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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](https://www.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.

He's handsome, assertive, a killer dresser, and he can teach you how to make a negroni in just three minutes. Stanley Tucci is my guest this week—the Academy Award nominated star of *The Lovely Bones*, *The Devil Wears Prada*, *Julie & Julia*, and so many others. The writer and director of the legendarily heartwarming food dramedy *Big Night*, and the host of the excellent travel and food show *Searching for Italy*. The man can do it all. What's he been up to lately? Well, he plays Cardinal Bellini in *Conclave*, the Oscar nominated drama starring Ralph Fiennes, John Lithgow, Isabella Rossellini, and many others. He's wonderful in it.

When I talked to him in 2023, he had starred in *Citadel*, a mega-budget action TV show that is streaming now on Amazon Prime. Here's the premise: *Citadel* is the name of an international spy agency—or at least it was. The show starts after *Citadel* was taken down by a crime syndicate called Manticore. Tucci plays Bernard, a tech genius who went into hiding after *Citadel* collapsed.

When the show begins, Bernard reconnects with one of *Citadel*'s top agents, Mason Kane. Their mission is to take down Manticore. But there's a hitch. Mason has no idea that he used to be a spy. When *Citadel* fell, his memories were erased, and he got a new identity. In this scene, Bernard and Mason are out on a mission. Mason's a little nervous; Bernard decides to lend him a hand.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Music: High-tempo, suspenseful jazz.

Bernard (*Citadel*): There's a secret Manticore tech lab on the top floor of that tower. The case is in their lab. But the good news is: I'm a genius. And I hacked into their servers. So, your biometrics—under an alias—are baked into the backdoor security system. Put this on and lose that.

Mason: This is the moment where I'm gonna raise my hand and say I need a little more clarity in the plan, here.

Bernard: You don't need to know the plan.

Mason: I definitely need to know—how could I not need to know the plan?

Bernard: Look. I'll guide you. Okay? You just listen to me, and I will get you through this.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Stanley Tucci, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's nice to have you on the show.

Stanley Tucci: Thank you. Nice to be here.

Jesse Thorn: You're very good at this. You're very good at entertainingly offering exposition.

(They laugh.)

You're very good at wearing spy outfits, all this stuff you're very good at. Was this your career goal? That one day you would—you'd hit 60, and you'd be like, "It's on, now. I'm getting arm muscles and—"

Stanley Tucci: Yeah. "I gotta be spy." Uh, no. I—the thing—this is a thing that just came along, you know, a couple of years ago. And I thought it was really interesting. And—you know—I knew the Russos were involved. I knew that Richard was playing the lead. I like the character. He was fun. And also, we shot the whole first bit of it in London—outside of London.

So, it was 40 minutes from my house. I thought, "Oh, this is a great job." And then, things were then—you know, additional photography was done, all that stuff was done later—about a year or more later. And it turned into what it is now. And—yeah. But it's exciting. I mean, it's exciting.

Jesse Thorn: When you're making something fun like this, what parts of the process of making it are similarly fun, and what are the hardest hard work parts of making something like this?

Stanley Tucci: The hard part—I didn't really—like, Richard and Priyanka had a lot of action stuff to do. So, that's grueling. You know, that's hard on your body and stuff. But for me, it was—you know, for me it wasn't really that much. You know. I was in and out. Those guys, and Richard in particular, is in like every scene. Uh, you know, the only thing—what's

difficult about filmmaking or TV making or whatever is the waiting. That's the hardest part. It's just waiting.

Jesse Thorn: Are you also, I imagine, trying to stay ready enough to go do art when they're done setting up the lights or whatever?

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Stanley Tucci: Yeah! I mean, you just have to—you're always ready, so it's very hard to concentrate on anything. So, when you go to your trailer, you know, it's very hard to—unless you have a really, really interesting book, you're just sitting there sort of languishing. You can't really concentrate on anything, because people are constantly knocking on your door going, "Five minutes," or "Do you have that thing that we gave you the other day? That prop that—?" "Oh, yeah, it's over there."

And so, you're never (*laughs*)—you really never get any time to concentrate on anything else. You just sort of sit there, you know, and watch YouTube or something. And you know. I watch cooking shows a lot.

Jesse Thorn: On YouTube?

