

# THE PERFORMER IDENTITY OF BILLIE EILISH

And why it constructs the concepts of performance, authenticity & liveness



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## Abstract

This thesis analyzes the live performance of Billie Eilish at Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival 2019, to argue why performance, authenticity, and liveness are constructed by the performer identity. Billie Eilish is one of the most popular artists in the world at this moment, and her show at Coachella in 2019 was her first one as headliner of one of the biggest festivals in the United States. The concepts of performance, authenticity, and liveness have been examined in musicology over the past decades and are still relevant in for example recent debates about mediatized music. To argue why these concepts are constructed by the performer identity, theories of Philip Auslander, Alan Moore and Paul Sanden will be used. It becomes clear that the performer identity of Billie Eilish, that consists out of three layers, defines the concept of performance, creates the feeling of authenticity in multiple ways, and constructs the perception of liveness.

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## Introduction

With over 16.000.000.000 streams and 5 Grammy's on her debut album, a stadium world tour of 55 shows, and the fact that her first single was uploaded to Soundcloud less than 4 years ago at an age of 13, Billie Eilish is an absolute pop-phenomena. Not only her success is groundbreaking, but within the pop genre, also the music itself. The timbre is dark, the lyrics even darker, the vocals are subdued to an extent that has similarities with ASMR, the production is hyper-modern and avoids the clichés - in terms of for example structure and chord progression - that the top charts are filled with. Just like her music breaks with the contemporary pop sound, her performer identity breaks with the typical style of female pop artists. Billie Eilish stated in 2017 that she likes to wear clothes out of her comfort zone, in order to get attention of people around her.<sup>1</sup> Her style can be described as primarily baggy, ill-fitting, and "real different from a lot of people".<sup>2</sup> In 2019, she stated that the reason behind the choice for oversized clothing, is to avoid being victim of body shaming.<sup>3</sup> Body shaming is not the only personal issue Eilish addresses. She is open about the fact that she has Tourette syndrome, synesthesia and deals with depressions, as these depressions are often a central topic in her lyrics and interviews.<sup>4</sup> The nihilistic style of her appearance and her message are the source of her music and her performer identity.

Eilish's performer identity can be analyzed in her performance at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in 2019.<sup>5</sup> The show is full of elements that creates a dark and sometimes frightening image, but just like it is the case with the album *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*, fragile ballads give the crowd a chance to breath, and moreover, the perception to get close to the human behind the artist. These elements, such as the lights, visuals, attributes, band, and outfits are in balance with the music and contributes to a magnification of Eilish's performer identity, but also partly construct it. Not only is this show a representation of her performer identity, it is also Eilish's first performance as headliner on one of the biggest festivals in the United States. This lack of experience makes the distinction

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<sup>1</sup> Erica Gonzales, "Billie Eilish Is a 15-Year-Old Pop Prodigy—And She's Intimidating as Hell," *Harpers Bazaar*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/art-books-music/a13040159/billie-eilish-interview/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ilana Kaplan, "Pop Newcomer Billie Eilish Wants to Make Sure You Never Forget Her," *PAPER Magazine*, March 16, 2017, <https://www.papermag.com/pop-newcomer-billie-eilish-wants-to-make-sure-you-never-forget-her-2305463278.html>.

<sup>3</sup> De Elizabeth, "Billie Eilish Reveals the Reason for Her Baggy Clothes in New Calvin Klein Ad," *teenVOGUE*, May 11, 2019, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/billie-eilish-baggy-clothes-calvin-klein>.

<sup>4</sup> "Billie Eilish Talks Handling Fame, Life on the Road & Depression With Zane Lowe: Watch," *Billboard*, April 8, 2019, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop/8506181/billie-eilish-zane-lowe-beats-one-interview>.

<sup>5</sup> "Billie Eilish live Coachella Festival 13-04-19.mp4," Google Drive file, 51:51, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DgBJTOS9goFAIceaKpk218oAS\\_IrdRFz/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DgBJTOS9goFAIceaKpk218oAS_IrdRFz/view).

between the artist Billie Eilish and the person behind it visible, which will be further explained in Chapter 1. Analyzing the performer identity of Billie Eilish is relevant because the growth of her success in combination with her age has been unique in the history of pop music. Moreover, it provides a perspective on the construction of three common concepts in musicology.

