

# FOR REVENGE: THE PHENOMENON OF EMO MUSIC PERFORMANCES AND AUDIENCE EMOTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

This research was conducted for the purpose of identifying the character of emo (emotional hardcore) music performances and their relationship to the emotional situation of the audience watching them, especially in the case of a music group in Indonesia named for Revenge. This qualitative research, which relies on document studies, observations and interviews, found that this underground group with an emo (emotional hardcore) character, with themes of inner conflict, suffering and rebellion, especially in matters of love, deserves to label itself as "for revenge" or "untuk balas dendam" in Indonesian. Apart from being musically aesthetic, the emo lyrics created in many cases are truly capable of piercing the deepest hearts of audiences who have experienced love problems. In today's era of social media, this group is favored by a fairly large segment of the youth market. This means that in Indonesia for Revenge has increasingly succeeded in blurring the boundaries between underground entities and the popular music industry.

## KEYWORDS

musical phenomenon, emo, emotions, love problems.



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## Introduction

In the midst of the development and dynamics of Indonesian music, where music groups tend to be less ideological in terms of the musical themes and musicality they perform, for Revenge has emerged as one that has consistently had certain special values for at least the last five years. for Revenge is not as popular as contemporary Indonesian music groups such as Dewa 19, Noah, Slank, or Sheila on 7, but its phenomenon cannot be ignored. Even though the group is closely associated with post-hardcore, metalcore and emo, in relation to the influence of the audience's emotions due to the presentation of music in the musical psychology discourse, what needs to be put forward by this quartet is the emo musical style it promotes. Emo is a term for "emotional hardcore" [15]. In for Revenge's songs, emo music is pretty much mixed with post-hardcore and metalcore.

Historically, emo is a music genre that initially developed from hardcore punk in the 1980s, focusing more on emotional and personal expression rather than the energy or aggression typically associated with hardcore punk. Emo, short for "emotional hardcore," emerged as a subgenre of various underground music styles such as punk rock, indie rock, garage rock, and the Seattle sound, distinguished by its introspective lyrics and emotionally charged performances. Bands like Rites of Spring and Embrace pioneered the genre, embedding themes of personal turmoil, societal critique, and relational complexities into their music.

By the 1990s, emo diversified into substyles, including *midwest emo*, which incorporated melodic structures and softer tones. The genre reached mainstream popularity in the early 2000s, such as Jimmy Eat World, My Chemical Romance, and Dashboard Confessional, who infused emo with alternative and pop-punk sensibilities [3]. Emo's rise coincided with the advent of digital platforms such as MySpace, which facilitated its global reach. In Asia, emo was adapted into local contexts, blending with genres like visual-kei in Japan or alternative rock in South Korea, while Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, embraced the genre through independent scenes. Indonesian bands like Killing Me Inside, Pee Wee Gaskins and Rocket Rockers incorporated emo elements into their music, contributing to a thriving underground movement that resonated with youth seeking emotional and creative outlets.

Although its mainstream prominence declined after the 2010s, emo remains a cultural and musical phenomenon. It is celebrated through reunions, nostalgia-driven events, and online communities, underscoring its enduring impact on global music culture and its ability to transcend geographic and generational boundaries. Moreover, emo is known for its deep, introspective lyrics, and often deals with feelings of sadness, heartbreak, or uncertainty in life [15];[16];[17].

Several world music groups that are famous for playing post-hardcore, metalcore and emo music styles are Underoath, Bring Me the Horizon, The Used, Alexisonfire and Silverstein. In Indonesia, there are quite a lot of music groups that combine post-hardcore and metalcore, but rarely try to combine these two types of music with emo like what for Revenge did. Even though it exists, its ability is not as great, as phenomenal, and as successful as for Revenge.

The word emotion itself comes from the word *emouvoir* (French) which means joy. The word emotion is actually neutral so it can have a positive meaning (such as happiness, love) or negative (such as anger, sadness). Emotions have been discussed extensively in psychological literature. Emotions refer to feelings or psychological responses that arise as a reaction to certain situations [5];[18]. In psychology, emotions are known to originate from various things, such as a person's past experiences, genetic factors,

interactions with other people and the social environment, circumstances or events, and mental and physical health.

