[00:00:00]

(ADVERTISEMENT)

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

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

Music: "Huddle Formation" from the album *Thunder Lightning Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast upbeat peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks then fades out.

Jesse Thorn: It is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. What makes a joke? It's a straightforward question, right? It's like a setup with a punchline? Maybe add a tag at the end? But the more interesting question—maybe the tougher question—is what makes a joke work? Or how do you make a joke work? Joke writers have spent their lives puzzling over those questions, and I submit to you the answer in book form. *Joke Farming: How to Write Comedy and Other Nonsense*.

Its author is my guest, Elliott Kalan. Why is Elliott an authority on the matter of joke writing? Well, let's take a look at his resume. He started as a production assistant on *The Daily Show* working under Jon Stewart, where he worked his way up to head writer of that program—which for many years was the best place on television to hear jokes. He also served as the head writer of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. More recently, he's been the head writer of an upcoming *Ghostbusters* show. He also hosts the wonderful podcast *The Flop House*.

In short, one of the funniest and smartest people I've ever met, and he's here in the studio with me now. Let's get into it.

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

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

Elliott Kalan: Thank you so much, Jesse! I'm so excited to be here on the show. One of my favorite shows.

Jesse Thorn: Why did you wanna reveal your secrets, Elliott?

Elliott Kalan: Well, *(sighs heavily)* there comes a time when the skeletons in the closet just get too loud. The rattling of the bones.

(Jesse laughs.)

No, *(chuckles)* I assume you mean my joke writing secrets.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah.

Elliott Kalan: I love joke writing, and I love comedy. And comedy is not just jokes, but jokes are the most important part of comedy—in my opinion. I love when things are funny. And I felt like I've spent so much time writing jokes as a professional joke writer that I wanted to have a chance to kind of share what I've figured out, what I've learned, and also to help other people understand the work that goes into writing jokes. Because I think—on a very basic, selfish level—I think they'll appreciate it more if they know it's really hard to do. But it's really interesting, and it's not just somebody getting up onstage and picking up the microphone and just spitting their truth off the dome and just making people guffaw with reality.

There's a lot of work that goes into writing jokes. And I know, personally, the more I learn about the way something works, the more I'm interested in it, the more I appreciate it. I'm hoping that's what happens here. But also, because there's a lot of joke writers out there, Jesse, that are relying on their gut instinct. They're just writing based on inspiration alone, and that's no way to build a joke writing career. You'll wear yourself out; you'll burn out from it. And so, I wanted to show people there's a way to write jokes where you can do it reliably; you can do it on demand and in a funny way that lowers the amount of anxiety and stress that you will carry if you are just a servant to inspiration and have to wait for your brain to tell you it has a joke ready for you when it decides.

Jesse Thorn: Why is this book called *Joke Farming* and not called *Joke Grabbing* or *Joke Hunting* or *Joke Catching*?

Elliott Kalan: That's a very good question, and I'll tell you exactly why. So, I think a lot of people when they start writing jokes, they are joke grabbers or joke hunters. I call it joke foragers. You know? People who are kind of pulling funny ideas out of the air as they come to them. You know? The same way that early humans were dependent on the herds of wild beasts roaming through the Savannah—you know, where they were—and had no control over when food would be available.

When you're starting out joke writing, you don't have control over when jokes come to you. You know? And joke farming, to me, is figuring out a way— And so, I have this joke writing process that I use. And I just advise people—in the book, I say, "This is how I do it. You don't have to do it this way, but you should think about how your brain thinks and develop a process that feels right to you." But a way to be able to write jokes kind of reliably, to be able to write them on demand, write them when you need to, rather than being subject to the unpredictability and unreliability of sudden inspiration. You know? Or gut writing and hoping that an idea comes to you. And it's exactly that difference between being a joke hunter, where you gotta go out and find those ideas that hopefully exist, and a joke farmer—where you're like, "I can create my own jokes."

[00:05:00]

"I know how to sow the seeds and then reap the rewards!"

Jesse Thorn: Something that drove home for me the idea of joke farming, relative to joke gathering, in your book was I think a lot of folks understand that comics have notebooks. Right?

Elliott Kalan: Yes They love to bring 'em up on stage and then flip through 'em, and go, "What else? What else? What else?"

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughs.)* Yeah. But you know, everybody knows Larry David has a notebook, and he writes things down in it, and then he— You know, if he loses it it's a catastrophe or whatever. Right?

