave, I'd still be in there and I'd try. I'd grab that *[laughing]*—that monstrous pistol off the wall and wrap the whole holster rig around my little body and try not to drop the gun, you know. *[Laughs.]* And just trying to copy these guys.

So, yeah. I had a chance to meet some of the most remarkable people in the business. Dorothy Dandridge, you know, who was just gorgeous beyond belief—even as a 12-year-old, you know, you can imagine what impression she made on me. You know.

00:11:29 Jesse Host

I like the idea that Sammy Davis Jr. upgraded himself from triple threat to quadruple threat with an actual threat. *[Chuckles.]* Which is quickdraw.

00:11:39 Glynn Guest

[They laugh.]

Right. Right. No, but that—he was real—

00:11:41 Jesse Host

If you think it's just singing, dancing, and acting... *[laughs].*

00:11:44 Glynn Guest

Yeah, then you're wrong. Exactly. Exactly. He had something else for you, there.

00:11:50 Jesse Host

But you didn't think that you wanted to be an actor. You went to—you went to PA, the famous performing arts high school in New York.

00:11:57 Glynn Guest

Mm-hm. Yeah. Quite by—on a fluke, because luckily, thank God, a great teacher that I had in junior high school—Mr. Wilson, my shop teacher, woodshop teacher—Black teacher who knew that I had been on Broadway in *A Raisin in the Sun* and he knew also that I was a chronic truant, mostly just skating by in my grades. Just skating by enough to get promoted in the three years I was there. And when it came time to go to high school, he said, "Son, Turman, what's—where are you going to high school?"

So, I said, "I'm going to the High School of Aviation and Design. I wanna be an aviation's engineer." And he laughed. I said, "What's so funny?"

He said, "Glynn," he says, "You need to know math to become an aviation engineer and you haven't been in a math class in three years." You know? *[Laughs.]* He said—he—"You've cut class in my class for I don't know how many semesters." He says, "Why don't you try out for the High School of Performing Arts?" I said I'd never heard of it and what do they do? He said, "Well, they—you know, you've been in—the only time you do come to school, Turman, is to

be in a play. You know. One of the school plays.” He said, “So, they do plays at school—at the High School of Performing Arts.”

I said, “I’m not interested.” I said, “I’m going to be an aviation’s engineer. I’m great with making models, doing model airplanes and model ships and so on and so forth.”

He says, “Okay, I tell you what.” He says, “Take the test for aviation and take the audition for performing arts.” Well, I did. And of course, I failed the test for aviation, and I passed the audition for performing arts. And boom, there I was. And it was the first time I ever got an A in class. You know? So, when I got to that school, I never played a day of hooky again. You know? I just loved it and graduated top of the class. You know.

00:13:47 Jesse Host Did you know about famous people who had gone to your high school?

00:13:51 Glynn Guest Well, they give you a—they give you a rundown of those people who are, you know—when they first started, where it was, you know. Eartha Kitt I think went to that school. And some other famous people. You know, along the line. So, yeah, they give you a whole history of it. It was—it was quite a school. Because it was a small school and what was great about it, then—you know, like the movie *Fame*, it was right smack dab in the middle of the great white way, Broadway. You know? It was right on 46th and between the 6th and 7th Avenue. You know, so it was smack dab in the middle of showbusiness.

00:14:26 Jesse Host We’ve got even more with Glynn Turman still to come. Stay with us. It’s *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:14:34 Music Transition Thumpy rock music.

00:14:40 Jesse Host Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. My guest, Glynn Turman, is a veteran actor with over 150 credits to his name. Lately, he’s appeared on the TV shows *Fargo*, *Women of the Movement*, and in the Academy Award nominated movie, *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*. Let’s get back into it.

