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Live Islands in the Seas of Recordings: The Music Experience of Visitors at the Øya Festival

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Live music remains popular in the digital age, as reflected in the growth in music festivals in the 2000s. The increased availability of music online highlights the issue of what sets live music apart but also raises the question of whether the use of new music media changes the experience of live music. This article explores perceptual, psychological, and social aspects of the music experience of visitors at the Øya festival in Norway. It finds that new music media can in fact enhance the live music experience but also uncovers fresh dilemmas regarding the fundamental pleasures of attending performances.

Introduction

Over the last couple of decades, the means for accessing and experiencing music have changed markedly. Music is made available in new ways through online services like iTunes, Spotify, and YouTube, and it can now be heard anywhere via mobile devices. Many people are now relating to recorded music in new ways, abandoning their CD collections and using new digital media for listening, sharing, and searching for music. Is the rampant use of new technology, however, also affecting people's relationship to *live* music?

This article sets out to explore how people attending live music events are using digital media specifically in relation to those events. It approaches the issue via focus-group interviews with ninety-one informants recruited from a popular annual music festival in Norway, the Øya ("island" in Norwegian) festival in Oslo, between 2010 and 2012. In particular, the article looks at two evolving media practices for accessing music in tandem with the festival: first, the use of online music archives before and after particular performances; and second, the use of (increasingly

advanced) mobile phones to photograph, film, and record performances as they unfold. The overarching question is whether new possibilities for both listening to and creating recordings affect how people approach live music, how they experience it and how they subsequently relate to it. The answer to this question requires an in-depth analysis of the evolving forms of what we call *pre-event* and *post-event* listening practices.

Performances and recordings differ in many respects, but these two music domains are nevertheless closely related. The relationship between live and recorded music has been described in economic terms (Mortimer, Nosko, and Sorensen), as well as in terms of aesthetics (Auslander). In discussions addressing the music industry directly, this relationship has even become quite fraught, thanks to slowing sales of recordings and growing revenues from live music (Wikstrøm), which has led many people to question whether the latter remains a marketing tool for the former, or it is now the other way round. In the wake of this development, there has been a steady increase in the number and magnitude of live music events, particularly festivals, and we follow both Frith (9) and Holt (252) in wondering how audiences in fact feel about them. Despite an abiding interest in the relationship between the live and the recorded, that is, few empirical researchers have addressed how people experience these forms, respectively, and apply their agency to combining them.

The present article starts with a theoretical discussion of the experience of live music via a combination of perceptual, psychological, and sociological perspectives. It then turns to the issue of how new media are used in relation to the live experience, and how that experience might be affected in turn. The article aims to be an inclusive overview of a rapidly evolving field, presenting methods, perspectives, and questions for further exploration. The insertion of new media into old practices sets the stage for a critical reflection upon the “new” and an enhanced awareness of the old.¹

The Live Music Experience and the Media

Comparing concerts with recorded music highlights key elements of the live music experience. “Concerts” are here defined as occasions where musicians perform before an audience. These face-to-face encounters offer a greater range of sensory impressions than listening to records does, including, of course, images. Being there (but also not being able to press *stop*, *repeat*, or *skip track*) also encompasses a

different set of interpretations, emotions, and memories in relation to the music. Lastly, attending concerts entails one's participation in a social event in some kind of public space. Perceptual, psychological, and social features thus distinguish the live music experience.

This article explores these basic features through interviews with concertgoers. Its perspective therefore differs from studies of the aesthetic value of live performance, which often contrast the live performance with the musical work in recorded or otherwise mediated form. In analyses like that, Auslander has concluded that the live performance has little cultural power, and Gracyk has questioned its capacity to convey artistic intentions. In the present article, on the other hand, the object of study is not artists and their expressions but rather audiences and their experiences, which introduces other perspectives on the significance of live music.

Live music events, first and foremost, are characterized by their perceptual range. Along with the sounds to be heard, Gabrielsson draws upon many audience accounts to remark upon the powerful experience of the sights to be seen on stage, as well as the things to be touched—that is, the various tactile sensations of being present at concerts. These accounts reveal a remarkable diversity in terms of what people perceive and what impression it makes on them. One source of this diversity, Clarke argues, is our natural desire to identify sounds and understand what they mean. In this case, previous experiences inform new ones in a perceptual learning process whereby “distinctions that previously went unnoticed become detectable” (Clarke, *Ways*, 23).

Familiarity with the music one is hearing (live as well as recorded music) also affects one's interpretation of and emotional response to it. Studies have confirmed that actively chosen music has a stronger emotional impact than passive music exposure (Sloboda, O'Neill, and Ivaldi 23). Anticipation is also central to the transformative musical experience, a point that has particular relevance to live music in a performance situation. Expectations not only affect the live experience as it occurs but also one's retrospective appreciation of it. Huron argues, from a biological standpoint, that we are rewarded emotionally when our anticipations are confirmed (22–23). Outcomes that surpass expectations are usually particularly pleasurable, whereas high hopes that are not met can lead to bitter disappointment.

Gabrielsson relates several accounts of strong emotional reactions to live music, expressing positive as well as negative and mixed feelings (see, for example, 45 or 133). Interestingly, his informants are describing their emotional experiences in retrospect, often a long time after they occurred. This demonstrates the fact that music can create very resilient memories, connecting people with past mental states and situations. According to Snyder, new information “is forgotten if not rehearsed, that is, recycled through the focus of conscious awareness” (9). Furthermore, a memory is made more retrievable if “its context is rich and many different things can cue its recall,” such as music (Snyder 71). By drawing one’s attention to the musicians on stage and offering a wide range of sensory impressions, concerts are well suited to creating new musical memories.

