REVIEW

Phoebe Bridgers and the Gen-Z urge to document

// BY JULIA YAKIREVICH

As much as I wish I was one of those wise Yalies who deleted their social media before their first step on campus, I am no such student. In reality, social media plays a conflicting role in my life. On one hand, it's often the reason I procrastinate my p-sets or end up going to bed far later than I'd planned on. On the other, it gives me a way to engage with media that inspires me and keep in touch with friends and family — a much more resonant justification now that we're geographically separated.

Gen Z has been a guinea pig generation for social media use and regulation. We're the first to post our lives, our politics and even our concert-going experiences for the world to see. We've become so accustomed to preserving each moment that the moment itself gets away from us. It has instead become defined by the impulse to memorialize it. Last weekend, I, along with 60,000 others over three nights at Barclay's Stadium, was challenged to embrace a moment knowing I would never have access to it again. I attended The Lost Tour, a Phoebe Bridgers concert and, for the first time, experienced a mass digital detox. I'll attempt to preserve the moment now.

The experience began with a rarity. For the first time in years, I had to use a physical ticket, unaided by my Apple Wallet. From there, I approached the security line where I was given a Yondr pouch to lock up my phones. It wasn't only the performance that was phone-free, but the entirety of our time in the stadium. Even while waiting between the opener and the main set, I felt more present than ever talking to my friends — one of whom I met that night — in the absence of our handheld distractions.

During Bridgers' set, the no-phone difference became even more apparent. I noticed that people appeared more free to move their bodies and allow for physical connection to the music without risking an arm cramp from holding up their phone. Body language also came without the inherent self-regulation imposed by recordings.

There was an unspoken acknowledgement that the 90 minutes we chose to experience together could not ever be restored; for that reason, we responded to the music and the experience's ephemerality in the best way we could. We were hungrier to connect with it, and carve it into our memories — not our camera rolls or Instagram stories.

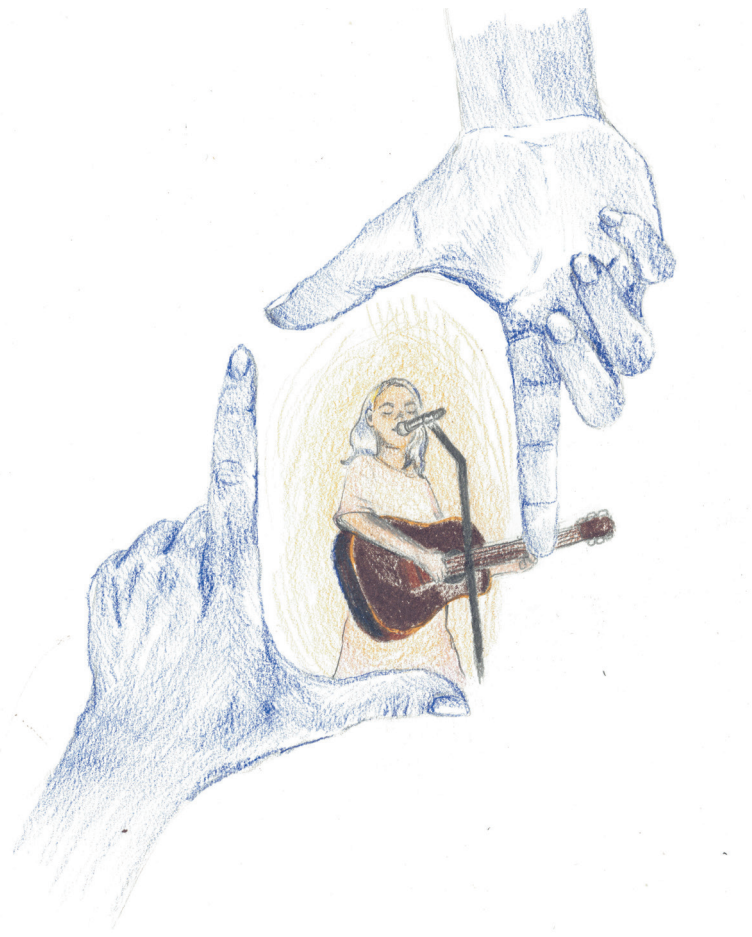
In the middle of the show, Bridgers thanked the audience for accepting and participating in her no-phone policy. In her spiel, she acknowledged a merit of the no-phone concert I was completely oblivious to: lighting. Of course, with no iPhone or camera flash, darkness easily settles over the stadium, a quality that is valuable to Bridgers' moody set in particular. There were times it was so quiet and dark we could hear security guards' walkie talkies and follow the glow of their flashlights from across the stadium. Throughout the show, she used a lighting effect that I can only describe as being inside a plasma globe — a radiating glass sphere you might recall playing with at the science museum as a kid.

