[00:00:00]

(ADVERTISEMENT)

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. My first guest this week is Christopher Lloyd. Christopher Lloyd is, for a lot of people, an icon. He's been in some of the most memorable movies of the 20th century: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, and—of course—*Back to the Future*.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Doc Brown (*Back to the Future*): I remember it vividly. I was standing on the edge of my toilet hanging a clock. The porcelain was wet. I slipped, hit my head on the edge of the sink. And when I came to, I had a revelation! A vision! A picture in my head! A picture of this! <u>This</u> is what makes time travel possible. The flux capacitor.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Christopher Lloyd has been in the game a long time. Around the age of 19, he took acting classes at the Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theater in New York with the legendary acting teacher, Sanford Meisner—the guy who invented the Meisner technique. Christopher acted mainly on stage before getting his first big role in *Cuckoo's Nest*. He's still extremely committed to his craft and performs on stage whenever he has a moment. And at the age of 86, he has no plans to stop anytime soon. In his latest film role, he stars alongside Bob Odenkirk in *Nobody 2*, the second installment in the wild action series that answers the question, "What if Bob Odenkirk could beat up a whole bus full of chumps?"

Lloyd plays David Mansel, father to Odinkirk's Hutch. Can Christopher Lloyd's character beat up a bus full of chumps? Probably not at 80 something. But he still sees plenty of action! Lloyd is always a treat to see on screen. I was really grateful to get to talk to him in 2021. Let's listen back to my interview with him.

Transition: Thumpy synth and light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Christopher Lloyd, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show.

Christopher Lloyd: Well, thank you. I'm delighted.

Jesse Thorn: How did you get the idea that you wanted to be an actor?

Christopher Lloyd: It's funny, 'cause I kind of—I don't know why, but I anticipated that you might ask for that. So, I was thinking it over. *(Chuckles.)* I just remember, back 7th, 8th, 9th grade or something that if I felt threatened by the bigger boys or whomever, whatever, I would do something that was kind of—I don't know—unexpected and it made them laugh or they were amused and then somebody asked me to be in a school play. This was 7th or 8th grade or something. And I did that a few times, subsequently. It just kind of coalesced after a while. So, I thought I'd try acting.

Jesse Thorn: You studied at the Neighborhood Playhouse with Sanford Meisner, who's—you know, one of the greatest acting teachers of the 20th century.

And he was, you know—his method, his famous—known as the Meisner Technique—listening is so essential to it. Like, it's really like a system of teaching you how to be very profoundly present. How did you end up there and how did it change you as a—as a performer?

Christopher Lloyd: Well, I did—you know—some summer stock before I went to the playhouse for a while. And you hear other actors talking about—you know, this place, that place. And Meisner, for—what I felt the way they talked about the Neighborhood Playhouse was that it was where I wanted to go and just sort of—so I had an interview with Meisner and then I was accepted. (Chuckles.) And then he wasn't there for the first year, which was a big surprise. And he wasn't there for both years—I was at the playhouse for two years and when I got out of it, I felt—I really—and all the faculty were proteges. But it wasn't getting through. I came out of it.

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I felt that I'd still—a little bit where I was when it started. So, Meisner came back, and it got—and started teaching again at the playhouse. And he had two classes each week, outside of the playhouse. Then I went back to him, and I started in with those classes. And he was fabulous. I mean, just extraordinary. And I came out of it getting what I wanted. So, it worked out.

Jesse Thorn: Did you think you were gonna be a theater actor forever?

Christopher Lloyd: Uh, (laughs) I began to wonder about it. I wanted to do film. I came to New York—because I lived in Connecticut—and I was familiar with the scene, having gone in and out of the—uh... I wanted to do film, but I just felt, "Get a base in the theatre." And

I—you know, I really loved theatre. I loved going back and doing the play; I feel I'm going home. You know? It just feels right. And then I started going up for film meetings and interviews and I could tell there's nothing happening here. And I just thought maybe I'm one of those actors who do not make the bridge from theatre to screen. You know? And then *Cuckoo's Nest* came to New York to do some casting. And the casting director who, you know, was good to me—sent me out all the time—set me up and that was that.

Jesse Thorn I think that when you're working in theatre, often it is expected that—you know—you'll be able to transform yourself, because you're working in rep or you're working with a company and you're playing all kinds of different roles, it's really valuable to be able to do anything. Right?

(Christopher confirms.)

