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

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

**Music:** “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

**Jesse Thorn:** It is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Next up this week is Antonio Banderas, the award-winning actor who is, frankly, one of the most versatile, charming, handsome performers out there today. You've probably seen him in *Zoro* or *Philadelphia*, or *Desperado*. You've heard him in *Shrek*. He played the voice of Puss in Boots.

Man, I'll tell you what, if you didn't see that most recent Puss in Boots movie, I thought it was really good. And I'm not a *Shrek* guy. Or maybe you've seen him in his latest film, *Paddington in Peru*. He plays a treasure hunter named Hunter.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Speaker:** What a handsome... boat.

**Hunter:** Capitan Hunter Cabot at your service. Oh, Paddington Brown—smooth, strong, easy on the eye. And that's just the boat!

(*Flourishing sounds.*)

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** When Banderas and I talked in 2019, he'd just taken on a very different role, one that he said was amongst his most challenging. His friend and frequent collaborator, director, Pedro Almodóvar, had a new script called *Pain & Glory*. It's about a guy named Salvador Mallo—that's Banderas's character. The character's a director. He made a handful of well-regarded sex comedies in the '80s. He has a nice apartment in Madrid. And he's stuck. He isn't really making movies anymore. He hardly has the drive to go out. He's crippled by his maladies, headaches, back pain, asthma, and all of that pretty much describes Almodóvar.

In casting Banderas, somebody who's known him for decades now, he made the movie all the more personal. Banderas's character in *Pain & Glory* wears Almodóvar's clothes, grows the same facial hair, lives in a replica of the director's apartment. The performance Banderas gives is beautiful. It's not an impression. He doesn't channel Almodóvar. Instead, he personifies the director's pain, his need to still create despite the suffering. It's a beautiful movie. If you have a chance to see *Pain & Glory*, I really recommend it. For now, let's get into my interview with Antonio Banderas.

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

**Jesse Thorn:** Antonio Banderas, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's so great to have you on the show.

**Antonio Banderas:** Thank you very much.

**Jesse Thorn:** And I also wanna let you know, for our listeners at home as well, that you smell very nice. You smell great, Antonio.

**Antonio Banderas:** Oh, thank you. That's good. (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** A few years ago I had Almodóvar in here, and he actually—he doesn't like to do interviews in English. He's embarrassed of his English, but his English is very good. And he and I talked about migraine. He suffers from migraine, and I do too.

(*Antonio confirms.*)

And I felt like when I talked to him about it, he was very touched to talk about it. It's a hard thing to talk about. But he was very touched to talk about it. And I was very surprised, but in a way not surprised, that that kind of pain is such a big part of *Pain & Glory*. You've known him for, you know, 40 years or something. Did you know about that part of his life?

**Antonio Banderas:** Yes. You know, it was not... that important, when we met four decades ago—maybe because we were younger. And he, at the time, probably he didn't suffer these migraine attacks so—you know, as strongly. But then, when I came to America, actually—in the beginning of the 90's, I remember—because we never lost contact, but sometimes I'd call some of my friends, "Come on, friends." You know, with Almodóvar.

And I—and I asked them about Pedro, you know. "Did you see Pedro?"

They said, "No, no, Pedro is not going out, lately. Apparently he got these migraines, and he stays home. Also, he got problems in his back. He suffers from the photophobia, you know—the light produced his headaches on him, too. So, no, no, no. He's getting very isolated." And then they—you know, every time that I went to Spain—especially if I went to Madrid—I used to call him and just go for dinner, with him, and stuff like that.

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And then I started just realizing that he was very secluded, because I call him and he say, (*reluctantly*) “Aah, I can’t do it. You know, I don’t feel good.” See, he was always, you know, giving what I thought—at the time—they were excuses until I, you know, realized that they were not excuses. That he was really suffering, you know? It’s interesting that you say that he actually was really interested in talking to you about that, because I think, actually, you can connect with people through pain, too. And especially if it’s a common pain.

It happens to me too, you know? I don’t suffer those types of pain, although I got problems in my back, in the past. But I suffered a heart attack, now two and half years ago. And every time that I find somebody who had the same cardiac problem, I (*chuckles*) feel strangely, and in a bizarre way connected to that person. Yeah.

(*Laughs.*) So, I understand, you know, that you established some kind of connection, you know, with your pain, for sure.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, one of the unusual things about chronic pain, particularly, is that—you know—it’s invisible. And you learn the lesson very quickly that you’re not going—and you kind of learn it the hard way—that you’re not—that you don’t get that far talking about it. Because other people can’t see it, whether some people might not believe in it or not understand the stakes or whatever, you learn to just kind of lock it up.

