

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.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:00:11	Jesse Thorn	Host	From MaximumFun.org and NPR, it's <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:00:15	Music	Transition	"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.
00:00:22	Jesse	Host	A quick warning about this upcoming interview: there are some references to sexual assault in this conversation. No graphic descriptions, just a few mentions. Also! There is some talk about sex in it, so if you or someone you're with is sensitive to that, we figured we'd let you know. The great Sam Jay—she's a standup comic. She was a writer for <i>Saturday Night Live</i> . She cocreated the sitcom <i>The Bust Down</i> , and she's also the host of the HBO talk show, <i>Pause</i> . <i>Pause</i> is a really special series. Each episode usually starts at Sam's apartment—or at least a set that looks like Sam's apartment. She's hosting a party, hanging out with her pals. And on every episode, they talk something through, usually a tough topic, often something that's close to home for Sam. Queerness or intersectionality, prison, fidelity.
00:01:07	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:08	Clip	Clip	Music: Upbeat party music.
			Speaker 1: I don't think anyone enjoys being told what to do.
			Sam: I think—I think weirdly too we live in a country where they promise you that. We literally live in a country where they're like, "You can do whatever you wanna do!"
			Speaker 1: Right! So, when you're—
			Speaker 2: That is—that is the problem!
			Speaker 3: And that is a lie.
			Speaker 2: That is the promise until you do it.
			Speaker 1: Exactly! Exactly, exactly.
			Speaker 2: It's a promise until you do it. And then you're tossed out for it.
			Sam: And when like—hate to make it this, but when you're Black and poor, those bumpers come a lot earlier in life. And you're seeing other people do things they're telling you you can't.
00:01:37	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:38	Jesse	Host	Those casual conversations are interspersed with an interview, usually something a bit more serious. And there's often a sketch or two thrown in. In this one, Sam is Paul Revere-ing her way through the streets of modern Boston.

00:01:53	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:54	Clip	Clip	Music: Revolutionary War era pipe and drum music.
			Sam: Did you know you can make your own menthol? All you have to do is melt down some candy canes and pour gasoline on it! The crackers are coming, the crackers are coming! Are you ready for <i>Jumanji</i> ? 'Cause the crackers are! They're coming! The crackers are coming! Stopping worrying about Jada and Will and start worrying about jams! We're jamless, y'all! Preserves, people! Preseeeerves! <i>Insecure</i> is over! Learn a skill, <i>[censored]</i> ! The crackers are coming! The crackers are coming! You need to stop quoting Nelson Mandela on TikTok and start learning how to purify your own pee! The crackers are coming! The crackers are coming!
00:02:33	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:34	Jesse	Host	Sam Jay, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> .
			<i>[Sam laughs.]</i>
00:02:37	Sam	Guest	I'm happy to have you on the show.
00:02:38	Jesse	Host	Hey!
00:02:41	Sam	Guest	Did you say, "Are you ready for <i>Jumanji</i> ?" <i>[Chuckles.]</i> Yeah.
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>
			I have no excuse for it.
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>
00:02:50	Jesse	Host	That's like something that you start yelling into the megaphone on like hour four of shooting riding around on a horse and yelling things into the— <i>[laughing]</i> it gets more and more. It starts with, "Do you know how to make jams and jellies?" And it ends up with, "Are you ready for <i>Jumanji</i> ?"
00:03:06	Sam	Guest	Yeah. For sure. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:03:10	Jesse	Host	Like, do you feel like that is a matter that you have considered? Have you considered what would happen if animals appeared in your home?
00:03:17	Sam	Guest	I mean, the more and more we were saying things <i>[laughs]</i> , the more just stupid it got. And then—I don't know how we got to <i>Jumanji</i> . I think I was talking about how White people know how to hunt. I think that's where it all started. Wow. Whatever. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:03:38	Jesse	Host	It's nice to have a bit like that that is—you know, that's a very pointed bit, and I like that it has room for that kind of silliness.
			<i>[Sam agrees.]</i>
			Which is like true silliness.
00:03:49	Sam	Guest	Yeah, we try to like remember whenever we're doing it—'cause we are talking and tackling like such heavy things, but you know, we're like, "Hey, guys, we're still a comedy show." You know. Like, it's okay to just be goofy.
00:04:03	Jesse	Host	When we were talking before the show—I have a buddy who made a show, or tried to make a show, with a format similar to the show that you have now, which is to say that kind of like <i>Playboy After</i>

Dark, it's a talk show but we're actually having a party thing. And I think what he found in making this show with a lot of amazing people involved and amazing talents as guests and stuff is that it is really hard to—as hard as it is to make a show feel like a party, it may be even harder to make a party feel like a show. So, what preparation do you do to make a segment where four or five or six people are hanging out around a pool table and talking about something tight and impactful enough that it works as a television program?

