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Girls, Rock Your Boys: Female Tribute Acts and the Reclamation of Rock

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Graduate Program in Popular Music and Culture
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts
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Abstract

Female musicians who perform in tribute acts to male rock artists are an increasingly popular form of live musical entertainment, from Lez Zeppelin (Led Zeppelin) to Hervana (Nirvana). The purpose of this thesis is to explore the motivations for or rewards derived through tributing for women. Original interviews with artists and participant observation at performances are used for analysis alongside published interviews, videos, and website information. Discussions reveal how female tribute acts subvert the patriarchal dominance of rock music's history by re-imagining canonical figures as women, as well as how archetypal signifiers of masculinity can be separated from male bodies and performed effectively via a feminized embodiment. Additionally, tribute performance spaces serve as communal fandom gatherings where texts can be reinterpreted and transformed through collective participation by musicians and audiences alike. In sum, female tribute acts allow new creative possibilities for women's further involvement in rock and popular music-making.

Keywords

Popular music, gender, fandom, female musicians, tribute, tribute acts, women, rock

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

1.1 Topic and Background

In a 2005 piece for *SPIN* Magazine, rock journalist Chuck Klosterman attends a performance by Lez Zeppelin, a four-piece, all-female tribute band to the legendary 1970s rock group, Led Zeppelin. He is immediately impressed with the band's abilities: "Their recreation of these songs is 80 percent flawless and 99 percent awesome," he writes;

They sound like what would've happened if Heart had somehow written four songs that were all better than "Barracuda." And there are a few jarring moments when it will feel like the most powerful all-female band in rock history is not the Runaways or L7 or Sleater-Kinney; it will feel like the most powerful all-female band in rock history is made up of four women playing cock rock... That might sound sexist (and perhaps it is), but it also might be true.¹

In his subsequent profile of both Lez Zeppelin, AC/DC tribute band AC/DShe, and Cheap Trick tribute Cheap Chick, Klosterman was perhaps the first to publicly identify in the media a metacultural phenomenon that, in the decade since, has perceivably only grown: that is, bands comprised entirely of women who enact live the musical repertoire of other performers – typically those who, in their original incarnation, were all men. His reaction to Lez Zeppelin, while succinct, is enormously telling of the many complicated and often contradictory layers of meaning such bands present when situated within the current discourse of popular music and, specifically, rock music.

This thesis is an exploration of contemporary all-female tribute acts to male rock artists: their role and function in the world of live music entertainment, their capacity for gender-bending and breaking through social norms, and their participation in fandom activities that transcend the prescribed boundaries between text and audience and transform the

¹ Chuck Klosterman, "She's Got Big Balls," *SPIN* June 2005, 72-78: 74.

original works through their remaking. While these types of acts appear to be an increasingly common phenomenon throughout North America and parts of Western Europe, there has been little extensive inquiry into how, why, or where they operate. While the potential issues and areas of research within this subject field are many, the main questions I attempt to unravel within these pages and throughout the following three chapters are: Why do women tribute male rock acts? What compels them to start, and what propels them to keep going? What do they get out of the experience? Obviously, the answers to these questions are not simple or singular, but the subsequent sections attempt to unpack the grounds of rationale through three different angles – namely, function, fluidity, and fandom.

Klosterman's appraisal of Lez Zeppelin is useful for highlighting some of the incentives behind and controversies surrounding female tributing from the start. Most obvious is their femaleness. As is typical of many discussions of female musicians in the mainstream press, the members of Lez Zeppelin are foregrounded in the *SPIN* article by their gender; the music they produce is mediated in terms of comparison solely with other female groups (Heart, the Runaways, L7, Sleater-Kinney) who bear little in common musically other than the primary members' genitalia. This is likely due in part to cultural expectations that female instrumentalists are less competent than men² – and so comparing women only with other women is construed as “fair,” as though they cannot compete with male ability. Furthermore, their “all-girl” appeal, whether advertised as such or not, posits these groups as a kind of novelty act, a derivation from the male norm that is to be tolerated and interpreted by viewers as primarily a spectacle rather than studied musicianship or serious creative output.

Klosterman also alludes to each of the aforementioned female groups in terms of their relative “power” – a highly masculine-coded word, yet one that is also enmeshed in rock discourse (e.g., “power chords,” “power ballad,” etc.). Paradoxically, even as female

² See, e.g., Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

music-makers are ghettoized by the rock press, they are still held to the same standards of male-centric rock vocabularies. But the case for comparing Lez Zeppelin to other “female bands” is heavily complicated by the fact that they are a tribute band – and, even more pertinently, a band tributing an all-male rock band highly notorious for blatant misogynistic conduct, on stage and off.³ Arguably, the “power” Klosterman attributes to Lez Zep is itself a remnant of the masculine codings associated with the original group, reaffirming the belief that men’s music is more powerful (and, by implication, inherently different) than women’s music. At the same time, it demonstrates how tightly interwoven are the concepts of “power” and “masculinity,” especially within rock’s discourse.

This is what Klosterman appears to fear in being accused of sexism: that his enjoyment of women playing male music over that of women playing music written by women somehow implicates him in the continual churn of patriarchal dominance in rock music. And in fact, the women of Lez Zeppelin might themselves be accused of willfully perpetuating their own subjugation; as Jennie Ruby writes in a response to Klosterman’s *SPIN* article, “women playing up to the male gaze” – by playing hard rock, by wearing provocative clothing, by acting sensuously with each other on stage, as the members of Lez Zeppelin often do – “is not the same thing as women’s self-actualization as artists... All-girl tribute bands can automatically draw a crowd, because men and women will come to see a performance of men’s music. But women doing men’s music to get some respect is not the same thing as women’s music getting respect.”⁴ In terms of a broad feminist agenda calling for a more equal representation of women in music – and rock music in particular – Lez Zeppelin, and groups like them honoring the male dinosaurs of rock’s past, are often castigated as gender-traitors, hindering the progress of female musicians at large by rehashing and validating the sexism of old.

³ See Susan Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴ Jennie Ruby, “Women’s ‘Cock Rock’ Goes Mainstream,” *Off Our Backs* 35, no.7/8 (2005), 42-44: 44.

Latent within these discussions are aesthetic judgments and ideological preconceptions surrounding originality, authenticity, and creativity in rock music – or, more broadly, rock’s and tributing’s respective “functions.” Klosterman’s privileging of Lez Zeppelin’s “power” over that of other female bands might be read as inflammatory not only because of its reiteration of a patriarchal musical value system, but also because of Lez Zeppelin’s comparatively marginal status as a *tribute* band – a qualifier that serves to delineate acts who perform other artists’ material from the more “real” bands who write and perform their own music, those bands that we tend to call just “bands.” Though tribute bands (and their even less-respected counterparts, the cover band⁵) contribute a significant proportion of the entertainment in local-level live popular music venues in cities and towns across the English-speaking world, they are often maligned in comparison with original-music bands, castigated as imitators, wannabes, or copycats who both capitalize selfishly off the cultural product of another and possess little creative talent or skills of their own.

Perhaps even more pessimistically, tribute bands are cited by cultural critics as proof that “the music industry has successfully colonized our musical imaginations”⁶ or as indicative of an “end-stage vision of capitalism where the commodification of the past compromises innovation and the capacity to generate any worthwhile statements.”⁷ In other words, Lez Zeppelin’s repetitious invocation of popular music history, the reiteration of its sexist codes and easy commercial viability, might impede social advancement within these realms by both offering validation for its messages and by blocking accessible opportunities to would-be artists or innovators; a venue booked up

⁵ See Stephen B. Groce, “Occupational Rhetoric and Ideology: A Comparison of Copy and Original Music Performers,” *Qualitative Sociology* 12.4 (1989), 391-410.

⁶ Jason Lee Oakes, *Losers, Punks, and Queers (and Elvii too): Identification and ‘Identity’ at New York City Music Tribute Events*. Diss. Columbia University, 2005 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2005): 20.

⁷ Georgina Gregory, “Transgender Tribute Bands and the Subversion of Male Rites of Passage through the Performance of Heavy Metal Music,” *Journal for Cultural Research* 17.1 (2013), 21-36: 23.

with tribute bands, after all, is one less space for new, original music to be played or heard, for talent to be “discovered” in the romantic rock tradition. Lez Zeppelin, along with all other tribute bands – male or female alike – are thus again rendered complicit in the regulation and maintenance of current hegemonic practices and are viewed as stalemates in the march of cultural progress.

On the flipside of all these cynical accusations, however, is Klosterman’s final caveat: “it also might be *true*” that Lez Zeppelin, a high-concept tribute band recycling pre-sold properties and exploiting sexualized gender divisions in a capital-driven commercial entertainment climate, is nevertheless capable of standing as “the most powerful all-female band in rock history.” This hyperbolic claim pertains not just to Lez Zeppelin, but likely to many other competent female tribute bands who refigure the masculinity – the “power” – of canonized rock music, from the virtuosic stylings of Iron Maiden (played by tribute group the Iron Maidens) to the oafish physicality of the Ramones (reworked as the Ramonas) or even the nerdy intellectualism of Weezer (as interpreted by Sheezer). Yet how are women able to appropriate this power while still maintaining a socialized female embodiment? How might female tribute acts be rendered valid by the public as acceptable feminine bodies while acting as male impersonators at the same time? In what ways do they subvert the patriarchal canon of rock music, and in what ways might they perpetuate it?

Despite the many reservations about women’s involvement in the perpetuation of a patriarchal rock culture via their participation in musical groups devoted to “classic” male artists, I believe such groups present extensive opportunities to explore the transgressive and, ultimately, empowering capacities of such seemingly innocuous (or worse, conservative) entertainment, especially as the numbers of groups and their popularity with audiences increase. As women operating in a male-dominated sphere and as imitative acts operating in an innovation-focused industry, these female tribute bands face double barriers to success in the popular music world, whether success in this instance is defined as commercial, popular, financial, critical, personal, or otherwise. This perhaps only serves to make their prevalence all the more interesting and especially worthy of study. Their unique position at the intersection of gender, genre, and creativity allows for

the probing of ideological constructs which regulate not only this very specific phenomenon of all-female tribute bands, but the larger constructs of rock, popular music, and broader gender culture relations as well.

1.2 Literature Review

Despite their noted presence on the live music circuit since at least the late 1970s, relatively little scholarly or media attention has been paid to tribute bands of any gender; however, over the last fifteen years there has been increased consideration given to the subject in academic inquiries of popular music studies and ethnomusicology. Shane Homan's 2006 edited anthology *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture* posits tribute acts as a world-spanning phenomena that allow for the investigation of questions variously surrounding performance, history, audiences, industry, cultural geography, and (in)authenticity in relation to popular music.⁸ As Jesse Samba Wheeler argues in a chapter on Brazilian rock tributes, "a reconsideration of the role of tribute bands [is] important" because they offer "occasions for the reinforcement or critique of systems of value. ...The fantasizing that tribute bands stimulate in audiences is an element in the enactment of ideas about self and other. ...[T]ribute acts may [help performers] construct new identities in the interstices between original and cover."⁹

Similarly, Jason Lee Oakes' 2005 ethnomusicology dissertation for Columbia University examines the "identification politics" surrounding tribute events, insomuch as there are "political implications [in] choosing to identify with a particular musical star and with particular musical sounds, and... these identifications [can be] used as a means of representing oneself, as a pathway for forming social relationships, and as leverage for

⁸ Shane Homan, "Introduction." *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*, ed. Shane Homan (New York: Open University Press, 2006), 1-16: 3.

⁹ Jesse Samba Wheeler, "Toca Raul! Praise Singers on Brazil's Central Plateau" in *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*, ed. Shane Homan (New York: Open University Press, 2006), 198-212: 210.

acquiring cultural capital.”¹⁰ Georgina Gregory offers a comprehensive, quasi-ethnographic account of working tribute musicians in her 2012 book, *Send in the Clones: A Cultural Study of the Tribute Band*.¹¹ She finds “interest particularly due to their capacity to disrupt the status quo,”¹² and, like Andy Bennett in Homan’s anthology, considers the tribute band phenomenon as an indicative symptom of postmodern society, “a Baudrillardian world of simulations and hyperreality.”¹³ Since tribute musicians tend to work only on an amateur or semi-professional level, their labor and contributions to the current musical landscape tend to be overlooked; as such, much of the literature that does exist on tribute bands explicitly aims to rescue their efforts from obscurity, giving them the attention they do not otherwise receive from mainstream critical or industry media.

The inherent nature of such projects as those listed above, pitted as they are against prevailing notions of tribute musicians as hacks, thieves, amateurs, or worse, perhaps run the risk of becoming overly celebratory or of over-politicizing their subjects. As John Paul Meyers counters in his dissertation for the University of Pennsylvania, we ought to exercise certain

caution against the idea that tribute band performances are sites of a kind of free, postmodernist play. In fact, it seems that many tribute band musicians and audience members take an absolutely reverential stance towards [popular music] history and are not interested in playing with it: instead, they are interested in recreating that history, re-performing it as authentically as possible.¹⁴

¹⁰ Oakes, *Losers*: 31.

¹¹ Georgina Gregory, *Send in the Clones: A Cultural Study of the Tribute Band* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012).

¹² *Ibid.*: 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*: 4.

¹⁴ John Paul Meyers, “*Rock and Roll Never Forgets*”: *Memory, History and Performance in the Tribute Band Scene*. Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 2011 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2012): 116.

However, Meyers' conclusion itself invites discussion as to what constitutes "authentic" recreation and the ways in which historical reverence for popular music history necessarily precludes certain players – such as women – from successfully entering the tribute circuit at all. For example, the extensive list of acts Meyers uses as the basis for his research includes tributes to:

The Beatles, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, The Doors, The Rolling Stones, U2, Bruce Springsteen, The Grateful Dead, The Who, Pearl Jam, Aerosmith, Radiohead, Sublime, Coldplay, The Dave Matthews Band, Rush, Yes, Ozzy Osbourne, Janis Joplin, Johnny Cash, Journey, The Allman Brothers, Neil Young, Muse, Jimmy Buffett, Billy Joel, Jimi Hendrix, Soundgarden, Alice in Chains, Michael Jackson, Gun 'n' Roses, No Doubt, David Bowie, ABBA, Steely Dan, and Metallica.¹⁵

Similarly, Homan cites the ten most frequently tributed acts in Great Britain as of 2004: Elvis Presley, ABBA, Robbie Williams, Neil Diamond, Queen, Frank Sinatra, the Beatles, Rod Stewart, and the Blues Brothers.¹⁶ Note how, of all these many musicians, only *four* women – Joplin, No Doubt singer Gwen Stefani, and ABBA vocalists Agnetha Faltskog and Frida Lyngstad – are mentioned, none of whom are instrumentalists. (We could also count Patti Scialfa of Springsteen's E Street Band as a possible fifth vocalist and sometimes-guitarist, but her vitality in the live reproduction of Springsteen's most recognizable material is arguably minimal.) If, as Oakes argues, "the central selling point of tribute bands is the accuracy of their replication – matching as closely as possible the look, the sound, and the overall experience (however this is interpreted) of seeing the original band in person,"¹⁷ then the possibility for women to play instruments in tribute bands *as women* appears severely limited, given their inability to "authentically" inhabit the space of male performers due to preconceived gender differentials in female appearance, musical/technical ability, and behavioral decorum in public spaces, such as on a stage.

¹⁵ Ibid.: 16.

¹⁶ Homan: 7.

¹⁷ Oakes, *Losers*: 5.

Though Homan and Meyers mention all-female tributes to male bands in passing (even naming Lez Zeppelin specifically), neither give consideration to the ways in which such acts are perhaps differently constituted, motivated, or perceived by audiences in comparison with straightforwardly-imitative male-to-male tributes. As serious and devoted as their intentions might be, a female tribute may not be able to help but open up sites of ironic play within the original material, as when Lez Zep vocalist Shannon Conley sings Robert Plant's written lyrics about fickle women loved and lost; the heteronormative archetype of such Blues-inspired narratives suddenly adopts currents of lesbian desire (perhaps thereby excluding men altogether) while enabling masculine posturings from a woman. In imitating Plant's characteristic stage appearance and mannerisms, Conley likewise exposes the strong elements of feminized sexuality borrowed by the male singer for his presentation in the first place – for example, with Zeppelin's version of Memphis Minnie's "When the Levee Breaks." When men perform tributes to other men, these subtleties may remain obscured. It is not necessarily that female groups do not share the same type of reverence for rock's past as do men, but that women must – because of their systematic exscription from such fields – approach their tributed subject matters in different ways.

For her part, Georgina Gregory includes a small subchapter on cross-gender tribute bands in *Send in the Clones* and additionally authored an article, "Transgender Tribute Bands and the Subversion of Male Rites of Passage through the Performance of Heavy Metal Music," in the *Journal for Cultural Research*. After explaining and establishing the masculinist codes of heavy metal music, Gregory argues that the entry of female musicians on the tribute scene disrupts the naturalized conventions of the genre. "By showing that they can play rock and exposing the constructed nature of rock's masculinity, and by claiming an audience," she concludes, "the female transgender bands transgress and subvert the traditions of the heavy metal rite of passage and a male-bonding exercise."¹⁸ Additionally, Francesca Brittan's "Women Who 'Do Elvis':

¹⁸ Gregory, "Transgender," 33.

Authenticity, Masculinity, and Masquerade”¹⁹ offers a contextualization of several female Elvis Presley tribute artists and their various performances of masculinity, which in turn expose some of the underlying constructions of “the King’s” masculine performance itself.

While I largely agree with both of their findings, I believe that Gregory’s analysis of female metal tribute bands and Brittan’s of female Elvis tribute artists only scratch the surface of a highly fascinating issue – one that, to the best of my knowledge, has unfortunately not been taken up since. For instance, Gregory writes that “there is a frisson of excitement as soon as the audience realizes that [the musician] is a woman;”²⁰ however, I would postulate that most attendees are aware of this in advance – in fact, that these bands’ gender formations are one of their biggest selling points and marketing tools, as evidenced by band names that explicitly capitalize on a pun-y feminization of the original artists (e.g. Judas Priestess [tributing Judas Priest], Aerochix [Aerosmith], Sheo [Ronnie James Dio]). Furthermore, while Gregory was probably correct at the time of her writing that the majority of female tribute bands replicated artists heavily concentrated within the heavy metal/hard rock genre, my sample of currently active bands (see Table 1) shows a diversifying range of genres. While Led Zeppelin and AC/DC remain some of the most frequently impersonated acts by women, with four tribute groups found for each, I have also come across tributes to male punk bands (four to the Ramones, and one to the Clash), new wave (Duran Duran), 1990s alternative (Nirvana, Alice in Chains, Weezer), and even rock-rap hybrids (Rage Against the Machine, the Beastie Boys). The implications of these acts and their growing popularity ought to be explored outside of narrow genre conventions and considered as part of the live popular music landscape at large.

¹⁹ Francesca Brittan, “Women Who ‘Do Elvis’: Authenticity, Masculinity, and Masquerade,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 18, no. 2 (2006): 167-190.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

The body of existent work on tribute bands can be used to consider and theorize all-female gender-traversing groups' space both within and outside the conventions of the tribute scene. Clearly, such groups operate in similar modes of reverence and simulation as their male counterparts, but it is the differences which appear most ripe for investigation, differences that are wrought through the simple act of musical gender reversal. That the same songs could be perceived so differently when performed by men versus women drives questions surrounding the gendered "nature" of music and the meaning of gendered embodiment in live performance. As Jennie Ruby writes about Lez Zeppelin's lead singer: "Somehow there is something different about a woman's hip-thrusting with the microphone stand than a man making virtually the same moves."²¹ By drawing on theories of gender performativity²² and embodiment,²³ I will explore what that "something" is, and what it means within the discourse of popular music that otherwise seeks to relegate women's bodies to passive and/or receptive roles. As Frith and McRobbie note, simply finding an active role within music-making can be extremely difficult for women. "The problems facing a woman seeking to enter the rock world as a participant are clear," they wrote in 1978. "A girl is supposed to be an individual listener, she is not encouraged to develop the skills and knowledge to become a performer."²⁴ Nearly forty years later, these words seem to still ring true for many young music fans.

Significantly, all-female tribute bands potentially offer insight into the current state of women's music-making practices, where they clearly exist, operate, and thrive. In her 1998 *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music*,²⁵ Mavis Bayton draws on

²¹ Ruby, 43.

²² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

²³ E.g., J. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

²⁴ Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality," in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 371-398: 376.

²⁵ Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

ethnographic research from the mid-1980s and mid-90s to recount the experiences of female instrumentalists and the barriers they face when trying to navigate the predominantly male world of rock music. Despite minimal gains in achieving equality of gender representations in mainstream rock, little work has been done to bring Bayton's important findings into the 21st century. Though female tribute bands occupy a specific niche market and are unlikely to be representative of all women instrumentalists, Bayton's research questions still appear pertinent for investigation and further discussion within the (also male-dominated) tribute scene: "Under what particular social circumstances are women able to resist gender socialization and successfully break into a male enclave? How and why have they done it? What alternative strengths do they draw on to oppose gender hegemony?"²⁶ The liminal space female tribute groups occupy – not quite a straightforward tribute band, but not an original band either – offers avenues to explore the current state of working female musicianship.

1.3 Methodology

With these questions and contexts in mind, I set out to investigate and analyze female tribute acts using both publicly available information (websites, Facebook pages, YouTube videos, press interviews, etc.), first-hand participant observation at performances, and personally-conducted interviews with the musicians themselves. Before doing so, however, I needed to constitute parameters for what type of acts might qualify for my study. I define "tribute acts" as musical performance artists who specifically play material originally written or performed by another, singular popular music act. For example, Judas Priestess is a tribute act because when the members perform together under that name, they only play the repertoire of Judas Priest. This quality distinguishes from "cover acts," those who perform a range of popular material

²⁶ Ibid., 189.

from various artists.²⁷ Furthermore, the tribute acts in my study must serve as “acts,” as opposed to tribute “events”; that is, their performances cannot be one-time-only occasions but should rather be at least semi-regular iterations of the repertoire of the same tributed artist. Following that, I wanted to exclude tribute acts that were no longer operational so that the information used for analysis in the study could remain current and contemporaneous for discussion and comparison. As such, all of the acts included here had publicized live performance tribute concerts held within the 2015 calendar year.

Along with the distinctions of “tribute,” I also needed to set defining standards for the “female” aspect of these acts. In keeping with Bayton’s past research, I was particularly interested in female instrumentalists who played guitars, drums, and bass in tribute acts and, furthermore, I was particularly interested in the *all*-female dimensions of music-making. Therefore, while I came across many tribute bands with female singers (but male instrument players) who tributed originally all-male acts, they are not included here. I use the terms “female” and “woman” throughout these pages mostly interchangeably, because I accepted unquestioningly artists’ own self-definitions of their sexed and gendered embodiment as told through website biographies or Facebook page descriptions (e.g., “This is the OFFICIAL Allison Chains facebook fan page. Allison Chains is the world’s only all-female tribute to Alice In Chains.”²⁸). As opposed to Georgina Gregory, I use the term “cross-gender” to refer to tribute artists who identify themselves as female and pay tribute to male artists, or vice-versa. Both in her book and journal article, Gregory uses the term “transgender” tribute bands. I believe this is both misleading and inaccurate. The term “transgender” already bears significant meaning in gender studies literature, and to conflate the musical practices of cisgendered men and women within such a category would be a disservice to trans communities. The prefix “cross-” implies a

²⁷ As such, the popular all-female Toronto band Vag Halen was unfortunately discounted from my study because, contrary to what the name might suggest, they perform hard rock and heavy metal covers from many different artists, and not just Van Halen.

