

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	<b>Speaker:</b> <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:13	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Time now for a segment called <i>I Wish I Made That</i> where we invite some of our favorites in pop culture to dive deep into a work of art they didn’t make but really wish they did. On deck is John Darnielle. He’s a writer. His 2014 debut novel, <i>Wolf in White Van</i> , was nominated for a national book award. Along with fiction, he also writes a column for <i>Decibel Magazine</i> . His third novel is out now. It’s called <i>Devil House</i> .
00:01:09	Music	Music	<i>[Music fades in.]</i> It’s an epic story that touches on the true crime fad of today, the Satanic panic of the 1980s, and a spooky home in Milpitas, California. You might also know John Darnielle for his other gig: singer, songwriter, and front man of The Mountain Goats. “This Year” from the album <i>The Sunset Tree</i> by The Mountain Goats.  <i>I broke free on a Saturday morning I put the pedal to the floor Headed north on Mills Avenue And listened to the engine roar</i>  <i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i>
00:01:25	Jesse	Host	The Mountain Goats are a folk rock band John started all by himself, back in the early ‘90s. Just him and a tape recorder. Since then, they’ve gained a few members and put out over two dozen albums, including last year’s <i>Dark in Here</i> .
00:01:40	Music	Music	“Parisian Enclave” from the album <i>Dark in Here</i> by The Mountain Goats.  <i>Signal drawn upon the bricks Of a clinic for the dispossessed</i>  <i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i>
00:01:52	Jesse	Host	When we asked John to pick something he wishes he’d made, he sent us a list first. It said, “Patrick Ouredník’s book, <i>Europeana</i> . The album <i>The Fallen King</i> by Italian power metal band, Frozen Crown. Gary Gaetti’s first <i>[chuckling]</i> —Gary Gaetti’s <i>[unable to make it through without laughing]</i> —that’s the third baseman for the Minnesota Twins—first and last appearance as a relief pitcher for the Cubs, in 1999. Or <i>Speak &amp; Spell</i> , the debut album by new wave legends Depeche Mode.”

Eventually, we got him to narrow it down to one and he chose the last one. We’ll let John explain why.

00:02:37	John Darnielle	Guest	So, my name is John Darnielle, and one thing among many things I wish I'd made is Depeche Mode's premier album, <i>Speak &amp; Spell</i> .
00:02:43	Music	Music	"Just Can't Get Enough" from the album <i>Speak &amp; Spell</i> by Depeche Mode.
00:02:55	John	Guest	<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i> So, this segment's called <i>I Wish I Made That</i> , and one reason I wish that I was the guy who made the Depeche Mode debut is how brave it is. You know, how singular it was to make a record like this when it came out. It doesn't sound that way in retrospect. There's a lot of stuff that sounds like it, but there was not then.
00:03:12	Music	Music	<i>[Volume increases.]</i>  <i>I just can't get enough</i>  <i>All the things you do to me</i> <i>And everything you said</i> <i>I just can't get enough</i> <i>I just can't get enough</i>
00:03:20	John	Guest	<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i> So, <i>Speak &amp; Spell</i> is the first Depeche Mode album, and it's—if you are an '80s music student or if you were there, saying it's the one that has Vince Clarke on it tells you what you need to know about this album. Right? Vince Clarke was in a band called Yaz in the UK, or Yazoo in the US. Alison Moyet was the singer, and they did very pure techno pop songs.
00:03:42	Music	Music	"Only You" from the album <i>Upstairs at Eric's</i> by Yazoo.  <i>All I needed was the love you gave</i> <i>All I needed for another day</i> <i>And all I ever knew</i> <i>Only you</i>
00:03:55	John	Guest	<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i> But he was the—if not the pioneer of Depeche Mode, he was absolutely the guy writing all the songs on the first album. It was kind of his vision, although I don't think it was his vision in a sense that like he thought, "I will form a band and implement my vision." I think they got together, and he was the guy who could write songs, so he wrote songs. Right? And wrote the entire album. He was in the band. He was a founding member. He's in all the early videos. I think he actually quit on the last night of the only UK tour as a band. I think that's right. I've seen a documentary about somebody.
00:04:44	Music	Music	He quit just as they were getting some headway. Like, they'd gotten the contract to make the record and—you know, they were like a lot of bands in the late '70s, early '80s. It was sort of a lark. It was some guys getting together and maybe making something happen. But the songs are hits. Right? Some of these songs, like "Just Can't Get Enough", are like incontestable hooks. Right? "Just Can't Get Enough" from the album <i>Speak &amp; Spell</i> by Depeche Mode.

