University of South Carolina
Scholar Commons

Theses and Dissertations

Spring 2023

“Everything Old Is New Again”: The Rise of Interpolation in Popular Music

Grayson M. Saylor

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd

Part of the Music Commons

Recommended Citation

Saylor, G. M.(2023). *“Everything Old Is New Again”: The Rise of Interpolation in Popular Music.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/7300

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

"Everything Old is New Again": The Rise of Interpolation in Popular Music

by

Grayson M. Saylor

Bachelor of Music
Kennesaw State University, 2020

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Music in

Music History

School of Music

University of South Carolina

2023

Accepted by:

Kunio Hara, Co-Director of Thesis

Bruno Alcalde, Co-Director of Thesis

Birgitta Johnson, Reader

Julie Hubbert, Reader

Cheryl L. Addy, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

© Copyright by Grayson Saylor, 2023
All Rights Reserved.

ABSTRACT

With hip-hop becoming the number one genre in the United States, many artists working outside of the hip-hop genre are trying to emulate the success of hip-hop artists by incorporating compositional techniques of hip-hop into their own music. One of the most common hip-hop techniques adopted by artists working in other genres is sampling. However, with copyright rules and regulations becoming more strictly enforced, artists are finding creative ways to emulate sampling styles, while trying to avoid copyright concerns, including interpolation. Through the technique of interpolation, by reperforming aspects of the original song, artists are able to quote and reference previously recorded songs while avoiding some of the legal ramifications. This avoids many issues of copyright while providing the original songwriter with credit and a portion of the royalties. This trend has been increasing significantly since 2017 and many publishing companies are taking an interest in this trend. Primary Wave is leading the trend of buying artists' catalogs and encouraging current artists to interpolate music from their own song library, bringing in revenue to the publishing company in addition to the artists. By focusing on songs from 2017 to 2023 of *Billboard's* Year-End Hot 100, this thesis will exam interpolation trends through the lenses of social media, copyright issues, and economic gain for publishing companies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract iii

List of Figures v

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Description of the Problem 4

Statement of Purpose 5

Review of Related Literature 6

Methodology 16

Limitations/delimitations 18

Conclusion 18

Chapter 2: Case Studies 20

"7 Rings" by Ariana Grande 25

"Kings and Queens" by Ava Max 32

"Good 4 U" by Olivia Rodrigo 38

Chapter 3: Economic and Social Impacts 45

Publishing Companies 45

The Impact of Social Media 48

Conclusion 55

Bibliography 56

Appendix: Discography 64

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Diagram for the first half of “Kings and Queens,” “You Give Love a Bad Name,” and “If You Were a Woman (And I Was a Man)” 34

Figure 2.2 Diagram for the second half of “Kings and Queens,” “You Give Love a Bad Name,” and “If You Were a Woman (And I Was a Man)” 35

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard a song and thought to yourself, “I’ve heard this song before,” but then realized it was just released and there was no possible way you had heard it previously? Chances are your brain is not tricking you, but rather you *have* heard this song before, or at least snippets of it, from a previously released song. This phenomenon is called “interpolation.” Interpolation is the musical technique of taking a previously recorded song and re-performing a portion of that track, whether it be the sung melody, lyrics, part of an instrumental line, or particular production techniques, and including it in the creation of a new song. Since 2017, many popular artists, such as Ariana Grande, Taylor Swift, and Doja Cat, are increasingly incorporating interpolations into their newly released songs. There are many reasons why this may be the case, but two in particular are the rise in popularity of hip-hop and the increasing concerns for copyright infringement. Sampling is a technique that is closely associated with hip-hop, but including a sample into a song requires approval from the original artist, and some sort of upfront payment from the artist wanting to use the sampling. This can bring about issues when an artist does not give approval for their sample to be used, or if an artist

does not pay the fee needed to include the sample.[1] Many artists are choosing to avoid this process entirely by including an interpolation instead of a sample.

Ethan Millman from *Rolling Stone* describes interpolation as a "cousin to sampling" and defines its limits by borrowing "from a song's written composition – whether that's lyrics, a melody, a riff, or a beat."[2] While this definition can give a good idea of what interpolation may be to readers who are more familiar with sampling, it is historically inaccurate. Interpolations have existed far before sampling was established; therefore, it is better to describe interpolation as a "parent" to sampling.[3] One of the clearest examples of interpolation in recent popular music is Ariana Grande's "7 Rings" where the melody is interpolated from Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's "My Favorite Things" from *The Sound of Music,* but with new lyrics over it. Other interpolations, however, are harder to identify from first listen. The chorus of Doja Cat's "Kiss me More" may sound familiar because the melody is actually interpolated from parts of the chorus of Oliva Newton-John's "Physical." Listeners may not pick this up the first time they hear it, or the second time, or even the tenth time, but when paired side-by-side, the influence is unmistakable. This creates a sort of subliminal nostalgia that companies are capitalizing on to help make new songs become instant hits.

---

[1] Amanda Sewell, "A Typology of Sampling in Hip-Hop" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, Indiana, 2013), 196. https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/1427344595/abstract/CCE46814E6F64782PQ/1

[2] Ethan Millman, "'No Shelf Life Now': The Big Business of Interpolating Old Songs for New Hits," *Rolling Stone*, September 7, 2021, https://www.rollingstone.com/pro/features/olivia-rodrigo-doja-cat-interpolation-music-1220580/.

[3] J. Peter Burkholder, "Musical Borrowing or Curious Coincidence?: Testing the Evidence," *The Journal of Musicology* 35, no. 2 (2018): 223–66.

While the trend has greatly increased since 2017, this technique is nothing new, as interpolation is older than sampling, and even older than contemporary pop music. The tradition of interpolation falls into the larger category of musical borrowings. Musical borrowings can be traced back to the early creation of music, with one of the earliest instances of borrowing through the practice of troping in the 9th to 13th centuries.[4] Various other forms of borrowing evolved throughout the Renaissance and Baroque periods, and instances of borrowing can be found in classical music such as Alban Berg quoting Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* for his *Lyric Suite,* or Johannes Brahms using Johan Sebastian Bach's chaconne for solo violin "as one model for the chaconne finale of his Symphony No. 4 in E Minor."[5]

Interpolation has been used by pre-2000s' popular artists, with one of the clearest early examples of interpolation in hip-hop being Afrika Bambaataa and Soul Sonic Force's "Planet Rock." Inspired by Kraftwerk, "Planet Rock" interpolates elements of the synthesizer from "Trans Euro Express." While the melody and timbre are changed, the interpolation is still clear, causing some people at the time of its release to believe that this was sampled. Even before its use in popular music, interpolation dates as far back as classical composers quoting other composers. What is new, however, is that critics and fans are noticing the phenomenon on a much larger scale than before and increasing conversations around the topic. Additionally, publishing companies are using information

[4] J. Peter Burkholder, "Borrowing," *Grove Music Online*, January 20, 2001. https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.52918.

[5] Burkholder, "Musical Borrowing or Curious Coincidence?" 236-237.

from fans to create and market new music featuring interpolation, with the intention of predicting the creation of an immediate hit song.

Description of the Problem

Instances of interpolation in American popular music are increasing significantly, and journalistic writings as well as fan interactions are noticing the phenomenon. Despite the ubiquity of interpolation in the current popular music scene, academic research on the topic is still under development. This lack of robust academic discourse on interpolation specifically, and on what is influencing the increase of the use of interpolation in pop music and public conversations about it, provides an opportunity for further research on the subject. Much of the recent exploration of this topic is from music magazines such as *Spin* and *Billboard*, in addition to social media websites, while much of older exploration that discusses the topic either focuses more on concrete musical borrowings, such as sampling, or talks more broadly about musical borrowings. Because of this, the language when discussing interpolation is somewhat limited, therefore difficult to discuss without musical examples.

Many authors have tried to define interpolation. Charlie Harding from *Vulture* describes it as "a kind of reboot, incorporating musical ideas from another song by rerecording and/or reimagining them."[6] Gil Kaufman from *Billboard* defines it as "making a new piece of music in which you don't sample the original, but either sing or

[6] Charlie Harding, "Invasion of the Vibe-Snatchers: Pop Music Is Regurgitating Itself Faster Than Ever," *Vulture*, September 15, 2022, https://www.vulture.com/article/pop-music-regurgitations-switched-on-pop.html.

play a piece of it yourself with an acknowledgement of such."[7] Matthew Newton from *Spin* defines interpolation as "the practice of having a musician rerecord a sample to help reduce costs."[8] *Billboard* staff when discussing their top interpolations chooses to describe interpolations as "sections of new songs that borrow melodic and sometimes lyrical elements from older songs, without sampling their original recordings."[9] While all of these definitions do explain aspects of interpolation, there is not one standard definition, thus showing a need to establish one. Additionally, the increase of interpolation in recent years shows a trend that potentially may become a new norm in the music industry, thus creating major importance on studying and understanding this creative process.[10]

Statement of Purpose

There are many reasons artists may be increasing their use of interpolation and these reasons will be explained and explored throughout this thesis. Additionally, I will analyze sampling and interpolation in contemporary popular music to show how trends are increasing and determine terminology to describe different forms of interpolation. In my research, I define interpolation as a type of musical borrowing, where a portion of one or more elements of a previously composed song are extracted and reperformed, with or without subtle alterations, by another artist in the creation of a new song. These elements

[7] Gil Kaufman, "Experts Explain How to Decipher — And Then Prove — Whether a Song Borrows By Accident or on Purpose," *Billboard*, October 28, 2021, https://www.billboard.com/pro/interpolations-experts-prove-court/.

[8] Matthew Newton, "Is Sampling Dying?" *SPIN*, November 21, 2008, https://www.spin.com/2008/11/sampling-dying/.

[9] "The 50 Best Song Interpolations of the 21st Century: Staff Picks," *Billboard*, October 28, 2021, https://www.billboard.com/media/lists/best-interpolations-9651682/.

[10] Charlie Harding, "Invasion of the Vibe-Snatchers."

may be melody, texture, lyrics, production characteristics, or other aspects of the original song. Additionally, for contemporary interpolations, the original songwriter receives credit on the new creation. From the result of my research, I have identified three main subcategories of interpolation: melodic, textual, and production interpolations. These categories can be applied to examples found in pop music. The goals of this thesis are to identify how fans and other artists are receiving these interpolations, and identify the role of publishing companies within this phenomenon.

Review of Related Literature

The literature reviewed in the following section includes dissertations, magazine articles, academic journal articles, edited volumes, and monographs all relating to sampling and interpolation in hip-hop and popular music. This literature review is divided into three main categories: interpolation in popular music, sampling and terminology, and copyright and social media. Much of the reviewed literature comes from sources that directly interact with the music industry such as trade publications, as well as various forms of social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, where fans can voice their opinions and artists are able to respond.

Interpolation in Popular Music

Much of the current discussion on interpolation exists in trade publications and fan-driven online communities including popular social media outlets and music centered online communities. Each of these sources defines interpolation since it is a term that may not be familiar to many people outside of the industry. In *Rolling Stone*'s article "Why You're Hearing More Borrowed Lyrics and Melodies on Pop Radio," Elias Leight

describes interpolation as a "sort of borrowing, in which an artist employs a snippet of an already-recorded song in the creation of something new."[11] The article expresses that this trend of interpolation is present in popular music, going beyond just the "unabashedly nostalgic songs" and being included in other pop hits.[12] This article, published in 2018, describes 2017 as having "major pop records based around interpolations" with previous years not even coming close.[13] Each of the sources on interpolation are incredibly recent, with this *Rolling Stone* article being the oldest. However, almost all of the articles seem to describe 2017 as being the starting year of the mass trend of interpolating music. According to the article "Rap Dominated Pop in 2017, and It's Not Going Anywhere Anytime Soon" from *Vulture*, 2017 was the year that hip-hop took over as the number one music genre in the United States.[14] That same year pop artists, such as Ed Sheeran, Taylor Swift, and The Chainsmokers, began to realize the popularity of hip-hop and started emulating techniques used by hip-hop artists, such as sampling and interpolation, to capitalize on their success.[15] Before 2017, interpolations could be found within *Billboard's* Year-End Hot 100, however most of the artists utilizing this technique were known for hip-hop or rap genres. During 2017, not only was there an increase of hip-hop artists with songs including interpolations in the Year-End Hot 100, but also artists

[11] Elias Leight, "Why You're Hearing More Borrowed Lyrics and Melodies on Pop Radio," *Rolling Stone*, July 5, 2018, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/why-youre-hearing-more-borrowing-on-pop-radio-627837/.

[12] Leight, "Why You're Hearing More Borrowed Lyrics."

[13] Leight, "Why You're Hearing More Borrowed Lyrics."