This thesis analyzes the live performance of Billie Eilish at Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival 2019, to argue why performance, authenticity and liveness are constructed by the performer identity. The concepts of performance, authenticity, and liveness have been discussed in numerous studies over the past decades. In 1934, Theodore Adorno already indirectly used these concepts in his essay about the Phonograph Record by pointing out its shortcomings: the loss of the realm of live production and therefore the loss of artistic expression.<sup>6</sup> In other words, this form of mediatization harmed the essence of performance, because of the loss of liveness. More recently, Mark J. Butler discussed liveness in a mediatized form of “DJ and Laptop Performance”, where he argues that liveness can appear in a performance that is mediatized, because of the interaction with the audience.<sup>7</sup> As for authenticity, the quest for what is ‘real’ and ‘fake’ has become a dominant factor in musical taste for the last fifty years, according to Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor.<sup>8</sup> The concepts performance, authenticity and liveness are always influenced by the presence or absence of the performer. Moreover, they are constructed by the performer identity of an artist, which will be argued in this thesis.

Billie Eilish carries out different acts simultaneously during her performance, which becomes clear in the performance of “All The Good Girls Go To Hell”. How this defines the concept of performance, will be discussed in chapter one, based on the “three layers of performance” theory of Philip Auslander.<sup>9</sup> Chapter two will provide an examination on the ways that a feeling of authenticity is created in the Coachella performance, through an audio-visual analysis and the theories of Allan Moore and Philip Auslander. The concept of liveness will be the central topic of the last chapter. The seven categories of liveness, stated by Paul Sanden, will be discussed and used in order to answer the question: in what ways is the

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<sup>6</sup> T. W. Adorno and T. Y. Levin, “The Form of the Phonograph Record,” *October* 55, (1990): 58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/778936>.

<sup>7</sup> Mark J. Butler, “Performing Performance: Interface Design, Liveness, and Listener Orientation,” in *Playing with Something That Runs: Technology, Improvisation, and Composition in DJ and Laptop Performance*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 106.

<sup>8</sup> Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor, *Faking It: The Quest for Authenticity in Popular Music*, (London: Faber, 2007), 324.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Auslander, “Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14, no. 1 (2004): 6, DOI: 10.1080/1026716032000128674.

perception of liveness constructed in the partly mediatized performance of Billie Eilish? To conclude, the general findings in this thesis will be summarized.

## Chapter 1 - Performance

In this chapter, the different roles Eilish plays during the live performance will be analyzed. These roles are especially visible in the performance of the song “All The Good Girls Go To Hell” at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. The lyrics of this song are based on Christian symbolism, partly written from the perspective of God, the Devil, and Billie Eilish herself. In these different roles, Eilish reflects on the topic of this song: climate change, caused by the actions of humans and their lack of compassion for the planet. Eilish’s brother Finneas, the co-writer and producer of her songs, stated that the wildfires in the hills of California in the past years, which is their home state, was one of the inspirations for this song. “You could just look out the window and see the skyline on fire”, says Finneas from their own experience.<sup>10</sup> While Billie Eilish expresses such personal experiences in her songs, she simultaneously enlarges these personal expressions through distinctive clothing and performances that portrays her star personality, which also becomes clear in her Coachella performance. Acting in different roles at the same time, like Eilish does as a person and as an artist, is key to performance in general.

Over the past decades, the concept of performance in popular music (such as jazz, hip-hop, and rock music) has been discussed and tried to be defined.<sup>11</sup> A valuable contribution to this debate comes from Phillip Auslander. In his perspective, a performer acts in three layers of performance.<sup>12</sup> This theory is based on the concept by Simon Frith, that popular musicians are “involved in a process of double enactment: they enact both a star personality (their image) and a song personality, the role that each lyric requires, and the pop star’s art is to keep both acts in play at once”.<sup>13</sup> Auslander calls the act of a star personality the performance persona, and links the role that each lyric requires to different characters a performance persona plays. “The real person” is linked to the statement of Frith, that pop singers are personally expressive, because they sing from their own experiences.<sup>14</sup>

The audience infers the real person from the performance persona and the character

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<sup>10</sup> Tala Woods, “Billie Eilish – All The Good Girls Go To Hell – Story of song,” Story Of Song, accessed June 9, 2020, <https://storyofsong.com/story/all-the-good-girls-go-to-hell/>.

<sup>11</sup> For example:

- Ingrid Monson, “Music, Language, and Cultural Styles: Improvisation as Conversation,” in *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 73–96.
- Michael Dowdy, “Live Hip Hop, Collective Agency, and ‘Acting in Concert’,” *Popular Music and Society* 30, no. 1, (2007): 75–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007760500503459>.

