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**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. My first guest this week, the comedian and actor Megan Stalter, excels at playing a very particular type of character: self-confident—extremely self-confident, and rarely possessing the skills to back up that bravado. Now, “confident person who is bad at their job” is a stock character. Bad doctor or whatever. But what Meg Stalter's characters lack in real world skill, they more than make up for in charm.

If you've seen *Hacks*, the hit sitcom, you know what I mean. Stalter plays Kayla Schaefer, an assistant to Paul W. Downs's showbiz manager. Schaefer is bad at her job, wildly inappropriate at work, but also—again—charming.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Kayla:** Hi, dude! (*Chuckles.*)

**Jimmy:** (*Cautiously.*) Hi.

**Kayla:** You told me to like interrupt you when more important clients call. And Deborah Vance is on the line and like she's not like as important. So, I'm just like trying to give you a heads up.

**Jimmy:** (*Exasperated.*) Okay, Kayla, can you set her up somewhere comfortable, please?

**Kayla:** Absolutely! Follow me, chica.

**Deborah:** We're right in the middle of something.

**Jimmy:** Deborah! Perfect timing. How are you? My favorite client.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** Stalter also performs in the movie *Cora Bora*, which just became available to buy and rent online. Meg plays the title character. Cora has moved to LA from Oregon to make a go at being a singer songwriter. She's in a long-distance relationship with her girlfriend, Justine. They say that they're open, so they're seeing other people. But Cora begins to worry she's losing Justine for good, so she flies back to Portland to win her back. When she gets there, she finds a new woman, Riley, at her girlfriend's house. And she discovers that Riley and her girlfriend are a lot closer than she'd imagined.

In fact, Riley is friends with Justine's parents.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Cora:** You're Judas, and you are Judas!

**Justine:** You were the one who kept asking us to come over here and pack up more things to send to you in LA. Riley was just helping!

**Cora:** (*Snidely.*) I'm sure she was. So, nice.

**Justine:** Anyway, it turns out that Riley's a massage therapist.

**Cora:** (*Through gritted teeth.*) Get off.

**Justine:** She's been helping your dad with his back and—

**Cora's Dad:** She has magic hands.

**Cora:** Wait, I'm sorry. You've massaged my dad?! You've been touching Gary, my father, with your bare hands? That's perverted.

**Jesse Thorn:** Cora, I can finally walk properly again.

**Cora:** I wish you couldn't walk.

**Cora's Dad:** Okay. She saved me.

**Justine:** C-Cora—

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** Megan Stalter, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's so nice to have you on the show.

**Megan Stalter:** Thank you for having me, and thank you for playing the clip.

**Jesse Thorn:** Of course.

*(They laugh.)*

That's probably more thanking than we deserve. It's like a pretty integral part of the interview process.

**Megan Stalter:** I still am smiling, and it feels nice to hear it.

**Jesse Thorn:** We are glad to have you on the show. Is your character in this film a terrible person?

**Megan Stalter:** I think that she could be unlikable on paper. But she has such a beautiful heart that I love her so much that I don't think she's a bad person. I think she went through bad things, and she hasn't healed from them.

**Jesse Thorn:** I think that is—

**Megan Stalter:** *(Giggles.)* But she also can be a sassy brat at times.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, there's some heavy brat-ery.

**Megan Stalter:** Mm-hm. She's naughty. I'd say she's an angel with a naughty side.  
*(Chuckles.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** I think you are often keen to find the sweet part of someone who is impulsive and self-obsessed and solipsistic.

**Megan Stalter:** That's what—I would say yes. She has definitely—she shows a lot of selfishness. She appears to be full of herself, but I think she's actually insecure, which is some of my favorite people to play are like—they're very—I say this all the time. Like, a nervous person who like appears very confident at the same time is so fun.

**Jesse Thorn:** Are you a nervous person who appears confident?

*(Megan confirms with a laugh.)*

Yeah. I thought you might be.

**Megan Stalter:** Or sometimes I think I appear nervous, but I'm very confident. Like, it's like I'm both at the same time. Like, on stage, you know, like I might stutter and like—you know, my on-stage persona is like the show's always falling apart, but I've actually never felt more confident than when I'm on stage.

