

Bethany Klein. 2010. *As Heard on TV: Popular Music in Advertising*. Farnham and Surrey, England: Ashgate.

Reviewed by Heather Pinson

Bethany Klein's *As Heard on TV: Popular Music in Advertising* provides an introduction into the recent history of popular music as a marketing tool in television commercials and assembles a chronological history of the most well-known usages of popular music utilized in advertising campaigns. Klein includes a series of case studies throughout this book, such as the Beatles's "Revolution," used by Nike; Iggy Pop's lyrically salacious "Lust for Life," used by Royal Caribbean Cruise; and Creedence Clearwater Revival's song "Fortunate Son," used in a Wrangler's ad. As a media industries scholar at the Institute of Communications Studies at the University of Leeds, Klein's focus is on the commercialization of popular music and its involvement in other media. As such, her main goal is to create a chronological history of the significant collaborations between musicians and corporate businesses and to provide insight into the decisions, reactions, and outcomes of popular music licensers and advertising industry representatives. Framed in the rhetoric of market communication and media research, *As Heard on TV's* broad scope makes it best suited for an introduction to intersections between the music industry, advertising, business practices, and popular culture.

As Heard on TV explores the relationships between music executives, musicians, and music business practices through various modes of communication such as e-mails, written contracts, and verbal exchanges. For each commercial discussed, Klein provides any written or verbal accounts stemming from the advertising agency's inquiry into the potential use of a band's song to the final acquisition of the music license. Much of the author's information comes from newspapers, online magazines, magazines, industry journals, scholarly books, and interviews that Klein conducted. Many of these interviews were with music supervisors, musicians, advertising "creatives," and licensing managers. These individuals serve as the basis for much of her insight into the business side of music making and is an examination of the frayed relationship between marketing executives, licensers, and the music supervisors who must create a business arrangement between the band and the product's brand name. While Klein acknowledges that these interviews are not ethnographic in scope or nature, as have been studies of American culture such as Tia DeNora's *Music in Everyday Life* (2000), these interviews do offer a unique insight into the advertising industry.

Drawing from a range of resources that include newspaper editorials and her own interviews with musicians or music supervisors from advertis-

ing agencies, Klein gauges audience reactions to the music. She introduces reception theory as discussed by socio-musicologists Simon Frith, *Sound Effects* (1981) and *Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Pop* (1988), and Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1956), who examine the mass appeal of popular music. While I commend the author's efforts to present the historical happenings as well as the documentation from various news sources on the specific commercials that include popular music, it seems that Klein missed some opportunities to expand on the information presented from her almost thirty interviews. I wonder, for instance, what questions the author asked during their conversation, what commonalities, if any, were found in their answers, and what effect these commercials had on the person being interviewed. Subjectivity involving discussions on taste, musical style, and business ethics are expected, and Klein is well aware of this slippery slope. Still, her presentation would gain greater significance with further analyses in semiotics, as a study in hermeneutics, that specifically analyze the meaning of the song interpreted by different viewers who see the commercials. Perhaps further analyses of musical taste and demographics found in target audiences or the expansion of similar relationships of popular music possession such as political campaign ads, for example, would solidify the author's argument. Or perhaps the author could have positioned each case study in a specific theoretical context that extrapolates the responses of select viewers to the material presented. Regardless, Klein hedges toward many directions in the areas of pre-existing music and advertising for future scholars to explore.

This book is organized into seven short chapters. Chapter 1, "As Heard on TV: The Marriage of Popular Music and Advertising," describes the increasingly symbiotic relationship between popular music and the advertising industry by outlining specific television commercials that incorporate rock bands as background music or even as jingles for brand name products, such as the 1987 Nike commercial that borrows the Beatles's song "Revolution," and the 2002 McDonald's commercials featuring indie-rock group the Shins's "New Slang." The thesis is that the adoption of popular music into television commercials highlight, "one of the current battlegrounds on which the struggle between cultural and commercial interests takes place" (15). The battle lies in the attempt to establish a connection between commercial and consumer through the aid of popular music, and this chapter succinctly outlines the cultivation of this connection as a seemingly successful marketing tactic. The Nike commercial is one of the most well-known examples because it was the first Beatles recording to be licensed for use in a television commercial, and McDonald's targets a hip, younger demographic by including newer music.

There is a distinct difference between exploitation and collaboration, and Klein presents “the reasons why the use of popular music in advertising has become more common and the reasons why this partnership is problematic” (121). Chapter 2, “Selling Revolution: The Role of Authorship in Music Licensing,” acknowledges the differences between ownership of copyright and authorship, and the choice of copyright owners in making licensing decisions about music. Musicians and advertising executives benefit from shared established guidelines, although the television audience and fans of the band often believe that the band has been taken advantage of by the larger, wealthier corporation. Typically, “the gut reaction of the press and public, in defense of the musicians, reveals that music copyright law fails to reflect cultural intuition,” (36) illustrating that public appeal favors the creator instead of the licensor. However, Klein acknowledges that entertainment law involving music authorship and intellectual property is lagging behind older laws that protect personal property or published copyright. She recounts examples, such as in the case of Nike, who used “Revolution” without the permission of the Beatles, since the band members no longer owned the rights to the song. According to current United States legislation, license to use a musical piece is needed only from the copyright holder, not from the actual author or musician who wrote the song, unlike many European legal systems, for instance, where moral law marks control of some authors’ rights for subsequent use of work as inalienable.