Stanley Tucci: Yeah. Yeah, I watch like—yeah, like cooking videos and stuff. It relaxes me.

Jesse Thorn: What kind of thing do you like to watch on YouTube? Let's get more specific.

Stanley Tucci: I like this show, um—it's not so much here in America. Well, YouTube's everywhere, but it's—Pasta Grannies, it's called. Do you know this?

Jesse Thorn: No.

Stanley Tucci: And it's made by a British woman.

Jesse Thorn: I've got some enthusiastic nods outside the studio, here. Some big Pasta Granny heads.

Stanley Tucci: It's amazing. Each bit is like six minutes long and—you know, it's—there's no production value or anything like that. It's just really interesting. They basically get—I don't think there's a woman in it under the age of 75 or 80. And they just go to all different parts of Italy, and these people just make pasta. And you know, a recipe with pasta. It's really interesting, because she's—you know, the woman is going to different regions of Italy and sort of explaining very briefly why they're making that pasta in—you know—Bracciano or wherever.

Jesse Thorn: When you were a kid, how much did you know about—you're Italian American. Your grandparents were born in Italy.

(Stanley confirms.)

How much did you know from growing up in Westchester—is that right?

(Stanley confirms.)

In Westchester County in New York—about what the different ways of being Italian were, what the difference was? Or was everyone just Italian to you?

Stanley Tucci: No, no, no, no. No, it was very different. You know, we were—I suppose at that time, more of a minority—Italian Americans—in that part of Westchester. Whereas lower Westchester, it was—there were quite—there was a huge number of Italian Americans. And to me, it had to do with— You know, there were those guys who—you know, they were sort of like—made a show of being Italian American or something. Do you know what I mean? In a thuggish way. That sounds terrible, but you know what I mean.

And also—I mean, it was interesting for me, because I went and lived in Italy when I was like 12/13 years old. And so, I learned how to speak Italian. So, then when I heard people like pronounce—or the way Italian Americans would say certain words, I was like, “What word is that?” Like, “That’s not even close to—?”

Jesse Thorn: Are we talking specifically about that thing where they drop the vowel at the end of a word? In that part of the country?

Stanley Tucci: Well, yeah. Which is very common, because that’s—yeah, because in the south of Italy, that’s what they do. Right? So, the farther south you go, the less it sounds like real Italian. Right? Or what is like—you know—the way they might speak in Florence or Naples—or rather Milan or something. So, the Italian Americans, that became—it became a real bastardization of Italian. And so, it was taken to an extreme.

So, when you hear a Roman speak, you know, it’s very different than when you hear somebody from Milan speak. But you still know they’re speaking Italian. It’s very much where they are. Whereas you know, in America it just got completely perverted. So, you’d hear people—you know, instead of capicola, they say gabagool. You know. And you’re like, “What’s that? I don’t even know what that is.” Do you know what I mean?

So, there was that.

Jesse Thorn: To be fair, gabagool, very fun word.

Stanley Tucci: Very fun word. But yeah. So, that was just a product of—and that was the way they spoke, and they would—you know, they didn’t—so, that was the difference. I think that the real difference for me was that—you know, my parents were—like, they were so—they were very, very interested in their heritage. And they really like championed it. And it was very important for them to know where we came from, who we came from. And I think going to Italy was really important for my dad, because he studied art at the Accademia for a

year. He took a sabbatical. It was really important for him to show us really where we came from. And it was a great gift. It was a great gift.

[00:10:00]

Jesse Thorn: I mean, that's not always the case with the first generation of an immigrant family born in the United States.

Stanley Tucci: No, it's not. No, they normally don't encourage that. I mean, in fact, a lot of immigrants—you know, the first generation, so the grand—I'm never quite sure which is which.

(Jesse agrees with a chuckle.)

But—so, my—

Jesse Thorn: That's why I added those extra words. I realized on my way in. Yeah.

Stanley Tucci: Yeah, no one knows what it is. But the—it wasn't encouraged in a lot of households to speak Italian, because you wanted to assimilate. You wanted to do the complete opposite. You wanted to really deny your ethnicity. And other families didn't feel that way.

Jesse Thorn: How did that reveal itself in your house when you were a kid?

