

The Liveness of Music and Philosophy: Points of Convergence and Difference

Kristijan Krkač

address: [Zagreb School of Economics and Management](#)
e-mail: kristian.krkač@gmail.com

Abstract The article describes the uniqueness of live performances, using the example of the liveness of music and of philosophy, and highlighting the points of convergence and difference between them. The following stands out as a part of the conclusion: philosophy seems to have some similarities to music. Both music and philosophy have more liveness when practiced live (it sounds trivial, but it isn't). Also, when practiced live, they cannot avoid having some aspects of action and of performance in contrast to situations in which they aren't practiced live.

Key words: live music, live philosophy, live performance, performance, art.

Introduction: Liveness

Philosophers every now and then think that live philosophy lectures are unnecessary (one of my colleagues thinks so, *nomina sunt odiosa*). Everything can be found in articles and books, a lot of material is online, and even lectures by contemporary philosophers are available on many online platforms they say. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown many “negative aspects of online teaching” ([Bird, Castleman, and Lohner, 2020](#)). Also, people sometimes think that listening to music live is unnecessary (another colleague of mine, again *nomina sunt odiosa*), that it can be listened to on high-quality sound carriers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, “prerecorded concerts, or concerts with online audience also showed many negative aspects” ([Kjus, Storstein Spilker, and Kiberg, 2022](#)) compared to live concerts with an audience (although here results of research are diverse). Perhaps “liveness” ([Reason, Mølle Lindelof, 2016](#)) is what is missing from both philosophy and music that do not involve live philosophical lectures or debates or live musical concerts or art performances. But what does liveness mean in both cases and are these meanings similar enough to draw some conclusions or at least suggestions?

(1) Liveness is the manner of existence in which an event reveals itself as present, immediate, and unrepeatable, constituted through the co-presence of agents (performers, speakers, audience) who share a temporality that cannot be deferred without altering its ontological status. Liveness has some specific properties such as “nowness, co-existence (with others), eventhood (event is inseparable from its happening), immediacy, and unrepeatability, and may include many things some of which are interaction, feedback, active participation, multi-sensory experience etc.”. ([Auslander, 2022](#))

What will be said hereafter on music and philosophy stands for both. After all some musical pieces can be intellectually very hard, as well as some philosophical works can be set to music very successfully (e.g. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logic-Philosophicus* (further on abbreviated as TLP) by [M. A. Numminen, CD](#)).

Liveness of a rock concert or artistic performance: “This is true, this is true. The sound of my voice touches you.” (NMN)

The Canadian rock band *Nomeansno* (further on abbreviated as NMN) sings the following verses in their song “Cats, Sex and Nazis”: “I spy with my lizard eye and everything I say is a lie. What about you? What will you do when the sound of my voice touches you? When you hear me say this is true and the sound of my voice touches you. This is true, this is true. The sound of my voice touches you.” ([Nomeansno, “Cats, Sex and Nazis”, Why Do They Call Me Mr. Happy? Alternative Tentacles, 1993](#)). Is this true? Of course, music touches us primarily musically

(melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, timbre, texture, form, and lyrics), but it also touches us in many other ways. Let's mention a few. So, lyrics "[This is true, this is true. The sound of my voice touches you.](#)" are true in many ways. Let us sketchily mention some of them.

(2.1) "The music, the singer's voice and the sounds of the musicians' instruments touch us physically" ([Müller, Lindenberger, 2023](#)). Admittedly, they touch us indirectly, i.e. through the microphones, amplifiers and speakers, but they still touch us. Nonetheless they also touch us directly, considering that *Nomeansno* was a hardcore band and held its concerts in small and medium-sized clubs, it was always possible to talk to band members before, *during* and after the concert. Also, we could feel the vibrations of the bass guitar and drums in our chest, under our feet, and in other parts of our body.

(2.2) Music also touches us "emotionally ([Mori, Iwanaga, 2017](#)) and intellectually". Loud, rhythmic live music ([Trost, Trevor, Fernandez, Steiner & Frühholz, 2024](#)) can "trigger the release of dopamine and endorphins, giving us chills or erection of hair on the skin". The human voice carries emotional tone that often feels amplified in a live setting. Music, especially loud and rock, can "stir adrenaline, joy, nostalgia, or catharsis". Also, music can touch us "intellectually" ([Farber, 2007](#)), especially bands that have very demanding music and lyrics, which NMN certainly has. Understanding wordplay, irony, cynicism (surely a Diogenian topic, [Krkač, 2017](#)), or layered meanings requires mental effort, so the listener is intellectually engaged.

