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(ADVERTISEMENT)

Jesse Thorn: Hey, *Bullseye* listeners, it's Jesse and it's MaxFunDrive time. *Bullseye* is produced by Maximum Fun, a worker-owned cooperative of audio producers. And this is the time of year when we ask you to join Maximum Fun and support the production of *Bullseye*. Most of our budget comes from members of Maximum Fun. We're not asking for much—five bucks a month or so. Go to MaximumFun.org/join to become a member and support *Bullseye*'s production.

Let's get into our conversation with Vincent D'Onofrio.

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 is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn.

Sugar in water. Two ingredients that, I guess, make—what? Simple syrup, hummingbird food, a mess. (*Chuckles.*) Also though, “sugar in water” is a line from *Men in Black* delivered by my guest, Vincent D'Onofrio—who at the time was playing a giant cockroach space alien inhabiting the body of a man. It's a moment that is bizarre, unforgettable, and iconic.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Beatrice (*Men in Black*): Egar, what on earth was that?

Edgar: Sugar.

Beatrice: I've never seen sugar do that.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Give me sugar in water.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: *Men in Black* is, of course, only one chapter in Vincent D’Onofrio’s career. He’s a remarkably versatile, remarkably physical actor. He played Gomer Pile in *Full Metal Jacket*, a role for which he gained 70 pounds. For 10 years, he starred as Detective Robert Goran on *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*. And more recently, he’s been one of the stars of *Daredevil*. He plays Kingpin, the crime overlord, supervillain, and foil to Charlie Cox’s *Daredevil* character. Earlier this month, Disney+ revived the show as *Daredevil: Born Again*.

Here’s a clip from the second season of the original *Daredevil* series. Kingpin, also known as Wilson Fisk, is in jail—locked up by *Daredevil* himself. But wouldn’t you know it? Kingpin’s influence extends well beyond the prison walls. In this clip, Murdoch—*Daredevil*’s alter ego—visits Kingpin in prison. He accuses Fisk of aiding and abetting other criminals while Fisk has been behind bars. Murdoch even threatens the Kingpin; says he’ll never be allowed to see his lover again. So, the kingpin, enraged, picks up Murdoch and slams him on the table. The guards look on unfazed.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

(A loud slam and heavy breathing.)

Wilson Fisk: Yes! The son of a boxer!

Matt Murdoch: *(Breathlessly.)* You’re all running this place. Yeah, you did set him free.

Fisk: You asked such spare questions, Mr. Murdoch.

Murdoch: I know you’re regaining power in here.

Fisk: Yes. Ask my lawyer! He’ll deny it. Ask the guards; they’ll deny it. Ask the inmates here. They’ll cut their tongues out before they talk! But I have something to say to you. When I finally get out of this cage, I will dismantle the lives of the two amateurs THAT PUT ME IN HERE. You, Mr. Murdoch, and Franklin Percy Nelson!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Vincent D’Onofrio, welcome to *Bullseye*. That’s like the highest intensity audio content that’s ever played on National Public Radio, I think.

Vincent D’Onofrio: Yeah. It’s weird to just listen to the audio of it, ‘cause it’s such like an action-packed scene.

(Jesse agrees.)

I believe it's the scene where we're like holding each other intensely—like, brutally—over the interrogation desk, right? Is that what it is?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I think that's right.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Is that what's happening in the scene? Something like that, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: *(Chuckles.)* I mean, it's also such an intense like aesthetic experience watching the show with, you know, outfits and— I mean, like you're a giant dude in a giant, special outfit, you know what I mean? Like, the white suit draws all of the eyes on the screen into you, and then you can be like as grand as you would like to be and kind of carry that weight. It's a hoot. It's really fun.

Vincent D'Onofrio: It's quite a character to be able to play. I love the character. Been doing it for like almost 10 years now.

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It's crazy. You know, off and on.

Jesse Thorn: Do you feel like it's different now, for you?

Vincent D'Onofrio: No, because there's a way that I established playing him for the first season of the Netflix show that is very kind of personal and intense in a way. Like, even—his voice even comes from an emotional event in my life. And so, when I'm speaking his voice, it doesn't matter if he's in love or if he's having fun or if he's in pain or frustrated or angry, it's always coming through this particular event that happened in my life.

And so, that's how I found his voice—his actual, literal— That's how I found him vocally, I should say. And so, that kind of takes the lead, and then everything else sort of falls into place.

