

[00:00:00]

(ADVERTISEMENT)

**Transition:** Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

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

**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.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. There is a short list of truly great rapper-producers. Folks who combine the verbal skill of the emcee and the melodic and technical skills of a beatmaker are rare. Doing it well, even more so. My guest DJ Quik stands at the very top of that list. His conversational and occasionally confessional mic style would have been enough to make him a star, but he also helped create G-Funk. And his distinctive aesthetic has backed artists ranging from Snoop Dogg to Jay-Z to Tony! Toni! Toné!. It was now a decade ago that I talked to DJ Quik, and it was easily—and I really mean this—easily one of my all-time favorite music interviews on *Bullseye*. Back then, Quik had just put out his ninth full length album, *The Midnight Life*.

He's since gone on to collaborate with rappers like The Game and Westside Boogie, and now he's going out on tour. The Cali to Canada Tour teams Quik up with fellow legends Warren G and Snoop Dogg for a tour across that great nation to our north. Yes, folks, Canada. It kicks off this June. Quik is also hard at work on a new album—so hard at work that he basically quit using Twitter so he could focus on it, and I can't wait to hear it.

In the meantime, here's a bit from one of his first hits. From his debut album, *Quik is the Name*. This track is “Born and Raised in Compton”.

**Music:** “Born and Raised in Compton” from the album *Quik is the Name* by DJ Quik.

*Now everybody wants to know the truth about a brother named Quik*

*I come from the school of the sly, wicked, and the slick*

*A lot of people already know exactly where it's at*

*'Cause it's the home of the jackers and the crack*

*(Compton) Yeah, that's the name of my hometown*

*I'm throwing down in the town, where my name is all around*

*The suckers just be having a fit, and that's a pity*

*But I ain't doing nothing but (claiming my city)*

*See, my lyrics I'm doubling up, and proving to suckers that I can throw 'em*

*I'm passing a natural ten, or four, or six, or eight before I go*

*Yes, I'm definitely freestyling, all the while, still profilin'*

*Never trickster, DJ Quikster steals the show*

*So, yeah, that's how I'm living, I do as I please, you see*

*A younger brother that's up on reality*

*'Cause everybody knows, you have to be stomping*

*If you're born and raised in Compton*

*(Born and raised)*

*(Born and raised)*

*(Born and raised)*

*(Music fades out.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** How old were you when you made that record?

**DJ Quik:** 19 years old.

**Jesse Thorn:** What did you use to make it?

**DJ Quik:** Technics 1200 Turntable. Pyramid Mixer, one of the worst mixers ever made. It was all I could afford. And an E-mu Systems SP-1200 Sampling Percussion Machine.

**Jesse Thorn:** The SP1200 at the time was like—that was the machine.

**DJ Quik:** That was it. You know, if you had it, you were playing with the big boys.

**Jesse Thorn:** It must have been a big deal to get one.

**DJ Quik:** It was truly such a big deal that I stayed on it for like three days straight. I didn't even shower. I had to be forced to go take a bath. Like, "Come on, man. You stink, man. Get up and go."

I'm like, "Dude, one more beat." I was on it. I was tunnel vision until I learned it. And then I learned it.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you always intend to be both a rapper and a producer?

**DJ Quik:** No. I intended to just be a DJ and back up—you know, I wanted to be Jam Master Jay. I just wanted to back up rappers, you know, and produce them. And I ended up writing my own songs. It was weird. It just kind of happened. My inspirations at that time were Rakim, Slick Rick, Eazy-E, Ice Cube, D.O.C. Actually, might as well just say NWA. But basically, you know, I got a chance to meet The D.O.C., and he became like my favorite. You know what I mean? You know, so a lot of respect goes to him.

**Jesse Thorn:** How did you meet The D.O.C.?

**DJ Quik:** Through Suge Knight, when he was with this guy named Tom Kline, who was like an insurance guy. I guess that's what you call a venture capitalist. You know, Suge, they made a record company, and Suge signed me to be a part of it. I met D.O.C., and I was like, wow, it's incredible.

**Jesse Thorn:** How old were you then?

**DJ Quik:** Still 19. A lot happened when I was 19. (*Laughs.*) It was like that was the year, 1989. It was going on.

**Jesse Thorn:** Tell me about what it was like when you went from a guy who had been signed in this group and thought of yourself as a producer to, about a year later—

[00:05:00]

—in the midst of a bidding war and, you know, getting a real major label solo deal.

**DJ Quik:** You know, it was like an out of body experience. It was like a dream. When I got the deal and got the check, it was like I kept looking at this—you know, I had to get a bank account, obviously. I just kept looking at my stub. Like you know, my balance. And it's like this is crazy. You know what I mean? I could go finally buy a car. I could go buy a motorcycle.

