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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 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 guests this week are two of hip-hop's greatest heroes. The first is Pete Rock, one of the greatest beat makers of all time. In the late 1980s and early '90s, he recorded with the rapper CL Smooth, making some of the most beloved records in the history of the genre. Pete Rock's dusty fingers reached into the deepest corners of record shops and thrift stores, pulling out perfect loops and drum sounds and pushing the limits of the SP-1200 sampler.

Music: “Soul Brother #1” from the album *Mecca and The Soul Brother* by Pete Rock and CL Smooth.

Soul Brother #1, here I come on the new tip

Nestle coated right, 'cause I'm rich thick and chocolate

Plug up any mic, I'll bet you Pete Rock'll spark it

Huns always ask what's the bulge in my pocket

I tell 'em, "Papes", I rock them top to bottom

Never hesitate to say...

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: The second is the rapper Common, who—I mean, that's Common! Chicago's favorite son, winner of a Grammy, a Golden Globe, and an Academy Award—a man who did a Tiny Desk concert at the White House.

Music: “I Used to Love H.E.R.” from the album *Resurrection* by Common.

A-yes, yes y'all, and you don't stop

And to the beat Com Sense'll be the sure shot, come on

I met this girl when I was ten years old

And what I loved most, she had so much soul

She was old school when I was just a shorty

Never knew throughout my life she would be there for me

On the regular, not a church girl, she was secular

Not about the money

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Pete Rock and Common had been friends for decades, but they had hardly worked together until now. Pete and Common just released *The Auditorium, Vol. 1*, a 15-track epic. Here's one of those songs, "Dreamin".

Music: "Dreamin" from the album *The Auditorium, Vol. 1* by Pete Rock and Common.

D-d-daydreaming and I'm thinking of you

Daydreamin' and I'm thinking of you, you, you

Baby, we could do it, take your time, do it right

I was hearing melodies and rhythms through the night

This was a dream that felt real like a fight

What made it realer, J Dilla was there in the light

A movement was happening, H. Brown was rapping and

Kool G and Polo talking 'bout they back again

I seen Prince; he was time-travelling

Through the Morris Days and Gladys Knights (Woo)

Sheila E. reminded me about the glamorous life

Ali was telling me why he had to fight

The struggle, he never left so we could have our rights

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Common, Pete Rock, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's so nice to have you on the show.

Pete Rock: Oh man, it's nice to be here.

Common: Yes, thank you for having us, brother.

Jesse Thorn: Pete, I should say welcome back. Thank you. Thank you again. I looked; it was a decade ago that we talked. 2015.

Pete Rock: It was some years. Yes. Good to see you again.

Jesse Thorn: I'm grateful to have you both here. How long have the two of you known each other?

Pete Rock: Since the early '90s.

Common: We don't know the exact year, but it's somewhere around that.

Pete Rock: '91 maybe, bro!

Common: Since the early '90s, Pete and I knew each other, was cool, been around each other. Did some work together on songs. So, we've been brothers. It's just, you know, our journeys like—we've both like been doing our own things, and this has been the first time we've obviously came together for something, a full vision project.

Jesse Thorn: Comm, you must have been intimidated by Pete and CL Smooth in the early '90s.

Common: Yeah, no, for sure. I mean I was definitely looking up to like Pete Rock and CL Smooth, Tribe Called Quest, Jungle Brothers, you know, KRS. It was many—Ice Cube, Pharcyde, even people that were my age and peers and just coming out at the same time, I still—Nas, Big. You know, it was a slew of people, but for sure P Rock and CL Smooth were inspirations for us. Like this—when you're an MC, you like—you got that boxer mentality like, "Yo, I belong there."

Pete Rock: Yep. *(Chuckles.)*

Common: You kind of got the mentality of an athlete. You hear—when you hear like Anthony Edwards, who plays for the Minnesota Timberwolves like, “Yo, I’m the man,” you’ve kind of got to have some of that in you to be an MC in hip-hop.

Music: “All the Places” from the album *The Main Ingredient* by Pete Rock and CL Smooth.

