

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.
00:00:23	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Loudon Wainwright III just turned 75 years old. He’s a singer and a songwriter. He did have a hit record in the early 1970s: “Dead Skunk in the Middle of the Road”.
00:00:37	Music	Music	“Dead Skunk in the Middle of the Road” from the album <i>Album III</i> by Loudon Wainwright III. <i>Crossin' the highway late last night He should've looked left and he should've looked right He didn't see the station wagon car The skunk got squashed and there you are</i> <i>You got your Dead skunk in the middle of the road Dead skunk in the middle of the road Dead skunk in the middle of the road Stinking to high heaven</i>
00:01:05	Jesse	Host	[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.] He had a few other, minor hits, like “Motel Blues”, “Lullaby”, and one of my all-time favorites, “The Swimming Song”.
00:01:13	Music	Music	“The Swimming Song” from the album <i>Attempted Mustache</i> by Loudon Wainwright III. <i>This summer I went swimming This summer I might have drowned But I held my breath and I kicked my feet And I moved my arms around Moved my arms around</i> <i>This summer I swam in the ocean And I swam in a swimming pool Salt my wounds, chlorine'd my eyes I'm a self-destructive fool I'm a self-destructive fool</i>
00:01:42	Jesse	Host	[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.] He’s been called a novelty singer at times in his career. At other times, he’s been called the next Bob Dylan. Now, I guess they call him an elder statesman of folk music. And honestly, I don’t know how he felt or would feel about any of those. The best Loudon Wainwright songs—and he has written a lot of great songs—the best Loudon Wainwright songs are unrestrained and honest, sometimes brutally so. Often they’re funny, sometimes they’re sad. Sometimes, he howls them at the top of his lungs. Sometimes, they’re whisper-quiet.

As I said, Loudon just turned 75. It's a milestone he commemorated with an album called *Lifetime Achievement*. Loudon Wainwright still has it. I'm gonna interview him, but there's a bonus. He brought his guitar; he's gonna sing a few songs for us. Oh, and also, before we get into the interview, we normally bleep swear words and obscenities on the podcast. For Loudon's performance, we're making an exception. So, there will be a couple of un-bleeped swears.

[Music fades in.]

Let's start with a recording from the album, *Lifetime Achievement*. The song is called "Back in Your Town".

00:02:58 Music Music

"Back in Your Town" from the album *Lifetime Achievement* by Loudon Wainwright III.

*I'm back in your town, I'm walking around
Crossin' the street, unsure on my feet
And I'm carefully looking around*

*Because I'm back in your town
I'm back in this burg*

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

00:03:29 Jesse Host

Loudon Wainwright III, welcome back to *Bullseye*! I'm so happy to have you back in the studio with us.

00:03:34 Loudon Wainwright III Guest

I'm happy to be here! Thanks for having me.

00:03:36 Jesse Host

Or I guess I should say, back in your studio with us. Where are you right now?

00:03:42 Loudon Guest

Well, I am in the exotic lower east side of New York, at my friend—Dick Conant's—studio on Chrystie Street, where we actually made a lot of this new record. Was done right here in the very room that I'm sitting in.

00:03:59 Jesse Host

Do you wanna start with a song from your new record, *Lifetime Achievement*?

00:04:04 Loudon Guest

[Laughs.] Okaaaay! Cool. [Plays a scale on his guitar.] Yeah, this is a song—

00:04:09 Jesse Host

Don't act surprised, Loudon! We talked about the format!

00:04:11 Loudon Guest

We—yeah, okay. I just wanna inject some spontaneity—some phony spontaneity into the proceedings. This is a perfect song to start with, because this morning, I got up really early. Normally, I reside out on the end of eastern Long Island. So, I had to take the bus and—no, the train today. I took the train to come to the big [censored], as I—as my mother used to put it, and as I sing in this song. This is called "Town & Country".

00:04:44 Music Music

"Town & Country" performed live by Loudon Wainwright III.