²⁸ Allison Chains, “About,” <https://www.facebook.com/AllisonChaintribute/info>. Accessed 12 March 2016.

more nuanced and flexible meaning, as in “to extend across or over,” “to meet in passing, especially from opposite directions.”²⁹

All of the musicians eligible for inclusion in my study, therefore, are women involved in recurring performances of musical material from another original performer/group alongside other women. Table 1 is a list of all of the acts included for consideration in the discussions herein, though it is not intended as a comprehensive list of every all-female tribute act in current existence. I relied heavily on Internet presence and searchability in order to uncover these acts for myself; there are likely more out there who operate without such media visibility. Furthermore, my hunt for acts was limited by my own language and cultural knowledge; there could very well be many all-female tribute acts in, for example, Japan, Russia, or Brazil, paying homage to either English-speaking or to Japanese, Russian, or Brazilian acts – but because I had no way of seeking them out, I have no way of knowing for sure. Thus, while I included acts from Italy and Switzerland because their web pages were in English, I excluded an AC/DC tribute group from Germany because all of their information was in German, and probably failed to unearth many more like them.

As stated previously, I was especially interested in female tribute artists who play physical instruments, as opposed to just vocalists. As Bayton³⁰ and other have noted, it is often much easier for female singers to find acceptance in musical communities than instrument players, because the voice is perceived as a natural extension of the body and because women are perceived as “naturally” corporeal, though less capable of mastery over technological instruments such as guitars, drums, amplifiers, pedals, etc. Thus, while I did not intentionally set out to only examine “rock” tributes, my own prescribed inclinations largely forced that hand. Even so, I did not discover in my searches any sign of female tributes to male pop singers or “boyband” groups, and found only one cross-gender rap tribute (She’s Crafty) very late in the research process – to a group, who,

²⁹ “Cross” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2015.

³⁰ Bayton, *Frock Rock*.

nevertheless, is often categorized as “rock/rap” (the Beastie Boys).³¹ My pursuit of *all-female* groups similarly implies my interest in multiple women working together in music-making – though again, I did not uncover very many solo-act female tributers to solo-act male artists, with the glaring exception of Elvis Presley.

Table 1: A list of all tribute acts considered for the present study.

TRIBUTE ACT	ORIGINAL ARTIST	LOCATION
AC/DShe	AC/DC	San Francisco, CA
Back:N:Black	AC/DC	Zurich, Switzerland
Hell’s Belles	AC/DC	Seattle, WA
ThundHerStruck	AC/DC	Los Angeles, CA
Aerochix	Aerosmith	Boston, MA
Allison Chains	Alice in Chains	Los Angeles, CA
She’s Crafty	The Beastie Boys	Chicago, IL
Mistress of Reality	Black Sabbath	Los Angeles, CA
RudeGirl	The Clash	Minneapolis, MN
DIA	DIO	Los Angeles, CA
SHEO	DIO	New York, NY

³¹ Rage Against the Machine is also a rap group, but includes instrument-playing members; the Beastie Boys are vocalists who use sampled tracks.

Joanne Joanne	Duran Duran	London, UK
Guns N' Hoses	Guns N' Roses	New York, NY
The Rocket Queens	Guns N' Roses	New York, NY
Diamond Beast	Iron Maiden	Italy
The Iron Maidens	Iron Maiden	Los Angeles, CA
Judas Priestess	Judas Priest	New York, NY
The Minks	The Kinks	San Francisco, CA
PRISS	KISS	Los Angeles, CA
Slutter	KISS	Chicago, IL
FEM Zeppelin	Led Zeppelin	Los Angeles, CA
Hammer of the Broads	Led Zeppelin	Los Angeles, CA
Lez Zeppelin	Led Zeppelin	New York, NY
Zepparella	Led Zeppelin	San Francisco, CA
Crüella	Mötley Crüe	San Francisco, CA
Girls Girls Girls	Mötley Crüe	New York, NY
Hervana	Nirvana	Toronto, ON
Lady E	Elvis Presley	Miami, FL
Gunpowder Gelatine	Queen	Boston, MA
The Killer Queens	Queen	San Francisco, CA

Take the Power Back	Rage Against the Machine	Nashville, TN
The Hormones	The Ramones	San Francisco, CA
The Pheramones	The Ramones	Guelph, ON
The Ramonas	The Ramones	London, UK
Rockaway Bitch	The Ramones	New York, NY
Sheezer	Weezer	Toronto, ON

Elvis is an outlier from the rest of the tributed subjects here in many ways; he is largely perceived as purely a vocalist and not an instrumentalist (though he did also play guitar); he was a solo artist with various backing bands throughout his career, and he did not write the music or lyrics to any of his own songs. However, I chose to include female Elvis tribute artists in my study for a number of important reasons: A) As Oakes³² and others have written, Elvis has one of the largest and most well-defined tribute communities of any popular music artist. His early “impersonators” are generally considered the progenitors of modern rock tribute itself. There is also more written *about* the Elvis tribute community than any other singular form of musical tribute activity, including Francesca Brittan’s study of female Elvis tribute artists, which proved beneficial for informing my analysis of women tributers in other genres. B) Presley still bears a looming influence over the ideological constructs of “rock” music, especially, as David Shumway has argued, in terms of how male artists present their masculinity and sexuality on-stage.³³ Therefore, including Elvis among other rock groups offers a route of

³² Jason Lee Oakes, “All the King’s Elvii: Identifying with Elvis through Musical Tribute,” in *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*, ed. Shane Homan (New York: Open University Press, 2006), 166-181.

³³ David R. Shumway, “Watching Elvis: The Male Rock Star as Object of the Gaze,” in *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*, ed. Joel Forman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 124 -143.

entry for exploration of male rock prototypes and how women navigate these terms within the context of tribute performance. Reason C) for including Elvis Presley in this study of all-female tribute acts was a matter of chance and convenience; I was able to attend the annual Collingwood Elvis Festival in Ontario, Canada in July 2015 – the largest event of its kind – and witness performances by dozens of different Elvis tribute artists. It was there I also arranged to meet with Deborah Knight, a female Elvis tribute artist who goes by the stage name Lady E, who kindly offered me valuable insight into her world of tributing.

For the purposes of this study, I managed to conduct three interviews: one with Lady E, one with the members of Toronto-based Nirvana tribute Hervana, and one with the members of New York City-based Judas Priest tribute act Judas Priestess. All of the participants were recruited by email and agreed to an in-person interview which was digitally recorded.³⁴ Interviews followed a semi-structured format; while I came prepared with a set list of topical questions concerning, for example, motivations for tributing, the work involved in tributing, and self-conceptions of “female” tributing,³⁵ I attempted to allow the sessions to flow as natural conversation by asking follow-up questions to participants’ responses, allowing multiple participants to give different responses to the same question, allowing the participants to ask each other questions, or to ask me questions about my own research. These interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis, and the results are peppered throughout the following chapters as illustrative examples or evidence. Quotes from other musicians not personally interviewed by the researcher often appear as taken from previously-published press interviews with newspapers or magazines. While three interviews is hardly a strong foundation for drawing generalized conclusions, those artists I did manage to speak with might be considered representative of three sorts of subgenres of the female tribute world: the classic rock/heavy metal artists (Judas Priestess), the newer and somewhat younger demographic of ‘90s rock tributes (Hervana), and the Elvis tribute community (Lady E).

³⁴ See Appendix C.

³⁵ See Appendix D.

I was also fortunate enough to attend live performances by the three above acts, as well as concerts given by Lez Zeppelin, the Rocket Queens, and Sheezer. These helped inform my observations about performance strategies as, unlike many other areas of study within popular music where the studio-recorded album serves as the principal commodity and text,³⁶ tribute bands are an almost exclusively live medium. Participant observation at concerts was also intended to help inform my study as to tribute audiences – though, as I soon discovered, experiences and crowds varied so widely that it is difficult to make any kind of generalizations about audiences in total. The sold-out theater in Ferndale, MI where Lez Zeppelin performed was very different from the small and sparsely-populated club in Niagara Falls, NY where I saw the Rocket Queens play. Unsurprisingly, too, the geriatric crowds at the Collingwood Elvis Festival had little in common demographically with Sheezer’s mostly 20-to-30-something audience at Lee’s Palace in Toronto, ON. Confined by time and geographical space, my observations concerning audiences of tribute artists felt too limited and circumstantial to provide much conclusive or generalizable commentary on this nevertheless very crucial piece of the tribute act world. As such, my discussions are primarily focused on the stage players rather than the listeners and viewers, except to provide specific context or insight. While I offer my own interpretations and experiential moments as an audience member, I cannot claim to speak for the fellow fans around me.

1.4 Contents

The subsequent chapters of this thesis are as follows:

Chapter 2: The Social Function of Female Tributes

This chapter contextualizes all-female tribute acts within the traditions of both the tribute act and of the history of women in rock music as parallel forces contributing to the

³⁶ See, e.g., Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

current prominence of all-female tributes. The customs, ideologies, and value systems of each precedent are explored with special consideration of the sometimes-oppositional constructs of “authenticity” in each. Because female tributes do not fully exemplify purist notions of tribute or the common agendas of female music-making, they occupy a liminal space that allows imaginative possibilities about the past, present, and future states of women’s relationships with rock music to flourish and take form.

Chapter 3: Identity and Performance

This chapter examines how women in tribute bands identify with and work to reconcile the gender differentiation in their homage to male artists. Using a case study of four different all-female AC/DC tribute bands as a guiding example (based on available YouTube performance recordings and webpages), I first argue how and why popular musical acts like AC/DC might inspire identification among listeners to such a degree that they would want to form a tribute act to perform the same music to other listeners. Then, I look at the four female tributes more closely in terms of how they perform and embody various aspects that make up the “tribute”: their dress, their naming, their mannerisms, etc. The differences between each act demonstrate how the tributer’s sense of Self necessarily collides with the appropriated, tributed Other through the act of performance. Notions of masculinities and femininities in particular become blended, bended, and borrowed in such a way that their naturalized attachments to particular sexed bodies are exposed as an artificial social construct.

Chapter 4: Fandom and Transformation

This section relates tribute activity to active modes of fandom including conventions, cosplay, and fanfiction. It explores the unique position of tribute performers as fans (of the original artists whom they tribute) and as performers with a fanbase of their own – one that may or may not be distinct from the original artist’s fans. These activities and communities among and between fans enable a transformation of original source texts in not only a figurative but a legal sense. “Transformative” works are derivative forms of art that shed new meaning on used texts and, as such, are protected under fair use clauses of U.S. copyright law. I argue that female tribute acts are exemplary models of

transformative work, which in turn validates their position as crucial modes of cultural critique within the rock universe.

Ultimately, the study of all-female tribute bands provides a highly unique and contemporarily relevant opportunity for the simultaneous discussion of gender, cultural labor, popular music history, fandom, and community. While I never anticipated finding a tightly-connected network of female musicians operating within the sphere of tributing, it is precisely the diasporic nature of the phenomenon that is cause for questioning the broader cultural and social implications of such practices on both regional and national music scenes. With both my critical and ethnographic research I hope to assemble a picture of what it means to work in a musical mode that is both bent on resuscitating a problematic past while fiercely advocating new futures for women in popular music. The many layers of possible meanings embedded in such a seemingly simple form of entertainment demonstrate not only tributing's essence as a product of our times but its potential to defy and transcend the hegemonic systems structuring women's lives – perhaps not only in music, but in the broader schemes of cultural production and social realms. I aim to give all-female tribute bands the attention they deserve as music makers, as gender rebels, and as artists in their own right.

Chapter 2

2 Is This Just Fantasy?: The Social Function of Female Tributes

Female tribute bands are the culmination of two separate lineages: the tribute band and the all-girl rock band. Though this conclusion appears obvious, it is far from inevitable. The driving ideological forces and *raison d'être* of each are not only starkly different, but at times directly oppositional. In this chapter, I will trace the history and significance of both the “tribute” and “all-girl” branches of modern-day female tributes in order to assess how these performance acts proliferated at the turn of the 21st century and why they have seemingly only increased in popularity since then. While they combine the theatrical and nostalgic elements of tributing with the feminist imperatives of female rock music-making, women’s tribute acts do not neatly follow the trajectory of either cultural precedent. Their flagrant subversion of the various markers of authenticity in both realms situates female tribute acts in a neither/nor space of possible classification. Yet it is this very liminality that renders their work and performances meaningful and even seditious. In this creation of new space, it becomes possible to imagine rock history as something other than hegemonic and masculinist; to imagine female rock musicians as something other than marginalized or inferior. With tribute acts, women can reconstitute and reclaim the ideological boundaries around rock music that have long kept female artists exiled to the sidelines, bending the constructs of the past to envision a new structural future.

2.1 The Role of Tributes in Rock

Tribute acts serve a vital function in the live entertainment sector of the music industry, filling in physical, emotional, visual, and visceral voids that big-name star acts do not, or cannot, always provide for their audiences. To illustrate some of these gaps and differences, I want to first relate my own early experiences with rock and tribute concerts.

At fourteen years old, I was recklessly obsessed with the Beatles and just learning to play guitar. My father, ever-supportive of inculcating baby-boomer tastes in a younger

generation, brought me and my friend/bandmate at the time, Katie, to see Paul McCartney perform at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto on his *Driving USA* tour. We treated the event not only as a pilgrimage, but a time capsule: with homemade posters and outmoded fashions, we hoped to experience some slice of true, frenetic Beatlemania from our nosebleed seats, to witness with this 2002 concert the spirit of 1965 that we would never see with our own eyes. Paul did not disappoint. The show was tight, lively, and wisely catered to the discerning tastes of hardcore Beatles fans. In an unforgettably surreal moment, Katie and I locked eyes while singing Lennon's lower melody line on the refrain of "We Can Work It Out," the two of us telekinetically recognizing that we were harmonizing in real time and space with *the* Sir Paul McCartney. Our fellow concert-goers seemed less enthused. Mostly middle-aged and well-behaved, they clapped and sang in the appropriate ways, but took less kindly to our teenaged shrieks and desperate posterboard manifestos. After all, they'd paid a pretty penny for the privilege to share an evening with Paul and 20,000 of his closest Canadian fans, and our type of behavior was not – or no longer, it seemed – a part of the production.

Such tepidity did not discourage our quest to find and feel with our own senses more of the Beatles experience, and later that same summer Katie and I went to a neighboring town festival to see a Beatles tribute band. Pedantic in our knowledge and purists in our devotion, we could spot visual flaws and discrepancies straightaway: "Paul" played right-handed; "John" was too short; "George" was almost certainly wearing a wig. But when the music started and four men in collarless Edwardian suits played through "I Want to Hold Your Hand," few of those small details seemed to matter anymore. A crowd instantly assembled on the open field where, unlike the steep stairs of McCartney's concert, we were able to twist, shout, and work it on out in direct view of not just one Beatle but – if one allowed for enough suspension of disbelief – four. Our screams for every song were matched and raised by the fellow fans around us as the familiar frenzy of Beatlemania, the kind we'd only heard about or seen on screen in *A Hard Day's Night*, began to take hold. On stage, the band could not only hear our requests for certain numbers or marriage proposals, they responded to them. Even when performing later studio material that the Beatles never performed live or using a backing track to help replicate certain studio sounds, the tributers delivered a justifiably "authentic"

simulacrum of a true Beatles Experience. We never once lost sight of the fact that it was all utterly fabricated, but that was part of the experiential charm: with eight years of material condensed down to eighty minutes, we knew that this was not what a real Beatles concert *was*, only that it was what it must have been *like*. By the end of the show, we believers knew how to fulfill our own roles as fans, and between fits of giggles impishly asked the band members to please autograph our concert fliers, t-shirts, anything they could sanctify with the touch of a hand. Though harmonizing with Macca in Toronto had been an otherworldly experience, this tribute show was equally fulfilling in its own, much more worldly, way.

The extreme contrasts between my examples point up some of the functions of tributing in the contemporary age, how such acts can serve rock audiences in ways otherwise impractical. The first is the obvious re-appearance of defunct acts: the Beatles broke up in 1970, and two of the four members are deceased. Barring time travel, it would be impossible to ever see the band live today. Beatles tributes therefore offer a performance spectacle imitating what a concert (or usually, several concerts combined) would have been like in the 1960s. Faithfully recreating songs and sounds with historically accurate instruments (McCartney's signature Höfner bass, for example) as well as identifiable costumes (such as the *Sgt. Pepper* uniforms) lend tribute bands an aura of credibility to the viewer. However, not all tributes perform material of dead or defunct rock stars; many exist in homage to still-active, often still-touring, artists such as the Rolling Stones, AC/DC, and even very contemporary acts like One Direction or Taylor Swift. In any case, the tributes still tend to reiterate a specific and bygone moment of the star's oeuvre: the One Direction lineup complete with Zayn Malik, for instance, or the late-'60s era Stones. Even the septuagenarian McCartney, remarkably agile though he is for his age, is little match for his own former self, or, for that matter, someone who can convincingly imitate his mop-topped and baby-cheeked former self.

No matter the vital signs of their chosen stars, tribute acts serve still further functions in music entertainment. They usually perform in venues much smaller than their tributees: clubs and theaters, as opposed to arenas and stadiums. The intimacy of performance and the opportunity for engagement between audience and performer is much greater in

smaller spaces, which can have a tremendous effect on the concert experience. From my vantage point in the Air Canada Centre, Paul McCartney looked not much bigger than an ant, whereas at the Beatles tribute concert I was close enough to study “Paul’s” fret technique. Had we been willing to shell out several hundred more dollars per ticket, we might have been lucky enough to get front-row seats and have that up-close experience with the real McCartney – but then, the tribute experience was free. Tickets to tribute events tend to be inexpensive not only in comparison to their original counterparts, but in terms of the live music market in general, making them an affordable option for a night out. Moreover, tributes tend to work and migrate between smaller cities or out-of-reach places that large touring itineraries are likely to pass over. Whether original-music artists have retired, disbanded, changed lineups, passed away, or simply aged, tributes exist to capture a moment of glories past and to deliver it to your doorstep at a cut-rate price.

The word “tribute” itself offers further indication of the function and purpose of tribute events. It confers with its original meaning a sense of “something paid or contributed as by a subordinate to a superior; an offering or gift rendered as a duty, or as an acknowledgement of affection or esteem.”³⁷ Though it would appear that the obvious subordinate/superior relationship herein is that between tributing performer and tributed star, the audience’s role in facilitating the “tribute” should not be underestimated. Tribute acts would not exist without fans of the original music, after all, and the service rendered by tribute musicians is not for the benefit of the stars, who might barely know of their existence, but for the fans. The spirit of affection and esteem comes from the collective iteration of the full concert experience – the stage, the amplifiers, the sweat, the applause, the mosh pits – for the sake of communal fan culture itself. Musical tributing, in other words, is a self-reflexive practice in and celebration of fandom, as will be more deeply explored in chapter four. Attending a tribute performance is both proclamation and validation of fandom: a place to fraternize, dance, and sing along with fellow fans and to engage with the wider cultural practices for which music often serves as soundtrack. As Georgina Gregory posits, these opportunities for communal gathering may provide

³⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary* online, s.v. “tribute.”

respite for the increasingly acute desires for personal interaction and socialization as the music industry becomes further digitized. While record stores diminish (or become progressively niche or elitist) and as live music entertainment veers toward massive festivals and arena tours, tribute events offer a way for fans of a particular artist or genre to find community and belonging, to share face-to-face intimacy, “to be acknowledged in a culture where so many of us experience alienation.”³⁸ There is a qualitative difference in the communal atmosphere between a modern-day Morrissey concert at Madison Square Garden and a Smiths tribute at a club in south Brooklyn, for example. The first allows passive voyeurism and the safe anonymity of numbers; the latter almost compels you to grab the stranger next to you while you both sing, “I am human and I need to be loved!” It requires a certain level of fandom to commit and participate in the knowingly artificial simulacrum of the tribute event as an audience member – and, as I will explore in later chapters, it takes quite a bit more to have the gumption, determination, and intricate knowledge necessary to perform on stage in one.

As the generational waves of rock music continue to mature, tribute acts also supply local live music scenes with fresh bouts of nostalgia and familiarity. In contrast to the milieu of original-music artists that make up most local circuits, tribute and cover bands perform radio hits and other tracks the audience is likely to already know; they offer a canny concert-going experience that, as Andy Bennett notes, “respond[s] to a range of mundane, everyday desires exhibited by audiences: to relive a particular moment in their youth; to experience again their personal icons in a live setting (and perhaps take their children along too).”³⁹ Not all tribute events conform to the stereotypical setting of middle-aged crowds (and/or performers), however. As already noted, tributes to highly contemporary youth-oriented acts can be lucrative – and not just in the twenty-first century, when tributing as a concept is well known and understood. Tributes to boy bands

³⁸ Georgina Gregory, *Send in the Clones: A Cultural Study of the Tribute Band* (Sheffield, Equinox: 2012), 148.

³⁹ Andy Bennett, “Even Better than the Real Thing? Understanding the Tribute Band Phenomenon,” in *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*, ed. Shane Homan (New York: Open University Press, 2006), 19-20.

like Take That or *NSYNC operated alongside their actual counterparts in the 1990s; the cult of Elvis impersonation was already well-established before Presley's death in 1977. Indeed, the origins of tributing seem to stem not from temporal distance, but from a lack of physical proximity. Australia and South Africa were hotbeds for tribute acts as early as the 1970s, since concert tours from major artists like the Rolling Stones or Pink Floyd were few and far between in these countries.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the current lure of nostalgia and the profitability of the "retro industry," as Simon Reynolds calls it,⁴¹ is still an influential factor, though it is no longer exclusively relegated to the baby boomer generation. As Gen Xers and pre-Millennials mature, the musical behemoths of their respective youths, too, are increasingly subjected to the tribute treatment. Though the concept of reviving and incorporating past artworks on contemporary stages hints at the kind of bricolage and pastiche indicative of postmodernism, John Paul Meyers rather concludes that tributing "is a decidedly [M]odern phenomenon, one in which the past is venerated so much that it is re-created as faithfully as possible, not played with or treated with irony or bemusement. In some sense, tribute band musicians and audiences are deeply conservative, feeling a great desire to preserve what they see was of value of the past."⁴² Though his decree of uniform humorlessness is perhaps too totalizing, given the types of alternative tributes that will be discussed within this study, the spirit of sincere homage Meyers notes does appear central to most forms of tribute.

One rockist aspect that most tribute outfits do not uphold, however, is the primacy of the studio recording as the music's "principal text" and the ideological implications bound up therein. As Theodore Gracyk notes in *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock*, the

⁴⁰ Shane Homan, "You've Got to Carry that Weight: Tribute Acts in the Entertainment Supermarket," in *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*, ed. Shane Homan (New York: Open University Press, 2006): 33-51.

⁴¹ Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to its own Past* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011).

⁴² John Paul Meyers, "Rock and Roll Never Forgets": *Memory, History and Performance in the Tribute Band Scene*. Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 2011 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2012): 136.

genesis of “rock [music was] significantly dependent on a shift in ontological category, in *what* counts as a unit of significance or an object of critical attention” – specifically, the shift to a mass distribution of albums or singles containing duplicates of the same musical recording.⁴³ This differs from previous iterations of popular music, such as folk or Tin Pan Alley, which largely circulated via oral traditions or sheet music. On one hand, the intrinsic coupling of certain songs with certain artists’ recordings is what enabled the rise of the modern-day rock & roll star, and is what makes the mimetic concept of tributing possible. For example, Gracyk argues that Elvis Presley’s Sun Studios recordings set a precedent for “erasing any distinction between the performance and the musical work. ...[E]ach listener who learns these songs through these recordings grasps every aspect as properties of a *total musical work*. The timbre of Presley’s voice, the phrasing, even the sound of his voice *on that particular day*, is as much a part of the musical work as the melody or the syncopation.”⁴⁴ To this day, that mode of performance captured on record is often what Elvis tribute artists attempt to mimic in their performances of “Blue Moon,” “Mystery Train,” or other early Presley tunes.

