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(ADVERTISEMENT)

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. Before I get into my interview this week, a question. How would you explain the *Blues Brothers* to a person who had never heard of them? Like a teen who was born the same year the iPhone came out, or a monk that lived in a monastery her whole life, or—I don't know—a space alien. Think about it. It is not easy.

You have these two guys wearing suits and sunglasses, Jake and Elwood Blues. They wear dark suits and stingy brim fedoras. They sing in a kind of blues/soul revival band. And also, they are played by actors, the late John Belushi and my guest Dan Aykroyd.

“But wait,” that space alien might say, “Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi are comedians! Do they play funny songs or something?” No! When they perform live, they do a very sincere, very capable tribute to Chicago and Memphis blues music. They save the funny stuff for when they're offstage. And even then, if you've seen the movie, you know this: the jokes aren't really jokey jokes. You get a lot of high stakes, absurd situations, a lot of car chases, and a series of very fun, funny, deadpan one-liners.

That's all to say that the *Blues Brothers* is a very weird idea, but also a weirdly enduring one. The *Blues Brothers* have spanned well over four decades, three albums, two movies, countless live shows, a string of performance venues around the country, and now an audio documentary. In *Blues Brothers: The Arc of Gratitude*, Dan Aykroyd tells the story of how the band formed and how it persevered through decades of tumult, including the death of its co-founder, John Belushi. The documentary is streaming now on Audible. It is a great listen. I'm so excited to talk to Dan Aykroyd about it.

Before that, let's play a quick clip from the original *Blues Brothers* movie. This is sort of the beginning of the film. Jake and Elwood Blues are visiting the orphanage in which they grew up. They are having a meeting with their former teacher, Sister Mary Stigmata. And Sister Mary has some bad news. The orphanage needs \$5,000. Or it'll shut down. By the way, important visual cues: number one, Sister Mary has a ruler in her hand. She's doing nun stuff with it. And Jake and Elwood are sitting in tiny children's desks.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Jake: Five grand? No problem! We'll have it for you in the morning. Let's go, Elwood.

Sister Mary: No, no! I will not take your filthy, stolen money!

Jake: Well then, I guess you're really up shit creek.

(Smack.)

Ow!

Sister Mary: I beg your pardon. What did you say?

Jake: I offered to help you. You refused to take our money. Then I said, "I guess you're really up shit creek."

(Smack.)

Ow!

Elwood: Christ, Jake. Take it easy, man.

(Sister Mary keeps smacking him with the ruler.)

Jake: Elwood—ouch! Ow!

Elwood: Jesus Christ!

Jake: Ow! Jesus Christ!

(They both keep shouting in pain as the hits keep coming.)

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: *(Chuckling.)* Dan Aykroyd. Welcome to *Bullseye*. I am so happy and grateful to have you on the show. It's really nice to get to talk to you.

Dan Aykroyd: Well, thanks very much. You played a venerable clip there, of course. That was followed by a spectacular stunt done by Eddie Donno, who was our practical stuntman and driver and one of the drivers. He went down those steps.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, for folks who haven't seen the movie, this all happens—the scene that you just heard happens in like the rectory of the nunnery or whatever. My language is not perfect *(inaudible)*.

Dan Aykroyd: The orphanage, yeah. Her office in the orphanage.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. The two of you are sitting at like children's school desks, and it is at the top of a very narrow flight of stairs that is shot very intensely claustrophobically. And he almost immediately is beaten backwards, then down the set of stairs on his back.

Dan Aykroyd: And he rides the desk all the way and tumbled right over. And that was a spectacular stunt, yeah, when you think about it. I know Kathleen Freeman, the nun, she was so great.

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She'd been in a lot of movies. She was a veteran, of course, a Hollywood veteran. And yeah, that was just based upon, I think, my Catholic experience. My experience in Catholic schools. Although I was never whipped like that, but a teacher did put a pointer in my chest once.

Jesse Thorn: Did the two of you, when you started doing the *Blues Brothers*, think of it as a comedy act or as a party band?

Dan Aykroyd: We wanted to emulate the ludic, ridiculous clown frontman figures of the '30s and '40s who fronted these amazing bands. Wynonie Harris, Bobby Bland, Kay Kyser, Jimmie Lunceford. There were so many of these great clown frontmen who had amazing sax players, guitar players, organ players, drummers. So, that was the idea, to put together that old style tribute to the artists that we loved, to venerate them and preserve the culture. We were always about cultural preservation from the very beginning. And that was our mission, if the mission from God was anything.

So, you know, to venerate and to enjoy the music and turn the people onto the music that we loved, that was really our prime motivator.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, you had Cab Calloway in the movie. Who was always both the coolest human being on earth and kind of a winking joke about the coolest human being on earth, you know, with his wild threads. And he wrote a slang dictionary, you know, in the '30s or '40s.

Dan Aykroyd: No, he was—first of all, he headed an incredible band. You see, he was the ludic, comedic frontman. So, I guess to go right to your question there at the beginning, yes, comedy. But then, you know, tied in with the real musicians making—the music made it real.

