

**Song Exploder**  
**Raye - Escapism (feat. 070 Shake)**  
**Episode 264**

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.

This episode contains explicit language and references to drug use.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE)*

Raye is a singer, songwriter and producer from London. Besides being an artist in her own right, she's also been a songwriter for other artists since she was a teenager. She's co-written songs for Beyoncé, Charli XCX, and Ellie Goulding. In 2023, she released her debut album. It's called My 21st Century Blues. The first single, "Escapism," became her first song to hit #1 in the UK. It's gone platinum in the US, the UK, and seven other countries. And it features guest vocals from 070 Shake.

When Raye was here in LA on tour, I talked to her about how she made "Escapism," and what inspired it.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE)*

*(Vocals: "I don't wanna feel how I did last night / I don't wanna feel how I did last night / Doctor, doctor, anything, please / Doctor, doctor, have mercy on me, take this pain away / You're asking me my symptoms, doctor, I don't wanna feel, mm")*

Raye: My name is Raye.

*(music fades out)*

I was with Mike Sabath, a producer, one of my best friends. And I was like, We need to go to the middle of nowhere, and write the rest of the songs for this album. So we were getting ready, and we packed Mike's car full of gear, and we set off on, like, a drive from LA to Utah. It was really cold and lovely. We went to this little log cabin, and then got ready to wake up the next day and start writing some songs.

I had split with my label.

Hrishikesh: Mm-hmm.

Raye: And I'd kind of got my head around some of the shit that I went through, and landed in a positive mindset of, *Okay, I'm going to make the album that I always wanted to make.*

Hrishikesh: What was the situation with the old label, and what you were doing versus what you wanted to do?

Raye: I think in the UK, and especially at the time, it's all about having hits, and specifically with dance music.

I was explicitly told, you know, Until you have more big hits, you can't do your album.

So then I went on this whole journey of trying to do that.

Hrishikesh: Just trying to make music that would be commercially successful?

Raye: Exactly. So I did that — I did that for years! And I absolutely *hated* it.

Hrishikesh: You were writing those songs, though...

Raye: I was creating within confines. You know, you get a brief; you get the boundaries in which you need to create. So I was ashamed of the artist that I was, at that point in time.

I hit my breaking point of like, I can't do this anymore. I've wanted to be a musician since I was seven years old. It's the only goal I've had in my life. But I got pushed to the point where I was like, I'll give up. Because, fuck this, this is horrible [laughs].

So, I became independent. And it happened very quick.

And so, when the time came that I was like, okay, I'm ready to like, put an album together, I was like, Mike... Let's do it. I'm ready now.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - synths)*

And then I remember Mike played me this beat, with synth strings... into the drums.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - add drums)*

... and this piano.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - add piano)*

And I was like, *Turn it up, turn it up!* We maxed out the volume, and I'm bopping my head to these drums. I'm like, Oh my god, this shit is *fire*.

*(music ends)*

Hrishikesh: Can you tell me about Mike; you said he was your best friend?

Raye: Yeah, he's one of my best mates. I always say we met before Mike had facial hair. I think we were both 19 or 20, something like that. It was like a little songwriting camp, and Mike was there, and I walked into the room and he was making this beat that nearly made me throw up –

Hrishikesh: Because it was so good?

Raye: Because it was so good, yeah. It was a *disgusting* beat. You know what I mean? Like [makes gagging noises] *uh!* What the *uh!* It was amazing.

From then we really clicked, and we'd started making songs together.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - synths, piano)*

I'd written lots of titles of songs; of stories that I knew I wanted to tell. And I had the title "Escapism." Just needed the right sonic bed to lie those lyrics in.

So when I heard the beat,

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - add drums)*

I was like, oh shit, it's time for this song.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - music lowers)*

Hrishikesh: What was the feeling you got from the beat, and what was the feeling of the story that you wanted to tell?

*(music fades out)*

Raye: 2019 was a really dark year. I'd kind of cut out the people in my life that cared. I didn't see my parents at all that year. I like, didn't talk to my sisters, my friends, my real friends. And was just trying to feel anything other than how I actually felt.

You know, and to be completely candid... being a suppressed artist; combine that with drugs, and a sprinkle of alcohol... You get what is my definition of escapism.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - synths)*

I remember being out one of these nights, and I was literally in a car with..... I didn't know any of these people, none of them gave a shit about me. I don't even think they knew my name, d'you know what I mean? And they're just there in the back doing lines. And they're like, Oh my God, we're gonna go to this place! And I'm like, Cool! Like, Where am I?

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - synths fade out)*

I just wanted to create that picture.

And so the first part that I wrote was. "Just a heartbroke bitch, high heels, six inch..."

