

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.
00:00:22	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. So, there is a show that I love on TV right now, called <i>Sherman’s Showcase</i> . It was cocreated by my guest, Bashir Salahuddin, and Diallo Riddle—his friend and longtime collaborator. They’re also the stars of the show. Bashir and Diallo went to Harvard together. They worked together as writers on <i>Late Night with Jimmy Fallon</i> , then they left to do their own stuff. One of those projects was <i>South Side</i> , a sitcom which is set in Chicago and stars Riddle and Salahuddin, among others. It is so great. It’s really funny and we’ll talk about it in a bit.
			The other project, <i>Sherman’s Showcase</i> —and as I was saying, I love <i>Sherman’s Showcase</i> —you could probably call it a sketch show. But it has a very unique format. It’s pretty unusual in the world of sketch shows. It basically takes the form of a variety show—like definitely very informed by <i>Soul Train</i> . There are also notes of <i>The Muppets</i> and I guess maybe something like <i>Laugh-In</i> . Bashir stars on the show as Sherman McDaniels, who has been hosting <i>Sherman’s Showcase</i> for nearly 40 years. Every episode looks back on some of the show’s greatest hits—musical numbers, clips from Sherman’s movie and television work, and occasionally infomercials. Remember infomercials? Here’s an example.
00:01:51	Sound effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:52	Clip	Clip	Music: “Unwritten” by Natasha Bedingfield plays under the dialogue.

Sherman (*Sherman’s Showcase*): Brothers and sisters, have you ever been getting down at a party, blissful and unsuspecting, when this happened to you?

Speaker 1: Yo, this singer’s White!

Speaker 2: Yeah, but I *[censored]* with this.

Sherman: Y’all know these tunes. “Roxanne” by Sting. “I Can’t Go For That” by Hall & Oates. The entire Steely Dan album, *Asia*. These are White singers, so these songs ain’t FUBU (foo-boo), they’re FUBT (foo-but). For Us, By Them. And now, they’re all on one compact disc. *Sherman Showcase presents: Now That’s What I Call White Music, Volumes 1*. I’m talking “Another One Bites the Dust” by Queen and “What You Won’t Do For Love” by Bobby Caldwell. That’s right.

[An ominous turn in the music.]

Bobby Caldwell was White.

00:02:31	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:32	Jesse	Host	<i>[Laughing.]</i> Bashir, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> . It's nice to have you on the show.
00:02:35	Bashir Salahuddin	Guest	Oh, it's a pleasure to be here. Thank you.
00:02:37	Jesse	Host	Somewhere in heaven, Teena Marie is mad that she was not in that sketch.
00:02:40	Bashir	Guest	Ugh, what—literally, until this moment it did not occur to me, but shout out Teena Marie. You know. Shout out to her voice. Shout out to how much she was on Black radio in the '80s. Shout out to, honestly, the Teena Marie renaissance quietly came from this video game, called <i>Grand Theft Auto: Vice City</i> , which was one of the first video games of all time that actually had real music on the radio when you drove around in the car. I'm a big gamer.
			<i>[Jesse agrees.]</i>
			And they had—this is before artists knew anything, in terms of video game music. So, everybody said yes. So, the <i>Grand Theft Auto: Vice City</i> soundtrack is incredible. I think it's probably since not been repeated, for licensing reasons, but that soundtrack had "Square Biz" by Teena Marie, and I used to play that thing. Oof!
00:03:25	Jesse	Host	That's top ten all-time for me.
00:03:27	Bashir	Guest	That's hot.
00:03:28	Jesse	Host	Like, literally top ten songs ever of all time.
00:03:30	Bashir	Guest	Just a monster jam. And a <u>jam</u> ! That bassline! <i>[Mimics the bassline.]</i> Ugh! Filthy.
00:03:36	Jesse	Host	She raps on it.
00:03:37	Bashir	Guest	<i>[Laughing.]</i> Let's go!
00:03:38	Jesse	Host	And you let her rap, it's fine. Way to go. You know, she signed to Cash Money, right? Before she died?
00:03:44	Bashir	Guest	Are you serious?!
00:03:45	Jesse	Host	I'm 100%. She put out a record on Cash Money. 100% for real.
00:03:48	Bashir	Guest	Shout out. Shout out. You learn. The more you live, the more you learn.
00:03:52	Jesse	Host	Teena Marie. Love her. Okay, so here's my first question. So, Don Cornelius, the host of <i>Soul Train</i> , who is the spiritual forefather of Sherman from <i>Sherman's Showcase</i> —
			<i>[Bashir confirms gleefully.]</i>
00:04:08	Bashir	Guest	Was he a cool guy? Mm. You know, I don't—I can only go by what I saw, as a fan. And he was the coolest guy. He was out of time. He was—you know, it's interesting. I think if you watch <i>Soul Train</i> , it begins with him sort of <i>[laughs]</i> —like all TV shows with hosts—deeply in the zeitgeist. Right? He's like in—he's in the river with all the other artists. They're all swimming in the same direction. Right? And then, like <i>[laughs]</i> as it goes on, then there's this moment where like the hip-hop starts to come on, and then there's a little bit of like—you look and you go like, "I don't know—I don't know if Don liked this. I don't know if the—I don't know if he booked this artist or if the crowd—you know, his people were like—" Because when you see Don Cornelius in those episodes where it's like him and Marvin Gaye, you kind of get a sense that like after like they went and got a drink

