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(ADVERTISEMENT)

Transition: Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

Promo: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org 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.

Sudan Archives. She's been making music all of her life. She grew up in Ohio, where she played violin in church and school bands. Her dad was a label guy. He tried to make a pop duo out of Sudan and her twin sister, but it didn't take. Sudan needed to do her own thing, to be an artist in her own right. So, when she got her high school diploma, she headed out to Los Angeles. She started hanging out at a club called Low End Theory: home to beatmakers Flying Lotus, Daedalus, and No Such Thing. It was there that she found her voice as an artist.

Sudan Archives is a violinist who— Well, breaks new ground with what that instrument can do in popular music. She isn't just a violinist. It's only one of the colors that she uses to paint, one arrow in her quiver.

(*Music fades in.*)

When she combines that violin with her voice, her beat making, and her songwriting, her music is mesmerizing.

Music: “Nont for Sale” from the album *Sink* by Sudan Archives.

Stay out of my flight path

Never feeling lonely only gliding, flying

Always being constantly reminded

Time is running up; don't waste your luck, sucker

This is my life don't mix that up

This is my light, don't block the sun

This is my seat, can't you tell?

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: That's "Nont for Sale", Sudan Archives' breakthrough single off her 2018 EP, *Sink*. When I talked with her in 2022, she had just released *Natural Brown Prom Queen*. She recorded it at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. And it sounds like it. Close interior, heady.

Music: "Selfish Soul" from the album *Natural Brown Prom Queen* by Sudan Archives.

If I cut my hair, hope I grow it long

Back long, back time like way before

If I wear it straight, will they like me more?

Like those girls on front covers?

Long hair make 'em stay little longer

Stay hair, stay straight, though we feel ashamed

By the curls, waves, and natural things

Curls, waves, and natural things

Okay, one time, if I grow it long

Am I good enough? Am I good enough?

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: In the fall of 2025, she released *The BPM*, a follow up to *Natural Brown Prom Queen*. And folks, we have a Sudan Archives club record—and I am not really exaggerating. Here's "A Bug's Life."

Music: “A Bug’s Life” from the album *The BPM* by Sudan Archives.

She's gonna flip this

Fly to the moon right back

Travel the distance

She likes it when we fall

She so sadistic

I wonder where she goes

Goes when the sun sets

She's so courageous

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Sudan Archives, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's great to have you on the show.

Sudan Archives: Hello!

Jesse Thorn: Your hands are facing me. Are those tattoo-tattoos or henna tattoos on your hand there?

Sudan Archives: Tatsssss.

Jesse Thorn: All the way up both of your arms.

Sudan Archives: Yeah. I'm about to get tatted all over too. Like, I used to think that I was gonna go to hell if I ever got tattoos. But yeah.

Jesse Thorn: When you say that, do you mean that sincerely? Did you sincerely believe you would go to—?

Sudan Archives: I sincerely believed I was gonna go to hell. Like, I was a super church girl. But that's not true. I'm not gonna go to hell. And I really love tattoos! I don't really like jewelry, 'cause I lose it. So, I wanna adorn my body and not have to worry about like losing it.

Jesse Thorn: So, what have we got going on here? I see a jellyfish on one side. Is that what that is?

Sudan Archives: Yeah, this is a jellyfish. So, I realized I'm doing like land, water, fire—like, the elements or something. Because like this arm is a tree. It's an inverted tattoo. So, the skin is the art. So, you see like a branch.

Jesse Thorn: Oh yeah! Right.

Sudan Archives: And then this one's a jellyfish. And I think I'm gonna get my chest piece.

Jesse Thorn: So, you say you were a heavy churchgoer. How heavy are we talking about? How serious?

Sudan Archives: Three times a week. Bible study, choir rehearsal, Sunday. So, that's like three times a week. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: And was that your folks' doing?

Sudan Archives: Yeah, they're like— My dad was like a pastor at one point, so yeah. I was like a preacher's kid.

Jesse Thorn: What did that mean to be a preacher's kid?

Sudan Archives: Read the Bible, write stories about it.

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Jesse Thorn: Wait, write stories about the Bible? Like fanfiction?

Sudan Archives: Like read the Bible and then write like—summarize what you read in your own way.

Jesse Thorn: Okay. Not like a thing where Buffy and Willow kiss.

Sudan Archives: (*Laughs.*) No.

Jesse Thorn: Like a thing where—

(*They giggle.*)

Not like an alternate ending to the David and Goliath story or something.

Sudan Archives: No. But yeah, I was not really— Like, when I started playing like violin in the choir, that's when I actually started liking it though. Because aside from that, I would just be in the back, just chilling.

Jesse Thorn: You picked up the violin at school, right?

