

**Song Exploder**  
**Open Mike Eagle - Dark Comedy Morning Show ft. Toy Light**  
**Episode 14**

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.

*("Dark Comedy Morning Show" by OPEN MIKE EAGLE ft. TOY LIGHT)*

Hrishikesh: In this episode, rapper Open Mike Eagle talks about making the song "Dark Comedy Morning Show," along with the track's producer, Walker Ashby, aka Toy Light. Mike talks about how Toy Light's original instrumental inspired him, and how his view of his own vocals on the track has changed since recording.

*("Dark Comedy Morning Show" by OPEN MIKE EAGLE ft. TOY LIGHT)*

*(Music fades)*

Mike: My name is Open Mike Eagle. I write and record and perform rap music.

Walker: I'm Toy Light, I produce for Mike on a couple songs.

Mike: I was in Boston about a year ago, and there is a guy up there who promotes shows by the name of Connor. And he puts on shows up there. So he likes to stay very abreast as to what's going on, especially with, like, the LA beat scene. He's the kind of person where when you're just sitting at his house talking, he's just kind of playing beats and playing music the whole time. And he played this track that really caught my ear. And, like, I made him repeat it. And then, I made him tell me who it was. And then, I went on the SoundCloud, and it was one of Walker's tracks. He goes under the name, Toy Light. And so, when I saw that he lived in LA, that's when I decided to reach out.

Walker: It was really, really wonderful to get that message from him. I'm really familiar with a lot of the rap stuff around LA. And it's pretty small, you know, like,

Mike: Yeah, it's all kind of the same family, you know, like it's all kind of connected.

Walker: Yeah. It was flattering that he liked it so much.

Mike: I think what first caught my ear about the track, I don't know a lot of, like, music theory terms, but I feel like there was a chord progression that was really interesting.

*(Guitar)*

Mike: For me to really, really get ready to write a song, it's like, I have to let the beat get me pregnant almost. You know what I mean?

Walker: [laughter]

Mike: Like I have to like, I have to let the beat, like, live inside of me, to the point where, like, I can recreate the beat in my head when I'm away from it over and over again. It's about, like, finding a frequency and answering whatever questions this beat is asking me. I can spend enough time with a beat in a few days to get that way. Or, in this case, I actually spent quite some time with it, hanging out with it. It was a process. It was a little longer than it usually would take me, but I think that's more to do with just where I was in the album and trying to figure out a different way forward.

*(Guitar)*

*(Vocals: "Dark comedy cold as the ocean / Add a lol cause nobody seems to know when I'm joking / For those who haven't of heard of me / I'm bad at sarcasm so I work in absurdity")*

Mike: I had relegated singing to hooks only in the past. With this album, I definitely played more with singing deliveries of rap lines, and going in and out of singing; going from singing into straight rapping, and back to singing even within the same song. My relationship to singing is kind of developing over time.

*(Vocals: "Cause my genre's all hack / Actions cliché, melodrama falls flat")*

Mike: What I was noticing then, what they were playing right now, was how emotional the delivery kind of sounds, especially without the music. Like, I hear myself sounding really vulnerable about the words as if I was, like, reluctant to say them. So that was kind of striking me right now. My more immediate memories of the song right now are the last 10 or 12 times I performed it. Because it's been in my live-set lately. And so, now, like, you know, if I'm in front of a crowd, I'm definitely delivering it with more emphasis, with more weight now. So it's interesting to hear that naked on the record is that kind of timid. But actually I

find that's the case for a lot of my songs, is over the course of learning how to perform them, which is usually like a year or two later, even after the song was already out, then I have a whole completely different relationship with the lyrics. And so, I often feel like, "Oh, I wish," but it's just kind of no way for me to get that. Unless I wait five years before I put stuff out.

*(Vocals: "On that laugh to keep from crying tip")*

Mike: "That laugh to keep from crying tip,"

*("Steve Biko (Stir It Up)" by A TRIBE CALLED QUEST)*

Mike: I mean, it's a specific reference from A Tribe Called Quest song.

*("Steve Biko (Stir It Up)" by A TRIBE CALLED QUEST)*

Mike: That's a line that just, you know, comes and goes. People never talk about it. But I think that line is kind of important. That line always struck me. And I wanted to borrow that for, like, a thesis statement.

*(Beat)*

Walker: I was an art major at UCLA, and one of my focuses was Sculpture. And there was this giant sculpture junkyard in the back of the lab where it was just a free-for-all materials to mess with. And I would just go back there with my handy recorder, and toss things around, and just sampling just like a couple seconds of that. I probably looked like a freak out there just like [laughter] scraping around.

*(Beat)*

*(Bass)*

Walker: Really just warm, deep, sub bass. I wanted you to almost not even hear it. It's really just to be kind of a floaty foundation, you know? It's just a warm song, you know?

Mike: Super warm. And I think it was the contrast of the super warmth with that anchor in hip hop. The drums are like, they're heavy in a way, even though there are not even a lot there, like it's still got like this heavy rhythm inside of that warmth. Like that's the kind of beat I'm always envisioning hearing. Drums can be like

kind of heavy hip hop production drums, but still have like these musical elements that are, you know, more ethereal.

*(Synth)*

Mike: What entertains me is trying to find a balance between, like, what's dark and heavy, and what's funny, and playing with those lines. It put me in a headspace of wanting to be vulnerable, wanting to be very honest. And I felt like it was challenging me to go someplace that I was, like, afraid to go.

*(Synth)*

*(Music fades)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Dark Comedy Morning Show," in its entirety.

*("Dark Comedy Morning Show" by OPEN MIKE EAGLE ft. TOY LIGHT)*

Hrishikesh: Visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) for a link to buy Open Mike Eagle's album, which is called *Dark Comedy*.

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.