*I just can't get enough  
I just can't get enough  
I just can't get enough  
I just can't get enough  
I just can't get enough  
I just can't get enough  
I just can't get enough*

- 00:04:56 John Guest *[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]*  
And so, he didn't really feel it. *[Laughs.]* He was like, "I got some other things I wanna be doing." So, he bailed. And so, they are left to figure out how to be a band, 'cause they have a record contract. They have everything else except they don't have their songwriter anymore.
- 00:05:11 Clip Clip *["Just Can't Get Enough" gradually fades out.]*
- Speaker:** This evening, I have with me Vince Clarke, the quite talented man behind the keyboards of Depeche Mode, Yazoo, The Assembly, and most currently, Erasure. Now Vince, that's quite a lot of bands to be, you know, involved in in ten years. You're a quite restless chap.
- Vince Clarke:** Well, I was restless. You know? I was born under the sign of Cancer, which makes me indecisive.
- Speaker:** Alright.
- Vince:** But, um, now I think I've mellowed out. You know.
- Speaker:** Yeah.
- Vince:** I'm quite settled in the band, I mean.
- Speaker:** So, you started off with Depeche Mode, in Basildon, and you wrote three hits for them. You had an album, went into the top ten, and then you left the band. Why did you—why—when it was riding on a sort of tide of success, why did you peel off?
- [Music fades in.]*
- 00:05:53 Music Music **Vince:** Well, at the time, I just felt that the band wasn't going the direction that I'd have chosen to go in. You know?  
"Just Can't Get Enough" from the album *Speak & Spell* by Depeche Mode.
- 00:05:54 John Guest *[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]*  
So, Martin Gore has to step up and become the songwriter—for better or worse, I would say, because I don't think they would've reached the level of success, certainly that they got in southern California and probably globally, if Martin Gore hadn't been forced to say, "Okay, well, somebody has to do this." *[Laughs.]* You know? And so—but the place he takes it, it takes him a while to get there. The album after this one? You hear the sound of a band with no direction. Right? They don't know what to do, but they have the hardware. Right? And I'm very fascinated by that. I mean, it's really—narratively, it's extremely fascinating. And then, it must feel

to them, I would imagine to this day, like a sort of Cinderella story. Like, not only did we recover from that, we got so big, Vince could never have guessed at it. You know?  
*[Volume increases.]*

00:06:36 Music Music  
*I just can't get enough  
 I just can't get enough  
 I just can't get enough*

00:06:41 John Guest  
*[Music fades out.]*  
 So, the first album is a synth pop record. Right? Now, synth pop I think—as a term—isn't as narrow as it was then. Right? The Human League are a synth pop band. Right? Depeche Mode is maybe, possibly the first synth rock band. I don't know who the first one was to say—besides Kraftwerk, who are laying the ground for this but are not pop, right? Really, Vince Clarke's one of the first guys to go, "We can take this technology. We don't need a drummer. Right? We're gonna do it with the Linn or the Oberheim or whatever and it'll all be sequenced."  
*[Music fades in.]*  
 And it's remarkable to see them performing in early clips from this era, because you can tell nobody really—you know, people have lip synced without drummers and stuff, but you can—they're trying to sort of sell this image of a band where everybody is behind a keyboard. Right? To see this as unusual, you really have to divest yourself of the trappings of the modern world, because it's now very normal to see a rock band who have laptops onstage.  
 "New Life (Live)" from the album *Speak & Spell* by Depeche Mode.

00:07:33 Music Music  
*Yeah!*

00:07:48 John Guest  
*[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]*  
 So, then Depeche Mode had a very charismatic lead in Dave Gahan. One of the first things a ex-girlfriend told me about him, 'cause I was very anti Depeche Mode in high school. I was like, "I don't care about this kind of music." And she said, "Oh yeah, but he's an amazing dancer." *[Laughs.]* And it's true. He really has moves. He believes in and feels this music. Right? And he also—he's not the lyricist. He's the guy—and I'm fascinated by that. 'Cause I'm a singer-songwriter, right? And he's the guy who's like, "Yeah, give me the song and I will sell it. I will put it out there."  
 And he's not—he doesn't have a really broad range, but he has a skillset of putting these lyrics over.  
*[Music fades in.]*  
 Which—the thing is—on *Speak & Spell*, they're kind of clever. Right? After *Speak & Spell*, it takes them a long time to really aspire even to the condition of clever. There's some pretty ham-fisted stuff in the future for old Dave, after this record. *[Chuckles.]* You know. I mean, "Personal Jesus", is a gigantic, global hit. Right?

