

**Song Exploder**  
**Denzel Curry - RICKY**  
**Episode 164**

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.

*("RICKY" by DENZEL CURRY)*

Hrishikesh: This episode contains explicit language. Denzel Curry is a rapper from Miami. He started his career at age 16 as part of the hip hop collective Raider Klan. He released his first solo album while he was still in high school. In May 2019, Denzel released his fourth album, *ZUU*. He made it with the Australian production duo FnZ, who have been collaborating with him since 2016. The album was named "Best New Music" by Pitchfork, and Denzel made his TV debut on *The Tonight Show*. In this episode, Denzel Curry and FnZ break down the song "RICKY," which was named after Denzel's father.

*("RICKY" by DENZEL CURRY)*

Denzel: My name is Denzel Curry.

*(Music fades out)*

Denzel: The day this song started, man, we was just, we was all in the studio. I just got off of a tour in Australia, and I was like, "When I get back we're going to go in," because I was still trying to keep the momentum up as much as I can. I didn't want to lose that or disappear for another two years, so as soon as I came back, we just went straight to the studio the next day.

Michael: My name is Michael aka Finatik.

Zac: And I am Zac of the production duo FnZ.

Michael: We executive produced the album. The first day that we initially started working on this song, it was back in February early this year and we'd been hammering through so many ideas a day.

Denzel: It was a week of just making songs that were duds, like they were bad songs.

Michael: It was pretty full-on. We just had been like doing, you know, long days, long nights like a lot was just like a quick, rough idea, jump to the next one.

Denzel: We were struggling to make coal into a diamond throughout that whole week, just trying to find something.

Michael: Denzel had been recording some ideas that we had prepared earlier, and then in between, sometimes in sessions like that, we'll just jump on the headphones while he's doing his thing. We'll start getting the next idea ready. I remember stumbling across this sample I found from an artist named Lukid, the song was called "Twisted Blood."

*("Twisted Blood" by LUKID)*

Michael: It was a really random electronic track that had these crazy synths like sounds that I haven't heard before that.

*("Twisted Blood" by LUKID)*

Michael: Kind of has like this melody that sounds like a, an ice cream truck or something like that, you know, like coming down the block. And it was just very catchy.

*(Music fades out)*

Michael: So just basically, yeah chop that up and found out a way to slow it down.

*(Chopped and slowed sample)*

Michael: When it's slowed down, It has like almost a nostalgic, reminiscent feel of like early NWA. And then we put the drums to it.

*(Beat)*

*(Sample fades)*

Michael: Just random kicks and snares we've collected over the years, and then the 808 kick,

*(808s)*

Michael: the real booming one that's in there.

*(Beat rejoins)*

Michael: We were really referencing early NWA and Eazy E.

*(Beat along with 808 end)*

Michael: Kind of like listening sonically like the way the drums sound.

*(“Boyz-n-the-Hood” by EAZY E)*

Michael: Living on the West Coast, it's hard not to be inspired by that type of music. And as producers, we all grow up on the greats, the West Coast and that. So it's like, to be able to infuse that with a sound that we're inspired by and something different, it was, you know, a cool twist on it.

Denzel: Sometimes like Finatik, when he's really making a beat, he doesn't let us hear nothing. Like he goes in his headphones and he does it himself. And then we was like “Hey, play us something.” He was like, “Oh, it's not done, but okay,” boom.

*(Beat along with sample)*

Denzel: I was like, “Oh shit!” [Sings sample] You know, it was like ice cream. So I'm like, “Yo this is kind of hard.”

Michael: Yeah he just jumped up and was just like, “Oh, I need to get on that right now.” Like very frantic, you know, and that's always a good sign, knowing that, you know, he's ready to go in the booth and lay down something crazy. And he started with actually the chorus first.

*(Beat ends)*

*(Chorus vocals: “My daddy said, “Trust no man but your brothers / And never leave your day ones in the gutter” / My daddy said, “Treat young girls like your mother” / My mama said, “Trust no ho, use a rubber””)*

Denzel: The whole track is freestyle. And my dad was like one of my main supporters, my number one supporter actually. My dad's just pretty much just been there,

you know. And he knew how much music and art was important to me, so he let me do what he do, but long as I make it home before curfew. Because he didn't want to see me get in trouble and things like that. Especially when I was like 16, when I was becoming a young man, like my dad instilled a lot of like values, both of my parents have when it comes down to the way you treat your friends, you know, make sure you like keep your friends close, at all times, because everybody might come up and say they your friend and they not really your dog, you feel me? Just keep your family close like keep your brothers close. Make sure you let them know you love them. You know? And just like, don't let nobody punk you, or push you over, because that's what you know what I mean, don't let nobody play you for a fool and if it happens, just don't let that shit happen again.

*(First verse vocals: "See, Ricky said, "Never let nobody get the one up on you / If they run up on you, hit 'em with a one, two")*

Denzel: You always got to switch your flows up, because it's just like it keeps people engaged and I'm good at fast flows.

*(First verse vocals: "Leave the cul-de-sac, your brothers gon' have your back regardless / And stick with your day one homies that was here before you started / And fear no man but the man above your head / "Pray before you go to bed," every day my mama said")*

Denzel: "Fear no man but the man above your head," just fear no man on this Earth except God, you feel me? My dad's Baptist, my mom's Jehovah's Witness, and my mom like instilled a lot of those church morals in me, but my mom definitely is the harder one out the two. I think that's where I get like a lot of my aggression and my attitude from.