Did you work when you were a young man? Because the kind of work that you were getting, after you were in *Raisin in the Sun* was the kind where they say, “Hey, I know a kid who looks like the thing and can do a decent job.” You know? It’s kid acting work. And that’s very different from the work that you get when you’re 19. Like, the work that you get when you’re 15 is very different from the work you get when you’re 19. Was it an easy or a difficult transition?

00:15:28 Glynn Guest Let’s put it this way. When I was 15, work came easily. Because, you know, you were doing kids that were still in school age, you know. Did—he was called LeRoi Jones at the time but changed his name to Amiri Baraka—and I did his early works in off-Broadway houses and at the actor’s studio, for Lee Strasberg, at that time. And I was—you know—15 and doing the roles of 15-year-olds. But then I made the decision to become an actor after graduating. And I’m 19 now and I’m—19, 20—and I’m married, and I got a kid. And I—soon as I made that declaration that I wanted to be an actor, that I’m 19 years old, I couldn’t get arrested. You know? *[Chuckling.]* I couldn’t—another role didn’t come for a couple of years. You know? And so, I was struggling being a struggling actor running to auditions and trying to feed a family. You know. I’m getting fired from jobs because I would leave in the middle of the day to go for

the sparse auditions that were there for Black performers of my age category.

So, it was—it was very rough, making that transition. The thing that saved me was that I ended up at the Guthrie Theater as a journeyman. So, there I had a steady job for a year. I moved everybody to Minneapolis and worked with Sir Tyrone Guthrie and Douglas Campbell and Len Cariou, Michael Moriarty, at the Guthrie Theater for a year. Adolph Caesar. That was the first time I had stability as an actor in that age group.

00:17:18 Jesse Host

I mean, I was thinking about when you're 12 years old and you're not the kind of kid actor—you know, I think there is this kind of kid actor who's like a pageant contestant. Who can understand what the inflection of a line is supposed to be and is cute and can—you know—kind of shine it on. That's the kind of actor who will, I think, you know—they have a lot of growth to do to become an adult professional actor. But the way you describe your kid acting is—because it was so accidental, you know, it is like a lack of self-consciousness rather than extreme self-consciousness onstage. And in some ways, that's like what you aspire to. *[Chuckles.]* As an adult professional actor.

00:18:04 Glynn Guest

You're absolutely right. Matter of fact, someone—someone asked me just the other day am I a better actor now or was I a better actor as a kid? I said, "I was a better actor as a kid." You know. I said, "Just getting to how—to where I was as a kid, you know, in my craft." And it speaks to exactly what you're talking about, here.

00:18:26 Jesse Host

Sometimes I feel like acting training is so embarrassing. When you're doing acting training, you do so much embarrassing stuff. Not because you're doing a bad job—although you probably are—but, like, you know—walking around the room like an elephant and going be-bop-booboo or whatever it is, is like totally embarrassing. And, you know, once in a while you'll hear, like, "This is ridiculous. This is embarrassing." And there's this part of me that wonders is it so ridiculous and embarrassing because it is just, like, total ego destruction so that you can get to a point where you can invest yourself completely fully without artifice in something that is ridiculous—which is, like, pretending in front of other people?

00:19:11 Glynn Guest

Yeah, that's exactly what it is. I—hey, let's just put it this way. I agree with you. I don't know if that's exactly what it is or if that's right or wrong, but I agree. I understand exactly what you're talking about. You know. The other side of it is the—call it certain freedom. Freeing yourself up to be and so you can call it that. It sounds better. But you can also just say *[chuckles]* look at this ridiculous behavior.

[Jesse laughs.]

But it's just—it's just—has just as much value, you know, as calling yourself a ridiculous human being, doing all these boop-bop-boop-bop things. You know. So that you can do it in front of people. It's quite a craft. I've grown to just love it. I'm able to express myself through it and hopefully people enjoy it.

00:19:59 Jesse Host

You know, you had a real career changing and history of cinema changing role in *Cooley High*, in the mid '70s. When you got that part, was it just another gig?

