

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.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. My first guest this week is Michael Showalter. This is his fourth time on the show. Four! And somehow, this is his first interview on our show by himself. Michael Showalter is a member of the sketch comedy group The State, who had their own show on MTV in the ’90s. Gen-u-ine Gen-X comedy legends. With his fellow State members, David Wayne and Michael Ian Black, he also starred on <i>Stella</i> , a Comedy Central series that is one of my personal all-time favorites. Oh, and Showalter and Wayne also directed <i>Wet Hot American Summer</i> —one of the most unique, enduring cult comedies of the 21 st century. And I’m just gonna say it, probably one of my top ten favorite movies of all time. Music swells and fades.
00:01:11	Sound Effect	Transition	
00:01:12	Clip	Clip	Music: Percussive, inspiring music. Coop (<i>Wet Hot American Summer</i>): Today is the big, culminating, climactic softball game against evil Camp Tigerclaw. <i>[Someone boos aggressively.]</i> We have put together an unlikely team of misfits, and we’ve been training like crazy all summer. Yeah, it’s a motley crew that you’d think would never even be able to win a single game. We had a kooky training period where it seemed like—well, it seemed like nothing was gonna go right, but guys, somehow we made it to the finals! So, I say, when those anonymously evil campers from Tigerclaw get here, we give it our best shot and we try to come from behind at the last minute with some weird trick play that we made up, and we win the game! What do you say, team?!
			Kid 1: It sounds like pretty well-worn territory.
			Kid 2: The whole thing feels kind of trite. I say we forget it.
			Coop: Is that how everybody feels? <i>[The campers all agree in dejected unison.]</i>
00:02:01	Sound Effect	Transition	Kid 3: Pretty much. Music swells and fades.
00:02:02	Jesse	Host	Lately, Showalter has been spending more and more time behind the camera as a director. He directed the academy award nominated drama, <i>The Big Sick</i> , starring Kumail Nanjiani. He also directed and co-created the HBO show, <i>Search Party</i> . Showalter’s newest movie is called <i>Spoiler Alert</i> , and he directed it. It’s a

romantic comedy based on the book, *Spoiler Alert: The Hero Dies*, a memoir by TV writer Michael Ausiello.

It's about Ausiello and his relationship with his partner, Kit Cowan. Ausiello is played by Jim Parsons from *The Big Bang Theory*. Cowan is played by Ben Aldridge. Michael and Kit meet. They move in together, grow closer, grow more distant. Then, about 13 years into their relationship, Kit is diagnosed with a rare, deadly form of cancer. A little over a year later, it claims Kit's life. That's the spoiler. If there's a theme in Michael Showalter's recent work, it's an ability to find comedy in dark and vulnerable places. He does it without coming off as phony or betraying the gravity of the situations. Like in this scene from *Spoiler Alert*.

A nurse has just told Michael that the hospital's out of beds. Kit will have to get chemo treatment in a chair. Music swells and fades.

00:03:28 Sound Effect
00:03:29 Clip

Transition
Clip

[An elevator ding and hurried footsteps.]

Michael (*Spoiler Alert*): Hey.

[A ding.]

Give my husband a bed.

Nurse: Sir, I'm afraid we just don't—

Michael: He has a rectal tumor the size of the Death Star. He needs a bed. We were promised a bed.

Nurse: All the beds are occupied today.

Michael: *[Furiously, with building intensity.]* I don't care where you have to go and find one! I don't care if you have to drive to Ikea and buy one, I don't care if you have to go to Jennifer Convertibles. *[Screaming and banging on the desk.]* Give my husband a bed!

Nurse: *[Cautiously.]* Okay, sir. Okay. We'll find your husband a bed.

Michael: Thank you.

Kit: *[Quietly.]* Well, that was Oscar worthy.

Michael: I worked for Shirley MacLaine.

Kit: I think the husband detail really swung it for you.

Michael: Well, boyfriend didn't seem dramatic enough. Music swells and fades.

00:04:09 Sound Effect
00:04:10 Jesse
00:04:12 Michael Showalter

Transition
Host
Guest

[Chuckles.] Michael Showalter, welcome back to *Bullseye*. It's nice to see you.
Great to be here! Great to see you.

00:04:14 Jesse Host Jim Parsons is a producer on this movie. Did he come to you, or did you come to him?

00:04:19 Michael Guest I actually came to him, but I discovered that he was looking for a Michael Showalter type to direct the movie, but didn't think I would wanna do it because of similarities between this film and *The Big Sick*. But I read about that he had optioned this material and reached out to him and said this sounds really interesting. Do you guys have a director? And that was way before we had a script or anything like that. So, I sort of partnered up with Jim sort of from the earliest stages of this project.

00:04:48 Jesse Host What is a Michael Showalter type? You've sat in audition rooms to direct films—

00:04:51 Michael Guest Someone who's—someone who's not me. Well, no, it's like—

00:04:53 Jesse Host —with guys that look like you.

00:04:56 Michael Guest Yeah, exactly. Like it was you—you know, someone I guess who's that tone of a director? You know, the sort of funny, character-driven but with drama. No, I always remember back in the day, Janeane Garofalo telling me she was always up for parts that were—for a Janeane Garofalo type and then she wouldn't get the part. But no, so I think they were—they were like, "This is amazing, because you're who we—you're our dream person for this." And we then went around meeting with writers and hearing ideas and takes, and we partnered up with David Marshall Grant and Dan Savage, and they had an unbelievable sort of vision for a version of the movie, an adaptation. And then, a couple years went by and they wrote many drafts, and then we were—all of the sudden, we were making the movie.

