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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’s *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. I don’t think I’m being too controversial when I say this. The Broadway play *Oh Mary* can’t miss lately! *Oh Mary*, in case you haven’t heard, tells the imagined story of Mary Todd Lincoln in the days running up to the death of her husband, Abraham Lincoln. This Mary Todd Lincoln is not the Mary Todd Lincoln you would read about in a history book, though. She’s a frustrated cabaret performer, a very intense alcoholic, a very dumb but oddly sweet person who wears giant *Looney Tunes*-style bloomer underwear, complete with hearts on it.

The show was written by Cole Escola, who originally played the lead. Cole received a Tony Award for their performance in the show, as did *Oh Mary*’s director, Sam Pinkleton. After playing the part of Mary for the better part of a year, Cole passed along the hoop skirt and curly wig to a number of performers who have proven themselves just as wonderful in the role. There’s Betty Gilpin, who starred on *GLOW*, among other shows. Titus Burgess, who played Tituss on *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*. And if you go see the play right now, my guest, Jinkx Monsoon.

Jinkx is one of the top drag performers in the world today. She’s won *RuPaul’s Drag Race* twice. She’s appeared in Broadway Productions of *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Chicago*. There is, I mean, nobody better than Jinkx Monsoon to play a part as unhinged and also endearing as Mary Todd Lincoln in *Oh Mary*. I’m so thrilled to get to talk with the brilliant and very funny Jinkx Monsoon. Let’s get right into it.

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

**Jesse Thorn:** Jinkx, welcome to *Bullseye*. I am so happy to have you on the show!

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Thank you for having me. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** I gotta tell you, I saw Cole Escola in this show.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Yeah, me too! (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** And Cole Escola is really something else, and I would be terrified to be taking on any role that Cole had originated.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Yeah, you know, there's a little terror there. But the terror is exciting. I've known Cole a long time, and Cole is a singular performer and, in my opinion, the funniest person alive right now. So, I studied Cole's performance, and then I did everything I could to forget about it. You know? *(Laughs.)* I saw Cole perform it multiple times, starting Off-Broadway at the Lortel. And then when I signed on for the role, I was given a video to watch for the blocking and to help with everything. And so, I watched Cole perform the role over and over and over. And I just knew, "Okay, so that's what Cole did." And then I went and saw Titus, and I was like, "Okay. So, that's what Titus did."

And I never went in thinking, "Okay, I have to outdo anyone." I just have to bring my version of it, you know? And the more I lean into what I can bring uniquely to it, the less people are gonna worry about how it compares to someone else's performance. 'Cause they're just gonna see a new, unique performance. You know? If I were trying to recreate Cole's performance, then you'd probably notice some glaring issues. *(Cackles delightedly.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Can I ask you a specific follow-up here?

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** You mentioned the blocking. Does the blocking remain the same here?

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Yeah! The important blocking does, as in like the crucial, essential blocking for lights and for key moments in the show that everyone depends on so everyone can do their job in correspondence to those moments. So, there's sound cues and wardrobe and everything. But! Lest we forget, Sam Pinkleton won a Tony for the direction of this show. So, honoring the blocking and honoring that is honoring Sam's work as well. And if we came in like a wrecking ball and just undid it, then you know, that's not—*(laughs)* it's not a wrecking ball that has the Tony right now. You know what I mean!? *(Titters.)*

[00:05:00]

**Jesse Thorn:** Jinkx, that said, I'm glad you brought up wrecking balls. Because I'll be frank, in the two versions of the show that I have seen, the blocking is not unlike a wrecking ball. I mean, *(chuckling)* that character flings herself around the stage in an absolutely bonkers manner. And Cole, I mean, they're little and dainty. You know what I mean? It's like a dropping an ant off the Empire State Building, and it won't get hurt when it hits the ground.

*(They chuckle.)*

Because of the ratio of it.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Is that true?

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I believe that's true.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Well, I mean, it's still terrifying for the ant, I have to imagine.

*(Jesse agrees.)*

Think of how long they're falling.