00:05:03 Jesse Host and like these are like—these are friends. You know? They went to the same parties and stuff.
At least like a sort of uncle-ish figure. Like, it feels maybe like—to me, he felt like a little bit 1966 in 1971, but—

[Bashir agrees with a laugh.]

00:05:16 Bashir Guest But like there for it. Like, ready to go.
He got it. He got it. Right? But then the—in the later seasons, there is some comedy. There is some comedy in just like him talking to groups like, you know, Leaders of the New School or H-Town or somebody. You kind of look like, “Oh, I don’t think Don listened to this album, guys. *[Chuckling.]* I think he said, ‘Who is this group? Okay, yeah, let’s do it.’” You know, sort of Ed Sullivan, right? Just like, “Alright, let’s just do the show and I’ll figure out who these young folks are.”

00:05:42 Jesse Host It lives in my memory in this kind of weird liminal space, and I think it’s one of the reasons that *Sherman’s Showcase* works so well for me. Because I’ve watched a lot of whatever on YouTube. You know, I’ve watched a lot of The JB’s or whatever, on *Soul Train*. Great.

00:06:00 Bashir Guest Oh, the best. The best!

00:06:01 Jesse Host But when I was a kid, it was the late 1980s—mid to late 1980s, and it came on UHF on weekend mornings or something.

[Bashir confirms.]

And I remember it occupying kind of the same space as when I was that age—when I was like six, I couldn’t figure out if Mr. T was a real man, a cartoon character, a fictional television character, or a wrestler. Like, I knew I loved him, but I couldn’t figure out which was the real Mr. T, and it all felt like a dream. And *Soul Train* was the same, because it had Don Cornelius, who was so weird to me. Then it had the cartoon train that made me think it was a cool, cartoon show about a cool, cartoon train. And then it had the musical performances, which I liked. And then it had the dance sequences, which I did not understand at all. I was like, “What happened to the band?” So, it is like so many different, weird things at once. *[Laughs.]*

00:07:08 Bashir Guest So legendary. So groundbreaking. And yeah, that cartoon train was funky. I mean, we do that on our show, *Sherman’s Showcase*. We have a lot of animation. There’s a sense of a variety show to it. But it also doesn’t move like a traditional variety show. In earlier episodes—and we kind of tried to emulate this—he’s sort of doing bits. He’s doing sketches. He’s out there shooting hoops with Marvin Gaye. He’s—you know, he’s doing the in-studio commercials. Lot of swings were being taken. And then, of course, as the show evolves, I think music becomes like *[laughing]* the main thing. But at first, Don was like, “What are we doing this week? Let’s go. We’re gonna change it.”

And when you think about the fact that that was the only place that that existed, the only place where some of those artists were performing, the fact that it was so popular at one point—you know—Dick Clark apparently made his own version of it. I forget what it was called. It was like *Soul Town* or something. It’s really one of

those things where the reverberations and the power of that show echoed far more greatly I think than people realized, especially for those of us who like—I'll never forget. Like, I'm from Chicago, but I had friends in—and my family originally moved to Carbondale, which is south of—southern Illinois, because my parents met in college, and they went to college in Carbondale. So, they—you know, they had—I think they had my brother there, and then they moved to Chicago and had me. Then they moved back, and then they moved back again to Chicago.

But when we would go to Carbondale, 'cause I would—I had, you know, some sort of like play cousins and things down there. And we would go there like—you know, when I was like 10/11/12. And it was interesting. That was their tethering to all of Black America was shows like *Soul Train*. That's where they got their full diet of connectivity, because they weren't like me living on the southside where, you know, you walk out your front door and everybody is. And so, I think those shows' importance also was a way for people to feel connected, specifically Black folks who were maybe living in some less populated areas. And so, again, I think the outsized effect of that show is probably immeasurable.

00:09:17 Jesse Host
00:09:19 Bashir Guest

He also owned the show, didn't he?

I don't know for sure, but it's—I believe he does own it, yeah. You know, I think he'd seen what happened to all those artists in the '50s and '60s and he was like, "I'm not making that mistake!" You know? But sometimes owning the show is also because to get a show like that on the air is probably a herculean effort at that time. Even more still to come with Bashir Salahuddin. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:09:37 Jesse Host

00:09:44 Music Transition
00:09:49 Jesse Host

Thumpy rock music.

