

[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.

[00:00:28] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Time now for The Song That Changed My Life, a chance for *Bullseye* guests to dig way back into their brains and serve us a little bit of their personal musical history—the tune that made them who they are today. And on deck, we have Bobby Rush.

[00:00:44] **Music:** “Chicken Heads” from the album *Black Snake Moan* by Bobby Rush.

Daddy told me on his dying bed

Give up your heart, but don't you lose your head

You come along, girl, what did I do?

I lost my heart, and my head went too

Little girl, little girl, you sure can cook

Little girl, little girl, you've got me hooked

When you cook that chicken, save me the head

(Music fades out.)

[00:01:27] **Jesse Thorn:** Bobby Rush is a blues guy, Chicago blues, specifically. Coming up, he hung out and played with Jimmy Reed, Buddy Guy, and Howlin' Wolf. And whereas Reed, Guy, and Wolf were virtuosos at their instruments, scholars of the blues, Bobby Rush was something different: audacious, funny, eclectic, and a legendary songwriter. Here's his 1991 hit, “I Ain't Studdin' You”.

[00:01:54] **Music:** “I Ain't Studdin' You” from the album *Bobby Rush Live* by Bobby Rush.

I ain't studding you

I'll tell you, I ain't studding you

Some folks are saying a woman love me

And some folks said she don't

But it don't make no damn difference

Long as I'm getting what I want

I ain't studding you

I tell you, I ain't studding you

If you think I'm gonna leave my woman

Because what somebody says

You must be crazy, going out of your doggone head

I ain't studding you

(Music fades out.)

[00:02:36] **Jesse Thorn:** Bobby Rush is now 89 years old. He is not slowing down. He won a Grammy for his 2017 album, *Porcupine Meat*. It was his first. And earlier this year, he released *All My Love for You*.

[00:02:48] **Music:** "I'm the One" from the album *All My Love for You* by Bobby Rush.

My name is Bobby Rush

I want everybody to know

I was born to sing the blues

I sing the blues everywhere I go

I'm not like B.B. King

I'm not like Guitar Slim

I'm not like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and all of them

I'm the one, I'm the one, I'm the one, I'm the one

I'm the one

(Music fades out.)

[00:03:21] **Jesse Thorn:** When we asked Bobby Rush about the song that changed his life, he picked one recorded by a close friend of his, Little Walter. We'll let Bobby take it from here.

[00:03:30] **Bobby Rush:** Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Bobby Rush. Here's a song that changed my whole life, and the beginning of my musical life.

[00:03:50] **Music:** "My Babe" from the album *Stray Dog Blues* by Little Walter.

My baby don't stand no cheating, my babe

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

[00:03:54] **Bobby Rush:** Ahhh, I believe the first time I heard it even before he recorded it, got to be in 1955 or '56.

[00:04:05] **Music:** "My Babe" by Little Walter.

She don't stand none of that midnight creeping, my babe

True little baby, my babe

My babe, I know she love me...

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

[00:04:14] **Bobby Rush:** Man, it reminded me so much of this little lady that I was involved with. *(Singing.)* "My baby don't stand no cheating, my baby. Oh, no, she don't stand no cheating, my baby."

[00:04:26] **Music:** "My Babe" by Little Walter.

Oh yes, I she love me

She don't do nothing but kiss and hug me, my babe

True little baby, my babe

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

[00:04:34] **Bobby Rush:** I said, wow, this is it. This is my heaven. (*Chuckles.*) This is it. And the way Walter played it, you know. It was—oh, god, just knocked me off my feet.

I remember—oh, I heard it from WLAC radio. John R. was playing it on in Nashville, Tennessee. At that time, John R. was big in radio. And it was satellite, but we didn't know anything about satellite. We thought it was next door. (*Chuckles.*) You know? And I heard this record play. And when I met Walter, I was so dumb about radio at that time. We was in Chicago, but the record was playing in Nashville. I said, “Man, I heard your record playing yesterday.” I thought he was in Nashville yesterday! I didn't know that was radio, you know. Well, that's a country boy for you.

[00:05:40] **Music:** “My Babe” by Little Walter.

My baby don't stand no fooling, my babe

Oh yeah, she don't stand no fooling, my babe

Oh yeah, she don't stand no fooling...

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

[00:05:53] **Bobby Rush:** You know, I want to tell you that Walter was a harmonica player. We called him a harp player. But he always played a harp like a horn player, like a tenor horn player. (*Sings a few notes.*) And he had that style. He was a blues man, but he had a style like a horn player playing jazz. And nobody didn't get that.

[00:06:14] **Clip:**

Speaker: I bring you a gentleman by the name of Little Walter.

Music: Bold, energetic blues harmonica.

[00:06:27] **Bobby Rush:** Our harp (*inaudible*) was a harmonica. And our—'cause you know you got the David playing the harp—the upright harp with the string. And that's a different harp, but we're talking about the harmonica. People nowadays call it the Mississippi Saxophone. But it's a harmonica, that's what it is, you know.

(Harmonica music swells.)

Ah, I remember he went to Waukegan, Illinois, and wanted me to go with him. He said, “Blood!”—that's what he called me—“Come go to Waukegan with me.” We went to Waukegan, Illinois, right out of Chicago. And he drank a lot, and he was buying beer for everybody.

I said, “Wow.” And I didn't have three dollars in my pocket. I thought Walter was rich, because he was buying all the ladies a beer, and they were 25 cents apiece for a quart of beer.

