

[00:00:00] **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.

[00:00:04] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*, I'm Jesse Thorn. Sam Richardson is an actor. His breakthrough role was on *Veep*, the HBO show starring Julia Louis-Dreyfus in which everyone is terrible and mean and incompetent, and they all hate each other—except for Sam's character, Richard Splett, cheerful and incorruptible.

[00:00:23] **Transition:** Music swells then fades.

[00:00:24] **Clip:**

Speaker (Veep): Is there a way to change Doyle's music without screwing up the lights?

Richard Splett: Oh, absolutely.

Speaker: Great!

Richard: Well, I'm not sure, but positivity is the first step.

Speaker: Love it.

Richard: Change to what? Doesn't matter.

Speaker: I honestly have no idea. What do you have on your phone?

Richard: Well, it's mostly self-help audio books and relaxation tapes. I'm quite an anxious man.

[00:00:40] **Transition:** Music swells then fades.

[00:00:41] **Jesse Thorn:** Sam is also a writer. He, along with Tim Robinson, co-created and starred in *Detroiters*—one of the most charming and hilarious television comedies of all time. About two buddies working for an advertising firm in Detroit. Richardson has also appeared in *I Think You Should Leave*, which is his buddy, Tim Robinson's, iconic sketch comedy show. He currently stars alongside Zoe Chao and Tiffany Haddish in *The Afterparty*. And I guess you could say that Sam Richardson has a brand. He plays cheerful, friendly characters who are so nice that they end up getting in their own way. That's probably in part because, in real life, Sam Richardson is extremely cheerful and friendly.

When I talked with Sam back in 2021, he'd just starred in *Werewolves Within*, a horror comedy. It's set in a small New England town, everyone is trapped in a snowstorm, and enough scary stuff has happened that people are starting to wonder if maybe, just maybe, a werewolf is out there. Or maybe not. Hard to say.

My guest, Sam Richardson, plays Finn Wheeler in the film. Finn is a park ranger. He's new at the national park nearby. And as the bodies begin to pile up, residents of the town start to turn on each other. After all, if there's a werewolf around, it could be literally anyone. In this clip, Finn makes a last-ditch attempt to keep everyone together with—well, a classic, inspiring speech.

[00:02:15] **Transition:** Music swells then fades.

[00:02:17] **Clip:**

Music: Touching, orchestral music that swells with the speech.

Finn Wheeler (*Werewolves Within*): I know it's easy to point the finger and fear each other. At its heart, this is a community, you know? One that agrees about more than it doesn't. You know, hard work. Be a good neighbor. A warm place to meet, have a sandwich. Love. All I'm asking is that we remember our common... our common humanity. And we just hold off on being enemies 'til we've all had a little sleep.

Gwen: (*Censor beep*) that noise! I saw what happened to Pete, and I saw what happened to Dave, and I'm not gonna stick around and let that happen to me and Marcus. Let's go, Marcus!

Marcus: Hell yeah!

[00:03:13] **Transition:** Music swells then fades.

[00:03:15] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Chuckles.*) Sam Richardson, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm happy to have you back on the show.

[00:03:18] **Sam Richardson:** Thank you so much for having me back!

[00:03:19] **Jesse Thorn:** How do you feel about werewolves in general?

[00:03:22] **Sam Richardson:** Uh, you know, a healthy fear.

[00:03:26] **Jesse Thorn:** Just like standard. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:03:28] **Sam Richardson:** Just like standard. Like, what the typical amount of fear should be.

(*Jesse agrees with a laugh.*)

But not more than I think is normal. Like, there's no phobia, you know, of werewolves—just respect and appreciation for them.

[00:03:40] **Jesse Thorn:** How do you feel about scary things in general?

[00:03:43] **Sam Richardson:** Scary things in general, you know, I'm not typically just like a scary person. You know, like as in like a person who is scared. (*Laughs.*)

[00:03:52] **Jesse Thorn:** Certainly, you're known for being fearsome.

[00:03:54] **Sam Richardson:** I'm being—yeah, that's my main thing in real life.

[00:03:56] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughing.*) Yeah, terrifying.

[00:03:57] **Sam Richardson:** I'm just like—(*laughs*).

[00:03:58] **Jesse Thorn:** You're a real Tiny Lister type.

[00:04:00] **Sam Richardson:** Exactly, the one I kind of looks on to who knows where. I have a—I'll just come right out there; I have like a true arachnophobia, you know? So, like a true like irrational fear of spiders. So, that's the one thing. Everything else I'm like, (*nonchalantly*) yeah, sure.

[00:04:21] **Jesse Thorn:** Does it interfere with your life?

