

# On “ocean eyes” by Billie Eilish

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The sighs of the song begin, a longing resurgence that trembles across the air. Sitting in the waiting room of the ballet studio, I listen to my daughter leaping, twirling, and tiptoeing across the polished floor to the keening, swirling music. At 14 she is still too young for pointe. I know she is self-conscious of her taller, more womanly body amid the bonier girls, so pale and paper-thin. Like every ballet afternoon I close my eyes and wish she remembers how beautiful she is, made to be her best self.

*I've been watching you for some time  
Can't stop staring at those ocean eyes*

The haunting echoes of the song advance and recede as the girls dance, bending, arching, falling, backing away with gentle fists angled at the ends of their supple arms. The hollow beats tap constantly like an anxious heart, overpowered by the thunderous pounds of the girls leaping, twisting, and landing on the polished floor with all the force they have (a sound we will never hear on the recital stage).

*Burning cities and napalm skies  
Fifteen flares inside those ocean eyes  
Your ocean eyes*

For now, the girls churn their bodies behind a wall, and I hear the work of stomping feet, the teacher's hard claps, the girls' nervous giggles and breaths of delight when that loud descent lands the right way.

Her class is almost over. The younger dancers trip in for the next class, and get the honor of peeking around the corner to view the dance. My daughter was once one of these girls, looking with large eyes at the taller, more easily bendable ballerinas, longing to take up space in the dressing room with the star on the door, marked only for the older dancers. Now she is one of the envied, but too preoccupied with her own insecurities to realize the honor she now owns.

*No fair  
You really know how to make me cry  
When you gimme those ocean eyes*

The vocals rise higher and higher, almost to a childish squeak as the girls spin faster, from corner to corner. I peer at the convex mirror poised in a high corner to help the parents spy, blurred with mysterious handprints. I barely recognize my ballerina, so graceful in her black and bun, dipping and diving, learning a safe abandon.

*I'm scared  
I've never fallen from quite this high  
Falling into your ocean eyes  
Those ocean eyes*

I'm glad I could give her an adolescence that wasn't my own, where I think she knows she's loved, beautiful, and talented. No mornings where a mother looks at her clean,



Billie Eilish

“ocean eyes”

*don't smile at me*

08/2017

Darkroom · Interscope

newly awake face and questions, "You look so innocent. Why can't you always look that way? I can almost forget you're evil."

Looking at her among the swirling girls, listening to the synths and sighs, I marvel at a songscape that actually echoes a yearning, intelligent girl's feelings, with sad breaths, long trills, confessions of fear and a sweet, high-pitched tenderness. Songs that belong to a real choreography, of heartbeats, a sweet adrenaline, and thoughtful asides.

*I've been walking through a world gone blind  
Can't stop thinking of your diamond mind*

I think of the songs on my school bus, with the incessant drumbeats, coupled on video with robotically perfect dance moves I could never achieve. Lyrics about sex and combat and perfection instead of mind, fear, hope and reluctance. I could never dance to that. I'm so glad my child can bloom and step in tune with a more sympathetic, understanding melody.

*Careful creature made friends with time  
He left her lonely with a diamond mind  
And those ocean eyes*

On the drive home, she takes videos of the sunset flaring against the slim silhouettes of telephone wires and bare branches. Her fingers flutter in a particular way, waving from the screen. Over 4,000 fans on her Tik Tok and hundreds of likes on every video she makes. Her stately, ever maturing dance will never be a part of them. A couple of her videos show ballet slippers falling gracefully to the ground, but her body is her own and will never be shown. She is more than that—intelligence, art, longing, hopes and dreams set to the soft adolescent wails of today's forgiving, embracing music and her own unseen steps.

Whatever she feels about her body, her mind, and her talents as perceived by her teachers, friends, and doting mom, her creations are her own and strangely loved, the soundtrack as haunting and unique.