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. My guest is Bashir Salahuddin. Bashir is a comic actor and writer. Alongside Diallo Riddle, he has created and starred in the television shows *South Side* and *Sherman's Showcase*. The second season of *Sherman's Showcase* just premiered on IFC. Oh, [chuckles] and he was also in the new *Top Gun* movie, the one that made 74 billion-trillion dollars. Let's get back into our conversation.

00:10:17 Bashir Guest

Sherman's Showcase is really—you know, it's a sketch show but really it's a music show. It's secretly a music show. Was that what you conceived of when you conceived of and pitched the show? Was it like, "We wanna do every kind of song."

So, it's interesting. I think we wanted to make—Diallo Riddle and I wanted to make a full entertainment vehicle. We had done sketch comedy for years. We actually started doing sketch comedy. We did—we had our own sketch comedy troupe when we first moved to LA years ago, with some great folks in it. And then we—by hook or by crook—ended up on one sketch show, which was *Chocolate News* on Comedy Central, and then we ended up really discovering our voice and also really putting our name kind of in the comedy world when we worked for four years for Jimmy Fallon. Again, variety but mostly sketch. Our department was sketch.

So, we knew we wanted to do a sketch comedy. So, we were like, "We wanna do a sketch comedy show." But! I think for us, you know, when you look at our sort of amount of Malcom Gladwellian

manhours—right?—that 10,000 hours that we had put in, it was like, “Oh. You know, we don’t need to do this the way that anyone’s ever done it.” I think we owe it to ourselves and to any fans to challenge ourselves and say what is a format that we can do with this that is unlike anything else. And at the time, we had also just done this sketch at Fallon called—I think it was Jackie Neptune and the Planetariums. *[Laughs.]* It was Jackie Neptune and the Planetariums. It was like a Temptations group where each member had a different planet on their back.

We were singing like—‘cause I’m obsessed with space, and we were singing like space-themed grooves. And I think we were like, “Yo, man, this is the show we wanna do.” Because Diallo and I really love music. We met in a music group in college. He still, to this day, spins like parties and does stuff. We love music. We really respect and adore musicians.

00:12:18 Jesse Host
00:12:20 Bashir Guest

Wait, what kind of music group was it, in college?

It was—in college, it was an acapella group, called Brothers. We sang in like—you know, different tea stops around Boston for like one person. We’d be out there—you know, not going to class. Not studying but singing jams.

00:12:32 Jesse Host

You were at an Ivy League university.

[Bashir confirms.]

And you guys—and you decided to take the single dorkiest element of Ivy League education and take it to subway stations?

00:12:45 Bashir Guest

Not—and also just, you know, different plazas around town. They have these little like—you know—they have these little—I wanna call them plazas.

00:12:52 Jesse Host
00:12:56 Bashir Guest

“I just got back from the comptroller’s office. I have a list of plazas.” These are things that the people of Boston demanded of us! No, it’s funny, when you first get to college—especially in a big east coast school, right? You’re in class one day, all of the sudden these kids run in there looking preppy, singing tunes. And you’re like, “This is the wackest *[censored]* I’ve ever seen.]

00:13:12 Jesse Host
00:13:14 Bashir Guest

Aren’t they singing like “Ida Rose” or something like that?

They’re singing a lot of like old Irish stuff. They’re singing—you know, the classic acapella tunes. You know, “Old Danny Boy”, stuff like that. And you’re like, “This is so dorky.” And then they’re all just singing like upbeat, jazzy versions of R&B tunes. *[Singing and snapping to the beat.]* “What’s going on and la-da-da-da, what’s going on?”

00:13:30 Jesse Host

I mean, there’s literally nothing dorkier than the beatboxer in an acapella group. Like, truly.

00:13:35 Bashir Guest

I gotta shout out *Key & Peele* for that hilarious acapella sketch. But I will say, like the Stockholm syndrome that takes over when you go to these schools sets in quick. ‘Cause about two months later, you’re like, “Aw man, we should do that.” And so, we did. But to our credit, we wanted to do it differently. We didn’t wanna sing those. So, we sang a lot of R&B. We sang a lot of like Jodeci, H-Town, you know. We sang like a lot of like Shy, Silk, 112. Like, all these cool R&B groups. So, we thought we were like sort of upending the form. We were not. We were just dorkily singing R&B.

00:14:10 Jesse Host

Let’s hear some music from *Sherman’s Showcase*. This is a delightful Hall & Oates pastiche called “Marina del Rey”.