Musical experiences and memories are also colored by those with whom we share them. Concerts are fundamentally social events, both between the audience and the performers and within the audience itself. Musicians on stage can communicate with the audience in any number of ways, including leading a sing-along or dancing with or for them. Audience members also communicate among themselves, and discussing the music and the way it feels is often a key part of this interaction. Concerts create a context, in other words, for meeting one’s musical idols but also one’s friends and even strangers, and Fonarow shows how people use them to explore social identities as well as aesthetic values. The night of the performance itself is the social peak of this process, but concerts also structure human interaction in the periods before and after them as well. The decision to go and the preparations and expectations leading up the event are often shared with others, as are the subsequent appraisal of the experience and reminiscences about it.

This overview indicates some of the ways in which the perceptual, psychological, and social aspects of the live music experience are intimately connected. It also underscores how actions taken *before* entering the performance venue affect the experience while *there*, which in turn informs how the concert feels *afterwards*. There is, then, a significant disparity between going to concerts well prepared and going without knowing anything at all about the music in question. What happens before and after concerts is in fact integral to the fully realized live music experience. The analysis to come will therefore encompass musical engagement before, during, and after the live music event.

The informants in the present interview study, as mentioned above, were recruited from a music festival, which constitutes a particular kind of live event. Festivals stage a series of concerts and often offer other art forms and activities as well. Recent decades have seen a substantial growth in music festivals, one that might be related to shrinking record sales as well as larger overall trends in tourism and the experience economy (Tschmuck, Pearce, and Campbell). Festivals come in all sizes and may address a niche genre or present a broader, cross-genre profile. Either way, though, festivals are likely to include several artists that some audience members will not know. The fact that this does not matter as such dovetails well with Bowen and Daniels's finding that the motivations for attending music festivals go beyond the music to include socializing and enrichment in a celebratory atmosphere. Festivals differ in this essential fashion from stand-alone concerts, where the audience comes to see a specific artist, and present a greater range of options (and uncertainties) regarding the live music experience that they will entail. These qualities will in turn inform the present discussion of the use of new media in relation to live music—with regard to festivals in particular, that is, new forms of music access can have great significance, for example in preparing and building expectations about such a varied and complex event.

Since the early days of popular music, listening to recordings has mingled with the live music experience in different ways. Various economic studies have addressed how record sales and concert attendance promote each other in a reciprocal fashion (Mortimer, Nosko, and Sorensen). Aesthetic studies have debated whether the record or the performance ought to be considered the primary expression of the music, to which the other must adhere (Gracyk; Auslander). There is little audience-based research, however, on the relationship between live and recorded music, especially with regard to the behaviors associated with record listening before and after attending concerts.

The specific uses of recordings in relation to concerts are of course interlaced with the development of media technologies. For a long time, a dominant means of accessing recordings was to go to a record store, buy a record, and then go home and play it on a record player. Recorded music could also be heard on the radio, on television, and in films, but only at certain times. One benefit of owning records was the ability to personally tailor the times and forms of one's listening, which included

the build-up to concerts. Access to records was always limited, however, by the shelf space of record stores as well as the individual's resources; few festival visitors, that is, would likely be able to buy the records of all of the performing artists.

In the 2000s, access to music recordings changed dramatically (Styvén). They first began to spread via peer-to-peer networks like Napster and subsequently via global commercial providers like iTunes, YouTube, Spotify, and WiMP (launched in 2001, 2005, 2008, and 2010, respectively). Spotify and WiMP represent a streaming model of distribution that is growing fast, offering low-cost, easy access to millions of albums and tracks. In Norway, streaming represented 65 percent of total music revenues in 2013, up from 32 percent just two years earlier (IFPI Norway).

Streaming services are able to monitor listening patterns in new ways, and the numbers reveal remarkable peaks in the streaming of artists, both famous and lesser known, who are performing in major live events (Maasø). We can parse these results further as well. Streaming data from 2012 shows that in the period leading up to the Øya festival, to which we shall soon turn, there was a greater relative increase in interest in lesser-known artists rather than famous ones. In the weeks after the festival, however, this pattern reverses itself. This begs the question of how recordings are specifically applied in relation to the live music experience, as well as whether strategies have changed alongside the switch from physical formats (LP or CD, for example) to online ones. The focus group interviews to follow will shed light on these issues.

In the digital age, concertgoers also have new means of acquiring recordings of the live music experience they have just had. In the past, one could purchase official film or musical recordings of the specific event, when they existed. Audience members could also take photos or make amateur (and generally illegal) recordings themselves, which sometimes were distributed in turn as bootlegs. With the rise of the mobile phone in the 2000s, of course, things changed dramatically. The mobile phone not only has become a key platform for accessing music online but also has developed into an increasingly advanced recording medium for both sound and images. At live music events, unsurprisingly, the use of these devices has proliferated.