Jesse Thorn: Are there like physical things that you remember? Like, are there touch points? Is there a place you put your tongue, or a way that you hold a shoulder that help you stay locked in?

Vincent D'Onofrio: Oh yeah, for sure. I mean, he has a completely different posture than me. And so, basically when I'm playing him, I sort of consciously deplete myself of all anxiety, and I'm in a total relaxed state. And then I start to bring the scene on through that. And so, like touchpoints would be emotional touchpoints more than physical touchpoints. But still, you know, when I stand completely— When I'm standing up and my shoulders are back and I'm doing his like big posture—also, that's a—I would call that a touchpoint too. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: How do you feel doing that stuff physically at your age? I mean, we're not in the same room. You look pretty healthy to me.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah, I'm pretty healthy. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: But you're also not a 26-year-old.

Vincent D'Onofrio: I'm not. And so, I stopped putting the weight on for him. And kept the weight on for many years with the first iteration, and then when I did *Hawkeye*. And then when we did *Echo*, I had been investigating suits that make your body look bigger—sometimes muscles or sometimes just heavier weight. And they started to get really good. There was this one version that NASA made that was a really good version, and I tried that for *Echo*, and it worked really well. And so, since *Echo*, which is a while ago now—like, almost four years ago, I think. So, during that I realized that I could wear these suits. I could take the weight off that I had put on, get super fit, and play him.

And then I realized, of course, this is—'cause I never trusted those suits before. 'Cause they always looked silly to me, those kind of body suits that you wear under your clothes to make you look bigger. But they work! They're really good. And we did that all for *Echo*. We did it for the first season of the new series, *Born Again*. And I'm gonna keep wearing those. So, now I'm just like really my fighting weight now. Like, I can stay really fit, and it's much easier to get through the season and get through all the fight scenes. I can do more stunts on my own now and stuff wearing this suit that puts weight on me. And I'm able to stay healthy.

So, actually, you know, my job is really to keep up with these younger guys. You know, I have to do it. So, it's like I'm super fit.

Jesse Thorn: How much weight did you have to hold that you don't have now?

Vincent D'Onofrio: It's probably around... I think when I was doing the original series, it was probably about 40 pounds or something like that. Maybe 50 pounds? Maybe I went up—fluctuated between 40 and 50 pounds. I usually kept it around there, and then it was less and less.

Jesse Thorn: When you say that this new suit that you're wearing was made for NASA, what does that mean? (*Chuckles.*)

Vincent D'Onofrio: NASA made a suit that—I believe it was the one that I wore on *Echo*. The fabric is from NASA, I think. This is what I've heard. And so, it's very, very lightweight. It's like—you know how like when you pick up a sneaker that looks like it's heavy, and then it weighs absolutely nothing? Sort of like that.

Jesse Thorn: Is it a bunch of different pieces? Like, does it go all the way down to your wrists kind of thing?

Vincent D'Onofrio: It goes from the wrist to the ankles, and it's one piece that you slide into, your legs first.

(Jesse “wow”s.)

You put it on like a pair of pants. 'Cause the muscles are actually molded off of your own body structure. So, it's your muscles being enhanced. And they do that with—obviously, with digital; these things that they walk around you, and the digital scans your whole body, very specifically, very intricately. And then it's just made into this like whole body. So, you kind of step into this body, pull it on like a pair of really tight pants.

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And then you put the top on, which is attached to the—it hangs off you in the front. And you put your arms through it frontways, and then they zip it up in the back.

Jesse Thorn: Did you have to like stand in a scanner room in your underpants?

Vincent D'Onofrio: I've never scanned in my underpants, and I feel like that's a very personal question you just asked me there, Jess. (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: I'm a journalist, Vincent.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah, that's your excuse? That's good.

Jesse Thorn: It's a little something called journalism.

Vincent D'Onofrio: It's a good excuse. It's a good question.

Jesse Thorn: Even more still to come with Vincent D'Onofrio. Stick around. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Promo:

Music: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Hey, *Bullseye* friends! It's Jesse. I am joined by two of the producers of *Bullseye*. Senior producer Kevin Ferguson. Hi, Kevin.

Kevin Ferguson: What up, what up?

Jesse Thorn: And producer Jesus Ambrosio. Hey, Jesus.

Jesus Ambrosio: Hey, how's it going?

