

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. Bonnie Raitt has been recording music for over 50 years. She’s got more than a dozen Grammys. She’s been in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for more than two decades. She has topped scores of 100 Best Singers of All Time lists. She’s also a guitarist legend, especially for her work on the slide and bottleneck. She’s always played the same one: a woodgrain Fender Stratocaster she bought in 1969 for \$120. She calls it Brownie. Raitt is also an accomplished songwriter. She has a bunch of hits, including ’90s classic.
00:01:00	Music	Music	“Something to Talk About” from the album <i>Luck of the Draw</i> by Bonnie Raitt. <i>Now that we know it, let's really show it, darling</i> <i>Let's give 'em something to talk about</i> <i>A little mystery to figure out, babe</i> <i>Let's give 'em something to talk about</i> <i>How about love, love, love?</i> <i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i>
00:01:26	Jesse	Host	Bonnie Raitt! I mean, the woman is a legend. Still touring. Stilling singing great. Still shredding well into her 70s. She just won another Grammy. It was for the title track off her latest album, <i>Just Like That</i> , her 18 th full-length studio record.
00:01:44	Music	Music	“Just Like That” from the album <i>Just Like That</i> by Bonnie Raitt. <i>My boy might still be with me now</i> <i>He'd be 25 today</i> <i>No knife can carve away the stain</i> <i>No drink can drown regret</i> <i>They say Jesus brings you peace and grace</i> <i>Well, he ain't found me yet</i> <i>Na, na, na, na, na</i> <i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i>
00:02:15	Jesse	Host	Our correspondent, Ray Suarez, is a Bonnie Raitt fan. He got to talk to her about that song and so much more last year. Let’s get into it. Here’s another song from <i>Just Like That</i> . This is “Made Up Mind”.
00:02:27	Music	Music	“Made Up Mind” from the album <i>Just Like That</i> by Bonnie Raitt. <i>It starts out slow</i> <i>With go ahead and go</i> <i>Pretty soon, the melody is like a rainstorm tin roof symphony</i> <i>But it starts out slow</i>

*It goes on and on
For way too long
It always ends on a bad note
If you could dance at all, you'd dance alone
It goes on and on*

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

00:03:08	Ray Suarez	Host	Bonnie Raitt, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> . It's so great to have you.
00:03:11	Bonnie Raitt	Guest	I'm honored to be on your show, Ray. Big fan.
00:03:14	Ray	Host	We seem to be—in fits and starts—coming out of the pandemic after some tough years for America, for the world. Everybody had to cope in various ways. Performers had a particular set of challenges. What did it mean for you, personally and professionally?
00:03:34	Bonnie	Guest	Well, unprecedented is a word that gets used too much, but it was really true that I just never expected to be—you know, maybe a couple of months sidelined by something that we don't know what, but this was two and a half years without doing a live gig in front of people. And at the time, when we canceled one of four rescheduled James Taylor co-bill tours of Canada, and then we booked our own tours when that went ahead to be postponed, because I didn't wanna refund everybody. 'Cause we thought we were gonna reschedule. It involved a lot of booking, holding the band, holding a cruise. Subsidizing people's salaries to help them pay their mortgage. And just settling into doing acoustic performances from my house to raise money for candidates, 'cause it was a very strong election year—campaign and ongoing annual benefits that I had already committed to.
			So, I ended up not being able to plug my electric guitar in or play in front of a band and a live audience for two and a half years, which was really like the kind of house arrest I really didn't wanna be under. But compared to what people are through that are really suffering, it was nothing.
00:04:47	Ray	Host	You mentioned going acoustic and going online. It is a little bit of a chilly kind of distanced world. No match for having an audience that can laugh at an aside or feeling that intensity rise in response to a solo. You kept on playing, but how was Zoom world for you? How did it work out?
00:05:08	Bonnie	Guest	You know, it had its own kind of charm. I mean, it was—I was doing it for a cause bigger than just recreation. You know? I wish that the technology were such that I could jam live with my band members who are everywhere from Nova Scotia to Maui to Connecticut to, you know, Oakland. The whole band is spread out all over the place. I would've loved—but because of the latency issue with Facetime or Zoom, you can't actually play in real-time without the grooves not being lined up. So, that necessitated me playing solo in my house. Which is kind of a challenge. And I actually really enjoyed it. I was more nervous performing knowing that people on the—you know, that were donating to candidates and the different congressional representatives were on the call.

