

[00:00:00]

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. Wendy Melvoin and Lisa Coleman were born in the '60s. They grew up here in Los Angeles, where we make *Bullseye*. Wendy's father, Mike Melvoin, was a session musician—mainly on piano and organ. Lisa's father, Gary, was also a session musician. He played percussion. They were members of the legendary Wrecking Crew. They played on everything.

Wendy and Lisa went to each other's birthday parties, played catch, that kind of thing. In their early 20s, the two started dating. Also around that time, Lisa started playing keys and singing with Prince. You can hear her work on Prince's breakthrough album, *Dirty Mind*.

Music: “When You Were Mine” from the album *Dirty Minds* by Prince.

When you were mine

I gave you all of my money

Time after time

You done me wrong

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Not long after that, Wendy joined on guitar. Soon, they were integral members of Prince's band, The Revolution. Together, they recorded stone cold classics, like *Purple Rain*, *Raspberry Beret*, *Kiss*, *When Doves Cry*.

Music: “Anotherloverholenyohead” from the album *Parade* by Prince and The Revolution.

I gave my love, I gave my life

I gave my body and mind

We were inseparable

I guess I gave you all of my time

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: They left The Revolution in 1986. They put out a few albums of their own under the name Wendy & Lisa. And for all these years, Wendy and Lisa have kept collaborating, even long after they broke up as a couple. I talked with the two of them in 2021. Earlier this summer, they reunited with The Revolution to celebrate the 40th anniversary of *Purple Rain*. And they've just announced they're working on an album with Annie Lennox. Annie Lennox! Pretty good! Anyway, let's hear a track from Wendy and Lisa. This is from their 1989 album, *Fruit at the Bottom*. It's called "Are You My Baby?"

Music: "Are You My Baby" from the album *Fruit at the Bottom* by Wendy & Lisa.

Ooh, are you my baby?

Ooh, you make me crazy

Won't you be my man?

To my young and foolish heart

Loving has no end

Sometimes people...

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Wendy and Lisa, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show.

Wendy: Thanks, Jessie.

Lisa: Thank you. Nice to be here.

Jesse Thorn: I want to get into your lives and careers more broadly in a minute, but I wanted to start with composing particularly TV themes. I mean, you two are Emmy Award winners at this point. What do you get when someone is looking for a theme for a TV show? Like, do you get a call first that says, "We want Wendy and Lisa", or do you submit a demo, or—? How does it work?

Lisa: Usually it's been that we've been scoring the show. We get hired to score the show, and then it seems like main titles are sort of a last-minute decision a lot of times, because they're not sure if they're gonna use—

Wendy: It didn't used to be that way.

Lisa: Yeah, it didn't used to be. It used to be a little more deliberate. And we've done a lot of really good themes when we get to work with the graphics company or whoever's doing the title design. And if we get a chance to go kind of back and forth sending music and picture back and forth to match cuts and to develop the whole thing—like, we did that on *Carnival* and it was really a great collaboration. And also, on *Nurse Jackie*. It—you know, it went through several different lives until it ended up what it was. And, um, yeah. I think it's really great when you get to collaborate with the title house.

Wendy: Yeah. I'll add to that. You know, it's funny 'cause main title sequences aren't as revered as they used to be, back in the—let's say the '60s, '70s, and '80s. So, nowadays, they really only have time for between 5 and 11 seconds for a main title card that kind of says it all about your show. A lot of the times, in just these streaming services—because people are bingeing and they don't want any—they don't want a 30-second title sequence, you know, that goes between an opening act—the first act of a show.

So, we've had to—the past handful of years, even since *Nurse Jackie*—develop these sounds that will represent a show in 10 seconds. And it's a tall order.

[00:05:00]

But we're—a lot of times—in the position now to ask the producers once we're hired, “Are you thinking about a main title sequence? We are Emmy Award winners for that very thing. And it might be nice to do something special for your show.” So, we always push for that, but in the end, it doesn't normally end up that way, because they're looking for so much to happen in between 5 and 11 seconds. We're working on something right now where the opening act's first queue has to just tail over the cards. So, it's a completely different orientation, but when we do get offered or when we push, and it's accepted to actually do a main title sequence, we really dig it. 'Cause we love to work with the—like Lisa had mentioned—the title house. So, it's really great to work with them and then work with the showrunner on what they're trying to say in that opening title sequence. It's a lovely job.

And if you get, you know, network TV for instance, they're still doing—you know—big, main title sequences. But we haven't been on a network show since we did *Shades of Blue* for NBC. That was the Jennifer Lopez cop show with Ray Liotta. We—that was the last main title that we actually did for network. And since then, we haven't actually done an actual—well, I guess the CW would be considered one of the networks.

(Lisa affirms.)