Jesse Thorn: This is the MaxFunDrive. That means that it is the time of year when we celebrate all of the work that Maximum Fun does, including *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*, and ask you to join us in making it possible by going to MaximumFun.org/join and becoming a member.

Kevin, you haven't always worked at Maximum Fun. You've worked on other audio productions outside of Maximum Fun. How is it special to work here and work directly for Maximum Fun members?

Kevin Ferguson: It is the listeners and the audience, 100%. It is hearing about the connections that they have with what we do, the feedback that we get.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, I don't think that there is a week that passes where we don't get a note or an email about the way that the work we did touched someone's life.

Kevin Ferguson: Absolutely not. Or even better, a comment on our Instagram or YouTube. That way other people can see it.

(They chuckle.)

Jesse Thorn: We even get that kind of feedback sometimes from guests on the program.

Kevin Ferguson: Mm-hm. Yeah, I remember one of the first interviews we produced was with Sarah Jessica Parker, who like revealed—before, after, and during—that she was a fan of the show, which was so cool.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. The best part of that conversation with Sarah Jessica Parker comfortably was when I told her I had the most shoes of anyone in my family. And then she said, “Well, how many pairs of shoes could you possibly have?” And then I told her, and she was like, “Oh.” *(Laughs.)*

Kevin Ferguson: That is such a Samantha thing to say.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: You know, joining Maximum Fun of course gives you the great feeling that you are supporting the content that you love, and that is the most important reason to join. But you also get all kinds of other cool stuff for being a member. The very basic level is \$5 a month. It doesn't just get you that feeling of satisfaction, Jesus. It also gets you some stuff that you have been working very hard on.

Jesus Ambrosio: Yeah. We have a bonus episode coming out about the worst jobs that people have ever had, and we've been asking that question to folks that have been coming into the studio.

Kevin Ferguson: And this is stuff that we have with *Bullseye* guests that you've heard in the past, but it is not stuff you have heard with them. We have been saving it just for the drive. This is folks like Denzel Curry.

Kevin & Jesse: Ken Burns.

Kevin Ferguson: George Lopez, who we released earlier this week. It is one of our favorite little passion projects—just saving all these little sections in a little, tiny folder, putting it together now.

Jesse Thorn: And that's not all. I mean, there are at this point, literally thousands of hours of Max Fun content that is exclusive to members. We did an episode where our friend, Linda Holmes, interviewed me. We did an entire series about listeners to *Bullseye* who had unusual and amazing jobs. There's all kinds of cool, exclusive stuff.

If you join at the \$10 a month level, you get all of that, plus you get something a little more corporeal. If you join at the \$10 a month level, you get all of that, plus you get a little physical token of our gratitude and affection. Kevin, if people join at 10 bucks a month, what do they get?

Kevin Ferguson: This is one of my favorite things. This is one of our listeners' and fans' favorite things too. It's pins; pins tied to each show, the shows that you support. This year, *Bullseye* is giving a tote bag pin. Now, I'm—

(Jesus laughs.)

That's confusing. I know. It is not a tote bag. It is a pin in the shape of the tote bag. Do not try to put anything in it. It'll just slide off a pin.

Jesse Thorn: But you can put this tote bag pin on your tote bag.

(Jesus and Kevin affirm.)

We felt like we had gone too long as a public radio program not offering any tote bags as pledge premiums.

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We felt embarrassed, so—

Kevin Ferguson: We were getting phone calls from Ira Glass. Ari Shapiro.

(Jesus laughs.)

Jesse Thorn: Terry Gross absolutely bawled me out. Just tore me up. She called up on the phone, “Hi, this is Terry,” in her quiet voice, and then she just ripped into me. She said, “You're not doing tote bags? Again?!”

So, this year our pins are tote bags.

Kevin Ferguson: And please stop calling us, Terry.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, come on, Terry.

(They laugh.)

At \$20 a month, Jesus, are some of the most remarkable items we have ever given away in the MaxFunDrive.

Jesus Ambrosio: Have you seen this towel, Jesse? We have a beach towel.

Jesse Thorn: Go to MaximumFun.org/join and look at this towel, because this beach towel is—this year's drive is spring break themed, because it's springtime, and we think everyone needs a break from the world. But this towel looks like— This is what I'm thinking right now. Tell me if this rings true to you. It's like Lisa Frank went to Cozumel, then ate mushrooms for a week while listening to Max Fun podcasts.