In sum, there are now many new possibilities for both accessing the recordings of performing artists as well as recording them oneself on the spot. According to Jenkins, access and possibilities for interaction are increasingly being taken for

granted by fans. As new music media are explored, however, new choices and dilemmas arise. Lingel and Naaman, for example, interviewed members of fan communities who regularly recorded concerts and uploaded the video onto YouTube. They found that motivations differed within these subcultures; while mainstream fans wanted to connect with other fans, indie fans wanted to connect with the bands themselves. Both types shared a yearning to document the event, however, and both faced challenges to their enjoyment of the concerts that they were trying to record. While such audience recordings certainly add to the total amount of music that is available to listen to before or after concerts, their making and effects on the live music experience beg further exploration.

Approaching Live Music

As is clear by now, live music experiences occur in complex and dynamic situations and consist of shifting and subjective impressions. Despite the fact that these events are hard to reproduce and test, Goethem and Sloboda argue that research on music experience must find ways to approach real-life situations (211). In the case of live music, one way to do this is to interact with audiences as they attend concerts, and another is to solicit audience accounts in retrospect. These possibilities are combined in this article, as we recruited concertgoer informants from a music festival that we ourselves attended, which provided us with observations that subsequently informed our questions. The main material to be presented here was derived from focus-group interviews.

When interviewing people about concerts in retrospect, the live experience is not present but exists instead as memories or expectations of what is to come. Perceptual, emotional, or social aspects of the experience can therefore be challenging to access, let alone translate into words. Although the interview situation is radically different from a concert, both contexts represent social events during which different attitudes to the musical experience can be expressed. Focus-group interviews are often seen as subject to consensus-seeking group dynamics (Lunt and Livingstone), meaning that informants can be reluctant to share potentially sensitive opinions. However, discussions and negotiations can also occur, helping researchers identify key issues and dilemmas.

Informants were recruited from the Øya festival, which has been presented annually in Oslo, the capital of Norway, since the turn of the new century. It takes place over the course of four days in early August and attracts about 80,000 visitors, making it one of the largest popular-music festivals in Norway. On average, around eighty bands perform in the festival park, and there are more than one hundred additional acts in various affiliated area clubs. Øya has an indie rock profile of sorts but also features genres such as electronica, rap, metal, and soul, all performed by well-established international acts as well as lesser-known local talent. In keeping with the traditional affinity to Anglo-American pop music in Norway, many of the visiting acts are from Britain and the United States. Referring to their product as a boutique festival, Øya organizers privilege innovativeness and quality and signal a cultivated awareness of musical trends and conventions. Festival attendees respond to this elite appeal; in 2012, for example, the average Øya visitor was a thirty-two year old, and 63 percent of the festival's audience members considered the artist booking to be the primary reason for coming (Comte Bureau). The ways in which Øya visitors engage with the festival music vary, of course, and one's age and particular genre devotion (see Fonarow) are just two of the determining factors in things like whether one would seek out the mosh pit during a heavy metal performance. The present analysis aims to encompass variations as well as commonalities in the collective experiences of the Øya visitors.

Informants for the focus-group interviews were mostly recruited from the festival area itself, and the interviews were carried out within two weeks of the festival. Volunteers for the study were likely to be particularly interested in music in general, of course, and a small tick-box test indicated that most classified themselves as "enthusiasts" with a "greater than average interest in music." This augured well for the study's acquisition of informed and articulate viewpoints on music. Seventeen focus-group interviews in all were conducted in tandem with festivals over a period of three years, in 2010, 2011 and 2012, with anywhere from two to nine participants at a time. There were ninety-one informants in all. The average age of the informants was twenty-eight, with an age span from twenty to fifty-seven, and there was an even split between women and men. Attributions in the analysis include real ages but fictitious names. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and the excerpts included here were subsequently translated into English by the authors. While we look at

experiences and behaviors that are common to our respondents overall, these accounts (and the findings we derive from them) are not intended to be taken as universally representative in some way. Instead, we simply seek to identify key aspects regarding how our informants experience live music and draw some larger conclusions from them.

Concerts and festivals were consistently important to most of the informants, but there was considerable variation in how often they attended live events, which ranged from weekly to a few times a year. Most of them used various media to consume music, including online streaming services and mobile devices, which is unsurprising, given the general technological sophistication of young urban Norwegians in relation to their peers around the world (Mulligan). One advantage of studying this group, in fact, is that its behaviors tend to anticipate future developments in music consumption everywhere else.

The focus group interviews aimed to chart developments in both recorded and live music listening. Questions regarding live music began by addressing the live experience in a general way—for example, what motivates you to attend concerts? How does live music experience differ from other music experiences? The questions then turned to the use of digital music media before, during, and after concerts—for example, how do you use mobile media during concerts? How do you use streaming services or social media in relation to concerts? Øya was used as a reference point in the interviews, but the informants also referred to concerts at other festivals, as well as stand-alone events. Questions were formulated in an open way in order to encourage varied responses, and the interviewers actively followed up on those responses with the informants.