[14] Frank Guan, "Rap Dominated Pop in 2017, and It's Not Going Anywhere Anytime Soon," *Vulture*, December 20, 2017, https://www.vulture.com/2017/12/the-year-rap-overtook-pop.html.

[15] Charlie Harding, "Interpolation Database Year End Hot 100 2010-2011 (2022 top 10)" Unpublished raw data, Accessed February 2023.

producing pop songs and hip-pop (hip-hop and pop fusion) were including a significant increase of interpolations as well. This year also corresponds to the international launch of TikTok, a social media platform that is currently making major waves in the music industry.

Some industry experts have identified how music companies' business strategies contribute to the popularity of interpolation. Primary Wave, a music publishing company, is leading the way of interpolation in popular music. According to Kristin Robinson for *Billboard*, Primary Wave has actively encouraged artists "to use melodies, lyrics and samples of the company's catalog as a way to increase the value of Primary Wave's holdings while easing the tedious licensing process for the music makers at the same time."[16] In the same article, Robinson highlights Yung Gravy's 2022 hit "Betty (Get Money)" as doing just that by interpolating from Rick Astley's 1987 hit "Never Gonna Give You Up." Primary Wave and Hipgnosis Songs Fund have gone on massive spending sprees in the past two years "collecting publishing rights on legacy hits from songwriters."[17] In addition to companies buying songs for their catalog, artists have also increased the use of sampling and interpolation from other catalogs. Sony Music Publishing, one of the largest music and entertainment companies in the United States, announced that in the past couple of years they have "received twice as many requests for samples and interpolations from its catalog."[18]

---

[16] Kristin Robinson, "How Primary Wave Proved Everything Old Is New Again With Yung Gravy's Radio Hit," *Billboard*, September 15, 2022, https://www.billboard.com/pro/primary-wave-yung-gravy-radio-hit-sample-strategy/.

[17] Millman, "'No Shelf Life Now.'"

[18] Millman, "'No Shelf Life Now.'"

This trend seems to have been picking up around the release of TikTok in the United States, and it continues to follow TikTok's popularity. The design of the TikTok app encourages creators to collaborate with each other by participating in popular trends or duetting another video. Additionally, TikTok has a large music catalog for creators to use in their videos, which contributes to much of the younger American population discovering new music through the app.[19] It seems to be a goal of producers to get a song to be viral on TikTok as it brings more listeners to the song and increases traction to the song on all platforms. Better yet, if a song includes an interpolation, it brings more listeners to the original song as well. This is not unlike trends with streaming services such as Netflix, where older TV shows are seeing a resurgence in popularity.[20]

Sampling and Terminology

Interpolation fits into a similar category as sampling and musical borrowings. The literature on sampling is significantly more comprehensive than interpolation. There are several reasons why this would be the case, one being that sampling is often more easily quantifiable than interpolation. Additionally, interpolation has undergone different terminology throughout history which have received varying reactions of acceptance. Much of the literature that I have reviewed on sampling describes the technique, gives examples of it in music, and explains copyright cases. Literature, such as *That's the*

[19] "New Studies Quantify TikTok's Growing Impact on Culture and Music," *TikTok Newsroom*, July 21, 2021, https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/new-studies-quantify-tiktoks-growing-impact-on-culture-and-music.

[20] Bill Keveney, "Exclusive: Nielsen Finds Nostalgia Fuels Interest in Classic TV Comedies during Pandemic," *USA TODAY*, April 2, 2021, https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/tv/2021/03/19/nielsen-finds-covid-19-tv-viewing-spikes-classic-sitcoms/4754533001/.

Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader by Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* by Cheryl Keyes, and *Hip Hop America* by Nelson George, go into the culture of hip-hop and varying aspects of DJ culture, which includes techniques like sampling, scratching, and mixing.

Amanda Sewell's "A Typology of Sampling in Hip-Hop" stands out among the literature on sampling as it identifies one key issue: the lack of a unified terminology for different types of samples.[21] Sewell provides new terminology for various types of samples but does not touch much on interpolation. Sewell does mention interpolation briefly in this dissertation, but only regarding one case study where the lyrics and melody of the song are reperformed and slightly modified.[22] Instead of describing this example as interpolation, she refers to it only as musical borrowing.

Sewell is not the only one who has attempted labeling different types of music. Serge Lacasse coined the terms "allosonic" and "autosonic" quotation to describe musical borrowing in his 2000 article "Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music" where he applies Gérard Genette's theory of hypertextuality to recorded popular music. [23] Lacasse specifically refers to "autosonic" being most commonly exemplified as sampling, defining the term as "as a 'sameness of sounding.'"[24] He compares "allosonic quotation" to jazz musicians quoting other songs in improvisation, stating that the material shared between the original source and the new source "consists of an abstract

[21] Sewell, "A Typology of Sampling in Hip-Hop."
[22] Sewell, "A Typology of Sampling in Hip-Hop," 62.
[23] Serge Lacasse, "Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music," *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, (2000): 35–58. https://doi.org/10.5949/liverpool/9780853238256.003.0003.
[24] Lacasse, "Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music," 39.

structure."[25] Although Lacasse does describe allosonic quotation, he avoids further discussion by claiming that "it is not especially typical of recording techniques."[26] The choice to not dwell on the topic further indicates that mainstream musicians in the year 2000 were not focusing on interpolations.[27] The explanations Lacasse provides for both allosonic and autosonic quotations are too vague as he does not give concrete definitions to these concepts, but rather only explains them through examples. The last concept that Lacasse discusses relating to allosonic is pastiche, which is defined by Genette as "the imitation of a particular style applied to a brand new text."[28] This could potentially include production and stylistic elements of interpolation, but Lacasse describes pastiche as having "no particular hypotext" meaning that it would not have one particular song that it is emulating the style of, but rather a genre or band.[29] Lacasse also uses various other literary terms to refer to other types of musical borrowings, however he does not describe any more instances that relate to the allosonic category.

Christine Boone has also tried to tackle the concept of interpolation using the term allosonic. In "Mashing: Toward a Typology of Recycled Music," Boone describes an example of interpolation but refers to it as "sound-alikes, or "allosonic quotations" and even points out that interpolations "will often be called "samples," even though they are not technically "sampled" from another commercial recording."[30] Boone highlights

[25] Lacasse, "Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music," 38.
[26] Lacasse, "Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music," 38.
[27] Lacasse, "Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music," 38.
[28] Lacasse, "Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music," 43.
[29] Lacasse, "Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music," 43.
[30] Christine Boone, "Mashing: Toward a Typology of Recycled Music," *Music Theory Online* 19, no. 3 (September 1, 2013), https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.13.19.3/mto.13.19.3.boone.html.

sound-alikes and sampling as "two distinct production techniques for creating the same basic musical effect," focusing on the inclusion for "legal reasons and not always obvious aesthetic reasons."[31]

Interpolation may have come out of the African-American musical tradition of Signifyin' as defined by Henry Louis Gates. According to Christopher Jenkins, Signifyin' in the musical context can be understood as "a mode of indirect and/or coded communication, intended to convey multiple meanings specific to various in-groups with access to specialized information."[32] By this definition, interpolation functions very similarly to Signifyin', in that interpolations are meant to be understood by certain audiences to provide further meaning to the original text. While Gates mainly refers to Signifyin' from a literary standpoint, through written and spoken language, Signifyin' can also be represented musically as "a way of demonstrating respect for . . . a musical style, process, or practice" and "Signifyin(g) shows, among other things, either reverence or irreverence towards previously stated musical statements and values."[33] Jenkins gives a concrete example of Signifin' in music by saying, "an obvious form of signifyin(g) in instrumental music, classical or otherwise, would be the quotation of reference material, which could consist of older recordings but also spirituals or other folk songs."[34] J. Peter Burkholder further explains the connection of Signifyin' to popular music:

> Re-use, reworking and extension of existing music are basic elements of West African musical practice and continued in black American music of the 19th and 20th centuries. The concept of borrowing, developed in the study of European

[31] Boone, "Mashing."

[32] Christopher Jenkins, "Signifyin(g) within African American Classical Music: Linking Gates, Hip-Hop, and Perkinson," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 77, no. 4 (Fall 2019): 391–400.

[33] Jenkins, "Signifyin(g) within African American Classical Music," 398.

[34] Jenkins, "Signifyin(g) within African American Classical Music," 396.

> written repertories, is less appropriate to these traditions than the concept of sharing materials and traditions. This avoids implications of ownership, singularity and originality, and acknowledges that there is often no distinct entity from which to borrow. Recent scholarship has introduced the term 'signifying' for the characteristic approach of black American musicians; the materials of music are considered common property, and anyone who engages with those materials in an expressive way is 'signifying' on them. As slaves were converted to Christianity, they adapted work-songs to Christian texts and improvised new songs on similar material to create a new tradition of spirituals (Epstein, 1977). Blues and jazz involved improvisation and composition based on existing harmonies, melodies and bass patterns, and similar practices continued into popular music derived from black American traditions, including rhythm and blues and rock and roll.[35]

The main difference between Signifin' and interpolation is that interpolations, at least for the purposes of this thesis, are inherently tied to economics and the idea of ownership since songwriting credits must be given to the original songwriter to avoid copyright issues. This is in direct contradiction with Signifin' which relies on the belief that the materials of music are considered common property. Additionally, Signifin' comes from elements of West African musical practice and are attributed to Black American musicians, whereas interpolation has been adopted by several different genres of music.

Burkholder uses three categories to determine musical borrowings: analytical evidence, biographical and historical evidence, and the purpose of the borrowing.[36] Burkholder's typology is incredibly useful for identifying musical quotation in classical music, but it can also be applied to contemporary pop songs as well. This would be particularly useful for musicologists working in a copyright lawsuit to determine if an artist borrowed from a previous song without permission. However, when it comes to identifying interpolations in popular music, there seems to be one key identifier: song

[35] Burkholder, "Borrowing."
[36] Burkholder, "Musical Borrowing or Curious Coincidence?"

writing credits. In almost every case of interpolation, the songwriter of the original song will also be credited in the new song. Although, if this information is inaccurate, or unable to be found, Burkholder's typology of evidence can be used to identify instances of interpolation.

Copyright and Social Media

The literature I have reviewed that highlights copyright issues can be found in both academic literature and music industry magazines and articles. This seems to be a universal issue affecting artists. Since artists began sampling, they have had to deal with the issue of copyright, and with music being so easily and quickly accessible to everyone around the world, the number of copyright cases in music seems to be at an all-time high. The music industry is changing vastly in the advent of dealing with copyright issues, and interpolation seems to be one way to avoid these issues.

When artists sample from another song, they must clear their samples, often paying thousands of dollars to the company that owns the copyright. If an artist is unable to clear their samples, they can be sued and potentially fined for even more than if they had cleared it first.[37] Additionally, with sampling comes the issue of having permission to sample. If an artist does not have permission to use a sample, their song will either be taken down, or it will be stopped from ever being released in the first place. CJ's "Whoopty," for example, was taken down from YouTube when T-Series – the largest music record label in India – found that CJ's song contained an uncredited sample from

[37] Joanna Demers, "Sound-Alikes, Law, and Style," *UMKC Law Review* 83, no. 2 (Winter 2014): 307.

their catalog. According to an interview with VladTV, CJ had to pay $80,000 to get it cleared to be put back on YouTube and other streaming services.[38] The popularity of this song launched CJ from an independent SoundCloud artist to being signed to Warner Records. Without the popularity of this song on social media, it is possible T-Series would not have found the song to claim the copyright to it, avoiding this controversy entirely.

With interpolation, however, an artist can avoid the issue of paying for permission to use the original song. Instead, songwriters from the original song are included in the credits for the new song, thus giving royalties to the original songwriter and the original song publisher for the interpolation.[39] Using an interpolation is often cheaper for artists than using a sample, because there are no upfront costs. Most songwriters will be credited for an interpolation when a song is released, but fans on social media have taken to calling out interpolations when they think they hear one, causing some artists to add songwriting credits retroactively. Olivia Rodrigo is a great example of this.

In 2021, Olivia Rodrigo faced significant controversy on social media with the release of her first studio album *SOUR*. Due to gaining a massive amount of fame from her first single "Driver's License," she was bound to face some backlash. The controversy first started when Courtney Love posted on Facebook claiming that Rodrigo had copied Hole's 1994 *Live Through This* album cover for her release of promotional

[38] VladTV, "CJ: "Whoopty" Had an Uncleared Sample from Indian Movie, We Had to Pay Them $80K (Part 3)" *Facebook*, April 3, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=393572678880924.

