

**Song Exploder**  
**Clipping - Work Work**  
**Episode 65**

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.

*("Work Work" by CLIPPING)*

Hrishikesh: Clipping is a trio made up of producers William Hutson and Jonathan Snipes, and rapper Daveed Diggs. You might be familiar with Daveed's voice from his roles as Thomas Jefferson and the Marquis de Lafayette in the hit Broadway musical *Hamilton*. But in Clipping, the whole band takes on different roles, playing with different tropes and genres within hip-hop, but setting up these strict overarching rules for how they make their music. In this episode, the three of them break down how they made their song "Work Work," which features guest vocals from rapper Cocc Pistol Cree.

*("Work Work" by CLIPPING)*

Daveed: My name's Daveed Diggs.

*(Music fades)*

Daveed: We were listening to this DJ Mustard compilation,

*("Lady Killa" by COCC PISTOL CREE ft. DJ MUSTARD)*

Daveed: and there was this Cocc Pistol Cree song, "Lady Killers," on there, and we loved that song.

*("Lady Killa" by COCC PISTOL CREE ft. DJ MUSTARD)*

*(Music fades)*

Daveed: We were really like, "Man, we should do a song with her." And that sort of started the conversation about this song, about "Work Work," was actually, specifically, to get her on a track.

William: I'm William Hutson. We were like, "Who is going to be really amazing to everyone, but nobody knows yet? Who can we put on our album that everyone's like, who is that? That person's amazing." I was just on the lookout for stuff like that, and then, that song was on that mixtape. And I was certain, that was just the standout by far out, I thought.

Jonathan: So we made a song that we thought she would sound [laughter] good on, and then tried to find her. My name is Jonathan Snipes. With William Hutson, I make the beats.

William: The idea was trying to do what is a Clipping version of a kind of DJ mustard style beat. What I think is really, sort of, interesting and unique about DJ Mustard's sound is how incredibly limited his palette is, and how many songs he can generate out of a handful of sounds. And this really great sense of this, sort of, bouncy propulsive rhythm with it. We're never just going to recreate or try to fit perfectly into the style that we're referencing. How do we make it without presets using field recordings? How do we make it harsher, broken? Like how would Clipping as an entity misunderstand this genre and then try to participate in it?

Jonathan: We started Clipping with the rules that we weren't allowed to use any drum sounds. We figured out how to make field recordings stand in for drums. So, I'm using a bunch of different sounds made by sampling, tapping on this metal thermos.

*(Metal thermos sound)*

Jonathan: We recorded probably 128 different taps, and sampled them, and stuck them in a sampler instrument so that they could be played on a keyboard.

*(Keyboard)*

Jonathan: And, sort of, painstakingly added little stutter effects.

*(Processed keyboard)*

Jonathan: Then I added other layers.

*(Processed keyboard)*

Jonathan: And then, there's a, sort of, swell sound that happens every four bars, which is just a can of compressed air, like you would use to clean the inside of your computer.

*(Compressed air sound)*

Jonathan: We found a bunch of cinder blocks, and broke them, and recorded it,

*(Cinder blocks sound)*

Jonathan: and we played it backwards and forwards.

*(Processed cinder blocks sound)*

Jonathan: That's kind of our snare drum sound. Then the other element in the drum part of the beat is me, like, just mangling a beer can very, very close to microphones, which ends up making all these really harsh pops.

*(Beer can sound)*

Jonathan: And then, with delay on them, they kind of become the hi-hat.

*(Processed beer can sound)*

Jonathan: So those are all of the sort of field recording elements of the percussion.

*(Percussion)*

*(Percussion fades)*

Jonathan: We've made such, like, clear, sort of, aesthetic rules for ourselves. Just where sounds can come from, what kinds of sounds are appropriate.

William: And Daveed wasn't allowed to say "I."

Jonathan: Yeah, he wasn't allowed to rap in first-person.

William: No first-person, no true stories.

Daveed: We sort of came to the conclusion that Clipping is certainly not any of the three of us, and in fact, it's nobody. It's more of like a high of mind of things that exist in the world of rap music. So those are the perspectives I try to write from, or the kind of one shattered perspective of every rap song that's ever existed.