00:14:20	Bashir	Guest	Oh my god, I love this song.
00:14:21	Music	Music	“Marina del Rey (Let’s Spend the Day)” from <i>Sherman’s Showcase</i> .
			<i>It’s that silver malibu</i>
			<i>Let’s spend the day in Marina del Rey</i> <i>Let’s spend the day in Marina del Rey</i> <i>I wanna play in Marina del Rey</i> <i>In Marina del Rey</i>
			<i>[Splash.]</i>
			<i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i>
00:15:01	Jesse	Host	There’s a reason that a lot of television shows do not have original music in them, and it is because it is a lot of hard work to write and record original music on a television schedule.
			<i>[Bashir confirms.]</i>
			I mean, Rachel Bloom from <i>Crazy Ex-Girlfriend</i> ’ll tell you that. You know. Anybody that—I’m sure the people on <i>Bob’s Burgers</i> and <i>Central Park</i> ’ll tell you that. Like there’s—it’s too much work too fast.
00:15:28	Bashir	Guest	Yeah. And that’s why you gotta deal with folks who are just already doing it all the time. That specific song you just mentioned came from two places. It came number one from Diallo, ‘cause he was like <i>[laughs]</i> —he’s always—he likes to make jokes about like, you know, like, “Hey man, everybody’s talking about LA, but we’re gonna do a joke about—we’re gonna do a song about Glendale. You know, G-Town.” <i>[Laughing.]</i> Nobody cares about Glendale! I’m sorry, shout out Glendale, but nobody’s talking about Glendale.
00:15:53	Jesse	Host	There’s some great Glendale content on the show.
00:15:55	Bashir	Guest	There is—because the show we say is based in Glendale and Sherman, in his cheapness, treats Glendale as if it is the entertainment capital of the world, which it’s not. But with that song—so, it came from his point of view of like, “We gotta do a funny song about a place nobody ever talks about, Marina del Rey. And then, there’s a group who are incredible—the Knocks.” And the Knocks are musicians. They’re actual, real musicians. And he somehow, through his DJing and knowing music people thing, met the Knocks and he said, “Hey, I’m going to do this song.”
			And then they were like, “Great.” And they worked with him on it. And so, that’s how you get that music—that’s how you get music that’s actually written by a musician. And so, if we had to write music it wouldn’t happen. That being said, there are songs—this season and the first season—that are original melodies that Diallo or I or both of us came up with or somebody else’s. So, every now and then we’ll stumble on something kind of good, and we’ll give it to our musician friends, and they’ll go, “You know what? This is not bad, actually! We’re gonna do something with this.” And so, we’re very proud of those rare moments. But ultimately, we—you know, we know what we can do, and we know what we can’t do.
00:16:55	Jesse	Host	I wonder if part of the thing that draws Ne-Yo to come on your show and sing a song about how he has a time machine—

00:17:01 Bashir Guest Ugh, what a great—thank you, Ne-Yo. *[Laughs.]* Yes, “Time Loop”.
00:17:06 Jesse Host Really a good song about him having a time machine.

[Bashir agrees.]

00:17:35 Bashir Guest But I would imagine for John Legend or Ne-Yo or Phonte or whomever, like there is a special appeal to getting to go do something funny that is also both Black and weird—that like the weird silliness and Blackness, that they don’t have to trade one for the other; they get to do both at the same time.
You know, if that is part of the appeal, then I feel proud about it. I think weird is very important. I feel like specifically, you know again, *Sherman’s Showcase* does not—it’s not born of—it’s not like a fresh idea we had a long time ago that we finally got to do. *Sherman’s Showcase* in some ways was born of tremendous frustration at going around Hollywood pitching TV shows and having folks not get it, being told to our face by White executives, “Oh, Black people won’t like that.” This has happened to me on several occasions. I think people think, “Oh, that’s a weird Hollywood story and it feels perhaps heightened.” It’s not heightened. That is actually a very grounded statement.

I’ve had White executives look at me in my eye and go, “Are Black people gonna like this?” Or like, “Are they gonna get that?” And so, for us as Black kids who did not fit in the box, who liked everything from *Pee-Wee’s Big Adventure* to the movie *The Explorers to Fraggie Rock*—obviously, *The Muppet Show* is like—*Sherman’s Showcase* borrows a ton from *The Muppet Show* in terms of the backstageness, the craziness, the—Kermit being sort of like this character who’s trying to essentially herd cats all day every day, and you cannot herd cats. All those things inform it. And so, we had that experience, but we also had the sort of chip on our shoulder of being angry that every time we tried to go like, “We wanna do this TV show about these Black guys in space, and they do time travel.”

And then they’d go like, “Black people in—? Come on. Come on, man. Black people space? In space. You’re gonna put some—?” You know, it was like—and you have to fight all these fights where you’d say, “Oh, you know, we wanna do this show about fantasy characters.” And I said, “Well, they don’t have to be White—well, I mean, it’s fantasy. It doesn’t exist, guys.” There’s no—here’s a terrible secret, America, there’s actually no such place as Middle Earth. It doesn’t exist. It is not findable on a map.

