

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:13	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:21	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. If you’ve listened to this show for a while, you know this already, but every guest we have here has made something that I, personally, care about and admire. Sometimes they’re people you’ve heard about, sometimes not. My next guest probably falls into the latter category. So, hear me out. He’s a guy from New Zealand. His name is Tom Scott. He’s in his 30s. He lives in Auckland. He has a kid. He’s been working in hip-hop for a little over a decade. He’s one of the most important figures in New Zealand hip-hop, but financially that doesn’t mean all that much. In 2019, when I interviewed Tom, he’d just put out an album under the name Avantdale Bowling Club. And it was, if I am honest, spectacular.
00:01:07	Music	Music	“Water Medley” from the album <i>Avantdale Bowling Club</i> by Avantdale Bowling Club. <i>World getting warmer (World getting warmer while the order getting out of order)</i> <i>Days getting shorter (Days getting shorter while the walls getting taller)</i> <i>New world order (Pour a glass full of water for my daughter, watch her crawl up)</i> <i>Nuclear water (To the sky like I taught her, all she needs is light and water)</i> <i>World getting warmer (World getting warmer while the order getting out of order)</i> <i>Walls getting taller (Days getting shorter while the walls getting taller)</i> <i>New world order (Pour a glass full of water for my daughter, watch her crawl up)</i> <i>Nuclear water (To the sky like I taught her, all she needs is light and water)</i> <i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i>
00:01:34	Jesse	Host	It’s a hip-hop record with jazz instrumentations. And that’s real jazz, not just loops from jazz records. It’s pushing forward into the territory that Kendrick Lamar staked out with <i>To Pimp a Butterfly</i> . It’s also a personal album. He named it after the suburb of Auckland where he grew up. It’s where he lives now, too. Scott raps about his childhood, the places he’s been, the people he doesn’t see anymore, his family. It’s one of my favorite records from that year, and I was excited to hear recently that he has followed it up with another Avantdale Bowling Club album. <i>Trees</i> took Tom four years to make. He even made a test pressing of it—printed at the vinyl plant and everything before scrapping it and then going back to the

drawing board. It's more stripped down than the debut album. Just as captivating, though.

Before we get into the interview, let's hear a song from Avantdale Bowling Club and their album *Trees*. This is "Twenty Eight".
"Twenty Eight" from the album *Trees* by Avantdale Bowling Club.

00:02:27 Music Music

*Twenty-eight grams in an ounce, break it down
Sixteen ounces in a pound, double that
Round it up about ten thou
Once you take away the rent nothing left in the account
Add it up while I bag it up in the lounge
Next to my son watching cartoons on the couch
Round about four to five deep in an ounce
Hitting on about two to three years in a cell*

*But I'll be out in one, wonder if I was brown
Would I get the same amount of time for the same amount?
It ain't hard to tell and it ain't hard to sell
When everyone's the prince this shit sells itself
Work a forty-hour week for a box and a pouch
Round about fifteen years on at Aucks
Small town about the size of a roundabout*

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

00:03:13 Jesse Host Tom Scott, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's great to have you on the show.
00:03:15 Tom Scott Guest Thanks for having me, bruv! Appreciate it.
00:03:17 Jesse Host I was thinking that this record feels like it is kind of about growing up, and you're well into your 30s at this point. Were you not a grownup before?
00:03:28 Tom Guest Huh. I'm not a grownup as is!

[Jesse laughs.]

Yeah, I'm still growing. I felt like there was some kind of—you have to take checkpoints. You know? Someone tweeted the other day, "Every time you look in the mirror is a checkpoint." So, that's pretty buzzy. But yeah, I think sometimes at the completion of an album, it's kind of like that. It's like a checkpoint to see where you are. You start to realize what's changed between records, and yeah, see how much you've matured from the last time. And I like to tell myself that I'm still maturing and going somewhere. So, yeah. Hip-hop isn't always the medium for maturing. And I say that as like a pretty serious hip-hop fan.

00:04:06 Jesse Host
00:04:12 Tom Guest No—yeah, but fair enough. It hasn't really had—you know, it's still only 40 years old. You know? That's a young art form. And there's not really a template for how to do it. Jay-Z's kind of showing us some way to do it, but it's pretty easy to be a cool, mature rapper when you're a multimillionaire.

[They chuckle.]

But try to tell your friends you're a 34-year-old rapper when you're—when you've got my income.

00:04:44 Jesse Host As a guy in my 30s myself, I feel like I really related to that song, “Old Dogs”—not because I can still, you know, knock down trays on the basketball court, which I absolutely cannot.

00:04:56 Tom Guest Me neither. But it’s about belief. You know?

[Jesse cackles.]

You have to—you can’t shoot to miss. My bro told me that. He’s a professional. He said, “You can’t shoot to miss.” ‘Cause especially in our country, we got this humility that—you know—we gotta keep it humble in New Zealand. We’re at the bottom of the world, da-da-da-da-da. But we often just shoot like as long as it hits the ring, I won’t look stupid. You know? But I think you gotta be willing to airball. That’s what he was trying to tell me. I don’t know if that’s a metaphor, but that’s where the cockiness in that verse comes from. It’s like telling yourself like you got this. *[Whispers.]* You got this.