Sudan Archives: Yeah, like I started in school. Then we moved around a bunch of times. And then they never had orchestra, so then I just kept playing in church basically.

Jesse Thorn: Were you moving around because your dad was a pastor or because of money stuff or—?

Sudan Archives: Money stuff. Basically, my dad sold cars. And my mom, she was like working in an insurance or something at the time. They just basically kept making hella money, and then they just wanted us to like— They kept upgrading their life, and they wanted us to be in the best schools. So, it just like—I don't know. It just got more suburban and suburban and suburban.

Jesse Thorn: Were you going to church three times a week the whole way through, into your teenage years and everything?

Sudan Archives: Yeah. Until I moved when I was 19, you know.

Jesse Thorn: Were you a firm believer that whole time?

Sudan Archives: Yeah! It was just like installed in me. And then I just started doing psychedelics and going to experimental shows and raving. And then I just kind of like— It opened me up, and I was just like, “Yo, I'm about to move.”

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: That's not unfair. What did you do with a violin in choir at church?

Sudan Archives: I was basically like— They were like—I was just soloing. Like, they basically learned songs that had violin in it. So, I would just play those songs. I would just teach myself how to play those songs. And I think that's how I just learned how to just be very like improv-y and learning. You know, like in the church—in the Black church—like, they just let anybody go up there. And they could sound like horrible. They're just like, “Yes, Lord.” So, for years I like sucked. It was like—I don't know how they dealt with that.

Jesse Thorn: What songs that you would sing in a church choir have a violin part?

Sudan Archives: Okay. (*Singing.*) When we pray, we believe, we receive what we have, (*falls off into scatting and mumbling*).” And there's this violin solo. It goes like (*bums the melody*), and then they sing that part again.

Jesse Thorn: Did you have an aspiration with the violin? I mean, did you think you were gonna be a concert violinist, or did you think you were gonna work in the touring company of River Dance, or did you think—?

Sudan Archives: Yeah, I definitely think I was not gonna be in no orchestra, but I was feeling some River Dance. I was thinking maybe I'm gonna be like a *Fiddler on the Roof*, and I'm going to be playing all these fiddles, and I'm gonna be jigging around. Yeah!

Jesse Thorn: Was that something going on in Cincinnati where you grew up? Like, were there—

Sudan Archives: Yeah, that was something going on!

Jesse Thorn: Are we talking about country? Like, Appalachian music fiddling? Are we talking about—

Sudan Archives: We're talking about Irish jigging!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, for real Irish jigging.

Sudan Archives: We're talking about jigging. There's this little town in Ohio called Wyoming, and that's where I first picked up the instrument. And they had like fiddle clubs and stuff. And you know!

Jesse Thorn: There was a fiddle club?!

Sudan Archives: Yeah. There was an afterschool program called Fiddle Club.

Jesse Thorn: No.

Sudan Archives: Yeah!

Jesse Thorn: For real?

Sudan Archives: And I was fiddling! Okay? Yes. And I remember I was so sad, 'cause I moved. And then I never had like any kind of like classes or anything to go to, so I just kept playing in church. But yeah, I had a little taste of that.

Jesse Thorn: And the Fiddle Club, was it like step dancers with ribbons on their calves?

Sudan Archives: It was like we're walking around, okay? We're two stepping; we're playing the fiddle. We're jigging, and then we're learning how to like improv in the songs we learned. And then that's all I remember. And then I left.

Jesse Thorn: So, when did you figure out that your violin was useful for something other than church, Irish folk music, and “what if I was in an orchestra?”

Sudan Archives: When did I realize that—?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, that it was good for other stuff too.

Sudan Archives: Oh, exactly. Really early. 'Cause I had the fiddle experience at such a young age. So, I started to like just YouTube a lot of like fiddle stuff. So, I learned about like African fiddling and how the Irish jig music I liked, because it was like basically like in me. Like, African fiddle or something. And they basically have their traditional songs, and it's like wild and

beautiful, like the Irish jig music. And then I just discovered so much more playing in Sudan and a Czech and just everywhere.

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Then I realized, oh, like violin is like a culture. It depends on where you're at, and you don't have to just do it in this White way—like in the classical orchestra, just playing all these people's musics. You can kind of like—you can branch out. You can do it in your own way. And it's been done already, actually.

Jesse Thorn: So, let's start with—you said Czech. What's going on in Czechoslovakia?

Sudan Archives: Well, there's this artist named Iva Bittová, and she is like the Bjork of violin. Like, one of her first—if you go on Spotify, like the very first album, she's just like singing and playing violin, and it's like very like—really cool! I don't know. Stuff like that, you find people like that, and then you're like, "Oh! I don't have to be in an orchestra! I can just do what I wanna do!"

