

**Song Exploder**  
**Youth Lagoon - The Knower**  
**Episode 56**

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.

*("The Knower" by YOUTH LAGOON)*

Hrishikesh: Trevor Powers has put out three records under the name Youth Lagoon. His most recent album features this song "The Knower." For this episode, I spoke to Trevor from his rehearsal space in Boise, Idaho. Coming up, Trevor talks about why he intentionally put himself in an uncomfortable environment when trying to make music, and how this song dealt with some very personal issues about self-image and self-awareness.

*("The Knower" by YOUTH LAGOON)*

Trevor: My name is Trevor Powers. I go by Youth Lagoon when I make music.

*(Music fades)*

Trevor: I remember, you know, like being really overwhelmed about the way I had viewed myself for a really long time. I think when we look in the mirror, we only really see what we want to see. It's easy to focus on your strong points and get consumed with that, and forget about negative areas of your life or things that you need to work on. It's easy to ignore the shitty parts of your life, you know, and I think writing this song was sort of my way of dealing with that.

*(Sampled vocals)*

Trevor: I love the idea of incorporating voice samples, and I think that's where the song really spawned from. I started sampling voices and stacking them, and messing around with the idea of repetition and using 16th notes, and really driving this song with that. So throughout the song, there's the [sings sampled vocals].

*(Sampled vocals)*

Trevor: I knew from the beginning that I wanted to really emphasize human voices, that were pitched way down or pitched way up throughout the entire track, and use that as the glue that really holds the rhythm together.

*(Sampled vocals)*

Trevor: My goal was really to make the song sound completely engulfed in voices.

*(Sampled vocals)*

*(Sampled vocals end)*

Trevor: I want to make a certain sound first. I want to be the first person to make a guitar sound this way, or a keyboard sound this way, or a computer sound this way. You know, it'd be like, "how the hell did they make that noise?" I love that about music. After I'd been working on the programming aspects, it was just me and a piano. And then, from that point on, was when I started figuring out the melodies and the chord structures.

*(Wurlitzer)*

Trevor: We ended up choosing a Wurlitzer because of the tremolo. They gave it a little more depth.

*(Wurlitzer)*

*(Wurlitzer fades)*

Trevor: This song starts very subtle, and so, the first

*(Beat)*

Trevor: rhythmic elements that you hear I wanted something that sounded very large and bombastic.

*(Beat)*

*(Beat ends)*

Trevor: Because the rest of this song is, it's pretty straight, and the percussion keeps things fairly in line. With this guitar section, I wanted a picking rhythm sound that was a bit off. I wanted a sound that was very drunk.

*(Guitar)*

Trevor: We ran it through a couple delay pedals to give this song this sort of tension.

*(Guitar)*

*(Guitar ends)*

Trevor: I went to Bristol to record with a co-producer whose name is Ali chant. And that was the first time I'd been to Bristol. I didn't know anyone there, and it was a very uncomfortable place, and that's what drew me to it.

My main thing whenever I record is, I want to make sure that I feel uncomfortable because if I feel too at ease, then I feel like, you know, ideas just don't come out the way they need to. And so, I like the idea of Bristol because I'd never been there, and it seemed very isolated, and it just seemed like the perfect fit. Once I got to Bristol, Ali and I started talking, and he brought up the idea of adding in real trumpet and real flugelhorn too. He's like, "What if we take these sections that you've written on keyboard, and we send them over to a trumpet player, and we see how that sounds?"

*(Trumpet)*

*(Trumpet ends)*

Trevor: I was raised with parents who, they pretty much only watched old television shows: *Andy Griffith* to *Little House on the Prairie* to *The Honeymooners*, to all those, kind of, shows with songs that were, like, extremely cheesy. And so, you know, I really wanted the horns to sound like some old television theme song that got stuck in a weird reality.

*(Horns)*

*(Vocals: "Oh, everybody wants to think they're not what they ate, that their body's great")*

Trevor: The song starts with, “Everybody wants to think they're not what they ate / That their body's great / Everybody wants to think that they're good at heart / When they're full of hate.”

*(Vocals: “that they’re good at heart when they’re full of hate”)*

Trevor: You know, I think I just really saw it in myself

*(Guitar)*

Trevor: being tired of viewing myself as someone that doesn't have nearly as many flaws as I do have. I think this song is called “The Knower,” because it's sort of a representation of being out of your own body, and being able to look down at yourself, and recognize who you truly are, and not like the lies you've been told or the skewed perspective in the way you view yourself, but who you actually are.

*(Guitar)*

*(Guitar ends)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's “The Knower,” by Youth Lagoon, in its entirety.

*(“The Knower” by YOUTH LAGOON)*

Hrishikesh: For more on Youth Lagoon, visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) where you can find a link to buy this track and watch the music video.

*(“Hasta la Raíz” by NATALIA LAFOURCADE)*

Hrishikesh: Next time on Song Exploder, Natalia Lafourcade, who's been nominated for 5 Latin Grammys, including Song of the Year for this track. You can find Song Exploder on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and subscribe to all the episodes on iTunes or wherever you download podcasts. You can also find the show at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm), home of all the shows on the Radiotopia podcast network from PRX. Special thanks to Christian Koons for production assistance on this episode. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

*(“Hasta la Raíz” by NATALIA LAFOURCADE)*

*(Music fades)*

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