And I think you learn more about how to shoot—you learn more about—you know, I can’t beat some of these kids off the dribble anymore, but I can see the court a bit clearer. I think. At least, I tell myself that to keep the shoes on.

00:05:49 Jesse Host Do you get that feeling when you’re writing or on the microphone?

00:05:55 Tom Guest Yeah. Definitely. It’s funny, you start to master your craft by the time you’re irrelevant, especially as a rapper. Maybe not so much as a jazz bassist or something. But yeah, it’s definitely like that. And then, trying to find a place where what you have to say should be heard is a weird one as a 34-year-old.

00:06:21 Music Music “Old Dogs” from the album *Avantdale Bowling Club* by Avantdale Bowling Club.

Yeah, one of them days

*And we were chilling at the park
Feeling like I'm Miller at the arc
Killing it like Starks at The Garden
Feeling myself, my self-esteem can't be guarded
Been on my Carmen Sandiego, just got back from France
And I gotta little bit of that Parisian steez in me still
My knees are Grant Hill, but I still feel like Phil
I'm on that Zen ting, feel like I just won my 10th ring
I'm on, I could shoot the sun into a wedding ring
From half court, it's pouring*

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

00:06:56 Jesse Host Can you tell me a little bit about what the hip-hop scene is like in New Zealand? New Zealand is a small country. I mean, I looked it up, and fewer people live in New Zealand than live here, in Los Angeles.

00:07:10 Tom Guest Yeah. I’d like to say it’s a bunch of dispossessed people. A lot of people that relate to the art form for the reason it was created. A lot of people that have things to say about the state of politics, whether they deliberately say those things or not. They have those things that they need to say, and they gravitate towards this art form because there’s more freedom to speak on those things. It’s almost encouraged, I guess. And people from working class

neighborhoods, the majority of those people being Polynesian people that came to New Zealand from—a Samoan dude called Sugarpark, I believe, who came from California—visited California. Came down, started popping and—yeah, I mean, the hip-hop scene’s like anywhere else in the world. It’s a little scene of people that get together.

These days, I guess it’s getting more and more popular. It’s pretty hard to speak about us like dancing about architecture. But yeah. That’s my best description.

00:08:19 Jesse Host Is it a job? I mean, can you tour in New Zealand and make a living?
00:08:23 Tom Guest Nope. *[Laughs.]* You can like—I mean, there’s—I’m just in the studio at the moment, with the bro that I just met, and we were just talking about what it is to be a musician. And all the other side hustles that you have to have as a musician in New Zealand. And the bro does—you know, he records a bunch of adverts and things like that, and then when the doors are shut, he makes his own stuff. And I think that’s what a lot of us do. You know, we wash dishes. We paint houses. We play in bands we might not really love. Things like that. But that’s how we’re all getting through in this world, I think. We’re all compromising our integrity throughout the day to keep the landlord fat.

00:09:14 Jesse Host I wanna play a little bit of “Pocket Lint” from your album, *Avantdale Bowling Club*.

00:09:19 Music Music *[Tom agrees.]*
“Pocket Lint” from the album *Avantdale Bowling Club* by Avantdale Bowling Club.

*My lady late like the rent, I'm skint
Every cent that I made I spent
Cut the cheque and I paid my pimp
Now all I got is this pocket lint
Bank that run the world ain't my friend
Man that own the land ain't my kin*

00:09:32 Jesse Host *[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]*
More with Tom Scott of Avantdale Bowling Club after the break. Stay with us. It’s *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:09:40 Music Music *[Volume increases.]*

*Pocket lint
Pocket lint
All I got is this pocket lint
Pocket lint
Pocket lint
Pocket lint (yeah)*

00:09:53 Music Transition Chiming synth with a steady beat.
00:09:58 Jesse Host Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. If you’re just joining us, I’m talking with Tom Scott. He’s a rapper based in New Zealand. He’s been making records for a little over a decade, there. Lately, he has been recording under the name Avantdale Bowling Club. In

2018, that group recorded a beautiful self-titled debut. He just followed it up with *Trees*, which is out now.

Tom and I talked in 2018. Before we get back into our conversation, let's hear another song from *Trees*. This is "Friday Night @ the Liquor Store".

00:10:29 Music Music

"Friday Night @ the Liquor Store" from the album *Trees* by Avantdale Bowling Club.

*Yeah it's a eight hour day
Forty-hour week
And it's a Friday night
At the liquor store*

*Yeah, the water hole at the—
The whole neighborhood lined up like prey in the Sahara
Dismount front truck cab and stampede
The pool of Stein lager, like a school of piranha
Box under arm but still under the armor
Young cub under the table watching his father
Red lions, grey geese, purple iguanas
All running like mascara the day after
Still trying to chase a dragon they'll never catch
Of an itch of which he'll never scratch
With a scratchie, blow a whole bag on a baggy
Bottle up a problem in a bottle of happy
In a high-vis tux at the broke folk's ball*

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

00:11:09 Jesse Host
00:11:13 Tom Guest

Avantdale is a real place. Can you tell me about it?
Avantdale. I'm from a place called Avantdale. Yeah. *[Censored]*, I'll tell you about that. I just spent a whole album telling you about that.