*I'm in the city and the sirens are screaming
All day and night long where it's 24/7
I'm on a mission, I'm in the city, I'm here
I been in the country, out on an island
I feel good now, I'm damn near smiling*

I'm in the city, I can hardly believe that I'm here

*I took the train when I got to the station
I felt a release, you could say it was elation
Just to be back in the city with all of you people down here
Thousands of faces I never seen
Out of my mind in a fever dream
I'm in the city with all of you people down here
Behind those masks is all those faces
I'm so excited seeing parking spaces
There's talking and there's laughing and there's screaming and
there's singing down here
I'm in the city, you better believe it
I'm done with the country, no fun, I had to leave it
The crickets made me nervous, I'm in the city, I'm here*

*Last night we ate in a restaurant
Fine wine, good food, all that we wanted
Just like in the old days, sitting round, having us a meal
But there was a moment that was a little unstable
A rat big as a cat ran under the table
I guess the rats are all happy, there's plenty to eat down here*

*A couple of drunkards on a subway train
Made me feel right at home, no not much changes
When you're in the city bright lights look pretty down here
I was afraid I might feel a little empty
But now that I'm here, go on and tempt me
I'm here to get tempted, I'm here to get rid of that fear*

*My dear mother was afraid of the city
She'd say, "Don't go there, Loudie, it's shady and it's shitty"
She was raised in the country, what could that poor woman know?
My father went to town, he was a working slob
Getting into trouble was his other job
There's plenty of trouble in the city, that's why folks go
All right, let's go*

*Tomorrow morning I'll be back on that train
Get me to the station I'm going insane
Get me out of this city it's a little too crazy for me
I need trees, salt water, clean air
Warm feet, fireplace, and a rocking chair
Mother knew best, the city's too shitty for me*

*Yeah, living in the city and the sirens are screaming
All day and night long, 24/7
I'm on a mission, I'm in the city, I'm here
Been in the country, stuck on an island
I feel good now, I'm damn near smiling
I'm in the city, I can hardly believe that I'm here*

00:08:23	Jesse	Host	Aw, thank you, Loudon. That was so great.
00:08:25	Loudon	Guest	Thank you!
00:08:26	Jesse	Host	Particularly for four o'clock in the afternoon. I really appreciate it. How holed up were you when you were holed up?
00:08:33	Loudon	Guest	We were pretty holed up, 'cause of the you-know-what.

[Jesse affirms.]

So, we were way out there in this place on the end of the island there. And—which was great, because it was a—relatively speaking—quite a safe location. And for most of the last three years, I’ve been out there, coming into town for maintenance, I call it. Doctor appointments and the like. But mostly, out on that island there.

00:09:03	Jesse	Host	It must have been very different not only not to tour, but to know that you weren’t gonna be touring for a while.
00:09:13	Loudon	Guest	Yeah. And then there was the thing of we would set up a tour—in two weeks, I’m gonna go on this UK tour, which has been postponed twice now. So, we had an entire—like everybody else, you know? Lots of work set up, and then it got canceled! So, yeah. The whole thing—I don’t have to tell any of your people. It was weird for everybody. Me too.
00:09:39	Jesse	Host	I think a lot about this thing that Tom Lehrer said—and I know you were a Tom Lehrer fan when you were a kid. But he had this—you know, he stopped making music after, I don’t know, about five years. And he had this famous quote that was [chuckles], “What’s the use of having laurels if you don’t rest on them?” And uh.
00:10:02	Loudon	Guest	That’s so Tom.
00:10:05	Jesse	Host	He’s a funny dude. And I wonder if having this like enforced quiet time changed your relationship with work.
00:10:18	Loudon	Guest	I suppose it did. I mean, because—you know, when I’m touring—I mean, I’m—that’s another kind of work. But my other kind of work, where I’m just sitting around my house living and then occasionally writing a song—I mean, that doesn’t change. I didn’t write a lot more during the pandemic. I mean, I wrote the usual amount of stuff, although I did reference the pandemic, as I do in that last song I did. But you know, it just—it didn’t feel all that different. The first year felt different. You know? You’d wake up and say, “God, it’s Friday again.” But other than that, it’s a piece of cake. A snap.
00:11:06	Jesse	Host	More with Loudon Wainwright after the break. Stay with us. It’s <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:11:13	Music	Transition	Thumpy rock music.
00:11:17	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. If you’re just joining us, I’m talking with Loudon Wainwright III. The veteran folk singer and songwriter just celebrated his 75 th birthday with a brand-new album, called <i>Lifetime Achievement</i> . Let’s get back into our conversation.
00:11:37	Loudon	Guest	Do you play music for fun around the house? Well, I try to play a little bit every day. And it’s fun, but it’s for fun and for work, too.
00:11:46	Jesse	Host	I didn’t come from a musical family, and my wife did—not professional, amateur musicians. And when we first started dating as teenagers, I was so baffled by my wife, her siblings, and her father kind of sitting around in the living room with guitars and stuff in their hands. It was so foreign to me. [Laughs.] That they’d just doodle around while they were talking.
00:12:16	Loudon	Guest	Is that a ukulele I see in your domain there?
00:12:19	Jesse	Host	It is, but I taught myself to play it like two years ago. So, it doesn’t count as me being an actual musician. I’m the worst professional musician ever to sing at Lincoln Center.