Welcome to the zone where the strong only survive

The places I drive? All the gangsters can't stay alive

Take my universal journey through the jungles of the hardest town

Where my brothers lay their life down

You want something to play with?

Go find yourself some toys, when you mistake these grown men for little boys

More real than what is real, so feel 'em sending

Compare the God with no beginning, and we'll have no ending

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Pete, what's the first of Comm's records that you remember being impressed by?

Pete Rock: I mean, I liked the *Can I Borrow a Dollar* album. I liked the *Resurrection* album. I liked the B album, of course. And the one with “your mother undercover”.

Common: Yeah, *One Day It'll All Make Sense*.

Pete Rock: *One Day It'll All Make Sense*. And basically everything. You know, *Electric Circus*. I appreciate the effort that he put in to make all these albums. That part is the impressive part.

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Jesse Thorn: I mean, *Resurrection* is one of those records that—there's a lot of recording artists who say what they have to say on their first album, and it's diminishing returns from there. *Resurrection* is one of those records that is a big expansion in ambition from what *Can I Borrow a Dollar* is. And *Can I Borrow a Dollar* is a good record, but *Resurrection* was an attempt to do a lot more than that.

Common: With *Can I Borrow a Dollar*, it was really like whatever resources we had, the records that were from our friends' fathers—you know—attics. So, we didn't have as much—it's no excuse, but this is where we were starting. And then I was finding my voice too, like you know, from doing like the squeaky thing to—that was my style, to being like, okay, how do I figure out what's next for me? Like, what is a style that I really feel?

And it just took me growing within myself, man. I started reading the Quran along with the Bible. I was reading both. I was listening to Coltrane and listening to a lot of jazz because of Pete Rock and because of Tribe. I started listening to like, you know, Love Supreme and things that I hadn't been exposed to growing up in Chicago. I was—I mean, jazz was here, but I wasn't listening to jazz growing up. So, I think you could find No I.D. and myself really starting to kind of grow up in a way and cultivate even—that was the first time I really started talking about my life in certain ways. Like, where I was. I was 20/21 years old when I was writing it. And there was a lot of things on my mind, and I felt like, oh man, I can tell some of my story and tell some of the things I feel.

Jesse Thorn: I think that record, Comm—like, I was listening to some of it, and there's a track on there called “I Used to Love H.E.R.” that's sort of a metaphorical, brokenhearted love story about hip-hop. But there's another song on there that I hadn't thought about in a while called “Book of Life”.

Music: “Book of Life” from the album *Resurrection* by Common.

In the prime of my life, I have no time for a wife

I funnel through the tunnel, disgruntled

Trying to find me some light

In the rim of darkness, I too sing

I may not be the darkest, brother

But I was always told to act my age, not my color

Not knowing that my color...

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: You know, you rap about your age. You offhandedly mention your age in that song. I think it's either 21 or 22. It's really a song about you interrogating yourself and like asking yourself where you are at this point in your life and who you are. And that's something that not every 21- or 22-year-old, especially MC, can do.

Common: Yeah, that was—I'm so glad you bring that song up, Jesse. Because that was the song that I was thinking about when I was saying I really started to go within and like

examine myself and see like— In that song, I say, “I’m 22 catch. Like, it’s a catch-22, because I really don’t like school, wasn’t really for me though.” My mother is a teacher, and I’ve been in school, and I’ve been told to pursue these things, but what really do I want for my life? And society is saying this, and society is telling me I should have this. And I’m drinking a lot. And I’m kicking it. And I’m like—I ain’t mature all the way yet. And I’m just acknowledging these things and just putting it in my raps, and it’s my book of life.

And yeah, man. That was one of the first songs that I ever had written that was really more introspective and putting myself out there and my vulnerability as a person. And you know, it taught me a lot, as far as being an artist. Because I eventually became more about that. You know like just writing songs like “Retrospect for Life”, which was about abortion, or like, “Between Me, You, and Liberation”, which, is a song I wrote about my aunt having cancer and how I was dealing with that. And just, you know, I started to write about a lot of things that dealt with me, family, and just my own vulnerabilities in life.

