Uncovering the Cover

Reading Authenticity and Subjectivity in Cover Songs

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Chapter 1. Introduction

They are everywhere. The reality shows on TV, where everyday people audition in front of a carefully selected jury with hopes of becoming the next superstar. On Norwegian television the shows are numerous - Idol, X-faktor, Norske Talenter (Norway’s Got Talent), and The Voice. Another concept both similar and different is Hver gang vi møtes (Every Time We Meet), a programme where established, successful artists meet and perform each other’s songs. The first season (aired winter 2012) was a great success, and TV2 expects that finding artists for season 2 will be an easy task (Waskaas 2012). From USA we get the popular high school TV show Glee, which makes new versions of popular songs, both older music such as Queen and Michael Jackson, and popular songs from this decade. The show is so popular that new pop artists give their songs willingly to the show for the publicity. Recordings of popular songs, as they are performed by the cast of the TV series, are selling worldwide - the show has charted more songs on the Billboard Hot 100 than the Beatles (Lewis 2010). All these productions have the same fundament; one concept that constitutes most of the shows’ airtime - the cover song.

Music analysis is not an easy task. Music is not static, an object to observe - it is a process, an activity. According to Christopher Small (1998) “there is no such thing as music”. He states that it should be called “musicking”, an activity taking place in every instant where music plays a part, be that in listening, performing, making an instrument, or cleaning a studio or back stage. Musicking is a difficult term for music researchers - it is easier to study a static object than a dynamic process. Still it might be beneficial to consider using “to music” as a verb. After all, music is an art form that happens over time; there is no way to hear a piece of music in one single moment in the same way as viewing a painting or a sculpture. Music is people; it is bodies that create moving sound waves, which in turn create physical or cerebral movement in us. I want to draw a line from “musicking” to another process - gender. Judith Butler (2006) says that gender is not something we have or are, it is something we do. In our relating to the world, whether in everyday activities or on any kind of stage, gender is part of our identity performance. There are few areas in which this is as clear as in the performances of pop and rock subjectivities. Christopher Small and Judith Butler bring to mind a third, more specifically musical, process - the process of the “cover song”. Just like music can be turned into a verb, so too can “cover”, creating the activity known as “covering”. All music is built on previously heard music in one way or another, but not as obviously as the cover song. It lies in
the nature of the cover song to be based on musical material the listener has heard before - although with some significant changes. This means that in cover songs both the musician’s and the listener’s *musicking* is a process of appropriation and comparison - a link between past and present - an activity clearly taking place over time. No wonder why cover songs are popular features in prime time TV - the process is both fascinating and highly entertaining.

My experiences with listening to and performing music have given me ideas as to how cover songs *work*. The cover song is a fascinating concept in popular music, because it gives the listener the feeling of recognition and variation simultaneously. It is a process that is easy to grasp in practice, but surprisingly hard to explain in theory. This thesis will be my contribution to the discourse concerning how remakes, re-versionings, cover songs, etc. influence our perception of artists and understanding of popular music. My thesis will be influenced by central theories within popular musicology, with both modernist and postmodernist perspectives, as well as some ideas from sociology. The term “cover song”, which I will define below, will be referred to as cover song, cover version, or just cover, and the process or phenomenon will also be referred to as *covering*. The version upon which the cover song is based, will in most cases be called the original version or simply the original.

**Research questions**

However tempting to ask “How and why do artists make cover songs?”, it is too broad and blurry a question for me to answer in the time and space available to me. I will have to narrow the question down to several, more precise questions, related to various issues within popular musicology. I have chosen to focus especially on five areas. 1) There is the question of why artists make cover songs, or more precisely, the artist’s *intent*. Understanding the motives behind a cover song might help me understand their meaning. 2) Then there is the discussion of authorship and how to define a composition or a work in popular music. This question might be answered mainly through literature and less through my analysis, but with clear links to the chosen examples. 3) The *voice* is an essential factor in the listener’s perception of cover songs. 4) Closely linked to the voice is the artist’s subjectivity, which is also linked to questions concerning gender and its connection to cover songs. 5) Last but not least, the relationship between cover songs and authenticity will be a large and important part of my discussions. These issues raise a number of questions as well as certain expectations regarding the answers to those questions.
1) Every artist covering another artist has an intent for their choices. Behind every rendition there is an intention, whether it is egocentric or tributary; to sell or to show respect and influence; lack of creativity or proof of the opposite. Plasketes gives some examples of reasons for making cover songs, “such as the historical context, apprenticeship, homage, empathy, adaption, translation, interpretation, preservation, revitalization and the value of exposing songwriters, their songs and styles, old and new, to an audience” (Plasketes 2010: 26). In order to understand why the artist creates the particular musical expression, I need to have some idea of his intentions and motives for doing so. I will try to show how understanding the intentions might change the understanding of the cover version in general. An obvious example would be a cover with a parodic intent, in which case the perceptions could be in opposite directions depending on the individual listener. To use one of my analytical objects as example - why is Jamie Cullum making a cover version of a Rihanna song? It might be both respectful on one side, and somewhat ironic on the other. As I will explain in detail later, authenticity is an essential part of the cover song discourse, and authenticity goes hand in hand with the artist’s intentions.

2) Who is the author of a performance of popular music? The discussion of the cover song as a phenomenon requires an understanding of musical authorship and ownership. The songs I have chosen for my analysis are all written or co-written by the artist performing the “original”, but I will argue that this is no necessity for the listener to perceive them as “original” pieces of music. The term “originality” may be wrong in this context - to be musically original is to create a musical expression that is different from everything else in significant ways. Most popular music does not have this as its goal - it is rather part of an ongoing tradition where artists are unique within certain generic frames, and the author is less important than in the Western art music tradition. This difference between the author in art music and popular music might suggest that the cover may be perceived as unique and innovative in spite of the obvious recycling of musical material - the actual writer is “just not that important”. I will also discuss the relationship between authorship and performance. A performance (another term I will explore further) may be perceived as a kind of “composition”, which means that the person performing a song may be perceived as the author of that particular performance and the author of that version of the song.

3) An important element that helps in making an artist characteristic and recognizable, is the voice. When we hear a voice, we hear a body, and we instantly picture the person within this body. The voice will hence be one of the most significant changes in the process from the original to the cover song. The difference between two voices is usually much more distinct than the difference
between, say, two guitars. The voice is the main indication of subjectivity in an artist’s performance. This is where we hear a person as he or she sounds, without a mask or an instrument to hide behind. Language is much more than the words as they are written, there is also meaning hidden in the way they are spoken or sung, and in the voice and body of the speaker or singer. The meaning of the words in a song can hence be changed when the singer interprets them differently, and when the voice is a different one altogether. Here we return to the issue of cover songs. A cover song is not just a new performance of a song, it might also change the entire meaning of the words without rewriting the lyrics. I will discuss this later in this introduction, as well as in each of the case studies. I will also, through my analytical objects, try to show how voices influence perception in different ways and to varying degrees. The voice is essential to every cover song, and will therefore be a central element in all my analyses.

4) Subjectivity and identity are important terms in the popular music discourse in general, and no less in the process of covering. I will argue that the audience’s perception of the artist’s subjectivity is influenced by the fact that a given song is a cover. I find it useful to think of the artist as an actor (see Frith 1998). The actor can take on different roles, but the face and body will be the same or changed within certain limits. Because of its nature as personal, but manipulable within limits, the voice can be understood as the “face” of the artist. The artist may be perceived as an actor taking on a role as the character heard within the song. The listener will hear two different voices; the author inside the text, and the author outside the text (see Brackett 1995). How is the identity factor influenced by the fact that a song is a cover? I will discuss this throughout my thesis. The question of gender is linked to subjectivity, and the popular music discourse talks about gendered subjectivity. All my case studies raise the issue of gender in some way, since all of my case studies have a change of sex from the original version to the cover version. What, if any, is the effect of this?

5) I arrive at the final area of interest; authenticity. In spite of the idea of the artist as an actor, we somehow feel that they are real and honest in their performance, and that what they do is true and natural. The most important difference between the actor and the artist, is that the artist appears to be himself. Even if he has an artistic name, he is still always using that name in communication with the audience. Gordon Sumner is known to most listeners as Sting, but he is just as personal and real as he would have been without using an artistic name. Authenticity is certainly not always the goal of the performance, but it is nevertheless central to our perception of the artists. Artistry is stardom, which in turn is subjectivity and persona. We might know that the artists are not
themselves, but we still like to think that they are. I will argue that even through the performance of other artists’ songs, an artist can come across as honest and sincere - convincing us that they are who they perform.

In order to further explore these concepts and processes, I need to have a clear and distinct understanding of certain theoretical terms, and of how they are used in the academic discourse. The next section will present the terminology essential to my work on cover songs. It seems beneficial to start with a discussion of how to define the term itself.

The cover song

A cover song is a performance or recording of a song that has been performed or recorded before, and where the listener has a distinct notion of an original version.

Every writer who deals with cover songs has either an explicit or a subconscious definition of the term. The definitions have some minor differences, usually only regarding semantic details, and are otherwise quite similar. Oxford Music Online calls it “a recording of a particular song by performers other than those responsible for the original recorded version” (Witmer and Marks 2012). This definition opens up for calling any re-versioning covering. Most scholars choose to narrow the definition down, with the beneficial elimination of folk music, art music and jazz standards as a result. Deena Weinstein (2010) is one of them. She has two criteria for a song to be called a cover; there must be an original version on which the cover artist’s version is based, and the listener must also know this original version. Gabriel Solis (2010) has a similar but more precise definition of the cover song. He says that the cover is “a new version of a song in which the original version is a recording, and for which musicians and listeners have a particular set of ideas about authenticity, authorship, and the ontological status of both original and cover versions” (Solis 2010: 298). Solis is thus more explicit about the status of both the original and the cover, demanding that there is a certain level of awareness around ownership in both listeners and musicians.

One might want to opt for a definition stating that a cover song is a new performance or recording of a previously performed or recorded song. This, however, is too simplistic and probably not consistent with the general use of the term. This definition would imply that a recording of The Four Seasons by Vivaldi is a cover of the first performance of the piece, and it would also suggest that a recording of, say, My Funny Valentine, is a cover of Rogers and Hart, or perhaps a cover of
Mitzi Green, the girl performing the song in the Broadway play *Babes in Arms* in 1937. To avoid the difficulties that arise with examples like these, Gabriel Solis uses the term "rock code". The rock code is an interesting suggestion on how to separate cover songs from other re-makings or re-versionings. “Though essentially every musical style involves the production of versions of pieces of music by performers, the versioning practice of “covering” a song is endemic to rock”, (Solis 2010: 299). There is a rock code that makes us hear the cover as such, unlike the jazz code, in which a new version will be heard as another interpretation of the collectively owned, standard repertoire. This is connected to the idea of authorship in rock. The traditional rock songs were performed by the artist writing the music, creating an authentic image, as opposed to the commerciality of the pop music.

The history of the term, and the overall importance of history to the concept itself, cannot be overlooked. Originally the cover versions were made to sell a song to a broader audience, for instance by white artists recording songs previously recorded by black artists. The term itself stems from when record labels distributed their music within a particular region, and other labels made new versions of popular songs to cover their own region (Mizell 2008). The focus shifted from the song to the singer; from the distribution of sheet music to the distribution of recordings. What used to be new renditions of popular songs, became cover versions of popular artists. Ian Inglis (2005) writes about the label “Embassy Records”, and their strategy of releasing cover songs. In the ’50s, cover versions by less known artists were sold cheaper than the originals, and reached a less wealthy audience. Inglis says that the history of cover songs shows “the history of the emergence and development of an authentic popular music in Britain” (2005: 163). A new recording of an old song is a nod to history, and the listener might experience the cover song as a link between present and past; a song that is both old and new at the same time. The aspect of history is interesting when looking at how the term “cover song” has developed, with the idea of authorship and an original artist as a fundamental premise for the idea of one artist covering another. Sheldon Schiffer (2010) takes one step further by taking into account the aspect of *historiography* in the cover song discourse. The cover artist uses elements from the past, existing in a collective memory, to create a new performance. In this way he is a subjective part of the history and an objective commenter on history simultaneously.

In this thesis I will mainly focus on covers made by some of the biggest artists in the popular music business, and the examples are covers in the most common sense of the term. However, there are many examples of musical productions and concepts which are situated in the periphery of the
cover song definition. I will not give the question of whether or not to call them covers too much space and attention, but merely make the reader aware of some of the issues arising when music is created in new ways. One example is the extensive concept of sampling. Should sampling be considered a covering of the artist behind the sample? A further development of the sampling techniques is presented by David Tough (2010), who looks at the growing phenomenon mashup. Various songs are sampled and played one on top of the other, usually with “the master track and instrumental music of one song and the a cappella vocal master track from another” (Tough 2010: 205). Many songs have roughly the same chord progressions, which is exploited in mashups to create a new, autonomous piece of music that still holds clear evidence of the original songs. This could be considered covering, since it is a new release of previously recorded music. But, the technology and techniques of the mashup are far from the ordinary cover version, which means that the concept might fall outside of the concept we call covers. If that should be the case, do we have another category for this music?

As difficult as the process of defining “cover song” is, it is nevertheless a process with at least one premise shared by all possible examples - the “original”. In order to perceive a song as a re-versioning of some sort, one needs to know of a previous version of the song. Like many listeners before me, I once heard Jimi Hendrix playing “All Along the Watchtower”, thinking this was his own autonomous work, which made the issue of “cover” insignificant to me. Some might even hear Bob Dylan’s performance of the song as a cover of Hendrix, which makes their listening process completely different from that of those knowing it is the other way around (Reising 2010). Deena Weinstein (2010) uses the term stereophony to describe what happens when the listener hears a cover song - he hears the original (or another previously heard version) in his inner ear, probably also comparing it to the cover, consciously or not. Weinstein states that whatever song you hear first will be your “original”, which would be the case for many listeners in the example of Dylan and Hendrix. Which of the versions came first, and who wrote the song, is, according to Weinstein, less important when the issue of interest is the listener’s perception. In order to avoid difficulties concerning the chronological aspect of cover songs, as well as “such paradoxes as an artist covering his or her own song” (Mosser 2008), Kurt Mosser uses the term “base” song instead of “original”. The base song is the song that is perceived by the audience as the version upon which other artists base their versions of the song. The benefit of this term is that one avoids the connotations found in the term “original”, especially seeing as an “original” piece of music might be too connected to the classical music tradition’s notion of the “work”.

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The difficulties with defining the term might have connections to the major differences in how covers are made. Mosser (2008) argues that how we categorise cover songs contribute to the understanding of their meaning. This is also linked to the artist’s intent. Mosser presents the categories according to where the songs can be placed on a continuum of their relationship to the base song - from as similar as possible to almost completely new. The cover songs that are nearly identical to the base song, are called reduplication covers. The reduplication covers will usually be limited to live performances, as they are usually performed by tribute bands, who want to give the audience an experience of hearing their favourite band live - or as close as possible. This category brings to mind the musical practice in the days before cover songs were a concept; the same sets of songs were played by many different bands. The next category is a large group of songs called interpretative covers. These are divided into three groups; minor and major interpretations, and sendup (ironic) covers. My analytical objects are all placed in one of these groups, and here we find most of the songs we consider covers today; those who are easily recognizable but with a personal touch. The last category is the parody cover, in which the base song is used merely as a reference, either musically or lyrically (Mosser 2008). These categories are useful when trying to understand the artist’s intent - whether he intended to make an interpretation cover or a sendup cover is essential to the meaning of his performance; no less important is the listener’s perception of categories when he hears the song.

I will leave the cover for now to move on to other terms and issues relevant to my thesis, but I will discuss the cover issue further in each of my case studies as well as in the last chapter of this thesis.

Theoretical concepts

So far I have presented my research questions, and tried to give some kind of definition of cover songs. What remains of this introduction can be separated into two sections - theoretical concepts, and issues concerning method and methodology. In this section on theory, I will present six main aspects that I find useful in understanding the meaning of cover songs: authorship, performance, style and genre, subjectivity, gender and authenticity.

The author

Who is the author in popular music? This is a complex question in a kind of music where the
artist is centre stage and the composer is often uncredited. David Brackett (1995) explains how the idea of the author in popular music can be a multifaceted concept - including the actual composer(s), the lyricist(s), the lead vocalist(s) in the studio, the persona(e) on stage, and the star persona(e) offstage. The relationship between the different roles varies depending on stylistic and historical factors, from music consisting of many “owners” to music in which all of these functions are found in one individual (such as the singer-songwriter). A similar idea is presented by Hawkins (2002). He says that the composition in pop music is usually the recording, which is “realized through a blend of live performance, multiple takes, overdubs and mastering” (Hawkins 2002: 160).

Here we arrive at the issue of production - what is the role of the producer in the question of authorship? Allan Moore states that “the producer’s role must be seen as equating that of the performing musicians: he is at least as much auteur as are the songs originator(s)” (Moore 2001:189).

The stylistic and historical factors are important in the authorship discourse. The relationship between the music and its creator(s) has changed over time, and through the development of new genres and directions of popular music. Allan Moore (2001) is writing about the history of rock, with blues as a fundament for the development of a variety of rock genres and styles. The influence from African-American music is obvious for example in the early Beatles and the Rolling Stones recordings (as well as other similar contemporary bands). On their way to discovering their own musical image and identities, they did covers of early rock’n’roll songs from the US, and “the aim tends to be a near-exact reproduction of the source” (Moore 2001: 71). This is a clear parallel to the reduplication covers (see Mosser 2008). The importance of the blues is also significant in rock, especially regarding the distinction between rock and pop. Moore explains: “among musicians, audiences and commentators, there seems to have arisen the sense that if the origin of a style, practice or object can be found, the essence of what it is about can be captured, and magically that essence will transfer itself to the finder” (Moore 2001: 74). This idea of the natural and true artist has its parallel in the romantic era in the 19th century, with the search for an authentic individual. However, as important as the individual seems to be in rock, there is also a presence of what Moore calls a consolidatory approach to music making (ibid.: 68). Most listeners prefer music that is similar to the music they already know and like, and the new music with close links to the old will sell because of the already existing market. This is particularly interesting in the discussion of cover songs.

Another aspect of authorship is the singer-songwriter. The artists normally placed in this
category are apparently in possession of all the functions of authorship presented by Brackett (1995) - they write, compose and perform the music themselves, often with lyrics based on personal experiences. However, there are some issues concerning this approach to authorship. Even if the artist is singing about his own life, he would not have the feeling he is singing about in the moment of performance. This might suggest that the song is a story in any case, and that the origin of the story is less important. There is also the listener's interpretation of the song, which might be different from the singer's intention. “There is thus the possibility - even in a performance by a solo singer-songwriter in which singer, instrumentalist, arranger, and composer are one and the same person - of a multiplicity of authorial voices in the musical text” states Brackett (1995: 15).

Furthermore, he quotes Kaja Silverman, who wrote about film and distinguished between an author “inside the text” and an author “outside the text” (Brackett 1995: 16). This can easily be related to songs, hearing the author "inside the text" as the different voices or images created through the music. The "authors" might be the same person, but not necessarily. These factors, among others, suggest that the authorship of a song might be hard to establish. The authorship is perceived by the audience through the artist’s performance, the next theoretical aspect.

With reference to recordings by Bob Dylan, Deena Weinstein (2010) has an interesting take on the authorship/originality discourse. Bob Dylan, who has been a symbol of the authenticity found in early rock, plays his songs differently in each performance, and his musical material is constantly developing. The performance ending up on a recording is just one of many, and not an “original”. “What the listeners hear in the original recording is simply the iteration that Dylan chose at that moment”, Weinstein says (2010: 249). This leads me to the next issue; performance.

**Performance**

In *Performance Studies. An Introduction* (2006), Richard Schechner makes the distinction between “being”, “doing”, and “showing doing”. All these three activities are considered performance, but in different ways. “Being” is the philosophical idea of existence, the living creature that can be both static and active in its being. “Doing” is the activity of this creature, and “showing doing” is the displayed and underlined way of doing. Both “doing” and “showing doing” are dynamic and flexible. Schechner’s description of performance is broad and general - performance happens everywhere at all times. It may thus be seen as comprehensive; it includes the artist, the actor and the performances of everyday life. Similar to this are Simon Frith’s thoughts on performance. Frith says that “we are listening to a performance, but, further, that ‘listening’ itself is
a performance” (Frith 1998: 203). He refers to performance as a communicative process, and a form of rhetoric. The listening performance is the ways in which the listeners interpret the performance of the artist, and this listening is where the performance of the artist gets its meaning. The performance thus has a temporary character - “it comes into being only as it is being performed” (ibid.: 208). Frith goes even further on this, saying that the artists are what they do: “We don’t, after all, consume the stars but their performances” (ibid.: 211). This is an important point, to which I will return in my discussion of the artist.

There is an interesting connection between authorship and performance, and the discussion of authorship in popular music cannot avoid the idea of the performance (usually as a recording) as the musical work. Jason Toynbee (2000) says that “performance refers to creation-in-progress” (2000: 53), further explaining the process as thinking-up and sounding-out being two sides of the same coin in most popular music. There is a paradox in the split between popular and classical music in the understanding of performance and the work. Popular music does not evolve around the autonomous work; it is rather the result of a process where the artist and his performance are more central than the songwriter. However, most popular music is perceived through the recording. According to Toynbee, “we get to hear identical versions of the recording-work through the medium of phonographic reproduction, not discrete renditions of a piece in performance as in classical music” (Toynbee 2000: 55). This means that the perception of popular music is the same every time, in spite of its nature as fluid and flexible. But, it is also not the same, since the listening activity is affected by the listening context.

The idea of the performance as a kind of composition can be found in Rob Bowman (2003). He is writing about the aspect of performance in his reading of the Tin Pan Alley song “Try a Little Tenderness”. Bowman looks at four different performances of the song, and his four examples show how a song can be rerecorded in very different ways. One of Bowman's main aspects, is the issue of the melodic interpretation. Here lies an important part of our understanding of the singer. The melody is changed to make the performance one’s own, and the performance thus marks the artist’s subjectivity. The meaning of the lyrics can be reinforced or altogether changed by the way the singer performs them. Bowman asks why a song using samples of older songs is considered new compositions, while covers are not. The elements of the song that are kept from the original to the cover are factors that signify which song it is. But there are many other factors that have an important influence on the song - factors that change the audience’s perception and the overall meaning of the song. Bowman says:
“Words, chords and melody are those aspects most easily written down, ‘frozen’ as a way of proving authorship and ‘fixing’ details permanently within a system of notation developed by and for the European art music tradition” (Bowman 2003: 129).

Bowman is arguing that the other elements, besides the words, chords and melody, should be part of what proves authorship in a song. He also states that the ownership or authorship of the song could be split into group ownership, “multiple individuals who collectively take part in the musical moment” (ibid.: 128-9). This view is strong and helpful in the discussion of cover songs, because it enables a stronger ownership of the cover song. The cover artist might be heard as “author” of his version of a song.

