

**Song Exploder**  
**Siddhartha Khosla - Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)**  
**Episode 258**

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. I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

Just a quick note before we start, since this is an episode about a TV show: You know, Song Exploder is a podcast about creativity. We stand with the WGA, and SAG-AFTRA, and the creativity that those unions support. Okay. Here we go.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA)*

The "Skip Intro" button first got introduced to us through Netflix in 2017, and I know, a lot of people use it – including me. But if I can get into old-man, back-in-my-day mode for a second, I have so much fondness for the opening theme music for so many shows. It's a chance to set the mood for everything that you're about to see. One of the intros that I *never* skip is the animated opening title sequence for *Only Murders in the Building*, which is a Hulu show that debuted in August 2021, and now is in its third season. It was created by Steve Martin and John Hoffman, and it stars Steve Martin, Martin Short, and Selena Gomez. The three of them play neighbors who live in the same building in New York, and they're all obsessed with the same true crime podcast. And then when someone in their building gets murdered, they decide to start their own true crime podcast, and try and solve the mystery of who the killer is.

For this episode, I talked to composer Siddhartha Khosla about the show's theme music. Coming up, you'll hear a voice memo that Siddhartha recorded before he'd even heard about the show, which then led to a demo that you'll hear, and then, eventually, the final theme.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA)*

Siddhartha: My name is Siddharthe Khosla, and I'm the composer for *Only Murders in the Building*.

I had spent six seasons working with Dan Fogelman, who created *This Is Us*.

Dan reached out to me and said, Hey, I want to get you in touch with John Hoffman, who's gonna be showrunning the show, and co-created *Only Murders* with Steve Martin. Let's just see if you guys hit it off. And in the meantime, I'm gonna send you a script, and see what you think.

And it totally blew me away. It was funny, it was dramatic. It was deeper than, sort of, your normal comedy. I wrote a note back to Dan: "*Only Murders is magic.*" And that led to my meeting with John Hoffman.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - piano demo idea)*

We were firmly, you know, in the pandemic at that point. And a lot of productions had stopped for this period. And I'd decided to write my own sort of instrumental classical record.

I'm not a classically trained musician. I grew up singing as a kid, like old Hindi songs. I was in a band. But I don't have the classical music chops.

And so, I wanted to start writing so I could also get over that hump, any insecurity that I have about my own ability. And so, I wrote all this music, over a two or three month period, while everything stopped. And I played some of that stuff for John in my meeting, on the piano.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - piano demo idea)*

I just noodled and played a couple things.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - piano demo idea)*

He was like, this is exactly the tone of my show.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - piano demo idea)*

That's my main theme right there.

And I was shocked. I was like, really? I was like, that can't be it, John. He's like, no, that's it. It makes me feel happy. It makes me feel sad. I feel mystery. I feel comedy, I feel intrigue. It feels very New York to me. And I want you to finish it.

This is really a story about three disparate souls that live in an apartment building in New York City.

It's three people trying to find connection. Three people who are also incredibly lonely, in their own way, and this podcast that they create. It's really about their emotional connection.

And so, if I score the music based on that underlying need for connection, then it sort of makes the mystery and the drama that much more powerful when you see it unfold.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - vocal clip)*

Old Hindi music, music my parents brought to this country when they came here, and I lived in India as a kid... If you listen to that music, it's all about the melody.

And so I grew up dreaming in melody, and thinking in melody, and writing in melody. So this had that, the (sings) "Da-da-da, da-da-da-da-da-da."

It was also a very Indian melody. Like, I could sing it with like, Indian inflection. (Sings) "Na-na-na, naaa, naaa," like, you could do stuff like that, if you wanted to, to it.

So the vocals that you hear are my vocals:

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - vocal stem)*

And then, there's a mellotron that I use.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - mellotron)*

It's a digital mellotron. It's like, it's got these Beatles-y sort of like sounds to 'em.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - add piano)*

I also was proud of the chord changes in there. Each phrase ends in the major or minor version of the next chord that follows. So like, the first phrase ends on G Major, and right after that G major, I go to a G minor.

And then D major to D minor.

It's an odd switch. And it becomes unsettling for a moment.

I'm also playing flute.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - flute)*

The flute was the first instrument I ever played, and so, I have one sitting around, and when I can, I just take it out and I just do stuff like that, where I can color something.

And it was all loose, it was free. I wasn't thinking about anything when I wrote that, except like, ah, let me be weird if I want to and not judge myself. And I'm jumping up and down, playing that flute like an idiot.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - flute)*

And so, I'm building this stuff at home in my studio. And I've got the mellotron, I got my vocals, I got the piano, I have my little fingers on a little snare drum.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - demo)*

What you're hearing right there... *that* is the very, very first little demo.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - demo)*

When I sent it to John, he came back and he goes, I love this, but how do we make this even more New York?

