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

**Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

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

**Jesse Thorn:** It is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. So, I wanna tell you about a new television program. It's called *Haha, You Clowns*. If you haven't seen it, you can watch it on Adult Swim or stream it on HBO Max. And like a lot of Adult Swim shows, it is animated. And like a lot of animated Adult Swim shows, the animation is presented in a very distinct way. Everyone is a little bit grotesque. They have tiny, uneven eyes. When they talk, their mouths open in slightly unsettling ways. Also, on this show, every character pretty much is absolutely yolked. Just the beefiest bunch of cartoon characters this side of *He-Man*. I say that—possibly more beefy than *He-Man*.

But unlike most Adult Swim shows, all that off-kilter animation belies *Haha, You Clowns*' true nature, which is basically the sweetest thing on television since maybe *Joe Pera Talks With You*—possibly even sweeter than that show?! I love *Haha, You Clowns*. It's about the Campbell boys. They are three, again, monstrously beefy brothers who are maybe like late high school/early college age. It's hard to say. The Campbell boys lost their mom before the show began, and they live with their dad, Tom. He is a television weatherman. He is also big and beefy. The four of them together navigate life and its challenges in a way that is very wholesome, healthy, and supportive.

Like, when one brother gets sad because he lost his beloved bomber jacket, the whole family rallies to his aid to cheer him up and help him recover it. When they need some outside help, maybe they ask their girlfriends, or maybe they just chat with their next-door neighbor: real life billiards professional, Jeanette Lee. The show is created by and mostly voiced by my guest, Joe Cappa. I'm so thrilled to get to talk to him about one of my favorite new television programs. Let's get right into it.

**Transition:** Bright, brassy synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** Joe Cappa welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show, and I'm such a fan of your show.

**Joe Cappa:** Thanks so much, and thanks for reaching out.

**Jesse Thorn:** Can you tell me how you describe the show to people? Because by the time people are hearing this coming out of my mouth, I will probably have tried to describe it in the introduction to this interview but have probably failed. (*Laughs.*)

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. You know, it's like a take on a show like *7th Heaven* or something that's wholesome. When we onboarded artists and had them sort of download my sensibility and like the humor of the show—you know, we told them, "It's as if a live action director was given an animated show, and they can't draw very well, and it's like they're trying their best to do a *7th Heaven*, but it's animated."

**Jesse Thorn:** And it's like their job to draw.

**Joe Cappa:** (*Confirming.*) One person's job.

**Jesse Thorn:** Like it's just that they're ordering drawing people. Like, the idea is that a guy who can't really draw is trying to draw it?

**Joe Cappa:** (*Chuckling.*) Yeah, yeah. You'd like to think it's just one guy animating everything and trying like really fast to do it.

**Jesse Thorn:** Have you watched *7th Heaven* or similar programs?

**Joe Cappa:** When I came up with the idea and everything, I had never seen *7th Heaven* and then sort of like retroactively watching a few episodes—I mean, I'd seen like clips that would be shared on Instagram that was just like—(*laughs*) it's just like such an outlandish plot. You know?

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughing.*) You were on—like, people talk about they're on, you know, book Twitter or whatever. You were on *7th Heaven* instead!

**Joe Cappa:** Once the algorithm knows I'm watching it, they're just gonna gimme a ton of *7th Heaven*, *Family Matters*.

**Jesse Thorn:** It started with a couple of *One Tree Hill* clips and—

**Joe Cappa:** It's the entry point. Yeah. And yeah, what's your take on *7th Heaven*? I mean it's—

**Jesse Thorn:** I have a friend that worked on *One Tree Hill* for like 10 years. And I could not bear to watch it, but he was a nice man—is a nice man—who was well-treated on the program, which turned out to be run by a creep.

**Joe Cappa:** Oh, okay.

**Jesse Thorn:** The guy turned out to be a creep that ran that show. Yeah. But like, it's its own world. Like, my friend also ended up writing movies about the royal family for basic cable networks and stuff.

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You know what I mean? Like, romances about Pippa Middleton or something?

**Joe Cappa:** Oh, sure. Sure. Yeah. There's something called Pure Flix which is just like a Christian Hallmark sort of streaming service. And we have events (*chuckling*) hosted by us and other people in the group, and we just watch these like really wholesome—or at least trying to be wholesome—Hallmark-esque love stories, always sprinkled with a little bit of Christianity. And it's very fascinating to watch. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Do you like wholesomeness, or are you opposed to wholesomeness?

