

Song Exploder
Big Boi - Order of Operations
Episode 148

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.

("Order of Operations" by BIG BOI)

Hrishikesh: Big Boi is a rapper from Atlanta. When he was a teenager, he and Andre 3000 formed OutKast, and went on to sell over 25 million records and win six Grammys. He's released three solo albums, including *Boomiverse*, which came out in 2017. In this episode, Big Boi breaks down a song from that album called "Order of Operations."

("Order of Operations" by BIG BOI)

Big Boi: My name is Big Boi AKA Daddy Fat Sacks AKA Sir Lucious L. Left Foot. The L stands for Lavender because the ladies like to put lip gloss on my lapel. That's my name.

(Music fades)

Big Boi: During the course of me recording *Boomiverse*, I would kind of break up my recording sessions between Stankonia, my studio, and I would record at a studio in LA as well. So this happened to be on one of my trips to LA. I would have, you know, producers come in and that first day was the producer Scott Storch, who I worked with on "Shutterbugg."

("Shutterbugg" by BIG BOI)

Hrishikesh: "Shutterbug" was Big Boi's debut single as a solo artist. It was nominated for a Grammy and named by *Rolling Stone* as one of the best singles of 2010.

("Shutterbugg" by BIG BOI)

(Music fades)

Big Boi: This was our first time reconnecting since we did “Shutterbugg.” I wanted real, raw, rough, rap song that had a simple melody in it, and that was just kind of driving. And he kind of tailor-makes the beats to fit the artist. So we got in the studio, and we were cooking it up from scratch.

Scott: My name is Scott Storch. The very first thing that I did to start this beat was the guitar part.

(Guitar)

Scott: Oftentimes, I’ll layer different instruments playing the same part. Slightly, slightly different feel on it to make it have a certain human feel to it. And, this particular instance, I used the keys.

(Keyboard)

Scott: So that’s just creating that little gel around the guitar.

(Guitar with keyboard)

Big Boi: I love the way the melodies roll in the song. The emotion came from the keys, the [sings keyboard melody].

(Music fades)

Big Boi: That was like the driving force of the melody to me.

Scott: We like to have a contrast from this, like, smooth part that’s played on the keys and on the guitar with some good tempo and some dirty 808s.

(808)

Scott: That’s my boy Diego Ave on the 808. He does co-production work with me.

(808)

Scott: And then I program some drums.

(Drums)

Scott: Like snares,

(Snares)

Scott: hi-hats,

(Hi-hats)

Scott: and atmospheric things like little delay tricks and vocal chops,

(Atmospheric elements)

Scott: just to keep the momentum going for the rest of the beat to get fleshed out.

(Beat)

Big Boi: It just sounded like something that I knew that I could attack. And my lyrical style, sometimes I might tap dance on the beat, and I could be Fred Astaire all over this motherfucker.

(Beat ends)

Big Boi: The next step was, he brought a writer in with him, this guy by the name of Eric Bellinger.

Hrishikesh: Eric Bellinger is an R&B singer and songwriter from LA. He's put out 4 albums of his own, and co-written songs for other artists, like Usher, Justin Bieber, and Brandy.

Big Boi: This was like my first time working with somebody that was outside of the camp, and collaborating with somebody who I've never collaborated with, and trusting him with hook responsibilities. But he came in with Scott so it was somebody that Scott was working with. I liked his voice, and I didn't want to hear my voice the whole song. I wanted to kind of break it up some. And so me and him kind of kicked it off and we vibed out. We were kind of tossing back ideas about what the hook should be. And basically my take on it was step-by-step, play-by-play of everyday repetitive life of making it happen and hustling. It was like a hustler's anthem, you know. And he killed it.

(Vocals: "Wake up, fresh, crease, jeans, get to the fucking money / Roll up, smoke, pour up, drink, right back to the money / Pull up, stunt, turn up, leave, more motherfucking money / Go hard, go home, wake up, repeat, order of operations")

Big Boi: I'm a hustler by blood, you know. I got that hustle blood. So just to be sitting still, just doing nothing, or just, you know, kind of relaxing, that's just not where I'm ready to be right now. So it kind of fit perfectly for what I was trying to say on the song.

(Vocals: "Order of operations")

Big Boi: And once you get a hook in place, you know what you're talking about. You know what I mean? Can't just be out here just saying anything just to say it. So, I sat down at the counter and just started putting the verses together.

(Vocals: "So what if I told ya that I was a cold soldier / That give 'em the cold shoulder? These hoes been getting over / On these niggas like Olympic hurdle jumpers")

Big Boi: My voice has a little raspiness to it, and I know how to control it with breath control, and I know how to make it hum, or make it smooth at certain times, you know what I'm saying? I kind of use my voice as an instrument.