Jesus Ambrosio: *(Laughs.)* That's the towel. You gotta check out this towel. We also have a bucket hat. So, at \$20 a month, you can get either the beach towel or the bucket hat.

Jesse Thorn: And the bucket hat, much more tasteful.

(They laugh.)

Kevin Ferguson: Much more tasteful, more like New Radicals maybe than Lisa Frank. If that's your style, that's great. I'm getting the beach towel.

Jesse Thorn: Look, the bucket hat is something that I would actually wear out in public. It's really handsome and tasteful. I could not give up the opportunity to get that bonkers beach towel though.

(They laugh.)

You know I'm laying out on that thing. And there are levels above that as well. All of these gifts are cumulative. The really important thing though is that you join us and support the production of the show. 'Cause we couldn't—we really and truly could not and would not do it without you. And by you, I mean you—not some other theoretical you, but you, the person that I'm talking to right now.

Kevin Ferguson: Yeah. If you're thinking about doing it, stop thinking about doing it. If you're in the car, pull over. If you're doing the dishes, stop doing the dishes. They'll wait. Go to MaximumFun.org/join. Think about the amount that's right for you. It does not matter if it is five bucks a month, if it is 10, if it's 20. MaximumFun.org/join.

Jesse Thorn: Thank you so much for listening, and thank you so much for being a part of Maximum Fun. We truly couldn't do it without you. Join right now at MaximumFun.org/join while you're listening to our conversation with Vincent D'Onofrio.

Transition: Thumpy rock music.

Jesse Thorn: This is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Vincent D'Onofrio.

I think you're such a wonderful physical actor, and you're also like big, you're 6'4", right? We're not sitting in the same room.

(Vincent confirms.)

And you know, you read as big on screen, but also like a camera really changes the way that somebody's size plays; it's really hard to see what size someone is when they're on camera. Is it different for you, acting on stage using your body and acting on camera using your body? Or are you making the same kind of choices and letting the person behind the lens worry about it?

Vincent D'Onofrio: That's a very specific question. Nobody's ever asked me that before. So, I think when it comes to performance, I think it's the same. I don't think it's that different. The only thing that's different about a physical performance on stage—you know, there's no cutting. So, it's like you're doing the whole play. And so, the way you've mapped out your character's movement throughout the whole play, throughout all the acts that you're in, it's playing more of a long game. You know.

Like, you can play a long game with the movie script too, but it's more about the—that's more about the arc. But if you're talking about movement on stage and actually getting out on stage, staying out there for a full act, and then going on a second act and stuff like that, that's all been rehearsed, and it's all been sorted so you can maintain energy and display incredible amounts of energy. Like, you have to pace yourself, you know, on a play. And so, it's kind of—there's that kind of thinking that's a bit different.

On a movie, it's just like you plan your arc in the film, and you've planned how your character's aesthetically gonna look and feel and sound. But when it comes to doing actual performance, it's you just go full on each take, you know. And then back to zero again, rest, and then go full-on again. You know, it's like you don't have to really think about a long game of, you know, making it through, 'cause you get to rest. You know, 'cause it's just film. You can do it again and again and again.

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Jesse Thorn: It occurred to me that you've been working for like 40 years. And for a lot of that, you were not someone who put yourself forward other than in your performances. And being the Kingpin on a series of, you know, Marvel television shows necessitates you doing so, right? Like, that's part of the job is that you also let go to Comic Con and are Vincent D'Onofrio, and people shake your hand or ask you questions on a panel.

(Vincent confirms.)

Have you gotten more comfortable with that at this point in your life and career?

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah, I have. I think it's because it's narrowed down to just that. Like, when I do a Comic Con, the people that are there are very unique people. They're—you know, people call them nerds, whatever you wanna call them, but they're just big fans of science fiction and fantasy stuff. And the amount of fans is incredible. You know, the size of them. It's an immense group of people. And so, when you go to the panels, like when we do D23—the Disney 23 conventions—and you know, sometimes there's 60,000 people there. You know, it's like I get that it's part of the deal. It's part of the job when it comes to this kind of stuff.