[They laugh.]

			But is that part of—is that part of your life? To sit in an easy chair and there's a guitar sitting there, and you're just playing "Camptown Races" or something?
00:12:47	Loudon	Guest	No, not really. I mean, what I do is I sit in the easy chair and stare at the television or read a book or something, and then I think, "Oh, well I should go down and try to do something with my career." So, then I go down into my little mancave with my little instruments, and I might play "Camptown Races" just for fun or—but I might also take a whack at writing something or stuff like—it's all kind of meandering and random, though I've been doing it for 50 years and 30 albums. But it's the way I operate.
00:13:28	Jesse	Host	Did you miss performing?
00:13:31	Loudon	Guest	I certainly did not miss going to the airport and checking into the hotel and the schlepp. You know, getting from A to B. And I haven't missed—you know, I've hated that for almost—for a long time. But the heart of the matter, the real part of the job, which is going and singing the songs for people, I did miss that. And when I started to go out and do it again, it was delightful and fun, and everybody seemed to be having a good time. So, that aspect I did miss.
00:14:06	Jesse	Host	There's a song on your new record called "Fam Vac", that is kind of a journey through some feelings that I also recognized. I would ask you to introduce it, but I think you might as well play it, 'cause it introduces itself.
00:14:	Loudon	Guest	Yeah. Yeah. Let me just—[plays a few chords].
00:14:	Music	Music	"Fam Vac" played live by Loudon Wainwright III.

*Oh, I need a family vacation
I mean a family vacation alone
I'm gonna pack up the car, load up the bike and the kayak
And leave the fucking family at home*

*A vacation away from the family
A vacation away from the fray
When it comes to you so called loved ones
Sometimes you got to get away*

*Maybe I'll go to the mountains
Or else I'll get down to the shore
Yeah, and I guess there's a chance I might miss my people
But right now, I can't stand 'em no more
When I'm barbecuing there on my Weber
I might be focused on my family
Then I'll throw down some hot dogs, burgers, and some chicken
And I'll burn 'em all in effigy*

Oh, oh

*When I get back from my family vacation
Tanned and relaxed will be the shape that I'm in
Yeah, I'll be patient and loving not to mention detached
When I'm dealing with my kith and my kin*

We all need a family vacation

*You got to keep the mishpocheh at bay
Tolstoy got it right when he wrote "each and every family
Is unhappy in its own way"*

Oh, oh

*I ran away from my parents
I still run away from my kids
As for brother and sister we're playing Twister
It's a cover up to keep ourselves hid from each other*

*I need a family vacation
My family needs a vacation from me
Because your dearest and nearest, they're the most dangerous
They're the ones that make you crazy
That's right, your nearest and dearest, they're the most dangerous
They're the ones that make you fucking crazy
Oh*

00:18:28 Jesse Host *Jean Paul Sartre said it: Hell is other people!*
So, I was thinking about the arc of your career. That's a pretty funny song. A very funny song. It's far from just a funny song. You have recorded songs aaall the way along the funny song spectrum, from very serious, not funny at all, to like full on novelty songs.