00:20:14	Glynn	Guest	Well... it was a little more than just another gig. I'd worked with Michael Schultz, the director. We'd done a play on Broadway. So, he and I had had a great working relationship and he brought this project to me and we were all kind of crafting it. He was crafting it with Eric Monte, at the time. And they were just telling stories. Eric was building his stories and I was kind of in on some of that process. And I knew Eric, as well, from—again, from the theatre. So, I was kind of invested early on in the process. Which was—I had never been before in the couple of three or four movies that I had done prior to <i>Cooley High</i> . So, I felt a little more attached to that project. And when we did indeed go into production, you know, I was all in. You know. Just absolutely all in. So, it was a little different in that respect.
00:21:18	Jesse	Host	It's an amazing movie. It's a really great movie, if people haven't seen it. And I—it seems to me like one of the reasons that it is such an influential film, besides being good—and it's—you know, you can—one of the reasons you can see it in, you know, directing—the work of directors like Spike Lee and John Singleton is that it has a little bit of melodrama to it, but it combines that melodrama with a really, like, well-earned, slice-of-life, breeziness. And that is like a—that's a very unusual tone. Most of the movie is kind of a wandering around buddies comedy. But at the same time, like, it is—it is a very heavy movie. You must have been thinking about that as it was coming to be, as it was being developed.
00:22:12	Glynn	Guest	No, not—not really. I wasn't thinking about that, at all. I knew that the slices of life that it was taking were so familiar to me. You know. The—Rich hiding—hiking on the back of busses to go from one place to other in the city. I mean, that's what we did in Manhattan, in New York, during all of these times that I was—we were talking about, earlier. Jumping the subway stile to get to the train. That's how we lived. You know? Knowing the good guys and the bad guys and the jocks in the neighborhood. You know. The—one of the things that made it different was that everybody—any movies that show you the bad guys, you know, the dealers or the gangsters in the hood, is that they have no connection to the hood. Like, they are separate people who don't know any—doesn't know anyone else in the neighborhood who isn't a gangster. Well, that's not true. You know. I knew all the gangsters [<i>laughing</i>] in the neighborhood. You know? All the gangsters in the neighborhood knew me. And you know, we had a relationship.
00:23:14	Jesse	Host	'Cause you, like, played little league with them when you were seven. Except then the people don't realize—
00:23:17	Glynn	Guest	Exactly! And that's the truth! Yeah, 'cause you played little league with those same guys, you know! So, you have a—you know. You know everybody. You know their parents. You know their brothers and sisters. You know, you gotta risk going to their house to pick up their sister that you're dating. You know? [<i>Laughs.</i>] And, you know—you know, when they—they're—you gotta get them back. You gotta get the date back because you know who the brother is. You know? And that's what it exposed, that there was a community that everyone had a place, and everyone knew one another's situation. So, there was—you know—I liked when the tragedy happened at the end, when—for the fella who inflicted the fatal blow—how innocent he looked the moment after he realized what he had done. He—all of the sudden, to me—I never get this picture out of my head of how it looks like that cool hat that was such a

gangster hat on him, all through the movie, all of the sudden it looked like he was a kid in his daddy's hat. You know? The hat was a little too big for him. You know?

[*Laughing.*] I thought that they had to be such a great metaphor for, you know, the loss of innocence. So, you know, the movie just struck home on so many levels. And some of it was intentional, but a lot of it was just playing the truth of who the people are and what that life was about. You know?

00:24:42 Jesse Host

Yeah. I mean, I grew up in a—in a relatively tough neighborhood and I feel like one of the things that people don't always see from the outside is, like, there are the same—the same breath of humanity in that kind of neighborhood. And that people see it in each other. You know, like, it can change, but—you know. There's nerds [*chuckles*]*—there's nerds and jocks and—you know, like, I wasn't ever gonna become a Norteño because the kids that lived on my block knew that I was a—I mean, for one thing super White—but also, you know, they could tell I was a nerd. You know. They could tell I was already on my way to becoming a public radio host. And—*

[*They chuckle.*]

And that was, like—that was like a normal part of the neighborhood. Like, it's not like it was so crazy that someone was on a different track. You know what I mean?

