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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 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. Jimmy Pardo is my first guest this week. He's a veteran standup comedian. He cut his teeth in Chicago. Fellow Chicagoan Bob Odenkirk actually encouraged him to go to his first open mic night. At the time, Jimmy had a real job. He was working at a record store. Eventually, he parlayed that into becoming a sales rep at MCA Records. For context, this was like the end of the '80s. And if there was a better time to work for a giant record company in the history of America, I don't know it. That was a pretty good life! I mean, hanging out backstage with Tiffany and then racing over to the comedy cottage to do a set.

But Pardo wanted more. So, he quit his big, fancy job. He hit the road. And eventually, he landed here in Los Angeles. And let me ask you: have you ever seen Jimmy Pardo onstage? It is the best. Jimmy is small, trim, athletic, handsome, with a brush haircut. He talks a mile a minute. He does maybe five or seven minutes of material in an hour. He just talks to the crowd and goes on tangents and, again, like maybe two jokes. (*Laughs.*) Anyway, he is one of my favorite standup comedians in the world, and he is also the ideal podcast host. Just, as he would put it, “a funny talker.” In 2006—20 years ago, before the invention of the iPhone—Pardo launched *Never Not Funny*.

Like Pardo's standup act, *Never Not Funny* is loose. He and his producer and cohost, Matt Belknap, talk about life and music, chat with a guest—usually another comedy person—and they just kind of let it ride. I have been a listener to *Never Not Funny* for literally as long as it has existed, since it was Jimmy and Matt at Jimmy's dining room table. I'm so thrilled to welcome Jimmy Pardo back onto the program. Let's get right into it.

Transition: Bright, airy synth.

Jesse Thorn: Jimmy Pardo, welcome back to *Bullseye*. It's so nice to see you.

Jimmy Pardo: When is the last—? Other than the anniversary, when was the last—? I mean, I think we're going—

Jesse Thorn: We did something maybe five/ten years ago. You did what we call a C segment, one of the segments that's—it's like a “Song that Changed My Life” or a “Thing I Wish I'd Made”, something like that. And then you were a guest a few years before that. But you're a longtime friend of the program. One of the most treasured friends.

Jimmy Pardo: Thank you very much! I appreciate that. I believe we first met on *The Sound of Young America*, when you were based out of the Bay Area, and I was doing a show at the Punchline.

Jesse Thorn: I think you came on *The Sound of Young America* before podcasting existed!

Jimmy Pardo: Oh, 100%.

Jesse Thorn: Jimmy, you are a Chicagoan—a proud Chicagoan. You lived in Los Angeles 30 years or something like that.

Jimmy Pardo: I've been in LA—yeah, LA now going on 31 years.

Jesse Thorn: But I think it always goes back to Chicago. What do you think it is for all Chicagoans—?

Jimmy Pardo: That's a—yes! (*Stammering.*) I don't—I—

Jesse Thorn: Whether it's your choice or not!

Jimmy Pardo: I don't know if it does for this guy!

Jesse Thorn: Okay. Why not?

Jimmy Pardo: I'm pretty happy here. I met my beautiful wife here. My friends are all here. I do have great friends back in Chicago, but I'm not one of these guys that yearns to “(*Gruffly.*) Hey, when I make it, man, I'm gonna move back to Chicago and take my meetings.” I will live here. I will go back and visit my dad. And honestly, my

dad's 83. In 15 years when my dad's no longer here, I think I go back once a year.
Max. I'm not a big—I'm okay.

Jesse Thorn: What do you think it gave you? And what do you think were the challenges of being from Chicago?

Jimmy Pardo: Well, I grew up in the south suburbs, initially the south side of the city, and then we kept moving further south. And so, I grew up in the south suburbs, which I just brought my son—my wonderful son, Oliver, who's 18 years old—I brought him there. We saw my father, and I wanted him to meet some of my friends. And we had some downtime in between lunch and dinner, and I took him to both my childhood home in Hometown, Illinois, which was basically like 87th and Cicero.

Jesse Thorn: Like, literally named Hometown.

Jimmy Pardo: It's called Hometown, yeah. It's right near Oaklawn, and it literally—it shares 87th Street with the city of Chicago. Just a guardrail separates Hometown from Chicago. Chicago's a big city. And Hometown, you think you're in Mayberry. It's the weirdest thing, even though it's a guardrail away. And then I took him to Hometown. *(Correcting himself.)* I'm sorry, I took him to Oak Forest to see where I grew up, my high school years, and then basically where I lived when I started doing theatre and standup and that sort of thing. And dude, the Trump flags on the street that I lived on, I turned the corner and I was fascinated by it. And I mean, it checks. That's the biggest challenge. I grew up in that environment. My mother and father did not raise us that way. I'm not that way.