**Jesse Thorn:** I have to say—have you looked at your Wikipedia page before?

**Megan Stalter:** I think I've looked at it before, but—

**Jesse Thorn:** Not recently?

**Megan Stalter:** (*Laughing.*) I don't know if I've looked at it recently. What does it say?

[00:05:00]

**Jesse Thorn:** Okay, so I want to be clear that my research process extends far beyond the bounds of Wikipedia. I don't want people to think that when someone comes in to be a guest on the show, I just like look at their Wikipedia page and call it a day. But both my producer, Kevin, and I were struck by the first paragraph of your Wikipedia page.

**Megan Stalter:** (*Laughing.*) What does it say?

**Jesse Thorn:** It says, “Megan Stalter, born 1990 or 1991.” Do you want to clarify that?

**Megan Stalter:** Uh, no, that's really private information. No, 1990. I'll say it. That's interesting that they're going, “I don't know which year,” but they're so close that how could they be that close without knowing?

**Jesse Thorn:** We'll see. “Megan Stalter, born 1990 or 1991.” We now know 1990.

**Megan Stalter:** (*Laughs.*) Yeah, we could change it.

**Jesse Thorn:** “—is an American comedian and actress. In her videos, she specializes in desperate, deluded characters who are prone to theatricality, frequent mispronunciations, and botched suicide attempts.”

**Megan Stalter:** What does that mean? (*Laughs.*) I don't know about the last part.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, the last part seems like a little bit of filigree.

**Megan Stalter:** Yeah, but it also seems so specific, but I don't remember doing a character that tried to do that.

**Jesse Thorn:** I think that there is—

**Megan Stalter:** That is weird! The last part!

**Jesse Thorn:** The other parts of it do add up to me.

**Megan Stalter:** Yeah, that's what I was going to say. The last part's like wait a second. Like, I was on board. I was like, yeah, yeah. Of course, of course. The last part, I'm like, “Well, maybe that's someone else.”

**Jesse Thorn:** It is rare that I have read interviews with guests on this show where they describe themselves in childhood as having known they were special. (*Chuckles.*)

**Megan Stalter:** (*Cackles.*) Yeah, that is something that I've definitely said. I would say that.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you mean it?

**Megan Stalter:** Yeah. (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** I admire you saying that and meaning it.

**Megan Stalter:** But I think that, to be honest, when I first started performing, I was like really delusional. I was like, "I am so good," in like not a cocky way, you know. Like, I'm really proud of myself, but I was actually really bad.

Like, I remember my friend was like, "You were kind of the person that'd run on stage and people would be like, (*groaning*) 'oh my god'. like very Michael Scott in the office doing improv." But I always thought I was really good, and I just had so much fun on stage. So, maybe that's what I was feeling.

**Jesse Thorn:** What is the context that we're talking about? Are you like a nine-year-old in summer camp or a 13-year-old in middle school theatre or what?

**Megan Stalter:** Well, I think like when I was little, I was probably just classic theatre girl wanting to be on stage, so I don't think I was really bad or good. But then when I was like early 20s, I thought I was really good. And I was not good. But I think that's good for me. I'm glad that I wasn't that good at first. (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** What were the first places where you performed on stage?

**Megan Stalter:** So, I did improv in a theater in Dayton, Ohio. It's called the Black Box Theater. And the man that ran that theater turned out to be kind of naughty in a way that was like he was upset with me, because I started doing standup, and I kept taking classes from a different woman that wasn't him. And he was like, "You need to choose. You know, stop doing so many little jokes on my stage. Like, you need to choose." And I wanted to keep doing standup and taking classes from this woman and him. So, then he kind of asked me to leave the show.

And it was a Shakespeare improv show. So, to his defense like I wasn't really good in the show. Like, I would poison everyone. But I was like, "That's Shakespeare, right? Like, I don't really know." (*Laughs.*) But I did that. And I also did standup at Wiley's in Dayton, Ohio.

**Jesse Thorn:** That could be a scene-stopper, though.

**Megan Stalter:** Oh, of course! (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Once you've killed the other people in the scene, there's not far to go.

**Megan Stalter:** I will—in everyone's defense, like I was not great at that point. But it was a little bit like heated. My mom emailed the theater after I was asked to leave the show, and she was like, “Me and my friends will not be back to the theater, because rising star Megan Stalter just got asked to leave the show.”

