

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	[Music fades out.] “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. Our first guest this week is the great Isabella Rossellini. She’s being interviewed by our pal, correspondent, and Isabella Rossellini superfan, Louis Virtel. Isabella Rossellini was born into European film royalty. She’s the daughter of director, Roberto Rossellini, and actor, Ingrid Bergman. And she’s probably best known as an actor. She’s had acclaimed parts in movies like <i>Blue Velvet</i> and <i>Death Becomes Her</i> and <i>Big Night</i> . Her appearance on <i>30 Rock</i> as Jack Donaghy’s ex is the stuff of legends and memes, today.
00:00:56	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:00:57	Clip	Clip	Bianca (30 Rock): Well, damn it, Johnny. You know I love my big beef and cheddar.
00:00:59	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:00	Jesse	Host	But I mean, it’s kind of unfair. Rossellini isn’t just a terrific actor. She’s a model, a performance artist, and accomplished singer. She’s even an academic. Just three years ago, Isabella earned a master’s degree in animal behavior from Hunter College, in New York City. Most recently, she’s lent her talents to voice acting. She’s starring alongside Jenny Slate in the movie <i>Marcel the Shell with Shoes On</i> . It’s a comedy that mixes animation and live action, based on the viral short from 2010.
00:01:57	Sound Effect	Transition	Jenny Slate plays the film’s title character: a tiny, talking seashell with red shoes and single googly eye. Marcel is the subject of a documentary. Isabella plays Marcel’s nanna, Connie. Connie lives in the backyard of the house Marcel lives in. She’s a little forgetful. And as you’re about to hear, she’s not quite clear on the concept of what a documentary is. Music swells and fades.
00:01:58	Clip	Clip	Connie (Marcel the Shell With Shoes On): You’re making what? Speaker: A documentary. [Beat.] It’s like— Marcel: Oh, it’s like a movie. But nobody has any lines. And nobody even knows what it is while they’re making it. Speaker: Mm. Marcel: No? Speaker: That’s sort of a way to put it. Yeah. No, I just am making a little video portrait. Connie: About Marcel?

Marcel & Speaker: Yeah.

Connie: A document—a film?

Speaker: Uh, yeah.

Marcel: It's like the truth, kind of. It's a movie!

Connie: And it's the truth about Marcel.

Marcel: I mean, I hope so! I guess he could really spin it and make me look like a total—

[Bright, warm music fades in.]

Speaker: So, this is your garden out here, huh?

Connie: Yes!

Speaker: It's beautiful.

Connie: Thank you!
Music swells and fades.

00:02:29 Sound Effect Transition

00:02:30 Louis Virtel Host

Isabella Rossellini, it's a thrill to talk to you. And it's especially a thrill to talk to you in the context of this movie, because Marcell the Shell is a hard concept to wrap your head around if you're not familiar with the YouTube videos.

00:02:42 Isabella Rossellini Guest

[Chuckling.] Right. When I was offered the role, I went to see the YouTube short films about it. And I found it charming, but most of all, I really liked the story of how the film came about. Jen was at a wedding, and she felt a little bit intimidated and started to play with this funny voice. And Dean then created Marcel, and they made a short video that was put on YouTube that went viral. And so, they made more videos. And then they were offered a book deal, and now they're making a feature film. And I thought that is such a modern story about how artists come to bring their narrative, come to make films. So, I was interested to meet a new generation that starts on YouTube and ends up in the movie theater. And so, *Marcel* was charming.

It was an interesting process. We improvised a lot of dialogue. And so, generally as an actor, you're given lines and you memorize them, and then you have to make them come out of your mouth in a spontaneous way. Here, we were going—we were given an outline. For example, we just heard the clip where I am a shell and I'm old. I don't know what a documentary is. I don't know the difference between a documentary and a feature film. And they're trying to explain it to me. And so, we improvised but we—that clip that was maybe 30 seconds long, we might have improvised for two hours about it. And then, Dean selected the words and put it together and then created the animation. So, it was a complete different process than a regular film.

00:04:28 Louis Host Yes. And it's unusual how much improvisation is going into this—you know, an animated movie. What's your favorite thing that came out of the improvisation on this movie?

00:04:40 Isabella Guest Well, I think I like to experiment. I like to do things that are new and unusual, and for sure that was—I never worked as an actress like this. You know? Again, you're generally given a script that you have to memorize word perfect. And if you change a word, the writer is not happy. And here, instead there was—the writing came after you said many, many, many, many things. And then it was put together by Dean. And it took him two years to go through these hours and hours of improvisation. It was unusual, but there is a spontaneity.

I also think that when you improvise, there is a lot of spontaneity. You know? Because you're not memorizing anything. And in a stop animation and animation and drawings, maybe the voice has to be incredibly authentic—the expression of the voice has to be incredibly authentic to bring that character to real life. So, the voice I think is very important, although we remember the character of Marcel and the grandmother as a drawing. But I think the voice is what gives them the truthfulness, that you believe that they're characters.