Music: “Between Me, You, and Liberation” from the album *Electric Circus* by Common.

Because of you I’m stronger, I’m afraid no longer

I feel so alive in me, you help liberate me, me, me

She laid; I watched her breathe

Happy to be here, not afraid to leave

I couldn’t conceive her not being here

Death in her face, her not having fear

Less than a year, she was diagnosed with it

Memories of that year, so close and vivid

Happiness, would only visit...

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Did you have to gear yourself up for that? Like, did you have to talk yourself into writing about something that is, you know, not just self-reflective but self-critical as well?

Common: I think, because I grew up around a group of people, a group of men—young men, who—man, they would only let you be yourself.

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Meaning, I couldn't come up with like—if I ain't a tough dude, don't try to be tough. You could be who you are. And like, if you're scared about something, they're going to call you out on it. And because we were so open as young men at that time, I felt like it was okay for me to be critical in my raps. Like, if my friends could accept it, I almost was like, “Oh, well, whatever the world thinks—”

‘Cause I was really, at that time, rapping to impress my friends. You know? And they would hear me talk about these things, and we would talk about them as brothers, like as men. Like, “Man, I don't know what I want to do, man. What's going on?” You know, these were conversations that we would have. So, I didn't feel as fearful about expressing that when I did write like that. And as I continue—

You know, the times where my friends got real critical is when I was wearing like crochet clothes and hats, you know. And they were like, “What are you doing all this artsy stuff and electric circus type of music?” But even by the end, you know, I'm super confident in the fact that I'm going to be true to who I am—whether, you know, my friends liked it, my mama liked it, whether—you know, I just knew just to be me.

Jesse Thorn: You are a real great advocate for crochet as an artform, Common.

(Common laughs and agrees.)

More still to come with Pete Rock and Common. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Promo:

(Sci-fi beeping.)

Music: Cheerful synth.

Ben Harrison: Hey, do you have a favorite episode of *Star Trek*?

Adam Pranica: If you do, you should also have a favorite *Star Trek* podcast.

Ben: *Greatest Trek* is about all the new streaming *Star Trek* shows, and it's a great companion to *The Greatest Generation*—our hit show about back catalog *Star Trek* that you grew up with.

Adam: It's a comedy podcast by two folks who used to be video producers. So, it's a serious mix of comedy and insight that fits right into the Maximum Fun network of shows.

Ben: And *Greatest Trek* is one of the most popular *Star Trek* podcasts in the world.

Adam: So, if you're following *Lower Decks*, *Prodigy*, or *Strange New Worlds*, come hang out with us every Friday as we roast and review favorite *Star Trek* shows.

Ben: It's on [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org), YouTube, or your podcatching app.

(Sci-fi beep.)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Pete Rock and Common. Common is, of course, a legend of underground hip-hop—the kind of legend of underground hip-hop who has been above ground for quite some time. Pete Rock is a producer with hundreds of credits to his name. He's made beats for CL Smooth, Heavy D & the Boyz, Run-DMC, Public Enemy, Biggie, Nas. I mean, I could go on naming famous rappers, or we could get back into the interview. So, let's do the latter.

Pete, there are these records that both of you made in that time that are like the kind of songs that—if the DJ puts them on in that set of music like that, people will lose their minds, right?

Probably the most iconic hip-hop record that you ever produced is “They Reminisce Over You”.

Pete Rock: I agree.

Music: “They Reminisce Over You (*T.R.O.Y.*)” from the album *Mecca and The Soul Brother* by Pete Rock and CL Smooth.

I reminisce so you never forget this

The days of way-back, so many bear witness the fitness

Take the first letter out of each word in this joint

Listen close as I prove my point

T to the R the O-Y, how did you and I meet?

In front of Big Lou's, fighting in the street

But only you saw what took many time to see

I dedicate this to you for believing in me

Rain or shine, yes, in any weather

My Grandmom Pam holds the family together

My Uncle Doc's the greatest, better yet the latest

If we're talking about a car...

