

**Song Exploder**  
**Glass Animals - Heat Waves**  
**Episode 204**

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.

*("Heat Waves" by GLASS ANIMALS)*

Hrishikesh: Glass Animals is a band from Oxford, England. They've released three albums since forming back in 2010. One of their biggest hits is the song "Heat Waves," which came out in June 2020. It was certified gold in a bunch of countries, and platinum in Australia, where it hit #1. Dave Bayley is the singer, songwriter, and producer of the band. He won the UK's Music Producers Guild award for "Self-Producing Artist of the Year" and he's produced songs for other artists, too. In this episode, Dave tells the story of making "Heat Waves," over several months. First, on his own, and then later with his bandmates, Joe Seaward, Ed Irwin-Singer, and Drew MacFarlane. Here's Glass Animals on Song Exploder.

Dave: I'm Dave from Glass Animals.

*(Music fades out)*

Dave: May 2018 is when I first started something. And I didn't feel like there was any pressure to make another Glass Animals' record. We weren't in a rush. So I was going into the studio every day, long hours, just getting crazy synths, just finding sounds. I have this like exploratory phase before actually making an album for the band, which is just me [laughter] eating lots of cereal and doing nerdy things, twisting knobs. I was in this studio complex in North London called The Church, there were some bigger artists in all the other rooms. And I was in this little basement room and I was ready to go home, I had a long, very unsuccessful day in the studio. I always use this fishing analogy of Arlo Guthrie's where he always said that writing songs is like fishing. You change your bait, put some fresh bait on, you can move your boat to a new spot, you can get some new line, you can try all these tricks, but you know, mainly you just catch like tires and weeds and like weird fish that you can't eat. And I'd had a whole day of that, just catching weird fish. But I was like, fine, one more.

*(Electric guitar riff)*

Dave: I always have a guitar plugged in and a microphone. And I think I just hit record, picked up the guitar and that's when I started like fumbling around. I'd been reading some gimmicky book about songwriting and it was about like how you can kind of get these longer chord phrases that tell a story. And I was like, "Oh let's try something like that." So, I was trying to get this longer chord phrase and just started noodling around trying to find eight chords that fit together and had some kind of arc that took you on a bit of a journey. It was about nine minutes of fumbling. And then I played that chord pattern and I was like, "oh, that's cool," so I'd play it over and over again. They had this very reflective quality, but then it resolves quite well that chord pattern, and it feels like, I don't know, maybe like coming to terms with something or acceptance. And I think that's probably where the lyric came from.

*(Electric guitar riff along with lead vocals: "Last night, all I think about is you")*

Dave: I think one of the first things that came out of my mouth was that vocal line. It was late at night and I was thinking about all those people that I missed.

*(Electric guitar riff along with lead vocals continue: "Last night, all I think about is you / Don't stop, baby, you can walk through / Don't want, baby, think about you / You know that I'm never gonna lose / You know, what you, what you want")*

Dave: I do all sorts of things to my vocal when I'm recording these raw ideas. Cause I think like many people, I really hate the sound of my own voice, so sometimes I pitch it down an octave, sometimes I pitch it up an octave, and I don't know, I just have all these tricks to kind of disassociate yourself from, from you, and this was kind of around the time that I started using Auto-Tune to do that for me. I feel like a lot of music is about not overthinking things, and when it's your own voice, it's so easy to overthink it. It's like, I don't know, I think sometimes I'm on zoom and I can see people looking at their own picture [laughter], and kind of losing sense of the conversation, and I don't know it's kind of the same thing, it stops you doing that, it stops you - just allows you to not think about the rules and how it should sound and try not to make everything too perfect.

*(Pitched down vocal stem)*

Dave: At that point I kind of tried to firm up a sound. When I have the guitar live and recording it's not often a particularly interesting sound.

*(Electric guitar stem)*

Dave: So I just recorded the guitar, pitched it down an octave,

*(Pitched down guitar)*

Dave: Pitched it up an octave.