Jesse Thorn: What was the incident that got you out of the house?

Sudan Archives: Like, out of—?

Jesse Thorn: Out of Cincinnati.

Sudan Archives: I told you I was doing psychedelics, and I was like, "*(Dreamily.)* I need to move to LA... and just be free. And live on the ocean... and do open mics... and get a job."

Jesse Thorn: Did you know somebody?

Sudan Archives: Oh yeah! I knew Cat 500. So, basically, I was like pen pals with Cat 500 on Soundcloud. And we both thought each other were men. So, we were like messaging like, *(dropping her voice)* "Hey, dude. You wanna like jam? Blah-blah-blah? Yeah, come to LA! You wanna like play dublab with me?"

I was like, "What is dublab? Yeah."

So, I flew out. Then I stayed with her. And then I just never came back. *(Makes an 'I don't know' sound.)*

Jesse Thorn: Where were your folks in this?

Sudan Archives: They were at the house. They were like, "*(Weepily.)* Why are you leaving? Just stay here."

I was like, "I gotta go, because y'all telling me I can't go out late." My curfew's like 9:30 or 10 or something? Some crazy time.

Jesse Thorn: And you're an 18-year-old or something?

Sudan Archives: Yeah, something like that. 17/18/19. You know. I'm like, "Look, y'all, no."

And they're like, "(*Dropping her voice.*) If you're not gonna respect the rules, you gotta get out."

"So, I'm leaving. I'm gonna LA though. It's sunny."

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

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Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn, if you're just joining us, my guest is Sudan Archives. She is a singer, a violinist, and a songwriter. She was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. She lives in Los Angeles. When I talked with her in 2022, she had just released an album called *Natural Brown Prom Queen*. Her latest record, *The BPM*, is a punchy, layered dance album filled with homages to Chicago house and Detroit techno. Here's another track from it. "YEA YEA YEA".

Music: "YEA YEA YEA" from the album *The BPM* by Sudan Archives.

Yea, yea, yea

I hit the dance floor he got his eyes watching me

I licked my lips, flipped my hair and rolled up some weed

Yea, yea, yea

He said I like that

He said, "What's that on your sleeve?"

(*Music fades out.*)

Jesse Thorn: You had a stepfather who had been a record producer and was like recording music with you. And they were still on the "you gotta be home by 10" situation?!

Sudan Archives: Exactly! Like, it just wasn't adding up. I was like—I don't know. Like, he wanted us to like focus on our craft and stuff, but it was just like the rules around it were a little

bit too tight for me. 'Cause I'm still like a teenager. I'm still trying to like— Like, I wanna do music, but I don't have to do it this way. I just know. I just need to figure out what it is.

Jesse Thorn: Right. Like it sounds like your stepfather knew very well, Alane?. He had worked for LaFace, one of the most important urban record labels in American history.

Sudan Archives: Yeah, like he came over with Babyface, and then he was like, "Perform for them!"

And I was just like, "Nooo."

It was like really bad.

Jesse Thorn: Wait, Babyface came over to your house?!

Sudan Archives: Yeah! Because, you know, he was married to my stepdad's sister at one point. So, they're like kind of close, you know? They still like—when they're in town— I think he was doing a show, so then he just stopped by and said hi to all the family. You know?

Jesse Thorn: And your stepdad was like, "Go get your violin; let's do this"?

Sudan Archives: Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: And you did it?

Sudan Archives: I did it with Catherine, yeah. And it was like—in my head I was like, "I do not—"

Jesse Thorn: That's your twin sister?

Sudan Archives: Yeah. It was just bad.

Jesse Thorn: Why was it bad?

Sudan Archives: Because! I just didn't— I didn't like the songs we were doing and stuff, and I just felt like, "Ugh. I'm so nervous. I don't feel like doing this."

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"This doesn't feel—this feels weird."

Jesse Thorn: Were you making music outta the house besides that, when you were still in Cincinnati?

Sudan Archives: Yes, I was. So, I was doing that with my twin, and then I just kind of was like hanging out with a group of rappers and going to this night called Synthesizer Nights. That was the first time I saw a SP-404. And then from there, that's when I discovered, "Oh, I wanna make music like this." Be in control of the production and kind of like—I guess it's like experimental music in a way. Like, you know? I was going to all these experimental shows. It's like not—It's like hands on.

Jesse Thorn: What's an SP-404?

Sudan Archives: It's a drum machine. And you can like make beats on it, and you can also like put backing tracks on it. And you can like affect a lot of the sounds. Like, you can put a lot of crazy effects on them. And then, you can also put a microphone in it or an instrument in it, and you can like mess with that too. So, basically, I started like getting gear like that. And like the looper. Once I got the looper, then I discovered I can be my own orchestra and layer loops of loops of loops of violin and kind of like just perform like that.

