

[00:00:00]

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’s *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. This whole month we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of *Bullseye*, and I wanna kick off today’s show with a story. It’s 25 years ago. I was a sophomore in college at UC Santa Cruz—go Banana Slugs—division three hacky sack juggernaut. Me and two buddies had a good idea. What if we hosted a show on the local student-run radio station? Not to like play—you know (*chuckles*)—Rusted Root songs. But our show was jokes and funny stuff and talking. We applied for—and we got—a time slot at 7:30 on Thursday mornings, which meant that we had to get up at the crack of dawn. In fact, sometimes in the dark; and because the campus shuttle wasn’t running yet, walk through the forest and up a bunch of hills, and then step inside a cold radio station to tell jokes. KZSC, the Heavyweight 88.

Those friends were Jordan Morris, who is still my comedy partner and the co-host of my other show, *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*, and Eugene O’Neil. And I know that you’re a public radio listener, and you’re saying, “Eugene O’Neill?” Different Eugene O’Neil. These days, Gene is a writer and producer in television here in Los Angeles. Anyway, we called the show *The Sound of Young America*. I thought it was kind of a funny joke, because obviously we weren’t *The Sound of Young America*. We were on a college radio show, and no one was listening to us. It also was, of course, the slogan of Motown Records. *The Sound of Young America* is the very same show that I have been doing every single week for the last 25 years. We call it *Bullseye* now, but you know. Same show.

On this episode of *Bullseye*, you’re gonna hear a lot of clips from our program. I’ll be joined by Gene and Jordan to listen back. And you know, (*laughs*) we were in college. It sounds like a college radio show. But I hope that you’ll have a good time with me and get a sense of how this show came to be this show. Here’s the original theme song, written and recorded in a pool house in the valley by me and my college buddy, Dan Grayson. I wrote the lyrics, and I’m also going (*singing falsetto*), “Maximum Fuuun!” in the background. And playing the tambourine! I also played the tambourine.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Jesse Thorn: Hi, I’m Jesse Thorn, America’s radio sweetheart. And this is *The Sound of Young America*!

Music: The theme song for *The Sound of Young America*—an upbeat, alt-rock number.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, crying

When that cry is done

When it's done,

Maximum Fun!

Thursdays are for being awesome

Dancing in the sun

In the sun, Maximum Fun

Gimme Thursday, I don't need no Fridays.

Five o'clock comes, it's Maximum Fun!

Radio sweetheart, boy detective

It's The Sound of Young America

Maximum Fun! Maximum Fun! Maximum Fun!

Maximum Fun! Maximum Fun!

(Maximum Fun)

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. So, this is the 25th anniversary of *Bullseye*. It is a show that I started with some pals when I was a freshman...? Sophomore in college at uc Santa Cruz on KZSC, the Heavyweight 88, the college radio station of UCSC. And since it's the 25th anniversary, we thought we would look back with my original co-hosts on the program. Eugene O'Neil. Hi, Gene!

Gene O'Neil: Hello!

Jesse Thorn: And Jordan Morris. Hi, Jordan!

Jordan Morris: Hi, Jesse! (*Amused.*) I can't wait to reminisce.

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughs.)* You seem already mortified.

(Jordan laughs.)

[00:05:00]

Gene O'Neil: I am filled with dread right now.

Jordan Morris: I wanna hear what I thought was funny when I was 19.

(They chuckle.)

Jesse Thorn: Jordan, you and I still podcast together on the podcast *Jordan, Jesse, Go!* Gene, we still text every once in a while, lo these past 25 years or so.

Gene O'Neil: Every so often.

Jesse Thorn: See each other. It's great to see you, Gene.

(Gene agrees.)

Jordan Morris: What about?! What's in these texts? I gotta know!

Jesse Thorn: Oh, like, "What's wrong with Jordan?"

(Jordan cackles.)

Gene O'Neil: Yeah, he'll just ask me, "Are you still avoiding Jordan?"

"Yes."

Jordan Morris: "Has Jordan been lurking outside your house?"

"Yeah."

Jesse Thorn: We're gonna listen to some clips from the show and talk about them. We have these two binders of CDRs that—

Gene O'Neil: Binders full of CDRs.

(They laugh.)

Jordan Morris: These are like Case Logics.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, exactly. And like, KZSC at some point—

Jordan Morris: Listen, if you leave those in your car, you gotta cover 'em up with a sweatshirt or else someone will break in and sell them later at the swap meet.

Jesse Thorn: Initially, we had to go into a second studio to use a cassette deck to record a live broadcast on KZSC. And the second studio had a mixing console that had knobs that you turned instead of sliders that went up and down. It was a mixing console from the late '60s, when the station had gotten started. But I found these CD books. They were in our closet here at the office. A kind helper named Robin has been helping us go through them and pull clips.

Jordan Morris: And really scratched copy of the *Repo Man* soundtrack.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: The first thing that we found was one of the first interviews that we ever did—maybe even the first interview that we ever did.

Jordan Morris: Yeah. 'Cause what was the show? The show wasn't always interviews. It was a lot of different stuff.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, it only became all-the-time interviews after you guys graduated from college, moved to Los Angeles to work in real showbusiness, and I was just sitting there by myself and didn't want to do jokes by myself to no audience.

(Jordan chuckles.)

But yeah, initially we were— Every week we would write material. We'd all just be like in my dorm room, writing jokes, writing premises, thinking of contests—like, call-in contests and stuff. And maybe we would have one interview, partly to just kind of fill time. I think very early we figured out that an interview was a great way to take up half an hour of the show.

(They laugh and agree.)

Like, we had an hour to fill every week, and we couldn't do it just by talking to each other. But this was like not long after the *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack had taken America by storm. Central to the *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack was Dick Dale, the king of the surf guitar.