In our conversations, John would always talk about the dichotomy of rich and poor in New York City. That as you're walking down a block in New York City, you know, you see incredible amounts of wealth. And then you also see abject poverty.

Even in the Arconia, where everybody lives in the show, you have people that have been living there forever, who are paying hundreds of dollars a month in rent, versus people that are incredibly wealthy, that have these gorgeous apartments that are worth millions and millions of dollars. And so, how do you make this more New York?

I went back with my team and we were talking, and Alan, you know, at the time was my assistant. You know, we were sitting and chatting and he said, well, what if we made it sound like a, a homeless guy in the subway, playing along? Wouldn't they be using, like, Home Depot paint buckets, or something? (chuckles).

And I was like, oh, that's a great idea. And immediately when he said that I reached out to James McAlister, who is one of my favorite drummers. He plays with The National, he plays with Sufjan Stevens, and played on at like the last, at least the last Taylor Swift record.

And I told James the concept. I think he was in a cabin somewhere, he's like, but I got some microphones. There's some paint buckets in, like, the garage over here somewhere. I said, yes. Find what you've got.

He went out into the woods. Collected a bunch of twigs and tied them together to make drumsticks out of them. He took some pots and pans, and he assembled a little drum kit, and it was awesome.

*(“Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)” by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - drums)*

These are James's paint buckets and pots and pans.

*(“Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)” by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - drums)*

I sent it back to John and the gang, and they were like, that's New York to me.

I started just sort of flirting around with what live orchestra might sound like.

And so, there's pizzicato cello in the mellotron also.

*(“Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)” by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - demo cello)*

And I was like, oh, I'm just gonna write parts that'll eventually get played by our orchestra.

*(“Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)” by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - orchestra stem)*

And then somehow in the final mix, we felt like, actually, some of that shitty-sounding cello feels cool. Leave it.

'Cause sometimes it's that combination of the live cello with that sort of fake cello together that feels cool.

It's the best feeling, is that, everyone signs off, studio, network, producers. We love it, great. And yeah, I thought I was done.

But when they did the animation sequence, they actually had done it to a different piece of music. It was some oldie song, with like vocals. I would've hoped that they would've cut the animation to the theme, because the timing is everything.

And so, the sequence that they sent me was twice as long as the demo. And they were like, don't worry, let's just loop it, And in my mind I was like, oh no, this is like not gonna work.

You can't just double up on the theme. It's, it's gonna get so repetitive, and it needs more movement. It needs more movement.

And so, now I'm going to add one more round of the melody.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA)*

And we are going to reorchestrate the back half. So it feels like we intended to do that.

So at the end of the main theme, you hear these screeches.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - "screeches")*

And in my mind, it's a cat discovering, like, danger. And with my voice, I actually sang (sings) "LA - ah!"

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - "screeches")*

(sings) "HA - ah!"

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - "screeches")*

And then I pitched it up like two or three octaves,

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - "screeches" from demo)*

And it sounds so ridiculous.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - "screeches" from demo)*

And then we had the violins try to recreate that.

*("Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)" by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA - demo violins)*

And it's just a random thing of me pretending I was a cat discovering a dead body.

Up until the mix, I was making changes to this. And they probably didn't even realize all the stuff I had done, they were like, oh, cool, cool, cool, yeah.

But things just happened to work out on this show. So in our pilot episode, Julie Monroe, who was editing it, she goes, Sidd, every time there's a clue, every time somebody discovers something, I want to hear the (sings) "Da-da-da, da-da-da-da-da-da." I want to hear that *there*.

*(“Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)” by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA)*

And somehow, the phrasing always seems to work, when we drop it in.

And so, the presence of that melody... if you closed your eyes and you watched the show, the score can also tell you a little bit about what's happening.

It's a beautiful collaboration, that show. It's unlike anything I've experienced before.

Hrishikesh: Coming up, you'll hear how all of these ideas and elements came together in the final piece.

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And now, here's the main title theme for *Only Murders in the Building*, in its entirety.

*(“Only Murders in the Building (Main Title Theme)” by SIDDHARTHA KHOSLA)*

Visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) to learn more. You'll find links to buy or stream the *Only Murders* theme song, and you can watch the opening title sequence from season one.

If you liked this episode, there are a lot of other TV theme song episodes that you could check out next. One of the very first episodes that I made of Song Exploder is from 2014, about the Bob's Burgers theme song. That was back before the “Skip Intro” button existed. You'll find that, and all the other episodes of the podcast, at [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net), or wherever you listen.

Song Exploder is produced by me, Craig Eley, Kathleen Smith, and Mary Dolan. The episode artwork is by Carlos Lerma, and I made the show's theme music and logo.

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I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Thanks for listening.

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