

[00:00:00] **Music:** Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

[00:00:01] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[00:00:14] **Music:** “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

[00:00:21] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Okay, so if you're under 25—well, first of all, if you're under 25, congratulations on listening to NPR. You are, to me, a treasured jewel. I love you so much. Please keep listening. Second, if you're under 25, you probably know who Khalid is. He is a world-famous singer—millions of streaming plays millions of album sales. He plays to huge crowds. One time, at the Santa Monica pier, he drew a crowd so big that they stopped having shows there.

Khalid has worked with Kendrick Lamar. Imagine Dragons, Normani, just naming a few. And his sound is unique. They're not straight up dance tracks, but not a lot of ballads either. They're light and soulful, plainspoken and sincere. There's a little bit of maybe Bill Withers or Sade.

(Music fades in.)

Khalid's breakthrough single was called “Location”. It's one of the first songs he ever wrote.

[00:01:23] **Music:** “Location” from the album *American Teen* by Khalid. A dreamy track with a steady beat.

Send me your location

Let's focus on communicating

'Cause I just need the time and place to come through

(Place to come through)

Send me your location

Let's ride the vibrations

I don't need nothing else but you

(Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.)

[00:01:47] **Jesse Thorn:** That track dropped when he was 18. People assumed he was in his late 20s. You can kind of understand why. His voice has a certain grace. He sings like a

person who's seen stuff. When Khalid and I talked in 2019, he'd just dropped his sophomore album, *Free Spirit*. Before we get into the interview, let's hear a song from it: "Talk".

[00:02:11] **Music:** "Talk" from the album *Free Spirit* by Khalid. A bouncy, electric R&B track.

Can't we just talk?

Can't we just talk?

Talk about where we're going

Before we get lost

Let me out first

Can't get what we want without knowing

I've never felt like this before

I apologize if I'm moving too far

Can't we just talk?

Can't we just talk?

Figure out where we're going

Yeah

(Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.)

[00:02:42] **Jesse Thorn:** Khalid, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's great to have you on the show.

[00:02:44] **Khalid:** What's up? It's great to be here.

[00:02:46] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm glad you're still enjoying your new record. I can see you getting down a little bit over there.

[00:02:49] **Khalid:** *(Chuckles.)* Dancing over here. I love it.

[00:02:53] **Jesse Thorn:** I read an article where you were—you know, it was one of those like, "Khalid is eating a green salad across from me at the—" type articles. And you were headed off to dance rehearsal for your tour, with your backup dancers.

[00:03:09] **Khalid:** Oh, yes, yes, yes. I remember. I remember this day.

[00:03:11] **Jesse Thorn:** Are you a—are you a dancer?

[00:03:14] **Khalid:** Nooo.

(Jesse laughs.)

As much as I would like to be gifted in the art of dance, I am terrible. I think I'm terrible. My friends, like my dancer friends always hype me up, and they always have me dance when we're, you know, in my house in a safety zone.

(Jess laughs.)

And then, sometimes I get so like stage-high that I'm just like—I might like bust a dance move. And then, it goes on like Twitter and I look at it and I'm like, “Why did I just do that?”

(They laugh.)

[00:03:44] **Jesse Thorn:** You grew up with your mom, who was in the Army. She just recently retired. What places did you grow up in?

[00:03:53] **Khalid:** So, as far as I remember, I lived in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for a good amount. I was born in Fort Stewart, Georgia. I had—I moved overseas to Germany. I lived in Patrick Henry Village over in Heidelberg, Germany, for six years—which was amazing. Lived in Fort Drum. There's a lot of forts here. *(Laughs.)* And then, I lived in Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas. Fort Drum is in New York.

So, I've been all over, but you know, my recent memory only stems until like—I would say like first grade, and that's when I lived in Fort Campbell right before like my abrupt, intense like move overseas to Germany. Because when you're a kid and you're like—I didn't even know what Germany is. I'm thinking Germany's down the street, you know? My mom's like we're moving to Germany. Had no idea. So that when I moved over to Germany, I think it was just so intense, a lot of my memory beforehand was just like shot.

[00:04:51] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you have a sense of how your life as a kid was different from other people that lived in one place and went to regular schools and didn't go overseas?