I think that's what you're alluding to anyway. It's definitely a different world when you work for Marvel, or you do any kind of blockbusters like this that has a franchise. You know? It's a whole different deal.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, like *Men in Black* is no less genre-ic and is, if anything, more popular and successful. I mean, it's like one of the most popular blockbuster films of my lifetime. Right? You're one of the stars of the film. But also that job is not like being the Kingpin. *(Laughs.)* You know? It's monumentally popular, it's sci-fi, it's all of these other things, but like you're not going to *Men in Black* Con.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah, no. It's interesting you bring *Men in Black* up, because you know, like I've always thought— Like, when I play parts of that size in a movie, they're not leads. They're supporting roles. They're like character roles. And I love doing that kind of stuff. I do it all the time. I've done it my whole career. All the time. And so, what happens is it's like I usually, most of my career, just sneak into a movie and sneak out of the movie. I don't do press for it. It's like a part that speaks for itself. You know?

Like, a lot of people don't even know that I'm the guy in *Men in Black*. You know? It's like when I do Comic Cons, like people will see the pictures of me in *Men in Black*, and they wonder why it's there in front of me. Like, they had no idea that it was me. And like the same guy—like, Marine Corps guys will come over, and have no idea that the guy that did this movie, *Full Metal Jacket*, is the same guy in *Men in Black*, you know?

And so, that's been going on my whole career. That's nothing new. And I can just go back and name, you know, a bunch of crazy roles that I paid that were— You know, I was always just kind of in and out of the movies. I never really made a big fuss. You know.

Jesse Thorn: Can I ask you about *Men in Black* for a minute? I happen to have watched it relatively recently.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah. You can ask me anything you like. Yep.

Jesse Thorn: I hadn't seen it since it was like in movie theaters, I guess—or maybe shortly after it was in movie theaters I rented it on VHS or something. And your character, for folks who don't remember, is like the main alien guy. And your job as an actor in that movie—and you said you weren't the lead in the movie; I'm gonna give you at least secondary lead. Look, you're not Will Smith or Tommy Lee Jones, but...

(Vincent chuckles.)

But anyway, your job as an actor in this movie is you have to be a guy who does not know how to use a body. So, first of all, did you have to go in and audition against a bunch of like mimes, and—? No. You got invited.

Vincent D'Onofrio: I got invited by the director. Actually, there's this wonderful producer that's been producing films for a long time named Stacey Sher. She used to work for Danny DeVito's company back in the day, and now she does Tarantino films. But she's an amazing producer, and we became friends. I did a film with Keanu called *Feeling Minnesota*, where we play brothers. Cameron Diaz and Keanu. So, we met on that. She produced that, and I got a call from her one day. And she said, "I'm friends of Barry Sonnenfeld,"—the director of this film—"and he wants to give you a script."

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"But you need to promise that you won't talk to him about acting or performance or anything like that."

And I said, "Uh, really?"

And she goes, "Yeah, he's nervous, because he doesn't want to talk about that kind of stuff."

And I'm like, "Okay." I go, "Remind him that I worked for Stanley Kubrick." And Kubrick was exactly the same way. Didn't wanna talk about anything, just wanted to, you know, see what we were gonna do and then shoot it the best way he could. You know, he's—

Jesse Thorn: I mean, Barry Sonnenfeld was on the show recently, and the man thinks in camera moves. There's no question that everything is a composition in his mind.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah. Mm-hm. Yeah, he's an incredible—like, one of—I remember knowing him from his early films when he was at GP. You know, he's a shot designer. He's amazing at it too. And he's like a hell of a dude, you know, to work with. So.

Jesse Thorn: He literally—Vincent, he literally showed up an hour early for his interview, because he wanted to make sure that his shot of him on this radio interview was framed correctly. (*Laughs.*) Like, he—

Vincent D'Onofrio: I believe it.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, it was great.

Vincent D'Onofrio: I believe it. Yeah. Yeah, I'm sure. No, that's what he's like. So, you know. And so, I said, "Okay, I won't." And I went forward and created this whole character—Rick Baker and I, who did all the special effects. And so, Rick and I became very close on that show, 'cause we worked with each other for months before we started shooting. Rick was developing the look of the character. I was developing his voice and his movement. And so, on our own, we were doing stuff. And then we would come together in his office, (*chuckling*) and I would show him what I was gonna do.

And so, we all—you know, his work was incredible. And he trusted me, and I trusted him. And then in one day, we eventually ended up on set. And I had to perform a scene, and Barry had never seen what I was gonna do, had no idea.

Jesse Thorn: And he didn't like—it wasn't like he gave you six sentences to—? It was just you and special effects legend Rick Baker, go and come back with something, and we'll shoot it.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah, I don't—I can't speak for what Rick and him discussed. I have no idea. But I know that when it came to myself, like Rick was the only one that was seeing what I was doing every day and what it was turning out to be. And I was being inspired by him, and he was being inspired by me.