00:08:42	Music	Music	<p>“Personal Jesus” from the album <i>Die internationalen Top Hits aus den Hitparaden 1989 Extra</i> by Depeche Mode.</p> <p><i>Your own personal Jesus Someone to hear your prayers</i></p> <p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i></p>
00:08:50	John	Guest	<p>But I’m kind of obsessed with how the lyrics—how it’s clear that a person who didn’t intend to be writing lyrics, in Martin Gore, is like, “Well, I gotta do that, now.”</p> <p>Oh! And here’s the—here’s the other thing. One thing about this record that makes me wish I had made it is the sequence. Right? I am absolutely—I can’t prove this, right? And I could be wrong, because I know record labels in those days often exerted a very strong influence over album sequencing. And to this day, some of them try—greater or lesser. In my own life, I am the guy who decides the sequence. And then people do argue with me about it, and often we come to an agreement.</p> <p>I always wanna save stuff for the back nine. Right? I want—I want something on side two to pop so hard—right?—that people go, “Wow! You really had a lot of faith in your record to not put that one in the first four.” Because most people never hear any songs after the fourth song on an album. You’re gonna hear the first four and you won’t dig any further. Well, Depeche Mode saves “Dreaming of Me”—an utter masterpiece, one of the best songs of the record, two or three best songs—for the <u>last</u> one.</p>
00:09:52	Music	Music	<p>“Dreaming of Me” from the album <i>Speak &amp; Spell</i> by Depeche Mode.</p> <p><i>Light switch, man switch</i></p> <p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i></p>
00:10:11	John	Guest	<p>I mean, that’s like the greatest, most visionary thing to me, to put “Dreaming of Me”—such a catchy, amazing, little tune—and to save it all the way for the end. Just incredible.</p>
00:10:20	Music	Music	<p><i>[Volume increases.]</i></p> <p><i>Dancing with a distant friend</i></p> <p><i>Filming and screening I picture the scene Filming and dreaming Dreaming of me</i></p> <p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i></p>
00:10:35	John	Guest	<p>The other thing is like they made this record knowing full well that nobody was gonna know what to do with them. You know? It’s like the—how to present a band like this isn’t something that the industry is ready to really do.</p>
00:10:49	Music	Music	<p><i>[Volume increases.]</i></p> <p><i>So we left, understanding Clean cut, so we’re sounding fast Talked of sad, I talked of war</i></p>

*I laughed and climbed the rising cast*

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

00:11:04 John Guest

I can't even imagine having that kind of confidence in what you're making. Possibly the only album you get to make. Every time you make your first album, the one time you make your first album, there is a strong possibility that that is the last the world will ever hear of you. Right? But I guess it speaks to why you would say, "Well, then I'm going to sequence it the way I like," instead of worrying about what other people want.

So, the first time I heard the record is a long story. And I'm certain I heard some of the hits from it in high school. I know that I did. "Just Can't Get Enough" was everywhere. I probably would've heard "New Life" and "Dreaming of Me". But I didn't actually hear the record itself until many years later, when we were making a record in Nashville.

00:12:00 Music Music

"Shelved" from the album *Goths* by The Mountain Goats.

*I wanna ride the hydraulics*

*Lit up like the North Star*

*I wanna wallow in the spoils*

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

00:12:09 John Guest

What happened was this. In 2016 or '17, I'm in Nashville—a studio called Blackbird. If you've never been to Blackbird or seen pictures of it, they have multiple studios. They have every microphone you've ever wanted to see, and they have 12 copies of every one. But yeah, I mean, they just had everything. Amazing, very comprehensive studio. And one they have is a mixing room, a 5.1 mixing room. If people don't know what this is, this is where you mix for Dolby. Right? You mix for movies. And on day five or six of our session there, one of the engineers—and I hope I'm not talking out of school, 'cause I'm not sure if he was supposed to do this or not—says, "Hey, if you guys are done for the night, if you wanted to go listen to music in the 5.1 room—" You know, you seldom get the opportunity to hear music in that state.

And so, we went in there and we listened to "Gold Dust Woman". Right? Which is—you know—a legendary feat of engineering. And also, the person who had been remixing Michael Jackson's "Thriller" had been doing that work when Jackson died. So, I had this great experience of listening to that and a thing or two more in the 5.1 room. And I said, "When we go back, I'm gonna buy some 5.1 stuff so I can listen to it in that room when we go back." Right? And I got The Pretenders, and I got Hall & Oates, and I got Depeche Mode, 'cause it was one of the ones that was there. I said, "Oh, that probably will sound really cool." Right? And it did. But the thing that happened was when I came home, my son, Roman—who was probably five at the time, right?—he's a music fiend. He loves to listen to music and get super into it and ask questions about it and stuff.