[00:04:22] **Sam Richardson:** Well, I'll never go to Australia. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:04:25] **Jesse Thorn:** Wait, is that a—is that a spider place?

[00:04:28] **Sam Richardson:** It's like a spider place, like huge spiders. You always see like videos and things like, "Look at that spider. That's normal." I'm like, no, then not for me then. Or like Brazil.

[00:04:37] **Jesse Thorn:** How do you feel about scary media? Like, I saw *The Shining* in high school English class.

(*They laugh.*)

And even in 40-minute chunks during the day while people threw spitballs, I was too upset to...

[00:04:53] **Sam Richardson:** I tell you what, I'm not—scary movies don't scare me. However, again, like spiders in movies, I won't—I can't watch it. So, like you're talking about like *Harry Potter*, I'll close my eyes at the—you know, when—I can't even think of the name of the spider in the forest. I close my eyes on it. If I go on the *Harry Potter* ride in Universal Studios, I shut my eyes. I can't do it. You know? *Lord of the Rings*, Shelob's Lair. I don't know what that part of the movie looks like. Like, fully. I can't—I cannot do it.

[00:05:29] **Jesse Thorn:** There's a pretty wild part in *King Kong*, the Peter Jackson *King Kong*, with all these giant spiders. Have you seen that movie?

[00:05:36] **Sam Richardson:** Yep! I've seen all the parts around it!

(They laugh.)

I can't do it. Can't do it. And like if I think about spiders too much, then I'll like close—if I about spiders before I go to bed I can't like not see them in my head, so I can't shut my eyes, and I'll be like, “Oop! Nope! Now I'm thinking—now—” My image in my head is more vivid than like an actual spider, so like I've gotta like then keep myself up for a little bit and try and like distract myself, because I'm like, “Huh, spiders, huh? Whoops! Okay. Now we're on the—okay. Ooh, well, don't think about their eyes—their eyes! I'm thinking about their eyes.”

(They laugh.)

And then like, that goes on for 45 minutes at least.

[00:06:16] **Jesse Thorn:** This morning my son came up to me as I was pouring breakfast cereal for myself. And he said, “Dad. Did you know that scorpions have more eyes than spiders?”

[00:06:34] **Sam Richardson:** *(Softly.)* Didn't want to know that.

[00:06:35] **Jesse Thorn:** I was like, “Wow! Well, good morning!” *(Makes a strangled sound.)*

[00:06:39] **Sam Richardson:** *(Laughing.)* There you go. That's a cup of joe for you.

(Jesse groans.)

I don't have a fear of scorpions, truly. But however, I've never like encountered a scorpion like in like the wild. So, I wonder how I would react to it. I have no fear of snakes, you know, a healthy respect of werewolves, but not a—and also, a healthy respect of wolves in general, but I do like them. But like a spider is just like an irrational thing. When I was a kid, I was—I grew up between Detroit and Ghana, and when I was in Ghana, my cousin and I watched *Arachnophobia*—my cousin Julian. We were watching the movie *Arachnophobia*, and we were in my aunt's house in Accra, and we're watching *Arachnophobia*, and it comes to the part where the giant spider goes like—reels up and *(whisper-roars)*. And my cousin goes, “YEAH!” like right next to me, and I screamed. And I ran around the corner.

And so, the way the house was set up, it was—there was like this living room, and then there was like a hallway that led to the kitchen with windows on it. And outside the windows was like a patio area with fluorescent lighting. And so, like I was running down that hallway. And I'm running, and I get down halfway through the hallway, and I like stop, and I'm like

breathing. I'm like, whew, okay, okay. And then I see on the wall across from me like the bat symbol, just like this image of like his legs and his arms. And I look to my right, and there's like a spider maybe six inches from my face. And I like fainted, essentially. (*Laughs.*) And from now on, that's like a true trauma. I can't—I can't handle them! (*Chuckles.*) Which I'm going to overcome one day. Today! Today's the day. There we go.

(*They laugh.*)

I'm done with it.

[00:08:24] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, I think we heard in that scene from *Werewolves Within* something that you are called upon to do a lot on screen, which is to be a charismatic good guy who nonetheless can't quite get over the hump.

(*They laugh and Sam agrees.*)

Like, a leader of men who is a little bit failing at leading men.

[00:08:47] **Sam Richardson:** Yes! That's like—the entire flock doesn't entirely listen, you know. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:08:54] **Jesse Thorn:** But honestly, like in a horror movie—even in a horror comedy—it's nice to have the Black guy be the doofy one.

(*Sam agrees.*)

You know what I mean? Like, instead of like the fast-talking guy who gets killed quickly.

