

**Song Exploder**  
**Deftones - Ohms**  
**Episode 196**

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.

*("Ohms" by DEFTONES)*

Hrishikesh: This episode contains explicit language. Deftones are a Grammy-winning band from Sacramento who've sold over ten million albums. Their ninth album came out this year on September 25th, 2020. It's called *Ohms*, and the last track on it is also called "Ohms." In this episode, singer Chino Moreno breaks down how that song came together, and how they literally went back to where things started in order to create the music.

*("Ohms" by DEFTONES)*

Hrishikesh: Here's Chino Moreno on how "Ohms" got started.

Chino: My name is Chino Moreno.

*(Music fades out)*

Chino: The first time I heard anything of it was a email that I received from Stephen Carpenter, who plays guitar. He sent this demo and I remember I was travelling, and I was on my way to Yellowstone National Park. And I remember like my wife was getting mad at me because I don't have unlimited data so like I was downloading stuff like using my cellular network. And she was like "Why are you downloading stuff right now? We're going to run out of data!" But I had already got like two thirds of the way through so I just continued on. This was probably three or so years ago out of the blue. He rarely sends me demos because a lot of our music is really written like when all of us are in the same room. But I know when he sends me something that he feels strongly enough about it to send it to me. So when he does do that, I'm already excited right off the bat.

*(Distorted guitar)*

Chino: Just the guitar riff ideas were there. There was like this longing, desperate sort of undertone in there. This sort of desperate feeling.

*(Distorted guitar)*

Chino: I think it's like close to seven minutes long, I don't remember, but it's pretty lengthy and like a lot of the parts were super extended, so my first initial idea was to chop it down and kind of just, you know, make it more concise. So I was in the passenger seat, and I just started chopping it up on the road, while we were like driving through Idaho or something like that.

*(Distorted guitar)*

Chino: So I just kinda trimmed it down a little bit, and then I sent it back to him and the rest of the guys in the band. And it wasn't until couple years later 'til we actually started our first writing sessions. I pulled it out and said, "Hey, you guys remember this thing?"

*(Distorted guitar ends)*

Chino: When we went in to go do the initial writing for this record, we decided to go back to our studio that we have in Sacramento, California, which we've had since the mid-90s. We call it The Spot. It was kinda like a clubhouse. Like literally, when we first started hanging out there, we built like a half pipe in there, and we just like used it as a place to skate. And like we used to play this board game called Risk. We would have these like hour-long games and just sit back and, you know, drink, and smoke and, you know, that was just as big a part of us as making music. So over the years, we slowly sort of morphed it into like an actual recording studio. But we hadn't been to that studio for 10 years, ever since 2008, I believe. That was when our bass player, Chi, he was in a car accident, and we took a break from that point on, like we actually just took a break from the band for a good 6 months, I would say.

Hrishikesh: The car accident left Chi in a coma. He passed away in April 2013.

Chino: I think one of the main reasons why we hadn't been back there for so long, was because it was sort of a difficult thing to be back there in the same place. And you know it was crazy because like you look into the corner where Chi, all of his stuff was set up like all the same with like all his stuff like there. It was almost like a time capsule in a way. It was kind of a trip. So there are some sort of like uneasy feelings. But at the same time, there's some great memories that we have there. So we cleaned it all out, we like, you know, got some new gear, new

carpet, new everything. And then all of a sudden, it was almost like, "Okay, it's the same place, but it has like this new sort of revitalized kind of feel to it. And you know, obviously left a couple of Chi's things in there to just save his place in there. But it definitely was a good feeling to be back there and to be, you know, with the same guys that wrote multiple records in that place, and to be there, all of us in our mid to late 40s. We've been going there since we were kids, man, so it was pretty crazy. But it's definitely like a cool feeling to have, that nostalgia that we created and to sort of resurrect that too with this record.

*(Band rehearsal, distorted guitar)*

Chino: This recording is probably one of the first things that we started jamming on, and at that point, we started working on it from scratch with everybody sort of learning the parts and joining in, you know, in their own way.