The term emo in the world of music, which is short for emotional hardcore, refers to the genre of music and not to the emotions experienced by the music audience, but in the end the two are interconnected [2]. The audience's emotions referred to in this paper are the audience's response to emo music for Revenge.

What is interesting is the fact that the negative aspects of emotions are expressed in the form of musical works, especially songs with a rock tendency, which are able to influence the audience in such a way with the aroma of sadness carried by the song through its poetic and meaningful lyrics. This is what happens in the phenomenon of for Revenge, which is currently a music group with the most character and musical ideology, has uniqueness (differentiation), and is best known in Indonesia as a marketable underground musician. The name for Revenge or often abbreviated as FR itself shows the fact that it already has its own brand.

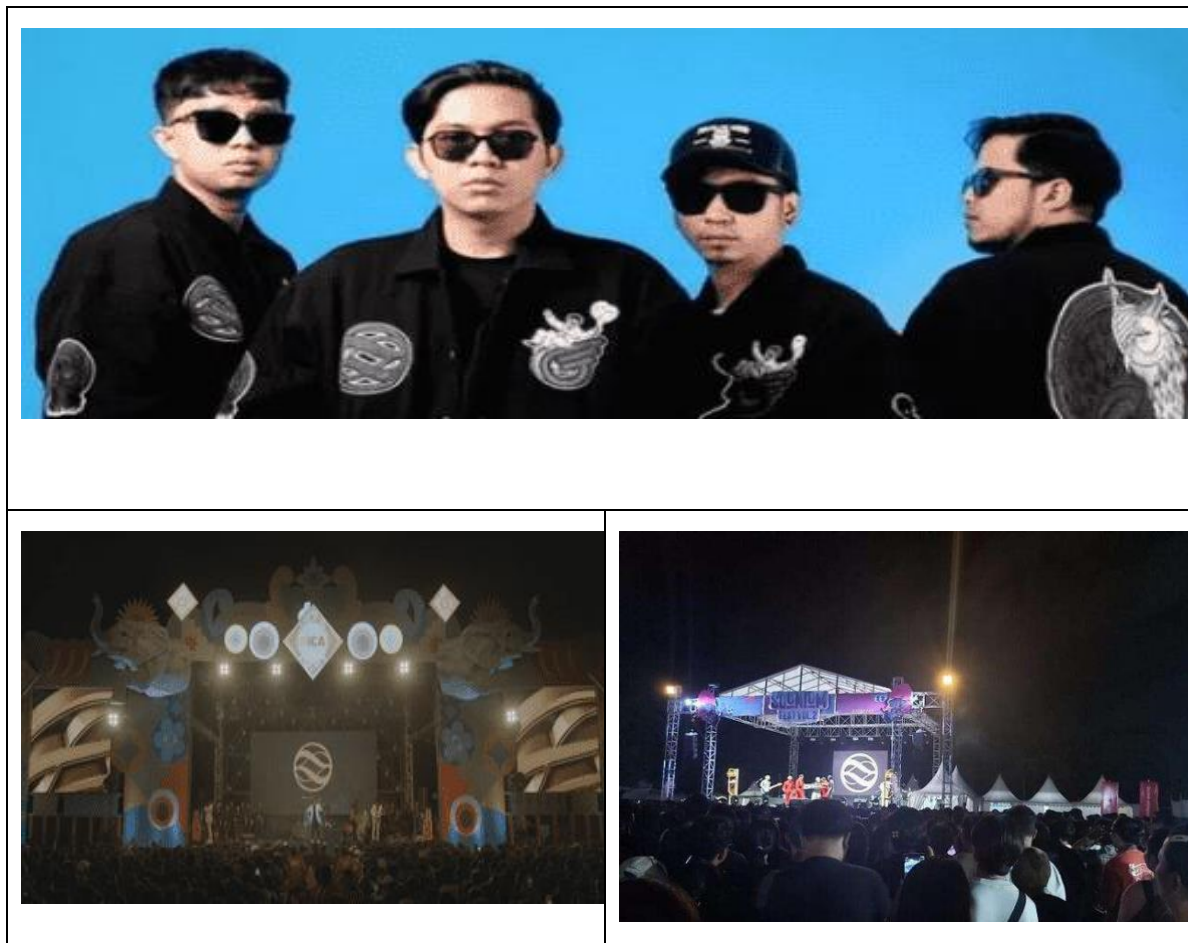


Figure 1. Personnel for Revenge; from left Arif, Boniex, Archims, and Izha (top photo; source: @forrevengeofficial, 2024). for Revenge at Niti Mandala Renon Denpasar (bottom left photo; source: Ardini, 2023) and Lapangan Lagoon Nusa Dua (bottom right photo; source: Ardini, 2024).

