

**Song Exploder**  
**Fall Out Boy - Sugar, We're Goin Down**  
**Episode 297**

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.

Fall Out Boy is a band from Chicago that formed in 2001. Their first album, *Take This To Your Grave*, was a hit, especially in the punk rock world. When they put out their second album, though, in 2005, that was on a whole other scale. That album is called *From Under the Cork Tree*, and it went double platinum, and they were nominated for a Grammy for Best New Artist. For this episode, I talked to the band's singer, Patrick Stump, about how they made their breakout hit from that album, the song "Sugar, We're Goin Down."

*("Sugar, We're Goin Down" by FALL OUT BOY)*

*(Vocals: "We're going down, down in an earlier round / And sugar, we're going down swinging / I'll be your number one with a bullet / A loaded god complex, cock it and pull it / We're going down, down in an earlier round / And sugar, we're going down swinging / I'll be your number one with a bullet / A loaded god complex, cock it and pull it")*

Hrishikesh: Could you just say your name and your role in the band?

Patrick: I'm Patrick Stump and I sing and play guitar and a lot of other instruments and write a lot of the music for Fall Out Boy.

Hrishikesh: And who else is in the band?

Patrick: Pete Wentz, who plays bass, and he writes a lot of the lyrics. Joe Trohman, who plays guitar, and Andy Hurley, who plays drums.

Hrishikesh: How did you guys get started?

Patrick: So, the band kind of happened by accident. Both Pete and Andy had pretty serious full-time hardcore bands. And I'd never sung before. I'd never played guitar, anything other than drums before, in a band.

Hrishikesh: Mm.

Patrick: The kind of gag was, we were gonna do a pop punk band, but kind of it was for fun. 'Cause again, these were, everybody had like, what we all thought of as real bands, you know?

And then the band started kind of taking off and it was really fun. And I remember telling my parents, you know, okay, so I think I'm gonna take this semester off.

And the whole time, my parents are like, wait, you sing? (laughs)

Hrishikesh: (laughs)

Patrick: Like, you know, because it's like, I'd never sung before in my life, you know. And they're like, wait, the band where you sing, that's the one you're not going to school... You know. My parents believed in me, but they were kind of shocked. Like, that doesn't really sound like you, but okay.

And then we got offered a record deal with Fueled by Ramen. And basically, they said if you sell 350,000 copies of this record, then, you know, the way this deal is structured, then you might have to talk to, like, a major label. And I was like, that has never happened. But then we got struck by lightning, and *Take This To Your Grave*, the album *Take This To Your Grave*, did really well and it sold 350,000 copies.

And now we kind of have to contractually talk to Island Records about making a major label debut. And that was kind of where we were, was figuring out how to do that. (chuckles)

So, we had to make the big record for the big major label. But then also, I, personally, was kind of, I, I kind of had this very fatalistic take on everything where I'm like, this is going to fail. Just statistically, like, not even being negative about it, like that's how this plays out. Every band that I knew that got signed, that's what happened.

One of my favorite bands was this band, The Blue Meanies, in Chicago. And they were like, huge locally. They put out these two records that, you know, it was just this upward trajectory, and then they got signed to the major label, and it tanked, and they disappeared.

But there was this part of me, I don't know, this was this very silly part of me that's like, well, what if we don't? What if it does succeed?

Hrishikesh: I could imagine being faced with that situation of, you know, now you have to make your big record, that, for some people, it would be really intimidating and make them, you know, kind of hide away, or get intimidated into writer's block or something like that, but the way that you're describing it, that there's a, a certainty that this was gonna be the last thing, that in some ways, it could be really liberating.

Patrick: Well, yeah, absolutely. My, my dad is a folk singer, right? And he kicked around for like 10 years trying to make it, and it didn't really happen.

Hrishikesh: Did he put out records?

Patrick: No, and that was actually a big thing to me, was that he'd never put out a record and he never went on tour as, as a performer.

Hrishikesh: Yeah.