Jesse Thorn: To what extent were the people around you in that scene making beats? Like, making music that you would call hip hop? And to what extent were they making weird noises?

Sudan Archives: They were just going in. They were like all of these like dope Black men like doing cool (*censored*). They were like—Blackie was his name, and then Kafari was throwing synthesizer nights. He like made "Home Maker" and "Freakalizer" with me. I took some of his piano samples. But they were inspired by, I think, the LA experimental beat scene. They would like talk about like *Low End Theory* and stuff. They would like make—they would be inspired by like, you know, J Dilla and stuff like that. So, they were making like these really cool like hip-hop beats, and they were like really good. And they were just like—that's all they would do.

Jesse Thorn: So, when you got to LA did you have a plan?

Sudan Archives: Yeah, I really didn't get—I just didn't care. I just wanted to go to LA, go to college, and maybe get some good grades so I could transfer to a—you know, a music college or something. And that's what I was gonna do, and I was just gonna like live and be an independent person, you know?

Jesse Thorn: So, let's talk for a minute again about what kind of violin stuff you heard that you were into. So, we talked about Czechoslovakia. Right? There's a variety of kind of violin-instruments in West Africa, right?

Sudan Archives: Yeah. There's gonjes. There's ritis. There's a lot of like one-string fiddles that I would say are like the first violins. They're like Stone Age violins that have been invented, you know, a long time ago. And the way that they play, it reminds me of fiddle music. It's like they play—They make it seem like they're playing on like a violin, but it's really in one string. So, when I discovered that music, it really inspired the songs like "Come Meh Way". Because like it's just like wild rifts.

Music: "Come Meh Way" from the album *Sudan Archives* by Sudan Archives.

And I can't escape; I get blown away

When you come my way (when you come my way)

And I can't escape; I get blown away

When you come my way (when you come my way)

And I can't escape...

(Music fades out.)

Sudan Archives: Yeah! That was like a huge like moment, discovering African fiddles. So yeah. Skip that, in Sudan, they're actually playing the violin, but they're doing it in their own way. And like, their music is just so good, and there's like a really, really strong violin culture there. And it's like—it really like fascinated my mind that there's strong Black violin culture, like even as like—during slavery, there was a lot of like fiddlers and stuff. And like, I read that if you were like a fiddler, you were worth more. *(Chuckles awkwardly.)* That's trippy.

But yeah. African American fiddle music, like there's some music like that. And then there's West African gonje fiddles from like the northern Ghana. And there's like traditional Sudanese violin music. And there's like Ethiopian violins. And all around Africa, there's basically—there's these like one-string fiddles, and then they also play violin. And like, when I discovered all that, I just felt like seen or something. 'Cause I was like, "Oh, like I'm not the only Black person in my orchestra. I'm just like in a place right now. And I need to just like find my sound. Yup!"

Jesse Thorn: You're not the only one where you are. You're one of many; you just happen to be 6,000 miles away?

Sudan Archives: Exactly! Like! I'm not an enigma.

(They chuckle.)

I'm just a *(censor beep)*. Can you cuss on here?

Jesse Thorn: I mean, we'll beep it out.

[00:20:00]

I can't imagine we'd cut that. It was too good.

(Sudan laughs.)

We'll have to beep it, I think.

How important is it to you that your music jams? Like, how important is it that it's danceable, that it's like—?

Sudan Archives: Yeah, it's like really important. Like, it has to bop. Like, I will make a beat all year just making sure, like— It would be like a really like (*censor beep*) beat, but I will like make sure I got the swing right and that it bops, and like the ideas are there, and then like I'll like get other people to like redo the baseline or this or that. But it's like— It has to have some feeling, you know?

Jesse Thorn: Because it's not a natural— It's not an easy, obvious instrument, the violin, to make bang. You know what I mean?

(Sudan agrees.)

In western pop music.

Sudan Archives: In western pop, yeah. It's not banging.

Jesse Thorn: It's corny filler, right?

Sudan Archives: It's not banging. And like, that's what I'm saying. I discovered it bangs. The fill used to be the music that you go in a club, and it is the filler, and everybody just is raunchy—like little raunchy, hot, little puff thing. And that's what I'm doing! But in a Black girl way. *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: You know, your music— Because I'm old, your music makes me think a little bit of Timbaland.

Sudan Archives: Oh yeah. I love Timb— Look, I love Timbaland. Timbaland, I love you.

Jesse Thorn: I love you too, Timbaland.

Sudan Archives: *(Laughs.)* Like, I low-key— Like, that era probably was the—aside from like all the stuff I was doing, going to the shows—that era is— I'm trying to be like that.