On the other hand, however, tribute acts give equal, if not more, weight to the visual spectacle of performance as to the music being tributed. Though concerts and touring are very often an important component of rock, musicians can thrive solely through the production of recorded material, as most clearly evidenced by the Beatles’ later career or the invention of studio-mediated “non-groups” like the Archies or the Gorillaz. But tribute acts reanimate live performance as the principal function of rock music. Notably, Elvis tribute artists tend to favor the faster tempo and improvised stylings of *live* versions of “Suspicious Minds,” for instance, over the studio/single version. Even when tributers do not expressly “dress up” like the artists they represent, the spectacle of, for example, a Pink Floyd-style light show can be used to invoke the spirit of an “authentic” concert

⁴³ Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): x.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: 14.

representation.⁴⁵ This speaks to the sensory gaps in musical reception which tributes seek to fulfill. Audiences, John Meyers writes, “attend tribute performances... because, on some level, the ‘real things’ – the officially-authorized recordings and products of the band – are not enough. They still crave, among other things, a live, differently mediated experience of these songs, and this is precisely one of the attractions of tribute band performances. In this way, tribute band shows present a kind of reality that the band itself, as transmitted through recordings, cannot.”⁴⁶ Bennett likewise acknowledges that the “audience realizes that the tribute is not the ‘real thing,’ but this is not the point. For decades, records, tapes, and videos have had to stand in for the original. Tribute bands follow this pattern of standing in for the original, but with the added novelty of the flesh and blood dimension which they bring to the reproduction of music.”⁴⁷ What Bennett defines as the “original,” then, is not the album/record, but the star who makes the album, which undermines the primacy of studio records as rock’s main focal point of consumption or consideration. According to the tribute aesthetic, rock cannot exist without its stars or on sounds alone: it demands the attention of sights, touches, even tastes and smells.

Music constitutes an allographic art form in that all performances of “Suspicious Minds,” for instance, “may vary in correctness and quality and even in ‘authenticity’ of a more esoteric kind; but all correct performances are equally genuine instances of the work.”⁴⁸ Presley himself, however, is an autographic “artwork,” if we consider him as a text unto himself, because “even the most exact duplication” enacted by his impersonators “does not thereby count as genuine.”⁴⁹ In privileging the liveness of music along with its star-

⁴⁵ See Bennett, 25-27.

⁴⁶ Meyers, 37.

⁴⁷ Bennett, 22.

⁴⁸ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1968): 113. Cf. also: Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*, 31-36.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

text, tribute artists paradoxically combine allographic and autographic elements in their reenactments; they are both genuine and counterfeit, legitimate and fake. While the sonic musical text itself cannot ever be said to be false, the corporeal star linked with that text cannot ever be fully replicated. Nevertheless, tribute artists attempt to reproduce the star's physical presence – her essence, or, as Walter Benjamin might put it, her “aura.”⁵⁰ In 1936, Benjamin argued that the mechanical reproduction of art erodes the aura of an originary art object, or “the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning.”⁵¹ As “copies,” tribute performers might be said to erode a star's aura – and yet, as originary persons with their own auras, tribute artists contribute some kind of further “essence” to the presentation of the musical text. Just as “the aura which, on the stage, resonates from *Macbeth*, cannot be separated for the spectators from that of the actor,”⁵² neither can the aura of Elvis Presley be severed from that of any of his impersonators in the throes of performance. A high school production of *Macbeth*, if it is at least a reasonably faithful performance of the text, is as “genuine” as the Royal Shakespeare Company's, and each of the many renditions of “Suspicious Minds” I witnessed at the Collingwood Elvis Festival were equally genuine in their execution, though some of them quite tune-deaf. None of them, however, were “authentically” Elvis.

Like mechanical copies, tributes “meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation,” their commercial demand a symptom of “the desire of contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spiritually and humanly... to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.”⁵³ Tributers' attempts to replicate the star text of any given performer may be futile because of the original's undeniable idiosyncrasy, but their endeavors to reinvigorate the aura of that text through musical performance – to use their own embodied auras as a vehicle for reproduction – is a

⁵⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, n.p.

⁵² *Ibid.*, n.p.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, n.p.

principal aspect of their popular appeal. Real persons making music in real time are liable to vary from note to note, to make mistakes or add new flourishes. Discrepancies will always manifest between the tributer and tributee, just as every time Elvis himself sang “Suspicious Minds” it came out a little differently. The variations may be subtle or obvious, but this is precisely the draw for audiences: to witness spontaneity, chance, creation, and fate. Ultimately, as Gregory notes, “performance is the *raison d’être* of the live tribute, so rather than judging a tribute as the failed execution of a text, it is more constructive to appreciate the individuality of single performances, the responses of the audience and the diversity of approaches within the process.”⁵⁴ Because of their variance and liveness, tributes offer an experience of music that the sole consumption of records, albums, or other mechanical reproductions cannot fulfill. They may not have the same auras as their original stars, but they can help to refurbish a bit of their original glow.

But perhaps these conclusions are too celebratory or self-justifying. Alternately, tribute acts might be painted as some of contemporary society’s worst perpetrators of the postmodernist assault of simulacra and simulation,⁵⁵ empty replications of the past that arguably stagnate social and creative development.⁵⁶ Tributes often portray and perform the work of musicians already well-established either in the canon of “Classic Rock” or contemporary industry giants, thereby perpetuating and reaffirming the importance of such artists, and by association, the validity of their aesthetic and cultural values. Gregory acknowledges that, “in cultivating and feeding nostalgia... [tribute acts] avoid progress and any radical tendencies toward reform. On the surface, their replication of the status quo only serves to reinforce existing structural inequalities.”⁵⁷ For instance, the rock star demographic is overwhelmingly comprised of white men. In order for tribute artists to

⁵⁴ Gregory, *Send in the Clones*, 128.

⁵⁵ See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

⁵⁷ *Send in the Clones*, 65.

convincingly play the part, they, too, must need be white men, thereby continuing the ideological processes of exclusion that bar women, non-white, gender-deviant, disabled, or otherwise “different” people from entering and gaining acceptance on rock’s stage. Though tributes serve an important function in catering to the desires of consumers in the live music entertainment industry, these perpetuations of “the same-old” can likewise be accused of pandering to conservative impulses and prohibiting the revelation or realization of new ideas.

In sum, tributes may be neither saviors of artistic integrity nor demons regulating social behavior. Their reception lies ultimately with the individual interpretations of the audience. But no matter their purported aims, tribute acts problematize aspects of the cult of authenticity surrounding rock history. They bring to light questions regarding the primacy of the recorded text, the authority of the artist as interpreter, and the uniqueness of identities or postures that prove ultimately replicable, at least by some stretch of the imagination. They challenge industry models of music-making that demand newness, flawlessness, and distribution on the largest possible of scales. There is little that is “authentic” about tribute artists who openly perform as something they are not, yet this is precisely what frees them to explore the authenticity of musical feeling, understanding, and community. Despite their common focus on the sacrosanct art of the past, many performers have found ways to use the constructed and “artificial” aspects of the tributing model to articulate the very real conditions of the present, as will be explored in the following section.

2.2 Alternative Tributes

The most popular and prevalent form of tribute acts are of the kind that seek to replicate as faithfully and accurately as possible the sound, look, and stage presence of the original. The overwhelming majority of performers who gather at the Collingwood Elvis Festival every year, for example, are white men with dyed black pompadours and tremulous baritone voices, dressed in an identifiable period outfit (the gold lamé jacket, the black leather ensemble, or some variation on the white jumpsuits, usually), and doing

their best to copy verbatim the body movements and vocal inflections of some recorded Elvis performance. Performances that seek to minimize the differences between tributer and tributee, whether for Elvis or any other artist, are what I refer to as “mainstream” or “straightforward” tributes. But many people do not, or cannot, conform to these aims. Within the Elvis tribute community, there are cowboy Elvises, Latino Elvises, child Elvises, female Elvises, environmental activist Elvises, Indian Elvises, and more. These “alternative” forms of tribute deliberately toy with the defining features of the original in ways that often reveal the structures, prejudices, and working mechanisms underlying popular figures, genres, and texts. Though alternative tributes fulfill many of the same roles and functions in the live music circuit as do mainstream tributes, their subtle subversions offer different conceptual takes on the purpose and meaning of the art of tributing.

Alternative tributes can take the form of mash-ups, thematic alterations, or embodied difference. Some perform the music of one artist or genre in the style of another, such as reggae versions of Led Zeppelin songs (Dread Zeppelin) or nü-metal rearranged for easy-listening (Richard Cheese & Lounge Against the Machine). Others blend fully disparate repertoires, stitching together lyrics and melodies from, for example, the Beatles and Metallica to form “Beatallica.” Another trend in tributing is rewriting the lyrics of an artist’s oeuvre to match an offbeat theme – Black Sabbath songs about fast food chains (Mac Sabbath); pizza in the Velvet Underground’s lyrics (Pizza Underground); Krampus and Rammstein (Krammpstein). The results in any of the above cases are often humorous and parodic, but still reverential. Mike Odd, spokesperson for Mac Sabbath, explained that the idea for the group stemmed from his own genuine fandom of Black Sabbath and his belief that the anti-corporate messages of Mac Sabbath would fit naturally with the original group’s style: “They were the first punks in my opinion... Everything I like has a Black Sabbath influence, so this made sense.”⁵⁸ Still, the effectiveness of such groups requires from the audience at least a passing knowledge and understanding of the

⁵⁸ Interview with Lena Lecaro, “Who’s Behind Mac Sabbath’s ‘Drive-Thru Metal’? Manager Mike Odd Isn’t Telling,” *LA Weekly* 15 April 2015.

elements being combined or altered. As Andy Bennett notes, "...the appeal of the tribute band formula has everything to do with the way audiences respond to popular music and tribute bands' understanding of this response."⁵⁹ This is true for straightforward as well as alternative tributes. Any Rage Against the Machine tribute needs to know not only the group's musical repertoire, but the ways in which the group is situated socially, culturally, and politically, and how those elements contribute to the popular reception and significance of the group. Similarly, Richard Cheese & Lounge Against the Machine understand – and expect their audiences to understand – the wider implications of Rage as well as those of lounge music; the “joke” behind such performances is that the two realms appear, on the surface, so intrinsically opposed or unrelated. Fusing together disparate elements in this way forces listeners to approach familiar music in novel situations; the subversion of the defining structures of an artist or genre can bring those very elements into plain sight.

Where the above tribute examples take willing liberties with known musical paradigms, other tribute artists create alternative performances through the sheer act of marginalized embodiment. Robert Lopez, known by his stage name El Vez, is a Mexican-American Elvis tribute artist. Like other alternative tributers, he sometimes rewrites lyrics or arrangements of known Presley tunes to reflect the concerns and heritage of Latino culture.⁶⁰ Yet because of his ethnicity, Lopez's alternative tribute is of a different nature than other “mashups”; it is embodied rather than chosen, something that is always already a part of his identity as a performer. Similar veins of tribute can be enacted without alteration of the original music or lyrics: Mini Kiss is a full-makeup KISS tribute group comprised of men with dwarfism; GayC/DC performs regular AC/DC tracks with an exaggerated gay male flamboyancy. The only disparities between these groups and their tributed originals may be visual, but the parodic or novel effect such differences enact on

⁵⁹ Bennett, 21.

⁶⁰ See Jason Lee Oakes, “All the King's Elvii: Identifying with Elvis through Musical Tribute,” in *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*, ed. Shane Homan (New York: Open University Press, 2006): 166-181.

stage speaks to the ingrained biases of rock'n'roll: it is expected for performers to be white, male, heteronormative, etc. When bodies depart from these norms, they become cause for spectacle.

Female tribute groups to male acts likewise constitute a form of embodied alternative tributing, though their current prevalence on the tribute circuit far exceeds that of any other single alternate form. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, “all-girl” groups that perform the music of male classic rock bands have increased in numbers and popularity. Part of the reason for this trend may involve sheer demographics: women may comprise half of the global population, but their representation in rock music is minimal. As it becomes more commonplace and socially acceptable for women to play rock instruments, they require a platform on which to do so. As I will elaborate later, opportunities for female instrumentalists in original music-making are still limited. Tributing can be lucrative, but there are perhaps even fewer opportunities for women musicians in the straightforward classic rock tribute scene than there are in original music-making.⁶¹ Tributes to groups like the Runaways or the Bangles can and do exist, but their ability to easily draw large crowds is negligible compared to household-name acts like the Beatles or the Rolling Stones. The concept of alternate tributes gives women space and prospects to perform live music at a professional or semi-professional level. The “all-girl” twist, like the embodied difference of other visible minority tributes, offers audiences an unexpected or novel incarnation of familiar musical tropes.

The differences that arise when women perform works written by men in a masculinist medium are variously explicit or subtle. Very few female tribute singers change the lyrics or pronouns of songs, so that original heterosexual love songs become rife with homoerotic meaning, and tales of masculine conquest are decontextualized. In Guns N'

⁶¹ As other feminist music scholars have noted, female singers may have an easier time finding work in rock music than their guitar- or drum-playing counterparts, either as original or tribute artists, because singing is viewed as a “natural” extension of feminine ability (e.g., Mavis Bayton, “Women and the Electric Guitar,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 37-49).

Roses' "Sweet Child O' Mine," for example, the song's narrator longs for the smile, hair, face, and eyes of a female lover; Led Zeppelin's "Good Times, Bad Times" opens brazenly with the lines, "In the days of my youth, I was told what it means to be a man / Now I've reached that age I try to do all those things the best I can." Women's recitation of such lyrics bears different implications than for men, causing a disconnect that in itself reveals some of the naturalized or taken-for-granted constructs of heterosexuality and gender identity. The phallic symbol of the electric guitar, a traditional pillar of rock music, is likewise differently constituted on an all-female stage. As will be explored in more depth in chapter three, the ways women negotiate male-defined modes of performance in terms of movement, display, and dress can inflect nuances of meaning that draw attention to the socialized nature of masculine/feminine binaries and their attachment to sexed bodies. Ultimately, women's takeover of the male rock stage visibly challenges the assumed archetypes of how a "rock star" is supposed to look, act, or sound.

Not all women are content with the "alternative" label, however. Many of the musicians I observed and interviewed for this project – including several who declined to be interviewed for precisely these reasons – maintained that they were not "female tributes," but just "tributes." Despite invariable advertisements or disclaimers on websites or social media pages promoting such groups as "all-girl" or "all-female" tribute acts, many musicians articulated a desire to be perceived as more analogous to straightforward tributes than to parodic alternative tributes. "I just wanted to do Elvis," Lady E (Deborah Knight), an Elvis tribute artist, told me. "I didn't want anyone thinking I'm a girl or a dyke; I just wanted them to see Elvis. I didn't want that to take away from the show... I didn't feel like a girl. I just felt like Elvis [when I put] that big belt on."⁶² Many artists wanted to make clear that their act was not a gimmick, but a sincere display of fan affection and homage. I also observed a trend among certain female acts to distance themselves from *other* female tribute acts, ones they saw as distastefully capitalizing on their sexuality as a marketing ploy or otherwise privileging sex appeal over musical

⁶² Interview with the author, 23 July 2015.

artistry. The members of Judas Priestess, for instance, referred to other sorts of female tributes as “panty bands.” Singer MilitiA explained: “To me, it becomes a kind of pornography. ‘Girls playing the music you love!’ It ends up being this sexuality thing. . . . You can see the bands who put that first, that that’s their gimmick and that’s what they’re selling. For [us] it’s very different.” Bassist Gyda Gash continued: “We’re just a team of highly skilled musicians. We’re experienced. We didn’t want to be like that.”⁶³ On the other hand, many groups are acutely self-aware of their already-sexualized position as women on a stage set for the male gaze, but instead attempt to use this handicap as promotional leverage. Led Zeppelin guitarist Steph Paynes told *SPIN* magazine in 2005: “My theory is that a lot of male Zeppelin fans really *did* want to sleep with Led Zeppelin. So those kinds of guys love the fact that we’re girls, because they can watch us play those songs and still feel normal. They can actually go there in their mind without freaking themselves out.”⁶⁴ The internal contention over acceptable levels of female sexuality on public display is hardly unique to tribute acts; similar debates play out in contemporary popular music of all kinds, as evidenced by events like the 2013 Internet-based exchange of “open letters” between Sinéad O’Connor and Miley Cyrus concerning the latter’s supposed self-exploitation and “prostitution” via the music industry.⁶⁵ But for tribute artists, the distinction is in some ways a murky attempt to delineate the sincere from the parodic, the fans from the profiteers. As joke-based tributes become an increasingly common form of live music entertainment, female musicians are forced to validate and legitimize their appearance on the rock stage as a serious, rather than frivolous, endeavor.

One notable difference between highly parodic tributes and female tributes is women’s staying power on the tribute circuit. Mash-up tributes tend to be short-lived projects, whereas many all-women tributes have been consistently active and touring for ten to

⁶³ Interview with the author, 18 July 2015.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Chuck Klosterman, “She’s Got Big Balls.” *SPIN*, June 2005: 75.

⁶⁵ See “Sinéad O’Connor Pens Miley Cyrus 4th Open Letter,” *Huffington Post* 9 October 2013.

fifteen years (as have El Vez and Mini Kiss). The novelty factor that gives parodic tributes their appeal can prove wearisome; as one review for Richard Cheese and Lounge Against the Machine writes, “It was a gimmick that was funny once, but got pretty old pretty quick. Once you heard one song, you’d heard them all.”⁶⁶ In contrast, nearly all of the female tribute artists I spoke with or observed commented on the loyalty of their own fanbase, of fans who repeatedly attended or traveled great distances to see shows. These discrepancies suggest that the imperatives behind female tributing versus other kinds of alternative/parodic tributing bear greater incentive and reward for musicians and audiences alike.

Interestingly, the significance of gender-swapping does not necessarily translate both ways. Though male-performed tributes to female artists are exceedingly rare – I could find no currently active examples – their motives tend to align more with parody than veneration, sometimes even amounting to spite. As Jimmy Wiz of the now-defunct Madonna tribute group Mandonna told *VICE*: “We started the band out of complete irreverence for tribute bands – in particular, all-female versions of all-male acts. Madonna was the likely candidate as she and her music are well known. ...Mandonna is the ultimate anti-tribute.”⁶⁷ As Georgina Gregory also notes, Mandonna’s “depiction of pop femininity has overt connotations of misogyny,”⁶⁸ though their explanations of subject matter and motive only reinforce the dire need for space in music-making for alternate femininities. Mandonna’s backlash response to female tribute acts perhaps indicates the great threat women’s performances pose to the boundaries that cordon off rock music as an exclusively male enterprise. If women can rock as convincingly as any man, then what’s to stop them from taking over the genre entirely?⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Mike Hollan, “6 Clever Cover Bands with Crazy Themes.” *Smosh* n.d.

⁶⁷ *VICE* Staff, “Tribute Bands.” 31 October 2008.

⁶⁸ Georgina Gregory, “Transgender Tribute Bands and the Subversion of Male Rites of Passage through the Performance of Heavy Metal Music.” *Journal for Cultural Research* 17.1 (2012), 21-36: 30.

⁶⁹ I would like to clarify, also, that Mandonna is an isolated example. I do not think that such animosity extends to, for example, drag queens or even tribute events like the

2.3 Tributes and Rock “Herstories”

Despite their niche popularity, female tribute artists still operate in a highly male-dominated sphere with regards to both the tribute circuit and to live rock music entertainment as a whole. They therefore must contend with many of the same obstacles and prejudices that have long plagued women instrumentalists throughout the history of modern popular music. Proficiency on rock instruments might be regarded with suspicion, derision, or disbelief when it comes to female players, and their attempts to break into modes of mainstream rock have historically been met with resistance and/or attempts to ghettoize “women in rock” as a subgenre based on comparative anatomy rather than sonic similarities. Female tribute bands represent a continuation of the attempt to legitimize female music-making in rock by equating their own technical and performance ability with that of canonical male rockers. By minimizing difference while maintaining an open “female-ness,” tribute acts expose the artificiality of boundaries and prescriptions that maintain rock music as a “man’s” game. Their plight constitutes both a natural continuation of feminist projects to increase women’s visibility on the rock stage while opening up a new and forward-looking way of reimagining the past. At the same time, tension arises as female bodies continue to draw from rock’s patriarchal well. Do female tribute artists truly carve a new musical space for women, or do they only reaffirm their own lines of circumscription?

Female musicians undoubtedly served as vital contributors to the inception of rock’n’roll, even if their influence is not always directly acknowledged by mainstream historiographies. Though American blues had an obvious impact on early British rock, female guitar players and singers of the genre tend to be overshadowed by male artists, despite the direct influence that, for example, Sister Rosetta Tharpe or Big Mama

“Night of One Thousand Stevies” Oakes details in *Losers*. But that Mandonna deliberately set out to undermine female tribute bands’ efforts is indicative of at least some kind of cultural backlash against women’s presence on rock stages.

Thornton had on Elvis Presley.⁷⁰ Women also played a sizable role in the proliferation of American rockabilly during the 1950s, many of whom played guitar as well as sang; they often wrote their own material and challenged social and sexual gender norms with their lyrics and stage presentations.⁷¹ Additionally, the “girl groups” of the 1950s and ‘60s – the Supremes, the Shangri-Las, etc. – were extremely popular and profitable, though contemporary conceptions tend to cast the members of such outfits as “interchangeable, easily manipulated puppets, while the ones with the ‘real’ talent were the [mostly male] managers, songwriters, publishers, and producers who worked behind such groups.”⁷² As both Gillian Gaar⁷³ and Will Stos⁷⁴ have argued, however, this view radically underestimates the agency female performers had over their careers as well as the tremendous influence they had on early male rock bands like the Beatles. The concept of the “girl group” or “all-girl band” has deep roots in 20th century popular music that seems to stem from the industry’s insistence on gender lines as a tool for marketing.

As rock music congealed into a (perhaps loosely defined) genre throughout the 1960s and ‘70s, few women were able to find commercial opportunities, much less success, within its framework. The exceptions – Janis Joplin, Suzi Quatro – only prove the rule. Bands like Goldie and the Gingerbreads or Fanny likely developed as “all-female” ensembles during this time not necessarily out of choice, but because female instrumentalists would have been unwelcome in circles of serious male musicians.⁷⁵ Other groups, such as the

⁷⁰ Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1994).

⁷¹ David Sanjek, “Can a Fujiyama Mama be the Female Elvis?: The Wild, Wild Women of Rockabilly,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 2007), 137-167.

⁷² Gillian Gaar, *She’s a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1992): 34.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Will Stos, “Bouffants, Beehives, and Breaking Gender Norms: Rethinking ‘Girl Group’ Music of the 1950s and 1960s.” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24.2 (2012), 117-154.

⁷⁵ Gaar.

Runaways, might be purposely recruited for industry-crafted commodification and exploitation. Musical movements outside mainstream or major-label models, such as womyn's music or punk, offered increased stage space for women; their philosophies carried through post-punk and into the riot grrrl movement of the 1990s, which specifically catered to female-centric, DIY music-making.⁷⁶ Though women are arguably more visible in rock today than ever before, they still remain largely outnumbered and out-favored by their male counterparts.

It would be redundant and unnecessary to recount every overlooked or undervalued instance of female music-making. Many valuable texts already exist that chronicle women's involvement throughout rock history, such as Gillian Gaar's *She's a Rebel* and Lucy O'Brien's *She Bop*.⁷⁷ The point is not that stories of beating the odds and overcoming institutionalized sexism to enjoy a respectable career in the music industry exist, but that the narrative arc of each story remains very much the same for women today as it was fifty or more years ago. Even the most comprehensive lists of exceptional female musicians cannot undo the ideological impediments that quarantine women to the fringes of rock in the first place. Their roles and stories continue to be left out of rock history, relegated instead to tomes that deal exclusively with "women in rock" as a sub-category. As Sherrie Tucker writes, "...it is not enough to prove that women were there all along, that they played all manner of instruments. The continued erasure of women from dominant [music] discourse, *despite* a dignified body of published knowledge... points to an ideological morass impervious to the pleas for the dignity and heroism of the women" who play or played popular music.⁷⁸ Tucker's work is not concerned with rock music, however, but with big-band jazz ensembles of the 1940s – nonetheless, the parallels that can be drawn from that period of popular music-making to ours are striking.

