

**Song Exploder**  
**Caribou - Home**  
**Episode 178**

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.

*("Home" by CARIBOU)*

Dan: If you'd have proposed that to me before I started this process that, "Oh yeah Dan, I think you should make a kind of hip hop influenced track that's like a duet with a 70s soul singer," I would have been like, "That's never going to work."

Hrishikesh: Dan Snaith has been making Caribou records since 2001. He won Canada's Polaris music prize in 2007, and this month, he's releasing the seventh Caribou album, *Suddenly*. In this episode, Dan breaks down the song "Home." He talks about how he managed to get past several moments of creative uncertainty to figure out the final track.

*("Home" by CARIBOU)*

Dan: This is Dan Snaith from Caribou.

*(Music fades out)*

Dan: Every day I come down into my studio and make something. I kind of turn off the critical part of my brain that thinks, "Is this something that's going to be a Caribou track? Is this going to be something that goes on an album?" I'm just having fun, every day, that's the process is to just enjoy that. So that was very much the spirit in which I put this together. I was browsing YouTube when I first came across the sample that's the kind of core of this track, which is the track by Gloria Barnes also called "Home."

*("Home" by GLORIA BARNES)*

Dan: It's kind of a lost, soul gem. I spend a lot of time in my life digging for records in dusty warehouses and flea markets and things. Now, just as often, I'm looking for music on YouTube, and that's how I came across this track. I kind of miss that sense of stumbling across something when you're there in a kind of back room of a record store or wherever you might find something. But to be honest

with you, the thing that I'm really interested in is the musical ideas, and that's always just as thrilling no matter where you find it.

*("Home" by GLORIA BARNES fades out)*

Dan: So it's a beautiful song. So lovely to listen to, it's so memorable, and there's so much emotion in her recording and her performance. You know, first and foremost, I'm a music fan, and that's just finding out about a piece of music that is new to me and exciting is the root of everything I do really. I mean I think just a love of music as a listener. But then it's hard to hear something sometimes and not think, "Oh my goodness. You know, how does this thing relate to the music that I make, and could I do my own version of this idea or sample this in some way?" And I think maybe from growing up, listening to hip hop, you know, finding the samples on Wu Tang and Tribe Called Quest records and idolizing people like Madlib, et cetera, I just have that impulse to be like, "Okay, that's a loop."

*(First loop from Gloria Barnes' "Home")*

Dan: The part that I've used from it is just the first few seconds looped. The other part that loops is kind of the bit that repeats, "Baby, I'm home, I'm home, I'm home," afterwards.

*(Second loop)*

Dan: I could immediately hear it

*(First loop)*

Dan: oscillating back and forth between those two sections.

*(Loop fades)*

Dan: I didn't know that it was going to be a Caribou track or be a track that was going to be released or used in any way like that, but I just wanted to make a quick beat out of it.

*(First loop along with beat)*

Dan: In my head it was like a hip hop instrumental, you know. I'd kind of taken the loop from this record and done what I imagined a kind of 90s hip hop producer would have done with it. But it wasn't clear like how that world, which I love, how that related to the music that I was making or that I've made in the past.

*(First loop along with beat ends)*

Dan: I'm just always making these kind of little loops and ideas, and then I come back and revisit them later with a bit of hindsight or a bit of perspective from time passing and think, "Oh, maybe that would be useful in some way. Or maybe that does fit in with the other things I've been doing lately." But I just didn't know what to do with that. It sat that way for years, probably a year and a half, two years just on my hard drive with a collection of all these other, you know, draft ideas that I'd been making over the course of making the record. And you know I was like, "I keep coming back to this. But so what next?" It wasn't at all clear to me.

*(First loop along with beat)*

Dan: At some point I thought, "Well, maybe it's still like hip hop drums that are kind of preventing me from seeing it in the prism of the music that I'm making aside from that."

*(First loop without drums)*

Dan: So I kind of played my own drums over the top of it.

*(First loop along with live acoustic drums)*

*(Live acoustic drums)*

Dan: The drum parts that I played are played really, really quietly with the microphones really, really close to them, you just get a really dry, intimate kind of drum sound, which I liked along with this.