Jesse Thorn: Well, I mean, the “that” of that era is basically Timbaland. *(Laughs.)* There's not much—

Sudan Archives: Yeah. Yeah! Like, I just wanna be like Timbaland. I wanna be like Timbaland. I wanna be like Timbaland, and I'm going to be like Timbaland. And Timbaland? Yeah. Now you know.

Jesse Thorn: Timbaland made a record with Bubba Sparxxx that I really love that has a looot of fiddles on it. And there's—

Sudan Archives: Ooooh, I have not heard of that.

Jesse Thorn: They're fiddle fiddles. Like, he used a lot of pretty straight country music in making the beats. And I think that must be why it reminds me of your music, that like—the idea of taking these sounds and turning them into dance sounds. And like urban dance. Like, there are things about the kind of Irish jig kind of dance music. But there's also like hip-hop beat aesthetics that you make the sounds into.

Sudan Archives: Yeah! Like, I'm sampling myself all the time. I'm basically getting high, playing violin, putting a bunch of like guitar parts through it, "Oh, that's weird." And then I'm re-sampling that and then making a bop. (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: What kind of getting high are we talking about? What are the paths here?

Sudan Archives: I love weed. And I love psychedelics. Psychedelics is gonna heal the world. Every Black person should do psychedelics, because we're already just so traumatized. We need to do psychedelics! Actually, everybody just needs to do psychedelics!

Jesse Thorn: What did your "be home by 10" family think about all that?

Sudan Archives: I don't even think they knew I was on these things. She thought I was out there just having sex and stuff, but I was discovering God in a way I've never— You know?! I was talking to God! (*Laughs.*)

And I talked about it to my mom. I'm like, "Did you know I was doing shrooms and stuff?"

She was like, "No! But then I kind of got hip, and then it's like there's nothing I can do!"

And I was like, "Yeah, you're right. There's nothing you can do."

But now, we healed her disk—like, back thing that she has. And she— You know, it helps her back. And I just think it's so funny that all of my like family members are asking me to send them like weed and stuff—this weed cream—because they all got aching body stuff. You know? And now it's just funny, 'cause y'all was judging me! Y'all was like really judging me, though! And now you doing what I'm doing! Huh! Huh-huh-huh! (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: In this new record, there's a lot of you trying to figure out what home is and create home. There's a great song on here called "Homemaker" that is sort of mixed-up bowl of different of those different feelings. Was that partly about— You know, a lot of us were just in our houses a lot.

Sudan Archives: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. My home looked like an IKEA trap house before COVID happened. And then when COVID happened, I actually had time to decorate! I started doing stuff. Ooh! It's a vibe now. So, then I made that song 'cause I was like, "(*Singing.*) Why don't you step inside my house?" Because, you know, I was like, "I want someone to come over. Like, it's so cute!" And I remember like, that was the first song I made on the album.

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And then I knew from there, I was like, “This album is gonna stem from that song.” And that's when I— Yeah, I remember like making it and starting with the claps. And like, I remember I started getting a bunch of plants, so I just started singing about the stuff in my house.

Music: “Home Maker” from the album *Natural Brown Prom Queen* by Sudan Archives.

I just got a wall mount for my plants

And hoping that they'll thrive around the madness

Won't you step inside my lovely cottage?

Feels so green, it feels like magic

Only bad b— in my trellis

And baby, I'm the baddest

Wake me up when this gets to the action

When the place a mess, I get the maddest

I'm so sorry, baby; it's a habit

When you go away, I get the saddest

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Was it really truly like a “look around, start singing about the first four things you see”? *(Chuckles.)*

Sudan Archives: Was it? No, 'cause I was in the basement, and I was talking about what was upstairs. I was just— But I had just bought a wall mount for my plants, so I was probably just singing about that, like— I was just singing about what was on my mind, like kind of freestyling it. And then finished it. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: There is also a lot on this record about like home beyond the physical place. You know what I mean? Like, I imagined you must have been thinking—as you were sitting in an apartment or recording in a basement in LA—about what you had left in Cincinnati, what you wanted from there, whether you wanted to be there.

Sudan Archives: Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: I knew a lot of people who moved home during the pandemic from places like New York and—

Sudan Archives: Yeah, me too.

Jesse Thorn: And I'm from San Francisco. I can't afford to move home. But. (*Laughs.*)

Sudan Archives: (*Amused.*) Right! Yeah, you can't go home.

Jesse Thorn: But you know, everybody moved to upstate New York or whatever because they reevaluated their lives. Did you have that feeling, as somebody who had so rejected where you were from?

Sudan Archives: Yeah. Exactly. No, I was like, "Look. I'm not going back, or I'll turn to stone. Okay? So, I'm gonna ground myself even if it kills me!"

