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. But if you haven't seen *Dune* yet, there aren't any spoilers other than a very basic description of the premise of the movie - which I'm about to do now.

("Dune" by HANS ZIMMER)

Hrishikesh: The movie *Dune* was released on October 21st. It's the most recent adaptation of Frank Herbert's epic science fiction novel from 1965. The film was directed by Denis Villeneuve, and the score was written by Oscar-winning composer Hans Zimmer. Hans Zimmer has scored over 200 films, and he's been nominated for Oscars eleven times. He and Denis Villeneuve first worked together on the film *Blade Runner 2049*. *Dune* tells the story of the Atreides family as they relocate to the desert planet of Arrakis. When Hans Zimmer first started working on the music, he made what he calls a "sketchbook" - creating motifs and themes that might occur in the film. In this episode, he takes us through the first sketch that he did for *Dune*. It's called "Paul's Dream."

("Dune" by HANS ZIMMER)

(Music fades)

Hans: My name is Hans Zimmer. I'm a film composer, and that was the job I had on Denis Villeneuve's *Dune*. We have a mutual friend, our editor, Joe Walker. Joe and I, we go back. We worked for the BBC in 1988. Joe actually started out as a composer, and I think that's an important part to know, because he cuts in a very musical way. I remember Joe phoning up and going, "We're a little stuck on this project, *Blade Runner 2049*." And it was somewhere in that time that Denis said the word "Dune" to me.

(Synth)

Hans: It's a lifetime story, really.

(Synth fades)

Hrishikesh: Hans Zimmer first read *Dune* when he was 13 years old.

Hans: And now if you go forward many, many years, Denis, very quietly one evening, asking me if I had ever heard of a book called *Dune*, and me sort of freaking out at him going, "But you don't understand, when I was a teenager, duh, duh, duh, I'd make my own movie in my head." And one of the things I never did, I never watched the David Lynch version, I never watched the television version, because I had all these images burned into my head, and I didn't want them to get extinguished or blunted or disturbed in any way.

(Synth)

Hans: But knowing Denis, and Denis being a friend, it felt really safe to go on this adventure together.

(Synth ends)

Hans: You know, usually you have discussions about ideas. You'd say, you know, "Here I have this idea. What do you think?" But with Denis and me, what kept happening was that he would start a sentence and I could finish it. Or I would start a sentence and he could finish it. And it was like, we had always heard and seen the movie on parallel tracks. And it wasn't ever about, "What's the creative approach to the music?" It was more about, "What's the philosophical underpinning of the story?"

(Strings)

Hans: It's very much like a teenager dreaming, you know, where your dreams seem to have a profound meaning. And sometimes some of that meaning becomes the truth, but very often that meaning is just random noise,

(Crumpling paper sound joins)

Hans: and very unreliable narrator to your own life or even to your own subconscious.

(Crumpling paper sound ends)

Hans: The piece I sent you is the original demo, it's just called, "Paul's Dream." The sketchbook is how I go about figuring out what the architecture of the whole thing is, so the sketchbook gives you all the motifs. It gives you all the sounds, it gives you everything. And then from that, it becomes the score.

(Music ends)

Hans: For this track in particular, the idea partly was that it's a boy that dreams of the desert, and he's not at the desert yet.

(Temple bell)

Hans: The first thing I put down was "Synth Bell Plonk," which has nothing to do with anything. It's just, you have got to start somewhere. Part of my conceptual thing is I know what tempos Joe likes working at when he's editing. I know what tempos Denis likes, because there's an unhurriedness about his filmmaking. There's a deep sense of letting you experience the image fully and letting you experience the performance fully. So nothing develops at like a lightning speed. So, you know, picking the tempo is partly knowing the people you're working with.

(Drone joins)

(Drone ends)

Hans: The little quarter notes at the beginning and that low, you know, I don't know that low droney thingy, they're safe places to start on.

(Drone)

(Drone fades)

Hrishikesh: To me, this is like a signature Hans Zimmer sound. Do you think of it that way?

Hans: Yeah. You know, and at the same time, every movie I make them, I make new ones, but they're not that different from each other. It's just, I love the low, sort of Tibetan, [sung] "oh," you know, look, I can sing it [laugher]. You know, it's part of my register, "ohhh."

(Drone)

Hans: I love the idea of that innocent little temple bell

(Temple bell)

Hans: ringing at the top and then some of these monks at the bottom.

(Drone joins)

Hans: I needed to go and find some familiar ground, you know, to calm myself down. Because, here's the thing,

(Music ends)

Hans: this is an enormously ambitious project, making this movie, and sort of a childhood dream. So the last thing I said to Denis before he went off to shoot the movie, I just looked at him sort of sternly and I said, "Denis just one thing: Don't fuck it up." But then he came back and it was the same thing. Now, the responsibility had shifted onto my shoulders.