[Jesse laughs.]

It's a working-class neighborhood. It's the most diverse neighborhood in the country, other than a place called Porirua. So, it's full of Polynesian people, Māori people, Indian people, Chinese, Nigerian. And it's one of the last places in Auckland to still not be gentrified. In fact, the gentrification even just jumped over Avantdale and went to Newland. Like, "Mmmm, we'll come back here."

[Jesse laughs.]

So, it's a place that we're still fighting for. 'Cause I believe it's like—it's a template for utopia. It's not utopia, but it's some kind of like blueprint for it. Because you're all—I don't know. I'm gonna get into some "we are the world" *[censored]* if I'm not careful here. But yeah, it's a beautiful place. And it's something I believe in. It's one of the only things I believe in, to be honest. So, I stand proud for it, and I've always tried to put it on the map and speak about it. Yeah. *[Sighs.]* It's my home. It's the place that I associate with as home.

00:12:34 Jesse Host
00:12:36 Tom Guest

You left and came back, right?
Yeah. I went to Melbourne, just 'cause in New Zealand, there's only so much you can do before you've—you know—outgrown the

fishbowl. Not that—it's a beautiful fishbowl. I like the fishbowl. But yeah, I had to jump. So, I went to Melbourne. Went looking for something over there. And it was a little bit hotter than I'd expected. I was really growing into the city, and then my girlfriend got pregnant. My fault. She didn't just get pregnant. I impregnated her. And then, we came home. Yeah. That's about the story, there.

00:13:16 Jesse Host
00:13:18 Tom Guest

Why did you decide to come home?

[Sighs.] We came home because I wanted my sons to be from here. I don't wanna sound like a nationalist or anything like that, but I just wanted my sons to be raised in this place, because I love everything about this place. And I just don't think you'd get those opportunities in Australia as much as the money was better in Australia and the fishbowl was bigger in Australia. There's just something about New Zealand, about Aotearoa, that's just—yeah. I realized that once I left it.

00:13:55 Jesse Host

When I think of the place I grew up, there are like particular spots that hold a lot of meaning for me.

00:14:03 Tom Guest

Yes, bruv. Yep.

00:14:06 Jesse Host

And I wonder what those spots are for you, with Avantdale.

00:14:11 Tom Guest

I know exactly what those spots are for me. It's funny, like it's the same spots you ran to when your mum sent you to your room. You know? The same spot you jumped out the window and went to. And for me, it's this one—it's the end of Avantdale road. There's a creek there. And I went there when I was a kid, and we climbed the pylons. I went there when I was a teenager, and we smoked weed. And I still go there as an adult when I'm anxious. I still just go there. It's a [censored] old creek that you wouldn't wanna swim in, but we did as kids. And yeah, it's still that place and it's still that same basketball court that I went to as a kid.

Yeah, I think maybe like we were saying, it's those spots that are familiar. And they're just so rich in data. You know? In data of memories. You know? Like, yeah, they're just so rich. So, they just seem so lit up. Something about those places. Yeah. I'm probably under no illusion that some of these things are constructs of my mind. I'm like under no illusion that when I speak of home, it's probably not a physical place. But maybe it's just that—you know, I can sit there and see this sort of augmented reality of the past. You know? I can—like, layered over this creek are the kids that we were playing in it. Layered over this creek are—you know, the teenagers that we were sitting there with a box of beers. It's really just a template. It's really just a background for memories. You know? To layer memories on.

So, even if eventually there's a big sweatshop built on top of that creek, I can probably still see under it. So, I still value those physical places for some reason. You know? But yeah, they change. But I just don't think—I mean, they're just such a great way to generate memories. When you go to those places, it just sparks memories. So, I value those places. And yeah, I'm aware they change. But also, I think gentrification kind of teaches you what's important. There's a saying, a Māori saying, that goes, "He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata." And that just means, "The people, the people, the people." Yeah, the Māori have a saying, "Tāngata whenua," that means, "The people of the land." And so, when I'm glamorizing and romanticizing this land, this—you know—this place,

it's really not about the land. It's about the people. And I think that's what I've learned through the gentrification of our neighborhood.

If they push us out, I'll just follow the people. You know? I'll follow the nomadic people to wherever they push us. And I won't be too concerned that they want that piece of land, because it's just a piece of land. Yeah.

00:17:17 Jesse Host
00:17:22 Music Music

Let's hear Avantdale Bowling Club and "Home".
"Home" from the album *Avantdale Bowling Club* by Avantdale Bowling Club.

