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.

("Up in Hudson" by DIRTY PROJECTORS)

Hrishikesh: David Longstreth started making music under the name Dirty Projectors in 2002, while he was in college. Since then, he's released seven albums and collaborated with Björk, Solange, Kanye West, Paul McCartney, and Rihanna, and Dirty Projectors went from a solo project to a full-band, performing on TV, and at Carnegie Hall. Dave and one of his bandmates were in a relationship for much of that time, but then the relationship - and the band - broke up. In February 2017, with Dirty Projectors as a solo project once more, Dave released a self-titled album, a breakup album looking back at all those years. In this episode, Dave takes apart the song "Up in Hudson" and the winding road he went down to create it. The story starts in 2013 after the last Dirty Projectors album with a full band came out.

("Up in Hudson" by DIRTY PROJECTORS)

Dave: My name is Dave from Dirty Projectors.

(Music ends)

Dave: Sometimes when I finish an album, I'm like, "Alright, well, whatever that was, I want to try to do the exact opposite of that." I definitely felt that way after *Swing Lo Magellan*.

("Swing Lo Magellan" by DIRTY PROJECTORS)

Dave: For "Swing Lo Magellan," I had like holed up and written, sitting with a guitar and like hammering out like, "What's the second verse lyric?" You know, "three verses of lyrics, and a chorus, and a bridge."

("Swing Lo Magellan" by DIRTY PROJECTORS)

Dave: And I wrote a whole ton of songs that way, and then winnowed them down to 12 songs on the record. I knew I wasn't doing that this time.

(Music ends)

Dave: I wanted to make a sort of big break from the previous stuff that I've been working on. Something that like I didn't even recognize as being related to what came before. I wanted to go back to what little I knew about electronic music, and my weird homemade style of like beatmaking. One of the first things that I tried to do, in going back to like this mindset of making beats, was thinking about the Diwali Riddim.

(Diwali Riddim)

Hrishikesh: The Diwali Riddim is a beat by Jamaican producer named Lenky. It was sampled by a lot of artists for songs that ended up becoming hits in 2002 and 2003.

Dave: When I was in college, I had a job doing pizza delivery for Domino's. I would like just drive around and listen to hip hop radio, R&B. 2003, the Diwali Riddim was like super popular. At that point, there's a bunch of songs, the Wayne Wonder song "No Letting Go."

("No Letting Go" by WAYNE WONDER)

Dave: There's just this amazing polyrhythmic clapping pattern with great melodies on top of it. That to me was like super cool.

(Music ends)

Dave: But so flashing forward to 2013, feeling done with this kind of rock band zone, I was like, "Oh yeah, there's this Diwali pattern. How did that go?" And I tried to remake it,

(Beat)

Dave: which I knew was wrong, but I was kind of like, "Whatever, maybe this is going to be cool."

(Beat ends)

Dave: That's the first thing that I came up with, and it came out of that like, "Can I remember how I used to think the Diwali Riddim [laughter] went?" No chords, just a rhythmic grid.

(Beat)

(Beat ends)

Dave: It felt like a hard thing to go from rhythm to adding notes on top of it, that didn't feel stupid or like wrong. It's like, "Oh, am I going to put a major chord on there? That seems stupid." I was just bored of like what I would come up with. It was like a weird block. I had a practice space in Greenpoint, and my old friend, Tyondai Braxton, had a room in the building that the studio was in. We shared a wall, and I would literally just hear what he was working on at the time, blasting through this thin wall [laughter].

("Scout1" by TYONDAI BRAXTON)

Dave: The sounds that were coming through the wall were like crazy, they were amazing. And he was diving headlong into the world of modular synthesis at the time.

Tyondai: If you walked into my studio, you'd see, honestly, it's just like a bunch of wires passed from one to the other. Looks kind of like rainbow spaghetti between all the different modules. My name is Tyondai Braxton, and I'm a musician.

Dave: Somehow we ended up cross-pollinating, you know, I would feed a layer to him of the beat.