**Jesse Thorn:** I think they're probably upset that they're separated from their friends! That's very important to ants.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** It's—yes, exactly! Good show of empathy there. *(Laughs.)* You know, that's a big part of why the blocking is specific. You know? To be able to do that stuff and not hurt yourself and other actors, that's an important element here. You know, it's like stage combat. If everyone just grabbed a sword and started swinging, that would be horrible! You know? That would not be fun to watch. That wouldn't be fun for the people involved. So, we rigorously choreograph our fights.

Like, I just did *Pirates*. I was sword fighting for months, and we had a sword fight call every single day to make sure that no one was not completely aware of what they were going to do that night with where their body was at or whatever. You know? And that's hugely important. Because if you skip over that stuff, that's how people get hurt. And to be able to do everything that you described Mary doing, you have to know how to do it safely, or you're only gonna do it once. *(Snorts a laugh.)* You know what I mean? And what we need is you to be able to do it sustainably for eight times a week. *(Chuckles.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** What about these outfits? Mary Todd Lincoln wears some pretty extraordinary outfits in the show.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Compared to what?! *(Laughs.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Okay. Fair.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** I'm teasing you! I'm teasing you!

**Jesse Thorn:** I haven't been— Look, I haven't been a professional drag performer for a couple of decades.

*(Jinkx laughs.)*

But the thing that struck me about these outfits when I saw them in person particularly is the skirts, which are not just wide, but are tall in any body position. Like, Cole would throw themselves down onto the stage and just be—it was as though they had like landed in one of those giant balloons that stunt men jump off of buildings into. Like, just completely enveloped vertically those skirts. *(Laughs.)*

**Jinkx Monsoon:** And that is not something that every hoop skirt does. That's something that a professionally designed hoop skirt for this purpose does. And that's, again, why I say, you know, honoring the production that you step into. When you're onstage, you're not just there for you; you're representing the costumer, the wig designer, the playwright, the director.

There's a lot of responsibility involved in comedy. I gotta say. (*Chuckles.*) You know? Like, especially at this level, it's not a one-person show. And even one-person shows aren't one-person shows. You know what I mean? So, I don't know. I just feel honored to be trusted with all of this. 'Cause I've worn, as you said, a number of outstanding outfits in my life that are very cumbersome and restrictive and god awful. (*chuckles.*) But this one is just top notch. Like, everything has been considered. It's an indestructible hoop skirt. And that effect you talked about was manufactured and engineered by the team that created the costumery.

And so, it's not— Nothing in *Oh Mary* happens by mistake, even though—as you said and aptly—it's like a wrecking ball. The show swings in these huge pendulums, (*struggling for the word*) pendulumic? It's a pendulum. You know what I mean? It's a wrecking ball! I don't know why I'm building on it. It's a wrecking ball! A wrecking ball's a pendulum. Why did I have to qualify it?! (*Laughing.*) Anyway, there you go.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, Mary Todd Lincoln in the show is sort of like a—is like a gremlin after dark. You know?

[00:10:00]

After midnight? After midnight. Like a wet gremlin? I can't remember the rules of *Gremlins* exactly, but—

**Jinkx Monsoon:** It's, um—you feed 'em after midnight, that makes more gremlins. You get 'em wet, they turn icky. No, I got it all backwards.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's like the crazy gremlins—

**Jinkx Monsoon:** No! Now I've got it backwards! You get 'em wet, they make more.

Anyway, the point is what I like to say: Mary Todd is just completely honest. She just says what is in her head in that moment. Unless she's hiding the truth for a purpose. But like, she has a reeeally hard time not just saying what's on her mind. And that's the thing I think I find the most freeing about her. Because I like to think these days I have good instincts and good intuition, and I can trust my instincts and intuition. And so, sometimes I find myself saying just what's in my mind. And then I look at the person I'm talking to, and I go, “Sorry, that was a little blunt. But now I've said it!” (*Laughs.*)

And then they go, “You know what? Let's talk about it. It's right.”

And I'm like, “Okay!” There's something to—like, if there's an elephant in the room, talk about it! Find a way to talk about it. Mary does it in a very aggressive way. I do it in a very passive way, I guess. You know? I just say, “Hey. Has anyone noticed that elephant?” (*Cackles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** One of the things about the character is that I think it's rare for a woman character in comedy to have that level of id.

