

# Billie Eilish

## GLOBAL POP SENSATION

Amy Allison



# CONTENTS

## **Introduction** **4**

Gen Z Phenomenon

## **Chapter One** **8**

Bohemian Beginnings

## **Chapter Two** **19**

Dreams and Nightmares

## **Chapter Three** **31**

Growth Factor

## **Chapter Four** **43**

Power-Up

---

Source Notes 54

Important Events in the Life of Billie Eilish 57

For More Information 59

Index 60

Picture Credits 63

About the Author 64



# CHAPTER ONE

## Bohemian Beginnings

Actors Maggie Baird and Patrick O'Connell met while performing together in a play, and they married in 1995. Their list of acting credits includes occasional roles in TV series: Baird in *Charmed* and *The X-Files* and O'Connell in *Supergirl*. Baird also has performed in the acclaimed Los Angeles–based improvisational group the Groundlings.

But by the time their daughter, Billie Eilish Pirate Baird O'Connell, was born on December 18, 2001, Baird and O'Connell were less focused on their acting careers. Along with doing voiceover work for video games, Baird taught improv and aerial classes, and O'Connell took carpentry jobs to help support their family, which already included Eilish's older brother, Finneas.

Finneas, four years older than Eilish, contributed *Pirate* to her name. *Billie* honors Eilish's maternal grandfather, William, who died a few months before her birth. Baird and McConnell chose *Eilish*, an Irish variant of *Elizabeth*, after watching a documentary about Eilish Holton, a successfully separated conjoined twin.

### Home Base

Eilish grew up in a two-bedroom Craftsman-style house in Highland Park, a section of northeast Los Angeles. Highland Park is home to artists and academics, as well as to film and television production workers and other supporting players, like

Baird and O'Connell, in the entertainment industry. Music journalist Ann Powers says of the neighborhood, "It's exactly the kind of milieu where weird achievers are deeply nurtured." She adds of its influence on Eilish, "Hollywood craft and knowledge, her inheritance, is part of what makes her a prodigy, and a pop star."<sup>10</sup>

Eilish's brother has contrasted their unconventional childhood with the more conventional upbringing of their friends. Of their friends' eagerness to move out of their childhood homes in reaction to how they were parented, Finneas remarked to *Vogue*, "Truth be told, we never had that feeling. I think our parents never trivialized our questions and our interests."<sup>11</sup>

Eilish shared her childhood home not just with her parents and her brother but also with musical instruments, including three pianos, among them a grand piano her father acquired for free online. With coaching from her father, she learned to play piano as well as the ukulele. "Music was always underlying," she says. "I always sang. It was like wearing underwear: It was just always underneath whatever else you were doing."<sup>12</sup> Baird and O'Connell were so supportive of their children's musical activities that they never forced Eilish and Finneas to go to bed if they were making music.

