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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

[Fred again.. - Actual Life 3 Piano Live \(22 December 2022\)](#)

It's the first song in the performance

Artist(s): Fred Again..	Song: Mustava (time to move you) Piano version
Tempo (<i>optional</i>): Roughly 120	Key (<i>optional</i>): G sharp

The thing I love about Fred Again is how he humanises a genre that is not typically associated with having a lot of heart or soul. All of his musical content and iconography suggests life, humanity, happiness and heartbreak. In his music videos and album artwork, people in reality are always at the forefront and he approaches his live shows in a similar fashion. He doesn't rely on fancy backdrops or visuals but contrasts connection and loneliness in his different types of performances. We can all relate to both of these human experiences.

This song is off his album Actual Life 3 which was in the process of being written when he performed his Boiler room set, which was a significant turning point in his career and I will analyse in the next performance. In this performance he uses;

- Roland RD-700 Digital stage piano,
- Dynamic mic recording ambient sounds from London rooftop,
- Laptop playing vocals and other ambient voice recordings,
- Drone to film around,
- Camera to film himself alone on the rooftop,
- Focal alpha studio monitors,
- Interface or mixer, no doubt recording the performance into a DAW.

This track's genre is ambiguous. Fred is definitely an Electronic artist but this track has no drums and focuses on harmony more than anything else. This version uses less vocal samples from the album version and strips away the minimal synth sounds it does have, particularly the bass. On the album it's used as an interlude track however in this performance it's the opening track used to set the scene for the whole performance, which aims to showcase his vulnerability and a more solemn message.

The piano, ambient sounds and vocal samples are all that's included in the performance. I think this shows his commitment to presenting only the raw emotion he included in the song. He has let most of his genre conventions fall to the side. I think it's interesting how he has presented this

performance with the stripped back bare bones of the instruments paired and him being alone on a rooftop in a busy city really highlights being alone. He matches the loneliness with minimal connection to the camera, instead letting the viewers connect with a space like the city and themselves.

The showmanship is subdued and minimal, however by him playing the piano live he is showing the audience he's not just a laptop producer and that he has this musical ability and a strong personal connection to the meaning of the song.

The stagecraft here is all about matching the emotion to the visuals. Through not being very active in the performance he lets you digest the audio and city instead, although the video regularly comes back to him to remind you he is writing about something really personal to himself and his life. I think he removes his persona from the performance really effectively, letting you put yourself in the music. Reading the comments on the video this has been really effective with all types of people talking about their inner feelings and self. Given all the barriers to connection to the performance here, such as no one witnessing the performance and it being a youtube upload, there has been a strong audience reaction and interaction. I'll paste some comments from the video below.



@lenchasanchez5158 8 months ago (edited)

This is going to sound hyperbolic, but it's my truth. I've been in a bad way since November... drowning, is what it's felt like; all day and all night, in public and when I'm alone, I'm struggling to surface for another breath. And then last week I discovered your Actual Life Piano series and suddenly, at least for a little while every day, I listen to each track, and I just float.

...

@betsamelamar 9 months ago

Fred has the ability to make you bounce and party to his songs. You just loose yourself on the dance floor. But Fred also has the ability to use those same songs and convert them into something completely ethereal. Again, you loose yourself in the serenity.



@getslowerx 9 months ago (edited)

Listening to this under raid alert in Kyiv & trying to sleep 🥱💔 When the war is over i will find Fred's playing live wherever it will be

👍 3K 🗨️ Reply

▼ 118 replies



@evanshapiro8829 9 months ago (edited)

One of the best discoveries of 2022 was your music. Thanks Fred! Your music is therapeutic and beautiful, and has helped me process so much this year.

👍 626 🗨️ Reply

▼ 10 replies

There is almost no stage dressing apart from the city backdrop. It's like you are just with him practising at home, just him in his tracksuit and his home studio equipment.

I also just want to touch on the lyrics of the song and why he chose all of the above aspects of the performance to communicate this song. All of the choices led to an intimate, personal performance that wanted to communicate heartbreak and loss. In having a theme around death, the iconography is still representing life; just instead from carrying on in life with this grief. This is a part of life, but maybe it's one that requires healing and some amount of solitude and inner reflection. In many of his other songs he talks about how personal connections save him and are the reason to keep going.

Now it's only me that needs to save himself
Feel like I can't be here while you're in that realm
Oh, I need time
Oh, I need time
Oh, I need time
Oh, I need time to mourn you
Time to mourn you

Mid-Project Reflection

Process:

Identify your reasons for choosing the performances that served as your starting point for the analysis.

Fred Again is a good example of an electronic artist showing they have a musical ability rather than just smashing out DJ sets all the time, and when he does do DJ sets he still makes an effort to perform parts live. Hes also a versatile performer and has adapted to covid and new technologies and ways of marketing your live performances.