And I didn't. I used a whole lot of restraint. You know, Eazy-E turned me on to his accountant like early on in my career. And I kind of did it the right way.

**Jesse Thorn:** Can you tell me a little bit about what the scene was like that you were a part of, especially right at the beginning—you know, '92, '93, '94, as—you know, what NWA had built was exploding into a capital B, capital D, Big Deal.

**DJ Quik:** Right. There was a lot of work going on, and I remember—you know, it was busy, but the circles were small. Like, you'd be in the studio with Eazy-E, or you'd be in the studio with Ice Cube in the studio next to you, and everybody was just working. It was like this big thing to just be working, you know. And I spent most of my time in dark studios and dark rooms, with the lights low and candles lit, making music. So, I didn't see a lot of outside. I got really pale. You know what I mean? (*Chuckles.*) Because I was in the—I was a studio rat, and that's pretty much where I remember just being in the studio, making sounds, bringing sound to life, you know.

**Jesse Thorn:** It must have been complicated too. I mean, when there's that much money going around.

**DJ Quik:** And it was.

**Jesse Thorn:** Especially in places where there wasn't money going around before.

**DJ Quik:** Before, exactly. It was almost like the world is yours. It was like everyone was rich, you know what I mean? There was no economic struggle, no recession. It was—everybody was rich. I remember even regular guys in the street had, you know, Porsches and BMWs and stuff. It was just—what a great time, man. I'm nostalgic for it right now.

(*They laugh.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** But at the same time, I mean, everybody wasn't rich. I mean, I'm sure you had plenty of people who were looking to you.

**DJ Quik:** Oh yeah, everybody was in my pocket. Everybody was like, “Man.” I heard so many stories, like—have you ever seen that movie, *The Jerk*?

(*Jesse confirms.*)

You see when he got rich, and everybody was like the cat juggler? And he needed money to stop this scourge called cat juggling. I was hearing all kind of stories, man. My mom. You know, “Man, all I need is this. I'm short here, man. If you could help me, man.” It's like I was getting begged for money every which way but loose.

And my accountant was like, “Be smart, David. Don't be generous. Like, you know, you're not going to get this money back.” So, I listened to him, and I got this idea to—if people did ask me for big sums of money, like say, you know, “I need to borrow \$3,000, and I'll give it back. I promise. I'll give it back.” Nobody's going to give you \$3,000 back. Just forget about it. You know. And I'm not a bank. I'm not—you know, I'm not a lender. So, what I did was I would say, “You know what, I don't have 3,000 to give you, but how about I give you like 200 bucks, and you don't owe me. And then you're just \$2,800 away from your goal.”

(*Chuckles.*) That was my theory. Like, you know. And I never looked for it again. But yeah, people were begging me for money, like now you're going west, bro.

**Jesse Thorn:** I want to play a song of yours from your album *Rhythm-al-ism* from 1998. And it's a really great song, and it has—I don't know, the perspective of this record is something that I've basically never heard anywhere else in hip-hop as a lifelong fan. The song's called “You’z a Ganxta”.

**Music:** “You’z a Ganxta” from the album *Rhythm-al-ism* by DJ Quik.

*You's a gangsta (No, I'm not!)*

*You's a gangsta!*

*Just 'cause I kick it with killers don't mean that I do it*

*My occupation's a musician, and I'm staying true to it*

*I went from being a rider to being a provider*

*While I was straddling the fence trying not to hit the divider*

*Just an impressionable human being trying to do right*

*Every now and then I get my manhood tested in fights*

*Like, I used to have a beef with this cat named Eiht*

*And his homies approached me at the club El Rey*

*What was I to do I'm on stage, and I'm doing my thang*

*And this— out in the crowd trying to hoo' bang*

*Giving it up for his homies and set tripping too*

*But he wasn't from Rollin' 60's more like Tragniew*

*I wonder what's his problem what he trying to say*

*Is this business, personal or just "— Quik Day"?*

*I approached him like a man and not like a nut*

*He turned around and put his drink down and straight knuckled up*

*In the dark club punches is flying all around*

*And even though it was me and him, the rumors went 'round*

*And said I killed somebody, now how that sound?*

*How could I stomp somebody to death that's bigger than me?*

*And I'm just 155 pounds, tell me*

*Bang, bang, boogie da bang, da bang, boogie to da...*

*(Music fades out.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** There aren't that many hip-hop records where like part of it is, "I couldn't beat that guy up. I'm too small." *(Laughs.)*

**DJ Quik:** Yeah. Think about it. You know, too light to fight, too thin to win. And I was little back then. I might have been putting something—

[00:10:00]

I might have been 152 pounds.