*(Jinkx agrees.)*

I think it's pretty common for male comedy characters to be uninhibited and crazy and do whatever the first thing that comes to their head is. I mean, you know, that's half of the characters Will Ferrell has ever played or John Belushi or all these other characters. Right? But Mary Todd Lincoln is a woman in the show, and they don't get to do that that much in comedy. It's rare.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Yeah. You know, many, many queer people just really honor the divine feminine. And we just wanna celebrate the things we love most about our favorite women. And that's what drag stems from, I think. You know, when I get into drag and I'm resembling someone—you know, it's very intentional. And so, I think you know the reason why female characters don't get to do that often is because female characters are constantly dealing with circumstances that male characters don't deal with. The costume, for one. I mean, all the men are in pants and suits, like they're wearing what men wear today. And the women are in parade floats.

Like, it is an athletic thing to do what Mary does because of that. You know? And most women wouldn't wanna put themselves through the athleticism required to do that. *(Chuckling.)* And that's by design. That is a costume right now, but that is what people wore. So, now you have Mary, who has all of those circumstances that normally would inhibit her. Except she's the president's wife, and she's protected, and she's at the top of the food chain. She gets to not care about those things. And we see another woman in the show—Louise—dealing with those circumstances in the opposite direction by adhering to them.

And all of this is—whether Cole did this intentionally, or Cole just so deeply gets it—like, that's the brilliant thing about this play being set when it is and it being the characters that they are. Part of the reason I love playing villains is villains are often, you know, at the top of the food chain in some way. And queer people rarely get to feel that way. And trans people rarely get to feel that way. So, as an actress who's queer and trans, to step into a character that is at the top of the food chain after I've walked the streets of New York as a trans woman, *(chuckles)* it's really liberating. You know, Cole didn't just write a great role. Cole gave performers like me a huge gift.

**Jesse Thorn:** I was thinking about the fact that this part is not a particularly campy one.

[00:15:00]

But it shares this quality with some of the kind of icons of drag performance like Liza Minnelli and Judy Garland, which is this big-eyed excitement about whatever is in front of her—or *(laughing)* in her peripheral vision that immediately becomes the center of things.

*(Jinkx agrees.)*

Like, a kind of like—like a combination—

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Like an alcoholic!

(They laugh.)

I've watched so many interviews of Cole's, and I've been a fan of Cole's for at least 20 years now, and I've been a friend of Cole's for about 13 years now. And when you watched the interviews Cole gave talking about creating this character, I'm like, "Oh. So, you and I are one and the same." (*Laughs warmly.*) And that is— I mean, the second I saw Cole perform this like a year and a half ago Off-Broadway, I told Cole, "If that ever gets to the point that you're looking for other people to take over this role, I would only want to do it after you've completely gotten everything you want out of it. But I would love for a chance to play this role."

Because this role is very real, even though she's written like the Tasmanian Devil. She's a very real character, and that's why this is all so funny. The show is so funny because it's written about actual, true, honest things in the most stupid way. And that is my favorite way to work. I love talking about serious topics that we need to talk about in the stupidest way possible. Because not only am I having fun, but my audience is having fun, but we all know what we're really talking about.

**Jesse Thorn:** So much more still to come with Jinkx Monsoon. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* for [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

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

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Jinkx Monsoon. She is, of course, a legend of drag and a regular on *RuPaul's Drag Race*. She's also a celebrated Broadway actor who's had lead roles in *Chicago*, *Pirates*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and now *Oh Mary*—a play about the life and times of a very silly, very fictionalized Mary Todd Lincoln. Let's get back into our conversation.

You've played onstage every possible alignment of gender.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** (*Excited.*) I have! Thank you for noting that! Thank you. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, you've played straight dudes when you were young and identifying as a gay man. You've played drag performances. You've played women's roles that were sort of semi-drag performances. You've played straight-ahead women's roles. Like, every type of alignment of gender presentation onstage, and—you know—its relationship to your gender identity and presentation in your day-to-day life.

(*She confirms.*)

What do you enjoy the most?