So, we did do that. So, god, there's been—we've done so much. Um. Anyway, it's great to be able to do a main—a longer main title sequence. It's always fun for us to do, is to create kind of like the—what do they call it? (Inaudible) the idea, the uber-narrative of the show in, you know, a 30 second title sequence is really lovely to do.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, TV title sequences are such an important part of television, because—especially in anything where you might get dropped into it not from the very beginning, the job of that title sequence is to basically tell you everything about the entire show. Like, if you think of—I don't know what the most iconic title sequences are, but you know, *Star Trek*,

where there's both that soaring music and that sort of narrative that tells you what exactly is going to happen, you know.

(They agree.)

You think of like great sitcoms where they introduce all the characters and the situation visually while music plays that is the—you know, whatever, *The Odd Couple* theme or something.

Wendy: Oh, yeah, the Neal Hefti *Odd Couple* theme is fantastic. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Did you, by the way, know that song has lyrics?

Wendy: Yes!

(Jesse laughs.)

Just like *MASH* does. Just like the title sequence to *MASH*. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: I literally can't hear it now like in a—I don't know where you hear the *Odd Couple* theme other than in your head, without thinking of (singing) “Everywhere they go, they are known as the couple.”

Wendy: Oh, that's fantastic! I love that. (Laughs.) That's great.

Jesse Thorn: But do you get like a brief? Sometimes you've been working on the show scoring it, so you're pretty familiar with what the showrunner and directors and writers want. But when you're not, do you get a breakdown of what kind of thing it should be?

Wendy: Not normally. That's the joy of us working with the title house. If we've already done cues for a pilot, we have a pretty good idea of sounds and themes that we need to incorporate. And when we're initially doing something for a pilot, we literally think about themes and how that's going to translate into something like, you know, a main title.

Jesse Thorn: So, give me an example of a theme that you're particularly proud of and how it developed—how those iterations and communications between you and the title house and the showrunners and so forth developed over time.

Wendy: Well, *Nurse Jackie*, the one we won the Emmy for—I think I'm really proud of that because it won an Emmy.

(They laugh.)

No, it's much deeper than that.

Jesse Thorn: So, where did it start?

Wendy: I mean, Lisa and I wanted to create a sound for Edie Falco’s character that was playful, that sounded slightly secretive and magical, that sounded slightly...

Lisa: A little bit tough.

Wendy: A little bit tough.

Music: “Nurse Jackie Title Sequence” by Wendy & Lisa.

Na, na, na, na, na, na, na

Na, na, na, na, na, na, na

Na, na, na, na, na, na, na

Hey, hey

(Music fades out.)

Wendy: We got these visuals too, from the producers and the writers where they had all of these little artifacts and little trinkets inside the title sequence cards—like her wedding band that she hides in her pocket, a stethoscope, but there were—

Lisa: Pills. Lots of pills.

Wendy: Pills, right? So, there’s lots of secrets. Her hiding things. And we wanted to incorporate as much of those sounds in our heads that we kind of put a narrative to and create this beautiful title sequence. And it worked really well, ‘cause we also got to work with the title sequence. So, if you saw Jackie take her wedding band and put it in her pocket, we were able to actually score that movement so that when you watched the visual, you could see Jackie, that your eye—and the audience—could actually focus on that moment. So, it was really a really conscious effort to make those things pop out, musically. And then we—you know.

Lisa: We did some fun things too. Like, for our shakers, we used pill bottles, bottles of aspirin or whatever it was—Advil.

[00:10:00]

Just because we were seeing pill bottles. She opens the medicine cabinet, and there's a bunch of pills—

Wendy: That fall out.

Lisa: That fall out. So—and the shakers come in, so we used pill bottles for the shakers and stuff like that. It's just—it's fun when you get a chance to work with the visual.

Jesse Thorn: Do the two of you remember how old you were when you first met?

Wendy: I was two years old.

Lisa: Yeah. I was like five.

Wendy: Mm-hm. I remember it perfectly. It was in the backyard of a valley house that my mother and father had. My sister and brother and me were in our backyard. And the Coleman family came over. And Lisa was in the backyard with me, and I was playing with a big red ball. And I was bouncing it in the backyard, and I bounced it to her, and she said to me, “That ball's cockeyed.” And I'd never heard that word before!

(They chuckle.)

Being two years old, I didn't have a lot of room to find out what that word—but it stuck with me because of—she connected the angle at which it dropped. And it would go—it went to the left instead of directly to her. So, she said, “That ball's cockeyed.”

Lisa: Yeah, ‘cause I was a good catch. And you know, for me to miss it was a big deal. So, that ball was cockeyed.

(They laugh.)

Wendy: Anyway, I remember it well. And I was two.

Jesse Thorn: Do you remember it, Lisa?