And so, that's when I say, like, “I don't need to really go back.” Because I didn't grow up on the North Side where everything's a little more accepted. So, where I grew up impacted a lot of my opinion on if I would—you know, how much it's still in my body. So, there's my Chicago synopsis! Thanks for having me.

Jesse Thorn: Were you expected to be a regular Joe? Like, did you have to do jock stuff and so on and so forth?

Jimmy Pardo: It was just— Yeah, it was. Because athletics in my high school— Like, I won some awards for theatre. You know, like high schools bring the theatre production to different schools, and six schools perform against each other, and then somebody wins. And so, I always got best actor in those, and then the morning

announcements the following Monday were “Quarterback, quarterback, quarterback, running back, quarterback, running back, basketball, this. Blah, blah, blah. Oh, and by the way, Jimmy Pardo won something. Blah, blah, blah.” You know, it was so focused on athletics that me being good in theatre, it was kinda, “Eeeh, okay, Pardo's funny and he's talented. But look at that guy! He can throw a ball!” So, yeah, I tried out for—ridiculously tried out for the basketball team. Jesse, I’m 5’4” now.

Jesse Thorn: You're a small guy. You're pretty athletic, but you're but you're not a tall guy.

Jimmy Pardo: I'm 5'4". So, if I'm a freshman in high school, 3'7". You know what I mean?

(Jesse agrees with a laugh.)

And so, I'm throwing up, I’m trying to make baskets, and I'm missing by a lot. Or I'm hitting the rim, and it's making that noise. You know, like dinggg, where the whole gym echoes because it's such a bad shot. And then as I'm running back on defense, I hear the assistant coach ask the head coach, “Hey, should I take Pardo out of there?”

And the coach goes, “Nah, leave him in. I think it's pretty funny.” And—

Jesse Thorn: *(Empathetic but holding back laughter.)* Gee whiz!

Jimmy Pardo: I hear that as a freshman!

Jesse Thorn: *(Horrorified laughter.)* Oh god!

Jimmy Pardo: And I laugh about it now, but it hurt!

Jesse Thorn: That's brutal! *(Laughs.)*

Jimmy Pardo: It's brutal. And I shouldn't have heard it! Apparently, I had no pride, because then I said, “Hey, I didn't make the team. I'll be the team manager.” Because again, I wanted to be part of that group of guys. And so, I was the team manager—the idiot that just lugs the netted bag of balls out to the court. And *(clapping)* “Alright, fellas, let's go! Good game now! Good game!” But you know, I got invited to parties and stuff like that, which I would not have been invited to. I just wanted to be accepted.

Jesse Thorn: Did you have to socially be like constantly managing your smallness?

Jimmy Pardo: You know, my mom tells me yes. I have specific memories of people making fun of my height. That said, you know, eight out of ten girls I asked on a date said yes. The two that didn't, you know, made me feel really foolish.

Jesse Thorn: I wasn't thinking even of girls particularly. I was thinking about like in a situation where— Look, like I went to arts high school, right? Like, violence was not on the table at my high school. Nobody was getting beat up after school or whatever. In my neighborhood, I had to manage my tall, skinny Whiteness. Like, I kind of stuck out and was a little femme. You know, I was a theatre guy myself.

Jimmy Pardo: Right.

Jesse Thorn: And so, I had to manage that because I've lived in the hood, right? But I am imagining, suburban high school, that you are not constantly getting beat up but having to keep an eye out on where you're at relative to other people to make sure that that doesn't come up.

Jimmy Pardo: I'll say this. It didn't happen in high school at all. I got along with— I ended up getting— I got along with everybody. I just didn't have great friends until I joined theatre and such. So, I never had a fear of getting beat up in high school. In what would be junior high—sixth, seventh, eighth grade—I did, but it was mostly because I got mouthy. I fear that I started bullying others, and I would then make fun of their last name, and then they would then want to fight me. I would never get beat up, because there was a guy in my neighborhood named Bill Schrog, and he was almost like a *My Bodyguard*—the movie *My Bodyguard*. It was almost like a Chris Makepeace/Adam Baldwin situation, where if Bill heard that somebody wanted to beat me up, Bill would show up and then make that guy go away.

Jesse Thorn: We've got more still to come with Jimmy Pardo. When we come back, we will talk about his alcoholism and how being a road comic both helped and hindered his journey to sobriety. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Jimmy Pardo. He's a veteran standup comic. He worked for years on *The Conan O'Brien Show*. For 20 years, he has also hosted his own podcast, *Never Not Funny*. One of the first and one of the best comedy podcasts. Let's get back into my conversation with the great Jimmy Pardo.

Did you aspire to be a capital A Actor? I ask you this because, as a standup comic, I know—first of all, as you know, you're one of my favorite standup comics to watch in the world.

Jimmy Pardo: Thank you. Oh my god, thank you.

Jesse Thorn: You're also one of the most presentational standup comics I've ever seen. It really is about you connecting to an audience directly and putting on a show as well.