Jesse Thorn: What was your sister's role in all of this? 'Cause you have a twin sister with whom you had made music when you were teens. She was back in Cincinnati?

Sudan Archives: Yeah! She like moved back to Cincinnati, 'cause her lease was up. So, she was like, "I'm going back to Cincinnati at this time." So, she just moved back to LA right now. So, we live four minutes away from each other. So, she was just in Cincinnati that whole COVID time. So, that really— So, I had like no family. I was just like, "Look, I'm gonna make a home. I'm just gonna stay here. I'm gonna hold down the fort!"

Jesse Thorn: Had you been as close with her as people imagine twin siblings to be?

Sudan Archives: Yeah. Like, we get close, and then we hate each other, then we get close, then we hate each other. Right now, we're close. I basically forced her to come on tour with me and quit her job and do the merch.

Jesse Thorn: What's it like to have your sister on tour with you, selling tapes and LPs in the back?

Sudan Archives: It was like amazing! She basically was like the best. She drove most of the time and was slinging the merch. And then we just slept in the rooms together to save money.

Jesse Thorn: My wife and her sister will sleep in a bed together at a moment's notice. You couldn't pay me enough to get in a bed with my brothers. They smell terrible.

Sudan Archives: (*Chuckles softly.*) (*Whispering.*) That's hilarious.

Jesse Thorn: I love them very much.

Sudan Archives: That's hilarious, yeah. (*Laughs musically.*)

Jesse Thorn: I love them so much, but...

Sudan Archives: She was doing really good on tour. Like, she works really well under pressure. It was great. Everyone kept thinking it was me though. When they would walk in, they would hug her, and then she'd be like, "*(Awkwardly.)* I'm not Sudan."

Jesse Thorn: Are the two of you identical?

Sudan Archives: No! (*Scoffs.*) You know how people be.

Jesse Thorn: You're talking about White people?

(Sudan confirms.)

Yeah.

Sudan Archives: Mm-hmm. (*Whispering.*) They think everybody look the same.

Jesse Thorn: Mm-hmm. (*With a goofy affect.*) Guilty!

Sudan Archives: (*Laughs.*) Oh my god. But I'm a visual person, so I could never— When I see a face—? Like, twins? Identical? I can tell them apart. Because they act different. They're like moving different, you know?

Jesse Thorn: Well, your sister could be on stage with you.

Sudan Archives: She could! I keep telling her, "You better learn to fiddle again, 'Cause you could come out; we could do a little thing."

Jesse Thorn: So, the plan is for her to learn the fiddle, so she can do your fiddle parts, so you can do more arm dancing?

Sudan Archives: Well, I was thinking— You know how dudes be on stage with the guitar, and they got a backup guitar? Like, somebody can hold me down while I go like (*mimics the violin*). And someone's like (*mimics the violin, but deeper*). And I'm like (*lilting violin scatting*), and she's just like (*low violin gargling*).

Jesse Thorn: Sure!

Sudan Archives: Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Makes perfect sense.

Sudan Archives: Really does.

Jesse Thorn: You gotta just save your money and hire, Miri Ben-Ari, the hip-hop violinist.

[00:30:00]

Sudan Archives: Oh my god! That's a funny story. That's the first CD that my uncle Ted gave me. He bought my violin, and he gave me a Miri Ben-Ari CD, and that was the first time I saw a violinist doing their own thing. And I was like, "Oh! Oh, I can be like that!"

Jesse Thorn: Do you like working the road?

Sudan Archives: I mean, I really like it, because basically—I don't like it because I miss home, but I really like it because I basically practice the violin a lot. When I'm on the road, it's like that's the time where I'm like really serious about practicing scales and stuff. Like, for every song, I make like an exercise sheet that has like "Chevy" is this song, in this scale, here are the exercises I practice it." And like, I just feel like I love playing the violin, and I love learning the violin. And I love knowing like, "Ooh, I'm getting better!" 'Cause it's been a slow growth for me. Like, I haven't been like—You know, it's been very like freeform and just kind of like—just live experiences really just have trained me. But right now, I'm in my like routine bag where I feel like I could like stay the same, or I could just (*whispering*) go crazy!

Jesse Thorn: I imagine it's a very different kind of skill to play your records when you are making your records and to play them on a stage. That like, because your sound is so much about manipulating the sounds that the violin makes—you know, you might just be standing there playing the same four notes 20 times until they sound exactly the right kind of way you want them to sound. Which is a very different skill than going on stage and playing a whole thing straight through.