[Loudon confirms.]

00:18:50 Loudon Guest Do you like novelty songs?
I love novelty songs! You know, we mentioned Tom Lehrer. Yeah, I—you know, he was and is—'cause he's still alive and kicking up there in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as far as I know—a hero of mine. You know, I love Stan Freberg and you know, my favorite songwriter is Roger Miller I think, in a way. Just because he could be funny, but also—you know, he could also be very moving and—I don't know if serious is the right word, but you know, moving! I like "moving".

00:19:38 Jesse Host So, yeah, I like funny, but it also allows you, if you do a funny song, then you can trick them and do something that'll [dramatically] break their hearts. That's a fun thing to do.

00:20:08 Loudon Guest I mean, I think there's a lot of great country songs that are—you can take a lot of tones and a lot of perspectives in country music. And Roger Miller's such a wonderful example of that. You know? Like, there's everything from warm to a little heartbreaking to straight funny in his songs. You know? It's such a—it's such a great thing.

Yeah, he was remarkable. And what a great singer! Boy. Sang the heck out of those songs with his little, acoustic, nylon string guitar. I actually met him once, in Los Angeles. It was years and years ago. There was a thing—I guess at the Troubadour. Is the Troubadour still there, on Santa Monica Boulevard?

00:20:28 Jesse Host As far as I know.

00:20:29 Loudon Guest Yeah, well it used to be the happening place. This would've been in the 1970s. And Phil Ochs, the legendary, long ago—unfortunately deceased—singer songwriter Phil Ochs. There was kind of a Phil Ochs festival at the Troubadour. And Phil was there, and they had all kinds of guest singers, and I was one of them. And Roger Miller

came one night and sang. And he was a very nice fella. Also, he died too soon too, actually.

00:21:05 Jesse Host Roger Miller also had a bit of straight show business to him. And I get the impression that you like the idea of—you know, being an entertainer, doing showbusiness—which isn't true for everybody with an acoustic guitar. You know what I mean?

00:21:27 Loudon Guest Uh, yeah. My first manager was a guy called Milton Kramer. [Laughs.] All of these people are long gone, but you know, I said something once, when I was 24, like, "Entertaining is an honorable profession!" And he liked so much that he made some pencils up that had that on the pencil—you know, #2 pencils.

[Jesse laughs.]

"Entertaining is an honorable profession!" But it is! You know? You provide a service. I mean, it's not only to distract people. But again, you have the option of moving them in one direction or another and affecting them. So, it's a very important job.

00:22:13 Jesse Host Do you wanna play another song?

00:22:14 Loudon Guest Yeah! Uh, let's see. What should I play? [Plays a few notes.]

00:22:17 Jesse Host Well, what about the first song from your first record? "School Days".

00:22:20 Loudon Guest Ooh! Okay! Yeah.

00:22:26 Jesse Host Did you think I did a good job selling that we had not discussed what songs you would play beforehand?

00:22:30 Loudon Guest I think you've completely fooled everybody, including me.

00:22:33 Jesse Host Thank you. I'm gonna start doing those NPR news two-ways, where they say like, "What's Dick Cheney's angle on this?" And then the reporter says like, "Well, reports are saying that—"

00:22:45 Loudon Guest Right. Then they read the answer. [Plays a scale.]

This is a song called "School Days". It was the first song on my first record. And boy, it was a record. You know? It was a vinyl record called *Loudon Wainwright III*. [Laughs.] And uh, it is about this boarding school that I used to go to many, many years ago, in the early 1960s, in Middletown, Delaware—a place called St. Andrews. It's very likely that people would've seen this place, because it was the boarding school that they used in *The Dead Poets Society* movie. They went down to Delaware and shot it at my old boarding school. So, it was a great looking place, that's for sure. Anyway, here it is.

00:23:37 Music Music "School Days" performed live by Loudon Wainwright III.