[00:05:04] **Khalid:** Yeah. I grew to understand it. While I was in it, I didn't think of it, because it was all I knew. So, all of my friends were military kids. But when I left Germany, and I left this safety net, and I went to a public school—when I lived in New York—it was intense. It was almost like a culture shock, because I wasn't surrounded by people whose parents were sergeants and, you know—well, do you know what I mean? Like, we—there was more freedom, I feel like, in a public school. Because when you live on a military base, your—eyes are on you, and you represent your parents, so anything that you do could get them in trouble. But when you go to a public school, it's like no one really cares that your—

that your parents are in the military. (*Chuckles.*) You know what I mean? I do! I love being a military child. I loved it, but it was just a completely different experience outside of it.

[00:05:55] **Jesse Thorn:** Was your home as serious as I imagine?

[00:06:00] **Khalid:** No. My mom—even to this day, she's so relaxed. She's like my best friend. And her priority was making sure that we were okay wherever we were. And when she would get deployed, we'd get sent back home, overseas—back overseas, you know, to around like North Carolina with my grandparents. And it was a good time. It was what I knew. It was all I knew. And I loved the way my mom raised me. I think she raised me to be, you know, a very strong and definitely very based off of like independency and all of that, because that's what she did. And she's a fighter.

You know, being in the military, but not only having just one kid at home, but having two. Um, it's tough. Especially—I could never imagine how it would feel to be deployed and to be literally fighting a war, and your kids are back home, and you don't know what they're doing, and they don't know what you're doing. That stress, that anxiety that would come with it. I mean, the fact that my mom got through all of that, and we are where we are now is a blessing.

[00:07:08] **Jesse Thorn:** Was your mother deployed when you were a kid?

[00:07:10] **Khalid:** Yeah, multiple times. I mean, she even got stationed in North—not North Korea. (*Chuckles.*) She got stationed in South Korea while I was a kid, and I couldn't go with her. She was there for around a year. She got deployed to Afghanistan a couple of times. She was on the brink of getting deployed when I was a sophomore in high school. But then she didn't. They didn't need her. So, her MOS became—her MOS switched. She became a vocalist, but she went in, and she was supply. So, then they didn't need a vocalist out there, so she stayed home.

[00:07:47] **Jesse Thorn:** Your mom was a vocalist in an army band.

(*Khalid confirms.*)

What did she sing?

[00:07:53] **Khalid:** She sang mezzo Soprano. So, she has a pretty high range. And she's amazing. Her tone, her pitch is just—it's unbelievable still to this day. Every time I listen to her sing when she does, which is more rare than—you know, I'm not usually around her, and we don't really talk about music when we're with each other, because it's my life now. But hearing her sing, her voice is just literally the best.

[00:08:18] **Jesse Thorn:** Did she sing songs you knew when you were a kid? I don't know what—I mean, what do they—what does the Army band sing? “Battle Him in the Republic” or something?

[00:08:26] **Khalid:** (*Chuckles.*) Nah, she was in a cool band. They sang, you know, songs—they did like this Queen set that they used to always do. They used to sing current songs too, from that time. My mom would always ask me, she's like, “What are you listening to on the radio right now? What's new?” And they would like implement it into their set and everything, and it was super cool. And the locals loooved them. They loved them. You'd just see, you know, everyone—Germans and Americans—just all just drinking beer, getting twisted, just listening to my mom sing. And I'm looking at it.

And for me, I like—I should have appreciated that more, because since I saw it every single day, I think I grew tired of it. I was like, (*exasperated*) “Oh my god. Alright, Mom.”

My mom's like, “Do you wanna come to my show?”

I'm like, “Mom, I went to a hundred shows. I'm 12. What am I gonna do? I'm gonna be so bored.” But now that I look at it and I'm like, wow, my mom is always willing to go to a show of mine. She will take a flight to go wherever to go see me perform. And I really love that about us now in life. (*Laughs.*)

[00:09:35] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you sing in school or in church or at home?

[00:09:38] **Khalid:** I tried to. I'd sing in the choir. In middle school, I actually joined my first choir in eighth grade. Through puberty, as a kid, I used to love to sing. I sang like all of my life, because of my mom, of course. But when my voice started changing, I thought it was over. I'm like, “Oh, this is it. I have no more singing in me!” Like all these dreams that I have as this kid, I'm like, “oh my God, they're over!”

