

**Song Exploder**  
**Sea Wolf - Kasper**  
**Episode 5**

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.

*("Sea Wolf" by KASPER)*

Hrishikesh: In this episode, Alex Brown Church of Sea Wolf breaks down "Kasper," a song from the album *Old World Romance*. He talks about his songwriting process, collaborating with his bandmates, and the evolution that comes with learning the difference between making something that's good, and making something that's perfect.

*("Sea Wolf" by KASPER)*

*(Music fades)*

Alex: I'm Alex Brown Church from the band Sea Wolf. Today, we're going to listen to "Kasper," which is from the latest Sea Wolf album, *Old World Romance* that came out in September of 2012. Traditionally, I sort of just sat down with acoustic guitar and come up with ideas until, you know, something clicked with me. And then, I would just stick with it until it became a song. But this time I wanted to be a lot more productive. I just wanted to have a lot more songs to choose from at the end. I would just record as many ideas as I could in a day on my iPhone.

*(iPhone recording)*

Alex: And then, every few weeks I'd go back and listen to those recordings, and then whatever, you know, jumped out at me, that's what I would kind of like set aside to be a song, that I would end up working on. So a lot of this record I use my Martin.

*(Guitar)*

Alex: And I would send it through like a Fender Twin Reverb amp, and just, you know, mic it, and then also have the amp in another room, and mic the amp as well, and then kind of blend the two. I sort of wanted to like pull back on the folk-like

kind of influences for this album. That's part of the reason why I chose to go with the sort of non-traditional acoustic guitar sound on some of the songs.

*(Guitar fades)*

Alex: I wanted to change up what I normally do, which is write with an acoustic guitar. And I just felt like I'd kind of developed a sort of thing that was sort of my default in terms of like rhythms and like the style of songs. So Sea Wolf drummer, Joey Ficken, lent me this Oberheim DX drum machine, which is an old drum machine from the 80s. He was like, "Oh, I have just the thing, it's under my bed." But I'm definitely not a drummer, and like, and when I sit down and program beats, I don't think as a drummer would think, you know, I don't think, "Is this something that's real, that would be playable at all?"

*(Beat)*

Alex: Yeah, this one's kind of not humanly possible, although Joey is like pretty amazing at like getting it very close. The live drums were essentially just to kind of double the drum machine.

*(Beat)*

*(Beat ends)*

Alex: It took me a little while to get the vocal melody for the verse down. And the vocal melody that I came up with, for some reason, I just wasn't that impressed with it. I just didn't think it was that cool. Eventually I just thought like, "OK, forget it. I'm just going to write words. I'm going to record it. And then, I'm just going to forget about it and move on." I kind of got frustrated with it, and I felt like I didn't want to, I didn't want to like beat it into the ground. So I felt like, "Just capture what I have now." So I did, and like two weeks later, I came back and listened to the song.

*(Vocals: "I think the sky is going to clear / Because the hills turn green when summer nears / But a lightning storm, a lightning storm / Can even happen when the air was warm / And I can hear that nothing calling out to me / I can feel that nothing reaching out to me")*

Alex: I don't know, it came out sounding almost [laughter] like somebody else had written the song. And the significant thing is that this was the second song that I wrote for this record. And it was a real lesson to me. So I kind of took that with

me, just sort of letting things be, just capturing first instincts. And being a little less critical, and a little less of a perfectionist about getting things to be, you know, just so, that's what I kind of took away from the experience of doing this song. And I feel like it's definitely been a good thing for me in that I sort of know that I don't have to get things perfect for them to be good. I feel like it's had a big effect on my creativity. I feel like more inspired than I've felt in a long time.

*(Guitar)*

Alex: That's actually Zac Rae playing that part. He did some additional production on the record, and he's kind of a Swiss Army knife player. He can play pretty much everything. He threw down a lot of keyboards on this record, and on this song, he actually came up with this little, arpeggiated guitar part on the chorus.

*(Guitar ends)*

Alex: Ted Liscinski played bass. He's sort of the longtime Sea Wolf bass player. Ted just came up with this part like kind of immediately. And I just was like, "Oh yeah, done, perfect. Okay."

*(Bass)*

Alex: For whatever reason, I've always struggled with getting a good bass sound. I really like warm sort of Beatles-y bass sounds. But that's kind of like what I usually try and do. But it ends up never sounding that good in the mix. It just sounds like mush. And I think it's probably because of the nature of my songs and like the bass, you kind of have to tailor the way the bass sounds to the way everything else sounds to get it to like cut through the mix, but still sound like a bass and sound good. Zac Rae brought in like a 1957 P bass, like an actual 1957 P bass, and an old Ampeg 15 inch Speaker Flip-top, at least 40 years old or something. And it was like, "Yeah, this is generally pretty good combination." We just plugged it in, it was like, "Oh, okay. Done [laughter]."

*(Bass)*

Alex: Lisa's piano part was something that she was kind of just noodling around with, when we were first trying to come up with ideas for keyboards for the song. I was like, "Oh, that's it. I'm going to just keep that." And she's like, "That's not even a part." [laughter] I'm like, "Alright, but that's it." It comes in after the first chorus.

*(Piano)*

*(Piano ends)*

Alex: Yeah, so this song is basically just about accepting your adulthood and your responsibilities. Issues that you may have had in the past that you kind of just have to move on from, and that transition being a little bit scary, but also a little bit empowering and exciting. I don't know if seeking out perfection is necessarily a younger man's pursuit as opposed to an older man's pursuit. I just think we get to know ourselves a little better as we get older, and we see like our own strengths and weaknesses. And I think as we sort of evolve as artists, we get closer to sort of knowing what it is that we want to do, you know, or like, I should say, we get closer to knowing what we don't want to do.

*(Vocals with guitar)*

Alex: So, for me, I know that I have a tendency to try and make things perfect, you know, not necessarily to other people, but for my own definition of what it would be if it was perfect. I know that that's an issue of mine, and I know that it's something that has slowed me down in the past, and I feel like I don't want to be slowed down anymore. Yeah.

*(Music ends)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Kasper," by Sea Wolf, in its entirety.

*("Kasper" by Sea Wolf)*

Hrishikesh: To learn more about Sea Wolf, including a link to buy this song, visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net). 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 the 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.