And he was like, “Did your mom email me this?” And I was like yeah. And he was like, “She needs to apologize to me if you want to come back.” (*Laughs.*) So, uh—

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

**Megan Stalter:** I was probably like—I think 23.

**Jesse Thorn:** Oh!

**Megan Stalter:** Yeah, this is when I was older. That would be worse. No, this was an adult who was a little bit naughty, bad attitude, talking to another adult who was not amazing in his shows. (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Was your mom's last—I'm sorry that I'm just gathering context on this. Was your mom's last name Stalter, and was that on her email?

**Megan Stalter:** No, she actually has a different last name. But I think that he put it together. I mean, she said “rising Star Megan Stalter”. Like, I don't know who else would have emailed the theater that.

**Jesse Thorn:** Or at least capitalized all four words.

**Megan Stalter:** Yeah. (*Laughs.*)

[00:10:00]

**Jesse Thorn:** How did your mother feel about you not finishing college?

**Megan Stalter:** Oh, you know, it's so funny, because I was like in and out of different classes. I was trying nursing classes, teaching classes. But all I wanted to do was perform. And she's actually the one that was like, “You should just like go for it.” I think she saw that I was like really wanting it and feeling stuck. And it's funny, because she'll be like, “Go for it,” and then be like, “But don't leave.” Right? Like, it'll be like, “Go for it. Do what you need to do.” And then it'll be like, “Please don't move.” (*Laughs.*) But she's never made me feel weird about not finishing. I think that it was like the best decision, but I'm also really glad I had those years where I was like trying to figure it out, I think.

**Jesse Thorn:** How long was it? How long was it before you moved to—you moved to New York first, right?

**Megan Stalter:** I moved to Chicago. And I lived in Chicago for like seven years doing comedy and nannyng. So, it was like I was in Ohio in community college. So, it's like I was in and out of different majors, and like I did that for a couple years. Like, I definitely have like a lot of credits. But I was like I just need to go now, because I really—I would go to the bookstore and read like acting books and like those old like theatre books and just dream about like, “This is all I want to do.”

**Jesse Thorn:** More still to come with Megan Stalter. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

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**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm here in the studio with Megan Stalter. She's a comedian and actor. You've seen her on the TV show *Hacks*, which just wrapped up its third season on Max. She also stars in the movie *Cora Bora*, which is available on demand now. Let's get back into our conversation.

You grew up going to Pentecostal church. What did that mean practically? What was going on in church?

**Megan Stalter:** Yeah, I really loved the church that we came up in. It was definitely like really Holy Spirit-filled, like definitely intense in like a good way. Like, I really loved it. It's not like cartoonish—like you know, when they're like running around with snakes? Like, the joke about Pentecostal churches? It wasn't like that. But it was like very like spiritually intense. And I remember like being so little then—

**Jesse Thorn:** Was there any speaking in tongues or—?

**Megan Stalter:** Yeah, definitely. But when you grow up with it, it's not scary. Like, I think it's—I understand people like feeling scared if they don't know what it is or aren't around it, but I—I mean, I was like little, tiny, tiny, having people around me do it. Like, I mean, I remember like sleeping in the pews. Like, it was like—I never remember not being at that church. I feel lucky to experience that at such a young age.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I mean, that kind of religious ecstasy is an incredible thing for a human being.

**Megan Stalter:** Mm-hm. Yeah. I mean, it's so wild. It's hard to even explain that kind of experience. And I get that—I've seen people experience it for the first time, like be around like a church like that. I mean, in high school, I went to a non-denominational church, but we also spoke in tongues sometimes. And I've definitely seen teenagers like see it for the first time. And it's intense. Like, it makes sense that it is. It's like a—

I mean, I guess for me, I'm like, “Wow, like all these people are connecting to something bigger than ourselves at the same time.” Like, we're feeling connected to God at the same time. And it's like very unique. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** When I was a teenager was—in the late 1990s—was a real peak of rave culture. And EDM has never been for me, for the most part.

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But the thing that people described to me as loving most about that was the ecstatic feeling of losing yourself in a group experience that is the secular equivalent to speaking in tongues.