**Antonio Banderas:** Of course. And that’s when, actually, the pain that is just physical can become something bigger than that. And it goes to the psyche, you know? It goes to other places. As I was commenting before, I saw that in Pedro. Isolation, basically, you know? Because, you know, you have a friend—or an enemy, better—you know, that is invisible. That nobody sees. Everybody’s happy. It’s very difficult to connect with that kind of pain, but you see the effect that you produce in other people, so you start getting isolated. You start going away. And that produce another type of pain.

So, there is a moment—in the movie, in *Pain & Glory*—in which he is playing, very graphically, almost like in a cartoon, all the different type of pains. And when that is the frontier, that border that you cross between the physical pain and the psychological pain. And the psychological pain, that’s another animal, another—you know—thing that you have to deal with. Completely different and much more permanent, because that can even last longer. You can lose your physical pain, but that thing stays with you for a longer time.

**Jesse Thorn:** What kind of relationship did you have with Almodóvar when the two of you were young?

**Antonio Banderas:** Very—Almodóvar is a very private person. And I always had a very strong relationship with him as friends, but limited. I never tried to trespass those sides of his privacy.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, it’s funny to think of him as a very private person. Not that I disbelieve you, it’s just that—you know, like—in the—in the ‘80s, in Spain, when he first started making films and right before you first started making films—you know, like—he was playing in—I watched clips of him playing in his band, which was like some of the wildest performance I’ve—like, B-52’s, you know, hold my purse. Like, it was way past that.

And you know, obviously his films are so grandly emotional and exciting and fun and kinetic and, you know, all of those things. And you think—you think this must be somebody who just like whirlwinds into your life and—you know, and blasts it with color, or something!

What you're telling me is not what you might assume from his work.

**Antonio Banderas:** Not in my case. I have—I got to the Almodóvar universe as an actor. He saw me, for the first time, performing at the National Theater. I was doing classic theatre at the time, and he just came to me to offer me a character in his second movie, *Labyrinth of Passion*.

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

**Antonio Banderas:** I was, at the time, 19 years old. And so, you know, we start working always like that. Then he got a group of crazy people breaking all of the rules of the Spain of the time. You have to think that when I met Pedro, it was 1980. That was five years after Franco died, so Spain was coming out of a dictatorship. It was very specific rules put onto us, you know, morality. A number of things that would accompany this regime, and that—those things, they don't dissolve just like that by, you know, a degree that says—

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You know, “Now we're a democracy and everybody just forget (*chuckling*) 40 years of dictatorship and become something different.”

No. It doesn't happen like that. But people like Pedro Almodóvar, some musicians, you know, groups, people in the—in the World Photography, and writers—they were pushing the idea of a new Spain, you know? With a more colorful (*stammering*)—

So, there were a bunch of peoples running all over. They were like The Rolling Stones. It was like, “These guys are breaking the rules.” None of them were actors. Some of them were writers, painters, but they act in Almodóvar movies almost like a hobby. It was kind of fun. It was kind of crazy and, you know, off the box completely. And I was almost the only “actor-actor”, (*laughing*) you know, that actually was participating in that movement. But I wasn't part of the movement.

So, Almodóvar always called me in that context. It was not until 1985, 1986—I think by the time that we did *Law of Desire*—that, you know, that relationship—I totally understood the dimension of the man that I had in front of me. Because he was able, actually, to bend completely the Spanish morality of the time.

*The Law of Desire* is a movie that actually put more sexuality on the scene, very graphically, with no complexes at all. Very raw, but at the same time very honestly, you know? It was not a porn movie or anything like that. It was a real movie with a very interesting narrative that was, you know, awarded all around Europe in festivals and stuff like that. But it was very interesting how that film bent Spanish morality. And at the same time, my own, in a way. Because you start reflecting about the things that you have seen for many years.

For example: yes, my character is homosexual, and he kiss another man. And you know, there's scenes that were very explicit, in that context. But in the same movie, I killed somebody. And nobody put attention to that. That was accepted. That has been always accepted. The fact that a person can kill another person in a movie, you know, is—you know, even in movies for kids—is fine. You know? If you don't see blood in movies for kids, it's totally fine. But one person kissing another person of the same sex—(*gasping*) “Oh my god!” It seems like the world is gonna just explode, you know, in pieces!

So, things like that, Almodóvar—things are that simple, you know, were very important at the Spain of the time.