Sudan Archives: Yeah! I know! So, I got these exercises that basically help me—it's like these crazy exercises. And my music and my melodies are really simple, but I'm like now trying to like practice these like intricate scales. So, when I'm onstage, it just feels like I can do it and sing at the same time. Like, it's like nothing. Well, I'm trying to get to that point. But it's kind of working! And it's kind of fun. Like, even songs that don't have violin, I've created violin things to play. And it's just like really fun. I don't know. I just love violin.

Jesse Thorn: So, when you're on stage and you're performing, do you have a band these days?

Sudan Archives: Well, right now I just have like a Moog player who plays samples on SPDX and drum stuff on it. And then, I have my SP-404 that I do samples—melodic samples on—and play the violin. And it's been banging, because bass is important in my music. And now when you walk in my show, you hear and feel the bass shaking your heart up. And I'm just like yes. But in LA, I had my homie play guitar on "Chevy S10". He produced some of the songs with me. And it looked so good! A three-piece, too. So, I feel like what I really want is like a drummer that knows Ableton really well, the same bass player who samples stuff, and then me. And that'll be the complete trio.

Jesse Thorn: We'll be back in just a second! It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR!

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Promo:

(*Sci-fi beeping.*)

Music: Cheerful synth.

Ben Harrison: Hey, do you have a favorite episode of *Star Trek*?

Adam Pranica: If you do, you should also have a favorite *Star Trek* podcast.

Ben: *Greatest Trek* is about all the new streaming *Star Trek* shows, and it's a great companion to *The Greatest Generation*—our hit show about back catalog *Star Trek* that you grew up with.

Adam: It's a comedy podcast by two folks who used to be video producers. So, it's a serious mix of comedy and insight that fits right into the Maximum Fun network of shows.

Ben: And *Greatest Trek* is one of the most popular *Star Trek* podcasts in the world.

Adam: So, if you're following *Lower Decks*, *Prodigy*, or *Strange New Worlds*, come hang out with us every Friday as we roast and review favorite *Star Trek* shows.

Ben: It's on MaximumFun.org, YouTube, or your podcatching app.

(*Sci-fi beep.*)

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: I am Jesse Thorn. This is *Bullseye*. My guest is Sudan Archives.

Are there like electronic music/violin club meetups? Like, do you ever have lunch with Laurie Anderson?

Sudan Archives: Um, no, but I do—I did this kind of meetup with—oh! Lora Escudé, yeah. So, basically she is like a play—she's the owner of this like playback company. Like, she'll do playback for like Honey and West and like stuff like that, back in the day.

[00:35:00]

But she knows everything about Ableton and violin. And I do know this guy, Trevor Noah, who's like—he is just like that. So, when I find people like that, I definitely try to like meet up with them, and I'm just like, “(*Whispering.*) You wanna talk about violins? But electronic violins and nerdy stuff? And can you lowkey like help me... make it... better?

Jesse Thorn: There was a dude in my neighborhood when I was kid, in the Mission district in San Francisco, who would wear like... kind of like a loincloth sort of like you might see an Aztec dancer wear. And he was I think multi-ethnic, but probably read as African American and had big, long braids that he wore up above his head. And so, he would just be wearing this loincloth and boots, and he had these big, intense—I googled a picture of them so I could show them to you—had these big, intense braids up on top of his head. And his name was Thoth.

(Sudan “ooh”s.)

And he'd just be jamming out on the street. And then, one time I think he won an Oscar or something. I think that it was like a documentary about him that won an Oscar or something. But anyway.

Sudan Archives: Oh, wait, I'm gonna look that up! What's his name?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, that dude, would just be— Thoth. Yeah. I googled Thoth because I was like, “I think that guy's name was Thoth.” And it was. It was Thoth.

Sudan Archives: (*Whispered.*) That's amazing.

Jesse Thorn: SK Thoth, or often just Thoth.

Sudan Archives: SK?

Jesse Thorn: He is a New York based pray-formance artist.

Sudan Archives: Pray-formance?! (*Whispering.*) What does that even mean?

Jesse Thorn: It's his eclectic mix of violin, voice, and dance performance.

Sudan Archives: Hell, the hell yeah!

Jesse Thorn: It's pretty badass. I mean, the other thing about him is he's only wearing the loin cloth, and he only-wears-a-loincloth very well. He looks like a million dollars only wearing a line cloth. He's pretty yoked. Pretty handsome guy, Thoth.

Sudan Archives: So, Thoth was the god of the moon, it says.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, you gotta search for “Thoth violin” or something.

Sudan Archives: Okay. So, he looks like the god, like the Thoth god.

Jesse Thorn: He sort of does. Sometimes he wears a cool dress. Here's one with him wearing a cool dress. He looks pretty good in that.

Sudan Archives: Oh my god! This is crazy. This is crazy! Oh my god, I need to take a picture of this.