Describe the genre and style you chose for your performances.

Ambient electronic music and Dance / UK Garage. The ambient side uses sampling, big atmospheres and a really simple piano tone. It's all stripped back. His other performances are fully produced electronic works with the full spectrum of frequencies and uptempo beats to move your body.

How did your understanding of pitch, tempo, and musical elements contribute to the understanding of the musicality of the performances?

I would say the pitches were similar between both performances, but the tempo was different. I couldn't hear if he had transposed anything, I don't think he did. However I think it's the musical elements as a whole which is where you find the contrasting elements of the performances. The intention and intensity behind the music is what made these performances so different.

How did your understanding of music technology and instruments contribute to the understanding of the performances?

The type of music technology Fred uses is exactly why I'm here studying this course. I love drum machines, samplers, synths and grooveboxes. I've spent a lot of time figuring out how they work and how you can harness their power to perform whole tracks as an individual. I really enjoy that Freds approach to both of these performances. One where you focus on playing a piano and cueing up vocal / ambient samples while you play and the other where you combine DJ decks and a groovebox. It's in the combination of technologies where he organised his performance.

How did your understanding of stagecraft contribute to the understanding of the performances?

His stagecraft and manner was quite different in each performance. When he wants to express a soft inner feeling he pulls you in close with his stagecraft, and when he wants to take you dancing and experience euphoria he brings up the energy. I think his sincerity stays the same

though, which is important for connection to the crowd and keeping them invested and in the moment.

Read Cashman, D., & Garrido, W. (2019). *Performing Popular Music* (1st ed.). Taylor and Francis. Section 1 Part 1 What Makes a Performance Memorable. Give examples of how this research informed your understanding and analysis of performance. Cite sources in APA7.

The most interesting point they made in *Performing Popular Music* to me was about how Taylor Swift can engage a crowd with silence (Cashman & Garrido, 2020, 2). She just stands and looks out at the audience. There are different ways to engage the audience and they are all valid if they work. Maybe a pub performer can't stand and stare silently so you have to pick the right method of engagement for the situation. I think Fred knows this well, and demonstrates this in his piano rooftop performance.

Person:

How did your personal musical preferences and background influence the choice of style and genre of your analysis?

It's not a genre I've always liked but in the past few years I've really delved into it and I understand it deeply now. This no doubt influences why I chose these performances. I think they also speak to my personality type. I either like really high energy performances or really soothing experiences.

What feedback have you received and how did you apply it?

I haven't got feedback from anyone in the class but I've asked my partner what she thought of my writing and she helped me to fix some wishy-washy sentences and encouraged me to be more decisive with what I'm trying to say. I think that will help with the final product.

Have you given feedback to others on their work?

I did give Sophie some feedback in the form of encouragement but she had a lot going on and had to drop the subject.

Proficiency:

How well could you identify the technological, musical and stagecraft elements of the performances?

I think fairly well for the stagecraft element, although it's probably an area I need to improve in my own performances and getting a bigger base of knowledge would help. Although I can see Fred may not be the most outgoing performer (like me) so I could incorporate his types of stagecraft into my own. I think I identify the technological and musical aspects strongly.

What appropriate knowledge did you have before this project and how has it expanded?

I think as someone who has been to a few concerts there is some innate knowledge of understanding it from a consumer perspective, but just like musical elements of a piece of music, the stagecraft as a whole needs to all say the same message. You can't have one thing out of place, otherwise your performance may be confusing and not come across very well. So nailing all the small things is important. I've definitely learned more about the small things including iconography and that even silence can be emotionally connecting.

What I did already know is that you need to connect to the audience, your stage presence is important or if it's not there then you need to have some sort of visual aid.

How has this project enhanced your understanding of stagecraft and live music?

I think I answered this above.

In what ways has your proficiency improved through this project?

I think it's been about understanding where my strengths and weaknesses are and finding people I would feel comfortable emulating such as Fred Again. Also understanding that my performance needs to be appropriate for my message and all the smaller things make up that aspect of stagecraft as a whole.

References:

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

Documentation For Performance Analysis

[Fred again.. | Boiler Room: London](#)

Artist(s): Fred Again..	Performance: Boiler room performance 13:30 in, <i>Delilah (pull me out of this)</i>
Tempo (<i>optional</i>): Roughly 134	Key (<i>optional</i>): A sharp

I chose this track because it contrasts nicely with the previous track/performance. It has a different meaning behind the song which he has highlighted with his choices of instrumentation, stagecraft and musicianship. Although they do share a similar theme, what he wants you to feel and understand is different. This is a Boiler Room DJ set so there isn't a lot of live performance musicianship, particularly in this track. He did play live finger drumming in an earlier song but it's not the focus of the performance as a whole. He mixed this song in and also lined up the song on several different channels. He used the below equipment to perform this track;

- Native instruments maschine+,
- Pioneer CDJ,
- Pioneer 4 channel mixer,
- Headphones,
- PA system.

