

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.
00:00:14	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.
00:00:21	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Kate Berlant and John Early are comedians and performers. Kate has appeared in movies like <i>Sorry to Bother You</i> and <i>Once Upon a Time in Hollywood</i> . John has appeared on TV shows like <i>Search Party</i> , <i>30 Rock</i> , and <i>The Afterparty</i> . They’ve also been best friends and collaborators for over a decade. They’ve done sketches on YouTube and other platforms, live performances on TV and around the country. When John and Kate perform onstage together, it’s really something. There is a frenetic, unhinged energy. They tend to veer between intense platonic love and seething contempt thinly masked with backhanded compliments and probing questions.

Their TV sketches are equally unhinged—though, in a slightly different way. The settings are usually pretty grounded. The stakes aren’t too high. But they almost always insert a little bit of surreality into the mundane: a meet cute at a farmers’ market where both Kate and John have enormous face tattoos. An awkward “who gets the check” moment where you pay the bill with hot, melted caramel sauce. Their newest project combines both of those practices into one very, very funny special. It’s called *Would It Kill You to Laugh*, and it comes out this week on Peacock. Here’s the premise.

John Early and Kate Berlant play fictionalized versions of themselves. Decades ago, the two starred on a smash hit sitcom, called *He’s Gay, She’s Half-Jewish*. Shortly after the show wrapped, they had a very public falling out. Between the sketches in *Would It Kill You to Laugh*, Kate and John reunite for an interview with journalist Meredith Viera, and it becomes very clear that—while it’s been a while—the old wounds aren’t quite healed.

00:02:08	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:09	Clip	Clip	<b>Kate (<i>Would It Kill You to Laugh</i>):</b> I needed this. I think I’m actually now really looking around—

**Meredith:** Cathartic. Yeah, yeah.

**Kate:** It’s really cathartic.

**John:** Yeah. *[Sighs.]*

**Kate:** I’m getting a little dizzy.

**Meredith:** Oh, jeez.

**Kate:** I’m fine.

**John:** Okay. Okay.

**Kate:** I'm gonna move through it. But I'm getting a little dizzy.

**Meredith:** And for you, John? Same feelings?

**John:** Uuuh. Uum.

**Meredith:** I'm sorry.

**John:** *[Voice pinched.]* I feel really good.

**Kate:** We can't hear you, sweetie.

**John:** *[Strangled.]* I feel good.

**Kate:** You look—I'm looking at you. It's so strange, 'cause you look 12, but you also look 60. And it's—I love the way your—the shading and you finally found a foundation that matches.

**John:** You know, it's so funny. Obviously, I haven't seen you in years. *[Chuckles.]*

**Kate:** Yeah, yeah. I know. Years! Years! Yeah, years!

**John:** Um, you know, I haven't seen you in person. *[Beat.]* Um. I haven't seen you in person, but I also haven't seen you just kind of reflected anywhere in the culture. So, what have—what have you been up to?

**Kate:** I've been really good. I've been busy. I've been in New York doing theatre. Which is—

**John:** AWWWWWW!  
Music swells and fades.

00:02:58 Sound Effect Transition

00:02:59 Jesse Host

*[They laugh.]*

00:03:05 Kate Berlant Guest

John Early, Kate Berlant, thanks for coming on *Bullseye*. Thanks for having us!

00:03:06 John Early Guest

Thank you for having us.

00:03:07 Jesse Host

Congratulations on the special; it's so funny. I like that clip, really. I did not pick that clip. But it really illustrates some real hallmarks of the Berlant-Early relationship, including insulting funny voice, false illness.

*[They laugh and John agrees.]*

Like, there's a real laundry list of stuff you seem to enjoy doing together.

*[They agree.]*

What was the—what was like the first thing that you discovered yourselves doing together that you were like, "This is what I enjoy in my life?"

00:03:40 John Guest That's a great question.

*[Kate agrees.]*

I mean, I think it would be this exact energy from the clip. Like, when we first became friends, we watched a—I showed Kate, if I may take credit.

00:03:56 Kate Guest You may! You may.

00:03:57 John Host Like, you know. You know, as you do in early friendships—early on in friendships in our modern era. You show each other YouTube videos. And I showed Kate this video of Suzanne Somers and—

00:04:12 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John & Kate:** Joyce DeWitt.

00:04:13 John Guest Reuniting after like maybe 30 years of not speaking to each other and having a very public falling out. And—

00:04:20 Kate Guest On *Three's Company*.

00:04:21 John Guest On *Three's Company*, yep. And it was like Suzanne Somers own kind of YouTube series, called *Café Mom*. And so, it was like—she was in full control over it, like in control of like the lighting. It was very much her.

00:04:33 Jesse Host Was it like a professionally produced situation?

*[They confirm.]*

00:04:37 John Guest She had some sort of talk show on YouTube and used that as a platform to have this reuniting.

00:04:44 Kate Guest To invite Joyce on.

00:04:45 John Guest Yeah. And we just—there was just something in that dynamic that I think really spoke to the overlap in our sensibility—sensibilities, plural. And I don't know, I think we just—that video kind of ignited a certain kind of like tense kind of smiley, kind of undercut-y like thing.

00:05:08 Kate Guest Yeah. And they were—in that clip, it's pretty amazing. They're both really trying to—it's this subtle competition over who is kindest and who is the most—who's moved on.

*[John and Jesse.]*

00:05:21 John Guest It's the past. You know. But they're like—

00:05:22 Kate Guest *[Saccharinely.]* “Yeeeah.”

00:05:24 John Guest Yeah, and it's wacky. *[Laughs.]*

00:05:28 Kate Guest It's wackadoo. And it's very layered. It's very, very layered.

Yeah, and I think John and I—that's kind of the first—the thing that brought us together... is and remains that kind of obsession of those layered moments in social nicety.

*[John agrees.]*

And the subtext that we refuse to acknowledge.