Lisa: I do remember. And I remember their house, particularly the living room, because Wendy's father was a piano player. And the living room was completely taken up by his grand piano, and I remember crawling underneath it to get through the house. Because it was—you know, it was pretty much the living room was a piano.

Wendy: Yeah, he had a nine-foot Grotrian-Steinweg in the middle of the living room in this tiny little house in the valley. So, it was like it made no sense. (Laughs.) But yeah.

Jesse Thorn: I like that the two of you were two and five years old, and you were essentially playing in a giant metaphor. Like, really, no subtlety there at all.

Wendy: Yes! No, that's really good. Well spotted. Well spotted, my man. Well spotted.

Lisa: It's true.

Jesse Thorn: (Laughs.) So, both of your fathers were session musicians in the Wrecking Crew, like one of the most legendary groups of session musicians ever. Did that mean that you saw a lot of each other when you were kids?

Wendy: Oh, yeah. We had the—we went to the same schools, had the same doctors. Our mothers were, you know, weekenders constantly. And the kids would go from one house to the other house. I mean, it was—

Lisa: Yeah, we were all—

Wendy: We kind of grew up in the same—

Lisa: Bunch of kittens.

Wendy: Yeah, we were a bunch of kittens. Exactly.

(They chuckle.)

Jesse Thorn: Did you think it was cool that your fathers were musicians, or did you think it was weird and annoying?

Wendy: Oh, no, I loved it. There was great people around us all the time. We were exposed to everything, you know. And it's funny, you know, both Lisa and I had mothers that were huge music fans, massive music fans, and loved everything, and played everything, and exposed us to everything. And our fathers were like the studio guys, right? But they didn't have the same—

Well, that's not true a Gary, Lisa's father who's like a groundbreaking percussionist and then you know probably had the first Oberheim and ARP 2600 in his little studio in the house in 1970—they were all really— They explored everything. But our mothers, I think, are the ones that kind of exposed us to what the emotion was behind music more than the technique of music, which was more on our father's side, I think. I mean, that's how I experienced it.

Lisa: Yeah, I mean, that's great. 'Cause we got such a... a whole world of appreciation for music from, you know, our fathers who worked and were professionals at it, and our mothers who were talented, but also forced into being mothers and raising kids. And they taught us how to love music. You know? My mother was a singer, a jazz singer, as a teenager. And she used to lie about her age and sing in clubs and stuff like that. But of course, when she got married, you know, she quit to raise a family and all that stuff. So—but she had this passion inside her for music and, you know, she would sit us kids down and play us a Mozart symphony or something crazy like that. And, you know, we would sit there as long as we could pay attention. (Chuckles.)

But, you know, we got it. We understood why she was doing that and, you know, how vast the world of music is and how we could always find a home there, somewhere. And you know, in many—

[00:15:00]

—in lots of ways. You know, in different styles and things like

Wendy: Yeah. I also remember my mother was the one that used to play the records. My father used to make the records, and my mother was the one that was always putting a record on the turntable. So, that was a big influence for me.

Jesse Thorn: Much, much more to come with Wendy and Lisa in just a minute. Their dads were session musicians. And after the break, we'll play Wendy and Lisa a song on which both their fathers played. It's one they know well, and odds are one that you know, too. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Promo:

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, a spirited acoustic guitar number.

John Moe: One thing we all have in common: we all have a mind.

Speaker 1: It makes me so scared, because I'm like, “When is the bad thing going to happen?”

John Moe: And minds can be kind of unpredictable and eccentric.

Speaker 2: Everybody wants to hear that they're not alone. Everybody wants to hear that someone else has those same thoughts.

John Moe: *Depresh Mode with John Moe* is about how interesting minds intersect with the lives and work of the people who have them: comedians, authors, experts, all sorts of folks trying to make sense of their world.

Speaker 3: It's not admitting something bad if you say, “This is scary.”

John Moe: *Depresh Mode with John Moe*, every Monday at MaximumFun.org or wherever you get podcasts.

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guests are Wendy and Lisa. They're a long-time musical duo who have been writing and performing together for almost 40 years. They were members of the Revolution, Prince's band, and they helped Prince record some of his greatest hits. Wendy and Lisa have also written and recorded albums as a duo, and they've scored many TV and film projects, and have even won an Emmy. Let's get back into our conversation with them from 2021.

I talked to Kevin, my producer. I texted him like an hour ago, and I said, "Hey Kevin, can you find something that both Wendy and Lisa's dad played on?" And you know, (chuckles) both of your dads worked on 25 million records.

Wendy: That's right.

Jesse Thorn: The one that he pulled was "That's Life" by Frank Sinatra. I thought we'd listen to a little bit of it.

(They agree.)

Music: "That's Life" from the album *That's Life* by Frank Sinatra.