<sup>12</sup> Auslander, “Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto,” 6.

<sup>13</sup> Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 186 & 212.

<sup>14</sup> Auslander, “Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto,” 6.

the performer plays, which makes the real person the least accessible or clear layer for the audience.<sup>15</sup> However, there are a few elements in the performance of this song through which the real person behind Eilish can be discovered. The fact that this song is based on her own experiences, the raging wildfires in the hills of California, confirms that Eilish is personally expressive. But even though it is a loaded topic, Eilish does not sing the song with loaded emotion. The up-tempo style of the music asks for an uplifting performance, even though the lyrics are not. Thus it makes sense that Eilish performs this song with a certain aloofness attitude, which is also one of the main characteristics of her performance persona, and it has the brutality that suits the character in this song, the angel of hell. As a consequence, the real person is not clearly present in this song. However, during the performance of the second verse of the song, Eilish forgets her lyrics. Suddenly we see a glimpse of the real person: a girl of nearly seventeen years old, performing on one of the biggest festivals in the world, that forgets her lyrics.<sup>16</sup> For a very short moment, the person behind this act seems to get exposed. But then she replies with “What the fuck are the words though?”, after which she picks it up again at the pre-chorus and proceeds her performance undisturbed.<sup>17</sup> She does it with the attitude that fits her performance persona, and even fits the character of this song. It is at this moment that the process of triple enactment becomes very clear.

The aloof nature of Billie Eilish’s performance persona is reflected in her presence. With wide, baggy clothing, she hides her body and prickly heavy chains around her neck make her less appealing. The reason behind this clothing style is to avoid being victim of body shaming, as Eilish stated in 2019.<sup>18</sup> This is interesting, because with such a vulnerable statement, she really emphasizes the fact that there is a real person behind Billie Eilish, which is in contrast with the self-protecting, defensive style of her performance persona. During the concert, Eilish moves most of the time in the style of Popping Dance, which is characterized by sudden tensing and releasing of the muscles, at the rhythm of the music. It has an unnatural or inhuman appearance, which enlarges the stand-offish vibe of her performance persona. But during the performance of “All The Good Girls Go To Hell”, Eilish moves natural, in a relaxed but uplifting walk on the beat. This “normal” way of moving makes her more accessible than the unnatural Popping Dance movements does. Thus, her performance persona seems to balance on the line of aloofness and connection.

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<sup>15</sup> Auslander, “Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto,” 7.

<sup>16</sup> “Billie Eilish live Coachella Festival 13-04-19.mp4,” 26:17.

<sup>17</sup> “Billie Eilish live Coachella Festival 13-04-19.mp4,” 26:24.

<sup>18</sup> De Elizabeth, “Billie Eilish Reveals the Reason for Her Baggy Clothes in New Calvin Klein Ad,” *teenVOGUE*, May 11, 2019, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/billie-eilish-baggy-clothes-calvin-klein>.



In the music video of “All The Good Girls Go To Hell”, Eilish plays the character of a fallen angel, that turns into some kind of demon. She uses the same popping dance technique as she does on stage, which makes it, in combination with the grime, horrific. In the live performance however, she acts mostly in her performance persona and seems to be focused on transmitting the dance vibe, created by the uplifting beat of the music, to the audience. Instead of a demon, she is acting like a good girl, and elements around her places this good girl in Hell. The raging fires in the visuals behind the band represent the burning flames in hell, but it also emphasize the actual topic of this song, which is the hill burns in California as an example of the consequences of climate change. During some lines, for example “My Lucifer is lonely”, Eilish’s voice is being doubled by a low-pitched cracking voice. This turns her character of “good girl” into the character of creepy demon she plays in the music video.

To conclude, the performance “All The Good Girls Go To Hell” can be seen as a process of triple enactment, where three layers of performance, or roles, are active. The main layer in her performance is that of the performance persona. This performance persona is a magnification of the real person behind the artist, which becomes clear out of the fact that she sings from her own experiences, or at a moment when she forgets her lyrics for example. The character that she plays during her performance is close to her performance persona, that acts like a good girl, and is less striking than the character she plays in the music video of this song. But elements around her, like visuals of raging fires, help to create the impression of a good girl that went to Hell, which not only suits the title, but also the message of this song. The performer identity, that consists out of these different roles, defines the concept of performance.