Jimmy Pardo: Yeah. Thanks, man.

Jesse Thorn: Like, both of those things.

Jimmy Pardo: That means so much.

Jesse Thorn: But those are also, in some ways, the opposite of acting. (*Chuckles.*)

Jimmy Pardo: Yyyeah.

Jesse Thorn: So, did you aspire to be the kind of, quote/unquote, “serious actor” who disappears transparently into roles and so on and so forth?

Jimmy Pardo: Yeah. I think other people will say that standup helped them become a better actor. I think standup actually, to your point, made me a worse actor. Because of the you know the presentational aspect of it. And as a kid, I wanted to be the aforementioned Chris Makepeace or Lance Kerwin. And then in high school, I wanted to I wanted to be—and I I've been lucky enough to tell both of these guys to their face—I wanted to be Michael J. Fox or Jon Cryer. And I wanted— Or! Oddly enough, I wanted to be Andrew Koenig, who was Boner on *Growing Pains*, who I— You know, that's my wife's brother! A great, funny comedic actor, and he's not the tallest. And look at him come in and steal the scene comedically! Michael J. Fox, short,

stole the scene. John Cryer at the time—now he's a taller man, but he was a shorter guy—he stole the scene!

So, I wanted to be them, and I was a good actor. You know, like I said, I won awards and stuff. And then I did community theatre and some other theatre, and I was good at it. I was a good actor.

Jesse Thorn: Also, none of those guys stole the scene by being pushy and annoying.

(Jimmy rushes to agree.)

They all stole the scene by being charming.

Jimmy Pardo: Yeah, yeah, agreed. And so, I wanted to be that! And so, I went to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and I studied there. And their takeaway was I should do Second City or standup.

Jesse Thorn: When you got back to Chicago, you started back down a different career path. You had been working in record stores when you graduated from high school. You went back to working in record stores, eventually moved to working for a record company as a salesperson to record stores. How did you end up starting standup?

Jimmy Pardo: I was working—I was managing Orange's Records and Tapes in Naperville, Illinois. And every Saturday morning, Bob Odenkirk—*Mr. Show's* Bob Odenkirk, *Better Call Saul's* Bob Odenkirk—would come into my record store, because his parents lived nearby. So, he would come into my record store, he would buy a record, chat with me, and then go visit his parents. And we would talk every Saturday, and I would make him laugh every Saturday. And finally, he said, “You know, you may be one of the funniest guys I've ever met. You should do standup.”

And I was like, oh, that's very nice of you. He goes, “My roommate, Bill”—a guy named Bill Gorgo, who's a great guy that I'm in a fantasy baseball league to this day with, Bill Gorgo. Bill Gorgo— He goes, “My roommate, Bill, runs a show right around the corner here at the Hyatt every Saturday. Come out watch the show and then see if that's something you'd like to do.”

And I'm like, "Well, you know what? My friends all tell me I'm funny! But you know what? Everybody's got a friend that they think is funny. That doesn't mean you should do standup."

So, I went to see that show with some buddies, and I walk in. And a guy named Bill Leff—who is has become a radio personality in Chicago—I went to high school with Bill. And I walk in, and I see Bill, and I go, "Hey, Bill!"

And he goes, "*(Excitedly.)* Are you on the show?!"

And I go, "No, no, no, I came to watch. Bob Odenkirk invited me."

He goes, "Bob Odenkirk?! Bob Odenkirk, he doesn't like anybody!"

(Jesse laughs.)

And I said, I go, "Yeah, I know, but he invited me! He said, I should see the show and I should do standup."

And Bill said, "You're the funniest guy I ever met. It'd be a crime if you didn't do standup. You gotta do standup." So, the next Saturday, I did standup.

Jesse Thorn: It's interesting to me that your comedy career in some ways always reflected the kind of comic that you are—in that you, in your earliest days in Chicago, are going to shows of and performing with folks like the original Upright Citizens Brigade guys and Bob Odenkirk, people who were doing all these crazy things. But then you're also doing road jobs in Indiana, where you have to do something regular enough that some people that showed up to see comedy in a bar in Indiana understand it. Or else, you know, you're gonna eat it.

(Jimmy confirms.)

So, what was it like to have those two parallel sensibilities. That you wanted to do—that you had aspired to something really special, I'm sure, but also were able to build this career doing something really regular.

Jimmy Pardo: Oh boy, that's—! You know what, Jesse? That may be the greatest question I've ever been asked about my career. When I would be at the Roxy, which is where I knew the UCB guys—and eventually, Besser would do the suburban clubs as

well. And Besser would bomb miserably, because he would be brilliantly, uh—uh, nuts.

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughing.)* I just saw— I was just thinking once of a time I saw him doing standup or solo performing, and he just did a long—an impression of Bjork telling dirty jokes. *(Laughs.)*

Jimmy Pardo: Great! Right?! And he would do that—

Jesse Thorn: Dressed as Bjork!