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: That's a song that you and CL Smooth made about a friend, Trouble T Roy, who died. To have this huge hit record and all the excitement of having a huge hit record, but also it's a record about a friend of yours who's gone and relatively recently.

Pete Rock: Yeah. Shout to Troy Dixon and his family, you know. And yeah, he was a great in our community. And when he passed, you know, it affected every single last one of us. So, you know, one day I went digging and, you know, feeling all depressed and everything. And it still drew me to listening to music. And I found this album, this jazz album, Tom Scott album. And I'm, you know, listening to it. And then I hear this song called "Today". And when I heard the beginning, I was like, "Oh, wow, Black Sheep used that part." You know?

Then as the record is continually playing, I'm hearing other elements that's messing with my emotions. You know what I'm saying? So, I'm listening, and I hear this bass line, and I'm like, wow. You know what I mean? Then I hear other little things like voices and guitars. And then I heard the saxophone. And when I heard that saxophone, I just started crying. You know what I'm saying? Like, you know, 'cause I'd just lost someone that was dear to me.

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So, then you know, I said to myself, you know, "Why am I crying like this?" Then I figured it out. I'm like, "You know what? Maybe that's God telling me I got to make something out of this." And so, that's what I did. And I believe he was in the room when I did it.

Jesse Thorn: What was it like to live with it? I mean, you have this record that you hear when you're out or that you put on or that you perform, and like every time you're doing it, you're living with this thing that happened in your life, your friend passing.

Pete Rock: Yeah, bittersweet record. You know, for me it's bittersweet. And then if you can relate, then you understand what I just said. You know what I'm saying? In your life, if you lost someone special, and you hear this song, and it makes you think about them, that means—you know, I guess maybe I did my job. You know? And it's a song that's sentimental. It's like a hip-hop sentimental song, you know what I mean?

Common: I feel like it was one of the first songs that I can remember in hip-hop that had that much soul to it. Like, where it was like somebody talking about their life and then honoring somebody who had passed in that way. And I gotta say, you know, to that is it's also

something—I know—I mean I can't tell you how your experience is, hearing it over and over, but I will say, like when I've mentioned people who've passed who've been close to me in my songs, it's almost like a release and an honoring of them so much that at different times, I could feel the celebration of them. And sometimes I could feel, damn, that person is actually not physically here in that form. And then at times I feel their spirit with me when I'm singing it. I'm like charged, you know?

So, it's like—it serves so many things. But for me, it's definitely been a release and a healing thing to be able to mention people. And I bring that up, because even on our new album, I talk about my cousin who I lost. His name is Ajile. And he was the first person that I wrote a rap with. Like, I had been into hip-hop, but he and I sat down and decided to write raps. So, he's almost responsible for me like starting to rap. But he was one of my—he's my best friend in life. The closest one. And when—you know, it took me a long time to say anything. But on this album, I said his name a couple times. And I'm like—man, it feels like empowering in a way.

Music: “Lonesome” from the album *The Auditorium, Vol. 1* by Common and Pete Rock.

(Are you lonesome?)

I thank God for the day and my cousin Ajile

And the one that got away, I'm the potter's clay

Speak and it will be just like my mama say

I'm seeking to be free like a holiday

My man get the work off, I'm tryna get these words off

Pops left, love gone, that was my first loss

Skin in the game like I'm playing with my shirt off

A lot on my shoulders, I'm tryna get the dirt off

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: How did the two of you decide to make a record together?

Pete Rock: I'm gonna say—I always wanted to do a full project with Common after working with him twice, you know, during our come up. And after the *Soul Survivor* album, you know, he left me with that beautiful verse with Pun and Nore. And you know, I listen to my records and my albums over and over sometimes. And sometimes I don't listen to it for a

couple of years. You know what I'm saying? But when I went back and listened to his verse, I was like, "Wow, it would be great if I could do an album with Common."

You know, I thought about that back then, you know. And then our paths just led us in different directions. But you know, when the strike happened and the pandemic happened, people had really not much to do. So, you know, I think we found each other like after 2020, was it? Again?