And often when you're working onscreen, the direction of your career is determined by, you know, what you seem like when you walk into a room. Like, people taking one glance at you and deciding what kind of thing you are, what kind of thing you do. And I wonder whether when you started going up for film roles—when you were—I mean, you were a full-on grownup before you started doing screenwork—whether you had to, like, reckon with what people thought of you when you walked into a room.

Christopher Lloyd: Overtime, yeah—overtime, I started making a real effort to be as much the character that I'm going in to read for or meet for as I can without it being annoying, you know, or something stupid. You know, just trying to really find the essence of it and bring it in, hope that I could convey that. Whether I did my hair in a certain way, what I dressed, an accent, whatever. But if I could make it, you know, real. So, I would do that more and more and it started paying off. It took a while, but it started—I could notice—I got more adept at it, and it helped. And also, *Cuckoo's Nest* was—you know, an incredible film to start out with. After—you know, I was buzzed.

(They chuckle.)

It was a great experience. So, that really helped things along.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Dale Harding (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*): For the third time, you do not have a hotel on Boardwalk.

Martini: Hotel. Hotel. Hotel.

Dale: It costs \$1,000 and four green houses to put a hotel on Boardwalk and you do not have a hotel!

Taber: Play the game. Knock off the *(censored)*.

Dale: Huh?

Taber: Play the game, Harding.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: The audition process for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was sort of famously unusual and involved. What did you have to do to get your part in the film?

Christopher Lloyd: Um, Miloš Forman—the director, of course. He would set up chairs in a semi-circle in front of him on the floor. And they would be filled by actors all, you know, auditioning, in effect. And he would talk to us.

[00:10:00]

He'd be sitting where Nurse Ratched would be sitting, and he'd ask us a question, and he had the sense of how to get things going. And that was the audition, you know. You just kind of lived out the way it went. People were talking about things. You could interject at any time. You know, it was kind of cool. But, you know, I think that I came up and did that a couple of times. And then that was that.

Jesse Thorn: We'll wrap up with Christopher Lloyd in just a minute. Stick around. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Promo:

Music: Bright, playful backing.

Alexis: Hi, I am Alexis. I am one of the cohosts of *Comfort Creatures*, and I'm here with River Ju, who has been a member since 2019. Thank you so much for being a listener and a supporter of our show.

River: Yeah. I can't believe it's been that long.

(They chuckle.)

Alexis: Yeah, right?! As the MaxFun member of the month, can I ask what sort of made you decide to be a member?

River: I used to work in a library, so I just used to listen to podcasts while I reshelved all the books. It really help with, you know, doing—(laughs) reading at work. So, I just wanted to give back to what's been helping me. It feels good to be part of that.

Alexis: As the member of the month, you will be getting a \$25 gift card to the Maximum Fun Store, a member of the month bumper sticker. And you also—if you're ever in Los Angeles—you can get a parking spot at the MaxFun HQ just for you.

River: Yay! I'm actually going to LA in September, so I'll get to use the parking space!

Alexis: (Gasps.) Oh! Yes! Thank you so much, River, for doing this. This has been an absolute blast.

River: Yeah, of course. I've been so glad to be able to talk to you too, and I'm so excited to be a member of the month.

Alexis: Yay!

Speaker: Become a MaxFun member now at MaximumFun.org/join.

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Christopher Lloyd. He's of course the star of *Back to the Future, Taxi, Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, and so many other iconic roles. He's now 86 years old, and he's still working! He performs on stage. He's acting in movies and TV shows. His newest film is *Nobody 2*, the action comedy in which he stars alongside the RZA and Bob Odenkirk.

Let's hear a scene from *Taxi*, which—you know, was a very long running sitcom about a group of New York City cab drivers, one of whom was played by my guest, Christopher Lloyd: Reverend Jim, who is a kind of spaced-out, sweet kook. So, in this scene the dispatcher, Tiny—who's played by Danny DeVito is there and Jim is at the garage and he's just sitting down to a snack.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

(The sounds of people talking in the background.)

(The audience laughs regularly throughout the scene.)

Jim (Taxi): (Sighs heavily.) Well, boss, I'm back from my vacation!

Tiny: You didn't happen to run into your brains while you were out there, did you?

Jim: No, but I wasn't really looking.

Tiny: Well, I'll have a cab for you in a minute, Gulliver.

Jim: Okay. What's all these cookies?

Tiny: They were baked by a guy I fired.

The Audience: (In unison.) He quit! (Laughter.)

Jim: (Beat.) Oooh! They got a nice little surprise inside!

Tiny: What are you talking about?