As part of music psychology issues in addition to music sociology, this paper analyzes the phenomenon of emo music performances in the group for Revenge and its consequences on the audience's emotional response, especially in live performances, both those that the writers witnessed directly and those that the writers themselves witnessed. The writers only watched the video on YouTube. Here there is a slight intersection between music psychology and music sociology. While music psychology focuses more on individual experiences and mental processes in interacting with music, music sociology places more emphasis on the role and function of music in social and cultural contexts.

The aim of this paper is to identify the existence of the emo music style, especially through its deep and meaningful song lyrics, which during live performances is able to influence the way it is consumed by young audiences who are experiencing turmoil in their love lives. There has been no research and/or writing about emo music, let alone about emo music in Indonesia or for Revenge. For this reason, it is hoped that this paper will be able to provide an introductory overview of the phenomenon of music performances and its relationship to other phenomena, namely the emotions of the audience who enjoy the music, especially what happens in Indonesia or in this case what happened at for Revenge.

## Method

This qualitative research employs a combination of document studies, direct observation, and interviews for data collection, focusing on the emotional dynamics of audiences at for Revenge performances. Recognizing the absence of prior academic research on emo music performance and its audience's emotional engagement, particularly in the Indonesian context, this study maximizes the use of online documents from social media platforms like YouTube and news articles. Direct observation was conducted at two performances by for Revenge in Bali in 2023 and 2024, providing firsthand insights into the phenomenon. Casual interviews with audience members and an orchestra leader further enriched the data. Notably, interview data also incorporated pre-existing video interviews available on YouTube, recontextualized as part of the document study.

To analyze this data, the researchers adopted interactive qualitative data analysis method, encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing [10]. Furthermore, netnography is central to this study, as it integrates online interactions, digital observations, and cultural analysis to interpret the emo phenomenon. Netnography is a qualitative method aimed at understanding online cultures and interactions through web 2.0 communication channels [9]. This method involves collecting digital footprints such as text, video, audio, and other multimedia content, offering a comprehensive view of participants' identities, beliefs, and social behaviors.

Through netnographic immersion, the researchers engaged with the emo music culture by analyzing audience reactions and digital traces left across various online platforms. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of how for Revenge performances, as cultural events, resonate with audiences on emotional and communal levels. The six stages of netnography—initiation, investigation, interaction, immersion, integration, and incarnation—guided the study [8]. Namely: (1) initiation focused on defining the research objectives around emo music performances. (2) Investigation in searching of how audience's emotion able to connect with the lyrics of for Revenge's Song. (3) Interaction mainly aim to observe how the band build interaction during the concert via youtube & tiktok video (4) Immersion involved analyzing and interpreting digital traces like audience comments, video reactions, and shared experiences online. (5) Integration consolidated insights from observations, interviews, and digital data, enabling the researchers to construct a thematic narrative about the audience's emotional engagement with emo performances.

This methodologically innovative approach bridges online and offline realms, demonstrating how digital traces and live observations intertwine in understanding cultural phenomena like emo music. It positions emo not only as a musical genre but as a dynamic cultural movement, deeply rooted in both physical performances and digital narratives. By applying netnographic principles, the study contributes to the academic discourse on music and emotional expression in the digital age, particularly in the Southeast Asian context.

## Discussion

For Revenge is an alternative rock music group formed in Bandung, West Java Province. It was founded by Archims Pribadi (drums), Abie Nugraha (bass) and Hagie Juliandri (guitar) on April 18 2006. The three of them had a similar vision of how to combine elements of loud music with deep emotional expressions. They wanted to create music that was not only sonically powerful but also meaningful, that could connect them with listeners experiencing similar feelings.