(Drone)

(Drone fades)

Hans: One of the things that Denis and I agreed on was that even though the book seems, on the surface, to be about all these very masculine heroes, it's really the women that are the power that drives the story forward, and that drive fate and destiny of everybody forward. So the score should be relying heavily on the female voice.

(Vocals)

Hans: You have Lisa Gerrard, you have Suzanne Waters, you have Edie Lehmann Boddicker, and then the great Loire Cotler on lead vocal. And those are really the choir.

(Vocals)

Hans: If our hero is Paul and his mother, Jessica, and she actually is not in a scene, I still always kept like an echo of a female voice going to, to just maintain that.

(Vocals)

(Strings join)

Hans: It felt like the desert to me.

(Vocals with strings)

Hans: The book is tinged with Middle Eastern themes,

(Music ends)

Hans: but first of all, I didn't want to do that cultural imperialism where I was going to go and suddenly rip off every cliché that you find in Middle Eastern music. Nor did I want to root the thing that firmly in the Middle East. That's really not the point. The point is it's on the Planet Arrakis set in the future. There should be just a hint, and maybe it's the Middle East, but maybe it's not.

(Vocals with strings)

(Music ends)

Hans: John Williams is, to me, the most masterful composer we have. And one of the most masterful scores he's ever written was *Star Wars*. But when you're a 13 year old, and you're precocious, and you're, you know, you're full of hubris and a little arrogant, and you start thinking all these crazy things, you know, and I'm sitting there and I'm going, "In a galaxy far, far away, why am I hearing strings? Why am I hearing French horns? Shouldn't that be completely different sounds?" And truly no insult intended to the pleasure, for instance, that I got out of listening to the *Star Wars*, and how that is a perfect score for that movie, but I always, at the back of my mind, was the thought that, there should be a different sound. And the only sound that should remain in our galaxy far, far away in time and space, should be the human voice.

(Vocals)

Hans: And again, it's this idea that the woman's voice is whispering in your ear something, some secret. You'll never know what the secret is.

(Vocals)

Hans: One day, I got this sort of amazing chant back from Lisa that just became like the underbelly. That's Lisa Gerrard from Dead Can Dance or Lisa Gerrard from *Gladiator*. I tried to make everything tension, basically holding your breath through this dream, and then there comes this very obvious chord that will lead you to something else. You just know it's building towards something.

(Strings and drone join)

(Bell, distorted sound effect, and percussion join)

Hans: We're now in the meat of *Dune*,

(Helicopter sound joins)

Hans: now we're on a journey.

(Vocals, strings, drone, wind sound, and helicopter sound)

(Music ends)

Hans: I have this band of extraordinary musicians like Tina Guo and Guthrie Govan and Pedro Eustache, and they can do things that other people can't do.

(Duduk)

Hans: The duduk, ancient Armenian instrument, and I keep thinking, "If it's ancient, it'll hold its value into the future. It'll be something that you can pick up in 10,000 years and it will still be relevant. So it's actually Pedro playing two different duduks, one in one key and one in another key, because the tune is just outside its range.

(Duduk)

(Duduk ends)

Hans: What I like in folk music is this, that idea of everybody is playing the same tune at the same time, but they're all interpreting it slightly differently.

(Cello)

Hans: Tina Guo, who is very polite, wonderful human being. And then, she picks up her cello, and the way she picks up her cello, it's suddenly, it's like a sword.

(Electric cello)

Hans: It's an electric cello, so it can become anything I want it to become. The way she plays, I mean, that's not how you're supposed to play a cello [laughter], and that's what I love about it [laughter].

(Electric cello)

(Electric cello fades)

Hans: And you got Guthrie Govan, who's one of the world's finest guitar players.

(Electric guitar)

Hans: And you suddenly realize, "Hang on a second, there is a rock band playing."

(Duduk and cello join)

(Music ends)

Hans: For Denis and myself, it was teenagers reading this book, and we were listening to Pink Floyd, and we were listening to guitar music, and so the idea of some weird rock opera wasn't so far removed from our thoughts.

(Electric guitar)

(Electric guitar fades)

Hans: Many people have tried to make this movie and two people who have been very influential and, to me, in this, one was Jodorowsky.

Hrishikesh: Alejandro Jodorowsky was a visionary director who tried to make an adaptation of *Dune* in the mid-1970s, but the project ran way over budget and was never finished.