*[Music fades in.]*

00:13:50	Music	Music	<p>So, I threw it into the stereo. And it just—bang! It resounded with him, profoundly, to a point where it was all he wanted to hear, every single day.</p> <p>“Photographic” from the album <i>Speak &amp; Spell</i> by Depeche Mode.</p> <p><i>A white house, a white room</i>  <i>The program of today</i>  <i>Lights on, switch on</i>  <i>Your eyes are far away</i></p>
00:14:04	John	Guest	<p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i></p> <p>So, I wind up hearing <i>Speak &amp; Spell</i> every day for about three months. Right? And I got really interested! I was like, you know—I never really had dug into this music, and these are really good hooks. And so, I got real curious and so did Roman. Right? And this is an ongoing project with us, is we’re going through the discography.</p>
00:14:20	Music	Music	<p><i>[Volume increases.]</i></p> <p><i>I take pictures</i>  <i>Photographic pictures</i></p> <p><i>Bright light, dark room</i></p>
00:14:37	John	Guest	<p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i></p> <p>So, yeah. So, that was—that’s my experience with it, is like through the accident of wanting to listen to something in 5.1 and then of my son getting into the record, I became fascinated by it.</p>
00:14:46	Music	Music	<p><i>[Volume increases.]</i></p> <p><i>I said I’d write a letter</i>  <i>But I never got the time</i>  <i>And looking to the day</i>  <i>I mesmerize the light</i></p> <p><i>The years I spend just thinking</i></p>
00:15:02	John	Guest	<p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]</i></p> <p>The question on the table was whether I am in fact a Depeche Mode fan. And it’s a complicated question, because I mean, I would say yes, I am. But I come at it from a sideways angle, because—you know—I’m pretty critical of other lyricists and I don’t think that’s strictly territorial. I think what I do is kind of in a—you know, a singer-songwriter, poet mode. Right? Whereas, as I say, when Gore’s learning to write lyrics, you can hear him learning on the fly. It’s like he’s figuring out how to do this thing that wasn’t what he was planning on doing when he took the gig. Right? And so, there’s a lot of fairly ham-fisted stuff that goes on. And you know—but for me, the humanity of it—and there’s an irony in this, because synth pop, when it was new, the knock on it for all the rock people was like, <i>[gruffly]</i> “Oh, this is music played by robots. There’s no <u>soul</u> in it.” These sorts of very phoned in, and if you scratched them they’re actually—there’s often a lot of homophobia underneath it and stuff like that that, you know, the music isn’t <u>hard</u> enough or whatever. You know?</p>

But there were all these rock reaction to the rise of the synthesizer. It was—it was—and this was a very prevalent discourse. And one of them was that it was cold music. I used to always hear people use it—they still use these in criticisms: cold, icy, glacial. All these sorts of words to describe synthesizers. These are meaningless words. [Chuckles.] I was like—when somebody uses “glacial” to describe anything but the tempo, like my radar goes up. It’s like, “What are you really talking about? I don’t know what you’re talking about.” You know? And it did take them a while to manage to put it across. It was like—it was a pretty gutsy thing to do in those days, to make a record that was like, “No, we don’t have a drummer. There are no guitar solos.” You know. It sits in its own pocket that way. And also, the thing is, melodically, Clarke—that guy [chuckles], that guy’s really good.

00:16:39 Music Music

“I Sometimes Wish I Was Dead” from the album *Speak & Spell* by Depeche Mode.

*New sound, all around, you can hear it too*

00:16:50 John Guest

[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.] So, it’s because it’s—the boldness I’m talking about in Depeche Mode, of saying, “Well, look, we’re gonna be a pop band that’s just synthesizers.” That’s enviable. You know. I know it’s brave because of my own reaction to it when I was a kid was like, “What are you even kidding? Where’s your guitarist? Where’s—this is garbage.” You know? [Laughs.] So, I was like—and everything’s sort of in the middle, nobody really raises their voice as much and the 808 handclaps and stuff, this was not my thing at all. And it was really brave!

00:17:23 Jesse Host

John Darnielle on the thing he wishes he made, *Speak & Spell* by Depeche Mode. John’s third novel is out now. It’s called *Devil House*. Honestly, it is kind of outrageous that he is so gifted a songwriter and so gifted a novelist. [Laughs.] It really bothers me, to be honest. He’s a nice guy, too. And I—look, I’m not the only one who says these things. Everybody says it about John Darnielle.

00:18:01 Music Music

John’s setting out on a book tour right now. We’ll have a link to dates on the *Bullseye* page, at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org). [Volume increases.]

*You say this is from above  
And I say this is modern love*

00:18:14 Music Transition  
00:18:16 Jesse Host

[Music fades out.] Upbeat, percussive synth with light vocalizations. That’s the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created out of the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where I was lucky enough to get a visit from the head honcho over there at York Lock & Key. He was nice enough to rebuild the barrel lock on my treasure cabinet. He said he needed to, uh, machine a new... hook? Barb, maybe? He couldn’t get parts for the lock, and he couldn’t get a one-to-one replacement. Anyway. The best part was at the end he said, “Aw, thanks for having me do this. It was really fun.” He’s a nice 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. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation" recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it with us. I know you've probably heard me say that 1000 times, but man, The Go! Team are so great. Go check out their records.

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

00:19:41    Promo            Promo

**Speaker:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*[Music fades out.]*