00:05:45 Jesse Host Did you know that Jim Parsons was good at acting?

[Michael laughs and confirms.]

00:06:00 Michael Guest I mean, I wanna be clear, like Jim Parsons is wonderful in his career-making role, on a television sitcom—a multi-camera television sitcom. But that's a very different kind of performing. Yeah. I did know he was good at acting. And in fact, found myself intrigued by him, which is part of what I was interested in with this project is I sort of—there's certain actors whose careers I find intriguing, the choices that they make or the choices they don't make. And he's someone in that category who I found very intriguing the kinds of choices I saw him making post-*The Big Bang Theory*—wanting to do theatre, wanting to do independent film, wanting to do more serious roles. And I did see him on Broadway, doing *Boys in the Band*, and he's spectacular in that. So, I kind of am always—you know, I think I've—I think I can relate to that, to kind of being seen one way and wanting to do something a different way.

And so, I gravitate towards people who I feel like have something that they wanna show the world that maybe the world hasn't seen yet. And Jim definitely felt, to me, like he was that person. And so, I was really excited to see him playing this character who's—you know, who's got a whole range of attributes that are not, you know, what we're used to from Jim and his inner life and sexuality and angry and joyful and just the whole range of emotions that we get to see with this character that he plays in the film.

00:07:23 Jesse Host The character that he plays, based on a real-life human being, is a television critic or television journalist, and is obsessed with television, and that's part of the movie. You know, you tell a little bit of the story of his childhood as though it were a—you know, a multi-camera, '80s sitcom. How did you think about how the audience would look at this celebrated sitcom man who is playing someone who watches that, whose life is built around watching that, and who is sort of alternately depicted as a child within that world that *[chuckling]* Jim Parsons was the king of!

[Michael agrees.]

00:08:23 Michael Guest Like, there's a lot of—like, it's one thing to just say like, "What's it like to see somebody that's been in our house every week in a different way?" Right? That's like a classic what do you do about being a sitcom actor thing. This is a much more complicated stew. Yes. And I feel like, you know, I do like things that have a meta quality to them. And I think everything I've done, I like to think that in this sort of meta way, that the movie is about what the movie is about. It's about what the characters in the movie are dealing with in the movie. But as a fan of cinema and looking at things in a certain way, it's also about the actor—the individual actor that's playing that part. And so, this movie is in certain ways about Jim, in the same way that it's sort of about me, in the same way that it's sort of about Sally and all of the other actors in the film. It's predominantly the story of these characters and Michael Ausiello's true story and all of that, but I like the ability that we have in these things to also say something about the actors themselves.

And so, I think there's a little bit of—I don't know what it means. I don't have—I can't say for sure what I think it means other than that I think it's interesting. And I would say that that's true of other things I've done too, where I think *The Eyes of Tammy Faye* is about Jessica Chastain is as much as it's about Tammy Faye. And I could—you know, say—go through the other things I've done and say the same thing. So, I haven't thought through all the meaning of it, but I do think it's intriguing that Jim plays this character being who he is.

00:09:45 Jesse Host This is a relationship movie, and I thought that was the most successful part of the film. Like, I really was touched by the relationship between these two guys. How do you cast for that?

00:10:00 Michael Guest Like chemistry?

00:10:01 Jesse Host Yeah. Like how can you tell? 'Cause you've made—you've made a lot of movies about romances, now. So, how can you tell whether it's gonna feel for reals?

00:10:11 Michael Guest Yeah! You can't, really. You can't. I should say that you can and I have a secret system for it, but I think you—I think I have a type of actor that I gravitate towards, that I am looking for a certain quality that they might have that is a sort of openness, a kind of a sense that there's some sort of honesty about them—however that is conveyed, that like we're—you're seeing the full person. And so, I think you don't know—well, I'll back up a bit. I like casting people that I think would be nice to me at a party.

[They chuckle.]

And so, I'm looking for people that have a certain quality that I'm drawn to, that makes me think that there's a—like I said, a kind of like openness about them and an authenticity to them. And then, you hope that in the process of working with that person, that that openness is conveyed and that those two people do have chemistry, but you don't know. You don't.

00:11:14 Jesse Host It's funny that you describe that quality of openness and somebody that would be nice to you, because I think in your career as a performer—which, you know, these days you're primarily a director, but once upon a time you were primarily a writer and performer. Many characters you played were like open-eyed and sweet to the point of madness. Like, complete obscene like nightmarish sweetness.

[They laugh and Michael agrees.]

00:11:51 Michael Guest So, it's something you've always been into!
Yeah. I mean, it literally is what I said, which is would this person be nice to me at a dinner party? Do I think that this person would be nice to me at a dinner party? And yeah, I respond—I don't know, I—it's that part of me that wants to just be liked and accepted and to feel invited, included somehow. And so, I think that's what I look for. That's definitely the quality that I look for.

00:12:17 Jesse Host We've got more coming with Michael Showalter. When we come back from our break, Sally Field also stars in *Spoiler Alert*. It's Showalter's second time directing her. She's frankly one of the best to ever do it. And we'll talk to Michael about how he managed to forge a relationship with a legend. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

00:12:40 Music Transition Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

00:12:44 Jesse Host Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guest is Michael Showalter. He was a founding member of the sketch comedy group *The State*. He also helped make possible cult comedy favorites like *Wet Hot American Summer*, *The Baxter*, and *Search Party*. He just directed the film *Spoiler Alert*, which is streaming now on Peacock. It's a drama about a couple—Michael Ausiello, who's played by Jim Parsons, and Kit Cowan, who's played by Ben Aldridge. It follows the story of their relationship. The spoiler in the title is that Kit dies of cancer. Let's get into the rest of our conversation.