Jordan Morris: Yeah. I mean, that's another CD that was in every Case Logic. You had to have the *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack.

Jesse Thorn: Exactly! I mean, there was one in mine. And Jordan, you are the one who booked Dick Dale.

Jordan Morris: Yes. So, on Dick Dale's website, which I think had—

Gene O'Neil: —was your homepage.

Jordan Morris: (*Laughing.*) Was my homepage. Yeah. I don't remember what it looked like, but it had graphics that might remind you of the dancing baby.

(*Jesse agrees with a laugh.*)

That was the aesthetic. I don't know if he literally had the dancing baby dancing to—

Jesse Thorn: “Ooga-Chaka”.

Gene O'Neil: It was an Angelfire website.

Jordan Morris: Yeah. It had to have been.

Gene O'Neil: Or a Rapid City one.

Jesse Thorn: GeoCities.

Jordan Morris: It had to have been. It had to have been. Yeah. GeoCities or similar. Yeah. You just— If you clicked “contact”, it had Dick Dale's phone number.

Jesse Thorn: And you called. Like, but he didn't say, “This is Dick Dale's phone number.” It said, “Contact Phone Number.”

Jordan Morris: And I assumed maybe it would be like his manager or something like that. But you called, and it was him. He picked up, and I just booked an interview with him! It was pretty wild. He was down to do it. He, up until the end, was a real just like self-promotion machine. He would do anything. He had a lot of wild claims about having invented various kinds of music.

Jesse Thorn: That's the thing. The two things I remember most vividly were that he was like really excited and pleasant—that we liked him. But also, central to the interview was him saying that he invented every kind of music.

Jordan Morris: Right. Yeah, no, it was a thrill! I mean, I was and am a big Dick Dale fan. And it was just— And yeah. And I think just wild, you know, to feel like, “Oh, I'm in college. I am a dork. But these people will talk to me.” It was a cool feeling.

Jesse Thorn: Let's take a listen to Dick Dale on *The Sound of Young America*, the predecessor to *Bullseye*, 20 some years ago.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Music: Dick Dale songs playing too loudly in the background.

Jesse Thorn: What is the—what was the stomp?

Jordan Morris: *(Clarifying.)* That you were the king of.

Jesse Thorn: That you were the king of.

Dick Dale: *(Unclear),* the way we stomped our feet when I played the music.

Jordan Morris: Ah.

Jesse Thorn: Just stomping and guitar playing both at once?

Dick Dale: Well... that's the way it's usually done, I guess.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I suppose so.

Jordan Morris: Yeah!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Can you pause this for a second?!

Jordan Morris: *(Cackling.)* RIVETING!

Jesse Thorn: Do you think that they picked this clip specifically because it was one of the most interesting clips, or specifically to embarrass us on the air?

(Jordan continues laughing.)

Gene O'Neil: I hope it was specifically because I'm not speaking in it, which I'd love to stay on that tack.

(They laugh.)

Jordan Morris: I like the choice that we just had a bed of his music playing louder behind him than when he was speaking!

Gene O'Neil: Yeah. And that wasn't added later. Right?

[00:10:00]

Weren't we just (*laughing*) playing that as we talked to him?

Jesse Thorn: I think we were probably just playing one of his CDs behind us.

Jordan Morris: But I guess when you have a guest that primarily does instrumental music, you're like, "Why not?!", huh?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, let's take a listen to some more.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Jesse Thorn: Now, um—

Dick Dale: (*Chuckling.*) Moving right along. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: The stomp angle really didn't get us very far, did it?

(*Dick laughs.*)

Jordan Morris: That's okay. We got a while.

Jesse Thorn: Now I know that one of the raps on surf music is that a lot of surf musicians are into it for aesthetic reasons and not because they're actual surfers. But I'm told that you in fact are or were an actual surfer.

Dick Dale: Well, that was the first surfing picture ever used on a cover used commercially.

Jesse Thorn: Was that a—? Is that—is that you surfing that I'm looking at on the cover of Dick Dale and his Del-Tones' *Surfer's Choice*?

Dick Dale: That's when I was in the buff.

Jesse Thorn: Man. Fantastic. Do you still look—?

Dick Dale: That's when I was in the buff.

Jesse Thorn: Man! Fantastic. Do you still look like this?

Dick Dale: *(Correcting himself.)* That's when I was buff! *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: Do you still look this good, Dale?

Dick Dale: *(Clears his throat.)* Well, yeah, because I took all the windows out of my house. I took all the mirrors off the wall. So, my brain never left 20.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jordan Morris: *(Laughs.)* Riveting! See, Jesse, you asked a good question. You had done some research. You can see the—

Jesse Thorn: I claimed that—I liked that my question started with, “I’m told that,” as though we had a helper helping us like—as though there was a segment producer for this.

Jordan Morris: Our assistant Bruno.

Gene O’Neil: Yeah, our team lets us know, yeah.

Jordan Morris: Our various producers running around getting us coffee. But yeah, you could see the like “I did my research” interview guy kind of coming out there,

Jesse Thorn: The thing that I remember really vividly about doing interviews in those early days, they were almost always by phone, because no one was ever actually physically in Santa Cruz. And because we were booking people by pretending that we were in the, quote/unquote, “Bay Area” without telling them that we were in the Monterey Bay Area. Not the San Francisco—

Jordan Morris: Monterey Bay Area. We're in a bay area. We're near a bay, *(laughing)* if that's your criteria for coming on a radio show.

Jesse Thorn: But I remember that it would be the three of us, and all three of us would be desperately trying to think of something to say when the guests stopped talking. And I remember the feeling of relief when I would see one of your hands go up, like just at your waist. Like, just like a, “Hey, I got something,” wave.

