

Song Exploder
Selena Gomez - Lose You to Love Me
Episode 193

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.

("Lose You to Love Me" BY SELENA GOMEZ)

Hrishikesh: Selena Gomez is a singer, songwriter, and actress, who's spent most of her life in the public eye. She started her acting career as a child, and put out her first albums as a teenager. She's had 3 number one albums, eight Top 10 hits, and in 2017, Billboard named her Woman of the Year. At one point, she was the most followed person on Instagram, and the details of her life are constantly discussed in tabloid headlines. So, when your private life is that public, how do you write a song about something as personal as heartbreak?

Selena: Do I think my story intrigues people in a different way? Obviously it does. It's unfortunately how it works. But this song alone represents what a lot of people who are heartbroken have gone through.

Hrishikesh: For the song "Lose You to Love Me," Selena teamed up with the Grammy-winning production duo Mattman & Robin, whom she'd worked with before. And she turned to her longtime songwriting collaborators, Julia Michaels and Justin Tranter. Julia Michaels is a Grammy-nominated artist in her own right, and Justin Tranter is also a Grammy-nominee who was named BMI's Pop Songwriter of the Year. Selena, Julia, and Justin have written 10 songs together, including "Lose You to Love Me." The song came out in October 2019, and went on to become Selena's first #1 hit. It went double-platinum in the US, and was named one of the best songs of the year by Vulture and Billboard. In this episode, Selena Gomez tells the story of how "Lose You to Love Me" was made. I also spoke to Julia Michaels and Justin Tranter. Selena explains why she worked with them for this song.

("Lose You to Love Me" BY SELENA GOMEZ)

Selena: I'm Selena Gomez.

(Music fades out)

Selena: I work with tons of writers that I respect and love so much, but when it comes to working on something that's super personal, they were the ones that I went to. How do you know if you trust someone? You trust them, and I think that's what I felt with Justin and Julia. And I think how that happened so naturally with them is they didn't really want anything from me. They were genuinely people that came in and wanted to know my story.

Julia: My name is Julia Michaels.

Justin: My name is Justin Tranter.

Julia: Like a good 90% of the songs that I write are with Justin.

Justin: But there's something so special about me, Julia, and Selena together.

Selena: In the beginning, I kind of would take one brick down, another brick down, and slowly but surely it was, it was all of us sharing, you know, our lives together.

Julia: I want to say it had been almost like a year and a half or so since I had seen Selena. I was on tour, like, pretty aggressively and she was working on her album.

Selena: I was working with Mattman & Robin, and I actually have worked with them millions of times, and they're kind of like a Justin-Julia to me, we have like a good power team going on when we all work together.

Julia: I was like, "Yeah, I'm coming home, I'll be home for like, four days, and then I have to get back on the road." So I think it was the last day that I was home. I texted her, because we were going into the studio a little bit early just to see if we could maybe finesse some sort of idea or finagle something. I had texted her like, "Hey, where's your mind at right now? What do you want us to focus on?"

Selena: And I was like, "Honestly, I'm exhausted but I just want to tell the truth." You know, I just, I want to let go of this feeling that I had.

Justin: When Julia came in and was talking about what her and Selena had discussed, it was really wanting to address, like, head on what Selena had been through, the heartbreak, the emotional roller coaster, but really portray that she is on the other side of it.

Julia: And I said to Justin, I was like, "I feel like we should do a ballad." So Robin started playing some chords on the piano.

(Piano chords)

Justin: Me and Julia just started to go and get ideas started and melodies started and sections started for her.

Selena: What I remember going in, it was like I just saw the four people I was working on the song with, and they were just like, "How are you doing?" I said, "I honestly don't know." Kind of felt defeated and sat down, and they just played me the chords. And Julia then started humming, and it was just like, it like brought tears to my eyes.

Julia: She just started crying. She was like, "This is so beautiful. This is like exactly what I wanted."

Selena: All of a sudden it was just the melodies and it all just came out naturally.

(First verse vocals along with piano: "You promised the world and I fell for it / I put you first and you adored it / Set fires to my forest / And you let it burn / Sang off-key in my chorus / 'Cause it wasn't yours")

Justin: We then just dove into every single lyric and every single little thing that we could. Tweaking lyrics from the first verse and chorus with us, making sure it fit her story perfectly.

(Pre-chorus vocals along with piano: "We'd always go into it blindly / I needed to lose you to find me / This dancing was killing me softly / I needed to hate you to love me")

Selena: That's word for word what I felt.

Julia: It's like I needed to lose you in order to feel like myself again. I needed to know what this kind of loss and this kind of pain was to really accept myself and reflect on myself in order to grow and learn. We gave her a big hug and it was just like a nice little like reuniting, because none of us had seen each other in a while so it was really nice. And then

(Piano chords)

Julia: she was like, “Okay, I have this idea for the second verse.”

Justin: Pretty much syllable for syllable of the second verse is all Selena.

(Second verse vocals along with piano: “I gave my all and they all know it / Then you tore me down and now it’s showing / In two months, you replaced us / Like it was easy / Made me think I deserved it / In the thick of healing”)

Justin: I was like, “This song is coming out. Are you sure you're willing to go there, to be this honest about your journey?” And she was like, “Of course, we're going there. Are we trying to tell the story? Are we trying to like let people heal through my healing? Then we have to go there.” One of her superpowers is being so honest, and she's going to give you her life in the lyric, but then when she gets on the mic, she does the same thing, she tells you the story. She brings you through her truth and that is what makes great art. You have to have an artist who is willing to expose their truth.

