

Song Exploder
BoJack Horseman - Main Title Theme
Episode 80

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: Last week Netflix released the fifth season of *BoJack Horseman*. In the opening credits of the first episode of Season Five, as the theme song plays, there's a shot of BoJack in the foreground, and in the background, on a TV, there's a drawing of a man with a saxophone and the dates 1956 to 2017. It's a Memorial tribute. The man in the drawing is Ralph Carney, who co-wrote the theme song along with his nephew, Patrick Carney of the Black Keys. I spoke with both of them in 2016 for the Song Exploder episode about the making of the theme song. But in December of 2017, Ralph Carney passed away suddenly. Here's Patrick.

Patrick: Losing Ralph's been really hard for me. He was one of my biggest inspirations. When it came to music, he always encouraged me ever since I was a teenager. I know that he would be happy to know that people are interested in this song. And I encourage you to look deeper into Ralph's catalog, including the songs that he made with Tom Waits on records like *Rain Dogs*, *Mule Variations*, along with some of the stuff he did with Daved Hild, and Tin Huey, and the B-52's. But it's been a rough year so far. Losing your mentor is a terrible thing, and losing your uncle's terrible thing, but it is really cool that we have this song we made together that has been exposed to a lot more people, because it's the theme song to a great show than as if we would have just put it out like as a seven inch. So every time I hear it, it makes me happy to know that millions of people get to hear Ralph playing his horn.

Hrishikesh: With the new season of BoJack out now, I wanted to revisit their episode and hear Patrick and Ralph talking together again about how they made the theme. Here it is.

("BoJack Horseman (Main Title Theme)" by PATRICK CARNEY ft. RALPH CARNEY)

Hrishikesh: *BoJack Horseman* is a Netflix original series, an animated comedy about a washed up 90s sitcom star who's trying to figure out his life and career without drowning in self-loathing and existential despair. It won the 2016 Critics Choice award for Best Animated Series. The theme song for the show was created by

Patrick Carney, who is one half of The Black Keys, and his uncle, Ralph Carney, a multi-instrumentalist who has worked with artists like Tom Waits, St. Vincent, Galaxie 500, and a lot more. But the track wasn't written for the show, originally. It was just something that Patrick and Ralph made without knowing what it was for. In this episode, the two of them break down how the song was created, and how it went from their long-distance collaboration to become the main title theme.

("BoJack Horseman (Main Title Theme)" by PATRICK CARNEY ft. RALPH CARNEY)

(Music ends)

Patrick: I'm Patrick Carney. I'm the drummer for the Black Keys. And I produced and co-wrote the theme song to *BoJack Horseman* with my uncle Ralph.

Ralph: This is Ralph Carney, the uncle of Patrick Carney. I played some instruments on that BoJack theme.

Patrick: We've been sending stuff back and forth to each other, since I was a teenager.

Ralph: You used to send cassettes back when you were like 16 or something. Those were hilarious. I got some good ones.

Patrick: I got into music because of Ralph. The first time I think I ever saw Ralph perform, my dad, I don't remember if he woke us up or if he had taped it, but it was Ralph playing with Tom Waits on *Letterman* in probably like '87.

Ralph: It was '88, but that's okay.

Patrick: Ralph was more of like an influence than someone I learned to play music with.

Ralph: I came back in 2008, specifically to record some stuff with you. And we, and I remember you're like, "Let's do a MySpace page right now." I remember [laughter].

Patrick: I think it might still be up.

Ralph: It's still there!

Patrick: [laughter]

(Synth pad)

Patrick: I built a studio at my house in Nashville. And basically the theme from BoJack was just the first thing I recorded in the studio, was more of a test to make sure everything worked well. The first thing I did was I just built a click track.

(Click track)

Patrick: I bought a Roland Jupiter-4 off of my buddy in Ohio, and I plugged the Pro Tools click track into the CV input, and then turned the arpeggiator on.

(Synth joins)

Patrick: CV is controlled voltage. So it's basically, it's a primitive way of controlling a synthesizer externally with a different, like, electronic source. The Jupiter-4's a cool keyboard, and it has like old, weird presets. The whole sound of that is from glitching out the clock. It moves in that way, because I have so much volume, I think, going into the CV inputs from a Pro Tools click track that it's just totally glitching it out.

(Synth with click track)

Patrick: And the next thing I added to it was the drums.

(Drums)

Patrick: So the way I do drums typically is I record like a very simple beat, like: kick snare, hi-hat. When you hear the beginning of the song, when the drums first come in, that's just a loop of just that very simple beat.

(Drums)

Patrick: And then the next thing I did after that was I recorded a whole drum take of fills on top of it.

(Drums and drum fills)

(Guitar)

Patrick: The thing after that was this distorted rhythm guitar, kind of call and response thing that I recorded it in mono, and then I took the pan pot, and went left to right.