I’d be like, “Oh god, thank you! I don't have anything!”

Gene O’Neil: And then it just turned out to be me saying hi.

(They laugh.)

Jordan Morris: “I’m here too!”

Jesse Thorn: We're gonna take a break. When we come back, Jordan Morris, Gene O'Neil, and I will talk about how this show went from being a show with almost no listeners to having fans from places that weren't Santa Cruz! Also, more embarrassing clips. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We are changing things up a little this week. And by a little, I mean a lot. A huge amount. *Bullseye* is ringing in its 25th anniversary. We're celebrating by going deep into the archives. 25 years ago, we were a college radio show on KZSC in Santa Cruz, California—the Heavyweight 88. We were called *The Sound of Young America*—ironically; I wanna make that clear. We did interviews and comedy bits. We took calls from listeners. Joining me to listen back and share in my pain are my co-hosts from way back when, Gene O'Neil and Jordan Morris. Let's get back into it.

Gene, we did the show together for three and a half years. At no point in that time was I completely convinced that you wanted to be there.

(They laugh.)

Gene O'Neil: I was always very uncomfortable doing it. I think when you first pitched the premise to me of us doing this together, I thought, “Well, that'll just be like Jesse and I being funny together, and it'll just be recorded.” And I don't think I was ready for the anxiety that would come with that in the moment. And I kept thinking, “I'll get comfortable with this eventually.” And then Jordan joined it, and he was just like so much better at jumping in and having a funny thing to say.

Jordan Morris: Well, I think it's clear from the clips that I wasn't.

(They laugh.)

[00:15:00]

You were mistaken about that, Gene!

Gene O'Neil: Yeah, I— No, I mean, to be honest I always just thought like you guys were so good at it, and I just never felt comfortable. It was more anxiety than it was fun for me. Yeah, the fun I had just hanging out with you guys and being funny, it felt like it never translated over.

Jesse Thorn: I disagree completely. I think people thought Gene was the funniest.

(Jordan agrees.)

I remember getting lots of feedback that Gene was the best one. And Gene had quit improv. Gene and I did improv together our freshman year of college. Jordan, one year younger than us, wasn't there yet. And Gene quit improv for the same reason!

Gene O'Neil: Same reason! The fun of the rehearsal that was just hanging out with your buddies and being funny, it didn't carry over into the stage performance. Which for me, it was filled with anxiety. And look, I don't have a lot of memories of college. I still remember a few of the whiffs I had in radio and on the improv stage.

(Jordan laughs.)

And I have to tell you, all my dread right now is that one of those is gonna come back, and we're gonna hear it, and I have to relive that. Because almost on a daily basis I have to tell myself, "No one remembers that really bad joke you told on the radio show. So, you can stop bothering yourself about it."

Jordan Morris: *(Laughs.)* Yeah. Jesse, if for some reason you have audio recordings of our old improv shows, I'll leave.

(They laugh.)

I will walk out!

Jesse Thorn: I have a clip here. We used to get tickets to giveaway at KZSC. And the problem with the ticket giveaways was we would get like 10 tickets to give away. And no, we couldn't get anyone to call in to take them. So, in order to keep getting them, we would have to put names on the list. So, we would end up often just like putting a guy we know's name on the list.

Jordan Morris: Seymore Butts got a lot of free tickets in Santa Cruz.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: But we were coming up with ideas to give away tickets. And this one was for a themed episode of the show that was themed arts and culture. And so, we were asking people to call in and give us their movie ideas, and whoever had the best movie idea would win the ticket.

Jordan Morris: That's a good bit!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Jesse Thorn: KZSC, you're on the air. Hello?

Dara: Good morning.

Jesse Thorn: Hi. What's your name?

Dara: My name's Dara.

Jesse Thorn: Hi, Dara. We've heard you before, haven't we?

Dara: I think you have.

Jesse Thorn: Fantastic, fantastic. So, our understanding is that you have a movie idea in an attempt to win tickets to Fiesta Flamenca, a spell-binding evening of flamenca—

(Jordan laughs at him.)

—(correcting himself) flamenco dance, song, and guitar. And I think—it's Flamenco dance, but I think it's actually tap guitar. I think it's Eddie Van Halen or something.

(They laugh.)

Dara: Van Halen?

Jordan Morris: Sweet!

Jesse Thorn: Actually, that was a trick. Yeah, I don't really think it's Eddie Van Halen.

Dara: Aww. I gotta go. No, just kidding. *(Chuckles.)*

Jesse Thorn: *(Sadly.)* Oh. *(Chuckling.)* That was kind of harsh there.

Dara: Sorry.

Jesse Thorn: Anyway, Dara, let's get back to your movie idea. Why don't you start us off?

Dara: Okay. How about a movie of me and Gene going on a date to the dance?

Gene O'Neil: Whoa! That sounds like an awesome movie!

Dara: Doesn't it?

Jesse Thorn: Wait, is this just a regular dance, or is this like the big dance?

Dara: This is a tango and salsa dance that you're selling tickets for!

Jesse Thorn: Wait, so you're offering to take Gene to the flamenco salsa dance?

Dara: Yeah.

Jordan Morris: Wait, he's on the radio. You don't even know what he looks like!

Dara: I'm picturing it.

(They chuckle.)

Gene O'Neil: I could just be a mound.

Dara: Are you saying no?!

(Flamenco music fades in.)

Jesse Thorn: Here, listen, Dara. I got you some like background music here. I think we should do a reenactment of what might happen on the date with you, Dara—our caller—and you, Eugene—our co-host.

Gene O'Neil: Okay. How do we do this?

Jesse Thorn: Okay. Dara, would you pick up Gene, or would Gene pick you up?