My eighth—when I went into choir my eighth grade year, my teacher that I had—and I don't remember her name, I'm sorry—but she pushed me through the cracking of my voice and was like, “You gotta push for it. You gotta just try.” And I'm glad that she told me to do that, because now it's my job, and I get to do it like every single day. But it was definitely because of that teacher pushing me through my puberty voice that I'm doing what I'm doing now, and I love it.

[00:10:35] **Jesse Thorn:** Much more to get into with Khalid. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:10:42] **Music:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:10:42] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guest is Khalid. He's on the road right now with Ed Sheeran. Let's get back into our conversation.

What was the first really big show that you played?

[00:11:00] **Khalid:** The first really big show that I played was on the Santa Monica pier. And the turnout was supposed to be around like, you know—5,000/7,000, literally 50,000+ people show up to the Santa Monica pier. 50,000+. I don't wanna say 60,000. But was up there, and

it was so bad that they literally—I'm the reason that they can't do any shows on the pier ever again. And there were news crews. There was like this big riot. There was like a stampede, and it was amazing. And I loved—I loved it. And it gave me a different insight on performing and seeing all those people who didn't make it onto this pier—the part of the pier that like held like—what?—3,000 and so people, the people who float over and were on the beach and just sat with their friends.

And I still meet people to this day who told me that they were there. I think that that's amazing, and that's one of my favorite shows I've ever done in my entire career. And I was not the performer that I look at myself as right now, but I feel like that experience was just—that's when I knew that my life was on the path of just something way, way bigger. (*Chuckles.*) Way bigger, way bigger.

[00:12:36] **Jesse Thorn:** It seems to me like one of the challenges of being a performer is that your relationship with the audience is so fundamentally out of scale, because you are—no matter what—performing to many more people than you are. And in a way, you are—you desperately want to have this bilateral relationship with each person there. There's no way to manage that in a room of 200, much less a room of 2,000 or 10,000.

(*Khalid agrees.*)

And like they're giving you something that feels really good and important, but then you also feel like you owe them something. And you're not sure how to give it to them. And I've read stories about you like stepping off of the stage to try and give somebody a hug or something. But like, you can't give a thousand people a hug. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:13:36] **Khalid:** Everybody a hug. Same with like phones. You know, I try to pick up phones and record the show from my—from my perspective. And then you get phones thrown on the stage, and I'm dodging phones now. You know?

I understand that I can't impact everybody individually, but knowing the fact that there's something in me that drew all of these people to that room for the time being—an hour to an hour and 30—it's just crazy. I feel like that relationship that I have with my fans is the best relationship. Knowing that all though the energy is very intense, and I'm, you know, receiving it very heavily—especially, how can you not look at someone crying to your song, to the lyrics of your song, in front of your face and not be impacted and not be affected?

I realized that I have that relationship with them, but then I look at myself like, “Okay, all of this energy that I have, I'm going to try my best to exert it and to give it to you, knowing that we have something that's reciprocated. And if I need a little bit of extra or whatever, then I'm gonna get that from my friends.”

My friends are—they go to every show. I don't think I've ever done one show where I didn't have two to three friends standing on the side of the stage. And a couple of my friends I gave jobs, and now they work on the production end of my show. And so, now it's our experience. And that gives me that energy to go out there and to want to speak and to wanna—(*chuckles*) I'm not gonna stage dive or anything like that, so I'll step down now. I'll touch a couple hands if I need to. It is upsetting that I can't touch every single hand, but at least hopefully I touch

everybody in their heart. You know. Not to be cliché, but I hope people are going there to my show and leaving fulfilled and full.

[00:15:34] **Jesse Thorn:** I feel like for me, the hardest part is when I interact with someone who has a really deep emotional connection to something that I've done. I'm very grateful for it. And I—like, I'm proud of my work. But I also, in that moment, feel like a total fraud or imposter. Like, I'm like, “I didn't—I'm just trying to do my job. I can't—” It scares me to be responsible for that.

