

[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](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

[00:00:14] **Music:** “The Oogum Boogum Song” from *The Last Days of Disco* by Brenton Wood.

*One, two, one, two, three!*

*(Music continues under the dialogue.)*

[00:00:24] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. There are songs that just work for basically everyone, that give you some particular feeling—vibrant and specific. Pursuant to this, I submit to you “The Oogum Boogum Song”.

[00:01:01] **Music:** “The Oogum Boogum Song” by Brenton Wood.

*Oogum, oogum, boogum, boogum*

*Boogum now, baby, you're casting your spell on me*

*I say, Oogum, oogum, boogum, boogum*

*Boogum now, baby, you're casting your spell on me*

*You' got me doing funny things like a clown*

*Just look at me*

*(Music continues under the dialogue.)*

[00:01:03] **Jesse Thorn:** Silly title, obviously. Silly lyrics also. But there's something about the feeling—that almost playful falsetto, the drums bouncing along, the jangly guitar.

[00:01:18] **Music:** “The Oogum Boogum Song” by Brenton Wood.

*When you wear your high heeled boots with your hip hugger suit*

*It's all right, you're out of sight*

*And you wear that cute mini skirt with your brother's sloppy shirt*

*I admit it, girl, that I can dig it*

*Well, then I says...*

*(Music continues under the dialogue.)*

[00:01:36] **Jesse Thorn:** It is genuinely hard to be in a bad mood after you hear “The Oogum Boogum Song”. In fact, it's probably not worth the effort. Better to just kick your feet up, have a nice tea and breathe easy for a minute.

[00:01:53] **Music:** “The Oogum Boogum Song” by Brenton Wood.

*You got me doing funny things like a clown*

*Just look at me*

*When you wear your bell bottom pants*

*I just stand there in a trance...*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:02:07] **Jesse Thorn:** The song was released in 1967. Its singer, my guest Brenton Wood. Brenton wrote it too. He's also responsible for the hit songs “Gimme a Little Sign” and “Me and You.” We'll hear those later on. Now, Wood—as I said—had some hits. That song, “The Oogum Boogum Song”, went to number 34. You've probably heard it sometime in a movie or a grocery store or something. But more than that, he had a sound—that sweetness and lightness, the bounce, the cool. That sound helped define what these days are called lowrider oldies. In the big wide world, he's a guy who had a few minor hits. In the world of *East Side Story* compilations and dropped Chevy Fleetlines, Brenton Wood is basically Bruce Springsteen.

I saw Wood in concert a few months ago, and it wasn't at a jazz club or some performing arts center on a college campus. He was headlining an arena, literally thousands of fans, every age, almost all Chicano there to see an intergenerational touchstone. The man is in his 80s now, and he absolutely has still got it. If you can, you should go see him live. He's currently wrapping up his farewell tour. The tour is named after another one of his hits, *Catch You on the Rebound*. I'm so excited to talk with Brenton Wood, who is a true legend. Let's get into our conversation.

[00:03:41] **Music:** “I Think You've Got Your Fools Mixed Up” from the album *Oogum Boogum* by Brenton Wood.

*I think you got your fools mixed up*

*You must think I'm somebody else*

*I'm not the same fool you knew*

*That couldn't help himself*

*And followed you around like a dog*

*Strung on a chain...*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:04:04] **Jesse Thorn:** Brent Wood, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show.

[00:04:07] **Brenton Woods:** Thank you very much. It's my pleasure.

[00:04:09] **Jesse Thorn:** You sound like a million dollars. You were giving us your best Barry White before you came on the air.

[00:04:14] **Brenton Woods:** *(Laughs.)* That's because I just woke up. I woke up not too long ago.

[00:04:20] **Jesse Thorn:** *(Chuckles.)* My mom used to—my mom used to call and say, “It's the muffled tones of Barry White.”

[00:04:25] **Brenton Woods:** He had a great sound. I mean, everybody don't sound like him. That's how he became a lover's choice with that music.

[00:04:34] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, Brenton, you have always sung sweetly. Was Sam Cooke your guy?

[00:04:42] **Brenton Woods:** Sam Cooke gave me a lot of pointers in what I was doing and interested in. I found out that the diction of annunciation on songs, understanding what the word was, what the artist said, kind of gave me a good insight on trying to make myself clear and understood.

[00:05:04] **Jesse Thorn:** I know what you mean when you say that. Your singing style is very carefully enunciated, and it kind of gives you the—it feeds into the kind of lightness of your singing. The—you know, the feeling that you could almost float away. You know what I mean?

[00:05:20] **Brenton Woods:** *(Laughs.)* Yeah, they've been floating. I was kind of fortunate with that, but you know, I was—I had to teach myself all, everything that I needed to know, except for how to get the money.

*(They laugh.)*

[00:05:36] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you sing in the neighborhood when you were a kid or in your family?