*(They laugh.)*

You know, I was in the studio all the time. And you know, I was a little guy. But listening to that record, it reminds me of just how volatile the streets were too. Because as good as everything was, it's equally as bad. You know, law of physics—for every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction. Same thing. It was like we're rich on one hand, and at the same time, you can't go to certain neighborhoods. You know, stuff popped off, people were tense, and, you know, gangs. It was wild.

**Jesse Thorn:** You had a record called *Just Like Compton* that was about, you know—the premise of the song is, you know, you learning essentially as you tour—

**DJ Quik:** That there's a lot of cities where gangbanging is. I thought gangbanging was only in LA. I thought it was just an LA thing. But I didn't realize it until I got out on the road that, you know, places—these rural towns had gangbangers. It's like how do they even see—? You know, did our movies inspire that? Like, you know, like the *Boyz n the Hood*? Like, what

made gangbangers—what made people want to be in a gang in El Paso, Texas? Like, it was just—it's crazy to me.

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, it turns out it's the same stuff that made people want to be in a gang in LA, right?

**DJ Quik:** Maybe so. I never looked at it from that point. You might be right. (*Chuckles.*) You know, it was just—it was a trip, man. I mean, you know, I don't feel responsible for it. I mean, gangs were here way before I was—you know, before I was in the Blood gang, and they're going to be here long after I'm gone. But it was just—it was surprising to me. It was like, truly—you know, it was kind of—what do you call—? Polarizing. It was polarizing to see that.

**Jesse Thorn:** What did it mean to you then to—I mean, you were, at least from what I understand, like wearing colors on stage and stuff like that.

**DJ Quik:** Yeah, we used to wear cross colors. Like, my thing was I wasn't like the out there gangbanger. 'Cause, you know, I actually—when I got my record deal, I wasn't even in a gang. You know, my gang days was like from when I was like 14, 15, 16 and moved out of Compton. You know. But I pretty much was a square from, you know, from 16, 17 years old, all the way 'til my album came out. And it was almost like I couldn't perpetrate and wear blue or black, you know what I mean? So, I just kind of rocked my colors a little bit, rocked a little red. And I didn't go overboard with it, but it was like people kind of knew anyway. Because you know, I guess Bloods have a certain kind of thing about them. You know, and I had that thing.

But it was a trip, man, to see just how that made people feel seeing me on stage performing and them being from another set. Like, it angered some dudes. People were jealous. And I just got used to that. It's like—it's whatever. Yeah, I'm up here. You know, I got the biggest voice. I got the mic. So, it's all about me. But you know, some people liked it, and some people didn't. You know, I took a lot of lumps for that.

**Jesse Thorn:** What did it mean to you? Why did you—why'd you pick it back up when you were—?

**DJ Quik:** I had the—just I had bad people around me. Like, the group that I signed, I got them a deal, 2nd To None. They were really pro gangbangers, like really about keeping it real, keeping it gully. You know, beer in the alley behind the liquor store type of dudes. And these were my friends. So, I was like almost, you know, slipping back into it watching these dudes do it, you know. And then all the bad came with that, like we got shot at on Crenshaw. You know what I mean? Just going to the record company to pick up records. Because that's the energy they brought. But when I'm by myself, it doesn't happen. So, you can get killed by affiliation. It happens all the time. You know? And it was pretty much—I'm not putting it on them, I was just going with the flow with these dudes. And I probably shouldn't have, in hindsight.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's a tough line to walk if you—you know, if you want to choose to continue to be the person you are from the place that you are and have relationships with the people that

you grew up with, and so on and so forth, and be something else that's beyond the scope of that. You know, it's tough to do both of those things.

**DJ Quik:** Yeah, it's a narrow line that you walk. And ultimately, one of them is going to get the best of you. And I feel like I went the right way. You know, I made it more about music. You know, now—and that was then, you know what I mean? But then the temptation gets bigger. When I went to Death Row Records, that's all it was about, was Bloods and Crips. And it was like that just became a part of the norm. It made for some really interesting times in the studio, some really scary, uneasy, unpredictable times. You know, it was just—it went into overdrive.

[00:15:00]

So, it was almost like if I kept being the sullen, implicit gangbanger, I'm gonna get crushed by these dudes. Because I'm not letting it all hang out, or I'm not representing, so to speak. So, I kind of started letting it all hang out then. And it was to my peril. You know, it was pretty costly.

**Jesse Thorn:** More with DJ Quik after a break. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

**Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We're replaying my conversation with DJ Quik from 2014. He's one of the greatest rappers/producers in the history of hip hop. He helped define the genre of G-Funk, working with artists like Snoop Dogg, Tupac, Suga Free, Jay-Z, E-40, and Tony! Toni! Toné!. He's kicking off a massive tour this summer, and he's been working on an album for a while now. We can't wait to hear that.