Jim: Well, I could be wrong, but I detect something in here that's a lot more powerful than oatmeal.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: (Laughs.) So, when you got cast in Taxi, did you think of yourself as a comedy actor?

Christopher Lloyd: I knew— You know, it was written for laughs, for comedy and all that. But I've felt that— I don't know. I've just—I've never—

[00:15:00]

I don't know if I've ever really thought of myself in a particular way, comedy actor or dramatic actor, whatever. When casting's going on, when I'm—you know—I don't go up one way or the other. I just go up there and try to respond to the material and see what happens. I enjoy laughs.

(They chuckle.)

I was in a—I was in a Neil Simon play, *Barefoot in the Park*. And I did that in the summer stock, in Cape May, New Jersey somewhere in the '60s. And I was playing the Robert Redford part. Bob or whoever it was. And I hadn't seen Neil Simon, yet. I hadn't—you know. So, we were—you know—a couple of days into rehearsal and the director beckoned me over to the edge of the stage and he kind of confidentially told me, "Chris, this is a comedy."

(Jesse laughs.)

And I learned something. (*Laughs.*) I learned something that, you know—when I made the adjustment, every line... you know, you just had to open your mouth and say them, and you got the laugh. It was just written so well. It was extraordinary.

Jesse Thorn: One of the things that I've heard from people who did audience sitcoms—multi-camera sitcoms over long periods of time is that you learn a very particular kind of basically stage performance, because not only are you—you know—acting in front of an audience, not only are you doing jokes in front of an audience, but often you're—you know—you're there doing the same joke a few times, 'cause there's—you know—multiple takes of things and you have to do—you're doing the same joke or a similar joke in front of the audience. You have to find a new wrinkle in it. You have to find something that's a little bit different. What was it like to do that over years? You know, every week, go up in front of a—in front of an audience and do those jokes?

Christopher Lloyd: I don't know. Sometimes I've watched a sitcom, and I got a feeling that it looks like sitcom acting. Or sitcom—you know what I mean? I think.

(Jesse confirms.)

And it's kind of stale and mechanical, a bit. Whatever. And the laughs were kind of—you know, contrived and all that. So, I never wanted to end up that way. You know. Doing something—repeating it, you know, like—you know, doing it every week. And it's no better than that. You know. I didn't—I didn't, you know—I wanted—it had to have something bring excitement to it. So. And I lucked out. You know, I lucked out getting into—overcoming my prejudices and *(chuckling)* grow up. And it worked out great.

Jesse Thorn: Reverend Jim is such an iconic TV character and, you know, was repeated on television ad infinitum. You know, like—as with me, you know. By the time I was watching *Taxi* it was in reruns, but I've seen a lot of *Taxi*.

(Christopher confirms.)

What was it like to go from working actor of basically about 20 years to, you know, people's television friend? Which is, I think, what a—sort of like what a long-running sitcoms character is?

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(Christopher agrees.)
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You know, it's a very different way of (chuckles)—of having people see you.

Christopher Lloyd: Right. I guess there's a certain inclination to want everybody to get what you have to say or—you know what I mean?

(Jesse hums in agreement.)

So—and you wanna give your best for them, whatever medium you're working in. And yeah. Acting is kind of like really communicating a lot and like a character and—no matter whether it's a nice guy or a not-so-nice guy—and find what makes, you know—what is it that's human about this guy and I can identify with? Even if I'm not him. And convey that to an audience.

[00:20:00]

They might not even like the character, but they will feel for it. You know? Understand it.

Jesse Thorn: So, I think that—as an elder millennial myself—you are most burned into my memory as the guy who's about to put Roger Rabbit into The Dip. (*Chuckles.*) Um, I mean—you've had a number of iconic screen roles, Christopher, but you know, outside of maybe playing Large Marge in *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, I don't think there was any more terrifying character from my childhood you could have played.

Christopher Lloyd: Yeah, yeah. And I get great pleasure knowing that.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

(Sizzling sound.)

Judge Doom (Who Framed Roger Rabbit): Can you guess what this is?!

(Ominous music swells.)

Jessica Rabbit: (In horror.) Oooh my god, it's DIIIIP!

Judge Doom: That's right, my dear! Enough to Dip Toon Town off the face of the Earth!

(Boiling noises.)

Judge Doom: Vehicle of my own design! 5,000 gallons of heated Dip pumped at enormous velocity through a pressurized water cannon! Toon Town will be erased in a matter of minutes!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Christopher Lloyd: I remember seeing Disney films when they—I mean, when Walt Disney was making them. You know? Way back in the '50s? Somewhere in there. I don't know where. And there was—seemed like every one of them, there was a moment that was absolutely horrifying. You know.