(2.3) Last, but not the least, it touches us collectively. When hundreds of people are experiencing the same sound together, "the collective energy can intensify how deeply the music "touches" each person". ([Tarr, Launay, Dunbar, 2014](#))

So, it can be said that music, especially at a rock concert and especially in a small club in front of 200-300 listeners, touches us in more ways than one. We can certainly be touched if we read the lyrics of NMN's songs, also if we listen to their music on the radio, on YouTube, or similar, but in the full sense of the word we can only be touched at a concert (I hope this doesn't need further clarification, [nevertheless here it is](#)).

Liveness of a philosophical lecture or discussion: "Really one should write philosophy only as one writes a poem." (L.W.)

Without wanting to get into a discussion about the truth (or for that matter of avoiding bullshit, [Krkač 2006](#)) in philosophy or in the discussion about verses of NMN (I did it elsewhere, see [Krkač 2021](#)), imagine reading this text. Then imagine listening to it and watching me read it or talk about it on, for example, Youtube. Then imagine giving it as a lecture. And finally imagine me saying and defending it in an informal conversation in a pub over a beer. Maybe reading this text and talking about it with me in a pub would be as different as reading NMN's lyrics and hearing those lyrics at a concert. What I am aiming at here is the well-known fact of philosophy, no matter how sporadic or strange it may be.

(3.1) The [descriptive fallacy](#), introduced by philosopher [J. L. Austin](#), is the mistaken idea that the only or primary function of natural language is to describe reality and that utterances can be evaluated solely on their truth or falsehood. Austin argued that many sentences are not just descriptions but are instead performative utterances, where the act of speaking is the doing of something (e.g. "I take you to be my lawfully wedded wife."). Let's imagine for a moment that the descriptive fallacy applies not only to language and therefore to philosophical language, but also to philosophy, at least in some of its parts or aspects. When someone teaches philosophy, they are not just presenting the content of philosophy, but they are also philosophizing, performing an act, a performance in which the audience participates, and even more so when several philosophers are leading a philosophical discussion.

(3.2) Additionally, as Wittgenstein would say in [Philosophical Grammar](#) (PG): "Think about the multiplicity of what we call language. The language of words, the language of images, the language of gestures, the language of sound." (PG 2005: I,129, also: "No *represents* a gesture of rejection. No; no *is* a gesture of rejection. To understand negation is to understand the gesture of rejection.", PG 2005: I,23). In short, speech is a part of human action and wide-ranging practices. Even in his early work, TLP, [Wittgenstein](#) claimed: "Philosophy is not a theory but an activity." (TLP 1922: 4.112). So, live philosophy has similarities with live performances.

(3.3) Until Wittgenstein, philosophy did not flourish in drawings and sketches, and his books, manuscripts and lectures (according to students' notes) are abounded in drawings (truth tables, duck-rabbit heads, cubes, smiling faces, etc. see Krkač [2010](#), [2019](#), [2020](#)). The visual element of his philosophy is indispensable. Finally, there are Wittgenstein's remarks about whistling philosophy, or the one in which he wrote: "I believe I summed up where I stand in relation to philosophy when I said: really one should write philosophy only as one writes a poem." ([Culture and Value](#), CV 1998:28) perhaps suggesting the performative aspect of philosophy in action, and there is a small step between a poem and the lyrics set to music (again M. A. Numminen).

(3.4) During a philosophy lecture, for example, drawing a duck-rabbit head on the board during the lecture or paying close attention to the style of what you want to say, almost like the lyrics of a recited poem (see [Klagge, 2021](#)), and constantly correcting yourself until you achieve a satisfactory style of what you say, are more characteristics of a live artistic performance than philosophical topics written down in a book.

Finally, just as there is an element of [performance art](#) during a live rock band performance, so perhaps there is one in philosophy. Let's remember the anecdote that describes how philosopher Diogenes ([Dudley, 2008](#)) mocked Plato by bringing a plucked chicken to Plato's Academy, declaring, "Here is Plato's man!". This and similar cases are radical, and today few philosophers give in to the charms of such philosophical extremes. However, until recently we had milder examples such as Wittgenstein's.

(3.5) Also, it is sometimes thought that philosophy occupies us only intellectually, but not motivationally or emotionally. However, if we look at how philosophers choose their areas and topics of study, how passionately they defend or attack positions, and ultimately how biased they themselves are in their philosophy in light of their own pre-philosophical beliefs ([Bourget, & Chalmers, 2014](#)), then we can suspect that philosophy is not just an intellectual pursuit.

