

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.
00:00:14	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:21	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. My guest this week is Cheech Marin. Cheech was born in south Los Angeles. His family was tight knit. What mattered to them was making sure Cheech went to school and got right with God. By the time he was in eighth grade, his plan was to become a priest. But that—well, that was before he tried smoking weed. Now, he didn’t actually try it until he went away to college. It was a new world for him: living away from home with friends. One night, somebody passed him a joint. It was the ’60s; he got turned on. Not just to smoking pot, but eventually to the peace movement and the movement for Chicano civil rights. And at that point, becoming a priest wasn’t really on the agenda. He was an artist. He met Tommy Chong. They started a double act. And the rest is history.
00:01:20	Sound Effect	Transition	Stoner history. Music swells and fades.
00:01:21	Clip	Clip	“Mexican Americans” by Cheech & Chong. <i>Mexican Americans don’t like to just get into gang fights They like flowers and music and White girls named Debby, too Mexican Americans are named Chata and Chella and Jemma and have a son-in-law named Jeff</i>
00:01:43	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:44	Jesse	Host	Of course, Cheech Marin isn’t just half of Cheech and Chong. He was in <i>The Lion King</i> . He made 122 episodes of <i>Nash Bridges</i> . He was even for a little while the star of a <i>Golden Girls</i> spinoff. And let me tell you, if you are the right age for the <i>Spy Kids</i> movies, he will always be Fake Uncle Felix.
00:02:04	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:05	Clip	Clip	Music: Dramatic, tense music. Carmen (<i>Spy Kids</i>): What are you talking about?!
			Felix: I was assigned to protect your family, but something’s gone wrong. I have to take you to the safehouse.
			Carmen: My parents can’t be spies! They’re not cool enough!
			<i>[Beeping. Electrical whirring.]</i>
00:02:19	Sound Effect	Transition	Juni: That’s cool. Music swells and fades.

00:02:20	Jesse	Host	<p>Cheech is also a collector of Chicano art—probably the most prolific and significant collector in the world. He’s been building up his treasure trove since the ’80s, and now it’s so large that he’s opened his own museum: The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture, in Riverside. He says you should call it the Cheech.</p> <p>Marin, of course, is also still acting. He’s got a part in the new comedy <i>Champions</i>. That’s in theaters now. And he also just played alongside Jennifer Lopez in the movie <i>Shotgun Wedding</i>. That’s about a couple and their families who’ve come together for the ultimate destination wedding. Only then, the bride and groom start to get cold feet! And also, the wedding is invaded by pirates. Here’s a little bit of <i>Shotgun Wedding</i>. The pirates have taken captives. They have a list of demands, and the captives—well, I guess the captives have a counter offer? Anyway, you’ll hear Carol. She’s the mother of the groom, played by Jennifer Coolidge, and Robert—who’s the father of the bride, played by my guest, Cheech Marin.</p>
00:03:30	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:03:32	Clip	Clip	<p>Carol (<i>Shotgun Wedding</i>): Robert. He’s calling you again.</p> <p>Robert: Thanks, Carol!</p> <p><i>[Splashing. Robert grunts.]</i></p> <p>Okay, what do you want?</p> <p>Pirate: Well, we call my colleague on the satellite phone and you transport \$45,000,000 to a bank account.</p> <p>Robert: I don’t have that kind of money!</p> <p>Pirate: We googled you. Net worth is \$60,000,000.</p> <p>Robert: I’m not giving you anything until I find out if my daughter is safe!</p> <p>Carol: And your son-in-law.</p> <p>Robert: Yeah, him too!</p>
00:04:05	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:04:06	Jesse	Host	<i>[Chuckles.]</i> Cheech Marin, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m so happy to have you here.
00:04:12	Cheech Marin	Guest	It’s my pleasure. Thank you very much.
00:04:14	Jesse	Host	And congratulations on being America’s film and television dad, lo these past—at this point, like 35 years. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:04:23	Cheech	Guest	<p>You know, it’s—you know, you’re really shocked into reality. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> When my agent called me for this movie and she says, “JLo wants you to be her daddy.”</p> <p>I said, <i>[curiously]</i> “Really?! Oooh, I’ll see if I can squeeze her in. But you know, I’m married and everything.” <i>[Chuckles.]</i></p>

“No, no. Her father, you moron.” *[Chuckles.]* And so, I’m JLo’s father now. So, that’s great.

00:04:44 Jesse Host Do you tire of smiling gently at children and grandchildren in films and television?

00:04:51 Cheech Guest Not at all! You know, I love it. You know, I love—you know, every age has its golden spot. You know? And the longer you live, the sweeter that spot gets. For me, anyways.

00:05:04 Jesse Host I mean, *Champions* is also a very sweet movie, and you get to be very sweet in it. And it’s nice to watch you do it. It’s the same with all those—like the *Spy Kids* movies. Like, I hadn’t watched those *Spy Kids* movies as a kid, ‘cause I was just a little too old for it, but then my kids got into them. They’re so pleasant and fun! They’re just such a pleasant vibe.

00:05:25 Cheech Guest And they’re smart and funny. I met Robert Rodriguez a long time ago, and he was—I think he was still in college or he just made his first film, *Mariachi*, which was—you know—a student film. And so, I had this thing that I was reminded of today. *Cheech the Bus Driver* was a record, and it was children’s stuff. And so, there was a lot of interest in some studios that were making something—you know, whether animated or a movie, and so he says—he came and he said, “Well, who would you like to direct this?” And I said Robert Rodriguez. And they looked at me and said, “Are you out of your mind?! He’s all blood and guts.”

00:06:02 Jesse Host I said, “No, no, no, he has this—”
The guy with a machine gun in the violin case?!

00:06:04 Cheech Guest *[They laugh.]*
Oh my god. He, you know, blows your head off?! No!

And I said, “He has this other side of him that’s just children’s *[inaudible.]*” Eh, *[mumbles.]* Because that’s the first thing I ever saw, when I met him. He showed me this little film he’d made. It was a student film with his brothers and sisters. And it was called *Bedhead*. And it was like—it was *Spy Kids*! You know? And he—but nobody ever saw it. And so, after *Spy Kids* came off—it came out and I said, “Sooo, who’s laughing now?!”

[They chuckle.]

[Reluctantly growling.] “Yeah, you were right.”

00:06:37 Jesse Host You’re originally from Los Angeles. You grew up in South LA and the valley, right?

00:06:42 Cheech Guest Yeah. Half and half.

00:06:44 Jesse Host Which half and which half?

00:06:45 Cheech Guest Uh, South Central, 36th and San Pedro, if you wanna go look it up, for the first half until I was—

00:06:52 Jesse Host Can I just give a shoutout to all people that give their intersection when they—‘cause it’s—I’m the—I’m like 15th and Guerrero. Immediately.

[Cheech agrees.]

00:07:02 Cheech Guest “Where are you from?” 15th and Guerrero.
Boy, you know?! And that’s a way to specifically identify it. You know? ‘Cause when I was first out with Cheech and Chong and

being in other parts of the country and they would ask me, you know, saying where'd you go up and blah, blah, blah.