00:05:57 Louis Host The process for making this movie took seven years, and you did the voiceover work for this years ago now.

[Isabella confirms.]

00:06:05 Isabella Guest Three years ago. Four years ago?
Yes! I thought that they were kidding. You know, because they started in YouTube, and they were very young. And so, I said, "Well, maybe—you know, maybe it was a dream and it'll never come to be." [Chuckles.] 'Cause sometime you do work with a lot of young people, and they're trying to make a film. But you know, they're—it's so difficult to make a film that it never comes to be. Yes. It took seven years. It's incredible.

00:06:30 Louis Host Is there anything that made it into the film that you completely forgot about? I mean, if I recorded something three years ago or four years ago, I can't say I would have a sharp memory of what the movie even was after a while.

00:06:41 Isabella Guest No, I—the same. I forgot what were the improvisations. I remember that we did some improvisation at my farm. I live in a farm. And they wanted to do some improvisation at the farm. And it didn't make it into the film, but at a certain point, crows started to go [imitates crow squaws]. And—because they saw a hawk and they were chasing the hawk away. That is what was happening in reality. But that sound allowed me and Jenny to improvise, "Oh, the crows. Let's hide because a crow might eat the shell." And so, also I think Dean occasionally wanted to have something completely new that he would surprise himself—not only the outline. Now, Marcel is—the grandmother is trying to convince him to do the interview for television. You know. That was the outline. And we talked and then we improvised about me trying to convince Marcel to be adventurous, to try new things.

But I think also, Dean sometimes needed—because seven years is a long time. So, I think also Dean needed to be surprised. And so, he did—we did an improvisation, and all of the sudden the crow

allowed him to have a scene where the two of us—the shell were vulnerable to the environment. Crows, mice, dogs. The dog made it. [Chuckles.]

00:08:09 Louis Host And what you're saying is you recorded some of this in Silverlake, in Los Angeles, and also at your place, on the east coast.

[Isabella confirms.]

00:08:22 Isabella Guest And while that gave Dean plenty of surprises, did it add an extra layer of spontaneity for you too?

Yes! Because you know, if you improvised for—we improvised not for one or two hours. It was improvised for a whole day! You know, we were in Silverlake. They had I think a house of a friend. And we stayed there, and we would take breaks for lunch. But Dean wanted to record everything, even lunch. Because maybe at lunch we would say something—a sentence. "I'm not hungry. I don't want to eat. I've eaten enough." That he might use. So, he constantly recorded everything. I don't know how he had the patience to listen to all these words and edit. I wouldn't have had that patience.

00:09:03 Louis Host It's also satisfying to see you do comedy again, which has been sprinkled somewhat liberally throughout your career. But it's probably not what your primarily known for. Is it satisfying particularly to be funny?

00:09:16 Isabella Guest Yes! Although, I—you know, yes. It is. You know, when I do my own films, they're always comical. So, I do like it. [Chuckles.]

00:09:26 Louis Host Is there a particular film you've made where you felt the funniest? Or TV show appearance!

00:09:32 Isabella Guest Uh, *30 Rock* was pretty funny.

00:09:34 Sound Transition Music swells and fades.

00:09:35 Clip Clip **Music:** Upbeat, brassy music.

Bianca: Are you going to marry him?

Liz: Oh, hi! What?

Bianca: Are you going to marry Jack?

Liz: [Awkwardly.] A-ah. I don't know! We've talked about it.

Bianca: I can tell from the way he looks at you that he's serious. He's gonna get you pregnant right away, I'm sure! [Giggles.]

[Liz chuckles politely.]

A little late-in-life baby he can parade around Nantucket. The whole thing makes me wanna vomit!

Liz: Oh, no, you know—

Bianca: [With sudden rage and disgust.] I can take the models! The Rockettes! The Shakira! Because ultimately, I know they are going to leave him! But you?! You can actually make him happy. [Crying.] And that makes me want to sit on a knife!

00:10:20 Sound Effect Transition Music swells and fades.