[00:09:08] **Sam Richardson:** Yep. You know, it's nice to have the Black guy be the sort of like emotional and “inspirational”, quote/unquote, like leader for this thing and like to make it far in. Who knows how far, if you haven't seen the movie. But you know, to sort of be that instead of a garnish, you know? To get to kind of like be the meat of this thing and not only the purpose being (*exaggerated*) “Oh my god! I'm so scared!” the whole time. You know, being like, (*calmly*) “Oh, okay, well, what's the situation?” I really appreciated to get to do that and like that in the script as well.

[00:09:49] **Jesse Thorn:** I was and am a huge fan of the show that you and Tim Robinson created, *Detroiters*.

(*Sam affirms.*)

And one of the things that I don't think I realized until six or eight episodes into the show that was unexpected to me was—this is a show about two best friends, right? So, the two of you are essentially the co-leads of the program.

(*Sam confirms.*)

But in terms of the structure of the world of the show, he—Tim—is the best friend.

(Sam chuckles.)

He lives in your character's world. And Tim Robinson is White, and I thought, “Well, gosh, how many thousands of times have I seen a television sitcom with a Black guy who's best friends to a White guy and lives in the White guy's world? And how close to zero times have I seen the opposite?”

(Sam agrees.)

Was that a choice that the two of you made?

[00:10:44] **Sam Richardson:** It was. It was. To make it true to life—whereas like Detroit is 75% Black, you know. So, with casting and with that world and all that, we were like, “Well, this show is going to be primarily a Black show with characters who are also not.” You know? So, like the show being a Black show with Tim in it, you know, that we very purposefully—like, so at the workplace, it's Tim's legacy in Tim's job. But then, outside of there, it's kind of like Sam's world, you know. So, it's a very purposeful relationship, like to have Tim's wife be my sister, and so that Tim's family is my family. You know? So, Tim is my best friend and my brother-in-law but in the family unit of the Duvets, which is the bigger family. And that you get the Cramblins as well, but like, you know, typically the family things are happening among the Duvets like the world—like you try and get the clients to be Black, all these things. Because that's what Detroit is. You know, so that was a very purposeful sort of a composition.

[00:11:54] **Jesse Thorn:** Because of that composition, there's also something that you don't see a lot in television—in terms of race dynamics—which is that Tim Robinson's character has a Black wife. Which, you know—I mean, If you watch television commercials in America, there's a lot of interracial couples, and almost none of them have—you know, in heterosexual couples have a wife who is darker skinned than the husband.

(Sam agrees.)

That is something that you essentially never see.

(Sam agrees.)

And I just—*(laughs)* I was like, “Isn't that nice?” They're a loving couple that has normal couple things going on.

[00:12:37] **Sam Richardson:** *(Laughs.)* Yeah. You know, it was like—I mean, again, part of that composition was like, “Well, what if—” Like, if Tim grew up in my world—again, in my world, you know, we're best friends and he probably just mostly dated Black girls, you know. And he mostly like existed in that world, so like him falling in—and also—and the thing is like we spent so much time together that like—I mean, we never have explored this, because we only did the two seasons, but like kind of like how the dynamic of them started, like

where it came from. For a while, we never landed on whether Chrissy and I were twins or not, because we never like—but that was always kind of like a little idea. And so, the idea of him marrying her was like the closest thing to marrying me that he could do, because we're like in a situation where we're like, "Maybe we can hang out together all the time!" (*Laughs.*) And like there's a photo of—(*laughs*) the like—the wedding photo. I don't know if it ever showed up on screen, but it's like their wedding photos, and I'm in them too—like kind of doing jokes, and she's like annoyed.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

Because like in marrying—like, he married the both of us, essentially.

[00:13:46] **Jesse Thorn:** We've got more to get into with Sam Richardson after a quick break. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

[00:13:54] **Transition:** Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

[00:13:59] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Sam Richardson. He's the star of the TV show, *The Afterparty*. Its two seasons are streaming now on Apple TV+. Richardson and his frequent collaborator, Tim Robinson, co-created and starred in the absolutely terrific show *Detroiters*. Sam is also a frequent presence on Tim Robinson's hilarious sketch show, *I Think You Should Leave*. Sam Richardson and I talked in 2021. Let's get back into our conversation.

There's a great scene from the show that I'm going to play—and *Detroiters* ran for two seasons on Comedy Central a couple of years ago and was co-created by my guest, Sam Richardson, and his real-life pal, Tim Robinson. And they play best buddies on the show, and they're also business partners in the advertising business, which they're pretty bad at. And they're neighbors, and Tim's character is married to Sam's character's sister. So, they're very close-knit. And so, in this scene, the two of them are hanging out at a bar, and Tim is trying to figure out why Sam has such a hard time meeting women.

[00:15:13] **Transition:** Music swells then fades.

[00:15:14] **Clip:**

Music: Rock music playing over the bar speakers.