Elliott Kalan: Yeah. I remember the nationwide search for that one notebook. Yeah. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: But I think people who don't write comedy might imagine that what someone is writing in that notebook is jokes. And it may be that occasionally they're writing down a joke they thought of. Maybe they were talking to someone and said something funny and thought, "Oh, I should remember that. That was good." But more often, as you describe in the book, what they might be writing down is the seeds for growing jokes later. Things they have noticed; things they have noticed they care about; things that they have noticed they have a perspective on.

Elliott Kalan: Yeah. It's a— You are writing down, often in a— 'Cause I also carry—I'll show you! *(Mumbling.)* This one's pretty beat up. I'm due for a new one.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, you definitely bought that at the 99 Cent store. In a packet of four.

Elliott Kalan: I actually—I bought a case of 72 from the Dollar Tree website.

Jesse Thorn: *(Chuckling.)* Okay. Excellent.

Elliott Kalan: Because I realized I liked this brand a lot. But I have stuff in here that are— It's like, for instance, my podcast—*The Flop House*—we just did a show in Chicago. And I had to do a presentation about Chicago, and so I have some joke ideas in here for things I can say about Chicago. And it's like—right here it just says, "Can't roast Chicago harder than Mrs. O'Leary's cow."

(Jesse cackles.)

Like, that just— So, it's like not a full joke but it's like part of the way to a joke. And so, you're writing down just—yeah, thoughts or things or something that doesn't make sense. A lot of jokes come from a thing that just kind of confuses or irritates you, so you might write down something like, "How clean are the shoes at the shoe store? You don't know." But that's not a joke. It's just a thing that might be confusing or annoying, and later you can process it. You know?

Jesse Thorn: Let's get simple. What are the constituent parts of a joke?

Elliott Kalan: So—okay. There's two ways to think about this. Way number one is just the physical structure of a joke. Which is just—the simplest way to do it is there's a setup, and there's a punchline. There's a piece of information, and then there's a last piece of information that changes your understanding of that first piece of information in some way. To get it into beyond just structure, these are the basic elements of joke. Okay?

There's voice. Who is telling the joke? Where's it coming from? Every joke implies a teller—a mind that is creating this, and it's expressing their point of view or their perspective, their frame of preference. There's the premise of the joke. What is the thing they're trying to say? What's the intention of this joke? And what's the funny kind of little story that you tell to get that intention across? There's the structure I just talked about. How do you arrange the elements of information in this joke? A joke is basically time-released units of information that are meant to plant ideas or feelings in the audience's mind in the right order, and then leaving out just enough of that information so that the audience has to fill in a little bit of it. And that's where you're literally getting the joke. You're literally understanding what's not being said in it and filling it in, so you get it as a joke.

Jesse Thorn: As though the joke teller is holding two livewires and bringing them closer to each other until they're close enough that the audience is that electrical arc between them.

Elliott Kalan: That's such a better metaphor than the one I use in the book.

(Jesse laughs.)

But that but exactly that. You wanna pull the wires close enough together that the electricity jumps between them, but you're not just jamming them together. Then there's tone. What is the feeling of this joke? I define tone as the kind of emotional temperature that tells the audience how sincere or ironic you're being. Is what you're saying meant to be taken as "this is how I feel about it?" Or is what you're saying meant to be taken as "this is just a funny idea?" Are you— Is this *Nanette*, or are you Steven Wright? Like, is this is incredibly emotionally sincere, or are you a man from another planet who is telling you things that could never be true?

Then there's what I call wording, which is just precision. It's just—you know—going to each detail of a joke and making sure it is clear enough, specific enough.

Jesse Thorn: And the wording doesn't have to be words in your telling.

Elliott Kalan: Doesn't have to be words.

Jesse Thorn: It could be visual elements; it could be— But that sort of specificity and clarity.

Elliott Kalan: Yes. You could also call it detailing. You know? But wording was just the easiest way to put it. But it also means just fine-tuning the elements.

And then finally, the audience. And that's probably the most important element of a joke is the audience, is having someone to react to it. Because a joke lives— For the audience, it lives in the moment when they understand it. And for me at least, as a joke maker, it lives in the moment where I have released the joke into the open, and I have that thousandth of a second maybe where I'm waiting to see if the audience likes it or not.

[00:10:00]

And that's the most exciting part of the whole process.

