

**Song Exploder**  
**Bat for Lashes - Kids in the Dark**  
**Episode 173**

Thao: 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 Thao Nguyen.

*("Kids in the Dark" by BAT FOR LASHES)*

Thao: Natasha Khan makes music under the name Bat for Lashes. She's released five albums, including *Lost Girls*, which came out in September 2019. In this episode, she breaks down the making of the lead single from that album, called "Kids in the Dark." But just before she started writing it, she wasn't sure if she would make another album at all.

*("Kids in the Dark" by BAT FOR LASHES)*

Natasha: I'm Natasha of Bat for Lashes.

*(Music fades out)*

Natasha: I had been living in LA for six months and I moved from London and basically decided that I was never going to make an album again [laughter]. I'd come off a 10-year major label deal and was feeling a bit cynical and fed up and I just decided to move to sunny California to pursue script writing. I was developing a script called *The Lost Girls*, which was essentially about this renegade biker gang of vampire witches that [laughter] were trolling around LA, you know like, possibly murdering people and at the time, I was doing a lot of late-night driving around LA, listening to electronic music, like Com Truise.

*("Propagation" by COM TRUISE)*

Natasha: I was driving to Death Valley, Joshua Tree, up to the sequoias. You know, just sort of absorbing these pastel sunsets, you know, feet on the dashboard, hands out the window. And I was just imagining this biker gang of witchy girls that come from the desert, and what it might feel like if I saw them following me on bikes or creeping in my yard or if I bumped into them in the Hollywood Forever cemetery or something [laughter]. Also, I was falling in love at the time and falling in love with LA, so it was sort of a heightened romantic time of freedom for me, where I had really no expectations of ever making music again.

*(Music fades out)*

Natasha: So lo and behold, I get a phone call from Bad Robot, who's J.J. Abrams' company, and they were making a new series called *Castle Rock*. We got together and their sort of brief was, "Look, we're making a Stephen King series. Can you write a song that sounds like it's from any era, but just that it would have like an identity of being from a specific era?" Sort of like they could be long-lost hits that for some reason no one ever heard or you know something like that. And Bad Robot weren't aware of the fact that I was writing this script and had been gathering all this inspiration and information. They just wanted me to come and write a song for their TV show, but I guess synchronicity or coincidence, it just worked out that the decade of the '80s just felt so natural and it almost felt like the soundtrack to this film that I've been thinking about so much. And I've learned through my career and sort of over the years of doing this to say yes to things, because sometimes it's almost like the universe orchestrates meetings and opportunities and people. And when I started making the music, I didn't even realize I would ever make an album. But I guess I was ready whether that was conscious or not. They asked me to go in and work with their music producer who covers all the film music and stuff, Charles Scott, who I ended up making this record with, essentially. I'd never met Charles before, and he'd never met me. And, you know, you never know how those things are going to go, but I think we quickly realized that we bonded and gelled over a lot of touchstone artists of that era. That whole kind of new wave, lost romantic '80s era of music. And so he was like, "Oh, well, let's get the Prophet out." And I started to play this chord sequence, on quite a soft sound.

*(Prophet synth)*

Natasha: To me, music is really visual. And the image I was holding in my mind when I started playing those chords was driving at night in LA in my car and holding my boyfriend's hand, like in the middle of the seats. And the red lights of the highway kind of shining on our hands, and it was just how do I put across this fuzzy, romantic feeling of being in the womb of a car? Because in LA, as opposed to London or New York, where I've lived before, when you were out in the elements and walking everywhere, I was really struck by how the inside of your car becomes like your second home [laughter] and you're just in there all the time, kind of looking out this windscreen. It's almost like a cinema screen and watching the movie of a ballet go by and all these locations that were so cinematic and nostalgic to me.

*(Prophet synth ends)*

Natasha: And Charles, you know, he's like the mad inventor in the studio. He's like the *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* sort of Willy Wonka guy that will bring out sounds and say like, "Pick from this box of chocolates," and I'm like, "Oh, I like this one." And so it was nice because he knows the exact location, the machine, the era, the year, to go to, when I'm saying, "You know that bit in *The Goonies* where they drive on their bikes down the hill and Cyndi Lauper comes in with that like weird koto sound?" "Oh, yeah, here we go." Like, you know, that sort of thing, so it was like being a kid in a sweet shop. That gets my creative fire going because it's very immediate and it's fun. You know, you're not poring over ideas and stressing about anything. I was speaking a bit about driving around LA and how this sort of like deep, electronic, fuzzy, sexy sound was something that had been on my mind. And Charles helped me get this kind of deep, sort of, squelchy bass sound.

*(Bass)*

Natasha: The filter kind of opens at the end of each note so you get that like,

*(Natasha mimics a lion roaring along with bass)*

Natasha: like a lion roaring kind of sound. Isolated, they sound pretty harsh. But combined with those chords,

*(Bass along with Prophet synth)*

Natasha: there's an alchemical reaction that happens when they meet each other, it gives you that fuzzy television snow kind of feeling where things are, waves are kind of working against each other.

*(Bass along with Prophet synth end)*

Natasha: And then the next thing we brought in was the beat.

*(Beat)*

Natasha: I love my drum sounds to have something elemental. I want it to sound sort of crumbly, sandy, cliff distortion and like a rainstorm or, you know, like we're sort

of falling into darkness. And there's actually a thunder sample that we use as part of the beat.