South Central.

And so, "You mean like Watts?" And so, that was their concept of—yeah, yeah, yeah, Watts. It's just a shortcut to say, yeah, it was an all-Black neighborhood. And so, later on—you know—when I came to do movies, and some days there would be some reporters being like, "Oh yeah? What part of South Central are you from?!" Uh, 36th and San Pedro. "Oh." *[Laughs.]* You get it. You know? Now, I'd say it was all—mostly all-Black, then. And then—and now it's all Salvadorian. And then, we moved from there to Grenada Hills in the San Fernando Valley. And so, one day everybody was Black and then the next day, everybody was White. And I was a Chicano in both, you know. So, how do you navigate that? *[Chuckles.]* You try to be nice to everybody.

00:07:58 Jesse Host Did your family have a relationship to Chicano culture in LA? That was already really vibrant. Like, there was plenty of Mexicans born in America.

00:08:11 Cheech Guest Yeah. It was called my family. Yeah.

[They laugh.]

What kind of community—? I had 63 cousins. You know? Or something like that. It was—you know. But I went to all-Black schools. Trinity Street School, I don't know if you know it.

00:08:23 Jesse Host But like was there like masa at the grocery store by your house? You know what I mean?

00:08:25 Cheech Guest Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah, there was. You had to go find it, but mostly you didn't wanna find it there. You wanted to find it in East Los or someplace like that.

00:08:35 Jesse Host Your father was a police officer, right?

00:08:37 Cheech Guest He was! 30 years, LAPD.

00:08:39 Jesse Host What was it like to have a dad who was a police officer in, let's say, turbulent times?

00:08:44 Cheech Guest Well, it was good and bad, you know? It was like I used to—for like, "Well, my dad's a cop and he can throw you in jail," when I was a little kid to, you know—there was always a lot of angst in the neighborhood, being the Chicano cop in an all-Black neighborhood. But you know, you got to see the police department really up close, 'cause I grew up at the police academy, and you saw that there was *[chuckles]* good guys and bad guys. You know? Overwhelmingly good guys, you know? They were doing their job, and they were—but, uh, that was kind of my family's profession. They were either law enforcement or clergy. So, I don't know. *[Laughs.]*

00:09:20 Jesse Host Were you a goody two shoes?

00:09:22 Cheech Guest Uh, pretty much. Yeah. I was an altar boy. I was in the choir. I got the religion award. I was headed for the priesthood. I was going to the junior seminary in Montebello. I was gonna be a Diocesan priest or a Vincentian priest. And I started going to parties after I graduated from eighth grade, that summer. And I said, "Wait a minute, let me get this—"

00:09:42 Jesse Host Well, you were—hold up. You were headed for the priesthood when you were in eighth grade?!

00:09:47 Cheech Guest About to go to high school, yeah. The junior seminary, I was supposed to go—

00:09:52 Jesse Host I didn't know there was a—that's like under 18s basketball.

00:09:56 Cheech Guest *[They laugh.]*
No, no, the junior seminary's where you went to—did your high school.

00:09:59 Jesse Host JROTC or whatever?

00:10:01 Cheech Guest Yeah, exactly that, but for a priest. You know? And many members of my family did that. And—

00:10:07 Jesse Host Were you doing it because of how much you loved God or because it was just—you were just rolling down that hill?

00:10:13 Cheech Guest I was—mostly that. You know? I was just rolling downhill. But I was very religious. I mean, I was an altar boy in choir. I sang in the choir and all this. And I got the—*[chuckles]* that was a big deal. I got the religion award. So, they were like—I was being pushed in that direction. And my cousins were either priests or nuns or they'd gone to the junior seminary and went on to be priests. And... you know. So, it was—it was fairly usual, because I don't know if anybody else had this experience, but in Catholic school, they drill that into you every day that you're gonna get a vocation and wait for the—God's gonna talk to you and you're gonna be a priest. *[Chuckles.]* They drilled it into you every day.

00:10:54 Jesse Host Well, I mean, I also imagine—I mean, I'm speaking for you here, but perhaps you never heard the call?

00:11:01 Cheech Guest Uh, no. No, it was more like an echo. *[Chuckles.]* It was noise.

00:11:03 Jesse Host Uh-huh? From your cousin's house?

00:11:06 Cheech Guest Oh yeah, they were—both of my older cousins, Luis and Regine, they went to the Franciscan junior seminary in Santa Barbara, and they were gonna be Franciscan priests until they both dropped out. Regine actually went all four years, and he was a student body president. He was headed for the priesthood, and he dropped out. Eventually, he landed in Harvard on a full scholarship and became the first PhD in Chicano Studies from Harvard University. So, there was a real fast crowd that I was—you know—running with. And that's how I got all my education and everything.

00:11:43 Jesse Host So, when you started getting into partying—I guess it must have been the mid '60s, huh?

00:11:48 Cheech Guest Sure! When did I go—yeah! Mid—oh, that was when I was in college, in the mid-'60s.

00:11:53 Jesse Host Okay. So, the early '60s, then. So, what was the scene like in the early '60s? My dad lived in Glendale. And I found out as an adult that his main thing—he went to Berkeley. He was an A student. His main thing was doing speed and stealing his parents' car, driving to the beach from Glendale, partying at the beach all night, then driving back in the morning before his parents woke up, and going to school.

00:12:22 Cheech Guest That's living on the line.

00:12:30 Jesse Host *[They laugh.]*
You know, my dad was a policeman. You know. And I feared death more than I feared anything else.

00:12:33 Cheech Guest Yeah, I don't know if my CPA grandfather really could've—
Yeah. No, I was—it was very clear what the—what the expectancy was. You know? So, nah. I was a really strict guy. I was a real—we

were very academic kids. We all went to Catholic school. And so, my older—the oldest cousin, Luis, formed us a little group and basically started what came to be AP classes. And he assigned each one of us these topics to go learn about and bring back to the group. And I got assigned art. That’s how I learned about art, from this. Well, how do you do that? Go to the library. And you take out all the library books. You don’t even take out the library books, ‘cause they wouldn’t let a kid take them out. But they would bring them in front of me, and then turn them over page by page. And that’s how I learned about western art.

00:13:15 Jesse Host

So—okay. So, tell me what leaving the straight and narrow meant for you. Like, at what point did you deviate from this path of this family home study group, this ad hoc home study group that you were doing and going to junior priest school and everything?

00:13:34 Cheech Guest

Uh, as soon as I could. *[Laughs.]* I mean, really. You know? Like, I was finally off the leash. You know? I was in college, and I was living in an apartment with a bunch of guys. And I came home one night, and there was a party going on. That wasn’t unusual. There was always parties going on. And very smokey in the apartment. And my roommate handed me this cigarette. And I said, “What is this? You know I don’t smoke?”

And so, he says, “No, man. It’s a joint.”

00:14:03 Jesse Host

“Uh, what—what’s a joint?”

