



precisely what it claims is not needed in an evaluation of cover songs – parsing definitions, categories and classifications in a way that inadvertently formulates *a priori* guidelines. Organisationally, this renders a disconnect between the majority of the book and the final chapters, which would perhaps stand better as a distinct article.

There are quite a few moments of useful insight in this book. Popular debate does in many ways continue to revolve around a needless parsing of definitions; this book offers a unique corrective to that tendency. However, I would be remiss if I did not state that readers already familiar with existing scholarly literature will likely find *A Philosophy of Cover Songs* to be an intriguing if somewhat pedantic exercise. Ultimately, the kind of pragmatic pluralism Magnus argues for is already deployed by scholars in areas of popular music, communication, media studies and cultural studies (even if we do not explicitly name our approach with that term). And we have been doing so in more – and more contextually expansive – ways than are suggested by the author. Some of the definitive work on cover songs addresses concerns over (for example) copyright, historiography, race, the archive, changing practices of consumption, cross-cultural influence, postmodernism, commerce, aesthetics, changing technological formats, narrative recontextualisation and the relation between audience use and perceptions of value (Plasketes 2010; *Popular Music and Society* special issue, 2008). Indeed, pluralism (whether pragmatic or not) already defines our approach to cover songs.

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Reference

Plasketes, G. (ed.) 2010. *Play It Again: Cover Songs in Popular Music* (Aldershot, Ashgate) *Popular Music and Society*, special issue on cover songs, 28/2, 2008

***Popular Song in the 19th Century*. Edited by Derek Scott. Turnhout: Brepols, 2022. 380 pp. ISBN: 978-2-503-60078-9**

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For years now, publishers and editors have been pushing academics to give their books algorithm-friendly titles: simple and unadorned, but also front-loaded with keywords and, ideally, as definitive-sounding as possible. This edited collection's title must have made its press very happy. Free of such limiting proscriptions as geography or theme, it might be taken as offering a field-defining statement, or providing a total overview. And certainly its 18 chapters do a fine job of covering Europe (Scandinavia excepted), the US and Brazil, in terms of both content and authorship – a laudable achievement by the standards of Western historical musicology. From attention to transnational exchange, to welcome attention to song cultures in Serbia or Cyprus, the range of perspectives is refreshing. In his introduction, Derek Scott makes this diversity a methodological imperative:

[W]e need to consider a range of interdisciplinary approaches: social and cultural history, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationalism, imperialism, generation (youth/age), production (industry, commerce, markets), and reception (consumers, audiences, dancers, and so forth). (p. ix)

This, then, is an ambitious and well-intended volume, assembled in the face of the pandemic, and doubly welcome for its mix of contributions from scholars of all career stages, from the immediately postgraduate to distinguished professors.

For those of us involved professionally with the production of such work – specifically, the publishing of multi-authored collections – this volume also raises a series of productive questions. Are heavy-weight, REF-able introductions, engaging with recent literature and the state of the field, a desideratum, or is it possible to adopt a more modest, even effacing approach? Scott's relatively brief introduction is written in quite remarkably straightforward prose and is almost entirely free of references. A similarly light editorial touch is employed throughout, especially for the index which restricts itself to an Index of Names, rather than seeking to pick out thematic or contextual connections between the disparate chapters.


It's worth dwelling on this index a little longer, as it is deeply eloquent of the volume's preoccupations. Around half the chapters 'grapple', as Candace Bailey puts it (p. 38), with a working definition of 'popular song', and they reach a consensus: that this is an era where its former usage as implying 'of the people' becomes replaced with an understanding of song 'for the people'. Who 'the people' are is never asked. However, with one or two fleeting exceptions, the answer for these authors becomes clear: it is those people who consumed printed sheet music, which is the principal object of study throughout. In other words, this is a small minority of 'the people', analysed, by and large, not by the exhilarating gamut of interdisciplinary approaches promised in that introductory statement, but by reference to notated scores. Which returns us to that index. By my rough headcount, around 40 artists feature in more than one chapter. Ranging from Auber to Weber, they are almost all canonical white male composers in the Western tradition. Balfe might count himself lucky to come up as often as Chopin or Rossini, but the only real exceptions to the rule are the French cabaret *diseuse* Yvette Guilbert and that towering figure of American song, Stephen Foster (whose relative unimportance in the antebellum US South, as argued by Candace Bailey, is one of the most intriguing facets of the book).

It is highly stimulating to consider how viewing the idea of 'popular song' through the frame of the WAM canon affects our conception of the 19th century. At its best, this volume places that question front and centre, as in Chloe Valenti's analysis of Verdi's 'Va pensiero', Avra Xepapadakou's formulation of 'the light compositions of art musicians', or Eva-Maria de Oliveira Pinto's dynamic and wide-ranging exploration of the mediating role of the organ between church, street and concert hall. Where several of these authors root their conceptions of 'popular appeal' in musical works, they generally affirm the importance of accessible and appealing melody, or some form of 'hook', that lends itself to portability between different material and performative contexts – a straightforward but vital conclusion that makes a virtue out of considering this repertoire. Yet more often, one is left with the sense that the focus is on established composers, not because of a provocative shared thesis about popular taste, but because it is what the authors are used to. No problem with that, of course – but it generally results in a most perplexing and elitist conception of popular song. Overall, argument and thesis are most notable by

their absence: this volume boasts a lot of diligent and highly informative scholarship, and the student of any one of the areas under discussion would do well to consult the piece in question, but very few of the authors attempt to connect their particular subject to broader themes or to make comparisons across national contexts – in short, no one in this book is speaking to anyone else. Some authors argue convincingly against the restrictions of generic categories; others structure their chapters entirely by discrete generic categories. One topic is covered both by a very senior scholar, who produces an accomplished and thought-provoking piece, and by a postgraduate student working well beyond their usual area of expertise and seemingly unsupported, resulting in some unfortunate and highly regrettable pages containing a number of basic errors. The overall result is an anthology, but not a conversation.

That said, what we learn is often fascinating. Flávia Camargo Toni's discussion of the relationship between Sigismund Neukomm and the illiterate, mixed-race composer Joaquim Manoel Gago da Câmera is richly detailed, and would benefit further from a wider contextualisation within the vogue for publishing 'national melodies' in the non-Lusophone world. David Robb's introduction to the political and rebel songs of revolutionary Germany is a masterpiece of concise description, and a worthy trailer for the book on that subject he recently co-authored with Eckhard John (2020). Jan Dewilde's analysis of song's role in the development of Flemish linguistic nationalism is never less than absorbing.

Scott makes particular reference to the pandemic at the end of his introduction (p. xxv). Perhaps the original intention was to come together, share expertise and generate discussion that would enrich and open out these chapters. It is an unhappy reflection on recent history that the 19th-century musicians and works documented in these pages managed to circulate much more freely and fruitfully than the book's contributors. Taken as a starting point rather than a conclusion, this volume begins to look more promising: this is a topic rich in scholars and sources, and I look forward to the conversation continuing in years to come.

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Reference

John, E. and Robb, D. 2020. *Songs for a Revolution: The 1848 Protest Song Tradition in Germany* (Rochester, NY, Camden House)

Music by Numbers: The Use and Abuse of Statistics in the Music Industries. Edited by Richard Osborne and Dave Laing. Bristol: Intellect, 2021. 270 pp. ISBN 978-1-78938-253-2
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The chapters collected in *Music by Numbers* mark the final contribution of Dave Laing to the study of popular music. The book begins with a touching tribute to Dave written by his co-editor, Richard Osborne, who also contributes four of the 14 essays published in this work. Part I consists of three essays written by Osborne