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE)*

*(Vocals: "...High heels, six inch / In the back of the nightclub, sippin' champagne / I don't trust any of these bitches I'm with / In the back of the taxi, sniffin' cocaine")*

I think the conscious decision you have to make, especially when you want to create something a bit more honest or personal, is the wrestle between lyricism and melody.

You know, you want melody, you want it to have catchiness, you want people to be able to connect to the melodies, but I'm a lyrics girl. Like, for me, the story or painting the picture, like I want you to close your eyes and see it all in your head..

I kind of chose one note. So in that, I'm prioritizing the lyric.

It's not like, [sings] *"There's a heartbroke bitch, high heels six inch."* It's like, I don't want you to *sing* it. I want the lyric to be the priority over the melody. *"Da da da da, da-na na na na na. One note, one note, all about the story..."*

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE)*

*(Vocals: "Drunk calls, drunk texts, drunk tears, drunk sex / I was lookin' for a man who was on the same page")*

*\*add other instruments\**

*(Vocals: "Now it's back to the intro, back to the bar / To the Bentley, to the hotel, to my old ways")*

So you get a little [sings melody] *"La - LAY"* – little sprinkly melody thing at the end.

And then when you get to the chorus, that [sings] *"I don't wanna feel,"* you get a little sweet, emotional breath.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE)*

*(Vocals: "I don't wanna feel how I did last night")*

I don't want to feel reality. I don't want to feel honest feelings.

*(music continues)*

Those times are, for me, specific times in my life where you're just trying to run away from reality as fast as you can.

You'll take whatever is on the table; whatever's on offer; whatever you can get your hands on; wherever you can run.

*(music ends)*

Hrishikesh: Do you think that you could have written about this period in your life while you were in it? Or do you think you needed to have this many years' distance from it, to be able to write the song?

Raye: I think it's, it's complicated to say whether I could've. Because at the time, I didn't feel like I had permission to tell the truth in such an intense way.

Really, the artist that I've decided I want to be today is explicitly honest, no matter what. You know, I'd rather be explicitly, uncomfortably honest than glaze over the truth.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - vocals and piano)*

*(Vocals: "Last night really was the cherry on the cake / Been some dark days lately and I'm finding it crippling / Excuse my state, I'm as high as your hopes / That you'll make it to my bed, get me hot and sizzling / If I take a step back to see the glass half full / At least it's the Prada two-piece that I'm trippin' in")*

*(music ends)*

Hrishikesh: I wanted to ask you about this one part that I just love, and I didn't fully appreciate it until I got the stems:

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE)*

*(Isolated vocals: "Just a heartbroke bitch, high heels six inch / In the back of the nightclub, sippin' champagne")*

Raye: Ahhhh, the harmony?

Hrishikesh: Yeah. Can you tell me about writing that part?

Raye: Yeah. I do so many layers, and so many harmonies, and then it will be a case of: Take it out; That's not it; Take it out, oh, keep it there, it's nice over that one phrase.

We'd originally done a three-part, four-part harmony over that section, but it took away the kind of *grit* of it? It *softened* it. It didn't need to be soft.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - solo vocals)*

*(Vocals: "In the back of the taxi sniffing cocaine")*

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - add piano and vocal harmonies)*

*(Vocals: "Drunk calls, drunk texts, drunk tears, drunk sex) / (I was looking for a man who was on the same page) / Now it's back to the intro (oooh-oooh) (back to the bar, to the Bentley, to the hotel, to my old ways")*

Juxtaposition is something I love in music. If you was to really zone into the lyrics, you'd be like oh, shit, this is a sad story. But musically, it's the opposite thing.

So we went back to L.A.

I remember listening back to all the demos we'd made, and "Escapism" was my favorite. I *loved* it, so much. But it had a lot of work to do. I had way more things I needed to add. We needed to take the production to the next level.

And so, we woke up one morning. We were kind of all slept at the studio, and we'd been there for a couple of days. I woke up, hadn't showered, I was just like, *Can we just play "Escapism" really quickly?*

So there was a choir section; we were like, do we keep this in? Do we take it out? It was originally gonna be the outro. It was that bit, the [sings] *"I don't wanna feel how I did last night."*

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE)*

*(Solo vocals: "I don't wanna feel how I did last night / I don't wanna feel how I did last night / How I did, how I did, how I did last night")*

So we took this section and we kind of looped it round and round and round.

*(Vocal loop: "Night, night, night, night")*

And then done this thing where you can send it left; send it right; send it left.

*(Vocal loop: "Night, night, night, night")*

When you've got headphones on, it'll rotate between ears. Like, this feels so good.

*(Vocal loop: "Night, night, night, night")*

*(music ends)*

I was like, we can't end it here. Like, we just gotta keep going.

And Mike's like, *Whoa, I got a great idea.*

He'd like, voice-noted some thunder that he heard.