Heads up, before we get into the rest of the conversation, there is a mention of a violent altercation and of guns. We thought we'd let you know in case you or someone you're with might be sensitive to that. Anyway, let's get back into my conversation with DJ Quik.

Can you give me an example of a time when it got tense in a context where you were trying to—you know, where you would have preferred to just be making music?

**DJ Quik:** Yeah, there was a time when Tupac—we were just finishing *All Eyez on Me*, and I had a CD burner, which was a little rare back then. I had a burner, and I burned a CD and listened to it in my Lexus. And my security guy, who knew how important that CD was, took it to the neighborhood and let his friend make a cassette copy of it. So, it got bootlegged. Suge found out, and he called us up to the studio, and he told me what was going on. And I didn't believe it. I'm like, "He wouldn't do anything like that." But he did. And you know, he got disciplined, you know. And I felt bad for him. So, I went to his neighborhood to go get the dude that did it. It was like, "You're the culprit. This dude—my boy just got beat up for



you, and you just walking around here drinking Hennessy in the neighborhood like it's easy.” So, I took off on him. Bink, bink.

He cocked back and was like, “This dude just come over here and hit me in my mouth?!” And he had somebody with him. He was like, “Blast him, Blood! Blast him!” And dude put out a Tec-9 on me. And I just went like low key into shock. Like, oh man, this is some bull (*sensor beep*). You know, over a Tupac CD and my boy not being honest, now I get killed, right? So, instead of him shooting me, we just started fighting. It was like, you know, a fair fight. Then they double teamed me, and I got to fight two guys over this dude who didn't even help me. But I almost got killed. I really—this dude pulled a Tec-9 on me, and I had a Glock 19 in the car, a 45.

So, when I got in the car, I reached up under my seat, and I grabbed it. And when I thought about killing these dudes, I knew I was gonna have to kill my friend too, because he was in the way with him. Like, he was like on—it was just weird. And I didn't kill him. And my friends tell me that was a good idea, because—and this is real. Like you know, this is this really happened. Nobody really even knows this story. But they said that, you know, it wouldn't have been self-defense. You know, you would have went to jail for murder. But they got a Tec-9, you know what I mean? This dude's about to shoot me, if I—ain't that how the law works? Somebody's about to kill you and you got an arms, aren't you protecting yourself? Isn't that a law?

And they were like, “Nah, you go to jail. You would have went to jail.” So, I was like whatever, and I decided to never, ever put myself in those situations again. Yeah, you can imagine how that could weigh on your psyche. But it was like—you know, that was a test that I feel I passed. You know what I mean? I kind of—I took lumps for it. Like, you know, I had to fight two people.

[00:20:00]

And I ran out of—I was tired, all because of this guy. He taught me what your friends can do for you. See, it's them. It's always the homies. The homies always bring everybody down. That's just how it works. Your guy's next to you. Do you think Tupac is dead because he fought for his own chain? Because somebody took it from him? No. You understand what I'm saying? He was just defending somebody. And then he dies. It's like, you know, you gotta watch your friends, man. Or have none.

**Jesse Thorn:** At the same time, I mean, you were producing. You were sort of a house producer for a while with Death Row. And Death Row was about enacting a drama of gangbanging.

**DJ Quik:** Of the streets, yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** You know, on the one hand, people are making these records that aren't—you know, they're not literal truth type records. You know, they're theatrical. But at the same time, there was a lot of people getting caught up in a lot of stuff.

**DJ Quik:** Yeah. Well, you know, at that point, life was imitating art. And it was like people were trying to live the records, you know. You write this big, sensationalized record, and then you go out and try to back it. You know, it was—that was the downfall I think. It's like you gotta be as hard as the record or else. It was strange times, dude.

**Jesse Thorn:** I figure I should play one of your happy records. And this happens to be one of my favorite records of all time. It's from your album *Balance and Options*. It's called “Pitch In Ona Party”. Yes,

**Music:** “Pitch In Ona Party” from the album *Balance and Options* by DJ Quik.

*Somebody bring the potato salad*

*Let's take a ballot*

*On who gonna invite the— that make the party valid*

*'Cause we don't need a whole crib full of dudes again*

*And here come the police with them big black boots again*

*Kicking— out*

*Hand cuffing and stuffing a gang of Jackie's chicken in they mouth*

*Anton and Sean pitching a fit*

*'Cause somebody rolled her— in a henny blunt and won't pass the—*

*Who keeps turning the lights on?*

*Why the music keep skipping?*

*And why these dirty khaki— tripping?*

*I don't know I'm Quik, and I'm still delighted*

*\$500 worth of white star*

*About to hide it*

*'Cause y'all ain't drinking mine up*

*You better drink that E&J and Paul Masson and the rest of that wine up*

*You party haters need to stop it*

*I think we really about to pat your pockets*

*And for sure*

*You've got yours*

*I've got mine's, and we're balling*

*(That's right)*

*So, call up everybody*

*Let's pitch in on a party for sure*

*(Music fades out.)*

**DJ Quik:** What a groove, man. That's still groovy. I still perform this song too. It goes over well with the audience.

