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.

("Goodbye" by APPARAT)

Hrishikesh: This episode contains explicit language. There's a Netflix original series called *Dark* that debuted in December 2017. It's a German show and I'm constantly recommending it to anyone who likes science fiction. It's a really mysterious, mind-bending series with a tone that feels unique to me. And a big part of that tone is announced every episode with the music in the show's opening title sequence. It's the song "Goodbye," by German electronic artist Apparat. Apparat is the solo project of Sascha Ring. And this song actually came out years ago, on his 2011 album, *The Devil's Walk*. Before it was used as the theme song for *Dark*, it's been featured in a bunch of films and commercials. The thing that really put it on the map was when the song was featured in the Season 4 finale of *Breaking Bad*.

Thomas: Vince Gilligan, who's the showrunner and the creator of *Breaking Bad*, he described it as one of his favorite music moments in *Breaking Bad* up to that point.

Hrishikesh: That's Thomas Golubić.

Thomas: I am the music supervisor for *Breaking Bad*.

Hrishikesh: He's the person who placed the song in a crucial scene near the very end of the finale.

Thomas: We knew that we wanted something that had a grand quality to it, and an epic quality to it, something that was really powerful. And the song, "Goodbye," really struck me. When Vince heard that song, he responded incredibly powerfully, and just said, "There it is," like, "That is the one."

Hrishikesh: The final season of *Dark* just came out last week at the end of June 2020, so I wanted to find out how the show's theme song was made. It features vocals from Anja Plaschg, an Austrian artist who makes music under the name

Soap&Skin. Coming up later, she'll tell her part of the story. But the story starts with Sascha Ring, trying to write and feeling stuck.

("Goodbye" by APPARAT)

Sascha: This is Sascha Ring, I make music under the name Apparat.

(Music fades out)

Sascha: "Goodbye" is quite an old song. I started working on it maybe in 2009, 2010, and it was a bit of a difficult period because I just finished the first chapter of Moderat, the band project I have. And we kept on touring and touring, and at some point, I wanted to work on my own music again but I found it very hard, just because it was so easy for me to collaborate with someone in the studio and rely on a second and third opinion. It made making music for me so much nicer that I kind of lost the ability to make music on my own after that. So when it was time to make a new Apparat record, there was this huge void in front of me at first and I didn't really know how to do that and I played around in my studio and it didn't go anywhere and at some point, I just realized that maybe I should just go somewhere else, just take a few people with me, try making a record that way. And I invited a few friends and we ended up going to Mexico. So basically we isolated ourselves in a little house on top of a little hill, watching the sea, and we set up all this recording gear in quite a big room and we were just jamming out with electronic synths the whole time [laughter]. "Goodbye" was one of the songs that originated in Mexico during one of these sessions.

(Synth along with drum elements)

Sascha: That song just started with some synth chords I just looped, and the early version already had some sort of drums.

(Synth along with drum elements)

Sascha: And at some point, I tried to come up with a few words and I did have a simple idea. I wanted it to be some sort of like a final lullaby you'd sing to someone who'll never see you again when he wakes up. Like, bringing him to bed, saying goodbye and sneaking out the back door, you know, before the person even notices what happened.

(Demo vocals along with synth and drum elements: "Fold your hands / Crack me a smile")

Sascha: The lines were, "Fold your hands, crack me a smile. Fold your hands, kiss me goodbye."

(Demo vocals along with synth and drum elements: "Fold your hands / Kiss me goodbye")

Sascha: And that's basically it. I tried to come up with more and have like a traditional structure, verse, chorus, whatever, but yeah it was always just the chord loop, and like four vocal lines on top. There wasn't much substance but it wasn't bad enough to throw away so I kept working on it but it also never really made real progress while we were in Mexico. It never became a real song.

(Music fades out)

Sascha: At some point, we had to pack our bags, we went home to Berlin and I was a little depressed about the result. Not because we didn't get anything done, but maybe I had different expectations, maybe I thought we're going to return home with a whole record and that's not what we had. And also, it was not really what I wanted to do because somehow I wanted to make more acoustic and human record and for some reason, we ended up all behind our laptops and it was very electronic in the end. I remember being frustrated for a while after I returned to Berlin and at some point I talked to my manager, Daniel, who's also my friend. He understood that my problem was that I really couldn't do stuff on my own anymore, so he connected me with PC, a friend of his from Berlin. And he became my co-producer in Berlin actually, and he's not like a traditional recording engineer but he's someone who really likes acoustic instruments, and that's what I wanted. And when I showed him the idea that turned into "Goodbye" later on,

(Synth along with drum elements)

Sascha: he suggested that we step by step try to exchange electronic parts with real instruments.