[00:05:39] **Brenton Woods:** Every day I walk down the street! Every day I'm singing. Every day at work I'm singing. Every—I mean, yeah. I did it in the neighborhood, but I'd never been on the stage before I got a hit record.

[00:05:51] **Jesse Thorn:** You were one of 11 kids, right?

[00:05:53] **Brenton Woods:** Yes. 13, but two died. Damn.

[00:05:58] **Jesse Thorn:** How did you all sleep in the house?

[00:06:02] **Brenton Woods:** (*Laughs.*) Well, it was kinda rough, because we had only a two-bedroom house. And with 11 of us in there, you know, plus a friend that liked to stay over there too.

[00:06:14] **Jesse Thorn:** So, where did you—where did everybody go?

[00:06:17] **Brenton Woods:** Remember, they doubled up on beds. You know? The ladies in the room and—ladies' room and guys in the guys' room.

(*They laugh.*)

Yeah. And one bathroom.

[00:06:31] **Jesse Thorn:** Where were you in the order of the kids?

[00:06:32] **Brenton Woods:** I'm number seven.

[00:06:34] **Jesse Thorn:** Did your siblings sing?

[00:06:38] **Brenton Woods:** Not that I knew of. My family actually didn't know I was singing. I was really actually going through the changes, studying. I got my academics in Hollywood. You know? Reading the trade papers and following the music scenes and following music progress.

[00:06:58] **Jesse Thorn:** How old are we talking about that you're reading trades?

[00:07:02] **Brenton Woods:** Oh, 15, 16.

[00:07:07] **Jesse Thorn:** You know, I talked to Smokey Robinson the other day for the show, and he told me the same thing. He was talking about being 13, 14, 15 years old and buying *Hit Parade* so that he could get the songwriting credits on the hit songs. I said that is not a typical thing for a 14-year-old to be up to. You know what I mean?

[00:07:31] **Brenton Woods:** Yeah. It is not, but you know—you know, I was—we were so poor, and like I was saying, there were 11 people—that I was a real hustler at a young age.

Young age. I was really—I'd say about 12 years old; I was into school until I heard piano. On the stage—I ended up playing the recreational center. They had a stage and a basketball court. And this person was on the stage singing the—playing the piano. And I wondered what the heck that was. (*Laughs.*) When you're at that age, it's like, "Oh, what is—what is a piano?" But we didn't have that type of piano. We didn't have a piano in our house at all. Wasn't enough room.

[00:08:25] **Jesse Thorn:** So, how did you learn?

[00:08:27] **Brenton Woods:** I practiced, and I practiced, and I watched him play, and I watched him play. And when he finished, I got up and I tried the same thing he did, but my hands weren't big enough. So, I had to do a two-finger harmony from, you know, C, D.

[00:08:47] **Jesse Thorn:** Was there someone to teach you or somewhere to learn in the neighborhood?

[00:08:50] **Brenton Woods:** You know, there were places to learn, but you know, I was just learning about that and the radio station. I wanted to do what they were doing on the radio. I had a good—I wanted to be—(*chuckling*) I wanted to be rich. I wanted to be somebody that was making some money, because Pop didn't make too much money back then with 11 kids and \$45 a week. Some days he had to bring home jackrabbits. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:09:18] **Jesse Thorn:** You mean to eat?

[00:09:19] **Brenton Woods:** Of course. I was just like the birds. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:09:25] **Jesse Thorn:** Was there always all the food you needed?

[00:09:28] **Brenton Woods:** Uh, well, no.

[00:09:34] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Beat.*) What would happen when there wasn't enough to eat?

[00:09:36] **Brenton Woods:** Well, that's where my neighbor—my friends caught heck with me, because I would eat over to their house, 'cause I knew there wasn't gonna be anything there when I got home. So, I would eat over there, and I'd leave that—use their telephone and their piano. And I'd write—you know, I'd just write. And her son used to—we used to sing together. We did a song together by a neighborhood producer. And so, that was it. But I didn't think anything would come out of it until I see the uprising of that stuff that I did in the early years, up and changed over and—you know, and made my—today's—made it sound today's, and then they released it.

[00:10:25] **Jesse Thorn:** What were you singing when you were a kid? Was it doowop going on?

[00:10:29] **Brenton Woods:** You know, when I was a kid, I used to watch a lot of cowboy movies. I used to watch Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy. (*Chuckles.*) All the singing cowboys. It used to make me feel different.

[00:10:44] **Music:** “If It Wasn’t for the Rain” by Gene Autry.