*(Drums end)*

Dan: And then I play it for other people. I played it for, for example, Kieran Hebden Four Tet is my, one of my main go-to's about, "Hey, would you give a listen to this thing that I've been working on? What do you think about it?" He's always

giving me kind of feedback about the music that I'm making, and I can reciprocate with the music that he makes. And in the credits to the song, the first time this has ever happened is Kieran Four Tet is credited as an arranger on this song as well. And it was his idea actually, having the two versions, the one with the kind of hip hop breakbeat on it, and the one with more mellow me playing drum kit on it. And immediately I was like, "oh that's great!" And he actually said, "Hang on a minute, like I can hear this so exactly what I want so well. Let me just chop these two versions that you've given me together, this would be easier to do than to describe." And so he sent this version back to me. When it kicks in at the beginning, it has a tougher beat.

*(First loop along with hip hop beat)*

Dan: And then when I sing, it had this kind of more intimate feel.

*(Quieted first loop along with live acoustic drums and vocals: "She just does what she pleases / 'Cause she's happy on her own")*

Dan: I tried thinking about how to sing alongside this sample in a number of different ways. And then it was actually the serendipitous coincidence or something that well, unfortunate in some ways because a friend of mine had like been through a difficult, kind of toxic relationship and had left that relationship, and I mean literally gone home but also kind of figuratively grounded herself in her sense of home, and within herself and that kind of thing. So all of a sudden, I was thinking about writing a song about her and about that experience, and then I just realized that this loop that had been sitting there forever kind of had exactly those connotations within the lyric of the sample. The original song, it's kind of love song about Gloria Barnes singing in character about somebody who's coming home to the person that they love in some sense. Whereas the song that I ended up writing inspired by my friend's experience, was more about breaking away from a relationship that was toxic and finding home within yourself.

*(Bridge vocals: "She's better off than she has ever been / Now she's made her peace with everything")*

Dan: That was the first time I thought, "Okay, maybe I could sing, kind of, in some sense, in some weird sense, a duet." Which if you'd have proposed that to me before I'd started this process that, "Oh, yeah. Dan, I think you should make a kind of hip hop influenced track that's like a duet with a 70s soul singer," I would have been like, "That's never going to work." But this kind of personal input from

a friend's life and wanting to kind of honor them through telling their story was the key that unlocked bringing that together. It was easy to write the lyrics for this one because I was thinking of such a specific situation, and, you know, the refrain was kind of there in place already. So when I'd sing, it would be responded to by the "Baby, I'm home" vocal part.

*(Vocals duet along with first loop and beat: "And she picks up all the pieces / She's going home / (Baby I'm home, I'm home, I'm home) / Yeah, she's going home / (Baby I'm home, I'm home, I'm home)")*

Dan: The thing that was missing was a kind of third section of the song, a middle 8 or bridge. It just needed something so that you move harmonically somewhere else, so that it can kind of end satisfyingly going back to the loop. And I always got like you know a minute and a half in or wherever it is, two minutes, I can't remember. And I was like, "I'm stuck. You know, there needs to be something here, and there just isn't. There's just a hole here." And that was the real stumbling block for months and months, and I tried so many different options, none of which quite fit.

*(First glossy version of the bridge)*

Dan: This one, this like version of the bridge that never was kind of takes it to a more contemporary place. It's a kind of glossy *Blade Runner* sounding, but also kind of referencing R&B maybe to some degree. But it just, when I put it in the song, it was like, the mood changes too much. The change from the verse and chorus to the bridge had to feel more natural, and this one felt like too much of a stretch. And then, I really thought I had landed on it.

*(70s jazz fusion version of the bridge)*

Dan: This is something that I built up playing like a piano part and the drum part, get a kind of very vintage sound to it. It fits in with the kind of soul, funk, jazz influenced era, right? I was like, "I finally cracked it. You know, this is going to be it. I'm going to finish that song!" And then the next day I came back to it, and I was like, "Ah, I don't know if it's quite the one." Again, it takes it into a different place.

*(70s jazz fusion version of the bridge ends)*

Dan: The rest of the song is kind of so classic sounding that I wanted this section to have a bit more of a kind of connection to contemporary hip hop production, but that references that era. So actually, when I was finishing this, the newest Tyler the Creator album had come out.