Jimmy Pardo: —at a suburban club in Chicago to silence! And then I would always go, “Why do I have that at the Roxy, and I don't have it in the suburban clubs?” I don't have it in Indiana, where—in Indiana I'm trying so hard to be Paul Reiser and not being good! But then I'd go to the Roxy and just riff, you know, and I would get in my car, and I would go home and be like, “That's what I gotta do! You know, how brilliant is that?! You know, I felt good about that!”

Then I would go work on the road, and all I would hear is, “*(Gruffly.)* Man, you're so much funnier off stage. You're so much funnier off stage.”

And I would be like, “Well, I don't know. I'm making a living!”

Jesse Thorn: You could deliver the thing that you that got you the \$300 or whatever it was.

Jimmy Pardo: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. More like \$150 or \$75 or \$50. But yes.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, I've interviewed a lot of comedians, Jimmy, in 25 years. And usually, the origin story starts with “Well, I had nothing going on in my life. My life was a disaster area. You know, I was working at the grocery store, but it wasn't a union grocery store, you know. So, I didn't have health insurance. And I just started going to the clubs because I was a drinker, and—” *(Chuckling.)* You know what I mean?

(Jimmy confirms.)

“And I was desperate.” Right? You were 23 or whatever.

Jimmy Pardo: 23! Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: And you were working at the record company, literally making six figures! (*Laughs.*)

Jimmy Pardo: Yeah, you know what? I've been saying that for years, that I was making \$100,000. That's not—there's no way that's true! You know what I mean?!

(Jesse laughs.)

There's no way I was making that! Maybe 60.

Jesse Thorn: But you were a salesman, and you were a successful salesman.

Jimmy Pardo: And I was working at MCA at the time, where Bobby Brown and Tiffany and Tom Petty and New Edition—they were at the top of the charts.

Jesse Thorn: When the record business was a good business to be in.

Jimmy Pardo: Yes. And I'm hanging out with rock stars! And I'm going to concerts for free. And I have an expense account. So, I'm not spending any money either! I'm writing everything off.

“Hey, Jim, what's this meal?”

“Oh, I took the guy out from Discount Records.” (*Muttering.*) I might not have, but that's—I was told by all the other salesmen that's what you do.

Jesse Thorn: And you love music about as much as anybody I've ever known. So, it's also a world where you were, I'm sure, a pig and slop enjoying that.

Jimmy Pardo: Dude, yes. It was the dream job! It was the job that we all—at the record store, we all wanted the job with the record label. I got it! And I eventually was working full time as a comedian locally and working for MCA—and in fairness, not doing my job at MCA. I really wasn't. I wasn't going to my accounts anymore. I was using my office as a—we moved buildings, and they offered me, “Hey, you could have a roommate, an office mate. Or you know, we could put you— Since you're a low guy on the totem pole, sales wise, you could share with the storage room.”

“Well, give me the storage room!”

(Jesse laughs.)

I'm going to be alone! I'm alone in the storage room. Every now and then somebody comes in and goes, "Hey, sorry, Jim. I just need to get some paper. Hey, I need to get some ink."

"Oh, okay!"

Meanwhile, I'm alone in this office calling comedy clubs, booking gigs.

(Jesse laughs.)

If I had an office mate, I couldn't be doing that!

So, eventually my boss gave me the ultimatum. "You got to figure out what you want to do. Do you want to be a comedian, or do you want to stay working here?"

And I said, "You know what? Give me the night. I'll tell you in the morning." Which he was not expecting that. He was expecting, "Well, I'm going to stay here! Because this is the greatest job in the world!"

And he's like, "Oh! Oh, okay."

And then I came in the next day, and I said, "I'm gonna move on." And everybody that I worked with at MCA happened to come to see me do comedy the week prior—maybe two weeks prior—and I BOMBED miserably. I mean, so bad that on that Monday, nobody talked about it. So, we're at the conference table; we're having our morning meeting. And the boss, Jim, said, "Hey, before we get started, I just want to let you know that Jim Pardo here is—this morning is giving me his two-week notice. He's gonna pursue a career in in standup comedy."

And the silence in the room!

(Jesse cackles.)

And you know, the Roger Rabbit eyes of people like, "Wh-wh-what?! That can't be! He's not good!"

And they weren't there were they weren't wrong! I wasn't great!

Jesse Thorn: How long did it take you to be Jimmy Pardo on the road?

Jimmy Pardo: I got my first paid gig in March of '89. I quit my day job in July of '89. I would not have quit if I was not given the ultimatum. I would have stayed there and just worked around Chicago. And by the way, I should have! I should have still had a day job! I wasn't ready to be a touring comedian! I wasn't good enough.

