

**Song Exploder**  
**Natalie Prass - Short Court Style**  
**Episode 130**

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.

*("Short Court Style" by NATALIE PRASS)*

Hrishikesh: Natalie Prass released her debut album in 2015. That year, *Time Magazine* called her an Artist to Watch, *Pitchfork* gave the album Best New Music, and *Stereogum* named it one of the Top Albums of the Year. In this episode, Natalie Prass takes apart a new song from 2018, called "Short Court Style." It's her first track to come out since that debut album.

*("Short Court Style" by NATALIE PRASS)*

Natalie: My name is Natalie Prass.

*(Music fades)*

Natalie: My first record came out in 2015, and I toured on it all of 2015. And then it was time for me to start writing for the next record. One of my favorite collaborators is this guy Kyle Ryan. We blocked out a week to write together, and during that time, I got an email from my friend Teddy Blanks, asking if I would be interested in writing music for his short film, *Oh Jerome, No*.

Teddy: My name is Teddy Blanks. *Oh Jerome No* is a short film about a young man who says "I love you," on the first date. And he has to try to figure out how to stop doing that. Since the short is so much about this over-sensitive man and his nervous adventures in the dating world, we thought it would be really interesting to have the music all be very feminine and done by a woman.

Natalie: Writing for film has always been a dream of mine, and I've known Teddy Blanks since I was in high school. Our bands used to play together.

Teddy: I was in college and she was in high school. And so, we approached Natalie because my co-director Alex Karpovsky and I both loved her album.

Natalie: At that time, I was particularly obsessed with the Bee Gees, and especially this one song, "Children of the World."

*("Children of the World" by BEE GEES)*

Natalie: The keyboard bass, in particular, was like what really hypes me up whenever I hear that song.

*("Children of the World" by BEE GEES)*

Natalie: I showed that song to Kyle, I was like, "What if we do something kind of like this vibe?"

*(Music fades)*

Natalie: And Kyle started playing on the piano, just these two chords.

*(Piano)*

Natalie: And I was like, "That's it!"

*(Piano)*

Natalie: And then, I was like, "How about this kind of bass sound?"

*(Bass)*

Natalie: So I just started with that line.

*(Bass and Natalie)*

Natalie: [sings bass line] So, that's me playing that Juno bass.

*(Piano with bass)*

Natalie: And from then on, the whole process of writing "Short Court Style" was one of those magical moments that you always hope to have when you're a songwriter. It all just started unfolding, like so easily.

*(Beat, percussion, and guitar join)*

Natalie: So I first sent them the track, and Teddy was like, “Do you think you could add some like vocal like an “ooohh” or something just to show that like it's you, Natalie?” I was like, “Got it.” My favorite background vocal word [laughter] to sing is, “Na na na.” I love all those classic things that people don't really use anymore, I think it's fun. And I thought of a little melody.

*(Vocals: “Na, na, na / Na, na, na / Na, na, na, na, na / Na, na, na, na, na, na”)*

*(Piano, guitar, bass, percussion, and beat join)*

Teddy: We were just bowled over. It was exactly what we were looking for, without really knowing what we were looking for.

*(Music ends)*

Natalie: So [laughter] “Short Court Style” is like the hold title for the song, just placement title. Honestly, it's kind of embarrassing how I got the name because it sounds really pretentious but I had like a cortado in my hand [laughter], which is a fancy espresso drink. Equal parts espresso, equal parts steamed milk. And [laughter] it was just funny, I was like, “Short court. Short court style. But spell it with, you know, C-O-U-R, like basketball.” [laughter] I don't know.

*(Vocals, synth, piano, guitar, bass, percussion, and beat: “Na, na, na”)*

Natalie: And actually, I'm in that short film like a character in it. So I posted on my socials, and I got such a reaction to “Short Court Style,” like, “Where can I get that track? Is this something I can download somewhere?” And so, I was like to Kyle, “Like yeah man, we have to finish this song, it's just so much fun. Maybe we should write lyrics to this [laughter], you know? This doesn't have to be just for this short film, it could be like an actual song.”

*(Music ends)*

Natalie: At this point, I was like, “Okay, I'm ready to record my next record.” The track that appeared in the short film was just Kyle and I. But I knew I always wanted to have that song interpreted through a band, because I love those old recordings like Chic.

