

**Song Exploder**  
**Garbage - Felt**  
**Episode 10**

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.

Hrishikesh: This episode contains explicit language.

*("Felt" by GARBAGE)*

Hrishikesh: The band Garbage formed in 1994 when three guys from Madison, Wisconsin - Butch Vig, Steve Marker, and Duke Erikson met Scottish singer, Shirley Manson. Twenty years later, they've sold over 17 million records worldwide. In this episode, we'll get a view inside their 2012 song "Felt" from the album *Not Your Kind of People*. Butch Vig, who is also a legendary producer behind some of the most influential albums of all time like *Nevermind* by Nirvana, *Siamese Dream* by Smashing Pumpkins, *Dirty* by Sonic Youth, and countless others, spoke to me from his home studio in Los Angeles. I also interviewed Shirley Manson separately to get her insight on how the song was made. Plus some thoughts from their longtime engineer, and now co-producer, Billy Bush. This is "Felt" by Garbage on Song Exploder.

*("Felt" by GARBAGE)*

*(Music fades)*

Butch: Hi, my name's Butch Vig. I'm a music producer, and I'm also the drummer in Garbage. I play a lot of instruments, but primarily drums. We're not just defined to one role, we get to play a lot of different instruments, and that's one of the things that's cool about being in the band. The track is one of the simpler songs on the record. The song started with a very simple riff, kind of a drone in E.

*(Guitar)*

Butch: I came up with just the initial riff, and it doesn't really have a chorus. It just sort of has this turnaround that Duke and Steve came up with.

*(Guitar)*

*(Guitar ends)*

Butch: It is grungy sounding [laughter]. It's almost like a blues progression in a way, because it just loops that main riff, and then it has the turnaround, and it goes back into the main riff. Because I remember the initial guitar that was recorded was kind of a scratch guitar. And we didn't think about it too much, so it sounds kind of lo-fi in a good way. A lot of times we'll record something really quick thinking, at least I'm thinking, "Oh, we'll go back and get a" Quote, unquote, "better sound later." And then, we fall in love with it and leave it. Relatively quickly, Shirley came up with an idea for some vocals. I think she, more than anyone, really thought it should have sort of a shoegazer vibe to it. Really saturated guitars, dreamy, kind of ethereal sounding vocals.

Shirley: Well, he's being very generous. But I did have an idea for how I wanted the song to sound for sure. My name is Shirley Manson, and I'm the lead singer of Garbage, the band. I wanted it to sound, basically like the Cocteau Twins, if the truth be told, they're one of my all time favorite bands.

*("For Phoebe Still a Baby" by COCTEAU TWINS)*

*(Music fades)*

Shirley: They're a touchstone band for me. I'm lucky, you know, because my husband is an engineer, so I can, like, shove ideas down whenever I see fit, really. You know, "shove something on this, so it sounds like the Cocteau Twins." And so, I put up.

Billy: And so, I put up a couple of reverbs, and she was like, "That's it." And then, she sang it. I'm Billy Bush, producer, engineer, and mixer. The scratch vocals that we did that day were the ones that ended up on the record.

*(Vocals: "Felt sure you felt something / Felt sure, but it really was nothing")*

Billy: She wanted it to sound huge, and dreamy, and ethereal in her headphones when she sang it. She just said, "I'm not going to get the right vibe unless you kind of get the song that we're going for." And I think that helped her get the vibe instantly.

*(Vocals: "They're only feelings, baby / They're only feelings")*

Billy: A lot of the vocals on Garbage records are processed, but very rarely ever with any reverb. Butch is not really much of a fan of reverb.

Butch: Sometimes there are too many cooks in the kitchen, but I think we're pretty aware of who has a good idea at the time and letting them run with it, whether it's me or Duke or Steve or Shirley. And sometimes if someone has a vision, the other three of us will just sort of take a back seat, and follow that person to try out an idea or an arrangement, whatever it is until we sort to get to a point where it either works or no one's into it. In the case of "Felt," I think it's a little bit atypical for Garbage because it is simple, and the song came together really quickly. Most of our songs have a difficult birth. It might start out with a vibe, and then we try a lot of different things. We experiment a lot, and we record a lot of different ideas, and sometimes argue about those until we get to a point where all of us can agree on the song. But more often than not, our songs are a fairly messy, complicated affair, and "Felt" came together very quickly.