Common: It was somewhere during the pandemic. I reached out to Pete, because at one point when we was really—when I was like, "Pete, I want to do something with you," I was over in London filming a TV project. But I knew, I said, "Once I get back to the land, once I get back to the land, like the US, I'm going to see Pete." I'm like, "Pete, is it cool to come through?"

He's like, "Yes, come through."

I went out to his spot. And being in his house and just being in the atmosphere of records, of just life, brotherhood—it was like him playing me beats. I was like, "We got to do something. We got to do like a project." And this—you know, I knew it was going to be a journey. I didn't know like that I would have this much fun and joy and feel so good about the work we've done!

Pete Rock: (*Chuckles.*) You deserve it, bro.

Common: Thank you, brother. You do too.

(*Pete thanks him.*)

And I got to say, one of my biggest blessings in this whole thing is seeing Pete Rock be celebrated the way he deserves to, and to see him being reinvented and introduced to some—

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—reintroduced to some. Like, just remember—like, people—you know, sometimes you gotta remind people of who you are and what you do.

(*Pete agrees.*)

And I think he's done it in such a brilliant way with the music he created for this album. He's been doing it, doing instrumentals and doing— But to have an album project that's like around people, people are aware of it. And they're like, "Pete Rock is—" You know, just having people coming to me on the streets talking about, "Yo, that album you and Pete Rock got—"

I'm like—yeah. It's almost kind of like—it is a dream in a way, and we just—we grateful, and I'm grateful that we decided to connect with it. Pete told me one other thing. Pete told me

something that kind of hit me. He was like—he said J Dilla had told him before he passed that, man, you should—J Dilla said you should work with—what? Phat Cat?

Pete Rock: Phat Cat. Guilty Simpson.

Common: Guilty Simpson, and me.

Pete Rock: You.

Common: Three people that Dilla said that Pete should work with. And that's like—that meant something to me, and it must have meant something to Pete too.

(Pete confirms.)

And you know, we here. Everything is—when we're in tune, everything is divine timing. So, it happened at the right time. I think people are now open to hip-hop in a new way too.

Jesse Thorn: Common, I think that for an emcee with such a strong voice—and I don't mean literal voice, but like figurative voice—you've made a lot of very producer-centric records. You've had, you know—earlier in your career you were really deeply partnered with No I.D.. you worked really closely with Questlove on some of the middle records, you know. Your partnership with Kanye West led to some big hits in the aughts. You worked with No I.D. recently.

So, how is it different working with Pete when you're used to working with producers with a lot to say, with a lot of input? People who are not just folks making beats.

Common: Well, Pete is truly a producer. And I got to know that more and more working on the whole album. And he's just truly a visionary and has a passion and his own artistry, his own way of approaching things. Like, each producer you mentioned, from No I.D. to J Dilla to Questlove to Kanye, they all have their own thing. They are true to who they are. They are soulful artists, producers.

And Pete is very true to who he is as a producer. You can feel the accumulation of everything; from his father's records to his Jamaican heritage, to his knowledge of music, to his own experiences, to being a dude born in the Bronx growing up in Mount Vernon. Like, all that comes out. His perspective is a strong-minded, intelligent perspective. It comes through his music. And that makes him very unique in the production space, you know. Because he's giving his soul to the music.

And like, from a producer's standpoint, the reason why I could say it wasn't just sending beats is because, yeah, it was—first of all, there were times he was sending records to me like, “What do you think of this record?” And then he'd chop it up three different ways and be like, “Which way you like the best?”

And I'm like, *(excited)* “Oh, I get to say this?! Like, yo, this is amazing!”

(Pete laughs and agrees.)

You know. And just, that's a joy for me as an artist to be a part of that process, especially when somebody's sending you good records. 'Cause it's like the records—you're like, oh, the potential of this record is like—it's infinite. It's in God's hands. You know? And that just feels great. So, then that process was great, but then also like me writing the songs and having Pete's input—whether it was like—if a time where we bumped heads— We had bumped heads on a song on the album called “A God There Is”, and it was like—man, Pete was like, “The one is right here.”

And I was like, “Well, I wrote the one right here. This is where I started.”

(Pete chuckles.)

