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.

("One Second of Love" by NITE JEWEL)

Hrishikesh: In this episode, we'll get a deconstructed view of the song "One Second of Love" by Nite Jewel. I spoke to Ramona Gonzalez and her partner and producer Cole MGN in their home studio in Los Angeles as they took a break from making a new Nite Jewel record. Coming up, they'll talk about working with friends like Julia Holter, who sings backing vocals on this, and their own collaborative relationship with one another.

("One Second of Love" by NITE JEWEL)

(Music fades)

Ramona: I am Nite Jewel, and I'm also called Ramona by some people.

Cole: My name's Cole MGN, and I'm a producer and part of Nite Jewel.

Ramona: So, in 2010, yeah, we started tracking the instrumental ideas for what became "One Second of Love."

Cole: Well, when we started out recording, we, the idea was just to record ourselves improvising in our friend's studio that they built that's incredible called the Brick Factory. And so we were like, "Cool. Let's just go up there, bring some synths, and jam on synths, and just no expectations, have fun."

Ramona: One of the stipulations for us, because we like to work under certain parameters when we're, like, working on a record, was we have to record on tape.

Cole: Yeah, we just took the opportunity. We could only afford one reel of tape, which afforded us about like 30 minutes or something like that.

Ramona: But we turned it into an hour, we split the tape in half. So, we had 12 tracks per song.

Cole: We said, "Okay, it's a 24-track machine." And so, we said, "If we do 12 tracks, you know, we have effectively twice as long, you know? And actually we recorded from literally the first second that the tapes started

Ramona: [laughter]

Cole: to the very end. But then it was a long process before that, before we even realized that what we needed to do was to take those sessions, sample from them, and then really go back, and sort of write songs sampling from those sessions.

Ramona: So that's what we did with this song, is we sampled like a 12 minute jam.

(MS-20)

Ramona: Cole got this MS-20.

Cole: A Korg MS-20.

Ramona: And he started to like mess around with it, and get really familiar with how to make these really cool sequences, because he had the, also the accompanying sequencer with this synthesizer. We realized that, like, a lot of the songs could be formulated from creating a sequence on the MS-20 and using it as sort of like a metronomic, cool sound.

Cole: It was rhythmic and melodic at

Ramona: Yeah.

Cole: the same time. We wanted something that was rhythmic, melodic, and also sort of noisy. I just kind of had a rhythm in my head, something that was like [mimics beat], and I just kind of sat about fiddling with it for 5 or 10 minutes until we got that. It was all very spontaneous, all of this, you know?

Ramona: Yeah.

Cole: Even though I had this spark of an idea in my head, it was just something that came out really fast.

Ramona: Yeah. We just let this sequence kind of go. It ended up being the fundamental backbone of the song for the whole process.

(MS-20)

Ramona: We were trying to also do this thing, I think this was, like, really important where it's like taking the time to be inspired by something like, you know, sit there for as long as you need to dial in a certain tone catching those moments.

(MS-20 ends)

Cole: The aesthetic of the studio, the Brick Factory I was talking about, is very much this industrial sort of like, almost German aesthetic of recording, or something where it's big sheets of metal in there. So we just created sort of these weird rhythmic elements.

Ramona: I love the shelf.

Cole: It just sounds like, I mean, it sounds like a shelf.

(Percussion)

(Beat joins)

Cole: It was like a big industrial shelf, like a big piece of metal. And then, we started playing and then, we were like, "Oh, it's almost in the pitch of the song here," if you varispeed the tape machine, because that's one of the amazing things about tape is that you can change the pitch of it.

(Music ends)

Cole: Yeah, and then, it took us a while to get the tape transferred to digital, because we were really working with like on our own budget and everything [laughter]. So finally, when we got the multis from the tape back, we were like, "Wow, OK." That's when we discovered the vibe that we created, it was really intact on this.

Ramona: It sat in our house for a while, like we didn't open the sessions. Mainly because we moved to Topanga Canyon. Cole got a job working for Beck. So our whole life just like changed very drastically. And we were like working to set up our

studio, all this stuff. And then, so like we opened the sessions, and it was like, "Oh! Oh! I see what to do with this song." Like it all just started to make sense.

(Drums)

Ramona: Cole had the idea because we had this amazing drummer named Gavin Salmon who was performing with us. And Cole was like, "I think we should have Gavin play drums on "One Second of Love." I think we should double the MS-20 loop with drums," which was a great idea. And Cole had an idea for the drum pattern.

