

**Song Exploder**  
**Jeremy Zuckerman - The Legend of Korra**  
**Episode 30**

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.

Hrishikesh: In this episode, composer Jeremy Zuckerman will break down his score for the final scene of the final episode of the groundbreaking animated series, *The Legend of Korra*. Spoilers are ahead, but honestly, as someone who's seen every episode, I don't think these spoilers will detract from how much you'll love the franchise if you've never seen it, and you decide to start after this. So,

*("The Legend of Korra" by JEREMY ZUCKERMAN)*

Hrishikesh: in 2005, Nickelodeon premiered an animated series called *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, about a young boy and his friends who have to keep peace and balance in the world. It combined fantasy and martial arts. It ran for four seasons, won an Emmy and a Peabody, and in 2012, spawned a sequel called *The Legend of Korra*. This time, the story was about a girl, Korra, who's a teenager, and just as the characters were older and the world they inhabited was older, the themes of the show matured as well. In December 2014, after four seasons of its own, the series aired its finale. The finale made headlines because in the very last scene, Korra and her female companion, Asami, come together as a couple romantically. Composer Jeremy Zuckerman used a mix of Chinese and western instruments for the series. Coming up, he deconstructs the music he wrote, reflects on the significance of that scene, and also what it felt like to close the curtain on a franchise he'd been working on over the course of twelve years of his life. Now here's Jeremy Zuckerman on the final piece of music for *The Legend of Korra*.

*("The Legend of Korra" by JEREMY ZUCKERMAN)*

*(Music fades)*

Jeremy: *The Legend of Korra* is about a teenage girl. She's, I think, she's 17 when this show starts. And Korra is this hotheaded girl and, you know, she's kind of cocky, you know, she sort of acts before she thinks a lot. And over the course of

this show, she really develops as a person. And really the show, to me, the show is really about finding yourself. This is Jeremy Zuckerman. I did the music for *The Legend of Korra*. Today, we're going to be talking about the final cue from the finale. I knew what I wanted to do with it because I'd been wanting to develop the end credits for the whole series.

*("The Legend of Korra End Credits" by JEREMY ZUCKERMAN)*

Jeremy: That's like my favorite cue, I think, of the whole series. Such a simple little thing. When *Korra* started, I was going, like I was emotionally going through some stuff. Both my parents had died. My dad had died suddenly, like in the middle of *Avatar*, my mom died suddenly right before *Korra* started. And I was just like, "Fuck this man. I'm just laying my emotions out a little bit." And it made sense for me because *Korra* is sort of this teenager, and teenagers go through some stuff, and they feel things super deeply. And I remembered, like, the end of the end credits of the *Incredible Hulk*, the live action series.

*("The Lonely Man Theme" by JOE HARNELL)*

Jeremy: I love that. The piano, and it would come in as he's walking away. And it was so sad, you know, and he's like going away to be alone again. I was like, I don't know. I want to somehow tap into that a little bit for this.

*("The Lonely Man Theme" by JOE HARNELL)*

*(Music fades)*

Jeremy: All along, I'd been looking for an opportunity to extend that end credits, and I never could find one until that last scene. So then when I watched that last act, then I knew it would definitely work, I was so happy. And I think if I never extended that, it would always feel like unfinished business.

*(Percussion)*

Jeremy: So I would guess by notes, it's just sort of like pages of detailed stuff, in the sense of like, "Hit this moment." "Support this." It's more like where there needs to be music and sometimes how it should function. Okay, the final episode, spotting notes: "Transition to score for this last sequence: they will hold hands and turn to each other at the end. So we'd like to have a more romantic feel for this last sequence to support the intention that these lovely ladies are going to

get together.” I was totally surprised. I couldn't sleep. I was so happy. It was like super amazing. I don't know. I just didn't think they'd go for it. I couldn't sleep. And I didn't, I like wanted to tell my wife, but I didn't want to, like, ruin it for her. So I was like, “Something really amazing happens at the end of *Korra*, man. It's like *really* important.”

*(Piano)*

Jeremy: This was one of the only times that I did a piano demo before fleshing it out, just to get the pacing and the feeling of it and everything.