Your most famous sketch comedy character from *The State*, it was the guy who says, "I'm outta here."

00:13:30 Michael Guest Yes, exactly. Whose father is cooler than he is. He's trying to rebel against his—he's trying to be rebellious, but it's hard to be rebellious when your parents are cooler than you are.

00:13:41 Jesse Host And is—you know, like most of the recurring things on *The State* was also kind of a parody of the idea of recurring things. And you know, you did *Stella* for years, which was—it's hard to even characterize the tone of *Stella*. Like, it was like three wide-eyed—

00:14:01 Michael Guest Monsters.

00:14:02 Jesse Host Monsters. But with a sort of open-to-the-world, no memory sweetness to them. And like, you know, you made like a—both a farcical parody romantic comedy movie with David Wayne, and you made a sort of sideways what-if romantic comedy movie in *The Baxter*. So, like you had approached these ideas every sideways

00:14:47 Michael Guest before. So, at some point, did you feel like you had the courage to approach those things directly and purely sincerely?
Yeah. Yes. And what I think I started to feel like there was a limitation to the kind of meta thing where everything was in quotes. Like, there might even be a scene of real drama or, you know, there might actually be a scene in some *Stella*—something we might have done in *Stella*, where the characters really are experiencing deep emotions, but it was a joke. Like, the joke was, “Isn’t this funny how serious this is? Isn’t it funny how tragic this scene is becoming?” Or something. And as much as I love doing that and still love doing that, I listened—I do listen to and pay attention to, you know, the criticisms, because I want my work to be seen.

00:15:49 Jesse Host I’m not satisfied to just have it be something that is cult-like or divisive in some way. I actually aspire to have my stuff be accessible.
And when you say your earlier work was divisive, like I wanna be clear that I’m against it.

00:15:53 Michael Guest You should be.

00:15:54 Jesse Host Yeah. I don’t care for it.

00:15:55 Michael Guest Yeah. I mean, people would—you know, people—the anger, the hate that came at us for *Stella* and *Wet Hot*, um—

00:16:04 Jesse Host *[Laughs.]* I think like—so, *Wet Hot American Summer*, one of my favorite movies. Roger Ebert, the great American film critic—perhaps the greatest. Pauline Kael and Roger Ebert, right? He—*[laughing]* he wrote a parody of “Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah” about how much he hated *Wet Hot American Summer*. *[Laughs.]* And like, he’s the main—he’s the famous film critic that enjoys comedy!

00:16:25 Michael Guest Yes. And the same thing I remember, you know, Virginia Heffernan, who I love, and think is so brilliant and so smart and so with it and all of these things wrote the most—the most scathing review of *Stella* when we had our show on Comedy Central.

00:16:43 Jesse Host I remember reading that. *[Chuckling.]* It made me so mad!

00:16:45 Michael Guest And you know, I’m thinking like—but this is *Airplane*. This is—you know, an early Steve Martin. Like, everyone loves—

00:16:55 Jesse Host It’s much weird than those.

00:16:57 Michael Guest Well, that’s what I found out. That’s what I found out. I didn’t realize that. I didn’t realize how weird it was.

00:17:02 Jesse Host Like, *Airplane* is how many jokes can you make, which is—I mean, *Airplane* is perfect. Like, no—not a word bad said to me from—about *Airplane*.

[Michael agrees.]

00:17:24 Michael Guest And Steve Martin is—as much as he was making fun of zaniness, he had a certain kind of zaniness that people could just take at face and enjoy on that basis.

And I hoped that that’s what we were doing. I—you know, it’s like you don’t know yourself. I didn’t—I really didn’t know that we weren’t doing that. I thought we were doing that. Or maybe I hoped we were doing that. And—but yeah, I mean, it never—for me, it never felt good to have that kind of polarizing. I never enjoyed that there was as many people who hated it as liked it. I didn’t like that feeling at all.

00:17:51	Jesse	Host	Was that just because you wanted everyone to like you? Not to put too fine a point on it.
00:17:55	Michael	Guest	Um, no, it's because I wanted people to get it. I don't want people to not get it. I don't—I don't want it to be something that only certain people understand. I'm sure there's a big part of it that's wanting to be liked, but it's more that—in all honesty—I think if I had made something where I was like, "I'm making this and I know for a fact as I'm doing it that it will offend half of the audience and it will—the other half of the audience will like it and that's my intention." But that wasn't my intention. My intention was to make something that could affect an audience the way <i>Airplane</i> affected me or the way <i>The Jerk</i> affected me or the way any—you know, or Monty Python or on down the list, where there was an absurd, crazy, avantgarde sort of sense of humor being on display that was ultimately not trying to hurt anybody or was ultimately celebrating creativity and comedy and all these different things.
			And I suppose I am someone who takes the criticism very, very hard. And it's something I need to work on is the reaction, the—what people say, I pay too much attention—I care too much what they say. I don't read it—I don't read anymore, but I kind of know what's being said, and I don't—I need to get better at sort of being okay with that people are gonna have their opinions and it's not my business what they say.
00:19:28	Jesse	Host	One of the things that I have most admired in another human being in my entire life is my friend Dave Holmes, who got famous in the most difficult circumstances ever, by finishing second in the MTV <i>Wanna Be a VJ</i> contest to—
00:19:44	Michael	Guest	Oh yeah, I remember Dave Holmes.
00:19:45	Jesse	Host	—famous weirdo, Jesse Camp.
00:19:48	Michael	Guest	Oh yeah!
00:19:49	Jesse	Host	And got a job anyway and was like the square guy that—
00:19:53	Michael	Guest	Wasn't he like "dinner and a movie" guy?
00:19:56	Jesse	Host	I think that was Paul Gilmartin hosted that one. Somebody else also hosted. I'm trying to think of who else besides Paul did. But Dave hosts many, many television shows over many years. He writes for <i>Esquire</i> I think, now. Brilliant and wonderful guy. And one time I said to him like, "Man, you know, like you had to go do club appearances to make a living." Like, walk onstage at a night club in Newark and wave and say, "Hey, it's me, Dave Holmes from MTV. Have a fun night." And like, how do you deal with the people that like hate you?
			And he goes, "I've never read any of it. Never." I was like really?! And he's like, "Yeah. I just—I didn't. I just didn't—" [<i>Laughing.</i>] I was like WHAAAT?!
00:20:40	Michael	Guest	I know lots of people who say that. And it's—
00:20:42	Jesse	Host	But he—he meant it! That was what was crazy to me.
00:20:44	Michael	Guest	Well, no, and I'm sure it's true. And I know lots of people who don't read what's written about them, and I know lots of people who don't care. The reason that I can't do that easily is because I read this stuff myself. So, I read movie reviews in the <i>New York Times</i> . I read television reviews in the <i>New York Times</i> . I read—you know, I read all the trades. I read <i>Vanity Fair</i> and <i>Esquire</i> and I read what people write! I read the think pieces. I read the criticism of pop culture, positive and negative. I pay attention to it.