**Jesse Thorn:** I think one of the things that makes the song work so well is this underlying tension, which is this song is about having an awesome party. But really, (*chuckling*) you're narrating this song. You're like a nervous mom about this party, because—

**DJ Quik:** They're gonna tear the house up.

**Jesse Thorn:** You're just trying to make sure that things don't go off the rails.

**DJ Quik:** And they often did. That's why I made the song. Like, I really literally tried to throw cool parties, because I was a party animal. Like, I loved music and food and people dancing. And then the way they trashed my house when—you know, that's to be expected. But you know, things are coming up missing and, you know, it's cigarette burns on this really expensive Persian rug or blue carpet—you know, powder blue carpet. So, it was just like—you know, I just—it was like a true story. Like, that actually happened. I just wrote about it. I thought it would make a good narrative.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you ever think about how I'm just gonna move to Vancouver? You know what I mean?

**DJ Quik:** I thought about—ironically enough, I thought about moving to Denver, Colorado. Because Denver's got seasons, you know. You can go skiing, you can go up to Aspen, you

know. It was like Denver was where I wanted to move. Even though I got into a big brouhaha out there, it's just a beautiful place to me. Still is, actually.

**Jesse Thorn:** It seems like, you know, it's this eternal question. Which is: once you have some money and some success, do you choose to use that money and success to enter a whole other different world? Or do you try and—?

**DJ Quik:** Expand your own world that you lived in?

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. Which is hard.

**DJ Quik:** Duality. You want to move up. Like you know, of course I moved out of Compton, and I never moved back. Because I had enough money to live, you know, somewhere a little bit more affluent. You know, Compton was a poor city at that time. But there was—you know, there was really no other place that I felt comfortable. Like, when I went to stay in New York and work in New York, I was homesick. It was just a lot—a different environment pretty much. And it's not—you know, the city ain't for raising a family. The city ain't for being comfortable.

[00:25:00]

The city is just alive 24 hours a day. So, you know, we don't have that here in LA. So, it was hard to adjust. I thought about moving to Atlanta, but then Atlanta got crowded. Everybody moved to Atlanta. It was like a big exodus. Everybody just moved there. So, you know, I decided to stay here and just stay in the valley where I get a little bit of the best of both worlds. I'm not too far away from my family who still live in Compton. And I'm not too close to where, you know, I won't sleep good at night.

**Jesse Thorn:** When you're away, what do you miss about LA and Southern California?

**DJ Quik:** I'll tell you what I don't miss about it. I don't miss this heat.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Cackles.*) It has been way too hot.

**DJ Quik:** This is—wouldn't this—you know, summer doesn't end until November. It's like wow.

**Jesse Thorn:** I got a lot of sweaters I wanna wear.

**DJ Quik:** Right? And then you can't wear any of 'em. Like, what's the use of having a chinchilla fur coat out here?

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Playfully.*) I know, I have that same problem, Quik. I got all this chinchilla furs up in my closet!

**DJ Quik:** *(Laughing.)* No, you don't. You're joking with me. No, if there's anything I miss, I miss just what I'm used to, like the food. You know, the night. The nights here are beautiful, because they cool off enough to where it's comfortable. So, I really miss the nightlife here, and I miss the food when I'm gone.

**Jesse Thorn:** I have to ask you a silly question.

*(DJ Quik affirms.)*

So, your hair right now is in a very beautiful braid.

*(DJ Quik laughs.)*

But I have to say that you have had some of the most creative hairstyles of anyone in the hip-hop world over the past 20 years or so. So, when was the first time that you grew your hair long and straightened it?

**DJ Quik:** Ironically enough, it was a grad night, graduating junior high school. And up until that point, you know, all the rave was Jheri curls. But Jheri curls were expensive back then. We're talking about 1985, '84. And you know, them things cost like \$90 apiece. And mama ain't even going to give me \$90 to get clothes. So, I can forget about, you know, straightening out my fro. So, my sister gave me a blowout for my graduation, and she pressed it with a hot comb. And you know, up until this time, I was just wearing a fro—you know, a patter where you pat it down and try to make it as even as you could, put a scarf on it, so it'd lay every hair down. You pull it away, you know, and you have this hair. You know, a fro.