And then '94 is when it really kicked in, where then people from Hollywood were taking note. I would say '94/'95 is when it really kicked in. And then, you know, just getting better and better at what I'm doing today. And now, it's just—it's so just—I go up there with nothing today.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. I mean, I've seen you headline—do an hour—where I've seen you do maybe six jokes. (*Chuckles.*)

Jimmy Pardo: Yeah, that's fair.

Jesse Thorn: You know? Like, every once in a while you'll be like, “Oh, maybe I should do a joke now. Okay, I'll do one of my jokes that I thought of.”

Jimmy Pardo: Yeah, and that's usually because I feel like I should do that for the people that came to hear a bit. So, I give it to them. I do that for them. Not so much that I feel like, “Oh! Oh, I've got this great chunk that needs to be heard!” It's like, “No, you know what? They came to hear comedy. I'll give them that. They don't understand why I'm just riffing.”

But I don't— You know, I do crowd work almost—I'm almost a one-man improv team where it's “Give me an occupation and a location, and I'm now gonna improvise a scene.” It's almost that, where I'll say, “What's your name? You know, what do you—” You know, I hate to say this, but you know. “What do you do?”

“Oh, oh, is this the white blah, blah, blah?”

Jesse Thorn: You typically ask the spelling of the name.

Jimmy Pardo: (*Amused.*) I do ask the spelling of the name! “Standard spelling?” is what I ask. I will then stream of conscious improvise a bit about what these people just told me. And again, it's not “What's your name? What do you do? Put down, put down, put down.”

And there's guys out there right now that people say, "This guy's the best!" Then I watch a clip, and it's nothing but insults! You know, Don Rickles, the insult comic—he wasn't just an insult comic. Those were brilliant jokes.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, he also sang patriotic songs! Don't forget that! (*Laughs.*)

Jimmy Pardo: Yeah! He'd, you know, a "Yankee Doodle" at the end in homage to his great hero, James Cagney.

Jesse Thorn: When in all of this did you quit drinking?

Jimmy Pardo: Oh! 1999. I stopped drinking July 18th of 1999. I was working at the Boise Funny Bone. It was a Sunday night. I was having a great show. And they had a tradition there, this staff, that if they liked you, they would send you a shot on stage. And they would send you a shot called The Dead Nazi, which was just a collection of I think six hard liquors in a shot glass. And they sent that to me, and I did it—because I drank quite a bit back then.

Jesse Thorn: And you're onstage!

Jimmy Pardo: And I'm onstage.

Jesse Thorn: What are you gonna do? Not drink it? It's hard.

Jimmy Pardo: Right! You don't have that—it is hard. And it's also the staff sending me it. They like me. Oh, good. The staff likes me! That's important. They sent me the shot.

And then they just kept sending me more and more and more. And I got hammered onstage. Then I got to my hotel room, and I called my beautiful girlfriend, Danielle, on the telephone and just was a jerk. And apparently, I had done that before—where I would call her drunk after a show and not be the best. And Danielle, who is now my wife of 22 years, is without a doubt the greatest person I've ever met in my life. She is the great—I mean, sincerely, the greatest person I've ever met. And she never gave me the ultimatum of "you either stop drinking or I'm leaving you." What she kind of did say was, "You can't keep calling me like that. I'm not gonna put up with that."

And it's like, “I'm not gonna screw this one up. I'm not, she's the greatest. Don't be an idiot here, dude. Yeah, it's fun to get drunk on the road. Yeah, it's fun to hang out with the staff, with people after the show. Yes, that's all fun. Don't screw this up.”

And I stopped that day. And I'm grateful for it. And I believe that's also made me a better comedian by getting sober and being sharper onstage and being in the moment and being clearheaded.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, when you are a standup comic—this is true to some extent for any touring entertainer—but I think particularly for standups, who tend to be in the same place for a few days, you are not usually touring with other people. And you're working nights; you're working in a place where the work is getting people to buy drinks, basically.

Jimmy Pardo: Yes.

Jesse Thorn: And you what relationship you have maybe is with the wait staff, right?

Jimmy Pardo: Very much so.

Jesse Thorn: And so, it just is like the thing that fills the hole for people. A lot of people.

Jimmy Pardo: Dude, that is 100%. I drank on the road, because I was bored. I had to fill the hole, the void, the emptiness after the show. And by the way—and I should have mentioned this earlier—the drinks were free! And that's what I thought you did as a road comic. Hey, the headliner's doing it! I want to be like the headliner. Hey, the headliner's here at the four in the morning drinking. I want to be like him.

So, I did! I'm veeery grateful that Danielle stayed with me. Because again, we've been together now 20—I guess 27 years—or 28 years, married 22. We have an 18-year-old son who's the greatest, and none of that would have happened if I had continued drinking.

Jesse Thorn: You're here because it's the 20th anniversary of your comedy podcast, *Never Not Funny*.

Jimmy Pardo: (*Excitedly.*) Yes! Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: I want to play you a little bit of audio. Take a listen.