Now, was I part of that movement? No, because I came out of the Almodóvar world, and I did theatre, and I did other things. I belonged to the group, but to a certain limit. I wasn't a full part of that kind of movement.

**Jesse Thorn:** Even more with Antonio Banderas still to come. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

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

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I am Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guest is Antonio Banderas, the Academy Award nominated actor. When we talked in 2019, he had just starred in the Pedro Almodóvar film *Pain & Glory*. His newest movie is different. He's in *Paddington in Peru*, the third installment of the *Paddington* franchise. You can catch that in theaters now. Let's get back into our conversation.

You grew up in Andalusia. Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like when you were a kid?

**Antonio Banderas:** Well, when I was a kid—until I was 15 years old, we were living under a dictatorship. That is—it was not—(*sighs*) it was not very violent, and not— People may think that there was a lot of violence in that.

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What I remember is in a state of—how can I describe it?—almost anesthesia. Everything was fine. Too fine. Eerie fine. (*Chuckles.*) You know? And now, with time, if I think about those days—you know—I can see the cracks of the regime, at the time, how it was falling apart.

But when Franco died, you know, I remember growing up from being a kid into being a man at the same time that my country was going from a dictatorship to a democracy. So, you know, those years and the place where I was born, Málaga—which is in the south of Spain, the south of Andalusia—it was a little bit more liberal, more freer—if you will—because the tourists coming from the north of Europe: Swedish, Finland, Norwegian, British. They came with other things in their mind.

**Jesse Thorn:** I was gonna say, you get those wild Swedes in there.

*(They laugh.)*

**Antonio Banderas:** Oh yeah! It was kind of fun, actually. But they came with different stories and different things.

*(Jesse agrees.)*

And I remember the discotheque scene in Torremolinos and the people I remember at Tiffany's, places that were—you know, you can find those places only probably in London, at the time, in Europe, but there were in Torremolinos in Franco's times. Which is an incredible anachronism, if you will. You know, very weird.

I remember *(laughs)*—I remember going in the car with my father and my mother. We used to have a little apartment in Fuengirola which is, you know, like a *(inaudible)*. You have to pass through Torremolinos, and Torremolinos was a heaven for hippies at the time. You know? And I remember, in 1970... '70, '69, '71—something like that. You know, my mother used to—in the car—we were crossing Torremolinos, and when she saw hippies, she ordered my brother and I to close our eyes!

*(Jesse laughs.)*

“Close your eyes! Close your eyes! There are hippies there!” *(Cackles.)* I loved that. You know, I am just crazy to do a movie in which I can just put this in. But yeah, it's true. I was—you know, my family was a very good family. I never, you know, had problems in my childhood. *(Stammering)* A loving father and mother and a great brother that is still, as of today, my best friend. And so, there is no traumas, or anything related to my early years in the world.

And then, you know, as I said to you—politically, I understood, you know, that the Franco regime had to disappear, and our lives then start growing in a completely different direction and that's exactly what the country did, yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** When did you leave town?

**Antonio Banderas:** I left town on the 3rd of August 1979.

*(Jesse laughs.)*

At six o'clock in the afternoon.

**Jesse Thorn:** *(Amused)* I just wanna say, I was not setting you up for that. I didn't know that you had the exact same time and—*(laughs)*.

**Antonio Banderas:** I have the exact time, and I have the exact image and the exact sounds and everything. My mother (*chuckles*)—my mother took my pants, and she put secret pockets inside, just in case that I was robbed. You know, that they couldn't find the money. The money that I left my hometown with was not even \$100. That was all I had to my adventure. And they were in those secret pockets, inside my pants.

But I remember that afternoon. The train was called Costa del Sol. And I went there with my \$100, a little suitcase, and some of my friends—actors, amateur actors that I worked with, at the time—came to say goodbye. They brought me cigarettes (*laughing*) and things like that, you know, at the time. And I remember exactly the moment that the train start going, because it was a movement without sound. It was like a (*imitating*) “clunk.” And suddenly I saw my friends going away, away. And I knew—at that moment—that if I go back to Málaga, sometime, someday, I will be somebody else. I will be a new me.

It was a very clear thought that came to my mind. “This is it. This is a moment in which I separate from what I was until this particular time. And I'm gonna create something new.”

**Jesse Thorn:** I have a lot of friends who are comics, and one of the things that a comic—one of the skills that a comic has to develop is the ability to walk onstage, have an understanding of what the audience's impression of them is, immediately, and address it so that they can do other things, you know?