There was a journalist that actually—many, many years later; only a few years ago, actually—came to both of us; I think it's like six or seven years ago—came to both Barry and I, and wanted to do an article about each side of our story when it came to the development of my character. 'Cause she had heard that we didn't talk about it. And so, she interviewed us both, and our stories matched perfectly. What happened on set that day is during my first take, Barry—very nicely, of course—he cleared the set. And I was the only one left on set. And he asked me to do it again.

And he said, "Are you gonna do that the whole time?"

And I was like, "Oh, (*sensor beep*)." Like, the blood ran outta my body. And I'm like, "Yeah, like this is all I got."

He goes, "Well, do it again."

And I did it again. And you could—I could just see his face. He was like, "Oh my God. Like, I can't—this could be horrible, or it could be great. You know? Okay, let's just do it, and we'll just keep shooting it this way, and we'll see what happens."

So, that's the last time we spoke about the character in any scene, for any anything. And then, so it was like good mornings and goodnights and no discussions. We kept shooting all my scenes, and eventually I realized that it was—we'd shot so much that I probably wasn't gonna get fired. So, I just kept doing it, and I ended up in the film.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Edgar: (*Gravelly and disjointed.*) Ohhh, a man came in here earlier. A dead man.

Store Clerk: (*Bored.*) And that means what to me?

Edgar: He was a very dear friend of mine. I believe he had an animal with him. It was a gift I gave him. A pet cat who means worlds to me. And I'd like to have it back.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Vincent D'Onofrio: I just can't believe how much he trusted me. There's been a few directors, like I said, that have done that. So, it's like I'm very lucky that way.

Jesse Thorn: And who were the others?

Vincent D'Onofrio: Stanley Kubrick and Antoine Fuqua.

Jesse Thorn: It's interesting, 'cause Kubrick has a reputation for having been the most obsessive director, in terms of controlling every aspect of the production that could exist on Earth. But that didn't extend to you as an actor; that was more about the *mise en scene*, and so forth?

Vincent D'Onofrio: Well, he was very particular. You know, like if you didn't know your lines, you were not gonna be his best friend. You know? And that was my first film, so I knew all my lines for sure. (*Chuckles.*) Like, I mean, I still do, obviously. But like, there was no way I was gonna be in a Stanley Kubrick film and didn't know my lines. It's like ridiculous.

[00:30:00]

Jesse Thorn: We will finish up with Vincent D'Onofrio after a break. When we come back, we will talk about one of his most memorable early roles: a guest appearance on *Homicide Life in the Street*. It's one of the greatest episodes of television ever. We'll talk to Vincent

D'Onofrio about acting opposite the late, great Andre Braugher. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Vincent D'Onofrio. He's a veteran actor who has appeared in *Full Metal Jacket*, *Men in Black*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *Jurassic World*, and many, many, many more. These days, you can watch him on the Marvel TV series *Daredevil: Born Again*. He plays Wilson Fisk, also known as Kingpin.

Was *Full Metal Jacket* your first film, or was it the Troma summer camp, sexploitation film, *The First Turn-on!*?

Vincent D'Onofrio: That's right. Yeah. For those guys over there at Troma, which was a crazy company. And then I was gonna do another one with them too, but I got fired from it somehow.

Jesse Thorn: What do you—*(laughing)* what do you have to do to get fired from a Troma movie?

Vincent D'Onofrio: I must have—I think I didn't wanna wear the nose or some—? I don't know. I was talking to somebody from Troma a few years ago, and they told me it was because they wanted me to wear a red nose, and I didn't wanna wear the red nose for whatever reason. I have no—this is what I hear. I don't remember the exact reasons or anything. And I was just told not to come, and so I didn't go.

Jesse Thorn: Like, a realistic red nose, or like a clown nose?

Vincent D'Onofrio: No, like a clown nose. Yeah. So, I guess they got somebody to wear the red nose. I don't know. *(Laughs.)* But you know, we're still friendly with those guys. Those guys are awesome. You know.

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughing.)* That's such a like literal expression of like what an actor would object to in a role. Like, "What? I'm a clown to you? Like, what, do you want me to wear a red nose on my nose?!"