*(Band rehearsal, drums and bass join in)*

Chino: The recording is kind of funny because we were sitting there learning it, and it's pretty terrible. And I was sort of reluctant to send it, but I think it's awesome because it just shows that like how these things happen, really, with us five in the same room at the same time. That energy is pretty important. It's really about us just trying not to come in with preconceived ideas and really just like building off the reaction that we all have to one another in the room at that point in time.

*(Band rehearsal, vocals join instruments)*

Chino: The very first time that I approached it vocally was when we were in the room together. And it's really bad, like the words aren't really there. You can totally tell, but you know the same cadence and the same melodies that ended up being on the record are like heavily hinted in there.

*(Band rehearsal continues)*

Chino: The way we work is very much off just like one person makes a sound and then the next person reacts to that sound.

*(Band banter)*

Chino: I knew already off the bat that it was way too long, and I knew that we were going to cut it down more. And since I'm gonna be the one that has to kind of like sing over it, and figure out where and how my vocals are gonna fit into it, I feel like I have a strong idea of where it needs to go.

*(Distorted guitar)*

Chino: At that point, the style of the guitar playing itself was kinda less riff-y, and kind of had more like a, more of the halftime feel. But I was like, "This song needs to start off more spastic. It needs to be more spastic when it comes out."

*(Distorted guitar ends)*

Chino: I always felt like the end of the song was kind of the most exciting part of the song, that riff that it kinda goes out on.

*(Intro guitar riff)*

Chino: And I was like, "What if it just starts off with that part?" So now the song starts with the ending of the song. It's kinda like bookend by that rolling guitar riff. So it starts off a little bit more frantic, and then all of a sudden, it drops into that more mellow thing. But then when Abe comes in with the drums on the downbeat,

*(Drums along with intro guitar riff)*

Chino: it syncs into place and like cements the song into this sort of feeling.

*(Drums along with intro guitar riff end)*

Chino: So we had Terry come out. Terry Date is an awesome producer from Seattle, Washington that did, you know, some of our biggest records. So when we went in to make this new record, we were like, one main thing was like we need to feel comfortable and, you know, having Terry there, we already know he allows us to just be us. Terry's first thing that he said was like, "Hey, if we do this, we're gonna do it live, you know. Like I don't want you guys to play restraint. I want you guys just to play off each other." And that's what we did. We decided that we were not gonna record to a click.

*(Click track)*

Hrishikesh: A click is a metronome track that plays while you're recording to make sure the tempo of the song stays consistent.

*(Click track fades)*

Chino: Our last two records, we started using a tempo map. Not that it's a bad thing, but Abe is sitting there playing his drums, listening to a click in his headphones, and I saw so many times him not having fun doing that, like literally I could tell he was just unhappy doing that. And when we got rid of the click track and we all went in there and tracked stuff together, and basically Abe is the clock now, everything just falls right into place like so much better.

*(Pre-chorus drums along with guitar)*

Chino: Abe had a couple different beat ideas in the pre-chorus. But I was like, "This one is perfect."

*(Pre-chorus drums)*

Chino: This kinda halftime stuttered beat reminded me of like Jane's Addiction style and sort of very washed out, kind of, you know, maybe shoegaze-y even. It feels like you're falling.

*(Drums end)*

*(Sergio Vega playing bass)*

Chino: That's Sergio Vega, bass. He's kind of the big melodic part in the verses. I mean, he's sort of like dancing.

*(Bass)*

Chino: And he goes up on the neck a lot, doon, doon, doon, doon, doon, doon, doon. He has a little bit of grit still in his bass tone. You know when he does those melodies, he's still holding down the low end, but there's that melody that's weaving in and out of it.

*(Bass fades)*

Chino: With this record, we wanted Frank Delgado, who plays synthesizer, to be more prominent. And he had purchased this Prophet. And he basically uses that synth through pretty much the whole record.

*(Prophet synth)*

Chino: You know, the sounds from it are so warm. And they're kind of old school, you know, it's like more vintage sounding and less, you know, like processed. I think it's always the challenge to marry that organic guitar stuff with the, you know, synth stuff. But I feel like we've been trying to sneak them into the tunes for quite some time. And with this song, in particular though, he's sort of toying with this same sort of melody that Sergio's doing, like dun, dun, dun, dun.