Jimmy Pardo: Uh-oh! Oh no!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Jimmy Pardo (*Never Not Funny*): Well, you know what? The podcast that I'm doing—and it kind of is the way that I would do radio, where it's an extension of my standup act, where it's just— I'm in the moment constantly and commenting on everything that's going on around me—whether, you know, good or bad. But I know you were up at arms over us talking about the time (*Unclear.*)

Jesse Thorn: Yeah! (*Laughs.*) What you're saying is that, if you were on radio, what you would talk about is the amount of time that you've done so far and the amount of time that you have left?

Jimmy Pardo: Yes!

Jesse Thorn: You understand that in podcasting, the time is not even an issue! It's not like radio, where at noon you go off the air because you gotta give it to *Jimmy and the Fritz* or whatever it's called.

Jimmy Pardo: Well, first of all, *Jimmy and the Fritz* do a very fine podcast.

Jesse Thorn: (*Chuckling.*) I shouldn't have said something.

Jimmy Pardo: You should not badmouth Jimmy and the Fritz.

Jesse Thorn: Sorry.

Jimmy Pardo: Uh, you made that up, right? I'm hoping.

Jesse Thorn: Of course.

Jimmy Pardo: Of course. Good! The way you said sorry was like, “Wow, did I just piss off somebody about *Jimmy and the Fritz*?!”

Jesse Thorn: I was playing into your little game.

Jimmy Pardo: Oh, terrific.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: That's you and me 20 years ago.

Jimmy Pardo: Is that twenty years ago?!

Jesse Thorn: You had been podcasting, Jimmy, two weeks.

Jimmy Pardo: (*With exaggerated shock.*) Wait a minute?! And you're mad at me about the time after two weeks?! You heard two shows?!

Jesse Thorn: Probably, yeah! (*Laughs.*)

Jimmy Pardo: You heard two shows, and you're mad at me?!

Again—and I alluded to it in that clip—I aspired to be one of my heroes, Steve Dahl and Garry Meier, who did radio in Chicago. I loved what they did on radio! And I always— Again, I wanted to be a capital A Actor! Or I would have— To this day, if somebody hears this interview and goes, “Hey, do you want to do overnights at LOS”—or whatever it's called here—“for \$1 an hour,” I'm there! I would do it in a heartbeat! I love the idea of doing radio! So, talking about the time was what I heard them do.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

And I thought, “Well, that's what we do.” And so, I talked about the time, and then here it comes, *The Sound of Young America*, to make me feel badly about myself!

Jesse Thorn: Sounding like a literal twelve-year-old on that recording, me.

Jimmy Pardo: You did sound young! I sound exactly the same, and also long winded and stupid! (*Chuckles.*) And I thought of the same joke as I heard that, *about Jimmy and the Fritz* and how they do a good show. The same thing hit me.

Jesse Thorn: Our friend, Matt Belknap, who is the cohost and producer on your program to this day, pitched you the idea of doing a podcast two decades ago.

(Jimmy confirms.)

Had you heard a podcast when he pitched it to you?

Jimmy Pardo: Well, I was listening at the time to somebody now I would not listen to for one second, but Ricky Gervaise. Ricky had that— It was hysterical. And then I was doing a live talk show at the UCB theater—live talk—like a non-televised, you know, talk show. Matt was a fan. Matt would come to every one of those. After one of them, he came up to me. He was like, “Hey, do you want to do a podcast?” I don't know what that means. But I always felt like the guy who was chasing something, you know? Like, “Oh, oh, oh! Everybody's doing Myspace now? Uhhh! I'll do that too! Oh, everybody's on Friendster? I'll do that too.” Or you know, whatever it was, I always felt like I was behind.

So, Matt asked me to do this, and I was like, “I'm gonna say yes to this.” And I am forever grateful. Again, everybody gives Jimmy Pardo the credit. Matt Belknap asked me to do this. Thank heavens he came to me 20 something years ago and said, “Do you want to start a podcast?” And thank god I said yes.

Jesse Thorn: I think Matt asked you, not just because you were one of the funniest guys working in the sphere that he knew. There were a lot of funny people. You know, Sarah Silverman was doing those shows, and Zach Galifianakis was doing those shows. But I think he had the sense to recognize how directly what you did onstage could translate to sitting down at microphones. And that what you wanted to do most in the world was point at somebody, ask them a question, and then talk about it for five minutes.

Jimmy Pardo: Yeah, that's true! I mean, it's— Thank you for acknowledging that. And it's a compliment to Matt as well. You know, initially he was just gonna sit behind a mixing board, and I would do I would talk to a guest. That was the plan. He was to be quiet. Oh my god. How I how I yearn for those days!

(Jesse laughs.)