00:19:17 Jesse Host Where do hobbits live, then?

00:19:19 Bashir Guest They live in your imagination, man. Middle Earth is inside of you.

00:19:22 Jesse Host Oh, wow.

00:19:23 Bashir Guest Like all these other places. Also, to be fair, it’s England. But anyway. *[Laughs.]* It’s essentially the English country.

00:19:27 Jesse Host So, like a combo of inside of me and England.

00:19:30 Bashir Guest I think it’s New Zealand—New Zealand countryside.

[Jesse agrees.]

The point is, though, you have these people whose sensibility and brain are so limited by their own personal interpretation of reality. I mean, Diallo says this all the time. He’s like, “I’m pretty sure George

Lucas didn't grow up on a foreign planet." You know, nobody was telling him "make it grounded and relatable" when he's pitching Luke Skywalker. They're not going, "Oh, we don't know. You know. Write about your own experience. You know?" And it's also what's sitting in tons and tons of meetings and having executives when we come to them with something ebullient and fun and silly and vibrant that we know our people wanna watch, and they're like, "Well, what about the moment where your character cries and really understands the depth of sadness of the Black American experience?"

And we go like, "That [censored] isn't—watch movies in the '70s, there's tons of it. Let us make the thing that is joyous." And then we were told no a lot. And so, again, what you're seeing in that weirdness and that quirkiness is so much wish fulfillment for us. It's so much of us finally having a chance to do both Fredrick Douglas as a time traveler and also a sketch about—this season, one of my favorite sketches is called Dark Zenon and it's about—it is a alien robot space opera set in the future. It is goofy! But I would watch the hell out of that thing if I had to. [Laughs.] We also have westerns, and then we also have great music and great songs.

So, it's just us doing all the things that folks were telling us no, you can't do it and your people won't get it. Which is just a terrible thing to say to somebody, but it happens.

00:20:57 Jesse Host

We're gonna take a quick break. When we come back, we'll have more with Bashir Salahuddin. We've talked a lot about *Sherman's Showcase*, which is great, but what about *South Side*, his other television show, which is also great? We'll get into it. Stick around, it's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:21:15 Promo Clip

Music: Gentle, upbeat synth.

Jesse Thorn: Hi, it's Jesse Thorn, the founder of Maximum Fun. I am breaking into this programming to say thank you to Max Fun's members. Your purchases in this year's post Max Fun Drive patch sale raised over \$50,000 for Trans Lifeline. Maybe you already know about the good work that Trans Lifeline does. If you don't, they're a trans-run organization that offers direct emotional and financial support to trans people in crisis. If you wanna learn more about the work Trans Lifeline does or support them further, go to TransLifeline.org. Thanks for supporting Maximum Fun. Thanks for supporting Trans Lifeline. And thanks for being awesome people who wanna do good in the world.

00:22:01 Music Transition

Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

00:22:05 Jesse Host

This is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Bashir Salahuddin. He's the star and cocreator of two of the funniest shows on TV, *South Side* and *Sherman's Showcase*.

South Side, while it is ebullient, it is also—as a—is very grounded! It has a slice of life quality to it.

[Bashir agrees.]

It sort of flashes through characters living in a relatively real life. I mean, a lighthearted, silly version of real life, but a relatively real

life. So, it's a very different kind of thing. What made you want to make that show?
00:22:47 Bashir Guest *[Whistles.]* That's a good question. So, I think when we were at *Fallon*, we had already had—we already knew that we wanted to do our own thing. And to his credit, Lorne Michaels at one point even told us, "You know, I think you guys are ready." I won't do my Lorne impression; everybody has one. But you know, he said, "I really think you guys are ready to do your own show."

And we said, "Oh, good, we feel the same way." So, we knew we wanted to get our voice out there, because Jimmy Fallon had been generous, and he had been thoughtful. He'd been really the best kind of boss we could ask for. Yet, as an artist, you still have to go your own way. At some point, Michael McDonald has to go, "Alright, guys. It's been fun." At some point, Lionel Richie goes, "Alright, you 25 guys, the Commodores. There's a lot of us. I'ma go do something else, now." You know, there's an evolution that happens in artists' lives.

00:23:31 Jesse Host I think it's worth noting here, Jimmy Fallon has a very specific voice.
00:23:36 Bashir Guest Yes he does! He has Jimmy's voice!
00:23:37 Jesse Host As a comic performer.

[Bashir agrees.]

And he is a very talented and successful man. It might not be—
Let's Slow Jam the News might not have been a bit that he pitched in a room.

00:23:51 Bashir Guest Well, you know what's crazy? And I've said this before and I'll say it again: we wrote Slow Jam the News, but we did not come up with Slow Jam the News. Slow Jam the News was conceived of by a White guy. Gavin Purcell, who's a producer on *The Jimmy Fallon Show*.

