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# MUS 111.1: Exploring The Technical and Artistic Elements of Live Music Performances

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## Documentation For Performance Analysis #1

Artist(s): Phoebe Bridgers	Song: Halloween
Tempo ( <i>optional</i> ): unsteady (56-59 bpm)	Key ( <i>optional</i> ): C# Major
Chord Progressions [Roman Numerals] ( <i>optional</i> ):	
<i>Intro</i> vi-IV-vi-iii-IV	<i>Verse 2</i> I-V-IV-I-V I-V-vi-IV-I-V-IV
<i>Verse 1</i> I-V-IV-I-V I-vi-IV-I-V-IV I-V-IV-I-V I-V-vi-IV-I-V-IV	<i>Chorus 2</i> I-iii-IV I-iii-IV vi-iii-IV I-iii-IV (2x)
<i>Chorus 1</i> I-iii-IV I-iii-IV vi-iii-IV I-iii-IV	<i>Outro</i> II-IV (repeat until end)
<i>Post-Chorus</i> I-V-vi-IV-V I-V-vi-IV-I-V-IV	

Phoebe Bridgers performs “Halloween” from her 2020 album *Punisher* live at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum in front of a small crowd. Unlike large-scale performances that are synonymous with stadium settings, the artist carries out an intimate show.

### **Technology & Instrumentation**

Because the performance was set in such a small space, there wasn’t any need for a full-scale PA system. A typical PA system for a small band (3 instrument players and 2 vocalists) with a few speakers worked just fine. I reckon the wedge that served as a monitor also served as a FOH speaker for the audience. Moreover, the fact that they used a wedge instead of in-ear monitors may

indicate that they strive for rawness and intimacy. Wedge monitoring allows the performers to hear the acoustics of the room, the crowd, and the guitar amps, which Phoebe and the band preferred over a higher sound quality that in-ears offer (Shambro, 2019). However, this also meant that they don't have a click track to let them stay on tempo, though it would only make the performance more human and raw.

The inputs included microphones for electric guitar, kick drum, snare, overhead mic for drums, violin, lead vocals, and backing vocals. It's interesting that the lead and backing vocals utilised different types of microphones. Phoebe used a dynamic microphone, while the backing vocals used a condenser, specifically a large diaphragm condenser. The difference in sensitivity was probably the biggest aspect the artist considered. Based on how quiet and fragile the backing vocalist is singing, I assume a condenser microphone that has higher sensitivity than its dynamic counterpart would capture the sound better.

## **Musicianship**

"Halloween" is an alternative/indie folk song with a slow tempo, minimalist instrumentation, and a subdued overall sound, encapsulating a melancholic, haunting feel. The song choice may have been a nod to the venue; a spooky-titled song was performed in a memorial stadium. The melody is conjunct with no large leaps, sung in a soft and fragile way. I believe Phoebe's vocal delivery was truly the essence of the performance.

The instrumentation revolved around an arpeggiated guitar pattern, backed up rhythmically by the drums and harmonically by the violin. Similar to the vocal delivery, the drums and violin were also played in low energy, barely hitting and stroking their respective instruments. Interestingly, the drummer would tap the snare consecutively with his finger, and softer with each tap. The resulting sound mimics a delay effect. To vary the drum pattern in the chorus, he played a shaker-type percussive instrument in conjunction with the snare, creating a snapping sound. Furthermore, at the end of the performance, the drummer barely stroked the snare with his fingertips, producing a brush sound. This ended the performance in a diminuendo along with the guitarist playing softer and softer to complete silence. The audience was left at a state of tranquillity.

As mentioned before, the absence of in-ear monitors to provide a click track led to an unsteady tempo, which contributed to the rawness of the performance. They also strived for rawness by performing everything live, disregarding a backing track.

### **Stagecraft**

Words that would describe the overall performance would be raw, intimate, calm, and eerie. Phoebe and the band's demeanour throughout the performance was calm, showing no grand facial and body expressions. This aligned perfectly with the mood of the song. They were all dressed in matching black tie suits, except for Phoebe who was wearing a funeral-like black dress. The prominently black outfits may have been a nod to the venue, and the minimal makeup application contributed to the rawness of the performance.

Lighting was dimly lit, and this lack of visibility evoked a sense of eeriness. By setting up the stage on the same plane as the audience and them surrounding the musicians, the performance was on another level of intimacy. There's also something about being able to hear the delicate haptic sounds made by musicians that adds to the overall sense of connectedness.