It was supposed to be I would rant for 15 minutes, talk to a guest for 15 minutes, and then we're out. And then that quickly became 45 minutes, quickly became an hour, quickly became—now I think close to two and a half hours, which the fans don't think is too long; the host does.

Jesse Thorn: We're going to take a quick break. When we come back, we'll finish up with Jimmy Pardo, the host of the long-running podcast, *Never Not Funny*. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Promo:

(Triumphant trumpeting.)

Announcer 1: *(With a tinny, canned effect like old radio.)* Let's get ready to re-coo-ord!

Narrator: Maximum Fun, bringing you the finest of podcasts from the worlds of comedy and culture!

Announcer 1: Almost a perfect episode!

Narrator: Made by real people!

(Gasps from the crowd.)

Announcer 2: *(Also with a tinny, canned effect like old radio.)* Oh no, I think that's gonna cost him!

Announcer 1: Ya hate to see it!

Narrator: Supported by people just like you.

Announcer 2: They're only five seconds away from the longest stretch without saying "um." Two... one...

(Roaring cheers.)

And he's done it, folks! A new world record!

Announcer 1: Amazing!

Narrator: MaxFunDrive is coming soon.

Announcer 2: And they hit the cute interruption trifecta! Cat!

(A meow.)

Dog!

(A bark.)

And sleepy toddler!

(Baby babbling.)

(The audience "aww"s.)

Narrator: The best two weeks in podcasting starts Monday, April 20th. Bonus content, gifts, games, and great episodes, and so much more. Follow [@MaxFunHQ](#) and all your shows on social media so you don't miss a thing!

(Music cuts out.)

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: This is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Jimmy Pardo. Since April of 2006, Pardo has hosted the comedy conversation podcast *Never Not Funny*.

When did you realize that *Never Not Funny* was your job?

Jimmy Pardo: Boy, that's interesting!

Jesse Thorn: Because I'm not wrong to characterize it as your job. You're still a very successful standup comic, but—

Jimmy Pardo: Oh no, but *Never Not Funny* is—that pays the bills. I mean, I do the road as a way to say thank you to the *Never Not Funny* fans! I mean, that's why I kind of do those live shows, is— Which is why I'm happy doing a one o'clock at Zanies in Rosemont. I'll do a one o'clock, because I know the *Never Not Funny* fans will come to a one o'clock. I don't care about people just coming—“Oh, should we go bowling or go to a comedy club?” I'm not doing the road for them. I'm doing it for the *Never Not Funny* fans.

Never Not Funny became my job— So, we went from my dining room table to a studio in Sherman Oaks above a 7-Eleven that we shared with other folks. And then we left there to get—we wanted our own space. And when we got our own space with our own posters, everything was up, I was like, “I'm going to work!” And I don't mean work in the, “Oh, you know, I'm grabbing the briefcase. (*Remorsefully.*) Oh, I gotta go to work. Blah, blah, blah.” (*Excitedly.*) I'm going to work! I love it!

Conan, we're very grateful that that man hired me, changed my life. He made it possible for *Never Not Funny* to become my job. I didn't have to travel, because I was working at *Conan* basically full time. But *Never Not Funny*, again, was my job. (*Blows out a heavy breath.*)

(*Jesse laughs.*)

I don't know how the editor is gonna do this, but I wish him a lot of luck.

Jesse Thorn: I think they use Adobe Audition.

Jimmy Pardo: What does that mean? I don't even know what that means! I'm so— Here's the thing with *Never Not Funny*. If Matt and Elliot left—because I always make a joke like, “You guys know that if I go off on my own, you're done. The three of you are done. I'm the face of the show!”

(*Jesse laughs.*)

But the truth is, I don't know how to do anything. I show up and talk.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) The whole thing falls apart. You're on the phone with MCA records like, “Does Tiffany still need somebody to—”

Jimmy Pardo: Yeah, yeah. Is MCA still a thing? How's Bobby Brown doing these days? I'm happy to say hello!

(Jesse laughs.)

Yeah. It would be— You know what? I always did think that would be the fallback if comedy didn't work out. Oh, I could go back—oh, I could always go back to the record business.

I didn't know that was gonna go away! That's not even an option. So, this better continue minimum until I'm 67. That's all I gotta get! I just gotta get to that! And then I'll be okay.

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughs.)* You have been in showbusiness basically your entire adult life; your wife has been in show business for her entire adult life. She was a standup. I don't think she's doing standup right now.

Jimmy Pardo: She does not. She's a writer.

Jesse Thorn: But she's a podcaster and a comedy writer, very successful. And her brother was in showbusiness, as you mentioned, Andrew. And her father was Walter Koenig, who was one of the stars of *Star Trek*. And now your son, Oliver, has started doing standup.

Jimmy Pardo: Yes. He has.

(Jesse erupts into giggles that only get louder.)

Jimmy Pardo: And he— I think I just gave off the wrong—

Jesse Thorn: *(Through laughter.)* Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Jimmy Pardo: Here's why that happened.