00:04:54 Sam Guest

Really, in building that construction, a lot of it was just initially thinking about like, 1) how to get the most natural conversation out of people and like what would give you that vibe. So, it's a lot of like really particular things. Like, we do it in an actual apartment. It's not my apartment, but it is a real apartment. And I remember being like very adamant like, "This can't happen in a studio." 'Cause once we're in a studio, people are gonna feel weird, it's gonna be unnatural, and people aren't gonna wanna just like kick it and talk. You know? So, it has to really feel like you're coming into my home. And like the set designer, Roxy, truly was like—I took her on a tour of my apartment. You know, like a virtual tour of my actual apartment.

And she did a really good job of incorporating things that are really in my house in there, and just really making it feel like a home. And I think also we made a decision that I would host these parties with my girl, I think. Well, now my fiancé. I think that was also super important. At first, you know, I was being kind of an egomaniac like a little bit in my head. I was like, "This is my show. Is this gonna be weird now?" Or you know, just thinking stupid *[censored]*. But I think it really helps, because I host parties with my girl in reality, and I think it just warms everybody when they come in. It's two of us, and we're like kicking it. And then it's also just like less camera men. Like, I only wanted two cameras moving on a roaming camera. No boom mics at all. Everyone's like lavs.

So, just all those kind of little TV elements that I know kind of put me in my own head when I'm making something that I was trying to eliminate for people. And then it was also about just inviting regular people. Like we thought about it. Like, if we have a room full of stars, no one's gonna *[censored]* talk for real. Everyone's gonna be like putting on airs and *[censored]*. But if we like just invite some cool comics and people I actually grew up with and know from my everyday life and family and actual friends, then we can maybe really get some good like conversation out of it. You know what I mean? And then knowing what the conversation is that we wanna have. Even though the guests come, they have no idea what we're gonna talk about. Ever. Because I want them to be as honest and candid as possible.

But I really have the direction down of like where these conversations need to go. And then I kind of just drop in and push the conversation in the direction I want it to go to.

00:07:17 Jesse Host

Okay, so I have to ask you, Sam, if that set designer comes to your apartment to get inspiration, your partner is a interior designer. So, how much stuff inside your apartment is yours?

00:07:30 Sam Guest

Uh, like none. I live—

[They laugh.]

I live with a lady, and she took over. I probably have like a little corner. But I think that was what Roxy was really good at too, was like still—that apartment that we see on TV is definitely more me than my own home. *[Laughs.]* For sure.

00:07:52 Jesse Host Like, I'm the one that buys the furniture for my house, but I also know that there's like—and so, most of the house is my choices and my wife is fine with that. But you know, there's some stuff like I have a Rickey Henderson autographed batting glove. And that stays here in the office. That's not going pride of place on the mantelpiece.

[Laughs.]

00:08:13 Sam Guest Right. Yeah, I have an office, and that's where like all my stuff is—my Lego stuff, any of my items, and also just anything she wants to dump and doesn't know where she wants it to go, it also ends up in my office as well.

00:08:27 Jesse Host What are you making out of Legos?

00:08:29 Sam Guest I'm not building anything right now, but I build mostly like *Star Wars* sets. I have like three sitting in the closet that I need to get to. People like always give me them as gifts and stuff 'cause people know I like Legos.

00:08:41 Jesse Host Are we talking about the kind that costs—you know—hundreds of dollars and have thousands of pieces?

[Sam confirms.]

Like the big, giant ones?

00:08:49 Sam Guest Yeah, yeah. Like, 7000 pieces or more. Yeah.

00:08:54 Jesse Host Are you one of those people who finds building those giant sets like centering and calming? I feel like the whole time I was working on it—I might be able to do it, but the whole time I would be so bent out of shape about what if I lost a piece or whatever.

00:09:08 Sam Guest Nah. It's just very chill. You know what I mean? Like, only thing I gotta worry about is my cat. He tries to like get in on the action. But other than that, like it's just a way to chill out. You know? I'll like smoke a joint and just sit in my living room listening to some music and put it together.

00:09:25 Jesse Host What does your partner think about that?

00:09:27 Sam Guest She thinks I'm a nerd, but she's been calling me a nerd since I met her, so *[laughs]* it's like whatever. She just thinks I'm a little dweeb. It's fine.

00:09:38 Jesse Host Is she not a nerd?

00:09:40 Sam Guest She thinks she's real cool, uuuh but—

[They laugh.]

I don't know that I believe that she's cool. She's definitely cooler than I am. But I'm like slowly nerding her out. It's taking a long time. I've known her 13 years, and I'm starting to get her to turn some corners. Like, she's watched all the *Lord of the Rings* with me. So, you know. Just working on her slowly but surely.