Going to concerts: Pre-event listening practices

As concerts approached (but at other times as well), our informants used a range of media to listen to recordings, including radio and CDs as well as online services offering downloads, file-sharing, and streaming. In particular, online music archives such as Spotify were particularly useful in relation to concerts featuring artists who were unfamiliar to the given informant. Such situations arose often with festivals, which further demanded careful planning to navigate an at times overwhelming program. This informant exemplifies this point:

I always listen extensively to artists who are going to Øya. That way, I figure out which performances to attend. Usually there are many that I already know I want to see, but I also discover new acts because they are going to Øya, and then I listen to them and want to see them at Øya too. (Maria, age twenty-five)

In the time leading up to a concert, many informants relied upon playlists, which are able to bundle the performers together in a single music stream. One informant first makes a list of the bands with whom she is unfamiliar, “then I add my own—the ones I want to see” (Ingrid, age twenty-six). These preparations are often integrated into a social process that in turn determines how music media will be used, as this informant describes:

We are usually a group of three to five people going to Øya, with somewhat overlapping music tastes, but not always overlapping. You can use that kind of service and say, like, “Well, I want to see this.” Then perhaps one of us hasn’t heard of the band before, and then you can decide if it is something you want to come along for. You can do that before other concerts as well. I have a good friend, and we used to say to each other, “I want to go to that concert on Friday—can you come?” Then it’s really a question of timing—if I can, I always say yes. But then you can use, say, WiMP or Spotify and decide, “Yeah, this’ll be cool,” or “I have to admit, I am a bit sceptical.” But I go anyway. (Eric, age thirty-eight)

For this informant, it seems that pre-event listening is more decisive regarding what he attends at festivals than it is regarding stand-alone concerts. In either case, however, online music media are integrated into the social interaction revolving around concertgoing. This informant reports that new music media even encourage her to go to concerts:

It is fairly easy for me to go to concerts with artists that I haven’t necessarily heard about before, but that I can check out. I find a YouTube video, Spotify, or something like that. Then it’s easier for me to attend the concert. (Ellen, age twenty-six)

For some people, then, going to concerts appears to be easier in the wake of online media’s cultural ascendancy. But is the experience of being at the concert also affected by this preparatory listening? Some think so:

Things can simply sound the same—live, that is—if you haven’t listened to it a bit before. (Jon, age twenty-six)

I prefer concerts where I know the music in advance. Then I get more out of it. When I am at concerts with artists I don't know, I am not always able to immerse myself in the music. That's why I choose to do it that way. (Camilla, age twenty-six)

My boyfriend prefers to know the songs, and which songs, so he can sing along and things like that. (Anne, age thirty-one)

Listening in advance enhances the perceptual awareness of songs and artists that otherwise can "sound the same." Moreover, it might help to form one's personal interpretations of or emotions concerning a performer that the live performance then would invoke. It also enables some manner of live social interaction with the performer (and other audience members) in the form of, for example, singing along. Some informants claim that it is simply essential to familiarize themselves with the repertoire of the artist to be able to appreciate the performance; otherwise, frustration can arise:

If I go to a concert and don't know the songs, I get a bit irritated at myself, because then I haven't done my research, in a way. Well, it is not that I have to know all the songs in advance, but, in a way, I haven't put myself in the proper state....I can be taken by surprise by the band. (Peter, age twenty-six)

I know many people that run around to concerts, and I don't think they even know what they are attending. I don't do that. I want to have a really good time when I go to a concert, and to know that I will have a good time. Well-spent money. (Kasper, age twenty-three)

When one is unprepared, one risks missing out on certain nuances and emotional undercurrents in the music, as well as some of its social pleasures. Pre-event listening provides a measure of familiarity and creates expectations, both of which in turn facilitate the emotional rewards of anticipation confirmed that were described by Huron above.

Somewhat intriguingly, then, some of our informants noted that they also occasionally preferred to go to a concert with a completely blank musical slate:

It's a total experience, not just, like, through the ears. Sometimes I am at concerts and regret that I haven't checked it out in advance, to get more out of it. But then

again, there are some concerts where someone radiates something very special, and you may have no preconceptions and may not have heard any of the songs before, and it can really grab you. Some of my greatest experiences at Øya, for example, are times when I have come completely unprepared and then was swept away.
(Kenneth, age twenty-nine)

At concerts, the listening is more dedicated, in my opinion. I don't need to know the music beforehand, either. I take in the music in a completely different way. I feel like it's much more physical, to speak plainly. Both because you can let yourself get carried away and because I listen more actively, on the whole. (Anne, age thirty-one)

Going to concerts musically unprepared is thus characterized as a special kind of experience, one that is appreciated for its relative sensory intensity and spontaneity. These particular pleasures, of course, are counteracted by the purposefulness of preparation; Huron further points to a psychological mechanism that rewards surprises of this kind: "In general, unexpected fortune or misfortune causes the biggest emotional responses" (22). One informant was entirely ambivalent about the virtues of preparation, in fact:

I think it's a double-edged sword, checking out the music before a concert. Because then, okay, you study and become familiar with it—recognize the songs and things like that. But you also develop a set of expectations along with it that might disappoint you. You don't get the element of surprise. Often the best concerts are those where I'm positively surprised. (Lucas, age twenty-six)

Our informants thus explicitly acknowledge the limitations of pre-event listening. With regard to new or unfamiliar artists at big festivals in particular, advance listening can be superficial and even misleading with regard to the impending live experience. For many of our informants, that is, discovering and enjoying *new* music was the goal at festivals. Nevertheless, though it was a gamble of sorts to check out new music in advance, most of the informants regularly did so. In accordance with the availability of artists' recordings online, it becomes an ever-increasing challenge to identify forms of pre-event listening that lay the groundwork for the desired live experience.

