

Song Exploder
Jewel - You Were Meant For Me
Episode 198

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.

("You Were Meant For Me" by JEWEL)

Hrishikesh: This episode contains explicit language. When I was in high school, my girlfriend made a mixtape for me. The first song on it was "You Were Meant for Me," from the debut album of a singer named Jewel. I probably listened to that mixtape a hundred times over the next few months, so I knew the song really well. A little while later, I started hearing it on the radio, but it sounded different. And then later, I heard yet another version, and that was different, too. For years, I had no idea why this song kept changing. But then I got the chance to do this episode, and ask Jewel directly. Jewel is a singer-songwriter from Homer, Alaska, who's received four Grammy nominations and sold over 30 million albums. The 25th anniversary of that debut album of hers, *Pieces of You*, came out last month in November 2020. It turns out it wasn't a runaway success, not at first. So in this episode, Jewel traces the history of making "You Were Meant For Me," starting with the demo, and moving through all the different versions that were made along the way to becoming a massive hit song.

("You Were Meant For Me" by JEWEL)

Jewel: I'm Jewel.

(Music fades out)

Jewel: The time of my life just before I wrote "You Were Meant For Me" was spent in San Diego. I think I was 18 and I had just been discovered. I was a homeless kid living in a car, so I started gigging in a local coffee shop to try and just work my way out of it, if I could develop a following and get some door money. It was a tiny little coffee shop in a strip mall, nothing very vibey. But all the local musicians would come and play and sit in and do open mics and it just created a lot of draw. A local radio station put a bootleg of mine on air, and that caused record labels to start coming down, which was surprising to me. And I think I wrote this song after I signed my record deal with my friend Steve Poltz. I recall Steve, asking me if I wanted to go to Mexico to write songs. He was like, "It's

two hours door to door,” but 13 hours later, we ended up lost on some washboard dirt road in the middle of nowhere in Baja. And we found an abandoned town, and we broke into a little lodging motel. And we woke up the next morning in paradise. So we're sitting on the beach, it was on the Bahia de Gonzaga, this beautiful bay on the Sea of Cortez, pink sand and blue water and so we stayed there and we wrote three songs. And one was “You Were Meant For Me.”

(Acoustic guitar demo)

Jewel: Steve was a better guitar player than I so he usually would play the guitar, and I would start making up lyrics. I liked writing very visually, I grew up reading a lot, I didn't listen to a lot of music but I read a lot. My favorite writers were very visual writers, we can almost smell and taste the writing. And we had just eaten breakfast so that's why breakfast makes a [laughter] center role in the song.

(First verse demo, consisting of vocals and acoustic guitar: “I hear the clock, it's 6 a.m / I feel so far from where I've been / I got my eggs, and my pancakes too / I got my maple syrup, everything but you”)

Jewel: It was just a little vignette, a little movie, you know, of a person that was tragically in love but it wasn't returned. And I wrote the lyrics so that people could see the same movie that was in my head of this girl that was wracking her brain, thinking of all the things she thought made her unlovable like leaving towels on the floor, and all the little things that really aren't what kill a relationship but what you fixate on when you're done.

(First verse demo into chorus demo, consisting of vocals and acoustic guitar: “Wipe the spots up off the mirror / Don't leave my keys in the door / I never put wet towels on the floor anymore 'cause / Dreams last so long / Even after you're gone / I know that you love me / And soon you will see / You were meant for me / And I was meant for you”)

Jewel: After we wrote the song, we did that demo. Steve's singing harmony. I remember being a little embarrassed by the song live because most of my other work tended to be very wordy and I thought, smarter and this was just such a plaintive, simple love song. You know, it made me feel like a teenybopper somehow.

(Demo fades out)

Jewel: When I got discovered, they brought in a lot of really fancy producers and I met with a lot of them. And they were all super nice but they all made me uncomfortable. They all kind of wanted to change and lend their incredible expertise and experience to my lack of experience. And it didn't feel right. And so I looked at an album I thought was really honest and simple. And I loved the Neil Young *Harvest* and *Harvest Moon* records.

("Harvest Moon" by NEIL YOUNG)

Jewel: I saw that Ben Keith had co-produced them. And so I asked my label to reach out to him. And because of Ben's relationship with Neil, we made it up at Neil's studio on his ranch.

(Acoustic guitar ends)

Jewel: Getting to Neil Young's ranch was trippy. I mean, I couldn't believe that I was at Neil Young's studio. It was this log cabin with killer vintage gear, killer vintage amps. And The Stray Gators, I mean The Stray Gators were incredible. It was Neil's band on *Harvest* and *Harvest Moon*. I was like, [laughter], it was an insane, experienced band. And they would look at me and go, "What would you like?" And I was like, "I don't know." Like I felt, I was definitely the least experienced, least qualified person in the room. But they definitely looked to me to kind of lead the ship.

(Acoustic guitar)

Jewel: We cut everything, you know, live in the studio. I brought Steve up with me, and I remember Steve was playing guitar. Tim Drummond played bass with Elvis and James Brown.

(Bass joins)

Jewel: I mean to this day one of the best players I've ever been around.

(Acoustic guitar along with bass)

Jewel: And Kenny Buttrey on drums, you know, played on a lot of Bob Dylan records.