*In Delaware when I was younger
I would live the life obscene
In the spring I had great hunger
I was Brando, I was Dean*

*Blaspheming, booted blue-jeaned baby boy
Oh, how I made them turn their heads
The townie, brownie girls, they jumped for joy
And begged me, bless them in their beds*

*In Delaware when I was younger
I would row upon the lake
In the spring I had great hunger*

*I was Keats, I was Blake
My pimple pencil pain I'd bring
To frogs who sat entranced
My drift-dream ditties I would sing
The water strider danced*

*In Delaware when I was younger
They thought St. Andrew had sufficed
But in the spring I had great hunger
I was Buddha, I was Christ*

*You wicked wise men where you wonder
You Pharisees one day will pay
See my lightning, hear my thunder
I am truth, I know the way*

In Delaware when I was younger.

00:26:51	Jesse	Host	Thank you for that.
00:26:53	Loudon	Guest	You're welcome.
00:26:54	Jesse	Host	How does your relationship with a song about callow youth change between when you're 25 and when you're 75?
00:27:06	Loudon	Guest	Hmm! I don't know. I mean, again, that song has—a lot of the songs that I wrote at the beginning of my career on the first few records have gone by the wayside. That is to say, I don't have the desire or feel the need to perform them. And a lot of them, I've actually forgotten. But I don't know, I can still relate to that song, even as a 75-year-old guy. And it does say, "In Delaware, when I was younger." So, I mean, I'm just—I'm set up to do it—you know, I can—it's perfect for a 75-year-old guy, actually, that one.
00:27:45	Jesse	Host	When you're 30 albums in, do you hear songs that you recorded long ago and get surprised by them?
00:27:54	Loudon	Guest	You mean, when I listen to the recordings of them?
00:27:57	Jesse	Host	Yeah. Or if someone says to you, "Oh gosh, I like to sing this one." Or you know, someone plays one back to you. Or even if you play it back in your own—you know, in your memory.
00:28:08	Loudon	Guest	Yeah, I think there is an element of surprise. And it's—I mean, in some cases, I hear things that are on the records, and I cringe. My idea of a bad time would be to sit around—I had to do a box set about 12 years ago, and I was required to go back and listen to all my records, all the tracks on them. And boy, I hated that. But it was a dirty job, and I was the guy that had to do it. But occasionally, I'll be delighted by something I've done or something that somebody really likes of mine. Yeah.
00:28:47	Jesse	Host	So, on the subject of show business and doing show business, you were on a few episodes of <i>M*A*S*H</i> as an actor, but you also sang. And I hadn't ever seen those episodes—or at least, didn't remember seeing those episodes. I definitely watched a lot of <i>M*A*S*H</i> as a—you know, as an eight-year-old, on UHF on a black and white TV. You know? But I went on YouTube and was watching them, and I just love this song, and I wanted to play it. Because it's only like a minute long on the show. And one of the things that I like about it—it's such a beautiful song and it's—and the theme of this episode is such a... it's such a <i>M*A*S*H</i> thing, because it's such a sitcom premise. Which is that the—all the nurses are gone. So, it's just us guys. But it also has this kind of wistful, sweet song in the middle of it. [Laughs.]

[Music fades in.]

00:29:51 Music Clip So, I wanted to play it.
"Spalding's Tribute to the Nurses" from the TV show *M*A*S*H*.

*Well, it's funny when they're here
How we take for granted
The way they taste, the way they feel
Their sight, their smell, their sound
And it's funny when they're gone
Just how bad we miss them
And how life can be so empty
When they're not around.*

[Volume fades out.]

00:30:24 Jesse Host Do you remember that?
00:30:25 Loudon Guest Sure! I—yeah! Yeah. I—what I remember about it was I originally—
you know, they—what those guys on *M*A*S*H* did, quite often
they'd tell me the situation and then I would actually go in some
room and have to come up with a song in a couple of hours. But the
original song that I came up with is a song of mine which I actually
recorded about three years after I wrote it, that they didn't like.

[Strums a few chords.]

00:30:52 Music Music Which I think is a better song.
"Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder" performed live by Loudon
Wainwright III.