**Joe Cappa:** I like wholesomeness. I do love it. There's also this other movie, called *The Buttercream Gang*.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Giggling.*) Uh-huh?

**Joe Cappa:** Have you—?

(*Jesse hasn't seen it.*)

Oh, okay. You're like, “Oooh yeah!”

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Giggling.*) I'm just excited!

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah, it's called *Buttercream Gang*. It was made by like Mormons, and it's about kids getting into trouble, but it's very wholesome.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Elder Buttercreamer:** I was a buttercreamer, you know, when I was your age.

*(Coin clinking noises.)*

Yeah. I've seen a lot of them come and go, but I think you boys are the best I've seen. You give all that change to Mrs. Jenkins. The treats are on me, one buttercreamer to another.

**Younger Buttercreamer:** Thanks!

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Joe Cappa:** Anyway, I was raised on that movie—that VHS—and so was my brother. So, when I had my brother on to write with me, and it's just the two of us, we definitely like had *Buttercream Gang* in our mind as we were like writing it. And we love the movie! I mean, we still love it. We watch it *(chuckling)* just to watch it and like laugh. There's something very—I mean, I like it! And you know, it's also fun to make fun of, but it's like you can have your cake and eat it too. Which is like what I think *Haha, You Clowns* is.

**Jesse Thorn:** How did you decide that the version of this—*7th Heaven, One Tree Hill*—this wholesome drama that you were going to portray in your show was going to be about a world of hypermasculinity?

**Joe Cappa:** Right. Well, I've discovered that it is something that I just inevitably do when I animate. *(Chuckles.)* 'Cause—I mean, when I started like seriously trying to do animation—or at least talk, and I voiced the characters—that was like in 2021 or 2020. And like, my first animation like had a *(dropping his voice)* dude. And he was like—and he punches another dude. So. *(Laughs.)* It's just like I guess it's 'cause I am a man that I just think that way. But I've never punched anybody.

But it's just like I always have like these kind of buff guys and thick necks and stuff. And so, it had been like leading up to *Haha, You Clowns*, probably, by that point. But... yyyeah. I mean I think there's something interesting about strong guys. *(Laughs.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** You're a slim man.

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah, I'm a slim man. In fact, when people meet me—to act like a celebrity for a second—but like at animation film festivals and stuff, and people have seen my stuff, and then they meet me; they're just like, "You look nothing like I thought. I thought you were gonna have this really thick neck." Because that's how I draw everybody.

**Jesse Thorn:** They just imagine a swole animator?

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. Very swole, who's really nice! (*Dropping his voice in a dudely way.*) "Man, you make some kick(*censor beep*) animations! Good for you, man!"

But yeah, you know, somebody who's like really strong but like really nice and wholesome! Which is something I also get on my Instagram feed.

**Jesse Thorn:** What kind of videos are you being served?

**Joe Cappa:** There's a great Instagram account called Pastors with Props. And it's just like—they filmed their own sermons, and then it somehow gets aggregated to this Instagram account. But it's just like pastors like being cool. You know? Like, cool pastors, and a lot of them are like ripped. And they like use analogies about like working out and weightlifting with like God.

**Jesse Thorn:** Have you heard about these guys that would go to schools ripping telephone books in half for God?

**Joe Cappa:** Oh yeah. I've seen it. Yeah. I've seen it.

(*They laugh.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Like, I've met multiple people who these guys—these muscle men that would do a thing about Christ that involved tearing telephone books in half at public schools— They like came to their school; like they really saw them.

**Joe Cappa:** Right. They would come to schools.

**Jesse Thorn:** Like, Slim Goodbody or something. Did you have any stuff like that in your own childhood?

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. I mean, I grew up in Oklahoma, so— Like, the cool kids at my high school were, you know, like the Christian ones. You know? Like, there's a thing called Fellowship of Christian Athletes, FCA. And so, that was like the popular clique. And I went to like two of their meetings where they would all meet

up at somebody's really nice house and talk about God. And I think that probably influenced this sort of show as well and who these boys are.

**Jesse Thorn:** Where were you in high school? I mean, like culturally/socially?

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. I was like an artsy kid. I had like my group of friends that would just like fool around in acting class. Like, we found that the acting class would have a really lenient teacher.

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And we could just do whatever we wanted. So. Not to say I was like a wild guy, but I liked acting, and I liked the art and drawing, and I got into filmmaking. And then, yeah, went to college to try to do that.