That's life (that's life)

That's what all the people say

You're riding high in April, shot down in May

But I know I'm gonna change that tune

When I'm back on top, back on top in June

I said that's life (that's life)

And as funny as it may seem

Some people get their kicks

Stomping on a dream

But I don't let it, let it get me down

'Cause this fine old world...

(Music fades out.)

Wendy: That's my dad on the organ!

Jesse Thorn: (Laughs.) That's the best—that was the part like listening to it. And like obviously, I've heard "That's Life" 25,000 times at the grocery store, but I did not remember that it opened with that organ!

Wendy: Well, get this. So, if you think about that organ tone on that Hammond, think about "Good Vibrations". My father did the organ on that as well. So, it sounds—it's the exact same tone.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I mean, that sound quality honestly reminded me of Soul Records more than it reminded me of Frank Sinatra.

Wendy: Oh yeah, for sure. For sure.

Jesse Thorn: Did the two of you think that the records that your dads worked on were cool? Or were you like rolling your eyes?

Wendy: Lisa's father got—I thought—I always thought Lisa's father got the cooler gigs. Like he got to play on the Steely Dan records and all that stuff, and my father didn't—wasn't the call, the keyboard player, for those sessions. It was like either Boddicker or Michael Lang or—there's a handful of other keyboard players that were called in for those gigs. My dad got a lot of the straighter, big band, TV—well, they both got tons of orchestra dates on TV and film, you know. All the Jerry Goldsmith sessions and the Elmer Bernstein sessions at the Newman Stage at, you know, Sony Studios.

And so—but I always thought that Gary got cooler gigs. But my father played on a million—I mean, he played with Tom Waits and Bette Midler and Streisand. I mean, just—it's—the list is massive! My father came out of the kitchen one day—I went to go visit him. This is right before he passed away, and he was in his kitchen, and he goes—he used to call me Dolly. (In a deep voice.) "Oh, Dolly, I just—I got a printout of some of the stuff that I've played on in my career." And he drops this scroll—like, it's a Warner Brothers cartoon?

(Jesse and Lisa laugh.)

And it goes the length of the entire kitchen.

Lisa: (Chuckling.) Right. Like a mile.

Wendy: And it's all typed in like triple columns of all the artists he's played with over the years. I wish I had that list. I don't know where it went, but it was astonishing. It was astonishing.

Jesse Thorn: So, the two of you grew up together and also ended up, essentially—maybe literally, I'm not sure—married for a really long time. Did you help each other realize that you were gay when you were kids and adolescents?

[00:20:00]

Wendy: For me, yes. That's Wendy speaking. Yeah, I was 16 years old and, you know, it was already very weird for Lisa and I, 'cause we grew up together, but then we spent a couple years apart. I went back east to go finish a couple years of school and while I was gone, I didn't see the Colemans, so Lisa and I grew into young women. And by that time, I was questioning my sexuality at that very young age, 13, 14, 15. And then I came back and saw Lisa one summer after she had done—had been away doing the *Dirty Mind* record with Prince. And it just was—you know, cheeseball as it is, we fell in love with each other. You know?

Lisa: Yeah. It was kind of funny, 'cause I'm older, and (chuckling) I just didn't expect that little Wendy Melvoin would be—you know. I'd suddenly look at her differently. 'Cause I was more like best friends with her brother, her older brother. 'Cause we were similar in age. And you know, it was like the twins were a two-headed monster that, you know—it was like our little sisters. So, it was kind of funny when, after those few years we spent apart and she came back to LA and we were like, "Uh, hello!"

(They laugh.)

And that lasted for, you know, 20 years. I mean, it's still—still—

Wendy: Yeah, I mean, we were a couple for 20 years and realized that the couple part romantically wasn't our thing, but we were able to miraculously hang on to the parts that do work so well. And that's us as partners in music and in just—dare I be as dorky as to say: this thing called life. But we have partners, you know, independent of each other romantically, and we have children by different people. But we've—you know, this relationship has lasted, even work-wise, 40 years.

(Music fades in.)

Jesse Thorn: I want to play a Prince song that neither of you played on. And I think when I play it—at least Wendy, you will know why I chose this song to play. It's from his 1978 album, *For You*, the debut record. And it's called "Soft and Wet".

Music: "Soft and Wet" from the album *For You* by Prince.

If this is lust, then I must confess

I feel it every day

If this is wrong, then I long

To be as far from right as I may

Soft and wet

Soft and wet

Ooooooh!

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: I wish our listeners at home could see Lisa air drumming to that record.

(They laugh.) Playing that funky disco beat.

Lisa: That disco beat. Yeah.

(Wendy imitates the percussion.)

Jesse Thorn: Wendy, was that really the first Prince song that you ever heard?