The practice of banning phones at a concert has two main effects: keeping attendees present and more engaged with the music — and maintaining that those attendees are the only people to engage with the concert. Before experiencing it for myself, the former felt more obvious, but the outcome of the latter is what has resonated with me most in the days since. Without phones and, by extension, no social media, Bridgers removes participation from anyone not actively in the stadium. This effect inherently makes the experience more intimate: she is performing with only the people she can see, not the troves of people who will engage with her show secondhand.

While this makes the concert more special for the attendees, it could also be exclusionary to the fans who can't attend which, frankly, is a majority of her listeners, especially given the price barrier of ticket sales. As we've seen with strikingly popular concerts such as Taylor Swift's Eras Tour and Sabrina Carpenter's Short and Sweet Tour, the social media phenomenon comprised of videos and livestreams of tour-related content has become a legitimate form of alternative entertainment to actual attendance. For better and for worse, the 2020s have shown us that you don't have to be in the room to achieve the experience.

This posed the question of what embracing a live performance could look like. Is it standing the entire time and screaming at the top of your lungs? Is it closing your eyes and attempting to receive the music by osmosis? Truthfully, I'm not sure, and I have to assume it looks different for everyone, even when our phones and social media are removed from the situation.

Roughly a year ago, I attended Lorde's Virgin Tour in Boston. After consulting my camera roll, I can confirm I took eight videos of the opener, Blood Orange, and 10 videos and 12 photos of Lorde. Reflecting on that quantity, I give more credit to my iPhone 13's crappy quality than my inclination to record the show — the three other people I went with made up for my lack of content. While at the concert, I remember my motivation for recording stemmed from my intent to rewatch and reminisce. Over the year since the concert, not once have I meaningfully watched one of those videos. In fact, trying to relive the concert through my phone would be fruitless. The true experience rested in the ambiance of the stadium, the feeling of being part of the crowd, and Lorde's presence and live vocals; it can't be recreated by viewing my cracked phone screen in broad daylight. This experience leads to my conclusion: while I don't regret having my phone with me at the Lorde concert, it didn't improve the performance or make it more memorable in any noteworthy way.



JANE CALLANAN / CONTRIBUTING ILLUSTRATOR

I attended the Phoebe Bridgers concert on a whim, only securing a ticket after a friend gave up his Friday night in New York for a weekend a cappella retreat. The night invited a lot of reflection: mostly on my seventh-grade self who insisted on playing Phoebe Bridgers before school every morning, surrendering to middle school existential dread.

But it was a single line from Bridgers' "Garden Song" that inspired further contemplation on the no-phones of it all: "And when I grow up, I'm gonna look up / From my phone and see my life."

So while Phoebe Bridgers took the pro-Yondr pouch stance, her own lyrics might offer another conclusion on the matter. Keep your phone, document as you will, but don't forget to look up, and turn your flash off. The lighting designer will thank you.

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REVIEW

The "Unraveled" tour

// BY AZUL SANCHEZ

The opening synth-pop beat begins spilling from the stage, and a frenzy erupts. Girls as young as six and as old as forty, dressed in pink, scream at the top of their lungs. Breathless excitement colors the air, and an undercurrent of suspense crawls up your spine as you wait for Olivia Rodrigo to take the main stage.

As the melody progresses, the half-moon screen flashes to a brunette girl lying on a bed of flowers. She flashes a cheeky smile and begins to sing. The Unraveled tour begins.