It started as comedy. We wanted to be these frontmen in the whole spirit of the ridiculousness of those other guys, Wynonie and Cab, and emulate them. And then, of course, turn people onto this music—songs that nobody sings anymore. My band is going to perform in August 18th in Illinois at the Joliet Prison, the *Blues Brothers* Formal Classic Revue with the Brothers Z. And people are going to hear songs they just haven't heard in years or have never heard in their lives! It's such a privilege. I'm so grateful that I get to go 40+ years after and go and do Elwood again and have fun with the band. And I've got about 74% of the moves left.

Jesse Thorn: (*Chuckles.*) Last I read, you were at 80. So, it's deteriorated just a very small amount. I'm glad that you're keeping careful track.

Dan Aykroyd: Yeah, yeah. Last night. Last night.

Jesse Thorn: (*Chuckles.*) How did you come into this music? I mean, you grew up in Canada, in Ottawa. Which isn't exactly the world's R&B capital. So, how did you come to be so passionate about it?

Dan Aykroyd: Interestingly enough, because Ottawa is a government town with well-read, well-educated people. It's an academic town with several great institutions, University of Ottawa, Carleton University. So, there was a very sophisticated population that loved folk music, blues music, and music that was just outside of the range of the '50s and '60s pop. They wanted to see these genuine artists. So, there was a nightclub there called Le Hibou. And that's a—it means an owl in French. And it was a guy named Harvey Glatt. And he was the impresario who brought all of these acts in.

And man, I saw them all. I saw Chester Burnett, Howlin' Wolf a dozen times. I jammed on stage one night for a minute before S.P. Leary threw me off the drum kit with Muddy Waters. "That beat makes Muddy feel good," he said to me. I watched—I saw them all. CarrieBell, Butterfield, Musselwhite, Cotton—oh God, man. You know, all the great guitar players. Elvin Bishop. Just Harvey brought them all in, and I went to see them all.

Jesse Thorn: Was there R&B and soul on the radio?

Dan Aykroyd: Yes, from Detroit and from Boston and New York and from my short wave. I used to get up to listen to the Stax-Volt.

So, when we put together the repertoire of the band, it was always let's venerate Chicago blues, let's do Chicago traditional blues numbers, but let's marry it with a Memphis fusion band, and let's celebrate Stax-Volt as well. And that's what the *Blues Brothers* is. It's a Chicago Memphis fusion band. Because you have Matt Murphy with the style of Chicago blues, although he was from Memphis. And then you have Cropper and Dunn.

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The Memphis artists who were the backbone of the Stax-Volt movement and who were Otis Redding's guitar players. I mean, when they came on to the band at Tom Malone's and Shaffer's and my and John Belushi's invitation, the *Blues Brothers* are now real. You have those—they played with everybody, of course. You know, Booker T and Wilson Pickett. And they come on and they say, "We know what you're doing. It's not like you're making fun. You're going to have fun, but you're not making fun or poking fun or trying to diminish this. You're trying to venerate these artists. You're doing it in the exactly right way. Like, take Wynonie Harris or Cab Calloway. You're doing that. And we're in."

And that's what made the band so legitimate and, in the end, what makes the whole project real.

Jesse Thorn: Who called Steve Cropper and Duck Dunn—two of the, you know, greatest session musicians of the 20th century—and said, “We have some comedians who are interested in fronting a band”? (*Laughs.*)

Dan Aykroyd: Well, it was a call that John Belushi and, I believe, made at Tom Malone's, connection. He set up the call, and we called.

Jesse Thorn: Were you scared to make the call?

Dan Aykroyd: No, no, not at all. Because we were such massive fans. To even talk to the guy, what an honor. And Duck was, of course, wonderful. I think we had appeared once on the show, or... I don't know that Cropper and Dunn were with us in that first appearance as King Bee, we were on as—we did King Bee. But yes, and they understood what we were up to right away. It didn't take long, and we started to rehearse, and then we went from there with these spectacular, you know, legitimizers of our cause.

Jesse Thorn: I think that one of the pieces of context that the documentary gets at that is hard to see or understand for people who were not there at the time is the place that particularly soul and R&B but also blues music was at the end of the '70s and beginning of the '80s. You know, I think of James Brown, and I think, well, this is the... you know, this is the greatest American musician of the 20th century. You know, like obviously.

(*Dan agrees.*)

You know, I mean, maybe like Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington have a claim, but like he's certainly top five.

Dan Aykroyd: No, no. No, JB for sure.

Jesse Thorn: But at the same time, like he was coming off being the original disco godfather, and not even—you know, even that had run its course.

So, what was going on with these musicians who were so important in American music history when this band started? And this form of music that was so important in American music when this band started?

Dan Aykroyd: Well, you hit the nerve when you said disco, because what happened in '79 was—that's right, disco was dying. Although James Brown kept going and made himself relevant all the way through that. Disco was dying, and it was the late '70s there. And what you had was the growing emergence of punk rock, which Belushi was totally into! Not me. So, you had a little—a gap between disco and the emergence of punk rock where there was nothing fresh or nothing new or nothing old that anybody wanted to listen to.