Stanley Tucci: No, it was—we were very proud of being Italian. Very proud of it. We didn't speak Italian. My father—my mom—they would speak—they could speak a dialect. They could speak—like, when they spoke to their parents, they could speak a dialect. But everybody spoke English. It was only when we went to Italy that—I didn't speak a word of Italian until I went to Italy.

Jesse Thorn: What was it like to meet family members that you didn't know who were living in such a different place from where you lived?

Stanley Tucci: It was fascinating. You know, it was really only—you know, it was like not even 30 years after the war had ended. You know. And you know, there were people down there in Cittanova, where my mother's family's from—you know still living like with dirt floors. And everyone wore black, because you always wore black when a family member died. Well, the family was just so big, somebody was dying all the time. So, you just wore black all the time.

It was the complete opposite of anything I'd ever known. Our family was doing quite well. My mother's family was doing quite well. They had a business where they sold agricultural machines and stuff like that. And they had like a garage and stuff like that. And they were doing quite well and still are. But there was real poverty there at that time.

It's still very poor. I think it might still be the poorest region of Italy. And corrupt. So, it was—but it was fascinating meeting them. I couldn't really understand everybody, (*chuckles*) because they had a Calabrese dialect.

Jesse Thorn: It wasn't just scary and overwhelming?

Stanley Tucci: Um, no. No. It wasn't—it was fascinating! You know, I was with my parents. I felt incredibly safe. You know. No, it was kind of cool. I was ready to go home at the end of the year, nine months, however long we were there. I was ready to go home and see my friends.

Jesse Thorn: Did you miss like baseball or hotdogs or—?

Stanley Tucci: I missed peanut butter. Peanut butter. At the time, you couldn't get that stuff in Italy. You know. Italy didn't—you know, they didn't have anything. It wasn't like it is today where you can get anything, anywhere, all the time. You couldn't—there were no American products there. Yeah. Hotdogs. I wanted a hotdog. And peanut butter. Peanut butter and jelly. (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: We've got so much more with Stanley Tucci still to come. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is actor and TV host Stanley Tucci.

What are you eating for breakfast, Stanley Tucci?

Stanley Tucci: Depends.

[00:15:00]

Sometimes I just have some oatmeal, and then I'll have like—I have eggs. Scrambled eggs. Little piece of toast.

Jesse Thorn: Does your eating reach its apex at nighttime or in the middle of the day?

Stanley Tucci: Nighttime. Yeah. It's a progressive—unless I go out for a big lunch or something. I do like big lunches, like on a weekend. I love that. I like to make a big lunch, especially in the summers. Like, that's just so much fun. But also, I love having people over to dinner and doing all that. But yeah, during the—it gets bigger and bigger. I mean, they say you're not supposed to eat a lot late at night, but I don't know. Tell the Italians, the Spanish, and the French that.

Jesse Thorn: Did you have the experience of having food in your lunchbox that other kids thought was weird?

Stanley Tucci: Without question. I wrote about it in this book that I wrote last year. And my—I could eat an enormous amount of food. I had a very fast metabolism. And so, I would bring like eggplant parmigiana sandwiches, like on a half a loaf of Italian bread. I would bring scrambled eggs with peppers and potatoes on bread as a sandwich. I would bring—we never brought pasta or anything like that. It was all like sandwiches and stuff. You know, and fruit and dessert.

Then, I'd come home and eat more. Then, I'd have dinner. Then, I'd eat again before I went to sleep. Like Velveeta sandwiches or something.

(They chuckle.)

Just, you know—I just ate everything! I just ate everything.

Jesse Thorn: What did your family think of your bottomless quality?

Stanley Tucci: They were like, “Keep eating.” You know. There was no—you know, it was just—it was a gift.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: Did you always eat everything?

Stanley Tucci: Yeah! Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: That's amazing.

Stanley Tucci: I was very—I was pretty adventurous. I was happy to try just about anything.

Jesse Thorn: You didn't really start cooking seriously—like as a life project until you made *Big Night*, right? Like, it was—not that you weren't cooking before, but—

Stanley Tucci: No, but I wasn't—I mean, I really learned a lot doing *Big Night*. But it's only—I have to say—in the last probably 10/12 years where I've really, really learned a lot more. And my wife, Felicity, is a great cook. And she's taught me a lot.

Jesse Thorn: When you made *Big Night*, you co-wrote the movie, co-directed it. Was it something that you had always wanted to make a film about? Or did you just one day realize, “Oh gosh, I know what's really important to me: not eating spaghetti and risotto together.”