And they're like, "Could you please wear this red nose on your nose?" *(Laughs.)*

Vincent D'Onofrio: But I remember exactly, 'cause I was—I had lost my apartment from not being able to pay rent. 'Cause you know, I was like in my twenties. Like, I was very young. I did *Full Metal Jacket* when I was 24, so I must have been like 20 or something like that. And doing plays and working in bars and stuff like that. And yeah, so I remember my grandfather being—I was on the phone. I didn't have—there was no cellphones. And I was on the phone, and my grandfather was sitting across from me. I was staying with him. And he like whispered to me, "You're gonna lose that job, you know?"

And I'm like, "Yeah, I know."

He goes, "You don't care?"

And I'm like, "No, I don't care."

And he goes, "Whatever you're gonna do, make sure you're friends when you end it. Whether you do the job or not, just end it as friends." That's what he told me. And I'll never forget that, you know?

Jesse Thorn: Have there been other times that you've been in a position to remember your grandfather's advice?

Vincent D'Onofrio: It used to happen a lot on *Criminal Intent*. I insisted that I never wanted to play a cop on that show. I just wanted to play a man who was a cop. And so, sometimes there were people that wanted me to act more like a cop, and I didn't really know—I don't know what that means. So, I did all my research, and I did all the interrogation research, the interviewing research. I did all that. I was—I had an opportunity on that show to learn from interrogators and interviewers in law enforcement, all from federal to local. So, the stuff that I was doing on that show was rooted in the real psychology of interrogation or interviews.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Detective Goren: You went to school with those people? Grew up with them?

Suspect: Well, yes.

Detective Goren: What school? Brearly? Spence?

Suspect: Brearly.

Detective Goren: Are you wearing those invisible braces? Because you keep running your tongue over the back of your teeth.

Suspect: Yes, I am.

Detective Goren: I'm thinking about getting my teeth fixed. Are they comfortable?

Suspect: You get used to it. Now, please, I...

Detective Goren: Sure. And those are lovely earrings. Are they family heirlooms?

Suspect: (*Becoming more uncomfortable.*) They're from Harry Winston.

Detective Goren: The place that uses the blue and gold gift boxes.

Suspect: I work in their corporate sales.

Detective Eames: The day he was killed, Kaspari was asking about blue and gold gift boxes. It sounds like he was trying to find you.

Suspect: Well, he didn't.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Vincent D'Onofrio: So, yeah. So, they would put choices upon me that I would just refuse to do. You know, it's like I had never met an agent or officer... you know, if you meet them when you're not being handcuffed, they're a person. You know, when you're being handcuffed, they're not a person; they're a law enforcer. You know. But when you meet them under regular—any circumstance other than that, they're people. And they're more interesting as people than they are as cops.

[00:35:00]

You know, obviously they would be. You know? I think all of us are more interesting than our jobs. So, I used to run into that a lot there. Very rare on films, though.

Jesse Thorn: Do you miss having a job like *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, where you go to work and then work all day and then come home? And I mean, it's like a kind of acting job that you don't—that's pretty hard to get.

Vincent D'Onofrio: I think *CI* is a really bad example for that. *CI* worked their actors too much. *The Times* even did an article about it. It was like—it was crazy. Kate and I, we were in mostly every scene. I had more dialogue than anybody else on the show. You know, at least three times more. And the two of us, Kate and I, you know, we worked an average of 17—sometimes 18—hours a day, every day for 10 months. It was a brutal, brutal job. You know. And yeah, I got paid great and all that, but you know, I ended up giving my money back to them, basically. I mean, not directly, but I saved them a lot of money just so I started doing half the show. I just couldn't do it anymore.

So, to answer your question, to use *Criminal Intent* as an example is the wrong example, but yes, I do like that solid job feeling. You know. I think nowadays because of streaming and stuff, I can go and have a solid job with Marvel, and I can go and have a solid job with these people, and I can do 'em all at the same time. So, yeah, I like it.

Jesse Thorn: You did an episode of a *Homicide*, which is like—you know, for my money, with all due respect to your *Law and Order* program, may be the greatest cop procedural ever made.

Vincent D'Onofrio: For sure. I mean, I would agree with you 100%.