00:25:39 Glynn Guest

Like—well, you know, it was like my thing—some of the things that I wanted to do, which was, you know, being a tough guy and would run with a tough crowd, they wouldn't let me do! [*Laughing.*] Because they knew I was—I was, you know, gonna be this actor guy. Oh, he's the actor. You know. You can't do this, Glynn. No. You can't come with us. You know? I said, "What are you talking about?!" You know? [*Laughs.*] But they—the neighborhood sort of helped guide me and you know kind of looked out for me in terms of me being the kid who was supposed to do something else other than what was going down with the—with everybody else. You know what I'm saying?

00:26:24 Jesse Host

When you were in *Cooley High*, I can't imagine that it was lifechanging in terms of the amount of money that you got paid, because American International Pictures I'm sure was not writing giant checks to relatively unknown actors to be in their movies. But I can imagine that it changed your life in terms of walking down the street.

00:26:44 Glynn Guest

Yeah. To this day, you know. To this day. I can't believe that there's four generations of people who recognize me as Preach from *Cooley High*. You know? I've had young people come to me and say, "My folks made me watch *Cooley High*. You're Preach from *Cooley High*. My folks put that on for me. It was the coolest movie." So, yeah, I just finished filming in Chicago and though the Cabrini-Green community is no more, there are still remnants of people who lived in that community since it's been torn down who are still in that area and who will come up to me and say, "Hey. Hey, man. Hey, Preach. It's me. I was in the scene in the—in Martha's, in Martha's Candy Store. You know. I was in that scene. I did—I did the house party scene with you." So, it's—it's an amazing, amazing feeling.

00:27:45 Jesse Host So, it's like I'm a folk hero kind of thing. You know? It's—I didn't become an international star, but I did become a folk hero in my community.

00:27:45 Jesse Host So, one of the remarkable things about your personal life is that your second wife was Aretha Franklin. And I guess the question that I have about that is basically just, like, how do you ask Aretha Franklin out on a date?

[They laugh.]

00:28:20 Glynn Guest You—like, you were married to her in the—in the late '70s and early '80s, which—when she was definitely, 100% already Aretha Franklin. So, like, w-wh-what do you do? Like, how's that work? Like, I know you were already—you were already Preach from *Cooley High*, but that's no Aretha Franklin. You know what I mean? *[Chuckling.]* No, that's no Aretha Franklin at all. But it is what made Aretha Franklin a Glynn Turman fan. So, I go to—with a friend, Ben Vereen, who was from the High School of Performing Arts. We were in the same class together.

00:28:37 Jesse Host *[Laughs.]* I like—I'm impressed, Glynn, that we just—we had a whole conversation about High School of the Performing Arts and how wild it was and, you know, whether you knew that Eartha Kitt went there when you were there and so on and so forth. You were literally in the same class as Ben Vereen.

00:28:55 Glynn Guest Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We were buddies and still are, to this day. We're neighbors, to this day.

00:29:01 Jesse Host Okay, so you're kicking it with your man, Ben Vereen.

00:29:04 Glynn Guest Yeah, so Ben and I are hanging, and he says, "Whatcha doing tonight?" Or tomorrow night or something.

And I said, "Nothing much. What's going on?"

And he said, "I got a concert. I'm gonna go to Ahmason Theatre tomorrow to perform for Jacqueline Onassis." So, he said, "Do you wanna come?"

And I said, "Sure, I'll go with you."

[Jesse laughs.]

00:29:25 Jesse Host So, we go down to—
"Yeah, alright. If you hold my feet to the fire."