She straightened it out, and I went to school, and I remember the looks I was getting with my hair like that. And that—you know, who knew anything about androgyny or, you know, it's a girl's hairstyle. I just knew that it felt good. Like, it didn't even feel like my hair. It was like it was light, but it was strong. And it moved when I moved, it was like it became its own effect. And people—you know, people saw that and they—I don't know if they liked it; they just knew it was different, you know. Nobody'd really ever be like, "Hey, we like your hair like that."

*(Jesse laughs.)*

But I did. And I saw—I looked in the mirror and it was like, dang, I look like Prince. You know? And I started to feel like, you know, a star because of my hair. You know? It was a trip. It was when I was 14.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you have to—I mean, did you bring somebody on the road to take care of it?

**DJ Quik:** Sure did, bro! The first time—I'm gonna give you the story. I'll give you the story.

*(Jesse laughs.)*

The first time I went on the road, 1991, with *Quik is the Name*, I wore a low maintenance—what they call a wave nouveau. It's like a body perm, but it was like Jheri curl at the same time. It was a mix. So, that was easy to manage, you know. It was just like you wet it and let it dry a little bit, and it looks natural when you go. When I dropped *Way 2 Fonky*, I got a perm, because I wanted that straight look all the time on the stage. Well, lo and behold, on my Way Too Funky Tour, all my hair fell out because of the perm.

*(They laugh.)*

So, I had to come home after the tour. And I remember wearing this little—I mean, this was an anorexic ponytail. Like, it was so short, it didn't even move. It was like—you know, it wasn't enough to wrap a rubber band around. But you know, I came home and had to cut it, because the chemicals just tore my hair out. And I had to start over at that fro I was telling you about. And this was like right in between *Way 2 Fonky* and *Safe + Sound*, where I was just gone for about a year and a half, two years, trying to grow my hair back. Because my hair became a part of the thing. It was like DJ Quik is known for his hair, you know. So, after that, then I could afford to bring a hairdresser on the tour bus with us.

[00:30:00]

But she just primarily did braids. I left the chemicals a long time ago.

**Jesse Thorn:** I remember the first time that I saw the video for the remix of “I Got 5 On It”, and Dru Down had out of control hair.

**DJ Quik:** Dude, that was the coolest hair. At one point, I did. I had some really dope hair. But dude, Dru Down took it to the next level.

**Jesse Thorn:** He had like full on Goldilocks curls.

**DJ Quik:** Dude, that was—it was awesome. He was known more for his hair than anything else. Girls used to go to his concerts—I know girls that did—just because they wanted to swing in his hair.

*(Jesse cackles.)*

Literally. *(Laughs.)* Yeah. Then Snoop came on and started doing the Goldilocks styles, and I knew that came from me. But it didn't really. I'll be honest. It came from Ice-T. Ice-T started it with that fly. He was flying those album covers, and I wanted to be like that guy.

**Jesse Thorn:** I want to talk a little bit about how you make your records. You started out mostly working with that sampler and drum machine.

**DJ Quik:** That was it, just taking little pieces of records. Trying not to clear a sample—like, not stealing somebody's song, but take a snare or a kick from it, you know, and then EQ it different, and make it kind of my own. Like, just put a warp on it, is what it was. And

ultimately a sample, you just use like maybe a bar or two bars, and you loop them, and you play over it. That was my whole thing up until I had to spend all that money clearing samples and end up with so small a portion of the song, you know, when it came to royalty time, that it was like it didn't make any sense to sample anymore. You know, 'cause these guys are robbing me. You know, it's too much money. So.

**Jesse Thorn:** What are we talking about? Early/mid-'90s?

**DJ Quik:** We're talking about definitely '91, when sampling became illegal. Because before it was like free fair use, you know. But people started making money off of these records, and ultimately the RIAA shut it all down. And there was a law, and James Brown and everybody was mad and up in arms about, you know, "Give us our money for using our records." And I came in right when it became illegal to sample. Like, I met him right at the door. Like, boom! Like, aw. And I had sampled, so I had to pay a lot of—you know, I had to pay for a lot of records that I used on *Quik is the Name*. But it was still a hit, you know, Platinum Record, whatever. You know, people ate handsomely off of me, but I decided that I wanted to record and produce my own music.

But back then, if you did that, those records just kind of sounded boring and thin. You know, you had to really be a musician. And here I am, I'm just a—at this point, I'm a sampler. I'm a beat maker or beat crafter, but I sample. The way they record it, it's hard to go in the studio yourself and try to get that sound. There's something magical about the way they record it, who was playing—it's all a thing. It was just hard to—it's hard to get that. So, of course we sampled it. And it just made our lives that much easier, because we took a little bit of that vibe and put our—you know, wrote our own music to it.