Hans: And, of course, his idea was to hire Pink Floyd to do the music. So one of the trailers, you know, just to honor Jodorowsky and the whole thing, we actually

used clips from *Dark Side of the Moon*. And the other person that was important to me was Klaus Schulze, you know, who's really one of the pioneers of electronic music. And he actually wrote an album called *Dune*, but in another album called, *X*, he wrote a track called "Frank Herbert." So I thought it was appropriate to do a little bit of Klaus Schulze-type, Pink Floyd-type electronic synth sequences repeating ostinatos.

(Ostinatos)

Hans: We're now in the real theme for the planet.

(Bagpipes sound and drone join)

Hans: Once Paul's family arrives on the planet Dune, on Arrakis, like all noble house, you need a fanfare, you need somebody to herald the arrival. And, you know, you suddenly see a bagpiper in a shot.

(Bagpipes sound)

Hans: But the first bagpipes you hear in the movie aren't bagpipes at all, it's actually Guthrie imitating it on guitar.

(Bagpipes sound)

Hans: By the time I actually came to putting anything down, I wasn't in my studio. I was at home in COVID lockdown, so this whole score was done in my sitting room. My team turned it into a studio, and it's right next to my daughter's bedroom, so she will tell everybody that she suffers from bagpipe PTSD, because, you know, at 5:30 in the morning, and I'm still blasting away, you know, and the whole house is shaking.

(Bagpipes sound)

(Music ends)

Hans: For Denis, there are shots in the movie that he saw when he was reading the book as a teenager, and there are sounds and gestures and ideas that I heard in my head when I was a teenager. There's a crazy drum phrase, which, it's called "Worm Boy."

(Worm Boy)

Hans: It's sort of the anti-groove. If you try to dance to that, you will break your ankles. But I always had this idea that, you know, rhythm develops, rhythm moves forward. And maybe as we evolve there are rhythms which we've never heard before that we suddenly find interesting.

(Worm Boy)

Hans: Quite a bit of the score is based on this really inhuman pattern of drumbeats, which are, by the way, completely synthesized.

(Worm Boy)

Hans: There's a piece of score that Loire really grabs and, I mean, sings full out, and there's a commitment to each note, which is, I mean, it's terrifying.

(Vocals)

Hans: It takes a special human being to commit to expose their soul that way. To be that audacious about their singing.

(Vocals)

Hans: It's the same tune as at the beginning now, but now it's the warrior princess singing it, you know, and Loire truly is for me the warrior woman.

(Brass)

Hans: There's a whole dictionary that was written for this language. But, of course, I did what every good rock musician does: I ignored what the words mean, and I just picked the words that would sing well. The professor of linguistics who spent months and months and months writing this language is probably quietly horrified by what I did. But the point isn't that you're supposed to understand the words, you understand somebody is telling you something important. And I don't know how you feel, but I mean when I hear Loire, you know, grab those notes and those words, I feel I'm understanding that she's telling me a story.

(Vocals and strings join)

(Vocals and strings end)

Hans: This was done during COVID, and I have a fabulous photo of Loire in her clothes cupboard with all her coats hanging above her head, and she's sitting on the floor, and she's got a microphone in front of her. And so, this piece, which feels like it's being sung across an endless landscape of a desert bouncing off the rocks, off mountains, et cetera, was all done in a closet in Brooklyn.

(Vocals, strings, and brass)

(Music ends)

Hans: I'm a great believer in that music should always let you know that you can have an experience, but never tell you what the experience is. But it just says to you, "Come along, I'm going to take you on a journey, and it's going to be different."

(Vocals with strings)

Hans: You never know anything until you play it to your partner, your director. Denis was in Montreal, I was in Los Angeles, but Denis went, "That's it! That is the thing that I've been hearing in my head."

(Vocals, strings, and ostinatos)

Hans: We both approached the movie, not with the hindsight of grown men in their middle age, not with the wisdom of time gone by, and all the other stuff we've done, but somehow we had the recklessness, and the sense of experimentation, and the sense of fearlessness. And remember, a big message of the book is, you know, "Fear is the mind killer, I shall not fear." You know, there's this to a teenage boy, it was very important. So this is the score that I would have written as a 13-year-old. Yeah, I didn't fuck it up.

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Paul's Dream" from the Dune sketchbook by Hans Zimmer, in its entirety.

("Dune" by HANS ZIMMER)

Hrishikesh: To learn more, visit songexploder.net/dune. You'll find links to stream or
               download this track, and you can watch the trailer for the film.
               This episode was made by me with editing help from Craig Eley and Casey Deal.
               Artwork by Carlos Lerma, music clearance by Kathleen Smith, and production
               assistance from Chloe Parker. 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. You can follow me on
               Twitter and Instagram @HrishiHirway, and you can follow the show at Song
               Exploder. You can also get a Song Exploder t-shirt at songexploder.net/shirt. I'm
               Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.