Phoebe Bridgers Live at Red Rocks

I chose to do my review on Phoebe Bridgers’ performance for a virtual audience at the Red Rocks Amphitheater in 2020. Due to the pandemic the production was exclusively virtual, and thus had no live audience. This changed the experience from a traditional concert quite a lot, but the production value was very high and added significantly to the experience. Overall, it made the experience more about the music and the performance rather than on the setting.

Phoebe is an artist who has not been in the public eye for a long time, as her first relatively popular songs were released in 2014. She first performed as a member in a band called *Sloppy Jane,* but eventually went solo around 2017. Since then, she has released two albums, both of which have been very successful, receiving many nominations for Grammys and winning several other notable awards. Her music is generally described as indie, and it focuses on personal issues such as relationships and struggles with mental health. She has very complex storytelling and imagery in her music, bringing the listener through a different story with each new song. The meanings of much of her music is not explicitly explained and leaves the listener to interpret for themselves. Though she has not been in the public eye for very long, it is apparent that she is a very talented artist who will continue to connect with people everywhere.

The concert starts with one of her most popular songs: *Motion Sickness.* In typical fashion, it is a great hook to the overall concert. It starts things off well with its upbeat melody and rhythm, despite the sad story of a failed relationship. The mood slows down a bit after that with the songs *DVD Menu* and *Garden Song,* both of which depict past experiences that could be interpreted in many ways. She continues to play the entirety of her latest album, *Punisher,* which generally invokes emotion in the listener as she traverses struggles and experiences through various stories and imagery. The show culminates with two of her most popular songs, *Scott Street,* and *I Know the End. I Know the End* is one of my favorite songs of all time. It has two distinctive halves. The first half has a slow tempo, soft dynamics, and nostalgic lyrics about being home, but the second half picks up the tempo and crescendos into a very energetic, almost chaotic climax. This second half speculates about how Phoebe would react to trying to make peace with the world ending. This song being the end of the concert was the perfect climax to finish off what was overall an incredible performance.

While it can be very easy and enjoyable to hear a song that has a very clear meaning to it, there is something special about ambiguity that allows the listener to apply the lyrics to their own lives, and Phoebe does an incredible job of providing exactly that. The overall structure of the concert, starting with a very strong lead and providing a rollercoaster of emotions up until the very exciting climax provided an engaging experience that made the hour-long performance fly by in mere moments. This is a testament to the strong use of form in the concert. This “rollercoaster of emotion” comes from the contrast between the different songs, or even sections of songs that keeps the listener from disengaging. A set or song that is cranked up to full speed and volume the whole time can become unpleasant very quickly, and one that is slow and quiet without breaks could put an insomniac to sleep. Through these ups and downs, particularly emphasized with the high notes found at the start and end of the concert, I was dragged through the whole spectrum of emotions and left only wanting more.