A comparison of music and philosophy when they are just written down or recorded and when they are live

So perhaps philosophy is more *truthful*, as well as music, perhaps not more or less *true* because that would be nonsense, but in some way more *dynamic*, more *complete* and more *alive* if we participate in it (even if only as listeners), if it is a live performance.

So, perhaps philosophy as performative ([Kirkkopelto, 2015](#)) and [performance](#) seems to be important if it is done live because it is more dynamic, more complete. I hope that, if nothing else, I have at least directed the reader's attention to the possibility that a philosophical lecture or debate is partly similar to a concert or an art performance.

Anyway, let's try to compare some elements of liveness and others between music and philosophy live and not-live (as shown in Table 1).

		Topics of comparison			
		written / recorded		live	
		music	philosophy	music (concert)	philosophy (lecture, discussion)
		A rock album on a sound carrier or a streaming service	philosophy written in a notebook, article, or book	a rock concert or art performance	a philosophical lecture or discussion
Properties of liveness and other properties of live performance	Nowness	x	x	✓	✓
	Co-existence	x / ✓ (Exception: listening an album together)	x / ✓ (Exception: reading a book together, book clubs)	✓	✓
	Eventhood	x	x	✓	✓
	Immediacy	x	x	✓	✓
	Unrepeatability	x	x	✓	✓
	Interaction	x / ✓ (See exception)	x / ✓ (See exception)	✓	✓
	Feedback	x	x	✓	✓
	Active participation	x	x	✓	✓
	Multi-sensory experience	x / ✓ (See exception)	x / ✓ (See exception)	✓	✓

Table 1: A comparison of music and philosophy when they are just written down or recorded and when they are live. Symbol index: x = there is no property, ✓ = there is property, x / ✓ = there is no property, but there are exceptions.

At first glance, it may seem that music and philosophy are separate and do not have much in common. For the sake of the argument, let us leave out the philosophy of music and philosophy set to music or music that is philosophical, so to speak, because, after all, both philosophy and music would exist without them.

(4.1) However, when we compare music and philosophy from the perspective of liveness, then live music and philosophy are much closer to each other than music that is not live and philosophy that not live. What makes live philosophy and music close is not only liveness but also a whole series of other properties (some of which are listed in Table 1) that are closer or further from liveness.

Does the liveness of music and philosophy contribute to live performance in a way that makes them substantially different from non-live performance? So far, I can only give few examples which could be good candidates for affirmative answer (as shown in Table 2).

Examples	
Music	Philosophy
Hearing a band only on a record and hearing them in concert, or listening to a band in a garage while they are creating a new composition or rehearsing it and hearing the finished composition on a record, are obviously different things.	Also, during philosophizing, there are parts of the process that are often live and ultimately not recorded in any way (sometimes by notes), such as a discussion of a topic that may stimulate the development of a new concept, new analysis, argument or objection, or a discussion of a manuscript or lecture before it is published or a discussion on them after publication (book symposia), and these are obviously different things from philosophizing in privacy or from published articles and books.
Rock concerts have been recorded and recordings published for quite some time because, apparently, for obvious financial and marketing reasons, someone thinks that recording and publishing a concert is worthwhile even though the concert features songs that have previously been released on studio albums.	Recently (for sure since the beginning of TV, but more often since YouTube and social networks) discussions of philosophers have been filmed; various debates, duels, panels, round tables, etc. Here too, someone thinks that this is worth recording and publishing, even though most of them most of the time repeat thoughts that have already been published.

Table 2: Some examples in music and in philosophy that could serve as candidates for claiming that there is a substantial difference between live and non-live philosophy and music.

So, is there anything substantially different in this (Table 2)?

(4.2) In music, in live performance, it can be a new version of an already published song (sometimes a completely new composition, as in some types of jazz and experimental music), and in philosophy, it can be a new analysis, a new argument, giving up a position that the philosopher previously held or accepting a new one, etc. (which, to be honest, is rare because, besides Wittgenstein, we can only count on the fingers of one hand the philosophers who have publicly renounced their previous viewpoints).