**Jesse Thorn:** But you didn't, exactly. You're in your 40s, and you're kind of new to showbusiness in a way. *(Chuckles)*

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah! Yeah. It's like a midlife crisis thing. Like, that's how it felt when I moved out to LA. 'Cause I just like totally wrote it off. I think like right after college I was like, "I wanna move out to LA!" And then I was like, "No way. It's too expensive, and I don't wanna live with a bunch of people." And then got into like advertising, and then—yeah, just like slowly got into animation, learning animation.

**Jesse Thorn:** Where were you working in advertising?

**Joe Cappa:** A local ad agency in Oklahoma City, called Staplegun at Ackerman McQueen.

**Jesse Thorn:** So, even if you're in advertising in New York or something, showbusiness is like right there within your reach. You know what I mean?

**Joe Cappa:** In New York, yeah. Right.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. It is like the next thing beyond. Like, maybe you stay in advertising, 'cause you're making so much money or something. But like, it's within your site. You know?

**Joe Cappa:** Sure.

**Jesse Thorn:** When you were working in advertising, did showbusiness feel within your field of vision?

**Joe Cappa:** No. I'd say I was thinking, "Okay, I'm doing ad stuff. I would like to make music videos." You know, that seemed pretty cool. (*Playfully*.) Vimeo was pretty hot at the time. And you know, I had friends in bands, and I was like, "Okay, I'll try to get into that world." And I did do quite a few music videos for friends. And then, you know, I moved to Colorado, and I was in Colorado for about seven years or something like that. And I was just like getting poorer and poorer. I was trying to do my own thing. I started my own company and realized I just did not have the heart to do advertising and music videos for like \$2,000.

And at some point, I was just like, "I gotta do my own thing." It's nice when you make music videos or make something for somebody else—even like a corporate video on their website. 'Cause it's like you can try to give your own sort of sensibility. I try to be funny. You know, I try to sprinkle in my little isms. But I kind of realized I was kind of falling back on them. I'd be like, "Weeell, if the video sucks, it's their video. You know? I was just trying to help." (*Chuckles*.)

And then making my own thing, that was like the big hurdle to overcome. And then I made a short film, and it got into Sundance. And then that's when I started thinking like maybe I can tell it like a story from beginning to end and it be watchable.

**Jesse Thorn:** We're gonna take a quick break. When we come back, even more with Joe Cappa. He's the creator of the very funny *Haha, You Clowns*. It's *Bullseye* for [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

**Transition:** Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest right now is Joe Cappa. He created one of my favorite TV shows that's out right now: an animated sitcom called *Haha, You Clowns*. It's about three gigantically—almost monstrously muscular kind of grotesquely drawn brothers who live with their also gigantically buff dad. And also, the four of them basically kind of want to get along and support each other. It is a really special show. Let's get back into my conversation with Joe Cappa.

What's an example of an image or a pose in *Haha, You Clowns* that you realized you had like a really specific idea of?

**Joe Cappa:** Like, in the last episode, Tristan, he's doing improv. And he makes like—It's like such a specific—Like, he's trying to do comedy, and he is trying to

do a bit, and he knows he's bombing, and he is trying to upstage the person next to him. And he looks at the audience like, (*incredulously*) "Can you believe this person?!" And so, it had to be like this very peculiar face, like this kind of confused, silly face. And I was just like, "I gotta do that face." But yeah, you know, just little nuances. I mean, I think that's what it's all about.

**Jesse Thorn:** One of the things that I imagine when I'm watching *Haha, You Clowns* is I imagine you—or you and your brother with whom you write the show—having a file in your Notes app or something that is just every banality that exists in human conversation.

*(Joe chuckles softly.)*

Like, every plain cliché that exists in human conversation. Do you pull those out of the air, or do you track them?

**Joe Cappa:** I try to track them, but most often it'll just kind of come up while we're writing the script. But yes, when I hear something that I think is funny, I'll definitely write it down. I mean, the idea with the boys is like they use a lot of idioms and expressions, and it's kind of like how they communicate. It's kinda like my way of saying that, you know, they've borrowed personalities from things they've seen on TV in movies, and that's how they talk.

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**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Speaker 1 (*Haha, You Clowns*):** Really, I just feel bad for Dad.

Is he seriously putting something off again? He does realize it's nine o'clock on a Saturday, right?!

**Duncan:** He's been working so hard since Mom passed away. As far as I'm concerned, we're gonna put an end to that tonight! But first things first, we're gonna invite him up here, and we're gonna play a round of billiards!