(*Antonio confirms.*)

It's the cliché joke of somebody walking onstage and somebody says, “I know what you're thinking, such-and-such had a baby with such-and-such. Well, here I am! Right?”

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And it's not—the comics don't do that because it's the funniest joke in the world. They do it just because they understand that as soon as they step in front of people, people have a reaction to what they see. And I wonder at what point like you realized that part of the reaction that people had to looking at you was that you are—and I'm just gonna stipulate this—super handsome. (*Chuckles.*) Like? You know, you're like some kind of movie star, or something.

But I wonder like how you manage that in your life, and when you realized like what effect it had on people? For good and ill, I'm sure.

**Antonio Banderas:** One has always a tendency—and they talk about, probably everybody—to actually, mm, don't be completely objective about what you are, you know? Sometimes I get surprised. And I don't wanna think too much about it, you know, what the people see in me. I see that I produce some kind of effect. But at the same time, that was kind of a handicap, at some point. You say, “Oh, I am trapped in this thing.”

And it's one of the things, actually—when I've been doing Q&A's these days, when you're sometimes answering questions and the people next to you—some of them are very poignant

and very interesting—you start discovering things that you have done that you didn't even know. You know? But one of the things that I had to do, when I did *Pain & Glory*, is to kill that guy. To kill Antonio Banderas. The Antonio Banderas that everybody has in his mind, you know? That is kind of athletic. We have seen him in *Zorro*, we have seen him in action movies. He's basically a guy that, you know, performs—he moves good, in front of a camera. Whatever it is. You know, I had to get rid of him, somehow.

**Jesse Thorn:** And you're not doing—I mean, like it's interesting to me that, while you are wearing Almodóvar's hairstyle—

*(They laugh.)*

—and you're wearing his beautiful clothes, it didn't feel to me like you killed Antonio Banderas by doing an impression of Pedro Almodóvar.

**Antonio Banderas:** No. No, that would have been a huge mistake. No. An impression is not acting. It's something else. And it goes more to the comedy territory, and it would have killed the movie. No, if we wanted to do something complex and deep, I had to—yeah, I can have the hair, I can have all these stereo-things. But the character has to be created from the inside out and cannot be an imitation, because if it's an imitation—especially in Spain, that everybody knows Pedro Almodóvar and his mannerism—you know, ah, I would have been just imitating somebody.

No, I have to create the character from another point of view. And so, he got his own life. Remember, the character is not called Pedro Almodóvar. He's called Salvador Mallo. So, I have to go with him. Then, of course, he's an alter-ego of Pedro. And he has to do, pretty much, with the whole entire universe of the movie. Why? Because it's true that Almodóvar is not telling everything that is on the screen. Not everything happened for real. You know? Some of the things happened, some of the things didn't happen.

But that's the point. The point is to think, “What am I? Am I only the things that I have done and the things that I have said? Or am I also the things that I have dreamt? Am I the things that I wanted to say, and I never said? The things that I wanted to do, and I never did?”

And Pedro Almodóvar allowed himself, in this movie, to do and to say those things. So, in reality, it's him. Of course, it's him! Even if those events didn't happen. In reality, it's more Almodóvar than Pedro Almodóvar. *(Laughs.)* You know? It's just—because it is just creating, you know—the things that he never said to his mother, which was actually very emotional, when we were doing that. Because you know, you can have all types of information, when you're doing a movie, especially if you're doing a character that actually existed. And it's very complicated when the character that you're playing is actually the director of the movie and is the one who is saying “action” and “cut” and is giving you indications.

But when the indications that he's giving you are not verbal, but emotional, you see the effect that those lines produce in him. Then it's, *(reverently)* “Oh man, I know exactly what is happening to him, so I can act it. I know what is—” Sometimes, he was giving indications to



us, and he couldn't. He couldn't. It was so emotional, to him, that he had to go. Because he got tears in his eyes, you know?

So, I said to him—at those times—I said, “Just say action. Say action! I got it. I got it, I got it! I got it, now.” Pleading.

And he said, “Action!” And boom! And it came. So, you know, it's a—this movie was a different deal. But yes. No, no imitation.

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That was a rule. He allowed me, though—he came to me, and he said to me, “Antonio, if you wanna use some of my mannerisms—”

I say, “No! No, Pedro. Allow me just to go from another angle, really. Because otherwise we are just gonna do something that's gonna be cheap.” And he agreed.

**Jesse Thorn:** You've had a long career as an American movie star, very fruitfully, but I also think that you and Almodóvar, as artists, will be tied together for the rest of your lives and beyond. And it was a big deal for him to write and direct a movie that was this autobiographical, that was this much his story. That's not his normal modus operandi. Was it scary for you to accept that responsibility?