## Chapter 2 - Authenticity

To determine how the performer identity of Billie Eilish constructs the concept of authenticity, the ways in which the feeling of authenticity is created during the show will be examined in this chapter, through Alan Moore's theory on "first and second person authenticity". First person authenticity gets constructed by the expressions of the performer(s) and the way these expressions are communicated to the audience, whereas second person authenticity arises through the experiences of life that the performer(s) shares and to what extent these experiences validate the life of the audience. As visual or audio effects are magnifiers of the performer identity, they are also important elements in the establishment of first- and second-person authenticity. Therefore, these elements will be analyzed in this chapter too.

There are several aspects of Eilish's Coachella performance that could give the audience a feeling of unmediated communication. This type of communication helps with establishing "first person authenticity", or more specific: authenticity of expression.<sup>19</sup> It occurs when the artist, who serves as the originator, gives the audience the feeling that he communicates with them in an unmediated form because his/hers utterance is one of integrity. First, there is the fact that Eilish is singing live, without autotune, and that great parts of the music are performed live by her brother Finneas, and a drummer. Also, her performance is with just 2 musicians and no background dancers for example (except during one song) minimalistic in a way, which increases the sense that Eilish performs without needing (mediated) tools, and thus increases the sense of integrity. However, there are also aspects in this show that could harm the sense of integrity and thus the feeling of authenticity. The music and the vocals are supported by a backing track that is pre-recorded. In addition, the visual aspects play a vital part in the performance, with animations on huge led screens. There is even a part where Eilish defies gravity through an illusion on a "floating" bed during the performance of "Bury A Friend".<sup>20</sup> But because these aspects are magnifiers of Billie Eilish's performer identity, they can also serve as magnifiers of the feeling of authenticity, since her performer identity is personally expressive. In addition, Eilish maintains the feeling of integrity through some vulnerable speeches in between the songs, by stressing how much it means to her to perform at this stage at this festival, and that she cried in her hotel room the

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<sup>19</sup>Allan Moore, "Authenticity as authentication," *Popular Music* 21, no.2, (2002): 214, [https://www-jstor-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/stable/853683?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/stable/853683?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>20</sup>"Billie Eilish live Coachella Festival 13-04-19.mp4," 33:24.

night before because she “wanted this shit so bad.”<sup>21</sup> It is in this way of communicating with the audience, that she gives the feeling as if anybody in the audience could take her place, because she is just as impressed to be there as the audience is. This open or honest attitude, in combination with the fact that the main parts of the music are performed live, helps to establish the feeling of an unmediated and thus authentic performance.

With words like “this is crazy” and “I don’t deserve this”, Eilish shares her experience of standing on such a stage in a way that many listeners can relate to. But also the topics of her songs could be in line with experiences of listeners, because Eilish sings about problems or challenges that her audience might also deal with in life, like insecurity, love sickness, jealousy, or broader topics such as climate change. In addition, she is open about specific issues she is facing, such as dealing with the Tourette syndrome and depressions. Listeners with the same problems will recognize this and experience her performance as a validation of their life. When a performer succeeds in giving the listener the feeling that the listener’s experience of life is being validated, authenticity of experience arises.<sup>22</sup> This feeling of authenticity is particularly strong at the moments when Eilish is singing a ballad like “When The Party Is Over”, about taking distance from her lover, as she is sitting on a stool, moves natural and translates the emotions through her voice and her facial expressions, magnified by the video on the led screen of Eilish crying black tears. Because people can relate or are familiar with this situation and those emotions, the performance is authentic to their experiences in life.

The live performance of a performer is especially in rock music seen as an important aspect in the construction of authenticity. From the perspective of rock ideologist, the stereotype of pop music cannot be characterized as authentic. The distinction between rock and pop is seen as the authentic against in-authentic, art against entertainment, the genuinely against the slicky commercial, the potentially resistant against the necessarily co-opted.<sup>23</sup> This would imply that the performance of a pop-artist, such as Billie Eilish, is unlikely to construct the feeling of authenticity. However, Alan Moore argues that authenticity is not inscribed, it is ascribed to someone.<sup>24</sup> The actions of a performer, regardless if they make pop or rock music, can create the feeling of authenticity. These actions can be for example communicating in an

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<sup>21</sup> “Billie Eilish live Coachella Festival 13-04-19.mp4,” 46:30.

<sup>22</sup> Moore, “Authenticity as authentication,” 220.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Auslander, “Tryin’ to Make It Real: Live Performance, Simulation, and the Discourse of Authenticity in Rock Culture,” in *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 81.

