

Song Exploder
Metric - Victim of Luck
Episode 317

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 has some explicit language.

Metric is a band from Canada that was formed in 1998. They've won four Juno Awards, including Group of the Year, and Rolling Stone included them in their list of the 50 Greatest Canadian Artists of All Time. In April 2026, Metric released their 10th album, *Romanticize the Dive*. And for this episode, I spoke to Emily Haines and Jimmy Shaw about how they made the opening song on that album, "Victim of Luck."

("Victim of Luck" by METRIC)

(Vocals: "Saying "never better," baby, am I a victim of luck? / Never better, baby, I was a victim of luck / Never better, baby, at last I don't give a fuck / Baby, I'm free")

Emily: I'm Emily from Metric, and I write songs, and I sing and I play synths. I started this band with Jimmy in '98.

Jimmy: I'm Jimmy Shaw, the other co-founder, and sort of the musical director, if you will. And there's Joshua Winstead, who plays bass guitar, and there's Joules Scott-Key, who plays drums.

Hrishikesh: So I'm curious, with such a long history of working together, was there a particular headspace or emotional place that you found yourselves in when you were going in to make this album?

Emily: Yeah, we actually, it was quite a plan this time around. I remember I was talking to Jimmy on the phone and we were like, what's the vision? It's our 10th album. This is monumental for us. How should we approach it? And we had the idea of this, like, "What would Metric do?" ethos.

Instead of referencing other artists while we were working, we would just reference ourselves and go back and be like, what would we do? What is this essence of who we are?

Jimmy: We had just moved our studio to this place in the countryside, kind of in the woods, north of Toronto, and we call it Main Street. And it's an amazing space. And we were there all the time. We were there every day for a long, long time.

Emily: I came into the studio with this idea of this fictional sort of like Ziggy Stardust character, and this story of a band. Like an *Almost Famous* kind of, “could have been” band, and the life that you spend, the dedication that you spend, and the sacrifices that you make and the commitment to it. You stay with it regardless, and that you'd rather that than any other life.

And I came back to the piano and recorded it.

(demo piano & vocal: “It was the start of something / Scattered pieces, long before all the stories / Like who’d discover you, a starving artist / What’s your thesis? I’m a starving artist / Could have discovered, you start talking on the side / Show you a thing or two / Graduate from bars / Shoot us like magnets to a venue on the sun / We’ll all be buried wearing Balmain and Verdun / Or not, though I know someone’s got to summit to the top and it could be me but it won’t be / I know someone’s got to summit to the top and it won’t be me but it could be...”)

And I had been on a walk and heard that melody in my head. And I came back to the piano and recorded it. And then brought it in with all these ideas of somehow talking about this fictional band.

Jimmy: A lot of times when we start the recording process of these songs and Emily brings something in, she'll usually have it in Garage Band.

Emily: Or a voice note.

(piano idea voice note)

Hrishikesh: How do you go about translating something like that into what the arrangement's gonna be for the full band?

Jimmy: Those two little melodies, you know, there was the main melody and then there's the counter melody that happens up top. It was the sort of interaction between those two things that we were trying to explore and trying to develop.

And so there was two things that happened on the first day. There was like a modular synth, sort of like a pulsing thing that it's going like *boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom*.

(modular synth pulse)

And it's kind of holding like some like very static harmony down.

And then the bass synth line,

(bass synth)

Which was all sort of about those moving notes.

You know, we were just kind of throwing everything at the wall in, like, a really relaxed and very enjoyable and fun way.

Hrishikesh: And so was it just the two of you in the studio working on this?

Jimmy: No, it's, it's me and Emily and Liam. Liam O'Neil. Liam is kind of like the other X factor. He's the keyboard player in Kings of Leon and was in The Stills.

And Emily and I discovered a long time ago that we can't really work with just the two of us. There has to be a third person in the room. Someone needs to man Pro Tools, so we can be the musicians. Also, like, you know, Emily and I's relationship is, like, we argue, and when there's someone else in the room, it makes sense. If we're just arguing with each other, then it's just an argument.

And so Liam is kind of like a fifth member of the band. It's like an extended family.

(demo drums)

A lot of what we were doing in those recordings was smashing drum mics, over-compressing stuff, and going for, like, the sort of Dave Fridmann, MGMT, big, crunchy drum sound.

Hrishikesh: So I have this early recording that you sent me. What is this demo that we're listening to?

(piano voice note)

Emily: So, we would do bounces as the days went on, and the one that I sent you was the most indicative of when we started to get the right idea.