(Vocals: "While nigga be stressing about this money, I retire my dear mama / Been fucking up some commas way before I could buy a bottle / Of liquor, looking like the lotto my nigga, but we don't flash it / I balled throughout my twenties, by thirty, see I was stashing, yeah")

Big Boi: And then, I would kind of say a little soliloquy after the first verse where it kind of really summed up what I was trying to say on the song.

(Vocals: "First hundred-thousand, I bought a Lexus / First million, I was twenty, I learned my lesson / I bought some land")

Big Boi: That's real life. First hundred thousand, I was probably like nineteen years old. Me and my partner signed a publishing deal with Chrysalis Music after "Player's Ball," had success and went gold to being number one, being a teenager straight out of high school and getting a hundred thousand dollars, that shit was like, "Boy."

(Beat with bass)

Big Boi: You don't know what to do with that type of money when you first get it, so there are times when you might buy a new car every week, you know what I mean? Or you might go to the mall and spend ten thousand dollars on clothes and buying the same tennis shoes and outfits every week, just blowing money. And then, you know, from being on the road and being a platinum artist, you know, by the time I was twenty, I made my first million dollars and I knew what to do with the money then.

(Vocals: "bought some land")

Big Boi: They're not going to be making no more land, the Earth is what the Earth is, so once you buy it, it's yours. You know, me, I come from nothing, you know, I come from the projects of the west side of Savannah, we lived in homeless shelters and hotels and things like that. And me now, being a father, married with three kids, like what I went through, I would never, never, never want my kids to go through that, and they shouldn't have to go through that because of the legacy that I'm creating for them and the generations to come in my family.

(Vocals: "Operation Grind and Stack")

Big Boi: Operation Grind and Stack is something that was instilled in me by my uncle. It's like, being a multimillionaire and having it now and just doing music for fun, like I don't have to do music, I could retire, do whatever I want to do, but it enables me to provide for my family and my extended family, and provide jobs for people that work at my studio, to my band members. So Operation Grind and Stack is just basically, working, doing what you love to do, and instead of being frivolous with your income, it's putting it away, you know what I'm saying? I mean it's okay to get some wants, you know, but it's all about needs and right now, it's about helping other people.

(Vocals: "Grind and stack, grind and stack, grind and stack, grind and stack")

Big Boi: I wrote the first verse one day and the next day, I wrote the second verse. Sometimes when I'm writing, shit be going so good I be like, I want to back up off of it and then come back with a fresh set of ears, the next day. Because I don't want to go into the second verse on that same vibe. I never want to sound the same or repeat the same cadence or repeat anything that I've ever recorded in the past so I try to come back the next day and challenge myself to do something other than what I did already. And so,

(Beat)

Big Boi: I jumped right back in the studio, they got this raspberry lemonade that they make, so I ordered that, drunk me a cup of lemonade, got a whole bunch of sugar in my system and went crazy.

(Vocals with beat: "I'm King Cole like Natalie and her daddy be / My thing swole, pole dancers, shit, they be adding me / On IG, they gon' DM, we gon' act like we don't see them / They just follow us, follow me, follow us, nobody's leading / But everybody eating, or acting like they full / I'm blessed and highly favored, learned the game when I was lil' / I guess it's time to stake my claim and conquer every hood / Help my partners get this number too by sponsoring the juug / Yeah!")

Big Boi: The juug is, in Atlanta, it's like, making a move that's going to get to some money, you know what I'm saying? We call that juuging. If you juuging that mean, you making money. You hustling to get to the bag. And so, I'm sponsoring the juug by taking my DJ, horn players, background singers, sound man, road managers, bus drivers on the road with me. If I eat, everybody eat.

(Keyboard)

Big Boi: It's a certain spiritual gratification when you come in the studio and you make a song from scratch. It's something that I was born to do and still am excited to do every time I'm in the studio, but to sit down and write a song, you know, I don't have a team of writers, so everything you hear me say, every rhyme I spit, that's coming straight from my ink pen. You understand what I'm saying? And trying to be fresh and new with every verse, is a challenge, you know what I'm saying? So you have got to push yourself. I've been on Operation Grind and Stack for some years right now. Nothing's going to fall in your lap, nobody's going to do it for you, whatever you put your mind to, you can achieve, man, as long as you keep grinding at it, you're sure to chip through and break ground man, so if you want it, it's out there for you to go get it.

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Order of Operations," by Big Boi, in its entirety.

("Order of Operations" by BIG BOI)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net to learn more about Big Boi and to find a link to buy or stream this song.

This episode was produced and edited by me, along with Christian Koons. Carlos Lerma made the art for this episode, which you can also see on the Song Exploder site. Production help from Nick Song. And special thanks to Adam Harrison. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a collective of fiercely independent podcasts. You can learn about all of our shows at radiotopia.fm. You can get a Song Exploder t-shirt at songexploder.net/merch, and you can find Song Exploder on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @SongExploder. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.