00:10:21	Louis	Host	<p><i>30 Rock</i> in particular taught me something I didn't know about you. Because that—and I wanna say it was during the first or second season. So, it's not even like the reputation of that show would've been widely known yet. And it goes at such a—you know, whip-smart speed. Was it fun to jump into that particular comic dynamic? And was it difficult?</p>
00:10:43	Isabella	Guest	<p>Sometimes I find it difficult to play a small role, because on the set, people become—especially on television series that last so long, five months, six months—they become like a family. And then you come in, and everybody knows each other. They are not shy. You know, and I am shy. I make mistakes. I get embarrassed. We're not friendly yet. We're not friends yet. So, I find sometimes that playing a small role, it's harder than playing a longer role. Just because you're shy and also there is a mood on the set. There is a style and there is a rhythm. And you don't know that. And so, when you arrive, you have to really quickly adapt and try to guess how they work and adapt.</p>
00:11:46	Jesse	Host	<p>But it's easier if you—it's easier to play a part that is a little bit more substantial than a very—you know, than a part where you go for a day or two on a set.</p> <p>So much more still to get into with Isabella Rossellini. When we come back from a quick break, she and Louis will talk about why she's attracted to working in experimental film. It's <i>Bullseye</i>, from MaximunFun.org and NPR.</p>
00:11:59	Music	Transition	Chiming synth with a steady beat.
00:12:04	Jesse	Host	<p>It's <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, our guest is Isabella Rossellini. She is, of course, a beloved actor and performer. She's the star of movies like <i>Big Night</i> and <i>Blue Velvet</i> and the new comedy, <i>Marcel the Shell With Shoes On</i>. She's being interviewed by our friend and correspondent, Louis Virtel. Let's get back into the conversation.</p>
00:12:25	Louis	Host	<p>Clearly, most of the stuff you've done is experimental in some way. Which leads me to believe that you must be largely bored with the things you are offered—that there's not, you know, that experimental edge to everything you get.</p>
00:12:37	Isabella	Guest	<p>Well, no, I'm not bored. But I think there are two main reasons that made me be in experimental film. First of all, I come from experimental film. My father was considered an experimental filmmaker. His name is Roberto Rossellini and he worked right after the war really changing film, making something that looked like a documentary. But it wasn't a documentary. It was reenacted things that he had seen in his life, with actor and non-actor. And his style—his new style of film that he made was called neo-realism. My father was extremely experimental. And so, I'm not intimidated to jump into something experimental.</p>

And then, the fact that I was a foreigner, and I had an accent. I always felt a little at the margin. I always thought, "Well, I can't be on a regular, big, Hollywood film." Because most of the time, there are not that many foreign actors. They are Anglo-Saxon speaking, but you don't hear many foreigners who have an accent. And so, I thought, when something was offered that was a little odd, I thought, "Well, let me do it! Because I'm not gonna get any of the big films." And in fact, I did sometimes big film to my total, big surprise. [Laughs.] But I did—I continued to do both.

00:13:58	Louis	Host	Your mother, for people who don't know and need to be told immediately, was Ingrid Bergman, star of <i>Casablanca</i> , <i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i> , <i>Notorious</i> , among other unbelievable classics. How likely are you, just at any given time, to watch the movies of either of your parents?
00:14:16	Isabella	Guest	Well, nowadays, it's much simpler. You know. They're all in the Criterion Collection, which I absolutely adore. And I'm hooked to it. I watch the Criterion Collection every day. And it's moving to me that I can see my parents' film whenever I want. Or you know, my mom worked with Hitchcock, with Fleming, with Bergman. And if I want to see more of that director, I can easily access today. When I was a little girl, I had to wait for a retrospective in the movie theater to do it. And they don't do retrospective every year, so sometimes you wait ten years to finally see, you know, the film that my father did during the war. Because I was born after the war. And they were very famous films, and people talked about it. But I had to wait until they were presented in a art movie theater or in a museum for me to see it.
00:15:40	Louis	Host	<p>I think I was 12 years old when I saw <i>Casablanca</i>, my mom's film. Because it didn't—you know. It came out when I was not born, and then finally when I was 12 years old, in Italy, they gave a retrospective of my mom. So, I, every night—it was a retrospective every Wednesday night. I remember they showed ten films of my mom, and every Wednesday for ten Wednesdays I saw my mom's Hollywood films. So, I'm very grateful that today you can access all these whenever you want.</p> <p>When I think of Ingrid Bergman's filmography, she doesn't have too many—you know—I guess broad comedies that stand out. But one movie I love in particular that she—at first the role seems like it's gonna be smaller or less thankless than the other comic roles, but then it really blossoms is <i>Cactus Flower</i>. And I was wondering if you had any particular good memories of watching that movie. 'Cause her personality in that just I think flourishes. She's such a joy to watch.</p> <p>She was so happy to play a comedy. Because they often made her play the romantic lead. You know, she was very beautiful. But she was considered a beauty—an accessible beauty. The girl next door. So, she always played a little bit the girl next door, the good girl. And she was happy when she had to play a nasty character like in <i>Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde</i>. And then, as she grew older—and Mama was very simpatico. She was very funny. She could finally also do comedy, as she did in <i>Cactus Flower</i>. She's very funny in <i>Cactus Flower</i>. I'm sorry that she didn't do more comedy. And I think she was sorry too. She would've wished—she wished to have done more.</p> <p>You really remind me of your mom, specifically in interviews. When I watch interviews with her, she has the same kind of witty, fun flare.</p>

[Isabella laughs.]

And yet, on the silver screen, I really can't think of many roles you've done that either she would've taken or would've even been in the realm of possibility for someone like Ingrid Bergman. Do you ever—do you think—can you think of any roles you've taken that remind you of your mother?

00:17:14 Isabella Guest No, but I also haven't done films in contrast to my mother. You know?

[Louis agrees.]