**"Our parents never trivialized our questions and our interests."<sup>11</sup>**

—Finneas O'Connell

## Artistic Curriculum

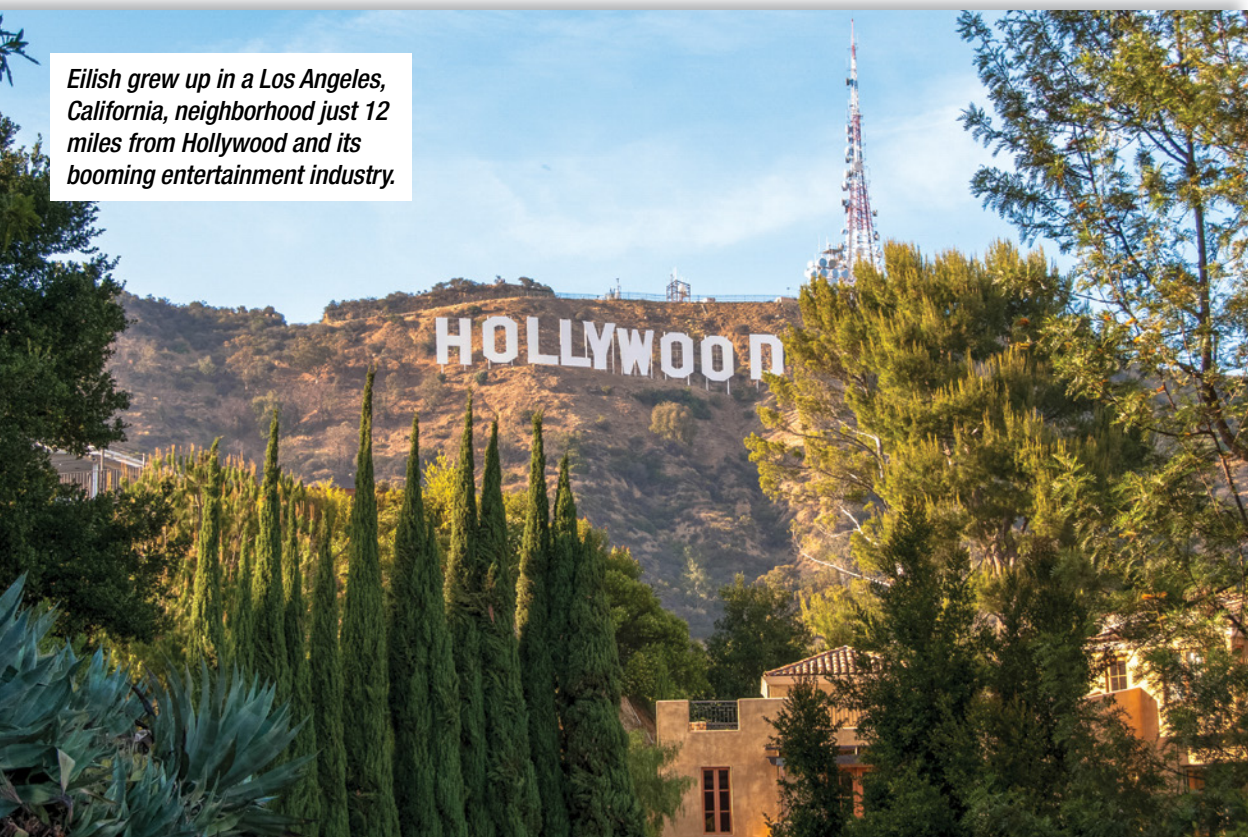
In 1997, the year Finneas was born, the group Hanson released the hit single "MMMBop." O'Connell was convinced that homeschooling had allowed the three Hanson brothers the freedom to pursue their artistic interests. Baird's roots in Colorado, where the Columbine High School massacre took place in 1999, also played a part in her and O'Connell's decision to homeschool Eilish and Finneas. Additionally, Baird and O'Connell wanted to spend as much time as possible with their children, especially since Eilish came along relatively late in their lives: Baird at forty-two and O'Connell at forty-four.

Besides the use of everyday activities in their learning—for example, cooking to build math skills—homeschooling for Eilish and her brother involved “strewing.” Their parents presented them with books, paints, and other items, along with different activities, and observed which the children gravitated toward. Eilish was drawn to singing and dancing.

Eilish’s first experience singing before an audience was at homeschool talent shows. When she was six years old, her father accompanied her on the keyboards as she performed the Beatles’ song “Happiness Is a Warm Gun,” which cycles through different styles of rock and roll music.

At age eight, Eilish joined the Los Angeles Children’s Chorus (LACC). “It’s taught me all of my technique,” she says. “Choir has taught me the way to protect your voice and not f\*\*k it up because you’re just screaming. Some artists just ruin their voices because they don’t know any better.”<sup>13</sup> Eilish also learned how to read and write music while with LACC. She credits the ease with which she figures out a harmony to her choral training.