Selena: I view acting and singing completely different. For me, when I’m on a set, I feel like I get to transform into someone else’s life, and I get to experience something different. I find it sometimes easier for me to get out emotions when I’m doing a scene or working with someone, or a director, that pulls that out of me. But when I start getting in the studio, I start getting really weird, because I know that it’s all about me. And that’s, that’s really hard. You know, that’s me even processing things in my life that I haven’t processed yet, or that I am currently walking through. And it’s about me, yeah, it’s like, every part of it. And that’s, you know, sometimes scary.

(Chorus vocals along with keyboard: “To love, love, yeah / To love, love, yeah / To love, yeah / I needed to lose you to love me, yeah / To love, love, yeah / To love, love, yeah / To love, yeah / I needed to lose you to love me”)

Selena: So we all went into the studio, the recording booth, and Justin, Julia, and myself just started chanting, “To love, to love me,” and it was so fun, I got to create it with, you know, these people that were almost celebrating with me, and those are the moments you can let loose in the studio.

(Group chant: “To love, love, yeah / To love, love, yeah / To love, yeah”)

Selena: The chanting is such an important part of the song, and it’s the part where it’s like, the cliché, open your arms wide and just like scream, and let all of it out.

Justin: And then Mattman & Robin with all their magic somehow made it sound like there was, you know, a thousand of us.

(Group vocals along with kick, bass and keyboard: "To love, love, yeah / To love, love, yeah / To love, yeah")

Selena: I thought that was just so beautiful.

(Group vocals along with kick, bass and keyboard: "To love, love, yeah / To love, love, yeah / To love, yeah")

Julia: I remember doing the, "To love, love, yeah."

Justin: It was really emotional, really beautiful, and just like a moment that you know, you never know what's going to be a hit, but you know when something's special.

(Strings)

Selena: So after we laid down the demo, you know we would have to go back into the studio to then work on, you know, getting it just perfectly like done, and kind of tweak things here and there, but we kept the song pretty bare.

(Strings plucks)

Selena: The string parts of the song just kill me.

Justin: That sort of bass pluck, high pluck, bass pluck, high pluck.

(Strings plucks)

Selena: When I hear it instantly now, it takes me to that place. And it almost makes it feel, to me, like a ballerina.

(Pre-chorus vocals along with strings and keyboard: "We'd always go into it blindly / I needed to lose you to find me / This dancing was killing me softly / I needed to hate you to love me")

Selena: And then we got this really cool idea that Finneas would maybe take it to a whole other level like we know that he does so well.

(Ambient wind sounds)

Hrishikesh: Finneas O'Connell, aka Finneas, is an artist and producer. He won the 2020 Grammy for Producer of the Year for his work on his sister Billie Eilish's album.

Selena: His extra touches and that kind of windy feeling, it just added a texture to the song. You know, I'm like that's, how do you even come up with that? It was weird. And that's what made it cool. It was supposed to be released around fall, the new season, new harvest if you will, and he made it feel that way.

(Ambient wind sounds fade out)

(Synth)

Selena: I definitely wouldn't say that I was fully healed when we worked on the song, and there were a few times when I would go into the studio and I would take a few passes at it, and I wouldn't be able to get through it. So it became almost like another version of therapy, which, you know, that's so important to me at this point.

(Synth)

Selena: One of the hardest things for me to sing in the song was the bridge. It's the ending of the song, and it's, that's the part where it's like, you know, I guess this is goodbye for us, you know, and that killed me [laughter]. You know, I think that was very hard, because it was like me saying it out loud. And now it's just a story, and now that story has ended.

(Bridge vocals along with piano: "And now the chapter is closed and done / To love, love, yeah / To love, love, yeah / To love, yeah / And now it's goodbye, it's goodbye for us")

Justin: Me and Selena kind of just wrote that little part to be like, "It's over in a good way. Like I am done. I'm okay. I love me."

(Soundscape)

Selena: I'm so glad that this happened but it's just so painful. Like I think the whole point of "Lose You to Love Me" is that it's actually honest word for word. And those moments are actually the truth of my story. I felt like that was what I was needing and that's what I was missing, was just a little bit of the truth but this was actually me letting it go. I felt like I got to do something so great with

something that may have been really difficult for me. It was almost like, all those questions, like why did I have to walk through that, why did I need that lesson so many times, why is it worth it? And then I got the song, and I was so overwhelmed with relief and peace. It is one of those moments, where you're like, I got it. I went through what I went through, and now this is the best I've ever felt. It's just gonna go from here, we'll see what happens.

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Lose You to Love Me," by Selena Gomez, in its entirety.

("Lose You to Love Me" BY SELENA GOMEZ)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net for more information. You'll find links to buy or stream "Lose You to Love Me," and you can watch the music video for it. Plus, you can also watch the trailer for the upcoming Song Exploder netflix series, which debuts on October 2nd. You can also go to netflix.com/songexploder to add it to your list.

Song Exploder is made by me, Hrishikesh Hirway, with producer Christian Koons, production assistant Olivia Wood, and illustrator Carlos Lerma. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a collective of creative, independent podcasts. You can learn more about all the radiotopia shows at radiotopia.fm. If you'd like to support the podcast, you can get a Song Exploder t-shirt at songexploder.net/shirt. You can also follow the show on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @SongExploder. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.