(MS-20 joins)

Cole: Peter Granet recorded these drums, actually, and is our friend's dad, and a seriously accomplished engineer, producer. You know, he's worked with people like the Jackson 5, Van Morrison, and that's just our friend's dad. And so, I was like, "Corey, come on, please like, can we bring your dad in?"

Ramona: [laughter] And he served as, like, inspiration at times, like talking from the control room like, "Ramona, get closer to the mic," and like, "Think about these lyrics and who you're talking to," and stuff like that, which is *never* what I ever do. And he had this idea that you're speaking to your audience. It's a different sort of approach to singing.

Hrishikesh: Do you think it affected the way you sang?

Ramona: Absolutely. I sang much more passionately than I sang in the past. I think it helped a lot. Yeah.

(Vocals with bass: "They talk all the time but nothing gets done")

Ramona: I played the bass part and did the vocals, which is normally sort of like where I find the core harmonic structure in a song, is like how the vocal and bass interact.

(Vocals with bass: "The work begins with the setting of the sun / They advise me how to play, how to look that way")

Ramona: This song has to be like really harmonically simple. And that's kind of how it works is in the simplicity of the bass and the vocal.

Cole: Because that, the melodic idea, I mean, we didn't articulate this verbally at all, but it was clear that it was like this beautiful melody on top of this harsh,

(Beat)

Cole: noisy sort of electronic backbone. And there was the contrast that, you know, I think that's why we initially liked it.

(Vocals and bass join: "See life goes on and on and on and on, on, on")

Ramona: I think I was like really used to like writing music and melodies within like a sort of dissonant de-tuned structure. And so, it really didn't bother me.

(Vocals, bass, and beat: "Oh, who was one second of love?")

(Music ends)

Ramona: I wrote it for my voice, and it just sounded sort of like, especially the high, high vocal, I couldn't get that pure tone. I use more vibrato in my voice. I couldn't get that like pure tone. And I was just like, "Julia, do you think you could help me with this?" And she's like,

(Vocals: "Oh, who was one second of love?")

Cole: Julia's and Ramona's voice just compliment each other really well.

(Vocals: "One second of love, one second of love")

Ramona: "One second of love," as that phrase was something that I thought about, because I was thinking how interesting it was that people have these, like, very intense but short relationships and connections due to like internet speed. So you can exchange email, exchange a post or something, and you get this like momentary, just like [gasp] feeling. And it's very intense, but it's very short. That's too bad, basically. Not in the sense that I think it's wrong, but just that there's more than that. The first verse, the first two verses actually, are centered around sort of like the drawbacks and the issues that arise because of that. And the last verse is sort of about how I attempt to overcome that. Basically for this middle section

Cole: Right.

Ramona: that splits up the two parts of the song, it needed this drastic change.

(FX)

Cole: Well, okay. So it was created by our friend, Harley Burkhart, who's a longtime collaborator of ours, and I've been, Harley and I have been working on stuff together since I was a teenager, since I was like 15. And I was like, "I'm going to give all this stuff to Harley and just say, do something." So then you get all these like crazy things like,

(FX)

Cole: harmonized reverse reverbs, and

(FX)

Cole: he uses, you know, the same stuff anybody has, you know, just I feel like with the people that inspire me with like software and all that, they don't have anything special, you know? They just make something amazing out of nothing, you know, out of just the most basic reverb plugin or whatever.

(Synth)

Ramona: Colin and I met in New York through a friend, when we were both going to college. And I sort of fell in love with Cole, but then we just started working on music, not going out or anything. We were just sort of collaborating on music living in this horrible apartment in Harlem.

Hrishikesh: Did he know that you were in love with him?

Ramona: Yeah. I'm sure. Yeah.

Hrishikesh: Was he also in love with you?

Ramona: Yeah.

Hrishikesh: But you weren't going out?

Ramona: No. Then we played in bands together, then at that point we were going out, played bands together in Oakland. That's where we met Scott and David who recorded these sessions. And we've been playing music together since 2004, and I'm so grateful for it.

(Synth)

(Music ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "One Second of Love," by Nite Jewel, in its entirety.

("One Second of Love" by NITE JEWEL)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net for more info on Nite Jewel, including the music video for "One Second of Love," and a link to buy this song on iTunes.
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