⁷⁶ See Gaar.

⁷⁷ Lucy O'Brien, *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul* (New York: Penguin, 1996).

⁷⁸ Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000): 21.

Despite the long and rich history of women on the musical stage, the struggles remain the same.

Common themes of audience skepticism and initial disbelief recur throughout Tucker's studies, Gaar's histories, Mavis Bayton's ethnographies, and my own observations of contemporary female tribute musicians. When it comes to playing masculine-coded instruments such as guitar, drums, or horns, Bayton notes, "a women's band is expected to be sexy and incompetent, expectations which form a de facto hurdle facing women musicians and, especially, all-women bands."⁷⁹ Gender stereotypes that paint men as more capable of technical proficiency and mastery over many skilled subjects automatically relegate women players to second-tier status; they often have to prove their competency in ways not so openly demanded of men. This pressure accelerates when the performance material itself is also coded as masculine, as is the case with most branches of rock and jazz, but especially so with hard rock and heavy metal.⁸⁰ Many female tribute acts choose to work in such genres, with the additional burden of performing to an audience with readily-available mental comparisons to be made between their execution of a text and the versions as performed by the original male artists on studio albums. Mistakes are perhaps not only noticeable, but anticipated. "Being women, of course, is met with immediate skepticism," guitarist Steph Paynes of Lez Zeppelin has said. "Everyone assumes we can't do this because we're women... When we really do pull it off, they're kind of stunned by it."⁸¹ Significantly, prejudices do not solely reside with male audience members. As Teddi Tarnoff, bassist for (now-defunct) Metallica tribute Misstallica, has commented: "You'd be amazed at the women that come to shows and go, 'I didn't know girls could do that.' What do you mean you didn't know girls could do

⁷⁹ Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 122.

⁸⁰ See: Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993); Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000).

⁸¹ Quoted in "Livin', Lovin' – and They're Women." *Boston Globe* 3 August 2007.

that?”⁸² Part of the challenge, or perhaps the appeal, of tributing male rock acts is overturning the preliminary and/or biased expectations of audience members concerning female musical capacity to prove that women can play just as fast, loud, or hard as men.

In fact, the majority of female tributes tend to tackle some of the most severe cases of “cock rock” in the pop music canon. At least two-thirds of the acts in my research can be comfortably categorized as hard rock or heavy metal, a precedent that seems to have been established early on by pioneering female groups like Lez Zeppelin, the Iron Maidens, and AC/DShe. As Bayton notes, these represent the genres in which “women are least likely to get involved” as far as original music-making goes because they “embod[y] the apotheosis of ‘masculinist’ values.”⁸³ On the contrary, these modes have become the *most* likely way for women to become involved in the tribute circuit. In her study of all types of acts beneath the tribute umbrella, Georgina Gregory posits that there are three factors that make an original rock or pop act highly adaptable for tribute treatment: widespread popularity, a distinctive look, and an early death.⁸⁴ Additionally, there is something to be said about the “liveness” of an artist’s reputation or material; tributes to jam bands are likely more popular than electronic dance music artists because the former relies on improvisation where the latter is largely constructed through digital sampling. Elvis Presley, too, is renowned as a live performer in a way that Roy Orbison, for instance, is not. Overall, however, I would suggest that for women these traits are less important than the cult of masculinity surrounding the artist. The more aggressive the displays of masculinity, the more the affected nature of such postures are revealed as women perform them; the embodied discrepancies create the ironic distance of play that draws concert-goers to alternative tributes, as described in the previous section. At the same time, though, the consistent prevalence of female hard/heavy rock tributes speaks to the underlying, and usually unspoken, aim to equate female instrumental ability with men’s,

⁸² Quoted in Amanda Petrusich, “Flowing Hair? Tight Pants? Women Can Rock That.” *New York Times* 21 July 2011.

⁸³ Bayton, *Frock Rock*: 39.

⁸⁴ Gregory, *Send in the Clones*: 50-53.

to increase women's representation in these genres, and to reduce the stigma associated with being a female fan of such music.

Hard rock and heavy metal artists are notoriously misogynistic in their treatment of women in lyrics, music videos, and on- and off-stage behavior.⁸⁵ It is little surprise, then, that their fanbase tends to comprise few women.⁸⁶ This does not mean, however, that such music is universally unappealing or inaccessible to women, and female tribute bands in these veins often work to combat stereotypes that women do not like heavy music while rendering the physical presentation of their act more inviting for a broader audience. To be a tribute artist is usually to be a fan, first and foremost, and the women on stage are conscious of their leverage to persuade more women into the audience, to recruit new listening converts for the music or artists they hold most dear. Even the mere advertisement of acts as “all-female bands” signals to potential concert-goers a safe(r) space where they will not be the only women in attendance. Carly Beath, singer and guitarist for Hervana, told me the story of a woman at one of their shows who had previously “gone to a Nirvana show when she was a teenager and it wasn’t a great experience for her. She felt intimidated [by the male crowds]. But at our show, she could sort of relax and enjoy the songs in a live setting again.”⁸⁷ Not coincidentally, the performance Beath mentions took place at a launch party for a feminist teen-girl magazine called *Shameless*. The venues female tributes choose to play can also help cater to a more inclusive crowd. When I saw Judas Priestess, for example, it was their third year headlining the “Women’s Right to Rock” festival in Seneca Falls, New York. They felt it not an insignificant part of their mission as a band to turn more women on to the music of Judas Priest. The demographic makeup of their audiences was a common point of conversation:

MILITIA (vocals): I would say more females are willing to come to [our show, as opposed to a straightforward male Judas Priest tribute].

⁸⁵ Again, see: Walser; Weinsten.

⁸⁶ The “armadillo in the trousers” syndrome of *Spinal Tap* philosophy.

⁸⁷ Interview with the author, 16 October 2015.

JOSETTE (guitar): Really? I was just going to say I'd like to get more females to come. [...]

RENA SANDS (guitar): There's a lot of male support, but the last few shows we've played there's been a lot of girls, too, and girls who come back to see us a lot.⁸⁸

While it might be rational to assume that most tribute bands are preachers to the converted – audiences in this realm tend to be more likely to pay to see material performed that they are already familiar with – female tribute acts can, and often deliberately do, offer more accessible space in which to hear music that women audiences might not otherwise have thought to seek out, much less discover that they enjoy.

All of these tactics for and sensitivities to other women, the defiance necessary to pursue a male field, the proclamations of “all-girl,” “all-female” spaces: they teem with feminist politics, but the outright use of the “f” word proves contentious among female tribute bands. The desire to make a feminist statement rarely serves as the driving impetus for starting or continuing on with an act, though for some it's an added bonus. As bassist Erin Cousins of Hervana told me: “I would definitely say we're feminists. I mean, it's not the primary *raison d'être* of the band, but...” and she shrugged. Bandmate Carly Beath continued: “That is feminism,” she said – the idea, perhaps, that the personal can be political; that the sheer act of their taking to the stage to perform the music of Nirvana, which they enjoy doing on a personal level, can be righteously feminist without proclaiming itself as such. “That's the ideal. And the way you get [equality] is through visibility and being seen.”⁸⁹ On the opposite end, singer Amy Ward of AC/DC told *SPIN* magazine: “We were never trying to be political. We would never say, ‘We're chicks and we can rock too!’ I mean, *of course* chicks can rock. But there are other all-girl bands where that is absolutely their agenda, and they're feminists and they make feminist statements. ...Our agenda is to have no agenda. Rock'n'roll has nothing to do

⁸⁸ Interview with the author, 11 July 2015.

⁸⁹ Interview with the author, 16 October 2015.

with politics.”⁹⁰ While it is far from necessary for various tribute acts to have convergent views on politics or feminism, part of the inconsistencies surely spring from the volatility of the word “feminist” itself, which can mean different things to different people at different points throughout history (much like the word “rock”). Regardless of their own labels, the growth of female tribute bands has undoubtedly increased the presence of women on at least some stages. That these stages are enabled only by tributing men’s creative output, however, is another source of contention.

Of course, conversations about feminism are not confined to female tribute acts. Drawing conclusions from research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, Mavis Bayton also found ambiguities concerning not only how women musicians defined themselves, but how well others measured up to their own standards of feminism. Bayton writes:

Some feminists in my research... argued that women’s bands should not do ‘covers’ because the majority of existing songs have been written by men and it was about time women’s voices were heard, the implicit suggestion being that women write different sorts of songs than men, in terms of both lyric and sound. For these women, songwriting was an ideological duty... [They] believed that it was important that everyone should know that women were *capable* of writing their own material.⁹¹

From this perspective, no cross-gender tribute act would or could qualify as “feminist.” Again, the argument can easily be made that tributes only perpetuate and reinforce the established importance of men’s contributions to the rock canon while underplaying or continuing to marginalize women’s roles. Tributing does little to grapple with assumptions about the nature of women’s songwriting abilities in the way that, say, the Riot Grrrl movement did. However, tributes can contribute something in terms of broadening the range of emotions women are allowed to express on stage. Aggression, anger, lust, greed, boredom, frustration, sexuality: these are the frequent topics of classic rock songs, and they are not sensations familiar only to men, as riot grrrls also proved.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Klosterman, 76.

⁹¹ *Frock Rock*, 95.

Women's performance of male-written music mitigates the differences between them not just as instrumentalists but as emotional beings. They demonstrate that authentic feeling as well as technical proficiency is not contingent on one's biological sex assignment at birth.

When female tribute artists succeed artistically, emotively, and technically in their performances, however, the surprise and congratulations can prove just as frustrating as the initial doubts. Members of Hervana agreed that they had all heard a version of the comment "You're pretty good – for a girl" at some point during their musical careers.⁹² Similarly, when audiences attempted to compliment members of all-girl jazz bands in Tucker's research by saying "they played 'like men,' ...they countered with the rejoinder, 'You mean, we play like musicians.'"⁹³ Like contemporary tribute artists, female jazz bands of the 1940s primarily interpreted music written and arranged by men. They employed skilled musicians who may have been hard-pressed to find other work in their genre of choice simply because of their gender. Tributes and big bands both concentrate their energies in live performance rather than recordings. In all, rock tributes are remarkably similar to Tucker's jazz groups in their motives and results alike. Both, to borrow Tucker's conclusions,

[make] it possible to describe women's playing as undifferentiated from – not just equal to – men's. To perform [music] without audible gender difference meant women playing instruments and styles that were associated with men. It meant women refusing to restrict themselves to soft or sweet timbres. ...And such women, whose [music] did not produce *feminine difference*, challenged both audiences' definition of *woman* and men's exclusive possession of the most highly valued instruments and styles.⁹⁴

Therefore, to play "like men" is not necessarily a bad thing, even within the context of promoting women's involvement and recognition in rock. To erase gender difference is

⁹² Interview with the author, 16 October 2015.

⁹³ Tucker, 68.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 209-10.

to render obsolete the term “women in rock,” which, as Norma Coates writes, “itself delineates hegemonic space. ‘Rock’ is separate from ‘women’. ‘Women’ are only related to ‘rock’ by being allowed ‘in’. The ‘in’ of ‘women in rock’ has a contingent feel about it, an aura of something that will never be complete, never fully integrated with the whole.”⁹⁵ When women take on the most superlative characters of the canon via tribute performance, they are not so much *in* rock as they *become* rock. Women playing Led Zeppelin can seem as ordinary as Led Zeppelin playing Led Zeppelin because it is real, embodied, and undifferentiated. Cross-gender tributes may give further credence to male-authored texts by continuing to perform them on a stage, but women’s performances are resolutely *theirs*. For as long as gender stereotypes and preconceptions prohibit women’s original music-making opportunities in the music industry, tributing serves as an effective way for women to “integrate with the whole” of rock. By reclaiming aspects of the past, female tribute acts gesture toward a more inclusive future.

2.4 Conclusion: Imagination and Liminality

According to poet Wallace Stevens, “The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.”⁹⁶ Tribute bands are of course a kind of fiction: they are not, nor do they ever claim to be, the people they play. And yet if we allow ourselves to get caught up in the moment, a tribute performance can feel very much like the “real thing.” After all, what is there that is not “real” about real musicians performing real songs to real audiences? To know that tributes are an artificial simulation and to participate in that fiction is not only to believe in a fiction, but to make it real. Tribute bands bear a rather unique capacity in popular culture to rewrite some aspects of

⁹⁵ Norma Coates, “(R)evolution Now? Rock and the Political Potential of Gender,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 50-63: 61.

⁹⁶ Wallace Stevens, “Adagia,” in *Opus Posthumous* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), n.p.

the past, to breathe not only new but possibly different life into the artifacts of history. They can become whatever they, and their audiences, imagine them to be.

Tribute bands “occupy a peculiar place within the contemporary music-mediascape,”⁹⁷ and for female acts, even more so. They are neither modern nor historical, original nor imitative, masculine nor feminine, innovative nor redundant, reverent nor ridiculous, real nor fictitious. They exist on the thresholds, the limens, of popular music-making; the persistent gaps of either/or, neither/nor. Yet “within the liminal space,” June Boyce-Tillman writes, “we can imagine new worlds for ourselves and others. This is because we are outside the real-life situation”⁹⁸ – that is, the social rules of rock, the hegemonic dictates of gender. If we willingly enter musical tributes knowing they are a fiction, that they do not represent reality, imaginative possibilities are opened wide. We can leave the venue at the end of the show and “re-enter that [real-life] situation with ideas of strategies for resisting or overcoming situations of oppression.”⁹⁹ We can not only recognize that female musicians are as equally capable as men, we can see the proof played out before our very eyes and ears. Tributing classic rock artists with female bodies is nothing more than a plausible version of history where all the classic rock artists were female to begin with.

When *SPIN* writer Chuck Klosterman lauds Lez Zeppelin as “the most powerful all-female band in rock history,”¹⁰⁰ he does not simply mean that the music itself is loud, masculine, or overbearing – though it very well is. For as long as Klosterman believes and participates in the “fiction” of Lez Zeppelin, it becomes real. If Led Zeppelin was one of the most powerful all-male bands in rock history, as surely they were, that power can transcend its progenitors to transpose onto those who embody it within the fiction.

⁹⁷ Shane Homan, “Introduction,” in *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*, ed. Shane Homan (New York: Open University Press, 2006), 3.

⁹⁸ June Boyce-Tillman, “The Transformative Qualities of a Liminal Space Created by Musicking.” *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 17.2 (2009), 184-202: 197.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Klosterman, 74.

Any Led Zeppelin is likely bound to be powerful, male or female or otherwise. But female tributes have a certain ability to conjure the questions of *what if*: What if Led Zeppelin had produced the same output in the 1970s but had been comprised of female members? Would they have received the same attention or achieved the same popularity? What if women had been allowed the same opportunities in rock from the start? Would they have produced a “Led Zeppelin,” a “Beatles” – or something even greater? Ultimately, the role and social function of female tribute bands is not to reveal the past, but to rewrite it according to their own fantasies.

Chapter 3

3 We Salute You: Gender Identity and Performance

“I didn’t set out to be sweaty onstage and look like Dee Dee Ramone – I wanted to be me even though I was impersonating someone onstage,” says Ramonas bassist Vicky Smith, AKA Pee Pee Ramona. “We’re not a massively straight tribute, but what people like about it is that we keep the spirit alive, but we’re doing it our own way.”¹⁰¹ The Ramones, Led Zeppelin, and AC/DC are the three most frequently tributed acts by women in my study. While these three groups might have little in common musically to begin with, their various female tribute acts hardly resemble one another at all, even – or especially – when they tribute the same group. In the end, however, they all offer a remarkable resemblance to the bands they tribute, if each in their “own way.”

Why do women gravitate toward tributing particular artists, and how do they decide how to perform said tribute? This chapter examines the processes of identification as they relate to connecting with a particular musical artist and embodying that artist through the act of tribute on stage. Women in particular, when tributing male artists, have to deal with physical and social differentials that regulate the acceptable modes of public behavior for men and women as separate and distinct categories. When women trespass those boundaries, they challenge the structures of socialized gender itself. Using four different female AC/DC tribute groups – Hell’s Belles, AC/DShe, ThundHerStruck, and Back:N:Black¹⁰² – as a case study, I argue that the various modes of presentation enacted by each group demonstrate the potential for increasingly fluid notions of gender that can incorporate masculinities and femininities within a singular embodiment. Like Pee Pee

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Caroline Sullivan, “Cover Girls: The Ramonas, Iron Maidens and the Rise of the Female Tribute Band,” *The Guardian* 7 April 2016. Web.

¹⁰² I also found evidence of additional female AC/DC tribute bands, including Whole Lotta Rosies from Los Angeles and (a different) Hell’s Belles from Germany, but the information available was either minimal, outdated, or in German. As such, I’ve limited my discussion to these four bands, who each have a sizable Facebook and YouTube presence available for analysis.

Ramona, many tribute artists strive to simultaneously be both themselves and someone else while on stage. This very idea of dual embodiment enables a deeper understanding of the performance of gender and how the projection of a fixed “self” can only exist in a constant state of flux and negotiation. The openly constructed nature of the tribute performance space mirrors the constructions of “nature” as we encounter them from day to day as sexed and gendered subjects of discourse.

3.1 Musical Tribute and Identification

What might compel female musicians to form tribute acts to a group like AC/DC? For singer Amy Ward of AC/DShe, the band’s original frontman, Bon Scott, “was the epitome of cool. ... There was just something in my blood that said I needed to go act like Bon.”¹⁰³ In a separate interview, she states plainly: “There’s no one else I’d rather be” than him.¹⁰⁴ She’s not the only one who feels this way. Apart from the three other all-female acts studied here, there are approximately 150 straightforward AC/DC tribute bands listed on fan site *AC/DC Collector* who are active and operating today.¹⁰⁵ Tributing is an acute proclamation of identification with an artist;¹⁰⁶ it is a way to express appreciation for their artistry and to contribute to a broader dissemination of their music while borrowing their tools of expression to convey a public identity. Popular music can be a powerful instrument for negotiating an understanding of the self and for the reckoning of one’s position in society.¹⁰⁷ Mainstream groups like AC/DC provide valuable opportunities to interrogate how mass texts can contribute to individual identity formations among large groups or specific populations. While, on the surface, the band

¹⁰³ Quoted in Aidin Vaziri, “Rock ‘n’ Role Playing.” *San Francisco Gate* 7 March 2004.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Shea, “AC/DShe.” *Thrasher Magazine*, 13 January 2008.

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.acdcollector.com/tributes.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ See Oakes, *Losers*.

¹⁰⁷ See Theodore Gracyk, *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

tends to bear a reputation for exemplifying the axiom “boys will be boys,” there are more subtle aspects of their public presentation that may make possible and understandable female musicians’ attraction to and connection with their music.

Formed in 1973 by brothers Malcolm and Angus Young in Sydney, Australia, AC/DC meets all three of Georgina Gregory’s criteria for a highly tributable band.¹⁰⁸ (1) They are extremely popular and commercially successful; even non-fans are sure to be familiar with at least some of their repertoire because of its perennial radio play or its use in commercials or movie soundtracks. As Joe Bonomo writes in his *33 1/3* series treatise on 1979’s *Highway to Hell*, the album’s title track “has become a touchstone for many, from besotted fans to... indie hipsters who can grin and ironically head-bang their way through the song’s fun inanity.”¹⁰⁹ (2) They have a highly distinctive look, especially with lead guitarist Angus’ signature schoolboy-uniform stage costume or original singer Bon Scott’s trademark tattoos, wild mane, “crotch-choking jeans and a sleeveless denim vest.”¹¹⁰ And although the band continues to tour and release new material to the present day, they technically also meet criterion (3), an early death, as the charismatic frontman Scott died in 1980 and was replaced by the somewhat less visually captivating singer Brian Johnson. Furthermore, AC/DC is also renowned for their live performances, often replete with hyperbolic antics, earsplitting volumes, and exploding canons. They also meet my own extra condition for female tribute acts in particular, the cult of masculinity surrounding the artist; as *Melody Maker* reporter Caroline Coon wrote in 1976, “a more macho and less sexually ambivalent lot” would be difficult to find.¹¹¹ Bonomo also concedes that the group’s “lyrics catalog an epic sweep through the triumvirate of men’s needs: pussy, rock & roll, drink.”¹¹² These attributes combined likely make the recipe for

¹⁰⁸ Georgina Gregory, *Send in the Clones: A Cultural Study of the Tribute Band* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012): 50-53.

¹⁰⁹ Bonomo, 30.

¹¹⁰ Bonomo, 10.

¹¹¹ Caroline Coon, “AC/DC: Nashville Rooms, London.” *Melody Maker* 8 May 1976.

¹¹² Bonomo: 35.

much of AC/DC's long-lasting popularity as well as their tributability among musicians of any gender.

Another vital component of the band's success is their particular brand of humor. While they encapsulate and incorporate many of the archetypal gestures of "rock" into their music and stage presence – such as "anthemic choruses, the timeless appeal of adolescent uncouthness, and the giddy propulsion of eighth-notes"¹¹³ alongside a fierce machismo and flirtations with the occult – they do so in a way that, unlike so many other groups, is closer to silly rather than scary, self-mocking rather than self-aggrandizing. As music journalist Phil Sutcliffe explains, "They stand for everything I disagree with... and yet they're so totally honest, open and funny about it I [get] carried away with liking them."¹¹⁴ Bonomo, too, defends their often chauvinistic lyrics as "simply reaching in to the well-worn bag of adolescent boys' (wet) dreamscapes," but "delivered with a meaningful grin that deflates the misogyny a bit."¹¹⁵ These jokes and grins complicate any concrete meanings that might be gleaned through their music alone; the invitation to play with, and even poke fun at, the conventions of rock and masculinity offers women an open entry point onto the hard rock stage. If the presentation is not "serious" itself to begin with, then women cannot be accused of tarnishing its gravity.

Perhaps largely because of this lighthearted attitude as well, AC/DC seems to have a particularly strong attraction for youth first exploring rock territory. Guitarist Angus Young, whose signature stage costume for the past forty years has been a schoolboy's uniform, has commented on this appeal: "We've got the basic thing the kids want," he has said. "They want to rock and that's it."¹¹⁶ Even as the group itself has gotten older, their crowds seem only to expand, rather than mature, in age. At their tribute events, AC/DC's Amy Ward has also observed a particularly youthful crowd: "A lot of young

¹¹³ Joe Bonomo, *AC/DC's Highway to Hell* (New York: Continuum, 2010): 27.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Bonomo, 40.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 39

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Bonomo: 70.

kids come to our shows,” she told *SPIN* in 2005, when she herself was only in her early twenties. “They’ve never seen AC/DC, but they’ve grown up on AC/DC because of their parents. There’s nothing cooler than playing to a shitload of kids in the front row – kids who are nine or ten, wearing AC/DC shirts, singing all the words. I know that sounds fucking corny, but it’s cool.”¹¹⁷ Musical imprinting can last a lifetime. It makes sense that musicians seeking to form a tribute act would want to perform music that is important, meaningful, or influential to them, and to pass those values on to others. The wealth of tributes like Ward’s that spring from AC/DC might not only have to do with the band’s ability to elicit strong ties of identification during crucial periods of adolescent self-discovery, but the loyalty that such fandom can instill during that time – the kind that compels young individuals to grow up and form tribute bands so that more young people can benefit from the group’s music in the way that they did.