Jesse Thorn: We've got more still to come with Elliott Kalan. He's the author of the new book *Joke Farming: How to Write Comedy and Other Nonsense*. Stay With Us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm joined right now by Elliott Kalan. Elliott is a comedian and writer. He has served as head writer on the shows *Mystery Science Theater 3000* and *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart, among others. He also hosts the brilliant podcast *The Flop House*. Kalan has a new book out. It's about the process of writing jokes and comedy. It is called *Joke Farming: How to Write Comedy and Other Nonsense*.

So, the techniques that you describe in this book are ones that you learned writing for 10 or 12 years on the most like expository, argumentative, point-of-view driven television show in the history of television comedy.

Elliott Kalan: *(Correcting Jesse.)* One of.

Jesse Thorn: *The Daily Show*.

Elliott Kalan: Certainly, it's in the top five argumentative, expository comedy shows. Yeah. *(Chuckles.)*

Jesse Thorn: I mean, it's like a show that created a genre of television, which is a sort of like essay about what's going on in the world that is comedy.

Elliott Kalan: I mean, that's one of the amazing things about Jon Stewart's achievement with that show is taking a format of like "we're gonna tell jokes about the news," and creating in it his preferred way to deliver his thoughts in a funny way. And it was such a powerful way to do it that—like you're saying—there's this whole genre of shows that are like that. But it very much, I think, was him spending years figuring out "what fits my voice and my sensibility in the way that I wanna deliver this work?"

Jesse Thorn: One of the things that you write in the book that awed me, even as a man that knows you as a careful, fastidious thinker—

Elliott Kalan: Some would say too much!

(Jesse laughs.)

(Brightly.) Some would say, "Loosen up, Elliott!"

Jesse Thorn: Was that— At *The Daily Show*, where you eventually became head writer, you would write down non-comic turns of phrase that you heard Jon Stewart use so that you could put them into scripts later, so they would sound more like something he would say.

Elliott Kalan: Yeah. Yes, that's something I picked up from a book about White House speech writers that I read not for work, just 'cause I wanted to read it. Which is the thing I'd say to a lot of people who wanna be writers or joke writers: just read and watch a lot of the stuff you like. You know, don't just do everything for work. 'Cause the stuff you do for your own enjoyment is gonna come into play and work much more than you think it is. But I knew that my job was to write for his voice, particularly—and the correspondence voices, but mostly for his voice. And so, whatever I could do to really internalize that voice and get it down and understand it— And it helped taking phrases that I would hear him say a lot. I'd be like, "Okay, cool. If I put that in, he's gonna recognize them on the page as something he says. You know? Or he'll know how to say it, and it'll just put that much more of his reality and his stamp on it."

And I felt like my job often at that show was "I'm gonna write the jokes that Jon would have written if he either had the time I have now or knew this one piece of information that I know that I don't know whether he knows or not—but it is conceivable that he would know it."

So, it was my job to slightly expand his voice or frame of reference with what individual things I could bring to it, but to very much live in his voice and his frame of reference. So, certain things that he said, I would just be like, "Oh yeah, I've heard him say that five times in meetings."

Jesse Thorn: What's a phrase that Jon Stewart said five times in meetings?

Elliott Kalan: *(Whispered.)* It's been so long now. Can I remember them? Let's see.

I mean, for instance, he would always refer to Stephen Colbert as like "this young man," or like "a young man I know, named Stephen Colbert." Things like that.

So, I'd be like, "Okay if he's gonna—" So, there was a— I wrote a draft once of something where he was talking about— I don't know if it was Stephen leaving to go to the CBS show or something else, but I was like, "Alright well this rough version of it— 'Cause I know Jon's gonna change it. I'm gonna have him refer to him 'ah, as this young man.' You know, or something like that." Or some of it was just kinda like New Jersey types of things. Just calling people guys. You know, "these guys" or "can you believe those guys?" That kind of stuff.

Jesse Thorn: What's an example of a news story that came down the pike when you were working on *The Daily Show*, and how did you break it into a desk monologue for Jon Stewart?

Elliott Kalan: Unfortunately, the one that comes to mind most readily is the one of the sadder stories, unfortunately. The one that sticks out in my mind the most—I think because it was the most challenging for us—was when the Charlie Hebdo massacre took place in France, and it was really brutal.

[00:15:00]

It was really— The next day after that, when we were gonna have to write that show, it was a very tough day and a tough start to the day. 'Cause it felt like we have to cover it. Like, we're a comedy show; this involves a comedy thing, and it's a rough story. And we didn't really know exactly what to say about it. And the great thing about it was that we had our process. You know? We had our process of we meet, and we talk about how we feel about it; we try to come

up with ways to express that in comedy; we try to develop it further throughout the day. We look for other stories that we can use to buttress the argument we're making or the point we're making.

