

Song Exploder
Bob's Burgers - Bob's Burgers (Theme Song)
Episode 8

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.

("Bob's Burgers (Theme Song)" by LOREN BOUCHARD)

Hrishikesh: Loren Bouchard is the creator of the animated TV comedy *Bob's Burgers*, currently in its fourth season on Fox. In addition to being the co-executive producer and showrunner, Loren also composed the show's opening theme. I interviewed Loren in his office, where his desk is surrounded by musical instruments. Coming up, he talks about which ones went into the theme, and the emotions he wanted to evoke with each of them. Plus a few thoughts from cast members Jon Benjamin and Eugene Mirman.

("Bob's Burgers (Theme Song)" by LOREN BOUCHARD)

(Music fades)

Loren: I'm Loren Bouchard, and this is me talking about the *Bob's Burgers* theme song. So I created this show, I guess it was 2010. I always knew I wanted to write the theme song to *Bob's Burgers*, partly because when you give people a piece of work, animated comedy, to me, it sort of feels appropriate that you should also have your hand in the music. It kind of marries the voice of the thing together, I think, if you do it right. While we were working on the pilot in the early development phases, I was working on the theme music. I knew it was something that I could grow alongside the show, the earliest version of the show, which was a 12 minute demo that they, you know, paid for us to do until about 2010.

I love making this music. So much of the music is almost as if kids made it. Maybe the best part of that experience is there are adults hearing it who are essentially being invited to hear it the way kids hear it. I stumbled across the ukulele in probably about 2005 or 6. I literally stumbled across one at a flea market. And it lit me up. And it was very exciting. I knew I'd found something that I'd probably been waiting for my whole life, which was the instrument that fit

my hands, and my ears, and my sensibility. Before that, I had just been sort of lost, you know, a little bit of a keyboard player, and just kind of a dilettante. And I still am, but the ukulele is a great instrument for a dilettante, for a hack. It's wonderful, because in a way you really shouldn't overthink the ukulele. I mean, it's just a simple, and humble, and happy little instrument. It's almost a percussive thing like banging on a cardboard box. I mean, it's more than that, to be sure, but it has a quality that almost, I think, reminds you and invites you to play like a child would play. And that fit me perfectly. It was great. And it fits *Bob's* because I wanted a little bit of hope and optimism in the music. This had to be a story of a hardship as it pertains to running a restaurant, but it's supposed to be an optimistic show, and a nice slice of life with a lot of happiness in it. The ukulele was perfect. So I knew that I wanted to start with that.

(Ukulele)

Loren: Just a nice, little, accidental thing. And then, you know, there's something just so like horribly simple about that, that you wouldn't want, I wouldn't want to like write that on the piano. You'd feel, you know, a little, I think, underwhelmed.

(Ukulele)

Loren: That's the uke track that I originally recorded back then. I had a baritone uke so I doubled it. So you get this, sort of, ukulele orchestra effect after the first few bars. We've added layers to this theme song over the years, since, you know, we got greenlit for production, and became a real series, and moved to LA, but this uke stem that it all started with is the original stem. Yeah, there's something about the way it finds and loses the beat that I kind of like. We could have rerecorded it here, but I've kind of become attached to this original recording. It's sort of nice to leave it in a nice, little sort of snapshot of a time of me in San Francisco, and just fooling around. And I liked the fact that that's sort of, it's still in the DNA of this theme music, even though we've added so much to it since then.

(Ukulele ends)

Jon: My name's Jon Benjamin. I play Bob on *Bob's Burgers*. This family like stays afloat by having fun with each other. There's something really sweet and fond about that family. Working with Loren, as much as I have, there's always like a premium on optimism, I think. I'm more darker than I am optimistic. I think Loren

brings the light side to it. I'm just always annoyed. I think Loren enjoys that. He bought me a ukulele, and I remember a while ago, you know, he sort of really wanted me to learn.

(Guitarette)

Loren: You know, one thing that I only found recently was the guitarette. It's this wonderful instrument, it's really weird. I got this off eBay.

Hrishikesh: Were you looking for it?

Loren: No. So I have a very active relationship with eBay, the potential and the possibility is always very exciting. It's actually very hard to stumble across new instruments that you're going to fall in love with, and that are worthwhile, but the possibility keeps me coming back for more. So I'll Google, and, or just sort of search. Yeah, digging for treasure, kind of attitude. And I try not to spend too much. I try to have this sort of \$250 limit. And I feel like that's a good experiment, that's worthwhile. And if I use it on the show, I feel that I've gotten my money's worth and then some. And if I don't, I feel like I haven't taken from my children's college fund in order to fund this addiction. And it does bear fruit, sometimes you get lucky. For me, that's this nice childish aspect of the theme, and it goes nicely. This is an actual children's xylophone playing a similar harmony that, I think, helps give it a childhood glow.

(Xylophone)

Loren: So together you get this.