(more fleshed out demo)

But that was like many, many phases in.

(Vocals: "Take it from the top again / Say how you're feeling, I spilled my guts / I said I'll die of boredom If this is us / Hiding away, half living, vicarious / We have a future problem, it's all on us...")

Hrishikesh: What comes to your mind when you hear this older version right now?

Emily: That any other band, this would've been totally great.

Jimmy: *(laughs)*

Emily: But it was still just vague.

(Vocals: "Saying "never better," baby / Whether it's trouble or luck")

You know, it's partly 'cause of the audio quality, but it's partly 'cause it's like, "trouble", "whether it's trouble or luck," it's like, what are you saying? It's like still hiding behind some gauzy words.

Jimmy: But we knew there was something in this song for like, a very, very long time.

Emily: It was sort of like sculpture. It was in there, but it was in a block of marble and we had quite a journey pulling it out.

(Vocals: "Countdown to a hot mess, 5-4-3-2-1 / It's time to live my life like it's never been done / Shoot me like a magnet up to the sun / Yeah, better late than never, better")

This song had many, many lives from that point forward.

Jimmy: Yeah, we got to this point in May of last year, and I was in Barcelona and I was walking around listening to all the mixes. And there was like three or four songs that were just reading, like, aggressive, from like a sonic perspective. So I called John.

John O'Mahony is a mixer and an engineer and a producer that we've worked with off and on for long, almost longer than anyone. He has a good way of putting things sometimes. He says, you know, "If you want it to sound like there's reverb on everything, you don't put reverb on everything, because then you can't hear the reverb anymore. You take reverb off of everything except the one thing that has the most transients. And then you put reverb on that, and then it feels like everything has reverb on it."

And so smashing these drum mics was just eating up every little bit of headroom for everything else. And you couldn't hear any reverbs or delays or anything because the drums were just eating everything up. So he was like, "We gotta go back to the studio and we gotta rerecord drums."

(original crunchy drums)

(new clean drums)

Hrishikesh: In this new drum recording, I noticed that there's a separate layer of just cymbals.

(cymbals)

Jimmy: Well, if you want your kick and your snare to be, like, big, when you add splashy cymbals to that, you know, they're gonna go crazy in the room mics. So the clean way to do it is to separate them and to overdub them. A lot of the time you lose the feel, but this time it kind of worked.

(instrumental with new drums)

Hrishikesh: More with Metric, after this.

Hrishikesh: So what was the work that you had to do, then, in order to get the song from where it was to where it ultimately ended up?

Emily: "Victim Of Luck" was the last thing that we finished, lyrically. 'Cause I had done this rewrite and I was like, I, "This is it! I finally, I know I have it. I know this is it."

And then it was like, "I don't know about this. I don't know about that." And I guess we had one last session and I was, like, let's play "destroy the ego." Like, "What isn't working? What are the words? What are the, like, which word? Like, what don't you understand of what I'm trying to say? How am I not saying it?"

Jimmy: I don't think we were seeing it necessarily clearly at the moment, but we knew somewhere in us that the song was song one on the album. And for us, the first song is supposed to really encapsulate the rest of, of what you're gonna hear. And so you couldn't start with, like, an abstract moment. It needed to, like, start with something tangible.

Emily: I mean, I definitely prefer to write in code. Definitely there are times when it comes to me as, like, an external character.

Hrishikesh: The fictional band in the story?

Emily: Yeah. And then in real time it was like, me owning that I was talking about myself.

(Vocals: "I don't know what we are, frightened of heights we knew / Scared to go too far, how I might look to you / Now who have I become? / Trash that mirror, let my black mascara run")

And that's when we also said the phrase "victim of luck" for the first time.

(Isolated vocals: "Saying "never better," baby, am I a victim of luck? / Never better, baby, at last I don't give a fuck")

Hrishikesh: What did that phrase, "victim of luck," mean for you?

Emily: Well, I love it. The idea that you can be a victim of good luck. I love the idea that, here I am with this incredible life and all I'm seeing is all my flaws. And the only reason I'm in this tortured position is because I'm so lucky to have this life of playing music with my friends for 25 years and making my 10th album and living this long and doing all of it.

And all it's meaning to me is like, more self scrutiny and less courage and more lameness.

Hrishikesh: Why less courage?

Emily: Because that's what happens to people. You get more established.

Jimmy: More to lose.

Emily: Exactly. And even until that moment, we started the whole song with "Take it from the top again."