When I get back home

*Looking out the window on the plane
Rain dripping on the windows to my soul
Three years now that I been away
A little fish had to find a bigger bowl
When I touch down on the runway
I'm gonna run straight to my mum waiting at the gate
Get the duty free for the old man
And drink it with him till I can't stand
Never been so lonely
When I get home
I'm gonna hit up all the homies
And then we'll get stoned
See my Nana and my Grandpop
These days only see 'em on the laptop
These days I ain't got a day to have off
Been away so long when I get back I'ma head back out to
Avantdale
That's home, never turn my back on where I'm from
When I'm back, then it's back on*

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

00:18:17 Jesse Host

I heard about your most recent record on a message board on the internet, which actually still exist. And the post was like, "You wouldn't believe it if I said that this was a jazz rap record from New Zealand that is really good. You might not think that that makes any sense."

[Tom chuckles.]

And I thank goodness that they put it in that context, 'cause if they had just said, "This is a great jazz rap record from New Zealand," I would've been like, okay, fine, whatever. Enjoy *Guru's Jazzmatazz* or whatever with different local references. But when I listened to it, what I thought was it is so hard to combine the aesthetics of jazz and hip-hop. And usually, when someone says jazz hip-hop, what they mean is they are pulling a sample from a jazz record. Like, you know, usually a sort of soul jazz record, like Lou Donaldson or something like that. Just pulling four bars from it and looping them up and adding a little bit hard drums. Like, they're using it the same way that they would use—you know, the same way that they would use a sample from a Journey record. You know what I mean.

[Tom agrees.]

00:19:28 Tom Guest And the aesthetic—you know, it sounds different. And most journalists would probably still go, “Oh, it’s got jazzy undertones,” if it was a Journey record. You know?

00:19:33 Jesse Host I think that your record is much more a jazz record than most records that are called jazz rap records. And I wonder if that was intentional and why you made that choice.

00:19:52 Tom Guest Yeah. I—[sighs], I think I was well aware of everything you just mentioned. And the jazz I was listening to was jazz. So, I wanted to make that. I wanted to make it sound like Pharoah Sanders, not like Guru. I wanted it to have the musicianship of a jazz record, of a Blue Note record or of a Strata-East record. Yeah. And so, that’s how I set out to do it. And then it was inevitable that people were gonna call it jazz rap, because it had jazz and rap in it. And I just love jazz music, and I wanted to try to add something to that legacy. And it’s really hard to do, because it’s not mine to take. And it’s—you know, I just went to a jazz gig on Monday, and an amazing gig, but no one was dancing. No one was dancing. Maybe because it was in 5:7 or something, I don’t know. But it still seemed a bit backwards.

Like, where jazz is these days and what it means, it’s kind of sad. Like, it’s gentrified, you know? Like, it’s like this [sighs]—like wanky, intellectual music that it doesn’t have to be. Like, such a dangerous weapon to play with. But yeah, that’s what it was. And there’s just so much you can do with it. It’s just—I feel like I could make another seven albums with this formula, and they’d all be different. So, yeah, I’m just—I just wanna honor all the greats that taught me the things that I understand about this music, and yeah—and hopefully not [censored] on what it is.

00:21:38 Jesse Host Are you an instrumentalist?

00:21:40 Tom Guest No. Far from it.

00:21:42 Jesse Host So, how do you make a record like this?

00:21:46 Tom Guest Uh. [Sighs.] Just you’re kind of forced to, I guess. Yeah. A lot of the time, when I try to explain how the record was made, it feels like I’m saying that I was kind of forced to do it. ‘Cause I don’t really know much about mixing or engineering or anything. I just know what chords speak to me. And so, I would just find those chords through samples and things like that. And then I would just try to make them more interesting by getting friends I knew to add to them. Whether it was Julianne Dion on drums or Johnathan Crayford on the keys or Guy Harrison, da-da-da-da, all these people that I was lucky enough to know. I just got them to add to it and then accidentally, through that, I guess I was kind of a producer. But I had a lot of friends that helped me as well. I—through that, I accidentally became some sort of producer, I guess. [With a thick northern English accent.] Producer. I’m a producer. I produce things, innit?

And yeah. That’s what it is, I guess. But I think every—I think rappers probably a lot of the time get undervalued as producers. Like, it’s often probably assumed that the rapper had nothing to do with how the record sounds. You know? And I think that’s probably wrong a lot of the time. Yeah, so maybe that will be a nice myth to bust. But yeah.

00:23:20 Jesse Host Yeah, I mean, I don't think Kanye West could sit down at a piano and play "The Entertainer".

[Tom chuckles and sings a few bars of "The Entertainer".]

But like, you know, Kanye West is a guy who came from sample-based production. You know, like certainly Kanye West knows his way around an MPC, a sampler. But I don't think he likely even puts hands on the MPC much, anymore. What he is doing is—but at the same time, I don't think his music is any less his for it. Like, I don't think there's any doubt that whether there's a guitarist in there or a guy who brought a stack of records or whatever, it is all coming from—it is all coming from the producer on those records, and the producer is Kanye West. And I would say the same even of, you know—I'm sure it's the same for Kendrick Lamar, a guy who doesn't—who's probably never made a beat in his life.

[Tom agrees.]

00:24:30 Tom Guest It's clear that someone is in charge of those records, or they would all sound different.