*[John laughs.]*

00:05:45 Jesse Host I do sometimes worry, watching your work together. I think it's so funny, and sometimes I worry that you know that so well that you might be bad people. Like, I don't like think that, but I—

*[They affirm.]*

It gives me that concern.

00:06:02 Kate Guest *[They agree.]*  
Everyone always is so shocked by how sweet I am.

00:06:04 John Guest *[Jesse laughs.]*  
I know.  
00:06:05 Kate Guest You're meeting me right now, Jesse. I need a tuna melt; I'm a little hungry. I should've had the tuna melt before the interview.

00:06:09 John Guest *[They agree.]*  
Yeah, it's good for that for that fuel.  
00:06:11 Kate Guest But I have the tuna melt kind of in this—in the near future. And I'm gonna—even now, you feel the energy lifting, just talking about the tuna melt.

00:06:16 John Guest Yeah, yeah, talking about the tuna melt.  
00:06:17 Kate Guest I'm very meal-oriented in that way. So, just knowing the tuna melt is near, I will let the energy bubble to the surface.

00:06:23 John Guest And I brought pastries for all the kind of technicians today, and their kids.

00:06:28 Kate Guest *[Pleasantly.]* And that's a lie!  
00:06:29 John Guest That's a lie.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

Very sweet. No, we're not bad people, but I do think we have—I do think we enjoy the kind of freedom of playing bad people. You know?

*[Kate agrees.]*

00:06:41 Kate Guest Like, there's something very—  
00:06:44 John Guest 'Cause we're not rude. We don't have the bravery to be rude.  
No, exactly, exactly! There's something very liberating about being just openly rude.

00:06:51 Jesse Host *[Laughing.]* What—what was the first show that the two of you did together?

00:06:56 John Guest Live show?

*[Jesse confirms.]*

00:06:59 Crosstalk Crosstalk We did a—  
00:07:00 Kate Guest **John & Kate:** Union Hall.  
00:07:01 John Guest Sold it out.  
00:07:02 Kate Guest Sold it out.  
It's like 40 seats.

*[They laugh.]*

00:07:15 John Guest It's more. But yeah, we sold it out. That's not what I meant to repeat. *[Laughs.]* We, you know, did a show at Union Hall where it began with a wedding—or began with us getting married. And actually, I had a bouquet of kale.  
She literally walked down the aisle with a bouquet of kale. It started with me onstage in a suit, and like I—

00:07:21 Kate Guest Like straight guy.  
00:07:22 John Guest Yeah, straight guy like trying not to cry. And then, yeah. Kate came down in a wedding dress and a bouquet of kale, and we did like 33

like insane sketches, and it was like probably—it was like a very bloated kind of like two-hour show. *[Laughs.]*

*[Kate agrees.]*

00:07:42 Jesse Host But it was so—it was so exciting.  
00:07:44 John Guest What was exciting about it?  
Well, honestly, it was exciting—frankly—that it was sold out. Like, I think that Kate and I like—you know, we had a very—I mean, literally, day one of our friendship, we were very—verbalized that we knew we would be working together, that it was like a very—it was like—and not just like, “Let’s collaborate.” It was like, “Oh, this is a partnership.”  
00:08:04 Kate Guest This is huge. Yeah. Yeah.  
00:08:05 John Guest *[Laughing.]* Yeah, this is huge is a common refrain.  
00:08:07 Jesse Host Where were you? What was the—what was the context for it?  
Where were you?  
00:08:11 Kate Guest We were on the set of a friend’s short film, and it was—there was like a room where the snacks were. And John and I started talking, and I was like instantly upset whenever somebody else would come in the room and we had to pivot the conversation to them and become sociable. And I’d be like, “Okay! You got your snack! Get out!”

*[John laughs.]*

And I really felt like I just wanted to talk to John. And we were just screaming laughing all day. And then we parted at like midnight at Grand Central Station. Why were we at Grand Central? We were. We were transferring.  
00:08:40 John Guest Because we were shooting near there. Yeah.  
00:08:42 Kate Guest To the six.  
00:08:43 John Guest To the six.  
00:08:45 Kate Guest Oh, and *On the 6*—J-Lo’s album, also.  
And it was midnight, and we were parting. And then we texted. I got back to my apartment, and we texted until like four AM. And I remember John was like, “If I don’t see you in two days, I’ll kill myself.”  
00:08:54 John Guest I think I said, “I’ll kill myself in public.” *[Chuckles.]*  
00:08:56 Kate Guest Oh, yeah, yeah. And then we just—  
00:08:59 John Guest And then, I remember Kate—I mean, not to brag, but you were like, “I’m watching your YouTube videos and I’m breathless.”

*[Jesse cackles.]*

00:09:04 Kate Guest Oh my god, did I say that? *[Laughs.]*  
00:09:06 John Guest You said “breathless”. I was like *[makes a strangled, excited sound]*. It was really—it was very romantic.

*[Kate agrees.]*

00:09:11 Jesse Host Is there a sketch that you did in that first stage show at Union Hall that you’re still proud of?  
00:09:16 Kate Guest No recollection, basically.  
00:09:17 John Guest We kissed—remember? We kissed.  
00:09:18 Kate Guest Oh yeah! Wait, we did?!  
00:09:19 John Guest Which we’ve like never done since.

00:09:20 Kate Guest Woah.  
00:09:21 John Guest I guess we did in the Bieber sketch that didn't make it. But we—the—we kissed. Remember? I played your mother.  
00:09:29 Kate Guest Oh! This is—wait, this is amazing. And we should actually shoot that for real.  
00:09:32 John Guest We should definitely do this. Kate played my daughter. And she was like—were you reading?  
00:09:37 Kate Guest No, I was brushing my hair in a vanity mirror—pretending to brush my hair before bed.  
00:09:41 John Guest Yeah, and I was her like—you know, a severe kind of period mother character.  
00:09:45 Kate Guest Like, pacing behind me and being like—  
00:09:47 John Guest “You [censored].”  
00:09:48 Kate Guest Yeah, like calling me a [censored]. And I was like, “Please, mother!” And like brushing my hair. And then you grabbed me and kissed me.  
00:09:55 John Guest Yeah. Like, grabbed her by the face. And you were putting on lipstick, and we like—  
00:09:59 Kate Guest You—and then you grabbed me—yeah. It's pretty amazing.  
00:10:01 John Guest Yeah. And it was like—it was unwritten, I would say.