Dara: We would probably toss a coin.

Jesse Thorn: You'd toss a coin? Okay. We're tossing a coin right now. Heads or tails, Gene?

Gene O'Neil: Heads.

Jesse Thorn: Okay. Heads. It's heads.

Dara: Great.

Jesse Thorn: Gene, it's your choice. You wanna pick her up or—?

Gene O'Neil: Well, I don't have a car.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: Okay. Dara picks up Gene at his dorm room.

Dara: Okay.

Jesse Thorn: So, they're headed to Felton, California on the bicycle, over highway Nine. Okay. Gene, what do you say to Dara on the date?

Gene O'Neil: Well, I guess I have to say yes. I'm so flattered.

Jesse Thorn: No, not yes! I mean, like we're on the pretend date, Gene. What kind of things might you make conversation about?

(Jordan laughs.)

Gene O'Neil: Oh! Oh yeah. Oh, I thought we were at the part where we're pretending Dara's asking me out.

Jesse Thorn: No.

Dara: We did that part.

Jordan Morris: This has to be really dramatic and interesting and funny.

(Gene agrees.)

And if you're at a loss for something to say, this is a movie. So, just say, "Oh no! Look out for the ninjas!"

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: I feel like that's something you'd say right now, Jordan.

Jordan Morris: Yeah, sure! *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: What I like best about this is that clearly the best one at improvising this scenario out of any of us is Dara, the caller.

(Jordan laughs and agrees.)

Gene O'Neil: I really went off the rails there with whatever the hell that was.

Jordan Morris: I know.

[00:20:00]

And it's something I've learned kind of thing, is that like— Because I used to like produce some like man-on-the-street type stuff for cable networks that aren't around anymore. Asking a random person to be funny is such a mistake. You have to say something funny, and then they can react. But just like, “What do you do?! What would you say?” (*Laughs.*) Like, that's— Hearing that now is so—is one of the nine or ten cringiest things about listening to this.

Jesse Thorn: She's doing an exceptional job.

Jordan Morris: She is doing great!

Jesse Thorn: I also think that the tone of this clip speaks most vividly of anything we've heard to Gene's feeling about being on the show, which is this mix of excitement and mortification that can't even really be described in words. But you can hear Gene being both glad to be involved in this and hating it at the same time.

Gene O'Neil: I liked it when one of you guys said something, and then I could make a comment on it. But like, me having to start something or initiate something? Yeah, that was my nightmare. And I think we just heard all the reasons unfold right there.

Jesse Thorn: I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. We're listening back to some of the very earliest recordings we ever did on the show when we were on college radio at UC Santa Cruz. This next bit is a sketch that we did on the show. In it, Jordan calls in. I mean, he was just like in the lobby of the radio station, (*chuckles*) but he calls in as the voice of the beloved holiday Arbor Day.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Jordan Morris: (*Pitching his voice up.*) I have a lot of new and exciting traditions planned for Arbor Day.

Jesse Thorn: Now, Arbor Day, here's my question. You mentioned that Arbor Day has been around for 130 years. Honestly, it's getting a little stale, I think. It doesn't have a “now” feeling. What kind of actions are you taking to give it that excitement—that pizzazz—that today's holiday consumer requires?

Jordan Morris: Well, first of all, I'm trying to speak to the young people. Young people, like trees, are part of the future of our nation. So, what I'm doing is I've teamed up with hip hop super group Limp Bizkit and producer Swizz Beatz to record

a new song about Arbor Day—an Arbor Day anthem, if you will—called “Climb that Tree (*sensor beep*)”.

Jesse Thorn: I see!

Gene O'Neil: That's pretty in your face.

Jordan Morris: Yes! And I think that the American public is ready for a more in your face Arbor Day!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Do you remember the first call that we ever got? I might not even have told you about it.

Jordan Morris: I do!

Jesse Thorn: So, the first time we went on the air, the phone— There was no producer, so the phone light would blink when we were sitting there. We were in a song break. The phone light was blinking. I answer the phone, “KZSC.” You know, “This is the on-air line,” or whatever.

Jordan Morris: And it's 5AM, right? Like, that's when we started.

Jesse Thorn: 7:30. 7:30 to 8. Yeah. (*Unclear.*)

Jordan Morris: 7:30, okay. In my mind it was 5AM. Yeah. Sure. (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: And you know, I answer the phone, say, “KZSC.”

And this woman says, “Hi. This is Klisha, the folk goddess.”

(*Jordan “mm-hm”s calmly.*)

Gene O'Neil: Oh my God.

Jordan Morris: Oh yeah!

Jesse Thorn: She was another DJ on the station.

“I'm listening right now, and I want you to know this show represents everything that's wrong with KZSC.”

Gene O'Neil: *(Laughs.)* I remember this.

Jesse Thorn: And she said, “I’m gonna put a complaint into the programming committee about this, but I wanted to tell you first.” Clink!

Jordan Morris: What were we doing?

Jesse Thorn: The first time we were on the air! The first time we were on the air!

Jordan Morris: Didn’t you use that—*(laughing)* didn't you use that in promos, down the line?

Jesse Thorn: I think I may have!

Jordan Morris: Like, “This is the worst show in the history of the station.” Because yeah, a thing about this station is it was— You know, it’s a college radio station. And the joke about college radio stations is that no one listens, and it doesn’t reach anyone.

Jesse Thorn: But kind of a lot of people listen to KZSC!

Jordan Morris: Yeah. And it wasn’t just students on the station. Like, there were community members that could have shows. And there are people on that station who had had shows for 20 or 30 years. Right? The folk goddess probably being one of them. And it was like stuff that you would associate with crunchy, White hippies.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. It was reggae, Americana, folk music. But they were really popular shows.