And I am interested in it. Like I said, I think Virginia Heffernan or yourself or any number of people who kind of live in that space where they are talking about pop culture and writing about pop culture and thinking about pop culture—I consume that. And so, it's very hard to say, "But I draw—but I won't read it if it's about me or I won't pay attention to it if it's about me," because I—so, I think I don't know Dave Holmes at all, but I wonder if Dave Holmes is maybe just not into reading reviews of anything and he's just not that guy. I don't know. I don't know. But I think it's hard when you read that stuff about other things to not read it—to have no concept of it when it's about you.

But I am... busy, so I'm doing things that are getting written about enough to where I've gotten better at it. I've definitely gotten better at it, about not sort of opening the Pandora's box of what's being said—positive or negative.

00:22:17	Jesse	Host	You're gonna have to turn in your Gen-X icon card that you earned when you were 23, making <i>The State</i> , over this thing about trying to make things that people enjoy. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:22:29	Michael	Guest	What do you mean? Like I'm not supposed to—like I'm not supposed to care?
00:22:32	Jesse	Host	Yeah! You're supposed to—you and Kim Deal or whatever are supposed to be off in a bar in New York talking about things you don't like!
00:22:39	Michael	Guest	Oh my god. Oh my god, if only. If—I mean, Kim—if I could ever be thought of as in any sort of continuum with Kim Deal, I could be done for—

I remember when I did—when we did *Big Sick* and Judd Apatow—I believe, I would like to quote him on this. Maybe he would refute this—said, you know, about reviews, like you can't read the good or the bad. It's like you just—none of it can count. And like I said, many people I've worked with have said the same thing. Sally Field says that and all these people. You know, Jim Parsons doesn't read anything. I want to achieve that. That's—maybe that's my new year's resolution for 2023, is to like really get to place where I can let go of caring what other people say.

00:23:25	Jesse	Host	It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Michael Showalter. He directed <i>The Big Sick</i> , <i>The Eyes of Tammy Faye</i> , and the new romantic drama <i>Spoiler Alert</i> .
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Sally Field is in this movie, and she was in—she was the star of *Hello, My Name is Doris*. It was really like a vehicle for her. And she's so wonderful in both. And I was *[chuckles]* I was working—look, I don't—I'm not here to brag about my career successes, but I was working—

00:23:55	Michael	Guest	I want you to do that, though.
00:23:57	Jesse	Host	I was working on my Burt Reynolds movie recap podcast.

[Michael "ooh"s.]

And I watched *Smokey and the Bandit*, in which she is just spectacularly good. Just spectacularly good. And I think I grew up imagining her to be—as a person who's ten years younger than you, like imagining her to be a lady that cries in movies. I think I

missed her funniness substantially. And she really is the embodiment of that thing that you were describing wishing you could find in performers or voices or whatever—that kind of open-heartedness. And whether she’s being serious or goofy or ditzy or whatever, she’s such an open-hearted performer.

00:24:54 Michael Guest Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Yeah, she brings her whole self to it, and she—yeah, she gives you everything. She gives you every shade: her humor, her—there’s a kind of a rage there. There’s an anger there. There’s a strength. There’s a—there’s vulnerability. There’s joy. There’s sexiness. There’s sweetness. There’s incredible wisdom. She’s the—she’s incredible. She’s incredible.

00:25:25 Jesse Host Did you have her in mind when you—before you cast her on *Hello, My Name is Doris*?

[Michael confirms.]

Was it always a Sally Field vehicle, only you hadn’t asked Sally Field yet?

00:25:34 Michael Guest No. No, because I would’ve never imagined Sally Field would do the movie. And so, I would never have said a Sally—I would never have said it was a vehicle for her, because I just wanted to make a movie. I wanted to tell the story. I always felt like the ultimate best person to play this part would be her, because she has all the right—she combines all the right elements that are needed to pull this character off. But because of who she was and because of the kinds of movies that she’s done, which is not a lot of small movies like this—if any, that I’m aware of—it never crossed my mind that she would do the movie. So, when she did agree to do the movie, it was sort of like, “Oh my god.”