The name for Revenge, which in Indonesian means "untuk balas dendam," describes the passion and emotional intensity that these musicians try to convey through their music, with lyrics that often revolve around themes of inner conflict, suffering, and rebellion, especially in matters of love. As a group that emerged in the digital era, they utilized online platforms (such as YouTube, Spotify, and Bandcamp) to spread their music, which made them quickly gain fans from various cities in Indonesia.

for Revenge recorded releasing their debut album Fireworks in 2010. Their second studio album, Second Chance was released in 2013 under Off The Records. Several times they changed personalities, in fact this group reached the peak of its glory when its personnel consisted of vocalist Boniex, guitarist Arief Ismail, bassist Izha Muhammad,

and drummer Archims Pribadi where only Archims Pribadi was among the founders of Revenge. This group's heyday occurred after Boniex re-entered the group in 2020.

With the return of Boniex, the quartet released four singles including "Derana", "Serana", "Perayaan Patah Hati" and "Jentaka", followed by "Jakarta Hari Ini" in 2021. At the end of 2021, for Revenge released the mini album *Get Closer with for Revenge*. In February 2022 they released the single "Jeda", under the auspices of Didi Music and in August 2022 for Revenge released the single "Untuk Siapa?" which completes the fourth album entitled Heartbreak Celebration - Act One.

Boniex or Boniex Noer, whose real name is Mohammad Boniex Nurwega, is the front man of this group. He suddenly quit as a senior producer of television programs at a national television station at NET Mediatama Televisi to focus on the world of music in for Revenge which he left in 2015. Even though most of the songs were composed by Arif, the guitarist, the lyrics created by Boniex and the charisma of Boniex's vocals in each his appearance really enlivens the existence of for Revenge. Boniex's vocals are clean and his pronunciation is clear; he is able to reach high and shrill notes like an experienced rock singer. His lyrics are like pearls of wisdom which are often quoted by young and old people on social media. With the help of certain technology, the lyrics of the song for Revenge are often displayed in the background of the show when this group performs live.

The performance styles of the performers for Revenge both at Niti Mandala Renon Denpasar and Lapangan Lagoon Nusa Dua are clearly underground and indie in style, where the more advanced the styles become, the more emo (emotional hardcore) they show. At Niti Mandala Renon Denpasar, the emo style further dramatized the audience's emotional atmosphere with the involvement of a local (Bali) orchestra group led by Fare Desfare Silitonga (27 years old). According to the musician from North Sumatra, who graduated from the Music Study Program at the Performance Faculty of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Denpasar in 2021, as an academic musician, he was amazed by the creation of the songs for Revenge which were able to really influence the feelings and emotions of the audience. "Sorrow, pain, disappointment, despair, resistance and revenge which are the themes of the song can be expressed in the loud music category with nuances of orchestral music. This is truly a sumptuous musical presentation in a sense... The audience's emotional response is mixed between the sad memories of their personal experiences and the musical beauty of the songs." In this regard there is a relationship between art and human pain which can be channeled through lyrics that are emphasized in an identical emotional hardcore style [19].

With a strong and deep aesthetic ideology in creating musical themes and musicality, the songs throughout the album and single for Revenge are difficult to separate from each other. The storylines of the songs are interconnected. Hard-core audiences of for

Revenge will easily mention titles like “Sadrah”, “Serana”, “Penyangkalan”, “Pulang”, or “Untuk Siapa?”. Uniquely, each song has its own beauty. Almost every song for Revenge has its own lyrical strength and is made to rhyme. The strong, touching and meaningful lyrics for Revenge in the songs are not always in the chorus. Such beautiful and relaxing lyrics are usually discussed again by netizens with their own interpretations according to their real experiences.

An example is “Serana”. This song has the following lyrics which contain sadness and resignation alongside maturity.