Wendy: Yeah. That was the very first Prince song I ever heard! I was underage at a night club in LA called The Starwood, which is infamous in its own right. It had a rock and roll room and then it had a disco room. And this is 19—summer of '78. And I was underage. I was probably between—I think it was 13 or 14. And my sister and I went to this club, snuck out of the house—sorry Dad, sorry Mom. And I was on the disco floor, baby, and the DJ put that record on and I was completely—and mind you, I was always a funky kid. I loved everything that was funky. I loved everything that was soulful. My favorite records were all the deepest, darkest of all the funk records in the '70s. And then I wanted to be John McLaughlin from Mahavishnu.

So, I was a complicated listener.

(Lisa agrees and Jesse laughs.)

Jesse Thorn: Wait, what were the—were you like listening to like Mandrill or something?

Wendy: Sure, I listened to Mandrill! Yeah, of course. Sure, I did. And I also listened to, you know—

Jesse Thorn: (Laughing.) Like most 13-year-olds.

Wendy: Yeah, no, I was deep. I was deep. You can't—I mean, my friend Q-Tip and I send records back to each other to see whether or not we can stump each other with that era. And he can't stump me. He can't stump me! He just can't.

Lisa: No, you're good.

Wendy: Yeah. So, by that time I was on the dance floor. And I heard that record. I ran up to the DJ, and I was like, “Oh my God. Who was that girl?!”

I thought it was a girl. I did. And he said, “No, it's not a girl.”

[00:25:00]

“It's this young kid named Prince.”

And that started my love affair. I was completely obsessed with him. And then when I found out Lisa had gotten a gig on the *Dirty Mind* record and she really didn't know who he was and I got wind of it back east, when I was going to school. And I was like, “Does she have any idea who she just got a gig with!?” And then I came back to LA one summer and went to the Coleman's house and Lisa was back from Minnesota, just from her audition, and put on the cassette of *Dirty Mind* and I heard Lisa say, “I'm just a virgin, and I'm on my way to wed,” and I lost my mind!

(Jesse and Lisa laugh.)

I couldn't believe it! I couldn't believe it! I couldn't believe it!

Lisa: Well, it was really funny too, because I didn't know Prince. I didn't know his music. And I was really, you know, kind of a snob, I think. When I think about it. I was heavy into classical and, you know, was really focused on that. And then all of a sudden I ended up in Prince's band. (Chuckles.) It was, it seemed like a real—

Wendy: It was cognitive dissonance. You know, it really was. But she was perfect.

Lisa: Yeah, like what? What happened to Lisa?

Wendy: It was perfect!

Lisa: Prince happened.

Wendy: Yeah, totally. And Prince happened. That's exactly right. And then that happened for both of us. Yeah. And he adored her because—you know, he could kind of do everybody and everybody's position in a band. He could outdo you. (Laughs.) You know what I mean?

He couldn't do Lisa. He tried for years and years to do—to be Lisa, to do—to channel her when he played piano. And he could never do it. And so, he kind of, in a way, I think coveted the fact that she was so singular and such a singular voice, musically. And I think it's probably one of the more important musical relationships he's ever had, because of that.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, when I think of *Dirty Mind*, which is maybe my favorite Prince record, certainly one of my favorite records of all time—

Wendy: Same here.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I mean—you know, when you talk about like Prince just a couple years earlier, you think like this is a person capable of immense greatness. And then you listen to *Dirty Mind*, and you're like, oh wow, this does not let up the entire time. It is all perfect.

Wendy: No! It does not! And it's only 32 minutes long. And it's so groundbreaking. Every time I talk to people about Prince and they're like—wanna know—wanna do a deep dive? I say, “You have—you have to listen to *Dirty Mind*.” I mean, that's where he was the most sweaty, dirty, uncomfortable yet convicted, and dark and yet sexy, and playful, and manipulative, and smart. And what he was doing with sounds, by trying to take that new wave era and put it into a funk environment to try and outdo like the Rick James of the world and the Zapps of the world and all that kind of stuff. He was—it was everything. It was—and then he looked like this weird like transgender chick. He looked like a—you know, like he could have been in—you know—*Paris is Burning*. You know what I mean?

Just... what—the only other person that had done anything like that was David Bowie, but he didn't—David wasn't even that person off the microphone. He became like a really kind of straight guy. Prince was that guy, on and off.

Jesse Thorn: The sound of *Dirty Mind* is what I think of the most, and a lot of that sound is keyboards. So, where did all those sounds come from? When you first started with Prince, and you're like walking in cold into this weird situation, like where did all that stuff come from?

Lisa: He was really specific with that stuff. He would most often already have a sound picked out and he would just point me to it and say, “Here, play this. Play this sound.” You know. And he—it would—he was not afraid of presets, back then. And, you know, they were still new. You know? You'd get an ARP Omni or something. It had, you know, three buttons that you could choose—you know—synth or synth string or just string. You know. (Chuckles.) “Wow! This is the magic combination, like this!” You know. And Prince would just turn everything up, just like (makes a crackling noise).

