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.

("Put Your Money On Me" by ARCADE FIRE)

Hrishikesh: Arcade Fire is a Grammy-winning six-piece band originally from Montreal. They've released five albums, and the last three have all debuted at number one on the charts. In this episode, singer Win Butler takes apart "Put Your Money On Me," from their 2017 album *Everything Now*. The story of the song began when Win and his wife and bandmate Régine Chassagne moved to New Orleans.

("Put Your Money On Me" by ARCADE FIRE)

Win: I'm Win Butler. I play in Arcade Fire.

(Music fades)

Win: We built a new studio in New Orleans, which I've kind of begun to recognize as part of the process of making a record. We always end up kind of putting a new studio together, and somehow in making the space, there's this kind of period where you're just plugging things in, and seeing how they work, and you accidentally end up writing a bunch of music. And so, the beginning of this song was around when I first got an 808 drum machine, and was just kind of plugging it in, and just got really excited about how it was sounding.

(Beat)

Win: We did a tour where we played these small venues, and played all new material, and then I would usually DJ after. And I just had so much fun. But the thing that was really interesting was I found it really forced me to listen to a lot more music, and then listen to it really loud on a really big PA, which is something I wasn't doing in my day-to-day life. Like, "Sexual Healing."

("Sexual Healing" by MARVIN GAYE)

Win: The first time I heard that in a real club system, it was like, "What? That's what that sounds like?"

("Sexual Healing" by MARVIN GAYE)

Win: There's a little bit of guitar, but the backing track is just an 808 drum machine.

(Beat)

Win: The drums on that song sound so good. And so, I was realizing that you could do that with that instrument.

(Beat)

Win: We have this synth called the CS-80, which is just a beautiful, archaic piece of hardware. It's most famous for the *Blade Runner* soundtrack. You can hear it in the demo.

(Synth with beat)

Win: I was just kind of playing that bass loop on one hand. And then, there's this high kind of [sings high melody] sound.

(Synth with beat)

Win: That I was making just by pulling the slider, like adding harmonics to the bassline.

(Synth with beat)

Win: So it was all basically just one track. It's a beautiful sound but it's really out of tune if you ever try to add any other instruments. Like if it's by itself, it's perfect, and then it just was like, "Wow. I guess no other instruments can be in this song."

(Music fades)

Win: So we ended up kind of recreating that using three synths to make the sound that had been coming out of that one CS-80.

(Synths)

Win: The sounds, they're kind of like little bleeps, the [mimics synth], kind of made me think of like a casino.

(Synths end)

Win: Régine and I were hanging out. And we went down to the Harrah's Casino in New Orleans, and just recorded a bunch of slot machines cashing out, and weird little bleeps and bloops, and kind of ambient sounds.

(Casino sounds)

Win: It's an iPhone recording of the casino.

(Casino sounds)

Win: I was born in Northern California, kind of near Reno, like right on the border of Nevada. And my mom and dad in my early life spent a lot of time in these really burned-out Nevada towns. And I remember being a little kid and being in this crazy casino, hearing the slot machines, and there's something really magical about that sound, as a little kid. It just, it's one of my first times being aware of sound, it sounded so crazy. And so, I had this real, deep childhood association with that feeling, that sound, and it's, like, kind of somewhere between sadness and joy. And so, we just recorded a bunch of slot machines, and ended up putting that on top of the demo.

(Beat with synth and casino sounds)

Win: And then all of a sudden, it just had this kind of magical otherworldly feeling,

(Beat with synth and casino sounds)

(Music fades)

Win: Right after we did the field recording and put it on, I remember going outside and pretty much just wrote all the lyrics *very, very* fast. The feeling that the song was evoking was kind of this burned-out, science fiction-y, casino world.

(Synth)

Win: And so, I was sort of channeling just being a crooner in one of those casinos and like stepping up to the mic.

(Vocals with synth and piano: "Put your money on me / 'Cause I can barely breathe")

Win: You know, like backlit, cowboy hat, people playing slot machines and bringing drinks to people, and singing in that context.

(Vocals with piano: "When you put your money on me")

Win: It's like a love song from the perspective of someone who has been through a lot.

(Vocals with piano and synth: "If there was a race, a race for your heart / I started before you were born / Above the chloroform sky / Clouds made of ambien / Sitting on carpets in the basement of Heaven")

Win: My mom is Mormon, I grew up in Mormon church. And when you were in Sunday school, there'd be these ideas of what heaven's like and it always seemed so strange to me. You know, like as a kid you're trying to picture what that actually was. So I think there's like a little bit of that in there too.

(Vocals with piano: "Trumpets of angels call for my head / But I fight through the ether and I'll quit when I'm dead / If you want to know who'll be there in the end / When you bury me, baby, I'll still be your friend")

(Synth with beat)

Win: The original demo really sounded great. But it didn't really sound like a Arcade Fire song.

(Synth with beat)

(Music fades)

Win: We tried to like work just with that and it didn't, there was too much information there already for the band to really inhabit it and make it its own thing. And so, we decided to do a couple shows in Europe, just to kind of get the blood flowing a little bit. We kind of had an instinct that it would be good for us to remember

what we're doing, which is [laughter] playing live music. So we booked a couple shows, and then at the end, we went to Paris for two weeks with Thomas. Thomas is one half of Daft Punk.