Being at Concerts: To Snap or Not to Snap

If most of the informants listened to recordings in advance of a concert, the most frequently stated reward of attending concerts remained the acquisition of something that exceeded a recording. Some people wanted “the sound—you feel it in the chest,” or they wanted “to feel the presence of the artists” or “to see their expressions and movements.” Others wanted to “see the people behind what I listen to every night” or to see them “play the music differently, and better.” Still others wanted to “clap and sing along,” to “go out together, drink beer,” and “share a music experience,” or to “meet like-minded geeks.” Most of them in fact sought the “whole package” of all of these perceptual, psychological, and social pleasures. At the same time, our informants ruefully acknowledged the constant spectre of disappointment—a poor view, bad sound, half-hearted artist engagement, or restless or disinterested audiences. If most of our informants had enjoyed an extraordinary experience at one time or another, these moments did appear to become scarcer with age. Still, most went to concerts hoping that they would turn out to be exceedingly good.

At concerts, our informants almost always brought their mobile phones, and most used them in ways that somehow impacted their experience. The phone was used to share or record images, audio, or both at the same time. Mostly, our informants raised their mobile phones when attracted to or inspired by something special on stage:

I take pictures of bands, cause it’s very cool there, and then, like, “Oh, great picture of the guitarist there.” (Lisa, age twenty-five)

I sent a photo of the chime at Pantha Du Prince to a friend. (Patrick, age twenty-two)

I don’t take that many pictures, but when I think it is completely super, that’s when the photos are taken. (Sylvia, age twenty-one)

Other people were more interested in things that were happening among their friends:

[I only take pictures] if there is something interesting to photograph—say, if [my friend] Geir suddenly does something strange. If you stand way back and are taking pictures [of the stage], the pictures are very poor. (Thomas, age thirty-seven)

I took a photo of myself when two beers had been spilled in my lap. I think that was the one picture I posted from Øya this year. (Christopher, age thirty-six)

Images were captured with phones for later use, but they were also used in real-time communication with people who were not at the concert. This informant reflects on what triggered the latter for her:

I do it a lot. Upload a picture, and then it is like “ha-ha” to everybody who is not there: “This is the place to be.” I use Facebook and Twitter the most. I have also called friends who are not there and said, “Oh, listen to this song,” [especially] if it is a special song that you have a special memory of with that person. But [at those times] you perhaps have had a beer too many. (Jenny, age twenty-four)

This informant uploads pictures on social media in order to draw attention to the exciting things she is doing or to exploit the personal content or connections in the music with someone else. Interestingly, she employs an ironic, even self-reproachful tone, which reflects the mixed feelings of many of our informants regarding mobile-phone and “live” social media use during concerts:

Yes, I take photos and upload them on Twitter and things like that. (Sarah, age twenty-seven)

I used to do it. But now...it is like recording at the cinema, I think. (Thor, age twenty-five)

You could, for example, call it’s a cool song with a cool band . . . like, “Ha ha, I’m here, you’re not.” (Frank, age twenty-nine)

Some of the more negative reactions to this mobile-phone use arose from its attendant distractions from the performance at hand:

You don’t get a feel for the concert, you don’t get a good picture, [and] you only see a lot of people in the way, cause you’re so far from the stage. So the whole thing sucks, and moreover it disturbs the others and me. They stand there waving. (Victor, age twenty-three)

I am actually an opponent of that. Sharing. People calling people from concerts— “Listen to this”—and things like that. I think we who are present should share it. And then we should maintain a clear distinction between those who are there and those who are not. Those who aren’t there shouldn’t be there at all, I think. It is all

about minimizing the factors that take you out of the atmosphere or that feeling. Particularly at the concerts that create a certain mood, like the Bon Iver concert . . . it is like theater, like “now it’s closed, we shall all focus on the stage, not talk to each other or take pictures or any of that.” (Lucas, age twenty-six)

Some informants thus find that mobile-phone use undermines their live experience and the “feeling of the concert.” Raising one’s phone diverts one’s attention to the camera and the attempt to take a good picture, as well as considerations regarding how the picture might be received or used by others at a later stage. One no longer takes in or appreciates the music as such, and the concert’s overall impression promptly fades. As Snyder notes, ongoing impressions are not retained unless they are “recycled through the focus of conscious awareness” (9). The concert that has been archived via a mobile phone will likely make less of an imprint via human perception, and one’s memory of it may suffer. Paradoxically, the urge to record will be strongest at exactly those moments when immersion in the music can (and should) be greatest. As will be addressed further below, however, any mobile phone-enabled diversion from one’s live music experience will always be a question of degree, depending on the duration of the recording in question as well as the way it is shared with others.

Our informants were generally quite outspoken about the frustrations caused by the mobile use of others (though rather less critical of their own use). First of all, people holding up mobile phones simply block the view to the stage and disrupt others’ focus on the performance. Mobile use was also felt to undermine the atmosphere and perceived intimacy that is shared among audience members at concerts. (See the comment by Lucas above.) Several informants applauded the social activities that were coordinated in tandem with the performances, like singing along, which accommodated a group focus and sense of community. Using the mobile to communicate with others would break that spell, leading Lucas to his insistence that “those who aren’t there shouldn’t be there at all.” Mobile use is often mentioned alongside other kinds of unwarranted behavior as well, such as people at concerts who “can’t stop talking” (Anita, age twenty-five). The mobile phone, in the end, seems to intensify the social dilemmas associated with making the most of the moment while necessarily sitting or standing shoulder-to-shoulder with many others who have temporarily congregated at the same event.