*If it wasn't for the rain I might have found somebody new*

*And I'd be crying over you, if it wasn't for the rain*

*We're together once again, and now we'll never, ever part*

*I might have had a broken heart, if it wasn't for the rain*

*(Thunder clap.)*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:11:18] **Brenton Woods:** So, I—you know, had to get into that really heavy with those soap—with those operas. Soap operas. Well, they’re not soap operas. They were like “to be continued” tomorrow or next week. Did so-and-so get out of that situation that he was in? Tune in next week! (*Laughs.*) You know, and stuff like that. I used to—they used to give me nightmares, because I was always going up the cliff with him. (*Laughs.*)

[00:11:51] **Jesse Thorn:** So, are you telling me that you were sitting around singing “Happy Trails”?

[00:11:55] **Brenton Woods:** Yes. “Happy Trails” and everything pertaining to. I was more country, more—so to speak.

[00:12:05] **Jesse Thorn:** So, how close did you become—how close did you come to becoming a singing cowboy? That's what I need to know!

[00:12:12] **Brenton Woods:** Well, you know, first I had to make some money, 'cause I could have become a cowboy. Because I used to love Eddie Dean and those cowboys and stuff like that. And they really sent me on an adventure. And I had a—I mean, that was my favorite pastime was watching those soap operas—or what’d they call them?

[00:12:35] **Jesse Thorn:** Serials?

[00:12:36] **Brenton Woods:** Serials. I was into serials really heavy.

[00:12:40] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you have radio or records at your house?

[00:12:43] **Brenton Woods:** We had radio and records, you know. “No More Dogging.” All that early stuff in the ’50s.

[00:12:52] **Jesse Thorn:** What do you remember listening to?

[00:12:54] **Brenton Woods:** Lloyd Price, Big Mama Thornton, Eddie James up in the ’50s, ’60s. And a lot of Sam Cooke and a lot of Nat King Cole, Jesse Belvin. My style is actually out of Jesse Belvin’s music, because he had such a romantic thing going about him in his songs. Nat King Cole was really a good annunciator, in his annunciation and the way he handled a song.

I just worked and worked and worked and prayed—I mean played—until I got to the point to where I thought I was good enough to make a record. And then, I said, “What in the hell am I—” I’m thinking, “What am I gonna sing about?” (*Laughs.*) I got a girlfriend! That’s where it came from. I got a girlfriend. She gave me everything I needed to talk about.

[00:14:17] **Music:** “I Like the Way You Love Me” from the album *Oogum Boogum* by Brenton Wood.

*Oh, yeah*

*Don’t know why*

*But I love you, I do, girl, yeah*

*‘Cause I like the way you look at me, oh girl*

*Every time you’re kissing me, it thrills me*

*From my head to feet*

*And I tell myself deep down inside*

*There will be no one else for me*

*‘Cause I like the way you love me, love me, love me*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:14:50] **Jesse Thorn:** More still to come with Brenton Wood after a break. Stay with us. It’s *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:14:59] **Promo:**

*(Sci-fi beeps.)*

**Music:** High energy, bright synth.

**Adam Prianca:** *The Greatest Generation!* Maximum Fun's irreverent, filthy-mouthed *Star Trek* podcast is a big deal!

**Benjamin Harrison:** How big? It's the only *Star Trek* podcast big enough to have a live show tour! And we are inviting all *Star Trek* fans and MaxFunsters everywhere.

**Adam Prianca:** We're calling the Share Your Embarrassment tour. We're going to celebrate and roast *Star Trek V*.

**Benjamin Harrison:** That's the one where they killed God! We're gonna be in a bunch of cities, and [GreatestGenTour.com](http://GreatestGenTour.com) has all the info and ticket links.

**Adam Prianca:** That's [GreatestGenTour.com](http://GreatestGenTour.com) for dates and ticketing info for the Share Your Embarrassment tour!

**Benjamin Harrison:** Come share your embarrassment with us!

**Adam Prianca:** And grow stronger from the sharing.

*(Sci-fi beep.)*

[00:15:43] **Transition:** Thumpy synth.

[00:15:47] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guest is Brenton Wood. He's the singer and songwriter behind the hits "Baby, You Got It", "Gimme a Little Sign", and "The Oogum Boogum Song". He's also an all-time favorite for fans of lowrider oldies. At 82 years old, he's in the midst of his farewell tour. It's called the Catch You on the Rebound tour. Let's get back into our conversation.

What was the first time you got to go into a studio?

[00:16:17] **Brenton Woods:** 1958—'57.

[00:16:20] **Jesse Thorn:** So, you were young. Who were you singing with?

[00:16:23] **Brenton Woods:** Don Moore, Donald Moore. Don Moore. His—he had a piano at his house, and his mother cooked, and I ate before I left her house. 'Cause there wasn't going to be anything left when I got home, because we—all of us, everybody's saying, "We didn't know!" *(Chuckles.)*

[00:16:42] **Jesse Thorn:** How did the two of you end up in a studio?

[00:16:45] **Brenton Woods:** Uh, actually the neighborhood producer. They used to come. His name was Mushroom Robinson.