Conclusion

Here we have deliberately taken the example of music, which we have compared with philosophy under the view of liveness. It would be easier to compare philosophy with some other theoretical or very abstract science (e.g. with fundamental mathematics, linguistics, programming, logic or theoretical physics), but what would we get from that? In this way we have given a difficult example of a comparison that by definition should give excessive differences, but we have tried to point out that it does not. Differences certainly exist, but they do not seem to be differences in kind but rather in degree. When music and philosophy are performed live, then this liveness of the experience makes them much closer than live music and music in, for example, a musical notation or on a sound carrier, or live philosophy and philosophy in, for example, a philosopher's private notes or in a published article.

In the text so far, we have stated or at least attempted to state the following (I am giving relations between previously stated most important remarks 1–5):

(1) (liveness)

↓

(2.1) → (2.3) (liveness in music)

↓

(3.1) → (3.5) (liveness in philosophy)

↓

(4.1.) → (4.2) (similarities and differences of liveness in music and philosophy)

↓

(5) (conclusion)

In short, and based on previously described similarities and their comparison, my hunch would be this. Live philosophy seems to have similarities to live music. Both music and philosophy have more liveness when practiced live (it sounds trivial, but it isn't). Also, when practiced live, they cannot avoid having some aspects of action and of performance in contrast to situations in which they are practiced privately, offline (recorded, written and similar).

(5) Therefore, if previous remarks (1–4) hold, it seems that properties of performance, action, liveness (and others) make live music and live philosophy much closer than live and non-live music or live and non-live philosophy.

If we return to the beginning of the text and the opinion of *some people dear to us* that live philosophy, e.g. a philosophical lecture, has no particular advantages over philosophy that is not live, e.g. reading philosophical articles and books in private, then perhaps we have at least aroused suspicion that this may not be entirely the case. We have tried, at least in principle and through a few examples, to point out the existence of at least hunches, indications or even suspicions that this may not be the case because there is a part of philosophy that can only take place live and even if it is recorded and reproduced, it is not the same as live.

Here we are of course referring to the so-called "classical liveness" and to live philosophy practiced by philosophers themselves among themselves (mostly within their institutions). As for how effective or useful live philosophy can be for non-philosophers even some philosophers have written (see [Sušnik, 2024](#) Sušnik, as being a philosopher himself, if I am right, in brief claims that philosophy in itself is too difficult and abstract (universal) for the general public, to institutionalized (not in psychiatric way) that it cannot be popularized without crippling it,

therefore, acknowledges the inability of philosophy to popularize itself in the right way (he also mentions the bad ways which are many), and that the benefit of philosophy to the public is small, which, if we may say so, is certainly inconsistent with, for example, the comparatively large number of philosophers in some philosophical communities).

Although this is another topic that we have not presented and analyzed here, still, popular, public, applied or practical philosophy, in terms of its liveness, could certainly present an argument contrary to the one I have attempted to formulate here. Namely, if the liveness of philosophy is something that makes it closer to other live things, e.g. rock concerts, then its liveness should also come to the fore during its popularization, application, and presentation to the general public, even more so, but what often happens here, if there are no other philosophers in the public, is that the philosopher talks to himself, and perhaps not even that because that same public could declare him crazy for it.¹