Schechner (2006) makes a distinction between “make-believe” and “make belief” in performance. Actions can be “make-believe” - in acting, in playing, in pretending. “Make-believe” is performance in the way the term is understood in acting; the performer is playing a role that is clearly separated from the real person, in a context separated from the “real world”. Actions that are “make belief” are much more blurry in their signals to the surroundings - these actions are “enacting the effects they want the receivers of their performances to accept ‘for real’” (Schechner 2006: 43). This is present in everyday life, but probably most common among public figures; politicians, TV personalities - and artists. “Make belief” performances “create the very social realities they enact”, says Schechner (2006: 42). The boundaries are blurry - knowing what is real and what is acting is difficult, and so too in the world of popular music personae.

My own use of the word performance is, with a few exceptions, referring to the recordings of my case studies, and visual displays linked to them. The artist’s “being” and “doing” in public are also performances, but the word will refer to the actual music or the music videos. The performances I discuss will normally be some kind of “make belief” - the artists are rarely openly playing a role in the public sphere. An interesting exception is Beyoncé’s “Sasha Fierce” character, which I will get back to in my case study in chapter 4.

**Style and genre**

When Jamie Cullum performs a song by Rihanna (see chapter 3), he changes elements that are essential to the meaning of the music. Rihanna’s “Don’t Stop the Music” is a dance/hip hop song with its typical generic characteristics, whereas Jamie Cullum is part of a jazz/pop genre, releasing various albums within the standard jazz sphere as well as recording cover songs from contemporary rock and pop styles. Hence, the cover is stylistically quite distant from the original
performance. However, the cover makes a connection between Rihanna’s music and the performance practice of Jamie Cullum. Cullum belongs to a certain musical style, into which he brings Rihanna’s musical material. Stylistic affiliation is interesting as a fundament for further musical development, as we know from this particular example.

There are different factors playing a part in our evaluation of the cover song, and one element is especially important when it comes to value judgement: the musical style. A cover song is valued according to the style in which it is performed, and sometimes also the style of the original. Moore is writing about this concept in *Rock: The Primary Text* (2001). The term is crucial in music analysis, because the musical elements and their meanings change according to what style and stylistic ideology the music belongs to. Moore makes a distinction between style and genre, a term used widely but often incorrectly. The two terms overlap, meaning that a style can be part of several genres and - vice versa - a genre can consist of a variety of styles. Moore is mostly concerned with the term style, referring to the different technical elements of the music, which make us hear what we actually hear. Moore says that genre can be seen as the what of the music, i.e. the musical meaning, whereas style is the how, i.e. the way the music is expressed (Moore 2001: 3).

I want to look further into the concept of genre. Franco Fabbri (2004) defines genre as “a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules” (Fabbri 2004: 7). These rules are interesting in the discourse on cover songs because of the cover’s ability to cross borders between genres. The rules are not only based on musical elements, but also dependent on the context. “Genre is not determined by the form or style of a text itself but by the audience’s perception of its style and meaning, defined most importantly at the moment of performance”, says Frith (1998: 94). Frith argues, as the sociologist he is, that the audience is central to the understanding of music in general and genres in particular. I will discuss this further in my readings.

What is interesting regarding genre and style in relation to covers is the meeting point between the artist’s creative potential and the generic borderlines. Pierre Bourdieu’s (quoted in Toynbee 2000) idea of the habitus is a valuable contribution to the discussion of genre. The habitus is the set of attributes in each person that influence who they are and what they do. The habitus is present in all our actions, and also in creating and performing music. However, the habitus is not endless and limitless - it is strongly influenced by the field. Toynbee says that “cultural production takes place at the intersection between habitus and field” (2000: 37). It is in the meeting point between habitus and field that the development of creativity takes place. Bourdieu explains the
relationship between possibilities and restrictions with a circle. The artist is in the centre of the circle, and around him are the **possibles** available to him. Closest to him are the possibles that come natural to him - the elements that don’t require any significant amount of creativity on his part - the “easy choice”. The further away from the centre he moves, the harder it is for the artist to see his possibilities (ibid: 40). The circle is closely connected to genre - Toynbee says: “those densely clustered possibles near the centre of the radius of creativity (the codes, traditions and musical traits most commonly selected by a music maker) are generic” (ibid: 102). I find that understanding these terms is fruitful in an evaluation of covers, because of the relationship between musical taste and genres. I will discuss genre and stylistic elements in the following chapters.

*The artist*

Artists sell. Their personal appearances and images - ways of presenting themselves to an audience - are central to our perception of the music, perhaps especially so in vocal music. Although Jamie Cullum (see chapter 3) is highly influenced by the generic *rules* he is expected to follow, he is nevertheless the creator of a musical expression that is his own. The covering process, as most popular music, is affected by the artists’ *subjectivity* and the audience’s notions of his *identity*.

Popular music has been a scene for *subjects*. It is communicated by stars on display, to the audience with their personal tastes and values. Subjectivity may be understood as “who we are”, whereas identity is the ways in which we describe or present ourselves to others, through performance. This means that identities are shifting and varying depending on the receiver. Hawkins (2002) gives a description of identity in pop, saying that “pop culture forms a site where identity roles are constantly evolving to fit social needs” (Hawkins 2002: 12). Middleton (1990) discusses subjectivity and history, saying that “the thrust of modernization [...] has resulted in an increasing stress on the sphere of culture, and especially popular culture, as a primary site for the interpellation of subjects” (1990: 249). He is discussing the different ways in which subjectivity is present, and its value in the minds of its listeners. There are four carriers of subjectivity according to Middleton; the syntagmatic structure (time-awareness), emotion (the level of sympathy and empathy), character roles (e.g. personal types), and bodily participation (representation of the body and patterns of movement). The time-awareness refers to how the listener may perceive a certain subject in the music through the time aspect of the performance. The artist’s emotional expression is an important carrier of subjectivity, as well as the character roles, e.g. gender, class, age, etc. Bodily
participation is linked to rhythmic contents and “representations of the body” (Middleton 1990: 251). As we see from these categories, the presence of subjectivity in popular music is similar to how we perceive subjects in life in general. This is perhaps not surprising, but it might help explain why we feel that we “know” the artists just through their performances. I will examine this further in the final chapter.

A term that links together the already discussed performance and subjectivity, is agency. Agency is “the ability of a person to act or perform in the world”. This is also linked to authenticity, to which I will soon return. Middleton (2006) notes that the term authenticity origins in the Greek “auctor”, which means agent. Thus, author, actor and agent are all related to actions, or the process of doing or creating. The difference between the actions of the author and the actor, however, is that the actor “acts for (another), particularly on a stage, in a way that seems opposed to the idea of self-generation” (Middleton 2006: 206). The artist is in the eyes of the audience situated somewhere between authorship and acting, and thus complicating the relationship between what is performed and the performance itself. The ways in which, and to what extent, these terms are reflected in the performance, influence our perception of the artist’s identity.

Performance and the listener’s interpretation of the artist’s identity has been described in many ways. Philip Auslander (2009) discusses the idea of a persona, the artist’s “personality” as perceived by the listener. The persona is the character as perceived by its surroundings, and is linked to identity; how the audience will identify the artist. Schechner’s descriptions of performance are also relevant in this context - as he said, there is a distinction between “make-believe” and “make belief”, in which case the persona is the artist “making belief” (Schechner 2006). The real person, the artist’s true personality, is usually the most hidden, although many listeners like to believe otherwise. The persona is not limited to stars and celebrities; it is also something we create for ourselves, based on social and historical context. In the music industry, the artist personae are often created not only by themselves, but by managers, producers, advertisers etc. However, this does not necessarily mean that the industry is in charge and the artist only a puppet – the many personae are a part of our appreciation of the artists. The issue concerning the music industry could have been a central part of this thesis, but I choose to focus on the artist, which is who we as audience mainly perceive.

**Gender**

Three main aspect will be dealt with regarding gender issues in this thesis. The case studies I
will present in the following chapters all deal with gender to some extent, and the subject could have had a much more central position in this thesis. I have chosen, however, to direct my attention towards a variety of issues concerning cover songs. Firstly, gender will be present through the discourse of feminism, through a brief discussion of the term and its relation to my cases. Secondly, the issue of masculinity will be dealt with, particularly focused on the voice and the phallus. Thirdly, I need to explore the particular issues that arise in covers, since all my case studies have a transition from a male to a female artist or vice versa.

Musicology has benefited from gender studies within other subject areas, especially sociology. The idea of two distinctly different genders/sexes and their position in relation to each other, has become central to philosophy, anthropology and sociology, and later questioned. Judith Butler (2006) focuses especially on the female, saying that “there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women” (2006: 2). The history of feminism and popular music shows that women have been excluded from the business, and that the canon has been highly dominated by men (McClary 2002: 150pp). Sheila Whiteley (2000) points to the lack of women in leading positions in record companies, saying that “production continues overall to be gendered in quite conventional ways, especially with regard to positions of power” (2000: 4). Whiteley shows how women are present as performers, but that they are “primarily concerned with subjectivity, more interested in communicating and telling stories than in taking the more masculine obsession of sonic wizardry” (ibid.: 8). I find that this is still evident more than ten years later, but also that female artists are perhaps more in control of their own music and have their say in production and distribution.

The gender differences are also apparent in style and genre; most genres have a tendency to be more masculine or more feminine. One example is rock, which has been considered masculine. Feminists in the 1970s used the term “cock rock”, referring to the electric guitar as a phallus symbol. An example of this is Mick Jagger of The Rolling Stones, an artist I will return to in my case study in chapter 5. However, this argument must be considered essentialist - there is no room for variation and exceptions. A different approach to understanding masculinity in popular music is thoroughly treated in Hawkins (2009). Hawkins has some interesting thoughts on gender issues in British rock and pop. Gender studies have usually focused on women in the music business, leaving masculinity an unexplored topic. Masculinity is as full of issues as femininity, especially regarding pop. The Dandy, Hawkins’ “main character”, is a queer, weird, feminine, and vain man. A combination of the “flaneur” from the 19th century, the Oscar Wilde type, and the character of gay
pop and disco, the dandy is a male character whose poise and image challenges our view of the masculine. In pop music, masculinity is so diverse, that it is difficult to make any generalities. Hawkins states that the ambivalence is actually the point with pop - it is supposed to be surprising, confusing and fascinating. Exploring pop artists and gender, Hawkins says that “all pop artists encounter some controversy surrounding their sexual identity” (2009: 95).

All my case studies are either an original by a woman covered by a man, or vice versa. This might not be particularly important to my perception of the cover, but it might influence the notion of subjectivity and authenticity in the performance. In his article “Queering Cohen: Cover Versions as Subversions of Identity”, Erik Steinskog writes about gender and covers, showing how the cover artist can change the meaning of the song by using gender as a factor. This is most obvious in the lyrics; using he or she, changing the pronoun according to your own sex, or consistently keeping the words from the original. Steinskog illustrates this through Martha Wainwright’s version of a Leonard Cohen song, where she keeps Cohen’s use of “she” and “her”, giving the performance a “lesbian” dimension. The notion of gender is also found in the voice itself; its sound and pitch, the way words are expressed, the phrasing. As I will discuss later, the voice carries markers of a person, including age, sex, etc. There is also the possibility of gender being hard to grasp - a concept Steinskog uses Antony Hegarty to illustrate. “Calling a voice ‘ethereal’ [...] brings up the possibility of hearing it as gender-less, [...] this has not least been a case regarding Antony Hegarty (of Antony and the Johnsons) where there seems to be a possible non-human dimension to the voice” (Steinskog 2010: 143). In my readings of cover songs in the following chapters, I will discuss how gender might influence my perception of the songs’ meaning.

**Authenticity**

Previously I looked into the concept of subjectivity and how this is perceived by the listener. The ways in which the artists are presented to us through different channels, for instance concerts, music distribution, mass media and social networks, tell us how to “feel” about them and their music. There are many factors influencing our ways of enjoying and appreciating music, and the artist’s subjectivity is one of them. Another even more interesting term in the discussion of cover songs is authenticity. The various examples of cover songs in my analysis chapters might reveal various aspects and open up for different discussions, but I believe the authenticity aspect is central to all of them. Although interesting as well as important in the popular music discourse, the term authenticity is hard to pin down because of its applicability to a vast range of expressions and
performances. The term is also difficult because we might get a certain notion of something being authentic, honest, or true, without really knowing what it is that makes us feel that way.

Authenticity may be perceived in relation to several of the theoretical concepts I have discussed in this chapter. Many scholars have tried to describe the concept of authenticity, and how it is both related to and divided from the concept of authorship. The word origins in “auto-”, “self-”, the same as found in author and authority. However, the artist may very well come across as authentic without being the author of the particular piece of music. This is linked to performance and the subjectivity of the artist. Authenticity, as used in popular music research, is considered to be the relationship between the artist, the listener and the music, as a triangle of mutually influencing factors. To the audience, it might seem to centre around the relationship between the artist and the music, but authenticity is just as much about the relationship between the music and the audience.

The definition and explanation of authenticity chosen in my analytical work is based on several scholars’ work and their terminology considering the different ways in which authenticity is evident through popular music. I find Allan Moore’s (2002) tripartite terminological suggestion very useful, as it covers many different types of performances in which the artists come across as true to themselves or convincing, in other words with a certain level of authenticity to their performances. Moore’s point of view is the listener’s, focusing on how the audience will experience the artist through the music in various ways. What we find to be authentic is dependent on who we are - our preferences and ways of listening. In other words, authenticity is highly influenced by historical and cultural background. Moore's tripartite model is divided into first person-, second person-, and third person authenticity. He stresses that the terms both overlap (you could find all three types of authenticity with one artist at once) and exclude certain notions of authenticity in some music. First person authenticity is called “authenticity of expression”, and this is the definition that might be closest to what most people would consider an "authentic" artist. The authenticity of expression implies that the artist is honest and true, and has integrity and authority. He is in a close relationship with the music he is playing, and there is a straight line from the artist and his feelings to the listener, without the apparently inflicting factors of mediation and production. Weisethaunet and Lindberg call this category "'authenticity' as self-expression", and they explain this authenticity as "offer[ing] access to the inner world of an exceptional subject" (2010: 471). The second person authenticity is called “authenticity of experience”, referring to the experiences of the listener and the notion of the artist “knowing” what their lives are like. The third person authenticity is called “authenticity of execution” and is used about instances
where an artist represents a bigger entity, giving a form of authenticity to a culture, genre or tradition. This is the authenticity closest to folk music. In the discourse of versioning practices, the third person authenticity is interesting. The artist seems authentic if he belongs to a certain style, and within this style there is a repertory that is available to all. As opposed to the first person authenticity, the artist does not gain authenticity through his originality, but through his ability to be true to the genre and show that he is part of a tradition.

Corporeality in popular music is central to our understanding of artists. We hear a body through the voice, we see the artist’s body in performance, and we move our own body to the music. The question of where we are closest to music - through our body or our mind - has been asked in musicology for decades. Middleton talks about pop criticism,

“which often divides its attentions in this area into the ‘groove’ on the one hand (the music’s danceability, associated with its ‘bodily’ power), discourses of sexuality and gender on the other (located in lyrics, singing style, and - especially in most video analysis - visual gesture and image)” (2000: 11).

The bodily focus is also closely linked to authenticity. Weisethaunet and Lindberg (2010) call this “body authenticity”, a term used to emphasize the bodies in performance (both the artists’ and the audience’s). The link between body music and “black music” has had the tendency to be too close, but “there is a line from early rhythm and blues, through Motown, disco and hip hop, to R&B and electronic dance music [...] which demarcates its ‘authenticity’ by being able to crowd the dance floor” (ibid.: 476).

Hawkins (2002) is writing about pop, which originally has been heard as a genre based on commercial and “fictive” principles. Authenticity as it is understood in the popular musicology has its origins in rock. Hawkins, writing on pop as a genre, finds authenticity to be a central element of pop music, although in a different way. This might have to do with the intention of the music. In his reading of Morrissey’s music, Hawkins points to the use of the voice. Morrissey is using his voice in such a way that it seems almost too authentic and becomes a form of parody or irony. However, this is dependent on the degree of musical competence on the listener’s part. Many of his fans may well find his performances authentic and not at all ironic. This is an interesting phenomenon, that we find not only in Morrissey’s performances. Weisethaunet and Lindberg (2010) use the term "authentic inauthenticity", discussing how the split between authentic and commercial is considered too absolute, and that commerciality is present in all music. It is "regarded both as a threat and a necessary condition for what is produced at the "autonomous" pole" (2010: 474). Weisethaunet and
Lindberg question the importance of authenticity, stating that the joy of music may lie in other factors, and that authenticity may be an attempt to explain the “magic” of music. “When performances are thought to be particularly good or evocative, they may [...] be perceived as “unmediated” [...]. However, it might also be that they are particularly well mediated, in the sense of staged...” (ibid.: 468). Hawkins (2009) says that “the act of singing takes on numerous roles that mediate narrativity through processes of masking [...] that do not necessarily imply inauthenticity” (ibid.: 123). He links this to the vocal costume explained by Frith (1998), which I will return to later in this chapter.

In his text on authenticity in Voicing the Popular (2006), Richard Middleton draws the line between concepts in rock and the ideas of truth and honesty that have developed from the ancient time up till today. Drawing on Roland Barthes, he makes a point similar to that of Moore; the authenticity is dependent on the receiver. “The author is dead; the meaning of texts – of songs, let us say – is the creation of the reader (the listener)” (2006: 228). Middleton claims that we live in a capitalist world and thus use the freedom of wealth to buy an authenticity for ourselves. But something is about to change. Music in a certain style can suddenly have a different content, and an artist can do any kind of music regardless of their race, sex and background. Is this the postmodernism influencing our perception of authenticity? If we read Hawkins (2009) in the light of this thought, we see that the idea of authenticity within pop is coloured by the tenet that “anything goes”, which might be the kind of authenticity that Middleton is referring to. After looking into various approaches to authenticity in popular music, I find that the term seems to be applicable to almost any musical and artistic expression, and may thus lose its power to its adaptability. However, authenticity is firmly grounded in the popular musicology discourse, and once an understanding is reached, the term is important in interpretation of popular music.

Finally, I want to stress my understanding of authenticity in three points: 1) The listener’s relationship to the music is central to his understanding of the artist’s level of authenticity. 2) Although using different terms, many scholars dealing with authenticity make similar distinctions between various forms of expressions. 3) Writers have different notions of the importance of authenticity to the meaning of popular music.

**Method - the reading process**

The theoretical concepts I have looked at so far - understanding of authorship and
performance, the degree of subjectivity found in the artists’ interpretations, the perception of
generic and stylistic ideologies, the issues of gender and authenticity - it is all necessary in order to
understand the meaning of cover songs. But, these ideas are not helping me with any answers by
virtue of themselves; I need to explore the actual music. How can I find the musical elements that
change the perception of covers, and how should I treat these elements when I find them? I need to
draw on earlier analysts and their ways of reviewing the music, in other words look into
methodology. In the heading of this section I use the term “reading”. This concept is linked to the
use of the word “text”, that has been used to describe any kind of object that has been created, and
that may be studied - for instance written words, a sculpture, a photograph, or a performance. We
find this term in for instance Moore’s work Rock: The Primary Text (2001). The “reading” process
refers to the process in which the reader uses her knowledge and experience in order to interpret the
text in the best possible way. I will soon go more into detail on the reader or analyst, and distinguish
more extensively between these two terms. I will start by positioning my thesis within a scope of
popular music studies, and present the specific analytical “tools” I will apply to my analysis.

The bigger picture

Popular music in all its shapes and sizes is present in our everyday lives to a continuously
larger degree. Whether this presence is on the bus, in a grocery shop, in a TV commercial or in bed,
our listening is affected by the listening context (Kennett 2003: 196). These ways of using popular
music in our lives was what initially made it interesting to other academic disciplines. Popular
music was for a long time only studied by disciplines such as sociology, media studies and
anthropology, and the analysis of the actual music might be said to have fallen between two chairs.
On one hand the sociological studies has had a focus on the cultural and historical context, and on
the other hand the music theory and music analysis of traditional musicology were developed for
Western art music. It is this “falling” that has made popular musicology lean on both chairs, so to
speak, in order to find its stability. “Many debates over method and value within popular music
studies stem from its mixed heritage”, says Robert Walser (2003: 17). He mentions sociology,
music theory, musicology, English, ethnomusicology, fandom, and rock criticism, as fields in which
popular music studies find their academic fundament. But where in this field of popular music
studies will my own readings of cover songs be situated?

Regarding the musicological gateway into popular music studies, some central issues must be
acknowledged and discussed. Richard Middleton (2000) focuses on five particular problems that
arise in the musicological approach to popular music. First, there is terminology; the terms we use in description of popular music are both loaded with evaluation (usually in favor of the classical) and automatically leading to comparison where this does not make any sense. Then there is focus; what is important in classical music is not necessarily central to the understanding of popular music. This has called for the development of new analytic tools. Thirdly, there is the notation problem; many elements of popular music cannot be notated in the notation system developed for the classical tradition, including “complex rhythmic detail, pitch nuance [and] sound qualities” (Middleton 2000: 4). The fourth problem is the “work”; a reduction of meaning “to effects of structure, ignoring emotional and corporeal aspects” (loc.cit). The fifth problem is the individuality of the analyst; “the possibility of variable aural readings is ignored” (loc.cit).

Popular music’s entry into the musicological field has called for some terminological clarifications. Terminology has been an important issue in the task of making popular music a part of the broader musicological field. The term “popular musicology” was first used in the early ’90s and became the title of a journal published from 1994 (Scott 2009: 1). The aim of this expression was to create a focus on popular music where criticism and analysis of the music itself was in focus (ibid.: 2), as opposed to for instance “popular music studies”, grounded in sociology. Other terms used to separate the field from the traditional art music based field of musicology, are “critical musicology”, mostly taken into use by the British researchers, and “new musicology”, the main term in American popular musicology. These were not solely linked to popular music, but became important because they opened up for taking popular music more seriously, not just as a minor element in other academic fields of study (loc.cit).

The analytical theories developed for art music, were for a long time the only analytical tools available and therefore applied to popular music as well as the traditional art music. The structuralist philosophy stemming from literary studies made its way into musicology. The structuralists found musical meaning in the music itself, more precisely in the autonomous work. The poststructuralist ideology stresses the need to always look at the context, whether the issue in question is musical analysis, aesthetics or authenticity. The development of various analytical directions is also linked to aesthetics. In popular music studies, the discourse of aesthetics is a central debate between the modernists and the postmodernists, on the importance of the actual music versus extra-musical elements - the context. This distinction is similar to the structuralist/poststructuralist split. Moore holds a modernist perspective in his development of a musicology of rock. His aim is to explore the primary text, or the sounding music and its value and quality. He
states that “until we cognize the sounds [...] we have no musical entity to care about, or to which to give value (Moore 2001: 17). Hawkins takes on a postmodernist, poststructuralist point of view. He states that his work is highly influenced by writers in other fields, and says that his analysis is based on a specific tenet: “for music to signify anything, for it to assume its own set of meanings, it needs to be rooted in an organised system which exposes the traits of the author’s and reader’s identity through the text’s purposive function” (Hawkins 2002: 8).

