

**Song Exploder**  
**My Morning Jacket - Spring (Among the Living)**  
**Episode 36**

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.

Jim: Every winter, I just feel like I want to die. I'm just so fucking

*("Spring (Among the Living)" by MY MORNING JACKET)*

Jim: sick of being beaten down by the winter time. I feel like every spring, my life is saved and I'm reborn.

Hrishikesh: You're listening to Song Exploder, my name is Hrishikesh Hirway. Jim James is the lead singer of the Grammy-nominated band My Morning Jacket. Since starting in 1998, they've put out six albums, and in this episode, Jim breaks down the song, "Spring (Among the Living)," from their soon-to-be released seventh album, *The Waterfall*.

*("Spring (Among the Living)" by MY MORNING JACKET)*

*(Music fades)*

Jim: When spring finally comes, it's like, in Louisville, where I live, it's a massive transition, you know, because everybody is so bummed in the wintertime and so down, and it's gray and horrible. And so, when it finally becomes spring, it just really is like this rebirth, you know, and everybody's out in their shorts running through the park, and falling in love, and going out, and having fun again, you know? It's their lifesaver.

*(Acoustic guitar)*

Jim: I remember I had an apartment in New York City for awhile, and I had the back door open, and I had this really cool backyard, for New York [laughter], and the door was open, and the snow was thawing and, you know, the grass was starting to come up, and it just popped into my head of like, how glad I was, that it was spring again. So I just remember that moment so vividly and the song came into my head.

*(Vocals: "Boy, I was ready / Boy, I was ready for spring")*

Jim: I picked this song to talk about because I think it represents what I love about the era we're in now, which is true analog performance by a band, but also tons of digital editing and smashing together of parts, and all the cool things you can do in a computer now.

We played through the song, but we never really figured it out at the studio. We like, had just done the basic tracks. And then, when I went home, I opened up the session, and just started putting it together, and connecting the dots. Like I had this really left, right feeling of like the drum beat. This one's happening,

*(Drums)*

Jim: and then this one's happening.

*(Drums)*

Jim: And then bam, they're both happening together.

*(Drums)*

Jim: Yeah, and that was something that we couldn't just track like that or figure that out. Well, it would be physically impossible because you couldn't play two parts at the same time.

*(Drums fade)*

And for me, it really came together in that way.

*(Processed acoustic guitar)*

Jim: The [mimics electric guitar], I really, I wanted a really horrible sound. And I was like, "What sounds more horrible than an acoustic through an amp?" I think it's one of those horrible sounds on the face of the earth. So we put it through the amp with reverb on it.

*(Processed acoustic guitar)*

Jim: I just love it when things sound terrible, you know? I mean, sometimes I love it when things sound great, but there's just something about the way something sounds, maybe I've listened to "There's a Riot Goin' On" by Sly Stone, I think it's one of the greatest records ever made, and that record sounds horrible, and the vocal super muffled.

*("There's a Riot Goin' On" by SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE)*

Jim: Everything's dirty and horrible, and I just love that stuff. They were like, "This is a fucking great take, like we're not going to go fix that vocal just because it blew up, you know? It sounds great. It's awesome." So I'm a big fan of external noises. Like if I do a vocal at home now, it's just like, I've just got to start recording it, and if it distorts a little, I'm kind of glad.

*(Vocals: "Ooh yeah / Among the living again, yeah / Ooh")*

Jim: I was doing a lot of howling on this song, and I was like, "God, this is fun." And I was like, "Oh man, that would sound so good if somebody was howling with me or along with me." And yeah, we had our friend Merrill from tUnE-yArDs, sing on this and howl, and because I love Merrill's spirit and her howling, and you know, her spirit is so big.

*(Vocals: "Done hibernating / We animals roam / Out of the holes / [howls]")*

Jim: There were other girls singing along with her,

*(Vocals: "Boy, I was ready / Ready for spring")*

Jim: Kylene King and Patti King from Portland, who also did the strings on the record.

*(Strings)*

Jim: They were like the powerhouse.

*(Strings fade)*

Jim: The next part coming up on the clav, like Bo came up with like the [mimics the clavinet].

*(Clavinet)*

Jim: This always reminds me of the news, “Tonight at 7, breaking news.”

Bo: I almost broke my hand, playing that so fast, it's so like, tense to get it. I'm Bo and I'm the keyboardist.

*(Clavinet ends)*

Bo: I'm Bo and I'm the keyboardist.

It's funny hearing that, because I'm relearning how to play the song, and I forgot that extra note was in there [laughter]. I'm going to add it back [laughter].

*(Strings)*

Jim: The whole ending to me feels super joyous and triumphant, like spring is supposed to feel. I feel like you've made it through this big, weird song; parts of it are jarring, and parts of it feel good, and parts of it feel sad. But then you make it to the end and it's like, it's kind of all let's go, and you're enjoying it. It's like a joyous kind of yelling.

*(Howl)*

*(Howl ends)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's “Spring (Among the Living),” by My Morning Jacket, in its entirety.

*(“Spring (Among the Living)” by MY MORNING JACKET)*

Hrishikesh: Go to [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) for links to buy the record or stream it. Next time on the show, composer John Lunn breaks down his Emmy-winning music for the show, *Downton Abbey*.

*(“Downton Abbey: Main Theme” by JOHN LUNN)*

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. Find the 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.

*("Downton Abbey: Main Theme" by JOHN LUNN)*

*(Music ends)*

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