(Music fades out)

Sascha: The first thing he suggested was that we should just start with a piano, it's always a great thing to do [laughter]. But our problem at that point was that I just moved into a new studio and it was in the top floor of a building and it was around Christmas, my piano was not in my studio at that time, it was still in my

apartment at home. Eventually at some point, we found someone and I had them pick up the piano at my apartment, they brought it to the studio just to realize that the staircase is too narrow. So they couldn't really bring it up and the only option to do that was to use the fire escalator on the back of the building, and the staircase was like super icy and slippery. I mean I thought, "There's no way to get the piano up to the studio." But these guys were just kind of, it seemed like they see it as a challenge. So they carried that crazy old, big piano up the icy fire escalator and I thought someone's going to die that day but they really managed to get it up.

(Piano chords)

Sascha: PC instantly started playing these chords, just those four chords, originating from the synth line. And very, very soon, I realized that this is the way to go because my piano also is just the right atmosphere for it. It's a very old, muffled sounding one and it has a lot of kind of unwanted sounds in it, like the pedal noises that normal piano players would probably not like but I'm a fan of those.

(Piano ends)

Sascha: And they kind of really inspired us and since the piano was there, you know, knowing how hard it was to get it into the studio, we just had to use the piano a lot. And actually in the end, a lot of the sounds you hear in "Goodbye," those sounds are piano-based. For example, the slow marching drum thing

(Sascha hitting the side of the piano)

Sascha: is me banging the side of the piano.

(Sascha hitting the side of the piano)

Sascha: The kind of reverb on it is no reverb, it's just really the strings acting like a spring reverb.

(Sascha hitting the side of the piano fades)

Sascha: For the first time in my life, I had a recording room which I really enjoyed and it was really playful, I would say. Most of the recording really happened during one night and we went pretty crazy, we were just jumping around in the studio and we were banging the piano or grabbing it, or just clapping hands and we would

just put microphones very far away from us so we would have a lot of room sound. That was like a whole night of just piano fun.

(Studio noises)

Sascha: So in the end, it was really worth it getting the piano up in the studio. At that point I was still not really ready to completely abandon the synth chord, but PC wanted to convince me to try something else so at some point he would just grab an acoustic guitar and he would play these like flageolet sounds, harmonic plucks, through a delay basically.

(Guitar plucks)

Sascha: And I liked that a lot because it did blend with the rhythm section very well and it gave that whole song that moving and marching feel that I really wanted to achieve.

(Guitar plucks along with rhythm section)

Sascha: Since I'm from such an electronic background, usually my songs were very looper-based

(Guitar plucks along with rhythm section and piano)

Sascha: and they didn't develop much so we wanted to have a second part and that's where that Mellotron thing comes in and it was supposed to open up and go a bit into a different direction.

(Mellotron along with synth and piano)

Sascha: And I thought, now this is enough to sit down and think about lyrics and a vocal performance again. Because I was quite inspired by our sudden encounter and the creativity that happened, so I really wanted to use that drive to write more lyrics and to finish that song.

(Music ends)

Sascha: This is when I ran into a wall and I got really depressed. I was there in the studio for like a whole day and I was trying different parts, different things, different words and it would never really go somewhere where I would really saw it as a

song, or something. The only thing I liked about it really was the instrumental. By that time, I was really, really close to just throw away the whole thing, put it in a folder and just never open it again, which I do quite often with song ideas. I mean, I have folders with lots of, lots of, lots of old song ideas that I still can't listen to because all the frustration comes up again [laughter]. So "Goodbye" was really, really close to end up at the, at the graveyard. I remember the evening of that whole day when I was struggling with the lyrics, I was tired and I just wanted to go home and I had this little idea that would turn out very important. I was like, "Okay, if I can't really get anywhere with this, why don't I try to get help again?" And the person that came to my mind right away was Anja from Soap&Skin because somehow, that "Goodbye" song idea had that feeling that Soap&Skin songs have as well: slow, morbid, melancholy.

(Mr. Gaunt Pt. 1000 by SOAP&SKIN)

Sascha: I knew Anja a few years already because I used to run a record label called Shitkatapult. We released a few songs of hers and I kept in contact with her, and I occasionally would exchange a few words with her and yeah, she came to my mind and I exported an instrumental and put it in an email, I sent it to her with just the four lines of lyrics I had and I went home and slept through the night, not very happy.

Anja: My name is Anja Plaschg from Soap&Skin. I remember it was New Year's Eve, 10 years ago. In that year, I released my debut and then lost my father unforeseeably, and a bit later, also had a breakup. And so it was the end of the year and I was tired. Yeah, I felt stuck. When I received his email, it was like receiving a gift. And when I listened to it for the first time, what I really loved about the instrumental was this ritualistic beat.