(Jordan agrees.)

I mean, they would win the like favorite radio DJs in the alternative newspapers every year.

Jordan Morris: Yeah. I mean, the guy who hosted the reggae show cut ribbons at car washes and stuff! *(Laughing.)* Like, he was a local celebrity!

Jesse Thorn: I was thinking about the fact that we filled our shows half with interviews, usually. Usually, we’d usually have one interview in a show. It was because we realized we could not come up with more than half an hour of stuff to fill our hour. So, half an hour of it could be an interview. And then we would try and come up with stuff for the first half of the show, and that was always a challenge.

Jordan Morris: We played “The Monster Mash” a lot.

(They laugh.)

I think a lot of it was various monster themed parody songs.

Gene O'Neil: Sometimes multiple times within the episodes.

(They laugh.)

Jordan Morris: “Let’s hear ‘The Monster Mash’ again!”

Jesse Thorn: But we didn't know how to talk for a long time on the air.

(Jordan agrees.)

We were terrified to talk. Like, there was no possibility that we would just come up with a topic and talk about it, like real talk radio hosts. That was terrifying to me.

[00:25:00]

It was either people calling in or something we had scripted, because otherwise it was too scary to just talk for half an hour.

Gene O'Neil: Didn't we do recordings of scripted bits? Or am I misremembering that?

Jesse Thorn: We sometimes did recordings of scripted bits as well. This is one of the most ambitious things that we ever did.

(Jordan snorts.)

We did this live on the air. It's called “Mace Detective, Private Detective”. Do you guys remember writing this bit?

Jordan Morris: Yyyeah!

Gene O'Neil: I do remember being in your dorm room and writing this.

Jordan Morris: Yeah. We had the cutting-edge idea to *(laughs)* parody old detective movies, something no one has done before, and no one has done since. And yeah, I think the kind of fun part was like, “Oh, we're gonna do an old-time radio drama and do all the sound effects in studio and stuff like that.” And I think you were potting up and potting? down like background music. As you were in the clips we heard. Like, you were live, *(laughs)* you know, engineering the background music.

Gene O'Neil: Yeah. You were doing all the Foley work.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, I think I literally had sound effects CDs that I was like throwing into the CD player, pushing up, pressing play, potting it down, taking it out, throwing in

something else. And Gene was Mace Detective. We wrote, I think, all of it the night before. We went on the air at 7:30 in the morning. I think we were in my dorm room 'til 1 or 1:30 writing our one draft script for this. And then just calling everyone we knew to ask them if they were willing to come by the studio at 7:30 in the morning and play the other characters.

Jordan Morris: Yeah. I'm guessing that this bit is probably heavily casted from our improv group, Humor Force Five. So, yeah, I'm guessing that's where a lot of the folks came from.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, maybe we'll hear the voice of bestselling children's author Jessica Love in this!

Jordan Morris: Oh, maybe! Yeah!

Jesse Thorn: Let's see.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Music: Jazzy, atmospheric backing music typical of classic noir genre films.

Jesse Thorn: *(In a dramatic narrator voice.)* Deep in the city lies Mace Detective, private detective.

Jordan Morris: *(Present day.) (Laughing.)* I love “deep in the city lies this guy!” He's lying down!

Gene O'Neil: *(Present day.)* Dead! *(Laughing.)*

Jesse Thorn: A man of questionable morals and questionable odor. Mace?

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: 100% what just happened— First of all, questionable morals and questionable odor is not a bad joke. I think that's pretty solid. But 100% what just happened is I read the intro; Gene was spacing out and forgot to start his lines.

(Gene snorts.)

So, I have to throw to him. Did you hear me go, “Mace?”

(They laugh.)

Jordan Morris: Because that's— You know, when you watch those old detective movies, the narrator is always talking to the main character! *(Laughs.)* “Time to start the story now!”

Gene O'Neil: Jesse was always saying, “You have to put Gene's name in the script. You can't put his character's name, or he won't know to read it.” *(Chuckles.)*

Jordan Morris: It's like how Tony Danza has to be named Tony in everything.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: That’s because of his star power! I mean, the name's what's selling the show!

Okay, let's listen.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

(The music swells.)

Mace Detective: I'd fallen asleep somewhere. I couldn't remember where, and I had just woken up mid-morning. My bleary eyes could just make out my office halfway down the block over the bar. That was when fate intervened. By fate, I mean the newspaper.

Paperboy: *(In an exaggerated, high-pitched newsie affect.)* Extry, extry! Mayor’s wife dead in grizzly rollercoaster spill! City in mourning!

Mace Detective: I'll take one.

Paperboy: Thanks, Mace. Working on a case?

Jesse Thorn: *(Present day.)* Can I just say? Whoever's doing this voice is incredible. This person’s breathtaking.

Mace Detective: I scanned the lead story as I made my way into my office. Seems the poor lady had her head knocked clean off at the reopening of Pop & Jay's Whizzbang, a theme park at the edge of the city. It was an old coaster, and it had been ordered shut down, since it seems the same grizzly fate had befallen the park's original owner before Pop and Jay got ahold of the rundown old joint and cleaned it up. I entered my office and sat down at my desk.

Gene O'Neil: (*Present day.*) Just racing through this. Alright.

(*Jordan and Jesse laugh.*)

Mace Detective: I finished up the story about Mrs. Mayor's failure to get reelected to the commission of people who were still alive, and I had moved on to Marmaduke.

(*The gang giggles as they listen.*)

It seems that the neighbor kid's party had been disrupted, and Marmaduke was left with cake all over his paws. I love that crazy mutt.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: That's 100% a Gene joke.

