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TRENDS

Billie Eilish's documentary is a revealing look at heartbreak, fame: 'The pressure is constant'

Patrick Ryan USA TODAY

Published 5:00 PM ET Nov. 19, 2021 | Updated 5:00 p.m. ET Nov. 19, 2021

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Spoiler alert! Contains details about Apple TV+ documentary 'Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry,' premiering Friday.

No one loves "The Office," more than Billie Eilish.

The pop star sampled a clip from NBC's beloved mockumentary series in her song "My Dream Addiction," and has since referred her fanbase to a podcast with Rainn Wilson and "Office" extra Angela Kinsey.

So when it came time to make her documentary, "Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry" (streaming on Apple TV+ Friday), Eilish, 19, naturally looked to the sitcom's director for inspiration.

"When we first met and were chatting about the [film], I was like, 'What would you want it to be like?' Tonya [Lewis Lee, director of the film] TOLD! 'And she said, 'I want it to be like "The Office." She wanted that kind of real and comprehensive [approach], and that Jake Rossdale relationship with the cameraworkers a glance over can break the fourth wall. We do it two or three times in these critical moments, where she looks right down the barrel of the camera.

"You know that she's seeing you and she knows you're seeing her. It's that very Billie Eilish connection with the audience."

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Billie Eilish is a great fan of her new boss TV documentary "Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry." Streaming Friday. | Courtesy Apple TV+

'She's the boss'

That connection is part of what makes "Blurry" the most intimate and revelatory music film in years. Many of Eilish's peers have released documentaries recently, in an excess of intervention or promoting albums. But most only scratch the surface of their subjects' interior lives, while Cutler digs deep into the tenacity and tradeoffs of creating art.

Running nearly two hours, "Blurry" forgoes talking head interviews and voiceovers for vérité-style footage and refreshingly unscripted home video (much of which was shot by Eilish and her family). The first half is devoted almost entirely to the making of her Grammy-dominating debut album "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?", which she co-wrote and recorded in her modest Los Angeles home with brother Finneas O'Connell, now 25.

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Told through laptop screens and iPhone videos, we watch as the siblings experiment with sound and work through the fear-fueled fallout of "Bad Guy," all while vomiting in their parents, Maggie Baird and Patrick O'Connell, about the overwhelming success of their creation. Eilish's mom and dad are shown as Eilish's vital sounding boards, to the point, she charmingly directs her mom in their backyard, shooting proof of concept for her "When the Party's Over" video.

"Billie Eilish is the volcano of Billie Eilish. Her entire body of work, her image, her business. She's the boss," Cutler says. "That footage was shot when she was 16, and the tonicpoint and specificity and confidence she has is great to see. It wasn't be surprising if Billie's career ultimately involves a really healthy amount of directing."

Nothing was off-limits

Cutler doesn't shy away from the struggles, acting as a fly on the wall as Eilish deals with heartbreak, growing up and multiple leg injuries from performing. On a tour bus, she commiserates with her brother, who's experiencing hamstring discomfort from his friends back home. In another conversation with her mom, she debates releasing "Xanax," to assure the song's anti-drug sentiment could come back to bite her when she's older.

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We also get rare glimpses into her relationship with a now-ex-boyfriend, orchestrated by through public phone calls and behind the scenes footage. She mostly serenades him before placing the biggest show of her career at Coachella ever, only to be dumped soon after. Her mom and dad don't like him, it seems but he's kind and hugs his brother, their wrinkle just out of earshot.

Eilish opened up to Vogue last year about falling into depression after dating someone who treated her poorly, but has otherwise kept her relationships private.

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"We're Hoarding#, we're sensitive – we're not hiding in corners. But there was no specific area of her life at all that we were not invited into," Cutler says. At the end of the day, "we're telling the story of this extraordinary artist who's exploding with the creative artistic stage, and of a young woman who's crossing the threshold from childhood to adulthood."

Billie Eilish, right, talks to her mom Maggie Baird in "Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry." | Courtesy Of Apple TV+

'I literally can't have a bad moment'

Cutler credits Eilish's family and team for helping her navigate stardom, along with celebrity mentors Justin Bieber and Katy Perry, who make endearing cameos offering advice. But it's not always perfect.

One of the doc's saddest moments comes late in the film when the singer is ambushed by various executives and their kids demanding photos at her concert. Afterwards, she sits down with a manager who was "rude at the meet-and-greet."

"I literally can't have a bad moment," says Eilish, understandably frustrated. "I don't want anyone who knows who I am and is any sort of fan or knows a fan to see me in any sort of awkward situation. It's embarrassing and I have to keep smiling, and if I don't, they hate me and think I'm horrible."

"So throwing fan to the wolves," her mom responds, admitting they "failed" and promising to do better.

"The pressure is constant, it's hard work," Cutler says. But Eilish "is so damn smart. I remember asking her gutter-talk the first day of shooting. 'What's the key to their success, Billie and Finneas?' And he said, 'They don't give a [expletive] and they don't care.' And that's the smart enough to surround themselves with the people who recognize that and support that, and don't want them to be anything other than what they are."

Billie Eilish, 19, and her mom Maggie Baird in "Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry." | Courtesy Apple TV+

24 Photos VIEW FULL IMAGE

Haggis 19th birthday, Billie Eilish's Met career in photos
Stage Billie Eilish, at age 19, has accomplished more than many artists do in their entire careers. Mark her birthday with photos of her Met career.
Michael Gallagher | USA TODAY

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