00:29:28 Glynn Guest Yeah, yeah. You know. What the hell? So, we go down to the—the theatre and he's in his dressing room. He's getting ready to do his thing and I'm—I start wandering around backstage, you know, and give him his space and time to do—get into his character and all that kind of stuff. And I wandered through—up these stairs. And halfway up the stairs, there's a kid at the top of the stairs. Young fella. And he says, "Glynn Turman!"

I said, "Hello." You know.

He says, "Oh my god." He said, "My mother just loves you!"

I said, "So, who's your mother, kid?"

And he says, “Aretha Franklin! Come with me!”

I said, “Aretha?! Woah! Yeah!”

[They laugh.]

00:30:07 Jesse Host
00:30:09 Glynn Guest

So—so—

You said, “Yeah, I’m familiar—I’m familiar with her work.”

I’m familiar! Yeah, I’m familiar. Sounds familiar. *[Chuckles.]* So, he takes me up to her dressing room—over to her dressing room. And she’s standing in front of the mirror, you know, and the lights are on, you know, around the vanity mirror. You know. Huge, beautiful, with all these white flowers in the—roses, you know—flowers around the room. And she’s standing in this beautiful white gown and she sees me in the mirror—the reflection. And she let out a little scream! You know! “Aaah!”

[Jesse chuckles.]

You know. And I was like, *[matching the high energy]* “Yeeeeah!”

[They laugh.]

So, you know—so, we introduced us—she, you know, “I love *Cooley High*,” and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So, we talk, and she says, you know, she’s moved—she just moved to California and that she wanted to become—take some acting lessons. Well, I had been teaching acting for years, at this point, and so I—and I gave her that information. I said, “If you want,” I said, “Come down and check out a class, see if you wanna join it.” Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, I said. So, I gave her the address and the time, and all the kind of stuff and she says, “Okay! I’ll get down there.” You know, and that’s—and so, you know, you say *[skeptically]* yeah right, you know, sure. Sure, she’s gonna come to class. I’ll believe that when I see it.

Well, this particular evening, my whole class is over at the window looking downstairs and there’s all this hubbub going on. I said, “Everybody get back to your seats. What’s going on? Get back—let’s—we’ve got, you know, work to do.”

And they said, “A limousine just pulled up downstairs. There’s a lady getting out with a—with a fur coat on!” So, lo and behold, it was Aretha! She’d come to the class and, you know, and the first thing I said to her was, “You’re late.” You know.

[They laugh.]

And so—and so—she says *[laughing]*—so, she says, “I’m sorry,” you know? And she came and took one or two or three more classes. But by that time, we were already dating, and you know, the rest is history.

00:32:23 Jesse Host

I once asked this guy I know, Matt Besser—who was one of the founders of an improv and sketch group called the Upright Citizens Brigade—what it was like to have this one weird job that he had, which was at the very beginning of Kanye West’s career—or, you

know, not the very beginning of his career, but the very beginning of his fame—he was developing a show for HBO that was supposed to be kind of like *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, but as a slice of life of Kanye West rather than a slice of life of Larry David. And Matt Besser got hired to be his improv coach. And I was like, “What—what is—what was it like?” You know? ‘Cause obviously, you know, Kanye West is a brilliant artist. I don’t know whether he’s a good improviser. Comedy improviser.

And he was like, “Yeah! I mean, it was weird.”

[They laugh.]

And it’s like funny to think that into your acting class walks literally the greatest singer in the world! *[Laughs.]*

00:33:18 Glynn Guest

In the world! Yeah. Yeah. Literally. You know? Yeah. And the class was like, “What in the world?!”

00:33:23 Jesse Host
00:33:26 Glynn Guest

And then you have to be like, “Well, you’re okay at this. Uuum.” *[Laughs.]* She was really—she was really good, but you know—it’s—she—you know, it wasn’t her cup of tea for real. But we were already together when she got *Blues Brothers*. So, I was her coach. You know, I was able—I had been working with her and continued to work with her for the production of *Blues Brothers*, which she did a very nice job in.