**Speaker 2:** Now, that's the best idea I've heard all day, Duncan!

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** It reminds me of— Like, I—this morning, on my way to work on the bus—I was listening to an interview with a former relief pitcher from my favorite baseball team, the San Francisco Giants. And he seemed like a reasonably bright guy. He was an excellent relief pitcher, especially left-on-left matchups. But—

**Joe Cappa:** Did he like misuse the expression or something?

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, there was like— It was just short of malapropisms. Like, awkwardly fit in cliches?

**Joe Cappa:** (*Chuckling.*) Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I love that. When we can do that in the show, I love that. Yes.

**Jesse Thorn:** What's an example of language on the show that you really got a kick out of?

**Joe Cappa:** I mean, there's like a moment where they're playing with this like middle-aged woman on a video game. You know?

**Jesse Thorn:** Like a first-person shooter.

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. And she's— You know, they're playing remotely. She's just online. They get the sense that they need to take care of this woman. You know, like, “She's a frail person. We need to like take care of her.”

And then Duncan like holds the microphone from his headset, and he tells his brothers, (*mimicking the deep-voiced mush-mouthed affect of the characters*) “We must protect Bribri at all costs.”

(*They laugh.*)

It's just like usually used for—you know. If you know the expression, it's just like you like this person a lot; this person rocks; we must protect them at all costs.

**Jesse Thorn:** You voice the main characters in the show. They have distinctive voices.

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you intend those voices to be sometimes somewhat... (*bashfully*) hard to understand?

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. I mean, I knew that was going to be the case. But when I do it— Like, I've been doing it for so long now, it just doesn't— Like, I kind of forgot that it would be unintelligible.

*(Jesse laughs.)*

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Brother 1:** Duncan, what's wrong?

**Duncan:** *(Tearfully.)* I'm just so happy. I just love you guys so much!

*(Splashing bro hugs.)*

**Brother 2:** And we love you, Duncan!

**Duncan:** I'm sorry I've been so hard on you guys during band practice!

**Brother 2:** No, I should have been making band practice a priority! Not roast beef melts!

**Duncan:** Oh, this hot tub's got me in the feels!

**Brother 2:** Okay, let's change the mood in here, shall we?

**Music:** Tender piano fades in.

**Brother 1:** You know, I want our sons to share moments like these.

**Brother 2:** Then let's make an oath tonight guys. The hot tub stays in our family forever.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Joe Cappa:** And now that it's out there in the world and— (*Chuckling.*) I just can't believe that the higher ups at Adult Swim— Like, they never gave a note about like, "Oh, it's kind of hard to hear what they're saying," or "We don't know what they're saying." I mean, they never mentioned that. And I'm glad they didn't! And I watched TV with subtitles anyway for anything, so I guess it was just— Thank god for subtitles.

**Jesse Thorn:** Why is the show about a dad and three brothers?

**Joe Cappa:** Weeell, you know. I mean... (*Laughs.*) Like, the simple answer I guess is just like—again—didn't have much of a life; didn't want to rely on a lot of people. So, I ended up like voicing a lot of my characters. And in doing so— (*chuckles*). Yeah, you know, it is just like a lot of dudes in the process. And I knew I could do like a good like (*dropping his voice more deeply than before*) a voice like this. (*Returning to normal.*) You know, the father voice. And then I just like sort of stumbled upon this the voice of the brothers pretty much. And we all know what they sound like. So, yeah. I don't know. I'm sorry. I don't really have like a really fun answer other than it was just like outta necessity, I guess.

**Jesse Thorn:** The thing that strikes me about the like wholesome quality of the show is I always expect it to be a little neater than it ends up being on the show. Like, if you pitched this show as a show about three brothers and their dad, and they love their dad—which is a perfectly appropriate pitch for the show—you would imagine that their wholesomeness would be less confused and misdirected. But it's also not a joke about how misdirected it is. They're just like a little bit of confused guys. (*Laughs.*)

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I've been tracking what people are saying on Twitter and Reddit.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Jokingly.*) Oh, that's good.

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah, it's very healthy. I never— I mean, I started a Twitter just so I can like see what people are saying on the show. (*Chuckles.*) But yeah, there seems to be like different camps.

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People are like interpreting the show in interesting ways. And I mean, a lot of people like see it as like straight-up, 100% wholesome, and they're getting a lot out of it, and it's improving their lives is what I'm hearing. And then there's other people that are just like, "It's clear that Joe has a disdain for America and all of its values, and he's poking fun of it."