00:10:06 Jesse Host So much more to get into with Sam Jay. Sam lived in Atlanta for a while, went to school there and found her voice as a comedian there. But did she go to Freaknik, the legendary spring break

00:10:25	Promo	Clip	<p>festival? The answer's after the break. It's <i>Bullseye</i>, from MaximumFun.org and NPR. <i>[A shop door opens, ringing a bell.]</i></p> <p>Speaker: Um, hi. I'm looking for a movie.</p> <p>Ify Nwadiwe: Oh, I gotcha!</p> <p>Drea Clark: Uh, there's that new foreign film with the time travel.</p> <p>Alonso Duralde: There's an amazing documentary about queer history on streaming!</p> <p>Ify: Have I told you about this classic where giant robots fight?!</p> <p>Alonso: Or there's that one that most critics hated but I thought was actually pretty good!</p> <p>Drea: Oooh! I know, the one with the huge car chase and then there's that scene where—</p> <p>Ify & Alonso & Drea: <i>[In unison.]</i> The car jumps over the submarine!</p> <p>Speaker: Wow, who are you eclectic movie experts?</p> <p><i>[Fun, upbeat music fades in.]</i></p> <p>Ify: Well, I'm Ify Nwadiwe.</p> <p>Drea: I'm Drea Clark!</p> <p>Alonso: And I'm Alonso Duralde, and together we host the movie podcast <i>Maximum Film</i>.</p> <p>Drea: New episodes every week on MaximumFun.org!</p> <p>Ify: Aaand you actually just walked into our recording booth.</p> <p>Speaker: Oh! Weird?! Sorry! I thought this was a video store.</p> <p>Drea: You seem like a lady with a lot of problems.</p> <p><i>[Music fades out.]</i></p>
00:11:09	Music	Transition	<p>Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.</p>
00:11:14	Jesse	Host	<p>It's <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guest is Sam Jay. She's a standup comic who starred in two television specials. She was a writer on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> and she's the host and creator of the show <i>Pause with Sam Jay</i>. <i>Pause</i> is a genre-breaking talk show that combines interviews, sketch, and real life. And you can watch both seasons of it on HBO. Let's get back into our conversation.</p> <p>I have a friend who's a comic and I always thought he was like the oldest getting-into-standup successful standup that I knew. He was 27 when he first did standup. You had tried standup, but you didn't</p>

really start doing standup until you were a little older than that. You were like 29. Right?

00:12:02 Sam Guest Yeah, I was 29.

00:12:04 Jesse Host So, what happened when you were 29 that made you think you could that?

00:12:11 Sam Guest I don't know that anything particularly happened. I wanted to do it and, I'd been wanting to do it for a long time kind of secretly. And I just felt like—I think it was just that fear, really, of like turning 30 and looking at my life and being like, "Is this gonna be like the whole jam?" And I was kind of like, "Ah, this can't be the whole jam." *[Chuckles.]* You know, "I gotta do something. I gotta figure something out to—for lack of a better word, feel more connected to this experience." And I was just tired of like being fearful of it. And so, I was like, "Let's just see what happens."

00:12:53 Jesse Host What were you doing for work when you started standup?

00:12:56 Sam Guest I was working in a mailroom at the John Hancock, in Boston.

00:13:02 Jesse Host Was it in Boston that you first tried standup?

00:13:05 Sam Guest Uh, yeah. Both times. Like, that's where I started, and it is the first place that I tried to do it. Yeah.

00:13:12 Jesse Host 'Cause you kind of have roots both in Boston and in Georgia and Atlanta. Right?

00:13:16 Sam Guest Kiiinda. Like, I grew up in Boston. I'm from Boston. I lived there my whole life. I went to Atlanta—I was in my 20s—to go to school, and I stayed there for like eight years and then moved back home.

00:13:28 Jesse Host That is a very different lifestyle experience, I think—living in Boston and living in Atlanta.

00:13:35 Sam Guest Yeah, for sure. But also, I was a different age, too. So, it was a different experience for like a million reasons, not just culturally. Of course, there's more like Black people and there's more Black culture—culturally, things to do. But also, you know, Atlanta's a—I always feel like Boston is White Atlanta. You know? Atlanta is where Black youths go to college and like—so, there's a lot of college clubs and bars. And you kind of pretty much have the run of the city. You know what I mean? In the same way like a lot of White kids come to Boston for college, and bars, and all that kind of *[censored]*.

00:14:25 Jesse Host So, I think mostly it was just like that coming into myself—like as my sexual identity and all that stuff, and then being in a city that was kind of swirling with Blackness and Black queerness and all that good stuff was definitely like a big culture shock. You know. I mean, I feel like there's a lot of—as an outsider, there's a lot of cities in the United States where there are a lot of Black people. You know, I'm in Los Angeles. There's a lot of Black folks in LA. Right? But Atlanta, culturally, is like defined by its Blackness.

[Sam agrees.]