<sup>24</sup> Moore, “Authenticity as authentication,” 210.

unmediated form or performing songs with emotions people can relate to. People might even relate with a performer identity, which can construct the feeling of authenticity.

In the performance of Billie Eilish at Coachella, it becomes clear that there is an overlap between these types of authenticity. It turns out that it is more valuable to look at who is authenticated by a performance, rather than if a performance is authentic or not. That “who” can be the performer (first person authenticity) or the audience of the performer (second person authenticity).<sup>25</sup> In Eilish’s Coachella performance, all groups are being authenticated by the performance and thus the feeling of authenticity is created in multiple ways. It becomes clear in this chapter that the audience ascribes authenticity to an artist, due to the actions of the performer, which arise from the characteristics of the performer identity. Thus, any form of authenticity is constructed by the performer identity, or the elements that are magnifiers of this identity.

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<sup>25</sup> Moore, “Authenticity as authentication,” 220.

## Chapter 3 - Liveness

The performance of Billie Eilish at Coachella 2019 is highly mediatized. Not only does she use pre-produced backing tracks to perform her songs (in combination with live instruments); visuals that create illusions in the presence of Eilish play a role in her performance. How does these forms of mediatization effect the construction of the perception of liveness in her performance? To investigate this, a further explanation of the concept liveness is needed in advance.

There are different perceptions on the emergence of the concept liveness, but in general it is understood as a concept that has been historically and ideologically determined in a resistance against the increasing mediatization of music since 1930.<sup>26</sup> The rise of recorded music was a threat for the dominant position of live performance as main form of musical consumption.<sup>27</sup> Liveness represented an almost magical piece of the experience of a live performance, that was missing in this “mediatized” recorded music. However, the relationships between music and technology have changed in a way that such pre-produced backing tracks and other types of mediatization have been allowed inside common constructions of liveness.<sup>28</sup> Paul Sanden provides a theory based on “categories of liveness”, that illustrates this development of liveness in mediatized music.<sup>29</sup> These categories can be used to analyze the concept of liveness in Billie Eilish’s Coachella performance.

During her performance, Eilish specifically stresses the fact that the audience is physically attending and witnessing her performance, and she wants them to realize the value of that. Prior to singing the loaded ballad “When The Party’s Over”, Eilish says to the audience:

I just want us all to be in the moment for this song, because like, in life we tend to do things and then we are always looking forward to the next thing and the next thing after that. We are never looking at what is happening right now, and this is happening right now, and this is crazy. We and I are never going to be in this moment again, no matter what, this exact moment right here, never again, ever. This is the only chance we get to be in the moment, so why don’t we be in the moment yeah?<sup>30</sup>

When looking at the registration of the concert, hearing Eilish saying those words, it is hard not to feel like you are missing something that only the audience experienced on that

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Sanden, “A Theory of Liveness in Mediatized Music,” in *Liveness in Modern Music: Musicians, Technology, and the Perception of Performance*, (New York; London: Routledge, 2013), 19.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: music, media, and subcultural capital*, (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 41.

<sup>28</sup> Sanden, “A Theory of Liveness in Mediatized Music,” 21.

<sup>29</sup> Sanden, 32.

<sup>30</sup> “Billie Eilish live Coachella Festival 13-04-19.mp4,” 38:20.

moment. This moment represents two of the most vital aspects and common perceptions of liveness: time and space, also described by Sanden as temporal and spatial liveness.<sup>31</sup> To experience a performance at its original time of occurrence, with the psychological presence of the performer(s), is a requirement for a live performance. In rock music, performing music live is an important chain in the establishment of the feeling of authenticity, as long as the live version of that song is a good or ultimately better representation of the recorded version.<sup>32</sup> From that perspective, it is hard to find the added value of a physical live performance, especially regarding the fact that people can relive musical performances endlessly when buying a registration of the concert. However, according to Theodore Adorno, liveness is the essential part of music, and it gets lost in recorded music, as it repudiates the essence of the artistic expression. Consequently, as artistic expression is bound to time and place, it cannot be relived on demand.<sup>33</sup> It seems that Eilish wants to make that clear by pointing out that something special is about to happen, but only if they realize that they are all right there at that specific moment.