## Documentation For Performance Analysis #2

Artist(s): Wallows	Song: Talk Like That
Tempo ( <i>optional</i> ): unsteady (138-147) bpm	Key ( <i>optional</i> ): E Major
Chord Progressions [Roman Numerals] ( <i>optional</i> ):	
<i>Intro</i> I-ii-IV-vi-V I-ii-IV-vi-V	<i>Verse 2</i> ii-I <sup>7</sup> -ii-I <sup>7</sup> ii-I <sup>7</sup> -ii-I <sup>7</sup>
<i>Chorus</i> I-ii-I-ii-IV-vi-V I-ii-I-ii-IV-vi-V	<i>Bridge</i> ii-IV-I ii-IV-I
<i>Verse 1</i> ii-I <sup>7</sup> -ii-I <sup>7</sup> ii-I <sup>7</sup> -ii-I <sup>7</sup>	<i>Chorus</i> I-ii-I-ii-IV-vi-V I-ii-I-ii-IV-vi-V ii-IV-I ii-IV-I
<i>Chorus</i> I-ii-I-ii-IV-vi-V I-ii-I-ii-IV-vi-V	

Wallows performs “Talk Like That” from their 2020 EP *Remote*, amongst several other songs from their discography, live at the Bandsintown Plus virtual show.

### **Technology & Instrumentation**

A virtual show would mean that the band isn’t playing in front of a crowd, so loudspeakers wouldn’t be necessary. The inputs would only be mixed and presented as a whole virtually. Moreover, Wallows used in-ear monitors instead of wedges. This would allow each member to hear their individual playing better, as they can be mixed independently from one another. Although in-ears would often come with a click track, the unsteady tempo throughout the performance suggests otherwise.

The drummer utilised an electronic drum pad in conjunction with the acoustic drums. The guitarist utilised pedals to add effects to the guitar sound. The inputs included a pedal board DI, direct input from the keyboards, drum pad, overhead mics for drums, as well as microphones for lead vocals, backing vocals, saxophone, trumpet, bass amp, guitar amp, kick drum, snare, hi hats, crash, and toms. The lead and backing vocalists used a dynamic microphone, presumably with a cardioid polar pattern, as their durability, versatility, and lower sensitivity make them widely favoured for live vocals especially in rock bands (Narang, 2022).

### **Musicianship**

“Talk Like That” is a very short, upbeat indie rock song with a fast tempo, repetitive song structures, and catchy melodies. What I noticed was that the vocalist didn’t really care if he sounded perfect when singing the melodies. Occasional pitchiness and moments when he was out of breath indicated the absence of auto tune. This aligns with indie genre conventions of sounding DIY-like and celebrating imperfections (Deubel, 2023). The singing wasn’t the core essence of the performance. I would argue that the energy and unity of the band played a bigger role in the identity of the artist, which is typical in indie bands. The tempo was also highly unsteady, driven more by the players’ (notably drummer’s) emotions/energy, further conforming to the previously mentioned indie genre conventions.

The instrumentation included a saxophone and a trumpet, atypical instruments in a rock band. The drums were a mix of acoustic and electronic with the utilisation of a drum pad. A backing track was used in the intro when the players were getting ready and changing instruments from a previous song, which was quickly taken over by live instrument playing. Perhaps, the most notable and engaging part of the performance was the long pause between the bridge and final chorus. The bridge ended unexpectedly to a solid 14 seconds of silence, resumed after the vocalist cued the drummer to break the silence. It was very sudden and unexpected, especially coming right after a loud, high-energy part of the song. The silence was long enough for the audience to wonder when the band would continue playing, serving as a great talking point. Lastly, the performance also ended unexpectedly by an erratic electric guitar power slide. This generated noise as non-diatonic notes overlapped with one another.

## **Stagecraft**

In this performance, Wallows channelled teenage boy angst but in a more subtle and breezy way than a typical rock band. It was clear that having fun was one of their main objectives, particularly shown by how freely the vocalist moved around. He also freely held the mic even though a mic stand was available. He wasn't concerned about facing front and addressing the "audience". Since it was a virtual show, he only had to interact with the camera. They were dressed in casual outfits, akin to what style is popular amongst Gen Z. Some of them had multiple instruments to play, so they changed instruments mid-performance, e.g, the person playing the synth keys in the intro plays the trumpet in the bridge. The roles of each member were strategically planned and timed. For example, they played a backing track in the beginning and the end of the song because they needed to switch gears transitioning into other songs.