It was sort of like, you know, getting into—you know, like suddenly you’re onstage playing for a million people, because I have this opportunity now to do something with this film that I never thought was possible. I actually have an actor that can play this character who’s of that caliber. And she is—she is what you hope she is. She is that person who’s a good—she is the person you hope she is. You know? And that’s not to say that she’s perfect or anything like that. She’s a very complex human being, but she’s a wonderful, wonderful person who—you know, I’m so—I’m genuinely so happy that I’ve had this opportunity to work with her a few times.

00:26:59 Jesse Host Did you write her a letter like, “Dear Ms. Field, my name is Michael Showalter from MTVs *The State*. I’ve been given \$300,000 to make a film.”

00:27:08 Michael Guest Um, no. It was—maybe, actually. I can’t remember, but I do know that we sent her the script and it was very—you know, it was probably something like that. “I’m your biggest fan, and it would mean so much to me if you’d even read this.” You know. And I was her biggest fan. I mean, you talk about *Smokey and the Bandit*, and I did love her in those Burt Reynolds movies, but then she made this sort of string of movies when I was sort of starting to really get into movies, like *Soap Dish* and *Punchline* and *Mrs. Doubtfire*, where she was sort of doing these kind of sillier type roles and where I got to see her comedy, her comedic—how funny she could be on top of those other things that you mentioned and all the incredible performances that she’s given.

00:28:03	Jesse	Host	I mean, that same—that same stuff is what makes her funny. Like, in <i>Smokey and the Bandit</i> , next to Burt Reynolds, who’s—you know—chewing gum and staring off at the horizon line, he’s wont to do. He’s great. He’s great in the movie. I have nothing—
00:28:19	Michael	Guest	He’s amazing, Burt Reynolds. Yeah. Yeah.
00:28:21	Jesse	Host	Amazing. But like, as he’s doing that and she’s like flitting around him—you know, taking off her pants in the passenger’s seat of the car and stuff, like the thing that puts it over, the reason that you can see this weird truck driver man liking her and keeping her in the car and the reason that you can see her staying in the car with this is that quality—that hilarious quality of like open-eyed, you know, like—
00:28:50	Michael	Guest	Present.

[Jesse agrees.]

00:29:11	Jesse	Host	There’s a present-ness to her, yeah. But yeah, when we—she read the script, and it was like—you know, that phone call that was like Sally Field read your script, and she’s interested in meeting you. And so, we went and had coffee at Le Pain Quotidien. And I hope that I pronounced that right. In Santa Monica.
00:29:13	Michael	Guest	That’s known as the Cosi of Santa Monica. Incredible place. Yes. And we hit it off. I was absolutely shaking with nervousness, and completely star-struck and completely—you know, wearing a new shirt kind of thing. And—
00:29:24	Jesse	Host	Had you ever blown one of those before?
00:29:26	Michael	Guest	Yes. For sure. For sure.
00:29:28	Jesse	Host	Do you feel comfortable telling me what you have blown?
00:29:30	Michael	Guest	No. Nah. Not on—not on—not on record. Not on record. I—
00:29:37	Jesse	Host	You had a fresh shirt on—
00:29:39	Michael	Guest	Well, I was gonna say—and the thing is that my children had just been born. Or were about to be born. So, it was a crazy time. I’d just moved to LA, and we have twin daughters and they were about to be born or had just been born. I have to go look at my calendar. It was like I had this meeting with Sally Field, and then my children were born, and then I remember we were in this tiny, little place were renting in Studio City. And I was upstairs, probably like getting diapers for my kids. And then, it was like I—you know, saw—on my phone, I saw my phone ringing and I think it said “CAA” on my phone.

And we had in-laws in the house and the house was filled with all the insanity of when you have a newborn. And I answered the phone, and it was the manager and the agent on the phone together. And they said, “So, Sally wants to do your movie.” It was just one of those moments where you’re like, “Oh my god! I can’t believe this is real!” You know? “Sally wants to do your movie.” And I just about had a heart attack right there. And then, that \$300,000—this is all stuff I’ve said before. About \$300,000 became \$1,000,000.

And suddenly, we had a giant budget of \$1,000,000 to make the movie. And it was great. It was really great. And she was an incredible collaborator, and she encouraged me to follow those instincts that we’ve talked about to kind of take the quotation marks off and to go further into the—you know, the drama and the

			character stuff and to trust those instincts and to really try to be a filmmaker.
00:31:17	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:31:19	Clip	Clip	Marilyn: <i>[Frantically.]</i> What is going on here?! Who is this guy?! What's happening? Why is he still here? I don't understand. You are acting so <u>weird</u> ! And you don't even look us in the face. You're acting so weird!
			Kit: He's my boyfriend! Mom.
			Marilyn: Your boyfriend.
			Kit: Yes. I'm... I'm gay.
00:31:42	Sound Effect	Transition	Michael: <i>[Beat.]</i> I'm gay, too. Music swells and fades.
00:31:43	Jesse	Host	You have some great parents in these movies. Sally Field and Bill Irwin are so, so great in this movie. And I think like Ray Romano and Holly Hunter in <i>The Big Sick</i> are just two of my favorite comedy film performances. Not just in terms of maximum funniness, but just overall performances. What is your—? This movie made me think of my relationship with my wife's parents. What has been your relationship with partner's parents over the years?
00:31:23	Michael	Guest	Um, <i>[chuckles]</i> I have a very good relationship with my wife's parents. They actually live in LA. They moved here from Tennessee, which is where they're from. So, they retired and moved out here. And there's similarities in, you know, that all of these parents that you're mentioning are kind of composites of my parents and my wife's parents and other friends I knows' parents. And what I see as similar is—you know, these are people that have stayed together. These are people that have kind of kept their relationship going and you don't—that it's not perfect, but that there's a kind of an idea that runs through both of those movies that I think is something I believe, which is that—you know, relationships take work. Relationships take sacrifice. Relationships take commitment.
			This runs sort of contrary to what a lot of romantic comedies wanna tell you, which is that you meet the one, and then it's easy street for the rest of your life. You just are in love with that person, and everything's easy. And so, these are characters that have worked for it, that have really fought for it and are better for that.
00:33:31	Jesse	Host	I think Bill Irwin and Ray Romano are also both very strong arguments in favor of how funny it is when a dad slumps slightly.
			<i>[They chuckle.]</i>
00:33:41	Michael	Guest	Yes. The pattering—the pattering father.
00:33:44	Jesse	Host	Just an “eugh”.
00:33:45	Michael	Guest	The pattering, muttering dad. Which I feel like I am sort of becoming that, myself. So, I think I sort of see a lot of—there's something heroic about that kind of character, who is—just wants to be a good guy and just wants to be a good husband and a good father and work hard. And you know, he's not the dashing—you know, leading man. He's the Baxter, in a lot of ways. You know?