You know, there was like seven or eight people I really admired that were watching while I was playing. And a lot of times, we recorded

the songs in advance so that there wouldn't be that buffering situation when, you know, scores and scores of people paid a certain amount of money to come on and raise funds and listen to the politicians speak their case. And I was, you know, endorsing their positions. And so, it got a little bit easier when it wasn't live. But I learned to play *Nick of Time* just without my band, and I went back and played folk guitar and played "Angel from Montgomery" by myself. That was kind of fun, actually! It was reminding me of my early days before I could afford a bass player.

00:06:37 Ray Host

Let's talk about the new album. It's great work. And listening to the entire recording in one sitting—which I really hardly do anymore, in the era of iTunes and Pandora. Listening to an album from beginning to end, it's a reminder of what you've always had: range, a mastery of many forms, from reggae infused "Love So Strong" to the blues wail of "Blame It on Me", the lovely ballad of the title track, "Just Like That". And the song about an invisible challenge in America: the aging prison population. A song from a prison hospice down the hall.

00:07:25 Bonnie Guest

You've always been politically aware as an artist, politically active. What made you write about this?

I was just—as they say in England—gob smacked when I read this story in *The New York Times* magazine and saw the photos and was just so deeply moved at the inspiration of these guys with so much bitterness and regret and anger and who know what their early life was like that they would find out that at the end of these guy's life that they really had nobody to come and visit them. And they wanted to go and volunteer on the ward and be there for them. And what moved me so much was knowing in this climate of so much dissention and animosity among—you know—disparate groups, you know, just going off to separate corners, we know—even though I've never—I've played a prison, but I don't—I know that the different populations don't mix. You know? It's really unheard of for the Black prisoners to mix with the gang Latino guys that are in there and the skinhead guys. You know, they're just off in separate camps and it's very delineated.

And yet, I imagined—and when I wrote the song, I imagined that this guy, as it showed in the pictures, all of those disparate things just disappear and the human need for compassion and help overrode all of those things that happened in prison. And just the sheer beauty of a person giving of themselves to be there at the end and be of service—I mean, without any appeal to, you know, oh, I should get money for this or lessen my sentence. Just out of the compassion of, look, I probably did something really bad in my life, and I'd like to do something good now. That was indelibly put into my heart, and I wanted to write a song from that good news story, if I may coin a phrase.

00:09:13 Music Music

"Down the Hall" from the album *Just Like That* by Bonnie Raitt.

*Had the flu in the prison infirmary
My last day I looked up and saw
A man wheeled round the corner
Down to skin and bones that's all*

I asked the nurse where he was going

*She said, "Hospice down the hall
He probably won't be in there long
Any day we'll get the call"*

*I asked if they let family in
She said, "Not really at the end
Truth is, a lot don't have someone
No friends or next of kin"*

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

00:10:06	Ray	Host	Well, it's a beautiful song. And I think it will get people wise to the fact that a lot of prisons across the country are becoming part old age homes and part hospices, because of the way a lot of states are releasing prisoners because of the changes in laws regarding drug sentencing. Because of a fairly low-crime era that ended just recently, the prison population in the United States is getting older and older and more and more expensive to take care of. And a lot of men are living out the last years of their lives behind bars, quite aged, and quite sick. And that brought me right there.
00:10:50	Bonnie	Guest	Yeah. It's unbelievable to imagine the lack of, you know, good food and—you know, who knows what the level of medical care is. But just, you know, as I wrote in the song, I imagine that—you know—when the guy said, "Do they let family in in the end?" She said, "A lot of them don't have anybody." You know? Nobody—they've lost touch. And I just—it opened up a level of compassion and empathy for me that I hadn't seen before. And that's what great investigative journalism will do. And I was just so moved by that.

And the other song, "Just Like That", about—you know—having seen a news program about a woman that was going to meet a man for the first time who received her son's heart, and he just simply said, "Would you like to put your head on my chest and listen to his heart?" And I just—right now, I'm choked up just talking about it, because it's just so moving that people in the height of their tragedy can be so generous and so loving to be able to donate their loved one's organs at that time.