00:33:46 Jesse Host
00:33:47 Glynn Guest

And she’s great in *Blues Brothers*!

Yeah! She did a very nice job in *Blues Brothers*. So, yeah. You know, the story I tell is that the question that you asked is a legitimate question. How do—how do you—you know, how—basically what you’re saying is, “How’s a dude like you get hooked up with Aretha Franklin?” You know?

[They laugh.]

You know. That’s—that’s the question! But how does—how does—yeah, yeah!

00:34:05 Jesse Host

Well—Glynn, anybody can fall in love. I don’t question that anybody can fall in love! It’s mostly, “How do you get up the gumption to ask the queen of soul out for dinner or whatever?” You know what I mean?

00:34:18 Glynn Guest

[Laughing.] Right, right, right. Well, that’s how that happened. But it—but the enormity of that dawned on me later. You know? The enormity, the gumption, *[laughing]* dawned on me later when, one night, I was—you know, we were—you know, it was late. Like two or something in the morning, and I rolled over and she wasn’t in the bed and I kind of sat up and wondered where she was and I kind of got up and I went down—I heard something downstairs. And I went and the closer I got the more I realized it was music and it had to have been her sitting at the Fender piano in the area where we kept that piano. And she was playing. And I kind of eased in and there she was sitting at the piano playing. You know, she was in her house slippers and a robe and, you know, a cigarette dangling off her mouth and just playing this music and—you know, people don’t really give her the credit for the wonderful, wonderful musician that she was. You know? And—

00:35:22 Jesse Host

Yeah, wonderful pianist and organist.

00:35:24	Glynn	Guest	Oh, what a pianist. So, I just sat down like in the doorway of the entrance of that room and just had this private concert given by—it dawned on me. I said, “That’s Aretha Franklin!”
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>
			It’s like you’re hitting the palm of your hand against your forehead moment. You know, it’s like, “OH! My god! That’s—! That’s Aretha Franklin!” And so, I hear myself answer, “Yeah, dummy. You know, how did you pull that off?” You know? It’s like— <i>[laughs]</i> it’s—so, she was amazing. You know. She was really just amazing, amazing, amazing person and musician.
00:36:09	Jesse	Host	So, I’m gonna fast forward through some pretty extraordinary screen credits that you have. I mean, I was looking at your IMDb page <i>[chuckles]</i> going, “Oh, right! He was in <i>Gremlins!</i> Oh, look at that, he was on an episode of the new <i>Twilight Zone</i> that costarred Danny Kaye.” Like—
00:36:30	Glynn	Guest	Danny Kaye. Yeah. Yeah.
00:36:32	Jesse	Host	All—you have an extraordinary list of credits, but I’m gonna fast forward to the greatest television show of all time: <i>The Wire</i> .
00:36:40	Glynn	Guest	<i>The Wire</i> , yeah.
00:36:42	Jesse	Host	And my producer made fun of me for my goal of, you know, doing this radio show in an attempt to interview every actor who ever appeared on <i>The Wire</i> . But <i>[chuckles]</i> when you joined the show—and you played Mayor Royce, on the show. The sort of like—the machine-ish mayor of Baltimore. Had you seen the show when you went into the audition?
00:37:07	Glynn	Guest	I think I’d watched an episode or so. And I had been—I didn’t audition. It was a role that I got while I was doing another project. And it was offered to me and to my—I had a wonderful manager at that time, Hilly Elkins. So, I’d heard more of the show than I had seen it. But I never really tuned into it and got into it until I ended up on it. And then I was just hooked once I started reading and seeing the scripts that came down the pipe.
00:37:40	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:37:41	Clip	Clip	Mayor Royce (<i>The Wire</i>): What can we expect the last week of my reelection campaign?
			Ervin: Sir, I did what you asked. No more, no less.
			Mayor Royce: Hamsterdam. Legalized drug zone?
			Speaker: Well, he takes responsibility for that.
			Mayor Royce: Or subpoenas all over town.
			Speaker: That too.
			Mayor Royce: And the leak about the witness murder. I mean, that was his shop too, right?
			Speaker: Hell yeah.
			Mayor Royce: And now this last thing: transferring detectives off the case? What is that? What is that?