Jesse Thorn: And the episode that you did was essentially a two-hander with you and Andre Braugher, where you were the guest star. And you were a guy who was caught between the cars of the subway, or—

Vincent D'Onofrio: Caught between the platform and the subway car. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. And there was no way that the guy could be saved. And your character had to be told that over the course of the show, and it kind of fell to Andre Braugher. So, Andre Braugher was like interviewing him for the murder investigation while also engaging with him about the fact that he was fully conscious and all the way there, but also there was no way to take him out of that situation without him dying.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah, it was based on something that really happened. And so, I was crushed between the—from just above the waist down, I was crushed between the car and the platform. So, if you were on the platform, you could only see me from the waist up, and my back was against the actual car. But my legs and the rest of my waist was hanging down completely damaged. You know, that's the idea of what happened. And you know, all I really remember about doing that is Andre Braugher and I like just sitting there for a few days doing this great dialogue that was written.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

John: What? Are you scared? It's not every day you talk to a dead man, huh? (*Beat. Clanging sounds.*) I want my fare back.

Detective Pembleton: You what?

John: My dollar-thirty-five. I paid my fare. I didn't get my ride.

Detective Pembleton: No, you didn't.

John: Then I get it back.

Detective Pembleton: (*Solemnly.*) Alright.

John: You get it. Do what you want with it, but the hell if I get taken!

Detective Pembleton: Okay, nobody's trying to take you.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah, it was like one of my favorite things I've ever done.

Jesse Thorn: Did you audition for that part?

Vincent D'Onofrio: No, I was asked to do it.

Jesse Thorn: Did you know what you were going in to do?

Vincent D'Onofrio: Once I read it, yeah. And I—you know, you were spot on. You know, like I approached it like a two-hander. I mean, that's what it was. So, I just approached it like a play, and I just got all the dialogue—many, many pages of dialogue under my belt in a few days. So did Andre. And we just did it, you know. We did it like a play every day.

Jesse Thorn: Had you met him before?

Vincent D'Onofrio: No. I was thrilled to meet him. I think he was amazing.

Jesse Thorn: It must have been wild. I mean, as I picture it in my mind, the two of you on the set, one of the things that strikes me is you must have been shooting for a week, and you're stuck between subway cars. (*Chuckles.*) You know what I mean? Like, you're not literally stuck between subway cars, but there's gotta be—

Vincent D'Onofrio: No, but I'm stuck. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. There's gotta be something there.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah. No, the actor is stuck. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Look, they found a lot of levels in the look. You know, there's a lot of parts where Andre Braugher sits down next to you and that kind of thing. But like, just the feeling of looking up at him the whole time. You know what I mean?

[00:40:00]

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah. It was incredible. And then it got incredibly intimate, you know, towards the end of the piece where he was sort of eventually— You know, he was so good. Like, eventually he—he eventually ended up leaning into me a bit and being close to me and talking to me closer as the time came. And the more we got to know each other—the

characters, I mean—it became a more intimate conversation. But you know, that piece would not have worked without— Whoever was playing that cop on the platform had to be great.

Jesse Thorn: It really hit me when he passed away.

(Vincent agrees.)

I think—I really loved him on *Men of a Certain Age*, in addition to *Homicide* and *Brooklyn Nine Nine*. And you know, for a person that I had never met before in my life, I was really surprised at the extent to which it affected me that he wasn't around.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Yeah. You know, there's these actors out there that just have put out incredible work their whole careers. They're not showboats; they don't do a lot of press. They don't put themselves out in front of projects. You know, they lead from behind, and they're amazing. And he was one of those. I was shook up by the whole thing. I mean, I'm sure his family misses him very much, and it was hard. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Vincent D'Onofrio, I'm so grateful for all your time and for your work as well. Thank you so much for talking to me.

Vincent D'Onofrio: Ah, you're welcome.

Transition: Bright, playful synth.

Jesse Thorn: Vincent D'Onofrio. You can catch him on the latest iteration of the *Daredevil* franchise, *Daredevil: Born Again*. It's streaming now on Disney+.

Transition: Warm, relaxed synth with a steady beat.

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, as well as at Max Fun HQ—overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. It is clear and blue skied outside my window as I record this. It also hailed today.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers, Jesus Ambrocio 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](https://www.djwsounds.bandcamp.com). Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you'll find videos from just about all our interviews—including both of the interviews you heard this week. I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

Promo: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Thank you so much for listening to that episode with Vincent D'Onofrio. Now that it's over, you have no excuse to put off going to MaximumFun.org/join and becoming a member of Maximum Fun. I hope that you will. That's MaximumFun.org/join, and thank you so much for listening.

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