Yeah. And maybe there's not a particular title that you can give, because we always wanna—you know, like we always wanna give that title like, "Oh, he's not just a rapper. He's a rapper slash producer slash—" You know? But maybe it's a bit more complicated. And those titles are a easy way for us to sort of put things into boxes. Like, you know, people often—when, you know, they wanna call a rapper a poet, but—you know, sometimes a rapper's just a rapper who's poetic.

00:25:01 Jesse Host I get really mad when people call rappers poets.

[Tom agrees.]

00:25:10 Tom Guest I'm like, "You know what? Rappers are bad poets, but you know what? Poets are bad rappers."

Yeah. Straight up. That's why we try to avoid calling people rappers in the first place, because no one wants to own it. Like, you know? Everyone wants to try to pretend they're something bigger than that. But in doing so, you lose all the best ones, because the best ones don't wanna admit that they are rappers. And so, now we're calling them all poets. Like, yeah. It's kind of dangerous. I like to own the genre of hip-hop and claim it, because—yeah, it's an intricate genre. And there's so much more to it than the box that people wanna put all the rappers in.

00:25:50 Jesse Host Let's hear some of "Years Gone By", which is the opening track of the self-titled album from my guest Tom Scott, *Avantdale Bowling Club*.

00:25:59 Music Music "Years Gone By" from the album *Avantdale Bowling Club* by Avantdale Bowling Club.

*I cut another tree down to pass the time
While I watch a lifetime pass me by
Looking back on old days, glassy-eyed
Watching years go, like my auntie's mind
We used to sit up in the car park and rhyme
Now a night like that is hard to find*

*Looking back on old times, I can't rewind
Talking to my old friends that aren't alive no more
The years gone by*

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

00:26:26 Jesse Host This song was the single. It's also like five or seven minutes long. And it's basically your entire autobiography. It's the story—it's the story of your life, more or less year by year. Was that a hard thing or an easy thing to write?

00:26:44 Tom Guest I guess it was both. 'Cause it's cathartic, but I also had to be quite specific. And to be honest, I probably don't remember much of my life. But maybe that was just me like putting together a little bunch of stuff to identify with, 'cause I have no memory. Maybe I smoked that away. I don't know. But I really don't remember most of my life. Most of the times people tell me things, I'm like, "Sure, I did that. That's interesting." So, maybe that's why I wrote that. But yeah, it was hard to sum up a whole year in two bars or sometimes four. But it's probably easier than writing a whole autobiography. Like, you know? At least it ends in seven minutes.

[Jesse chuckles.]

But yeah, I think it is—I think there's something interesting about trying to recall your whole life, because—you know, every time you bring a memory up, you taint it. Right? With where you are, remembering it. So. It's really hard to know what really happened in your life and how much weight you should place on each moment. I think that causes a lot of mental health issues. You know? Like, how much we think our parents weren't there for us or—you know what I mean? 'Cause you really can't—you can—*[sighs]*. Even the trauma, you only remember a couple days of it, and how important was that compared to the other years where everything wasn't traumatic? I think those were some of the difficulties in writing that song, just making sure not to accidentally disrupt my whole reality. You know? By conjuring up these memories and giving them too much power. Yeah.

00:28:53 Jesse Host I mean, the whole album is kind of elegiac. It's about what is irrevocably gone. Like, it's about the past and memory, but like it's—in a particular way, it's not so much about living in that as just that that will never be again. Because it's passed.

00:29:12 Tom Guest Yeah. Interesting, isn't it? But—and then sometimes it's just dangerous to think that we can ever recall it. You know? Like, 'cause it is gone. It's totally gone. And it's like trying to paint a car that just went past. You know? Like, you'll do your best impression. You know how things don't even hold up in court? Like, testimony from witnesses and things? You know? And how much that there's disproof against memory being—you know, like how fallible memory is. I'm quite obsessed with that and interested in that idea. So, yeah, I don't know how much weight you should put into memory. *[Clicks teeth.]* But I'm guilty of reminiscing. For sure.

00:29:59 Jesse Host Both memory and hip-hop—and especially on this record—are like in a way acts of editing. You know? Like, creating music from other music is about capturing these like little, fleeting moments. I mean, there's hip-hop that recreates old music, substantially. You know. That was—the golden age of Puff Daddy solo singles, he was

practically rapping over disco instrumentals. But mostly, it's about capturing these little—these little pieces as they—like, grabbing them as they float by and saying like, you know, what if we built the whole airplane out of the black box? And I feel like memory is the same thing. Like, and this song is the same thing. Like, it's you just picking the little pieces—'cause there's no way to fit your life into a song, but it's just these little things that stick out. You know, your MC Hammer tape and track number nine on *All Eyes on Me*. And those may be the things that you're built upon, eh? But then I think that's also what I'm saying is that you don't—I wanna remember more. I wanna remember that there was a lot more, but I guess after a while you can't. Or maybe you just can't access it.

00:31:05 Tom Guest

00:31:24 Jesse Host

00:31:43 Tom Guest

I wanna ask you about a few of the things that you rap about in "Years Gone By", the autobiographical track on this record. When you were a kid, you say, "In '92, my drunk dad jumped ship on my mom." How old were you?