And so, Duck Dunn suggests that we do “Soul Man”, and we put that out there. And wow, it just—that's what the—it was like a breath of air that we gave to the nation to enjoy the soul music that hadn't been heard since the Stax-Volt era—what, a decade before? And it just—it was like a breath of kind of, wow, party music, party record, something the country really

needed after disco and before punk. And that's where we were able to get in and make that record a success, because the audience was kind of thirsting for something like that.

Music: “She Caught the Katy” from *The Blues Brothers: Original Soundtrack Recording* by the Blues Brothers.

She caught the Katy

And left me a mule to ride

She caught the Katy

And left me a mule to ride

Yeah, my baby caught the Katy...

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

Jesse Thorn: We've got more to get into with Dan Aykroyd. When we return from a quick break, we will talk about John Belushi—

[00:15:00]

—his co-star in the *Blues Brothers*, and how Aykroyd learned about his friend's passing. It's *Bullseye* for MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Music:

Man, my baby long, great gosh almighty

My baby tall

You know my baby long, great gosh almighty...

(Music fades out.)

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Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Dan Aykroyd. Dan Aykroyd is, of course, Dan Aykroyd: a *Ghostbuster*, Beldar the Conehead, the dad in *My Girl*, a floor wax, a dessert topping. He is, of course, also one of the original *Blues Brothers*. He just released an audio documentary about the history of the duo. You can listen to it now on Audible. Let's get back into our conversation.

So, part of the kind of aesthetic of these characters came from you two guys who were best buds and were very different shapes. But where did the rest of the kind of aesthetic part of the *Blues Brothers* come from? Besides tall, skinny guy and medium, roundish guy?

Dan Aykroyd: Yeah, Abbott and Costello. Well, I think, the character of John was more outgoing and pushy and cocky and Elwood is more taciturn and reticent. So, you know, you got maybe a little Laurel and Hardy going in there. As far as the physical, the sartorial look, it was definitely men in black, alien hunters. Hasidic diamond merchants, Lenny Bruce. You wear a tie because you want to look straight with the straights. Because you're not straight, you want to look straight. So, it's about fooling the straights, that suit.

Jesse Thorn: It was also like such an out of style suit and look at the time. Like, you guys look like you got dressed in 1964, you know what I mean?

Dan Aykroyd: Yep, very ratpack and all that. So, that was from there. The hat and the glasses are directly from John Lee Hooker's album, *House of the Blues*, where he's got the fedora, and he's got the wraparound shades. That is where we got the hat and the glasses and then on down through the suit. The dancing, of course again, comes from those front men. That's Cab and Wynonie and Kay. They just did wonderful dance steps, and then passed it over to the amazing sax player, trumpet player, drummer, guitarist, organ player.

We have four horns in our band now, and there's just—it's just sensational to be able to get out in front and play music with them and feel that exhilaration. And that's what those front men brought to it. So, that kind of—and then the myth of the Catholic orphans and then being brought up in a tough steel town was just us, you know, being around Chicago and living it, and John and Judy being from the region.

Music: “Everybody Needs Somebody to Love” from *The Blues Brothers: Original Movie Soundtrack Recording* by The Blues Brothers.

Elwood: We're so glad to see so many of you lovely people here tonight. We'd especially like to welcome all of the representatives of Illinois's law enforcement community who have chosen to join us in the Palace Hotel ballroom at this time. We certainly hope you all enjoy the show. And remember, people, it don't matter who you are and what you do to live, thrive, and survive. There's still some things that make us all the same. You, me, them, everybody! Everybody.

Everybody needs somebody

(Music fades out.)

[00:20:00]

Jesse Thorn: When you started writing the movie, was it always going to be as fantastical as it turned out to be? I mean, *The Blues Brothers* is a movie that exists in this sort of confluence between, you know, the very end of the aesthetics of 1970s American movies—

you know, it's very gritty looking, and there's a lot of shots of L tracks—but then it also exists in a kind of absurd, silly, magical fantasy world.

Dan Aykroyd: Well, yes. When I started out to write that, I wanted to—and we did succeed in making Chicago a character and kind of romanticizing being in Chicago in all of its aspects. So, there was that fantasy element. At the time, we were very inspired by Hal Needham, the stunt coordinator. He was doing things with cars that were corkscrews and pipe ramp stuff. So, we thought we're going to take full advantage of that technology and that knowledge. So, there was fantasy elements there. You know, when the Bluesmobile flips itself over just before the Nazis get dropped. Now there's a—pure defies physics. There's fantasy that Landis enhanced by doing that.

Landis is the great cineast, the great director. He knows movies. He knows pacing. The movie would not be what it was, or is, without John Landis's skill as a director and knowledge as a filmmaker. And so, he had the car do a flip. He had us—when the hotel gets imploded, we climb out of those bricks as if there's nothing wrong. We brush off the dust and keep going. So, he imbued more of a sense of fantasy in there than I think I had in the original scripts. But he was certainly building upon the ethos of what I was trying to build there and trying to do regarding romancing and romanticizing Chicago.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, there is such a silliness to these incredibly practical (*chuckles*) things that are happening on screen, right? Like, you are crashing real cars into each other. Like, real cars are crashing before your eyes, but also there's 84 of them in a pile. (*Laughs.*) You know what I mean? Like, it's the most ridiculous thing in the world.