**Jesse Thorn:** But by the time it was the mid-1990s, your music was—

**DJ Quik:** It was mostly original. It kind of happened overnight. I remember jamming out. It happened from jam sessions. Like, it really happened on *Safe + Sound* when you listen to songs like, "Quik's Groove III". Like, we just threw caution to the wind, and I started mic'ing drums. I mic'd those drums. Like, I engineered that whole record. Bacon played—you know, he played a virtuoso bass, guitar. And my man Chaz came in and played flute. And we just build and build, and then I realized that "Wow, I'm a musician. I went from being a DJ and a sampler to full-on recording drums the right way. Mic in the snare, two mics—one out of phase on the bottom." Like, I was really experimenting, and I knew what I wanted. I was driven. I became incensed to get the sound that I wanted, and I ended up getting it. And now, I'm a real musician. I don't have to sample at all if I want to, and I can make some of the most incredible records ever.

**Jesse Thorn:** If you do say so yourself.

**DJ Quik:** If I do say so myself. I'm trying to be humble here, but I make some really incredible pieces of work. Like, they impress me. I go, "Wow, this must have happened during one of my blackouts, but I love it."

(*They laugh.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** More with DJ Quik after a break. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

[00:35:00]

**Promo:**

**Music:** Paramore-inspired pop punk music.

**Sequoia Holmes:** It's Webby season. Hi, I'm Sequoia Holmes, host of the *Black People Love Paramore* podcast. And we are nominated for a Webby for the episode where I interviewed Hayley Williams. In case you're unfamiliar, *Black People Love Paramore* is a podcast delving into the common and uncommon interests of Black people in order to help us feel more seen.

We would love your vote to help us win this Webby. Please take a second and go over to the *Black People Love Paramore* podcast social media accounts, and you can find them at BPLPPod across all social media platforms. Hit the link in bio and vote for *Black People Love Paramore*.

**Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with the great G-Funk producer and rapper, DJ Quik.

Let's play a little bit of an instrumental from your new album, *The Midnight Life*. And my guest is DJ Quik. And this song is called "Bacon's Groove". You've historically always had an instrumental on your record called "Quik's Groove".

**DJ Quik:** Yeah, as this album; I got one on there too.

**Jesse Thorn:** And those have almost always featured your guitarist, whose name is Robert Bacon.

(DJ Quik confirms.)

So, tell me how he got his own cut on this one.

**DJ Quik:** Well, (*chuckles*) when he—we were in the studio, and we were just vibing around. And I told him, you know, I got this real old drum machine, bro—like a 1970s Roland. Like, you know, I think it was called a CR-8000 or something. Just these old, dirty drums. And as I was playing them, he was like, "Oh." It was like he knew what to do already. So, he started playing around, joking around—right? And this happened in less than an hour. It was creepy, because it happened so fast. It was like over already.



I programmed the drums, did a nice program while he's playing the guitar. I recorded the drum—you know, in the Pro Tools—and set him up a track, and he just started writing the song out. Like, it just came out of the air. He was just pulling the notes in, and it was just perfect. Track by track. He did the guitar one, and then he did an overdub harmony guitar, and then he did the solo, and then he played Moog. Like, you know, he coproduced *Way Too Funky*, so he's still an awesome songwriter, arranger, you know, multi-instrumentalist or whatever. But this song, when I mixed it, it made me feel so good that, you know, I felt bad if I tried to call it a “Quik’s Groove”. Because it just really came out of this man's soul. So, for the first time ever, I gave a person a groove on my album, and it was Bacon. It's just—this is really his music. This is all his soul.

**Jesse Thorn:** Let's take a listen.

**Music:** “Bacon’s Groove” from the album *The Midnight Life* by DJ Quik, a funky, percussive track with lilting synth.

*(Music fades out.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** You really aren't afraid to make pretty music.

**DJ Quik:** Yeah, I've been heckled a lot about it.

*(Jesse laughs.)*

You know, people have—I felt it. Like, why do you make beautiful music? I don't know. I think that's what the world of music is missing. You know, there are people that are trying to do it now, and they're just making cute music. And cute is fleeting. I think that beautiful music lives forever, you know. And this is obviously a totally beautiful record. And that's how the man felt when he played it and how I felt when I mixed it. I just—you know, I knew it was too gorgeous. I almost—it was a risk to put it on the record. But I did it anyway, because I wouldn't be being honest to my musical heritage if I didn't put that record up.

**Jesse Thorn:** I want to play one more song. It's a happy song, a party song. Another one of your biggest hit records as a producer. It's Tony! Toni! Toné! and “Let's Get Down.”