*Absence makes the heart grow fonder
And the mind begins to wander back
To happier days*

*I guess you could say you were taken for granted
I went on and on and I raved, and I ranted
Oh, my tyrannical ways*

*But now things are different
'Cause now you are gone
And I'm not so sure that I can carry on*

00:31:33 Loudon Guest Anyway, that's a song called "Absence Makes the Heart Grow
Fonder", which I thought was great. And I played it for Larry Gelbart
and Gene Reynolds, who were the guys who produced the TV
show. And they said, "Eeh, no, no. I don't love that." So, I went back
into my room and came up with that other one. But I'm glad you like
it!

00:31:55 Jesse Host [Chuckles.] I like that they were making you write songs on the
sitcom schedule. Like, on a guest actor schedule. You know, go into
[laughs]—get in your trailer. We have some photography for some
scenes you're not in. When you come back, could you have a song
for us?

00:32:09 Loudon Guest Well, it was kind of like that. I mean, there was an episode—I only
did three episodes, but one of them was called—it was about
Douglas MacArthur coming to the *M*A*S*H* unit camp. And I—you
know, I didn't know anything about Douglas MacArthur, really. So,

they gave me—you know, a kind of folder of MacArthur bio stuff. And I had to go into a room and come up with this—another song, which I like a lot, which is a song called “Five Gold Stars”, which they did use and did like. And that—and it mentions exotic Korean locations like Incheon and stuff like that.

00:32:52 Jesse Host It must have been something else to go on television, sing a song, and then when that episode comes out, realize that 18,000,000 people—25% of the people in the United States who had their television on at that time—had seen you sing that song.

00:33:13 Loudon Guest Yeah. Well, I see—and you know, because *M*A*S*H* is in reruns, of course. People are always saying to me, “Hey! I saw you on *M*A*S*H* last night! What happened to you? You looked so young!” But it was, you know—it was more than 50 years ago. But it was—yeah, it was a huge—it was a big [censored] show to be on. And it was fun to be on it.

00:33:37 Jesse Host How did it affect your career to have that very unusual, huge credit?

00:33:44 Loudon Guest Well, people always ask me about *M*A*S*H*. And uh.

[They chuckle.]

00:33:52 Jesse Host And uh, then I give—

00:33:58 Loudon Guest I mean, the other thing is *M*A*S*H* is super good. Like, there’s plenty of huge sitcoms that aren’t that great.

00:34:28 Jesse Host No, the writing is very good. And yeah, no, I’m happy. I’m happy about all the stuff I got to do. You know? That’s gonna be in my obituary. Like, he was on *M*A*S*H* for three episodes! And “Dead Skunk in the Middle of the Road” was number one in Little Rock, Arkansas, for six weeks or whatever. But I’m delighted when anybody likes anything I do. [Laughs.] That’s why I got into show business.

00:34:53 Loudon Guest Somebody on Twitter, after I mentioned that you were coming on the show today, replied to me and said, “You know, in the ’80s, I had a nighttime job, and I would watch David Letterman in the morning. He used to come on David Letterman, and I thought it was greatest.”

00:35:32 Jesse Host Going on Letterman’s morning show’s about as high credibility a talk show appearance as you can make. [Laughs.]

00:35:49 Promo Clip I was the first—that was the first week of that show, when it was on earlier in the day. And I was on all week, actually. But you know, that’s how everybody saw that. And you know, Judd Apatow, who I’ve worked with on a couple of different things, that’s—you know, when he was 14, living in Syosset, Long Island—that’s when he saw me on the morning Letterman show. He thought I was pretty funny, so he started coming to New York City and see me playing in the clubs. But yeah, that was another landmark appearance, I suppose—the Letterman show.

00:35:32 Jesse Host We’ll wrap up with Loudon Wainwright in just a bit. When we come back, we’ll talk about how different Loudon’s career would’ve been if he’d had a huge, chart-topping, smash hit single. And honestly, whether he would even want that. It’s *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:35:49 Promo Clip **Announcer:** [Canned, as though over an antique speaker.] Maximum Fun is a network by and for cool, popular people! But did you know it also has an offering designed to appeal to nerds?!

