

Song Exploder
RAC - Let Go ft. Kele & MNDR
Episode 19

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.

("Let Go" by RAC ft. KELE & MNDR)

Hrishikesh: André Allen Anjos is better known as RAC, a musician who first found success by remixing other people's songs. His remixes for artists like Lana Del Rey have gotten millions of plays online. In 2013, RAC released *Strangers*, his first album of original material, and in this episode, he breaks down the song "Let Go" from that record. It features guest vocals from Kele, best known as the frontman of the band Bloc Party, and singer MNDR, who talks later on about her experience working on the track. Here's "Let Go" by RAC on Song Exploder.

("Let Go" by RAC ft. KELE & MNDR)

André: My name's André. I make music as RAC.

(Music ends)

André: I think I started writing this song in, like, early 2010. It was actually the first track that I got a singer on, which Kele from Bloc Party was actually the first guy to agree to do anything on this album.

("Helicopter" by BLOC PARTY)

(Music ends)

André: Because I'd done a couple of remixes for Bloc Party before, and this was actually pre-RAC. I was still living in Portugal at the time. I think it was 2005. I was just some, I wasn't even in college yet. I was just like, basically, begging for remixes, you know? And I just hit him. I was like, "Please, please let me, let me remix this. I love it." They were super supportive, and this was, yeah, before RAC, and that's what kicked it off.

("Helicopter" (Allen Santa Monica Mix) by BLOC PARTY)

(Music fades)

André: So it was kind of a, it's kind of fun that the first official remix I ever did, ended up being also, you know, the first guest vocalist to sign off on singing on this record, you know, many years later. Before I reached out, I already had a basic idea of what I wanted to do. Like I think it was just a bassline, really. I think it was like a bassline with the drums.

(Bass with drums)

(Music ends)

André: I use that as a starting point, really. The only direction I really gave anybody on the album was that I wanted to write a pop album, a pop album with substance. And, you know, he came back with those verses.

(Vocals: "You play, you play, you play up to them / But they're not around / Don't be, don't be so rough with me / When you are a gem")

André: His original chorus ended up being the pre-chorus.

(Vocals: "You are golden, you are pure / You are golden")

André: I used it, but I felt like it made more sense as a pre-chorus, and that's kind of the reason why I brought in MNDR. I felt like it just needed a little something extra, and I've always liked it when there's sort of like a male and female vocal in a song. So I just, straight up, cold emailed Amanda, and asked her if she would write a chorus for this.

Amanda: And I was like, "Yeah, would love to." I loved his stuff on SoundCloud, and everything he'd been doing. This is MNDR. Kele's stuff was already on there, so I just, sort of, took a leaf from his lyrics. And his delivery felt like he was pleading with someone to just choose love over drugs.

(Vocals: "Just try, just try, just try to stay sober / It's eating you")

Amanda: And you're just so empathetic, and you want to help them because you love them, but it's sort of, like, really nihilistic. So it's, like, bad for everyone, because it's, like, codependent. It really struck me as like a really great way to, like, approach a relationship in a really honest way.

(Vocals: "Your eyes, your eyes are glowing red / And your tongue has caught on fire")

Amanda: That inspired me to take the imagery of the fire inside of you being like the addiction, the like problem. But instead of it being like a burning imagery, it's taking that, and like just letting go of it. You know, we'll crash, and it might be smoke and ash, but just let go of it. So it's kind of a codependent song [laughter].

(Vocals: "So let go, let go of your fire / Let it go, let go of your fire / Live it up 'til we crash and there's smoke in the air / Let it go, let go of your fire")

André: You know, when you get a chorus like that, it's like, "Okay [laughter], we're good now [laughter]." She just sent it to me. That's how pro she is. She just sent me it, like, finished. I mean, you know, there's a reason why she's out, like writing with Kylie Minogue and stuff like that now. It's like I feel like she kind of turned the song into a single.

(Vocals: "You are golden, you are pure / You are golden")

André: When Kele's vocal comes in underneath, that one's pretty harshly tuned and, like, affected. I actually use this application called Melodyne. It's sort of like Auto-Tune, but it's all done manually, so it's not really automatic in that sense. But you can really mess with a vocal, and kind of turn it into this mechanical thing.

(Melodyne)

André: Really play with the, what's called a formant. There's all this stuff that you can do, and I use that pretty extensively in this song.

(Melodyne)

André: There's this trick with Melodyne, it's basically when you remove all the variations, it creates this, like, kind of robotic sound. And that's what I did a lot with Kele's vocal, not in the verses, but during these sections,

(Melodyne)

André: which I actually got from the video game *Portal*.

(Portal video game voiceover: "We both said a lot of things that you're going to regret, but I think we can put our differences behind us for science, you monster")

André: I think there might even be some, like, tutorials on YouTube on how to do that. And I think that's how I figured it out [laughter].

(Guitar)

André: Guitar is, by far, my main instrument. That's what I've been playing my whole life. And, you know, it's my go-to writing tool. It's kind of what I use for almost everything.

(Guitar)

André: I didn't actually play that live. I recorded each note individually [laughter].

(Guitar)

André: I think, probably just because I'm lazy. I didn't want to have to learn it. It was faster just to do it individually, then practice it, you know, 30 times.

(Strings)

André: I am a big fan of *Lost*, and I absolutely love the string arrangements in that show. Like this atonal, kind of, slow slide up of this cello. I mean, I did it with violins, but it was something that I really wanted to kind of play with.

(Strings)

André: That's my friend, Luke Christian.

(Strings)

André: At the time, I was living in a, in like a duplex, and he moved in next door. It was just complete luck, circumstance that he [laughter] happened to know how to play a violin, and I needed a violin part. So he was there, and we did it [laughter].

(Strings)

(Strings end)

André: It was one of my favorite parts of the song.

(Piano with synth)

André: Since I was 13 years old, I've been writing songs, but, yeah, this was like the first RAC track that got finished. I'd argue that remixing and original music, as far as my writing process goes, it's pretty much the same. You know, remixes are, in some, way derivative, and you're sort of working off of something else that's pre-existing, but I'm writing original music underneath it. With the original material, it's just kind of a different starting point.

(Piano with synth)

André: In hindsight, I think it, kind of, put me on the map a little bit. People took me a little more seriously. With remixes, a lot of people just kind of, you know, don't even care, or don't even notice the amount of work that I put into it, you know? So like it was, I don't see them as different things. Like I find creative satisfaction in both of them.

(Piano with synth)

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Let Go," by RAC, in its entirety.

("Let Go" by RAC ft. KELE & MNDR)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net for links to buy this song, and to learn more about RAC, Kele, Bloc Party, and MNDR.

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