

YACHT - Plastic Soul
Song Exploder
Episode 3

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.

("Plastic Soul"- by YACHT)

In this episode, Claire and Jona of the band YACHT will place their brand new single, "Plastic Soul." They explain how technology inspired them musically, as well as lyrically and the secret to getting the best sounds from your software.

Jona: By just clicking on everything.

Hrishikesh: Here's the exploded view of "Plastic Soul" by YACHT.

("Plastic Soul" - by YACHT)

(Music fades)

Jona: Hi, I am Jona.

Claire: And I'm Claire.

Jona: Together, we make something called...

Claire: YACHT.

Jona: "T" [laughter]

Claire: [laughter] We always start with these points of reference that then, when you hear the finished song, there's no bearing on it whatsoever. But Amanda Lear is this, like, sort of, disco, deeply baritone voiced, sexy lady who made this, kind of, like, spoken word disco songs.

Jona: Yeah.

Claire: That are so good.

Jona: The song that this is, the chorus is modeled after is called, "Never Trust A Pretty Face."

Claire: [singing] "Never trust a pretty face," she sounds like Nico a little bit.

Jona: Yeah.

("Never Trust a Pretty Face" - AMANDA LEAR)

Jona: But on that song, there's a chorus, a harmony of, maybe, like, three or four men. And I loved the way it sounded as her with this baritone voice, but then also men backing her up. We should have hired a choir but we did it with software because I wanted it to sound a little bit fucked up.

(Layered vocals: You think you're losing it because / You see the things your mother does)

Jona: So there's an octave and a fifth.

(Layered vocals: You see the man your father was)

Jona: It just sounded wrong in a fun way.

(Layered vocals: The trouble that your brothers cause)

Jona: We always wanted to play with technology, and that's why we think we chose to use the, the plug-in, the harmonizer and why we used a vocoder for the majority of the track too. We wanted it to be about technology and served by technology.

Claire: Yeah like, the human voice, sort of, drowning in and bathing in this amniotic reality of connection and technology, which is why the vocoder is there.

(Layered vocals: If you only had a plastic soul)

Jona: I think my favorite part of the song is this synthesizer on the chorus.

(Synthesizer)

Jona: And the thing I love about it, yeah, my mom heard it, and she's like, "Oh! The organ on this song is so great!"

Claire: [laughter] Aw!

Jona: Yeah. And a couple people said that, like, emailed and been like, "Oh, what's the organ part?" And I love that people hear it as an organ. It's an ARP 2600 plug-in. I can't afford an awesome vintage \$10,000 synthesizer like that. But yeah, I don't know. It doesn't register as an organ sound to me, but I like that other people hear it as an organ. I think that that makes it, like, romantic in a special way.

Claire: It sounds to me like a, like a cartoon mouse [laughter].

Jona: I futzed with it for hours and hours, and I think that's when we really got to a point when I was like, "Oh this song is going to be something that we're going to love."

(Synthesizer fades)

Jona: One big thing that I love to do, and I've been doing since I've always been making music, is really recycling. And the first thing that we started with, I was like, going through all of this, all these old files on a hard drive that was just about to fail, and I found this drum loop that I made.

(Drum loop)

Jona: But yeah, this drum loop was the first thing that we started with and then I added the drum machine on top of it.

(Drum loop and drum machine)

Jona: Once we had the drums and the organ together...

(Drums and synth)

Jona: But yeah, I think I listen to, like, this whole progression on loop for an hour straight. Do you remember that?

Claire: Yeah, I mean everything you make you listen to on loop. When you first wrote that, you would just sit at your computer listening to it, like so happy.

Jona: [laughter]

(Drum and synth loop)

Claire: We record at home.

Jona: Yeah.

Claire: In, like, Jona's office.

(Drums and synth)

Claire: I don't know, there's something about, like, living inside the music that you're making.

(Drums and synth)

Claire: I'll be, like, cooking dinner and this will be playing the loop for like an hour and a half.

Jona: Yeah.

Claire: And it becomes a domestic thing.

Jona: Yeah. Just like, I'll be folding laundry.

Claire: [laughter]

(Drums and synth fades)

Jona: I like to just tweak everything just a tiny bit so it gives it some character instead of just playing through. For instance, that bassline

(Bass)

Jona: Slowly modulates the entire time. Like, yeah.

(Bass)

Jona: I love, kind of, misusing the software; getting interesting results by just clicking on everything. Yeah, it's fun. We've only been in proper studios twice. Claire and I just went in and basically rented out the place without any engineers and we just engineered each other. We didn't really know what we were doing or how to use any of the equipment.

Claire: We were just kids [laughter].

Jona: [laughter] It's the first time that we really got to get a drum sound that we loved. The drums on this song, that come in at the last chorus are recycled from one of those sessions and they come in like this

(Drums)

Jona: It's funny too, they sound pretty shitty now that I'm listening to them soloed [laughter].

Claire: [laughter]

(Drums end)

Claire: This song is a lot about the difficulty of modern life and the superficiality of modern life, not to be too highfalutin about it.

(Instrumental)

Claire: How easy it is to be stuck in momentary trends and impulses and how much broader and more universal human suffering is on, like, a massive scale and also on just an interpersonal scale. Like, the chorus is all about family and it's maybe saying something a little bit different, which is that maybe technology also helps us articulate our suffering, as well as it does help us forget it. It's a pop song and no matter what we do, people will be like, "Oh, what a summer jam!" you know?

Jona: Yeah

(Instrumental ends)

Hrishikesh: And now, here's the full recording of "Plastic Soul."

("Plastic Soul" - by YACHT)

Hrishikesh: Visit songexploder.net for links to more info on YACHT. You'll also find a link to the Amanda Lear song that influenced them. You can find all the past episodes of the podcast, and subscribe to future episodes, at itunes.com/songexploder. You can also find Song Exploder on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. I send out mixtapes on Friday's on my newsletter. You can find links to all of these at songexploder.net. Song Exploder is a proud member of radiotopia from PRX. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway. Thanks for listening.