[39] Millman, "'No Shelf Life Now.'"

photos for the *Sour Prom Concert Film.*[40] Love did not stop with her criticism though; when fans on social media started noticing similarities between Rodrigo's "Good 4 U" and Paramore's "Misery Business," Love put her thoughts out on social media again bashing Rodrigo and calling her "rude."[41] The controversy did not end there, and Rodrigo's song "Deja Vu" also caused suspicion with fans for being similar to Taylor Swift's "Cruel Summer." This backlash on social media caused Rodrigo's team to retroactively add songwriting credits to both Hayley Williams and Taylor Swift onto *SOUR* in an effort to avoid any potential copyright lawsuits. This retroactive addition of songwriting credits now allows the two songs to be considered as including interpolations, when it might be debatable if these songs are reperforming part of a song, or if they just fall into a "sound-alike" category for having similar production techniques, similar timbre, and genre similarities.

Methodology

The methodology I will be using consists of a combination of quantitative and qualitative research. For the quantitative portion of research, I used WhoSampled.com to identify direct samples and interpolation in songs from *Billboard*'s year end Hot 100 for

[40] Courtney Love, "Spot the difference! #twinning! @oliviarodrigo," *Facebook*, June 24, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/courtneylove/posts/345959820223117?comment_id=346823063470126&reply_comment_id=346831413469291&__cft__[0]=AZW4v93VRC2IYkumeqmzZj7Sm-8kfh_XkfBUesiI6S22-zDqp_mfXyCpxjAb7-8caGN4LEmoGZ6dUBkCbkZi5ITrIkAGSApVLd4w5ls__tIvmvA9IhtmSNDQCO2uu4_oNbqctfhHiOLyaVMtzfZ_BN07&__tn__=R]-R.

[41] Ashley Iasimone, "Courtney Love Accuses Olivia Rodrigo of Copying Hole Album Cover Concept for 'Sour Prom' Photos," *Billboard*, June 28, 2021, https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/courtney-love-olivia-rodrigo-album-cover-sour-prom-9593423/.

the United States for the span of 2017-2022. WhoSampled.com is a user-generated site that pinpoints samples from songs, highlights what song the sample is from, states where the sample is being used in the song and from what portion of the original song it is taken from. According to their website, WhoSampled.com allows music enthusiasts to identify the "DNA" of songs and to better understand musical connections.[42] I have chosen to use this website because it is highly comprehensive, with the website stating that is the "world's most comprehensive, detailed and accurate database of samples, cover songs and remixes."[43] While the website is very extensive, it does not specify beyond direct sampling or interpolation (referred to as "replayed-samples" on the website) so I will have to do my own further analysis to determine the specifics. Because WhoSampled.com is a user-generated site with some inaccuracies, I also referred to Charlie Harding's Interpolation Database from 2010-2023. This is an unpublished database used with permission that lists interpolations and samples from songs on *Billboard's* Year-End 100 charts. I have chosen to focus on the years 2017-2022 because interpolation has become a more popular trend starting in 2017, and has a close correlation with the launch of TikTok in 2018. Additionally, because of social media and the pandemic, the ways people listen to music and the ways music are produced have drastically changed. By analyzing these years, I have observed a few years prior to the pandemic, during the pandemic, and coming out of the pandemic to really identify and understand the changes happening.

[42] Whosampled, "WhoSampled.com - About Us," YouTube video, 1:26, Jan 10, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9SgiN5g9mY.

[43] "About Us," WhoSampled.com, 2023, https://www.whosampled.com/about/.

The qualitative research is from analyzing current sources' significance over interpolation. This is mostly explored through my literature review, but also through the case studies presented. Much of the literature comes from trade publications, which are leading the conversations around interpolation in the music industry. Other sources in the literature review include academic resources focusing on sampling and other musical borrowings. Outside of these sources, I have analyzed various social media outlets to see how fans are responding to interpolation, and through primary sources such as recorded interviews with artists.

Limitations/Delimitations

Because of the nature of this study there are some limitations to address. I will only analyze songs from *Billboard's* Year-End Hot 100 from 2017-2022. I chose to limit the years in order to create a manageable sample size, and I used *Billboard* because of its reputability, consistency, and the inclusion of streaming listens as well as sales, radio plays, etc. Additionally, I will mostly be focusing on artists that fall into the genre of pop to see how artists from this genre are interpreting techniques that are usually associated with hip-hop.

Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates how pop artists are using interpolation, how the industry is interacting with interpolation, and how fans are responding to interpolation. Through the case studies presented, this thesis identifies three main types of interpolation: melodic, textual, and production. This document also addresses how commercialization of music and the economic aspects behind it greatly impact interpolation. For the

purposes of this research, interpolation is inseparable from capitalization, as credits are given to songwriters, or copyright is bought from music publishers, to act as a monetary form of accountability. Social media is heavily intertwined as well, as fans are noticing and reacting to interpolations, and in many cases influencing how interpolations are being credited.

CHAPTER 2

CASE STUDIES

As discussed in the previous chapter, interpolation is the musical technique of taking a previously recorded song and re-performing a portion of that track, whether it be the sung melody, lyrics, part of an instrumental line, or stylistic production techniques, and including it in the creation of a new song. While many authors who have written on the phenomenon group all manifestations of interpolations together, for my research, I have identified three main types of interpolation: melodic interpolation, textual interpolation, and production interpolation. An interpolation is not limited to just one of these categories, rather it can be any combination of multiple categories, although one category may be more prominent than others.

Melodic interpolation is when part or all of a melody is taken from a previously recorded song and reperformed, often with different lyrics, in the creation of a new song. Melodic interpolations seem to be the most common, or at least the most easily identifiable. While most melodic interpolations seem to be in the vocal line, they are not limited to the vocal line. They can also be present in instrumental lines, such as lead guitar, or other instrumental solos. As an example of melodic interpolation, the chorus of Doja Cat's "Kiss Me More" borrows the melody of the chorus to Olivia Newton-John's "Physical." Both songs give credit to Olivia Newton-John's songwriters Stephen Kipner and Terry Shaddick.

Textual interpolations are where a significant portion of the text from a prerecorded song is being incorporated into a newly created song. These interpolations vary from covers because they interpolate a significant portion of the lyrics, but not all of them, and new text is also incorporated. These seem to be the least common type of interpolation in current top hits. However, text interpolation is one of the earlier forms of interpolation, such as interpolated vocality and interpolated verbalism. These are two techniques are used in African-American music, where vocalists add additional vocal sounds or text to a song.[44] So while this is not as common in pop hits, this is one of the earliest traceable forms of the term "interpolation" and is important to highlight as a type of interpolation. One could argue that Brittany Spears and Elton John's "Hold Me Closer" is a text interpolation of Elton John's "Tiny Dancer" and "The One." "Hold Me Closer" contains both the melody and text of the chorus from "Tiny Dancer" and also includes both the melody and text from two verses of "The One." Potentially this song could be considered a remix or mashup, but with the addition of Brittany Spears' vocals and a completely new instrumental background, it becomes an entirely new song.

What is more common in pop hits than text interpolations is quotation or allusion to the text of another song. Alluding to another song through text incorporates borrowing portions of lyrics in a way that the lyrics cannot be copyrighted. A good example of this is Miley Cyrus's 2023 single "Flowers" where she is alluding to Bruno Mars's "When I Was Your Man." Many fans on social media have speculated that Miley was copying Bruno Mars because of the similar lyrics, such as Bruno Mars's lyrics, "I should have

[44] Earl L. Stewart, *African American Music: An Introduction* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998): 6.

bought you flowers/ And held your hand" while Miley Cyrus's lyrics are stating: "I can buy myself flowers," and "I can hold my own hand" along with several other lyrics that are similar.[45] However, Bruno Mars's lyrics occur one line after another, and with Miley Cyrus, her lyrics are broken up in the chorus, with other lyrics in between them. There are other similarities between lyrics, however the lyrics are never quoted directly, and words like "flowers" and "hand" cannot not be copyrighted on their own. Because the lyrics are not being directly taken from Bruno Mars's song, "Flowers" does not contain an interpolation, but rather functions as allusion to his song, in a type of trend known as a response song.[46]

Production interpolations are the most ambiguous and therefore the most difficult to identify. A production interpolation may only emulate one production aspect of a prerecorded song, or it may emulate multiple aspects. These aspects include but are not limited to texture, instrumentation, style, and timbre. OneRepulic's 2022 single "I Ain't Worried," written for and featured in the 2022 movie *Top Gun: Maverick,* features a hook that is entirely whistled. Although the melody is vastly different, the song's association with the alternative genre and the overall shape of the melodic line of the whistle can cause some listeners to think of another song incorporating an iconic whistled hook: "Young Folks" by Peter Bjorn and John. Although these two songs are very different, for the case of "I Ain't Worried" Paramount Productions decided to add songwriting credits

[45] Bruno Mars, "When I Was Your Man," Track 6 on *Unorthodox Jukebox*, Atlantic Records, 2012, Spotify streaming audio, and Miley Cyrus, "Flowers," Single, Columbia Records, 2023, Spotify streaming audio.

[46] Charlie Harding, Nate Sloan, and Reanna Cruz, "'Flowers' and the Art of the Response Song," *Switched on Pop*, Podcast audio, February 14, 2023, https://switchedonpop.com/episodes/flowers-miley-cyrus-bruno-mars-response-song.

to Peter Bjorn and John as preventative measures in case any other listeners were also reminded of "Young Folks."[47] What this case is hinting at is something that is often called a "sound-alike," which is very ambiguously described as a song that sounds like another song. Several factors can lead to songs becoming labeled as a sound-alike, such as same harmonic progression, same key, same tempi, closely related timbre, closely related texture, same style of genre, and same rhythmic aspects. For something to be considered a production interpolation it usually has to contain multiple of these elements. While one element present could lead to a production interpolation – like the whistled hook – most of the time one element alone will not cause enough of a resemblance. Harmonic progressions and rhythms themselves cannot be copyrighted, however these aspects paired together or combined with other musical elements can be copyrighted, such as in the case of The Chainsmokers' "Closer." The harmonic progression in "Closer" is near identical to The Fray's "Over My Head (Cable Car)" and both songs are in the key of Ab. While The Chainsmokers have a much more synthesized and pop sound than The Fray, the harmonic progression paired with the same prominent rhythm played in the piano/synthesizer on both songs for these harmonic progressions necessitated the need to credit both Joe King & Isaac Slade from The Fray as songwriters for "Closer." The Chainsmokers take this element a step further and incorporate it into their melody, making the similarities even more clear. While identifying a production interpolation can be difficult and up to interpretation, many artists that recognize their song as a potential

[47] Chris Willman, "Ryan Tedder Whistled While He Worked: OneRepublic's Frontman on Crafting a 'Top Gun' Soundtrack Smash With 'I Ain't Worried,'" *Variety*, November 30, 2022, https://variety.com/2022/music/news/ryan-tedder-onerepublic-i-aint-worred-top-gun-maverick-hit-song-whistle-1235446172/.

sound-alike will give credits to the songwriter of the original song in order to prevent any future copyright issues.

These three types of interpolations are not the only kinds present in contemporary popular music, but these seem to be the most common. With all three of these types of interpolations, songwriting credits are given for the original song's songwriter, and the original songwriter is then paid royalties for that song. While some songs may seem like they fit into any of these categories of interpolations, for the purposes of my research, a song only contains an interpolation if songwriting credits are given to the original songwriter. For example, "Memories" by Maroon 5 does incorporate the melody from Pachelbel's Canon in D, but due to the original piece being available for public domain, no songwriting credits are given to the composer. Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, "Memories" is a great example of musical borrowing, but it is not a true interpolation. The definition of interpolation throughout this document relies on economic and copyright aspects, because of ambiguities that result from current copyright laws. While copyright protects recorded music, the only clear way to prove these protections is from a song's composition, which is not physically available for most pop songs since this genre comes from an oral tradition. Therefore, the credits are given to the songwriter for composing the song, because there is no physical score to prove similarities or dissimilarities between the two songs. The songwriting credit provides royalties to the original songwriter, allowing them to be paid for their composition. If songs are borrowing from public domain, no royalties need to go to another writer, thus putting them into a different category of musical borrowing.

The songs I will be analyzing are all by artists that are traditionally known for fitting into the pop genre. The reason for this is to understand how pop artists are interpreting techniques more commonly used by hip-hop artists and how this is impacting the popular music charts. While there is also value in analyzing hip-hop artists that are incorporating interpolations, because of the association with hip-hop and sampling, musical borrowing is generally more accepted in hip-hop genres, and is dealt with differently than in other genres.

