

Song Exploder
Tame Impala - It Might Be Time
Episode 183

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.

("It Might Be Time" by TAME IMPALA)

Hrishikesh: This episode contains explicit language. Tame Impala is the project of Kevin Parker, a songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and producer from Perth, Australia. Since putting his first EP out in 2008, he's been nominated for two Grammys and won eight of Australia's ARIA Awards. Multiple Tame Impala albums have been named Best of the Year. And as a producer, he's collaborated with Lady Gaga, Mark Ronson, The Weeknd, and more. The most recent Tame Impala album is *The Slow Rush*, which came out in February 2020. For this episode, Kevin chose to take apart the song, "It Might Be Time."

("It Might Be Time" by TAME IMPALA)

Kevin: My name is Kevin Parker, I'm from Tame Impala.

(Music fades out)

Kevin: I'd just started working on this album, and I had no idea what the album was gonna sound like. So I started working on this song, and it was definitely just a creative trying whatever phase, which I think is important. These songs were coming off the back of doing a bunch of collabs, so this is kind of when I was starting to get back into working by myself again, which was nice. I guess jamming with other people, there can be kind of an anxiety that it's not going anywhere. One of the reasons I like to work alone is that it doesn't matter if you spend 12 hours and get nowhere. You just have to kind of separate yourself from the end result being perfect.

(Keyboard)

Kevin: I remember the first kind of jam I had with myself.

(Keyboard along with vocals)

Kevin: I was just playing around with some chords on a keyboard. I kind of like it to be a sound I haven't used before, because I feel like it's a more kind of fertile ground for thinking of new things, you know having a new sound. Because if you use the same sound twice, I think you kind of gravitate to the same thing you've done before. And then I just kind of jumped on the drums, just recorded over the top of that.

(Drum beat along with keyboard)

Kevin: Just slowly trying to find something.

(Drum beat along with keyboard and vocals)

Kevin: I like to think that things that I arrive at musically and sonically are serendipitous, happy accidents. And this album I wanted to allow that to happen even more.

(Drum beat along with keyboard and vocals fade out)

Kevin: But I like to have drums sounding good off the bat, because a bad drum sound for me is just the least inspiring thing, like I can't work on a song. Even when I just record drums for messing around, it's still kind of this like sound that I've dialed in.

(Drum beat)

Kevin: So after this demo, I found a little bit that I liked and made that into a chorus.

(Chorus keyboard riff)

Kevin: And then I kind of built the song around that.

(Drums along with keyboard riff)

Kevin: And what's funny is the final drums on the song are actually those drums, from the same demo, just chopped up and processed.

(Processed drums)

Kevin: It's got a real kind of like late 90s, chopped up drum break sound but like smashed.

(Processed drums)

Kevin: The raw stem for those drums are really dry. It's kind of funny switching between the two.

(Dry drum stem followed by processed drums)

Hrishikesh: How does that happen? How do you get it to sound like you're playing the drums 8000 times harder?

Kevin: Just lots of tricks [laughter].

(Drums end)

Kevin: That question in itself, making the drums sound like that, accounts for most of my life in the studio.

(Processed drums)

Kevin: The sounds in this song I love on their own. Almost everything in the chorus is distorted except the keyboard part. Bass is distorted, the drums are distorted, that like lead line that comes in is distorted.

(Distorted lead)

Kevin: And it has one of the gnarliest synth basses I've made.

(Synth bass)

Kevin: Like if you solo that and the drums, that's the best way to know if you're feeling it or not.

(Drums along with synth bass and distorted lead)

(Keyboard riff)

Kevin: I like to write a melody over chords that are stuck in my head. I mean like get them rock solid into your head. The important thing is to like digest the chords first. So I replayed them on just like a spaced out synthesizer.

(Synth)

Kevin: And I made an eight minute loop of it and I just had it going all day every day, all around the world, wherever I was. I'll be sort of walking around. I'll just have it blasting in the studio, doing what I'm doing, dancing around, I don't know. And I don't know what possessed me but I just started singing.

(Chorus vocals: "You ain't as fun as you used to be")

Kevin: The hook kind of sounded like someone teasing someone, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na. You know!

(Chorus vocals: "It ain't as fun as as it used to be, no")

Kevin: So then I thought it could be cool to make it like your own subconscious teasing you, and that's where like, "It might be time to face it," came from.

(Chorus vocals: "It might be time to face it")

(Drum pattern)

Kevin: I had this idea for a clip of someone going around trying to live their life, and these like almost gremlin-like kids just jumping out from behind corners when they're trying do something cool. You know, they're like trying to skateboard down a hill or something and then like these kids run out and just like kick the skateboard out [laughter], you know? And sing that chorus lyric to them, because that's kind of how I saw it, is like internal gremlins, you know what I mean.

(Chorus full track: "It might be time to face it / You ain't as cool as you used to be, no)

Kevin: At that point, I felt like it had this kind of rock hip hop almost thing, like something that N.E.R.D. would do. You know like how they do rock but it's clearly a hip hop song, even though it's like distorted guitars and distorted drum kit?

(Chorus full track ends)

Kevin: Once I've got the whole thing of music where I love how it feels, it takes a lot for me to be able to go and write something new for it, to add to it. Like I just love the idea of taking everything that was from this kind of like six hour time, like just this one like session in the studio where I just had this burst of ideas. I love the idea that everything that is in the song came from that little burst of creativity. So with this one I was like, "Oh, I've got these like chords that I wrote in that demo." And I liked the wandering nature of the chords, so I was like, "That could be a verse."

(Verse keyboard chords)

Kevin: There's something about like an unexpected chord change or unexpected timing of a chord change that just does it for me, that I just kind of subconsciously gravitate towards. The chords on their own are so disjointing, but with the vocals they kind of make sense.

(First verse vocals along with keyboard: "Something doesn't feel right / That's enough for one night / Hope ya get home alright")

Kevin: The song starts with deciding to go home early on a night out, because I felt like we've all done that, and for whatever reason those have always been a source of like defeat for me, like just going like, "Oh, fuck it. You know what, guys? I'm out [laughter]." In like the Uber on the way home you're like,

(Music stops)

Kevin: "Maybe I'm not good at partying after all [laughter]." And then the chorus comes in slamming, like you've lost it.

(Chorus full track: "It might be time / It might be time to face it")

Kevin: Oh boom, there it is, like a punch in the face.

(Chorus full track: "It might be time to face it")

Kevin: But also, you know, this song was also meant to be kind of playful, and almost kind of tongue in cheek. It's earnest but it's also kind of funny, you know, light-hearted. I remember that's kind of what me and my brother used to tease each other about in high school. You know like you peaked, you peaked in Year 8, man, like that's how we'd get under each other's skin. See that's the thing

about this song, I wanted to make sure that it wasn't specific to any kind of like situation or age or anything.

(Chorus vocals: "You're goin' under / You ain't as young as you used to be")

Kevin: I'm 34 so I could be thinking that, but then like someone that's 64 would be thinking the same thing, and someone that's 24 and 14. You know, you ain't as cool as you used to be.

Hrishikesh: And now, here is "It Might Be Time," by Tame Impala, in its entirety.

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Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net to learn more about Kevin Parker and Tame Impala. You'll also find the link to stream or buy this song.

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