

Song Exploder
Baths - Miasma Sky
Episode 4

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.

("Miasma Sky" by BATHS)

Hrishikesh: In this episode, Will Wiesenfeld, who records under the name Baths, breaks down his song "Miasma Sky." It came out last year on his highly-praised sophomore album *Obsidian*. Coming up, Will talks about using the computer to intentionally destroy sounds, trying to find a balance in his music between simplicity and complexity, and how he felt getting his first drum kit.

(Music ends)

Will: Just like the most fun thing ever.

Hrishikesh: This is "Miasma Sky" on Song Exploder.

("Miasma Sky" by BATHS)

(Music fades)

Will: Hi, I'm Will Wiesenfeld. I am Baths. With this song, with "Miasma Sky," I went into it knowing I wanted to make like a sort of a simple dance track. And in order to do that, I wanted to make a synth sound that was really, really thick, and took up the space of the entire track almost. And that the song was sort of built around that sound.

(Synth)

Will: I don't have a lot of synths, and there is something in my head that was like the idea of making the most of what I have. And so, all of the synth sounds on this entire record are from a small Casio that I borrowed from my friend, Luke and the OG microKORG. And that's it. Those are the only two synths I have. And then, it's like a bunch of layers of effects, and manipulation, and like stitching

clips together, and all that sort of stuff. So I'm getting stuff that's like further than what either of those can achieve by themselves, but it's still the root of it is just those sounds. And it was like a very delicate thing, and took a while to get the right kind of distortion, where it doesn't sound like distortion. It just sounds thick. And that was the whole, the whole thing with it. So this sound is the sound of the microKORG before any of the effects were laid on.

(microKORG)

Will: And then, this sound is of the MIDI synth.

(Synth joins)

Will: I knew that the timing was going to be what it was, where it's kind of syncopated, you know? So it's like three over four.

(microKORG, synth, and beat)

(microKORG and synth fade)

Will: Early on, in the process of this record, I got a drum set for myself, which was like the most fun thing ever. Because I wanted to get a drum set that basically was kind of the closest I could get to an electronic drum set that was a live drum set. So it's very muted, and small sounding, and claustrophobic, and all of that. You can basically turn any drum set into that. It's just a matter of meating the crap out of it and like putting stuff all over it. I live sampled that drum set like crazy, partially because I'm not great at drums, partially because I just wanted those sounds completely isolated. Because almost every drum sound that I have in my songs is at least like four or five layers deep of different sounds. So like I turned to the sound of a cassette player, closing and opening into

(Cassette player sound)

Will: part of the snare rhythms in the song.

(Beat)

Will: And I put lima beans in a pill bottle.

(Shaker)

Will: And I use that as a shaker [laughter] just to make like a fuzzier feel for the track, so that it feels like dancey or something like that.

(Beat join)

Will: And I was just like nervous [laughter], but it ended up working really well. I'd recorded the rain

(Rain)

Will: where the latter half of the record was finished, and it was raining out there. And I just posted my little portable recorder. Like I recorded most of the record in places that aren't my house, which is what's so different about the process of this record, and what was so challenging about it. Because I'm not used to that, I'm used to my bedroom.

(Rain fades)

Will: For this song, for my life in recording, this is kind of how it goes, where it's like, I'm in a room with a bunch of instruments and making this record. I was in my friend Mario's bedroom, and he has a bunch of instruments laying around, and there was a banjo, and I was like, "I want a sound that's slightly different than a guitar for this song. So let me try that."

(Banjo)

Will: And I'm sure that I'm playing it like not correct banjo style, you know, whatever [laughter].

(Banjo ends)

Will: The way I got a lot of vocals written, and a lot of parts written was like listening to the songs in my car, and singing in my car by myself, and sometimes having to pull over, and just sing in my car when an idea fit really well.

(Vocals)

Will: I would just pull my phone out and press record. So I would just have all the melodies in my phone, and then I wouldn't have to stress over like remembering

them right at that moment. It was just like, "Oh, this feels really good. Let me put it into my phone." I had like eight or so different types of melodies that I had tried. And a lot of them just didn't work, and I would have the one or two that fit really well. And then, I would use that, and then come back in, and record it that way. I remember like trying a lot of different things for this part and hating a lot of it. And then, I came to this one, and I was very comfortable.

(Vocals)

(Vocals end)

Will: Okay, so in the middle section of the song, in the bridge where the key change happens and all of that, there's this sound.

(Digital sound)

Will: It's one of those things that's kind of the thrill of recording on the computer, where I can't tell you what that sound is. And that's the magic of it. I just turn it up a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot, so that it's digitally peaking. And then, you boost it maybe like 30 or 40 decibels beyond that. I don't technically know what I'm doing. But it [laughter] sounds really good, and it sounds really digital, and really gross. And then, it comes out to this really cool, little clip sound.

(Digital sound)

(Synth)

Will: There's something to be said for like really good dance producers, how they can ride out an atmosphere like that, and keep it going for a really long time. And I think I'm just a fidgety piece of shit. And I like, I need things to like get moved around a little bit more. And it's also, I like details, and I like details in the rhythm like that, that just like for a moment pull it out, and make it a little bit different. You can hear kind of the bass part, and how it goes like [sings bass part],

(Bass joins)

Will: so it's a little bit out of place. You're hearing it, and then it makes sense. And then, that little jolt every now and then like every four bars or so, kind of throws you off a little bit, which is kind of fun. And the really abrupt key change was kind of like that same idea of like I'm fidgety.

(Key change)

Will: I actually struggle with that a lot, is that I think my rhythms by themselves are sometimes too simple. I fight with myself about that all the time, that I just wish I could make it weirder, and still have the song make sense to me.

(Synth)

Will: It's an endless battle.

(Synth)

(Synth ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Miasma Sky," by Baths.

("Miasma Sky" by BATHS)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net for more info on Baths. You can find all of the past episodes of the podcast and subscribe to future episodes at itunes.com/songexploder. You can also find Song Exploder on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I send out mixtapes on Fridays on my newsletter. You can find links to all of these at songexploder.net. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.