His philosophy was, “Pin it.”

Wendy: Pin the meters.

Lisa: Just pin it, just anything in life, you know.

(They laugh.)

[00:30:00]

I mean, even if you're just walking, “(Censor beep) pin that (censor beep)!” So, it was just like that. Like, the keyboard sounds are so like aggressive, you know.

Jesse Thorn: Wendy, would you say that you schemed your way in, or did you fall in accidentally?

Wendy: Um, you know, if I was to really pathologize it, I'm sure I schemed my way in. I wasn't aware of it at the time. I was just like, "Oh my god, I'm in love with my girlfriend and I get to be around the most important artist of all time, for me." So, that was the extent of it. But I think, in the court of law—if I was in front of a judge and a lawyer was grilling me, I'd have to say I was really hoping that he'd take notice of me and that I could jump onboard, for sure. But at the time I was just happy to be in his presence and soak it all in and be with my girlfriend. So. And then I just got lucky he heard me practicing my guitar in her hotel room. And then it just happened.

Jesse Thorn: We'll wrap up with Wendy and Lisa. After the break, we'll talk about how they coped with Prince's passing and why they decided to do one more tour as the Revolution. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Promo:

Music: Playful, quirky music.

John-Luke Roberts: *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts* is a real podcast made up of fake podcasts, like *If You Had a Cupboard in Your Lower Back, What Would You Keep in It?*

Speaker 1: So, I'm gonna say mugs.

Speaker 2: A little yogurt and a spoon.

Speaker 3: A small handkerchief that was given to me by my grandmother on her deathbed.

Speaker 4: Maybe some spare honey?

Speaker 5: (Seriously.) I'd keep batteries in it. I'd pretend to be a toy.

Speaker 6: If I had a cupboard in my lower back, I'd probably fill it with spines.

John-Luke Roberts: *If You Had a Cupboard in Your Lower Back, What Would You Keep in It?* doesn't exist. We made it up for *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts*, an award-winning comedy podcast from Maximum Fun made up of hundreds of stupid podcasts. Listen and subscribe to *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts*, now!

(Music ends.)

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guests are Wendy and Lisa. They're musicians who've been collaborating for 40 years. The two of them played in Prince's band, the Revolution, cutting the classic records *Purple Rain*, *Parade*, and *Around the World in a Day*. They're also recording artists under their own name who have released several albums. I talked with Wendy and Lisa in 2021. Let's get back into it.

So, this is a question that I ask a lot of artists. But I think it plays differently in the context of both of your fathers having been like workaholic professional session musicians. What did your parents think of your jobs as musicians in this very particular kind of band?

Wendy: Oh! My god, they loved it! My mother was such a fan! So was my father! They loved it. They loved every second of it. My father—you should see the clip of my father announcing us at the Grammys. You know. You know, he was the president of NARAS at the time. And you know, there's clips of him and you can see how proud was of us—

Lisa: (Interrupting delightedly.) “Oooh, my daughter, Wendy!”

Wendy: —that we were playing the Grammys and accepted all these awards for *Purple Rain*. I mean, he was like—and my mother was like—Prince loved my mother! She was such a groupie! It was just—yeah. No, it was never a problem.

(Jesse and Lisa chuckle.)

Never. And then, of course, Prince fell in love with my twin sister and hired my brother to play on a whole bunch of things. And both of our brothers were integral parts in *Around the World in a Day*. And you know, it all became kind of like a—you know. Yeah.

Lisa: (Singing.) “Family affaaaair.”

(Wendy agrees.)

Jesse Thorn: It's funny to think that, of all the stories that I've heard over 20 years of doing this show from people about—artists about their relationships with their parents and their parents' relationship with being artists, them being artists. Like, the two of you had the clearest path to parental approval of any of them—which was neither of your fathers could deny the band was tight. Like (laughs)—like, ultimately like whether they like Prince Records or not—

Wendy: That's right. They knew we were good. They knew we were really good. I remember my father was more worried about me and Lisa as a couple when he found out. (Laughs.)

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I was about to say, did your parents know that you were a couple?

Wendy: They were all really—you know, if you could imagine seeing a dog with its ears cocked and their head cocked when they found out, like “What? Isn't that incest? Isn't that-?”

(Lisa laughs.)

So, I remember my father trying to be so good with me and Lisa. And he looked at me, and he goes, “Well, just as long as you two are productive.”

[00:35:00]

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: Productive!

I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. My guests are Wendy and Lisa.