Shirley: I had been sitting in my bedroom thinking, *I wonder what happened to Lawrence from the band Felt.*

*("Primitive Painters" by FELT)*

*(Music fades)*

Shirley: So earlier on I'd been stalking Lawrence on the internet. And so, the word "Felt" was in my brain. And also I'd had an experience that day for a friend of mine, who had been berating me about making decisions based solely on my feelings, which are, as you can imagine, pretty strong one way or another *always*. You know, I'm just ruled by my feelings. And she was insisting that I switch my feelings off and use my logic, use my brain. I thought it was a really powerful statement. And so, I guess all these ideas and thoughts were in my brain when the instrumental came through that day, and I came up with a melody, and the words tripped out at the same time. It was really super easy. I wish all songs were that simple.

*(Drums)*

Butch: A lot of the drums I recorded on *Not Your Kind of People*, I did in the den here right outside my little home studio, which is primarily where I watch football games on Sundays. It's not really a studio, as you can see, it's just four walls of drywall, but we have a secret weapon in Garbage. We have these old Roger

Mayer compressors. Think they're solid state, and they sound pretty weird in a cool way, they get distorted quickly. I have one and Billy has one, and we have a tendency to run the drums through them quite a bit, and get a little bit of that unpredictable quality in the way the drums sound. And as soon as we ran it through the Roger Mayer, it just completely sort of shreds a little bit, and pushes the volume up on it. You can really hear the overhead room mic's cranking up and down and saturating, which is good. By the time I compress it, add EQ, run it through the Roger Mayer, it no longer sounds like I recorded the drums in my den. It sounds like it's going into some other worldly space.

(Drums)

(Drums end)

Butch: We made a conscious effort to start *Not Your Kind of People* in a more of a lowkey manner. When we first started writing songs, no one knew we were even getting together. We didn't want to go into a full rock studio and, you know, block it out for three or four, five months at a time. We wanted to just get some ideas quickly, and there's no overhead for us to hang in there. We can open a bottle of wine, and just sort of plug in instruments, and jam, and see what comes out of it. It's funny, the very first Garbage record we did, a lot of the song ideas came from Steve's basement. And we had a little 8-track ADAT that we were jamming on, and a Mac computer so we could do some loops and things. And we probably spent three or four months there coming up with song ideas before we actually went into Smart Studios. And Steve and I owned Smart. and Duke worked there a lot as an engineer and producer. And we could have just gone in there, but we decided let's go super lowkey, no pressure. And it worked. So I think when we started *Not Your Kind of People*, we wanted to go back to that kind of lowkey guerrilla style, if you will, and not worry so much about, "Okay, we're going into the recording studio today. Let's hopefully get our shit together." It's funny. I don't really think of myself these days as having to need a real recording studio to get a good sound. There was a time, I guess, when I started making a lot of rock records with Nirvana, the Pumpkins, and I felt like you've got to be in the best studio you can get in. I want to have a Neve, or an API console, or whatever it is, but I don't really feel that way now. I think you can get amazing sounds with whatever you're given, whatever your limitations are. Whether it's a world-class studio, or whether it's recording in your garage, or your basement.

(Bass)

Butch: We had Justin Meldal-Johnsen come in, and play bass on this track, who's an incredible bass player. We love work with him because he's got a great vibe. He's funny. He always has really good ideas, and he's quick, you know? Duke and Steve play bass, but not as good as Justin. We might write the part between us in the band, but it's always better to get someone in who really knows their instrument. Justin played a cool turnaround at the end of each verse where he just swings the notes a little bit.

*(Bass)*

*(Bass ends)*

Butch: Because the song is so simple and repetitive, little changes like that in the bass sort of help really define the arrangement.