**Jinkx Monsoon:** (*Chuckles.*) As far as what I've played?

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. I mean, what do you like to do? Is it—?

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Everything up until playing women was a compromise. You know? And drag was my solution before I decided to transition. And I think, you know, it's— If you're paying attention to the drag's fear of, you know, what's going on in our world, that's a very true story for a lot of us. Like, drag doesn't make you trans, but trans people seek drag. Because it's one of the first ways of reimagining yourself.

Sasha Colby said, “God doesn't make mistakes, but sometimes he's making suggestions that you need to build upon.”

*(They chuckle.)*

And I thought that was really beautiful, because the reason why I've played all of those roles onstage is because I've played all of those roles in my life. And that's what every trans person has to do. And you know, being amidst my own medical transition, it's like you go through a stage where you are neither gender—you know?—as you are letting go of your previous self and transitioning into your new self.

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The big thing I find so asinine about the whole conversation around gender is we all are doing this constantly. Trans people just do it in a very visible way. But when you dye your hair, you're deciding to take charge of how the world sees you. When you go from glasses to contacts—you know, the shoes you decide to wear. Like, and men who think they're immune from it, like what decision went into you choosing the color of your tie today? Because that's your drag. You know what I mean? Like, we all do it.

So, this conversation of “some people are just doing what's natural”. It's like, no, you were conditioned like the rest of us, and you're using clothing and gender and aesthetic markers to show the world who you want them to see you as.

**Jesse Thorn:** How has your experience walking down the street in New York City different as you've transitioned—?

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Honestly—

**Jesse Thorn:** Both socially, and—you know—physically, medically.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Sorry to interject, but it's like— What's so funny is it's the same. Just the slurs have changed. And you know, there's also— Sometimes there's people who can't take their eyes off me, and I'm like, “What are they staring at?” And then I recently was talking to someone about it, and it just came to me. If they, in their mind, believe that they can see that I'm a trans woman, they might just be staring at me because, “There's one of those trans women I've heard so much about constantly. There she is! Ahh, what do I do? What do I do?!”

You know? Because they've been fed nonstop BS about us. And they don't even actually care, but they notice me, and they're like, *(militantly)* “I'm supposed to care about something about

this person!” You know? And it's like I didn't ask to be the center of attention just for being what I believe I was meant to be. You know? Someone else made me, but luckily I liked a spotlight.

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, that's what I was about to say. It must really complicate things when you're walking down the street, and you can't tell if someone is staring at you because they're uncomfortable with your presentation in some way, or because—

**Jinkx Monsoon:** They recognize me.

**Jesse Thorn:** They're like, “Ohhh, here goes Jinkx Monsoon!”

**Jinkx Monsoon:** It's difficult, you know? It's not easy to navigate. The theater provides rides to and from the theater. If I wanted, I could take cars everywhere, but we both know that's not practical in New York. So, oftentimes walking down the street is what's best for me to do, even though anything could happen. From adoration to physical threat. You know?

What's frustrating is there is so many times that people stop me to give me just the best comment—you know—that means the world to me and helps keep me going. Unfortunately, I miss tons of that, because my method to deal with that dichotomy is to put on my sunglasses and put in my noise cancellation headphones and walk from A to B as fast as possible. And I've made a game out of it. You know? Like, get through Times Square as quickly as possible with as few people noticing you. Because that's what brings the most ease to my life.

It is something I still don't really know how to comprehend, how I can be a celebrated star on Broadway and still feel so unsafe walking down the street, you know? But the thing is, talk to any famous woman, and she's probably dealing with it. It's not a trans thing. I talk to my therapist a lot about it. *(Chuckles.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Something that you just said is something that had not occurred to me in the slightest, which is when you're an actor on Broadway, your workplace is Times Square.

*(Agrees through laughter.)*

And even as a—you know—6'4", 210-pound, cis, straight guy, it's a trial. And the idea of doing that when you're in a situation where you are vulnerable more broadly is stomach-turning.