Dan Aykroyd: I think we bought about—well, I heard at one point we bought 120 old wrecks from the Chicago Police Department, and we paid \$700 apiece. So, that was a good bit of coin for wrecked police cars. And then we fixed them up and turned them into state police cars, and then we selected a Bluesmobile, of which there were a drag car, a straightaway car, an interior car, and two or three others. I think there were five or six Bluesmobiles made.

Jesse Thorn: When the movie came out, it wasn't immediately a huge hit. It had to be kind of carried on a wave into (*inaudible*) distribution.

Dan Aykroyd: It really was—for that time, it was a huge hit. Yeah. The movie opened at the top and then *Airplane!* came in. But no, it opened number at top of the box office. It made about \$80,000,000. Well, \$78-80,000,000 in the gross that summer. So, that's very significant.

Jesse Thorn: But you didn't have the distribution that you wanted when the movie opened.

Dan Aykroyd: Well, we didn't have southern states, because the exhibitors down there didn't want the movie, because there were too many Black people in it. Can you believe that? In 1980. (*Sarcastically.*) Thank you very much. God bless America. Ho-ly.

Jesse Thorn: They literally, explicitly said that.

(*Dan confirms.*)

That's not you interpreting their actions.

Dan Aykroyd: No, no, they refused it. Finally, when the movie did do well in business elsewhere, southern exhibitors took it on. But no, it was a hit. It was a hit that summer.

And it made its money back for Universal, of course, many times over by now.

Clip:

Music: Playful harmonica that melts into relaxed jazz.

Dan Aykroyd: The night Belushi and me first met, John arrived late after the set show at the old Firehall Theater backdoor entrance, which opened from the alley behind the building directly into our common dressing and properties room at Second City. We were preparing to go on for improv. On this blizzardy February evening, just before midnight, the door banged open without a warning and a silhouette filled the space against a swirl of blowing snow. The shape was defined by an octagonal, brown tweed “they drive by night” cap. Sitting on a large square head above a solid frame, which as he entered into the light of our dressing room, was revealed to be clothed entirely inadequately for the weather.

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An open four button white cable knit cardigan sweater and a long, white, silk scarf draped over his shoulders. Just as one might imagine a great actor would dress.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: It's a movie that you made with a best friend who was an absolute genius, every bit as passionate about spreading this kind of music as you were. He also was in a really tough part of his life. And like, there are scenes when you watch the *Blues Brothers*—which is one of my favorite movies. I mean, he's wonderful in the movie. You know, there are scenes where he's like a little glassy eyed, you know?

Dan Aykroyd: Well, he wore shades through the whole movie, so I don't know that you'd see—

Jesse Thorn: I'm saying metaphorically speaking.

Dan Aykroyd: Mm. Well, you know, I only remember—you know, really—I only remember one night there, one day where he was a little hazy from the night before, where we're driving down the street calling the people on the PA in the car. He was a little shaky that morning. But, you know, he showed up even though there was a lot of cocaine around. It was sort of the currency of the time, and we were shooting nights. And you know, there was like that

implied reward to the crew of, oh, a bump here, a bump there. Personally, I never liked it. And it ended up partially killing John. But he did have an appetite for it.

But you know, he came to work sober pretty much—I would say 90% of the time, I would say.

Jesse Thorn: Were you worried about him?

Dan Aykroyd: Oh, yes. Always. Always. Because you don't know what's in that stuff. And you know, Judy and I policed it as much as we could. But again, it was everywhere. And you know, “I want to do a bump with John Belushi.” You're doing him a favor. You know, this is the view of people who were the purveyors and the enablers. But the summer, the last summer of his life in Martha's Vineyard, he was only smoking weed. And it was a great summer. We cut the blow scene off completely, and it wasn't there.

Jesse Thorn: With the two of you being such good friends and such close creative partners in this effort, was it hard for you to be the one that wasn't really doing that stuff?

Dan Aykroyd: No! I never liked it. Never liked it at all. And I looked with a baleful eye when it was done. But what am I'm going to tell these grown men and incredible artists and musicians who live their lives, what I'm going to tell them? You know, “No, you can't do—” It's like saying you can't do your coffee. No, no. As I say, I cast a baleful eye on it. It wasn't hard, because I have a good, iron will. And I don't have to—I'm not going to be pressured into doing anything I don't want to, especially substance-wise. So, that was easy.

Jesse Thorn: In the documentary, a story is told that I didn't know, which was that you were the one who actually told John's wife that he had died.

Dan Aykroyd: Yeah, I had to rush down. Yes, I had to rush. I was writing *Ghostbusters* at 150 5th Avenue. And my agent called from LA. It was early in the morning—nine, I guess, and six over there. And he said that—told me briefly what happened. So, I immediately hung up, and I ran. I was writing a line for John, for God's sake! I ran downstairs to 5th Avenue, and I ran right down to Morton Street in the village the whole way. And about halfway down 5th Avenue, at a newsstand, a truck pulled up and dropped a stack of newspapers, and it said, “Belushi Dead at 33”. And I thought, I gotta get there before Judy hears or sees.