And it's like—I mean, it's all of that stuff! I mean, again, I do like wholesome stuff. I do like watching it. And there would be something very basic, and I think it would get pretty boring if it was just straight “the gag is they're just wholesome all, the time and they're so happy!” I mean, we really are—I mean, I'd like to comment—you know, there's commentary about masculinity, for sure. The idea is that they are boys who mean really well. They're in this like upper middle class, White bubble, and they are being influenced through media what it is to be a man.

And I think that starts to convolute things, and it sort of misguides them. They are misguided. I mean, I think that's kind of like the point of the show.

**Jesse Thorn:** What do you love about those guys?

**Joe Cappa:** They love each other, and they love their dad. I mean, that's kind of like it. And if other things get in the way, you know, then it kind of creates chaos. But at the heart of the show, they really do love their dad. (*Chuckles.*)

**Transition:** A whooshing noise.

**Clip:**

**Tom (*Haha, You Clowns*):** Hey, gang. Just checking in on you. How you guys doing on popcorn?

**Brother 1:** I think we're stuffed.

**Brother 2:** We're so good, Dad.

**Tom:** Did it taste okay? How was the butter?

**Brother 1:** We devoured it all.

**Brother 2:** Oh, it was so good. You don't have to.

**Brother 3:** Seriously, we really appreciate it.

**Tom:** What about drinks? Everybody good on pop?

**Speaker 1:** Can I actually have another one?

**Tom:** One pop, going once, going twice!

**Brother 2:** Dad, do you need a second hand?

**Tom:** No, I think I can handle it.

**Brother 2:** You sure?

**Tom:** Yeah, I'm good. Enjoy the movie guys.

**Speaker 2:** Your dad is seriously so sweet.

**Transition:** A whooshing noise.

**Joe Cappa:** And yeah! You know, I'm writing the show with my brother. I think we borrow a lot of stuff—like mannerisms—from our dad, who's a very nice guy. And so, yeah! It's kind of just fun to live in that world, you know?

**Jesse Thorn:** Is your dad enormous?

**Joe Cappa:** No! No, he's not. He's not a big guy.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's just like—

**Joe Cappa:** He did lift weights when he was—like, when I was little, you know?

**Jesse Thorn:** Oh, really?

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. Yeah. He was pretty like— If you looked at photos—  
(*Laughing.*) I wish I had photos of my dad in his like big buff days. But yeah. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** My dad got his vet's disability certified when I was 13, I think? And he got free tuition at business school, so he went to business school. But part of that was he could get free membership at the University of San Francisco gym. And it came with like training, and there was just a period where my dad was like pumping iron. But just the idea of him like doing curls! Like—it's like, “What?!”

**Joe Cappa:** Like, “Wow!” I can see the shot now.

**Jesse Thorn:** Can he hit someone?!

**Joe Cappa:** (*Laughing.*) Yeah. “What are those for?!”

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah!

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. I mean, the more I talk about it, it's like, “Oh, dang. That was probably another inspiration. Why'd I drop—(*unclear*) dude's so buff!”

I think it's like true. I did another interview, and I kind of realized—you know—we all are like fascinated with our dads. I don't know if it's true for like unhealthy relationships with dads, but I think you are fascinated. You're like—yeah, you wanna know what they're thinking. And with my group of friends growing up like in high school, we just thought dads were so funny.

You know? It's like we would make little videos, and we would play father figures and put on fake mustaches. It's just so fun to do. And then at some point you kind of get older, and then the bit about being a dad is like you really take it on. It starts as a joke, and then like it takes on your persona. And so, yeah, it's just kinda like an evergreen thing. Just fascination with dads, exploring dad/son relationships. It's important for guys.

**Jesse Thorn:** When you got your short film, called *Ghost Dogs*, into Sundance—that film is—I watch it today, and it's incredible. It's a it's about a new rescue dog who realizes that his house is full of the ghosts of the old dogs that lived in that house. And then it gets reeeeeally intense and dark while the rescue dog just remains a rescue dog the entire time. And when that got into Sundance, did you imagine, “Oh, I'm in showbusiness now”?

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. I mean, I was like, “(*Whispering.*) Oh, my life is gonna change now.” But it was like during COVID, and I didn't get to go. It was all remote, and the whole festival run for that year was like—you know—pandemic time. So, everything was like virtual. And then a year had passed, and I mean nothing really happened at all. And everybody I knew from Sundance I don't think they like got any gigs from that. So, that was kinda like an eye-opening experience.