[00:25:00]

**Jinkx Monsoon:** And again, I'm gonna say thank you for your empathy. *(Chuckles.)* I mean, first it was for the ant, and now it's for me. But the point being that I think I asked a friend of mine who I've talked about all of this at great length with. I was like, “Will you help me boil it down? What makes masculinity toxic?” Because masculinity is not naturally toxic. There's nothing wrong with being a masculine person. It's how you use your masculinity and how you impose it on others and how you treat it and how you relate to it. And I believe that



masculinity was meant to be a force of protection, and it's morphed into a force of aggression and attack.

And so, I asked my friend, “Help me boil this down to a sentence I can say.”

And he said, “Lots of men lack empathy. It's that simple. They just—because of their privileges, they've never been asked to think about the other person. They've never been forced to think about the other person.” You know? And when life is set up for you, you don't realize how difficult it is if it isn't. *(Chuckling.)* Do you know what I mean? Because nothing's set up for trans people. We have to carve our path constantly.

**Jesse Thorn:** As someone who has transitioned in midlife, you had the experience of being younger—and even as a drag performer—having the opportunity to walk through the world with your masc mask—

*(They chuckle.)*

—on. You could always like put on a beat-up leather jacket and keep your head down and barrel down a sidewalk.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** You'd think, but no. Because you have to walk right. And you have to be the right build. And if you slip up and someone catches it—you know? I tried. Ask any trans person, and they'll probably tell you they tried. And everyone saw right through it. And eventually you just say, “If no one's gonna let me be even when I'm trying, then I'm not gonna try anymore. Because I'm not gonna live the rest of my life unhappy like this.”

And that's— I mean, every person should do that for themselves regardless of whether they are satisfied with the gender assigned to them or not. We all have to make that decision to stop doing ourselves for other people. Especially some arbitrary opinion that was formed by people we don't even like!

**Jesse Thorn:** How is the experience of walking down the street different for you within yourself? Leaving aside the—you know—the tip of the spear of hatred?

**Jinkx Monsoon:** What's changed is if I'm gonna get called slurs, I'm gonna get called slurs looking the way I wanna look. If someone attacks me, that I'm gonna go out knowing that I looked the way I wanted people to see me, and I didn't let someone else control me by fear. You know? It's like the feeling of empowerment I get by dressing like a sexy, middle-aged witch. It's almost like— What I think keeps people at bay from me is, like I said, I have intention when I walk down the street. And I make it very clear I'm not about to be stopped and messed with. *(Chuckles.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, Jinkx as you sit before me right now—or at least, sit before me 3,000 miles away from me through a Zoom camera—you are wearing laaarge, dangly earrings of what looked like broad swords. *(Laughs delightedly.)*

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Yeah! I got gifted these at the stage door during *Pirates*, and I like wearing them a lot. Because, you know, (*laughing*) I've been trained in stage combat.

**Jesse Thorn:** You weren't just like, "Oh, come on! This is a pirate show! We're doing epees and foils! (*Laughs.*) This is a saber show!"

**Jinkx Monsoon:** (*Laughs.*) No, we had scimitars.

**Jesse Thorn:** Oh!

**Jinkx Monsoon:** No, the pirate king had a scimitar. I think we all had scimitars.

[00:30:00]

Anyway, the point is I've talked to costars before, and I've thanked them for never treating me like anything but the leading lady. Like, my gender identity never really came up, because all they needed to know was I was playing the female lead, and I was the leading lady, and treat me like any leading lady.

But that's the thing is like I think I dealt with way more BS when I was trying to fit the mold. Because now, I don't look like an uncomfortable person in men's clothes uncomfortably walking down the street. I look like a person who knows exactly who she is, who chose her outfit intentionally, walking around with confidence 'cause she loves the way she looks. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** I read an interview from when you were guest starring on *Doctor Who*. And one of the questions that interviewer asked was, "If you had a TARDIS, where would you go?" And your answer was that you would go see *Elaine Stritch: At Liberty*. The Elaine Stritch—Elaine Stritch's one-woman show, which is available on video, unlike dinosaurs, for example. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Hey! You can't synthesize a live performance. You know? I have listened to the audio recording of that performance so many times. I learned from her in *At Liberty* in the way she performed, period. She was so honest and upfront and candid with anyone who would listen. I used to think there were things I needed to keep private, because if people heard those things about me—you know—they'd be like, "Ew!" And instead, opening up about those uncomfortable parts of me—you know, ADHD, trans identity, alcoholism, past trauma—it's only connected me with my audience more. And Elaine Stritch strikes me as someone who, even if she was difficult, she was honest. And you knew that she cared.