(They laugh.)

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Woman (*Big Night*): I just—well, I’m—I mean, it’s just—it’s not what I expected.

(Stirring sounds.)

But I get a side order of spaghetti with this, right?

Secondo: Why? Well, no.

Man: I thought all main courses come with spaghetti.

Secondo: For some, yes, but you see, risotto is rice. So, it is a starch, and it doesn’t go really with pasta.

Woman: But I don’t—

(Fork clatters.)

Man: Honey, honey. Order a side of spaghetti, that’s all. And I’ll eat your meatballs.

Woman: Yeah, he’ll have the meatballs.

Secondo: Well, um, the spaghetti comes without meatballs.

Woman: *(Testily.)* There are no meatballs with the spaghetti?

Secondo: No, sometimes spaghetti likes to be alone.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Stanley Tucci: I think we wanted to tell the story—part of the story is about the role of the artist in society. Now, I know that sound a bit pretentious, but that really is a big sort of point of the film. How does a person who is devoted to their art—and in this case, the art is edible—how do they exist when they’re not appreciated, when they can’t get that foot in the door?

And of course, you could make the movie about a musician. You could make the movie about a painter. But for some reason, we thought, “Oh, food.” You know? But I was writing it. And see, when I was writing it, it really was a comedy at first I was writing. I didn’t know what I was writing. I asked my cousin to help me, and when we started—it was like a farce at one

point. And then, we decided that it needed—it was going in a different direction. We were like, “Mm, maybe it’s more serious.”

And then we came up with what we came up with.

Jesse Thorn: So, you describe *Big Night* as being about the challenge of an artist and, you know, how to be an artist in the world.

[00:20:00]

Part of that in the movie is that we're talking about immigrants, and the challenge to their art is Americanism. It's people—it's a lady wanting to order risotto and spaghetti together, right? I wonder if that was also in your mind.

Stanley Tucci: Without question. Yeah. There's a bastardization of, you know, anything ethnic when people go to another country. It's not just America either. People will make compromises. And sometimes too much. But they need to make a living. So, you know, when you see Italian American food and you see Italian food, it's very different.

Italian American food is larger portions. There are dishes that are completely made up that aren't Italian. There'll be huge amounts of sauce. Whereas, when you go to Italy, you're getting just a little bit of—you're getting exactly the amount of sauce that you need for that dish. That pasta isn't this enormous bowl of pasta, because you know there's another course that's coming. So, everything is in proportion.

So, there are those changes. And of course, you know, depending on where an Italian would settle in America, they're—let's say an Italian restauranter would settle—they're gonna adapt their dishes for that area. If you settle in the south, you'll probably end up using more spice. You know? Or you just end up using—who knows? In the north, you'll end up doing something different. California, you end up doing something different. And they do it to cater to—

I mean, now people are more aware. I think particularly in major cities, people are more aware that someone is doing authentic Italian cooking. And people now wanna flock to that, which I think is a good thing.

Jesse Thorn: Did you feel as passionately about acting as Tony Shalhoub's character in that movie feels about food?

Stanley Tucci: Yeah. I did. Yeah, without question. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: When did you figure that out?

Stanley Tucci: Oh, very early on. Very early on. I always felt passionately about it, which was good. But also, I got in my own way. You know, when you—sometimes, just like that

character—he's myopic. He's not movable. And you can't be like that. You have to have flexibility.

Jesse Thorn: How very early on are we talking about? I mean, are we talking about when you were 9 years old or when you were 21 years old?

Stanley Tucci: No, no. When I graduated university. It was—you know, I took myself too seriously. Not—it didn't mean that I (*chuckles*) didn't wanna do comedy. I did comedies. That's not the—that's not what I'm talking about. Sometimes, I would—you know, you think about things too much and you—and you can—if you think about things too much, it just becomes an intellectual exercise.

Jesse Thorn: What's an example of that?

Stanley Tucci: It's hard to say. Um. I always wanted to be better than I was. And I think one of the things that that young actors make a mistake doing is trying to sort of look at other people's performances and go like, "Oh, I can do that. I think I know how to—how he—" That's a huge mistake. It's just—you have to be who you are and do it the way you want to do it. You can look at other people to say, "Oh, that's beautifully subtle." But you can't try to mimic them. If you do that, it's disastrous.