(Instrumental)

Anja: It triggered a lot of feelings, and I had a rush of images in my head. I probably finished my recordings on "Goodbye" early morning, around 5 or 6am after working on it the whole night.

Sascha: And the next morning, I woke up, I checked my email and I had a finished vocal recording in my inbox.

(First verse vocals along with kick and guitars: "Find out, I was just a bad dream")

Anja: The first time I read Sascha's draft for the lyrics, there was one sentence which kind of unlocked the song for me. It was, "Find out, I was a bad dream." It resonated the feeling of being disconnected to the outside world and not to know if I'm really here or if I'm even real. This feeling of being disconnected is something that I struggle with most of my life.

Sascha: I really admired the fact that she was able to kind of like remix the lyrics, you know. I mean she took the words, put them in a different order and kind of like you can still tell what it was before but it became something completely different and it became her story.

Anja: From Sascha's draft I changed, "Crack me a smile," to, "Give me a sigh," to move the whole thing probably to the dark side of hopelessness.

(First verse vocals along with piano and kick: "Fold down your hands / Give me a sigh / Put down your lies")

Anja: And that time, I always recorded tons of layers of my voice. It was kind of a necessity to handle my own shyness.

(First verse vocals: "Bury your doubts and fall asleep")

Sascha: The beginning is kind of like more spoken word and it's very minimal.

(Intro vocals: "Please put me to bed / And turn down the light")

Sascha: And that's actually something I also learned, that sometimes it's good to hold back so the effect is bigger in the end when you go for it and I think that's what she did. She kept it minimal, spoken in the beginning and then it opens up with the mellotron part.

(Chorus vocals along with mellotron: "For neither ever, nor never / Goodbye / Neither ever, nor never / Goodbye / Goodbye")

Sascha: It made such a difference, from imagining the one night when I went home depressed basically and the next morning I woke up, I had that in my inbox and I was like, "Damn, that's really what the song needed." And it just, you know, happened in felt like it was just one second, it's crazy. And I got a tiny little piano part she also came up with that ended up being in the end, I used it as some sort of like tail of the song.

(Final piano part)

Sascha: This way of working together with someone for me, it seemed like the most natural and awesome way of collaborating. There was no like, "My manager calls your manager" bullshit. There was no like business idea behind it, whatever. It was really just that one little spark of an idea in my mind that she might be the right one for that performance and it worked so well because she probably had that same feeling right away. Her vocal recording completed the whole thing basically so all I had to do was just a little bit of mixing. A few days later, I had Jörg, the drummer, visiting my studio. And he loved "Goodbye," which I played for him, and he asked me if he can just improvise a little bit on it. And I thought, "The song is done, it doesn't need anything else." But yeah, I just pressed record and he did a bit of like jazzing around.

(Drums)

Sascha: I put those drums very, very quietly in the end, but I think they give everything a nice twist as well.

(Drums along with bass)

Sascha: That was the last thing we recorded.

(Drums along with bass end)

Sascha: "Goodbye" has done plenty of good things for me. When *Breaking Bad* happened, that was definitely quite a highlight because I didn't have that much success already and the album was also quite fresh, so we didn't really know what's going to happen with the album. And *Breaking Bad* was one of the first things to happen and that was obviously a very, very exciting moment for me.

(Instrumental)

Sascha: And then it just appeared in more and more films and also trailers. It's probably used in like five, six, seven different films alone. Once a record is finished, I just cannot listen to it anymore and I think it's all garbage and, "I could have done so much better." And that's what happened with "Goodbye" and for a long time, I didn't like it. But all the feedback from the directors, probably that helped me to

look at it from a new angle. And that's usually that moment at some point, when you make peace with your record and you start liking what you hear actually.

(Instrumental ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here is "Goodbye," by Apparat ft. Soap&Skin, in its entirety.

("Goodbye" by APPARAT)

Hrishikesh: For more information, visit songexploder.net/apparat. You'll find links to buy or stream this song and you can learn more about Apparat and Soap&Skin. You can also watch the great, creepy opening title sequence for *Dark*. As I record this, I haven't finished the series yet, but I'm planning on binge watching as soon as I hit stop because I have so many questions.
Next time on Song Exploder, Khruangbin.

("So We Won't Forget" by KRUANGBIN)

Song Exploder is made by me, Hrishikesh Hirway, with producer Christian Koons and production assistant Olivia Wood. Illustrations by Carlos Lerma. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a collective of fiercely independent podcasts. You can learn about all the shows at radiotopia.fm. If you'd like to support Song Exploder, 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.