(Guitarette joins)

(Music ends)

Loren: My three-year-old destroyed this thing not long after I recorded this because I left it out. So this is the last song of this little kids xylophone. And I still have it in a bag, you know, all the pieces and all the little nails. They didn't even use screws, you know, it's cheap thing, and yeah, it's just in a bag waiting to be buried [laughter].

(Guitar)

Loren: If you tease apart the theme, you can find elements of the show, that the ukulele has the sort of happy, bright sound, but that there's something a little more melancholy about the bells and the guitar.

(Guitar)

Loren: Guitar came late in the game. It's a little more shaded. It's not straight up happy. That tremolo sound always has a kind of a nice, moody effect, a little sadder or bittersweet or something. And I wanted that very much to be in there as well. So you have this happy, happy ukulele, but then there's more.

(Drums)

Loren: At Sam Adato's Drum Shop in the SoMa district of San Francisco, I bought a shitty, old floor tom and a shitty, old snare. The night I was recording this early version of the theme, I had this idea to play the floor tom with my right hand, with like a beater, like a mallet, and the snare with my left hand. And I played this very simple beat. You know, I originally played it all the way through. And then, since then, when we sort of did this version, we just cut up a few bars and looped it. I have a musical collaborator on the show now who you're going to hear all over the theme song, and that's John Keith. So here's John playing real drums, trap kit down here in LA.

(Drums)

Loren: Sounds great, right? That's like great kit, carefully recorded, and really well played, but I love the two of them together.

(Drums)

Loren: The boominess of the floor tom, and the room that I recorded it in San Francisco, and the bad quality, if you will, of the recording. I feel like just putting a lot of air around the whole drum sound in the theme. And so, that's been nice to keep the ukulele, and then also this old, two hand, "boom-chick-boom," thing that feels like the original ingredients still in the stew.

(Drums end)

Loren: I knew I had this character in the show, who's going to be playing the Casio, and playing fart samples on his Casio SK-5.

Eugene: I'm Eugene Mirman, and I voice Jean. I think the music in the show, in general, is very reflective of both humor and sweetness.

Loren: For me, especially, and for people my age, the Casio keyboard, especially the SK-1 and the SK-5, are so tied in with your earliest memories of making music. That's a silly instrument. The SK-5 that I still have is the one that we had when we were kids. I think it was actually a present for my sister. And so, I got to give it back to her at some point. That's a stem that's in the intro. Here it is.

(Casio SK-5)

Loren: And then, a little fill,

(Casio SK-5)

Loren: and that's it. I should say this, knowing the kids watch the show is great. But I don't think it has changed how we approach it, or I should say, not nearly as much as *having* kids has changed me. One of the things I do with them, love doing with them, is watch movies and shows. You, you know, are hearing a Disney movie or something like that through their ears, and you're, at the same time, remembering what those movies were for you, that music was for you. And so, I have, at times, humbly thought, *Oh, right, this will be that for some kid*. You sort of become aware, you sit up a little straighter, and you say, "Oh. Yeah, but then, at the same time, you can't overthink it. Don't let that thought pull you off of what you were doing, which is, you know, just farting around on a ukulele, and making something silly and light for your comedy show." So, you know, the thought comes, but mostly you let it drift on by, and not get too hung up on that.

(Bowed bass)

Loren: One more stem that's only ever going to be heard on a podcast like yours, because you can't hear it in the mix, and I keep it in there only as a secret sauce that I know about, is this bowed bass.

(Bowed bass)

Loren: Like an Ovation acoustic bass that you're supposed to play with your fingers. But I bowed it, and then sampled it, and kind of played the samples, more like ProTools playing it. You know, I edited it, and sort of moved it around, and

pitched them around. It's barely there, little, little farts in the wind that just help kind of bounce the track along.

(Bowed bass ends)

Loren: My most important job on the show is: tone police. I try to ride the tone of the show if nothing else, and make sure that I'm following an instinct that seems like it's true to itself at all times. And so, that will pertain to jokes and dialogue and performances by the actors, and all the aspects of the animation. But ultimately, music is one of the most powerful tonal controllers that there is. Music is the secret weapon of Hollywood, as you know, and for good reason, you can turn someone's mood, like you're turning a dial if you do it right, and even if you do it wrong. I like that I've been able to put that in the show. I think in the end you feel it, you know, as the audience. It's a little weird, it's a little off because I'm not trained and I'm not that talented, and the show's a little weird and a little off. And so, I think it, you know, on a good day, hopefully, it just kind of marries the whole thing, and makes it feel like you're watching something that came from one sensibility.

(Guitar with percussion)

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's the theme song to *Bob's Burgers*.

("Bob's Burgers (Theme Song)" by LOREN BOUCHARD)

Hrishikesh: For more information on *Bob's Burgers*, including a link to watch the original 13 minute pilot with Loren Bouchard's first version of the theme song, visit songexploder.net. *Bob's Burgers* airs Sunday nights on Fox. And the first three seasons are available on Netflix.

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