00:14:50 Sam Guest Like, it is the place that you go to do all kinds of different stuff if you're Black. At least, *[chuckles]* that's how it's been described to me and how it felt when I was there.

00:14:51 Jesse Host Yeah, no, it is.

00:14:51 Jesse Host I was like, "This is a place for Black folks to do all kinds of stuff, rather than just feel like their Blackness has to be a single vector. You know what I mean?"

00:15:00 Sam Guest Yessss. 100%. That's exactly how it feels. I always say it was the place where I saw the most like different types of Black people in my life when I went to Atlanta. It was like every version of us. The Afropunk version, the nerdy, buttoned up like lawyer/doctor version, the hood [censored] version, the—you know, it's just like every style we got [chuckles] is down there.

00:15:25 Jesse Host Did you choose that on purpose?

00:15:27 Sam Guest So, I was born in Atlanta. So, I was born in Georgia when I was a kid, but I moved out of there when I was very little. Like, I wasn't even one years old. So, I don't remember it. But my family's kind of always had ties to it. You know? My grandmother's from Augusta. So, my brother and my cousin moved down there together when I was like 11 or something like that. And I had another cousin who lived down there. So, I would go sometimes in the summer—you know, when I was 14 and stuff like that. So, I kind of always like would go back and forth in that kind of a way. So, I was familiar with the city.

So, when I—I always was kind of like, "When I get old enough, I'm moving to Atlanta." You know, I was always kind of saying that to myself. Like, "When I get old enough, I'm gonna move to Atlanta." 'Cause I had already kind of been going there and seeing what it was.

00:16:15 Jesse Host Did you ever get to go to Freaknik when you were—?

00:16:17 Sam Guest No! My little cousins went, though. My aunt made them a fake ID. She made them a fake birth certificate so that they could get fake IDs so they could go to Freaknik. They were like 15 years old. So, they probably shouldn't have been there, but they went and then she shouldn't make me one 'cause I was a girl. I wanted to go! It was me and my boy cousins that I'm really close to—my cousin Gerald and my cousin JJ. We like did everything together. And she was like, "No, you can't go 'cause you're a girl."

And I was like, "That's bull[censored]."

00:16:46 Jesse Host When you moved to Atlanta in your 20s, did you already know that you were gay or think of yourself as gay?

00:16:52 Sam Guest No. I was like dating dudes and stuff when I first got to Atlanta. Probably for the first like two years I was there. Two or three years, maybe.

00:17:02 Jesse Host Do you mean that—were you dating dudes because you felt obliged or 'cause it seemed like it was working for you? You know what I mean?

00:17:10 Sam Guest I thought it was working! It was just like what you did. I didn't feel like I had to. It wasn't begrudgingly, and like I wasn't like one of those people who was like in the closet pained and stuff like that. It's just like one day I was like, "This, uh, this [censored] isn't working out for me anymore." You know?

[Jesse laughs.]

Like, it just was really like—I don't know! Like, something's not clicking anymore with this, and I don't quite understand why. And then, once I figured out what was going on with me, I then understood that it was never really working. But I didn't really have any perspective or anything to compare it to at the time, prior to that. You know? Once I was like intimate with women and it felt

different and the way that my homegirls would talk about being with dudes and I would always be like, “I don’t really get it. It’s not that deep to me.” Then I got it. And I was like, “Ooh, you were just like a gay [censored] the whole time. That’s crazy.”

00:18:06 Jesse Host You have a bit in your act that is about seeing [censored] from [chuckles]—from a upwards or from knees to hips direction—

00:18:20 Sam Guest [Laughs.] I forgot about that. Wooow.

00:18:21 Jesse Host —for the first time. And I like—

00:18:22 Sam Guest That’s crazy. I forgot about that.

00:18:25 Jesse Host And I like the idea that you’re like—this incredible, personal realization about, you know, the most intimate relationships in your life and like what romance and love were to you and so and so forth is framed in like [chuckling] a realization that is completely just about switching types of oral sex.

[Sam agrees.]

00:18:49 Sam Guest Like, you’re done [censored], and you’re into [censored] now. Yeah. Yeah. And it was like a lot to do. It was. I remember the first time I saw a vagina, I was like, “Wooooah. You’re supposed to put your mouth on that?” It’s a lot going on. [Censored] is very straightforward. It presents itself, and all that it is is right there. But vajayjays, like you gotta get in there and move things around.

00:19:12 Jesse Host Yeah, it’s a whole operation.

00:19:14 Sam Guest Yeah, yeah, yeah. It’s a real job.

00:19:16 Jesse Host You know, at the end of the day, you put in the work, it’s worth it. In my opinion!

00:19:19 Sam Guest Yeah! No, no, no. I think it’s for sure worth it. But it is—like, I don’t think women who don’t go down on other women realize what’s happening.

[Jesse laughs.]