*(rain sounds fade in)*

He'd held his phone up during a thunderstorm.

*(thunder stem)*

He's like, *We gotta add this thunder in.* I'm like, *You're sick.*

And I was like, fuck it. Let's do a key change! Just pitch shift everything.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE)*

*(Vocals: "You're asking me my symptoms, doctor, I don't wanna feel")*

*(thunder followed by key change)*

*(Vocals: "I don't wanna feel how I did last night")*

*(synth)*

I was just gassed all over again.

*(synths continue)*

That bit at the end made me just imagine this blurry chaos just coming to a head. Musically, that's what it sounded like to me.

*(synths end)*

And then I was like, like, I need to rap at the end! I was like, fuck it, I don't care. I wanna rap at the end... [Laughs]

So, in the morning, in my pajamas, just in the mic, like, [raps] *"Lipstick smudged, like modern art,"* trying to figure out the right little eight bars to go in there.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE)*

*(Vocals: "Lipstick smudged like modern art / I don't know where the fuck I am or who's drivin' the fuckin' car / Speedin' down the highway, sippin' / Mixin' pills with the liquor 'cah fuck these feelings / I left everyone I love on read / Spilling secrets to the stranger in my bed (uh-huh) / I remember nothing, so there's nothing to regret / Other than this 4-4 kick drum poundin' in my head, mm")*

Hrishikesh: I feel like it's a story of someone who's having a really bad night, dressed up as a good night...

Raye: Yes.

Hrishikesh: ... and it just gets worse and worse and worse.

Raye: Absolutely. It *is* a bad night. But you don't *realize* it's a bad night, because you're in the product of escapism.

You're standing on top of the bar, screaming and singing lyrics, both hands in the air. You're in a car, with your hands out the windows, like I'm in a movie, like... Obviously it's not a good night, but it *feels* like it is.

The last thing that happened with the song is getting 070 Shake's vocal.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - synths plus vocals)*

*(070 Shake vocals: "Out of reach, out of touch, too numb, I don't feel no way")*

Her name is Dani, but she goes by 070 Shake. And she's one of the, in my opinion, greatest artists making music today.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - synths plus vocals)*

*(070 Shake vocals: "Yes I don't wanna feel like I felt last night / I don't wanna feel like I felt last night / Be at peace with the things you can't change (last night) / I'll be naked when I leave and I was naked when I came, yeah")*

I met her a couple of years before and, you know, when she was like, *Oh, you know, what music do you make?* Or whatever. I was like, *Don't listen to anything that's released. You know, like, DON'T.* I really wanted her to think that I was good. Because I was such a fan of her.

This was around the time... two, three months before I went independent.

I FaceTimed her and we're talking and I was like, I was just explaining how, what a tough time I was having, and how I was really struggling. And... and her perspective is: Raye, like, nothing else matters but the music. None of these other things matter.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE)*

*(070 Shake vocals: "Toast up, so what? Street small, but it go both ways / So you'll run, yeah, but you'll never escape / Sunset in the maze")*

*(Raye vocals: "You're asking me my symptoms, doctor, I don't wanna feel) / I don't wanna feel how I did last night / I don't wanna feel how I did last night, oh / Doctor, doctor, anything, please / Doctor, doctor, have mercy on me")*

Hrishikesh: Is it ever hard for you to listen to this song, because you did *too good* of a job capturing the experience of what was a darker time in your life?

Raye: I don't think I could have handled that story if the music didn't feel how it did.

I think that's the whole point of what escapism is; it's transcending above your sadness or your pain for a moment in time. And that's what I needed this song to feel like.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - piano, synths)*

It could never have been a ballad; sad piano and strings and freaking sprawled out on the bathroom floor cryin', you know what I mean? That would have been so sad. And that wouldn't have been honest; that's not how I would want to hear an emotion like that.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE - add drums, mellotron flute)*



And I think some people just like the song. So, to anyone who just wants to listen and feel nice, just play it. But to anyone who actually needs to acknowledge their pain, or the people who empathized, maybe, or listened a bit more to the lyrics in detail, and found that they really related, and needed it... Like that, I think that's the whole point, isn't it?

I don't know how, but it makes something beautiful, and so powerful, out of something so ugly. And that is something that I'm proud of.

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

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And now, here's "Escapism," by Raye featuring 070 Shake, in its entirety.

*("Escapism" (feat. 070 Shake) by RAYE)*

For more info, visit [songexploder.net/raye](http://songexploder.net/raye). You'll find links to buy or stream "Escapism."

And if you liked this episode, you might like Christine and the Queens' episode from 2018. Christine and the Queens and 070 Shake have also collaborated together. You can find a link to that episode in the show notes.

This episode was produced by Craig Eley, Theo Balcomb, Kathleen Smith, Mary Dolan, and me. 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.