*[Kate agrees with a laugh.]*

00:10:11 Kate Guest It was just like wild improvised genre parody. We should do it.  
00:10:14 John Guest Doing that—doing like a Vermeer, like making it really—  
Yes, fully period.

*[Kate confirms.]*

00:10:17 Kate Guest M'kay. Well.  
00:10:18 John Guest Great. See you in season two.  
00:10:20 Jesse Host And we'll credit you, Jesse!  
Thank you. I would prefer executive producer, but I'll take co-executive producer if it comes to it.

*[They agree playfully.]*

Josh Lindgren is my agent. You can just give him a call. CAA.

00:10:39 John Guest *[Chuckles.]* So, the two of you have been working together ever since. And being a comedy duo isn't the most—  
Chic.

*[They chuckle.]*

00:10:41 Jesse Host Yeah, it's not like the most—the easiest or most—  
00:10:43 John Guest It's outre.  
00:10:44 Jesse Host Yeah, remunerative lane. You know what I mean? Like, there's just not—I mean, as with sketch comedy, like there's only so many places you can do that.

*[John agrees.]*

00:11:00 Kate Guest And it's twice as expensive as doing something by yourself. You know? Like, going on tour or something like that.  
00:11:02 John Guest Unless you share a hotel bed, like we do.  
Yes, exactly.

00:11:03 Jesse Host Aw, that's really sweet.  
00:11:04 John Guest On our—when we tour, we share a bed.  
00:11:06 Jesse Host They have hotel rooms with two beds in them.  
00:11:08 Kate Guest We've gotten those too. But why? You know.

*[They laugh.]*

00:11:12 John Guest We've had to beds, yeah.  
00:11:13 Kate Guest No, we have had two beds, but rarely.  
But sometimes it's one! Yeah.

*[They laugh.]*

00:11:17 John Guest Yeah, no, honestly, we—I've always been very like—the duo, the comedy duo I think is—there's something very kind of sweet and old school about it. And that's also very sad that that's old school. And I think that's only old school a result of like—  
00:11:37 Kate Guest Rugged individualism?  
00:11:38 John Guest It's—yeah! It's literally—it's the way rugged individualism has now like kind of manifested through social media. You know? I don't think there's any sort of actual public like change like in like desire.

*[Kate echoes the word.]*

I don't think the public's like, "Down with duos! Like, we want individuals now." I just think it's that social media has become so prevalent, obviously. Everyone has their little platform, and for some reason—I mean, it's very clear why. They want us all atomized and alienated, so we can—you know.  
00:12:13 Kate Guest Rip each other to shreds. Yeah.  
00:12:14 John Guest *[Chuckling.]* Yeah, exactly, so that we can't—you know—come together and overthrow the ruling class. But like I do think there's something bizarre about the fact that—imagine if Kate and I had a shared Instagram. That would be corny. Why, though?

*[Kate agrees several times.]*

Because honestly, it would be crass, because it would be like we were trying to kind of like sell and market our duo-ship. But anyway, while we were shooting this special—because it's been a long time since Kate and I have been given the opportunity to make something on a big platform, while we were shooting it, there were times when I would be like *[laughing]* so moved. Where I would be like, "Kate, I like—I really believe in the duo. Like, this is so special. Like, this is so important right now." Everyone is like screaming on their phones—you know. And I understand why they're screaming. I get it! You know, but it's like—it's really—I think it's—there is something profound right now, about like insisting on something that isn't maybe as clearly—that doesn't snugly fit in with what's seen as marketable.

Like, we love being a duo. We love having long sketches that can breathe and where like things can happen subtextually, where they're not spelled out. You know, like I think that's... I think it's important to insist on that, even as the venues for that keep like shrinking and dying.

00:13:32	Jesse	Host	More of my interview with John Early and Kate Berlant after a quick break. Stay with us. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.
00:13:42	Music	Transition	Relaxed synth with a steady beat.
00:13:46	Jesse	Host	It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, I am talking with the comedians Kate Berlant and John Early. Kate is a standup comic and actor who has appeared in <i>Tuca &amp; Birdie</i> , <i>Space Force</i> , and more. John is an actor who's had roles on <i>Search Party</i> and <i>Los Espookys</i> . The two have been working together as a comedy duo for over a decade, and they are very good at it. They have a brand-new special that debuts this week on Peacock, called <i>Would It Kill You to Laugh</i> . Let's get back into our conversation.
			Let's play a little bit from my guests—Kate Berlant and John Early's—new special, which is called <i>Would It Kill You to Laugh</i> . And this is the two of them in a book club. They have not read the book, 'cause they heard it's a pretty chill book club. It turns out to be a pretty not chill book club. And so, they are—they are trying to play along.
00:14:39	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:14:40	Clip	Clip	<b>Kate:</b> Loved it. Completely. Loved it completely!
			<b>John:</b> Loved it. Loved it in a way where I'm just like, "I loved it. Period."
			<b>Speaker 1:</b> What did you love about it, Kate?
			<b>Kate:</b> You know what? You know what? You know what? You know what? I think that people who look like me have had the stage for so long. The microphone for so long. Right? I just kind of feel like as a way to rectify like the sins of my ancestors—by the way, I hate you guys! I reeeally do! Um. I'm gonna give the floor to someone else.
			<b>Speaker 1:</b> Uh, John do you have any thoughts that you wanna share? I mean, any impressions you have are welcome here.
			<b>John:</b> Well, I'm gay. <i>[Beat.]</i> I'm gay. And I just wanna get right out in front of that. You know? 'Cause I have to wake up to that every morning. It's not just a hat that I can take off.
			<b>Speaker 2:</b> What did you think of the book?
			<b>John:</b> Where were you guys when you finished it? I'll start. Um, I remember being in my bedroom and getting to the end and going <i>[sighs exaggeratedly]</i> .
00:15:35	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:15:36	Kate	Guest	<i>[They laugh.]</i>
00:15:40	John	Guest	So fun to hear it chopped up and—
00:15:41	Kate	Guest	Chopped and screwed.
00:15:42	Jesse	Host	In the ears. Yeah.
			The two of you often seem to be having a contest when you're doing a sketch.
			<i>[They agree.]</i>

Like, a lot of sketches have a straight character, joke character. The two of you seem to do a lot of goading-related sketches.