I think I was about—wait, '92... six—eight. Yeah. I was eight. I think it's a bit rough that I said that. When—in saying that line, I was like, "Oh, it wasn't totally my dad's fault," but it kind of was. He was seeing another lady. My mum went to—he's a bass player, so one day my mom decided to go to check one of the—he's like, you know, I've got a gig tonight. I'll see you later. Da-da-da.

And I guess my mum's intuition was like, "I'll go see what he's up to." And she went along and saw that he was with another girl. And anyway, they broke up. But I remember the day my mum told me like, "Me and your dad aren't gonna be living in the same house anymore."

And all I said was, "Alright, that's cool. Can I go outside and play basketball now?" And maybe that's when I started repressing it. I don't know. But it didn't really affect me that hard. But yeah, that's what happened. I mean, yeah. And then my mum sort of raised me, and my dad in my head kind of wasn't there, but I'm scared that I'm like giving him—I'm just putting all the blame on him, to be honest.

I better be paying you \$450 an hour, now that I'm confessing all this.

00:33:54 Jesse Host

Wow, you go to a really premium therapist.

[They laugh.]

00:32:58 Tom Guest

But no, that's—I mean, that's my story and that's probably most people's story of my generation. Like, how many marriages work out?

00:33:06 Jesse Host

The line that comes after that line about your dad jumping ship on your mom is—or the two lines that come after are, "In '93, I won my first fight, like a D-O-double-G." And obviously, that was the year that Snoop Dogg came out. "Still mad at the man I wanted to be."

00:33:23 Tom Guest

Yeah. I think at the time I had no connection of those two events. Right? But there was some stage where my mum told me that that year I was a real—I was really disruptive in class. I don't know if it was because I just learned how to say no and had to rebel or if I was mad at the man I wanted to be. And I think I kind of was. I think I was a little bit gutted about it. And you know what? Unrightfully so. I don't think I had a right to be, 'cause he tried to do what he could.

And now, I find myself in his shoes raising my kid, and that's hard, man! That's hard to have time for your child and your partner.

One thing I've been—cheesy metaphor that I've been talking on lately is like if you wanna feed a plant, you water the roots. And I think like we forget to do that when we have children. We forget to water the relationship and like put time into the relationship. 'Cause if you do that, your kid's gonna be good. But anyway, I didn't think my dad and my mum really did that. And yeah, I guess it kind of upset me, but I just feel like such a brat, being upset by that. You know? That's a kind of thing you should just deal with. You know? It's not your problem.

00:34:46 Jesse Host Well, number one, I don't think that's true—the deny your problem part. Number two, I feel like one of the things that I have learned as an adult—and especially from actual therapy was that it was okay for me to simultaneously believe that things about my childhood caused me emotional problems that I still grapple with to this day, but that did not mean that my parents weren't and aren't good people who were doing their best.

00:35:25 Tom Guest Yeah! I think, you know, that they're just kids, man. They're just trying. Like, maybe it's a dangerous thing to put as much weight as we do on the definition of a parent. You know what I mean? Like, there's a Tupac song that says, "Mom is just a little girl." And just, that sums it up in that line right there. You know? They're all just trying. They didn't know what they were doing. So, yeah. But yeah, that's not to say that your pain isn't real. I just think there's a lot more to be sad about in the world than that.

00:36:02 Jesse Host In this song, "Years Gone By", you rap a little bit about the mid aughts. And it sounds like in the early years of the 21st century, you really got lost.

00:36:17 Tom Guest Yeah. I did. Didn't know I was lost, though. Like anyone who's lost. *[Sighs.]* But looking back at it, I've realized I definitely was. I dropped out of school. School didn't do it for me. I didn't know where that started, but at some point I was more concerned with Nas than Shakespeare. And I didn't relate to what the school system was trying to give me. Maybe that's my excuse for my bad attention span. I don't know. Whatever it was. I went to a public school—not to blame it on that either. But I dropped out of school and then I worked all these jobs. Like, cleaning hotel beds. That's why I just left a tip at the hotel I'm at. 'Cause I know how painful that is. Packing rice in a factory, digging holes for the counsel. Everything. My mama was like, "You go pay the rent." You know?

Yeah. Well, to be honest, all those jobs showed me like—they taught me more than anything I ever learned. Like, the value of a dollar and all of that. Anyway, I got lost somewhere in there, because I think it was hard. And New Zealand in the working class, we work and then we drink. That's what we do on a Friday night. The liquor store has a line out the door; you know? You work and you drink. And in the process of that, I got a bit lost. And I fell out with my best friend. One night, we got way too drunk, and we got in a fight. And just everything was going wrong. I was with this girl; she left 'cause I was a piece of *[censored]*. And yeah. And I kept doing my music, and I guess music eventually was the remedy that I needed. But I was—yeah. It was a hard time, I guess. Looking back.

Plus, you're too young to know what's going on! You know? You're thrown out of the house, sort of figuring it all out. Is that a universal kind of feeling?

00:38:20 Jesse Host

I got thrown out of the house too.

[Tom chuckles.]