Speaker: A show for nerds? On Maximum Fun?! The devil, you say!

Announcer: It's true! It's called *The Greatest Generation* and they review episodes of a television program for nerds, called *Star Trek*. They've reviewed *TNG*, *DS9*, and are now reviewing *Voyager*.

Speaker: Heeey! *Star Trek*! My daughter enjoys that program!

Announcer: Well, if she enjoys that and she enjoys humor of the flatulent variety, might I recommend she subscribe to *The Greatest Generation*?

Speaker: Hey, are you calling my kid a nerd? Why, I oughta—

Announcer: Welp! Gotta go! [Hurried footsteps.] Become a friend of DeSoto by subscribing to *The Greatest Generation* on MaximumFun.org todaaay!

00:36:38 Music Transition
00:36:43 Jesse Host

Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.
It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Loudon Wainwright III. His new album is called *Lifetime Achievement*.

00:36:54 Loudon Guest

Do you wanna play the title track from your new record?
Shall we do that? Yeah! [Strums a few chords.]

00:37:20 Music Music

This song is called "Lifetime Achievement", and it is the title of this record that I made with my wonderful friends, Dick Conant—whose studio we're in today, or I'm in—and my other, wonderful friend, Stewart Lerman.

"Lifetime Achievement" from the album *Lifetime Achievement* by Loudon Wainwright III.

*I have lived a lifetime, it's hard to be believed
I'm near the end and time's almost up so what have I achieved?
I have done and won some things; awards I have a few
But the biggest prize, the great surprise is I managed to win you*

*Trophies on my mantelpiece, citations on my wall
Accolades and autographs, yes I guess I got them all
But all these honors don't add up to all that much it's true
That the biggest prize, the great surprise is I managed to win you*

*Gold records and blue ribbons, bronze statuettes and plaques
We all want to be winners. Admit it, face the facts
But I couldn't win what I craved the most, that's the thing we all
dream of*

*It's the loving cup we long for with our names engraved in love
As for my life achievement it just a hill of beans
In the end what's justified is not what it all means
I have done and won some things, but I lost myself; who knew?
But the biggest prize, the great surprise is I managed to find you
Who needs cash and prizes? What I achieved is you*

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

00:40:24 Jesse Host

That's beautiful.

00:40:26	Loudon	Guest	Thanks!
00:40:29	Jesse	Host	For a guy who has a great song on this record about desperately needing to escape his family, you also have quite a few songs and bits of songs on this record that are about not just love, but you know, companionship love. Domesticity. I get the impression that getting comfortable with that was hard earned for you.
00:41:02	Loudon	Guest	Yeah. Yeah. It's—well, that song—you know, I mean, it's about my girlfriend, Susan, but it's also about—I've combed—you know, you write these things and sometimes you're not quite sure what it's about. But I think it's also about my audience. You know? It could be sung to an audience. And then, of course, it could be Love with a capital "L", you know? Whatever the heck that is, the big love. But it's a rather uncharacteristic, very optimistic song. And I feel very fortunate to have been given it by the people—or not the people, but whatever—wherever this stuff comes from.
00:41:45	Jesse	Host	Do you think you would've had a better or more enjoyable or preferable career if you had a big hit song or a couple big hit songs?
00:41:56	Loudon	Guest	Ah! [Laughs.] I don't know. I mean, you know, I did have a kind of hit song—the aforementioned "Dead Skunk in the Middle of the Road". [Laughs.] And that got to be a pain in the [censored] of course, 'cause—"Where's the funny animal song on the album?! I don't get it!" In fact, we were talking earlier about "The Swimming Song". I mean, "Dead Skunk" came out in '72, and that was a big radio thing, and then the next single I gave them was "The Swimming Song". But they said, "No, we need a funny animal song!"
			So. But if I'd had hits—let's see, what would've been—? You know, who the hell knows. It all worked out perfectly. [Laughs.] It's still working out perfectly! You know? I'm getting to do what I always wanted to do, which is to be—sing and write. And I have these friends that helped me make these records, which we got to make another record that we like, and that people seem to like. And I'm just—I'm in great shape, feeling good about everything. You got me on a good day.
00:43:02	Jesse	Host	I think, like a lot of people, I had a lot of pain and difficulty in my life and my family during the pandemic. And "Swimming Song" was a song that I listened to a lot during that time and since, thinking about what it's like to remain engaged with the world when it's really hard. Do you remember the circumstances in your life when you wrote that track?
00:43:42	Loudon	Guest	Well, what I remember—and I wrote it a long time ago. I mean, I wrote it probably in 1973. You know, my first wife was a great—she also is no longer with us. I'm talking about Kate McGarrigle. But—and the mother of Rufus and Martha Wainwright. Kate was a great songwriter and a great musician and taught me how to play the banjo. Unfortunately, I don't have a banjo with me today. But you know, what I—"The Swimming Song", you know, I don't—again, I wasn't sure where the heck—I loved to swim. You know, I swam as a kid. I was on the swim team at the Bedford Golf and Tennis Club. And I still—you know, I went swimming yesterday, in Gardener's Bay, out on the end of Long Island. Swimming has saved my life.