[00:16:02] **Khalid:** It's so cool that you said that, because I was at home, and I was Facetimeing one of my friends. And I was checking my notifications, and I saw, you know, an abundance of positive comments and hearts and smiley faces and “I love Khalid”s and everything. And I'm like, wow, there's people in this world who are geared to me, who probably have my notifications on, who love me. Who really love me, who really feel a connection with me and my music, who've probably met—who have met me, have probably touched me or hugged me. There's people out there who are very dedicated to being beside me throughout the music and who want to help me and who don't want me upset.

And that's a lot! It's a lot to know that there's—because in an average lifetime, you know, you meet a couple of people who you have a strong relationship with and that—you know—you impact and that love you.

[00:17:00] **Jesse Thorn:** I could do like four at a time.

[00:17:01] **Khalid:** Yeah. But now it's like 4,000,000 at a time, in their own right. You know, probably have posters of things that I've signed just on their walls, and they love it, and they look at it, and it gets them about their day. It's almost like, am I worthy of all of that? To myself, I'm like, wow. It's—am I actually worth all of these people? You know? Because sometimes I feel like I'm on autopilot, and I act like I know what I'm doing, but in reality I don't. (*Laughs.*)

And so, people are watching me, and they're like—they love that I did this. “How did you do it?” And sometimes it's just like, how did—? How did I do this? How has my—how has my life become this in three years? It sounds ridiculous, and it's my life, and I'm grateful, and I'm appreciative that it is that way, but it's always insane to look back. I'm like I graduated high school in 2016.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

This is—this is just on a completely different level than that.

[00:18:05] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. That's pretty intense for me. I'm class of '99. You're making me feel super old. Super old.

(*Khalid laughs.*)

When did you start writing songs?

[00:18:15] **Khalid:** I wrote my first song that I finished in 2015. It was in August 2015.

[00:18:22] **Jesse Thorn:** That's like *(laughing)* four years ago!

[00:18:24] **Khalid:** Yeah. Nuts!

[00:18:26] **Jesse Thorn:** Not even four years ago!

[00:18:27] **Khalid:** Nnnuts. And that song—it was—it's so crazy, 'cause my best friend is out there right now. He was with me when I was in the booth doing this like freestyle song. We threw it on SoundCloud. It was just gonna be our thing. Then, people found out about it in school, and there was this big demand. But then, you know, obviously there's like a couple of haters, and this is the first time I'm experiencing any of this. So, I'm more geared to the people who hate me. I'm like, "Why?" *(Laughs.)* "What did I do?!" But instead of letting that affect me and, you know, stopping me, I feel like it gave me energy and courage. Like, okay, you know what? You don't think that I can do this? I really, really believe that I can do this, so I'm going to do this.

And then, that song that came after that was this song called "Saved", uh, which made it onto my debut album, and it's one of my favorite songs I performed ever. The way that I look at the song kind of changes a little bit with age, 'cause it's like a time marker. It's like this—it's my own personal time capsule of music. And I'm like, oh my—any song that I made around that time, I'm like, "Oh my god." I had no clue of what I really wanted to do or—you know what I mean?—or what sounds that I could have done better. And I always—you always hear things that you could have added, or you could have taken away.

But I think the beauty behind it is that it's so raw and it's so me at 17. And I loved my year at 17. I loved my senior year of high school. And I've had a pretty good year. I'm on a roll. *(Chuckles.)* Up until—you know, now, I don't know what's gonna happen in the future, but I've had a pretty good time growing as a musician while my music grows as well.

[00:20:18] **Jesse Thorn:** Let's hear my guest, Khalid, and the song "Saved" from his first album, *American Teen*.

[00:20:24] **Music:** "Saved" from the album *American Teen* by Khalid. A dreamy track with a steady beat.

The hard part always seems to last forever

Sometimes I forget that we aren't together

Deep down in my heart, I hope you're doing alright

But from time to time, I often think of why you aren't mine

(Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.)

[00:20:56] **Jesse Thorn:** What was it like for you, your senior year of high school, to show up for school in El Paso? That's when you moved, right?

(Khalid confirms.)