Patrick: So I was like, I want to do that. And there was this extra added thing to it where it was like, it wasn't just for me, it was like, you know, the people around me had been wanting this exact thing for forever, and it's like, okay, well now, you know. The pressure's on. (laughs)

Hrishikesh: Did you have an initial sense of how your process was gonna have to change from the previous album to this new one you were about to make?

Patrick: So, *Take This To Your Grave* was recorded as three different recordings over the span of like a year.

Hrishikesh: Mm-hmm.

Patrick: And at the beginning of it, we were kind of this, like, pop punk band/side project that I didn't take seriously.

And I was the lyricist, I was the, you know, songwriter, kind of. So I was writing the songs all together. And I was like, I'll just write some pop punk stuff. I'll write very kind of like just, oh, this is a silly, fun pop punk song. And so I wasn't gonna give us like, my *good* lyrics, you know?

Hrishikesh: (chuckles)

Patrick: And Pete didn't like that. It just irked him. He wasn't like, mean about it, but he's like, "I just can't, we need to take this more serious-", I need to take this more seriously. Like, he would've trusted me to write the lyrics, but it really disturbed him that I would ever half-ass that. (laughs)

Hrishikesh: Mmm.

Patrick: And he was like, "No, no, no, no, no, no. Here, this", and he started sending me lyrics. The way Pete would write lyrics was not related to a song in any way. It was just words. It was just one-liners. My dad had this coffee table book of like, Yogi Berra quotes, and it was kind of like that.

Hrishikesh: (laughs)

Patrick: Where it was just like, thought, thought, thought, thought, thought.

And there's a couple songs on *Take This To Your Grave* that, by the end of the recording, I had gotten so fed up with the kind of minutia of like, changing every individual word that I was like, just gimme words, and I will write around that. I had had a song, the opening song on, on *Take This To Your Grave*, I had written a completely other lyric to it.

The entire lyric was different. And that one, Pete made me change the entirety of it.

Hrishikesh: Mm.

Patrick: From start to finish. Which was incredibly difficult, like astoundingly, extraordinarily difficult, to go through each of these sections of songs that had, you know, emphasis and syllable structure that was like really kind of stuck now.

But now I had to put somebody else's words into it that didn't even have a rhyme scheme, (chuckles) you know?

Hrishikesh: Yeah.

Patrick: And uh, it was incredibly, it was like, really, really hard. The song came out great, the record came out great, but I'm like, I am never doing that again.

Hrishikesh: Was it hard technically? Or was it hard emotionally?

Patrick: Yes.

Hrishikesh: (chuckles)

Patrick: Yeah, both. It was, it was hard both emotionally and technically. Because emotionally, you know, the ego of like, of like, okay, no, but I *am* a lyricist! I know I was giving you my, like, D material, but like, I can write good stuff! But at that point it was like, I crashed the car and it's like, well, okay, we're gonna take the keys away.

Hrishikesh: Yeah.

Patrick: So that really hurt emotionally. But then structurally, just like logistically, it's very, very, very difficult. And Pete, he's inspired when he is inspired. So he's not the

guy that you're gonna say, okay, I need two syllables that rhyme with family, and he's like, okay. I would say that. And then he would send me like, six paragraphs, you know, like, whatever. And, none of it really ended with a definite E sound, you know?

Hrishikesh: Yeah.

Patrick: So it was like he didn't really work that way. So going into *Cork Tree*, I was like, I'm gonna start with his lyrics.

So he started giving me, he would just like rip pages out of his notebook and hand them to me after he had written enough. And I would grab his lyrics and I'd start just kind of sifting through 'em, and be like, okay, well this could go here with this, could go here with this.

Hrishikesh: Did you talk to Pete about the meaning of his words or what was inspiring his words when you would go to build a song around them?

Patrick: No. He is a closed book about that. I don't think it's, like, intentional. I think his lyrics are like how he thinks and talks. He can't explain it any more; that's how he would explain it. And, you know, Pete was a little bit older than me. He had been in, in a real band, as far as I was concerned.

Hrishikesh: Yeah.