[00:16:53] **Jesse Thorn:** That's a great name.



[00:16:54] **Brenton Woods:** Who you telling? (*Inaudible.*) Mush Mouth. (*Cackles.*) That's crazy.

[00:17:01] **Jesse Thorn:** And he had recorded like in the '40s.

[00:17:06] **Brenton Woods:** He was out of the '40s. He lived in our neighborhood, you know, and he recorded us. 'Cause we used to ride around in our little (*stammering*) Dune buggy. It wasn't an old Dune buggy. It was a '46 Chevy because I got a '46 now. A '46 Chevy singing, (*singing*) "And just a-walking in the rain." You know, songs like that.

[00:17:30] **Jesse Thorn:** I have a track here by Little Freddie and the Rockets.

[00:17:35] **Brenton Woods:** That's the one. And there was no such thing as the Rockets.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

That's what I'm talking about. They built that madness up, you know? But that's what they'd say. Little Freddie and the Rockets. It's Freddie and Don.

[00:17:48] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) And you were little Freddy?

[00:17:51] **Brenton Woods:** Yes. And Don Moore was Don Moore.

(*Music fades in.*)

[00:17:54] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, let's listen to "All My Love".

[00:17:56] **Music:** "All My Love" by Little Freddy and the Rockets.

*... her heart so true*

*Why, oh why, do you treat me like you do, my dear?*

*I give her all my love*

(*Inaudible.*)

*Why, oh why, can't you give me what is there for me?*

*I give her all my love*

(*Music fades out.*)

[00:18:47] **Brenton Woods:** See, that background is something.

[00:18:51] **Jesse Thorn:** What about it?

[00:18:52] **Brenton Woods:** I started learning to harmonize with myself, and then after I got into that particular part about it, I just—I said, “I don't need you guys to rehearse with me. I mean, you guys don't have time. I got time!” So, I just followed through on my own dream.

[00:19:13] **Jesse Thorn:** What does it mean to harmonize—how do you learn to harmonize with yourself?

[00:19:16] **Brenton Woods:** Sing alone. Sing alone and didn't sing along against it with another tape recorder. (*Laughs.*)

[00:19:23] **Jesse Thorn:** So, you were just bouncing back and forth between tape recorders? I love that.

[00:19:29] **Brenton Woods:** So, I was learning all the time. (*Laughs.*)

[00:19:31] **Music:** “I Want Love” from the album *Sweet Old School* by Brenton Wood.

*I want love*

*Gotta have a lot of love*

*Gotta have a whole lotta love from a-you, little girl*

*Gotta have a whole lotta love from a-you, little girl*

*A-right now*

*Tonight, I was thinking about how we used to be*

*Hoping and praying you'd come home back to me*

*I want love (I want love)*

*Gotta have a lot of love*

*Gotta have a whole lotta love from a-you, little girl*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:20:39] **Jesse Thorn:** You went to college out of high school, right?

[00:20:41] **Brenton Woods:** I went to junior college, Compton Junior College.

[00:20:45] **Jesse Thorn:** What'd you think you were gonna get out of it? What was the plan?

[00:20:47] **Brenton Woods:** Well, I didn't get out of junior college—I didn't go to junior college because I wanted to. I had to go there because they wouldn't let me walk across the stage to get my diploma, because I couldn't afford, you know, my year end pictures.  
(Laughs.)

[00:21:03] **Jesse Thorn:** You're talking about in high school?

[00:21:05] **Brenton Woods:** Yeah, so I had to do a continuation of school, and I did it at Compton College.

[00:21:12] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you expect that if music didn't work, you'd go into the—I mean, grew up in South LA and the South Bay. There's a lot of like manufacturing stuff going on there. Did you expect that you were gonna go into the trades if you couldn't make it as a singer?

[00:21:30] **Brenton Woods:** You know, I had a great job history working in the everyday marketplace. You know, and I first started off as a construction helper digging swimming pools. And I moved from there to dish washing, and I went to Harvey Aluminum, which is now Martin Marietta, and I was an overhead crane operator. You know, and stacking stuff for Vietnam. Bullets, shells, and all that, bombshells, and all that stuff. After we'd run them through the extrusion machine. And I was actually getting ready to quit, because I was making pretty good bucks back then, on that particular job. Until I said, "I'm gonna quit singing, and I'm gonna just stay on my job. And this is a great job, 'cause I get bonus checks plus."

So, I was gonna relax. I was gonna kick back and don't—you know, quit singing.

[00:22:51] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, you were by then—if we're talking about 1964, 1965—you were into your 20s.