*Eilish grew up in a Los Angeles, California, neighborhood just 12 miles from Hollywood and its booming entertainment industry.*



Also, around age eight, Eilish took ballet lessons. She hated them, though, preferring tap, which led her to hip-hop and contemporary styles of dance. By age twelve, she had been accepted into a dance troupe at the Revolution Dance Center in Montrose, California, on the outskirts of Los Angeles, and was spending up to eleven hours a week in dance class. “I have always moved in song,” Eilish says. “Dance classes were just an extension of that.”<sup>14</sup>

Eilish learned the basics of songwriting through a once-a-week class her mother taught for a co-op homeschool program, WISH, short for Workshops Investing in Socializing Homeschoolers. When given an assignment to watch a movie or TV show and write down lines she thought were promising as song hooks or titles, Eilish chose her favorite show at the time, *The Walking Dead*. “I wrote this song about the apocalypse in my mind, and it came out as a love song—a longing despair, which wasn’t my intention, but it happened,” Eilish recalls about the first song she “really wrote,” at age eleven, titled “Fingers Crossed.” Up until that time, she had composed “random stupid little things” and at age four came up with a song about falling into a black hole, though she claims that “it was really upbeat.”<sup>15</sup>

## Outsider Status

Eilish shrugs off claims that she is breaking the mold of pop stardom. It is not her intention to break molds or rules or conform to them either. “Maybe people see me as a rule-breaker because they themselves feel like they have to follow rules, and here I am not doing it. That’s great, if I can make someone feel more free to do what they actually want to do instead of what they are expected to do. But for me, I never realized that I was expected to do anything,” Eilish says. “Nobody told me that . . . so I did what I wanted.”<sup>16</sup>

Eilish’s mother remembers her being strong-willed from her early childhood. She would not even let her mother buckle up her car seat.



## Los Angeles Children's Chorus

Since 1986 the Los Angeles Children's Chorus (LACC) has provided Los Angeles residents ages six to eighteen with a choral music education. A scholarship program ensures that families across the city's economic spectrum can fund their children's participation in LACC.

The curriculum follows an experience-based approach to learning: the experience of singing during rehearsals reinforces concepts learned in class. Besides training in reading and writing music and in basic music theory, choristers receive one-on-one vocal coaching. They also learn to interpret music from various time periods and cultures.

LACC presents a multilingual repertoire and tours nationally as well as internationally. The group performs frequently with esteemed music ensembles such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, and Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. LACC members also perform with the Los Angeles Opera in productions that call for a children's chorus or child soloists.

LACC has been the subject of four documentaries by Oscar-winning filmmaker Freida Mock, including *Sing!* Chronicling a year in the life of the chorus, *Sing!* received an Academy Award nomination for Best Documentary Short in 2001.


Despite her independent streak, Eilish was not immune from peer pressure. "Peer pressure is real; I had some of that," she told *British GQ*. "Although because I wasn't at school and didn't know what school actually was, to a degree, I was definitely spared some of that mad bullying that goes on in hallways and so on after class."<sup>17</sup>

While she was not bullied, Eilish recalls feeling like an outsider at the stables where she took horseback riding lessons. To pay for her lessons, she groomed the horses and cleaned their stalls. "I didn't make any friends riding horses," she says. "Nobody wanted to be a little girl with no money at an equestrian center. Nobody."<sup>18</sup>

## Body Insecurity

Eilish started wearing baggy clothes because she felt the need to hide her body. When you are a teenager, she explains, your body is your “deepest insecurity.”<sup>19</sup> She recalls that she developed early: “I had boobs at nine. I got my period at 11. So my body was going faster than my brain. It’s funny, because when you’re a little kid, you don’t think of your body at all. And all of a sudden, you look down and you’re, like, whoa. What can I do to make this go away?”<sup>20</sup>

When she was fourteen, Eilish’s body issues led her to start cutting herself. She would hide razors in her bedroom and lock herself inside the bathroom, where she would make herself bleed. According to medical professionals, self-injury is an attempt to release tension built up from anxiety and frustration. Adolescents have the highest rate of self-injurious acts of any age group, with about 17 percent admitting to committing self-harm at least once in their lives.