The past decades have shown the development of analytical tools more suited for popular music, and the technological development has given new and improved methods for the analyses. However, as in all disciplines there is debate, and popular music analysis has taken various directions. My own readings will be situated somewhere in between the modernist and postmodernist directions - a mix of focusing on the music itself (searching for meaning within the musical codes - the primary text), and its context (as I believe the listener’s background and situation will affect the listening process significantly). I have made some choices on what to include and what to rule out in my thesis. Cover songs are found in various forms and with different intentions, and they are also dependent on the listening context. I will take this into account in my readings, but first I need to look more closely into the role of the listener and the analyst.

The listener

In this thesis I am using a method where I interpret the music from an auditory perspective alone, which means that I need to problematise the function and influence of the listener. There are many different kinds of listeners, but a distinction between two can be made; the “average listener” who uses music actively or takes it in passively, and the “professional listener”, the analyst who listens with a conscious and curious ear, trying his best to be objective. A question concerning the everyday listener’s evaluation of the music is raised by Chris Kennett. In his article “Is Anybody Listening?” (2003) he explores the attention popular music is given by its listeners, because of the obvious change this factor has gone through. Music is now present through a vast number of channels and over growing periods of time. This means that the focus we give the music surrounding us will necessarily vary. And if we actually listen, the elements we pay attention to and what conclusions we draw from them will vary as well. Kennett (2003) distinguishes between personal listening, situational listening and intentional listening (Kennett 2003: 208-9). Personal listening varies depending on time and demography. Situational listening varies according to intensity with which we listen, and locus-specific factors. The particular listener’s preference and
evaluation of music changes according to the listening context. Hearing a song in a night club at 3 a.m. or in the fitting room of a clothing shop will influence the feelings and thoughts regarding the particular song. The analyst has to acknowledge this and thus discuss the musical meanings accordingly. Intentional listening varies dependent on the producer, the broadcaster, etc., or the listener’s purposes. These categories are interesting in this context because of the nature of music analysis. Reading and searching for meaning within popular music texts require awareness of the differences between different ways of listening. Hence, my readings in the following chapters will present results that will necessarily deviate from the effects the music has on different listeners. This difference is not only present in different listening contexts, but also in the subjective nature of the analysis. When listening for answers, the analyst is not only dependent on asking the right questions; she is also answering them according to her own background, values, and personal views. Two analysts would not find the same answers in the same material; they will both influence their analysis and make it subjective. This does not, however, mean that the analysis is only subjective, as it is influenced by many factors. “Musical judgements can never be dismissed as subjective; neither can they be celebrated as objective”, says Walser (2003: 23). Analysis will always be intersubjective, as the analyst is coloured by his surroundings. This point regarding the subjectivity of the analyst is also made by Middleton. In his introduction in the anthology Reading Pop (2000), Middleton deals with the role of the analyst, or the reader. In recent years the analyst’s position has moved towards being a teller of one story among many - he “no longer appeals to some notion of a (scientifically) true account of the music but to a sense of collective complicity: [...] a form of dialogue” (Middleton 2000: 12-13).

In my reading of cover songs, the fundament is a comparison between two performances. Odd Skårberg (2003) writes about the analysis of style and how to deal with comparison between styles. A single performance is representing a given style, and is thus the carrier of characteristics of this style. The question is where in the music these characteristic codes or features are found (Skårberg 2003: 32). He says that through musical analysis, we are trying to work in the tension between the hermeneutic, qualitative research, and the search for general “laws” within our common understanding of popular music. I find that the idea of codes is useful when I deal with these tensions within popular music analysis.

Codes

In order to bring the analysis from being a description of musical elements to giving new
insight to and understanding of popular music, the analyst could benefit from this idea of *codes* (Middleton 1990). The codes are a means of explaining how musical elements are interpreted and what they *mean*. These codes may be criticized for being too simple, because valuable information might be lost, but Brackett (1995) says that the codes must be simplified in order to be useful on all kinds of music. Middleton’s codes stretch from the overall terms like *musicology*, through the different eras and periods, genres and styles, down to the specific song. "Existing models of musical communication [...] often understate the plurality of codes involved and the multiplicity of variables affecting every component", says Middleton (1990: 173). Stan Hawkins (2002) states that musical meaning can only be found when musical codes are seen in a cultural context. Furthermore, he makes the distinction between stylistic and technical codes. The stylistic codes are “relatively discernible through performance, genre and musical trend” (2002: 10), while the technical codes are “identifiable through established musictheoretical parameters that denote musical units and structures” (loc.cit). Middleton (1990) uses the terms presented by Eco: undercoded and overcoded. They have traditionally been linked to the distinction between art music and popular music, which is highly simplistic. There are bigger differences within the category "popular music" than between art and popular music, and you will find undercoded and overcoded music in both categories (Middleton 1990: 173). The codes go hand in hand with the listener’s *competence*. The listener’s competence is linked to what I said about the listener in the previous section; there are many different kinds of listeners. When you combine the musical codes with competence, is when you really find meaning in the relationship between the music and the perception of it, says Brackett (1995). The codes will change according to the listener’s competence, and hence both scales must be taken into account in musical analysis.

The music

Analysing popular music means focusing on the elements of the music that are essential to the area of interest in the particular analysis. In my readings I will choose these elements based on what I find particularly interesting regarding the concept of covers. My reading of harmonic, rhythmic and melodic elements is less thorough than my reading of sound and voices, because this is where I find the most interesting codes in cover songs to be. I give a short introduction to the various elements that will be given my attention in the following chapters. I think these elements will be useful in my readings of cover songs, and I will refer to them in each of my case studies. In the
following I will present some approaches found in various scholars’ analytical works.

**Sound and production**

First, there are the elements that are present through the overall sound and atmosphere of the music. They can be difficult to pin down, and the use of metaphors could be a solution. Moore (2001) uses a *spatial* metaphor when he talks about the analysis of these elements. He pictures the music as consisting of four different layers (Moore 2001: 33). The first layer is the rhythmical elements, the second is the lower register, the third is the upper register, and the fourth is the space between the second and third layers. We can usually picture the third layer as the melody, and the other layers as the accompaniment of this melody. He then moves from this two-dimensional understanding of the music, into a three-dimensional description of the sound, the *sound box* (Moore 2001: 121). The idea of a sound box allows the analyst to look at the sound’s horizontal and vertical qualities, as well as the *depth* of the music. The horizontality refers to the effect of stereophonic techniques (not to be confused with *stereophonic listening* as explained by Weinstein 2010) of using two or more channels, and the placement of the sounds within this auditive “construction”. The vertical location refers to the pitch range in which each instrument plays, from the bass drum and the bass to the treble of the smaller instruments and the white noise of the cymbals. The depth is the listener’s notion that “some sounds originate at a greater distance than others” (Moore 2001: 121). Middleton says that the sound box gives "a feeling of being inserted into the mix, a process which produces gestural identification and resonance" (1990: 179). The sound box concept can be useful in analysis because it gives the possibility of explaining the differences in sound and production using the spatial metaphor. In cover songs, the space in the music is an important element that enables the artist to be creative and original without changing the more obvious musical elements, e.g. melody, chords and lyrics.

**Rhythmic and melodic factors**

I will not go into detail on analysis of rhythmic patterns and general grooves, but merely mention some aspects that may be of interest when I discuss the case studies and the effects of their rhythmic elements. Anne Danielsen (2006) deals with the issue of rhythm and movement in her work on James Brown. She goes down to the core of what a rhythm is, using the terms *basic unit* and *period*. Danielsen says that “the basic pattern of rhythm might be described as a stable of separate figures played on top of each other, or perhaps in parallel” (2006: 44). Furthermore, she
points to what is happening in the relationship between the sounding and the not sounding parts of
the music, and that the “holes” must be considered an important part of the actual music (ibid.: 47).
Moore (2001), in his presentation of analytic tools in analysis of rock, says that in rock “[t]he notion
of ‘feel’, so beloved of commentators and players […] but so resistant to analysis, seems to concern
‘playing around with’ the beat” (Moore 2001: 44). The pleasure thus arises in the tension “between
‘wayward’ voice or guitar and ‘strict’ kit and bass” (loc.cit). In my case studies I will in some
instances discuss the rhythms and grooves, but this is not a central issue in my readings of cover
songs.

Regarding the treatment of melody, I will not go into any analysis of the exact changes of the
melodies or the change of musical meaning that might take place in the cover artist’s interpretation
of the melody. I find that the voice and its role as carrier of meanings are much more important
factors in the discussion of cover songs. However, there is one element related to the melody that I
wish to mention, because of its central role in re-versionings in general. Henry Louis Gates Jr. wrote
about the term signifyin(g) from a literary perspective. He explains the term as “to repeat with a
difference”. Several music scholars have taken this term into their own field, and one of them is
Robert Walser (1995). With Miles Davis’ performances as his point of departure, Walser explains
how musical material can be played and played with in new performances. Davis plays “My Funny
Valentine” with the melody intact in only the first phrase. For the rest of the performance, he is
“signifyin’” on the famous jazz standard. Why can Davis perform a song in this way, leaving almost
all of the original melody out? Part of the answer to this question lies in the song’s existence in the
memory of the listener. Davis is signifyin’ on every version of the song he has heard, and also every
version of the song the audience has heard. There is a clear parallel between this and the cover song,
which can be understood through Weinstein’s (2010) idea of the stereophonic listening. In my
readings of cover songs, I will at times refer to signifyin’ as understood by Walser.

**Voices and lyrics**

One of the most important changes from original to cover that occur in my case studies, is the
artist’s voice. The voice plays an important role as carrier of meaning. It might even be that a cover
song needs vocals to be heard as a cover (see Mosser 2008). But, what are the elements of the voice
that influence our interpretation of the cover? And what is the relationship between the voice and
lyrics? These questions are essential to my understanding of cover songs, and I will return to the
musical codes found in voices throughout this thesis.
There are several voices present in popular music. Simon Frith writes about the voice in *Performing Rites* (1998), distinguishing between four different categories of the human voice. The voice as a *musical instrument* is what separates singing from talking. The human voice has the ability to create different timbres, it has a certain pitch range, and it can create phrases, attack, and other effects similar to those found in other musical instruments. However, the voice differ from other musical instruments through its individuality, which you will not find to the same extent in, say, a trumpet or a piano. To a large extent we can hear age, sex, race, and emotions in a voice, which leads to the second category; the voice as *body*. The voice is the creator of music in the same way as other instruments: air creates motion which in turn creates sound. The size, energy, and effects will influence what we hear, and in our head we picture the body creating the sound. This may or may not be a correct image, but it is nevertheless based on a lifetime of experience with hearing people talk and sing. The third category is the voice as *person*. When we picture a body to which the voice belongs, we often picture a personality to which the body belongs. The voice creates a bond between the singer and the listener, and the direct line from the creator to the recipient makes singing something more personal and intimate than a musical instrument. This is easily exploited by the singer, through the fourth category – the voice as *character*. There are many voices present in a performance, like we have seen in the issue of authorship. The notion of authorship is closely linked to the voice, and in may be both strengthened and manipulated by the voice. Frith says that a voice is easily changed, which is part of why the singer can be heard as an actor, taking on different roles. The voice in performance works as both the marker of subjectivity - the person behind it - and as something artificial and changed, or objective. This makes the notion of authenticity questionable and confusing.

According to Moore (2001), there is an important distinction between the “trained” and the “untrained” voice, that has to do with the authenticity of the singer. A “trained” voice “is clearly held to have been tampered with”, says Moore (2001: 45). Moore divides the use of the voice into four characterising factors: register and range, resonance, attitude to pitch and attitude to rhythm (ibid.: 45-46). The register is either high, medium or low, at a particular point during the song. The range, used more broadly to describe the voice’s general abilities, is either large or narrow. Resonance can be useful in characterising the voice’s timbre and sound based on richness of overtones. This is difficult to describe, but no less important in the discussion of the quality of a voice. Attitude to pitch and rhythm refers to the ways in which the singer deviates from the tempered pitch and the treatment of syncopation and deviation of the beat. Hawkins (2002) writes
about the voice in his study of Morrissey, showing how he uses the voice to receive empathy from the audience. Morrissey is singing with an “untrained” voice in the sense that he avoids accurate pitching, but the “untrained” sound is clearly produced deliberately by a “trained” voice. Hawkins states that “the technique of controlling pitch is one of the distinguishing features of any singer” (2002: 86).

Furthermore, Hawkins points to Morrissey’s lyrical performance to stress how he models empathy, which brings me to the next issue. The discourse of cover songs seems to focus mainly on songs with words, and instrumental versions of songs either with or without lyrics would normally not fall under the category of cover song. It might even seem as though lyrics are part of what defines cover songs and separates them from other versioning practices. Mosser (2008) asks if this is actually the case, and if so, why. His adds, however, that it is mainly an issue of semantics. Whether or not necessary for a cover song, lyrics are nevertheless central in the understanding of the concept. I will focus for a moment on lyrics and their position in the understanding of cover songs, by drawing my attention to what is written about music as message through words.

In the development of popular music analysis, the words were for a long time the centre of attention. The music itself was not worth analysing in the way that the classical music was analysed, and the words were seen as the only element where something valuable could be found. Many listeners and scholars alike would say that the meaning of the music can be found in the lyrics. However, the discussion that takes place asks whether the music changes the meaning of the words, or whether the lyrics could be considered poetry - without the need to be accompanied by a melody. Dai Griffith says that we should “stop thinking that the words in pop songs are poems, and begin to say that they are like poetry” (2003: 42). Furthermore, he discusses the meaning of rhythm and rhyme in the words, saying that the words’ sonorous quality needs to be given more attention.

Simon Frith (1998) distinguishes between the semantic meaning of words, and the words as rhetoric. He says that “the issue in lyrical analysis is not words, but words in performance” (1998: 166). The words matter more as expression than as ideas - love songs might not always be true or realistic, but they give the audience a sense of recognition anyway. And there are many examples of songs that originally carry a certain meaning and are used in completely different contexts, changing their meanings significantly. These ideas - words as expressions through performance - reflect the processes taking place in cover songs. Meaning is changed through new vocal performances, although the words remain the same. I will return to this matter in each case study, but without putting much emphasis on lyrical content analysis. I choose to focus on the voice and
the musical codes expressed by it, more than the actual words.

Much could be said about the elements presented here, as well as other elements, and their functions as markers of musical codes. But, due to both time and space available to me, I have had to choose some issues that I find particularly beneficial for this thesis. Throughout this thesis, I will return to the theoretical concepts and ideas that have been presented in this chapter. I will do so by applying them to the case studies that make up the main body of the thesis.

Synopsis

The choice of case studies is an important one and deserves validation here. The examples were mainly chosen based on my own personal fascination with the particular songs, as well as a certain influence by my own musical preferences. In the following chapter, I will focus on Sting’s song “Fields of Gold” from 1993, covered by Eva Cassidy. This example shows a common way of making a cover song; reducing the instrumental accompaniment to an acoustic guitar, and interpreting the melody and lyrics in one’s own way. Chapter 3 examines “Don’t Stop the Music” from 2007, a cover in which the changes are more significant than in the previous example. The two artists in this case, Rihanna and Jamie Cullum, each make interesting performances; they are both confident in their respective styles and perform with great persuasion. Chapter 4 addresses the 2003 hit “Crazy In Love” by Beyoncé and Jay-Z, a song that has similarities with “Don’t Stop the Music”, but where the nature of the cover, by Antony and the Johnsons, is very different. Gender issues and authenticity is particularly interesting in this chapter. Chapter 5 deals with the 1965 hit by the Rolling Stones, “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction”, covered by Britney Spears, in which the question of gendered subjectivity is just as important. Here the concept of genre is central, more precisely the historical issue of rock versus pop. In chapter 6, I “connect the dots”, so to speak. The case studies are individual examples of cover songs, each showing their own ways of covering and hence their own ways of reading covers. I do feel, however, that they might represent covers of different kinds in an interesting way, and show how cover songs share some similarities, in spite of their individuality.
Chapter 2. “Fields of Gold”

My father introduced me to Sting some time after I had started listening to Eva Cassidy’s music. I had a vague idea of the Police being more than a crime stopping profession, and bells were ringing when I heard Puff Daddy and Faith Evans’ “I’ll Be Missing You”, a 1997 “major interpretation” (see Mosser 2008) of the Police’s “I’ll Be Watching You” (another interesting example of the cover song). Hearing Sting’s “Fields of Gold” was the beginning of a long musical relationship, but that first meeting was not particularly positive - to me, he ruined Cassidy’s song! This is a perfect example of Weinstein’s (2010) idea of the original appearing as the cover version and vice versa. This changed fast, however - Sting’s performance is now an obvious original to me, and Cassidy is the cover artist, a brilliant such.

Why analyse “Fields of Gold” as part of this thesis? Sting’s “Fields of Gold” is the kind of song that is included in songbooks and performed by a school class on their end-of-the-year concert. The song has, together with for instance many of the Beatles’ hits and many rock and pop “classics”, become part of a “standard” popular music material, similar to the jazz standards. What separates these rock and pop classics from the jazz standards, however, is that they in most incidences still have a connection to their “author” (see Brackett 1995)- the original artist making the song the hit that it was. Eva Cassidy performs a song which is originally performed with a full band, but which is also very much suited for guitar and vocals, “folk ballad-y” as it is. There are also other elements beside the music that I want to discuss. Eva Cassidy died from cancer at the age of 33, and this might to many listeners be a central part of her artistic identity. Her story is not evident through the music, but it is still part of many listeners’ perception of the artist, and I will therefore get back to the issue at the end of this chapter.

**Sting**

Born Gordon Sumner in 1951, Sting grew up in Wallsend, UK. In 1977 he moved to London and soon became lead vocalist and bassist in the Police. The rock band moved to USA to try making a career in the American music business. Gradually they got bigger gigs and “won over their audiences with a combination of new wave toughness and reggae rhythms” (Sting.com). The band released five albums before breaking up in 1983, after major success with the album *Synchronicity* (1983), featuring their hit single “Every Breath You Take”. At the time of the breakup
of the Police, Sting had already started his solo career and done a little acting, starring in various movies (but he himself stated that the acting was merely a hobby). His solo career, however, grew rapidly, with both old Police fans and new listeners. His albums show an artist who is versatile and curious of new styles and sounds. He has released 14 solo albums and several “Best Of”-compilations (Larkin 2006c). Interestingly, some of his albums have been re-recorded with Spanish and Portuguese lyrics, to appeal to a wider, Latin-American audience. Sting is also a philanthropist, engaged in human rights, mainly through Amnesty International, and together with his wife Trudie Styler he founded The Rainforest Foundation in 1987. She is also the mother of four of his six children (Sting.com).

Placing Sting within generic boundaries has proven to be difficult. Many labels have been put on his music, and although continuously giving the audience his old hits, he continues to renew and develop his stylistic language after thirty years as a solo artist. For instance, The Soul Cages (1991) was a collaboration with outstanding jazz musicians, and If On a Winter’s Night... (2009) is a collection of ancient hymns, carols and folk tunes (Sting.com). Sting is an accomplished songwriter and composer, with the authenticity of the rock musician who writes his own material, always in control of his musical expression and image. As with many other artists, Sting’s public persona is influenced by his social engagement, with human rights and the work against rainforest reduction. If not influencing his musical persona directly, knowledge of his activities will affect the listener’s perception of him, which in turn affects the view of him as an artist and songwriter.

**Analysis**

“Fields of Gold” was released as one of the singles from the album Ten Summoner’s Tales in 1993, an album selling three times Platinum in the US and two times Platinum in the UK. The album title is a word play on Sting’s surname Sumner, indicating that the songs are his tales and stories. The album, featuring some of Sting’s biggest hits, got six nominations and three wins in the Grammy awards. The success surprised many critics after the “seeming failure” of the previous album The Soul Cages (1991). “Fields of Gold” has been covered by many artists; the internet database Second Hand Songs lists 23 cover versions (Second Hand Songs 2012b). Many of the versions are covers of Eva Cassidy’s version, which has inspired many singers.

**Structure and sound**

Fields of Gold resembles a folk tune or ballad, with a four line verse repeated seven times in
total (including a guitar solo verse). After four verses there is a B section introducing a new melody, which is only played once during the song. The first and the third lines are new in every verse, whereas the second and fourth lines are roughly the same every time, respectively “among (or upon) the fields of barley” and “among (or upon) the fields of gold”. The overall sound of the song is rich and warm. The production is following ideals that are typical for this contemporary pop ballad style, with extensive use of synth and echo. I find the idea of layers and the sound box (see Moore 2001) useful when listening to “Fields of Gold”. There is a typical placement of instruments in the sound box and a nice balance between the different layers. Sting is in the front centre of the sound box, the general accompaniment is in the back, and solo parts are also in the front, but slightly to one side. This gives the same impression as being at a concert standing in front of the stage. I get the feeling of standing in the middle of the music, with the sound source “close” to me. The closeness and warmth of the sound is largely due to the instrumentation and production. The synth is especially important in creating the rich sound, as it fills the fourth layer (the middle register, see Moore 2001) and provides a harmonic presence. Sting’s voice is also a central part of the general sound construction.

**Rhythm and harmony**

“Fields of Gold” has a standard 4/4 rhythm with straight eights, at approximately 100 bpm. The percussion establishes the rhythmic pattern from the first beat, and stays the same throughout the song. With strong emphasis on second and fourth beats and a rhythm on every 8th note, the percussion is an established and steady element. The bass has his own rhythmic pattern with a closer relationship to the melody than the drums. Could this be influenced by the fact that Sting plays the bass himself? Whether the bass playing affects the singer is not a discussion I will get into here (for more on this, see for instance singingbassist.com).

The guitar is central to the development of the song; it has a variety of functions throughout the song, with the roles of both rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment, and playing the solo verse. It also functions as an “opposite” to the synth, with its arpeggios against the synth’s long, static harmonies. The guitar also has an important role in creating progress throughout the song. The verses are roughly built up by the same elements, with just a few variations in synth and voice. The guitar, however, goes from quiet accompaniment, to a doubling of the melody in the third verse, to plucking every 16th from the fourth verse. This makes every verse a little different from the one before, and creates development throughout the song.
“Fields of Gold” is in D major, and uses traditional chord progressions, sometimes with an added seventh. The song starts with the relative minor, B minor. The melody is the same through all parts - a simple diatonic movement from the third of the chord down to the seventh. Moore (2001) discusses the melody as it most typically appears in rock songs. A common pattern from the blues, is the descending movement through each phrase. This is what happens also in Sting’s melody. The verses have an overall descending movement, ending on the D below where it started. Although deriving from blues and gospel, it is also something we find in for instance folk tunes (as blues and gospel were basically folk). This might be, together with the structure, part of the folk character. The B section (1:48) is different, mainly because of the more static nature of the melody. Harmonically based on G major to D, the part has a melody mostly consisting of an A. In my opinion, this creates an interesting effect of uncertainty regarding the harmonic material - is the B section placed on the subdominant or the dominant?

Voice

Sting’s voice is recognized as a bright tenor with a soft and rich texture. It has changed through his career, both due to life and age, and his musical development, stylistically and technically. He uses the voice actively as a central marker of style, changing it according to generic context. On “Fields of Gold” (recorded when Sting was in his early 40s) he uses a low part of the tenor register, bordering on a baritone range. The pitch range is only an octave for the whole song, reaching from d to d’. The small pitch range strengthens the notion of the folk ballad style. The phrasing is typical of the style, with slightly bent pitch at the end of phrases. Sting’s ideal is to sound natural and tell the story almost as if it was spoken, and the voice has the sound and character of an “untrained” voice. This is not to be understood as Sting’s voice being “untrained”, as he probably has the technique and experience of a trained singer - it is rather a stylistic ideal, where phrasing and expression should sound natural in order to come across as true and convincing (see Moore 2001). Looking at Sting’s back catalogue, it is evident that he works within a variety of genres, and his voice is changed accordingly (although obviously within certain limits).

