Song Exploder
Busdriver - Worlds to Run
Episode 73

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.

("Worlds to Run" by BUSDRIVER)

Hrishikesh: Busdriver is a rapper from Los Angeles, and since 2001, he's been releasing albums with a signature hyperliterate, intellectual style. But over a decade later, Busdriver has found himself reaching for something more intimate and personal. In this episode, he breaks down the 2015 song "Worlds to Run," along with the track's producer, Kenny Segal. It features guest vocals from Anderson .Paak and Milo, and coming up, you'll hear how their contributions shaped Busdriver's vision for the song.

("Worlds to Run" by BUSDRIVER)

Busdriver: Hello, this is Regan, I go by Busdriver.

(Music fades)

Busdriver: Kenny Segal's a DJ, producer, who's been around for years, and has been my engineer since 2008 or '09. I first heard the beat for "Worlds to Run"

(Guitar)

Busdriver: in Kenny's studio, who was just playing on something that he was working on. And it was pretty simple, and it was really just elegant.

(Beat joins)

(Guitar)

Kenny: I'm Kenny Segal.

(Guitar fades)

Kenny: I initially just kind of, like, looped up this little acoustic guitar loop.

(Acoustic guitar)

Kenny: I added the drums that night.

(Beat)

(Beat ends)

Kenny: A group that I work with a lot called Penthouse Penthouse, they came over to record a song for themselves. And that day we plug my friend's guitar into the SP-404. The SP-404 is this little sampler, and it was like this crazy aha moment, because it made the guitar sound like this old sample.

(Guitar)

Kenny: So I added the drums, and then I was like, "What's the next element to add?" I raided that session I'd just done with Penthouse Penthouse, so I chopped up a bunch of those guitars from that other song. And that kind of lays the backbone chords of the whole song, was those chopped up guitars of Mike Parvizi from Penthouse Penthouse playing through the SP-404.

(Guitar with beat)

(Guitar)

(Guitar fades)

Busdriver: The beat, there was just like a depth to it that was suggested in like this dustiness, that kind of had an emotional longing in it. At the time, I was doing a lot of songs with Milo, a rapper from Milwaukee, we had a really good chemistry. Someone like Milo, he tends to give songs an emotional root. I tend to put a lot of information in songs. So I like to work with him, because he allows me to take the same idea, and go on the other end of it. We heard the beat, and then Milo wrote his rap, and he did it right then.

(Vocals: "This slack-jaw mealy-mouth / I mumble when I'm round the house / I'm trying not to do no chores today / Crying in my underwear / I lost my sense of wonder there / No, I'm not

Milan Kundera / Though this lightness is unbearable / The feeling is indelible / I'm wishing I could teleport somewhere")

Busdriver: And once Milo did his verse on it, almost like instantly, it formed just a bed of this just like broad, emotional context that you can draw from. When he laid his verse, it definitely informed what I wrote. That refrain, "I can run the world from my mama's house,"

(Vocals: "I can run the world from my mama's house / I can run the world from my mama's house / I can run the world")

Busdriver: It's really kind of drawing from Milo's sentiment. When he comes into the song, or at least what I interpreted as the sentiment, just the feeling of it, just

(Vocals: "Crying in my underwear / I lost my sense of wonder there")

Busdriver: "Crying in my underwear, I lost my sense of wonder there," just kind of this dealing with very personal matters [laughter], you know? You know, holding things close to the chest, and the only thing I can think of was my mom, and we're trying to make things happen in agency. I was trying [laughter] so desperately to, like, find like the heart in something that seems so declarative and tough. "I can run the world from my mama's house." Like I can, you know [laughter],

Hrishikesh: [laughter]

Busdriver: like I can do it if I try, you know?

(Vocals: "I can run the world from my mama's house / I can run the world")

Busdriver: The first thing that we wrote was the deep and the raw part that I sang. "When you're deep in the raw, there's only so much truth you can keep in your jaw."

(Vocals: "When you're deep in the raw (Yeah) / There's only so much truth you can keep in your jaw / 'Till it bleeds through the wall")

Busdriver: I was thinking of what kind of metaphor I can use, you know, just using like jaw and mouth, and use all these corporeal metaphors of just the body. I'm using raw in that way, deep in the raw. I think I was reading about film editing and someone referred to the film stock as "The Raw," and I was like, "Oh shit, that's

amazing. Let's get deep in the raw." I was like, "Oh wow, that's it," [laughter] you know? So I just went with that. I asked Anderson .Paak to kind of help and interpret what we were doing. And he interpreted the head that I wrote, and did his own version.