Jesse Thorn: I'm just gonna talk about Thoth now. It's gonna be you and Laurie Anderson and Thoth, having your crazy violin club.

Sudan Archives: Yeah, I really wanna like start like a weird little meetup thing. That would be cool.

Jesse Thorn: Do you have a dream goal? Do you wanna be an MTV pop star?

Sudan Archives: I wanna learn the violin. Like, I wanna be so good on the violin. I don't really care about anything else. I just wanna be so good. You know? I wanna master my instrument, and that's never gonna happen. But yeah.

Jesse Thorn: What does "so good" mean for you?

Sudan Archives: I want to know a lot of like material that I like. I wanna learn it, and I also want to be able to understand the theory of music and my music specifically. I wanna be able to like, just be able to play any scale right now and actually understand what that means. I think that would be pretty cool!

Jesse Thorn: Could you see yourself ten years from now being Miri Ben-Ari, the hip-hop violinist? Like, can you see yourself being a person who's like—whatever the big, national headliner of urban music is, you're the one that goes on tour with them and plays the violin parts? Or is it gonna be your thing?

Sudan Archives: I don't know. I think it might— If it's like a dope thing, then yeah; maybe. But I always wanted to just be like in a band where people are screaming.

(Jesse laughs delightedly.)

Like, and be that violinist. Like, looking hot in the corner. Like—

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: If anyone is wondering, Sudan Archives just offered a sort of physical interpretation of ripping out a sweet violin solo, sort of like Eddie Van Halen style. *(Laughs.)*

Sudan Archives: I think that'd be so dope. My friend Koran said she wants to start a band, and she wants to scream, and I told her I'd be in it.

Jesse Thorn: This could be big!

Sudan Archives: Yeah, I think it's gonna be big.

Jesse Thorn: Do you go to church now?

Sudan Archives: (*Embarrassed.*) No, I don't go to church!

Jesse Thorn: Do you think about it ever?

Sudan Archives: Yeah. It seems like I just don't ever have time, to be honest.

Jesse Thorn: Do you think you would if you had time?

Sudan Archives: Yeah! Why not? I also would go to the mosque, try it all out.

[00:40:00]

Jesse Thorn: Do you believe in the same kind of god that you believed in when you were 14?

Sudan Archives: Yeah. I mean, subconsciously, yeah. Like, it's all the same to me. So, yeah. I definitely feel like I'm a little ant, and the world is bigger this than me, and then there's the ocean. And that's God. Like, if you don't think that, then that's cool. But that's what I think, and I think that makes me sleep good. (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: 100%, I thought that you meant that you think of yourself as an aunt—A-U-N-T. Like, a fun aunt, like an auntie. Like, you're gonna have nieces and nephews, and you're gonna take them to concerts.

Sudan Archives: Like, I'm a little ant bug! I'm ant to this world, (*adding a posh flourish*) and I am humbled by my experience.

Jesse Thorn: Well, Sudan Archives, I sure appreciate you taking the time to be on *Bullseye*. It was really nice to get to talk to you.

Sudan Archives: Thank you! I was like really nervous!

Jesse Thorn: It's gonna be okay.

Sudan Archives: And I hope I didn't say anything crazy. But I just have to be myself. So! Bye, NPR.

(*They giggle.*)

Music: “Freakalizer” from the album *Natural Brown Prom Queen* by Sudan Archives.

My feet can't touch the ground

'Cause I can't seem to grasp on what's going wrong

(Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.)

Jesse Thorn: Bye, Sudan Archives! That interview with Sudan was taped in 2022. Her great new album is called *The BPM*. Go buy or stream it.

Music:

And what's up with the frown?

'Cause I know we'll pass this test, we'll be alright

The world is spinning 'round

And we don't go time to sit and dwell on lies

I got that energizer (Yeah)

That freakalizer

You got that tranquilizer (I got that tranquilizer, baby)

(Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.)

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created in 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—where right now, I'm preparing for a visit from our friend, Tonya Mosley, from *Fresh Air!* She's stopping by for lunch. Hi, Tonya. Hi, *Fresh Airs*. Love You.

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 from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our friend, Dan Wally. You can find him on Bandcamp at DJWsounds.bandcamp.com. Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. It's

called “Huddle Formation”. Our thanks to The Go! Team and to their label, Memphis Industries.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you will find video from just about all our interviews—including the ones you heard this week. And! Sometimes extra stuff. We had a clip that wasn't on the air with Vince Staples going nutso viral on Instagram right now. 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 Maximum Fun dot org and is distributed by NPR.

Music:

I don't wanna be alone, no

And I pray, pray that I learn, learn

To never get on your nerves, nerves

But if I do, baby, it's alright

'Cause I just wanna hold you...

(Music fades out.)