[Stuttering in disbelief.] You’re—you’re—you’re doing a bit, here! You knew what a joint was!

00:14:06 Cheech Guest

I didn’t know what a joint was! The only thing I know about marijuana is seeing it in the newspapers *[chuckles]*; they were always busting some guy with a trunk open and a big bale of hay in the back of it. You know? And my dad said, *[menacingly]* “Now, if you ever do any of this, I will kill you myself.”

[Meekly.] “Okay.” I believed him! You know? Because he was that kind of guy. And no, I was just—I was a very, very—you know, I went to Catholic school all my life. You know? But then I was off the leash and went to Cal State North. It was Valley State, then. It wasn’t even Cal State North. It was Valley State. And so, it’s just—it’s a joint! Marijuana! And I go, “Oooh.”

And he says, “Try it!”

And I say, “Well, okay. Hey, I’m off the leash!” And took a big hit. And then, the joint went around the room. And by the time it got to me—back to me, I was—I was hiiiiigh! And I go, “And what else have they been lying about?”

00:15:01 Jesse Host

[Chuckles.] How aware were you in the mid-’60s—we’re talking about before you—before you moved out of the States, which you did eventually, which is where you met Tommy Chong. How aware were you of the—of the Chicano civil rights movement?

00:15:20 Cheech Guest

It was just starting. It was just starting. It was the—it was the Black civil rights movement that really took over campuses at the time. And SDS. That movement, which was a—had a big, strong chapter at Valley State. Because they were all red diaper babies, you know, from their parents that were—*[stammering]* that were the Commies of their day. You know? And so, it was—there was—it was a very

strong on that campus. And so, that's—we had this string of speakers that stopped there and did their speech at our campus, and it was very influential to me. *[Inaudible]* would come. Eldridge Cleaver. Floyd McKissick. But the guy that made the most impression on—the biggest impression on me was David Harris. And he came through with the draft resistance movement. And it just, boom, rung a bell with me. Okay, this is the way to go, the universal soldier. Don't participate in the thing.

And so, I joined the draft resistance movement. Turned in my draft card, and then I—*[chuckles]* I went on a speaking tour with David Harris and Joan Baez, his new wife, around the country. And it was on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine. And if you look very closely, you can see my draft card pasted on there in the corner. You know? And so, then we all did that. But it coincided at the same time with me discovering pottery.

00:16:40	Jesse	Host	Really? I took a—I took a, you know, wheel class. Shoutout to the Barnsdall Art Center. And I could not throw a pot—well, I could not get that—I could not get that clay to come up right.
00:16:52	Cheech	Guest	Yeah, uncentered.
00:16:53	Jesse	Host	At all! At all. Not even close.
00:16:56	Cheech	Guest	It is—it is a craft that you learn! If you have enough patience to do it. But once you center your first piece of clay and you put it— <i>[mimics a resonating sticking noise]</i> , it centers you. Physically centers you. And I remember that feeling. I want this feeling all the time. And I kept—I gave up—I quit all my other classes, quit my job, got a \$900 NEDA loan. I lived on that. And then, I made pottery all day, every day.
00:17:22	Jesse	Host	I mean, that is a bold move for a dude whose dad is a cop. You know what I mean?
00:17:27	Cheech	Guest	Yeah, well I was off the leash. <i>[Laughing.]</i> You know? You shouldn't let those kids off the leash if you want them to come back.
00:17:33	Jesse	Host	Did your family know about what was going on with you? Were you ex-communicated? Were you encouraged to spend your days <i>[chuckling]</i> making pottery?
00:17:40	Cheech	Guest	Uh, you know, I was disconnected to my family just during that period. My parents were going through a divorce at the same time, so it was like very chaotic. And I was living on my own. And I didn't inform them—
00:17:54	Jesse	Host	I imagine extra big deal with Catholic parents.
00:17:56	Cheech	Guest	Oh yeah, you know. 'Cause I was supposed to be a priest, and now I'm making pottery. Wh-what? Where did we fail you? <i>[Laughs.]</i> But you didn't fail me at all. I—you know, I learned over the years is if opportunity presents itself and there's an open door then you have a second to recognize it and walk through the door. And so, if your instincts are trained and honed, you walk through the door. And that's what I've done all my life. You know? It's recognizing that possibility when it presents itself.
00:18:29	Jesse	Host	Were you already performing at this point?
00:18:32	Cheech	Guest	I was always a performer. I made my first record when I was five years old, singing little Mexican songs.

[Sings a bar.] I had this little, squeaky voice, but I could sing in tune. You know? So, my mother had this friend who had this little record company. And so, I made direct to disk recordings of these songs. You know. So, I was always—it was natural to me, and I sang in

00:19:02	Jesse	Host	school, and I was in the choir all the time. So, yeah. Performing was another part that was just—came instinctively to me.
00:19:05	Cheech	Guest	What about acting or being funny? Funny, yeah. I had a—I had a very funny family. And they were very quick-witted, and you had to have your A material if you wanted to get any time at the dinner table. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> You know, to interject your little views of life. And so, I had to—you know—compete with a lot of really smart, intelligent, very fast people. And so, I honed my skill there. So, I knew I was funny. I knew I could be funny. And that just—I just took that for granted. Just like I took singing for granted. You know?
00:19:35	Jesse	Host	We've got more from my conversation with Cheech Marin still to come. Stay with us. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:19:43	Music	Transition	Chiming synth with a steady beat.
00:19:48	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guest is comedy legend Cheech Marin. Now, Cheech isn't just an actor. He's also an art collector with a huge collection of Chicano art. He's been buying it since the '80s. And at this point, it's way, way more stuff than he could fit on the walls of his house or the walls of pretty much any house. So, when the Riverside art museum told him that there was an empty library in Riverside that they might be able to get into, Marin was listening. They teamed up and in a few years, they built it. The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture. 60,000 square feet of Mexican American art. They call it, for short, the Cheech. Let's get into the rest of my conversation with Cheech Marin.
			You moved to Canada because of your objection to the draft and the war.
00:20:48	Cheech	Guest	But equally to be a potter.
00:20:51	Jesse	Host	Is that so?
00:20:52	Cheech	Guest	Yeah. I was in the middle of the draft thing, and they were coming to get us. You know, because Hershey issued its directive—who was the director of the draft at the time—that directed anybody who turned in their draft cards or burnt them or protested the draft, we'd be immediately reclassified, drafted, and sent to the front lines in Vietnam. That was his <i>[chuckles]</i> —his fix. Good luck on that one! Everybody knew it was a First Amendment issue and it would be thrown out of court—which it did, eventually. But they were gonna spend three or four years in Leavenworth, which is where they were sending everybody to wait their decision.
			But at the same time, I discovered pottery. And I—my pottery teacher, Howard Tolleson, big shoutout to Howard—knew my predicament. He says, "Well, I have this ex-student who's opening up a pottery in Canada, in Alberta. Maybe he needs an assistant." <i>[Chuckles.]</i> That was all I needed. I got on the dog and went to Calgary, Alberta. And you know, I thought that this was going to—I thought it was gonna be like <i>Sergeant Preston of the Yukon</i> and I was gonna be met like sled dog with huskies. And it looked like Bakersfield, you know? <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:21:58	Jesse	Host	It is pretty—I mean, like real talk though, like, I've been to Calgary. It's pretty Bakersfield-y.