*(Piano)*

Jeremy: We start with this pitched percussion.

*(Pitched percussion)*

Jeremy: And then, we have these strings in the background

*(Strings)*

Jeremy: that are just doing these really simple, long notes. I wanted to keep it pretty minimal in the beginning, so we had room to grow. Also, it's a very, sort of peaceful moment. You know, they're looking out on the water, and you realize they've really come a long way together, and just want to reflect that a bit. I'm using a technique called flageolet, they're actually referred to as artificial harmonics. So that's, you get these really high ghostly sort of sounding notes, and they're very, they have like noise, they're noisy, you know? You get this nice sort of white noise or could be a really beautiful sound.

*(Strings)*

Jeremy: We're about to go into the end credits melody. It starts with a zhonghu.

*(Zhonghu)*

Jeremy: And then, it goes out of the range of the zhonghu, so then the erhu takes over.

*(Erhu)*

Jeremy: So erhu's a two-string Chinese instrument. There are no frets or anything. It's extremely vocal, there's a lot of sliding into notes, and sliding around, and it's extremely lyrical. And so, the zhonghu is just like an erhu, but it's a fifth lower, it has a lower range. Hong Wang, he's the Chinese instrumentalist on this show. He played all the Chinese instruments. Hong contacted me via LinkedIn of all things. He just said, "Hey, I'm a Chinese instrumentalist. I can play pretty much any Chinese instrument. I like your music. You know, it'd be great to work together sometime."

*(Kalimba)*

Jeremy: That arpeggio part is a kalimba. And for the end credits, it's only kalimba, but for this, I sweetened it with some Pegasus.

*(Pegasus)*

Jeremy: Pegasus is a pitched percussion metal instrument with mallets. And then, there's the glockenspiel.

*(Glockenspiel)*

Jeremy: It's really simple, you know? But together

*(Kalimba, Pegasus, and Glockenspiel)*

Jeremy: And the strings now are playing the melody instead of the zhonghu.

*(Strings)*

Jeremy: I'm just using a trio, violin, viola, and cello. And I would fit them all in the room right here in this small space. So here Asami shows up, and there's this thing called these "shippers," which is this thing that I had never known about until like way into this show. And it's these like tweens, and young adults, and probably adults of all ages, you know, who like vie for these different relationships, these different characters getting together. And there apparently were people who wanted Korra and Asami to get together. And so, when Asami shows up, it's this moment for all these fans, and it's clearly a romantic moment.

*(Strings)*

Jeremy: The Chinese instruments left for a little bit to give us some room. And now it comes back again with the end credits melody, and it's sort of wrapping up here. The last build.

*(Zhonghu and kalimba join)*

Jeremy: Korra and Asami are talking about how maybe they should go away together on a kid's show showing a lesbian relationship. And I kind of wanted the music to reflect that this is a historic moment.

*(Strings)*

*(Strings end)*

Jeremy: One of the first things that I wrote in the first series, the *Avatar* series, became like a really important, simple little theme.

*(Vocals)*

Jeremy: Kind of wanted to come back to that for me, selfishly [laughter]. You know, people who had been through this show and are thinking, "Oh my God, like this whole thing that I've been through, this experience, you know, I was a kid when I first started watching it. Now I'm like a teenager or a young adult, or whatever." The series is coming to an end, and we've all been through it together. You know, fans, all the production, the crew, this huge chunk of life, like it's just zipped by. And then so I end on this little melody that is from the first series. All this time has passed. And like I wanted them to sort of feel that time.

*(Final melody)*

*(Music ends)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's composer Jeremy Zuckerman's final cue from the finale of *The Legend of Korra*, in its entirety.

*("The Legend of Korra" by JEREMY ZUCKERMAN)*

Hrishikesh: Visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) to hear more of Jeremy Zuckerman's music from *The Legend of Korra*. You can also watch that last scene from the finale.

*(“Love Is to Die” by WARPAIN)*

Hrishikesh: Coming up on the show, Warpaint breaks down their song “Love Is to Die.” You can find all the past and future episodes of Song Exploder at [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) or on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you download podcasts. Find this 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](http://radiotopia.fm). My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

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