Lyrically, the song is a love story, looking back at the life they had together. Sting interprets the lyrics with little use of melodic variation. The melody is the same every time it is repeated, which leaves the possibility of variation up to other elements of the vocals. Sting changes the rhythm of some phrases, which is part of what makes it sound closer to spoken words. At certain words there is the occasional emphasis, evident in both the character of the voice and the use of
dynamics. Apart from these emphasized words, there is surprisingly little use of dynamics throughout the song.

The main issues that arise from my reading of Sting, are that 1) the sound is rich and typical of the folk/pop-ballad, 2) the instrumentation and the rhythmic and harmonic elements follow certain stylistic codes, and 3) the voice is natural and with a small pitch range, which makes it comfortable but expressive.

**Eva Cassidy**

Eva Cassidy was the singer-songwriter without the songwriting. She performed her own versions of songs by artists like Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon and Cindy Lauper. While also doing more traditional blues and jazz repertoire, she became known for doing covers of pop/rock artists. The story of Eva Cassidy is a melancholic and emotional story of a gifted singer whose life ended too soon. Eva Cassidy was born in 1963, and grew up in the Washington DC area in the USA. Her father was an amateur musician, and she sang with him and her brother growing up. Later Cassidy did some backing singing and was part of various groups without much luck, before she met producer Chris Biondi in 1986. Always the shy girl, Cassidy found it difficult to perform on stage, but through her voice she could interpret and perform with great stage presence. Cassidy got melanoma (a form of skin cancer) and died in 1996, only 33 years old. Since her death several albums have been released, featuring both studio recordings, and recordings of her live performances. Four years after its release, the compilation *Songbird* (1998) topped the UK charts. Two more compilations would do the same in the years to come (Allmusic.com 2012a).

The angelic voice and the soft, pure and emotional expression is well suited for the folk songs and ballads of her repertoire. But, she also performed soul, blues and gospel with a big, strong and confident voice, and her interpretations of songs within contemporary pop are among her most acknowledged recordings. One of these is her cover version of Sting’s “Fields of Gold” (Larkin 2006b).

**Analysis**

Eva Cassidy included “Fields of Gold” on her independent live album *Live at Blues Alley*, recorded in January 1996. The album consists of jazz standards such as “Autumn Leaves” and “Honeysuckle Rose”, traditional blues and gospel songs like “Oh, Had I a Golden Thread”, as well
as contemporary pop covers like “Fields of Gold” and “Take Me to the River”. *Live at Blues Alley* was the only solo album by Cassidy released in her lifetime. Later “Fields of Gold” was released on the compilation *Songbird*.

**Structure and sound**

Eva Cassidy keeps the structural elements of the original, with a few minor changes. One of the verses is removed, and the B section is played twice. This gives a different feeling of structure from that of the original. As opposed to the original’s form of a folk ballad, Cassidy’s version seems closer to the verse and chorus structure common in most pop and rock music. Another difference is that Cassidy starts with the “hook” of Sting’s version, only singing the line on an “oo”. This creates a link to the original version, while also expressing a personal approach to the song.

“Fields of Gold” is a recording from a live performance, not a studio recording, which influences the sound. The live recording means that the instruments and the vocal track were recorded simultaneously. The sound is characterised by extended use of echo, in both the guitar and the vocals. Although singing with a natural voice and a credible expression, Eva Cassidy is still focusing on the sound. This is linked to the aesthetics of her style; the sound is essential and more important than for instance the artist’s image. There is a “simplicity” about Eva Cassidy’s version. The instrumentation is simpler than in Sting’s version, with only guitars and vocals. Cassidy is singing and playing the acoustic guitar, and Keith Grimes plays the electric guitar solo. The guitar playing is characterised by a small pitch range and a simple plucking of chords. This creates an intimacy which is central to the sincerity and credibility of Cassidy’s version. Regarding the layers presented by Moore (2001), Cassidy has much less of the first and second layers, with no drums and less bass than the original. With only the guitar and the voice, the lower pitches are nonexistent. In spite of this, I don’t get a sense of anything “missing” from the version. The sound is rich and warm despite the lack of a large pitch range, and I feel that the depth of the music is present through resonance in the guitar and the timbres of the guitar and the voice together.

**Melodic interpretation**

From a singer’s perspective, the cover version is transposed down a fourth note, to A major. Cassidy’s pitch range is hence below that of Sting, as she is in a typical alto register. However, the *sounding* pitch of her voice is above the original pitch, as he is singing in a tenor register, a fifth below her. Eva Cassidy’s music can in many instances be characterised by her ability to make the
music “her own”. This is evident for instance through her arrangements, her sound, and her ways of expressing emotions. However, I will focus here on one specific element where she influences the music - the treatment of the melody. As I said in the reading of Sting’s version, the melody of the verses is a descending line. Although not as consistently as in the original, Cassidy’s melodic interpretation has the same general movement. What she does, however, is to change some of the phrases, particularly the third of the verse, to make the melody itself more interesting and to show a wider register. Several times her melody is a third above the original melody, so that the line descending through the third and fourth phrases is even longer and more persistent.

**Voice**

Eva Cassidy has a vocal technique and ideal that situates her quite close to Sting, but with some important differences. The voice is untrained and with a natural sound, and the vocal interpretation is also affected by the fact that this is a live recording. Cassidy has some use of melodic interpretation, changing the melodic phrases in several of the verses. This is also connected to her interpretation of the lyrics, as the words and the melodic lines go hand in hand and influence each other. The song has few significant dynamic changes, but there are a few peaks in the vocal line, especially where Cassidy changes the melody to emphasise certain words. As I mentioned earlier, the sound is important to the aesthetic expression. Cassidy has an angelic voice with a timbre of purity and innocence. Part of the reason as of why she may “reduce” the accompaniment and create a simpler sound, is because of her stylistic ideals - to express beautiful music and emotions through her voice.

The lyrics are slightly changed in Cassidy’s performance. As previously mentioned, one of the verses is removed. In this verse Sting sings “feel her body rise as you kiss her mouth” (time), which is by far the most intimate phrase of the song. Why has she omitted this phrase from her performance? Is it not suited for her quiet, vulnerable performance? Are there gender issues related to this? The line is from the man’s perspective, which is probably why Cassidy has left it out. She has also changed the structure by adding a second B verse, which might be part of the reason why one of the A parts has been cut from her performance.

Where Sting uses the accompaniment to create musical development, Cassidy uses her voice. Her accompaniment is simpler than his, which means that she has to create movement and development through melodic interpretation and emotion to a larger degree than him. Her tempo is slower, at 80 bpm, which gives her more time to phrase differently. Let us consider Cassidy’s
appropriation from a stylistic perspective; the simple accompaniment and nature of the song brings to mind the folk tune - the singer telling a story from “olden times”, using a simple melody and few chords. The song could also, however, be considered a singer-songwriter ballad, where the sound is warm and round, and the performer is giving the listener a personal and intimate story from her own life. If both these ways of listening to Cassidy are relevant, I find two different ways of reading her music through the perspective of authenticity. The singer-songwriter is personal and intimate about her own life and feelings. The folk singer, on the other hand, is part of a tradition of storytelling, in which the artist comes across as true not only to herself, but to a traditional style as well.

Eva Cassidy’s version of “Fields of Gold” can be summarized in a few points: 1) her instrumental accompaniment is much simpler than the original, as it only consists of her guitar and a solo guitar, 2) Cassidy treats the melody with respect, but also changes it, “signifyin(g)” on Sting’s melody, and 3) an important part of the aesthetic character of the song is in the voice, which is linked to both 1) and 2).

“You’ll remember me...”

But who will remember whom? Does Eva Cassidy “remember” Sting through her interpretation of his song? Or do we as listeners remember him when listening to her cover version? And does the fact that it is a cover song affect us when we listen to it? This discussion will deal with the issues that come to the surface through my readings of the two versions, and the concept of cover will be main issue.

The analyses have dealt with stylistic codes and the aesthetics of performance. Stylistically, Sting’s performance can be heard as an adult contemporary pop ballad, with some traces of folk. This is evident in the pop sound and the vocal performance, whereas the structure of the song and the lyrical content bring to mind a folk ballad. Sting’s aesthetic ideals seem to be a rich sound where pleasure is gained through the beauty of the musical elements. We are somehow dealing with a type of easy listening. Eva Cassidy strips the music of many elements in her performance, and what remains are only her voice and her guitar. The pop sound is not as obvious, but the aesthetic goals are quite similar. However, Cassidy aims for a higher degree of lyrical interpretation.

The stylistic notion is also influenced by the liveness and the acoustic sound in both of the versions. Eva Cassidy’s performance of “Fields of Gold” is a live recording. How does this affect the listener? Does it matter? And if so, how? There is an element of liveness to the performance -
through the production of sound the listener will perceive certain codes related to liveness. Eva Cassidy’s performance is in possession of these codes - the immediacy of the voice, the notion of room - which gives the impression of liveness. But, is this far from the liveness as perceived in the original version of the song? Sting’s version is also an acoustic version, with a sound ideal approaching that of a concert experience. This implies a liveness in his version as well, which implies that the importance of this issue is less than I first assumed. This might be because of the development of music production, where the desired effect can be achieved in any studio recording.

The sound is an interesting factor in the comparison of the versions, but there are other musical elements worth discussing. What can be said about the effect of Cassidy’s treatment of the melody? Sting’s melody is characterised by a descending movement, and a melodic structure typical of rock and other popular music genres. The melody consists of repetition of phrases and parts of phrases, a repetitive character in addition to the repetition of the overall structure of the song. Sting uses other elements besides melody to create variation, especially development in the accompaniment. Cassidy’s interpretations of melodies have in many instances been further from the original than in this case (consider her version of “Autumn Leaves”, in which the melody is “hidden” in the guitar and she is rather using it as a reference for her own phrasing of the lyrics). But, also in “Fields of Gold” the melody is slightly changed. This has several functions - Cassidy gets to show a broader register, and it makes her lyrical interpretation more interesting. What is perhaps the biggest advantage of this, is that Cassidy proves to be a talented musician, creative and with the ability to make the song her own through her performance. This leads to the next issue - authenticity.

I also need to raise the question of how identities are expressed through the two performances. Sting had a large audience in 1993, first from his important role in the Police and later from his solo career. He had to find the balance between giving the audience what they wanted, and giving them something new and different. This is linked to the *habitus* as explained by Bourdieu. All creativity takes place in the space between the habitus - the abilities and potential of a subject - and the field. Sting is thus exploring his creativity by moving outside of his field, or his stylistic boundaries. The subjectivity lies partly in these stylistic elements, but more so in the use of the voice. Sting has a great voice, which he uses in different ways to create stylistic and expressive variations in his music. In this particular case, however, the way in which he performs the lyrics and the melody is more “straightforward”, in the sense that he uses less of his vocal range and dynamics. His dynamic variations are small, and the emotional expression is likewise - the performance is typical of the
storytelling of the folk song. However, this “simple” performance does not exclude the notion of identity - Sting is true to the style in which he is situated and with which he is identified, as well as being true to his own emotional expression. Eva Cassidy establishes identity in a different way through her personal performances of popular songs. Is the identity also somewhat unintentional? I find, looking beyond this particular example, that the story behind the artist is part of how I perceive her. The tragic ending of her career formed a backdrop of her performances and was hence part of her identity construction. The musical performance is influenced by Cassidy’s very much human vulnerability as it was displayed through her illness and early death, particularly opening up for thoughts like “she was an angel on earth” and “she was too good for this world”. This shows how contextual elements may change the interpretation and meaning of the song, implying that there is a close relationship between musical extra-musical codes.

As I have mentioned in the analysis of the cover, I find that Eva Cassidy’s cover could be interpreted in at least two ways. In one sense it sounds like a singer-songwriter performing her own song, with the intention of performing the lyrics like she is telling a story, with a simple guitar accompaniment. The sincerity with which she performs the lyrics suggests that she is in possession of a certain “ownership” of the song, which also leads to a kind of first person authenticity. However, in another sense it could be heard as a typical cover song, in the way Cassidy appropriates Sting’s melody by keeping it fairly intact while also changing it to make it her own. Brackett’s (1995) question of who is the author is interesting in this context - Cassidy is the author of her own performance, and we sense a certain degree of creativity here. She is not “fake” despite making a cover version. Bowman states in his discussion of performance that the performer should be seen as an author, because many of the song’s elements, who carry important significations of musical meaning, are changed.

It is time to try finding an answer to the questions that introduced this discussion. Who will remember whom? I think there is some truth to all of the questions. Eva Cassidy “remembers” Sting by showing him and his song respect through her own personal performance. The cover song is different, but easily recognisable - the original is clearly present in Eva Cassidy’s performance, and her appropriation provides the listener with a lyrical focus through its simplicity. We also remember Sting as we hear the cover (at least when we know of it), through the stereophonic listening as discussed by Weinstein (2010). This is also linked to the clarity and simplicity with which Eva Cassidy performs the song. The last question is more difficult. Does the fact that it is a cover song affect us when we listen to it? If we know the original and feel Sting’s “presence”, the cover might
be coloured by comparison. Or maybe not - it could be that the pleasure of the listening experience lies in the sound and performance aesthetics of this particular song, and that Cassidy’s voice and identity as an artist would be appreciated whether or not Sting was involved. The appreciation of Cassidy’s performance might be unaffected by the concept of cover.
Chapter 3. “Don't Stop the Music”

How can the same song, the same lyrics and melody, work well in styles as different as those of Rihanna and Jamie Cullum? Throughout this thesis I deal with music’s nomadic qualities, its ability to be adopted by different artists positioned within different styles, and the artist’s possibility to change almost every characteristic element of the music while it still remains somewhat the same. Why is Cullum performing this song? He is exploiting these possibilities hidden in the music, and makes Rihanna’s performance his own. What happens to my way of listening to his music when I know the original version by Rihanna so well? I will try to find some answers to these questions, and hopefully the answers will influence my future listening to cover songs in general.

The two versions of the song with the fabulous title are both great performances. My personal taste will probably influence each of my readings, so too in this case. But, there are differences in the pleasure I get from listening to these songs, and these differences are what make this reading interesting. They are unquestionably linked to each other, while at the same time being two distincty different performances, and I want to explore the effect of this. How am I as listener affected by the fact that these two performances are of the same song?

A video shows an explosion of a grand piano. A symbol of music, perishing in the air to the sound of “please don’t stop the music”, brings to mind hard rock bands destroying their instruments as a central part of their performance. There are no more similarities, however - the man in a suit and tie does not at all look like he is about to destroy any musical instrument. The music is far from hard rock, it is rather a groovy but gentle jazz-pop tune. Jamie Cullum is somehow like a child, playing with different expressions and styles, trying and at times possibly failing, but always building his musical persona on precisely this phenomenon – the talented musician who can pull off almost any musical material – he cracked the musical code, so to speak.

Rihanna

The young, talented R'n'B artist Rihanna is known not only for her groovy music, her great voice and her sexy image, but also for her troubled childhood and journey from poverty to stardom. Born Robyn Rihanna Fenty in 1988, Rihanna grew up in Barbados with a drug-addict father who divorced her mother when Rihanna was 14. Although moving to the US in her teens, Rihanna never forgot her roots, and has become an ambassador for Barbados. The artist has called herself Robyn
all her life, but decided to use her middle name as a stage name. The first album, *Music of the Sun*, was released in 2005, and the second, *A Girl Like Me*, came just a few months later. At the time of writing, Rihanna has released six studio albums, had eleven number one hits in the US, and sold more than 30 million records. Her official web page illustrates her success by saying that she “ranks as the only female artist of the last decade to chart ten #1’s on the Hot 100” (RihannaNow.com 2012).

Rihanna’s earlier music was by some critics called “teen pop” and “bubblegum pop”, but she was marketed as a reggae/dancehall act. Later her music established itself in the contemporary R’n’B world, and Rihanna has many times been called “a new Beyoncé”. The collaboration with her producer, and Beyoncé’s husband, Jay-Z, has probably influenced this. However, Rihanna’s general stylistic sphere is closer to pop than that of Beyoncé (Wikipedia 2012d).

**Analysis**

First released in 2007, “Don’t Stop the Music” was one of several hit singles from Rihanna’s third studio album *Good Girl Gone Bad*. The song was written, recorded and produced by the Norwegian producer duo Mikkel Eriksen and Tor Erik Hermansen, otherwise known as the production team *Stargate*. The duo has had three #1 hits with Rihanna, while also working with artists like Beyoncé and Lionel Ritchie. They have revitalised the pop/R’n’B sound of Michael Jackson and Prince (Sisario 2007).

The music video (Youtube.com 2009d) underlines the story of the song - a party. The exciting, carefree atmosphere of the lyrics is reflected in the image of Rihanna dancing, clapping and singing with her friends (and with one guy in particular). She is wearing a black, tight, strapless dress, her hair is long and loose, and the whole place has an air of exclusiveness to it. This exclusive image is underlined by the beginning of the video, where Rihanna and her friends enter a candy shop and sneak through the back door to a secret night club. The place can thus be seen as some kind of fantasy - the place of your dreams, which is also reflected in the lyrics of the chorus: “I wanna take you away, let’s escape into the music”.

**Structure and sound**

A typical R’n’B/hip hop song, "Don't Stop the Music" is characterised by repetition of a few effective musical elements, such as the bass line and Rihanna’s hook in the intro (“please don’t stop the music” repeated four times). The rhythm is simple, and the whole verse consists of percussion,
bass, and vocals. However, there are some elements “hidden” in the back of the sound-box: there is
a bright, metallic sound, like a “click”, that is “moved” from one side of the sound box to the other.
This emphasises the notion of surround and *room*. Generally, the notion of room in the music,
through the sound and production, is fascinating. The sound gives the impression that you are
standing outside of a party waiting to come in, as if hearing only the bass and drums through a wall.
This is underlined by Rihanna’s lyrics: “I’m making my way over to my favourite place” (at 0:34).
The sound opens up gradually, as if you get closer and closer to the party, as the chorus is
approaching. The effect is significant, as the tension rises throughout the bridge and peaks when the
chorus starts. Here the sound is open and rich, the music packed with new elements.

Production and technology is important in the discussion of Rihanna’s music, as the
technological tools are central to the aesthetics of the song. I will not give an extensive analysis of
these elements, but generally I find that the smooth and rich sound is essential to this music.
Rihanna does not “cover up” the use of digital effects in the production; on the contrary, it is part of
the pleasure and enjoyment of the listener. Historically, there has been a general notion that
mediated music has a lower value than unmediated, more “authentic” music (see e.g. Moore 2001,
Weisethaunet and Lindberg 2010), but postmodernist thinking has a growing influence on the value
judgement of mediated, digital, and commercial music (see Hawkins 2002). Rihanna’s performance
shows that there might very well be a high level of mediation to a performance, and a significant
notion of credibility to the artist simultaneously. Rihanna thus represents a pop style where pleasure
and seduction are central to the song’s aesthetics.

*Rhythmic and harmonic treatment*

Rhythm is a central element of Rihanna’s music. When listening to Rihanna, I get the feeling
of intense bodily focus, as if the song is somehow kinetic instead of aural listening, the music
reaching the body before the mind. The tempo is about 120 bpm. The percussion has a “clapping”
sound, which brings to mind hands, which are attached to bodies. In other words, the bodies are
present not only through the voices, but also through actual body sounds. Although the rhythm
seems fairly simple at first, with each beat equally emphasised, there are small underlying details in
the percussions, which together create a good dancing groove.

“Don’t Stop the Music” is characterised by sparingly use of harmonic material; just a few
chords are repeated throughout the song. The harmonic structure is from D major to F# minor,
played for four bars each all the way through. One exception is the repetition of the chorus (from
2:38), which is without bass. A richer harmonic texture is created by the backing vocals, but they always stay close to the chord. This is however no loss; the repetitive nature of the harmonies goes well with the genre, and there are other elements in which a development takes place, especially in the vocals.

**Voices and lyrics**

Rihanna takes on the role of a girl on the dance floor, telling someone to keep on playing the beat so that she can keep on dancing, “hand in hand, chest to chest, face to face”. Her voice is in an alto register, with a clear tone and diction. Her pitch range is quite small on the song, only an octave plus a minor third - from f# to a’. She adds some vibrato at the end of phrases, while otherwise focusing on the consonants and emphasising on the lyrics. The echo in the overall sound is also an important effect on the voice. Generally, the sound is the most important element regarding the musical development of the song, whereas the main vocals are more static. On both the emotional and the dynamic level, the vocals remain almost unchanged. As typical of the style, the voice is influenced by the production. There is an extensive use of echo, in different ways; the vocals are double tracked on the chorus to make it richer, and the echo is particularly present in the parts where Rihanna’s voice is single tracked (especially on the verses).

Rihanna’s voice is centre stage throughout the song. But, there are other voices present as well - the backing vocals. The backing vocals are added in the choruses, with several elements adding to the music as a whole. They have a descending, harmonised phrase (first time from 1:36), as well as joining Rihanna in the last word of phrases in the bridge - "started", "party" etc. Most importantly, the backing vocals are in possession of one of the most significant elements - the riff (fading in from 1:04) sampled from the Michael Jackson song “Wanna Be Startin’ Somethin’” (1983). The riff creates a richer rhythm, as well as being central to the production of sound, by being present nearly all the time but in different ways. Sometimes the riff is centre stage of the sound box, other times a mere shadow of itself - during the second verse, the riff is just a rhythmic, electric sound.

There is a close relationship between the lyrics and the music. The lyrics are about a girl who is at a party and sees someone she really likes, with whom she then dances through the choruses. It feels like the lyrics tell the story of the party at which the music is playing, saying that the music must never stop as long as they are dancing. “Now we’re rockin’ on the dance floor, acting naughty”, she sings, and the body is very present also through the words. I find that the relationship
between the words and the music is tight. Rihanna sings about “the passion ready to explode”, which shows how the power in the words underlines the power of the music. The effect is significant.

To sum up the analysis of Rihanna’s “Don’t Stop the Music” in four points: 1) the sound and production of the song are important elements for the aesthetic expression, 2) the rhythmic aspect is essential to the perception of the song, 3) linked to the production, the voices are clean and with extensive use of echo, and 4) the lyrics are clever, combining the story of the party and the feelings connected to instant attention and attraction towards someone.

Jamie Cullum

Jamie Cullum was born in Rochford, UK, in 1979. He started playing the piano and the guitar at eight, influenced by his older brother who is also a musician. Through his teens he played in various rock bands, developing his musical talent on the piano, the guitar and as a drummer. After searching through a number of different styles, he finally ended up in the jazz sphere, still influenced by a variety of genres. The early interest in various musical instruments and going in and out of bands for years, made Cullum the multi-instrumentalist he is, and opened up for continuing experiments with varying genres and styles (Jamiecullum.com 2012).