[Cheech agrees.]

00:22:13 Cheech Guest Like Canadian Dallas, Bakersfield, like oil towns, big flat places. Until you got to the Rockies. *[Laughs.]*

[John agrees.]

It was flatter than a tortilla. Yeah, and so, you know, okay. Well, this is good. But I met this potter who was a young guy and helped him build his pottery. And when we built it, he couldn't afford to hire me 'cause he was just starting. So, he says, "But I know this other potter. He's actually well-known potter. He lives in Bragg Creek, about 11 miles away. Maybe he needs an assistant!"

And so, I got up in the morning, put on my cowboy boots, and started walking. And hitchhiked a little bit, and went up to this—found this guy, where his studio was. His name was Ed Drahanchuk. And he had just one the bicentennial exhibition award the year I got there. Pretty famous for pottery. And I walked up to him, up to his studio, and started talking until he hired me. And so, he says, "Well, when can you start?" I said I can start right now. And he says, "Okay, start cleaning these bricks over there." And that's what I did for—and I was in the foothills of the Rockies in the Provincial Park in Bragg Creek and made pottery.

00:23:15 Jesse Host Did they have masa at the grocery store?
00:23:17 Cheech Guest Not at all. *[Laughs.]* They had no masa, and they were stuck with a predicament that all Canadians that I met at this period were stuck with, is they looked at me and go, "What are you?" 'Cause they had no idea. Mexicans or Chicanos. "Are you Indian or American Indian? Are you East Indian?" But they looked at me all the time and go, "What—what—? You speak English?"

[Exaggerating his accent.] "A little. A little bit, mister."

[Jesse chuckles.]

00:23:47 Jesse Host You know. It was funny to me. So, how did you end up leaving the world of making fine art pottery behind in favor of doing a music comedy act two-hander in strip clubs or whatever?

00:24:00 Cheech Guest Ooh! Well, it's a natural progression I thought, man. No, it was—I—in this little town, Bragg Creek, during the winter there was maybe ten people who lived there. And they had one restaurant. It was called The Steak Pit. Gordy Schultz and his wife had it, and it was a—you know, it was a steak restaurant. And Gordy was a jazz player. He played bass and he played sax, and his brother and his sister-in-law had a little dine and dance trio there at the restaurant. And I—that was the only place to go. *[Laughs.]* First of all. And then, I used to go there at night and sing with them. 'Cause I knew all those tunes. You know? I knew all that. I grew up with them.

And so, that was great! So, like I started being—you know—allured into the evil world of showbusiness again. And these—this trio wanted me to go on tour with them. "So, we're going to Hawaii next!" That's great, but that's in the United States, and I can't go back there, because they're—I'm wanted. And so, you know, so I got to set up to—I was waiting to be set up with a tour of the Northwest territories, I guess. You know, me and a guitar and

singing songs. But then, I was waiting in Banff, in Alberta. And I knew a girl that I met, and she said, “Well, you can stay here while you’re doing that.” And so, after a while she goes, “You ever think of getting a job?” *[Laughs.]*

And I go, “I’ve thought about it, but you know.”

And so, she says, “Well, they need a fry cook up in the sunshine village. And so, I did that. And I did that until I broke my leg badly skiing, ‘cause I never—you know, I was skiing for the first time in my life. And speed? Who needs to stop.

00:25:41 Jesse Host
00:25:43 Cheech Guest
00:25:47 Jesse Host
00:25:48 Cheech Guest

You never skied in south LA?

[Chuckling.] No, not a bunch. Ice skated a lot! No. Skated by!

Not even in the Valley, huh?

Not even in the Valley, yeah. No, and so—and I compound fractured my leg, and I was like—it was bad, and I was in the hospital for months with a broken leg. You know? So, when I got out of there, my roommate in Banff said, “Hey, well, let’s go to Vancouver. That’s where I’m from. We’ll hang out there and see what’s happening.” And so, eventually I met—I got turned on to Tommy Chong by the editor of this magazine that I was writing for at the time, a rock and roll magazine called *Poppin*.

And he says, “There’s this guy. He’s doing this weird theatre thing in this strip bar in Chinatown.” Yeah! Sounds good. And so, I went down there to check it out, and it was—it was the first strip club in Vancouver. It was the first total naked. *[Inaudible]* was intrigued and *[chuckles]*—and so, I looked at that, and I—and I convinced him that I was this great improv actor from LA and had—I improved a resume. And he said, “Well, that sounds good to me.” And he hired me as a writer for this group. And so, I started writing for this group. And then, I became part of the group. I acted. So, the group fell apart, but it was a real strip bar. I mean, not—you know, like *[chuckles]* a gentleman’s club. No, it was a strip bar. You know?

And it was loggers and bikers and, you know, hardcore guys. And we changed the club overnight from a strip bar to naked improv. *[Chuckles.]*

00:27:20 Jesse Host

What I’m imagining—that I’m wrapping my head around—is you, a small Chicano man, an American here in Canada, Tommy Chong—half-White, half-Asian Canadian man. Both of you long hairs in this strip club. I mean, you must have been space aliens to these—like, what were you doing that was—? What was the thing that you found that could land with people who had come to see you like when you had gone to see Tommy Chong and with guys that were coming in to see a strip show?

00:27:58 Cheech Guest
00:27:59 Jesse Guest

Naked women.

Uh-huh!

[They laugh.]

It’s—you know, the original Upright Citizens Brigade, in New York, was in a strip club. But they had closed the strip club before they opened the comedy theater. So, it was just people who thought it was still a strip club and were confused. It wasn’t people who were also seeing strippers.

00:28:17 Cheech Guest Yeah, no, no, we incorporated it. And what I realized after a while that what we were really doing was classic burlesque: strippers and comedians. Except the comedians at this point were improv actors. And the audience dug it as long as we got to the stripping part eventually. You know? And there was like, "Oh!" And then we started attracting an audience, and then we started getting reviewed by the papers. You know? Like, they didn't like us, but they reviewed us. And you know, it took them two pages to give us a review. And so, we started attracting this audience. And just as we did, everybody in the group quit because they wanted to go to the hills and get their heads together.

I had been to the hills. My head was together. My pocketbook wasn't together. So, Tommy calls me after one night and he says, "Alright, this is what we're gonna do. We're gonna start a duo, me and you. You're a singer. I'm a guitar player." 'Cause he was with Motown for many years, had a big hit song, too. And he says, "We'll do some bits, and then we'll play R&B, and then we'll do some more bits."

And I said, "Maybe we can get a gig in Vegas in one of the lounges."

"Huh! That sounds good to me!" But we had to go back to LA to do that, where I was wanted by the FBI. So, it was—you know—a little dicey. So, I took all the precautions. I got my friend's *[chuckles]* photo ID, his driver's license with his picture on it. And I crossed back into the United States like, "Huh, okay, brown. Go ahead."