00:24:03 Jesse Host Did he really?!
00:24:04 Bashir Guest Yes. He came up with—
00:24:05 Jesse Host I didn't know that!
00:24:06 Bashir Guest He came up not with the bit; he came up with the phrase "slow jam the news". And he came in one day and he said, "What do you guys think of Slow Jam the News?" He said, "I don't know what it is. I don't know how it works." And so, we were like that's hysterical. And we knew exactly what it is, and we knew how it worked. And then, we sent it to Jimmy, and then he did a pass on it, because everything is actually very collaborative in comedy. Everybody does a pass, everybody's looking, everybody's talking. So, Jimmy had a big hand in how that came about, but to his credit, he really felt like until Diallo and I took it and wrote it, it didn't know what it was. And then we figured out what this thing is, and then we kind of ran with it and ended up writing, you know, for the president to do it. So, shout out Gavin. Good guy. But—

00:24:45 Jesse Host He is a good guy!
00:24:46 Bashir Guest I do think that, to his credit again—here's some thing else Jimmy did. We would be doing bits, and every now and then we—you know, and this was about a year or so in—I'd give him a bit and say like, "Hey man, we wanted to do this."

And he would look at it and go, "Aaah! This is—I don't wanna do this; it's not for me."

And we'd be like, *[disappointed]* "Oh, okay."

And he'd say, "But y'all do it."

And we'd say, "What?"

And he'd say, "Yeah! Just do it. Write it up, and we'll put it on the show."

So, that sense of like oh! You guys can, in some ways, sort of create your own lane within his space. Also, supported the idea that we wanted to do our own thing and we wanted to have our own voice. Because again, like you just said, Jimmy is Jimmy, and we want to be us. So, we wanna be us. But *South Side* specifically, you know, we'd had this really great moment with Chris Rock. I know it sounds like I'm all over the place, but we were doing a sketch comedy show yeeeeeears ago, and this is when Chris Rock was editing I believe his movie *Good Hair*. It was at HBO. We were doing an HBO sketch comedy thing online, called *The Message*, which is like how I really, really got started. And those sketches are online, and you can find them today, folks.

And Chris was like, "Hey man, you guys write sketch?" He said, "Hollywood's gonna try to make you write sketch forever, but you need to write characters." He said, "You should learn how to write characters and learn how to write specific characters in the space of a TV show, of a narrative TV show. Because that's something that people who come from the sketch world are often pushed away from. And I know for a fact when were trying to sell shows, there were absolutely conversations that our agents would tell us about where like, "Yeah, they feel like they know you guys wanna do a cool show about being in Atlanta." 'Cause originally we wanted to do a show about Atlanta, where Diallo is from. We wanted to do something about blue-collar folks in one of our hometowns. And we set it up at HBO.

But you know, again, that show unfortunately for many reasons—which I don't wanna go into again—did not end up airing. But we knew we wanted to do something with characters, and we really felt like, "Let's do something about my hometown, Chicago." And at the time, Chicago was much maligned in the news. And it was being called all these awful names, and I was like, "That's so crazy! That's not my experience! When I go there, it's fun and like you get off the airplane and some dude goes, 'Hey man, nice shoes, brother. Where you get them from?'" *[Chuckles.]* You know? People who talk to you don't know. It was like, "I don't even know this guy!"

One of my friends who I just worked with on—

00:26:58 Jesse Host
00:27:00 Bashir Guest

Wait, that person isn't trying to take your shoes?

No! He's cool! He thinks they're funny. I mean, he's trying to be funny. He thinks you're cool. He's like, "Aw, I like those." So, people just talk to you. They just—there's no like getting to know. In Chicago, there's no getting to know phase. People just, "Hey! What you doing here?" Like, it's just direct. And in some ways, Chicago is like a small town in a big city. There is a sense of a Chicago point of

view. And so, we were able to tap into that. And we were able to do that, and I said, “Let’s show the world a lighter side, a funnier side of Chicago from the POV of the people who have all the side hustles.”

Because in Chicago, it almost feels like eeverybody’s got a side hustle. I don’t care if you’re a lawyer or a teacher or a sanitation worker, you know, you might go to your attorney’s office and he’s like, “Oh, and by the way, man, I’m also doing this, um—you know, I do these little parties on the weekend. It’s \$15 entry. It’s a place for young professionals to mingle, man. Come be—” You know. And it’s like, oh, okay, alright. And also, the probate case. We should look at that at some point.

So, that is Chicago. *[Laughs.]* Chicago, you got people—everybody’s striving. And I said, “That’s not anywhere on television.” And so, to his credit, my brother Sultan, at the time—two of my really good friends from growing up, they’re twins, Kareem and Quincy. You saw them on the show. I grew up with those guys. They were always just really funny dudes, and one of them worked at this place called Rent-A-Center. And my brother’s like, “Hey, man, I know you weren’t doing a show in Chicago. Why not set it at Rent-A-Center?” And we did. We figured it out. We actually—me, Diallo, and our other executive producer, Michael Blyden, who we met on *Jimmy Fallon*, we rode around with Quincy on his route at Rent-A-Center, picking up and dropping off furniture and meeting people, talking to people. And we just said, “Oh, this is the show.”