"7 Rings" by Ariana Grande

One of the clearest examples of melodic interpolation is Ariana Grande's 2019 hit "7 Rings" which landed at aptly enough at #7 for *Billboard's* 2019 Year End Hot 100.[48] Each verse in Grande's "7 Rings" interpolates portions of the melody from the verses of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "My Favorite Things" from the musical *The Sound of Music (1959).* While Grande strays from the interpolated melody in the pre-choruses and choruses going into a more hip-hop rap spoken-lyric rhythmic vocal style, each verse includes the interpolation. Additionally, "7 Rings" mimics the minor key of "My Favorite Things." While the harmonic progression for "7 Rings" is simplified compared to "My Favorite Things," both follow a similar harmonic progression. "My Favorite Things" mainly uses a chord progression of i-VI-iv-VII-III, hinting at the relative major key toward the end of the progression with ii-V-I, while "7 Rings" simplifies this with the progression to i-VI-iv-V, a minor version of the 50s' Doo-Wop progression. The progression in "My Favorite Things" likely reflects the positive mood that Maria's

[48] "Year End Charts: Hot 100 Songs 2019," *Billboard,* Accessed February 2023, https://www.billboard.com/charts/year-end/2019/hot-100-songs/.

character is put in from thinking about her favorite things, or the positive mood that she is trying to reflect upon the children when they are scared of the thunderstorm. The harmonic progression for "7 Rings" is similar, but only sticks to the Doo-Wop progression in a minor key. It leaves out the last two chords hinting to the relative major and instead uses the minor key throughout the entire song. Whether intentionally left out by the songwriters or not, removing the hint toward the relative major leaves a different impact on the listeners.

Many middle-class American audience members would be able to identify the melodic interpolation in this song, as *The Sound of Music* is an incredibly popular film and musical in the United States. "7 Rings" provides several cues to the original song in addition to the borrowed melody. Some of the lyrics are similar to the original song, thus cueing the listener into the context of "7 Rings." For instance, if a listener did not pick up on the melody from "My Favorite Things," then they may be able to catch the reference to the original song from Grande's line "Buy myself all of my favorite things."[49] This should cue the listener to the reference from the original song, but if not, Grande also makes a couple of other references in her lyrics such as "Rather be tied up with calls and not strings" which is referencing the line "Brown paper packages tied up with strings" from "My Favorite Things."[50]

These references provide an extra and further added meaning to the song. In this instance, Grande is singing about money and other luxuries such as diamonds and

[49] Ariana Grande, "7 Rings," Track 10 on *Thank U, Next,* Republic Records, 2019, Spotify streaming audio.

[50] Rodgers & Hammerstein, "My Favorite Things," Performed by Julie Andrews, Track 7 on *The Sound of Music (Original Soundtrack Recording,* RCA Victor, 1965, Spotify streaming audio.

champagne rather than ephemeral and mundane pleasures such as observing raindrops on roses. While Julie Andrews's interpretation of Maria in the film adaptation of *The Sound of Music* sings "My Favorite Things" to the children to comfort them during a storm, the items in the song feel very humble and innocent, simple things just to comfort the children. To her, the things listed in the song are "nice things" although they have no monetary value. This goes along with her character in the movie, being more demure, as further seen when she stops singing to the children when Captain Georg von Trapp walks in, and he immediately is the one in charge of the situation.[51] In this adaptation, the man acts as the provider while Maria is only in charge of caring for the children. In the musical version of *The Sound of Music*, however, Maria sings this song in a very different context. Mother Abbess and Maria bond over the song as it is a shared childhood song for the both of them.[52] Mother Abbess realizes that Maria is not quite ready to commit to the religious life of a nun, as she is comforting herself with music and with materialistic things, things she should not be comforted by, and especially because she has difficulty following rules about when she does not have permission to sing.

The context of "My Favorite Things" in the musical more closely relates to the narrative context of Ariana Grande's "7 Rings." Both Maria and Ariana Grande are singing about materialistic things, although Ariana Grande's lyrics are much more focused on contemporary materialism. The callback to "My Favorite Things" implies that money and/or luxury goods are Grande's favorite things, going so far as Grande even

---

[51] *The Sound of Music,* directed by Robert Wise, (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 1965), 2 hrs. 54 min., DVD.

[52] "The Sound of Music Stage Synopsis," *The Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization,* 2022, https://rodgersandhammerstein.com/the-sound-of-music-stage-synopsis/.

implying that happiness can be bought, equating a pair of Louboutin heels to happiness.[53] In addition to the similarities in context to the musical version of Maria, Grande's persona of the song more closely aligns with Maria's character in the musical. In the film adaptation, Maria acts as more of a submissive character, while the musical version shows her being a stronger and more independent woman. Grande captures this strong independent persona as she is relying on herself to purchase the expensive goods that bring her comfort, rather than relying on a man to provide for her. She captures an incredibly independent character as she buys anything she wants immediately, and even denounces needing a man tied to her side with the lyrics "Wearing a ring, but ain't gon' be no "Mrs."/ Bought matching diamonds for six of my bitches."[54] This shows Grande's independence and focus on supporting other women, rather than being tied to a man. Grande has a widespread audience, with much of them being from younger generations, so picking a well-known song to interpolate, like "My Favorite Things" ensures that her audience will recognize the interpolation and understand the contextual connection. Additionally, with the strong independent persona that Grande is capturing, it is ensuring her audience that they can be strong independent women too.

Ariana Grande is known as a pop artist with R&B influences. However, *Thank U, Next*, the album that "7 Rings" is from, strays a little from her traditional sound and is noted to have a strong trap influence. This influence can be heard lyrically through themes of flaunting wealth and musically especially through the hi-hat and drums in the latter half of this song. Before Grande's success with her solo career as a pop singer, she

[53] Ariana Grande, "7 Rings."
[54] Ariana Grande, "7 Rings."

was known for her singing and acting. Her appearance as Cat Valentine in the Nickelodeon show *Victorious* propelled her into the spotlight, but her first experience with acting and singing professionally was in the Broadway show *13* in 2008.[55] Grande states that "7 Rings" was inspired by a personal experience of shopping with her friends at Tiffany's. Because of this personal account, it seems like Grande and her team of songwriters may have also included some other of her personal experiences in the creation of this song. With the influence of Tiffany's and the reference of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, it is possible that Grande is also capturing the independent persona of Holly Golightly from *Breakfast at Tiffany's.* Holly, played by Audrey Hepburn, is an independent woman who lives by herself and fancies nice things, such as Tiffany's. Holly, while reliant on men for her money, still makes decisions on her own, and always makes choices that are in her best interest and help support her eccentric lifestyle. Grande embodies this independent and materialistic personality in "7 Rings" and in both cases, materialism is not seen as a bad thing, but rather as a way that the women are able to support and provide for themselves. "7 Rings" addresses past constructions of female agency and power through referencing both *The Sound of Music* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Maria in *The Sound of Music* openly treasures things that are free, and Holly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* relies on men to purchase her nice things, but Grande has the power to buy luxuries for herself. Grande demonstrates a new construction of female agency through economic empowerment.

[55] "Ariana Grande," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 22, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ariana-Grande.

With her background in Broadway, it is unsurprising that Grande would be familiar with the musical *The Sound of Music*. With the form of her song starting with the interpolation from "My Favorite Things" and ending with a much more trap influence style of music, it is almost as if Grande is expressing her life changing from her beginnings in Broadway, to where she is currently, as a very successful R&B influenced pop artist. However, not everyone has been supportive of Grande's R&B and trap influences. "7 Rings" has been speculated to also contain references to The Notorious B.I.G.'s "Gimme the Loot" and Princess Nokia's "Mine" with claims that Grande copied both lyrics and flow from these two songs.[56] No credits have been given to either of the artists, and many people have claimed that Grande has gotten away with "stealing" from them.

This is not the first time that Grande has been accused of stealing or appropriating from Black artists and Black culture. Grande has been accused several times of Blackfishing, (when someone changes their appearance or personality to imitate and appear as a Black person) due to darkening her skin significantly with tanner. Additionally, Grande has borrowed traits of Black fashion such as her iconic slicked-back high ponytail. Although this hairstyle is closely associated with Ariana Grande, it brought her some critiques within "7 Rings" with her lyrics "you like my hair, gee thanks, just bought it."[57] Ariana Grande is praised for her high ponytail with long extensions, but when Princess Nokia sings about her hair in "Mine" saying "it's mine, I bought it"

[56] Spencer Kornhaber, "How Ariana Grande Fell Off the Cultural-Appropriation Tightrope," *The Atlantic*, January 23, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/01/ariana-grandes-7-rings-really-cultural-appropriation/580978/.

[57] Ariana Grande, "7 Rings."

referring to the hairpieces of Black women, she points out in her song how Black women are regularly ridiculed for this hairstyle instead of being praised like Ariana Grande.[58] Additionally, Grande has previously been accused of appropriating Japanese culture by getting a tattoo for "7 Rings" that she believed said "7 Rings" in Japanese characters, but was actually the name of a popular brand of grill.[59] This is not the only time she has appropriated Asian culture, as she was also accused of Asianfishing from a since deleted Instagram photoshoot where her skin appears lighter than her usual appearance, and her makeup has been altered to make her features look more like a K-Pop star. Grande is just one instance of a white artist appropriating from other cultures and not providing any accountability for their actions, a trend that has been prevalent among white artists since the beginnings of American popular music.

Despite these instances of controversy, "7 Rings" is still Grande's most popular song, and for the most part she remains positively in the public eye. "7 Rings" was undoubtedly popular with Grande's fans, gaining popularity as her second top song on Spotify. Many fans commented on the official music video for "7 Rings" with praise as their favorite song or a song they listen to on repeat. By including the interpolation from "My Favorite Things," "7 Rings" also rose to success with audiences outside of her fanbase, from those that found familiarity with the melody. "7 Rings" was able to introduce many of Grande's fans to "My Favorite Things" and many fans of *The Sound*

[58] Princess Nokia, "Mine," Track 5 on *1992 Deluxe*, Rough Trade Records, 2017, Spotify streaming audio.

[59] Spencer, "How Ariana Grande Fell Off the Cultural-Appropriation Tightrope."

of Music may have been introduced to trap inspired music though "7 Rings," perhaps enjoying a new music genre they may have not listened to before.

"Kings and Queens" by Ava Max

"Kings and Queens" by Ava Max is a great example of a song that includes both a melodic and production interpolation. Additionally, this song does not share a songwriting credit with just one song, but rather it shares a songwriting credit with two different songs. "Kings and Queens" by Ava Max, "You Give Love a Bad Name" by Bon Jovi, and "If You Were a Woman (And I Was a Man)" by Bonnie Tyler all give songwriting credits to Desmond Child, who wrote the iconic hook that can be heard in each of these songs.

Not only does "Kings and Queens" share a hook with both of these songs, but it also shares aspects of form and texture at several points. As one can see in Figure 2.1 and 2.2, each song follows a fairly typical verse-chorus form with the inclusion of a pre-chorus and a bridge. While this form is not unusual for popular music during these time periods, what is somewhat unusual and unique is that all three songs start with the chorus before the first verse. Additionally, the production is very similar throughout the hook in each song. As seen in Figure 2.1, "If You Were a Woman (And I Was a Man)" starts out with a very densely textured choir singing the full hook/chorus with added reverb on the voices. "You Give Love a Bad Name" begins with a chorus of voices by the band members who only sing the first half of the hook rather than the entire chorus, also with an intense added reverb. "Kings and Queens" starts out very similar to both of these songs, with the full hook/chorus being sung by Ava Max's voice layered rather than

including other singers, imitating that same reverb as the previous songs. This is a rather unique instance included in each of these songs, whereas many other examples of interpolation do not attempt to create such intense textural and timbral similarities in addition to the inclusion of the interpolated melody. While these production techniques alone do not necessarily state the need to list songwriting credits, they do contribute to the overall similarity to the original pieces, so when paired with the melodic interpolation, makes the interpolation even clearer.