Jesse Thorn: I wanna ask you, as a guy who's Italian American, you made a whole television show about Italy. A wonderful television show.

(Stanley thanks him.)

It was really good. Like, my stepmother's Irish. And there's nothing on Earth that she has more contempt for than Irish American stuff. Like, she just hates it all so much! (*Laughs.*) It just makes her so mad, like—you know—Riverdance or whatever.

(They laugh.)

You know what I mean?

(Stanley confirms.)

And I wonder what it's like for you to have tried to—I mean, A) to have lived in Italy for a year as a kid, which is an experience not many Italian American people get to have. But also, as an adult, to have an identity and make work that's so closely tied to Italy, which is a—you know, it's a whole other thing from Italian American.

Stanley Tucci: It's very different! It's very different. But one of the things that I'm really happy about is that the show—first of all, the show became incredibly successful. You know, I never anticipated it would be this successful.

[00:25:00]

You know, I came up with the concept of it like 15/16 years ago. And CNN had come to me about five years ago and said, “Do you have any ideas for a show?” And I gave them three different ideas, and this was one of them. And I saw their eyes light up and go like, “We’re going to Italy to eat!” You know.

Jesse Thorn: They’re like, “We like this one better than the Velveeta sandwich one.”
(*Chuckles.*)

Stanley Tucci: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Or the documentary about cancer treatments. They were like, “Mm. No, I don’t think so.” But they were great, and they really—you know—put themselves behind it, and they were great. And one of the reasons I wanted to do it was to kind of dispel the myths of Italy. Do you know what I mean? That a lot of Italian Americans have, which is everybody’s hugging each other, everybody’s—

We did that partly in *Big Night*, too. If you notice, the brothers never touch each other until the end. And they touch each other very uncomfortably. Like, they’re not—you know. Because this idea that Italians are always hugging each other, and they’re happy all the time, and the sun is shining, they’re eating pizza and pasta—that’s not the case. Sometimes, it’s the case. But not always.

And so, I wanted to show that, you know, Italy isn’t just pizza and pasta and sunshine. It’s much more complex than that. And it only became a united country or a republic in 1861. So, the fact that Italian Americans are now—those who have seen the show, so many of them (*chuckles*), when I’m walking around and even when I’m in Italy—they’re like, “We’re here because of you. We always wanted to come, and we never thought about—you know, we were two afraid to come.” Or whatever. “We didn’t—we just thought now is the time to do it.”

And they’ll follow like where we went in the show. They’ll go and follow that kind of—you know—trajectory in one region or two regions or whatever. And that makes me really happy, because I think that it’s opening up a new way of looking at Italy, as opposed to just hopping on a bus and taking some sort of, you know, tour. They’re really doing it, and they understand like the genesis of pizza. How did pizza start? And how different pizza is.

I mean, for me, that’s important, but also what forces formed and created that dish? What were they—what political forces? What religious forces? What socioeconomic forces? What geographic forces formed the way those people eat in Naples and why they eat that?

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Music: Upbeat, playful music.

Stanley Tucci (*Searching for Italy*): As if the awe-inspiring majesty of Vesuvius and volcanic islands aren't enough, Champagne has one final crowning glory.

Just a half-hour outside of Naples, some of the most famous and fabled landscape on Earth begins: The Amalfi Coast. It's the backdrop for 1,000 romantic movies and one-in-a-lifetime vacations. And home to a restaurant where I had a simple zucchini and pasta dish that honestly changed my life.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Do you still have the metabolism that you described in your adolescence? Are you still a bottomless pit?

Stanley Tucci: Look, I have a faster metabolism now, because I went through high dose radiation five years ago. That increases your metabolism. I lost 35 pounds. I was about 168 pounds or something like that. Which actually was a little too—when I look at it, I wasn't—you know—heavy, I was just—it just looked not great. Because I'm small. You know, I'm not...

And—but yes. So, I did that. When I lost that weight and muscle, it took a long time to come back. And it seems that I'm now at the weight where, basically, I'm going to be. Which is about ten pounds more than I weighed when I was in high school. And that's fine with me. I think it looks better.

Jesse Thorn: That's all bicep.