*(Thunder sample)*

Natasha: This song is so womb-like in its sound to me, and it's so vibrational and it's almost this place, sonically, that I wanted to go to that was this protective layer, this cave or, you know, this sonic egg or something I wanted to be inside. And someone said once like, "Storm makes sense of shelter," you know like, you only really know you're sheltered when you can hear the storm outside.

*(Drums along with lightning sample)*

Natasha: So, once I had the chords, the bass, and the beat, I think Charles went to get like a Coca-Cola and a sandwich or something and I sat in the room with my notebook and I composed the lyrics within the session from scratch, starting off with, "Lying next to you, we could be on the moon."

*(First verse vocals: "Lying next to you / We could be on the moon / Tell me you're not leaving")*

Natasha: It's just like this pining, innocent, sort of childlike love song to me. It was sort of the idea that when you really closely bond to somebody, you start thinking less about your life just from a singular perspective and you start to think about living as a duo or a team or a couple. You want to live for both of you.

*(Second verse vocals: "Lying next to you / And I wanna live for two / I tell you I'm never leaving")*

Natasha: That vocal that you hear is what came out on that day and I didn't change it. I just added layers behind it.

*(Chorus vocals: "Riding through the pines / See you in the red light / Everything is on fire")*

Natasha: That to me was sort of the LA location where Malibu fires and the bushfires that we had last year, happened after I wrote this song, but I do remember coming out of my house and seeing all the ash floating in the air and finding it so sinister and there was sort of almost this silence, it created like a dead air sort of feeling. And in this song, there was sort of this foreboding idea of danger, like the danger of being hurt, or the danger of darkness coming.

*(Second verse vocals: “Cause you’re always on my mind / It’s been such a hard time / But I know it’s the real thing”)*

Natasha: That's an exciting time when the vocal's down, because that's like the architectural structure is built and then I can go about decorating.

*(Guitar)*

Natasha: Charles is a great guitar player and so he was kind of in charge of a lot of the guitar stuff.

*(Guitar ends)*

Natasha: And we both discussed that we wanted that sort of early 80s new wave guitar sound. You know, that thing people did a lot, which was really holding the strings down and using that percussive kind of muted electric guitar sound, which to me brings up a lot of romance.

*(Muted electric guitar)*

Natasha: When I was a kid growing up in England, it sounded like American highways and dusty roadside bars and gals and guys like dancing around playing music out the jukebox or something, you know like. I guess maybe I was just a teenager and really hormonal and had major crushes on people and would listen to those sorts of songs at night on my own and be like, “My heart hurts.”

*(Muted guitar fades)*

Natasha: So in the very beginning, there's sort of this siren, it sounds like a siren call.

*(Synth)*

Natasha: I played that on a synth, it was like a distorted, synthetic cello sound. To me, it sounds like driving down Mulholland Drive and the car's like winding around roads, trails of lights are going past you. It's sort of this careening almost off the edge of a road sound.

*(Synth)*

Natasha: The next day, I think we created the arpeggio that you hear in the introduction.

*(Arpeggio)*

Natasha: To me, the arpeggiator, even though it came later, is sort of like the trademark of the song. It's the sound that I love to hear the most. Charles had been fiddling around with some different arpeggios and suddenly on top of these quite robust architectural sounds, there started to grow this idea of, "Okay, this is layers of washes."

*(Second arpeggio joins)*

Natasha: Sometimes I liken it to a painting. You'll paint a layer and then you'll paint over the top of it. But because that layer's been there, the next layer, it sits ever so slightly differently.

*(Drums and bass join)*

*(Music fades)*

Natasha: "Kids in the Dark" came about in one day. You know when you see Bambi, deers being born, they just stand up, right immediately? Some songs, they just sort of, they're an egg for a long time and then you see a crack and you're like, "Oh, thank God." But this one was just like a fully-fledged, beautiful, vulnerable, you know, knock-kneed thing that just suddenly appeared in the studio. But it was for the Bad Robot show and I remember leaving that day and thinking, "Oh my God, [laughter] I hope they use it." But at the same time, there was this conflicted feeling of, "Oh, do I want to give my child away so quickly?" And they never ended up using the song for the television show and I got to keep it and use it.

*(Synth)*

Natasha: It just gave me the bug of making an album again. It sort of opened up that portal for me where I realized, "Oh, I'm in trouble. I think another one's coming."

*(Chorus vocals along with synths: "Let's take it down / To the heart / Let's take it down / Where the loving starts / Where we're just kids in the dark")*

Natasha: The idea of the chorus for me was, I was realizing that like all relationships, this relationship was complex and was going to probably be difficult. And the kids in

the dark thing, the motif for me was, I remember someone saying you know, “When you watch anybody sleeping, you see that these people were children once and they were innocent once and in dreams, we're all just kind of these soft, breathing beings, you know like, in our unconsciousness.” So the chorus for me was very much about stripping away all of the angst or the worries or whatever your heart is going through at the time, and just look at the child within each of you, you could just be little children, lying in the dark, playing. Why can't it be that simple?

Thao: And now, here's “Kids in the Dark,” by Bat for Lashes, in its entirety.

*(“Kids in the Dark” by BAT FOR LASHES)*

Thao: Visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) for more information about Bat for Lashes. You'll also find a link to buy or stream this song. Song Exploder is made by executive producer Hrishikesh Hirway, producer Christian Koons, and me, I'm guest hosting for 2019, production assistance from Olivia Wood, and illustrations by Carlos Lerma. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a curated collective of independent, creative podcasts. You can learn about all of our shows at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). You can also follow Song Exploder on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @SongExploder. And you can follow me @thaogetstaydown. I'm Thao Nguyen, thanks so much for listening.