Patrick: So I felt uncomfortable questioning him, you know.

Hrishikesh: So, with "Sugar, We're Going Down," how did that first start?

Patrick: So "Sugar" was built around this really gentle kind of verse.

*(acoustic demo - vocals: "Shut your mouth / You know what you'd say / Besides, I write you better than you write yourself anyway / This is my interrogation / And I'm asking all the questions / Forget what you heard / This is a dance craze")*

You know, I have this idea for this like, slower song, this like more mellow song.

So, we're on the road and I was just writing. And in fact, I remember the day that I wrote the chorus of "Sugar."

It was in, like, Orange or Orangevale or something. I don't know, somewhere in California, this venue. And there wasn't really a backstage. There was like an office across the parking lot. And I was sitting on the floor with Pete's lyrics and somebody's acoustic guitar. I'm reading his lyrics and, and just kind of just going

through it.

And it got to the part of "*Drop a heart / Break a name.*" And that grabbed me and I was like, oh, I like that, you know?

Not really thinking about what it actually meant, just I like that it's wordplay.

*(acoustic demo - vocals: "Drop a heart, break a name / We're always sleeping in and sleeping for the wrong team")*

So I go to the next part, which feels to me like it probably wants to be some kind of chorus, I start kind of singing what's there. His lyric was, "We're going down in the earlier rounds," but it doesn't really fit, and doesn't really rhyme yet.

Hrishikesh: Hmm.

Patrick: And I kind of said to myself, well, okay, we'll figure out how to fix that.

Hrishikesh: So, you didn't talk to Pete about his ideas of what the meaning was behind the, the words that he was giving you.

Patrick: Mm-hmm.

Hrishikesh: Would you imbue the words with your own meaning? Like, was there a story that was forming for you?

Patrick: Well, I mean, I just kind of thought it was, uh, a couple kind of falling apart, but, you know, trying as hard as they could to hold it together. And that was kind of where I was coming from in putting it together, you know?

Hrishikesh: Yeah.

Patrick: And at that point, I kind of had this skeleton of a song. But that verse, um, it's not in the song anymore. (chuckles)

Hrishikesh: What happened? Why did it go away?

Patrick: So, we were talking to producers. We had recorded with Sean O'Keefe, who produced *Take This To Your Grave*. And Sean was a big part of us becoming who we were because Sean also, in a similar way to Pete, would not put up with us half-assing it.

Hrishikesh: Mm-hm.

Patrick: And we were really happy with the recording we'd done with Sean. Sean was very unproven, though. He had never done a major label record at that time. But we really fought for him. The thing that was really funny was, we're fighting with Island Records. We're like, "Hey, we need to go with Sean. It needs to be Sean."

And Sean is a, is a dear friend of mine, so this is not, he will say this: Sean really did not wanna. He really didn't like pop punk. It was not, he could not have wanted to do something less than doing a Fall Out Boy record. It was because we were friends that he did it. He's a real deal producer. and this was where he was at the time. He did not want to be doing this band. I, I had never sung before. You know, I sang one album and now I'm a singer, but I didn't know what I was doing. I'd never played guitar before. I'd been playing guitar for maybe a year. So we weren't really up to snuff, you know.

And he, he comes and he sits me down and he goes, "Patrick, these songs. These are good. These are very good. You are not good enough to play them."

Hrishikesh: (chuckles)

Patrick: (laughs) And, and he is like, "I don't want to make this. I don't want to be the guy that makes this." And I was like, oh no. (laughs)

Hrishikesh: More with Patrick Stump from Fall Out Boy after this.

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Patrick: So now we don't have our producer. Then the whole thing changed, and now we had to go *meet* producers.

And we saw everybody. We saw every producer that did big, major-label, rock records, and no one wanted us. Absolutely no one wanted us. Because they hear my voice and they think that this is what I sound like. Not knowing –and by the way, I didn't know either– that apparently I could sing better than that.

Hrishikesh: Mm-hmm.