00:15:57 John Guest Yes. What does goading mean, if I were a person who didn't know?  
00:16:00 Jesse Host Like, poking each other. Like, trying to escalate.

*[They agree.]*

00:16:03 Kate Guest We slip into competition energy very quickly.  
00:16:06 John Guest Yeah. But what I like about book club is like we are kind of—we are on the same time.  
00:16:10 Kate Guest We're a united front. We both didn't read it. Yeah.

*[They laugh.]*

00:16:16 John Guest Yeah.  
00:16:20 Kate Guest Yeah. And I think we—that was why we did that sketch. We were like, "What's something where we're not kind of like—" At each other's throats. Yeah.

*[They laugh.]*

00:16:22 Jesse Host You also have a lot of comedy where you name your identity categories.

*[They confirm.]*

That—I mean, like when it comes to things that might be seen as Millennial in their nature, I think struggling with trying to figure out how to relate to your identity category is—or categories—is one of them.

00:16:42 John Guest Absolutely. How to exploit it. Hyphenize it.  
00:16:46 Jesse Host I've probably seen—  
00:16:47 John Guest Profit off of it.  
00:16:48 Jesse Host —eight bits where, John, you've announced that you're gay.  
*[Laughs.]*  
00:16:51 John Guest It's my—it's the oldest trick in the—one time, my mom was like, "You say you're gay a lot."

*[They chuckle.]*

00:16:56 Kate Guest I was like yeeeah.  
Well, it's one of the funniest things you do just in conversation. Or like, with just like—I don't even—

*[John agrees.]*

Like, we'll be at a restaurant, and John will be like, "Sorry. I'm gay." And then order something. You'll like go back on your order and blame it—

00:17:09 John Guest And blame it on my homosexuality.  
00:17:10 Kate Guest Blame the moment on the fact that you're gay.

*[They chuckle.]*

00:17:16 Jesse Host It's so funny.  
What do those identity categories actually, practically mean to you, do you think?

00:17:22	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	<b>Kate:</b> It's my culture.
			<b>John:</b> Nothing. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:17:25	Kate	Guest	<b>Kate:</b> Yeah, it's everything. <i>[Laughs.]</i> Yeah, I mean, we have another joke in the special that we're on a sitcom called <i>He's Gay, She's Half-Jewish</i> . Which is another sort of... the joke of my proclaiming being half-Jewish. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> And what that could possibly mean. Even though, you know, actually I'd be fully Jewish. Anyway, it's a long—it's a long story. We won't get into it.
00:17:47	John	Guest	We won't get into that. We don't—yeah.
00:17:49	Kate	Guest	But what do they actually mean? Well, I think as John said before, just these categories that can become—you know—weaponized or kind of used as some kind of ammo to—or used in some way to be perceived as smart or having something to say.
			<i>[John agrees.]</i>
			Or some angle, some experience, and kind of you're hyperaware of your own experience next to other people's.
00:18:13	John	Guest	Yeah, as if there's some sort of—right.
00:18:17	Kate	Guest	And being very hyperconscious about—you know—saying the right thing and...
00:18:21	John	Guest	As if there's a monolithic experience for any identity group.
			<i>[Kate agrees.]</i>
			Yeah. It's—I think it—yeah. I think that is just so—I mean, that is not something we even really planned on doing in this special.
			<i>[Kate confirms.]</i>
			We—like, the book club sketch is one of the more improvised sketches. And <i>He's Gay, She's Half-Jewish</i> just like flew out of Kate's mouth.
00:18:41	Kate	Guest	It was like a stupid joke.
00:18:42	John	Guest	Yeah. And we were like, "What should the sitcom be called?" <i>[Chuckles.]</i> You know? I think it was like "He's Gay, She's Jewish". And then later, we changed it to half-Jewish.
00:18:47	Kate	Guest	Which is funnier. Yeah. But—
00:18:49	John	Guest	But yeah. So, we don't—we come by these—or we came by this particular theme, I think, unintentionally. But I do think we are clearly on some level absorbing it from the zeitgeist. There's a—that's really in the air. You know? And then—
00:19:01	Kate	Guest	Yeah, yeah. The need to identify yourself clearly so you can be more directly advertised to.
			<i>[John giggles and agrees.]</i>
00:19:08	Jesse	Host	I remember very vividly an instance in college where I was sitting in the dining hall with my two best buds, who were the co-hosts of this show at the time. And we were sitting with this girl named Rebecca, who I <u>really</u> liked and admired. Really cool, smart lady. And she said, "It's really hard to sit with you guys."

And I said, “Why’s that, Rebecca?” And like, “Cause you’re the greatest! Why—?”

00:19:39 John Guest  
00:19:41 Kate Guest

And she said, “I can’t tell if you’re joking or when you’re joking.”  
Mm. We get that. For sure.  
I struggle with that, because I’m so serious.

*[They chuckle.]*

00:19:46 Jesse Host

But you know, yeah.  
But you so comfortably slip into your either dumb or insincere or passive aggressive characters in casual conversation.

00:19:56 Kate Guest  
00:19:59 John Guest

*[John agrees.]*

No, you’re totally correct. Yeah. I can—I can take it.  
Or yeah, when we slip into those things, they’re not—it’s often very small. And like we had trouble with our editor, Sophie—one of our editors on this. She was like, “You guys are always—” She was like—we would just, you know—

00:20:12 Kate Guest  
00:20:13 John Guest

Be talking?  
Or we’d have jokes. We’d do like what—to us, what felt like very clear jokes.