Billie Eilish does not use Auto-tune on her live vocals, but if she would, the audience would consider her performance as less “live”. It would impair the fidelity of the music, which stands for how little the musical performance deviates from the real (physically) produced sounds.<sup>34</sup> However, there are other elements that could question the fidelity of the music of this show, as prerecorded samples and backing tracks are being used. The band consists out of a drummer and Eilish’s brother Finneas, who plays keys, bass, guitar and backing vocals. Clearly, he can only play one or two of these parts at the same time, while we hear at least five or six parts. But the fact that he seems to be in charge of all the parts, and maybe even the fact that he initially produced and wrote the records of Eilish himself, distracts the attention from the mediatized nature of this performance. This is possible, because the fidelity of the music is not so much determined by whether a performance consist of live acoustic sounds, but rather if the live abilities of the performer is truthfully in line with those on the record.<sup>35</sup> As Billie Eilish sings everything live, and Finneas shows that he can play every instrument live, sometimes accompanied by his own productions, liveness regarding the fidelity of the music is being realized in this performance.

Nevertheless, this performance feels highly “preproduced”. Of course, every band or

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<sup>31</sup> Sanden, “A Theory of Liveness in Mediatized Music,” 33.

<sup>32</sup> Auslander, “Tryin’ to Make It Real: Live Performance, Simulation, and the Discourse of Authenticity in Rock Culture,” 76.

<sup>33</sup> Adorno and Levin, “The Form of the Phonograph Record,” 58.

<sup>34</sup> Sanden, “A Theory of Liveness in Mediatized Music,” 35.

<sup>35</sup> Sanden, 36.

artist rehearses their performance months in advance, for example their musical parts and choreography, but also musical and visual cues, so the fact that a show is preproduced is inevitable. However, this affects the amount of spontaneity in a show. The small talks that Eilish has with the audience between the songs feel spontaneous, but the spontaneity in her music is highly limited. Almost all songs are equal to their recordings and there are no musical intermezzo's or improvisations. According to Sanden, spontaneity is an element that can help to establish the perception of liveness in a show. This lack of spontaneity is overshadowed though by the other types of liveness, for example the corporeality of the performance. That corporeality can be found in physical expressions of the performer(s)(singing or playing an instrument) that embody the thoughts and intentions of the composer's (Billie or Finneas) mind, in combination with the embodied perceptions of the audience (dancing, singing along).<sup>36</sup> Before the last song, Eilish even encourages the audience to go down to their knees in the bridge, and then jump up when the chorus kicks in. This is a specific request to the audience that accomplish liveness in corporeality.

In this chapter, several elements through which the perception of liveness is constructed in a mediatized performance have been presented. Due to the fact that the audience is physically witnessing the performance at the time of occurrence, they are able to experience spatial and temporal liveness. Despite the mediatized nature of the music itself, the perception of liveness is created through the fidelity of the music that arises out of the correct representation of the musical abilities of the performers known from the records, in the live performance of the performers. This experience of liveness, which can also be found in the corporeal aspects of the performance, will even be greater when spontaneous elements are integrated in the show. Although the performance of Billie Eilish at Coachella is highly mediatized, the perception of liveness is created through her performer identity in multiple ways.

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<sup>36</sup> Sanden, 39.

## Conclusion

The concepts of performance, authenticity, and liveness are constructed by the performer identity. While analyzing these concepts in the context of a live performance, it also becomes clear that there is an overlap between them. Billie Eilish acts in three different layers of performance. Her expressions of the personal experiences that serves as the topics for her songs, reveal the real person behind the performance persona of Billie Eilish. This performance persona is in contrast with the vulnerable stories she shares with her audience, due to an aloofness clothing style, attitude, and way of moving. These movements, characterized by the technique of Popping Dance, also serve to create certain characters, in combination with other elements such as visuals on led screens or audio techniques. Within these different layers of performance, the feeling of authenticity is being created: Not only can the audience relate with the personal experiences of the real person behind the artist Billie Eilish, they can also experience her performance as one with integrity, for example because she sings without a mediatized feature such as Auto-tune. Although there are also elements in her show that are mediatized, such as prerecorded musical parts, the perception of liveness is being established due to the physical attendance of the audience and the performer that stresses the value of that, but also by the fidelity and corporeality in the musical performance. This thesis provided a perspective on the construction of the concepts of performance, authenticity, and liveness, as they have been analyzed through the performer identity of one of the most popular popstars of this moment: Billie Eilish. For further research, it can be interesting to examine how these concepts are constructed by the performer identity of performers in other disciplines, such as dance or theatre.



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