

Song Exploder
FKA twigs - Mirrored Heart
Episode 182

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.

("Mirrored Heart" by FKA TWIGS)

Hrishikesh: This episode contains explicit language. FKA twigs is a singer, songwriter, and producer from London. She's released three EPs and two albums. Her most recent album, *Magdalene*, came out in 2019, and was named one of the best albums of the year by *Rolling Stone*, *Pitchfork*, *Time*, *NME*, and more. For this episode, twigs chose the song "Mirrored Heart" from that album. She wrote and produced it in Los Angeles with a few collaborators, but it's an intensely personal song.

("Mirrored Heart" by FKA TWIGS)

twigs: This is FKA twigs.

(Music fades out)

twigs: The lyric "mirrored heart" was something that I had had written in my phone for a while. I'd heard the saying that your greatest love will be somebody who will like truly like reflect who you like aspire to be and can mirror. It doesn't mean that you have to do the same thing or like the same things. It's more to do with like morals, or like a kind of deeper understanding of life, or sort of human values. Somebody who's going to give what you give, put in what you put in. It's like an equal meeting of two loves. I write a lot of things down. Sometimes they turn into songs, or sometimes they turn into things that I write to myself. So I didn't know necessarily that it was going to be a song at the time, but it presented itself.

(Piano)

twigs: I wrote "Mirrored Heart" with Ethan P. Flynn, an amazing musician and songwriter, and it was just Ethan playing on the piano. He came to visit me in LA, I had this house and I invited a few of my friends to come and work on the record and write and eat together and wake together. And Ethan and I wrote

“Mirrored Heart” on a very sort of lonely morning, I remember. Everyone was in bed or out or you know just doing their own thing. I think we'd maybe even said that that day was like a chill day and we weren't really going to work, but then Ethan and I just found ourselves at the piano just playing around, and we just have something really special when we're together and it's very melancholy, but easy and there's a real sort of like deep blue joy to the music that we make. He just has all these like deep, amazing feelings and unusual chords.

(Piano)

twigs: It felt really unusual and quite strange, but also it felt like something that I knew really well. It felt like a very old song. Something that like I would have heard my grandma playing or something like that, it had a very like old feel, in a really inspiring way.

(Piano ends)

twigs: It was very calm and very quiet and very sensitive, that moment. But you could play anything and I'll just start singing. It's a nightmare, it's like compulsive [laughter].

(First verse vocals along with piano: “It’s all for the gain / It’s all for the lovers tryna take the breath away”)

twigs: I sometimes make music in images. For “Mirrored Heart,” I saw an opium den and loads of lovers on top of each other and then me as like a singular person that couldn't find an in on the situation. And then everybody had mirrors on themselves in different places. But where my mirror was, I couldn't find anyone that had it in the same place. And then everybody like held hands and then walked off the horizon together, like they were falling and then I was left without anybody to fall with.

(Piano ends)

twigs: During that time I was like furiously dating [laughter] without much luck and I think I was feeling kind of lonely and unseen. For me, anyway, I mean I'm quite a sort of relationship person. I just feel more comfortable knowing where I am romantically. I've never enjoyed dating, if I'm honest with you. It just doesn't suit me. I hadn't been single for a long time and it just felt like I was there dating to like, don't say like boost people's egos, but it just felt like not genuine

connections. Like everyone's trying to be grabby, just to kind of like fill a hole, to gain something. Find that high, get that fix, get that heart racing, like get that text, feel good about yourself for those 10 minutes while someone's paying you attention.

(First verse vocals along with piano: "It's all for the gain / It's all for the lovers tryna chase the rush again")

twigs: And so I was feeling quite vulnerable and just wondering like, "Was I ever going to love again, you know? Was I ever going to be loved again? Like what was that going to feel like this time around?"

(Chorus vocals along with piano: "But I'm never gonna give up / Though I'm probably gonna think about you all the time / And for the lovers who found a mirrored heart / They just remind me I'm without you")

twigs: And then Cy An, who's a very old friend and collaborator, came in and played the guitar and I remember singing to him, a little riff, like dung, gung, gung, gung.

(Lead guitar)

twigs: During like *LP1*, you know, I was just really into the laptop, you know. I was really into Ableton and finding the cool sounds and how many effects can you put on something, whereas during *Magdalene* I started to feel the need to like actively get out of the computer a bit and I have more acoustic instruments than I've ever had before. The ploddiness of the guitar that kind of sounds like a kid walking with like lazy feet. It's like a reluctance to get to like the destination. That's something that was just really important to me in conveying in this piece of music, it's like a reluctant march to an unknown destination.

(Guitar ends)

(Drum machine)

twigs: I had this new drum machine and I didn't know how to work it and it has all these different like settings of different types of music, but I couldn't get out of the hip hop and trap setting, because it was my first day of having it. So like it was just these weird voice samples like, "Yep" and like "200 bands, 300 bands," like that [laughter]. And so like actually in the song it says, "200 bands."