This track's genre stays firmly in dance, electronic, house and UK garage and is a faithful reproduction of the original track. The track includes drums, bass, synth keys, synth strings and vocals. It also uses sampling as a production technique. It is just him performing and is unlike other performances of his, where he will show the footage of the sample (generally a friend films themselves on their phone and he samples that). The meaning of the song (and this album as a whole) is connection and togetherness so it suits the performance as he is surrounded by the crowd. This album was composed in 2021 just after huge lockdowns in London. The crowd are really included in the performance because Boiler Room sets are filmed and posted online. This connection he tries to get with the audience echoes the intention of the song.

Fred's stagecraft mostly consists of dancing and mixing in the track which strongly ties into genre conventions for electronic music and DJ's. His ability to involve the crowd with minimal effort is helped by the stage setup and lighting. There is club style lighting to place you in that realm of dancing but it's still all about people and the crowd here. His persona is way more involved in this performance, the spotlight and attention is solely on him at the decks throughout the whole performance. At the end of the song he thanks the crowd with his hand to his heart which is a

Project-Completion Reflection

Appraisal:

How did the exploration of live music performances enhance your understanding of the music technology and instrumentation employed in performances.

I think that knowledge was already there as it's the main reason why I like making music and would consider putting myself in an unfamiliar position such as live performance. Although during class we talked about Daft Punk and how they have to hire a midi *engineer* to perform their music live. That blows my mind.

How did the exploration of live music performances enhance your understanding of the musicianship employed in performances.

I think it shows that whatever your strengths are in music, you can perform live. The technology is powerful enough we don't need a full band or eight arms to perform a full set alone. You can also have different levels of this where you could have a hybrid band of technology and live played instruments.

How did the exploration of live music performances enhance your understanding of the stagecraft employed in performances.

I think most people are confused by what DJs do. "What is that knob twist doing? I can't hear it." So Fred Again's performances allow people to still connect with seeing "live music" by seeing that he's performing these drums live, or playing that piano live. Seeing the people perform and understanding what, why or how this is affecting the sound is important to stagecraft. It can also be an interesting way of performing because most people haven't seen these technologies before so they are intrigued how it works.

Challenges:

What challenges did you encounter when analysing your chosen performances?

Were there areas that you understood better than others? Reflect on each area of analysis: Technology and Instrumentation, Musicianship and Stagecraft.

Technology was an easy one for me. He used different pieces of equipment in each performance. Although the overall setup was the same, one piece of equipment taking care of most of the sound and one piece to play live.

The Instrumentation was vastly different in each performance so this was also easy to compare.

Musicianship was probably slightly more challenging. He played piano in one performance and finger drumming in the other. They probably require pretty similar skills as you play with your fingers in both.

Stagecraft was the most complex part to look at. There were a few aspects to talk about such as presence, energy, stage dressing, lighting, ambience. However both performances were treated really differently and produced different outcomes.

How did you navigate through these obstacles to achieve a better understanding?

It was really about giving myself enough time to properly think about it and fully dissect the performances. I'm certainly not an expert on stagecraft so digging in deeper through analysis helped me to get a better understanding.

Future Goals:

Do you feel more confident engaging with live music performance?

Yes and no. Yes because I feel like I have a blueprint as a starting point. No because I realise how much there is to it and how important it is.

How will you apply any of the tools and techniques learned into your future performances?

I think I like the sincerity and honesty of Fred's performance, and if you talk about relatable things it may act as an icebreaker and a path to audience connection. I would just have to be careful in not making people uncomfortable with my lack of experience or confidence.

Considering the insights gained from this project, what specific areas or skills would you like to further develop in your future musical endeavours?

Performance for sure. It's my weakest link no doubt, and I would like to do it. I think the skills needed will come from getting more experience. Although I think I can forge a path in producing and hopefully making music for things like commercials or tv shows. The skills needed to do this would be business and entrepreneurial skills.

How will you improve your skills for future projects? What will you do differently in your next project? What will you repeat?

I would try to overcome my roadblocks quicker. I got stuck for quite a while trying to choose which specific songs to analyse which held me back. I need to be more decisive in that manner. I would like to be more decisive in my write ups as well.

I would repeat choosing something that really interests me. It's easy to do the work when you're passionate about it.

References

Cashman, D., & Garrido, W. (2020). *Performing Popular Music: The Art of Creating Memorable and Successful Performances*. Taylor & Francis Group.