

Song Exploder
Oathbreaker - 10:56 / Second Son of R.
Episode 87

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.

("10:56 / Second Son of R." by OATHBREAKER)

Hrishikesh: The band Oathbreaker formed in 2008 in Belgium. In this episode, Caro and Gilles from the band break down the two-part song that opens their third album, *Rheia*. These two tracks, "10:56" and "Second Son of R.," were written and performed as one song. Coming up, they talk about how and why their sound transformed from a pure hardcore band to something more amalgamated. And Caro talks about her own evolution as a vocalist and as a lyricist, writing candidly about her own past.

("10:56 / Second Son of R." by OATHBREAKER)

(Music fades)

Caro: My name is Caro. I'm a singer in Oathbreaker.

Gilles: My name is Gilles. I play guitar in Oathbreaker. The story of that song is basically like I was trying to have like a shoegaze band. And like I don't know, in my head, like this idea of a band and the record were very separate things, but like why have these two separate bands? There has to be a way to like combine all these things I'm looking for in music or in a band. Why can't we like blend those two together? And that's where they all like kind of started making sense.

(Guitar)

Gilles: The chorus was the first thing that was written. I wrote a lot of stuff on acoustic guitar at home, because like I live together with Caro. So we just try out stuff like how vocals work with this, what can we do with this?

(Guitar)

Caro: That's also why

(Guitar ends)

Caro: it made so much sense to sing on it.

Gilles: Yeah.

Caro: Like normal singing, like he plays acoustic guitar and I tried to just sing on it.

Gilles: Riffs start making more sense to sing over it than to like scream over it.

("Second Son of R." by OATHBREAKER)

(Music ends)

Caro: We basically grew up together. We've been playing in bands for 13 years together. And screaming was, I've been doing that since I was 13. So that's 13 years now. And it's such a like comfortable thing for me because I grew up doing that, basically. I remember we were jamming in like a friend's house doing like cover songs. And I remember picking up the microphone, and it was plugged in like a bass amplifier, and I just started screaming on it, and it didn't sound that bad. And then, we realized, "Hey, maybe we should start a hardcore band," and that's it, and I never stopped doing that.

(Screams)

Gilles: Screaming can be really cool, but it's also like an, feels like a very easy option.

Caro: Stepping out of that comfort zone was such a hard thing for me. Even in a rehearsal space, I shut down completely. It was just a confidence thing. It took a lot of time. During the entire writing process, I never sing in the rehearsal space ever. So that's like two years and a half. When the first demos were recorded, I remember like hitting the send button to like the rest of the band, like, "Okay, they're going to listen to this and I'll hear like what they think of it pretty soon now." And I think once they like gave their feedback, I started accepting it. But the first time they actually heard me sing normal singing with them was in the studio.

(Vocals with swells: "The sun rose when I saw / Steam ascending from")

Caro: I only realized how broad clean singing is, and how like a different spectrum it opens of like emotions. And that was like mind opening.

Gilles: The swells in the intro, they're like all different because we all did that live. Like the whole intro, 10:56 is all done live to tape in one track. In another situation, we would have had like a click track, would have done this all separately, so they're all perfect, that they have the same volume swell, that the chord is exactly right.

(Swells)

(Swells end)

Gilles: We recorded the entire record in Palo Alto with Jack Shirley.

Caro: Jack made us focus a lot more on how the song feels than actually having it technically correct, you know?

Gilles: I think we were stressing out about recording a lot, because we used to think that recording is like get everything exactly right. And so, we got to Jack's studio, and suddenly everything changed. He doesn't think in like terms of everything has to be perfect. So we were like kind of, it took me a while to get used to that with after like five, six days. I really liked that idea. It's like he wants music to sound

(Drums)

Gilles: human, that you can hear that a human played guitar. Yeah, I really liked the fact that this record sounds a lot more like us.

(Drums)

(Drums end)

Gilles: Instead of like drums are recorded like all close-mic'd, those were recorded, I mean, I don't know *that* much about engineering, but it's like with three or four mic's.

Caro: Very basic.

Gilles: The whole idea was to make it less aggressive. And so, that made it sound a lot more like organic. Because I felt like we finally found how, musically, we were supposed to sound.

(Piano)

Caro: This entire record is a collection of memories that I have from childhood. Before writing *Rheia*, I was kind of in a like bad time, and I like kept arriving at the same point. Like I was alone on the world, and like no one was there for me. I kept on like having these like really serious relationships. And then, after a year I would like [gasps] suddenly have this panic attack, and just like break everything loose. And because we've known each other for so long, Gilles made me like self-reflect. It wasn't something I would do. I'm not really open about stuff. I don't talk about feelings. And he made me think about it a lot. The roots of all these like, the way I was dealing with things, he just made me like just write these things down.

(Guitar)

(Guitar fades)

Caro: I wrote down this like memory that I have when I was 10, maybe. My dad was a bit of an alcoholic. And my stepmom kept calling my dad in the morning. It was 10:56, so that was the time, and he wasn't home yet so he went out drinking. There was a little alleyway. We would see him walking like trying not to fall down, like being really drunk. And so, he fell down, and he like didn't have the reflex to like put his hands. So he just fell on his nose, and like broke his nose. And I remember that my stepmom like ran away. She was like, "Ugh, not dealing with this." Of course that wasn't the first time stuff like that happened. And I remember I was in my pajamas, and I would like go outside, and like pick him up, and bring him back in. And so, that's basically the entire intro to the record.

(Vocals with guitar: "Your skull merged with the surface / I mended your broken nose")

Caro: The most important kind of lyric in the entire song is the end part.

(Guitar)

Caro: It's like, "You'll never know the person I've become." I couldn't deal anymore with all like my dad's issues. And at one point you just have to like shut that off.

And I think the end part is just all the frustration, like letting go, and like deciding like, “well he will never know what kind of person I am.” It’s like beyond that point. So yeah.

(Vocals join: “You’ll never know the person I’ve become / [Screams]”)

(Music ends)

Caro: I don’t see that as a screaming section. It’s so weird. It’s a complete different use of my voice. I don’t know how to explain this, but it’s more like I’m shouting, and I didn’t have any control over what I was doing when we recorded it. That wasn’t set in stone, what I was going to do. I knew where we were going with it, and what the emotion had to be like. But I had, it’s not something you just write.

Gilles: It makes people feel like uncomfortable. If you tell the truth, or if you like just open your heart to like somebody, that makes people very uncomfortable.

Caro: It’s a cliché that it’s like, you write it down, and it’s over, and it’s like, you can go past it, and like it’s finished. Of course, it’s not like that, but just thinking about it, and like performing this live, I wouldn’t say it’s the same as going to therapy or anything, but it definitely frees you in a way.

Hrishikesh: And now, here’s “10:56 / Second Son of R.,” by Oathbreaker.

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Hrishikesh: To learn more, visit songexploder.net/oathbreaker. There, you’ll find a link to buy Oathbreaker’s album *Rheia*. You can find all the past and future episodes of Song Exploder at songexploder.net or wherever you download podcasts. You can follow Song Exploder on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @SongExploder. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.