A photograph of Billie Eilish performing on stage. She is wearing a green and black patterned dress and black socks with white crosses. She is holding a microphone and has one leg raised. The background is a large screen displaying blue and white abstract patterns. Stage equipment is visible in the foreground and background.

*Whether in concert or on the red carpet, Billie Eilish is known for often wearing baggy clothing.*



# SOURCE NOTES

## Introduction: Gen Z Phenomenon

1. Quoted in Keziah Weir, "The Charming Billie Eilish," *Vanity Fair*, January 25, 2021. [www.vanityfair.com](http://www.vanityfair.com).
2. Quoted in Katherine Schaffstall, "Billie Eilish and Brother Finneas Dedicate Grammy Win to 'Kids Who Are Making Music in Their Bedrooms,'" *Hollywood Reporter*, January 26, 2020. [www.hollywoodreporter.com](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com).
3. Quoted in Schaffstall, "Billie Eilish and Brother Finneas Dedicate Grammy Win to 'Kids Who Are Making Music in Their Bedrooms.'"
4. Charlie Harding, "Billie Eilish, the Neo-Goth, Chart-Topping Teenage Pop Star, Explained," *Vox*, August 19, 2019. [www.vox.com](http://www.vox.com).
5. Quoted in Joe Coscarelli, "Billie Eilish Is Not Your Typical 17-Year-Old Pop Star. Get Used to Her," *New York Times*, March 28, 2019. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).
6. Quoted in Weir, "The Charming Billie Eilish."
7. Quoted in Rob Haskell, "How Billie Eilish Is Reinventing Pop Stardom," *Vogue*, February 3, 2020. [www.vogue.com](http://www.vogue.com).
8. Megan Thee Stallion, "The 100 Most Influential People of 2021: Billie Eilish," *Time*, September 15, 2021. <https://time.com>.
9. Paul Zollo, "Billie Eilish's 2021 Grammy Acceptance Speech: The Greatest Ever or the Worst?," *American Songwriter*, April 2021. <https://americansongwriter.com>.

## Chapter One: Bohemian Beginnings

10. Ann Powers, "Billie Eilish Is the Weird Achiever of the Year," NPR, December 10, 2019. [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org).
11. Quoted in Haskell, "How Billie Eilish Is Reinventing Pop Stardom."
12. Quoted in Haskell, "How Billie Eilish Is Reinventing Pop Stardom."
13. Quoted in Haley Weiss, "Discovery: Billie Eilish," *Interview*, February 27, 2017. [www.interviewmagazine.com](http://www.interviewmagazine.com).
14. Quoted in Jonathan Heaf, "Billie Eilish: Confessions of a Teenage Superstar," *British GQ*, June 4, 2020. [www.gq-magazine.co.uk](http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk).
15. Quoted in Weiss, "Discovery."
16. Quoted in Haskell, "How Billie Eilish Is Reinventing Pop Stardom."
17. Quoted in Heaf, "Billie Eilish."
18. Quoted in Matt Medved, "Artist of the Year: Billie Eilish," *Spin*, December 23, 2019. [www.spin.com](http://www.spin.com).
19. Quoted in Laura Snapes, "It's All About What Makes You Feel Good: Billie Eilish on New Music, Power Dynamics, and Her

# IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF BILLIE EILISH

## 2001

**December 18:** Billie Eilish Pirate Baird O'Connell is born in Los Angeles.

## 2015

**November 18:** Eilish's brother, Finneas O'Connell, uploads a link on SoundCloud to a song he and Eilish recorded, "Ocean Eyes"; the song quickly goes viral.

## 2017

**August 11:** Darkroom releases Eilish's nine-track EP, *Don't Smile at Me*.

**October 4:** Eilish launches her first headlining concert tour, with dates in the United States and Canada.

## 2018

**February 14:** Eilish embarks on her first international tour, headlining performances in Europe as well as the United States and Canada.

## 2019

**March 29:** Darkroom releases Eilish's debut album, *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*

**April 13:** Eilish performs for the first time at the famed Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, kicking off a global tour in support of her LP.