Tim (*Detroiters*): When are you gonna settle down, man?

Woman 1: Can you help us settle a bet?

Sam: Sure!

Tim: (*Shouting.*) Excuse me! We're talking! Move it alooong! Thaaaaanks.
(*Returning to normal.*) Seriously, man. When are you gonna settle down? It's amazing.

Sam: Yeah, Tim, I do wanna meet somebody.

Tim: Then what is stopping you?!

Woman 2: Heeey. I like your shirt. That color looks great on you.

Sam: Oh, thank you.

Tim: (*Talking over Sam.*) Oh, so you just interrupt people?! Is that your whole gig?! You interrupt folks?

(*Sam struggles with laughter.*)

I don't know who you are! Later, dude! (*Beat.*) Seriously. Why are you not settling down?!

Sam: (*Sharply.*) Because of you, Tim! It is impossible to meet girls around you!

Tim: Okay, that's insane.

Sam: Oh, yeah. Sure. Okay. I'm insane, then.

Tim: Suit yourself, man! I'm giving you advice!

[00:16:01] **Transition:** Music swells then fades.

[00:16:03] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughing.*) The tag to that that I think got edited out is him saying, "Maybe he's right!" And then he goes, "Maybe he is insane."

[00:16:17] **Sam Richardson:** (*Laughing.*) "Maybe I'm a figment of his imagination."

(*They laugh.*)

Oh man. So, that scene and that like sort of notion and like even that storyline comes from real life. Because Tim and I were, you know, performing at Second City together. We were on the Mainstage together in Chicago, and we would spend all the time together. You know, because we were best friends before then got hired to the Mainstage together. We moved to Chicago essentially at the same time. We got hired to the Mainstage to write two shows together. And we would spend all our time together. We did eight shows a week, six days a week—Tuesday through Sunday. And then, Mondays we would hang out, you know, and go

to the bar, or watch TV or whatever. And Tim, though, would be the worst wingman possible.

Like, we would go—so, we would do a show at Second City, then go across the street to Corcoran's, and like be eating. We would get what we called a turf and turf, which is where we would get wings and a burger, and we'd cut the burger in half and then split the wings. And we'd go like, "Turf and turf?"

"Yeah, turf and turf." Anyway. But we—so, we—after a show—

[00:17:24] **Jesse Thorn:** That's very cute, Sam.

[00:17:26] **Sam Richardson:** Isn't that cute? (*Laughing.*) Isn't that cuuute?

[00:17:27] **Jesse Thorn:** It's adorable. It's genuinely adorable.

[00:17:29] **Sam Richardson:** We're very cute, and we love each other very much. (*Laughs.*) But we would do the show, and then go across the street. And I was single, you know. Tim has been married to his high school sweetheart. Tim has essentially—you know—his whole adult life been married, you know. But we would go across the street, and then like people would come up and like kinda like flirt. You know, and I'm like single, so I'm like, oh, perfect. I just did this show; I'm on cloud nine, and like—

[00:17:56] **Jesse Thorn:** You've got all these wings.

[00:17:58] **Sam Richardson:** You know, I've got all these wings and winks! And like, so we'd start talking, and then Tim would literally be like, "Excuse me. Uuuh, thank you. We're in the middle of something." (*Laughing.*) He would do that, and he'd be so annoyed, and I'd get so mad. He'd be like, "Sorry, but I just want to spend time with you."

And I'm like, "Yes, of course. We spend so much time together. Let me have this moment!"

[00:18:23] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, in *Detroiters*, I think you have a really clear reason to make the choice that these guys are going to be—you know, to borrow the cherry tomato brand—'lil sweetums.

(*Sam chuckles.*)

Which is that like you want to do all this crazy stuff. 'Cause I can tell the two of you just sit around all day making a list of crazy stuff you thought of for a guy to do.

(*Sam confirms with a laugh.*)

What if a guy did this? What if a guy did that? But like beyond that—so, you need to make room for that, but beyond that like you have named this show after your home. It is a home that is only represented in one way in mass media, essentially, which is as a symbol of either

crime or decrepitude. Or you know, maybe the like flip side of that, which is like a parody of blue-collar resilience. Something, something, something. Like, picture of a metal grinder with sparks coming off of it and a guy lifting up his welder's mask, and like he's got like—he's handsome. He's got a lined face.

[00:19:37] **Sam Richardson:** (*Laughing.*) Yep. Built Ford tough.

[00:19:39] **Jesse Thorn:** So, like ultimately—yeah. So, ultimately like you're representing your home, which is a big responsibility.

(*Sam agrees.*)

And if you made everybody in the show a jerk, it would be hard to represent your home in a way that you could be proud of.