00:11:55	Music	Music	"Just Like That" from the album <i>Just Like That</i> by Bonnie Raitt.
----------	-------	-------	--

*He sat down and took a deeper breath
Then looked right in my face
I heard about the son you lost
How you left without a trace
I've spent years just trying to find you
So I could finally let you know
It was your son's heart that saved me
And a life you gave us both*

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

00:12:28	Bonnie	Guest	I think that I'm really raw because of the last six years of this nightmare election cycle coupled with George Floyd and the fires and floods and the wars and ongoing famines, but then—you know—to have covid on top of the climate crisis and then Ukraine on top of it, I'm just very, very raw. As we all are. You know? We're just—I don't think anybody's been as anxious, dreading, and grief-
----------	--------	-------	--

			stricken as we've all been and worried. So, these stories move me in a way that inspired me to write these songs. And I'm inspired by my friend, John Prine, who we also lost to covid this last year. And I was inspired to write from a third person point of view, as I sing "Angel from Montgomery" every night.
00:13:19	Jesse	Host	We're taking a break. We'll be back in just a second. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximunFun.org and NPR.
00:13:26	Music	Transition	Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.
00:13:31	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. Our guest, Bonnie Raitt, is a Grammy Award winning songwriter and guitarist. She just won a Grammy for the title track from her 2022 album, <i>Just Like That</i> , so we're replaying the conversation we had with her last year. And conducting that conversation, another legend: the one and only Mr. Ray Suarez.
00:13:52	Ray	Host	Well, it's been six years since your last album. And I wonder a little bit about the process of putting this song in and taking this song out, deciding what makes a complete work from top to bottom. The era of the concept album that was ushered in in the '60s made you really feel like an album was a thing that had a beginning, a middle, and an end. You <i>[chuckles]</i> —after side one was over and you heard that do-do-do-do of the needle at the end of the groove, you'd flip it over to the other side and listen to the other side.
			Well, I listened to this, and I thought, "Well, yeah! I mean, it's great. This and this and this." But how do you figure out what goes where and what goes in and what doesn't get in there?
00:14:45	Bonnie	Guest	A great question. It's somewhat the same when I put a show together, and you do it by trial and error. But especially learning from examples. I mean, I wasn't expecting to do this for a living, but I was—I loved going to see artists that I loved in concert, and I watched and paid attention to how they developed the arc of the show. And I think, being my dad's daughter, and watching those great Rodgers and Hammerstein shows where the—after the overture, what they started with, what the second act opened with, how the arc of the incredibly powerful emotional ballad reached a peak. And then there was an emotional release with something lighter. And then, you know, it moved the story along.
			And all you have to do is accidentally, as I did one time in the '90s—I had written a bunch of really soulful ballads on <i>Longing in their Hearts</i> —the triple—the third album in the series after <i>Nick of Time</i> , and I thought, "Oh, this'll be so interesting to just have a whole half hour of kind of down <i>[chuckles]</i> , solo ballad songs." You know, just—and the show just died. You know? It was like immediate that it was—

[Ray laughs.]

It just lay there. I could never revive it. So, that went on like one show, and then I went back to what I knew. Which is there's a certain type of song that opens the show and an album, and then you coast a little bit and throw in some—you know, some variation. And then you do something familiar, and then hit them with one of those ballads. And I would never open in the second or third song with something that was devastatingly sad. So—and after you do the sad song, you have to come out a little bit gently. And I would

usually put the acoustic and blues stuff kind of in the middle. And then an aim up, ramp up for something to put “Angel from Montgomery” there towards the end, where it deserves.

[Music fades in.]

And then I always sing “I Can’t Make You Love Me” as an encore, because it’s really hard to follow.

00:16:41 Music Music

“I Can’t Make You Love Me” from the album *Luck of the Draw* by Bonnie Raitt.

*'Cause I can't make you love me if you don't
You can't make your heart feel something it won't
Here in the dark, in these final hours
I will lay down my heart and I'll feel the power
But you won't, no you won't
'Cause I can't make you love me, if you don't*

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

00:17:39 Ray Host

Yeah, now that you mention it—I mean, what would you sing after that? *[Chuckles.]* You’re right.

00:17:43 Bonnie Guest

Well, we do get up and play some more stuff, but it’s kind of my choice. I sort of gauge how the audience feels and how I feel. And this tour has been more emotional—the ballads have been more deep and deeply impactful than—and actually, the other side, the joyful and the sexy songs and the rockers are even more juicy, because we were deprived for so long. And I can feel it in the audience. I feel it with their reactions to Mavis Staples, who just galvanizes. It’s like wrestling audiences. They’re just cheering so loud that I can hear them downstairs in my dressing room. And I’m going, “Oh my god, these guys really have been waiting and waiting to get back to play live again and be in the audience and enjoy this exaltation that happens.”