Jamie Cullum has released five studio albums and one live album, of which *The Pursuit* (2009) is the latest release (Jamiecullum.com 2012). All of his albums consist of a combination of jazz standards and covers of rock and pop. Of his more well-known covers are Radiohead’s “High and Dry” and Jimi Hendrix’ “Wind Cries Mary”. Cullum is married to writer Sophie Dahl, and they have a daughter. At the point of writing, Cullum is a presenter at BBC Radio 2, where he has his own radio show playing jazz with guests and live sessions (BBC Radio 2 2012).

Analysis

*The Pursuit*, released in 2009, was recorded in Los Angeles with producer Greg Wells. Consisting of nine originals and five covers, the album represents a songwriter within the jazz sphere, as well as a talented cover artist. “I like that this album journeys from a big band track at the start to a prog-y house/dance track at the end, because it’s all me”, Cullum says about the album (Jamiecullum.com 2012). This is symptomatic for his whole career, both regarding his talent as a multi-instrumentalist, and the experimenting mentality in his treatment of styles and expressions.
“The artists I most admire […] are people like Miles Davis and Tom Waits, who […] change and evolve over the years, but still remain themselves”, Cullum says (ibid.). One of the cover songs on the album the Pursuit is Rihanna’s “Don’t Stop the Music”. Cullum heard the song in a night club in London, and wanted to make a version of it as he enjoyed its lyrics and its whole vibe. He took it to the studio with his drummer and his bassist, and says himself about the song: “it was one of those ones which we did in two or three takes, and I think this is the second take we used” (The Pursuit, Audio Commentary). He also explains the cover by saying that “it added a kind of coolness to the record […] which really kind of helped it” (ibid.).

The music video shows Cullum alone on stage with his grand piano, first “playing” the percussion rhythms on the piano, then playing the piano part while singing. He is wearing a black suit and tie and a grey shirt, giving the impression of a certain seriousness. His image is that of the mainstream jazz musician, in a somewhat exclusive and sophisticated concert environment. As a parallel to this scene, we see another grand piano slowly going to pieces, strings snapping and keys flying. In the end the whole piano explodes, an image that is also used at the album cover of the Pursuit (Youtube.com 2009c).

**Structure and sound**

A quiet, acoustic drum groove is all we hear in the first four bars, giving a notion of stylistic placement. The vocals and the bass confirm this placement, as they start the first verse with the same laid-back groove and the jazz-pop sound. There is a significant build-up towards the chorus, from the quiet atmosphere of the first verse, to the additional piano in the bridge, then the change of rhythm and more intensity in the chorus. After the chorus Cullum adds an extra half a verse, which works as a calm break after the chorus as well as an introduction to the piano solo. The structure is overall quite similar to the original, built up by verses, bridges and choruses; the difference is that Cullum adds an extra verse after the first chorus - the piano solo. Immediately following the solo is the second verse, bridge and chorus, before an additional eight bars (half the chorus) and a quiet fade-out with rubato chords.

The instrumentation is the standard acoustic jazz trio, consisting of drums, bass and piano, with the added vocal. All the instruments have an important role in creating a musical sound sphere that is grounded in the style. An important difference from the original version is that the overall sound aesthetics are based on an acoustic, unplugged performance. This influences both the instruments’ roles and the vocal performance. The rhythmic treatment is an important part of the
change of style, as the drummer uses brushes and hi-hats to create a more laid-back, jazzy groove. The bass line is part of the harmonic development away from the simplistic two-chord accompaniment of the original, towards a thicker, jazz-influenced harmonisation. There is also an important rhythmic element in the bass player’s interpretation and collaboration with the drummer. The piano has the role of Moore’s (2001) fourth layer, filling the gap between the bass and the voice. The piano is also important because of its melodic contributions - in addition to the piano solo, there are melodic fills throughout the song. The characteristic riffs and fills of Rihanna’s version are replaced with more standard jazz fills, which is part of the stylistic positioning.

Rhythm and harmony

Jamie Cullum slows the tempo down to a comfortable 100 bpm. The percussion groove is based on straight 16ths, which are subtly “hidden” in the groove, but creating an important drive forward. The drummer uses brushes to make the soft jazz sound, until the chorus, where he switches to regular sticks. The 16ths are still present in the hi-hats. The shift in the percussion is an essential part of the long, gradual crescendo towards the chorus. Generally the percussions are important to the aesthetics, creating the groove and vibe of the song, which are central to the perception of the cover. I will return to this matter later.

Harmonically, Jamie Cullum’s version shows a different approach to chords and chord progressions. The treatment of harmony is one of the central elements in showing the foundation of the genre. Cullum keeps the general harmonic material, but makes it thicker and more complex. Because I don’t find it necessary for my reading, I will not go into an extensive analysis of the harmonic development in Cullum’s version, but it is important to be aware of the genre aesthetics regarding the harmonic material. The richness of the chords and rapidness of the chord changes are typical of Cullum’s style, just as the treatment of harmony is typical of Rihanna’s style in the original. This might seem obvious, but what is interesting to observe, is how Cullum had to find the balance and compromises between the simplicity of the original’s stylistic ideals of the mainstream jazz world. The balance results in a simpler harmonic material than what is common in Cullum’s performances.

The voice and lyrics

Not unlike most male popular music singers, Cullum sings in a tenor register. His sound is that of a young, white, masculine voice, and he stays aesthetically fairly close to the pitch, although
not quite as much as the crooners of earlier jazz. On “Don’t Stop the Music” his pitch range is from c to f’. Cullum’s voice is relaxed and pleasant, and he uses different techniques on the voice to create an emotional expression. There is an “airiness” to his timbre, combined with a small vibrato at the end of phrases, whereas the beginning of words and phrases has a kind of scratching sound. This combination gives me the notion of a voice that is emotionally influenced and engaged, but also steady and under control by the singer at all times. Cullum is also “dragging” the notes out of the rhythmic structure - the slower tempo gives more time to emphasise on certain words and phrases. At times Cullum is using the words more for their rhythmic qualities than their lyrical meaning. An example of this is the phrase “that you’d be up in here looking like you do” (0:31), in which Cullum moves the syllables out of the straight 8ths of the original. The effect of this is a more dynamic and personal treatment of the melody.

The lyrics are identical in both versions of the song. Although this is a man covering a woman’s song, the song is from “I” to “you”, which means that no gendered pronouns had to be changed. In my opinion, the only phrase in which there might be a notion of gender, is where they sing “your hands around my waist” - the placement of hands in a dance usually follow the culturally established “system” where his arms are around her waist, and her arms are around his neck. The question that arises is whether or not this changes how we hear the phrase. Personally, I find that it doesn’t - the lyrics are suited for a man as well as for a woman. But, there is more to the voice that is linked to gender than just the lyrics; there is something about Cullum’s performance that might be considered slightly “feminine”. I will get back to this in my discussion of the two versions. Another issue concerning lyrics is linked to national identity. The Brit Jamie Cullum keeps Rihanna’s lyrics, but they are now performed with a clear British accent. In much of popular music the lyrics of British singers are somewhat “Americanised” (Hawkins 2009: 169), but in this case they have a degree of Britishness to them. This is especially evident in the open sound of the “a” in “can’t”, in the sentence “I just can’t refuse it” (first time at 1:14). Cullum is thus marking a sense of belonging to his country, and probably finds this a way of making the song more his own.

Four elements are particularly interesting also in this analysis: 1) the whole cover version is influenced by the jazz aesthetics, and Cullum stands firmly in this style, 2) this is for instance evident in the groove and the harmonic development, 3) Cullum uses his voice to appropriate from the original and make the song his own, which is also linked to 4) the lyrics, where several issues arise.
*Live performance*

I want to add a short reading of a live performance of “Don’t Stop the Music”. Jamie Cullum’s “Don’t Stop the Music” was released on a single with two additional tracks - the audio commentary, where Cullum talks about the song and his version of it, and a live performance from the Oak Room. This live performance is interesting because of several factors. First, the version is with Cullum alone, stripped down to piano and vocals only. This means that he has to create the rhythmic groove as well as the harmonic density using only the piano and the timbre and phrasing of the voice. The song starts with Cullum beating the rhythm on the piano (like in the music video). The version is closer to a ballad than the studio version, due to the lack of rhythmic drive. There is also a stronger emphasis on the vocals, because of the more delicate texture of the sound. The vocals have an obvious character of a live performance.

The live version shows yet another side of Cullum as a cover artist than the studio version. He proves to have a high level of musicality and the ability to perform live with little or no help from production or technology. This is particularly interesting considering the level of production present in Rihanna’s original version of the song. The live performance shows that although it has an acoustic character, Cullum’s studio production is influenced by technology to a greater extent than what is perceived by the listener. The live performance is interesting as it shows the difference between a live cover and a studio cover.

*“Let’s escape into the music...”*

The discussion following my reading of the two versions of the song will deal with a few main points. I will discuss 1) style and the meaning of stylistic features, as well as the grounding in genre and the value question connected to this. Then I will address 2) the voices and how they are connected to identity and authenticity. 3) Gender will also be discussed, as well as the possible presence of 4) irony.

When a song is performed by two different artists, their stylistic and generic properties will clearly influence their respective performances. This is the case also in the two versions of “Don’t Stop the Music”, but how does it affect our perception of the song? Rihanna’s performance is stylistically solid - its groove and sound are firmly established within generic borderlines. Rihanna is conscious of the stylistic features of her genre, and her creativity lies in mixing her own artistic
habitus into the generic field, staying fairly close to the centre of the circle of possibles (see Toynbee 2000). Cullum also uses the field to give the listener a sense of recognition, and he is stylistically quite true to the jazz-pop field. However, he moves further out from the centre of the circle to find musical material stylistically situated far from this field. In spite of performing songs written by someone else, he comes across as creative in his way of integrating musical material from other genres into his own generic field. They both achieve a certain level of authenticity based on their combination of stylistic positioning and creativity, evident through various musical elements of the songs. Percussion plays an important role in the changes taking place from the original to the cover. Rhythm and groove are important elements in both versions, but in different ways. Rihanna’s R’n’B hit is based on the rhythmic effects in both percussion and bass, as well as the help from the vocals and other fills, to such an extent that body and movement hold a central position in the perception of the song. Rihanna thus requires a kind of body authenticity (see Weisethaunet and Lindberg 2010). Cullum’s groove is more laid-back, but no less important. His “dramaturgical” build-up of the song gives it a continuous forward drive, while the percussionist also gives the groove a laid-back character. This shows a generic positioning within a jazz sphere while also underlining the lyrical contents of Rihanna’s song.

This leads me to the next point; the voices. Voices are important carriers of identity, whether through spoken or sung words. Rihanna and Cullum are both talented singers who combine the quality of their vocal sounds and their ability to interpret and perform convincingly to establish artistic identities. Jamie Cullum’s voice shows, in my opinion, a high level of musicality. He is part of a jazz aesthetic, and a large part of his back catalogue is based on re-versionings, many of old jazz standards, which means that his approach to music is based on rendition and appropriation. This is reflected in his voice and its stylistic qualities. Rihanna’s musicality is also reflected through her voice, which is rich and strong, as well as through her phrasing and expressive character. Frith (1998) talks about the voice as body, saying that we use our experience with listening to voices, to picture the bodies we hear. Rihanna and Cullum’s vocal performances create images of their bodies and characters, and they deliberately use this as a tool in identity construction. Here we are back at the issue of authenticity. As I have already stated, Rihanna comes across with a sort of body authenticity that is not just evident through stylistic elements, but also through her voice. Her body is present in her voice, despite the high level of technology in the production, and the body is a central part of the artistic identity that is presented to the audience. The character of the authenticity gained by Cullum is different - his voice is also a carrier of bodily notions, but perhaps more of a
“personal attachment” to the lyrics - a first person authenticity. I find that Cullum’s vocal performance (due to aesthetic ideals and generic position) shows that the lyrics are more of a focal point than in Rihanna’s performance.

The identities expressed through the music are also highly influenced by the music videos. Interestingly, both videos show somewhat similar environments, though linked to different contexts. Rihanna is at a party, in a nightclub dancing, while Cullum is on stage at what seems like a concert. It is as if Cullum has tried to adopt some of the exclusiveness and high class of Rihanna’s video, while also changing the scenery to go with his own musical and personal style. That said, the backdrop of Rihanna’s video could have been part of Cullum’s, and vice versa. The versions of the song, and the artists performing them, could both be situated either in a nightclub or on a backlit concert stage. Considering the live version by Cullum in this light, however, changes the notion of similarity in the two versions. Cullum seems to be moving further away from the original stylistically in his live performance, which also distances him from the night club scenery.

Identity construction through musical as well as visual codes opens up for notions of gendered subjectivity, which is my third point. The gender issues arising in the two versions by Rihanna and Cullum are interesting. Rihanna is, not unlike e.g. Madonna and Beyoncé, the girly, sexy, feminine character in her music, while at the same time being “one of the guys” in the music business, with seemingly significant influence on her own music and her own say in the production and distribution. The gender aspect of Cullum’s performance is quite different. Is there a kind of “feminine” masculinity to it? I find that Cullum’s masculinity is that of the “modern man”, who is not afraid to be in touch with his more feminine sides. This is, however, not similar to those we have found in subjectivities throughout pop’s history (see Hawkins 2002, 2009). But Cullum is not the strong, macho type like those you find in rock. Being part of a mainstream jazz and contemporary pop scene, Cullum is popular among middle aged women who would think of him as the perfect son in law. Is it that he adds a hint of femininity to his interpretation of Rihanna, and that this somehow appeals to his female audience - that he comes across as the soft, intimate and gentle man, in touch with his feelings? I feel that the feminine notion I get from Cullum’s performance lies in his voice. I find that his way of using his breath and a certain hint of groans and “scratching” may be of a certain sensual character. The lyrics call for a sensual and intimate performance, which Cullum emphasises perhaps even more than Rihanna, sensuality that is, perhaps, associated with female expression rather than the sexuality found in more masculine performances. However, my interpretation may be this way because I hear Rihanna in my inner ear, and draw a line to her
sensual way of performing. If that is the case, it makes up a very interesting point in this context. Is the gender aspect of Cullum’s performance as I perceive it influenced by the fact that it is a cover? I think it might very well be, and this issue will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

I arrive at the final point of this discussion; categorisation of the cover. The way I hear it, there are two main positions to take when analysing the cover version by Jamie Cullum in terms of categorisation, and I will to some extent try explaining both. Using Mosser’s (2008) different categories of cover songs, I will distinguish between the interpretative cover and the send-up. As an interpretative cover version, the song is transferred from one genre to another, with some central elements intact and some important changes (not even the most characteristic riffs are used in Cullum’s version). He makes a typical sound and structure of his own genre, and adds the lyrics and the melody of Rihanna, turning the song into a groovy jazz-pop love song. As a send-up cover, the cover version might be heard as Cullum "showing off". Is he deliberately proving himself to be a talented musician, able to make a new version of "everything"? Is he not so much showing Rihanna respect and honour, as trying his best to make a version that is better than the original? I would assume that Cullum’s audience would prefer his version, because of the difference in genres. Part of Cullum’s artistic credibility lies in the acoustic sound and lack of technology, which goes well with Cullum pointing out that the song was recorded in two or three takes. But where are the ironic markers, if any, in the musical codes of Cullum’s performance? Hawkins (2002) talks of ironic intent in pop music. The problem is that “[b]ecause of its very nature, irony has few guarantees - [it] always occurs with reservations” (2002: 20). The intent and perception of irony will vary depending on people and contexts. This means that irony has the ability to create “in-groups”, which in turn constructs a collective identity in this group. In his reading of Morrissey’s vocal production and identity construction, Hawkins (2002) writes about irony in Morrissey’s performances. There is a fine line between the personal, empathic performance and the ironic, and the ironic markers are interpreted as such only by the “in-group”. Jamie Cullum’s performance might be seen in the light of the gender issues I discussed previously. The femininity of Cullum’s vocal performance could be read as a marker of ironic intent, in which case the emotional expression is more due to the link to the original than due to Cullum’s own interpretation of emotions.
Chapter 4. “Crazy In Love”

As a teenager at the beginning of this century, I listened and danced to Beyoncé’s music with my friends. As I got older, my taste in music changed and opened up for artists like Antony and the Johnsons. When I discovered his version of “Crazy In Love” a few years back, it was a thrill. This example of a cover song is probably an important part of why I chose to write this thesis at all. Looking at the definition of covers earlier in this thesis, I feel that there is no question of whether or not this is a cover, and I think most people would agree. What might be interesting, however, is to look at how the concept of the cover affects our listening. I will come back to this question in my discussion, after looking at the analytic objects of my case studies.

The idea of stereophonic listening as explained by Weinstein (2010), refers to the listener’s tendency to compare two versions of a song and make up his mind about the quality and value of the cover. Making a cover version of a song as popular and well known as “Crazy In Love” takes courage, musical skills, and the belief that you can make an autonomous musical expression that is too remote from the original to open up for real comparison. I think that Antony’s cover version is this kind of version, although it is compared to the original anyway, an unavoidable effect of music making. Antony’s cover shows how musical meaning is dependent on style, and thus how the change of style can bring new meaning to a song without changing the musical elements in which the song’s character lies (e.g. the melody, lyrics and partly chord progressions). The style is also connected to the subjectivity and authenticity, which will be discussed both in this chapter and in the final discussion on cover songs in general. The evaluation of covers is interesting because of the obvious connection between two distinctly different performances, and I will argue that evaluation is difficult because of the difference in generic premises. I will look into the different treatments of musical codes and how they affect my perception of the artists, and I will also discuss the gender issues arising in my analysis.

Beyoncé feat. Jay-Z

Beyoncé Knowles was born in Houston, Texas in 1981. With a family of musicians, she started singing at an early age. Already at eight years old, Beyoncé was part of a girl group that, with the help of her father, developed into the R’n’B group Destiny’s Child. The group had several best-selling albums and experienced major success in the late ’90s. However, internal
disagreements as well as ambitions of personal careers caused the group split up, and Beyoncé started her solo career. As a solo artist, Beyoncé has become one of the bestselling R’n’B singers in history, and the collaboration with her husband Shawn Carter, better known by his artist name Jay-Z, has been fruitful. Beyoncé also has a career in acting, playing leading roles in movies such as “Austin Powers”, “The Pink Panther”, and “Dreamgirls”. She is also listed as co-writer and co-producer of most of her music, both with Destiny’s Child and in her solo releases. This makes her appear to be more than just a super star with a pretty voice - she is an ambitious and hardworking musician. In recent years, Beyoncé has been one of the most important stars in the process of making R’n’B one of the biggest genres in the industry. She is part of the history of Black music, with links to blues, soul and Motown, although the genre is highly influenced by pop music as well, and has a large number of white fans and musicians (Wikipedia 2012a).

Gender and feminism is an interesting issue in Beyoncé’s work and performance. Although different from Madonna both stylistically and in image, Beyoncé is similar to the pop artist through the fact that they are both in control of their own work to a large extent. Madonna has been a co-writer and co-producer throughout her career (see Whiteley 2000, Hawkins 2002), and the same goes with Beyoncé. Her songs have expressed female empowerment and independence, first with Destiny’s Child with songs like “Independent Women part I” (from the movie Charlie’s Angels) and “Survivor”, and later in her own work, especially the album B’Day (2006). However, despite this image, Beyoncé can also be seen as an object of desire, a body on display. This is somewhat similar to Whiteley’s (2000) discussion of Madonna. She states that Madonna holds a feminist position while also expressing a repression of female empowerment, and reads this as a postmodernist, ironic stance. Beyoncé may somehow be influenced by this.

Beyoncé created an alter ego to distance herself from her public persona. In the introduction, I discuss how the artist persona is essential to how we perceive the music and performances. What we see and hear is never completely true; there will always be an element of mediation and performativity present. Depending on the genre, the record company, and the individual artists, the degree of “fake” varies. This is part of what makes them interesting to the audience - they need the right balance between “mysterious” stardom and personal intimacy. Sasha Fierce, Beyoncé’s alter ego, was “born” in 2008, when Beyoncé released the double album I am ... Sasha Fierce, supposedly consisting of one album by Beyoncé and one by Sasha (Wikipedia 2012c). The concept is interesting because it creates a different relationship between Beyoncé and her audience. By saying that Sasha is “who she is on stage”, she makes “Beyoncé” more real and authentic, “the true
This “true Beyoncé” is also a public persona, just as created as her alter ego, and thus part of the whole public “stunt”. Her on-stage persona also suggests that the singing artist should be considered less authentic, as she is obviously a role played. Paradoxically, this could be perceived as Beyoncé’s way of being more authentic, as she needs to “protect” her own self from the unpleasant sides of stardom.

Analysis

In 2003, Beyoncé released her solo debut album *Dangerously In Love* with Columbia Records. “Crazy In Love” is written by Rich Harrison, with Beyoncé and Jay-Z as co-writers. The song has been extremely popular, ranking high on lists of the best songs from the decade. It won two Grammys in 2003 - best R&B song, and best rap/sung collaboration. The music video (Youtube.com 2012) shows Beyoncé in various dancing scenes, but mostly with Jay-Z on a deserted parking lot. Beyoncé is part of nearly every frame, giving the camera sexy looks and moves. She is the object of desire, and she knows it. Beyoncé’s combination of “sexual object” and empowering femininity is evident throughout the video. I will get back to the visual appearance in my discussion of the songs, but for now I move on to the musical elements.

Structure and sound

Structurally, “Crazy In Love” is a typical contemporary R’n’B song, built up around verses, choruses, memorable hooks, and a rap section. The intro has a hook in the brass section that is repeated in the chorus, and another of the song’s most characteristic features - Beyoncé’s “oh-no-no”s. The main structure is built up as three repetitions of verse and chorus. First verse is eight bars of Beyoncé and percussion, with bass and brass on the first beat of every second bar. The chorus is a new eight bar section, with richer harmonies. The second verse and chorus are similar to the first, with additional fills by Beyoncé. Round three is an eighteen-bar rap with Jay-Z, which is a new section of verse, chorus and hook. After the rap, there is a bridge, consisting of Beyoncé and backing vocals. This is a climax in dynamics and harmonies, and introduces new musical material through a melody and harmonised vocals. After the bridge, the chorus is repeated twice and the song fades.

The general character of the song is influenced by many elements. The instrumentation is an important element that contributes to the perception of room and presence of people. The sound is rich and complex, with the ensemble mixed in a way that makes it sound big. The rhythm section,
the brass section and the singers are all part of the complexity, as each of them contribute their own individual elements to the song, giving the impression of “crowdedness”. The bridge has a vocal section with at least three different voices in harmony, and vocal fills through the song are also giving the impression of a group of singers. I get a general impression of many people present, and feel that the character of the song is of a dance or a party. The rhythmical elements are solid and give the song a continuing drive forward. This allows variations in other sections, the bass and the brass section in particular. The song has several breaks and big shifts throughout, which adds to the element of surprise. The song’s most characteristic elements, those the listener will remember, are the hooks in different sections throughout the song. The brass hook, which is most obvious in the beginning of the song but also part of the background in the choruses, is actually a sample from a song by the 70s group *The Chi Lites*, “Are You My Woman (Tell Me So)” (Wikipedia 2012b). Beyoncé also has a characteristic line repeated three times - the “Uh-oh [...] oh-no-no”s (first time at 0:16).