And it’s the show because it’s like *The Simpsons*, you know? There’s a central place. And when the show first came out, people were like, “Oh, it’s like a Black *The Office*.” And I was like not even close. There just happens to be an office in it. But ultimately, the city of Chicago is our office. And we were really going for *The Simpsons*. I mean, I can tell you right now, *South Side*’s aim is to be live action *The Simpsons*. It’s a show where anybody can have the lead episode. So, in *The Simpsons*, you have like this is a Bart episode. This is the Chief Wiggum episode. Right? *South Side* can do the same thing. Sometimes it’s me, sometimes it’s this other person. But you get to go by virtue of being in that Rent-A-Center truck, now you have freedom to go all over the city. And so, for us it was a way—the actual Rent-A-Center place was simply a way to show the entirety of Chicago to everybody and to show people how silly and fun and lighthearted the show can be. And I love it, because Chicagoans have just told me so many times how grateful they are for that version of their city, that depiction of their city. Your character on the show is a cop who’s pretty square.

00:29:35 Jesse Host

[Bashir laughs and agrees.]

00:29:43 Bashir Guest
00:29:44 Jesse Host
00:29:47 Bashir Guest
00:29:48 Jesse Host

And has a charming and corrupt partner. Who I’m married to in real life. *[Laughs.]*
Congratulations on that. She’s a delight. She’s a joy.
Shout out to Chandra Russell.
I wanna play a clip from the second season. So, Officer Goodnight, which is your character, and Officer Turner—your wife’s character, Chandra Russell—are searching for a man selling fur coats.

[Bashir confirms with a laugh.]

But it is during a heat wave, and your character does not understand why they're looking for fur coats in the middle of a heat wave. And it turns out that it's because that's when they're on sale.

00:30:16 Sound effect
00:30:17 Clip

[Bashir confirms.]
Music swells and fades.

[Turner makes a frustrated sound and shuts the door.]

Goodnight (South Side): Wrong one, again?

Turner: How hard is it to find a damn house selling some fur?

Goodnight: Logic police, here. On the hottest day of the year, you've got us driving around whilst on duty looking for, quote, "a dude moving furs out of his crib", end quote. Not even a storefront, by the way. Just his house and he's selling furs. Yeah. That's the problem.

Turner: Exactly. On the hottest day of the year, okay? I'm about to pay a quarter of the price for some luxurious *[censored]* furs made by a local Black businessman.

Goodnight: You don't know that. He could be Portuguese. Obrigado, bro!

00:30:47 Sound Effect
00:30:49 Bashir

Turner: I just need to call my girl. Mm-hm. That's it.
Music swells and fades.

You know what I love? I have a lot of friends who are doctors, because I went—you know, where I went to school. And I've asked them like, "Which is the most realistic doctor show?" Like, and they'll go like, "Oh, it was *Scrubs*. *Scrubs* is the one." I'm like the silly show where everybody's making jokes and it's a— They're like, "Yeah, that's the closest to the vibe."

And so, that's one of the things that I think we wanna do too, on *South Side*. And so, you know, we get these cop characters, but we're not gonna be doing no episodes about who got shot and... there are so many other TV shows where you can watch people of color get shot. You know, if that's your thing, go do that. On our show, you're gonna see them argue about fur coats. You're gonna see characters try to keep his Omaha Steaks from melting. You know, you're gonna see these people have these small, human moments. But when you do live at that level and at that price point, it means everything. You know, we've often—I've often talked about our show and said in our world, \$50 is a loot of money. Now, here—you know, in Los Angeles and in entertainment, that is not a lot of money, but on our TV show? If somebody's got 50 bucks, that's like a big deal. And I think that's the world that I grew up in, and that's the world that I was so excited to explore in *South Side*.

And so, the other thing about that show, in terms of its creation was—you know, we had spent years trying to get a show on the air, listening to other people, doing the—you know, casting these people, and who are the hot comedians? Let's put these hot comedians in. And then ask ourselves like wait a second. Like, who do we find funny? And if you ask most people who the funniest person in their life is, you know, they might name a comedian, but usually it's like, "Oh, my auntie. She's hilarious. Oh, my little baby cousin, he'll make you laugh in three seconds." And so, we just said well, let's put those people on TV. So, we used my wife and the twins and my brother and two of my boys from high school are on the show. My other brother and his friends from high school are on the show. My sister's girl is on the show. You know, it's like all these Chicagoans.