**Jesse Thorn:** You went to theatre school, and I read an interview where you said that your favorite class that you took at theatre school was a commedia dell'arte class.

(*Jinkx confirms.*)

I love to bring up commedia dell'arte on this program.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** So do I! (*Cackles.*) It takes a special kind of person who just loves to bring up commedia dell'arte.

**Jesse Thorn:** What did you love about learning commedia?

**Jinkx Monsoon:** It was the first time that a teacher in the acting world told me, “There's two approaches to finding your character, and neither one is better.” You can either start from the inside, think about that character's internal life, and then let it inform the form and the shape of that character; or if you're having trouble connecting to that person, that character's internal life, get into their form and see how it makes you feel.

And it's kind of poignant that you brought it up, because it's like Mary Todd is a perfect character to examine that. Like, she's got so much internal life. But let's say you have no connection to that. Get in that costume we talked about (*chuckles*) and see how that makes you feel. See how it feels when you can't just easily do anything. It's like being in a cage. Like, even though you can get around and do everything, it's like trying to do that with sandbags on, you know?

So, I loved commedia dell'arte, 'cause we examined both approaches for the intention of comedy. You know, like for the intention of finding what's funniest.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's exciting in theatre school just to get to do something where the point is to be funny.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** Yeah, but once the— The first day of class, the teacher said, “Okay, who wants to volunteer?” Someone volunteers. They go up and stand up in front of everyone. And he goes, “Okay, be funny.”

Let me tell you. Not a lot of funny stuff happened that day. (*Laughs.*) Because comedy is a science. And the second someone says, “Be funny”—

[00:35:00]

(*Laughs.*) I don't know. That's not a good start to something that requires scientific accuracy. (*Cackles.*) But so, you can't— The way you train in comedy is just start doing it! And just start failing at it and find out what doesn't work. 'Cause that's just as important.

**Jesse Thorn:** We'll wrap up with Jinkx Monsoon in just a minute. After the break: Jinkx, as we said, is one of the most celebrated and prominent drag performers in the world today. And being a drag performer today is a very fraught and difficult thing. We'll get into how that's changed after the break. It's *Bullseye* for [MaximumFun.org](https://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

**Promo:**

**Mike Cabellon:** You guys wanna try and do this promo with British accents?

**Ify Nwadiwe:** Yeah! Yeah, of course.

**Sierra Katow:** Let's do it.

**Mike:** Okay, Iffy you go.

**Ify:** *(In an exaggerated cockney accent.)* Oi, bruv! This is *TV Chef Fah-ntasy League*.

*(Mike and Sierra laugh.)*

**Mike:** Fah-ntasy League!

**Sierra:** *(Giggling.)* Okay, Fah-ntasy League!

**Mike:** Okay, Sierra.

**Sierra:** *(In a crisp British Received Pronunciation.)* We take cooking competition shows and treat them like fantasy sports.

**Mike:** Like a newscaster!

**Ify:** Yeah! Yeah, very fancy!

**Mike:** Very posh!

*(Also in British RP.)* Right now, we're doing *The Great British Bake Off*. Or! *The Great British Baking Show*, if you're listening from the US.

**Sierra:** Oooh! That was really sooth!

**Ify:** Yes. You chose like a prim and proper *Downton Abbey*.

*(Sierra agrees.)*

**Mike:** Thank you, thank you. Okay. Ify, I think you have the best accent if you wanna take us home?

**Music:** Light, playful percussion.

**Ify:** *(Aiming for a posher accent.)* Subscribe to *TV Chef Fantasy League* on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and wherever you get your podcasts. *(Snorts a laugh.)*

*(In his usual accent.)* Better than my Boston one.

*(Music fades out.)*

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

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Jinkx Monsoon. She's starring in the play *Oh Mary*, which was written by Cole Escola.