00:34:14	Jesse	Host	There's—I think my favorite grace note in <i>Spoiler Alert</i> is the two protagonists have come to the parents' house and Sally Field calls Bill Irwin over to carry their luggage. Which is funny because they're—you know—40-year-old men and he's 65 or whatever. But also, he—we see him just pick up the luggage and just—his head drops a little. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> And you're like, "Oh, right! Bill Irwin is the world's greatest clown in addition to being a great actor." Because that's the funniest thing I've ever said, and it somehow didn't break the tone of the film.
00:34:59	Michael	Guest	I mean, when he—when there's the scene in the movie where the Ben Aldridge character, Kit, finally comes out to his parents in a kind of ridiculous situation. And they're kind of asking—it's all about like why is—what is Jim Parsons doing hanging around? Like he's sort of this friend that won't go away, and they're—Sally Field's character is zeroing in on it like who is this guy? Why won't he go anywhere? Bill Irwin has almost no dialogue in that scene. He's just sort of following the conversation. And his expressions on his face as he's following this conversation between Sally Field and Ben Aldridge, getting to the core of what it is—which is that Ben finally admits that Jim Parsons is his boyfriend—are so funny. And he never says a single word in the scene, and it's just what you said, which is it just reminds you, oh my god, this guy—what this guy can do without dialogue!
			And his body language and his facial expressions and just the range of emotion that he can portray with just his body and his face is unbelievable and he is amazing. He is truly incredible. I love the idea that between Jim and Sally and Bill, there's these three kind of American comic treasures all in their own different way, all sharing space in this movie is really special.
00:36:28	Jesse	Host	I sometimes think that I have—I'm just approaching the point of my life where I'm really gonna like walking around with my hands behind my back. You know what I'm talking about?
			<i>[Michael confirms.]</i>
00:36:39	Michael	Guest	That kind of like walking—you know—clasped. Absolutely. And your head forward, a little bit? With your head forward a little bit?
00:36:42	Jesse	Host	Yeah. Just giving some consideration to the park or what have you. A museum. I could see—I think you—I think that could be extraordinary for you.
00:36:52	Michael	Guest	Well, do you see my shoes? I've already got the big—yeah.
00:36:56	Jesse	Host	<u>Oh, yeah!</u> But we gotta get you some—you're wearing—you're wearing sort of dad-ish New Balances, but those are to en vogue. We need to get you some Rockports.
			<i>[Michael "ooh"s and agrees.]</i>
			Let's get you a pair of—let's get you a pair of Mephisto and go from there.
00:37:10	Michael	Guest	I want—that's what I want. I want Mephisto. I need some Mephisto. Yeah, or some—yeah, some Clarks. But these are really quite comfortable, I must say.
00:37:23	Jesse	Host	I think sometimes about that scene from <i>Mad Men</i> , where January Jones's dad puts salt on his ice cream. And it is such a gorgeous

dad moment. He just has his—he knows what his life is. He knows that he should put some salt on his ice cream, ‘cause it’s good.

[They chuckle.]

00:37:50	Michael	Guest	Yeah, that’s what getting old—getting older isn’t necessarily a bad thing. It’s—there’s a lot of—a lot of—a lot of things come into focus as you get older.
00:38:03	Jesse	Host	You can’t be as cute anymore.
00:38:04	Michael	Guest	Like—no, you’re not as cute.
00:38:06	Jesse	Host	Because, Mike, that was an important part of your persona was being cute. And I don’t just mean like good looking, although you are very good looking.

[Michael thanks him.]

00:38:20	Michael	Guest	But I mean like being puckishly adorable even if sometimes it was an ironic version of—or an ironicized version. Huh. I never—I never thought of that. I never thought of myself as puckishly adorable. I think I—
00:38:25	Jesse	Host	Well. I know you don’t listen to what people have to say, but I’m here to tell you, you were puckishly adorable.
00:38:32	Michael	Guest	I had sort of aspirations to be kind of like—you know, John Cusack or like Jason Bateman, but it just was never meant to be. I didn’t have that extra gear that is—
00:38:46	Jesse	Host	You’re too much of a doofus. I mean, onscreen, as a performer.
00:38:48	Michael	Guest	I am. No, it’s so true. It’s so true. It’s so very true.
00:38:51	Jesse	Host	Like, Cusack in particular is so sharp.
00:38:54	Michael	Guest	He’s cool. Yeah, he’s very cool.
00:38:56	Jesse	Host	And I think—
00:38:58	Michael	Guest	My inner doofus couldn’t be—couldn’t be—I couldn’t keep my inner doofus under the rug.
00:39:06	Jesse	Host	We’ll wrap up with Michael Showalter after a quick break. Stay with us. It’s <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:39:15	Promo	Clip	Music: Bouncy synth.

