

Music History 191G – Winter 2008 – W 3-5:50 – SMB 1420
Durrell Bowman – office hours F 11-12 and by appt., SMB 2424 – db@durrellbowman.com
Popular Music in Appropriation, Covers, Versions, and Parody

Overview

Every music aficionado probably knows at least several dozen “cover versions,” but music scholars need to develop a sufficiently-nuanced terminology for beginning to interpret the vastly wide variety of activities in this area. To begin with, an arrangement-identical performance of a song originally recorded by another artist (i.e., a “cover,” probably intended to surpass the sales of that artist) and a new arrangement of such a song (i.e., a “version,” perhaps intended as a tribute to that artist) are hardly the same type of thing. For musicians, “musical literacy” has involved the techniques and related technological contexts not only of practicing and performing, but also of understanding, interpreting, recording, listening, learning, and responding. Indeed, almost any re-recording of a piece of music could reasonably be considered a “cover version.” However, in order to do *useful* work in distinguishing covers from versions, appropriations from tributes and parodies, and so on, we need to consider 1) the socio-cultural “intent” of the artist and, above all, 2) the genre/stylistic content of the recordings themselves.

Relevant Questions

- If a jazz singer records a “standard,” having heard her pop-singer colleague’s very recent recording of it, is she performing a version of that recording or a version of the song?
- Similarly, if an artist creates a new version of someone else’s (or his or her own!) much earlier interpretation of a particular song, does that produce a “version of a version”?
- Where do we draw the line between a song being “stolen” vs. being remade in tribute?
- What if an important artist positions a new version as “better” than a well-loved original?
- How does a parody that covers an existing song’s music—but with new words—differ in intent from a parody with a new version of music that strictly holds to the original words?
- If a band’s live performances, even its guitar solos, are virtually identical to its studio recordings, is the band performing live covers of its own music?
- What do we call it if classical musicians record rock songs, retain the songs’ formal complexity, replace the guitars and singing with strings, and leave out the drumming?
- Similarly, what if aggressive rock anthems are turned into instrumental children’s “lullabies” by drastically changing their instrumentation and tempos?
- Is there a name for the resultant performances if an early music ensemble translates heavy metal songs into Latin and performs them in “Medieval” style?

Requirements

- Weekly Readings, Listening & Discussion – Weeks 1-6 – see p. 2 & the course website
- Weekly Comparative Song-Chart Assignments – Weeks 2-6 – 10 % each (50% total)
- Development of a Presentation (15%) and a related Term Paper (35%) – Weeks 7-10

Readings – available on the course website, which also includes relevant Listening

Weeks 1-2

Frith, Simon, excerpt from Chapter 3, “Common Sense and the Language of Criticism,” *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998/96)

Starr, Larry and Chris Waterman, excerpts on the 1920s-70s from *American Popular Music from Minstrelsy to MP3* (2nd edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Brackett, David, Chapter 2, “Family values in music? Billie Holiday’s and Bing Crosby’s ‘I’ll Be Seeing You’,” *Interpreting Popular Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000/1995)

Week 3

Coyle, Michael, “Hijacked Hits and Antic Authenticity: Cover Songs, Race, and Postwar Marketing,” in *Rock Over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture*, ed. Beebe, Fulbrook, Saunders (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002)

Bowman, Rob, Chapter 6, “The determining role of performance in the articulation of meaning: the case of ‘Try a Little Tenderness’,” in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Week 4

Awkward, Michael, “How the Parts Relate to the Whole” (preface) and “‘I live in the lyrics’: On Truth, Intent, Image, Identity, and Song Covers” (introduction), *Soul Covers: Rhythm and Blues Remakes and the Struggle for Artistic Identity (Aretha Franklin, Al Green, Phobe Snow)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007)

Flory, Andy, article on the Shirelles’ “Will You Love Me Tomorrow?” and the Satintones’ response-song “Tomorrow and Always” (American Musicological Society, Los Angeles, 2006)

Week 5

Burns, Lori, “‘Joanie’ Get Angry: k.d. lang’s Feminist Revision,” in *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, ed. John Covach and Graeme M. Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Cateforis, Theo, Chapter 2, “New Wave as ‘Art Rock’: Irony and Anti-Pop,” in “Are We Not New Wave? Nostalgia, Technology and Exoticism in Popular Music at the Turn of the 1980s” (dissertation, Ph.D. in Music, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2000)

Week 6

Bowman, Durrell, “Textu(r)al Undercoding and the Music of the Rock Band Rush: String Quartets, Death Metal, Trip-Hop, and other Tributes (conference and colloquia presentations, 2002-03)

----- “‘We’ll Sail the Big Dominion’: Independent’s Day and Canada’s Rheostatics”
(International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Los Angeles, 1998)

----- “Logarithmic History and the Music of *The Simpsons*”
(International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Murfreesboro, TN, 2006)

Weeks 7-10 Development and Presentation of Term Paper in Progress (2 students per week, plus discussion)

Exam Week Term Paper Due