

Review

Gregory, G. 2012. *Send in the Clones: A Cultural Study of the Tribute Band*. Sheffield: Equinox. ISBN 978-1-84553263-5 (hbk); 978-1-84553-245-1 (pbk). 172 pp.

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The tens of thousands of tribute bands engaged in mimetic reproductions of famous performers represent the numeric opposite of the scholarly attention devoted to this global music phenomenon of performance and celebrity simulation. Outside of Steven Kurutz's lighthearted freelance book *Like a Rolling Stone: The Strange Life of a Tribute Band* (2008), Georgina Gregory provides the first single-author examination of the vast proliferation of tribute reproductions and, in doing so, contributes to an important but under-populated field of interest in popular music studies. In this way, she offers a welcome augmentation of Shane Homan's fascinating edited collection (2006), and its diverse authors who constitute the nascent tribute band literature. Within this compelling group of researchers, Gregory helps assuage a lack of analysis on working bands in general through a vital expansion of the scholarly portrayals of popular performance.

The book features an unexpectedly deep historical context, from the obscure tribute archetype of 'ghost bands' that reproduced big band repertoires, to the emergence of cover groups and the first tribute band prototypes. This history incorporates the previous incarnations of these bands, including Led Zeppelin proto-tributes, The White, and prehumorous Elvis impersonation. From these historical precedents, Gregory tracks The Rutles (The Prefab Four) 1970s television Beatles parodies and the Beatlemania musical, which inspired The Bootleg Beatles and the other early tribute bands that followed (39).

The breadth of the research aims of the book is based partially in the staggering scope and creative fringes of the tribute bands themselves, from Nudist Priest (who perform naked renditions of Judas Priest songs), to Mandonna (Madonna's all-male and predominantly bearded tributes), and Li'l G'n'R (the unlikely child performers of Guns N' Roses stage shows). This sweeping performative scope is filtered through an array of aesthetic components including the bands' expressions of appearance memes, soundalike authenticity, celebrity death, and 'subversive potential' (47).

The book is crafted around a comprehensive phalanx of personal and virtual interviews with tribute band members, tour managers, and diehard fans. The theoretical framework is similarly framed over an astute understanding of popular music studies and performance studies. Gregory's philosophical discussion includes the obvious resonance of Baudrillardian simulation, but also integrates unexpected sources such as Plato, Aristotle, and psychoanalysis. It also deftly showcases the provocative imagery of tribute bands and their physical artifacts, and provides a few randomly placed case studies of bands that she developed close interactions with, such as The Counterfeit Stones and The Iron Maidens.

Beginning with the fourth chapter, 'Establishing a Typology', the book could comprise an alternate instructional guide for the self-management of tribute band careers. Her narratives address the demands of working life, and at the same time, provide an honest assessment of the derisive attitude that many tribute bands face. Gregory's analysis mediates the lack of recognition for these bands by contextualizing them within a widespread critical aversion to copying. This appraisal of critical response to the 'parodic workforce' makes substantial contributions to popular music studies by offering a nuanced consideration of the tribute phenomenon's association with wider perceptions of creative copying, artistic individuality, financial symbiosis, and periodic antagonism with original bands (112–23).

Although the text includes occasional typos, missing punctuation and awkward phrases, one of the most obvious technical criticisms emerges from the volume's lack of a conclusion. Instead, readers are left abruptly among exhaustedly sated crowds and discarded plastic cups after a brief case study encounter with a Thin Lizzy tribute act at the Manchester Academy. Nevertheless, the final chapter on fandom and collective participation offers intriguing analyses of the dynamic role of fleeting youth, the emotional vacuum of dead rock icons, and the redemptive participation in 'live imitative entertainment' (144). Among these entertaining clones, Georgina Gregory successfully navigates the interactive small-scale gigs and profitable tribute behemoths to offer a scholarly and fan-based assessment of the paradox of accessibility and alienation within contemporary popular music.

References

- Homan, S. 2006. *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Kurutz, S. 2008. *Like a Rolling Stone: The Strange Life of a Tribute Band*. New York: Broadway Books.