Jordan Morris: I’m Jordan Morris.

Jesse Thorn: And I’m Jesse Thorn.

Jordan: On *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*, we make pure, delightful nonsense.

Jesse: We rope in awesome guests.

Jordan: And bring them down to our level.

Jesse: We got stupid with Judy Greer.

Judy Greer: My friend, Molly, and I call it “having the space weirds”.

Jordan: Patton Oswalt.

Patton Oswalt: Could I get a Balrog burger and some Aragorn fries? Thank you.

Jesse: And Kumail Nanjiani.

Kumail Nanjiani: I've come back with cat toothbrushes, which is impossible to use.

Jordan: Come get stupider with us at MaximumFun.org.

Jesse: Look, your podcast app's already open. Just pull it out! Give *Jordan, Jesse, Go!* a try.

Jordan: Being smart is hard. Be dumb instead!

[Music fades out.]

00:39:49 Music Transition
00:39:54 Jesse Host

Thumpy synth with light vocalizations. It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Michael Showalter. Let's get into the rest of our conversation.

I'm sure you spent 15 to 20 years auditioning to be in network sitcoms.

[Michael confirms.]

00:40:18 Michael Guest
00:40:19 Jesse Host
00:40:22 Michael Guest

If you had gotten one of those network sitcoms and it had been—I mean, it doesn't have to be *The Big Bang Theory*. If it had been a show that ran for five years or whatever, do you think you would—? Still be acting?

Still be acting and auditioning for television shows? Probably not, ultimately. I mean, I'm not a big believer in like—I don't think it's a—I don't think it's a fluke that I'm not—that that didn't happen. Like, I kind of think it's probably—there's a reason why I didn't get that show or whatever. But I really love being on the other side of it. And so, I think there's a natural evolution that took place, which is that I enjoy making the thing. I enjoy writing it. I enjoy working with the writers. I enjoy the prep part, where you're going around working out of an office and hiring people and staffing up and scouting locations. I enjoy the administrative part as much as I—

Whereas being an actor—and I enjoy working with actors; I love the craft of acting, as a fan, as an audience member—it requires certain skills that I don't have or that I don't enjoy, such as taking care of yourself and being healthy and a certain commitment to being good at that. There's a certain—not just—I don't mean the taking care of yourself. To be a good actor, you need to be a good actor. And good acting requires the same level of passion about that—about the job—about the job of acting that any job requires. I do not have that. I never had—having now worked with lots of fantastic actors, I see a desire to be good at that that I never had.

[Jesse chuckles and affirms.]

They think about it a lot. They—it's what gets them up in the morning is, "How am I gonna play this part really well?" I never had that.

00:42:09	Jesse	Host	I think I've probably brought this up seven times on this show, but one time Gillian Jacobs was here, from many wonderful things. Wonderful actress.
			<i>[Michael agrees.]</i>
			And I asked her how she felt about always having to audition for things, 'cause that's like my worst nightmare. And she was like, "Oh, I don't mind." And I was like, really? Why is that? Because to me, going into a room for people to decide whether you're good or bad is the worst life I can imagine.
00:42:38	Michael	Guest	Well, she said, "Cause I like acting."
00:42:40	Jesse	Host	'Cause she likes acting! So, she's like, "When I go to an audition, I enjoy acting there."
00:42:47	Michael	Guest	Mm-hm. Yes. That's it! That's it. And I'll tell you, when I go and I have a meeting with someone about an idea, about a project that is something that I wanna direct or that I wanna produce, I enjoy those meetings. The exact same thing. I enjoy talking to somebody about a story that I wanna tell or a character that I'm interested in or a project that I'm interested in. And I walk out of those—I never walk out of that feeling exposed or vulnerable, because I feel like I'm in my element. I'm happy to talk about it. You don't wanna do it? That's fine. Someone else'll do it or whatever. And whereas—and I think on some level, it's a similar thing you might get with good actors, which is "I like acting". So, you turn me on, I go.
			Or I watch all the singing competition shows, and it's like if you're a good singer, it's just like, "Give me a mic and I open my mouth and I start singing. And beautiful sounds come out of my mouth when I start singing." And it's like that's just talent.
00:43:48	Jesse	Host	And it's a joy to work hard at something that you're—
00:43:50	Michael	Guest	Yeah. And it's just talent. And I think for me, acting was always a way to make money or a way to, you know, be—you know, help me meet people socially or—and it was kind of fun. But I never—again, I see what a real—what real acting is. And I care enough about doing something the right way that I don't wanna be an actor, if that's— If I'm not doing what that person's doing and putting the effort in and these people are taking classes and they're working at it. Just they're working at it because they view it as a craft, and I love that. I never had that kind of discipline about it. And like, when I go and see a play or a movie, there's not one part of me that's going, "Oh man, I wish I was up there" or "if I were doing this, what would I do differently?" or anything. I'm just enjoying it.
			And that was eye-opening for me too, because I don't think—it's certainly not like that with writing or directing, although I do think I can enjoy other people's work. But there isn't that feeling of "how would I do that?" or "what would I do differently?" It's just no connection to it at all.
00:45:02	Jesse	Host	Do you feel like if your current success—which is notable—was taken away from you, as typically happens in showbusiness, that you could still be satisfied doing the work? Like, what happens if you make two things that people don't like?
00:45:22	Michael	Guest	Mm-hm. Which is always a fear.
00:45:25	Jesse	Host	I mean, it's a likelihood.