00:19:41 Jesse Host You know what I mean? I think they’re very much just like, “What’s the big deal?” And it’s like, baby girl... there’s a lot of occupational hazards going on down there.

00:20:07 Sam Guest You know, a couple years ago, the last lesbian bar in LA closed. One closed—there was one by where I grew up in San Francisco that closed a few years ago. And like, I just—I feel like it can be really tough to find spaces. And I imagine it’s like double extra when you’re Black.

00:20:07 Sam Guest Yeah, but that particular—stuff like that, like the last lesbian bar closing or like—that’s not—I blame that on like lesbians. We’re not—

[Jesse laughs.]

We’re not like good at it. Like, I wish I was a gay dude. Gay dudes have so much [censored] fun, bro. They go out all the time and like they’re just having a blast. Like, they’re really like out the gate having a good time. And lesbian like—I don’t know if you’ve ever been to a lesbian bar. It’s [censored] boring, bro. First of all, most women—like, ‘cause we just—we couple up so fast. So, if you go out to a bar, it’s just a bunch of like [censored] who are together just like in corners making out. It’s not like—if you’re single and a lesbian trying to go out and get some action? You’re probably not

gonna find it at a lesbian bar, 'cause everybody in there's gonna be with somebody. And you just gonna standing there by yourself looking like a *[censored]* damn fool.

So, I blame the lack of lesbian night life on the fact that we're all cuddled up in a bed somewhere, watching TV.

00:21:09 Jesse Host
00:21:13 Sam Guest

When you started dating women, where did you meet girls?
I mean, at clubs and *[censored]* in Atlanta. You know? Like, gay nights, different gay clubs would have like a lesbian night here and there, whatever. You know which ones are which. Like, in the city. You know what I mean? Through friends, same way people—you know. All that kind of stuff. But it definitely was like one of those things where you are—you would go out sometimes on a dolo and be like, "Everybody here's with somebody!" You know what I mean? *[Laughing.]* Like, that happens quite often, for sure.

It's like a known lesbian complaint. Like.

[They chuckle.]

00:21:49 Jesse Host

This is what it is.
A KLC. A classic KLC.

[Sam agrees and Jesse laughs.]

00:21:57 Sam Guest

What are your top five known lesbian complaints?
Oh, probably that, the way they make *[censored]*. They don't really make *[censored]* for actually—I think it's a guy probably behind it. And I don't think they're made for like people who are actually trying to like *[censored]*. You know what I'm saying? They're like novelty. That's how they're looked at. But it's like I really need this to do a job, and it would be nice if like one was made with that in mind.
[Laughs.] But—

00:22:19 Jesse Host
00:22:21 Sam Guest

Right. The proper bracing and so forth.
Yeeeah! Yeah, yeah! Like, all the kind of like what you need to do it right. You know what I mean?

00:22:26 Jesse Host

I've looked at them at the—you know, at the fancy sex store. You know? Like, at the—

00:22:31 Sam Guest
00:22:33 Jesse Host

[Laughing.] The fancy sex store!
You know what I'm talking about! A—like a—like a friendly, lesbian-owned, lots of lights type of sex store. And even there, where—you know, the kind where there's a blog that reviews products and so forth. Even at those, you're like, "This really looks like somebody bought it from a—you know, a novelty store that also sold French ticklers."

[Sam agrees.]

Okay, so that's number two.

[They laugh.]

00:23:07 Sam Guest

If you're just listening on the radio, Sam said something that we can't play, but we're onto number three.
Number three is the mean stares you get from dudes at the barber shop because your hairline will never recede like theirs.