Gene O'Neil: Can I say, I vividly remember writing this the night before. And there's some line in the script that goes something like— Someone's trying to give me a payoff, and they say they'll give me like a thick wad of cash. And I said— And the line was me going, “How thick?” And we were trying to think of a joke there.

And Jordan came up with: (*in a cartoonishly exaggerated Boston accent*) “Thicker than my Bastin accent!”

(*They laugh.*)

Gene O'Neil: Which I thought was one of the funniest things I ever heard. But Jesse overruled it, because he thought it kind of shattered the reality (*laughing*) of the story too much!

Jordan Morris: No, listen, Jesse— If there's one thing I know about Jesse, it's he loves world building. (*Cracking into a chuckle.*) He loves world building.

Jesse Thorn: I like that I was trying to dad you guys' genius even when we were 19 years old, like scoldingly be like, "No, we have to take this seriously, guys!"

(*They laugh.*)

Jordan Morris: But you were the guy who— Like, you were the guy who learned all the technical stuff, right?

[00:30:00]

Like, we still podcast. I still don't know how to hook up a microphone. You know. We've been doing our podcast for almost 20 years.

Jesse Thorn: 15? Yeah, 20 years.

Jordan Morris: And I still don't know how to like edit something. So, yeah, I think the fact that you were the guy— And I know that's like not your passion, right? You're not a tech guy. You don't love bleeps and bleeps, but you were like, "The only way this will happen is if I learn how to edit stuff, if I learn how to drop in sound effects and music behind the talking." 'Cause yeah, I think that was a like super important and impressive thing that you did at the time was like you pointed to 19-year-old (*sensor beep*)-ups and actually doing something that made sense. You know, because I think we— I'll speak for myself. I was not gonna do any of that.

Gene O'Neil: Yeah, I was definitely gonna quit if I had to do any of the unfun things that you took upon yourself to do for us.

Jesse Thorn: We're gonna take a break. When we return, we will wrap up our look back on the very early days of *Bullseye* with some of our earliest interviews—including ones with Matt Besser of the Upright Citizens Brigade and the great comedian Patton Oswalt. Still our pals today! It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

(*ADVERTISEMENT*)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We're listening back to some of the oldest recordings made for this program. All the way back, some of them, from the year 2000! 25 years ago, when I was still a teenager.

I wanna play you another comedy bit that we did. One day we were in the dorms, and we found out that there was this website where you could type a phrase in, and then it would send you an MP3 file of a synthesized computer voice saying that phrase. And this was— I

mean, this was like whatever ChatGPT is now. This was peak technology as far as we were concerned. The other thing that it could do was sing the song “Bicycle Built for Two”, which I think was an allusion to the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the Kubrick movie.

So, we just started typing things into this text box and turning them into wave files. And the bit that eventually came out of it that we probably wrote at one o'clock in the morning before our 7:30AM show, was that this computer wanted to destroy the world, was our guest on the show, and was in love with someone named Daisy, and also wanted us to help it/him get her to fall for him. At least, that's how I remember the premise. *(Chuckling.)* Let's listen.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Robot: If you don't want to be a stick, you should sing with me. This song is for my darling, Daisy, in Sheboygan.

Jordan Morris: Gulp!

Robot: The most beautiful woman the world has ever known! 1, 2, 3, 4.

Music: “Bicycle Built for Two” by Harry Dacre.

(All four of them sing together, with varying success at staying in tune and remembering the lyrics.)

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do

I'm half crazy, all, for the love of you

It won't be a stylish marriage

I can't afford a carriage

But you'd look sweet upon the seat

Of a bicycle build for two

Robot: Good enough, gentlemen, I will let you go this time. I'll return, however. I will return.

Jesse Thorn: *(Shuddering.)* Oh gosh! That robot is evil. He almost shot us with his—

Jordan Morris: Yeah, he has a ray that causes death!

Gene O'Neil: I know one guest we won't be having back on the show.

Jesse Thorn: Permanent death!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. A little bit of the very, very, very early days of *Bullseye*, when we were on a community and college radio station called KZSC in Santa Cruz, California. Let's get back into the booth here in LA with my co-hosts from those halcyon days, Gene O'Neil and Jordan Morris.

I don't think that I would have had the chutzpah to think that I could do something like this for a career if I hadn't known the two of you guys in college.

[00:35:00]

Like, I think that... the fact that at that point in my life, the literal two funniest people I had ever met in my life—and you know, you guys are both still right up there—were willing to show up with me to do this thing every week? Like, I was partly just motivated by a fear of change. (*Laughs.*) Like I still am! I've been doing this show every week for 25 years. But I think the fact that you guys were willing to show up with me and do it every week, and you guys were so talented and both willing to work really hard at it—'cause we all were working really hard at it. We're joking about it, but—

Jordan Morris: Yeah. Well, we were working hard at different parts of it, for sure.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. It made me think that it was worth trying to do something like this.

Jordan Morris: Yeah. And I think like— Again, speaking to the time we were doing this where interviews with working showbusiness people were rare—you know, you could see someone talk on the *Tonight Show* or something, but there weren't a lot of like actual anecdotes about working in showbusiness from not-super-famous people. And the fact that we were like doing something that was kind of, sort of a thing, and we were talking to like people we super admired who weren't super famous— You know, we're 19! You know, we're gonna graduate in a couple years. What the heck do we do with our lives?! Like, it was so nice to be doing something that was kind of a thing, and also to talk to people who were like where we wanted to be.

That was really impressive! 'Cause I don't think— You know, I didn't know any like creative adults! So, it was so nice to like actually talk to some creative adults and to be doing something that wasn't just a bedroom notebook project that wasn't gonna go anywhere.