So, I went into her house. And of course, you know, I had to relive that when I wrote the book. I had to relive that. And that was emotional considering all of the other exhilarating stuff I was writing about with the band and all that. That was the nadir right there. And it was a traumatic moment of extreme grief shared with someone that I love and loved. She's gone with John now, last week.

So, yeah, that was one of those sort of unforgettable, crystalline moments in your life that you never forget. And I was happy that Judy and I were able to go on and keep the *Blues Brothers* alive.

Jesse Thorn: He obviously had a huge career and, you know, artistic partners outside of him. But when he was gone, did you have to think about what kind of art you wanted to make?

Dan Aykroyd: Well, at that point, it was merely just surviving his loss and not really wanting to do anything.

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I was presented with the opportunity to do a film at Universal, and I thought about it. I took a long drive. I drove up the Alaska highway, with John Deveikis, who was the artist who originally conceptualized Mr. Stay Puft, the Cadillac, the patch, the mowgli—the worldwide moogly patch that everybody knows from *Ghostbusters*. He was my main graphic artist. We got into an inline 6, Mercedes 280CE Coupe with 5 rolls of toilet paper and a cooler full of sandwiches, and we drove up the Alaska highway and then back down the Cassiar highway and back down to Hollywood.

And I did that movie. And as far as getting back with the band, it was Isaac Tigrett, who started Hard Rock and House of Blues, who said, “You know, the *Blues Brothers*, that band, you can't let that go.”

And I said, “Well, what am I going to do? Go out there and do that alone without John?”

And he said, “Yes. Call it the Elwood Blues Review, and we'll get guest artists.”

We got Sam Moore and Wilson Pickett and other great artists to come on with us. And I did it at the Hard Rock Cafe on 57th street in New York. I went out there with the Elwood Blues Review. I didn't wear the hat, but I had a blue suit and shades and the tie. And you know, when the first bars of that music started, and I started that first number, and the backup singers were in there and the guitar players were playing, and then we had our guest artists? It worked! We burned the rafters off the place. And I opened the Hard Rock Supreme Court of Rock and Roll in Dallas with Paul Shaffer. And then we opened for Chuck Berry.

And, oh yeah, it went on, strangely enough. And then I recruited Jimmy for a benefit for Carleton University, my alma mater in Ottawa, Canada. And we played the Government Opera House and the National Arts Centre for a sold-out benefit. And I called him one day and said, “You're going to come and do it.”

“I don't do that! I don't do that. I don't sing and play harmonica and dance.”

And “Yes, you do! It's in your blood. You're an Illinois alpha male. You'll learn.”

And so, he trained and learned within a month, and we did a great show. And you know, he had a gig the other night. We're going to be playing August 18th. He built a whole career out of it. And so, that's how it kept going was me doing the Elwood Blues Review. And now, thankfully, I've got Brother Zarushida, Brother Z, the blood brother of Jake Blues, the Albanian prince we found under a stone in Albania. And he now is the young brother, and he plays with me. That's the myth. That's the current myth.

Jesse Thorn: I have three kids who are neurodivergent, and I get to kind of watch their special interests. Like, one of the kids is completely obsessed with movies. And in fact, she and I have watched a number of *Ghostbusters* movies lately. One of my kids is obsessed with basketball right now. One of them is really into *Dragonball*, just completely into *Dragonball* and *Dragonball Z*.

As I was thinking about you and the *Blues Brothers*, one of the things I thought is that you having this special interest—you've talked about being autistic, level one autistic.

Dan Aykroyd: Mm, no, no, no. No, that's a self—I never said autistic. I don't think I ever said that. I think—that's a self-diagnosis. I place no medical store in it, because I'm not a doctor at all. And I'm just playing around with terms. If you want to know what I really think I am, I'm probably a trypophobic, heterochromatic syndactylite with a touch of Asperger's and a dash of Tourette's. Now that's my analysis today. So, go where you're going with the autistic, but by no means can I say that I would be that, because I'm not a doctor. I don't know. And I've never been analyzed. That's self-analysis, which is spurious at best. Go ahead.

Jesse Thorn: You mentioned trypophobia.

Dan Aykroyd: Trypophobia. Yeah, trypophobia, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: I'm so excited—I was so excited to read that you have this condition, because my wife, with whom I've been for now 25 years.

(Dan congratulates him.)

Thank you very much. We're very happy. I'm a very lucky guy, et cetera, et cetera. Now it sounds insincere, but I mean it.

(Dan affirms.)

When we got together, one day she was looking at something. I think—I feel like it often came up with like pairs of shoes that had holes in the leather. She'd say, “Ugh! I hate that! I hate that. I hate that. I hate that!”

(Dan chuckles.)

I'd be like, “What do you hate about it?!” I was so baffled about it.

Dan Aykroyd: The pattern, the pattern! Oh, like I don't know if you—there's some people that collect these glass knickknack—

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—googa, you know, top of table globes. And they have these shapes in them. I don't know if you—they drive me crazy, those things! And I can't—I have trouble looking at a garlic clove if it's been slit in half. I love garlic, but I can't look at it. So, yeah, trypophobic. YES.

Jesse Thorn: It's this pattern of—it's this discomfort with, fear of, however you want to say it. There's certain kinds of patterns that might be like—my wife used to say holes.