On Sept. 26, Olivia Rodrigo began her Unraveled tour at PeoplesBank Arena in Hartford, Connecticut. The setlist included a few fan favorites as well as tracks from her latest album, "you seem pretty sad for a girl so in love." The album — which was released in June and since then has broken multiple charts, streaming and sales records — traces a relationship's progression from conception to termination. Some fans have divided the album into a "so in love" portion and a "pretty sad" portion. Rodrigo herself divided the concert in a manner that tells the love story through seasons.

A hazy dreamscape greets you as you set foot in the stadium. The main stage transforms into a field of idyllic flowers, and the stadium lights cast a soft, warm glow. It's like stepping into a meadow at dusk. It's as if you risk getting drunk on ambrosia and on the faint perfume of fauna if you get too close. You arrive in the spring, the season when nature and love bloom. You, as an audience member, become entangled in this web of tentative touches and flickering hope, when love is young and nothing bad has happened yet.

The flashing colorful visuals, wristband lights worn by audience members and general playfulness of the singer elicit the same elation and adrenaline that a new relationship brings. Ending with "good 4 u," spring transitions into summer with a montage. The visuals are more intimate. The twinkling notes and haunting vocals evoke melancholy and nostalgia. Even from the beginning, it is clear that this specific affair will end.



AZUL SANCHEZ / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Summer brings its tumultuous storms. Conflict arises: jealousy, fights, dizzying make-ups. A rock electric-guitar sound crescendos, the pressure building as we arrive at "my way," a vengeful territorial anthem. The anger is palpable, and the urgency to fight is too.

In autumn, the trees shed their leaves and love begins to lose its shine. When the life of the party dies out and the rot in the walls is revealed, we witness the tale of a girl coming to terms with the fact that romantic love cannot fix you. It turns out that love does not conquer all and that the tiny flame ignited in your chest does not survive the blow of depression. You may flip between mania and depression and conflate that with passion. Autumn ends with shouts of sorrow during "cigarette smoke." The live version conveys the palpable loss and Rodrigo's tumultuous pain — an explosive build-up within a heartbroken chest. Mournful wails and a desperate electric guitar signal a last hint of warmth.

Winter is quiet and solitary, but a bit of hope emerges in the montage's score. Although the lyric "and if there is a God, he's the bond that's between us two" from the song "stupid song" technically belongs to autumn's chapter of the story, I think it fits best during "honeybee," a song about the vulnerability that comes with being in love. When played live, the song creates a bond not of a romantic nature, but of a human one with the audience.

At the concert, Rodrigo invites her fans to dissect a past relationship. She created an album millions have listened to under their covers, cherished, cried to and felt kinship with.

Something divine hung in the air. Sharing the moment with the person you brought with you, surrounded by bored fathers with the daughters they love. Rodrigo in the center, playing piano, dressed in white, skin like moonlight, every flick of her wrist so graceful. Angelic strings building. Everyone gathered from all walks of life, sitting together, carrying the grief that means you loved. Every distant light someone who has felt the same thing as you, someone who, just like you, is human and indulging in the beauty of art.

And in that moment God did exist in the space between us.

And so the concert continues from winter back to spring, when it all begins again.

Overall, Rodrigo and her team created a phenomenal experience, from visual storytelling to her haunting live performance. They captured the essence of love.

Love, in my opinion, is not a feeling. Love is what makes you feel a depth like no other. It is not simply happiness or infatuation, but an intangible, amorphous substance. I mean, sure, it's oxytocin and dopamine, but there's also this ether-like quality to it. Something beyond the physical, something innate, something primal and human. Transcending the metaphysical, indescribable.

Love creates a multitude of emotions, and it makes you feel those emotions deeper than anything else could. Love can make you feel like you're at the peak of your favorite crescendo, but it can also make you feel like the world is ending. And Rodrigo managed to recreate the sensation for thousands of audience members: that, in and of itself, is an incredible feat.

Rodrigo not only told her own story, but also created a bond between herself and the audience, and within the audience itself. I can only try to replicate the experience through this article, but inevitably words will fail me, as there is nothing like experiencing the Unraveled show live. My only regret is that I was neither in love nor heartbroken myself, so I couldn't experience the show to its fullest. Overall, the Unraveled tour is one you do not want to miss.

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WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:

A DIGITAL DETOX