Hrishikesh: You're listening to Song Exploder, where musicians take apart their songs and piece by piece tell the story of how they were made. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway.

("Money Machine" by 100 GECS)

Hrishikesh: This episode contains explicit language. 100 gecs is a duo, made up of Laura Les and Dylan Brady. In 2016, they put out an EP called *100 Gecs*, and three years later, they released their first album called *1000 Gecs*. It was named the Best Album of 2019 in *Vice* and in *The New York Times*. It was also on year-end lists in *Rolling Stone*, *Pitchfork*, *Stereogum* and more. Dylan lives in Los Angeles, and Laura in Chicago - they work remotely, and send files back and forth to each other. In this episode, the two of them break down how they made the song "Money Machine."

("Money Machine" by 100 GECS)

Dylan: My name is Dylan Brady.

Laura: My name is Laura Les of the band 100 gecs.

(Music fades out)

Dylan: We both produce, both write the songs.

Laura: Dylan lives out in LA, and I was just recording out of my bedroom in Chicago. So we email the files back and forth.

Dylan: We know each other really well and we're super close.

Laura: Me and Dylan first met at a party in St. Louis when we were in high school.

Dylan: A few years after that we were like, "Let's work on a project."

Laura: We would send songs or ideas and kind of just like talk music, occasionally.

Dylan: Probably took five or six years to do the first EP from meeting each other.

Laura: We really liked what we had done for the EP. But we had both been doing our own things for a few years. We had been planning on coming back to 100 Gecs for a while. And then we started doing these Minecraft festivals.

Dylan: Minecraft festivals, it's like a big server that multiple people, like thousands of people, can go into this designed online world as their avatar. It's like a real festival layout. There's stages, there's booths, there's huge sculptures that you could walk around and interact with but it's all online.

Laura: There's, you know, stages set up so that artists can perform virtually. One of the people who runs that, he had asked me to do a set, and I thought that was the perfect opportunity to, you know, give Dylan and myself an excuse to start up the project again. That's when we made "Money Machine."

(Dobro slide)

Laura: Dylan started the project.

(Dobro slide)

Dylan: That sound I just found it in Logic. It's called Dobro slide, if you press it at the highest velocity, you get that crazy twang thing that's in some of the notes.

(Dobro slide)

Dylan: I thought the contrast of that to like screaming bass would be a sick kind of thing.

(Screaming bass)

Dylan: We both like really heavy shit and we both like cute, fun melodies so try and bring them together.

(Synth plucks)

Dylan: Just like fun, ear candy, catchy moments in like the context of more heavy shit.

(Synth plucks along with screaming bass and beat)

Dylan: So I just made this beat, saved it as "Money Machine." I usually look around at like objects, try and find some sort of hint at a filename. Must've been some money on the ground [laughter].

Laura: I thought the instrumental was a little bit not mocking, it was sarcastic. It was like wearing a $6,000 fur coat into the most disgusting bar that you can walk into [laughter]. The way the bass feels when you're listening to it, it's like honking at you and laughing at you.

(Beat ends)

Laura: I was working sort of a shitty job [laughter]. And after work I would just come home at night and work on music, deep into the night. I just kind of sat down with the instrumental and put some headphones on and started mumbling into the microphone. But I had had a fight at work, I had had a fight with another man, later on I was just fed up in general. I just wanted to take it out in some way. I had been watching a lot of *King of the Hill*, and I constructed in my head a sort of Hank Hill asshole character to just absolutely break down.

(King of the Hill soccer clip: https://youtu.be/Gj6CIveQGLs?t=32: "Bobby, I didn't think I'd ever need to tell you this, but I would be a bad parent if I didn't. Soccer was invented by European ladies to keep them busy while their husbands did the cooking.")

Laura: [Laughter] Right then, I was needing to just absolutely decimate this man, this man in my head. So I recorded the intro of the song, just thinking of this emotion of "Fuck you. I'm flexing."

(First verse vocals: "Hey, you little piss baby / You think you're so fucking cool? Huh? / You think you're so fucking tough? / You talk a lotta big game for someone with such a small truck")

Laura: I was just kind of getting in that sort of mindset of these people that I'd grown up with, these like people in St. Louis talking about their big trucks and driving around in their like huge whatever, F750s. I just thought, "Your truck isn't that big, all right? Calm down, you have a tiny little truck." People have tried to assign very crude meaning to that line [laughter]. I swear I was talking about a truck [laughter]. I was just thinking the most, you know, how could I destroy this person [laughter]? I would make you fall in love with me and then I would break your heart [laughter].

(First verse vocals: "Aw, look at those arms / Your arms look so fucking cute, they look like lil' cigarettes / I bet I could smoke you, I could roast you / And then you'd love it and you'd text me "I love you" / And then I'd fucking ghost you")

Laura: And then I actually wrote an entirely different hook for the song that was a little more direct.

(Old chorus track)

Laura: But it wasn't very good. I just thought that it like didn't have a lot of personality, it wasn't super catchy so I did my "stay up all night and try to think of a hook" routine. Dylan labeled the track, "Money Machine." So I think that just the phrase was in my head, and it was a really good phrase.

Dylan: Beat titles matter. Don't just call it a number.

Laura: I guess it kind of like morphed into the idea of the chorus.