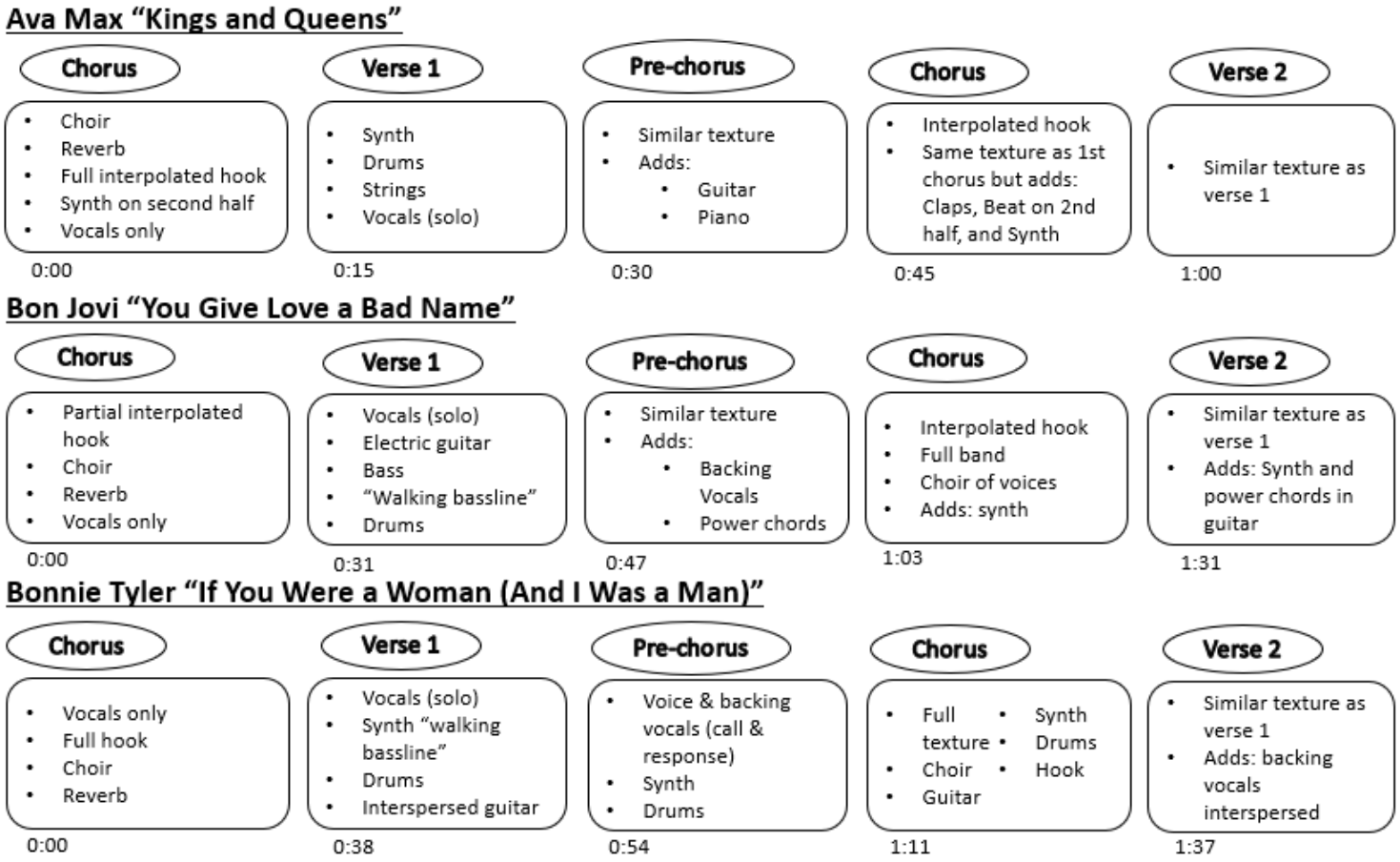

Figure 2.1 A diagram for the first half of the songs "Kings and Queens," "You Give Love a Bad Name," and "If You Were a Woman (And I Was a Man.)" This chart demonstrates the similarities in the three songs' forms and points out important timbral and textural changes to listen for during each section.

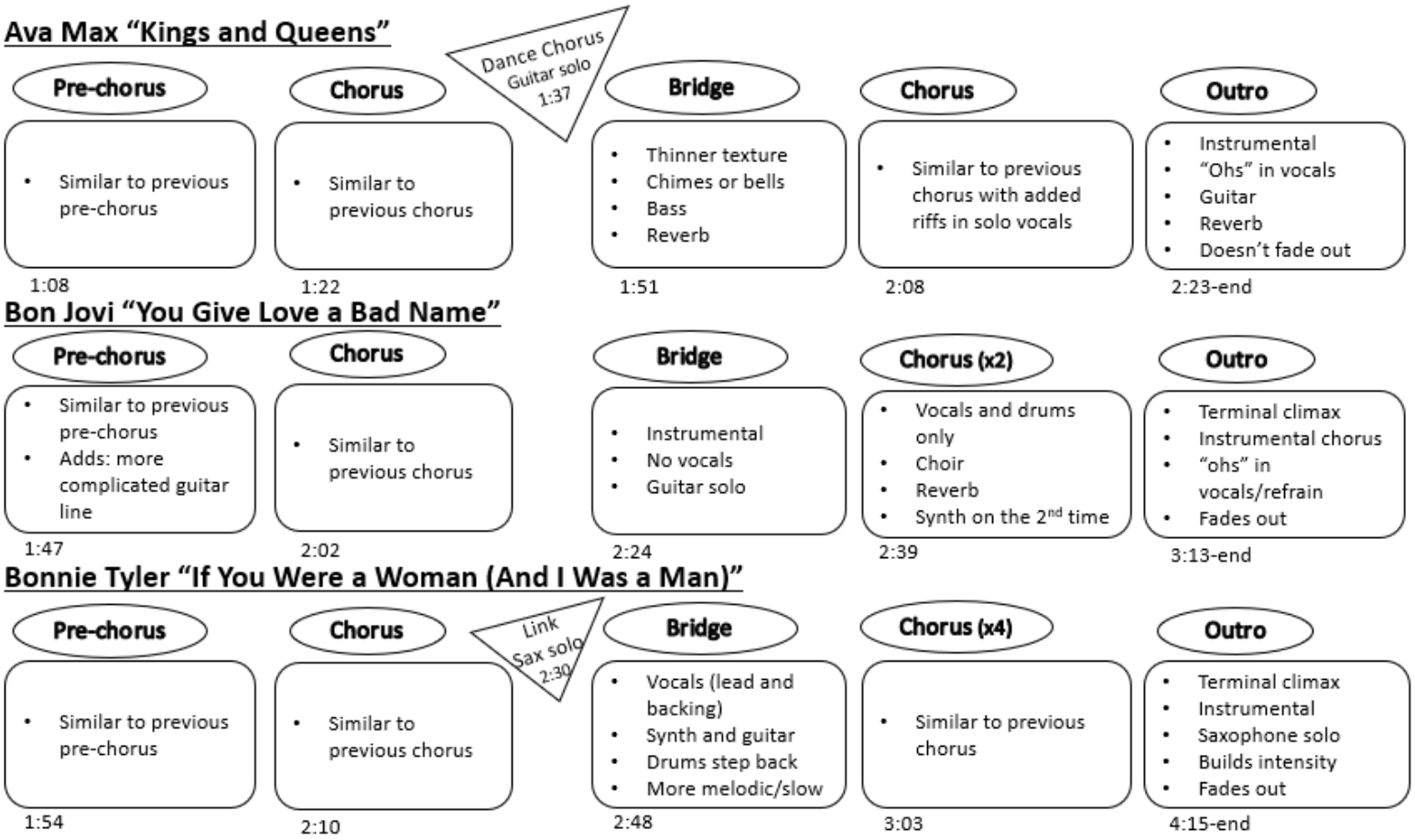

Figure 2.2 A diagram for the second half of the songs "Kings and Queens," "You Give Love a Bad Name," and "If You Were a Woman (And I Was a Man.)" This chart demonstrates the similarities in the three songs' forms and points out important timbral and textural changes to listen for during each section.

The similarities of "Kings and Queens" to its predecessors does not stop there. As seen in Figure 2.2, all three songs include an instrumental section either during or around the bridge, with a focus on an instrumental solo. Bonnie Tyler's song includes a saxophone solo as a link right before the bridge, Bon Jovi includes a guitar solo during the bridge, and Ava Max includes a Dance chorus before the bridge that also features a guitar solo. Additionally, all three songs include an outro/terminal climax that is mostly instrumental, which builds through to the end. Both Ava Max and Bon Jovi include some backing vocal embellishments in the form of "ohs" while Bonnie Tyler includes an improvised saxophone solo until the end. Both "You Give Love a Bad Name" and "If You Were a Woman (And I Was a Man)" fade out before the song ends, while "Kings and Queens" includes a conclusive final cadence in the electric guitar. Although these three songs do not all end with a fade out, this is unsurprising as pop songs that fade out were really popular between the 1950s' to the mid-1980s' but fell out of favor at the turn of the century.[60] It would be rather unusual for a Top 40 song during the 2020s' to include a fade out, so the cold end is likely just due to the popular nature of such an ending. The form of a song is not a copyrightable element as song forms have been copied and followed since practically the beginning of music. We see this in the commonality of classical forms such as sonata, concerto, and rondo forms. Verse/chorus forms in pop music tend to be the most popular, but switching up the form does not change the song that drastically. How closely these three songs follow a similar form just

[60] William Weir, "The Fade-out in Pop Music: Why Don't Modern Pop Songs End by Slowly Reducing in Volume?," *Slate,* September 14, 2014, https://slate.com/culture/2014/09/the-fade-out-in-pop-music-why-dont-modern-pop-songs-end-by-slowly-reducing-in-volume.html.

adds to the defense of a production interpolation, but alone would not constitute it as such.

"Kings and Queens" includes other stylistic aspects of both the '80's pop sound from Bonnie Tyler's song and the '80's hair metal rock sound from Bon Jovi. The inclusion of power chords in the synthesizer during the second half of the first chorus and throughout the second and third choruses of "Kings and Queens" is very reminiscent of the synths often used in '80's pop music. While "If You Were a Woman (And I Was a Man)" does not use the synth in the same way as "Kings and Queens," the synth can be heard playing the bassline throughout much of the song. "You Give Love a Bad Name" does also include a synthesizer in parts of the song, however it does not play as prominent of a role as in "Kings and Queens" or "If You Were a Woman (And I Was a Man.)" "Kings and Queens" does seem to be at least somewhat emulating that nostalgic '80's pop sound, a sound that has become increasingly popular around 2020. Not only does this show the song is keeping up with trends at the time, but it also pays homage to Bonnie Tyler's song specifically more so than Bon Jovi's with the emphasis on the synthesizer over other instruments, the pop style over a rock sound, and the focus on female vocals.

While the intention may not have been to pay greater homage to Bonnie Tyler rather than Bon Jovi, Ava Max does say in an interview with Kelly Clarkson that this song is about equality stating, "growing up I saw a lot of men in positions of power, and

not enough queens."[61] This statement is present even now with the greater popularity today of "You Give Love a Bad Name" over "If You Were a Woman (And I Was a Man.)" Many comments on Ava Max's official music video of "Kings and Queens" state that she is "copying" or "stealing" from Bon Jovi, whereas much fewer comments say anything about Bonnie Tyler. The choice of an '80s' pop sound of "Kings and Queens" rather than a '80's rock sound very well could be to pay homage and bring more attention to the "queen" Bonnie Tyler who has been overshadowed by Bon Jovi, at least with the comparison of popularity of these two songs.

"Good 4 U" by Olivia Rodrigo

Olivia Rodrigo's work is a very interesting case for interpolations. Several of her songs are classified as having additional songwriting credits, thus implying interpolation, though many instances of interpolations in her music are ambiguous and not obvious to many listeners. In the previous chapter I discussed an instance of Olivia Rodrigo retroactively adding songwriting credits to Hayley Williams and Josh Farro from the band Paramore, on Rodrigo's song "Good 4 U" due to the resemblances to Paramore's "Misery Business." When analyzing these songs, the melodies are not the same. As Adam Neely points out in his YouTube video "Did Olivia Rodrigo steal from Paramore? (analysis)" the two songs share a melodic contour targeting "the same tones every four bars in the chorus," starting on scale degree 3, going to scale degree 2, and then ending

[61] Salty, "Ava Max - Interview and "Kings & Queens" Performance with The Kelly Clarkson Show," YouTube video, 9:06, September 22, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ujMWu8Ucig.

on scale degree 1.[62] This does effectively make the listener focus on these target tones, which can lead to the choruses sounding the same for some listeners, despite the rest of the melodies differing.

While they follow a similar shape at times, the melodies are different enough that it would not be considered an issue of copyright. Many fans may not have picked up on this fact, since most of Rodrigo's fanbase are not musicologists, but many of them have noticed the comparable production techniques. Both songs emulate the punk-pop style, with heavy reliance on a strong backbeat in the drums, distorted electric guitar at the forefront, upbeat tempo, and prominence of a harsher voice. The overall textures both contain comparable instrumentation, and the timbre of both songs are also similar. Both songs do have some resemblance in the vocals, characterized by having impressive large leaps to high notes in the second half of the songs. Additionally, both choruses have the same harmonic progression: IV-I-V-vi, a rotation of the axis progression. Neely also points out that both songs have a similar harmonic scheme, starting in the relative minor during the verses and then progressing to the major during the choruses.[63] Despite these harmonic coincidences, harmony alone cannot be copyrighted. Yet, due to production techniques (such as similarities in texture, timbre, style, harmony, and syncopation) paired with shared themes of relationship angst, fans can pick up on a similar "feel" or "vibe" in both songs, thus resulting in the sound-alike quality of these songs.