00:23:18	Jesse	Host	<i>[Cackles.]</i> Just LeBron James looking at you with his eyes squinted.
00:23:24	Sam	Guest	And like I had to be like kind of like, “Is my barber purposefully pushing me back?” Like, “Is he waiting on me?”
<i>[They laugh.]</i>			
00:23:34	Jesse	Host	Sam, did you always get your hair cut at a barber shop?
00:23:37	Sam	Guest	No. Not ‘til I cut it off.
00:23:39	Jesse	Host	When did you cut it off?
00:23:41	Sam	Guest	Uuuh, I was proooobably 25? Probably 25.
00:23:49	Jesse	Host	Was that ahead of or behind a realization about your identity.
00:23:52	Sam	Guest	Behind. Behind. Behind. Behind. Best thing I ever did.
00:23:58	Jesse	Host	When did you decide?
00:24:00	Sam	Guest	To cut it?
<i>[Jesse confirms.]</i>			
I don’t know. I just woke up one day and was like, “I’m gonna go cut it.” It was really like, “Eh, today’s the day. I’m just gonna go cut it off and see how I feel.”			
00:24:08	Jesse	Host	What was it like before you cut it off?
00:24:11	Sam	Guest	It was just long, girl hair. It just came like down to here. Just like to the shoulder. Girl stuff.
00:24:18	Jesse	Host	That’s a lot of work. I mean, one thing that—
00:24:20	Sam	Guest	<i>[Censored]</i> ton of work.
00:24:23	Jesse	Host	<i>[Chuckles.]</i> Like, you gotta go to the barber shop a lot when you have really short hair, to keep it clean and straight. But like—
00:24:28	Sam	Guest	It’s easy. Girls, it’s so much—it’s so much when it like—like, being a woman, I will never go back to that. Like, that part? I don’t care what happens in my life. I could go back to <i>[censored]</i> , but you just gonna have to like me like this. Like, you’re just gonna have to be okay with getting <i>[censored]</i> from a <i>[censored]</i> with a Caesar. Because I’m not doing it. I’m not doing it. It’s too much.
00:24:52	Jesse	Host	Let’s hear another clip from my guest, Sam Jay’s, show <i>Pause</i> . As we said, it is sort of a talk show that is built mostly out of conversations in an apartment, but it also has some more closer to traditional talk show interview segments. Now, these are often—I mean, the one that we’re about to hear is going on in some kind of grand ballroom while two like mostly but not completely dressed muscle dudes are standing behind Sam and everyone is enjoying high tea. It’s a real grand presentation overall. And Sam’s guest in this conversation is a woman named Cathy Renna, who’s communications director for the National LGBTQ Task Force. And Sam is kind of—Sam’s putting it a little bit to Cathy about her experiences trying to find Black spaces within gay spaces.
00:25:51	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:25:52	Clip	Clip	Sam: I want what I guess is considered the unfavorable side of it. You know what I mean?
Cathy: Right, right, right, right, right.			
Sam: I feel like that part of it is actually being isolated and out of it, and that contributes to—I think—Black identity not really finding an identity within gay identity. Right? I think about myself coming out. It took me a long time to really fully understand my queerness, because every representation of it was so White.			

Cathy: Didn't look like you. Right, right, right.

Sam: I couldn't find myself in it. And it seemed like in order to be gay, I also had to somewhat abandon part of my Black identity. And I think that even effects like Black families and how they view it. Right? It's like, "Oh, you're gay now?" Now, not only are you—

Cathy: It's a White thing. It's a White thing.

Sam: You're doing a White thing.

Cathy: Yeah. Yeah. We have a lot of work to do. And I think it's true. I mean, it's something you can level at, you know—at a lot of folks is that they're just *[sighs]*—just trying to get the work done every day. You know? It's hard enough.

00:26:49 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:26:50 Jesse Host
00:26:51 Sam Guest

She hung in there in that conversation. I really appreciated that. Yeah, she did. She did. I appreciated her. She took the blows and she tried. She really did.

00:27:00 Jesse Host

[Chuckles.] Well, one of the things that I find really interesting about these segments of your show is that even when you're talking to somebody who is espousing a point of view that is not one that you share, you're pretty generous about your listening. Was that a choice that you were gonna have that kind of generosity? Even when somebody is—I mean, even when somebody's being gross. You know? Even when somebody's being a jerk.

00:27:32 Sam Guest

I mean, when we talked about what we wanted the show to be, we talked a lot about like—yo, we want this to be a dialogue and we wanna invite people to the conversation that may not necessarily share our point of views and perspectives, because we need to start having conversations with people who don't share our views and perspectives. And right now, it feels like people are drawing really hard lines in the sand. And it's like if you don't think like me, I'm not even gonna talk to you. And I just don't know how you advance anything doing it that way.

And so—and then the other thing we decided is like these are people that we're inviting to the show. Like, that was very big for me is like I'm not gonna be *[censored]* to people I invited. It just seems wrong. I reached out to you. I asked you to have this conversation knowing full well how you think. It's very wrong for me to then sit you down and try to get you into some gotcha moment or be like *[censored]*. It just doesn't feel right.

00:28:31 Jesse Host

There have been a lot of shows where comics give their opinions about stuff in a funny way. And you know, *Politically Incorrect* was 30 years ago now. And a lot of those shows are funny because comics are funny, and they—you know, they think of ideas in funny ways, and they know how to put on a show. Right? I think a lot of those shows are about telling. Maybe because standup is a relatively unilateral form. Right? It's like only one person has the mic.

[Sam agrees.]

I don't feel like your show is like that. Was that a choice that you made?

00:29:11 Sam Guest Yeah. I mean, I think that we wanted it to be a dialogue. You know? When we talked about what we felt was missing in the late-night space or what we weren't seeing that we would like to see. We just felt like there was nobody having conversations. There was a lot of just, you know, people touting out their opinions and saying like, "I'm correct," or being judgmental of the left or being judgmental of the right and just going like, "This is the way that you should think." And like if you don't, you're dumb as hell." And me and Prentice, when we would talk a lot, we would often quote this one interview that Prentice saw that he had me watch where this guy was like a Fox News supporter. And the reporter's like, "Why do you watch Fox News? Like, don't you know it's this and don't you know it's that?"