[00:40:00]

**DJ Quik:** Funny song. *(Chuckles.)*

**Music:** “Let’s Get Down” from the album *House of Music* by Tony! Toni! Toné!.

*You didn't think we could flip it on yo ass, huh?*

*Something for the dance floor*

*In a real way*

*It's going down like this forever*

*And a day*

*Now what you hear is not a drag*

*'Cause Mr. DJ Quik got a brand new bag*

*But first I gotta bang, bang*

*A boogie for the boogie*

*To the rhythm of the ghettoey streets*

*Check it out now*

*You trying to give me some Eight Ball*

*But no way*

*I'd rather have a Mimosa with Cristal and O.J., yeah*

*Just a little something bubbly and tingly*

*To have me walking around naked*

*But wait a second*

*The function's on*

*Around midnight*

*What time is it?*

*Are you inside?*

*Available*

*To come and play*

*Give me a clue*

*So I don't have to*

*Look for you*

*Come on, let's get down, let's get down, let's get down*

*(Music fades out.)*

**DJ Quik:** That drum sequence is responsible for a lot of platinum records. That same drum sequence was used in “Shackles On My Feet” from Mary Mary. It was used in “Dollars and Cents”. In my record. It was used as a breakbeat for a Simon Harris compilation, one of those breakbeat compilations, and it ended up on “Indo Smoke” by Warren G and Mista Grimm. It ended up on “Black Superman” by Cold 187um. “Above the Law”. And 2nd To None’s “Be True to Yourself”. It was like that drum break with the extra drums that I added—it’s an automatic—it tells your feet what to do immediately, as soon as you hear it. I’ve never seen people not react to that song. That song is gonna be a hit. That song’s gonna outlive us all.

**Jesse Thorn:** It must have been fun to get in the studio with Tony! Toni! Toné!

**DJ Quik:** Dude, I hate it when it goes by too fast though. It’s like, let’s do a whole album! Like, this song is great! Like, let’s do more. But you know, they’re already doing their own thing; they’re all still working on their own records. But yeah man, Raphael Saadiq is—you know, and D’Wayne, and Timm, and Elijah. You know, all these guys are just incredible. Like, you know, they inspired me as a musician. And from the time I heard the Sons of Soul album, I was already a fan, you know. But there was just certain special records that the Tonys did that were just bigger than everybody else’s records, you know—“Just Me and You”, the song for the *Boyz n the Hood* soundtrack. I mean, this record is a soundtrack to my life, you know. “Anniversary” and “Lay Your Head on My Pillow”, you know what I mean, *from Sons of Soul?*

**Jesse Thorn:** I had a cassingle of “Lay Your Head on My Pillow” that I wore out.

**DJ Quik:** Wore out! Probably popped. Dude, that was—I wanted to do that with them. So, if you listen to “Let’s Get Down”, I was kind of like—you know, like the way he did drums, the way they had the drum machine but real drums playing on top of it—that’s kind of what I did. You know, I was just following up. I said it in the studio when I was working on *Safe + Sound*. I said I want to work with the Tonys one day. Because we were so—we were all into the *Sons of Soul* record. And I ended up doing it. I ended up going in the studio with them, meeting them. And we ended up becoming friends and making that record. Dream come true, buddy.

**Jesse Thorn:** What instrument is it that makes the sound that goes (*twinkles*).

**DJ Quik:** It's called a flexatone. They don't make them as much as they do, but if you Google it, it's a flexatone. It looks like a piece of sheet metal that's folded in a special way, and it's on these—it's on this wire—kind of a wire frame. And when you bend it, you change the pitch of it. If you bend it in, it tightens and it—you know, naturally the pitch goes up. You release it, the pitch goes down. And I learned how to play that thing like a—that was my saxophone. You know what I mean? I'm playing just little wooden mallets and a piece of sheet metal, but I'm making it make some sounds that was out of this world. I know I've mastered that thing.

**Jesse Thorn:** Does Flexatone Incorporated keep you in flexatones? Because you are the undisputed king of the flexatone.

**DJ Quik:** (*Laughs.*) No, it's a—I think Latin percussion makes it, but they don't make them as much anymore. Like, you gotta order them. They come from, I think, South America or whatever, you know. But, yeah, they don't make them like they used to. I wish they would have gave me an endorsement though.

(*They laugh.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** DJ Quik. Catch him on tour throughout Canada on the Cali to Canada Tour. Listen to his classic records, and keep your ears to the ground for his follow-up to the wonderful *The Midnight Life* later this year.

**Transition:** Upbeat, funky synth.

**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. Here at my house, the shutter guy's coming over, so I gotta get going.

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 Danielle Huecias. We get booking help from Mara Davis.

[00:45:00]

Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, aka DJW. Our theme song is “Huddle Formation”, written and recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

*Bullseye* is on Instagram, [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). We're also on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. And just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

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

(*ADVERTISEMENT*)