("Around the World" by DAFT PUNK)

Win: And Daft Punk has this amazing studio in Paris that's like one of the last vintage 70s analog studios. So we booked these 2 weeks and we worked on "Put Your Money On Me" again. You would think Thomas is all about electronic music.

(Music ends)

Win: He doesn't actually really like electronic music. And he's very, like, academic and very like deep and philosophical, and I think it was fun for him just to help us try to get clear on what we wanted to accomplish with the song. He was really pushing us to try to translate it, figure out how it makes sense with the band. Sort of like Harry Nilsson, "Everybody's Talkin' At Me."

("Everybody's Talkin'" by HARRY NILSSON)

Win: Which like on paper kind of makes sense for this song.

(Music fades)

Win: And so, there's a whole version of it that's much more of like a classic, country sort of vibe.

(Country version: "Put your money on me (Put your money on me) / If you think I'm losing you, you must be crazy / All your money on me (Put your money on me) / I'm never gonna let you go, even when it's easy / Put your money on me (Put your money on me)")

(Music fades)

Win: We took it pretty far, like we worked on it a lot. But it just wasn't right. Intellectually it kind of made sense, but it just wasn't right, you know. It wasn't that song. It kind of was not happening, like the song wasn't going to make the record, it's like, "Oh well, we couldn't figure out that one." And we're kind of done with the studio. We have maybe half a day left after 2 weeks. And Régine really insisted, she was like, "We have got to play "Put Your Money on Me" again. And so we went back to the original demo.

(Synth with beat)

Win: We're like, "That's the feel. We don't need to reinvent the wheel, like that's how it goes." That ended up being the template for the song.

(Music fades)

Win: But we ended up losing the drum machine and putting real drums in it.

(Drums)

Win: Jeremy Gara plays drums. And there's this kind of like rolling hi-hat thing, which Jeremy was playing, and instead of having him do that, I just had him play just the one note.

(Drums)

Win: And we got the rolling tape delay, which kind of gives it this more electronic kind of lilt.

(Beat)

Win: And it was just reducing, like what's the simplest thing you can do instead of like banging the hell out of it, what's the most minimal thing you can possibly do?

(Drums with beat)

Win: It's one of my favorite drum performances Jeremy has ever done on a record, even though it's kind of the most simple.

(Music ends)

Win: The first time we jammed on the song with the band, my brother Will played like this little synth hook [sings synth hook].

(Synth)

Win: And it just stuck, like that just became the part.

(Synth)

Win: Will's the sort of player that he usually will come up with his idea like pretty much right out of the gate. And then, the rest of us take like a year to figure it out. And Will's like, "But I did my part a year ago."

(Synth)

Win: Richard Reed Parry plays guitar.

(Guitar)

Win: Richard is like a very atmospheric player. He was responding to the casino soundscape, like if you open those two tracks, it sounds like it's part of the same universe.

(Casino sounds join)

(Music fades)

Win: The whole thing is kind of building to the chorale. It's like their really full on kind of disco singing part.

(Vocals: "Singing put your money / All your money on me / I know it's not the last time / Put your money / All your money on me")

Win: Régine really had a vision on the harmonies for this song, and it's very classic ABBA sort of vocal harmonies.

(Vocals: "Put your money on / All your money on me / Put your money on me / You know it's not the last time")

Win: But kind of fitting with this futuristic landscape of the song, there's a little bit of a android singing ABBA part.

(Processed vocals)

Win: And then, there's acoustic guitar.

(Guitar)

Win: Tim Kingsbury uses kind of Nashville guitar tuning, which is where you take just the high strings of a 12-string. And we ended up really pushing that a lot in the chorale and it's super essential, really kind of drives the song forward.

(Vocals with acoustic guitar and processed vocals: "Put your money on / All your money on me / Put your money on me / I know it's not the last time / Put your money on / All your money on me / Put your money on me / I know it's not easy")

Win: And then, there's pedal steel.

(Pedal steel guitar)

Win: We recorded that in New Orleans with Daniel Lanois, who was in town for Jazz Fest, and he came by the studio.

(Pedal steel guitar ends)

Win: He kind of has a system where he has like a sampler, so he can play a note and hit it, and it'll just hold forever.

(Pedal steel guitar)

Win: So they have infinite decay.

(Pedal steel guitar)

Win: It's like very kind of sci-fi sounding version of a pedal steel.

(Pedal steel guitar)

(Pedal steel guitar ends)

Win: I remember watching my grandpa Alvino play the pedal steel guitar in Lake Tahoe at Harrah's Casino.

(Pedal steel guitar)

Win: Whenever you're in a casino, it's very melancholy because there's people winning but most people are losing. So it's like, even in the victory, there's like one table over, someone's just lost their house or is doing something they

shouldn't be doing. So it's like really a nod to the whole emotional atmosphere of the whole thing. It ended up better than I could've hoped. It's kind of a thing that happens sometimes when there's something really cool in a demo and you get stuck on the demo. I mean that's what's hard about making records, is that it's half lightning in a bottle that if you missed it, it's gone, and sorry that you weren't paying attention. And then, the rest is like this meticulous thing that can take years to figure out.

(Pedal steel guitar)

Win: There's always something magic in there that you're chasing. And this was an example where we were kind of suffering from that, but through pushing through it, ended up going somewhere a lot more interesting, I think.

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Put Your Money On Me," by Arcade Fire, in its entirety.

("Put Your Money On Me" by ARCADE FIRE)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net to learn more about Arcade Fire, and for links to buy or stream their song.
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