[00:22:56] **Brenton Woods:** Yeah, I was into my 20s. But you know, from 1957—which is the song on our label called "So Bad". (Singing.) "Ooh, so bad." It was about my first girlfriend. You know, and how fickle ladies are when they're that young and stuff like that. I wrote a song called "Betty Joe". (Speaking the lyrics.) "I've been waiting for you to make up your mind. Do you want my love or all you going to leave me all crazy?" Something like that. And that's where I got that song called "Betty Joe". And then the flip side was a slow song called "So Bad".

[00:23:41] **Music:** "Need Your Love So Bad" by Brenton Wood.

*I need someone's hands to lead me through the night*

*I need someone's arms to hold and squeeze me tight*

*When the night begins, oh lord, again and again*

*Honey, I need your love so bad*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:24:32] **Brenton Woods:** I had recorded four songs every year from that point up to 1965, '66. I've been on Scepter label. I've been on Screen Gems. I've been on... uh, oh boy, *(chuckles)* a lot of labels. What they was trying to—I got kinda upset because all I got out of it was a hamburger and lunch.

[00:25:07] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you get to the point where you thought it wasn't—it just wasn't gonna happen for you?

[00:25:11] **Brenton Woods:** Yeah, I just said that, you know. I mean, I got to—I had many—had so many jobs, when I got to the point that I was making a good \$500 a week.

[00:25:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Were you single?

[00:25:24] **Brenton Woods:** Yeah, I was single, but it didn't—I wasn't single, because I was really a neighborhood flirt.

*(Jesse laughs.)*

Basically, you know—because when I'd write the songs over at Don's house—when I would write songs, I'd call up ladies and ask them, “What do you think about this? What do you think about this?” You know, and that kinda gave me some direction, you know? And then I got into the what makes a hit record a hit record? How does it expand? It starts in the neighborhood and reaches from neighborhood to neighborhood or city to city or, you know, state to state. But the disc jockeys pick it up, because they want, you know, recognition of being playing hit records. I took time out to say, “Well, I'm gonna do it one more shot. I'm gonna give you one more shot.”

Then, the fashion chain came. Bellbottom, hot pants, miniskirts, all that stuff came about. Then, I wrote the song around that, you know, what's happening right now. The miniskirts. *(Singing.)* “When you wearing them high heeled boots?” The heeled boots and all that stuff. I just wrote, you know, a lot of—I scribbled a lot of rhyming, you know, lyrics and then making sense out of what I'm talking about. Then, I got to a certain part, I started laughing. So, I was laughing, because “The Oogum Boogum Song” was a funny song, but I just changed the word “that oogum boogum thing” to—changed abracadabra to oogum boogum, which with the same thing is a hocus pocus. You know, casting your spell on whatever and stuff like that. Then, I built it. And then, I got the hit. I got the record. After—I mean, I went into the studio over at Nashville West on the—next to Paramount Studios on Melrose. Was it Melrose or Santa Monica? Melrose. Santa Monica? One of them. And I went in with another group, another band, because they were a band. They would play their song. The record company was recording I think a couple—four songs with them.

Then, I asked them to back me up—you know—on my song that I had, one song. And I didn't—I just sat at the piano and expressed myself. They followed me, and it was like, you know, (*sings a few bars*), and that kind of made—it's kind of exciting that way when they build it up like a train's getting ready to go off on tracks or whatever.

[00:28:17] **Jesse Thorn:** That production choice was a function of the fact that those guys had just—you know, you had just been like, “Hey, can you guys stick around? I got a song I need,” and so they're like literally just joining in? (*Laughs.*)

[00:28:30] **Brenton Woods:** Actually, yeah, more or less.

[00:28:32] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, let's hear “The Oogum Boogum Song”, your first hit record from 1967.

[00:28:37] **Brenton Woods:** And they got me in the bottom (*inaudible*), and you can hear my piano playing in the bottom, because I'm—when I start playing this time, I'm almost like I'm nervous. And I just go, and I just keep that in mind where I'm at. So, I just gotta stay here. When I get to this part, I'm gonna raise my hand and just repeat the front and we going out.

[00:28:56] **Jesse Thorn:** Let's hear it.

[00:28:57] **Music:** “The Oogum Boogum Song” by Brenton Wood.

*One, two, one, two, three*

*Oogum, oogum, boogum, boogum*

*Boogum now, baby, you're casting your spell on me*

*I say, “Oogum, oogum, boogum, boogum*

*Boogum now, baby, you're casting your spell on me”*

*You got me doing funny things like a clown*

*Just look at me*

*When you wear your high heeled boots*

*With your hip-hugger suit*

*It's all right, you're out of sight*

*And you wear that cute miniskirt*

*With your brother's sloppy shirt*

*I admit it, girl, that I can dig it*

*Well, then I says*

*Oogum, oogum, boogum, boogum*

*Boogum now, baby, you're casting your spell on me*

*I say, "Oogum, oogum, boogum, boogum*

*Boogum now...*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:30:04] **Brenton Woods:** *(Chuckles.)* It just makes me laugh.