[62] Adam Neely, "Did Olivia Rodrigo Steal from Paramore? (Analysis,)" YouTube video, 10:50, August 30, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX7a2p5_JsM.

[63] Neely, "Did Olivia Rodrigo Steal from Paramore?"

This is not the first instance of an artist being scrutinized for potential copyright issues due to a production interpolation. When Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams released the single "Blurred Lines" in 2013, the Marvin Gaye estate found it to sound incredibly close to Marvin Gaye's "Got to Give it Up" and sued Thicke and Williams for copyright infringement by not providing a songwriting credit to Marvin Gaye. Despite "Blurred Lines" not borrowing any melodic or direct reperformed elements of "Got to Give it Up," the estate argued that it has the same "feel" and "sound."[64] In regard to the validity of the argument, copyright can be awarded to the composition of a piece, but neither a harmony nor a "feel" can be copyrighted, however they can "contribute to the copyrightability of a musical composition as a whole."[65] The wording of copyright laws with recorded music can be interpreted as ideas themselves cannot be copyrighted, but expressions of ideas are.[66] Williams may have been inspired by "Got to Give it Up," but he did not seemingly intend on copying it. Yet, because he was familiar with the song, the court ruled in favor of the Gaye estate. Ultimately Thicke and Williams were found liable for copyright infringement, and retroactively added Marvin Gaye as a songwriter, to pay royalties to the estate. The laws on copyright in music seem to be rather ambiguous, and this case brought significant light to this issue. This was one of the earliest and biggest cases of copyright infringement that many artists felt was unfair and damaging to the music industry, compelling over 200 artists to sign and file an amicus brief with the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in support of Williams and Thicke to overturn

[64] Kal Raustiala and Christopher Jon Sprigman, "Squelching Creativity," *Slate*, March 12, 2015, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/03/blurred-lines-verdict-is-wrong-williams-and-thicke-did-not-infringe-on-marvin-gaye-copyright.html.

[65] Demers, "Sound-Alikes, Law, and Style," 309.

[66] Demers, "Sound-Alikes, Law, and Style," 306.

the $5.3 million final judgment.[67] Many artists felt like this prevented future artists from producing works inspired by previous ones, and likely delayed the use of interpolations in the mainstream pop industry. The outcome of the trial created concern that could potentially hinder techniques of musical borrowing—many of which have been present in music before recording technology was available, and even before the existence of pop music in its contemporary format.

The jury of the "Blurred Lines" case were neither musicologists, nor previously familiar with copyright laws with recorded music, so they were easily swayed by musicologists on the side of the Gaye estate which presented evidence of musical elements that are not copyrightable, and therefore should not have been considered. In the case of Rodrigo, her fans and listeners were playing the role of the jury—making assumptions on similarities that are not vital to the song's composition. Because of the impact that the "Blurred Lines" case had on the music industry, it is highly likely that Rodrigo and her publishing team tacked on songwriting credits to prevent another "Blurred Lines" outcome. In addition to adding Hayley Williams as a songwriter to "Good 4 U," Taylor Swift was also later added as a songwriter to Rodrigo's "Deja Vu," an interesting decision because Swift was already credited as a songwriter on "1 Step Forward, 3 Steps Back" at the original release of *SOUR*.

What complicates Rodrigo's situation even more is her song "Brutal," also from the album *Sour*. Many fans and critics pointed out the similarities in the guitar riff heard

[67] Eriq Gardner, "'Blurred Lines' Appeal Gets Support From More Than 200 Musicians," *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 30, 2016, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/blurred-lines-appeal-gets-support-924213/.

at the beginning of the song and throughout to Elvis Costello's hit "Pump it Up" from 1978. While these riffs show incredible similarities with timbre and melody, Rodrigo did not receive the same backlash for this song as she did for "Good 4 U" and "Deja Vu" despite "Brutal" being perhaps more quantifiably like "Pump it Up" than the other songs are to their original interpolated songs. The reason why Rodrigo did not receive as much criticism for "Brutal" can be explained by audience familiarity and Elvis Costello's reaction. Olivia Rodrigo is a contemporary pop artist, whose personal and musical style is heavily influenced by punk and alternative. She originally got her start on Disney Channel and launched her music and songwriting career through her role as Nini on Disney Channel's 2019 show *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*, inspired by the popular original Disney movie *High School Musical.* Because of this connection, much of Rodrigo's fanbase is younger such as people that would be regularly watching Disney Channel or people that are fans of the original *High School Musical.* Her fanbase is also much of the same demographic as Taylor Swift, and potentially, especially older fans of Rodrigo, would be familiar with Paramore as the band was at its peak of popularity around the same time as the peak popularity of *High School Musical*, which was released in 2006, and Paramore's most popular album *Riot!* releasing the very next year. While Rodrigo may share similar fanbases to Swift and Paramore, Elvis Costello as an older artist would not have much overlap with Rodrigo's fanbase. Elvis Costello is a singer/songwriter, often associated with New Wave, first became active in 1970 and while he is still active today, he is not in the same spotlight as some of these other pop artists. Rodrigo's audience would not widely recognize the connection of "Brutal" to "Pump it Up" because they would most likely be unfamiliar with the original song.

Additionally, Rodrigo received approval from Costello himself to incorporate the riff on "Brutal."[68] When backlash hit Rodrigo for "Brutal," Costello spoke up on Twitter coming to her defense stating, "It's how rock and roll works. You take the broken pieces of another thrill and make a brand new toy."[69] Because of less attention of "Brutal" compared to "Good 4 U" or "Déjà vu," and because of the approval from Costello himself, he is not listed as a songwriter on "Brutal," but if Costello did not provide any approval, this situation could have resulted much differently.

The previous case studies describe several different types of interpolation, showing the need for more specific terminology on melodic, textual, and production interpolations. Additionally, the cases show how the media is currently playing a large role in identifying interpolation, which has not always been the case. There likely will be more conversations in the future about what musical borrowings will be acceptable not only in the eyes of the law, but also in the eyes of fans. Becoming aware of these cases can help artists in the future predict how fans will react to interpolation and other musical borrowings, so that artists can determine the proper way to prepare for these reactions. The analysis from these songs demonstrates how interpolations can offer a deeper meaning to a song through intertextuality. By understanding the origins of an

[68] Mark Savage, "Elvis Costello Defends Olivia Rodrigo over Brutal Plagiarism Claim," *BBC News*, June 29, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-57650176.

[69] Elvis Costello, "This is fine by me, Billy. It's how rock and roll works. You take the broken pieces of another thrill and make a brand new toy. That's what I did. #subterreaneanhomesickblues #toomuchmonkeybusiness," *Twitter*, June 28, 2021, https://twitter.com/ElvisCostello/status/1409567943520931847.

interpolation, one can find a more meaningful listening experience with how each song interacts with its predecessor.

CHAPTER 3

ECONMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

Publishing Companies

Publishing companies like Primary Wave and Hipgnosis are leading the trend of publishing companies purchasing catalogs from artists with the goal of growing their library and earning royalties from it. Many publishing companies like these two are encouraging up-and-coming artists to interpolate songs from their library in hopes of creating a new hit song that brings attention not only to the new song, but brings listeners to the original song as well, thus boosting their revenue from not just one song, but two. We can see this happening in the case of Yung Gravy's "Betty (Get Money)." Released in 2022, "Betty (get Money)" garnered attention from interpolating Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up," a song that was not only a hit in the '80s', but also regained attention in the 2010s' for becoming the popular internet trend of "Rick Rolling." Interpolating "Never Gonna Give You Up" was practically a predicted success from the beginning, because it would garner attention from audiences by turning the infamous "Rick Roll" meme back into a trending song that one could listen to seriously, and somewhat separate it from the original meme. By interpolating "Never Gonna Give You Up," Yung Gravy became a hit on TikTok, and not only brought fans to listen to "Betty (Get Money)" on other streaming platforms, but also brought more fans to Rick Astley's

original song as well. This became such a hit on social media that radio stations also played Yung Gravy's hit, exposing both his song and "Never Gonna Give You Up" to a wider audience.

The trend of publishing companies purchasing artists' catalogs seems to correspond with the initial increase of interpolations in top hits, and with the creation and increased popularity of TikTok. The reliance of streaming contributes to a big part of this, especially more recently, with the COVID-19 pandemic contributing to the increase in streaming.[70] Each artist that sells their catalog to these publishing company seems to be selling it very differently, with some artists selling only their publishing rights, others are selling both the music composition and lyrics, and others may be selling the performance or recording rights. Additionally, artists may be selling all of their catalog or only a portion of it.[71] Primary Wave has been leading the trend of purchasing legacy catalogs, and other publishing companies have followed suit. These companies are not only buying catalogs, but also encouraging artists to sell their catalogs, especially if there is suspicion of an artist falling out of the spotlight, or potentially ending their career. Justin Bieber is one example of this, selling his music catalog to Hipgnosis in early 2023, with many speculating that it may be due to his lack of releasing new music and potential health concerns.[72] Bieber is one of the more contemporary artists selling their catalog, but

[70] Syb Terpstra, "Why Do Artists Sell Their Music Rights? And What Exactly Are They Selling?," *Lexology*, July 15, 2021, https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=b67e5d80-aaee-4b39-a003-998cff216db0.

[71] Terpstra, "Why Do Artists Sell Their Music Rights?"

[72] Oliver Darcy, "Justin Bieber Sells His Music Catalog," *CNN*, January 24, 2023, https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/24/media/justin-bieber-music-catalog-sale/index.html.

several other artists who were popular before the turn of the century have done the same. For instance, 1980s' and '90s' artists like Stevie Nicks, Prince, Whitney Houston, and Olivia Newton-John have also sold their music catalog. It is almost shocking to see on Primary Wave's website all of these legacy artists tied to their 'artists' page since many of these artists are no longer active and some of them are no longer living. The 'artists' tab on Primary Wave's website does not show only artists that are actively writing music for the publishing company, but rather shows the artists of which they own their music catalogs. Primary Wave's Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Lawrence Mestel, founded the company on the idea of acquiring legacy catalogs with the goals of "being forward thinking and re-introducing classic artists and their music into the modern marketplace as well as nurturing young talent to become legends themselves."[73] This ideology is seen by encouraging their modern artists to incorporate interpolations from their legacy catalogs.

Hipgnosis and Primary Wave have both hosted writing camps, where they bring together up-and-coming songwriters to create new music interpolating various songs from their catalogs.[74] With publishing companies working so closely with songwriters and encouraging them to interpolate specific songs from their catalogs, we are seeing a new age where publishing companies are becoming creative entities of their own. Publishing companies are not only encouraging songwriters to interpolate music from their catalogs, but they are also recruiting artists to perform and release these new songs.

[73] "About Primary Wave," *Primary Wave*, 2023, https://primarywave.com/about-pw/.

[74] Millman, "'No Shelf Life Now.'"

Many of them are recruiting artists who gained fame due to TikTok, like Yung Gravy. This allows publishing companies to blend new with old, and appeal to a generation of music listeners who are obsessed with the idea of nostalgia, even if that nostalgia is fabricated.

Publishing companies and record labels are currently competing with fans who are using social media to decide what music is popular, rather than having radio or record labels decide. Some of the most popular music trends from the past few years have come from TikTok, many of them not even being from traditional artists, such as the trend of "Jiggle Jiggle," which is a remix by Duke & Jones of an interview by Louis Theroux. Louis Theorux was never intending to create a hit song, but was rather freestyling a verse for an interview, and when it was remixed by Duke & Jones in 2022, it became a huge hit on TikTok, being one of the most played songs on the platform that year. With nontraditional songs becoming hits, it feels almost impossible to predict or force songs to popularity, but interpolations are one way publishing companies are trying to predict the next hit song. By setting up the right songwriter, the right interpolation, and the right artist, publishing companies can come up with the perfect hook that is both familiar and new, to strike up popularity on social media, and become the next big hit.