Jesse Thorn: I remember— This was after you graduated from college, Gene, and moved back to LA. But I remember there is this sketch comedy group in San Francisco that we admired more than anything called Kasper Hauser. It's four total geniuses. And two of them were kind enough to drive down to Santa Cruz from San Francisco to be guests on our show. We had seen them at a benefit show for McSweeney's—or 826; 826 Valencia—and thought, “These guys are the most hilarious people we've ever seen in our life. How could we possibly be friends with them?”

We invited them down, and we had recorded a bunch of little liners—little fake PSAs and stuff like that. And while they were sitting in the studio, we played a bunch of those. Basically, so that we would make them listen to them without asking.

Jordan Morris: Right. Yeah. Uh-huh.

Jesse Thorn: *(Chuckles.)* And at the end of it, James Richmond—who is one of the guys—said to us, “Oh, those were funny bits. Do you guys do sketch comedy too?”

And Jordan said, “Yes.”

(They laugh.)

Which was not true!

Jordan Morris: Fake it till you make it.

Jesse Thorn: And James got us gigs! And we put together a sketch comedy group based on that that led to our—you know, I mean to the extent that a sketch comedy group without a TV show could be successful in 2006, which was pre-YouTube—successful sketch comedy career! Like, we were getting paid to do sketch comedy. It was the first professional showbusiness job I ever had. *(Laughing.)* And it was directly because of us showing off to someone!

Jordan Morris: Right? Yeah. I think it was just really important to me to like do something that was a thing. And yeah. And I think that's why that radio show felt so good. And that's why our sketch comedy thing felt so good is like, “Oh, this doesn't feel like just a creative person getting stoned and doodling in a notebook.” It felt like we were actually doing something.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, I think you can tell that we still have the same kind of passion for this stuff that we had when we were 19 and 20 years old.

(Jordan agrees.)

I mean, I remember getting a voicemail message from David Cross saying, “I heard you'd like me to come on your show. I'm glad to do it.” I was standing in Union Station in Washington, DC, where I had an internship with XM Radio. And I remember almost crying.

Because I couldn't believe that I would get the chance to talk to somebody whose work I admired so much.

And the idea that you could celebrate art that you love that much, celebrate the work and craft that goes into it, celebrate it as art for real—even if it was rap or comedy or punk rock or these things that weren't often being celebrated as art—and also, that it could not just be self-serious, that you could recognize the artist's humanity and that they were a person like you—

[00:40:00]

—and that they liked being happy and having fun as well?

Jordan Morris: Because, yeah, it does feel like there's— You know, apart from *Bullseye*, there's two kinds of interviews. You know, there's the late-night talk show interview that's super canned, and maybe it has some like sweaty game built into it at this point. They're playing flip cup or something like that. And then there's the super bookish blog or public radio interview, where the person doesn't sound like a person. They don't sound like they're having fun or they like what they're doing. But yeah, and I think that's what's great about *Bullseye* is that it's both. It's a little bit of both. It's a little bit of goofing around, a little bit of humanity.

Like, you inject your personal self into it a lot. And I think that's something people respond to it. And it's like not only is the guest a person, but you—the interviewer—are also a person. And I think that's something that differentiates it from basically all other interview content. Like, there is so much of that now. But I think *Bullseye* is still different and special in that way.

Jesse Thorn: I think when you say people respond to it, it's largely negative. But.

(They laugh.)

Jordan Morris: Hey, a response is a response right?!

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, I'm talking with Gene O'Neil and Jordan Morris. The three of us were the original hosts of *The Sound of Young America*. The radio show started 25 years ago and eventually became this radio show, *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Speaker: The Sound of Young America!

(Rhythmic, high-tempo drumming.)

Multiple Voice: The Sound of Young America! Whoo!

Announcer: *(Echoing.)* And now, ladies and gentlemen, the greatest act in the entire world!

Jesse Thorn: That greatest act in the entire world, of course, is *The Sound of Young America*, on KZSC FM. I'm your host, Jesse Thorn. Across the table from me are—

Jordan Morris: *(Solemnly.)* The reverend Jordan Morris

Jesse Thorn: And?

Gene O'Neil: Eugene Big-Time O'Neil.

Jesse Thorn: Oh man! You think we don't work hard for your radio delight, but we do. We walked here. We walked here in the rain. And not just rain, but also hail. It was a night.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: We used to run Thursday mornings at 7:30AM on KZSC, the Heavyweight 88 in Santa Cruz, California. Eventually, when we got some seniority at the radio station, we got a 5 to 6PM slot—which was great, except for that people would call in and yell at us because the KPFA news hadn't played yet. Anyway. Point is, we're listening to some of our favorite segments from back when we were in college. Let's get back into it.

Do you think that doing this in college informed the work that you do now? Gene, you've been forever a reality television producer, a story producer. You sort of help craft narratives on reality television. Jordan, you're a writer of comic books and television. Do you think that having had this experience—?

Jordan Morris: I also punched up some cut scenes from *Crash Bandicoot 4*. Please mention that.

(They giggle.)

Please. I told the producers! *(Laughs.)*

Gene O'Neil: What's he like, by the way, in real life?

Jordan Morris: Gene? He's great.

(They laugh.)

He's everything you want him to be.

Jesse Thorn: Do you think that having had this experience when you were 20 years old is something that's meaningful to you in the showbusiness work that you do now?

Gene O'Neil: I mean, I'll say— 'Cause now, yeah, I do— You know, I'm a reality TV producer. I do a lot of interviewing of, you know, subjects. I don't wanna say subjects! What do we call these people? Just—whatever. People on reality shows. Yeah. Talent on shows. And I think you were the first person I had ever seen— I remembered admiring the way you could interview someone. You were very natural about it. And it was something I respected even more when you couldn't do the David Cross interview, and it was on Jordan and I. And I realized what a skill it was to kind of put someone at ease but also give them just enough to sort of take the baton, rather than just ask them like a sort of like quick question.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Gene O'Neil: You are gonna be in *Men in Black II*, and I noticed that, in *Men in Black I*, you were just “Morgue Attendant”. But now, I think they're giving you a name.