(Chorus into post-chorus full track: "Big boys coming with the big stuff / Feel so clean like a money machine, oh yeah / Big boys coming with the big trucks / Feel so clean like a money machine, oh yeah / Feel so clean like a money machine / Feel so clean like a money machine")

Dylan: We both love Auto-Tune.

Laura: A lot of people still do have a closed mind about using autotune on vocals or especially the kind of autotune that we use that's very in your face and very fast. And you know, I think that's, that's sad, you know, you should open your mind to it. It lets me do things with my voice that I can't do regularly. So when I'm doing vocal delivery, a lot of times, you know, I don't care about getting right on pitch the first time. It's much more important to me about letting the emotion of the vocal out. So first, I recorded my vocal just completely dry.

(Dry vocals: "With the big boys coming with the big stuff / I feel so clean like a money machine, oh yeah")

Laura: There's lots of little like pitch slurs, you know, so that when the autotune is on it, it has this cool effect to me of staircases.

(Autotune vocals: "With the big boys coming with the big stuff / I feel so clean like a money machine, oh yeah")

Laura: Which, ugh, sends shivers down my spine. We threw some distortion on a lot of the vocals. We just wanted it to sound like huge and big, and just flex as hard as we possibly could.

(Distorted vocals: "With the big boys coming with the big stuff / I feel so clean like a money machine, oh yeah")

Laura: And if you're pitching the vocal up, I can sing way higher. That just lets me do some more intense melodies than I would regularly be able to sing.

(Pitched up vocals: "big boys coming with the big stuff / I feel so clean like a money machine, oh yeah / Big boys coming with the big trucks / Feel so clean like a money machine, oh yeah / Big boys coming with the big trucks / Feel so clean like a money machine, oh yeah")

Laura: I understand that I'm not the best singer [laughter]. But I sort of bionic woman myself into becoming a good singer. You know, I'll use every trick in the book to get the vocal sounding how I want it and get the idea out.

(Post-chorus vocals along with dobro slide: "Feel so clean like a money machine / Feel so clean like a money machine")

Dylan: She sent back the intro and the hook and I was like, "Shit, this is just fucking crazy." And then I just added my verse.

Laura: It definitely wouldn't be complete without Dylan's spin on it.

(Second verse vocals: "Tell me what's the deal, I've been tryin' to go to bed / I've been up for days, I've been tryna get ahead / Said it all before, and I'll say it once again / I'm better off alone")

Laura: He was like, "Tell me what to do because I'm trying to go to bed." For a second, I was thinking I was like keeping him awake because we had been working on the set for so long. And he was like, "Get the fucking chorus over with and like get it done."

Dylan: No, it's definitely not like, "Finish your verse. I'm trying to go to bed." It's like, "Fuck, I'm tired as hell." We were just working like really hard on this shit, and her part is so fucking good, I just wanted to like not fuck it up [laughter].

(Second verse vocals along with beat: "Tell me what's the deal, I've been tryin' to go to bed / I've been up for days, I've been tryna get ahead / Said it all before, and I'll say it once again / I'm better off alone")

Laura: Dylan inspires me a lot to not get lazy with writing. I think it's like sort of healthy rivalry to me because I will come up with some line, and then he'll work off of it, and he will do something great. And then I'm like, "Wow, well, mine sounds lazy now, so I have to go back and [laughter] make it even better." And I think that's just sort of like an ethos that we have when we're working is that, you know, we're just always building off of each other and just another reason that he's so great to work with.

Dylan: After the Minecraft festival, we went back and tweaked a bunch of shit.

Laura: There was like the little snare part right before the chorus kicks in. It's like, "doo doo doo doo doo doo."

(Snare fill along with Laura vocalizing the fill at the same time)

Laura: It's just one snare. I just drew in a little MIDI pattern with it, just automated the pitch bend on my sampler that I was playing the snare off of.

(Snare fill along with other drum elements)

Laura: I had a couple tracks of just like noises that I have made, one I think is a SpongeBob clip, but it's just overly processed to the point where it just sounds like a screech.

(SpongeBob noise)

Laura: I think it's Plankton.

(SpongeBob noise fades)

Laura: And then Dylan and I have this specific noise that we recorded in my apartment when we were recording the album. We had a really like distorted vocal track.

Dylan: Feeding back from the other room speakers.

(Feedback noise)

Dylan: And then we just threw a fucking 808 at the end of it [laughter].

(Feedback noise along with 808)

Laura: I guess it kind of like is the one final flex. Alright, we just did a great song. Now we're just going to absolutely bury it at the end with this noise, because fuck you.

(Noise along with 808 ends)

Laura: It's pop music, I wanted people to like it. But I wasn't very sure just because of a lot of the choices that we make when we're making our music.

Dylan: I mean I thought it was a fucking banger.

(Beat)

Laura: Music has always sort of been a way that I can say what I need to say and "Money Machine" brought out a feeling in me where I just wanted to let out some sort of aggression in the most fun possible way [laughter].

(Beat ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here is "Money Machine," by 100 gecs, in its entirety.

("Money Machine" by 100 GECS)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net to learn more about 100 gecs. You'll also find the music video for "Money Machine," and the link to buy or stream the song.
Song Exploder is made by me and producer Christian Koons, with production help from Olivia Wood, and illustrations by Carlos Lerma. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a collective of fiercely independent podcasts. You can learn more about all of our shows at radiotopia.fm. If you'd like to support the podcast, you can get a Song Exploder t-shirt at

songexploder.net/shirt. You can also follow the show on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @SongExploder. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.