Speaker: [*Disdainfully.*] Skuttling the investigation.

Mayor Royce: Yeah right. Yeah, that's awful. Jesus.

Ervin: Mr. Mayor, you asked me to slow that investigation down.

Mayor Royce: Subtle, Ervin. You hold a few facts for a few weeks. You put a report or two in a desk drawer. But the transferring of people off a case?!

Ervin: Look, you told me you specifically wanted me to not—

Mayor Royce: Ervin, you may leave.

Ervin: Mr. Mayor—

Mayor Royce: That will be all, Commissioner.
Music swells and fades.

00:38:33 Sound Effect Transition

00:38:34 Jesse Host

Were there people that you were thinking of? I worked for a minute in the mayor's office of Willie Brown, in San Francisco. Willie Brown was a much more kind of playful figure than Mayor Royce is. But he had the same—had and has, you know he's easily in his 80s now—had and has the same kind of like—you look in his eyes and you know he always has everything schemed out four steps ahead. You know what I mean? Were you thinking of anybody like that?

00:39:04 Glynn Guest

Well, I got the chance to meet—to meet the man that was—it was crafted after, which was Mayor Schmoke, who was the mayor of Baltimore at that time when we did the Hamsterdam thing about the legal drug zone. You know. That was Mayor Schmoke's idea. And as a matter of fact, he was even in one of the episodes that addressed that whole thing. So, I got a chance to see his temperament and his pace of things. And it was interesting that he's—on that whole take of Hamsterdam, he said, "I would have been a hero!" He says, "All I had to do was change the phrasing of what I was putting out there, what was being put out there." And he said, "That would have made me a hero instead of costing me my—another term." He says, "All I had do was phrase it as a—as a health zone instead of a drug zone." You know, he said, "If I had—I could have phrased it—if I had phrased it as a place where you could go to get well, I would have been a big hero." You know. He was right.

00:40:13 Jesse Host

We'll wrap up with Glynn Turman in just a minute. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:40:21 Promo Clip

[A restless crowd chatters indistinctly.]

Music: Upbeat rock music.

Jordan Crucchiola: You're in the theatre. The lights go down. You're about to get swept up by the characters and all their little details and interpersonal dramas. You look at them and think, "That person is so obviously in love with their best friend. Wait, am I in love with my best friend?! That character's mom is so overbearing. Why doesn't she stand up to her? Oh, good god, do I need to stand up to my own mother?!"

If you've ever recognized yourself in a movie then join me, Jordan Crucchiola, for the podcast, *Feeling Seen*. We've talked to author Susan Orlean on realizing her own marriage was falling apart after watching *Adaptation.*, an adaptation of her own work, and comedian Hari Kondabolu on why *Harold & Kumar* was a depressingly important movie for Southeast Asians.

So, join me every Thursday for the *Feeling Seen* podcast, here on Maximum Fun.