The stage was wide and had a huge monitor in the background. It displayed a real-time shot of the performance duplicated many times, creating an infinite mirror effect. The image was also heavily saturated and put through a VHS effect, triggering our hallucinatory senses. This made the visual aspect of the performance dynamic and unpredictable since it progressed in real-time. The lighting was predominantly red, which accentuated the song's angst energy. Furthermore, the lighting supported the performance's energy curve, as it became more animated in high-energy parts like the chorus and bridge, but static during the long pause.



## Mid-Project Reflection

I chose live performances from Wallows and Phoebe Bridgers, who are both artists I look up to. Wallows performed an indie rock song, whereas Phoebe chose an indie folk song. Both song choices were akin to their overall style as artists. Conforming to indie genre conventions, they celebrate the rawness and imperfections of music, which was what I find most appealing about their performances. As someone with a Classical background, it has come in handy when analysing the musicianship aspect. For example, my exposure to classical music taught me that Phoebe ending a performance with a diminuendo leaves the audience in a state of tranquillity. However, I lack knowledge on live music technology, so I had to do a lot of research into PA systems, monitors, types of microphones, etc. The stagecraft elements are the easiest to analyse because they don't require as much research. The effects of certain elements being put into use can be deduced quite easily. A notable amount of research into stagecraft came from the pre-class readings. One example is *Performing Popular Music* by David Cashman and Waldo Garrido. Memorable performances engage with as many human senses as possible, even senses beyond the common five. Performers should consider the following senses: vibration, heat, time passing, pain, balance, and position and movement of our bodies (Cashman & Garrido, 2019). This reading reminds me to consider how my chosen performances engage with human senses.

I have gotten some feedback from Peter when I showed him my analysis. He said the analysis is quite detailed and well-thought-out, but it would be great to see the analysis of 2 contrasting types of performances. Perhaps choosing a large-venue performance that utilises an elaborate set of live music technology would be perfect. Nevertheless, I have already finished most of my analysis and was unsure if I had enough time to redo one of the performances. I realised giving each other feedback has to be delivered with a lot of respect and receiving it requires an open mindset and readiness to be criticised. So far, the technology in the performances has been the most challenging to analyse because I'm least familiar with it. Researching about technological elements has expanded my knowledge considerably. On the other hand, my familiarity with musicianship and stagecraft elements from my experience in high school allowed me to refer back to knowledge I learned, saving me a lot of time. However, I still looked for more information online to enhance the quality of my analysis and deepen my understanding. This project has made me look deeper into the elements of a live performance that artists intentionally chose to

deliver a unique experience. It has made me pay attention to details of a performance that I would've never considered important before, e.g., the sensory experience that supports the music. Knowledge gathered from this project will be highly valuable when I will be putting on a live show.

## References

Cashman, D., & Garrido, W. (2019). *Performing Popular Music* (1st ed.). Taylor and Francis.

## Project-Completion Reflection

The exploration of live music performances has greatly enhanced my understanding of live music equipment and technology in particular. Before starting this project, I had very limited knowledge on the equipment used in live performances. I am now more aware of the usage of speakers and monitors, as well as the justifications for choosing certain equipment over others. Although I still struggle with input lists, I am now way more informed about them than ever before. Furthermore, this project has enhanced my awareness of deliberate decisions made by artists in musicianship and stagecraft aspects employed in live performances. For example, in Phoebe's performance, they all wore matching black suits, signifying funeral-like outfits and matching the song choice. I would have never paid attention to this prior to this project.

The biggest challenge has been working out the technology employed in the performances. Because these videos did not showcase the technology, it was hard to determine the things that were in the background, especially in dim lighting. Watching the performances at 0.5x speed, pausing, and turning up the screen brightness have aided me a lot. On the other hand, the musicianship and stagecraft areas weren't difficult to describe, but were still challenging to decipher the intentions behind each artist's decision. Sometimes I wondered if these choices weren't deliberate; just doing things this way because it would look/sound cool. Nevertheless, I tried to put myself in their shoes and thought of how each decision would affect the audience's perception.

I feel more confident now engaging with live music performances. For future performances, I will be able to be more involved in the equipment and technology used and not rely on others. I will also be more deliberate with decisions regarding musicianship and stagecraft aspects, aiming to deliver a unique, tailored experience for the audience, engaging with their senses. An area I would like to further develop will be my understanding of live music technology, including live sampling, mixers, electronic percussion, etc. I will pay more attention to live performances I see in real life and online, specifically about the technology implemented.

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## Performance Links

Link to the performance #1	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gheV7FyJPZ4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gheV7FyJPZ4</a>
Link to the performance #2	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDQTa3jw9Qg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDQTa3jw9Qg</a>