*(Chorus vocals: "My daddy said, "Treat young girls like your mother" / My mama said, "Trust no ho, use a rubber")*

Denzel: So when I lay all that down, I came up with like a little pre-hook and then Finatik told me, "I like what you did the second half, but the first half I don't like it." Like he's brutally honest about it.

Zac: When we're working with Denzel, we definitely give feedback on like takes, melodies, flows. We're always collaborating, communicating, just to get the best songs.

Denzel: And then they was like, “Yo, let's just take some time off, because we've been going in like the whole week and not really letting it breathe.” So we was like, “Alright, cool.” I remember being at my house and I was going through these DJ Screw freestyles because like I'm from the South, so we're into most of the southern culture and shit. And basically, I stumbled upon a Fat Pat freestyle, it was Fat Pat and Z-Ro called “Been Around the World.”

*(“Been Around the World Freestyle” by FAT PAT & Z-RO)*

*(Music fades out)*

Denzel: And I was just like, “Aww man, this shit sounds crazy, man.” I like the flows on this a lot. So I sent it to Finatik and Zac, and they was like, “Yo this shit's sick man, like this is some hard shit.” We went back into the studio. He was like, “You want to try that DJ Screw little flow on that?” So I just flipped it in my own way. I did it regular and then I was like, “Just turn it down like a couple notches.” And we found the perfect pitch for it.

*(Pitched pre-chorus vocals along with claps: “First they mockin’, now they hoppin’ / All on the wave, ‘cause they see me poppin’ / Big-big-big large pockets, they start flockin’ / Here what I say when they ass keep knockin’”)*

Zac: The fact that it's pitched gives it a certain break from the rest of the song. So we also added the bass.

*(Bass along with claps)*

Zac: And it emphasizes it even more.

*(Pitched pre-chorus vocals along with bass and claps: “Big large pockets, they start flockin’ / Here what I say when they ass keep knockin’”)*

Michael: Denzel laying down the chorus and the pre-chorus was very quick. It was more so the verses that he really wanted to take his time with, you know. And we're really grateful that he did because there's so many memorable lines throughout that song, especially in verse two.

*(Second verse vocals: “That was it, we was lit, y'all wasn't even shit yet / We was Three 6, Wu-Tang mixed with Dipset”)*

Denzel: A lot of old school hip hop impacted me man. If you don't know nothing about Denzel Curry, so you got to go dig in the crates for Denzel Curry and what you're going to find is the infamous history of Raider Klan. That's the group I was in at the time, when I was going to high school. So when I said, "We was Three 6, Wu-Tang mixed with Dipset," the way Raider Klan was set up, we was deep like Wu-Tang Clan and the personalities that we had were like numerous. Three 6 was like the type of music we was making, because it was all dark sounding. It sounded like the Triple 6 Mafia stuff, like the early stuff with the bass and the beats distorted and crazy and hard to hear.

*("Break Da Law '95" by THREE 6 MAFIA)*

*(Music fades out)*

Denzel: And then the Dipset line, we were just fly. We knew we was fly, because everybody was copying us. Like the whole industry was copying what Raider Klan was doing.

*(Second verse vocals: "We was Three 6, Wu-Tang mixed with Dipset")*

Michael: That was at a point where, you know, post-production stages, when we knew the song was going to be the single and going on the album, and we're just trying to figure out little tweaks we could do at that point to make this song a little more exciting. And Zac had the idea and was like, "Man, you know he says that line about "Three 6 mixed with Wu Tang and Dipset," it was like, you know, it'd be crazy idea to sample some like old school, early nineties drums and just do it very, very quick, you know, for one or two bars."

Zac: It's just like a little Easter egg, switch the beat up a little bit.

*(Second verse vocals along with beat: "That was it, we was lit, y'all wasn't even shit yet")*

*(Second verse vocals along with early nineties drums: "We was Three 6, Wu-Tang mixed with Dipset")*

*(Beat)*

*(Producer tag)*

Zac: That's our producer tag that we created pretty recently. It just says FnZ, and then Denzel saying, "Well damn."

*(Producer tag)*

Zac: It's just a tool that a lot of producers use, just a promotional thing, you know, try to get your name out there more.

Michael: And it's actually worked with that tag in there, we saw online people were like, "What is that? What is that?" Some people don't even know exactly what it was saying, but it was already kind of getting the, the word out there. And then there's like people putting two and two together and they're like, "Who's this "FnZ, well damn," who are these guys?" Then they start connecting the dots.

*(Producer tag into bass along with claps)*

Denzel: This is the most simple song. I made a hard record about treating my friends right, about morals that I got because of my parents and talking about like shit that I had to learn the hard way, you know? That's basically what it was growing up in the neighborhood like just how we was raised.

Hrishikesh: Can you tell me about the first time your dad heard this song?

Denzel: He's just like, "Man, I fucks with that song. That's my shit." He's like, "I got, I got a theme song. Now I know it, you know. Who would've thought my son would make me a goddamn theme song?"

*(Music ends)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "RICKY," by Denzel Curry, in its entirety.

*("RICKY" by DENZEL CURRY)*

Hrishikesh: Visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) for more information about Denzel Curry and FnZ. You'll also find a link to buy or stream this song.

This episode was produced by Christian Koons, and me, Hrishikesh Hirway. This year, our guest host is Thao Nguyen but she's off this week. Carlos Lerma is our illustrator, he makes a portrait for every episode. You can see his portrait of Denzel Curry on the Song Exploder website or Instagram. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a mighty collective of independent

podcasts. You can learn about all of our shows at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). You can also follow Song Exploder on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @SongExploder. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

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