AC/DC’s immature, perhaps even self-deprecating, humor might stem from their own underdog status in rock ideology itself. Despite holding a firm place as one of the most commercially successful rock acts of all time, they are largely ignored or panned by critics and academics alike. But even preceding their fame, the band members were, physically speaking, all smaller-than-average dudes, and critics and audiences have often taken notice. At five-foot-two-or-three and not much more than skin and bones, the young Angus Young was especially victim to scrutiny in their early years: “From the runty looks of him, he is quite the unlikely Guitar God,” Bonomo summarizes,¹¹⁸ and it’s undeniable that his crass hyperactivity on stage was a far cry from the opulent and self-effusive style typical of rock players in the latter 1970s (and likely part of the reason the band was first classified as “punk” during this time). Rather than allow this handicap to limit or define him, however, Young – like many of the alternative tribute artists discussed in chapter two – openly plays with this difference. The schoolboy uniform he wears on stage is both an acknowledgment of and a joke on his inability to physically measure up to the pillars of “masculinity,” even if his technical ability and stage prowess

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Klosterman: 75.

¹¹⁸ Bonomo, 71.

attempt to indicate otherwise. Whether by design or errant rumor, it was widely reported that Young was only 16 years old on their first UK/American tour¹¹⁹ (he was 21). The boy/man delineations are called into question with his performance because of his ability to ape the gestures of “authentic” rock-star masculinity via a supposedly emasculated embodiment. His and the rest of the band’s stature are contrasted with bombastic, self-aggrandizing lyrics and an “impossibly large noise coming out of these five micropeople. Watch it with the sound down and your ears still ring.”¹²⁰

It’s easy to imagine how women musicians might empathize or identify with these kinds of preordained doubts concerning their legitimate competence in rocking out based off of visual perceptions alone. While plenty of bands may be popular, distinctive, dead, masculine, and fun to watch live, AC/DC is relatively unique in their combination of these attributes with a built-in level of good-humored artifice and an attitude of devout playfulness that borders on the self-mocking. In all, these qualities are surely what help define them as one of the most-tributed acts by females in my study, though they’re challenged closely in numbers by tributes to Led Zeppelin and the Ramones. It seems that these three artists are representative of three different tactics women can easily utilize to combat the prejudices and stereotypes concerning their ability to play rock music: they can master some of the most virtuosic and masculinist repertoire in the canon and prove their equal technical proficiency (Led Zeppelin); they can deny the prescription that rock needs to be difficult or complicated in order to be good and instead revel in three-chord-changes and bubble-gum simplicity (the Ramones); or they can adopt the same strategies as the original band before them, acknowledging their own differences or eccentricities, using humor and fun not necessarily to deflect criticism, but to anticipate, engage, and refigure those setbacks as positive forces from the start.

¹¹⁹ As Coon reports, e.g.

¹²⁰ Bonomo, 20.

3.2 Female Embodiment and Gender Fluidity

If pure imitation were the sole goal of tribute acts, each of them would end up looking very much the same. As the previous chapter's discussion of alternative tributes demonstrates, however, this is not always the case. Identifying characteristics such as race and gender can influence and shape the outcome of a tribute performance. And yet, if such categories as race and gender are to be believed as "identifying," that is, as engendering a common set of attributes that congeals such categories and differentiates them from others, then it might be assumed that all alternative tributes that share common differences would end up looking much the same – all Hispanic Elvises, for example, or all of the female AC/DC tribute groups. Again, nothing could be further from reality. The subjectivity of every member in a tribute act is constantly in play, informing both their interpretation of the material performed and negotiating the "identity" that is projected via performance. No two female tributes are alike because of the various tools they bring with them to the stage, which may or may not be the tools conferred on them by gendered discourse. As a willful project combining the "Self" with the "Other," tributes eradicate many of the binaries that define hegemonic social discourse, destabilizing the categories of singular "identity" imposed on bodies in favor of a multiplicity of meanings and expressions. For women in particular, this involves the mixing and melding of masculinities and femininities onto singular bodies, a process that deconstructs the bifurcated mechanisms of socialized gender and enables a wider spectrum of self-expression.

Even among straightforward tributes, the nuances of personality often emerge through the guise of imitation. As Rick Marino, author of *Be Elvis: A Guide to Impersonating the King*, notes: "It's really surprising how individual we Elvis impersonators are.

...Superficially, we may resemble each other. But believe me, there's no shortage of personal styles. ...At the first [Elvis Presley Impersonators International Association] convention... I looked at the forty or so Elvis impersonators in full costume who were present for the grand finale and said, 'You know what, fellas? We're all supposed to look

like Elvis, but we don't look a damn thing like each other!"¹²¹ The differences are often more than skin-deep, though: a tribute artist's performance of a song may reflect not only the way Elvis interpreted the song, but how the tributer interprets the song, or how a tributer interprets the way Elvis interpreted the song. Variations from one act to another are common, though any or all of them could be equally deemed faithful to the original or "authentic." It follows that there is no "right" way to tribute a star, because there are different ways to interpret that star. As Jason Lee Oakes writes:

The concept of "tribute," and specific phenomena such as tribute events, are wholly dependent on the presence of a sizable and varied discourse surrounding the tributed star, for the heterogeneity of approaches taken to a given musical star at a tribute event do not appear out of thin air. Without an elaborated network of meanings and significances around the star and his or her music, tribute performers would be lacking the needed vocabulary which they can then allude to, rearrange, or attempt to subvert.¹²²

An Elvis tribute event such as the Collingwood Elvis Festival would be less exciting without the variety of interpretations tribute artists bring to their performances. Though they are universally informed by the real Elvis, and though in competition they are judged by their likeness to the one true King, the diversity among tributers indicates that Presley himself is not a static, unchangeable text, but a multidimensional being of complex significance to his fans.

At the same time, it is not just the discourse surrounding the star that affects tribute performance, but the discourse surrounding the tribute artist herself. Where and when a rendition of Elvis' "American Trilogy" happens, for instance, can affect whether the tone is mocking or serious, whether the singer should be regarded as a ham or a patriot. And again, the politics of embodiment come into play to influence the meaning and

¹²¹ Quoted in Francesca Brittan, "Women Who 'Do Elvis': Authenticity, Masculinity, and Masquerade." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 18.2 (2006), 167-190: 170.

¹²² Jason Lee Oakes, *Losers, Punks, and Queers (and Elvii Too): Identification and 'Identity' at New York City Music Tribute Events*, Diss. Columbia University, 2005 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2005): 111.

interpretation of the tribute stage. As Francesca Brittan writes of Elvis tribute artists, the act of performance involves a “simultaneous invention of self; it is not simply a process of performative recovery, but an act of creative self-claiming.”¹²³ The discourse surrounding “women” or “women in rock” affects the outcome of performance. The end result in any act of tribute is not the pure distillation of a singular “star text” or of a representational Self, but an amalgamation of the two. Brittan invokes dramaturgist Richard Schechner’s sense of “double negativity” to describe the “doubling of identity implicit in impersonation... the simultaneous experience of ‘not me’ and ‘not not me’ that allows contradictory and even opposite identities to mingle, opening up a space in which the self may also be other.”¹²⁴ When guitarist Adrian Conner of Hell’s Belles duckwalks across the stage or writhes on the floor through a solo, for example, she presents behavior that is “not Adrian” because it is a direct imitation of Angus Young’s movements, but it is also “not not Adrian” because she embodies the movement in that moment of time and space. The inverse might also be said – that the performance is “not Angus,” but also “not not Angus.” These contradictory positions complicate the determination of categories of identity and what it means to be (or not to be) a “woman,” a “musician,” a “rock star,” and so on.

Women in particular must decide how to present a stage character that is “not woman” and “not not woman” when they tribute male artists. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler suggests that “the experience of a gendered psychic disposition or cultural identity... requires a differentiation from the opposite gender. Hence, one is one’s gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair.”¹²⁵ The very notion of cross-gender tribute bands depends on the existence and social reality of binary genders, and in some ways, female tribute acts might be said to reinforce these demarcations. At the same time,

¹²³ Brittan, 171.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹²⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 30.

however, they call into question the processes that typically separate and determine the hard and fast rules of psychic gendered dispositions. They appropriate the normative markers of masculinity oft conflated with maleness – aggression, loudness, technical mastery – and superimpose them over unobjectionably female bodies. The double negativity inherent in tribute performance destabilizes either/or categorizations that pair superficial attributes with biological sex, though the extent to which female tribute acts play with these potentials likewise varies.

The four female AC/DC tribute groups, like almost all female tributes, overtly declare their gender from the start. The respective descriptions on their Facebook pages read: “The original all-girl tribute to AC/DC!” (AC/DShe);¹²⁶ “Crazy Awesome the one and only all female AC/DC tribute act” (Hell’s Belles);¹²⁷ “The Girls Who Play AC/DC” (Back:N:Black);¹²⁸ “The ULTIMATE All-Girl Tribute to AC/DC!” (ThundHerStruck).¹²⁹ The feminine puns in three of the four of their band names also loudly indicates their gender, which is especially significant given that these words often serve as potential audiences’ first point of encounter with a group, whether via a concert flier, social media post, or word of mouth. Puns are rampant throughout the tribute circuit (even for straightforward groups; e.g., the Rolling Clones) – probably because they serve as effective marketing tools since people are likely to remember them or share them with friends. Some female tribute artists even admit that they thought of a name before they ever considered actually forming a group.¹³⁰ That Back:N:Black does not follow suit says something about how they hope to project themselves, which rhythm guitarist BB explained in an interview with *Metaladies*: “We all definitely wanted to avoid the cliché

¹²⁶ “About,” <http://www.facebook.com/ac.dshe.1>. Accessed 12 February 2016.

¹²⁷ “About,” <http://www.facebook.com/Hells-Belles-150101406739>. Accessed 12 February 2016.

¹²⁸ “About,” <http://www.facebook.com/backnblack>. Accessed 12 February 2016.

¹²⁹ “About,” <http://www.facebook.com/ThundHerStruck>. Accessed 12 February 2016.

¹³⁰ Bassist Nici “Williams, in fact, had never even picked up a bass until she thought up the name AC/DShe and decided the group needed to exist,” from Klosterman, 75. See also Hervana’s origin story, www.hervanaband.com/about.

names that... just stress that we are girls,” she said. “It’s hard enough to show we rock first, and are girls second. So we leave the names like ‘Let There Be Girls’, ‘Tush Too Much’, ‘Dirty Dames Done Dirt Cheap’ to others.”¹³¹ Back:N:Black represents one of many female tribute acts who likely wish to be de-classified as “alternative” tributes and regarded on equal footing as their straightforward male peers – which is not to suggest that the other groups do not, but that their approach to divided categories of “male” and “female” are different. Where one declines to make a spectacle of their named femaleness, others use it as a platform to draw attention to the disparities they see or experience in music culture. As the website for Hell’s Belles declares:

HELL’S BELLES are indeed ALL female, all the way to their rock-n-roll cores, all the time and without exception. Representing for a whole new generation of women that won’t be intimidated, HELL’S BELLES actively encourage our legions of lady fans to stand up and be counted, and collaborate with women musicians and causes as a part of the mission towards rock and roll inclusion. Not some down-your-throat feminism, but a proactive support and action spirit towards the continued march towards balancing of the gender scales.¹³²

These up-front assertions or minimizations of gender terminology and the avowed rationale behind them already point to a variable and contestable picture of what it means to be a cross-gender tribute band.

Some acts take the process of naming into even deeper gender territory, coming up with individual stage monikers that pun on the original members’ names. AC/DShe’s lineup is billed as “Bonny Scott” (Amy Ward; named after vocalist Bon Scott); “Agnes Young” (Pamela Ausejo; guitarist Angus Young); “Mallory Young” (Sara Brownell; guitarist Malcolm Young); “Riff Williams” (Nici Williams; bassist Cliff Williams); and “Philomena Rudd” (Tina Gordon; drummer Phil Rudd).¹³³ This tactic simultaneously emphasizes one-to-one identification with the roles of the original band’s male members

¹³¹ “Back:N:Black Interview,” *Metaladies*, n.d. <http://www.metaladies.com/interviews/backnblack-interview>. Accessed 21 August 2015.

¹³² “Bio,” <http://www.hellsbelles.info/bio.html>. Accessed 13 October 2015.

¹³³ Other acts that employ this tactic include Hervana, Guns N’ Hoses, and the Ramonas.

while again highlighting a feminized embodiment. Reworking names as gender-normative allows the women who play them to potentially further ridicule the social prohibitions surrounding female music-making as “Agnes” rips through solo after solo. Straightforward tributes also sometimes pun on original artists’ names so as to avoid legal trouble, but the more common method of billing for male and female acts alike is to list the parts as roles played, as both ThundHerStruck and Hell’s Belles do: Adrian Conner “as” Angus Young, etc. Other tributes, like Back:N:Black, do not offer comparative roles at all, but simply list their members as a self-contained unit.¹³⁴ Though each approach has its own internal logic, the one-to-one pun names of female tributes are especially interesting for the ways they continue to impose femininity and female embodiment over masculinized behavior. In some ways, this tactic resembles drag – queens or kings – where performers employ obviously fake names that heighten gender consciousness (a quick Google search offers examples like “Anna Conda” and “Ophelia Coxx” for queens; “Justin Saine” and “Buck Wylde” for kings). But whereas in drag the purpose is to highlight the discrepancies between gender presentation and anatomy, tribute performer nicknames work to align a socially cohesive presentation of gender/anatomy, to appear “more woman,” even though their bodies already write them as women. Most at odds in this presentation, after all, is their behavior: their playing of masculine-coded sounds via masculine-coded instruments. The discrepancies here and the effort to align name and embodiment under a singular gender identity work to make such behavior more socially acceptable for women. The less they deviate in other ways, the more their masculine antics might be allowed or accepted by audiences as plausible or appropriate.

In this sense, all-female tribute bands bear similarity to another contemporary female-centric entertainment/performance mode: women’s roller derby leagues. Along with the tradition of adopting pseudonyms, the parallels between all-female tribute bands and

¹³⁴ This is also most common for tribute acts whose membership does not readily correlate with the original act. In Sheezer, for example, all members share lead vocal duties from song to song, so no one of them can be said to play the “Rivers Cuomo” part, for instance.

derby teams seem more than coincidental: both began to take current standard form around the turn of the twenty-first century and have rapidly grown in popularity since; both have roots in the tradition of female-centric community and feminist performance, especially in the punk/DIY ethos of Riot Grrrl.¹³⁵ The naming praxis has perhaps stronger ties in derby than in tributing, where adoption of a skater name propels a “reimagining of the sport as a punk-rock spectacle that allow[s], and encourage[s], participants to develop outrageous public personas.”¹³⁶ For tributers, the espousal of an outrageous persona often comes ready-made with the mythology built around the artist tributed – mention the words “Keith Moon,” for example, and legends of driving Rolls-Royces into swimming pools are likely to come to mind. Nevertheless, as David Fagundes writes, “Nicknames are more than just an amusing quirk of roller derby culture. They serve a variety of practical functions for fans and skaters alike. ... The dark irony and overtly violent references communicated by derby names combines the sport’s punk aesthetic to enhance the countercultural appeal of derby and the spectacle that surrounds a bout.”¹³⁷ Derby names like “Jenna Cyde” or “Ivanna S. Pankin,” he continues, combine femininity and brutality in a way that, like tributes, is both serious and self-consciously cheeky. In derby and tributes alike, the name can serve as a point of negotiation between masculine behavior and female embodiment, though they tend to work in opposite directions: derby names imbue traditional femininity (and often historical femininity; punning on notable women’s names [e.g., “Susan B. Agony”] is also common) with aggression, whereas for tribute artists the outrageousness or violence is often already culturally contained in a name like “Bon Scott” or “Angus Young.” When female tribute artists feminize the names of their tributees, they can borrow the cultural associations of the original name to give their performances increased diametric contrast between the displays of a cis-gendered embodiment and a counter-normative performance – much like the way female

¹³⁵ Travis Beaver, “‘By the Skaters, For the Skaters’: The DIY Ethos of the Roller Derby Revival,” *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 36.1 (2012), 25-49.

¹³⁶ David Fagundes, “Talk Derby to Me: Intellectual Property Norms Governing Roller Derby Pseudonyms,” *Texas Law Review* 90.5 (2012): n.p.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

derby players use feminine names to purposely counterpose the display of aggression required for a full-contact sport. Once again, the process of naming consciously “borrows” masculinity for female purposes, demonstrating that the ties between masculine and male are not inseparable or, perhaps, even natural to begin with.

Another highly gendered territory in which female tributes differ from one another is their choice of stage costuming and dress. Regardless of the type of musical material they play, Mavis Bayton postulates that clothing is a particularly crucial decision for female musicians in rock music. She writes:

For a female musician, the question, “How shall I present myself on stage?” is also “How shall I present myself as a woman?” Men and women playing rock are simultaneously performing both gender and sexuality, following existing scripts, creating new ones, and playing with them. But female musicians have less space in which to negotiate such scripts since, for example, men do not have to contend with the dual standard of morality which polices the expression of women’s sexuality both on and off stage.¹³⁸

For tribute musicians in particular, the questions of dress ultimately revolve around whether or not to imitate the costumes or styles worn by the tributed artist, and if so, to what extent and how. Same-gender tribute acts tend to have less fraught choices; costumes, if so desired, can be replicated at home or, in the case of artists like Elvis or the Beatles, custom-ordered from specialty tailors. Otherwise, costumes may be foregone altogether in favor of contemporary styles or street clothes. For cross-gender acts that want to costume themselves like their tributees, the gender-appropriateness of clothing must be considered as well as more minor matters like waist, hip, and bust fits. When Lady E first started her Elvis tribute act, she told me, she “didn’t want to go with the gold lamé jacket because [she] thought [she’d] look like a dyke.”¹³⁹ At the same time, she “didn’t want to turn it into a sex thing” with an overly-revealing outfit, as is common with the standard type of “female Elvis” attire available for women from costume shops

¹³⁸ Bayton, *Frock Rock*, 194.

¹³⁹ Interview with the author, 23 July 2015.

with low-plunging necklines and hip-hugging curves. “I didn’t want to be like that because Elvis wasn’t like that,” she said. “He was a sexy person, but you can still be sexy without letting it all hang out.”¹⁴⁰ Eventually, she decided on a stock 1970-style white fringe jumpsuit for her first costume, but has since acquired several more. After developing a rapport with the tailors, she now owns unique custom-designed suits, including a peacock-style jumpsuit with a pink sequin design and an all-pink caped jumpsuit modeled on Elvis’ famous blue one. Lady E’s balancing of the original with an overtly effeminate sensibility seems characteristic of many female tribute artists in other genres, and has additionally given her a distinctive signature appearance within the Elvis tribute artist community that has helped to enhance and specialize her act.

The four female AC/DC tributes likewise represent the diversity of approaches women can take to tribute costuming. Original guitarist Angus Young’s characteristic schoolboy outfit is a clear, if exaggerated, example of the highly gendered associations stage clothing and presentations can have. The origin story of Young’s costume is not particularly revelatory: it was simply the one that stuck in a long line of test-driven outfits including superhero and bandito costumes early in the band’s career, all donned at the suggestion of his sister.¹⁴¹ But the reason it stuck perhaps again speaks to his visually noticeable departure from the guitar-god norm, and how he was able to use the supposed handicap of his small stature and youthful appearance to his advantage. The schoolboy outfit obviously emphasizes his diminutiveness, but his hyperbolic stage antics command sizeable attention; the contrast between the two is instantly memorable for audiences. Women, too, can readily adopt this tactic of opposing expectations and performance, but the question for AC/DC tributers remains as to how to do so in a fashion that is both “Angus” and “female.” Guitarist Pamela Ausejo of AC/DShe, for one, copies Young’s costume verbatim with shorts, button-down shirt, tie, jacket, and cap. The only immediate difference is her long, dark, curly hair. Dressing just like Angus enhances her likeness to the original, but because the outfit is distinctively a boy’s, it marks her as cross-dressing.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Bonomo.

Whether such a label bothers Ausejo or deters other guitarists from doing the same is unclear. This specific gender transgression is not so great or pronounced, though, as it might be if a woman were to purposely imitate U2's the Edge or Guns N' Roses' Slash, for instance, because the markers of masculinity are purposely downplayed with Angus' outfit, whereas the Edge's facial hair or Slash's bare chest are such distinctive markers of their appearance. Ausejo's easy replication of Young's dress itself speaks to some of the incongruence between men's and women's acceptable displays of masculinity, especially in public performance. As Halberstam has noted, women commonly play boys on the theatrical stage (e.g., Peter Pan), but "this role reversal actually masks the asymmetry of male and female impersonation. If boys can play girls and women" – as was typical of Shakespearian theatre and Monty Python sketches – "but women can only play boys, mature masculinity once again remains an authentic property of adult male bodies."¹⁴² These prohibitions are evidenced on the tribute stage as well, though other women's increasing appropriations of male dress – Steph Paynes' replication of Jimmy Page's dragon-suit outfits, for example – challenge the rigidity of such boundaries, and with it, the defining codes of masculine/rock dress.

Hell's Belles and ThundHerStruck take a different approach to the Angus Young stage style. Guitarists Adrian Conner and Tina Wood, respectively, both wear a gender-inverse adaptation of the schoolboy outfit during performance, including a plaid or pleated skirt with a blouse. Conner tends to begin concerts in full and proper uniform and progressively strip down through the duration of the show (much as Angus did), whereas Wood starts off in a sleeveless blouse tied above the midriff, Britney Spears-style. Though the simple shorts-for-skirt swap is inherently gender-normative, the gross discrepancies between the cultural connotations of "schoolboy" and "schoolgirl" become readily apparent. A grown man in a young boy's clothes might be playful, comical, even eccentric, but a grown woman in young girls' clothes acquires an undeniable sexual overtone. The sexualization and fetishization of young girls is rampant in contemporary Western popular culture, as is the infantilization of women in order to appear "sexy" –

¹⁴² Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 233.

and the “naughty Catholic schoolgirl” is no doubt a common trope.¹⁴³ And yet, for Conner and Wood, the inequalities and the seemingly cavernous divide between “schoolgirl” and “rock star” can be used to their advantage as performers. Much like Young’s original incarnation, their performances are visually gripping and entrancingly memorable, if only because they probably look so unlike anything the audience has ever encountered before. At the same time this “novelty” factor can be employed commercially, it also defies stereotypes, writes new images of expression for women, and re-shapes the archetypal figure of the “Guitar God(dess).” If the common associations made with females in plaid skirts are infantilizing or objectifying, Conner and Wood demonstrate how women in such clothes can also be assertive, aggressive, powerful, and skillful. The fetishization of the clothing article itself is disrupted by their reclaiming and repurposing of the skirt for a proud declaration of, rather than a meek submission to, femaleness.

Some female tribute acts, like Back:N:Black, decline to dress like their tributed stars at all. As guitarist BB explains, “There are lots of bands that like to dress up as AC/DC copies, but we prefer to be ourselves playing the music as best we can.”¹⁴⁴ Her tone expresses perhaps a distaste for the “playacting” style of tributing where the goal is active imitation, though, as I’ve argued, few tribute artists actually vie to negate their own selves entirely. On the spectrum between “Self” and “Other” where tribute artists exist in performance, the members of Back:N:Black simply prefer to embody something closer to pure “Self,” as much as that might even be possible. Similar sentiments were expressed in my interview with Judas Priestess; singer MilitiA expressed concern that other tribute artists “just want to look like a rock star. Some of these motherfuckers actually act like they are that person, the person they’re tributing... I’m like, ‘What the fuck? Are you out of your mind?’ That’s something that was always important to us – we always wanted to

¹⁴³ See, e.g., Marty Machia and Sharon Lamb, “Sexualized Innocence: Effects of Magazine Ads Portraying Adult Women as Sexy Little Girls,” *Journal of Media Psychology* 21 (1), 15-24.