*(Pitched up guitar along with pitched down guitar)*

Dave: And that just left enough space for the vocal to sit in between. Because a lot of writing a song is about leaving a space for the vocal to breathe.

*(Pitched guitar tracks along with lead vocals: "You just need a better life than this / You need somethin' I can never give / Fake water all across the road / It's gone now, the night has come, but")*

Dave: The guitar was a bit plucky and tinkly so I thought it needs some warmth.

*(Synth stem)*

Dave: It was a really deep, rich sounding synthesizer.

*(Synth stem continues)*

Dave: I remember putting the drums on after those synths.

*(Drums along with synth)*

Dave: Well, at that point, I just looped everything I had. And loads of different verse ideas came out, loads of different hooks came out. And also 'cause the chords are moving so much you could use quite rhythmic vocal patterns that weren't necessarily crazy melodies to keep things moving, you know, the chords did a lot of the moving for you. So, I put Auto-Tune in key, picked up the microphone, and then I just went for it.

*(Full demo)*

Dave: And I think after about two minutes I was like, "woah, I've got loads to go with here." I tend to feel very comfortable writing late at night. I think there's a part of your brain that really - the sensible bit that keeps you alive starts to shut down.

And you just get to that point in the night and that part, the sensible bit's gone, and like these weird bits of your brain start coming out. At that point, I think it's probably time to head home, I'm knackered. The song ended, I heard someone behind me and I was like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, I thought I was alone in here. I turned around and there's just someone sitting there at the piano with a glass of wine. I was like "What is this? Who is this? Who are you?" And they just said, "It's John." And I was like, "who is John? I don't know John." They were wearing a really nice suit, and I was like this is so strange, I said, "Hi John." And they turned around and it was Johnny Depp! [Laughter] I couldn't believe - I was like, so he weirdly, Johnny Depp was the first person to hear this song. Someone who was working in one of the studios above me came in and was like, "Oh Dave, I'm sorry. We - John got lost." And he'd gotten lost, he was working with someone in a different studio and anyway, that was pretty weird and then they invited me upstairs to go hang out. So that was it, that was the end of day one. [Laughter]

*(Demo ends)*

Dave: I just didn't touch it, for like six months. And then I was going on another LA trip and was gonna be pitching songs for a particular pop artist. One of my favorite pop artists as well, I was so excited and nervous, and I was digging through just old stuff and I think I remembered this, and showed it to this pop artist to no success.

*(Electric guitar riff)*

Dave: I mean, it would have been a great thing to have one of my favorite pop artists sing a song, but at the same time, it was a really personal piece of music, and I think a part of me would have actually been a bit sad if I'd given it away.

*(Electric guitar riff along with vocals: "Sometimes all I think about is you / Late nights in the middle of June / Heat waves been fakin' me out / Can't make you happier now")*

Dave: "Sometimes all I think about is you, late nights in the middle of June." It means something very specific to me but I like it when a chorus lyric can be interpreted in lots of different ways. For me, it's actually very, very personal. I lost someone, I lost my best friend some time ago now. I'm getting a bit welly uppy here, but this particular person had their birthday in June and every time their birthday comes up, it just like, it ruins me. I guess this whole song is about missing somebody. And people are just kind of vulnerable to that, you can't do anything

about it. You can't help and save everybody, and it's okay to let yourself miss someone and feel this, feel this pain.

*(Electric guitar riff fades out)*

Dave: So, after it had been denied by this particular pop artist I think, I was like, cool, this is good, I have ammunition to show to the band. And I think we were going to the studio in November, December, and I was like cool this is another one I can show the guys and maybe, maybe they'll like it.

*(Acoustic drums)*

Dave: There's Ed, Joe, and Drew. These guys are amazing players and musicians, in a way that I am not. Joe is always very keen on acoustic drums. I think they just add life. That feel of a good drummer is really hard to replicate with electronic drums.