*(Prophet synth along with bass)*

Chino: They're both in their sort of weaving up and down with those notes and it sounds rad, I mean, I love, I love that.

*(Prophet synth along with bass end)*

Chino: There's just like little shear of sound in the intro of the song where it sounds like maybe like a fighter plane is going by or something like that.

*(Fighter plane-like sound)*

Chino: We were just like tweaking pedals through his synthesizer. We grabbed a little snippet of it, and then we put that in the beginning too. And then it went right into that guitar riff.

*(Guitar riff along with fighter plane-like sound)*

Chino: And it just like launched you into the song.

*(Guitar riff along with fighter plane-like sound and drums)*

*(First verse vocals: "We're surrounded by debris of the past")*

Chino: I love to hear the grit on my voice, which is maybe years of abuse or whatever that's there. It kinda sounds aged, I guess, in a way.

*(First verse vocals: "And it's too late to cause a change in the tides")*

Chino: I always have overdrive to sort of even give it a little bit more coarse feel to it, but then, so I take that and then I'll coat that usually with a little bit of slapback delay, a little bit of the washiness of it to kind of smooth it out. And when I get that right balance, to me, it's really, really comfortable to sing.

*(First verse vocals: "So we slip into our hopeless sea of regret")*

Chino: You know, in the beginning, at the time, I still didn't really know what the song was about, but I knew there was this sense of desperation. The very first line of the song says, "We're surrounded by debris of the past." And the next line is, "And it's too late to cause a change in the tides." And that's phrases that just came to me, like I wasn't trying to write about the environment, per se, or the state of the planet, but that was the first thing that popped in my head. It's like yeah, this is like a mission statement of like where we are today with the planet. Music has always sort of been an escape from like reality, for me, so I've never sort of taken any like political, environmental stance with any of our music. I don't feel the passion to use this thing that happens between 5 people as like my soapbox, you know what I'm saying. So I feel like I've kinda copped out of like actually like, you know, speaking my voice. But at the same time, if I am gonna do it, I think I wanna do it in a more artistic way, you know. I don't abandon the theme, but I kinda make it more open-ended, so just not allowing it to just be like this linear idea. With the next line and the next line sort of, it could be, "Okay maybe he's talking about a relationship."

*(Second verse vocals along with bass: "As we slip on through, we promised to meet again somewhere")*

Chino: I always think that the chorus should go somewhere, whether it dives down or it's uplifting. Lyrically, I feel like the song already has this sort of like doomsday kind of acceptance of like, you know, everything is sort of caving in on itself. And then the chorus lyrics are uplifting.

*(First chorus vocals: "Yeah, time won't change this / This promise we made")*

Chino: "Time won't change this promise we made" basically just saying like, "Yo we're locked arms, like together, while like the meteor is coming at us, and no matter what, even beyond this planet, we will remain, like our bond and like this promise to just like have each other's back."

Hrishikesh: How come you decided to make this the last song on the album?

Chino: I felt like this song was kind of a closing statement in a way. Kinda leaves you with this optimistic feeling. That dichotomy, I think, of the song, having this like desolate vibe and then morphing into that uplifting thing, that's kind of a challenge. So to end the record on that vibe, I felt good about it. Now we're just looking towards the future.

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Ohms," by Deftones, in its entirety.

*("Ohms" by DEFTONES)*

Hrishikesh: For more, visit [songexploder.net/deftones](http://songexploder.net/deftones). You'll find links to buy or stream "Ohms," and you can watch the music video for it. Song Exploder is made by me, Hrishikesh Hirway, with producer Christian Koons, and production assistant Olivia Wood. Illustrator Carlos Lerma makes original artwork for every episode, and Kathleen Smith handles music clearance. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a collective of creative, independent podcasts. You can learn more about our shows at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). If you'd like to support the podcast, you can get a Song Exploder t-shirt at [songexploder.net/shirt](http://songexploder.net/shirt). You can also follow the show on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @SongExploder. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.