I think that was a new generation of filmmakers. Like, my mom—I like directors that have a very strong hand, that are very author-like. And so, once you work with these directors of film—they really have their signature, whether it's Hitchcock or David Lynch or Martin Scorsese or Bergman, they become very strong signature of the directors. So, partially, if I had done a Hitchcock film, maybe you would have said, "Oh! You know, there is a similarity." But it's the director. And we favor these kind of films.

I think we—both Mama and I—regard films as an art. And so, originality and new points of view becomes fascinating rather than something that you know is gonna be commercially successful because it has the good guy, the bad guy, the little romantic. You know. Once you do something that has all the ingredients to make it successful, it's less interesting to us. And it's also probably a European tradition.

00:18:27 Louis Host I can't stop thinking about how long ago it was that you recorded this stuff for *Marcel the Shell*. And I was wondering just in general, has there been—in particular—a movie you've worked on where you worked on it and then it took however long it took for it to come out and you were surprised by the final product? Like, in a way you were—

00:18:44 Isabella Guest Probably *Marcel the Shell* has the prize for that.

[They laugh.]

00:18:53 Louis Host At a certain point, I thought it wasn't going to come out. Because you've made so many movies where there's a specific, theatrical feel. And I feel like on the set, you wouldn't have been able to predict what that was. Or it must have been described to you, but you couldn't—you know—tangibly see it. You know. For instance, I don't think *Blue Velvet* could've been described to me in the abstract while making it.

00:19:11 Isabella Guest Well, this is the problem that one has. You know? So, if you work every day, you more or less start to understand the style. But the script is never the final product. A script—for example, *Blue Velvet*—yes, the story was there. But the power of the images of David Lynch, who's also a painter, is so powerful. And the film is all this sequence of imagery. It's also the narration, but the narration is not so important for David. In fact, sometimes you can't really follow the story. And yet, you are afraid. And yet, you are—you feel romantic. So, he's interested in the mood and the mystery of what causes that mood.

So, if you read the script and try to seek narration and try to seek—you're lost. But if you work with David, then you understand something that sometimes cannot be expressed in words: that he's seeking for mood, atmosphere, more than narrative. But it takes a few days to be with the director or the other actors to understand their style, their genre. And then, to adapt. But this is also the great pleasure of being an actor is that you really take trips into people's

minds. And if their minds are great like Tina Fey or David Lynch or Bob Wilson, it's a fantastic journey. But as you're taking it, you're also hesitant and you're a bit shy and you have to—

But I am open to experimentation. And I think that's why I always end up with these experimental films, whether it's *Marcel the Shell* or Guy Maddin and *The Saddest Music in the World*. Or even David Lynch, who—when he did *Blue Velvet*, he was considered very avant-garde. It just wasn't as classic as it is today.

00:21:05 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:21:06 Clip Clip

Music: Discordant, unsettling music.

Dorothy (*Blue Velvet*): Who sent you here?

Jeffrey: Nobody.

Dorothy: I've seen you before.

Jeffrey: I sprayed your apartment. I took your key. I didn't mean to do anything except see you.

Dorothy: What did you see, tonight? Tell me!

Jeffrey: I saw you come in and I saw you talk on the phone.

Dorothy: AND THEN?!

Jeffrey: You got undressed.

Dorothy: Do you sneak in girls' apartments to see them get undressed?

Jeffrey: I haven't before this.

Dorothy: Get undressed. I want to see you.

Jeffrey: Look, I'm sorry. Just let me leave.

00:21:43 Sound Effect Transition

Dorothy: [Furiously.] NO WAY! I wanna see you! Get undressed!
Music swells and fades.

00:21:44 Louis Host

The vigor of this movie, how did he create the atmosphere that would produce a movie like *Blue Velvet*?

00:21:52 Isabella Guest

Well, he produced it by creating enormous friendship and trust. Because we were talking about rape—ritualized rape, crime. A woman that I played—a battered woman. But he did an incredible, extreme situation. And then, when I meet the character played by Kyle MacLachlan—Jeffrey Beaumont—and he's younger than I, I become the character played by Dennis Hopper. I become the executor of the crime on Kyle. And because I exercise power, because I'm powerless in front of Dennis Hopper. But at the opportunity to have a younger boy, I can exercise that muscle.

So, she's crazy. I mean, she's a very convoluted psychological character. And if there wasn't a total trust and a feel of friendship

and protection, it would have been very hard to play the part. We're still very good friends, you know—Laura, Kyle, David, and I. We call each other family.

00:23:10 Louis Host No, Laura is also a stone pro in that movie, and it's one of the first things—starring roles she really had. I hope people revisit also in the future, just specifically for Laura Dern in addition to all the other great performances.

[Isabella agrees.]

But I wanna say about *Blue Velvet*—it's one of the few movies I've seen where I actually find some of it too scary. Like, Dennis Hopper is too frightening for me to rewatch.

[Isabella laughs.]

And I—obviously, you're an intimidating presence yourself in certain ways, but have you ever been just intimidated by the kind of power that an actor brings onset?