Shirley: When I first started in Garbage, I was very fearful, and I didn't have a lot of confidence, and I felt really intimidated by their reputation. And so, I would do my best to be prepared for when I stepped into the studio. On one hand, that's great to be prepared, but also I think it can be a very restrictive way of working and being creative, because I would have one idea, and it would matter to me whether I sold that idea. And if I didn't sell that idea to them, I'd be really gutted and feel like a failure. And now, as a writer, I understand it's like playing, you know, there must be a million ways to play this scene. So here's one way, here's another. And I genuinely think I'm not as married to an idea as I used to be, and as a result, you start having more ideas. The less married you are to ideas, the more you have. And that gives you confidence because you know that no matter what, a microphone can go up in front of you, somebody can play a piece of music, and you can come up with something. Well, I never believed that before, when I first started with Garbage, I didn't believe in that. But now I'm older [laughter]. I feel like the studio should be playful, and it should be fun.

Butch: To me, if you're going to write a shoegazer song, you got to have a lot of fuzzy, saturated guitars. It's got to kind of be a wall of sound.

*(Guitar)*

Butch: That was the primary goal on this, once Shirley came up with her idea for the vocals, is Duke and Steve knew they needed to record kind of a Phil Spector

approach almost. There's a lot of guitar tracks, so we lay it on here. And after each verse and chorus that Shirley sings, Duke does a subtle turnaround riff.

*(Guitar)*

Butch: The guitars are a bit out of tune here and there. I think the guitars being slightly out of tune on this song are okay, because if everything is perfectly in pitch, it sounds kind of clean. And part of that sort of saturated sound and that wall of sound is that everything is slightly out of tune, just ever so slightly, and that gives it a much wider kind of washy sound.

*(Guitar fades)*

Butch: This is one of my favorite things. Shirley just did this crazy ad lib at the end of the song, and we loved it and left it in.

*(Vocals: "Oh-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo / Oh-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo / Oh-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo")*

Butch: You can hear the vocal mic is distorting a little bit. She was really leaning into it. I think you can hear it's a handheld mic too, so that might've been the first pass she did where she just used a handheld mic as she ran through the song.

*(Vocals: "Oh-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo")*

Butch: It sounds like Garbage because I hear Shirley's voice on it, and we're a band that's lucky in that way. We can kind of do anything sonically. And once you put her voice on it, it sounds like Garbage.

*(Vocals: "Oh-lo-lo-lo-lo")*

Shirley: Oh, the lo, lo, lo's. Yeah. I wanted to come up with something different, and I was like, "What would Siouxsie do?" Because I was so obsessed with Siouxsie at that particular, I mean, I've always been obsessed by Siouxsie. She's been, again, a massive touchstone for me. She was the first rock star I fell in love with like genuinely, and I'd been listening to a lot of her records at the time of making the last record a couple of years ago now. And I was like, "What would Siouxsie do in this part?" Because I wanted something aggressive because the whole song had been so dreamy. And I thought it would be unexpected to have something a little more weird. And I came up with the lo, lo, lo, lo's, and then my husband put this weird effect on it, and it just sounded cool as fuck in my mind. I

was like, "I sound like Siouxsie, let's keep it in." Well, my absolute favorite Siouxsie and the Banshees song was quite obscure. It's called "Drop Dead/Celebration." I used to play it nonstop when I was a kid.

*("Drop Dead/Celebration" by SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES)*

*(Music fades)*

Shirley: Thanks for busting me. If I get sued by Siouxsie, I will come to you [laughter].

Butch: I remember we were mixing the record, and I was listening to roughs in my car. This was one of my favorite tracks, and I would just crank it, and stun by, driving down the 101 or whatever, because it just, I just loved the vibe on it, you know? And as I said, I don't even know exactly what Shirley's singing and all the lyrics, but it doesn't matter because I love the song.

*(Guitar)*

Shirley: I think when you're in a band, the alchemy that exists between members of the band is invaluable, and misunderstood by the public, and underestimated in general, you know, because tiny things that get included become huge. People don't really understand bands. They don't know how they work. They don't know how they're balanced, the balance is so - and again, I know that you know this - it's magic.

*(Music ends)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Felt," by Garbage, in its entirety.

*("Felt" by GARBAGE)*

Hrishikesh: Visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) for more information on Garbage, including a link to purchase the song "Felt," as well as links to the other songs referenced in this episode. A note about that song we heard by the band Felt, it's called "Primitive Painters" and features guest vocals by Elizabeth Fraser, lead singer of the Cocteau Twins.

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](http://songexploder.net) or wherever you download podcasts. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