(Jesse agrees.)

Just dream—nightmare-material. And people'd come up to me and tell me the same story that happened to them, when they saw that movie. And it's just payback.

(They chuckle.)

It's fun. But I love it! I mean, it's just—to be that nasty but that little shoe—my squeaky little shoe in The Dip. But it was a wonderful film.

Jesse Thorn: This is what I was thinking about, 'cause I watched it recently with my kids, and it—I was really—I was really thrilled with how well it held up. I thought it was just as wonderful, as an adult, as I had thought it was, as a kid.

Christopher Lloyd: Great.

Jesse Thorn: But as I was watching it, I was thinking, "This movie is like an unequivocal success." Like, this is a great film. Everything works. But then I was just thinking of all of these actors, including you, on a soundstage—you know, probably holding a cube painted green, when you're dipping the shoe into The Dip. You know what I mean?

(Christopher confirms with a chuckle.)

And I thought, like, "All of these people, like—how did they convince themselves this was gonna work?" (Laughs.)

Christopher Lloyd: I know! I—well, they took a lot of pains to make it happen. First of all, it was like—it wasn't digital. It was, you know—every plate was painted and drawn and all that. And they had it—they—there was a like—sort of three-story, old factory building a few—in London. And it had divided compartments in it. In a big open space. And all these guys and women from everywhere—Thailand and all-around Europe and Asia and Australia—you know, in there making each cell. You know what I'm saying? It was like extraordinary. Anyway, they had that and then they had a guy who was a comedian. Damn, I can't think of his name at the moment. Who played Roger Rabbit, off camera. So, whenever you had words to say to Roger Rabbit, you'd talk to this guy, and he got himself all done up in a crazy kind of Roger Rabbit kind of costume and he had (pitching his voice up) a voice! You know. He had Roger Rabbit's voice. And so, you'd stare at him. And that was very helpful. You know. The—for that.

And then they also had Roger Rabbit foam cutouts. You know, Roger Rabbit maybe up to your thigh size and it had real weight and arms and legs, the whole thing.

[00:25:00]

And you'd rehearse with that to get the feeling of the muscles you would need—what you'd need to support that weight. And then, of course, they'd take it away after you'd rehearsed a while and they'd shoot without it. So—and then they had a pantomimist there to assist in the whole process. So, they took a lot of—took a lot of pains to be sure it could be done, that it would work.

Jesse Thorn: Even more with Christopher Lloyd still to come. We still haven't talked about *Back to the Future*. How could we miss that? Hear about it after the break. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: You're listening to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is actor Christopher Lloyd.

Well, Christopher, I have to tell you that if I don't talk to you about *Back to the Future*, I will get a volume of angry letters that will like make my house float away.

Christopher Lloyd: (Chuckles.) Ah. I don't wanna—

Jesse Thorn: Like a Midwestern flood.

Christopher Lloyd: Uh-huh. Well, uh, fire away.

Jesse Thorn: (Laughs.) You know, I was thinking about the Back to the Future movies. And I realized that, for you, certainly the first Back to the Future movie— They're all really fun. The first Back to the Future movie, you know, having established the world, and it is probably the definitive classic.

Transition: A whooshing noise.

Clip:

Music: Quirky orchestral music.

Marty McFly: You disintegrated Einstein!

Doc Brown: (Yelling.) CALM DOWN, MARTY! I didn't disintegrate <u>anything</u>! The molecular structure of both Einstein and the car are completely intact!

Marty: (Panicked.) Then where the hell are they!?

Doc Brown: The appropriate question is, "When the hell are they?" You see, Einstein has just become the world's first-time traveler! I sent him into the future! One minute into the future to be exact! And at precisely 1:21AM and zero seconds, we shall catch up with him and the time machine!

Transition: A whooshing noise.

Jesse Thorn: But *Back to the Future III*, where it's in the old west and you have a love interest is kind of the most Christopher Lloyd-y *Back to the Future* movie.

Christopher Lloyd: Uh, well. (Chuckles.) I can't quite judge that impartially on a—But...

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: I'm asking for your partial evaluation.

Christopher Lloyd: No, I—uh, that's why it's hard when people say, "Which one did you love doing the most?" And it's number three. Number one is exciting, because it initiates the whole—you know—story. The DeLorean coming out of the truck and, you know, all that stuff was being established. That gives it a special energy. But you know, I love—I loved westerns, as a kid. Watching western movies and all that stuff. And I spent time in Wyoming and whatever. So, I loved *Back to the Future 3*. That was great.