00:41:06	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:41:11	Jesse	Host	Bright, chiming synth. Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Glynn Turman. Glynn is an actor who's been in the game for over half a century. He's been in movies like <i>Cooley High</i> and <i>Gremlins</i> , TV shows like <i>A Different World</i> , <i>Fargo</i> , and <i>The Wire</i> . When I talked with Glynn last year, he'd just starred in <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i> , opposite Viola Davis and the late Chadwick Boseman. It was the latter's last ever film role. You can watch the movie now on Netflix. Let's get back into it.
00:41:53	Glynn	Guest	I wanna return for a moment to <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i> . One of your co-stars, in the film, was Chadwick Boseman. Did you know that he was ill when you were making the movie? No one had a clue. No one had a clue. I think the only one who might have—who knew probably was Todd Black, our producer. But I don't think Denzel knew. Todd would have known because he had to handle the insurance situations and all that kind of stuff. So, he probably knew. But none of—none of the creative ends knew.
00:42:15	Jesse	Host	What was it like to process that information and know that you didn't know?
00:42:21	Glynn	Guest	Well, it just—you know, you could feel the puzzle pieces starting to click into place. You know. On afterthought. You know. You would say, "Ooh, that makes sense. Oh, that's why those people were there. Oh, that's who those people really were." You know, I thought it was a bodyguard when actually he was a physical therapist. You know. "Oooh, that's why—you know—such and such and such and such a thing happened." You know. And on the other hand, you'd say, "Wait a minute, how in the hell could he be that sick and be on, you know, those powerful medicines and have the energy to do take after take after take of these strenuous scenes that we were doing?" You know? Who in the hell was this guy really? You know. Maybe he was the Black Panther. You know. Because he was doing superhuman <i>[censored]</i> . You know? So, it just brought in a lot of questions. Answered a lot of questions and posed a lot of other questions.
00:43:20	Jesse	Host	You can tell me if this is too broad of a thought or too big of a thought, but there's a part of me that wonders if being that aware of one's expiration date... gives you permission to have that kind of freedom that you were talking about earlier, as a performer.
00:43:44	Glynn	Guest	<i>[Sighs.]</i> I don't know. Because I don't want to cut short the notion that he was as brilliant as he was regardless of what his condition was.

[Jesse agrees.]

You know what I'm saying? I don't want anyone to get the opinion that, "Oh, he only did this because of that." He was that crafted, that gifted an artist that I'd rather believe that he was gonna turn in that performance anyway.

00:44:15 Jesse Host

Yeah, I believe that. Do you have ambitions for your career? Particular ambitions for your career, now that you've done the first 60 years of it? *[Laughs.]*

00:44:28 Glynn Guest

[Laughs.] Um, I call this the back nine of my—of my career. You know. And the back nine is going rather well. Of course, I've still got projects that I'm—some I pulled out of the trunk, you know, and I'd like to see done before I—you know—play the 19th hole. But then the—and there's some new projects that have come to me through—to try to do or that I'd like to do as well. So, yeah, I'm—you know I'm still in the game. I'm still in the game. I still enjoy it, still love it. Trying to get better at it. And I just keep on—keep on keeping on. You know?

00:45:13 Jesse Host

Well, Glynn Turman, I wish we had another four hours so we could get to your ABC afterschool special and your episode of *Manimal*.

[They chuckle.]

But I appreciate you taking this time. It was really nice to get to talk to you.

00:45:27 Glynn Guest

Good to talk to you too, my brother. I appreciate it and look forward to rapping with you some more.

00:45:33 Jesse Host

Glynn Turman from last year. His movie, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, is streaming right now on Netflix. You can go check that out. You can also see him on ABC's *Women of the Movement* where he plays the great uncle of Emmett Till. Glynn Turman has had so many other wonderful performances, as well. More than I can list here. *The Wire*, greatest television show of all-time. But if I had to recommend one, go watch *Cooley High*. If you haven't seen *Cooley High*, what a wonderful movie that is.

00:46:03 Music Transition

Bright, chiming synth.

00:46:04 Jesse Host

That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where right at this very moment, a man is in my crawlspace with some all-weather, indoor-outdoor ethernet cabling, ready to connect this very computer that I'm talking you on directly to the internet. So, I don't have to worry about dumb, old Wi-Fi.

Our 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. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is "Huddle Formation" recorded by the group The Go! Team. Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it with us.

You can also keep up with our show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post our stuff in all those places as well as at NPR.org. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:47:07 Promo

Promo

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

[Music fades out.]