Generally, the informants were not all as outspoken as Lucas, who presented

himself as overly passionate about music. Forthright positions of this kind could make others reluctant to share their views, but they also spurred further discussion:

Many [people] want to communicate some sort of mood or feeling to people who aren't present, because they got sick, broke a leg, have a kid, or whatever. So even if you think, "Damn, take that down now," it's a bit—it feels like it's allowed. (Maya, age thirty-five)

I think I have changed my mind a bit, having heard all of the mitigating circumstances. But there is a difference between doing it once during a concert and the guy who is standing there filming for two and a half hours, you know. I think it doesn't necessarily have to be that super strict. But at least try to be considerate of people around you. Common "concert courtesy." (Jeanette, age twenty-seven)

This discussion shows how mobile phone use at concerts prompts both ethical and aesthetic considerations, as well as attitudes that vary from the pragmatic to the puritanical. Most of our informants seemed to favor the middle ground, distancing themselves from both rigorous abstinence and unfettered collecting and communicating. Roger, age thirty, concluded simply, "I just take a picture and say 'now it starts' and then I put [my phone] in my pocket." While most people do take photographs or capture recordings at one point or another, it is a self-conscious enterprise: "For me it's like, okay, everybody else is taking some pictures, so I can take some too," said Veronica, age twenty-eight. There are also relevant distinctions to be made between festivals and standalone concerts in terms of what is socially sanctioned:

I feel there is a big difference between concerts at festivals and dedicated concerts. Because at festivals you get the—in quotation marks—"irritating audience" [members] who are like, "Shit, should we just go to that concert? Yes, why not, we have nothing better to do." Then you go to the concert, and they are chatting [the whole time]. I experienced that at Øya this year—even during the [musical] climax for many [of us], Bon Iver, people were talking in the back row, using mobile phones, you name it. (Peter, age twenty-six)

But when you go to a festival, you know, you can't expect it to be like a concert at

Sentrum Scene. You have to wear—what’s it called?—blinders. (Martha, age thirty-three)

I think it’s more about genres, and obviously, if you go to Victoria Nasjonale Jazzscene, then there are not many [people] filming, or at least not [many] talking. It is a completely different atmosphere, and different audience, of a different age, than if you go to a concert at Rockefeller or John Dee. (Lucas, age twenty-six)

These informants are all aware of the way in which the concert setting (the specific place, musical genre, and artist) dictates the decorum, which experienced audience members follow. Popular music festivals, of course, are often staged in places that are otherwise used for alternative purposes, and by extension they attract audiences that are not necessarily familiar with the decorum (or all of the genres and artists that will appear there). Festivals thus represent arenas where attitudes toward mobile use are particularly varied, and while our informants were reasonably adaptable, they were also at times either frustrated or resigned.

As we have seen, the informants’ evaluation of mobile usage at concerts touches upon ethical as well as aesthetic issues, impinging as it does upon others’ experiences as well as one’s own. Ultimately, it has the capacity to transfer the concert experience to a later time and to other people, which takes us to the third part of this study, concerning the impact of new media usage after the performance is over.

Coming Home from Concerts: Keeping the Spirit Alive

When the concert ends, the audience members return to their everyday lives, but they now carry with them a new experience. Our informants handled this in different ways. While some reported simply sitting in silence and “feeling what happened” at a good concert, others reported a profound need to consume images and audio related to what they just saw, and to reminisce about it with friends. In what follows, we will first address the exploitation of mobile-phone documentation after concerts, then various related post-event listening practices.

Documenting the Event

As we have seen, many people tend to take out their mobile cameras and audio

recorders at particularly remarkable moments, hoping to take those moments with them in some tangible form. The results, of course, vary considerably:

I use [my mobile phone] to take some photos, I guess, for the experience, and then they always turn out so bad that I throw them away when I get home. The bass usually kills the entire sound experience when I have tried to record something [as well]. (Victoria, age twenty-nine)

Filming is definitely unusable. It is just nothing, really. It is just a lot of light and blurred images. (Carl, age twenty-three)

Unless something really special happens . . . I have found my concert pictures to really suck afterwards. Five pictures of the same . . . backdrop, in a way, and that's that. Can't even see the people. It is possible that I have a bad mobile, but I don't find it all that [compelling]. (Ada, age twenty-two)

It appears, then, that video and particularly sound recordings are often found to fall drastically short of the sensory experience at the concert. The technological shortcomings of mobile phones afflict both the audio and the video, but so does one's positioning at the performance—standing in the middle of a crowd, far from the stage or in a wild mosh pit, for example, it is virtually impossible to get good shots. However, if “something really special happens,” our informants were careful to acknowledge the virtues of a material record of their experience.

Photos can also act as straightforward memory aids:

When you have attended such an insane number of concerts in [just] a few days, it's easy to forget. Having a picture is a good way to remember it. (Sylvia, age twenty-one)

As mentioned, Snyder argues that richness in context is useful for recalling memories, and features captured in concert images might serve as cues in this regard. Some people, then, are happy to accept poor media quality in exchange for its ability to fulfill specific memory functions. When shared online, such documentation not only represents a memory aid but also a means of preparation for others who are planning to see the same artist, as this conversation excerpt illustrates:

There are better pictures out there. (Lisa, age twenty-five)

But I find that I benefit from others' mobile phone use. I watch a lot of YouTube videos from the concert tour, before they come here. To see how that song is now.