**Megan Stalter:** Yeah. I think like—it's interesting, especially talking about God in like the queer community that and kind of the comedy community. Because I think it's like two communities where there's not a ton of people that maybe consider themselves religious or spiritual. I don't like saying like, “Oh, religious, like I'm religious,” because it feels like it's like, oh, there's certain connotations. But I'm definitely very spiritual, and that's why I always say that I'm a God girl. (*Laughs.*)

I feel like I say that in every interview because I'm like—I love God. I feel connected to God. I don't have a church I go to, so that's why I feel like I'm not really like religious, I guess. But I'm also open to going to a cool, gay church. So, I feel very spiritual.

And I think that in the queer community and comedy community and just in general, the world, I sense that people want God or want to feel connected to each other and like something bigger. But I feel like the churches hurt people, or people just hurt each other. So, I think that's where all that pain is. But I don't believe that God is who's making us feel that way. And so, it's just interesting being able to share my experience. Because you don't always hear like—I just feel very sensitive to the— Like, people grow up with God a lot of times, and they come out and feel like they can't have God anymore, or church, or like that community. And it's like a huge loss.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's something I saw a lot as a kid myself. My godfather—I grew up Episcopalian, and my godfather is gay. And I grew up in a very queer church. Like, I grew up with gay priests, and the Episcopal Bishop of San Francisco was gay at the time and had both gay and lesbian priests.

**Megan Stalter:** That's so cool.

**Jesse Thorn:** But you know, it's also an institution that had traumatized lots of people. And people like—you know, like my godfather had to do a lot of work to get back over the bridge to their relationship with God because of that.

**Megan Stalter:** I mean, there's a lot of churches and religions that are like, “You can't be gay and be here.” Like, you know, even if they're people that aren't saying hateful things, they're still being like, “Well, you can't really be Catholic, or you can't really be this or that if you are gay. But come to the service.” You know? So—

And that, to me, doesn't feel like from the God that I know. I mean, God, created, you know, us to be gay. (*Laughs.*) Like, there's so many queer people—



**Jesse Thorn:** (*Playfully.*) Aw, man! I blew it!

**Megan Stalter:** There's so many queer people—imagine I'm like, “We're supposed to be gay. All of us.”

(*Jesse makes a faux frustrated grunt.*)

(*Laughs.*) But it's like—I just don't know how that's the same message of like love that they preach, but I also know it's a very complicated system. But I think it's painful to think of people that maybe want that and feel like they can't have it. Like, that is painful to me, because I'm like—that's not the God that I believe in.

**Jesse Thorn:** You're bi. I've heard you perhaps somewhat jokingly—

**Megan Stalter:** Imagine I'm like, “I am straight though.”

(*They laugh.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** You're bi, and I've heard you perhaps jokingly describe yourself as liking women better. But when you were growing up, when you were a teen and you were discovering romance—and you were also in the Pentecostal church and serious about it—did you just think of yourself as straight, because you knew you liked guys?

**Megan Stalter:** I think that I didn't not know that I was bi because of church or anything. I just didn't know, because I was a really late bloomer of doing anything with anyone. I felt like I always would get crushes, but I'd be very like shy. I wasn't like—you know, in elementary school when the girls chase the boys? Like, I knew I liked boys, but I didn't chase them. I was like, “I don't want anyone knowing who I like.” And I think when I started dating, I figured out quickly that I was bi. But I had a gay boyfriend in high school, so I'm like—I didn't really do anything sexually with anyone (*chuckles*) until I was like an adult, because my gay boyfriend and I didn't even make out. Like, we just kissed with our mouths closed.

So, I think I just didn't know, because when you know that you like guys, and everyone just assumes you're straight, and you're like coming across as straight, and you know you like guys, you're like—

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“Oh, I guess I'm straight,” and you don't even think about it. And then once you start dating, you're kind of like dating different people and you're realizing like what you like and what kinds of people you like.

**Jesse Thorn:** Do you have any relationship with your gay high school boyfriend?

**Megan Stalter:** I saw him maybe a year or so ago at a show. So, I ran into him. Like, he came out to see me with his boyfriend, like one of my shows, and that was special. We were so close, but we just don't live in the same place anymore. But I do love him a lot. And I think like a lot of people with taste had a gay boyfriend in high school.

*(They chuckle.)*

But it was like a sweet relationship, 'cause we really loved each other. But it was toxic at times, 'cause we were really obsessed with each other, and we were kids. So, we'd get jealous over the other person.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, I can understand that. Like, having seen those relationships from the outside, like there is an element of mutual protection society, right? Like, there is an element of people who really need some safety getting some safety out of that and often very sincere, true love and intimacy. But it can also be super painful on both sides, because of the inherent disjuncture of—you know, at the center of it, you know.