There’s nothing like the healing and inspiration and joy that has been witnessed every night by me and the band since April—since we’ve been on tour. I’ve never loved to tour as much as I’ve loved this last year.

00:18:42 Ray Host

You mentioned singing “Angel from Montgomery” and your friend John Prine’s death from covid. Do you remember the first time you sang it after he died?

00:18:52 Bonnie Guest

Yes. It was within a short period of time. I mean, Anderson Cooper put in a—you know—request for me to talk live the next day. It wasn’t even 24 hours since we got the news. And I don’t even remember what I said in the interview; I was so emotional, and I wanted to—I was just very raw. And then, a few days later, we were all recording a tribute online. And that’s when I was glad I was in my house without an audience, because we did multiple takes, and I didn’t think I could get through it. But it was a very emotional performance of that. And you know, it takes—like any shocking loss, it takes a while to process it. And it was so huge to lose someone I was so close to and that meant so much to many of us, that it was really time to put aside your personal grief and sing for the—sing for the world to honor him.

00:19:50 Ray Host

And really for a long time, I mean, you guys were friends.

00:19:53 Bonnie Guest Oh yeah, we started out around the same time. I remember reading the early reviews and hearing in the folk music circles that I was just starting to do my own gigs, hearing about this incredible guy coming out. This singing mailman who [*chuckles*—who had written these incredible songs. And I think “Sam Stone” was the first one I heard. And that masterpiece of a first album was just—I mean, how this guy could put—you know, bat it out of the park with every single song. And we became friends very soon after we saw each other’s shows at two different clubs in the Village. And then we went on to tour many, many decades later. Across the last, you know, four decades until I get to honor him at the Grammys and sing a little tribute for him for the lifetime achievement.

00:20:46 Music Music And then we, you know, performed “Angel” at the Americana Awards, right before he passed away. “Angel from Montgomery” performed live by John Prine and Bonnie Raitt.

*I am an old woman
Named after my mother
My old man is another
Child who's grown old*

*If dreams were thunder
And lightning were desire
This old house would've burned down
A long time ago*

*Make me an angel
That flies from Montgomery
Make me a poster
Of an old rodeo
Just give me one thing
That I can hold on to
To believe in this living
Is just a hard way to go*

00:21:48 Ray Host [*Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.*]
Another collaboration with the brilliant Hal Willner, who unfortunately also died of covid, was the *Stay Awake* album—one of a vast collection of compilations he did where you now got to play Dumbo’s mother.

[Bonnie confirms and they chuckle.]

00:22:21 Bonnie Guest And sing “Baby Mine”. And I get this feeling that you’re kind of a go-for-it person. [*Chuckles.*] That if somebody pitches you and says, “Hey, how about we do this thing?” You’re at least willing to give it a shot.

00:22:21 Bonnie Guest But only if it’s extremely well-suited to what I do and what my taste is, which is pretty particular. So, even though I’ve gotten a chance to do a lot of great stuff, I had to really like this song and really like the artist that I was gonna be collaborating with. And I love Hal Willner’s projects, and I love Disney music. I loved Tom Waits singing “Heigh Ho”. I mean, oh my god. NRBQ doing “Whistle While

You Work”, I think. And you know, it’s because Hal was surprised to hear that I loved *Was Not Was*, that my life-changing introduction to Hal, to Don Was—you know—and I was—no one was more surprised that Don was a fan of my early records. So, we made a friendship that was born out in *Nick of Time* and the subsequent three records after that.

And I only go where I really feel like I can fit in and uplift what’s going on. And I do the same thing with my live shows. I don’t open for anyone that I wouldn’t pay money to go see, and I don’t have anybody on the show that wouldn’t be a fan of mine and really be glad to—you know, discover.

00:23:34 Ray Host

When you’ve been writing for as long as you have, are there things that you did in the ’70s, the ’80s where—if it comes on the radio or just gets played somehow and you hear it and you think, “Well, that was me then. I’m not really interested in that. That’s the past.” Or are they kind of like children, where you don’t wanna pick a favorite one? They’re all your children. You have to kind of love them all. You’ve got such a big catalogue now.

[Bonnie thanks him.]