The Impact of Social Media

TikTok has become one of the leading ways that listeners discover new music, and is increasingly having a major impact on the music industry to the point that Ryan Tedder, lead singer for the band OneRepublic, has stated that "TikTok is the new

MTV."[75] TikTok has such a strong impact that in many cases it has launched songs higher in the charts, and can even cause them to become the top songs of the year. In the same interview where Tedder talks about TikTok as the new MTV, he points out that Lizzo's "About Damn Time" was falling in the charts, but when a TikToker came up with a dance to the song, the popularity of the song skyrocketed once again as people were emulating the dance trend on TikTok and boosting streams. The year 2020 saw a rise in popularity again for Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams" as one TikToker popularized the song while skateboarding and drinking cranberry juice. When this TikTok went viral, "Dreams" jumped by 374% in sales and 89% in streams, allowing the song to re-enter the Billboard Hot 100 at #21 after a forty-three year absence.[76] With the popularity of *Stranger Things* in 2022, Kate Bush's "Running Up That Hill" charted for the first time since its release in 1985, becoming her first ever U.S. Top 10 hit, and even landing a spot at #23 on *Billboard's* Year-End Hot 100 for 2022.[77] *Stranger Things* alone is not responsible for Kate Bush charting once again; the song became majorly popular on TikTok the same year, bringing in fans of *Stranger Things* and non-fans to this song. Seeing trends of older songs once again gaining popularity on TikTok encourages publishing companies to find ways of popularizing older songs from their library. For some, this might be as easy as selling the rights of a song to a popular TV show, but for others, it may be encouraging artists to interpolation songs from their catalog. These

[75] Willman, "Ryan Tedder Whistled While He Worked."

[76] "Doggface Gives the World a Smile with Juice, a Skateboard, and All the Vibes," *TikTok Newsroom,* October 14, 2020, https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/doggface-gives-the-world-a-smile-with-juice-a-skateboard-and-all-the-vibes.

[77] "Year End Charts: Hot 100 Songs – 2022." *Billboard,* 2023, https://www.billboard.com/charts/year-end/hot-100-songs/.

interpolations can cause subliminal nostalgia, tricking listeners into feeling familiar with a new song because it evokes the same feelings and emotions as an older hit.

With TikTok becoming the "new MTV," record labels are encouraging, and in many cases requiring, artists to post TikToks to boost their music and promote their songs.[78] Artists like Doja Cat have found significant popularity on TikTok by sharing aspects of their lives outside of music, while others focus almost exclusively on their music. Though the cases are rare, some singers have been discovered on TikTok and have launched their music career because of it. One of the most significant examples of this is JVKE who was discovered and promoted by Charlie Puth, an American singer-songwriter who is well-known on TikTok for promoting his music by demonstrating production techniques and behind the scenes of song creation. Puth followed and promoted JVKE on TikTok, and eventually Puth was featured on one of JVKE's songs, with their collaboration documented on TikTok. Puth first initiated their collaboration through a duet on TikTok where he added his own verse to JVKE's song "Upside Down" which then led to the creation of their official song and launched JVKE into the mainstream.[79]

TikTok not only allows for artists to launch into mainstream popularity, but its user-based algorithm also allows for artists to gain popularity who previously did not have a voice in the music industry. Semler, an openly queer Christian artist, gained

[78] Ashley Capoot, "TikTok Is Upending the Music Industry and Spotify May Be Next," *CNBC*, September 5, 2022, https://www.cnbc.com/2022/09/05/tiktok-is-upending-the-music-industry-and-spotify-may-be-next.html.

[79] JVKE, "How My Song with Charlie Puth Happened," YouTube video, 1:58, Dec 11, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKwsOfDtND4.

popularity on TikTok for their original songs, garnering the attention of listeners as well as the band Relient K, an early 2000s alternative band who are closely associated with the Christian community. Semler was invited to open for Relient K on their 2022 tour, promoting their music career outside of TikTok. Many members of LGBTQ+ community are not represented in contemporary Christian music, but through TikTok, Semler was able to break out of those constraints, find their voice to share with others, and became the first openly queer artist to reach #1 on the iTunes Christian charts, something that would not have been possible before TikTok.[80]

Now more than ever, artists are realizing the huge impact that TikTok has on their career, and because of TikTok's algorithm and the "For You Page" being dictated purely by users, fans decide what TikToks will become popular. Because of this, it is often quite difficult for a label to predict what is going to go viral on TikTok, and fans are deciding what songs will be hits rather than record labels or the radio. While many labels are pushing artists to promote their music on TikTok, many fans can sense when an artist is being disingenuous with their music promotion, and fans will opt to support a more organically recommended song instead. The only true way to predict what song will be the next hot trend is by using something that has already proven to be a hit, which is why interpolations become vital for promoting music on TikTok.

The chorus of "Kings and Queens" by Ava Max easily became a popular sound on TikTok due to its familiar melody. "Kings and Queens" contains the perfect amount of

[80] NBC News, "Queer Artist Semler Tops Christian Music Chart With New Album | NBC News NOW," YouTube video, 4:16, April 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_XKHe50TmY.

familiarity without being too obvious, thus creating that sense of subliminal nostalgia. By interpolating the melody and production from Bon Jovi's "You Give Love a Bad Name," but also incorporating new lyrics, fans can recognize the familiarity of a popular hook that is different enough to feel organic and not planted by the industry. Whether or not the songwriters for "Kings and Queens" intended for it to be trending on TikTok, the interpolation worked, proving that this formula of an interpolated hit hook can almost guarantee TikTok popularity.

The hook or an iconic chorus has become such an important part of a song's virality on TikTok. "Kings and Queens" is not the only song whose catchy or interesting hook caught the attention of viewers and the favoritism of the algorithm. As singer-songwriter Gabi Belle points out in her YouTube video "The TikTokification of Music," the structure of many pop songs seems to be moving away from the traditional verse/chorus/bridge form.[81] In many songs, the bridge is eliminated, and instead the song utilizes a verse/chorus form that first introduces the chorus or hook, hoping to catch immediate interest of the listeners, and emphasize a hook or a catchy lyric that will be utilized by others in future TikToks.[82]

One of the main draws of TikTok is the collaborative aspect of it, encouraging viewers and creators to incorporate music in different ways, and to duet or remix other TikToks. The trend of acting out songs or interacting with the music in a more dramatized manner has become more popular in recent years, straying away from the

[81] Gabi Belle, "The TikTokification of Music," YouTube video, 14:21, March 3, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mS4r5tDxASE.

[82] Belle, "The TikTokification of Music."

original trends of TikTok, where many creators became viral for dancing to popular songs. While dancing is still popular on TikTok now, trends have evolved to introduce skits, show off visual artwork, promote a business, and so much more. TikTok actively encourages users to search for videos using popular songs, and the algorithm promotes dueting and collaboration, where one user will react or interact to another user's video. TikTok tends to promote the more popular songs to users on their "For You Page," the main feed that users see where videos are "handpicked" by the algorithm for the independent user. This encourages users to create content including those more popular songs to drive views to their own posts. In some instances, a particular trend may be linked to a specific song, or a song may be used frequently in many different types of videos. This encourages the idea of "remixing" or changing/adding meaning to current content. When TikTok successfully encourages people to remix or interact with a certain sound, the app is able to push that information to many demographics and can introduce this music to a new audience. This not only encourages users to spend more time on the platform, but it also allows artists to reach a wider audience than before. This is one of the reasons why music labels may push so hard for their artists to promote music on TikTok. The same collaboration aspect that is so important on TikTok is an important driver for interpolations. When artists include an interpolation into a song, they are interacting more with the network of popular music. It creates a sense of collaboration within the song, even if the original songwriter did not actively work in the creation of the new song.

TikTok has become such an important driving force for the music industry, that in many ways it is uprooting the radio industry. While radio still functions very much the

same, it is currently having to compete or catch up to TikTok. This has led to many radio stations playing songs that became popular on TikTok first, in order to encourage listeners to stick to the radio stations, rather than falling out.

While TikTok seems to have the largest current impact on the production and consumption of music currently, other social media platforms are certainly contributing to the conversation. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are all encouraging fans to interact and discuss music in a quicker and more connected way than ever before. Fans are able to interact directly with artists, and fans are also able to interact more closely with each other. Mentions of artists on social media platforms are so prevalent that *Billboard* now includes streams on platforms such as Twitter when calculating song charts. As shown in several of the examples discussed in the previous chapters, social media greatly impacts how people listen to music and can inform other fans about interpolations in top hits or promote further connections to other songs. Social media creates a space where fans can interact with others, and this increased fan interaction can encourage artists to respond. Additionally, this fan to artist interaction has become a much more important role, where fans feel closer to an artist when the artist is able to respond to them, or when they are more present on social media. Interpolation further emphasizes collaboration by connecting to the network of popular music. By encouraging this collaboration and remixing culture, interpolations foster a way of recontextualizing previous songs in mainstream pop music.

Conclusion

With the momentum and popularity of interpolations, it is very likely to see more of them popping up in the near future. Interpolation, in its current form, is a trend that seems like it will continue as long as TikTok retains the userbase that it currently has. Media and the entertainment industry are currently promoting nostalgia and the trend does not seem to be stopping soon. Just like remakes or reboots of classic movies, songs that reimagine old hits have value in the industry and provide fans with the right amount of familiarity while also providing something new. Although there are concerns of copyright issues between artists, there generally seems to be a community sense of giving artists credit that they deserve, since many artists in the past have been smudged of their credit. Interpolation allows artists to react, interpret, borrow, and reference preexisting songs in a manner that does not hinder artist creativity and actively promotes inclusivity and collaboration within popular music. As social media remains such an integral part of many people's lives, for better or worse, this collaboration is of vital importance in today's culture and in the music industry. Interpolation allows artists to honor and highlight those that came before them. It provides a newer artist with the opportunity to garner more attention quickly, and it allows artists to reach a wider audience than previously available. As the world grows ever increasingly connected, so does the music industry, and musical trends are reflecting that. Just as with movie remakes, vintage clothing, or vinyl records, everything old is new again during an age where audiences are interested in preserving and participating in cultural nostalgia.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Belle, Gabi. “The TikTokification of Music.” YouTube video, 14:21. March 3, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mS4r5tDxASE.

Billboard. “Best Song Interpolations of the 21st Century: Staff Picks.” October 28, 2021. https://www.billboard.com/media/lists/best-interpolations-9651682/.

———. “Billboard Explains: How R&B/Hip-Hop Became the Biggest Genre in the U.S.” August 11, 2021. https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/billboard-explains-rb-hip-hop-biggest-genre-9613422/.

———. “Year End Charts: Hot 100 Songs.” 2023. https://www.billboard.com/charts/year-end/hot-100-songs/.

Boone, Christine. “Mashing: Toward a Typology of Recycled Music.” *Music Theory Online* 19, no. 3 (September 1, 2013). https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.13.19.3/mto.13.19.3.boone.html.

Burkholder, J. Peter. “Borrowing.” *Grove Music Online*, 20 January 2001. https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.52918.

———. “Musical Borrowing or Curious Coincidence?: Testing the Evidence.” *The Journal of Musicology* 35, no. 2 (2018): 223–66.

Capoot, Ashley. “TikTok Is Upending the Music Industry and Spotify May Be Next.” *CNBC*. September 5, 2022. https://www.cnbc.com/2022/09/05/tiktok-is-upending-the-music-industry-and-spotify-may-be-next.html.

Cook-Wilson, Winston. “Carly Rae Jepsen’s ‘Everything He Needs’ Features an Interpolation of a Harry Nilsson Song From the Popeye Soundtrack.” *SPIN*. May 17, 2019. https://www.spin.com/2019/05/carly-rae-jepsen-harry-nilsson-popeye-everything-she-needs/.

Costello, Elvis. “This is fine by me, Billy. It’s how rock and roll works. You take the broken pieces of another thrill and make a brand new toy. That’s what I did. #subterreaneanhomesickblues #toomuchmonkeybusiness.” *Twitter*. June 28, 2021. https://twitter.com/ElvisCostello/status/1409567943520931847

Darcy, Oliver. “Justin Bieber Sells His Music Catalog.” *CNN*. January 24, 2023. https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/24/media/justin-bieber-music-catalog-sale/index.html.

Demers, Joanna. “Sound-Alikes, Law, and Style.” *UMKC Law Review* 83, no. 2 (Winter 2014): 303–11.

Encyclopedia Britannica. “Ariana Grande.” June 22, 2022. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ariana-Grande.

Forman, Murray, and Mark Anthony Neal. *That’s the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. Second edition. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Fulford-Jones, Will. “Sampling.” *Grove Music Online*. January 20, 2001. https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.47228.

Fulton, Will. “Sampling and Sequencing, Hip Hop.” *Grove Music Online*. November 26, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2225524.

Gardner, Eriq. "'Blurred Lines' Appeal Gets Support From More Than 200 Musicians." *The Hollywood Reporter*. August 30, 2016. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/blurred-lines-appeal-gets-support-924213/.

Gates, Henry Louis. *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. Cary, U.K.: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1989. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/southcarolina/detail.action?docID=679616.

George, Nelson. *Hip Hop America*. New York: Viking, 1998.

Guan, Frank. "Rap Dominated Pop in 2017, and It's Not Going Anywhere Anytime Soon." *Vulture*. December 20, 2017. https://www.vulture.com/2017/12/the-year-rap-overtook-pop.html.

Harding, Charlie. "Interpolation Database Year End Hot 100 2010-2011 (2022 top 10.)" Unpublished raw data. Accessed February 2023.