00:29:49 Jesse Host Did you think this was a burlesque act? Like, did you think you were touring like you would've been touring with the jazz band from Banff singing standards or whatever? Like, did you think you were gonna be going and playing lounges and doing something that everyone would like? Or did you think that you were going to be making something that cool people would like that would make you famous comedians? Which were you shooting for?

00:30:11 Cheech Guest You know... I was shooting—our goal, right when we started, we had to get our hands on \$1.50 every day. That was my goal. Because with \$1.50, we could make some kind of Chinese meal—beef and greens with rice and we could live, and we could eat. That was our goal, really. And so, we went around town walking around, pulling the little, red wagon with us. This is honest to god true. The little red—to pick up pop bottles in empty lots. And they had a three-cent deposit or something, and at the end of the day you got \$1.50 even if we didn't get a gig. I knew right away that we had something that was different, people reacted to it if they could see it.

And so, it was eventually—we were gonna do something with it, 'cause it was different than anything else that was out there. And also, that when we came back into LA, we only played Black clubs. You know, because that's—Tommy knew the Black clubs from Motown, and I knew Black clubs from having lived there for—you know? So, we were doing material that was appealing to that audience. You know? And weed was the commonality.

00:31:23 Jesse Host Yeah, so when did you find that was the theme?

00:31:27 Cheech Guest Right away! Right away. They didn't know—in Canada, they didn't know anything about Chicanos. You know. So—but the weed?

Yeah, that really connected us. So, it wasn't until we got back to LA—

00:31:39 Jesse Host That the material about the upholstery in lowriders started hitting?

00:31:42 Cheech Guest Yeah, it started—you know! Exactly that. And so, we were out, and we were struggling at first, you know, to kind of connect with the audience. And we were playing a gig out in the Valley, on Rosita Boulevard, and it was a rock and roll club. And we were doing okay, but it wasn't—and so, Tommy and I were standing in front of the club in between shows, and I remember saying, "Well, what are we gonna do?" And this car pulled up. It was full of low riders.

"Hey, man, you know where Rosita Boulevard is?"

"Yeah, you're on it."

"Hey! I told you, *[censored]*!"

[They laugh.]

And they took off, and Tommy goes, "When we go back in to do the show—the bit in the car with me and you? Do it like a Chicano. Do it like these guys." Okay! Got it. We went back and the club stopped. I mean, really. This is—the club stopped, the music stopped, people came from all parts of the club to sit. They had a rousing reaction and—okay, this is the direction and we're going this direction because it's—everybody responded to it!

00:32:43 Jesse Host If you as a kid had talked that way, been that way, in your household, what would've happened?

00:32:51 Cheech Guest Nothing. You know. *[Laughs.]* I guess it depends on which side of the Valley. I had a lot of cousins, you know. They were all over the place. But you know, at least three or four of my uncles were policemen, LAPD. My uncle Rudy—and this is a great story—my uncle, Rudy De Leon, who always was Uncle Rudy, he became the highest ranking Chicano in the force. He was the first captain to Hollenbeck, and they've named the Hollenbeck station after him. It's the Rudy UCL plaque there, if you go. The Rudy De Leon—and it wasn't *[laughs]*, in typical Chicano fashion, it wasn't until I was in my 40's that I was told that he really wasn't my uncle. Uncle Rudy's not my uncle?! Wh—*[stammering]* what? You know, Chicanos are all uncles. *[Laughs.]* They're all your uncle, you know?

Robert Rodriguez introduces me to his kids as Uncle Cheech, and they go, "Oh, hi, Uncle Cheech!" Every time I go there. And so, it's like, okay, well, this is—you know—shifting ground here, but—

00:33:49 Jesse Host Your parents also—there's a point at which—and I learned this when I visited my stepmother's family in northern Ireland, where there's a certain number of brothers and sisters that you cannot be expected to be responsible for all of them.

[Cheech agrees enthusiastically.]

You're like okay, this is—I'm 99% this is one of them. Is this Frank? I think this is Frank.

00:34:10 Cheech Guest You never know! And you just go okay. You just nod. You know, "Okay, that's your uncle." Okay, that's my uncle. I was into my 40's—he's not my uncle! Well, what's—what's—? All the world

			shifted, and so I—okay, we’re in that zone right now. Okay. That was okay! You know. But it was eye opening.
00:34:30	Jesse	Host	Was your gigantic moustache real?
00:34:32	Cheech	Guest	Uh, yeah. I had it when I left Canada and we came back to LA, I started growing a moustache. And then, Tommy and I were together, and we were looking for gigs and we’re dealing with this agent that says, “Well, I got this movie that they’re trying to cast, and you might be great for it.” And so, I went into read for it, and the guy says, “You know, eeeh could be. Uh, let’s see you without the moustache.” Oh, okay. And so, I went home and I shaved off my moustache, and then he goes, “Eh, nah, I don’t think you’re right for the part.”
			And I said, “Well, <i>[censored]</i> you, dude.” <i>[Chuckles.]</i> And that was the last time. I had it for the next 40 years. You know?
00:35:06	Jesse	Host	I gotta tell you, I watched <i>Up in Smoke</i> last night. And you look great in that movie! That moustache looks good on you. The hat looks good on you. You even pull off the halter top pretty well.
00:35:18	Cheech	Guest	You know! And it was—it came out of observation what I was seeing. I designed all the—not designed; I put together all my own costumes, because I would observe what was happening—you know—around. That kind of half t-shirt with the suspenders, with the red suspenders. And my original touch, with khakis that are—you know—high-waisted khakis, mostly to hide my love handles. You know? <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:35:41	Jesse	Host	You were pretty—honestly, there’s a shirtless scene in <i>Up in Smoke</i> , and I was like, “Look at—look at Cheech! This dude’s—this dude’s pretty yolked! This dude’s in good shape!”
00:35:51	Cheech	Guest	You know, I was an athlete all my life too, in addition to all this other stuff. I played every sport and worked out. And Tommy was a body builder. He was a real body builder with all those guys—Schwarzenegger at the muscle beach and Dave Draper and all those guys.
00:36:07	Jesse	Host	What’s amazing about that outfit that you wear in—that like classic Cheech and Chong Cheech outfit is it’s clean. Like, you look good. Right? It is also not very far from a clown suit.
			<i>[Cheech agrees with a laugh.]</i>
			Like, the red suspenders and the high pants and the—like, I’m not even—I’m not like—it really gives you a form and a shape that’s funny!
00:36:31	Cheech	Guest	Yeah! I mean, you know, I’ve been repeating this lately because I’m kind of coming to the realization of what it was is that we were both deep and shallow at the same time with the same material. And that is the mark of true genius!
00:36:48	Jesse	Host	It’s like double funny too, just physically with your kind of Pacheco cholo lean back. You know, drop back a shoulder.
			<i>[Cheech agrees.]</i>
			Like, it really—the same thing that makes it cool—right? Is...
00:37:01	Cheech	Guest	Is funny! It’s funny!
00:37:02	Jesse	Host	Is funny! Yeah. You just—5% more of it, and it’s funny.
00:37:06	Cheech	Guest	You know, and that is really the truth. You know? And I do it intuitively from observation. I don’t like say, well, what would this

guy look like? I just kind of put together what the guy looks like or talks like or walks like. You know? And it was just intuitive to me, like most things. It was like what I was talking about before, you know? And that leads to opportunity. When you recognize opportunity, go for it! You know? So. And Tommy, you know—Tommy was *[laughs]* he's still to this day, he comes up with the most outrageous ideas. And you kind of look at him like, "Yeah, okay." You know? But there's one in there that's going to be shallow and deep at the same time. You know? And that's a mark of genius, really.