From New York to El Paso, to show up for school and be like, “Uh, hey guys. New guy here, I'll only be here for nine months.” *(Laughs.)*

[00:21:13] **Khalid:** Right, right. It was crazy! For me, it was something that, obviously as a teenager, no one's gonna wanna do. Who wants to move their senior year? You spent three years making all these memories with all these people, and it's just like, “Well, were any of these memories worth it? They're all just going away. I'm not gonna graduate with them. I'm not gonna turn my tassel or anything.”

So, I was a little upset that I had to move to El Paso, but I was very naive. And then, I moved there, and my senior year was one of my most life-changing—literally, of course—life-changing years of my whole entire life. And I loved it. And I made a best friend who's with me right now to this day my senior year. But I always thought I'm like—for me, would always kind of—made me a little timid or upset and kind of pushed me away from making too many friendships. I was just like, “These people have spent three years getting to know each other. They already got each other figured out, at this point. They're not gonna get to know me in one year. You're gonna need one—you're gonna need more than a year to get to know me and who I am. So where does that leave me?”

And seeing people in social gatherings, they had their cliques and their groups, and they were solid, and they were cool. I'm like, “Me being in their group isn't going to impact them in any way, and it's not gonna take away if I'm not.” And that was the mindset I had, and it was the wrong mindset. I really should have enjoyed making friends my senior year, because now that I go back home, I barely have anybody to talk to, because all of my friends—I took them on the road with me! *(Chuckles.)* And you know, they stay with me, or they're graduating and they're going into school, and they're doing what they gotta do.

So, it's interesting to look back at it, but I mean, everything happens for a reason. That's just things that I needed to go through, to grow and to change my mindset on. Who do I let in my life and who do I keep out?

[00:23:17] **Jesse Thorn:** I feel like you had a plan. Like, the reverse version of a high school horror movie, where you had like an “I'll show them” plan, but it was like a—it was a positive “I'll show them”, instead of pigs' blood on them.

(They laugh.)

It was, “I'm gonna write a song and put it on SoundCloud, and—”

[00:23:40] **Khalid:** Oh my god. It literally—when I think about the story, and I recite it, it literally sounds like a movie, like a cliché, coming of age—you know.

[00:23:53] **Jesse Thorn:** What's crazy about it is not that you tried to do it; what's crazy about it is that it worked! (*Laughs.*)

(*Khalid agrees.*)

Like, plenty of people who are a senior in high school in difficult circumstances are like, “Ooh, I'll show them.” And you did! (*Stammering.*) You wrote a hit song!

[00:24:10] **Khalid:** I know. It was—it's a blessing. It's amazing that I did it. And I look back and I'm like I can see why people, you know, would think—and because when I was coming up, you know, out of 2016/2017, everybody thought it was fabricated. They were like, “What is this? Like there's no way this kid is 19 years old. He has a full-grown beard. He's 27. Has to be. He's not as young as he's saying that he is.”

[00:24:38] **Jesse Thorn:** You're a huge man, also. It's worth noting you're a big man. I think you're probably bigger than me, and I'm about as big as it gets.

[00:24:44] **Khalid:** (*Laughs.*) Right. So, I could understand. I could see it, but nah. That's—it is my life, and it is the interesting life that played out very, very weird and—you know, it's not a normal life, but I love it, and I love everything that I went through to get to the point that I am now.

[00:25:04] **Jesse Thorn:** More with Khalid after the break. Still to come: wanna hear him freestyle? 'Cause he's got bars! It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:25:15] **Promo:**

Music: Ominous, low, rumbling tones.

John Hodgman: They can be anywhere. At your office, in your car. And they. Are. Wrong.

Speaker 1: My mom says that the Grey House didn't exist, but she's wrong!

Speaker 2: He just does it wrong.

Jesse Thorn: Someone in your life is wrong about something. Something small, something weird, something vitally important. Only one person has the courage to tell them just how wrong they are.

John: You know what you did was wrong, but your daughter is a liar who eats garbage.

(*They laugh.*)

Music: Instantly transitions to a relaxed, bouncy synth.

John: They call me Judge John Hodgman. Listen to me on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

Jesse: If someone in your life is doing you wrong, don't just take it. Take it to court. Submit your case at MaximumFun.org/jjho.

(Three gavel bangs.)