I—(chuckles) one of my best friends from high school was your publicist for a little bit for an awards campaign. And she normally would represent people that would not be good fits for this show, so she never like pitched me anybody or anything. We've known each other since we were 16. So, when I heard that she was representing the two of you on this awards campaign, I said, “Woah! You're representing somebody that I definitely wanna have on the show! Like, can—(chuckles) can you get them to come and do *Bullseye*?” It might even have been called *The Sound of Young America*. This was 10/12 years ago.

(Laughing.) And I remember she said, “I think I could get them to do it, but they cannot talk about Prince, because they're not allowed to. Because Lisa said Prince is a fancy lesbian.”

(They laugh.)

Wendy: Is that what she said? That's hysterical. But that's true. He was. He was a very fancy lesbian.

Lisa: It's true.

Jesse Thorn: (Laughing.) And so, I had never—I never actually got around to reading the interview where—and you truly did say that, Lisa.

(Lisa confirms.)

And in that bit, the question was, “Was Prince gay?” And the two of you were kind of laughing about it, but also being very sincere and saying that it was much less about his sexuality being, you know—that he was interested in guys, but rather that his gender expression was so kind of fluid and expansive that he gave what—you know—I mean, I guess Janelle Monáe is giving Prince vibes, but like, you know, Prince was giving what I would associate with Janelle Monáe vibes.

(They agree.)

Like getting out there in a tuxedo where the hips are a lot bigger than the waist. You know what I mean? And I wonder what the two of you thought of all that when you were like around him working on a day-to-day basis. Like, he was—he was doing a lot.

Wendy: You know, I never—and I... I know my gay boys (laughs), and I know my closeted gay boys. Prince was not one of them. He just wasn't. He was very heterosexual. And this kind of nods to what we were just talking about—that he preferred the beauty of women and representing that kind of beauty on his own body than trying to look like Steven Seagal, if that's your form of macho. You know what I mean? He had no interest in dumbing his physicality down. He was extremely connected to the expression of his—but he was like a—he was like a ballet dancer. People used to think that, you know, Peter Martins was gay. Great ballet dancer from the '80s and '70s. Straight as an arrow, but on the stage, there was such feminine beauty—and masculine—about the way he moved. And a lot of dancers are like that.

Prince had that. He just—he just did. He just happened to feel like he looked much better with makeup on and smelled better with some female perfume on and have his clothes made^ and wear heels because he wanted to be taller. You know? I never, eever got a sense that he was gay. I mean, that's why it's funny to call him a lesbian, because he loved women. You know what I mean? He's a lesbian.

Lisa: And he loved being a woman.

Wendy: And he loved being a woman. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: I wonder if each of you could pick some contribution that you made to one of those songs or one of those records that you are particularly proud of—whether it's, you know, something you did as a player or something you contributed even more holistically?

Wendy: God, there are so many songs. I think if I was to think of it in terms of the iconic nature of one of the songs, I'd say that, you know—and it's not my favorite track, but I would say that it couldn't have happened without the input, and that would be “Purple Rain”. I just think that—now, we didn't write it, but we helped create what it is.

[00:40:00]

And I don't know if it would have had the same popularity if it hadn't had our interpretation of what it was that he was asking, musical interpretation.

Jesse Thorn: Tell me what you mean by that. Like, what were the specific choices?

Wendy: Well, he came in with this very simple country song, this idea he had, you know. And it was really only kind of the chords to... was it the verse or the chords to the chorus? I can't remember what he presented first, but it felt very simple.

Lisa: I think the verse.

Wendy: And yeah, probably the chorus. And it felt very simple, and it was... but we could—he came in and he just said, you know, “I have this idea and here are the chords. What do you guys got? What can you do?” And so, he taught every one of us—Matt and Lisa and me and, of course, Mark and Bobby kept the meat and potatoes of it going. But I felt like it needed to be more beautiful and complicated. So, I stretched the chords and made these different inversions and reharmonized the—you know, the second chord of the progression and came up with this sort of chord progression that was not there, that did not exist prior to the song.

Lisa: Well, it sounded more like—instead of just straight triads kind of chords, it sounded almost like she was playing in an open tuning. It was like these big sort of (imitates a descending note) you know, like a harp or something. You know. And Prince just loved it, and that's why the guitar opens the song.

Wendy: It opens the track, and you know what the song is based on those opening chords.

Music: “Purple Rain” off the album *Purple Rain* by Prince.

I never meant to cause you any sorrow

I never meant to cause you any pain

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: This is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Here with me, Wendy and Lisa.

You played a lot of the songs that you worked on with Prince without Prince, as the Revolution, after he passed away. You went out on tour. And you know, you're well-paid professional musicians who mostly work from home or like a studio you own and have kids and et cetera, et cetera. Why did you decide to tour?

Like, touring is hard. And I'm sure that all of you had very complicated feelings about Prince and that time in your lives. So, why did you choose to take it on the road?

