

Song Exploder
Best Coast - Feeling Ok
Episode 48

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.

("Feeling Ok" by BEST COAST)

Hrishikesh: In this episode, Bethany Cosentino and Bobb Bruno of the band Best Coast take apart their song "Feeling Ok," from the 2015 album *California Nights*. They trace their process and their influences, from the movie *10 Things I Hate About You* to the video game Rock Band. Plus, we'll hear from producer Wally Gagel. Special thanks to Poketo and the LINE Hotel who hosted the live Song Exploder event in Los Angeles, where I recorded my interview with Bethany. Now here's Best Coast on Song Exploder.

("Feeling Ok" by BEST COAST)

Bethany: My name is Bethany Cosentino.

(Music fades)

Bethany: When I wrote this song, I wanted there to be a positive, sort of, vibe behind the song, lyrically and melodically. So when I sat down to start working on it, I think that was like the thing in mind was like, "OK, stay positive as, or as positive as you can be," because I'm not, not always the most positive person [laughter].

(Guitar)

(Guitar fades)

Bethany: I have a couple different guitars that I use at home when I'm writing. I don't play very intricate guitar parts. So I like a guitar that is lightweight and easy for me to hold. And, you know, I don't need anything super fancy because I'm just playing power chords.

(Guitar)

(Guitar ends)

Bethany: With this song and, you know, with pretty much every Best Coast song, I'll record it until it feels strong enough that I can send it to Bobb and say, "Hey, this is what I'm thinking of what I want the rest of the song to be, can you fill in those parts?"

Bobb: My name is Bobb Bruno. I play guitar in Best Coast.

(Guitar)

Bobb: That whole guitar intro, that was me trying to do an arpeggiated like 80s, kind of, synth part, but to play it on guitar. That kind of thing happens a lot on the *California Nights* record.

(Guitar)

Bobb: I got really into, like, Andy Summers from The Police. If you basically listen to, like, "Every Breath You Take," it's like, that's the whole guitar part.

("Every Breath You Take" by THE POLICE)

Bobb: And that came out of, from playing, I play Rock Band a lot. There's something about the game when, because the actual tracks are, kind of, parted out for the gameplay, the mixes in the game sound a little different than what the actual recordings are. His guitar parts on The Police songs that I was playing on, in that game, they just were, they stood out more in the mix while I was playing, and so I just, in the back of my mind, I was like, "Oh, that's a cool thing." And again, like, well, not trying to make this,

(Music ends)

Bobb: like, a 80s synth pop song, I still wanted to have, like, something that kind of conveyed that feeling. It just kind of like, you know, our messed up version of that, which is pretty much everything in Best Coast, is our messed up version of something.

Bethany: For me, when I listen back to my own lyrics, when a song is done, I'll kind of look at it and then think, "OK, now I know what this is about." Leaving some of my more, kind of, childish immaturities behind, not that I have a hundred percent left any of those in the past, I'm still for sure working on that. But I think that, to

me, that was sort of like giving myself some motivation and saying like, "Take your own advice." Because I give advice to a lot of my friends all the time where I'll say, "Well, don't do this and don't do that. Then you won't have this problem." But then I don't take my own advice. So I think it's like me telling myself like, "Give up on whatever you're doing wrong, you know, and take your own advice."

(Vocals: "I took my own advice for once / I gave it up, I gave it up / I know someday you'll find it / Where I, I least expect it")

Bethany: I really wanted to have a song that had like a very evident, kind of like, booming chorus. I wanted everything to sort of have a vibe of, sort of like, 90s movie soundtracks, because when I was growing up all the movies that I loved like *Clueless*, and *10 Things I Hate About You*, and *She's All That*, and that kind of genre of film, they had these very like definitive, like great soundtracks with these really, really great like songs from that era. Feel like a lot of 90s songs had that, "and here's the chorus, and now it's gone, and then it comes back," you know? To me, that was a big influence. The one that stuck out the most to me was "Cruel To Be Kind" by Letters To Cleo.

("Cruel To Be Kind" by LETTERS TO CLEO)

(Music ends)

Bethany: This one is funny because I remember telling Bobb that this was an influence, and he wasn't very happy about that. He was like, "Letters To Cleo?!" And I was like, "You weren't a 15 year old girl when *10 Things I Hate About You* came out.

(Audience laughter)

Bethany: This meant something to me, you know? And, at 28, it still does so.

Wally: I'm Wally Gagel, I was a producer on *California Nights*. When the chorus happens, it kind of opens up without it being complicated.

(Vocals with guitar: "Today I know I feel ok")

Wally: And I think Bethany also keeps her vocals very purposely simple, so that the harmonies that come in, she really does know, like, really in her head.

Bobb: She has so many great ideas, like it's really second nature to her. Like it's, it's actually pretty incredible to watch in the studio, you know. Most of the time, it's like the first or second take. So it's awesome when she's done to hear them all layered.

(Vocals: "Today I know I feel ok / Baby look at me with those eyes of grey / But I'll keep trying to stay this way / I know it's love that's got me feeling ok")

Wally: There's just a real, like, easiness to it. In other words, like the lyrics all seem to make sense, and there's like a great melody that you remember right after hearing it once, and the chords don't even really have to change too much, but you feel movement throughout the song. And Bethany is so melodic, and she's really great at this kind of real basic songwriting that most people can't do, you know, she's really got a gift on it. To actually have the ability just to kind of write that way is, it's a lot harder than it seems.

Bethany: When I write lyrics, it's very much like what I remember doing when I journaled as a young girl, and I just sort of follow those feelings. And I think that

(Ambient sounds)

Bethany: this song to me was a statement of reaching a point in my life where I felt very content. I felt content about myself, I felt content about my friendships and relationships, you know, with people around me. And I didn't feel *amazing* about them, but I was trying to become a lot more positive at the way that I looked at things. For me, it was a realistic way of looking at this idea of like, "Yeah, when I get down, I get really down," but I was trying to tell myself like, "I want to get away from that and sort of stay more at this like medium level of contentedness."

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Feeling Ok," by Best Coast, in its entirety.

("Feeling Ok" by BEST COAST)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net for more information on Best Coast, including links to buy this song and the footnotes for this episode. Next time on Song Exploder, American Football.

("The One With The Tambourine" by AMERICAN FOOTBALL)

Hrishikesh: You can find Song Exploder on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. And you can get all the past and future episodes on iTunes or on songexploder.net. I'm Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

("The One With The Tambourine" by AMERICAN FOOTBALL)

(Music fades)

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