00:23:44 Isabella Guest There are films that I can't watch, because I'm too scared. But it's not *Blue Velvet*, maybe because I've done it. When I watch it—when I watched *Blue Velvet*—I watched it recently, because it was an anniversary. I don't know if it was 30 years or 40 years. And it was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. So, I went to see it and presented. And I sat down and looked at the film; I hadn't seen it in 20 years. And I thought, "Wow, it still feels modern. It still feels avant-garde." And that surprised me. But it also fills you—I don't really watch many of the films that I've done, because it always get a little nostalgic. You know? You see that scene and say, "Oh, I remember that day. We did this and then we all went to dinner, or this happened."

And so, it brings up a lot of memories. And nice memories! But still, it's always a little bit sad. I like to look forward instead of backwards.

00:24:37 Louis Host It's interesting that you say you're specifically forward-looking. Not anti-nostalgia, but not seeking out nostalgia. And yet, you also say you watch the Criterion Collection every day.

00:24:46 Isabella Guest Oh, but I don't watch my film! I watch other. [Laughs.] I watch—I love to see—so, the Criterion Collection, what I love is that it is—really treats films like an art. I can't say that about Netflix and Amazon. I'm grateful that all these other platforms—you can see a lot of film, but they are not curated. It's a bin with everything, and unless you know what you're looking for and how to put in order, they certainly don't give you any indication. And Amazon has the stupidest thing in the world. It's something called trivia. You press a little button, and it tells you the mistake in continuity. That enrages me that you can look at a film of John Ford or Hitchcock and the only thing that—and they paid somebody to look at this stupidity?! And you miss the big picture.

These are the new Michelangelos. These are the new Raphael; these are the new Picasso. Cinema has to be recognized as an art. And we're just saying, "Oh look! There's this little thing that is a mistake." Who cares?! You never find that in Criterion. Criterion treats cinema with enormous respect. And also, it teaches you to watch films, because you watch—you select a director and you find

interviews with the director, with critics, with actors. And it's very well-curated, so it gives you an enormous satisfaction, and I've seen more films. Because I might watch—I don't know, a Fellini film, *Amarcord*, but then because it gives me so much information, I might see also another film of Fellini that might have not been very successful, but they give me the key to understand what was the search that Fellini was making.

And maybe it is not terribly successful in this case, but it's still interesting. So, I'm a huge fan of Criterion Collection. And I hope that Amazon and Netflix will learn from them to do similar curation of their collections.

00:26:48	Louis	Host	Have there been any other satisfying deep-dives of directors you've enjoyed recently?
00:26:53	Isabella	Guest	Oh, I've done with—I started with covid. So, now—and I've continued, so now it's a couple of years that I—and I have a film group. And I watch more film than the film group. At the beginning, we watched—you know—four films a week and then we would do Zoom and comment. And now, everybody's back to work, so we do one film a week. And sometimes we take a break, 'cause everybody got too busy. Now, we have a break in July because everybody's traveling or on the holidays or work. So, we resume in August. But I generally watch more films, because I wake up very early in the morning and watch Criterion Channel.

So—and then—I mean, other people suggest things, but I think I'm the one that suggests most. And I'm the daughter of Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rossellini, so I know a little bit more than the others about cinema.

00:27:45	Louis	Host	It should be noted that you live on a farm with some delightful animals that I've seen on your Instagram time and again. What does living on a farm provide an actor? Do you get something specific, spiritually or otherwise, from living where you live?
00:27:58	Isabella	Guest	No, I also—I'm also a scientist. I'm an ethologist. I studied animal behavior and conservation. So, I want to be with animals. And in fact, when I write as an author or a director, all my work—whether it's <i>Green Porno</i> or now I have a new monologue that is coming out, calling <i>Darwin Smile</i> . It's always about animals. So, as an actress, directors can use me for whatever they see in me that corresponds to their character. But when I write and I direct my own things, it's always about animals. So, living in a farm, for me, is lab where I'm close to them and I can see it. So, I enjoy running a farm.
00:28:40	Louis	Host	What was the beginning of this particular interest? Like, what was the moment you—I don't know, a lightbulb went off and you thought, "I need to get into this in a serious, academic way."
00:28:51	Isabella	Guest	Well, I always liked animals since I was a little girl. And then, my father—when I was 14 years old—gave me book that is called <i>King Solomon's Ring</i> by Konrad Lorenz. Konrad Lorenz, it was the founder of this new science of animal behavior, ethology. And he won a Nobel prize for it. And father read the book and he knew that I loved animals. And he gave it to me. And yes, that was the little lamp that went on. And I said, "I want to study this."