**Megan Stalter:** Right! *(Chuckles.)* We were both also theatre kids, so we were like very dramatic.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I don't think you even need to say that.

**Megan Stalter:** *(Cackles.)* We're both jocks, by the way, and we just loved playing soccer. So, it was hard for us to hang out, because we were always playing—doing sports, and we were doing basketball. *(Chuckles.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** When you moved to Chicago, did you start doing improv, or—? Like, Chicago is the biggest improv town probably in the world. And this has changed in the last—like, 10/15 years ago when you were there, it was somewhat different. But historically, the improv lane and the standup lane were very, very separate.

Like, I think the Kumail Nanjiani's and Cameron Esposito's of the world were a little more connected to the improv world than the previous generation. But like there were very separate lanes historically. And Chicago standup.

**Megan Stalter:** You mean before our time?

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. And Chicago standup was a very—thank you for including me in your time.

*(Megan laughs.)*

Chicago standup was very traditional historically. So, what was it like for you? Because your standup, to the extent that you do standup, is not traditional standup.

**Megan Stalter:** Imagine I'm like very traditional, like—*(laughs)*. I feel like it's always changing, and I felt like I saw it change while I was there. I mean, I was there for seven years. And I think I saw like a big, first of all, crazy, weird, “Hello, Andy Kaufman” comedy has been around forever, too. But I do think like you see alt comedy have big moments at different times, right? Like, I mean, everything's always changing.

And it feels like now alt comedy is kind of cool. Whereas before, I feel like you're right. Like, standup was so traditional that anyone doing anything different is like an absolute freak of nature, you know?

**Jesse Thorn:** One of the interesting things about your career is that even after you moved from Chicago to New York, you were a style of performance that certainly can be enjoyed, but it's not super monetizable in and of itself. Right? Like, nobody makes a living—almost nobody makes a living doing standup. A very narrow band of the world makes a living doing improv. And it seems like you kind of backed into your career as a grown adult, being lonely at home and talking into the camera on your phone.

**Megan Stalter:** *(Chuckles.)* Yeah, it's interesting. Like, you know, my stuff like blew up online during the pandemic, because I was like, “There's no way to perform right now.”

I definitely was getting more of a following before. When I moved to New York, I had a fake talk show online, *The Megan Stalter Show*. I don't think a ton of people were watching it, but I started putting little stuff online. But a lot of my standup doesn't translate online, because so much of it is the crowd being part of the weird experience of like a show falling apart. But that clip did make sense online.

And to be working so many years doing it and then that be the—you know, me doing like a two-minute video online, that's what got me so many opportunities. It all comes from my experience in Chicago. I mean, that's all—like, learning improv and knowing myself on stage, like all those tools like help me when I'm on set.

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Like, “Oh, do something crazy in this scene, or like make this one more loose.” Like, that's all my training. I've never been to like an acting class, or I didn't take like theatre in college or anything. So, all my training is improv and being on stage.

**Jesse Thorn:** I want to play a little bit of one of the first videos you made online that really went viral. Still maybe one of your most popular overall. And it's a pride announcement from a butter shop called Cecily's Butter Shop.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Megan Statler:** *(With a southern twang.)* Hi, gay! Happy Pride Month! We are sashaying away with deals. This month at The Butter Shop, we're running a special deal. If you can prove that you're queer, you get three pints off your choice of creamed, chucked, or drowned—drowned butter. And if you do mouth stuff, you get four.

We love gay! And it's awesome. Yeah, we—we wouldn't. *(Stammering.)* Your partn—wouldn't—hey. Wouldn't your partner want butter from the original Old Maid's home?

We've been making butter since 1945. And we've been accepting all people since... the last four months. So, yeah. We're gagging for you to come take a taste of Cecily's Butter Chop—uh Cecily's Butter Shop.

My friend's mom, um, I think is... I think is gay. So.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Megan Stalter:** I haven't heard the whole thing in so long.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, I think it is like reflective of like—obviously, this kind of thing goes viral if it A) is good. It has to be good. But also, you know, it speaks to something about someone that's watching it. Right? But I think that broadly, it reflects something that you're good at, which is that kind of sweaty desperation that is incompetent.