*[Kate affirms.]*

Just like stuff like—you know, just like, “Hey, Sophie, like do you—”  
Like, we were editing at my house—you know, and it was just stuff like, “Do you—if you don’t mind not using the bathroom.” You know, stuff like that. Like—and she would just be like, “Oh! I’m sorry!”

And you’re like, “Oh no! No! Use the bathroom!”

*[Kate agrees with a laugh.]*

00:20:41 Jesse Host

So, that does happen a lot, I think. And we’re sorry for it, ‘cause we really don’t mean to.  
The special is really intensely aesthetic.

*[Kate “ooh”s.]*

00:21:12 John Guest

In a way that comedy isn’t often, on video. You know, like usually on film, comedy is just in the middle, and you just catch the funny things that people say or the funny faces they make or whatever. That must have been—I saw that your director also had a cowriting credit on the show. Did you like work on the visual aspects as you were writing? Like, were you trying to think of them as one thing?  
I—always.

*[Kate agrees.]*

I mean, I think we’re always—like, part of the joke is always the kind of genre or the tone or the look of it. I think we’re—Kate, Andy, and I—are all very aesthetically driven. And you know, we certainly don’t wanna do it—we’re never trying to make things, you know, like aesthetically like oppressive.

00:21:36 Kate Guest I know we sort of like—we're very sensitive to that. We want things to be beautiful and lush and exciting, but also the most important thing to us is that it's funny.

*[John agrees.]*

00:21:46 John Guest And we don't wanna—you know.  
00:21:47 Kate Guest We don't wanna take away from that.  
And be like, "Well, we have a lens flare. So."

*[They chuckle.]*

"Good luck criticizing this!" Yeah.

*[John cackles.]*

00:21:53 Jesse Host The special is directed by JJ Abrams. You should explain.  
00:21:56 Kate Guest Our director is Andrew DeYoung. So, yes.  
00:22:00 Jesse Host There is a really wonderful "who's gonna pay the bill" sketch in which you are both—I presume—straight dudes. Kate, you have a soul patch.

*[She affirms.]*

00:22:12 John Guest It's unbelievable. Real hair, right?  
00:22:15 Kate Guest I don't know.  
00:22:16 John Guest I think she laid real hair on your chin. It was all so fast.  
00:22:19 Kate Guest It was very fast.  
00:22:21 Jesse Host Like, uh, did it come on—you know, like a nylon—like a piece—like a false moustache? Or is it—

00:22:28 Kate Guest It's like a little piece that she—I don't even know! Yeah.  
00:22:30 John Guest Yeah, like a—yeah. A little lace front. Glued.  
00:22:32 Jesse Host It's just on skin?

*[They confirm.]*

00:22:38 Kate Guest Like someone who's had a portion of their head flayed?  
Possibly.  
00:22:39 John Guest Possibly, yeah. A cadaver. *[Chuckles.]*  
00:22:41 Kate Guest I don't know where the hair comes from. I just sign for it when they deliver it.  
00:22:45 Jesse Host What are the things that you think are interesting about straight dudeness? And I can take it.

*[Kate chuckles.]*

00:22:54 John Guest Oh yeah, well.  
00:22:55 Kate Guest We love our boys.  
00:22:56 John Guest We love our straight men. Yes. I think—  
00:22:59 Jesse Host Thank you. That sounded insincere, but I'll take it.  
00:23:01 John Guest It's totally real. It's totally sincere. Truly. I love a straight guy.  
00:23:02 Kate Guest We do! I think just like straight male friendship is fascinating to us. Or to me, 'cause it's like I have these intense, emotional, involved friendships. And I've always felt sad for straight men in my life that I know who maybe aren't able to have the emotional openness to like—

*[John agrees.]*

Like, I always think about myself just like openly weeping in front of my friends, and like falling on them and like being physically affectionate. And the way that straight men aren't allowed to do that.

00:23:33 John Guest I mean, we slept in the same bed for like two years, basically, in the beginning of our friendship.  
00:23:38 Kate Guest Totally. And so, something about two straight men trying to connect, but maybe there isn't that natural chemistry there to be friends.  
00:23:45 John Guest Yeah, or permission.  
00:23:46 Kate Guest But they just have to be—have lunch. Which, by the way, we can all—we've all experienced that. That goes beyond any—  
00:23:52 John Guest Yeah, like having that lunch.

*[Kate agrees with a chuckle.]*

00:23:55 Kate Guest Like, clinical catchup.  
Yeah. The clinical catchup, which we're obsessed with. But  
*[chuckles]...*  
00:24:00 Jesse Host Define the clinical catchup, please?  
00:24:02 John Guest Basically, the—  
00:24:03 Kate Guest Like, a joyless encounter of like two people. And maybe there's history there. Like, you feel like you—it's obligatory. You gotta meet up and go, "How were your last two years?"

*[John agrees.]*

00:24:13 John Guest But it's medical.  
And it's merely—*[laughs]*.  
00:24:15 Kate Guest Yeah, it's not—*[laughing]* it's not—yeah. It feels—  
00:24:19 Jesse Host Like filling out one of those forms when you have a new doctor?  
00:24:23 Kate Guest Yeah, it just feel enforced. It feels like suddenly like the state organized this coffee.

*[They snort with laughter.]*

00:24:36 John Guest There is no actual joy to be pulled from it. It's just like, "Who are you appeasing? Like your mother? The mayor?" Like it just doesn't—why are we doing this?  
Well, you just—it's a good opportunity to kind of lock in your narrative.  
00:24:40 Kate Guest Well said.  
00:24:41 John Guest That's like the most you get out of those lunches, is you're like—  
00:24:43 Crosstalk **Kate:** You've got your little speech.