But I wonder if there’s things that you just say, “Well, maybe I wouldn’t do that today or I wouldn’t do it that way, but I don’t mind listening to it.” Or are you still kind of still invested in those old things?

00:24:19 Bonnie Guest

You know, most of the songs that I’ve recorded, even in the early records, I would still record now. There’s very few that I—you know, especially the covers of R&B, like “I Know” or “Let Me In” or “Runaway”—you know, Talking Heads “Burning Down the House”—I mean, any number of years I would—Robert Palmer’s “You’re Gonna Get What’s Coming”, Jackson Brown’s songs, John Prine songs. They’re all things I would’ve cut as the years—if I didn’t cut them back, then I would’ve done it on another record. So, the only thing I listen to sometimes and cringe at is the sound of how wimpy my voice was and too high.

[Ray laughs.]

Too high and thin. I tried so hard to age my voice with cigarettes and alcohol and just *[gruffly]* talking tough. And you know, I just could not get the blues mama persona going with the little round faced, redheaded, freckle faced, you know, Pippy Longstocking trying to be a blues mama. It just wasn’t working for me. But by the time I was 25 or 26, I thought I’d earned my stripes and the swagger was what I felt like inside. So, I have great affection for listening to the earlier records, ‘cause I remember who I was going out with at the time, and I loved the musicians, and I loved the songs and the songwriters. But my own performances, sometimes I’m a little harsh on.

[Music fades in.]

But you know, starting at about *Sweet Forgiveness*, when I did “Runaway”, I was kind of going, “Yeah, I’m starting to sound like what I feel like.”

00:25:52	Music	Music	"Runaway" from the album <i>Sweet Forgiveness</i> by Bonnie Raitt.
			<p><i>I'm a walking in the rain, tears are falling, and I feel a pain Wishing you were here by me to end this misery And I wonder, I wonder Why you ran away And I wonder if you will stay My little runaway, my runaway</i></p> <p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i></p>
00:26:46	Ray	Host	I'm glad you brought up "Runaway", because that's one of your breakout hits, very early on. And the original "Runaway", by Del Shannon, is such a different record. You didn't just sing it again to sing it again; you made it into a whole different thing. And some people at the time got a little annoyed at that.
00:27:07	Bonnie	Guest	Well, what I got feedback was from my musician friends. They said that was a really cool rearrangement from it, kind of like Al Green "Love and Happiness", which—I mean, you know, Al burst onto the scene not long before that, and I just was so knocked out by him. We were jamming on the <i>Homeplate</i> record in the studio. John Hall from Orleans and I. And I just started to sing "Runaway" over the "Love and Happiness" groove, and I went, "Okay, that's going on the next record."
			So, I love to rearrange older songs. I mean, Gerry Rafferty's song, "Right Down the Line", I immediately knew when I hadn't heard it in a few decades and I just went, "Wow, there's this reggae undercurrent. I'm gonna play it on my slide guitar and do it this way." And I told my band, so we cut it a couple albums ago. And you know, "Burning Down the House"—I love the Talking Heads. We did an In Excess song on the last record, called "Need You Tonight", which surprised people. But man, I've been waiting to do that for 30 years. So, my great joy is to rearrange older songs in my own style.
00:28:11	Ray	Host	Well, you've been playing the electric guitar for a very long time. And your guitar is actually known by your fans, it's so much a part of you. It's the extension of your arms. How does your relationship to an instrument change over time? Is it like a carpenter with a hammer and T-square? Or is it something a little bit more intimate than that?
00:28:40	Bonnie	Guest	You know, it's been the same since I learned the guitar when I was nine or ten. I played acoustic, and then when I got the electric and I played slide, it's just an extension of my musicality. I don't even think about it. I don't know if I'm any better at it than I used to be, because it's just another voice to me. My arms and fingers and hands just go to those things that I love to play, and my favorite thing is to find a new song and then lay my slide guitar over it in an interesting, unusual musical context of a reggae song or something with—we'll mix all kinds of different influences together, and then I put my slide on it like a voice. You know? So, I can't really say I think about what I'm doing. I don't work at it. I just strap it on and let it rip! <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
			Honestly, that's how I feel about it. It's just an extension of me.

00:29:37 Ray Host What keeps you going? What—when you sit down to write, when you sit down to plan ahead, what am I gonna do in 2023—is there—are there things that are still out there for you to hunt? Are there things that are still out there for you to accomplish? What is it that's the gas in the tank at this stage of the game?