Patrick: But we kept sending things around, and we did send something to Neal Avron, and Neal called us and he said, I don't know about your last record, but I really like these songs. There was a demo. He's like, I really like this "Sugar" song. So we talked and we met up and right away I think Pete was impressed with the way that Neal was, like, very serious about recording. And I think Neal was like, okay, you know, he saw us live and he was like, I think there's something here live.

I think Patrick can sing. I think Andy's a really good drummer. I think Pete has this, like, energy, like Joe's a great guitar player. I think there's a thing here. I can make something out of this.

So, we go out to Los Angeles and we do pre-production with Neal. And it was this very different experience for us, because there would be whole sections of songs where he wouldn't say anything, he'd be like, that's great.

But when it wasn't great, he'd be like, that. We need to, like, take this apart entirely. down to the finest details of like, what's the kick snare pattern here? What's the guitar accent pattern, whatever.

"Sugar," we get in. And he, he really didn't touch anything except the verse. He goes, "The verse doesn't work."

Hrishikesh: Hmm.

Patrick: And I didn't like that. I was like, really? This was the whole point of the song to me, was this, like, weird chord verse.

Hrishikesh: Yeah.

Patrick: He's like, "It doesn't work."

He's like, "All the rest of the song feels energetic. The verse feels like you're asleep." And he's like, "I think this song can be something, but it can't be something with this verse."

And he made us try it every different way. And I think I even kind of like passive aggressively was like, fine, whatever. At some point, you know, I think I took it kind of hard at one point where I'm like, fine, you know, I'll play whatever you want, you know. But he was having us kind of just imagine grooves that could go there.

Hrishikesh: Hmm.

Patrick: It was really tough. We have never jammed as a band before or since. This is like the only time. 'Cause that's not really the way that any of us work.

But there was this thing that Neal was hitting on where he's like, I wanna maintain the energy, but the song really can't change tempo. So, at some point he goes, okay. Andy, why don't you do like a four on the floor, just count?  
(imitates drum pattern)



*(kick drum loop)*

It's a fairly simple chord structure to the rest of the song. So then Pete and I start kind of experimenting with those chords over that groove.

*(add bass)*

And then Joe came up with that (imitates guitar part) "*Dah, ba-da-dah, ba-da, da-ba-da, dah.*"

*(add Joe's guitar)*

I started doing this rhythmic cutting of my volume on my guitar. So (sings) "*Meh, eh, eh...*"

*(add Patrick's guitar)*

And with that groove, it really started to lock into place.

*(full instrumental)*

Hrishikesh: Was it just the music that was changing or were the lyrics changing as well?

Patrick: I think Neal (chuckles) was kind of slow walking that, 'cause I think he knew that he wanted the entire thing to change. I think I was pretty, I was pretty precious about it. I was like, "I really like this part." And Neal was like, "I think it needs more than that."

So we just recorded us jamming that verse. And Neal sent me home with that, sent me, well, "home," to the extended stay apartments in Los Angeles. And he was like, "See what you come up with."

So I took a bunch of Pete's lyrics and just sat with it and listened over and over again and, like, saw what I could put where. But the strange thing was, because of Pete's lyrics and, like I said, they didn't ever fit in the way that like, you know, a normal rhyme scheme would. They don't really read like poetry. They read like a really strange manifesto or something, you know?

Hrishikesh: (chuckles)

Patrick: Because of that, this kind of run-on sentence nature of it, I started with this kind of nursery rhyme element (sings melody) "*Nah-dah-dah-dah-dah-dah-dah.*"

*(Vocals: "Am I more than you bargained for yet?")*

But then, I have to fit this next line.

*(Vocals: "I've been dying to tell you anything you wanna hear")*

I don't... How would you repeat that, even, you know? It's just (hums melody)  
You know, it's just, it never, never repeats anything.

*(Vocals: "Cause that's just who I am this week / Lie in the grass next to the mausoleum")*

So it's like, it started with this very, very simplistic setup, but by necessity, it got really complicated. But that did it. That really did it. That was like where it all came together, there.