**Antonio Banderas:** Yeah. Yeah, it was.

**Jesse Thorn:** For this friend of yours that you must—I mean like I imagine (*chuckling*)—I've met the man once, and I like think all the time about how much I admire him. And like you've had this working relationship for 40 years. I imagine that you also admire his art as much as I do and find him to be as compelling a person as I do.

**Antonio Banderas:** Yeah. Let's just—let me just tell you a story that explains—well, it's gonna give you an answer. You know, our relationship, as friends has been constant. You know, all of these 40 years. But as professionals, we stop working at the end of the '80s and we didn't go back to work until 22 years, after. And that was for a movie called *The Skin I Live In*.

So, he called me after 22 years. I arrived to—because he loves to rehearse, right? For a month before principal photography, which is very rare in directors. I mean, in movie directors. In theatre it's normal, but not in movies. And so, I arrived to my first rehearsals, just throwing on the table, saying, “Mira, the things—look at the things that I have learned in America. Look at the way that I use my voice. I am so in, you know, secure now, in front of the camera. I am so this and so that and so, (*vocalizing nonsensically*) and a bedbeepbeembomp.”

And then, after a week rehearsing, he said to me, “(*Sucking a breath through his teeth.*) You know, those things that you brought from America? They may be very useful for your

American directors, but they are not useful for me.” (*Chuckles.*) “So, what are you?” And that question was like—what? “Yeah, what are you?”

(*Stammering, struggling for words.*) “I am here.”

“Really?”

So, I got into the movie, you know, confronting him a little bit. And of course, we’re friends and it’s always a creative, you know, relationship. But there was tension on the set. We were just (*disgruntled noise*), trying to just occupy our spaces. Then the movie finish. He edited the movie, and I went to the Toronto Film Festival, and I saw the movie for the first time, there with an audience. And I just couldn’t believe that he was capable to just bring out of me, take out of me, the character that I was seeing on the screen. That I didn’t even know I had it, inside.

So, it was like, “Oh my god!” What happened? Well, what happened then is that you have to be humble. You have to be humble. You have to open your eyes, and you have to open your ears and your heart and, you know, realize that you were making a mistake. And you have to listen more, especially for those people that, actually, you have been growing with. You know?

And I was thinking, “Ah, this is gonna happen again or not. He’s gonna call me again or not.” So, when I received this call, nine years after. A professional, call.

“Antonio, I sent you a script. It’s filled with references of people that you know, of yourself, of myself. You know, you are gonna find the material is very, very close to you too. I would like for you to play this guy, Salvador Mallo.” He didn’t say anything else.

Of course, I read the script, and I thought, “Oh my god. This is it. This is opportunity.” So, I call him, and I said, “Alright, I’m gonna just to go there as a plain soldier. I don’t have medals. I don’t have anything. I had a heart attack, and I think I have learned from that, too. And there is something that has changed in me. Because when you see death face-to-face, things change, in you.”

And he said, “Yeah, I noticed that, and I would like for you to use it for this character. Whatever happened in you, I don’t know how to describe it, but there is something different.”

And I said, “Okay. So, let’s start from the scratch. Ey? I don’t wanna use those tools that made me feel comfortable in front of the camera. Those tricks that I have learned during the years, that I know that are effective for an audience. I wanna go from zero, man. Let’s just try to get together in the mud and start creating the character from there.”

And he says, “Wow. It sounds beautiful to me.” And that’s how we start working in this movie. From zero.

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It's very scary, (*chuckling*) because he doesn't—he sees everything. So, in the moment that you're using tricks that he knows, he'll go, "Yeah. No, Antonio, no. That's not the way to go."

But a week after rehearsals, not even principal photography, we knew that we were rolling in the same direction. And it's so spectacular, you know, how beautiful things went that—we finished the movie a week and a half before we were supposed to, which is unheard of (*chuckling*) in the movie world. You know, normally you go—

**Jesse Thorn:** Right, you're constantly begging the money people for an extra few days of shooting. Yeah.

**Antonio Banderas:** Exactly. Yeah. So, it has been very—(*sighs*) interesting experience that, actually, I don't think I totally metabolized, yet. I need all of this foam that is surrounding us these days to go down and—probably, in the years to come, I will realize what happened, you know, during all of those days of shooting and how we found the things that we found and how this movie's gonna change our lives.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I was thinking of Tom Cruise, you know. One of our greatest movie stars.