**Jesse Thorn:** And did you think, “Well, I did the thing I'm supposed to do. I'm 38 years old or whatever, and I guess I should just move to Chicago and do advertising again”?

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. Yeah. We can't—I mean, we were looking at homes in Oklahoma and everything. I was just like, “Well, I mean—yeah, stick with

advertising.” 'Cause like even then, I wasn't really fully out of advertising. I was still doing it like while I was making *Ghost Dogs*.

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But yeah, there was a period of time where you're like, “Oh, dang! Man, I'm like mixing it up with like these other filmmakers. Like, this person made a feature film! And I'm in the same chat room with them! So, yeah it was kind of that experience.

**Jesse Thorn:** Are you proud of the work that you've done in the first season of this show? Were you able to make the thing that you kind of imagined in your head you'd be able to make?

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah, I think so! I think we did a great job. The team did an amazing job. The show was made in-house at Adult Swim, and so they sort of started up their studio again to do *Haha, You Clowns*. And you know, everybody just wanted it to work. You know? And so, it was like a learning curve for everybody as they like—you know, they had to like wire up their whole offices to animate. And I think it came out great, and everybody was like so flexible. It's like any request I had where I was like, “No, this shot isn't working—” I mean, they did their best to make it work and to try to keep it as true to the shorts as they could, which is how it started. It started as shorts on YouTube.

**Jesse Thorn:** We'll wrap up with Joe Cappa in just a minute. *Haha, You Clowns*, the show that he created and runs, is his first television program. His job creating it is pretty much his first ever job in showbusiness. Does it feel weird? Yes. Does he feel like he's finally made it? Well, we'll get into it after the break. It's *Bullseye* for MaximumFun.org and NPR.

**Promo:**

**Music:** Cheerful, chiming music interspersed with animal sounds.

**Ella McLeod:** Hey, Alexis.

**Alexis B. Preston:** Hey, Ella.

**Ella:** What animal has the most teeth?

**Alexis:** I would guess a shark.

**Ella:** A snail?

**Alexis:** No, snails don't have teeth.

**Ella:** They have thousands and they are freaky looking.

**Ella:** No, I don't want that to be true.

(*Alexis giggles.*)

Okay. Did you know that the hippocampus in your brain is named after the half-horse, half-fish sea creature found in Greek mythology?

**Alexis:** I didn't know that. Buuut we are meant to be doing animal trivia, and hippocampus isn't a real animal.

**Ella:** Well, that doesn't matter on *Comfort Creatures*.

**Alexis:** You're right. It doesn't matter at all. (*Laughs.*)

**Ella:** *Comfort Creatures* is a cozy show for lovers of animals of all shapes and sizes—real and unreal.

**Alexis:** If that sounds like your cup of tea then join us every Thursday for new episodes on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

(*Music ends.*)

**Transition:** Chiming synth with a syncopated beat.

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. My guest is Joe Cappa. He created the wonderful new animated show. *Haha, You Clowns*. It is airing now on Adult Swim.

20 years ago, Adult Swim was this block of programming that had occasional *Family Guy* reruns in it to goose the ratings, and then—in between—the cheapest things that could possibly be made.

**Joe Cappa:** (*Chuckles.*) Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** And one of the reasons that they were so strange and compelling was because it was like “what happens if you give eight dudes in Atlanta your \$100,000 production budget to make seven shows?” (*Laughing.*) Or whatever it was. Right?

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** What is Adult Swim in 2026, when college students aren't sitting around watching whatever's on at 11 o'clock at night, and they can just watch another *Family Guy* rerun after the first one that they watch?

**Joe Cappa:** Right. I don't know if I have an answer for that, 'cause I didn't really watch Adult Swim. I'm not like a big cartoon guy. I just like—you know, I just wanted to make something funny. And Adult Swim is like the last place that still—I mean, to this day—that like supports weird stuff, supports the unpolished stuff. And they're definitely like getting back into that—I feel like how it began. It's kinda like a renaissance to that style with like *Smiling Friends* and my show. And it's the only network that's keeping it alive, and we have to support it. (*Laughs.*) We have to support that. I mean, it's so important.

**Jesse Thorn:** One of the characters on *Haha, You Clowns* is a billiards player named Jeanette Lee. She lives next door to the family at the center of the show and is typically practicing billiard shots in the backyard. And they talk to her a little like Wilson on *Home Improvement*. This is probably the most unusual element of an unusual show. Why does real-life billiards player Jeanette Lee play billiards in the backyard over the fence from their backyard?