And I'm not speaking lightly about that. I mean, when I get into the water and move around, I feel better. So, that's all you really need

00:44:56 Jesse Host to know. More than any of my songs, it's been recorded by other
00:44:57 Music Music people. Kate recorded it. Earl Scruggs recorded it twice. The Avett
Brothers did it. And people like it. Shall I play it for you?
Please. Thank you.
"The Swimming Song" performed live by Loudon Wainwright III.

*This summer I went swimming
This summer I might have drowned
But I held my breath, and I kicked my feet
And I moved my arms around
Moved my arms around*

*This summer I swam in the ocean
And I swam in a swimming pool
Salt my wounds, chlorine my eyes
I'm a self-destructive fool
I'm a self-destructive fool
This summer I did the backstroke
And you know that that's not all
I did the breaststroke and the butterfly
And the old Australian crawl
The old Australian crawl*

*This summer I swam in a public place
And a reservoir to boot
At the latter I was informal
At the former I wore my suit
I wore my swimming suit, yeah*

*This summer I did swan dives
And jackknives for you all
And once when you weren't looking
I did a cannonball
Did a cannonball*

*This summer I went swimming
This summer I might have drowned
But I held my breath, and I kicked my feet
And I moved my arms around
I moved my arms around*

00:47:22 Jesse Host You wrote this little song about Liza Minnelli, who you knew as a
kid. And somebody played it for her. And the thing that she said—
and this I'm paraphrasing from memory—was she listened to the
song and said—it's a beautiful little song about kind of just loving a
childhood friend. You know? And the thing she said about it was,
"He's gonna lose his voice if he keeps singing like that."
00:47:49 Loudon Guest Yeah. Yeah, she said, uh, "Oh, I know a good vocal coach! He
needs—he's gonna ruin his voice if he keeps singing that way."
00:47:57 Jesse Host Anyway, as you were giving those songs your all at four o'clock in
the afternoon, I was so grateful to you for doing it. Thank you so
much for those performances.
00:48:07 Loudon Guest Well, I enjoyed hanging out with you. And thanks for having me.
00:48:12 Jesse Host Loudon Wainwright. The best. His new album is called *Lifetime
Achievement*. You can get it wherever you listen to music. And a
quick heads up, if you listen to this on the radio, we have a longer
version of this interview with even more songs that I recommend

you download if you like this. You can grab it in your favorite podcast app or on our website and give it a listen or share it with somebody.

00:48:36 Music Transition
00:48:38 Jesse Host

Bright piano with a steady beat.

That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where, look, I don't know if you've heard, but it's been hot.

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 sometimes from Mara Davis. Special thanks this week to the folks at Second Story Studios in New York City for recording Loudon Wainwright III. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is "Huddle Formation", written and recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team and Memphis Industries for sharing that with us. Go buy a Go! Team album. They rule.

Bullseye is also on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. You can find us, follow us, and we will share with you our interviews in those places. You can then share them with others. I guess that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:49:44 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]