00:37:48 Jesse Host We had, a year or two ago, Chaz Bojorquez on the show, and he lives in Mount Washington, which is right next to that neighborhood. And he was talking about the way that like that neighborhood and its world—northeast Los Angeles, specifically—was—how distinct it was from east LA and south LA. And he's like you would never confuse it with Boyle Heights. Whole other thing. You know. Whole other—for him, it was about graffiti styles and, you know, the gangs that they represented as well. But like each of those places is a whole other place, and like LA in the movies—it's the beach.

00:38:31 Cheech Guest
00:38:32 Jesse Host Yeah, you go to Beverley Hills. Yeah. Exactly. Hollywood, Beverley Hills. And maybe you get a story about south or east LA that's about—that's an awful tragedy about someone getting shot or whatever.

00:38:42 Cheech Guest Yeah. *[Chuckles.]* That was my neighborhood. Uh, yeah. Yeah. They were really—but they were never portrayed on TV or in any kind of media, even writing. You know? The only media they were in was newspapers. *[Laughs.]* The guy with a trunk open and a bale of hay in there. You know? And yeah, it was very distinct. And—but you—we kind of incorporated that intuitively, as a representation of LA. It's like—I mean, it was meant to—there were certain aspects of our career and my career that were meant to be. And I just don't get in the way. That's the genius. Don't get in the way of something that's meant to be.

When I moved to Canada, when I moved to Calgary, I moved into the exact neighborhood that Tommy Chong was born and raised in. And I started hearing stories about him, because he was the most famous guy—just before Cheech and Chong, when he was with Motown—to come out of there. So, I don't know why I was gravitated towards that area, but it was! I was. And so, I kind of trusted that. You know?

00:39:47 Jesse Host It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Cheech Marin. He's in the new films *Champions* and *Shotgun Wedding*.

We were talking before we went on the air about—my mom used to work at the Mexican museum in San Francisco, and at the Mexican museum, they had a lot of Mexican art. That is art created by Mexicans in Mexico. And you've pretty much always focused on Chicano art—Mexican American art. Why was that?

00:40:15 Cheech Guest Because it was something new—
00:40:17 Jesse Host I should say, as a collector, which—
00:40:19 Cheech Guest As a collector, yeah.
00:40:20 Jesse Host Yeah, you're a pretty major collector.
00:40:22 Cheech Guest You know what the—I knew about western art. I was self-educated in that for a long time, and other arts too. The gap in my knowledge, artistically or art-wise was contemporary art. And I didn't—I knew

some names. I knew up to modern art, but contemporary I didn't know. But I was married to a painter at the time, and she started taking me—you know, Patty—to these contemporary galleries in Santa Monica and other places. And that's where I discovered these Chicano artists, Chaz Bojorquez being one of them, Carlos Almaraz and those four, those guys. And I recognized what it was right away.

I could see the foundations and influence, that they created Chicano art because all these painters and these artists were art school and/or university trained. They weren't naïve, you know, hobbyists. But kind of. They were incorporating international elements all the time in their art. And I go—that's just—you know what it was? For me, it was like hearing the Beatles for the first time. You've heard this music before. There was Jerry Lee Lewis and then there was Elvis. There was Fats Domino. But it was English. You know? And so, it gave it this whole other spin. And that's what Chicano art did for me and these artists. It's just—this is world art, but it's Chicano. You know? I saw where they were going. I saw—

And so, I said, "Well, I'm—" It was the perfect storm. I knew what the art was. I had money to collect it, and I had celebrity in order to proselytize for it, eventually. And so—and I started buying the art. You know? And from as early as I can remember, I was a collector of something. Stamps, bottle caps, baseball cards, everything. I collect them all and get the whole set. You know? That mentality. And so, I started buying—as soon as you buy one piece of Chicano art, all the Chicano artists know there's a live one out there. *[Laughs.]* And so, I got in it. And I was the only guy out there that was collecting on that scale, but that could collect big pieces. You know? 24x12 foot, mural-sized pieces. You're not gonna put it over your couch or over your bedroom, you know? Usually, it goes to storage.

But I was unique in that aspect, so I just kept going. And there was nobody else out there. You know, I wasn't battling other zillionaires for the latest pieces of contemporary art.

00:42:50 Jesse Host

So, what was the first piece that you bought that—you know—got pride of place? What was the first thing that was like over your sofa or your mantelpiece? Like, the one that you looked at every day, the first one that you looked at every day.

00:43:02 Cheech Guest

I bought a bunch of them at the same time. You know? And there was a big Carlos Almaraz car crash painting—"A Sunset Crash". And it was, you know—I made various leaps in my purchasing power over the years. And okay, they want \$20,000 for this one. *[Sighs.]* Alright! And I leapt. *[Chuckles.]* You know? And it was like—I was the only guy out there buying impressionist art when the impressionists were like—I knew what it was! I knew what it was going to be. And that was—that was the important part. I knew what it was going to be, 'cause it was inevitable. This was great art.

00:43:41 Jesse Host

Describe that picture for me.

00:43:43 Cheech Guest

"Sunset Crash" is a car going off the freeway, when they had bilevel freeways. One was higher; one was lower. And it's crashing on the freeway below in a fiery explosion. And I had seen that as a kid. There was—you know, the freeway that led out of downtown LA to

like Whittier and Norwalk was one of the—and I saw cars go over that thing, and it scared the [censors] out of me when I was a kid. And like, the fiery crash, and it could—and so, every time we got on the freeway, I was saying every kind of rosary that you could. Please, please don't let that happen to me. I was terrified! But it was alluring at the same time, you know? Like, "Did you see that?! Woow, that made a big explosion and blah—!"

And it was like—and then I saw it represented in painting. And I go, okay, this is not only my greatest fears and source of joy [chuckles], I'll take this. I'll go from spending \$1,500 or \$2,000 on a painting to \$20,000. And it was—it was a big leap.

00:44:52 Jesse Host

Was it kind of weird and scary to think that you were like a showbusiness guy that was in galleries buying art like a fancy art dude?