**Joe Cappa:** The answer is simple. I wanted a Wilson character that the boys could talk to over a fence. I knew that, you know, we needed a woman in their life—like a mother figure, 'cause their mom was deceased. And I think—I mean, there's nothing better than an athlete acting. I just find it mesmerizing. And so, I wanted to get a female athlete and give them lines and see how they do. And you know, there's an episode where they're playing pool.

[00:30:00]

Then I was like, “Oh, that'd be really funny if there was a pool table outside, and she's just practicing shots outside.” So, yeah. And then it was Jeanette, and she did amazing. I never heard her talk before or anything like that.

**Jesse Thorn:** But she's a famous billiards player, to the extent that an American billiards player could be famous. Right?

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I don't know. I'm not a billiards guy, but she's the one person I know. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you know her from billiards on television in—?

**Joe Cappa:** (*Sighing.*) I don't know. I just—I was familiar with her.

**Jesse Thorn:** I looked her up. I'm like, "I kind of think that's a real person. Isn't that a real person?"

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. Well. See, the thing is like even—It's just the way that athletes deliver lines. (*Chuckles.*) It's just like—There's something like, "Oh, this sounds like an athlete."

**Jesse Thorn:** And she does a really good job too.

**Joe Cappa:** She does amazing.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's not—The joke isn't that she does a bad job.

**Joe Cappa:** Right.

**Jesse Thorn:** That would be an easy joke if she was just a horrible actor. She's a pretty solid actor.

**Joe Cappa:** Yes.

**Transition:** A whooshing noise.

**Clip:**

**Brother 1:** Dad's been super zonk lately.

**Jeanette:** You know who gets super zonked watching movies? Sean Penn. Sean was notorious for zonking out.

**Brother 2:** Just like Dad!

**Jeanette:** Just when Sean was about to zonk out, his all-time favorite movie came on the TV: *Lawrence of Arabia*.

**Brother 1:** (*Thoughtfully.*) So, if we play Dad's favorite movie...

**Brother 2:** He'll stay up with us!

**Jeanette:** It's worth a shot.

(*Pool balls clacking.*)

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** Why did you decide that she should be both wise and a person who mostly talks about celebrities that she's dated?

**Joe Cappa:** Well, yeah. I mean she's a celebrity pool player, and it just seemed right. I mean, it's like the boys are looking for advice, and they have to kind of dig through what her advice is through some sort of like weird, you know—I don't know.

**Jesse Thorn:** Like an anecdote about a time she met Arsenal Hall or something.

**Joe Cappa:** (*Laughs.*) Yeah, that's a good example. Yeah. It was just like, "Now what? Wait, what's the point of the story here?" Yeah. It's funny. I dunno.

(*They laugh.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Do you get reactions from people who have contempt for the show?

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. I mean, a lot of people—especially when it first aired, a lot of people just didn't know what to take away from the show. They just hated the style. I mean, they hated the animation style.

**Jesse Thorn:** Two of my children have yelled at me about it.

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. They hate the voices of the boys.

**Jesse Thorn:** "*(Angrily.)* Why are you watching that show again, Dad!?"

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. “There's no jokes! There's no jokes in this.” That's like when I know that—*(chuckles)* you know, I know what would make the show funny. And when they're saying that the style sucks, that there's no jokes, I'm just like, “You just don't get it. I'm sorry. Like, this show is not for you. But trust me, I think it's funny!” That's pretty much my reaction.

**Jesse Thorn:** The other day, my 14-year-old daughter said to me—I was watching the show; I love to watch the show, 'cause I love the show so much. I was watching the show in the living room, and she came to the doorframe of the living room and looked in, and she said, “*(Remorsefully.)* Dad, why would someone make a show like that?” *(Laughs softly.)*

**Joe Cappa:** You know, I think when *King of the Hill* first aired, I don't think everybody was like, “*King of the Hill!* Let's make some memes about Bobby!” You know? It took a long time for society catch up, and I think that's what's happening. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** It barely stayed on television. Yeah, no, *King of the Hill* was a bad *Simpsons* knockoff, as far as most people were concerned, for five years.

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. Yeah. So, you know, I just gotta gain that street cred. I gotta be around for a second, and then—I mean, I don't watch a show until there's been about three seasons out, and then I'm like, “Well, it seems to be doing okay, so I'll check it out.” It's very hard for me to get into a new show. So, I have empathy for your daughter.