Lisa: We just, um... I mean, the short answer is cheesy. It's just because of love. Because we needed each other. We love each other, as a band and as people. And the loss of Prince was really shocking and really a devastating feeling. You know? It—we didn't just grieve him as a person, but we were grieving the loss of possibilities and things that we always kept—you know, we always kept that plate spinning, like something might happen and we would do little things here and there. You know? Just play with each other. And so... you know. Just playing all the gigs was a grieving process, a healing process, for us and—as it turned out—for a lot of the fans.

Wendy: Yeah, we tried to conjure the feeling... that we all had when we played together, for the audience, so they could sort of—as well as us—have a sense of that moment in time. And it was sort of a form of relief and a way to keep him alive in a really vibrant way, for a moment. And we chose songs that absolutely did not need like a real lead singer to kind of...

do Prince. We didn't—we didn't wanna—we wanted—we chose songs in the repertoire that really the audience could only sing out loud to us and group vocals stuff.

(Lisa agrees.)

And maybe we had, you know, a guest vocalist come out and do, you know—

[00:45:00]

—lead the audience on to “Kiss”. But it wasn't like, “Okay! And here's the person that's gonna be replacing him.” We didn't want any of that. It was just literally, “Let's all just see if we can conjure him in this room and have some sense of relief at this crazy loss. And that was really—there was no money in—there was nothing. It was so down and dirty. That tour was like put together with spit and spackle. It was incredibly uncomfortable and raw and awful and great. And is it gonna happen again? I don't think so. I don't—I don't think that that's in the cards. But it was a great time for us to do that together and to heal in some way and to get closer, as a band.

But you know, we're missing our master and commander, and it just—it doesn't make much sense.

Jesse Thorn: When you were doing that tour, were you able to feel proud of what you personally and you as a band had accomplished with Prince?

Wendy: Yeah, the audience let us know that.

Lisa: Yeah, we didn't—it was a surprise, in a way, that—how important we were to people. You know? The fans that would come and we do meet and greets after the shows. And there was a lot of tears, and it was always like—I don't know, a very deep experience. And just to know that he... with us, he touched so many people. And we did, gradually, feel more and more proud, like with each gig that we were—we kind of—the grief turned into more joy and pride and that sort of thing.

But it was—it was difficult, especially at first. It took a while before we could come off the stage smiling. You know. We'd come off the stage feeling pretty bummed out.

Jesse Thorn: I'm glad that you were able to eventually. I mean, I think of all the smiles you've brought people, you know what I mean? Even smiling through tears.

Wendy: Yeah, it's pretty amazing.

Lisa: Yeah, it was a process.

Wendy: It's like I said: and then Prince happened.

(They laugh.)

That's what our life is like. And then Prince happened.

Jesse Thorn: Well, Wendy and Lisa, I'm so grateful to you for taking this time and even taking a little bit of extra time. And it was such a pleasure and an honor to get to talk to you. I hope you'll come back again, and we can talk about more of this stuff we didn't have time for. I really appreciate it.

Wendy: Would love it. We'd love it. Thanks, Jesse.

Jesse Thorn: Wendy Melvoin and Lisa Coleman, everyone. Such a thrill to have them on the show. Boy, just as fun and amazing as it gets. You've probably already heard all of the classic Prince records they worked on, but maybe you need an excuse to revisit them. And also, the Wendy & Lisa records are great, really. Let's go out on another single from them.

This is from their 1987 self-titled debut. It's called “Waterfall”.

Music: “Waterfall” from the album *Wendy and Lisa* by Wendy & Lisa.

Move slow

Now your time's at hand

Take heed

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

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—as well as our office overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in LA. I'm gonna be honest with you, the main thing that I'm dealing with right now at my house is I'm recording here in my little backyard shed, but I don't really know how to move the sprinklers. So, the sprinklers just sprinkle the heck out of the shed, and sheds don't need water. In fact, they don't like it. I'm trying to figure out how that works. I should watch a tutorial or something. Anyway. Can you tell I grew up as a renter?

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. City kid here. 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. Yes, we have video! Go check it out on YouTube. Video of all our new interviews. You can share them there. It's really cool and fun to see us and see the inside of our studios and so forth. Booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, DJW.

I just found out the other day that Dan Wally lives right next to a tennis court that used to belong to Motown Records and is where Rick James used to go to play tennis with Herb Alpert. (Laughs.) Isn't that awesome?

[00:50:00]

Anyway. Our theme music, “Huddle Formation”, written and recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and Memphis Industries, their label, for providing it to us.

Bullseye is on Instagram, where you can find clips of the aforementioned videos, along with behind-the-scenes shots, and find out what's coming up. And so on and so forth. We are [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). We're also on Twitter and on Facebook. And do not miss us in full video form on YouTube, and in short video form on TikTok. I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

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

(Music fades out.)