The production is clean and tight, with a smooth studio sound and no “human errors” audible, for instance accidental sounds from the studio that give a sense of “liveness”. The only “human” sounds present are for instance Beyoncé’s breath, which is used deliberately to create a particular emotional expression. The vocal hooks and fills throughout the song - “yeah”, “ao”, “yes”, etc. from either Jay-Z or backing vocals - have the character of spontaneous, live outbursts, but at the same time they are mixed in a way that is clearly deliberate and produced.

*Rhythm and harmony*

The rhythmic aspect of Beyoncé and Jay-Z’s song is essential for the song’s aesthetics. Percussion with elements from latino dance rhythms, the horn section which brings to mind funk grooves, and the drive of the bass - it is all part of what makes the body move, and this is where a significant part of the pleasure of this music can be found. The tempo is a pleasurable 100 bpm. The percussion section is rich, consisting of many different sounds including both pitched and not-pitched percussion instruments. The band is important in creating the “drive” of the song, and the brass section, with its marking of the first beat of certain bars, plays an important role in the rhythmical groove. The percussions are nevertheless always the fundament of the song, which is particularly evident in the verses with mostly drums and vocals.

Harmonically, “Crazy In Love” consists of a few repetitive patterns, each with only one or two different chords. However, more complex harmonies are created by the melody and the
harmonised vocals. The verses have a centrality around D aeolian, which is evident through the melody and the brass section on the first beat of every other bar. The D is actually not a tempered D - the pitch is bent up and the song is thus in a key between D and D sharp. How does this affect the music? It might give the song a “brighter” sound, but the effect is in my opinion otherwise minimal. The choruses have a Bb major to G minor structure. After the harmonically static nature of the verse, the chorus seems more complex, with the bass emphasizing every 8th note and the riff in the brass section functioning both as a rhythmic and harmonic element. The backing vocals in the chorus are at first only doubling the melody, but in the third line they sing a steady A on the harmonies centered around Bb major and G minor. This creates a richer harmony in this particular line. The instrumental accompaniment is important for the rhythmic aspect, but plays a smaller role harmonically, which means that the backing vocals are essential to the harmonic structure.

Voices and lyrics

The voices in the song are present through three main channels. There are Beyoncé’s main vocals, which are essential to the song, placed in the front and centre of the sound box. There is Jay-Z, with his fills in the intro and certain “comments” through the song, and the longest single section of the song; his rap. Thirdly, there are the female backing vocal sections. Whether they are actually more vocalists or just the doubling of Beyoncé, they give the impression of a group of girls, both in the doubling of the melody and the harmonies on the choruses, the vocal fills throughout the song, and the harmonies in the bridge. In my reading I focus mainly on the vocal performance of Beyoncé.

Beyoncé’s pitch range in the song is from a to f”. The voice is balancing between being big, virtuosic and impressive on one side, and young, pure and comfortable on the other. The virtuosic part comes through in the long phrases, where Beyoncé uses her big voice with remarkable precision, spicing up the melody with the use of melismas. In these parts I feel that I can hear the influence of artists such as Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey. The young purity (Beyoncé was only 21 when the song was released) is especially evident in the softer sections of the verses, in a comfortable alto range which makes it easy for the listener to sing along. This balancing of different voices allows the listener to be paying close attention to the voice when listening, but also to keep it out of focus when dancing.

There is an element of sensuality in the vocals. This is especially evident in the fills, but also in Beyoncé’s vocals in the verses and choruses; the voices brim with affection and emotion.
Breathing and moaning create the notion of both physical and emotional presence. These notions are more obvious in many other songs, for example “Naughty Girl” from the same album, but it cannot be ignored in “Crazy In Love” - through sentences like “I touch on you more and more every time”. Beyoncé is not only crazy in love; she is crazy from lust. When watching the music video, I feel that the clothes, the glances and the moves make me hear the performance differently from when I only listen to the song - the sexuality of the visual appearance is changing the auditive appearance. However, this probably goes both ways; the video would probably have been more provocatively sexual if the voice was sweet and innocent.

An important part of the vocal lines are the lyrics. Through the lyrics, Beyoncé tells the story of how much she is in love with someone (to whom the song is directed) and how that makes her act in strange ways, never able to stop thinking about him. This is reflected in the chorus, where the line “got me looking so crazy right now” or various versions of it is repeated. The lyrics are not only a story told by Beyoncé, but also a tool used to create music through the vocals. An example is the rhythmical use of the first five syllables “got me looking so” and the following emphasis on “crazy”. This shows how Beyoncé uses the words because of their sounds more than for their semiotic meaning.

To sum up my reading of Beyoncé’s “Crazy In Love”: 1) the production is clean, 2) there is a distinct rhythmic focus, also in the harmonic treatment, and 3) Beyoncé’s voice is strong and sensual, and an important carrier of artistic subjectivity.

**Antony and the Johnsons**

Antony Hegarty is a different star in the popular music skies. He is not typical of a pop dandy as described by Hawkins (2009) - he is all about dressing up and “being different”, but not in the poise and camp sort of way. His register is that of a tenor, which is common among male pop artists, but the sound of the voice is not at all typical. His “queerness” is different from the typical pop queer, as his music is symphonic, dreamy and melancholic. But how can we place him within the popular music scene? Antony was born in Chichester, UK, in 1971. From the age of ten, he lived in California with his family, as the second of four children. He moved to New York and became part of the alternative performance scene of Manhattan, including the drag and cabaret milieus; however, calling his performance a drag act is misleading, as his expression is not the typical extravagant dress-up and makeup of drag artists. Antony is constructing his own subjectivity
through the staging of his performance; he is constantly changing his visual and auditive image. With his band he formed the group *Antony and the Johnsons* and released their self-titled debut album in 2000. The members of the band vary, but the ensemble usually consists of drums, bass, guitar, cello, and violins. The band’s breakthrough was the album *I am a bird now* from 2005, making Antony Hegarty a world known artist. Two more albums have been released since - *The Crying Light* (2009) and *Swanlights* (2010). Antony has also collaborated with various artists including Lou Reed, Boy George, Rufus Wainwright, and Björk. In recent years, Antony has been engaged in the fight against climate change (see Antony and the Johnsons 2012).

Antony and the Johnsons are hard to place stylistically. They play pop music, but the music is influenced by a variety of styles. The voice has a classical character to it; a big, warm tenor voice (see Natvig 2006). The band is also playing with instruments and a sound typical of the classical concert orchestra. This is combined with rhythmic and harmonic structures typical of the pop world. His music has been given a variation of labels, for instance called “baroque pop” and “chamber pop”. Although firmly established on the pop music scene, Antony has been influenced by jazz singer Nina Simone. Maybe his biggest mentor, however, is Boy George, both due to his music and the femininity of his appearance (Hodgman 2005). Steinskog (2008) writes about Antony’s voice, saying that “he has been called ‘a creature’ as if to challenge any notion of a gendered human being. [...] It is as if the humanity of Antony is questioned, and the term quite obviously might have a transphobic ring to it” (Steinskog 2008). I will say more about the voice later in this chapter.

**Analysis**

Antony’s cover of “Crazy In Love” was a popular feature at his live concerts for a long time before it was officially released in August 2009. It is part of the double A-sided single *Aeon*, released at the record company *Secretly Canadian*. The song “Aeon”, a soft, slow ballad in 6/8, is from the album *The Crying Light*. The album reached number 1 on the Billboard European Top 100.

I want to mention two visual presentations of Antony’s performance. First, there is the official music video, and second, there is a clip showing a live performance of the song in Amsterdam. The music video of “Crazy In Love” (Youtube.com 2009a) shows a woman sitting in a chair, filmed with poor resolution and a flickering image. The video is slow, almost static, showing Antony sitting quietly in the light from the sun shining through the branches of a palm tree. He is wearing robes, and he has long, black hair and makeup. There is no obvious link to the song, as no one is moving with the rhythm, singing the lyrics or otherwise establishing a relationship between sound
and image. With Beyoncé and Jay-Z’s video in mind, watching Antony’s video makes the song seem stylistically even further away from the original version. This is perhaps because of the role played by visual elements - the codes that are either emphasized or created by the videos.

Antony and the Johnsons were touring with the album in 2009, mostly doing concerts with symphony orchestras around the world, including the London Symphony Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic. Looking at a film recording from one such concert performance of the song is interesting. The video (Youtube.com 2009b) shows a dark stage with a poorly lit symphony orchestra, all dressed in black. Antony is standing centre stage, alone, with bright, white spotlights directly at him. He is dressed in white, long robes. The light makes Antony’s features blurred; his face is either in shadows or too lit up to see clearly. I feel that the ethereal image is strengthened - the performance reinforces his image as somewhat “outer-worldly”, with the angelic appearance and the lights blurring out his personal traits. The interesting paradox here, is his quite personal and human expression of emotions through the song - there seems to be a conflict between his unique voice and physical appearance on one side, and a musical expression that many people can easily relate to on the other. I will discuss this later, but first I will focus on the auditive elements in “Crazy In Love”, with the recording from Aeon as analytic object.

Structure and sound

Structurally, the cover is simpler than the original; Antony keeps the verse and chorus structure, but without Jay-Z’s rap and the bridge. The song begins with eight bars of harp and piano in 8ths and an oboe solo line, before Antony starts the first verse. The verse builds up gradually, with cellos entering in the middle of the verse. The tension further increases through the chorus, with more strings and richer harmonic material. The oboe solo returns, with an added octave in the low strings, below the oboe solo. During the second verse and chorus, the whole ensemble and extra vocal backings are present. The chorus is repeated twice, the second time without the melody, but with parts of the lyrics repeated freely. The tension decreases, and the oboe solo returns once again, with a quieter sound similar to the intro.

The instrumentation and the sound are stylistically far from the original. The song’s atmosphere is calm, quiet and soft. The accompaniment has an almost transparent texture, with every instrument clearly audible in the mix. This gives an interesting notion of the room, almost like a recording of a live classical concert. The production is open, raw and unpolished, and the ideal seems to be a natural, authentic sound. The sound box is very different from the polished mastering
of Beyoncé’s original version; it can almost seem as if you are listening to the raw material of the recording sessions. The microphones seem to me to be placed at some distance to the musicians, which gives the impression that they take in the sounds of the whole room. The perception of sound is therefore different from that of the standard studio recording. This may have a connection to the fact that this has been a live performance rather than recorded material.

Although performing the song with bigger orchestras on stage, Antony uses a smaller group of musicians on the recording. They consist of the usual members of “the Johnsons”, as well as an additional trumpet (Aeon 2009). The strings use tremolo to create a particular effect - a fragile, slightly disturbing addition to Antony’s voice on the verge of tears. This is particularly present from the end of the second chorus. The second chorus is also where we hear a xylophone and a muted trumpet, that help in creating a more complex sound before the climax at the end of this chorus.

**Rhythm and harmony**

The rhythmical element of Antony’s version is treated significantly different from the drum-and-brass structure of Beyoncé’s dance hit. Antony is situated in a different style - the quiet atmosphere of a symphonic pop ballad. He uses the rhythm to create a forward drive, and the steady rhythmic layer in the piano and the harp gives him the opportunity to interpret freely. The most important rhythmic factor in the cover version is the tempo, which at 55 bpm is slightly faster than half of Beyoncé’s tempo (ca. 100 bpm). The slower tempo influences Antony’s phrasing and the overall calmness of the cover. I find there are two different rhythmic layers that each contribute to the feeling of a rhythmical presence in their own way. First, there are the 8ths in harp and piano, creating the drive forward throughout the song. Second, there are the strings and woodwinds drawing the long lines, creating the calm and soft atmosphere. Together these elements give the song a sense of movement and static calmness simultaneously.

Harmonically, Antony stays surprisingly close to the original. The song is transposed down one tone, from a D aeolian to a C aeolian. The chord progressions and the rapidness of the chord changes are roughly the same, but the cover uses thicker chords. Because of the orchestration, the harmonic factor is more obvious in Antony’s version, which could make the listener feel as if there is more harmonic development. This effect is interesting, because it shows that the feeling of harmonic density can be influenced by the instrumental timbres and the music’s placement in the sound box.
Voices and lyrics

Antony’s voice is probably his most important characteristic, and usually the element that holds centre stage when his music is discussed. A voice has the ability to express a variety of emotions and take on different shapes, and Antony uses its connotations actively in his music. His human voice, his supernatural voice, his produced voice, his gendered voice, and his disembodied voice - they are all closely linked to his subjectivity and authenticity as a pop artist and a celebrity persona.

As I said in the introduction to this chapter, Antony is neither the typical queer act nor the male, phallic tenor of popular music. His voice is androgynous, “which might be described as genderless, but also as having ‘too much’ gender to it” (Steinskog 2008). Natvig states that Antony’s voice gives the impression of a large range, which is actually not the case. This might be because Antony is using different timbral qualities to sound high or low in register, and because of his quite low spoken register, and the feminine quality of his sung register (Natvig 2006: 118).

The song is a tone lower than the original, but Antony sings an octave higher than Beyoncé, ending up in her range. I find the difference between the voices significant and fascinating. Apart from singing in roughly the same pitch range and performing the same song, the similarities are few. Antony’s voice is soft and big, with a classically trained sound and extended use of vibrato. This is part of what gives the song a whole new character. The tempo is almost half of the original, which gives Antony a lot of time on each phrase to emphasize the words. He stretches the phrases as long as possible, emphasizing each word to add meaning to the lyrics. Some words are stretched out to the point where the break between phrases is cut, which adds to the feeling of persistence and emotional expression. Antony’s breath is used to create an emotional character, with a strain on the voice at the end of each note giving the impression that he is running out of air. This creates the sensation of someone who is emotionally affected. At times the voice has a trembling and quivering character, and together with tremolos in the violins it seems almost as though Antony is about to start crying.

The lyrics and the voice are closely linked in Antony’s performance of “Crazy In Love”. This is probably because Antony is stylistically situated where the lyrics are a leading feature when it comes to phrasing and expressions. To put this another way: Antony uses the words and their semiotic meaning actively to create music through his voice. He not only tells the story, he feels the story, apparently in the moment of performing the song. In the second verse, Antony says “look at what you’ve done to me” (1:52), referring to how the “you” of the song is making a mess of
Antony’s feelings. The lyrics are perceived at another level in Antony’s version; the musical codes -
the soft and repetitive accompaniment, the use of the voice, the sound and production - make me
hear the lyrics as more honest, darker, and sadder, and Antony as more vulnerable and upset than
Beyoncé. “Just the way that you know what I thought I knew” (2:03), Antony sings, to a person
apparently so close to him that he gives new personal insight, which is clearly both frustrating and
something to crave. Antony feels the need to express his feelings thoroughly, with an assertive
emphasis on “crazy” and the repetitive structure of the chorus. Interestingly, this is how the
structure could be perceived, very differently from the rhythmic structure in Beyoncé’s version.

Writing about Antony and his interpretation of lyrics, it is impossible to overlook the aspect of
gender. The lyrics are no longer the words of a young girl in love with a boy, but the story of a man
in love with another man. The lyrics are kept the same, which means that he also says “Don’t even
need to buy a new dress”. This could be awkward coming from most male pop stars, but Antony -
with his sexually ambivalent, transvestite image - gets away with this. In fact, I think I would react
more to a change of the lyrics, knowing what I do about his persona.

I would like to sum up some main point in my reading of Antony and the Johnsons’ cover: 1)
the sound is calm - an acoustic sound reminiscent of being at a concert, 2) the tempo is much
slower, which is an important stylistic feature, 3) the sound of Antony’s voice is central to the
performance, with its emotional and expressive character, and 4) the lyrics are treated differently,
with more emphasis on the meaning of the words, which is also anchored in style.

“Such a funny thing for me to try to explain”

What can I say about the processes taking place in the stereophonic listening to Antony’s
version of “Crazy In Love”? Because that is what I find it to be a great example of - stereophony;
the “inner presence” of a different version of a song you are listening to; the spontaneous reaction
when Antony sings “I look and stare so deep in your eyes” and you think “I have heard this before.
Where?”. Stereophonic listening, as expressed by Weinstein, is not referring to the technique used
in sound recording where sounds seem to come from more than one source. Weinstein’s adoption of
the term is more abstract; the mental, “inner ear”-listening to a song that reminds one of the actual
listening. I believe that this must somehow affect the listener - the question is how? How does
Antony make me feel, and why does he bring out these thoughts and emotions in me as I hear a
song that is both old and new? There are certain musical elements that hold the character and
uniqueness of a song; usually the lyrics, the melody and chord progressions, along with riffs, hooks and other characteristics. Songs are also, however, filled with other musical codes in which meaning can be found, and by which the listener’s perception is influenced. These codes (they can be found in many elements, including the sound, the timbres, the voices, the images...) tell us how to feel and behave when we hear the song, often based on the emotional expressions of the artist. Beyoncé and Antony have very different ways of “coding” their music, which is why the two performances of the same song elicit different feelings in the listener.

The treatment of the lyrics is an important part of the difference between Beyoncé’s and Antony’s versions. Whereas Beyoncé treats the lyrics as is typical of the style of this particular song, with the focus being the rhythm of the words and phrases, Antony has to treat the words as carriers of semiotic meaning. Where Beyoncé sings with virtuosity and uses the words as a rhythmical element, Antony finds his credibility through the lyrics’ emotional element. An example is the sentence “got me hoping you’ll save me right now”, which can be seen as an expression of despair and longing. Antony and the whole orchestra build up to “save” while Beyoncé treats the sentence no different than the far less emotionally loaded “got me hoping you’ll page me right now”. This is not to say that Beyoncé is not emotionally in touch with her own lyrics. It simply means that the two artists follow two very different sets of stylistic codes.

As I mentioned in the introduction, there is a question of what kind of cover Antony has made. Mosser (2008) writes about what he calls interpretative covers, and from that perspective Antony’s performance would be considered a major interpretation. There are so many of the song’s characteristic elements that are changed, and the listener will not recognize the song at once. I find that the only alternative to calling this a major interpretation, would be to leave the whole concept of covering, and talk about taking musical material as inspiration and point of departure to a new and unique musical “work”. Then there is the question of ironic covers, which I find not suited for this case study. In my ears and opinion, Antony is not changing Beyoncé’s music at her expense, but rather emphasizing the emotional content latent in the lyrics, with respect to the original artist and her performance.

The personalities are fascinating, each in their own way. The ways in which their subjectivities are constructed are complex, and very different. But are there similarities as well? Beyoncé has an enormous amount of focus on her person - her private life, her family, her looks, her future plans - and she states that this was her reason for creating the Sasha Fierce character. Beyoncé is strong, independent and talented as an artist and a songwriter. She is one of the most
important star personae in a billion dollar business, and she has been part of the mainstream music scene of the world for years. She has also starred in major movies, further exposing her to an enormous audience. A Google search for “Beyoncé” gives more than 300 million hits. She obviously has a great impact on the industry. Antony, on the other hand, has a very different image and another share of the market. He is characterized by an “otherness”, with an angelic and ethereal voice, and an androgynous image. Natvig (2006) says that Antony appears with an ambivalent image, somewhere between every established connotation of gender and identity (2006: 133-140). His image is probably coloured by his background in the worlds of cabaret and drag, in which display and performativity are central elements. The two artists have different ways of gaining the respect and admiration of their fans, and coming across to them as independent, strong, special. Beyoncé is elevated by her audience, as “unnaturally” pretty and talented, a “superwoman”. Antony has the image of a “superhuman”, appearing on stage as an angel or a saviour, a supernal creature. What is interesting here, is how they both manage to appear to be very much human - Antony through his way of expressing emotion through music, Beyoncé through her star personality, creating her alter ego to get some distance to her stardom and paradoxically ending up seeming more honest and true to herself. Antony appears on stage looking angelic, but at the same time expressing personal and human feelings through the lyrics of the song.

Although they both seem to be a combination of personal and elevated, Beyoncé’s and Antony’s ways of coming across as convincing in their performances are quite different. The two versions have stylistic differences which affect the ways in which the music is used by the listener. The listening situation will work in distinctly different ways. Antony’s authenticity is a first person authenticity (Moore 2002), or an “authenticity of expression” (Weisethaunet and Lindberg 2010) - he seems real because he is personal. How he creates a character through the music, is particularly interesting. He seems like a talented and creative musician because he makes the song his own, despite the fact that we listen to Beyoncé with stereophony and know it is her song. But what kind of authenticity do we sense on her part? Weisethaunet and Lindberg (2010) use the term “body authenticity”, which may be transferred to Beyoncé’s music. Her music has a rhythmic focus that makes bodies move, and it seems persuasive, convincing and real if she achieves that movement in us. This notion of authenticity is also connected to a generic or historical fundament (see Weisethaunet and Lindberg 2010). Beyoncé’s brass hook is an obvious example of a nod to earlier Afro-American artists.

To avoid falling into the trap of discussing the songs as merely two different performances, I
need to emphasise the fact that one is a cover of the other. How does the awareness of the original change our perception of Antony’s performance? I will assert that the listening experience in this particular case will be characterized by comparison and hence evaluation of the cover version. It might be that Antony actually seems *more* authentic because he is doing a cover, than he would, had he written the song himself. The song itself has a typical “rhythmic” structure, with few chord changes and a melody using few notes and a small pitch range. The cover version is thus not the most suited for Antony’s style and structure. Could it be that the song is captivating precisely because it is a cover of Beyoncé, and that it is perceived as a great performance because of its stylistic distance to the original?

This is part of an equally important issue - the significance of the original. What might be Antony’s motives be to make a cover of this song, by this particular artist? There are an endless number of songs - of love songs - in the world; why did he choose the one he chose? Has this got to do with the artist - Beyoncé’s position on the international music scene; her image and subjectivity? Or is the choice based on musical considerations - the qualities of the particular song; the semiotic content of the lyrics; the potential hidden in the original version? My own answer to these questions, based on my personal interpretation of the versions, is that the meanings of the cover is connected to all of the above. The songs has to be of a certain quality to be suited for a “translation” into a completely different set of stylistic features. The song is not written as a quiet pop ballad, but it still has qualities that make such a transition successful. In addition to this, Antony will gain from adopting musical material from this particular source. He has also covered other artists - Leonard Cohen, John Lennon, and Bob Dylan, among others - but it seems as if the possibilities of gaining the audience’s admiration are greater if the choice of song is more surprising. The surprise lies in the stylistic and personal distance to the original artist.
Chapter 5. “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction”

In summer of 2000, I was 13 and a big fan of Britney Spears’ newest album *Oops!... I Did It Again*. It didn’t occur to me that any of the songs could be covers - in my head, Britney was the source of all her music, and so too of this catchy and powerful track called “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction” (though to me somehow a low point on the album). It wasn’t until some years later that I was introduced to the original (“The Rolling Stones? I think I’ve heard of them...”), which changed my perception of Britney’s version in turning it into a cover song. In time I have changed my view of the Rolling Stones in line with a general development of musical preferences.