I'm a committed rule follower, which is why I work in public radio.

[Tom laughs.]

00:38:34 Tom Guest

But it's terrifying.

Yeah. That's what I'm saying. I mean, it's part of the—it's like right of passage: crippling depression. *[Laughs.]*

00:38:46 Jesse Host

You have a line in the song where you say, "Then, '06, my homie hung in the park where we all hung."

00:38:53 Tom Guest

Yeah. Yeah. Um. Yeah. We used to drink in this park in Morningside. All of us. You know. The first time we started smoking, you know—we're smoking mad weed just every day all day, getting into trouble. We're all best friends, you know? And one of my bros, he started getting into like—he was smoking meth and stealing cars and all sorts of *[censored]*. And one night he crashed this car. And he came 'round to the bro's house and the bro wasn't there. And he left. And I think that night he hung himself in that park where we used to drink. And... that *[censored]* me up. And yeah. Because in New Zealand, a lot of us do it. A lot of us young men do that. I don't know what you guys know about this country, but we're a colonized country. You know? I'm someone with the same skin as the colonizers.

But they brought with them—you know—Catholicism and sort of hashed out the native peoples' culture and beliefs, a tribal people who would speak about their problems and, you know, brought with it this sort of "harden up" attitude. You know? We thrive at rugby, a sport that's just played by macho dummies, to be honest. And that's our attitude on things here. "Harden up." You know? That's something you'll constantly hear people say here. "Harden up." And there was a thing where you weren't even allowed to talk about suicide on the radio, 'cause they thought that that sort of led people to do it. We don't know what *[censored]* we're doing with this problem. We've got some ideas, but we really haven't solved it. We got the rate of youth suicide in the world. And we've got it good. We're supposed to be, you know, clean, green New Zealand.

But yeah, so everyone in this country probably knows someone who took their life. And for me, that changed everything for me, that day when I found out that my bro had taken his. After that, I just swore that I would never—I'd never let my masculinity get in the way of like my emotions ever again. And I'm a tough kid, myself. You know? I'm from a place where you had to know how to fight, and you had to like—you had to be hard. You know? But I'm over that. It's not worth it. You know. Like, the amount of times you can be wrong by being positive I think outweigh the amount of times you could be wrong being negative. You know? What if you're wrong about your self-worth? You know?

00:42:09	Jesse	Host	We're taking a break. We'll be back in just a second. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:42:16	Promo	Clip	Music: Exciting, distorted techno music.
			Jesse Thorn: Did your neighbor back into your car?!
			John Hodgman: Bring that case to Judge Judy.
			<i>[Gavel bang.]</i>
			Jesse: Think the mailman might be the real father?
			John: Give that one to Judge Mathis.
			<i>[Gavel bang.]</i>
			Jesse: But. <i>[Music cuts out suddenly.]</i> Does your mom want you to flush her ashes down the toilet at Disney World when she passes away?
			John: Now, that's my jurisdiction.
			<i>[Relaxed music fades in.]</i>
			John: Welcome to the court of Judge John Hodgman, where the people are real, the disputes are real, and the stakes are often unusual.
			Speaker 1: If I got arrested for dumping your ashes in The Jungle Cruise, it would be an honor.
			Speaker 2: I don't wanna be part of somebody getting a super yacht.
			Speaker 3: I don't know at what point you wanna go into this, but we've had a worm bin before.
			Jesse: Available free right now at MaximumFun.org .
			John: <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> , the court of last resort when your wife won't stop pretending to be a cat and knocking the clean laundry over.
			<i>[A meow.]</i>
00:43:04	Music	Transition	Relaxed synth with a steady beat.
00:43:09	Jesse	Host	I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to <i>Bullseye</i> . My guest is rapper Tom Scott of Avantdale Bowling Club.
00:43:22	Music	Music	There's a beautiful song on the record, called "F(r)iends", with the R in parentheses so it also spells fiends. "F(r)iends" from the album <i>Avantdale Bowling Club</i> by Avantdale Bowling Club.
			<i>Old boy sitting in the dark with a lightbulb And a lighter in his hand like a pyro Just can't put the thing down like an iPhone</i>

*Got too high flipped out like a psycho
What's he gonna do? Where's he gonna go now?
Last I heard he was living in a motel
Broke up with his old girl then he broke down
Took it out on a best bro, they ain't bros now
What you really know about a spot like that?
Thirty-one years old, addicted to crack since way back
How you gonna quit like that?
Try kick that, it'll kick right back*