Hrishikesh: That's *Igor*, which just won the Grammy for Best Rap Album.

Dan: And I was like listening to that and thinking this is like treating old samples and things but cutting them up in a way that seems really contemporary. So there was a kind of thought to do that, to have it be both new and old sounding at the same time, this specific section of the song.

*(A modern-vintage version of the bridge, including oscillating piano tuning)*

*(Oscillating piano tuning)*

Dan: That's me playing a kind of software version of a piano and then processing it so that the kind of pitch is oscillating in and out of tune. You know, if it's just a kind of really clean piano sound, oh, it seems too straight, too safe. So I'll affect it in some way, and in this case, using that kind of effect of warbling in and out of tune a little bit.

*(Oscillating piano tuning)*

Dan: I'm always kind of trying to tread that line between something that's familiar and unfamiliar, whether it's taking a piano sound and then affecting in a way that you haven't heard before or taking a human voice and chopping it up and so that it's kind of disembodied.

*(Vocal chops)*

Dan: I like this idea of this really loud disembodied voice that is not quite saying anything. You hear just a syllable or a kind of beginning of a word, and make a kind of sense that there's somebody there about to sing, but they are not quite singing lyrics or words, but you kind of get a sense of a human voice in there. So it sounds more like a percussion instrument than it does like a vocal instrument.

*(More vocal chops)*

Dan: And then this is a kind of classic, ubiquitous sound on contemporary hip hop and R&B, and pop music is the kind of tuned 808 bass drum sound.

*(808)*

Dan: I thought it'd be interesting to have it in this context, of something sounding more old, to get a really gritty, rough sounding 808 kick drum that's tuned kind of playing a bass line.

*(Tuned 808)*

Dan: You know, I played this on a keyboard. And a lot of the feel to the records I make I think comes from not being a person who corrects things and quantizes, meaning leaving things leeway to be a little sloppy and off beat. That's something that I think gives the music that you make personality. You know, if you locked everything on a grid, it just sounds like very robotic.

*(808 hits)*

Dan: So the saxophone on this track, there is actually some saxophone in the original sample. The additional saxophone is played by a musician named Colin Fisher from Toronto. He heard that there was maybe a baritone sax or something in the original sample.

*(Second loop including the sax)*

Dan: He was like, "What if I doubled that and then harmonized," and it just adds to it so nicely.

*(Colin Fisher's sax recording)*

Dan: In this song, those saxophones, there's something that allows you to play with the dynamics and kind of make the song have more of a narrative arc and feel more like a song rather than a loop.

*(First loop along with sax)*

Dan: That was like the last piece of the puzzle, and then I remember actually sitting back and listening to it, and I was like, "That's a song." Because you live with it so long when it's just bits and pieces of something, and it's not clear how it's

going to come together. It's such a relief and so thrilling to think, "Yeah, I've got all the pieces to fit where they should."

*(Drum beat)*

Dan: A lot of the songs on this album and this one in particular tell the stories of people close to me, the people that I love who've been through very difficult times in the last five years. And I want the music to kind of be a big hug and be supportive of the person that's the protagonist in these situations. This song sounds very optimistic, and it sounds very positive. And getting out of this situation, this relationship, for this friend of mine, was difficult but was the best thing that could have happened. When I found the lyrics, "She's better off than she has ever been," that was like a central thing that it could have that kind of uplifting sense to it, that it should feel jubilant in some sense.

*(First loop)*

*(First loop muffled)*

Dan: But also, a lot of the time, the making of the music is like a therapeutic process to myself. Starting with nothing, and then having something, you know, I still enjoy that so much after, you know, more than 20 years of doing it.

*(First loop along with beat)*

*(First loop fades out)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here is "Home," by Caribou, in its entirety.

*("Home" by CARIBOU)*

Hrishikesh: For more information, visit [songexploder.net/caribou](http://songexploder.net/caribou). Song Exploder is made by me and producer Christian Koons, with production assistance from Olivia Wood, and illustrations by Carlos Lerma. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a collective of independent, creative podcasts. Learn more about all of our shows at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). You can find Song Exploder on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @SongExploder. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.