

**Song Exploder**  
**White Hinterland - Ring the Bell**  
**Episode 32**

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.

*("Ring the Bell" by WHITE HINTERLAND)*

Hrishikesh: Casey Dienel is a producer, singer, and songwriter who goes by the name White Hinterland. In this episode, she'll break down her song "Ring the Bell." To make it, she had to break out of her comfort zone of working alone and reach out to other people. She got a little unexpected help from Beyoncé. Here's the exploded view of the song "Ring the Bell."

*("Ring the Bell" by WHITE HINTERLAND)*

Casey: My name is Casey Dienel, and I am the singer, writer [laughter], I guess, for White Hinterland.

*(Music ends)*

Casey: Day-to-day, it's a solo project. In 2010, I was touring, and the opening melody, the chords that are just like,

*(Keyboard)*

Casey: this popped in my head. And then, I ran to the practice space, and we, like, banged out a little demo. The way that my songs tend to work is that I create like a big mound of clay [laughter]. I work backwards, so rather than starting from nothing, I like to have a *lot* of things to choose from, and then I'll just viciously cut away at it, until I feel like I'm getting at the heart of whatever it is, that I'm trying to experience or feel.

*(Keyboard ends)*

Casey: Once I, kind of, commit words to a melody, it's really hard for me to go back from that. Because it's almost like, the way that I write lyrics is like they have the melody in them. I never shoehorn words into the melody. I find that the words, kind of, carry their own intonation, and then I have to find a way into it. And so,

for a song like “Ring the Bell,” I think the words just “Ring the Bell” like that just carried the melody immediately, and I didn't have to do much beyond that.

*(Vocals: “Come on / Ring the bell / Ring the bell / Ring the bell / For me”)*

Casey: I don't even know where it came from. I think I liked the simplicity of it. Like it's both a demand, but also a request. It's not just one thing. And I also like that it has, like, a positive need to it. Like, “I need you to tell me what you want.” Or “I need you to tell me how you feel.” There's some initiative in it that I, at the time, I was going through a lot of stuff in my life where I was like, “I just want people to say [laughter] what they mean, and what they need from me, and then, I can give you that.” You know, I didn't want it to be too wordy, because there's a lot of other things that I wanted to accomplish, you know, texturally with the other instruments. In the winter of 2012, I was really stuck. I'd been playing around with all these different demos of “Ring the Bell.” I didn't know what to do. And I was driving around in my car listening to Beyoncé, and there's a part on the “End of Time”

*(“End of Time” by BEYONCÉ)*

Casey: where all these horns come in, and it's just like the sky opening up.

*(“End of Time” by BEYONCÉ)*

*(Music fades)*

Casey: And I was like, “That's what these songs need. That's what I want. I want it to sound like, you know, when joy escapes.” And then, I was looking at the credits, and Cole's name was in the Beyoncé credits, and he and I went to New England Conservatory together. And I dropped everything I was doing, and I was like, “Oh my God, like I know him!” and I hadn't spoken to him in probably eight years or something. And so, I just, I called, and I left like a really shy voicemail. I was like, “I really need your help.” And he got back to me, like, immediately.

*(Trumpet)*

*(Trumpet ends)*

Casey: That was Cole playing trumpet, and it actually is reversed. I was messing around with it, and I wanted it to feel like more pastoral [laughter] in some way. And I

thought, "Oh, I'll just reverse it and see what that's like." And then, when I flipped it, I was like, "Oh, it's like this really wonderful, kind of, balletic texture." And I just had chills. And then, I spent July recording for like about a week with the whole brass section.

*(Brass section)*

*(Brass section fades)*

Casey: The musicians on it are all part of The Superpower Horns, who did a lot of the Beyoncé stuff. Basically, you just call them and say, "Can you do this?" And they're like, "Yeah," and in one take. And I've never seen anything quite like it, it's really amazing.

*(Brass section)*

*(Brass section ends)*

Casey: I ended up running all the horns through this tape machine to, kind of, compress and glue them together a little bit more. When we use that, it made it sound a little more aggressive.

*(Brass section)*

Casey: When the horns come in on the choruses, I wanted it to feel like when you blush [laughter] and someone says something nice to you, like that open warmth that you feel. I work a lot like that. I think I was like the worst composition student because all of my, like, directions and my scores were just like, "Imagine that you have like half a leg instead of two legs with the deranged clarity of a psychopath, please play this oboe passage."

*(Brass section ends)*

Casey: I just wanted to have like hook after hook, and there's a lot of hooks in the vocal loops.

*(Vocal loop)*

*(Vocal loop ends)*

Casey: I lived in another place where I wasn't allowed to make noise. It was a quiet building, and my neighbor was a nurse who worked the night shift. So she'd sleep during the day, and that was something I could do quietly, is just like, sing these loops.

*(Vocal loop)*

Casey: But it's really just about improvisation, I mean I think that's the hugest part for me from playing jazz, and a lot of good stuff gets kicked up when you're not trying so hard. The human voice is my favorite instrument, but when it comes to my own voice, I think it's the hardest instrument for me to record. When that vocal loop happened, I was like, "Okay, we've got something. This song can happen now."

*(Vocal loop ends)*

Casey: Let's talk about the drums.

*(Beat)*

Casey: I wanted it to, kind of, move around in stereo space.

*(Beat)*

*(Beat fades)*

Casey: But then, you know, with a lot of electronic beats with me is you kind of will be like, "Okay, I have ADD, I want a new flavor." And I would try to, you know, program it differently or like add a different pattern. And that was when I decided to call Neal Morgan, who's my friend, because I was like, "Well, I'm going to call the best drummer I know [laughter], see what he thinks." He laid it down like two days later in Portland.

*(Drums)*

*(Beat joins)*

*(Music ends)*

Casey: Neil's like an incredibly spontaneous performer, and he doesn't really play anything the same way twice.

*(Drums)*

Casey: So I felt like it was perfect casting, because I kind of gave it to like an agent of chaos.

*(Drums)*

*(Drums end)*

Casey: In any job I've ever had, it's the surprises that are the most exciting. And there is no bigger surprise than having someone else come toy with your music [laughter], and you see what happens.

*(Synth)*

Casey: For me, this song is kind of about being vulnerable. You know, opening yourself up to someone. Because it's really scary to say, "I need help" or, you know, "I need affection." For two years, I was just like, messing around with it pretty much by myself. And it felt pretty fitting to have to open that up to other people to come play with me.

*(Music ends)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Ring the Bell," by White Hinterland, in its entirety.

*("Ring the Bell" by WHITE HINTERLAND)*

Hrishikesh: 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.

*("Pour Cyril" by HOW TO DRESS WELL)*

Hrishikesh: Next time on Song Exploder, How to Dress Well tells a story of how a Belgian film moved him so much that he wrote a song about its main character. 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.

*("Pour Cyril" by HOW TO DRESS WELL)*

*(Music fades)*

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