(Guitar)

(Guitar ends)

Patrick: I love to collaborate on music. I prefer it. I hate working by myself. The fact that I had even bothered to structure something, and like get a rough mix together, you know, it was all because I knew I was going to send it to Ralph.

(Tenor saxophone)

Ralph: First of all, when I got it from Patrick, I was like, "Man, this is, you're really coming up with some cool stuff." So the first, what I do, I put it on, and I just look around in my room, I go, "Hmm, there's a tenor sax right there."

(Tenor saxophone)

Ralph: And then, there were a couple of rhythmic things that, like I said, "Oh, that's kind of a cool little riff. There's that one [sings riff]."

(Guitar with bass)

Ralph: And I basically would find something that seemed like a riff, and then double it or triple it. And I sort of like beefed up some of the parts, like they were written out horns parts, you know?

(Guitar, bass, and tenor saxophone)

Ralph: And then, I added bass trombone and baritone sax. So there's a lot of low horns stuff, and that kind of gives it that bite.

(Bass trombone with baritone saxophone)

Ralph: At the very end, I'm playing baritone sax, and it was really cool how Patrick like had, just isolated that as like a solo instrument.

(Baritone saxophone)

Ralph: Kind of like The Simpsons [laughter]. Lisa Simpson, bari sax.

("The Simpsons Theme" by DANNY ELFMAN)

(Music ends)

Patrick: The thing about the sax, I mean, the saxophone like in rock & roll has such a bad rap. But I mean, it is, like it can supplement a human voice, I think, so well. Which is why it's such an important instrument when it comes to jazz and stuff like that. I mean, Ralph has such good instincts, and everything he plays is interesting, you know? A couple days later, I got, you know, an email with the files back from him. And I knew, like, instantly after playing it back, that it was going to work. I just, I went through, and kind of edited stuff, and mixed it down. And like three months later, I got an email from one of the producers of *BoJack*, a guy named Noel Bright. And I didn't know him. He just asked.

Noel: I'm Noel Bright. And I'm one of the executive producers on the show.

(Guitar)

Noel: Every part of *BoJack Horseman* had been sort of, "Well, what's our dream?" And during the casting process, it was sort of, "What's our dream for BoJack?" And I was like, "Will Arnett." And we got Will Arnett. And then, it was like, "Who is our dream for Todd? Aaron Paul?" And we got Aaron Paul, and we started to realize that we had something special when we started making the show. And working on the main title, it felt like, "Okay, what are we going to do that's going to be very special? It's going to be very, you know, emblematic of the show." And it felt like, "Well, it's worked all along from this [laughter] point. Let's go for what would be our dream." And for me personally, I've always been a Black Keys fan. And because we were on Netflix, we had a lot of flexibility to do something really different. So reaching out to work with one of your favorite artists was kind of a no-brainer. And so, like let's take a shot. This is a show that's not a typical animated comedy. It's a funny show, but it's thoughtful, and it has a dark side to it. When we heard the original track, we knew immediately that it worked, just captured the tone so well. When you hear the saxophone, and you hear the dreamlike quality of the piece, I think it was something that immediately we weren't looking for, but we knew it was right when we heard it. We showed it to the team at Netflix, and said, "We think that we have our main title, and we think this is going to be very special. And we think this is going to brand the show,

and identify right out of the bat like, tell the fans, tell people, this is what the show is.”

(Guitar)

Ralph: That was just really like one of those lucky breaks. You know? It wasn't like, “Hey man, these people want us to do this theme for a cartoon about a horse,” you know, then it'd be like, “Oh,

Patrick: Right.

Ralph: what should I, what sax should I play that sounds like a horse?” Or I would've thought about it too much. And, you know, probably would have sucked [laughter]. You're thinking too hard. So that's, it's the best world when something you've done, just they like it.

(Guitar with tenor saxophone)

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: The main title sequence for *BoJack Horseman*, where this song appears in each episode, is about 55 seconds long. The music is edited to fit the length. But the original version that they made is actually about four and a half minutes long with sections that are never heard on the show. So now, here's the *BoJack Horseman* theme by Patrick Carney, featuring Ralph Carney, in its entirety.

“BoJack Horseman (Main Title Theme)” by PATRICK CARNEY ft. RALPH CARNEY

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net for more information on Patrick Carney, Ralph Carney, and *BoJack Horseman*. There's a link to buy the full length version of this song, and you can see the show's main title sequence.

This episode was produced and edited by me, along with Christian Koons. The illustration for this episode was done by Carlos Lerma. You can see that on the Song Exploder website too. 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. I'd love to know your thoughts on this episode. You can find Song Exploder on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @SongExploder. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