	English Version
Beri tahu aku cara melupakanmu	Tell me how to forget you
Seperti kau ajarkanku dewasa	Like you taught me as an adult
Beri tahu aku cara merelakanmu	Tell me how to let you go
Seperti kau ajarkanku bahagia	Like you taught me to be happy

This song tells the story of the suffering of a broken love so that you have to find a strategy to escape from the reality of being abandoned by a loved one. The official video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGsMkd8qHWI>. Serana means to languish[7]. There are also those who interpret it as someone who is very miserable because they have to be willing to let go of a lover they really love.

“Jakarta Hari ini” contains the following bitter lyrics.

	English Version
Dan sebuah pesan menyapa	And a message saying
Menjelang hari bahagia	Ahead of the happy day
Tanpa namaku yang di sana	Without my name there
Temanimu selamanya	Be with you forever
Menyakitkan	Hurtful
Ini terlalu satir	This is too satirical
Terlampau getir untuk diterima	Too bitter to accept

“Jakarta Hari Ini” tells the story of a person who received a message (news) that he had been abandoned by the person he loved. For him, this was painful because on the wedding invitation card it was someone else's name and not his own name (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLZsHuWWdQY>).

In “Jeda”, the last verse of this song contains lyrics that are like words of wisdom because of the deep message they contain.

	English Version
Kau berkata	You said
"Janganlah memulai yang tak bisa kauakhiri"	"Don't start what you can't finish"
Dan kau berkata	
"Jangan menginginkan yang tak bisa kaumiliki"	And you said
	"Don't hope what you can't have"

In the visualization of the video "Jeda", Wika Salim as the singer accompanying Boniex actually shed tears in the middle of the song. Boniex's theatrical appearance here also really supports the song's story ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Jxx\\_2-n3Qs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Jxx_2-n3Qs)).

"Untuk Siapa?" is a heartbreaking song.

	English Version
Bila hadirnya yang kau nanti Biarlah ku yang menukar tempat ini Dan saat dia di sini Ku pastikan ku pergi	If it is his presence that you are waiting for Let me change this place And when he's here I'm sure I'll go
Jika bisa menghilangkan lara Kembali merekah seperti bunga Usah menginglatku pernah ada Karena kuyakin ku tak berharga	If you can get rid of the pain It blooms again like a flower Don't remember I was there Because I believe I'm worthless

The content of this song tells of a person's despair because of the presence of another person who will replace him in love. The official video for this song is also full of tears from the woman who is the visual background for the song's story (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgqkMyJ-lp0>).

In "Pulang" there are lyrics of despair below.

	English Version
Ku terjebak di titik terendah Terjatuh, kehilangan arah Saat ku merasa semua 'kan berakhir Seketika, suara itu tiba Datang dan menyapa lirih Memanggil namaku	I am stuck at my lowest point Falling, losing direction When I feel like everything will end Instantly, the voice arrived Come and say hello softly Calling my name

"Pulang" has a spiritualist nuance. In observations made by the writers of the performance for Revenge at Niti Manda Renon Denpasar on October 25 2023, this song made a man in the audience cry uncontrollably because he was so absorbed in the content of the song, especially since the group's performance this time was equipped with orchestral music. In the instrumental part of the song, Boniex comes and hugs the man for a while until finally the man is calmer (Figure 2) ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Nlz\\_6\\_CeFA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Nlz_6_CeFA)).





Figure 2. An audience member cries in Boniex's arms in the middle of the song "Pulang" during a performance at Niti Mandala Renon Denpasar on October 25 2023 (Source: Ardini, 2023).

As previously at Niti Mandala Renon Denpasar, the performance at Lapangan Lagoon Nusa Dua attracted a lot of attention from urban young people in southern Bali, including Denpasar, who like similar music. As already mentioned, the music group for Revenge had performed four times in Bali since October 2023. According to book *Blantika Linimasa: A Kaleidoscope of Balinese Non-Trad Music*, non-traditional music has been alive for a long time in Bali [1]. Many related groups were born and live with their own ups and downs. That is why the underground and indie communities as audiences from the past until now are not small in number.

Several audience members who were interviewed in passing at performances both at Niti Mandala Renon Denpasar and at Lapangan Lagoon Nusa Dua stated that they had been fans of for Revenge for the last few years. As young people in the digital era, they enjoy it every day on their cellphones by opening YouTube and occasionally on their laptops. In general, they stated that the music for Revenge suited their young soul which was still exploding. That's why they are desperate to come to the performance venue and, even though they are crowded, choose a location in the front row so they can capture the exciting moments of the performance.