First, I check the set list. Which songs do they play? [By] doing this, I am ready when the concert comes. (August, age twenty-one)

Hasn't that got a down side too? Because you take away the surprise? (Andreas, age twenty-four)

No, because when you eventually enter the venue, you have a substantially better experience than blurred mobile images. (August)

Mobile documentation can act to sharpen anticipation of upcoming concerts as well as contribute to the recollection of them, but it is rarely seen as an aesthetic object in its own right. It is more often valued as an extension of the social experience.

[I do] take pictures—yes, absolutely. But I don't get to use them much afterwards.

Unless you photograph yourself and friends. (Lisa, twenty-five)

Social images are particularly treasured after festivals, which are places where numerous friends and acquaintances gather. These images celebrate the shared experience and the concert itself, and the image quality is seen to be perfectly sufficient, whereas mobile photos of performing artists never equal what is already available elsewhere from professional media outlets. The growing variety of performer footage online, by amateurs as well as professionals, might increase sensitivity towards the quality and usefulness of mobile footage. Generally, however, mobile documentation seems to be used as a personal and social memory aid rather than an aesthetic object as such.

Post-event Listening Practices

Live music experiences often have a transformative effect on fans' attitudes toward artists' official recordings. A poor performance, for example, can stifle one's interest for a few months, whereas a good performance can multiply it. The after-effects will differ depending upon whether the artist was familiar or unfamiliar before the concert as well. In the first case, one would have already heard the recordings, to some extent,

and the concert might make one listen to them differently, a point reflected in this conversation excerpt:

[At a concert] you are among others who like the same [performer]. Moreover, if the band is charismatic on stage, has great energy and plays great, it can be a magic night. (Julia, age twenty-two)

I have come across many bands that I have heard with half an ear—“They’re okay, but . . .” Then I check them out live and I am sold. They have a charisma on stage that is, like, “Okay!” (Carl, age twenty-three)

And then you remember that when you listen to it on Spotify . . . (Julia)

You get things when you listen to the records afterwards. [Things] that you didn’t manage [to hear] when you had only listened to the record, in the background, perhaps, without listening properly. (Robert, age forty-nine)

Often they also announce, like, “This song is dedicated to . . . this is about that.”

Perhaps things you did not know. Then the music acquires more depth. (Julia)

The live music (and, just as importantly, its live presentation) sheds new light on the recording. For the audience, then, concerts can cultivate an enhanced perceptual awareness of the recording and provide a new emotional and/or social context for its later interpretation. This can revitalize one’s interest in the artists and their repertoires, which is then easily accommodated online via streaming services such as Spotify, for example.

In addition, just as concerts can evoke (and refract) memories or impressions of recordings, recordings can do the same for concerts:

There are things that I, at least, bring back to the album. When you get home and listen to it, it somehow acquires an entirely new meaning, because you have the live experience along with it. So it becomes something that will always evoke good memories, because it was so good. (Veronica, age twenty-eight)

Recordings thus acquire a new stature through their bond with a live performance of the same material. This form of appreciation can reveal a social dimension as well, and sometimes our informants shared links via social media with other fans.

But what about occasions when the artist’s recordings have not been heard before, because the concertgoer’s first encounter with the performer is at a live event? As mentioned above, this is an increasingly common experience, given the

proliferation of music festivals in general. According to several informants, online music access after the fact is then particularly valuable:

Often, if I have been at a concert that had some artist or another that I hadn't heard before, I sweep the web for the records. (Eric, age thirty-eight)

Interviewer: Do others go home and listen [as well]?

[Many nod.]

I do that. As long as [the performance] didn't suck, normally you do that. (Kim, age thirty-two)

It is thus a relatively common impulse after an enjoyable concert to seek out the given artist's recordings. In recent years the effort required to do so has decreased substantially. Online music services make it easy to listen to recordings immediately after concerts, even as one is walking out of the venue, when the live impression is still vivid. Concerts and festivals can thus represent very agreeable opportunities for exploring new music. But this is not assured:

I am usually disappointed—almost always—over how much more boring [the performers] are on the record than in the concert that I thought was way cool, and moreover [that I] had had ten thousand beers at. Then it's like, "Okay, this was cool, now I want to listen to it," and then it might become a new favorite, or it might become something like, "Okay, it was a cool concert, but I won't listen to this record again." (Eric, age thirty-eight)

I have a lot of really good concert experiences, but I had two this summer that were absolutely fantastic. And then I got home and listened to it, and it was, like, nothing. So I was really disappointed. (Anita, age twenty-five)

When the recordings fall short after a great concert, it can be a profound letdown. In such cases, the concert experience, with its perceptual, emotional, and social facets, is not able to add to the interpretational frame of this particular artist and, in fact, even increases the distance between recording and performance.

Beyond the Here and Now

The preceding analysis points to the significance of different types of live music events for audiences, and specifically to the ways in which new digital tools can be used to enhance and extend the live experience. We have looked particularly at

festivals, which are often chaotic events during which the audience is presented with a range of artists they may, or may not, know or like. The live experience is therefore largely unpredictable. In general, we find that audiences expect (or at least hope) to experience something extraordinary when attending a live music event. Our informants contrast live music and different forms of recordings in many ways, but a recurring theme is the unique sense of presence and dedication in relation to the concert. Many also noted the risk involved in the live music experience, which can dampen as well as excite interest in the performer in question.