*(Megan laughs and agrees.)*

Like, an incompetent—just an awkward, disastrous, thirstiness.

**Megan Stalter:** Hard to watch, can't look away trainwreck.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. Did you know that was something you were good at?

*(They chuckle.)*

**Megan Stalter:** I think that's definitely something I learned on stage to do. I think it's funny, because sometimes I'll stutter on stage. 'Cause it's like, I feel really confident, but also like it's such a funny, easy joke if you are moving on to the next thing to do. *(Laughs.)* Like, the stuttering, the nervousness. Like, to appear nervous, but also you feel really confident. Like, on stage I feel really confident. In real life, a lot of times I'll feel like nervous like ordering coffee or something.

I just think it's funny to appear like—to be able to have the power of the room being on stage, everyone's watching you, and you're stuttering through. It's like really funny to me.

**Jesse Thorn:** We'll finish up with Megan Stalter in just a minute. After the break: she got her first taste of success making short videos on YouTube. How does it feel going from that kind of success to traditional showbusiness success? We'll get into it. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

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**Promo:**

**Hal Lublin:** Alison Brie was the star of the Netflix series *GLOW*.

**Danielle Radford:** Being a gorgeous lady of wrestling isn't easy.

**Lindsey Kelk:** Especially when it's time to get in the ring.

**Alison Brie:** Wrestling is so interesting in that you can't do anything halfway. Okay, so now it's time to run at that woman's body and dive over her, headfirst. Like, you can't do that halfway. You can't do that in slow motion.

**Hal Lublin:** Alison Brie on *Tights and Fights*.

**Danielle Radford:** Max Fun's perfect wrestling podcast, available now.

**Lindsey Kelk:** And if you don't listen:

**Alison Brie:** I'll see you in the ring! (*Chuckles.*)

(*Musical stinger.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm Jesse Thorn. It's a *Bullseye*. My guest, Meg Stalter, has starred on the TV show *Hacks*. That show is about standup comedy and the business of standup comedy. Her character, Kayla, is an assistant to Jimmy, who's a manager. The two of them are kind of stuck together, and they don't really like each other. Kayla is profoundly incompetent, more than a little bit inappropriate towards her boss.

[00:30:00]

And when I say more than a little bit inappropriate, not play-ably on NPR inappropriate. So, of course, HR gets involved.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Barbara:** So, after further investigation and speaking with legal, we have determined that this was a misunderstanding and that Kayla will remain at your desk.

**Kayla:** Yes!

**Jimmy:** Are you kidding me? Barbara, who did you talk to?

**Kayla:** Probably everyone. This whole office is always talking about our will-they-won't-they.

**Jimmy:** They won't!

**Barbara:** Okay. Um, Kayla, would you mind stuffing out for a moment, please?

**Kayla:** (*Cheerfully.*) Yep!

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Megan Stalter:** That is so crazy. That girl's crazy. (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** So, what do you see in that character that is not just monster with no self-awareness?

**Megan Stalter:** Well, first of all, I want to say that Paul Downs, who plays Jimmy, is the world's most beautiful goddess. He is so funny and sweet, and I love working with him and everyone on the show. I think that Kayla, what gets me about her is that, yes, she has no boundaries. Yes, she's sassy. But she loves Jimmy so much.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Chuckling.*) She's sassy.

**Megan Stalter:** She's sassy! She loves him. And like, she just wants like his love and friendship. And I think, you know, there's some scenes in season three that's a little bit more like emotional with them. And I think that those like came really easy, because I feel so connected to Paul and their friendship in the show. You know, I think it gets me. If someone just wants to be loved and like wants friendship and like—for me, I could forgive them for so much of their mistakes.

**Jesse Thorn:** One of the interesting things about the character to me is that *Hacks* is a very grounded show that is largely about the emotional consequences of comedy than it is about the comedy itself. Like, it honestly has probably the best simulacrum of standup I've ever seen in a TV show or movie. Like, standup in a TV show or movie often feels really false. And it doesn't in *Hacks*, which is—

**Megan Stalter:** They do a good job of that, too. Thank you. I can't take credit, obviously, but like on behalf of the show, thank you. Because I know that's hard.