And the dude was like, "I don't know, it just—every other thing just talks down to me and makes me feel dumb and wrong. And Fox News doesn't make me feel dumb and wrong." And it was just really that simple for him. *[Chuckling.]* You know what I mean? It was just like, "These things make me feel bad about myself and these things do not make me feel bad about myself." And so, we thought a lot about that with the show of like where's a space where no one has to necessarily feel bad, but we can have a conversation and hear different a perspective? And then maybe that can like move a conversation or an issue or topic forward rather than this kind of heels-in-the-sand thing that seems to be happening.

00:30:41 Jesse Host And I think for a lot of White people in America, the prospect of feeling bad at yourself is—about yourself is truly terrifying. *[Chuckling.]* Because we haven't been asked to be in a lot of spaces where we consider others, basically.

00:30:57 Sam Guest Right. And it's like how do you get to a space where you can show someone that? You know, in order to do that, you gotta hear them too. You know? You gotta hear what's going on with them and why they are where they are. And then you can say—and then you can reveal something to them on the other side of it.

00:31:16 Jesse Host Stick around! More *Bullseye* around the corner, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:31:22 Promo Clip **Music:** "Oh No, Ross and Carrie! Theme Song" by Brian Keith Dalton.

Ross Blocher: Carrie, is it?

Carrie Poppy: Oh yes, hi, I'm Carrie.

Ross: I am psychic Ross, and I will be reading you this evening.

Carrie: Oh! Interesting! Well, okay. I co-host a podcast. It's called *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*

Ross: *[Interrupting.]* Yes, I'm sensing that.

Carrie: Oh.

Ross: The spirits are telling me. It is a show about poodles.

Carrie: Well, it's about like fringe science—

Ross: Yes!

Carrie: And spirituality.

Ross: That's correct.

Carrie: And claims of the paranormal. Oh, you knew that?!

Ross: And you do research online. You—

Carrie: But more importantly, like we do in-person investigations.

Ross: *[Stiltedly repeating Carrie just a beat too late to be in sync.]*
In-person investigate as well.

Carrie: Yeah. Oh my god! That's amazing!

Ross: See?!

Carrie: Me and my friend—this is so weird, my friend Ross—same name as you.

Ross: Weird.

Carrie: He and I just go and try them all out. And actually, we've gone to a number of psychics. And to be honest with you, it's a lot like this. It's called *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*. They can find it at MaximumFun.org.

Ross: I could've told you that!

[Music ends.]

00:32:07 Music Transition
00:32:12 Jesse Host

Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.
It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Sam Jay, comedian and host of the HBO show, *Pause with Sam Jay*. Let's get back into our interview.

I was really touched—I read an interview that you did a year or two ago, and you had a special that you shot in 2020, and there were some people who I think reasonably said that some of your jokes in that special were transphobic. And you know, I've seen the jokes and I'm pretty sensitive to that kind of stuff, and they're not hateful or anything. I don't want anybody in the audience to think that. But I don't think it was an unreasonable criticism. And in this interview, somebody asked you about it and you said, "Yeah, well, I felt bad about it."

And I was like—I know that I have made, I mean, specifically transphobic jokes in my past, and homophobic jokes. And I feel bad about it. And it was hard to hear people say that to me. It was hard to get that feedback. And I felt bad about it. And I have to say that just like hearing somebody respond to that criticism not by saying what you could've said—which is like, "It's not like it was hateful!" or something. But by saying like, "Yeah. Oof. Sorry, I—yeah, I didn't

wanna—like, it makes me feel bad to make people feel bad.” Like, I was very touched by that. But it can be—that can be a hard place to be and a hard thing to kind of engage with in yourself. It’s a lot easier to be defensive about it, I think.

00:33:46 Sam Guest

Uh, I don’t know. I genuinely felt bad that people felt bad. So, it wasn’t really that hard to like be like, “That was not what I thought was gonna happen.” Like, I went in with an intention to move a conversation forward that I hadn’t been seeing being pushed forward in any way, and I thought what I was doing was supportive. It was jerky at times, ‘cause I’m a bit of a jerk and a comic. And you know what I mean? But I didn’t think it was undercutting the support of what I was saying, which was like make space for these people and stop being *[censored]*. And to have that kind of get lost and the fact that people’s feelings were hurt made me feel bad! ‘Cause that’s not what I was trying to do. You know what I mean? And I can’t deny that that happened. If that—if someone said they were hurt by it or offended by it, then they were! And on a base level, you have to say, “Hey, that isn’t the goal.”

Though, when I fight back on it is when people are kind of just like, *[angrily]* “Are you aware what you’re doing is causing—?”

