

**Song Exploder**  
**Raleigh Ritchie - Time in a Tree**  
**Episode 160**

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.

*("Time in a Tree" by RALEIGH RITCHIE)*

Hrishikesh: This episode contains explicit language. Raleigh Ritchie is the musical alias of Jacob Anderson, a musician and actor who's probably best known for playing the character Grey Worm on *Game of Thrones*. Raleigh Ritchie released his first album in 2016, and he's put out a handful of EPs. In September 2018, he released the single, "Time in a Tree." He made the song with Grammy-nominated producer Daniel Traynor, aka GRADES. In this episode, Raleigh Ritchie and GRADES take apart "Time in a Tree" to explain how it came together, and how it was influenced by classic Hollywood movies, Billy Joel, and overwhelming anxiety.

*("Time in a Tree" by RALEIGH RITCHIE)*

Raleigh: My name is Raleigh Ritchie.

*(Music fades out)*

Raleigh: I have anxiety so I just started therapy, which is something I tried when I was 19, and I didn't really respond particularly well to it the first time around. But I was like I'll try it again. And therapy was forcing me to think about my past a lot more. And for me this song is all about connecting one thing that might happen in adult life to something that happens when you're a teenager, to something that happens when you're a child. And like how you kind of have to reach back in order to help yourself in the present.

*(Piano)*

Raleigh: We wrote and recorded this song in GRADES's studio in Brixton, in London.

GRADES: I was tinkering around on the keys for a little bit trying to find some cool sounds and I started to play with this kind of riff here.

*(Piano)*

GRADES: My name's Dan Traynor, aka GRADES. We'd done a couple of songs before this. We were both sort of mutual fans of each other's work and the powers that be kind of hooked us up together.

Raleigh: It's a really scary thing to share your ideas especially when they're like really personal things you may not have told people that you're really close to. And this is why it's so important to have a really symbiotic trustful relationship with a producer. And me and GRADES, we just really got on. We get excited by the same sounds. And he knows his way around a keyboard.

*(Piano)*

GRADES: When I started to play the progression that ended up being the progression on the song, Jacob was like, "Oh I like that." It just kind of caught his ear.

Raleigh: I wanted the song to feel contemplative because that's kind of where my head was at.

*(Piano fades out)*

GRADES: And that's when he started to sort of hum a few ideas that turned into the melodies and stuff that ended up on the record.

Raleigh: I kind of use voice memos to just throw down ideas.

*(Voice memo)*

Raleigh: One of the first things in the song that I had was, "Did Billy Joel have self esteem? / Maybe Vienna wouldn't wait for me." I love Billy Joel's album *The Stranger*. I was listening to "Vienna" which is normally a song that's really inspiring and really comforting.

*("Vienna" by BILLY JOEL)*

*(Music fades out)*

Raleigh: But it just, it just wasn't working for me, that thing of like, "Just be patient." I couldn't be patient. I was just like, "But I don't have the self-esteem that I need

to implement what the song is telling me to implement.” Just feeling like every single direction I turned in, there was a wall in front of me. I couldn't hold down a positive thought if I tried.

*(Vocals along with piano: “I get wound up, from the ground up / And I don't know why / Turn the sound up, drown the noise out / Swallow (Woah), Don't cry / Got an anxious heart, and it's stone made / Can't take paper or heartbreak / Did Billy Joel have self-esteem? / Maybe Vienna wouldn't wait for me”)*

Raleigh: So I was having a bit of a Billy Joel moment when I wrote this song. Each verse has a different flow and each verse is about a different place in my mind and a different time in my life. And in verse two, it's about hopefulness. It's about trying to work out what are the steps I need to take to just worry less, to find a bit of contentment and peace.

*(Vocals along with piano, beat, and sound effects: “Do you ever feel like, you could live a real life? / Like everybody else in the real world, you could be a real girl? / You could be a wizard, or you could be in NASA, you could write fiction, you could tame raptors”)*

*(Beat along with piano and sound effects)*

Raleigh: That whole verse is about being a child and feeling like you could be anything. There was never any doubt. And now I'm kind of like riddled with doubt. And so it's just about reaching back and trying to find the things that I still care about and I still want to do from when I was a child.

GRADES: So with the drums on the second verse, we thought, “Why not, let's just like switch the rhythm up completely.”

*(Music ends)*

GRADES: Lyrically and his delivery, it completely switches up there and becomes much more aggressive.

*(Vocals: “Swimming against the current / Am I wrong? / Can you show me a warrant / Honestly, I'm a bomb / Abhorrent / I'm on it, I get it, I've got it / I wanna be 10 again, just me and Sonic / And nobody telling me I should be more than I am / Back when I had a plan”)*

GRADES: So it was kind of like trying to create a beat that would support that.

*(Trap beat)*

Raleigh: It's like a trap rhythm really. It's just that what the hi-hats would normally do, the kick's doing [laughter], instead. Essentially like inverted trap drums, which kind of has quite a frenetic quality to it. I want the drums to feel overwhelming, and I think that suits the song and what the song's about really well.