David Cross: Really?

Gene O'Neil: *(Laughs.)* I looked on—

David Cross: Is it *(unclear)*?

Gene O'Neil: Well, thanks a lot. No, it's—the name is Newton.

David Cross: Newton. Okay.

Gene O'Neil: Yeah, you're Newton, the morgue attendant. So, do you have an expanded role in this movie?

David Cross: Well, yeah. I'm pretty much like— When you see all the stuff with Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones, like in every scene, even in the—what do you call it?—the box art, you know, lobby posters and stuff; I'm just off to the right in every scene. You can't see me. I'm offscreen. But I'm present in every scene those guys are in. I'm just off camera, to the right.

Jordan Morris: *(Unclear)* will move into frame? *(Unclear.)*

David Cross: Yeah, unless they were able to correct that. Then, yeah.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Gene O'Neil: And I do kind of feel like that was like an internship for me, a little bit, in interviewing was sort of watching you do it. And it's something to kind of aspire to. I realized like that's how good you have to be to both be good at it yourself and get good stuff outta the people you're talking to.

[00:45:00]

Jordan Morris: Yeah, I think something that I took away from that experience is that like—you can be a comedy person, you can be a creative person. It's also a job, and you have to show up to it. And I think that like—I think a lot about that. It's like, you know, have fun, laugh! Yes! Be creative! Let your imagination run wild. But you gotta show up at the time you said you were gonna show up, you know? And that was a big lesson in that. And I think that like I try and be that when I'm doing a job. I try and be the guy who like shows up on time. Even though! I was late to this.

(Gene cackles.)

And we're all thinking it! I was late! But I try and show up on time. I try and like hit my deadlines. I try and send a professional email. So, yeah, I think that's definitely something that I was like getting training wheels on when we did our show, of like— You know, the stakes were pretty low, but! You know, if I didn't show up or we didn't show up, it would mess stuff up. People would be mad. We might lose the show. Yeah, the radio station could get in trouble, because there was dead air, because we slept in too much. So, yeah, it was a nice like—you know. And god forbid there'd be dead air on KZSC. So, yeah, it was just a nice, little practice, kind-of-sort-of job.

Jesse Thorn: I know there's probably a lot of 19-year-olds out there listening to NPR right now.

Jordan Morris: *(Seriously.)* There are. Yes.

Jesse Thorn: I think that the thing that I learned the most from doing this—which, you know, obviously I never stopped; you know, you guys moved away, and I kept going once a week for 20 further years—is that feeling that when you are trying, and you keep showing up, you will get better.

Jordan Morris: Yeah, totally.

Jesse Thorn: And that it's worth trying and worth showing up, That like showing up is worth doing, and trying to do better is worth doing. And you will grow. And as somebody who's

like a natural born incrementalist, like not someone who gives themselves permission to take big swings, and not someone maybe even who's naturally diligent—like, I was a bad student—but I think just showing up to something, messing some things up, trying to do those things better the next time has been really special.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Jesse Thorn: Our guest on *The Sound of Young America* is comedian Patton Oswalt. He can also be seen on CBS's *The King of Queens* and heard on his brand-new comedy album, which is called *Feeling Kind of Patton*. Patton, I'm wondering— You know, you're really passionate about standup, and I think for a lot of people the idea of going up in front of people and just them in front of this huge audience would be just the most horrifying thing in the world. What do you think is it about standup for you that makes it so great?

Patton Oswalt: Because it's a dictatorship, you know? It's just—it's all me, and I get to flex my autonomous muscles—what little of them are left—and do something that's all me. No editorials, no committee, no rewrites. You know, you get up and spew. It's really rare when you get to do that these days and have people that wanna hear it, you know. To me, “horrible” is sitting in a cubicle and doing someone else's work to make them rich. Does that make sense?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: I also wanna say just how grateful I am to you guys for starting this project with me. And there's no question that it would never exist in any form—much less the form that it's in now—if it weren't for your contributions. And you guys are such brilliant geniuses. I'm so grateful that I got to do this with you and that I still get to work with you every week, Jordan. And I really love both you guys, and I'm really grateful to both you guys. So, thank you for that.

Jordan Morris: Aw man. Thanks, pal. Love you too.

Gene O'Neil: Very touching, Jesse. Likewise.

Jesse Thorn: Thanks for listening to 25 years of *Bullseye*—at least the first 4 years or so of 25 years of *Bullseye*. Thanks for indulging us, NPR audience. Thanks to Jordan Morris and

Gene O’Neil, my original co-hosts on this program. And thanks for listening for however many years you’ve been listening.

Transition: Bright, upbeat synth.

Jesse Thorn: Alright! 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 Maximum Fun HQ in the historic jewelry district in downtown Los Angeles, California. In fact! I am right now speaking to you for the first time from our studios in the jewelry district. This is the very first recording we have made in our brand-new studios. Very exciting for us.

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.

[00:50:00]

Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help on *Bullseye* from Mara Davis. I wanna give some very, very special thanks this week to Robin Groves, who went through hours and hours and hours and hours of audio from back in the day to find stuff to share here. Robin, one of our oldest pals at *Bullseye* and *The Sound of Young America*: a true, stalwart friend of the program. We hope that it wasn't too torturous for you, Robin. Also, our thanks to Mike Shirk for helping out as well.

Our interstitial music comes from our friend Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find his music at. [DJWsounds.bandcamp.com](https://djwsounds.bandcamp.com). Our theme music, 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. And 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.)