[00:19:55] **Sam Richardson:** Yes, exactly that. And it was such an important thing to us to shine a different light on Detroit than is commonly. Like, the idea of like Detroit being the easy joke for everyone, it makes us so mad. It makes me so mad. The idea is like, yeah, Detroit, like—oh, Detroit, right like *Robocop*. Like, you're just thinking of *Robocop* automatically. Or just like uh an easy A to B punch line is like what's dangerous—uuuh, not more dangerous than Detroit! And then you're there, and you get your little laugh and all that.

But like, they're—it's so disrespectful to this place where there are people who are genuinely—it's a Midwestern city. So, everybody is kind, and everybody is—you know, is doing their best and everybody's supporting the way they live. The fact that outside of it, everybody's like, “Ha-ha-ha.” And then, we're like, “Woah, you know how strong we are here?” Like, we wanted to show that to a degree—or not even to a degree. We wanted to show that and give that the respect and the love that it deserves, and I think we achieved that. And I think, at first—I don't know if the show—I don't think the show was very well advertised or like, well set. People were—people from Detroit were a little fearful of it. They were like, “Aw, what's this?! This isn't Detroit! This isn't Detroit!”

I'm like, “Well, it is. Like, I'm not an outsider. I've lived there my entire life.” Well, up until I left, (*chuckles*) but I think as the show went on and people like kind of saw what we were doing, they got onboard. I remember, you know—and I was happy that it was like well received by Detroit, by Detroiters themselves. After the show premiered, we—Tim and I went to Detroit to like do a screening. And I remember the very first person off the airplane—like, the guy who like—with the wheelchair on the tarmac was like, (*excitedly*) “Hey Detroiters!” And I was like wow! That's like the very first person stepping back into Detroit, somebody who like loved and respected that show.

And if we walk down the streets of Detroit together, people will stop, and they'll honk, and they'll be like, “Heeey!” And like that's the warmest, best feeling, you know. We always—people would get so annoyed with us when we were like in Chicago. ‘Cause like they would always be like, “Yeah, we get it. Sam, Tim, you're from Detroit. Yes, we know.” We were always like, “Well, back in Detroit, we do this. And back in Detroit—” ‘Cause we love it so much. Anybody from Detroit will always rep Detroit as hard as they can. And that's not a

false thing. It's because we love where we come from so much. You know, and that's a universal.

[00:22:30] **Jesse Thorn:** It's a very beautiful place. I mean, I've only been one time, so I can't speak to it from a really informed perspective. But that was something that struck me in the time that I was there. I was like, wow, what a beautiful city. You know?

(Sam agrees.)

Similar to when you're in Chicago, and you're like, god, there's a lot of beautiful buildings around me. It was the very same feeling in Detroit. Like, what a beautiful place.

[00:22:52] **Sam Richardson:** Yeah. Really. Really it is. And like, you know, the ruin porn that you know books are sold on and like all these things—I get it, because you are looking at something beautiful, and like even something amazing that was once and majestic is now dilapidated, but in that dilapidation there is still like this beauty and like the negative space of what was there and what is there currently is beautiful in itself. Sort of like—I appreciate that, but you have to counter it with like what is alive there as well. If you only show these things that are like decrepit, then people think it's a zombie town. You know, but like you have to show what is still there and what is new there, you know, along with what was there and what is old there.

[00:23:45] **Jesse Thorn:** I want to play an *I Think You Should Leave* sketch that is really a Sam Richardson sketch. This is one where you're really front and center. You're really carrying the burden on this. It's called “Baby of the Year”.

(Sam giggles.)

And I mean, it's a sort of beauty contest, although not—I mean, in the same way that beauty contests aren't just about beauty. You know, it's like a—it's a pageant for babies.

[00:24:14] **Sam Richardson:** For babies. Just like the general baby, yeah.

[00:24:17] **Jesse Thorn:** And my guest, Sam Richardson, is the host.

[00:24:19] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:24:20] **Clip:**

(Applause.)

Music: Upbeat piano. The host sings the pageant's opening song.

Who will be the baby of the year? Look at their rolls!

Look at their folds! Look at their rummy, bummy, tummies!

Heads are round, bellies are squishy.

(The music swaps suddenly to death metal.)

Look at their toes, like so many curled, canned shrimp

(The music returns to piano.)

Are they ticklish? Are they jigglish? Can they be tricked?

Can they be chucked? Which ones will move?

Which ones will talk? But more important

Which ones can dance?

Oh, who will be baby of the year?

(Thunderous applause.)

[00:25:03] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:25:07] **Jesse Thorn:** *(Struggling with laughter.)* This sketch, like many *I Think You Should Leave* sketches, just has a long series of premises rather than one premise.