[00:30:07] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, it's a funny song. 'Cause you know, it's such a gorgeous song. It's also headed two different directions between the—as you said, like you had rewritten it to be about what was going on with, you know, young people's fashion at the time, right?

[00:30:26] **Brenton Woods:** Well, that was the change of time where everybody was a lovechild!

[00:30:32] **Jesse Thorn:** Things had changed so much. I mean, like we hear those songs that you recorded as a teenager and this song are miles and miles apart. And you know, you were an adult man by the time you had a hit record. Like, you weren't a 19-year-old who didn't know was going on around you.

[00:30:52] **Brenton Woods:** Nope, I was 24.

[00:30:54] **Jesse Thorn:** You kind of had perspective on the world and the music changing. You know what I mean?

[00:30:58] **Brenton Woods:** I followed *Record World*, *Cashbox*, and *Billboard* intensely. I had to find out what made a record a hit, how they spread it around to the next station, to the next city, to across the world, whatever. I had to study that, you know, in order to know what I was doing. Because I came to a point to where—you know, when I got to, you know, a great idea, I was very enthusiastic about the stuff that I was doing. And I wanted to be, you know, a star. And thinking I'll be rich—hoping I'll be rich one day. And I—you know, I've been handled like a stepchild from that point. *(Laughs.)* You know? But you know, it's like—you know, the experience, I wouldn't trade it for nothing.

[00:32:03] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, I wanna play another one of those records that you cut around that time in around 1967. This one's called “Baby, You Got It”.

*(Brenton laughs.)*

[00:32:13] **Music:** “Baby, You Got It” from the album *Baby You Got It* by Brenton Wood.

*I run after you*

*Like a fool would do*

*But Mama didn't raise no fools*

*And I should know*

*That, baby, you got it*

*That's all I can say for you*

*You got soul, too much soul*

*Foxy clothes, the cutest nose*

*The greatest shape*

*There's nothing fake about you*

*Baby, you got it*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:32:39] **Jesse Thorn:** By the time you were cutting these records, you know, there were like big, heavy soul records on the radio. There were the kind of, you know, screaming, pleading kind of soul records on the radio. And your music has such a kind of light, gentle touch to it. Did you ever want to go up on stage and just, you know, scream your heart out?

[00:33:06] **Brenton Woods:** Ah, yeah, I do that all the time! You know, I used to do that when I was younger. I used to—see, I used to get on the stage and try to sing “Land of 1000 Dancers”. *(Laughs.)* You know, and I opened up with “Land of 1000 Dancers” when I got—but I was very discouraged in certain stages of my career.

[00:33:34] **Jesse Thorn:** I wanna play another great Brenton Wood record. My guest is Brenton Wood. This might be my favorite of all the singles that you cut the mid/late '60s. This one's called “I'm the One Who Knows”.

[00:33:47] **Music:** “I’m the One Who Knows” from the album *Oogum Boogum* by Brenton Wood.

*When a boy falls in love*

*He thinks of one girl*

*He wants to try to get a little thing going*

*Strange expressions on his face is showing*

*He gets an old rag, and he shines his shoes*

*And patches the holes in his favorite suit*

*I’m the one who knows*

*I’m the one who really knows*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:34:31] **Jesse Thorn:** I went to see you, and I bought tickets. It was you and Barbara Mason. I bought tickets to this show, 'cause there was a poster on the street by my house. I said, “Brenton Wood. That’s the man that sings ‘Give Me a Little Sign’ and ‘The Oogum Boogum Song’ . That sounds like a good night out.” I bought these tickets, and the whole time I’m waiting for this show—you know, I bought the tickets a month ahead of time. I’m thinking, “What is this show gonna be when I get there? Right? Who is this show for? You know, I don’t—” I’m like—not who is it for as in it couldn’t be possibly for anyone, but I’m like, “Is this gonna be be 30-year-old, you know, record store hipsters? Is this gonna be, you know, elderly black folks in church clothes? Is this gonna—like, who is this?”

And I got to Long Beach where the show was, and I’m walking up to the venue. I don’t even know is this gonna be a show with 200 people at it or 2000 people at it. I’m walking up to the venue, and the line of lowriders and bombas is down the street, like one after another, after another, after another. Especially bombas. And it’s like families. It’s grandpa. It’s multiple generations. Not just two. Three and four generations there together.

So, you are—obviously, you’re from that part of the country, right? You’re from Southern California or at least grew up in Southern California.

[00:36:17] **Brenton Woods:** Mm-hm. I grew up in San Pedro, and I grew up in Los Angeles. Well, inner Los Angeles. And I don’t even have to say—

[00:36:25] **Jesse Thorn:** Was your audience always that Latino and especially Chicano?