But when I was 20—in my 20s, and the right moment to go to college and—there wasn't really, in Italy—it wasn't yet formalized. It was zoology. There was biology. But I was interested in behavior. I

00:30:06	Louis	Host	<p>was intimidated to a lot of chemistry and all that. And then, anyway, I became a model and I loved that too, and became an actress. But then, as I grew older—and so, there was less work as a model and as an actress, and ethology now is presented in schools. I went back! I had time. And the children were grown up; they were moved out of the house. So, I went back. So, I'm a scientist recently. I graduated—I got my master's degree three or four years ago.</p> <p>When I think of like the kindred spirits in my own life, they happen to be people who have literally like the same job. Like, they're also entertainment obsessed comedy writers. Now, I'm wondering who are the people you have found to be kindred spirits? Because absolutely nobody has had the career track you've had. And the leaps between universes you've had. And you know, the lineage you've had. So, I was wondering, who are the people—I guess specifically in showbusiness, you've found yourself really relating to?</p>
00:30:33	Isabella	Guest	<p>Well, I'm very friendly with David Lynch and Laura Dern. Very. We <u>love</u> each other. My best friend is a teacher at Columbia University of human rights and international laws. I have a friend who is—Camilla, who is a film editor. Another very good friend of mine is a nurse who is now had a—you know, he's 60 and he's taking a PhD in alternative medicine, meditation and all that. That also is fascinating and very experimental. So, these are my friends.</p>
00:31:11	Louis	Host	<p>I think people would be surprised to learn that your first movie was in fact with your mother. And in fact, you were costarring with Liza Minnelli, who was being directed by her father, Vincente Minnelli. What was that experience like as a—you know, as a first big-screen acting performance?</p>
00:31:27	Isabella	Guest	<p>It was pretty difficult. You know, it was very—so, I didn't think I was going to be an actress, but Mama often made films away. And so, we didn't see her for two or three months. And finally, she made a film in Rome, Italy, where we lived. And she was delighted to play an Italian character, the Contessa Casati. And she spoke Italian beautifully, my mom, because we were Italian. My dad is Italian. And we had Mama home for three months. And so, my sister—I have a twin sister, Ingrid—went everyday on the set. And Mama played a character of a kind of a crazy lady that would put on a lot of makeup and never take it off, so her eyes are all—you know—full of mascara.</p>

So, my sister helped her with that makeup, because you didn't need a good makeup artist. You needed a bad makeup artist! And my sister, Ingrid, could be with my mom all day long and she was very happy. And Mama, she dies in the film. And people tell me and my mom that we resemble each other. And Mama thought it would be interesting if, while she died, I played the nun that goes to her bed. That she sees her face, herself young. And so, she asked me to play the role and Vincente really liked the idea and Liza accepted it. But I was so intimidated to play with everybody. And I didn't speak English very well. And the film was in English. I had very few lines, but I still remember it as very nightmarish.

And of course, the producer had photographers too, because it was a little bit of a story that could appear in gossipy newspapers. "Oh, Isabella Rossellini, the daughter, who resembles her mom is

00:33:18	Louis	Host	playing—” So, I remember the day being very paralyzingly intimidating. [Chuckles.] But I’m glad I’ve done it.
00:33:28	Isabella	Guest	What was it like to witness Liza Minnelli and her father on that set? Were there any parallels between your relationship with your father? Or was it like looking into a totally different universe? It was looking into a different universe. Vincente Minnelli is completely different than my father. Also, he was quite old. I could see the love of Liza to her dad and the devotion to her dad. And I could understand that, because I am also a devoted daughter to my father. So, in that, I saw the tenderness. I think the father was old and had not worked for many years. And Liza wanted to make a film with her dad. And she had just gotten the Oscar for this extraordinary film, <i>Cabaret</i> . I did a Bob Fosse retrospective with her [chuckling] in my early morning. And so, in that moment, she had the power to make her dream come true, which was to work with her dad. ‘Cause she had worked with her mom a long time, many times.
00:34:20	Jesse	Host	We’ll finish up with Isabella Rossellini after a quick break. When we return, she’s accomplished so much. Singing, writing, acting, modeling. What’s next? Louis Virtel gets to the bottom of it. It’s <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:34:36	Promo	Clip	Music: Cheerful synth.
			Brea Grant: Hey! Were you a reader as a kid? Like, maybe you read a lot of fantasy novels.
			Mallory O’Meara: Or horse girl books. We know how it is.
			Brea: But now you’re an adult and you miss reading. You’re so busy and you can’t figure out how to get back into books.
			Mallory: We’re <i>Reading Glasses</i> and we’re here to help.
			Brea: Yeah! We’ll give you advice, you know, figure out what books you love or learn to stop reading books you don’t even like.
			Mallory: We’re really big proponents of dumping that book.
			Brea: Dump! That! Book!
			Mallory: But most importantly, we’ll help you fall back in love with reading. <i>Reading Glasses</i> . Every Thursday on Maximum Fun.
00:35:15	Music	Transition	[Music fades out.]
00:35:20	Jesse	Host	Chiming synth with a steady beat. It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Our guest is Isabella Rossellini. She’s an actor, model, performance artist, and so much more. She’s had unforgettable parts on <i>30 Rock</i> and in movies, like <i>The Saddest Music in the World</i> , <i>Blue Velvet</i> , and more. You can hear her voice talent in the new film <i>Marcel the Shell with Shoes On</i> . She’s being interviewed by our correspondent, Louis Virtel, who also writes for <i>Jimmy Kimmel Live</i> and cohosts the great podcast, <i>Keep It</i> . Let’s get into the rest of their conversation.
00:35:50	Louis	Host	Another strange moment in your filmography that I’ve always been curious about is <i>White Nights</i> . You don’t get too many movies with someone like Mikhail Baryshnikov and Geraldine Page and—