Jesse Thorn: I have a question about your hair,

Christopher Lloyd: (Laughs.) Uuuh. Moving along.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, certainly in the *Back to the Future* movies and in some of your other iconic roles your hair has a volume and flare that is very distinctive.

(Christopher agrees.)

To what extent was that your hair in real life, during those years? And to what extent did you have to, like, "Oh. I gotta grow my Doc Brown hair back out."

[00:30:00]

Christopher Lloyd: Uh-huh. Well, in the trilogy—I can't quite remember exactly, but it was—at times it was my own hair. And then they wanted a wig, because it was all gonna be white and not blonde. Or something like that. And—I don't know, lately I've sudden gotten long hair going on with my work. That's just the way it is. I had some—when I was doing theatre work, I shaved my head. I shaved my head for *Addams Family*, for Uncle Fester. So.

Jesse Thorn: That was your real shaved head in *Addams Family*?!

Christopher Lloyd: Yeah. Yeah. 'Cause he's bald. He's bald. As he is in the cartoon.

Jesse Thorn: (Laughing.) That's true! But there are bald caps!

Christopher Lloyd: Yes.

Jesse Thorn: That is something that a major motion picture <u>could</u> have supplied you with.

Christopher Lloyd: Yes, but I've done that. I've done it in the theatre, and I think I did it maybe in something. But that's kind of—you know. You gotta cut your hair shorter anyway, because the—it's gotta fit well. And they—and that takes some time for the makeup artist to—you know, to put it on and then he has to stick it on. You know. So, it stays in place. And then if you have hair of any, you know, length—which I usually do—the hair stylist has to take the hair you have and pin it with 100,000 hairpins before she puts the false head—lays it over you.

So, it's a lot of that. And then, if you've got an active role, you sweat. And your scalp starts itching furiously. And so, when I can avoid that, I do. I just shave my head.

Jesse Thorn: I've only shaved my head for real—I have very short hair 'cause I'm pretty bald, but I've only shaved my head down to the skin once in my life. It was when I was—you know, I had finished all my classes in college, but I was an RA, and I had to stick around for another ten days or something. And I just got really bored.

(Christopher chuckles.)

But *(chuckling)* I remember, vividly, the feeling—what it felt like to <u>really</u> have no hair on my head. Do you remember what it was like when you took the razor to your head?

Christopher Lloyd: Yeah. I had an audition once. I interviewed for a film, and it was during while I was—I did a play where I shaved my head. So, I had a shaved head, and I got a wig kind of disordered brown hair and when it was on, it was really—you know, very convincing. Looked good. So, I wore the wig to the interview.

(Jesse chuckles.)

And the lady was a bit—kind of bossy, you know? Middle-aged, bossy kind of lady. I normally, you know—and she's going on about it and then she said, "Of course, the part you'd be playing would be the part of a monk. And you'd have to shave your head." And I just reached up, pulled my wig off.

(Jesse laughs.)

It was like—I didn't even get the part, but it was such a delicious moment. (Laughs.)

Jesse Thorn: That's like the time that you didn't get the part, but you still won.

Christopher Lloyd: Oh, yeah. Yeah. It felt good.

Jesse Thorn: I don't mean this question as an insult, but why do you think you're still working?

Christopher Lloyd: Why?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah.

Christopher Lloyd: Well, one thing, I want to. For sure.

Jesse Thorn: Why do you want to?

Christopher Lloyd: I love doing it. And I feel like it—you know, it's—I feel I'm getting better and better with the acting, with using myself and connecting and all that. That keeps me going. And I've been—I—you know, so far, I haven't been disabled by anything. So, I'm very fortunate and just keep going. *(Chuckles.)* As long as it takes.

[00:35:00]

Jesse Thorn: Well, Christopher Lloyd, I'm so grateful for your time. Thank you for talking with me.

Christopher Lloyd: Oh, you're welcome! Thank you for—thank you.

Jesse Thorn: Christopher Lloyd, originally recorded in 2021. Catch Him in *Nobody 2*. It's in theaters and on demand and extremely fun.

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

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 beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. It's been too hot outside lately, but sometimes when it's hot and clear you look out the window from our office, see MacArthur Park in downtown Los Angeles, and you're just like, "Wow. This is great."

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Hannah Moroz. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help on *Bullseye* from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our friend Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find his music at <u>DJWsounds.bandcamp.com</u>. 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 video from just about all our interviews—including the ones 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.)