

Song Exploder
HEALTH - Stonefist
Episode 47

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.

("Stonefist" by HEALTH)

Hrishikesh: The band HEALTH formed in Los Angeles in 2005. Their newest record, *Death Magic*, came out in 2015. They spent four years trying to make it. They describe themselves as a noise band, but for this record, they reinvented their palette and their process. In this episode, John and Jake from HEALTH take apart the song "Stonefist," which they made with their bandmates, Jupiter Keyes and BJ Miller. And just a heads up, this episode has some explicit language.

Now, here's "Stonefist" on Song Exploder.

("Stonefist" by HEALTH)

(Music fades)

Jake: Hi, I'm Jake from HEALTH, and I sing and play guitar.

John: This is John, and I play bass, though I guess we're all doing a lot of stuff on computer. The whole song started completely computer generated as the [mimics synth] kind of riff.

(Synth)

(Synth fades)

John: I had like a synth sound that I had made, and I put it in reverse and just chopped this really tiny segment, and then just, like, cranked all the distortion. And I was like, "Oh shit, this rocks! We're in business."

Jake: We've always been making aggressive music. Typically, historically, you've done something like that is, like, with a guitar and like shit, little guitar pedals that sounded really intense. But you do lose clarity when you record that. And there was already a mission statement of the band that was like, "We're supposed to

try to have it sound new.” We just knew we had to start using computers because we were a noise band, like it was about being able to create, like aggressive, elements. And so it’s like there was a new range of things available to us. I kind of had this realization where it was just like pop music on the radio is, like, heavier than like cool underground, like gnarly bands. And you're just like:

John: this Lady Gaga song is kicking my dick off, like “Telephone,”

(“Telephone” by LADY GAGA ft. BEYONCÉ)

John: where I'm like, “This is fucking nuts!”

(“Telephone” by LADY GAGA ft. BEYONCÉ)

(Music fades)

Jake: That's like a big part of why the record sounds like this. It's like it was hearing those things, and just being like, *if you could apply that technology that made those sounds that aggressive, and that apparent, and like do it tastefully, like it'd be fucking crazy.*

(Beat)

(Beat ends)

Jake: There’s a lot of goofy shit in there.

John: So there’s a live snare,

(Snare)

John: there's a white noise sound,

(White noise sound)

John: and then there's, like, a cartoon punching sound effect.

(Cartoon punching sound)

John: I want these really heavy drums with like the way to get really heavy is you need it to sound kind of goofy. So we have this like push and pull with a loving dumb shit, but thinking you're not a dumb person, I don't know [laughter].

(Beat)

Jake: The first line is like, "And though we know how far we've come, we stay possessed by what we've lost."

(Vocals: "And though we know how far we've come / We stay possessed by what we lost")

Jake: We're obsessive of the past, we're obsessive of memory, and it's just like, no matter how far you've gotten, if you're successful, unsuccessful, married, unmarried, whatever thing it's like, you still have all this fucking baggage. And a lot of times, regardless of the point that you're at, that, kind of, tends to weigh you down more than where you've gone.

(Vocals: "And we both know, love's not in our hearts / And we both know, love's not in our hearts / And we both know, love's not in our hearts / And we both know, love's not in our hearts")

Jake: I'm trying to do an anti-love song anthem. This is the not exciting part of a relationship that is not usually in a pop song where you're just kind of like, "Secretly, if I was just going to be honest right now, like we both know that we don't even like each other anymore [laughter]." So it's like saying the shit that you will deny yourself, but you know, that you actually think.

(Vocals: "Are we all the same, different? / Promised you to promise more")

Jake: Because my voice is so airy and kind of feminine, we wanted things to be able to punctuate more, and like it's never really worked for me doing that. So Jupiter, whatever my main vocal is, he would just do an octave down. So he's in there too, and it really helped.

(Vocals: "Love's not in our hearts")

Lars: I'm Lars Stalfors, I produced and mixed the HEALTH record. Every sound was, like, chopped up, pitched. It could never just be like, "Here's a keyboard sound or a bass." It's not like just plugging a guitar in, and like getting, like, a cool reverb tone. It was like, "No, we have to create the soundscape." But they are

perfectionists that way, and it's crazy. It's like, how do you make sounds you've never heard before? It takes forever [laughter].

(Synth)

(Synth ends)

Jake: So in the chorus, we did some moments where like the whole song glitches, basically.

John: Well, it was a Pro Tools mistake, and it was actually the whole track looping and then, we just put it in.

(Track loops)

John: That just happened to happen. And we're like, "Whoa. What was that?"

Jake: Our producer was like, "Oh sorry, it was a fuck up." That was, like, exciting to us. So then that became part of this song.

(Synth)

John: So this record has been scrapped and remade.

Jake: Scrapped and remade like three times.

John: All our early records, we wanted them to sound as huge and as pro as possible.

Jake: We did our first record ourselves. We'd never even worked with an engineer before. We felt like we got, kind of, burnt a little bit on the experience. So this one, we wanted the production to be very big and clear and modern, and it's like, this is part of why the record took so long for us to finish, is, one thing we all knew is we were just like, "We are not finishing this record until it sounds good."

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Stonefist," by HEALTH, in its entirety.

("Stonefist" by HEALTH)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net for links to buy the new HEALTH record, and to watch the video for this song. You can find all the past and future episodes of Song Exploder at songexploder.net or on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you download podcasts. Next time on Song Exploder, Best Coast.

("Feeling Ok" by BEST COAST)

Hrishikesh: Find the show on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @SongExploder. 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.

("Feeling Ok" by BEST COAST)

(Music fades)