Dan Aykroyd: Holes, holes. They're holes, yes. Yes. Think of a big elephant garlic clove cut in half, and you look at it, and there's little slots. Or a beehive even.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. A sunflower without the seeds in it.

Dan Aykroyd: That's it. That's it. You know, put me—take me away.

Jesse Thorn: Had you--? Okay. So, one of the things is my wife had never known anyone with this condition or who felt and thought this way. And it's such an odd thing that she just thought, “Gosh, I guess I'm the only person like this,” until the word kind of slipped out on the internet five or eight years ago.

(Dan chuckles.)

Did you like run it by everyone? Like, “Hey, do you hate the idea of an elephant garlic clove with the top cut off?”

Dan Aykroyd: No, I always—when I see a pattern or something crosses me, and if I'm with another person, I say, “Do you—how does this make you feel? Take a look at this.” And my daughter, Stella, has it too. She's a trypophobe. Absolutely. I think it's from a—a trype is a—is it a plant that would cut a certain way? Or is it a seafood? I don't know. What's a trype? Because I think it has that pattern in it, you know?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I mean, I don't think it comes from Menudo, that's made with that kind of tripe. That's a different kind of tripe.

Dan Aykroyd: I don't know.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, honeycombs, sunflowers, and lotus seed pods, soles of shoes.

Dan Aykroyd: And I'm a heterochromatic, because I have two different colored eyes. And I'm a syndactylite, because the two middle toes of each of my feet are fused together. So, okay, take seven—what, eight? How many on the planet now, 8.3 billion people? How many heterochromatic syndactylites are there?

Jesse Thorn: You know, I think—I've always thought, Dan, that you were one of a kind.

Dan Aykroyd: I think so, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: (*Chuckles.*) We're going to take a quick break. When we return, Dan Aykroyd is 72 years old. He says he's thought about death, and he has a very detailed plan for how he'd like to go, and then once that happens, how he plans to spend his afterlife. We'll get into it, I promise. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Promo:

(*Pleasant school announcement chimes.*)

Janet Varney: Hello, teachers and faculty. This is Janet Varney. I'm here to remind you that listening to my podcast, *The JV Club with Janet Varney*, is part of the curriculum for the school year. Learning about the teenage years of such guests as Alison Brie, Vicki Peterson, John Hodgman, and so many more is a valuable and enriching experience—one you have no choice but to embrace, because yes, listening is mandatory. *The JV Club with Janet Varney* is available every Thursday on Maximum Fun or wherever you get your podcasts. Thank you. And remember, no running in the halls!

(*Pleasant chimes.*)

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Dan Aykroyd. The veteran *Ghostbuster*, *Saturday Night Live* alum, and Crystal Skull vodka seller has just released a great new audio documentary about the history of the *Blues Brothers*. It's called *Blues Brothers: The Arc of Gratitude*. It's streaming now on Audible.

I just want to mention that in this next part of the interview, Aykroyd and I will talk about sex. Nothing graphic or descriptive, but we wanted you to have a heads up. Let's get back into our conversation.

It seems like you've had other special interests in your life as well. One of them is the paranormal that sort of drove *Ghostbusters*.

[00:40:00]

Did you always think like, “Oh, my interest in ghosts, et cetera, could become an action comedy”? (*Laughs.*)

Dan Aykroyd: It wasn't always. It was more just a classic lightbulb flash of inspiration that took place in a microsecond. When I was in the house built by my fourth great grandfather, and I was reading *The American Society for Psychological Research*, an article on quantum

physics and parapsychology. Now, that was in that house, because my great grandfather Sam was a spiritualist and a paranormal researcher in the '20s. The house was a location for seances in the '30s and '40s. And all around the house, which was always our old summer cottage—most cottages on the lake there, up on the lake country, you'd go into the living room. There'd be *Collier's* or *Look Magazine* or *Life Magazine*.

Well, around our house, it was *Fate Magazine* and *The American Society for Psychical Research Journal* and my great grandfather's journals and writings. So, I'm flipping through this, and I think, "Yeah, what about doing a—?" Because the vernacular of paranormal research was always in my family, passed down from my great grandfather, my grandfather, and my dad to me. It was just part of our language. Oh yeah, that's all real, you know. Survival of the consciousness after death. Not only the soul, the spirit, the consciousness survives and can reach back and communicate with the living. That's just part of what my belief was.

So, I read this article on quantum physics and parapsychology, and I think—in that second there—"Oh yeah, we'll use all of that real paranormal science and vernacular. We'll take that. That'll be the base and the background, but we'll do an old-style Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, Bowery Boys, Abbott and Costello ghost movie." Like those classic, old, comic ghost movies. In fact, the first reference to ghostbusters is in the movie *Hold That Ghost* with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. Someone asked Dean Martin, "What are you guys?"

And he says, "We're *Ghostbusters*." So, there it is right there. It was coined right there.

Jesse Thorn: I watched the other day *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*.

Dan Aykroyd: See, it was that form I wanted to get into as well. You do this—the anti-comedy, but you're in the real science there. And that's what *Ghostbusters* was. From that—you know, that afternoon. And then from there I wrote it, and then co-wrote it with of course Harold and Ivan and Billy. We all wrote that. Yeah. And Rick Moranis and Sigourney, oh my god, what a cast.