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

00:43:46	Jesse	Host	There are a lot of hip-hop records about drug addiction, and they come mostly from two perspectives—or have mostly come from two perspectives. One is, “I do this all the time. This isn’t a problem.” And one is, you know, kind of a classic, “Yeah, crackheads are funny and pathetic.” And I mean, I don’t mean to say that that’s every hip-hop song about drug addiction, but that’s a lot of them. And—
00:44:19	Tom	Guest	Yeah. I think Nas is different. I think—yeah, let’s make sure that we’re not the White guys that say all of African American music is about drug dealers.
00:44:29	Jesse	Host	No, not at all. Not at all. But you know.
00:44:32	Tom	Guest	“We’re different.” You’re not saying that, are you?
00:44:34	Jesse	Host	Even Nas was laughing at bass heads.
00:44:36	Tom	Guest	Yeah, true. Selling some stolen amps. Broken amps?
00:44:40	Jesse	Host	Broken amps, yeah.
00:44:42	Tom	Guest	Nah, you’re right.
00:44:43	Jesse	Host	And “F(r)iends” is a song that is like deeply sympathetic to people who are deep in drug addiction.
00:44:54	Tom	Guest	Yeah. I think that—I think the reason being is that my parents were both fiends. My dad still struggles with addiction. They both come from the love movement, which—you know, nothing feels more like love than opiates. You know? So, I know how to empathize with a fiend. And that’s really the only way to fix it. Like, you know? These people need help. And we could go a bit deeper into like how many people need help. ‘Cause—yeah, I just kind of also believe that if you grew the weed, it’s—you know, it’s on you to remove it as a—you know, as a society. Like, that came from something. So, yeah, our addiction problems in New Zealand come from probably toxic masculinity. You know? Our refusal to acknowledge colonialism. Da-da-da-da-da.
			There’s a whole lot to it. And I think we gotta start by empathizing with these people that are victims of the system. My old man, now he works in a needle clinic where they provide services for people that are addicted to certain substances. And he gets in trouble from the management because he’s too empathetic to these people. And they’re like, <i>[callously]</i> “You can’t get attached to these people! They’re bloody fiends. You know?” And it’s a weird way of looking at things, man. It’s weird. I don’t get it. I don’t get it.
00:46:23	Jesse	Host	Did spending all this time on this record—and you worked on this record for years—and making a record that is so much a kind of record of your life, no pun intended, did it change the way you think about yourself?

00:46:43	Tom	Guest	I think so. 'Cause I now get to reflect on everything. It's like the timer went off. <i>[Beeps.]</i> What do you think of yourself? Okay. Ah. That's all the time we have. What do you think of yourself now?
			So, yeah, I think it definitely did. It was a checkpoint, like I was saying. I think it helped me. I think it really did help. I mean, like now that you asked that—no one's ever really asked that, but yeah, it helps you see yourself and see where you're at and where you're going. Mm. Yeah, and I now see my—I can see myself as a father. I can see myself a little bit as a role model and understand what I've gotta do from here to change the way I see myself, I think. I don't really like seeing myself. It's frightening. But yeah. That's it.
00:47:39	Jesse	Host	Tom, I really appreciate you taking all this time to be on <i>Bullseye</i> . It was really great to get to talk to you.
			<i>[Music fades in.]</i>
00:47:45	Tom	Guest	Bruv, I appreciate you taking all this time, man. Thank you so much, brother. Thank you.
00:47:52	Jesse	Host	Tom Scott. His group, Avantdale Bowling Club's latest album is called <i>Trees</i> . You can find out how to buy it on the <i>Bullseye</i> page at MaximumFun.org . Let's go out with one last song from <i>Trees</i> . This is "Still Feel Broke".
00:48:07	Music	Music	"Still Feel Broke" from the album <i>Trees</i> by Avantdale Bowling Club.
			<i>Fresh cray with the crab, pair that with a sav' Seared bass with the hash, pear tart and ganache Old girl had to smash that, really I thought it was av' Tell the truth it was trash, really but— it I wanted to splash (splash) Blow a rack like a sax, sipping on 'gnac like going to Paris Tipping the bag boy like a bad boy, hit her back later with the bag Sipping the house red with the head chef, with the white stuck in my 'stache Smash making an —hole of the man that I know him as But it's an act though, I'm bored man Never wanted to ball, eff that food court Just wanted to play some H.O.R.S.E. on a horse Pour some port on a pork chop at a new place on up north Far from poor but I'll probably take this mortgage to the morgue Really what good is it being adored if I still feel like a fraud Hearing a sold-out town hall applauding, still feeling ignored Bruv, I'm floored What do I do with another award, give it to Lorde I was just happy to play support, this is the therapy I can afford Writing these words just to cope, grow this herb just to smoke Really its all just jokes bruv, this coach just a cloak All of these fans just some fiends</i>
			<i>[Song fades out.]</i>
00:49:03	Music	Transition	Brassy, relaxed music.
00:49:05	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, I finally retired the set of drinking glasses that I bought 10 or 15 years ago at a thrift store. I had broken one too many. Two of them got stuck together; when I <i>[chuckles]</i> tried to separate them using heat and

cold to expand and contract them, one of them exploded. Uh, the new ones—the new ones are tempered glass.

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 Max Fun is Tabatha Myers. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is called “Huddle Formation”, recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries. They let us use that. We appreciate it.

Bullseye is on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. [@Bullseye](#) on Twitter. [Facebook.com/Bullseyewithjessethorn](https://www.facebook.com/Bullseyewithjessethorn) and search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* on YouTube. You will find our interviews and stuff we're up to there. Great places to go if you wanna share something that you liked on this week's show. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:50:30 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]