

Song Exploder
Action Bronson - The Chairman's Intent
Episode 140

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.

Hrishikesh: This episode contains explicit language.

("The Chairman's Intent" by ACTION BRONSON)

Hrishikesh: Action Bronson is a rapper from Queens who's been making records since 2011. He also stars as the host of two TV shows about food on Vice's channel, *Viceland*. His third album, *Blue Chips 7000*, came out in 2017, and it features this song - "The Chairman's Intent." It was produced by his longtime collaborator, producer Harry Fraud. I spoke to Action Bronson here in L.A. and separately to Harry Fraud, while he was in his studio in Brooklyn. In this episode, the two of them tell the story of how "The Chairman's Intent" was made.

("The Chairman's Intent" by ACTION BRONSON)

Action: How are you today? This is Action Bronson.

Harry: My name is Harry Fraud.

(Music fades)

Harry: Me and Action first met in 2011.

Action: Many, many years ago when I first started rapping, you know, he was hitting me up to work.

Harry: And I started sending him beats.

Action: And then I was like, "You know what, fuck it, this dude keeps on hitting me up, let's go."

Harry: And then, once he pulled up to my studio, we just kind of bonded.

Action: We laugh at the same things, we grew up a similar way, you know. He's a city kid and I feel like we built this rapport now that he knows me, I know him, it just works well. So the birth of this song was in a studio in Gowanus.

Harry: We start really with a blank canvas and, you know, just start by listening to different old records, and stuff like that. Me and my guy Red Walrus, we constantly just start digging for stuff and filing it away for, "Oh, this sample would be good for Action." So I'm already prepped with an arsenal, so to speak, of things.

Action: His boy Walrus that works with him, he had put a bunch of samples aside for me. He came in, he's like, "Oh, I have something for you."

("Mae Kha Som Tam" by ONUMA SINGSIRI)

Harry: We came upon this kind of obscure Thai funk song.

("Mae Kha Som Tam" by ONUMA SINGSIRI)

Action: And man, freaked me out. Like this was exactly what I was looking for.

("Mae Kha Som Tam" by ONUMA SINGSIRI)

Action: I love Asian funk. They're just loose and very druggy. Because of the war, there was a lot of G.I.'s over there, and they were playing music, and they brought the funk during the 70s, and man, they made some incredible music. It's right up my alley, and I love rapping over that type of stuff.

Harry: It was really the funkiness of how the rhythm and the melody interacted with each other. That caught our ears simultaneously, and we decided, "Let's make something with this."

(Music fades)

Harry: With Action, particularly, it's important to grab his inspiration and put it in the bottle as quick as we can, because I want him to feel that moment and be able to keep moving. I work very quickly so it probably took me 30 minutes to put the beat together on the spot.

Action: Harry Fraud is a master, you know.

Harry: For me, it's always about getting something to a pocket. It's a combination of tempo, and also how the drums interact. It's important for him to have something that moves you a little bit.

Hrishikesh: So Harry Fraud slowed the original track down.

("Mae Kha Som Tam" by ONUMA SINGSIRI)

(Sample)

Harry: We found the parts that were still rhythmic and funky but left enough space for him to fill in with his voice, because his voice is ultimately another instrument in the overall composition of the music.

(Music fades)

Harry: Then there is also that B part.

(Sample)

Harry: It kind of breathes a little bit.

Action: Directly as soon as I heard it, I started writing. When I hear a beat that I like, and I hear something that moves me, it's right away. I don't wait, because that feeling, you're not going to get that again. You look for that feeling while listening to music, your eyes open wide, you freak out. I always say, "When I hear my favorite song, I want to crash my car, you know." It's like one of those, it's just like, "Fuck it, let's just drive off the road." It just makes me that hype.

(Sample)

Action: The thing that started this off, I just was screaming, "You don't know me."

(Vocals with sample: "Yeah (You don't even know me) / Yeah, yeah, ah (You don't even know me) / Ah-ha (You don't even know me) / It's me")

Action: My man Evidence sent me an email, and in the headline of the email, said, "Please give me your 16 bars, and in return I will give you 16 cars." So I was like, "Damn, that's a hot line." So the first line was, "These sixteen bars cost sixteen cars."

(Vocals: "These sixteen bars cost sixteen cars / Kiss these balls, bitch, we stars")

Action: It's just aggressive, comedic, and every punchline hard, and then I tell people that, "Fuck that shit, because you ain't hot like Prince." At the end of the day, I always say this, "You're not Prince."

Hrishikesh: Who do you say that to?

Action: To anybody, they're not hot. Don't be all like, "You're the shit," you're not Prince, he's the man.

(Vocals: "Fuck that shit, you ain't hot like Prince / Got a little shine, but not like this")

Action: When I end that verse, I say,

(Vocals: "You're looking at some motherfucking art, boo")

Action: "You're looking at some motherfucking art, boo." And then it goes into the strings.

(Strings)

Harry: We brought in a cellist to add that string part in the middle.

Action: And I just want people to imagine, hands behind their back, walking through a gallery, looking at the art, and they just see a statue of me. And I'm just standing there, and then as soon as the second verse starts, I come to life. I fucking break through.

(Vocals with sample: "Two pumps from the inhaler got me feeling like Lawrence Taylor / Two kisses on the cheek for my tailor")

Harry: The sample is so hard hitting, so I think it was important to find those moments of like dynamics to break it up a little bit.

Action: "The Chairman's Intent" is kind of like a movie title.

Harry: That's why we had my man, Young Mexico, come in and play the organ piece for us, that starts it.

(Organ)

(Organ ends)

Action: I just felt like it needed a wedding vibe or church-y vibe, you know? Getting you ready for a sermon.

Harry: Something to set it up, and set the scene, so to speak, you know, when the credits come up.

(Organ)

Action: So you have something so beautiful, and elegant, and gentle as the organ. And then out of nowhere, boom [sings the guitar melody].

(Sample)

Harry: We kind of explode with that big first scene of the movie. That's what this song feels like to me. You know, just like a high level 90s blockbuster. And that's kind of the feeling we were trying to convey.

Action: Listening to the song, I feel like a vigilante. I feel like I'm driving an old Oldsmobile with 70s apparel on with a gun, and going to seek revenge against the gangsters that killed my family, you know.

Harry: I visualize Action, repelling out of a helicopter on a SWAT team type mission, down onto the roof of a mansion.

Action: This could be a boxer's walkout song. It's just energy. You don't even have to like rap, you don't have to like anything, but when you put that song on, and you hear that music,

(Pause)

Action: you're a fucking badass.

(Sample)

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here is “The Chairman’s Intent,” by Action Bronson, in its entirety.

(“The Chairman’s Intent” by ACTION BRONSON)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net to learn more about Action Bronson, and for a link to buy or stream this song.

This episode was produced by me, along with Christian Koons, and intern Olivia Wood. Special thanks to Jane Shin for her help making this episode possible.

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