[00:25:59] **Music:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:26:04] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. I'm talking with singer-songwriter Khalid. He's had a bunch of chart-topping singles, two albums, and he was on the *Black Panther* soundtrack. You can catch him right now on tour with Ed Sheeran.

One of the interesting things to me about your music is that you're very emotional on your records, but this—the sound has a real reserve to it.

(Khalid agrees.)

And listening to your new album, I wondered if there was like a future where you have a—you know, “No Parking on the Dance Floor”, word-up type song. *(Laughs.)*

[00:26:45] **Khalid:** Oh my god.

[00:26:46] **Jesse Thorn:** Like if your—there's a couple cuts that are like a little more jams. But like, is there a get-down song in your future? Or for that matter, a big—like a wide-open ballad. Like, a big, wide-open ballad. Because it's—you're sooo... it's so beautiful, but—and it's sooo particular, your aesthetic. And it doesn't give too much.

[00:27:14] **Khalid:** Yeah. For me, there's definitely like an alternate like recording life that I do of songs that just don't come out, that just never come out. And I always joke with my friends, and I'll rap, and we'll put on a beat in the house, and I'll rap. And it's—you know, it's funny. But it's still kind of like, “Okay, wait, you can tell that he makes music.” You know? But it's nothing—it's nothing serious.

[00:27:41] **Jesse Thorn:** It's not just, *(rhythmically)* “My name's Khalid and I'm here to say—”

[00:27:43] **Khalid:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. You know what I mean? Like—

[00:27:44] **Jesse Thorn:** “I love to rap in a major way.”

[00:27:45] **Khalid:** Exactly, exactly. It's not that. There's thought behind it, but even if I'm joking, there's still thought. And I've thought about it, but I don't know. I feel like for me—when I make music, it's all about creating what I want to create in the moment and finding out about myself, musically. And the music that I'm making, I would've never been able to

make three years ago. And so, I don't know where this path of music is taking me. Right now, it's very—you know, I feel like I'm a very mellow guy. I think I'm very like chill and easygoing, and I feel like my music reflects that. And what goes to say that my personality intensifies and I'm like, you know, “I gotta—I gotta make something like this.”

I wouldn't limit myself. I wouldn't say that I would be bad at it. I just feel like it is just nothing that I would wanna do right now, unless it was a collaboration with someone else. I just feel like I would not be able to take myself seriously if I started rapping on a track and, you know, getting everybody hype at the club. ‘Cause I don't even go to the club anyway! I'm always at home just chilling, you know? Just chilling, smoking, vibing, just living. And I—you know, I feel like I definitely make music that resembles who I am right now.

[00:29:06] **Jesse Thorn:** I was at a kid's birthday party the other day and there was this guy wearing a Sade t-shirt.

[00:29:11] **Khalid:** Oh my god. I love Sade.

[00:29:12] **Jesse Thorn:** And I went up to talk to him, and we talked for probably 20 minutes about how the best thing about being a grownup is how much you get Sade.

[00:29:23] **Khalid:** Oh my God! Of course.

[00:29:24] **Jesse Thorn:** Like, when I was like 16, I was like, “This is the boring-est thing in history! Why won't this beautiful woman sing a fun song?”

(They laugh.)

And now I'm like, “Oh, this is the greatest thing that's ever been recorded.”

[00:29:36] **Khalid:** Oh my god, of course. I love Sade. I love her wistfulness. I love her—how you hear serenity in her voice and how it gives you this sense of peace, and it's so quiet and soft but still has so much effect. Especially—like, the production feels like water drops in the back. You know? And just—I love her so much, and she's amazing. And I think that she inspires me a lot when I try to sing soft (*laughs*) and sing at different tone. I always—I always think about Sade.

[00:30:12] **Jesse Thorn:** I think that something that your music shares with Sade's is—you know, there are parts of the aesthetic that are entirely different. I mean, you know, she's got a—she's got a band, and you know, there's a jazzier sound. Your sound is much more synthesized. But you also both live in a place that's like one step to the left of R&B—like Sade usually gets classified as an R&B singer, but it's not that R&B-y.

And your music too, like your music has—sounds as much like a pop song from 1986 as it sounds like a Beyonce track or whatever. And I feel like that must be a choice on your part.