The potentially transformative impact of the live music event resides in part in the intimate relationship with recorded formats that it cultivates, in the heightened forms of pre- and post-event listening. Online music libraries present new opportunities for recording-based preparation for live events, but they also present new dilemmas. How extensively should one peruse the always-growing music archives in order to develop realistic, not unrealistic, expectations for the live experience? Some of our informants chose to listen to nothing in advance, in order to guarantee a fresh live experience, but most explored the extant recordings to some extent and clearly found it rewarding to do so.

Post-event listening was also common among our informants, who generally agreed that live music experiences in turn affected the perceived value of recorded music in a profound way. Post-event listening tended to act as reinforcement for preconceived notions about familiar artists or for one's impressions of the performance in question, explaining why there was a greater relative increase in the streaming of more well-known artists compared with small artists *after* the Øya festival, whereas the opposite was the case before the festival.

Our study therefore suggests that pre- and post-event listening are modes that represent specific forms of music appropriation and appreciation. Clarke distinguishes between autonomous and heteronomous listening modes, depending on whether one is concentrating on the music or also engaging with other elements, such as dancing or socializing (*Rhythm* 109). In one sense, pre- and post-event listening is heteronomous, as it is listening that entails the imagining of other, specifically performance-related things, like interaction with friends and what the artists will say between songs. Still, it can be highly concentrated on the music as well. Essentially, pre- and post-event listening is targeted at *another* listening experience and can

perhaps best be defined by its prospective or retrospective directedness toward a live event. The listener's existing relationship with the music is equally definitive for this listening experience, whether it is devoted to known or unknown artists.

There are also new media-related dilemmas linked to concertgoers' urge to document powerful aesthetic moments and important social interactions during concerts. This urge is understandable given the fragility of memory and the drive to share what we do; it is also true that festivals can present unexpected experiences at any moment, and no one wants to miss one of those. As mentioned above, informants balance this urge against the disruption represented by the picture-taking effort. Several people also noted the paradox here, in that the act of documenting a moment can in fact change and even ruin it. It is also clear that pictures and recordings are almost never regarded as aesthetic objects in and of themselves. They are used to aid memory and to share experiences with others, who might in turn include this documentation in their own pre-event preparations.

Ultimately, our study has shown that new media facilitate new forms of listener agency before, during, and after live music events. While present at concerts, many people use their mobile phones to record and then share their experience. In one sense, this is just a new expression of a very old desire. The utter omnipresence of mobile media, however, seemed to drive our informants to re-evaluate what they really valued in concerts, and to consider the extent to which their media would support or otherwise undermine those aspects. Many in fact concluded that mobile-media use threatens the perception of the performance, the immersion in the moment, and the social pleasures of live music. The intervention of mobile media raises ethical as well as aesthetic questions whose answers must be informed by experiences of previous events and one's interest in retaining those experiences in the future.

Conclusion: Prospects of Live and Recorded Experience

As we have seen, musical recordings can color the experience of live music. But live music can also affect the experience of those recordings. The interplay between live and recorded is continuously evolving, and we have here confronted a number of emerging forms of experience and practice with regard to live music at a time when access to recordings is virtually limitless. We have also tried to demonstrate the

ability of qualitative audience studies to shed light on these developments in a manner that far transcends audience statistics, for example. Lastly, we have proposed that the study of live music experience might benefit from the incorporation of insights from music psychology with perspectives from cultural and sociological music studies. There has arguably been a dearth of these approaches (which have been called for by Allesch and Krakauer, among others), especially in the case of live music.

Our informants clearly demonstrated an increased awareness of the virtues of live music over recorded music, with regard to both well-known artists and unfamiliar ones. Many of them, for example, saw festivals as an excellent opportunity to encounter new artists and even preferred not to seek out their music in advance. Alternatively, it was also clear from the interviews that using new music media for various pre-event listening activities could be part of a strategy for overcoming the uncertainties of unknown bands and live music in general, particularly at festivals. A key attraction of live music, of course, is precisely its inherent limitations for manipulation within its specific frame in time and space, for the performers as well as the audience. Live music, in essence, requires that one entrust the musicians with one's mind and body (and money) for the duration of the show, and our study indicates that the dedication to these singular musical experiences is increasing, even as an infinite range of recordings has become available online and via personal media.

New media have no doubt entered the live music scene before, during, and after concerts, and they clearly provide new opportunities for manipulating and controlling experiences as well as memories. They also pose new dilemmas. The most common response to those dilemmas, discussed above, is to occupy a pragmatic middle ground, balancing aesthetic and ethical concerns with the perceived and actual demands of the unfolding situation. The integration of media in the live-music experience is likely to continue to evolve along with the diffusion and quality of the technology itself, though this will likely depend upon the event form, genre, venue, and audience demographics. We have shown that people try to use new media to strengthen their live music experience, and there are likely to be differences between people seeking to capture the dance fever of EDM, the stage antics of heavy metal, or the improvisatory flights of jazz. The practices and attitudes of our informants, recruited at the Øya festival, may for example be affected by the age of the participants and the traditionally conservative ethos of the rock/indie genres that are

characteristic of the festival. Explorations of other genres and audience groups—for example, electronica and hip-hop—might further illuminate the uses (and abuses) of new media in the contemporary live music experience.

Notes

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