*(Electronic drums)*

Dave: So Joe always has a pass with acoustic drums.

*(Electric guitar riff along with acoustic drums)*

Dave: July of that year, Joe had a really terrible accident. He was injured very badly and couldn't walk or talk for a long time. But Joe is very stubborn, and he was riding a bike when he had his accident. The first thing he wanted to do was get on his bike again. And the second thing he wanted to do was get back on the drum kit. And he just wouldn't let anything stand in his way. And he's playing with the groove that he always had.

*(Acoustic drums + electronic drums)*

Dave: Sometimes, it takes a lot of time getting drums to sit together, but I love layering like snare sounds and kick sounds. And it can be quite a fine process.

*(Acoustic drums + electronic drums fade)*

Dave: Sometimes I'll cut all the low end out of one, cut all the high end out of another to get them to blend together and then run that through tape machine.

*(Dave's voice slowly fades out)*

Dave: It's a long and very tedious process that everybody hates watching me do. And I'm sorry to everyone who's ever seen it.

*(Acoustic drums + electronic drums come back then end)*

Dave: And then, Drew and I were doing a lot of orchestral arrangements for everything. And he was keen to put these big stabs in.

*(MIDI orchestral stabs)*

Dave: Big orchestral kind of moody like \*boom\* and then \*plung\* of a slightly cheesy jazzy guitar on the off beats.

*(Guitar chords)*

Dave: In those jazzy kind of seventh chords, it adds a little bit of optimism. 'Cause ultimately I think the song is meant to be optimistic. It is really sad at its core, but it's kind of about accepting that sadness and vulnerability's okay.

*(Pitched down vocals: "The road shimmer wiggling the vision/ heat-heat waves I'm swimming in a mirror.")*

Dave: "Road shimmer wiggling the vision / heat-heat waves I'm swimming in a mirror." The lyrics are all about mirages and reflection.

*(A cappella vocals: "Usually I put somethin' on TV / So we never think about you and me / But today I see our reflections clearly / In Hollywood, layin' on the screen")*

Dave: I just had this picture of two people sitting on a sofa and looking into the TV screen, and seeing the reflection of the two of you, and realizing that you can't help them, and it kind of breaks your heart, yeah. I think the song was really intimate and really personal. So I liked the idea of the verse being really simple, just one single vocal and then the choruses I wanted to beef it up big time.

*(Chorus group vocals: "Sometimes all I think about is you / Late nights in the middle of June / Heat waves been fakin' me out / Can't make you happier now")*

*(808s added underneath the vocals)*

Dave: I absolutely love 808 bass. I used to DJ 'til quite late at night and then not be able to sleep. I'd come home and start making music while all my housemates were asleep. And I just, I needed to feel that bass outside the club. So, yeah I've always been obsessed with 808s.

*(Intro of "Heat Waves")*

Dave: So that intro is the first demo, the first ever thing that was ever recorded for this, is that. I thought that was a nice way to round it off because I kind of like to think that albums, they're kind of like a snapshot of who you are in that certain period of time and where your head's at. Sometimes it's just useful to like help you get to the next step, if you think about like the idea of the song and the concept. It can just be, it can be a helpful trick but really, I think in this case, it felt like a nice nod back to something really really personal and starting just alone at night in a room...until Johnny Depp showed up [laughter].

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Heat Waves," by Glass Animals, in its entirety.

*("Heat Waves" by GLASS ANIMALS)*

Hrishikesh: To learn more, visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net). You'll find links to buy or stream "Heat Waves," and you can watch the music video for it.

This episode was made by me, with editing help from Teeny Lieberman and Casey Deal, artwork by Carlos Lerma, and music clearance by Kathleen Smith. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a network of independent, listener-supported, artist-owned 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 and Instagram @SongExploder. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway. Thanks for listening.