The cover song database *Second Hand Songs* lists a total of 122 cover version of the song (Second Hand Songs 2012a). An additional three versions are listed - translations into French, Spanish and German. Sixteen covers were released in 1965 alone, the year *the Rolling Stones* released the original. Britney was in other words not particularly original in her choice of cover song, but she was brave to do a version of such a popular song with a solid foundation in the world of “authentic rock”. I can only imagine what the hardcore rock fans must have thought of this pop version of a Stones “classic”. This chapter will, as the three previous chapters, present a comparative reading of the two versions. The rock/pop-split will be interesting in this chapter, as the artists have been among the most popular and widely known ambassadors for their respective genres. I will deal with questions of gender and sexuality in this chapter, but also talk about the issue of authenticity. Gender is relevant in the case of both Mick Jagger and Britney Spears, and authenticity is interesting in relation to genre. Finally, I will look at the aspect of taste, pleasure and evaluation - or simply “satisfaction”.

*The Rolling Stones*

*The Rolling Stones* is one of the most significant rock bands of popular music history. In the early sixties the Rolling Stones grew out of the childhood friendship of singer Mick Jagger and guitarist Keith Richards. The first album, self-titled, was released in 1964, and the following year as many as three albums were released (Rollingstones.com 2009). The band is still active, although with some member changes, and they have now released an impressive 29 studio albums and 10 live albums, and several compilations. The Rolling Stones have made an important contribution to the development of rock. Some of their biggest hits include “Angie”, “Honky Tonk Women” and
“Black Sugar”. Moore places the Rolling Stones in the category he calls formative rock, referring to the early rhythm and blues bands who were part of creating a consistent “set of stylistic norms” (Moore 2001: 66). As a contrast to a contemporary British rock band, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones developed a style that was closer to blues and would play a role in defining hard rock. The group was also influenced by country, folk and world music, and used elements from various genres to create their own sound. They have throughout their career continued to play cover songs both live and on their albums.

Mick Jagger, the vocalist and front figure of the Rolling Stones, is a fascinating character coming from the British popular music scene. Hawkins (2009) writes about Jagger as one of the dandies, because of the camp irony of his image and style, but with a different approach. He says that Jagger “epitomizes the swashbuckling rock dandy”(2009: 161), referring to the artist as “unmistakably self-deprecating and outrageously over-the-top” (2009: 162). Perhaps the world of Mick Jagger’s rock performances and Britney’s pop spectacle are not as far apart as first suspected.

Analysis

“(I can’t get no) Satisfaction” was released first as a single, then as part of the album Out of Our Heads in July, 1965. This was the band’s fourth studio album, and the first to reach number 1 on American charts. The album was released in both mono and stereo, and consisted of a mix of cover songs and originals written by Jagger and Richard. “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction” was one of their own songs, and the first track on the B side. “Released in the UK during the ‘summer of protest songs’, the single encapsulated the restless weariness of a band already old before its time”, says the band’s official web page (Rollingstones.com 2009). My analysis of the song will focus mainly on stylistic positioning as well as the voice and performance of Mick Jagger.

Structure and sound

The song’s structure is divided into two parts. First, there is the chorus - a melody on the song title, sung in a lower register by only Jagger. Second, there is the angrier, “protest song”-like shout of the line “I can’t get no” and the lyrics of the verse. A simple, repetitive riff in the guitar and bass, and a rhythmic groove typical of the period, are part of the positioning within generic boundaries. The chorus consists of a repeated line (the song title) and the repeated line "and I try". There is something about the structure that brings to mind blues, a notion that lies in the repetitive simplicity. This shows that the band was inspired by the early American rhythm and blues, an issue
I return to in the analysis of harmonic elements.

The sound and instrumentation bring to mind many similar bands from the ’60s. The simple groove reminds me of garage bands from the period, and could perhaps have been a Ringo Starr beat. The guitar, centred on riffs and hooks, is also typical of the style. The sound is far from digital - this is analogue and acoustic rock. The introduction instruments start playing one at a time, first the guitar riff, then the bass and drums. Throughout the song all the instruments are part of the accompaniment, except for a break in 1:04 and again in 2:04. There are some minor changes in the accompaniment, for instance the guitar in second verse, but the general “atmosphere” of the song is the same throughout. Regarding the placement in time of the song, the mid 1960s saw a still growing sense of youth and the freedom to be young and rebellious. This is part of the song’s aesthetics and must be noted.

Rhythm and harmony

This analysis will not pay very much attention to rhythm and harmony. More could be said about this, but I find that focusing on sound and voices is more beneficial for the answers I want to find. That said, I need to mention a few points to draw a clear picture of the song. As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, there is a simplicity to this song, which is also evident in it’s rhythms. Rhythmical development is used as sparingly as harmonic and melodic, if not even more. The song is in 135 bpm. The drums have the same emphasis on every beat, and there are 8th notes played on a cow bell on the third and fourth beats. Even breaks are almost nonexistent, and the two I have already mentioned are mainly in the rest of the band, leaving the drums with the same emphasis on all four beats.

Harmonically, the chord progressions are reminiscent of blues - three major chords, all with 7ths, and especially the “blue” minor third in the melody on “I can’t get no”. The main harmonic structure is from E7 to A7, with the occasional B7, the second time “and I try” is repeated (at 0:30). This structure is simple, but it works well because of the power of the “less is more” ideology, its nature of being easy to pick up and sing along to, and not least because of the riff. The guitar riff is the main signature of the song, as expressed on the band’s web page: “The distinctive riff, which Keith Richard invented with almost casual dismissal, became one of the most famous hook lines in the entire glossary of pop and was picked up and imitated by a generation of garage bands thereafter” (Rollingstones.com 2009). The movement B - C# - D and back down is central in almost every cover of the song, as if the song would not be complete without it. Cover versions like those
of Otis Redding, Tom Jones and Samantha Fox all use the riff similarly to the Rolling Stones. The version by Britney Spears also uses the riff to show the relationship to the original, but in a quite different way. I will get back to this in the analysis of the cover.

**Voice and lyrics**

As typical of the early rock, all the musical elements are played by the members of the band, which includes the voices. Mick Jagger’s voice is natural and calm in the first part, before a different intensity takes over in the verses. The backing vocals by Keith Richards come in on the second part, partly doubling Jagger’s melody and partly creating a different line. They are strong and confident, singing loudly and emphasising every syllable. The voices are those of young, white males, and the strained and sincere character makes them sound untrained. The pitch is sometimes bent, slightly out of tune or either leaving or bending towards pitch. The contrast between chorus and verse is also evident through the voices, going from a quiet statement to a stronger, more “angry”-sounding singing style. The repetitive nature is efficient to create a sense of something like a demonstration, a “protest song”. This is also underpinned by the lyrics and the powerful message of the title.

The band’s web page says about the performance that it showed a “still youthful Jagger sounding like a jaundiced roué” (Rollingstones.com 2009). Mick Jagger’s range is from c# to g’. The melody of the verses (“when I’m driving in my car”, and so on) is mainly on an e’, which underlines the feeling of protest and a performance closer to “shouting” than singing. He brings to mind the young, independent rebel who will not surrender to authorities. The lack of satisfaction expressed through the lyrics is emphasised thoroughly through the repetitive nature, but the voice is equally important in getting the message through.

To sum up this analysis in a few points: 1) To the Rolling Stones, less was more. The music is characterised by a simple groove, a straight structure, and a plain interpretation of the lyrics. 2) The harmonic material as well as the melody is similar to blues, and 3) Mick Jagger’s voice shows a young, angry rebel, with an expressive character and the ability to engage the audience.

**Britney**

Many children and young teenagers have been pop stars through the years, kids who have a special bond to their young audience, someone the fans can relate to as well as look up to. Britney
Spears, born in 1981 and growing up in Louisiana, was one of these stars, starting her career in the popular TV show The Mickey Mouse Club in 1992. Here were also Justin Timberlake and Christina Aguilera, two other important pop artists from Britney’s generation. The show was successful, but it would still take a few years before Britney’s solo career would take off. Her debut album, ...Baby One More Time, was released in 1999, and soon topped the charts in both the US and the UK (Larkin 2006a).

Britney has released six more studio albums after this, with major hits such as “Stronger”, “I’m Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman”, and “Toxic”. In spite of her popularity, she has through the years been critisised for not being a talented singer, often compared to her pop rival Christina Aguilera. There has also been a lot of attention given her personal struggles; drug abuse, a rumoured insanity and loss of custody for her two children. As a pop artist, however, Britney has had major success, and her work has held important position in the world of pop (Larkin 2006a).

Analysis

The cover of The Rolling Stones’ “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction” was released on Britney Spears’ second album Oops!... I did it again from 2000. The album features, besides the title track, the hit singles “Stronger” and “Lucky”. “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction” received mixed reviews after its release. The magazine Rolling Stone wrote about the sexual fury of “her brilliant version of the Stones’ ‘(I can’t get no) Satisfaction’ as she vandalizes the words and snarls in libidinal frustration” (Sheffield 2004). The magazine New Music Express, while otherwise giving a good review, called the song “a letdown” (New Music Express 2000).

Britney Spears' version came 35 years after the original. How can Britney's performance be interpreted? In my analysis, I will focus on the moves made to adapt the song to a different sound aesthetic, as well as exploring Britney’s vocal performance and treatment of lyrics.

Structure and sound

Britney’s cover stays structurally pretty close to the original version by the Rolling Stones. She has the same use of verses and choruses, but the lyrics have some minor changes. The biggest difference, however, is probably the beginning of the cover song, where Britney turns the rock hit into a kind of R’n’B/soul ballad with a pop “coating”. I find that Keith Richards’ characteristic guitar riff is the element of the song that most effectively establishes the relationship with the original, which might be why it is present from the cover’s first bar. The difference is significant,
though, as the riff is played by a soft acoustic guitar and hummed by Britney. Interestingly, this measure is quite similar to that taken by Eva Cassidy in her version of “Fields of Gold”, discussed in chapter 3. After the “And I try”s, the rhythm kicks in, and the song turns into a catchy, soul-like up-tempo pop tune with a marked beat throughout. Towards the end of the song (from 2:31), there is an added whispered riff in the vocals, “I can’t get no, ah, satisfaction”. The end is also slightly changed, with Britney singing a few lines that are not part of the original version.

Generally, the production of the song is taking place in the studio with one producer playing all the “instruments”, adding sound effects and mastering the recording. The result is a clean, smooth pop sound. The placement in the sound box (see Moore 2001) is typical, with a balanced and rich sound. The percussion uses a wide register, from the bass drum up to the metallic sounds of the high pitched elements. The synth is also part of the general sound, with its role as creator of harmonic depth. Although the general production is digital, some sounds are more acoustic than others, for instance the guitar, especially in the intro where it plays the guitar riff. The bass line is also interesting, and more complex than that of the original.

**Rhythm and harmony**

As I have already mentioned, the song is characterised by a digitally produced sound. The rhythms are more complex than in the Rolling Stones’ version, with many digital elements and much more development throughout the song. Britney’s pop style is not based on the same simplicity as we find in the original, and there are several elements added throughout the song to create development, such as the slower intro, extensive use of backing vocals and a modulation. The tempo is 110 bpm, but with lower density in the beat from the start. The intro gives the impression of holding half tempo, because of an emphasis on only every second beat. The effect of this is that the rhythms are an important element of development in the song.

The harmonic treatment is interesting in the cover version because of its role as marker of stylistic. Britney keeps the original melody, and the lyrics are fairly intact, but the chord progressions are changed. The cover leaves the whole harmonic world of blues, which is part of the transition from rock to pop, and places the song in a minor key (Eb minor). This means that the “get” of the verse is no longer a blue third on a major 7th chord, but rather a minor third which is well inside the chord notes. The chord progression is now Ebm - Cb - Db, repeatedly. At 3:17 the song modulates to E minor, which is an important lift and part of the song’s development. Interestingly, Britney’s version has more chord changes, but they are there to simplify the
relationship between the melody and the harmonic material.

**Voice and lyrics**

So far we have seen that the sound, instrumentation and rhythmic and harmonic treatments are all influenced by the change of style. What I would like to emphasise, however, is the importance of Britney’s voice, and the construction of gendered meaning through her use of the voice. This is to me the most interesting element in this cover song.

Britney Spears has suffered under the constant comparison of voices in the pop business, with particular focus on the voice of Christina Aguilera, her fellow *Mickey Mouse* “clubber” and biggest rival at the time of their first albums and beyond. Britney’s voice is not as soulful and virtuosic as Aguilera’s, but it is young, pure and expressive, and suits her glossy pop image. On “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction” her range is from eb on the intro, to d” in the fills towards the end of the song. Britney’s voice starts off as soft, airy and sensual. She has a “scratch” in her voice that creates sensual tension. Throughout the song, there are many examples of how Britney uses the sounds of her voice to give it a bodily focus - consider the sigh at the end of the intro (0:39); it is loaded with sexual tension. The backing vocals are also a central part of this. They moan and groan throughout the song to emphasise the lyrics, or simply to create fills where this is suited (an example is in 1:22, where there is an “ah” repeated with the rhythm). Britney also uses her voice in this way in the verses, particularly by giving the note a bend at the end of phrases, sending it up to a high register or falling down to a groan. Generally, the lyrics are performed with a high level of expression through moans and sighs.

Hawkins (2002) writes about Madonna’s ways of constructing her identity through her different voices. He states that when Madonna’s whispering and moans creates an intimate atmosphere, “the aesthetics of the voice lures us into a world harnessed by the body” (2002: 46). This is similar to what happens in Britney Spears’ performance. She uses her voice, and especially the breath, to express her body through the music. This is particularly evident at the end of phrases, with moans and sighs that sometimes follow the lyrics, sometimes not. The effect of this on the listener is significant - this “luring into a world” is a central part of the pleasure of listening to the cover song.

The lyrics of the second verse are interesting. Britney changes the original lyrics by referring to a girl instead of a man. The verse also flags independence and the importance of being oneself. This is clearly a way for the listener to experience identity confirmation and perhaps somehow a
second person authenticity.

When I'm watchin' my TV, ah ah
And that girl comes on and tells me
How tight my skirt should be
But she can't tell me who to be, baby

The lyrics express what many of her listeners might think and feel in their own lives, and hence Britney represents them in a way, by giving a sense of recognition. Interestingly, the verse implies a high level of independence on Britney’s part, but does this go well with the sexy image? Britney was the “innocent and pure virgin” while at the same time dancing in, precisely, tight skirts. But, as Hawkins (2002) states, the pleasure of pop is also hidden in its tendency to be ambivalent and changing.

To sum up this analysis of Britney’s cover version: 1) the original’s garage band sound is replaced with clean pop, with more elements and more rapid changes. 2) The elements from blues are gone, which means that the harmonic material is different. 3) Britney uses her voice to express body and sexuality, which changes the perception of both lyrics and the overall meaning of the music.

No satisfaction?

Five areas should cover the issues arising in my reading of this song. First there is 1) the genre issues connected to the rock/pop-split, and then I discuss 2) the artists’ voices and how they express emotion, before moving on to 3) a short lyrical analysis. A central part of my discussion is the issues of 4) gender and sexuality, identity and authenticity. I will also discuss 5) the evaluation of the cover song.

1. The Rolling Stones is one of the 1960s rock bands who gained great respect and authenticity as autonomous, innovative and original artists. They have, perhaps partly for this reason, been covered many times by other artists, with “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction” on top of the list (Second Hand Songs 2012a). For this reason too, however, the chance of “failing” in the sense of making a poor version is all the bigger due to the Stones’ ownership of their own music. However, the Rolling Stones have themselves made cover songs throughout their career, and are thus positive to the circulation of popular music. We also need to consider the factors of genre and time, which means that the two versions (not to say the 122) have intentions of reaching different audiences. Many of Britney’s listeners, including myself, would not bring the Stones into their
evaluation in the first place, and if we did, the loyalty towards Britney would be strong among her fans.

Traditionally, the split between rock and pop has been characterised by rock being “the real thing”, based on talented musicians who have the control over their music, and pop being the “artificial”, playful and commercial music. Mark Butler (2003) talks about the difference of rock and pop in his analysis of two covers by the Pet Shop Boys. He says that authenticity and rock go hand in hand, and what started with authenticity stemming from being true to a cultural and musical tradition soon turned into authenticity in the sense of being true to oneself and one’s own musical expression. Although continuously changing, there is still a general notion of pop being commercial and without the same level of authenticity as rock (except perhaps for certain pop artists who have proven to be great musicians and songwriters as well as producers, e.g. Madonna or Michael Jackson, but yet with the same commercial pop image). Gabriel Solis (2010) writes about the “rock code”, which he explains as a necessary component in the concept of covers. Through the idea of the rock code, Solis excludes the existence of covers in other genres, but in this case study, his idea fits perfectly. Britney Spears’ cover of the Rolling Stones is a good example of the traditional rock hit being covered by a commercial pop star. The aesthetic ideals are very different in the two versions because they follow their respective genre rules (see Frith 1998). I find that the split between rock and pop influences my perception of the cover version; not only through the actual music, but also through the surrounding factors. The codes on which we base our understanding of the music are not only musical codes, but also the music’s context - the star persona, their public appearances, etc. Britney’s musical codes must be heard with the context in mind. I find it useful to view Britney’s performance in the light of Toynbee’s (2000) idea of habitus and field. Britney (and her production team) use the possibilities within the field to create a pop production, while also using the habitus to transfer a song that is initially different to their own field. This enables a transition from one genre to another where more is gained than lost through the process. However, the success of this process is individually evaluated and will be discussed later.

2. What are the differences in the two vocalists’ ways of using their voices in their performances? Comparing Mick Jagger to Britney Spears is interesting, because they both have a high level of emotional engagement through their voices, but in different ways. Jagger has a long career behind him, and his performances have developed through fifty years as vocalist in the Rolling Stones. Much can be said about his development both regarding voice and performance, but I will focus on the particular example of this case study - the 1965 version of him. His voice is
young at this point, with a natural and untrained sound, but his emotional expression is easy to grasp, perhaps even more so because of the simplicity of both the song and his vocal performance. He follows the stylistic norms in his performance, expressing the anger and frustration of the young rebel of his generation. The untrained and natural character of his voice is according to Moore part of what signifies authenticity, especially the straining quality of high pitch, which is seemingly “produced as the result of great effort” (Moore 2001: 48). Britney’s performance shows a quite different way of expressing ones emotions. The cover starts with a quiet humming of the guitar riff from the original, going into a verse loaded with sexual and emotional tension, which remains part of the performance throughout the song. Her voice is also young; the two singers were about the same age (22 and 19 respectively) at the time of recording. But the frustration and “anger” in their performances are not the same, because the kind of “change” they want seems to be quite different. This is linked to the interpretation of lyrics.

3. As I discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, there has been a tendency to overemphasise the importance of lyrics in studies of popular music. The actual music is after all essential to the concept of a “song”. But, the combination of music and words is (depending on listening context, personal taste, etc.) usually the most beneficial approach to an analyst. I will therefore take a brief look at the interpretation of lyrics. As I said, this is also linked to the use of the voice, since the voice is the channel through which the lyrics are perceived. Jagger’s and Britney’s approaches to interpreting the lyrics are both similar and different. Jagger says “when that man comes on and tells me / how wide my shirts can be”, and through this he expresses a frustrated disapproval of the lack of freedom and independence. Britney says “when that girl comes on and tells me / how tight my skirt should be”, which shows the same urge to be independent and in charge of oneself. I feel that there is a difference in the sincerity of the two performances considering the lyrics. Frith (1998) writes about the protest song, saying that they are mainly about creating slogans, and slogans “need not bear any relationship to its intended message at all” (1998: 165). I find that the musical codes of Britney’s performance reflect this in a convincing way - through her vocal performance the phrase “I can’t get no satisfaction” changes meaning significantly. She exploits the song’s slogan-like qualities.

4. The cover version of “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction” raises some interesting issues concerning gender and gendered subjectivity, and the construction of sexuality in pop music. Reaching a comprehensive understanding of subjectivity in the cases of Mick Jagger and Britney Spears would take much more than this reading of their versions of “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction”,
but some points can be made based on my view of these performances. First, an important point to remember is that both singers construct an image based on the expectations and traditions found in their respective genres. Jagger is the typical “cock rock”, macho rock artist - Britney is the sexy pop superstar (I deliberately use the surname of one and the first name of the other, as this tendency shows an interesting difference in genres and subjects). As my reading of both the voices and the lyrics have shown, Britney’s interpretation of the song changes its meaning and provides the listener with a completely different musical material from which to draw pleasure and enjoyment. The understanding of both artists is not only based on the reading of this particular song, but also influenced by the general perception of them, from musical performances and public display. The way I read it is that Jagger and the Rolling Stones represent the stereotypical male rock musicians, with the “no girls aloud” philosophy from the garage bands with “the guys”. Britney, on the other hand, represents the typical sexy pop princess; the girl the guys want and the girls want to be. But what about the question of authenticity in Britney Spears’ cover of the Rolling Stones? In order to explore the level of authenticity in Britney’s performance, I need to put myself in her target audience’s space. Would young girls listening to her music feel that she is a representative of their view of life? Hearing Britney’s emotional engagement in this performance might be part of many listeners’ enjoyment of the music - her music is “telling it like it is for them”, to quote Moore’s idea of the second person authenticity (Moore 2002: 220). The same might be said about the Rolling Stones, but from the point of view of a different target audience. I find that a certain level of authenticity might be perceived in both performances, but not necessarily by the same listener at the same time. Here I approach the issue of musical taste and evaluation of the two performances.

5. Britney Spears’ cover version has ranked high on several lists of “worst cover song”. The magazine *Rolling Stone* asked their readers to vote for the worst cover songs of history, a list on which Britney Spears ended up as number 5 (Rollingstone.com 2012). Why? What is it that makes the song so criticised among music connoisseurs? This question is linked to genre as well as authenticity. The ideals of those making these lists are usually quite different from those of the pop audience. I must express my personal opinion in this case. Is Britney’s cover a good cover? What are the criteria for a good cover? Is the question perhaps impossible to answer? I feel that, based on the stylistic ideals and the general quality of the album *Oops!...I Did It Again*, Britney somehow makes the song her own and tailors it to fit the album, which might be considered important criteria of a cover song. After all, Britney is performing for her own audience, and she is trying to please them more than the fans of old rock’n’roll. That said, regarding the song outside of its context and
in relation to the original version, the two songs are of different standards. Viewed from a musician’s perspective, there is a certain value to an actual band of musicians who play the music themselves.
Chapter 6. Conclusion: Under the Covers

Introduction

In 2007, the Norwegian hip hop duo Madcon had a major hit in Norway that later spread around the world; “Beggin”. The song was a great success, staying at number one on the Norwegian sales chart for twelve weeks (VG-lista 2012) and awarded “Hit of the Year” at the Norwegian music awards “Spellemannsprisen” (Groove.no 2008). With their unique intensity and youth-like playfulness on stage, the duo were both the press’ and the audience’s favourites for a long time, and they still hold a special position within the Norwegian music scene. Three years after their success with “Beggin”, I went to London and saw the West End musical “Jersey Boys”, telling the story of the group Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, an American rock and pop group with many hits in the 1960s and ’70s. After hearing one hit after another, I did not expect to hear what I thought was a catchy, 21st century, Norwegian hip hop hit - “Beggin”! But there it was - the Four Seasons’ hit from 1967. The two versions are surprisingly similar. They start with a slow, rubato string intro, before the soul groove comes on. Except for a bridge in the original that is replaced with rap verses, the Madcon cover is almost identical to the original. The sound, the tempo and key, the use of the voice, the rhythmic aesthetics - it seems as if the aim was to stay as close to the original as possible. Madcon’s music video shows the group playing TV games, falling asleep, and suddenly finding themselves in a 1970s-style movie. The link to history is obvious, but I still don’t feel that the link to the Four Seasons is quite as obvious. In the winter of 2012, the Norwegian television channel TV2 gave their viewers the Voice, one of the TV shows that base their whole musical material on covers. One of the auditions showed a contestant performing “Beggin”, and as it happened, one of the artist members of the jury was also one of the members of Madcon. He was immediately flattered that someone would cover his song, and my guess is that most of the target audience (a group of people born many years after the members of the Four Seasons had gone their separate ways) agreed with him - this was definitely a Madcon song.