(Drums join)

Jewel: And Spooner Oldham on keyboards.

(MIDI flute)

Jewel: He played the famous, you know, riffs in all the Muscle Shoals records - that's him.

(MIDI flute orchestra solo)

Jewel: And I was just singing.

(Vocals join along with acoustic guitar, bass, keys, and drums: "I know that you love me / And soon you will see / You were meant for me / And I was meant for you")

Jewel: I remember being very, very nervous and my throat really tightened up and I have this very frog-ish tone in my voice. I was swallowing my chest voice 'cause singing in headphones was so hard for me. That's why my vocals sound so weird. Having a band on me definitely felt a little uncomfortable. But this band definitely followed you.

(Vocals along with full instrumental backing: "And I was meant for you")

Jewel: They were highly supportive, they only cared about the song.

(Vocals along with full instrumental backing: "You were meant for me / And I was meant for you")

(Music ends)

Jewel: I turned the album in. We know, it was no surprise, I made a folk album at the height of grunge. Grunge was cool and angsty and cynical, and I was not those things and a girl to boot. And so, radio hated me, they hated me, vehemently hated me, the press hated me. I mean, imagine Nirvana and Soundgarden and you hear a song like "You Were Meant For Me" and you go, "No" [laughter]. It was too long, they wanted it faster, they wanted no intro. And so the song got recut many, many, many times on its way to becoming a hit.

(Juan Patino's version intro)

Jewel: In September of '95, I recut it with Juan Patino who headed Lisa Loeb's "Stay."
And we did a super poppy version, we sped it up and I cut down the chorus.

(Juan Patino's version of the verse into the chorus: "I never put wet towels on the floor anymore 'cause / I know you love me / And soon you will see / You were meant for me / And I was meant for you")

Jewel: And I hated it, but it was expensive. And I was too embarrassed to tell the label how much I hated it, but, you know, my label never once did anything except support my decisions. I know a lot of people say they hate their labels but my label had a lot of heart and they really cared and fought for me. And I remember going into the label and I ran into Danny, who was one of the radio promoters, and he was like, "Jewel, I heard the new version with Juan Patino and we don't want you to change for radio. We want radio to change for you."

(Juan Patino's version ends)

Jewel: The record was considered a complete failure after selling about 2000 copies in two years. And so I made a second record but this album never got released ultimately. And while I was in the studio making the second album that never was, we decided to recut the bassline and the vocals on "You Were Meant For Me," and take another go at it. I went in the studio with a guy named Peter Collins. And Flea was a friend, he had been a friend for a long time, since I was homeless actually. I met him when I was homeless of all things.

Hrishikesh: That's Flea, the bassist from Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Jewel: We redid the vocal and the bass. Flea played bass, I re-sang the vocal.

(Third version bridge: "I go about my business, I'm doing fine / Besides, what would I say if I had you on the line? / Same old story, not much to say / Hearts are broken, every day")

Jewel: And then things started taking off. I remember, you know, I was doing an interview somewhere in a shitty hotel at a motel six exhausted and the radio guy was like, "What's it like to be famous?" And I remember looking around at these stained, you know, duvet covers this nasty hotel room going, "Am I famous? Did it happen?" But things started to shift and when they shifted, it was tectonic. I started selling at one point a million albums every single month. And I did it for over a year. And it just kept exploding. Shockingly, the song that nobody ever

thought would make it went on to break a record. It became the longest running single of all time.

(Third version instrumental)

Jewel: Neil Young asked me to open for him and so I went on the road with him. You know, him and Bob Dylan, just really believed in me. They really, really believed in me when nobody did. And they really just grilled in my head that being a singer-songwriter is different and that you may never get radio, and it doesn't matter. You're not allowed to do anything that is inauthentic as a singer-songwriter. Part of me always knew it was an incredible long shot. But I also sang every night and I saw what people, how people felt when I sang. And it might be three people, but I could tell what I did worked. And so, I didn't wanna give up on that music. And I didn't wanna give up on being sincere and I didn't wanna give up on being a folky. And I never thought I was gonna be a massive success but the more I got disrespected, just made me incredibly determined, and hard work did not scare me. Tenacity and endurance were kind of the name of the game. You know songwriting is a lot like being a miner, it's solitary work, you're alone in a dark cave [laughter]. And you just chip away everyday, and most days it's dirt, and sometimes it's gold. But with songwriting, you don't always know.

(Third version instrumental ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "You Were Meant For Me," the final version that Jewel did, in its entirety.

("You Were Meant For Me" by JEWEL)

Hrishikesh: To learn more, visit songexploder.net/jewel. You'll find links to buy or stream "You Were Meant For Me," as well as the entire 25th anniversary edition of *Pieces of You*, so you can hear all the different versions of the song. Song Exploder is made by me, Hrishikesh Hirway, with producer Christian Koons, production assistant Olivia Wood, and illustrator Carlos Lerma. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a collective of creative, independent podcasts. You can learn more about all of our shows at radiotopia.fm. If you'd like to support the podcast, you can get a Song Exploder t-shirt at songexploder.net/shirt. You can also follow the show on Twitter and Instagram @SongExploder. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