Jesse Thorn: I watched it the other day. In fact I watched both of the original movies and some of the more recent ones recently. And I found myself wondering did this movie that—you know, as you sort of joked about in *Ghostbusters 2*—became a family movie, I don't know that it was imagined to be a family movie initially. But did this movie always have a part where your character had a sexual relationship with a ghost?

Dan Aykroyd: Yes, in the fort. He goes into the fort there, and he's looking around. And he's trying to—he's got the meter. He lies down on the bed, and the ghost comes down and undoes his belt. And actually, that's where it went.

Jesse Thorn: This scene is in the movie as like a dream sequence.

Dan Aykroyd: It is, it's in there. But it's in there! Yes, and you know—look, I don't know about you, but I kind of knew about sex at seven years old, and I think most kids in America

know about sex. (*Laughs.*) And especially after Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, there's certain terms that are well known to the adolescent, preteen, and before. So, that movie wouldn't have been too shocking.

Now, just picking up on your reference to the movies that you watched, I liked the movie with Paul Feig and those magnificent women. I really enjoyed it! And I liked the tack they took. I was mad at them at the time, because I was supposed to be a producer on there. And I let my producing hat fall off. And the movie—you know, there were some costs in there I didn't agree with and Ivan did not agree with. But you gotta let the filmmaker make what they're gonna make! And dammit, you know, you don't stand in the way. And you know, I was just trying to—so, I was upset with him at the time. But I must say, and I go on the record now saying that is a great part of the collection. If you're gonna get all five movies, that is a great part of the collection. Kate McKinnon, come on. Melissa McCarthy, Leslie Jones. I liked it.

Jesse Thorn: I really loved it. You don't have to convince me. I love Paul Feig's movie.

Dan Aykroyd: I do. And I like what he did with that. I really do.

[00:45:00]

I have no trucking—I was in it! I agreed to be in it, and I agreed to grant my part of the license!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, and I saw the most recent one just the other day, which you're also in—you have a pretty substantial part in. And honest, I really enjoyed that one as well. I was really delighted.

Dan Aykroyd: It just crossed \$200,000,000 worldwide gross box office, and you can, you know, be sure that not every movie out there today or in the last few months has done that. All the fans turned out to see it; it's streaming. It's a streaming hit now. It's gonna be on Netflix. It's got a DVD, Blu-ray. And I must tell you, the scene that's worth the price of admission in that movie, I laughed when I saw it, is when Garraka, the Meso-Arabic entity comes into the apartment and plugs his horns back in. Remember that scene? He plugs his horns in. I laughed. I mean, you know, all the cast is great. And it's been a great success. And Sony wants to do more of them. Of course, all of these cost too much, and everybody knows that. And if you can do them for a price, they can go on for a long time.

Jesse Thorn: One of the things that I like about the first two *Ghostbusters* movies is that they have a kind of—I'm sure you haven't ever seen this movie called *Style Wars*. It's like this documentary about hip-hop from 1980.

Dan Aykroyd: I'll check it out.

Jesse Thorn: It's a wonderful, wonderful movie, but Ed Koch is featured heavily in it. And I think of that movie, the Ed Koch parts of that movie, and maybe *The Taking of Pelham 123*, and just the idea of the bureaucratic state of New York City as a character in the film—

(*chuckling*) like, just this sort of weird, miasmic, inertia-driven—plus like New Yorkie guys yelling stuff in New Yorkie ways. I love the ways that those affect this like fantastical story about guys capturing ghosts in boxes, you know what I mean?

Dan Aykroyd: Well, the mayor, of course is at—city hall was a big part of the movie, as you say. And the actor who played the mayor was wonderful. And Bill Atherton as the EPA inspector in the region there. Funny how the Environmental Protection Agency was a villain in the movie. And some analysts about it—critics have said or writers about it have said, “Oh, it was a very pro-Reagan movie,” because it was anti-environmental, anti-regulation, okay to use radiation elements in your trapping your ghosts, and pro capitalists; they’re trying to build a business, so perfect movie for the Reagan era, I guess.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Ray (*Ghostbusters*): Good evening. As a duly designated representative of the city, county, and state of New York, I order you to cease any and all supernatural activity and return forthwith to your place of origin, or to the nearest convenient parallel dimension!

Peter: That ought to do it. Thanks very much, Ray.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: I asked a friend of mine, a painter named Brandon Bird—creator of Aan Daykroyd, the evil Dan Aykroyd from another world—what I should ask you. ‘Cause I was thinking about Aan Daykroyd, the evil Dan Aykroyd.

Dan Aykroyd: Mm. The bizarro version.

Jesse Thorn: But Brandon asked a really great question, or asked me to ask a really great question. Which is: he has a brother, also a huge fan of yours, who recently lost a pet—a dog named Daisy. And he wondered what you thought about the afterlife of pets and animals.

Dan Aykroyd: They are—the province of Quebec, Canada, has deemed dogs and cats as sentient beings. When a dog or a cat crosses over, absolutely there are very talented mediums out there who are able to get in touch with your pet, I am glad to say. And when my father went to Lilydale near Chatauqua, which is the spiritualist community where there are registered mediums, he went to a woman. And I never knew that my dad, as an eight-year-old boy, had a cat named Bob. Never knew that! My dad told me a lot of things.