At Niti Mandala Renon Denpasar, Utami (24 years) and Anny (19 years) expressed their admiration for the music and songs for Revenge. Moreover, Utami admitted that she had been dumped by her boyfriend, making it difficult for her to forget so she could move on. Because of that, while sad, he sang "Serana" (*serana* in Indonesian means miserable) which is generally the last song of this group's performance. Anny, who is

Utami's friend, admitted that she had never experienced love but had been curious about this group for a long time. Anny suddenly felt a deep feeling of sadness when "Pulang" was sung and a man standing next to her sang loudly but there were a few tears in the corners of his eyes.

At the Lapangan Lagoon Nusa Dua, a pair of 22 year old lovers named Sida and Okasanti came to the show because they had their own love experiences before. Sida shamelessly admitted that someone had taken her previous boyfriend and then realized that her boyfriend preferred that someone, so she accepted the situation. In this performance he seemed to find his life story in the song "Sadrah" (in Indonesian *sadrah* means surrender). The story of Okasanti's love life is even worse. He was tragically abandoned by his girlfriend for unexplained reasons, even though he knew little by little that he had another girlfriend secretly. Okasanti was so emotional and her eyes filled with tears when "Jakarta Hari ini" was sung, especially in the chorus "Dan sebuah pesan menyapa. Menjelang hari bahagia. Tanpa namaku yang di sana. Temanimu selamanya". Sida and Okasanti were seen holding hands and then hugging while following lyric after lyric in both the songs "Sadrah" and "Jakarta Hari ini". They seemed to be trying to strengthen each other for their respective fates.



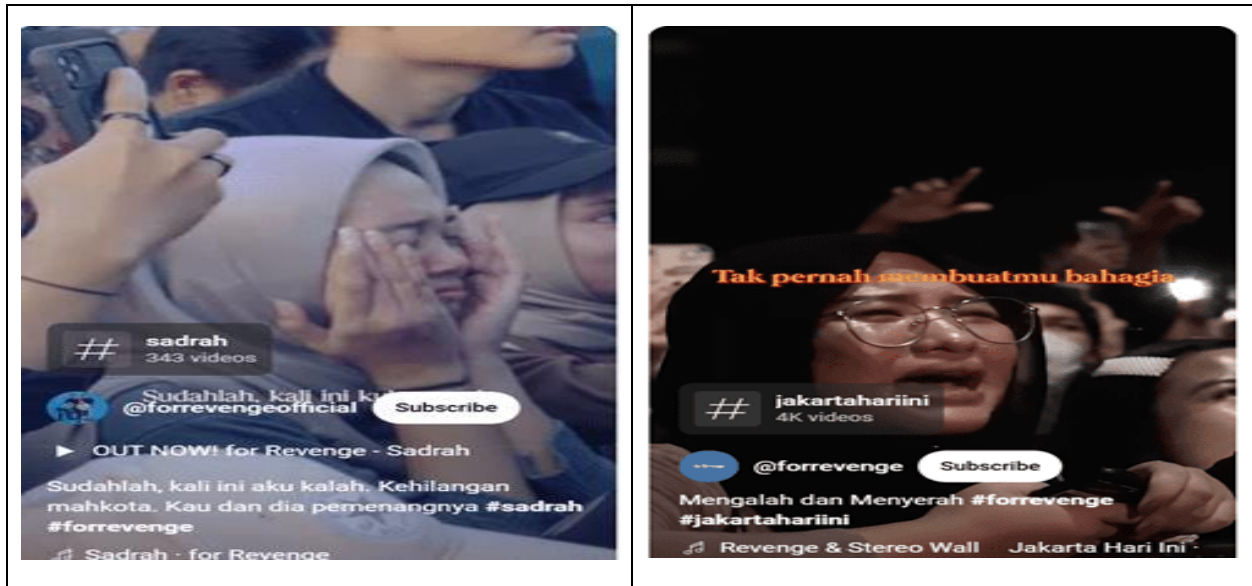


Figure 3. Footage of several Shorts images from YouTube showing the emotional turmoil of the audience crying while enjoying the songs for Revenge in performances in several cities in Indonesia (Source: @forrevengeofficial, 2024).