*(add bass and guitars)*

*(Vocals: "Am I more than you bargained for yet? / I've been dying to tell you anything you wanna hear / 'Cause that's just who I am this week / Lie in the grass next to the mausoleum / I'm just a notch in your bedpost, but you're just a line in a song")*

Neal is really funny. He's one of the most judicious producers I've ever met, where when something doesn't need anything, he will not add anything.

Which was not what we had done before, with Sean. We were layering a lot.

Neal was like, "I prefer to mix less things". And so, that was much more difficult, honestly. Because the more layers of things that you lay in, the more that your little pockets of mistakes kind of get softened out.

So there's not a lot of guitar. I remember like the biggest musical thing that we added there was, the second verse has the, it's very subtle, you can barely hear it, but there's some piano there.

*(piano)*

I sat at the piano and it was one of those things where I had, in true Patrick fashion, I had much more ornate stuff.

And Neal would pick parts out and go like, "Now just do this. Now take this out. Now take this out." Until it was this thing that really just complimented the vocal.

*(piano and vocals: "Is this more than you bargained for yet? / Oh, don't mind me, I'm watching you two from the closet / Wishing to be the friction in your jeans")*

(drums)

We spent forever on those drums. Neal was very, very meticulous. Andy was very meticulous. And uh, there's a guy, Mike Fasano. He's set up and tuned drums for Neal on all of the records we've done with Neal. And he would bring out this collection of drums that he had.

He had this whole case of snares, and I wanna say maybe that snare was the "November Rain" snare. He ended up with the snare that was on "November Rain."

(more drums)

So, I write the song around Pete's words, but I don't ever clarify what the words are gonna be in the chorus. Because Pete's words are, "We're going down in the earlier rounds." But that doesn't sing right. That doesn't sing the way I want it to.

But any of the things that I can come up with don't mean the thing that he wants it to mean.

So I settled on "We're going down, down, in an earlier round." And I managed to get a syllable out of that. Um, and I thought it was catchy and I liked it, but that's not Pete's lyrics. So I didn't really wanna confidently say that.

And so I was kind of just mumbling it. I come from a long line of mumblers,

Hrishikesh: (laughs)

Patrick: So I, I take full responsibility for that. But it was doomed from the start, in that regard, because, you know, maybe I don't always enunciate clearly, sometimes my accent comes out and I just sort of, whatever.

But then, on top of that, I don't know confidently what I should be singing here, lyrically.

Hrishikesh: Even as you're going into the actual lead vocal recording?

Patrick: Yes. So, it was like this perfect confluence of everything, where it was just like, (imitates vague singing). And I was just like, I hope no one notices, you know what I mean? (laughs)

(vocals: "We're going down, down in an earlier round / And sugar, we're going down swinging / I'll be your number one with a bullet / A loaded god complex, cock it and pull it")

Hrishikesh: And Pete didn't mind that the lyrics weren't the most, maybe, clearly enunciated?

Patrick: Pete had this interesting way of, 'cause he, because in hardcore, kind of famously, you can't always hear the lyrics, you know. A lot of times it's distorted. You're screaming.

Hrishikesh: Yeah.

Patrick: So Pete had had this kind of funny perspective on lyrics where he is like, it doesn't really matter what I sing. You just write whatever you mean in the lyric sheet. He was gonna fix it in post, being the lyric sheet. (laughs)

Hrishikesh: There are also some backing vocal parts that happen,

Patrick: Mm-hmm.

Hrishikesh: How did those come about?

Patrick: Like I said, uh, Neal had this kind of idea of not really doing anything unless we needed it. We got to the chorus and, you know, he was like, there's, we're missing something here. It needs to explode in a way that it's not. And I typically would wanna do harmonies. And we started trying that, and Neal was like, this sounds like a barbershop. This isn't right.

Hrishikesh: Mm.

Patrick: One of the ways that I ended up working with Sean and becoming a singer in the first place was that, there was a band, Knockout, who we were friends with. And they asked me to come sing backups on a song. And this is back before Take This To Your Grave. And one of the things that I found, is that I had a pretty big lung capacity and I could just hold out these notes, these belt notes I could hold for a really long time.