00:45:01 Cheech Guest

Yeah, no, not at all. I felt right at home there. You know? I just like—'cause I was raised with art, unbeknownst to anybody. I was—you know, and I—okay! I could—a lot of people—guys, you know, they get money, and they buy the Ferrari or the Lamborghini or the, you know, whatever that is. I was never interested in cars. You know? And I—but I was always interested in art. And so—hm! This is something I can own that I can—that is really particular, you know, to me. And it hasn't had a big—a showing anywhere. But it caught up really quick. You know? People started getting interested in it. So. And there was other collectors starting to emerge.

The big battle was getting it into museums. You know, because the official attitude in museums was, oh, this is agitprop folk art. And so, every artist that I told that to that was—they always had the same reaction, "What's agitprop folk art that I'm doing?" [Laughs.] Chaz Bojorquez being one of them, man. You know? Who was the inventor of graffiti art.

00:46:05 Jesse Host

When you collect art and you got more than you can put up in your house or you just wanna share it with people, you send it out places. You know. You call up the Dallas Museum of Art and say—you say, "Would you like this Saison for a little while?"

00:46:20 Cheech Guest

Yeeeeah. That didn't happen.

[They laugh.]

When there was no other place to put it, it got put in storage. And so, I started making friends in the art community, and I started showing this collection and he says, "Well, this is a great collection! You've gotta show it! It does you no good under the bed or in the closet. You gotta show it." [Uncertainly.] Well, how do you do that? "Well, you've gotta get a show and go to museums." Well, how do you do that? What are the—and so—

00:46:44 Jesse Host

But it's—a lot of museums will not make a show of one person's stuff, because theoretically that person could be doing that in order to get the stamp on the back of their picture from the, you know, SF MOMA and then sell it afterwards for more, 'cause it was exhibited at SF MOMA.

00:47:01 Cheech Guest

That was always the attitude. That was always the attitude. And my only argument against this was, "Well, I have this collection because you don't." [Laughing.] And there wasn't any argument! There was no witty retort to that. You know? Well, okay! But when I

put together a significant collection, I realized—he says, “Well, if you wanna put together a traveling show, you have to have sponsors.” I mean, because it’s a very expensive proposition. You know, I mean, everybody thinks, well, you just call the museum and they come and—nah, nah. That’s a very expensive proposition. So, I went around and started looking for sponsors. I was hooked up with a company called Evergreen in San Antonio, and they had—they were doing big museum shows, but mostly kind of interactive natural history kind of stuff.

And so, we started going to every corporation—corporate headquarters in the United States: General Mills, General Motors, anything with a “general” in it, we were out there—you know—tap dancing. And eventually, the Target stores and Hewlett-Packard put together the seed money to make the first show. And then, the Target stores stayed with it. ‘Cause it was a perfect storm, you know? If Joe Blow had exactly the same collection and he went to a museum? Eehh, you know, that’s great, Joe Blow. But you know, how are we gonna sell this? If Cheech Marin goes, a well-known name, goes—it’s a different story! They’re still putting their heads on the block, which they don’t wanna do—the museum directors. Because this is the official—like I said, *[inaudible]* like this really exists. This is a legitimate school of art.

And finally, the San Antonio museum put their head on the block and their director. And it was a huge hit. But it was—but there was resistance from the Chicano community, the academic community, because, “Well, we love you as a comedian, but—you know—who are you to come in and tell us what’s what about Chicano art?” That was not my purpose. My purpose was to share the art and to get everybody to see it. You know? And so, once they started unloading the crates, the story changed.

00:49:09 Jesse Host We’ve got more to get into with Cheech Marin. When we come back from a quick break: how do you get your own museum with your name on the front and everything? Well, Cheech Marin knows! He did it! He’s living the dream! He’ll tell us how it went down in just a minute. It’s *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:49:29 Music Transition Thumpy rock music.

00:49:33 Jesse Host Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. I’m talking with Cheech Marin. He’s a comedy legend, a legend in the art world, and of course one of our working-est working actors. You’ve seen him in *From Dusk ‘til Dawn*, *Spy Kids*, *Tin Cup*. He’s in two new movies right now: *Champions* and *Shotgun Wedding*. Let’s get into the rest of my conversation with Cheech Marin.

So, there’s now a museum named after you in Riverside that houses most of your collection. Um, *[chuckles]* did that really like go from being someone’s idea to a museum in five years?!

[Cheech confirms.]

00:50:13 Cheech Guest That is incredible!
It is incredible. I—it’s even more incredible, because I had been doing shows, traveling shows, before that. You know? But to have a permanent home for it, that came like the—like the house out of the—that was falling from the sky in *The Wizard of Oz*, you know? It

just—what?! What do you mean? And I didn't understand what they wanted, because I'd done a show at the Riverside art museum, which was I think "Works on Paper" from the collection. It was a big hit. It was the biggest show they had. And the town manager—city manager came, and he says, "I have this idea. We have this building, which is a beautiful mid-century building. It's right next door to the Mission Inn. It was the town library. And we're building a new library, so we have to repurpose this building, and we wanted to offer you the building for the collection. You give us the collection, and we'll permanently house it there in the thing."

And I didn't understand what they were talking about when they first—"You want me to buy a museum? Oh, well, I'm doing okay. I don't know if I'm museum rich, but—you know."

"No, no, no. We wanna give you the museum."

"Uuh, oh? Okay!" And it's one of those examples, again, of there was an opportunity. The door opened. It's not gonna stay opened forever. You gotta walk through. And this was a collection that I had spent, you know, 40 years putting together. And I wasn't gonna give it to them. Uh-uh. Walk through.

00:51:34 Jesse Host Did you immediately switch to collecting something else?
00:51:37 Cheech Guest No!

[They laugh.]

00:51:38 Jesse Host Yeah, I'm back on bottlecaps.

00:51:42 Cheech Guest You know, it was—it was—I just, you know, it was—I recognize what it could be. You know? And it far exceeded my expectations. This year, we were just voted one of the top 50 museum shows in the world.

00:51:55 Jesse Host Now, I saw this gargantuan piece that is the like entryway piece for the museum.

[Cheech chuckles knowingly.]

00:52:06 Cheech Guest It looks pretty incredible.

00:52:07 Jesse Host It is incredible.

00:52:09 Cheech Guest Can you describe it for me?

It's a big, lenticular piece by the brothers De la Torre, Einar and Jamex De la Torre. And they are the perfect Chicanos—half Mexican, half San Diego. You know? They're my favorite kind of Chicano. They don't know they're Chicanos yet.

[They chuckle.]

And there's a bunch of them, because it's a long trail. But it's always the same source of inspiration, description of culture. You know, whether it's intimate moments or big, public moments. But it's told in 1000 shades of brown. You know? This whole story. And it keeps continuing on, to this day. And—

00:52:44 Jesse Host Lenticular means—that's like Sportflics baseball cards or like those—or like prayer cards with the—with the Virgin Mary on them.

00:52:52 Cheech Guest Eyes of Jesus that follow you around. And it's a prismatic plastic, basically, that shifts—the images shift as you move around the piece. And it's a huuge—it's 26x13 feet. And it goes up through

the second floor. We had to cut out the floor of the second story in order to fit this piece. And it's incredible!