00:24:47 John Guest **John:** "Well, I could kind of practice my little like story of my life." I'm like, "Things are good! They're good!" And I'm—you know, and I'm—  
00:24:50 Kate Guest "Took me a while to get here, but—" Yeah, no, true. It's a way to lock it in.  
00:24:56 Jesse Host That was like a cowboy voice, Kate.  
00:24:57 Kate Guest Was it?

*[They confirm.]*

00:24:59 John Guest Ooh.  
She's *[inaudible]*.

00:25:00	Kate	Guest	I have a western flare, today.
00:25:02	John	Guest	No, but we love those boys. And I have to say, like those boys—you know, were—in the script, were a vehicle for the end of the sketch, which was the caramel as payment. And—
00:25:15	Jesse	Host	We should say that there is a runner through the sketch that instead of money, hot caramel is used to pay bills, which is heated on like a little portable induction heater.
			<i>[They confirm.]</i>
00:25:30	John	Guest	In a little—like a little tin. Ladled. So, you have—ladled onto the check—directly onto the check. But that was kind of the point of the joke for us, was that. And then we didn't—
00:25:42	Jesse	Host	And why wouldn't you build the whole thing around that? <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:25:44	John	Guest	Exactly. And we were like—I think that was one of the—that was like a kind of set of characters that I was maybe privately where—we talked about it, about it being kind of like, “Does this feel a little flat? Like, we're just kind doing—”
00:25:56	Kate	Guest	Yeah, 'cause we're not interested in just being like, “Straight guuuys!” Like, meeeh!
00:25:59	John	Guest	Yeah, making fun of straight guys. We had no desire to do that.
00:26:00	Kate	Guest	It doesn't feel—yeah.
00:26:02	John	Guest	But like, once Kate had—not to be like that actor that talks <i>[in a weighty whisper]</i> , “When I put on the costume—”
00:26:08	Kate	Guest	No, but it's true. Yeah.
00:26:09	John	Guest	But really, when Kate had the soul patch and started doing it, I was like, “This is the most—this is like watching Robert Altman. This is like watching <i>Short Cuts</i> .
00:26:20	Kate	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> I love you.
00:26:21	John	Guest	I mean, I was shhhocked by what she was doing. And I also was like, “I don't have to do anything.” Like, I felt so free. I felt so relaxed for the first time since '82. Like, I just finally—like, when there's like any sort of ambiguity of like, “How am I gonna do this? Like I don't—what's my approach? What's my angle in, comedically?”
00:26:40	Kate	Guest	Which so often, we never discuss. Like, that was something where we just never—
00:26:41	John	Guest	Literally. Did not discuss.
00:26:43	Kate	Guest	And there was so—we had no time. We really had to just like throw the costume on, go. My hair was a crisis.
00:26:50	John	Guest	It was the end of the first day.
00:26:51	Kate	Guest	Greg Lennon is a genius and was like twisting my hair manically, like the—and we just <u>had</u> to shoot it.
00:26:57	John	Guest	The sun was going down.
00:26:58	Kate	Guest	But thank god—I think that just speaks to the trust of the friendship and the collaboration. It's just like—it just comes, somehow. Yeah.
00:27:06	John	Guest	Yeah. And I just really—I'm stunned by what Kate's doing in that sketch.
00:27:09	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:27:10	Clip	Clip	<i>[The muted bustle of a busy restaurant.]</i>

**Kate:** *[Kate speaks in a lower register at a relaxed pace.]* I told you we were doing like a lot of home renovation stuff.

**John:** We're actually doing some renovations, too.

**Kate:** Oh, no way.

**John:** Yeah, a buddy of mine is helping me out with some—you know that wall between the living room and the garage?

**Kate:** Yesss.

**John:** We had that knocked down.

**Kate:** Oh, so the garage is exposed to the living room.

**John:** Totally exposed. Yeah, yeah.

**Kate:** Oooh, no way. No way. You know that wall that separates the bedroom from the bathroom? Like the main—

**John:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Kate:** Yeah. We knocked that down.

**John:** Oh, amazing! Amazing.

**Kate:** Yeah. Yeah.

**John:** You know, my daughter's room at the top of the stairs?

**Kate:** Oh yeah, for sure.

**John:** There's that utility room next to it with the boiler, hot water heater.

**Kate:** Uuuuh—

**John:** But yeah, we had that wall knocked down.

**Kate:** Okay.

**John:** So, now the boiler's kind of in the room with my daughter as she sleeps.

**Kate:** Cool. No, the renovation stuff is like—you have to...  
Music swells and fades.

00:27:47 Sound Effect Transition

00:27:48 Jesse Host

Does the insincerity of your schtick ever get in the way of your actual intimacy?

00:27:54 Kate Guest

Never.

00:27:55 John Guest

No. No. We know how to drop it. Like, we—we know.

00:28:00 Kate Guest

Oh, and we drop it. I mean. *[Chuckles.]*

00:28:01 John Guest

We drop it. I mean, this morning.

*[They laugh.]*

We got in the car. We were like both so depressed.

*[Kate agrees with a laugh.]*

00:28:10 Jesse Host You know. And it's not hard for us to drop it.  
00:28:13 Kate Guest Do you still have mysteries about each other?  
Oooh! I mean, isn't everyone a mystery? I mean, absolutely. Yeah.

*[John agrees.]*

00:28:19 Jesse Host *[Beat.]* I...  
00:28:20 Kate Guest E.g.?  
Yeah. I mean, I think people are inherently mysterious, even when you really know someone, there's always more to uncover. Or else, I don't know, you just—what do you do? Throw in the towel. It's like if you get to the bottom, then...

00:28:32 Jesse Host What do you think John doesn't know about you?  
00:28:34 Kate Guest A loot.

*[They chuckle.]*

00:28:39 John Guest I hope he finds out. That's all I'm gonna say.  
*[Playfully.]* I'm ready to find out.