(Drum machine: "200 bands")

twigs: Which I thought was really funny. Sometimes in my music I have little jokes to myself like that.

(Drum machine: "200 bands")

twigs: I'm not a traditional musician. Actually like I play instruments horribly. But I'm good at working things out. On "Mirrored Heart," like I played drum machines and stuff like that and I have my personal touch on it, but really it's me relying on people that can play chords beautifully to just listen and be able to like execute my vision. It's different being a male producer to being a female producer, you know. It is a very different vibe and I feel that I have to work with men that really embrace their feminine energy for it to work. I don't want to be trapped inside a clever boy's laptop.

(Distorted loop)

twigs: So it means often that like I work with someone very closely and explain to them in great detail what I want and how I need things to sound, and I write this way with an artist called Koreless as well. Koreless actually produced the song. And Nicolas Jaar being another person, like you know, that allowed me to create through their well of skills, you know, and be able to explain that things, you know like "Okay, I hear a synth here, it needs to be deep. It's playing these notes. It has this amount of sadness in it. It sounds like a wizard's crying."

(Oscillating synth)

twigs: You know, you just tap into each other and you can figure it out. I'd done that sound that was like uhhhhh

*(Vocal sound: *uhhhh* with reverb)*

twigs: and then Koreless did this crazy sound that goes underneath it, which is like this whirring. It just sounds like what pain is.

(Buzz synth)

twigs: It sounds like the end of a cry. And he just layered it under my voice.

(Vocal sound along with synth)

(Marimba)

twigs: That's the Marimba of hope, right there. It's a sign that maybe things are going to be okay, but probably not [laughter].

(Marimba)

twigs: I actually went to Rick Nowels studio in Santa Monica.

Hrishikesh: That's Rick Knowles, the grammy-winning songwriter and producer. He's worked with Madonna, Lana Del Rey, Stevie Nicks, and a bunch more.

twigs: And he has a lot of really amazing amps, so we were able to play with a lot of his toys and run a lot of the sounds through his amps and re-record them just to give it extra "gritch," you know. Like extra grunge and feeling.

(Distorted sounds)

twigs: To me like, "Mirrored Heart" at its best, it sounds like it's just really hard to like squeeze out, really like compressed and stressed out.

(Distorted sounds end)

twigs: And then there's these like moments of just relaxing, this kind of glittery like release.

(Chorus vocals along with distorted sounds, synth and piano: "But I'm never gonna give up / Though I'm probably gonna think about you all the time / And for the lovers who found a mirrored heart / They just remind me I'm without you")

twigs: When we were at Rick Nowels studio in Santa Monica, I recorded the vocals there with him. And "Mirrored Heart" was one song that I just really wanted to go in on and warm up properly and drink lemon and honey tea and do my breathing exercises and go in knowing that I'm a vocalist, and that is something that in my earlier work I just didn't care about. Like I just didn't care. I was like, "I'm an artist, my voice is an instrument, you know, it'll sound how it sounds, drown it in reverb, put loads of effects on it, put me in the back because actually that synth

is way more important than me right now.” Whereas now like I just wanted people to hear my lyrics.

(Post-chorus vocals along with piano and strings: “Did you want me all? / No, not for life / Did you truly see me? / No, not this time / Were you ever sure? / No, no, no, not with me”)

twigs: It was a very weird time in my life. In my mid twenties I really thought I had it all sorted and together. And then, in my late twenties I really realized that I 100% did not, you know. I just realized I did not have a Scooby Doo, what was going on. And I think for me like “Mirrored Heart,” it was really like at the peak of me feeling very alone and just like intense heartbreak, like keep you up at night, heartbreak.

(Synth pad)

twigs: During this time I called my manager, like it must have been 4:00 AM for me and it was in the early morning for him in London and I called him and I was just crying. I was just like completely inconsolable. And he said, “What's the matter?” And I said, “I don't want to make a heartbreak record, I don't want to be on stage singing these songs. I don't want to feel sad. I don't want to have to carry it with me. Like I don't want to make a sad album.”

(Piano)

twigs: I'd made *LP1* and I felt like so strong. I felt like on top of the world, I felt like I had it sorted. I felt like I would make this next record, and I would be like this strong Nubian queen, and I go and take the world, and it would be amazing. But then that just was not my truth at all. And I think at a certain point, I had to accept that. In a lot of the interviews I did about the record, like you know, everyone was kind of like, “This must have been so healing for you. Like this must have been such like a healing process,” and I'm kind of like, “Absolutely not! Like are you kidding me?” I said I have no idea, like I just fixed one thing and then another thing comes up. You know, that's life. There was just nothing that I could do than ride it out and try and get on with my life, and that's what I was trying to do. But it was a great time of self discovery, genuine, real, like gut wrenching self discovery.

(Piano ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here is “Mirrored Heart,” by FKA twigs, in its entirety.

(“Mirrored Heart” by FKA TWIGS)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net to learn more about FKA twigs. You’ll also find the link to stream or buy this song.

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