00:36:00	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Isabella: Gregory Hines.
00:36:02	Isabella	Guest	Louis: Gregory Hines! Yeah.
00:36:04	Louis	Host	And Helen Mirren!
00:36:11	Isabella	Guest	Right! Helen Mirren right at sort of the onset of her becoming the grandame we know. What was that experience like?
			That was really great. It was one of the first films that I've done—I've actually done it before <i>Blue Velvet</i> . I've been a model, and a very successful model, but I wasn't thinking to become an actress because my mom was Ingrid Bergman, and I thought—you know, I'll always be compared to her. I'll never be good enough, and maybe it's better if I just stay a model. And then I was interested in animals or this dream to eventually make films about animals. And I was following that path. But my mom, herself, said, "You know, you should try to make films." She was dead by the time I did <i>White Nights</i> , but she always told me—you know, because I'd been offered film, and I always turned them down. And she said, "Just the adventure of it. You should just do one for the adventure of it."
			And then <i>White Nights</i> came. Taylor Hackford, a fantastic director, offered me the part. And it was with Mikhail Baryshnikov, and I played Gregory Hines's wife. I would play a Russian that Gregory Hines marries. A Russian woman; he comes to live in Russia. And I met them. I liked them. I'm a very good friend of Baryshnikov. And I was a very good friend of Gregory Hines. Died, really, too young. And so, I dared doing the film, just to see. I remember working with a fantastic photographer called Richard Avedon. And he said the same thing as my mom. He said, "You know, they're offering you a film and you're turning it down just because you're afraid of being compared to your mother. But that's nothing, and it's a new director and other actors, a new era. And you prevent yourself from having an extraordinary adventure and knowing all these incredibly talented people."
			And I thought he was right. And so, I did the film. And then, after <i>White Nights</i> came <i>Blue Velvet</i> . And <i>Blue Velvet</i> established my reputation as an actor, although it was very controversial. But it established my reputation as an actor more than <i>White Nights</i> .
00:38:14	Louis	Host	Do you take anything still from your years as a model? What was the lasting impact for you, personally, on—you know—being such a successful model for Lancôme and did it add anything to your acting arsenal?
00:38:28	Isabella	Guest	Oh my god, everything! A lot! I mean, it's very similar, you know. Avedon said, you know, "Modeling is a little bit like being a silent movie star. I'm not photographing your nose, your eyes, your perfect mouth. I'm photographing emotion. There is no beauty without emotion." So, it was acting. I was acting in front of the camera. Bruce Weber, Peter Lindbergh, Steven Meisel, or [inaudible], Avedon, Penn. You have no words, because there's not a dialogue when you do still photos. And that also made me think, well, but if I am a successful model, maybe I can evolve and become an actress. And I did. And then when I become an actress and you work with many directors, that helps you say, "Oh, I always wanted to make films about animals."

00:39:30 Louis Host That experience help you learn and evolve to become a writer and director. So, everything leads to other things. Speaking once more about your mom's filmography, a movie I watched with a bunch of my friends that you would think would just play like an austere drama where we all sat in silence, but in fact we were screaming at the TV, loving it so much, being in the movie, is *Autumn Sonata*. And the intensity of that drama but also the power of both their personalities—we're talking about Ingrid Bergman and Liv Ullmann. I was wondering if that movie had any particular—if you had any particular love for that movie? Since I personally now find it to be a scream.

00:40:05 Isabella Guest [Laughs.] It's funny that you say that. You know, it's interesting. It was done as a serious movie. I mean, Ingmar Bergman doesn't do comedy. But it was shown recently at the Berlin Film Festival, and Liv Ullmann was there to present it. And I was the president of the festival. So, I went—you know, as an homage. Of course, it was my mom. It was Liv Ullmann. And I talked—I presented the film with great reverence. And then Liv Ullmann came and talked. And she said—she made me laugh so much. She said, "Well, Ingmar Bergman never really reconciled himself with the fact that women have career. He made a film about a woman who had a big career, and therefore she neglected her daughters." And the film is all about that. And she told a very funny story.

There is a big scene in the film where Liv Ullmann, who plays my mom's daughter, has a long monologue. And she lays it out to the mother how much you neglected me, think what you've done to your family in the name of your career and all this. So, the camera—they first did the closeup of Liv Ullmann. She had all these words to remember. And so, they started with that. And then when they reversed the camera, my mother had to react. Bergman said, "Now, Liv is going to do the same thing. How would you react?"