This example of a cover song is interesting because it was not heard as a cover at all. There are many examples of this - the covers of both “Fields of Gold” and “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction” were originals to me before the real originals crossed my musical path. This is in other words not that surprising. What might be more surprising, however, is that the cover artist himself considered his performance a new original (at least in front of a camera) despite the fact that the cover is almost
a reduplication cover, or a minor interpretation at best (see Mosser 2008). It seems that if a song is old enough and your target audience is young enough, you can make a cover that stays very close to the original, at least in a case where the original has not turned into a “classic” and lived on to reach 21st century ears. In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed the term cover song, stating that the original has to be familiar to the listener for him to perceive the song as a cover. Madcon’s cover is an example of this, and knowing that it was a cover song changed my perception of it immediately.

Key elements

The four songs and eight artists of my case studies are not a representative selection of cover songs. Hence, I have no foundation on which to state anything in general regarding ways of making covers and their influence on their listeners. In the chapters in which I present each case study, I discuss how I hear the songs and how I perceive their meanings as covers. In this chapter I will try to draw some lines between the different examples. I will go into further detail on some of the discussions, as well as presenting a few new points. The aim of this chapter is not to generalise and make solid statements concerning cover songs, but rather to show how covers may be perceived, and open up for other interpretations than my own. I list seven points which are particularly interesting, and elaborate each of them in the following.

1. A cover song is neither an original nor a copy, but placed along a continuum from nearly identical to nearly unrecognizable.
2. Taste and appreciation is affected by, but not dependent on, the cover aspect of a performance.
3. The original artist might somehow be “present” through the cover artist’s voice.
4. The meaning of the lyrics might also be changed even if the actual words are the same.
5. The gender connotations of the performances influence our ways of hearing covers.
6. The artist is in a character and appears with some kind of persona, which means that we “buy it” even if we know that it is not “real”.
7. The cover artist might come across with a higher level of authenticity through his or her cover version.

1. The starting point of this master thesis was re-versioning in popular music. The process has seen many crossroads and dilemmas regarding the choice of focus. I chose to pay less attention to different uses of music, for instance sampling and mashups, and I didn’t prioritise issues concerning
the music business, the producers, etc. Another area that could have been explored, is the difference between popular music and the art music tradition regarding their philosophies and ideologies about “ownership”, performance, and the artists’ freedom to interpret the music in their own way. To put it (perhaps too) simply: traditionally, art/classical/serious music is performed with a great respect for the composer and his notations, by staying close to his musical intentions; popular music (as we know it today) is performed with a different kind of respect, where, if you perform songs performed by other artists, you are supposed to make the music your own, otherwise it would just be a copy of the original. Here I touch on another interesting issue; throughout this thesis I discuss the relationship between the original and the cover, but isn’t the antonym of original copy? This is, however, only a question of semantics. Perhaps the word “original” has some flaws in the cover context - I do believe I have expressed thoroughly that a cover is not a copy. This is what is interesting about cover songs - they are all placed “along a continuum from those that are drastically different from, to those nearly identical to the original” (Weinstein 2010: 245). I find that the more the cover artist makes his performance his own, the more credibility he gets as a creative and innovative artist. I will soon re-examine this point further.

In chapter 1, I discussed the meaning and function of the term cover song. I looked at its historical aspect, and asked whether the cover song can illuminate music history and even be some kind of comment on history itself (see Shiffer 2010). The story about Madcon’s version of “Beggin” is interesting in this historical light - the song is similar to the original to such an extent that it could be heard as a tribute to earlier music in general and the Four Seasons in particular. But what about the case studies of this thesis? Apart from Britney’s cover, all are examples of covers that were released just a few years after the original. Britney is thus in this respect the closest to the Madcon cover - her version of the Rolling Stones’ hit can perhaps be heard as a tribute to the 1960s rock’n’roll (although perhaps not making her a more popular and successful artist with the rock audience), or a comment on history itself, as Schiffer (2010) suggests that covers might be. Jamie Cullum, on the other hand, has as part of the jazz sphere a link to history in much of his music, making new and updated versions of the jazz standards from all of its history. This cover, however, is a version of a song that was released only two years prior, and Cullum is rather transferring Rihanna’s song to his own style than making a tribute to her style. The history is thus not of much relevance in this case. The same goes with both “Fields of Gold” and “Crazy In Love”. That said, I think the historical aspect is less important than what actually goes on in the process from original to cover. I will now discuss the aspect of taste and appreciation.
2. What is a good cover, and is there an objective answer to this? Musical taste - the pleasure and enjoyment of listening to music - is influenced by the listening context. The codes we pick up and how we interpret them, are changed according to the ways in which we listen. Kennett (2003) presents different ways of listening, all of them influenced by several factors. This can be, for instance, the aspect of time between when the music was made and the listener hears it, when and where the listening takes place, and the production’s original purpose of the song (Kennett 2003: 208-9). The listener’s competence is also an important factor in the evaluation of music; the competence is acquired through previous listening and influenced by age, sex, race, class etc. But what about the artist’s intent? Do the intentions and motives that form the base of the performance, affect our perception of it? Mosser says: “the artist’s intent should be a factor, but certainly cannot be the determining element in making an aesthetic judgement about the ‘success’ of a given cover” (Mosser 2008). The evaluation of covers is basically similar to the evaluation of any popular music. Considering the cover of “Crazy In Love” by Antony and the Johnsons, the evaluation of the song is naturally influenced by the relationship to Beyoncé’s original, but it is just as dependent on the quality of the cover song as a song, not just as a cover. The aesthetics of the style, the performance of Antony, the level of credibility and authenticity - it is all part of what makes the song good or bad.

After discussing the four case studies of this master thesis, I might be able to say something about the quality and evaluation of cover songs. I find that the cover’s quality has to be considered based on both its generic positioning and its relationship to the original. As Weinstein states, the question of quality is dependent on how the stereophonic listening takes place, but also on each individual listener’s personal taste. A cover version of a song you like might open up doors to new genres, but the outcome might just as well be the opposite. Furthermore, she says that when a cover is evaluated, the criteria are not based primarily on relationship to the original. “The degree of a cover song’s artistic innovation, of its novelty, is [...] irrelevant to the appreciation one can derive from it” (Weinstein 2010: 246). This suggests that the evaluation of covers as such is less important than first assumed. However, I find that the question of quality based on the concept of covering must be asked. Later in this chapter I will turn to the authenticity issue, which holds a central position in the evaluation of covers.

3. Is there a general set of “rules” that cover artists follow, in order to make their performances less like copies? My point of view in this thesis has been that of the listener; how we perceive the music, the artists, and the relationship between original and cover. The question of how
to make a good cover song has to be answered by each cover artist for himself, but I have dealt with one element that will always be an important part of making a song one’s own. It is time to discuss the voice.

We hear and recognise voices everywhere, and they are important markers of identity as we have learned how to “read” them through a lifetime of interpreting spoken or sung words. In songs, the voice is the storyteller; it is direct communication from one individual to another. I want to discuss the three different voices that I feel are present in the cover song - the author inside the text, the author outside the text, and the author (or voice) of the original version. The author outside the text is also the artist’s persona, as we perceive them in their performances. Frith (1998) talks about four aspects of the voice - the instrument, the body, the person and the character. In a cover song, all these functions are changed, which might also change the whole idea of the song. When listening to Antony’s performance of “Crazy In Love”, or Britney’s version of “(I can’t get no) Satisfaction”, the voices are different kinds of instruments from the voices of Beyoncé and Mick Jagger, both in timbre and technique, and the bodies we hear are significantly different. It might be hard to tell what is dependent on the entire song, its sound and arrangement, and what is part of the voice alone. However, the persona, the character that we perceive through the voice, is essential to our perception of the song. To me, Antony’s appropriation of Beyoncé’s song gives it a new meaning, and the same can be said about the other examples, though to varying degrees.

Before I move on to a discussion of the third voice, I want to draw the attention towards two of the cover artists, whose artistic images are very different, but who still seem to be reviewed with some of the same musical features, especially concerning their voices. Eva Cassidy’s way of coming across as “angelic” and “ethereal” through her voice is remarkable, but it is also remarkably different from the voice of Antony Hegarty. But, his voice is regularly described using the same words. How can this be? And what are these differences about? As I discussed in chapter 4, Antony’s voice is an important marker of identity and carrier of musical meaning. His way of interpreting Beyoncé’s lyrics is very much real and human, although his subjectivity is less so. Considering his live performance of the cover; the term “angelic” reaches a new level through his stage performance, where he looks as if he just descended from the skies. Natvig points to the cover of Antony and the Johnsons’ first album, with a picture of Antony presented as “a hybrid of an alien and a Christ figure” (Natvig 2006: 137-8, my translation). His voice is not particularly high in register, and will by no means be confused with a woman’s voice. But, it has a characteristic quality which makes terms like “ethereal” and “superhuman” seem fitting. As stated by Natvig, he has the
ability to make what seems “outer-worldly” and abnormal turn into something to which we can relate - he expands the limits of “normality” (Natvig 2006). Eva Cassidy’s subjectivity was influenced by her sad and sentimental story. Knowing that she died from cancer might add a dimension of melancholy to my listening, as if it makes her more vulnerable and the music even more beautiful and delicate. Her voice reflected an emotional attachment to the music, while also being especially pure and with a beautiful timbre. The difference of the two artists, as I hear them, can be summed up in the following: Eva Cassidy is ethereal in spite of her distinct humanity and vulnerability, while Antony is human, personal and with a high level of authenticity in spite of his freakishness.

Comparing Antony Hegarty and Eva Cassidy might be interesting, but it is somehow on the side of my main issue of this thesis - the cover. What is most interesting in the discussion of voices in cover songs, is precisely the relationship to the original version. Hearing a song we know well performed by another voice can be an exciting experience. In the introduction I discussed the presence of a third voice in cover songs, in addition to the voice of the artist and the voice of the character within the song. Hearing the third voice is like the stereophonic listening (see Weinstein 2010) that has been object of my attention throughout this thesis. With my four case studies as points of departure, I want to discuss this additional voice. My questions are as follows: “Is” Jamie Cullum Rihanna? Is Sting as an artist present in Eva Cassidy’s performance? Is Britney not only performing a Stones hit, but also “performing” Mick Jagger? And “is” Antony Beyoncé?

There is no easy answer to these questions. They depend on each individual listener, and I can only express my personal opinion when listening to the songs. My immediate answer would be “no, of course Cullum is not Rihanna”. He makes his own version and his performance is reliant on his abilities and his style as an artist, which means that Rihanna has no part in this. But, as Rihanna is in the back of the listener’s mind through the concept of stereophonic listening, and probably also in Jamie Cullum’s mind because of his knowledge of the original, one might say that Rihanna is part of his version. The way in which I hear his voice is influenced by the presence of Rihanna’s, and this colours my listening experience. As I discussed in chapter 3, I find that Cullum seems more feminine in his performance because of the link to the original, which shows an important effect of cover songs. The same process is present in Antony and the Johnsons’ performance of “Crazy In Love”. “Hearing” Beyoncé’s voice through the performance of Antony makes me feel as if he is “performing” her. But, the cover is also a major interpretation, and Antony makes his own, personal performance, which makes Beyoncé’s presence less obvious. In the examples of Britney Spears and
Eva Cassidy I have to take into account the fact that I knew the covers before I heard the originals, which has affected my way of hearing the presence of the voices of the original versions. This might also be affected by the fact that both songs are popular and have been covered many times. However, I have a general notion that Antony and Jamie Cullum are more aware of the original artists and cover them, whereas Britney Spears and Eva Cassidy make covers of the songs, with seemingly less focus on the original versions. This shows that different covers have significantly different relationships to their originals, and that the link to the original version is also influenced by the listener’s knowledge of, and relationship to, the songs, as well as the position of the original. The example of Madcon might suggest that the distance in time between the original and the cover releases influences the perception as well. Generally, I find it hard to say anything universally valid about voices in cover songs.

4. I have reached the point of considering the lyrics. All of the songs of my case studies have the first person point of view. There is an “I” in every song, whether the “I” on the dance floor in Rihanna’s hit, or the “we” who will “walk in fields of gold”. How are these personal angles influenced by the concept of covers? The voices inside and outside the text are part of this issue, seeing as the singer and the “I” are two different characters. For instance, when Rihanna performs her song, she is not necessarily telling her own personal story, but rather performing, like an actor on stage. And when Cullum sings the lyrics initially sung by Rihanna, he is not taking on the role of Rihanna, but rather taking on her character within the text. This brings to mind Schechner’s idea of the “make belief”. Cullum’s performance has a presence of both his artistic persona and the role he is playing in the song. He is somehow acting himself who is acting.

“(I can’t get no) Satisfaction” is an example of a song where the lyrics change their meaning in the process from original to cover. As I discussed in chapter 5, the artist’s personae that we perceive through their performances influence how we interpret the lyrics. The satisfaction as it is expressed by Britney is much more sexually loaded than that expressed by Jagger. We might see something similar happening in “Crazy In Love”, although not as obviously. The story of the woman (Beyoncé?) who is madly in love has a dramatic frustration to it, whereas the man in Antony’s story is much more vulnerable and sad in his craziness. The ways in which the lyrics are interpreted, in combination with the voice and the sound of the song, change the rhetorical meaning of the words.

I will soon go further into the gender discourse, but there are gender issues related to lyrics that may be expressed here. As already mentioned, all the songs have lyrics from the first person
point of view, with the “I” as the narrator. Some words, however, are changed because of the gender differences. Britney Spears changes the words to go with a female perspective. Antony keeps the female perspective so intact that it influences the perception of him and his persona. Both Cullum and Cassidy keep the original lyrics, but here the gender issue is less in focus as the lyrics tell us nothing about the sex of the performer. However, the gender notion might still be influenced by the knowledge of the original versions of the songs.

5. Cover songs will often involve a change of gender, from a male to a female vocalist or vice versa. How might this change our perception of the song? As a singer who doesn’t write her own material, I can easily relate to the process of covering, from listening to a song you like, to making a personal performance of it. I have many times faced the challenges of making the song my own while remaining respectful of the original artist. I have experienced the benefits of doing covers of songs by male artists; the chance of being compared to the original decreases significantly. This is of course not only dependent on the sexes, but also genre, instrumentation, arrangement, sound, etc. The gender factor seems nevertheless helpful. Interestingly, it was not until after I had decided which examples to use, that I saw that gender was present in all of them. I have throughout this thesis dealt with gender issues that arise in many cover songs, and the gender focus could have been a master thesis in itself. I will see if there are any similarities in the way gender issues affect my case studies.

I want to draw the attention to the feminist issue in the performances of Beyoncé and Rihanna. The two world famous artists play with notions of sexuality and bodily agency, but not in the suppressed, “victim of the masculine music business”-sort of way. It is rather an act of being confident in one’s own body, of being in charge. “It is my body. I do what I want with it”. And, what they want is to tease. There is an element of cheekiness, especially in Rihanna’s case. Their play with sexual connotations is based on their freedom to do so - they are sexy because they can (or so it seems, but there is always the question: how free are they really?). Feminism has gone through some changes, and we might say that we are dealing with a kind of postfeminism, also in the music business. Sheila Whiteley (2000) links this to postmodernism and the “recognition and acknowledgement of complexities” (2000: 3).

I have previously talked about Antony Hegarty’s cover, and his way of coming across as a “freak”. But, drawing on Antony’s “freakish” qualities is just one way of reading him. The issue of gender is another, equally important angle. His ways of appropriating Beyoncé’s text, and his construction of gender notions through his performance, might well be compared to the gender
aspect of other examples, especially Jamie Cullum. Both are white males, born in the UK in the 70s, but they are otherwise quite different, both in their musical expressions and their public personae. Nevertheless, the ways in which they both perform covers of R’n’B hits by young, Afro American women, call for a comparison. Cullum is somehow feminine in his performance, but in a significantly different way from the femininity of Antony’s performance. What is this difference about? Antony appears almost like a woman in some of his performances, including both the music video and the live performance of “Crazy In Love”. Wearing a dress, with long hair down his shoulders, and heavy make-up, he is almost in drag. Cullum, on the other side, follow more traditional masculine connotations in his visual performance, but with a hint of femininity to his vocal performance. Is he a dandy? He is not the typical British pop dandy as discussed by Hawkins (2009), but perhaps there is a hint of poise and display to him as a jazz-pop subjective. Cullum steps into a character through his music, and he somehow “performs” Rihanna in this particular song (see chapter 3). More could be said about the gender issues of all my case studies, but I will move on to a different but related issue - the artist subjectivity or persona.

6. Who is the artist? The uncertainty and confusion with which we approach this question is truly fascinating. There is a certain desire in human beings to believe in somebody or something, which makes us consider artists and performances as completely natural and believable, even if our common sense tells us that it is all fake. Nicknames such as Sting, alter egos such as Sasha Fierce, and complex subjectivities such as Antony, do not undermine our ideas of the artist’s true inner subject. The level of fake, or the distance between the artist persona and the real person, will vary according to genre, history, popularity, context, etc. The issue is certainly no less confusing when the different voices are included in the discussion. Who are the artists? Are they actors? What we know for certain is that they perform. They “make belief” (see Schechner 2006), by being somewhere in between a character within the song and a character outside the song, as well as in between their real selves and their stage personae. If we perceive the artists as actors playing themselves, we might get closer to an understanding of the processes taking place in cover songs. The notion of a true original and a fake cover changes if we also consider the original an act and the original artist an actor. But, as I said previously, we have a tendency to believe in what we see and hear, which means that the artists are rarely considered actors, at least not in their vocal performances. The authenticity and credibility of both the original and the cover must be taken into account.

The cover artist’s ability to “own” his own musical performance is important in the listener’s
perception of him. Much of the history of rock has been centred around the artist’s ownership of his music. According to Moore (2001), “distinctions between rock and ‘pop’ styles are made not in terms of stylistic practice but in terms of the observation that rock (as opposed to ‘pop’) musicians apparently have control over both their material and their music’s production” (2001: 4). However, this is not the only pathway to respect and credibility from the audience. I find that a cover version can show a high level of creativity and talent in an artist. Of the four cover artists of my case studies, only Antony Hegarty writes his own musical material for most of his recordings. Cullum does jazz standards as well as contemporary covers, Eva Cassidy did versions of many kinds of music, and Britney is part of a pop apparatus where writers, co-writers and producers, together with the artist create a recording. The artist personae make us believe in them anyway, and provide them with a certain amount of authenticity, which is my next topic.

7. Many terms within popular music studies open up for seemingly endless discussions of their true meaning and reliability, as well as their right usage and suitable areas. Authenticity is the queen of these terms in the monarchy that is this thesis. The term has been extensively treated in the introduction, and it plays a central role in several, if not all, of my case studies. I arrive here at the impossible task of concluding, but with the aim of discussing possible angles on authenticity and cover songs, rather than engraving any concluding thoughts in stone.

There are many kinds of authenticity, and they might all be reflected in various cover songs. There is in other words no “code” in the musical material that serves as a key to an understanding of the authenticity factor. Rather, I find that authenticity can be found, dependent on the context and the individual listener, through many different elements in both the music and the visual performance of the artist. Take Antony Hegarty; he comes across with an “authenticity of expression” (see Moore 2002) through his way of performing the song as if he is telling us about his inner emotions. The ways in which he uses his characteristic voice strengthen the overall sentimental and intimate character of the performance. But what I find most interesting in this case, is his very distinct personal touch on the song - it seems as if his “level” of authenticity increases because he is doing a cover. This reflects an important point that needs to be made regarding covers and authenticity; there might not be a direct link between the authenticity, originality and uniqueness in the artist’s performance, and his status as the author of the song he is performing. Covers can in some instances be heard as “original” works because of their ability to reflect personal creativity and innovation.

This is merely one side of the issue of covers and authenticity. I also want to express the
potential presence of other kinds of authenticity, particularly Moore’s third person authenticity, or “authenticity of execution” (Moore 2002). As I already mentioned in the introduction, the third person authenticity is the kind of authenticity with the closest bonds to folk. This means that the artist may very well be perceived as honest, reliable and sincere while playing music that holds a special position within a style or tradition. In folk music, the term cover song is usually not applicable, since the “original” tends to be a vague figure from the past, and the music changed through generations of musicians. The third person authenticity, however, can be applied to cover songs. The Rolling Stones got their authenticity from the foundation in blues as much as from their musical and songwriting abilities.

Authenticity is also linked to the artist’s talent and quality as a musician. Here we touch on the question of style and stylistic positioning. When Jamie Cullum covers Rihanna, and especially in his solo live performance of the song, he uses his creativity and musicality to create his own music. What is interesting about this example is seeing how Cullum uses the original that is stylistically remote from his own music to present himself with credibility and authenticity as an artist. We see the same effect in Antony and the Johnsons’ performance. Antony is signifyin’ on the original version, and the audience is struck by his originality, in spite of the obvious appropriation of Beyoncé’s musical “work”. This is part of the reason why covers are fascinating artistic expressions that should not, to quote Weinstein, be dismissed as “inauthentic ugly ducklings” (Weinstein 2010: 243).

Final perspectives

Placing this thesis within popular music studies has been one of my prime challenges. This is because of the diversity and numerous possibilities encountered in the conceptualisation of reversionings of many kinds. Many of the discourses of popular musicology are relevant to cover songs, and my work shows only a few of the issues arising when covers are performed. Plasketes et al. (2010) provide many interesting approaches to the issue. With writers from a wide range of academic fields, the anthology provides the reader with very different approaches to the discourse on reuse of old music. However, this also means that the book holds various definitions of covers, from artists covering themselves (Metcalf 2010 on Bob Dylan), to choirs performing a cappella versions of pop (Duchan 2010 on “Hide and Seek”), to Cusic’s (2010) defense of covers (which to me seems rather a defense of songwriters). The writers each explore their respective objects of interest, and together they cover the issue quite well. However, some of the articles are so specific
in their focus that finding generalities seems difficult.

I find that my readings of eight different songs show how covers can work in very different ways and produce musical meaning similarly, while at the same time sharing the mutual premise of the relationship between the original and the cover. That said, I am not that much closer to a firm and accurate understanding of the processes and effects of cover songs. Other listeners would make their own findings, and I would have made other findings had the choice of cases been different. However, my hope is that I have provided the readers with some ideas as to how one might listen to cover songs.
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