[Michael agrees.]

Very—I mean, it's very, very unusual that that doesn't happen. Right?

[Michael agrees.]

So, when the string likely plays out of getting to make feature films and stuff, do you think you will get the same satisfaction from what you are doing then?

00:45:47 Michael Guest

You mean the next thing? Whatever comes after that?

[Jesse confirms and Michael laughs.]

Um.

00:45:53 Jesse Host
00:45:54 Michael Guest

And don't snow me, here.

I'll give you a straight answer! Um, I think that I will enjoy—I always enjoy the process. So, I'll go—I'll go—first of all, I like really hope that whoever has the ability to decide this won't listen to this podcast. So, whoever gets to decide my fate isn't also listening to this show.

00:46:18 Jesse Host

Oh, I thought you meant like whoever gets to decide who directs episodes of *Airwolf 2025*.

00:46:24 Michael Guest
00:46:26 Jesse Host
00:46:27 Michael Guest

No, I'm saying like if the—

The job you might get after.

No. Like, whoever is like gonna put me in director's jail, I hope that they're not listening to your show. I mean, many directors whose work I love—and I will from time to time be like what happened to that guy or that woman? And I'll look them up on IMDb, and usually they do have a career. It's just not what it was. It's different. I think I would be happy doing the thing that they're doing if it's not the thing that I'm doing now. I think because I like working with people, I like the process of making a movie. I like enjoy the collaboration. I enjoy going to work every day. I like being on set. I like working with people.

So, that part will always be there for me. And then I always will have that other thing that I'm working on that's keeping me—keeping that flame burning, that I'm also—meanwhile, I'm writing my—you know, I'm writing my great movie that I'll—that I'll—that I'll now suddenly have time to do that. I suddenly have a little space to—so, that's—you know, I spent many, many, many years not doing—not being as—not having the opportunities that I have now. And I always—I think I always have a kind of a magical thinking that it's gonna come, that moment's gonna come and I'm gonna get my chance. And I can dream. I'm a big dreamer. And so, I could dream about the thing that is gonna be the thing that if I'm—if I'm doing *Airwolf* is gonna get me back doing the other thing. I don't even know what *Airwolf* is. Is that Jan-Michael Vincent?

00:48:09 Jesse Host

Yeah. It was about like a robotic attack helicopter, I think. If I remember right.

00:48:12 Michael Guest

Sure, sure, sure. Sure, sure, sure. That was like in the—like the *Nightrider* and there was like the humanoid vehicle genre.

00:48:22 Jesse Host

Yeah, exactly. And I think it's due for a comeback in 2035.

00:48:25 Michael Guest

Yeah. Yeah. But no, I mean, I hope I am always—I hope I always am working on interesting projects. They don't all have to be the

biggest, brightest, shiniest thing. I just like working on interesting projects.

00:48:42 Jesse Host And then maybe you could putter a little. You could do some puttering.

00:48:45 Michael Guest Well, yeah. And then, at a certain point, I just—hopefully, I can just retire and take up some hobby.

00:48:51 Jesse Host What do you think the hobby is? Woodworking?

00:48:54 Michael Guest Woodwork could be good. Pottery. Pottery.

00:48:56 Jesse Host I could see pottery. You could get a home kiln.

00:48:59 Michael Guest I would love to—oh, definitely get a home kiln. I would love to like—and then like have a little stand or something at like an arts show, like be one of those people that sits in like a little tent at an arts show and like does the crossword puzzle while people look at their pottery and then ask you how much it is. And you're like, "Well, I'll give it to you for—" whatever. You know. That could be fun.

00:49:22 Jesse Host Love it. Set up a little pop-up tent.

00:49:23 Michael Guest Mm-hm. A little pop-up tent.

00:49:26 Jesse Host I love everything about this.

00:49:27 Michael Guest Mm-hm. Do crossword puzzles. Um. I would enjoy maybe learning to scuba dive. Underwater stuff, going snorkeling, scuba diving, looking at the fish.

00:49:38 Jesse Host Just underwater stuff in general.

00:49:39 Michael Guest Underwater stuff. Mm-hm.

00:49:40 Jesse Host Like James Cameron.

00:49:42 Michael Guest Yeah. Yes. Is he big? Is he a big snorkeler? I mean, I know he—

00:49:45 Jesse Host He has submarines. He has a fleet of submarines.

00:49:46 Michael Guest I mean, I know he has—oh, he has a fleet of submarines. *[Laughs.]*

00:49:49 Jesse Host Yeah. And he made a movie called *Avatar: The Way of Water*.

00:49:51 Michael Guest Well, I know that. I know that. And he made—he made that movie about the submarine.

00:49:54 Jesse Host *The Abyss*.

00:49:56 Michael Guest Yeah, *The Abyss*.

00:49:57 Jesse Host Yeah. Michael Showalter, I'm so grateful to you for taking the time again. It's always nice to see you.

00:50:02 Michael Guest It's always great to see you. This was very, very enjoyable.

00:50:05 Jesse Host Michael Showalter. His movie, *Spoiler Alert*, is streaming now on Peacock.

00:50:10 Music Transition Thumpy, bright synth.

00:50:15 Jesse Host That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, I have decided that playing *Skyrim* is self-care.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellows at Maximum Fun are Tabatha Myers and Bryanna Paz. We get help booking from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is composed and provided to us by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation" The Go! Team rules. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries.

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

00:51:14 Promo

Promo

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

[Music fades out.]