He's like, “Bro, I came from the school of James Brown, and this is where the one is.”

And I'm like, “Okay, well, listen—I think I'm a jazz artist, so I'm coming with the one right here.”

And then he—we just ended up coming to an agreement, and the song is right. And we went—Pete was right. It was his way. He was like, “Look, I made this beat. I know where the one started when I set it.” So, I had to—that's part of producing to me.

And at times he was like, you know, hey—like, on the song “Fortune”, he was like, “I want you to just mellow it down. The rhyme is great. The rhyme is great. Like, that rough take you did, I'll wrap it in that energy.” And I just—you know, I appreciated that and just also seeing the levels. Because there was times I wanted to—

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I was like, “Pete, we done with this song, right?”

He's like, “No, I got some other stuff, you know, I added.”

(Pete laughs.)

And one thing I got to say that I really, really loved that I missed from my own creative process that I don't—I can't say I've even experienced that with every producer I've worked with—is Pete will do some things right on the spot that just become the record. You know, like it ain't like it's premeditated, thought out like, “Okay, I was at home, and I thought about putting this Biz scratch or putting these horns in from this.” He'll just be like, “Oh man, these horns might be—” Or just start trying it, and then it's just there.

And I'm like, “Huh! Damn, that's dope!” And it's the record, man. So, it's almost got a freedom to it that I really loved in working with Pete too.

Music: “Don’t Curse” from the album *Peaceful Journey* by Heavy D & the Boyz.

Keep a party pimping from now 'til then

I don't have to swear, curse, or juggle

Lyrics in a verse to make a party bubble

So, Mr. Censorship, tell me what's your problem?

There's girlies on the corner, if wifey can't solve them

How does she say it? I'm curious, G

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Comm, you're in your 50s. Do you still get on the floor in your shows? There still some windmills in there?

Pete Rock: He just did windmills last week.

(They laugh.)

He's in shape. Tip top.

Common: Yeah, man, I can still bust out a couple. I was actually at a breakdance event. And man, these—I mean, I gotta give it up to the artists that were there, the breakdancers that were there. Like, B Boys and B Girls from all over the world. It was a Red Bull event. And man, it was incredible. And I couldn't help but be inspired. I got down and did my thing. I busted a few windmills.

(Pete laughs and confirms.)

Got up feeling a little dizzy. My knee hurt for about a month.

(They laugh.)

But it was all worth it, man. And that was an inspiration too, I gotta say. Because when I went there, I was listening to the music they was playing all these breakbeats and like breakdance joints!

Pete Rock: Music, yeah.

Common: Yeah, music that I wasn't even up on. And I was like, “Man, hip-hop is always alive.”

(Pete agrees.)

Like, these people are not going to be on TV for breaking or like being on the charts. But they love the culture, and they're doing it. And they were there from all over the world rocking. And these pieces of music I heard, it was in the middle of when we were making the album. It just was an affirmation for me like, man, we were going in the right way. Because I was like this culture is still alive, and people yearn and thrive. And I mean, they yearn and desire it and want to hear that music. And some people are totally doing it and living it.

So, anyway, I was real appreciative. And to answer your question, Jesse, I can get down still with some windmills.

(Pete laughs.)

Jesse Thorn: I'm glad to hear it.

Pete Rock: And breathing life back into hip-hop is like the main focus for us. You know what I'm saying? And just joining in with the youngins that are doing it right now.

Jesse Thorn: We're going to take a quick break. When we come back, the true story of the time that I—mild mannered public radio host Jesse Thorn—booed one of our guests at a concert. It's *Bullseye*. For MaximumFun.org.

Promo:

Griffin McElroy: (*Dramatically.*) From the twisted minds that brought you *The Adventure Zone: Balance*, and *Amnesty*, and *Graduation*, and *Ethersea*, and *Steeplechase*, and *Outrespace*, and all the other ones—the McElroy brothers and dad are proud to reveal a bold vision for the future of actual play podcasting!

It's, um—it's called *The Adventure Zone vs. Dracula*.

Music: High energy, gothic-inspired harpsichord music.