¹⁴⁴ *Metaladies*.

keep our identities. I'm not trying to *be* [Judas Priest vocalist] Rob Halford; I'm MilitiA singing the music of Rob Halford."¹⁴⁵ Even so, Priestess' relaxed pre-show banter with me was wildly different from the highly disciplined way they conducted themselves on stage, garbed in a female bondage/biker/leather aesthetic type of clothing (a style that Halford himself helped to popularize within the heavy metal music community for men). Which presentation constituted a more "authentic" portrayal of identity for the members of the band is impossible to theorize. Interestingly, Back:N:Black has a similar stage aesthetic to Judas Priestess – lots of black, lots of leather, lots of ripped fishnet stockings – as do many other "non-costumed" female tribute acts (the Iron Maidens, Mistress of Reality, Crüella, the Rocket Queens, e.g.). This look itself is fairly typical of the few major female original-artist musicians in hard rock/heavy metal, such as Girlschool, Vixen, Joan Jett, or Lita Ford. Thus while this style of clothing is not a tribute "costume" per se, it still constitutes a costume of sorts – one that articulates an affinity with women-in-rock, one that has already proven viable for women on stage and appealing to men in audiences. Its widespread use between tribute settings, despite the diversity of styles found in original acts ranging from Black Sabbath to Guns N' Roses, indicates how constrained the choices for female presentation are for women as compared with men on a rock stage. The dearth of models and the predictability of dress for women in hard rock suggests that female tribute artists dressing in leather-chic are perhaps not so much declaring a unique personal identity through dress, but identifying with or through a particular subculture and the tandem values and traditions therein.

Between their clothing, naming, and performance styles, the female AC/DC tribute groups enact widely divergent presentations of gender, especially in regards to the metonymic scales of maleness/masculinity and femaleness/femininity. Though their stage acts constitute an explicit act of "performance," this term should not be conflated with the "gender performance" elicited by such acts. Judith Butler cautions against the common "misapprehension about gender performativity...: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the

¹⁴⁵ Interview with the author, 18 July 2015.

morning, that there is a ‘one’ who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today.”¹⁴⁶ I do not mean to suggest that how tribute performers act onstage is analogous with how they act off-stage, much less that their conscious choices of gender portrayals during tribute represent any psychic gendered disposition throughout the rest of their lives. What I do suggest, however, is that the openly constructed portrayals of femaleness coupled with a broad range of femininities and/or masculinities toys with and consequently opens up the binary categories of sex/gender to such multiple degrees as to render them untenable, indistinguishable, fluid, and even unnecessary. Tribute artists’ examples unlock further forms of presentation for women to explore in musical performance and, perhaps by example, in daily life, too.

3.3 Performing Masculinities

More than proving that women can play rock music just as well as men, female tributes demonstrate that the gendered constructions of rock are fallacious from the start, that the stylized repetitions cementing “guitar” with “masculinity” and “masculine” with “male” in the popular imagination, for example, are unfounded. Tribute artists are free to adopt the signifiers of the genre or artist in which they work, but they are just as free to decline any such symbols and still create meaningful music. Their mix-and-match combinations of femininity and masculinity attest to the fluidity of gender while also wrenching masculinity from the sole domain of men’s bodies altogether.

The staged space and the act of imitation inherent in tribute acts invites an open consciousness of performativity – of “the sense,” in Judith Butler’s terms, “that the essence or identity that [acts, gestures, and desires] otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive

¹⁴⁶ Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 1.1 (1993): 21.

means... [that they] create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality.”¹⁴⁷ Because the tribute concert experience is an openly fabricated presentation, it allows the audience to see what acts or gestures constitute the “identity” of a performer, precisely because their reenactment on a different body or different figure can elicit a similar aura. For male rock stars, and for men in general, “masculinity” is often deemed a natural and inherent property of the body, an inseparable constituent of the phallus. When female tribute artists are able to replicate men’s gestures and paint a convincing portrait of masculinity without maleness, however, they sever these ties and reveal the constructed character of genders in total.

“[M]ainstream definitions of male masculinity [are] nonperformative,” Halberstam writes. “Indeed, current representations of masculinity in white men unfailingly depend on a relatively stable notion of the realness and the naturalness of both the male body and its signifying effects.”¹⁴⁸ Whereas femininity is socially perceived as constructed through the use of cosmetics, fashions, products, affectations, etc., and therefore rendered “artificial,” masculinity is deemed tethered and bound to the nature of the male body, apparent from the first. In rock music ideology, notions of “realness” and “naturalness” further conflate with desirable definitions of “authenticity.” If masculinity is “real” and “natural,” and what is “real” and “natural” is “authentic,” then it follows that only masculine presentations in rock can be considered authentic. Indeed, Mavis Bayton notes these metonymic overlaps as a constant site of struggle for female musicians: it is “difficult to stay ‘feminine’ in a rock band precisely because ‘femininity’ is an artifice,” she writes. “...In contrast, for young men playing guitar in a band directly enhances their masculinity,”¹⁴⁹ and with it, their levels of authenticity. Philip Auslander in his book

¹⁴⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 185-6.

¹⁴⁸ Judith Halberstam, “Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance,” in *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 400-417: 402.

¹⁴⁹ Mavis Bayton, “Women and the Electric Guitar,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997): 40.

Performing Glam Rock also comments on the double standards for women in the music business: “whereas male... rockers [are] presumed to be authentic until proven otherwise, the opposite assumption applie[s] to female musicians... [who are] presumed at the outset to be an inauthentic construct created by [their] male handlers.”¹⁵⁰ Women in rock may find it difficult to achieve authenticity without invoking masculinity or downplaying femininity – take, for example, prominent figures of success like Patti Smith or Suzi Quatro, who are often noted for their “masculine” appearance. For female tribute performers, too, conveying an “authentic” performance of their texts is tantamount to conveying a “masculine” performance. To do so, they must appropriate and re-articulate the ingredients for masculinity as written upon the original artists themselves.

By lifting presentations of masculinity off male bodies and onto female ones, however, cross-gender tribute artists perhaps inadvertently dabble with the defining features of drag – or more appropriately, according to Halberstam’s argument for a delineating terminology that accounts for the nuances of difference between male-to-female drag and female-to-male impersonation, “kinging.”¹⁵¹ “If the drag queen takes what is artificial about femininity (or what has been culturally constructed as artificial) and plays it to the hilt, the Drag King takes what is so-called natural about masculinity and reveals its mechanisms – the tricks and poses, the speech patterns and attitudes that have been seamlessly assimilated into a performance of realness.”¹⁵² The core performance of drag/kinging rests with the audience’s knowledge and awareness of difference between the performers’ outward gender presentation and embodied self; its potential subversiveness, according to Butler, lies in its ability to replicate normative genders and constitute convincing presentations without the attachment to a predetermined sexed

¹⁵⁰ Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender & Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996): 204.

¹⁵¹ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*.

¹⁵² ¹⁵² Del Lagrace Volcano and Judith Halberstam, *The Drag King Book* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1999): 62.

self.¹⁵³ Though as I've already mentioned, female tribute artists do not usually take their stage presentation to the same level as drag kings or male impersonators, their potential subversiveness, too, lies in their ability to replicate the presentation of the original male artist convincingly – not just through sound and song, but through physicality, through emotive appeals, and through the generation of an *esprit de corps* analogous to an original-artist music event. Like kings, their very proximity to the “original,” in whatever ways an original may be socially defined, threatens to expose the baselessness of men’s authentic ownership of masculinities by revealing the mechanical workings behind masculine presentation. Female tribute artists make it possible to imagine a rock world of masculinities *without* men.

Elvis Presley is again a useful starting reference, not only because he is such an enduringly idiosyncratic and widely tributed performer, but because he has long been a pervasive figure in kinging culture, too. Halberstam and Del Lagrace Volcano state simply in their *Drag King Book* that “Elvis Presley is to Drag Kings as Liza Minnelli is to Drag Queens”¹⁵⁴ – a tangible icon. In other words, Presley’s configuration of masculinity, like Minnelli’s of femininity, is so transparently constructed through the use of loaded signifiers – looks, gestures, affectations – as to be mimicable, and so recognizable in popular culture as to be easily appropriated within different contexts. Presley’s signature characteristics, from his white jumpsuits to his soft Southern drawl, offer an instant point of cultural reference. Elvis Herselvis, the stage name for tribute artist Leigh Crow,¹⁵⁵ is notable for being a pioneering figure in female cross-gender tributing *and* kinging culture. Unlike Deborah Knight (Lady E), Crow took her tribute act to full drag, styling her hair, clothing, and voice to match Presley as close as possible. Her performances were controversial within the officially-sanctioned ETA (Elvis Tribute Artist)

¹⁵³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

¹⁵⁴ Volcano and Halberstam.

¹⁵⁵ Crow appears to still occasionally perform her Elvis tribute act for pre-organized events but has no current website or social media page, and was thus not included as “currently active” for this study as a whole.

community; in 1996, she was invited to perform at the second International Elvis Presley Conference in Oxford, Mississippi, but event organizers subsequently reneged due to community protests. Said Crow in an interview the following year: “Straight men are very intimidated by a woman impersonating Elvis. It is one of the last bastions of masculinity, the right to ‘do’ Elvis.”¹⁵⁶ In Francesca Brittan’s article, titled in reference to Crow’s comments, “Women Who ‘Do’ Elvis,” she explains how Herselvis and several other (all now inactive) female ETAs stimulate within Elvis’ fan community “an underlying fear that [the] cross-gender acts will reveal the mechanisms of Presley’s own imposture, drawing attention to the King’s masculine masquerade and challenging his (already contested) claims to both naturalness and authenticity. By unveiling masculinity as a set of performative (and therefore reformed) gestures, female Elvisses threaten its assumed innateness, disrupting the established paradigm of masculinity as ‘real’ and femininity as ‘artificial.’”¹⁵⁷

Presley’s presentation of masculinity is “already contested” because, as David Shumway has articulated, he “transgressed gender boundaries... [by] call[ing] attention to his body as a sexual object.”¹⁵⁸ His notorious pelvic shakes, along with his deliberate use of eye makeup and hair products to exaggerate his features, constitute what Shumway calls a “feminization” that subsequently became a standard model of presentation for male rock’n’roll stars because of Elvis’ tremendous success in and influence on the genre.¹⁵⁹ Investigating Elvis, then, offers a route of entry for exploring the construction of male rock masculinity throughout much of the later twentieth century and today. His

¹⁵⁶ Kimberly O’Sullivan, “Elvis Herselvis: An Interview between the American Performer and Wicked Women Magazine.” *Polare* (1997): <http://www.gendercentre.org.au/resources/polare-archive/archived-articles/elvis-herselvis-1.htm>.

¹⁵⁷ Brittan, 181.

¹⁵⁸ David R. Shumway, “Watching Elvis: The Male Rock Star as Object of the Gaze,” in *The Other Fifties: P Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*, ed. Joel Forman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 124-143: 126.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

“feminization,” rather than allowing space for female femininity in rock, actually subsumes the role of women and renders them unnecessary to the genre. As Norma Coates argues, “any trace of the ‘feminine’ is expunged, incorporated or appropriated” by stereotypical rock masculinities;¹⁶⁰ “male rockers who literally appropriate ‘feminine markers’ do so to in order to assert power over them, and over the ‘feminine’ or the female. It is no surprise, then, that heavy metal rockers, those with the biggest hair and the tightest clothes, ...are often held up as the prime representations of excessive masculinity in rock.”¹⁶¹ But when female bodies take the place of male rock stars within a tribute performance space, the appropriated markers of femininity glean new, even self-mocking, significance. “Flowing hair? Tight pants? Women can rock that,” Amanda Petrusich writes in her *New York Times* profile on Lez Zeppelin and Misstallica, tongue held firmly in cheek.¹⁶² The indicators of femininity that rock has historically lifted and imbued with masculinity in order to assert its dominance in the genre are re-inscribed upon female bodies, but with their masculinity still intact. Female singers in AC/DC tribute bands, for example, can wear their hair long and their dungarees tight – not only because that’s how Bon Scott wore his, but because his doing so rendered such gestures “authentically” masculine. While Scott’s appearance signified a particular kind of 1970s rock masculinity that appropriated markers of femininity, women can re-appropriate these common modes of feminine appearance to convey the same rock masculinity without the incongruence of sexed embodiment. Furthermore, gender signifiers of all kinds – shorts or skirts, jackets or blouses – are herein allowed to take on masculinity because of their presentation through a masculine rock context. The “origin” of such outward markers of socialized gender ceases to be of any importance precisely because the notion of a concrete, natural origin is exposed as a false and unfounded myth.

¹⁶⁰ Norma Coates, “(R)evolution Now? Rock and the Political Potential of Gender,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997): 52.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁶² Petrusich, Amanda. “Flowing Hair? Tight Pants? Women Can Rock That,” *New York Times* 21 July 2011. Web. Accessed 27 February 2016.

Women who “do” the cultural icons of rock masculinity demonstrate that such performances are not necessarily the natural outcome of a psychologically gendered disposition dictated by sexed embodiment. They are able to successfully “drag” or “king” masculinities via their own bodies because the acts, gestures, and desires palpable from the original musical performance are able to be untied from male bodies and re-drawn on disparate figures. But the very fact that they are not drag kings renders their performances all the more significant for a female-centric agenda of women in music-making. Rock’s masculinity does not unquestionably derive from the power of the phallus so often symbolized via the electric guitar. Women can rock masculinity as well as they can rock flowing hair and tight pants, too.

3.4 Conclusion

AC/DC’s ability to inspire identification with young rock audiences sets an early precedent for contemporary audiences so far as imagining what “rock” looks like, sounds like, and acts like. Their unique brand of masculinity is interesting in both its bombastic and self-humored expressions of rockist stereotypes, and this attitude itself can influence audiences in their approach to understandings of gendered presentation and performance, consciously or not. In many ways, AC/DC makes for a perfectly tributable model for female musicians because the opportunities for play are already built in and flexible according to the tribute artist’s own concept of self-relation to the band.

Female tribute artists are allowed to interpret their figures of tribute according to any number of factors: their dispositions toward parody or irony; their personal feelings of femininity or masculinity; their goals of “authenticity”; their perceptions of what constitutes maleness on the rock stage. As the women across AC/DC culture demonstrate, tributing can take many variations of form, all of which are equally valid. To compare them is not to privilege one method over any other, but to demonstrate how fluid and interpretable the conditions for presentation are. When women get up on a stage and proclaim themselves rock stars, they have no choice but to negotiate with the written codes of acceptable gender-prescribed behavior within the specific ideological

framework of rock. They can appropriate, reject, repurpose, bend, blend, or buck the figurative signals of “femininity” and “masculinity” in a rock context because, as female tributes to male stars, they can neither fully escape one nor solely confine themselves to the other. In the process, the ways “original” masculinities of known and often admired figures in rock have been constructed through acts, gestures, and desires are exposed to the audience – and perhaps to the tribute artist herself. The implications of performance on a rock stage might easily translate to the modes of performativity off of it.

Chapter 4

4 Living Loving Maids: Fandom and Transformation

Like many fans at true Guns N' Roses concerts before me, I was still waiting at the bar for tribute band the Rocket Queens to take the stage a full two hours after the show's advertised start time. But this was no Whisky a Go Go or Sunset Strip; this was the Evening Star on Niagara Falls Boulevard, a significantly less glamorous dive bar in the upper- and western-most reaches of New York state. Except for the bartender, I was the only woman in the room, and was, probably by a long shot, the only person under 40. So I was rather taken aback when the middle-aged guy who'd been talking non-stop to no one in particular about his drive up from Buffalo suddenly turned to me and asked if I'd ever seen them.

"Ever seen Guns N' Roses?" I asked. I was eight years old when Slash quit the band – so no, I'd never seen them. But I'd misunderstood the question: He wasn't asking whether I'd ever seen Guns N' Roses, he was asking if I'd ever seen the Rocket Queens, an all-female GnR tribute from New York City. It was his fourth or fifth time seeing them, he couldn't remember, but any time they made an appearance in Western New York, he made a point of being there. He described to me at length the miracle I was about to witness: the skill of Lily Maase's guitar playing, the power of Magdalena Baldych's voice. Not once were words like "Axl," "Slash," "Duff," or "Izzy" ever mentioned. As musicians finally started to amble on to the stage, he quickly ordered eight shots of whiskey: one for each girl in the band, one for himself, and one for me. Over the course of the next hour, he sang and headbanged along to every song, and when he yelled out "Back off Bitch!" Maase readily complied – it's one of her favorite songs too, she explained, but they didn't play it often because it's not a very well known track. By the end of the night I, too, was not just a Guns N' Roses fan, but a Rocket Queens fan.

The dynamics of fandom at tribute events can be complicated and often multilayered, as my own experiences testify. Audiences at tribute shows are typically comprised of fans of the artist being tributed – though, like my new friend, they might specifically count themselves as fans of the tribute act itself. Moreover, the performers in tribute acts are

usually fans of the music they play, and they connect with audiences on a fan-to-fan level – swapping favorite deep track picks, for instance – but must also maintain some semblance of boundaries between the stage and the audience in order to make the tribute event seem like an authentic concert experience. While a venue might be full of fans, some are also fans of fans, and some of them are actively performing their fandom on stage for other fans to see.

Tribute events seem to stimulate and encourage bold expressions of fandom, more so than might be allowed outside the venue walls or even at a “real” concert; recently, I sat down at my assigned stadium seating for a Bruce Springsteen concert and, chatting with the women behind me before the show, they expressed enormous relief that I wasn’t (or didn’t appear to be) one of the “crazies.” Tribute events, on the other hand, very much require active involvement from their audiences: it is a chance to demonstrate and boast knowledge, to participate in the reenactment of a “real” concert, to let one’s crazy flag fly in the safe space among other crazies. Furthermore, for the tribute artists on stage, it is those perks and more. It is an opportunity to lead the charge, to direct the course, and to take some control over and ownership of those texts of veneration.

Yet during this process, texts are not simply redrawn verbatim. Especially with female tribute acts, subtleties can emerge; meanings can be re-wrought or questioned entirely. It was jarring, for instance, to hear Rocket Queens singer Magdalena Baldych recite lyrics like “Turn around bitch, I’ve got a use for you” – though her entreaty to the audience to “Feel my, my, my serpentine” was a bit more openly humorous. The band describes themselves on their website as “the closest thing a modern audience can get to seeing hard rock’s heaviest hitters as they were in their prime... If, of course, the original GnR lineup had shopped at Victoria’s Secret and worn 6-inch heels.”¹⁶³ Clearly, some kind of transformation must take place during the tribute event and within the tribute space to turn the original source material, whatever it may be, into a living, breathing, and

¹⁶³ “About,” *The Rocket Queens*: <http://www.therocketqueens.com/about/>. Accessed 14 March 2016.

convincing temporal experience, though it may not always be as obvious as a pair of stilettos. When it comes to tributing, performers, as readers and consumers of musical texts, “do not observe from the distance (be it physical, emotional, or cognitive); they trespass upon others’ property; they grab it and hold on to it; they internalize its meanings and remake these borrowed terms” in their own fashion.¹⁶⁴

In these regards, tribute acts and the art of tributing itself bear much in common with fandom activities in other media, including the “textual poachers” Henry Jenkins describes in his seminal work on television fandoms.¹⁶⁵ Their activities and participation within fandom-based communities require diving headlong into texts; when fans resurface with the fan-art they create, the original pool of source material is changed in the process, too. In this chapter, I want to explore the transformative power of tributing in both a figurative and legal sense: how the organized activities of tribute/fan communities rework the structure and significance of old source material to create something new, and how that resultant process challenges concepts of ownership and intellectual property in very real ways.

4.1 Tribute/Fan Activity

The steps necessary to enact a musical tribute have systems of organization and functional structures similar to the kinds of participatory activities widespread throughout contemporary fandom cultures in other media, including science fiction, comic books, television series, literature, and more. Practices such as conventioning, cosplay, and fanfiction are vital to community-building and self-expression within fandom

¹⁶⁴ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 62.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

networks¹⁶⁶ and, among tribute artists and their audiences, these outcomes appear very much the same, even if the operations themselves are not quite identical. Comparing and contrasting tribute activities with other arenas of fandom helps not only to contextualize musical tribute as a “fannish” mode of expression, but demonstrates their mutual transformative properties and potential. Fans’ treatment of texts involves an intricate study and analysis of characters and worlds that can be utilized for purposes outside of the original author’s intentions or meanings. In musical tribute, and with women’s cross-gender tributing in particular, the original source material is used to evoke new or changed presentational forms that can then reflect back on the primary text itself.

4.1.1 Conventions

Elvis Presley is to the tributing world what *Star Trek* is to science-fiction television fandom: an important precedent and a still-relevant text around which many fans gravitate. Events like the annual Collingwood Elvis Festival, which plays host to more than one hundred tribute artists and tens of thousands of attendees every July in northern Ontario, are probably the closest things the music-fan world has to the text-specific conventions common in other media, such as *Star Trek* conventions.¹⁶⁷ Camille Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women*, an early fandom-studies treatise on female *Star Trek* fans, notes how “the fan world structures itself around a series of conventions, held in a ‘mobile geography’ of hotels all over the world. Conventions spatially and temporally organize the interaction between the community and potential new members, and serve as formal meeting places for the various smaller groups of fans who follow a convention circuit.”¹⁶⁸ Though Internet forums and online communities have greatly impacted the nature of fan-to-fan interaction and information exchange since the time of Bacon-

¹⁶⁶ See, e.g., Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, or Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

¹⁶⁷ There are also annual KISS “expos” throughout the United States, though these seem to concentrate more on memorabilia exchange than performance or tribute.

¹⁶⁸ Bacon-Smith, 9.

Smith's writings, conventions are still integral to media fandom and exceedingly popular, allowing fans to meet in-person and exchange material goods. Mark Duffett has described Elvis fan gatherings as "a space... where people can express a sense of community, or 'family' as some call it. Popular stereotypes tend to brand Elvis fans as losers and eccentrics, so many of them act discreetly or feel ostracized in daily life. In the company of each other they can open up and feel relaxed. [Conventions] provide environments where platonic love for Elvis is celebrated."¹⁶⁹

Conventions also remain instrumental in integrating and inspiring newcomers. Lady E, for instance, decided to become an Elvis tribute artist (ETA) after attending Collingwood for the first time in 2011 as a spectator; she returned the following year as a registered performer. As I trailed her from show to show throughout the festival's weekend, the sense of community among ETAs was obvious from how frequently she and others stopped to greet each other in passing, to inquire after families, and to discuss who would or wouldn't be attending other upcoming festivals. Dozens of annual ETA events occur year-round throughout North America and Europe, and many performers and non-performers alike travel great distances to attend one or more of them every year. The result is a nomadic community of Presley devotees who can reliably depend on seeing familiar faces and developing interpersonal relationships with other attendees year in and year out. Lady E described to me her sense of affiliation with other performers, despite her gender difference:

Most of them are nice; they treat me like one of the guys. Well, not like a guy... like an ETA. These Elvis guys, these ETAs, myself included, first they were an Elvis fan. Maybe they've been singing since they were a kid, or maybe they just started singing like me, who knows. It wouldn't matter. But first they were an Elvis fan. At the core they don't want to do anything to hurt Elvis, and they know a lot about Elvis. They know how much it takes and how much studying you have to do. ...They know, and they're supportive. ...They treat you like a family and they understand you.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Mark Duffett, "Caught in a Trap?: Beyond Pop Theory's 'Butch' Construction of Male Elvis Fans," *Popular Music* 20.3 (2001), 395-408: 403.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with the author, 23 July 2015.

For performers and spectators alike, Elvis tribute events and others like them are not just random exercises in self-indulgence or an extemporaneous string of events; they are about community, convening, and fostering the mutual understanding between fans of what it is to *be* a fan.

Another obvious counterpart to the fan convention in popular music is the concert itself. While live performances by the original artist who inspires fandom communities might naturally serve as a meeting point between fans, the locus of attention at concerts is typically centered on the performer rather than the community of or between audience members. Furthermore, the original icons may be retired or deceased, or their live appearances may be sporadic or impersonal, as described in chapter two. Tribute events, however, demand the kind of fan-to-fan interaction seen at more traditional fandom conventions. The fans on stage – the tribute artists – require the participation of the fans in the audience to engender a “real” or believable concert experience: applauding in the appropriate ways, singing along at the appropriate moments, treating the tributer in the appropriate fashion (e.g., rushing the stage to hug the “Morrissey” of a Smiths tribute; calling out an extensive “Bruuuuuce” at a Springsteen tribute).