[00:36:30] **Brenton Woods:** Chicanos—see, I'm from the neighborhood, and they call them Cholos. And these people there have car shows, and they do—bring back memories of old cars and stuff like that. You know, and it was like they had their favorite artists—myself and Mary Wells. And Smokey was in there too. But you know, I lived in the neighborhood, and I've done—they followed me and supported me long after the records came off the charts. And because I didn't get, you know, what I expected from the record companies, I started doing—asking bars and clubs to let me take the door, and you take the bar.

My first week, my first two days there, I made \$5 when I did a concert. The next time I came there, I made \$15! But that next following week, I had a line around the corner. So, that's where I was raised too, in that neighborhood. And it stemmed from there. And they're very loyal. They keep me supported. And then, you know, I can just be grateful and thankful that the radio station that told me they would play my music, but they wouldn't—they would have to—I had to make him play it. I wonder what he meant about that? Then, I found out. That's where it is. I have to go—I have to top the Black charts before I go over to the White charts.

[00:38:30] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll finish up with Brenton Wood in just a minute. Catch you on the rebound. It's *Bullseye* for [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:38:39] **Promo:**

**Music:** Sophisticated electronic harpsichord music.

**Travis McElroy:** Hi, I'm Travis McElroy.

**Teresa McElroy:** And I'm Teresa McElroy.

**Travis McElroy:** And we're the hosts of *Shmanners!*

**Teresa McElroy:** We don't believe that etiquette should be used to judge other people.

**Travis McElroy:** No. On *Shmanners*, we see etiquette as a way to navigate social situations with confidence.

**Teresa McElroy:** So, if that sounds like something you're into—

**Travis McElroy:** Join us every Friday, on Maximum Fun or wherever you get your podcasts.

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:39:04] **Music:** "Gimme Little Sign" from the album *Oogum Boogum* by Brenton Wood.

*If you do want me, gimme little sugar*

*If you don't want me, don't lead me on, girl*

*But if you need me, show me that you love me*

*And when I'm feeling blue and I want you*

*There's just one thing that you should do*

*Just gimme some kind of sign, girl*

*Oh, my baby*

*To show me that you're mine, girl*

*Oh yeah*

*Just gimme some kind of sign, girl*

*Oh, my darling*

*To show me that you're mine, girl*

*Alright*

*(Music continues under the dialogue.)*

[00:39:42] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. My guest is soul singer and lowrider oldies legend Brenton Wood.

When you were introduced in this show that I went to see, the man who was MCing the event came out. It was you and Barbara Mason. He came out, and he said, “Your grandparents loved this music. Your parents love this music. And if you're doing it right, you're teaching your children to love this music.” And what I had thought maybe was gonna be a 300/400-person show—like a nice little theater show—there's thousands. I don't know, 3/4,000 people. And people were in tears.

[00:40:34] **Brenton Woods:** You know, we're getting back to the part where I—the part where lovemaking in the hood is where it all begins. These love affairs. And then, they go—you know, everybody, they want to do it different, but they don't do it. They wanted to do it, but they have to hang out and all that stuff like that. I had to deal with—when I was creating songs and dealing with the certain elements and stuff like that, I had to put stuff that was going on with them, what they were doing, what they were fussing and fighting and all that stuff like that stuff like that. I had to put all that stuff into a song or real life.

So, I just broke it down to giving back what's going on in the neighborhood back to the audience. And they dish it out, and I take it and write about it. And then, I just blow it out of proportion, make a big deal, and then they found out that I had to do a third record, a fourth record, “Me and You”.

[00:42:06] **Music:** “Me and You” from the album *Baby You Got It* by Brenton Wood.

*Me and you...*

*(Music continues under the dialogue.)*

[00:42:17] **Brenton Wood:** It was the identical thing for what was going on in the neighborhood. “You know? We've been together a long time, and you know what? We can get a little low, lightweight thing going.” Which means I—I add slang talk within the community into it. “If you try and I try.” Oh man! Like, those people would just sit down and cry all through those stuff, through the song because of memories.

[00:42:43] **Music:** “Me and You” by Brenton Wood.

*You know, we've been together a long time*

*And you know what?*

*We can get a little old, lightweight thing going if we really put our hearts to it*

*If you try, and I try—girl, there's no telling how far we can go*

*Remember those loving fools, Romeo and Juliet?*

*They thought they had a thing going*

*But they just didn't know*

*They couldn't visualize*

*They had no idea how it could really be*

*But we know, don't we, darling?*

*Me and you*

*Let's get away*

*(Music continues under the dialogue.)*

[00:43:30] **Brenton Woods:** Memories are, you know, how they were with their boyfriend and girlfriend during that time, and they connected. Just like those cars that they built in the—I mean, they really made Chevrolet. *(Chuckles.)*

[00:43:50] **Music:** “Me and You” by Brenton Wood.