00:30:04 Bonnie Guest For me, I start with being on tour, because I love it so much. I mean, I love playing live. Always will. There's nothing like it. Right below that is supporting the people in my band and crew and staff. They deserve to be making a living and having—even if it's really fun and it's hard work and it's—I feel a responsibility to keep those guys working. And right alongside is the sixth member of our band is my causes. You know? I'm singing for the tithing of my—whatever, a dollar a ticket and a good portion of auctioned off, scalping our own seats for charity, we call it. But it's just as much for social action groups. There are many, many grassroots groups that are working on toxics and plastics and safe energy and stopping nuclear plants and worker's rights and clean water and clean air and organic food and sustainable environmental policies and justice and amnesty. All of those causes as well as peace in Ukraine and assisting refugees all around and the climate crises.

There's never gonna be any stopping in my life as long as I can open my mouth and sing and raise some funds and attention for causes that I think are deserving of more support. And those guys don't have the big corporate bucks to buy the ads on TV. So, you know, the hard work of going door to door and the unpaid, incredible sacrifice of all the volunteers for all these groups around the world—Doctors Without Borders, international rescue committees, the aid workers everywhere that put their lives on the line—they all deserve our support. And if I can invite them to my show and tithe some of the income from there, that's my job this time around. I was raised that way, as a Quaker. And I'm really grateful to be able to use my voice responsibly, but also effectively.

00:32:09 Ray Host Do you have to take care of yourself in a little different way than you did when you were 25 or 35?

00:32:14 Bonnie Guest Oh, well I don't even think I had to take care of myself until *[chuckling]*—until I—you know, you kind of get away with that nighttime lifestyle until it doesn't work. In my mid-30s I was kind of puffy and not recovering from a cold as well. I didn't always remember the last two hours of the party the night before, of what I said. And you know, and I promised somebody they could manage me. I went, "You know, maybe I ought to rethink this drinking thing." And you know, everything worked until about 36 and I went, "You know what? I gotta get it together." And I basically changed my lifestyle to lose some weight, to go work with Prince who—as we know—is quite svelte and tiny. And I was kind of ballooning up there. And I said, "You know, if we sing a really sexy duet together, this is not gonna be believable. So, I better get my stuff together."

So, I initially quit drinking just to be able to get healthy and lose some weight. And I took to it, and I've been sober 35 years now. And I think that has a lot to do with why I love to be on the road and can do it this many years, because I take better care of myself. And I really enjoyed those first 17 years. I didn't play drunk or get messed up every day, but I mean, there was a lifestyle that eventually—you know, radio disk jockeys, bartenders, theatre

people, anybody that works at night, even journalists and radio journalists—we all go to shows at night, and at the end of the night when we're finished work, we're not like going to the gym and having milk. You know? So.

[Ray chuckles.]

00:33:51	Ray	Host	And now, we travel—
00:33:53	Bonnie	Guest	Yeah, I think I've—I think I've heard something about that. Yeah. So, I—you know, sobriety is a lot more okay this last couple of decades than it was in the beginning. It's not considered as lame or as moony and like, oh, you're—you know, you've been bitten by the Evangelical bug. You know. And it's not like that at all; it's just being a better version of yourself and it's never—you're never recovered. You have to work on it every day. And actually, one of the songs I'm most proud of on this new record is all about those ways that the devil can try to drag you down—your own demons of personality faults can keep sneaking up on you. Gotta be vigilant. And that song's called "Waitin' for You to Blow", in the spirit of Randy Newman and Mose Allison, I wrote a little wry kind of sardonic poke from the point of view of the devil on your shoulder.
00:34:42	Music	Music	"Waitin' for You to Blow" from the album <i>RECORD</i> by Bonnie Raitt. <i>Don't matter how much time you got It's still a slippery ledge Gotta keep an eye on every step When there's no more bets to hedge You can whine and boast, and cut and run You can fall down on your knees But if it ain't the full surrender, baby It's all the same to me</i> <i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i>
00:35:06	Jesse	Host	We've got so much more to get into with Bonnie Raitt and our pal, Ray Suarez. Stay with us. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:35:18	Promo	Clip	Music: Relaxed ukulele. Jesse Thorn: Hi, I'm Jesse Thorn, the founder of Maximum Fun. And I have a special announcement. I'm no longer embarrassed by <i>My Brother, My Brother and Me</i> . You know, for years, each new episode of this supposed advice show was a fresh insult, a depraved jumble of erection jokes, ghost humor, and—frankly this is for the best—very little actionable advice. But now, as they enter their twilight years, I'm as surprised as anyone to admit that it's gotten kind of good. Justin, Travis, and Griffin's witticisms are more refined, like a humor column in a fancy magazine. And they hardly ever say "bazinga" anymore. So, after you've completely finished listening to every single one of all of our other shows, why not join the McElroy brothers every week for <i>My Brother, My Brother and Me</i> ?
00:36:13	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