*[Kate laughs.]*

00:28:44 Kate Guest *[Whispering.]* God, you're gorgeous.  
00:28:46 John Guest No, John knows everything.  
Yeah. I do feel like we kind of know everything. And what we don't reveal is probably, on some level, felt. I mean, I would argue. I mean, I think that we I think are very sensitive to each other and kind of absorb even the subtextual. Like the stuff that doesn't get expressed, I feel like we do express it in some way and process it and—you know what I mean?  
00:29:04 Kate Guest I think what you don't know about me is 'cause I don't know it about myself. You—  
00:29:07 John Guest And vice versa.  
00:29:08 Kate Guest But you also know things about me I don't know about myself.  
00:29:11 John Guest And vice versa.

*[They laugh.]*

00:29:14 Jesse Host John, you mentioned you have a boyfriend. I don't know if you have a partner, Kate. But what is it like for your romantic partners to have this other intense intimacy?

00:29:26 John Guest *[Laughing.]* That's a really good question!  
00:29:27 Kate Guest I've been lucky that there's always an understanding that John and I—of the sanctity of our relationship and friendship, and that we need time alone, and that there is a closeness that we have that—I mean, we've joked about this, but like we do have a marriage. Like, very much.

00:29:45 John Guest Yeah, there's a kind of like—there's a commitment involved in our friendship.

*[Kate agrees.]*

And I think there's like a—always has been a sense of the future in our friendship. Like, there's always been like—we've literally, since

day one of our friendship, always had a plan for our 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. A joint 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, like at the Met.

00:30:02 Kate Guest We almost went—remember, ‘cause we wanted to do a *[laughs]*—we just had our ten-year anniversary.

00:30:06 John Guest May 5<sup>th</sup>, yeah.

00:30:07 Kate Guest And we wanted to do—we were like—well, we didn’t get to do a big ol’ party, ‘cause of covid and John’s back. But next year. Hey, look at me.

00:30:14 John Guest Next year. See you there.

00:30:16 Kate Guest Year 11. *[Laughs.]*

00:30:17 John Guest See you there. Yeah, we wanna do a 60<sup>th</sup>, too. A 10<sup>th</sup> and a 60<sup>th</sup>. But yeah, I agree. There’s always—everyone that I’ve been romantically involved with has come—it’s come kind of after this relationship has been very publicly established. *[Laughs.]*

*[Kate agrees.]*

So, they’re coming in with an understanding of like the primacy. And that’s part of all these—and I think we’ve had very—

00:30:43 Kate Guest It’s never been an issue, thank god.

00:30:44 John Guest It’s never been an issue. Our partners have been very respectful of the kind of—and loved it, I think, in a way too.

*[Kate agrees.]*

Yeah.

00:30:51 Jesse Host Even more with Kate Berlant and John Early still to come. When we return, we will talk about what it is like to dress as a beaver going through a TSA line. Turns out it is very uncomfortable. It’s *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

00:31:07 Promo Clip **Music:** Solemn string music.

**Narrator:** A man goes to the doctor and says that he’s depressed, and that life seems cruel. The doctor says, “Ah. The treatment is simple: the great clown, Pagliacci, is in town tonight. Go and see him and you will surely feel better.” The man bursts into tears and says, “But doctor, I am Pagliacci!”

*[The music swells emotionally.]*

“Ah, okay,” Says the doctor. “In which case, try listening to the *Beef and Dairy Network Podcast*.”

*[Air horns usher in smooth, upbeat music.]*

The *Beef and Dairy Network Podcast* is a multi-award-winning comedy podcast, and you can find it at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) or wherever you get your podcasts.

*[Music fades out.]*

00:31:46 Music Transition Relaxed synth with a steady beat.

00:31:51 Jesse Host It’s *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. I’m talking with Kate Berlant and John Early. Let’s get back into our conversation.

We talked about how intimate your relationship was from the beginning and how much your work right from the beginning had

			the tone of what you do now. But what's different about your relationship now and your work now?
00:32:15	John	Guest	I think that if I'm looking—I mean, if you think about like from <i>Paris</i> to <i>Would It Kill You to Laugh</i> , I just think there's a relaxing. You know. I think we're obviously—
00:32:24	Kate	Guest	We've had more experience.
00:32:25	John	Guest	We know when to deploy our kind of like vaudevillian like, "Honk, honk!" kind of thing that we will always like have in us and always use. You know?
			<i>[Kate agrees.]</i>
			But I do think—I mean, I actually think about <i>Paris</i> , and I think about the way that you were so relaxed to the point of falling asleep, like on camera. Like, she was in the bed—
00:32:45	Kate	Guest	I was, I believe—I was hungover. It was the day after Thanksgiving.
00:32:48	John	Guest	Yeah, we were both hungover.
00:32:49	Kate	Guest	And I was hungover and had a migraine. And so, I was on migraine medication. And I was like propping—like, in the video, I'm propping my head up a lot with my hand as I remember.
			<i>[John confirms.]</i>
00:32:58	Jesse	Host	We talking about a triptan here?
00:33:00	Kate	Guest	Yeah. Truxima, honey.
			<i>[John confirms.]</i>
			Sumatriptan.
00:33:05	Jesse	Host	Knocks me out, too.
00:33:06	Kate	Guest	I was like sooo dazed.
00:33:08	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:33:09	Clip	Clip	<b>Kate (<i>Paris</i>):</b> Do you miss it, um, more now or—ugh. I mean, stupid question. <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
			<b>John:</b> Ask it again. Try it again.
			<b>Kate:</b> Do you miss Paris?
			<b>John:</b> <u>Yesss!</u>
			<b>Kate:</b> Thank god you're coming over, because we can talk about this. Because I can't talk about it with other friends.
			<b>John:</b> I can't talk about it with other friends!
			<b>Kate:</b> People are scared.
			<b>John:</b> People here are scared! It's a fear-based culture! In Paris, it's a luxury-based culture.
			<b>Kate:</b> It's a fear-based culture in America.
00:33:27	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:33:29	John	Guest	But you've always been capable of like—I think you've always been capable of kind of just getting in a flow state, performance-wise.