And in fact, people will ask us all the time like, "What's it like shooting on the southside?" We shoot a lot on the southside. Not exclusively, but a lot. And I say, "You know, it's interesting. Everybody on the southside is convinced that the one thing missing from our TV show is them." And so, that's what it is. And you know what's crazy? Sometimes they're right! You know, this season—*South Side* season three opens with a dude who I'd literally met on the street selling snow cones. But he made me laugh my [censored] off. And then, a couple days later, one of our producers went and met him, and he didn't know what they were talking about. 'Cause I was like, "Go to this block. There's a guy there. Find him. We're gonna put him on the show." And he had some really funny moments.

00:33:12	Bashir	Guest	And so, there's a bus driver—season one—that dude is an actual bus driver that just made us laugh. And so, ultimately, as we try to redefine Chicago away from all the negativity, our best bet is to let the city speak for itself. And there's no better way to do that—most of the people on that show are from Chicago. Most of the actors are from Chicago. I would say over 90% Chicago.
00:33:33	Jesse	Host	I was just thinking, on the subject of \$50 being a lot of money.
00:33:37	Bashir	Guest	It's a lot of money, yeah!
00:33:38	Jesse	Host	I was walking down the street in my neighborhood, and I had this thought that I had made it. And the reason was that I had \$100, and it wasn't in my shoe.
00:33:48	Bashir	Guest	There it is.
00:33:49	Jesse	Host	I was like, "This is in my pocket! 'Cause if somebody rolls up on me, I'll give them my \$100."
00:33:55	Bashir	Guest	I got something to give him. I got something to give him.
00:33:56	Jesse	Host	I got another \$100. This isn't my only \$100. I don't have to keep this under my sock.

[Bashir agrees with a laugh.]

Like, not even—one intermediate step is in the side, but the serious one is where it's underneath your foot, because no one wants to go there.

00:34:10	Bashir	Guest	Nobody wants to deal with that.
00:34:11	Jesse	Host	It's not just that it's hidden; it's in a gross place.
00:34:15	Bashir	Guest	I think there's a sense in Hollywood that if you happen to be born poor or lower middleclass or working class—whatever word you wanna use to say you don't have a ton a ton of money, that that is

what you're obsessed with. And the opposite is true. You're obsessed with the same facile, silly things in the news as everybody else. You want—you know. Like, I remember one time I was doing this project, and they were talking about, "Oh, and then at the height of the project, we're gonna go out and we're gonna give away free money to people. People who really need it. And we're gonna show it, and they're gonna be grateful."

And I was thinking to myself, "Clearly nobody in this room grew up poor." Nobody poor wants to be seen on camera getting charity. That is not how poor people think. They don't—they want the opposite. Nobody poor wasn't to go to high school and be the dude in the Payless shoes. Nobody's gonna think you're frugal. They're gonna think you're wack. You know? So, it's like you can't assume that the things that are challenges for people are also things that they're obsessed with. And I know that, because I grew up that way. Right? No, it's actually silly stuff. And they're talking about entertainment news and they're talking about movies. And then, they have as robust and diverse a set of interests as you do. We told people all the time like, "The southside has astronomers and librarians and lawyers and it has hustlers, too. And some gang members and everything else in between, but it is not one thing."

And Hollywood I think still struggles with that. You know? And hopefully with these two shows, we can continue to kind of hammer away at that and go, "You guys just don't know. Just let us speak for ourself."

00:35:43	Jesse	Host	Well, Bashir, I'm so grateful to you for taking all this time to talk to me and for your great work.
00:35:46	Bashir	Guest	Of course! Thank you so much for having me!
00:35:50	Jesse	Host	Bashir Salahuddin. <i>Sherman's Showcase</i> is a wonderful program. You can watch seasons one and two on IFC now, and I insist that if you're the kind of person who enjoys a good Faith Evans joke, oh, you're gonna love this show. It's such a great show. And his other show, <i>South Side</i> , is a kind of like a slightly silly slice of life comedy with a panoply of characters from across south Chicago. Oh, it is so funny. It's so great and sweet and pleasant. It's great. Go watch that on HBO Max, too. Great show.
00:36:27	Music	Transition	Relaxed synth with light vocalizations.
00:36:29	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. Thank goodness, we finally reached sweater weather here in Los Angeles, which is anything below 80 degrees. <i>[Laughs.]</i> And uh, unfortunately, it rained the other night. I don't know who you call when there's no storm drain by your house, so the rain just stays there. Eh, if you've got an idea, tweet at me! @JesseThorn . How about that?

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". It was written and recorded by The Go! Team. They've got a brand-new single out. Go check it out. Thanks to them and to their label, which is Memphis Industries. Nice of them

to let us use that great music. Special thanks this week to Sarah Milton for recording Bruce McCulloch in his home in Toronto.

Bullseye is also on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Find us there, give us a follow. We will share with you all of our interviews. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:37:43 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]