*(Trap beat ends)*

Raleigh: The sonics of the song changed as we went on and they definitely changed when the chorus came about.

GRADES: He started just humming this idea and I was like, "Woah, that sounds really cool."

*(Vocals: "I just want time in a tree / I need a place just for me")*

GRADES: He was sort of almost putting this kind of slight character on. So it sort of sounded like an old sample and we were both like, "Oh it'd be cool to try and make this sound like an old record." We started playing with effects on his voice, distortion, loads of compression, and like, a little bit of chorus-y stuff. And there's two different layers of the vocal. There's a same audio file on a duplicate track that's been pitched up an octave, and then the formant added to it gives it that kind of deeper throaty sound that makes his voice like, not so recognizable, so it sounds like this.

*(Processed vocals: "I just want time in a tree / I need a place just for me / Somewhere that I can be free / Keep the faith and just be / What you'll be")*

GRADES: Most people who I play the song to now are like, "Oh, what's the sample? It sounds like a famous record but I've never heard what the sample is."

Raleigh: And I really enjoy that. And I did that intentionally, I was like, I love the idea of people trying to find this sample that they'll never find.

GRADES: And people have been googling it and trying to find it out and it was just something that came up in Raleigh's head. His acting background is what makes him such a versatile musician and artist. There's almost like a few different moods throughout the track that he can access and really like deliver

because he has that background. So I guess he can sort of tap into that performance and create the character for the hook.

*(Processed vocals along with piano and plucks: "I just want time in a tree / I need a place just for me / Somewhere that I can be free")*

*(Processed vocals fade out)*

Raleigh: The whole thing of "Time in a Tree" really is like climbing trees when you're a kid and being above the ground and not being attached to the world and to the Earth. You can dream [laughter].

*(Piano and plucks ends)*

Raleigh: Listening to that piano line along with that doo doo doo doo

*(Plucks)*

Raleigh: makes me think about like *Casablanca*, you know the "As time goes by," that kind of thing. And I think that's probably what gave me that very traditional movie romance sort of feeling. And I always associate strings with like very cinematic moments. My connection to films and that type of storytelling I think is why some kind of orchestration feels like a really important part of my music. Rosie Danvers who arranges all of my strings is one of my musical heroes.

GRADES: Rosie's an incredible arranger.

Raleigh: I send Rosie these voice notes of me humming different melodies like string melodies over the song.

*(Voice memo)*

GRADES: I actually got to go down when they were recording the strings. That was like mind blowing, like seeing and hearing a full orchestra, like essentially playing some stuff that we'd written.

*(Strings)*

Raleigh: And then, me and GRADES were talking about putting nature sounds in there.

*(Nature sounds)*

Raleigh: It's like building things into the song that can work on that subconscious level. So you listen to it and hopefully it helps build an image and hopefully you can put yourself in that image.

GRADES: Jacob when he was writing it, he was saying, "Ah I can kind of imagine a guy sitting like with an old guitar, like in a tree, writing this song or singing this song."

Raleigh: I imagine like a 70 year old singing it because the song was so much about reaching back through points in your life. I thought there was something kind of romantic about the chorus being like an elderly person sitting in a park, singing this melody to themselves.

*(Nature sounds fade out)*

Raleigh: And then there's like those clicks in the percussion in the song.

*(Clock ticks)*

Raleigh: The ticking of the clock.

*(Clock ticks)*

Raleigh: The song is about using your time well. And I often feel like I am against the clock. There was a particular point in my teenage-dom where I was very depressed, and I couldn't do anything. I stayed indoors for a week without talking to anybody. I didn't go outside. I just got like delivery. And it was a very dark part of my life. And I've got this weird complex about that time in my life where I feel like I really wasted valuable time. I feel like I haven't done enough with my life all the time. I feel like I could always be doing more.

*(Piano along with clock ticks and plucks)*

Raleigh: I don't easily articulate myself particularly when it comes to things that are really personal so writing a song is how I access that part of my brain that I wish I could access when I'm face to face with somebody. This song's called "Time in a Tree," partly because one of the realizations of the song I think is that time is the biggest currency. That's the only thing that you can't get back.

*(Music ends)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here is “Time in a Tree,” by Raleigh Ritchie, in its entirety.

*(“Time in a Tree” by RALEIGH RITCHIE)*

Hrishikesh: Visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) to learn more about Raleigh Ritchie. You’ll also find a link to buy or stream this song.

Song Exploder is made by producer Christian Koons, by guest host Thao Nguyen, who’s filling in for me this whole year but just happens to be out of town this week, and me, I’m Hrishikesh Hirway, creator and executive producer. Carlos Lerma is our illustrator, he makes a portrait for every episode, which you can see on the Song Exploder website. Many thanks to Daniel Traynor and Jason Lee for all their help with this episode. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a collective of fiercely independent podcasts. You can learn about all of our shows at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). You can also find Song Exploder on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @SongExploder. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.