So I'm in the booth doing "Sugar," and Neal and I are trying to figure out what we do to add there to make it erupt when the chorus hits.

And I was like, I could try that. I could try my, my big, "Ahh," you know, whatever and see how long I hold that. And he's like, okay, let's see.

*(backing vocals: "Down, down in an earlier round (Ahh) / And sugar, we're going down swinging (Ahh) / I'll be your number one with a bullet (Ahh) / A loaded god complex, cock it and pull it (Ahh) / We're going down, down in an earlier round (Ahh) / And sugar, we're going down swinging (Ahh) / I'll be your number one with a bullet (Ahh) / A loaded god complex, cock it and*

*pull it (Ahh)"*

So we get through the song, we get to the end of the song. Now what? We didn't really have an end to the song. A friend of ours had said, you know, oh, you guys really can't do a song this slow. You really should do something faster. So that is the one spot of the song where it picks up. (imitates drums)

*(outro instrumental)*

And just kind of in the outro of that, I had picked up some more of Pete's lyrics and I started doing that. "Take aim at myself." I started doing that as the lead vocal there.

*(vocals: "(take aim at myself) / (take back what you said) / (take aim at myself)")*

And then, as we were doing the bridge, this big held-out part, we noticed that it needed to keep building. It couldn't just be this static thing.

And the idea came to, like, start building in the layers of these vocals, too.

*("A loaded god complex, cock it and pull it / We're going down, down in an earlier round (take aim at myself) / And sugar, we're going down swinging (take back what you said) / I'll be your number one with a bullet (take aim at myself) / A loaded god complex, cock it and pull it")*

Hrishikesh: Was there a specific moment where it really kind of sank in that you guys had taken a big step in your evolution?

Patrick: Honestly, the mixing. When we went to mix the record at Paramount Studios. There was something about being there and hearing it in a real mixing studio. You know, next door, there were real bands there. There were real artists there. They were mixing movies there. It was like, big stuff.

Hrishikesh: Yeah.

Patrick: And so, we're in the mains at Paramount. And so, you're hearing your stuff come out of that, and it was like, everything. It was impressive. It was scary. It was, you know, weird.

Hrishikesh: And what about after the song came out? Was there a moment where you realized that this song had changed things for you?

Patrick: So TRL was a thing that existed and predated us.

Hrishikesh: TRL, Total Request Live on MTV.

Patrick: Yeah. So "Sugar" got in that way. As one of the fan, as the fan vote, right. And that I was like, okay, well, you know, our fans are just really excited. They're voting often, you know. (chuckles)

Hrishikesh: Yeah.

Patrick: And so we went out to New York and they had us on the show and whatever. It still felt very much, like, this probably isn't gonna last. Um, but then "Sugar" stayed in the chart there, then it, like, stayed at number one for a while. So they play our video for Times Square, right, and I remember iTunes had their iTunes chart, it ended up in the top 10. And that was like, oh no, you know, I'm not going to college now, am I? You know, it just, like, that was weird. It was a very weird experience to, like, suddenly be, accidental big shot, you know. (chuckles)

I just felt the whole time, any minute now, somebody's gonna come in and be like, "Wait a second. Not these guys, they don't belong in here."

Hrishikesh: (laughs)

Patrick: We have had a very strange career and we've gotten to be this kind of improbably big band, and I think the earnestness of that song is a big part of it. The realness of it, 'cause we weren't trying to do a big hit song. We just were us.

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Sugar, We're Goin Down" by Fall Out Boy, in its entirety.

*("Sugar, We're Goin Down" by FALL OUT BOY)*

Visit [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) to learn more. You'll find links to buy or stream "Sugar, We're Goin Down," and you can watch the music video.

This episode was produced by me, Mary Dolan, Craig Eley, and Kathleen Smith, with production assistance from Tiger Biskup. The episode artwork is by Carlos Lerma, and I made the show's theme music and logo.

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