

Song Exploder
Grimes - Kill V. Maim
Episode 78

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.

("Kill V. Maim by GRIMES)

Hrishikesh: Grimes is the project of Claire Boucher. In 2015, she released *Art Angels*, her 4th album. In this episode, she breaks down her song "Kill V. Maim," and how the experience of writing songs for other artists opened up the way that she writes for herself.

("Kill V. Maim by GRIMES)

Claire: This is Claire Boucher from Grimes.

(Music fades)

Claire: I was like jamming with a friend, and this person was really good at making really aggressive music. And he kept doing these cute, little plucky things. And I was like, "No, no, let's make a hard song." He was like, "No, no, you make cute music." I was like [gasps]! Like I was so horrified, like I was like, "I can make hard music." So I went home after that, and sort of wanting to prove that I could make a, I don't know, something that's going to be really aggressive that like I would want to play during an action sequence in a movie or something. So that was kind of the impetus of how it started.

(Guitar)

Claire: So the first thing I made for this song was I just got out this old, crappy guitar I had, and I didn't know any chords. I hadn't really played guitar very much. It's like a single note, guitar lead thing. And then, I just pitched it down an octave, just so it sounded more like a bass.

(Bass sound)

Claire: But then later on, I ended up getting a really sweet guitar amp.

(Guitar)

Claire: And so, I re-recorded a lot of guitars. And then, also I played some chords that I had subsequently figured out with, like, better guitar, like mic'ing a real amp.

(Guitar)

Claire: You can tell that it's like chopped and pitched. I mean everything about the guitars in this song are the by-product of me just knowing nothing about guitars. Like if it sounded interesting, I just wasn't worried about keeping it, I guess. It's just a complete mess of unprofessionalism.

(Guitar)

(Beat)

Claire: I'm a real kick drum person, like I live for kick drums. That's what the whole thing for me is about.

(Beat)

Claire: Every song I do, like there's at least 15% of the time that I work on the song, is dedicated to the kick drums.

(Beat)

(Beat ends)

Claire: But this song was really hard for me because what I came to realize making this song is that, it's usually like either a kick drum song or a guitar song, if it's a banger. Like you usually get one or the other, like a big rock song, that's, the kick are actually usually pretty chill. So this was just me, just really trying to get as much bang from the kicks as I could.

(Beat)

Claire: There's like toms,

(Toms)

Claire: and explosions,

(Explosions with beat)

Claire: that are also layered into the kicks. There was like 40 layers of drums.

(Beat)

(Beat ends)

Claire: I wanted to make a song that I would want to dance to. I also stood up for most of the time that I was making it, like I put my computer on a monitor stand so that I could, you know, dance while I made the song.

(Synth)

Claire: I had been watching *Godfather* and *Godfather II*. And I just had this thought in my mind of this like insane movie that would just be like *The Godfather* with vampires, like a mixture of *Godfather* and *Twilight*. I just wanted to make the song that would play during the trailer of this fictional movie in my mind.

(Vocals join: "Cause I'm only a man, do what I can, oh / 'Cause I'm only a man, do what I can")

Claire: I hate singing. It's just not something I identify with at all. I'm pretty much always pretending to be someone else when I'm singing.

(Synth)

Claire: Six months before starting this song and stuff, I did some sessions like writing for other people, which I don't know, it was actually really great, because I started for the first time writing in other people's voices. And it was a huge door for me when I first started trying to write music for other people. It was like this amazing, because suddenly you don't have to feel self-conscious. Lyrically, it's also so much easier. You're like, "Oh, well, this doesn't have to be something my parents are going to hear and think, *Wow, I can't believe you did that, you know?*" Which is actually a huge, probably one of my biggest hindrances as an artist, is like my parents or grandparents being upset by my lyrics being, you know, not PG or too weird or something. So writing for other people was definitely how I sort of started down the path. Music, for me, it's like fanfiction.

(Vocals: "I got friends in high places / I get out for free / I got in a fight but they don't know me / 'Cause I'm only a man")

Claire: When I was like really doing the vocals and lyrics for this, I was deep in the record. I was not talking to people, and I was very isolated, and I was doing just a lot of voices like in the house. This makes me sound insane. I actually feel like maybe I shouldn't [laughter] say stuff like this, but when you're

Hrishikesh: [laughter]

Claire: making a record and you're never talking to anybody, you just start, "Oh, I'm going to try to write in the voice of a something." You know, like with a Harley Quinn kind of vibe, like just sort of this jokery, like scary demon chorus." The "B-E-H-A," which sounds terrible, you shouldn't solo it. It sounds so bad as solo'd.

Hrishikesh: I'm definitely going to solo it.

Claire: Okay. Well, let the people know that I think it sounds, it's really embarrassing to listen to solo'd, but I respect if you solo it.

(Vocals: "B-E-H-A-V-E / Arrest us / Italiana mobster / Looking so precious / B-E-H-A-V-E / Never more / You gave up being good when you declared a state of war")

Claire: I mean, that was the thing that I was really just totally stuck on until the very, very, very end, was just finishing the "B-E-H-A" just because it was so hard to get it right. Like I just had to do that 50 different times, and like go through, and try to find the ones that were off key, and then just like get those out, and like just Auto-Tune some and not other ones. And when you're working with 50 plus vocals, it's like one vocal in the whole, it's like a, if a light bulb burns out on the Christmas tree lights, and you have to figure out which one it is, it's like that. It's just really mind numbing and annoying.

(Crowd)

Claire: Oh, I add crowds into everything. I think it's a huge key to making dance music. Even if it's so quiet, like in "Kill V. Maim," it's so quiet, you can't even hear it.

(Crowd)

Claire: But it's like you take crowd cheering, you sidechain it to the kick.

(Sidechained crowd with kick)

Claire: Pan hard right and left.

(Sidechained and panned crowd with kick)

Claire: It just adds so much energy. It's my number one go-to trick with, it just makes everything sound better. Also, like when it's live, people think it's live, and they cheer more. Like it's a very manipulative tactic, but it's great.

(Music fades)

Claire: This song, it's probably my favorite song I've ever made. Like, it was definitely fun the whole time. Like there were times when I was really worried that it was like going off the deep end, where I was like, "I should probably just give up on this song." But I always enjoyed the song, which is more than I can say for most of my songs.

(Synth)

Claire: I do feel like it's important to consider how music is made. I think really great music, like over time, you start hearing little imperfections in it. For me, the process is by far the best part.

(Synth)

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Kill V. Maim," by Grimes, in its entirety.

("Kill V. Maim by GRIMES)

Hrishikesh: For more on Grimes, go to songexploder.net. I've put the music video for the song up on the site, and a link to buy the track on iTunes.

("Solemn Oath" by BAND OF HORSES)

Hrishikesh: Next time on Song Exploder, Band of Horses. You can find all the past and future episodes of Song Exploder at songexploder.net or on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you download podcasts. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a curated network of extraordinary, story-driven shows. Learn more at radiotopia.fm. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

("Solemn Oath" by BAND OF HORSES)

(Music fades)

© 2020 Translucence