*(“Le Freak” by CHIC)*

Natalie: That's just drums, bass, guitar, and vocals, and that's it. But that shit will make you dance.

*(Music fades)*

Natalie: So I wanted to take that and just make a really celebratory, groovy band record, where like a band could play it and people would dance. I live in Richmond, Virginia, and I always wanted to record my second record in Richmond. But the label I was with at the time, they saw me as a different kind of artist. I think they wanted me to record in L.A. with like a big pop person or something. They *really* pushed back against me working in Richmond. And when you're working in the creative arts, you know, you have to stand your ground for sure but you also have to be open to other people's suggestions. So I was like, "Alright, let's go out to L.A. and record." That's when we did the second version playing it live.

*(L.A. version)*

Natalie: The band out in L.A. was Beck's peeps, Gus Seyffert on bass, Roger Manning on keys, Joey Waronker on drums: dream team. And I was just singing. But I didn't have lyrics yet.

*(L.A. version)*

*(L.A. version fades)*

Natalie: I had just gotten into this relationship at the time, and we were figuring each other out. When you're new in a relationship, you have to learn about each other, and that can be so difficult sometimes. And, you know, it takes at least a good handful of months. You're in that honeymoon like, "Oh my God, everything's amazing," two months in, and then third, fourth month, and you're like, "Wait a second." And then, you start fighting over what you want for dinner [laughter]. And then just things just start coming out, you start seeing like the little nuanced things. Thinking to yourself, "I don't like how this person talks to the cash register at CVS, I don't know if this is going to work," you know [laughter], which is so silly, but like, you're figuring each other out, and trying to make it work. And then, you realize, "Oh wait, yeah, this person is amazing and I think everything's going to be okay." So that's basically what the song is about. The ups and downs and just working it out kind of love, and just not giving up kind of love. And it's celebratory like, "We did it!" [laughter]

*(L.A. version)*

Natalie: “We're still here!” [laughter] So the chorus, it’s “Round and ‘round we’ve had ups and downs but I can't be without the love that I found.”

*(L.A. version fades)*

*(Vocals: “Round and ‘round / Had ups and downs / No, but I can’t be without / My love that I have found”)*

Natalie: I use breath a lot as a percussive thing. I’m so into that stuff and I feel like that's just as important in a melody, like this would be a good place to have a [breath].

*(Vocals: “Oh, I can’t be without [breath] / My love that I have found [breath]”)*

*(L.A. version)*

Natalie: So the band out in L.A. was the most sick band ever. But I just, I didn’t feel completely comfortable out there. When I meet new people, I kind of, it's hard for me to come out of my shell immediately, and just didn't feel like my best self was being heard.

*(L.A. version fades)*

Natalie: So that's when I put my foot down, I’m like, “You know what, I want to stick to working in Richmond, my home, I want to like go home at night after I'm done tracking, I want to be with my friends and there's nothing anybody can do to like make that any different.”

Hrishikesh: So Natalie left L.A. and went back to Richmond, started over with a new band, and a producer she’d worked with before.

Natalie: My buddy Matt White, we both grew up in Virginia Beach together. Matt and I just work so well together, because I’m very particular about what I want, what I want the instruments to sound like, what kind of feel I want. And what I love about Matt is like he can then take everything that I'm saying, and organize it, and get all the musicians on the same page. And the guys that are playing in the band, they are, yeah I’m biased, but I think they’re some of the best musicians out there. Richmond has a really special music scene. So “Short Court Style,”

that song is all about the bass and guitar riff. And what was so beautiful was they took my original demo riff,

*(Bass)*

Natalie: and developed it into something so cool.

*(Guitar with bass)*

Natalie: And it sounds like it repeats, but it really doesn't. So we got Cameron Ralston, the bass player,

*(Bass)*

Natalie: Alan Parker, the guitar player.

*(Guitar)*

Natalie: I love in the chorus, Alan's riff where he goes

*(Guitar)*

Natalie: The riff is so catchy, I remember when he played and I was like, "Man, that's the catchiest part of the song." Like that's why I love collaborating so much because it's like, I have this idea but I never would have thought to put a guitar melody there, and it's really cool.

*(Guitar)*

Natalie: And then, we got Pinson Chanselle on drums.