Klein remarks on the pressure felt by those in the corporate world to find the latest hip band that could potentially offer their sound as a unique approach to marketing a certain product. One of the impacts of commercially successful ads is that they create a strong reaction from the public as discussed in Chapter 3, “Commercial Art: Advertising as an Artistic Vehicle for Music Placement.” Advertisers are often drawn to the chorus or the hook of the song that could best represent the message experienced in the commercial. By being “incredibly literal” (107) and choosing only the words of a song that reiterate the ad’s message, advertisers truncate the various interpretations of a song to its chorus and then supplant one or two musical phrases to the advertising campaign. A hilarious and egregious example illustrates this type of use: “So it is that Johnny Cash’s ‘Ring of Fire’ seemed to one ad creative a reasonable choice for pitching hemorrhoid-relief products,” only to be quickly rejected by the Cash family (107).

Chapter 4, “‘The New Radio’: Music Licensing as a Response to Industry Woe,” considers the role that radio plays in the growth of advertising. Perhaps commercials are the “new radio,” and Klein postulates how music in the advertising industry may change our perception of pop music. Although radio itself is not the subject of this chapter, the application of selling products

through music and media becomes a common theme. The fifth chapter, “In Perfect Harmony: Popular Music and Cola Advertising,” focuses on a case study of the competition between Coke-a-Cola and Pepsi advertising executives to use the biggest pop star to feature in their television commercials. Coke and Pepsi have battled each other through a series of advertising campaigns featuring various musical pop stars and have effectively become significant players in the music industry. Thomas Frank, in *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise Hip Consumerism* (1997), also covers the “cola wars” and track their revolutionary battle for recognition from films like *Forrest Gump* released in 1994 to choosing pop icons to promote products, as with Britney Spears and Pepsi in 2001.

Chapter 6, “Taming Rebellion: Advertising’s Control over Meaning,” examines the betrayal felt by the public when the meaning of music is changed by its use in commercials. A song can go through various interpretations whether it is heard through a recording, film, stage, or television commercial, and in so doing, “popular music also generates a collective response for listeners, whose personal investments in a song are intertwined with their relationship to other members of groups. Though the goal of the music industry may be primarily commercial, this does not prevent groups from employing songs to mark identities, commemorate events, and observe relationships” (112). In Royal Caribbean Cruise line’s television commercial staged to Iggy Pop’s “Lust for Life,” a ten-second hook stretches the “lust” for heroin to a “desire” to be pampered while enjoying a cruise. “Royal Caribbean’s use of ‘Lust for Life’ has struck some fans as similarly subversive . . . , but for others, the use of a song about one thing to sell something else entirely seems irrational” (107). Through these and other case studies, Klein traces the development of the music industry’s use of popular music in advertising which she argues “is a way to have music heard, but hardly the ideal way, giving to advertisers a tool for branding through the reinterpretation of songs” (136).

In some commercials, the lyrics of a song are recontextualized to represent something other than their initial meaning as interpreted in the song. In 2001, Wrangler used CCR’s “Fortunate Son,” a song that strongly and expertly critiques the social inequalities in the military draft system and which became a protest anthem during the Vietnam War, in a patriotic television commercial featuring their jeans in an American landscape of hay bales and farmland while the lyrics resound, “Some folks are born made to wave the flag/ Ooh, they’re red, white and blue.” The misinterpreted comparison angered many viewers, including singer John Fogerty. It even inspired a short documentary called *Fortunate Son* (2003), directed by Greg Wilcox, whose mission was to explain the meaning of the lines excluded from the Wrangler

commercial. Klein describes how the meaning of the song is transformed from its original context to a new association with Wrangler jeans:

Meaning may arise primarily from word choices in lyrics, instrumentalization produced by the combination of sounds, the personal backgrounds, knowledge, and preferences that fans invest in the music they consume, or the shared socio-cultural experiences that develop for certain songs salient to specific cultural contexts. (106)

In this case, the strong association of the song with a contested moment in American politics and society was such that fans and the author alike arose against the attempted shift in meaning. Wrangler halted television appearances of the commercial once it was clear that Fogerty did not approve.

In the final chapter, “Negotiating the Future of Popular Music in Advertising,” Klein uses media theory to examine questions about the direction of commercialism and provides insights on the growing tensions between corporations and the artists who create an advertising campaign. She asks: are the ad campaign creators themselves artists? What is the distinction between a commercial and a work of art? She points out that some advertising creators stand behind their commercials as art works similar to those of the musicians.

Books such as *Commodify Your Dissent: Salvos from the Baffler* (1997) edited by Thomas Frank and Matt Weiland, as well as Frank’s subsequent book on the relationship between hipness and commercialism, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise Hip Consumerism* (1997), covers similar areas of consumerism, cultural speculation, political upheaval, and branding tactics. Frank is of a generation preceding, and more critical of commercialism in *Commodify Your Dissent* than Klein is here, and he indicates that the corporate allegiance causes damage to the artistic merit of the song. Another source to consider is *Music in Advertising: Commercial Sounds in Media Communication and Other Settings* edited by Nicolai Graakjær and Christian Jantzen (2009), which is the first anthology of articles focusing entirely on music in various forms of advertisement and social engagements. Driven by critical theory and an investigative inquiry into media research, this collection grapples with consumption as both a social interest and a theoretical one, which includes the structural formation of music in commercials, as found in certain aspects of musicology, to acoustic branding and sound identification, as found in threads of media theory. *As Heard on TV* joins a growing literature on the relationship between popular music and consumer culture, but instead of the inherently skeptical attitude of the Birmingham School scholars, Klein, along with a new generation of

Current Musicology

popular music and media scholars, takes commercialism as a de facto part of the experience of popular music in daily life and attempts to describe and contextualize the media effects on listeners and viewer.

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