00:36:17 Jesse Host It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to Ray Suarez's conversation with the great Bonnie Raitt. Her Grammy award-winning latest album is called *And Just Like That*.

00:36:28 Ray Host Are you a "what might have been" person? 'Cause I look at your life and think, well, if she had hung in for two more years at Radcliff and graduated, life might have taken this course. If she had ended up working in a Ujamaa village in Tanzania in the 1970s, life might have taken this course. There were inflection points where things could've gone one way and they went another, and now that you have a good, long life to look back on, I wonder if you think, "Hm. You know, we are sort of the sum of our little accidents," or this is always the way it was gonna go.

00:37:14 Bonnie Guest Oh, I—you know, I have no idea what's gonna happen next, and I didn't at the time, but I don't regret one decision. You know, I am who I am now because of all the stumbles and falls and all the lucky breaks. I swear, I'm one of the luckiest people, 'cause I didn't pay dues as a musician. I just happened to be pretty good on the guitar, played blues guitar for myself, and I loved singing all these mixtures of songs. And somebody said, "Wow, what you're doing is really unusual, especially coming from where you're the daughter of John Raitt and growing up in LA. How did you get so funky?"

[They chuckle.]

And I just said, "Man, how did any of us fall in love with The Rolling Stones? How did The Rolling Stones fall in love with Muddy Waters?" Once you get that blues thing, you can't get rid of it. So, our whole generation fell in love with African American music, and as the generations that fell in love with swing and big band jazz got it from the Black artists that created the music in the turn of the century—the last century. We've all fallen in love with this music, and it's up to us to make sure that we have reparations and get those people paid and credit due where—you know, if you're gonna share in the music and celebrate it, make sure—that's why we did the Rhythm and Blues Foundation, to try to give some payback to people that didn't have the luxury of good lawyers and didn't have—weren't given the time where they were given the rights to have royalty participation.

00:39:18 Ray Host So, I know I'm digressing here, but to tell you the truth, I think I can do more good in the world for my causes that I care about than if I was working for the American Friends Service Committee in Tanzania. So, I knew how lucky I was to get a record deal on my terms, at 21. I mean, it's unheard of for me to say to an executive, "Don't ever tell me what to record or with whom or how often to record or what to look like. I'm not a singles artist and I don't wanna be a star." And they still signed me. That was incredible!

00:39:18 Ray Host *[Laughs.]* Yeah, I can imagine a bunch of executives who would've said, "Nah. She's got too many dos and don'ts. Forget it. We'll go with someone more pliable."

00:39:28 Bonnie Guest Well, Warner Brothers was an amazing record—the music business was different back then, but especially Warner Brothers. I mean, where else would Ry Cooder and Randy Newman and The Meters and Allen Toussaint and The Grateful Dead get a record deal. You know? It just—it was a fantastic time. FM radio was—you know, John Prine, all these artists that are so revered today, including—

you know—the benefits that I get to have of people respecting me and getting all these awards. That was just unheard of back then, but that’s not why we did it. We just did it. We were folkies and wanted to play a couple of festivals and do an honest to god livelihood of touring and playing live, which is what we love to do.

I wish John and Toots Hibbert from Toots and the Maytals hadn’t died from covid, and Hal Willner and Oliver Mtukudzi from Zimbabwe. So many people have passed on, and you know, I’m gonna be—as I wrote in my song on this record: I’m living for the ones that didn’t make it. I’ll keep living for them.

00:40:27 Music

Music

“Livin’ for the Ones” from the album *Just Like That* by Bonnie Raitt.