Your career as a drag performer has kind of tracked with these huge changes in drag's place in American culture, specifically. You know, there was a time when it was essentially not on the radar of most Americans. There was a time when it was charming and felt powerless enough to many Americans that they were not bothered by it. In recent years, it has become very deeply villainized.

*(She agrees.)*

If I had asked you about drag, you know, 10 or 12 years ago, do you think you would've felt like the growing acceptance of the form would have traipsed along lightly and grown consistently—if not exponentially—over a long period of time?

**Jinkx Monsoon:** 10 or 12 years ago, I probably just would've still been in the stunned state that I was, that I was getting the opportunities I was being given as a drag performer. Because the drag lifers, those of us who have been doing it since before it had a place in mainstream society, you became a drag queen because you had no other choice. You just knew you needed to do it. You know? Like, that's how you were gonna do all the things you wanted to do.

Now, when I heard you ask that question, all I could think is: what has happened to drag performers, that's just what happens to every marginalized group when they step into the mainstream. First they're a novelty, and they're cute and harmless. Then they start to have influence and power, and that threatens the people who are threatened by them, because they represent that the old ways are on the way out. You know? So, drag queens are just another group of people who are going through that same BS that people of color had to go through. Queer people in general have to go through still, being in the public eye. You know, trans people are going through it if you're in the public eye. Women constantly go through it.

So, it's like—at the same time that I don't want to compare my experience to other marginalized people, because they're all so unique, it's also like, that's why I relate to women. It's why I relate to people of color. Because we have all been treated the same way by the same people. And those are my allies, because we all get it. I know that I don't get every aspect of it, but I do get what it feels like! And then empathy comes into play again.

**Jesse Thorn:** Jinkx, you can tell me if my read on this from the outside is incorrect, but it seems to me that the drag community is an intersectional one—

[00:40:00]

—even more than the broader queer community. That people of color have always had a relatively central place in the drag community, compared to the—you know—gay and lesbian community of the 1980s for various cultural and safety reasons and so on and so forth. That the drag community has always made room for trans people. And you know, now trans people are very central in the drag community.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** You know, drag queens have had this very interesting place in the LGBTQ+ community, because we are simultaneously celebrated. And also blamed for everything. You know, this whole “LGB without the T” movement? That's not new. It's just a different version of what drag queens and trans people have always dealt with. Which is people who lack empathy, even within the LGBTQ plus community. And they think their life will be better if they just chop off one leg of this community, because that's the leg that's holding us back.

Wrong. If they know you will sell out members of your community, then they got you. Then they know your community can be broken. And then they know they can break you, 'cause they know you have a price, and you don't actually stand for anything.

So, in the LGBTQ+ community, drag queens are the freaks of the freaks. The LGBTQ+ community is already an outcast community. And drag queens have oftentimes been ostracized and demonized within the queer community. So, that's why we started making room for everyone. Because in a community that welcomes everyone, we had to be the people who really welcomed everyone. So, we are specially equipped for these things. And that's just all there is to it. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, Jinkx Monsoon, that's all there is to our conversation. We're out of time.

(*Jinkx laughs.*)

I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me. It was really nice.

**Jinkx Monsoon:** I appreciate you talking to me. You know, this was a lovely conversation.

**Jesse Thorn:** Jinkx Monsoon, everyone. If you're able to catch her in *Oh Mary* on Broadway, you absolutely should. She's incredible in it. She's great in just about everything. It's a hilarious show. Also! (*Chuckles.*) The producers of *Oh Mary* just announced the next actor to perform the late after Jinkx: Jane Krakowski! Jenna from *30 Rock*. Like I said, these people can't miss.

**Transition:** Upbeat, thumpy synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created in the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, as well as at Maximum Fun HQ—overlooking MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. It's getting swampy here in Los Angeles, and my office keeps being invaded by mosquitoes.

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, Hannah Moroz. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help on *Bullseye* 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. 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 will find video from all our interviews, including the ones that you heard this week. And hey, why not take the opportunity to share them with a pal? YouTube's great way to do that.

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](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*(Music fades out.)*