**Antonio Banderas:** (*Clicks teeth.*) Of course.

**Jesse Thorn:** And like the question is sometimes like, why is Tom Cruise one of our greatest movie stars? And he's a very good actor, but I don't think he's our greatest movie star because he's the greatest actor. But there's something about his... like, almost his like way of moving that is compelling. Right? And I was thinking about these—and also, the way that he looks is compelling. Like, onscreen, he's fascinating to look at, right?

**Antonio Banderas:** He is, definitely.

**Jesse Thorn:** Whether or not you think he's like the handsomest guy ever or not the handsomest guy ever, it's sort of irrelevant. You wanna look at him, right? And I was thinking of these gifts that you have that are similar, in that you have a beautiful voice. You know, people wanna look at you on a screen, and you have a like a sort of, I think—you alluded to it earlier, but like a physical, almost athletic quality that makes it so that you can be Zorro, right? Like, (*chuckles*) not everybody can be Zorro and make it seem right.

And those are (*laughing*)—those are the things that you have to leave aside to do this particular role for the most important professional collaborator you've had in your career, where you're playing the highest stakes role that he has ever had in any film, in his career, because it's him. And you know, you have to let go of sounding beautiful. You have to allow yourself to, you know, beat yourself up physically a little bit.

**Antonio Banderas:** Be old.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, be old! (*Laughs.*)

**Antonio Banderas:** Decrepit. And lonely.

*(Jesse laughs.)*

But it happens, too—I had kind of a training when I did, for seven months, Picasso. Because I don't look like Picasso neither. And I got into that skin in a different way, because I mean—I know Picasso very well too, because I was born in the same town that he was born in, in Málaga, in the south of Spain. So, that image of Picasso has been always, you know, inserted in my brain, since I was a little kid.

But also, physically, I had completely different—you know—physicality. *(Beat.)* I don't wanna be redundant, but yeah. And so, I have to take a leap.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I mean it's like, you can put on a Picasso shirt. That helps. But it's not the...

**Antonio Banderas:** But it's not gonna do the whole thing. No. No. You know, there's a way that he talk. There's a way that he walk. There is a way that, you know, his presence, his aura, everything about him. So, in a way—you know—age, in a way, has given me more opportunities than in my young years. And I am very thankful to that, to play characters that are way more interesting than the things that I used to do.

And, you know, I am not—I don't regret any of the things that I have done. But they were done, at the time, because... I was very close to them.

*(Jesse affirms.)*

You know? Also, you have to think—

**Jesse Thorn:** Antonio, I'll just say. If I could be Zorro in a movie? I'd take it.

*(Antonio laughs.)*

I'd be into that, that'd be awesome.

**Antonio Banderas:** Alright, gotcha. *(Laughs.)* No, you know, another thing that, for me, was difficult is when I came to America. I—you know, it's not that my English improved too much, you know. But I couldn't speak the language at all, when I came over here. At all.

**Jesse Thorn:** You literally—when you say that, my understanding, and tell me if I'm wrong, was that you literally couldn't speak English when you—

**Antonio Banderas:** At all. Nothing. Zero. Nothing. I learned my lines phonetically when I did *The Mambo Kings*.

[00:35:00]

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

*(The sounds of people chattering, laughing, and eating in the background.)*

**Speaker 1:** *(In the background.)* How 'bout that?

**Speaker 2:** Mike and I wanted to compliment you on your performance.

**Nestor Castillo:** *(Bashfully)* Ooh.

**Speaker 2:** That was a wonderful song.

**Several voices in the crowd:** Yeah!

**Speaker 3:** It was very nice.

**Speaker 2:** "Beautiful Maria of My Soul".

**Nestor:** I have written many different songs of the first name. Many different personality songs. Excuse me, man.

**Speaker 3:** Have you written any other songs?

**Nestor:** Yes, a few songs. Uh.

**Speaker 4:** Yeah, a suitcase full.

**Nestor:** *(Agreeing).* Suitcase.

**Speaker 4:** *(Chuckling.)* Yeah. Suitcase.

**Speaker 2:** So, where are you fellas from, in Cuba?

**Speaker 4 and Nestor:** Las Pinas.

**Speaker 4:** That's the sugar mill town there in Oriente. You know that.

*(They laugh.)*

**Speaker 2:** So am I! From Oriente, too!

**Speaker 4:** (*Amused*) That's what I said.

**Speaker 2:** Santiago!

(*Various members of the crowd laugh mixed with the sound of clinking glasses and silverware.*)

**Speaker 5:** If you put a couple of Cubanos together, we're all related, right?!

(*The crowd laughs uproariously. Someone claps. Brassy music begins to fade in, slowly getting louder than the voices.*)

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Antonio Banderas:** (*Chuckles.*) It was very weird. I had an interpreter, just to give me the direction from the director. And you know, the director had to talk to the interpreter, interpreter with me, I talk to the interpreter. All day long, like that. I couldn't understand anybody. It was a very weird and very bizarre experience.