And he would set up three or four of them around the bar, which was probably about a dollar and a half or whatever. And he told me about two or three hours later, “Bobby Rush.”

I said, “Yeah?”

He said, “I got to go home and get some more money.” Go home and get some more money? He went to his car and opened the trunk. And he was about drunk at that time. He said—and it was full of money. I mean, \$1 bills. And it just fluffed all up in the trunk. I thought he was a millionaire! Probably wasn’t about 200-300 in \$1 bills. But to me, that was—I didn’t have any money, man!

I said, “Walter, where did you get all this money?”

He said, “Playing harp, boy! Just playing the harp.”

I said, “That’s what I’m going to do the rest of my life!” (*Chuckles.*) I’m going to play harp, so I can get rich and buy the girls some beer. (*Laughs.*)

(Harmonica music ends with a bright chord.)

Oh, I played with Little Walter many times. I played in the same setting. And he was one of the reasons which caused me to play as well as I played. Because when you were around Little Walter, he was so good. If you didn’t play up to his standard, then you’d get thrown out the building. So, I would play his style, then I would go into my style.

And they would say, “Oh, Bobby Rush, man! You got something happening with this, man!”

Because you couldn’t play too much of it, because Walter’d take your lick next week, and you hear him on the radio, man, on somebody’s record. (*Laughs.*) But Little Walter had his sound. Little Walter had his sound.

I would say, if you want to listen to the blues, you ought to listen to our Little Walter. Not only that he created at the time, but he modified it to the point where it was like blues, jazz, rock. I think he meant everything to the blues, because Little Walter—see, at the time Little Walter was in, harmonica was a thing that Black people wasn’t into to harp as much. Because the harmonica and singing the blues was something less than something else. Because that’s the way White people wrote about it until the White people started doing it. Then they wrote that the blues was the big thing to do, when they could do it. As long as Black people only were doing it, it was something less than something else.

(“My Babe” fades back in.)

Little Walter put a stamp on the harmonica. He also put a stamp on “My Babe”. There’s nobody can sing that song different with sighing, (*singing*) “my babe”. I don’t care who they are! My babe!

[00:10:13] **Music:** “My Babe” by Little Walter.

Don't stand none of that midnight creeping

My babe, true little baby, my babe

My babe, I know she love me, my babe

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

[00:10:24] **Bobby Rush:** Walter was so slick, he took the Y out of baby! My babe. *(Chuckles.)* B-A-B-E. Yeah, that's Walter, man. You know?

[00:10:34] **Music:** “My Babe” by Little Walter.

Oh yes, I know she love me

She don't do nothing but kiss and hug me

My babe, true little baby...

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

[00:10:41] **Bobby Rush:** One of the few songs that got the same meter and the same riff. ‘Cause when you say, *(singing)* “My babe, don't stand—” You can't do nothing with that! It's what it is. It's what it is. What you see is what you get.

Little Walter's music and the style of his playing mean everything to me as a harp player. It may not mean that much to you, if you talk about the music itself. But as a harmonica player, it mean everything to me. But nevertheless, I learned so much from Walter from the things he did. So, when he put this record out—“My Babe”.

[00:11:29] **Music:** “My Babe” by Little Walter.

... don't stand no cheating, my babe

Oh no, she don't stand no cheating

Everything she do, she do so pleasing

My babe, true little baby, my babe

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

[00:11:44] **Bobby Rush:** You can't beat Little. Walter. You can't beat him out, and you can't beat him under. You can't beat him doing what he's doing, 'cause what he did—he put a stamp on the harmonica thing. That's it.

[00:11:53] **Music:** “My Babe” by Little Walter.

She don't stand no fooling, my babe

Oh yeah, she don't stand no fooling

When she's hot, there ain't no cooling

My babe, true little baby, my babe

True little baby

She's my baby

True little baby

She's my baby

True little baby

(Music fades out.)

[00:12:18] **Jesse Thorn:** Bobby Rush on the song that changed his life: “My Babe”, by Little Walter. Bobby's new album is called *All My Love for You*. We'll go out with one more song from it. This is “I Want To”.

[00:12:39] **Music:** “I Want To” from the album *All My Love for You* by Bobby Rush.

Hey, little girl, let me talk to you

And let me tell you what I wanna do

Play with your poodle, you play with mine

Take you home and have a real good time

I wanna hold you, baby, and kiss you too

Uh-huh, that ain't all, girl, I wanna do to you

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

[00:13:05] **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. Will the lemon bush that I transplanted make it? It's in shock right now. I did a bad job transplanting it, I'm not gonna lie. But I'm hopeful. Maybe we'll find out on a future update in the credits of *Bullseye*.

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 who, believe it or not, I'm about to meet in real life for the first time. *(Chuckles.)* I'm headed to Atlanta, where she lives, on tour with my friend, John Hodgman. So, we'll see what she's like! Our interstitial music—we have meetings, of course, on the internet. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is called “Huddle Formation”. It was written and recorded by The Go! Team. Our thanks to them. Our thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

Bullseye is on Instagram now. Yes, that's right, the latest trend, we've jumped onto it. [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#), search for us and follow us, and we post fun clips from the show and pictures of me and my guests and all kinds of neat stuff.

And I think that's it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[00:14:29] **Jesse Thorn:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](#) and is distributed by NPR.

(Music fades out.)