**Jesse Thorn:** You've had some wonderful guest performers on the show. It's not a guest-performer-heavy show, but you had a character—a big character—played by Justin Thoreau. And then you also had a character played by Cheri Oteri, who was like a deeply troubled woman.

*(They chuckle.)*

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah. They try to set Dad up on a date with Cheri Oteri, basically. And that's a good example of: we were in the studio; she came in, recorded, did amazing, did her like Cheri Oteri-isms. And then we really tried to like borrow the way that she cocks her head and stuff and like wiggles it when she talks. And we really—

**Jesse Thorn:** And it's a character that doesn't look anything like Cheri Oteri.

**Joe Cappa:** Doesn't look like that.

**Jesse Thorn:** But it has that—

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah, she was offended. She could— 'Cause we had like the animatic by the time that she recorded the lines. (*Laughing.*) She was like offended by her appearance. She's like, "God dang, I'm ugly!"

I'm like, "Just wait. Just wait."

**Jesse Thorn:** You're like, "Look at the other characters on the show!"

(*They laugh.*)

**Joe Cappa:** Yeah, exactly. That's always my excuse when somebody's offended by how they look. I'm like, "Just trust me. You're like... pretty attractive in this world."

(*Jesse laughs.*) But Cheri—

[00:35:00]

Yeah, Cheri Oteri did sooo good. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Have you worked with any of those kinds of voice actors who are serious voice actors where you can ask them for a different take, and they do something completely different? And they can do that seven times in a row?

**Joe Cappa:** Yes. Because our budget is so—you know, we couldn't pay for a lot of actors. So, you know, oftentimes somebody would come in to read two or three characters, and so they would have to play different ages. And they're really good at what they do. Yeah. That's when— You know, there's the actors—you know, great comedians—and then there's people who are just really good at voice acting.

**Jesse Thorn:** Do you feel like you're in showbusiness now?

**Joe Cappa:** A little bit, yeah! Yeah. Having the— So, it was renewed for two and three—for seasons two and three—and I was like so excited, so relieved. 'Cause I didn't know if anybody was watching the show, which is why I was on Twitter all the time. And then, you know, whenever other people heard the news, they'd be like, "Damn. Two seasons. Two seasons!" Which I guess is like a big thing! And so, now I feel like, "Oh dang, I got something here." So, I'm feeling good.

**Jesse Thorn:** Have you talked to any reporters from *Variety* or gone to the CableACE awards or anything?

**Joe Cappa:** We got an Annie Award, and so we're gonna go to the animations award. So, that's not bad!

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Muttering under his breath.*) That doesn't count. That's not showbusiness.

(*Joe giggles.*)

How did the experience of having your own television program compare with what you imagined it might be like?

**Joe Cappa:** (*Laughs.*) Yeah, it's—I don't know. I don't think I had any expectations of, you know, this process of making a TV show. I can't believe that it's happening. I'll tell you that. That's all. I mean, it's just—Again, it's so fun to be able to work with my brother. It's just like we have this like—He lives in England. And so, it's just a great opportunity to hang out. We'll have writer's retreats, and we'll like come up with funny ideas and just be cracking up. And in the animatic room with my showrunner, Carl Faruolo—I mean, we're just like—We're just laughing as we're making stuff. It's like such a fun experience.

And that's why I think animation—I mean, truly if it's done right, it could be like the funniest medium. Because you have so many opportunities to get it right! You can always go back and rerecord. You could always like—You could change the scene entirely if you wanted to. Like, there's so many opportunities to plus up stuff, and that's been a lot of fun.

**Jesse Thorn:** Joe Cappa, I have just loved *Haha, You Clowns*. I'm so glad you got to make it. So glad it got picked up for its second and third season. And thank you so much for taking the time to come and talk to me.

**Joe Cappa:** Thank you! This has been a great interview.

**Jesse Thorn:** Joe Cappa. As we mentioned before, you can catch the first season of his show, *Haha, You Clowns*, on Adult Swim and on HBO Max. If you've already watched it and you want more good news, it's been picked up for two more seasons.

**Transition:** Jazzy synth with a syncopated beat.

**Jesse Thorn:** 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 historical jewelry district in downtown Los Angeles, California. Although, for the last ten days, I have been in the Federal District of Mexico, Mexico City, where I just ate like a true maniac—just shoved food into my mouth like I was never guaranteed to see food again.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun, Hannah Moroz. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help on *Bullseye* from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our pal, Dan Wally. He's also known as DJ W. You can find his music at [DJWsounds.bandcamp.com](https://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, for providing it to us.

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

*(Music fades out.)*