And my mama said, "I would slap her." What?! You can't slap her! Mama said, "I would slap her. It's a boring daughter. I do my career." So, she took the defense of women that had the career, and she starts fighting with Bergman. And Liv Ullmann said Bergman was not used to being contradicted, 'cause every—he was revered as a great genius. And they storm out—the two of them, you can hear them scream in the hallway. And everybody on the set was looking at each other. And then, mother came back and did the scene. And Liv Ullmann said, "I couldn't believe this teaching not only of acting, but this teaching of humanity." Because my mom played the character with just a rage. She wanted to slap the daughter who was accusing the mother. "You've done this. Look at me. [Babbling.]"

And the rage that women have to having to swallow always the accusation of—you know, that the first role you have is to your family, is bringing up the children. And if you do anything that isn't just that, you are punished for it. And you see the rage in my mother's eyes. And that was a big lesson for Liv.

00:42:52 Louis Host And I guess my final question is do you have a dream personal project you'd like to do in the future? Maybe concerning animals? Because I really think there should just be some sort of Instagram

00:43:09	Isabella	Guest	<p>Live feature where we watch Isabella Rossellini just monologuing about things we don't know about animals.</p> <p>Yeah! I mean, this farm for me is a lab. It's a lab of ideas. It's not only my lab of ideas, but other people's lab of ideas. A friend was artist, Leah Chavez, who has medicinal plant, and she's creating teas and she's creating oils and it's quite interesting, her research. And Patty Gentry, who's renting three acres out of my 30, that has been a chef for 25 years and now she's growing these absolutely incredibly vegetable for great chefs, but also for the community. They can come and buy her extraordinary tomatoes and peas. I would say she's the Picasso of vegetables.</p> <p>I am very interested now on my chickens, but also on my fiber and wool and the fact that there is a lot of breeds of animal—sheep. You know, there is the merino sheep. And that's almost like a monoculture is a very soft wool. And it's great and that's the only sheep that is around. But there is a lot of other breeds that are forgotten, and I have some breeds here that are endangered. Breeds, not the species is not in danger. It's the breeds. As if we decide to just have Labrador and we would neglect all the other dogs, so you lose the pugs, you lose the dachshund, you lose the chowchows, you lose the hunting dogs, you lose the herding dog, and you just have Labradors.</p> <p>You lose a lot of talent. You lose a lot of things. So, my collection of animals at the farm has become more and more about these endangered breeds of farm animals. And I study their benefit, and I'm creating association with Parsons School of Design and also their School of Fashion so they can come—the students can come and look at the different wools and decide to maybe work with a small farm. You know, what we've done with farm to table might be done with fashion. You know, farm to fashion. So, that's my next experiment.</p>
00:45:15	Louis	Host	<p>That seems like a perfect experiment. I can't imagine anybody else fronting that but you. So, I'm thrilled when it finally comes to fruition.</p>
[Isabella laughs.]			
00:45:32	Isabella	Guest	<p>Thank you again for this chat. My god, what a pleasure to talk about your career, your family, everything you do, everything you are.</p>
00:45:35	Louis	Host	<p>Thank you so much! It was fun to talk to you.</p>
00:45:37	Jesse	Host	<p>What a pleasure.</p> <p>Isabella Rossellini. Her latest movie, <i>Marcel the Shell With Shoes On</i>, is <u>very</u> sweet and funny. You should definitely check it out. And our thanks to our correspondent and friend, Louis Virtel, for interviewing her. Louis is, as we mentioned earlier, the cohost of the podcast <i>Keep It</i>, which you can download wherever. If you're a Twitter user and you do not follow Louis on Twitter, you are using the service wrong. Go follow Louis Virtel on Twitter. He's one of the great geniuses of the medium. So funny.</p>
00:46:10	Music	Transition	<p>Jazzy piano with a steady beat.</p>
00:46:16	Jesse	Host	<p>That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i>. <i>Bullseye</i>, created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. I actually got out of the house this week! I went to Porter Ranch, deep in the Valley, to go to the 80th birthday party of friend of <i>Bullseye</i> and soul legend, Swamp Dogg.</p>

It was great. I got to hang out with Swamp. They're making a documentary film about him, and they repainted his pool with a giant painting of him riding a rat. I hung out with Vernon Reid, the great guitarist. I met Ira from Yo La Tengo who had been on this show 20 years ago, maybe, and I had never met him in real life. Oh, it was a great time. It was great. Swamp has a new record coming out soon. It's a bluegrass album, and I could hardly imagine a better 80-year-old psychedelic soul singer to make a bluegrass record than Swamp Dogg. So, keep your eyes peeled. Or your ears, I guess.

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". Our thanks to The Go! Team for letting us use it. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries. Special thanks to the great Louis Virtel for interviewing Isabella Rossellini and to Delaney Hefner for recording Rossellini at her farm, in upstate New York.

Bullseye is also on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. You can find us in those places, follow us. We share our interviews there. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:48:06 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]