Jesse Thorn: Hold on. For YouTube, I'm gonna need like a smash cut into Jimmy's eyes as he says, “Yes, he has,” about his son. Okay, go ahead.

Jimmy Pardo: Okay. Again, I say this as a comedian, not as a dad. Oliver, my son; he's only 18 years old. He has it. He's good at it. So, my reaction when you said, “Is your son doing—?” and I went, “Yes, he is—”

When I went on the road, to your point from earlier, killing time with the wait staff; drinking 'til all hours; maybe going to a party at a trailer park; maybe going to a bonfire out in the middle of the field with people I don't know! My parents didn't know any of that was happening. They just went, "Oh, Jimmy's doing Go Bananas in Cincinnati. I'll uh, see you later!" Now I'm gonna go to Iowa and do a week of shows. I know what the road is. I don't know if I want to know what my son is doing on the road.

Jesse Thorn: What about the other parts of showbiz? Like, when I worry that my kids might want to go into entertainment—which I do!

Jimmy Pardo: Yes, of course you do.

Jesse Thorn: I think like, "Well, maybe if I'm lucky, they'll become a VFX artist or something like that. And they'll just have a job." But my worry is more about having a job that has directly to do with whether other people like you!

Jimmy Pardo: I know. It's all— Admittedly, before he started doing standup and he's on the improv team down at school—before I saw all that, I literally was like, "Dude, do anything else. Please, please. Go into any other industry. This industry is horrible. You're told no every day. Yes, if you get the one yes and it changes your life, great! But that doesn't happen to everybody." It scares me for him. That said, I think he's got it. And I hope the right people see it. Whatever he wants to do, I just—and I'm sure you feel the same way about your kids—just be happy.

Jesse Thorn: What's amazing to me is, 20 years into *Never Not Funny*, there have been so many waves in podcasting.

Jimmy Pardo: Right?

Jesse Thorn: You ride the wave, you hit the crash, or the crash falls on you. You know, maybe the wave is just Joe Rogan, and it just lands on you. (*Laughs.*)

Jimmy Pardo: Hard.

Jesse Thorn: And you found a relationship with an audience that is durable. And that's something that you can't find almost anywhere else in entertainment or even media. Like, maybe some authors have that with their audience. But like, to have a

relationship for 20 years with people who love your work—people come and go, but that's a really extraordinary way to make your living.

Jimmy Pardo: I don't disagree with you. To your point, we one of our features of our subscription model is if you subscribe X amount of money per month, you get a 15-minute Zoom call with me. I just did my batch for 2025 two weeks ago. And I came out of my office—no exaggeration, no hyperbole here—I came out with tears in my eyes and talked—I'm gonna get teary about it right now. I mean, I'm not—no BS; I'm not a good enough actor. And the academy will tell you so.

And my wife's like, “What's up?”

And I said, “I just talked to 15 people, minimum. To a single—to every one of them: “You're my favorite comedian. You're the podcast that I still listen to. I've been listening for 20 years.” And for somebody to call me their favorite comedian means the world to me! Like, it means— Like, when you say it, or Dave Holmes says it, or other—you know, there's other people that I respect and admire or people that just are fans of mine. Nate Bargatze's out there! John Mullaney's out there! Sarah Silverman's out there! Nikki Glazer's out there! You have other options.

I mean, honest to god, it made me so emotional on that day to think I've touched these people in a way that is meaningful. They stay with *Never Not Funny*. They like—your word—the relationship of it. And it is a great relationship that we have with our listeners. You know, we're kind of a niche, culty-sized podcast. And I think because of that, when people come in as a guest, people speak very honestly and openly. We have fun. It's a lot of nonsense. You know, we'll talk about ghosts for 45 minutes. I know nothing about ghosts. You know, people like that, clearly. And so, it means the world to me. And thank you for getting me to say that.

Jesse Thorn: Jimmy, I'm always so happy to see you. Thank you for coming on *Bullseye* and congratulations on two decades of *Never Not Funny*. What an incredible achievement.

Jimmy Pardo: I thank you for all your support over the years, and I appreciate you having me on here today. It means the world to me. Thank you.

Jesse Thorn: Jimmy Pardo. As we mentioned, you can listen to *Never Not Funny* wherever you get your podcasts. You should. It's a delight. And if Jimmy Pardo comes

to your town, you are doing yourself a disservice missing him in your local comedy club. It is one of the most fun things you can do on a night out.

Transition: Bright, jazzy synth.

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, recorded from Maximum Fun World Headquarters in the historic Jewelry District of downtown Los Angeles. In the jewelry district, I bought four clamshells of strawberries for \$1 each. Thank you, lady who just pulled up a truck full of clamshells of strawberries.

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

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you will find video from just about all our interviews—including the ones you've heard this week. And I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

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

(Music fades out.)

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