Justin McElroy: Yeah, we're gonna kill Dracula's (*a censoring crow caw*).

Travis McElroy: We're gonna—well, we're gonna attempt—we haven't recorded all of it yet. We will attempt to kill Dracula's (*censoring crow caw*).

Justin: *The Adventure Zone vs. Dracula*.

Griffin: Yes, a season I will be running using the D&D 5th edition rule set. And there's two episodes out for you to listen to right now. We hope you will join us. Same bat-time, same bat-channel.

Clint McElroy: (*Amused.*) Bats, I see what you did there.

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guests are Pete Rock and Common. These two absolute legends of hip-hop just released their first ever collaborative album. It's called *The Auditorium, Vol. 1*. Let's get back into our conversation.

You've always been, Common, I think one of the rappers who's best at rapping about romance and love. And you know, when you're 21 years old, that's a pretty—you know, that's an unusual topic to be able to get at in rapping. Because, you know, when you're a 21-year-old young man, you may be thinking about specific parts of romance.

(Common laughs.)

[00:30:00]

Your body may be driving you towards specific parts of romance.

(Common agrees.)

But you know, now that you're in your 50s—you know, in a way I wonder like if it is reflective of a struggle to embrace the parts of love that are like beyond romance, right?

Common: Yeah. I mean, through songs, through heartbreaks, through therapy, through all different types of experiences. I feel like I could talk about love in a more full way, in a holistic way that like—you know, when you're in— For me, when I was in my early 20s, that tingle of love could come from me and a girl being in the same—we like the same music, and we like—you know, she dressed this way and we—you know. And those are things that were attractive to me, and I'm not knocking it. And that was fun. And like you said, you know, beyond that love, just chasing women and just being—and like just wanting to be around women.

But then, you know, you start to learn like, man, the things that really matter in your life and what type of people you want in your life, especially long term, have to have values that you share in. And that, for me, has become one of the most significant things when it comes to partnership and romance and love, is like what things do we like consider important to us in life? And for me, I can just say like—I actually learned from just talking to people. I remember, you know, I was sitting with First Lady Michelle Obama at one point, and she said to me, man, she said, “Rashid, why ain't you married?” I was like 45.

I was like, “Man, I ain't found nobody that got these things that I want.”

She's like, "Well, what are the things?" And I started naming some things. She's like, "Okay, that's cool, but you're not going to get all of that. Let's get the things that are very important to you, and then that some of those other things, you know, they might not have. But you're not perfect, and neither will they be. So, let's get the things that's important to you."

And that was helpful to me, to be honest, to understand like, man, what is important? For me, like a woman who does have like spirituality and like believes in a higher power, and because she does, it reflects in the way she treats herself and other people. A woman who can have fun. A woman who is like feminine, but at the same token can be around some of me and my friends and not be judgmental. A woman who is caring and loving. And you know, those are things that are important to me. And like now I can rap about those things and rap about also things from a perspective of my failures in love and what do I want, like in relationships, and how I've learned, and how I've balanced, and also looking at myself and not putting it all on the other person.

So, I talk about love in so many different ways. You right. And even beyond Eros love, the romance love, I talk about—and Agape love. Like, you know, just love for life and love for people and love for music and love for God. But going back to romance and relationship, I just understand that, yo, it's all about that values and the values and what type of people you want in your life. And it ends up being even that in the music. Like, if Pete and I sat with each other, and we just didn't bond as human beings, this music wouldn't be what it is.

Pete Rock: Totally different.

Jesse Thorn: We're almost out of time, but I wanted to share this one thing that happened to me one time with you, Common. Because you're a part of it. So, when your like *Water for Chocolate* album came out, you toured to promote it. And you came through Santa Cruz, and I went with some pals from college. And we're always in the front, small club. You put on a really great show. And on that album, there was kind of a talking mess song that had a slur for gay people in it. And when you performed that song and said that—I think me and my pals were right up front, and we were really getting down at the show. But I think we booed you.

Pete Rock: (*Quietly.*) Ooh!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. I know, right? And out of—you know, out of love and admiration. You know, we used to kind of hang out after the show, steal a poster, that kind of thing.