And because we had this production process, we were able to let the process kind of lead us through the day. And so, it was a matter of like, "Okay, what do we really think about this? How do we feel about it?"

And Jon would say often—he would tell us to steer into the skid. That if we were uncomfortable about something in a story, that's where you would wanna explore the most. Not to just say something uncomfortable or say something—you know—that will make other people uncomfortable. But if that's the part of the story that is bothering us, then that's the thing that means the most to us. And I don't remember who it was, but somebody found a story about these cows in Europe that were descended from cows the Nazis had bred to be like super cows. And they were still finding their genes in modern cattle in Europe.

And it became this thing about how hard it is to stamp out extremism. You know? Like, it's still there decades later, even in the cows. And it was one of these things where it was, "Okay, let's talk about how this makes us feel. Let's look for other stories that could help us to illustrate this and help us find a comedic premise, so we're not just stating outright 'this is terrible, and we feel bad about it.'"

And I felt the show that came out was super successful as a result of it.

Jesse Thorn: I went to a couple of *Daily Show* tapings, which were a great time. But the thing that struck me when I was sitting in that room— It would strike me occasionally on TV, but especially sitting in that room, is—

Elliott Kalan: How cold the room was?

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughs.)* No.

(Elliott "oh"s softly.)

Jon Stewart was a godhead to that audience. They couldn't have adored Jon Stewart more if he was George Washington sitting before them. Right? And it complicated the act of doing comedy, because no matter what Jon Stewart said, people would whoop and applaud as though he had just cured polio.

Was it ever difficult to write for a guy who was so adored as to be like it's hard to discern what's actually working for the audience?

Elliott Kalan: No, I don't— It wasn't difficult to write for him. It was difficult sometimes when you were watching the show, 'cause you'd be like, "Listen to what he's really saying!" And Jon, who I have nothing but great things to say about— You know, working for him was truly a wonderful experience for me, and I learned so much, and I really grew up at that show. You know, I started there when I was 20 and I was a college intern. And when I left, I was 32/33, and I had a family, and I was the head writer. And I feel like there's a number of people there that I

owe an enormous amount to. And learning from Jon was really amazing, and I think it helped that we're both kind of like Jersey Jewish guys. So, I understood his language. But it was really fantastic. So, I would never— *(Playfully suspicious.)* I'm not gonna say anything bad about him if you're trying to get me to say something bad about him!

Jesse Thorn: Not at all.

Elliott Kalan: But I think for the audience— It wasn't hard to write, but I bet it was probably frustrating in the performance sometimes. And I don't know if Jon felt this way, but I know I sometimes took satisfaction when he would say something that the audience did not like.

When Obama was a relatively new president, and Jon would criticize him, and the audience would have a kneejerk like, "Wait, what!? But I—! But I like him!"—that was always a little satisfying. Or if we told a joke that where the audience went, "*(Unpleasantly.)* Oooh…" Like, it was a little too much for them, that was always a little satisfying.

Jesse Thorn: Did you ever worry whether you were writing a laugh line or an applause line?

Elliott Kalan: No. I didn't. Not me, personally, because I just wasn't trying to. And I think it's— It's funny, because in the book I talk about how the audience is— They are literally the other half of what creates a joke. Like, if there's not someone to laugh at a joke—to hear it and laugh or not to laugh at it—then it doesn't really exist as a joke. You need an audience. And so, it's funny to think that in some ways I was discounting their reaction. I was hoping they would react to it the way I would prefer, which was with laughter rather than applause. But at the same time, also sometimes applause means they really like the joke. Like, the best was laughter followed by applause, as opposed to applause with no laughter, meaning: "We agree with you, but we weren't really listening to the joke part of it." But laughter followed by applause means "that was a great joke!" *(Laughs.)* "Like, my laughter is not stating how great I thought it was! I gotta slap my hands together!"

But I think it was something that, at least from my point of view—I was so focused on Jon as the audience for my jokes, because he was the decider of what jokes would end up on the show. And my goal was "I gotta get jokes on the show." Any episode that I'm writing for—'cause you know, you weren't always on each day's show—but any episode I'm writing for, my goal is to get at least one joke on the show.

[00:20:00]

And if I can get a joke that I wrote in the morning on the show? That's the best thing of all. If it's a joke I wrote in the afternoon, that's still great, but it's not as good.

Jesse Thorn: That's because in the afternoon it might have been an emergency, or at the very least it's a third draft.