*I can barely raise my head off the pillow
Some days I never get out of bed
I start out with the best of intentions
And then shuck it instead*

*I don't think we'll get back how we use to
No use in trying to measure the loss
We better start getting used to it
And damn the cost*

*Go ahead and ask me
How I make it through
Only way I know is to
Keep*

*Living for the ones (ones who didn't make it)
Living for the ones (ones who didn't make it)
Keep living for the ones (ones who didn't make it)
Living for the ones*

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

00:41:16

Ray

Host

You mentioned your father several times now. I never saw him on Broadway. I was never lucky enough to see him onstage, but I did see him on TV a fair bit and singing Rodgers and Hammerstein classics. Why didn’t his experience turn you away from show business instead of toward it?

00:41:40

Bonnie

Guest

Oh, he loved what he did, and people loved him. I mean, he chose to not wait around for another Broadway show. He took his hits—*Carousel, Oklahoma, Pajama Game*—and went on the road and did regional theatre for 25 consecutive summers. And that’s what I grew up watching him just be ecstatic, have his days free, show up, put on a little—you know—makeup and go out there and have a blast and have people going nuts for him, and then get up the next day and play golf with somebody else, and then on Monday get in the bus and drive to the next city and set up and do it all over again. He never got tired of it. It was the great joy, and none of us—my brothers and I—could not believe that our dad got paid to play in front of people at night, basically.

00:42:27

Ray

Host

But also, away from home a lot and away from you.

00:42:30

Bonnie

Guest

Well, you know what? He was really home a lot! And except for the summer and when we were away at summer camp, that’s when he made his living. So, he really was around most of the year and most

00:42:59	Ray	Host	of the days. You know, we'd come home from school, he'd be washing the car. And so, we got a lot more of him than what a lot of people's dads do that are working in offices and have to stay late for work. So, he was just like one of the—he was like the fourth kid in our family, we felt like. You know? He was like a big kid.
00:43:03	Bonnie	Guest	Are you glad that you're not trying to break in now? Oh my god, I don't think I'd have the stomach for it. But on the other hand, there's so many great—because of the Americana format, which ironically includes a bunch of music that wasn't started in America—I mean, the only real Americana music is Native American music. So, go figure. You know. There's English, Irish, Scottish, Appalachian music was inspired by the British isles, and there's Romania and g-psy music and world music, African music that inspired the blues. So, either way, the reality is the Americana format makes it not urgent that you have a big hit record. You just play because you love it. And you can open up <i>No Depression</i> or <i>Performing Songwriter</i> or <i>Rolling Stone</i> or any of the music magazines and see scores of great, new artists or artists continuing to put record out after record out without any chance of making enough to even cover their expenses. And they're still sticking with it. You know?

So, I think if I really didn't wanna get a regular job, I would probably start playing in clubs and playing festivals and putting out my own little—you know, what's it called? Patreon? You know, you just sort of play over the internet.

[Ray affirms.]

00:44:22	Ray	Host	Yeah. I can't—I can't say what it—
00:44:24	Bonnie	Guest	It's like passing the hat, electronically. Yeah. I can't say whether I'd have the stomach to do it now, because—you know—I can't turn the clock back. So, I'm just glad to be able to celebrate that the music business—the roots of the music business is alive and healthy, and there's tons of festivals and fans that are appreciating all kinds of music that was ignored for so many years.
00:44:46	Ray	Host	Well, Bonnie Raitt, it's been a great joy to talk to you. Good luck in everything that's coming down the road and in getting back to work in front of actual, live, breathing people.
00:44:57	Bonnie	Guest	Thank you, Ray. It's been a pleasure and an honor. All the best.
00:45:02	Jesse	Host	Bonnie Raitt from last year. Her latest album is called <i>And Just Like That</i> . You can find it in stores now. Bonnie is on tour with gigs all over the US. We will have a link to dates on the <i>Bullseye</i> page at MaximumFun.org . Thanks to Ray Suarez for conducting that interview, especially because he did this one—and this is real!—from a hotel room in Shanghai at five o'clock in the morning, local time. That's a pro, folks. Ray has his own podcast: a memoir about his battle with cancer. It's called <i>The Things I Thought About When My Body Was Trying to Kill Me</i> . You can get it wherever you listen to podcasts.
00:45:39	Music	Transition	Chiming synth with light vocalizations.
00:45:43	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, the hail was so hard and heavy that it piled up on my sloped roof like a blizzard. It

was absolutely bananas! And now, it is like clear and warm outside. Los Angeles is very weird.

Our 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 booking help on the show from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is composed and provided to us by Dan Wally, AKA DJW. Our theme song is by the great band The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to Memphis Industries, their label, for letting us use that.

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

00:46:50 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]