Stanley Tucci: It's all bicep. And I work out—but I work out like a—I love working out. Like, if I go more than 24 or 48 hours without exercising, I can't function.

Jesse Thorn: How did you come to love working out?

Stanley Tucci: I started when I was in college, because a friend of mine said, "Come on, come to the gym with me." I'd never worked out in a gym before, really. I mean, I played sports. I was a soccer player, and skier, tennis. But I never worked out. And then, I started working out, and I loved it. Absolutely loved it. And now, I'm like—and I do a lot of different stuff now. I do Pilates. I do—like, today I did yoga for half an hour.

[00:30:00]

And you know, but I'd do weights. I'd do my own body weight. All that sort of stuff.

Jesse Thorn: Do you do that thing where you hook your fingers together and you're like—? (*Grunting with effort.*)

Stanley Tucci: Oh, like isometric thing? Is that what they call it? Uh, no, I don't do that.

Jesse Thorn: Eeh, yeah. I just—I only know it from movies from 1960.

Stanley Tucci: Yeah, I remember those.

Jesse Thorn: But I imagined it immediately when you said your own body weight.

Stanley Tucci: Yeah, I don't do that. Yeah. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: I immediately assumed you were—

Stanley Tucci: No, I—meaning pushups, pullups, dips. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: You were doing Charles Atlas exercises.

Stanley Tucci: Yeah, I remember those. Yeah. Yeah.

(They chuckle.)

Jesse Thorn: I mean, don't get me wrong. I love the idea of you in a hotel room doing one-arm pushups and then doing those things where you push the heels of your hand together to increase your bust.

Stanley Tucci: No, I don't do that. No. (Laughs.) The key, though—when I stay in a hotel, the key thing is if the gym—it has to have a gym. Or like in Italy, a lot of times the hotels we stayed in might not necessarily be the best hotels. (Laughs.) And you know, I would, you know, get them—like, I would rent like a bench and just some weights and stuff like that to—'cause you have to do it. You know, 'cause you're in a car all the time, you're traveling all the time, you're eating stuff, you're drinking wine. And you just need to do it. You just—'cause you won't look good; you won't feel good. What's the point?

Jesse Thorn: We're going to take a quick break. We'll continue my conversation with Stanley Tucci in just a minute. Stanley Tucci was diagnosed with cancer a few years back, and he only recently made a complete recovery. We'll talk about how that changed him. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Promo:

(Phone rings.)

Stewart Wellington: Hey, is this Jesse?

Jesse: This is Jesse.

Stewart: Hey, this is Stewart Wellington, host of *The Flop House* podcast on MaxFun. I'm calling because you've been named Maximum Fun's member of the month for February.

Jesse: Nice!

Stewart: If you don't mind me asking, what prompted you to start supporting the network and become a MaxFun member?

Jesse: I was trying to think of when I started listening to *The Flop House*, but I think it was something like 2014/2015.

Stewart: Oh, wow!

Jesse: And then actually having a real job in 2021 was what allowed me to actually start supporting.

Stewart: Congratulations for having a real job and supporting my not real job.

(Jesse laughs.)

So, as member of the month, you're going to be getting a \$25 gift card to the MaxFun store, a special member of the month bumper sticker, and a special priority parking spot at MaxFun HQ in Los Angeles.

Jesse: It's awesome to support you guys, to support MaxFun. I get endless joy and entertainment.

Speaker: If you're a MaxFun member, you can become the next MaxFun member of the month. Support us at MaximumFun.org/join.

(Music ends.)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with actor, director, and writer Stanley Tucci. You've seen him in *The Lovely Bones*, *The Hunger Games*, *Spotlight*, and in *Big Night*, which he also wrote and directed. You can also see him in the

Oscar nominated drama *Conclave*. It's a story about the election of a new pope. Tucci and I talked in 2023.

You mentioned that you had cancer. Your therapy and recovery involved a long period where not only your ability to taste was reduced and changed dramatically, but also your salivary production was reduced dramatically, so it was hard to eat foods—it was hard to physically swallow food. You eventually recovered from that. Was the recovery complete?

Stanley Tucci: No. It'll never be complete. So, I still can't—there are still—like, if I eat a croissant, I eat it very slowly. And sometimes, I just dip it in coffee, 'cause I can't—or I have to keep drinking water or whatever after I take a bite, because I don't have enough saliva to make it work.

