

## Publication Reviews

This book is too specialised for the casual reader and will not satisfy the knowledgeable to realise the potential of its premise.

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### **Homan, S (ed) (2006) *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*, Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press**

The tribute band phenomenon is a complex and multi-faceted one, with roots that extend into the mid-1960s and probably further. The story that Adelaide group The Twilights were able to present live and entirely credible renditions of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *Ogdens' Nut Gone Flake* in toto is possibly apocryphal, though it is worth noting that a recent Twilights reunion saw them concentrate only on performing Beatles material, despite an impressive array of self-penned hits. The twenty-first century emergence of what amount to 'artist self-tribute' – shows in which artists will play one of their own 'classic' albums in sequence – may also lend itself to consideration within the 'tribute' genre.

Neither of these examples, or anything similar, is addressed here. The authors within Shane Homan's edited collection tackle diverse tribute band phenomena, be they Beatles shows (Homan) or Japanese bands paying homage to The Ventures (Keiji Maruyama and Shuhei Hosokawa). This is done with a variety of agendas. It is easy to detect an underlying cynicism, even dismay, in places. Tribute acts are not generally typified as creative (or even 'real') musicians, and when Homan tells the reader that an attempt by a British version of Bjorn Again to inform its audience of ABBA's folk roots is considered brave and admirable, we glimpse the shiny tendrils of pedantic and prescriptive academe (luckily, we only see this in a footnote) (49). In the case of Bjorn Again, the alternative theatre elements of the act – parts of it, as described here, are parody as much as celebration, incorporating numerous and rather passé digs at 'Swedishness' – could have been more closely examined. Bjorn Again is surely much more the product of Australian alternative theatre than it is a calculated homage. Indeed, products such as the witty response to Erasure's *Abba-esque* EP, titled *Erasuresque*, go unmentioned.

The final section of the book is perhaps its most problematic, largely because, in opening up new directions and geographical study areas, it abandons the original concept. The Chinese and Papua New Guinean artists surveyed by Tony Mitchell and Denis Crowdy, respectively, are not tribute acts but examples of non-western appropriation of western culture for an additional purpose. Questioning 'when', 'who' and 'where' the music came from is largely beside the point in these scenarios and there is no attempt to recreate, 'access', or connect to another era. Had such an open approach to appropriation and cover versions been reflected throughout the book, other extremely interesting aspects of rock music in the

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twenty-first century could have been discussed. Presumably everything that could ever be said about sampling has already been documented. But the issue of ostensibly original groups who take the sound and style of other seminal acts – while admittedly taking the academic researcher into dangerously subjective waters – remains largely unexplored. A number of Australian acts of the past and present who, deliberately or unconsciously, have tapped into the public's desire for a safer version of something lost to international markets, or otherwise unavailable, immediately spring to mind: the common dismissal, for example, of Tex Perkins as a safer, and more available, Nick Cave. The leader of a top ten chart act of the 1990s once complained to me when I accused him, in print, of imitating others in sound and style, and claimed 'influence' over imitation. No doubt there are many other examples which are as good or better and, as such, these require consideration within the 'cover band' parameters.

That the tribute band phenomenon is so widely accepted in the present is, in itself, unsurprising. Even if we accept that the future of rock music is long-tail niche marketing, the collective, active and passive consumer pasts within generations will long be ripe for such ventures, even given the apparent truth that young music consumers in the present day seem far more magpie-like than previous generations, in terms of picking from, swapping and appropriating songs of the past and present without baggage. As with all manifestations of live popular music, audience experience is varietal and impossible to typify, connected in many ways to the regard audiences may have for skill (in musicianship or reproduction) and/or entertainment value, as seen through the filter of numerous intangibles. That being a given, the main point of interest for tribute acts is their own rationales for their existence, if that moves beyond the mere fact of commercial benefit.

As all these points reveal, *Access All Eras* – while a decent starting point for discussion on the reconfiguration and appropriation of image, sound and product within the tribute band/covers band arena – remains only a starting point. It evokes some important, and indeed fascinating, case studies of cross- and inter-cultural musical and performative creation. One can only hope that the work is sufficiently successful and widely read that Homan and others are able to take the discussion into new territories, analysing these notions of influence, homage and re-creation with greater complexity.

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**Brophy, P (2004) *100 Modern Soundtracks*, London: British Film Institute Publishing**

Many of these short pieces originally appeared in a series entitled "The Secret History of Film Music" in the British music monthly the Wire: a rather snobbish and anti-academic vehicle for 'adventures in sound' which covers everything