[00:31:00] **Khalid:** (*Laughs.*) Yeah. I love it. I love like the late '80s, the early '90s. That's what I grew up off of, listening to music in the household with my mom. That's all she would play. And I love that whole vibe, and I love that energy that it gives you. And especially with *Free Spirit*, I felt like as my shows are growing, I want to have that energy that I could imagine myself seeing. Like, I want that anthemic, you know, that stadium, that singing. I want everyone to be able to sing my songs, and I want everyone to experience what I'm feeling singing these songs. And I want everyone to feel free and to have fun and to throw their arms in the air, and—you know, and just let go. And I feel like that's what I think about when I record. And when I make music, I always think about, “Okay, how are—what are they—what are they hearing?”

And I test it with my friends. I'm like, okay, how are my friends going to react to the music that I'm making right now? And I feel like I love that. And you know, this year—going on my first worldwide arena tour—I'm gonna live with my music in a completely different way, and then it'll change the music that I make. Because I'm gonna see—as an artist, I'm gonna see what they receive and what they respond to.

[00:32:28] **Jesse Thorn:** I feel really strongly that everybody who admits that they rap on my show who are not rappers should probably rap on my show.

[00:32:37] **Khalid:** (*Chuckling.*) Ooh my God.

[00:32:38] **Jesse Thorn:** This is coming right out of my speaker. It's the instrumental from “Grindin’” by the Clipse. Sort of a standard—

[00:32:43] **Music:** “Grindin’” by the Clipse vamps on the instrumental.

[00:32:44] **Khalid:** Alright. Alright. (*Laughs.*) On the spot. (*Settling into a rhythm.*) Alright. Alright. Yeah, yeah.

Chilling in LA

I'm from Kelly

But I'm not from the Bay.

I don't know

I say, “Yeah, I'm from GA,” Georgia

I'm so important

Whips so imported

I don't even know

I just know I gotta pour it

Oh, you see the drip? Yeah, you see that water flowing?

Flowing, said, "I'm wavy," yeah

I'm wavy like the ocean.

Wow.

(Returning to speaking.) Alright. I'm good. *(Laughs.)*

[00:33:12] **Jesse Thorn:** This is—this is incredible courage, Khalid! *(Applauding.)* I'm deeply grateful to you. Deeply grateful to you. Deeply grateful to the Neptunes for the beat there.

[00:33:20] **Khalid:** *(Laughing.)* Straight freestyle!

[00:33:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Thank you very much, Khalid.

[00:33:26] **Khalid:** *(Giggling.)* I had to, I had to.

[00:33:27] **Jesse Thorn:** That's how—that's how I know you're a star. You're ready to go! You're ready to do this! Off the dome!

[00:33:32] **Khalid:** Freestyle! And none of it probably made sense at all. It was—

[00:33:34] **Jesse Thorn:** Off. The. Dome. It was very bad—

(Khalid laughs.)

But as you said! As you said, Khalid, it was better than most!

[00:33:42] **Khalid:** Oh my God. Better than most!

[00:33:44] **Jesse Thorn:** I can tell you're a professional musician, as you pointed out. *(Laughs.)*

[00:33:47] **Khalid:** Kind of—it was strongly okay.

(Jesse agrees with a laugh.)

[00:33:50] **Khalid:** Strongly okay. That's what I like to keep my rap bars at. Strongly okay.

[00:33:55] **Jesse Thorn:** Khalid, thank you so much for joining me on *Bullseye*. It was so nice to meet you. Thanks for your beautiful record.

[00:33:58] **Khalid:** Yeah, thank you man. (*Chuckles.*) Thanks for having me.

[00:34:02] **Jesse Thorn:** Khalid. He's on tour right now. You can get some tickets to see him in—I don't know, giant stadiums?—with Ed Sheeran.

[00:34:11] **Music:** Relaxed piano with a steady beat.

[00:34:13] **Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun in and around greater Los Angeles, California. This afternoon here in Los Angeles, it seems to have finally become summer, because it is very hot in my house.

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

Bullseye is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Follow us in all those places. We share our interviews there. We hope that you will share our interviews with others. Tell somebody about *Bullseye*. It means a lot to us when you do. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[00:35:19] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

(*Music fades out.*)