Music appreciation can be understood as the ability to listen to and enjoy music in a deeper way, involving an understanding of musical structure, cultural context, and the emotions evoked by the music itself [13];[14], moreover music appreciation is not only about listening to music for pleasure but also to understand the technical elements contained in it, such as melody, harmony, rhythm and compositional form [6]. They emphasized the importance of being familiar with various musical genres and styles, as well as the ability to absorb the emotional nuances contained in music.

Furthermore, the level of music appreciation can be achieved based on a person's attitude as a listener, in one of the following five ways [4]. (1) listening passively, (2) listening with enjoyment, (3) listening emotionally, (4) listening from perspective, and (5) combining attitudes because it assumes that none of the four ways of listening to music in the previous point was done purely by someone.

In the case of the music for Revenge, especially in its live performances, it is clear that the audience listens with enjoyment as well as listening emotionally. In this case, listening with enjoyment occurs when the audience watches for Revenge by consuming the beauty of the songs being played, including the message (meaning), lyrics, tone, melody, rhythm and other aspects of musicality. Emotional listening occurs because the songs played affect the emotions of the audience so intensely.

The phenomenon of the music group for Revenge in Indonesia can be read as a representation of how the dynamics of contemporary music and culture are developing, especially in music genres that combine elements of rock and metal. This group has a certain appeal that attracts the attention of the Indonesian public, especially the younger generation. The themes of the songs sung by for Revenge are very resonant

with the emotional experiences of the younger generation, who are searching for self-identity, understanding the world, and often feel isolated. In Indonesia, a place that has a society with strict social norms, music like this can be an outlet or a way to express feelings that are difficult to express in everyday life.

Due to its popularity and success in performing live, for Revenge has now become part of the music industry, which means this group is no longer solely operating along underground and indie lines. Currently, Revenge is also part of the industrialization of music in Indonesia.

Theoretically, the industrialization of popular music is caused by the development of economics, technology and new musical culture in society [11];[12]. In the phenomenon of for Revenge performances, the existence of a new musical culture in society is very visible. The for Revenge phenomenon is an example of how the Indonesian music scene is developing, creating genres and subcultures that were previously little known. They helped popularize certain genres that were initially more limited to only extreme music fans, and are now starting to be more widely accepted. This phenomenon is also supported by the important role of digital technology in the dissemination of music, allowing for Revenge to reach a wider audience, as well as strengthening their presence in the growing underground and indie music community in Indonesia.

## Conclusion

Through the musical ideology chosen, for Revenge has succeeded in carrying out revenge according to the name of the band created and which became the mission of his musical movement. Musically and musically, for Revenge is able to beautifully combine elements of post-hardcore, metalcore, and emo to create a tough yet emotional sound, depicting themes such as heartbreak, despair, and internal struggle. for Revenge's advantage compared to almost all bands in Indonesia is its ability to influence audiences through the songs they sing.

With all the success of this group in gaining popularity and a relatively large segment of the Indonesian music market, it shows that emo, slowly and surely, is becoming accepted in Indonesia, especially among the younger generation. It can be said that the genre of music for Revenge, especially emo, significantly influences the emotional side of the audience during live performances.

The emotional phenomena in this group's musical performances reflect intense expressions of feelings and inner conflicts, which can be felt by the audience, especially the young ones. Lyrics full of personal expression and vocal aggressiveness become a channel for audiences to express feelings that may be difficult to express in everyday life, especially in experiences of love that are not okay.

Overall, the for Revenge phenomenon is part of a larger movement in the Indonesian music industry, where freedom of expression and the search for identity are the main focus. Their music represents the spirit of a younger generation that seeks not only entertainment, but also a way to express deep feelings, through heavier, more emotional lyrics and music. This means that this group can increasingly be equalized in its position in the Indonesian music scene, which is generally promoted by the music industry as a mainstream force and not by underground and indie groups. At least in Indonesia, for Revenge has been quite successful in blurring the rigid boundaries between the popular music industry and underground entities.

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