[00:25:13] **Sam Richardson:** Yes, that scene had so many twists and turns and like hard banks.

[00:25:18] **Jesse Thorn:** Like, it really starts with what we just heard, which is what if in like—there's kid pageants, there's toddler pageants, why not baby pageants, right?

[00:25:30] **Sam Richardson:** Mm-hm! *(Laughing.)* Why not baby pageants?

[00:25:33] **Jesse Thorn:** That's just a pretty straightforward sketch premise that could be on almost any sketch show.

(Sam agrees.)

And it just—like, there's no moment that is not more insane than the last.

[00:25:44] **Sam Richardson:** Yes. Yes. Because it goes from there into like the devolution. It devolves quickly into the idea of like, oh, well, alright, there's three babies, but one baby is hated by the audience.

(Jesse laughs.)

Like, for what? Like, why? What did this baby do?

[00:25:59] **Jesse Thorn:** It's the bad boy baby.

[00:26:01] **Sam Richardson:** The bad boy baby! And the audience is not having it. They hate it!

[00:26:03] **Jesse Thorn:** He's wearing a leather jacket.

[00:26:04] **Sam Richardson:** He's wearing a little jacket and a little bandana. Bart Harley Jarvis, the bad boy of the competition. *(Laughs.)* You know? And then, it like kinda just goes so many places, and—*(laughs)*. Ah.

[00:26:19] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, I mean, there is a pleasure in like “I can't believe how crazy this thing is” that is kind of like—you know, it's what people imagine of the kind of like Adult Swim humor of 20 years ago—15/20 years ago. Right? And it can be really great.

One of the things that always surprises me—and it was true of *Detroiters*; it's true of *I Think You Should Leave*—is the commitment to grounding this insane nonsense in human emotions. *(Laughs.)*

[00:26:54] **Sam Richardson:** Uh-huh, yes, exactly that! *(Laughs.)* Exactly that. And I mean, I think that's like the key to comedy, period, you know? It's like, whatever—or the key to like bold, big sketch comedy is like whatever's going on, as long as somebody like legitimately cares about it in the thing, then you can get away with so much. You know? And it grounds even the most out-there premise, as long as somebody is like—who has an emotional investment in it, you know. So, that's true for that sketch. Like, the people—like, and there's so many different emotions in that. Like, because the people aren't just like screaming out. They legitimately hate that baby.

(Jesse laughs and agrees.)

This guy legitimately is like annoyed with how the thing is going. Like, he legitimately is angry at them for like screaming and ruining the competition. *(Laughs.)* And then, like even at the end like, “Dump it, this one's garbage. Dump it.” *(Chuckling.)* Like, he's giving up on this thing.

[00:27:57] **Jesse Thorn:** Your mother is Ghanaian, as you mentioned. And you spent a fair bit of your childhood in Ghana just, you know, going there, whatever, summers or that kind of thing.

(Sam confirms.)

You know, what kind of relatives did you have in Ghana who didn't spend much time in the United States?

[00:28:15] **Sam Richardson:** Most of my cousins were between Ghana and London. I was the American one up until older, when my cousin Lauren then came to the States to go to college, and my cousin William came. He like started working in finance. But apart from that, I'm the American one among my Ghanaian and English cousins, you know.

[00:28:39] **Jesse Thorn:** What did they think that meant?

[00:28:41] **Sam Richardson:** What did they think that—? And, oh, also because like America was like very cool, you know? It's very cool. And like, also you could—my cousins would—sometimes they'd come and visit the States. And the whole idea was like, “Go shopping!” You can get your cool sneakers. You can get all these things. You can get stuff. Because like the tax and like the import and all the stuff, it doesn't make sense to like buy it in England, or you certainly just can't buy it in Ghana. So, you'd come to America and like you just get stuff to take back with you. So, it was like—sort of like an amusement park kind of thing, you know. Come to America and like all the stuff is on TV and like all the—you know, go to the mall and like all these activities. There's like so much going on, even in Detroit, you know.

[00:29:25] **Jesse Thorn:** Like a *Bill and Ted* type situation?

(Sam agrees with a laugh.)

Where all the figures from history are playing the demonstration organ in the mall?

[00:29:33] **Sam Richardson:** Exactly! Station is—you know. *(Laughs.)* But yeah, I think sort of—I think among us, we were all Ghanaian, you know. And so, being the American Ghanaian just meant that I probably was spending less time with everybody than everybody else was, you know. But it was still—you know, we still had like our—there, we were Ghanaians with a little extra something. You know, if that makes sense.

[00:30:04] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll finish up with Sam Richardson after a quick break. As we said, Sam is a nice guy. He gets a lot of roles where he plays nice guys. And when we come back, he will tell us how he plans to break into new different parts. It's *Bullseye* for MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:30:25] **Promo:**

Music: Cheerful acoustic guitar.