———. "Pop Music Is Regurgitating Itself Faster Than Ever." *Vulture*. September 15, 2022. https://www.vulture.com/article/pop-music-regurgitations-switched-on-pop.html.

Harding, Charlie, Nate Sloan, and Reanna Cruz. "'Flowers' and the Art of the Response Song." *Switched on Pop*. Podcast audio. February 14, 2023. https://switchedonpop.com/episodes/flowers-miley-cyrus-bruno-mars-response-song.

Iasimone, Ashley. “Courtney Love Accuses Olivia Rodrigo of Copying Hole Album Cover Concept for ‘Sour Prom’ Photos.” *Billboard*. June 28, 2021. https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/courtney-love-olivia-rodrigo-album-cover-sour-prom-9593423/.

Jenkins, Christopher. “Signifyin(g) within African American Classical Music: Linking Gates, Hip-Hop, and Perkinson.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 77, no. 4 (Fall 2019): 391–400.

JVKE. “How My Song with Charlie Puth Happened.” YouTube video, 1:58. Dec 11, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKwsOfDtND4.

Kaufman, Gil. “Experts Explain How to Decipher — And Then Prove — Whether a Song Borrows By Accident or on Purpose.” *Billboard*. October 28, 2021. https://www.billboard.com/pro/interpolations-experts-prove-court/.

Keveney, Bill. “Exclusive: Nielsen Finds Nostalgia Fuels Interest in Classic TV Comedies during Pandemic.” *USA TODAY*. April 2, 2021. https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/tv/2021/03/19/nielsen-finds-covid-19-tv-viewing-spikes-classic-sitcoms/4754533001/.

Keyes, Cheryl. *Rap Music and Street Consciousness.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

Kornhaber, Spencer. “How Ariana Grande Fell Off the Cultural-Appropriation Tightrope.” *The Atlantic*. January 23, 2019. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/01/ariana-grandes-7-rings-really-cultural-appropriation/580978/.

Lacasse, Serge. “Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music.” *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, (2000): 35–58. https://doi.org/10.5949/liverpool/9780853238256.003.0003.

Leight, Elias. “Why You’re Hearing More Borrowed Lyrics and Melodies on Pop Radio.” *Rolling Stone*. July 5, 2018. https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/why-youre-hearing-more-borrowing-on-pop-radio-627837/.

Love, Courtney. “Spot the difference! #twinning! @oliviarodrigo.” *Facebook.* June 24, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/courtneylove/posts/345959820223117?comment_id=346823063470126&reply_comment_id=346831413469291&__cft__[0]=AZW4v93VRC2IYkumeqmzZj7Sm-8kfh_XkfBUesiI6S22-zDqp_mfXyCpxjAb7-8caGN4LEmoGZ6dUBkCbkZi5ITrIkAGSApVLd4w5ls__tIvmvA9IhtmSNDQCO2uu4_oNbqctfhHiOLyaVMtzfZ_BN07&__tn__=R]-R.

Middleton, Richard and Peter Manuel. “Popular Music.” *Grove Music Online*. January 20, 2001. https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.43179.

Millman, Ethan. “‘No Shelf Life Now’: The Big Business of Interpolating Old Songs for New Hits.” *Rolling Stone*. September 7, 2021. https://www.rollingstone.com/pro/features/olivia-rodrigo-doja-cat-interpolation-music-1220580/.

NBC News. “Queer Artist Semler Tops Christian Music Chart With New Album | NBC News NOW.” YouTube video, 4:16. April 1, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_XKHe50TmY.

Neely, Adam. “Did Olivia Rodrigo Steal from Paramore? (Analysis.)” YouTube video, 10:50. August 30, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX7a2p5_JsM.

Newton, Matthew. “Is Sampling Dying?” *SPIN*. November 21, 2008. https://www.spin.com/2008/11/sampling-dying/.

Primary Wave. “About Primary Wave.” 2023. https://primarywave.com/about-pw/.

Rabaka, Reiland. *Hip Hop’s Inheritance: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011.

Raustiala, Kal, and Christopher Jon Sprigman. “Squelching Creativity.” *Slate*. March 12, 2015. https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/03/blurred-lines-verdict-is-wrong-williams-and-thicke-did-not-infringe-on-marvin-gaye-copyright.html.

Robinson, Kristin. “How Primary Wave Proved Everything Old Is New Again With Yung Gravy’s Radio Hit.” *Billboard*. September 15, 2022. https://www.billboard.com/pro/primary-wave-yung-gravy-radio-hit-sample-strategy/.

Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994.

Salty. “Ava Max - Interview and “Kings & Queens” Performance with The Kelly Clarkson Show.” YouTube video, 9:06. September 22, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ujMWu8Ucig.

Savage, Mark. “Elvis Costello Defends Olivia Rodrigo over Brutal Plagiarism Claim.” *BBC News*. June 29, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-57650176.

Schloss, Joseph Glenn. *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004.

Sewell, Amanda. "A Typology of Sampling in Hip-Hop." Ph.D. diss, Indiana University, Indiana, 2013. https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/1427344595/abstract/CCE46814E6F64782PQ/1.

Stewart, Earl L. *African American Music: An Introduction*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1998.

Terpstra, Syb. "Why Do Artists Sell Their Music Rights? And What Exactly Are They Selling?" *Lexology*. July 15, 2021. https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=b67e5d80-aaee-4b39-a003-998cff216db0.

The Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization. "The Sound of Music Stage Synopsis." 2022. https://rodgersandhammerstein.com/the-sound-of-music-stage-synopsis/.

TikTok Newsroom. "Doggface Gives the World a Smile with Juice, a Skateboard, and All the Vibes." October 14, 2020. https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/doggface-gives-the-world-a-smile-with-juice-a-skateboard-and-all-the-vibes.

TikTok Newsroom. "New Studies Quantify TikTok's Growing Impact on Culture and Music." July 21, 2021. https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/new-studies-quantify-tiktoks-growing-impact-on-culture-and-music.

VladTV. “CJ: ‘Whoopty’ Had an Uncleared Sample from Indian Movie, We Had to Pay Them $80K (Part 3.)” *Facebook*. April 3, 2022. https://www.facebook.com/vladtv/videos/cj-whoopty-had-an-uncleared-sample-from-indian-movie-we-had-to-pay-them-80k-part/393572678880924/.

Weir, William. “The Fade-out in Pop Music: Why Don’t Modern Pop Songs End by Slowly Reducing in Volume?” *Slate*. September 14, 2014. https://slate.com/culture/2014/09/the-fade-out-in-pop-music-why-dont-modern-pop-songs-end-by-slowly-reducing-in-volume.html.

Whosampled. “WhoSampled.com - About Us.” YouTube video, 1:26. Jan 10, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9SgiN5g9mY.

WhoSampled.com. “About Us.” 2023. https://www.whosampled.com/about/.

Williams, Justin A. *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*. Cambridge Companions to Music. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

———. “Theoretical Approaches to Quotation in Hip-Hop Recordings.” *Contemporary Music Review* 33, no. 2 (March 4, 2014): 188–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2014.959276.

Willman, Chris. “Ryan Tedder Whistled While He Worked: OneRepublic’s Frontman on Crafting a ‘Top Gun’ Soundtrack Smash With ‘I Ain’t Worried.’” *Variety*. November 30, 2022. https://variety.com/2022/music/news/ryan-tedder-onerepublic-i-aint-worred-top-gun-maverick-hit-song-whistle-1235446172/.

Wise, Robert, director. *The Sound of Music*. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 1965. 2 hrs., 54 min. DVD.

APPENDIX

DISCOGRAPHY

Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force. “Planet Rock.” Single. Tommy Boy Entertainment, 1982. Spotify streaming audio.

Ariana Grande. “7 Rings.” Track 10 on *Thank U, Next.* Republic Records, 2019 Spotify streaming audio.

Ava Max. “Kings & Queens.” Track 3 on *Heaven & Hell.* Atlantic Records, 2020. Spotify streaming audio.

Bon Jovi, “You Give Love a Bad Name.” Track 2 on *Slippery When Wet*. Mercury Records, 1986. Spotify streaming audio.

Bonnie Tyler. “If You Were a Woman (And I Was a Man).” Track 2 on *Secret Dreams and Forbidden Fire*. Columbia Records, 1986. Spotify streaming audio.

Bruno Mars. “When I Was Your Man.” Track 6 on *Unorthodox Jukebox*. Atlantic Records, 2012. Spotify streaming audio.

The Chainsmokers. “Closer.” Featuring Halsey. Single. Disruptor Records/Columbia Records, 2016. Spotify streaming audio.

CJ. “Whoopty.” Single. Warner Records, 2020. Spotify streaming audio.

Doja Cat. “Kiss Me More.” Featuring SZA. Single. Kemosabe Records/RCA Records, 2021. Spotify streaming audio.

Elton John. “The One.” Track 2 on *The One*. MCA/The Rocket Record Company, 1992.

———. “Tiny Dancer.” Track 1 on *Madman Across The Water*. Uni Records/DMJ Records, 1971. Spotify streaming audio.

Elton John and Britney Spears. “Hold Me Closer.” Single. EMI Records, 2022. Spotify streaming audio.

Elvis Costello. “Pump It Up.” Track 4 on *This Year’s Model (2021 Remaster).* Radar Records, 1978. Spotify streaming audio.

Fleetwood Mac. “Dreams.” Track 2 on *Rumours*. Warner Bros., 1977. Spotify streaming audio.

JVKE. “Upside Down.” Featuring Charlie Puth. Single. 2020. Spotify streaming audio.

Kate Bush. “Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God).” Track 1 on *Hounds of Love (2018 Remaster).* EMI Records, 1985. Spotify streaming audio.

Kraftwerk. “Trans-Europe Express.” Track 4 on *Trans-Europe Express (2009 Remaster).* Kling Klang/EMI, 1977. Spotify streaming audio.

Lizzo. “About Damn Time.” Single. Nice Life Recording Company/Atlantic Records, 2022. Spotify streaming audio.

Maroon 5. “Memories.” Track 11 on *Jordi.* 222 Records/Interscope Records, 2019. Spotify streaming audio.

Marvin Gaye. “Got to Give It Up.” Track 15 on *Favorites (2008).* Tamla, 1977. Spotify streaming audio.

Miley Cyrus. “Flowers.” Single. Columbia Records, 2023. Spotify streaming audio.

Olivia Newton-John. “Physical.” Track 6 on *Physical*. 1981. EMI/MCA, 1981. Spotify streaming audio.

Olivia Rodrigo. “1 Step Forward, 3 Steps Back.” Track4 on *SOUR.* Geffen Records, 2021. Spotify streaming audio.

———. “Brutal.” Track1 on *SOUR.* Geffen Records, 2021. Spotify streaming audio.

———. “Deja Vu.” Track 5 on *SOUR.* Geffen Records, 2021. Spotify streaming audio.

———. “Drivers License.” Track 3 on *SOUR.* Geffen Records, 2021. Spotify streaming audio.

———. “Good 4 U.” Track 6 on *SOUR.* Geffen Records, 2021. Spotify streaming audio.

OneRepublic. “I Ain’t Worried.” Single from *I Ain’t Worried (Music From The Motion Picture “Top Gun: Maverick.”)* Mosley Music Group/Interscope Records, 2022. Spotify streaming audio.

Paramore. “Misery Business.” Track 4 on *Riot!* Fueled by Ramen, 2007. Spotify streaming audio.

Peter Bjorn and John. “Young Folks.” Track 3 on *Writer’s Block*. Wichita Recordings, 2006. Spotify streaming audio.

Princess Nokia. “Mine.” Track 5 on *1992 Deluxe.* Rough Trade Records, 2017. Spotify streaming audio.

Robin Thicke. “Blurred Lines.” Featuring T.I. and Pharrell Williams. Track 1 on *Blurred Lines.* Star Trak Recordings/Interscope Records, 2013. Spotify streaming audio.

Rick Astley. “Never Gonna Give You Up.” Track 1 on *Whenever You Need Somebody*, 1987. RCA Records and PWL. Spotify streaming audio.

Rodgers & Hammerstein. “My Favorite Things.” Performed by Julie Andrews. Track 7 on *The Sound of Music (Original Soundtrack Recording).* RCA Victor, 1965. Spotify streaming audio.

Taylor Swift. “Cruel Summer.” Track 2 on *Lover*. Republic Records, 2019. Spotify streaming audio.

The Notorious B.I.G. “Gimme the Loot – 2005 Remaster” Track 3 on *Ready to Die (The Remaster).* Bad Boy Records/Arista Records, 1994. Spotify streaming audio.

Yung Gravy. “Betty (Get Money.)” Single. Republic Records, 2022. Spotify streaming audio.