References

Articles and books

- Auslander, P. (2022) *Liveness. Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 3rd Edition, New York and London: Routledge, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003031314>.
- Bird, Kelli A., Benjamin L. Castleman, and Gabrielle Lohner. (2020) "Negative Impacts from the Shift to Online Learning During the COVID-19 Crisis: Evidence from a Statewide Community College System" (EdWorkingPaper: 20-299), Annenberg Institute, Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/gx68-rq13>.
- Bourget, D., & Chalmers, D. J. (2014) "What do philosophers believe?" *Philosophical Studies*, 170(3), 465–500, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11098-013-0259-7>.
- Dudley, R. D. (2008) *A History Of Cynicism - From Diogenes To The 6th Century A.D.*, Mayo Press, URL: <https://www.amazon.com/History-Cynicism-Diogenes-Century-D/dp/144372176X>.
- Farber, B. A. (2007) *Rock 'n' Roll Wisdom, What Psychologically Astute Lyrics Teach about Life and Love*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Kjus, Y., Storstein Spilker, H., and Kiberg, H. (2022) "Liveness online in deadly times: How artists explored the expressive potential of live-streamed concerts at the face of COVID-19 in Norway", *First Monday*, Volume 27, Number 6 - 6 June, <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/download/12398/10657>, doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v27i6.12398>.
- Kirkkopelto, E. (2015) "For what do we need performance philosophy?", *Performance Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (2015):4-6, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21476/PP.2015.117>, <https://www.performancephilosophy.org/journal/article/view/7/65>.
- Klagge, J. C. (2021) *Wittgenstein's Artillery: Philosophy as Poetry* Cambridge, MA. The MIT Press.
- Krkač, K. (2006) "Harry G. Frankfurt, On Bullshit", *Prolegomena*, 5, 1/2006:117-121, URL: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/6618>.
- Krkač, K. (2010) „Wittgenstein's Dubbit III: Caught in Kirchberg am Aspekt-Wechsel“, *Wittgenstein Studien*, De Gruyter, 1/2010:121-51, URL: <https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110222999.121/html>.
- Krkač, K. (2017) "Cynic as a Melancholic Who Keeps His Depression Under Control (parallel English and Croatian text)", in Raguz, I. and Šokčević, Š. (eds.) "Melancholy between Creativity and Depression", Theological Faculty in Đakovo, University of Osijek, 2017, pp. 157-174, 341-359.
- Krkač, K. (2019) "Steadily Cubic: A Squared Odyssey, Wittgenstein's cube examples", *Disputatio philosophica: International journal on philosophy and religion*, Vol. 21 No. 1, 2019, pp. 47-66, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32701/dp.21.1.5>.
- Krkač, K. (2020) "Wittgenstein's four-stroke faces and the idea of visual philosophy", *Wittgenstein Studien*, De Gruyter, (online 2019, print 2020), Vol. 11, No. 1, 2020:31-52, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/witt-2020-0003>.
- Krkač, K. (2021) *The Clan of the Cave Speaker: A Philosophy of rock from the listener's point-of-hearing, (in Croatian)*, Zagreb: Stjepan Mihovili Blažević – Vlastita naklada, e-book, Udruga za promicanje filozofije Filozofija.org, URL: [https://www.filozofija.org/wp-content/uploads/knjige/Krka%C4%8D-\(2021\)-Pleme-spijskog-zvu%C4%8Dnika-final.pdf](https://www.filozofija.org/wp-content/uploads/knjige/Krka%C4%8D-(2021)-Pleme-spijskog-zvu%C4%8Dnika-final.pdf).

¹ This text is a draft and has not been published anywhere yet. It was read by two colleagues who made some comments that I took into account and made corrections. The text was checked for plagiarism using the Turnitin system and contains 0% overall similarity and 0% use of artificial intelligence.

Longworth, G. (2025), "John Langshaw Austin", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2025/entries/austin-jl/>.

Mori, K., Iwanaga, M. (2017) "Two types of peak emotional responses to music: The psychophysiology of chills and tears". Sci Rep 7, 46063, <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep46063>.

Müller V., Lindenberger U. (2023) "Intra- and interbrain synchrony and hyperbrain network dynamics of a guitarist quartet and its audience during a concert". Ann N Y Acad Sci. 2023 May;1523(1):74-90. doi: <https://10.1111/nyas.14987>. Epub 2023 Mar 27. PMID: 36973939.

Reason, M., Mølle Lindelof, A. (eds.) (2017) *Experiencing Liveness in Contemporary Performance Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, New York and London: Routledge.

Sušnik, M. (2024) "Kome je uopće potrebna akademska filozofija?" ["Who needs academic philosophy anyway?"], Prolegomena: Časopis za filozofiju, 23 (2) 2024: 221-242
doi: <https://doi.org/10.26362/20240204>.

Tarr, B., Launay, J., Dunbar, R. I. M. (2014) "Music and social bonding: "self-other" merging and neurohormonal mechanisms", Frontiers in Psychology Volume 5 – 2014, <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01096>, <https://10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01096>.

Trost, W., Trevor, C., Fernandez, N., Steiner, F., & Fröhholz, S. (2024) "Live music stimulates the affective brain and emotionally entrains listeners in real time", Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. 121 (10) e2316306121, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2316306121>.

University of Zurich. "Live music emotionally moves us more than streamed music", ScienceDaily, 28 February 2024, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2024/02/240226204557.htm.

Wittgenstein, L. (1961) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Wittgenstein, L. (1998) *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Wittgenstein, L. (2005) *Philosophical Grammar*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Other sources

"Descriptive Fallacy" (n.d.) Wikipedia, URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Descriptive_fallacy.

"Nomeansno" (n.d.) Wikipedia, URL: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nomeansno>.

"Performance" (n.d.) Wikipedia, URL: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance>.

"Performance Art" (n.d.) Wikipedia, URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_art.