Not many other artists besides Elvis have such a strong contingent of tribute artists who convene in the same manner as ETAs; among the four female AC/DC tribute acts studied in the previous chapter, for instance, it seems as though they were cognizant of each other’s existence, but there is no sense that they, or any other tribute bands, would be likely to organize an AC/DC festival in the same kind of way as ETAs. Even so, tribute events can serve as fan-convention sites in a more general kind of way; just as science-fiction conventions often play host to multiple sectors of more specific fandoms at once, tribute acts can be billed together under a common pretense of fandom. Female Ramones tribute Rockaway Bitch and Guns N’ Roses tribute Guns N’ Hoses have played shows together in New York City, for example, which would be a rather strange mix of genres for an original-music concert. Though Ramones fans and GnR fans might not typically intermingle in everyday life or even enjoy the other’s music, there is a mutual respect for the modes of fandom in action and on display during such events. There are even tribute act festivals, such as Glastonbudget in the U.K. or Tribute Fest in Minnesota (though

female and other alternative tribute acts seem to be mostly absent from their lineups). As Jenkins writes of television, participation in fandom communities begets a certain kind of “discursive logic that knits together interests across textual and generic boundaries. While some fans remain exclusively committed to a single show or star, many others use individual series as points of entry into a broader fan community, linking to intertextual network composed of many... popular materials.”¹⁷¹ The opportunity for exchange and communication at conventions/concerts allows fans to not only bond within like-minded fan circles but to perhaps expand their textual horizons by interacting with people of other related but distinct fandoms.

4.1.2 Cosplay

For the performers on stage (and the audiences who watch them), looking the part is often an essential component of the tribute experience. Dressing up as and performing “in character” as the original musical artist is more or less a form of cosplay – a portmanteau of “costume play” – a fan activity where participants replicate the dress and performance mannerisms of a favored character from literature, comic books, video games, films, television series, etc. But whereas in other media fandoms the characters of choice tend to be fictional, in musical tribute they are modeled on the real-life artists themselves. This presents an interesting contrast between media that reveals something about the mechanisms of celebrity stardom: with fictional texts, the details of one-dimensional characters are fleshed out through story, narrative, and imagination to make them appear more life-like; with real persons, their complexities are minimalized and their personalities compartmentalized in order to render them more highly saleable commodities, or “star texts,”¹⁷² in the cultural marketplace. For example, a cosplayer who dresses as video game character Zelda must fill in the necessary gaps to turn the screen figure into a three-dimensional figure; she must not only materialize all angles of

¹⁷¹ *Textual Poachers*, 40.

¹⁷² Keith Negus, *Producing Pop: Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry* (London: Arnold, 1992). For “star text,” see also: Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979).

the costume, but understand the given psychology of the character well enough to act and react to the situations around her in a believable and true-to-form way. A tribute artist performing Mick Jagger, on the other hand, must work from the opposite direction, reducing his psychology to enable a certain formulaic character and choosing signature clothes pieces or fashions to evoke the right kind of swagger.

In either case, however, it's clear that the source text must be extensively studied, researched, and planned before executing performance. Cosplay, as fan scholar Nicolle Lamerichs writes, "motivates fans to closely interpret existing texts, perform them, and extend them with their own narratives and ideas."¹⁷³ There can be a certain derogatory attitude toward cosplayers or costumed tributers by outsiders – or even other members of the fan/tribute community – who misinterpret cosplay's aim as *becoming* a superhero/princess/wizard/rock star/etc. merely by dressing up as one. Rather, the process is about deepening the understanding of the character and enhancing one's connection to the source text. "Proximity is not a symptom of passive submission to the power of texts," Jenkins explains, "but a way of exercising power over texts. The text is drawn" – and worn – "close not so that the fan can be possessed by it but rather so that the fan may more fully possess it."¹⁷⁴

As with tributing, the embodiment of the cosplayer in other non-musical media is significant. "[W]here there is correspondence" between a cosplayer and the source text character, "there is potential for a set of signs to be recognized by an informed receiver as an adaptation of a specific textual feature or set of features. Where there is contrast, there is the possibility to generate commentary through parody, pastiche, satire, burlesque, and caricature."¹⁷⁵ Crossplay, or cross-gendered cosplay, is an increasingly common mode of

¹⁷³ Nicolle Lamerichs, "Stranger than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay," in *Transformative Works & Cultures* 7.21 (2011): section 1.2.

¹⁷⁴ Henry Jenkins, "If I Could Speak with your Sound: Fan Music, Textual Proximity, and Liminal Identification," *Camera Obscura* 8.2 (1990), 148-175: 169.

¹⁷⁵ Matthew Hale, "Cosplay: Intertextuality, Public Texts, and the Body Fantastic," *Western Folklore* 5 (2014): 20.

fandom activity, just as it is in the tribute world. In both realms, the modes of variance available to players in negotiating the space between embodiment and performativity are a tool for self-expression as well as a challenge to usual boundaries of binary gender. Though there does not yet appear to be very much ethnographic research on crossplay, one wonders if similar patterns would emerge with women's cross-gender cosplay as in cross-gender tributing: the predilection for hypermasculine texts, the repurposing of female codes, the resultant fluidity of genders and the disassociation of masculinity from exclusively male bodies. The relatively recent common proliferation of cross/play in both music and other media fandoms within the past decade or two also merits further investigation as far as explaining any shifts in the cultural landscape that might have suddenly encouraged such practices to flourish and to continue unabated.

4.1.3 Fanfiction

I also want to make a case for the similarities between tributing and fanfiction, which, on the surface, could seem like a stretch. Tribute artists do not literally write their characters of affection into novel scenarios the way fanfiction authors do; at the end of the day, the musicians remain simply performers on a stage. However, some comparable themes emerge when examining women's particular modes of fannish expression in these different veins, particularly in terms of sexual expression and the regulation of heteronormative conduct within popular texts.

There is a particular genre of fanfiction commonly produced by women authors called slashfic where two male protagonists of the source text are written into a homoerotic romance or sexual rendezvous – the “slash” coming from the typed pairing of characters, such as Kirk/Spock or Harry/Draco, for example. The reasons women write or read slashfic are potentially many, as Camille Bacon-Smith demonstrates: for one, fully-developed, central male characters are typically more abundant in source texts than female ones and are thus more appealing for fan use; as well, slashfic provides a way to plumb a character's psychological depths, to place them in novel scenarios not likely to come up in the original universe, and to orchestrate a romantic tryst between characters

who possess equal power dynamics. In these stories, women control the plays of sexuality through writing as much as they are allowed to enjoy it through reading.¹⁷⁶

In classic rock texts, too, male “characters” are much more abundant and their on-stage relationships often lend to certain readings of homoeroticism. In *Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music*, for example, Susan Fast paints singer Robert Plant as a feminine counterpoint to Jimmy Page’s masculine style of guitar performance, and in *Performing Glam Rock*, Philip Auslander notes how David Bowie’s deliberately sexualized portrayal of his Ziggy Stardust persona feeds off of guitarist Mick Ronson’s macho stance. The gregarious singer / mysterious guitarist dynamic is a common trope in much rock music, one that female tribute artists are able to utilize and exaggerate to their full advantage. Led Zeppelin often closes their live sets with “Whole Lotta Love,” for instance, the original version of which features a lengthy tête-à-tête between Plant’s vocals and Page’s theremin performance. Led Zeppelin vocalist Shannon Conley and guitarist Steph Paynes feature this bit as the climax of their live show: by the end of the duet interval, Conley is laying supine before Paynes, who concentrates on stimulating the theremin with her hands, and with it, Conley’s increasingly orgasmic vocal responses. The result, as Bacon-Smith writes of slashfic, is that authors/performers and audiences alike are allowed to “share in the fantasy of sexual relationships with both of the male screen [or stage] characters with whom they already maintain an imaginary relationship.”¹⁷⁷ After all, as Paynes once explained in an interview, Led Zeppelin’s sexual appeal was never strictly for female arousal only: “You had masses of young guys in puberty looking at these beautiful guys on stage and feeling – I don’t know, maybe they didn’t want to sleep with them consciously – but they were definitely turned on. Their music was extremely sexual, there’s no getting around that. All of that is part of the alchemy that’s going on with [Led Zeppelin] as well.”¹⁷⁸ On stage and in writing,

¹⁷⁶ Bacon-Smith, 228-254.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁷⁸ “Livin’, Lovin’ – and they’re Women.” *Boston Globe* 3 August 2007.
<http://www.ledzeppelin.com/sites/default/files/BostonGlobeFeatureComplete.pdf>.

fantasies are materialized through the bodies of female tribute artists or through the words of slashfic authors; the homoerotic subtexts of the original are brought into full relief by virtue of the imaginative will of fan-artists.

However, there remains an important difference between slashfic and hyper-eroticized tributing – primarily, the fact that slashfic characters stay male while women’s tribute characters “become” female. Where slashfic plots use the physical likeness of source text characters to depict their relationships, female tributers are using their own femininely-sexualized bodies for homoerotic titillation. It is much more socially acceptable for two women to perform same-sex flirtations – especially when done for the benefit of a largely male audience – than it is for two masculine action heroes to conduct romantic suggestions of any kind. Perhaps for these reasons, slashfic audiences remain largely female or queer, while female tribute acts’ audiences have a broader appeal to straight men as well. Nevertheless, the mere hyperbolization of sexual dynamics between the protagonists on a rock stage that is, by default, a straight male territory has the potential to question compulsory heterosexuality and the social taboos barring intimate male-to-male relations. Though David Bowie’s publicized bisexuality and homoerotic stage performance in the 1970s may have shook the foundations of sexuality within glam rock, the heavy metal worlds in which many female tribute artists play maintains an almost aggressively heterosexual bias.¹⁷⁹ A peculiar demonstration of such prejudice in action is Judas Priest and their female tribute act, Judas Priestess. In 1998, Priest vocalist Rob Halford publicly came out as gay, an announcement he made knowing the possible risk of alienating or offending a large contingent of the group’s straight male fan base. The women of Judas Priestess told me about a fan of theirs who had gotten a “Judas Priestess” tattoo; when they asked him why he didn’t just get an original Priest tattoo, he replied that he took issue with Halford’s sexuality.¹⁸⁰ Not only did the Priestess members seem

¹⁷⁹ Female tributes to Freddie Mercury and Queen are an important exception in terms of sexual representation as well as an important bridge between glam and hard rock, but such an analysis is beyond the scope of my present discussion.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with the author, 18 July 2105.

to find this stance rather unconscionable, they figuratively denounced it on stage by offering marked interpretations of Halford's lyrics. Before launching into the song "Jawbreaker," singer MilitiA spoke clearly into the microphone: "This song is about sucking a giant cock." Coming from her body and her voice, this statement might appear heterosexualized – but it is still a direct reminder to the audience of the original text's not-so-straight context, despite a long and closeted history of outward appearances.

Whether flirting with erotica or spelling out implied messages, female tribute acts take what is already covertly available within the source material and make it much more obvious. Lez Zeppelin's sexual tantalizations were not concocted out of thin air for the amusement of a male gaze, nor are Judas Priestess' song-by-song commentaries out of line or question. As with slashfic writers, the opportunity to explore the oft-shrouded dimensions of male homosocial relations is an important aspect to understanding one's position as a female fan of such material. Jenkins, too, notes how "female fan culture clusters around traditionally masculine... genres," and that women necessarily "colonize [texts] through their active interest in them."¹⁸¹ Songs, gestures, and plotlines might be changed simply by women's embodiment or imagination of the source material, but it is the way that such changes are managed through performance that makes the transformation of the text possible.

4.1.4 DIY and Gift Economies

Finally, tributes and fandoms relate in their mutual disregard for the conventional capitalist modes of art-making and distribution. "Traditionally," Kristina Busse writes, "one of the central tenets of fandom has been its anticapitalist character: Often termed a gift culture of paying it forward, large sections of fandom rely on volunteer labor and a proud amateurism."¹⁸² Fan videos, artworks, stories, and so on are typically distributed

¹⁸¹ *Textual Poachers*: 114-5.

¹⁸² Kristina Busse, "Fans, Fandom, and Fan Studies," in *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, eds. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2009), 386-390.

online or at conventions free of cost and free of expected reciprocity. Musical tributing, however, is *not* a gift economy: musicians expect financial compensation for their performances and audiences pay money to see them. However, I suspect that this is true partially because musical instruments and gear require such a sizable up-front investment and bands seek to, at the very least, recoup their expenses. Additionally, tribute audiences are more fleeting and irregular than the “economy” of fandom communities; tribute acts must go on tour to reach their fans, unlike stories or videos which can be distributed electronically. But for most tributers, profit margins are not the end goal. Guitarist Michelle Turingan of Hervana told me: “I think we all went into [this] knowing it was a passion project. We’re not doing this to get some big payoff. We’re doing this for fun. We really like playing live, and any money we make... goes back into the band, to pay for gas and to play shows and toward merch[andise]. It just goes back into the band.”¹⁸³ Whereas mainstream tribute acts may vary greatly in their size and scope, from local endeavors to internationally touring enterprises like ABBA tribute Björn Again, most female rock tributes within my research operate as mid-level ventures, touring regionally and playing mid-size clubs, likely earning just enough through their performances to break even in terms of travel and equipment expenses. Some tributes explicitly place the principles of fandom above the potential for material gain. Duran Duran tribute Joanne Joanne dictates on their website that “they don’t do *Rio*,” the original group’s most commercially popular album.¹⁸⁴ AC/DC she only performs material from the pre-1980 Bon Scott era, and Sheezer deals exclusively in songs from *Weezer (Blue Album)* and *Pinkerton*. These decisions preclude some newer or more popular material from the tribute’s repertoire, though, at the same time, it offers the groups clout as highly knowledgeable or “serious” fans of the music performed.

¹⁸³ Interview with the author, 16 October 2015.

¹⁸⁴ “About,” www.joannejoanne.co.uk. Accessed 9 April 2016.

Tributes resemble the “proto-markets” common in independent music-making scenes, where creative labor is only partially commoditized by the cultural marketplace.¹⁸⁵ But more than that, they embody the Do-It-Yourself spirit endemic to fan-art creation. Indeed, as John Fiske notes, “...there is a strong distrust of making a profit in fandom, and those who attempt to do so are typically classed as hucksters rather than fans”¹⁸⁶ – a prejudice that carries on even with modern Internet advertising and crowdfunding resources, such as YouTube or Patreon, which have further enabled a class of professionalized fans Susan Scott calls “fantrepreneurs”: “one who openly leverages or strategically adopts a fannish identity for his or her own professional advancement.”¹⁸⁷ There is often a stigma attached to musical tribute artists in the entertainment industry at large; they might be viewed as “sell-outs” in the music world because their activities (i.e., performing other artists’ already-successful material for their own interests) often guarantees high audience turnout and, with it, easy financial gain. But this perception overlooks the amount of work required to learn the source material and to be able to perform it to a highly discerning audience as an ensemble. As Guy Morrow argues, tributing is equally an opportunity for musicians to “buy in” to the precarious world of the live music business, allowing for “the development of performance technique, stage presence and musicianship, and ultimately... the production of original music.”¹⁸⁸ While it can enhance skills or lead to further projects, not all female musicians engage in tributing as an alternative “sustainable career that provides the funding to attempt to infiltrate the [original-music] star system.”¹⁸⁹ Tribute artists vary in terms of their career

¹⁸⁵ Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions* (London: Arnold, 2000).

¹⁸⁶ John Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992), 30-49: 40.

¹⁸⁷ Susan Scott, “‘Cosplay is Serious Business’: Gendering Material Fan Labor on *Heroes of Cosplay*,” *Cinema Journal* 53.4 (2015), 145-154: 148.

¹⁸⁸ Guy Morrow, “Selling Out or Buying In?: The Dual Career of the Original and Cover Band Musician,” in *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*, ed. Shane Homan (New York: Open University Press, 2006), 182-192: 182.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

involvement in music: some, like AC/DC's co-founders Amy Ward and Nicki Williams, have never played in any bands besides their tribute. Others, like some members of Hervana, are more hobbyist musicians and have other principal "day jobs." Still others, including members of Judas Priestess, Sheezer, and the Iron Maidens are full-time musicians with major-label acts or symphonic orchestras; tributing is perhaps only a marginal stream in their overall income. The high and low ends of this incredible range of professionalism seem more prominent with female tribute acts than with straightforward tributes, perhaps again demonstrating the difficulty women have in either finding suitable entry points or deserved recognition in music-making. Similar patterns emerge with fandoms: the vast majority of female fanfiction writers are amateurs or hobbyists, while the authors of official or authorized universe novels tend to be written by male authors. Where men might be more likely to earn a living out of fan activity, women's efforts are often kept to marginalized peripheries.

4.1.5 I'm With the Band: Female Fandom Refigured

Contextualizing female tribute acts within the frames of fandom and fan studies is more than a game of comparisons. It offers a structural method for analyzing both tribute activities as participatory pursuits and of female tributers as fans themselves. Too often in the popular imagination, the female rock fan is conflated with the "groupie," the obsessed girls who, "...unable to maintain critical distance from the image, want to take it inside themselves, to obtain 'total intimacy' with it."¹⁹⁰ Tributing offers an alternative means of fannish expression, one where women can convey technical skill along with intricate knowledge of the text, one where the concept of the word "tribute" itself, couched as it is in the idea of something paid by a subordinate to a superior "as the price of peace, security, and protection"¹⁹¹ symbolizes the spirit of deference and exchange in tribute activity rather than the willful submission and self-exploitation expected of the groupie. For tributes, just as Jenkins concludes of fandom, its "power (and hence, its scandal) lies

¹⁹⁰ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 15.

¹⁹¹ "tribute, n." OED Online. December 2015. Oxford University Press (accessed 9 January 2016).

in its systematic trespassing of... boundaries. Fandom is characterized precisely by its... rejection of aesthetic distance (the boundary between text and reader); ...its defiance of conventional conceptions of [creative] intellectual property (the boundary between reader and writer); and its attempt to integrate media content into its everyday social experiences (the boundary between fantasy and reality).”¹⁹² A legitimate consideration of fandom and fan creations in turn engenders a partial collapse of the boundaries between producers and consumers. In the end, the terms defining the “legitimacy” of how art is to be produced, disseminated, consumed, or considered are brought to question in and of themselves.

Fan art and tributing demonstrate how original texts can be destabilized, reimagined, and transformed through acts of performance, embodiment, community-building, and communal economies. When it comes to masculine-coded genres of media such as hard rock, science fiction, and comic books, women currently may have limited opportunities to engage in avenues of creative self-expression via mainstream media outlets. However, the pursuit of participatory activity and involvement in fandom (sub)cultures is one way to eke out a future space for more female voices.

4.2 Copyright and Transformative Fair Use

Fan artists often have complicated relationships with their source texts; likewise, original content creators often have complicated relationships with their fans. Fans who poach source material such as characters, settings, and styles from other texts for use in fanfiction, filk songs, or, as I’ve argued, musical tribute, many times portray widely divergent scenarios from the original text or explore subtexts or meanings perhaps not overtly intended by the original author. Because fan artists use copyrighted characters or real-life public personas, they risk potentially running into fraught legal territory in terms of intellectual property or publicity rights. Debate continues in both sci-fi/fantasy and

¹⁹² Jenkins, “If I Could...”: 157.

music communities as to whether fan and tribute activity constitutes infringement, distortion, and/or misattribution of the original source material, or whether it is a viable means of commentary and creative expression. In a legal sense, derivative works deemed “transformative” from the original text are protected under “fair use” stipulations of copyright law.¹⁹³ Many pro-fandom scholars argue that most traditional forms of fan activity deserve fair use allowance.¹⁹⁴ In this section, I will argue that female tributes, too, comprise a transformative use of original material that merits fair use exception for their practices. More than simply protecting the right to tribute, though, the legal implications of transformation validates tribute performance as an art form capable of social and cultural commentary, one that reveals and investigates the structures of rock music as they currently and historically operate.

As Rebecca Tushnet writes, “fans tend to see their legal status as similar to their social status: marginal and, at best, tolerated rather than accepted as a legitimate part of the universe of creators.”¹⁹⁵ Tribute acts of any form or gender may be liable to feel the same way. They arguably do not make significant contributions to local or regional original-music scenes – which are typically more highly regarded as legitimate artistic endeavors than copy or cover bands¹⁹⁶ – but they are “tolerated” as marginal forms of live music entertainment. Even so, their legal status is sometimes contested and their means of credit or remuneration toward the original artists dubious. Tribute acts have not been immune to litigious threats and prosecution, a fact apparent since the early inception of rock tributes themselves. In 1979, Apple Corps Ltd. filed a lawsuit against a Broadway-based musical

¹⁹³ In this section, I will be referring to United States law and legal definitions.

¹⁹⁴ E.g., Christina Z. Ranon, “Honor Among Thieves: Copyright Infringement in Internet Fandom,” *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law* 8.2 (2005-06), 421-452; and Rebecca Tushnet, “Legal Frictions: Copyright, Fan Fiction, and a New Common Law,” *Loyola L.A. Entertainment Law Journal* 17 651-86.

¹⁹⁵ Rebecca Tushnet, “Copyright Law, Fan Practices, and the Rights of the Author,” in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, eds. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 60-72: 60.

¹⁹⁶ See Groce.

revue called *Beatlemania* for what the judge, who ruled in Apple's favor, deemed "a complete appropriation of the Beatles' persona."¹⁹⁷ Similarly, in the years succeeding Elvis Presley's death, executors of his estate tried desperately to stamp out imitators and impersonators, but to little avail. Today, many of the major Elvis tribute festivals are officially incorporated under Elvis Presley Enterprises in a spirit of "If you can't beat them, make them pay a licensing fee to join you." Technicalities can prove troublesome; as Jason Lee Oakes notes, ETAs often "make sure not to include 'Elvis' or any variation thereof in their stage name, settling instead for the 'tribute to Elvis' tag" underneath in order not to be sued by the Presley estate.¹⁹⁸ Part of Apple Corps Ltd.'s complaint against *Beatlemania* was that "the disclaimer in the show's advertisements were in such small print that they were probably disregarded," confusing the public as to "whether the production was authorized by the Beatles."¹⁹⁹ Disclaimers, as Tushnet notes, were also de rigueur in fanfiction and other modes of fan activity in its early stages, but, as with tributing, have become increasingly inferred or implied as fannish creations have become more common, widespread, and culturally understood. "Fewer fan creators [today] are worried that they are somehow doing something wrong, and they are more likely to expect that their [audiences] will understand their basic premises," she writes.²⁰⁰ However, this does not mean that all fan activities are safeguarded from legal action. Recently, an all-female Bon Jovi tribute band was forced to change their name from "Blonde Jovi"²⁰¹ and a Metallica tribute act was sent cease-and-desist papers for use of licensed fonts in their promotional advertising.²⁰² Despite their "tolerated" space in the

¹⁹⁷ "Beatlemania Co. Loses Apple Suit," Los Angeles *Times* 5 June 1986: n.p.

¹⁹⁸ Jason Lee Oakes, "All the King's Elvii: Identifying with Elvis through Musical Tribute," in *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*, ed. Shane Homan (New York: Open University Press, 2006), 166-181: 170.

¹⁹⁹ "Beatlemania," n.p.

²⁰⁰ Tushnet, "Copyright," 64.

²⁰¹ Joe Bosso, "Bon Jovi Sue Female Tribute Band," *Musicradar* 6 April 2009.

²⁰² Chad Childers, "Metallica Send Cease and Desist Letter to Canadian Tribute Band," *Loudwire* 13 January 2016.

cultural sphere, fan-creators and tribute artists still tread contestable ground from a legal purview.