(Beat)

Dave: And so, even though this is just a dumb one bar pattern, he can just manipulate the sound. We threw the various layers through the modular gear. And lo and behold, the kick now had a tone,

(Beat)

Dave: which became the basic harmonic foundation of what happened from there. I would just kind of like sing over the beat, just kind of freestyle.

(Vocals join)

Dave: When I found something that I thought I might like, I would just sing it into three part harmony. And I do that because everything sounds better in three-part [laughter] harmony.

(Vocals with beat)

(Music ends)

Dave: So suddenly I had all these three-part harmony things, but I was having a difficult time figuring out what the underlying chords of it would be. And then, I was like, "Oh, everything I write is always a melody that's starting here, and ending up somewhere else." It's never four chords that repeat, and in like a functional music vocabulary, that's a bridge. So I've been writing bridges all my life, and that's all I know how to do [laughter]. So, but I was trying to think of like, *Well, what are different contexts where the form of that, this wandering thing, could make sense, could actually be a strength?* And it's like, *Well, you could tell a story.* The story about the previous couple years a little bit of what it felt like to be in a band. And to be in a relationship sort of like a Paul Thomas Anderson movie, but instead of like 30 years compressed into three hours, it would be like seven years compressed into seven minutes.

(Vocals: "The first time ever I saw your face, laid my eyes on you / Was the Bowery Ballroom stage, you were shredding Marshall tubes")

Dave: With this album instead of using abstract concepts or language to get at real feelings, it's almost like the opposite of that, where it's using the language of really personal, vivid emotion to talk about these larger things.

(Vocals: "Maybe I could be with you / Do the things that lovers do / Slightly domesticate the truth / And write you "Stillness Is the Move"")

Dave: "Stillness is the move,"

("Stillness Is The Move" by DIRTY PROJECTORS)

Dave: which is the Dirty Projectors' biggest song. I namechecked that song in the lyrics of the song. And, uh, it's one that, uh, um,

(Music ends)

Dave:	nah, see, I don't want. I don't want to talk too much about the lyrics, because I really do feel like there has been too much emphasis on the lyrics, you know? Yeah, particularly like people taking them very on the face. And maybe this is a fantasy and it's not true at all, but I did feel like there's a certain amount of, it's not actually, it's not me. It's not anyone specific. This is just a story. So I'm sure someone else lived this story, you know, being in a rock band in New York,

(Vocals: "Moved to Brooklyn on your own / And join the band, come on the road")

Dave:	Doing that for a couple years, going around the world, sleeping on floors, and then playing bigger stages.

(Vocals: "This is how we saw the world, side by side from the road and the stage")

Dave:	And then, the band splits up. And somebody moves upstate. Somebody moves to LA.

(Vocals: "I'm just up in Hudson bored and destructive knowing that nothing lasts")

Dave:	So I just felt like this is not personal. This is my experience, but it's generic. You know, this is like a movie. I mean also it's important to say that the record was a long time. I made it over the course of a long time. It was, I'm, you know, I'm in a very different spot in my [laughter] life now, than the stories that I'm telling in the album. You know, I thought that I would feel more protected knowing that I'm telling a fictionalized, old, outgrown version of a self that I, maybe, inhabited in certain moments years ago. I thought that I would feel a separation from it, but the separation is not real to other people. And I wouldn't expect that it would be necessarily, and you have to just listen to a song, and take what you're getting from it. So, but it's been intense.

(Vocals: "And love will burn out / And love will just fade away / And love's gonna rot / And love will just dissipate")

(Beat)

Dave:	I came out to LA, and so did the amazing Brazilian percussionist, Mauro Refosco. Just as a performer, he's just like so crazy. You could throw a couple rocks off of a roof, and have it go like, doo doo doo. And then, he would go

digging around in these boxes, and just find like three little woodblocks, and be able to just match it. "Doo doo doo." He's crazy. So I had Mauro re-play each different layer of the original beat.

(Percussion)

Dave: And then, I'd layer his performances over themselves, over elements of Ty's modular stuff.

(Beat with percussion)

Dave: And the Diwali beat really felt like it was starting to get somewhere. It sounded super cool.