*(Drums)*

Natalie: When you have a drum take and you're doing a dance song, adding in some shaker,

*(Percussion)*

Natalie: and a couple snaps and claps

*(Percussion)*

Natalie: really take it to the next level.

*(Percussion)*

Natalie: Pinson rolls into the studio with a big suitcase, and he's got all kinds of fun percussive stuff.

*(Drums with percussion)*

*(Glass bottles)*

Natalie: Those are glass bottles that were set up on the floor of the studio in the live room. It wasn't really like planned out. It was just like, "Hey, how about you do that?" And it was like, "Oh that's perfect [laughter]."

*(Glass bottles fade)*

*(Piano)*

Natalie: That's Devonne Harris aka DJ Harrison, who plays the piano on all the tracks.

*(Piano)*

Natalie: The CP-70, it's like a in-between like a piano and a Rhodes to me a little bit, almost has like a nice little bell quality to it.

*(Piano)*

Natalie: It has that real 70's shiny, sparkly piano sound.

*(Piano)*

Natalie: It's just very crisp.

*(Piano)*

Natalie: Very magical sounding.

*(Piano)*

*(Piano ends)*

Natalie: Matt was like, "I really want there to be some kind of sample in this song like, someone going 'Yeah,' you know. [laughter] 'Hey.'" [laughter] I was like, "Alright. Cool." And Devonne was in the room and Devonne was like, "Oh, I have a bunch of sound effects on my keyboard. I have this cuíca sound." The cuíca's that Brazilian instrument, you play it with like a wet rag, and you rub this stick, and you make the sound.

*(Cuíca)*

Natalie: It's a percussion instrument, it's on a lot of, like, Paul Simon tunes. So it was that sound. It's like a hilarious, like, digital version.

*(Cuíca)*

Natalie: Once he started playing that cuíca sound, we were all just like, "That's it!" Like, "Yes! Keep going!" And he just played that cuíca the whole way through, I'm pretty sure, like he just sat there the whole track.

*(Cuíca)*

*(Drums)*

Natalie: [laughter] It just brings me so much joy, like I will never get tired of that cuíca sound.

*(Cuíca)*

*(Piano, guitar, bass, percussion, and drums)*

Natalie: We probably recorded "Short Court Style," nonstop from 7PM to midnight. That band probably played that track at least, I'm going to say [laughter] like thirty-some times. I feel like you hear this a lot nowadays, especially like, "Oh, we recorded that live in one take, and we're done." And I think that's really cool, but I also, my mind goes to like, "But where could you have gone if you had just done it like five more times or ten more times, like you could have *really* developed it into something special if you just thought about it a little more."



*(Beat ends)*

*(Vocals: "Ahhh")*

Natalie: Matt knows my love for layered, closely stacked, 90's background vocals [laughter]. I just go nuts over that stuff.

*(Vocals: "Oh, when it fits / It should stay like this / Oh, I can't be without / My love that I have found")*

Natalie: I have a lot of fun recording my vocals in that way, and that was Matt's idea. He was like, "We should start the song with the [sings the "Ahhh"]."

*(Vocals: "Ahhh")*

Natalie: The person that I wrote this song about,

*(Piano)*

Natalie: we've been together for like two and a half years at this point, but it was hard work. And it's still hard work, and we still have our ups and downs. But at the end

*(Synth joins)*

Natalie: of the day, you're like, "Ugh, I can't believe I found you and you're the person that I'm going through all this stuff with. Like, this is great!" I played it for him when we were done tracking. You know, I put on our Bose speaker in the kitchen. I didn't have to tell him that it was about him like he, he knew right away. And he was like, "I love it!"

*(Drums join)*

Natalie: And we just started dancing together in the kitchen,

*(Drums with synth end)*

Natalie: and it was really sweet.

*(Piano)*

*(Music ends)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Short Court Style," by Natalie Prass, in its entirety.

*("Short Court Style" by NATALIE PRASS)*

Hrishikesh: To learn more about Natalie Prass, visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net). Song Exploder is produced by me, along with Christian Koons, with help from intern Olivia Wood. Carlos Lerma creates original illustrations for each episode of the podcast, which you can see on the Song Exploder website and Instagram. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a curated network of creative, independent podcasts made possible by listeners like you. Learn more at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). If you like the podcast, you can leave a review or a rating on Apple Podcasts. And you can find the show on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @SongExploder. I'd love to hear your thoughts. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.