(Vocals: "When you're deep in the raw / Everybody wants to get a piece of your heart / There's only so much truth you can keep in your vault / Speak your piece, but words are too harsh")

Busdriver: He's such a good studio guy, he got it instantly, you know, and was able to take my seed idea and make it his own and, you know, make it *way* better. Anderson .Paak was never in the studio with us, I was just on the phone with him. And he's like, "How's this?" And I'm like, "Oh my God, you're brilliant." Having Anderson .Paak was a huge asset, you know, for that chorus, because I wanted the chorus to be big and dynamic, and Anderson .Paak really leaned in with some amazing vocals, it was just. And I never structured a chorus, like how I did on "Worlds to Run." We were going to replace my part with his part, and just jettison my part, but when we heard it all, we're like, "Oh, all this kind of compliments everything. Let's move these parts around." And there were all these moving parts, and we kind of swirled them around.

(Vocals: "When you're deep in the raw / Everybody wants to get a piece of your heart / There's only so much truth you can keep in your vault / Speak your piece, but words are too harsh / (Hold my, hold my, hold my piece, yeah) / Uh, overspoke my piece / Now I'm known in the streets / (I hope I don't break, ayy) / When you're deep in the raw / There's only so much truth you can keep in your jaw / So what you saying? (Ooh) / I can run the world from my mama's house (Ayy, yeah) / I can run the world from my mama's house")

Busdriver: So the chorus is really alive for me, you know, it's not really like, "Here's the hook. Copy and pasted. Hook."

(Bass)

Busdriver: I know I'm getting older, I know this is going to come to an end, but it's a good state of mind to filter in through songs. But yes, my daughter is old enough to vote, so I put that in there.

(Vocals join: "Driver old as fuck / My daughter old enough to vote")

Busdriver: "My daughter, old enough to vote." [laughter] Just kind of, once again, like a boast, like I say it in a boastful way. "Driver old as fuck, my daughter old enough

to vote, rap songs blowing up on the coast," like what? You, what? That's not cool [laughter] you know [laughter]? So you got an old ass kid? Wait a minute [laughter]. I guess that's our writing style; aggressive bravado behind ridiculous things to say. I'm talking about my mother and my daughter, you know I'm touching on the core of my existence, and I wanted to be personal and personable, and reveal something about myself, because I thought the song was so beautiful it needs something. But getting personal on songs is uncomfortable for me. Like I try to make sure people don't know it's me, you know what I mean? Like that's how my act started, a stylistic mask, you know [laughter]? But my writing style's changed, and I try to put my heart into it. And so, I try to bleed it out more. And I was really focused on home for this song [laughter]. That was really a thing with me.

(Horns)

(Horns end)

Busdriver: And I guided the song, but a lot of beauty on there that I didn't prompt. Like, I didn't tell Mr. Carmack what to play, he did that with Kenny. They did all the horn stuff.

Kenny: It was just one of those songs that all of my musician friends that, like, live with me, or like come and hang out at my house, everyone wanted to kind of play on it. So my roommate, Mr. Carmack, he heard it, and I think the actual melody was just something he heard and came up with. It was just one of those magical music moments.

(Horns)

Busdriver: That's the type of stuff that people often don't associate with rap music, like moments [laughter]. Like there's a *moment* here, it's a musical moment too, it's like, "Oh." Sometimes people, not people, I mean, me, myself also, I don't know, the limitations of rap seem so daunting. It's like, you can't do this. It's like, the truth is you can do whatever.

(Horns)

(Horns end)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Worlds to Run," by Busdriver, in its entirety.

("Worlds to Run" by BUSDRIVER)

Hrishikesh: To find out more about Busdriver, visit songexploder.net. You'll find all the past episodes of the podcast there too. You can also subscribe to Song Exploder on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you download podcasts.
Next time on Song Exploder, Old Crow Medicine Show.

("Dearly Departed Friend" by OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW)

Hrishikesh: Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a network of independent, creative podcasts. Learn more at radiotopia.fm. And you can find Song Exploder on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

("Dearly Departed Friend" by OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW)

(Music fades)