**Jesse Thorn:** We'll have even more with Antonio Banderas in just a minute. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

(*ADVERTISEMENT*)

**Promo:**

(*Phone rings.*)

**Music:** Relaxed string music.

**Benjamin Partridge:** Hello. Podcast Recommendation Service.

**Client:** (*With an exaggeratedly posh transatlantic accent.*) Hello there, young man! I'm looking for a new podcast to listen to. Something amusing perhaps.

**Benjamin:** Oh, what about *Beef and Dairy Network*?

**Client:** Something surreal and satirical.

**Benjamin:** Well, I would suggest *Beef and Dairy Network*.

**Client:** Ideally it would be a spoof industry podcast for the beef and dairy industries.

**Benjamin:** Yes, *Beef and Dairy Network*.

**Client:** Maybe it would have brilliant guests such as Josie Long, Heather Anne Campbell, Nick Offerman, and the actor Ted Danson.

**Benjamin:** *Beef and Dairy Network!*

**Client:** I don't know, I think I'm going to stick to *Joe Rogan*.

**Music:** Upbeat synth.

**Benjamin:** *The Beef and Dairy Network* podcast is a multi-award-winning comedy podcast, and you can find it at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) or wherever you get your podcasts.

*(Music fades out.)*

**Transition:** Thumpy rock music.

**Jesse Thorn:** You're listening to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest, Antonio Banderas, starred in *Pain & Glory*, the Academy Award nominated film from director Pedro Almodóvar.

Is it a different experience to you to act in English than in Spanish?

*(Antonio confirms.)*

In what way?

**Antonio Banderas:** It's weird, but your body moves in a different way. I work, for example, also in Italian language—that I kinda speak Italian, too—and my body moves in a different way. My hands go crazy, when I work in Italian. But something interesting, even—you know, English obviously is not my mother language, but—now it's different, but at the beginning, when I start working in English, words didn't have the history that the Spanish words had, to me. And so, it was very interesting to see that I was more detached, emotionally, from those words. And it was, in a way, easier to express things. I mean, English is a very syntactic language. You express—with very little words, you express a lot of things and ideas, which is great. It's great for music, for example.

But for example, it was very easy for me to say, "I love you" in English, which it was not that easy to say, "te quiero, o te amo" in Espanol, because in Spanish I knew the—*(sigh)* the weight of the words. It's a—and you know, anybody would understand what I am saying. When you learn bad words in a—in a different language, you just drop them. You don't—

you don't care. You don't know, really, because you don't have a history with the words. You are in a dinner, and you say, "Whatever. Word." And produce an effect on people that is, you know, is shocking to you. Because for you, the word is just a word, you know?

Right, but that thing happened with everything, you know, that you're saying. So, there was a certain freedom actually, that I felt when I was working in English. Regardless of the accent.

**Jesse Thorn:** A big part of this film is not just the pain of—not just the physical, but the emotional pain of getting older. I think the pain that your character goes through is—you know, it's partly the depression that comes from chronic pain that, you know, I recognize, but also I think it is...

[00:40:00]

When you're younger, it can be easier to build up the steam to take that on and to take solace in the creativity that your character, ultimately, you know takes solace in.

**Antonio Banderas:** Yeah. And (*sighs*) getting old—what is getting old, really? Because, if you have your memory and you have your intelligence with you, you know, it's not that bad. You know? The problem of the character, and I think the problem for anybody who become old, is when you have to stop doing what you love to do. And that is the big drama of the character. He wants to direct movies, but movies—for him—are a very physical, you know, thing to do. And so, he couldn't. He can't.

So, there is a moment in the movie in which he take a decision. He's gonna take a surgery. He goes through it. He wanna fix himself. And there is something very simple in the move, but very beautiful. The doctor comes to him. He's just received anesthesia—didn't do effect, yet—but, he says to him, "So, what are you doing now?"

He said, "Well, no," he says to the doctor, you know, "I am writing." And he says that like a "please, don't kill me." (*Chuckles.*) "I have to continue doing things. So, I am writing."

Say, "Oh! Fantastic! What are you doing? A comedy, a tragedy?"