Elliott Kalan: Yes, exactly. It's a later thing. Whereas if you wrote it in the morning, it's got through all the hurdles. Like, every obstacle that was thrown in its path, it still ended up on the show. That's an achievement.

Jesse Thorn: It's interesting that like the role of the host of a program—this is true in news as well; I've never like worked in news, so this is something I only learned as an adult wandering through the halls of NPR in Washington, DC or whatever. And you learn that the role of the host on the show is to host the show, but ultimately the role of the host of the show—like, the most important perhaps role of the host of the show—is to be where the buck stops. To be the person who decides what the tone and content of the program is, ultimately. There's like a firehose of stuff from writers and reporters or whatever it is. And somebody says, "This is what's important. This doesn't work. We would say this way." And so on down the line. And ultimately, that's the person whose mouth is opening and closing into the microphone.

Elliott Kalan: Yeah. He has the ultimate say—and should have the ultimate say, because he is the one who is standing up for that joke and who is gonna be attached to it—or for a news show, has to stand behind that news story. And you can't just say, "Oh, well they put it in there, and I didn't know what it was, and I just read it." You know?

Then it's "Who are you? You're just a face. You're just a voice. You know, you're not a thinking person creating direction at that point." And writers would often get frustrated if Jon felt a joke was going too far. And he would never be like, "This will never happen!" It just wouldn't get chosen. Or it would get rewritten after rehearsal or something.

And sometimes writers would be like, "Ugh! He doesn't wanna say it."

And I'd be like, "*(Casually.)* Yeah." 'Cause he is— It's easy for us to write a joke, and then just kind of give it to him and say, "Say it." Like, if he says something that he doesn't fully believe or can't fully stand behind, it's still attached to him. People still assume that's what he's thinking or saying. And he can't say, "Oh, well the writer wrote that. It's on them." You know that can't happen. And so, it's very easy for the person who's not public facing to not feel that responsibility the way that the host has to feel.

Jesse Thorn: Look, we're gonna take a break. When we return, we will wrap up with Elliott Kalan. He's the author of *Joke Farming: How to Write Comedy and Other Nonsense*. He spent years as a writer on *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart. What did he learn about the practice of joke writing while he was there? And is he relieved *(laughs)* not to have to write jokes every day about the things that happened that day?

We'll get into it. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Promo:

(Pleasant chimes.)

Manolo Moreno: Hey, it's Sue the Subway train.

(Pleasant chimes.)

Hey, guess what, Sue? I just inherited a game show. And I have to continue it, because there are people out there who like to curl up into a ball and listen to it.

(Thoughtful chimes.)

Yeah. It's a podcast where listeners submit game show ideas for others to play on air.

(Cheery chimes.)

Well, it is! In fact, the dumber the better.

(Querying chimes.)

Right, right. It's called *Dr. Gameshow*. Some curled up balls consider it a tradition while others call it a train wreck.

(Unhappy chimes.)

No, not you, Sue. It's *Dr. Gameshow*. If you're the sort that likes to listen to people competing for refrigerator magnets, then curl up into a ball and listen to *Dr. Gameshow* every other Wednesday on MaximumFun.org.

(Bright chimes.)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: I'm Jesse Thorn. This is *Bullseye*. My guest is comedy writer Elliott Kalan. He is, among other things, the past head writer of *The Daily Show* and *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. He's also the author of the new book *Joke Farming: How to Write Comedy and Other Nonsense*.

You lately have been working on an upcoming *Ghostbusters* television show, a Fox TV show about talking animals—

[00:25:00]

Elliott Kalan: Well, that was a while ago. Yeah. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: You know, these are not topical.

Elliott Kalan: They're not news jokes shows. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah.

Elliott Kalan: Which is real nice in today's world. It's real nice not to have to make the world funny. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: So, here's my question for you. The world of news jokes is upside down right now, like it has been at no time in my life. Stephen Colbert got canceled.

Elliott Kalan: Mm-hm. And like, legitimately business canceled, not socially "said the wrong thing" canceled. Like, the show will end.

Jesse Thorn: Yes. You know, Jimmy Kimmel was pulled from the air after a direct threat from the chairman of the FCC to pull the broadcast license of his network, because the FCC and the president didn't like his show.

How does it feel right now to have this long history of writing jokes about the news when writing those jokes about the news is the most fraught thing you could possibly be writing jokes about now? Even in the context of an entertainment economy that's upside down in general!