And sometimes, what happens is—it happened to me the other day. (*Laughing.*) I was eating something, and I literally almost choked to death, 'cause it just didn't—I took too big a bite of something—like a sandwich or something—and it got stuck in my throat. And I thought—you know, and we were in public. And you're like, "Geez, now what do I do?" And eventually, I got it down, you know, without spewing it all over the table.

[00:35:00]

So, yes, it's a very common side effect of high-dose radiation.

You know, and also the mechanism doesn't quite work the way it used to work. You know. When you swallow, there are times where you just—it can't. Because there's so much scar tissue in here. Like, my neck is like—it's like a rock. This is all scar tissue in here. So, it's unfortunate. The good thing—I can't eat any spice at all. It's excruciating. It's so painful, because the mouth has been compromised so much. I had to have my teeth redone, 'cause they—you know, it damaged the teeth. They needed to be redone anyway, so. But you know, there was damage to them. There was—it was just gross.

Anyway, this is so boring. But yeah, it changed my life completely. So, it is the—I think I'm probably at the point now where this is about as far as I'm gonna get. I mean, the recovery—the fact that I've gotten this far is great. I can eat. I can have wine with my family. I can cook, and I can taste and smell even better than I did before. And that is probably the best gift.

Jesse Thorn: Why is that?

Stanley Tucci: Because I'm so much more—I'm so much more aware of food. I can—like, I can tell you what's in something. I never used to be able to—I could do it to a certain extent, but now it's like I'm hyperaware of it. And I talked to the doctors about it, and I said, "Have you ever heard—?"

And they were like no. They'd never heard of that. It's just weird. That's like super smeller/taster.

Jesse Thorn: When you had COVID, you lost your taste, right?

Stanley Tucci: I did, for five days. And I did everything I could not to like freak out. (*Chuckles.*) Because I thought, “Oh no, I can’t go through this again.”

Jesse Thorn: I mean, there are plenty of folks who lost their taste for a very long time or even significantly or completely permanently.

Stanley Tucci: I know. I know. Yeah, or completely! Or it compromised it and—yeah. In fact, a woman who works with me, she’s still—after covid, she has certain foods she eats, she goes, “I can’t eat that anymore. It tastes funny to me.” It’s weird.

Jesse Thorn: It must have been terrifying for you.

Stanley Tucci: I was terrified.

Jesse Thorn: You’re like, “Oh no, I have to come up with a whole new brand!”

Stanley Tucci: I know! I was like, “What do I do?!” And then, I thought, “No, it’ll be fine.” And after five days, it came back. And I wasn’t even—I mean, the thing is I didn’t even—this is right at the beginning of the pandemic. So, we didn’t really know. And I wasn’t sick. I got sick for like a day, day and a half. I didn’t feel bad at all, really. I was a little—like, you’re getting a flu, but then I never got it.

Jesse Thorn: Well, I’m glad you got all of it back, because I got to enjoy these great TV shows you couldn’t have made otherwise.

(*Stanley thanks him.*)

And thanks for all your wonderful work as an actor. You’re such a gift.

Stanley Tucci: (*Chuckles.*) Aw, you’re very kind.

Jesse Thorn: Stanley Tucci, the Tooch. Catch him on *Citadel*, which has been renewed for a second season. Season one is streaming now on Amazon Prime. Catch him in *Conclave*, and if you haven’t seen his film *Big Night*, just go watch *Big Night*. That is just—that is rentable just about anywhere, and is about as warm and beautiful a movie as exists.

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. Thanks to the listener who sent us some 1960s MacArthur Park postcards. It was nice to see MacArthur Park with a lake on both sides of Wilshire Boulevard and to see a look, over MacArthur Park, towards our building, the American Cement Building.

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 thanks to Daniel for a fantastic year of work at Maximum Fun. Daniel's just been an absolute joy to work with. It's great to see him every time I come into the office, and he's done really wonderful work. He's going to stick around doing some freelance stuff for Maximum Fun upcoming. But also—hey, if you're hiring, holler at our man.

Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is from our friend DJW, as Dan Wally. You can find his music, including the music he makes for the show at 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.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube! And we do ask that you do that! I think you will really enjoy watching video of our interviews, as well as listening to them. It's also a great way to share them with your pals. I think that's about it.

[00:40:00]

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.)

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