(Music ends)

Dave: I was still looking for that master key; that ostinato, that riff, the loop that ties the whole wandering character of the song together. You know, I've been looking for that for like the entire time. And so, I texted Ty, and I was like, "If you have any other ideas, I'm desperate. I need them. If you want to just do some like real simple, rhythmic, repetitive stuff, that'd be awesome."

Tyondai: I just imported like a rough sketch of the track that he gave me. And he told me the BPM, I was able to kind of like grid it out, and then just kind of experiment with stuff in and around that BPM, and see what I can get to work.

Dave: And he came back with something amazing.

(Synth)

Tyondai: When you build a modular synthesizer, you build it, you know, module by module, so it's all very personalized, and it's all, it's an instrument that's unique to you, and what you want to get out of it. If you actually master the expressive nature of what a modular synth can do, you can make sounds that are real, because it's an analog instrument, but that sound completely out of this world. You know, something impossible that couldn't be real. It's kind of propulsive and percussive, but it also sat really well against his voice.

(Vocals join: "And that was basically my dream and I dreamed it with you 'til we betrayed it")

(Music ends)

Dave: To me, that was the glue between the drums, and all of the harmonic stuff. And not a moment too soon. About a week before I was supposed to go to Miami to start to mix, I was like at home making dinner, listening to *Porgy and Bess*, the Miles Davis, Gil Evans collabo.

(Oh Bess, Oh Where's My Bess?" by MILES DAVIS ft. GIL EVANS)

Dave: And I was thinking about how Miles is a storyteller, and his voice is his horn. I love the way those are recorded. Artificially close, very intimate, and often moving in these really close harmonies. So I was listening to those winds and the brass and everything, I was like, "Well, those are voices too. This is like a Greek chorus that's alternately sort of affirming and responding more critically to what Miles is talking about." And so, that's where the idea of turning the three-part harmonies into a horn arrangement came from.

(Horns)

(Horns end)

Dave: Kanye was, he was an important spirit for me making this album. In the chorus I was thinking about that kind of like Hudson Mohawke synth from "Blood on the Leaves," that's just so cutting and just fierce.

("Blood on the Leaves" by KANYE WEST)

(Music fades)

Dave: The trombones in the choruses is like a mixture of bass trombone, trombone, and tuba.

(Bass trombone, trombone, and tuba)

Dave: But then, we actually had to dial it in a little bit. It was difficult to find that specific sound, that kind of zap on the trombone. It's like, it's amazing when you hear it in a room.

(Bass trombone, trombone, and tuba hit)

Dave: And I kept on being like, "Yeah, maybe zap even a little bit more."

(Bass trombone, trombone, and tuba hit)

(Music ends)

Dave: So finally had the kind of like harmonic bed for the story that the main voice is telling. It felt like an epic, you know, and I wanted it to have a beginning and an ending.

(Guitar)

Dave: So there's the ending part, that guitar Coda, which I made after Bowie died last year.

(Guitar)

Dave: It felt maybe like a elegy in thinking about Bowie when I made it. And, you know, it goes on for a long time, like way too long, actually. And that feels like a metaphor for something, you know, life just keeps on churning forward, long after whatever drama happened, like way in the past. Life keeps going and going, it gets boring. Becomes a new thing and gets interesting again, and then, that becomes boring, and then [laughter].

(Guitar)

(Music fades)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Up in Hudson," by Dirty Projectors, in its entirety.

("Up in Hudson" by DIRTY PROJECTORS)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net for a link to buy this song, and to learn more about Dirty Projectors.
               Song Exploder is produced by me, along with Christian Koons, and is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a curated network of extraordinary, cutting edge podcasts made possible by the Knight Foundation. Learn more at radiotopia.fm.

("Day Breaks" by NORAH JONES)

Hrishikesh: Next time on Song Exploder, Norah Jones. You can find Song Exploder on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @SongExploder. And you can find all the past and future episodes of the show at songexploder.net or wherever you download podcasts. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

("Day Breaks" by NORAH JONES)

(Music fades)