Though it's rare for tribute acts to be prosecuted for simply existing anymore, their ventures are not universally accepted by copyright holders or legal strategists. Economically and financially, it may appear questionable for tribute acts to capitalize off of others' intellectual property. Live performance of cover songs is included under standard blanket licensing fees that venues pay to publishing houses for use of copyrighted material, but this system does not always adequately account for tribute performances. Because royalty distribution under standard licensing is largely based on average radio/jukebox plays rather than any itemized tallies, a two-hour long set of DIO material at a SHEO or DIA concert, for example, is unlikely to provide any actual compensation to the copyright owners of the original works. But, as with fan creators in other media, most tribute artists would likely maintain "that their activities do not hurt and even help revenues from authorized works, by increasing loyalty to and interest in the official versions."²⁰³ Even alternative tributes, who modify or alter elements of the original, could make a case for "adding value through labor" to the original work, especially within fan communities where artists "seek recognition from their peers for adding new perspectives and twists to the official texts."²⁰⁴ Tribute acts tend to operate in more generic and publicly visible musical venues than the specialized forums in the far reaches of the Internet reserved for other media fandoms, and so might be likely to spark new or renewed interest in the tributed artist through their performances.

However, as tributing becomes increasingly commonplace, the oversight in royalty distributions for use of material has led some, like musician-cum-entertainment lawyer Brent Giles Davis, to conclude that tribute acts ought to be classified as "dramaticomusical performances" and should acquire and pay for grand rights permissions for use

²⁰³ Tushnet, "Copyright," 64.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

of copyrighted material.²⁰⁵ Moreover, tribute artists often imitate the physical likeness as well as the music of the tributed artists, meaning that the originary person being tributed risks losing some control over the public dissemination of his or her image. Just as “a reader’s view of Harry Potter may be altered by an unexpected encounter with a sexually explicit or graphically violent story about him” in the world of fanfiction,²⁰⁶ a listener’s views of singer Robert Plant may be compromised by an unexpected depiction of him as hyperfeminized and overtly flirtatious with the guitarist in a Led Zeppelin show. In view of this, Davis also argues that “tribute bands misappropriate the original artist’s goodwill, which can result in a variety of trademark-type harms including infringement, dilution, tarnishment, and violation of the right of publicity.”²⁰⁷ This might especially apply to forms of alternative tributing where deliberate liberties are taken with the original material (e.g., the Black Sabbath/McDonald’s tribute Mac Sabbath) or where the music is embodied in a different or controversial way (e.g., Leigh Crow’s openly lesbian depiction of Elvis Presley). However, it could equally apply to tribute groups of any stripe who fail to adequately deliver on the promise of the original music’s standards of quality. Part of Apple Ltd.’s issue with *Beatlemania* was “that the imitation was vastly inferior to the Beatles’ live performance and confused and deceived the public by passing itself off as a true replica of those performances.”²⁰⁸ Whether or not they meet critical standards, some interpretations of the law steadfastly maintain that “pure imitation – such as tribute band performance – is not transformative and thus does not warrant First Amendment protection.”²⁰⁹

But what of female tribute acts? Do they likewise merely operate as “pure imitation,” or does the difference of their gender rewrite the act anew? Do they infringe upon the rights

²⁰⁵ Brent Giles Davis, “Identity Theft: Tribute Bands, Grand Rights, and Dramatico-Musical Performances,” *Cardozo Arts & Entertainment Law Journal* 24 (2006), 845-882.

²⁰⁶ Tushnet, “Copyright,” 62.

²⁰⁷ Davis, 881.

²⁰⁸ “Beatlemania,” n.p.

²⁰⁹ Michael S. Newman, “Imitation is the Sincerest Form of Flattery, but is it Infringement? The Law of Tribute Bands,” *Touro Law Review* 28 (2012), 391-419: 406.

of the original artists through the sheer audacity of a differently embodied performance? Krissi Geary, J.D., counters that we must examine “how a tribute uses the identity of the original artists... to determine whether it contributes information, provides creative expression that adds to cultural enrichment, or primarily exists as a form of commercial exploitation” before writing off each and every form of tribute entirely.²¹⁰ In legal terms, the question is whether derivative works such as tribute acts (or fanfictions, etc.) constitute a “transformative” interpretation of the original. Copyright law allows for the “fair use” of material when derivative pieces “add new insights or meaning to the original work,”²¹¹ but it is not simply a matter of inserting any categorically fresh element into a tried-and-true scheme. Tushnet explains that “courts are more likely to find a use fair when it comments on the underlying work – when it brings out into the open what was present in the subtext or context,”²¹² differentiating with this crucial quality the line between parody and satire. “According to the Supreme Court, a parody, by distorting elements of the original, causes readers to rethink the messages of the original,” whereas a satire uses the original to make pointed comments about an unrelated issue, and thus is untransformative.²¹³ In this sense, Mac Sabbath would exemplify satire, since there is little in Black Sabbath’s original body of repertoire that lends itself to a critical assessment of the fast-food industry. Female rock tribute groups, however, can consciously or inadvertently distort elements of the original through their embodiment. Their presence as women on a stage is enough to provoke audiences into rethinking the messages of rock and gender: Who is allowed to be a rock star? How are women allowed to express themselves musically? What messages do rock lyrics convey in regards to gender and sexuality?

²¹⁰ Krissi Geary, “Tribute Bands: Flattering Imitators or Flagrant Infringers,” *Southern Illinois University Law Journal* 29 (2005), 481-506: 495.

²¹¹ Tushnet, “Copyright,” 61.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 62.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 67

In the previous two chapters, I argued that female tribute acts to male rock artists allow for an imaginative reinterpretation of pop music history and a means for women to explore and expose the fluidity of available gender representations. It is vital here that both of these possibilities stem from an internal rendering of the source material itself, that there are elements of gendered constriction always already present in the classic rock tropes female tribute artists take on. Their entry into the tribute space does not require radical alterations; it simply happens as they take the stage, as they pick up their instruments, as they sing the songs as they've always been sung. Female tributing is a prime example of "a legitimate transformation" in that "the new work makes overt that which was present in the original text covertly...: transformative fair uses make subtext text."²¹⁴ Rock music of the kind frequently tributed by women is full of subtexts that variously hint at the fragility of patriarchal dominance, that use masculinity, aggression, and misogyny as tactics to mask the vulnerability of male control over the field. As Tushnet describes, "The more successfully a work is transformed in the technical legal sense, the more we are likely to be able to see that the evidence supporting the transformation was present all along in the original."²¹⁵

4.3 Conclusion

Female tribute acts' relation to fandoms in other media genres demonstrates their like capabilities to reformulate, re-question, and reinterpret works of mass media and popular culture that, in more pessimistic views, might be thought of only as opiates for the masses. Tributators and fans show that passionate consumption does not necessarily translate into stultified obedience to the hegemonic powers and ideologies that be; there is room for negotiation, room for creativity, and room for insubordination. Fair use laws surrounding copyrighted material ensure that fan and tribute activities can continue even without the approval of the original creators, though the lack of clear and categorical

²¹⁴ Ibid., 68.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 70.

exemption for works of this nature demonstrates that "...the law has yet to make explicit what fans have always known, that meaning cannot be imposed by authors or owners but rather is negotiated among texts, authors, and audiences."²¹⁶ Even so, the common themes of female tributes and fan activities allow for new imaginative possibilities, new modes of self-expression, and new foundations of community. Such positive outcomes are not achieved without a substantial irony, though, as Jenkins notes:

The irony, of course, is that fans have found the very forces that work to isolate us from each other to be the ideal foundation for creating connections across traditional boundaries; that fans have found the very forces that transform many Americans into spectators to provide the very resources for creating a more participatory culture; that fans have found the very forces that reinforce patriarchal authority to contain tools by which to critique that authority.²¹⁷

That critique, in the end, is at the heart of fan activity; for though texts and rock bands may be loved and adored, their intentions do not always equal their found meanings. The tools for navigating reality and change within that reality can be discovered using the power of critique; we *can* dismantle the master's house using his own tools, if only we know where to look.

²¹⁶ Tushnet, "Copyright," 62.

²¹⁷ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 284.

Chapter 5

5 Conclusion: Welcome to the Vajungle

5.1 Summary

A banner adorning the wall of the stage at a Guns N' Hoses concert reads simply: "Welcome to the Vajungle." Nothing could sum up the current scene of female tribute acts any better. Within the spaces where tributes are played out, performers and audiences embark together on a journey deep into the vajungle – that is, the social and artistic arena where women are allowed to be rock gods, where they can freely boast of their masculine prowess along with their feminine sensibilities, and where the communal fantasies of popular music audiences can become reality.

There is a strong current throughout all the previous chapters of the sense of "fantasy" in the tribute realm, as in "imagination; the process or the faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present."²¹⁸ In chapter two, I detailed the history and function of both tribute acts and female artists in the rock world, and how all-female tribute acts contribute to a liminal imaginative space where prototypical rock fantasies can be performed on a stage where female bodies serve as a believable substitute for the more common male archetype. In chapter three, I demonstrated how the processes of identification and embodiment enable a fluid representation of gender roles, and how the overt "performance" of musical tribute dovetails with the "performativity" of socialized gender constructions. The fusion of masculine/feminine signifiers allows fantasies of new and different gender representations to take form. Chapter four examines tributing as a function of participatory fandom activity, and the fantasies engaged here are many: collaborative celebration, inhabited roleplay, sexual desire, and a collective sharing economy. These fantasies expand receptive understandings of a fixed text and transform its meanings in the process.

²¹⁸ "fantasy | phantasy, n." OED Online. March 2016. Oxford University Press.

The projection of fantasies onto tangible bodies and the figuration of “things not actually present” within the realms of real space and real time make all-female tribute acts something more than just the evening’s entertainment. They demonstrate how a process of make-believe can translate into a practice of progress, and how dreams can become a reality.

5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

There are many areas of women’s tributing that I had intended or wanted to explore but could not because of time or geographic constraints. Though the interviews I was able to procure with actual musicians were extremely informative, they do not constitute a full or representative sample of the many female tribute artists actively performing today. Direct information from the women who pursue tributing as a hobby or occupation that is not overtly tied to promotional or advertising initiatives (as many of the available online magazine interviews with such musicians are) would allow for a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the motives behind tribute, the labor required to enable tributes, and the ingredients that make tribute acts ultimately successful or not within the larger scheme of the live music entertainment industry.

While I focused my research only on currently active tribute artists, I came across many more defunct or disused web pages or old advertisements for female tribute acts who no longer appear to perform regularly. Furthermore, I observed a significant amount of turnover in band members – Lez Zeppelin, for example, has had at least three different singers over the past dozen years, and Hell’s Belles guitarist Adrian Conner was only promoted to lead after the group’s original “Angus” left. A pertinent question to this research is not only why female musicians *start* tribute acts, but why do they *stop* tributing? They might grow weary of the repertoire, they may find the intrinsic or financial rewards wanting, or they may have opportunities for further exposure as original music performers as a result of their success as tributers. Because my information is limited to only contemporary active performers, such possible causes for disbandment are only speculative.

Another area for discussion that is lacking in the current discourse is the amount of off-stage labor involved to keep tribute acts running smoothly. As guitarist Rena Sands of Judas Priestess told me, “It’s the preparation that people don’t see. You see the show, but as guitarists and musicians we have to practice all the time to keep up with it. We have like forty songs that we play, and we’re changing the setlist all the time. ... This music is pretty demanding as players.”²¹⁹ Additionally, singer MilitiA of Judas Priestess handles all of the band’s booking, promotion, and management. “It takes up a lot of time,” she said, “but I don’t even think of it that way anymore. If there are things to get done I just do it.”²²⁰ From my understanding, many other female tribute acts are in a similar position as self-managed artists who must deal with venues, contracts, transportation, lodging, and other business issues in addition to their roles as performers on stage. It would be worthwhile to further explore this side of their experiences, especially considering the doubly-marginalized role of such acts as women (read: incompetent) and as tributes (read: unsophisticated). Indeed, the members of Hervana informed me that any sexist attitudes they encountered were not generally in relation to their actual performance, but in the more technical arenas of sound checks, set-ups, and even purchasing instruments and gear. As guitarist Michelle Turingan very keenly noted, these obstacles can impede women’s further involvement in music before they even have a chance to start. “It’s so early on in the process. You have to go there [to an instrument store] to get the stuff to do the thing you want to do, right? If you’re a sixteen-year-old girl and you want to buy a guitar and [you have a poor] first experience, that can be really off-putting.”²²¹ Clearly these observations have relevance to female music-making of any kind, and though they echo the findings of Mavis Bayton’s ethnographic research on female musicians in the 1980s and ‘90s,²²² more contemporary research is vital to update the attitudes and experiences of women working in popular music in the twenty-first century.

²¹⁹ Interview with the author, 11 July 2015.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Interview with the author, 16 October 2015.

²²² Bayton, *Frock Rock*.

At the same time, the old feminist adage that “the personal is political” perhaps deserves some context when discussing female tribute acts. How does their stage act fit in with the structures of their lives as members of a local community or music scene, as workers in other fields, as musicians in other bands, or as mothers, daughters, sisters, or lovers? For example, Lady E told me that while her husband and sisters were supportive of her Elvis act, her brother “totally doesn’t even want to talk about it,” insinuating that her act constituted some form of sexual deviance.²²³ And, as Bayton has also noted, women are expected to provide the bulk of domestic, family, and child care, which may inhibit their ability to tour, perform late-night concerts, or find rehearsal time.²²⁴ As Judas Priestess’ Rena Sands told me, “I’m the only one in the band with kids... I had a guy come up to me once, ...and he goes, ‘You look like a soccer mom!’ And I just burst out laughing. He blew my cover!”²²⁵ As amusing as this is, I still wonder whether anyone has ever called out Sands’ husband, guitarist John Petrucci of Dream Theater, for being a “soccer dad.” Finally, though women’s sexual orientation does not necessarily have any bearing on their musical endeavors, the blatant use of names like *Lez Zeppelin* (and the members’ repeated refusal to disclose their sexual orientation to the press) has some significance or possible implications for the visibility of queer representations on rock’s stage.

As mentioned in my introduction and previous chapters, making generalizations about audiences at female tribute events proved extraordinarily difficult. The crowds varied widely depending on the size of the venue, the location of the performance, the time of day or week of the show, and, of course, the act or acts scheduled to perform. Further attendance and observations at concerts might help in drawing more conclusions about the people who attend female tribute events, but, because of their increasing diversity, I suspect that patterns would emerge only in relation to specific acts – e.g., a Rocket Queens audience versus a Killer Queens audience – rather than in relation to tributing as a practice. People seem to attend tribute events out of fandom for the specific group being

²²³ Interview with the author, 23 July 2015.

²²⁴ Bayton, *Frock Rock*.

²²⁵ Interview with the author, 11 July 2015.

tributed rather than a passion for tribute acts as a whole (though admittedly, the success of all-tribute festivals like Glastonbudget might suggest otherwise). Even so, increased opportunities to speak with concert attendees and fans of tribute groups would undoubtedly help illuminate various questions as to the audience's role in the process of tribute, the satisfaction (or lack thereof) derived from attending tributes, and the messages that audiences perceive from watching cross-gender tributes in action.

Furthermore, there are ways to study fans in music outside of the concert hall, and the fact that a large portion of my initial research was conducted via the Internet and social media presented even more fascinating objects for potential inquiry. Nearly all of the tribute acts in this study maintain Facebook pages, where other users can post or comment on the artist's publicly shared images, statuses, activities, or event listings. Some of them also have official Twitter or Instagram accounts. This can often serve as a double-edged sword for public figures, and perhaps especially for female musicians: as singer Lauren Mayberry of original-music group CHVRCHES has observed, social media has become a vital tool for artist publicity and fan connectivity, but the easy anonymity of its platform allows for harassment and misogynistic attacks launched from behind the safety net of a screen.²²⁶ The ways that followers interact with band pages and, similarly, the ways that artists groom their social media accounts, might be a rich area for discussion – such as, for example, photo comments on Guns N' Hoses' profile pictures that read “this is like the HOTTEST thing ever” or “that's too hevvy [*sic*] jacket for a Slash.”²²⁷ This might be true for all music artists and their fans, but, as the two quotes above indicate, there are certain particularities to all-female tribute acts in terms of the ways they are sexualized by their gender and their accountability to other fans within a larger community. (Guns N' Hoses' page admin responded to the second comment, “You're right. That's why [GnH guitarist] Gash is wearing it.”²²⁸)

²²⁶ Lauren Mayberry, “Chvrches' Lauren Mayberry: 'I Will Not Accept Online Misogyny,’” *The Guardian* 30 September 2013. Web. Accessed 20 March 2016.

²²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/gunshosesgals>, accessed 14 March 2016.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

Overall, this study presents only an opening act for the possible worlds of discussion surrounding female tribute acts, as well as their tangential relations to other tribute acts as a whole and to other female musicians in rock music.

5.3 Significance and Implications

It is my hope and intention that the discussions herein help point to an understanding of female tribute acts as a unique and highly relevant mode of performance that dissects and challenges many of the hegemonic assumptions within popular music ideology. However, they should not be treated as an isolated occurrence or remote example, either. The study of all-female tribute acts has implications for continued feminist scholarship in popular music, for conceptualizing the current “retro industry”²²⁹ of pop culture, and for the persistent project of unraveling and revealing the ideologies and structured systems of rock music, past and present.

Original-music performers and cover musicians alike in Stephen Groce’s ethnographic study concede that “to be an artist is simply to create something that has never existed before.”²³⁰ Even if female tribute artists do not write their own material, they embody a new form of musical expression that has been hitherto lacking in the rock lexicon to date. With that, they are artists: artists who represent a culmination of social and musical forces, artists who possess the ability to rock.

²²⁹ Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture’s Addiction to its own Past* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011).

²³⁰ Stephen B. Groce, “Occupational Rhetoric and Ideology: A Comparison of Copy and Original Music Performers,” *Qualitative Sociology* 12.4 (1989): 291-410: 402.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval



**Western
Research**

Research Ethics

**Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice**

Principal Investigator: Norma Coates

Department & Institution: Information and Media Studies\Faculty of Information & Media Studies, Western University

NMREB File Number: 106969

Study Title: Girls, Rock Your Boys: Gender, Labor, and Fandom in All-Female Tributes to Male Musicians

Sponsor:

NMREB Initial Approval Date: November 13, 2015

NMREB Expiry Date: November 13, 2016

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Instruments	Template for Interview Conduct	2015/07/06
Recruitment Items	Email Script for Recruitment	2015/07/06
Western University Protocol	Revised Western Protocol	2015/08/27
Letter of Information & Consent	Letter of Information and Consent - Revised	2015/08/27

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB00000941.

Ethics Officer, on behalf of Riley/Hinson, NMREB Chair or delegated board member

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information: Erika Basile ___ Nicole Kaniki ___ Grace Kelly ___ Mina Mekhail ___ Vikki Tran ___

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files

Appendix B: Letter of Information

Project Title: Girls, Rock Your Boys: Gender, Labor, and Fandom in All-Female Tributes to Male Musicians

Student Investigator:

Sandra Canosa, M.A. candidate, Popular Music & Culture, University of Western Ontario

Faculty Supervisor:

Norma Coates, PhD, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, University of Western Ontario

Letter of Information

1. Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in an interview for this research study about all-female tribute acts because you currently are or formerly have been a participant in such an act.

2. Purpose of the Letter

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

3. Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to detail the working lives of women who participate in tribute acts, their motivations and goals for performing such material, and their relationship with the music they play.

4. Inclusion Criteria

Individuals who identify as women and who are currently or have in the past been involved with a musical tribute act that reproduces the music or stage performance of a male popular music artist are eligible to participate in this study.

5. Exclusion Criteria

Participants must be 18 years of age or over.

6. Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to an interview with the researcher. It is anticipated that the entire conversation will take approximately one hour. The interview can be conducted in person, by phone or Skype, or written over email as is convenient for the participant. If you allow, spoken word interviews may be taped with a digital recorder. Otherwise, the interviewer will take manual notes, and quotations or ideas from your responses may be used in papers or articles related to the research, with your permission.

7. Possible Risks and Harms

There are no known risks to this study, though certain questions may possibly cause discomfort. Participants may refuse to answer any questions without repercussion.

8. Possible Benefits

Participants will be given space to speak about their projects in a meaningful way and in turn may learn about the broader network of similar acts working and performing throughout the globe. Possible benefits to society include fostering a better understanding of women's roles in the musical tribute community within the live music entertainment industry. Those who have perhaps considered forming projects of their own will benefit by learning about the experiences of already-established artists.

9. Compensation

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

10. Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no adverse effects.

11. Confidentiality

The information collected will be used for research purposes only. All data will remain confidential, and any identifiable data will be retained in a separate, encrypted digital file for five years, after which time it will be destroyed. Results of this study may be published using quotations from your interview. A pseudonym can be used instead of your real name if you do not wish to disclose your identity. However, it may be beneficial for readers to know which quotations come from performers of different genres (e.g., a Metallica tribute band versus an Elvis tribute act). Because there are a small number of women performing in such acts, this amount of detail means your anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

12. Contacts for Further Information

If you have any questions about this research, or any comments to make now or at a later date, or if you would like a copy of the published results of this study, please contact Sandra Canosa at XXX, or faculty supervisor Norma Coates at XXX. If you have any questions about the conduct of the study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Western Ontario, XXX.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent Form

Project Title: Girls, Rock Your Boys: Gender, Labor, and Fandom in All-Female Tributes to Male Musicians

Study Investigator's Name: Sandra Canosa

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's Name (please print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

- I give permission for the use of my name attached to the use of any quotations from my interview.
- I would prefer a pseudonym be used for the attribution of any quotations from my interview.
- I give permission for my interview to be recorded as a digital audio file.

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Interview Template

Project Title:

Girls, Rock Your Boys: Gender, Labor, and Fandom in All-Female Tributes to Male Musicians

Student Investigator:

Sandra Canosa, M.A. candidate, Popular Music & Culture, University of Western Ontario

Faculty Supervisor:

Norma Coates, PhD, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, University of Western Ontario

Interview Template

Information regarding these questions: Interviews will be conducted one-on-one or in small groups (i.e., with all members of a band present) and will be open-ended. The exact wording of questions may vary, and follow-up questions may be used for clarification (e.g., “So, are you saying that...?”), to solicit further information (e.g., “Can you tell me more about...?”), or to comprehend feelings or statements (e.g., “Why do you think that is?”).

1. Can you tell me your motivations for starting the tribute act?
2. How was the group assembled? (E.g., Did members of the band know each other before starting the group, or were advertisements used to find players?)
3. How long did you rehearse together before your first performance?
4. What have been some of the biggest challenges in learning to play this music?
5. Have you performed in other musical groups or settings before? How does the tribute act differ from other experiences?
6. What was your first gig like? How did you feel both leading up to and after the end of the performance?
7. How have your performances evolved since then?
8. What is your personal relationship with the music you play?
9. In what ways do you try to emulate [the tributed artist], and in what ways do you differ?

10. What do you think of more traditional male tribute bands? How do you think your group fits into this circuit?
11. Do you think that your group attracts different audiences because you are a woman?
12. Have you ever felt judged as to your musical abilities because you are a woman?
13. How do you think audiences react when they see you perform for the first time?
14. What is your typical audience crowd like?
15. Do you find your work as a tribute artist creatively fulfilling?
16. Do you consider yourself more an artist or an entertainer? Why?
17. Do you consider your project as having any kind of statement or agenda – political, feminist, etc.?
18. Do you have any relationship ties with other female tribute acts? Other regular tribute acts? Other female musicians in your community?
19. Have you ever felt that you struggle to be taken seriously, either as a tribute artist or as a female musician?
20. Do you consider your project as more playful, humorous, and ironic, or as a serious and dedicated homage?
21. Do you think or hope that other women might be inspired to take up instruments because of your example?
22. Are there any other questions I should be asking, or topics you would like to address?

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Sandra Canosa

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: Ithaca College
Ithaca, New York
2006-2008

Wells College
Aurora, New York
2008-2010 B.A.

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2014-2016 M.A.

Related Work Experience Teaching Assistant
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