**August 26:** Eilish wins MTV Video Music Awards for Best New Artist and Push Artist of the Year.

## 2020

**January 26:** Eilish wins five Grammy Awards: Best New Artist, Best Pop Vocal Album and Album of the Year (*When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*), and Record of the Year and Song of the Year ("Bad Guy").

# FOR MORE INFORMATION

## Books

Adrian Besley, *Billie Eilish: From E-girl to Icon: The Unofficial Biography*. Minneapolis, MN: Zest, 2021.

Billie Eilish, *Billie Eilish*. New York: Grand Central, 2021.

Stuart Kallen, *Stand Up Against Climate Change*. San Diego, CA: ReferencePoint, 2022.

Saddleback Educational Publishing, *Billie Eilish/Halsey*. Costa Mesa, CA: Saddleback Educational, 2020.

Jennifer Stephen, *Stand Up for Animal Welfare*. San Diego, CA: ReferencePoint, 2022.

## Internet Sources

August Brown, "Billie Eilish Isn't Stressing over the Grammys. She's Busy Worrying About the End of the World," *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 2019. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com).

Rob Haskell, "How Billie Eilish Is Reinventing Pop Stardom," *Vogue*, February 3, 2020. [www.vogue.com](http://www.vogue.com).

Matt Medved, "Artist of the Year: Billie Eilish," *Spin*, December 23, 2019. [www.spin.com](http://www.spin.com).

Laura Snapes, "It's All About What Makes You Feel Good: Billie Eilish on New Music, Power Dynamics, and Her Internet-Breaking Transformation," *British Vogue*, May 2, 2021. [www.vogue.co.uk](http://www.vogue.co.uk).

Brittany Spanos, "Billie Eilish and the Pursuit of Happiness," *Rolling Stone*, June 17, 2021. [www.rollingstone.com](http://www.rollingstone.com).

Keziah Weir, "The Charming Billie Eilish," *Vanity Fair*, January 25, 2021. [www.vanityfair.com](http://www.vanityfair.com).

Haley Weiss, "Discovery: Billie Eilish," *Interview*, February 27, 2017. [www.interviewmagazine.com](http://www.interviewmagazine.com).



# INDEX

*Note: Boldface page numbers indicate illustrations.*

“All the Good Girls Go to Hell” (song), 27, 30

Astronymy, 15

autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR), 23

“Bad Guy” (song), 4, 23, 24

Baird, Maggie (mother), 7, 8–10

“Bellyache” (song), 21

Bieber, Justin, 50

*Billie Eilish* (photo album memoir), 47

*Billie Eilish: In Her Own Words* (audiobook), 48

*Billie Eilish: The World’s a Little Blurry* (documentary), 48–50, 51

poster for, **49**

Blackbear, 15

body image issues, 13–14

Instagram and, 41

“Bored” (song), 20–21, **20**

*British Vogue* (magazine), 43

“Brutally Honest Rankings of the Oscars 2020 Musical Performances” (*USA Today*), 31

“Bury a Friend” (song), 23, 25, 26, 50

Cautious Clay, 15

Childish Gambino, 38

Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, 29–30, **29**

Costume Institute Gala (Metropolitan Museum of Art), 44

Cusumano, Katherine, 19

Cutler, R.J., 48

*Daily Mail* (newspaper), 36

Del Rey, Lana, 18

Descartes, René, 39

Donahoe, Zoe, 30

*Don’t Smile at Me* (album), 19, 20

Don’t Smile at Me Tour, 21

Eilish, Billie, **13**

awards won by, 4, 7, 22, 24, 27, 32

birth/early life of, 8–11

body image issues and, 13–14

causes championed by, 43, 47, 52–53

at Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, 29–30, **29**

controversies confronting, 28, 36–38

during COVID-19 lockdown, 32–33

eighteenth birthday celebrated, 31

on exploitation of young women, 40–41

with 2020 Grammy Awards, **6**

harassment/stalking of, 39–40

at iHeart Radio Jingle Ball, **39**

makes *Time* magazine’s Most Influential People list, 7