John Moe: The human mind can be tricky. Your mental health can be complex. Your emotional life can be complicated. So, it helps to talk about it. I'm John Moe. Join me each week on my show, *Depresh Mode with John Moe*. It's in-depth conversations about mental health with writers, musicians, comedians, doctors, and experts. Folks like Noah Kahan, Sasheer Zamata, and Surgeon General Vivek Murthy. We talk

about depression, anxiety, trauma, imposter syndrome, and perfectionism. We have the kind of conversations that a lot of folks are hesitant to have themselves. Listen, and you won't feel as alone, and you'll have some laughs too.

Depresh Mode from Maximum Fun, at MaximumFun.org or wherever you get your podcasts.

(Music ends.)

[00:31:10] **Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:31:14] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is actor Sam Richardson.

Did you have a different class position in the States and in Ghana and in London, if you were visiting family there?

[00:31:25] **Sam Richardson:** Yes. In the states, you know, my family was like in into politics. My auntie is a congresswoman, you know. We were involved in in politics and all that sort of stuff. And like, you know, like middle class, you know, African American family in Detroit. And Detroit being like a predominantly Black city, you know, that's good. But in Ghana, my grandfather was a chief and like a businessman, so we were upper class in Ghana. So, you know, drivers and, you know, cooks and all that sort of thing, where like the dichotomy of wealth also like lends itself to that—where like you have the haves, and you have the have nots. And so, like it's the haves—if you don't have a cook and a driver, then you were being irresponsible, because like you have to employ people. You know, that sort of thing.

Now, there's a full middle class, in Ghana. I think the advent of like technology becoming exponentially more available and useful and cheap kind of like allowed that to happen. But it was an interesting thing to go from being at the top of the mountain to being—even in Detroit, even among all the Black people, you know, (*chuckles*) you're still second class. You know, if that makes—I mean, of course, it makes sense, because it's what it is. But you can certainly see it. And like, you come back to the States and like even if all you see are Black people around you, if you turn on the TV, you don't. You know, and so like that's culture there and here. But versus Ghana, it was like, oh, everybody's Black and all—the president's Black here, the—you know, the parliament's all Black here. You know, like every—the king—the chief of Mpraeso is Black, the chief of Atibie is Black, the chief of—you know, the Omanhene is Black. They're all African, you know, everything.

But then, you still have these interests from other nations and colonialism still has its grips there. So, like a lot of the wealth is still diverted to White nations and to White people. I remember a kid—a friend of mine growing up at school, his name was Alex. And his dad worked in the gold mines. And I was like—he's from Canada. And I was like, “Why—? Why? Like, why do you have access to our gold mines?” It never made sense to me. You know, like this resource—surely, is our resource. We mine it, and then we sell it. Why is that not the case? Even still, I'm like—I don't—it's befuddling to me. But that sort of thing, like you know, like age old lines cut and drawn—like, literally lines drawn in the earth to say that this is what Ghana is and this is what Africa is. And we've accepted that, and it's like what

our world is. Even in this place, where I'm like, "Oh, well, in America, you know, it's at the second—it's at the behest or at the sort of whatever the service of White people is. In Africa, it's that way as well, because that's global. Yeah. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:34:41] **Jesse Thorn:** Did other kids at school in Detroit, where you grew up, know you were or think of you as Ghanaian?

[00:34:49] **Sam Richardson:** Not really. I've always been pretty Americanized. But I was like the African prince. That's what like they would say. But like because I went to such a small school that kind of like fades pretty quick. 'Cause like, you know, there's like 15 kids in my graduating class from middle school. I went to a friend's school. So, it was like the same kids from first grade to eighth grade, you know? So, like the idea of like of me being— (*laughing*) there was one kid who was new. I had just moved back from Ghana maybe two years previous, and I'd—and she was new to the class, and I convinced her that I was British, and she believed it. And everybody was like, "Yeeeah, let's play this game." And so, it was truly cruel.

[00:35:31] **Jesse Thorn:** Everyone was on board for this? All 13 other—?

(*Sam confirms.*)

What about staff?

[00:35:40] **Sam Richardson:** Staff, I don't know. (*Stammers.*) And also, the idea was that—

[00:35:44] **Jesse Thorn:** But you know the Quakers are known for cruelty.

[00:35:46] **Sam Richardson:** They looove cruelty! They love to get one up on each other.

(*They laugh.*)

[00:35:51] **Jesse Thorn:** If you've seen the prank wars in Quaker communities. Have a meeting. You know, that silence where everyone is contemplating whether they should speak, they're actually just letting cockroaches loose up people's trouser legs.