*Yes, lord, we know, don't we darling?*

*We won't be wasting our time fussing and fighting like other people*

*We're gonna be too busy being in love*

*This is the real thing*

*We found the groove, we move each other*

*We turn each other on*

*And this could last forever*

*All we need to do is give some kind of sign, yes, lord*

*And from then on, baby, it's easy*

*Let's talk about me and you*

*Me and you*

*Let's get away*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:44:36] **Jesse Thorn:** Why do you think that when your—when the hit records dried up, you decided not to quit? There's plenty of folks who had some hit records, and they said, “Well, that time in my life has passed. I'm off to other things.” And what you said you did was build something for the long term there.

[00:45:03] **Brenton Woods:** Well, I mean, I left my job at Harvey Aluminum, you know, to be a singer. So, I mean, I wanted it to last. But you know, like I said earlier, I loved what I was doing, writing songs and—you know, playing piano and stuff like that. I used to love it. I used to spend all my time—a lot of time just there doing that and creating songs and stuff like that and calling the girls up and asking them what did they think. Was I on the right track? Was I on the right track or whatever, you know? And they just, “Aaah!”

I said, “Oh!” And then, I had a friend that was a star. His name was Don Julian. Don Julian had the lark, and he had—“Always and Always” was one of my favorite songs back in the day. Then, I went to one of his concerts one time, one at the park in Compton, and I saw how the people reacted behind the songs. The ladies reacted behind the songs. And I said, “I want to do that.” (*Giggles.*) That got me into it. And then when I just—I didn't call them on the phone. They heard it on the radio. And you talk and talk, talk. (*Laughs.*) It just goes on and on.

[00:46:30] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, what I could see watching your show was that there are a lot of people with hit records. You know, there are plenty of folks who had some 45s on the charts, plenty of folks with great songs. But there's not many performers who have that feeling of community, who have that feeling of intergenerational connection that I felt in that room that night. It must be incredible to feel on the stage.

[00:47:10] **Brenton Woods:** It is a great feeling on the stage, because sometimes I don't even have to sing. They sing 'em for me, you know? And they give me all the—you know, inspiration to want to do it. But I don't wanna overdo it. So, I do that so much until I think they had enough, and I'm gonna get off the stage while I'm winning. (*Laughs.*) But you know, they kids come, and they grow up, then they want to come and stuff like that. And they want to come, and their kids want to come, and it just grows and grows and grows.

[00:47:43] **Music:** “Catch You on the Rebound” from the album *Baby You Got It* by Brenton Wood.

*(Music continues under the dialogue.)*

[00:47:52] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, Brenton Wood, I sure am grateful for the time you took to talk to me and grateful for your music and grateful I got to see you perform. I'll be out there next time.

[00:48:02] **Brenton Woods:** Come on down!

[00:48:03] **Music:** “Catch You on the Rebound” by Brenton Woods.

*Later, baby*

*Catch you on the rebound*

*The rebound*

*You didn't even write me...*

*(Music continues under the dialogue.)*

[00:48:19] **Jesse Thorn:** Brenton Wood, I guess what I'm saying is I'll catch you on the rebound.

[00:48:22] **Brenton Wood:** Later, baby. (*Laughs.*)

[00:48:25] **Music:** “Catch You on the Rebound” by Brenton Woods.

*Later, baby*

*Catch you on the rebound*

*(Music continues under the dialogue.)*

[00:48:33] **Jesse Thorn:** Brenton Wood. He's on his final tour, the Catch You On The Rebound tour, which will be hitting—among other places—the Greek Theater in Los Angeles on October 7th, where he'll be performing alongside The Chi-Lites, Barbara Mason and Los Yesterdays, among others. Do yourself a favor. Get out to one of these shows. It's a special experience.

[00:48:54] **Music:** “Catch You on the Rebound” by Brenton Woods.

*The rebound, the rebound*

*The rebound*

*(Music continues under the dialogue.)*

[00:49:14] **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—where we had an earthquake in the middle of a hurricane the other day! Los Angeles left relatively unscathed, so thankful for that. But boy, that was really something!

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 by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Dan went to that Brenton Wood concert with me. We had a good old time. That was great. That was great fun. By the way, Dan and I did 45 mixes—I'm mentioning it, 'cause Brenton Wood was in mine—that we posted the other day on Mixcloud. So, search for Jesse Thorn on Mixcloud, and you'll find Dan Wally and my, you know, 90-minute soul party mixes. Our theme song is called “Huddle Formation”. It was written and recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and Memphis Industries, their label, for providing it to us.

*Bullseye* is also on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. You can follow us in all those places. If you enjoyed something that you heard on today's show, please share it with somebody, because that is how people hear about our show. And I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[00:50:47] **Jesse Thorn:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

[00:50:54] **Music:** “Catch You on the Rebound” by Brenton Wood.

*Catch you on the rebound*

*The rebound, the rebound...*

*(Music fades out.)*