Then it’s like, “Come on, now. Chill. I wasn’t *[chuckles]*—that’s not what I was doing.” But I can totally hold responsibility for saying something that hurt people’s feelings or made them feel bad, because that wasn’t the goal of what I was doing or saying.

00:35:05 Jesse Host

One of the lessons that I have had to learn and still like struggle with myself is that there are a lot of things that I could make a joke about where I could defend the perspective of my joke. I can defend the structure of my joke. I can say like, “Oh, this person was the victim of the joke, not this person.” Like, “Oh, it was targeted at this because of this.” I could diagram the sentence. You know what I mean? But ultimately, there are things in people’s lives that they’re not going to respond to a diagrammed sentence. You know? Like, there was a time in the early 21st century where I was onboard the edgy, White comedian, “Look, if the joke is anti-rapist,” train.

And then I was like, “Well, you know what? If you’re in a room full of people and a sixth of them have been sexually assaulted, maybe don’t mess with that trauma. *[Chuckles.]* You know? Regardless of how you can like explain the logic of your joke. It’s sort of irrelevant to their trauma.

00:36:16 Sam Guest

But it’s a hard road to toe, because it’s also our responsibility, I think, as comics to talk about the things that are uncomfortable to talk about and to breach these topics and try to get some level of understanding out of them. And in that, you may misstep. You know what I mean? And in that, you may like go a direction and it doesn’t quite work out or it doesn’t land the way you wanted it to or, you know, the way you expected it to. And like, that’s a part of the risk of like what we’re doing. You know what I mean? And it’s just tough. It’s just tough. You know? ‘Cause like I have different things that have happened to me in my life, and like I’ve sat in audiences where a joke—for me—was like, “Damn. I personally have an experience where that doesn’t feel good.”

But I am a big person on intent. And I listen well. And I'm like, "Well, that—he doesn't know me, Sam, personally and the thing that happened to Sam, personally. And I cannot expect this person to write from my personal experience." And I do think that needs to be stated, because it's becoming dangerous for comedy. It's like everyone's walking in with their personal bag and going like, "You said this thing that tapped right—" And it's like, dude, I don't even know that. There's no way for me to create for each individual's like personal thing you got going on. But if it's like some blanketly like, "Yo, that's wild to say about a community." And the community is like, "That's wild to say about us," then you've gotta step back and assess it a little bit. And you may not—you may decide it isn't for you. That's fine, too. But I do think you gotta take a minute and look over it at that point.

00:37:57 Jesse Host I know a lot of comics who started comedy when they were foolish teens. Or at least, when they were like 20. You know? And they still had that like rocket ship behind them of [chuckles] feeling like they were the most important person in the world. But maybe they didn't have a good sense of who they were. Have you ever thought about what the trajectory of your career as a comic would be if you had started before you knew who you were?

00:38:29 Sam Guest Yeah! I mean, I don't know. I do think about it. And I really think everything happens for a reason. And it was the right time for me. I think a part of why—I needed to find myself before I could even be up there and talk with any sense or thought or any—[chuckles] about anything. And I think that's why that first time I tried it in Boston, it didn't really work out. You know? Like, I was talking to Wanda Sykes about this one day. And I was like, "You know, I just did it and it didn't feel like it was supposed to feel. Like I couldn't connect with it. And I just felt like I was up there saying nothing." I was just like, "Why do I deserve for these people to listen?" [Laughs.] I'm not talking about [censored]. You know?

Like, I just didn't feel like I had anything substantial. And I had all of these substantial feelings, but I just didn't feel like I had anything to give. And when I was like 29 and I had really been through some life and really had some ideas about the type of world I guess I wanted to see. Weirdly, I've never thought about it like this, but the type of world I wanted to see and how I wanted to impact the type of world I wanted to see, I felt this was a tool to do that. And then that gave me so much more like focus and ability up there.

00:39:49 Jesse Host Sam, your show is so great and—look, we haven't even talked about *Bust Down*, the show that you cocreated for Peacock, which is also really great. And I sure appreciate you taking all this time to talk to me. It was really nice to get to know you.

00:40:01 Sam Guest No problem. Thank you.

00:40:03 Jesse Host Sam Jay. Her great show, *Pause*, is airing now on HBO. Give it a watch there. She also cocreated and stars in the brand-new sitcom, *Bust Down*, which premiered on Peacock earlier this year and is super funny. I really strongly recommend that. I wish we'd had time to talk about both shows.

00:40:21 Music Transition Cheerful, thumpy synth.

00:40:25 Jesse Host *Bullseye* is created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Although, as I record this, I am preparing to head to the big apple, New York City, to perform at Lincoln Center. Probably will already have done it by

the time you hear this. I am very excited. Thanks to Lincoln Center for inviting *Judge John Hodgman* and me!

Our 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". Thanks to The Go! Team for sharing it with us, along with their label, Memphis Industries.

Bullseye can also be found on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. You can follow us there. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:41:24 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]