Elliott Kalan: Yeah. If I was in that world right now, I think I'd be really worried, and I think I'd be really anxious. But at the same time, I think there'd be a kind of thrill to it. And I think—from where I'm sitting now, I have a kind of an envy and a kind of FOMO. Because it's much more fraught, but that also is— The flip side of that is that it means a lot more right now. Like, now's a time when it's really meaningful to make those jokes in a way that it wasn't necessarily as meaningful during some of the times I was at *The Daily Show*. It was important, I think, in some ways. But it was not dangerous in the way it kind of is now, in a real way.

I talk about satire in the book a little bit, and I talk about how satire is really hard to pull off, and it can get you in real trouble if it doesn't work right. Or! If it does work right! And that in other countries, often when a totalitarian government takes over, it is comedians and satirists that are thrown in jail right away. Because dictators are very thin skinned, and it's a lot harder to frighten someone when they see the ridiculousness in you. I think one of the most amazing things recently was the decision by the protesters in Portland, I think it was, to like dress silly when they were protesting ICE. Because it instantly makes it harder I think for—it makes it harder for anyone to buy into the kind of narrative that the government is pushing that "this place is chaos; it's shambles; we have to send these soldiers in! We have to send the national guard in!"

Because if it was chaos and shambles, would people be dressed as like silly frogs, unicorns, things like that? Probably not. But also, because it instantly reflects back on their opponents a sort of ridiculousness. But there's a quote in the book that I have from Alan Moore—the comic book author and wizard—or warlock I should say. Warlock. Because he talks about casting magic spells on people. 'Cause if you cast a spell on somebody, put a curse on them, maybe they'll be cross-eyed; maybe they their chickens will lay eggs funny for a little bit. But if you cast a satire on somebody, they will lose their respect in the eyes of their colleagues, of their fellow citizens, of maybe their family, of maybe themselves. And if you write the satire well enough, hundreds of years later people will still be laughing derisively at this person. And that there's a real power to that. And that this is why, historically, you have crackdowns on these types of things when someone is in power who is both power hungry and has low self-esteem.

And so, I'm very worried for my colleagues in that part of the business—more because it's hard to live your life when you don't know if the government is gonna destroy the thing you're working at. You know, if you're gonna lose your job or your health insurance or anything like that, it's very tough. But there is a sort of an envy in some ways that like, "Oh yeah, they're like in the middle of it right now, and there's probably something very meaningful about that." There's something— As difficult as it is and as probably frustrating as the work is, there's something very like ennobling about feeling like, "Oh yeah, well I'm doing this at a time when it matters." You know?

That being said, I feel like the that's the kind of comedy that lives in the moment and then kind of evaporates after a little bit. Whereas the comedy that lasts for a very long time is often the stuff that is sillier or more general. And so, my goal—kind of selfishly—has been to try to work lately in comedy that could last 1,000 years. Less because it's so profound than because it's so kinda like goofy—you know?—or so silly that you're just reliably gonna laugh at it. And I find that the comedy that I hold to myself most dearly is not necessarily the comedy that like that makes a strong point but the comedy that makes me laugh.

[00:30:00]

Jesse Thorn: Well, Elliott Kalan, thank you so much for all your time, and thanks for your wonderful book.

Elliott Kalan: Thank you so much for having me, Jesse. It has been such a pleasure to talk to you, and I will love this moment always.

Jesse Thorn: Elliott Kalan. His book, *Joke Farming: How to Write Comedy and Other Nonsense*, is available anywhere you buy books. And hey, before I go, can I just recommend that you listen to his podcast *The Flop House*? I will say, I am not a bad movie guy. I'm not a guy who's all about watching bad movies and laughing at them. I just have so little time, I would rather watch good movies. But despite the fact that I have so little time, I always make time for Elliott's amazing, hilarious podcast, *The Flop House*—which is an insightful show about film as well as one of the funniest podcasts that there is.

Transition: Bright, upbeat synth.

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye. Bullseye,* created in the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, as well as at Maximum Fun HQ in the historic jewelry district in downtown Los Angeles California. In that district, I just found a very nice place to get a BLT.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun, Hannah Moroz. Our video producer, Daniel Speer. We have booking help on *Bullseye* from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our friend Dan Wally, also known. DJ W. You can find his music at DJWsounds.bandcamp.com. Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. It's called Huddle Formation. Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where we put up video from all our interviews—including the ones you heard this week. If you enjoyed an interview that you heard this week, why not share it using those videos? Just search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* on YouTube.

Alright, 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.)