00:53:17 Jesse Host What's depicted in this piece that's in the museum?

00:53:19 Cheech Guest I couldn't tell you. *[Laughs.]* There's so many images. Well, the main image is the—there's like an Aztec goddess who is just—I can't even remember the name. It has three Xs in it. And the goddess of something or other, but it shifts—

00:53:35 Jesse Host You don't even have fluent Spanish, much less fluent Nahuatl or whatever.

00:53:39 Cheech Guest No, yeah, exactly. Yeah, no. They told me the name, but I can't— And it shifts into like a *Power Rangers* thing. And it represented the continuation of that influence, but it's a huge piece and it has thousands of images in it. And they shift to another thousand images. And people are just like—and that's the first thing you see when you come into the museum is this big, gigantic, heretofore never seen way of art. You know? And so, it knocks people out, as well as it should. You know, 'cause it's spectacular.

00:54:13 Jesse Host Riverside is—I just typed it into the internet. It's 55% Latino. What is the consequence of having a Chicano art museum in a place like that that—you know—maybe had, I don't know. I went to the Bakersfield art museum one time, and there was a show of paintings of whales. And they were nice enough. But like in a place where maybe they previously had a lot of shows of paintings of whales, what does it mean to have Carmen Lomas Garza on the wall?

00:54:45 Cheech Guest It is—it is lifechanging for—not only for the community, but for the museum culture in general. You know? There's—this is the first Chicano museum dedicated solely to Chicano art. It is—people—you know, I experienced that feeling going to different places with the first show, *Chicano Visions*, that I put out. You go to Minneapolis, you know, it's not exactly the center of Chicano-hood. You see them coming out of the woodwork. *[Chuckling.]* And their reaction was always, "Where have all these people been?" And for many of—for most of them, it was the first time they'd been in a museum of any kind. You know? But because they—the mentality was that this is not for us. You know? The stuff that we can't understand, or it doesn't have pictures of saints in it or something. You know?

But—and it really changed that. And it brought the community together in a very positive way. You know? Because that's 50% Latino, as is the inland empire. So, that's a big chunk of real estate. You know? So, it gave them a source of pride, but also, hey, you know, this is—hey, that guy Santana, he can really play that guitar! I mean, it's the same thing, you know? All of the sudden, Santana meant rock and roll or rock or whatever that thing was. You know? There's a scene—*[chuckling]* there's a thing in *Up in Smoke* that I watched last night, where you say your band plays all kinds of music, from Santana to El Chicano.

00:56:01 Jesse Host

00:56:12 Cheech Guest You know everything!

[They laugh.]

There again, shallow and deep at the same time. And I'm still— every day, I realize that more and more, how that was our aesthetic. You know? Shallow and deep at the same time.

00:56:27 Jesse Host Do you think your artwork in museums would have the same impact if rather than being Cheech Marin, famous Hollywood actor, famous for being chill and fun or beatific, smiling dad, you were like—I don't know; I was trying to think of a good example. Like Benjamin Bratt is from the neighborhood I grew up in, right?

[Cheech affirms.]

00:57:11 Cheech Guest And he's Peruvian, I think. And like if it was Benjamin Bratt's museum, the guy who's famous for being handsome and cool and intense, I wonder if it would have—if it would be as welcoming.
00:57:12 Jesse Host I don't know!

00:57:21 Cheech Guest I mean, like nothing against—Benjamin Bratt, come on *Bullseye*.
00:57:23 Jesse Host But if you were a super intense, beautiful, famous dude—not that—you're very beautiful.

00:57:28 Cheech Guest This goes without saying.
Host Rather than a famous dude who's famous for being friendly, I feel like it might be a different story.
Guest I think it would be! You know? Because—but I built up that reputation over a long period of time touring the collection! You know? At the point where we got to Riverside and they made this offer, we had played in over 50 museums. 50! From the Smithsonian on down. And for a museum culture that didn't want to do that, they didn't want to show private collections because—I understand why. You serve curatorial power and blah, blah, blah. And who are you to set the standard? You don't have unpaid student loans. You know? You're not like one of us.

And so, it was—but the art spoke for itself at some point. You know? It's like I'm not kidding when I say in San Antonio, I was in the loading dock when they brought in the crates and started opening them. And that whole thing changed. And so, there was a certain segment of Chicano students that were very political. They were being urged to be political. And Chicano art is only political and blah, blah, blah, blah. And so, even in the face of free tacos and tequila and beer, they were still rowdy. Rah-rah-rah. And they—and they confronted me at the opening of the show. And I said, okay, anybody has anything to say tomorrow morning at 9:30—and I made it 9:30 to weed out most of the audience *[chuckles]*—9:30, we're gonna have an open forum here at the museum. And if anybody's got anything to say, that's the time to say it.

So, we convened and there was this big dais of, you know, all the museum people and some artists and the audience. And the argument went back and forth and *[stammering]* what was and what wasn't Chicano art. And so, finally this older lady who looked like she had seen everything Chicano in her life, and she says, "I have a question for John Valdez." And John Valdez was up there on the dais with me, and there's no more OG Chicano painter than John Valdez. "I have a question for you. Uh, considering everything you've heard today, do you still consider yourself a Chicano painter?"

And John looked up at the ceiling for a minute and he says, "Only if it bothers you."

[They laugh.]

[Excitedly.] That's my herooooo! That's my hero! He's gotta be my hero! Like, that is Chicano! That is Chicano. And he expressed it perfect. Only if it bothers you. And she said, "Okay, I get it."

[Laughs.] And sat down. But that is—that is the Chicano intellectual debate. *[Chuckles.]*

01:00:01 Jesse Host

Well, Cheech Marin, I sure appreciate you taking this time to be on the show. It's—I've always wanted to talk to you. It was really, really great to get to do it.

01:00:09 Cheech Guest

Thank you. Thank you very much. It was my honor to be here. And everybody go down to Riverside and see the Cheech, which I got that name in as soon as I could.

[Music fades in.]

"What should we call this thing?"

"Cheech! We have the Brokaw, how about the Cheech!?" Yeeeah! *[Chuckles.]*

01:00:20 Music Transition

Chiming synth with an easy beat.

01:00:23 Jesse Host

Cheech Marin, everyone. You can catch him in the new film *Champions*, that's in theaters right now. He also was in the film *Shotgun Wedding*, which is streaming right now on Amazon Prime. His museum is in Riverside, California. It's called The Cheech. It features over 700 works of Chicano art with more to come. You should go.

[Music fades out.]

01:00:47 Music Transition

Bright piano.

01:00:52 Jesse Host

That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Things have been very busy here at my house, and I'll tell you why. It's because our company, Maximum Fun, is becoming a worker owned cooperative. We're so proud. I'm so excited to become a worker-owner.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Among my fellow worker-owners to be are senior producer Kevin Ferguson and producers 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, composed and provided to us by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is by the great band The Go! Team. The song's called "Huddle Formation". Go check out The Go! Team. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries.

Bullseye is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. You can follow us in all 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.

01:02:05 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]