*(Vocals: "Holla out ya city if you'd ride for it / Let 'em know why you'd die for it / Same reason all these riders get high so it's / All medicinal - now what you wan' buy, homie?")*

Daveed: So it's all second-person, you know, a lot of like command form stuff [laughter], and a lot of third-person or environmental description. It actually is really fun, and it's actually opened things up for me quite a bit as a writer. There's such a tendency as a rapper to write these first-person narratives, and that's pretty limiting no matter who you are, that's limiting because you've only lived so much. And it also lends itself to a particular kind of storytelling. Whereas with Clipping, we get to do things that feel a little more like a film or like a novel or something, in that we get to sort of explore multiple perspectives and jump time really easily, and all of these things that writing styles that aren't as concerned with the first-person have a much easier time doing.

*(Vocals with percussion: "red lights in the distance (woop, woop) / You never been to that district they reference / Trunk full of hashish and mescaline / Your mind is a mess and this bitch is undressin' ya / A. Mash on the throttle like a G / Put a bottle to your teeth, say "Fuck it - you free, man!" / B. Pull over to the side of the street / Keep your hand on the shotty sittin' up under the seat or / C. Let the cop pull you over, say somethin' slick / On some JAY-Z 99 Problems-type shit / D. All of the above in your head / But it really doesn't matter 'cause you already dead")*

Daveed: The song has all the tropes of drug rap and, like, of gun rap because yeah, I want it to, you know, just be able to talk about hustling in a pretty vague way actually. We have the "99 problems" referenced in there, and then also referencing Digital Underground at the same time, with the A, B, C, D listing off the things that you can do, which I just stole from "Freaks of the Industry."

*("Freaks of the Industry" by DIGITAL UNDERGROUND)*

*(Music fades)*

Daveed: I was super proud of Reverend Jay-Z and Digital Underground in the same line. It made me very happy [laughter].

William: And the song features Cocc Pistol Cree. She raps the second verse.

*(Vocals: "I get it, I whip it, I flip it, I pocket the profit (uh huh) / Don't know when to stop it, they callin' me Griselda the harlot / My Blahniks erotic, I can't walk, the heel is enormous / The arm in the armrest (click-clack), these dames is dormant")*

Daveed: One of my favorite things about her is that she doesn't take a typical female position. You know, women in rap music are so complicated and underrepresented right now. So that was one of the reasons we really wanted to work with her, is she has like such a strong voice, but it's not traditionally feminine voice, I guess, if that makes sense, you know? We definitely sort of made the song and just hoped that we'd be able to track her down, and figured we'd find someone else if not, but it looked like it might not work out for a while. And we ended up sitting on the song for a long time because I just could not hear anybody else on there. It just made no sense to put it out if she wasn't going to be on it. So yeah, we waited until she made it through. We just sent her the track with the hook, and I think my verse is on there or at least one of the verses. And yeah, she did it all. I mean, she's great, and fiercely talented, and terribly underappreciated, I feel like.

*(Vocals: "No obituaries for the most part / Nobody cares, you are not even a co-star / Just a extra, they read about it as a number / Names got money in they wallet")*

Daveed: "They read about it as a number, names got money in they wallet." You know, we are just racking up statistics of dead black men, particularly right now. I mean, particularly always, depending on where you're from, which is also why it starts out with "Holla out ya city,"

*(Vocals with synth: "Holla out ya city")*

Daveed: like you are more likely to end up as one of those statistics. So I liked coming back to that, at the end, and just saying, "You will most likely be remembered as a number. Only if you have a certain amount of dollars in your wallet, are you going to earn the [laughter], the right to be remembered by your actual name.

*(Synth)*

*(Synth ends)*

Hrishikesh: Now, here's "Work Work," by Clipping ft. Cocc Pistol Cree, in its entirety.

*("Work Work" by CLIPPING)*

Hrishikesh: Visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) for more info on Clipping. You can watch the video for this song, and find links to more of their music. You can find Song Exploder on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @SongExploder. And you can find all the past and future episodes of the show at [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) or wherever you download podcasts.

My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.

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