**Jesse Thorn:** And it's being performed by actors, largely, who are not standups, which makes it even more remarkable to me. But like, it's not about the act. It's not about the jokes. It's about the consequences and the feelings behind doing comedy. And it's a grounded show. And your character is, in that context, the least grounded.

*(They laugh.)*

How do you modulate your performance and the tone of your performance to fit in the context of this world where everything has real emotional consequences?

**Megan Stalter:** I think that Lucia and Jen and Paul—you know, the show's creators and writers—and I think that they do such an amazing job of grounding even like really crazy moments. And I think the more we do, the more they give us—like, as we go on, there are like more intimate or sweet scenes. Even if like we're so crazy together, there's like sweet, grounded moments that keep them in the world of the show that we do try to be like, “Okay, maybe that is a little too far.” *(Giggles.)*

So, I think that they do a good job of grounding, even when it's so crazy, you know? And so, it's more like, “Okay, Kayla is wild. She completely has no boundaries. But if this person was real, like how much—how far would she go?”

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm just like—it was so hard for me to get a job. People like that have a job?!

**Megan Stalter:** I know, it's crazy! It is insane, but I think like the show being so grounded lets us have like a crazy character like that can still live in the world. Because the writers are so genius and make sure that still feels real even though it's the most unreal thing, unreal character. It's like the least grounded and yet still somehow fits in the show, because the writing's so amazing.

**Jesse Thorn:** Has performing the kind of unhinged thirst that sometimes characterizes characters you've played for comedy helped you understand yourself and the unhinged thirst that's necessary to think that you could go on stage and entertain people in general?

**Megan Stalter:** *(Chuckles.)* That's such a good question. Yeah. I think letting myself play these really crazy, wild people... I think I was like falling in love with myself in my 20s when I let myself do all of this. And I know that sounds kind of like corny, but it's like when you let yourself really be who you are—

[00:35:00]

—even if that means playing like really weird people like online and like getting on stage and feeling like, “No, like I feel like I have something funny to show these people!” I just feel like I really found myself when I let myself be who I am. And that includes letting myself do what I really love doing. So, in that way, yeah, I think it helped me.

But yeah, I think it gives you permission to feel like, oh, I'm not too much. Like, I'm really emotional and really intense in certain ways, but I love that about me. And I think playing a

character like Kayla and loving her even when she's like naughty and like makes mistakes? Yeah, that definitely helps you be like it's okay for me to, also.

**Jesse Thorn:** Because I'm thinking like what is more theatrical, desperate, and deluded than the feeling of being lonely in a COVID lockdown and doing comedy by yourself into your phone for an hour every night on Instagram Live.

**Megan Stalter:** (*Laughs.*) And that's the thing that brought me some sort of joy in the scariest time. Like, I was like, "Wow! I really love performing, because I will find a way even if there's no stage or you're not allowed out of your house." And that's what I was like—that kept me going. Because I was so—I was literally like in New York alone. Like, my family wasn't there. Eventually, I moved to Ohio for a bit to be with my family, but I was like so scared, so alone, so terrified, so sad about everything in the world. And I was like, "Let's pretend that we're going to Paris tonight and turn on the Instagram Live."

And it wasn't about blowing up or trying to get people to watch my stuff. It literally was about passing the time and having something to focus on. Because I really feel like a weird artist in that way of like, I have to be making something. I just like am addicted to performing. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, Megan Stalter, I sure appreciate your time. Thank you for coming to be on *Bullseye*.

**Megan Stalter:** Oh my gosh! Thank you so much for having me. It was so nice to talk to you.

**Jesse Thorn:** Megan Stalter. Her movie, *Cora Bora*, is available to rent digitally pretty much anywhere. Go check it out. If you want to catch her on *Hacks*, great choice. You can stream all three seasons of the show on Max.

**Transition:** Bright, chiming synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where, I'm going to be frank with you, it's too hot.

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 Daniel Huecias. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. I was gonna go to the—I was gonna try—I asked Dan to go to the ballgame with me this week. This guy's summering on the cape!

Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation", written and recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries.



*Bullseye* is on Instagram, [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). We're also on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. Big stuff coming on the *Bullseye* YouTube page. So, go subscribe now. I'm not playing around. Go search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. Hit subscribe. Smash that subscribe button, as they say.

I think that's about it. 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.

*(Music ends.)*

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