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**


**Week 3**


**Week 4**


**Week 5**


**Week 6**


----------------------

“‘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