[00:35:00]

And you came out of the wings and saw us hanging out there and said, "Hey, I saw you guys in the front row rocking in the show. I heard you guys when I said that word."

And we were like, "Oh yeah." You know, we don't know what's going to—you know, what's gonna happen. This is Common Sense. You know, this is one of our favorite rappers.

And you said, “Hey, listen, I heard that. I'm sorry about that. It's something I've been thinking about a lot.”

I was very deeply touched by that. Because it's hard to hear that kind of thing. I know that from having heard it from people about my own behavior in public as a public figure doing comedy and stuff. You've kind of been conspicuous about having changed your perspective on that.

Common: Yes.

Jesse Thorn: You know, you sort of made your voice heard about that. And I just wanted to share that I admired that. It was a very touching moment in my life that you were able—that you were proactively—like, it's not like we went up to you after the show and said, “Hey, this is our list of demands.” You know what I mean? (*Chuckles.*) You came up to us. And you know, as a lifelong hip-hop head, like it definitely meant a lot to me to hear somebody that I admired say, “Hey, I'm in a position where I'm trying to grow.”

Common: Well, first of all—man, Jesse, it's crazy you mentioned that. Because I tell a story about me evolving and not using that word and just—you know, just me evolving and understanding I grew up in a culture where, man, this is what we say, and this is what we think. And then having to like just learn and see how do I feel about this? And it took me like meeting people and like people expressing—who may be gay, who may be like feeling this thing or may be offended—for me to feel the humanity in them, to know like, okay. And you and your friends were part of my journey of growing in that, because y'all brought the humanity to it.

Because sometimes you're saying stuff, and you don't even know a human being is feeling a way about it. And that don't necessarily mean you will change it, or you won't, but at least gives you a chance to examine yourself and say, “What do I feel about it, honestly?” And for me? I was like, man, I can do better. I could be better. This is not the way I truly feel. You know, I grew up, and I seen people who were gay, this and that. But I just was spewing out what was natural, what was like around me and my culture.

So, I really appreciate that you all took a stance on that too, because that also was part of my journey of being better. I'd already been thinking about it, like I told you at that time, and probably had had conversations or just was reflecting on my own personal growth and being a better person. So, you all doing that was part of the catalyst. So, thank you. And that's—man, that's a real like moment. As you were telling that story, that hit me. ‘Cause I was like, where is he going with this story? What happened at Santa Cruz? Did I do something crazy?

(*Pete chuckles.*)

Like, ‘cause you know, I have done some crazy things in shows, but this was very like moving for me to know that that moved you, and it also moved me. And that's humanity; that's what we here for, man. That's what our music is about. That's what your jokes—that's what—you know, we're here for humanity,

Pete Rock: Humanity. That's a good way to put it. Our album, *The Auditorium, Vol. 1*, brings those things to life for people. Shameless plug.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: Comm, Pete Rock, I really appreciate you guys taking the time to talk to me. It was really nice to see you again, Pete, and really nice to talk to you, Comm.

Common: Great to see you, Jesse. We appreciate you, brother. It's a lot of love.

Jesse Thorn: Common and Pete Rock. Their album is everything you wish it would be. It's called *The Auditorium, Volume 1*.

Transition: Funky synth with a syncopated beat.

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. Here at my house, I went across the street the other day to the video store. Shout out to Vidéothèque. And I had to knock on the door and interrupt a comedy show so that I could ask if they had a copy of *Darkman II*. The kid wanted to watch *Darkman II*.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey.

[00:40:00]

Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Daniel Huecias. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Special thanks this week to Colton and all the folks at the Chicago Podcast Studio for recording our interview with Pete Rock and Common. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is "Huddle Formation", written and recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for providing it.

You can find us on Instagram, [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). I am on Instagram, [@JesseThornVeryFamous](#). And hey, guess what? There is full video of our interview with Common and Pete Rock on YouTube. So, go and hit subscribe, hit like. *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* there on YouTube. Send it to somebody you know. Got a lot more video coming.

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 fades out.)