[00:36:07] **Sam Richardson:** That's right! And into people's ears. It's a funny Quaker prank. But like, I think—but also, the game there was when I was using my American accent, that was me trying to fit in. And so, then when I was talking to her, and everybody's like, "Wow!" You know? Like, she was like the only one who really knew that I was British, and maybe a couple other people.

[00:36:30] **Jesse Thorn:** Is this a story you've ever told your therapist about?

[00:36:34] **Sam Richardson:** No! No.

[00:36:34] **Jesse Thorn:** Okay, I would—I don't know if you have a therapist.

(Sam laughs.)

But it's possible it might have some symbolic meaning. *(Chuckles.)*

[00:36:43] **Sam Richardson:** Probably! It probably does.

[00:36:43] **Jesse Thorn:** I have a good buddy from back home, where I'm from in San Francisco, who is now an Emmy winning television host. He was a standup comic for a long time, still is a standup comic. And because he is a huge guy, has an afro, and wears glasses, he fell into show business's best friend category immediately, and very hard, and had to try and figure out what to do about the fact—he's also very genial. White people like him because he seems like a nice guy. He is a nice guy, that's why.

(Sam affirms.)

But White people like him because he seems like a nice guy. And it took him a long time to find his own career and voice because of that. Now, you are a guy who comes over on screen and in real life is a notably nice guy, which means that if you want to have—and you're also very good at—you know, you're a skilled performer. So, if you want to have a career being a nice friend on every television show and in every movie ever made, you'll—you know, you'll own a home here in Los Angeles and have health insurance for a long time.

(Sam chuckles and agrees.)

Are there things that you want to do or wish you could do that are difficult to access from that place of people immediately seeing you as a nice friend?

[00:38:07] **Sam Richardson:** Yes, but I think I'm actively working to sort of widen that breadth. I'm not offered characters who have backbone a lot of times. It's always like a person who's like tripping up over himself and—you know, because I think I am good at imbuing like a kindness and a sort of likeability to a character who would be like a sad sack otherwise. You know, like a sad sack weak guy. I think I'm good at, and people I think look to me to try and find a way to like make that person likable and charming and those things. But there's—rarely do characters I play like straighten their back and be like, “Hey, get the hell out of here. Like, what are you talking about?”

Which is something I do myself. You know, like I'm nice up until I'm disrespected, and then I'll—you know what I mean? I can *(chuckles)* turn on a dime and become very sinister. But like that sort of character who doesn't need to have the other shoe drop when the person does stand up for themselves—it's not—it doesn't need to be—the rug doesn't need to be yanked out from under him once he like has like a bold moment I think is something that I'm looking to do more. And figuring out for myself, and when I read things I'm like, “Well, I mean, if this character is this—” Like, I'm looking for more characters with like guile, you know, and sort of not just like—

[00:39:38] **Jesse Thorn:** Guileful characters rather than guileless characters.

[00:39:41] **Sam Richardson:** Guileful characters, exactly. You know, that's something I'm making sure that it doesn't become that people don't think I can do that. You know.

[00:39:52] **Jesse Thorn:** You just sent your agent a postcard that says, “Wiley on it.”

[00:39:56] **Sam Richardson:** Wiley, exactly. *(Laughs.)* “Wiley? Hmm?” *(Laughs.)* Oh, yeah. Let me send another text.

[00:40:07] **Jesse Thorn:** *(Laughs.)* Sam Richardson, thanks for coming on *Bullseye*.

[00:40:08] **Sam Richardson:** Thank you so much for having me. This was great.

[00:40:10] **Transition:** Relaxed, jazzy synth.

[00:40:12] **Jesse Thorn:** Sam Richardson, from 2021. You can catch him in both seasons of *The Afterparty*, a very funny, unique spin on the murder mystery genre. It's on Apple TV+. Also, *Detroiters* is so great can't recommend—if you just need to watch something that is goofy and fun and about dumb friends, you can stream both seasons of *Detroiters* on Paramount+ and on the Comedy Central app.

(Music fades out.)

[00:40:44] **Transition:** Energetic synth.

[00:40:46] **Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Some guys came and built a shed in my backyard. They did it in one day. It's like a pretty big shed. It's unbelievable to me. There was no building there yesterday, and now there's an entire building there. Absolutely incredible. My thanks to Shed World.

The 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 Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is “Huddle Formation” by The Go! Team. Their label, Memphis Industries, and the band themselves agreed to let us use that. We always appreciate it.

Bullseye is on Instagram now. You can find interview highlights and looks behind the scenes and all kinds of stuff [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). You can also find us on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[00:41:56] **Promo:** *Bullseye* with Jesse Thorn is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

(Music fades out.)