He says, "Oh no. It's not comedy. It's not tragedy. It's both. It's just life." Boom. And he just lose consciousness. Well, there is—the movie, at the end, is very hopeful. And I could see, actually, my character, Pedro, taking weight out of his shoulders as the movie was advancing. Why? Because there was a process of relieving. It's almost like a therapy for him. Because this movie, at the end, (*stammering*) even if it's a very specific story, and the narrative is very specific, it manage with international and, you know, eternal concepts.

The movie talks about reconciliation. About coming to terms with the past. It talks about, even, forgiveness. And how you do that with your family, how you do that with actors—in his case—how you do that with your lovers, how you do that with cinema itself and with life itself! And that is what I think hooked people into the movie. That is probably the secret and the mystery that makes this movie accessible by anybody.



**Jesse Thorn:** One of the most moving scenes in the film is a scene where your character is in flashback. A lot of the film is in kind of reveries. And your character is an adult with his mom, who's very old. Getting close to death. And your character is obviously like experiencing a lot of pain about his mom and the way his mom relates to the world and to him.

And there's a very sincere moment where your character apologizes to his mom for never being the kid that she wanted to have. Which, I am—my, like—my initial instinct, in that scene is like, “Well, this has to be an angry sentiment.” This, you know—(*laughs*) like, I'm used to that story being told on film, but I'm used to it being told from the perspective of a kid who's establishing their autonomy—even if that kid's an adult, right?

But actually, what it felt to me like was a sincere apology, because he loves his mother, and not that he thinks he wants to have something else for his life, or to have had—

**Antonio Banderas:** No, no, no, no.

**Jesse Thorn:** In fact, in that scene, he says—you know, “I'm just a different person, and I was doing my life.”

**Antonio Banderas:** (*Sighs.*) Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's very beautiful. And, you know, it's a beautiful moment of reconciliation, as you described.

**Antonio Banderas:** That is one of those moments that I tried to explain, before—that all the information that came to me was emotional. Pedro Almodóvar loved to come to the set and read the scene with the actors. And he plays every actor and remind him—and while he's reading, you know, little details here and there that we were just working on the rehearsals and “Don't forget that” or “Remember that you have to pick up this, here” or anything.

So, he read my mother. I was giving the replica to him, and when he was going to read my part, he took the script and then—and he couldn't. He was going to read and— (*Gives a heavy sigh*).

And I saw that he couldn't read it! And suddenly I stood up and I embrace him and Julieta Serrano, the actress who played my mom, who is a dear friend of ours from a long time ago, also.

And I said to him that, you know—

[00:45:00]

(*Tenderly.*) “Go on, just say action, man. I know. I know what is happening. I know that what you wrote is what you wanted to say that you never said. And, uh, so I'm gonna—I'm gonna hit it.” And it—and exactly what you said, there was no angriness. There was a real apology.

That doesn't mean that he says, at the time, "I'm gonna change, Mama. I'm gonna be something different." Because he couldn't. You know? "This is where I am. I had to accept myself as I am, as I feel. And I am sorry, for that, because I know probably that you wanted something different, and I am so sorry for that, too." So, it's very simple and very beautiful, you know? That apology in which there is no anger involved. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, Antonio, I'm so grateful, to you, for coming to be on *Bullseye* and for this absolutely beautiful film.

**Antonio Banderas:** Thank you.

**Jesse Thorn:** It was a very—a very moving performance. An extraordinary performance.

**Antonio Banderas:** Thank you. Thank you so much.

**Jesse Thorn:** Antonio Banderas. The movie we talked about, *Pain & Glory*, is absolutely gorgeous. You can watch it online just about anywhere or stream it on DirecTV and Stars. And hey, if you watch that thing and you're feeling a little bit raw, why not chase it with *Paddington in Peru*, which is in theaters now?

**Transition:** Bright, chiming synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, as well as at Maximum Fun HQ, overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California, where—(laughs) man, I was in the office yesterday and out on the park, the street that adjoins the park, Park View, they were shooting an episode of a Fox TV show. They had a bus on fire with a bunch of insane smoke machines and a car that was smashed up against the bus, completely vertically perpendicular to the ground. And there was just like an assistant director on the microphone just yelling showbusiness stuff like "Extras!" and "Cue fire!" and "Action!". It was really great. Showbusiness.

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 Hannah Moroz. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our pal, Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find his music at [DJWsounds.bandcamp.com](http://DJWsounds.bandcamp.com). Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. The song is called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries. If you've never checked out The Go! Team, you should. They rule.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you will find video from just about all our interviews. And 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](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

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