(Vocals: "Take it from the top again, say how you're feeling")

Which was just like, what? But this is the top. Like, it was close, but it was like, no, that should have been the second verse, not the first. And I think, "let me take you back" was the line that happened last, that then made the whole thing click. It made the whole thesis of the album.

(Final vocals: "Let me take you back, it was the start of something / I was there, not long before all the stardom / Now I'm in front of you, and all I'm seeing is all my flaws / I was a starving artist, but I was fearless")

Jimmy: We'd been talking about how we had this piano intro that wasn't working for us for a long time.

Emily: But we were very sentimental about that piano part staying in, because that was the source of it all.

Jimmy: We wanted to still sort of, like, have this idea that you could hear the sort of

embryonic moment, and then it kind of just, like, exploded into the whole band. And then finally, like, landed on like, maybe it's the piano thing that's driving us crazy.

Emily: We tried so many different variations sonically of that top line. It was gonna kill us, but we felt like we had to hold onto it. And then at some point we were just like, maybe we don't need that.

Jimmy: There was a whole other song that the only thing that was working was the intro. The rest of the song basically got scrapped.

And when we were like, "Let's get rid of the piano intro," someone in the room was like, "Why don't we go get the intro from the song that we don't like?"

(new intro percussion)

What that actually is, is Joules hitting sticks and stuff, and weird cymbal swelly stuff and me running it through multiple tape echos. And then the whole thing got moved over.

(new intro synths)

And there's synth orchestra, like just tuning up, just sort of coming together from, like, you know, across the universe.

(Buchla synth lines)

The Buchla is such a cool instrument. It doesn't respond to things in normal ways, and it's not supposed to. And you just kind of, like, hold down notes on this, like, touch pad. Everything reacts against each other within the instrument. So it's like anytime you turn something up, it's affecting something else. So it's, everything modulates everything within it.

It's not the greatest thing of playing like an in tune melody, but it's the greatest thing for doing the things that you just heard. About halfway through like the sonic chaos where I was doing some crazy stuff with it and, and all of a sudden I got it to lock and do something cool.

Hrishikesh: Emily, I'm curious, given how exacting your lyric-writing process is, how do you feel about chaotic music elements like this?

Emily: Oh my God, I love them. I mean, it's like he can express an emotion with that instrument. Like we need this feeling, and one of the tools to create this feeling is, are these abstract sounds that, like, just make everything better. They add

this, like, dissonance and depth. It sounds like the feeling of when you're like, "wheee!" Like with you're, like on the top of a rollercoaster, right?

Jimmy: Totally.

Emily: It's like, and just hearing that soloed, it's so much the heart of this song.

Hrishikesh: Mm.

EMILY: Like, that feeling of like, like, "shoot me like a magnet." Like I'm going, I don't know. I, like, I'm doing this. There's a fearlessness within that sound and I don't know of another instrument that could have conveyed all that.

Jimmy: It's wild how instruments can do that.

(Vocals: "Can I get a hell yes? (Hell yes) Five, four, three, two, one / I'm trying to live my life like it's never been done / So shoot me like a magnet up to the sun / Yeah, better late than never, better")

Hrishikesh: Going back to what you had said in the beginning, about the idea of, like, having a lot to lose; you know, having the stakes be high for you all because of the success that you've had. You know, in the song you have this line, "I'm trying to live my life like it's never been done." And of course, in the chorus, you know, like, "At last, I don't give a fuck." And I was wondering, like, is that how you feel now, or is that aspirational still, of, like, "I'm gonna get there."

Emily: *(chuckles)* I mean, it's so funny you should say that because, that's exactly what I feel now, is I'm like, it's doing the manifestation thing, which is like, well now I really do have to get there. If I'm saying that this is where I'm at, I've gotta get outta the vanity, I gotta do what I allegedly say I have accomplished in terms of my perspective, and I have to, like, not give a fuck about the things that don't need to be given a fuck about, you know. So it's kind of a hybrid that I have now like a spiritual obligation to honor what I said is true.

So wish me luck with that. *(chuckles)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Victim of Luck," by Metric, in its entirety.

("Victim of Luck" by METRIC)

To learn more, visit songexploder.net. You'll find links to buy or stream "Victim of Luck," and you can watch the music video.

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

Tiger Biskup. The episode artwork is by Carlos Lerma, and I made the show's theme music and logo.

Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a network of independent, listener-supported, artist-owned podcasts. You can learn more about our shows at radiotopia.fm.

And if you'd like to hear more from me, you can subscribe to my newsletter, which you can find on the Song Exploder website. You can also get a Song Exploder shirt at songexploder.net/shirt.

I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Thanks for listening.