

Song Exploder
Warpaint - Love Is to Die
Episode 31

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.

("Love Is to Die" by WARPAINT)

Hrishikesh: In 2013, Warpaint started working on their sophomore album. They retreated away from their home in Los Angeles to the nearby desert oasis of Joshua Tree, California. There, they wrote the song "Love Is to Die," and it was decided that it would be the single from their upcoming record. Now, with over 6 million plays on Spotify and nearly 3 million more on YouTube, "Love Is to Die" is by some measures, their most popular song. Designating it as the single was a decision that was easy to make early on, but it also carried unforeseen consequences for the band. In this episode, three of the four members of Warpaint break down the sounds in the song, and weigh in on some of the difficulty they faced getting this track from the initial idea to the finished recording. This is Warpaint on Song Exploder.

("Love Is to Die" by WARPAINT)

(Music fades)

Jenny: This song actually was probably my favorite thing that we'd ever done. It started off, in my opinion, in such a magical, amazing place that was written in like five minutes. We rented a house, we rented a dome. We set up in the living room, put our amps, mic's, all of our instruments, and we had a little home studio. Basically just press record from like 12 noon and stopped record at midnight.

Hi, I'm Jenny Lee from Warpaint. I play bass.

(Bass)

Jenny: There's a chorus, just bass chorus pedal. That's my standard tone. How I found chorus was my first amp that I ever got was a PVTN-T150. It was my first amp, it was when we started our band. And we were playing in the garage, and it had a

chorus built into it. So I always had that on, that was my sound. And so, when I stopped playing out of that amp, I missed that sound, so I then went and bought a chorus pedal, and decided that that's what I'd be using forever.

Stella: And I'm Stella Mozgawa from Warpaint. I played drums and drum sampler.

Jenny: You started playing along to my loop.

(Beat)

Stella: That's an 808 sound that's triggered from my sampler that I play live.

(Beat)

Stella: Yeah, I'm playing the rim of the tom, as well as the sample of the rimshot.

(Beat)

Stella: Also, when we play live, I'm triggering a keyboard loop that Emily played when we wrote the song in Joshua Tree, that's like [mimics keyboard loop].

(Keyboard loop)

Stella: It was basically her just flipping through the different sine and square waves and frequencies on a Nord Electro? Nord Lead maybe?

Jenny: Nord Lead 3.

Stella: Nord Lead.

Jenny: Yeah.

Stella: Yeah. And Emily just looping, just pressing that same button on the Nord. And then,

(Keyboard loop fades)

Stella: I remember that was when Theresa was just riffing, and she started singing, "Love is to die."

Jenny: "Love is to die."

Theresa: I remember that.

(Vocals: "Love is to die / Love is to not die / Love is to dance / Love is to dance")

Theresa: I'm Theresa Wayman from Warpaint. We were just playing the song, we were jamming it. And I was just improvising singing and kind of doing gibberish. And then, I got that melody, and the words kind of really just came out right away. After that, I took the recording that we made, and listened to what my gibberish was kind of saying, and flipped out a meaning from all of that. I think sometimes a person can say things in their art that they don't realize, or even necessarily mean to say in a rational way at the start, you know, but it actually is very, a very cohesive idea.

(Vocals: "Love is to die / Love is to not die / Love is to dance / Love is to dance and dance and dance")

Theresa: It's just saying love is the full spectrum from life to death. Love is being alive, and love is also dying, and surrendering, and being nothing. It's sort of stating that love is all-encompassing. It's everything.

(Keyboard)

Theresa: I'm in a pretty challenging and beautiful relationship with my bandmates. And we're constantly having to figure out the best ways to operate with each other, you know? And how to be there for each other, how to love each other, but also how to have our own space and be our own person. I mean, that was probably what was spurring that idea, because we were in Joshua Tree, and we're spending a lot of time together, and it was just us in this house, and us, and our creativity, and our music, and I think it probably has a lot to do with just what I go through and being in our band.

Jenny: I think it was a bit difficult to, I guess, figure out what guitar sounded best over Theresa's vocals. And I think that was just, there's not disagreement, but it was a little, slightly hectic figuring the guitars out [laughter] for lack of a better word.

Stella: Yeah, took many months.

Jenny: Yeah, it took a while.

(Keyboard ends)

Theresa: The vocal was there, the drums and bass were there, but what was added on top of that was kind of hard to find.

Stella: Emily always had this kind of like latin guitar part that's that [mimics guitar]

(Guitar)

Jenny: Yeah.

(Guitar)

Jenny: Emily's guitar changed. She didn't know if she was playing keys or guitar, so she kind of switched back and forth with that for a while to try and find her pocket.

Stella: Yeah.

(Guitar)

Stella: I think with this song, with "Love Is to Die,"

(Guitar ends)

Stella: kind of had the kiss of death in some way, because when we wrote it, everyone went, "That's the single." And that's always a really bad kind of thing to focus on, even if you don't want it to be that way, and that's the last thing that you want to kind of think about, it does tend to dictate certain decisions that you make, or the focus gets pulled into this one song. It turned into a song that was quite different to the way that it started.

Jenny: There was a lot of over-analyzing, overthinking. Being, I think, maybe slightly harsh or too critical, or just hard. Hard on the song, hard on oneself, and I think we weren't agreeing on certain things. People wanted to take it in slightly different direction. It was one of the songs where it was, there was a lot of like tug of war going on. And I think after a while, it was just like that much tug of war, that much resistance, that much fight, that much struggle. "It's not good enough, or it needs to be better. It needs to be better, but slowly, it needs to be

better, needs to be better.” You just, you start making it worse. And there was also an outro to this song that I was pretty married to.

(Outro)

(Outro fades)

Stella: Nigel, who mixed the song, he

Jenny: He just cut it. He just thought, you know, that's not necessary, the song doesn't need to go there. It definitely takes a U-turn or just a sharp left turn comes out of nowhere. But that's kind of our trademark

Stella: [laughter]

Jenny: in a way, our stamp.

(Synth pad)

Jenny: It was just the one thing in the song that I was shocked, and, at least at first, didn't agree with, and was pretty disappointed. It was one of my favorite parts of the song.

Theresa: When a band, and our label, and producers, and people start to go, “Oh, this could be your single,” or “This could be your hit” or something, sometimes when that thought gets in there before the song is done, then it can really mess with the way people make decisions about the song. That it's got to be right, or it's got to be all it can be, and if it can be that, then how do we do that? You know, it's just kind of a mindfuck.

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's “Love Is to Die,” by Warpaint, in its entirety.

(“Love Is to Die” by WARPAIN)

Hrishikesh: You can find all the past and future episodes of Song Exploder at 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. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

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