And the woman said, “Your cat, Bob, wants to reach you, Peter. And wants to acknowledge you.” How the F is the woman in Lilydale gonna know about my dad's cat, Bob? And she described it and everything. Little gray cat. My dad was floored, even though he had a great interest in paranormal research and watched the seances as a little kid, that to him was a validation. So, yes you can get in touch with your pet!

[00:50:00]

You just need the right medium to do it.

Jesse Thorn: You know, you're in your 70s. I wonder if your, you know, interest in and knowledge about the paranormal and the afterlife has changed how you think about your own death.

Dan Aykroyd: I don't fear death at all. You know, obviously I don't want the ride to end earlier than it should, because I am enjoying where I'm at now and where I think I'm headed. The only thing I—and I'm confident that my soul energy, my atomic force/mass/energy/density/sphere, whatever that soul is atomically. Democritus said that the soul has an atomic structure, and a Dr. MacDougall in Boston weighed the soul. And then of course there was the *21 Grams* movie.

So, that's going to go on. I have no doubt. And I think, because I believe in the consciousness, reaching back—I might be able to reach back with the proper medium. I'm conscious this is going on. I just don't want to leave a mess when I go! I want the corporeal shell to be not in evidence. So, I would like to maybe go to the Bessemer Furnace there in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, one of the ol—or maybe the Caterpillar Ingot Forging Furnace, wherever they make Caterpillar Bulldozers, and go in for a tour. And I'm now, you know, maybe in a wheelchair, but still can walk. And I'm going to say, “Take me to the ingot furnace. I'd really like to see that.” And I'm going to hop in. And so that I don't leave anything behind, and I can be molded into a bulldozer blade.

Now that's how I'd like to go, you know, so I don't leave a mess behind. But otherwise, not hoping—I'm hoping that would be a quick termination and not a lingering one, because I don't like being high. And all those drugs they give you for pain—there's something to be said for the guillotine, the quick. You know.

Jesse Thorn: Do you think of yourself after death spending time on the corporeal plane?

Dan Aykroyd: I think I'm going to roam in a few places, yes. I'm going to manifest and roam. I won't go all the way until loved ones intervene and help me cross over. Because when I go, there'll be so much unfinished business that I have to get to!

Jesse Thorn: You seem like a guy who's focused on his business. You know what I mean? Like, a guy who's doing stuff.

Dan Aykroyd: Well, I've so many offices to cover. I've got *Blues Brothers* as an active R&B review. And then also the—you know, the brand, keeping that going and policing royalties and revenues. And I've got the *Ghostbusters*, the same thing. Then I have the Crystal Head vodka line. There's our agave-based vodka.

Jesse Thorn: I like that you're showing it to the camera for our radio program. I appreciate that.

Dan Aykroyd: Well, I wanted you to see it. And so—yeah, so I'm a humble beverage alcohol salesman. Everything in moderation. I'm happy that I can sell, because I'm a moderate consumer of alcohol. And so, there's all these enterprises that need my attention right now. And also, you know, benefit from my counsel and advice. So, those three main things are keeping me occupied. Not to mention, I wrote another book. It's not an audible book, maybe—yet. I don't know. And so, I'm finishing up that. And that is also another office that requires my focus and attention.

Jesse Thorn: Dan, I couldn't be more grateful for your time. And it's a total dream to have you on the show. I hope that you'll come back here. I could talk to you for six hours, and I got an hour of your time. So, I appreciate you doing this. It's really kind of you.

Dan Aykroyd: Well, thanks very much. So glad to be on an NPR-carried outlet.

Music: “Soul Man” from the album *The Blues Brothers: The Original Movie Soundtrack Recording* by the Blues Brothers.

Coming to you

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

Jesse Thorn: Dan Aykroyd! Come on. As we mentioned, his new audio documentary on the *Blues Brothers* is called *Blues Brothers: The Arc of Gratitude*. You can stream it now on Audible. Dan Aykroyd's vodka line is called Crystal Skull vodka. And yes, it is called Crystal Skull vodka, because it comes in a crystal skull. He brought bottles of it to show off for our interview. By the way, we were not in the same room. He was thousands of miles away from me, but he still was nice enough to bring some bottles of vodka.

Music:

Got what I got the hard way

And I'll make it better each and every day

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

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.

[00:55:00]

How is it where you are? Here in LA we are having like full-on Washington, DC, weather. It is—I don't know—90 degrees and drizzling outside?

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. And special thanks this week to Aaron Holmberg of Canada for recording our interview with Dan Aykroyd. Aaron and his crew could not have been more lovely.

Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is “Huddle Formation” by The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team. And thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

Hey, join us on Instagram, [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). Find out about new episodes and see behind the scenes pics, and—I don't know—get some dank *Bullseye* memes? Send them to us; we'll put them up there. We don't care. You know, it's Instagram. We're having fun. We're also on Twitter and Facebook. And hey, make sure to go search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* on YouTube and hit subscribe, because big stuff is right around the corner.

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

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(Music ends.)

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