And I'm a little—I mean, this is why I have back problems, is I'm a little more like *[nasally]* rigid and loud. And like—and so, I would say like I think both of us just like kind of trust it more. I mean, we've always trusted it, but there's just—something is—something's a little more—

Like, to me, when I watch this special, something feels like less forced, maybe.

00:33:53 Kate Guest  
00:33:55 John Guest

Yeah, yeah. It's a little more relaxed.

Yeah. Well, when I watch the whole thing, I feel like there is like a kind of like soft kind of conversational, kind of like languid, dreamy quality to it.

00:34:05 Kate Guest  
00:34:06 John Guest  
00:34:07 Jesse Host

Yeah. Great.

That's nice. Yeah. *[Chuckles.]*

There's a sketch in the show where the two of you are parents with a kid in an airport. And you're beavers.

*[Kate giggles and confirms.]*

00:34:23 Sound Effect Transition  
00:34:24 Clip Clip

It's a regular people airport, but you're human beavers. Music swells and fades.

*[As the beaver family speaks, you can hear them struggle to speak around their prosthetic teeth.]*

**John:** Put this in the check back, and we would've gotten a fee! An exorbitant fee. You know what? I'm just gonna hang on to it, read it on the plane. It'll be fine.

**Kate:** You are not gonna read that thing.

**John:** Yes, I am gonna read it!

**Kate:** This line is not moving. We are at a standstill.

**John:** Oh god.

**Kate:** I just hope I get on the plane.

**John:** Well, I also—*[mumbles]*.

**Kate:** They're boarding. They're boarding.

**Frankie:** What's up, folks? How would you like to breeze through this security line today, huh?

**Kate:** What does that mean?

**John:** Who are you?

**Frankie:** My name's Frankie. I'm with Breezer.

**John:** Breezer? What is that? What is Breezer?

**Frankie:** That's a VIP experience at the airport. Could have you at your gate within five minutes, huh?

**Kate:** Five minutes?!

**Frankie:** Oh damn, boy! You're strong. *[Chuckles.]* Congratulations.

**Kate:** Ask how much. Ask how much.

**John:** *[Mumbling.]* Uh, how much is it?

**Frankie:** You don't need to worry about that!  
Music swells and fades.

00:35:07 Sound Effect Transition

00:35:08 Jesse Host Are you meant to look like—from *The Lion, the Witch, and*—the live action *Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*? Is that what's supposed to be happening there? Not the movie. The like BBC television movie?

00:35:21 John Guest Right, no, of course. I love that one.

00:35:24 Jesse Host 'Cause it has the same deeply distressing quality. *[Laughs.]*

00:35:28 Kate Guest Yeah, yeah. We're just trying to be beavers.

00:35:31 John Guest We were just trying to be beavers. Like, we each wanted to be like a—we wanted to really have prosthetics that were like as real as possible. But I think that, if you're feeling that, it's because that was a time when people were using prosthetics in a way that was like more like sincere and practical and less about—there wasn't like the CGI blend of certain elements.

*[Kate agrees.]*

And like, so—and that was—like, we like in our like little deck for this—for the beaver sketch—we had *The Coneheads* in there. Like the family picture of *The Coneheads*. Like, it's that same kind of just like... I don't know.

00:36:09 Kate Guest It's not—the attempt isn't so much to become so real that—I mean, like I think the beaver makeup is amazing. And like—

00:36:19 John Guest Yeah. But if we wanted—or if we had the money to, someone might have wanted to sweeten it with CGI.

00:36:25 Kate Guest And somehow, then it becomes something else.

*[John agrees.]*

And it's like no longer... what is that? It's—it's something profound about—just something in there—  
It becomes uncanny?

00:36:36 Jesse Host

*[John agrees.]*

00:36:37 Kate Guest Yeah, it's like the uncanny valley or whatever. Or it's just like—it doesn't—the attempt isn't to... there's something about knowing that John and I are actually in there and that being clear is why it's funny.

*[John agrees.]*

If we just disappear into full beavers, it'd be like—yeah, then they're beavers. And it doesn't—it like loses something.

00:37:01 John Guest Yeah, like hearing us struggle with the teeth. You know, I think is—

00:37:04 Kate Guest Yeah, like we're in a mask. We're in the prosthetics.

00:37:07 Jesse Host The teeth have a little bit of gross color.

*[They agree.]*

It has a little bit of Brecht to it. There's a little bit of sort of confrontational quality that makes you step outside and makes the—

*[John makes chomping noises.]*

00:37:19 John Guest —content feel a little—  
00:37:20 Jesse Host What's that word?  
More intense. Let's call it the V-Effect (VFX), shall we?

*[They agree.]*

Well, Kate and John, I'm so grateful to you for coming and being on the show. Your special and your other work is so funny.

*[They thank him.]*

00:37:37 Crosstalk Crosstalk And I so admire it. So, thank you for coming here and doing this.  
**John:** Thank you for watching it. *[Giggles.]*

00:37:40 John Guest **Kate:** Thank you for watching it and liking it, truly.  
00:37:41 Kate Guest Didn't we—like, we haven't—  
00:37:42 John Guest Thanks for having us.  
You know. We—no one's watched it yet.

*[Kate affirms.]*

00:37:45 Jesse Host Kate Berlant and John Early. Their special is called *Would It Kill You to Laugh*. It is extraordinarily funny. You can stream it starting this week, on Peacock.

00:37:55 Music Transition Buzzy synth with a steady beat.  
00:37:58 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. Here at my house, I've been unboxing my late aunt's record collection. I inherited them from her, and they were shipped to me by Amtrak from Washington D.C., where she lived. Here's one that I recommend pretty unequivocally: it's the self-titled debut album by Merry Clayton. M-E-R-R-Y, Merry Clayton. Incredible, slightly rock-tinged soul album from the early 1970s. Listen to it on your streaming service!

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Tabatha Myers. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme music is by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Our thanks to The Go! Team for sharing it with us, along with their label, Memphis Industries.

*Bullseye* is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. So, connect with us in those places. We share all our interviews in all of those. And I

00:39:13 Promo Promo

think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

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

*[Music fades out.]*